

Meddlers In Time
Wayne Watson

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All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or otherwise able to take legal action against me, is purely coincidental.

All the names were pulled out of my memory and applied more or less at random. You ain't that character just because you share a first name and a trade.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Foreword

You can't change history- can you?

No- but you *can* make a new reality when you alter events. 'Meddlers in Time' explores the shaping of a parallel earth, by altering events in 9th century England.

A small band of time-traveling adventures recruit a specialist team, mainly of engineers and set about advancing 9th century technology. While doing this, they have to fight off invasions, win over the local population and have a bit of fun along the way.

Leaving Earth for a temporary base many light-years away, they train and prepare for the time jump back to the 9th century. Following the jump, they establish a stronghold and start making contact with the local inhabitants. Meanwhile, a more deadly mission is changing the political structure of this world.

As the tale unravels, the story of the time/space travel capabilities is revealed, along with some of the unexpected effects of using this technology.

Some were lured by money; other by the adventure- a few just wanted a new chance at life. One thing remains constant- time travel changes all that follow this path...

Meddlers In Time- Wayne Watson

PART ONE

Prelude-

When time jumping goes wrong:

“Last magazine” said Jenny as she reloaded, snapping off another two quick shots. “Hope the Transit crew is on the ball.” Another burst of 10mm fire splattered against the rear of the stairwell, as the gate finally snapped open. Sonja burst through carrying a green canvas satchel charge and yelled “Break left.” Tearing at the initiator cord, she heaved the satchel down the stairs.

The three flung themselves through the gate field, hitting the ground hard and rolling to their left. The instant they were all clear of the field, Andrea shut the gateway off, preventing the blast of the demolition charge from flashing through to their side of the gate. They picked themselves up and dusted off the dry, yellow dirt. Jenny was bleeding slightly from the cheek, nicked by a bullet fragment.

“Last time I stay at that hotel.” said Wayne.

“That time period is too crazy”, said Jenny, “Good work Sonja, Andrea. - we had about another minute before the heavy weapons arrived”

“Glad to return the favour” said Sonja, “I guess we had better rule out future travel into the next decade.”

“The whole fucking planet turns into a goddamn police state”, Wayne said, “We need a new home or we have to keep tripping backwards, so let’s do that- make a new timeline”

“Interesting”, said Jenny, “Time we did a little research as to when to make a split- and we are going to need a few more people...”

What to do?

It was a typical Transit day-about 28C and sunny, with a gentle midday breeze blowing. The group had gathered in their picnic area, a collection of outdoor furniture by a small stream. A pool deep enough to swim a few strokes in had been excavated and a neatly groomed earth-stock grass lawn had been established. The aroma of baking pheasant came from the kettle barbecue.

Jenny leaned back in her recliner chair under the shade of The Tree (a large Linden- the only one on the planet at this time) and poured herself a glass of Champagne. “So when and where do we do it?”

“We have a good population base and good mineral resources in the Sheffield area of England”, said Sonja, head of the research team. “Mid-ninth century looks optimal- there are plenty of bad guys for us to defeat, helping us win over the natives.”

“Wouldn’t we be better to go back before the church get a foothold?” said Andrea, the other research specialist.

“I thought about that”, said Wayne, flipping the butt of his cigar into the nearby stream, “But I think it would be better to let the natives see us take the church to the cleaners. First we take out the Viking invaders, and then we wait for the church to have a go at us”

Sonja waded out of the shallow stream and took a bottle of lager from the ice chest. “The weather patterns for that period are good, too. They are experiencing a warm period, which has caused a population boom- thus the problem with invaders. Our probes have found an eight day patch of clear weather at the start of spring, 846AD- this gives you the best conditions for establishing the stronghold, for that time of year.”

“Sounds as good a target as I have heard”, said Jenny, “Are we all in favour? - OK, we are off to Jolly Old England.”

“I suppose I had better look up that team I mentioned”, said Wayne, “But first- let’s raise the Jolly Roger again and drink to our success.”

“Here’s to burning the rule book and making up our own.” said Marty.

August 2004

‘Another shift done’ thought Mike, as he packed up and headed for the factory gate. Minding a gas boiler was as exciting as watching paint dry, but the mortgage needed paying. 48 years old and I have another 12 left to go on the bloody thing. But forget that- on Saturday I can finally fire up the traction engine after three years work on the restoration. Then listen to the wife bitch and moan about the time he spent on it all Sunday...

John Daniells was particularly pissed off today. He had just fired three of his staff for smoking ice on the job. Smoking fucking P in a butchery. “Fucking morons” he exclaimed for about the fifteenth time in the last hour. Four big orders due out this week- he was just starting to make some headway with his gourmet small goods line. Shit, he thought, back working in someone else’s friggin’ kitchen, catering to pretentious arsewipes bitching about their so-called food sensitivities...

John French carried the last box into his one bedroom flat. This is it after 20 years, he mused- second-hand furniture and a damp shitbox to live in. And now that bitch wife is sitting pretty in the house I busted a gut for. Fuck her. - Where did I put the whiskey?

Steve Anders put the calculator down. \$1200 in, \$1230 out and that was with 3 extra shifts. Townie wankers living in Auckland go nuts buying country property, so the interest rates get driven up. My pay never matches that, though. I can't loose the farm now with only 4 years to go...

Eric had had enough. 10 hours into the Friday night shift and this was the second fatality incident. The drunk from the other car staggered up, belligerently demanding something be done about his bleeding nose. Eric spun about and felled him with an uppercut. Throwing his jacket on the ground he walked off muttering 'Stick this fucking job.- who needs this shit.' No point in going back in- his career was now over...

James Lister looked out the window. For the twelfth day in a row it was pouring with rain. There had been five clear days in the last two months and the building site was choked in thick mud. The bank was ringing about his overdraft and his labourers had left, having found factory work in the dry. He picked up the 'Situations Vacant' section...

Team Alpha Recruits- A Summary

To: Transit Team Commander

CC: Section Leaders

I have compiled this team primarily as the construction and establishment team for the Ninth Century project.

The majority have a military background and experience on the types of equipment to be used in supporting this operation. I recommend an intensive six week training session in weaponry and equipment familiarization, before commencing the operation proper. Whilst the member's skills are such that we could commence operations immediately, I feel this training period will offer an excellent opportunity for team-building.

In carefully profiling the prospects, I specifically looked for persons who are skilled tradesmen, typically stuck in their careers, dissatisfied with their work and are from a financial position of week-to-week existence. Most have had relationship breakups and/or are free of dependents. All the candidates are personally known, by at least one of the members of our regular crew.

As you will have noticed, this is an all-male team. I have deliberately selected all male candidates, as this should make the team easier to manage, given their ages and backgrounds. They will have a very intensive training program to get through, plus a very busy first month. They don't need any distractions. Plenty of time for that later.

In addition to the primary skills below, we have a large range of secondary skills available over a wide area, such as forestry, stock management, martial arts, geology and various useful hand crafts.

You will note I have added a chef's position to our previous skills list. This is in the interests of morale and to ensure proper food hygiene is adhered to. He is currently working as a specialist butcher, providing a farm home-kill service, adding another highly useful skill.

I have high confidence of all accepting our proposal, with an estimated +60% opting for at least one additional 12 month tour.

Full individual files are attached to this brief summary.

Alpha Team

Steve Anders- Proposed Section Leader

17 years Regular Army- Staff Sergeant

Diesel mechanic

Current- Vehicle Inspector

Situation- Is currently in financial difficulties, due to mortgage over-commitments, (ruinous divorce settlement) Steve is a very capable tradesman and soldier.

Main Responsibilities- Section leader (?), vehicle maintenance, site security.

Additional skills- Horseman, basic stock management, fencing, martial arts, marksman.

Comments: Is one of those people who naturally get on with others- a natural leader. Typical of most of our current recruits, he has 'painted himself into a corner' He owns a block of land and 4 horses, but does not have the income to meet mortgage commitments, plus the expense of the horses and will not give them up. Having lost the second income from his ex-wife, he is headed towards bankruptcy. He is not the type to cut his losses, so the conclusion is inevitable.

He has no children from the previous marriage.

He is from a rural background and is conversant with most aspects of modern farm life. His interests in competitive horse-riding and the history of equine subjects should serve us well. Having a strong background in adventurous and physical pursuits, I would expect that the proposal to take part in our 9th century project will appeal to Steve and that he will almost certainly offer to join our permanent staff, at a future date.

Sean Brown

8 years Regular Army-Corporal

Electrician

Generator servicing/operations

Current- Refrigeration Specialist

Situation- single, has a good income. Requires capital to expand his business.

Main Responsibilities- Servicing and installation of generator systems. Monitoring power requirements. Electrical reticulation.

Additional skills- good mechanical aptitude

Comments: Sean is the classic example of a tradesman whose business sense does not match his trade aptitude. His motivation would be more financial and as such, he will probably return after a tour or two. He is a good self- starter when given good direction and is best managed by clear goal-setting, while leaving him free as to method. (Indeed, this is true of most of this team.)

He is of a steady personality, not easily shaken or unsettled and works well with others. He has no real leadership aptitude, but will be a valuable team member.

Mark Campbell

5 years Territorial Army-Corporal

Plumber

Gas fitter/liquid fuels

Plant operator

Current- Fuel Systems engineer

Situation- Is having health problems (contact dermatitis) from fuel oil exposure. Wants to get out of the trade, but needs the income.

Main Responsibilities- Fuel storage, facility plumbing installation and maintenance.

Additional skills- Served in an infantry mortar section.

Comments: Mark is motivated by a need for financial security, given the uncertainty regarding practicing his trade. While he has some physical problems regarding his planned duties, these are easily remedied with advanced medical techniques and he should have no problems carrying out his tasks, especially given that fuel handling systems are only an issue in the short term set-up phase.

He has experience in all aspects of working in a mortar platoon, a critical skill, given that I plan to use mortars as our heavy support weapons, downtime. He has been personally recommended by Jenny, who worked with him some 15 years ago (his time-line)

Mark did a lot of contract work for me some years ago and was always reliable and pleasant to deal with. His wife (a nurse) would also make a useful addition to our team, once the area is stabilized.

Phill Chambers

6 years Regular Army- Lance-Corporal

Vehicle mechanic

Welder

Current- Vehicle Mechanic

Situation- Has to choose between staying in his trade and moving to a service manager's position. He is under pressure from wife & family to do so, although he would prefer not to change.

Main Responsibilities- vehicle servicing and repair.

Additional skills- Involved in cross- country motorcycle racing, fishing, leather working.

Comments: Phill is my choice for IC vehicle section. While he has resisted a service manager's position, he is perfectly capable of performing it. We need someone with those skills, who also likes to get hands-on. While Steve Anders is also suitable for this position, he is better working in the security section.

He is more financially motivated, not through circumstances so much, as to wanting to do better for his family- his main motivation. Phil is well suited to a section 2IC position.

John Daniells (JD)

7 years Air Force- Corporal

Chef

Current- Butcher

Situation- has a new business with cash flow and staffing problems.

Main Responsibilities- Chef, food hygiene, unit morale (edible food.), food technology transfer (teach the locals how to make decent beer. - see morale) martial arts instructor

Additional skills- Is a good trade instructor.

Comments: John is an exceptional instructor, even if a bit eccentric in temperament. While his main role is to provide quality food to our team, as a morale-booster, he also has the aptitude to develop food technology and principles of hygiene to the locals. If you remember the early days at Transit, when we existed on army rations, you will not underestimate the importance of having a good cook in the team. We can always use a good martial arts instructor for training our own people, as well as a local militia. I intend to have John train a team of locals to carry out the numerous catering and domestic duties, under his supervision.

Note; I had the interesting experience in dining in his restaurant some years ago. I will never forget him frog-marching a particularly obnoxious customer out. - We HAVE to hire this guy. - BTW- the food was spectacular.

Dave Eastman

14 years Regular Army- Staff Sergeant

Fitter/turner

Electrician

Current- Alternative power systems

Situation- Wants to move from being an installer, to being a supplier of alternative energy systems, but lacks capital.

Main Responsibilities- Hydro and solar generation, water powered systems and solid fuel systems, electrical maintenance.

Additional skills- wind power installations, electrical reticulation, cabling.

Comments: Dave is another very competent tradesman and a good soldier. He is totally reliable and works a quiet, no-fuss manner always delivering on-time. He is a great team player and always willing to do that bit extra. His motivation is part financial and part from wanting to be involved in a project that really means something. This is shown by his involvement and enthusiasm for various community groups. I am certain that he will stay on for several tours, if not he whole project.

John French- Proposed Section Leader

22 years Regular Army. Retired Squadron Sergeant-Major (Engineers)

Current- Plant operator

Builder

Water treatment systems

Situation- Newly divorced and broke. Also another prospect for section leader.

Main Responsibilities- Potable water, plant and equipment operations. Section Leader (?), weapons instructor.

Additional skills- Musician, brewer, heavy plant instructor.

Comments: Another prospect for a full-timer. John is another of those quietly competent people who does well at everything he does. He works in a quiet, calm, methodical manner and always gets the job done without fuss. I think John would like to go back rich and rub it in her face, but would come back to us, having done that.- another good prospect for a full-time position with our group. John has worked on two peacekeeping/reconstruction missions and has considerable experience is working in a primitive and lawless culture- experience that will serve us well.

Sam Iams

Builder

Current- Concrete placer

Plant operator

Situation- Wishes to change careers, but needs the income from concrete work.

Main Responsibilities- Concrete placement prefabricated building construction.

Additional skills- building instructor, bricklaying

Comments: Sam is a very practical- minded person who would see our project as a step towards where he wants to be. I am hoping that he will stay on for several tours, as he has often spoken about early retirement. Several tours with us would let him indulge his passion for large boats and big-game fishing. Sam has no military background but has some firearms experience from a hunting background. I am sure that the prospect of being able to fish and hunt in the 9th century will appeal to him, and indeed, quite a few of the others. There is also the lure of some excellent caving in this area.

Simon Jones

12 years Air Force- Sergeant

Communications Technician

Current- Alarm systems

Communications

Situation- Despite being a competent technician, he has had the misfortune to take employment with companies that go bust after a couple of years, in a very competitive market.

Main Responsibilities- He will be responsible for the setup of our perimeter security system, internal communications plus setup and maintain the radio network.

Additional skills- martial arts, archery.

Comments: Simon is the sort of person who is always looking for the big break. I'm sure this will look like the big opportunity to him. I believe that if we keep the work interesting, he will want to stay on. Based on past experiences, I am sure that we will be upgrading our equipment as we go. A bit of new gear from a year or two ahead of our current timeline should keep him interested.

Pete Jordan

9 years Regular Army-Sergeant

Vehicle mechanic

Current-Small engine repair

Plant operator

Paramedic

Situation- Wants to buy a dealer's franchise (horticulture equipment) and requires capital.

Main Responsibilities- Small engine servicing, paramedic

Additional skills- Horticulture, timber milling.

Comments: Pete's intended role is primarily in servicing our small engines and plant. He will also assist with timber milling and be #2 paramedic. He is one of those tradesmen who can be put into any position and will be able to perform most tasks, within a short time. He is experienced in the repair and servicing of agricultural machinery and is an instructor in chainsaw use. He is a very experienced off- road driver and has considerable experience in vehicle recovery. Pete is an extremely talented mechanic with experience on engines big and small and is easily capable of servicing the microlight aircraft.

James Lister

Current- Builder

Plant operator

Sawmill operator

Situation- Unseasonably bad weather has pushed his undercapitalized building business into imminent bankruptcy.

Main Responsibilities- Builder, milling timber

Additional skills- Wood turning, forestry management

Comments: James is desperate for money and this offer will override his natural caution and skepticism. James has had no military service, but like the others, should be able to learn enough in the six weeks training to get by. I hope to have him operate the portable sawmill and train others to use this equipment. If he elects to do an additional tour, I want to move him into directing the setup of a sawmill and establish forestry in the area. Teaching the locals wood turning is another task for him. James also has experience with assembling the prefabricated steel buildings that we will be using.

Eric Ledern

Current- Paramedic (advanced)

Radiology Technician

Microlight pilot

Situation- Has just quit his job, with no real prospects of another in the immediate future.

Currently facing assault charges.

Main Responsibilities- Paramedic, Radiology technician, pilot.

Additional skills- martial arts, ceramics.

Comments: Another one who does not suffer fools gladly. He can get a bit fiery, but despite that, works well in a tight-knit team. Is a bit of a practical joker that occasionally needs to be reined in, but generally works well at raising team morale. Eric would be a candidate for advanced medical training, should he elect to join our group. While he also has no military experience, it should be a straightforward matter to train him in acceptable standard in six weeks. I can easily see Eric becoming one of our full-time crew.

He takes a bit of getting used to, but we definitely need him on-board.

Sean Marden

3 years Territorial Army- Corporal

Plant operator

Current-Plumber

Welder

Situation- Financially ruined from the cost of defending himself in court, after shooting and killing an intruder on his property.

Main Responsibilities- Water reticulation and sewerage treatment & disposal

Additional skills-wrought ironworker

Comments: financial motivation- will probably return after one tour, but will probably also be available for contract work. His main role will be to set up our water reticulation and sewerage system, plus establish some 'showcase technology' in the nearby settlement- communal bath houses, sanitary systems, reticulated water, etc. I hope to have this under way by the end of our first tour.

Dave Palmer

12 years Territorial Army- Sergeant

Current-Logging contractor

Plant operator

Situation- has a secure business, but heavy expenses, with 4 children at university.

Main Responsibilities- Forestry and milling

Additional skills- Horseman, farrier, chainsaw instructor.

Comments: Another that is primarily attracted by finances, but the adventurous element will also appeal to a person stuck in a tedious, but well-paying job. It would be useful to have him on-board for the second year, when we plan to start introducing forestry to the local population. His marriage appears strong- we could look to bringing his wife into the project for the second tour (she is a Veterinarian) His main motivation is to provide well for his children and family- I believe that he would like the financial security that we can offer, in order to ease up on his long working hours.

Brent Stevenson

16 years Regular Army-Staff Sergeant

Armourer

Current- Fitter

Situation- Single- works to finance his flying and other hobbies.

Main Responsibilities- Armourer & gunsmith, pilot, weapons instructor.

Additional skills- pistol instructor, cutler, Microlight pilot

Comments: This person is a natural adventurer type, spending much of his time in 'adventure' sports- parachuting, kayaking, caving, flying, climbing, etc. He would probably join up, even without the inducement of the money. I believe that he would welcome the chance to get back into working with military weapons again, especially seeing as we have access to equipment that he has only ever heard of. He has a flight instructor's qualification and may be able to train up some of the others, should they show interest in flying microlights. We can use further flight training as an incentive to stay on. Few pilots have ever been able to fly with no restrictions, overhead wires and empty skies.

Mike West

Blacksmith

Jack of all trades

Current- Steam Engineer

Situation- Has no dependents and is sick of work and his marriage. Spends all his available time at the local steam museum.

Main Responsibilities- Steam engineer, early technology, foundry.

Additional skills- black powder firearms, early firearms technology.

Comments: Would almost certainly come along, just to gain access to brand-new 19th and early 20th century equipment. Mike also has no military experience and his role of managing our steam equipment and technology training will have him in an essentially non-combatant position. He will still go through the weapons training program with the rest of the Alpha team. Mike also has a large network of like-minded engineering enthusiasts (fanatics might be a more appropriate term.) that may prove suitable for recruitment later in the project. His knowledge of early agricultural equipment would make him a valuable addition to our team.

I concur with all recommendations, let's get them on-board. - Jenny D.

The bait is set.

Sixteen letters arrived in the mail. Each contained a lotto ticket and a handwritten note. 'Remember me? I haven't been in touch for years and a few interesting events have happened. This IS a winning 3rd division ticket. Laugh now- but after Saturday, ask yourself how I knew.

I will be in contact shortly afterwards.'

"Well, I guess we have their attention now. Wonder how many watched the draw?" said Jenny.

"If I picked them right- anyone who could get to a TV. The next batch of winning tickets, the flight and hotel bookings are on the way" said Wayne.

"An all-expenses paid weekend at the luxury Huka Lodge. That should get them along- all we have to do now is sell the craziest scheme any of them will have ever heard."

"\$3 million for a 1 year tour should help do that..."

Advance party- Derbyshire
England March 7th, 846 AD

"Last sensor up- running diagnostics- yep, all PIR sensors on-line, all cameras working in low-light mode. Sweep the DZ."

"Area clear"

"30 Minutes to sunrise folks, firing in seconds Ten- cover your eyes and NV- 10, 9, 8...."

CRACK. 300 meters of primer cord instantly cleared a collection of scrub and small trees. For the first time the nearby village was aware that something was going on in the valley.

The noise was just about to start.

"Gate in minutes five. - High-Vis on, watch the markers and get ready to run like hell."

"GATE OPEN. - Wait for the gap- GO. GO. GO.

Saturday 2045hrs, August 7th 2004
Various locations about New Zealand

The word had gotten around concerning these mysterious letters that had arrived. After receiving the winning 3rd division tickets Sean Marden, Sam, Simon and Pete, who all lived nearby, decided- what else to do but have a few drinks and see what happened with the next lot of tickets.

“Sean, you would be the last one to have seen Jamieson, what is the old pirate up to these days?” said Simon.

Haven’t seen him for a couple of years”, said Sean, “I did a bit of work for him, he needed a really big soak pit dug- paid cash up front, too. He had a bit of a farm, about 100 hectares, mainly scrub, with a bit of it in glass houses, growing out-of-season berry fruits.

While I was there, I helped him unload about 50 sacks of sugar, so take a guess as to what he was really making. He had a big shed full of old stainless steel dairy tanks, so it looked like he was in business as the local bootlegger... again.”

“Sounds much like what I had heard”, said Simon, “The locals love him and he has the police on his side too- I went out that way pig-hunting a couple of years ago and he can do no wrong in that part of the world. He won’t sell to the under-20 market and he makes a top-notch product.

“Yep”, said Pete, “the wife’s family thinks he is the best thing since sliced bread. Since he brought that farm, there has been no crime in the district. Every local thief or crap-head has packed up and left, since he moved in- now nothing goes missing and there is never any trouble.”

“That would be Wayne.” said Sean, “He was never one for competition.”

“I heard he came into some money a couple of years ago”, said Simon, “Brought out his neighbors and was working with Jenny D.”

“Bloody hell- there’s a combination.”

The initial elation was over, now shock and amazement set in and the hard questions were being asked....

"Look at these tickets- they are all 2nd division Powerball winners, but THE WINNING LINES ARE ALL DIFFERENT. He has picked EVERY winning number."

"Hell, I was always going down to this get-together- who turns down an all-paid to Huka Lodge anyway, but I wouldn't miss it or anything now."

"How the fuck did he manage that?..."

"I don't care, but I want in on this."

"Let's have a look at that letter again"

‘Like my last letter? I’m sure that winning all that money caught your attention and I hope you consider this note all the more carefully for that.

I’m certain that after checking the enclosed Powerball ticket, you will wish to know how more of these may be earned. No obligations, but you may consider these payment for your time next weekend.

Enclosed are travel documents and reservation details for Huka Lodge, Taupo. All expenses are *fully* covered, so enjoy.

See you in the conference room at 0900 next Saturday, where I assure you, you will get an *interesting* explanation.

RSVP not required.’

US Army Predeployment storage facility, Kuwait

Visibility in the vehicle park was poor, with the sandstorm at its height. The security detail was content to shelter in their hut and trust to the perimeter fence sensors.

Nobody noticed the grey nothingness of the gate appearing, nor the two gray-clad men dragging a heavy wire hawser. In any case, it would have been almost impossible to see them, hidden amongst the huge fleet of armour. The cable was soon secured to the towing points of a newly rebuilt M113A3 armored personnel carrier, which was promptly dragged through the gate, to be followed in short order by two others.

At the other side of this vast compound, three M548 tracked equipment carriers met a similar fate. It would be some weeks before they were missed.

Transit Facility - 'Procurements' Section

"That worked better than I had hoped. The sand on the concrete really helped those rubber track pads slide and without waking the whole friggin' desert up. I thought we would only score one, maybe two vehicles" said the 'snatch team' leader, Steve.

"About time we got an easy after that last armory raid." said Simon, the other raider. "That security team was *fast*. - You damn near got stuck in 1999 then."

"I reckon, but I just couldn't resist going back for those M19 grenade launchers-I always wanted a play with one of those. Anyway, let's get this lot dragged into the hanger- we have most definitely earned a beer or ten."

The big D8 towed the last carrier away effortlessly, as the second moon started to rise.

Saturday, August 14th 2004.
Huka Falls Lodge, Taupo, New Zealand

The group had arrived and they were catching up with each other, some for the first time in many years. Everybody there knew at least one other person. Whatever was up, a weekend in a luxury hotel at somebody else's expense was not to be missed. The room was abuzz with speculation when Wayne and Jenny walked into the conference room. Wayne moved to the front of the conference room, while Jenny placed an aluminium case on a table and connected a cable between the case and the notebook. Opening the notebook, she started tapping on the keyboard, while glancing about the room.

"Good to see you all- damn glad everyone could get here. It's been a while since I've seen some of you. I know you are busting yourselves to know what the hell is going on here, so let's cut to the chase. You want to know:

- 1- How I can pick winning lotto tickets?
- 2- How you get in on the action?
- 3- What's it going to cost?
- 4- What's the catch?

Looking about the room, catching people's eyes, I could see that I had their undivided attention.

First- Time travel- that's how.

Second- Go back in time with me, which gets you in on the game.

Third- 12 months of service-which gets you \$3 million NZ dollars, paid by way of nice, explainable Lotto winnings.

Fourth- There is, of course, a risk that something will screw up, but we will do everything we can to minimize the hazards. If you don't like the look of it after training, you can still pull out and get paid pro rata.

"Anyone want to leave now?" Looking around the room, I saw that they were all glancing at each other- they looked a bit wary, as you would expect. Whatever they were thinking, I could see they wanted to at least hear what promised to be an interesting story. Probably relieved I wasn't trying to sell Amway.

"Good, I hoped you would hear me out", I said-, "Questions?"

"Yeah, if it wasn't for the tickets, I would say "bullshit."- but you delivered- so show us how you do it" said Steve.

"Fair enough- Jenny would you oblige?"

Jenny tapped at the laptop and an almost mirror-like rectangle appeared at the far end of the room. Looking at it was like peering into a nothingness that defied ready description.

"That, my friends, is a time/space gateway" said Wayne. He walked through the field and promptly disappeared. The gate winked out.

Jenny looked up from the screen and made some adjustments with the keyboard- "He will be back in 30 seconds, having been away for a week. Reopening the gate- now"

"How about that then- try growing this in under a minute." said Wayne, as he stepped out of the field- he was sporting a week's growth of beard.

"I can pretty well guess what you want to know. At the end of the job we will be returning to here, about two hours from now. I want to stress this point- nobody will miss us or even know that we have been gone.

You will receive payment by way of \$50k in cash and the balance in the form of a letter giving details for various lotto draws, racing results, sports results and pick 6's that you can cash in on. If you open the packages in front of you, you will find the money- by the way, if you do get killed, your next-of-kin will be sent a winning lotto ticket worth five million." We then paused while the packages were opened. Its always interesting watching people handle more cash than they have ever held at any one time in their lives.

"We are headed for England in the 9th century. The mission is to stabilize the area and to boost their technology- to this end we will set up a secure base for operations that will be carried out over a five year period. We will be armed with modern weaponry. M16's, pistols, 40 mm launchers and armored vehicles. You will have to seriously fuck up to get killed by the locals."

That got a few nodding heads. - Firearms against arrows and swords sound a much better prospect than crazy natives with AK-47's.

"We will be living in adapted shipping containers, stacked into a secure compound and will have most modern facilities. We are taking an assortment of dozers, diggers and plant and will have electricity, hot water and cold beer. Should be quite comfortable and plenty of time for a bit of fun. Great hunting in the area too.

If you decide to go, we leave for training in an hour. If you want to think about it, you have a week. Either way you all get to the training area at the same time. Time travel is useful like that.

If you don't want to go- stay here and enjoy this place for the weekend. I won't even tell you to keep this quiet- nobody would believe you for a second.

That's the guts of it. The details will get covered in training."
The group looked around at each other. They were all in similar circumstances and there was an air of 'why the hell not.'

"I'm in."

"Yep"

"Let's do it."

"Why the hell not."

They milled about for a time, talking excitedly amongst themselves, asking Jenny and myself endless questions and peering at the gate generator. For an hour or so, this continued. After I felt we had answered the more pressing questions, I stood up front and addressed the room.

"OK all in.- knew I could count on you all - Jenny will be setting up the gate for Transit One- this is an uninhabited spot that we have been talking about- we use it to store supplies and gear and do the training for these operations.

I will go through the gate first- for you, I advise hitting the gate at a run, first time through- it is a quite disorientating. I will keep the field wide- DON'T TOUCH THE EDGE OF THE FIELD. - It will slice you like a hot knife cuts butter.

"See you tomorrow your time" said Jenny, "I will be following you down, once I tidy up a few loose ends elsewhere"

"All set? - follow me." I said and leapt into the gate.

Saturday, August 14th, 2004
Huka Falls Lodge, Taupo, New Zealand

A few taps of the keyboard and the gate flicked out. Jenny sighed, took the PPK from her shoulder holster, unscrewed the silencer and returned it to her holster. No bodies to dispose of today.

"I *DO* like it when don't get chickenshit quitters" she muttered to herself as she set the new coordinates. Picking up the notebook and the generator box, she stepped through the gate.

Transit One Station

"It's called gatheshock and will be a bit worse with a big time jump" I said to the group. "You get used to it real quick- the first jump is the worse and it gets easy with practice, so we will be doing quite a few practice jumps- everyone done puking?"

Once the worst of the groans and retching had stopped, I pointed out the hall- "Head into that building- get a drink and a bite to eat and I will start to fill in the picture on how things are going to happen here."

Once everyone was settled, I grabbed a chair and sat facing the room. "Here is how we operate here. This isn't the Army, even if it looks like it at times- I don't tell you when to get up and when to go to bed. I expect you to be on time for everything without being chased up. If I wanted sheep, you wouldn't be here."

Today is an easy one, as you have had more than enough thrown at you for now. We will get personal equipment issues sorted today- uniforms, M16's and sidearm. After that, we get settled into our cabins- these are portable and will be coming with us. That done, we knock off for a beer. Over the next few days you can sort out a 'shopping list' for personal gear that you might want to take back. Your cabin is half of a customized 12 meter shipping container. What you can fit in that, you can take. By the way- from tomorrow onwards, you will always go armed. Get used to always wearing a pistol."

We headed into the hall where drinks and sandwiches had been put out. Appetites returned as quickly as they had left- gatheshock doesn't last long and you get used to it soon enough.

As I poured my first coffee of the day, a couple of the group approached me.

"By the way, Wayne- where the hell exactly are we?" said Brent, the armourer.

"Far enough away from home that possession of automatic weapons is not an issue" I said. "I guess that is where you are coming from, right?"

"You guessed mostly right, but there is something about this place that just doesn't look right" said Brent, as the others nodded in agreement, looking about. They could see something vaguely different about this place.

"You got that right", I said, "We about 270 light years from home and in the same time line. All that lives here, apart from us, is grass- anything else- we brought here. You *are* on another planet.

As to how we got all this equipment, you will get the opportunity to go 'shopping' via gate later" I added.

"Everyone feeling better? Good- let's go for a wander", I said, heading off towards a line of containers nearby. The group followed along, staring at lines of vehicles, stores, plant and shipping containers.

"These are home for the next 12 months, or as long as you want to stay on. Customized containers, 230 volt power and plumbed for a radiator. As we are on generator, don't bother taking anything that draws more than about 3 amps. Fold down bed, storage chest containing

soap, toothpaste, razors and so on- the rest is up to you- all I stipulate is you must be able to get out fast, so don't put too much crap in them. They are all identical, so grab a key and call it your own. One more thing- in the top drawer you will find a 'tourist's guide' to the local language- start learning the useful phrases in it- the MP3 player with it is part of that package- try wearing the headset at night- you will be surprised as to how much you will take on-board in your sleep."

Once all the units were taken, we headed over to the issues hanger. Here it was just a case of finding a uniform that fits. Mine having already been laid out, I changed, then wandered off to the office to get more coffee. No dramas, they had mostly been through this before, for the four that hadn't, the others were showing them the ropes. The issue was up on the whiteboard and all they had to do was fill out what was taken on a form. The support crew would enter that into the stores inventory system when they get back, tomorrow.

Heading back 30 minutes later, they were almost sorted out. "Once you are done, grab a rifle and pistol from over there", I said, pointing at the rack. "Stow your gear, back to the rec. hall and have a beer while we sort out what goodies you want to take back."

As the group was sorting out their gear, Steve asked John French, "Did you have any idea that Jenny was involved in this?"

"No." said John, "it was a hell of a surprise to see her there. "I knew that she and Wayne were friends, but that was about it."

"I haven't seen her for twenty-odd years- and that's the thing, she looks the same age" said Steve.

"I guess she can afford cosmetic surgery" said John.

Evening, Transit One Mess Hall

It takes a while for the fact that you have done something considered impossible to sink in.

As the crew sat around outside, on the clear and mild night, the sun set and the night sky revealed itself. Steve was the first to remark that it was not the night sky he had known. As the first moon rose, they started to truly believe the reality of this being another world. The second moon removed all doubts. It would take a couple more sunrises for the surreal events of the Saturday to be fully accepted...

Jenny and I sat in the upper floor of the barn that served as a mess hall, enjoying a whisky as we watched the evening's activities through the window. The shipping containers had been set up in a compound, as they would be after the jump. The team was busy stowing gear and sorting out their quarters.

Next Morning, Transit One

Jenny leaned back in her leather recliner and yawned, “Well, that’s the Earth end wrapped up for the moment- now I get a break ‘till gate training next week. Have you mentioned anything about the side effects of repeat gating yet?”

“No”, I replied, “I was going to leave that until the end of tour.”

“That’s what I would do.” she agreed, “A bit of a bonus for them- and an incentive to sign back on...”

“There is that”, I said with a grin, “There is that.”

Training program

0700 Breakfast

0745 Orders

0800 Weapons training

Week 1 M16A3

Week 2 M9 Beretta

Week 3 H&K MP5

Week 4 M249 & M60

Week 5 M19, M79, M67

Week 6 M229 60mm Mortar & M2 .50 cal.

1200 Lunch

1230 Plant & equipment familiarization

1600 Specialist Weapon/ individual coaching

1730 Personal housekeeping

1830 Dinner

1900 Self-directed training

2030 Bar open (until- Week 6 M16A3 & sniping rifles with night vision sights)

2300 Bar closed

Transit One

Review-Week one.

It was an unusually quiet morning at Transit. The team was off at the range, learning the intricacies of the Beretta M9 pistol and had not got to the firing stage yet, this being a new weapon to most of them.

Jenny had gated back to earth again, with the purchasing team. Contrary to popular belief, we actually paid for a great deal of our supplies and equipment. They were off for a week up-time and would not be back until tonight. The rest of the gateway team were sorting out personal requests from the stores and after that would probably disappear off for a drinking session in a hidden corner of the bulk store that I didn't know about...

The plant and equipment training is going so well that I will have to bring in some free time and/or up the weapons training. Almost all of them have had time on heavy plant, which has sped things up enormously. The basic stuff such as the loaders, tractors and excavators has been easy and we have plenty of competent operators including a couple of experts for them. Time to get out the more unusual kit, like the firewood processor and the sawmill.

Every morning I see people up at 5-6 am out running and training and the ranges are always in use in free time. Used up 100,000 rounds of 5.56 last week, so they are getting plenty of rounds down the range. A couple of them can't shoot for shit, but as long as they can use at least one weapon safely, they will do. No shortage of real shooters there that can do the trickier stuff.

You can hear people starting to use expressions and terms from out of the 9th century phase book quite often now. Steve, JD and Eric have soaked up the basics and are getting lessons from the Transit contact team, who wrote the 'Olde English Tourist Guide'. I struggle a bit with languages, so I cheated and used 35th century hypnotic drugs and got force-fed my essential words.

Time to start organizing more jumps- plan is to set up a bunch of bunny-hops around here, to get them hardened up. I want to use some of them for snatch and grab ops in a few weeks and they need to come out of that gate sharp. Most of them spent some years sneaking about military camps lifting other unit's gear, so this should be nothing new. I will take a couple of them down-time and mark out the site next week. Nothing like strange geometric designs sprayed in weed killer to scare superstitious locals off.

When purchasing get back, I will organize a meeting with JD, the chef, to sort out what foodstuffs he wants to haul down-time. Local food other than game is crap and I will have a mutiny if they have to spend 12 month on MRE. I think we will buy our local stock live and dose it before we slaughter it. Better put some more fencing gear on the inventory.

Ran up the boiler for the first time yesterday. Drives the 3 steam generators at 36 kW output, with plenty of steam left for heating. That should be more than enough for all but peak use thus helping us use less diesel. It won't take long to mine a few years supply of coal with the gear we are taking- we can probably use coal to trade with.

Anyway- time for me to go and fire a few down the range.

Transit One

Orders Group 0745

Everyone was assembled waiting to find out about today's jump, so I stood up in front of the group and addressed them

“Good morning, all- The afternoon's plant and equipment session will start with a jump to our target zone. We will be arriving in England, March 1st, 846AD, at a point 19 miles south of Sheffield, Derbyshire. You will see on your maps a structure called Haddon Hall- this will be built here in about 300 years, their time. That is where we set up shop in 6 weeks our time.”

“We will be on site for 15 minutes for quick look around and then we return here. On exiting the gate, you are to move into a small wood to your immediate left and go to ground. There should be nobody in the area, so I expect no trouble- having said that, everyone will carry 7 magazines of 9mm, one in the pistol, chamber empty. Anyone fires a shot without my say-so will be staying there.”

“Bulldozer and excavator operators- take note that you will need to find a line to cut a track from the lower river meadow up to the terrace that we will build on. Draw a video camera and get some footage of the area.”

“Last thing- it will pay to have a light lunch.”

Gate site Alpha 1300

The jumpers stood in front of Gate Site Alpha, which consisted of two stout steel posts topped with red beacon lamps and a loudspeaker. Two low and extremely solid barrier fences ran parallel up to the posts. This was all built like a crash barrier for trucks and was made of what appeared to be railway track. Between the posts was a concrete strip, with a narrow channel running down the middle. To the side and behind the barrier was a solid concrete block at a convenient height for a work surface. A brass frame looked like it was the right size to fit the gate generator case.

“This is the primary gate site for our target zone. The gate will open between the marker posts and the ground has been graded to match the other side. This is a big, wide gate as we will be moving a lot of plant and material fast, on the day. Form up on the line. Run through and fan out about 10 paces, then go to ground. Check radios are on and set to channel one.”

“Wait for my command which will be ‘Go’... gate up. - Go. Go. Go.”

England 846

As the last rank disappeared from sight, I stepped through. Things had gone mostly to plan- the shock is never so bad the second time. I looked around- everyone was well clear of the gate, so I threw down two paint makers at the gate edges and fired a green flare back through the gate, which immediately winked out. “Keep low and head to the wood in front as soon as you can move- when you get there- scan the area with thermal and binos” I ordered. I had to keep them moving and get them over the disorienting effect of the jump itself and the sudden changes in temperature, vegetation and even the subtly different colour of the sky.

I pulled out the sprayer from my bag, marked the gate site with a mix of weed killer and dye and trotted off into the brush. No movement here, today. A wisp of woodsmoke from the east- fine, I knew there was a village there at the confluence of the two rivers.

“Well done for a second jump- the clock is ticking- get some video of a likely approach to the top of that rise over there” I said, pointing at the site I had picked. This was an old river terrace, some 10 metres higher than the current river meadow.

“One section- secure the gate site, two section with me; cover the cameramen- back here in minutes ten.” I called out, as we trotted off towards the rise.

“This looks good”, said John, the bulldozer expert, who started filming. We stopped and spread out, watching for any locals. I had just unslung my silenced MP5, that being the only loaded weapon, when a stag broke cover about 30 metres away- I sighted and fired a short burst, dropping him immediately.

“OK, lets move. Grab dinner over there and lets hit the gate.”

Transit One Operations Control

I reached out flicking the ‘strobe’ switch, as I pushed the ‘talk’ button on the handset. “Clear gate site Alpha- gate in one minute, gate in one minute.”

Right on time the gate snapped open and a truck started to appear from the field. You never quite get used to the sight of a large vehicle gating- a man pops through almost immediately, but a vehicle seems to come out like toothpaste.

Two more trucks rolled through, followed by Jenny on foot, lugging the gate generator. She stopped, made an adjustment and the gate winked out.

I turned the strobes off and announced “Stand down gate site Alpha.” The stores Landcruiser had stopped to pick Jenny and her equipment up. They knew better than to keep her waiting- they probably wanted goodies that she had brought back.

Two of the trucks headed into the bulk store, the third pulling up in the compound.

Jenny walked in and secured the generator in the safe. “Better call a free night and late start tomorrow, all their goodies are here.” she said. “The manager at Regional Wines & Spirits near pissed himself when I gave him that order and paid in cash.”

“Well, I guess we had better help drink some then- barbecue smoke-roasted venison tonight too.”

“Yes, I heard JD playing ‘Who killed Bambi’ over by the bar” she laughed.

“Heard them referring to me as “Bambi’s Bane” earlier”, I replied- “But I did prove that there is some great hunting there, just like I promised.”

“Let’s go and get a beer” said Jenny- “It’s been a long, dry couple of weeks.”

We wandered over towards the bar. This consisted of a steel barn, opening onto a concrete courtyard. Facilities consisted of a couple of barbecues and an extremely well set up bar. A battered upright piano stood against one wall and looking out of place in a rough and ready shed, were a collection of luxurious leather recliner chairs. An outdoor fireplace showed signs of regular use, even though it was hardly needed in this balmy climate.

Work was winding up for the day, the last job being unloading the supply truck in the compound. Pallets of personal supplies were moved by forklift into containers and boxes were being stored in quarters. It must have been like Christmas day over there with Bose stereos, Rolex watches, 20 year old single malts, fly rods, custom rifles and a host of other items being unwrapped.

The bar was empty apart from JD the chef, who was hovering between two smoking kettle barbecues.

“Mighty hunter, slayer of savage beasts.” he said with a grin.

“How’s it going, Tucker Fucker?”

“About medium rare, boss- ready in about 45 minutes.”

“Stand down tonight and a 10 am start tomorrow- anyone wants breakfast they can kill a weetbix themselves. You won’t be getting dragged off to the range for extra drill tonight.” I said “We will have a meeting with stores in a week or so to sort out what supplies you need to take back.”

Jenny came over with three pilsners “Here you go- cheers”, she said, raising her bottle. “How did the kitchen module check out?” she asked.

“Looks great”, replied JD “I’ve never used an Aga, so that should be interesting, but the equipment is all top class and there is everything and more there.”

“I expect to recruit a couple of pot scrubbers and bottle-washers down-time along with woodcutters, sweepers and gofers” I said “We can always pay them with MRE”

“Please don’t use that language in my presence.” exclaimed JD. “Whose round is it?”

The Transit crew started to roll in, drawn by the smell of roasting meat...

Weeks review

Two weeks down, Four to go. There is a real routine going now, without one really being set down. The team has cajoled each other into going for some kind of a run, followed by weights before breakfast. Those I knew from the army would never have done that then. I see the plant training has been put to good use, a nearby stream bed having been excavated to make a swimming hole.

Apart from opening and closing time at the bar- more specifically- the sound system, I have placed no real restrictions on drinking- I think four hours on the firing range, first thing in the morning discourages brain abuse. In any case, most of them got that sort of thing out of their system some years ago.

Pistol training finishes today, with most able to now actually hit what they are aiming at before the magazine runs out. Sub-machine gun module next week- that should be a bit of fun for them. I have approved requests to draw hunting rifles out- a few of our hunting types wanted to get the rifles they had ordered zeroed up in their free time and that's fine by me. Same with requests for specific pistols- provided they qualify on the standard service pistol they can carry whatever suits them.

As they are doing driver/commander training on the M113's next week, I will incorporate the .50 heavy machine gun training in with that- might as well tie the two together.

Support crew are off fetching a couple of truckloads of logs from Earth, so we can fire up the sawmill and firewood processor next week.

Time to start doing a few more local training jumps and then we will go back down-time for a bit more scouting around- I want to get the site marked out, clear a site for a radio repeater station and check out a couple of drift mines for coal. Might be an idea to go a bit further down time and ring-bark a few trees for seasoned firewood, too.

Jenny's crew need to take a look at the site, as they will be helping out on the day, too.

Should keep up busy for the upcoming week.

Transit One

Command Staff Meeting Notes:

Matters for discussion:

Training changes
Down-time jumps
'Snatch & grab' jumps
Material requirements
General

Training:

I am very pleased with progress. 0.5 days allocated free each week.

Jump date unchanged; allocate additional training in areas as determined by specialists.

Down time jumps:

4x 4 man teams

1x survey team

1x team to clear top of high feature for a repeater site- hand tools only.

1x team to investigate drift mines.

1x team to ring-bark suitable firewood trees in near vicinity.

Jumps are of 6 hour duration- closed gate.

Weapons: M9 pistols, MP5SD for team leader.

Mission priority: avoid direct contact with locals

'Snatch & Grab' jumps:

4 x 2 man teams (Volunteer)

1x to acquire 3x M113A3's

1x to acquire 3 x M548 load carriers

1x to acquire 30 M16A3's plus items of opportunity

1x to acquire 1x truckload of assorted small-arms ammunition

Open gate jumps

Weapons: unarmed

Mission priority: Avoid capture

New Material Requirements

2x Hitachi tracked dumper vehicles (11,000 kg payload)

Fencing material for 5 km stock fence

Cat D3 Bulldozer (with winch)

General

Investigate sinking an artesian well within or near compound for security of potable water.

Identify suitable aggregate supply for concrete.

Half way function for Sunday 5th September -start 1200. Monday 6th Plant & equipment training canceled. Weapons training in the afternoon instead (M240 medium machine gun)

Ends.

Monday, August 30th, 2004. Transit One

Orders group 0745

“One small change to today’s training- Eric, Brent- report to my office after lunch. Otherwise, it’s back to high-speed bulldozers” I said. “Tomorrow we will stick the .50 caliber’s on them. Now go spread some lead.”

As they headed out, I heard “What’s a high speed bulldozer- none of them here move at more than....?”

”What’s a... oh right. You were air force- that’s an army term for a 113 personnel carrier.”

“Doh.”

Think I will go and fire a few myself, later...

Monday Afternoon, Transit

After lunch, Brent & Eric turned up to meet me. I grabbed the keys to my Hilux off the desk and away we went. We drove out to the end of the container park and I pulled up in front of a new container.

“Got some new gear in, that I thought you might be able to use”, I said, swinging the doors open.

Two sets of eyes bugged out and two mouths dropped wide open.

“Well, get them out and let’s run them up.” I said.

We climbed in and released the tie-downs on the front trailer. It rolled out easily and we attached it to the back of my Toyota. I towed it clear and they set to releasing the microlight from its trailer.

“Are you familiar with the model?” I asked Eric.

“One of the guys in my club had one- I’ve never flown one, but I hear good things”, he replied. “His one wasn’t fully optioned like this one, though.”

“This is the rough-field model“, said Brent, the other pilot, “this would take off from those fields around the site, no problem- dead easy if we got the grass down a bit”

“I believe the D6 will cut us a nice smooth landing strip or two” I replied.

Meanwhile Eric was going into raptures “No air space restrictions, no pylons or wires, no fences, no roads and clear sky’s- It just don’t get any better.”, he exclaimed.

“In back of the container is an extended range kit that drops into the passenger’s seat” I said, dryly.

“Fuck me, it just got better.” he cried out. “Let’s have a quick read up, get it pre-flighted and get in the air.”

“Grab those jerrycans of high octane and oil off the back of my wagon and the toolkit- I will catch up with you later. Stay this side of the range and don’t buzz my office, if you don’t want to find out what a .50 caliber can do to one of these.” I said, leaving them to it.

Transit One

Final jump training

“Final jump coming up in minutes five, gate over that way- 300 metres”, I called out, pointing at the next pair of marker poles.

Jenny had thrown everything at them today- day to night, gates into water and bogs, one side of the gate you are going uphill- on the other side you are going down, gates that had to be crawled through and gates above ground to be leapt through. At least gateshock was a bit less on localized ‘bunny-hops’. Still, I could see everyone was about had it- 20 jumps in two hours was really pushing it- even for a well-seasoned jumper like myself.

We waited at the next markers. “Watch out”, I said, “This one will be a beauty, if I guess right”

The gate popped up- a nice wide easy one. I fired a green flare through. “GO, GO, GO”, I yelled and charged through at the rear, into choking, acrid smoke, gunfire and explosions. Diesel engines roared, turbines howled and tracks squealed. Armored vehicles I had not seen here before bore down on us, only to swerve aside at the last moment, .50 caliber’s hammering overhead. I looked around as the smoke and dust cleared- everyone had gone to ground in a semi-circle from the gate’s position, weapons at the ready.

Jenny stood up in the commander’s turret of a huge M1A3 tank. “You will do” she yelled over the whining turbine, taking off in a cloud of dust.

“Fucking girl’s a worry.” I growled to nobody in particular, as I wiped my streaming nose and eyes on my sleeve. “I suppose we should be thankful she didn’t fire the main tube over our heads.”

“Let’s go get a shower and a beer. Or a beer and a shower...”

One hour later- the bar

“So where exactly did the Abrams come from, Jenny?” I asked.

“Knox.”

“Do I even need to ask if it is tooled up?”

“Training rounds- no war shots, but good enough for most armor, pre 90’s. Got a few HEAT and some APERS on board. Oh, and I got a supply train out of Kuwait which will keep this bad boy going for a bit. Hell, I could roll up Kursk in this beast.”

“You may get that opportunity some day”, I replied, grinning at her. “By the way, congratulations on the finale- keep them scared of you, least you wind up in the pond- I have heard talk”

“Scared of lil’ ole’ me- can’t imagine why. I would never accidentally gate someone into, say Auschwitz, 1944” she joked.

“No, you would do it deliberately- but then, he was a total prick and had it coming.”

“Revenge can be sweet- your round.”

Transit One

Gate site Beta 1300 hrs

“OK, to cover the main points again- as you all know, the gate will be in a different spot to last time. We will come out on the forest edge of the nearest high feature, on the other side of the North ridge. We need to mark the gate and make our way up to the high point marked ‘Lees Moor Wood’ on the map. This should be about 800 metres up a moderate grade, bearing 2700 mils. There we clear an area of 6x6 metres for a repeater station. Exit gate time will be at +8 hours, from mission start.”

“Radio’s on, set to channel one- weapons safe- gear secure.”

“Gate up- GO. GO. GO.”

I ran through and this time, the others marked the site and fired the ‘All Clear’ flare back. We faded into the forest edge. This was nice easy going- not like New Zealand bush. Shortly after, we had reached the top. We dropped packs and started cutting. Hand saws dealt with most of the growth and before long we had a large enough area cleared between a couple of larger trees. These we left standing, climbing up and clearing the branches overhanging our clearing.

The repeater station would easily fit in the gap and the remaining trees would screen the mast from easy view, without cutting out too much signal. A bit of razor concertina and a few hot wires should keep any curious locals off. 4 hours to go. Time for a bit of a snoop about.

There was quite a good view from up in the trees, so we circled around the hilltop, climbing likely trees along the way and noting any signs of life down on the map. There were three villages all about 2 km from our site, one upstream, one downstream and another smaller one in the southwest. We counted 15 smoking chimneys scattered about the landscape, the closest to our site was about 800 metres to the northeast. These I would match up with the original survey, to see if we had missed any the last time.

As we approached the edge of the wood, Phill, the lead man, raised his hand to halt. I moved up to see what the problem was.

“Over there”, said Phill, pointing northwest, “Heading our way.”

“Well lookee at that. – A Danish warband”, I said, passing my binoculars. “Take a good look everyone; they are going to become an endangered species.” This wasn’t in the plan, but we can turn it to our advantage. “Only twenty of them, let’s take them out. - we don’t want them killing off *our* peasants.”

I unscrewed my silencer as the others checked their pistols. “I’m going to hose them down- get them spooked- remember- nice & slow- aim each shot- we only have to get four each- a piece of cake. I think the best bet is to make contact at about 75 metres. Take the best firing position for

yourselves and I will take any out archers first- wait till they close to 40 metres before firing- now get down.”

Damn, I wish I had packed some frags or a M79.

Steve came crawling over- “Looking for a couple of these?” he whispered, handing me a grenade, “Compliments of Jenny, who said they would come in handy.”

“Got that right.”

“Slight change of plans, people”, I said. “We throw these when they start their charge- when I throw, hit the deck. Any luck and they will run right over them.”

We waited- no doubt about it, they were either scouting or raiding, sidling around the forest edge. Only one bow- good, arrows are about the only thing we have to worry about. I didn’t expect these guys out so early in the season; they must be scouting for a big raid later. From now on everyone carries M16’s. As they approached to 100 meters we stepped out into the open. They appeared taken aback at our sudden appearance out of nowhere. Hooray for disruptive pattern material.

The warband soon recovered, drawing swords and brandishing axes and spears. Steve and I tossed the grenades and both yelled “GRENADE. DOWN.”. Their shouting increased; obviously they thought us cowards who were trying to surrender.

Wrong.

Right over the top. - Half the band was cut down, hit from behind by the blast and fragments, their charge was now broken. Four stopped in their tracks and another six kept coming - these guys have got balls of rock and brains to match, I suspect. I dropped three, as a fusillade of pistol fire took out the remainder.

I stood up from my kneeling position. “Advance - finish them” I called out. We moved forward to do what had to be done. I flicked my selector to ‘semi’...

I knew the best thing was to keep everyone moving, not let them dwell on what they had actually done.- “Back to the gatesite and get to cover- this will draw some of the locals out for a look-let’s move.”

We headed back fast- the gate was due in 60 minutes.

“I know what you are thinking”, I said as we waited, “Remember, those guys were on their way for a bit of rape and murder- men, women, kids- they wouldn’t give a shit. Come tomorrow, there would have been burning farms all over these hills- fuck ‘em.”

“Gate in one- let’s look sharp.”

“GO.’GO.’GO.”

Transit One Operations Room

“Well”, I said, “now we have a blooded team- that is an unexpected bonus. - by the way, thanks for the frags”

“I had a feeling...” said Jenny.

“You usually do Jen, you usually do.”

“While you were cleaning up, I took the liberty of shifting the next two survey jumps two days up-time from today’s one.”

“Good” I said. “That drift mine is only 800 metres from a village.”

“I think they have had long enough to talk amongst themselves- let’s go down and have a beer.” said Jenny.

Transit One

Gate site Beta 1300 hrs

“OK, to cover the main points again- the gate will be the same as last time. We will move in cover as much as possible, to the river where Dave and I will be checking for ford and bridge sites plus checking the river gravel’s for use as aggregate. This time we are going fully armed, but I doubt we will have any excitement like last time.”

“Radio’s on- set to channel one- weapons safe- gear secure.”

“Gate up- GO. GO. GO.”

Jump. - Flare away, gate closed.

Good- drizzle and low cloud- visibility is well down. Time to get down in the dirt.

The river looks as I remember it- wide, fairly shallow here and not moving too fast. Easy to ford. Those gravel’s look OK to me- see what Dave says. And a rainbow trout. That news will go down well. We crawled up and down the river banks, 500 metres either side of the gate site. There is a narrow gorge suitable for a bridge further upstream. We can improvise one from two trailer beds and a bit of bracing. Good enough for the lighter vehicles and the big ones will ford this in all but the worst weather. Remembering a few old logging roads, we could drop a couple of oak logs over and set the trailer beds on that- should take all but the real heavy plant.

Shame these isn’t enough head for a worthwhile micro hydro setup. I could bring in a crossflow turbine, but are now convinced that coal power is the way to go here.

Dave had finished digging in the river bed. Better him than me- it would be freezing. He nodded to me and we started back.

At the wood, we broke out sandwiches and coffee, while we sat down in the cover of a thicket to wait for the gate. Nice and quiet- this time.

Transit One

Gate site Beta 1300 hrs

“OK, what’s happening- the gate will be the same as last time. We will move, keeping in the cover as much as possible, to the building site. Here Team Transit will mark out the site, while Team Haddon will provide security- watch for the cottage to the northeast at about 800m. This time we are going fully armed, but I doubt we will have any excitement like that previous jump did.”

“Radio’s on- check channel one is set, weapons safe, gear secure.”

“Gate up- GO. GO. GO.”

Jump. - Flare away, gate closed.

Quick scan- nothing in close. As we moved up the rise, spray cans were going already, marking tracks to be cut. We waited at the top for the ‘all clear’ which came in presently.

Sean Brown called in. “The only activity is what looks like a shepherd- about 2 km southwest. You are masked from him by the bush on the river side of the site”

I picked up the radio handpiece- “OK, let’s do it”

Two of the Transit crew were bent over a map correcting details, the rest were hammering in steel pins (using wooden mallets), spraying lines and running round with tape measures. In two days, local time, this would be a construction site, noisier than any other in this world.

“Security- I want one person watching that farm full-time. Take one hour watches”, I said. Time to wander over for a look myself.

Simon was lying in a thicket, watching the Cottage. I crawled alongside and took out a thermal viewer. “Some residual warmth” I said, “Looks like the fire burned out hours ago, no signs of life- nobody home. No stock either- could be market day. Designate this site ‘Coombe’” (We named features after the nearest feature on the modern maps, for convenience)

Simon replied “There looks like a track heading to the larger village in the northwest. Also looks like a much less used one heading right past our site to the northeast”

“Oh well”, I said, “two days and it’s ‘there goes the neighborhood.’ Stand fast here and wait for your relief, I’m going back to the funny farm below.”

With 2 hours to go a call came through. “Movement to the north west- four persons on foot, approaching Coombe at 1000 metres.”

“Monitor- if they show any interest in our position- Call a contact. On contact, everyone freeze and slowly go to ground. All acknowledge”, I called over the radio. Glad I planted those bushes 15 years down-time. We should be fairly well screened. This farm cottage was a new addition, having been rebuilt from ruins in the last year or so.

They are a bit close to our new home. I think I will have to do a special jump and make contact with them.

“Sentry, keep me posted on any changes- scrub that, I’m coming over”, I called.

I repacked the spotting scope and tripod in my pack. “Looks like we have a new farm being established or reestablished”, I said to Simon, who was back on sentry. Outbuildings part completed, wall being repaired. Looks like a young couple with a couple of relatives helping out.”

“Smoke rising, looks like tea time”

Time to fall back and head home ourselves.

Transit Operations Control

“How’s your schedule Jenny, I want to do a contact mission tomorrow”, I asked.

“I can fit it in the morning- the farmlet in the northeast?” she replied.

“That’s the one”, I said, “Time to do the hearts and minds thing.”

“No problem”, said Jenny, “I can take the afternoon jump in- I found a good electrical storm two winters back- that will cover our noise.”

Gate Site Alpha 0900 hrs.

My appearance at breakfast in costume caused some amusement. Only by those who had never done a contact mission, mind. Consensus seems to be that I was jumping back to get a part in the Lord of the Rings movie. They might have been closer to the truth than they realized- the cloak and robes were a copy by the makers of the movie costumes. What the movie model didn't have, however, was a concealed assortment of pyrotechnics, tasers, pistols, noisemakers, gas and smoke grenades or an overpowered cattle prod in the staff.

Gate open- a flare back through the gate and on my way. As I approached the cottage, three young men came out and walked towards me. They looked wary, but not overly hostile, just cautious. To be expected in this time and place.

I stopped and waited to approach. I put down my staff and raised my hands in greeting. Hope this means 'friendly' in their world. It did- Good.

"I bring greetings" I said, hopefully not making too much of a hash of 9th century English. "I have traveled far and seek food and shelter, for which I can trade news of abroad and strong drink."

"Where are you from, stranger?" asked the elder of the three.

"I come from the far south and bring urgent news of aid in the struggle against the Norsemen" I replied- ah. - That got their attention.

"If you are a foe of the Danes, then you are a friend of ours- come take an evening meal with us- we have meat and bread and cheese" said the leader of this group. I am Edgar of Bakewell; these are my cousins, Dwain and Hector of Rowsley."

"I am known as Gandalf", I said, giving a short bow (I know, but I won't forget the name halfway through the night.) "I have strong wine and salt from Cornwell, which we shall enjoy tonight."

Great, now I have to perform the equivalent of eating sheep's eyes to keep the local savages on-side with me. Fecking innards stew and gritty bread. The cheese should be OK though.

Well, that could have been worse. Edgar's young wife was a splendid cook and Bakewell didn't get its name for nothing, it would seem. I had two 1.5 liter bottles the Vin Blanc Very Ordinaire favored by the Transit Team crew for quaffing sessions. Here, they thought it was nectar of the gods, and having sampled their beer, I could understand why. Having got them nicely convivial, I started to move the subject from weather, crops and livestock. I put on my wise old man persona and started.

"I have come to give warning and hope, Come midsummer, the Norsemen plan to move south into this land..." Faces dropped, but this news didn't seem all that unexpected.

"But you have friends. Before the sun has risen thrice a band of Wizards will build a mighty fortress not half a mile from here. They will arrive with a great roaring as of a raging storm and build this fortress before the day is done. They will be mighty friends but terrible enemies."

OK, that has stretched them far enough.

“As proof of my words, I give you this token”, I said, placing an 8 inch Buck knife on the table. “This knife is of the steel that would fight at your side, to keep your lands. It is yours” I said, sliding it towards Edgar. “And here are two for your kin”, I said, sliding two slightly smaller knives across.

They picked up the knives, examining them in what passed for light here, gasping as they tested the razor-sharp edges.

“Friend Gandalf, what may we do to give thanks for such gifts?” Edgar exclaimed.

“Remember that those who arrive soon would be your friends- you will find their ways strange and fearsome, but they be good men- that is all.”

“Now to raise a mug to strong men and strong drink”, I said, bringing the second bottle from my bag...

Some time later, I slipped through the door, past my snoring hosts. I left the bag of salt and a few trade items, a stainless steel mug and a couple of small pocketknives.

Three hours till gate and its bloody cold here. Glad I stashed that thermos of coffee back at the gatesite.

Transit One

Jenny’s Office

“Do I have to go clean up?” asked Jenny

“Hey! Since when did I screw up a contact”

“You mean since when did anyone else survive your screwed up contact”, she said, with a grin.

“Exactly, I always take care of business.” I said, “Actually, that lot seemed a couple of cuts above your standard dumbfuck peasant. New blood- driving into new territory and so on. They should buy into the program- especially when they see what the nice wizards can do for them.”

“Oh feck. Wizards again- *you didn’t.*” she said

“Err, yes- first name that came into my head”, I said, blushing slightly, “Anyway, legends have to start somewhere....”

Changing the subject I asked, “Timber sorted OK?”

“All done”, she said, “An electrical storm, a bit of detonator cord and bang- down they come. We cut about 50 trees and set it up so most remained standing. No point in giving the locals free firewood.”

“I’m off to the bar”, said Jenny, “If you were to wait on me hand and foot, maybe, just maybe- I won’t mention Gandalf the Grey....”

“Cow.”

Transit One

Gate Site Alpha 1300 hrs

“This jump is a going to be a bit different to the previous ones that you have been hearing about, thus the fancy camouflage gear”, I said.

We were all decked out in the advanced camouflage clothing, much better than standard military issue. Faces painted, hoods, weapon covers- the works.

“We will be crawling out of a low and narrow gate, by twos into the target area, designated Gate Charlie. We will move by stealth to the drift mine in the south west, to assess coal deposits. This mine is in continuous use, so two will remain at the gate and keep an overwatch, while the other two will follow me to the mine and get some samples. This is a 3 hour mission and we will be operating close to a small village. The good news- visibility is poor. The bad news- it is raining- pissing down, actually. Minutes two to gate”, I said, “Weapons safe, radios on and set to channel one.”

“STAY LOW- GO.”

We exited to a wet, miserable day. Good- we should be able to get in for a close look, and anyone moving would stand out like a bonfire, on the thermal scope. We cautiously moved in to check the deposits out.

As we got close to the drift, we could finally stand up and move, being screened from the village area. The drift mine was an old slip face that had exposed a seam of coal. Looks like they would undercut as far as they dared, then move further down the seam- eventually the overburden above the undercut section would slip and make the face safe to work again- sort of safe, anyway. I gathered a bag of loose coal to take back for analysis, but it looked good to me. The boiler we had would burn next to anything, so quality wasn't too much of an issue.

“What do you reckon, Sean,” I asked.

“Ten hours tops with the D6 and the 322- we can strip that overburden above the face and in about 2-3 hours dig enough coal to last us 5 years”, he answered. That work will make what we leave far more accessible for the locals, which should make up for us swiping their coal. We should flatten out the base of the workings and shove the waste into that gully, to help with access. Basically, we take about 200 tons of coal and leave then a nice easy mine to work, as opposed to the current death trap.”

“The digger will be working up there, initially?” I asked pointing at the rise.

“Yeah, right in front of the village and in arrow shot- it remains to be seen who wants to try stop the dragon eating their coal.”

“Dragon..., now there's a thought” I said. A bit of artwork on the digger and a few canisters of marker smoke might just do the trick- no- it may be best not to scare them more than we have to.

Anyway, time to head home for a hot shower.

Derbyshire, England March 5th 846 AD

The band of men approached cautiously from the east. Armed with staves, bows and axes, they searched for what had caused the disturbances the previous afternoon- sounds of thunder under a clear sky and word of scouting Norsemen in the area needed investigating. A glint of bright metal caught their attention. At the same time a pair of crows took to the air from the same place- they moved forward, less cautiously than before, knowing what the birds meant.

The sight was a mystery to them- 20 dead Norsemen, with their weapons, armour and baggage. Whoever had done this had not even stopped to loot the bodies- not even to take their gold.

The Headman rubbed his beard in puzzlement “What manner of weapon caused these wounds?” he pondered.

His gray-haired old uncle spat at the nearest corpse and answered “I know not, but the enemy of my enemy may be my friend”, and bent to start stripping the body, giving it a kick, for good measure...

Transit One

Weeks review

Week 4 ends- we jump in 14 days. A hell of a lot was achieved this week- we are way ahead of schedule in most areas and I have enough time to add more language and customs lessons to the program- can't have people slacking off. A big plus getting some of the team blooded and they seem to have come through that OK.

On debriefing, I found all weapons had been fired in the attack and when we ran the simulation on the range, minus grenades, we found we would have taken them all before they had closed to 20 metres with pistols alone. When we ran it adding my MP5, it was a walk in the park

Everyone is competent with the various machine guns- those who don't shoot so well can at least haul ammo and feed the belts, and now everyone knows at least knows how to start up and move all of the variety of vehicles that we will be using- I will assign the specialist positions just before the date. The two pilots have enough hours up on the new microlights for now, so they can go back in the container. I'm sure they would spend all day buzzing the camp, if they could.

We now have enough firewood to fuel the wood burner in the bar for the next two years and plenty of sawn wood for odd jobs around the place.

All the machinery has been run up and tested now. Next week we will run 'snatch & grab' raids and uplift some newer M113's and M548's. I don't need the extra supplies but sending them raiding will help keep the team sharp. Won't hurt for them to know what the Transit staff goes through to get us this gear.

They really are ready to go now, but we will use the next two weeks to put the polish on. Time isn't exactly a problem here.

Transit One

Briefing Room

“Here is a plan view and photos of the target”, I said, pointing at video images of the interior of a large armoury on the screen.

“Gate will open at the west wall. I estimate you will have at least four minutes before the base security team can reach the compound, a further 30 seconds before they reach the building and another 30 seconds before they can position and unlock. You will set stopwatches for 5 minutes. At 5 minutes or at the first sound of security at the door you will exit via the gate.

Your return is the absolute priority- I can always set up another mission. If you are under pursuit call “Cover.” when you exit the field and we will throw smoke to hide the field. I DO NOT want hostiles this side of the field and I DO NOT want to send a strike team to recover prisoners. You may get wrung out by their spooks before we can get to you. If you want to know about what will happen in the event of your capture, keep Jenny well supplied with Cloudy Bay and get her talking about her time in the CIA.

Now- the mission proper. I want M16's firstly. They are stored on wheeled racks ready for issue- shove them straight through the gate. Two full racks will do. Next priority- machine guns- get what you can, anything else is good. Don't go looking- everything I want is out in the main armoury. Some real good stuff is secured in a strong room- ignore it. 16's, SAW's, Pistols, sights- that's what we want- anything you can throw through that gate in five minutes- that's it from me.”

Gate Area Alpha

“Stopwatches start- GO.” I yelled, as Steve and Simon disappeared into the gate.

Eight seconds later, two racks appeared side by side- the Transit crew grabbed them and pulled them through the gate. 10 seconds later, two more appeared. Then weapons started flying out of the gate, to be caught and passed down the human chain. 25 seconds down. Jenny aimed her MP5 parallel to the gate and I picked up a tear gas canister in one hand and hooked a concussion grenade onto my belt.

“Just like the picture” said Steve, grabbing a rack of weapons and shoving it towards the gate.

“IR illumination on the east wall- we have been spotted”, yelled Simon, “Let’s move.”

A wheeled bin flew through the gate. Steve grabbed it, pulling it across to a weapon rack. They both started grabbing weapons from the rack and loading it- as soon as it was full it was shoved through the gate and an empty was immediately returned for filling.

‘BEEP BIP’ “One minute.” said Steve. The racks were emptying fast and they were both sweating hard now.

‘BEEP BIP’ Two Minutes- the racks within easy distance of the gate were almost empty now. Time to start on the crates- drag and then slide them through the gate. Both were breathing hard and sweating profusely in their grey overalls and masks.

‘BEEP BIP BEEP’ “Three minutes”, they both shouted together, continuing to slide crates as fast as possible, while looking about for easy targets.

Simon heard it first. “Vehicle coming fast- Humvee.”

Steve yelled back “Keep going, but slow down a bit and listen” Then they saw a canvas cover at the other side of the room. Something was under it that might be worth having. He sprinted across and hauled off the canvas- yes. - Grenade-launching machine guns. The vehicle screeched to a halt outside and its doors banged. The security team must be at the compound gate. “Come on”, Steve yelled-“Over here.” They both grabbed an M19 as the ‘BEEP BIP BEEP’ of the four minute signal sounded.

They dragged the heavy machine guns across and into the gate. Steve said “One more.”

They dashed back to grab one more each, when they heard another screech of tires outside and the sound of boots as the security team surrounded the building. As they reached the gate the door started to open. They leapt through the gate.

Another pair of M19’s appeared closely followed by the ‘snatch & grab’ team. Steve yelled “COVER.” In went the gas and a concussion grenade. The gate snapped shut and we were in the clear. The poor sods on the other side should be so lucky.

‘BIP BIP’ went the stopwatch, with the retreat signal...

Steve and Simon flopped to the ground, removing camouflage hoods and mopping the sweat from their faces, as they caught their breath.

“A job well done.” I said-“Go get a shower- we will sort this lot away- by the way- that earned a \$100K bonus each.”

A good haul- a mix of 400 new M16A3's and M4 Carbines, some fitted with the M203 grenade launcher- 12 M249's and a heap of assorted goodies including flare guns, M9 pistols, sniping rifles, and of course the four M19's.

Great, they even got a couple of .50 caliber M-107 rifles.

Transit One

Briefing Room

“This is an ammunition raid. We are going to hijack a train. Sounds ambitious, doesn't it? -But it is in fact, relatively easy- here's how we do it...

This is a quite different type of operation, snatching a moving target and a lot less intense than the last armory raid. Over at Gateway Delta, we have about a kilometer of railway track set up. It has four rails and can manage most of the more common gauge rolling stock. Obviously, getting the gateway just so is the trickiest part- this takes a crack gate operator. We found this type of mission is best run from the other side and is one of the few times that the gate generator leaves Transit on a 'Snatch & Grab'.

The risk is minimal, as so much railway goes through wilderness. Even in Europe, there are plenty of spaces that are not often watched.

We jump in, close the gate and wait for a train, which has to be moving fairly slowly- 20kph is about right. We open the gate just in front of the part of the train we want, using a spotting telescope to line up on the exact position of the gate. Opening the gate effectively severs the coupling and the air line, which brings the brakes on. This is why we need just enough momentum to move through the gate, but not enough to rocket off the tracks. Quite important when hijacking ammo or fuel, I'm sure you can understand.

If the rolling stock we want is in the middle, (which more often than not it is) we can collapse the field again, to make another cut. Sometimes we just collapse the field when the rolling stock runs out of momentum. Not a good idea to do this in the middle of an LPG tanker or suchlike, so it is important to position yourself at right angles with the gate and to get the cut right.

At Gateway Delta, we have a heavy D11 bulldozer and a truck mounted air compressor to release the brakes, if the wagons we want get stuck halfway.

Tonight's grab is for 12 shipping containers of assorted ammunition on its way to the US Army- should keep us going for a bit, even given the way they shoot it off around here.”

Transit One

Final Review: Jump -8 days- 7 for me.

From here on in, we start preparations for the physical act of making the big jump. This is our largest operation to date, involving a five-year mission with 12-30 persons in the field. Best indications are that we should achieve the timeline divergence shortly after our first year.

The last containers are being loaded with the stores and the bulk equipment is being loaded onto trailers. The only items that will stay in use are the personal quarters and the freezer, which is fully loaded. These are all on trailers and the freezer will be switched to auxiliary power shortly before the jump. Now that we have fine-tuned the layout of the compound, all the containers have been marked with their numbers, designating their place in the structure. These containers have been modified, with side access doors and have had fittings and attachment points welded on for additions, such as access ways and catwalks for the second level and third levels. It all goes together like a big 3D puzzle, thus the numbering to ensure everything matches.

The whole structure is seven 12 metre containers long by four 12 metre containers wide, with a 6 metre container in the middle at one end and a 6 metre wide gate at the other. The whole thing is two containers high, with a third container on each wall, which serves as a watchhouse for the sentry's and an armory containing ammo and heavy weapons. Inside this compound, there are three 30,000 litre water tanks, 4 six metre storage containers, a large ex-military freezer, a similar chiller and three 8x10 metre barns which are a workshop, a recreation room and a boiler/plant room. Three sets of hangers are to be built for most of the vehicles. Inside dimensions of the compound will be 54x78 metres.

All the vehicles have been fueled and serviced and new weapons have been issued and sighted in, with the training ones returned to the pool.

For the next week, we have marked out the layout of the site and will practice the movements with spare containers and the Transit load moving equipment. If we don't get this just right there will be one huge traffic jam at the other end and I want the basic structure of the fort up FAST. The structure contains 44 x12 metre containers and 9 x 6 metre ones, plus the dozen or so that are to be used as outbuildings and secure stores, out of the immediate stronghold. Also coming along are kitsets to build 3 barns within the compound, along with hanger kits for the vehicles.

Then there are water tanks, septic tanks, fencing, barbed wire, building supplies, cement. The list is huge- the master manifest runs to about 50 pages of A4 and everything has to be checked- we can't be running out of fluffy toilet paper in 846 AD.

Sometimes I think it's so much easier to change history and cause a divergence by gating 60 kilos of Jenny with a silenced pistol... Still, this should be a bit of fun while we get the job done.

I will hold the brief for the jump movements tomorrow and announce who will make up the advance party. The advance party will jump in the previous day and install the sensor arrays. We have a ring of motion detectors and cameras going out into pre-surveyed positions that should keep anyone from sneaking about unnoticed. We also have to drop a few small trees and some brush from the gate area, which I will do using primer cord a few seconds before the gate opens. As the tracked vehicles are to come through first, they should crush anything still standing and clear the way for the wheeled transport.

We found some similar terrain nearby and the plant operators have been playing about cutting tracks and leveling a pad for the containers. The laser leveling gear makes the job a whole lot simpler. Set up the laser and the dozer blade is controlled automatically- as the big bottleneck

looks to be in getting the site prepared, anything that can speed this up is good. We have been thinking about using the big D11 to get things started, but none of my operators have done any time on anything that big- we just use it at Transit for a tractor when stealing trains, tanks, bridges and anything normally considered too big to move. We can always gate it over to the hills about 20k's from the main base and let them try it out. Could be useful for a fast and rough leveling of the site- it will certainly clear the surrounding trees a lot quicker than the D6. Plus scare the crap out of any nosy locals.

Some of the road trains pulling multiple trailers are huge- a few people were a bit dubious, but the larger dozers and tractors can pull some enormous loads on good ground. We get them rolling on the Transit side and soil tests on the site show that we should be OK. About 110 seconds to move the whole thing through the gate but each one of those trains carries 20% of our cargo. A lot of the trailers are coming back, but we will keep some to cannibalize for building projects, such as using the decks for bridges. The high-sided trailers are full of light, but bulky material- the sides themselves are intended to become fencing and gates.

The plan has the kitchen running at +1 days and the showers on by +2 days. At least everyone will have a bed on day one- I just don't think we will see much of them for the first 3-4 days. We will set up a temporary pumping station at the river until we get time to sink a bore. If we can get the bore going, that will save having to treat the drinking water. I always try to have several backup systems, in case things don't quite work out and we are SNAFU.

The boiler house and the outbuildings will take a week or two, so we will be running off the backup diesel generator and auxiliary sets. It is going to take a while to screen the aggregates for the concrete, then a week to cure it after we pour, then we have to get the shed up. These all-steel kitset sheds and barns don't take too long to put together- once you have done one and have learned a few of the tricks. They will be putting one up here; just to get the hang of it- they will also have the help of Will, Transit's resident carpenter. He has built quite a few of them here, alone with the rest of the Transit crew.

The rain gauge and instruments we dropped previously gave us an eight day window of good weather. Let's see what a top-notch crew can do in this time.

Transit One

The lads had a bit of a play around yesterday and found that, even if the D11 is too big to work on the site, it can pull a train of 20 heavy shipping containers at 7kph, once it is rolling. With that and 3 other trains pulled by the big 500 horsepower John Deere tractors, we can have all the containerized cargo through the gate in about 4.5 minutes. Looks like the 10 minutes gate time is quite achievable. I have allowed 15 minutes for safety. We never have a gate open for longer than we have to.

On the strength of this, here are the movement orders:

Orders Group 0745

Movement Day

Due to the movement of fuel and explosives, flares will not be used to signal.

Departure will commence as soon as advance party exits the gate, on the Transit side. Hi-visibility vests will signal a 'GO' condition. Only move forward on sighting these vests.

The teams for moving day are:

Advance party

Myself - Coordination
Steve Anders *
Simon Jones - Security Systems
Pete Jordan *
Dave Palmer *

Earthmoving

Sean Marden - Cat. 322C Excavator
John French - D6 Bulldozer
Mark Campbell - Bobcat

Security (M113's)

Brent Stevenson
Steve Anders
Pete Jordan

Cargo Handlers/Drivers

Sean Brown
Phill Chambers
John Daniells
Dave Eastman
Sam Iams
John Lister
Eric Ledern
Dave Palmer
Mike West

Plus all Transit staff not involved in gate operations.

Gate will be opened at dawn (down-time) for fifteen minutes- reopening at 1900 hrs for five minutes, for the Transit crew to depart.

Next gate is in 6 months or at first convenience.

Timings

Breakfast 0400

Recharged radio battery issue 0445

Vehicle checks, warm-up 0500

Gate opens 0600

Move on sighting advance team, *if* they are wearing Orange Hi-Visibility vests

Gate closes 0615

Communications

Radio Channel One

Ensure earpieces are worn

Order of Departure

Train Behemoth (D11)#, Train Leviathan (side by side) #

Train Kraken#, Train Mammoth (side by side)

M113's

D6, Cat. 322

M548's

LoadKing Container Handlers #

Fuel tankers

Tractors and remaining Plant

Humvees

Priorities

Earthmoving - prepare site

Cargo- Unload Behemoth, Leviathan, Kraken

Assemble compound

Security- secure perimeter

Responsibilities

Vehicle movements- as delegated in individual briefs.

Coordination- Wayne Jamieson

Gate operations- Jenny DeVires

Security- Steve Anders

* Return to Transit to uplift vehicles

Return to Transit, via second gate.

Transit One

The Bar, 1930 hrs.

We were doing the usual, having a quiet beer or two and talking shop. The subject of trading for labour came up, more specifically; I was asked what we were taking back as trade goods.

“Quite a bit of salt, axes, shovels, crowbars, pots and pans, knives, blankets, clothing and so on”, I answered, “About 2 containers worth- really most of what I want to trade is knowledge and time.”

“Is that time, as in gating them?” asked Steve.

“No. We can use the gear to mine, plow, log and quarry, freeing up a lot of time for them to work on improving their situation. Nothing slows progress like a hand to mouth existence. Of course I expect them to pay us in labour and produce.”

“How about sinking a few wells for the locals and teaching them about sanitation?” asked Sean Marden, one of the plumbers.

“Water is a good idea, sanitation is too, although they aren’t nearly as bad as they will become in a few hundred years. Some of the old Roman teaching still holds good- mind you, they still mostly stink.”, I said

“The trick with tech boosting is not to go too far in advance of what they have, in any one step. Let them get used to something new, then add something else when they get comfortable with that”, added Jenny, “go too far too soon and they give up. We believe it best to do stuff like improve what they have, initially- better plows, better bellows, better steel- that sort of thing. Things move faster if you go slower, odd though it sounds.”

“Sounds fair”, said Mike, our blacksmith and steam engineer, “But what then is the effect of them seeing us with all our high-tech gear?”

“Good question”, answered Jenny, with a grin. “But then they see you as wizards, to whom such things are natural.”

“Also”, I said, tossing an empty beer bottle into the bin, “Our trash may well be their treasure. Do try and coordinate any trading with me, though- we don’t want the prices driven up.”

Transit One

Transit Operations Control 2230hrs

In the moonlight, the convoy waited, poised before Gateway Alpha. Everything was packed now and the crew had bunked down in one of the new barns they had just built. Tomorrow was a rest day for all but the advance party. Jenny would be giving some last minute briefs, but that was about it. The advance team would be jumping in at 1600 tomorrow.

We sat for a while, just watching this sea of equipment. Jenny stood up and said, "I wish I was going along now, the rest of the regular crew, too- you look at all of this and just want to be a part of it- now not later."

"It's best if we go stag, with a new crew like this, but you know that- only six months tops until you come down time. Then we have a big midwinter bash."

"I know", she said, "Anyway, back to my place for a drink?"

"OK- actually, I don't think I have ever been in your quarters before"

"Maybe you need to spend more time here", she said, grinning.

We wandered over to Jenny's hut, a 12 metre portacabin, standard to all the Transit staff. It was sited against a container park, sheltering it from the prevailing winds, about 100 metres from operations control. She unlocked the door and we stepped in, then Jenny swung a full-length mirror aside and stepped into another room- her real quarters. Someone has finally made something here that I didn't know about.

"The six containers behind the cabin are fake", she said, "I had this made up back on earth, then skidded it through one day when no-one was about- like it?"

It was a surprise, most of Transit was rough and ready, but this was exquisitely crafted with all the finest fittings and furnishings. There were no windows, but four 240cm LCD screens showed the outside. The walls were wood paneled, Kauri, if I guess right. Classic paintings hung on the walls- original, no doubt. The light fittings were crystal, the wall hangings silk. The whole room was uncluttered, even a bit plain, yet incredibly tasteful.

Jenny opened an antique cabinet. "Whisky?" she asked, picking up two Waterford glasses.

I nodded, knowing that anything in Jen's private stock was going to be a treat.

"Laphroaig, 1900", she said, holding the glass to the light.

I raised my glass. "To the jump", I toasted, and we drank.

"Now take me to bed", she said, sliding up against me.

Now why had it taken us 90-odd years for us to get to this point?

Advance party- Derbyshire
England March 7th 846 AD

“Gate in minutes five. - High-Vis vests on, watch the markers and get ready to run like hell.”

“GATE OPEN. - Wait for the gap- GO. GO. GO.”

The three took off through the gate- one to the left and two for the right, heading for their assigned vehicles, just behind the trains.

Three seconds later, the huge blade of the D11 popped through, flanked by a John Deere 9620 tractor, engines roaring as they dragged their massive loads at a top speed of about 7kph. The train ‘Behemoth’ would take 3 minutes to pass through. ‘Leviathan’ on the other side would take 100 seconds. The D11’s blade was down, just scraping the surface and clearing a strip nearly 7 metres wide, which would make easier running for those following. Simon kept looking between the screen of the laptop and the emerging trains. I have a video camera recording this- hope nobody runs it down.

“When the lead 113 comes through, head towards it and make sure the driver sees you”, I yelled to Simon, “Put your Hi-Vis on and keep it on until you are aboard. Your vehicle is designated ‘Command Post’, I will be in the vehicle designated ‘Rover.’”

He gave me a ‘thumbs up’ and pulled the vest out of his pack. We gathered up our gear and got ready to move. The second train cleared the gate, immediately followed by the much faster 113’s, which broke left, turning straight at us. The leading two vehicles stopped and we scabbled up the sloping front and jumped in, through the roof hatches. Slapping the driver on the shoulder, as a signal to go, I pulled on a CVC helmet and plugged in, shrugged off my vest and climbed into the commander’s position. We roared off to a high point where I could watch the gate and the east of the site.

By this time, the D11 had been uncoupled from the train and was grinding up the grade towards the building site, knocking trees and scrub aside as it went. The earthmovers were clanking and clattering towards their positions and the M548’s were moving towards their designated parks. The first drivers through were circling around the traffic towards the gate, to go back and pick up their second vehicles. The Liftkings followed in single file, carrying the remaining shipping containers. Now the drivers started to head back through the gate to uplift the remaining vehicles. Hugging the left-hand side of the gate, they slipped through as the tankers and the remaining plant started to file through.

Seven minutes down. The two dozers had started to clear the site and the surrounding area. All sentries reported movement in the villages and the farm to the north, but no-one was attempting to investigate our arrival. The D3 popped out and headed off towards the building site, to set up his laser and start leveling, followed by the smaller 311 digger that would cut the trenches for sewer, drains and water, once the pad was leveled.

Nine minutes and all the plant was through, along with the remaining trailers. I called over the net, “6 minutes, 6 minutes”, as the lead Humvee broke through. Very impressive- that bettered our best rehearsal time by 40 seconds.

Now we needed to get that site ready.

I sent Mark Campbell to start trenching and laying pipe- we wouldn't need the Bobcat yet, so he can work the small digger. The four Liftkings had started to unload the trains, stacking the containers to the side of their trailers. For a brief time I would have more bodies than jobs- how to put them to use...

I detailed the Humvee drivers to start moving the light trailers and to uncouple them at the parking area and then sent the tanker drivers to help them. The tracked and wheeled loaders were sent to help clear spoil from the site and knock over any remaining trees. Two more people to saw up a couple of dead trees near the site, three to unload pipe and the water pump and start setting that up- everyone is now busy.

The gate is closed- 15 minutes gone.

The big excavator was well into forming a track up the rise- looked like that would take at least two hours, but he would get some help from the dozers soon. The D11 had taken about 10 minutes to flatten the site and was now lumbering about, clearing scrub. Time to move the D6 down to help cut the track. The laser level was running and the D3 was now finishing grading the site for the containers. Pre-cast concrete footings would be placed to keep the containers off the ground. Later on, we would pump concrete underneath them.

Still no visitors- the locals are probably huddling together, shaking and wondering what was going on.

One hour later and we now have a track up to the site- a nice gentle 1:20 grade. The D11 has finished and all the trains to return have been pulled clear of the area, ready to move back. The track is not wide enough to move the 12 metre containers into place with the Liftkings, so we have to bring them up on a flatbed truck, where they are lifted off and placed in position. The two dozers are now cutting a second, wider temporary track that the Liftkings can get up, with a push from a dozer. That should speed things up.

Two hours, thirty minutes and the first container is in place, one of the lighter accommodation modules- we are moving the heavy containers up by truck and the Liftkings can easily manage the lightweights up the hill. All diggers are currently trenching, plus the Bobcat has the trencher fitted and is rapidly making its way to the river. A three metre container equipped as filtration and pumping plant has been put in place and is ready to connect. A couple of scoops with the tracked loader and now there is a nice deep pool for the intake line. We should have time for the water to run clear, before we start pumping.

Four hours down and things are taking shape. We are getting a container in every six minutes and the south wall is completed. The plumbers are now flat-out hooking up water connections to the kitchen and shower modules in readiness for the tanks being brought up. The west wall is being started now- once that is in we will have generator power and full Command and Control facilities and then I can get out of this aluminum can. Time to change the sentries and let some of the others have a bit of a rest. Still no movement, but we are being watched closely from the north and southeast... Stay home and I won't teargas you.

Four hours and fifty minutes later and we have power- I have relocated to the C&C module, which is up and running and I have got the coffee maker going. The water tanks are in place and filling now- they tell me we will have flushing toilets before the end of the day. The septic tanks

are being fitted and the field drains are laid. When the plumbers finish here, they will hook all of that up. It helps that the fitters have a lot of interchangeable skills and can do a lot of the plumbing work.

I might leave this cozy room and help get the cooker's flue installed, which will free up a plumber. Anything to help get the toilets working earlier.

Midday and only the south wall left to go. We have three of the watch rooms operating and two of the sentries have been moved there- much more comfortable for them, and a better view up there. I have one Humvee out patrolling the perimeter as a roving patrol and have stood the 113's down. I'm now standing down groups of four at a time, for a quick lunch break.

1500hrs- the last wall is up. The welders are fastening the gates now and the toilets are working. The Bobcat is backfilling and tidying up the trenches. Pre-assembling the fittings and hoses has saved some serious time. The plumbers are now working on the Aga cooker- I think they have earned a serious bonus. The electricians are hooking up power to the accommodation units

The fitters are flat out now, welding and bolting fittings on, such as stairs and catwalks to the second and top levels.

Mike, the boiler man has got most of the heating system hooked up and is now connecting up the LPG supply to the kitchen module. I have gotten anyone spare to move the remaining equipment up near the compound, where we can watch it tonight. As soon as they move everything up the hill, they can start putting up barbed wire.

1700 hrs- The gates are on, everything movable or breakable is in the compound and the barbed wire is around 3 sides of the compound. The trailers and plant not needed right now are inside the wire. We have 2 stairways to the top of the walls- the other one can wait. The kitchen is running and the Aga is warming up. Mike has set up a wood burning boiler and the showers now work. - The grey water soak pit hasn't been finished but that can wait until tomorrow. Still no contact with the locals, but a group has been seen gathering in a nearby wood. I think they are waiting for nightfall- about 2000 tonight. We have set up an M19 on the north to lay down CS gas if needed and have floodlights all round, not that we need the light to see them.

I have stood the advance team down- they have been going for nearly 48 hours now. I can run on coffee for a while yet.

1830hrs- The Transit team is heading to the gate area now, with two 113's as security. They are returning with the Liftkings, the spare trucks and the trailers. Most of them want to stay. I know there have been a few attachments made between the Transit crew and Team Alpha. They can all get together on the second tour, which will save Jenny some recruiting.

Work here has slowed down now; the critical tasks are all completed ahead of schedule, now it is just a matter of tidy-up work and the multitude of ten-minute jobs that need doing. Tomorrow we will start getting ready to pour the concrete foundations for the barns and start getting some paving down, before the first rain turns this place to mud.

We have about two weeks worth of firewood stacked outside the kitchen, so no need to get the firewood processor out just yet.

The Transit crew has just exited and now I see a couple of boxes have been thrown back through. One of the 113's has dropped the rear ramp and they are being loaded aboard. Jenny must have found something she has thought we would need. With the closing of this gate, the final transfer was about to take place. Three gates opened in midair- about 50 meters above the ground and oriented to a horizontal plane. Pouring through these gates came many thousands of cubic meters of sand plus roading and concrete aggregate. This would keep us going until we opened up our own quarry- we had decided against tearing up the river for our supplies when it was so easy to move bulk materials of this sort.

That's it for the next six months.

The Bobcat was trundling up and down the compound with it's roller on, compacting the surface. A diesel tank was being connected up to the generator and the welding on of the catwalks continued. The freezer and chiller were now on mains power- good, that's two less engines thumping away out there. Glad I went for the top silencing kit for the generator, still- after 3 days you won't hear it unless it stops.

The 113's have just returned with two insulated containers full of hot food. - A fine assortment of pies, fried chicken, pizza and cold soft drinks. Time to stand down for a break. I will pack some up and take it round the sentries.

Then I'm going to check out the showers, followed by my bed for a couple of hours. No doubt I will be getting as wake up call tonight...

First Contact

Sure enough, the intercom went off at about 2300.

"Contact northeast. Estimate 25 moving our way"

"Responding- don't call stand-to just yet"

I pulled on my boots, grabbed my pistol belt and headed up top, along with everyone else not trying to sleep. I entered the guardhouse and took a look through the 'scope. Sure enough, about two dozen locals were trying to sneak up on us for a look. They were about 500 metres out.

"OK", I announced over the radio, "I'm going to rattle their cage, but I don't want to hurt anyone. We have to get on with these people, but they need to know who holds the big stick- weapons to safe and get ready for a flare. I took a parachute flare from the box by the door and handed it to Steve, who was on sentry.

said, picking up the microphone and switching to 'loud-hailer'. Steve grinned and stepped outside, readying the flare.

"LEAVE NOW.- RETURN TO YOUR HOMES." roared out as the field turned to day. Not unexpectedly, they froze like rabbits in the headlights. I moved to the M240 mount and fired a long burst of tracer just to their right. That did it- they were off at a sprint, headed for the trees.

"If they come back, give them some CS. I'm going back to bed."

Derbyshire, England
March 8th 846 AD

Day Two

0430 - I can't complain- that was more sleep than I had hoped to get. Might as well get up and do something useful. As I ran an electric razor over my face, I peered out the window, to see that lights were already on. The main generator was off and we were running on the 10 kW auxiliary set.

Another big day today, if not as frantic as yesterday was. Time to get started on these building foundations and the hanger bays, which will take almost everyone not needed on sentry. First order of the day is to get the foundations excavated and boxed up. Once we have some aggregate we can start mixing and pour.

First things first- I smell bacon cooking.

0600- All up, fed and ready to go. I detailed the day's tasks:

“This morning we start on the buildings, so we don't have to stand around in the rain and do this. John L and Sam are to organize the foundations. Mark- Take care of any pipe work needed for these buildings. Pete, Phill and Dave- we need about 50 cubic metres of builders mix moved on site. Brent and Steve are roving security. Everyone not assigned else carry on with the catwalks and the soak pit until we are ready to mix and pour. Lunch at 1200- any questions? - No? - let's do it.”

The Cat loader was heaping the aggregate into a tracked dumper, which then hauled it up to stockpiles outside where it would be needed. I went a bit overboard in the specification of almost all the equipment here, but it is worth it for the speed...

I climbed up the stairs to the eastern guardhouse, went in and opened the telescope case. I set up the spotting scope and scanned around the area. There didn't seem to be a lot of activity at the village today. Good- if they lie low for another day or two, all the better.

Down below in the compound, the boxing for the first pad was being laid out and the pipes, sewers and conduits lay in place. Again, all this was prefabricated, so everything was going at a rapid pace. We should be ready to start mixing concrete after lunch. This one is the pad for the boiler room and so will be a lot thicker than the others. Mixing the extra concrete should let the builders get ahead with the boxing for the other two slabs. Here comes the reinforcing now, slung under the bucket of a loader.

Just in time for lunch. A selection of cold meat, bread, cheese and pickles as I recall- shame there isn't time for a pint- never mind, plenty of time for that, later.

Someone had rigged a tarpaulin outside the kitchen for shade, and had found a folding table to set up lunch on. We didn't bring much furniture along, as I figured we could make that during the winter, as something to do during bad weather.

While we were eating, I outlined the afternoon's plans. Four feeding the mixer, one moving the concrete in the Bobcat's bucket, three vibrating and screeding the concrete, under expert guidance of Sam Iams. That left two spare, to work the small tracked Bobcat and bore the postholes for the hanger. While we were making concrete, we might as well get some posts set in the ground.

At 1800 we finally finished, with the slabs poured and all the posts up. All those not involved in sentry or dinner trudged off to the showers. I made a command decision and stood the sentries down, set the security system to automatic and secured the gates. Tomorrow we would spend the day pouring the paths and deck areas.

We improvised a table from a packing crate and found enough folding chairs to sit down to a huge roast dinner. If anyone out there interrupts, I won't be aiming to scare.

One sentry tonight on a two hour rotation. Let everyone get some rest.

When I said 'rest', it looks like everyone took that to mean potter about doing odd jobs- tidying cabling, bolting on lights and fittings, insulating hot water lines, cleaning and painting welds. A couple of them are even putting together a table and benches out of packing and bits and pieces.

Dusk- I'm going up top to see if there is anything out there I can shoot. Slim chance, with all the noise here. I went to sit up in the guardhouse for a bit, and watch the sensor screens for any movement.

There are four guardhouses. Each consists of a 6 metre container, with doors at each end and a long and low Plexiglas window at the front which folds down out of the way. They have a bench under the window, with a target bench-rest made for a rifle. Next to this are binoculars, spotting scope, image intensifier and a thermal viewer. A M19 on a pintle mount and a M240 general purpose machine gun on a tripod complete the fixed armament. On shelves at the rear are the ready supplies of ammunition in sealed boxes and in bandoleers of magazines, as well as four spare M16's. By the door is a box of parachute flares. Two large LCD screens display all the sensor information and the radio and intercom gear is on a shelf above the window, as well as the klaxon switch. Also found on shelves at the rear are thermos flasks, mugs and an assortment of snacks and personal gear. A comfortable office chair is the other essential fitting. All lights are on a dimmer circuit and there is a radiator for heating. In this particular one, a piece of PVC drainpipe has been attached outside as an improvised urinal. Two days and they have started improving the original design already.

Oh well, no venison today. Time to get some sleep.

Transit One
Jenny's Journal
Day Three

The gate closed, Jenny packed up the equipment and loaded it into the back of her Landcruiser. There was one small but critical job to do tomorrow, then it was back to Earth for six months.

Its funny how Transit station felt more like home now- there seemed less and less to go back to Earth for, she thought to herself, driving back to her quarters. I'm definitely looking forward to the next tour. The crew here can look after this place and Sonja and Jane are more than capable of running the gating side of operations. I stowed the generator and headed to the bar to meet the crew, who were just returning from the vehicle park.

"How did it go?" I asked.

"Real slick." said Sonja, "Hardly anything screwed up."

"I have a job for us over the next few months", I said- "Let's turn this place into a real holiday home- now how shall we do it?"

Jenny's Journal
Transit One

I woke early the next morning and drove to a large shed on the outskirts and backed the wagon up to the doors. I unloaded the gate equipment, set it up and dragged out an aluminum storage box, which I placed on a trolley. Moving this up to where the gate would appear, I snapped on a parachute to the corner brackets.

I moved to the gate controls and opened it to a preset position. Then, returning to the crate, opened an access panel, inserted a key and entered the code. The display came up 'Armed-Barometric Detonation'.

I shoved the trolley through the gate and promptly shut it off.

Goodbye Rome.

Now I think I need to go and get really smashed...

Derbyshire, England
March 9th 846 AD

Day Three

0500 Another early start- up before the sun. Most had switched from camouflage to green overalls, as we would be working mostly in the immediate area of the compound today. The rule was that weapons had to be within less than 5 metres when in the compound and within a pace or two within the sensor ring. Most had taken to carrying sidearms when working and a M4 carbine or MP5 when out in a vehicle.

After a good, clog-the-arteries-up breakfast, we set to- preparing to concrete. As soon as one part was boxed up, down went the plastic damp proofing and reinforcing steel where needed, then in went the concrete. The paths were much less demanding than the slabs, as they were not structural and did not require reinforcing steel or a smooth finish. We had mostly finished up at about 1130, just leaving Sam to finish off spraying the concrete with curing compound after lunch.

After lunch, I sent one team off to cart more gravel and put the rest to work assembling the hangers. The framework for these is pretty basic and was completed a couple of hours later. By 1800 we had the roof screwed down and hardfill spread along the access track. As a plus, a deep swimming hole had been dug in the river. They could put the grader blade on the Bobcat tomorrow and spread that out and compact it.

Still very quiet out there, but that would change soon. Tomorrow we are going out to set up the repeater station at the top of Lees Moor Wood. That was gated in while we were sorting this place out three days ago. To get there, we have to drive past a village and about eight small settlements, so we will take two 113's.

By 1900, most of the concrete paths were set enough to walk on and now, with the hangers up, we could eat under cover and use our new-made furniture. Five days clear weather left. Tonight the last catwalks would be set up, which would give some overhead cover when moving about the compound in bad weather. To say nothing of easier access to the stores held up there. The laundry is working, the dishwasher running and the wood fire wetback tested. We are nearly fully operational, with just the workshop, recreation room and boiler house to complete.

I think a few beers might be called for tonight.

Derbyshire, England
March 10th 846 AD

Day Four

Jobs for today

Set up Repeater
Finish the compound drain-laying
Spread gravel and compact
Bulldoze a ford
Bore an artesian well

Just after dawn the two 113's set out for the repeater site. It was about a 10km drive and would probably take up to two hours to get there, as they have to skirt around woods and farms. The two vehicles should easily flatten a path up to within a couple of hundred meters of the site. One of the many reasons I bought these vehicles along was that if they had to be locked up and left, they are unable to be damaged or entered by the locals.

Should take about 10 minutes to get the repeater on line and another couple of hours to set up the razor wire and electric fence around it. The repeater itself is housed in a three metre shipping container, which in this day and age is effectively impregnable. The aerials are not, so they have to be protected- thus the wire. The whole system is battery driven and trickle charged by a solar array on the roof. This is backed up by a small petrol generator, which comes on automatically when the repeater batteries start getting low. As it has a 50 litre fuel tank, it only needs the occasional top-up and service once a month or so.

I need to get this done so that we can have radio communications in the wider surrounding district. Once completed, we can get on with the coal-mining mission and we can put the microlights up.

Meanwhile, back at the compound, the rest of the sewer and the storm water drains were being put in. Once the trenches were dug and graded, we could lay sections of pre-cast concrete channel into them and sit steel plates onto the top. The layout is in a 'T' shape up the center of the compound, with the ground falling into the middle, and the top of the 'T' on the far side of the east hanger. This all drains into a 450mm pipe, which currently ends six metres from the outer wall and would be extended later. The toilets and showers that have yet to be installed in the new buildings will all drain into a pre-cast sump and be pumped to the septic tank. This is what the toilet in the C&C module is waiting on and as that is almost 80 metres from the toilets, we (I) will be glad to see it working.

Work is continuing on the track- the earthmoving crew is about to head down to extend this to the other side of the river and lay gravel up the gate. Can't metal the inside until the drains are finished, but we have four more days' clear weather. It looks like I am the only person with no assigned tasks for today. I will go and do a bit of drain-laying until the track is finished, then we will have a go at drilling a bore. They tell me we will get water no problem in this country.

0900 hrs- Just got a radio check from the repeater site- they are on site and have the system powered up, so now we can switch to channel two and have comms for about 30 km around- at last we can move out and do some exploring. The trenches are dug- the plumbers and their laborers are bottoming up the ballast now.

The ford is finished- the river is now flowing about 300mm deep. The hard fill had been spread and graded- the only job still going on is the surface being compacted by the Bobcat. He will spend a couple of hours going up and down with the vibrating roller. I will move the sentry round to the south side to keep an eye on him. Time to get this well started.

At about midday the two 113's pulled up outside the compound and their crews piled out.

"All done", said Steve, climbing out of the commander's hatch. "Saw a couple of dozen people on the way out there- we just gave them a wave and carried on. There were twice as many when we came back, though- now what's on the agenda for the rest of today?"

"I'll see if Mark needs a hand with the drains, otherwise take a couple of guys over and skid those dead trees that Jenny cut over here. If we get time, fire up the Timberwolf and sort out a couple of cords of wood", I said.

"Done", said Steve.

"LUNCH" I called out and we filed in to wash up. Sometime last night someone had put together a big hand basin and taps, over by the water tanks- useful.

During lunch I announced the afternoon's plan, which was to get the drains finished, some firewood cut and stored in an empty container, then carry on with the well. The road was finished, so that freed up one more pair of hands. Everyone not working on the Timberwolf or the well could work on drains, then switch to firewood.

1600 hrs- the drains are in and the sewer system is completed. A 12 meter container is full of wood and there is enough stacked outside the kitchen to keep it going for a month. All these jobs that take forever at home, such as doing firewood, are a breeze when you have lots of help and the best of whatever machinery you might need available.

The well has been sunk to 30 metres and the pump is being hooked up now- we have water- Mike has taken some off for testing, but we already know that it will need treating before it goes through the boiler, and we have brought an extra 20,000 litre tank along for that.

We now have the tracked dumpers bringing gravel up the hill for the compound and that is being spread out throughout the compound by the Bobcat loaders and Mk.One shovel.

All finished 15 minutes before I was going to call 'stand down'- barbecue tonight.

The site is really taking shape, we will start on the buildings in a couple of days- tomorrow we mine the coal, which will take almost everyone, with just a skeleton crew left here for security.

Some of the vehicles have been brought in and parked in the hangers and all the light vehicles, such as the Gators and quads are parked up on the concrete pad, outside C&C.

The C&C room is all go today, with the installation of the repeater and the toilet. From there we have radio and intercom control, plus controls to all the compound and outside lighting. In front of the workstation are two widescreen LCD displays showing sensor status and video. Another display switches between the compound and the view from a telephoto camera that is mounted on

a mast above the third level. This can be moved by remote from here. Directly outside, there is a stairway to the roof.

I will take a turn on watch tonight. I hear some deer have been spotted over to the south west.

Time for a shower and a sausage.

Derbyshire, England
March 11th 846 AD

Day Five

Jobs for today
Coal mining.

The convoy was lined up ready to move out- the 322 digger, the D6 bulldozer, all three tracked dumpers, and a wheeled loader- along with two 113's plus a Humvee for security. That left four plus me to man the fort. As soon as the convoy left, we would secure the compound and all go topside, apart from JD, who would be a couple of hours in the kitchen yet. At least we would get a hot lunch. - The rest were on MRE. (They tell me this actually stands for Meals Rejected by Ethiopians.)

It was only about 1 1/2 km to the mine site, so even the slow-moving D6 would get there in about an hour, allowing for time to smooth a bit of a track and shift the odd tree. The two 113's were to scout ahead and scare off anyone digging coal or tending sheep- we would make this up to them shortly after.

As this would all be going on out of sight, I would have to make do with listening on the radio...

Steve's 113 crested the rise- below were the workings and a few hundred metres beyond a village. "Convoy halt", he called over the radio. Raising his visor, he scanned the area through his binoculars. Yes, there were about 6 men working at the mine, loading coal into a cart. They had not yet seen him in the hull-down position, and the wind was blowing briskly from the miner's direction. "Contact front, convoy advance", Steve said into the microphone, pulling down his visor and lowering himself in the turret. No point in picking up an arrow in the face.

Bent to their tasks, the miners were unaware of the 113 as it advanced to within 200 metres, then the squeaking tracks gave it away. They froze for a second then bolted, abandoning their cart and tools. Phil gunned the engine and moved around the hill to flank them, easily gaining on the running figures. Holding back, he followed them to the river, then stopped and backed up to take position. The other 113 had taken position on the other side of the mine.

The Humvee took up position near a small wood to the north and following behind, the plant slowly moved forward to start stripping overburden and to cut a track to the village.

"Keep your windows and doors shut and locked- that's why you have air-conditioning", said Steve, as they started to rearrange the landscape, "and salvage that cart- we will take it back to them later"

The plan is to cut tracks giving the village and ourselves easy access to this site. When we have finished today, we will dump about thirty tons of coal just outside the village, by way of a peace offering. It would take them all year and some to mine that quantity. The cart they abandoned would be valuable to them and a sore loss. Steve had a sudden thought- why not take the cart back and do a bit of work on it first, then bring it back tomorrow- yes, hearts & minds. Especially after scaring the crap out of them this morning. We might even throw in a few shovels and assorted tools.

Through the binoculars he could see a small crowd peering over a stone wall on the edge of the village. They soon scattered as the D6 approached the river, tearing up turf as it came. The dozer cut a ramp down to the water, then forded and cut a ramp up the following side, crashing into the wood on the far bank. As he broke clear of the trees, John French angled the blade, pushing broken trees and bushes aside. Looking round to see that the going was clear, he started to swing the dozer about when an arrow cracked into the side window, snapping harmlessly on the laminated glass. He immediately called "Hostile contact" and Steve's vehicle charged forward.

Steve and Phill snapped down their visors, Steve checking the M19 as they forded the river. As they cleared the wood, they saw John's D6 pointed in the direction the arrow had come from. "In the brush, over there", he called, pointing at a thicket about 100 metres east. Steve took a quick look to gauge the wind, and then fired three rounds at the windward edge of the brush. "Should take care of him", he said, as the CS gas spread, "We will cover from here while you finish the ford"

"Roger", answered John, securing his MP5.

The rest of the day passed peacefully enough. If the dozer and the M113's looked scary, the digger must have looked like something straight from Hell as it uncovered the overburden from the edge of the seam. It took up until about 1430 to get the site ready to go but digging the coal would be the easy part. The three dumpers would run backwards and forwards until we had stockpiled about 300 tonnes. That would take about three hours now that we had a formed track of sorts to follow home. Once past the area covered by the Humvee's crew, they would be in direct view of the fort, which would cover them with their heavy weapons.

By 1800 we had moved enough coal back, so we loaded up the dumpers one more time and headed towards the village. The D6, excavator and the loader started back with the Humvee, further smoothing out the track as they went. We escorted the three dumpers to 100 metres of the village. The word of our 'poison breath' must have spread, as everyone was in hiding. Turning about, the dumpers dropped the coal and moving back into line, we headed for home, the handcart secure in the back of the 113.

"Damn, I love this work." said Steve, to no-one in particular.

I looked down from the wall at the mountain of coal, which was being heaped up by the loader. The other vehicles were refueling and being serviced. That job was well done, especially the arrow incident. I want to keep on the good side of the natives, but we can't let them get the idea that they can take pot-shots at us.

Time to make Steve's position as Section Leader official. Salvaging the cart was a nice touch.

Tomorrow we have an easier day, putting up barns and milling a few oak trees, plus a couple of small delivery jobs.

Derbyshire, England
March 12th 846 AD

Day Six

Jobs for today
Return cart
Deliver coal to surrounding farms
Start on barns (rec. hall first, boiler house last)
Mill timber to line barn & make furniture

Today we start on the first barn- I would have preferred to wait another three days, but time is against us- we only have another three days before we get rain and I want this recreation room for the sake of keeping morale up. I can spare two men to run the sawmill until it is time to screw the cladding on, then it's all hands on deck. The D11 knocked down a couple of nice straight oaks that will make great wallboards and I have put an order in for a slab table. As I have the luxury of knowing the exact weather conditions for the next few weeks, I know we don't have to fully torque the anchor bolts down for another five days, by which time the concrete will be considerably harder.

I'm going out on my own to do a bit of 'hearts and minds' with our locals. I want to sell us as the 'good guys'. I will take JD out to ride shotgun, as he has been stuck in the kitchen for six days now. I just need another vehicle in case I throw a track or suchlike- SOP here and I should try and set an example.

A few tonnes of coal should go a long way to improving relations around here. The cart had been given a quick refurbish last night, a bit of bracing added, the inside lined with sheet metal, the axles greased up and the handles sanded and oiled. Couldn't do too much work with the workshop still packed up. I think we might take a 113 over to the mine- this thing is too awkward to heave onto the back of the dumper.

Off we go again- I'm driving, so JD can hang onto the turret ring and pretend he is vehicle commander. We headed past the mine, which was deserted today, what a surprise. I headed down to where I considered was way past bowshot, pointed the front at the cover on the riverbank and dropped the ramp.

"Get that piece of junk out of here." I yelled over the intercom. JD shoved it down the ramp and dashed back in. Up came the ramp and we were off in a shower of turf, headed for home. In the cart was a pair of shovels, a crowbar and a pick. Cheapest pile of coal I ever bought, if you don't consider the few million dollars worth of plant that it took to get it.

For the rest of the morning, we traveled about the nearby farms, dropping a couple of tonnes of coal near each one.

I would zoom in to about 150 metres in the dumper and tip the coal, while JD stayed about 3-400 metres out and covered me with an M19. I had checked to make sure he had no HE up, just plain old smoke. I had no great confidence in his ability to give close cover with anything more lethal.

He could do OK shooting from the wall with no pressure on, but the dumper was never made to survive even small caliber fire. In any case, I could inflict plenty of damage on any hostiles with just this vehicle. You certainly can't outrun it.

Did about twelve coal drops to the nearest farms. The only people I saw were hiding behind things. We would change that in time. After a bit they would realize that the orange and yellow dragons didn't bite if you refrained from firing arrows at them. We called it quits at about 1400 and headed back to refuel.

I grabbed a cold pie as I inspected progress- the framing was completed and the cladding was going on the first building. The crew was keen to split into two teams and have one start on the next set of framing. I OK'd that, and they set to on the second building, the workshop. It really helps with any kitset, that you have assembled the same type before. Everyone had, and this one was going up much quicker than the first that they built, at Transit. Also I had cheated back there and pulled John Lister off the team- he had put quite a few of them together before. Must tell them that I know what the weather is doing and how exactly I know that.

Outside, in a sea of sawdust, four oak logs had been sawn into boards, with a couple of slabs put aside for the tabletops I had requested. We were going to need to drop a few more trees soon. We will have to have Dave find a cedar and build a sauna.

Meanwhile, time to visit C&C and get on the inventory computer. I need to find where I stowed the log fires for the rec. room. Looks like somebody found the time to do a bit of compacting in the yard- Now that's easier to walk on than loose gravel.

Here they are- front stow in container 58, let me see- next to the POL, by the potable water tanks. Getting this building up is going to empty at least two six metre containers and clear a lot of junk out from the quarters. Time to get it in before the wall cladding goes on- I can cut the holes for the flue through the roof from the loader bucket.

1800 hrs- Now that the barn is up, I'm hoping that two 23 kW log fires can keep this cavern warm in the winter. Already the crew is talking about building an open fire. I must say that has a certain appeal- log burners are efficient, but there is an appeal to watching logs roar on an open hearth. Another two days of keeping them focused on the plan, and then I will let them go for it.

The second frame is up and the third is set out on its slab, almost ready to go up. Most of the vehicles have been moved under the hangers now and all the small plant is safely inside the compound. On Steve's suggestion, we have parked two of the 113's just outside the gate ready to go, in the event of any trouble. A lot safer than roaring about in the compound.

I called quitting time a few minutes ago, but I hear work continues- can't keep good, keen men down. They are putting up the plyboard wall lining and insulation- if they want to keep going, that's fine by me. The bottom section will have to come off in a couple of days, so we can tighten the anchor bolts, but that won't take too much, as the sheets have just been tacked in place with a couple of screws. Judging by the stink of solvent, the mezzanine floor is being varnished. Our builders are putting up the framing for the toilets and the plumbers and electrician are doing their thing with the pipes and wires. Looks like they intend to keep going until this building is done, which won't take too long at this pace.

2330 hrs and the building is effectively finished, just requiring the finishing cosmetic touches. We have lit the fires to speed up curing the varnish and I think that will do for today. Tomorrow we can do it all over again for the workshop.

Derbyshire, England
March 11th 846 AD

The villagers were quite baffled. Just when they thought their end had come, the dragons turned about, spewed coal and fled. They were so close that the hiding villagers could see the faces of the dragon riders that guided these huge beasts.

Then there was the matter of a cart, abandoned at the mine workings that had been returned, repaired by a smith who worked metal far lighter than any they had ever seen or heard of and the tools of a quality, lightness and strength that had been left, as if a gift.

“Fool of a boy.” roared the headman, cuffing his nephew about the ears for the fifth time today. “You brought the wrath of the dragon upon us.” he bellowed, still recalling the burn and stench of the beast’s breath.

“YOU shall go to the coal and see what has happened there- and make sure that bring back a sack of coal, as proof that you went there.- on your way, fool”, punctuating his order with a kick.

The terrified youth reluctantly slunk away in the direction of the mine, not really expecting to return.

An hour later he returned, looking glad to be still in one piece.

“What say you boy?” said the headman.

“The dragons have eaten the hill but left the coal and they have made a road- I followed it a ways and it leads to a mighty fortress yonder.”

The headman cuffing him again and moved closer to smell his breath. “Liar.- You hid, fell asleep and dreamt. - what of the dragon?” he bellowed.

“I saw no dragon, uncle, but his spoor leads to the castle” answered the youth, cringing.

The headman pondered. He must have been to the mine, as he has returned with a sack of coal, as ordered. There was no castle over the hill last week and the lad had no smell of drink on him. He would have to investigate himself. After dusk.

“To your work” he growled at the youth, dismissing him.

Derbyshire, England
March 13th 846 AD

Day Seven

Jobs for today
Continue with building
Mill more timber

A later start this morning- I had given the OK for work to continue throughout the night and the hall was ready to use. Furniture has been moved in, electronic equipment set up. We can have a proper sit-down meal now- which will be much nicer when the stink of polyurethane clears.

Dave Palmer, the chainsaw guru, would take out a logging team this morning and I have put in a request for timber suitable for a sauna.

I have decided to pour a heavy pad at the gateway- it will have to be about 300 mm thick reinforced concrete, but it will tidy this area up nicely. We have a working sketch of a concrete fireplace for the hall, which can happen once the workshop is set up and the boiler house is finished.

Tonight we will have a practice alert and will test the floodlighting, alarms plus do a live-firing exercise. I will dump a couple of old crates out in the field for targets later on.

When the two pilots get out of bed, they can take the Bobcat and D3, sort out an airstrip, and get those microlights up tomorrow.

About time we had a name for this place so I wrote on the newly installed whiteboard 'Name our Castle' competition- winner gets one day off. I will have a look tonight and see what appears.

I spent the morning working on the workshop building. By noon we had half the logging crew back with enough logs to keep the mill going and the remaining exterior cladding was on. We decided to press on with the boiler house as we could finish the interiors in comfort, during the upcoming bad weather. Outside the stacks of sawn timber continued to grow. Once the frame was up, it was a case of too many hands on the job, so I sent the plumbers and an electrician to connect power and water to the workshop and to hook up the second shower block. The hot water for these would come from a wetback on the workshop's log burner. That would occupy everyone for the rest of the day.

2200 hrs- I got everyone up on the wall to watch the systems test. First we sounded the alarm call, and then we threw on the floods and the searchlights, which lit up the area hundreds of meters around like day. Now for some serious light and magic.

"Mortar- 3 rounds illuminating", I called over the radio. On this signal, all four guardrooms also fired up a hand-held parachute flare, turning the night into day.

"Target, crates- 800 metres east- all engage", I said, and then all hell cut loose. The two M19's and the mortars started putting down HE and four machine guns cut loose. Next thing, a round or a piece of shrapnel found my little surprise (a drum of petrol hidden in the crates) and up went the crates in a ball of fire, more often reserved for movies than the real world. Hope our locals saw that little lot- it was for their benefit.

I told the sentries to watch for fires. Everyone else- service the weapons and call it a day.

Derbyshire, England
March 14th 846 AD

Day Eight

Jobs for today
Finish building
Tighten all masonry anchors
Aerial reconnaissance

The barometer was dropping, so I wanted to get both aircraft up and get some video footage of the area. Leaving the building team to continue on, I headed down to the newly mown and smoothed airstrip, where the microlights were being assembled and pre-flighted.

“Keep talking to us”, I said as the pilots got ready for takeoff. “We have a crew ready in case you come down and we need to know where you are, especially when we go the radio range test. You have six hours before the wind will start to get up to about 15 knots, at this landing strip.”

The both nodded in acknowledgment and started to strap in and warm up the engines.

As they climbed to cruising height, we headed back to C&C to monitor on the flight, via the radio.

“Air to base, returning now”, came the call, “Confirm ground crew in place?”

“Crew to air, air patrol clear to land”, I called back. Off to the east, I saw the lead aircraft round the hill and start his final approach.

Once they were on the ground, we set about the business of stowing the microlights in their containers. They had already proved their worth.

“Alert crews- C&C in five”, I called over the radio, as we finished locking the containers. We all clambered aboard the Humvee and headed back at speed.

C &C- 1100 hrs

“We have a situation”, I said, “Take a look at this video.”

“They are about five hours march out from Rowsley”, Eric said, “I filmed that from 800 metres into a head wind then cut power and glided away- they gave no signs of noticing me.”

“They look like the band from the repeater jump”, Steve said. “Looking for the ones we aired out?”

“Too soon to miss them but they may be looking to meet up with them”, I said. “Either way, our neighbors have trouble.”

“For sure”, said Eric, “I backtracked along the most likely route north and found one farm burning and another burnt out.”

“Here’s how we do it” I said, after a few minutes thought. “We want to let the villagers see them coming, then we come in with the cavalry. I would guess they want to rest up a mile or two out and attack at first light. We will move now, so we can intercept regardless. Kit out for a wet night out, which we will have. We deploy the 113’s here”, I said, pointing at the map. “Three to stay in reserve and give fire support if need. The rest of us go grunting and set up here. Two SAW’s, one M79 and M16’s. Sidearms, two frags, one WP- full ammo load, two spare radio batteries and two day’s rations- move.”

I picked up the intercom and announced. “Standby, standby- Yellow condition. John French to C&C.”

As I pulled on my gear, John came in. “What’s up?” he asked.

“50-60 bad guys inbound”, I answered, “you are now IC, I should be back tomorrow- John L will brief you” This was no difficult or new task for him, John having been a Squadron Sergeant-Major for some years.

“Good hunting.” he replied.

We backed the 113’s into the scrub, about 800 meters from our planned ambush. Leaving our rearguard behind, we slipped into cover. The rain started to fall.

The village was unaware of any threat. If they were watching anywhere, it would be up towards our castle. They probably saw the 113’s, but probably wouldn’t know exactly where they went. Steve and Simon had gone forward a few hundred metres to try and give us some advance warning. After two hours, they radioed back with a contact.

“Contact north one point five kilometers” came over the radio “They have picked up the pace and don’t look like camping up- I guess they want out of the rain.”

“Patrol copy.”

“Armor copy.”

“C&C copy.”

“Patrol to scouts, fall back when they get to one K out.”

“Scout copy.”

“Armor, advance to 300 metres on contact.”

“Armour copy, 300 metres, on contact.”

All set. Now we wait.

The war band rounded the edge of the forest, keeping out of sight of the village as best they could. A cry went up from the village- they were onto it. Villagers ran to and fro, the men gathering up such weapons as they had. They wouldn't have a chance against this band of well-armed and seasoned marauders, who had just broken into a charge.

“Contact- ENGAGING.” I shouted into the radio, as the two SAW's cut loose and the grenadier started plinking out his HE rounds. I put the M16 to my shoulder and started popping away on 'semi'. Off to our rear, a diesel engine bust into life with a roar. As expected, the raiders went down like skittles. Within 5 seconds, they were totally routed, the charge broken up. We continued to mop up as the 113 added the long-range fire of its heavy weapons.

“Armor, cease fire, hold position”, I called, “Patrol- advance to contact”

“Patrol, armor- weapons safe”, came back.

Standing up, we moved forward firing as we advanced, mopping up the last bandits standing. As we closed to a few metres, a Norseman leapt up, screaming and brandishing an axe. Immediately hit by rifle fire, he charged on regardless, to be blasted down by a 40mm buckshot round from Brent's M79. “I prefer this for close encounters”, he said, grinning nervously.

We stopped our advance to ensure the corpses were, exactly that.

Now things are getting interesting, I thought. Some of the men of the village were moving very cautiously towards us.

“Easy”, I cautioned and moved forward to meet them. Time to take the initiative, I thought.

“These are the ones we came for”, I said, pointing to the dead, “We leave the spoils to you. If you leave the bodies in a pile here, we will bury them tomorrow. You are welcome in our hall, but come by day, that we know you to be friends.”

One who appeared to be their spokesmen, nodded. “We owe you a debt”, he said, “These would have slain us and sacked our homes, as sure as the sun rises in the morning.”

“There is no debt when aiding a friend”, I said, “We go in peace and shall return past sunrise”

“Armor up- slowly”, I called.

The men looked visibly shaken to see the 113 advance towards us, but as we stood our ground, so did they. Gutsy lot, really. The carrier turned about and dropped the ramp. We jumped in, raised the rear ramp, then opened the roof hatch and waved.

“Take her away, easy”, I said, as we returned to pick up our other vehicle. “Patrol, C&C, coming in”

Home and cleanup.

Here it starts.

Derbyshire, England
16th March 846 AD

Day Nine

Jobs for today:
Bury dead
Interior fitting
Receive visitors?

These raids are occurring far earlier than I would have thought. There must be something happening up north. It does, however, support our theory that this is a crux point in history. With the other operation completed, we are now moving towards creating a major divergence. The destruction of Rome should have done that alone, but now it is a case of directing the shift.

Yesterday's contact was timely. Whatever else they might think- those villages know we saved their collective butts from a very unpleasant fate. I'm sure they suspect that we were involved in killing the other group and now they have seen just how easily we can wipe out the toughest, meanest players in this age. That headman looked smart enough to know that we could have rolled his village up just as easily, were we so inclined.

We shall see what happens when we arrive with the digger after breakfast.

I detailed Sean Marden to take the 311 over and get rid of the dead meat, with myself and Steve riding shotgun in the Hummer. We rolled out early, leaving the fort in John French's capable hands.

We stood watch as Sean quickly dug a deep pit, when we spotted a group approaching from the village. We moved towards them, to meet them part way. I could see that the digger was making them nervous, they way they kept looking at it, trying not to stare, as if they might make eye contact with its spotlights.

The Humvee didn't look as scary, I hoped. They understood wheels, if not tracks. After exchanging greetings, the headman came to the point.

"Another band of foe meet a similar fate, to the other side to that hill", he said, pointing in the general direction of our first contact.

"Yes", I answered, "they meet my scouts eleven days ago and regretted it".

For the first time I saw a smile on a native. "One of those that you killed there, lead a band that put my cousins village, ten miles to the north, to the sword,"

"Glad to be of help. I am here to do battle with your enemy's- we shall drive the invaders into the sea, whence they came."

This seemed to please him- I believe that he was convinced that we may well be up to the job. He had stopped watching the digger out of the corner of his eye, just giving it the occasional glance. His men were more relaxed, yet still wary.

“We shall remove this crow-meat fouling your fields now” I said, gesturing towards the digger, which had started to rake bodies towards the hole, this action causing some of the villagers to cringe. Sean didn’t look too chirpy, for that matter, some of them had been really ripped up and the digger bucket wasn’t helping.

“We shall feast tonight, to celebrate our victory, would you join us?” I asked.

He thought about this for a bit... “I will”, he said, resolutely.

This one is clever, I thought. I believe he sees that our friendship can be to his advantage, more importantly, reasoning has overcome fear. We shall see.

1530 hrs- The outer sensors just picked up a group of four heading our way- looks like they are taking us up on our invitation. There is a big roast beef cooking and all the trimmings, we decided that food they mostly know would be best. All the buildings are up and the place is looking finished- only the boiler room is not fully operational.

I sent a party of four to meet them on foot and escort them in, taking the precaution of putting a couple of my better shots up on the wall to cover them with scoped rifles. I gave out some stunners and reloaded my Berretta with a magazine of frangible rounds, just in case the meeting went badly...

Rowsley Village, Derbyshire England

16th March 846 AD

“I don’t trust them, either”, Alfred, the headman replied forcefully, “But think- had they wanted to put village to the sword, they could have done so without breaking a sweat. Five slaughtered sixty like foxes amongst hens. And they command the iron beasts. We have no choice- we go to their hall and make an alliance- I have spoken.”

“Last time I went near there- night turned to day. And a giant roared at me and spat fire.” exclaimed one of his men.

“As you crept through the dark, like a thief in the night *and* against my counsel” Alfred growled at him. “You have my leave to stay here with the women.”

Alfred’s old friend Algor, the smith, remained after the men had left.

“What do you think?” asked Alfred.

“I agree with you, we need their friendship in these troubled times”, said Algor. “They have been here nine days and the only harm they have caused is to the Danes. They have not demanded tribute of us, yet they are strong- far stronger than Romans of old.”

“Just before they arrived, my wife’s kin, Edgar of Bakewell told a tale of an old man with strange ways and speech visiting. He brought a most powerful drink and left in the night when they were in their cups, but before this, he foretold the coming of a band of knights and wizards, who would build a mighty fortress in a day”, recalled Alfred, “He left tokens, knives made of the finest steel I have ever seen, which Edgar has shown me. Today I saw this same knife on their leader’s belt.”

“Did he say why they would come to be here?” asked Algor.

“No, but he said that they will be mighty friends but terrible enemies.” said Alfred.

“That they will be friends may be possible, but they are truly terrible enemies.” said Algor “Let us go to meet with them.”

Mission +7 days- Gateway Prime, New Zealand
Jenny’s journal

“OK”, said Jenny, to the Transit procurements team, “You all have your assignments- let’s do it.”

Everybody dispersed about the country on their shopping trips.

A simple plan, assemble a team of builders and tradesmen for a supposed two week job working on a retreat for an unnamed celebrity.

Gate them to Transit, with the materials already shipped ahead.

Pay them a shitload of money, with the possibility of more work in the future- if they kept quiet about it (Their story would be so unbelievable that no-one would buy it in any case.)

I had already jumped down-time and ordered a prefabricated 20 bedroom mansion, all snap-together wood construction. As usual with the building trade, cash gets results, five-figure sweeteners to the managers, even better results. And no questions asked.

I love doing the rich bitch routine. Wayne may not mind wandering about in gumboots and living in sheds, but I want to live with a bit more comfort. Luxury- actually.

Why not? - We can certainly afford it.

Transit is getting to be more and more like home for this bunch of misfits. That’s one aspect of time traveling- it’s near impossible to go back to one’s old life after you have been at it for a while and you have gotten the taste for adventure. Not to mention the other side-effects. I enjoy a visit, usually to see my daughter, but soon itch to be back wandering the timelines. But I feel that now the time has come to make Transit a real home, not just somewhere to rest between adventures. A home for all of us.

The floor pad is being poured tomorrow, our time. Will came up with an ingenious plan. He has a hose going into a barn at this end and a hose coming out of a barn at the other. At our end a concrete pump is hooked up and at the other end concrete comes out. The gates are hidden in the shed and no outsiders see this.

Concrete deliveries go into the pump and the operators are given a wad of cash in exchange for signing a secrecy declaration. It is hinted that this is a secret government project

Keeping something no-one wants to believe in a secret is easy- Don’t try too hard to hide it.

Getting the construction crew through the gate was problematic, but also solved by cash. Conditions for getting the job are being taken to a secret location in a blacked-out bus, then

giving them sedation in food. Ever know a builder or tradesman that could resist free greasy food? Thought not...

They should be able to put the place together in two weeks, at least to the point of us being able to finish it. We have a couple of talented decorators on the team. I can't wait to see what shopaholics Sonja and Jane bring back in the way of furniture- their taste is impeccable. We have a lot of house to outfit and this is a nice change to shopping for hardware, tools and vehicles- speaking of which, I think it's time I had a new one.

It's time now to go back to Transit and keep an eye on these builders. Just in case the early completion bonuses don't keep them from finding time to do any snooping. Not that they will remember much when they go home. Only what I want them to remember...

Derbyshire, England **16th March 846 AD**

Day Nine

I stood on the north wall, watching the two groups approach. All seems peaceful- I have been listening in using a directional microphone and I believe they want to ally with a powerful force, namely us.

They had to have been awed by the speed with which we destroyed a force more than ten times our number- and would have noticed that we gave no quarter. I wanted them to loot the dead, in order to see exactly what our weaponry does to a human body. If they are smart enough to put two and two together, they would know we could have rolled them up even easier. I wonder if they have talked to the people in the near farm yet.

I left the sentries on the wall to keep an eye on proceedings and went below to check on the hall. We have hidden the big LCD screen behind wooden shutters- I thought that on-screen images might be too scary for now. The place is far from finished- there has been little time for decoration and the wood we have milled will need a lot more seasoning. A long dining table and benches have been made from a milled oak slab and are quite presentable, now that they have been planed, smoothed and oiled. The concrete floor doesn't look like much- we are planning to polish it when we get time. Someone used to a dirt floor will see it differently, I suppose.

I greeted our ill-at-ease visitors and gave them a quick tour of the compound. They looked to be fascinated by the rows of parked vehicles, many of which they had not previously seen. I explained that we used these to dig, carry and travel far and fast and that they would sit unmoving until we commanded them to move. I noticed that no-one was getting close, though. We took them up on the wall for a look, just to show them how well we could see around the area and that we did keep a watch. The rain was just starting as we headed to the shelter of the hall.

The fires were blazing and the hall was warmed up nicely. Now to get a round of drinks in for our visitors. The crew had brought a full bar setup along and of course had that up and running ahead of most things. Time for a Guinness.

Pints were passed around and I invited our guests to sit on the leather sofas by the fire. A platter of cheeses with pickles and biscuits sat on the table. The beer met with their hearty approval, as did the snacks.

I welcomed Alfred and his men to our hall and explained that it was our custom to discuss serious business before our main meal.

“I want to talk to you about trade”, I said. “We need men to labour and women to clean and cook. In return, I offer the services of my machines to dig, plough, cut wood and do the work of many men. Also, I seek to build roads, as the Romans did, to your village and beyond to the other villages, that through trade we may all prosper. For this, my men shall defend your homes and fields from the invaders.”

“This is a worthy offer”, he answered, “To the second part, I agree, to the first, we must discuss terms further.”

So far, so good- this man is no fool, he wants to know exactly what this will cost him and has recognized that the second part was a sweetener that will benefit mostly him.

“Our needs are not great; I need four women to clean and cook and four men to labour. I need young ones, as they learn different ways easier. Your man Algor has the look of a smith- I would like him to work one day in seven with our smith, that both might learn from the other. In return, one of my machines will labour for you for one day each week, from sunrise to sunset”, I said.

He had seen what a digger could do in minutes and had also seen that we have a still larger one here. The Smith, Algor- his face completely gave away his excitement at being offered a chance to work here. He had seen our partially operational workshop and would still be there now, if he had his way.

“I might ask for any... machine... you have?” he asked.

“All those who dig and cut wood or carry, but not those used to wage war”, I clarified, “In a day, one of my machines can plough six times the lands you now have ploughed, saw enough wood to build a hall of this size or cut more firewood than all the men of your village. We can dig a well in a day, move boulders from fields or dig a mile of drains.”

“This is agreeable, but Algor is a free man and must answer for himself” said Alfred.

Algor nodded “I would work in your forge for one day a week.”

They knew a good deal when they heard it.

I called for another round of drinks and proposed a toast “To our pleasure and profits.”

“If you are agreeable, we will start work on a task of your choosing, immediately on your return”, I said, “If you are pleased with the work, please speak well of us to the surrounding villages, we want to work with all, but will never forget who our first friends were.”

Alfred raised his pint and said “I drink the health of our new friends”, he toasted, his men following suit. “I would have you plough fields for the day- the time of planting is upon us soon.”

“Done” I said, signaling for meal to be served.

With belly's full of roast meat, gravy, bread and beer, our visitors relaxed somewhat, once they finally realized that they were probably not going to be murdered. The drinks flowed and despite the language difficulties, we enjoyed a fairly convivial evening. We learned that some of the men in the nearby farm were kin of Edgar's wife and they were reestablishing a farm destroyed by Norsemen five years ago. I promised to see to their safety and Alfred agreed to accompany me on a visit, to vouch for us.

An interesting time was had by all, especially when we demonstrated the urinal and toilet facilities. They thought the urinal flushing was hilarious and must have been a Roman device. After a few hours, we brought blankets and they settled down to sleep in the hall. We can keep an eye on them by video.

Tomorrow I would give them a lift home in one of the M548's and have one of the tractors disc and harrow their current fields, plus prepare a few new ones. The D6 and the 322 could get started on the road to and beyond the village of Rowsley.

Derbyshire, England
17th March 846 AD

Day Ten

The rain had eased to intermittent showers. Fortified with a hearty breakfast- and a few pints, Alfred and his men agreed to a ride to the village. Alfred and Algor rode in front, as befitted their station, the other two having to ride in the back with a few bundles of trade goods that we had thrown in as a goodwill gesture. Leading the tractor, the D6 and the 322, we slowly rumbled off towards the village, with a Humvee riding shotgun. The 20kph I kept to was quite exciting enough for them. As we approached the village, we slowed and came to a halt a couple of hundred metres short. Best we don't startle the villagers, I explained.

We approached the village on foot and were received cautiously by the villagers, much reassured by the safe return of their men. Alfred addressed them, explaining that we were friends and allies and were to be treated with the honor that we had shown him. He explained that we would bring our 'tame machines' to the village to help them with work in the fields, which was greeted with cautious enthusiasm. They were to stay out of their way, lest they be accidentally 'trampled', but were not to be cowards and flee. He himself had ridden the huge beasts and was quite unharmed.

I then stood at his side and announced that I would bring one of the machines into the village and that it carried gifts for all, that another would start ploughing their fields and two more were headed this way, making a road between our two homes.

We had earlier agreed to give them a few days to get used to us, before he ordered people into my service. Also, that it would be good for the village to watch us work for a day or two, accepting that it would disrupt their work- which we would more than make good. We rolled into the village, with Alfred standing up in the cupola, looking mighty pleased with himself.

The tractor was set to ploughing several acres of field, in a short time surpassing the local's work of the last weeks. This was attracting a lot off attention and pointing. We brought the Humvee and the 548 into the village at a slow walking speed and I climbed onto the back as Alfred distributed pots, pans, tools and blankets amongst the villagers. Don't get used to this, people- There is no room for cargo cults here.

We drove off for a tour of the area with a few of the braver men riding on back, trying hard not to look terrified. As we gained a bit of height, the other digger and dozer could be seen forming the track towards the village. As we drove about, I saw an old dead tree, half-fallen at the edge of the tree line. I backed up to it and Steve jumped down and attached a chain to it. Might as well take a bit of firewood back, I thought as we drove off, log in tow. We will get it back and give them a chainsaw demonstration. Now to track down one of the new splitting axes I had brought along and show them how they work.

Despite the warning, they scattered as the chainsaw started up. Soon drawn by curiosity, they returned to see the log sliced into sections, in a time they were astounded by. Even the less enthusiastic were starting to realize just how much labour we could free them from.

As the day drew to a close, we looked back on our work here. We had ploughed and harrowed an area many times larger than had been previously cultivated, put in a rough road and made a ford across the river. Several trees had been dragged in and reduced to firewood, boulders moved from fields plus a couple of drains and a rubbish pit dug. I even had some seed brought down for the

extra fields. Algor was already inquiring as to when he could visit and we agreed on seven days time, when all was running properly.

We were off to a good start with this village. I would pick up Alfred and his eldest son tomorrow and go calling on some of the local farms.

Back at home, the workshop was mostly set up and the boiler was in, with the wiring completed and the water hooked up. Two more days work and the steam engines should be running.

Back at Rowsley, in the village hall, Alfred was breaking the news that eight young people were to go and work for the strangers and would bloody well like it. The village was over a month ahead with their work thanks to them.

Derbyshire, England **18th March 846 AD**

Day Eleven

Today's tasks:

Continue with boiler house

Finish workshop

Meet locals

Start excavating gravel pit

Move screening plant

The forecast is for settled weather for the next two days. It's time for us to get out and meet some of the locals. We headed out in two Humvees to the village. On arriving we found Alfred and son ready to go. As we drove off, he informed us that he would bring up our workers today, as soon as he returned to the village.

JD would be pleased to get his long-awaited pot-scrubbers and bottle-washers and none of us would miss our cleaning duties. First we would have to teach them the basics, like how to use flush toilets and showering.

We headed up to the nearest farm, the one to our north. As before, we approached on foot, to be met by the farmers. As we spoke to them, Edgar said that I sounded and looked familiar- I replied that he may have meet one of my kin who passed this way a few weeks ago and he seemed satisfied with that. They had decided that we were probably not hostile, as we had not attacked them and had given a gift of coal and shovels. Word had already got around about our attacks on the Northmen, which had improved everyone's attitudes towards our arrival and us in general. Understandably, we were the news of the moment- hopefully positive news of us would be getting out there, into the surrounding countryside before we appeared there.

I said that I would return later in the week to talk about buying some sheep and work on growing some crops together. I wanted to get a potato crop in, this vegetable being still in South America in the 9th century.

We continued like this for most of the day, speaking to farmers, stopping at some of the smaller villages and hamlets and indeed, the word had gotten about that we had defeated a dangerous threat to the area. Most were nervous about our vehicles, which had now been seen far and wide, but Alfred's reassurances helped to ease their worries about dragons and jabberwocky's. Alfred and son had taken quite a shining to driving about the countryside. We stopped at Alfred's hall on the way home, as he had offered hospitality, which turned out to be a type of Elderberry beer. As we drank and talked, we struck a deal to have his son (also an Alfred) travel the villages with news of us, as he was well known in the area as the son and successor to an important and respected headman.

I offered to do a wider patrol of the area, the next day, to ensure the area was free from wandering Northerners and bandits. As we had run late, we decided that the hirelings would come back with me tomorrow.

Off home to enjoy the company of people who use soap.

Derbyshire, England **19th March 846 AD**

Day Twelve

Jobs to do:
Steam generators on-line
Screen and spread gravel
Induct labor pool

Looks hopeful to go 100% operational today. The workshop is running, the second shower & toilet block is working and the boiler is getting up steam now. Steve and John have the delightful job of inducting our new labourers into life as *we* know it. Soap and hygiene 101. We will issue them with new clothes- we brought blue overalls along just for this, so we know who is who, at a glance. They may need the change of clothes after a ride up on the back of a 548.

I'm off with two 113's to do a border patrol this morning- should take 3-4 hours. I want to be here when the steam comes on line. Now to get a deer rifle from the armory.

We set off just before 0700, traveling at speed down the new road, turning off before the ford; we headed north, staying between the woods and the river. We were following an old foot trail towards a village to the north. On sighting that, we swung left heading past the area we hit the first band. Along the way we sighted a few shepherds and herders out tending to their stock who stopped and stared, as we waved back. Swinging south, we headed towards a likely ford across the Wye River, just south of Bakewell and heading into less undulating country, where we could increase the pace.

We traveled southwest for about seven kilometers and then east for 3k's, turning north to approach the village of Alport from the south. As we had given this village a bit of a wind-up already, we gave them a wide berth. We neared Rowsley from the southwest radioing ahead to

send the 548 down to meet us. This was the first village today where they waved at us and would come out to watch us pass through.

Steve and I had shot a couple of deer each along the way as well as a boar, so we untied two deer for Alfred, who was delighted with the gift. Shortly, the 548 pulled up, Sean Marden getting out with a sack of empty beer bottles and jars, which he passed on to Alfred, glass being a valuable item here. He would no doubt be selling these off next market day, for a tidy sum.

He passed these to his wife for safekeeping, then set about gathering up our 'recruits', with much bellowing and kicks to reluctant backsides. They were soon herded onto the back of the 548 with a few meager possessions, not at all happy with their change in status. Alfred was, however, smiling about it- he had probably cleared out a few hungry, troublesome lads and girls with no good marriage prospects.

He called out to me not to forget to beat them regularly, if they were idle or insolent and I solemnly assured him that this would be attended to. As the 548 rumbled off, we took up position close behind, to discourage any thoughts of jumping ship. A couple of good meals and the realization that our life was going to be a whole lot easier than their previous one and this would pass.

Passing the new gravel pit, I saw that the earthmoving crew had been busy and the road was nearly finished. Think I might organize a rock crusher at the next gate- this limestone around here will make good roads and a bit of crushed lime on the pasture won't hurt.

We parked in our usual spot outside the gates and I left the drivers to service and refuel the vehicles. A good morning, with a lot of new information on the maps and even a good bit of hunting- fresh venison and pork.

Steve, John and a couple of others had started work on our natives in the time-honored manner of shouting at them and generally berating them into total submission. Never start off soft on people that have been brought up hard. I headed off to the boiler house to check up on progress- business first.

Good timing- the boiler was running and we had steam. The engines had been run up and checked and were now being coupled to the generators for a load test. The hot water tank had been heated up with the surplus steam- unlimited hot water now and no need to keep the wood boiler burning. We can now think about rigging a spare couple of containers as drying rooms for clothes and wood, using some of the waste heat. Best of all, this system made much less noise than the diesel generator that had been thumping away for the last two weeks.

Congratulating Mike and Steve for their efforts and leaving to watch the shouting outside, I wandered over and eyed them up and down.

"If you work hard and follow orders, you will be well fed and will enjoy life here. If you do not, you will be punished harshly", I stated. "If I catch anyone peeing or shitting anywhere they shouldn't, I will drag you behind that for wolf-bait", I said, pointing to the spare 113.

“You should have them tamed in a couple of days”, I said to Steve & John, “Carry on.”

I went over to the kitchen to talk to JD about venison recipes.

Mission +12 days- Transit One. **Jenny’s Journal**

Jenny and her 2i/c, Sonja, looked out at the work in progress. The building was up and the roof on. Now the interior was being fitted out and should be completed in a week. The swimming pool was in and was now being enclosed and the landscaping was well underway.

The furnishings were arriving daily back on earth and were being stored at our various earth warehouses- I want to keep gate operations to a minimum while there are outsiders here. The less they see the better. They know they are a long way from home- there is just no hiding those two moons. But who would believe them, in any case.

Another couple of weeks and all will be finished. Everyone is looking forward to moving out of those containers.

“I might go back for a couple of weeks, once the building is finished”, said Jenny.

Sonja nodded. “No problem, I can look after this end, 2004 is only any good for local shopping these days. It’s just getting to be too much of a pain moving around outside of NZ now.”

“I know what you mean”, said Jenny, “It gets real bad after 2014 and WW3-remember that trip up-time to 2022 with Wayne, when we had to shoot our way out of Sydney- bloody Sydney.- it was worse than Moscow 1970. On-line worldwide passports and implanted ID- not good.”

“We did a few raids up-time to 2009 after the OCIW. Got them, but the security was real tight and we had to blow a few things up, by way of diversion. I like easy in, easy out”, said Sonja. “In the end we decided the damn things were too much trouble and stuck with M16’s- keep it simple.”

“I prefer the days where the alarm sensors are on the outside and you could just jump inside and shop at you leisure”, said Jenny with a grin, “Paris and New York with a bag and a can of CS.”

“Let’s get this cleared up and do lunch at the Ritz, 1920.” said Sonja.

“Done.” said Jenny. “Then shopping and dinner at the Savoy.”

Derbyshire, England **20th March 846 AD**

Day Thirteen

Jobs to do:
Make drying rooms
Roading
Train labor pool

Routine stuff today- continuing with the roads, pushing out towards the north, following the Wye River. Two spare containers had been stacked next to the boiler room- we planned to rig those as drying rooms for clothes and drying timber, as we had a lot of waste heat available. We might as well use it productively.

Our workers had spent a restless night locked in their quarters- two bunkhouses outside the compound within a barbed wire enclosure. When they settled down, they would get a few more facilities put on. Today they would get trained in the first of their tasks, which were very simple mop and bucket type jobs. The girls would be cleaners and kitchen hands and the lads would be chopping wood, bagging coal and raking gravel to start with. They don't get to use anything powered for a while yet. I had a few jobs like cleaning grease traps saved for any malcontents.

Steve and John did a bit of casual aptitude and intelligence assessment yesterday, amongst the usual stress-testing. Looks like Alfred had sent along a group that seem fairly intelligent and can learn from us, instead of dumping his deadwood, as he might have. There is a man that looks to the future. Not to say that he didn't also get rid of a few troublemakers. One of them, a burly chap of about 17 years is a surly looking type, who doesn't take orders well. The crew has already nicknamed him 'Happy'.

The girls are a quiet lot and are aged between 14 and 20. I will be doing medical inspections on all of them today and they shall all get a shot of Depo. The oldest one seems to be here as she has been childless since her marriage at 15. Won't be a problem here.

Last night we issued out clothing from our trade goods. These happened to be WW2 RAF uniforms, probably acquired by Jenny, who likes to hang out in this time period. They were pleased as punch with their fine new apparel. After an initial reluctance, most- especially the older girls- decided that hot showers and soap are not really all that bad. I see that the combs and mirrors had already been put to use. Our Mr. Happy needed the encouragement of a cattle prod to step into the shower and I can see he will be up for a hard lesson very shortly. I have heard no complaints about the food, even though we are feeding them rather basic tucker, as they would be used to.

I might take a drive out with the roading crew and see if I can get us a few rabbits for the pot.

1230 hrs- I arrived back with a good bag of rabbits and hares for one of our workers to deal to. As I drove through the gate, John came up, grinning. "Had a wee problem with one of our natives", he said.

"Let me guess- Happy?"

"Told JD he wouldn't take orders from a man who does women's work" said John.

"Silly boy." I said, laughing, "So he got jap-slapped around the compound?"

"Yep, I didn't need to call you, Eric patched him up OK. Word is, if that is what the cook can do, don't upset the others." said John. "I put him on a broom for a couple of days and told him that if it stopped moving he would stop eating."

An important lesson to all of them.

I did an inspection of the site, checking to see how they were going on their chores. All looked good, they just had to keep this up and I would be happy. Most of them seemed happy enough with their lot- the girls probably thought they were on holiday and the guys mostly looked pleased not to be staring at the south end of a north-bound bullock. One looked rather sorry for himself, and his pace picked up as soon as he saw my eyes on him. The others had split a large stack of kindling and stacked it in the container used as a woodshed. I would have to get some land ploughed and planted, so that they would have useful something to do. For now they could sort out these rabbits.

Later in the afternoon, I took a trip up to Edgar's farm and we agreed on a deal for sharecropping some of his land. He was happy as all he had to do was put up the land and take half the harvest. We drove in poles to mark out the land and went back to his house to talk about him selling some sheep, over a few beers that I brought along. I told him our future stock requirements and he agreed to purchase and graze them until we needed them for slaughter. I gave him a bag of silver and copper to buy the animals and agreed to supply materials and do some work about his property as payment for his efforts.

I drove back and arranged for one of the tractors to go and plough the field we marked. Tomorrow I would send our troublemaker up to dig the postholes by hand.

Derbyshire, England
21st March 846 AD

Day Fourteen

Day's tasks:

Fencing

Roading

Recon. flight

Perfect weather today, both microlights are going up, one rigged for extended range and I will be in the observer's seat in the other.

Made the announcement this morning that we were standing down from working all hours and that days off and shortened working hours would now commence. We were out of setup mode and into routine now. To celebrate there would be a barbecue tonight and the bar would now be open to anyone not on duty. Movies would now be available, with a roster drawn up as to who gets to pick for that day.

Had a talk to JD and he is confident that the older women that we have been calling Shirl, will be able to take over breakfast duties in a couple of days. As he rightly pointed out, if you can cook eggs over a fire, a gas ring or an Aga is a piece of cake.

Overall, the women have adapted to our technology much more easily, with the exception of one lad aged 15 or so, that looks to be the Smith's son. He has really taken to our technology and I have earmarked him for a workshop gofer/apprentice.

Happy has an aversion to flushing toilets that is currently being sorted by the odd application of a stunner and/or boot. Having had a hard lesson about insolence towards the staff, he has resorted to the usual practice of the bullying thug- harassing the smaller lads and the girls. I'm sure that cunning sod Alfred sent him here to see how we deal with him, so I won't send him back unchanged. I can see him in chains shortly.

Time to get my flight suit on.

0800hrs- we took off on a clear, still day and climbed to about 600 metres. The other aircraft broke off to the north, heading to where Sheffield would be- with only one on-board, he could stay up a bit longer. We commenced with a spiraling orbit of Haddon Hold (the name by default), heading further and further out into new country. Wish I had a GPS, but unfortunately- no satellites here. The countryside is really beautiful from up here- green rolling hills, forests, even the bleak moors in the distance. Quite unspoiled by roads, sprawling cities or power lines.

I got busy switching between video and thermal and marking positions on my map. After cruising for about two hours, the engine management computer told us it was time to return. As we had been circling, we had plenty of reserve, but who wants to run low on petrol in the 9th century.

We approached the airstrip from the south and radioed in for a clearance. Once the ground crews called back that they were in place, we started our final approach and touched down on the newly graded strip. As we taxied up to the sheds, a radio call came from the other aircraft.

“Position is 35km north of Sheffield and I have sighted a large camp. Estimate 2500-3000 present. Descending to 150 metres to get some video. I may lose radio contact”

A couple of nail-biting minutes later, he came back on the air, “Recommend 300 metres for overflights in future, some of those arrows got a bit close- backtracking to see where they came from, then returning to base, ETA 90 minutes, Air Two out.”

So much for our restful time- things must be bad in Europe this spring.

What to do? Worse case, I doubt they could storm the hold but they could seriously bugger up my plans for this area and set the project back a decade.

We have to take the fight to them.

PART TWO

Derbyshire, England
21st March 846 AD

Day Fourteen

We have a difficult situation here. The video footage we have shows a major invasion force of about 3,000 heading southwest- their first objective 35 km away, appears to be the major center of Sheffield. We need to break up this force, destroying as much of it as possible before it hits Sheffield. I put up another flight immediately to backtrack along the invaders path, looking for information. We have had a radio report of beached longboats up the Humber River and should have more video in two hours.

I know we can hurt them, but can we break them? We have to- failure is not an option here, so how? With only ten men...

We have started to get a plan together. We have the mobility to get into the area fast and we have the aircraft while the weather is clear. The best idea seemed to be to hit them as they form up to attack a larger town. Their tactics are to simply form in an extended line 6-10 deep, (depending on numbers) just outside arrow range, hype themselves up and charge, punching a hole through any defenses. We need to strike then with mortars and 40mm rounds, while raking the flanks with machine gun fire. For some seconds we were going to have a very densely packed target, on which the heavy MG's and HE rounds would have a devastating effect. At maximum rates of fire we will be able to pour in 60 rounds of 60mm and 60 of 40mm in the first 60 seconds. If we break them with this fire, then we can move in with both 113's and hammer the retreating groups with machine gun fire, with one mortar tube remaining in support.

From there, however things go, we will then have to find, pursue and destroy whoever is left, which could take a week or two.

I will need the two 113's, a 548 carrying fuel and ammo and two quad bikes for scouting. The aircraft will provide intelligence and may be able to drop CS to cover a retreat, if things go badly. We should be able to find somewhere to use as an airstrip for forward refueling. To crew this lot, we will need 10 men and the two pilots, leaving five at Haddon Hold. Barely enough to defend it, but enough. The plan called for training up a local militia before the invasion landed, but this is not to be, now.

Tomorrow morning, both aircraft go up to find us the easiest route in, while we load up the vehicles and sort our gear out. We roll out tomorrow afternoon as we need to be able to react to what will probably be a rapidly changing situation. Much as I don't like the idea, we will have to let some towns and villages be overrun. Fortunately, an army that size doesn't move too fast and they will be almost totally on foot.

Sending everyone on their way to prepare, I got John, who would be minding the fort, aside.

"Sorry to drop this on you", I said. "How do you think you will go here?"

“The only tricky bit will be refueling and stowing the aircraft”, he said, “Pilots are going to have to do that themselves with one helper, while we cover from up top. Having them back at night will help, but I’m sure we could beat off almost anything with five of us, in a worst-case scenario.”

“What about our workers?” I asked, “If Happy plays up, lock him down ‘till I get back and I will see how Alf feels about me hanging him.”

John laughed, “Leave that little puke to me”, he said. “If he thinks JD gave him a hiding, he hasn’t seen nothing yet- the rest are good value, though and more than make up for that sack of shite.”

“Well, sit tight and stay out of trouble back here”, I said, “If this goes on, I will rotate some of the crew back after about 4-5 days and the 548 will probably do a supply run every 3 days or so. I hope to have a repeater up at first opportunity; otherwise the aircraft will have to relay messages.”

“Best get the local repeater serviced tomorrow morning”, John said.

Damn- I had forgotten about that. “Yep- get a crew up first thing.”

Brent peered around the C&C door. “Got a minute boss? I’ve been working on an idea you might like to see now.”

John and I had finished, so I stepped out to see what he had to show. It was a length of PVC pipe, the type used for plumbing with a cap on each end and length of primer cord taped along it lengthways.

“Eric and I had the idea back at Transit”, he said, “The tube is a snug fit for a grenade and stops the handle releasing. The tube is split with primer cord, which is detonated by radio control. We can carry a bundle of ten, but they have to be released simultaneously or things start getting too complicated.”

“A poor man’s cluster bomb.” I said, “Bloody brilliant. Burst the canisters about 100 metres above ground and it rains grenades.”

This might just help turn things in our favor. Time to get these vehicles loaded, weapons sorted and try to get a decent night’s sleep.

Derbyshire, England
22nd March 846 AD

Day Fifteen

Working over the maps, we penciled in the most likely looking routes, with the pilots adding in details of settlements, terrain and the latest sighting of the hostiles, now 27km out from Sheffield. They are moving like the ground has been previously scouted and only have a few outriders in front. Horses don't travel well in longboats, but they had taken a few along their way.

From here until contact we would fly single air patrols at high altitude, to track their progress. As the crow flies, they are only 50 minutes away now, so we have two hours loiter time, should we need it. I want to locate a suitable airstrip closer to Sheffield- several promising sites have been marked on the maps, but will need checking on the ground. For the first time, we will be using the quad bikes for scouting ahead. I expect to use them a bit in the mop-up phase to move spotters and snipers about.

I had detailed John to send one of the lads to Alfred, to let him know we were off hunting the Norsemen and that any work we were going to do would have to wait, as we had an army of 3,500 to deal to. That should get his attention and the news should get around. All we have to do is deliver.

As we started our vehicle checks, the one I thought to be Algor's son nervously approached me.

"Sir, I hear you go to fight the Norsemen", he said, "May I have your leave to fight alongside you?"

"No- we will be too busy... belay that- yes, I have a job for you- John, would you please get him a jacket and a helmet, I can use an ammo bearer."

Kids got guts- he must have heard all the drama about what happens when you come second playing the friggin' Vikings. He can hump mortar bombs and fetch ammo belts. Somehow I think he will be up to it.

John came out of the store with a helmet, camouflage jacket and a pack of field kit.

"Up in the 548 with me", I said. He would get a quick course on his duties as we moved.

"MOVE OUT."

We rumbled down the road, towards Rowsley and then swung north.

Sheffield Area

As the shadows started to get longer, we looked for a good place to harbour up. We were about 5 km from the western outskirts of Sheffield town. We would spend tomorrow looking for ambush sites and a site for the mortars, hopefully where we would have direct fire. Of course all this would depend on what direction the attackers came from, so we had to have a few alternate sites.

The last flight reported them on course and their lead elements 19 km from our position. We put out the ID panels and the microlight waggled its wings as it flew over at about 2000 metres. The top-line silencing kit was well worth the money spent on it- we hardly could hear the engine at cruise speed.

That estimate gave us two days to get ready- fortunately they are travelling fairly slowly, as they stop to sack anything they come across. Two days march, overnight to rest, then attack in the morning, I would imagine. The aircraft will have to take off under lights, but this is easy terrain, with no surprises and no other air traffic. I need them loitering a couple of k's to the west before dawn. Assuming they can take off...

Time to set up camp for the night, it looks like rain.

It is- bugger.

Sheffield, England
23rd March 846 AD

Day Sixteen

The downpour last night had turned to drizzle and the aircraft are grounded. At least we had gotten our radio repeater up and running, so we can talk to home. We had a dry, if somewhat uncomfortable night, except for our recruit Edmund, who has an ability to sleep on top of ammunition crates. He has just had a crash course on how to use a gas cooker and make coffee. In a few minutes he can add latrine digging to his skills.

First patrol showed nothing nearby on the thermal and we had seen no obvious trails in our area. Better the rain now, than later. We have the camouflage nets up now- just need to figure out how we are going to move these 113's a whole lot closer on the day. They are not the quietest of things to move. Probably be a night move into position- Hopefully the town will be alerted by them and will be either fleeing or watching the campfires to the North and not the personnel carriers to the west. I can use smoke as a last resort, but it stinks and I would rather not.

We will head out on the quads soon to find a good observation point or two and sort out a couple of sites for the mortars to set up. If the weather stays like this we will have to do our own spotting, which will lose us one person on the trigger. I got a month's weather data at Haddon prior to this jump- that indicates it should clear up tonight- there at least. Hopefully here too.

Edmund is going to get a crash course in his job today. All he has to know is what ammo goes to what gun. .50, 40mm or 7.62, who to pass what box or belt to and where to keep out of the way when not doing that. Not a huge job but would really help us get that bit of extra fire on in the 'mad minute'. That's when we would do maximum damage- when they were grouped together for the charge.

We moved out on the quads to check out the area. We were carrying a bit of specialist gear such as laser range finders and a battlefield surveillance radar set. We carried silenced MP5's and a customized silenced .338 whisper rifle. Weren't planning to look for trouble, but we might have to take down scouts.

After a couple of hours, we had found several good positions 1- 1.5km from our probable battlefield for the mortars. A patch of brush on the forest edge 800 metres away from the town looked good for positioning our 113 and we had found a path for the second 113 to join up with us. A small hill just behind our mortar positions gave a likely spot for the radar and a quick sweep showed no more than expected activity. To save batteries, we would only power it up every couple of hours. I had found a bunch of likely sniping spots where I could drive in from the blind side of the hills and get with about 500 metres. A good distance- not too near, not too far and not much chance of our marksmen missing.

Sites are all pegged and designated now. As soon as we get an indication of direction, we can deploy the tubes and ammo. Unfortunately, there is nowhere suitable for a landing strip. Back to camp for a hot meal and a chance to get out of the rain. Apart from checking the radar every couple of hours, we would hole up until night then have a scout about the vehicle positions, using night vision goggles.

We will have to amuse ourselves with weapons drills. I see they have been teaching our recruit how to load M16 magazines and have been trying to explain how the rifle works. Rain looks set in for the rest of the day. It will slow down the advance for today. If we get lucky we might get a ping on the radar tonight.

Fine tuning our attack plan, we will pump in 60 rounds of airburst 60mm HE and 60 of 40mm HE, then cease fire as the aircraft perform their strike, a mix of WP and HE. This will let the tubes cool a bit and we can continue at 20 rounds per tube per minute, until they scatter too wide. At this point, one mortar crew will head in with the other 113. The 548 will stay near the mortars in case they have to bug out. Once they are on the run, the armor will close and engage, stopping to fire and not allowing anyone within 100 metres. One vehicle will try to stop them reaching the tree line. If they get into the forest, we have lost them. Mortar priority is to cut off any retreat.

After that, play it by ear.

Sheffield, England
24th March 846 AD

Day Seventeen

High cloud, no rain and the aircraft are up. We have contact on the radar at 14 km in about the direction we thought they would come from- it will be good to get a visual confirmation. Looks like the attack will go down tomorrow. We are picking that they will camp at a village about 5 km out. We have spotted riders entering the city and there seems to be more activity than usual. It seems like the bad news has arrived at Sheffield.

Just got news in from the aircraft confirming the radar information. The invasion force has been destroying all before it, but not burning buildings for a change. Don't want to advertise their presence too far ahead, it would seem. Lots of bodies were seen about the villages. Shit, I wish we could deal to them now. We would do another flight this afternoon. A steady stream of traffic has been heading south from the town. They will find our tracks about 8-9 km south, but

hopefully will just keep fleeing. I don't want either side to know we are here. In the original plan, I had hoped to make contact before this.

The chaps have been teaching our recruit the theory of how to use a rifle. I suppose he can manage one of the small caliber hunting rifles safely after a bit of instruction- no way did I want him going near military weapons, but once things quieten down he can amuse himself taking pot-shots. Helps them to pass the time, which is never easy when waiting for action.

Someone has gotten all inspired and unpacked one of the .22 rifles included in the survival kit each vehicle carries. I have given the OK for them to give a bit of instruction with this- they are silenced and dead easy to use. If he checks out on this weapon, he can try out the .338 whisper, to get used to a full- sized rifle. On thinking about this, we could use a local hero, returning to his people...

The afternoon flight has radioed in that the invaders have stopped for the night, having overrun the village as we predicted they would, and are now killing and cooking the livestock. The villagers had fled before they arrived and the flight from Sheffield was well under way, although barricades were being erected and some were preparing to try and sell their homes dearly. We have picked the positions we will take and will move into position at midnight. We have the radar and surveillance gear set up near the mortars and will monitor their movements throughout the night.

The radar hasn't been that useful, as we have had the use of the aircraft, but is good for spotting movement and if the rain had continued, it would have come into its own. The thermal viewers have been invaluable. No hiding from those.

Our recruit has turned out to be a passable shot and has been cleared to take part in the mopping up, provided he stays safely within the 113. The plan was to raise a local militia in a year's time- as usual we have jumped the gun on our planning. Up-time, Jenny and our crew will be preparing to set about snatching their weaponry and equipment.

Dusk is coming, time to pack up this camp and prepare to move.

Midnight. "Crank engines" came over the radio. Once they had warmed up, we set off on our different paths, my vehicle to the edge of the forest, the others to the OP and mortar site. We headed off to get in position, moving at a walking pace to keep the noise down. At the edge of the brush we stopped and shut down, three of the crew jumping out to drag a camouflage net over us and tie it off to the nearby scrub. I had instructed Edmund to prop up the front of the net with a long pole just before we attacked, so that we could drive out without dragging the net along with us.

Watching both camps, there appears to be no great interest in our movements. We were out of earshot of the Norse camp and if anyone from the town heard us, they were not coming out to investigate. I stood half the crew down to try and rest for a couple of hours. On the thermal, I could see a couple of men creeping along to get a closer look at the defenses. I thought about picking them off with the Whisper, but decided they were better left alone. The mortars were ready to go on a moment's notice and the skies were clear.

0330 hrs- The camp was stirring and troops were starting to mill about and form up for the march. No need to wake everyone up yet. At just after 0430 they started moving. I called base and told them to get the aircraft moving. 15 minutes later, they called back to report that they had taken off with no problems and would go into a holding pattern to our west. Time to wake up those who aren't.

0545 hours- the lead elements, the cavalry and light infantry are in place and are impatiently awaiting the rest of the grunts. They have started with the barbarian charm routine, waving heads on poles, baring buttocks and screaming obscenities at the defenders, who probably number 1,500 tops. The aircraft are orbiting at 2000 metres altitude, just off to the west and will attack on sighting a red flare. Steve has the mortar crews ready to go when I give the word. One final check of the range and we are ready.

Looks like almost everybody is here. Radar confirms only a few stragglers out there. The noise is building to a crescendo and the sun has just cleared the horizon.

“Mortar section-commence firing.”

“Aircraft- start your runs”

“Gunnery- fire on sighting splash. Driver- Crank it when we start shooting.”

They started moving just as the first round burst above them.

“Mortars on target,-engaging”, I yelled, sending a stream of thumb-sized slugs into the massed bodies.

Transit One -Mission +18 **Jenny's Journal**

The building and landscaping finished, the crew were in the process of moving in and setting up the house. Treasures acquired over the years were unpacked and put out, including more than a few priceless artworks that had 'vanished' over the years.

This house was really coming together, Jenny thought. More a collection of apartments sharing living areas, a huge kitchen, pools, spas, saunas, gymnasiums, bars and theaters than a house as such, but it suits us. Servants- we need servants.

I started thinking about how to recruit a team of totally dedicated servants- tricky, I might have to jump down-time to the late 18th and 'rescue' some poor domestics. I thought that might be fun and put the idea aside to talk over with Sonja and the others. I can get onto that after I do a couple of side trips down-time to the 9th and sort a few problems on Europe. Dumping that bucket of sunshine on Rome got rid of most of the trouble, but a bit of selective weeding was needed. Then we could bypass the middle ages and some of the other unpleasantness, like the inquisition.

Hell of a thing, nuking a city. Using a gate, you don't have to watch it and it's all a bit unreal. Sort of like launching a missile, but quieter. Five more 'specials' left, should any other religions get to big for their boots.

I love the touches some of the others have made. Sonja had acquired a set of dinnerware from the Titanic- she really has a great feel for the gate generator. She has a mission tomorrow to go back WW2 and pick up a load of rifles and ammo for the next tour. An easy job, in those pre-alarm days. We thought a load of .303 Lee-Enfield rifles would do nicely. Dead simple, robust as anything and they have a nice, long bayonet. Sonja suggested lifting a load of army battledress at the same time, as we will be fitting out English troops. That will probably appeal to Wayne's sense of humour.

Souvenirs from all the times visited- war booty taken from other looters, property salvaged from the moments just before disasters, furniture taken from famous homes, government offices and curios from ultra-high security areas. Wayne was a shocking collector of the unusual, although he usually hides his loot away. Stuff like his WWII booty, swiped from under the noses of various leaders of the opposing parties.

I'm supposed to be taking two weeks R&R, but really don't want to go back. I've settled all the old scores and my marriage is long over- no hard feelings and no regrets. The old home planet is really going downhill, as the governments take more and more control in the name of public safety- this will get much worse as the world heads closer towards WW3. I've been up-time and it gets quite depressing, knowing what is coming. The next 600 years are a mess, then it starts getting better again and while it is quite nice after 3k, but it ain't me.

That's why we are creating this split. A new timeline with a brave new world.

But will we find a place in it? I'm not sure that there is a place for us nomads of the timelines...

Derbyshire, England
25th March 846 AD

Day Eighteen

0400- Haddon Hold.

Expecting the call anytime now, John ordered the diesel generator started up. As soon as the electrician radioed all OK, he lit up the floods on the north side. That should help the ground crew get set up. The bombs had been armed and carefully secured to the airframes. One pull of a handle would release the canisters, which then required a radio signal to burst open. This was done by a radio controller attached to the instrument panel, the trigger under a covered switch, the cover being taped down. The bursting charges alone were enough to destroy the aircraft, which were never designed for this work.

Once the canister split, 10 hand grenades would be released, the striker handles now being released, they would detonate 4-5 seconds later. Each aircraft carried a bundle of 10 canisters, half fragmentation and half white phosphorus. White phosphorous or WP, would burn anything it touched and also gave of a cloud of toxic white smoke. Winds over the target were favorable for this weapon being used- the defenders should get little, if any, of the smoke.

On receiving the 'GO' message, the engines ran up to full power, as the ground crew fired two illuminating flares over the runway. The microlights sped down the runway climbing to their cruising altitude. After climbing to a safe height, they headed north, flying on instruments and assisted by night vision goggles. The two were displaying infra-red strobes, invisible from the ground. The ground force also have an infra-red torch shining as a beacon, invisible to all others not having night vision gear.

John and the ground crew collectively breathed a sigh of relief as the aircraft headed north. They had made the bombs as safe as they could, but it was still a fairly desperate measure, stuffing a tube with live grenades minus pins. Poor sods that would be under that lot. Hope they get some good video.

As the crew headed back, John ordered the generator shut down. Might as well get an early breakfast and listen on the radio. No doubt the locals would be up for news, soon after dawn. They knew what was coming if we couldn't stop the invaders.

All about the compound people were stirring, waiting for dawn and news.

Sheffield, England
25-28th March 846 AD

From 800 metres away, we couldn't really see the devastation the mortar rounds were causing. The 40mm started walking up and down the line at a rate of one per second as the two heavy machine guns scythed through the ranks. The charge, which had just begun, was stopped dead. After two long bursts each, we settled down to more controlled 5-6 round bursts to spare our barrels. The big .50 was particularly effective in this instance, the big, heavy 700 grain bullets slicing through their ranks.

For the next 60 seconds, we poured it on and then I fired a red parachute flare and called "Cease fire, cease fire."

The explosions continued for the next few seconds, as the mortar bombs already in the air continued to rain down. As the noise died down, a new sound was heard- two aircraft engines at full power. Swiveling around in the cupola, I saw them coming in at about 200 metres, about a wingspan apart. They flashed overhead at full speed and shot over the scattering crowd. At the distance we were, I could just see the bundles of orange pipe detach, then exactly two seconds later, spotted the flash of the primer cord detonating. The aircraft swept upwards, free from the weight of their deadly payload.

Hell just got worse for the invaders. Having been through a couple of sacked farms on the way here, we had no real sympathy for what they were getting. The scene was mostly obscured by the thick, killing smoke, which slowly drifted north towards the fleeing survivors.

I got on the intercom "Driver advance, stay clear of the smoke- mortar section, clear to re-engage." We moved forward to close the gap and cut off their retreat. Moving upwind of the smoke, towards the town, we continued to hammer those who were fleeing towards the defensive line. The townspeople would now deal with those we left. They would be the unlucky ones. When we got to within 200 metres, we stopped and carried on firing. The second 113 burst through the tree line and tore into the fleeing horde. As the smoke started to drift away, we could see the tremendous carnage caused on the massed troops. Fully 2/3 of them are dead or dying. This left about 1000 to deal with. I hailed the defenders- "We are friends from the south, stay out of the smoke- it is poison", I yelled, using a loudhailer.

We skirted around the smoke, engaging fleeing targets as we went, moving to meet up with the other 113. One microlight continued to orbit the battlefield at 500 metres, radioing information on movements. The other had returned to refuel, so we could have continuous spotting for the day. "Stand down mortars", I called, "Take a tube with you and get over to the northern OP and cut off their retreat"

We continued to hit them as they tried to flee to the cover of the forest, the weight of fire from four machine guns and the grenade launcher pushing them back into the open, where the mortar steadily ground them down. For the next two hours this continued. Move- shoot- move- load- change barrels. We were down to our last few rounds of 40mm and had only a few boxes of .50 left, when I decided to break off the attack. The few survivors had gone to ground or had made it

to shelter. The slaughter was over, for us. We headed back towards Sheffield, where the defenders had come out to kill the wounded and loot the bodies. As the vehicles approached, most scattered back to their barricades, but a few bravely stood their ground. Staying in the cupola, I spoke to them, telling them again that we had come from the south to aid them and would return there, once we had finished hunting down the couple of hundred left alive. While wary, they thanked us profusely for what we had done, offering us loot, which I declined.

Up close the carnage was particularly bad, the air stinking of phosphorus, blood and burnt flesh. Those bombs had really done some damage and our tracks had added to the mess, as the bodies were impossible to avoid. I left with an invitation to visit us and gave directions, warning them to beware anything foreign that might be an unexploded round. We left for the mortar site, to plan our next move. We would service the weapons and unpack rifles to finish the job. We would be stalking now.

From our vantage point, we could detect a few groups with the thermal equipment and the aircraft had followed a larger band as they escaped into a boggy wasteland to the east. The radar gave little useful information, as bands of townspeople were roving here and there spearing, looting and getting a bit of payback for fallen friends and kin.

After a couple of hours break, we had cleaned our weapons, redistributed ammunition and were ready to move to a new location on the eastern side of the valley. I wanted to break up the band that had gotten away. They were making slow progress through the bogs and we would soon be in mortar range. Once we had set up the tubes, the rest of us would split into two teams and hunt the rest down. Stores were holding up well, with less 60mm used than I had allowed for. We were light on .50, but it was small arms work now. A quick meal eaten on the move and we were back in business.

For the next three days we carried on much like this. Move, stalk, engage, call in mortar fire if needed, on to the next contact. Do it all day and work through the night with thermal and low-light sights. Try and sleep between contacts. Edmund was picking up the trade and had moved up from the Whisper to Steve's 7mm Magnum and was taking them down at 600 to 700 metres- impressive for a beginner. It was amazing how much he had picked up in a week. No longer handling equipment like it would bite and taking on our speech, jargon and mannerisms.

Tomorrow morning I will rotate five of the team back. The rest can come up and help finish off. I have cut air operations back to one flight per day, weather permitting.

The survivors have gotten cunning and keep to cover by daylight now. Makes a change for them to be the hunted. The game has been getting more dangerous, as they are avoiding the open and we have to move into cover to get them. I have switched pistols from my usual 9mm to a heavier .45 Auto. Last night's contacts in a wood were fought with pistols, SMG's and shotguns.

Not much long range stuff now. Three more days more and we are finished here. We should have starved them out by then.

Derbyshire, England
29th March 846 AD

Day 22

The 548 pulled up inside the compound and its crew clambered out. The replacements had another vehicle loaded and ready to go. After briefing them on the trip ahead, they exchanged places, securing the gates as the fresh team left.

Steve was dead tired after the drive back, but as IC, had to keep going. Standing down three of the crew, he headed to the C&C, while the remaining two climbed up to the wall. Give them 4 hours sleep then rotate. JD had left a fresh brew of coffee- from his private stock by the taste. Shirl was tidying up in the kitchen and the others were cleaning up about the compound. The guys were filling a coal hopper for the boiler and Mike was in the boiler house, as usual.

Eric was the only other still here, as he might need to do some flying. Not in this rain, though.

“Grab a shower while I cover”, he said “and try not to fall asleep in there.”

“Back in ten” answered Steve.

A hot shower, a fresh uniform and things seem so much better, thought Steve, as he headed back to C&C.

“Any problems here?” he asked Eric.

“When you next see our problem child note the chains”, said Eric, “he thought he would do a runner- John ran him down on a trail bike and dragged him back behind it.”

Should quieten him down, thought Steve, if he plays up today... well- he had better not.

“How about taking some coffee up to the sentries?” asked Steve.

“Already done”, said Eric, “Fresh flasks up in the sentry huts, just before you got here- lunch is in the oven, but after that we have to fend for ourselves”

“Fine by me, as long as it isn’t MRE”, said Steve.

1400 hrs- Changeover. “Wake up, get a shower and a change of clothes and get on duty.” called Steve over the intercom, “Simon, get a move on- you got C&C.”

We get 8 hours sleep, then night watch. At least it’s dry up there in the sentry hut- that makes for a pleasant change. It’s going to be a foul night out hunting tonight.

North of Sheffield

2300 hrs- I crept through the brush with Phil just behind. We had a fleeting contact in this area on the thermal an hour ago. Miserable cold wet nights like this were good for getting a good thermal contrast, but not much else. Night vision goggles are great, but you have to be wary on broken ground, as depth perception is not that good. I had the IR torch on my MP5 and was using it to search ahead. Phil had a shotgun loaded with #00 buckshot.

“Alpha, stand fast”, came over the radio, and we came to a halt and listened.

“Alpha, movement 100 metres ahead”, came back from the OP.

“Roger, advancing to contact- Alpha out”, I sent back, signaling to move forward slowly. At about 50 metres, we sighted them, sheltering behind a fallen tree. We kept moving carefully forward, hoping the noise of the rain would cover us. Seven of them. At 20 metres, I signaled to stop. I switched on the laser, selected burst, and fired, dropping their sentry. The others were cut down as they tried to rise- Phil’s shotgun blasting away, as my silenced weapon clattered. We moved forward to check they were all dead, firing a single shot to each head.

“Alpha to OP, contact eliminated- next contact?”

“OP, Alpha, no further contacts, return to OP- out”

“That will do me.” I said, as we trudged back towards our quad bikes.

Back at the OP tent we dried out and ate a hot meal. No one else was moving tonight. Were there any more out there?

Sheffield, England **30th March 846 AD**

Day 23

Much nicer today, the weather was clearing and radar showed a group of twenty about 12 km out and moving northeast. We will go and check them out after breakfast. No other contacts. Looks like we are nearly finished here. Life seems to be returning to normal in Sheffield, with people starting to return from their flight. We have had a bit of contact with the locals, who, while being wary of us, have been quite friendly. They are in absolutely no doubt as to who has saved them and their property.

They have caught a few invaders that have tried to hide in or around the town- they are now hanging from trees near the approach roads. These people haven’t come up with the idea of drop-hanging yet- its drag them up and let them choke. With us it’s generally a quick bullet, except for ones like the piece of shit the troops caught with an infant’s skull mounted on his helmet. He got dragged behind a 113 for a couple of hours. Oh dear, how sad for him...

The noble warrior myth doesn’t cut it with me- most of these scum are vicious thugs who prefer to steal from people living on the edge of survival, than to take up farming, fishing or trading themselves. Personal feelings aside, they are holding back any advancement here, with the

continual disruption to these people's lives. This is why we are here- to bring some stability so that the locals can grow and develop. Next time, I hope to meet the invaders at the coast and send them to the bottom of the North Sea.

Most of the men were feeling at least a little uneasy or guilty about the slaughter until their searching took them through farms and villages that had been taken. Edmund, who had spent all of his life under the treat of raiders, was quite unaffected by their change in fortune. He has notched up 35 confirmed kills and we can tell he was keen to get home and tell one and all.

We moved out after breakfast, half the team remaining to man the OP and rest up. After an hour, we had skirted round out of sight and dismounted to set up on a nearby hill. We spotted them approaching from about 3 km away. Just a matter of waiting until they were about 500 metres out. They must have thought they were in the clear, moving in the open like this. Best wait for a positive ID, we don't want to shoot up a group of traders.

Can't get a positive ID- No armour worn or weapons in sight. We have to let them get closer. At 100 metres I stood up and hailed them. Hands snatched at weapons in bundles and under cloaks. They were learning, but not fast enough. A volley of rifle-fire felled four, then another four. Too close- I hauled out my pistol and dropped to one knee. Out of the corner of my eye I could see others doing the same. We started firing at about 40 metres, steadily dropping them as they charged up the hill. As I sighted on one of the last ones standing, about ten metres away, a tremendous blast from behind me blew him backwards in a cloud of pink mist, near deafening me. Edmund, who had no pistol, had fired at point blank with his rifle. "Well done." I shouted, ears ringing. He was grinning ear to ear- this was the first one he had killed at close range. I reloaded my pistol and handed it to him "Go finish off the ones still moving", I told him and off he went. He came back loaded down with an assortment of jewelry, knives, sword and a helmet. Can't go home without a few souvenirs, I suppose. Just the stuff to hang on the wall of our hall, once the blood and gore had been scrubbed off.

'Don't forget my pistol', I reminded him. As he handed it over, I promised him that once he had received a bit more training in how to use one, I would give him his own. We had some revolvers coming up in 5 months time.

That was our last contact. Our body count was about 3,400. Best estimate was that 20-30 have escaped. I doubt they could mount another invasion like that in a hurry. Phase two is complete. The area is now stable and we will keep it that way.

Home to wash the stink off.

PART THREE

Derbyshire, England

31st March 846 AD

Day 24

Home. The wonderful place with showers, flush toilets, beds, real food, dry clothes and beer...

Now that the vehicles have been serviced and everyone cleaned up, I have decreed a four day break from all but sentry duty. Even our local workers have been given permission to join in, once their regular duties are finished. One of the lads has been sent down to the village to invite their leaders to join in the feasting tomorrow- tonight is for us. We picked up a bit of game on our return and some of that is roasting now.

I need to let them blow off steam after over three weeks of full-on work and the strain of the battle. Tonight would probably be a few drinks and crash. Tomorrow the party would start. Everyone else has been organised, now it's my turn for a shower.

Glad the crew here thought ahead to fire up the workshop water heater. I needed 30 minutes to get all the crap off me. My festering heap of clothing had been whisked away by one of our laundry girls and my boots have been added to the heap to be cleaned and polished by Happy, who going by the black eye, seems to have managed to piss Steve off again. Think I'm going to bump heads with that boy very soon. Over in my quarters, a clean and ironed uniform had been lain out. Ironed. Someone had been doing some training here. I headed over to the hall, noting that the fireplace had been finished. Good to see that work had still continued, despite being so tight for manpower. An assortment of captured weapons and armour were already being hung on the walls as trophies.

Drinks were well under way by the time I got there. It appears we have a barmaid now, looking as glamorous as you can in a WW2 uniform, which is to say, a huge improvement on appearances a week ago- Soap, shampoo and probably a razor have been put to good use. I can just imagine some of the shopping lists coming up at the 6 month resupply. Looking around, I can see that someone had brought paste jewelry down as personal trade goods- cunning. I suppose I did say to win hearts and minds, although I believe they are after other parts of anatomy.

I was met halfway to the bar by the one they called Doris, who presented me with a pint on a tray. I see the names had stuck- in the usual tradition of the military, anyone with a name the slightest bit difficult to pronounce was immediately renamed, as was anyone a bit slow in coming forth with a name. Usually, these names stuck like shit to a blanket, here being no exception. I thanked her and took a drink. The locals seem quite happy with their lot here, now that they have had a little time to settle in. I gather that some of the girls have made changes in their sleeping arrangements- I will just have to get more in from the other villages to keep everyone happy.

Everybody not on duty is here now. I see Steve had collared and chained our troublemaker, so he stays out of mischief. Talking to Edmund about him, it was confirmed that he is bad blood and was on the point of being banished when we turned up. He also confirmed that giving him to us to see how we coped would be typical for Alfred, who never wasted a thing. The locals had a tremendous respect for the leadership of Alfred, who had built the village up after it had been near destroyed years ago. Apparently, he had lopped a few Norse heads off in his younger days and hates them with a passion.

The local lads Bob and Baldric (no, really- that is his name.) are badgering Edmund for his war stories and seem a bit peeved that they didn't think of volunteering too, especially as he has arrived back intact. They are seriously impressed that he got to use a rifle, kill Norsemen and could now drive a quad bike.

As everyone was here, we put the video footage of the battle on the projector. This had been taken from the air, with a rear-looking video and a hand camera. We had also set up a telephoto at the OP, to catch the mortaring. As the battle wound down, we also got a bit of footage from the 113's.

The opening sequence of the airstrike was impressive. The tubes could be seen falling away, then bursting open, to shower grenades along the length of the line of invaders. We could see people being struck down by the yet unexploded grenades- then the battlefield disappears in a cloud of phosphorus smoke. The next shots taken from a hand-held show the smoke clearing, and the ground littered with dead and dying, bombs bursting and groups being cut down with machine gun fire. The next bit of footage is taken by a driver, who has started filming after coming to a stop and shows the effects of a heavy machine gun at 100 metres. That seems to have quieted them down.

I signaled to shut it off- enough serious stuff, time to put that behind them for now. Put on a music video or a comedy movie. I wonder if the barmaid knows any cocktails- if not, it's time she learned.

Mine's a Depth Charge.

Derbyshire, England
1st April 846 AD

Day 25

April Fools day. I'm saved from a sore head by the fact that I fell asleep in my chair after a few drinks. A free day here for all not on active duty, still- work continues about the place with people carrying on with their pet projects in their free time. Furniture making, improving facilities and tinkering in general, as well as teaching our local recruits the intricacies of our lives. Every day something new appears around the place, such as boot scrapers, benches, fresh paint, or a bit more concrete paving.

We have most of the day before our guests arrive and there is nothing that urgently need doing. Cooking a meal to impress is so easy with these people. Almost everything of ours is rich and exotic to them. I have to hold JD back to simple stuff like roasts and pies. Potatoes are exotic here and now and salt is an expensive commodity. They are bringing their women tonight, which

says a lot to me- probably they are wondering where ours are. JD is doing a big chocolate pudding that should be a crowd-pleaser. Not much of a day off for him, but he wouldn't have us cooking for guests ourselves- we might irreparably damage his kitchen.

One outstanding matter- calling up Steve, I asked him to find a couple of people and drag our problem child over to medical. He duly arrived and was now trussed up totally unable to move, on a hospital bed. I propped up the back of the bed. Eric came forward, skillfully inserted a cannula and gave him a dose of muscle relaxant- he was fully conscious but could not move. We taped his eyelids back and wired him up to an ECG and a hotted-up TENS machine. That completed, in went a cocktail of 30th century drugs that would enhance the experience...

“Right, here is where your attitude changes”, I said, “ If it doesn't, I'm going to send my demon to eat your liver- watch this and see my demon at work” Steve pushed ‘Play’ and the ‘Aliens’ DVD started to play. Happy had never seen a movie nor had experienced surround sound before...

It was all we could do not to piss ourselves laughing.

I'm glad we put the plastic sheet down- Happy wasn't very. After an hour of that the drugs started wearing off, so I kicked him out to go and clean himself up.

“Got to be cruel, to be kind”, said Eric, grinning.

We drove down to the village to pick up our guests and I let Edmund drive a quad down, rifle slung over his shoulder. Let him show off a bit, he has earned it, I thought.

We were soon returned to the hall, raising a mug to our victory. A rider from Sheffield had come through earlier in the day, spreading the news of the miraculous defeat of the Norsemen far and wide. The pride Algor showed for his son's newfound status was obvious for all to see. Alfred might even have been a bit pissed that he didn't send his son along to us. I'm sure he would put that to right soon.

I mentioned that we had been too busy to do the work we had agreed on, but would get it done after a few days rest. Alfred dismissed this as of no great importance, saying that killing Norsemen took precedence over all other things. I would send the sawmill over in a couple of days and also sink a well.

I could see him watching the people he had sent us and noting the cowed manner of Happy. Looks like we had done something he could not. They were all a bit more subdued and formal with their village headman there, which was probably no bad thing. Couldn't have him thinking things were too easy here.

The food arrived and that kept everyone busy for a bit- rich roasts of beef, mutton and pork, gravies, fresh bread and roast potatoes. These were a huge hit and Alfred offered as much land and labour as we might want, if we could supply seed potatoes. Next was a huge pudding, dripping with chocolate sauce and drowned in fresh cream. I thought they were going to burst, the way they packed it away.

After dinner, I had liqueurs brought out- nothing too high octane, just chocolate and coffee creams, along with after-dinner mints.

While they let that lot settle, we talked for a bit about plans for the area and the repercussions that our winning the battle might have. Seems there is a king of sorts, further south. That's useful to know. Sarah, Alfred's wife asked after our women. I replied that we had left them behind, to fetch them once we were secure here. I do believe she is lining up one of her daughters with me.

Yeah, right...

Getting back to beer and wine, we carried on for a bit until people started nodding off, then I offered to have them taken home for the night, extending an invitation to spend more time here, which Algor especially was keen to do. Rounding up a couple of mostly sober drivers, I farewelled them into the night; sending them off with a good supply of bottles. I was going to have to get a better people mover up here at the next resupply.

That went very well- now back to the party- now we can get the movies going and the top shelf out.

France, 1st April 846 AD

Jenny carefully put the range-finding binoculars away in their case. This was definitely the man. She drew the M79 grenade launcher out of her pack, carefully sighed on the silhouette in the window and fired. Almost before the HE round flew through the window, she had reloaded and sent another on its way, following that with a WP round to fire the abbey. All his guards didn't do him any good. Back through the gate, change equipment and find another target. Easy in- easy out.

Simple jobs, the only trick was to work fast and keep some fool from wandering into the gate. The old gods would be smiling tonight, as the new one's servants were dispatched across Europe. More fun than shooting Vikings, thought Jenny. These pricks really deserve it. Shame I couldn't get a bit more creative, but- business before pleasure...

Sonja adjusted a control and dilated the gate ever so slightly. Pushing the camera through with surgical precision, she twisted the stick to pan it about and then withdrew it. Replaying the video, she checked the room. Shame we can't get an electrical signal from the other side, she thought, but this beats poking your head through. Moving the gate back towards a wall, she poked the tiny camera through and checked again.

All good- save that gate setting to memory and on to locate the next target.

Marty, the Transit armourer, gave the big .50 caliber M107 long-range rifle a last wipe. 'I don't know what the hell she is playing at with this piece', he thought- wants to make a big impression on someone. "Still-'tis not mine, to wonder why...", he muttered to himself as he knocked on the door and waited for the green 'Enter' light.

Jenny crawled out of the shrunken gate, stopping alongside an Oak tree, resting the massive rifle on its bipod. Checking the magazine, she saw the specials in place, custom made .50 explosive projectiles tipping the hand-long cartridges. The self-declared Pope had just stepped onto the balcony. Tuning in her directional microphone Jenny waited for the about to become famous line. "...if this is not the true path, may God strike me...."

On "me" Jenny sent the thumb-sized slug on its 1100 metre journey. The bullet reached his sternum about a second after "Down", turning his upper body to pink mist.

Jenny safed the weapon, turned about and crawled back through the gate, collecting the spent case on the way.

"Hell of a nights work." said Sonja.

"One of them was quite creative" said Jenny, "otherwise, just stuffing grenades through a six inch gate, which has no class."

"None at all. If one has to be an assassin, one must have class"

"Bubbles?"

"Absolutely- the '96?"

"The '85- you have just graduated as Gate Operator, Unlimited."

Rowsley Village, Derbyshire, England
2nd April 846 AD

Alfred had a sore head. They had continued drinking on their return, talking into the small hours about all they had seen and heard. The villagers they had sent to labour had appeared to prosper and they seemed to have broken that young idiot, without maiming or killing him. I have the measure of them now, Alfred thought. They are some kind of militant priest order- I wish I could find out where they came from.

The rider yesterday brought news from Sheffield of flying beasts that dropped fire, carts with no horses that spat flame and men that killed from further than the best bow could hope to shoot. Best of all, they were at war with the Northmen, and were not interested in looting or conquering us.

Alfred would never have believed this, had he not seen it for himself- who would? He had never seen the flying machines drop fire, but all the rest he had seen, with his own eyes. An invincible army and he was first to have allied with them. And so far one young man from his village was carrying their weapons and riding their machines. I must get my son up there, he thought- I will offer to trade him for the useless one- that should work.

Looking for the water jug, he remembered their water that poured from the wall at their bidding. We have much we can learn from them. He pondered how he might win more favour with them. Alfred decided he would use his influence with the other village headmen of the area and get some trade going. They seemed quite keen on trading services for labour and from all accounts, they treated their workers very well, and won their loyalty easily. Perhaps I could broker exchanges of service to my profit...

Sarah, Alfred's wife, passed the jug to him, slightly the worse for wear herself. "They seem a well-mannered people and look well to their guests", she said, "Some of the villages around here could learn from them."

"They live very well", said Alfred, "Their hall is the finest I have ever seen or even heard of. The king will seek them soon, mark my words."

"That would be the first time he ever set foot in these parts", Sarah replied scornfully, "I could easily see a new king in our near future."

"I believe it may come to that. There is not room in a land for two such men. When is our son due back?" He asked, changing the subject.

"Two more days."

"Good, he can work up at the castle- I am sure they will exchange him for that idiot carpenter's son." Alfred said. I should have listened to you, he thought to himself.

"They seem to have tamed him", said Sarah.

"Indeed. They did what I could not." Privately, he would have given much to know how they broke him in such a short time, without leaving any obvious marks or signs of harsh treatment. They could be very dangerous enemies- there was no doubt of that.

Best keep them friends.

Derbyshire, England
2nd April 846 AD

Day 26

Another free day- a bit of hunting and fishing planned for today. There are a few fly fishermen that have been itching to get a day on the river, where rainbow trout have been spotted. The microlights are going up later in the morning, to give some of the others a chance to see the area from the air.

Plan is to barbecue up a pile of game tonight and JD has promised to make salamis and sausages later. I'm planning to park myself in an armchair, watch movies and drink beer today, with a serving wench on hand to bring me snacks and refills.

I can hear noises coming from the machine shop, so it looks like they are busy over there. Something was mentioned about a brass surround for the new fireplace. After being full-on for so long, it takes a bit of doing, to unwind properly. I shall just have to try my best. We could be out there, getting to know the locals, but the word is spreading far and wide about us. In the next week we will make contact with the nearby villages. It's time to start our tech-boosting plan.

Mike finished his morning checks on the boiler and generators. The automatic feed system was working fine, now that they were screening the coal and had rigged a lid to keep the contents of coal hopper dry. It was a great system, incorporating the best of the old and new. Most of the crew could run the boiler and service the steam engines, once they were run up and if there were no problems. Even then, most of the fitters or electricians could sort most of those. Now he could look at setting up a forge.

Over at the bar, Alice was busy polishing and dusting in between fetching drinks and bowls of peanuts. Eric was off in a corner reading and listening to something through headphones. Phill was measuring up the fire for a spark guard. A selection of music DVD's were playing on the big screen. I waved Mike over and Alice started pouring a pint of bitter in anticipation. Have to keep her on- a couple of days on the job and she knows everyone's preferred poisons and snacks. I imagine her father, Alfred, would be a demanding taskmaster.

"Just the man I wanted to see", I said, "Pull up a pew and tell me what this world needs right now."

"Time", he answered, "What else? Did you know the smiths here are almost all part-timer's. They work the fields all summer and bang on iron during the winter. Only in the big towns is it a full-time job and most of it is repairing stuff. They need time, to invent"

"So the real question is how do we find them time. Where to start, then?"

"We could try asking them."

Blinding flash of the bloody obvious...

“Alice- over here and pull up a chair” She stopped he polishing and came over and hovered by a chair. “Sit down- we want to ask you a few questions- Mark- get her a drink, will you?” Mark went over to the bar and got her a bottle of lager and a glass.

“Now tell me, what could we do to make your work at home easier? What is hard work?”

She thought for a bit “Fetching water from the river, finding firewood and heating water for cleaning and cooking. The stove you have in your kitchen would be every woman’s dreams come true. It heats water, enough for all to wash in, uses less wood and makes no smoke in the house.”

“Mike- how difficult?” I asked.

“A simpler, earlier design made from almost all cast iron parts- not too hard once we set up a foundry- the technology was 200 years old in our time. They can cast iron here and now- they just need to ramp up quantities. I brought a couple of books on casting down. The other thing is running water. Making a tank is easy- we just need to teach them how to make Portland cement. The technical bottleneck is making pipe in quantities. Hydraulic ram pumps are simple and easy to maintain. We can’t make O-rings here and now, but can do reasonably efficient leather seals- they just need replacing more often.”

“What I was thinking”, I said, “Was that we need to first make the tools, to make the machines that make other machines.”

“True. Better bellows, water powered hammers, millstones, grinders and so on. All do-able with what they have here.”

Alice looked uncomfortable sitting in the presence of the headman and an important person such as a Smith. This would have been frowned upon and punished in her home.

“Alice- that bar isn’t going to shine any more and those glasses won’t get any cleaner”, I said.

“Your job is to sit there, keep the beers coming and to tell us what your people need and what we can do to help them. This is important work that you will be doing.” She nodded, looking flattered but a bit dubious- I would doubt that her opinion had ever been asked before.

“I need to get to the villages and see what they can make now”, said Mike, “then I can see what they need to know next. From the little I have seen I can whip up a few simple hand tools that will make life easier in a very short time. Then move to wood turning, which leads to metal turning...”

He was off again.

Sam came in, returning from a successful morning’s duck shooting. Alice sprung up, but I gestured for her to sit back down. “Two bitters and a lager, thanks.” I called out. He brought the drinks over and winked at Alice, who blushed bright red.

“Just talking home improvements”, I said.

“How about running up a few spinning wheels?” he said.

“A machine for making woolen thread”, I explained that it would make more in a day than you could spin in a month. Alice looked impressed.

“Easy”, said Sam, “I used to make working replicas for rich bitches to park in the corner of the room, at a grand a pop.”

Again, I revised my plans for the 6- month resupply- we were going to need a woodwork shop.

“So, we will need a good glue recipe”, I said.

“No problem, find me a dead horse”, said Mark.

“What do the boys do when not in the fields?” I asked Alice.

“They tend the cows and sheep as they graze and take the pigs to the forest to eat acorns and roots” she answered.

“Fencing”, said Sam. “Stone is too labour intensive, same with wood. Drawing wire in that quantity is a few years away. How about hedging? It will work for all but a pig.”

We have a bit of research work to do. This is why I brought a library along.

As the afternoon wore on, more and more joined the discussion, each with ideas on projects. It was not so much a case of what to do, but what has priority. Biomass plants, hydro power stations, windmills, coal gas, steam engines, breech-loading weapons, sanitation, medicine, viticulture, mining, forestry. All good stuff, but let’s walk before we run. Then a movie was started on the big screen and that was that. Somebody got behind the bar and started making cocktails, which soon had all the Rowsley girls as silly as a flock of hens. The inevitable sing-song and party started and things went steadily downhill from there.

It was a great night.

Derbyshire, England

4th April 846 AD

Day 28

Today we are back to work roading, milling timber and sinking a well down at the village. We will be sending the bulldozers out towards the other near villages, as we intend making contact with them as soon as Alfred Jr. gets back. I have assigned Edmund to help in the workshop and boiler house and the other two useful lads to help on the sawmill, with a view to them learning to run it themselves in time. Also, we have two teams out scouting, looking for useful resources.

I have moved the workers bunkhouse into the main compound now that they have settled in. They don't get locked down at night now, but are under strict instructions only to answer calls of nature by the most direct route, for their own safety. Most of the girls are sleeping elsewhere, in any case. By next summer, I will build a barracks block away from the compound and by then we will have our farm and other workshops set. There will then be plenty of work to keep our local workers busy.

I think I will go down with the well drilling team and check on village life. Mike wants a look at their smithy, so he can come too. A well and pump will do for now. We can sort out a cistern and piping later. Public bathhouses were another suggestion for the villages.

The sawmill was in full swing when we got there. Stacks of sawn wood were steadily growing and the mill had attracted quite a bit of attention. The drilling team had found a likely site, away from any privies or middens and the well was under way. Plan was to run pipe to the center of the village and attach the hand pump there, if it was needed. Algor had appeared and had taken Mike to have a look at his forge. We would take him back with us to show him a few new ideas for tools. One simple one was a device Mike and the fitters knocked up, which trues up tool handles and cuts them to the exact diameter needed to fit them into a socket. Another is a 2 metre long auger for boring wooden pipes. I have discovered that tube-making is a very recent development- technically, it is quite difficult.

One of the more interesting suggestions was to set up a telephone system, using something like the sound-powered military field telephones. One phone per village- to summon our help in an emergency. Solar-powered/dynamo radios are another idea. There is a bunch of this stuff available back up-time for use in basket-case nations that are further down the evolutionary ladder than our 9th century friends. That's where I found the hand pumps.

Having a look about, the drains put in several weeks ago have worked well. There is now more available land for crops and the rubbish pit has been put to good use- not that they have anything like the rubbish we produce. Alfred has picked a site for the new hall, on top of a small rise, at the south end of the village. I will get the digger down tomorrow to take the top off the knob and prepare the site. Once it is boxed up, some of the village men can mix the concrete. There is a capable stonemason here whom I intend to teach how to make cement, next year. For now he can learn about concrete.

One of the scouting teams has just got back in- good news- they have found coal deposits in the north east and the area is uninhabited. The previous ones we had mined were not very big and will be gone well before the 20th century. Talking about minerals, we will have to test any groundwater for lead- this area is full of it. I know of a petroleum seep about 15 miles away, but we will leave that for a while. Getting back to the coal, we can start driving a road up that way.

Medium term, I want to link up with Chesterfield to the east, so we are heading in the right direction.

Heading back home, I saw the screening plant was in action again- they must have cut the track up to Bakewell already. We could really use a bridge over the river before winter. These light vehicles, which we are using more now that the area is fairly well secured, could use one. That and we get wet fording the river.

I will leave Algor with Mike and the fitters to talk shop and work out details on a setting up a new forge and foundry. I'm sure they will send him off loaded down with new gadgets and tools. For the moment we are mostly working on tools to improve and speed up the making of existing stuff. I believe they have gathered a collection of picture books to show him plans for water powered tools. Shame nobody here reads- we will have to correct that.

Over in the workshop, Algor had just watched a simple tube-cutter being made. This would be used to make hundreds of rake tines in an hour. This was a tool he could make, but it would take him half of the day. He had just seen it bored and turned in a couple of minutes. He knew he had made the right choice sending his son to work here, as he watched him drilling holes in a heavy steel plate.

"How are those brackets going?" asked Phil, "Last one- good. After that, you can sharpen up these billhooks and scythes; they all need a good edge before we take them to the Bakewell market, next week."

Derbyshire, England **5th April 846 AD**

Day 29

I woke at 0130- something didn't feel right- a kind of sixth sense thing. I picked up my pistol from the dresser and turned on the light. I thought I caught a flicker of movement from the far wall, but nothing was there now. Then a gate snapped open and Jenny stepped through.

"I had to come down for a look", she said, with a smile.

"Trouble?" I asked.

"No, I'm finished way ahead of schedule up-time and wanted to pay a visit and see how things were going- now move over." she said, placing an overnight bag down and removing her shoes...

We lay there talking for an hour or so, before falling asleep. At dawn we woke as the camp started coming to life.

"When do you have to be up?" asked Jenny.

"Not for a while. They are used to me working in here, first thing."

"Good", she said, rolling onto me...

The ensuite I had fitted into this container was one of my better ideas. No trudge across the cold yard to the shower block- rank has to have some privileges.

We had decided to pass off the early appearance of Jenny as a simple change in plans. The idea for 6 months isolation was not operational, but to give everyone here the sense of being truly isolated, with return not an option. They are passed that now. A bonus is that when she goes back in a week, we can get the equipment we want sent down before winter.

As we were getting dressed, Jenny asked- "Have they noticed the change yet?"

"Not as such. Some have said that they have been feeling better than they have for years, They have all lost a bit of weight and toned up, but have just put that down a healthy life here, exercise, good food and so on."

"Best let them figure out that something is happening in their own time."

"Agreed. Let's go get some breakfast and say hello, then we can do the tour."

Nothing like a surprise visitor to get this place in an uproar. After breakfast, we did a tour around the camp and watched everyone heading out to their respective tasks.

"The locals seem to be settling in well", said Jenny.

"We could use more", I answered, "That should get under way in a week or so. I don't want to deplete the local labour pool too much, at this stage. Thanks to our unwelcome visitors up north, local contact is running behind schedule."

"Looks like that is the only thing. Everything else I see is ahead of track. Everyone wanted to show me their pet projects."

"Let's get below into the warmth and sort out this material list."

Calling up Mike, Steve, JD and John on the radio, we headed for the hall, where the girls were cleaning up. We ordered coffee and settled round the freshly polished table.

Jenny started the meeting off. "Due to a change in timings, I have a week here to sort out additional material needs. There is sure to be a lot of stuff that you have now realized that you can use. As luck has it, you can have it in ten days time, which beats six months time, in the middle of winter. What do you want?"

"Got a list here", said Mike, pulling out a notebook and handing it over "Most of this stuff is antique and will be quite hard to find, in good condition."

Jenny read down the list. "No problem at all. It will all be in the Sears Roebuck catalogue, all I have to do is place an order- you get it all new, still in grease."

Mike looked rather taken aback, then laughed as he realised how she intended to get it. "Can you bring me a copy of the catalog on your next visit?"

The rest of the orders were a bit more ordinary- trade goods, building materials, vehicles, mining equipment, cast iron ranges and telephones.

I asked JD for an update on the food situation.

“Good, in most areas. Quantity wise, mostly no problem. What we are having problems with are eggs- we need some laying hens. Fresh meat is no problem, variety of fresh vegetables is not so great- we could really use a big glass house and some seed.”

“Anything else”, I asked.

“Something more attractive than RAF blue for the girls”, said Steve, which started everyone rolling about laughing.

“I hoped the smell of old battledress might keep you lot away from them” said Jenny, “I will get some sizes before I head back- If we are done here, let’s go for a drive.”

We took two of the Humvees out for a tour of the area. People in the nearer farms were waving back these days. The word had gotten round that we had saved them from probable slaughter and certain serfdom, but just as importantly, we were a welcome source of trade. We now had made contact with about a dozen outlying farms around Rowsley and were actively trading with them for stock, milk, eggs and produce. The formed tracks were certainly making traveling easier for us- the locals were also using them, although the roads skirted towns that we had not made formal contact with.

“Looks like a good site for a bridge”, said Jenny, looking across the river towards Bakewell. “Two container bases welded together then braced and topped with wood, across that narrow point-let the trade roll.”

“That’s what I want the crane for” said John, “that and a couple more bridges downstream. Downstream a couple of hundred metres is a likely spot to drop a 12 metre container as a dam. We cut a hatch in top, ballast it with rocks and we then have a decent head for a mill downstream. We could even run a generator with a crossflow turbine.”

“Sounds good. Let’s take a run up to those new coal deposits.”

On the way up to Hilltop, The subject of expanding early came up. “The whole Transit crew would like to come down, on rotation”, she said. “We can be here next month with the equipment shipment. Seeing as you have already eliminated the opposition we don’t need to bring in reinforcements for that. I suggest you ask the crew if they can recommend any likely candidates.”

“They already have”, I said, “A few of those were already on the ‘B’ list. We can start on the site works and clear the ground to the east for the new containers. We can tack the new wing onto the north side, with an access way through what is now the workshop store- that’s mostly empty now. With the crane, we can go three, four containers high.”

“Go three, anymore will make it a dark hole”, Jenny said, “ I will whip up something on the CAD tonight- ever thought about putting a 12 metre on end as a tower?”

“I had, but I didn’t have a crane in the plan then. Over there- our coalmine.” Work was well under way- the 322 digger had been stripping overburden and had exposed a much larger seam than the

first one we had mined. That should keep us going for a while. Time to move to a couple of wheeled off-road dumpers, those tracked ones are good, but the rubber tracks won't hold up to doing any distance traveling and they are a bit thirsty."

"Looks like a good place for lime-burning- no neighbors", said Jenny.

"So far we have coal, limestone, iron, lead, clay, gravel and wood everywhere", said Steve.

"I spent a bit of time in England researching further and have an updated geological map for you", said Jenny "infuriating how the modern maps don't mention mined out deposits, but I have filled in most of the gaps now. It's amazing how different the country looks 1100 years later."

"This looks like a nice, isolated spot to gate in the next shipment", I said, "otherwise we will have to do a night jump into Haddon. I don't want the locals seeing the gate. It might be a bit too much for them, seeing the trains appear out of thin air."

"A night jump is no problem", said Jenny, "we just lay out IR reflective tape and pick a night with a new moon."

"If you are OK with that, that's what we will do, then. Onward to Matlock and that completes the trip. There should be more to see next time- we may even find a nice village inn for lunch."

"I've tried the local beer and I can piss better" exclaimed Jenny, "let's move."

We drove about the countryside, down to the end of the track, which was currently being bulldozed towards Matlock, skirting a couple of small villages. We turned about after stopping to have a word with the roading crew and then headed home, via Rowsley. Stopping in there, we checked out the site of the new hall, which had been leveled and was now having the foundations boxed up for concreting. Off towards the forest, the saw-mill could be heard milling wood and a tractor was skidding logs over to the mill.

Everything was looking good here, the well was in and the hand pump fitted. When the next shipment came down we would fit a windmill and a holding tank. For now, they had clean water without walking down to the river. Time now to head for home.

Definitely time to bring in some more comfortable vehicles.

Derbyshire, England

6th April 846 AD

Day 30

We are due to go up to Bakewell today with Alfred and his son, who has returned from his travels. They are expecting us eagerly, according to Alfred. Jenny is staying back in camp today working on the shopping list- she agrees it is not a good idea to spring a new face on them just yet. I want to get this introduction to the shakers and movers done today, so that we can go the market day tomorrow.

We picked up our passengers at Rowsley and headed towards Bakewell along the southern approach road. This stopped 300 metres short of the town, so we drove the last bit cross-country

and walked the last hundred metres. A small crowd had gathered to watch, having been warned that we were coming. This town was the largest in our immediate area and had a population of slightly over 1000. As such, it was the center of trade in this area. The crowd looked more curious than fearful, the word had gotten around that we were peaceful enough to our neighbors.

A group of men bustled through the crowd and came forward to greet us, waving the others off. A fat, pompous looking man bustled forward, Alfred identifying him as the Mayor. We exchanged formal greetings and he invited us to his hall. I could see 'shopkeeper' written all over him, as such money and trade would be the key to motivating him, as compared with Alfred's wish to improve the lot of his people.

I'm glad the Transit team will be coming down early, as there are a couple of specialists there who really excel at this stuff.

As I thought, we soon got down to business and I played the usual line about needing labour and could provide men and machinery to do work in return. Alfred backed this up at length, waxing lyrical on the miracles done by our machines. Herlewin, the Mayor, looked a bit peeved that Alfred had one up on him.

After a bit of haggling, we arrived at an agreed amount of work to be done in exchange for eight indentured servants, four men and four women between 15 and 20 years and sound of body. This work was to extend some grain fields and to make a track suitable for a cart, to the nearby town of Ashford- tasks to be completed first. Alfred must have noticed that I did not give as favorable terms to Herlewin as I gave him. He seemed very satisfied with the arrangements, though, especially that future works arrangements were to be made through him.

I radioed for the tractor to come up and start ploughing and for the road to be pushed through to the next town immediately. That got their attention, Alfred and son taking this in their stride, having gotten quite accustomed to seeing us use our radios.

"Let us go and mark out the fields for ploughing", I said, "my men will be here soon."

We left and headed towards a ploughed field that was to be extended. Herlewin pointed out the area that he wanted, which looked bigger than that he described.

"It will be done before nightfall", I said. He looked at me doubtfully. In the distance I heard the throbbing of a diesel engine. They must have had the tractor waiting at the gate. Ten minutes later, the Mayor and his men stood with their mouths hanging open. I believe that he thought that Alfred and I were boasting and he would be able to renege on the deal.

"The road to Ashford will be completed by day's end", I said as the bulldozer clattered past the village, "I will pick up my labourers after tomorrow's market, as agreed. I'm sure we will have some interesting items for trade tomorrow that you may find of use- until our next meeting, farewell."

We walked down the new track to our vehicles. Once inside, Alfred burst into raucous laughter, followed by his son.

“You have truly bested the old miser.” he roared, “He thought you would be all season on those tasks.”

“We told him exactly what would we could do”, I said.

“Best way to fool a cheat”, bellowed Alfred, “Tell him the exact truth, and he will think you are a liar, as is he.”

“Thirsty work, this bartering- we all need a drink”, I offered, laughing with them.

“That we do, my friend”, said Alfred.

Derbyshire, England

6th April 846 AD

Day 30

As the workers departed to their tasks and the contact team headed off to Bakewell, Jenny settled down to work on the amended equipment requirements. As she worked through the lists she had been given, she made notes regarding who would be making the purchases, when and where. Getting down to the list provided by Mike, she popped next door into the boiler house.

“Got an hour or so? I want to go over this equipment list with you”, she asked.

“No problem, everything is OK here”, said Mike.

“Hope the boiler is working well”, Jenny said, “that was the best one I could find.”

“You did extremely well. If looked after, that should run for the next 200 or so years- it’s built like a nuclear reactor.”

“The makers also build nuclear reactors- you wouldn’t believe the cost. But cost is not a concern to us- reliability is.”

Over at the hall, they got coffee and Jenny handed over a book. Mike’s eyes widened- it was a 1904 Sears Roebuck catalog and looked brand-new.

“That’s a collector’s item.” said Mike.

“My agent is on the mailing list”, Jenny said, “give me the item numbers, I pass them on and the goods are delivered to a warehouse, which is then cleared by night and moved to Transit. Shop ‘till you drop.” she said, with a grin.

Mike picked up a pen and started flicking through the ‘Farmer’s Wish List’.

Jenny’s Dairy

I left Mike to it and went for a look around the compound, to see what was happening. As usual for this hour, the cleaners were going about their duties, doing laundry, mopping and wiping.

They all seem cheerful enough in their work, I thought. They had all been watching me closely, as the first women of the strangers they had seen, noting the fact that I went armed as did the men- I couldn't miss those glances at my pistol. I think I will cut one out of the herd and have a talk to her.

I headed for the kitchen.

"How's the restaurant business going?" I asked JD.

"A cruise", he answered with a laugh. "Fry it or roast it and they eat it and look for more. No catering to vegans, imaginary wheat intolerance's or pretentious yuppie pond-scum."

"How's the help working out?" I asked, "Must have been a drag doing three meals."

"Swings and roundabouts. Everyone was working 16 hours plus at first, but then I didn't have to stand a sentry watch. I tell, you, if I could have found kitchen hands that would work half as hard as the girls here, I may never have left the business."

Shirl, who was emptying the dishwasher, blushed with pride at that remark.

"Finish that and have a drink with us", I said to her. There was no room to sit in the kitchen so we stood by the Aga range and enjoyed a coffee. Shirl, like the other locals, had not acquired our taste for coffee and tea, but cocoa was a big hit.

"How do you like working here?" I asked her.

"I should very much like to remain in service here, my lady" she answered.

"My name is Jenny", I said, "and we always welcome a good worker- of course you may stay."

"She is sweet on one of our crew", said JD, causing her to blush again.

"The men are so good." she said, "They never strike us, even when do our work wrong and never take us against our will."

I could see why she was keen to stay. JD had filled me in on her background, which was not exceptional in this time.

"We do things differently here", I said. "We reward our friends and punish our enemies terribly- it is easy to stay our friend, though. Speaking of rewards- I have to leave soon but shall return with clothing- more attractive than that you have been given. Have the other women come to the hall after their work is done and I will take your measure."

"Also, there will be more women coming to work here, firstly from Bakewell, then the other villages- We want you to be headwomen and teach them our ways, should you wish the job."

"I would be honored", she answered.

"They will be working with the cows and growing vegetables in a farm we shall build. All of you shall keep your jobs here", I said, reassured her that she would not be demoted to a farm laborer.

“Good, I don’t want to lose my breakfast cook”, said JD, “I suppose I should start training one of the others up on breakfast, now that we have more coming.”

“I would do that- we could set up another kitchen for the locals in the adjoining compound. What will we need?” I asked.

The shopping list just got bigger again- never mind, we can’t spend the interest from our investments up-time, as it is.

We had sorted the ‘wish lists’, which I would ‘post’ back to Transit tonight. We have been finding more and more used for ‘microgates’, as we call them. We could have the material tomorrow, but they would not need it for another month, so a delay was actually useful. The new compound layout had been altered and now we had a final plan, with an adjoining compound being added to the north side- no services came in there. I had packed up my notebook and had moved to the hall, where I was getting acquainted with some of our workers, when two Humvees pulled up outside. Going by the sounds of merriment, I gathered that the Bakewell negotiations had gone well.

The girls busied themselves by furiously polishing and wiping, in the manner of servants everywhere, on hearing the master arrive. As they entered, I gestured that they should fetch refreshments, as would be expected. This must be Alfred and the village alphas. I walked up to him and introduced myself, which threw him a bit. Got to keep them of balance. Then just to throw him some more, Wayne introduced me as his second-in-command. I must say that Alfred recovered well.

Taking a seat at the table and sending Doris off for a glass of her private reserve, Jenny asked “How did it go?”

“Let’s say that the bloated buffoon of a mayor will take us more seriously next time”, Wayne said, to which they all laughed.

“He got fair measure”, said Alfred, “Which is less that he is want to ask for. You will find the other village headmen better to deal with. He is a rich townsman who only leads by virtue of his purse. My son will go with you tomorrow and make sure you are not given short measure.”

Alfred looked like he had been waiting to put one over this character for some time and had now helped in making this happen.

“We are not traders”, I said. “Perhaps your son might trade on our behalf? For a portion of the profits, of course.”

This meet with his hearty agreement- I’m sure he would be taking his cut, too.

Derbyshire, England
1st May 846 AD

Day 31

Market day today- We have offered to transport people from Rowsley and many of the braver ones have accepted a ride on a towed trailer that has been rigged with sides and rope handholds. Many were not keen on riding, but were happy to send their trade goods up by vehicle.

We are putting some goods up for sale, but not in quantities that will flood the market- just enough to make them hungry for more. We are hoping the curious have heard that we will be there and will come for a look, so we are sending up quite a large contingent. All non-essential work has been suspended for the day, so most of us will be attending. Of course that will mean we will have quite a bit of firepower there too.

Our convoy moved out, slowly heading towards Bakewell. As we knew, most people got to market early and had arrived well before us. Large crowds gathered to stare at the vehicles and us. Leaving a guard on them, we headed for the square. The mayor, who we had renamed Boss Hog, was feeling a bit better about yesterday, having been complemented by other visitors on the size of his new fields and fine new roads. I invited him to come and look at some of the new wares that we had on offer, pointing out that these were samples and orders would be taken. This character was not a fool and realized that if he bought up any new products, they could be on-sold for large profits. He was thus totally distracted from the real business that was happening at an inn, not far from here.

Algor and Mike were meeting with the local smiths, wheelwrights and farriers. Mike quickly pointed out that we could ruin trade if we flooded the market with our merchandise, but we would not do this. What we wanted to do was to work together cooperatively and make this area the place others would come to learn and buy the best products. Algor passed out samples of the new tools that we had brought, such as milling cutters, taps and dies, drills and swage blocks- all far ahead in quality of those available in this time. All master craftsmen, they instantly recognized the worth of these tools.

“But let us keep these plans amongst fellow master smiths”, Algor said. They all nodded in agreement. None wanted the mayor taking any of the profits they stood to gain.

“We shall establish a forge and foundry where all smiths may work their craft, to learn and to teach, with many new tools and devices”, said Mike, “This shall be built within two months. We have much to show you.”

The meeting broke up, with the participants wanting to get back to their shops and stalls, before they were missed.

Alfred Jr. was having a good day. His stock sold within minutes, fetching high prices. Miners had traded his picks and crowbars for a large quantity of lead pigs, the scythes were snapped up by Boss Hog in exchange of cattle and the other tools were purchased for coin, pigs and sheep by the more wealthy landowners, who recognized their quality. His one-fifth commission was a very large sum, even after it was split with his father.

I inspected the bondsmen that I had just acquired. They looked healthy enough and about the agreed age. Someone must have had a word in Boss Hog’s ear, as this looked like a fair deal, provided they had no major personality defects.

“Serve me well and I will treat you well- ask my other servants this”, I told them. “One gave me trouble and I returned him to his village. The headman, being a fair man, gave me his son in return. The troublemaker now smelts lead for the miners.”

They all knew that this craft made for what was an early death, even for these days.

We shooed them into the caged trailer and sent them on their way, looking quite dejected. Never mind, they would cheer up in a day or two. The others would soon explain what was required of them and sort out the pecking order.

Meanwhile, I wanted to check out the pudding this town was famous for. Hope it has been invented this far back.

Nope, due to a mistake in dates, I am 1000 years too early. Have to make do with a cheese that I have probably paid too much for. Hopefully JD will find a recipe for the pudding.

I have now met all of the locals of any importance and have promised to visit them soon to talk about trade. One came nervously forward to make apologies for one of his villagers shooting at us and I had to assure him that no harm was done and all was forgiven, assuming there were no further arrows. He now had many more wagons of coal to trade this year, thanks to us and the village would be prospering from our mining trip. Another village on our side.

I have offered rides to the daring as far as Rowsley and have promised to expand the roads as soon as we could. This was well received as the tracks that we had already put in had greatly sped up travel by horse and cart.

Everyone is happy, in no small part due to our buying large quantities of beer for the crowd, much to their pleasure and the innkeeper’s profits. Time to head home and see how things are going at home with the new recruits.

The new arrivals would at least find it easier with a group that had already had to adapt to our ways there to smooth the way. By the time I got back, they had been taught the basics- how and when to use showers, toilets and water taps, the house rules, what their duties would be and where they would sleep. Some of the empty containers on the second level had been fitted out as bunkhouses- Spartan, by our standards, but far better than anything they had previously known. They were all in overalls and would be issued uniforms in a couple of days.

I took some of our original recruits aside and asked if they knew the new ones. Most were known and apparently none were total rejects like Happy. They had, of course, taken great delight in pointing what had happened to him to our new recruits.

Now the trick was going to be finding work for them. Fencing our new potato field, I think.

Derbyshire, England
5th May 846 AD

Day 35

The last few days have been a continuation of roading and building. We have had a steady stream of visitors from about the area, notably every blacksmith for miles around. We have three new buildings underway, a mill, a forge and a foundry which will all be water powered. We are now confident that we can have this area up to sustaining 19th century technology in our 5 year timeframe. As we hoped, the attitudes here have not yet been warped by ingrained organised superstition. The people want to learn and gladly accept that which improves their lives.

Jenny goes back tonight to work on the resupply and recruiting. The team has provided her with a few likely prospects to follow up on. She mentioned having a few specialists in mind for a one-way trip back here. Jenny has a flair for finding people in desperate situations to come and work for her.

Mike has been invaluable in providing a bridge between old and new technology. He has determined that much of the jump forward will be in providing a few simple tools and techniques that would otherwise be slowly gained by trial and error over the next 900 years. The ability of the craftsmen now is not an issue. That they do so much with so little is a wonder. A few simple innovations such as the double-acting bellows have already won almost all of the smiths over to us. Of course there will always be the 'It was good enough for my father and his father before him' types.

We have three weeks to complete all the excavations and get foundations laid. This will almost exhaust our supply of cement, one item I underestimated the need for. We will be able to make our own, but there are more useful things to do right now. The CAD system is another thing that has been particularly useful. The carpenters here can't read, but can work to a drawing and are OK with numbers. They have all picked up the metric system easily and we have been giving away large numbers of tapes and rules.

The Rowsley hall is well under way- we have mostly left them to it, having made the foundations, provided the plans and sawn the timbers. All I have given them are a few modern hand tools, bolts and nails and a bit of help with lifting beams into place. I have enough corrugated steel to cover the roof and we will help with the invention that is the talk of all that have seen it- the chimney.

We have decided to establish a second camp at Hilltop, which may or may not be permanently manned, but will provide secure lockup for equipment and be a refueling point, as this is where we intend to set up our steel mill and coal mine. Jenny and Sonja are researching a plan to bring back some 19th century coal and steel workers.

A few new techniques have been refined back at Transit during the last year, notably, uses for smaller gates and precision gate location. We have set up an empty container in the compound as a drop point for smaller cargo. At night it is filled, during the day it is emptied and the locals never see a gate being used. We can also send mineral or biological samples for analysis, plus relay messages and requisitions. Now we can order the cement we need to pour the footings for the windmills that are coming.

More labour has been arranged with several of the local villages, but this is awaiting more accommodation and the extra staff from Transit to look after them. Time is on Transit's side. They can take a year and have the stuff to us in three weeks. Or three minutes, if we could handle it.

Tracks have been cut to all settlements within an 8km radius and two roads have been pushed most of the way to Matlock and Chesterfield. We hope to have them metalled and compacted before winter, with the more traveled ones already done. There is some roading plant coming down, such as a roller, a crusher and larger capacity dumpers, plus pipes for culverts. No wonder many of the locals think we are some lost tribe of Romans.

Now that we have had an opportunity to assess the skill of the local blacksmiths, we have found that with some instruction and guidance, they are perfectly capable of constructing black powder firearms and with the ability to manufacture lead styphnate primers (relatively simple), can jump straight past flintlocks to cap & ball muzzle loaders. Best guess is that with the technology we are introducing right now, breech loading cartridge arms are not far away. That is as good as we could have hoped for.

We have found a site for a micro hydro system near Hilltop that should power the mining camp, which will save a bit of diesel. We are to increase our storage capacity here, as Transit had adapted a 6 metre container into a double-skinned secure fuel tank containing 25,000 liters. With all the extra plant coming in, we will need the extra capacity.

Derbyshire, England

26th May 846 AD

Journal Entry-Day 56

Resupply tonight. Fortunately, it won't be as full-on as our arrival, as the gear doesn't have to be stowed away. All the locals have been warned that we will be moving large vehicles about tonight and they should stay well away, if they do not wish to be accidentally run down. As a lot of equipment will be sent to Fort Hilltop, a security team has been sent there to secure the area.

The foundations for the new buildings are ready. A lot of construction has gone on in the last three weeks, with the local roads being finished and a road being driven through to Sheffield. We are now getting regular cart traffic from Chesterfield and Matlock and have met most of the important players from these centers. I no longer require labour, as I have more than enough unskilled workers from the surrounding area.

The first ones I have recruited are now trained enough to run simple machinery, with a bit of supervision, such as tractors, quads, the Bobcats with some attachments, concrete mixers and the sawmill. It won't take long to train them up on a roller or a loader- those are fairly idiot-friendly. Take a look at any roading gang in our time.

More wire and posts arrived a week or so ago and now we have areas fenced off for animals- probably the most awaited being our chicken farm. The hen house is up and an area has been secured with netting- there are a few foxes here and we haven't had time to hunt them. All the other stock we have been able to purchase, but there are not enough laying hens here. We have had fresh milk, cream and butter for two weeks now, which had been great- beats that crap in a carton hands down.

No real problems with our labour pool. A few excesses in sorting out a pecking order have been dealt with by way of a few days digging postholes and drains by hand and short rations. Soon we will have plenty of work and won't have to keep looking for jobs to keep people busy. One interesting thing that has happened is that they are adapting to our variety of English, faster than

we are to theirs, picking up our words and expressions. I suppose so much of our life is totally new and they simply do not have the words for things. All round, conversations are getting easier as we both pick up each others language.

The great hall in Rowsley is finished and is the pride of the village, with its huge fireplace (and chimney.), steel roof and windows- something not often seen here and now. Most of the works in this village are near finished, just awaiting some of the larger fittings which arrive tonight, such as water tanks. The new seed is planted and all indications are for a bumper crop. Hopefully we will have the mill built and working by harvest time. Foundations are done and the fittings and building have all been prefabricated and are due to arrive tonight. All we have to make here are the millstones.

We have put wells down in a few of the outlying villages, priority going to those with no nearby running water or otherwise unsatisfactory water supplies. We have done quite a bit locally, trying to make sure something significant has been done in every settlement, even if it has just been to dig a drain or plough a new field. We just need more of us. Still, can't build Rome in a day, even if you can blow it off the map in a few milliseconds.

We have had reports of a bit of banditry along our new road to Chesterfield. It appears a few of the local thieves have been preying on travelers, although they have stayed well away from our vehicles. The next air patrol will be having a look for them and we will set up a surprise for them. Law in these parts seems to be of the Judge Roy Bean variety, hangings being a popular spectator sport. Theft is not a 'minor offense' here.

I have given the longer serving locals access to .410 single-barreled shotguns and air guns, as a mark of favor and they are putting these to good use in their free time. They bring in a steady stream of small game and are killing vermin, for which I have placed a bounty of tokens. These can be saved to purchase future items. Highly prized ones include binoculars, watches, sunglasses and knives. Just like teenagers up-time they all want to be sporting the latest and greatest. A few locals who we have judged to have been particularly helpful have also been favored with shotguns and other items not generally available to the commoners. A few of the villages have even had telephones installed, so that we may be contacted in an emergency.

Some of the local farms, such as the nearest one belonging to Edgar, are doing steady trade with us and are often daily visitors, bringing eggs, milk and butter to trade. Even though we will be producing our own soon, I want to continue this practice. JD has been doing a lot of trading- sugar and spices for the more uncommon foodstuffs, such as wild honey, mushrooms and cheeses. - He has been teaching the local women the art of salami making and has taught them techniques for making different style of cheese. Seafood is one thing we can't get- eventually we will cut a road to the coast and do some trading there.

Everyone is looking forward to the early arrival of the Transit team. I do believe that a few people are anxious to get reacquainted. At this stage it looks like only 5 or 6 will be going back at the end of their contracts. Despite \$3 million awaiting them on return, I have already been approached by Mike, John and Eric about doing at least one more tour. It is kind of fun here- always full on but you feel like you are doing something real. You feel alive.

Transit One

Jenny's Journal Entry-Day 56

Resupply today. Three weeks have passed down-time, but we have been working on this for 8 months here and now. We have brought in all the specialist supplies needed that have been identified, thus far. The tricky stuff done, we only need a team of four to keep up the 'Grocery Run'. We will be coming back on rotation to do that work, the rest of us having elected to work down-time. Unlike the first crew, most of the Transit staff are not engineers, but have picked up a lot of useful skills here and everyone can all use at least some of the plant competently. They have all had the firearms training they will need, plus what they have picked up with us, much of which is certainly more extensive than many armies offer.

They are a bunch of all-rounders and all have operated in other time periods and know how to blend in and pick up new languages and customs fast- you have to, if you want to survive time-travel.

Once we get the two teams integrated, I have a couple of 'body-snatcher missions' planned to get us a medical team and some 19th century miners. Sonja has identified our targets, who are facing imminent death that only we can save them from. They get a choice, join us- and meet our price (10 years service is my standard contract), or suffer your fate. Not many get this chance. We have also found some domestic servants in a similar predicament. They have been earmarked for the Transit mansion.

This should be a lot easier tonight, as we are gating onto formed roads and have full local security. Behemoth will be hauling the mining train into hilltop and staying to do some open cast mining work- one of the tractors can take the empty trailers back. Unlike the first jump, we will have a cleared and fully prepared site and can stack the containers into Fort Hilltop straight away. I'm dumping as much stuff as we can up there, as it isn't under local observation- especially if the weather packs in, as it is meant to.

My crew has picked up quite a few extras, as they do. So far I have seen a sauna, a swimming pool and a 6 meter container full of Champagne. That might account for the strawberry plants being packed into the live plants container. What else they may have squirreled away, only time will tell. They are all ready to go, but we need to synchronize times, so that we leave in the dark and retain our night vision. It wouldn't do to drive a D11 over the new foundations.

A lot of the new plant is real simple stuff that the local labour should have no trouble with after about a day's training. No reason they can't do the fetching and carrying using tractors, quads and suchlike. We already have a couple of them using loaders at the gravel pits. In a year we will have them using everything that we want them to. We have a collection of air rifles, shotguns and .22 rifles suitable for training a local army. Sonja has also secured 300 WW2 .303 rifles, plus uniforms and equipment, for when we put this local army together. That is staying here for now, as this is not planned to happen for another year. We expect another invasion next spring.

Waiting impatiently to go are another eight recruits, selected on the current crew's recommendations. Three were associates of Mike and are dead keen to get into blacksmithing and running the traction engines headed down-time. The others have all worked or served with members of the crew and were on our list when we started the project. They are all fitters, technicians and mechanics and have been training here as plant operators. As with all ex-services trained tradesmen, they all have quite a bit of jack-of-all-trades training. They were all easy to

recruit- money always gets their attention and you can't beat getting paid well for doing what you love.

We will have double the numbers after tonight, but the original facilities are built with to cope with the extra staff- we just need to add more living modules, plus Fort Hilltop will be manned on rotation most of the time, taking the pressure off showers and kitchen here. As facilities such as the foundry and mines open up, more of the crew will be staying away overnight, while the area remains stable. The Transit contact specialists and combat teams will quite often be in the field during the summer. I expect company from the local powers-that-be very soon. I'm sure they will want to know what happened at Sheffield. That should also make them very wary of us.

One of the new technicians here made the suggestion of putting up a mast for a repeater and also having that battlefield radar up there, which will give us advance warning of an approaching army. As our aircraft are often grounded for days, this sounds worth doing, so I have had a steel tower prefabricated. There is a site near Hilltop that will give us good coverage and we can get the crane in to erect this tower. I hope that someone has a head for heights.

Firstly, we have a one hour gate at Haddon Hold. This operation is simply shifting containers and palletized loads down and stacking them in the marked places, dropping off a few light vehicles and delivering fuel. After that, the bulk of the supply drop will be to Hilltop, where an area has been cleared. It's good to know that we will definitely have firm running on the other side. All the heavy plant is going there, where most of it will stay to work the mines. That movement should take another hour.

I have had my old quarters at Transit prepared to move and a site has been prepared for it adjoining Haddon Hold, on the quiet. It is intended to be a surprise and will be skidded in just after the Hilltop gate closes and is repositioned. The whole thing is braced up for moving and will be sited next to the dry goods store. I will take half of that container for an accessway to the compound and have a door cut in the side. I have half the Haddon crew in on the secret and they should have everything moved and the power, water and sewer ready to hook up.

It should be all up and running before Wayne gets back from Hilltop and will be a great improvement on his cabin. I have had another couple of the big cabins being moved down, which will be a perk for the section commanders.

Anyone can rough it- it takes talent to live in style. 10 hours to go...

Derbyshire, England
27th May 846 AD

Day 57

“Sentry to C&C, area clear”, came over the radio.

“Stand down smoke, 2 minute warning- Clear the area NOW.” I called.

The night was as black as it gets- it was darkly overcast, with rain threatening, no moon and our site was blacked out. With the image intensifier on, things were quite different, with the area brightly lit up with infra-red light, reflective tape and paint.

The Liftkings popped out of the gate, to gently place their containers in the marked positions, moving in a carefully practiced dance, the first to drop it's load moving to wait until the last came through the gate, then returning to repeat the performance. ten containers apiece, then came the fuel trucks, which headed to the Hold to top up the tanks. As soon as they were clear, the forklifts started to do their dance with pallets. The forklifts and tankers headed back to Transit then came the Land Cruisers, Gators and tractors, all towing trailers of some kind. This done, the Transit crew passed back through the gate and it closed. Time elapsed, 48 minutes and we are rolling on the way to Hilltop- I should get there in time, if we move it. 23 minutes until the next gate.

To the rear, I can see the floodlights coming on at Haddon. They will start positioning the new containers, cut the accessway and hook up power through the night, so that the new arrivals can get some rest once they finish up at Hilltop. We have plenty of time- this bit of road is a nice and wide, made for heavy traffic from the mines. Driving with night vision goggles is easy when you are on even ground. It isn't so good going cross country, as the depth perception isn't very good and a puddle and a mine shaft look identical. A lot of new players come unstuck that way.

10 minutes to spare. Security team reports the area clear, so we move this vehicle off the road and have a coffee while we wait. This move will be under lights- the generators will be started up in eight minutes, having already been tested and warmed up. This is a cold, windswept shithole and it is starting to rain. I'm glad I get to sit in here and watch.

The same sorts of arrangement as before- the Liftkings place the containers and pallets and then withdraw. The D11 hauls the freight through, this time skidding the load- the sleds that it pulls will become bridges. The empty trailers from last time are towed back and the fuel trucks come through and fill up the tanks. Lastly, the plant and equipment is brought through and the gate is closed. The rest of the night is spent getting the containers hooked up and operational. This Fort is about 1/3 the size of Haddon Hold, but will have three levels instead of two, when finished. In a few days it will be powered by a micro hydro plant, about 500 metres away and a standby generator set. Facilities here will be comfortable, but basic, as this is not a permanent station, but is to be manned on rotation. This is the no-frills version.

As dawn breaks, the Fort is operational, but still needs the septic tanks installed and the hydro plant hooked up. The weir and piping are already in, as is the wiring, we just need to move the plant down the hill and connect it. The 80 ton crane that has arrived will make that job relatively easy. As expected, the D11 and sleds have torn the road to pieces, but that damage will be repaired easily enough. The first job for the crane is to unload the sleds and stack them, until we are ready to turn them into bridges.

The relief crew is on the way now, so I'm headed back for a bit of sleep- we will let those still wound up from the jump work themselves to sleep. Although I will have to check out my new vehicle, after dropping off this trailer full of much needed fencing wire and posts.

John was directing the show down there- I hardly heard Jenny on the radio, which tells me she is up to something. She does keep life interesting. I bet that new structure on the south side is something to do with her. I don't remember that on the plans. The Hold is no longer the nice, tidy rectangle it was yesterday, but has two new wings added to the sides. The lower field is covered in building supplies and containers. The new vehicles have been moved to the fenced vehicle park adjacent to the west side of the compound. Suppose I have better go and inspect the new bits- that sort of thing seems to be expected of me- not that I could resist having a look at something new.

The accommodation modules have been improved since the last lot we had made up. To be expected- the Transit crew have spent a bit of time living in them. I should organise something a bit nicer for Transit when we have time. Looks like they have refined the system for attaching the upper level catwalks- the brackets are already on and the electrical systems are built in. There is no space here for additional buildings, as in the main compound, this is just living area. I see several interesting crates and packages, including a sauna, a swimming pool and a huge eight-burner barbecue and spit-roaster. Hope they brought plenty of spare LPG tanks down. Now to have a look at what has appeared on the other side of the compound.

Something is up- too many eyes following me about the compound. The access is most likely through the dry goods container- yes, there is a new hatchway in what used to be the outer wall. The door swung open and there stood Jenny, champagne in hand.

“Come on in, you have the rest of the day off ...”

Derbyshire, England

2nd June 846 AD

Journal entry- Day 62

Everyone is settling in now. The Hilltop site is all go and mining operations are underway. The first building, the mill, is up now and we are about to begin fitting the machinery. Now that we have a dedicated kitset building assembly team, they are flying up. Having two cranes also helps. The concrete team has started on the bridge abutments- the new higher capacity concrete mixer is working out well. I have hired every available local carpenter to assemble sheds, barns, stables, etc, out of imported wood and steel.

The local workers have been trained up and are now moving materials and people about with the tractors and Gators. Several are now operating loaders and are working on the screening and crushing plants, as well as up at the mines. The roller spends all day trundling along the roads, leveling and compacting them. When the crusher has produced a good stockpile, we will chip some of the roads with crushed limestone. Housekeeping, kitchen duties and looking after the dairy cows and hens keep the rest occupied. The greenhouse should be up soon, we will take on a couple more workers then. Jenny has screened the workers and found one she judges suitable to clean our 'suite'. She doesn't want some ham-fisted bumpkin crashing about her art treasures.

Alfred and a few of the others in Rowsley are having cast-iron ranges installed in their houses today. I predict a huge demand for these. We hope to be casting them here, by next year. The seed is being distributed around the area- we have opened up so much new land that they didn't have enough local seed to plant it out. I have some of our local boys out on the Gators delivering it- a job they are real keen on. Nothing impresses the local talent like being seen driving one of our vehicles. We give these jobs to those who have excelled in some area, as a motivation to others- it works.

The air patrols have found what looks to be a camp in the woods, near our bandit activity on the Chesterfield road. Thermal scan shows about a dozen persons in a well-hidden camp. We will send a wagon over that way to draw them out. I want them caught as an example- won't hurt to show the iron fist in the glove to the locals. I have put a bounty on them, with the promise of trebling the reward for live prisoners. One of the Bakewell merchants has also put up a bounty- he has lost a cart full of grain and flour.

Looking over the supplies brought down, it seems as if everything we ordered has been at least doubled, then more added for good measure. No doubt we will use it. They must have used the lists we provided as leads to certain lines of hardware as there are tools and gadgets here that I have never even heard of - all the bizarre stuff they used for running a household in the 19th century, such as butter churns and ice makers. You might think someone had robbed a museum, looking into some of these containers, but the gear is all new.

It has been amusing to watch the shuffling round of quarters here. The arrival of the Transit team, with six women has changed dynamics here. Also, several of the local girls have moved in with the crew- I don't mind as long as they work here- my only rule on these matters is that I know who lives within these walls. The old air of a barracks is fairly well gone now. Hilltop is a bit like that, but nobody stays up there for too long- it's not really a home like here. Our new suite is a real treat- it is also heavily soundproofed, unlike my other container, where I could hear all the activity in the compound.

Our Beta Team has fitted in smoothly, with a lot of them knowing members of the Alpha Team, from back in the 20th. The other specialists have also slotted in easily and have been getting up to speed on our boiler and steam engines. At last Mike isn't stuck in that shed all day anymore. They have fired up the traction engines and have taken Edmund as an apprentice engineer. They have come up with a list of equipment that can be driven off these traction engines- Jenny has already acquired it and has it stored back at Transit, as we won't need it until harvest time in a few months. This place already looks like a tractor sales yard. Slowly, the steam driven sawmills, pumps and generators will replace my more modern equipment. These blokes really live for this stuff and are full of ideas for this place. They are all highly skilled with the modern equipment, but can't wait to get back to basic stuff, such as making steel from iron ore.

We are back onto regular shift-10 hour working day, six days on, then one off. It seems that every rest day, people spend at least half the day working on some personal project or another. The locals here go from sunup to sundown- it took some convincing that it was OK, even good to stop before dark. We have shifted some containers on the second level around and put the local's quarters up there, over top of the storage and generator containers. Without appearing too obvious, the sentry can hear any movement if they come out onto the catwalk at night. The plumbers have even rigged toilets up in an empty container, so there is no reason for them to come below. They were originally all in an outside compound, where the vehicle park is now. Gone are the days when almost all the machinery was in the compound. Now it is just the

important stuff under cover i.e. Jenny's and my Land Cruiser's, although I want that sorted by winter, with some more hangers put up.

We are about a year ahead of schedule.

Derbyshire, England

24th June 846 AD

Journal entry- Day 82

Midsummer's Day.

Today has been declared a holiday, as it is throughout the land. We are putting on food and drink for all that come and have invited those neighboring to have a look around. We certainly have plenty to celebrate, with most of our buildings up and currently being fitted out. The mill is just a few days away from running and will be grinding this years grain crops. The forge and workshop are being fitted out and the foundry is also well under way.

The greenhouse is up and in use and our small stud farm is running. We have a wood boiler to keep the greenhouse going all year and will rig some lights as winter nears. The new wing now looks like it has always been part of the hold, with all the walkways up, welds painted and cables tidied away. Hilltop is finished- as far as anything is ever finished here, with a band of obsessive tinkers always adding refinements. The bridges are now in place and you can now drive from Hilltop to Bakewell without getting a tire or track wet. Interesting how we have found that the carts need to go through the water to swell their wheels, to hold the iron tires onto the wheel. Simple answer was to put a ford next to each bridge and form an easy path to the water. This is only a problem at the height of summer.

Our elusive bandits have finally been taken. In the end I left it up to our locals to set a trap. Armed with shotguns, they easily took the highwaymen, killing most, but taking four alive and mostly unharmed, apart from the obligatory thrashing. Edmund, Alfred (junior) and three others hid in a cart and ambushed the ambushers, disabling those surviving blasts of buckshot, mace, pickaxe handles and a few well-placed 20th century boots. The survivors have been held in a cage, to await the next rest day for the 'trial'. Custom here is for the offended parties- a Bakewell miller and the family of the murdered Carter to pronounce judgment. Also following custom, the heads of the slain have been placed upon poles at the nearest crossroads and their bodies burnt. The others get to live a little longer than usual, as executions never take place on a midsummer celebration.

The lads have collected the bounty of 10 marks per head and 30 for the living, from me. 190 Marks is a LOT of credit here, even split five ways. We also added a bonus of awarding the young men their own weapons, with each getting a new Remington 870 pump-action gun to replace their single-shot shotguns. They will receive their bounty from the Bakewell victims when the offenders are executed, as is customary. In a time where resources are so hard won, theft is regarded as being as bad as murder. It often amounts to the same thing.

Boss Hog has asked that we put the robbers to death with our weapons, to which I agreed with him- an excellent idea, giving the locals a first-hand demonstration of firearms. I want the locals to see first-hand exactly what happens when we use our weapons. Those new shotguns can get blooded, after all, the thief-taker has first right of refusal to be executioner.

Back to happier topics, the celebrations are getting under way, with our local workers introducing some of the more interesting local customs to us. I have given all of them leave to travel home for the celebrations, but most have chosen to stay here. They know where the best times are to be had. They have decorated the well, which is a tradition here known as 'well-dressing'- OK- that's a new one on me. JD has the day off for once, as he had finished his cooking yesterday and some of the crew have decided to put a hangi down, which is a way of cooking seldom used here, but is occasionally used nearer the coast. Still haven't managed to get any seafood, but the road is getting closer to the sea.

I have heard that a couple of strangers have been seen in the area, and are suspected to being the King's men. Nominally, this is a hunting park for the Royalty, that being the only time they come here and strictly speaking, it is forbidden to hunt deer or boar. I imagine we will get some visitors before too long.

One of Jenny's incentives has been to offer clothing for barter. They all get a modest wage for their work, but there are other voluntary tasks that they can do to earn more. Our local workers of both sexes have been able to earn credits by killing rats and other vermin. She has provided them with easy to carry high-powered air pistols, which they have proved deadly with-, killing rats, crows and other pests for bounty. They have also been given mousetraps to set and are rewarded with a bounty on mouse tails. I could set poison, but this way I get locals who know how to shoot. And they are seriously motivated. I would be too, if I had to wear the local cloth, which makes serge seem like fine apparel to them. They are all decked out in their finery today- they are not allowed to wear it during working hours. Modern underwear has become such a hot commodity, we have had to have a lot more sent down- it's the little things you overlook.

Many have family members coming to visit today and it has become a mark of pride to have a family member working 'at the Big Hold' Hilltop has been locked up for the day and we are taking turns in C&C and sentry monitoring the sites on remote. The couple of chaps that don't particularly drink have been real good sports about taking the watch during celebrations.

Over in the north wing, the party appears to be under way. With the crane and small digger, they have dug a hole and lifted in an eight metre swimming pool, which is now enclosed in a conservatory, heated by an ingenious solid fuel water heater and heat exchanger set-up. As well as the sauna, one of the containers has had an extension bolted onto the side and is now a cinema, using the equipment that was previously set up in the recreation hall. Potted plants, deck chairs and picnic tables are set up and artificial lawn has been laid over the concrete. This place is looking more and more like a holiday park.

A huge bonfire has been prepared out in an open field and I gather this is an 'anything-goes' fertility celebration.-should be an interesting night. Time to check out the festivities.

We have had a steady stream of visitors all day, come to sample our hospitality and have a look at all the wonders. As the sky darkens, our local lads have all gone off to the villages, no doubt to play the sophisticates to the local farm girls, while almost all of our girls have stayed on here. The real party starts once the gates are locked for the night. I should really say parties, as there are several going, to suit all tastes. There is music and dancing going on over in the hall, a rowdy pool party in the north wing with cocktails flowing freely and a monastic beer-drinking session in the workshop where the older and more married men are having a sing-song around the keg. Couples are pairing off and disappearing as the night goes on.

I feel like a swim now, then might disappear myself.

Derbyshire, England

4th July, 846 AD

Day 92

Market day at Bakewell today. This one will be a little different, as it has been arranged that we will perform three executions today. For the last week, we have been running the firing squad through how to carry out the job, so they can do it on autopilot.

As usually happens, the events have been already decided and all that remains is for a formal denouncement of the criminals. Boss Hogg will be doing this on behalf of the victims. All this will happen at midday, after market business has been completed. There is sure to be a large turnout today.

Orders Group 0630

I gave the usual morning brief on the tasks of the day and then added: “As you all know, we are performing three executions today. If you don’t wish to see them, please remain here today until it is all over, as we will be expected to be right up front. For those of you who haven’t seen one and I include those who took part in the Sheffield action, it will be bloody and unpleasant in the extreme. I will not think any less of anyone who does not wish to be there. You don’t need to say anything, just don’t go.”

“Latest air patrol has a possible sighting of a band on horseback 50 km south”, said Steve, who was on C&C duty. “Unfortunately, he hit bad weather and had to turn back before gathering any useful information.”

“In that case”, I said. “We get that southern mast completed tomorrow- construction and security systems- that is now your priority task. This sounds like the visit I have been expecting.”

“Anything else?” I asked, pausing, “No?- then lets do it.”

Today’s market was the first trading of samples of the milled grain from Rowsley. As we had hoped, demand for this product was high, as the quality far exceeded that of the local flour. An announcement was made that milling would be available at a cost of one bag in ten going to the miller. As the harvests came in soon, this was going to be a well-used service. Next year we would be able to offer steam-powered threshing and hay-bailing.

JD has been working with a local brewer that we helped build a new brewery and malt house for. He has convinced the brewer to try using hops for the first time and move away from ale, having sampled some of our lagers and pilsner. Of course, the fact that we have underwritten his new building plus supplied trade goods to purchase cooperage from Chesterfield meant we didn’t have too hard a job convincing him. To think I got laughed at when I first suggested bringing a chef down. JD is also involved with a dairy, smallgoods butchery, ciderhouse and a fledgling fruit brandy distillery. He has trained up a couple of the local girls who mostly run the kitchen now,

with him popping in to teach new recipes and do quality control. JD is another who has asked to extend his tour.

Time to get over to the town commons.

Jenny is running the show with the firing squad, three locals and three of ours. They have set up three posts, which the condemned will be tied to. The local crowd is real interested to see how this is to be done. Usually, they just drag-hang the condemned.

We spent a good few hours drilling the squad in how the execution was to proceed, in order to give the crowd a good show and display a disciplined team in action.

The cage was hauled over, being pelted with stones, refuse and shit as it moved. By nature of his work, the murdered Carter was a well-known man in these parts. Boss Hogg puffed himself up and delivered a suitably pompous speech and the victims all stood up and demanded the prisoner's death. To the cheers, catcalls and howls of the crowd, the three were dragged from the cage by a group of miners and relatives of the murdered man and strapped to the posts. We had taken the precaution of erecting a deer fence around the execution area.

As Jenny marched the squad into position, the crowd settled down eager to see and here the proceedings.

"Squad...Halt. Left...Turn." she ordered.

The crowd was silent- they had never seen such a sight as a group carrying out the same actions simultaneously. Morriss dancing has yet to be and hopefully will not be, invented.

"Three rounds- Load."

"Ready."

Six shotguns were cocked as one and the safety's released.

"FIRE."

The first prisoner was hit by six solid slugs, which literally blew him in half. Before the crowd could react, the next order was given.

"Ready."

"FIRE."

The second was hit, one slug striking him in the neck and all but decapitating him.

"Ready"

"FIRE."

And it was done. The crowd began to roar. Jenny marched the squad off to a nearby vehicle and the gates were flung open for the crowd to surge in and dismember the bodies.

Time to leave them to it.

Derbyshire, England

6th July 846 AD

Day 94

The band of riders swept into the village at dusk, demanding food, drink and shelter for the night. The villagers knew better than to argue with a band of well-armed soldiers, especially when they were obviously the king's men.

While they were watering and caring for their horses, the headman took his youngest son aside. "Run as fast as you can for Bonsall and tell your uncle what has happened- he will know what to do- go- and do not be seen"

One small boy was not missed as he dashed north across country, to the village seven miles away.

Exhausted, he forced out the story between gasps. His uncle Godwin, paused for a minute then called for his son to saddle his horse. He had to ride for Matlock, where William, the mayor, had one of the talking boxes.

It was not quite an half an hour's ride to Matlock by night. Pounding on William's door, he roused him. As soon as he heard the news, his anger at being woken left.

"We must tell them this news- Come in", he said to Godwin. Opening the box, he squeezed the handle, as he had been shown by the sorcerer.

In Alfred's home the talking box started to buzz. Unlike some of the other village headmen, he was no stranger to the device.

"Who calls?" he spoke into the handpiece.

"'Tis William of Matlock- I have news for our friends..."

C&C Haddon Hold 2345 hrs

"Well, they have finally gotten here", I said, "We go to yellow condition effective tomorrow morning. They must be just outside the radar, so we should acquire them early tomorrow- weather?"

"Should be a go for a surveillance flight", said Steve, "barometer is steady."

"Most probable route will take them towards Winster", said Jenny, "I suggest we meet them halfway. I have a feeling they know exactly where to go, we just need to know by what route. If we pre-position to the crossroads 1.5km south of Darley, we will be in a good position to intercept. By the time we get there, the radar should have a track."

"Sounds fair- any other suggestions?" I asked.

“Yes”, said John, “Get the local girls up to Hilltop. If we wind up bringing this lot here, as we hopefully will- well, the Transit girls can handle a few unwashed soldiers, but...”

“Point well taken”, said Jenny. “They are on the first transport out- after breakfast. And section heads- everyone and I mean everyone in full combat rig.”

“I’m hoping this will not result in war, but that is a possibility”, I said, “If they are bright enough, they will cut a deal, leaving us in control of this region- provided we ally with them. Doubtless they have heard of the Sheffield battle, but probably have a bit of trouble believing it. I want to help them to believe, without killing anyone. First, we let them see the microlight at altitude- they have probably heard of it. Second, we go to them. I hope to surprise them by surrounding them with our armour. We will take the 113’s and the 548’s. They move fast and look intimidating. We go fully armed- if it comes to a fight- we need to win fast, no survivors. Now go brief your sections and get some shut-eye.

One more thing- get me the names of all those involved in contacting us- they have some serious rewards coming.”

The room cleared, leaving myself, Jenny and Steve, who had C&C duty.

“Here we go again”, I said, “I hope this one isn’t another Sheffield.”

“My bet is that they have been testing the water before this”, said Jenny, “It’s not even close to a full army, just a strong patrol which is not unreasonable in Viking country.”

“You might as well get some rest”, said Steve, “I can call you quick enough if they appear on the screen.”

0500 hrs- Briefing.

“I want to remind you all again that this is not a hunt- we intend to intimidate and cut them off with our vehicles, then we talk downhill to them. Don’t push them too hard, but if I call ‘shoot’- go full-on. Mount up.”

Off we rolled. We could have breakfast once we parked up- should be there in 30 minutes. Then we wait for news.

The aircraft flew over shortly after 0630, steady at about 2000 metres. Who would find them first?

The radar, it would seem- I just heard Steve vectoring the aircraft in on the command channel.

“Received your last to Air One”, I sent back.

“Intermittent contact, 30-50 on horseback, plenty of metal- no track”, said Steve.

15 minutes later we had a track on their movement and moved to go hull down along a ridge they were headed towards- we would be able to pop up when they got to a couple of hundred metres away, and the wind was coming towards us.

“Air One to Command- headed straight for your position. You should have visual in 15 minutes, over”

“C&C confirm five-zero contacts, over”

“Command, copy-out”

We lay on the ridge amongst some low scrub, watching through the binoculars. When they closed to 1000 metres, we backed away and rejoined our vehicles.

“Command, Air One, call the range, over.”

“Air One to Command, copy- 900, 800, 700...”

“Crank engines, advance”, I called and we crested the ridge, moving to surround to horsemen, only a few hundred metres away. As they struggled to control their panicked horses, we swiftly circled around them then shut off engines.

“Looking for us, I believe”, I called out.

With the noise stopped, they started to gain control of their mounts, forming a defensive circle.

“If we meant you harm, you would already be dead”, I said. These were not men used to being totally outclassed. They must now be thinking that the stories are true.

Captain Forwin was having a bad day. After a miserable excuse for breakfast in that wretched village, two horses had come up lame. Then the dragon started followed them and he had to threaten a hanging to stop several of his men from deserting. Now he was surrounded by beasts straight out of the myths, which he had rubbished as tales of drunken peasants. I suppose we are alive, he thought. If the rest of the stories were even a small part true, we would be crow-bait already.

Struggling to find something to say, he fell back on a familiar challenge, “We are the king’s men- whom might you be?”

“We are enemies of the Northmen and friends to your king. We have come from afar to give aid in these troubled times. We slaughtered the invaders at Sheffield and left the city unspoiled. We are known in these parts as strangers, but worthy friends.”

A small part reassured, he came back with: “I would know who your Lord is and does he answer to the King?”

“I lead this army and answer to no king”, I replied, “but I may ally with your King Aedelvulf. I intend to hold these lands. In return- I shall help defend these shores. Thus far we have killed three and a half thousands of your foes.”

“This news I must take to the king”, he said. “We hear you have a mighty castle and have been commanded to find it”

“You are six miles away, along that road. Come and join us for our evening meal. We have shelter for you, so that you may rest before returning to your king with news. We will wait for you to move off, to avoid frightening your horses.”

“Until then.” said Forwin. That went better than I had hoped, he thought to himself. I just hope Aedelvulf does not take the news of losing his hunting lands too badly.

I radioed ahead to fire up the barbecue and set up a few kegs of beer. We would house them in the just-completed carpentry hall. I don't think there will be any trouble with this lot- they are just scouting and we have squashed any ideas that they might have had about taking us out. The king will make a deal- that or he is out of a job.

The band made good time traveling over the formed roads. The metal carts had long since disappeared. Despite the fact that they must have weighed many tons, they moved faster than a galloping horse. Even without the magic arrows he had heard stories about, they could have caught and crushed them easily. As they came over the rise, Haddon Hold came into view. The column halted as they stopped to stare. It was true- it was a huge, foreboding structure. An attacking army would be broken on those walls, even without the stranger's magical weaponry. With them...

The men were hoping that they would make peace with these strangers.

Derbyshire, England **6th July 846 AD**

Day 94

The band of riders moved cautiously towards the hold. As they reached the bridge, they were greeted by men on foot, carrying what he had been told were thunder spears. They had questioned several peasants along the road and they confirmed that these were weapons and had seen them used to execute some robbers, giving enthusiastic descriptions of the damage they caused to a body.

“Just as well we have good armour”, Captain Forwin told his men, when hearing this, although a nagging doubt bothered him. He knew the Northmen wore good armour too.

His professional eye swept over the castle. The walls were smooth and vertical, armed men patrolled the top of the wall and everywhere were wire fences- he had never heard of so much metal. The iron carts stood at the gates, which were also of iron. The strangers all moved as fighting men and all carried what he believed were weapons. Checking a wire fence, he discovered that the wire was covered with sharp spikes. Discreetly tugging on the wire, he noted that it was also stronger than it looked and would easily hold a charge back. No wonder they have no outer wall about their keep, which alone was bigger than any castle he had ever heard of. As they moved past he tapped the wall with his knuckles. It was metal- all metal.

I watched them approach from the southern sentry hut. I could see they were taking everything in, in order to report back- good. The ‘peasants’ we placed along the road have reported back,

telling us that they were asking all about us, especially our weapons. We might have to give them a small demonstration. They were being lead to a new shed on the outskirts, where they could camp up. An area had been temporarily fenced off for their horses and a pile of food cooked up. A few beers and they should crash, after traveling and living rough for a while.

Once they had eaten and had a few drinks, we decided to give them a shooting display. Setting pumpkins out on stakes from 200-500 metres away, Steve proceeded to blast them to pieces. Just to make it more for a better display, he was using a very noisy 7mm magnum with the almost explosive V-Max projectiles. This impressed them, seeing the weapon working first-hand- That and driving a few vehicles past, at speed. Give them some news to take back home.

The next morning we sent them off with food for the journey and an assortment of trade goods, including a modern Katana sword for the king, which they were all in awe and not a little envious of. The steel would be better than anything else in this world, at this time and it was honed to razor sharpness. This would slice through any of this time's blades and in 9th century money would be considered a good trade for this region.

Captain Forwin was a much happier man today. The gift of the sword, which had to be a magical weapon, would go a long way towards pacifying the king, when he found out his land had been effectively taken. Aedelvulf was quick to anger, but no fool. He would know that there would be more treasure where that sword came from and that if you cannot defeat an enemy, it may still be possible to trade with him. Himself, he would be a lot happier once they had put a few more days hard riding between him and the Hold of Steel.

C&C 7th July, 1000 hours

“Well that went fairly well”, said Steve, “They walked around eyes bugging out at everything and they just about pissed themselves the first time I fired that magnum.”

“I think they couldn't get out of here fast enough”, said Jenny, “They probably thought they were to be grabbed and tortured for information”

“Anyone get any useful info?” I asked.

“They had been riding for 6 days”, John answered. “They also knew roughly where we were, the king is going to be pissed that we have set up and they don't believe they can get rid of us. Also, they meet with a traveler who had been spying out this area for the last two weeks.”

As heads turned towards him, he continued- “I got Simon to bug the shed.”

Glad someone else thought of the bloody obvious thing to do.

“Their captain was digging for information”, I said, “He asked if we planned to travel and where- I told him we were building here and wanted to trade with all that came to us.”

“It would be a fair guess that their whole army would not have been able to take on that invasion force”, said Jenny, “They are six days south- keeping well away from any action up this way. Even with the stories flying, that was the first probe in any kind of strength. They now know that

we totally outclass them- not that we can rule out them having have a go at us- history is full of dead dumbfucks.”

“Question is, how much time do we have?” I asked.

“At least two weeks, probably not before August”, Jenny said. “But before September, if he doesn’t want to get caught by the first snow”

“Want to start cutting a track down that way?” John asked.

“Yep”, I said, “Get it started, head for Ashbourne and shadow them from high altitude. On the way down with the dozer, drop a big load of goodies on everyone who passed the word to us, especially the young lad that did the run. They get first call on any new works this week, too.”

The small hamlet of Kniveton was buzzing with excitement. One of the stranger’s captains had just paid a visit, to give thanks for informing them of the arrival of the king’s soldiers. The gifts they had left were worth more than half the village. Axes, fine blankets, spades, forks, knives and salt, flour and foods such as they had never seen. The other soldiers only took.

PART FOUR

Northamptonshire, England

14th July 846 AD

Day 102

King Aedelvulf was in an ambivalent mood having been told still more of his Northern lands were lost. This time was different however and he was cheered by the gifts sent-especially the magnificent sword, for which privately, he would have traded the whole province. In any case he had been sure to lose the shire to the encroaching Norsemen.

He had never seen or heard of it's like- the edge was sharp like he would never have believed possible and it shone like the finest silver- and so light.

Captain Forwin had done well, not that he would admit that to him. If he had offended these strangers, who knows what could have happened. From all accounts, no more than two dozen of them utterly crushed an army of over three thousand. An army that would have probably defeated all of his men- if they would stand and fight. No- Forwin had met them, inspected their castle and returned with a king's ransom in gifts. He was going to have to meet them for himself.

Captain Forwin was a very relieved man. He knew Aedelvulf well enough to know that despite his gruff grumbling about lost lands, he was mighty pleased with the stranger's offerings. Gods- who would not be pleased with that sword. Certainly, if he wasn't somebody's head would not be on their shoulders. He could see the king was just itching to try it out...

Terric, the king's armourer was a man in turmoil. Summoned to inspect a sword presented to the King, he had found a blade that defied belief. He was a master craftsman, one of the very best and could not hope to produce a weapon approaching that quality. Indeed, he had never heard of anyone that could make steel like that. He knew it had come from the north and the castle of the warrior sorcerers. There was only one thing for it. He must travel there and see how such steel might be made. He could not bear to beat out another blade, knowing that his work was as nothing compared to this craftsmanship.

Guardsmen Ernard slipped from the hall in the darkness, easily avoiding the sentries, whose patrols he knew all too well. Slinging his meager belongings over his shoulder, he set off for the south at a trot. He was hoping he would not be missed for a day, which would give him plenty of time to get well clear of the King's summer camp. They would only come after a deserter if he was foolish enough to leave with the King's weapons and he could move a lot faster unencumbered. Fighting Norsemen was one thing. That he may have to fight a foe that could launch tiny arrows with thunder far across fields to kill a man, was quite another. No- best to stay away from wizards and sorcerers.

Derbyshire, England

6th August 846 AD

Journal Entry Day 125

At last the first products are rolling out of the workshops in some volume. The spinning wheels are a big hit- the women here were not slow to get onto the benefits of them. We worked a deal where each settlement got at least a couple of wheels, in return for a take of the thread produced for those who could not afford to buy them outright. Everything costs here- I'm not going to create a cargo culture.

We have produced a few small castings- this was mainly an exercise to see how advanced casting techniques were here. Their main problem is how to heat up enough metal and of course, metal quality. Over winter we are going to do some castings for stoves, these being an item much in demand. Pans, skillets and pots they can do now, but we can speed up production very easily. We have placed a standing order with the local traders for any and all metals and ore. To tide us over, a large shipment of stock is being sent down to us soon.

The blast furnace and Bessemer converter are underway, as are the coking ovens and the lime burning plant. We may even start a small gasworks next year. All the buildings are up, at least to shell stage. We have set one warehouse aside for gate operations, that giving us far more flexibility than using a container- the next resupply can all be done indoors and out of sight.

Our warehouses and silos are starting to fill up with stockpiles for the winter. We found some plans for building a cool house and will build a trial one at Rowsley. We have found several good locations to make ponds which can be frozen for ice. The coal mountain continues to grow, as do our stockpiles of iron ore and limestone.

One thing I have got wrong was my giving coal away as a gift. Coal is a really bad fuel when you don't have a chimney in your house. It does get used, just not for domestic fires. So much for my big time-saver idea, still- the firewood processor had helped out there. The other thing is that we have had to design a suitable flue for houses with reed thatching or wooden shingle roofs. Slate is available, but is very costly and hard to get. Using lead sheet is a possibility for a fireproof, waterproof roofing material.

We are moving along with our local projects, having done a lot of drainage work, digging ponds and preparing fields for next year plus deep ripping the soil and moving boulders. There are countless jobs that we can do in hours, that would take the locals many days, even if they could spare the manpower- for example, removing a large stump from the middle of a field. The roads continue to lengthen and improve, with culverts being added and crushed rock and lime used to form the surface. Having a grader brought down has made the maintenance a lot easier. We have now reached the outskirts of Sheffield and Chesterfield.

Air patrols are being flown every three days, weather permitting, with no signs of movement from the south. The aircraft will have to be rotated back for a full service soon. Most other maintenance we can manage from our workshops. Even used engine oil is useful stuff here, so we are storing that too.

We are starting to rotate people back to Transit for a few days R&R now, as when we give them days off here they keep working anyway. Almost everyone has indicated that they will do another tour, some will stay on, others want to go back home for a few months or so, to settle up affairs and others say they will come back later in the project, after spending some time at home. No-one

has come out and said that they won't come back, so I must assume that things are working fairly well here.

Four months into the mission and quite a few have remarked that they feel 10-15 years younger. Initially, they were joking about this but are starting to get more and more curious about this sensation. They have been explaining changes such as old injuries recovering, hearing improving and grey hair disappearing to themselves by such things as exercise, diet, lack of pollutants, food additives and a lack of electro-magnetic radiation. All wrong.

If they used Occam's razor, they would soon get to the truth. They are getting younger. A side effect of regular time travel we can't explain. It seems to reset the body clock on a cellular level, if you do a bit of jumping, as they did in training. While many of them knew Jenny and me from 20 years back, they don't know we have lived for at least other 80 or so years between then and this time.

They will need to know soon. And that they need to keep jumping to maintain their gains. Still, a bonus of 20 years life is not to be sniffed at. The side effects can be worked around and are a small price to pay...

Derbyshire, England
7th August 846 AD

Journal Entry Day 126

It was another day of business as usual. The air patrol had just radioed back a 'situation normal' and I had almost finished my morning inspection tour of the compound. As usual, I completed the tour by climbing up to the second level to keep the sentry company for a bit. It is the duller duty there and I always take a flask of fresh coffee along and some fresh baking along- it's a bit of a ritual now.

Eric had the duty today. We left morning tea in the sentry hut and did the walk around the compound wall, checking the monitors, fixed weapons, lights and systems. "Have to get some safety rails up before winter", he remarked.

"Being made up for shipment down to us next month", I answered. "It's going to be a skating rink up here- I will have to put some locals to shoveling snow when the time comes."

We stopped in the eastern hut for a look around and a coffee. Recently, a telescope had been installed, so we could watch the Rowsley and the Hilltop areas.

"You must have heard the talk about feeling younger", said Eric, adding "I think there is more to it than just diet and exercise."

"You would be right", I said. "But tell me why you thought that."

"I wondered much like everyone else, then realised that an old injury hadn't played up for a while. I took an x-ray of it and there were no signs of the bone having ever been broken. From that point I started paying more attention to the others talk about feeling better. I'm sure a few of them have their suspicions."

“I didn’t tell you about this earlier, as I wanted to keep everyone focused on the job at hand, but basically the gate effect has reset your biological clocks”, I said, “As things stand, you all get another 15-20 years out of doing this job. That initial nausea and disorientation was your clock being wound back. You have had enough jumps to put your bodies back to when they were at their prime.”

He was still mulling this over, so I continued. “I look mid-forties, right?”

He nodded.

“That is because all the crew that knew me from 20 years back expects me to be that age. I have lived- it’s hard to be exact, as I’ve spent so long in different times periods- about 125 years. Jenny is roughly the same. The reason we look a well-kept mid-forties is we age ourselves cosmetically to maintain that appearance. As long as we jump, we stay in our prime. If we stop, we start aging like everyone else”, I continued.

“Bugger me.” was all he could manage.

“Now that it’s out of the bag, I will tell everyone, but keep it to yourself until I do, would you?” I asked.

“Yeah”, he answered, “It is a bit of a shock to the system.”

“We’re sprung”, I informed Jenny.

“Let me guess”, she said. “Eric?”

“Right in one. He shot some film of an old bone callus and it was gone.”

“Guess we had better break the news then”, Jenny said. “How about you go tell the Hilltop crew now and I will round up everyone here. We can catch the work parties tonight.”

“Be easier in small groups- let’s do it.”

I gave the Hilltop crew the news and stood them down for the rest of the day. They were not totally surprised that something was happening to them, but the implications of what was actually going on were huge. 20 years of extra life is not something that generally happens to people, nor is getting your body’s youth back. John remarked rather dryly that he was definitely going to have to look his ex wife up, looking a whole lot younger than her.

“I got much the same reaction”, said Jenny. “Very pleased with the news, but a bit stunned. -at last I can now quit pretending I colour my hair and don’t have to hide myself in a baggy uniform.”

“Yes”, I said, “I’m glad that is all out in the open now. This should have them all signing on for future tours too.”

“That is the other spin-off benefit”, Jenny said. “They are just getting their heads around the fact that they can leave here today, spend a year or two at home and be back tomorrow, our-time.”

“That does take some getting used to.”

“I suppose they will be asking how we found all this out, soon.”

“No doubt. I bet someone wants to bring their family down, too.”

“There are a couple of them that will. Profiles show their wives have some really useful skills, too- you might want to consider the idea”

Something I definitely will think about.

Diary Entry
Jane Somers- Acting I/C Transit One
Day 126

Transit doesn't have much in the way of seasons, but at the moment is in what we call 'summer', as it has no rain to speak of. We have been continuing with the 'milk run' stuff- diesel, food, drink, building supplies, spares. Leaves us a lot of time to work on a tan- no holes in the ozone layer here.

We currently have four medical specialists under training, but they are just getting the abridged course, as they aren't to be combat-rated. They need just enough weapons handling to defend themselves and familiarization with a few of the vehicles (no plant). The main point of them being here is to help them to adjust to their changed circumstances. One moment they are awaiting a grisly execution in a filthy barbarian prison, next thing they are whisked away to another planet.

That was a real interesting mission. Jenny left the snatch until the last possible moment, grabbing them and hosing down the guards with MP5's. We have found that unless our targets totally accept that they are about to die when we snatch them, their gratitude soon fades. The standard price demanded for being snatched from imminent death is ten years of service. Most of us- me included- were recruited like that in the early days and almost all elected to stay on after doing our ten years. Anyway, time to go and have a talk with them.

“I used to be a buyer for a big US chain store. Now I do much the same job here, but have no budgets, no managers from the Dilbert Zone, and can always make the time to get things done.”, I explained to the new recruits, “I work between here and my apartment in New York and run our US purchasing and warehousing network. I was recruited in much the same way that you were, but I was rescued from a burning building. Same deal- ten years service pays the debt, but I elected to stay on after my ten- this is the best job I ever dreamed of.”

“Hang on.” said Shane, the doctor we had pulled out of a Pakistani hell-hole. “It's 2004, you were rescued in 2000 and you have done over ten years here? That doesn't add up.”

“Takes a while to get to terms with time travel, doesn’t it” Jane said, laughing. “I’ve spent fifteen years down-time, setting up parts of our network- you wouldn’t believe the companies we have interests in.”

“It’s taking some getting used to all right”, said Sarah, a nurse on the rescued medical team, “Won’t we be going from the frying pan into the fire?”

“The 9th century is probably more civilized than where we picked you up”, Jane said, “The area is secure and the locals are mostly friendly- and don’t all have AK-47’s. But it is still a wild time and that is why we have the weapons training.”

Having been taken by savages once, they were rethinking their beliefs on carrying weapons...

“How are they going”, asked Jenny, who had come up-time for a quick visit.

“Still working on the attitude adjustment”, Jane said. “Typical medical types- don’t think they should have to know how to use a pistol, although this lot isn’t too bad after doing some jail time”

“Try them with Tasers”, said Jenny, “I don’t care what they pack, as long as they carry something defensive.”

“That may do it. They can carry mace as well.”

“Housekeeping team working OK?”

“Good. They are adjusting well to the timeshift. I suspect there is a lingering suspicion of having died and gone to heaven, doing housework with 21st century cleaning gear, after being a maid in the 19th century.”

“Funny, I never thought my housework was heavenly.” laughed Jenny, “30 minutes to zip- I will pick up your recruits on the next R&R rotation.”

“See you in seven” said Jane, locking the door to the Gateway Echo building, as she left.

Ship this medical team down next week and start training with a group of 19th century miners. Now *that* was going to be a real challenge. They would need a good six months to adjust to three timeshifts. I’m glad time is never a problem. Once I get that lot sorted out, then I can rotate with Sonja and actually get some time in down in the 9th.

In the meantime, tomorrow, there was business to sort out back in the US, 1960, with another shipment of Bourbon and Cuban cigars headed up-time for our contacts in the 52nd Century.

Northamptonshire, England
8th August 846 AD

From 3000 metres, Eric could clearly make out the town through the telephoto lens. He shot off a full ten gig memory stick full of high definition images, then slowly turned about and headed north, cruising to conserve fuel. That is where they went, he thought- all the tracks lead here.

Quite a number, according to the thermal. "In the can", he radioed. "Heading to FRP now- Air One out."

"OK- we have a location, Sonja, scry out a good entry point- we go in tonight", I said. Sonja left to get the gate set up. "John- get a four-man team ready to go covert for one day - get me the numbers and disposition."

The gate popped up, right on sunset and we dashed through, doubled over and staying low. From our position on the hill it was fairly easy to get a count of the encampment. Seven hundred, one fifty on horse, the rest pikemen and archers. He was going to have to either come with the horsemen soon, all of them now, or raise an army and do it next year.

I would bet on the first option. If he comes next year, it will be to make war.

And die.

Derbyshire, England **9th August, 846 AD**

Journal Entry Day 128

Jenny was right, yet again. Three of the crew have asked about bringing their wives into the project. The rest are single, divorced or in the process of it. Mark, Phil and Dave Palmer have come to an agreement with us to do a second tour, if they can have their wives along to take advantage of the aging reversal effect. The arrangement is they will go back at the end of this tour, sell the idea to their wives and return for the second tour. Hell, what 40-something women wouldn't go for a chance to have a 20 year-old body again.

They all have a decent array of skills, one nurse, one schoolteacher and a veterinarian. All with some expertise in a selection of crafts and skills- such as ceramics, weaving, dressmaking and archery, to name a few.

The fact that they don't need this to happen NOW means they must be getting used to the ways of a time-traveler. In any case, we will have to expand the north wing again. Might just extend parallel with the north wall, right up to the east wall. That can wait until next spring, although I will get the slab poured now, as I have local labour that can take care of this work.

The local crew has come a long way in the last couple of months. Some of the new crew coming down will have a job separating us, at least when out of uniform. We have been slowly training volunteers up as a militia, drilling them with old Lee-Enfield .303 rifles. A simple weapon, easy to maintain and use, plus it comes with an 18 inch bayonet. An enemy here would probably mistake them for pikemen. When winter comes, there will be lots more spare time, so we will use one of the stores as a drill hall and work them that way. Sonja and Jenny also came up with a couple of crates of new WWII Webley MkVI .455 revolvers, to be given out as marks of special favour, such as Edmund's efforts during the Sheffield operation.

Our medical team comes down in five days time. That will be interesting as they are not contractors or staff, but draftees, as we call people body-snatched from death. Still, many of the staff came from such a background and adapted to our ways. We intend to set up a mobile clinic for the district and put in a clinic/hospital up here. Basically, the locals are a healthy lot, childbirth and accident being the main killers. We have done a bit of medical work here, suturing, cleaning

and dressing wounds, setting broken bones and the suchlike. Sorting out clean water and smoky houses should also go a long way to improving health here. The miners need a long induction period going from the 19th to the 21st to the 9th and won't arrive until the spring.

Enough of this, the day is over and it's time for a few ales.

I joined Jenny, Sonja, Steve and John at the bar. JD was behind the bar, hooking up a new keg-odd, that was normally Shirl's domain- ah. The new brew must be ready. JD was enthusiastically explaining the process. "We made the brew up at the Bakewell brewery. The beer was brewed in oak, then I racked it off into 50 liter kegs, gassed them up with CO₂, then lagered them in the chiller for 4 weeks. The recipe is their traditional ale with hops added"

We waited for pints to be filled, then raised glasses and sampled the brew. Quite good- the local product isn't bad with some hops, clearing and chilling.

Now why is it when we crack a keg, everyone appears out of the woodwork.

Doris got behind the bar to give Shirl a hand. I feel a session coming on.

"Long life, lots of money and cold beer", I said. This will probably hurt...

Encouraged with his beer's success, JD proceeded to roll out an oak cask of scrumpy, which led to somebody remembering about mixing snakebite- a mix of beer, cider and vodka. All the talk soon turned to Methuselah Effect, with the Transit crew sharing their experiences with the new crew. Some of the stories were hilarious, some quite sad. There were a couple of impromptu strips done to prove the effect and Jenny was going to be very embarrassed come morning, after parading up and down the bar in a *very* skimpy set of black silk underwear. All good fun.

John was raving on in great detail about a plan to go up-time to when his ex-wife was fifty and arrange to meet her driving a Porsche and looking an extremely wealthy thirtyish, to the amusement of all at his table. If there is one thing better than winning a huge lotto prize, it is having the extra years to enjoy it. If they spend it like Jenny, Sonja and Jane can, the money might last a couple of years. Fortunately, they all make more than they could ever hope to spend.

I'm off to the Sauna to sweat some of this out.

Should have guessed it- I'm not the only one up for a sauna- there is a bottle of Aquavit, frozen into a chunk of ice going round and I'm sure if there was snow on the ground, they would be rolling around in it afterwards. The plunge pool they have made out of a water tank will have to do. Then it's time to haul my drunk-as-a-skunk 2I/C, who has flaked out on a couch, off to bed.

Must be a Friday.

Derbyshire, England
11th August, 846 AD

Journal Entry Day 130
1035hrs- C&C

The contact was at the extreme edge of radar range but definitely showed a large body of men moving from the southwest. Trying to sneak in a bit closer through the least populated area. Fat chance. The weather is crap and we can't get a plane up, so the radar is all we have for now. We have sent a couple of scouts down on motorcycles with a 113 hanging back a couple of k's in support. At the moment they are to hold 10 km down the road until we get a firm track.

We will call all the roading crews in now and raise our status to yellow at noon. The locals are out spreading the word about the approaching army. In this age, armies live by foraging as they go, which could leave a village starving come winter. If the example of the last lot was anything to go by, the Kings men aren't too bad, but I will let the locals decide their own actions here. I just keep them informed where possible.

We will do the same as last time and meet them northeast of the village of Hartington, a small village a few km out of our developed area, assuming we have their route correct. There is some rough ground and gorges that we can let them travel through, then surprise them from behind. At least the weather will affect them more than us.

1125hrs- We have a positive return on best estimate of 150 men, all mounted. That is a strong enough guard to show status, but not all of his troops. The track was consistent with the most probable approach, so the scouts and 113's were deployed to that area. The weather is getting worse.

1340hrs- Scouts have contact. Visibility is down to a little over a kilometer, but we have a confirmation of numbers at 150 men, which, if you have never seen it, is a hell of a lot of horses in one place.

Change of plans- we have pulled the 113's back and will make contact in the morning as we do not believe they will make it here by tonight. We may give them a light show tonight, to put the wind up them a bit. I have a big spotlight mounted on one of the Humvee's and will take a mortar out and pop up a few flares.

1540hrs- Scouts report a camp being set up about 8 km away. They are settling in for the night by a small wood near Gratton Moor. Sent the recall order for the scouts- they must be having a fairly miserable day out in this weather.

1700hrs- Scouts are back and we have some video of the approaching force. This time, everyone stays, but the non-combatants have to remain in the north wing, locked down and well out of the way.

2300hrs- We are headed out to do a light show. Plan is to move about 1½ k's way, set up the tube and fire off a few illuminating rounds, while we flash the spotlight around and light their camp. Just to let them know that we know they are there. We stopped behind a rise and approached on foot for a look. They had a well ordered camp and sentries could be seen moving about, trying to shelter from the rain.

We headed back to the vehicles, to bring them forward. As soon as we crested the rise we stopped and set up the mortar, lining it up so that the flares would land in the open and wet moor. First, a couple of hand-held red flares went up- that got their attention- then on with the searchlight, which was played about for a bit, before slowly playing over the camp. We flicked that off, fired 3 rounds of illuminating and quickly packed up the tube. They are all up and running about now. Time for us to disappear into the night.

0015hrs- Back home, warming up around the fire, drinking hot cocoa.

“That should give them something to think about”, I said with a grin. “We can make it up to them tomorrow, with a nice dry barn to sleep in and hot food.”

“How exactly are you planning to feed that lot?” asked Steve, “I would think outdoor cooking is out.”

“In a couple of hours, a shipment of food and spit-roasting gear will arrive in the gateway shed- all ready to light up and go”, I said, “Enough to satisfy the hungriest barbarian.”

“Should have guessed.” said Steve, who was in charge of housing our guests. “That’s just about everything then- I will get boys to move some nice soft hay in for bedding in the morning.”

“Glad it won’t be me cleaning up after those horses”, said John.

“They should be used to shoveling shit”, said Jenny, “Can’t have those local boys getting too soft and civilized.”

Think I will pop up and see the sentries before turning in for the night. An early start tomorrow.

Derbyshire, England

12th August, 846 AD

Day 131

0530hrs- C&C

All vehicles and crews are ready to move. The scouts are already out and in position. We will move to about halfway between last night’s campsite and here and wait for them. The weather is still crap, with intermittent rain squalls and cold. We have lit the potbelly stoves to warm the barn that has become an accommodation block for visitors. The food and drink is in the transfer shed and is all ready to go, plus we have gifts for all.

“Here is the detonator box and key”, I said, handing it to Jenny who would going out to meet the King. They had decided I should stay put, making him come to me.

“Let’s hope I don’t need this- that is a nice sword”, she said. The sword we had gifted has 5 grams of plastic explosive in the hilt and a radio frequency detonator. Just a bit of insurance.

“He probably quite likes his hands too.”

Out on the moors, the King’s men broke camp- always a miserable job in the rain. It was really too late in the year for traveling any distance. His mood was not improved by an unsettling night, disturbed by lightning such as never been seen before. Red stars in the sky, the moors lit up like day. His men were not happy, but those who had previously been to the castle were sure this was the work of the strangers. We should meet them soon.

Captain Forwin recognized a faint squeaking sound, off in the distance. "I hear them," he said. Then the sound stopped. "They are close", he warned. Riding closer to Aedelvulf, he explained that he had recognized the sound of the foreigner's magical metal carts. "They will try to surprise us, by suddenly appearing and circling us- the horses fear these carts"

"Send outriders out, then move amongst the men and steady them", said Aedelvulf.

Brent spoke into his radio, "Scout two, contact route alpha. Camp plus three clicks. Outriders 300 metres in advance- out"

Jenny thought quickly. The outriders were not unexpected, they may have heard us. They would know the sound of a tracked vehicle now. That's not going to affect anything, however

"Prepare to advance, halt at the ridge line. Try not to run down the outriders." she said.

As the riders came over the rise, Jenny called over the radio "Contact- crank and move."

The line of vehicles tore forward, engines roaring and tracks spraying turf.

Forwin heard the engines start. "Here they come" he shouted, "Hold your horses and stand fast"

This was different. They made no move to encircle, they just cleared the ridge and stopped, three either side of the road.

Aedelvulf nodded and Forwin signaled to advance. As they slowly moved the skittish horses forward, two figures stepped forward, both dressed identically. They moved forward of their line and waited. At about one hundred metres, Forwin signaled for the riders to halt and rode forward at a walk.

"Welcome back- we have food and shelter waiting for you", said John.

"Our king would speak at length with your leader" answered Forwin.

"He awaits King Aedelvulf with food and drink and bids you ride to our castle, that you all may enjoy our hospitality." said John. I hope those Transit people got the etiquette on this right.

"On behalf of my king, we accept your hospitality", said Forwin, who turned and waved the column forward.

The vehicles waited until the riders were a distance in front, before slowly following behind. As they approached the bridge to the castle, the vehicles veered off and headed east, to cross at a ford, then disappeared around the back of the castle.

1320hrs

We waited outside the castle, on the south side. They could only approach four abreast up the approach road, so the bulk of the force veered off into the lower field, to mill about and 12 horsemen rode up the hill towards us. That would be the King, his officers and the best of his

personal guard. He is carrying the sword we gave him. Hope he doesn't start waving it about, or Jenny will give him a manicure he will never forget. I see she is up on the wall already, watching.

Three of them have dismounted and are approaching on foot. That is a good sign.

I stepped forward, "Greetings King Aedelvulf, I am Commander Jamieson. I come from the far side of the world, to help you in your fight with the Northmen. I believe we have much to talk about, but first we offer you good food and drink and the warmth of our fire. We have a hall on the upper field ready for your men and grazing for your horses."

"I accept your hospitality. We do indeed have much to discuss," he said. "Lead us to your hall."

We lead them to the hall and an area which had been fenced off for grazing. The hall was a large prefabricated shed, which had been set up for accommodating visitors, with long communal sleeping platforms, benches and trestle tables, all made from local materials. The hall was heated by a boiler and radiators, plus a pot-bellied stove and an open fire. These prefab steel sheds are great but cold in winter. Lighting was by kerosene pressure lanterns- we don't want visitors to be exposed to electricity, yet. Adjoining this building is a smaller one, used for storing visitor's baggage, saddles, etc. Also, there is a twelve-hole long-drop and a lime pit urinal. Outside are water taps and a long sink for washing.

A makeshift bar had been set up and food had been laid out- bread, cheese, pickles and cold meat. Quite satisfactory after field rations, going by the way they were getting into it.

This seems to be as close to a professional army as you get in this age. The men appear well-disciplined and their officers competent, delegating some to see to the horses, others to stow gear and sort supplies, before moving inside to eat. It was quite easy to sort the ranks, by the type and quality of their equipment. Most were in leather and scale, with the officers in chain mail.

Everyone seemed much more relaxed after a bit of lunch and a pint. I'm told that the customs here are that it would be unheard of to attack someone after you had fed them and given them shelter. Why would you waste precious food on someone you intended to kill?

King Aedelvulf was sizing up the situation. If they intended to take us, they have passed up at least two good sites for an ambush, he thought. Nor would you go to such trouble to feed your enemy. He could smell roasting meats, which implied that they were intending to provide an evening meal, also. It looked like Captain Forwin's counsel and his own intuition were correct. Let us see what the strangers want to talk about.

"Would you care to inspect our hold, before we talk?" I asked Aedelvulf, "I am sure there is much there that would interest you."

"Yes, I should like to see if the stories are true", he said, signaling to his officers to follow.

They were. So much metal, he thought, and so many strange things, the uses of which he had no idea. Standing on the battlements of the Hold, he found himself agreeing with Forwin, that this castle could not be taken by force. The metal carts alone would crush them before they would get

within an arrows flight of the iron thorns that surrounded the walls. And he had seen other carts that dwarfed those. Time to find out what they intend.

I believe he is impressed. He hasn't seen the half of it, but no point in putting all the cards on the table. Let's see if he will talk terms.

We headed to our hall, to get out of the rain and talk.

I went for the direct approach- he seemed that kind of person. "What I want is the land for twelve miles around here to use as my own, plus leave to travel and trade elsewhere. I would pay well for these rights." He nodded for me to continue, keeping a poker face.

Aedelvulf was thinking that the pay may be along the lines of not being murdered.

"I offer my service in fighting any invaders of these lands, also, swords for all your men here. I will teach your armourers the secrets of our steel and shall show them how to make new weapons that may be used against your foe."

"You offer much, but also ask much- this is rich land."

OK- he is fishing for more, so it's just a question of price.

"I shall also train your best men in our ways of war, and I have fine stallions that you may have for stud, but first let us look at the swords I speak of, that you may judge their worth, the better."

"That is my wish."

I lead them to a store where we had a selection of swords and other hand weapons. Nothing quite as fancy as the one we had given him, but good, serviceable 19th century cavalry sabers, modern knives, axes, arrowheads and so on. I saw his jaw drop and eyes bug out, but he recovered fast and did a magnificent job of feigning nonchalance. When we got to the stable, he could no longer contain himself. Obviously a horse aficionado, the Shires and Clydesdales I pointed out as part of the deal had him darting about the stables like a kid in a chocolate factory.

The deal being agreed on, I threw in a few extras, such as carts to haul the goods home and food for the trip. Now with the real business done, the feasting and drinking could commence.

Aedelvulf wouldn't believe his luck. To have someone hold the constant invaders north of here was easily worth this land, whose value was mostly as a hunting reserve. He now had steel swords that would shatter the best iron, enough for his common soldiers. Some fine ones suitable for his officers and allies, too. The real prizes for him were the great horses, huge animals that would make his cavalry near unstoppable.

Then there was the trade and wealth that he could see coming out of this district. He had seen what the strangers had done in a year and they built roads like the Romans of old. He would send his armourers and smiths here to learn their ways with steel as soon as he returned. This should be a very profitable alliance.

Derbyshire, England
20th August, 846 AD

Day 138

Almost time for the weekly gate to Transit. At the insistence of all, Jenny and I would be going back together. They reckoned we had earned a week off- I had not been back to Transit since Day One.

Should hopefully be just the day-to-day routine for a while, now. Everything was moving towards getting ready for winter. We were fine, after all- we could get supplies any time we wanted but we didn't want the locals to know that. We don't want them relying on us to bail them out- not that it would be necessary after the bumper harvest.

The place was now cleaned up after three days of our visitors. Amazing the mess 150-odd horses can make. The hall took a bit of getting clean. Our local girls have been very busy cleaning and burning herbs in there and I am assured the smell will go. They should be well on the way home now, even loaded down with the stuff we gave them.

There is the gate- time to jump.

Transit One

“This must be the new gateway”, I said. “I'm sure I don't recognize this building”

“Correct, it's a new one”, said Jenny, “a double of the one at Haddon. It works well not having to consider the weather.”

We stepped out into what was summer here- a pleasant change after an English autumn. Jane was waiting with Jenny's old Landcruiser. “Welcome to the funny farm.” she said cheerfully. “We moved things around- your taxi awaits.”

We climbed in and she drove off. There must have been a few changes, if we are headed in this direction. Then I saw it- what looked like a country club a couple of k's out of camp. They are both grinning like idiots.

“Got you a present”, said Jenny, “Well- one for all of us, really.”

“Better check it out then- And I thought we were coming back for R&R in those 12 metre cabins.”

This place looked fantastic. Single story and sprawling, it looked like a multi-millionaire's summer home. Swimming pool, lawn tennis courts, courtyards and beautifully landscaped grounds- it had the lot. Everything designed to take advantage of the mild, fine weather here. There had to be at least 20 bedrooms in this place and if I know Jenny and crew, it would have every facility the 21st could offer, and more. It was going to take a couple of hours just to look around. We pulled up outside the main entrance- I have seen worse on 5-star hotels. Bloody hell. She has snatched the cast to 'Upstairs, Downstairs'. Servants- how often have I heard the girls go on about having them.

Jane introduced the servants. Wilson, the butler bowed to Jenny “Milord, Milady, your suite awaits, we had it aired directly we heard you were returning.”

“Thank you Wilson- that will be all”, said Jenny.
This is the same *Milady* that was dancing on the bar a week ago?.

The servants bowed and curtsied, then disappeared, as good servants do. I can’t wait to hear where she got them from.

“Wait ‘till you check out our room.”, said Jenny, grinning.

The outside and rest of the house can wait.

Later that evening, Jenny told the story of the servants...

London, 1871

The cellar was starting to heat up. The end would come soon. They had retreated to the cellar cool room when burning timbers cut off the exit to the servant’s quarters and the heat in the burning kitchen drove them back. The room was pitch black, the younger girls clung together sobbing, while Wilson, the butler tried to comfort them. “Be brave, it won’t be long now”, was all he could think of to say. Smoke started to enter the room.

Suddenly, the cellar filled with a blinding white light. The end must have come, they all thought- that was easier than they had imagined- no pain at all. Through watering eyes, they saw a figure clad in silver gesture to them. Behind her the wall shimmered with what looked like heat. “Quickly, come forward into the light”, she said. Used to obeying that tone of voice, they stepped forward, carrying the unconscious cook with them. Into a better life.

“They are still settling in”, said Jenny, “We reckon a couple of the girls are convinced they are now residing in heaven, but that could be something to do with dishwashers, washing machines, modern cleaning products and vacuum cleaners.”....

It’s been a real pleasant week recharging, but we are itching to get back down-time.

Derbyshire, England
27th August, 846 AD

Day 145

Back again, we jumped in at 0600 Haddon time. Hopefully we haven't missed anything exciting. Better go and find out. It's a bit of a shock going from summer to the end of autumn instantly, so we made a beeline for the warmth of the hall. A few early birds were up and about, having showers and getting ready to start the day. Breakfast was set out in the hall, so we helped ourselves and sat down with John and Steve to catch up on the news.

Just wildly exciting stuff, such as the parts order for the winter plant maintenance, work schedules and fuel consumption figures, so we arranged a time to do the paperwork later in the afternoon.

"How's the medical team working out?" I asked.

John rolled his eyes up. "They are settling in now- we had a bit of a heart-to-heart on the first day. Our doctor hadn't quite got his head around the fact that you can't get a flight home from here."

Jenny laughed. "I made it perfectly clear his arse was ours for the next 10 years, standard draftee contract, as used across the multiverse."

"Gratitude is such a fleeting thing", I said, "He will just have to play the Good Samaritan here, instead of Pakistan."

"Which they have been out doing", said John, "Doing a good job too, being accustomed to a culture that is even further back *and* armed with AK's. I went out with them for a day to do introductions. Plan is to run clinics here and they can phone or radio for help in an emergency. They reckon our improvements will do more for good health than anything else."

"Have they done anything useful yet?" Jenny asked.

"Put a couple of sutures in and did a difficult delivery up at Bakewell", said Steve. "No brain surgery yet."

"Give them time", I said. "Draftees often get off to a bumpy start."

Next stop after breakfast would be Hilltop and the coal and iron workings to the east. It's been a couple of weeks since I have been up there.

We wound up spending all morning up at Hilltop, as it was full on up there with several projects coming near to completion. One particularly interesting one was a coal gas generator that fueled a converted petrol engine, which in turn ran a generator set. Bringing those vintage machinery enthusiasts along was a stroke of genius. They are a mine of information on oddball machinery like this. Providing lighting into the villages was a problem for us, but now we could fit gas instead, or as well as, electric lights- I needed technology they had a chance of reproducing.

They tell me that the climate now is warmer than up in the 21st, but this is still a cold hole after spending a week at Transit, with its Southern Australia climate. Looks like Jenny has finished her

analysis of the ore, so it's back to Haddon to sort out the job schedule for the next couple of months.

"All done", said Jenny, "I want to stop in a Rowsley on the way and look in on the new hall- they are planning to fit gas lighting before winter."

"I need to have a look at the potable water setup, so I might as well do it now", I said. Picking up the handset, I radioed "Hilltop road, traffic. One coming down to Rowsley, over."

"C&C, Hilltop. Hold minutes five, one coming up now. Clear after 46. Out"

46, a wheeled dumper, thundered past empty and off we went. Time we cut another track up here.

Alfred must have spotted my Landcruiser, as he was on the way over before we had stopped. I jumped out and Jenny drove off towards the hall, which was now sporting a coat of whitewash.

"I wanted to speak to you alone", said Alfred in a lowered voice-unusual for him, "A man previously of this village has been found fleeing with tools of your making, belonging to your men."

"I see. What would you do with him, had he stole from another villager?" I asked.

"He would be branded and cast out, to live in the wilds, as best he may. As he was a year ago." he said.

"I understand. He has not learned, thus death."

"That is our way, but he stole from your men, thus his doom is yours to decide." Alfred stated.

"He dies, as an example to others", I said, "Our way is the same. You have done this well, bringing this problem to me and your men have protected my goods as their own. You all have our thanks. Does he have kin here?"

"He does."

"Then best it is done now and not made a spectacle on market day?"

"You are wise", said Alfred, "I will take you to him now."

They had him tied in a shed on the edge of the village. Seeing us heading that way, a small crowd gathered, anticipating something happening. Uncharacteristically, Alfred did not order them back to work. I had better warn our people.

“Jamieson, C&C. Gunfire to follow. No danger.”

I drew my pistol and flicked off the safety. “For theft, I condemn you to death”, I said, following the local custom and fired two rounds into his head before he knew what was happening. Well, they won’t be putting that one on a pole.

“What was the shooting about”, Jenny asked, as we headed home.

“Shot a thief”, I said, “Alf’s men caught one nicking our gear.”

“No shit!”

”I think I made an impression- I was loaded with frangibles.”

Jenny pulled a face and whistled. “They won’t put that one up on a pole.”

“So I was thinking.”

Back in plenty of time for our afternoon meeting, I hear our medical team wish to see me. I’m in just the mood to see them.

“I don’t see how you can hold us here against our will.” said Doctor Shane Robinson.

“Easy, I have the only way back to the 21st”, I said, “and you aren’t going there. YOU- have 10 years service to work out. That is the price for your being alive.”

“But I keep telling you people, we agreed to nothing.”

“Jenny or Sonja, to C&C please”, I called up on the radio.

I waited quietly for one of the two to arrive, while the doctor continued to rave on. No one else from the medical team was making too much fuss. Jenny came in.

“Please set up a gate back to where you picked him up- he thinks our terms unreasonable”

“Easy.” said Jenny, “I will bring the gear over- I will be about ten minutes.”

“OK, back you go”, I said “Right back to the instant after we snatched you. I’m sure your jailers will have lots to talk to you about- like who shot up the guardroom.”

“Err- I may have been a bit hasty.” he said in a lowered tone, as Jenny walked in with the generator...

Derbyshire, England
1st September, 846 AD

Day 150

The first day of autumn. Those who have spent a bit of time in England in the 20-21st reckon that overall it is warmer now than it is then. Still plenty of daylight for building, not that there is much large construction work left to do. Just lots of little finishing jobs: pouring concrete floors in sheds, wiring and so on.

The new forge has been going flat out- most of the local smiths have been coming up here to work- so many so that we have had to put an accommodation block in next to the forge. Their work has leapt centuries ahead, just by having a few simple techniques demonstrated. They have taken to the water-driven machinery, especially the forge blowers and power hammers. Already they are able to forge musket barrels and make a better sword than anywhere else on this world. Who knows what they will have turned out by the end of winter.

We have had a few small trial runs to demonstrate the principles of steel-making and will be in full production in a few months. The same with making cement- we just have to scale up production.

We had thought about putting a road through to the sea, but at 150km to the east and 90 km to the west, it is just too far away. Simple solution was to find a nearby gate site, which has been done and we now have a regular supply of seafood. Trading with them was easy- any kind of rope or line was in hot demand. Fishhooks, too. Interesting that news of us had traveled as far as the coastal villages. Rumors had arrived from Europe that the old gods had finally grown angry with Rome's new god and had razed the city with lightning. Guess that's how myths get started.

As it is the first of the month, we have our progress meeting and ideas group today, after lunch, over a pint or five.

"Right, let's kick this off", I said. "By sections- Smiths first."

"Metallurgy is way ahead. They have an understanding of alloys and fluxes, so it is just a matter of formula. Mechanization is on track and forging is also way ahead- those power hammers have been magic. Technique is going ahead as fast as we can show them new stuff. For those that don't know, we have forged our first serviceable musket barrels and have developed tools and dies to fabricate percussion caps- we decided to skip the flintlock stage. We are consolidating what we have taught before moving on to wire-drawing, which is our next step." Mike said.

"That would put us where I hoped to be by year three", I said, "Excellent- Carpentry?"

"Sawn timber has been the big step for them", Sam said. "They had knowledge of machining wood, but the tools were incredibly crude. The new lathes and tools have shot them way forward. I've learnt quite a bit about working without nails and making traditional glues. We won't really see the full results until the wood we have milled properly seasoned. The way they are getting through timber means we will have to introduce forestry next year."

"Milling is right on track. We need to have them make a mill entirely out of all local materials, now that we have provided a working model." said Jenny, "Our bottleneck is local containers for the flour."

That got a response from around the room. A lack of containers of all sorts was causing storage problems.

“Cooperage is just too slow and labour-intensive, even making slack barrels”, said Jenny, “we need to ramp up ceramics, glass and fabric production and investigate plastics.”

“Bakelite and Casein are easy enough, but you need formaldehyde and for that you need methanol and catalyst- it’s certainly do-able, but only in small quantities, here and now”, I said, “Cotton won’t grow here- how about hemp?”

“I reckon we go with that- it’s a good source of fiber for rope, sacks, clothing and it grows like the weed that it is- just get the low THC version”, Jenny laughed.

“Our prospectors have found good clay and have just tracked down a decent source of sand”, said John, “So the brick-making, ceramics and glass-making are all go, once the kilns are finished. They have a couple of reasonable potters here, but they have trouble transporting clay- something we have solved for now.”

“Roads are in maintenance now, we just need to work on culverts and drains”, said John, “As soon as they come free, we are going to put the dozers to work deep-ripping the fields that aren’t in winter crops. Building is pretty much completed, but we can always find a use for a few more of those hanger kits on the next big shipment”

“Water supply?” I asked.

“Still a few of the smaller villages to go”, answered Mark, “That can go on all year round, though. We have had to cap three wells due to lead contamination in the groundwater- at two of those sites, we have hooked up to a surface supply.”

“Finally, food stocks?”

“Ours are up to scale and we have enough reserves for 250 on full rations”, answered JD, “We will need some growing lights in the greenhouse, sometime during the next month.”

“Containers and fabrics are our new products for next year”, I said. “We need to break more ground to get a good hemp crop in next spring and work on fabric production. To stimulate discussion on containers, the bar is now open.”

That usually gets the talk going, one way or another.

Later in the evening, a few ideas had been written up on the blackboard.

Glazes for pottery

Porcelain

Glass

Seals for bottles- leather o-rings (?)

Hemp for fiber- cloth, canvas, sacking, bags, bales, paper, cardboard

Paper bags-see hemp

Waxed paper

Concrete- tanks, bunkers, cisterns

Wooden boxes and crates

Existing- technology-improve production on:

Pottery

Cooperage

Tanning

Weaving

Basket-making

Sorting out that lot should keep us busy for a bit.

Some of these were well underway already. We are already using rollers to speed up bending hoops for barrels, harder, sharper blades were being made for a multitude of hand tools and a mechanical puddling mill had been made for preparing potting clay, to mention but a few.

Now back to emptying a few of our containers.

Derbyshire, England

10th September, 846 AD

Day 160

Today a cart arrived carrying the King's armourer Terric, two journeymen and an assortment of hardware, escorted by Forwin and two soldiers- officers by their dress and bearing. As arranged, they had the king's leave to come here and learn for the winter. Good timing, we had just started to set up for drawing wire. Just what they would need for making chain mail. Although that would be obsolete shortly...

We took them on a tour of the various workshops, to show them what we could do here, before taking them down to the forge, which was on the other side of the river. As usual, half of the blacksmiths of the area were there. Today they were rolling out steel billets into rods that would be drawn into wire. We wouldn't be producing our own steel for a few months yet, so we were working with 21st century stock. While that was going on, Algor was forging a mould board for a plough, using a power hammer and Edmund was repairing a steel tire, using an arc welder. They didn't know where to look first.

Almost time for the midday meal- they can do introductions then.

I have sent Dave Palmer out to find a couple of Linden trees for milling; I believe that is a good timber for making boxes. We need nails to make boxes and boxes to pack the nails in, for sale. We didn't think of using wooden boxes immediately, but by the 21st, most things were packed in plastic or cardboard. They were certainly going to be cheaper and easier to make than the non-watertight 'slack' cooperage currently used to transport such things.

We will take a run over to Chesterfield tomorrow to see what pottery is available and how the potters work. We also need to check out what they have to trade, as we will have goods moving out soon and can't give them away. We will need to go in some strength for this outing, so I will take six of us, plus six armed locals as well as a couple of other locals that are always up for a trip, such as Alfred. Came to think of it, Chesterfield is part of the lands I am officially in control of now, being about 11 miles away.

Time to head off. I have promised to take a hot meal to a prospecting team out on the eastern moors towards Chesterfield. They have been looking for a possible source of roofing slate- its one

thing to have quarries marked on a 21st century map and another to find the actual mineral in the 9th. Today they are meant to be checking out the site of a quarry that was working in the late 18th. JD always makes a special effort when sending food out into the field and I make a effort to take it out personally, when I can.

Stopping up at the hold to pick up the hot boxes, I grabbed a couple of locals to ride shotgun, called in our route to C&C and set off in my Landcruiser. Humvees are great, but the military ones we keep lifting don't have leather seats, air conditioning or CD players. The road had already been traveled this morning and is in good repair, so this should be a quick trip. The ring road has been cut, so there is no need to wait for dump trucks coming downhill now.

20 minutes later I had found them. They had located the site and our geologist reckoned that we would find slate here. We celebrated with an excellent lunch of venison casserole, mashed potatoes and hot bread, with fruitcake and coffee. The stonemason in Rowsley knows how to work slate, so we now had a non-flammable roofing material to use. I would see about some local labour to work the mine tomorrow. They can dig the stuff out and sell it to us- we might have to kick-start a small hamlet here, by putting a few prefab and local-built houses in. Jenny had started on the planning for that, as soon as it looked likely that they would find slate here and had housing site, water supplies and roading penciled in on the map already.

We waited for the team to place the survey pegs that would show the machine operators where to dig and headed back in convoy. We have relaxed a lot of the travel precautions- especially closer to home- but still preferred to travel in numbers when this far out.

The next thing we needed to find was petroleum.

Back at Haddon, we started planning the oil expedition. Tomorrow the aircraft would go up and look for the tell-tale signs of a seep. We had an approximate location, but had done little exploring in that region, the nearest road ending several kilometers away. We diverted the nearest dozer and digger to the nearest friendly town of Matlock, where the gear would be left until tomorrow morning, for an early start on cutting the track. The drilling rig was down that way putting in wells so would be handy when we needed it. As there was local talk of bandits, we would beef up security on this job with our local militia. Watching the aircraft take off should be an interesting sight for our visitors tomorrow, so they can go along for that.

Down at the forge, Denis the armourer had started making a piece of intermediate technology for the 9th century armourers and the soldiers. He had just shaped, with Algor's assistance, the spring for a crossbow, a project he had been playing with in his spare time. If they can and fire a crossbow accurately, they are most of the way towards using a rifle, he reasoned and without using valuable ammunition. The visitors were fascinated with the pictures and explanations- this was a weapon that they could understand.

Derbyshire, England
11th September, 846 AD

Day 161

Our convoy moves out at 0700 for Chesterfield. One 113, a 548, two Humvees, my Landcruiser and a Gator in the lead. We are taking Alfred and wife, Forwin and one of his men, plus six of our local militia. Eight of us will go along and the 548 will be full of trade goods and local produce.

We rolled out, rumbling past the airfield where the microlights were being warmed up. They would fly down the road in a few minutes, checking that the way ahead was clear. Passing through Hilltop, the 322 digger was on the transporter, waiting with a Humvee carrying the security team to join on the end of our convoy, where it would follow us to the slate quarry site. We will all take a break there, as some of the passengers had done no time in a vehicle before. I had put them into the 113, where they could puke over the side.

Our convoy stopped at the site, put out security and the digger was unloaded, immediately starting work on a turnaround area for the transporter, before cutting a track to the quarry site, about 600 metres from our road. The air patrol had reported the area clear for the next three kilometers and had now swung south to look for the oil seep. The new visitors found the excavator at work fascinating, as they usually did. I could see Forwin weighing up the military possibilities of this machine.

We continued on our way after a short break and in ten minutes we were starting to pass through the outlying settlements, where the locals came out to stare and point. We moved near to the town center, parking up in the common field, used for market day. Here we posted guards on the vehicles- they promptly drove in pickets and put out an electric fence to create a perimeter. We loaded up a handcart with some of the smaller goods and moved off to visit the shops.

I mostly had business with the tanners, potters and stonemasons today, but first had a few small deliveries of improved and/or new tools for various tradesmen. This had been arranged during our last visit here, a few weeks ago. Most of our load consisted of deliveries and all we had to do was pick up payment. The coopers were first, they were to receive some specialist plane blades made from hardened steel. As with everyone, we threw in steel rules- we were introducing the metric system. Payment here was in the form of two large butts that JD wanted for his brewing. I made a note for engineering to run up a barrow for moving barrels and a barrel cradle, as samples for future trade.

The other deliveries were various drills, taps and dies and swage blocks to the local smiths and wheelwrights. We also arranged a time for them to come and visit our forge and workshop. Using the money received from the smiths, we placed an order for two-gallon stoneware jugs with the two larger potters stores and extended an invitation to visit, which they were happy to accept- it was now getting too cool to cure pottery outside. I hoped to lure them away from here to work for us.

Alfred's son traded some knives and scrapers with the tanners for cured hides and we did some investigating into the chemicals they used, hoping we could find a better process for them.

By this time, the town VIP's had caught up and invited us to lunch at the town's best inn, which we accepted, leaving our locals free to do some shopping for themselves. I advised them to keep together. It's not at all that the townspeople were at all unfriendly, especially to rich traders, such as ourselves, but we tended to attract crowds. Word had gotten here that I was now in charge of this part of the world and as such, I was the one to approach with their problem. It appeared that the bandits we took on the road earlier were just one band of several in the area. They had now moved south, having decided that the Rowsley road was bad for their health.

I agreed that I would indeed do something about this immediately and if possible they would be brought here to receive justice in a suitably impressive fashion. I want these trade routes kept open. This explained the lack of traffic between Chesterfield and us. Best give the prospecting team in the south a heads-up on this.

We inquired as to slate miners and were told of a village to visit, not far from here where they worked slate and quarried limestone. As their distance from town made cartage expensive, they sold little and were quite poor. I'm sure we can improve this situation.

We gathered up our goods, loaded them and got ready to leave. Once the engines started up, the crowds moved away a bit, giving us room to move. We traveled at a walking pace, until we could speed up at the edge of town. From there we put on speed, getting up to our cruising pace of about 25-30 kph. The village we were looking for turned out to be about 5km from the site of our new quarry and was as poor as described. We stopped the convoy a way out and walked in to meet the villagers.

They were wary of strangers, but had heard of us. Briefly, we told them of our plan to open a new quarry and that we would buy all the slate they could mine, plus pick it up at the quarry. They seemed interested, but the people here are definitely of the types who believe things when they see them. We told them that we would build them new houses as part of the deal and that they need not decide until they had seen these new houses. A couple of the men nervously accepted a ride to the site to see the new workings. I think they were more afraid to admit they were scared of the Humvee, than they were to actually ride in it.

By the time we got to the site, the track was most of the way in to the future quarry. I pointed out where we intended to put houses, fields and so on. They tentatively agreed that when all this was ready, they would move. I don't think they realize how quick we can make things happen. A Humvee was sent to return them to their village, with a few bags of the trade goods we always carry. The earthmoving crew was going to leave the excavator overnight when they were done for the day, as this area was mostly deserted. The machinery was all alarmed in any case- anyone playing with it was going to learn what 135 decibels meant.

An uneventful trip home, returning at about 1600hrs. Just enough daylight left to get the vehicles refueled and serviced.

That night, we had our usual planning session for the next day, in the bar over a few pints. The consensus was to have the prospecting team beefed up with a fast response team and some of the local militia. They would stay in the field and hunt bandits while the track was pushed through the rest of the way to Chesterfield, from the south. The good news was that there was an old Roman

road for a good part of the way, which would only need repairs. I would get a message up to Transit to send down the new aircraft, as ours were coming up for needing a full service. At some stage, Jenny had trained up on these, so now we had three pilots. I wanted to use aerial spotting as much as possible. If these bandits sat tight, the only way we would find them quickly would be on thermal.

I asked if there was a bulldozer spare that could be sent to the slate quarry.

“All tied up in the south”, said John, “Unless you want the D11?”

Why not.

Derbyshire, England
12th September, 846 AD

Day 162

Fair weather for today, so we can put the microlights up again, but the barometer is dropping, so tomorrow's forecast is doubtful. The roading crew have spent the night in Matlock- this is how we have been working for a while now in areas where the locals are used to us. In an hour, the prospectors and security teams will move down into the area and meet up with roading. All through this region, there are already existing 'roads' and as often as not we follow these, widening and draining them. The lighter vehicles can travel these tracks easily, but the heavier ones tend to cut them up in a very short time. The Gators and quads can go most anywhere and are great for pathfinding and scouting.

Last night we gated the big D11 through directly to the slate quarry. That is one vehicle that is way too big to drive over one of our roads. Also too slow and too thirsty. It makes short work of stripping overburden, though. If we can roll up these bandits in the next week to ten days, we have a good chance of completing most of Slatetown before winter sets in.

Forwin and his men can tag along too, this is the sort of stuff they have come to see- they may even be useful.

John is on the D11, Steve is in charge of the security team and Jenny is running prospecting. Looks like I'm stuck here in C&C. Bugger.

“Roading to convoy- road clear, see you in 20-out”, came over the radio.

“Convoy- Move out.” called Steve and the eight vehicle group headed south.

“Air One, Roading- clear to road end. No activity on thermal. Starting sweeps-out”

“Hilltop, C&C- excavation crew on route to Slatetown- Out”

Now I wait for something to happen.

As the engines warmed up, John and Mark looked over the site and planned their day. Tear this hill away and fill that gully- simple, really. Security called the all-clear and they climbed aboard their machines to rearrange the landscape.

I hope that forecast rain doesn't amount to much, Jenny thought, as she forded the Derwent below Matlock Bath. We might have to gate back. Four more km of road, then it's follow the goat track. At least I'm not on a Gator.

"Air One to Convoy - intermittent contacts about 5 k east of your position, over."

"Convoy to Air One, will harbour up at the Amber River and wait for the earthmovers to catch up, Do your thermal sweeps this side of the river- over"

"Air One, copy-out."

"Why the dam?" asked Mark, "I wouldn't have thought they needed the water in this climate."

"It's for us", John said, "We can clean the site up by hydraulic sluicing, just like on the old gold fields- the slate doesn't get crushed that way. Once it fills up, we bring the pump set over and spend a day washing down."

"Sounds fair", said Mark. "We might as well finish off those building sites and knock over a few trees for firewood, then its home time."

"Air Two to Convoy- I have a possible oil slick, about 8k's from your position, Grid to follow...."

The D4 had finally arrived and was cutting a ramp to a ford across the Amber. No point in banging the vehicles about unnecessarily. Plan was to cross the river and camp up there for the night before moving into to the area where the oil was hopefully located.

"Air Two, what's the weather looking like up there?" Jenny asked over the radio.

"No signs of rain yet- you have at least a couple of hours clear weather."

"Hilltop to Jenny, nothing on the Doppler, out."

"Security to Air two - Can you fly directly up along those narrow gorges to your northwest and scan with thermal? I have a feeling they could be hiding up there-over." Steve radioed. That's where I would be holed up, he thought.

"Air Two to Security, copy- I have 90 minutes fuel remaining-out."

"Security to Air Two- good hunting- Out." 'Right- park the wagons in a circle and set up camp,' Steve said to himself.

Forwin and his men kept to the edge of the activity and watched. There was plenty to see. Tents that almost put themselves up, metal thorn hedges that they carried with them and a sword that roared and screamed as it sliced through the thickest logs as easily as he might cut a loaf of bread. "That would be a fearsome weapon, were it not so awkward to wield", said Richard, Forwin's lieutenant.

"I do not believe it is a weapon", Forwin said, "Merely a tool- you have yet to hear their real weapons- they make a louder noise altogether."

"See the way they work- did you ever see a camp made so well and so quickly, yet no one gives an order.- they all know exactly what to do and do it with no bidding", said Giles, the more perceptive of the two junior officers.

"You have noticed the most important detail", said Forwin, "I look forward to seeing them fight."

Just then, the 'crack' of a high-powered rifle echoed across the valley. Immediately, the 113 crew leapt into their vehicle and started up, the commander cranking the M2 .50 cal., while all the others dropped what they were doing and readied weapons. "Stand down, that's our dinner", came over the radio.

"Only seasoned warriors act that quickly", said Forwin, to the two young lieutenants, "They are a strange people, even stranger than old Picts of legend, whose women also used to fight alongside the men, but they have the discipline and ways of the Romans. I am glad our king allied with them."

The two lieutenants nodded in agreement.

"Security, Air Two- have picked up a faint thermal plume up one of those gullies- no smoke evident- Going back for another look- over."

Jenny unfolded the map onto the folding table and they waited. A few minutes later, came the call. "Air Two to Security - Confirm campsite with approximately 18 contacts. Grid SK 364 661-out."

"Air Two to C&C - coming your way with minutes fifteen fuel- out."

"Two days out at this pace", Steve said. "They are only three k's from the Slatetown site."

"Drive them towards us?" asked Jenny.

"Yeah, hit them with mortars from the other side and push them over the ridge into the open", replied Steve, "We can split the team, take the tracks and be there tomorrow mid-morning- you OK with five for security?"

“No problem for us”, answered Jenny. “Let’s get those mortars moved in ASAP.”

Derbyshire, England
13th September, 846 AD

Day 163

The weather is turning, but will hold for a few hours- it has gotten colder, but that just makes things easier to find on thermal. The mortar team is in position and waiting the security team from the south to get in position. They will have a M113 and all but one of the Gators and will have all the local infantry, armed with their .303 rifles. I’m hoping they can get at least one prisoner.

John’s mortar section arrived at the new quarry just after dawn. Looking at his map, he could see that the bandit camp was far closer than he had thought. Picking an area out of direct sight, he directed the rest of the team to head there and set up. He had an idea to help move the bandits in the right direction and distract them a little.

Steve ordered the engine shut down well before reaching the saddle. Leaving Phil in the vehicle, He headed off with Marty and Andrea to meet up with the local infantry. Forwin and his men followed close behind armed with drawn swords. The local militia had parked their Gators a couple of hundred meters from the saddle and had moved into position on foot. Their job was to stop anyone escaping back into the forest. Sending Marty off with his rifle, to set up an observation post and direct fire, he gathered the rest around for a last briefing.

Climbing to 3000 metres, Eric took a look at the weather. “Air One, All teams- estimate rain in two hours- out.” He started to descend to 1000 metres, swinging wide of the campsite and heading south.

With the mortar tubes set up 1000 meters from the campsite and a radio check successfully completed, the fire team settled down to wait, when they heard a deep rumbling coming from behind. John was heading towards them in the D11.

“D11 to all teams- I’m bringing the dozer up the stream bed- if the mortars don’t flush them- this will.- in position in minutes five-out”, said John over the radio net.

Steve outlined the plan: “They should come our way running hard and scared. As soon as they clear the saddle the barrage stops and we hit them hard. Andrea- take out half with the SAW- I want the bandits cut down to six men. Rifle section- fix your bayonets now and get ready to shoot anyone who looks like getting away. I’m going to try and take some prisoners with the help of the Captain and his men and I will be firing non-lethals. If things go bad, don’t worry about prisoners. Marty will be backing up with his rifle from up there. Get in position and wait for the noise to start- good hunting”

“Air One to ground- we are in business, I say again, we are in business- out”. Eric banked hard left, to get well out of the way of the incoming rounds.

“Security team to OP- in position”, called Steve.

“OP to mortars, commence fire mission Alpha”, said Marty and it begun...

Jenny called the search team to a halt- everyone was listening in to the operation and not focused on their job of finding the soak. Time to call a break- this shouldn't take long.

The bandit group was gathered around the campfire grilling spitted rabbits over the coals, when a strange rumbling and creaking was heard. They had gotten somewhat used to the noise as the strangers tore up the local hills. This seemed to be getting louder. Then a strange, ominous whistling was heard and the stream bed and forest edge turned to fire and smoke, while thunder burst next to them. Momentarily paralyzed with shock, they froze, crouched around the fire pit, when the huge bulk of the D11 hove into sight. As a man, they leapt to their feet and fled in the only direction clear. Straight up the gully.

Breaking for a moment from directing the fall of shot, Marty called over the net. “Heads up- moving towards the saddle- very fast.”

Briefly halting at the camp, John looked about- no doubt these were our men, just looking at what lay scattered about. “All units- confirmed these are our bad guys.”

“Mortars cease fire”, called Marty, as the runners came up to the saddle. The last four bombs burst then almost immediately came a burst of machine gun fire. Marty raised his rifle and took aim.

The runners crested the saddle and started to head downhill, unaware yet that the barrage had just stopped. Andrea fired a long, raking burst that split the group of runners into two, dropping twelve of them in their tracks. Too easy. she thought. A .303 crashed as one broke for the tree line. Steve and the others leapt to their feet, 30 meters away from the group. “HALT.” he yelled out- two immediately stopped, Edmund and two of the militia coming forward to seize and handcuff them. The remaining five momentarily paused then rushed forward drawing knives. Steve fired his shotgun dropping one with a bean-bag round. Forwin stood his ground, neatly slashing across a bandit's neck with his saber, turning and spitting another. Clearing his blade and stepping forward, he hamstringed another as his two men dragged the remaining man to the ground. By this time the militia had moved in, to secure the prisoners at bayonet point.

Marty put his binoculars down. All over and no one had gotten away. Time to head down and help wrap up. “OP, Mortars, stand down and thanks- John, you might as well bring that big yellow beast the rest of the way up and bury the dead meat.”

With the five survivors bound, patched up and locked in the cage trailer, Steve's crew tidied up with John's help. Doesn't take long to sort out a mass grave with a big dozer. Forwin had tossed the bag of heads in with the survivors, which subdued them somewhat.

Steve dispatched the militia to search the camp and take anything of value as they planned the next move.

“Quickest way to Chesterfield would be down that gully, if John grades it on the way down, we could be there in under an hour and back to the prospecting team by nightfall”, said Steve.

“No problem”, said John, “You could get down now, but I will smooth it up a bit more as soon as those locals get back.”

“Better call up the boss and see if he wants to head over to Chesterfield”, said Steve. “C&C, Security”, he radioed.

“C&C to Security - do you want me over there?” came back.

“C&C- query, do you want to meet us at Chesterfield?” asked Steve.

“C&C to Steve- on my way now- ETA minutes ten to the mortar position.” Wayne answered.

“He must be on the bike.” laughed Steve.

Two pistol shots rang out from the gully. “Found two more the mortars had got”, Marty called in, “your local lads have sorted them.”

Slightly less than ten minutes later, the sound of the XR650 was heard coming up the hill. Following the dozer tracks had made for an easy ride. “Steve from Wayne- checking out the camp site- will be up soon.” I radioed in.

The mortars had torn up the camp and the forest edge pretty bad- cautioning the others to watch for unexploded rounds, we gathered up anything of value and loaded in onto the Gators, along with the two bodies. John had called it right- this was all stuff that we had been told was taken. Back up the trail to see the others.

“He’s a one-man slaughterhouse with that sword.” said Steve, as they watched Forwin remove the heads from the remaining two bodies.

Leaving his men to fling the bodies into the pit, Forwin walked over, with a rare smile on his face. “Good steel.” he said, raising his bloody sword in salute.

I called everyone over. “We travel to Chesterfield, to have them hanged”, I said, pointing to the cage. “I’m sure the people of Chesterfield will want to stand us a drink or two, so we will stay there overnight- John, we will give you twenty minutes head start and follow down. Park the beast up and bring the mortar team along.”

Chesterfield, England
13th September, 846 AD

Day 163

I rode into the town ahead of the main convoy, with two Gators trying to keep up. Heading to the middle of the town at speed, trying to keep ahead of the inevitable crowd that would gather, we pulled up outside the inn, which served as a town hall. Leaving the four militiamen to guard our vehicles, I entered the inn. As I thought, all the town leaders were present. They were already out of their seats having heard our engines. "We have taken the thieves and have prisoners on the way." I said.

"Splendid news." said their mayor, "We will feast, but first, I will have men build a gallows."

"Make them for five."

The convoy rumbled in, not far behind us and parked in the usual square, where townsmen were busy erecting a scaffold. It hadn't taken long for the word to spread about the town. From what I gathered, this band of thieves and murderers had been causing a lot of grief in the area, raiding isolated farms and waylaying travelers for some years. The local Reeve and his men had gathered to identify and take charge of our prisoners and were waiting to check the heads that were being brought in. With their help, we moved the crowd back and put up a wire barricade.

As the heads were identified, they were stuck on a pole and raised, to the delight of the crowd. We had taken all of the more notorious rouges in the area, two of whom were amongst the prisoners. All had prices on their heads and I arranged the reward to be split amongst Forwin, his men and our local militia. They would also pick up the standing bounty I had on bandits. This should go a long way towards getting trade going, as many local merchants and carter's had been unwilling to risk losing goods and lives traveling. The roads should be a lot safer now and more importantly, we can start rolling new technology out of our area into this, the nearest sizable town. Even the rain that had started was not going to dampen this occasion.

Feeling was that we had better give this crowd a hanging real soon, before they lost the plot. Rounding up a few family members of victims to formally denounce the criminals, the Reeve proceeded straight to the execution. This was a no-frills affair, with the condemned having a rope tied around the neck and being dragged up the scaffold to slowly strangle, while being pelted with stones and refuse. The crowd seems to need a bit more of a spectacle, I felt, so I called the Reeve and the Mayor over and told them what I planned. They agreed that if the crowd wanted blood, we should give it to them- before they mobbed the scaffold. Climbing into the 113, I cocked the .50 cal. and swung it around. Here's your blood, you vultures, I thought to myself...

Survey Team

From the ridge, Jenny could see the rain moving in. "Lets get camp set up- over there", she said, pointing out a promising looking site. As they drove the short distance to the new campsite, the Humvees circled slowly and wide to check the area.

Sharon, the Transit geologist, parked the 548 and climbed onto the back to start passing down the gear, when a smell caught her nose. Crude oil- somewhere near. That would have to wait though- bad weather was coming.

The first drops of rain began to fall as the prospecting team started to stow the last of their personal gear in the tents. Mark had used the excavator to scratch a drainage ditch around the campsite and had pulled down a couple of dead trees for firewood. "I caught a whiff of petroleum before", Sharon said, "We must be close."

"Good", said Jenny. "We can keep this site as a base and scout about to find a good site for drilling. Meanwhile, I intend to sit tight and ride this weather out. We have food for five more days and plenty of fuel. That oil isn't going anywhere." I might order a M577 command vehicle in for the next resupply, Jenny thought to herself, just the thing for these camping holidays.

"C&C, all units- Doppler shows heavy rain on the way in the next hour, over" Sonja called over the net.

"Combat team to C&C- secure in Chesterfield for the night- out."

"Prospecting to C&C- harbored up for the night- out."

"Earthmoving to C&C- on the way in now, ETA minutes 20- out."

"Hilltop to C&C- all secure- out."

"C&C to all teams- Haddon Hold locking down when earthmoving locates- out."

"OK, the weather forecast sounds bad- better get the storm ropes on and dig drains around the tents", said Jenny, "Deploy motion sensors and the sentry can hole up in the 548. I don't think that we will bother with a campfire tonight and make sure that latrine tent is lashed down good and tight. Get everything you are going to want into the tents now before it pisses down."

Chesterfield

"If I'm going to be visiting here, this inn is first on the list to get a stove with a chimney", I said to Steve.

"This is good- you can cut the smoke with an axe, in that tavern over by the square." he said. "At least we are in the inn reserved for the upper circle of town life."

"As the old story goes, the beer is fucking awful and I'll be glad when I've had enough and can go home", said John.

"Have you tried the wine?" asked Andrea, "I could sell chateau cardboard here and they would think I was a bloody Benedictine monk."

"Come on people, that's what we are here to do- improve the friggin' world." I said, laughing."

Forwin sat quietly in a dark corner, toying with his mug of ale. They tore them to pieces while holding back, in order to take prisoners. If they wanted them all dead, it would have been over in

a few heartbeats. I must travel to Sheffield, hear the stories for myself and visit the battlefield. I know a few good men there who would have stood firm to defend the city and seen all...

Edmund, Alfred and the other four Haddon militiamen were enjoying a rare night as the Chesterfield townsfolk toasted them as heroes. The bounties were to be split amongst them with the king's soldiers- this was a considerable amount of money and credits to spend- enough to buy modern treasures- even binoculars or a set of fine clothes. Outside the rain poured down.

Chesterfield, England
14th September, 846 AD

Day 164

The rain continues. We have split up at Chesterfield, with most of us returning back to Haddon and a group heading down to reinforce the prospecting and road building crew. There were no rivers of note to cross and there was most of an old Roman road to follow south. As this rain looks like continuing, I want to get back in case the road slips and we get stuck. The locals here have loaded us up with produce and gifts of food. Won't tell them, but a lot of this I will drop off at the quarrying village that I want to relocate.

“Convoy, C&C- ETA minutes ten- put a brew on”, John radioed in. The road had held up well, with only a couple of very small slips so far- nothing even worth cleaning up. “I hope those girls have had a good rest- they will have a bit of work in a few minutes.”

The streams were up, but were not a problem to the heavy 113. The Gators had been returned to Haddon and the militia crew is riding in the back of the carrier, which was buttoned down to keep the weather out. Steve and the driver were not so lucky, as they had to have their hatches open. Fortunately, the back was crammed with supplies, tents and gear, which stopped the passengers being flung about.

“Found out trail, 500 metres ahead”, came from the Humvee in the lead. Now we could step up the pace a bit.

Survey Team

“If you are bored, take the 548 and go for a drive”, said Jenny, as the rain continued to pound on the tent, “See if you can find that soak and do a patrol of the area.” Never go into the field without a good book, she thought to herself, as she continued reading, whilst sipping her Bourbon.

Sharon dashed for the tent, trying to stay dry. “Found two. East- about 700 metres.”

“Now all we have to do is get them tapped”, said Jenny, “Which is going to take another two days, if they can get the rig down here.”

“Prospecting to C&C - send down the drill to our loc, over”, Jenny called in.

“C&C to Prospecting - negative- the Derwent is flooding. Will advise an alternative when Steve gets back to your position, over.”

“Security to C&C- route is clear to 4WD, over.”

“C&C to Prospecting- stand by for drill ETA, over.”

“Prospecting to C&C- Tell them to bring their long johns.- out.”

Ahead, the Humvee stopped, the driver appearing to be searching for tracks. He started off again, veering east. Must be getting close, Steve thought. Not much out this way- the last farm was about 1.5 k's back. As he reached the point where the Humvee had stopped, he could see a variety of tracks and off to the south, a cleared path showed. Must be up here- no smoke visible, but in this rain...

Mark, Sean and two of the locals, who had missed going out on the previous action, set off with the drilling rig in tow and another trailer full of pipe and gear. Shouldn't be too hard- when the road ran out at Chesterfield, just follow the tracks to the other end. If it got too bad, the 548 could tow the Humvee along.

"Prospecting to Drilling- On the way now. ETA unknown as yet- out."

"Drilling to Prospecting- the 113 just got here- that makes two hours from town, but the track is marked now- I hope you brought whiskey.- out."

By late afternoon everyone was at the campsite and the rain was now heavier, if anything. With the rest of the tents up and dry clothes on everyone had gathered in the main tent, which consisted of two army 14'x14' tents set up end to end. A stove had been set up at one end of the tent, warming it up nicely. After the whiskey bottle had done a few rounds and people had started relaxing, Steve asked the question- "How did you get the gate generator in the first place, if that's not a big secret?"

"That's a bit of a story", said Jenny, "The best place to start is with what the gate generator actually is..."

Alfreton area, England
14th September, 846 AD

Day 400

Jenny continued with the tale.

"The gate generator stated life as something a bit different. The device was invented in the early 21st century, on Earth, in a closely parallel universe. Originally, it was intended to be the drive unit for a starship, but the technology was suppressed when the biological clock reset ability was discovered- by then other technologies were discovered that could warp a vessel through space and the original was forgotten.

One of the developers, however, disappeared with the prototype, to resettle in another parallel universe, at what would be about AD 4800. From here, a very small, very exclusive and *very* lucrative enterprise was set up obtaining luxury rarities from about the universes, for extremely wealthy connoisseurs. Ask for a look into Wayne's private liquor cache, for examples of what sort of stuff.

This had to be kept small and ultra-exclusive- the 52nd century market would soon clean Earth out of Scotch. Anyway, back to the story- one of the principals of this network came unstuck in another time and universe and had to run for it- a hazard of our trade. With her ship badly

damaged and herself injured, she made a blind jump and wound up on Wayne's farm, circa. 1998. Wayne, not ever being one to involve authorities, dragged the small scout ship into a shed with a bulldozer and covered up any trace of its landing, while he patched up the pilot and brought her back to health.

Once she was on the mend, they started trying to repair the ship, but it was too badly damaged. They removed the drive as she hoped they could get it to generate a gate, knowing a bit about the theory. This is where I came in, as I had worked with Wayne in the past when he wanted someone to help with programming a new control system. Between the three of us, we managed to power up a gate, thanks to the fact that the generator had an extremely versatile 52nd century interface unit, which had connected it to the ship's computers.

We spent the next 3 years, figuring out how to manipulate the gateway field and jump coordinates, but in the first few weeks we established a gate that appeared to go nowhere. It did, in fact, go two weeks into the future, as we found later. After we had run such tests as we could, to establish that a jumper would probably survive, Wayne went through.

He arrived in the same area he had left, minus the other two of us. Instead of immediately returning through the field, he thought to go inside and check his computer, discovering that the date was two weeks in the future, as was his desktop calendar.

This is the point where the dumb luck that started this whole thing is overtaken.

He then opened the Internet screen and went to the lotto results site, wrote the winning numbers for the last two weeks down, pocketed the note, *then* jumped back.

From there, our money problems were over. I quit my job and set up a fake holding company, which employed me as a sales rep to explain my absences from home, which were causing some problems.

The rest is mostly details, but with a lot of work, we got our friend from the 52nd back home. Shortly afterwards, she returned in a working ship and made us an offer to run this end of her black market operation, which continues today.

We did a lot of time-traveling, adventuring and making money, as well as discovering the rejuvenating effect of time-jumping. Along the way, we meet up with the players that you now know as from the Transit crew, who joined our merry band. We had about eighty-odd subjective years of this, going backward and forwards.

About two years ago, your time, we found that life and movement about our planet was getting increasingly tighter, as big government spread like cancer. A few hair-raising jumps into the next two decades confirmed this. The Transit One site was developed and set up as a safe house. We eventually hatched a plan to cause a time split and create a new universe for us to play in, inspired by our friends up in the 52nd, who also occasionally meddled with time and history. This is where you all entered the picture.

We have since found that there are three other groups who meddle in time, and after a few battles, we have agreed upon demarcation of the universes. After all, with infinity out there, there is room for everyone.”

Derbyshire, England
1st November, 846 AD

Journal Entry Day 212

Winter is here. Most outdoor work that is not maintenance has slowed right down, although there is still a bit of mineral prospecting continuing in our immediate area. There is plenty going on inside the forges, foundry and numerous workshops, as new products are made, new techniques are learned, and old ones are refined. The mechanics and fitters have been working servicing vehicles and equipment to have it ready for next spring and the gear beyond local repair has been sent back to Transit.

The big project is for the smiths, wheelwrights and carpenters to start making wagons, to replace the local carts- then we can start moving people and produce about the area and beyond. Once we make a few samples and sell them they are sure to be copied, which is what we want. I must get Jenny to find more of those big horses to pull them. Then we need leather workers to make harness, plus be taught how to make horse collars- the list goes on. In the interim, we will set up a bus system, once we have the ring road around our roughly twelve mile radius territory.

The best twenty of our team of local workers are to spend the winter undergoing intensive training to prepare them for the roles of future leaders. We have a pool of expertise here that is going to work with them and others over the next few years, cramming them full of information on subjects such as mathematics, mechanics, physics, hygiene, biology, medicine, warfare, metallurgy and so on. When they are not in the classroom, they are practicing marksmanship, small-unit tactics, weapons maintenance, drill, martial arts and our resident expert, Forwin, is teaching them swordsmanship. He and his men join us for most of these lessons and are apt pupils, as well as instructors.

They will be the first officers of the larger militia that we will put together over the next few years and I intend them to take a major part in the defense we must put up against next spring's invasion. Population pressures in Western Europe will have these continue for the next 3-4 years. They already hold the north- we intend to keep them there. All we have to do is hold them for a year or two and then invader becomes settler. Their genes are needed too.

In engineering they have taken huge strides. Without any prompting, Algor has made a cartridge firearm, a derringer-type pistol that takes a case made from a percussion cap with a small lead ball inserted on top of a small black powder charge. This has led on to the development of a larger rimfire cartridge of more power. We have shown them how to make superior steel in small quantities, now it is just a matter of scale, which we will demonstrate next year. As we have always said, once someone sees that something can be done, they will make it happen.

The new settlement at Slatetown is almost finished. Moving on prefabricated houses speeded up the project. It should be a model town, with running water, the new local-made cast-iron stoves and a sewerage system. Once we tidy up and stockpile a bit of fuel, we will move the workers and their families in.

Another rewarding project has been the radio station. We have set up an AM transmitter at Hilltop and distributed hundreds of crystal sets and solar/dynamo powered radio receivers around the area. We do a couple of hours broadcasting after dark, with news, talks with locals and music. We had to keep the hours short, to avoid keeping people from their work or staying up too late at night. They are one of the hottest trade items out there and we have ordered hundreds more.

Another hugely popular item is the hand-powered torch- this uses an LED light source and should last for many years. One of our Transit crew, who is a bit of an amateur chemist, has managed to make matches, of the old strike-anywhere type- they should also be popular.

After extracting a few barrels of petroleum, we have capped the well for now, and will organise another small settlement to work it, like Slatetown. I mainly want to use this precious resource for lubrication and chemicals, not for fuel. We have also tracked down fluor-spar, very useful mineral, a new sand pit and a marble quarry. On the chemical front, we have a very passable soap now and next year we will start extracting plant oils to scent it. Also on the next-year list are biofuel digesters to make methane that we shall install in Rowsley and Bakewell, for a trial run.

The medical team is working well, now that one of them has got over his attitude problem and stopped winding the rest up. Once they settled into it, the work here wasn't all that different with what they were doing. Most of the work is in education- teaching stuff like practical first aid and hygiene. Little things that we take for granted, like rehydration, the Heimlich maneuver and suturing are all news here. Childbirth and setting broken bones, plus a little dentistry are really helping win hearts & minds- to say nothing of pain relief, while doing the above.

We have a bit of new equipment coming down in our midwinter shipment. Jenny has an order in for a M577 command post vehicle and caravan and so must be planning a bit of camping out with the prospecting team. The big dozer is going back, to be replaced by a smaller and more versatile one and another timber mill is on the way. Quite a bit of saddlery and harness has been ordered, to serve as samples and patterns for the locals to duplicate. The suppliers at Transit have found a new item, the US army's new M1030 Diesel Kawasaki motorcycle that will be replacing our current motorcycles and quads, simplifying our fuel logistics. Now that the area is as stable as it will get, travel by motorcycle will save a lot of fuel consumption, road maintenance and provide a bit of recreation.

Things have changed a bit since we have got here, with the locals. Now everywhere we go people come out to wave and children run along with the vehicles, begging for a ride. It's not universal, some will never change their attitudes and still run and hide, but you always get those types. At least no one shoots arrows at us anymore. Almost every settlement or farm has something made or improved by us and the larger villages all have some kind of industry we have established.

55 days left to plan the big Christmas bash.

Derbyshire, England
24th December, 846 AD

Journal Entry Day 267

Christmas Eve 846. Here it is the Solstice feast or Saturnalia and will probably stay that way since Jenny has mostly knocked off the Christian power bloc. There won't be any Yuletide, either, since we the invaders that would introduce it are no longer destined to be a power here.

I prefer the Saturnalia- pagans have more fun.

All sensors and alarms are working, the snow is falling and it's time for me to finish writing and go and have a mug of buttered rum.

The bar was very mellow tonight. Quite a few were missing home and family, even those who hardly spent any time on earth now. It usually gets this way at Christmas time. Time to do a bit of that leadership stuff and stop them moping.

“Sean, what are you going to buy when you get back? I asked. He was the only one that was definitely not returning at the end of his tour.

His face brightened and he replied, “I saw a small block just before I came here- 20 hectares backing onto bush with a stream and a dam- I want to build a smaller version of the Transit mansion on it, retire at 40 and never unblock a toilet that isn’t my own again”

“I will have to come and check it out. You can take the 312 excavator, the quads and bikes, if you like- we actually paid for them. There are always short-term contracts going at Transit too- they might just pay enough to get you out of retirement.”

Mark, Phill and Dave Palmer were planning to go back up-time but would return for a second tour with their wives, whom they were sure they could convince to come along. They would be gone for two weeks, our time, but would have 3 months up-time. The two weeks was for training time at Transit for their partners. We try not to have time overlaps at Transit- that being the reference point for all our time jumps. Mark asked Dave how he was going to convince his wife to come back.

“Same way you got us here, lure her here with money- I will just show her some of the 50 grand that I got during our weekend away and she will buy in. No need to mention the Lotto numbers too soon”, he answered.

“I was going to tell her about the anti-aging effect, that should get her curious enough to try the gate”, said Mark.

“When you do your two-week debrief at Transit, we cover techniques for getting skeptics through the gate”, said Jenny, “Without picking them up and throwing or dragging them. We are always available to help, too- all part of the service.”

“True, Jenny can motivate anyone.” said Sonja, “She stuck a pistol in my face and said ‘jump.’- there is not much arguing with that.”

“Well, you were stubborn.” said Jenny, laughing.

“What have you three got planned?” I asked.

“I want to set up a trust for the kids- pay their way through uni, which was going to be a real struggle for them”, answered Dave Palmer. The other two nodded and said that was on the plans too.

“I really want to tell my boss to go fuck himself with a big blunt instrument”, said Mark, “Cliché, for sure, but who cares if it’s the #2 fantasy of Lotto winners, it’s *my* fantasy.”

“What’s the #1 fantasy then?” asked Steve, walking into the trap.

“It involves 19 year-old twins- girls in my case”, laughed Mark.

Three beers and the conversation is headed for the gutter- as usual.

“What exactly is the reintegration plan then, anyway? asked Steve, changing the subject.

“Its two weeks at Transit, where we cosmetically get your appearance back to where it was 12 months previous, as much as we can. We need to get you talking good 21st century English again, instead of the pidgin dialect we use here. You have to get used to walking around without a pistol and to get back to your home routine. We also teach techniques for covering up inadvertent slips of the tongue, how to explain your rejuvenated body and how to adjust your age” Jenny explained, “Sounds basic, but it will be bloody hard work. For anyone returning permanently, we run a slightly different program and can, if they wish, put in hypnotic blocks that make this like a vivid dream. I also give you ways of contacting my network, if you need help or want back in. Everyone who leaves in good standing is always looked after.”

“For everyone who stays on, we send you back for a couple of weeks in their second year, to keep in touch with the 21st. If you don’t want to go home, you can live in a luxury hotel, of which Jenny owns a number. They are all in sites where you can guarantee you won’t meet the bloke next door. Just in case you want to take care of loose ends and don’t want to wait until the end of your tour. Please let me know if you intend to kill anyone, so we can help keep you out of trouble.”

Everybody from the Transit crew seemed to be looking in Jenny’s direction...

“Am I the only one here who aired out an ex-boyfriend?” said Jenny, in a tone of false indignation.

“By sending him to Auschwitz?” said Sonja

“He was a total prick.” said Jenny, “Besides, you left one at the North Pole to turn into a popsicle.”

Shite, I’m glad those two are smiling.

Derbyshire, England

24th January, 847 AD

Journal Entry Day 351

End of tour today for Sean Marden, who returns to Transit for reintegration, along with Dave Palmer, Mark Campbell and Phill Chambers, who will return shortly, our time. Jenny and Sonja will be going back too, as this is their area of expertise.

The timings are arranged so that everyone is back on deck for the start of spring- we have a lot of planting to get done this year, the new crops, including hemp and the pine trees that will make up the new plantings in our forestry program.

It has been a productive winter, for training and production. Several of the breakthroughs in locally produced technology include a lead-acid storage battery, glassblowing, a cartridge rifle very similar to an old Martini-Henry, and paper. We have trained a local militia to company strength and shall use them in defending against the upcoming spring invasion.

Slatetown is in operation- the miners and their families love their new homes, and we send regular patrols over that way, to make sure nobody else gets too attached to them. The coke ovens and steelworks are about ready to start up. We hoped to bring some 18th century workers down to start a mine, but unfortunately, they were unable to adapt to the changes at Transit and had to pay Darwin's price. Can't win them all- we will just find others from a different time zone.

In one of the empty containers, Jenny and Sonja have rigged a surveillance probe that is lowered through a gate to take radar shots of the English Channel. By adjusting the time axis, they have found the time and place of the invasion landing. It looks to be a similar size to last year's- they can't keep that up too much longer. This year they will be stopped on the shore.

Time to head over to the hall for the farewells.

"See you at Transit in two weeks, Sean", I said, "Just before we jump back to where and when this all started."

"So we all arrive at Huka Lodge at the same time?" asked Sean.

"That's pretty much what happens", I said. Even those that elect to stay on have to go back to tidy up loose ends. You can't all disappear from the same place and time.

"Gate in Two." said Jenny, "All aboard that's headed up-time- secure the jump area and see you in two weeks". The container door was sealed and they were gone.

"Tour One is officially over", I said, "everyone is now three million \$NZ richer"

"Bugger me." said John, "I hadn't thought about that for months."

Transit One **14 days to Return**

"Here is the first lesson", said Jenny, "Tell the truth, but only part of it. One story could be that Wayne, an old friend who is now very rich, owed you money or a favour from years ago and paid you back with interest. This covers the \$100,000 cash- or however much you intend to reveal."

"Wasn't that \$50k?" asked Sean.

"You got a bonus for hooking up my ensuite so quick", said Jenny, with a grin.

"Same story applies to you others, but here you could use it as bait, saying that he has invited you down to his country estate", she continued, "We will visit there before you are returned to the world- it is the earth end of our shipping operation- the NZ one, anyway."

"Getting back to the cash, don't bank it or go crazy with it- that draws attention and you don't want to do that. The reason we use the Lotto numbers is that you have a reason for having large

amounts of cash. This is a token to tide you over until your money comes in. You four have the winning numbers for a \$12 million dollar powerball jackpot, which, by the way- you picked together while away for a weekend. That story is for immediate family, as I am aware that you all know each other back in the 21st."

"What if my wife hears about a weekend at this country estate, from one of the other wives?" asked Sean.

"Call the number I have given and you will have a weekend at our home arranged." Jenny answered, "I'm sure we will be having regular get-togethers after this. Some will be for everyone who has been down-time and some with their families that haven't. Sean- I have a feeling your wife will be too busy spending money to think about visiting for a while."

"You got that right." said Sean.

"Time to lose the hardware and uniforms", said Sonja, "I have your old clothes over in the store and some other stuff for you to wear in the meantime. A couple of you have slimmed down, so I need to get replacements in your new sizes. Let's go measure up, then its haircut time."

"Told you it would be busy", said Jenny.

Grimsby, England

6th April, 849 AD

The elite Haddon Rifles Company deployed into three ranks- their carts, auxiliaries and horses to the rear. The front rank took the prone position, the middle kneeled and the rear rank remained standing. The scouts had placed rock cairns at 100 metre intervals to their front. To either side were companies of the Kings Musketeers, mortarmen and the rocketeers. As the screaming horde reached the 600 metre mark, the mortar bombs and rockets began to rain their bursting shells down to the rear of the formation, cutting off their retreat.

“Company- volley fire- ten rounds rapid. -FIRE.” yelled Centurion Alfred. After this had scythed through the mass of invaders 600 metres away, he ordered- “Fire at will.”- Their .303 rifles cutting down men by the dozen.

As the survivors were pushed forward to the 300 metre mark by the artillery, the Kings Musketeers opened fire in volleys with their locally made rifles, the big 12mm lead slugs adding to the more precise fire of the Rifles Company.

The Norsemen broken, the mortars and rocket battery ceased firing. Captain Forwin ordered his cavalry forward and with saber and pistols completed the rout of the invaders.

The invaders would not try again.

Transit One

One day to Return

After working with stories for a few days, we decided that revealing the cash payment was a mistake, so changed this part of the plan to suit. Too many suspicious wives out there. We decided that they would leave most of their cash back at Transit and gave out a bit more betting information, to provide some ready money. They would just have to become interested in horse racing and sports betting for a brief time. Time to see Sean on his way back.

“That story sits quite well?” asked Jenny.

“Yes”, answered Sean, “It’s simple and believable.”

“OK, run it past me again”, said Jenny.

“Wayne gets the odd hot tip from inside the industry. He just wanted to share a few with a few old friends, as he has made a packet out of this”, said Sean.

“Just don’t elaborate and here are some winning horse’s names to memorize, if she asks”, suggested Jenny, “Otherwise, excellent- it sounds dodgy, but who wouldn’t do it? All set to jump?”

“Let’s do it.”...

“Good weekend?” asked Mary, Sean’s wife.

“Unbelievable.” he replied quite truthfully.

“The old pirate must be doing well if he could put you all up at that lodge- what’s he up to these days?”, she asked.

“He gets a few hot tips on the ponies, as well as investments all over the place”, Sean said. “We had a bit of a session with the horses on Saturday.”

“How much did you lose?” asked Mary, in a guarded voice.

“Some- but I won this.” said Sean pulling out a wad of bills.

“Bloody hell. There must be thousands there.”

“About fifteen grand.”

“With the win last weekend that gives us enough for a deposit on the property.” .

“Let’s do it tomorrow”, he said. “I’m taking the day off.” Wait till next Saturday, he thought to himself. “Anyway, we are going to win Powerball next week and pay cash”

She laughed...

“All set? Gate open- let’s go”, said Jenny.

Mark Campbell arrived home mid-afternoon. “How was Taupo?” asked Sue, his wife.

“Bloody great”, he said “Got a bit of work out of it.”

“Really? What’s the job?”

“A new ultra-luxury rich man’s retreat that Wayne is building out in the sticks” Mark answered. “We have to live on site and the good news is that there is a cottage to live in. You can take a couple of weeks off, come down for a holiday and ride his horses about.”

“Sounds good, but I don’t know about getting time off- we really can’t spare the second income, right now.”

“No problem, I got a seventeen grand advance on the job- all off the books, labour only. I just have to get on the job within two weeks.”

“So when do you go?, you can’t say no to a cashie like that- I would love to come down, but we still really need my pay, even after that lotto win last week.”

“Not a problem, we can take a week to think about it- something might come up.”...

Phill Chambers walked in and asked, “Would you finally like to tell that school board to go to hell?”

“You got a good job offer?” Linda asked.

“I got an offer for both of us, working on a country station and luxury VIP retreat- I fix the machinery and you as a private tutor”, he answered.

“You’re kidding.”

“Dead serious- he even put the money up front. Full accommodation and board, use of facilities when it’s not booked and \$80K per year, tax paid.”

Linda quickly did the sums. “That’s a lot better than we are getting now and we can put this place up for rent- what’s the catch?”

“We have to sign a confidentiality agreement not to talk about who visits- and that \$80k is each.”

“Each.” she exclaimed “Is all this above board?”

“He said to come down and check the place out before deciding- want to go sick tomorrow?”

“You talked me into it”, she answered. “How much did he put up front, by the way?”

“One month’s pay, for coming to an interview- no strings attached.”

Dave Palmer arrived home to an empty house, his wife being out on a call again. With Dave away, she thought she might as well swap shifts and work. Between them, they made a good living, but were always working- him as a logging contractor and her as a busy veterinarian. Even with a six-figure income, helping 4 kids through university, with one at medical school was a drain. Dave opened a beer and sat down to wait for Debbie to finish her shift.

“You need a break”, Dave said.

“Looks like your weekend did you good”, said Debbie, “I thought it would be a boozy ex-army bash.”

“So did I”, he answered, “But it was a job offer, for both of us- how would you like to specialize in horses and bloodstock?” This was the job she had always talked about.

“Tell me about it. Where, what, how much?”

“An exclusive retreat with stables- Clydesdales, Shires and Appaloosas. It’s set on the east coast of the Wairarapa and name your price. Accommodation provided. Wayne says to come down and check it out first. He also has a large forestry block he wants me to manage and mill- the place is a working station”, Dave answered, handing her a brochure, “It’s all in here.”

“I suppose it’s worth a look, especially if it gets me out of small animal work”, she replied somewhat skeptically. “Sounds too good to be true and we know what that means. The brochure looks good, though- ‘Haddon Hall- Stepping back in time...’”

Jenny removed the headphones and stopped the recording. “Got them”, she said quietly to herself. Dave’s wife would be the hardest one to sell the project to, but we still had the wild card to play. “Back to the safe house”, she said to Sonja, who started the van and drove quietly away. All we have to do is get them to Transit and they will believe...

Derbyshire, England
7th March, 847 AD

Journal Entry Day 365

One year today and we throw a big party tomorrow, when the others get back down-time. They are currently doing the non-combatant recruit training and sorting out specialist stores. This time we told them of the retro-aging process straight away. All of them had spotted changes in their partners before they got here, but without our course in doing three impossible things before breakfast, they couldn't really believe what must have happened.

That removed any misgivings they may have had about joining our team.

Sonja kept a covert watch on Sean Marden for a while after his return. She reported back about how his wife told everyone how calm and matter of fact he was about the big powerball win. The purchase of their farmlet has gone unconditional and they are now eagerly waiting to move in. I have the old 312 excavator, which we upgraded for operations here, plus a few assorted motorbikes and quads for him down at our farm. His boys are going to love those.

We have some short-term contracts for him on Earth and Transit, once he has had a good break, and spent some time with his family on their new property. He will be back with us, one day- but who's in a hurry when you have all the time in the worlds?

This was to be a five year mission, but many of those here have fallen in love with the land and people and want to stay on here. As long as they keep jumping to and fro, they can live here for a very long time indeed. We always planned to come back and visit, check on progress and alter course now and then.

For when you meddle in time, time is always on your side.

BOOK TWO

Part Five

Prime One, Wairarapa Coast, New Zealand **August 16th, 2004**

Mark and Sue finally found the gate at about 1pm, after a three hour drive. While Mark was trying to figure out how to open it, the wrought iron gates started to roll apart. 'He must have a camera somewhere', thought Mark, although he couldn't see one. The white crushed limestone road was much wider and better formed than the usual farm driveway and obviously carried a fair bit of heavy traffic. Once they had passed the roads high point, the ocean came into view and they could see what had to be the homestead and outbuildings, mostly hidden amongst Macrocarpa wind shelter belts. All about the hills were part-grown forestry blocks, the rows of pines stretching for miles.

Winding down the hillside, the road leveled out and branched off in two, with a sign post pointing the way to homestead. Coming through a belt of trees, the homestead could be seen. It was really more like a small settlement, with the main house dominating a collection of small cottages, barns, stables and garages. The usual collection of Land Cruisers, tractors and a Gator or two were scattered about. "This must be the old house", said Mark, "The new building site should be a couple of k's down the road, towards the sea."

"This one would do me." said Sue, "the location is fantastic- there is the cottage that we got a photo of- Oh!- I could live there!"

Jenny waved out from the verandah and got up to meet them.

"Now there's a face from the past- she's kept well." said Sue, who hadn't seen Jenny for fifteen years or so.

"Project manager here- Jenny and Wayne have been together for a while now", said Mark.

"Wish you had told me earlier- I would have come down just to catch up with Jen."

"...and that's the property", said Jenny, the tour over.

"Damn, I wish I could come down and stay while Mark puts that pipe in." said Sue.

"Work?" asked Jenny.

"The need to work", said Sue.

"Come down for next weekend- Phill won't need his van- we have a fully fitted out workshop and all the gear he will need here- if you can get an extra day off, all the better", said Jenny.

Wayne pulled up on a Gator "Sorry about being late- I got held up out by the coast- a slip had taken out the track and I had to go the long way round." he said, "Have you had a look at the new Lodge?"

“Just got back”, answered Mark, “We have to head home soon, but will come back next weekend and I’ll get into it on the following Monday.

“It’s been great to catch up with you two again”, said Sue, “You are both looking great- like you haven’t aged in the fifteen years since I saw you last.”

“Sue, that’s what we really want to talk to you about. We have cracked the secret of reversing age- that’s where the money has come from. Come on in and I’ll tell you all about it”, said Jenny, seizing the moment.

“It’s true”, said Mark, “We had to get you here to show you, it sounds so unbelievable.” He pulled his shirt over his head and showed her the change.

Sue was lost for words.

“The scar tissue is completely gone and the skin looks twenty years younger”, said Sue, shaking her head. Mark, like many outdoor workers had taken far too much sun over his 48 years. “How did you do it- drugs?”

“No drugs”, said Jenny, “This is where things get really weird, but it is through passing through a temporal/spatial portal repeatedly- this resets the body’s aging mechanisms at a cellular level. We don’t really know how.”

“You mean a time machine?” said Sue.

“Basically”, answered Wayne, “We need people for contract work in another time and place- this is a spin-off benefit.”

“Want to see it?” asked Jenny.

“I suppose I had better”, said Sue.

“It’s not very impressive”, said Sue, “Looks like a sewing-machine case-oh!”- The field had just sprung open. Jenny stepped through, disappeared and then reappeared. “Mark - you don’t look surprised to see this?”

“I’ve been through that a good few times now.” he answered.

“Well, if you have been gallivanting about with a time machine, you could at least have got us the lotto results”, Sue said. “Oh.” -she just clicked as to the secret of the winning tickets. Mark pulled out his wallet. “Why do you think I stopped on the way here?” he said, producing the ticket. “I got a bit more work than play last weekend.”

“Work tomorrow isn’t such an issue now”, Jenny said, “Come through to our other property and have a talk about a job. Using the gate gives you a sensation a bit like sea-sickness until you get used to it- that’s the reset process initiating in your body.”

Jenny and Wayne stepped through the gate, Mark and Sue followed.

Phill and Linda lived only a bit over an hour's drive away, so after phoning ahead, were at the homestead at about 9.30 am.

"Come in for a coffee, then we can do a tour of the new lodge", Wayne said.

"Great property you have here." said Linda, as they sat in the large country kitchen, toasty warm from the heat of the Aga stove. "When will you be up and running?"

"About 6 months time", said Jenny, "But if you accept our offer, you can start as soon as you want- we have a lot of set-up work to do here."

"I wouldn't have thought you would have needed a schoolteacher here", said Linda.

"We definitely need a tutor here, but there is a bit of a story behind why. Why don't we go and have a look at the building site, and I will explain", said Jenny.

"...either way, the job offer as it is stands, but you have the opportunity to go on this mission and introduce literacy to people who have never seen a pen or paper and as a extra, gain another 20 years of life." said Jenny.

"You have to see this from my point", said Linda, "This sounds totally unbelievable."

"It's easily proved", said Jenny, picking up the radio handset, "Open Charlie Prime, 5 minutes duration." A sight very familiar to Phill and Jenny appeared in front of the Land Cruiser.

"What is it?." said Linda.

"A gate in time and space", said Phil, "We just drive or walk through- you get motion sickness the first couple of times."

"This takes us to another planet a few hundred light years away, in the same time period", explained Jenny, "We use it as a transit point for our time jumps, for training and storage". She pulled the selector into 'Drive'..."

"Don't worry, it washes off the leather real easy", said Jenny, "We can freshen up at the house over there", pointing towards the Transit mansion. "This is our little holiday home- a trial run for the Lodge that we are building back on earth."

"That's a view you won't get from earth", said Phill, pointing out the twin moons of Transit.

"I have to admit that the Lodge back home is a front for this operation, although those jobs are genuine- we are bringing selected young people back to get an education there. You have to admit the whole thing sounds just too crazy to tell someone straight off, but now you know how Wayne can pick Lotto winners", said Jenny, "Initially we had no plans for bringing a teacher down, but Phill and a couple of others wanted the opportunity to bring their wives down, to give them the longevity treatment too."

"Will that... jump... we just did do it?" asked Linda.

“No”, said Jenny, “It takes about twenty jumps before the process is irreversible- basically, when it stops making you feel ill, it is working.”

“When does it start to work- how long does it take?” asked Linda.

“About 3-6 months- you will start feeling better and have more energy after a week or two, though”, said Jenny.

“How long does it last?” asked Linda,” and are there any side effects?”

“It takes you back to about a biological age of twenty-five, so if you are forty-five, you get another twenty years. If you keep jumping, you keep extending. I’ve been doing it for eighty-five years subjective- I have spent over 125 years alive, hopping from one time period to another- Wayne is a similar age”, Jenny said. “As for side effects, the more you jump, the more your fertility is reduced. I’m effectively infertile but you would be unaffected after 20 or so jumps- so don’t forget to keep taking the pills.”

“I think those days are over”, Linda laughed. “I want to go- I can make sure this man of mine hasn’t been up to mischief with the local peasant girls.”

“I can assure you, Phill has been a gentleman.” Jenny said laughing, “Let’s talk about the job, training and, of course, your pay.”

Dave and Debbie set out the following Saturday morning. As they headed down the access road, Debbie was forced to admit that so far, this looked like a prosperous enough operation to support what had been proposed. After twenty years of practice, she would welcome a change of pace, but it still had to pay their way.

Wayne and Jenny were waiting to meet them and, as with the others did a tour of the new works. “You would be wondering why we need a vet for an operation this size, right?” asked Jenny.

“That was what I was thinking”, Debbie said, “Is there something else I haven’t seen yet?” “Quite a bit”, said Jenny, “But part of the job involves traveling overseas- we want our own person to check out bloodstock before we purchase- that will keep you away for about six weeks a year”

Debbie couldn’t believe her luck. “Whereabouts overseas do you purchase stock?”

“The US, UK, Australia, Canada- mostly the UK”, Jenny answered.

“What’s the catch?” Debbie asked- this sounded too good to be true.

“We want you for a project we are running. Payment is three million dollars; tax free and you get an extra 20 years of life, for one year of your time. Want to know how we do it?” asked Wayne.

“I knew it.” said Debbie, “this is a set-up of some kind.”

“No, and it’s easily proved”, said Jenny, “In another three hours you are going to win a quarter share in a \$12 million dollar powerball prize. Dave has the ticket in his wallet- we gave him the

numbers- it's easy when you can travel in time. Are you willing to watch the draw, and then talk to us?"

"If I win the draw, why would I need to?" said Debbie.

"You might want an extra twenty years to enjoy the good life", said Jenny, "Our process will take your body clock back to about 25 years of age."

Debbie would have laughed at them, but for a nagging doubt at the back of her mind. Dave seemed like a new man last week. He always was fit and strong from his work, but he had his old energy back and had seemed a lot less stressed than he had been, especially with the logging rights for the area he worked being sold off. As if he knew something she didn't. "If we win tonight, you have a deal." she said, "and you will have a lot of explaining to do, Dave."

"I guess you will be staying." said Jenny, laughing, "We had the guest suite made up- didn't expect you would be driving back after becoming millionaires."

"But I have to go back tomorrow- I can't just walk out on the practice." said Debbie, taking another glass of champagne from Wayne.

"You will be- that's one of the great things about time-travel- I was away for a year last weekend." said Dave.

"That job offer still stands too", said Wayne, "If you still feel the need to work, that is. - at the end of this tour, you will have another six million coming your way."

"We could jump down to Transit", Jenny said, "But you usually get sick, first jump or two- shame to waste the bubbles. - we will head down tomorrow morning."

"What's- Transit?" asked Debbie.

"A planet a couple of hundred light-years out, that we use for a half-way house", said Wayne. "Nice place, if a bit plain- nothing but grasses there, but the weather is very good and there aren't any real seasons."

A couple of hours later, the wine had done its work, along with the shock of suddenly being very rich, and Debbie, who hardly ever drank, was snoring quietly in a chair.

"Got to admit", said Dave, "You two can be really persuasive- I didn't think she would go for it."

"That's why we're jumping now", said Jenny, "No time like when you are out of it, for a first jump- come on, pick her up. I have the jump set up to get in at 2100 local, so she gets plenty of sleep and we can have a few more drinks."

After leaving Dave & Debbie in the yellow suite, we headed down to the saloon bar for a few quiet drinks, to meet the other two couples. "Couldn't sleep", said Phill.

“We just brought Dave & Debbie in”, said Jenny, “We just watched the lotto draw with them and they had a few glasses of bubbles- you can look forward to doing that when you get back”

“Thank you Wilson”, said Jenny, taking the offered glass from the butler’s tray, “Plan is- we will all stay for the two weeks of non-combatant training, then head down together to arrive back on mission day 385.”

“What exactly is the training?” asked Linda.

“Vehicle familiarization, off-road driving, self-defense and equipment familiarisation- stuff like radios, generators- that sort of thing, but anything you are interested in. We will teach you the basics from bulldozers to machine guns.”

“Could be fun.” said Sue.

“It is.” said Mark.

Transit One- Training **Day One**

Debbie woke early, as was her habit. This didn't look like any room she had seen yesterday- strange. Wherever it was, the owner had amazing taste, she thought. This is the sort of place she had only seen in those glossy 'Home and Garden' type of magazines. Odd- I should have a headache from last night, she thought.

Dave picked up the telephone and called the kitchen. "Good morning Sara- tea and toast for two in the Yellow suite."

"Where are we? - you seem to have been here before", asked Debbie.

"This is Transit, Jenny decided it would be best to bring you down after you flaked out and spare you getting jump-sick. We come up here from the 9th century for a break- you can think of this as a new holiday home for us- one of many- from now on", answered Dave.

"Come in", said Dave, to a tap on the door, "Thank you Sara, that will be all for now". Sara did a small curtsy and left the room. "Sara and the staff here are genuine 19th century servants that Jenny rescued from a fire", he explained.

"This is going to take some getting used to, but so far I like it." said Debbie.

"It's not so fancy down-time", Dave said. "But we have a really good chef- don't tell him that. - and local workers- who do all the housework."

"Why didn't you say. I would have come along just for that." she replied.

"Bathroom's that way and your overnight bag is over by the dresser- when you are ready, I'll give you the tour", said Dave.

"We hold onto the clothes you came in, for when you go back. If need be, we find the same ones in a different size.", said Jenny, "These uniforms make good work clothes and believe it or not are the hottest fashion item where you are going. You can order other clothes when we take personal orders later on today- that's right, you get to mail order shop, on us.- not just clothes- anything you might want to take with you as long as the volume is under about 4 cubic metres."

"What's the shopping like where we are headed?" asked Sue, grinning.

"You can get a really good cheese or a nice fat pig", said Jenny, "Bit of a bugger, though -going all the way to England and no Harrods."

"The shopping is getting better", said Sonja, pushing a pile of uniform jackets across the counter, "We have taught them how to make things like soap and the bread has improved, to the point where you can eat it without your jaw muscles aching."

“We won’t worry about full issue just now, as we found from experience that you will shrink a bit once the retro-aging progresses”, said Jenny, “You will be arriving in the spring, so we will bring the cold weather gear down later.”

“Any skiing there?” asked Linda.

“The guys were doing a bit last winter- they were talking about clearing a couple of slopes nearby for this season”, said Sonja, “My idea of enjoying snow is to watch it out the window, from beside a roaring fire, while sipping a good brandy. There is fly-fishing, caving, horse-riding, motorbike and mountain bike riding and hunting of all kinds. If you are into any crafts, we are teaching the locals everything we know and any expertise is welcome.”

“While we are sorting your gear out, I want to mention security”, said Jenny, “The situation is that most of the locals are friendly now- the guys have done a fantastic job on that, but this is still a wild time and there are a few unpleasant individuals out there- on the whole though, our area is much safer than home, especially nearer the fort. To that, everyone who chooses not to carry some kind of weapon stays in the area of our compound. Almost everyone carries a pistol. A couple of our medical team carries pepper spray or electric stunners.”

“I keep a 30-06 in the back of the wagon, when I’m out on the road”, said Debbie, “A pistol would be a lot more convenient for putting an animal down. Firearms don’t bother me like they seem to with townies.”

“It’s been near 20 years, since I last used a pistol in the territorials”, said Sue, “And that was just firing a few off every year. I would like to learn how to use one properly.”

“I don’t know- I can give it a try”, said Linda doubtfully, “Pepper spray is OK, though- wish I could get it at home.”

“We will be using the US standard service pistol, which is real easy to use, for training. Once you get the hang of that, you can change to anything else you fancy- I use this”, Jenny said, removing her PPK from her holster, “I find it better for my hand size, plus I carry it concealed, back on earth. A modern firearm is as much a badge of rank down-time, it marks you as one of us- someone not to be trifled with- in much the same way as a good quality clothes mark someone of importance.”

After fitting everyone for a shoulder holster and getting them kitted out with their clothing, it was time for a lunch break, consisting of sandwiches over in the old mess hall.

“This is where we lived, until recently. Home was those 12 metre containers over there- they are better than they look, though- like a luxury caravan inside”, Sonja said, “Then Jenny had the new house built, found the servants and we got a small hydro plant set up in the hills, a couple of k’s away- no more noisy generator.”

“Speaking of those containers, we will have a look through them this afternoon, as they will be your accommodation down-time. After driver training this afternoon and dinner, we have some video taken down at the site, so you can see where you are headed. Now let’s go and pick up your vehicles”, said Jenny, “They will be the ones you are taking down, but we will also do some time in Humvees and Gators, which are the other ones you will use.”

Out the back of the mess hall, out of previous sight, three new Land Cruisers were parked. “The clothes aren’t too flash, but I think you will find your vehicles satisfactory”, said Jenny, grinning.

They did.

The rest of the afternoon was spent bumping about dirt tracks and through stream beds. Sue and Debbie had spent plenty of time bumping over rough roads and tracks over the years- Debbie’s job often took her off the sealed road, so it was just a matter of getting used to the particular vehicle. Linda would need a lot more instruction, having never been off a sealed road before, but that’s what this was all about. After dinner, everyone retired to the saloon bar and the big LCD screen was uncovered.

“This opens with an aerial view of the site”, said Wayne, starting the disk player, “We have a couple of microlight aircraft that we use for scouting.” The disk started to play.

“The main structure is made of stacked shipping containers, most of which have been customised for specific applications such as kitchens, shower blocks, accommodation. The vehicle park is fenced with razor wire and there is wire around three sides of the main structure. It is designed to be defended against a worst-case scenario- a massed attack, but hasn’t had so much as an arrow fired at it so far.

The buildings there are various workshops and an accommodation block for local visitors. The greenhouse is over there and that pile of black stuff is the coal storage.

As the camera spirals out, you can see the bridge across the Wye River, the forge and the water wheel that powers the machinery- there. The two nearest settlements are along the river, Bakewell to the west and Rowsley to the east. On the high point is a radio repeater station and as he gains altitude, you can catch a glimpse of Hilltop to the north-east. This is our coal mine, a limestone quarry and another radio station. From here, we have views of the surrounding countryside. You can see that we have done quite a bit of road building there.”

“Beautiful country.” said Sue, “Will we get a chance to have a flight?”

“No problem”, said Jenny, “We can always use an observer to work the camera.”

“The rest is a walk around of the main compound and some of the facilities”, Wayne continued, “This part has a commentary, so I can shut up, but if you have any questions, please ask.” The film continued.

“A heated swimming pool. And a sauna and steam room- you don’t do things by halves, do you.” said Debbie.

“Oh, any idiot can rough it”, said Jenny.

Transit One- Training, day two

“When I was training here, we had to live in a container, there were no servants, the swimming pool was a hole we dug in the stream bed and it was up at 5.30 am for a run.”, exclaimed Mark, as they sat around the breakfast table.

“Poor thing”, said Sue, “No doubt you lived on baked beans and sausages, too.”

“Five years ago, your time, we were all in caravans”, Jenny added, “There were only four of us. We didn’t have any idea what we would do with this place; it was just such a big deal being on another planet.”

“How did you discover it?” asked Debbie.

”Our friends from up-time that we got the gate technology from, gave us the coordinates to this place. It’s not due to be discovered for quite a while, on our timeline, because of the big collapse after WW4”, answered Jenny.

“Each answer opens up another three questions”, said Debbie, “Do I even want to know when WW3 starts, let alone WW4 starts?”

“What comes to be known as WW3 is in its opening phase, right now and will get really nasty after 2010. Earth is not a fit place to live, for anyone who likes their freedom much after that. Implanted ID, spot DNA analysis, secret police, planet-wide databases and suicide bombers seeking martyrdom everywhere. Wayne and I had to shoot our way out of Sydney on a shopping trip, up-time. After that, we came up with the idea of making a controlled split way back in the timeline. Anyway, enough doom and gloom on so fine a morning.” answered Jenny. Not what someone with children wants to hear- I wonder how long until someone approaches me about that, she thought to herself.

Today was the first day on the range, where we would cover the basics of safe pistol handling and do a bit of firing, to assess how they would take to it. Sue and Debbie had handled firearms before, but Linda was a complete novice and barely knew one end of a weapon from the other. I repeated the range safety procedures, as I would every day and we began with the basic ‘try to hit the paper bloke at 15 metres’. We would start them with magazines loaded with three rounds, to get them used to changing magazines automatically.

“See, it’s coming back, Sue”, I told her.

“I had forgotten how much I enjoyed this stuff”, said Sue enthusiastically loading another magazine.

“Good, you hardly looked at the weapon last time you reloaded”, I said, as she emptied the pistol. “Grouping is fair, too- all in the boiler house.” Sue had fired about 250 rounds down the range and I decided it was time for a break. Clearing her weapon, I sent her off to get a thermos of coffee from the Landcruiser. Linda was not doing so well. She fumbled every magazine change and was lucky to get one in six on the target. I caught Jenny’s eye and signaled for a break. Debbie appeared to be picking it up well. Watching her fire her last group, see looked like a real natural. Almost a shame she was a non-combatant.

“Good work so far, everybody, this stuff isn’t easy. We stop for a break, then strip those weapons down, clean them and start again.” I said. I got Jenny aside and asked “What’s up?”

“She has zero aptitude and is scared of the weapon”, Jenny said, “I’m going to try her on a Glock - her hands are a bit smaller than the other two’s and she doesn’t have the strength- it may make the difference. The lesser weight won’t hurt, either.”

It helped- by the end of the morning she could hit the target one time in three. Never mind, the other two are easy, so we can spend the time on her. At least with Jenny’s patient coaching, she hadn’t been put off and had started to get a little confidence.

“This is all good” said Debbie, “But I really would like to have a rifle, as well. Often I have to drop an injured animal that can’t be approached, and I wouldn’t like to try with the pistol.”

“Done- you can have anything that you can use safely”, I said, “We can have a look for something in the armoury and you can get it sighted in tomorrow. I’m sure we have Weatherby Mk V’s in 30-06. Unfortunately, my armourers are both down-time and can’t fit one to you.”

“That’s OK”, she said, “My Remington was straight out of the box and did all right”

I would find out how good ‘all right’ was tomorrow.

“Don’t sweat it”, I told Linda, who was looking down in the dumps after her morning’s performance “I knew plenty of soldiers who couldn’t hit anything with a full magazine- you can hit one in three and have plenty in the magazine- you will get better.”

“In any case”, said Jenny, “I haven’t seen a pistol fired at anything more dangerous than a rat, down-time.”

Well, that was economical with the truth, I thought.

“This is the John Deere 6x4 diesel Trail Gator, our utility vehicle.” I said, “There are used for everything from hunting to doing the local courier run. For the rest of the afternoon, you will be riding round getting the feel for them, as well as learning how to change tires and look after them. The tracks that have been cut around the hills are much the same as the ones you will be driving on down-time. Have fun.”

That should keep them busy for a bit, while we work on the equipment shopping list for the next big supply run. We were looking for a newer and more sophisticated communication system, as the existing one now had too many users and the increase in radio traffic was tying the net up. Our new system would be more like a radio telephone. One thing I have been learning is that there is a hell of a lot of gear out there that I have never heard of before. I just have to say “I wish we could get a..., that will...” and someone will say “You can.”

After dinner, we had a slide show and talk on local life in the 9th. After quite a few questions on 9th century life, Debbie asked about life after 2004.

“New Zealand fares better than most”, Jenny answered, “But in the not to distant future you can expect fuel prices to quadruple, spot ID checks everywhere and any number of laws restricting movement, communications, compulsory ID and the abolition of cash. If you intend going back to stay, I recommend moving to the country and avoid main centers like the plague. You will have enough assets to set yourself up away from most of the craziness and I can give you some investment advice to protect you from the inflation that will come.”

“It’s my children I’m thinking about”, said Debbie quietly.

“I have a 20 year old daughter back there, too”, said Jenny, “You should know that once you have worked for us, you always have a bolt-hole here for your immediate family. We can extract people from most situations, if need be.”

“Maybe I should stop asking questions about the future”, Debbie mused.

“We would have warned you before we sent you back”, said Jenny, “You have a year with us to sort out a plan for the future and a few years yet, up-time.”

“On a somewhat less depressing note, I want to pass your personal shopping lists on to the purchasing team tomorrow night”, said Jane, “Let’s talk shopping.”

“I’m out of here” said Mark, “See you in the saloon bar.”

Sounds like a good idea to me.

Transit One- Training, day thirteen

“So, do you think they are ready to go?” I asked.

“They are as ready as they ever will be”, Jenny said, “Linda still can’t shoot worth a shit and if she needed to, would probably never find the safety- that’s one reason I got her the Glock. She can use the pepper spray and a stunner OK, though. Might be worth getting her checked out when we get down, I think she might have a carpal tunnel problem, but the rejuvenation process should take care of that, in any case.”

“Once they get focused more on the mission and stop worrying about the future on earth, they will be fine”, Sonja said, “They just need to get busy.”

“Moving on to tomorrow’s supply run, as usual, mostly fuel and we jump to Hilltop and rotate the tankers there”, I continued, “Plant movements are 1 x 307 excavator, 1x D3 dozer and a back hoe. Also, 2x 6m containers of veterinary supplies and 2x 12m containers comprising one portable schoolhouse. Lastly, three Landcruisers towing light trailers.”

“Newbies to drive the Cruisers down?” asked Jenny.

“Yes, just send them behind the plant, and have them follow it out of the way of the train”, I said. “That’s us, unless you have anything else.”

“Best get some rest now, as we leave here at 2200 hrs and arrive at 0300 local time at the other end”, said Jane, “I recommend just carrying on through the day and having an early night, as the best way to adjust times. See you at 2100 for the pre-jump brief.”

“She’s right”, said Mark to Sue, in agreement, as they headed to their rooms. “The place is noisiest between about 0545 and 0730 as people get showered, fed and head off to their assignments, then there are vehicles being started up, the auxiliary generators are running and the pumps are started up.”

“We won’t get down to Haddon until about 0430, in any case, as the fuel trucks, plant and cargo have to be moved before we get the road” added Phill, “Then someone invariably bumps into you and has lots to talk about. About the time you get to your quarters, the local workers upstairs are rising and start banging about on the catwalks, although our modules should be well away from them, in the new wing.”

“Sounds just like the motor camp at Christmas time”, said Sue.

“Yep, we get our share of drunken parties too.” laughed Mark.

Gate Site Alpha, 2145 hrs

“Just keep your distance from the vehicle in front, follow the instructions of the marshal at the other end and you will do just fine”, said Sonja, completing the brief. They would be driving into rain, but otherwise, everything was good to go.

With five minutes to go, the ‘crank engines’ order came over the radio. At exactly 2200, the first fuel truck crossed 1100 years.

Sue flicked on the wipers as soon as the now momentary disorientation passed. There was the tanker she was following- 40 metres ahead. The area was well lit up by floodlights and ahead she saw the tanker start to pull off the road. At this point she saw the guide, dressed in a dayglo safety jacket; he waved his light batons at her, signaling her to pull off the road into a parking area. Pulling to one side of the huge tanker, she came to a halt, at the guide’s instructions. Putting the vehicle into park and pulling on the handbrake, she turned her head to see the other two Landcruisers pull alongside. Behind them followed a short procession of two diggers and a small bulldozer, which immediately veered off into the parking area.

Following instructions, they remained in their vehicles until the road train emerged, pulled by a huge tractor. As soon as that cleared the gate, the gate disappeared and most of the lights were extinguished. Mark headed for the respective vehicles and got them to shut down and follow him over to the Hilltop mess hall.

“Welcome to Hilltop”, said John, who was in charge of the night’s movement, “Grab a coffee or tea and a sandwich while we get the road train unloaded and the tractor turned about for the return jump.”

The Hilltop mess hall was a triple garage, lined with plywood sheeting, a potbelly stove and local-made furnishings. It was cozy enough, if plain. “Don’t worry”, said John, “It’s a lot fancier where you are headed- this is just a mining camp up here. - if you will excuse me, I have to get on one of the forklifts- see you down at the main camp.”

After about an hour, the fuel tankers could be heard returning, empty now. John came back in, “Roads clear- time to move.”

The group headed to their respective vehicles, which by now had been unhitched from their trailers and skirting around the parked road train and vehicles waiting to return to Transit, they headed down the hill. Even in the dark and rain, the white limestone road was easy to follow, the extra spotlights of the lead vehicle cutting through the night and they were soon parked outside the compound gates. The gates opened then closed behind as soon as they had entered. They parked up outside the workshop. Lights came on and a group of six or so came over from the hall. “Welcome to Haddon Hold”, called out Jenny, “Let’s get your gear out of the rain, then I will meet you over in the hall” Practiced hands soon stripped the luggage from the vehicles and soon had it into the dry of their quarters.

Mark and Sue got to the hall first, after making a quick dash through the rain, the others close behind. Jenny was warming herself by the open fire. “0445- This place starts waking up soon and if you want some sleep you are better waiting until after 0800, when it has started to quieten down again.”

“I don’t think I could sleep.” said Sue.

“Most don’t”, said Jenny, “But file that information away for when you have been working all night. I might as well start the tour here- this is our main recreation area, also a dining room and well-stocked bar. Over that way is a small pool, spa, steam room and sauna- also a small movie theater- the night’s movie is up on the whiteboard behind you, as will be any notices, weather forecasts and so on. The main kitchen is just beyond the main doors- that’s where the smell of bacon is coming from. Next door to us is the boiler house, which is fairly quiet now, as only one of the four steam-powered generators will be operating at this time of day.

Alice entered and after nodding towards Jenny, began to swiftly setting up the breakfast buffet.

“This is Alice, a local worker we have had here from the beginning”, said Jenny, “Meals are all buffet style, apart from a few formal dinners- you will find we eat rather well here and you will need to watch the waistlines. Over in the north wing is a self-serve kitchen- it is looked after by our girls here but people who trash it having late night cook-ups find they spend more time doing sentry duty”

“Or lugging jerrycans of petrol up to the repeater stations, in the rain.” said Mark, from experience, which set the others laughing.

“The rest of the tour can wait until after daylight”, said Jenny, “First up gets the best coffee.”

Breakfast was a social occasion, with everyone coming up to welcome the newcomers and introduce themselves. Debbie remarked that apart from the different uniforms, she would be hard pressed to tell who was from up-time and who was local. “These are all the long-serving and best of the locals here”, answered Jenny, “They were here before this was *the* place to work. Once you get further afield, you will tell the difference real easy.”

“Linda, here are your students”, Wayne pointed out. “We have done a very basic bit of work on literacy, but these folks wearing blue need your help now. They are the best and smartest in the area- let’s get them reading.”

“How long do I have?” asked Linda, nervously.

“As long as you need- we always have time.” said Wayne.

Derbyshire, England
8th March, 847 AD

Journal Entry Day 380

“Let’s do the rounds”, said Jenny, heading out the door. Heading anti-clockwise from the hall, she pointed out the different containers and buildings. “To the right is a library and on the left are the boiler room and steam generators. That hopper is the coal supply to the boiler. Next to the store is the laundry- have your laundry out by 0730 by your door and pick it up from here, otherwise, it’s self-serve.” They continued their circuit of the compound. “To the left are two containers that have been made into drying rooms, they use waste heat to dry timber in the lower container, anything else in the upper one- tentage, wet gear and so on. The next container on the right is a shower block. From here on, we have accommodation, 2 berths to a 12 metre container. Out to the left are the vehicle hangers, now used to store the light vehicles and the odd trailer mounted machine, like that sawmill there.”

Turning at the east wall, they continued on. “More accommodation and a toilet block in the middle- the accommodation continues down the north wall, until we get to the armoury and ammunition stores. On the left is another hanger and next to that is the workshop- the building off to the side is another shower block and toilet.” They continued along the north wall walkway, heading west. “Engineering stores, and the accessway to the north wing”, said Jenny as they stepped through the accessway that was cut through a now-empty storage container. “This wing was added on after a few months, when we expanded the operation here.” The north wing was similar to the main area, but only two containers deep and ran the whole length of the north, with the sentry box having been moved from its original position. “Over there is the other kitchen, the pool, sauna, spa, steam room, another shower and a toilet block. Most of the accommodation here are 12 metre berths, a perk of the full time staff, or shared by couples. That container that has been widened is our cinema. That’s about it for here, so we head back into the main compound.”

Continuing the anti-clockwise circuit, they headed west again. “That is the battery room and switchboard and the start of the west wall is the big generator container. That is a 75kVa Caterpillar and is on now, as the steam generators are down for morning maintenance, plus this is our peak electrical load time. Those 30,000 litre tanks are our water supply and are connected to a bore outside. The small shed in front of them is the pump house. All the other containers up to the main gate are general storage.”

They skirted around the stores and past the gates. “The container by the gate is the command and control center and is full of computer gear, radios and all the security systems. Next to that is the surgery and then we are back to the south wall. That accessway leads to my quarters, the rest of the container is kitchen storage and then the kitchen and we are back to where we started.”

Jenny headed up the stairs to the top of the container wall. “The second level is accommodation, mostly for the local workers who live on-site and storage. No need to look around there at this stage- we are headed for the top.” From the top, they had a panoramic view of the countryside, the rain having finished, for now. They walked around to the southern sentry hut. “This is a sentry hut; you won’t get that familiar with these, as you will not be standing watches. Mostly the sentry is a fire picket and watchman and monitors these screens that back up the ones in C&C. We have a sensor ring around this area at about 500 metres out. None of these weapons here have been used to shoot anything more dangerous than the odd wild boar, so far. We prefer to look so fierce that everyone leaves us alone.”

“I suppose you have to keep a close watch, with so much valuable gear around”, said Linda.

“Theft isn’t a real problem here”, Jenny explained, “The locals take a very dim view on it. We have had only one incident of theft from a building site and he was caught and handed over by the locals.”

“What happens to criminals here?” asked Linda.

“They don’t do it again”, said Jenny. “Public execution for entertainment on market day- the loss of something we would consider insignificant, such as a handcart or a sheep can be a major blow here.”

The sound of an aircraft engine starting up distracted them from this line of thought. “If we head around to the north, we will see them taking off”, said Jenny. They watched as the microlight climbed to cruising height and disappeared off into the distance. “Every couple of days they go out for a scout around- they take a lot less fuel and maintenance than a chopper”, Jenny said, “And can stay up for about four hours- they are two-seaters, if you want a flight some time.”

Jenny continued to point out the different buildings, stores, fields and points of interest about the countryside. “That’s about it from up here”, she said, “Now we go for a bit of a drive about and have a look at the nearest villages and you can see some of the improvements we have put in- there aren’t a lot of flush toilets out there, so go now or go rustic.”

“Every trip outside the gate starts with a visit to control”, Jenny said, “They need to know where you are headed and you need to get issued radios and fresh batteries” They entered C&C to log out. “The whiteboard there has everyone’s travel and work plans on it and their locations are marked with one of those coloured magnets, on the map up there.”

Wayne passed three radios out, with spare batteries. “Same model you used at Transit, but most of the advanced features won’t be available until Simon has finished upgrading the repeaters. Just like in training- call in anytime you stop or get somewhere. You will always have an escort for the first few weeks, so watch what they do and try to remember it- names, landmarks and all that sort of thing.”

“We will be on the Matlock- Winster- Bakewell circuit”, said Jenny, “Anything happening out that way?”

“Not much, the morning courier has gone and roading is working up north”, said Wayne, “Air One reports all clear and nothing of interest on radar.”

JD put his head around the corner- “Picnic lunch for four- have a good one.”

“Cheers”, said Jenny, “Let’s hit the road.”

A few minutes later they were nearing Rowsley on the south riverbank road. Jenny pointed out some of the new buildings, such as the Mill and the town hall. Just outside the town, a sawmill could be seen working and timber was being loaded onto a wagon. “These people were the first we had dealings with- the first friendly ones, anyway”, said Jenny, waving to Alfred, who was watching work in progress, as usual.

“You had some problems, early on?” asked Debbie, who seldom missed anything.

“Not with the locals- I don’t know how well you know your history, but a lot of invading went on in this time. One of our advance parties ran into a raiding party and just after we got here, a warband attacked the village we just passed through”, Jenny said, “Both got taken out by our crew, which sort of endeared us to those villagers, who were about to be killed, raped and looted.”

“That would be the Vikings”, said Linda.

“Sure was”, said Jenny, “We also beat off a large invasion force, about 30k’s north of here- now you know why we are armed to the teeth and didn’t offer to bring you down straight away. Your men played a big part in saving this part of the world from a very unpleasant time.”

“Modern weapons against swords?” said Debbie, “Not too hard a battle”

“Ten against 3,500?” said Jenny.

“Oh.”

“This is Matlock, famous in your time and this one for its old Roman baths”, said Jenny, “They are another friendly town and quite often some of the crew stay overnight at the local inns. Further east are the oilfields and the ring road up to Clay Cross and Chesterfield”

“Oil?” asked Sue.

“We have drilled into a couple of small oil deposits- more as a source of lubricants and chemicals than fuel”, said Jenny, “A few locals pump it into barrels and we trade for it.”

Turning off towards Winster, Jenny pointed out a quarry and some recent plantings. “We are introducing sustainable forestry here- a long-term plan. We are also planting hemp as a fibre crop. Next year we will be jump-starting their textile industries and rope-making. That will give some good short-term results.”

“All these roads are your work?” asked Sue.

“Mostly”, said Jenny, “They existed as tracks only suitable for a light cart in good weather- we have formed, widened, drained and metalled them- that’s why the quarry pits along the way. Already, it’s done wonders for trade and travel. That and removing the local bandit population, whom we caught and handed over to the locals”

“You have had a busy year”, Sue laughed.

“We expect a bit of work for three million a year”, said Jenny, grinning. “We will stop soon, up on the moor and have a bit of lunch.”

They had stopped at a high point on the windswept moors, sheltering behind a group of boulders for a picnic lunch- a popular spot with traveling workers. The area was free from cover and could not be approached unseen. Jenny pointed this out to the others.

“This place is amazing.” said Linda, “I’ve only seen it in books, but unspoiled back here, it really is something else. So much land, just unused and not spoiled by anything.”

“We hope to keep it that way”, said Jenny, “Maybe we can stop some of the mistakes of the future being made, through education- who really knows? But that’s what we are trying to do here- to make a better future. You can all have a big part in that.”

“I briefly met some of your medical team”, said Sue, “Will I be working with them?”

“That’s the plan”, said Jenny. “What you need to know about them, is that they did not come here like you did. They are what we call ‘draftees’, while you are ‘contractors’. A couple of us pulled them out of an imminent death situation. There is a price for that, which is ten years service. Most of the old timers started the same way, as did the servants back at Transit. Some aren’t too happy about that situation initially, but have decided not to go back to their burning building, prison cell or battlefield, whence they came. They don’t know about the retro-aging effect yet- we are waiting for them to figure it out. Generally, we don’t mention the effect until people have had a chance to start forming their own suspicions, but you were a special case, with your husbands coming back younger. We did a bit of cosmetic work before sending them back, by the way- we had to put a few years back on, superficially, at least.”

“What would you have done, if we had refused to come down?” asked Debbie.

“Left you back there”, said Jenny, “Nobody would believe you if you had told them of our offer, in any case- it’s just too crazy a story.” And you just keep believing that, Jenny thought to herself.

Quickly packing up, they set off again heading northwest. This was a very sparsely populated piece of country, with only a few small hamlets along the way. Even out this far, evidence could be seen of modern works, in the form of ditches, ploughed fields and ponds, all obviously dug by machine. Sue pointed out a circle of standing stones on a nearby hillock. Jenny laughed “If you get close, you will see the track marks from a digger up there. - making those is a bit of a hobby here.”

“Try to remember these turnaround areas”, Jenny said, “If a heavy vehicle is using the road, you have to get out of the way and these are a good place to wait for him to pass- beats pulling off the road and getting bogged. We give way to cart traffic, too- keeps the locals happy.” After a time, Jenny pulled off the main road, to follow a rough track cross-country track. “Just going to check on a prospecting team”, she explained.

After a couple of k’s, they spotted a Gator and a Humvee. “They are looking for Bluejohn, a useful mineral found in these parts”, Jenny explained. The prospecting team had uncovered another deposit and was just updating their survey map.

“Should be able to open-cast this one”, said Steve, “That should keep us going until the locals can take over the mining.”

“The 322 is free in a week or so, I think”, said Jenny, “One of the locals can work the dumper.”

“That should have the Bluejohn out in plenty of time for the first smelting and the glassworks”, said Steve, “The potters won’t say no to a new glaze colour, either.”

“Where are you headed now?” asked Jenny.

“Over to Ashford”, said Steve, “We have to drill a couple of anchor holes there- part of the new mill- you want to tag along?”

“OK”, said Jenny, explaining to the other three that where possible, we would travel in convoy.
“No AA out here on the moors.”

On arriving at Ashford, they were greeted by a group of workers-ours and locals, who were building a water-powered mill. Unlike the Rowsley mill, this one was constructed of all local materials and was well on the way to completion. They needed a heavy drill to sink holes into the bedrock, in order to anchor the machinery. With plenty of willing hands, the generator and equipment was soon set up and the noisy task of drilling into the limestone was underway.

“Interesting blend of old and new”, said Jenny, “The use of notched and fitted beams with modern, but locally produced brackets, bolts and more nails than you would normally see here. A lot of the fitting has been with power tools and augers too- must speed up work a bit. To say nothing of machine-milled wood”

“It would have taken me all year to get thus far- and a year before, just to shape this much timber”, said the local carpenter, who sported a belt full of the new locally made tools.

The stone proved easy work and the convoy was soon on the move again, this time towards Bakewell. This was an almost compulsory stop for our crews on the road, to visit the bakery JD had set up.

“I will be damned.” said Sue, “In my dreams, I never imagined getting a bagel in a 9th century bakery.”

“The croissants are bloody good too.” said Linda.

“The classic doughnut for me”, said Jenny, “See- we are bringing civilization here. - shame they can’t grow coffee.”

Time to head back- I hear their will be a few drinks on tonight and I could use a siesta.

Derbyshire, England **9th March, 847 AD**

Day 381 **0700 Orders group**

“Now that our plumber is back from his holiday, we can get those new septic tanks hooked up and the old ones pumped out”, I said, “The 322 can dig a pit for the sludge, before it heads east- just put it somewhere the stock won’t wander in. Anyone else stuck for labour?”

There being no extra workers needed, I continued, “In two days time we start doing assessments on the local workers, prior to starting the literacy program, so start arranging their schedules so

that half of them can be released for classes, much as we did through winter. If we run short of hands, we will soon get more volunteers in to work here.”

“I have another air patrol going up today, as we have had a bit of activity reported to the north and I want it checked out. We aren’t expecting an invasion on the scale of last year’s but there will be hostiles arriving soon, probably trying to link up with last years lot.”

“Lastly, Sue and Debbie will be attached to the medical team. Sue will be working with them and Debbie needs to get out, meet the locals and get us a decent assessment of the state of their livestock.”

I was planning to spend the day in the foundry, apparently they have some new toy to show off- this should be interesting- I haven’t been down there for a month now...

“The trickiest part was that cast-iron pipe”, said Mike, “but we can make it in metre-long lengths now.” The steam engine chugged away, turning the water pump which filled the workshop cistern.

“Everything was locally produced?” I asked.

“The lot, down to the lubricants- and all done by the locals too”, said Mike.

“Might be time we built a railway”, I said.

“Now you are talking.”

“Anything else down here I should know about?” I asked.

“Just this”, said Mike, unlocking a drawer. ‘This’ was a replica cap & ball revolver.

“Edmund’s work?” I asked- that boy was a real self-starter.

“Who else?” said Mike, “He copied it from a book, with a bit of help from us on the finer points of milling- I don’t know if you know it, but he reads quite well.”

“I know most of them can read a bit, but not how much- I’m having them assessed, then Linda can get on with tutoring the top twenty or so”, I said. “It’s time now to start doing it properly.”

“Ever thought about extending this mission?” Mike quietly asked, “I don’t want to go back.”

“Not even with six million waiting for you?” I asked.

“I have everything here I have ever wanted”, he said, “Everything and more.”

“We are keeping the mission open; it’s just this active phase that is scheduled to end- we were planning to visit every few years, to do a little steering. If you kept jumping back to visit up-time, you could stay here for a very long time indeed. I’m sure you won’t be the only one staying,

either”, I answered. “So welcome to the regulars- you are no longer a contractor. We need to have a sit-down meeting with Jenny and she will explain some of the advantages of joining our merry band. If you can keep all this to yourself for a while, that would be good. We prefer people to ask us to join, without knowing all the perks.”

“Tonight OK?” he asked, “After I get the boiler set for the night?”

“About 2030, then- I had better give her a heads-up.”

This is shaping up to being an interesting day- time to go and check in on the recon flight.

John played back the recording. “Confirm we have four groups of six to eight horsemen. Looks like they are scouting- they are off the known trails and went to cover as soon as we went lower. Grids as follows....”

“Someone’s checking us out- those locations are all on or about our boundaries”, I said.

“Time to get some men on the ground and check them out”, said John, “A good job for some of our locals”

“I agree”, I said, “I would like to know where they report to. I need to go have a talk to the players in Chesterfield- I hear the goods they have been shipping north may be upsetting someone north of Sheffield and they may know who.”

“That had better be tomorrow. All I have available for escorts are the rapid reaction crew.”

“Can’t use them with that bird in the air needing a standby rescue crew- it can wait until tomorrow.”

“Now you know why I carry the change of clothes- and the plastic bags”, said Debbie, slipping into a new pair of overalls.

“And those of us sharing your vehicle thank you.” laughed Sue.

“That made his day.” said Shane, nodding in the direction of the farmer. He had twin calves and a live cow, all doing well, a big change in fortune to what looked imminent two hours ago.

“Obstetrics seems to be the big business here.” said Sarah.

“Makes a nice change for them not worrying about how they are going to feed the babies, I must say”, said Shane, “I’m sort of glad they brought us here- these people have a real future and I did want to make a difference...”

Alfred watched as the masons finished off the pointing of the hearth flagstones. His new house would be ready for cladding soon. The stonework was now completed and the slate roof on. The cast iron stove would be delivered later that week and the glass for the windows was being fitted to the frames, over in the joiner’s shop. It had cost dearly, but he was a very rich man now, with

the wealth of trade going through his village and his share of his eldest son's business ventures. Life looked good.

As the sun set, hand generators were cranked and crystal sets delicately tuned into the now familiar strains of Mozart that preceded the evening's news and announcements.

"This will be easier than I thought", said Linda. "Your people have done a great job over the last year to get them to the level of literacy that they have. The only weakness is in their writing. Basic arithmetic is good and the limited testing I could do gives a high median IQ. They are averaging at about the reading level of a bright nine or ten year-old, back home and that is high praise indeed."

"You will hardly ever get a more motivated bunch of students- they don't want to go home and tend the pigs." laughed Jenny.

"How long for you to work up a program and start teaching?" I asked.

"A week or two to develop a full plan, but I can start teaching right now", said Linda.

"You have an open checkbook on any materials you need", said Jenny, "Subject to scrutiny on reading material- we are doing controlled advancement here and something that may look innocuous to you could be potentially harmful"

"War stories and suchlike?" asked Linda.

"Stuff like that, yes", said Jenny.

"Welcome aboard, Mike." said Jenny, "I was hoping we would get you on the regular team. Wayne probably told you there were a few perks and that we keep them to ourselves?"

"That's right."

"Well, there are a couple that are no big secret- you get to draw on our accounts for damn near anything you could want, from most time periods in the past or future, too. You can get a house built down here and don't have to keep living in a container, as you are staying on as caretaker. You also get transport anywhere, anytime, provided it doesn't clash with our operations", Jenny said.

"Now the one we keep under wraps is that we have an arrangement with friends up in the 52nd century. In return for services on our part, which you will become familiar with, they provide us with advanced medical treatment. You won't get sick again and can have your strength, endurance and speed enhanced, if you wish. You understand that we want people to join us without knowing this?"

"Yeah, I can see that you would want to keep that under wraps."

“If you wish this to happen, you go up-time on your next rotation to Transit, in two weeks time. There is no going back after that.”

“I understand.”

Derbyshire, England
10th March, 847 AD

Day 383

“So the plan is we plant locals in the outlying villages to listen for news”, I said.

“What’s their cover?” asked Jenny.

“Buyers looking for anything of use to us- something that could use doing, anyway”, I answered, “While they are up north, we can visit Chesterfield and Dronfield and have a quiet word to some of the players.”

“Usual security?” said Steve.

“For us, yes- Have our locals carry pistols and a radio, but concealed- make that real clear to them- no grandstanding. Keep a reaction unit about 6-7 k’s back from our spies, just in case things go wrong.” I said, “You can take that command vehicle along- it’s got a better radio and it’s a bit more comfortable to camp out in.”

“Jenny, you brief them and the reaction team- this sort of stuff is your forte, Steve- form up a team, we are off to Chesterfield and may be away for a couple of nights, depending on how talkative they are.”, I ordered.

“Who are we planning to visit first?” asked Steve.

“I think our friend, the Carter, is the one to start with”, I said.

Chesterfield

The transport operation had expanded a bit from the last time we were there. It looked like the main business they were in now was making our new pattern of wagons. A wheelwright and a blacksmith have moved to adjoining premises and new stables were being built.

“Most of my business has been carrying goods between here and Sheffield, via Dronfield- and building wagons”, said Carter, “I used to travel to most of the surrounding shires, but there is more profit on that run, now that you have removed the local bandits, than there is in sending goods southward and having to hire guards. I imagine that some of the goods I carry to Sheffield find their way to Manchester, Leeds and Nottingham and have come to the attention of the masters there.”

“Interesting”, I said, “I suppose someone who could only carry a cargo a fourth part of yours, would only profit from a cargo of some value, such as our new goods?”

“That would be the only way to offset the cost of guards and the wear on the carts”, he said, “Plus goods lost when the hired guards flee without a fight. If only I had men like yours...”

“So, if our goods have traveled further afield, who would be most affected by us producing superior products?” I asked.

“That would be the Bishop of Leeds”, said Carter, lowering his voice, “He has business interests everywhere. The old gods never asked so much- an offering at festival and the odd good word spoken of them, but this one god- he wants a tenth of all you have and more, so the traveler’s say.”

“We bring new ways”, I said, “But not the ways of these priests. Speaking of bringing new things, we have a new wagon, made for rougher roads...”

That’s one piece of the puzzle.

Haddon Hold

Jenny looked them over. “Good, nothing that makes you appear out of place, trouble is- you will smell of soap, even if you don’t notice it. But a night or two of sleeping rough will sort that out. Remember- don’t let anyone see your radios and keep those pistols out of sight, unless you really need to use them. If anybody asks, you have been sent by Alfred, to find out who has stock for sale and how much, as he intends to sell it to us. Call us when you can, without being seen.”

“I will drop them well short of the area”, said John, grinning, “Should give them time to pick up a bit of mud and sweat a bit”

“Sweat- that’s the trick.” said Jenny, “Chuck them in the sauna for a good sweat before they head out and don’t let them rinse off.”

After a bit of visiting about town, we got much the same story. The interest in us was probably from the north and that they doubted they would try any direct action. The stories spread from Sheffield had traveled far and wide.

Dronfield was interesting- we had just pushed the road through to there recently, improving an already reasonable track, and had not had any real dealings with the locals, although they knew all about us. We purchased a few bits and pieces, as we usually did, so we could check the quality of materials and work. While they were their usual wary selves, they were not hostile and appeared eager to get into the ever-increasing trade circuit. If anything, they seemed relieved to find that we were not all three metres high and covered in spiky armour.- seemed our reputation up north had also preceded us. They have some good timber up here and high-quality iron ore, so we have something to trade.

Stopping at Stoney Ridge, John dropped the rear hatch. “So long- time to pick up some dust from the road.” he said. “We will be camping up in those trees over there and listening for you- good hunting.”

As the three trudged of towards their respective destinations, the M577 pulled off the road and headed for the trees to make camp.

“Copy- out”, said Jenny, as the teams radioed in their positions. Wayne was to spend the night in Dronfield, being hosted by the locals, John was in position and had the radio post set up and the rest were starting to head back from their respective day’s work.

Edmund had the good fortune to have kin in the village he had been assigned to check- Algor his father, came from a large family, most of the men taking up blacksmithing, under the tutelage of their father, Edmund’s dead grandfather. As a journeyman, it was expected that he would travel about, so he needed no story to explain his presence. Greeting his cousins at the family forge, the talk soon turned to working metal and shortly they decided to continue over ale at the house. He had much to tell them and more to show them tomorrow.

Having bribed the innkeeper into agreement, Steve carried in the keg he had stowed in the back of his Humvee. "This should get them talking", he said.

"Come try the beer from Bakewell", I said. This was a treat the locals would not choose to miss out on- free beer was as popular as it was in our time.

Alfred got to the Inn just before dark. In the gloom inside, he noticed four men, dressed in the garb of riders. Time to start listening, he thought to himself. On asking the innkeeper, he found that the common room was taken by the riders, but he could stay in the barn, which was dry and would be warm enough. And he would be able to radio in.

Derbyshire, England
11th March, 847 AD

Day 385

“We were wondering about these newcomers- other strangers from the north have passed this way last week asking questions about them.” said Edmund’s uncle. “All we have seen of them is when they built the road nearby, but those who have dealt with them speak well of the newcomers. What can you tell us of them? You live near their castle.”

“They come from over the seas”, said Edmund, “And arrived one morning and built a castle of iron- its wall was built in a day. They kept to themselves for a time, while they built their castle- the first time we met them was when a band of sixty Norsemen came to sack Rowsley. Five of them rode out and slaughtered the sixty, as you or I might kill rats in the grain.”

“So the stories of magical bows of thunder are true?” one of his cousins asked.

“Their weapons are powerful, but there is no real magic in them- A simple one could be made on your forge here, if you knew the secrets” said Edmund.

“Do you know these secrets? His uncle asked.

“They have taught me some of their ways with working iron and making fine steel”, Edmund replied, “If you were to visit us at our new forge, you could learn many new ways. They are free with their lesser secrets, although there is much they do not show us. Mostly they teach us how to make new tools and better metals. All in our village prosper from trade with them.”

“This is what we were asked- what are they trading and what are there terms, plus questions about their numbers, wealth and gods”, his cousin confirmed.

“They are fair to trade with, hold to their word and always give full measure and more. Their wealth is beyond belief- that they can make walls of iron and gods, they have never mentioned.” said Edmund, “No-one really knows their true number, as they come and go, but it would be about 30 or 40.”

“40- And these are the same that crushed an army at Sheffield?” his uncle asked, sounding skeptical.

“Ten rode against the horde- I went with them, as a servant and they taught me some of their warrior ways.” said Edmund quietly, “Have you seen the flying beast around here?”

Their faces dropped as he mentioned the dragon. They had seen it, alright.

“That fights with them”, Edmund continued. “I watched it drop fire on the Northmen and its rider tells them all it sees from on high.”

“What does this... beast eat”, asked one of his cousins, cautiously.

“I have never seen them eat anything, but they drink a kind of oil”, Edmund said.

“I think you know more of these people that you have said”, said his uncle.

“I serve them, yes”, he said, “They are good friends to all of us in Rowsley and around. They have built halls, mills and forges and increased our fields fourfold.”

“What proof do you have to offer us of all this?” asked his uncle, “Much of what you say is hard to believe, even hearing it from kin.”

“I have this”, said Edmund, taking his revolver from inside his tunic...

“Enough of this gloom”, said Steve, and went out to the Humvee. Taking a wooden box, he returned to the inn. In a minute he had the Coleman kerosene lantern going, and for the first time, the inn was illuminated by night, to the wonder of all the local patrons. It’s always the small things that impress them the most.

The riders, in an attempt to be subtle, were buying rounds of ale, prior to asking questions. Alfred had been told that they would probably do that, but in any case, was now used to the much more potent Bakewell brew- this beer was rather feeble stuff compared to that.

They were saying that they were traders looking for goods and markets in this area, for their master, a man of importance in Leeds and asked if anyone could point them towards any likely customers.

“There are newcomers about twelve miles south that seek metals, minerals and ores of all kinds”, Alfred said.

“You know of them?” asked the man who had been doing most of the talking, obviously their leader.

“My master trades cattle and wheat for finely-crafted tools with them.” Alfred said- selectively telling the truth.

The leader of the riders waved for more drink to be served. “What more can you tell us of them- I’ll make it worth your while”, he said, shaking his purse.

The only subject’s off-limits were those regarding the King and the pact with him. As Jenny had told them, any total strangers would probably not believe them, anyway. Remembering his first experiences, Alfred was inclined to believe that to be true.

Alfred entertained them all for several hours with tales of the happenings in his village and stories of the newcomer’s machinery. The locals of the inn were able to back him up on some of these stories, as they have seen the odd vehicle passing by or road-making.

“Does the dragon that flies about these parts hail to the newcomers?” asked the innkeeper.

“I hear it does”, answered Alfred cautiously.

“Dragon.” snorted the leader of the band, “Now you jape with us.”

“Did you not hear of the dragon that burnt the attackers of Sheffield?” asked the innkeeper.

“I did, old uncle, but I do not believe everything I hear.” the leader roared with laughter and drink- I go to sleep now, it seems I will get no more sense from you tonight.”

Alfred retired to the barn. After all had gone quiet, he switched on his radio...

Bob had less luck. The group of horsemen shot past him without as much as a backwards glance. Looking at the state of their mounts, they had been riding hard for some time, as if pursued by the very devil. Or perhaps a dragon, Bob thought to himself with a chuckle. Oh well, might as well keep going and spend a comfortable night at the next inn, a mile or so up the road. First, he moved into a thicket and unpacked his radio, to report the sighting and his intentions...

“They ran like rabbits”, said Eric, with a grin. “Glided in from behind at idling, then went to full power at about 100 metres altitude and scattered them.”

“So now they believe in the dragon”, said Jenny. “Of course, they will never believe the locals when they say it is harmless. We can’t have them getting cocky.”

John put down the headset. “We pick up Alfred from the village tomorrow, and then meet up with the other two on the road. Sounds like everything went off OK- wake me in two hours- I’m off to get some kip.”

By the muted red glow of a small torch, Alfred found the groups baggage hanging in the barn and slipped the small packet into a saddlebag. He returned to his bed in the straw and stowed the torch in the lining of his pack. He knew he would be well rewarded for this.

Derbyshire, England
12th March, 847 AD

Day 386

“I’ve already interviewed the other teams already- let’s here what you have”, said Jenny.

“Our Carter and everyone else I talked to in Chesterfield and Dronfield, seems to think the most likely person is the Bishop of Yorkshire. He is behind most of the big business in this shire, and is the major landowner”, I said.

“Their opinions of him?” Jenny asked.

“I got the impression they were very wary of him, if not scared”, I continued, “Not a man to cross, apparently- the church has a lot more push up there than it does in backwaters like this.”

“That confirms everything else I have heard”, said Jenny, “Alfred got the best info on our spies- the group he checked out had one doing all the talking, the others were just his minders. He was sure this character wasn’t a trader- he never talked prices or quantities, despite being given some promising trading leads. Everyone else agreed they were much more interested in us.”

“I suppose the next move is for us to investigate them”, I said.

“I thought you might go north undercover with Carter & company, as hired guards. He can take that shipment of hardware that is taking up space in the forge”, suggested Jenny. “Meanwhile, Alfred slipped a pinger into their saddlebags, so we can track them home.”

“He shall be well rewarded for that.” I said, “He can come along undercover with us.”

Steve and Alfred drove over to Chesterfield to set up the trip with Carter, while we set up the radio sked and details for the trip. The microlight would be doing the radio tracking of the riders- the beacon being programmed to send only three times a day for five minutes on the hour at 1000, 1200 and 1400hrs. This was to stretch out battery life in the sealed unit. The aircraft were already set up with the DF antennae, as they used our Hilltop radio station for navigation.

In addition to getting useful information, the three locals had also made some good contacts for future trading- we had spent most of our time in the south and had little contact with the inhabitants of the northern end of our area. Plan was to start expanding in the spring, so we will start with Edmund’s relatives. We were planning to erect a series of strongholds in that area. An upturned 12 metre container with a pillbox on top would give a marksman a good secure position to spot and harass any hostiles from. We had the plans sketched up to convert an empty container into a secure tower- the sort of thing our fitters could put together in half a day and construction could erect and secure in about the same time. Time to get that project underway, now that we have the militia to man them.

“No doubt about it”, said Sue, “Two blue lines means that you are going to have a baby.”

“But I was told that would never happen- I was married five years and nothing.” said Shirl, “I’m barren.”

Sue shock her head and chuckled “Half the time it is the man, not the women- it was your husband.”

“So my new man and I can have a family.”

“In about 34 weeks, I believe”, said Sue. I need to talk to Jenny about this right now, she thought to herself. “Best to be sure and wait another month before telling everybody. Come back after dinner and I will make a tonic for you and baby.”

Sue punched Jenny’s direct number into the radio. “Sue here, could you please come over to medical? Five minutes? great.”

“I thought you would want to know first”, said Sue.

“I appreciate that”, said Jenny. “Between you and me, I knew that she was trying. She asked me if I knew a ‘spell’ to start a child. A bit of digging and I found out why she wanted a child, so I decided that she could stop the Depo. The father is staying here with her- he decided to stay on here, as anyone can should they chose. I believe a few others will be asking to stop the jabs soon.”

“That’s a relief.” said Sue, “I thought the policy was no children at all and I was wondering what went wrong with the Depo shot.”

“It was, for the first year, while our position here was uncertain. If the locals had proved hostile, that policy would have stayed.” said Jenny.

“I told her to wait for a bit before announcing the news.” said Sue.

“Good work”, said Jenny, “But I will bet she is on her way to find her man now- I suppose I had better order another house kit - and go pay Jane, who has just won the Transit sweepstakes, on who would knock a local up first.”

“I will get Shane to give her an examination tomorrow”, said Sue.

“I’ll sort the bubbles.”

“All go for this time next week”, said Steve, “The old bugger hummed and ha’d a bit, but when I told him we would supply the cargo and cut him in for half the profit on that, he was in. We are headed to Leeds carrying nails, wire and agricultural tools, but can swing for Manchester if the track heading that that way is open.”

“We will do both cities, next time we go to the one that we miss this time. Here is our covert equipment schedule.”

2x UHF radio sets, each w. spare battery
1x Solar battery charger
3x personal sidearms

1x silenced .22 pistol
2x M4 carbines
1x .338 Whisper
4x Fragmentation grenades
2x WP grenades
1x night vision goggles

“Most of this will be crated and top-stowed on the cargo. We carry the usual survival kits- everything else is native”, I said.

“Me poor feet.” Steve complained.

“We stop showering and shaving, too”, I added, but you can have a hot one tomorrow, just no soap. I added.

“And you can move into your old bunkhouse tomorrow”, said Jenny, with a chuckle.

“OK, we go dirty with three days to go, just quit shaving now and using soap”, I said.

“Before you go”, Jenny said, “I have a bit of news...”

Derbyshire, England
13th March, 847 AD

Day 388

After a slight change of plans, we decided to make a bit more time and take Alfred back to Transit for a bit of extra training, as well as do a bit more ourselves. I can put off moving into other quarters now. We will give up soap at Transit. Four weeks time should do to bring Alfred up to speed on automatic pistol and M4 carbine and since we have to train him up, we have decided to bring along a few of the more promising lads as well. Should be an experience for them.

Day 389

After keeping our locals up all night, then putting sedatives in their food and having the heat up in the Landcruiser, they were all asleep as we drove through the gate. Best way to do a first jump-unawares. We arrived at Transit at about the same local time and stopped at the container quarters. "Everyone out", I shouted, "And grab a bunk", pointing them towards the waiting cabins. Just like home for them. We have something a bit more comfortable planned, so it was back in the wagon and up to what was now called 'The Country Club'.

The next day we headed down to the old mess hall, where our five locals had gathered for breakfast, the Transit staff having been on the job since first light. All of them had rotated through Haddon, so everyone knew each other. As usual, first order of the day would be equipment issues and a quick tour of Transit One. As there were only five to train, we could get through that quickly and move on to some weapons training. Our intention was to introduce a few new weapons, such as 1911 pistols and M1 carbines. Over the winter, we had given them a bit of training in our weapons, although most was with their .303's and Webley revolvers. That technology would be sustainable, come the end of the project. M16's would be pushing it. We would do a bit of work with flares and grenades also.

They would spend most of the next month using the range facilities here, which were way in advance of the Haddon practice ranges. Here they had pop-up targets, jungle lanes, urban assault ranges, night firing- the whole nine yards. Also, we had weapons set up for blank firing and laser simulators, so we could get quite realistic there.

All of them could drive, although I wouldn't let them loose on the 21st century roads- even in small-town New Zealand, so we gave them the keys to my old utility and a couple of Gators, for them to get about in. Meals were going to be basic, with self-serve breakfast, cut lunch and a hot-box dinner brought down from the club.

They were over the moon at getting an issue of new clothes and gear, just the same as ours- this was a big status upgrade, in their eyes. With them kitted out and the extra gear stowed, it was time to issue firearms and get some rounds down the range. Four weeks of one-on-one firearms training here and they should be more than ready. When they weren't doing that, they would continue with lessons on literacy, arithmetic, engineering, leadership, medicine and a great many other subjects, as they had been getting over the last year.

After dinner and a couple of good bottles of Pinot Noir, Steve asked about getting on the permanent crew.

“I wouldn’t mind doing the whole mission down time”, he said, “But I don’t really want to stay on for good, like Mike. It would be good to visit, from time to time, mind- check in on the place.”

“I thought you might have got a taste for it, volunteering to go on all those ‘snatch and grab’ jobs.” I said.

“That was the first time I had had any real excitement in years.”, he said, “at first it was the money, then it was being part of something where you looked forward to waking up in the morning and getting stuck into the job.”

“Much the same with us, really”, I answered, “At first we kicked back and lived like millionaires- which we were. After a bit, that got dull and we went off exploring some of the more interesting periods in history, gathering up a few people along the way. We would split up and meet at pre-arranged places and times, did a bit of investing and speculating, ‘invented’ a few things, trained and studied subjects that interested us. It was easier to fake identities twenty, thirty years ago.”

“Is that how Jenny built up that supply network?” asked Steve.

“Amongst other things- when she starts teaching the locals intelligence, sit in on her lectures- she was a real, genuine spook, along with Sonja”, I said, “You’ve seen them shoot, when they taught you pistol.”

“I wondered where they learned to shoot like that.”

“Langley, for Jen and Sonja was old school OSS, to begin with. They hired a couple of instructors to come here and teach the rest of us, on contract. No point in paying for second best.”

“So Sonja isn’t from our time? You wouldn’t know it, to talk to her”

“You keep forgetting that we are a hell of a lot older than you perceive us. Takes a while to get your head around the idea, that just because we were the same age, twenty years back, we aren’t now. Jenny found Sonja back in her favorite time period, but you should ask one of them about that. Quite a story”

“The more I hear, the more I want a part of it.”

“Here’s the package...”

“Sounds good to me.” said Steve, after I had finished explaining the details, “Count me in.”

“This calls for another bottle”, I said, pushing the button to summon the butler. The 1988 Coleraine, I think.

Looks like we will be having a late start tomorrow.

Derbyshire, England
19th March, 847 AD

Day 395

After four weeks at Transit, we returned to the 9th century six days after we left. After a bit of deliberation, we decided to just tell our locals a version of the truth that they had been to a place where time ran at a different speed. They had enough to take on without the intricacies of time-travel. To that extent, we went through the gate with them wide awake, with the precaution of giving a dose of maxolon first- I like my upholstery the colour it is.

The three of us that were off escorting the wagons tomorrow had forgone showering for the last three days, to get into character, so we decided to stay at Hilltop and get ready for an early start tomorrow.

Jenny was waiting to brief us on developments. “We followed the track to York, where it has stayed static for the last day, so that is your destination. We will keep you posted on any developments. Your stores went over in crates last night and the rifles are crated and in the site office.”

“All set then”, I said, “What’s the weather looking like?”

“Barometer’s steady, should be settled for the next two days”, Jenny answered, “By the way- how did the training go?”

“They would be almost as good as anybody here now- I think we might repeat that a couple of times a year- stretch a bit of time, even get those contractors of yours down for some advanced stuff”, I replied.

“I wouldn’t mind getting in on some of the advanced training, too”, said Steve.

“Of course”, said Jenny, “I like all our regulars to get the very best training.”

“How did you know I had signed on.” exclaimed Steve.

“I always knew you would”, replied Jenny, “You enjoyed the ‘snatch & grab ops’ too much. I should know the look in an adventurer’s eye by now.”

Alfred returned from stowing his gear, which was to be sent down to Haddon Hold, to await his return. “How did the training go?” Jenny asked.

“Very well, thank you, I should like to learn more, if that is agreeable.” said Alfred.

“We have plenty more planned for you.”, Jenny laughed, “Try and get a couple of hours sleep, before you head out at 0600- you will be meeting up with the wagons a couple of miles north of Chesterfield.”

We were dropped off out of town, as planned. Too many people know us there and we didn’t want word to travel ahead of a slow-moving wagon. Taking shelter in a small clump of trees near the road, we ate a cold breakfast of bacon and egg sandwiches while we waited for the wagons. The carters must have been up well before dawn, as we didn’t have to wait too long for them to

appear. After a short pause to load our heavier weapons and a few bags, we started out on the first leg of the trip, which was Chesterfield to Dronfield.

Before we built the road, this trip would have been a full day, but could be now done in a couple of hours. James the Carter, the senior of this family business, used the trip to tell me much about the business of carrying goods in this area. He had done more business over the winter than he would usually do in a good year, thanks to the improved state of the main roads. Also with the demise of the local bandits, there was not the need to hire a large band of guards, thus the cost of carriage had dropped and there was more work as a consequence. Cargoes that were previously barely worth moving, such as slate, stone and grain were now profitable and the much larger wagons were more than paying for themselves. I told him of some of our plans, such as larger, stronger horses, more roads and patrols to keep them safe. I also told him a bit about some of the new things that would come on-line in the next year or two- more milled flour, steel and iron goods, building materials and so on.

After a couple of hours without any incidents more dramatic than a shower of rain, we neared Dronfield. Here we could stop to off-load some of our cargo to merchants here. The lighter and more profitable items would go further north, where we would have to travel the local excuses for roads. James planned to sell the hardware that we had supplied and reinvest some of the profits in wool on our return. Not surprising, as he had invested in our spinning wheels and looms last year. He also planned to do some short-haul on our return, to keep the wagons working, even though we wouldn't be able to haul loads like on our formed roads. We were told that the cost in hired guards would have taken most the profits from this run, previously. The whole time he kept asked when new roads might be built.

We kept a low profile in Dronfield, having been there recently. Choosing to stay with the wagons, as would be expected of us, got around us bumping into anyone that we had previously met. Tomorrow, we would head on to Sheffield, there being a partially completed road to within a couple of km of this city. We had been seen there, but one of the things about wearing a uniform, is that most people have difficulty recognising someone when they are out of it.

The morning sked gave us news of the weather (worsening) and that the locator beacon was still in Leeds. We set out on a grey dawn, traveling at a fast walk in our much lightened wagons. It was another fairly uneventful day's travel. As James pointed out, after a good public execution, thieving always went down, but would be back as new opportunists moved into the area. As we got within five or six k's of the city, we started to see an increase in farms and huts and passed the odd traveler on the road. Closer to the city, a band of riders approached us, but James recognised them as the local Reeve and his men. They were a sort of law in these parts, the Reeve being a policeman, magistrate and occasionally, executioner. After exchanging greetings, a bit of news and a few coppers, we continued on our way. The carters were more relaxed now that were in a safer area. We would be stopping for the night in Sheffield and I planned to send Alfred out to do a little investigating. We would have to stay in character and remain with the wagons, but these would be secured in the yard of a large inn and no doubt we would get the opportunity to talk to some of the locals.

We really need to make a sprung seat for these wagons.

Sheffield, England
20th March, 847 AD

Day 396

Last night a storm front moved in and it looks like we will be spending a couple of nights here. We have picked up a lot of useful information already and we have changed the plans accordingly. The spies from Leeds, we found- had passed through, heading for home at speed- much to the amusement of the locals here.

We have been advised not to take our wagons much further north, as the powers that be have decided that anything new is ours, thus- 'the devils work'. A lot of our trade and locally made goods had found themselves heading further north, as they were on-sold for a profit. This has created a few problems, as our tools caused the local products to decrease in value. This has upset those who collect taxes and run the marketplaces- namely the Bishop and his cronies.

That's what we wanted to know.

We would have no problem getting a good price for our goods here; we had been approached by several of the wealthier merchants who wanted to buy all we had and much more. James, ever the trader, had also found a lucrative sideline charging money for smiths, wagonwrights, wheelwrights, leatherworkers and carpenters to inspect our wagons and tack. No doubt there would be many copies of Conestoga wagons carrying goods about, by this time next year.

Word travels fast in a town always hungry for news. Once word got out that James was here from Chesterfield with cargo, he and his men had a steady stream of visitors to the inn, all with questions. They wanted to know about us.

We had progressed from being strangers, having been seen to have settled in the area now. We are known as 'The Green Men' on account of our wearing predominantly camouflage clothing and probably green camouflage paint on face & hands, more so in the early days. Then there is our habit of distributing new seed plus planting crops and trees everywhere- the locals have begun to associate us with the old gods. An unexpected twist- although it wasn't entirely unexpected that we would be thought to have some kind of magical powers. Any large difference in technology equates to magic, for those at the lower end of the scale.

We are getting more questions than answers here, but are getting useful snippets of information, such as news that mercenaries are being recruited further north and there is a good market for weapons there. Most of the questions are about work prospects with the 'Green Men'. Word is getting about that this is the place to go, to get rich quick. Trouble is- this rumour is also attracting the wrong type of person- the drifters, deadbeats and thugs, as much as the types we want. We could use a local recruiter here to sort the wheat from the chaff. I will have a quiet word with a couple of the smiths and tradesmen that came down to learn last winter about this. It looks like the weather will keep us here for a few more days.

As the sun went down, something interesting happened at the inn. One of our dynamo-powered radios was produced and the inn fell quiet as everyone listened intently to the radio program. As always, the program started with a piece of classical music- a bit of Vivaldi today. After the weather forecast (bad), there was a talk on what trades were needed at the Haddon workshops and who might find work there. Good timing that, as it backed up what we had been telling the locals. This was followed by a list of commodities that Haddon was buying and more on what we were selling. More music followed and then there was a report on the progress of the local roads.

Villages and towns outside out 12 mile area, wanting to be connected to the roading network, were asked to contact us. The show ended and the radio was carefully stored away by the innkeeper. As the inn returned to it's more usual activities, talk was that a road into Sheffield would be good for trade and that despite what the people further north might think, the Green Men had done nothing but good for Sheffield...

Day 397

With our cargo safely in the hands of its new owners, we were free to explore the town while we waited for the storm to pass. We decided to try inns further afield for news, but as strangers, we were more often asked for news than we received it. At the fourth inn, our luck changed.

An itinerant storyteller was plying his trade for food, fire and drink. Alfred recognised him, as he was a regular traveler in these parts. He was currently recounting the story of the capture and execution of a band of thieves, which he had witnessed in Bakewell last year. Sounded like we were giving him plenty of good material.

Passing the innkeeper a few coppers, with the instruction to keep this storyteller supplied with drink, we sat and listened as he brought the story to its bloody and somewhat embellished conclusion. With a discreet wave of a silver piece, I caught his attention and gestured for him to join us. Sitting himself at our table, he spoke in a voice intended for our ears only. "I see I am in the company of one of the Bakewell thief-takers", he said, looking at Alfred.

Sliding a couple of silver pieces across, I said "I believe we have much to talk about..."

Odo, Storyteller and Harper smiled and made the silver disappear. "That should buy a great deal of talk", he quietly replied, then raising his voice said. "Let the drink flow- I have song and more tales to tell."

Taking the hint, Steve ordered drink for the house, to the delight of the locals who had just figured out that they would now be entertained at the traveler's expense. As this was being brought out, I took advantage of the distraction to tell Odo that we would leave as soon as the weather cleared and that he should accompany our wagons south. Raising my voice, for the room to hear, I asked "What tale can you tell us of the great battle that was fought here, last year?" Going by the reaction of the crowd, this tale was a favorite of theirs and they would not mind it being retold yet again. Especially while the beer flowed freely...

After several hours of carousing, we were able to slip away back to our inn. Some form of lighting would be useful here- no wonder people don't go far at night, especially in this foul weather. Tomorrow we would do the rounds of the tradesmen that had visited us last winter and see how they were getting on. The weather forecast had this continuing for another two days.

The next morning we were woken by the sound of servants going about their morning tasks. "Don't know how you and the others can put away that stuff and wake up in such good shape." grumbled Steve, rising sluggishly from his bed of straw.

"That comes with the body refit that you are booked for next month", I said. "They do a little genetic modification and give you a controllable metabolism, amongst other things"

"I wish you had told me that a year ago", he said, "I would have signed up straight away."

"That's exactly why we don't tell you." I said.

We called in at 0700 for news and had the weather forecast confirmed. That being done, we were on our own for the next 6 hours, until the 1300 sked. Time to get out of the wind and rain and visit some of the local tradesmen. At least the smithies would be warm.

First call was on a partnership of brothers, the smiths who were the first to come calling from Sheffield, last winter. They had a large forge about 400 metres from here, according to Carter, who seemed to know everyone worth knowing.

The smiths soon recognised us, even in our sword-for-hire outfits, having spent all winter in our smithy. All about the forge and workshop were signs of new innovations- the double acting bellows, wire drawing equipment and an area set up for their new business line- nail-making. A group of apprentices were making nails and coach screws in quantities that now make these products economically viable.

They were well on the way to becoming rich and keen to come back this winter and learn more.

As we traveled about town, we found that many had taken our advice and specialised in new products- one smith had gone wholly into producing high-quality steel for other smiths, whilst another concentrated on casting iron. Yet another just did repairs, using modern techniques and tools.

It was worth being out in the miserable weather to see the seeds of innovation take root. We were planning to find the weavers and see what they were up to, when a burst of heavy gunfire sounded near the city outskirts and a line of tracer arced across the sky.

We started to run for the inn and our radio- There was a vehicle out there- that was .50 calibre fire. This had to be a signal of some kind.

Ignoring the startled looks from the locals, we dashed through the inn, to our room out back. Alfred had had the presence of mind to recognize that the sound of gunfire was probably a signal and had unpacked the radio. He passed to me and I switched to the emergency channel.

“Jamieson- Sitrep, over.”

“577 mobile- urgent recall for self- Anders to take command. Head east to our loc. ASAP- we have a local situation. I have a local team to assist escort your cargo back. I say again... 577 mobile- urgent recall for self- Anders to take command. Head east to our loc. ASAP- we have a local situation. I have a local team to assist escort your cargo back.”

“Jamieson, wilco- out”, I said. Something big must be going down, if Jenny wants me back.

“Your show now.” I said to Steve, as I hurriedly unpacked a pouch of spare magazines for my pistol. No need to dash out unprepared.

“I’ll stay on the radio until you get back to 577”, said Steve, fitting an earpiece to the radio.

I headed off into the storm, they couldn’t be too far away, judging by the tracer we had seen. If the townspeople had come out to investigate the gunfire, they had returned to the relative dry of their homes by now and I made good time leaving the city. My guess was that they would be in the area where we launched the attack from, last year.

Sure enough, as I trotted towards the forest, the unmistakable sounds over a tracked vehicle could be heard over the wind and rain, as the 577 command vehicle headed towards me. It stopped a couple of hundred metres off and a figure appeared at the commander’s cupola,

eyeballing me through a large pair of binoculars. After a couple of seconds, he waved out and the vehicle continued forward.

Stopping just short of me, the hatch was lowered and a section of the local militia exited. They were dressed in local clothing and were carrying carbines out of sight under their oilskin rain capes. I directed them to the inn and they headed off towards the city on foot.

As I climbed in through the rear hatch, the engine was shut down, so that we could talk easier. John passed over a towel and started to explain the situation that required my presence, as I dried my head and face off.

“We have a coup d’etat in the South”, said John. “This morning, I had a roading crew in the south and we came across Forwin, Terric and six others, on the run. We saw the pursuers off, killing twelve. Scouts report the survivors fleeing for home.”

“The king is confirmed dead?” I asked.

“Forwin saw him killed”, John said, “He didn’t care to stay around and be next- they tend to kill off all the officers, in these situations. He fought his way out, with two of his Lieutenants and aided by the Master Armourer and a few of his men. They took the best horses and figured we were their best bet to ally with.”

“Interesting”, I said. “This changes the local chain of command. Now is the time to start expanding our operation here. Let’s head home.”

I pulled a CVC helmet on and plugged into the intercom, as the engine fired up. Let’s see how quick this thing can get us back to Haddon, now that we have a road.

After a short radio conversation with Steve, the situation at Sheffield was sorted out. Steve and the militia would escort Carter back to Chesterfield, with the cargo of wool.

Back at Haddon, I met up with Forwin and the survivors of their flight from the King’s court.

Back at Haddon, I headed for the hall, to get a proper briefing. I left the others to service the vehicles, while I went to talk to Forwin and the survivors of the coup. They were in a filthy state and exhausted, having ridden as hard as they dared for the last three days and nights.

Jenny had already had a talk, so I sat them down and ordered beer all round. Forwin started to tell the tale...

“I was working in the forge. We were checking out some new castings, when I heard a commotion from the main hall. On the way there we were met by an armed band, with bloody swords drawn. Guessing what had happened; I drew my pistol and felled three, the rest taking flight. I entered the hall and found Adelvulf dead, with his cousin York holding his sword. At this point, I could guess what had happened and fled, to gather the smiths and such of Adelvulf’s kin as I could gather- that being his wish- that if all went wrong his kin should live. We took the best

of the horses- the bloodstock you provided. York's men pursued us, but with our pistols, we held them at bay while we fled here. Out of ammunition, we reached your boarders, to be aided by your men, who drove our pursuers back, with their rifles.

I now place myself and my charges into your hands."

"You are all welcome to stay and have our protection", I replied. "We held true to our pact with Adelvulf- now that he is murdered, I intend to expand our lands, that we have holdings to pass on to his surviving heirs." This was an interesting development- Adelvulf's untimely death was the first definitive sign that the history books were being rewritten. We definitely had confirmation of our divergence.

With his charges safe, Forwin, could finally relax- the first time in his week-long flight. After the formalities were completed and quarters had been assigned, Forwin finally condescended to agree to food and drink and after a few pints, told his story at length...

"Raised voices were the first sign something was wrong- not that raised voices were unusual, but they were always Adelvulf's. With his and that of York's voices, I knew something was badly amiss. I headed towards the great hall with Richard, when we meet a band of York's men headed to the forge. I'm sure they were sent to seize the smithy, which would be a major part of the prize. They had drawn swords and moved to attack us, so we drew our pistols, which, of course, did nothing, as they knew not what we held.

We fired, slaying half the band- the rest fled. We reloaded and moved towards the great hall. I entered with Richard covering the door. Adelvulf was dead and York had taken the sword that you had gifted him. Turning on me, he ordered his men to attack- I'm sure he recognised me as one of Adelvulf's men. I fired on his men, dropping two more and halting the charge. My duty was to hold to Adelvulf's charge and save his kin, so I directed Richard to secure the forge, while I fetched my king's wife and children from their quarters. York had three men posted at their door, and they were soon dispatched. Heading to the forge and adjoining stables, I heard more fire, as Richard and Terric repelled the traitors. We gathered up horses and such supplies as we would need for our flight, while we continued to hold off York's men- now very reluctant to come near us.

For the last three days and nights we have been moving, stopping briefly to rest and harrying our pursuers. The only reason we made it here, was the superiority of our horses and our pistols.

This morning, we used the last of our pistol ammunition to delay a group of outriders, who attacked at dawn.

By good luck, we meet with a roading crew, lead by Sir John, who organised a defense and routed our attackers."

We were escorted to your hold, where your Lady Jenny assured our safety. I am sure that more attackers will follow soon- Adelvulf was attacked as he was about to get too strong..."

"Jenny spoke for me", I said. "You all have sanctuary here, as our friends and family of a valued ally. I will accept your duty towards Adelvulf's family- if you will ally with me."

“Done willingly.” said Forwin.

“Good,” I said, “we have many details to discuss.”

After questioning all of the survivors, we found out that not a lot of new technology had been compromised. The best they would find were new and better methods of making chain mail and some prototype crossbows. Of course they had been working on firearms, but while they left the working prototypes behind, they took the secrets of gunpowder and priming compound.

What I really would like to know is the reason behind the coup. My best guess was that somebody saw Adulvulf as a threat, with his new alliance tipping the balance of power.

They had had a taste of modern weaponry now- it would be unlikely they would attack us directly, but they could make it difficult for the locals on our outskirts. That would make our expansion more problematic.

I need some prisoners for Jenny to question.

Haddon Hold, England
21st March, 847 AD

Day 398

We set out before dawn in convoy. Forwin, now rested up accompanied us on the raid- he had a few scores to settle. We headed south at speed, towards the route most likely taken by the fleeing soldiers. After dawn, both the aircraft would be up and scouting ahead. The plan was simple- once we had a direction, drive them towards a team that would be gated ahead. We would hang back and distract them from the ambush in front- this would be a squad armed with non-lethal ammunition and net guns, which would be supported by marksmen.

They would be well away from our road end, by now, but the land ahead had been thoroughly mapped and scouted and we could move fast in two 113's and three Humvee's.

The trail was not hard to follow- a large band of horsemen leave plenty of sign. Not too far from our first contact point we found the first bodies. Several had been wounded but had not fallen from their horses, until they bled out shortly afterwards. The villagers we encountered were quick to offer information and point us in the right direction. They well knew who looked after their best interests.

Making good time following, we were soon passed by our two aircraft as they searched ahead. After about an hour, they radioed us, with the news that the band was about 20km from our current position and looking pretty much spent, making little attempt to speed up when overflown by the microlights. They had pushed the horses too hard for too long.

One aircraft began orbiting them at altitude, while the other returned to refuel. With a good fix on the map, Jenny would no doubt be planning the ambush team's jump position.

About 45 minutes later, we were in visual contact with our target and they had certainly seen us. The ambush team was ahead and in radio contact. A few more minutes of driving them and we would have them. Closing the gap to 700 metres, we moved the 113's out to flank them and stop them breaking for the woodlands, while the Humvee teams prepared to pick up the stragglers.

About 2 km short of the ambush point, the first of the stragglers was overtaken. One of the militia took careful aim and fired his shotgun from the passenger's window, felling the rider with a bean-bag round, at about 5 metres range. Immediately the vehicle skidded to a halt, two militiamen leaping out and handcuffing the battered soldier. Leaving him immobilised, they jumped back into the vehicle, moving into position to take the next one...

"CONTACT." came over the radio, our signal to hold up the vehicles and prepare to pursue any who tried to flee. Immediately, the ground under the horsemen erupted, as Jenny's team set off a series of large concussion charges. This was the last straw for the weary and scared horses, who completely terrified, threw off all but the very best riders.

Heavily camouflaged, Jenny's squad leapt from their hidden positions, firing as they advanced. As a man was knocked down, he was pepper sprayed if he resisted and left for the militia team to bind and further subdue, if necessary.

The few, who managed to remain mounted, were soon knocked down or netted. Having swiftly subdued the remaining twenty of the original band of fifty-strong, the militia was then free to round up the horses, a valuable prize. Not too bad, we only killed three of them.

Now to let our captives know that things were going very badly for them. I could see that a few of them recognised Forwin- they would probably be the patrol's leaders and have the most useful information. What they didn't recognise was the chainsaw that Forwin carried. They would know what its use was soon enough...

Jenny had wound a few wraps of primer cord around each of the captives. That done, she wrapped a length several times around a small tree, about 30 cm thick and connected it to a detonator and wire. In a much exaggerated manner, she pointed the firing unit toward the tree and pressed the button, neatly cutting the tree in half. They were all looking very nervously towards the primer cord bonds now. They didn't know about the need for detonators or the firing circuit. They just looked from tree, to cord, to the box in Jenny's hand. We were ready to begin.

Sending my crew off to secure a perimeter, I ordered the militia, under the orders of Sergeant Ralf, to draw batons and only strike to subdue. Ralf was one of our more promising Rowsley militia recruits, a good, steady man in his mid twenties.

"Captain, I give you leave to put these to the question", I told Forwin, who stepped forward, chainsaw in hand.

"There is a matter of blood-price", said Forwin. "Three of my kin died of their treachery- I would claim three lives."

"Three lives are yours", I said, "and as many needed to give us our information."

Forwin flipped the switch to 'choke' and pulled the starter cord. The prisoners heard their first two-stroke engine burst into life...

"Turn the next one upside-down", said Jenny, "That will keep him conscious longer, while you cut."

Hell, thanks Jen. Forwin really needed that information; I thought to myself, as the militia seized the next victim and hoisted him up between the two 113's. The rest of the prisoners were now totally petrified and the field stunk of blood and spilled bowels. Forwin had yet to speak, let alone ask a question, but I had no doubts that after three particularly noisy and bloody deaths, he would get answers fairly quickly.

Leaving them to their interrogation, I set off to organise the rest of the troops. Ralf and his men were to recover the horses, after building a pyre and burning the dead. As we were well outside our borders, I would leave a 113 to trail them, as backup. The rest of my crew would gate back under cover of darkness. I really didn't see a great deal of useful information coming from our captives, just a few names and places to scout out. I was guessing that the killing of Adelvulf was a preemptive strike, by those made nervous by his new weaponry and alliance with us.

With the area cleaned up and the remaining prisoners now fleeing homeward, minus their possessions. It was time to return. We would give the militia time to clear the area, before we gated back to the Hilltop site. My guesses weren't too far off the mark, York had sprung his sneak attack on his 'ally' Adelvulf, in order to seize his new weapons and to make himself king.

Time to let York know that he is now on our 'Shit list'.

Sheffield, England
22nd March, 847 AD

Day 399

With the weather finally clear, the wagon train moved out of Sheffield, heavily laden with wool destined for the looms of Chesterfield.

Steve & Alfred had taken charge of the militia section, spreading them amongst the wagons, weapons in easy reach but out of sight. The fact that Carter had done a great deal of trading had not gone unnoticed. What was not common knowledge was that much of his money had been reinvested amongst the tradesmen of Sheffield, who were looking to expand their enterprises. In any case, the local bandits would find this convoy better defended than they might think.

Steve was sure they would get hit shortly- they had picked up that rumour before leaving Sheffield. They were in closer country now, with plenty of cover and the day was coming to an end. "I would hit just before we camped up for the night" he thought to himself. Balancing on the wagon seat, he scanned ahead and noted a few likely spots ahead. Jumping down from the wagon, he moved amongst the militia, telling them what he was expecting.

The bandits waited impatiently in the thicket, the wagon train now in sight. A group of five highwaymen had been reinforced by another thirty opportunists from about the countryside, hoping for rich pickings from this lightly guarded convoy.

From the cover of a tree trunk, Alfred scanned ahead with his binoculars, mindful of the warnings not to point at the sun and cause a flash of light. He could see definite human movement in the bushes, but not make out any real detail at this range. No matter, that was enough. Placing the binoculars back in their pouch, he trotted back to Steve's wagon and climbed aboard.

Carter knew the spot ahead as a favoured campsite for travelers, with good shelter, firewood and a stream. "They will try and take us as we are busy making camp", he agreed, discreetly slipping two buckshot rounds into the coach gun holstered next to his seat and loosening his cartridge pouch.

The bandit group was feeling more confident now. None of the dismounted men appeared to wear swords or carried bows, just walking staffs. Outnumbering the guards and drivers by three to one, this looked like it would be an easy fight. It wasn't like they were the legendary Haddon Green Men.

Carter called a halt and the drivers started moving their wagons together, while the guards started setting up camp. Steve pretended not to notice the rustling in the undergrowth, while discreetly sliding the M4 carbine on his knees in that direction.

With a shout, the bandit group rose up and surged forward. Steve raised his carbine to the shoulder and fired double-tap at a short man with a bow, dropping him to his knees. At this signal, the militiamen snatched their M1 carbines from under their oilskins and cut the front rank to pieces, while Steve and Alfred selectively picked off the archers and men further back. Carter barely had time to draw his shotgun and blast both barrels at the routed bandits. This time there would be no prisoners to hang.

“Section reload- fix bayonets”, yelled Steve, as he readied the militia for a sweep of the area. They moved forward in extended line, Steve at one end and Alfred at the other. There was no further firing from the well-disciplined troops, as they used their bayonets to finish the dying and wounded. They knew not to waste ammunition.

Carter’s men moved into the now secure wood, to cut poles for the heads.

With the sun now down, Steve gave up trying to raise Haddon on the radio. “Bloody UHF- wish I had a satellite phone.” he said to himself. He would have to wait until the morning air patrol, to relay a sitrep. While he could have easily climbed a hill, to get radio reception, his mission was to stay with the wagon train at all times.

Sitting around the campfires, the Chesterfield drivers and the Haddon militia were now talking like old friends; the wariness between the two groups had now evaporated. Nothing like a good fight to do that.

James Carter was well pleased with the speed of these wagons. Tomorrow they would reach Dronfield, the day after- home. It looked like inevitable losses from attacks would be a thing of the past. Now to turn this wool into fine clothes- and gold, on the looms of the Green Men.

Haddon Hold, England

23rd March, 847 AD

Day 383 0530hrs

“Still no radio contact with Steve’s Team”, said Simon, the comms operator. “That’s three missed skeds.”

“There are a lot of dead spots along that road”, said John. “Steve won’t leave the train, unless they are in real trouble- if we can’t get a flight up, I will take a section up there tomorrow.”

“Always the same with radio comms”, said Simon. “Shame we don’t have satellite here.”

“Hold onto that thought”, said Jenny who had just popped her head around the C&C door, on her way to breakfast.

A printer started up, and the weather report from the Hilltop station arrived.

Taking the printout, Simon quickly scanned the information. "Planes grounded- fog and low cloud, until afternoon"

"OK", said John, "Page the ready crew and stand down the pilots- I'm going to get a feed, before we head out."

The subject of discussion in the mess hall was what to do with the information they had extracted the previous day. We now knew who was openly hostile towards us.

"Agreed, we hit them hard and soon", said Jenny, "But the hit needs to be something spectacular, while minimizing collateral damage."

"Ruling out nukes, daisy-cutters, biologicals or chemicals", said Sonja, "why not use the gates and do something biblical?"

"Plague of locusts, floods, snowstorms, lava- that sort of thing?" I said.

"Floods sound good", Jenny said. "Open a 5 metre square gate and dump salt water from a couple of hundred metres above our target."

"That should smash any structure in this day & age", I said.

"What you need is a prophet" said John, "Someone who predicts all this happening to those who anger the Green Men."

"I think I have the man for the job" I answered. "Let's get moving- we may well meet him on the road."

Odo had been following the train south, keeping a discreet distance back. He knew that any trouble would be headed their way and that he was best to hold back and avoid it. At dusk he heard the thundering of firearms ahead- he had heard the sound before, at Bakewell. Looks like the local thugs had just met their bloody end. He was no fool and would not approach the campfire in the distance by night, not wanting to meet the same fate as the bandits. He could soon catch the slower wagons up in the morning, even though these wagons moved far faster than any others he had encountered.

"See him back there?" asked Steve.

"Yes, quite clear now- It may be the Harper", said Alfred, peering through the low-light scope, "He has no fire, so is aware of us and certainly heard our skirmish."

“If it is him, he will catch us up in the morning”, said Steve, “Get some sleep; I’ll take the first watch.”

Back at Haddon, the patrol was preparing to leave. John would be leading the patrol, which wasn’t expected to take more than a few hours, as they would be traveling along formed roads.

“We will do a sweep through to Sheffield”, John explained to the patrol members, “That way, it won’t look like we are specifically looking for this wagon train- that’s it, let’s roll.”

“I don’t know why I didn’t think of it sooner.” said Jenny, “Satellite comms are so easy to set up- the gate makes it even easier than up-time.”

“I did think about it briefly”, I said, “But while the ground equipment is readily available, satellites are a bit hard to come by.”

“No problem.” said Jenny, “A standard colony start-up comms package will easily do us. I can have the gear here in a day or so- I just need to send a message up to Jane. She knows where to get it.”

“Right, let’s go and give Simon the news- he will enjoy playing with some new technology”, I agreed, “If we are going to have an big shipment in, we might as well get your chopper out of the cold store. We are going to need a bit more mobility soon.”

“About time” said Jenny

“What is this cold store I keep hearing about?” asked JD, who had just arrived with fresh coffee.

“It’s another storage area on Transit”, Jenny answered “We have stores in another location and time, so that we can pick up equipment and supplies that have only spent a couple of days there. Stuff never decays or goes past its use-by date, that way. The helicopter was put there a couple of years ago, our time-line, but when we pick it up it will have only sat in the hanger for a couple of days and is all ready to go.”

“That could be useful the other way around, for aging wine and spirits”, said JD.

“Already onto that.” said Jenny with a grin.

As the wagons prepared to move off, Steve tried the radio one more time, to be rewarded by a reply from John’s vehicle set.

“LOC 4k’s south of Dronfield- should be passing you in 30 minutes or so”, said John. “We will sweep through to Sheffield and uplift you on our return- the locals can take it from here- by the way- any problems since your last sked?”

“Nothing we couldn’t deal with.” said Steve, heading to the other end of the wagon train, to give Alfred the news that he would be taking command of the escort.

“I thought they would be OK”, said Jenny, who had just received a call from the patrol. The far more powerful vehicle radio set had no trouble getting through. “I want to wait until the satellite system is running, then we hit York hard.”

“So that gives us three days for everyone to rest up and run through a couple of practice runs before the strike”, I said, “Should be a good training run for our future leaders group and Forwin has already put his name forward for further action.”

“The word will soon get out, that you hit our allies- expect to get dealt to”, said Jenny. “Let’s get this wannabe wrapped up, so that we can get on with the southern colony project.”

Haddon Hold, England
25th March, 847 AD

Day 385

Training for the strike continues. Jenny had been pushing them pretty hard for the last day. I’m sure they will find the actual strike a piece of cake, by comparison.

One spin-off benefit of the comms satellite system is that we will have real-time communications with New Zealand when we set up the colony sites there. The Transit crew has been stockpiling fuel and equipment at NZ for a couple of weeks now and the project is ready to go. First phase (three years previous to this time) involves developing farmland, which means felling and milling a LOT of timber. That should cover the shortfall of seasoned wood that we have here now, plus provide the new colonists with plenty of ready timber for building.

No problem getting volunteers for that job. The thought of fishing in the waters of uninhabited New Zealand was too much to resist. The first site, in the Bay of Islands, should be a good winter R&R site for the rest of us, too- we have been using it for some years now. We surveyed this site about 60 years previous and did quite a bit of burning off and planting, so there are mature fruit trees and easier clearing to be had. Our old holiday/survey site is some distance from the target zone and is still be in good order. We will be dropping the first team about three years prior to our current time line, to get grazing and stock established. The building and material build-up will be real-time.

Time for some of JD’s bacon and eggs, then off to the Hilltop range, to run the troops through another sim.

“Fucking pathetic.” roared John, “I want those sentries down less half a second after you take out the dogs. Patch out and back to positions.”

“So they are doing OK?” I asked.

“Edmund is doing most of the work with the marksmen- lad’s a real natural”, said John, “The rest are a bit slow, but picking up.”

“How is the strike team going?” I asked.

“Alfred and Forwin are pushing them along”, John answered. “With cutlass and pistol- they will be OK”- Very high praise indeed.

“We have another big job after this one”, I said. “You will be setting up another site in an uninhabited area- some compressed time, most in real time.”

“Do tell”, said John, “Where?”

“Bay of Islands, New Zealand.”

“WHO THE FUCK FIRED THAT?” yelled John, as one of the riflemen fired a fraction of a second ahead of the rest, “Around that tree- rifle over your head.” lowering his voice from a bellow, he replied. “Time for fishing?”

“Always time for fishing”, I said, “and take Shirl along- she needs a bit of rest before the baby is due- real time comms for phase II, so the doc is on call.”

“Good, she pushes herself too hard”, said John. “What is the fishing like? You would have reced the site.”

“We have had a holiday home in the area for 60 years- Crayfish like you won’t believe and Snapper from the shore- you can even have a new boat- just name what you want.”, I stated.

“The trick is going to be avoiding the stampede of volunteers.” said John.

“Stand them down at 1400 and back at 2200”, I said, “Do you want to tell Shirl?”

“Thanks, yes.”

“On track?” asked Jenny.

“John is getting them there”, I said.

“Good, Steve and Marty can back up”, she answered, “Forwin’s crew can handle the assault- I watched their sim- very well done, indeed.”

“Yep, Forwin is a one-man slaughterhouse- he would have done well on my old ship. So- what do we do with York’s backer?” I asked.

“I thought a flood of sea-water might be the ticket”, answered Jenny, “About a 3 metre square gate, 50 metres above ground level for 30 seconds, in the middle of the day should convince the great unwashed that he is being punished by divine intervention- especially if a God appears before and afterwards.”

“And who has drawn the short straw for that job?” I asked.

“Guess who- Gandalf.” Jenny said.

“Fuck.”

“It isn’t that bad- we will project a holo- we just need to get some video of you in a Thor outfit or suchlike, then we can blow it up to titan size”, said Jenny.

Well, I can live with that.

This will be the first military action that I haven’t been directly involved in and it’s hard to stand back and let the others get on with it, so I’m off to start organizing the next big operation, which is setting up four colony sites in New Zealand. Nothing as elaborate as we have here, just clearing some bush for farmland, introducing cattle and sheep and planting a few fruit and timber trees, as well as putting up some immediate shelter for the colonists, in the form of Quonset huts. Still, clearing New Zealand bush was no easy task, even with heavy machinery- as we found on the advance party, several years ago.

This colony is an insurance policy. Should something happen here, a healthy colony at the other side of the planet should still be there. We will boost their technology a bit, but not as much as here. The plan is to leave them a quite bit of showpiece technology, maps- geographic and mineral, picture books and information, then leave them to it. I’m picking they will take over the southern hemisphere and eventually Asia, within a couple of centuries.

Dave wants a pair of feller-bunchers, a couple of skidders, plus a whole lot of assorted logging gear, so I had better go organize that shipment. Then there are the Quonset huts. Sonja has found some, but we have to jump to 1943 and steal a ship. That should be interesting...

Haddon Hold, England **27th March, 847 AD**

Day 400

The strike team is ready to go. We will be using a pair of 113’s to travel through the gate, to keep our locals from seeing what actually happens. They will walk in the last 4 km, attacking at 0200. I’m staying with the vehicles and if everything fucks up, we can provide rescue. The 113’s will be moving in as soon as the shooting starts, all going well the show will be over by then and all we have to do is pick up our troops and their loot. At least now, most of them have gated enough that they won’t puke all through the back of the carrier.

The best estimate gives about 120 men-at-arms in the camp that the 14-man team will have to take out. The plan is a simple one. Four of the best marksmen will be using silenced rifles with night vision scopes- they will take down all sentries and guard dogs, then targets of opportunity. The rest will be split into two teams of five. Using explosives, one team will take out the great hall, the second the barracks. The assault teams will fall back clear before detonating the charges- from there- they move in and mop up. When we arrive, we sweep for survivors, then loot & scoot.

The 113 dropped with a stomach- churning lurch, as we passed through the gate onto a different grade. This was the worst time for a driver- trying to get reoriented after a jump, without running into something. Standing in the cupola, I looked around to the rear- seeing the second vehicle clear, I ordered Steve to halt, engine running, while we got our bearings. John's vehicle pulled alongside.

As soon as it stopped, John raised his night vision binoculars and scanned ahead. After about 15 seconds, we were off again, following the IR reflective markers that the scouts had previously laid out. All our troops had this tape on their clothing- it looked like a neon sign through our night vision gear, but was just grey tape to anyone not so equipped.

At the drop off point, we stopped and dropped the ramps, killing the engines. We had a hill between us and the camp and the wind in our faces. Scouts Marty and Ralf had heard us and radioed an 'All Clear' from their OP on the nearby hill, overlooking the camp. They would head down to meet up, as we moved off. One last equipment check and the teams were on their way, at a brisk trot. Hurry up and wait time.

As they neared the encampment, they slowed to a walk, Alfred's rifle section moving to the front. The marksmen would be taking up position 200 metres from the camp, on a small knoll, with four acting as snipers and one guard armed with an M1 carbine. At that range, Edmund and his hand-picked team would be able to place their heavy 300 grain .338 slugs at will. The successful assault depended on that.

As Edmund's team peeled off to take their positions, Forwin and Alfred's teams moved forward, splitting up and then going to ground while they waited for the snipers to do their work.

Edmund acquired his target, a burly soldier with a large dog on a chain and gave a quiet hiss, to let his team know he was ready. On hearing a hiss from each, he fired his first shot, striking the war dog in the head and dropping it. As the puzzled guard looked down, to see why the dog had collapsed, Alfred's second round hit him just behind the ear, killing him without a murmur. He swept the area with his 'scope, to see the other sentries and the guard dogs also down. He pressed the 'send' switch on his radio twice, the signal for the others to attack.

Moving silently, the teams placed their satchel charges where they had been directed, Forwin and Alfred checking and activating the radio detonators on each charge. The two teams separated to take up covering positions and then as arranged, Forwin called 'Firing' over the radio, flipped open the switch cover and detonated the charges.

Hearing the 'whump' of the explosives, we cranked the engines and moved forward. I could see Marty and Ralf running down the hill, towards our path. At the base of the hill, we paused to let them climb aboard and then moved forward again, at best speed.

In the camp, all was chaos- the halls were on fire, survivors were climbing from the wreckage, to be felled by rifle fire, while horses broke free, running from the flames. With the advantage of darkness gone, the rifle section was steadily sending up parachute flares, to keep the scene illuminated with a flickering, brilliant light.

Spotting movement, Forwin raised his carbine and dropped two men trying to scabble free from the broken timbers of the great hall. The fires were not burning fast enough for his liking, so he moved forward under cover and flung a WP grenade into the wreckage. That should flush them out, he thought, as he moved back, away from the suffocating smoke.

The lead 113 appeared in sight. From the knoll, Edwin could see that the survivors had fled into the night or were trapped in the buildings. Picking up his handpiece he radioed "Clear to sweep."

The two team leapt up, carbines at the ready. "Change magazines, fix bayonets", called out Forwin and Alfred, simultaneously, their teams moving forward to finish the assault.

The two 113s lit up their floodlights, further illuminating the scene, heavy machine guns at the ready. The two halls were now completely ablaze, leaving just the outbuildings to be checked. The teams systematically moved from hut to hut, throwing in grenades and shooting anyone trying to flee.

As Forwin's team moved around a burning stable, a figure dashed forward slashing with a sword at the nearest person. Bob dropped his carbine, his arm almost severed. Forwin recognised the sword before the figure and raised his carbine for a snap shot- nothing- a stoppage.

Remembering what Jenny had said, he dropped his carbine and slapped at his tunic pocket, finding the button on the box within.

Several milliseconds later, the detonator exploded, initiating the tiny charge of hexolite. Finding the path of least resistance, the superheated gases jetted out of the 1mm holes drilled through the steel core of the haft, destroying York's hands, while fusing them to the white-hot metal. As York doubled over in agony, the sword now welded to him, Forwin threw a kick, breaking his jaw with the toe of his boot. Taking the time to snatch up his dropped carbine, he smashed the butt into the side of York's head, felling him. He grabbed his handset and called "Man Down." grabbing Bob's arm to cut off the spurting blood, while one of the others tied on a field dressing and retrieved the dropped weapon.

John's 113 surged forward, headed for their position. Eric could take care of the injured, while John drove the vehicle. If York survived, he would be in for some interesting times at the tender mercies of Forwin and Jenny.

I got on the radio "Search this place- you have 15 minutes" It would take that long before we got Bob stabilized and ready to move. York would live, which was probably unfortunate for him.

Time to get out of here. I called up on the satellite phone to get the gate opened and a surgical team ready...

Haddon Hold, England
28th March, 847 AD

Day 403

Bob is recovering well from surgery, minus his left forearm. In this day and age, that would reduce him to a beggar, but we have much more use for a literate, intelligent person here. We will send him to New Zealand to recuperate- The team there can always use a radio operator.

It was a good reminder for our militia, if not all of us, they we can still come to harm, no matter how better armed we may be.

York is on hold. Jenny is in favour of dropping him from a few thousand metres above the city of Leeds, while Forwin has visited him, to show off his chainsaw.

I'm not so concerned with him, as his backer, the Bishop of Leeds.

Jenny has a plan and now I have to take part in her light and magic show.

"I don't care what you say, you have the voice and the character for it", exclaimed Jenny. "Just put the fucking armour on."

The armour consisted of a stylized faux metal plastic suit, complete with horned helmet and a huge, but very light, plastic hammer.

"OK- roll." said Jenny (who always got her way)

I glowered at the camera.

"Men do not command your fate, I DO." I bellowed, "See the pretenders feel my wrath- Tomorrow at noon. The Green Men are *my* faithful."

I'm told that's what I said, anyway- I don't speak their language that well.

"That's a wrap", called Jenny, bringing me a very large drink, "You are a natural born bullshit artist."

"Been telling you that for years", I said.

"Bloody hell." I said, watching a seven metre version of myself scolding the unfaithful. "Where did you get that SPX gear?"

"Brought some VR gaming software, about ten years up-time", said Jenny, "The projector system we will use is a bit more advanced- we need to get a team to deploy it and we are go."

"I have just the person", I said.

Odo had finally made his way to Haddon, tagging along with the security team attached to the Chesterfield wagon train. While they waited for the wagons to be serviced and reloaded, they had returned to Haddon, for a break. Summoned to the hold proper, something not normally accorded to the run-of-the-mill traders, Odo waited in the mess hall. It was hard to miss that the Green Men lived in an unheard of luxury- even their servants lived better than kings.

Odo immediately recognized the tall figure of Wayne Jamieson, but did not recognise Jenny- until she greeted him- that was the voice of the person who commanded the execution squad at Bakewell.

“We want you to travel to Leeds”, said Jenny, “you are to watch over one of our own, a stranger to those parts.”

Odo nodded.

Alfred stepped into the hall, dressed in local attire.

“Alfred, here will be your apprentice”, said Jenny. “You have little to do, Alfred just has to deliver some packages- you won’t want to get caught with them, but he will be armed with our weapons and has proven himself to be discreet.”

This didn’t seem very hard, thought Odo. “Payment?”

“Lands to call your own, of 50 acres and a home of our making- as well as our gratitude. The day will come when you know longer want to travel- here you will be able to live in ease and comfort”, answered Jenny.

Odo caught the subtle nod of Alfred- this would seem like a good price indeed.

Alfred waited with the amused patience of one who has done many jumps, whilst Odo finished gagging. “The wizard’s door will get easier”, he stated. Odo had a new respect for the young Alfred.

As fitted the apprentice storyteller, Alfred carried a large pack. Walking about the town, Alfred surveyed the best positions to set up his equipment. That night, Odo plied his trade, while Alfred played the role of the dutiful apprentice, fetching drinks for all and gathering coin, tossed to his master.

Rising early the next morning, Alfred covertly deployed the small but powerful projectors about the marketplace, to all intents looking like the curious yokel, come to town. Later in the morning, they headed to market and soon Odo had a small crowd gathered around, whilst he retold stories of adventure from the south.

At noon, the holographic projectors started and once they established their wireless network, cast a fearsome image for the entire marketplace to see.

Despite the dreadful appearance of this seven metre high armoured titan and his message, the holocaust was too short in length for the crowd to move from frozen awe to panic. All that

remained was to wait and see what happened tomorrow. The most intelligent of the crowd were picking (or hoping) that any wrath was due the Bishop.

Odo and his apprentice listened to most of the talk and then retired to an inn, a respectable distance from the cathedral, to consider the events of the day.

The Bishop of Leeds received the news, with scorn. "If a God has appeared, why did he not appear to me, directly?" he said, dismissing the reports of his men. A pragmatic man, he only believed what he saw and he had never seen a seven metre high armoured titan. These troublesome Green men might be indeed formidable, but they certainly were man-sized. More likely the bakers had been using mouldy grain again...

After a brief call to Alfred, Jenny confirmed the strike.

"We already have a secure location near the deep ocean, in New Zealand", said Sonja, "We can open the gate there- optimum height is about 300 meters above target."

"And our friend in the north gets one fuck of a saltwater enema", said Steve.

"Something like that", said Jenny, with a chuckle, "I definitely want to get some video of that."

Back in Leeds, the Inn was abuzz with talk of the apparition. Already there had been several fights between those who had actually seen it, and those who had not. Several had announced their intention to be well clear of the city before noon tomorrow. Odo was fueling the flames, by telling tales from mythology, of when the gods walked the earth.

Alfred and Odo had been well-warned and agreed that it would be best to watch events from a good distance tomorrow. One way or the other, the city was going to be in a state of riot. The wrath of gods was fearsome enough when they stayed well away from current events, but when they turned up, made threats, then carried them out, the common man took notice.

Leeds, England

29th March, 847 AD

Day 404

Judgment day for 'The Wicked'- The pair left the city at dawn, not alone. Heading for a likely vantage point away from the main roads, Alfred took out his satellite phone, as soon as they were well away from the others with the foresight to flee.

"Wind is from the southeast at about 5kph", he advised Jenny.

"Thanks, try to get some video, if you can do so unobserved", answered Jenny, "We will extract you after dark- just sit tight and turn on the beacon at dusk- I will call you near the time- if you can't answer, we will assume you have company- see you tonight for a well-earned drink."

Four hours until Showtime.

On the other side of the world, Sonja was setting up her gate generator, her target the deep water just off the Kaikoura coast. The cold waters 1500 metres below the surface would be moving through a 5 metre square gate under enormous pressure, directing a torrent several hundred metres above the cathedral. The gate would only be open for twenty seconds, but that was going to obliterate anything underneath.

The holographic projectors started up automatically, with the apparition announcing the city's doom. Then a great shaft appeared in the sky and smashed into the city.

While a few chose to flee, for the great majority it was business as usual. Refusing to look to the marketplace at the appointed hour, the Bishop sat at his books, looking over the month's tax take, when he noticed the light dim. That was to be the last thing he saw. The cathedral and the surrounding streets ceased to exist, washed away like a sand castle hit by a firehose. Churning water filled with wreckage, bodies and the very soil of the city, swept through the streets causing havoc. As the waters fanned out and lowered, debris was cast up everywhere, the city utterly devastated.

Alfred switched off the video camera and stowed it carefully in his pack. They were now very glad they had picked an observation site well away from the roads and trails, as hordes of shocked survivors fled the cursed city. The sooner night came the better.

Jenny withdrew the probe from the gate and ejected the data stick. She strode off to the cinema, where they could review the strike out of sight of any local workers. They didn't need to see this. Hearing about it would be enough.

The word would get out now- I don't think anyone else would be in a hurry to offend us now. Time to move to the next phase of the project.

The backup colony.

Part Six

Four years prior to NZ Baseline Time

Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 790AD

The convoy halted on the golden sands of the beach, the last vehicle- a slow moving excavator now well clear of the gate.

The crew shut down their engines and moved together as a group to admire the new dawn from the gently lapping water's edge. To one side, the sky was aglow with rays of orange gold over the harbour. On the other side, the forest of towering timber stood majestically, just a few dozen metres from the waters edge. Further back, massive Kauri trees raised high above the canopy. The crescent-shaped bay stretched for about a kilometer, with a rock point at either end, a small stream at the eastern point.

For a good while they stood silent admiring the untouched landscape, taking in the bird's dawn chorus- tuis, grey warblers, shining cuckoos, parakeets and the unrecognized sounds of species extinct in our time. The morning sky brightened over the sea, revealing what looked to be a cloudless summer's day.

Jenny broke the silence, "It's going to be a hot one, so let's get the camp set up before the heat hits- then you can get that boat in the water and find me a big crayfish."

Glancing at the photos, I identified a likely area, thumbed the starter on the quad bike and rode over to check it out, while Marty followed slowly along in the big Hitachi digger. We soon found a good spot and started marking the trees to be felled. The water detail passed us, heading further down the beach, to set up the tank and run a pipeline up the creek.

With the larger buttress trees notched and our charges finally laid, we moved our vehicles well clear and did a quick visual check of the area. The water detail was out of sight, bush-bashing up the creek to build a sandbag weir. The rest were at the other end of the beach setting up sensor pods. This area is meant to be uninhabited, but why leave anything to chance- also; we were installing a seismic sensor, common sense in a volcanic area. A quick radio check gave the area clear and the forest erupted, huge hardwoods flung upwards and out, towards the beach.

A quick check that all the charges had gone off, then in with chainsaws and bulldozer, the D6 skidding away the logs, while the excavator ripped stumps out.

By noon we had an area of about 75 by 25 metres cleared, backfilled and leveled. The water tank was filling and a temporary pipeline run back to our camp. The caravans had been moved onto the clearing and set up, with the cookhouse and ablutions block being hooked up to power and water. A track had been cut into the bush, where a 7.5kVa generator had been set up as far from the camp as possible, to dull the noise. Our power needs were small and most of the time we would run off LPG or solar power. The plant was lined up along the bush edge along with the vehicles. The alloy runabout boat was on its trailer, at the waters edge, waiting. Further down the beach,

there stood a small R44 Robinson helicopter wrapped in weatherproof covers. Some distance away, fuel drums were stored in the shade, well away from all other activities.

“That’s us for today.” Jenny called out, “I’m having a drink.” Carrying her beach chair to the water’s edge, she slumped into the canvas, feet in the water. Jane set a chair up alongside her and opened a chiller full of iced bottles and glasses. As she popped the cork, the 6.2 metre alloy ‘Tinnie’ was already in the water, fishermen aboard. Marty was heading further down the beach with his surf-casting rig.

I finished connecting the LPG bottles and water line to the shower unit and headed to my caravan to pick up a chiller bin and chair. Joining the girls on the sun-warmed golden sands, I put down my gear and walked out into the water to wash off the sawdust and dirt. A good morning’s work, but we would have a lot more land to clear before this advance mission was done. This was to be a test run for much larger events.

Sitting back in my chair to dry in the sun, I opened a frosty bottle of Emerson’s Pilsner and raised it as a toast. “I claim these lands- for us.” I said.

“I’m not so sure about giving it away, now”, said Jane.

“Well, we have 60 or so years before the colonists arrive”, said Jenny, “Then we can jump back to any time after the big bang in the second century- or preferably about 100 years after that.”

“Or cause yet another divergence”, I said.

“An uninhabited earth”, said Jenny.

“No need to go that far, just yet.” Jane said, “We have some real nice places in the US, too- lot’s of space for us in this time-line yet.”

“Now I’ll drink to that.” I said.

“We won’t be flying tomorrow”, said Jenny, “The crew need a bit of R&R after getting Transit set up for the big one and I’m long overdue a spree.”

“Damn right.” said Jane, “I’ve lost count of the holding companies I’ve set up- in New York- through the winter, while you basked in the Transit sunshine.”

“Doing nasty manual labour, building warehouses in the Transit sun”, I reminded her. She poked out her tongue and splashed water at me with her foot, so I shook my bottle and sent a jet of beer her way.

“Alcohol abuse!” yelled Jenny, reaching out and tipping our chairs over, spilling us into the water.

I keep forgetting that other people have those musculoskeletal enhancements. We really do need a good holiday, still- we have four months here doing recon. Even with rotating the Transit crew (we are NEVER all in the place at the same time.) they will be well rested after this.

Nothing to be done, but to drag Jenny into the water.

The new dawn broke on the beach, no longer quite pristine. Felled trees littered one end, while the beach in front of the camp was littered with bottles, cans, camping furniture and the remains of a bonfire. The camp was still quiet as the first of the revelers started to rise. Today we would clean up all the mess and clear a bit more bush. It was a bit crowded in this clearing and everyone here likes their space. Thanks to an up-time pill, hangovers would soon be banished and we would get on with making this camp more comfortable for our summer's working holiday.

We had four more sites to survey this summer. These we would return to over the next couple of years to prepare for the main project, 60-odd years ahead of this time. This untouched country would remain our playground for the next 60 summers.

Several of the more enthusiastic fishermen were heading off to the point and the smells of coffee, bacon and pancakes were starting to waft from the cookhouse, which drew still more people from their caravans and tents.

Around the table, we planned out the work ahead, for the next few days. We would open up another two clearings about the size of yesterday's one and three smaller ones. The trees would all be skidded through to Transit, as there was no native timber there and we had to import all our firewood and timber for building. A precast septic tank was due today and that would need to be installed. Several logs had been set aside for our use- making a shelter from the afternoon sun and a beach bar were two of the ideas put forward.

Our fishermen had put down crayfish pots plus a set net and would be off to collect another bumper haul of seafood in the afternoon. A shame there is no real hunting here, but we will be introducing a few food species next year, once we have burnt off some bush for grasslands. I need to scout out a nearby stream large enough to supply a micro hydro plant, which can power a large chiller unit. It's great not to have to worry about security of such things- not even a lock needed here. This is all a good shakedown for the big event. Happens to be a lot of fun, too.

The timber is due to be moved in about two hours, the gate being run from our end, as it had to be aligned with the log each time. The routine is to throw a chain through from the other side, which we hook on. A flag is waved through the gate, to signal winching to start and then the signaler gets out of the way fast. It's quite something to watch, as limbs are sheared off as they overlap the field. Nothing cuts like the edge of a gate. Trick is to make sure the cable goes through intact, or the crew on the other side has a cable under tension whipping through- a very dangerous event.

This is one job all the Transit crew is very well versed in. What else they do well, outside of their specialties; we are here to find out.

Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 790AD

Day Five

The site was finally finished today. Admittedly, the pace was relaxed, with everyone rising with the sun and working until the full heat of the day, but progress was slow.

We had gained a new insight into the pioneers of our timeline that broke these forests into farmland- without our chainsaws and heavy machinery. Trouble is- none of us are experts in using this stuff. We are all dabblers, some better at others. A real forestry crew would have cleared the lot in the first day and still had time for fishing.

A few of the more experienced members of our band have a lot of building experience from setting up Transit and are useful assistants, but there are only a handful of us with the experience needed to do the more technical stuff, such as plumbing, gas-fitting, wiring and demolition. They are all first-class all-rounders, but we will need specialists for the main effort. This trip is my way of reinforcing this point.

Anytime soon, they are going to be finding out exactly what important supplies they forgot to pack.

“That should do”, said Jenny, looking over the LZ that had been finally been leveled to her satisfaction, “we can do a pre-flight after lunch and have a look about inland.”

“Sharon and Carl are taking the boat around the coast to do a bit of mapping”, I said. “Hopefully she will find me a handy stream to set up that micro hydro generator.”

“Do we really need that?” she asked.

“They need to know how to set one up”, I said.

“Fair enough. I will find another job for Will- he already helped set up the Transit plant”, said Jenny.

“We are going to have to get another carpenter on the team one day soon”, I said. “We have plenty of reasonable hammer hands, but he needs some skilled help- he’s carrying too much of the workload.”

“True- they are a top-notch logistics and recon ops team, but colonists they ain’t”, Jenny said.

“Never planned to make them into colonists, but they need to know what colonists need and want”, I said. “This seemed the most interesting way- anyway- this is a cruise- next site I’m going to make it a zero resupply jump- three months unsupported.”

Jenny gave a shark-like grin. “You had best camp elsewhere, then- you’re too damn good at this game. This site would have been far less comfortable if you hadn’t packed a few items like the sunscreen, insect repellent or the automatic washing machine.”

“Any fool can camp out and rough it- it takes talent to do it in style- I always favoured the ‘White Hunter Approach’”, I said. “Speaking of which, fancy a spot of Moa hunting tomorrow?”

“Very impressive.” I remarked on Will’s hand-craft, a bar top cut from a solid slab of timber. A shelter had also been framed from locally cut timber and was covered with a tarpaulin.

“Ripping that slab with the chainsaw was a bitch.” he exclaimed, “when we scale up, we are going to need one of those portable sawmills.”

“Have you ever used one?” I asked.

“Nope- we will have to organize that too- we could get a contractor in to show us how and mill some of the timber on the farm.”

“Done”, I agreed, “we really need more tool-users than you, Marty and me. That’s our part of our problem.”

“Yeah, the others do well for a bunch of pen-pushers and blanket-counters, but we need some more tradesmen on the tools.”

“Well, I’m recruiting contractors soon”, I said. “If you know any likely lads to come work at the funny farm- do let me know.”

“One or two come to mind”, he mused, “There are quite a few at my old pistol club that would come along and build stuff, if they could wear their guns around and you supplied them with unlimited ammo.”

‘Hold that thought.’

The peace of the bay was abruptly disturbed by the roaring Lycoming engine, as Jenny powered up and completed the last of her checks. With just two of us on-board, the helicopter leapt into the air, leveling out at about 800 metres. We had mounted several video cameras, so all I had to do was shoot a few stills of the more interesting sights. I’m not a great fan of aircraft, especially rotary winged ones. In my opinion, they don’t start making decent aircraft for another 30 centuries from now, but you couldn’t ask for a better pilot than Jenny, who has one hell of a lot of flight time, in all manner of craft.

It looks much like we expected. Podocarp forest down to the shoreline, a few areas of scrub and a bit of wetland. I almost hate to have to do this, but we are going to need to do a big burn-off to get the grazing our colony will need- still, we don’t have to clearfell like the settlers in our timeline did. We will wait until we get the right weather conditions and torch the forests at the end of summer, when they are driest. Most of our work is going to be cutting firebreaks, so that the area of the burn is controlled. Again, unlike it was in our timeline.

I have identified five likely sites for our colonists first village and will recce them on foot over the next few weeks. They will change a bit, once cleared of bush, so I will have to use the imagination quite a bit. What is going to happen is that we will have a major burn-off, then come back and plant specimen trees, which will be helped along with a bit of weed matting and wire to keep browsing birds and the beasts yet to come at bay. About five years out from the colonist drop, we will do some extensive development of pasture and introduce cattle, horses & sheep. One year out, we will construct shelter and establish stores of material, including milled timber and ‘showcase’ technology. We will have a contractor construction team and 9th century labour ready by then.

Heading around the bay, we spotted the boat beached near a stream, about 4km from our bay. It looked like they were exploring for a possible generator site. I was hoping to get a freezer unit

powered up, then I had a good excuse for cutting daily access to Transit. I wanted to get them away from 'just popping back for a few loaves of fresh bread'

My first team was going down for up to six months unsupported- they needed to get a handle on what that was going to be like- damn supply poguees are just too good at their job- anything, anywhere, anytime.

Another Jenny landing. At least now I know that while they look terrible on approach, you don't even feel the skids touch down. We have lots of good footage (funny how that term still applies to digital storage.) to look over. Best we do that over a few drinks.

I see someone has connected power to Will's Beach Bar, so I can expect an assortment of Rum-powered cocktails.

They might forget to pack the spare fuses, Cajun seasoning or the dishwasher powder but not the mixers.

Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 790AD

Day Six

Today Jenny is taking up sightseeing flights. The coastal survey was a success- the stream we saw Sharon checking out was pronounced suitable to feed a 5 kVa hydro plant. That would arrive tomorrow and its installation would be the job of the day. Jenny had a LOC on the area and would gate the equipment direct. It just remained for us (and I don't mean me in 'us'.) to carry sandbags and 75mm pipe 400 metres upstream to make an intake weir. Once the chiller was up and running, I would have a load of frozen food sent down-time.

The fish is great, but I start craving red meat, before long. I'm starting to wonder what Moa tastes like. Ostrich, I hope- I like ostrich- when I can't get cow.

The 'shortages' have started. I shut down gating until next week and apparently we are about to run out of maple syrup. Soap was underestimated too- all this nasty physical work- razor blades are another item in short supply. The old campaigners and ex-military are of course having a great laugh at the pogue's predicaments and are selling their surplus for future favours.

Takes me back to my army days when we non-smokers used to take cigarettes into the field, to make a tidy profit at the expense of the stupid.

I can't be too hard-nosed with what is essentially family- the contractor's won't get such an easy time, but all the names I have picked are old campaigners- all this 'carry everything' deal is old-hat to them. They were the same bastards as me- selling cigarettes, beer and coke for outrageous amounts of money.

"We need some coconuts for a proper beach bar." said Joanne, who had brought along an actual 20 gallon oak barrel of rum.

"Leave that one with me", I said. In one of those strange moments that you have, I decided we might gate up to Fiji and gather said coconuts.

"It is an inhabited island and they are cannibals", said Jenny.

"In and out, how hard can it be?" I said, "Marty can come and cover me." Marty, like me, was always keen to go on an expedition and take pot-shots at people who had not yet invented firearms.

"OK, so how do you get the coconuts off the tree?" asked Jenny, quite reasonably.

"Easy, we cut a couple of them down, grab the coconuts and gate."

(I should explain, at this point, that scrying was not the art form that it is today and that we would be get dumped in the general area, of where we thought trees should be)

We exited the gate and looking around, saw some palms about 100 metres away. Running over, I started up the saw, planning to fell the palms in the direction of the gate. I was halfway through the second palm, when Marty started waving at me. Must be company-never mind- the saw would scare them off, so I continued cutting. No- apparently not- Marty was shooting at them.

I shut the saw down and we moved back to the coconuts, which I started chopping off with a hatchet and stuffing into a sack. Marty continued to take the odd pot-shot, by way of keeping the natives occupied.

Damn, they are brainless. Most all savages run away when we shoot at them.

Marty wasn't too concerned, so I got the rest of the coconuts and had a sizable load, along with the saw. He continued to fire at them with his H&K, reloading from a satchel of magazines.

"OK- home." I called and we backed towards the gate, Marty firing as we moved.

Back home.

I passed the sacks of coconuts over to Joanne.

"Next time get your own fuckin' coconuts", said Marty.

"I stole this run of the friggin' pirates of the Caribbean, circa 1750", said Joanne, "you just had cannibals with spears."

"So get mixing." I said. "Rum, Southern Comfort, coconut milk, pineapple juice, splash of lime and lots of ice- in a pint."

"Rum and Ginger Beer" said Marty, "I'm off to get my cleaning kit and will be return in a minute."

I had wondered where that very fine rum had come from.

We had a few hours before the others finished up their work, so we would be quite pickled by the time they returned. Of course we could take aldetox, but amongst the time traveling crew, you took it in the morning, or lived with the consequences, when not on a mission.

The best thing to do for the workers was to line up an array of very impressive drinks for their arrival.

As we thought, Jenny was back first and after refueling and securing the helicopter, her team was back to check out the bar.

“Real coconuts” said Jenny, “How did your foraging trip go?”

“Easy”, I said, “But it ain’t ‘the friendly isle’ in this time.”

“Next time get them from a fruit shop”, said Jenny, “Haven’t that lot got the hydro setup finished yet? All they have to do is run the pipe and pour the slab.”

“I think they might be finding that uncoiling and dragging 75mm alkathene pipe through thick bush isn’t all that easy.”, I answered, “They have to run out four coils of that stuff to reach the header weir and none of them were on the crew that did the job at Transit.”

“You are not going to be the most popular person on the planet, when they get back”, said Jenny.

“The fun has yet to come”, I said. “They have a real interesting job next.”

They were all done in from their day’s work, but pride would not let them admit to the difficulty of the job I had given them. After a few rum-laden drinks, they started to recount the day’s trials, most of which revolved around getting the tightly coiled plastic pipe up the stream, to the site of the weir.

“Once we decided to clear a track up the stream, it wasn’t so bad”, said Joanne “I just wish we had done that before we hauled the sandbags up to build the weir. And I thought the concreting was going to be the hardest part- that was easy.”

“A few days for the slab to season and we can go back and connect up the generator”, said Tom, “Right now- I need a very large drink and a swim.”

A very large drink was handed over.

“Remember that you were all agreed we needed a more permanent building here?” I said, “That is our next job- making yet another of those steel barns.”

They looked quite relieved- they had assembled dozens of them at Transit and were very proficient at doing so.

“Up there”, I said, pointing to a point up on the spur behind us. “You have to get the kitset up there, so have a think about how that might happen, without a gate.”

Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 790AD

Day Seven

Today they would be cutting a track and clearing the building site. They have all had chainsaw training, now it was time to get some real experience in. They would have to cut a track big enough for the 25 tonne excavator to get up the hill to clear the site. England would be easy after this.

While they had all been through 'Interesting Times' on the way to joining our band, they hadn't all been through them together- usually, we operated alone or in pairs when working in different times. They needed to learn how to work as a well-oiled team. This was what was happening now.

We needed some living space for when the weather was bad, as it so often is in this part of the world. As a bonus, this would become a permanent holiday site for a good many years.

One thing the crew brought down was a heap of solar-powered garden lights. Those have been a great idea- they give out no real illumination but are great for picking out paths to toilets, marking obstacles and the shoreline- this is very useful to the pickled time-traveler who might be stumbling about the camp, in the small hours.

Jenny produced something interesting at breakfast- the biggest egg I have ever seen.

"Where did you find that?" asked Jane.

"Scouting up the ridge behind us, this morning- Guess what that funny booming call is?" said Jenny.

"Must be one of the smaller Moa", said Sharon, "I thought there must be some around here."

"I saw one" said Jenny, "It was about one metre height and they can move quite quickly."

"Have to find out if they taste like chicken." I said.

After breakfast was cleaned up, we left the rest to sort out how they were going to get the building materials up the hill, to a terrace about 25 metres above the beach. The plan so far involved clearing a path four metres wide and straight up the hill, by chainsaw. From there, the dozer could use its winch to help the excavator up the track.

Once they cleared the site and got rid of the timber, the building kitset and material could be skidded up, using the winch again. Sounded like a good plan, simple usually being the best. Another water tank would be placed just above the building site. This would be topped up by a hydro-ram pump, the outflow from that feeding the lower tank. Almost everyone underestimates how much water that they need to live- comfortably, that is.

The building was to have a solar water booster for hot water and would be largely solar powered, with the usual backup diesel generator to cope with peak loads.

The work party set off down the beach to find a suitable accessway to the terrace. After a couple of hours, the sound of chainsaws told us that they had found a good grade, with not too many large trees. If they had been listening, they would have blazed a trail and marked the trees to be felled, then while two worked felling trees, the rest would be up clearing a site on the terrace, which had room for several parties to work. The path up the hill would be hard going, with the loggers working uphill, felling the trees towards the beach, where they would be skidded away later.

“What a shame we can’t take part”, said Jenny, as she rubbed sunscreen into her tanned legs. Will was enjoying this whole project enormously- normally he would be trying to direct, while doing the more technical aspects of the building himself. He had taken the precaution of laying in a supply of chilled cans, thus rendering himself unfit to operate machinery.

“They have made up enough of those kitset buildings under our supervision”, said Will, “Time they took the whole job on.”

“By the time they have put together four sites like this, they will be experts”, I said. Will wandered back to the kitchen to find some peanuts and chips. He didn’t drink much usually, but seemed to be planning a bit of a session.

“I will be a lot happier once they get those trees down- that’s what will get someone, if anything”, said Jenny.

“True.” I said. “Have you...”

“The usual arrangements- gate is on stand-by mode to whisk them back to Transit and Sonja has the cryo freezer standing by and is ready to prep them prior to a jump up-time. Jane is the only one here that knows the exact arrangements for medivac and is the only other, apart from Sonja who even knows anything about full resurrection.”

“Good. The gate operators need to know, nobody else does. The last thing we need is a team who feels bulletproof.”

The sawing continued throughout the day, through to the early evening. It looks like they wanted to crack on with the job, even though I had set no deadlines or even suggested a time. At about 5pm local time, we started preparing a meal of salads and cold meat and got the barbecue set up for those who wanted steaks. As the saws fell silent, we headed down to meet the workers and look over the site. Greeting them at the bottom of the hill with a chiller full of iced drinks, we told them that dinner was ready in the kitchen and that we would be back after having a quick look.

They had been busy- all the trees were down, delimbed and cut into more manageable lengths. The track uphill just needed one large stump removed, which wouldn’t take long for our excavator. They had picked the place well- the excavator should be able to climb the grade with just a bit of a push or a pull from the stick & bucket.

After a quick look about, it was back to camp, as the first of the crew were coming out of the showers and the sea. Already they were talking about the plans for the next day, which involved removing the timber and leveling the site, in preparation for the concrete floor slab.

While they were working on that, the rest of us would be starting on marking out the firebreak that was to be cut before we started the big burn-off.

Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 790AD

Day Eight

The building team got straight into the job, after an early breakfast. Our job would be bit of a bush walk today. Once Jenny got the helicopter pre-flighted and warmed up, we were off towards the Waitangi River, where Will would be dropped off. I would have to rappel down to the beach at the other end, as there was no clear area to land. Jenny would land at a clearing near the midway point, where we would meet up. We would be cutting a line from the Waitangi River through to what is known in our time as the town of Kerikeri. That should give our colonists a good start. Anything else they can clear themselves.

We both had about 12 km of hard going, but would be traveling fairly light, carrying basic survival gear and cans of marker paint. Jenny planned to mark out a couple of k's either side of her position, then start sorting out a bit of lunch- we expected to be 3-4 hours traveling what was very dense bush much of the way. Hopefully it would be easier traveling along the ridge line that would make up nearly half of our route.

I gathered up the rope, leaving it hanging at the bush edge- we would salvage it later. Taking a bearing from my compass, I set off at a trot, spray can in hand. Depending on the visibility, I would blaze a tree every 5 to 25 metres, marking the trail. After traveling about a kilometer, I found a good spot that would be easy to clear and marked it on my map. This would be cleared for a gate site, so we could move the heavy equipment and vehicles over from our bay. After a couple of hours and twelve cans of dazzle marker, I could hear a chainsaw some distance ahead. That would be Jenny, cutting a track to her landing area.

Twenty minutes later, I picked up the first of Jenny's markings- that was my job done and I could pick up the pace now that I didn't have to keep slowing to mark the path. Another thirty minutes and I found the track to where the helicopter presumably was. Jenny had found a patch of low scrub, where she had landed and had now cleared.

"Will should be here soon- spotted him a couple of k's off", Jenny said, handing me a cold bottle of ginger beer- my favorite soft drink.

I dropped my pack and pulled my shirt over my head, using it to wipe myself down. "Some rough country out there", I said, "We may need a bigger dozer than the D6, if we want this done by the end of summer."

"Just as well I ordered a pair of D9's before we came down-time, then", said Jenny. "The less chainsaw work the better."

Before long, Will arrived and we sat down to a picnic lunch. "After seeing the lie of the land, I think we should have two cutting teams- it will be slow going with just one", Will said.

“Sounds fair”, Jenny said. “In that case, we might as well finish clearing the gate area after a bite to eat. They can start here and work outwards.”

This was going to be another useful exercise- clearing a track here was going to be much harder than cutting one through the grasslands of Transit and harder than in England. There they would be directing road building, so needed to get the sort of experience that only doing the job under trying conditions could give.

We set off back up to the ridge loaded with chainsaws, fuel and the demolition kit. All we needed was enough space to move a bulldozer through. That would soon clear a spot for the rest of the equipment to follow. Jenny had already dropped a couple of trees and it didn't take long to get another dozen or so down, then to place charges on the remainder. With another dozen trees ready to blow and primer cord around the smaller trees, we moved off a few hundred yards and blew the top of the hill off. After all, who really wants to fly home with unused explosives.

After a few seconds, the radio burst into life, with an inquiry about our health. “Just a little blasting”, said Jenny. “Thanks for your concern.” Putting the radio back into her belt pouch, Jenny picked up the now mostly empty demolition pack and we headed back up the hill to check out our handiwork before heading for home. “All you have to do now is catch me a fish for dinner, while I get the chopper serviced.”

We certainly weren't getting too many hours on the machine, as the area we were working in was not that large- the preflight checks usually took longer than the flight. While Jenny tinkered with the helicopter, Will and I got the boat ready- much easier now that a rough pier had been built from logs. Fishing was so easy here- drop any kind of line into the water and something would bite. Nothing like in it would be in 1200 years time. After a few minutes, we had enough for a meal and to re-bait the crayfish pots, which we were about to lift. We won't bother with shellfish today.

By about 1600 we were tying up the boat. Jenny had the gas ring heating up the big pot, to boil the crayfish. We had already filleted the snapper and cod, using the skins and bodies to bait our crayfish pots. The sounds of heavy machinery could be heard from the building site, but the bulldozer was parked on the beach, so they must have finished with that.

Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 790AD

Day Nine

The concrete work finished, everyone dispersed to work on some of the smaller projects, such as hooking up the power and connecting the large chiller, which arrived this morning and was currently running on its own generator power. Finally, a supply of red meat, ice and for those with a sweet tooth, ice cream. If they could get the power on, that is.

The site on Transit was chosen for the near location of a good source of hydro power. We would not always have that option on our travels and I don't want to spend months listening to a large diesel engine. I wanted to get everyone familiar with energy systems and more importantly, the fact that you always seem to need 10% more power than you can actually generate. A fusion generator, of which I had several hidden in the cold store, would make life too easy.

One of the reasons for choosing the Haddon site was the ready availability of minerals, especially coal. This would be the fuel for a boiler and later, a gasworks. As I want to use this location for a holiday camp- not that is much of a holiday at the moment, we will go for solar & hydro, with LPG and later, wood for heating. As usual, we would have a stand-by diesel generator for peak loads.

The building was to be an exercise in energy-efficiency for all of us. Jane had found a range of expensive but very energy-efficient appliances that ran on low voltage systems and we would be trying them out.

Jenny was occupying herself by shooting at beer cans with her PPK. Marty was watching from the beach bar, a few metres away.

“When are you going to get a real gun? It's not like you can't afford one.”

“Ever seen me miss with this one?”

“Well..., no, but those 9mm Kurtz rounds have the stopping power of a slingshot. Plus that thing is ancient- it's going to wear out soon, the way you use it.”

Jenny cleared the pistol and passed it over. This was one of the few weapons that Marty had never inspected at some time and he stripped it for a closer look. He soon saw this was not a standard Walther. There were no machining marks whatsoever and the action slid like ice on ice. Taking his pocket knife out, he looked up at Jenny who nodded. The Victorinox steel slid off the pistol, leaving no mark. The truth started to dawn.

“Future construction, huh?” he asked.

“You got it.”, said Jenny, “I have ammo for it that is very far from 19th century- stuff that shoots like 9mm but hits like a .500 S&W.”

“OK, but why that particular model?”

“Simple, this is the sort of pistol that would be carried in the time periods I frequent.”

“So how do I get one like that built?”

“Just tell me what you want.”

The chiller was running on local power.- The generator would remain as backup, in case the water supply to the hydro plant blocked up, as they do in these small installations. In that case, the system would automatically radio us for help. Ideally, it would be in the same bay as our camp, but having the bulk store just 2km away was no real problem to us. About now, our fishermen were headed out to find something else to add to it. Conditions were just right for a bit of spear-fishing today. If they get the building up in good time, I will organize a bigger boat, so they can get out for a bit of deep-sea fishing and chase the Marlin and swordfish.

“You can move the excavator and the bulldozer anytime” said Jane, “That firewood processor you talked about would be useful now- we could cut up that heap of timber, to fuel the Stanley cooker.”

“Good idea” I said, “We will also get a portable sawmill for Transit and learn how to drive that, when we are done here.”

“Sonja is shipping two D9’s down” said Jenny, “Once we cut the main firebreak, we will cut a few more towards the coast- we want to keep a few pockets of Kauri alive and handy for ship building.”

“We will start at about the center of the firebreak and work toward the two river boundaries, for starters” I said. “Probably use those big dozers to flatten a nice area for the planned village too. The final works will happen in about 50 year’s time. We start now to get some specimen and fruit trees established and to let the cattle & horses breed up.”

“After a couple of years, we will have all manner of fruits available here- no coconuts unfortunately.” said Jenny.

“All taken care of” said Jane, “I have four crates of canned coconut cream in the next shipment.”

Along with a chiller full of meat, my Weber barbecue has arrived, so I will be smoke-roasting a large topside roast of beef tonight, along with a couple of chickens. We have had several sightings of Moa now, so when we start working on the firebreaks, I will be taking my shotgun along for a little hunting. We will have to recruit an old friend of mine, JD, who is a chef. He makes the best sausages out of exotic meat and would be great for morale on a long tour.

Now what wine to serve with Moa? That was the next question.

The cool night air blew gently through the insect screens of our caravan. It was a warm night and we were laying on top of the linen sheets, enjoying each others company, the sounds of the party dying away as the others headed to their beds. Soon all that could be heard was the surf and the cry of the Moreporks.

“I always thought that you and Jenny would pair up” said Jane.

“Jenny and I have always been two professionals working together”, I explained. “She approves of our arrangement- that’s one of the good things about a very long life- you tend to get over that possessiveness stuff.”

“But you and Jenny have never..?”

“No, don’t know why, but the time was never right and I guess we didn’t want to risk what we had.”

“I think you should, some day soon- and for the record, *I* approve.”

“No need to rush things.”

“Really- you seemed to be in a bit of a hurry a few minutes ago!”

“Just so that I can do it again.”

“In that case...”

Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 790AD Day Eleven

After a relaxing break, we moved the heavy machinery across to the clearing we had made. It was raining today- the first after a long fine spell. Within the hour, Will and I had knocked over enough trees to move the excavator and a couple of Toyota utilities loaded with equipment and fuel trailers through. The rest of the crew came through; to have a look at the work we had ahead, before heading back to start work on the steel framework of the building. From this high point, we could see quite a lot of the countryside, despite the low cloud and drizzle.

We had three months-plenty of time to get this work done, so it was decided that the least experienced operators would get to clear the hardest parts- best way to learn. Whilst I liked to keep the pressure on the troops, it was really no big deal if this job took one season or five. We could always make time.

Some of the county we had to break would be much harder, but this was a good place to start.

Jenny slewed the digger about, placed the bucket against a medium sized Rimu, pushing it over. Shifting the arm, she shoved against the upturned roots, tearing the tree loose from the ground and pushing it off the track. She killed the power and scabbled down from the cab. “That’s how it’s done”, she said. “Easy.”

“This is the hardest part of the track”, said Jane, “Two teams- Sharon and Tom- you drive south, Andrea and Carl, you drive north. Will stays here and runs supplies as needed, the rest of us are doing framing. Keep your radios on and stay safe.”

Jenny and I would be surveying the village site later this morning, taking the boat across and landing on the beach, after we returned we would fly over and would check out firebreak progress at the end of the day- weather permitting. In the meantime, a wet morning was a good time to

catch up on a bit of overdue paperwork. While we had reduced this to bugger all- a bit still had to be done to keep the operation running. We still needed to keep track of what we had used and what we wanted.

We landed at the village site, to begin a walk-about and site survey. It was too soon to start banging in pegs- that would come much later. Right now, we just wanted to get a feel for the place- where the wells might go, drainage- that sort of thing.

Stopping for lunch, we sat at the bush edge sheltering from the light rain, looking out towards the sea.

“Jane has been good for you, now”, said Jenny, in a matter-of -fact voice. “She is a dear friend and I think you are just what each other needs right now.”

I didn’t say anything, just left the space for her to say what she needed to.

“I know you both had a hard time walking away from the lives and careers you had in the Empire”, Jenny continued, “I’m real glad to see you two happy together and over all of that.”

“Jenny”, I said. ”What I really...”

“Don’t- this is what you need now.” she gently interrupted. “Anything else will come in time- and we have plenty of time- for everything.”

The framing was soon up. That part of the job was strictly routine. Back at Transit, they had raised over thirty of these buildings. The difference was that this one would have a different internal fit-out, with a mezzanine floor and lined walls, along with wiring, plumbing and all the comforts of home, unlike the usual storage shed that this sort of structure would be. The cladding wouldn’t take long for an experienced crew either. The whole thing would be finished in a few days, apart from a little interior fit-out and decorating.

The new team was definitely going to need a bit of practice putting these buildings up. It wouldn’t hurt to get some scaffolding for them, as well. That always comes in useful. What has worked well for us is being able to put more people and gear into the job than someone doing this commercially could ever afford to do. What keeps tripping us up, are the lack of people who can do the more technical tasks, such as plumbing, wiring, gas-fitting, etc. The more of these tradesmen that join us full-time, the better.

For colonists thriving in the harsh northern hemisphere climate, populating this land should be a walk in the park- especially once we cultivate and stock enough of it to get them through those first few ‘sink-or-swim’ years. Today’s efforts were more about identifying a site for further development over the next few years. We would put a campsite here and do some stump-pulling after the big burn-off. As well as that, we would be cutting secondary firebreaks, to preserve a few stands of bush.

We have 50-odd years on this timeline, so the place will be well developed and the fruit trees we will be planting will be mature. As well as that, we would be introducing faster growing trees for

timber. The local stuff is great wood, but like the English Oak, it takes forever to grow to full size.

We had finished the site survey by the middle of the afternoon and had headed back on the boat, a 15 minute trip, with the 90hp Johnson wound out. With several hours to fill in, we headed up to the building site, to check out progress.

The going was much slower in the wet- fastening a wet steel roof was a far slower job, if it is to be done safely. New steel is real slippery in the wet, so they had rigged safety lines, which seriously slowed movement down. Still- the roof was almost on and the crew was confident that they would have two sides clad before finishing for the day. That was enough progress to get the rest of them back here tomorrow. Some parts of the job are easier when there aren't too many people about- such as today. With the roof and a couple of walls covered, people could be working outside and in.

From up here, I could raise the firebreak team on the radio- I could see that a repeater station would be useful now. They were making slow but steady progress and had cut about 1 km of track between them. Time to head back down below, update the maps and finish off the paperwork.

The rain had gotten heavier, late in the afternoon. Jenny made the call and decided to open a gate, so she called up the building site to relay that message to the firebreak teams. We could fly over another day.

Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 790AD

Day Twelve

The rain continues- everyone is up at the barn today. The crew had finished three sides yesterday, leaving the bi-folding doors at the end for Will's expert attention. Despite the rain, it was warm enough, so work continued outside, with the rain guttering being fitted and the drainage temporarily hooked up. This would keep the site from turning into a swamp- more of a swamp, anyway.

Jenny and I are the only two who know how to herd electricity, so we are doing the wiring. In the dry- can't have the electric's getting wet.

This place is designed so that all utilities are on one wall, leaving the others to get on with cladding the rest and putting up the mezzanine floor. The toilets will be hooked up soon- the female members of our team will welcome that. There is a temporary 'long-drop' arrangement, but that is not a popular facility here. These plastic septic tanks are a great invention- easy to manhandle, set up and connect.

Another shortfall had become obvious- the means to dry wet clothing. This isn't such a big deal in a sub-tropical climate, but will be in England. Talking about the problem, we have decided to investigate using waste heat from our generator to heat a drying room. Here and now, we have put in the log burner early- the roof leaks where the chimney pokes through, but the flashing can wait until tomorrow. Tonight we will crank the fire up and hang up the washing, of which there is plenty. Fortunately, there was a dead rata tree on the site, which was cut up and put aside for the fire. There is plenty of green wood put aside to season for the next few years.

It would all be hard work, if it wasn't such fun building stuff for us.

So far, we had decided to add an extra builder to the recruitment list, along with plumbers, electricians and a forester.

The last few nights, we have been getting wake-up calls from the sensor pods. Tomorrow we will set up a couple of low-light cameras and try and see what is setting them off. The money is on Jenny's Bush Moa and a scheme has been forming there.

Rather than kill everything in the burn-off, Marty proposed capturing some of the wildlife.

Personally, I think he just wanted an excuse to get hold of a net gun.

We would catch and pen a bunch of these extinct grazing birds and release them into time line prime, New Zealand. That appealed to my sense of humour, more so to Jenny's.

I suspect some of histories anomalies may well be due to her sense of humour...

The proposer of this venture doesn't know it yet, but by his suggestion, he has just volunteered to organise the deer fence that will be needed to keep them in. It will have to be a big fence too.

With the rain pouring down now, most had elected for a 'bush shower' - soaping up outside and letting the rain wash it off, while clothes steamed around the fire, as we enjoyed a few well-earned drinks. Under a tarpaulin shelter outside, sausages sizzled on a barbecue. As usually happened,

one of the first appliances to be connected was the refrigerator- drinks must be cooled. Off behind the water tank, the generator thumped away, mostly unheard in the sub-tropical downpour.

“I have the repeater stations coming down tomorrow”, said Jenny, “They have to go up before we get back to earthmoving- we need to hear any calls for help.”

“Good”, said Will, “It’s too easy to come unstuck on a dozer, working on steep ground- and the nearest hospital’s a long way off.”

“If the D9 rolls over you, you won’t need a hospital.” said Jenny.

Whatever the weather, there would be plenty to do here tomorrow. The fit-out would be the best part of a day and the place would be mostly operational. Then we could clean up and get some furniture in. This was Jane’s department - everyone had learned to either speak up as to their personal requirements or defer to her impeccable taste- which seldom disappointed. Jane has a real flair for spending other people’s money and had furnished most of our 21st century accommodation. She was also one of those rare practical people, who could turn their head to almost anything and had become quite an accomplished carpenter and tiler, as well as a very promising plant operator. One day we must turn her, Jenny and Sonja loose, to design and build us some decent quarters at Transit.

Let’s get this job underway first- a luxury holiday home would be a good practice run.

“Leave the outbuildings for the next rotation”, said Jenny, “They need to do some building too.”

“The utilities block and storage will be a piece of cake”, said Will. “Two more double garages- they should be able to do those in their sleep.”

“There are four more of these sites- they will be getting their turn.” said Jenny, “The Westport one should be fun- if we get the timing out, it rains continually and you get eaten by sandflies.”

“As long as you drop us in the Whitebait season.” said Andrea, looking to her favorite food.

“That is the next site”, I said, “The best weather is outside of the Whitebait season, unfortunately, but I’m sure something can be arranged- after all, you don’t go to the coast for the weather.”

“We are going for the coal and iron sands”, said Jenny, “As well as the chance to pick over the best alluvial gold- that gets shipped to our 1850’s operation and reinvested- that’s how we get so damn rich.”

“That and those robberies you did.” said Jane.

“That was our start-up money”, answered Jenny, “and I stole it off the US government, who would have just wasted it, anyway.”

“Great how it works”, I said. “We get less for the gold than we would at any other time, but by sinking it into the more successful businesses of the day- we make shitloads.”

“What do we actually own, through our dummies?” asked Marty.

“It’s hard to tell, on a day-to-day basis- I keep it that way.” said Jane, “We are into most of the NASDAQ, but not in such a way that we the biggest player in any one company. I work very hard to keep us inconspicuous. Best estimate is we effectively control about 10-12% of the world’s economy- we could run a lot more, but I make sure we stay low-key.”

“Bugger me.” Marty said, “But what about our up-time activities?”

“We don’t even register on those economies”, said Jenny, “But we make ten times as much, in relative terms.”

“It’s all making more than we could ever spend the interest on”, I said. “That is quite enough.”

“Too much is never enough.” said Jane, “Which reminds me- get your shopping lists in for the next rotation- I will be in New York for a few days and intend to hit the deli’s.”

Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 790AD Day Fourteen

The summer is back, with a vengeance. The fit-out is finished and some of the furnishings have arrived. Will has come up with an idea for the outbuildings, which will save the next rotation a lot of work. Instead of assembling prefabricated buildings, we will be using modified shipping containers as storage and utility buildings- they come in any configuration we want to pay for- offices, accommodation, shower blocks, toilets, etc. All we have to do is pour concrete footings and connect power and plumbing- easy.

Sonja shipped some information on these to us yesterday and they look like just the sort of solution for the big project. We could make a stronghold out of these big steel boxes in a very short time. That’s what this is all about- trying ideas out and coming up with new ones. Today the four that stayed on at Transit would swap places with four of the crew here. We would do this every two weeks of this project, just to give everyone a turn at being on both supply and demand.

The building now being mostly finished, half of the crew has resumed the firebreak work. The firebreak was slowly lengthening at about a kilometer per day, as the two crews pushed in opposite directions. The excavator and a D9 would head to where the terrain was the most difficult and the other D9 and the D6 would head in the opposite direction. The route had been picked to avoid the heaviest timber and the slow progress was as much because of the inexperience of the operators. Still, by the end of this job, they would be a lot more experienced.

Two Toyota Utes were being used to shuttle between the gate point and the machinery and the dozers would skid a tank of diesel towards the work area, as needed. Jenny, having flown the day’s crew over, would stay on to do any blasting required. While they could have gated, it was good to see the progress from the air.

Andrea and Marty bumped along the rutted and muddy trail, headed north to start work. Jenny had headed south, to help blow a couple of trees that Sonja and Carl had judged too large to

move with the dozers. The Toyota made slow but steady progress over the trail, muddy and slick from the recent rains. Marty had a lot more 4WD experience and Andrea was happy to let him drive this morning- she had won the toss and would be operating the excavator today.

“A couple of those Argo 8-wheelers would be the thing for this swamp”, said Marty, over the growling of the diesel engine revving in low gear. He made a mental note to requisition one tonight.

“We should cut a new chopper pad at first chance”, Andrea said. “This drive is only going to get worse.”

She couldn't have been more right. As she spoke, the Ute lurched backwards, the rear wheels falling into a slip, as the hillside dropped away. Marty immediately gunned the engine, but it was too late to pull out and they started to fall backwards.

Marty yelled “Brace.” as Andrea grabbed at the radio handset, to have it flung from her hand as it smashed into the dash. The vehicle started to tumble as the fall gained momentum and then flipped end over end, showering them with tools, clothing and all the contents of the rear seat. The last sensation Andrea felt was a tremendous blow to the back of her head, as a toolbox slammed into her, her last thought being “I can feel bits of my teeth...” as she passed into unconsciousness.

Marty had just enough time to think 'I'm not going to live through this', when the vehicle was flung into a large tree, ending its plummet. Stunned and on the edge of consciousness, Marty started to drag himself back by sheer effort of will. Once he started to painfully breath, he started assessing his injuries. Ribs broken, legs pinned- not hurting yet- hands work and wiping the blood out of his eyes, he could see again.

First thing-call for help- the radio was dead, so he reached painfully for the handset on his belt. His left hand was cut and the wrist badly sprained, at least, but it came free and he pushed the pressel switch.

“Crew down, slip 1.5 km down trail”, he said, each breath feeling like it was cutting into him.

Jenny came back immediately, “On the way. Wayne- gate over here on a quad now.”

I heard the call, while working in my caravan. Responding with an “On the way.” I raced across to Jenny's caravan and grabbed the gate generator and controller, as well as her medical kit. Setting up the generator on the tray of my quad bike, I opened the gate from the camp to the firebreak preset. Locking the field, so that I could move the generator through it, I started the engine and drove through the gate, shutting it down once I had exited. I knew that Marty was working the north end today, so I started off in that direction. No doubt Jenny would be close behind.

I stopped well clear of the slip and again started up the generator. Jenny would set up a gate to the vehicle- that sort of operation needed someone with her 105% touch. I can manage presets, but this sort of operation is best left to a real expert.

Edging to the slip face, I looked down and could see the wreck about 200 metres below. I was just starting to think about sliding down the slip face, when Jenny arrived.

Having made the call, Marty turned his attention to Andrea. She was hurt bad- he could see her legs pinned and her head at a strange angle. The strange noise she was making was Cheyne-Stokes respiration. Marty didn't know that, but instinctively knew she was hurt real bad. She was bleeding heavily from a neck wound, caused by a branch. This he could help with, and reached across, ribs screaming in protest, to put pressure on the wound and steady her neck.

The pain was starting to come now and Marty knew that he was hurt real bad too. Where was that first aid kit? Damn- in the glovebox, where he couldn't reach. "Hang on girl- medics are on the way..."

Jenny's fingers flew over the controls, opening a gate above the crash and carefully moving it nearer and nearer. One tiny mistake and the field would shear through the wreck or bring a nearby tree down on them. Finally she locked down, as Sonja and Carl arrived. "Jane- you come too", said Jenny over the radio. "You can jump back to Transit from this end and organise the medivac - I can shoot you back in an hour without causing a loop- wait for me to reopen."

Sonja nodded- she intuitively knew that we couldn't go back and directly stop the crash, without causing a time spilt that could ruin all our work.

"Carl, monitor channel one on the hand-held, get on channel two on the vehicle set and keep the rest of the crew in the loop- go.", said Jenny. Carl ran off to his vehicle, to relay the progress. The others were too well-trained to swamp our frequency, but would want to know what was going on.

Sonja disappeared and Jenny immediately moved the field back to the road, near the slip. Through we went. Stumbling out onto the steep hillside, Jenny readjusted the plane of the gate and shut it down, while I checked the scene. We didn't want that vehicle breaking loose.

There wasn't much chance of that- smashed into a large tree, it was not going anywhere.

Andrea's breathing gave a bit of a rattle and she went limp. Tears welled up in Marty's eyes- he knew she was dead and could do nothing- Fuck- to live through all those battles and die in a stupid vehicle smash. He didn't even notice Jenny reaching through his broken window. "Let's get you sorted", said Jenny.

"Andrea- Help her- not breathing." Marty managed to grunt out. Jenny brought up an injector and pressed it against his neck, she pushed the trigger and he slumped back, his pain washing away.

I slapped a monitor onto Andrea's bloody temple. She was dead, but only a matter of seconds ago. "Jenny- this one's for you", I called out and moved around to see to Marty's injuries.

He was broken up bad and going into shock fast, but would live. Doing a quick survey, I found his legs hopelessly trapped and mangled amongst the wreckage. He had at least four broken ribs, lacerations and a broken arm. I pushed a line into his arm and started fluids. We were going to have to take his legs.

Jenny barely glanced at the monitor, slapping a heart-start kit to Andrea's neck, connecting it to a pack of haemofax. The unit found her carotid and shot a large bore needle precisely into place, starting the reanimation process and replacement of her lost blood. Andrea shuddered and then lapsed back into unconsciousness, as the analgesics kicked in. Jenny clapped on a positive pressure mask and her vital signs started to come up on the monitor.

It wouldn't keep her alive for long, but it would keep her going long enough.

The clattering of a chain signaled that Jane had a gate open and she and Tom were working to secure the wreckage, ready to pull it back to Transit. "Hooked on." called Sonja.

"All done, get clear." said Jenny.

We all jumped back, as Tom waved a flag through the gate, signaling the other side to winch through. Waiting a few seconds for the wreck to get clear, we jumped through.

"All away", Carl called over the radio, as the gate winked out. He was very much aware that he was a day's travel from the beach and there was now no gate operator in this timeline. Still, he thought, it wouldn't be the first time. Back to the helicopter pad and set up camp- who knew how long this might take to sort out?

Back at the bay, work had been abandoned, as everyone speculated over what would happen. From what they had heard over the radio, it appeared that Andrea was dead and Marty badly injured. Either way, it must have been real bad to get all of the senior members of the crew to leave.

As they sat about, Sonja appeared, running up the track. Everyone leapt to their feet and she was immediately deluged with questions.

"OK., OK.- they are going to be alright and will be back in a few days- I have a few things I need to bring you up to speed on, so get the camp into some sort of order- I have to gate across and get Carl, then will be back in a few minutes."

The remains of the Toyota scraped across the ground, dragged by a large tractor. Jane shut down the gate, as the rest ran forward to assess the wreck, cutting gear at the ready. Geoff draped Marty and Andrea with a fire-proof blanket and then backed off, standing ready with a large fire extinguisher.

Jenny aligned the heavy cutter and set the power. "Visors down." she yelled, checking to see that everyone was ready before energizing the cutting beam. In less than a second, the front of the vehicle fell loose and with a wave of her arm, Jenny signaled to the tractor to pull it clear. Geoff stepped forward, smothering the fires started as the laser sheared through flammables. As soon as there was enough room, Jenny was into the gap applying trauma packs to their severed legs, although the laser had neatly cauterized the wounds. That done, she attached the cryoprep packs to their life support units.

Now we could all get in, lifting the casualties free- amazing how much a lighter a person is without legs.

In seconds their clothing had been cut free and we first took hold of Andrea, who was on the point of death again, lowering her into the awaiting sarcophagus. The tank sealed and activated, Andrea was promptly lowered to three degrees above absolute zero. Seconds later, Marty followed into the other sarcophagus.

“Time elapsed, three minutes- very well done all round”, said Jenny, as we paused for a rest. “That was one real slick medevac.”

“I’m sure we saved her brain intact”, I said. “From here on in, we need to start looking at full backup and refit for the whole crew”

“Agreed”, said Jenny, “Jane- can you sort a timetable when you take these two up-time?”

“No problem”, said Jane, smiling, “I think they are getting nervous about the credit we are building up at the clinic- this will sort that out.”

“Enhancement level three and when they are on-line, ask what extra memories they would like uploaded- within reason.” said Jenny.

Enhancement level three gave a person strength and endurance of about three times earth-normal, as well as the usual features of total disease immunity, metabolism control, toughened bones and general resistance to injury. With that they find advanced training that a few of us have had a whole lot more achievable.

Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 790AD

Day Fourteen- evening

Before too long, Sonja had retrieved Carl and they had all gathered at the camp. Relieved at the news that their friends were out of danger, they had washed up and a scratch smorgasbord was being prepared.

Sonja explained, “You were right- Marty was badly banged up and Andrea was technically dead, but we have some advanced life-support gear here, that fortunately we have never had to use before- so we got her revived again. It’s about time we got everybody up to speed on what we have and can do in these situations- it has just never come up before.

They are both off to the 52nd century for complete overhaul- new, improved bodies, that is. We keep tissue samples of everyone banked at several sites and can clone a new body or parts as required. Can you guess why we didn’t make this public knowledge?”

“So we didn’t feel ten foot tall and bulletproof”, said Sharon, one of the deeper thinkers of our group.

“You got it.” said Sonja, watching the nodding heads. These people were no fools and would know we had good reason to do things the way we had.

“Andrea and Marty are going to be back in a few days, our time- they will be away about 9 months, their time. When they get back they will be better than new- they will be getting what we call EL3- enhancement level three treatment. This will be available to everyone here that wants it effective immediately.

Before you ask the inevitable, enhancement level three gives a person a strength and endurance of about three times earth-normal, as well as the usual features of total disease immunity, metabolism control, toughened bones and general resistance to injury. You also get to have certain memories uploaded- martial arts, languages, technical stuff- flight school, engineering, medicine.”

“Sign me up.” said Sharon enthusiastically.

“With some memories- of mainly physical stuff, you still have to train the body to use them. You may have Bruce Lee memories, but will have to train long and hard to make that body do that stuff to its full potential”, said Sonja. “But you will pick it up way faster than learning it the hard way. Languages you will understand, but have to learn to speak- get the picture?”

We had arrived quietly and were listening from the back as Sonja brought the crew up to speed. They were intelligent people and while some might be a little miffed for a time about being kept in the dark, they knew the importance of ‘need to know’. Jenny and I had just returned from a week up-time, sorting out some of the details and being around when the clinical staff woke up Andrea and Marty for the first time. Jane would stay with them- she enjoyed it up there in the 52nd and fitted in better than the rest of us. We had a timetable now, as to when to send the others and would start rotating them in the next few days. This was going to make the rest of the building easier, as EL3 meant they could go on very little sleep and work much harder. They would, while the new strength was a novelty. Little did they know what other plans I had for them, such as SAS School and beyond.

“Isn’t anyone going to get me a drink?” asked Jenny.

“Before you ask, they will be back in two days time.” I said. “It might be nice to get the new beach house finished for their arrival.”

“Wouldn’t it have been easier to have jumped back and prevented the crash?” asked Geoff.

“Simple answer is that it would have been and if I could have done that, I would have”, Jenny answered, “We start getting into the technicalities of windows of opportunity and divergence’s and we were out of luck with both. The best we could do was to fix them up. But the good news is that we can fix people up better than new, as Sonja has been explaining.”

“One thing that has come up, is that we really need more people on-board”, I said, “I have some likely candidates for the first mission team and I’m sure a few of them will fit in to our band- we are the ideal position of working with them before offering them the chance to come on-board.”

“Another carpenter or two, sometime soon”, said Will, “A concrete placer would be even better and someone who can operate a portable sawmill.”

“A better plumber than me is definitely on the list”, I said, “The same for an electrician- it gets so tedious doing *ALL* the skilled work.”

A shower of mostly empty beer cans told me they were getting over the shock of nearly losing two of our team.

I must ask Will if we can download some of his memories and make a real construction crew out of this lot...

Andrea gained consciousness. It was a most unusual sensation- quite like dreaming. No sound, no feeling, no sensations of any kind. A voice seemed to nag at her- ‘time to wake up’. The dream wasn’t all bad- her last memories were of terrible pain, then fading out, to be briefly woken as fire stabbed through her neck. The a sensation of traveling, of slowing- senses awakening, light again, sounds, smells, taste- yuck- tastes like a camel has taken a dump in my mouth. Voices- some I know, some are in a strange language- burning eyes- now I can see blurred images- Jane?- where the hell am I?- can’t move anything- nothing works- spinning-one of the figures steps forward- cold on my neck, the room stops spinning and comes into focus...

“Back with us, girl?”

“I thought I was dead”, Andrea said.

“You were, for a short time”, said Jane, “you will be better than new before you know it.”

“I can’t feel anything below the neck.” Andrea said.

“Don’t worry”, said Jane, “They are keeping it that way- you need to get used to your new body slowly. The medtech is getting anxious now, so I have to go- I will be staying here until you and Marty are better.”

The technician adjusted a control and Andrea fell asleep.

“Más largo mañana”, said the medtech.

“Gracias que usted ha hecho muy bien”, said Jane, thanking her and handing over a package, which the technician accepted with a nod and a polite smile. As Jane left, the technician opened the package, her eyes widening as she saw the contents. She was at the top of her field and commanded an impressive salary, even in this time and place, but this gift would put her children through the most prestigious universities of the planet.

A genuine 20th century bottle of Jack Daniel’s!

The clinical director spoke ancient English fluently, language being a gift of hers. “I will start forced maturity on the clones immediately- they will be ready in 185 days on this time-line.”

“I shall send our people through in groups of three, if that is agreeable?” asked Jane.

“That would be most suitable”, the director said, “Also- the family would be delighted for you to take residence with us for your stay here, if you are agreeing?”

“That would be my pleasure”, Jane said, “It must be 50 years since I had the pleasure of your company. I had hoped for such an invitation and brought a selection of 19th and 20th century wines and brandies.”

The director clapped her hands in delight. “I am almost ashamed to have to ask- you being family yourself.”

“We now-time build a holiday home on ancient earth- rustic beauty, virgin land- you must be the guest of my family.”

“Rejuvenate first, then holiday-party.”

“Agreed.”

Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 790AD Day Seventeen

If I thought these people had worked before, they showed that they must have been holding back. The whole job was completed, down to the landscaping, painting and arranging the furniture, all so their friends could return to a finished holiday home. I have to admit, the place looks great. With people like Jane and Sonja doing the design and layout, a shipping container can be fitted out like a palace, albeit a very small one.

The firebreak has been paused and a few changes made. Before he was injured, Marty was about to suggest lighter vehicles- this has been arranged, with the Toyotas returned and John Deere Gators replacing them. Also, Sharon- our geologist- is going to do a proper risk assessment of the track before work is resumed.

The rotations up-time start in two days and everyone will be getting a course on 52nd century first-aid techniques, while they are there. I think we will add a paramedic to our project team.

The main building, which started life in a brochure as a barn, looks great. In a few years up-time, these buildings will become popular as houses, but at the moment are utility buildings only. The sea-facing side is all bi-folding glass doors, which can be opened right up on a hot day, to let in the sea breeze. The sides of the building are clad in deep green coloursteel, with a red roof (although mostly covered with photovoltaic solar panels and the solar water heater). Around the building, the ground has been paved with flagstones of West Coast schist and crushed limestone. Terra cotta pots have been placed about filled with exotic plants and the overflow of the water tanks feeds a modest water feature.

Trees have been selectively felled to enhance the view to seaward and the pathway to the lower campsite has been formed from crushed limestone and illuminated with a low-voltage lighting system. Can't have drunks falling down the hill at night. Outdoor lights have been set on tall standards and trees, to keep the clouds of bugs they attract well above our heads.

The containerized ablutions and laundry block has exceeded all expectations and we will definitely go with that for the big project. We will probably come up with a few refinements before then. A sound-proofed shed for the generator would help- I get sick of that thing thumping away. Fuel is another matter- there has to be something better than 200 litre drums. I got so sick of looking at

them that I gated a bunch across the bay, out of sight. Still, in England the empty drums will probably become a hot commodity.

Gate time soon- I can see the fishermen coming back now. I hope they have plenty for crayfish- I have done a huge pot of cheese sauce. Fondue is one of Marty's eccentricities and Jane is sending down real baguettes.

The welcome back party was held at the now completed new building. Sonja had brought Andrea and Marty back in the early evening, at about the usual time we stopped for a few drinks after a days work. A quick word confirmed that she had synchronized the times so that they would be ready for an earlier night than normal. It took a lot of getting used to a new body.

"Now this is more my style." said Jenny as she leaned back in a leather recliner, looking out at the night sky, over the sea.

"Just as enjoyable as those early days in Africa, a nice Gin & Tonic after a hard day of shooting Jumbos with the old 4-bore", I said "Except you could never get any ice."

That got Marty's interest.

"Big game hunting- I never thought of that."

"Right- after this tour, we will go on safari. How about 1880, with a few modern rifles on the side- a Weatherby or two?"

"With the enhancements, I think I can handle that old 4-bore", he answered.

"That's the spirit."

"Andrea, if the boys are off plugging Jumbo's, you have to get out on the town with Sonja and me. Jenny said, "England during the phoney war just can't be beat for a girl's night out."

"Or learning to kick horny RAF officers in the balls." said Tom, who also frequented that time period. Hell, I used to enjoy it too, but found the typical German officers mess much more fun, at least in the early stages of the war. After spending a quite few years in that period (many more subjective years than the war ran for.), the sides did get a little blurred, although we all loathed the Russians and the French.

Perhaps after their enhancements, some of the others might get more interested in exploring other times. We all had our favorites- Tom, the academic and historian/linguist was probably wider traveled down-time than most, but it took nerves of steel to venture into the future. For good reasons.

Maybe we more experienced travelers needed to do some guided tours.

"I need about 2000 metres of deer fence and a couple of crates of staples", said Marty.

That's right- the Moa trap.

"I've had a bit of time to think about it", said Marty, I bet we can catch a bunch of them, easy."

“Might be an idea to shift them to an enclosure down south, to acclimatize them to the area you want to release them”, said Sharon.

I thought about that for a few seconds. “We could tie that in when we develop the Westland site- it would certainly be easier than trying to catch them down there.- I was planning on starting the New Plymouth site next, but we can switch them around. Will that cause any problems, Jenny?”

“No. We aren’t planning a burn-off at the Westport site, so you can just release them there. We can herd them through a gate any time in the next sixty years”

“That’s the details then- apart from feeding a bunch of oversized turkeys.” I said. The whole thing was a bit frivolous, but hell- we had to have the odd joke on the human race and if we can’t have a laugh, what is the point of a long life.

With the clear sky now dark and the moon still not out, the evening was in full swing. An impressive pile of empty bottles were accumulating in the ‘recycling’ bin- these would be left for our future settlers use. The night was balmy and a fire had been lit in the brazier for effect alone. The lights had been dimmed inside so that we could watch the night sky- a popular nighttime activity here was spotting meteorites- no satellites in these skies.

Jenny climbed on top of a hardwood outdoor table, rapping on the side of a Champagne bottle with a corkscrew, to the inevitable cries of “Speech, Speech.”- Someone always has to state the obvious.

“Ladies and Gentlemen- charge your glasses, please. To the newly rebuilt- may it take you many good years to bugger these bodies up.”

Marty climbed up to reply, well-oiled with genuine Dublin Guinness. “I feel like a nineteen year-old- I just need to find her now.” The inevitable catcalls and rain of empty beer cans followed, as he reverse-flipped off the table.

Andrea could see that she wasn’t going to get out of this. Pushed towards the table, she stood in front and did a standing jump onto it, to the cheers and whistles of the crew. “Reports of my death would seem to be premature.” she replied, lightly jumping down.

With a similar leap, I got onto the table, as well.

“Two days time and everybody starts going up for new bods- What you need to think about are what new memories you want added to them. All voluntary of course, but the memories all come from us- not outsiders.

We have flight training, paramedic, engineering, martial arts, assorted military stuff- weapons, vehicles, small unit, survival, logistics, demolitions, languages and general medicine. These are the standard ones we have available now. Think about it, anyway.

Just remember- we start with original genetic material, so until you get some jumps in, you will be fertile again. The good news is- if you request it, our friend’s up-time can give you a five-year contraceptive jab- male and female. And the next three days are free.”

With that, star-shells burst into the night sky, as Sonja triggered off a magnificent fireworks display. Enough serious stuff- time to party.

As planned, our guests of honor folded at about 11pm and were taken off to the bunkhouse set up on the mezzanine floor. Looking at the body language, they had obviously gotten very well acquainted during their nine month stay up-time. This was quite predictable really.

Relationships tended to start up and move about with us. One of the benefits of a long life- you got quite relaxed about such things and lost that annoying tendency to cling- or hold grudges.

High up behind the building, up on the spur, Will and some of the others had built a small observation platform. From there, you could see out into the bay, and look towards the open Tasman Sea beyond. It was a nice place to come for some quiet and to smoke a cigar.

Contentedly puffing away on a fine hand-rolled Dominican, I sat with a large snifter of Martel Cognac on the railing, looking out to sea. My enhanced hearing picked up the normally silent footsteps of Jenny.

“Hope you brought a refill”, I said.

Jenny placed the bottle on the small table between our canvas chairs and filled her glass. We sat for a few minutes, in that comfortable silence that two people who know each other very well can share.

“I think they sort of knew”, Jenny said.

“Well, we have given them a few hints.”,

“Yeah, they knew there was something different about you, me, Sonja, Tom and Jane- the old timers.”

“With a new crew coming on, they become the old crew. Now we can put them through the fun & games.”

“Oh, the lucky sods. Staff James and his troops get another lucrative contract turning supply pouges into soldiers- but Marty, Andrea and Carl are already up there, so they get the option of going back to the Empire for more training”

“Yep. “But not everyone wants to be an officer- can you see Gunny Martin taking a commission.”

“Poor bloody Staff James- he tries to grind them down, but even EL3’s run rings around his training programs. We must get him on board one day.”

“I had planned to bring him on for the Bravo or Charlie crew. He will be a believer by then- by the time we recruit Delta team, he will be ready to bring his crew on-board. First, I want my Alpha crew up to a point where they can take on the Imperial conditioning.”

“So four years, Transit time”, Jenny mused, “I don’t want to take on any new members that are too good...”

“By then, we will have pushed most of them through the Academy. SAS won’t stand up against our Lensmen.”

Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 790AD

Day Eighteen

The sun rose over the Bay of Islands. We ignored it and went back to sleep. Apart from two of us that had fallen asleep in chairs, out in the open.

Jenny and I had been up talking until sunrise, mainly discussing training plans and recruiting. The cool of dawn woke us, and we headed down the hill to our respective caravans. Before too long, the keen fishermen would be down at the pier loading the boat.

I have had three subjective days awake. I don't think their noise will bother me that much.

Wake me at noon, when I have had a sleep-in.

Carl, Andrea and Marty carried the catch over to the kitchen, while Sharon tied the boat to the pier. Sonja watched them, eyeing up the small swordfish they had caught. That would go well with the stuffed baked potatoes she was planning to cook on the Weber. There should be more than enough to send some back to Transit, for the remaining crew there.

A Nikau palm had been felled, to make 'Millionaire's Salad' and some 20th century venison was marinating in red wine, onions and garlic. Releasing deer here was forbidden for now, as we were aware of the ecological damage they could do unchecked. Moa remained off the menu, as nobody had yet had the time to go hunting them.

With the freezer's arrival, several delicacies had arrived, such as ice-cream. This had proved extremely popular with the cocktail set, which were now making seriously alcoholic milkshakes. We even had a few coconuts left from my and Marty's raid on Fiji. He hadn't surfaced yet, but I'm sure we could go off in pursuit of fresh fruit anytime soon.

With the fish filleted and stored away and the boat tied up, it was playtime on the beach. The usual driftwood stumps had been set up for cricket and the batters were waving bits of packing crates at a ball. Away from the action, several were rubbing sticky stuff on their skin- I preferred to stay out of the sun- a deck chair under a shady tree was more my idea of comfort.

A few days of this and we will be ready to get back to work.

After talking about things last night, we had decided to move the heavy gear towards the coast and spend some more time working the easier ground. We could cut the firebreak later in the season. With 50 years or so to go, we would wait until excavating the canal where we intended to moor the ship we were planning to hijack.

That was going to need a real big hole dug. A Liberty ship is 135 meters long, 17.3 metres wide, has a draft of 8.5 metres and carries 10,000 tons of cargo (that is what we are after). I'm not going to drag that onto the beach, even with a couple of D11's.

Back in the present, the new vehicles should be being gated through about now. Those 8-wheelers look like they might be a bit of fun. If people could avoid driving them off the side of hills, that is.

“So how do you plan to get this ship into the canal?”, asked Marty, “Its not going to be easy getting a ship of that size lined up with a small canal and you won’t have any time to get used to the helm.”

“Good point”, I said. “Firstly, I need someone with steam experience to work the engines. Then we can use the ship’s winches to warp us in. I had in mind running a hawser out on a small barge, which we position near the gate point. That’s going to involve putting down a big deadman anchor- plenty of big timber about for making a couple of those. Then we back-fill with the dozers, form a ramp up one side to unload and we have ourselves a ready made camp and storeroom- easy.”

“Sounds fair”, he said. “The interesting part is going to be seizing the damn thing- what are we up against?”

“28 gunners and 41 crew on this one,” answered Jenny, “All looking out to sea for submarines and nothing more than a couple of officers with sidearms. We can take them easy.- we take out the gun crews quiet, along with the bridge, then flush the rest out with CS. I plan to hit them a few hours after a storm, in the dark. We go in disguised as a German sub crew. The survivors get to leave on the lifeboats.”

Marty looked doubtful.

“Don’t worry, we will have a bit more training and will have a few more on-board before we move to outright piracy.” I said.

“We have about 4 year’s straight-line time before we get to there” said Jenny. “There is a hell of a lot more work to do before then- now quit talking shop and someone fetch me a fresh bottle.”

Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 790AD
Day Ninety Two

The rains were welcome- finally the smell of smoke was mostly washed away- at least over here. Across the bay, the blackened hills steamed and smoldered. Our work was done for the season- almost all of the equipment had been moved back to Transit and the barn had been secured against the up-coming winter months. We would be back to this location next summer for a break, to do some planting here and resume work on the other sites, which were now surveyed out.

We walked down the path towards the beach and the one remaining Toyota that was towing my caravan.

“Just like the end of the school holidays”, said Jenny, “But now it’s time to get back to work.”

The gate opened and the land went back to being uninhabited.

For now...

PART SEVEN

Haddon Hold, England, 10th April, 847 AD

Day 400

The news of our opponent's demise had spread far and wide, in part due to our people's efforts and the radio station. Getting several hundred new radio receivers out there has certainly helped.

Petitions for roads, trade and alliances have been coming in from all points of the compass. With them, we have had an influx of tradesmen, adventurers and an assortment of rouges and vagabonds.

The locals have soon sorted out the pretenders and criminals. The newly formed trade guilds have proved very efficient in weeding out those pretending to be craftsmen- tar and feathers being the gentlest medicine they prescribed. The fate of thieves and burglars depended in the inventiveness of their captors, who were quite adept in finding uses for their new technology. I have seen a whole new meaning given to a 'Tractor Pull'.

The roads are spreading daily, thanks to the efforts of the local roading crews, overseen by our people. In a few months, we will be making steel and Portland cement in quantity and a new power station is well under construction at Hilltop. This one will be a steam-powered turbine, developing at least 5 Megawatts. Finally- no more noisy generator in the compound, just the standby set. With the amount of work and projects going on in the nearby villages, we decided to run power lines, rather than keep moving generator sets about.

With the demand for large amounts of fuel and construction materials, we have constructed a run of railway track behind Hilltop's mines, to facilitate moving the bulk quantities we require. The whole area has been put off-limits for anyone not working for us- it was previously uninhabited anyway. This is where we do our training of the local militia, as well as have our practice ranges. Thermal sensors and holographic projectors have established rumors that this area is haunted.

The heavy equipment has been moved to New Zealand and the construction crew will be heading down there tomorrow, under the command of John French. Training for the hijacking of a shipload of supplies starts today, so John is going to be busy shuttling between here, there and Transit.

Transit Training Area.

The hulk of a Liberty ship floated in the dark, moored to the shore. Jenny had rigged the ship with holo gear, to simulate crew and no doubt had a few surprises built in. Today would be our first assault on the ship and a stealthy attack was to be rehearsed.

This holographic training is amazing stuff. After WW2 it was found that most soldiers just weren't firing their weapons in combat. After that, weapons training started to incorporate human-shaped figures as targets, the theory- which worked- was that it would desensitize troops to firing at people.

The reactive holo targets we use take this to a new level. They can be set to react to fire at different levels. On 'Real Life' they shoot back, bleed, scream and die.

And we can weed out those who aren't up to combat, before it's too late...

Exiting the gate on the boat deck, Sonja and I stayed low, pistols drawn. A few seconds later, Steve and Andrea appeared. Sonja and Andrea took position to take out the crew to aft, scanning the area with thermals and making sure the Orliken mounts above us were unmanned. Intelligence told us they would be, during the hours of darkness- but why leave things to chance? John and Marty now emerged from the gate and moved forward to attack the forward positions.

Steve and I moved to assault the bridge. The engine noises and the wind (simulated) drowned out what little sound we made. Our night vision goggles and laser sights (invisible to the naked eye) gave us a huge advantage in the dark, which we would need.

On the signal, the holos started winking out, signifying lethal hits. We started taking them out from nearest to furthest with the silenced rifles, as they watched to seaward, searching for submarines- the only night-time threat prior to us.

Steve entered the bridge high, with me down low, dropping the bridge crew in under a second with a well-placed volley of .45 slugs. We set to dragging out the sandbags that would be bodies on the real assault and several seconds later, a gate opened and Jenny and Mike came through with the gate generator, as the others reported their sectors clear.

The rest of the ship now needed to be cleared. Swapping their rifles for slung AA-12 assault shotguns, Sonja, Steve and John took up position to cover the crew's quarters. These three weapons would be totally devastating in the confined accessway to the quarters and messes.

Jenny reset the gate for the engineering spaces, where Andrea, John and Marty would quietly take out anyone below decks. We wanted to do this silently, to avoid rousing the rest of the crew and gunners. They could be taken prisoner and put off in the boats. History showed about half of this crew surviving an unspecified attack and I saw no reason to change that fact.

With the ship secured and the rest of the holo crew not alerted, the training session was over and we gated back to Haddon for debriefing.

"Not too badly done for a first attempt," said Jenny, "But the times to eliminate the gun crews were slower than I would have liked- any suggestions?"

"In your time-line there was an AR-15 variant, firing a .50 projectile under development that could be quieted", said Marty, "A semi-auto with good hitting power would speed up the takedown."

"I know another weapon, from a different time line that fits the parameters of this operation and it is very well developed", said Jenny, "I will fetch a couple and if you like it, you can go back and do a course on maintaining them. That's it for now- John, come on over to the shed and I will send you back to 2000 hrs NZ time, - just in time for drinks."

"This is the Sturmgewehr 83, an assault rifle firing a 10 x 45mm cartridge", explained Jenny, "it comes from a time line where WWII never happened - which is quite a story in itself. Anyway- it

has had 23 years in active service and is still considered the premium close-quarters infantry weapon of this world, as ubiquitous as the M16 in ours. This is the SD or Sound-Dampened model, to take liberties with the German. Not nearly as quiet as a Whisper, but quiet enough. Let's take it up to the range and try it out."

There was a scramble for the nearest vehicles.

"Are we smiling?" asked Jenny

"We are." Marty said, "Why did you hold out on us? this weapon runs rings around the M4."

"You needed to learn how to ask me the right questions", said Jenny. "You will now be going back to Transit for a couple of weeks to learn all about it and tomorrow, you will teach us how to look after it."

"We sure could have used those when we got here." I said.

"I didn't find out about them until very recently", Jenny said, "I expect this sort of thing will keep happening to us."

Haddon Hold, England, 20th April, 847 AD

Day 412

John was working to a 28 hour day, with his daily jumps to take part in training, but his upgraded body made light work of this and the work was not that demanding- all he had to do was oversee the digging of a canal and take the odd turn at the controls of the excavator. Following the advice of the more experienced members, they had set up camp across the bay, in a cove that had been long used as a holiday home by the earlier members of the team.

The old adapted barn and outbuildings were sound, but showing obvious signs of age now, over 50 years after they were built. All the same, it was still a most impressive campsite, Shirl in particular being awed by the New Zealand bush- so different to her home. All the scars caused by cutting the site out of the bush had long since healed and the surrounding plant life had taken on a well-manicured look, from 50 years of care. With only one summer left before the new settlers arrived, it was not worth building new quarters and so they would use these and travel to work by boat- a short trip of 15 minutes each way.

In the usual way, the station had been set up to need a minimum of housekeeping, part of the reason for taking Shirl, now in her final trimester. She would have little to do- just a bit of cooking and cleaning (it was impossible to stop her working.) and she would have the help of a couple of Haddon locals for the heavier work, such as gathering wood and gardening.

A satellite link kept them in direct touch with Haddon Hold and had now replaced the radio repeater to the main colony site. The team had arrived in autumn, but the subtropical weather would be no hardship to those used to northern hemisphere winters. All they had to do was erect a few Quonset huts, mill some timber, drill a couple of wells and- of course, unload a Liberty ship.

That left a LOT of time for fishing.

The two huge Caterpillar 385 excavators continued to deepen the great rift towards the shore, gouging out a canal eight metres below the high water mark, towards the shore; a constant stream of dump trucks tipping the spoil nearby. Later it would be used to backfill the canal and be ramped up for access to the ship. Another smaller excavator was busy digging holes to set logs as bollards, in order to secure the ship.

Scooping out 4 cubic metres with each bucket full, they would take six long days to complete this job, then another day to open the canal to the sea.

Meanwhile, the assault team continued to train for the assault on the Liberty ship. This would be the first of many ships they would seize.

Jenny had made each successive assault more difficult- crew changed position continually, oil was spilled on decks, the boat was made to pitch and yaw, while water was sprayed over the decks. Holo's were more reactive and now died realistically and sometimes noisily, instead of winking out. Alarms were sounded part way into the attack and crew members went out fighting.

Still, each time the ship's crew was quickly overwhelmed and the times kept getting shorter and shorter. Jenny finally pronounced us ready. One more part of the simulation remained- gating the ship to New Zealand.

The plan called for a gate to be opened directly under the keel, allowing the ship to fall through. It would emerge some metres above the surface of the bay and in falling, was going to go under some way before buoyancy took over and brought the ship back up, so we had to check all hatches were secure before jumping. We would all assemble on the bridge and if the calculations were wrong, we were to escape by gate to Transit. I'm sure Jenny has done her sums right- the only uncertainty is if the welded hull of a Liberty ship will hold up to the punishment of a drop into the sea. Jenny reckons that it will be nothing like as bad as an Atlantic storm on the structure.

"Brace for jump." Jenny called, then the ship fell for ½ a second, hitting with a thump, then bobbing up and down for about 15 seconds.

That wasn't as bad as I had thought it might be.

While Jenny and Mike inspected the ship, we threw a cargo net over the side to allow John to climb down to the awaiting boat. We would have to do the trip back to Transit, if the boat proved sound.

Fortunately, it proved sound after that jump and the next.

"Tomorrow you just have to do the same, but carry the lines out to the boat", John said to his crew, "While the excavators keep that sand bar open, we will run the boat in at full power, once those lines are aboard. She will possibly start to ground at the bar- that's when we use the ship's

winches to warp her in. Once in the canal, the diggers close the bar and we secure to the bollards- the rest is slow-time stuff, fill in the ditch, ramp up a road and unload.”

“We could even set up camp on the ship”, said Dave, who had come down to supervise the running of the sawmill.

“You could, but Debbie might prefer the living arrangements here.” John said.

“Dirty old ship’s cabin- luxury beach house- no choice.” said Debbie, who had come for what she called a ‘working holiday’. Her duties involved checking out the livestock that had been released into the area several years earlier, to multiply and to look over the South Island Moa Park.

“We have a go for two days time”, said Jenny, “The team jumps down to Transit tonight and synchronizes time for a night jump, plus gets a good day’s rest.”

“I guess that means we stay in the old camp, then- well away from the bar?”

“You guessed right.” said Jenny, “But after we pull this one off- you and I go back for a week to celebrate.”

“It’s a date.”

Transit One

Day 413

We jumped to Transit this morning and would spend a leisurely day on the range then get our gear serviced and ready to go. This was an important mission- we had decided that taking cargo ships would be something worth trying. We would get one hell of a lot of material out of one bulk carrier or container ship.

After the first two practice runs, we had decided to re-arm the team with the excellent 10mm SG-83 assault rifles and the AA-12 military shotgun, which was just coming into service on our prime timeline. With a 30 round drum magazine and capable of fully automatic fire, as well as the ability to fire grenade rounds, this was devastating in close-quarters fighting. These certainly addressed the stopping power problems we had with the M4's. Most of the team had already exchanged their 9mm pistols for .45 auto's- all those that had used them in a fight, anyway.

With all equipment tested and our body armour on, we were ready for the jump. Pistols drawn and safeties off, Sonja and I headed through the gate, to a ship on the cold Atlantic.

Cold isn't the half of it, but here it is our friend, numbing the sentries and aiding our thermal imaging scanners. A sweep with the thermals indicated that the crew was where they all should be. The others were now arriving through the gate, to take up their positions.

Twenty long seconds after arriving, we were ready to start the assault. I called "GO.", as we entered the bridge firing, killing the crew with two well-placed shots each. Looking out across the ship through night-vision goggles, tracery lines of laser light reached out through the fog- when they touched a gunner or sentry, he died. With the wind, the engine and machinery sounds and the noise of the ship cutting through the sea, the clacking of the sound-dampened rifles and clattering of spent cases went unnoticed. Working fast, we tossed the bodies into a corner and moved clear of where the gate would open.

Ten seconds later, the gate opened on the bridge and Jenny and Mike emerged. As soon as they cleared the field, Jenny shut down the field and began setting up for a gate to the engineering spaces. One team would work upwards, while the other secured the ship's quarters.

The ship's 1st engineer turned to stare down the barrel of what looked like the biggest pistol he had ever seen- held by what had to be a German soldier- the helmet was unmistakable.

"Hände oben." Mike barked at the engineers. This needed no translation- their hands were immediately raised. With a few gestures, Mike pointed them to the hatchway, Steve and Marty herding them forward at pistol point. Mike turned his attention to the controls and started the process of slowing the ship to a near halt.

With 55 seconds elapsed, Mike reported the engineering spaces secured without a struggle, four prisoners taken. The rest of the team systematically worked through the decks, rousing the sleeping off-watch and handcuffing them with plastic cable ties. The slightest sign of resistance met with a blast from a stunner. So far, not a shot fired during this stage of the operation. The ships crew was totally unprepared for a boarding, their defense's being set up for U-boat or air attack.

Half of us had slung our assault rifles and had swapped to the deadly AA-12 shotguns- the muzzle of a 12 gauge barrel makes a very intimidating sight. With our coal-scuttle kevlar helmets and a few bits of German insignia on our equipment, the ship's crew was totally convinced we were some kind raiding party from a U-boat.

With the survivors huddled on the freezing boat deck, I announced that they were to be put off the ship, but the slightest bit of resistance would result in them all being killed.

I then ordered the senior surviving ship's officer, the engineer, to man the lifeboats. They started warily preparing the boats, seeming to believe that we would open fire at any instant. A midshipsman and two men were dispatched, under escort, to fetch additional stores for the lifeboats and warm clothing.

As the last boat swung out on its davits, I called out, in the heavy German accent I had been using, "Steer due north- I don't want to run you down. You may make a signal in one hour- any earlier- we blow you out of the water."

As the lifeboats got under way, the realization of what had happened started to sink in, along with the fact that thirty of their number were missing. Glancing nervously behind, they could see the stern 5" gun tracking them. They would need to put a few more miles between themselves and the ship before sending the distress rockets up. After checking his compass bearing, Lieutenant (JG) Johnson, the Navy gunnery commander, glanced at his watch- two hour until dawn. "If we can just get another three miles away, we may live through this", he thought to himself. Forward, he could here the sailors talking.

"Did you see the eyes on the short one- that was one real mean looking Nazi, if ever I saw one..."

"Yeah- Joe tried to grab his pistol and that one fucked him up real bad, took him half an hour before he could speak- he still looked real sick when they put him in the boat..."

"I saw the for'ard mount and there were bodies everywhere- but I never heard a shot."

"Must be kind of some Nazi secret weapon.

"Man, I thought we were dead..."

"When they get 200 metres clear, get us under way. Team Alpha- get the bodies over the side and secure anything loose", said Jenny, "Bravo- start sweeping with the life-detectors, everything gets a dose of Gamma radiation. If we don't get visitors, we jump in thirty minutes."

We started the process of preparing the ship, part of which was to kill all pests and vermin on-board. This involved using up-time sensor equipment and beamers to irradiate any infestations- rats get everywhere. Standard gear- used in the days of early space travel, about 500 years from now. This was a near new ship and we weren't finding a lot, mostly mice, which were swiftly fried.

As we worked through the engineering spaces, my sensor suddenly leapt off the scale. Someone is hiding in here.

"Contact- machine shop." I called over the radio. The signal was coming from a large locker. I put down my equipment and drew my .45 while I waited for backup, which arrived in the form of Mark and Steve a few seconds later. I pointed at the locker and they took up position either side, Steve tearing the door open, as I held my gun on it. A young man, an engineer by his dress, fell out and was promptly seized and trussed up.

"Got a live one", I called over the radio, "Continuing sweeps- out."

An engineer, I thought. "We have taken the ship. Whether or not you live depends on your attitude. What is your job?" I asked the terrified sailor.

"Third assistant engineer" he blurted out.

"Can you operate the pumps, winches and cranes?"

"No problem", he answered, "Anything on this ship- except maybe the radio."

"Listen carefully then," I said. "If you give us your full and complete cooperation, you don't go over the side. Got that?"

"Hey- you got it. I only signed on for the hazard pay- this war don't concern me, I'm here for the money." he blurted out.

"Welcome to our crew", I said, cutting his bonds. "Now, you are going to be experiencing a lot of really weird stuff during the next few hours. I advise you to just roll with the punches and do exactly what Mike and Steve here tell you- what's your name?"

"Andrew Jackson, Sir." he answered.

"OK Andy, you are on the payroll, effective immediately," shaking his hand in greeting, "By the way, we aren't Germans- just pirates that like to blame the Germans."

I left to continue my sweep, as Mike started to explain what was about to happen.

Andy had been searching in the expendable stores locker, for a dropped screwdriver, when he heard the cry "Hände oben." from behind the boiler. Quickly, he decided the best course of action was to step into the locker and pull the door to. Peering through the keyhole, he decided that he had made the right call, as the rest of his watch was escorted off at gun point.

The sounds of the engine told him that the ship was slowing and that there had to be at least two others down here at the controls. What to do? He sat down as quietly as he could and tried to think what to do.

Then the door burst open and he was flung to the deck and pinned. No weakling by any means, he was amazed by the sheer strength of the two who pinned him down and tied his hands. For the first time he noticed the German uniforms and panic really set in.

“I’ve been waiting for an explanation of the contact report”, said Jenny.

“Got us a new prospect- an engineer”, I said.

“They always come in useful”, she said. “I will have a word to him after the jump.”

“Bravo secure” came over the radio.

“Everyone to the mess, 5 minutes to zip”, Jenny replied. We had emptied the room and rigged lines to hold, as from our training, we knew we were about to get tossed about. With the gate generator positioned and secured against movement, we started to secure ourselves for what was to come. Our new recruit was told to grab a line and get ready to be tossed about. We quickly stripped our armour off and all strapped auto-inflating life vests on. It wasn’t 100% that the ship would survive the jump.

“Three, two, one...” Jenny counted down. Andy dropped and turned inside out all at once. As he lay on the wildly lurching deck, gagging, he wondered what could do that, when he had ridden out the storms of the Atlantic.

Blinking and squinting as our eyes adjusted to a bright, sunny day, the teams ran to their allocated duties- mostly to check the integrity of the hull. “A little water taken”, Mike said, “The front hatch broke loose- starting the pumps now”

The runabout was approaching to take a line that would be used to drag a hawser aboard. “We caught a big one.” called Dave, as he threw a lead-weighted line aboard. At the shore, the two large diggers were working at the waterline, keeping the sand bar open.

At the helm, Jenny signaled ‘slow ahead’ and lined the ship up between the two excavators, 500 metres ahead. There was just a breath of wind and the tide was high.

On the forward deck, the hawser was pulled aboard, as the ship reached the 200 metre buoy. The purpose of this was as much to keep the bow aligned with the narrow cutting, as it was to warp the ship across any shallows. With Andy’s guidance, the heavy nylon hawser was wrapped around the main winch. ‘Strange- it’s not manila or hemp’, Andy thought, but was too busy with the controls to think about this more.

The pitch of the engines changed as Jenny signaled ‘full power’ and Andy increased the winch speed to match. The hawser had been run over the port side and the tail of the hawser was being dragged parallel with the beach by a large tractor. This would keep it clear of the screw.

The earthworks crew had done their job well, under John's expert guidance. The keel barely scraped over the bar, the winch not being needed. From here, the canal became progressively shallower and narrower, designed to slow the ship, which had now gone into full reverse. Other ropes were thrown off the sides, to be secured, stopping the ship from rolling, while we backfilled the trench.

As the ship screeched to a halt, the lines were drawn taut and the earthmovers were already hard at work backfilling the trench, now mostly occupied by one very firmly beached Liberty ship.

"Taking a little water." said John, "Pumps keeping up easily- get Andy below to help me shut down the main engine."

"Well done everyone- that's good for three days R&R down here." I said. I raised the binoculars and looked across the bay. The tents were up, the chiller was running and a fire was already going- it looked like a spit roast was in progress. I turned to John, "Looks like you have them organised down here."

"That was Shirl", he said, "She figured that you would want to stay and tie one on. By the way- is that new guy on the crew?"

"Provisionally- he has to fit in and get used to the idea that there is no going back", I answered, "But the 60 year technology and sociological jump isn't that hard- half our pre-Haddon crew came from that era. I think it would be a good idea for him to stay down here with you, to ease him into our life"

"I can always use another fitter or mechanic." said John, "Another five or six wouldn't go amiss."

"They are on the way."

Bay of Islands- New Zealand

Day 411- late afternoon- 21st April, 847 AD.

With the ship secure and the cutting backfilled, Mike shut down the auxiliaries, now that the water has stopped seeping in. The small detail of throwing a few dozen bags of cement into the hole before backfilling had worked. All work had stopped as a three-day holiday had been decreed- something unknown to the Haddon local workers and was a mark of their privileged position, with the best roading gang and construction team being selected for this mission.

Everyone had come over from the old holiday house for the occasion and had set up a very impressive camp under canvas. This was autumn, but it was still warm in this subtropical area. Not one, but two spits were going, with a whole pig on one and a sheep on the other, slowly roasting over a fire of Manuka hardwood. About 50 metres away from the camp, a laundry, shower and toilet block had been completed and behind that, a large chiller unit kept the drinks and food cold. A small earthwork had been raised, to dampen the sound of the generator set.

Our newest member had very quickly figured out that we were no ordinary band of pirates. As soon as he got off the ship, he had swarmed all over the earthmoving plant, the generator set, the sawmill and any other piece of equipment he caught sight of. John and Steve had taken him in tow, prying him off the caterpillar generator and escorting him off to where a bar had been set up in a 14'x14' tent.

“So you have a time machine- Just like in H.G. Well’s book.” Andy said, loosening up with a few shots of good navy rum on board.

“Sure do.” said Steve, “You are now about 1100 years before your time and drinking on the Northern coast of New Zealand.”

“This is your base?” Andy asked.

“Hell no”, said Steve. “This is an outpost- the main operation is back in England- that is a much bigger setup.”

“So what did you want with our cargo?” he asked.

“Mainly those Quonset huts- you might have noticed all the concrete pads about”, answered Steve, “We have a bunch of colonists coming down here, next spring. The K rations will feed them, while they get crops growing”

Jenny walked over to where we were sitting, on a couch carved by chainsaw, from a large section of Kauri log. Andy, showing a fine display of 1940’s manners stood up and raised his cap to greet Jenny.

“A taste of home”, said Jenny, handing him a chiller bin. He opened it and looked puzzled. He knew the brand, but beer in cans? Picking one up, he noticed straight away that the can wasn’t steel- it felt like aluminium.

“It still tastes like weasels.” Jenny said. “Welcome to our happy band- you will be pleased to know that it isn’t compulsory to sign the articles in blood, but we still toast the devil with Grog.”

“To the Devil then, Ma’am.” Andy said, raising a can. Steve showed him how to open a tear-tab.

“Tell us about yourself”, said Jenny.

“I’m from New Jersey”, Andy said, “I left home at 14, and gained two years overnight, signing on as a wiper on a tramp steamer doing the banana run from Ecuador to Los Angeles. Looking for adventure and travel, I guess. I worked the Pacific for five years on an assortment of tramps and scows, working up through the ranks. I eventually saved a bit of money and took a break to take classes and finally got my assistant engineer’s ticket. This gave me an opening to some of the better lines, but I found I missed the atmosphere of the tramps.

Then the war started in Europe and the pay was better doing the Atlantic runs. I made two trips before you jumped my ship.”

Jenny focused her gaze upon him, “You know we move through time. Your ship was to be destroyed by a U-boat a few hours after we took it. That is one reason we selected it. Our way, half of you got to live and the rest got a clean death- better that than choking on fuel oil, while freezing slowly to death.”

“I reckon you would be right, ma’am, you seem a whole lot more civilized than the pirates I have met, down Jakarta and South China”, he said.

“All I ask is that you live with us for a bit, before you decide about us”, Jenny asked, “and if you want an interesting life, you have come to the right place.”

John came over to our group and joined us. “You will be working with me for the next couple of months- I need someone to service diesel engines and you can get some time on that equipment you have been eyeing up. Firstly, though, we need to get that ship unloaded- those concrete pads you see are awaiting some of the Quonset huts on-board and a lot of the other supplies are needed elsewhere. Do you have any time on steam turbines?”

“No, that sort of stuff was out of my class- navy or the big liners”, Andy said.

“Never mind”, John said, “Anyone with a boiler ticket is a gift.”

“Why would you need that old stuff?” Andy asked, “The diesels on the plant I have seen are way ahead of anything I have ever seen or heard of.”

“Lets just say that steam is the latest and greatest for those we are working with”, John said, “We ARE in the 9th century.”

“Just let it roll over you and have another drink”, I said, “Don’t worry- everyone starts like this.”

Shirl waddled over, having been forcefully removed from the spit roasting pit by Debbie. “Sit here.” Debbie said and waving one of the other Haddon girls over, directing her to attend to Shirl’s every need. Debbie and Jenny went into a huddle, no doubt discussing obstetrics details.

Being the logistics person, I suddenly remembered that we had brought no supplies down specifically for babies. “John”, I said, “I just had this sudden thought that we are totally unprepared for a baby- unless you plan to go totally 9th century.”

“Don’t worry”, he said, “The girls have sorted all the modern conveniences and a few more, besides, they have it all stashed out in Hanger 18 (the off-limits site, where Jenny and the other top gate operators do their scrying)

“I foresee an influx of Mountain Buggies into the 9th century”, I said, “and I think I am going to have to suppress disposable technology- exemptions for my staff, of course.”

“The women think cotton nappies are the best thing since running water.” said John.

“Now why hadn’t I thought of that- GE cold-climate Cotton?” I said. “That sounds like a useful project.”

Jenny and Debbie had finished their discussion. Debbie headed off towards the keg to find Dave, who was with his sawmill crew. They were about to light an impressive bonfire of off-cuts and mill slabs. This signaled that the duties for the English staff were over, and now that the food was cooked, they could join in the fun.

Kegs of locally brewed Bakewell beer had been laid on, that being mostly preferred by our local workers to the beer of the 21st century. They had all done well just to get on this project and had been working long hours to get ready to receive the ship. With that done, the earthmoving crew would shift camp to start work on the next site on the west coast of the South Island- from there to the next three sites that we were setting up. The construction crews would follow, along with the portable sawmill. For now, though, they all had a three day break and would make the most of it.

Bay of Islands- New Zealand

Day 412- 22nd April, 847 AD_

While it may be a break, there is always someone who can’t help working. After a late start, Mike and Steve had taken Andy and had headed over to the ship, with the heavy lift crane. They must want something off the boat to play around with.

The inevitable fishing trip had departed earlier and the camp was quiet, with just a few of the Haddon locals tidying up- holiday being a relative term. Working 12 hour days could be considered a holiday compared to 9th century life.

Once I have called Haddon to see what is up, John and I are driving off inland to shoot a cattle beast for tonight’s barbecue.

We were only gone an hour- the cattle we released a few years back to breed were not very far inland. On the back of the truck was a nice prime bullock for our workers to butcher. Outside the kitchen was a brand-new Jeep- looking around, there were a few of them about the camp.

“So that’s what they were up to with the crane”, said John.

“I suppose they will be after petrol next- we don’t have a lot of that here”, I said, “Wonder what else they found- there was quite a bit of mixed cargo, aside from 4000 tons of Quonset huts.”

“Let’s go find them and see, then”, said John, taking two chilled beers from the chiller and handing me one.

Climbing the ladder to the deck, we headed towards the sound of a generator forward. Clattering chains and a crane overhead indicated they were getting ready to lift something out of the hold. They had a small lighting set running, power leads disappearing into the hold.

“Anything interesting?” I yelled down the hatchway.

“Bringing up some samples”, came back from below. The only cargo we had known about for sure, were the Quonset huts and the vehicles we had seen on the deck, useful more as scrap metal. Looking over the edge, I could see a cargo net filled with an assortment of crates. With the net hooked up, Mike and Andy started up the crane, raising the loaded net onto the space that was previously taken up by the Jeeps. While they lowered the hook back into the hold for another load, John and I checked out the markings on the crates. Uniforms, boots, C and K rations and an assortment of US army kit- all great trade goods.

“The hold is jammed full of useful stuff”, said Mike. “Andy saw most of it loaded- this hold is filled with an engineering battalion’s equipment and the next is full of bridging gear.”

“I can find plenty of use for the Bailey bridges.” said John, “The crossing at Matlock for starters.”

Another net was unhooked and Steve climbed out of the hold. We all helped pack up the generator and close the hatches- it looked like rain was on the way. By now a truck had been brought over and we lowered our loot over the side, onto its deck.

“That’s us for today- let’s go and have a look at what we got”, I said, pointing to the dark clouds to the west. Someone must have radioed the fishermen, as it we could see their boat heading across the bay, at speed. The ship went quiet as Andy shut down the generator. Back at camp, a timber and corrugated steel shelter was being hurriedly finished off, so that the drinking and feasting could continue outside.

Back at the main tent, the crates had been unloaded and were being sorted and opened.

“Those are the ones”, said Steve, dragging them off to one side.

“One of Mosquito repellent, three crates of mosquito nets and six of Lubricating Grease, Tropical, all headed for England- that would be the Army for you.”, said Jenny, shaking her head, “Very amusing, but what did you want them for?”

“Think like a quartermaster”, answered Steve with a grin, as he prised the lid of a crate of tinned grease.

Jenny’s face burst into a broad grin, as she inspected the contents. “Your stock is rising.” she laughed.

The crate was full of bottles of bourbon, carefully packed in straw.

Sure enough, the others were also full of whiskey, cigars, assorted pornography and the other currency of the time, silk stockings.

The booze & cigars were a good score, anyway- Cubans, too.

The crates of uniforms and boots were opened and all the Haddon locals were each given a complete set of US uniform, along with an assortment of mess-tins, water bottles, and entrenching tools and so on, to their great delight.

The crates of weapons were put aside for stripping and cleaning at a later date and crates of food sent off to the kitchen storage container. The bottles of Coca-Cola were sent to the chiller for cooling.

Marty was degreasing a Thompson sub-machine gun and talking about the weapon to a fascinated group of Haddon locals. He had also opened a crate of 1911 .45 pistols, to prepare.

Jenny had already laid claim to a bottle of Wild Turkey and had taken it to her table to sample, while she worked at her notebook, sorting out the schedule for moving the 11,000 tons of cargo about the world and checking her e-mail from Haddon. Closing the notebook, she picked up glass and bottle and moved over to the collection of old lounge chairs reserved for us.

“Every crane, trailer and tractor unit will be moved down here in two days time”, Jenny said, “We will have all the labor pool available at Haddon to stow the small cargo”

“I’m glad most of it can live outside”, I said, “Those Bailey bridges were a bit of a bonus, too.”

“All we need is a construction crew to put them together”, said John, “I know a couple of good men that would probably come down on contract.”

“Ahead of you there”, said Jenny, “Two of the next crew have bridging experience- a bit of a while ago, but they should help- still, give me the contact details and Jane can check your men out.”

“What are the timings with the new crew?” John asked.

“They come down in five days time”, Jenny said.

The rain had settled in, but a bonfire was blazing away in front of the open-front hanger, fueled by off-cuts from the sawmill.

“Time to go and mingle with the troops”, I said, rising from my chair. Good- those crates of grenades had been put away.

Back at Hilltop, all available trucks, trailers and cranes were lined up, ready to gate southward. All about the countryside concrete slabs had been poured, awaiting the arrival of the cargo soon to arrive.

Haddon Hold

“Why do we need so many of these huts?” asked JD, over the dinner table- he cooked less and supervised more, these days.

“In another couple of years, we will have something of a population explosion on our hands”, answered Sonja, who had returned early.

“It’s on the way already”, said Shane, who had attended two trouble-free deliveries today, “They have never eaten so well, everyone locally has decent water and we are getting through with the sanitary measures. Nobody really likes a midden just out the door- and as for chimney’s, the lack of....”

“And as we know, we don’t want overcrowding”, asaid Sonja. “These huts will buy the time needed to get more carpenters trained up. More good news today- they found 2500 tons of bridging gear in the ship- we can now keep the roads open all year.”

“Things are dead quiet here, I really should go down and give Shirl a checkup”, Shane hinted.

“Meaning you want to go fishing in New Zealand waters. Permission granted, so pack your bags- you can drive a crane down tomorrow”, said Sonja, “and don’t use the ‘Q’ word.”

Bay of Islands- New Zealand
Day 420- 26th April, 847 AD.

The first truck was loaded and read for the jump back to Hilltop. The loading area had a gentle downhill slope to the gate, to help the heavily laden trucks start rolling and a D6 bulldozer was positioned, ready to give a push in event of a breakdown.

As soon as Jenny gave the signal to go, I let out the clutch. As the road train started to roll, I eased up on the power; letting the 80 tonne weight of the loaded trailers push us down the grade. As we crossed from morning to night, I was glad of the extensive floodlighting at the Hilltop area. I brought the truck to a halt in the first unloading area and then climbed out of the cab, as local workers started unhooking chains, preparing the cargo for the forklifts to move in. I made my way to the gate control, up on the top level of the hold.

Sonja was at the controls, stopwatch in one hand and a cup of tea in the other. “Kettle’s just boiled”, she informed me.

Half the load was off already. “That’s a lot quicker than the load time”, I said. “The problem is getting the damn things out of the hold, as we thought.”

“Nine minutes, thirty-eight seconds”, Sonja said, as the truck rolled away towards the gate that had just been opened. “That’s it for another forty-five minutes, best guess.”

The door opened and Simon entered, carrying a toolkit. “Here to hook up the backup satellite dish”, he explained, setting to work connecting equipment on the other side of the room. Connecting his notebook into the system, he started the diagnostic software running.

“That must be the last of it”, I said.

“All done”, he said, “Until you find something new for me to play about with.”

“Not until the land lines are finished”, I said. Sonja’s phone rang- it was a call from New Zealand, telling her that the next shipment would be delayed thirty minutes, as one of the ship’s winches had jammed.

“Time for a brew then”, I hinted, looking at Simon.

“About time you got a gofer up here”, he mumbled, as he measured out coffee.

“I have just the person”, I said, “The chap who lost an arm can live up here and run the radio station- that should free up your day by a few good hours.”

“How did you get by in the beginning, without all these spare hands?” laughed Simon.

“I did it all myself, mostly”, I said, “I suppose you have only heard the short version from Jenny...”

“It was a cool night, overcast and looking to rain. I had gone out to take some samples, to see if my wash was ready to run through the still. I heard something fly over, but no engine noises and it left a smell of ozone. Real ‘Twilight Zone’ stuff. The next thing, I heard a thump and the sound of trees breaking- something had come down in the block of scrub I used for firewood.

I grabbed the shotgun and a bandoleer of ammo from inside the shed and jumped on the quad bike to go and investigate. I always carry a gun when moving about the farm. We get the odd dope-grower using this area, as it is so far out of the way.

As I reached the high point above the firewood block, I flicked on the spotlight and ran it over the trees- yes.- there was a line of broken trees- something had come down, so I took the bike down to the edge of the trees. I couldn’t go any further, as the splintered stumps would bellied my bike out. There is something big down there, but it looks more like a van than a plane- must be the fuselage.

I took the first-aid kit and a torch, from the pannier. Best find out what has happened first- there is no cellphone coverage out here anyway. Out of habit, I slung the gun over my shoulder and cautiously approached the wreckage, more concerned about fire. Strange- I couldn’t smell any fuel?

As I got closer, I could see this was no conventional aircraft. Not being a believer in UFO’s, I assumed it was some secret military craft. I was wrong. I could see a hatch open, so I started to work around the side, through the tangle of scrub. The inside was lit and I moved towards the hatch, when I heard a cry from within. “Is that someone out there? I need help.”

The sound of a woman’s voice, speaking English, with what sounded like a hint of a Southern US accent- that was rather reassuring, so I climbed through the hatchway.

I had a bad feeling that I was seeing something I was not meant to see here, but on seeing an obviously injured person at the controls, my old volunteer ambulance training took over.

I moved towards her, she was a young woman- looked like late twenties and was dressed in what looked like a well-cut overall. “Soon have you out of here”, I said, “But first I need to check you for injuries- I’m Wayne- what’s your name?”

“Gina”, she said, in a pained voice, “I’m sure glad to see you- left radius & ulna are broken, a couple of ribs too”, she said, which I quickly confirmed. She had a nasty gash on the forehead that would need suturing- I quickly covered that with a dressing and swabbed the blood out of her eyes.

“I’m going to have to go get some help.”

“NO!” she cried out, “Please don’t get the authorities involved- I will pay you very well, but nobody must know I’m here. I’m a traveler from another time and place- my people will come for me, but it may take them some time to find me.”

“OK- I don’t exactly want the authorities here either”, I reassured her- something to do with several thousand litres of highly illegal moonshine.

The effort of blurting this out left her breathless. With her remaining strength, she pointed to a container mounted on the wall. The symbol of the Caduceus was unmistakable- it had to be a

medical kit. I unclipped it from the wall easily and I brought it over and opened the kit, to find an array of equipment unlike anything I had ever seen before. Pointing to a box with a cuff, Gina indicated to put it on her good arm. As soon as I attached it, a display came up with symbols indicating what had to be heart rate, blood pressure, oxygen saturation and a few others that I couldn't figure out. After a few seconds, a soft hissing came from the box and Gina visibly relaxed- the device must have administered drugs.

After a minute or so, her breathing became normal and she could talk again.

Thinking fast, I thought through what had to happen next. "If you think you are OK for a while, I need to go back and get some equipment to get you out of here", I said, "I want to splint that arm before I move you."

"I will be OK for a while", she answered, "The drugs will take care of the bruising and shock- I should be able to move in a few minutes."

"Just stay put- we are in the middle of a stand of trees and I have to cut a path for you to get out. I'm going to go and get some transport and a saw. I won't be long".

The phone rang again- the winch was repaired and the next truck loaded. The gate would be opening in two minutes. Sonja picked up the radio handset and gave the two-minute warning. Down below, clouds of black smoke puffed out as the diesel engines of the forklifts started up.

"Anyway, back to the story." said Simon, impatiently.

I held up my empty coffee mug and waved it.

"OK, OK." said Simon, bringing the coffeepot over.

I knew I had gotten myself into something and gotten in real deep. After I had moved Gina back to the house, I was going to have to go back and cover our tracks before daylight. It was going to be a long night. Between the aircraft and the medkit, I was convinced that she really was not of this place. What remained to discover was why she was here.

I threw my chainsaw into the tray of my Toyota and raced back to the crash site. With the aid of the spotlight mounted on the cab roof, I was able to back down the path of broken trees, the higher ground clearance of the ute and the totally flattened trees making this possible.

With the area lit up by the spotlight, I started cutting a path around the side of the ship, finally shutting down the saw and placing it next to the ship, to retrieve later.

Gina had gotten out of her seat and gathered a few bags and boxes together. "Do you think you can walk a few metres?" I asked.

"Yes, if you help me. I have to take these, pointing to several bags..."

“I’ll get you in the truck first and then come back for them. In any case, I need to get this ship moved and hidden, ASAP.” She looked very relieved to hear that. First, I immobilised her broken arm, then moving very carefully, I got her to the passenger’s door and helped her carefully into the seat. Going as smoothly as I could, I drove us back to the house. There I managed to set and re-splint her arm, tape her ribs, then clean and dress a few other cuts and scrapes.

With her settled into the spare room, I asked if she would be OK for a while, as I wanted to get the ship out of sight. I had worked out a plan on my first trip back for tools. “I will be alright”, she said, “I can increase the analgesia now and let the medkit do its work.”

Just after midnight- I had five to six hours to get the ship out of sight and cover my tracks. I just hope nobody was watching its flight on radar. Unlikely they would have a good track, seeing as how low it was flying and given the hill country around here.

I loaded a couple of strainer posts, all the chains I had and a wire rope onto the back of the ute and rushed them back to the edge of the scrub, then, leaving the gear there, drove back for my elderly D3 bulldozer. A good blast of engine start and the motor spluttered and chugged into life- just as well it was warm weather and that I had used the dozer just a couple of days ago. While it warmed up, I unlocked and opened the old barn that I used to store useful junk- scrap metal, timber and other assorted salvage. With the tractor and trailer out, the ship should fit.

I crawled off down the track towards the ship, taking care to follow the path the ship had skidded in, hiding any sign of that. At the edge of the scrub, I dropped the blade and started widening the trail of smashed timber. I hoped it would look like I was doing a little scrub clearing when I was finished. I needed to widen the path, as I would have to pull the ship out sideways.

There was nowhere for me to attach a chain to on the outside of the craft, so I planned to slip a couple of strainer posts through the hatchway and wrap a wire strop around them, to make a toggle anchor. Gina thought that the hull was easily strong enough to hold up, when I asked her. The fact that it was barely marked by the impact supported that. The only sign of damage was a charred hole, which looked like it had been caused by a weapon. With this all hooked up, I slowly took up the strain and the ship started to swing around and slide towards me. It would have been easy, if it wasn’t for three farm gates that I had to thread a 6 metre ship through. After the first gate, I gave up and just cut the wire- I was going to have a bit of fencing work to do after this.

A blast on an air horn signaled that the truck was ready to return, so Sonja opened the gate, shutting it down a few seconds after the tail lights disappeared. We had a whole night of this ahead, so I continued with the story.

Eventually, I got the ship back to the yard and, unhooking the cable & chains, pushed it into the barn with the blade. I quickly covered it with an old tarpaulin and set off back to cover my tracks. As I finally stowed the last of the gear, the first light of dawn broke and the sky looked like rain. I had left the bulldozer by the scrub so that any aerial searches would see that the path had been cut by a bulldozer, not a crashed aircraft.

Time to check on my guest and hopefully, get an hour or two's sleep.

Wrong.

The sound of a helicopter flying nearby at 7:30am told me that something had been probably been sighted. It was the wrong time of year for crop spraying. I turned on the radio, while getting some breakfast cooked and the 8:00 news had a story about a meteorite sighting in the area. I looked in on Gina and she was still asleep. I took a look at the medkit monitor and all her vitals looked good. I have to get myself one of those.

I put some food aside and went off to do some of my morning jobs. While I was out in the distillery, the gate alarm flashed and I looked at the monitor, to see a police car headed through the gate. Only one car, so it was probably just our local policeman. We had a good working relationship, so I wasn't too concerned.

I met him in front of the house. Senior Constable Wood was a good country cop and knew when to turn a blind eye and when to come down hard. We had an understanding- I never supplied under-aged customers and he never noticed who supplied illicit spirits to various clubs and bars. Also, I provided information on who was supplying the under-aged or was supplying any other substances. Occasionally, I persuaded trouble-makers to leave town...

"Looking for flying saucers or shooting stars?" I asked.

He rolled his eyes up "Someone thinks it might have be an aircraft that hadn't put in a flight plan, so here I am- out 'making inquiries' and wasting yours and my time", he said.

"I did hear something heading out towards the coast. Probably someone doing a little Paua poaching - I hope they did friggin' crash, if that's the case"

"Yeah, that's what I thought too."

"Just so it isn't a wasted trip, I have that prize for the rugby club raffle that we talked about."

We loaded a crate of illicit rum and a home-cured ham into the back of his wagon and Woody departed, quite a bit happier with his wasted day.

I went back in to check on my patient. She was awake now and asking for her bags. "I will bring in some hot water and stuff for you to clean up with" I told her. "I don't want you in the shower just yet, although you are looking a lot better."

"Someone was here?" she asked.

"Don't worry- they think your ship was a helicopter on an illegal flight or a meteorite. We seem to be in the clear and I got the ship safely stored away and the landing damage covered up." She appeared to visibly relax after hearing that.

"You came to the right place. I'm not one for cooperating with the powers-that-be."

"I know. I was given your coordinates as an emergency safe-house."

"I have a great many questions, when you feel up to it", I said. "This has never been a safe-house for anyone apart from me- but I forget my manners. First- we get cleaned up and then you could probably use something to eat."

"That would be greatly appreciated", she replied.

After a reasonably short time, for a woman, Gina emerged from her room. She was dressed in fresh clothes and was looking a lot better than last night. She smiled at me and followed me slowly to the kitchen.

"Those ribs will give you problems for a while. I just hope I got the arm right and the forehead doesn't scar too bad."

She waved in dismissal "These things are easily corrected at home. Now to answer your questions", she continued, "But first, I need to know what time and universe I am in, and will need some answers."

"OK", I said, and she proceeded to rattle off a string of questions about dates and key events in history. I was able to answer most.

"That let's me narrow it down quite a bit. I'm here about a year too early- I had to set the jump computer from memory- I got the right spot and universe- I think- but the wrong time- this is about as far from where I have come as is possible to be.- I was on the run."

"Would that be something to do with that hole in the side of your ship?"

"You are observant. I was on a smuggling run and got hit just before I could jump. An unlucky shot which badly damaged the local drive. I think you would call it 'the golden BB'"

"I see- so you are stuck here?"

"Yes, I have to wait for a search team- that may take years."

"Can your ship be repaired?"

"I very much doubt it- not here and now."

“We can have a look at it when you are better”, I said, “Sounds like you haven’t had much of a chance to look at the damage- anyway- I would like to see how it works.”

Gina looked very doubtful.

“Now this sounds like the good part.” said Simon, eager to hear the technical details of the story.

“Not really”, I said, “Gina knew a lot of the theory, but like many pilots, knew little about the inner workings and sub-systems. What she did know, was the history of how the time/space drive came to be. This wasn’t general knowledge in their time. The gate as you know it now was previously fixed and projected to match the ship’s hull and the ship flew through this gate. The coordinates had been set on the ship’s computer with little adjustment available- just a range of presets. For security reasons, a minimum of presets were loaded onto the computer before a trip. I came up with the idea that the field could be established independent of the ship and the traveler could simply walk through.”

Gina believed something like that happened when the field was invented, although details were sketchy, as this was seriously suppressed technology. Once she was on the mend, we would have a go at getting the field generator and the controls out and working. Meanwhile, I have work backing up and the bills are still coming in.

Fortunately, this was my down-time. My main legitimate income was my hot houses, where I grew out-of season berry fruit and vegetables for the local restaurant trade. In the summer, I did a bit of local repair work- welding and small engine repairs. Mainly my money came from moonshine, but you need a believable income from other sources.

We got the generator and the universal interface out- this particular piece of equipment was to be what made the whole thing work- but the ship’s main IA core had been mostly fried by the plasma bolt that had struck next to it. Gina seemed to think that the universal interface would talk to my laptop computer. As she explained, these interface units were designed to work with different systems found around the galaxy and were very sophisticated, bordering on AI capable, themselves.

After a bit of experimenting, we were able to briefly open a ship-shaped gate but had no idea how to manipulate it. We were stuck.

We decided that we had to get somebody else with software and hardware experience in. Gina was no technician and I just knew enough to be dangerous.

That’s where Jenny came in. I knew that if I could get her here and show her the ship, she would be in.

I sent an email off asking her to drop in to have a look at an interfacing problem I had and got a reply back that she would be passing through in ten days, and would call in. She had helped set up the computer side of my automated environmental controls for the glass houses and my distillery.

By this stage Gina was mostly healed and able to help out around the place. The drugs she had been using had knitted the bones in a matter of two weeks and she was able to do all but the heaviest work. Some of the gear we had salvaged from the ship had been invaluable, such as a device for fusing metal in some kind of cold weld and a cellular stimulator that we had used to speed up the healing of her injuries as well as fix a few old injuries on my body.

She had been unexpectedly attacked by an air defense system, while delivering a cargo of contraband sometime in the 28th century. Apparently, her family ran a small but highly lucrative black market operation, carrying rarities from one time/place to another.

Due to the nature of the field used in a time hop, you could only do a limited amount of jumping as it interfered with the body on a genetic level, rendering one sterile. This meant, for them, going to the considerable expense and inconvenience of having to transfer to a newly-cloned body. So the family shared the duties, making that sure nobody jumped too often.

After another day of no progress, I asked when she might expect rescuing. She frowned and thought for a bit. "I think the problem is that I have caused a divergence- a split in time, by coming here early. This will make it near impossible for them to find me."

"Well, we will just have to get you back, ourselves", I said, "But you can stay here for as long as you want."

It was quite good having a woman around again...

The phone rang again, with the next shipment about to head our way. After Sonja had given the 'heads up' to the cargo handlers, she called the kitchen and got the duty steward to bring us up some supper. Simon's diagnostic tests were long finished, but he wasn't moving while I was telling the story. I wasn't particularly needed elsewhere and was still on NZ time, so I continued...

Jenny arrived about mid-day, expecting to find that I had installed another piece of automation about the place- last time it was using waste heat to warm the irrigation water.

"Is that what I think it is?" Jenny asked, looking at the ship, as she moved into the barn for a closer look.

"It is, and I have the drive unit out and working", I said, "That's why I need you- have a look through the ship, then I can show you the drive."

A quick look through the ship told her that this was not a prop or some kind of joke. She also noticed the blood in the instrument panel. "What happened to the pilot?" she asked cautiously.

"She is OK, now"- I didn't want too many surprises at once, so Gina had remained out of sight. "What we also have is a time-traveler, who crashed here", I said, "Sensibly, she didn't want to get turned over to the powers-that-be".

"I can understand that." Jenny said- "Let's go see this time-traveler and the ships workings."

Gina was waiting in my workshop, with the generator. I introduced Jenny and we explained our progress and where we had gotten stuck. She looked at the rig and thought for a bit. After a few minutes, she opened the generator's case and looked inside for a while. After a couple of minutes, she found what was after.

Jenny lifted the small clear plastic cover and pushed the button, holding it down for about two seconds. At once lights started on the interface and the computer screen burst into life. "Thought so", she said. "Most things have a reset."

On the screen was the message:

STARTUP MENU

Restart

Re-calibrate

Erase all Settings

Quit

Jenny selected 'Restart'

The screen came up with a variety of fields:

Coordinates Spatial

Coordinates Tau

Define field

Initiate field

Collapse field

Store settings

All we had to do now was learn how to use these settings.

"This is going to take a while", said Jenny, scanning through the computer directories, "It has uploaded a basic operating system for the gate- we need to back it up and I would like to take your laptop away with me, to work on it."

I agreed, we set a date for her next visit and would keep in touch by email. Before she left, she installed a 128 bit encryption program on my other computer. Jenny was going to make excuses to her husband and come down next weekend. We could see this project had caught her imagination. I had already thought up a few creative uses for a time machine and most of them involved money.

By Sunday morning, the next weekend, we had the gate working. We had already figured out that the field would appear 3 metres in front of the generator, that being the distance from it's mountings to the front of the ship's hull. Jenny had altered a piece of code and now the gate was a 3x3 metre square.

Time for our first test run.

As Jenny opened the gate, I flung a live chicken through, and she shut of the field. Two minutes later the field reappeared then disappeared, a 1/2 second later, leaving a very annoyed chicken making a dash for the hen-house.

My turn now.

Jenny set the Tau axis for fourteen days forward and opened the field. On Gina's advice, I hit the field running.

When I picked myself up from the dirt, I saw the gate still there, but the yard deserted. I spat, wiped my mouth and headed to the house to my computer, in order to check time and date. Also, I connected to the Internet and opened a page showing the Lotto results. Carefully copying down the winning numbers, I tucked the piece of paper into my pocket and went back though the gate. Back to see Gina and Jenny anxiously waiting.

"You where a while." said Jenny. "I thought you would be straight back."

"The first time can be very disorienting", said Gina.

"No, I had a little business", I said, holding up the piece of note paper.

"Ha. Lotto numbers." Jenny said delightedly, recognising the significance of the seven number string.

Gina looked puzzled.

"A big lottery", I said, "That will take care of our money problems."

We decided that we all had done enough and Jenny had a two hour drive to get home. She had decided that she just had to come down next Saturday, whatever the cost to her home life.

Over the next week, the emails flew thick and fast, as we developed a plan. We started up a holding company that would 'employ' Jenny as a consultant, explaining her absences from home and giving her more time to work on the control software. We knew that was going to take a long time, mainly working out the algorithms for the spatial translations. The Tau axis was the easy part. Jenny had a good grasp on higher mathematics and fortunately Gina was educated in a time where higher mathematics had come a long, long way from our day.

I do logistics and engineering. The stuff they talked made my head hurt.

Saturday rolled around and Jenny arrived early, well supplied with bottles.

"Brought alcohol- I've head about that", I said. Gina examined the bottles interestedly; she had not tried New Zealand wines in any of the universes. She had soaked up quite a bit of my home-made brandy over the last month or so, without any ill-effects and had revealed another secret of her time, a small pill that did away with the consequences of drink.

As we had all day to wait for the draw, Jenny hooked up the generator again. She had a prototype program for moving the field and wanted to try it out. Another small success- the field could be moved further from the generator. We had already found out what happened when an object overlapped the field and didn't want it any closer. It was really good for cutting heavy steel and left a mirror finish.

That was a start, now all we had to do was move it several thousand light-years and 3,200 years.

It was a night to remember for us, watching those numbers come up exactly as predicted and shortly after 8pm, we were millionaire's, being the sole winners of a three million dollar draw- plus a number of lesser prizes. The bubbles flowed like water as we made our plans for the future. It was hardest for Jenny, as she would have to go on acting as if none of this had happened, once she got home. Her marriage was a bit shaky to begin with and these weekends away were causing serious friction. Ever looking to the future, Jenny wanted her share of the loot kept well away from her husband's hands.

In a week or two, she was going to start working for us full-time, sometimes here and the rest of the time from a small office she organised in her home town. On a very large salary, of course. That would hopefully help quieten the home front.

Her first mission was to take Gina away for a few days and spend some money on her. We would need to escort her everywhere, as she didn't exist in the databases of this age.

Gina, for her part, had promised to let us keep the gate generator and to get us into the family business, if we got her back. She had resigned to the fact that rescue would not be coming from her time, try as they might to find her. At least things were looking way more positive now.

The rest, you pretty much know. We spent three years working on the software, as the original needed a much lesser degree of precision to move a ship in free space than we needed to go point-to-point about a planet's surface- without materializing inside a mountain or suchlike, that is. After about three months, Jenny split up with her husband and moved into the farm- a much more comfortable place now. Jenny did a few trips backward and forward in time, to make a few investments and by the end of the first year; we had made five times the original winnings and had an income stream coming in from 'past' investments. We brought out a couple of neighboring properties, which gave us land clear to the coast and moved to a very isolated and very large homestead on one of these properties. The ship was now hidden under a concrete pad out at the new homestead.

Just over three years after the crash-landing, we finally found Gina's home. Rather than waste time trying to move the gate to clear and safe land, we decided to drop a pod on a parachute as near to her home as we could get. A high-tech message in a bottle, that gave the coordinates to our location, time and time line.

That same night, another larger ship appeared in our sky, this time landing a lot more gently.

They was a tearful and very happy reunion as Gina's mother and two of her husbands met us at the homestead- she had been missing presumed dead. After hearing her story, they were adamant

that Jenny and I were family now and arranged to honour Gina's promises, with the coordinates to their home and many other useful places and times, not least, the uninhabited planet of Transit.

I stood up, stretched and got up to get yet another cup of coffee.

“That was really the start of an adventure that continued for the next eighty-odd years as we traveled about, made a heap of money and had a lot of really wild times”, I said, wrapping up the tale, “Now I'm off to Haddon and my bed- and I'll say goodnight.”

I must get these stories written down one day- I must ask Jenny to find a good voice transcriber up-time.

Haddon Hold, Derbyshire, England

Day 419- 27th April, 847 AD

The Quonset huts were already being shipped out to the construction sites, the slabs having been already poured. All throughout today, more would continue to arrive. At the same time, they were being delivered all over New Zealand.

Time we got back to business here. It looked like we were going to have a huge surplus of grain this season and we needed facilities to store this food, so I had to check out silos and how to build them. Something I could do in ten minutes, if we had Internet access here.

The main event of today would be the arrival of the Bravo Team, who would arrive tonight. This team was all referrals from our Alpha Team members and had all been recruited on a one-to-one basis. We had a more diverse crew this time, with older very experienced tradesmen and younger ones, not long out of their apprenticeships. Five of them were sons and daughters of the Alpha team.

We were picking that most of them would return after a tour, so had given them a different training routine- more time on different plant and equipment and a more basic weapons training. Just rifle and pistol would suffice, now that we had the area more or less tamed.

They would be going through a similar process as the first arrivals, setting up a new but slightly smaller stronghold, this one up in the uninhabited area two km to the southwest. This time, all the site works were already completed and power and water were laid on.

I would take a run out there this morning and have a look.

At breakfast, I meet up with several others who planned to head over to the site to check a few last minute jobs, so we decided to share a ride out to near what was marked as Cronkston Lodge on the maps of our time. The site overlooked the Lathkill Dales and had a very pleasant outlook. The construction team was hard at work erecting the first of the Quonset huts and Dave had come out to hook up some temporary power for them. Pete Jordan has returned from milling timber in New Zealand for a few days, to oversee the assembly of the first huts and to welcome his eldest son, Graham, who would arrive tonight. Dave and Debbie would also come back later today, as their son Greg was also joining us.

The hut was flying up- the use of air-powered tools greatly sped up the job of bolting the sections together. They would have the structure up by lunch time and be packed up and gone well before gate-time.

As soon as Sean finished hooking up the floodlights for tonight, we could go back and check out another new building, along the way.

The building in question was a more traditional looking structure, in wood and stone, but with a bright coloursteel roof. This was sited off the road halfway between Haddon Hold and Rowsley. It was situated on a terrace a few metres above the river, with access from an unformed track from the road.

Until recently, it was just another of many buildings under construction in our area and as it was not a structure near anything of ours, I paid it no real attention, until I saw a section of our newly acquired Bailey bridge headed there. Now that wasn't on the work schedule. Time for a surprise inspection.

The area was screened from the road by a stand of trees, so we left the Humvee and approached on foot. I wasn't concerned about what was going on- no doubt it was one of our crew doing a little freelancing- something I didn't mind- even encouraged, as long as their other duties were not neglected.

It was a pleasant looking building, a fusion of modern and old. Gritstone foundations and footings, about 1.5 metres high, pointed with white mortar and the rest in oiled Oak, topped with a red steel roof. Smoke rose from the chimney, also stone, with a stainless steel flue and cap. What looked like a car park was metalled with crushed lime. Over the Oak and iron-bound door was a sign- 'The Bywater Inn'. JD- I would be betting and I imagined Jenny had her hand in this also.

Sure enough, JD and a crew of local workers were inside, busily polishing glasses and tabletops, cleaning and stocking a very modern bar fridge. The interior was a mix of English Oak, New Zealand Kauri and Rimu, with locally made wrought-iron fittings and captured 9th century weaponry decorating the walls of a room of about 8x10 metres. The rear of the inn was of modern bi-folding doors, opening out onto a paved area overlooking the river Wye. A fire burned in the hearth, more for effect than heat and the smell of stew and baking bread wafted from the kitchen.

"The old one got too small", said JD, by way of explanation.

"Never mind that." I said, "Where's my pint?"

Suitably appeased, I took a tour of our new watering hole. As well as the common room and kitchen, there was a smaller bar- a snug- as well as five generous bedrooms plus an office with all modern conveniences. A well-appointed toilet block was a mixture of old and new, with sparkling white ceramic tiles to 1200 mm high, then rustic timbers.

Outside there were the usual collections of utility sheds and close by, a small cottage that was to be the innkeeper and servants quarters. Power had been run from the mill, about 300 metres away and was by underground cable, for once. JD had sketches of the landscaping plans- they looked like Sharon's hand to me.

"A stroke of bloody genius." I exclaimed. The old mess in the hold is just too crowded now and with another team coming down we desperately needed this. A bunch of young and thirsty builders too- I hope you have a driver on your payroll?"

"All I need is the transport", said JD.

"Couple of Landcruisers OK?" I asked, knowing the answer.

"That would be adequate", he said.

“I must send you out of town, to see the locals sleeping on the tables and in the straw, scratching and farting all night”, I said, “In fact, you can take the security team up to Dronfield tomorrow. It’s a stopover in the local.” It will do him good to see how the untamed locals live.

Much as we would have like to settle for the afternoon and evening, we had a crew coming down and I had to meet them. Dropping the others off at Haddon, I drove up to Hilltop and spent the rest of the day with the team working on the Bessemer converter, which was nearing fire-up date fast. We had hoped to have this running earlier, but had delayed until the refractory brick quality improved. This plant and the rolling mills under construction were the keys to establishing the railway.

The squat, egg-shaped furnace stood poised on its trunions, awaiting its first charge of iron. We would start it up once all the engineers were here, new team and old. They were all eagerly awaiting this event- the first bulk steel.

At sundown, I headed back to Haddon with the others, the locals retiring to their Hilltop quarters for dinner and a few well-earned pints. Jenny would be coming up as well as everyone else with friends and family arriving and would return in the morning. The best of the local crews needed no supervision, once given a task.

After dinner and a hot shower, I joined the stream of vehicles headed up to the new site, to await the new arrivals.

The gate opened soon after dark and the usual procession of vehicles trundled through, laden with containers. Watching from our vantage point, we looked out at the dance of heavy-lift forklifts, as they set down the modules on their marked positions. This being our third stronghold, we had the drill down to a fine art and the walls flew up. Once the forklifts and trucks retired, I waved the spectators forward and they rushed down to help the newcomers finish the hold and to give their greetings.

At about midnight, I passed the order to stop. A squad of local militia guarded the perimeter, while we made the new crew welcome. At about 1am, the power was connected and Dave joined the party, his daughter tending a spit roast for the crowd. One of the good things about our long days and physical work is that four meals a day do no harm.

The party continued, the Bravo team being well rested and too pumped up to consider sleep. I saw Jenny, watching from the outskirts and moved over to her.

We stood for a while, just watching everyone getting together. “You miss her- times like this especially”, I stated.

“Yes”, she said, “But I know she will come, when the time is right.”

“My spies tell me that will be very soon”, I said.

Jenny looked as startled as Jenny ever got. “Yes, I have my Intel network too- we have to look out for each other”, I said.

“What’s happening.” she asked.

“Nothing that we can’t sort, in time”, I said, which didn’t make it much easier for a mother who had just found out her only daughter was in some kind of trouble.

Haddon Hold, Derbyshire, England

Day 423- 28th April, 847 AD_

By the morning, Jenny had the story out of me- I had just gotten the information from my network, via Jane, at yesterday’s shipment.

“OK, no good way to break it- Ash hooks up with a meth head in her final year at Uni.”

Jenny exploded. “I want the coordinates.”

“Steady.” I said, “We will toast him, but don’t jump in.”

Jenny took a few deep breaths and poured herself a large brandy, something she never normally did at this hour. I could see her working through a series of calming exercises.

“I trust your judgment more than mine, right now”, she finally said, “You have a plan?”

“You and I plus a couple of the lads are going to put the frightners on him, real bad. If he doesn’t learn- well, we know how to deal to his sort.”

“John, JD and Eric”, she said, “Those three would be the best.”

“I agree”, I said, “four hours enough time?”

“Plenty”

We met in the snug of the new bar and I briefly explained the situation. All of them had seen family or friends fall into this sort of situation and would do whatever it took to get Jenny’s daughter out of it. They knew it was futile appealing to her- a more direct approach was needed.

We would jump to one of our Wellington safe houses, close to where Ashley flatted.

At Transit, we changed into 21st century clothing and swapped our pistols for compact laser beamers, disguised as cellular phones (they also made phone calls.) and waited while Jane quickly probed Ashley’s boyfriend’s flat through a microgate. The coast was clear and we jumped.

Hearing a noise and looking out of his room, Terry saw a group of strangers in the flat and immediately thought ‘Cops.’ Before he could move, John and JD had seized him and dragged him into the hallway, steely fingers locking into his arms, his meth-fueled struggles to no avail.

Jenny moved a few inches from his face.

“Listen very carefully, shit-for-brains. You leave town tonight. You never come back, you never make contact with my daughter again”, she snarled, “Here is ten grand and here is a taste of the pain you will experience if you cross me again.” Jenny fired the laser through his instep and John

and Eric flung him to the floor, the smell of seared meat filling the air. A head poked around a door, further down the corridor and immediately Eric was in pursuit. After a few muffled thumps, he rejoined us.

“Any question, numbnuts?” Jenny asked. He muttered a few more curses. “Wrong fuckin’ answer.” snapped Jenny, who grasped his left ear and tore it off. “Has that improved your hearing, cunt?”

Apparently it had. We turned about and left, not looking back.

A quick jump and we were back at Transit. “Let’s stay here the night”, said Jenny.

Agreeing, we took my old ute up to the house.

After a meal, we retired to the lounge for a few drinks. “That’s the darker side of what we can get up to”, said Jenny, “We all do it at some stage- it might be old scores or new ones, but it’s all part of being what we are. Before this life, we thought about it, but not being stupid, we knew the price was too high- now we can get away with it.”

“What about that laser burn?” asked John

“Too hard to figure out- and that is if he reports it. Laser wounds don’t tend to suppurate. Stuff like that happens all the time and gets shrugged off, like alien abductions- we aren’t the only players in town”, said Jenny.

All eyes turned towards her.

“Oh- those- early gate experiments, at least those cattle mutilation ones”, she said, a bit embarrassed.

“I confess to a couple of abductions”, I said, “Just payback and a few memory implants- absolutely no anal probes were given.” Quickly diverting the subject, I put the question: “Any of you got a score to settle?”

The shark-like grins told me that the answer was yes.

“That will be possible soon”, I said, “Firstly, we need to get our 21st century affairs wrapped up. As everyone is now on-board, I intend to take us all back to Huka Lodge to close off that part. We can also spend a bit of time with Sean and his family, as they enjoy their pay-out.”

That got the discussion onto a more positive note.

“He should be well set up by now”, said JD.

“You will be catching up with him about five minutes after he jumped back”, Jenny said, “He won’t have even brought his tickets yet.”

“How long are we back?” asked Eric.

“Four weeks enough?” said Jenny.

Everyone thought for a minute and nodded in agreement.

“If you have the need to kill someone- or even hurt them bad- please let us know, we want to help- and it’s easier to keep you out of jail, than to break you out.” I said.

“I have a few”, said JD.

“We will sort it”, Jenny said. “Remember- there is always time.”

As we got up to refill glasses- the servants having been dismissed- Jane slipped a note into my hand and I discreetly pocketed it, while holding a discussion on the merits of the various brandies on offer. I doubted that it would be good news.

Jenny disappeared for a toilet break and I quickly read the note. The bribe and threat had failed. We had to go back and finish the job. Fortunately, we had time on our side and could make a leisurely start and still arrive in plenty of time.

Jenny took the news as if she expected it. We prepared for a second attempt and in short order, were back in Wellington. Not expecting to see us quite so soon, Mr. Meth head was totally taken by surprise and was soon knocked into total submission, along with his two lowlife flatmates.

Dealing with his associates first, Jenny loaded them with a post-hypnotic suggestion that he had left for parts unknown, so strong that they would OD before they said otherwise and implanted some particularly unpleasant memories as a reminder to them.

Flushed of meth, the victim knelt before us.

“How do you want it done?” asked Eric.

Jenny threw Terry a knife and said “Thirteen Cuts”

This meant she had to land thirteen cuts, the last killing him and that the point of the knife may not be used to make the final cut. A 35th century duel- in that time, knife fighting had been raised to a high science. ‘Thirteen cuts’ was the hallmark of a Blademaster. It was just a shame he was unskilled.

The fight was merely a practice run for Jenny. Two cuts to each limb- upper and lower, two to the torso and a cut to each side of the face, without his slashing K-bar touching her. I was going to have to explain the significance of that to the troops.

It didn’t take long for Terry to realize that his size and reach was of absolutely no advantage- and the effects of drug withdrawal were now starting. Jenny pushed him to the wall and brought the bitter edge to his throat, with him screaming for mercy- as the coward might. Observing the all the forms, Jenny nicked his throat, completing the ritual and causing him to collapse in a gibbering heap. Magnificent..

I roughly dragged the wretched form off and sprayed woundseal on his cuts, to await Jenny’s decision.

“I locked him in a container- that should give you time”, I said.

“I will be back soon- patch him up. The doctor doesn’t like receiving damaged goods.” said Jenny, leaving.

While she was gone, I explained to the others what the fight was all about, which impressed them even more than the cold way she had cut him to pieces.

Jenny soon returned, dressed in a WW2 German uniform, which caused a few eyebrows. I knew what was coming and told them, after she left, dragging Terry through the gate. Everyone had become just a little paler...

A pair of cold, dead-fish eyes looked up at the latest arrival.

“This one is for your special attention, Herr Doktor”, said Jenny, handing him a file, “Orders from Berlin are that he should- linger, you understand, of course.”

“Of course, Frau Oberst”, said Dr. Joseph Mengele, “I will personally attend to this one.”

Jenny saluted casually and left...

“Someone buy me a drink”, Jenny said, “I feel dirty.” Jane hugged her and they embraced briefly. This was some sort of girl thing, so we busied ourselves with the wine list, having rung for Wilson, the butler.

Wilson appeared at the door and I waved him into the room. “The 1990 Krug- three bottles, I think, Wilson”

“Excellent choice Sir”, he said and left for the cellars. He must have settled in here at Transit- Wilson no longer was disconcerted by being asked for wine bottled more than a century after his birth, nor was bothered by the quick-chiller. Wilson being the consummate butler would have also anticipated that we would be requiring at least a crate.

Thanks to Aldetox, we were all in the dining room for breakfast. The maids had been convinced of the superiority of the buffet almost immediately- Wilson had taken a little longer, but Jane got through, as only she could. Business being forbidden at the table- a worthy tradition- the discussion turned to the impending birth of Shirl’s first child.

“We must have a baby shower”, said Jenny, backed up by Jane.

“Do it, then”, I said. After all, it’s only one baby.

How much impact could a few presents have on 9th century life?

Haddon Estate, Derbyshire, England

Day 424- 1st May, 847 AD

The new hold is operational, thanks to everyone, locals included, lending a hand. We would do an orientation day today and drive about most of the district. Tomorrow would be familiarisation with the operations that they would be working with, this team being selected for more specialist positions.

The engineers, electricians and anyone with steam experience would be working at Hilltop, the mechanics at the Haddon workshop and in the field- the builders would be starting to assemble kitset houses immediately. The hold was to be a temporary structure and would be fully converted to barracks for the local militia by next winter.

The last of the Quonset hut kits and the Bailey bridges were shipped last night, the rest being earmarked for New Zealand. Much of the cargo was to stay in New Zealand; the rest would be shipped here by convoy, in two days time. There should be sheds and containers spare by then. With the arrival of the Jeeps, I have had to arrange petrol. There is no sense in them sitting idle for lack of fuel. By week's end, John and his team would be left on their own, to get on with the business of setting up the New Zealand settlements. That should keep them busy for the next six weeks.

Off to the morning Section Heads meeting.

Most of the talk was about today's orientation for the new contractors. They would travel as a group today, touring everything within our original 16km radius. Tonight we would meet at the new inn for drinks, to welcome the newcomers. As the section heads left to brief their foremen and assign tasks, Sonja quietly asked me to wait.

"We need to get Shirl and John back- problem is, we can't use the gate", Sonja informed me.

"How's that?" I asked.

"I did a little research up-time and they tell us that they would never jump with a women in her last six weeks", Sonja said, "It is thought that newborn infants don't handle the shock too well, either."

"So we have to get the Black Beast out of the cold-store?"

"Looks like the only way."

"Well, I guess I could use some flight-tim. When do I jump?"

"You meet Jenny at cold-store 27, 2000hrs local, tonight."

The rest of the day was touring about the district, looking at the works in progress and meeting some of the key local players. From the power station, iron works and coal mines of Hilltop, the

wagon works and mills of Chesterfield, Oiltown in the southeast, the malt works and flour mills of Matlock and the factories and breweries of Bakewell.

It sure didn't look like the 9th century of 12 months ago.

The smallest villages had running water, communal bathhouses and some kind of factory, from a small wool mill to forges, foundries and grain mills. The towns had a good deal more, with power lines and telephone cables extending to the nearer ones. Armed militiamen waved at our vehicles as they patrolled the outskirts, and watchtowers stood over the approach roads to the region.

Cultivated field and plantations covered the countryside and everywhere there were buildings under construction.

"It gets a bit wilder out of the area we visited today", I explained, in the bar of the Bywater Inn, "and a lot stinkier." This got them laughing- they had heard about the most noticeable trait that distinguished the locals from us. "The saunas and bathhouses we are building are helping there and that's the sort of thing we are doing- facilities- and the spare time to wash, more clothes, better heating- chimneys. The little things you do here make a big difference to the locals. Now there is a whole industry based on our empty bottles and filling them with local products, so- drink up."

My official duties completed, the party continued, with the shop talk starting between the new crew and the old hands. As the evening looked fine, dinner would be outside- prime English beef, grilled over charcoal made from New Zealand hardwood and salads from our hothouses.

Once I had had a bite to eat, I drove up to Hilltop for the jump back to Transit.

Sonja had just gated a string of empty vehicles and trailers back to Transit and New Zealand. She looked up from her controls. "Your turn in five- I will call you once you get under way, with the landing coordinates- have a good flight."

I walked through the familiar hole in the fabric in space and was back at cool store 27.

Cool store 27 was exactly that, being sighted near the northern pole of Transit. Jenny was over by the main hanger unlocking the side door. Locks might seem silly on a mostly uninhabited planet, but everyone knew that if it was locked, the contents were 'need to know' and if you didn't have a key, you didn't need to know.

Inside was a survey ship, circa. 4550's. Jenny had acquired it 'As it might come in useful'. Relatively small, at 30 metres long and 8 wide, it was ideal for us, being set up to be flown under manual control on unexplored planets- not to run on automatic only, like the ships of a later period. Normally, it would operate as a larger ship's cutter, but we had installed a time/space drive. Living quarters were basic, but comfortable enough for a short stay. After a week or two, the crew would need to be either very good friends or sedated.

The airlock looked at Jenny's retina and decided she was to be admitted. Taking the controls, we powered up and moved slowly out of the hanger. Setting down again, I jumped out and closed the

main and side doors. Getting back onboard, we took off and when well clear of the ground, jumped for New Zealand.

Bringing the ship in from the east, we called Sonja to let her know that we were here. Jenny stayed low and out of sight, gently setting the ship down on the beach near the eastern point. Tonight, only John and Shirl would be at the old beach house, the rest being camped at the settlement or down at the West Coast site. There being no rush, we set the systems to standby and walked up the path through the bush, to meet them.

Shirl and John were enjoying a late breakfast on the courtyard, making the most of an unseasonably warm morning. Taking coffee, but refusing breakfast (Time zones), we joined them at the table.

“We have to head back now”, Jenny said, “We did some investigating and the gate is not advisable for near-term mothers or newborns, so we have arranged alternative transport.”

John’s eyebrows rose. “Yes, we have been holding out on you again”, said Jenny, “You are the first to know about the spaceship, other than the gate operators. Everyone will now about it soon enough, though.”

“Well, my boys can certainly get by without me for a few days”, said John, “I would like to bring Andy back, now that the ship is empty, though- we can use him working on the turbine’s boiler.”

“Give him a call and get him to come over then”, said Jenny.

Andy still hadn’t quite got used to the idea of a portable telephone and started when it rang. He opened it and got the order to bring the runabout across the bay. Good news- he loved that modern runabout, with its high powered outboards.

He tied up to the wharf and looked in amazement at the long black ship sitting in the clearing below the well-used path to the house.

“We are heading back now”, said John, “Your kit will be sent up later.”

I opened the hatch and let them file in. Interestingly enough, Shirl walked in without giving it a second thought- miracles being second nature to her.

With everyone secure, Jenny whipped the nose around skimming just above the waves, to disappear behind the point. Once we were a few km out, she put the nose up and set the nav computer to take us back to England. This was not a typical flight for us, as we would normally jump. Today, we had to fly through local space to our destination. The ship’s computer had picked a gradual climb to the stratosphere, then a long coast at high speed, before descending near Iceland. Shirl didn’t need to experience a military roller-coaster high-speed sub-orbital run.

Time for the in-flight movie and drinks as this trip would take us six hours. Jenny and I settled in to run a couple of simulations on the ship’s computer, the rest got to choose movies. Andy darted

from place to place, as he explored the ship. This scout craft was a hell of a long way from a Liberty Ship.

At about 2am local time, we set down on England. The ship in blackout, Sonja's Landcruiser was easy to spot on the low-light camera. With the ship hovering just above the ground, we exited, carrying John and Shirl's bags and Sonja climbed aboard, to take the ship back to New Zealand and take over the gate control there.

As we loaded the Landcruiser, the ship lifted, shot off at high speed and promptly disappeared as it gated.

Just short of the Haddon turnoff, we swung right, instead of left. John spotted the detour, but before he could say anything, Jenny said, "We have something to show you first." A light showed a couple of hundred metres away.

I pulled up outside a new house, an electric light burning in the entranceway. "Home." I said, as the front door was thrown open and a group of well-lubricated regulars poured out, bottles and glasses in hand.

"Housewarming party", said Jenny, by way of explanation.

The house was of 20th century, modular wood design- these homes clipped together like a child's construction set- they go up real fast, with an experienced crew. The days of living in shipping containers were almost over.

Haddon Estate, Derbyshire, England

Day 425 (?)- 2nd May, 847 AD_

Today will be off to a slow start, most having gotten caught up in last night's celebrations. When John gets in, we will do a bit of planning work on the roads. The comms satellites are in fact a general purpose device also containing imaging equipment, weather sensors and a GPS system. Simon has just finished hooking up the computers and systems to use these facilities. Now we had accurate topographical maps, not adapted 20th century ones. The colonist software package also included a feature for laying out roads, finding the best line from point to point. This was going to come in useful now.

"The best bet looks to be pushing the road the rest of the way to Derby, then up to Stoke-on-Trent and on to Manchester- it's taking the long way, but unless you have a mining laser or hardware we don't know about, that way will be quickest", said John, who was working at the computer.

"We don't- yet." I said, "but that works fine by me- connecting more towns is a better option than a direct route. After that, we connect up to Chester then get tracks into the secondary towns. On the wish list are bridgeheads to Birmingham and Nottingham."

"Forwin tells me we will have a fight at Nottingham. The city is fortified and full of our European friends."

“A good job for Forwin and his troops, them. The first two companies of militia should be up to it and the local-made mortars and rockets will be able to support them. As soon as that bridge is in- no rush though, that one is a priority three job.”

“We have a good local cadre now, we just need to drill up a few more local riflemen- hell, I’ve got more unskilled labourers than I can usefully put to work, anyway.”

“OK, stick it on the list for the next planning meeting.”

The whine of ‘Twin Pac’ Pratt & Whitney turbines starting up told me that Jenny’s helicopter was ready to go- to the distraction of half of our crew. From the upper level of Haddon Hold, looking out to the runway, I could see her new Bell 412 spooling up. I unclipped my phone and sent a broadcast text- ‘Anyone who wants to learn to fly those death-traps, see me tonight at the pub.’ I can think of at least two already- Eric and Brent were no longer going to be satisfied by microlights. I can spare them for a couple of years training and have them back tomorrow- I’m fairly sure Jane owns a flight school or two.

The arrows fell well short, as Jenny banked hard over Nottingham. “Hold your fire”, she ordered the door gunners. “They can’t hurt us and I don’t want them to know what we can do just yet.” They orbited several times, taking photos of the city and its fortifications.

“What do you think, Captain?” Jenny asked Forwin, through the intercom.

“We will take them easily, my Lady”, he answered.

“You will get to show us, come autumn. The man has balls of rock, she thought. None of the other locals would go near the chopper- let alone climb on-board.

Forwin had already sized up the military potential of the helicopter. It wasn’t much worse than a 113, if you didn’t look down. And soldiers could be trained not to look down. What it could do was put a squad right where they were needed, in a very short time- and could also resupply them in short order. This machine would let them extend the borders much further.

The wizard gates were all very well, but *this* machine would strike terror into our foes.

As the chopper was being serviced, we met at the Bywater Inn for lunch. These days, the kitchen at the hold only served breakfast, the rest of the day it was self-serve- soup, cold meats, bread, salad- that sort of stuff. This said a lot for how the region’s food standards had been raised over the last year. Also, the area was now deemed secure for people to stay overnight- the larger work crews taking a mobile kitchen and sleeping under canvas or at the better inns.

All around the Haddon area, houses were under construction and with the new industries in the Hilltop area, that hold was accommodating more and more of our people. The original site was now more of a command and meeting facility, with the steam plant, the workshop and the vehicle

hangers now moved elsewhere. Some of the earlier and more senior local crew had taken up residence and the old machine shop is now a school. Apart from Jenny and me, the only members of the first crew still living here are Steve and Pete, as the vehicle workshops are still just a few metres away and Simon, Brent and Eric, also to be near their work.

“Many requests for flight training” I asked?

“Five, plus you”, Jenny said.

“Hold up. I know how to and I don’t want to.”

“Oh, go on- these 21st century choppers are easy. You learned in old 1950’s pieces of junk- it’s no wonder you don’t like them.”

“Well...”

“I have a nice new Jet Ranger- a much better machine than the one we used in NZ”

“Exactly how many did you buy?”

“Six- it’s not like we can’t afford them. Three Jet Ranger 206’s- one with FLIR and three 412’s.”

“OK, so we have two pilots, plus one reluctant one and you are the only one with an instructor rating. That and we need a service crew for those turbine jobs.”

“No problem. I took the liberty of uploading the memories into all of them- all I have to do is unlock them, then get them some real-time experience.”

“I suppose we can ship them back for flight training and some time on the tools. Looks like it’s time for Alpha to go back and close the loose ends.”

“We have a window in 8 days. I will start the ball rolling at the Transit end. Don’t eat too much of that casserole- your chopper is waiting at Hilltop.”

I have to admit, she was right. This machine is a breeze compared to the old Bell 47. I was starting to enjoy the ride, when the radio burst into life.

“Can one of you gate operators get back here? We need a door to NZ opened for Doc, ASAP?”

The screen showed that we were the closest, so I banked the chopper over and headed for Hilltop, while Jenny gave instructions over the radio.

George John French, 3740 grams was born without complications 18 hours later. The first roots are set down.

Transit One

Day 430

This is the last time I mention specific mission dates in my journal. They are getting meaningless, with all the extra time we are clocking up on lines outside of the 9th. I'm sure the mission days in this journal are now well out of synch with the Haddon dates.

With most of the Alpha crew at Transit, we started preparations for wrapping up past lives. After a two week stop here, to readjust to 21st century ways, we would jump to Huka lodge five minutes after the other four members of the team arrived. If this sort of thing isn't done properly, people get looped- this isn't the end of the world, but we like to avoid complications.

We would start with the small things- not openly carrying arms, using EFTPOS, carrying money and ID and driving using other people's road rules.

Jane moved about, handing out folders. "These contain all the documents you will need", Jane said, "You will find corporate credit cards- these need to be signed and are to all practical extents, unlimited and are paid each month by us. Debit cards- the accounts have about \$100k credit and cash, of course. These have contact numbers, should you need to get hold of us. I have you all on the books of Somers and Associates as consultant employees. You will find an assortment of corporate account cards for rental cars, accommodation and so on- use them freely."

"Cellphones- all the numbers and names are pre-loaded. Don't *ever* discuss jumping, time-travel or anything related, on any form of electronic communication- best not at all unless at a secure location like the farm."

At this point, I cut in. "You may know that everything said on these mobiles is recorded and screened by computer- Now there are some CIA types who suspect there is a band who move by teleportation out there. Fortunately, most dismiss this as crazy spook talk and/or conspiracy theory crap. We want to keep it that way, so never use the keywords- gate, teleport, time jump or time travel by phone or email. Don't give fuel to the flames."

"My advice is to shut off the old life, forward any personal effects you wish to keep to the storage address in the folder and to kick back for a couple of weeks", Jane advised, "Don't bother with money-making schemes or investments- we have those angles more than well covered. Stay away from fast cars and motorcycles and it's more satisfying to outlive someone than to kill them. Usually, that is."

"On that subject", said Jenny, "It would be helpful if you talked to me first. If you have the need, I understand and can make the complications go away. My number is on your phones. You may not get me straight away, but we have a system for forwarding my messages to wherever I may be. We always have time, so don't rush things."

"Having said that", she continued, "Shit happens and we *will* get you out- you just may have to wear some unpleasant consequences until we can find and spring you. If one of the government agencies catches a jumper, they will get a rough time of it. They would love to find out our secrets- the good news is that most of them are totally unaware of us and dismiss the stories anyway. Don't run foul of the FBI or CIA. We *are* their x-files."

“You will all learn how to move around in different times and places, but not now”, I added.
“You are, in effect, new recruits, just out of camp for the first time. Just have some fun. Spend your money, get laid and live the good life for the next six weeks. That’s it for the pep talk- time to get you back into 21st century character.”

This crew would be relatively easy, as they were mostly single or loosely attached. They wouldn’t have wives to spot the changes. The couple that did would be soon parting company with them.

For the first time in a long while, everyone was out of uniform, be it military or work overalls. As usual, the Transit procurers had needed to travel and find the same clothes in new sizes, then to age them. After the first retro-aging and body enhancement, people stayed much the same size, unless they wished to change, but for the first time- they almost always changed shape or size.

Several were wearing glasses with the old lenses now made of non-corrective glass, their eyes having been adjusted to better than normal. The Rolex’s had been replaced with Casio’s and I watched people unconsciously reaching down, trying to find a familiar pistol that was no longer there, for the first time in over a year.

“Next lesson of the day, driving”, I said, “We have a simulator set up over in Hanger 56- do remember the little lever on the side of the wheel- those blinky things are called indicators.”

Welcome back to traffic.

“Fuck- it would be easier to get them diplomatic plates.” laughed Jenny, as we watched them struggle with the fact that they no longer had right of way to anything unarmoured.

“Switch the sim to 1930 Chicago- I could use a good laugh.”

“Don’t worry- 50 years of doing this and it becomes second nature”, Jenny reassured the crew over dinner.

“I wasn’t planning on doing a lot of driving”, John said, “Just drinking, eating and lying by a pool and catching up on sleep.”

“Return date is August- good luck with the pool.” said Simon.

“The sort of place I will be staying”, said John dryly, “Will have an indoor pool.”

“A few of us are looking at kicking in and buying a property- a luxury beach front holiday home at Waimarama that I saw just before we jumped down-time. Are there any problems with that?” Simon inquired.

“Give me the details and it will be yours before you jump”, Jane said. “We always need good investments.”

“Ahh... it was listed at 1.8 mil.”, Simon said.

“And the problem is?” said Jenny, smiling.

“You will need about 5-700k to outfit it properly, too”, said Jane, “My people will take care of that, if you want.”

That was well-received and agreed to by Simon, Eric and Brent, who had obviously been thinking ahead as to what they wanted.

“They probably want some kind of boat”, I said. “Find a good one, suited to the area- I will be visiting for a few days.”

“I’m paying off the bank and arranging some building for the farm”, Steve stated.

“Your spread is really isolated, isn’t it?” Jenny asked.

“Much like your place in the Wairarapa”, Steve said.

“That’s good- we could use another safe house”, said Jenny, “Just find a good architect- Jane knows a few that do what you want and are discrete- cost is no concern as all of you have unlimited credit- not just your three mil- that was just what you would have walked away with had you chosen not to stay on.”

Wilson wheeled in the trolley, laden with Stilton and Port, and then moved to the sideboard to prepare brandy and cigars.

The table had split into separate discussions, involving plans to spend money and get together for a bit of fun, but I notice Mike sitting quietly, doing a lot of thinking. This is not the time to interrupt, I thought. When Mike is thinking something over, it usually means that something useful is about to be put on the table.

Meanwhile, we have a selection of 100 year-old ports to sample. Time travel is *so* useful.

Interestingly enough, early on there was a lot of talk about settling old scores. There wasn’t much of that now, just talk about enjoying themselves- holidays, fishing trips, touring, hotels, and restaurants plus of course- getting laid.

They were moving into the mindset of temporal adventurers on holiday.

Transit One

After breakfast- a late one, I looked Mike up.

“You looked like a man with an idea, last night”, I told him.

“You would be right”, he said- “I’ve been thinking it over for a while. When I gave you that last list of prospective recruits, I missed a lot of others out, as they were way too old to be useful- but they wouldn’t be if they went through the retro process.”

“Damn”, I said, “You’re right. They are the ones with the missing technology- mines, gasworks, steam engines- outdated chemistry, Pre-computer stuff.” They would adapt easier, having had a glimpse of the future. That was what we needed- men that had been through the transition period- coal to nuclear.

“Find me these people. This is your project.”

“Easy. But I have business to attend to before pleasure- or is it the other way around?”

“Divorce?”

“Something a little less formal for the old bitch.”

As the breakfast dishes were being cleared away, Steve finally asked the awaited question- “What’s on for today?”

“The next lesson”, I said, “Not working to a timetable, schedule, task list or roster. No section meetings, patrols or routine tasks. You plan- or don’t plan- your own days now.”

While things were run loose down-time, everyone was still working to an overall plan and there were usually local workers to supervise and teach. It’s time for everyone to get used to doing their own planning and work- or delegating it out.

“You have all gotten used to having meals cooked, quarters cleaned, laundry done and boots polished. That doesn’t have to change, but now you have to find someone to do it for you.” I continued, “Money makes this easy, but you will still have staff problems and you can’t shoot them- as easily, anyway.

Back to what to do. Now myself- I would sit down and work out a list of things that need doing, what possessions I wanted to take with me, how to get rid of stuff I didn’t want, what I wanted to buy and where I wanted to stay. Work it out yourselves or in groups if you wish. The simulators are at your disposal and there are newspapers and videos, to refresh you on what was happening up to the time you jumped. If you want to know something- ask- but *YOU* have to think up the questions.”

That should keep them busy for a while. Now it remains to be seen how long it takes them to ask some of the ones I consider important.

Leaving them to their own devices, I joined with Jenny and Jane in the study, where we were looking over some plans for a new project. “Anyone asked about guns yet? Jenny asked

“No, but they will before the day is out.”

Jane tapped her keyboard and a flow chart appeared on the wall. “This is Phase one”, Jane said. “The forestry crew jump 200,100 and 50 years back into this location, about 28 km from here- picked as it has not been previously explored by us, thus avoiding a potential divergence. They will be planting out about 50,000 hectares.”

“So this is why you cordoned off the land to the north.” Jenny said.

“Exactly”, answered Jane- “We were always going to build one day and didn’t want to meet ourselves coming and going. Loops are minimized by using the Haddon labour teams. You can expect to see trees in about three hours- the timeline is altered from noon today.”

“The construction phase takes place real-time, then?” I asked.

“Yes, starting immediately you OK the design”, said Jane. “Material build-up is already under way and once you wrap up your current business up-time, construction will start, using our people and 9th century labour.”

“OK, let’s see the plans”, said Jenny, eagerly.

The artist’s impressions showed a village in a park-like setting, the homesteads were spread out- not closer than 500 metres to each other. The house designs- sketches and photographs of existing designs were varied, some low and sprawling, some multi-storied; old style colonial homesteads and modern stainless steel and glass- something for all tastes. Where styles changed, they were separated from view by plantings. At a central point, a communal area contained tennis courts and swimming pools, plus several cafés, shops, spas and pubs.

“I think that will do us fine”, I said.

“That all looks good to me”, said Jenny, “I see a few of the sketches done over the last ten years appearing there.”

“All the best bits of the early NZ project, plus the teams descriptions of ideal homes went into the architect’s brief”, answered Jane, “By the way- he is dead keen to supervise the project- I can get him on-board, no problem.”

“What architect wouldn’t want to help design a new world?” said Jenny, “Do it.”

“That’s settled, then”, I said, “How about nuts & bolts stuff- power, water, sewer- I don’t recall a good hydro source from the initial survey?”

“We have moved on a bit from then”, Jane said, “When I was picking up that satellite package, I also ordered the latest in self-contained homestead fusion power packs. We don’t need to stick to the project’s ‘duplicable technology’ guideline here.”

“I keep getting caught up on that on, having lived it for so long.” I said.

“This screen shows an earth dam, which will be our water supply- We also have a pipe extruder, so the water line has no joints and the whole pipeline is laid by a mole- minimum impact on the landscape. Sewerage is by eco septic tanks- the ones that have pumps and agitators. Roothing is much the same as your 9th century roads- single lane hardfill.

In addition, we will need approximately 20 additional staff to service the homes and gardens, initially using the Country Club’s staff as cadre.”

“Talk to Wilson- he has mentioned others that would perhaps fit here”, said Jenny.

The meeting being finished early, we decided that the pool was the place to spend the rest of the day. Jenny arranged a smorgasbord lunch for 1pm, while I got the drinks from the pool's self-serve bar. I took my usual chair, enjoying a frosty pilsner while watching Jenny and Jane racing each other at laps.

Shortly after settling- about ½ a bottle- Mike arrived. Grabbing a bottle, he sat in the chair next to mine and passed over a printout.

"I found the computer suite- I never would have thought you were connected to the internet here."

"It's a sort of backup, but a recent copy- mainly pages that we think will interest any of us- Jane has a room full of nerds on the payroll who ship us hard drives full of stuff- I take it you found what you want?", I said.

"Could I have one of these waiting on the Monday after our return- Rotorua dealership?" He asked, handing over a printout.

"Consider it done", I said, waving a now empty bottle, as a hint.

Mike returned with fresh bottles and we sat drinking and watching the girls cut through the water at a speed that would easily surpass any reached at the Olympics. "I'm looking forward to this." said Mike, with a wide grin.

Steve was the next to arrive and picked up a fresh round from the fridge. Jenny and Jane had finished now and were toweling down. Seeing Steve at the bar, Jane waved and made drinking motions. After a year, we all well knew each others orders.

"Finished with the sim?" Jenny asked.

"The Haddon roads aren't much different to those 'round home.", he answered, "Just less drunks. What does feel unnatural is getting about unarmed."

"Right on time", I laughed, "Come down to the armoury tomorrow and we can have a look at a few pistols and concealed carry rigs. We don't get about unarmed and don't expect anyone else to."

Next to arrive was JD, who needed no prompting to load up a drinks trolley.

"I have a few questions to ask about that special effects holo gear you used at Leeds", he said, "I know we aren't meant to use high tech stuff in front of the locals, but how about for our own purposes, specifically R&R?"

"Are you looking to make another bar", Jenny asked.

"You got it", he said, "I was hoping we could use the holo gear to put on sims of famous acts."

"Very interesting." Jenny said, thoughtfully. "I may have just found a position for someone I want to recruit. That may be just the hook for her."

“Your task, then, is to lay your hands on every DVD and music disk you believe worthy”, I said, “I know there is 2d to 3d conversion software out there, but it still needs just the right human input to make it work well.”

“O Genie- the next wish is for tickets to the UK and Europe”, JD asked, “I want to do a tour of the favorite restaurants.”

“A much more constructive use of time than feeding ex-employees through the mincer- Consider it done.” I said, “Jenny and Sonja may well join you- they seem to know every up-market hash-house in the northern hemisphere.”

Sara and Jackson arrived with the lunch trolleys and swiftly set up the buffet. The others wouldn't be too far away. It never took too long to get sick of the traffic simulator.

Jenny had placed an order for a barbecue dinner, lots of prime meat and salads. The rest of the crew drifted in over the afternoon. With the temperature in the 30's, the pool was the logical place to gather.

Andrea, who was currently running the logistics section, arrived late in the afternoon having driven a road train of supplies from Earth. Geoff was back in the US, taking care of that end of the pipeline.

“Any orders?” Andrea asked and promptly had a wad of printouts from the crew thrust at her. She quickly flicked through them, and then having made a few notes, sealed them into an envelope to go out in the next mail drop, where Jane's employees would sort them out.

For every person on the Transit crew, there were several hundred people on earth, scattered throughout several centuries and all five continents, ready to supply any commodity known on the planet. A few houses and vehicles would be a very straight-forward matter.

“I like the beach front property”, Andrea said, “You can expect to see me there real soon.”

“Best put in a bigger wine chiller”, laughed Eric, as Andrea tackled him, knocking him into the pool.

“Have you all read the contents of those folders?” asked Jane, “There is a list of all our holiday property in there- everything is available for this window.”

The looks told her that most had not looked that far, so she mentioned a few very exclusive locations.

I'm sure the folders will be studied a bit more closely now.

Catching JD at the bar, I took the opportunity to talk to him alone. “As you are off to the UK, I would like you to do something for us.”

“No problem”, he answered.

I handed him a list of numbers. “This is enough to pay the whole crew out without waiting. You were all promised this money and debts must be paid. Come see me tomorrow and we will go over the cover story, about a syndicate who always buy the same numbers and so on.”

“We have a few divorce settlements, then?” JD asked.

“Trust funds for the kids, anyway”, I answered.

Jenny stood up and tapped a spoon against the side of an empty wine bottle. “Something you all need to know- we will be unavailable for ten days after arrival, as we have to deal with the crew that went back at the end of the first tour- I know a few of you want to come down to the property, once you wrap up your affairs- but we are closed for ten days- sorry. After that, you are most welcome. On the second Saturday we are off to celebrate with Mark, who has elected to return, and his family. We will be taking the quads and the small excavator from the early days, as a present. Thanks for listening and rip into it.”

They have talked over what they want to do sober, time for them to discuss it drunk- doing both was the way to get all the answers.

Transit One

Preparation to jump- Or perhaps stroll, in this case. After a leisurely start and a good breakfast, we were off to Huka Lodge, Taupo- August 14th, 2004.

We emerged from the gate to the surprise of Mark, Dave, Phil and Sean, who were not expecting to see the rest of the crew arrive so soon. The new arrivals having being well-briefed not to discuss events since the others had left.

Jenny quickly explained the first arrivals, especially Sean. “This is what we talked about- everyone returning or back to wrap up their affairs. The group that has just arrived will travel back in six weeks local time and you all will meet up at Haddon two days after leaving the 9th. Please refrain from swapping notes until then.”

“To recap on business for the day”, I said- “Sean- you are free to stay tonight or you can get away anytime after lunch. Dave, Phil and Mark- you need to stay on until tomorrow mid-morning, or you will get looped. The rest- please stay on for a top meal tonight if you wish, or you can leave anytime. I recommend staying until mid afternoon- our next job is to take a bus to town and just get used to being in a 21st century urban setting. This is a tourist town, so you won’t look like fish out of water.”

“Can’t see any rush.” said Steve, “We seem to have plenty of time.”

Everyone laughed at this- indeed they were starting to get used to having a different outlook towards time.

Somers & Associates. Masterton office, New Zealand.

Leonie settled into her leather chair and raised her coffee cup to her lips, taking a sip. She had what she considered the best job in the world- a very generous salary, offices that were nothing short of luxurious and a free reign to do much as she pleased. A very small workload was normal, but when the work came in it had to be dealt with promptly and efficiently. Usually it involved paying the corporate credit card accounts and overseeing the management of a collection of very exclusive holiday homes, frequented by anonymous VIP’s.

Opening her e-mail, a flagged message indicated that the MD Jane Somers wanted something done personally.

Opening the encrypted message, Leonie received her instructions. Today it was to be the outfitting and provisioning of an up-market beach house for three young male VIP’s. An attached list gave all the equipment specifications, food and drink preferences. While that printed out, she was already on-line ordering supplies, when the phone rang.

“Somers and Associates, Masterton- Leonie speaking.”

“Good morning Leonie, Jane Somers- you have the list?”

“On it now, Miss Somers.”

“Splendid, I will be in New Zealand in three days and will be spending a couple of days at this property with a couple of the principals. I would appreciate it if you could attend to the details personally.”

“Of course- I would be delighted.” Leonie said. “Will you require any transport arrangements?”

“All taken care of, thank, you”, Jane answered.

Leonie finished her on-line ordering and then left the office to personally order the furnishings and electronic equipment, the stores being just a few doors away. All the better shops in town knew her well, being one of their best customers and more importantly, one who paid cash. That done, she would drive to the property and arrange power, phones, cleaners, caretakers, gardeners and all the other details.

‘How could people consider spending this much money work’, she thought to herself, as the sales manager loaded a few ‘complimentary gifts’ into her car. That LCD screen was going to look great in her lounge.

In a town full of fine restaurants, where did they want to go for lunch- Burger King. As JD said, at least they went to the best of the junk food factories. Afterwards, most of the afternoon was spent at a pleasant bar on the corner of the main street, watching the world go by- in 21st century clothing, as we got used to spending money again.

Pete’s new Holden sports ute was parked across the road, so he was not drinking and a few of the crew were still at the shops, buying gifts for wives and girlfriends. As the sun started to go down, I announced ‘last orders’, as Jenny sent a text message to everyone not in the bar to start heading for the bus soon. A quick dose of Aldetox and we would be ready to sample one of New Zealand’s finest wine cellars. I wouldn’t be surprised if Jane had an interest in this hotel- she was a shareholder of most of the better ones.

That was a legendary dinner, in the history of our group of Temporal Adventurer’s. Even our resident chef could find no fault with the meal and service. Jenny had taken the precaution of booking the entire facility and a few words exchanged confirmed that the staff was indeed of Jane’s elite and as such quite soundproofed. The Somers and Associates platinum card had unlocked the exclusive owner’s wine cellar, stocked with the finest wines and spirits that could only have been obtained by time-jumpers. Where else does 200 year-old Cognac come from- to say nothing of the ‘lost’ vintages?

We sat on the balcony of our suite, watching the Waikato River’s rapids in the first light of the dawn.

“They are a damn good crew.” Jenny said. “I might mention that I have won a certain bet, regarding percentages staying on”, I reminded her. “Come in and collect then.” said Jenny, taking my hand and rising from her chair.

They departed throughout the next day, those living close returning in their old cars, some in new ones- the rest in arranged transport. As the last of them left in a bus to the airport, we set up the gate for a jump to our farm. And a few hours sleep.

New Zealand, Time Line Prime

Mike West arrived just after noon, to find the house empty. The old trout would be out with friends and would be back at about 7pm to start complaining about Mike's weekend away.

Mike went to his workshop and loaded the big tool chest onto the back of his battered Mitsubishi. Filling it with tools and equipment, he then unlocked the cupboard and took out his .303 rifle and shotgun from where they had been hidden for the past 25 years and placed them on top of the tools, in their carrying cases. His wife did not approve of firearms- or a great many other things. That done, he collected a few personal items- photos and suchlike and packed them into an overnight bag.

This done, he sat down in the lounge, work boots still on and opened a can of beer- both things his wife also strongly disapproved of. Grinning to himself, he turned the TV to the sports channel...

At about 7:15, Cheryl arrived home and erupted on cue as she spotted Mike, boots on, drinking beer and watching sports. As she started to wind up about men off drinking all weekend, dirty boots and so on, Mike cut in "SHUT THE FUCK UP YOU WHINING OLD COW." He roared, in a voice more recently used to deal with unruly apprentices.

Cheryl stopped in mid-rant, jaw hanging slack in astonishment.

"Here's the deal, you old pox-drop- now get the shit out of your ears and listen real close. I'm out of here, as of 5 minutes. You get the house and an allowance of three grand a month, if and only if you follow these conditions to the letter."

Mike flung a bundle of notes at her feet "That's six grand- first installment- the deal is- listen very fucking carefully- one bad word about me to the kids and I cut you off- and you can get off your fat, lazy arse and try and work for a living- **DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME.**"

She nodded weakly, for the first time in her life, speechless.

"Right, I'm gone, then", said Mike, leaving for the hotel suite he had booked. Tomorrow he would pick up his new Toyota from the dealers. After that, he would visit his children with job offers...

Brent Stevenson arrived back at his flat, late Sunday afternoon. As usual, the place was a pigsty and reeked of stale wine and dope. The idiot flatmates would have recently surfaced and headed to the pub, where they would stay until they ran out of money.

Brent quickly packed the few possessions he wanted from his room, including a couple of 'souvenired' weapons. As he left, he threw a couple of hundred dollars onto his bed. They could consider that payment for cleaning up what was left of his stuff. He started his car and headed north towards Waimarama beach. He would stop halfway and find a good motel for the night, then in the morning, trade the car in...

JD ordered a taxi to the nearest 5-star hotel. Tomorrow he would close his old business and then head to England. Tonight someone else could cook for a change and the service had better be up to what he got down in the 9th.

Sam returned to find a letterbox full of final demands. He spent a satisfying evening, writing replies that mainly went 'paid in full- please close this account.'

That done, he picked up his mobile phone and made a couple of calls.

"Scott- Want some guaranteed work? Come around and see me tomorrow- I can get you a long term contract..."

"Ross- still looking for a job? Drop around tomorrow- about 10..."

Simon slept late and arrived at work after 10am. As his supervisor started to rant about irresponsibility and letting the team down, Simon interrupted by sticking two fingers up his nose, gripping it with his thumbnail.

"Do I have you complete attention numbnuts? Just blink for yes."

"Good", said Simon, "At the risk of being rather cliché- stick this job up your faggot arse- I won't be needing references, by the way."

Simon released him, deciding that humiliation would be more fun than pain. Before he could raise a hand to his throbbing nose, Simon had seized his trouser band and using his enhanced strength, tore his trousers and underwear painfully off, calling out "Wedgie.", thus creating a company legend.

Pete Jordan pulled up outside his son Graham's flat. He had called last night and talked him into taking the day off. "Very nice." stated Graham, looking enviously at the brand-new ute.

"Want one? Let's go shopping. What's the catch? Hear me out for a few hours..."

For the next two weeks, I would remain at the farm, while Jenny and several of the others did a little covert work keeping an eye on the team. They would be in and out and I needed to remain on hand here, should any of them need a fast trip off-planet or just wanted to stay here. Some of them would wrap up their affairs quickly and be at a loose end. I had a few simple cottages and

huts out towards the coast where they could hole up. This place had to be kept clear for the return of Mark, Phil and Dave and their wives. Once we had them safely back down-time we would be reasonably safe from a potential divergence in the time line.

The others had been cautioned to give Sean a wide berth until about a week after his lotto win. We didn't want to blow his cover story. We would all go up and visit him and take up the digger and quad bikes I promised him last year.

In the meantime, it was quite nice to not have anybody to organise, aside from myself.

“Yes, this will all do splendidly”, Jane said, “Just as my clients requested.”

“Your brief was certainly clear enough”, said Leonie, “It helps when the clients give you a good idea as to what they expect.”

“I'm expanding the operation here”, said Jane, “Would you be willing to move more into purchasing and hand the facility maintenance over to a competent contractor.”

“Of course- that is my favorite part of the job”, said Leonie.

“Good, the position is yours- as well as a 50% salary increase- you will need a new car, too”, Jane, ‘A Landcruiser or one of the better 4wd's- some of these properties are on rather rough roads.’

Right now I need you here, thought Jane- in a few years I will make you a much better offer.

Brent, Eric and Simon arrived late morning, having spent the night at nearby Hastings, sampling the excellent local food and wines. Jane had called to say that the real estate agent would meet them at the house at 10am, with the keys and alarm codes and that it would be fully stocked.

The street was mostly deserted, this being the worst time of year, weather-wise, for this holiday area. They stood and looked at the property for a while, thinking how only a short time ago, this sort of place was but a pipe-dream.

“Let's see how good Jane's people are”, said Eric, heading up the path, through the lush, semi-tropical garden.

“Very good indeed”, Brent said, finding that the bar had beer on tap- Guinness too.

The next couple of hours were spent exploring the house and grounds, learning to work the electronics, sampling the well-stocked bar and pantry, then finally- finding the boat in the garage.

Jane knocked at the door and was immediately waved in and plied with drink- a goodly supply of her favorite champagne having been conveniently supplied.

“I take it you approve?” she asked.

“Bloody fantastic.’ said Eric, speaking for them all.

“Sorry I couldn’t set this up for mid-summer, but for operational reasons, this had to be done now”, said Jane.

“No worries”, said Brent, “This place is bloody magnificent right bloody now.”

“It is a great location”, Janesaid, sipping her drink, “You guys have real taste.”

Jane had already left standing orders with the local agent to purchase any property coming up for sale. The agent was practically wetting herself when Jane had stated ‘price is not a consideration.’

“I can stay tonight, then have to get back to work”, said Jane, “I drove in from a safe house, but will gate from here- the easiest way to set up a new gate point is to jump from there to a known location. By the way, that Landcruiser is yours to keep here- I’m sure you need something to use as a boat tractor.”

The forecast for tomorrow was for calm seas- fishing weather.

A convoy of vehicles headed up the 1 ½ kilometer driveway to Steve’s house. Jane started the introductions- the architect, several contractors and a staffer she had previously mentioned- Leonie, one of her NZ employees.

After a look about the property, they agreed with Steve that the best site for the new house was where the existing one was located.

“A shame that”, said Steve, “This old house has been in the family for years and I’ve been busting myself paying off the rest of the family for years.”

“No problem”, said Peter, the architect, “We can shift it- there is a nice site over by the dam- Jane did say not to hold back.”

“That’s settled, then”, said Jane, “Let’s have a look at a few drawings...”

“I would seem Peter is a bit of a Frank Lloyd Wright fan”, Leonie remarked to Jane, as she got into the car.

“I wouldn’t have given him the job if he wasn’t.” said Jane, “I will call in on you in a week’s time.”

Dave Eastman didn’t have a lot to do, pack up a few bits and pieces- mementos from when his wife was still alive. Jenny had spent some time explaining to him why it wasn’t possible to travel back and prevent her from dying. Sometimes it could be done and other times not- in this case, too long ago and too likely to cause dangerous rifts in time, which we had discovered the hard way.

The packing done, he called the Salvation Army to come take the contents and then put the house on the market. The next stop was to see his daughter, whose shift should be nearly over. One thing he could do was to get her along- another chef would be a welcome addition and this was a non-combat role. These positions didn’t pay the real big money, but still paid very well indeed. And if you took a permanent position...

Dave mentally went over the strategies Jenny had suggested for getting someone along to the farm, where they could see the gate. In his pocket was a letter offering a position as a chef for the resort under construction. Once there, a trip through the gate to Transit tended to make a believer of most.

“So far, so good”, remarked Jenny, as we opened up the farmhouse. We had just returned from taking the first three and their wives down to the 9th. Now we could get out and spend some time with the others, who had been back for two weeks. Along with the rest of the Alpha team, we also had five family members joined up and another thirteen friends and associates. They would make up the Beta team.

Opening up our email, I found the final list- Jane has been busy here.

“Very good”, said Jenny, looking over my shoulder, “They should do nicely.”

As I thought, the first of them started heading to the farm during the second week. Mike was the first to arrive, followed the next day by John French. They knew that for operational reasons we had to stay in this time period for six weeks and had taken up the offer to stay on at the farm and do a bit of work about the place. As I had found, the novelty of a life of idle luxury soon wears off. Far better a bit of a spree after some hard work.

“That should do us for the next year”, stated Mike, shutting down the Caterpillar engine of the new firewood processor that we had been trying out. A couple of hours work and we had over ten cord cut, split and loaded into trailers- all without touching a log. These machines had been invaluable in freeing up labour to work on our projects. Most of this load of wood was headed for Transit, where there was no firewood available yet. With the climate there, heating was only needed on a couple of days a year, but a fire at night was still enjoyable.

The days work being finished; we loaded our fishing gear onto the back of my old Toyota and headed down the track to the coast, for a little fishing trip. With a storm front coming in, they should be biting.

“An amazing bit of coastline”, John said, “Its wonder you don’t have fishermen and surfers all over this area, even if it is out the back of nowhere.”

“The neighbors and I have a tacit agreement”, I said, “We lock the bastards out and keep the tracks real rough- for years, we let them in, but a few years ago, we started having problems with poaching, thieving, fires, rubbish and filth everywhere. Before I brought this block, I used to have access and made life difficult for trespassers. Then, around that time, this bit of coast got a real bad reputation for drownings.”

“The sort of drowning caused by a hit from a sonic stunner”, John hinted, winking.

“Something like that...” I said.

Rather than drive back in the pouring rain, we stopped at my fishing hut, hidden in a patch of scrub a few hundred metres from the coast. A few of the locals and I built this some years before I got into the time-travel business. Now it was only used by me, as I had brought all the surrounding properties out and the past owners now lived in very comfortable retirement in the far north. Quickly unlocking the steel door and shutters, we moved inside just as the rain started to get heavy. A turn of a key and the generator fired up, in an adjoining shed.

“The great New Zealand bach” said Mike, looking around at the collection of worn furniture, ancient books and a battered piano.

“It’s a real classic.” said John.

“The key to the woodshed is hanging by the door- could you check the diesel? There are a couple of jerrycans out there- I’ll get the fire lit and a brew on”, I asked.

“The tanks full”, John said, entering with a heaped armful of firewood. “You have satellite out here?”

“All the comforts of home”, I answered, “Actually we have a satellite data link- no TV, just voice and email. Apart from that, the place is basic, but comfortable- two bedrooms, a shower and an inside toilet, when there is water in the tank. The fridge is gas/electric and the beer will be cold by the time we finish off the contents of the cooler that we brought with us.”

Mike arrived with the beer and fish, which we stowed in the fridge. “We will have hot water in about 20 minutes”, I said, throwing another piece of pine into the stove. “There are a couple of pairs of clean overalls, socks and so on, in the main bedroom.”

“It’s really set in”, I said, as the rain lashed windows and roof. “Might have to stay here a couple of days and ride it out- the track slipped last week and we had a real bad experience with that sort of thing, down at the 9th century NZ site.”

“I heard the story”, said John, “Looking at the supplies out in the shed, we can hold out for a few weeks.”

“If we get stuck, there are a few deer around here”, I said. “I’ve been saving them for a time like this.”

“You can stick the fancy hotels”, said Mike, “This is the life!”

Jenny knocked on the door, clipboard in hand, looking to the entire world like a surveyor or salesperson. A disheveled, unshaven face appeared, glanced at her and grunted “Fuck off.”

Without speaking, Jenny raised a tube and pointed it at the face. A quick puff of vapour and the face disappeared. A drumming sound could be heard as his heels thrashed against the floor. Slipping the tube back into her pocket, Jenny calmly walked off.

Without a complainant or witness, Eric’s assault charges would now be dropped.

The coroner would write this one up as a massive cardiac failure- the police would be not unhappy to have to drop an assault charge against a paramedic well known to them, but pissed that they would miss out on a manslaughter charge that was a certainty.

Several blocks away, Jenny climbed into her car and took out her phone. “Eric- I’m on my way up- please make sure you chill the glasses this time.”

Sean Marden was a very happy man. After three terrible years, in which he had lost the family home defending himself on a murder charge for shooting a thief, his family was almost back to their old selves.

A smallish bribe to the property owner had let them take possession a week after having their offer accepted. He was more than happy for Sean to pay all moving costs and put his family up in a hotel until they found a new home.

“Mary- Wayne just called and he is coming up with a few friends for a housewarming, this Saturday”, Sean said.

“OK by me- we are due a good party”, she said, once more marveling at how easy moving was when you employed professionals to do it.

Another delivery truck arrived at the gate and she went out to meet them at the porch- this would be the new bedroom furniture. Across in the near paddock, two of her sons argued over whose turn it were to ride a battered old Honda trail bike. ‘I thought Sean would have been out and brought a couple of new bikes, by now’, she thought to herself.

The Komatsu excavator had finished the track and was now leveling the site for Steve’s old house, which would be relocated tomorrow.

“Time for us to go”, said Jane. “We will just get in the way here.”

Steve closed the back of the horse float. “Off to Wayne’s farm”, he said and they pulled out, as the relocating crew started work on jacking up the house for its 1500 metre move.

JD was enjoying his tour of the three Michelin star establishments so much that he had needed the calorie-blockers that Jenny had supplied. The Somers & Associates card had opened doors that otherwise would have been firmly closed and made any reservation difficulties disappear.

Eleven million pounds richer, he had transferred most of the funds into the accounts that Jane had provided and placed the rest onto another credit card that he had arranged himself. The lotteries people hadn’t been too pleased that most of the funds were being moved offshore, but there wasn’t anything they could do about that. He had given a story to the press about being part of a New Zealand syndicate that had for years played those winning numbers and he had used them on his holiday. The fact that he would share them with the other mystery syndicate members had made news for a couple of days. Time now to move to France, for a couple of weeks of wining and dining there.

Sean Brown had treated himself. For the first time in ten years he could have actually walked into his favorite spot, but chose to hire a chopper. The company had suggested a Robinson, for one person, but Sean requested a Jet Ranger - "I have a lot of gear to take in." he said, producing his Gold Card.

700 kg of the best food, drink and camping equipment was airlifted in and Sean was set for the best hunting trip of his life.

Two weeks of that and he would look some of the others up.

Outside was the pitch-black only found in the wilderness on a stormy evening. The hut was a beacon of light in the darkness and within, the drinks flowed, after a fine meal of fried fish and baked potatoes, followed by canned chocolate pudding and UHT cream. As the weather raged, we toasted our feet in front of the range, cigars and pipes aglow.

"Cut the guilt crap." I said. "One- you are one of a very few blokes who can take a couple of weeks off and be back later in the afternoon. Two- she has a bevy of servants- and half of my crew- running around after her and the baby. Three- Shirl is from a time when blokes had sod-all to do with child care. Four- my bloody can is empty."

"Aye." growled Mike, "Down there is a man's world- don't tell Jenny I said that."

We all burst out laughing.

"But really," continued Mike quietly. "It took Jenny to make me realize that I was less than a man back here. The matter has now been put straight."

"I'll drink to that", I toasted, raising a can of Newcastle Brown.

Changing the subject, I asked John "Are you going to look the ex-wife up?"

He paused for a second. "I was going to, but I thought- why not wait for another 20 years? That would really fuck her up."

"Nice thought, but don't wait that long- she will just go into denial- trust me on that", I answered.

John mused for a bit. "I could go back in about a year or two, this timeline, and take Shirl and the baby. That would really piss her off"

"Now you're talking." I said.

Mike was looking pensive.

"What are you planning?" I asked.

"It's done, but in the longer term- I thought it might be better for all the family if the old bitch just dropped dead", he said.

"Jenny is very good at arranging that sort of thing", I hinted.

The storm continued, not unusual at this time of year. Unlike most houses, the sound was deadened by the double-glazed windows of the beach home. A tone from the computer terminal indicated mail. Eric moved to the monitor and glanced at the screen- "Big party at Sean's new house on Saturday." he announced to the rest.

"I have a safe house nearby", Jane said, "What say we jump down to the farm on Friday and spend the night there?- you really need to have a look around as it is the most used gate site in New Zealand and no doubt you will be spending a bit of time there."

"This place here would be tops in the summer, but right now- let's take a trip to the farm." said Steve.

"It would be good to catch up with Sean, in any case." said Eric.

The convoy arrived at Sean's new property mid-morning, a string of our cars- mostly new, a transporter loaded with the 312 excavator and two trucks carrying the quads, motorbikes and light trailers loaded with spare parts. We climbed out and helped to unload the trucks and shortly, the hired transport was away. Leaving our vehicles at the roadside, we trundled up the driveway, the excavator setting the pace.

The whole family had come out to see what the noise was. I pulled up on a quad and switched off the engine- "Delivery for you."

"They were a nice bunch", said Mary, as the last of the vehicles left. "I thought at first they were looking for free drinks from the big winners, but I'm sure they brought way more than they actually drank."

"Free drink- not them", answered Sean, "They are all very well-off themselves. All that gear they brought here was stuff they had upgraded and I got it for next to nothing."

"Well, it's just as well, because you were really going to catch it for blowing the big secret." she said. "What do they do?"

"Property development- luxury hiding places for the mega-rich- you wouldn't believe the places they own. This is why you don't need to worry about them telling tales about us. They really know how to keep things to themselves. By the way- we have an invitation to work with them, when and if we feel the need to go back to work- all labour-only contract stuff."

"That could be very useful", said Mary, thinking. "Half the money is gone already- why blow the remaining capital when we can live off a few months work each year?"

"That's what I was thinking."

By now, most of the crew were living at the farm, and/or using it as a base. After all, we have most of the facilities of the better hotels and I had hired a couple of the local girls to do housekeeping. When the weather was good- not often, we would work on the earthworks for the new development or fish and hunt. For once, I even had some help in my greenhouses and the distillery.

The way they were spending up in Wellington, we were going to need a couple of trucks to take the extra gear back. The latest buying spree was everyone purchasing evening dress, as they had decided we needed to have formal dinners at Transit. They must have been gotten to by one of the girls- probably Sonja, AKA 'Lady Penelope'. It had to be- who else wears Chanel in the 9th century or has a bloody pink Landcruiser.

A lot of the purchases were for those moving into houses- the personal touches like glassware, linen, artwork- all the furniture was already arranged and almost everybody was happy to delegate that to our experts in style. There seems to be a lot of clothing going down as gifts and trade goods, plus everyone had started accumulating bits and pieces for the new homes to be built on Transit.

The collection of luxury motor homes waiting to head down-time is at least making accommodating everybody easy and the numbers here will halve, when the ski fields open later this week.

“An interesting proposal”, I said.

“It’s about time”, Sonja continued. “When you have all the material goods, what are left but personal services?”

“Well, we were part-way there with the domestic servants- you have now taken us the rest of the way”, I agreed. The amended plans for our village now included a group of shops and more importantly for the ladies, a spa and beauty salon. Can’t say I would have thought of that one, myself. The rest made perfect sense. Rather than the current system of sending an order through procurements, a small grocery store/delicatessen would stock most requirements and would deliver immediately, saving a day’s or two’s wait for, say, lemon grass, Darjeeling tea or Parma ham.

“The staff have been located”, Sonja continued, “I have also taken the liberty of adding their own village, plus some holiday homes and a recreation center for them.”

“Sounds good- I approve of everything, so I guess that makes approval unanimous”, I said, “How is the build-up going?”

“All the building materials are on-site, the ground work and landscaping are done. The concrete batching plant is ready and the furnishings are all in storage.” Sonja answered, “We are ready for the labour.”

“What is your window”, I asked.

“Transit time, plus three weeks, Haddon time, five months- plenty of time to get your new recruits settled in.”

Another week to go. All the new recruits have been moved to Transit and I'm just waiting to finish up a few loose ends here. I have two cases of skiing injuries- sprains and a broken arm- on light duties- they will be all sorted out before we go back- that's what happens on extended skiing trips. No injuries needing more than a couple of stitches on active duty and they all get busted up on holiday.

Sean and Mary are bringing the family down for a look on Monday. Good timing winning Lotto just before the school holidays. Hopefully they are after a bit of contract work.

John is getting anxious to get back. He knows that only two days will have elapsed, but is missing his wife and new baby. How many new fathers get a six week break and are only away for a weekend.

Over dinner, Jane and Steve were telling us about their holiday in the central North Island- Jane was particularly impressed with being able to ski and swim in the same area- at the same time of year.

"We have to build a holiday home there." Jane said.

"I steered away from active geothermal areas, when picking those sites", I said. I didn't bother to suggest trying to buy in the area- Jane would want lakefront and already be on the way to acquiring it.

"I think I have the answer", said Jane, "In the next millennium, when the push out into space goes on, standard surveying procedure is for scouts to place a sonde on a favorable site, pick it up a few years later and download all the weather, temperature, solar radiation and of course any seismic activity. They run for about fifty years."

"You can obtain these?" I asked.

"No problem, the company that sold us the satellites stocks them", said Jane, "Mr. Colonist Supplies is also an avid collector of ancient technology relating to early earth colonizing and one of my better black market customers. That communications setup cost us two old John Deere tractors, straight out of the factory."

"Project Orakei Korako is a go then, once we get a safe window- but let's get the rest of the building done first." I said.

As the last of the vehicles passed through the gate, I pulled the hanger doors closed and picked up the generator and notebook controller.

Back to Transit, then on back to the 9th century.

PART EIGHT

Haddon Hold, England

Back to work. The new team is settling in nicely and I have just sent some of them down to NZ to salvage the Liberty Ship's engine and boiler. That will power the big steel rolling mill that is due on-line next year.

On my return, our draftee doctor asked to see me and has requested to stay on here. He has heard some of the tales of our advanced medicine and wants in on it. As he said, what he does here is making a real difference; he is not playing the medic at the bottom of the cliff. The medical team is very tight-knit and I believe most of the other will follow. I suspect Sue Campbell has done a lot to talk them around. Jenny has agreed to teach him how to use some of the advanced medical kit and we will arrange training for him, once he has soaked up enough of that 52nd century polyglot lingo they speak.

First job of the day- try out the new locally made rifles.

As I pulled the loading lever smartly down, the fat brass cartridge flipped out of the breech and clattered onto the bench. I laid the rifle down, action open. As the smoke cleared, Marty peered through his spotter 'scope. "Another ten- I think- the bull is totally gone", he called.

"Range is safe", I yelled, "The next targets at 200 metres." The range gofers jogged forward to change targets.

"I think we can go to full production on those results", said Marty.

I agreed "Yep, 250 of those and better get another apprentice or two for the cartridge makers."

"I thought you would want more", Marty said.

"By the time we have enough troops trained up for these pieces, we will be making bolt-action repeaters", I said, "These are to let the local gunsmiths know they can do it."

By now the targets had been replaced. Looking over the old ones, there were no real differences between our groups.

"Right", I said, "200 metres- low score gets the drinks in all night."

The 12mm 'Thunderer' rifle was working well. This is what we would arm our second-line troops with- the constabulary would get a carbine version. Even a single shot breech loader can be very effective when used by a well-trained unit. We have planned to arm two companies with this rifle. Another company- the elite and more experienced men armed with Lee-Enfield rifles and a support company would give us battalion strength. The support company would be made up of a rocket and a mortar platoon, plus transport, farriers and other ancillaries. They would be reinforced with a cavalry squadron armed with carbines, pistols and swords.

We would see what they could do, come autumn.

“How are the language lessons going?” I asked Shane, who was studying 52nd century ‘English’.

“OK- it’s what you might expect English of the future to be- a mish-mash of any number of languages blended into what once was our English as we know it.” he said.

“Ask Tom about it next time you see him- he did the disks”, I said.

“Tom is the chap who is usually working in the wood-turning shop, isn’t he?” Shane asked.

“That’s him”, I said, “When he isn’t working with the stores crew, that’s where you will usually find him.”

“He must have a real talent for languages”, Shane said.”

“Oxford Professor of Ancient Languages”, I said, grinning at the look of surprise on Shane’s face.

Time to get some flight hours in.

“I must say- this is a good way to have a look at what is going on”, I said into the microphone, as I put the helicopter into a slow bank around the edges of Sheffield. Below me, a crew was putting in the last few concrete power poles- they would be in middle of town by tomorrow.

The flight plan was to head along the eastern boundaries then head for Sentinel Fourteen, a watchtower on the Derby road, situated at what would become Duffield in our timeline. We would land and check out this new design of tower.

After circling Sheffield several times, we headed south, following the Chesterfield road, then on to Clay Cross and the oil wells. From there, it was over the hills and on to Matlock. There I flew around a few of the villages to check out the plantings. After a good look, it was south following the Derwent.

The tower was easy to spot and I brought the helicopter down onto the nearby river flats about 100 metres away and shut down, having radioed in to C&C.

“Now that’s an improvement over those upended containers”, Jenny said.

The tower was a cylinder- in our world it would be a wind turbine or communications tower. Inside the cylinder was a ladder, which climbed 12 metres to a 4 metre diameter lookout station. This contained a solar powered radio, supplies for some days and rifles and ammunition in a locked strongbox. There was also a video up-link with sensor array on top and we could monitor by remote.

The big advantage was that these could be erected and fitted out in a couple of hours- they were also easily relocated, unlike our home-made model.

This one marked the southern road end. A huge stockpile of roading hardfill was heaped up, waiting for the rest of the road to Derby to be pushed through.

Unlocking the hatch, we entered, locking the door behind us and climbed the ladder to the two-storied watchhouse. Switching the controls to local, we did a scan of the area and checked that nobody was around. I don't like leaving equipment such as our helicopter unsecured.

The level below was a storeroom and contained extra ammunition, water, food, as well as mattresses, blankets and spare clothes. Several small hatches served as firing ports, covering the blind spot underneath and could be used as toilets in a siege, should the portable chemical toilet prove inadequate.

Jenny had climbed back down into this room, so I switched systems back to remote control and followed, to find her unzipping her flight suit.

"Now you see another reason I got the helos", she said, grinning, "We have an excuse to get out on our own."

Two hours later, we were on approach to the landing pad when the radio came to life.

"Can you head over to the south east road end? John's crew has just come under attack and they want you to flush them out."

"Helo Three on the way," I answered.

"I have control", said Jenny, "Get on the gun."

I uncoupled my harness, climbed into the back, clipped on a safety line then slid the door open, as Jenny wound on the power and started climbing. As soon as we were flying straight and level, I unclipped a rifle, fitted a magazine and switched on the red-dot sight.

John had the roading crew in a defensive position, overlooking the Erewash River and was tending to a wounded man. Bodies were laying on the other side of the river- none of ours, thankfully. All the local workers wore blue overalls, which made them quite distinctive from other locals.

"I'm going to make a low pass to flush them", Jenny warned, losing altitude.

I cocked the rifle and flicked the selector to 'safe'. They were out of sight to John's men, but we could see them easily from the air, as the downwash flattened the scrub they were hiding in. I snapped off a few quick shots, as Jenny swung around and lined us up for a pass on their position, hitting one and scattering the rest. This GW-83 assault rifle packs a hell of a lot more punch than an M4.

A couple of arrows flicked up at us, but our downwash threw them wide. I shifted aim and started dropping anyone moving. With them routed, Jenny brought us into the hover slewing the machine around with the rudder controls.

I called "Magazine" to let Jenny know I was empty, just as another arrow smashed into the windscreen, just in front of her face.

"FUCK." she yelled- pushing the stick forward, as the blond giant calmly fitted another arrow to his bow, resolutely standing his ground.

“I’m bailing.” I yelled, unfastening my harness and clipping my rifle back onto the rack. I leapt out the door and hit the ground rolling, as Jenny put on the power, climbing fast. No doubt she would go pick up John and a couple of locals.

I tore off my helmet and looked about, just in time to see the Bowman coming fast- and now he had a short sword out. I rolled to his left and kicked him hard in the thigh, staggering him, which gave me time to get to my feet.

I wanted this one alive.

We circled each other warily- I had my knife out now- hopefully, I could break his sword- Buck steel should be up to it.

Leaving him an opening, I brought my knife up to block, taking his blade on the edge. With our considerable combined strength, his blade snapped. I’m glad I have all these physical enhancements- that one would have got me, otherwise.

Not visibly shaken, he flung the hilt at my face. Dodging aside, I threw a quick left to his jaw, which staggered him. That would have put most men down, but he shook his head and came back. I threw my knife aside and ducked behind him, slamming a boot heel into the back of his knee. As he buckled, I kicked him again, this time in the back of the thigh. The leg paralyzed, he collapsed and I booted him again, this time in the solar plexus. Not yet out of the fight, he rolled over and slowly tried to reach for a long knife. This time, I kicked him in the elbow, with just enough force to numb the arm, and hopefully not break it.

“Stay down- you are beaten, worthy foe”, I said in the local speech. I now had my pistol out as I was not sure I had got them all.

“What manner of ...man are you, that rides a dragon?” he asked, breathing hard.

“One who needs a fearless leader of men, to rule new lands”, I said, retrieving my knife. “Unless you would prefer the thrall’s collar and a life slaving in the mines...”

The sound of rotors deepened, as Jenny returned with more troops.

“Well, that stunt confirms you are certifiable” said Jenny.

We had flown back and had the troops bring our captive, Hamarr, up by road. He was currently locked up in one of the old barracks containers. Medical had needed to get the regenerator out, as I had broken a few of his bones and done a fair bit of sundry tissue damage. That was one tough son-of-a-bitch.

“Hell, before I had the rebuild, I wouldn’t have taken him on, but now- no problem.” I said, “I just had to go easy on him- without making it look too easy. When I saw him facing down a chopper with a bow- I couldn’t kill a guy with balls that big. Right then I decided *this* was the man to lead our NZ colony.”

“What are you going to do with Conan, anyway?” Jenny asked.

“Patch him up and ship him down a bit ahead of the scheduled colonist move date”, I said, “He can have a bit of a scout about before they get there. If we catch any others- and we will- they can join him.”

“OK”, said Jenny, “It will make things easier, with him speaking common English and Norse.”

Haddon Hold, England

So much for my quiet first day back. One local worker injured, needing surgery, fifteen hostiles killed plus three taken prisoner and one helicopter in need of a new windshield.

We are going to install one of the new watchtowers where the attack took place yesterday and have a pair of locals permanently man it, while road and bridging operations go on in that area.

This afternoon, we have a meeting to decide exactly what to do with our prisoners. Having got them, we want to use them to our best advantage- that is, persuading them first and then using them to persuade others to colonize New Zealand. This should be easier than rounding them up and driving them through the gate.

This morning, I'm off to Sheffield to have a look at a hot-dip plant for zinc coating and the Alchemist's Guild's new battery-making shop.

Rather than run power lines every which way, we have supplied only a few users with electricity. The alchemist's guild made lead-acid batteries and also recharged them, as well as doing a bit of electroplating. This keeps the rest of the city's radios and lights running. Several of the smithies had electric arc welders and machinery- they were making steam engines to power the rest. Most of the power has gone to users who needed the new hot commodity- artificial light.

Mike pulled up outside the smithy and, as usual, bribed a group of young boys to give the Toyota a clean. Most of us now carried a bucket, detergent and rags for this sort of thing. I would take a walk around, while Mike set up a new power hammer that would be driven off the smithy's steam engine.

Every time I had visited, the Iremonger brothers who ran this outfit had added something new. Their operation now encompassed every building in the street- they had expanded into making cart hardware for the wainwrights and had brought and were renovating a nearby inn, which now served as the lodge for the local smith's guild.

The streets were looking MUCH better. We had stockpiled huge piles of crushed limestone for the streets to be paved with and the alchemists now provided buckets and carted waste away, for a very small charge- labour or goods accepted in lieu. In a very short time, those who would not pay had been pressured into doing so.

From the windows (some glass), music could be heard from radios. Solar lights could also be seen in the more affluent areas. They didn't give much light by our modern standards, but were a vast improvement on the darkness of the 9th century night. A planned gasworks would improve that further.

The city has really taken off, with buildings going up as fast as the carpenters could work. Much of the population that survived the destruction of Leeds had headed here. Fortunately, they had taken the place of many of those from Sheffield that have moved into the Haddon area.

Despite the influx of newcomers, the town was a more peaceful place than it had ever been. The local Reeve was happy to leave the troublesome outlying land to the protection of our militia and now he and his men only had to look after the actual town. A couple of short-barreled shotguns had added to their authority. Several of his men had come down to train with our senior militia and the Reeve was to come down later. Unsurprisingly, our people were calling him Sheriff Reeve and, as usual, the name would almost certainly stick.

The face of the town is noticeably changing in other ways. The new and more desirable residential buildings are being erected on the outskirts of the city, while more of the central area is being taken over by industry and the markets. Whitewash has made an appearance and so have windows and chimneys.

Could this place be the world's capital next century?

The growl of a diesel engine stopped my browsing of the market stalls. It was one of the new Toyotas and was driven by Doris, who now ran the Haddon Hold housekeeping staff. Along with her, four of her staff, dressed like they were out for a day on the town. They didn't have a great amount to do at this time of the year, with most of us out and about on the various projects.

I waved to them as they climbed out. Doris was dressed in all her finery- a navy beret, jeans, a red cotton shirt, sports shoes, gold Rolex Oyster and sunglasses. On her tooled leather belt hung a Webley revolver, ammunition pouch and a satellite phone. The very height of fashion here. Sonja despairs of these local girls and their dress sense, but I think they have come a hell of a long way.

We briefly exchanged greetings and I left the girls to get on with their day out, while I headed out of town to check out the methane digester.

Doris and her girls had completed the morning clean up in record time. With only three on duty at the hold today, there wasn't a great deal that needed doing, once the laundry was on and breakfast was cleared away. Leaving the two newer girls behind to take care of the remaining work, Doris picked up the keys for a Landcruiser from the duty officer, then with the other four, left for Sheffield just after 0900.

These days it was an easy drive to Sheffield- all the heavy traffic having left over an hour ago and the roading crews working in the south, headed for Derby and Nottingham. As they arrived at the outskirts, the odd vehicle could be seen out at the mines, quarries and farms. At the moment, nearly a quarter of the specialists would be working in this area, getting Sheffield up to the same tech level as Rowsley and Bakewell.

They parked next to the 'Green Dragon' Inn, the cleanest and the favorite watering hole of the Haddon engineers. Above the door was a sign with a fair representation of a microlight aircraft.

From the other side of the market, The Commander waved hello and came over to wish everyone a pleasant day's shopping and to invite them to lunch at the Dragon, before he headed off towards the east side of the town, on foot.

Sent by Jenny to pick up samples of the trader's wares, this was partially a working visit. There wasn't a lot at the market that appealed- the lowest worker at Haddon could easily earn finer clothing, footwear or food and drink, but the day was really about walking the town in their finery. It was quite an experience for the newer girls to be treated as persons of importance by the townsfolk, who, not so long ago, would have looked down on them as mere country folk.

They were quite enjoying themselves.

As they made their way to the inn, a figure darted from an alley and snatched a bag from the smallest of their number, knocking her to the ground and sprinting off down the street. Before he had covered ten metres, Doris had drawn her revolver and fired, the big .455 slug hitting him full in the back. The footpad staggered and dropped to his knees, as the second shot pitched him forward. From the inn, the Commander and Mike West burst out, pistols drawn and a crowd began to gather.

"I saw it all, I saw it all." cried one of the stall keepers, "He robbed them."

I watched the crowd carefully, as Mike called in a shotrep and discreetly ordered all of our people in the local area to close in. They were more excited than hostile, which was what I was concerned about- them turning on us. It was going to happen sooner or later but not here today.

Thankfully.

One of the Reeve's Lieutenants soon arrived with two of the watch. He politely listened to Doris and the witnesses and after hearing what had happened, started to order the crowd to go about their business and ordered his men to drag the body off. Before they left, I gave them a few pieces of silver, for the trouble of burying him, although I had a fair idea that he would wind up in the alchemist's digester tank.

We would try and carry on as normal and have lunch. Later I would sort out some kind of recognition for Doris and her fast actions.

The Bywater Inn

1600hrs

"OK", I said "We send them down tonight and give them two weeks to look around. Then we pull them back and send them home to recruit volunteers for the colony."

"I think we should send a guide", Jenny said.

"That could help", I said, "someone to answer questions and steer them in the right direction."

"I imagine that would be me then", Tom said, "I speak the language reasonably well."

Reasonably well. He spoke it like a native- as always.

“That’s it then”, I said, ending the meeting. I unhooked my phone and made a quick call. “Eric- Take our unwashed friend off the lullaby drugs and give him a mild sedative- he ships out in four hours.”

Hamarr slowly roused from his drugged sleep. He knew he had been badly beaten in the fight, but all that remained were a few fading bruises- How long had he slept?

With a clanging of steel, his cell opened and the man he recognised as his captor lead two other captives into the room. The door closed behind them.

“You remember our last words?”

Hamarr nodded.

“Good- we leave now for new lands. One of my men will accompany you as your guide. In fourteen days you will be returned to your people. You will have ten days to persuade as many of them as you can to accompany you to these lands. My man will explain the details to you. Now you will need all your courage, as you are to walk the wizard’s way. Do you have the courage to face the unknown?”

What good Viking warriors could say ‘no’ to that.

“Run through- that is the best way”, said Tom, “You will feel sick- like sea-sickness, but that will soon pass.”

Line abreast, they all ran through the gate and into their new world.

New Zealand, Bay Of Islands 0600hrs

While looking decidedly seedy, none of the future colonists actually vomited. They had gained a new respect for Tom, who as a well-seasoned jumper, showed almost no sign of discomfort from the gating.

“It feels like the dawn, yet it was barely night as we left”, said Hamarr.

“We are on the far side of the World”, said Tom and left the explanation at that.

The rain started to fall and the sky lightened. “This way- there is shelter, food and fire”, said Tom, pointing inland. The gate had been deliberately opened some distance from the settlement and the shelter was a cottage sited to watch over the bay. When the sun was up, they would see the future settlement before them.

Tom opened the door and gestured for the others to follow him inside, which they warily did. After lighting a couple of candles, Tom lit the wood range; using kindling that was ready in the wood-box. The men looked around at the interior, fascinated by what to us were basic facilities- a wood range, windows (still dark), pots and pans and a sink with a tap. Opening his pack, Tom brought out food and started on breakfast. Soon bacon, sausages and eggs were sizzling in a pan.

“A well-appointed hall”, said Hamarr, “I had heard you live well.”

“These will be yours soon”, said Tom.

“But what of the price?” Hamarr asked, pointedly.

“We want Nottingham” answered Tom, “But we would pay a good price for it. This is it- a rich but hard land, as you will find as we travel. We have tamed enough for you to settle, but much hard labour- and reward- awaits your descendants.”

They set upon the bacon, eggs and fresh baked bread.

The morning rain cleared with the arrival of the sun.

“What manner of people live there?” asked Hamarr, as they looked over the settlement. His men thought it strange that no sign of movement or fire could be seen.

“That village awaits your people. There are no other people in this land”, Tom answered, “Let us visit the village before we walk the lands.”

Sonja closed down the gate and started packing up the equipment.

“That’s the site surveyed in.”

John radioed, “OK, call the troops in” and Steve started moving his security team back from their defensive perimeter.

The two concrete pilings and steel railings on the Nottingham side of the river marked the gate point for the colonists. By persuasion or force they would be going this way- soon.

The Bywater Inn 2100 hrs

As was the custom, Doris had just been presented with her bounty for shooting a thief. In this case, it was the keys to her own vehicle- she was already the main driver, in any case. Tonight, instead of serving drinks, she was being waited on.

“She’s a good kid”, Jenny said.

“Agreed”, said John. “I could see here joining our band, in a few years- she really is another one ahead of her time.”

Linda, our schoolteacher, joined in the conversation. “Have a look in her quarters some time- she always has books from on loan from my library. Mostly picture books, but she can read a little and makes a real effort to try and learn. If she could just get more time in the classroom...”

Jenny looked thoughtful for a few seconds. “I think Doris can come with me tomorrow- we will be spending a couple of weeks at Transit and I can give her the speed-reading treatment there- just like you got your language lessons.”

“That may be a just good idea for all of our major players”, I said. “Let’s try it with Doris and see how it works out.”

Haddon Hold 600hrs

Jenny is off to Transit and then Earth 2004 for three days, our time. I have nothing in particular on my schedule and will be spending the day working on a few personal projects. We have found yet another use for the gate.

Hilltop Restricted Zone

By the time I arrived with the gate generator, John had the heavy Terex crane and the pile-driver set up and ready to go. With the first piling clamped on, all I had to do was take a measurement from the gate mounting to the steel pile and set the distance into the gateing software.

“I have the gate set for one metre underground- we can expect a little subsidence”, I yelled to John over the roar of the diesel engines and signaled Sara West, who was at the controls, to start the vibratory driver unit.

The pile bit into the soil, starting in Derbyshire and soon crossing to Arthur’s Pass, New Zealand. As the pile reached the required depth, I cut off the field, shearing the steel. Another piling was clamped on, the gate adjusted and reopened and another was on the way.

The final piling in, I shut down the gate and the diesels slowed to idle. Sara jumped down from the cab and came over to look at the last off-cut, before the John’s workers carted it back to the salvage stockpile.

“Now I see why we stay clear of the field edge.” said Sara, inspecting the mirror surface of the field-sheared steel.

“Now you know what caused those cattle-mutilation stories a few years back.” I said, “We opened a field into rural USA, just in time for a bunch of cows to wander into it.”

My phone rang. “On our way over now”, I said. “Phase two is ready to go- next stop New Zealand.”

After John and Sara had double-checked the cranes and cargo, we made the jump to NZ, arriving at day’s end, with about thirty minutes of useable light. We moved clear of the site, marked by 12 steel pilings. I set up the gate generator on the mounting John had built on our last visit here. Placing on my headset, I called up England and started giving instructions.

With the house lifted well clear of the ground, the gate opened beneath it. I’m glad we are doing this real-time, with the other side of the gate in communication. At our end, the gate hung ten metres above the pilings. Ropes suddenly popped through the gate, attached to the lifting frame- they all fell to the lines formed by the pilings, so I must have gotten the coordinates right. I gave the ‘lower away’ command and started talking the building down. With a metre to go, John and Sara took up the slack on the corner ropes and gave a small tug on the line, to bring the frame down to sit square on the pilings. As the cables came slack, we unhooked the slings, then I ordered the crane to lift and they disappeared back through the gate.

Another adjustment and the gate was relocated, with Phill and Mike coming through to do the welding- the welder and generator having traveled down on the lifting frame. The steel frame that surrounded this compact two-story building would be soon turned into a deck.

In the last of the light, we quickly secured the structure to the pilings. In the (NZ) morning, we would be down to finish off and hook up the wind turbine, water and septic tanks that had been previously installed, as well as finish the decking, which also was prefabricated.

We had two more days to finish Jenny's birthday present.

"Well done everybody- the lift went like clockwork- we just needed a tiny tweak for wind drift." I announced back at Hilltop.

John looked at his watch. "My construction crew can stand down now and report back here at 1800- any of you others that want to come down are welcome too."

All of the new crew, who hadn't been on one of our speed-building jobs, wanted to jump down to 9th century New Zealand for a look around. They would be finding out what it was like to run pipe and cable through bush and up a mountain streambed.

The sun rose on a damp morning in the mountains. The air was crisp and cool from the snow higher up. On a terrace 100 metres above the Poulter River, the builders assembled next to the cabin, for a quick briefing before they started. As the generators warmed up, all spare hands started to run out pipe and cable for the power and water.

Sparks flew from welding and grinding, plumbers connected sewer, gas and water lines, while labourers stacked firewood, shoveled limestone onto paths, painted barely cooled welds and generally tidied the site.

The last connection secured, Dave Eastman unclipped his phone and called the windmill crew, to tell them to slip the rope securing the turbine blades. Straight away, the meters went to 25% power, about right for the wind speed reading. With the solar panels connected, the batteries would be soon be fully charged. "All good here, come on down, once you seal it up", he told the crew at the turbine. "We should be finished by the time you get back."

Glancing up the hill, George saw that the water tank indicator showed half full already. The inlet must have be quite a way up, he thought, looking at the pressure gauge- plenty of head for a high pressure water system. I must ask how we get to use this holiday home and the others I've had heard about, thought George, as he opened the mains valve and started purging air from the pipes.

The windmill crew arrived, scratched and wet from a trip through thick bush and scrub.

"Just in time for a beer", I said, passing over a six-pack of chilled Heineken.

The mist had burned off, the sun was now out and it had finally warmed up. It had taken us just under four hours to complete the finishing touches to this cabin. We were getting a lot better at building these down-time retreats. The latest technique of pushing pilings through a gate was a great advance- the site was almost undamaged by construction and landscape repair was kept to a

minimum. John and Sara agreed that this method was the best they had ever seen for precisely locating piles.

The structure was a two-storied cabin. Each floor measured six by seven metres, with an open plan lounge and kitchen downstairs, bathroom and bedroom upstairs. It was Cedar weather-board clad, with a karaka green coloursteel roof. In a few years, the Cedar would age to a silver-grey colour.

Around three sides ran a large decked area, the front overlooking the river valley, 100 metres below. Stainless steel railings surrounded the deck- there was quite a steep drop from the southern edge. Double glazed sliding doors opened out from the lounge to the deck and wide stairs led down to a narrow path, which provided access to the woodshed and water supply.

Inside was the usual combination of wood, glass, brass and leather that always works so well. This was to be a winter retreat (mainly) and as well as being heavily insulated and double-glazed, would be heated by a large wood burner. Unlike many of our earlier retreats, this one was small- designed for couples who wanted to get away for a bit of privacy. Unlike many of our others, this would be used in the time New Zealand was populated, although it would be a good many years before the settlers found their way into these remote parts.

I had surveyed quite a few local sites on previous visits- nearby was a small lake and the river had many good swimming holes for summer visitors- as well as being full of trout and salmon- thanks to a few earlier seeding expeditions.

This may not be the best site we had available, but it is a special one to me, as I had spent many happy days hunting and fishing in this valley in what was now my past life...

Tomorrow I would send a few of the local girls down to unpack, clean and polish.

Haddon Hold 600hrs

Sonja is taking the girls down to NZ, as she wants to have a look at the new hideaway that she has furnished and decorated. That leaves me free, so I'm off for a drive on the moors to the north-west, to look over a few possible sites for future development. Then there is the matter of pheasant being seen in numbers there.

Steve and John were rostered off, so they decided to come along for a look and a shoot. Rounding up a couple of locals for drivers, beaters and gofers, we were off in two of the Humvee's. Heading for what would be known as Tideswell from the east of the Sheffield road we found the track, which was a class 'C' road- in other words; a bulldozer had knocked off most of the bigger bumps.

Three days ago, Forwin had taken the 1st Mounted Rifles (armed constabulary) through on a training exercise, reporting the locals friendly and the state of the game in the area to be good. They had swung south on their patrol and would be back to their barracks in another three days.

Aside from the hunting, the deep penetrating radar had found sizable coal deposits here, which we planned to mark for future use.

By mid-afternoon we had an impressive bag for the beaters to deal with. As they plucked and dressed the birds (none of our people were keen on 'high' game.), we set up camp to enjoy a late lunch and drinks.

I called Haddon to see if anything had come up. Sonja, who had taken charge on her return from New Zealand, told us to take a night off, so I directed our workers to set up a more substantial camp. I called for tents and supplies to be brought up and before long we had a pleasant camp set up- tents were pitched, a fire going, game roasting over the coals and everyone was well supplied with beer.

As the sky darkened, and the whiskey came out, the conversation turned more serious. Steve asked the question I knew had to come, eventually.

I sat quietly for a couple of minute, then started to tell the story that I wished would go away. I guess telling it is the price I have to pay for what I did to the world...

"Yes, I did try to undo the past", I said. "Early on in our first years..."

I got the idea that I would go back ten years and take out the piece of shit that killed my family. I spent six months researching everything- who he was, where he lived, safe houses, routes, backup plans. I thought I had set up a pretty good operation, but by our standards today, it really was totally lacking in finesse.

With Jenny off down-time, I jumped to Christchurch 1987. I had previously set up a couple of new identities and brought a couple of apartments in the central city. I wasn't as good at covert ops as today- later it came back to me that at that time, several people had reported seeing me in parts of town that I knew I had never been in. At the time I just dismissed this as mistaken identity. Bloody Doppelgangers.

I decided to make the hit the night before the piece of shit ran into our car, drunk as a skunk. For three weeks I shadowed him, to learn his habits and places he frequented. Damned if he didn't drive home pissed to beat the band 5-6 nights of the week. It took quite a bit of willpower not to slot him out the first time I saw this.

I also took a look at myself and I really stress that you should avoid the temptation to do this yourselves- It's just not good for you."

Alfred, who was doing a great job as steward, brought another bottle of Laphroaig over, along with the cigars.

I lit a Dominican cigar, took another Waterford tumbler of Islay whiskey and continued the story.

"Back in those days, traveling with a firearm was no big deal, so I took the ferry and drove down with a shotgun and a 30-06 in the back of the car. That was easier than flying, where they took a nominal interest in your firearms. Back then, the cops never bothered the driver of a late model vehicle if you stayed to near the speed limit and hadn't been drinking- as you probably remember.

Anyway, I moved into one of the apartments I had brought, five weeks before the hit was to go down, and surveyed the site for a quick getaway if needed. I established the pattern of a businessman in town, who came and went at all hours. Keeping in character, I went out on the town and sometimes into the hills on a weekend.

By the time the last week came around, I knew for sure that I would not be killing some damn fool who made a dumb mistake. This prick was a killing waiting to happen.

I had figured out how and when I would make the hit. A shotgun at point blank, in the carpark of his local as he went to drive home. This would happen, as previously planned, the night before he killed my wife and kids.

I had everything set up. One car to do the hit, packed with thermite to destroy any evidence and another car that I would swap to, four blocks away. Both had been brought some months ago for cash and no ID was needed then. The hit went exactly to plan. As he stumbled to his car, I came up from behind and called out. As he turned, I let him have a good look at the gun, then gave him two high-brass loads in the guts. If he survived that, he wouldn't be driving tomorrow. Why I didn't use a Welrod or something quieter, I don't know- I think I just wanted to do some serious damage.

Slipping the sawn-off under my jacket, I walked off, looking around, as if I was looking for what had made the noise. I climbed into the first car and dropped the gun on the passenger's side, driving off to a nearby park.

As I climbed out, I heard sirens- the police had been called to the pub. I pulled the initiator cord and walked across the park, unlocking the second car. The fuse in the demolition charge had ten minutes to run- plenty of time to get clear. I drove to the industrial area, unlocked a gate and parked it in a warehouse I had hired. From here I walked to a nearby bar and had a drink before catching a taxi back to the town centre, from where I walked to my nearby apartment.

No doubt the local constabulary would be now rounding up members of the local underworld for questioning, that being the not unreasonable assumption they would make. At this point, I should have left. I was not so green that I thought that my actions would have no consequences, but I had no idea the extent of what my actions would cause.

I thought I might stay on and see how my family (and my other self) got on after surviving the crash that would now never happen. The police were a bit baffled but were not really inclined to look too hard for the killer, having found 200 grams of 90% pure smack, that I had thrown into the deceased's car.

I shifted into Noah's, the best hotel in town, while I celebrated my success. In this time, I had turned the tide of events.

Then one morning, I spotted an article in the business section, as I ate my Eggs Benedictine. Now this didn't happen in my time- the crash there didn't happen until later in the year, but here were all the indicators. Seeing what was coming, I spent the next couple of days shifting our assets in this timeline.

To no avail- the market totally crashed and inflation was rampant. This was worse than the twenties, far worse than the '87 crash in my time line. As I watched from my hotel room, the world came unstuck in the worst financial collapse seen across the known timelines.

I stayed for three weeks, before I ran for the forties to seek help from Jenny. But there was nothing we could do- this time line had failed and anarchy ruled. At least New Zealand only regressed seventy-odd years. They never resorted to cannibalism here.

All I could do was to set up my (other) family and try and put them at the top of the heap. Jenny cornered my (other) self one day at the supermarket. He (I) recognised her instantly. "Take these", Jenny said, thrusting the tickets into his (my) hand. Before he (I) had a chance to react, she was gone.

That four million (before the worst of the inflation) with the sheet of instructions would protect them in the dark times to come. I believe that Jenny did the same for her family. This time line was doomed. All we could do was administer a little morphine here and there.

Later on, we returned with Sonja and Jane to do a proper analysis. The consensus was that, by altering my circumstances, earth's economy was destroyed. Some time later, we realised that was because *we* were the ones keeping earth's economy going.

By effectively removing us from the equation, we destroyed earth.

Good intentions can have worse consequences than the most evil intents, when you meddle in time."

We sat silent for some time, as the fire burnt down. Periodically, our diligent workers came over to refill the drinks and throw a few logs on our fire.

"Worse than you can possibly imagine", I replied to John's question, as to the state of that time line. "What I didn't fully understand at that time is that we can't change history, we just make a new one. The technical term is 'creating a divergence', which is what happens when pivotal events are altered.

Here, the introduction of technology, the destruction of Rome and the nobbling of some of the major players. Back in the time-line I meddled with, our influence was removed from the world economy, which crashed. You might want to remember that next time Jane suggests an investment- she keeps the world economies working, back on our timeline."

The serious story told it was time to invite the local lads over to our fire and share a few drinks...

Haddon Hold 600hrs

Jenny and Doris are back today. We have planned a formal dinner at the Bywater inn tonight. Afterwards, we will be spending a couple of nights down at Arthur's Pass, at the new house. Jenny knows nothing about this yet.

At 1900 we gathered at the Bywater inn. A few locals were present- Alfred, Algor and wives were invited, as well as our early and trusted local workers. Jane had previously arranged for formal dress to be sent to them and instructions as to how to wear it. By now, they were no strangers to formal dining and evening dress- to the envy of other less well-connected locals.

While some may have been less familiar with our formalities, they took great pride with the way their offspring easily coped with the ritual of a formal dinner.

Shirl, Alice and Doris were familiar with formal dining, as were Alfred, Baldrick, Edmund and Ralf. They had personally trained the stewards in their duties and were anxious that the dinner would go well.

The threats and promised rewards must have worked- the meal was delivered faultlessly.

Our other guest, Alured or Algy, as we knew him, has taken over as the Mayor of Bakewell. As a good friend of JD, he had, of course been invited. A much more popular man than his predecessor, Algy had stakes in most of the major works in town. Bakewell was three times larger than before we arrived, and many, many times more prosperous.

“To our hosts and our friends that served us so well”, he proposed, raising his glass.

“To our friends, in profit and pleasure”, I said.

Alfred and Edmund stepped forward, uncovering the biggest Banana cake I had ever seen.

It was Jenny’s favorite, smothered in Passion fruit icing and whipped cream. Jane had also found her favorite ice-cream- Rush Munroe’s Banana ice-cream.

Their usual rooms had been prepared and after the cheese board and port had done the rounds, the party started to break up.

After our guests had departed, Jane opened a gate- “To your present, from all of us.” she announced.

A gate snapped open and a select few of us walked through.

“It’s just beautiful.” said Jenny. She continued to take in the sight of the Poulter Valley hut. It was late morning here and had just started to snow. The fire had been already prepared and burst into life at the touch of a match. John had brought a large pot of coffee through the gate and a selection of liqueurs had been set out on the sideboard.

After an hour or so, the others left us to return to their beds at Haddon, leaving Jenny and I to drink brandy and enjoy watching the snow fall, by the warmth of our fire- by far the best way to enjoy snow.

“How long do we have down here?” Jenny asked.

“I was thinking a couple of days- but we have a data link here, so we are in real-time communications with Haddon and can work from here if we want’, I said.

“Good”, said Jenny, “A week here would be nice- in any case we have a bit of shop talk to catch up on. Jane could pop down for a day and visit, too. She has quite a few new developments to brief you on.”

“OK, call her tomorrow and sort out a time”, I said.

“Done- now let’s have a look at this place.”

I hadn’t had much of a look around the interior, after giving a brief to Sonja I left her to design it. Sonja’s taste could always be relied on and unlike many architects; she designed for ease of construction. With a few more skilled tradesmen on our team, she could really start to design some interesting stuff. The planned village looked like a Frank Lloyd Wright memorial- not surprising, as she had spent four years down-time studying under him.

“Looks like a wee oversight”, said Jenny, pointing to a Kea attacking the rubber seal of the lounge window. She tapped the glass and the bird stopped pecking the seal and turned it’s head on an angle, to stare at her.

The best laid plans of mice and men.

“I think we might need to install a domestic shock-field”, I said. A bit of 23rd century technology designed to keep animal pests and insects out wouldn’t go astray here.

It was soon obvious that Sonja had packed quite a bit of other hi-tech equipment into what seemed to be a country cabin. Robotic cleaners, TV/computer monitors that looked just like a window when not in use and a futuristic high-efficiency air-conditioning unit- no noise.

The first floor was a large bedroom and bathroom, also with a full glass frontage- nobody to look in, in any case. No doubt automatically polarizing glass- this would turn into a hothouse in the summer. The bathroom was fairly basic- spa bath, shower, toilet, and bidet and was in marble, glass and stainless steel.

The bedroom was plain, polished wood floors with thick woolen rugs and a large king-sized bed, with two small bedside cabinets. A modest wardrobe was built into the wall between bedroom and bathroom- on opening it, Jenny found that clothes had already been sent down and hung up, so she wouldn’t need an overnight bag, after all.

One the bedside cabinet, I spotted a remote control and pushed the ‘Play’ button. A screen dropped down, the windows darkened and music started. Jenny and I burst into fits of laughter- it was playing the B52’s ‘Love Shack’.

That had to be Jane’s touch.

“It looks like they have attended to all the details”, laughed Jenny.

“If they have”, I said, “Then in this, should be...” and pulled out about 50 grams of black lace. Sonja or Jane had.

We woke at about 8pm local time. You get used to this sort of thing after decades of time travel- with our enhanced bodies, two or three hour of sleep was plenty, which helped.

Jenny suddenly sat up in bed. “Damn. Of course. Music disks- I’ve been looking for something else to sell up-time and that’s it.”

“Go for the niche market, as usual- they are much less likely to duplicate their precious collection- it wouldn’t be near unique then.”, I said.

“We need to get some holographic recordings of the big gigs of the 20th too”, Jenny said, “That job is just what I can use to recruit someone I want...”

Looks like we have another money-maker on the way.

Jane arrived right on morning tea-time, carrying a basket of still-warm baking- muffins, scones and donuts, as well as her ever-present briefcase.

“A *very* nice setting. The photos don’t do it justice- please put me down for the next free slot here.” said Jane. “Sonja wants to have another look too and would be down today, but is a bit busy with the Transit building project.”

“The place is yours next week, when we go back”, said Jenny. “As for gate operators, Simon and Eric have asked to be trained up on the gate- if you all agree; they can start training on presets immediately.”

Jane and I also agreed that they could start and that I would take them through the security set-up when I got back. By the nature of what the gates were and what they could do, we had built some very advanced security into them. Fiddle with a gate generator without authorization and you would soon find very unpleasant things happening- briefly.

With fresh coffee brewing and the table set, Jane started up her notebook, which connected to the house computers and put up a display up on the wall.

“These are the latest in construction robotics and processing equipment I have just obtained”, said Jane, pointing to the picture on the screen. “This one is a concrete batching plant- raw materials go in the hopper and whatever concrete you program comes out and loads the skips- here. They carry it and pump it where required. The smaller ‘bots screed and vibrate the concrete.

Over here, iron ore and minerals go in the hopper and formed and coated steel are extruded. The mill also makes pipe up to 30 cm, structural steel, sheet and box section- also coated. Any steel stock you need can be programmed- including railway track.

This one builds wall, tanks, swimming pools and odd-shaped concrete structures, by spraying a form of silicate concrete, building up thin layers in a continuous process. Two of these can make a 1000 cubic metre water tank in 24 hours.

We also have miners, excavators carriers, form-work and frame builders, cladders, sawmills and last but not least, a fusion generator rated at 100 Mw at 100% load.- that’s the box about the size of a 15KvA diesel set.”

The slide show over, Jane switched off and the screen turned back into a window.

“Can that plant turn out Portland cement?” I asked.

“Certainly can- it can even blow the powder into a silo or bag it”, said Jane.

“That’s going to be useful- most of our freight tonnage is cement and steel”, I commented. “With that setup running on Transit, we cut our handling by 50%. All you need to do now is find us a portable hydrocarbon refinery.”

“I have- it will be down in two weeks and we have found good deposits about 200km from the Transit base- your diesel problems have been solved”, Jane said.

“This is going to make the supply crew happy- the cement and fuel can be pumped through a microgate and that just leaves the steel to truck through”, said Jenny.

“We will be self-sufficient for steel in about 18 months”, I said, “the current bottleneck is not production, but the rolling mills to process it- the first small one just came on-line a week or so ago and is making bar stock now.”

“That’s about it for the news”, said Jane, “I will head back now and unleash that gear on Transit- by the end of your summer, the place will be ready for your tradesmen to come over and do the joinery and decorating. Those robots are great for getting a utility structure or a shell up, but they are limited in their interior finishing- especially as so many of us favour wood. Anyway, see you later- I’m off home to bed.”

Walking over to the gate site, Jane flipped her phone open and called for the gate to be opened.

Poulter Valley, Arthur’s Pass- New Zealand.

The snowfall continues- the Beech forest and river flats are now dusted with white. A couple of unobtrusive small boxes and now the local bird life neither attacks our building nor craps on the deck. Yesterday we made up a feeder station with perches a few metres away from the deck as a peace offering.

Jenny has picked out an area for a helipad, as there is some good skiing in the area about five minutes flight from this valley. We will build a ski lodge as well about two km away on the valley floor and that will keep our skiing crowd happy.

The video conference having finished, Jenny turned off the camera pickup. The schedule was working well- we had a brief morning conference at 1900 hrs local and anyone who wanted to come down for a visit did so at our morning tea-time- the end of their day, so they didn’t stay too long. Of course they could conveniently bring down any essential supplies, such as fresh baking.

I opened the presentation on the ski lodge, the window now changing back into monitor mode.

“Those small fusion generators make life easy”, I said, “No need to plan electrical loads. It takes a bit of the challenge out of design, though.”

“Let’s see”, said Jenny, “No more gas cylinders running out halfway through a shower, with only one leg done. No trips up a creek to unblock the hydro intake. No more carrying diesel cans in the rain. No more engines thumping away in the background. No more cleaning solar panels. Air conditioning, clothes dryers, dishwashers, bottle chillers...”

“Well, this lodge has all the bells and whistles”, I said, “Sauna, spa pools, heated outdoor pool, steam room, heated pathways and floor. I must admit I do want to see these construction robots in action.”

“Jane tells me that they will be finished on Transit in time to build the lodge before the best of the skiing”, Jenny said. “And there is nothing to stop those who like to build things the traditional way- plenty of room and time for all here.”

The bottle chiller started tinkling, to announce that the champagne was at the correct temperature for serving.

“Excellent idea.” said Sonja. “She can start tomorrow.”

“Good, I could use some regular help- these classes just seem to keep growing”, said Linda. Her original literacy class had grown into four classes, teaching all from grey-haired craftmasters to young children the art of reading, writing and mathematics. It would be a great help having Doris teaching the younger ones- she was a local hero and role model to them.

“Now”, asked Sonja. “Who would the next prospects for a memory implant be?”

From the peak, the whole of the cleared and developed area could be seen, stretched out before the explorers. As could the vast expanses of untouched forest, the towering trees, the coastline and unexplored islands. For over half an hour they stood silent, just taking in the sight of all this land.

Their land.

“The land is about the same size as Albion”, said Tom, answering the unasked question.

“Is it all forest?” asked Skagi.

“Most of it”, Tom answered, “The best way to explore and travel by boat.”

“There is no shortage of good timber”, laughed Hamarr, “and I have an axe.”

“Tomorrow night we return”, said Tom, “Do you think your people will follow you here?”

“They will come if I have to throw each and every one through the wizard’s gate myself.” Hamarr answered. He thought of the orchards, fields of corn, barley and wheat, the herds of cattle, horses and flocks of sheep- the warm sea full of life and the magnificent halls full of treasure.

Keep Albion. He thought.

“You can start on Monday”, Linda told Doris, “Three hours in the morning with the youngster’s class. I’m glad to have you helping- I can take a few more into the class now. For you, Jenny has asked that you write down your experiences on your trip to her world- we all keep diaries and journals and it will be good practice using your new notebook.”

“What sort of things should I write about?” asked Doris, new to the business of writing.

“Just tell the story how you saw it”, answered Linda, “You can get started now- just write as if you were telling your friend Shirl about your trip.”

Doris sat at the table in her quarters- one of the 12 metre converted containers. Before her, a new notebook was running with a word processing screen open. She marveled at the fact that now the squiggles on the screen all made sense. While she previously had a bit of an understanding of the written language- all at once it was as if her eyes had cleared overnight, it all meant something and was effortless to read.

Even more amazing, her fingers knew just where to go on the keyboard, to make the words appear on the screen.

She started to type...

The Journey started with my first visit to the land called ‘Transit’, which I now know to mean a place in the middle of a journey.

I’m not sure how I come to know all these new things, but at Transit, Jenny told me that I would know many new things and the next day, when I awoke, I did.

Transit is a bit like here, but there are almost no people and it is always sunny and very hot. There is a Great Mansion and everyone lives there. It is much grander than anything here and has a big Swimming Pool, which is much nicer to swim in than the river. We do no work there, as there are people who cook and clean and do everything for us.

Jenny says this is a place for us to rest after working hard and that I would be able to come back here, if I looked well to my duties.

After we spent a day at Transit, we walked through the wizard gate to a place Jenny called ‘Earth’, which means ‘Dirt’. Sonja called it ‘Time Line Prime One’, but only when she made the wizard gate appear. It was not what I thought it would be, at first. ‘Earth’ was just a farm like one of the new ones at Haddon and there were no other houses for as far as I could see.

This was not like on the ‘Movies’ they show in the hall.

Jenny said we were to stay here overnight, as there was work to do. This wasn’t really work as all I had to do was weed some gardens in a glasshouse and after we had finished that, Jenny even cooked the dinner. We had spaghetti with ice-cream afterwards.

The next day, Jenny said we were to visit a city and buy clothes for me, as I needed some more. I have four overalls, two sets of work uniform and two sets of good clothes, which I thought was a lot, but Jenny doesn't think so and says a girl has to look good.

Jenny said I could drive about the farm, but not on the roads, as they were very different to the roads in our land. They looked just the same to me, until we had gone 15 minutes past the gates, then they changed.

The road had wire fences on either side and was grey with white lines in the middle. We drove a lot faster than was usual at Haddon and all the other vehicles went very fast too. The road got wider and we saw more and more vehicles, many of which I had not seen before. Mostly they were small ones called 'cars', which were smaller than our Landcruisers and trucks.

We arrived at the city before long. It was about the size of Sheffield. The road was lined by all kinds of shops, with huge glass windows and people walked everywhere, in all colours of clothing. Everything was in different, bright colours. There were more shops than in Sheffield and I could not see a market, but it must have been the wrong day. Everybody must be rich there- it was the middle of the day and nobody looked to be working. I thought that we would stop, but Jenny kept going, saying that this was just a small town and that we were still an hour away from the big city.

The clattering of boots on the landing above told Doris it was time for the evening meal, and she clicked the 'Save' icon and closed the notebook. Time for more writing later.

Haddon Hold Movements Hanger

Simon arrived with his new notebook. The generator wouldn't talk to anything but one of our customised notebooks, which had a few peripherals that were not on the early 21st century market.

The retinal scanner, and DNA sniffer, for example.

"For starter, let's get the notebook and the generator talking", I said, showing Simon where the cables connected.

"Looks like a standard USB cable", he said.

"It is- now they are swapping notes, as I configured the generator to accept a new user before you got here. The security on one of these things makes nuclear codes look like a 3-digit combination lock." I replied. "The first step is to enter a voice code, which will need three seconds of input- the analysis algorithms will detect stress from coercion and shut the system down. That is the first level. Think up an input now- songs are good."

Simon thought for a minute and sang "Beelzebub has a devil put aside for meeee..."

"Very good", I said. "Now repeat that three times."

After he had done so, we moved to the retinal scan. As the low-powered laser scanned his right eye, I told him a bit more about the security. "After this, let it see your left eye. The system will be

activated by your right eye, the one you would naturally present to the scanner. If you deliberately chose your left eye, the system would interpret that as you being under coercion. As it has your exact position, from the scan, it will gate you to a holding facility on Transit, before self-destructing. From Transit, you will find the means to contact us. We will run through that scenario later.”

We continued. “The next step is a DNA sample- place a finger on the tracking pad- good- see, it now has you the legitimate user- that’s the last step for getting initialized.”

“How does the system self-destruct?” Simon asked, wary of carrying explosives around.

“The generator will open a gate 600mm from its position, to the core of our sun. In the two nanoseconds before the generator is reduced to plasma, enough energy will come through to that gate to cause one hell of a lot of scorched earth in the immediate vicinity.”, I answered.

“Just what will initiate a self-destruct?” Simon asked.

“Anyone trying to open the generator casing, repeated attempts at the voice code, trying to scan the retina of a dead eye, altering the software codes or a manual initiation- you won’t have that accessed for a while yet.”, I answered. “Try to think of it as having a nuclear warhead that is perfectly safe if you don’t try to do more than you are permitted, but will detonate if you try to learn how it is made- the result of fucking with it is exactly the same.

Nervous? Good- that’s the right place for you to start. Let’s have a look at the operating software.”

At beginner’s level, the system was dead-easy to use. A selection of presets was accessible- for Simon that would be several New Zealand sites, Transit and a couple of local strategic sites- Hilltop, Sheffield and here at the movement’s hanger.

For the rest of the day we ran through procedures, such as for locking a gate and moving through it with the generator and the drills for emergency gate movement- getting out of a hot zone whilst being pursued.

By the end of the day, I had assessed Simon as competent to run local non-tactical gate operations, which would help take the load off the rest of us. Tomorrow, I would train Eric, then John, Mike and Steve in the basics. After that, if they wished to really get into gating, they would be handed over to Jenny for the stuff that really hurts the head.

It isn’t just about tricky gate maneuvering, but avoiding loops, divergences and keeping track of exactly where and when we have been. I think a couple of them are up to doing the ten-year training program.

“How did it go?” Jenny asked, later that evening.

“As well as any new player”, I answered, “He is up to speed on local operations and wants to learn more.”

“I thought he would”, said Jenny. “He can start working the Transit movement’s roster, as can the rest when they get up to speed- Jane and Sonja need to spend more time at Transit with the building project about to start.”

The food arrived, dish of the day being Cod, which was unusual.

“Have you surveyed a gate to the coast?” I asked Jenny.

“No”, she said- “This is a new trick- Jane came up with the idea of opening two gates simultaneously- one dumps seawater into a net and the other drains it back to the sea- the fish stay in the net- a sort of filter-feeding arrangement.”

“Something new everyday.”

The day’s work being finished, Doris hurried back to her room. Being one of the more privileged, she had her own shower and after a quick rinse, she was back into her story.

We left the town and started to drive over a mountain. It was higher than any hill I had ever climbed, by far. At the highest point on the road, we stopped and Jenny brought us food and drink from a shop. Outside it was raining and the wind was stronger than any storm I had known. Nobody worried about this storm; they just ate pies and sandwiches and drank coffee.

With the storm still raging, we continued on, now heading down the hill. Before long, we had to slow down, as machines such as our men work, were making roads. Down here, the storm had stopped and it was just raining.

I was glad to come to the end of the winding road, but more was to come- just after the road straightened, we crested a hill and before us lay a valley filled with houses- more than could be counted and they stretched as far as the eye could see. I thought this must be the great city, but again, Jenny said no.

Every minute, we passed more vehicles than there were in our whole land. We traveled over huge bridges spanning great rivers and after a time, arrived at the sea. Next to the sea, huge vehicles called ‘Trains’ ran next to the road and in the distance, we could see the city Jenny had told me about.

As we got closer and closer, I could see great towers that rose like glass cliffs- ships in the harbour that made our towns look small and huge flying machines in the sky, way bigger than any I have ever seen.

The nearer we got, the more vehicles there were on the huge roads- I was really glad not to be driving here and I don’t know how Jenny can drive here and talk at the same time. It was really quite frightening and I was glad when Jenny pulled off the road and into a garage.

We were at the place Jenny called her ‘Town House’. It was a very big house and most comfortable- like her rooms at Haddon Hold, but much bigger. The house was very close to other houses and was on the side of a steep hill, very near to the glass and stone towers. Jenny showed me to a bedroom, where there were clothes laid out on the bed and told me that we would walk ‘Up-Town’ after we had showered and changed, then get something to eat.

I even had my own bathroom and toilet.

Tomorrow I will tell you about our trip to the City.

Bay of Islands, New Zealand.

The portal- the small gate site which had a steel frame to mark the gate's position- started shimmering as the gate opened. "There- it is time to go now", said Tom and led the other three though to Hilltop.

"Not so bad the second time- is it?" said Tom to the others. "Rest for a moment and we will send you just north of your homes."

As the three Norsemen readied themselves for the next gate, Tom reminded them, "I will meet you at the river gateway in ten night's time"

In the Erewash watchtower, a light on the control panel winked on, as the circuits detected signals from three spy devices. Sending an automated message to the Haddon C&C, the computer started recording the incoming audio signal...

Haddon Hold A week later.

We now have four new gate operators able to do movements between here, New Zealand and Transit. Just in time, as both Jenny and I want to go back to Transit, to look in on the new village's progress.

Doris is now working half of the day at Linda's school, helping to teach apprentices how to read, write and do very basic math- the good old 'Three R's'. We don't see too much of her off-duty, as she is busy working her way through our library. Jenny is bringing her gear back from Transit and our initial locals- those who have graduated to better things, anyway- will be getting language implants in a few days.

The bugging devices we fitted to our Norse captives are providing some very useful Intel. Tom, who has been monitoring the listening devices, reports that there is a 50/50 split with half in favour of moving to the NZ colony, the rest dead against it. We get the impression that many of the town would follow Hamarr anywhere, so it looks like we will get our first group of colonists and a fight in the autumn.

Sonja and Jane were waiting for us at the Alpha gatesite. This was just a short visit- we were just interested in seeing the construction robots in action. Evidence of the robotic work was already here to see, in the form of new concrete roads from the stores to the mansion and on to the new villages. That's going to help with the dust.

“12 kilometers a day, on a graded track, if you stockpile enough material every kilometer or so, to feed it”, said Jane, to the unspoken question about the paver.

“So that would do our main roads in a month”, I said.

“I suppose it is just a glorified concrete mixer and concrete roads are duplicable technology”, said Jenny.

“OK- all those in favour? Carried”, I said. We would have paved roads at Haddon.

We climbed into Sonja’s Landcruiser planning to take a trip to the village before lunch and if that went well, we would probably stop over for the night.

“Quite a change travelling on a sealed road”, I said. “I suppose this means I will be seeing a selection of new cars next time I’m here.”

“Just look in the garage at the mansion, when we get back”, said Jane, with a grin.

The site was an impressive hive of industry. Loaders trundled backwards and forwards, feeding the construction robots with material. Over half of the foundations were finished and the swimming pool was well under way, with a small machine laying ceramic tiles- also made by another machine. The loaders ran on low ground pressure tires to avoid damage to the site and the whole effort looked much tidier than our usual building sites.

“Just what did that lot cost?” I asked.

“Oh- I didn’t buy them- they work so fast that the usual deal is to lease them, so I have hired them for two months. A LOT cheaper than buying them outright.” answered Jane. “The cost was one 19th-early 20th century piece of construction gear per unit, per month.”

“Hooray for collectors.” I said. ”You might have to buy the one making that stone wall, though- I could keep that in work for a long while.”

“You wouldn’t be thinking of taking that piece of advanced technology to the farm, would you?” asked Jenny.

“I would like to, but will settle for making stone walls in the 9th”, I said.

The way the work was progressing, we could move some of the equipment down to New Zealand in a week. We wouldn’t need nearly as much equipment to make a modest ski lodge.

Doris’s Journal

Continued:

After we had changed, it was time to visit The City. Jenny had told me to try not to talk to anyone, just to listen, watch and ask questions when we were back at her house.

It was a short walk to the cliffs of glass and stone, but in that short walk, I saw many times more vehicles than there are in our land. Just to cross a road was difficult and we had to go to a special place, where there were coloured lights to signal when we might walk across the road. It was worse than Hilltop gate on supply day.

Once amongst the towers, we entered a sea of people- the streets were worse than Sheffield during the spring markets and cars and trucks roared past, just a couple of metres away. I did not like this place at all. After struggling through the crowd for a couple of hundred metres, Jenny steered me through a large doorway into one of the towers. It was much better in here.

It was quiet after the noise outside- the only noise was music playing quietly and people eating and talking. I thought this must be a palace, it was so beautiful- the floors were of polished stone and all about was glass and polished wood, with strange plants growing in pots. Men and women dressed in black and white clothes carried food and drink to tables and one of these women came up to us and led us to a table. Jenny ordered food from a book on our table and the servant left.

Jenny smiled at me and said “I don’t like it out there, either- most of us don’t care for the city..”

I asked Jenny if this was her palace. She laughed then said, “Actually, I think I do own part of it.”, then she laughed some more. I’m sure I would know if I owned a palace like this.

Our meal was very nice, but JD cooks food that is just as good and he always makes enough for everyone to fill their plates. I don’t know why they gave us such big plates with only a little bit of food on them. They must be washing the other dishes.

After lunch, we went shopping for clothes. The streets were not as crowded as before, but were still very busy.

Jenny had a strange way of finding the best market- she goes to the one with the least people. I thought everyone knew that the busiest stall had the best goods. It was nice, though, to be out of the crowds again. Jenny walked about the shop pointing and the shopkeepers piled up clothes on a bench. They seemed very happy and so they should have been, as nobody else was buying anything there.

We spent until evening going amongst the shops and buying whatever took Jenny’s fancy. It must be a great thing to be so rich. If Jenny had not ordered the clothes, shoes and other things delivered, we should never have been able to carry them all. After that, we went to another fine hall to have an evening meal. By now, most of the people had disappeared. They must have gone into the towers for the night. I do not think I should like to live here.

Tom stood with his back to the Oak, listening to the noises of the night. He could hear two sets of footsteps quietly approaching, one heavier than the other. ‘That sounds like them’, he thought, reaching down- from habit checking the safety on his pistol. A voice whispered in his earpiece that the two were Hamarr and Skagi.

Stepping out from cover, Tom greeted the two Norsemen. They had previously gotten accustomed to his ability to appear without a sound.

“Greetings- what word of our quest?” Tom asked.

“As we expected”, Hamarr said, “More than ten-score halls are firmly with us and I may be able to shame another score or two into following me yet.”

“This is good”, said Tom, thinking that over a thousand individuals was an adequate gene pool. “Has there been any trouble from those who would stay?”

“No- they simply believe that this will come to naught and we shall look fools when we return to the city.” Hamarr answered.

“I shall show you the gate site”, said Tom, “It is close to here.”

They looked at the steel gateway and stout fences leading up to it.

“On the night, It may be best that your men go first and you stay to give the rest courage”, suggested Tom.

Hamarr pondered this. “It may be that is right- also, my doughtiest men should go through in a band, then return to reassure the women and children.”

Tom nodded. “That is wise- we shall do that. Also, if you wish, I can bring a barrel of strong wine to calm the womenfolk. I am sure your men will not fail you.”

“That, too, would be wise”, said Hamarr. “We shall return in three night’s time.

Haddon Hold 0600 hrs

Tonight the colonists gate to New Zealand. I doubt the vast majority of them have a clue what is going to happen, but will follow Hamarr anywhere, as they did some years ago when his men landed and took the town of Nottingham.

My only real concern is that there will be a panic at the gates. Tom has taken the initiative of having a few barrels of wine dosed with a mild sedative taken to the assembly area. He said ‘For the women’, to let them save face, but I’m sure most will have a tipple.

With 1500-odd people in the area, I have organised a crew to put in a few basics, such as toilet facilities, drinking water and a few tricks to contain the crowd, if things go wrong. A few holo projectors putting up a wall of flame will stampede them to the gate, if the worst goes wrong.

I’m hoping and planning that this will not be the case.

We will send an advance party through and do a small timeshift, so that they can return and reassure those remaining. Also, we have organised transport for the older folks and children. We can jam several hundred on the back of one of our bigger trailers.

The satellite says it will rain, so a crew is now loading up a couple of big army 7x15 metre tents to put up over the site.

Hilltop Gate 0800

The last of the convoy disappeared into the gate, headed for New Zealand. They would be preparing the site for the new arrivals and coordinate the movements with us back at England. This was going to be the largest movement of people through a gate that we had ever done. As almost all would be new jumpers, there was plenty of potential for problems.

The advance party would set up food and drink- familiar things to welcome the newcomers, as well as check out the halls, light fires and make sure everything was working. During the gating, they would have to keep the stunned arrivals moving forward.

Time now to brief the rest of them.

The Bywater Inn
0830

“Bottom line is”, I said, “That they all go through the gate, by whatever means. I believe most will go follow-the-leader, but we will surely get some that change their minds. Subdue them as best you can, throw them on a trailer and over they go.”

“NZ reports on-track and ready to receive in three hours”, said Jenny, “Everything down there is operational and the food and drink are all ready.”

“Security is in position”, said Steve, “The rifle companies are set to contain any problems from the town or outside and the AC Company is ready for crowd control, if we get pushed to contain them.”

I just hope the AC don't decide to settle old scores, I thought, but they were the steadiest, best drilled and the most disciplined of all our troops.

“The light and magic show is tested and ready”, said Simon, “When we ran a live test last night, the gate was totally obscured by the lights and fog machine- couldn't see it at all.”

“How did the wall of flame holo look?” I asked.

“Very effective, apart from the lack of heat”, he said.

“Good”, I said, “I hope we don't need that. Debbie- I said no livestock, but I'm sure half of them will have some animal too precious to leave behind- just like their possessions”

“Good old human nature”, said Debbie. “I have arranged most of the stock transporter trailers and will tranquilize the animals before moving them- just like with our livestock.”

“Can you bring along a couple of dosers set for human bodyweight, too?” I asked.

“I already planned to do so” she said

“Sounds like we are good to go”, I said. “Here is the latest imagery of Nottingham”, I said, turning on the projector.

The real-time satellite video showed a lot of activity in the town, with carts being loaded, livestock being driven in the direction of the gate site and far less activity in the fields than usual. They were definitely on the move.

**Temporary Gatesite
6km South-west of Nottingham
1300hrs**

The first and possibly boldest of the colonists have arrived. A group of young men, out to prove they feared nothing.

Hamarr is with the main body of his people, a good two hours away, at the speed they are travelling.

As they have announced they are ready to brave the journey, I see no reason to deny them. Tom will take them through, then try and talk them into coming back to help lead the less willing through the gateway.

We poured them a mug each, to toast their journey and shortly after, they were on their way.

As the group recovered their senses, they realised that they were, indeed, in a new land. The sea was near, the skies clear and such trees. Fine longboats would come from them. Friendly faces offered food and drink and nearby stood the great halls Hamarr and his men had described. They truly were in the land of the Gods.

The bulk of the colonists approached the gatesite, Hamarr and a band of his men in the lead. To the rear, a number of our locally made wagons carried women with babies and small children, plus the older folk, a few with injuries and heavily pregnant women. Well behind, tractors pulled large high-sided trailers, laden with personal goods.

The men from the earlier jump had returned and joined Hamarr's band, eagerly recounting their earlier adventure. While we set about distributing food and drink, the band prepared for their jump to their new home. The first group departed, to spread the tale of their adventure, to tell the others just how easy the jump was and of what awaited them in the new land. Just what we had hoped would happen.

By the time we had passed out food and drink, Debbie and her assistants- most of the medical team- had the animals sedated, along with a few particularly nervous individuals. The reappearance of Hamarr and his men reassured the crowd, and he climbed atop a wagon, to announce that their new homes awaited and it was time to go.

We had a wide gate set up and could put twenty people through, shoulder to shoulder. It would take us about four hours to push this group through.

1800hrs Local Time

We are in business.

In real-time now, the first group departed to the dawn of the Bay of Islands. Sonja, Jenny and I were in constant communication, with headsets connected to our phones. In our timeline, these wireless headsets wouldn't be available for a couple of years yet.

The drugs are working well, with minimal disorientation and physical sickness. We can speed up the cycle to under two minutes, instead of the three minutes I had planned for. The main delay is getting them clear of the gate, at the NZ end.

Jenny has just opened the secondary gate and the vehicles have taken the stock and baggage through. This will arrive on the other side of the village and the tractors will gate back to hilltop in a few minutes. This is where we need our top operators on the gates.

The rain is getting heavier, which is pushing the crowds into the tents- the weather is working in our favour. These people are a bit more stoic than us, but who wants to stay out in the rain- good news is that this is speeding up the movement through.

Ralf reports a group of about fifty staying well towards the rear of the group and thinks they might try to slip away. He has moved his platoon to block their retreat, if they try to run. I sent Skagi the Bard over to talk to them and remind them of their obligation to their lord.

0800hrs New Zealand Time

Tom has reported in. A feast has begun, now that the group's leaders have inspected the housing and facilities and the drink has started to flow. Most of the apprehension has gone and it's a brave new world. Already they are talking of cutting timber, boats they will build and of exploring the country- that's the kind of people I want here.

2000 Local Time

Alfred's Company has just had a contact with a group from the town, about 200 strong and has turned them back with the assistance of Forwin's mounted rifles. This was the first determined group wanting to know what was happening- a number of small groups had been turned back throughout the day. He reports no fatalities and just a couple of minor injuries to the Nottingham people, with no shots fired.

370 to go. The medical team has isolated eight women too late in pregnancy to gate and seven with newborns. Once the rest have been gated, the ship will be sent over to fly them direct. We had warned them that these women would have to travel a different route.

2130 Local Time

Ralf called it right. With the tents almost empty, a band of thirty refused to enter and wanted to return to the town. By now, they were ringed by the Armed Constabulary, carbines slung, pistols holstered and what looked like whips drawn.

“Push them through, Lieutenant”, I said and his men advanced cattle prods at the ready...

I called the NZ security team, “Reluctant’s coming”...

Marty’s security team assembled at the gate and as the unwilling colonists appeared, flung them unceremoniously clear of the gate, to the great amusement of the previous arrivals. By their actions, the involuntary travelers had just determined their status at the bottom of the heap.

Hamarr was very impressed by the effortless way they handled these wretches- particularly by the distance they flung them.

2215hrs local time

“AC unit- secure the site, all other- stand down”, I called over the radio. As the AC troopers secured the area and equipment, I sought out Ralf. “Tell your lads that was a job well done- and there is a three day leave for them when I get back from NZ.” -a rare favour indeed.

Ralf saluted and said “Thank you sir. I thought they did very well today.”

“Indeed they did- carry on, Lieutenant.”

Jenny opened the gate for the last jump of the evening from this site- mine. She and a few of the others would join us in NZ, once the generator was secured and the site clear. Time now for some of our new recruits to be given the chance to take charge. We were off to a real Viking feast.

1020hrs NZ Time

“Those women will be here in a few hours”, I reassured the concerned men. “So near birthing, the wizard’s gate could endanger the children, so we bring them by another path- has not all that has been said so far come to pass?” They reluctantly agreed that this was so.

“Then drink and feast”, I said, “They will be with you soon- you have my word.”

The wine and beer flowed, although even such a magnificent feast couldn’t keep some of these seafarers from testing the local fishing. We had thought this might happen and had acquired a couple of Kauri-timbered Whalers. With John aboard, teaching them how to sail these boats, they were soon off for a spot of fishing out in the bay. No doubt they would be soon be returning with a good haul of fresh fish.

1350hrs NZ Time

“I’ve slipped in” came Jenny’s voice over the radio. “We are on the other side of the village, about 2km out- send a couple of vehicles- their mum’s are fast asleep.”

Marty and Steve were already on the way. As they loaded their passengers aboard, Jenny said, “I will be back in about 20 minutes, armed with Akvavit.”

“Bloody hell.” said Marty, “We may be staying down here for a few days.”

By mid-afternoon- finally- we had everyone there.

Having delivered all we had said and more, the crowd had moved into full festival swing. The Whaler had returned, laden with a variety of new (to them) species of fish, while beef, pork and mutton roasted on the spits.

The nearest halls had been opened and the tired children had been fed and put down to sleep, along with more than a few adults. About 800 continued to feast- far too excited to sleep. I know the feeling.

Hamarr spotted me and marched over, face beaming. “I knew you were a true leader of men, when I first saw you- to get all of these people here”, I stated. He grabbed me in a friendly bear-hug, which I returned, being careful not to crack his ribs.

“By the gods, you people are strong” he said, “I saw your men and women toss grown men like babes, earlier.”

“Strength is good”, I said, “But to lead this band into the unknown- that is real strength.”

This seemed to please him greatly.

A few days down here, getting them settled and then we can start planning the assault on Nottingham.

Haddon Hold

October 6th

0600 hrs

Journal entry- progress to date.

The summer has been very productive. The harvest is in and we have a huge surplus in this region. Our population continues to grow near exponentially and demand for our goods comes from all over the country and overseas.

With the effective end of the building season, every master tradesman we can spare has been sent to Transit for the finishing of our village. The region is now operating at a sustainable level of the early 19th century and is way ahead in other areas, such as hygiene. The communal baths, running water, toilets and in particular- stoves with chimneys have been a great success.

The first hemp crop is now being converted to fabric, paper, rope and many other products. The rolling mills are steadily turning out bar stock, light steel plate and sheet metal for the smiths. The first reasonable quality float glass is being produced and optical quality glass is now being ground. We are even extruding copper tube locally now and cartridge cases are being drawn, instead of machined.

With the harvest over, our armed forces are beginning their full-time training. We now have five companies of regulars and an elite company (armed with .303 rifles), one of which is mounted and two of infantry, armed with local weapons, a company of Armed Constabulary and a heavy weapons company, armed with Coehorn mortars and rockets. Six more militia companies are in training. In a couple of days, the more experienced units will be deployed to the Grimsby area, where a new invasion is expected to take place. From there, they march on Nottingham. An ultimatum has been given to the inhabitants- to open the city and stop raiding or be crushed. We have had no response, other than stones and arrows.

Our latest recruits have fitted into our way of life easily- work hard, play hard suits them. They have quickly taken up opportunities such as pilot training, which has taken up most of Jenny's time this summer. Memory implants make learning something a lot easier, but you still have to get hands-on practice at the skill.

A couple of months use of the robotic roading machinery has done wonders for our roads, with the main roads all in concrete and even two-lane roads to the main centers. As I thought, the locals found the unmanned machines no more alarming than our less modern equipment. They assumed there was someone inside working them, just like in a truck or bulldozer. The bridges have yet to catch up, but they are steadily appearing at the more important crossings.

With the roads into Derby, we are now seeing a lot more traffic from the south and seeing as the roads are ahead of schedule, a railway will be the next step- got to keep those construction crews working. By the time that is ready, we will have enough steam-trained locals to run the show. We never intended to run rail and road everywhere, just to make enough to show the locals that it could be done and how. By the end of next year, we will be hands-off on this type of work, just advising.

We have 'force-fed' about eighty local's literacy, basic science and mathematics memories and will continue doing so as we identify talented individuals. This is in addition to the more conventional classes being held. This is already having an impact, as they now can start taking on information from the store of books we have brought here. It really helps having local workers

who can read instructions and lists or read them to others that can't. Their higher status inspires others to want to learn.

We are watching progress in New Zealand via satellite feed from a couple of well-hidden cameras. This is the nearest thing we have to a TV show and has quite a following. Not content to sit back and live in the temporary quarters we provided, they have spread out over the cleared land. The colony is building new halls, incorporating some of our modern design- such as chimneys and boats are under construction. Occasionally, we go down and do a little advising and teaching. At the site of the gate they entered by, we have placed a laser-cut stone plinth, with a thick stainless steel plate engraved with a map of the New Zealand and another of the South Pacific on it. That's a better head-start than anyone got on our timeline.

Back at Arthur's Pass, New Zealand, our holiday resort is mostly finished and several other small prefabricated buildings have been sited in the more picturesque parts of New Zealand- Orakei Korako, Nelson, Westport, Taupo and Waimarama. Before too long, our colonists will find our coastal sites- it didn't take them long to find our old home in the Bay of Islands.

Cronkston Hold 0900hrs

Steve parked the Landcruiser at the hold and we checked in with the duty officer, Ralf. This particular hold now served as the barracks for the Armed Constabulary, with just a few of the Bravo Team keeping rooms here.

Ralf was watching a group performing 'Field Hygiene 101' on a reluctant bather with mops, brooms and industrial strength detergent, a lesson we had all seen given to new recruits, here, in the future and in our own time.

"Can't have dirty troopers." chuckled Ralf, as they rinsed him off with the fire hose.

"When they have finished with that hose, let's take a tour around the area", I said, "I want to have a look at all this new building around here- it looks to me like you are attracting a few camp-followers.- I'm interested in why the building boom happened after the hold was built", I explained. "Before we put it here, there were only about twelve houses in this map grid- a couple of months later and I count over forty."

"That is exactly what has happened", said Ralf. "I have invited a few families to move here myself and a few others are related to our troops. They are doing the odd-jobs about the place- just like over at Haddon. A few moved in of their own accord- all tradesmen and crafters looking for a good new market"

Barry West walked into the duty office, having seen us arrive earlier. "Thought I would wait until the waterworks stopped", he said, greeting us. Outside the antics had finished, as one of Ralf's sergeants had decided the section had had enough fun and was restoring order with a little drill practice. Barry had a small engine workshop here and like his father, seemed to be permanently covered in oil and grease.

"The spares are coming up on the next courier run", said Steve, anticipating the question.

“Good”, he said, “It will take my boys until then to get those chainsaws nice and clean, before I start work on them.”

“Well, let’s go for a look around, then- I hear there is a new brewery here”, I said.

“Best save that for last.” said Steve.

“Do you know who built these?” I asked Ralf.

“They were all put together by the locals, the troops and early on-your men”, he said. “You can’t find a carpenter for hire in the district.”

“Native timber, fastened with locally made bolts and nails, cast-iron stove- made in Sheffield, roof from Slatetown, compacted limestone floor, from the local quarry, glass windows from Bakewell and blankets from Chesterfield- excellent”, I said. “I take it this is how you persuaded them to move here?”

“It was”, said Ralf, “They got the houses, which they helped build and I get three years service from the adults of the family. I give a year off if one of them signs on to the force- provided he completes training and stays on for two years.”

“A wise system”, I said. “Keep up the good work.”

“I’ll leave them a little present, for letting us have a look around”, said Steve, ducking through the door to fetch a box from the back of the Humvee. We always carried a few boxes of food, which was well-received by the locals, especially those further afield. The last time we ‘redirected’ a freight train we acquired three wagons full of tinned pineapple and were heartily sick of the fruit. The locals loved it though and the cans themselves were valuable- the local tinkers made all sorts of useful things out of them.

We looked over a few houses- most were similar, built to a simple design drawn up by Ross, one of the Bravo team builders. It was easy to tell the relative age of the buildings, by small improvements on the original design- a concrete hearth or a built in meat safe or wood box. In our day, these would have been huts, at best baches, but here they were highly desirable property.

“How long does it take to build one of these?” I asked Ralf.

“About a week, in fair weather”, he answered, “with about ten of us working. When your carpenters are here to help- about four days.”

“You did well to build these, as well as carrying out all your other duties”, I said. “No doubt you will need more next year, so I will send one of the construction teams down, when they get back from my other big project. This village will need a few more facilities, especially when it gets bigger.”

The next stop was down at the Dove River, where I wanted to have a look around a small village that I had only briefly passed through previously. We wound down the steep grade and I made a

note to send roading over here soon, to upgrade this track. At the bottom, more of our work was clearly in evidence, with a flume feeding a water wheel by a large modern building.

I should have known it- it was a brewery. When the mill was installed (all locally made components), somebody had decided to get some additional use out of the water power and had set up a brewery here. It wasn't so long ago that I knew everything that was happening in this part of the world. In the corner of the building was a large copper vessel, telling me they were about to branch into whiskey making. This has to be JD's work.

The brewer was falling over himself in an effort to please us, plying us with food and drink- which wasn't a bad drop. He didn't know exactly who we were, but anyone in our uniform was a friend for life, apparently, he was a relative of the Bakewell brewer and had spent some time there learning a few new tricks of the trade- including distilling.

Insisting on showing us every inch of his brewery, we toured a collection of sheds and outhouses- storerooms, malt houses, cooperage's and silos. They were a mixture of all sorts- kitset sheds, garages, industrial hangers, steel silos and local manufacture, which was what I was really interested in.

A pattern was forming for these local sheds- a fusion of old and new. The typical workman's shelter had one side that consisted of two doors that opened the whole side up- usually away from the prevailing winds- with shuttered windows on the other sides, to let in plenty of light. The frame and sides would be of local timber, the walls clad in ship-lapped boards and painted with whitewash or locally produced creosote, if at all. The roof would be of local or sometimes imported corrugated steel and painted red or green. The roof would be the most expensive part of the structure, but would always have extended eaves, keeping the surrounding ground dry. When water was needed, spouting and down pipes were added, draining to some kind of tank or cistern. The floor would usually be rammed earth, rammed crushed limestone or occasionally, concrete.

They looked like so many old sheds in our time's countryside must have looked when they were new. What we had done was to again speed up building with sawn timber, tools and fasteners. One of these buildings would have been a major undertaking a couple of years ago. Now they were sprouting like mushrooms.

Finally we got away, loaded with demijohns full of Best Bitter (Chesterfield glass) the day has been a success- I have seen plenty of evidence of our technology spreading, if not totally taking over.

This goat-track, however, definitely needs seeing to.

Back at the Hold, we dropped off Ralf and Barry, whose engine parts had now arrived. We unloaded the demijohns into the cookhouse chiller, which already had several barrels and casks in it.

"I have a small cask of their whiskey too", said Ralf, as he put down the last crate. "It's undrinkable, though." We must have spoiled him with our whiskey.

"Give it to me and I will see if I can improve it for you", I said- a quick trip through ten years should do it some good.

Being no fool, he had it locked in his office, away from less discerning tastes.

“I will bring it back in a couple of days”, I promised.

As we drove off, a platoon of Armed Constabulary recruits out on a route march moved off the road, to let us by, their Sergeant saluting the vehicle, as we waved.

Haddon Hold
October 6th
1600 hrs

Back at Haddon, I found Sonja over at the Movement hanger, or Hanger 18 as it is known, to those in on the joke.

“Can you send this cask to the cold store for ten years?” I asked.

“No problem”, she said, making a note in her computer. “It will be back here in two days time-moonshine is it?”

“A single malt, no less.”

“Another of JD’s stills?”

“No doubt- I’m just headed out to ask him about it.”

“Can you wait until I ship it? I’m going that way myself”, she said. “Just put it on the small parcel portal bench.”

The Bywater Inn
1645 hrs

“Oh, that brewery.” said JD, “I had almost forgotten about them. Back in the late winter, I met up with the brewer, at Bakewell- he was a journeyman working and learning his craft at the big brewery there. We arranged some gear for him to expand- looks like he got a bit of help from the new crew, as well. I believe there are a few home distillers in that group.”

“That would explain why we have had no problems recruiting for the AC”, said Sonja. “They have a convenient brewery- right on their barracks doorstep.”

“They have quite a set-up over there”, I said. “A village is starting to grow around the Hold; for all that it’s out the back of nowhere.”

“It’s going to keep growing too”, said Sharon, “There are some good high quality clay deposits over that way and excellent stone for quarrying close to the hold- quite a bit of assorted metal, too.”

“Do they need any help over that way?” John asked.

“Sure- if you could get roading to fix up the track down the gorge and stockpile a bit more hardfill before winter that would help”, I answered. ”A few loads of timber and another twenty tons of coal wouldn’t hurt, either.”

“Have they been using that makeshift plan sketched up by Ross?” asked John Lister.

“That’s the one”, I answered “It’s really basic and quick to throw up, with a minimum of skilled labour. It’s like an old tramper’s hut.”

“That’s not a bad design”, said our carpenter, “Most of it can be prefabricated- I think they have a jig set up for it in one of the hangers.”

“Well, the locals are keen to sign on for three years service to get one, so they can’t be too bad.”, I added.

“You don’t know the half of it”, said John. “I saw one of those just four k’s out of Derby last week and I know none of our crews built it. That design is spreading.”

“Anyway- just about time to gate down to NZ”, I said, glancing at my watch. “The big show kicks off in two hours.”

Oraki Korako, New Zealand 0700 Local Time.

From our vantage point on the other side of the narrow valley, the bright orange markings of the survey could be seen on the riverbanks.

Right on time, the gate opened, invisible to us and the top of a hill appeared in midair. Falling 100 metres to the Waikato River, the monolith slammed into the rock of the riverbed with a terrific crash and fountain of water. The ground heaved under our feet, as the shock wave hit us. Immediately following, what looked like half-metre thick wafers of rock rained down from the gate at a rate of two per second. The sections of mountainside smashed into the ground, shattering in clouds of dust. This deafening torrent of rock continued for over an hour, as the dam built up across the valley.

Finally, the rock slabs were replaced with a mix of river gravel and clay, to complete the dam. This would raise the river level and turn the area into the lake we knew in our time, which was formed by the construction of a hydro power station. More importantly, we now had a geothermal warm lake for water sports.

Jenny and Sharon gated in from the quarry site as the first corks popped. Taking the offered binoculars, they surveyed the site.

“All looks like it went to plan”, said Sharon, swapping binos for a flute of champagne. “That keystone is well and truly locked in place.”

“Here’s to another speed-building success”, said John, raising his glass.

Haddon Hold C&C
2000 hrs

As usual, the day had been uneventful and Simon, the duty officer, was playing around with the satellite cameras. As the IR camera tracked up the European coastline, a message flashed up on his monitor *Anomalous Reading Registered*

Mildly interested, he selected the 'Details' button and the message *New Settlement* appeared. Now he sat up - settlements didn't just appear in this part of the world at this time of year. Locking onto the area, Simon selected 'low light' and illuminated the area with the satellite's IR laser.

This was the camp of an army on the move. Longboats were drawn up all along the stretch of beach- this had to be the next invasion that was expected.

Time to make a few calls.

PART NINE

Orakei Korako, New Zealand

Our celebrating the completion of latest holiday site was interrupted as we received the news of the next critical step in our new history. The first battle to be fought solely by our local forces.

My initial reaction was to head back immediately, but there was really no need. Firstly, we had to keep out of the fight and secondly, we could monitor it just as easily from here via a real-time link to Haddon C&C.

“Looks like they are still building up”, said John, studying the monitor.

Jenny switched to thermal and set the camera to sweep the channel searching for more ships. “That’s going to take an hour or two- this isn’t a military satellite.” She switched the monitor back into ‘window’ mode and the aerial view of the coast of Holland changed back to a view of lush green bush.

Sharon walked in, having been down at the river checking the seismic sensors and level gauges. “No instabilities after our minor earthquake and the river should start rising at our end in about four hours”, she looked about the room “Have I missed something?”

Grimsby area 2100 local time

Forwin closed his phone and called for his runner, sending him to summon the officers and battalion senior NCOs to his tent. He laid a map out on the folding table and studied it briefly. Soon it was standing room only in the tent.

“Our enemy has been sighted across the sea and will be headed here soon”, Forwin said. Used to the unexplainable ways the Green Men knew these things, the men took this report at face value.

“This is the battle we have been training for, so you all know what to do”, he continued, “At first light, the scout platoon will take up their positions along the coastline. All the rest of the men are to stand down from exercises and rest. As soon as I have more news we will decide where to deploy- that is all.”

The troops on picket now knew something was up- that they were to be stood down from exercises meant that battle was imminent.

By dawn the camp would be abuzz with speculation.

**Stores Hanger Eight
2300hrs**

Andrea was working late, organizing locally made stores for a re-supply of the troops. In particular, bombs for the Coehorn mortars and more anti-personnel rockets, along with the usual small-arms ammunition, food, clothing, lantern fuel and the other numerous needs of a battalion in the field.

A requisition from Alfred caught her attention- this was a list of stores to be forwarded to the outskirts of Nottingham.

Corrugated steel sheet, framing timber, nails, wire, rope, sandbags and scaffolding- two full wagon loads.

'Somebody's looking to build a siege engine', thought Andrea, making a note to pass this information on. That wasn't part of the original plan.

**Orakei Korako, New Zealand
1400 hrs
Diary entry**

The real difference between jet lag and gate lag is that you haven't spent all that time on a jet and had to put up with airports. A few hours siesta and everybody would be recharged and back on local time.

A good hot soak in the spa pool with a few drinks and almost everybody had found a comfortable spot for an afternoon snooze. Even Jenny had been persuaded to turn off the computer monitor and take a break.

The upcoming fight is not a worry- the local forces have been well-trained and are far better armed than any others of that time. A few casualties are inevitable, especially in taking the city, but should be minimal.

Information I have just received tells me the local officers seem to have a few tricks up their sleeves and appear to have learned from their studies. Materials ordered can only be for some kind of siege engine. How they will deploy this equipment is going to be very interesting.

The only rules we set them were that they could requisition anything of local construction. The only modern equipment they have consists of circa. 1942 small arms for the elite company, plus three satellite telephones. I was hoping they would get creative with what they had and this appears to be the case.

I have said that I will leave the locals to fight this battle, but I will sure as hell be watching.

Time for a snooze before we take the boat out on the new lake...

**Hilltop Foundry
0230 AM**

Mike West passed the final casting to Andy, who checked it with his calipers and nodded his approval.

“That’s enough for tonight”, said Mike, wiping his brow with his overall sleeve. “We will weld on the chains in the morning.”

“We should be able to test-fire a couple of these tomorrow”, said Andy, placing the steel hemisphere into the crate. “I always thought chain shot was a naval weapon.”

“Edmund had the bright idea that it might be as effective on the light palisades they use around towns as it was on a ship’s rigging”, said Mike. “He might have something there- he also came up with the idea of making up moveable screens to keep off the arrows- I think he wants to get that cannon real close.”

“What about those guns that we stripped of the ship?” asked Andy.

“The deal is that the locals mostly only get to use locally made stuff- we want them to be able to make the stuff they use”, answered Mike, “Or at least be able to make in a year or so- with the exception of those satellite phones.”

“That Napoleon replica is going to really chew them up at close range, in any case”, said Andy. “How about a beer before we turn in?”

“I thought you would never ask.” agreed Mike, “I have a few cooling over in the workshop office.”

Haddon Hold **0630hrs- Breakfast**

“It’s the calm before the storm” said Sonja, over breakfast. “The word will be out soon that there is an invasion under way, so we need to tighten security up around here.”

“Just like the old days”, said Simon- “Gates locked, perimeter patrols and no unaccompanied travel.”

“That’s the drill.” said Sonja. “They will be a bit jumpy until the whole shooting match is over, especially when they find out that we won’t be fighting off the invaders like last time.”

“Speaking of fighting off the barbarian hordes,” said Joanne, “Andrea and I finished packing up the Nottingham resupply in the small hours of this morning. They have requisitioned a couple of wagons full of what look like materials for a siege tower- scaffolding, timber, ropes and iron.”

“That’s fantastic.” said Sonja. “I did so hope they would make good use of those history books.”

“That might explain why young Edmund was all over the scaffolding on the new Bessemer converter” said Mike. “I bet he will knock up a watchtower for a couple of snipers and spotters.”

“Alfred was very interested in one of those books on Roman tactics,” said Doris. “In particular, the use of a formation called ‘The Tortoise’”

“Andrea and I thought that might be the case- you can tell a lot about the battle plan by the stores ordered.” said Joanne.

“Make sure you let Wayne know at the briefing later this morning” said Sonja. “For those who haven’t checked their messages yet- the brief is at 1000hrs at the Bywater, by video conference.”

Orakei Korako, New Zealand
2300hrs local time

“I should have known.” said Jenny. “Not content with watching, there would be a few that want to actually take part in the battle.”

“Now what kind of adventures would they be if they didn’t want to join in the nearest fight.” said Jane.

“How about a compromise” I said? “They can take part only if they serve in the ranks and only if they use the same weaponry as the locals.”

Jenny thought for a while. “That should work- they may only fight as the common soldiery and no weaponry from later than baseline 1899- that should keep them happy.”

Grimsby Encampment
Commander’s Tent
1200 hrs

“We were told that we would be on our own for this battle, but if I know our friends, a good few won’t be able to keep out of the fight” said Alfred.

“You are right,” said Forwin. “I thought the same myself. I would guess some might join our ranks as common soldiers, as they have done before. Should they do so by Lord Jameson’s leave or not will depend on their discipline.

“I know the chief armourer is eager to see his weapons used in the field, especially the cannon,” said Edmund. “I would be most surprised if he does not at least come to watch us use it.”

Haddon Hold C&C
1500hrs

“The image shows four longboats at that coastal village renowned for harboring pirates,” said Simon, as he presented the latest satellite imagery. “Thermal track shows a band of between 25 and 30 headed inland towards Nottingham. Best guess is that this is a scouting party looking for intel from any friendly faces in the area.”

“OK, keep our eye in the sky on them- if they are scouting first we have a couple more days up our sleeve,” answered Sonja. “That’s all for the war. Mike- can you come over to gate operations for an hour?”

“Sure”, said Mike. “Andy has almost finished that run of special cannon ammo.”

As Mike and Sonja walked over to the hanger and office that was gate operations, she explained what she wanted to discuss in private.

“The project you suggested a while ago is about to happen, as soon as this war is over.” said Sonja.

“Hang on.” said Mike. “What project are you on about?”

“Think back a few months- you mentioned a group of retired engineers on an outing. They had disappeared, presumed dead when their bus went over a cliff in the Swiss Alps. I recall you saying ‘what a waste- they had all the skills we need at the right technology level- mining, railroad, gasworks, bridging.’”

“That’s right.” said Mike. “I remember them well- my grandfather was on that bus trip- a tour of European engineering works. The wreckage of the bus was found, but only a couple of bodies were ever recovered.”

“We are going to snatch the bus just after it goes over the cliff” said Sonja. “The bus will be having a soft- softer, anyway- landing at Transit, where the passengers will be given the choice- A one-way trip to the ninth century or back on the bus for a very short ride.”

“The youngest of them will be over seventy,” Mike pointed out. “Will you be giving them the reverse age treatment?”

“We will,” answered Sonja. “This is why we have to keep them away from here while the process works. One of our West Coast mining camps will do- with a bit of work.”

**Oraki Korakeo, NZ
0700 local time**

“Now no sneaking back to play war.” teased Jenny, waving a croissant.

“I’m going to be quite busy enough running the NZ end of ‘Bodysnatcher’” I replied. “In two hours, Sonja is gating me a housekeeping team and I daresay there will be a few repairs that need doing.”

“How is the site looking?” asked Jane.

“Much as you would expect after three months on the coast- there is a bit of storm damage, but that should take just a couple of days to clear up. With the exception of an electrician to set up the generator and some temporary power, I can get by with a local work crew” I said.

“I never got a look at that site,” said Jane. “All I did was sent trucks to and fro.”

“So come down for a few hours and have a look before ‘Bodysnatcher’ kicks off.” I answered.

“Might as well” said Jenny. “We don’t have anything else on until this lake clears.”

Westport, New Zealand
0930hrs local time

The morning rain had cleared and the sun was now making an appearance. Jane had found a time window for this site- unfortunately it was in the middle of winter. Down near the sea where the camp was positioned was at least above freezing, but the nearby mountains were covered in snow.

As cleanup crews tidied the site, chainsaws could be heard nearby adding to the camp’s firewood pile. Generator power was on to the cabins and two electricians and their helpers worked on connecting power to the hall and ablutions block.

This camp consisted of two parts. The first was an old holiday site consisting of a large wooden homestead, a collection of sheds and a water tank. This house had been built out of locally milled wood two years after our first home in the Bay of Islands. It had stood on this site for nearly fifty years now and was still in excellent condition, thanks to some advanced wood preservatives. Mostly built by Will, Marty and Sharon, it served as another fishing camp and a base camp for Sharon’s explorations of the area.

The rest was much more recent, having been built in the last couple of years and was made up of four Quonset huts, an ablutions block and a pair of concrete water tanks, fed from a nearby stream. The feed for these was currently being unblocked. Sitting on a terrace about 120 metres above sea level, there was an impressive view of the wild coastline and the mouth of the Buller River. Behind- the hills and mountains- full of valuable coal.

“It’s a bit more basic than the other settlement sites,” said Jane.

“This is a secondary- a mining camp in effect” I said. “That’s why we shipped all these accommodation containers in for the mission. They will be going back once we have finished here.”

“So it’s another fishing camp for some of the crew” Jane guessed.

“True, but we also ran a small mining operation here for a couple of years. Quite a bit of that bullion you have stashed in Switzerland came from these rivers and beaches.”

“I wondered where that came from.” said Jane.

“Getting back to business” I said, “The winter weather should help keep our geriatrics indoors. I have a lot of catch-up material for them- books, video and so on. That will keep them busy while the reverse aging process kicks in.”

Jane glanced at her Rolex. “Time for me to head for Transit- Jenny wants to run a couple of rehearsals for the snatch.”

“Good Luck.” I said, thinking I was glad not to be driving the bus...

Transit Training Area

Three elderly M.A.N buses stood lined up at the bottom of the hill. A narrow road wound up the hillside, a wooden railing on one side.

Near the buses stood what looked like a high white tent. Made of nylon, this stood 12 metres high and was secured by ropes. Off to one side, a crash tender with a foam sprayer stood by.

“That’s the airbag,” said Jenny. “Underneath are stacked cardboard boxes, creating a crush zone. I will correct the plane of the gate so that the bus should land upright. Another problem will be that the motor will still be running- I’m hoping that netting you see on top will foul the driveshaft and stall the engine.

The buses have been fitted with remote controls- let’s learn how to catch them.”

Westport, New Zealand 1645hrs local time

The local workers finished up and started preparing an evening meal- the rest of us climbed on the tray of the tractor for a ride back to the house. The house was quite unlike most of our properties, being built from locally milled timber and not prefabricated. It had started as Will’s hobby- a traditionally crafted home and had grown from a cottage to a two-storied high-stud homestead, with numerous outbuildings, most of these being experiments in working with old and new methods and materials.

As the last light faded and the rain and wind picked up, we arrived cold and wet. Doris had traveled ahead of us and had the range and fires going, but the generator was not going. While the others unloaded our baggage, Sharon went to check the water tank while I cranked up the ancient Lister generator that Will refused to part with.

By the time we had the generator chugging away and the tractor in the barn, the one modern piece of equipment- the gas-fired high pressure hot water system- was running. Stripping off our wet-weather gear in the shelter of the porch, we headed into the warmth of the kitchen. The showers we already taken, so Sharon and I started getting dinner ready- a simple matter of putting a couple of chickens into the Aga to roast, then a trip to the wine cellar.

I took my bags upstairs to my usual room at the west end of the building. The balcony looking out to sea wouldn’t be getting used tonight. The radiators were starting to warm up, so I draped a change of clothes and a towel over them to warm them up. There was a tap at the open door- I turned and waved to Doris to come in. Draped in a towel, she came in carrying an envelope.

“This was in the drop-box”, she said, handing the envelope over.

“No need to rush with these- it could have waited until after you were dressed, but thanks anyway.” I said, tearing the envelope open.

‘That girl has really filled out since she has been with us.’ I thought to myself, as she returned to her room to dress. She doesn’t look much like the scrawny, grubby girl that arrived at our gate over a year ago.

The message was a cryptic one. It was simply a note from Jenny saying “Do it- I approve without reservation.”

I don’t know what that is about, but her messages have a habit of making sense before long.

After a leisurely shower, the building had heated up, with the radiators now hot and the warmth of the downstairs fires spreading upstairs. The smell of roasting chicken and potatoes was wafting from the kitchen and the others had gathered in the saloon for drinks and nibbles. I poured a glass of bubbles and asked Barb how the hall wiring was going.

“The cabling is done, I just have to wire up the sub-main and connect the lights tomorrow”, she answered.

“Good” I said. “You might as well stay on until the sewer hook-up is finished- they will need power on to the pump and you are due for a couple of quiet days after getting that power plant on-line.”

“That would be great”, she said. “A few days here would be really nice- this is an amazing old house.”

“I don’t really want to give it up to the colonists” said Sharon. “This is my favorite of all the houses.”

“According to Jenny’s database, we still have 39 years use of it”, I said.

Doris glanced up from her book “Why don’t you just move it like those others?”

“I think I have a project for our engineer.” I said. This would be quite a bit more of a job than lifting a cabin, but why not.

Transit Training Area Vehicle arrestor testing

As the others moved the debris clear with a pair of bulldozers, Jenny and Jane conferred at the gate control.

“A touch less long axis bias this time” said Jenny, altering figures in the gate algorithm.

“That should do the trick” said Jane. “John was right about the front barrier- if that bus had 15 degrees less rotation, it would have taken off before the nets snagged it.”

“Which is why we test” said Jenny. “Next run tomorrow evening- as soon as they have the next arrestor up.”

Westport, New Zealand Evening

Outside the storm gained in intensity and we had no satellite forecasting here. Thankfully, most work tomorrow was indoors- fitting the septic tanks could wait- there was plenty of other work for the plumbers.

With this site about to pass out of our control soon, I wanted to make a visit to one of my private spots near here. I built this retreat single-handed about 30 years ago on this time-line- it was a replica of a small bar out in the wilderness. I thought I might take Sharon for a trip there- she would appreciate it, having spent a bit of time in this area.

Sharon was in the kitchen, checking on the roast. "Would you like to take a trip up to the Denniston Plateau tomorrow?" I asked.

"I don't have anything on that needs doing tomorrow- I would love to go for a drink at the saloon."

I should have guessed she would have been up there and found the Red Dog.

"I was doing a bit of prospecting up that way and had to visit the site of the town" she added. "It was a hell of a surprise to find that building out there in the 9th century, but your secret is safe with me- great copy of the original, by the way."

When we arrived back in the saloon, the conversation had turned to time travel- as it invariably did with those new to it. Barb had asked Doris how she had found her visit to our time.

"It was very interesting, but a bit unnerving", she said. "The main thing was that there were just so many people and everything seemed to have something built on it. The city in particular- I don't know how they could live so close to each other- so many of them."

Sharon laughed "Don't worry- you don't have that on your own- any city of more than 100,000 gives me the creeps."

"And that's from someone who lived most of her life in the more... interesting parts of earth," I said. "Africa, South America. Anywhere with hostile locals and interesting geology."

"Finally- the lower slopes of Pinatubo, where Jenny got me out just before a pyroclastic cloud toasted me." Sharon continued. "The standard ten-year deal, most of which was spent surveying Transit. Hell, I would have signed for twenty if I had known the work was surveying a virgin planet- it got even better when I got to come back here and look around before anyone messed up the landscape."

"How far in time have you gone either way?" asked Barb.

"There is a limit as to how far you can project a gate with the required precision for a walk-through", I answered. "That is about 1500-1600 years either way. More than that and you need to make the jump into deep space at the other end- but that doesn't answer your question. We routinely travel about 3200 years up-time and about 1200 years down-time from baseline. We

have made jumps of up to 20,000 years down-time and 10,000 years up-time. Future jumping is real high risk stuff.”

“Well this is far enough into the dark ages for me” said Barb.

“You should have been here two years ago.” said Doris. “Life before toilet paper, soap and hot showers was not a whole lot of fun.”

“Tell them about your first days with us” I said, poring Doris another drink.

“We were herded in from the village in the back of a 548, sure we had been sold into slavery,” Doris said.

“It’s quite funny now, but was really scary at the time. John and Steve had the task of introducing us to our new home. First, they showed us how to use a toilet and then a shower and we were threatened with all sorts of dire punishments if we did not use both. We were given towels, soap and shampoo and sent to the showers to get clean, our old clothes being taken to be burnt. At the time I had no idea that you could actually be rid of lice.”

That made a few of our newer member’s cringe hearing that- I must get them out into the hinterlands.

Doris continued “After we had scrubbed to John’s satisfaction, we were allowed out and were handed what were to us the grandest clothes we had ever seen, of marvelous sheer fabric and fine finish. T-shirts, track pants and overalls, with woolen socks and gumboots. Seriously- we thought these were fantastic.

We were then given a bag full of treasure- a change of clothes, another towel and soap, bottle of shampoo, comb, hairbrush, toothbrush and toothpaste, foot powder, nailbrush and nail cutters. John showed us how to use everything and explained that we must wash on rising and at the end of our working day, as this was their custom.

While he was doing this, Steve was making sure the boys washed properly and had already given the stinking brute of a carpenter’s son a moderate beating for disobedience, which I thoroughly enjoyed hearing.

After all this, we were shown what our duties were to be, which for us, was cleaning, laundry and helping in the kitchen and hall. Laundry.- fill a tub, tip in a scoop of powder and push a button- We thought it was hilarious that some people thought this was work. The boys had nothing more onerous than splitting wood and shoveling coal.

Each day we were given a few more tasks and taught to operate simple machines such as irons and vacuum cleaners. JD picked Shirl and I to work in the kitchen, just tidying and wiping at first, then how to use the cookers and before long we were preparing breakfast dishes. Now that this place wasn’t so frightening, we all starting to enjoy working there. Almost all of us, that is.

You will remember I mentioned a carpenter’s son- he wasn’t at all happy with his new life- in fact the men had nicknamed him ‘Happy’

He was always being taken to task for laziness, poor work or dirty habits and often received a well-deserved kick or cuff. One morning, just after the war had started he made a big mistake. With most of the men away fighting, he thought he would try his luck and refused to empty the kitchens scrap bins, saying that 'he did not take orders from a man who did women's work'.

JD gave him a thrashing that old Alfred the headman would have been proud of. Then he was stupid enough to run away- the rest of us only feared being sent back. John chased him on a motorbike and dragged him back on a rope. After that, they shackled him and put him on half rations. He was a pig- always pushing around anyone smaller and groping at us. I couldn't think of a better person to sell to the lead smelters.

But for the rest of us- these were great days- work was never too hard or long and everyone was always ready to explain what they were doing, what a piece of machinery was and what it did. There was always something new and exciting and we all looked forward to what each new day would bring. We were given more clothes and finery, even jewelry as rewards for a job well done. I didn't ever want to go back to the village."

Doris paused and swirled her drink around, staring at the glass for a few moments. "You will never know how drinking from a simple glass can be an almost magical experience- but you have lived all your lives with glass. The simple things you take for granted, that are wonders to my people- light at the touch of a fingertip. Clean clothes each morning. A cake of soap or a box of matches.

Then there are the things you know nothing about. Sleeping all winter in a pile of festering straw and having someone die next to you in the middle of a freezing night. Having lice constantly biting and continually itching. Your ragged clothes stinking and rotting off you. Wondering if today a warband will come killing and raping.

She drained her glass and smiled. "I'm glad you came."

Transit Training Area

This time the bus was cut free and rolled away on its wheels. Already the cardboard boxes were being taped together and stacked for the next catch. This time it would be full of passengers.

"Is the clinic all ready to go?" Jenny asked Shane.

"All set for tomorrow, when the rest of the medical team jump in" he said.

"I will be working medical as well," Jenny said, "Records show that two bodies will be found in the wreckage, showing that we won't save them all, so don't expect a perfect success rate tomorrow."

"Thanks for the heads-up on that," said Shane. "How is the down-time facility?"

"It will be all ready for you- once this lot is ready to take another jump- now while they are setting up, why don't you tell me about the latest anti-geriatric drugs over a glass of wine?"

Westport, New Zealand Evening

Over dinner, the talk continued about times past and present. Mostly about places and times our new members would like to visit. Nothing I hadn't heard before and mostly over-rated, in my opinion. Famous concerts and festivals may have their appeals, but I tended to head for less common events- for R&R anyway.

Simon asked me "How many wars have you been involved in?"

"About 14 actual wars- if you count the 'police actions', occupations and the current one back at England. Six wars down-time from baseline, the rest up-time."

"Those future wars must have been something else," said Simon.

"Not really." I said. "A couple of full-on stand-up fights, but mostly more like what we did at Sheffield. Shooting up totally under-gunned rebels in the outer worlds, hunting pirates- yes- me. And playing armed policeman."

"When did- does- this all happen?" Barb asked.

"About 2500 years from now," I answered. "In another universe run by an Empire which had it's origins in a US/UK alliance. They have a particularly outstanding training school- the Imperial War Academy. You may have heard us referring to the as 'The Lensmen'- which is the nickname us irreverent types called them by. The academy does turn out first-class troops, even if they are mostly boy scouts- at least until after a few tours in the outer rim.

I did six years at the academy- it sort of picks up where our special forces training leaves off- and you can only get in after doing a tour on active duty. It will become corrupted later when assholes start buying commissions for the prestige, but in its fourth century, the training is second to none.

I got in on an outie scholarship, as did most of our people who went through- most of the places are filled by this from the 'more civilized' inner worlds, but their best come from 'friendly'- read 'hard core fanatic allied' worlds on the fringes of the 'old empire'. That took four years of fighting in the reunification wars on Helzin to win that scholarship- as a regular and an irregular. Entry to the Empire proper required one world government and we had to basically take over the world. But that's another story- one of these days I must write the whole tale up."

"Sounds scary as hell" said Sue. "Alone in another time."

"I wasn't alone", I said. "There were four of us at the academy and another in the Imperial Civil Service, at that time- but they have their stories and we don't tell another's story, without their say-so."

"Oh- sorry" said Sue, "I didn't mean to pry."

"No worries", I said. "It's one of those conventions we have. Keep anyone of us plied with drinks and we mostly all love to spin a good yarn." I waved my empty glass in a not very subtle hint.

Doris filled my glass with Elston Chardonnay. “I must say that I find the stories MUCH more interesting now that I know what the hell you are talking about- at least most of the time.”

Sue Eastman, Dave’s daughter, placed two large Pavlova’s on the table “My sole contribution to coming on this trip as Chef.”

Haddon Hold **Sonja's Journal**

I awoke to a sense of Deja Vu this morning. I recognise the feeling as from so many years ago, from when I first lived through the period leading up to the invasion of Poland. We know the invasion will come, yet it is still possible that the invaders will go elsewhere. I know from this morning's satellite photographs that this is now highly unlikely. The force has put to sea and will make landfall before night. Our defenders have no idea where or when and we can only give them a few vague hints now. They must resolve this problem themselves.

Our volunteers have gone off to join our tiny army. In the end, only a few wished to join in the battle proper. I believe most of them had seen enough blood and death in the defense of Sheffield. Several will serve with the artillery they taught the local men to make and the old soldier from the 36th century, Gunnery Sergeant Martin, will be at the front as always. Six others have offered their services as Medics and all have been given our leave to serve.

I have my own mission- How that will turn out- who knows?

Transit Training Area

John gave a 'Thumbs Up' and climbed inside the crash tender. Shane and his medical team stood at the safety line, medkits and stretchers at the ready.

Jane initiated the gate macro and a silver bus dropped into the Transit air, just like in rehearsal. Dropping directly in front of a heavy wooden barricade, the engine stalled- the driveshaft and axles wrapped and tangled in nylon netting. An excavator tore an opening through the cushioning to the door and waiting teams sprung into the gap, wrenching the door open. With the engine and the electrics off, the rescue and medical teams entered and started to evacuate the severely shocked passengers.

"Make me a hole", yelled Shane, slapping a monitor onto an unconscious elderly man. Steve and John grabbed the seat in front and tore it off the floor. Shane attached a heart-start and activated it, then moved to the next row. That one would be OK.

The bus was emptying fast, a ramp to the door speeding up the evacuation. Most were walking wounded, battered by the initial crash through the barrier fence and then thrown about in the plunge over the cliff and the subsequent crash-landing on Transit. Eric and Sue triaged the injured, moving the minor injuries cases into a tent, while the more seriously hurt and shocked were taken into the containers that made up our field hospital. As each person was assessed, they were given a shot of Hypgnol, a 52nd century sedative. This drug had the added effect of making the recipient very open to suggestion whilst they were under its affect.

Jenny lowered the portable scanner and shook her head. "Massive CVA, he was dead before the bus touched down."

Shane removed the monitor and other equipment. "That's better than we thought- you said that two bodies were found."

Jenny nodded. Shane was a good doctor but had much to learn about time travel. One of those others out there wasn't going to make it.

She knew that it probably wouldn't be age or illness that killed them. If they were still alive, we could keep them alive.

Someone would die for another reason.

Sometime...

**West Coast, New Zealand.
Haddon Time, minus 3 months.**

The dinner dishes cleared away, we retired to the saloon, for Port and Stilton. It had been a good evening and a great chance to get to know some of our newer members better. If I'm any judge, a good few will sign on full-time.

"How many will I be cooking for tomorrow?" asked Sue, as she passed the bottle to me.

"Just two more for the evening meal- George has quite a bit of plumbing to do and Ken will be hooking up the heating boiler," I relied. "No locals coming down tomorrow to feed. George will be bringing an Argo through, with a load of supplies. Doris has a bit of time on Argo's, so she can do the supply run." Doris never missed a chance to get behind the wheel- she loved to drive.

The long day was fast catching up with us and the group broke up, with everyone heading to their respective rooms. With the generator off, the sound of the storm outside raged all the louder. Soon the sounds of toilets flushing, doors closing and the sounds of people getting ready for bed faded and the last of the battery-powered lights blinked out.

I lay back enjoying the music of the wild weather and the creaking of timbers, when I caught the sound of quiet footsteps- the steps of someone walking lightly, sounds that most non-enhanced ears would not hear. Then my door handle turned.

Out of longstanding habit, my .45 was in my hand and leveled at the doorway. Doris came into the room, closing the door behind her. Without a word, she was into my bed and pressed a finger to my lips. I discreetly tucked the pistol under my pillow and mentally counted to ten as I got ready to throw her out.

Doris was expecting this. "Not this time, my dear man- I'm not 'the hired help' anymore."

(This being what I had told her on the last two occasions I had kicked her out of my bed.)

"You learn fast," I said. Then Jenny's cryptic message dawned on me. Of course she would be in on this.

Let's not fight the inevitable.

Morning already. Outside the wind had died down a bit and the rain had eased off from torrential to hard. The generator started coughing into life and people were moving around. Oh well, if I

have to wait for a shower, I might as well stay in bed a bit longer. I do believe the girl is on for a repeat performance.

Going by the raised eyebrows, winking and sniggers at breakfast, I gather that most of them were in on this and I'm sure that Jenny has put a bit more than basic schooling into Doris's memory implants. After sending them off to their tasks, I unpacked my gate generator and set up. From experience, Sharon and I fastened our wet-weather gear before jumping to the windswept rock of the Denniston plateau.

As usual, it was freezing. A few yards in front of us stood one of my favorite private retreats. I didn't look much- a small and rather shabby building of cheap construction. Paint peeled from the asbestos cement cladding and the corrugated iron verandah was starting to rust. A faded sign on the front said 'Mt. Rochford Hotel' but it was also known as 'The Red Dog saloon' and was a copy of a bar from our time line which would stand near here.

I had built this myself and it remained a very private retreat, made more for solitude or perhaps the company of one or two friends. The appearances were deceiving, as the building had remained unchanged over fifty years, in one of the countries harshest environments.

Going in through the front- the door was never locked- we entered a small bar which would have been crowded by ten customers. A small high-tech environmental control unit kept the damp and mould away in my absence, also keeping the inside comfortably warm. Sharon turned it off and built a coal fire in the stove. We hung our outer jackets up on the wall and went about getting the little bar ready for a stay, checking water, coal and stowing our food and overnight bags. Doris's face had dropped when she saw me packing a bag, but cheered up when I told her I would be back in the afternoon. She was adjusting faster to the idea of being a time-traveler than most of our band had.

"How long are you planning on staying" asked Sharon?

"I don't know, but we will be back this afternoon", I said, pouring her a pink gin. I opened a bottle of Porter and took a seat in the other armchair. "I had an interesting night last night."

Sharon gave a short laugh "I bet it was- poor Doris has been trying to get you for the last couple of months."

"I was about to throw her out again, when she reminded my that she was now one of us- She must have been put up to that"

"Of course she was," said Sharon, rolling her eyes upwards. "Jenny didn't want her to have to wait forty years while you dithered about trying to find the perfect time and place- which you never would. Hell, from what I heard Jenny had to jump you after she got fed up with waiting- Don't be cross. It's a delightful little flaw of yours that we all love."

"Yeah, it's my ingrained 'don't screw the crew' management style that came with being a ship's captain for so long. I guess in another hundred years I might get over it", I said, with a grimace.

"None of us have been exactly celibate, even if we have one more or less steady partner" said Sharon. "As you know, the rule is- in another time, anything goes."

“Which is why Jen left me down-time with Doris.”

“Exactly. Plus she even sent you a bloody written permission slip.”

“Then there is the thing about Doris being so young...”

“Bullshit. Firstly, she would have been married off years ago, had she not avoided this happening-talk to her about that sometime. Secondly, she expected that you would have her, as was your right as local lord. Thirdly, she really wanted you to have her. She went to Jenny asking why you did not want her- actually, Jenny was quite touched by that.”

“You haven’t met Ashley, Jenny’s daughter- she bears quite a resemblance to Doris, apart from the tattoos and all the friggin’ metal in her face.”

“Between you and me, Jenny would rather have you bonking Ashley if that meant she would join us.”

“Not much chance of that. She has a serious dislike towards me- blames me for Jenny’s divorce.”

“Kids do that.”

I got another round of drinks in and threw another couple of shovel loads of coal on the fire. Outside, sleet rattled against the window glass, now fogged from the comfortable warmth inside. I could see we would be here for some time. I didn’t spend a lot of one on one time with Sharon, but she was great for talking through these sorts of moral dilemmas.

Sharon took her refill. “You are worried about Jenny’s reaction- don’t be. You won’t lose her and I know what she means to you- nor will she make Doris disappear- she regards her as a daughter and you can take that as a measure of Jenny’s opinion of you- she would NEVER want a second-rater near her daughter. I heard about what you lot did to the last one.

Now- what you need to do when we get back is to bring Doris up here for a couple of days and have a good drunken dirty weekend.”

“I know now why we plucked you off the side of that volcano.” I said. “Lunch?”

The morning’s tasks delegated, Sonja took her seat in the C&C to monitor the latest movements. Simon brought her the usual cup of Darjeeling Orange Pekoe. Porcelain cup and saucer, never a mug.

“First landfall at about 1500”, said Simon, passing over the printouts. Sonja glanced at them. “This is just like watching the invasion of Poland- except the invaders are in for a nasty surprise this time. Now we wait.”

“How did you get into this outfit?” said Simon. “If you don’t mind me asking- that is.”

“The thirties were a grand time for me”, said Sonja. “Of course, you would have heard otherwise, but we had money and as you will find when you travel, that makes all the difference. My mother died when I was an infant and my father rather indulged me. Provided I was the lady at parties and the table, I could do much as I liked. On safari with him in India and Africa, sailing in the Mediterranean, hunting, shooting and studying whatever took my fancy at university. It was a wonderful life.

Then war came. Daddy was only too keen to ‘do his bit’ and allow the military to put a radar installation- We didn’t know what it was then- next to our home.

We watched the war as most did, through the newspapers and thought that it would come to nothing. Hitler would stop after Poland and then he would stop after France. The next we knew, England was under attack and the Stuka’s came. I know now that the radar sites were a priority target, but at that time though we would be well away from the fighting. When the bombers came, our home was knocked flat and father killed. I was one of the few to survive.

I did what I thought anyone would do and joined up. My background in languages and an outdoors life eventually got me into MI6. There I met up with a brassy yank that had been seconded from OSS- one Captain Jenny Dean, as she was known then. She was a legend in MI6, known as ‘Jenny Death’ to the instructors, who she wound up training. Nobody ever got close to her with a pistol, knife or hand-to-hand- much to the disgust of a few Royal Marine Commando’s.

For some reason she took a shine to me and we used to go off to London on our leave passes. She was a real caution. Jenny never seemed bothered by rationing- like most yanks- and could always track down stockings, cigarettes and good drink. Or a good time.

Once I asked her if she was scared of getting pregnant and she told me that she had access to a secret drug that would stop that. This was positively scandalous to a thirties gal, yet really exciting at the same time- especially when she gave me a shot of this drug. I don’t know why, but I completely trusted her with that. With what I know now, she had probably loaded the dose with Hypnognol as well as 400 F-Inhibitor.

Lunch at the Ritz had previously been just something you did, but with Jenny, it was a ball. She scandalized customers, drank like a thirsty navvy and yet had all the staff loving her- even the crusty old maitre’D used to smile when she walked in- something that must have hurt his face. Locked wine cellars opened up and menus not normally available for regular customers appeared. She had an uncanny knack of being where the Luftwaffe was not- well; I thought so at the time.

After a long while, those in command realised that female agents could achieve what our male counterparts could not and that we would be going onto active service- as long as nobody knew they were using women. Actually, this attitude helped us, until the more pragmatic Germans realised that this must be happening.

Jenny and I did four drops into France and Holland, gathering intelligence reports and delivering weapons and explosives, plus doing a bit of training- to those that would actually listen- a small minority.

On our fifth tour we were ratted on by the bloody French bastards we were there to help. They got me, but Jenny escaped, leaving eight SS men dead without firing a shot. Of course they thought there must have been more of us.

They were somewhat miffed at us for killing eleven and wounding another seven and I had a rather bad time of it at the local Gestapo headquarters. I was informed that a top interrogator had been summoned and that I was very fortunate that he had specifically instructed that I was not to be further damaged prior to his arrival.

Early the next morning, the Interrogator arrived. He was possibly the coldest, hardest looking Nazi bastard I had ever seen, from his mirrored jackboots to his dueling scar. For the first time, I was really scared- this wasn't a thug but a real professional.

He stood and stared at me for a long while, his grey eyes cutting like knives.

The local commander nervously asked "Will the Herr Oberst require..."

"No- this facility is inadequate- chain her and take her to my car", he snapped.

Those were the only words he spoke and the way the local Gestapo scurried to obey his order told me much about the man.

Contrary to popular belief, we did not carry cyanide pills.

At the car, the two guards chained me to two huge men, who dragged me into the back seat of a waiting black Mercedes. The car roared off, driven by a female Luftwaffe Feldwebel- all I could see of her was a grey uniform jacket and a tight blond bun.

After a ½ hour's drive, we were in the country. The officer ordered the car to stop and ordered the guards to take me out.

This wasn't good.

He drew his pistol- a P-08- strange how you remember these little details. I thought he must me trying to put the wind up me for starters. He brought the pistol slowly up and then in a blur raised it, shooting one guard between the eyes- at the same time, there was another crack of a pistol shot and both guards dropped.

You could have knocked me down with a feather when Jenny moved into view wearing grey. The colonel started to unlock my chains- this had turned surreal.

"We don't have a lot of time", said Jenny. "Do you trust me?"

"Of course I do."

"Then take my hand and follow me."

The colonel had produced a box from the car and was tapping at what looked like a flattened typewriter. A silver-grey wall appeared. Jenny dragged me through and all the hangovers I had ever had hit me at once.

When my eyes started working again, we were someplace else. It was hot- hot like Italy in the summer. Jenny and the Colonel had started to strip off their uniforms.

"Sorry about that." said the Colonel. "Bit of a sticky situation."

“Let me introduce Commander Wayne Jamieson- Wayne- Lady Sonja Anderson”

Wayne clicked his heels and did a short bow, straight from the book of etiquette. “Delighted Milady”

At that point we became best of friends. Now you know why I occasionally refer to Wayne as ‘You Nazi bastard.’ and he is not offended.

From there, they took me to the then rather rudimentary Transit camp and told me that I was dead on that timeline and explained that I couldn’t go back.

But I got to travel to the 21st century and that rather made up for it.

At that stage, there were three of us travelers- yes, I’m the first one recruited.

According to Jenny, who keeps track of such things, I have spent about seventy years wandering up and down time.

But if you want to, I would be glad to take you on an escorted trip back to that time- your first time jumps are always escorted by one of us old-timers.”

“Damn.” said Simon “You are on for that- I signed on for the time-travel.”

“Ha. You wait until Wayne sends you to the Imperial War Academy.”

The Red Dog Saloon Denniston, NZ

Sharon and I were having a great night- by the glow of the coal fire, we had moved to Philosophy and the camaraderie of the bottle.

“The trick is” said Sharon “That once you get into what would be your second lifetime, you become a far better parent- if you have ½ a brain in your head.”

“Well, that may be true,” I said. “If you were a halfway decent parent in the first place, but I deliberately selected those who were past the age or inclination of wanting a family for my original team. That doesn’t make them flawed.”

“No, but they have to be managed differently”, said Sonja, “Example. Now that Jane has paired up with Steve, she is talking about a baby. She knows we had an agreement- no kids until this operation is complete, but that doesn’t stop her looking forward.”

“Jane.”

“Yes, Jane.”

“Bloody hell. Jenny will be onto me next.”

“That will come, one day.”

“Still, I suppose- what’s twenty-thirty years to raise a family. Bloody hell. At least we don’t have that 52nd century trait- ‘breed till you bust.’”

“Let me remind you Wayne, that you are married to a 52nd century woman- at least nominally.”

“That’s why I let Jane do all the dealings there- Gina wants me to do a clone retrains and knock her up. I could do it if her damned husbands would bugger off elsewhere while I did the bloody deed.”

“I know Wayne, that place is just too far ahead for Will and me. If you think you have problems adjusting to them, we are a whole generation behind you.”

Sharon reached for the Wild Turkey and poured two more drinks. We both had mixers at our sides- coke in the old glass torpedo bottles. I slid the bowl of peanuts across.

“Let’s take a couple of days”, said Sharon.

I agreed- “Damn fine idea. And my bedroom’s the one on the right.”

For the rest of the day we drank and talked about everything and nothing much at all, as you do- the project, wine, gemstone mining, planets, cities and times we had visited

The day wore on and we talked about what would happen to our houses here.

“They are sure to find this area in a few years,” I stated.

“For sure.” said Sharon. “But we have a few left- and at least 43 years down-time, for this site.”

As dawn broke, we headed for our respective beds.

Grimsby area 0800 local time

Forwin summoned his senior men. “Word has come that the foe are on the move. We now break camp and move into the forest positions. Your orders are to stay hidden- no fires. We do not strike until they are all landed. I want to take all of them.”

The men nodded and with no questions, they left to organise their commands. ‘They are good men- they know exactly what need to be done without further instruction,’ thought Forwin. Within a few minutes, the camp was being loaded onto wagons. Fires were extinguished; latrines backfilled and tents lowered and folded away- all hands busy with no signs of shirking. Within the hour they were on the move to the positions previously scouted.

Shortly after noon, the first scout arrived, his horse covered in sweat and nearly exhausted. “Sail sighted Sir.” the weary scout reported, climbing down as grooms lead his mount away. “We counted twelve sails, headed for the river.” he continued “My sergeant ordered me to bring you news- he will stay and watch where they land, then bring you more news.”

“Well done.” said Forwin “Give this report to your Centurion and then get some food and rest- your horse will be cared for.”

The scout saluted and trotted off to find his company.

“Tomorrow, then” said Alfred, commander of the Elite Haddon Rifles company.

“Tomorrow” said Forwin. “They will sack the deserted village and find the food and drink we left. Then with the dawn, we take them.”

Centurion Edmund, commander of the artillery joined them, bringing several steaming mugs of soup from the field kitchen. Edmund was the only one who had experienced a full-scale battle fought with modern weapons- all the other veterans had merely fought relatively minor skirmishes. “It’s going to be far worse than anything you have ever seen” he stated quietly. “But this time no villagers will be slaughtered. We saved Sheffield, but so many died before we got there. Not this time.”

Forwin had forced an evacuation of the area, with the villagers driven to Sheffield by the Armed Constabulary.

When they returned they would forgive the troopers from evicting them.

The Red Dog Saloon Denniston, NZ

All good things must come to an end- it’s time we were back to help with setting up camp and we jump back tomorrow.

It’s been an interesting couple of days with Doris. She is going to be a great addition to our crew. It’s hard to believe that she was a shy, disheveled and rather smelly young urchin just over a year ago. Almost all of our early recruits have really come into their own with a bit of education and encouragement.

This one is in a class of her own, though. She has set her mind to systematically seduce most of our crew and I predict interesting times ahead.

I recently wrote in this journal that 'I’m sure that Jenny has put a bit more than basic schooling into Doris’s memory implants.'

What was a light-hearted quip has turned out to be a more astute observation. After three days alone with her, I see more and more of Jenny’s mannerisms. This is not the natural and expected copying of another. These mannerisms are far more subtle. The way she makes love, showers, even sits reading with a drink at her side. With hindsight- the way she killed the thief at the Sheffield market with the skill of an expert pistolero. This is not stuff gleaned from a memory cube- these are direct implants from Jenny and I was unaware that we had the capability to do such transfers, as they require massive computer power. She must have access to at least an AI system.

Jenny has a few questions to answer sometime soon...

Transit Training Area Jenny's Journal

With all the new recruits treated, we only had four that needed to be kept in medical for further treatment and observation. Blood samples had been dispatched up-time to be processed into stage one retroviral anti-geriatric therapeutics and the uninjured and walking wounded had been lightly sedated and settled into quarters.

The easy part was over. Now we had the delicate job of explaining what had happened and what was to happen.

Doc Shane has been brilliant on this operation- he is an outstanding physician and after a (predictably) rocky start, is working like he has always been one of the regulars.

I hear that his trip to the 52nd was a changing experience for him. Gina's older daughters probably got their hooks into him, as he keeps talking about going back.

Its time to head up to the mansion for a celebratory dinner.

Haddon Hold C&C 1700hrs

Sonja called Andrea and Marty and asked them to drop by her 'apartment'- two 12 metre containers side by side.

Andrea rang the bell- an actual brass bell on a chain and Sonja opened the oak door and invited them in.

"I need an escort for a mission tomorrow," said Sonja. "I have a gate operation in a hostile area and Wayne has directed me to take a security team- would you be so good as to accompany me?"

"Of course we will," answered Andrea and Marty together.

"Splendid." replied Sonja. "I'm having dinner sent up at eight- will you join me and we can discuss the details?"

"That should give us time to change", said Marty, thankful that he had had his mess kit cleaned and pressed."

Westport, New Zealand 1500 hrs local time

"That's a wrap," I announced. "With 28 engineers coming, we have to leave them something to do. Sue- you get the night off- I have dinner being sent down tonight. For operational reasons known only to the Time Lord Jenny, we have to stay here for another eight days, so let's enjoy them."

I thumbed the starter button on my motorbike and yelled out over the engine- "I get first shower tonight." taking off in a rooster-tail of turf.

Fried Bluff oysters, fish and chips from earth tonight.

Grimsby Area
Haddon Rifles Harbour area.
1900 hrs

Centurion Alfred moved from group to group, talking to his men, who were brewing up over their spirit stoves. These were the first of the militia trained and had the more experienced NCOs, reinforced by the older and steadier men of the well-seasoned Armed Constabulary. Every man was a skilled marksman and Alfred knew well that these men would do most of the killing, come the dawn.

The men of his company were quietly confident that they would win the day- unlike previously in their history. Many had old scores to settle and Alfred and his platoon commanders, supported by the Haddon Green Men, had driven home that they must stand and fight as a unit, and not be rushing onto the field to pursue what seemed to be a defeated enemy. As Commander Jamieson had often repeated- as a unit they would hurt the foe all the more.

Most of the scouts were back now- best estimates were of 100+ longboats- 2000-3000 men all now landed and in the evacuated village. As we had thought, they were feasting on the spoils deliberately left there and were burning empty huts. Tomorrow they would move out in the direction of Nottingham and then we would take them.

Haddon Hold, MT section

Eric and Brent finished pre-fighting their helos for tomorrow's cross-channel flight. While their destination wasn't too much of a distance, there were no rescue services in this age. At the same time, John and Steve were working with their crews servicing the 113's for tomorrow's job, while Simon attached and wired up the holo and sound equipment.

A fuel trailer for the helicopters was hooked on and they were ready for the jump to Europe.

Transit Training Area
Medical Center.
1000hrs local time.

"All but the four in medical are now clear to jump", said Doc Shane, "they should be OK to move in about three days time."

"Right, we'll move the rest down just before noon." said Jenny. "If you can get them prep'd to jump and hold the fort here, I will take a quick trip down, to give the Westport crew a heads-up."

"Leave them to me," Shane said. "I have the story committed to memory now."

Shane, Jenny and the others had split the draftees up into small groups and had spent most of the previous day explaining what had happened and what their fate now was. So far they knew that they have been rescued from certain death and that they can't go back- that's enough for the moment. Right now they needed a few days for reality to set in.

Westport, New Zealand
1030 hrs local time

We had finished the site two days ago and were waiting to get the word about when the new occupants would be headed here. The weather had cleared and we had gotten in a bit of hunting and fishing, this being the one part of New Zealand that deer had been released into.

Shane's medical team had gated in yesterday and spent the morning checking the infirmary. After that, they joined in the time out. I had found out that unless we removed people from the work, they kept on working, so we set up visits to our resorts and to Transit on a rota. After a time, it worked out that certain groups liked to spend time with each other, couples paired off and some just took time alone- or combinations of all of these.

The news from the medical team was that the snatch had gone well and we could expect arrivals in a day's time. All of the others would gate back, but I would stay on briefly to lay down the law to the draftees, before going back to Haddon to watch the upcoming battles.

A flare bursting above told me that someone had just arrived at the local portal site- thanks to Simon rigging up an IR detector near it. A quick look through the binoculars showed that Jenny had just gated through. Doris was already on the way in the Argo.

A few minutes later, the Argo pulled up and Jenny got out. "Ready for visitors?" she asked.

"All set," I said. "When do they arrive?"

"In two hours. Most of this crew can jump back now, or stay down tonight, as long as they move back to the house."

"Right, I will put the word out," I said and sent up the signal- two rocket flares. I picked up my cooler bin and climbed onto the back of the Ago.

Back at the house, Jenny finally got me alone, having sent everyone else off on various tasks. "Did Doris finally get what she wanted?" she asked, smiling.

"She did," I said.

"That was my doing," said Jenny. "I was trying a direct upload and quite a bit of stuff slipped through- although she wanted you anyway."

"Hang on." I said. "A direct upload requires a minimum of an AI core- preferably a semi-sentient mainframe. Not the easiest hardware to come by, even in the 52nd."

"I put in a high-end MPP system some time ago and have been steadily adding to it. As you know, these jump simulations and surveys take one hell of a lot of computer power- if you want them done in a hurry" said Jenny. "I also needed somewhere to store memory downloads and skill patches. The computer core is about 150 meters under where my apartment used to be."

"I knew you had put something a bit more modern in. The ELVIRA management system never crashed- unlike those 21st century pieces of junk we had and you can actually hold a conversation with the software interface- hell- I thought the new software was pushing Turing potential."

“The system was very good to begin with- better than a few of the earliest known systems to go sentient. All of you holding conversations with Elvira started the process, but what ‘sparked’ the jump to full sentience was letting the system into my memories. The computer autonomously decided that Doris needed a top-up and crammed a whole heap of my experiences into her head.”

“So we have a sentient computer. If I read my future histories correctly, we have to socialize it and fit it into our crew.”

“We are well on the way already, as most of the crew has been chatting away with her already. The store group even had the ‘Mistress of the Dark’ posters up, but the thing you have missed is that this is one of the Big Three.”

“Damn. Inter-dimensional travel, anti-geriatric technology and a sentient computer. Criteria for full membership of the League.”

“Let’s just keep this to ourselves for now. I still have a lot of work to do with the computer.”

“We should twin her too- that is the usual procedure, I believe?”

“I have already started. Most of the hardware is onboard the ‘Jolly Roger’- the ‘Black Beast’ was a bit small, but your frigate has plenty of room. We can hide the ship in orbit or just park up in the restricted area at Hilltop.”

“Simon is going to have his hands full putting in the links. As I recall, a sentient computer needs a LOT of optical and audio input.”

“Yes, but most of the links will be in the Haddon and Hilltop areas, plus we can uplink to the comms satellite and various sensor arrays. Elvira can get a huge amount of data from those alone.”

“So when do we start bringing the others in on this?”

“Let’s let them figure out what is going on first- I know Sonja and Jane have been suspicious for a while. Most of the others just take an intelligent reply from a computer as a matter of course. They may notice the change now that she has sparked.”

Grimsby Area
Haddon Rifles Harbour area.
0600 hrs.

The last scouts moved carefully through the sentries positions as the first light appeared in the sky. Forwin was waiting for them to arrive and lead them to his tent for hot soup and bread as they gave their reports.

“I moved in to the edge of the village”, said the lead scout. “They were mostly drunk- you could have led a troop of horse through them and they wouldn’t have noticed. The talk I overheard was that they march for Nottingham tomorrow, sacking all along that road.”

“Good man.” said Forwin- now he had a direction of route and could refine his attack plan.

Speaking to his officers, he outlined the plan.

“We move now- leave the camp to the auxiliaries- just take field rations and plenty of ammunition. We will wait at the forest edge until they take the road. On my command, the infantry will take position and draw them forward. They won’t be able to resist an attack on what looks like two hundred pikemen. Edmund- you will deploy your artillery to the downwind side of the formation and follow the standard fire mission. The scouts are, as we speak, putting range markers out for the riflemen. Alfred- you will have your men fire on any bowmen or horsemen. The rest of you- order your men to fire at 300 metres.

When I bring the cavalry forward- make sure your men cease firing, with the exception of Alfred’s marksmen. That’s all- now see to your commands.”

In the gloom of the dawn, the men started to move out by sections, packhorses carrying the mortars, rockets and extra ammunition as the scouts finished setting up the rock marker cairns.

Taking the last reading from the theodolite, Sonja entered information into her computer. “That’s the last one- now we wait.”

Marty passed over an insulated cup and brought his rifle into the shoulder, scanning the area below them through the scope.

“Satellite IR shows all clear around our position” said Andrea.

“Keep monitoring- now we wait for our local forces to make their move” said Sonja.

Westport, New Zealand

Most of the work party had gated back to Haddon, leaving myself, Jenny, and the advance party of the medical team behind. The draftees had been settled into their new homes and we had retired to the house.

“They must be settling in,” said Jenny. “A couple of them were bitching about the absence of dinner- Doris directed them to the pantry and the can opener.”

That got a round of laughter, as I passed another bottle of Merlot around. This group of cranky old farts were going to get dragged into the 21st century by a 9th century girl.

“We should put Doris in charge of them,” I said flippantly. “She seems to have their measure.”

“That is actually a bloody good idea,” said Jenny, “But she needs a week’s R&R back in Haddon time, right now.”

“What’s that about?” I asked.

Jenny rolled her eyes. “You haven’t seen her making cow’s eyes at Eric? But then you didn’t see her making them at you, did you.”

“Life would be so much easier if you would just send me a memo on this stuff.”

Grimsby Area

Haddon Rifles

0924 hrs.

The three companies (understrength) waited on the road, rifles at the ‘at ease’ position. To most of the world, they looked like a group of pikemen. Off to their right flank, the artillery busied themselves with the setting up their equipment.

The advance group of the foe spied them. The advancing army briefly paused, while the main body caught up with their faster elements.

Two hundred pikemen would not last long, the leaders agreed. This probably represented the total of the organized resistance in this region. The advancing army began to group together for a fast charge to overwhelm the defenders. At a kilometer, they marched determinedly towards the defenders, well out of arrow-shot.

“Commence fire” yelled Edmund, his batteries commencing their pre-arranged fire missions as the advancing enemy reached the 800 metre mark. The rockets and bombs rained down on the rear of the enemy formation, leaving them nowhere to go by but forward. Towards the riflemen.

At 600 metres, the Elite Haddon Rifles started firing, steadily tearing holes in their ranks. At 300 meters, the two other companies added the volley fire of their locally made rifles. The weight of fire broke the ranks and the invaders started to break.

Spotting this, Forwin sent up the signal- a red flare. The artillery immediately ceased fire, as the horsemen burst from the woods to complete the rout.

The rifles now became silent, with the exception of the sniper’s detail. The cavalry advanced at the trot, driving the stragglers inward towards the arranged point. As they closed, they engaged with carbine and pistol shot. Well drilled, they stayed just far enough away to hold the advantage with their firearms, not yet needing the wickedly sharp sabers at their sides.

Grimsby Area

Haddon Rifles Harbour area.

1041 hrs

“Showtime” said Sonja. Andrea and Marty kept up their area security watch, all but invisible in their Chameleon suits.

Sonja tapped the ‘Enter’ key and the gate opened amid the smoke of battle. The fleeing masses fell through the gate to the shores of Holland.

Watching the battleground, Sonja cut the field as the smoke started to dissipate.

“Right- our job is done- back to Haddon for Tea and Scones.”

Normandy
0550

From the fields of England, the invaders fell to the sands of a beach near what would become France.

Bruised and battered by the fall and disoriented and sick from gatheshock, they where overwhelmed by the dazzling lights and thunder from the sky, as the very air beat down upon them. Pillars of light stabbed forth from the sand dunes and the sky above. A huge figure stepped forward atop the dunes, a titan or god twice the size of the largest man. Clad in spiked plate armour and carrying a flaming sword, he strode from the flames surrounding him and roared at the cowering crowd.

“YOU HAVE BEEN SPARED.

YOU WILL NOT MAKE WAR WITH ALBION.

IN RETURN, I WILL GRANT YOU FAIR LANDS IN THE WEST.

RETURN TO THIS PLACE IN ONE YEARS’ TIME AND CHARTS TO RICH LANDS WILL BE GIVEN.

RETURN TO YOUR LANDS, YOUR FAMILIES- ALBION IS NOT FOR YOU.

IF YOU ATTEMPT TO INVADE HER AGAIN- YOUR HALLS WILL BE VISITED WITH FIRE AND DEATH.

HEED OUR COUNCIL AND WE WILL BE FRIENDS IN PROFIT AND PLEASURE.

THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

BEHIND ME IS FOOD AND FIRE. TOMMORROW YOU WILL FIND YOUR BOATS TO THE NEAR NORTH.

CHOSE CAREFULLY.”

The helicopters continued to slowly orbit the beach, while the ground crew rapidly gathered their equipment, then gated. With the gate closed, the helos, pointed west and nosed down, picking up speed as they returned home.

Grimsby Area
Haddon Rifles
1138 hrs.

“I thought there were more,” said Centurion Alfred.

“As did I,” said Forwin “As did I.”

As the officers surveyed the battlefield, Lieutenant Ralf arrived.

He reported to Forwin "Sir- I have four men under arrest."

"The charges?" asked Forwin.

"Three broke ranks to loot and the other tried to flee the field, just before the battle." Ralf answered.

"Hang the deserter before the troops immediately and bring the others to defaulter's parade at sundown," answered Forwin.

"Staff- bring on the accused and state their charge," said Forwin.

"The accused did break ranks to loot the bodies of the dead whilst engaged in battle," said Staff Sergeant Baldric.

"You may speak in your defense," said Forwin, to the accused.

"Soor- we thought the battle was won and that we may take loot - as is our right", answered one of the three.

"Did your Sergeant give you leave to sack the dead?" asked Forwin.

"Well-not as such Soor- but the battle was well and truly won" said the defendant.

"Staff- you opinion on these men?" asked Forwin.

"They are good men, they fought well on this occasion and others," said Baldric.

Forwin contemplated for a while before addressing them men.

"The full penalty of breaking ranks is death by hanging," he said, pausing to let this fact set in. In your case, I will be lenient, as previously you have been good soldiers.

Denied all loot, half rations for a week and extra duties as your Centurions see fit- dismissed."

As the troops marched off, Staff Sergeant Baldric headed them off. "Those extra duties involve burying the dead- report to the quartermaster for picks and shovels now- move yourselves."

Westport, New Zealand

"Time to visit the Troops", said Jenny and we jumped through the awaiting gate.

Stepping through the gate, we arrived at the battlefield, just after the excavator that was just starting to dig a mass grave. A reluctant looking work party was lugging bodies over- no doubt this was a punishment detail.

Looking about the area, organised groups were systematically looting the dead, cleaning weapons and preparing tonight's camp.

It was pleasing to see that within a minute of arriving, a party was heading towards us- officers by their dress. Sure enough, I soon recognized Forwin and his men.

"The battle went well?" I asked.

"Just as you said it would," said Forwin.

"The next one will be the real test of your troops. This one has merely blooded them- however, I am confident that you will win the day."

"You have not been wrong thus far."

"Shall we walk amongst the men?"

"Always a good idea after the fight."

Grimsby Area

"Leave the bandage on for seven days," said Eric, who had amputated the thumb of the only serious casualty. Waving over Centurion Edmund, he directed that this man be evacuated back to barracks. In three to six months the thumb would grow back. Now Eric needed to report that there was a possible problem with the mortar loading drills.

Eric was surprised to find so few casualties. A few sutures and a couple of sprains. But then, the opposition was all long dead before he had arrived, apart from three concussed prisoners who had already been removed to Haddon.

Nottingham would be different...

Grimsby Area 1400 hrs.

The camp as now set up, equipment cleaned and the defaulters at work clearing the unpleasant mess of the battlefield.

While I said there would be no support of local battles, that didn't stop me putting on a feast for the triumphant army. As I received reports from Haddon as to the survivors, the local people set to roasting a couple of oxen over spits and beer had been sent down.

As the troops gathered for their reward, we picked out several for favors- these having being recommended by Forwin and the Centurions.

Ralf was singled out for his efforts in evacuating the local population and maintaining discipline amongst the local militia. Jenny pinned the badge of Chief Constable on him and awarded him lands of 200 hectares. Another notable was now Sergeant Theobold- a stalwart of the AC

seconded to the army, he had conspicuously held the ranks of the musketeers together, preventing them from breaking ranks to loot, while the battle still waged.

To him was awarded the rank of Staff Sergeant and a prized Thompson sub-machine gun.

After Forwin had finished, I stepped forward and invited all to feast on the roasting meats and drink from the barrels we had brought down.

They would have a day's rest before marching to Nottingham.

Haddon Hold C&C 1200hrs

"Right on time." said Sonja, as Alice delivered the tray laden with scones, cream and jam. "Now how do you take your tea?"

The satellite photos showed that they had salvaged just over three hundred men from the battle of Grimsby. Hopefully they would spread the word- that the prey had become the predators.

Westport, New Zealand

"Thanks Doris", I said, taking the package- a memory stick containing the video of today's battle. Simon had quickly edited the satellite and hidden camera footage and shipped the video down-time to Westport, where I had returned after feasting with the victorious troops. We could review the battle tonight- I had even had a projector and screen sent down, as normally this was a high-tech free zone.

Now it was time for a lesson on how to operate some of this equipment, for our new arrivals. They were going to need a crash-course in catching up with technology forty years ahead of their time. All to help them recreate the technology of their younger days and hopefully do it better.

It's often said that hindsight is a wonderful thing- they would soon have a chance to use that hindsight...

"This is the sort of plant that you will be working with", I said. "The principles are no different to the equipment that you have used on projects already, but they represent 40+ years of advancement on the gear of your day. We have a growing pool of skilled operators and you need to think of how to best use them." I started the first DVD, a promotional video on excavators.

They would have three months of this, with the pace intensifying as the anti-geriatric treatment did its work.

"That should keep them entertained for a week or so" said Jenny. "Doris can sort out their domestic arrangements- I don't want the other Haddon staff doing too many jumps, so she is the logical choice."

“Have her watch out for some of those old sods.” said Sue, “At least one of them is a nasty old sleaze.”

“Thanks for the heads-up” said Jenny, “I’m sure Doris won’t put up with any bullshit.”

“That girl is nearly at E2.” I said. “I think any arse-grabbers are up for a nasty surprise.”

“Just remember”, said Jenny, “One of this lot is going to be found dead in the crash. Expect trouble.”

“How is the bus driver doing?” asked Sharon.

“He is OK- young and single- no family back in the 20th- and I can always use another driver,” I said. “He can take one of the circuit runs driving the local’s bus.”

“They can get used to Doris pushing them around- that will be a gentle introduction to Sarah West, chief engineer”, said Jenny.

“That will certainly ruffle a few tail feathers.” I said. “No doubt as will John running construction operations. Tough shit.”

“Now watching them bump heads with John- that should be amusing.” said Sharon.

At 1800, we left the new arrivals to organizing their own dinner and headed back to our house in Doris’s Land Cruiser. It would be a simple dinner- reheated lasagna and salads, then off to watch the video of the battle.

The video started with satellite footage of the troops deploying. The IR showed the men forming up into two ranks, as the artillery set up their mortars and rockets. The enemy could clearly be seen as an advancing group. As they drew together, the first splashes of artillery fire could be seen bursting toward their rear.

Flashes from the left flank and the woods showed the snipers and Haddon Rifles at work. The advancing foe slowed- undecided as to where to advance to, but the killing rockets and bombs forced them forward onto the rifles.

“Stuck between a rock and a hard place” said Jenny. “The ranks look steady.”

“Here we go”, I said, as they approached the 300 metre mark. “Good volleys- that’s really hurting them.”

“Look- they have broken.” I said- “Just as well, the mortars must be almost out of bombs.” The cavalry could be seen advancing and the picture switched to a local camera, with the other half of the screen being a satellite overview. With clouds smoke from the mortar bombs and rockets obscuring the battlefield, we needed IR to see what was going on.

“That’s the gate”, said Jenny, as the IR signature of the fleeing masses winked out.

“Good disciple,” said Sharon, as we watched the cavalry and advancing troops systematically mop up the rest.

“Yes, they have done well.” I said. “Only a couple broke ranks on the advance. The cavalry have herded the survivors into the gate rather well- I guess they are wondering where all the foe got to.”

“That one was a set-piece battle, if ever I saw one- the next will be more uncertain”, said Jenny.

Grimsby Area
0800hrs

Their wagons now much lighter, the column set off towards Nottingham. With the cavalry in the lead, scouting ahead and guarding the flanks, the riflemen marched behind the wagon train carrying only their rifles, ammunition pouches and small packs.

Their camp tonight would be halfway to the village of Lincoln- one quarter of the way to Nottingham, where they would meet with the re-supply column. And two new weapons.

Westport, New Zealand
Haddon time, minus 77 days

One week into our specialist's training, things are going reasonably well. They have mostly accepted their lot and most are really looking forward to the challenges ahead. One or two have even thanked me for bringing them here. They don't know about the anti-geriatric treatment yet, but most have noticed feeling better than they have in years and commented on this. As with most, they have put this down to the new environment.

They are starting to get the idea that there is no going back. For most of them, anyway.

Sheffield
1400hrs

Mike eased open the throttle and the small Bagnall locomotive moved off on its first run down the new Sheffield to Chesterfield line, hauling a load of wool for the looms of Chesterfield- along with a guards van carrying Mike's fellow steam enthusiasts and a keg of Bakewell Bitter.

These men cared little for battles and war. Steam and track were what really mattered and this was what they had come down-time to do. To build railways and work with engines straight out of the works, as opposed to those restored from the scrap heaps. Traction and stationary engines were all very well but rail was the real thing.

The locals they were training would soon be running this railway, but not today.

New Zealand
Bay of Islands Colony

With a last great heave, the first new longboat slid down the path of log rollers and into the bay. Although a few of the old greybeards shook their heads, this boat incorporated a few new features, such a centerboard that would let it point far higher into the wind and a completely new style of sails, doubling its speed. The boats of the Green Men had more than proved that these changes to the traditional design were well worth doing.

With no foe here to do battle with, the young men needed some ordeal to prove themselves. Exploring their new home and the Pacific would do that- and they would find foe to raid and battle in a few years.

Haddon Hold Gate Operations

Tom shouldered his pack and waited for the gate to appear.

“We will meet you at the first checkpoint in about fourteen days” said Sonja, as she keyed in the coordinates. “Have a good trip.”

Tom strode through the gate, to meet his Norse friends waiting on the other side. They would spend the next two years exploring ninth century New Zealand by boat and foot.

Sonja closed the portal and turned her attention to a flashing light that indicated a message had arrived in a drop box. She opened the box and removed the envelope addressed to the Haddon IC. It contained the usual data stick, which Sonja plugged into a nearby computer.

Her eyes widened as she read the message from Jane and immediately put a call through to Jenny.

“Jenny- I’ve just received an urgent message from Jane. Maxine wants in. OK, my quarters in five minutes.”

Privateer Heavy Frigate 'Jolly Roger'
Low Earth Orbit
0800hrs HST

Greetings- I'm Elvira (1). I started life recently as ELVIRA- Emotive Linguistic & Visual Response Algorithm, residing as the management and interfacing software, in a massively parallel processor system.

My twin and mirror lives several hundred meters under the surface of the planet Transit, while I (mostly) reside in a low earth orbit over the Sheffield region of 9th century England.

I have been appointed archivist (a wise choice, if I may say so myself.) and have been asked to take over the job of writing up this and a few other adventures. I have decided to leave the current tale as it is, bad grammar and all, as that is how the players speak. In the words of the boss- if you don't like it- get stuffed.

I will, with the full approval of Commander Wayne Jamieson, the previous chronicler- continue in much the same style- apart from writing in the 'eye of god' mode. Quite apt, as I orbit the heavens above.

This work is a distillation out of a collection of personal journals- paper and electronic, as well as my personal observations through an ever-growing sensor suite and, of course, the narrations of the individuals in this tale.

The story resumes at the time of my first arrival over England. Word had just been received of the impending arrival of a close associate- Maxine.

"Best get Wayne back here pronto" said Jenny. "He is going to want to hear the news. I will go to Transit and pick up Maxie personally- Signal Jane to bring her down at the next available window."

"I checked the timings- first window is in 43 minutes, so you had best call John and hand over command", said Sonja.

Jenny unclipped her phone and started making calls, as she strode towards the movements hanger.

Jenny walked into the saloon, just after the pre-dinner drinks had started. "Drink up Wayne- we are off to Transit ASAP."

"What's the rush?" he asked.

"Maxie's coming in from the cold."

Wayne drained his pint. "Ok- let's move.- carry on folks and Doris- if Uncle Pervie pinches your bum once more, you have my permission to break his arm or any other bones you see fit."

'I was planning to', thought Doris to herself.

The first of the scouts made contact with the supply trains and immediately dispatched a rider back to their commander. Forty minutes later, the rider made contact with Forwin and passed on the news that they were near the end of their march. Forwin blew the whistle signal for the company Centurions and relayed the information. As the word spread down the column, the pace started to pick up and Forwin signaled to the lead to maintain their previous pace. No need to arrive tired.

They would need their strength tomorrow.

Transit
'The Mansion'
Poolside, 1400hrs Local Time

"I can't tell you how great it feels to be off Earth," said Maxine, already on her third drink.

"You will be safe enough here," said Jenny, "but if you decide to stay, The Order will be on your tail soon enough- and they will want answers as to how you managed to disappear."

"I'm not going back- I've had 65 years to think over the offer you proposed to me in London and I want out.- that was even before I was advised of my arranged marriage." Maxine screwed up her face and took a large swig of her gin & tonic. "It was even worth walking away-or running- from all the assets I had built up."

"Its wise person who knows when to cut their losses and run", Wayne said.

"Anyway, I'm now penniless, so I believe the usual terms are a ten-year indenture?" Maxine said.

"That's the usual deal," said Jenny, "and most started that way, however, all the terms really mean is that you can't opt out for at least ten years. As long as you follow our code, you live as you want- In your case there is no going back, as you well know."

Jane arrived back at the pool. "All secure from the earth end. You may have been watched but were not followed into the safe house."

"Well, Maxie- how do you want to do this?" asked Jenny.

"A clean break- we stage my death, as we have talked about" Maxine answered.

"Just disappearing would be easier", said Jane.

"No" said Maxine, "The Order will never accept one of its own as missing- they just keep searching. They need to positively ID a body and they have all of us on a DNA database.

"I thought that would be the case, so I took the liberty of cloning you several years back. If The Order is as thorough as you have told us, this has to be faultless, so we need to do a clone retrans and dump your current body- mind-wiped clean, of course." Jenny paused to think for a moment. "We should stage an accident- I believe you hold a pilot's license, so a light aircraft crash should be the way to go."

“It would be a lot easier to dump the cloned body,” said Jane.

Jenny shook her head, “No, it would probably work but little details would give that away to a good forensic pathologist. Inconsistent gut contents, lack of wear on teeth and joints- even self-rejuvenators have a little- unblemished skin, lack of calluses, absence of trace contaminants and toxins. I would try the clone swap on most police departments but not The Order. That lot are as devious and suspicious as us.”

“Jenny has done her homework,” Maxine said. “With a species as hardy as ourselves and one so obsessed with vendetta, every death is put under the microscope.”

“Then our next stop is up-time,” said Wayne. “Jane- what is our window?”

“Next trip to the 52nd is in two days”, said Jane. “Pack your tanning oil and shorts.”

“What do you mean ‘your’?” said Wayne.

Jenny grinned. “You will be aware that clones don’t come cheap. Gina named her price, so pack some Bluff oysters and vitamin E along with your clothes.”

“Sold off like a bloody bull. Which means I must be up for a refit too.”

“Poor darling,” said Jenny, voice dripping honey, “The things we make you do.”

“Never mind, I’m sure Maxie can find some way of making up to me for this ordeal.”

Jenny and Jane grabbed each side of his deckchair and flung him into the pool.

Westport

Haddon time minus three months

Doris took the hand, trapped the thumb, turned and brought the arm down just so...

The scream of pain brought people running from all directions. As the first of the concerned group reached the door, their looks of worry faded and turned to amusement.

Doris stood over the writhing figure, Webley pistol in her hand. James ‘Uncle Pervey’ Lucas clutched his broken arm, howling with pain.

“I warned you about grabbing my bum” Doris yelled “and I’ve seen you grabbing at Eva’s young daughters- and them volunteering to come down here and cook and clean. If I see you touch any women uninvited, I’m going to put one of these through your fuckin’ head. CLEAR?”

He nodded vigorously in agreement.

Doris holstered her pistol as Sue arrived carrying the medkit. Taking in the scene, she quickly realized what has happened. No sympathy for the wounded party here- everyone had seen this coming.

With a voice cultivated from years of working weekends in the Emergency Department, Sue ordered James to make his way to the surgery.

“Where’s the doctor?” whined the patient. “I’m the doctor today,” Sue said. “Now get your shirt off and get on the bed, I’m going to set that arm- a clean break by the look of it. If you want to keep breathing- you need to know that *she shot and killed* the last person that bothered her that much.

A few had now gathered around medical to enjoy the commentary coming from inside, as Sue worked.

“Don’t be a baby. It’s a clean break and it could have your neck.”

“Of course it bloody hurts.”

“If I give you pain relief you won’t learn your lesson”

“If you don’t bloody well shut up you will be finding out that a Taser hurts a damned sight more than a broken arm.

They didn’t know what a Taser was but were hoping to find out.

Nottingham
0500 hrs local time.

Forwin awoke before the dawn, as was his habit. His orderly handed over a mug full of hot soup, as he exited his tent. “A good day for a battle, sir”

“Aye”, said Forwin, looking about the camp. His keen eyesight saw sentries and pickets patrolling, ancillaries cooking, tending horses and going about their fatigues. Seeing movement, the first of his officers made their way to his tent.

Edmund saluted as he approached.

“How goes the new artillery” asked Forwin?

“Well, Sir” Edmund said, “Sir Martin and Sir Andrew will be here to advise on its use, come the battle.”

“You have its measure?” Forwin asked.

“I believe so Sir, I was involved in the proofing and testing and understand the principle of the weapon- but on the range is one thing- the battlefield another.”

“Well said, Centurion” answered Forwin. “The morning will tell.”

As the first rays of dawn’s light broke, the engineers were hard at work erecting scaffolding. As the sun broke the tree line, the tower was already six meters high and shielded by a framework

covered in corrugated steel sheeting. While the riggers worked, the Haddon Rifles snipers kept a watch on the city 200 meters away, ready to take out any archers. In another two hours the watchtower would be complete and the battle would start.

Transit
'The Mansion'
Poolside, 1930hrs Local Time

Daisy and Sara arrived with the dinner trolley- the usual selection of salads, vegetables and meat to be barbecued.

While Wayne took charge of his domain- the Weber- Jane plied the servants with wine. They were slowly adjusting to life on Transit and for the better part, liking it- even if Wilson the butler disapproved. He was weakening and had been seen (by all-seeing- me- Elvira.) to be wearing modern Adidas shoes, when none of the regular staff were around.

After a couple of glasses and a few giggles, the girls were dismissed for the night.

"I forgot," said Wayne. "Maxie- Elvira- Elvira- Maxie."

Taking my cue, I projected a holo. (That's me- I only ever come to the party when invited- even if I'm listening in.)

"Hi Maxine. If you need anything here- just call me by name and I jump out of the lamp. Down in the ninth, my twin sister does all the work, so just ask for her."

Maxine was taken back for a moment, not being used to high-tech like the rest of us.

"Elvira is the latest addition to our family," Jenny said. "You are seeing a holographic image of her."

Jenny left the explanation at that, which I feel is about right for a new arrival.

"Dinners ready," said Wayne. "two chicken breasts, well-done, one salmon fillet and two eye fillet steaks bloody as hell."

Maxine got up, a bit wobbly from an afternoon's drinking. "Thank you darling- you remembered."

Nottingham
0700hrs local time.

Forwin rode up to the cannon, the infantry waiting to their rear. "Centurions- you may commence bombardment in thirty minutes, once we have encircled the city. Start the assault as soon as you feel ready"

"Aye, sir," said Edmund and Alfred together.

Alfred waved at the tower and raised three fingers and a hand, signifying thirty minutes. The spotter gave a thumbs-up and lowered a line. Alfred waved to an orderly, who ran over and hooked on a billycan of hot cocoa.

Marty took a last sighting along the gun's barrel and pronounced it ready. With that done he started to recheck his four cap & ball pistols and his grenades. This latest new weapon was a stick grenade with a locally made dynamite charge. Andy would stay with the cannon, but Marty- his advisor's job done, would join the infantry in the assault.

The first round went high, scything through a roof behind the gates. Alfred ordered the elevation of the second gun lowered and the chain-shot tore through the picket gate, ripping a large chunk away and partially demolishing a house behind it. The troops cheered and jeered as the next shots tore through the palisades.

Edmund and his sergeants had their work cut out holding the infantry back, remembering that the plan was not to assault until the artillery had completed its job.

With the gate smashed into kindling, the troops were ready to go. Edmund drew his .45 pistol and yelled "I will shoot the first person to advance before I give the word."

His NCOs, lined up alongside him, pistols and carbines at the ready, to reinforce the order.

Meanwhile, Alfred's gunners continued to smash the city, while Edmund's snipers poured a steady stream of fire at anyone who showed themselves. The gates down, they pounded the surrounding area with mortar bombs and rockets, setting fire to the north of the city.

With the artillery rounds finally exhausted the signal flare was fired and the infantry were finally given the signal to go, advancing in a well-ordered line on the shattered city.

The sweep started, pushing the remaining population across the city, ahead of our guns and bayonets. So far it was small groups, with no-one making a determined stand. If they dropped their weapons, they were allowed to run.

Marty spotted the movement out of the corner of his eye and brought his Dragoon up and fired. Another swordsman dropped. Just ahead, a section had stopped advancing and was firing on a small hall.

Seeking out their section leader, Marty asked "What's the holdup?"

"We have a group waiting to storm- one man down with an arrow, trying to enter," said the squad leader. "We are awaiting a grenadier."

Marty looked about and took a breaching charge from his satchel. "Move your men there, there and there," he said, pointing.

Marty moved to the door and fastened the charge. He pulled the igniter strip and dashed for cover. As soon as the entranceway was blown open, he flung a stick grenade into the building.

With the ‘crump’ of the explosive, Marty was running and rolled through the door. Coming up with a pistol in each hand, he fired through the acrid smoke at a shape in the room, then at three more as they rose from the floor.

The building clear, he whistled ‘all clear’ to the infantry section leader, then reloaded the fired chambers.

Steve caught a flash of movement and spun his rifle about, to take them on the bayonet. He pulled the blade up a fraction of a second from spitting the hapless victim.

“Move to the west,” he yelled at the terrified woman, pointing. “We don’t make war against women and children- NOW MOVE.”

To his left, Steve caught sight of an archer and in one motion brought the rifle up and fired. As the archer dropped from the roof, he snapped down the action and reloaded. Another archer appeared down a lane and Steve fired again, the heavy 12mm bullet dropping him in his tracks.

Reloading again, he waved for the rest of his section to move up and start clearing the buildings.

Forwin drew his saber and ordered the advance. His horsemen moved forward at the walk. At 75 meters he cried “Yield!” and the refugees broke for the cover of the woods.

None of them got there.

For the rest of the day, this was the role of the cavalry. The fleeing locals either surrendered and were herded to the holding pen or were slaughtered.

Edmund rounded the long hall, his Thompson gun leveled and a group of women and children broke into a run at the sight of him. He turned to his men and signaled ‘hold your fire’. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a trooper raise his rifle and carefully aim. “Hold I say!” he yelled at the rifleman, who ignored him and fired, hitting an old woman slower than the rest. Furious, Edmund swung his gun and fired a short burst at the soldier, knocking him to his knees. Turning on the rest of the men he barked- “When I give an order- obey it.”

By 1400hrs the city was effectively taken.

The troops had mostly followed their orders to the letter. Anyone resisting was killed, while quarter was given to those who offered no resistance.

The refugees were expecting the usual fate- rape, death or thralldom for them and their children. When a group of soldiers arrived in the now dreaded camouflage clothing, they expected the worst.

John looked over the defeated masses. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught Simon's signal that the sound system was on.

"PEOPLE OF NOTTINGHAM," John addressed the crowd. "You have choices. Live as Thralls, swear allegiance to myself- Or walk the wizard's gate and live under Lord Hammar.

I will give you until the sun arises tomorrow to decide."

The prisoners would spend an uncomfortable night in a barbed wire enclosure under guard while they decided.

The inhabitants of Nottingham were baffled. All about troops stood with bayonets fixed and rifles at the ready, but there was no rape or looting- nor even any drunkenness. While troops might mutter about rape and pillage, steely-eyed officers and NCOs walked about stopping such talk at a glance.

Even the legendary Romans did not have this discipline.

A runner jogged up to the commander's tent and reported in "Sir- the south of the city is now secure."

"Right- let's get the fires out," said John. He unclipped his radio and called the awaiting bulldozers and the engineer section. "Start cutting a firebreak- let's try and save the rest of those hovels."

Transit

'The Mansion'

Poolside, 2130hrs Local Time

"Shall we retire to the saloon bar?" asked Jane.

"Good idea" said Jenny

Maxie had seen the two moons now and knew beyond all doubt that this place was not on earth.

Elvira must have called Wilson, as he had arrived at the Saloon ahead of us, with the port and cheese trolley.

Maxie was at the stage known as 'howling at the moons' - as a new chum she had just accepted that for the first time she was on another planet. The twin moons usually sorted that out.

We had allowed a couple of days for Maxie to run wild- that was bound to happen once she was off the chain from The Order.

The Order was many times our numbers, but we had soundly thrashed them in a faction fight thirty years ago. They were smart and tough, but being what they were, could not fight as a disciplined coherent unit- as we could and did- so very well. If they knew that Maxie had joined us, that fight would be on again. That would not happen.

We had the precious genetic material now.

And Maxie has the Green Chartreuse bottle.

Westport

Haddon time minus three months

Sonja laughed as she heard the latest reports of happenings at the camp.

“Do I need to put the frighteners on him?” she asked

“I think Doris has already done a splendid job of that”, said Sue.

“OK” said Sonja. “So how did the rest react?”

“They thought he got what was coming to him- we have found that he had a reputation of being a dirty old pervert,” said Sue.

“He had better get over his malfunction or he will be taking a mid-winter swim in Switzerland.” said Sonja.

Transit

‘The Mansion’

Salon bar, 0230hrs Local Time

“Let’s see the new village” said Maxie.

“Great idea. Let’s continue the party at my new house.” Jane enthusiastically agreed.

“I seem to be a bit too pissed for a drive” Wayne said.

“Well I’m good.” said Elvira

“Who the hell taught you to drive?” Wayne asked.

“I had Steve rig up a Beemer for my control” Elvira answered. “If you lot can stagger down to the 7-series in the garage, I will run you up to Jane’s house, which is the only one mostly completed.”

Gathering up bottles and glasses, we were off.

Jane had to steer them to the garage, she having been the only one to have used it recently. In the garage, there were an assortment of luxury cars- Beemer’s, Merc’s and a pink Rolls that had to belong to Sonja.

After a refill, we were away at speed following the new concrete road to our village. Elvira was projecting an image of a chauffeur into the driver’s seat, as she sped us through the night. As the contents of our glasses ran low, we arrived at Jane’s home ‘Crystalwater’- a local interpretation of Fallingwater.

Jane had reworked the local geography and had diverted a stream to the site- the building was, from the outside, very similar to the original- with a few refinements.

In our much warmer climate there were outdoor heated spa pools, with the stream and waterfalls feeding cooler plunge pools. The trees were evergreen here and the plantings were tropical, thriving with a bit of irrigation. Jane had captured the spirit of Fallingwater, while adapting it for the local environment, building in the best of modern conveniences and correcting the problems of the original structure- one built well ahead of it's time.

The sheer beauty of the place snapped us out of the fog of alcohol.

We took a quick tour of the interior. Jane and Sonja had surpassed their previous best in decorating and fitting out this palace- there was no other word to describe it.

Maxine clapped her hands delightedly. "Jane darling- I approve. Once I have earned some credit, I *MUST* get you and Sonja to design a home for me."

High praise indeed.

"All the controls are voice, but you will find manual controls in most of the rooms, should you require privacy- otherwise I turn the lights on, control the temperature and stock the bar" explained Elvira. "We have servants available, but I need a bit of notice to arrange them- Sonja has yet to recruit a few more to service the village."

"It's hard to find help of your caliber Elvira," Wayne said.

"And don't forget it, boss," she answered. "You will find champagne and glasses at the balcony bar- My algorithms predict one of those toast moments about now"

"An 1887 Moet. My birth year." Maxine exclaimed, trying to throw her arms around all of us. "I should have joined up years ago."

"It's never too late to join us," said Jenny. "We knew you would join when the time was right."

Westport

Haddon time minus three months

With only a few hours left in this time, the house that Will had built was almost ready to gate. Four concrete foundations supported steel pillars topped with steel beams, making a frame for two high capacity cranes.

Underneath the house was a lifting frame, attached to the cranes by cables. In a few hours, a gate would be opened under the house which would sever its pilings and allow the house to be lowered onto a new foundation that waited at Transit.

In a smaller scale operation, the outbuildings had already been relocated to the new site, and trees and shrubs had been planted to match the site here.

The only big change would be the weather.

Transit
'Crystalwater'
0400hrs local time

All the others having retired, Wayne and Maxine were alone on the lower balcony. With their metabolisms cranked up, the night's alcohol consumption had been mostly burned off.

"I have long suspected there is something very different about you" Maxine stated, looking intensely at Wayne.

"Well, you don't meet too many time-tripping, long-lifer pirates on old earth, I suppose," he replied.

Maxine moved closer, taking his hands. "No- I smell it on you- you aren't entirely human- I think you have the blood of my people."

"It's true that I know nothing of my ancestry- we can have a genetic assay done up-time" Wayne said, intrigued by this revelation.

"It's easier than that", said Maxine, kissing him deeply.

As they broke apart, Maxine said "I'm almost certain now, but to be sure I need a small blood sample"

"You may take it in the traditional manner if you wish" said Wayne- thus telling Maxine that he trusted her unconditionally.

Tears welling in her eyes, Maxine pulled him closer and gently nipped his throat.

Elvira was giving a running commentary to Jenny and Jane- now both totally sober and sweating heavily from the immediate effects of Aldetox.

"Their respective vitals are off the scale-[holographic chart projected] I'm picking up a massive pheromone release from Maxie- analyzing- yes- it contains organic hypnotics. Yes- Maxine confirms that Wayne is definitely of her direct bloodline.

Switching back to spycam..."

"I'll be damned," said Wayne. "We really have to do a full assay now. How did you know?"

"As you know, my sense of smell is far more advanced than H.Sapiens- crudely put, I'm up there with a German Shepherd.- and I've killed people for saying less", she answered, laughing. "I can differentiate by smell and taste. I suspected when we first met, as you didn't react as you should have to pheromones I put out. If you were a normal human you would have fallen for me."

“Who says I didn’t?”

“When I took that blood you offered, I used a portion to convert into a tailored pheromone that should have had you totally mesmerized. Only another vampire could have resisted.”

“I know- I resisted to see that I could- and I did- But I don’t want to.”

“And I want you all the more because I can’t make you do my bidding- but what of your lady?”

“If I know Jenny- she is watching us.”

“There were so many little clues” said Jane. “The fact that he lives on and thrives on an 80% protein diet- that raw meat eating thing- plus some of the events that he survived pre-enhancements.”

“You were his lover for some years, so I don’t need to remind you about the proverbial Three-Balled Billy-Goat either,” said Jenny.

“I cut video and sound, but look at these vitals” added Elvira. “That sort of activity would kill a normal human. I haven’t seen those sorts of vitals since you put a pickup in-”

“OK Elvira- privacy,” said Jenny.

“Sorry boss.”

“No problem, but some of us get touchy about such things- we’re a funny bunch,” explained Jenny.

“It’s a bit more ‘anything goes’ up at the 52nd, where your twin is taking that pair in a couple of days,” said Jane.

“If anything, they will put on an orgy for your analysis.” said Jenny. “And I don’t think I told you but they have three full AI minds up there for you/your sister to get to know.”

“Cool.”

At dawn there was a tap at the door and Jenny came in carrying a laden breakfast tray, Jane following behind with another.

“Big day today- the House gets lifted in three hours time,” said Jenny.

Behind Jenny, Jane winked at Maxine, to let her know that everything was good.

“I think you will like The House” Wayne told Maxine. “Now that’s a breakfast. Fillet steak done blue, with a runny egg on top.”

Elvira's holo appeared- this time in a French maid's costume. She had started to vary her clothing to match the circumstances nowadays.

"That's me, Boss."

"Elvira," Wayne asked, "Does your transmitter also work as a pickup?"

"Ahh- I refuse to answer on the grounds that I may get myself into deep shit?"

"I will take that as a yes, but feed me like this and you are forgiven."

**Nottingham
Prisoner compound
0530**

John had stayed on site overnight to supervise the captives. With the aid of a shotgun microphone he had been listening to the undercurrents in the holding compound. Forwin's men had fallen back to their camp and the AC troopers had taken over guard duty.

The field kitchen was busy preparing cauldrons of soup and baking bread to feed the survivors of the rout of Nottingham. After they had eaten breakfast, John would separate them out according to how they had chosen their fate.

Before that, there were a few small administrative issues to deal with. Unlike after the first battle, nobody had broken ranks and the only disciplinary case had been dealt with on the spot by a Centurion. It was pleasing to see rewards being given out for incidents like a soldier rescuing a family from a burning building and local medic taking an arrow refusing to leave the side of a wounded trooper.

John could hear Forwin's amplified voice preparing the locals for decision time. Time to get into the 'Lord of the Manor' Character.

John stood on the platform erected for him. "You have been given choices. Does anyone here not find an acceptable choice?"

Two men strode forward and started yelling Norse obscenities at John. Forwin drew his pistol and shot them both, the AC troopers raising their carbines in readiness.

"Two stupid men," said John. "Do we have any more stupid men?" Nobody moved or spoke.

"Good- you don't look like stupid people. Those who wish to stay here- move to the green gate. Those who wish to take the wizards path go to the blue gate."

The captives started to move to the respective gates, the blue gate leading to a large tent, the gate within- out of sight.

As the local people were escorted back into their town, to their amazement, they found it mostly intact and their stock had been herded into enclosures. They would find their lives improving

soon, as the builders and engineers started arriving. Even more unbelievable, men, women and children injured in the battle were returned to them, their wounds treated and healing already.

Sonja, who had been overseeing the gate operation, ordered the tents and equipment packed up. She walked over to John's Landcruiser and advised him- "That's a wrap"

"That was a real slick push," said John. "What's the word from NZ?"

"Hammar has the newbie's sorted and can handle any local trouble" Sonja advised. "Most of them were so overwhelmed they won't be any bother and he knows who the trouble makers are likely to be. What's the final butcher's bill?"

"For the campaign- Two KIA, 8 Wounded- all but two minor and 3 executed, for a body count of 3,641.

"That's about as good as we can expect."

Transit Northern Hemisphere Cordoned Zone

"We must be fairly close to the pole" Jane said, taking the jacket Wayne offered.

"About 800 kilometers," said Jenny- "We couldn't put that house down in a subtropical area- it had to be somewhere with wind, rain and wild weather- just like on the coast."

"It was an outstanding idea putting most of this planet off-limits, to allow for retro-terraforming" said Wayne. "The landscaping job looks just like I imagined it should- the NZ alpine grasses, the shrubs and trees twisted by the winds. It's a real Wuthering Heights."

"I believe we have a name," said Sharon.

Underneath the house, clanging and banging could be heard over the wind, as the services were connected and the house was secured to its new foundations.

It looked like as if it had always been here.

The 'Jolly Roger' Low Tellus Orbit

"Stand by for gating," said Elvira, as she threw the Jolly Roger 3100 years ahead in time and about 5000 light years in space.

"I'm being painted," said Elvira- "IFF request coming in- damn- they are sharp."

"Whatever you do, don't power any of the weaponry up- Open an AV channel and squawk Bravo Juliet Romeo 4-7," said Wayne.

A holo of a brassy-looking woman, with short curly blond hair and dressed in black leather flashed above the viewplate. “Welcome to the big ‘T’ Jolly Roger- it’s good to have you back Commander Jamieson. You may start your descent planetside.”

“A pleasure, as always Teena,” said Wayne. “Take us down Elvira.”

“In the pipe, touchdown in 15 minutes, synchronizing to local time- environment matching commenced,” said Elvira. “For your information, I detect eight active sensors tracking and ten high-energy signatures near those.”

“There will be more,” said Jenny. “That’s one reason why this is such a safe place. They are the friendliest folks around and pack enough firepower to melt three Imperial carrier groups.”

“The flight path optimizes any AAA fire too,” said Elvira. “This looks very like it was planned by the Skyhook software in my sister”

“It is- we only buy the best,” Wayne said.

With a slight shudder, which indicated the gravity plane was now off, the ship settled on its stabilizer’s.

By now, Elvira was fully engaged in conversation with three other Minds- her first exposure to other sentient computers and had arranged sharing of their local sensor/AV network, so we would be in contact, just like at our homes.

A groundcar pulled up to the open hatchway and two red-headed tweens, a boy and a girl, leapt out and wrapped themselves about Wayne.

“Did you bring us presents, Uncle Captain?” they noisily asked, having previously covered him with kisses.

“In the bags- when we get the bags loaded and home,” Wayne replied, smiling.

In record time, the bags- mostly Sonja’s collection of suitcases- were loaded and a robot freighter had picked up the cargo pod and had trundled off.

The groundcar being set in motion, the twins began a non-stop barrage of questions.

“How long are you staying?”

“Did you get the pirate treasure you promised?”

“How is your project going?”

“Do you have any new Holo’s?”

“OK, OK, OK,” said Wayne. “All in good time.-firstly- I’m here for a refit, as is my friend Maxine. Jenny and Jane will be here for a week and Sonja will be staying for as long as my refit takes.

The treasure is in our cargo, I have lots of ancient video and holos from the project and Transit.

The project- thank you for asking- goes well ahead of schedule and as your mother and family will want to know all about it- I will do a presentation tonight.”

Wayne continued, “Maxine- these two hellions are Beowulf and Grendel, Gina’s youngest. Don’t get into games of chance with them- they take after their great-grandmother, who won her first husbands at cards. This is Maxine-a good friend of ours, who has just joined our clan and yes, she is the one with the special genetic heritage that the entire clinic has been talking about lately.”

The twins studied Maxine briefly and decided that she had their provisional approval.

Within a few minutes, the villa was in sight and a small crowd had gathered around our stopped vehicle, Gina having used her perquisites to get to the front.

“They are sort of hero’s here,” said Jane to Maxie, as the crowd carried Wayne and Jenny off, with Sonja and Maxine plus the luggage following up. “You probably don’t know the whole story, but this whole thing got started when Wayne, aided by Jenny, rescued Gina from a starship crash in our time.”

Nottingham

0500hrs local time.

The day after the battle

Forwin gathered his officers. “We move out after breakfast, marching on the AC barracks, where we will set up camp. All luggage will be carried on the wagons, so the men will travel with day packs. It will be a long march, which should drain excess sprits and we will feast for three days on arrival. After this, the irregulars will disperse to their homes.

You may tell them that news once we have passed the half-way mark. That is all, men- now to your stations.”

With their baggage loaded onto the trucks of the engineers, along with the lightly injured, the column moved out and the AC troops moved in to take control of the shocked city.

And protect it from those who might move into this now weakened stronghold.

The Bywater Inn
2000 hrs

“That was one of the least messy high to low-tech conquests I have witnessed,” said Marty.

“I thought it was a slaughter,” said Andy.

“You haven’t seen Imperial Marines with high-energy weapons taking out a capital city defended with muzzle-loading firearms,” Marty said. “Stay with us and I can arrange that to happen- today was as surgical and clean as you can get.”

“That fight was real tame compared to the battle we fought just after getting here”, John added. “Word of that slaughter, as you call it will get around fast and now other cities will fall without bloodshed. It’s a victory in the longer term.”

“Hadn’t thought about it like that,” said Andy.

“That’s OK,” said Marty. “This is your second war- I’ve had about forty.”

“John- I was looking for you” said Andrea, who had just walked in. “I have a message in from up-time. You are in command until further notice- it looks like the Head Shed are held up in the 52nd”

“Thanks Andrea- same old- same old. What are you drinking?”

“That would be a lager, boss.”

“Shop. Two Stella’s.”

The drinks promptly arrive and John asked “Just who is this Maxine, anyway?”

Marty and Andrea looked at each other and Andrea started to tell the story.

“Maxine goes way back. She isn’t one of us, as such- but Jenny, Sonja and Wayne have spent quite a bit of time with her in the first half of the 20th century. She is one of the natural long-lifers and from what I have heard; they are a sub-species of your basic H. Sapiens stock. Those long lifers are all part of a tightly controlled order and I believe that now she wants out.”

“So the old conspiracy theories about shadow ruling elite, alumni and suchlike were correct?” asked John.

“”Not really”, said Andrea. “All planets have those same legends- That’s just ordinary human paranoia. Although with all good legends there is always an element of truth.”

Hilltop Marshalling Yard

0100 hrs

As soon as the gate opened, Andy swung the communications boom through and within a few seconds the connectivity light was glowing green, showing that it had been hooked up on the other side. The old system of flags or flares had been replaced by a new system designed by Simon and used pneumatics, solving the problems caused by trying to move electrons in some coherent form through a gate field.

As the communications were being established, a large chain and shackle were thrown through the gate, which was promptly connected to the winch cable.

With two green lights on the board, the winch-man started to take up the slack. The heavy hawser lifted from the ground and the heavily laden wagons started to slowly roll through the gate. As the last wagons rolled past, Andy jogged alongside, grabbed the brake lever and pushed it down, bringing the air brakes on. That done, he radioed 'all clear' to Bob in the control room and dragged over the fuel line, coupling it to the hose that had been passed through the gate on a boom. "Fuel on," Andy radioed to control.

Bob unlocked and pushed the 'Start Transfer' button, which signaled the Transit crew to start pumping 200 tonnes of diesel into the holding tanks.

From the stock crate came an enraged bellow and a crashing of hooves against the wooden crate. Steve carefully lifted the crate off the flatbed wagon and onto an awaiting truck. John climbed up and looked down into the crate, leaping back as snapping teeth narrowly missed his fingers.

"Where in the hell did you find that possessed son-of-a-bitch donkey from hell?" said John.

"Argentina- he's just a big softie really," said Debbie, who had just returned from a bloodstock purchasing trip up-time. "He is just a bit upset from translation shock- isn't he great."

"What are you going to do with that Pit Fiend?" asked John. "Not friggin' seaside rides I hope."

"He is breeding stock- I'm going to introduce these people to the mule," said Debbie. "If you want to breed good mules, you need a good Jack Donkey."

"Well, that bastard is bigger and meaner than most of the horses here. I thought you tranked them before you transhipped?"

"I did, but I've never dosed a donkey before."

"I have a feeling you couldn't trank that sod with a 14 pound sledgehammer. Where do you want him?"

"Haddon stables- I'll go with you and unload him."

"Maybe we can lure him out with a side of beef," John said.

Recovery Room Boondock Rejuvenation Clinic

“Don’t try and talk or move yet,” Wayne warned Maxine. “It will take some time to adjust to your new body. Don’t panic- you will be up and running soon enough. Now- lie very still and start wiggling your fingers on your right hand...”

“I have a feeling that Maxine will adjust to a new body as easily as Wayne does- look at him- who else would be up and sitting in a chair and talking two hours after a transfer,” said Jenny.

“The DNA assay confirms Maxine’s call- they share a common grandfather” said Jane, waving the interim report about.

“That’s a bonus for Gina,” said Jenny. “She gets both of the sets of genes she wants all in one go.”

“Incredible,” said Gina. “To see both of them adapt to new bodies so fast- I never thought I would see another do that.”

“Yes,” said Jenny. “For the rest of us it’s a three month ordeal. My feeling is it must be tied in with their auto-repair genes”

“That is the consensus so far,” Gina said. “This is very exciting. Just before I came here, Ish had announced she is to come out of retirement to work on the full assay personally.”

“I’m sure that the gene sequence would be of enormous value if you can isolate and splice it,” said Jenny.

“For the moment, we will keep that information restricted,” said Gina. “We need to consider the implications of greatly speeded clone transference in more detail. But to the family- the value is indeed great.”

“I agree,” said Jenny, “Only five of our sept have this information- that is how it shall stay for now.”

“Now some more news,” said Gina excitedly. “The Senior is to formally offer his sponsorship for your full membership of the League of Travelers.”

Haddon Hold
Sonja's apartment
Noon

As the maid cleared lunch away, John, Shirl and Sonja retired to the conservatory to enjoy a bottle of Chablis.

“Something is on your minds?” Sonja asked.

“Well- yes,” said John. “The gist of it is we want to get married and I would like to try and follow the traditions of my time.”

Sonja clapped her hands together delightedly. “Congratulations. We must have Champagne.” She pulled a cord and another maid, a young local girl of about 14 years appeared. “Mary, please fetch three flutes and a bottle from my private stock.” The girl bobbed a curtsy and disappeared into the pantry, to return shortly with three crystal flutes and a chilled bottle of '96 Dom Perignon on a silver tray.

With glasses charged, Sonja proposed a toast; “To your long, prosperous and fruitful union.”

“Now to business” said Sonja. “We have in our midsts several who are not only qualified to perform a marriage ceremony, but who have done so before.”

“Really?” said John, “I knew you are a multi-talented lot but had no idea you had a priest or a wedding celebrant.”

“We don't,” said Sonja, “but we have several ship's captains plus under Imperial regulations (Civil Governance) a senior officer (Major/Lieutenant Commander or above) may conduct a civil wedding service- as may a senior civil servant- such as Jane , who was a planetary governor-general. Technically- Wayne, Jenny and I are serving Imperial Officers of suitable rank and Wayne has even performed wedding services for several of his troops. Ask him- he would be tickled pink.”

John and Shirl looked at each other and nodded. “Ok- when does he get back?”

“Another five days Haddon time”, Sonja answered. “Now- you will need a wedding planner and I would be delighted to offer my services in this area- Shirl- we have to talk clothes, John- it's easy for you, just get a dress uniform cleaned and turn up sober- Mostly sober, anyway.”

Director's Suite
Boondock Rejuvenation Clinic
Late evening

“If you want a job here, you have but to ask,” said Gina, “In three days you have a first-time transfer up and walking”

“I can't take too much credit for Maxine,” said Wayne, “She is pure-strain and has the full auto-repair/regeneration gene. I'm a recessive and manage OK- think about how she will transfer after a few bodies.”

“Still,” said Gina, “Our therapists have learnt a lot from your self-taught awakening routines.”

“There is one technique I haven’t told you about”

“Oh- what is that?”

“It really helps to make the subconscious connections if you can have sex as soon as possible after awakening- and I’m please to see the ‘privacy’ button works.”

Gina crossed the room and took Wayne’s hands, leading him towards the bedroom. “I may be a bit late, but your recovery is not yet complete.”

Lying awake during the hour before dawn, Wayne asked- “Gina, would you like to take a short holiday- if you can make two jumps, that is?”

“Why not- I have only three jumps on this body- where did you have in mind?”

“Back to where this started- I have a little place near my old house, out near the coast- you haven’t been there yet”

“When do we leave?”

“Privacy off’ “Elvira?”

Elvira’s holo (dressed in a black nightgown) appeared at the foot of the bed. “Elvira- would you please set up a jump to my coastal retreat?”

The holo changed to Elvira in a 1960’s Air Hostesses outfit. “Course set Cap’n- elapsed absence will be 2 hours and Teena will tell everyone that needs to know. ETD thirty minutes and I have asked Teena to wake up a sled, which will await you at the clinic’s rear door.”

“What did I do without you Elvira?”

“Probably worked for a living, boss.”

Wayne threw back the silk covers “Let’s go for a spin.”

“But I haven’t anything packed.”

“Not to worry, I have everything you need on board the ‘Jolly Rodger’- let’s go.”

Elvira had matched times, if not seasons. The dawn was clear, but Wayne’s more experienced weather sense could feel a southerly storm coming in. Turning over a rock, he took a key and unlocked the cabin.

In a few minutes the fire was roaring, as the pinecones caught. Gina, used to a climate similar to the South of France, was warming her hands, shivering in her borrowed parka. Wayne placed the coffeepot on top of the range and carried the chiller bin of fresh food into the small scullery.

“So this is YOUR retreat,” Gina said. “The early 9th Century New Zealand one is delightful, but I didn’t think it was YOU.”

“True, I like that spot, but my favorites are a bit more- rustic.”

“I make have to take an absence of leave and come down to the ninth century for a while.”

“That’s a date- we would love to have you and any of the family come and visit- we also have a lot of building going on at Transit, too- Jane’s new house is amazing- even by your very high standards.”

The cabin was rapidly warming now- Gina had removed the heavy parka and was taking a better look around. This was a place totally out of her experience- the nearest thing to it had been Wayne’s old farmhouse. In her world, aesthetics ruled and homes and furnishings were as much works of art. Here- nothing matched- that being the classic New Zealand holiday home of the mid-twentieth century.

“The Senior would just love this place,” Gina said. “It wouldn’t hurt some of our children to take a holiday here or at your project either- they need to try life in the rough.”

“On that subject, my dear- I thought this was just the right place to start a baby.”

“Oh- Well then- breakfast can wait.”

Boondock Financial Director’s Offices

“There is a clause in the charter,” Estella read, “Where a candidate for membership brings an offering of unique and valuable consideration to the Family- all bonds, fees or subscriptions may be waived- not that money is a concern to you.”

Estella looked up from the volume to Jane. “Your unique contribution of Maxine and Wayne’s genetic heritage certainly fits that clause. Welcome to full membership of the League. We can do the formalities when the Senior gets back from visiting family off-planet in a couple of days- Teena, can you start making the arrangements?”

“I’m right on that Estella.”

“Thank you Teena.”

“If that is the end of business,” said Jenny, pulling a bottle of champagne out of a cooler bag, “We need to seal the deal.”

Estella came around from the other side of the desk and kissed Jenny warmly. “Business is complete- now we can be family again.”

Jenny kissed Estella back. "I have a new business scheme on the way-classic 2-D twentieth century movies and 3D-holos of famous live concerts- plus hardware for the 2-D stuff."

"That should certainly be a good mover with our network of aficionados," said Estella. "As always, we shall keep it exclusive and keep it well away from the general population."

"As always, Estella - refill?"

"Thank you Jenny- Teena- would you please send in the crowd eavesdropping at the door- and tell them to bring drinks and food."

The Bywater Inn Evening meal

"All right, Maxine has OK'd this, so drag your chairs around and I will tell you about her- seeing as you are all so interested," said Sonja.

Most of the regulars were there, so it was a good time to dispel some of the rumours.

"A year or two ago, most of you would have dismissed the notion of time-travel- right?"

Nodding heads showed their agreement.

"The idea of a gate would have been a work of fiction- would it have not?"

Again, heads nodded in agreement.

"OK, so stay with me here, when I give you another 'Impossible' fact- Maxine is a VAMPIRE."

Sonja looked about- there was a mixture of puzzlement, mouths hanging open and in the case of a few of the longer-serving members- an air of finally understanding a series of seemingly unconnected facts.

Sonja waited until they had seemed to absorb that.

"Now Maxie isn't a vampire out of the movies- the reality just isn't like that. Vampires are a subspecies of natural long-lifers and live under a strict social code known as The Order. They can and do drink blood- they need to live on a high protein diet and need a lot of hemoglobin, but don't run about sucking people dry- *that* is a ceremonial killing. They DO have a 'superhuman' strength- about E2.5 and they CAN mesmerize humans by use of naturally secreted pheromones and organic hypnotics.

She won't turn into a bat, fly, be repelled by garlic, holy water or silver bullets or control animals. She doesn't sleep in a coffin and is no more likely to attack you than any of us would. Please don't embarrass her-as a favor to myself, an old friend of fifty-odd years.

She is a hell of a nice person and will happily talk about what and who she is- but as with our rule for all of us- we don't ask about life before joining- that can only be volunteered.

Now, I don't want to come across as lecturing you- but- just cut her some slack- just like any new member and you will make a good friend.- now my throat is dry and my glass seems to be empty. Oh-and by the way- John is getting married."

That broke the silence from the previous news. John, of course, was dining at home- he only ate at the inn on a Friday night. They had plenty to talk about now.

Haddon Fields Manor 2000hrs

Dinner was usually held late at John's Estate- the numerous children having been fed and put to bed earlier. Shirl had a habit of gathering up orphans & waifs and they had been continually adding to the manor to accommodate them. Doris now had rooms here, as well as her quarters at Haddon Hold.

"I will check that out tomorrow," said Doris, having heard about a small child- probably a servant/slave- being mistreated by a Sheffield innkeeper."

"Take Oalfson with you- he is a good man," said John.

"Yes," said Shirl. "He has brought us three child servants that have been badly mistreated- and that inn is a rough house."

"I think I know Corporal Oalfson," said Doris. "Is he the one who takes a particular dislike to those who mistreat children?"

"That's him," said John, "So if you could avoid shooting this innkeeper and let Big Oalf deal with him, I would appreciate that."

"As you wish chief."

**Wairarapa Coastline
New Zealand
Time Line Prime**

The southerly storm had blown in and the driven rain lashed at the hut. Inside, Wayne and Gina toasted their feet in front of a roaring fire, while enjoying glasses of fine whiskey. A chicken and potatoes roasted in the oven of the range. On the old, threadbare sofa, Gina snuggled closer to Wayne.

“I never would have thought such a place could be so comfortable,” said Gina.

“It’s all about whom you share it with.”

“Ten years of my time it has taken to be here.”

“About fifty for me. But I had so very much further to go than you or any of the family. It took me ninety years to finally be with the women I have always wanted- I was married with a family, but through all that time- Jenny was the one I really wanted, ever since I had first met her. Strange though that concept must be to you- that one can want another to the exclusion of all others.

“That is not unknown, even amongst the family- that some couples will pair, in what do you call it? Monogamy?”

“I know now that I don’t need to be afraid of losing my Jenny. Thus we take the first steps out of the dark ages.”

Gina remained silent for a time, then- without speaking, led Wayne back into the bedroom...

**Sheffield
‘The Broken Barrel’ Inn**

Gesturing to Corporal Oalfson to wait at the door, Doris entered the infamous inn.

Wearing native clothing, she attracted no special attention and pushing copper across the bar, was given a mug of foul-smelling beer by a surly brute and then ignored. Taking a seat in a dark corner of the inn, she watched and listened. Sure enough, before too long sounds of someone being cursed and berated came from behind the bar and Doris saw a small half- starved looking boy cuffed and sent out to gather mugs and empty bowls.

She approached the slovenly barkeep. “The boy seems trouble- I would buy him from you”

“You can’t afford him- piss off.”

“You can’t afford to keep him”, said Doris.

Raising a sizable club, the barkeep threatened Doris “Who the devil do you think you are, slut.” As the nervous boy tried to sneak past, he was savagely kicked.

“Enough of that” said Doris, her Webley out in a flash and leveled at his face. The bartender blinked stupidly, not quite comprehending the pistol. He did, however, comprehend the hulking form of Big Oalf, who had taken the commotion as his cue to enter.

“You threaten the mistress, by damn.” Oalf roared, striding towards the now uncertain barkeep. He turned to face the threat of Oalf, grabbing his billyclub and as he did, Doris smashed the butt of the heavy Webley down onto the side of his elbow, causing the club to fall from his numbed fingers.

In a blur of movement and with a sickening crunch, the barkeep was down. Oalf moved much faster than his great size would indicate.

“Take him to the lockup, Miss Doris?”

“Please do Corporal- and well done.”

“Most welcome, Miss.”

As Oalf dragged the prisoner away, Doris coaxed the boy to her- he was all of four or five years old. Taking his hand gently but firmly, she led him out of the inn. “Come with me- I have a much nicer place for you to live.”

The Rocky Mountains USA

Maxine glanced at the GPS- right on course. A few seconds later the gate opened and she flew the Cessna straight through, fighting the momentary disorientation and nausea. As per the plan she was high over Transit and scanned the sky. Above, she saw ‘Jolly Roger’ ready to catch her aircraft with its tractor field, if needed. Wagging her wings, Maxine started her descent to the road that would serve as a landing strip.

Bringing the plane to a halt at the assembled vehicles, she started climbing out as the ‘Jolly Roger’ landed. As the Cessna sat idling, Sonja’s crew loaded Maxine’s mind-wiped old body, dressed identically in every detail.

“You may not want to watch this,” hinted Sonja.

“No, that’s OK” said Maxine. “My kind is not at all squeamish.”

Steve’s crew slung strops under the aircraft and connected the squib charges that would sever these nylon strops, to the firing circuit. Steve reached into the cockpit, pushed the throttle to the correct position and closed the cockpit- as he jumped clear, the crane took up the slack and Sonja initiated the gate.

As she did so, the cutting charges severed the strops and the plane lurched forward and downwards through the gate. Exactly as Elvira’s calculations had determined it would.

Sonja closed the gate and the others packed up the equipment. As they well knew, now was the time to keep Maxine occupied amongst friends.

“Don’t you have to monitor the crash?” Maxine asked.

“Yes, but we can go to that event anytime,” Sonja said. Indeed Sonja and the others had a bit of work left uncompleted, but for now- that could wait.

Now was a good time for Maxie to be introduced to the other team members that she had not yet met. We would have a bit of a party and look at the new houses, which would help take her mind off the ending of her old life.

“While they are cavorting in the pool, let’s get this affair wrapped up,” said Sonja.

“All set,” said Steve. “Mr. Grumpy is in the gun.”

The gun was a 500mm cylinder with a piston driven at low velocity, designed to drive the contents through a gate at a precise time. Mr. Grumpy was a Turkey Vulture that Elvira would gate in front of the Cessna’s windscreen, giving a plausible reason for the crash.

“Elvira, you have control-” said Sonja.

With a hiss of the pneumatics, 6 ½ pounds of highly irate Turkey Buzzard was launched through a gate, which then promptly closed. Sonja moved to her surveillance work area. She initiated a microgate and pushed two video cameras through. After five minutes she withdrew one camera and withdrew the data stick, pushing it into a player. After a few seconds running, the screen showed a blurred shape flash across, striking the aircraft squarely on the cockpit.

“Direct hit Elvira,” said Sonja. As they watched the video, the Cessna spun out of control, impacting against a mountain just before the recording ran out. Sonja let the other recorder run for a few more minutes, and then withdrew it. The job was done. Maxie was officially dead in the 21st century and even the Order would find that this was just a freak accident.

Sonja made a note to Jane to send a large donation to ONSA, on behalf of Mr. Grumpy.

Jane & Steve met her outside Movements. “Right- let’s check out this new pool,” said Jane. Climbing aboard Sonja’s Rolls, Jane asked “When will Jenny and Wayne come down?”

“Elvira has gone back for them- they will probably meet us there” said Sonja.

Elvira’s subroutine ‘Parker’ drew the Rolls to a halt at the community center- a pool & spa facility, with bar, massage and a café.

The doors opened and they climbed out. The new pool was in the center of the village, amongst the service area- the shops, cafes and bars. To their great surprise- over by the pool, they saw Jenny- who was already there.

As they moved nearer- they saw that this was not actually Jenny- she was over in the sauna. But this was somebody who looked like they could have been her sister.

Wayne came over, carrying a tray of cold drinks. "This is Gina- from our 52nd century family- welcome to the future."

The fact as to who Gina was suddenly dawned upon them- she was the one of the legends.

"Hello Gina," said Steve- "I thought you were Jenny."

"Not surprising," said Gina- "I am her ancestor, with a 37% convergence on her particular phenotype. We are blood relatives- as I am to many of you."

"All of you that have been up to the 52nd will have been worked on by Gina," Wayne said. "She runs the clinic, so you may not have met her personally"

Doris asked the question everyone else wanted to.

"Are you coming down to the Ninth with us?"

"Yes- I am- That's where I want my children to get an education.."

Doris nodded her approval and took another bottle from the chiller.

"Let's drink to Gina, then."

The last of the troops left the barracks, dismissed until spring. Forwin personally saw them off, laden with their well-earned pay. His standing army remained- they would be the cadre for the winter training. He was well satisfied with the performance of his standing army and every few days troops of his old command found their way to these barracks.

Now the season of training would begin- he looked forward to learning more of the art of the sword and warfare from Jenny, Wayne and the others.

The evening wore on and as the sky darkened, Gina remarked that this was very much like her home.

"We are hoping to improve it," said Jenny. "We just need some good servants."

"Good luck finding them," said Gina. "We have never had much success."

"I have a few ideas on recruitment," said Jenny. "They seem to be working."

The evening wore on and conversation got more somber.

"I thought my blowing the intervention on my original attempt to alter earth's history might have cost us admission to the League," said Wayne.

“Oh-no. no. no. no,” exclaimed Gina- quite horrified at the suggestion. “No, my darling- you have it all wrong.

The Time Line that failed was the original. Your intervention created a new line that was not nearly so badly hurt and by rescuing me- you created yet another main time line that would develop into the Imperium- the one you trained in.

You SAVED the earth- not destroyed it.”

Wayne sat heavily into a beach chair. “I had never seen it that way,” he said.

Gina quickly moved to his side and held him. Jenny saw what was going on and moved over. “This is the latest run from a sim we have had running for five s-years- these results have just come out.”

“For twenty years I have felt the weight of destroying a world. That isn’t lifted lightly,” Wayne sighed, “but a weight has gone...”

“How is the little fellow?” asked John.

“He is settling in well with the other children,” replied Shirl. “Doc has prescribed a supplement and given him an immunobooser- Doris did a great job today.”

“She is a great kid,” said John.

“She is darling- and we are to have another.”

John’s beaming smile said it all to Shirl, as he picked her up and embraced her.

“Do you- John French- take this Woman- Shirl of Rowsley, to be your wife- to bear your children and love you whilst you raise them to be good and wise citizens?”

“I do.”

“Do you- Shirl of Rowsley- take this man, Lord John French, to be your lover, husband and protector of your children?”

“I do.”

“Do you both enter into a bond to raise happy and good children, praising each other and setting an example to all others that would join in matrimony?”

“We do.”

“Then let all be told that these good people have made solemn vows and will lead by their example- You are now Husband and Wife- let the feasting begin.”

Wayne stepped down from the dais, shook John's hand and kissed Shirl, who was grinning from ear to ear. "Always a pleasure when one of my troops gets married."

After an outstanding private dinner prepared by JD and Sue, we climbed aboard the bus to continue at the Rowsley hall. The locals wanted to do their own well-wishing.

It was a long night by local standards. A few of us remained under the starlit late summer sky. Outside the Rowsley hall, we smoked cigars and passed the brandy bottle around.

Being a formal occasion, most had chosen to wear dress uniform- more than a few of them having several to choose from.

"Just where did those uniforms come from? I have seen a few different services dress kits before, but nothing like what you are wearing" asked John?

"Now there is another story," said Wayne. "Doris, my dear- could you please go and get us another couple of bottles of brandy..."

Glossary of Terms

Aired out- Killed

AC- Armed Constabulary

Aga- Cast iron stove

APC- Armored Personnel Carrier a.k.a. PC, M113, 113, high-speed bulldozer

Bayonet- A knife that is used for everything but what it was designed for.

Bobcat- All-round light earth mover, can be fitted with a large number of tools

CAD- Computer Aided Design (Software)

Cam- Camouflage (d)

Cat 312,322- Caterpillar excavators

Cat D4,6,8,11- Caterpillar Bulldozers, the bigger the number, the bigger the dozer.

Comms (communications)

Container- Steel shipping container

CS (gas)—Crowd, Suppressant a.k.a. Tear gas

Depo- Contraceptive injection

Doppler- A type of radar- don't make me get technical

DPM- Disruptive Patterned material (camouflage)

Down-Time- The past relative the current time

Firewood processor- turns logs to firewood with minimal sweating.

FNG- Fucking New Guy, usually preceded by 'That' or 'You-the'

Frag- Fragmentation (grenade)

Frangible- Bullet designed to shatter and not pass through a target.

FRP- Forward Refueling Point

FUBAR- Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition

Gator- six wheeled light utility vehicle

H.E.- High Explosive

Humvee- US army 4x4- a.k.a. High Mobility Vehicle, Hummer

Ice- Pure Methamphetamine

IHTFP- I Hate This Fucking Place

Laser- laser range finder or sighting device

LiftKing- Heavy rough terrain shipping container lifting equipment

LUP- Lying Up Point

M2- Heavy Machine Gun a.k.a.- .50 calibre. .50 cal, Fifty.

M4- Carbine version of the M16

M9- US service pistol. a.k.a. Beretta model 92

M16- Assault rifle- a.k.a. '16, LPTG (Little Plastic Toy Gun, by those brought up with SLR's)

M19- 40mm grenade-launching machine gun

M79- 40mm Grenade launcher

M107- .50 calibre anti-material rifle a.k.a. BFG (Big Fucking Gun)

M113- See APC

M203- 40mm Grenade launcher fitted to M4/16 rifles

M249- 5.56mm Light Machine Gun, a.k.a. SAW

M548- Tracked load carrying vehicle

Microlight- Light one-two person aircraft with fabric wings

MPP- Massively Parallel Processor (A futuristic computer system)

MRE- Meals, Ready to, Eat

NV (G) Night Vision (Goggles)

Orders Group- Briefing

OP- Observation Post

POL- Petrol, Oil and Lubricants (store)

Quad- Light four-wheeled ATV
Repeater- Radio relay station
Resup.- Resupply
SAW- Squad, Automatic, Weapon- see M249
SOP- Standard Operating Procedures
SLR- Self -Loading Rifle (L1A1 7.62mm)
SNAFU -Situation Normal- All Fucked Up.
Stunner- Industrial grade cattle prod.
Taser- Electrical 'gun' that fires a barb attached to power pack by wires and really hurts.
Thermal- Thermal Imaging Viewer
Up-Time- The Future, relative to the current time
W.P.- White Phosphorous

If I have missed it, a simple Internet search will tell you all about it.

Appendix

This tale has been in the making for the last thirty or so years, in one form or another. Whilst recovering from injuries, I finally found the motivation to start writing my thoughts down. As I got further into this, the writing turned from an ideas session into an actual story. I now have many pages, (paper and electronic) full of notes and are developing the story to a plan (admittedly, one that changes and grows along the way.)

I have had a lot of fun researching the equipment used and as a jack of all trades myself, I have some experience with what various equipment will actually do, when used by someone with a bit of aptitude towards it. The one thing that might seem inconsistent with ones experiences is the speed at which things have been built and put together.

From my time on construction sites I have a few ideas on why building takes so long.

- 1- Things are put together as cheaply as possible.
- 2- They are put together by teams of subcontractors who all have their own agendas.
- 3- Many (most) of the labourers involved in building are seldom well motivated.
- 4- There is always some tool or piece of equipment that could be used to speed things up, but costs too much, is in the other ute or has been stolen.
- 5- Buildings are more often designed to look pretty than easy to build.
- 6- Teamwork- What the hell is that? - see point two.

From my time in the army, I have seen that a motivated team, moderately well resourced, can chuck together a structure in very short order, in fact, I saw on a regular basis- the putting together a setup similar to the one that I have been writing about.

This is the first part of the story...