

The Dragon Option

Book One

A New World Paradigm From North Korea

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In time, history forgets everything and everyone...
...especially those it remembers.

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Seok Dae Jo sat at the large elm wood desk in a corner of the room, staring at the blank, flat screen in front of him. As requested, he had been sitting there patiently for the past four hours. Upon the desktop, in addition to the dormant, three foot wide by two foot high, plasma monitor, lay four objects: a pen, writing paper, a glass of water, and a bottle of pills. He made no notice of these, sitting patiently, staring straight ahead at the black void. The room he sat in was appointed handsomely. In addition to his desk and seat, there was a sofa and two other mahogany chairs surrounding a low, oval, centrally placed table of 18th century colonial craftsmanship. These, in turn, were complimented by an early American, carved walnut side-bar, with everything set upon a near room sized, pristine, 19th century New England hand-woven carpet. The overall effect, including period wall paper and indirect lighting, was precisely coordinated in muted reds, browns, and ambers, to produce a comforting glow. Even the room's two carved wooden doorways were inviting. The one directly behind him, past the side-bar, opened onto an alcove of two connected chambers of similar decor: one a bedroom, the other for bathing . However, the second door to his far left was most important as it was the way out. To the untrained eye, these surroundings appeared warm and welcoming, but not to him. He detested them. It was more than the fact that there were no windows in any of these rooms or that the door to his left was always locked. In an instinctive manner, without even looking, he knew what this was: a prison. Albeit, these rooms comprised extraordinary, if not lavish comforts for any person, prisoner or otherwise. Nonetheless, they were, in the final analysis, holding cells all the same. For he had been in such places before.

It was Monday, February 1st, 2010. The following Thursday, February 4th, would be Seok Dae Jo's second sixty-first birthday, the first having been a hallowed age by Korean tradition. Yet, according to Korean superstition, it was a day he was not sure to see.

* * * *

Seok Dae Jo was born on February 4th, 1949, during the dead of winter amidst the crew of a North Korean patrol boat in the Yellow Sea approximately twenty five miles southwest of the port of Haeju. It was exactly one hundred days after his father was executed by United States controlled forces in Suncheon, South Korea. His father, Seok Jo Hee, had been an aid to Lieutenant Kim Ji Hoe, one of the leaders of the 1948 Yosu Mutiny. The two soldiers had met during their enrollment in the third class of South Korea's Officers Training School, a military institution assumed from the Japanese after the end of World War Two. Japan, a staunch anti-communist nation, ruled over Korea from 1905 to 1945 in what remains as one of the most brutal occupations of the 20th century. During their dominion, the Japanese established a military school on the peninsula to train Koreans for service in Japan's army.

After the war, with aid from the United States, the South Korean government took control of this institution as a basis for developing its own military. No one with known ties to the Japanese or any communist sympathizers were allowed to enroll.

Cheju-do Island is located just off the Korean peninsula at the far western corner of the Korea Strait. In the violent and often confusing years after the United States occupied the southern half of the country in 1945, American military commanders, in conjunction with the fledgling South Korean Army, the Cheju-do Police Force, and some lingering elements of Japanese sympathizers, began an offensive against suspected communists on the island. Over a three year period, between ten and twenty percent of Cheju-do's estimated three hundred thousand inhabitants were executed by the U.S. coordinated forces. During the height of this massacre, the 14th Regiment of the South Korean Army, under the command of Lt. Kim, was ordered to Cheju-do from their mainland post in Yosu. Many of the officers in this regiment, including Seok Jo Hee and the lieutenant, had been born and raised on the island, their family members amongst those who had already been slaughtered. Torn between their duty to service and loyalty to families, they mutinied on October 19th, 1948, before they could be shipped out. Along with sympathetic members from the 6th Regiment, the rebels overtook the coastal towns of Yosu and Suncheon, killing an estimated eighteen hundred pro-Japanese police and government officials. Their mutiny, however, was short lived, lasting a mere ten days against a major American counter-offensive led by Captain James Hausman. On October 26, Seok Jo Hee was captured by U.S. forces during fierce fighting in Suncheon. Branded an anti-American, leftist agitator, he was executed the next day. Shortly thereafter, Lt. Kim died in battle and his severed head was delivered to Captain Hausman in a five-gallon drum.

Retribution for the Yosu Mutiny was not limited to the military participants and, as part of the counter-offensive, thousands of civilians in Yosu, Suncheon, and Cheju-do were also murdered. When the insurrection began, Seok Jo Hee's wife, Lee Dae Ja, had nearly finished her second trimester of pregnancy with their first child, though she barely showed for a woman at her stage. He had warned her of the likely outcome of the insurrection when she last saw him on October 17th. As the rebellion broke out, she remained in Yosu while Seok Jo Hee was dispatched to Suncheon where a week later he was captured and then killed. His death unbeknownst to her, the mutiny's momentum began to fail the day he died, providing her the only sure sign that she would never see him again. Knowing in her heart that he was gone, she made preparations, as they had agreed, to steal herself and their yet to be born child out of the city to begin the long, arduous journey to the North.

Avoiding the low mountains which dominate the eastern parts of South Korea and much of the North, Lee Dae Ja set out along the southern shoreline toward the western coast, in what for many would amount to a death march. In the five years between the end of World War Two and the outbreak of major Korean military offenses in 1950, an extensive, though poorly coordinated system of not-so-underground railroads criss-crossed North to South and South to North over the entire length of the peninsula. It was a period in which the entire country seemed to be on the move - communists going up and capitalists-imperialists heading down - all in an effort to pass over the Russian-American imposed 38th parallel boundary before overt hostilities began. It was as if their very movement was priming the

military pump toward the great explosion everyone was anticipating. Yet, such semi-secret passages, though common, were often fatal for those en route, hundreds of thousands never reaching their destinations. The mere charge of sympathizing with the other side was usually an immediate death sentence, and such accusations could easily be employed with impunity to rape and murder a strange woman who was traveling alone.

Political and social turmoil would not be all that stood in Lee Dae Ja's way. Korean winters are some of the harshest anywhere in the world. With ocean waters on three of its four sides and mountains ranges running its entire length, in an average year prior to the late 1900's more Koreans died from exposure than from any other single factor. The famous 19th century Korean poet Kim Sakkat often wrote of the horrible specters one witnessed each spring when receding snows revealed myriads of corpses lining the hillsides: peasants lost to winter's frozen grasp. In places, the bodies lay so thick and numerous, from a distance they appeared as a strange ground covering blossoming up from the slumbering earth. Though she would witness untold brutalities and barbaric acts during her trek north, Lee Dae Ja would be just as likely to see a supplicant cadaver with its last breath cast to stone by bitter cold, as one succumbed to violence. It was a surreal trip that not even good luck could justify for those who survived it, the horror of memory violating every moment they had gained.

Her journey began in Yosu on October 31st, 1948, two weeks after she had last seen her husband alive. As she left their small house early in the morning, a light pack with one or two days rations strapped to her back, a man came running down the street wildly waving his arms. Making a quick stop in front of her, his crazed eyes shouted at her silently. Suddenly, before she could react, he raised his hand and struck her forcefully with a small piece of wood he had been carrying. Then he ran on without a word, tacitly telling her to take his anger and be gone. Just as her husband had impregnated her with their yet to be born child months before, so too had this stranger impregnated her with a hysterical pain that would grow to control her life and that of her nation's during the months to come. Lee Dae Ja lurched toward the ground, but did not fall. Reflexively grasping the gaping wound in her scalp with both hands, she staggered out of town never looking back.

She followed a path that took her past many small coastal villages, some of which at first she knew, thereafter none of which had any particular name. More often than not, she would only come close enough to scavenge small bits of food from waste bins or communal dumps, preferring to travel the roadless woods than risk the contact of strangers. Once her starting rations were gone her diet consisted largely of any number of small rodents, snakes, and selected insects, for she could not bypass any chance for protein if she hoped to see her baby born alive. It was a struggle between her as a mother and the privations of mother nature. There was no bargaining. There was no alternative. If it moved and she could kill it quickly with a stick or rock, she would eat. If not, she walked or slept.

Without a map or appreciable knowledge of where she was going, Lee Dae Ja followed the coastline as much as possible. Beginning from Yosu, on the southern, central edge, she headed toward the west to avoid the eastern mountains. In doing so, she wasted an entire three weeks making her way to Mokpo at the country's southwest corner. Both it and Yosu being roughly at the same latitude, she had accomplished no appreciable distance toward the North

while winter was already turning its eyes southward. During this time, she would periodically hear gunfire far off in the hillsides around her. However, she witnessed little if any violence during this first leg of her journey, none of which, save that first day, was directed at her.

Half way to Mokpo, on the outskirts of Kangjin, she emerged from a stand of trees to find herself on the edge of a farmer's small field. She and the man who was working the remains of his fall harvest stood and exchanged stares for a few moments. Then, turning toward a small hut behind him, he called out. Momentarily, a large squat woman emerged from the hut carrying a small sack. She moved purposefully toward the man who, with a wave of his hand, directed her to the edge of the field. As the squat woman approached, she stopped a few feet away, gently placed the sack upon the ground, bowed slightly to the stranger, then quickly retraced her steps back to the hut. The man, in turn, resumed the inspection of his field as if their brief encounter had never occurred. When dealing with strangers, sometimes people who lived in huts took, and other times they gave. Silently, gratefully, and without questions, Lee Dae Ja retrieved the sack, then faded back into the woods. They were the only two people with whom she would have direct contact, until she reached Mokpo, and it was the last prepared food she would eat for nearly two months.

Mokpo was a city in turmoil. The unrest in Yosu had spread throughout the southern parts of the peninsula during the past three weeks prompting Syngman Rhee, the President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) - America's half of the torn country - to employ extreme measures against any movements toward a national revolution. In addition to Cheju-do, Yosu, and Suncheon, throughout South Korea anyone suspected of being a communist sympathizer was quickly executed without an investigation or trial of any kind. U.S. authorities did little to stand in the way of such brutal tactics and on many occasions, such as the massacre on Cheju-do, they encouraged and participated in these events. It was under such circumstances that an exhausted and hungry Lee Dae Ja approached the outskirts of Mokpo.

Walking through the woods at day break parallel to and within eyesight of a dirt road leading into town, Lee Dae Ja heard foot steps approaching her through the trees. The sounds quickly grew louder and faster, causing her to crouch down and hold her breath, unsure of what she feared. Suddenly, four, maybe five people - a man, woman, and children of different ages - burst past without seeming to take notice of her. Only the woman stopped suddenly, caught for a split second in mid-flight, frozen in a stance of palpable terror to stare horrified at Lee Dae Ja before charging off after the others. Whatever they were running from Lee Dae Ja did not want to know, so she, too, instinctively ran off into the woods away from the road and away from the fleeing strangers.

As she fled without direction, increasing waves of unknown horror pushed her this way, then pulled her backwards as sporadic gunfire began to perforate the air. First it came from the left at a distance and suddenly on the right much closer. Just as she was sure it was almost on top of her, the blasts quickly faded away to the rear. The fearful sounds made each moment a series of rapid, uncertain decisions where she would run a few paces in one direction and then throw herself off to either side, a few moments later scrambling back the way she had just come. As the sounds continued their confusing, echoing barrage, Lee Dae Ja unexpectedly tumbled down a ravine into a dry river bed, landing face first amidst the gravel and dust. A series of large blasts resounded from directly behind her,

so that without attention to the many bleeding cuts on her arms, legs, and face, she quickly darted to the far embankment to hasten up the incline. Halfway to the top, without warning, a soundless bullet punched into the back of her left shoulder smashing her body hard into the earthen wall. She choked for air, her whole side electrified with pain. Stunned, Lee Dae Ja grasped her dangling arm, and half-slid, half-spun around down the side of the ravine in an effort to face her attacker. If she and her baby were to die there, she preferred confrontation to an anonymous death. Wincing and shaking, her eyes darted all about, but no one was in sight. Her breaths came in rapid jerks, shaking her entire body as more shots sailed over head, loud rifle cracks preceding the whizzing snaps of bullets cutting air. A ricochet off a tree or rock, perhaps, had found its unlucky mark.

Trembling, Lee Dae Ja began to rise using the steep embankment as a crutch. Slowly, she stumbled down the empty river bed to a fallen tree a few steps away. Using her good arm to climb the dirt wall alongside the trunk, she leaned heavily against the bark to draw herself upward, but she did not get far. No more than a few feet into her ascent, something forcefully began pulling her back down causing her to emit a muffled yelp. Frantically, Lee Dae Ja fought the invisible power, torn between escape and the excruciating pain from her wounded, jerking body. Against her will she was being dragged back toward the river bed, her spasmodic kicks interwoven with the seizure-like flailing of her torso as she unsuccessfully tried to guard her injured side. Innumerable hands seemed to pull and claw at her, the futility of her struggle beginning to meld into the quick-sand of overpowering shock. As her consciousness waned, she saw many fingers gripping her body, covering everywhere: her legs, her arms, her face. She could not breathe. She really could not breathe. They were choking her. Yet, she was unable to resist. She would die. But before surrendering to that moment when life passes into death, she looked up dazedly only to see the frantic, panic stricken faces of the man and women who had run past her ages ago that morning. Then all went blank.

When Lee Dae Ja awoke, it was night time. She could feel her head moving, rolling aimlessly, but not by her own will. Only a faint glow was perceptible off to one side and as she concentrated on it, the squiggly shadows of branches and leaves began to take shape against a clear, moon-lit sky. Periodically, the outline of a featureless face would pass in front of her and then disappear, sometimes to the left or right, sometimes up or down beyond her vision. Soft sounds whispered to and fro, but there was no meaning. For some time, she remained in this half awake, half asleep state, every so often discovering something new about where or what she was: dead or alive? The answer finally came when she felt her head being lifted forward, chin toward chest, and the sensation of water washed across her lips. It was like the deluge of a monsoon after the drought and she greedily struggled to devour it all, only to capture a few drops. An invisible, soothing voice urged her to lay still as a few more morsels of liquid came from the darkness. A sense of clarity seemed to make headway in her mind, so that she tried to make a sound, a question, to say anything. But the mere effort was more than her body could support, and as quickly as it had come, her consciousness receded away again.

The following morning Lee Dae Ja awoke once more, this time aware of many sights and sounds. A small child of maybe four or five years old sat near her side in a shallow cave not more than four or five feet high and wide,

and no deeper than twice that. A fallen tree trunk stood guard over the cave's opening, beyond which lay the river bed that she had fallen into the previous morning. Momentarily, a man and women, followed by two more children, quickly slid over the side of the trunk and scurried into the hole. Crouching and moving in a waddling fashion, they anxiously approached her, each carrying small bags and packages in their hands. The woman leaned close over Lee Dae Ja and asked how she felt. Lee Dae Ja just stared blankly at her. It would be a few more days before she would be able to speak. The woman knew this and decided it best to speak for them both.

She introduced herself as Qui and her husband as Li-ho, the children remaining nameless. They were peasants from Mokpo where their family had lived for generations, subsisting on fishing and farming with the seasons. As the news of Yosu spread rapidly to the rest of the country, so too did the fear of contagion for mutiny. The local constabulary of the Mokpo's police force, determined to stem the revolt, armed a sizable portion of the town's people who were known loyalists to the ROK. Qui, and Li-ho, being peasants, were never of any political mind and, therefore, had never expressed any opinion, pro or con, to South Korea or America. Focusing on feeding their family, they had survived the Japanese occupation and they would survive the American occupation, too, or so they had hoped.

At first, the obvious targets were attacked. Anyone who in recent memory had made pro-communist statements was dragged into the street and either shot or beaten to death. This consumed most of Mokpo's energy and attention for the first two weeks following Lee Dae Ja's flight from Yosu. But as time wore on and the list of easily identifiable victims began to thin, the blood-thirsty nationalists started preying upon anyone with the scent of suspicion. It did not matter if you hailed Syngman Rhee. If you were the neighbor of known communists and lived on friendly terms next to them, then you must be a communist, too. So, after the slaughter of nearly eight hundred known insurgents, a spiraling frenzy of suspicion-based murders began shortly before Lee Dae Ja arrived on the edge of the city. That morning, a gang of armed nationalists had come marauding through the peasants' section on the northeast side of town, beating and shooting everyone in their path, men, women, and children alike. That is when Qui, Li-ho and their family ran. Weaker and slower members - including three grandparents, an aunt, and a baby - were either left behind or lost during the flight. At what point Qui had dropped her littlest girl, she could not say, but she was still too fearful for her remaining children to allow herself the comfort of mourning for it. Somehow, in the confusion of escape, after having passed Lee Dae Ja in the woods, the family had made their way to the ravine and found the small cave in which to hide. A few moments later, amidst the swirling gunfire, they heard the approach of faltering footsteps. Qui and Li-ho had pressed their children against the hole's back wall and then carefully, fearfully, peeked outside to again find Lee Dae Ja, this time staggering about. They struggled to drag her down into the cave and muffle her cries, it being a great relief to the entire family when she finally passed out: better she should die in silence than attract others to their hiding place.

That night, they had sat quietly around Lee Dae Ja. Once or twice she seemed to regain consciousness, but by morning she was still immobile and with shallow breathing. Having left without preparations, Qui, Li-ho, and their two sons had ventured out to scavenge food leaving their remaining daughter to watch over her, uncertain they would

find the stranger alive when they returned.

Having explained all of this, Qui said no more, and without another word she began to hand feed small bits of rice, fish, and local herbs to Lee Dae Ja. Like the water that evening before, she hungrily ate everything offered to her, including items she did not recognize. Even the bad things tasted good as she voicelessly mouthed for more. When the feeding was finished, Lee Dae Ja rested while Qui shifted to one side and began kneading together a small poultice of mud and weeds. As the drowsiness of food settled in, Qui suddenly leaned over and whispered in her ear that though it did not show, she had not lost her baby...yet. Then Qui quickly turned Lee Dae Ja on her side and pressed the new poultice into her wounded shoulder with such force that the sudden shock of pain caused her to black-out again.

For several more days they rested in the cave, different members of the family periodically venturing out for more food. On the fourth day, the eldest son went out alone. When he did not return by the next morning, without ceremony they knew it was time to leave. Lee Dae Ja had gained much strength during their brief respite, so that in late November they all set out north from the edge of Mokpo. Qui's poultices had noticeably improved Lee Dae Ja's left arm, and though it remained supported in a make-shift sling for a while, she could now move quickly with them without being overcome by pain. They had hundreds of miles to go before they would reach their unknown destination in the North and like the dropping temperature, time was falling fast. Snow had already begun in the low mountains to the east and the dead of winter would soon be upon them. In the chilled morning air, five slight figures wound their way through leafless trees, always balancing the urgent need to hurry against the dreaded exposure to cold and the cold hearts that surrounded them.

There were only three things to do on such a journey: walk, walk while eating, or stop to sleep. There was no such thing as real rest, since even when they did stop only two were allowed to drift off briefly into nightmare prone exhaustion while their alternates hazily stood guard. Eating was never done at a stand-still, either, as hands constantly reached out to grasp at anything in passing that appeared edible: twigs, loose bark, residual leaves that refused to fall. Each person also carried a small stick with which to club moving objects that were too large to snatch at alive. Once, Li-ho killed a startled rabbit in mid-stride that way, then cut it up into small pieces with his knife, which they all ate raw while continually walking the entire time. Even bodily functions were done on the move, the needy party falling to the back of the line for relief the same way a horse might do in mid-gait. Faced with outright survival, hygiene was neither a question nor concern.

In a meandering path, the small group, supporting and aiding one another, worked its way north, first between the western coastline and the inland road from Mokpo to Chonju and then further on until they were just slightly west of Taejon. Their unrelenting efforts allowed them to transit this great distance in a little over two weeks, so that by mid-December as snow blanketed the entire peninsula, the outskirts of Taejon were less than half a day's walk to the east. The impact of the Yosu Mutiny was still reverberating throughout the South and ever increasing numbers of peasants were on the move, going north, seeking relief from death and persecution. Each day they spotted greater

numbers of people engaged in similar struggles, some alone, others in small groups like themselves. At first, these sightings evoked mutual fear and distrust, all parties quickly taking evasive maneuvers to avoid one another. But by the time they reached the eastern bank of the Kim River a few days north of Chonju, their numbers had grown from five, then fifteen, to finally more than fifty, the enlarged mass making secret passage through the woods impossible. And so, they slowly drifted eastward to join an even larger group of refugees openly trudging along the dirt road from Taejon to Osan.

There were advantages and disadvantages to movement with others. The blowing cold and freezing rains that gave way to hail and sleet were more easily endured if huddled together. When the bitter chill became unbearable, one could always push into the group's slithering interior for temporary shelter, only to be slowly nudged back to the edge again as the suffering of those on the outside gained superior momentum over those holding ground inside. In this way, eight days after passing Taejon and two days south of Osan, a line of over three hundred peasants closely huddled in numerous packets of thirty to fifty people were stretched out along nearly one-quarter mile of frozen, dirt road. They crept along in centipede-like fashion, their northern progress equally matched by an undulating, circuitous movement as each individual repeatedly flowed in and then out of their group's central warmth. Lee Dae Ja and Qui's family made this double journey clinging to one another as they worked their way in and out and northward together. Now, there was no stopping even to sleep as it was known that anyone who did so would not resume the march. To fail taking the next step, to stop for even a moment was certain death as unconsciousness was ready at wait for anyone susceptible to such indulgence. In this way, as each group turned itself inside-out, over and over, it periodically cast off a frail or exhausted member, the apparent loss almost immediately replaced by some new refugee who had just emerged from the nearby woods.

The disadvantage to such large scale movements was the scarcity of food. A small group working its way through the woods might find enough frozen saplings or loose bark to sustain themselves from outright starvation. But large numbers moving along open roadways soon denuded their surroundings of anything bearing nutritional value. This left the old, the young, and the injured particularly susceptible. Due to Qui's skill and kindness, Lee Dae Ja's wound had healed dramatically during their first weeks together. Before they had been joined by others in flight, Qui had even seen to it that Lee Dae Ja received extra pieces of food at the expense of herself and her own family as she was eating for two. Yet, now four days were past since any of them had eaten anything and of greatest concern was Qui's daughter who was notably the weakest of them all. Qui did not think she would survive the distance to Osan as she and her husband took turns carrying her. With no food in sight that day, desperate for anything, Qui silently bent down in mid-step to retrieve a piece of warm excrement recently left behind anonymously by someone up ahead. Invisible tears pouring from her eyes, Qui pressed small pieces of the still hot mush against her listless daughter's lips. Koreans traditionally used their own waste to fertilize their fields, and if there were no plants to mediate between them and the offal, then perhaps there was still a remnant of nourishment to be found within the offensive paste. In response, the unconscious child did not resist, but instinctively suckled from her mother's warm, sticky fingertips.

It was barely noon that day as they moved along when yet another round of gunfire broke out in the distant, this time to the northeast. They could hear small crackling, interspersed with large, muffled explosions pinpointed by plumes of black smoke far above the hilltops. Another group of suspected traitors was being routed. It became more common, day by day, to witness such skirmishes either from afar or at an uncomfortably close distance. Mass migrations like theirs were becoming routine, and while the ROK regime supported southbound movements, those to the North were an open affront to the neonatal republic. So, the government and its American counterparts sanctioned open retaliation against any large scale civilian mobilizations toward the communists. Though not an administrative priority, given the mounting assaults that erupted daily against Pyongyang's clandestine supporters who were still operating in the South, it was a permissible and easy way for momentarily unoccupied infantry, tanks, and aircraft to hone their fighting skills. On that day, the rumor of attacks on unarmed northbound civilians was of no surprise to Lee Dae Ja's caravan when a single Grumman F6F Hellcat flown by a South Korean pilot-in-training suddenly roared over a nearby hillside, simultaneously unleashing all six of its 50 caliber Browning M2 machine guns. Hellcats, the classic American aircraft-carrier based fighter-bombers of World War Two, had been part of an early and secret lend-lease agreement between the U.S. and the newly organized Republic of Korea Air Force (ROKAF). After 1945, American forces began phasing out propeller airplanes in favor of the faster and nimbler jets, like the F-86 Sabre fighter-bomber, leaving a huge surplus of Hellcats available for trade, sale, or foreign exchange. However, given the numerous over-zealous incidents such as this attack which became common place between late 1948 until mid-1949, Washington ultimately rethought its developmental strategy for the ROKAF. Before the end of the decade, it quietly withdrew the Hellcats from the South and replaced them with unarmed Piper Cub L-4 Grasshopper reconnaissance-training aircraft. Unfortunately, Lee Dae Ja and her companions would not benefit from this exchange.

When shock and fear rise to a certain height, the brain critically changes to maximize its most useful resources. The Hellcat initially appeared in the east as if on an invisible roller coaster, swooping over the hillside to their right and then down into their snow laden valley. As it rapidly achieved floor level, the terrifying roar of its Pratt and Whitney radial piston engine was completely supplanted by the synchronized rale of the half dozen Browning machine guns. Then, there was pitch silence. Lee Dae Ja could no longer hear the continued threat of the Hellcat's pistons or the six earth-pounding parallel rows of incoming bullet spray that were charging down the valley floor toward them. But she could clearly see each individual popcorn-like explosion of snow burst which traced their intransigent advance. Her mind raced so quickly that everything appeared to happen in slow motion. The scene before her became a surreal display of almost beautiful timing as if in choreographed response she and everyone else on the road reflexively leapt toward the ditch on their left, some individually, others holding hands. Lee Dae Ja's face had not yet met the ground when the six angry lines of marauding lead marched across her pathway in gut wrenching silence. And then she hit the frozen earth with full force only to be stunned by the return of deafening thunder from the Hellcat passing directly overhead. Dazed, she looked up to see the attacker slowly fade over the western hilltops, not to return.

Rising cautiously, uncertain of her own injuries, she carefully looked around to witness the results. In all, seven people lay dead or near death, but although Lee Dae Ja was shaken up, she had escaped with only minor cuts and scratches. An elderly man a few feet in front of her was not so lucky. Unable to respond as quickly as the others, he had literally been torn in half by the strafing slugs. Cut clean through from his right hip to his left shoulder, his head and upper torso were thrown into the nearby ditch while his less fortunate legs and lower left side remained abandoned in the roadway. As if walking along a thin ledge, she cautiously moved past the divided corpse which lay in the direct line of assault from the Hellcat's southern triad of guns. Nine feet of unriddled dirt separated the two triplets' murderous pathways, and as she reached the scars from the northern triad's attack, her stare slowly followed the torn earth westward off the road. There, past two more mutilated bodies, she found Qui and the boy kneeling toward the west, the comatose daughter laying in repose nearby. Hesitantly, she approached to see Li-ho before them, huddled in a grotesque, fetal position, the right side of his face macerated by a single fist-sized hole. While the son looked on, Qui purposefully placed a series of small rags over the gaping wound to catch the receding torrent of blood. Once the fragments of cloth were all saturated, she forced one partway into her daughter's mouth, a macabre replacement for the previously employed human waste. The others she stuffed hurriedly into her pockets for future use. Li-ho was gone, but he might yet save his only remaining daughter. When the last rag was soaked and the unconscious girl pacified, Qui and her son, displaying neither reservation nor hesitation, quickly piled handfuls of snow upon their husband and father with as much ceremony as the dying can afford to the already dead. Then, when he was barely covered, they rose, Qui lifting up and carrying the listless girl, and the three family members resumed their northward trek amongst the survivors. Lee Dae Ja hesitated momentarily, having witnessed the entire episode on a single involuntarily held breath, before silently forcing herself away from the inanimate white mound to rejoin the others.

The next day, almost on the outskirts of Osan, an old woman watched from the side of a bend in the road as the refugees continued marching north. Unlike the rag covered skeletal figures which populated the convoy, she was plump and wrapped in warm fur. Without saying a word, she watched as one small group after another of closely huddled apparitions foggily approached and then faded away past the curve. She had come out daily for the last week to see the torpid parade, but she had not found what she was looking for until having spotted Lee Dae Ja holding Qui's daughter. Along with Qui and her son, the four had broken off into their own small group, clinging to one another for support as they wearily trudged along. They were too exhausted to notice the figure standing by the bend in the roadside, but when they were nearly abreast of her, the old woman removed from beneath her winter coat a small bundle wrapped in dark cloth. Holding it out at arms length, she opened it to reveal a sparkling treasure of five rice cakes. The skeletons froze in their tracks, wide eyed, open mouthed. Slowly, cautiously, the old woman placed the bundle on the snow and then backed from the road. She was no more than four steps away when the three standing ghosts pounced on the food, Lee Dae Ja almost dropping the girl as she leapt. It was devoured without chewing. Qui tried to save a small piece for her daughter, but the crouching boy viciously grabbed it from her hands and swallowed

it whole before she could stand up. In fury, Qui raised her hand high with anguished effort to strike the starving child when she was suddenly frozen in place by words the old woman began to speak. She told them that death surely lay ahead for anyone who continued up the road, but that hot food and a warm bed were waiting for those who cared to follow her. She then turned and walked away from them. Qui, still looming over the fear-stricken boy, let her frozen arm drop to her side, feebly helped her shamed son to his feet, retrieved her impassive daughter from the ground, and then hobbled after the retreating stranger. Lee Dae Ja, still on her hands and knees feverishly suckling every last nuance of flavor from the cloth, only noticed their absence when they were half way across the snowy field that lay between the road's curve and the wooded hillside to their west. Regurgitating a series of hoarse cries, she staggered to catch up with them, her uncoordinated steps repeatedly interrupted by awkward falls. They did not stop to wait for her and only after a dozen or more tumbles were they reunited, all of them entering the woods together.

They walked for maybe fifteen minutes through dense stands of trees guarding snow covered ground. Part way to their destination the old woman, without asking, took the weightless girl from Qui. Though she did not resist, Qui was humbled to see how effortlessly the elder carried her daughter cradled in just one arm, a task which had consumed all of Qui's strength. No one spoke as the old woman led the three death-like spirits behind her while the death march escapees followed the visage of salvation in front of them. Bound by unspoken mutual hope and fear, they wound through gullies, crossed frozen streams, and passed over a series of small crests until they made their way into a round clearing occupied by a central wooden hut with a few complimenting outbuildings on its south side. A small windowless structure, smoke whispered from a clay chimney protruding from the middle of the main shelter's flat roof. They entered through a low waist-high door on the near side into a space amounting to little more than a few hundred square feet darkly lit by embers from the central stove. Before the old woman could direct them to a resting place, the warmth inside overwhelmed the strangers and they all fell stupor-like upon each other not a foot inside the doorway. Carefully, she dragged them, one by one, to a large bedding platform off to the side, then covered them with a single large quilt under which they slept for the next two weeks. It was just as well. For this gave the old woman time to serve her real interest: the little girl.

Lee Dae Ja awoke intermittently to the smell of food. Too frail to raise herself, she felt her head lifted by a strong hand which ladled small amounts of rice and rabbit stew into her mouth. After each spoonful, her head was replaced on the bedding and she eagerly awaited her next turn as the process was repeated for the boy and Qui. Though the feedings only lasted a few minutes, all three were completely exhausted by the mere effort of swallowing and they would easily lapse back into sleep after a few bites. Several times a day the cycle was repeated, so that during this period their only times of consciousness were passively spent with spoonfuls of soup. However, to their infirm bodies and minds it seemed as if they were consumed in one long non-stop orgy of food. The old woman knew they would not be strong enough to leave the bed for some time, so she cleaned and bathed their bodies and replaced their clothes with fresh garments. To cope with their involuntary urinations, she covered their genitals with thick pads of cloth that she then cleaned, dried, and reused. However, she did not have to worry about bowel movements as starvation

encourages the body to conserve everything, even its wastes. But near the end of those two semi-conscious weeks, almost within an hour of each other, they all leapt from the bed to hurry outside and have their first painful defecations in the snow.

Once they were up and about, they continued their recuperation with the old woman. It was mid-January and by that time, though never fully awake, the small girl also began to show signs of recovery. Without their knowing, while trapped in sleep, the old woman had spent every free moment hovering over the dying child. Culling herbs of every description from her hard earned stores and from beneath the frozen ground, she painstakingly extricated the tiny soul from oblivion's grasp. Employing a varied array of potions and tonics - some that soothed, some that stimulated, others that burned - over and over, she covered every patch of skin, every orifice, every strand of hair and remnant of nail, so as, piece by piece, to reconstruct life into the tiny near-dead corpse. The old woman could do nothing less, her own life depending upon her success, and by the time Qui made her first flight outside, she returned to see her still unresponsive daughter alive and resting comfortably in a make-shift cradle. Qui cried so hard that she exhausted herself again and fell back into a deep sleep for the rest of that day.

The old woman encouraged them to stay on with her. Even though they were still many miles from their destination, Lee Dae Ja embraced the opportunity for isolated refuge. Over the coming weeks they all began to look better and healthier as the old woman plied them with home-made Korean meals. For the past few months, such delicacies had been nothing more than memories. Now, even the simplest rice dishes or the most ordinary rabbit meat seemed as if they were lavish banquets, their praise for the old woman only surpassed by their eagerness to devour everything she placed before them. As the days passed, even the boy who previously showed no signs of expression smiled periodically, and the hard edge of fear that constantly occupied Qui's face gave way to her softer, more beautiful features. Most amazing of all, Lee Dae Ja had not lost her baby...yet. She finally resumed eating for two, gaining the weight needed for a successful pregnancy and for the first time, nearing full term, she began to show in the way most women already have by their second trimester. Being in that clearing, in that hut, with that old woman, at that time, if they had not known what was happening all around them, they would have thought they had reached heaven. In dealing with strangers, sometimes people who lived in huts took, and other times they gave.

One day, about a week after they had all risen from bed, the old woman took Qui outside and showed her many small bullet holes burrowed into the north side of the hut. As they stood there inspecting the wounded wood, she asked what Qui remembered of their journey. Qui told the old woman everything she could recall: being chased from their home in Mokpo, finding Lee Dae Ja in the ravine, the children and other relatives she had lost along the way, their march through the woods and then along the road, and the death of Li-ho. The old woman listened attentively in silence to everything that was said and then she began speaking to Qui. She told of how several army regiments, American and ROK, had been gathering about five miles to the southwest of Osan for some time. They had carved a makeshift airfield out of the woods and much talk speculated that a large airbase would soon develop. The old woman correctly surmised that the plane which killed Li-ho had come from there as it was from there that many other

deadly things emerged.

When the buildup initially began about two years ago, she and twelve of her family members lived in that same hut. For generations they had been there, the old woman able to trace her heritage back over three hundred years on that very site. The family survived on hunting small game in the local woods and raising rabbits for their pelts and meat. Though not complicit with the previous occupiers, they suffered little under the Japanese who greatly admired their fine furs. However, after Yosu, the ROK forces in the area went on a blood spree, killing anyone who lived past 1945 without visible scars. One cold rainy day in November at dawn, around the same time that Lee Dae Ja was nearing Mokpo, a platoon of ROK soldiers under the guidance of an American advisor came marching through the downpour into their clearing. The family had just finished its morning chores and they were preparing to sit down for the day's first meal. The heavily armed men were convinced that anyone well off as her family appeared by peasants' standards must be affiliated with Yangban: the corrupt elite of Korea who prospered under Japan's rule. While their pelts had once earned them high regard from the area's Japanese administrator, their dealings with him were seldom profitable and were often done at a loss. Yet, they had fared far better than most in the region, many having lost both their profits and their lives to the invaders. So while they had always been and still remained peasants, it was easy for those even less fortunate to eye them with suspicion. The soldiers ordered everyone out of the hut.

Once they had all assembled outside along the north wall, a small, angry Korean officer repeatedly demanded to see their papers. When the old woman's eldest son finally replied that they had none, the man took out his revolver and shot her child once through the head. It was hard to say who was more shocked by what had happened: the old woman or the American. While she and the rest of her family huddled grief stricken, wailing over their dead relative, the American danced animatedly around the Korean officer shouting in a half pleading and half demanding voice. Periodically he would interject the Korean word for democracy into his discourse while the little man, all but inured to the American's ranting and raving, stood there impassively reholstering his weapon. Suddenly, as if tired of his advisor's nonsense, the Korean officer wheeled around and grabbed a soldier's rifle, switched it to automatic, and shot each remaining member of the family: men, women, and children. Being the gun was U.S. surplus and that the old woman was last in his line of fire, it jammed just as he reached her, her heart skipping several beats as the Korean cursed and hammered on the side of the weapon with his fist. This, in turn, pushed the American from animated to psychotic as he leapt between the old woman and the Korean who had now discarded the useless gun in favor of retrieving his revolver to finish her off. Unable to effectively sight past the delirious foreigner, the ROK officer finally acquiesced to the barrage of panic stricken orders that were foaming from his mentor's mouth. A few moments later, after the angry little man finally gave a terse and threatening command, the entire platoon resumed its rain-soaked march toward the far side of the clearing. Meanwhile, the American just stood there, breathless, watching as his soldiers neared the woods' edge. Then, he slowly turned and faced the tragedy behind him. Seeing the traumatized old woman still on the ground, he leaned forward, rain dripping from his nose, and pleaded the same word over and over in her native tongue: democracy, democracy, democracy. When she failed to move or offer any sense of

understanding his predicament, he leaned still closer and, face to face, asked the only other Korean words he appeared to know: Clean toilet? Clean toilet? The old woman remained as stone, unable to comprehend him or anything that had just happened. The American finally muttered an English word she would later learn meant excrement, and then he danced off dejectedly in the direction of his unruly charges.

Unable to face the slaughter next to her, the old woman remained laying there in the rain for many hours after the soldiers had left. Her entire family - a husband, four children, two step-daughters, and five grand-children - were gone. Her first meeting with an American had cost her everything she loved. But as the sun began to set on the horizon, from somewhere inside a small remnant of what she used to be finally roused her to stand, retrieve a shovel from the hut, and one by one, either carry or drag each of her loved ones up into the hills to do what had to be done. It took three days, working by sunlight during the daytime and moonlight by night, to lift enough mud from the near frozen ground to sufficiently cover each corpse. Though she did not purposefully sleep during the burials, just before evening on the second day she caught herself in a deep slumber, kneeling over the half covered body of her beloved youngest grandchild. She had been suddenly awakened by the growl from a wild dog who had followed her up the hill to investigate the smell of stale blood. But upon seeing what horror stared at him from her opened eyes, the animal slowly lowered its head and quietly slunk away into the dusk. She was not bothered again.

When it was over and everyone was sufficiently covered until spring, she returned to the hut, laid down upon the dirt floor, and did not come out for several weeks. She felt numb as a never ending flood of grief routed out every last residue of her soul, so that for each moment endured she became less than the nothing she had become the moment before. She slept little, ate less, and even her own stench and bodily functions were not enough to move her from the hut. In the end, she nearly reached her goal of willing herself to death when, of its own momentum, a small handmade shuttlecock that the children used to play with fell from a shelf onto the floor. It landed a few inches in front of her face and after staring at it for a long time, the old woman took it as a sign that she must go on living to honor the memory of those she had lost. Slowly, she raised herself off the floor and began the long process of performing the many rituals for the dead, cleansing both herself and the hut. She even started attending to her rabbits again, many of which had died in their wooden cages during her long period of neglect. Then, once everything was completed and she was restored, the old woman gathered some rice cakes, put on her coat, and headed off to see the refugees heading north.

Qui stood immobile, gently caressing the riddled wood with her eyes as she listened to the old woman's story. Knowing what would be asked next, Qui slowly raised her right hand and placed her fingertips to the old woman's lips. Before the question could be said, Qui answered her elder by stating that when they moved on she would leave her daughter behind. It was evident to both women that the child was in no condition to travel, and any attempt to do so would mean certain death for her as it had for many others along the northern march. Her only chance for survival was to remain in the old woman's nurturing care, for they both desperately needed one another: the girl to be drawn back to life and the lonely old woman to be ushered into death during the coming years. They were two frail and

vulnerable souls seeking a bond of belonging and affection with someone they could trust. Qui knew it was the right thing to do. Li-ho's death had temporarily saved their daughter. Now, to keep her alive Qui had to leave her in the care of someone she could trust. By her kindness and generosity the old woman had proven herself to be that person. As if to sign the agreement, the two women held hands and silently cried tears together.

As January continued to pass, the little girl made continual but small progress, seeming to ebb toward consciousness like a tide in slow motion. Like before, every few hours the old woman applied something new to her charge: a potion, followed by a tonic, then a poultice combined with chanting, and so on. All of this was done around two daily baths to cleanse the child before starting all over again. The process was as exhausting as it was redundant, but the old woman was determined to succeed, utilizing every helpful skill that her ancestors and their spirits had taught her. It could not fail. It would not fail. It must succeed. And it did. As the end of the month approached, the weary little traveler finally opened her eyes and cried out for her mother. It would, however, be several months more until she was strong enough to walk, too much time for the others to wait while they still hoped to reach safety. But the old woman had brought her back from the edge and would continue to strengthen her with each passing day.

In exchange for the little girl, the old woman had provided her guests with the name of a local fisherman and sufficient bribery for him to take them by sea to the North. It was pointless to continue by road past Osan, given that attacks on northbound refugees became harsher as one approached Seoul, the ROK capital some thirty miles south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Just as the old woman had predicted the day they met, death surely did lay ahead for anyone who continued up that way. Of the roughly two hundred and seventy fugitives left in their convoy after the Hellcat's attack, only sixty-seven had made it to the outskirts of Seoul by early January. Of these, a scant fifteen survived thirty miles farther to a clandestine crossing point along the DMZ, eleven falling to land mines and gunfire during the two and one-half mile wide passage through no-man's land. In the end, from over three hundred people assembled on the road west of Taejon just one month before, a total of four had survived the walk to freedom. As if being stalked by the approaching new year, Korean-on-Korean violence continued to escalate at a feverish pitch throughout 1949, the ghost of 1950 casting its long dark shadow into the past announcing its indomitable approach.

When the end of January neared, Qui, her son, and Lee Dae Ja prepared to leave. As had been agreed to by all, the old woman was introduced to the little girl as her long-lost grandmother. Having only known three of her grandparents, two grandfathers and one grandmother, all of whom perished during their flight from Mokpo, it was not hard to convince a denatured four year old that her other grandmother had returned from the dead with strong medicine to save her granddaughter. Qui, in turn, promised that she would come back as soon as possible to retrieve them both, knowing this too was a lie. But when the little girl, responsive to affection and comfort as all children are, looked up and said she loved her dead grandmother, Qui was able to leave in peace. She was certain her daughter would make a full recovery by year's end under the old woman's care, and she did. She walked, she played, she laughed, and she grew happily with the old woman. How could Qui have known that at the outbreak of overt hostilities in July of 1950 when thousands upon thousands of North Korean troops streamed across the DMZ, an errant artillery barrage in

support of the American Task Force Smith's ineffectual counterattack would obliterate everything in that small clearing: the rabbits, the bullet ridden wall, and the two terrified souls clinging to one another inside the hut.

Not knowing what was to come, on February 1st, the three remaining travelers said their heartfelt goodbyes and headed west. Physically recuperated from their prior trauma and with well stocked sacks over their shoulders, they made the twenty-two mile snow covered trek to the tiny coastal fishing village in just two days. There, as promised, they were able to contact the fisherman who eagerly accepted the bribes sent by the old woman: a small sum of money and two-dozen large pelts suitable for stitching into hats or gloves. In return, he neither criticized, condoned, nor commented upon the slaughter of the rabbit farmers, all of whom had been old acquaintances of his. He also made no attempt to inquire of his new cargo's plight. Death on the peninsula had become commonplace as breathing, so it was taken for granted that anyone who was alive had survived many who were not. To inquire or talk of such things was of no use or consequence. So, with little discussion their deal was struck, spending that evening hidden in the fisherman's home. The next night, they set out in his small motorized boat.

The fisherman had commandeered the diesel powered craft, a thirty-six foot vessel of Fukuoka design, from the Japanese during their hasty withdrawal in 1945. It was a rarity amongst Koreans and the fisherman had used all his skill and cunning, first to acquire the boat and then to secure a steady supply of black market fuel on which to keep it running. Both of these he put to great use establishing his reputation as one of the most proficient of all fishermen on the western coast. Not only did he catch enough to secure himself sizable wealth, but there was always plenty left over for the troops assembling southwest of Osan, thus ensuring his continued unencumbered success. Yet, given the country's ever present and invisible lottery of death, the old woman knew he would not be one to turn down an opportunity for feeding his own avarice.

The fisherman was well versed with all the waters along the west coast of Korea. Even after the establishment of the DMZ in 1945, he continued to maintain many contacts north of the line, some by trade, some by bribe, and all by mutual need. If fish were allowed to cross the 38th parallel, then so must he and every other fisherman on both sides of the divide. The seventy mile trip to dry land in the North would take roughly six hours, given the path necessary to avoid ROK patrol boats. Once there, he would discharge his passengers, secure a replenishment of fuel, and return south somewhat richer than the preceding day. Unfortunately, as they approached the aquatic border his plans began to unravel.

Traditionally, due to low visibility and rough winter seas, ROK warships stayed close to shore during nighttime. But with the American occupation came many advancements in military hardware including attainment of weaponry discarded by Japan. Unknown to the fisherman, the most recent of these additions included newly refurbished Japanese MTB type T-14 patrol boats, retrofitted with the latest in U.S. ship board radar. Fifty feet long, eleven feet wide, armed with a twenty-five millimeter cannon, and possessing a nine hundred horsepower engine that could thrust it along at well over thirty knots, the T-14's were dreaded scavengers amongst the Southeast Asian islands during World War Two. Previously limited to a few hundred yards by floodlights, their night vision had now been

unleashed horizon to horizon by American technology, making them a vastly more formidable foe. It was as the small fishing vessel approached northern waters that cannon fire from one of these T-14 boats landed less than one hundred yards off their stern. With nothing else to do, caught totally by surprise, the fisherman gunned his engine full throttle while he shouted desperate pleas for help into his radio.

Though his boat was significantly lighter than the fifteen ton T-14, it was hard pressed to match the thirty knots of its pursuer. However, as the overeager South Korean's had begun firing well before the smaller craft was in range, the fisherman knew he might yet outrun them if only a North Korean patrol boat were to respond. As luck would have it, a few minutes and several near misses into the chase, on the distant northern horizon he spotted searchlights from three communist vessels rapidly closing in their direction. He let out a loud cry of disrespectful defiance over the heads of the mother and child who were cowering against his boat's low stern gunwale and turned back to smile at the other woman who had been hiding behind the ship's high pointed prow when everything evaporated in one large flash of light.

Just before the chase began, Lee Dae Ja had left her two companions at the back of the boat and walked past the fisherman's cramped wheelhouse to peer out over the front. When the attack occurred and their small boat sped forward erratically changing directions to prevent the ROK gunman from gaining an accurate sight, there was no time to rejoin her friends. All any of them could do was crouch down so as not to be thrown over the side by their captain's evasive maneuvers. Periodically, as they were being tossed back and forth, Lee Dae Ja would catch a glimpse of Qui and her son fearfully clutching to one another as the fisherman skillfully ran slalom through a thundering valley of towering water columns. In abject despair, she turned to stare at her captain for any signs of hope when unexpectedly he smiled a huge grin right at her. It was at that precise moment that everything including the thwak-ka-chung of exploding ordinance disappeared along with her consciousness.

When she awoke a few moments later, Lee Dae Ja felt herself slipping toward the back of the boat. Grabbing a nearby deck cleat to steady and raise herself, her head lolled from side to side as her blurred vision revealed speckles of light floating in the water all around her. Startled by the sudden roar of the three North Korean boat's speeding by, she shuddered and pressed her eyes closed. Upon re-opening them, they began to clear and she started to recognize features of the wheelhouse just a few feet away. It was there that she found the fisherman, head down, impaled mid-abdomen halfway through the broken enclosure's front window. Beyond him there was nothing, and soon she realized that the speckles of light all around her were the burning shards from the vessel's stern end. Before the more powerful ROK ship turned to flee, fearing attack by the more numerous North Korean's, one of its final volleys had landed square in its prey's aft deck. Qui and the boy were gone. Horrified, Lee Dae Ja watched as her captain slipped beneath the blackness before her. All at once, the ship's remains leaned steeper into their final descent while she kicked and screamed feverishly at the approaching void. Unable to escape its frozen touch, first her flailing feet and then her hammering legs were enveloped in a pungent, sticky goo, only to be released momentarily by a second flash.

It is hard to say for sure what ignited the oil slick from the sinking craft. The North Korean boats had not

passed close enough to cause the explosion, so the culprit had most likely been a burning piece of wood or a spark from a shorted piece of electrical equipment in the shattered wheelhouse. Whatever the cause, more than one hundred gallons of fuel which had been disgorged from the boat's ruptured tanks blew up in a dense fireball that singed Lee Dae Ja's entire body, flinging her into the frozen sea. In near complete shock but still conscious, she struggled toward the surface only to be coated in flaming diesel as she involuntarily gasped for breath, the skin above her shoulders melting upon her. She breathed fire only briefly but helplessly, before being yanked from the inferno.

During the years to come, North Koreans would die by the hundreds of thousands, many in heroic efforts such as displayed that night at sea. A sailor having sighted the sole survivor when they hurried by, one of the Korean boats turned to rescue her while its companions continued on in pursuit. Undaunted by the explosion which hurled the woman overboard, the crew did not hesitate. Swooping forward through the fire, the craft momentarily slowed as one of them, supported by two others, leaned down through the flames, garnering himself a smattering of second and third degree burns, to grasp the charred victim before they sped off to the north. Taking her below and laying her upon a hastily cleared table, the ship's medic and all available crew stood by her side. Her scorched throat nearly swollen shut, Lee Dae Ja ejected desperate, gurgling, broken syllables, identifying herself, her heroic husband, and the name they had chosen for the child still inside of her whom she pleaded for them to save. The medic, who told the officer next to him that he did not think she would reach their port alive, was ordered to do what he could. Having little actual medical knowledge beyond what he had learned hunting as a boy, that is what he did. Removing several ampules, a large needle, glass syringe, and plunger from his bag, he rapidly drew up nearly half his supply of morphine. Then, after instructing his companions to hold her tightly, he slowly began injecting the thin liquid through the crisped skin of her neck, all the while listening to her heart through the stethoscope he had gingerly lain upon her burnt chest. As the struggling blackened mass before them lapsed into a contorted final peace and her heartbeats slowed to a near stop, the medic quickly unsheathed a dagger from his side and, plunging it into her, eviscerated the dying woman so as to free the child from its mother's hapless corpse.

And so it was on February 4th, 1949, approximately twenty-five miles southwest from the port of Haeju, Seok Dae Jo was born on a North Korean warship racing for home.

* * * *

Sitting in his lavish prison cell many decades later, Seok Dae Jo recalled how North Korean authorities had allowed him to view the sixty year old secret file which held the record of that night at sea. For the first time, he would read his mother's and father's names. For the first time, he would learn about the few known details of his father having been a loyal aid to the heroic Lieutenant Kim during the Yosu Mutiny. And for the first time, he would read the medic's agonizing report of how his mother died when he had been saved. It was not a large file. There were scant details of Seok Jo Hee's valiant fight and death at Sunchon, only a jumble of facts assembled from a hand full of

survivors who had made it north. Totally absent was any account of Lee Dae Ja's journey from Yosu to the Yellow Sea, no witnesses having survived. Neither Qui's family nor that of the old woman's were mentioned. There was little known of his heritage, and the medic's two page report comprised nearly half of the folder's content. There were no photographs, only words, and the few words that were there did not paint a pleasing image. It was something that brought great sadness to an aging Seok Dae Jo and, at the same time, renewed commitment as the authorities knew it would.

It was because of what was in this file that early on Seok Dae Jo was officially designated the sole surviving member of a heroic family. In different times, such state recognition might have meant special treatment or protection for the bearer of such distinction. But in 1949 as the North hovered on the precipice of an exponential increase in its number of heroic family orphans, it was thought that to make this known, absent its due merits, would be to only cheapen the honor. Rather than announce something that the State was in no position to fulfill, it was decided best to keep the child's title and family history a secret. So, two days after arriving in Haeju, the miracle baby was quietly shipped off to a nondescript orphanage on the outskirts of Anju, a coal mining town forty miles northwest of Pyongyang, the country's capital.

Overall, Seok Dae Jo's early life was quite typical for any North Korean orphan of that time. In the U.S. during the same period, priority for these leftover citizens fell well below the concern for roadway beautification, yet slightly above the need for a national garbage disposal policy. In the North, however, parentless children were highly valued, because this was the land of belonging and affection. These two key elements of North Korean being - belonging and affection - would later become the basis for Juche, the country's national philosophy of self-reliance. There was and there continues to be nothing more important to the citizenry of the North than to feel that you belong and to feel affection for and from those with whom you belong filially, locally, and nationally. What Americans would bumblingly claim to invent nearly fifty years later - it takes a village - the Koreans would have already perfected for well over a millennium. In Korea it took a family, a village, and a country. While the South was slowly losing its identity under the assault of U.S. imperialism, the North doubled its efforts at belonging and affecting, so that for those who had no family, the village and country worked all the harder.

It would be untrue to say that just because he was an orphan Seok Dae Jo lead a privileged life. By economic standards of the day North Korea was a poor country, devastated by almost forty-five years of a prior occupation and struggling to ward off another pending occupation from the South. At that time, most of the nation's wealth came from it's communist allies on the mainland, the bulk of it as military aid. Yet, whereas his American counterparts were often subject to prison-like institutionalization, he and his companions were sheltered in modest surroundings where, similar to those of children with parents, they were guaranteed daily rice, daily fish, and daily conformation that they were loved and belonged. In many ways, given their limited funding and resources, the early orphanages of North Korea were some of the best in the world. One of them, the Mangyongdae Revolutionary School, which is located on the northern banks of the Taedong River across from Konyu Islet in the western suburbs of Pyongyang, became an outright

factory for the country's future power elite. To be raised in one of these respected homes in no way limited a North Korean child's future.

One of the first things that distinguished Seok Dae Jo from his fellow orphans occurred when he was three years old. Over several months of observation, one of his care givers noticed that he lacked the same sing-songy way of talking common to most children his age. Instead, his pronunciations had a hard, uneven quality to them similar to that often heard in adults who are learning a second language. Marked down as a likely speech impediment, it was accepted as part of him with no further special attention given. Being that this was noticed in the middle of the three year war and there were increasing numbers of children who came daily to the orphanage with missing arms and legs, a variance in speech was hardly worth worrying about. What was important was that he survived the war, spending more of it in tunnels and shelters below ground than above, thankfully during that early time of life that few of us ever remember. And yet, one day this abnormality would be the very reason that the nation's Great Leader Kim Il Sung would declare Seok Dae Jo a national treasure. Many years later in New York, an American diplomat with extensive medical training would correctly diagnose the cause as foreign accent syndrome. An extremely rare medical condition, it was first reported in 1919 regarding a Czechoslovakian patient. Usually afflicting adults after a stroke or brain injury, the victims' speech patterns reveal new, never before used vocalizations. A famous case of this syndrome occurred in 1960 when a recuperating stroke sufferer native to North East England realized that her speech had been permanently recast within a Jamaican accent. Fetal malnutrition, such as Seok Dae Jo suffered during his mother's death march, can be just as injurious to the brain as a stroke. But for now, he was simply the child who sounded somewhat different from those with whom he belonged. However, soon everything would change after the funny sounding kid read a brief article on general relativity.

Albert Einstein published his Theory of General Relativity in 1915. Arguably second only to Sir Isaac Newton's discovery of gravity in terms of its overall contribution to science, Einstein's theory was read around the world, even in North Korea. Though he hardly understood what it meant, Seok Dae Jo first heard about it when he was nine years old. It was 1958, five years after the Korean War Armistice was signed, and he had found it in a weekly newspaper his school received from Pyongyang. The article, a crude and incorrect interpretation of Einstein's idea, gave just enough garbled information about the theory for its author to somehow conclude that like gravity, American imperialism did not apply equally to all who were subject to it. This gave Seok Dae Jo a marvelous idea. His teacher had just announced to his class that he wanted each of them to write an essay about the inferiority of the United States. What better way to expose the imperialists' weaknesses than by using a theory from one of their greatest thinkers. So, during his daily routine - rise at five, one hour of chores, one hour for food and hygiene, four hours of class, two hours for lunch and rest, five hours of age-appropriate labor in a local coal mine, one hour for dinner and hygiene, then two hours of study before going to bed a nine - he spent every free moment preparing his submission.

Titled "American Imperialism - a relativistic theory of freedom," Seok Dae Jo outlined how the U.S. version of freedom was, in fact, selective, applying to some but not to all of its citizens. For a nine year old and a nine year

old North Korean orphan at that, it was an amazing paper. While often missing or even omitting its own point in places, it was highly creative, intelligently written and above all else it was doomed to failure. Not only was it based upon a badly written article of half a column's length that was buried near the back of a weekly paper, the child's essay had severely overestimated his teacher's intelligence. The school master, instructor of boys from ages six to ten, had only ever finished the equivalent of fifth grade in his own education. An earnest man, having distinguished himself on the battlefield during the recent war, he was given this assignment after expressing a desire to work with orphans. Party officials granted his request by declaring him an Instructor for the People's Education of Orphans, and with just a few weeks of intensive study they sent him off to the school in Anju. The man was known to his pupils as a kind but strict teacher of both high expectations and confusing explanations. It was, therefore, of great surprise to all when the morning after they had submitted their works the instructor stormed into the classroom. He yanked Seok Dae Jo from his seat, beat him savagely about the head and body, after which he threw the dazed boy into the classroom's closet, locked the door, and then dismissed the others for the rest of the day before storming back out again. It was a Friday.

Sunday, two days later at 7:00 a.m., the teacher was awakened by loud knocking on his door. Opening it he found himself staring at four well dressed men with national party symbols on their lapels: agents from Pyongyang. They apologized for waking the school master and explained that they had come to find the boy. They had already been to the orphanage dormitory, but no one there seemed to know of his whereabouts. Having heard of the brutal display two days before, some had taken for granted that he was in the infirmary while others assumed he was still under the direct supervision of his instructor. Suddenly, the teacher who had been respectfully listening to the agents with half closed eyes let out a shocking cry. Indeed, he had looked forward to the boy's submission knowing that the lack of good speech made it natural for Seok Dae Jo to excel at writing. However, given his own educational shortfalls, he grossly misinterpreted his pupil's denunciations as being praise for the aggressors. Infuriated, he had hastily written a letter of condemnation about the paper and its author. Then, the next morning, after giving the boy his just rewards, he had raced off to submit his charges before the appropriate local town officials. But now, for the first time, standing in front of agents who had come in response to his accusations, he realized he had forgotten to retrieve the child from the closet before returning home for the weekend.

The agents aghast, the five men fled for the school only to find the boy unconscious on the closet floor amidst his own fluids. The agents frantically screamed for the teacher to bring water as they carefully lifted and then propped the child in a chair. After several drenchings and many trips back and forth by the master, the boy finally came around and the agents allowed him to drink as much as he pleased. Weak and still shaken, the small child thanked his rescuers profusely, at the same time cowering whenever his distraught instructor appeared with more water. After a few moments of rest, the agents patiently asked him to stand and he did. Then, to his master's great surprise, the four men each retrieved a small wooden club from beneath their jackets with which they summarily beat the boy back into unconsciousness. They then turned their attention upon the teacher.

When he awoke the next day, Seok Dae Jo had no idea he was in Pyongyang nor that his teacher was in far

worse shape than he. The instructor had submitted the boy's original work along with his complaint, after which both made their way quickly to the capital. For unlike the master, everyone else who read the work was able to clearly see what he had missed. True, it was written in a mangled way that only a nine year old could do, and at times it was self-contradicting or became lost in meaningless tangents. But beneath its surface ran certain undertones of political savvy with insinuations of international brinkmanship that are seldom seen in works of people twice his age. Perhaps it was just this fact that a nine year old was not expected to produce such sophistication which prevented the teacher from seeing what lay before his eyes. Instead of realizing the boy's true intent, the educator's mind had incorrectly refocused the essay's content to make its outcome suitable to the author's scant years, allowing the master to misinterpret it as a paper of praise rather than the denunciation it was meant to be. Unfortunately, after his presentation to the town authorities the irate teacher had stormed out of their presence as quickly as he had left the classroom earlier that morning, before anyone could correct him in hindsight. In contrast, the local officials were amazed by what they read and, knowing the Nation's thirst for excellence, quickly sped the paper and its conflicting complaint off to higher-ups. By the following day, they both lay in the hands of the Worker's Party's Sub-Secretary for the Office of People's Education and Understanding. Thus, it was a surprise to no one but the school teacher when the agents from Pyongyang appeared on his doorstep that Sunday morning.

It was not within the agents original plan to beat the boy. Instead, they had hoped to retrieve him with as little fan-fare as possible. Those needing to know were told ahead of time that they were dealing with a heroic family's sole surviving son due great honor and respect. But they were also reminded that the status of many such honorees was still held in the safekeeping of state secrecy as releasing such information might only serve to weaken the underpinnings of self-humility that formed the core of North Korean nationalism. The agents themselves were not told about this distinction, but were simply instructed to treat him with reverence, though without indulgence. Their intent, however, was dramatically influenced when they found the boy laying in his own waste. Their beatings were not a punishment for what he had written, but a disciplinary action against one who had failed to maintain the proper decorum befitting veneration. In the end, they did no real harm to the child, for their years of training and experience made them quite skillful at administering corporal punishment to men, women, or children. As each individual situation demanded, they applied their craft in sufficient manner so as to produce either mutilation without somnolence, mutilation with somnolence, or varying degrees and durations of somnolence without any lasting marks. In Seok Dae Jo's case, a few well placed whacks from each assailant's baton were compatible with the quiet, un mutilated acquisition and transportation of their charge as ordered. Their instructions regarding the teacher were quite different.

As Seok Dae Jo lay in a Pyongyang infirmary, the former teacher, his wife, and three children were all on their way to a re-education camp. How anyone could have so badly misinterpreted the work of a child, a heroic family member at that, was beyond the understanding of all through who's hands the paper had passed. It was of critical national interest to safely retrieve the child, but it was also important to stamp out weakness and ineptitude. In North Korean fashion, this meant punishment for both the offender and those who were tainted by being closest to him: the

family members. So, after subduing the child, the agents carried out their second orders by attending to the teacher with much greater force, but no less skill. Then, while two of them accompanied the boy back to Pyongyang, the remaining pair hastily loaded the battered master and his overwhelmed family into the back of a waiting truck for the twenty mile long journey northeast to the Kaechon Family Camp Number Fourteen. While not as draconian as the North's Centers for Life Imprisonment, such as Yodok or the many sites in the country's northeast, the sadism of Kaechon quickly earned it global recognition as a concentration camp. Ten years there proved sufficient to re-educate the teacher and his two remaining children, his wife and other child having been too contaminated to survive the process.

After being given a few days to recuperate and adjust to his new surroundings, Seok Dae Jo was carefully examined by handlers from the People's Youth Elite Core (PYEC). A division of the highly secretive North Korean Intelligence Agency, PYEC's main responsibility was to identify candidates for future vacancies in either diplomacy, espionage, or both. Its members were gleaned from all over the country, selecting the very best for both foreign affairs positions and highly sensitive undercover missions. It was unusual for a child of less than ten years of age to be referred to the PYEC for evaluation, and though its director was not enthusiastic about the file he had received from his friend, the Worker's Party Sub-Secretary, he dutifully prepared an appropriate battery of tests to engage the youth. Given the boy's eye opening essay and his well documented speech impediment, these exams were intended to assess his potential for writing national propaganda literature, without any attention being paid toward his verbal skills. However, as in any country, errors are often the mainstay of life in North Korea, a fact testified to by the large number of re-education camps which dot the peninsula's northern half. In preparing the package that the handlers would administer, an exclusion was misread as an inclusion, so that a small subset of verbal skills tests were accidentally inserted near the end of the exam bundle.

PYEC handlers seldom know nor claim to know the reasons behind what they do. Often spending less than one year with a candidate before being reassigned to a new charge, most never realize whether they are cultivating an ambassador, an assassin, or someone who will fulfill an important supportive role for either of the two. Yet, evaluations were, in essence, the bread and butter of a handler's career: the more accurate their reports in identifying the future potential of each handlee, the farther one climbed up the PYEC ladder. Evaluations were so vital to the institution in terms of both those who it served and those who served within it that even the director periodically handled a candidate so as to reaffirm his skills and reputation. Seok Dae Jo, not being on par with the director's interests, was assigned to a pair of newly trained handlers. Unlike the director, they would find nothing unusual about forty-seven consecutive written examinations being succeeded by a short series of early-childhood language tests.

The handlers, both pleasant men, were in their sixth day of working with Seok Dae Jo when they pulled out the nine verbal skill tests from the remaining bundle: one each in Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, French, German, Spanish, Italian, and English. Knowing of the boy's vocal failings by prior written evaluations and their own conversations with him, they thought it odd to include these exams in their report. Still, they were determined to fulfill

their duty to the PYEC and their Great Leader Kim Il Sung, so they carefully and patiently administered each one by asking the boy to repeat words after them. Starting with the Korean page, a handler would say a common Korean word, wait for the boy to repeat it, then move on to the next.

There were twenty words on each page and it would take about twenty-five minutes to complete the entire series. At first, the results were not alarming, the eager child doing his best to say each one clearly and succinctly. Yet, as expected, his words came out with the same clickety-clack irregularity that were the hallmark of his awkward vocalizations. But the three carried on, and from there things only got worse. After so much noteworthy penmanship, both handlers felt shamed to focus upon his well documented weakness. By the time the harsh Korean gave way to the disjointed Chinese, then the mangled Japanese was replaced by the incomprehensible Russian, the handlers' growing discomfort began to be reflected in the boy's watery eyes. It was a painful discourse for all three as they continued on, so that at the end of the disfigured French tears were streaming down the child's stolid face. At that juncture, the two older men briefly stopped and stepped to the corner of the room to argue the point of continuing.

They liked the boy and the boy would do as they asked, but he was obviously humiliated to perform so poorly in front of them. Perhaps they could ask their superintendent to postpone completion of the day's tests for reason of exhaustion. Examining this possibility for a few moments they decided not to ask. How tired could one get sitting and talking? Other excuses were considered, but to no avail. Belonging and affection required discipline and acceptance, the good and the bad both being taken into account. So, they returned to the table and persevered through some of the worst German, Spanish and Italian that they would ever hear, all the while encouraging the child to remain strong as they began to read from the final page.

For the most part, the handlers and the little boy did not know the meanings of the non-Korean words they were saying. Each handler, however, during their training had learned by rote how to precisely say the foreign symbols as if pronounced by a native speaker. And so, when one of them asked the near sobbing Seok Dae Jo to say the first English word - dog - and he heard nothing, the handler calmly repeated his request. Again, there seemed to be a void. Patiently, he was just about to ask a third time when he froze in mid-breath. Looking firmly at the boy and gently grasping the wet face between his hands, he leaned forward to listen intently as he slowly repeated the word, one more time. And then he heard it as if whispered along the sun drenched Coney Island Boardwalk on a warm summer afternoon: dog. Crystal clear with no impediments, purer than on the tapes with which the handlers themselves had been coached, the word flowed through the boy's lips in one smooth unabridged syllable. What had completely been missed the first time and nearly missed the second was experienced as the most angelic pronunciation of the word that either handler had ever heard. Like the teacher who had not seen what he had read, expecting something totally different, the two agents had not at first been able to hear when the boy spoke. But now as both men began saying the word over and over just to listen to him repeat it, there was no denying that they had discovered something truly amazing. As their momentum grew slowly at first, then faster and faster, they started shouting it at each other: dog, dog, dog, dog, dog! With each repetition the child's shaken confidence was further bolstered by his handler's

increasing glee. To everyone's astonishment, when the funny sounding orphan from Anju spoke English, he sounded just like an American.

Here was an incredible case and the very next day, though they had not yet been together one week, the two handlers were reassigned, so that the director himself might sign off on this candidate. While he cared little for the details of hardship which outlined the boy's short life, he knew when to make his presence known by both those within the PYEC and those outside of it. This boy would go far, having a rare gift born of privations that for some strange reason had given him the capability to sound just like the people his countrymen most hated. It was one thing to know a few words of someone else's language and yet another to be able to string them together into comprehensible sentences. But to do all this in the full-flavored accent of a foreign tongue was to bring all the subtleties and nuances of communication to their pinnacle of expression, like seasoning for a fine stew. Given the times they lived in, this child was destined to have an important life and the director was determined that his name be written large at its beginning. By officially enrolling the boy into the PYEC, he made Seok Dae Jo one of its youngest members and the very youngest to ever be assigned to the Pyongyang Foreign Language College. There he would be groomed as an instructor and translator of English.

For someone who for obvious reasons never spoke much before, being enveloped in the language arts was a whole new world for Seok Dae Jo, one to which he took whole heartedly. At last, he and everyone else understood his strange voice, and far from being the oddity he had believed it to be, it was actually a strength and great pride for both him and his nation. During the next eighteen years, fifty-two weeks per year, and seven days per week, he willingly immersed himself in the linguistic pursuit of understanding and assimilating everything American that could be expressed through verbal communication. It was not enough to be able to say, spell, and define a word. He needed to know all of its variant meanings as affected by grammatical context, historical perspectives, and regional dialects. It wasn't just a matter of learning to speak English. It was an overwhelming desire to be able to understand and use it in every imaginable situation and with any possible conversant. He needed to know the American language better than any American knew it. For him, it was a test of stamina, fortitude, and willpower at which, after eighteen years, he appeared to be making some headway.

In support of his endeavor, the Foreign Language College gave Seok Dae Jo access to its greatest hidden treasure: a library of over half a million volumes written in English. Containing everything from the Constitution of the United States to Moby Dick and beyond, there were books on poetry, music, archery, and economics. There were history books, novels, art books, and books about sports. There were textbooks on every imaginable subject, scientific and cultural journals, and magazines for both men and women on all conceivable aspects of human expression, including sexuality. The North had been secretly harvesting these works from around the globe for over a decade as if to, piece by piece, reconstruct the very heart and soul of their enemy in the hope that one day they might learn to master and, thereby, defeat it. This cache, a hoard of heretofore unused knowledge, had remained classified, growing daily, hidden within the confines of five sub-basements in one of the college's main edifices. Periodically, individual

tomes from a highly limited and by no means exhaustive index were leant out to various college faculty or students. But aside from four language masters, three full-time staff, two high-level Worker's Party administrators, and the Great Leader himself, Kim Il Sung, no one else was allowed full access to the trove. That is, until Seok Dae Jo.

If he could have had things his way, the funny sounding kid from Anju would have never left the secret library. As it was, he lived in it, literally, the staff having created an apartment of three small rooms for him on the middle floor: a study, bedroom, and bath. His masters came to instruct him daily in the boy's private rooms, and other than to sleep or go to the bathroom, if he was not in the study, then he was invariably out perusing the over eight miles of bookshelves stacked floor to ceiling amongst the sub-basement's five floors. Even his meals were brought to him in these cramped quarters which provided the first worrisome indications of their pupil's extreme commitment. The duly concerned staff regularly reported to the masters that there were uneaten meals stacked three and sometimes four high outside his apartment door. Whereas others studying at the college were often berated for not applying themselves hard enough, Seok Dae Jo was constantly being punished with walks outside, time out to play a game of spinning tops, trips to the beach to learn how to swim, or other forms of exercise to forcefully separate this child from the learning nipple. Not that anyone was attempting to wean him from succoring knowledge, but there was a general fear that insanity or worse might occur if he were allowed to drive himself onward unabated.

Indeed, he drove himself hard. After just two years, at age eleven, he began giving his first lectures on the English language to newly matriculated freshmen at the college. Between the ages of twelve and sixteen, he began working on and completed a series of eleven master's thesis, with titles like *The American Demand for Supply and Demand* and *American Egocentrism: the Limited View from the Top*. Each fully developed treatise came with its own written summary of over three hundred pages and an accompanying set of private and public lectures that he personally performed for college members, local officials, and on several occasions visiting heads of state. People marveled at his keen perspectives, insights, and crystal clear pronunciation, of which more than one diplomatic guest would inquire whether the child had been raised in the United States. His rate of learning was so astounding that by seventeen one of his masters openly commented that he doubted the boy would survive much past puberty. Though he had never been sick a day in his life since he first set foot inside the secret library, something had to give, surely would give, if he were allowed to go on at this breakneck speed. By eighteen, as he continued to write and lecture at an exhausting pace, the situation become so perilous that drastic measures were taken in an effort to reign in his health and sanity before it was too late. One day, after returning from his second national lecture tour throughout the provinces, he was called to a special meeting with all four of his masters. There, they announced that for his own good and as per their arrangements, the following week he would marry. For the first time in anyone's memory, the boy fainted dead away.

Their wedding and marriage were a comedy and tragedy all wrapped into one. The boy had no desire or need to get married, seeing it as yet another unexplainable punishment, much like swimming, that detracted from his never ending studies. She was intellectually his polar opposite, the niece to one of his masters, a respectful, polite girl raised in a small fishing village along the east coast. Two years his junior, the only things she could say in English were hello

and goodbye, which the boy secretly hoped would reflect the entirety of their communication and relationship. But even he could not dishonor his country's tradition of pre-arranged marriages and, as instructed, they were wed the very next week. In all, they spent one night together, an event he persevered by reminding himself that it was simply a practical application of knowledge. He read everything in the secret library, including the magazines no one else was allowed to see. Now, for the first time he said and did all of the things that only a virgin will ever say or do. It was a night of exploration, a night of whimsey, and a night of comedy from which neither suffered and yet neither was eager to repeat. For privacy, they were provided with a small furnished house near the college, though after their wedding night he was never there, preferring the solitude of his apartment to her company. Yet, they did talk by phone once or twice each week, at times even about that evening. But they only met by his masters' frustrated ultimatums and they would never spend another night together. The counterbalancing tragedy finally came nine months later when, unexpectedly, she died in childbirth.

A widower and father at nineteen, he withdrew into his basements. Lectures were cancelled, didactic responsibilities were postponed, and uneaten meals were hastily removed before they could be noticed stacked one upon another. Everyone grieved and pondered over what to do. The boy, for in so many ways he was still a child, was in no way prepared for the role of parent. After only one viewing of their offspring shortly after his wife's death, he showed no further inclination toward it. So, without any discussion, at his masters' behest, the baby was sent to be raised by its maternal grandparents. While Seok Dae Jo would hear of his son periodically, there would be no shared time nor bond between them, even though the father's prestige would be a great influence throughout the infant's life. As for the prodigy, he spent the next year more in confusion than mourning, trying to understand what he could have had, what he had lost, and why it all meant so little to him. It was a time of great self-reappraisal, a maturing around which his masters, the staff, several members of the local Worker's Party office, and even the Great Leader himself worried. It was, therefore, to everyone's uncertain relief and surprise when, a few days after the anniversary of his wife's passing, the twenty year old genius handed one of his masters a paper titled *American Religiosity: a Righteous Faith in Doing Wrong*. Instantly, without looking back, everything started up just as before, the only reminder of the past two years being a small but growing shrine to a deceased girl that was hidden in an unknown fishing village along the country's east coast. It was 1969 and the secret U.S. bombing of Cambodia was underway.

While Seok Dae Jo's own country struggled with the American menace, his life went on unabated. Though he was never given specific orders on what to say or write, he always managed to produce concise literary comments on every conceivable aspect of U.S. injustices and crimes. Being perhaps the most prodigious unknown author of his time, his works and lectures formed the basis of almost every notable North Korean propaganda campaign between 1960 and 1976. Though he seldom received any recognition for his contributions to national unity and identity, several cadres of state journalists and essayists were continually assigned to glean a bounty of useful phrases, insights, and themes from each of Seok Dae Jo's works. For his part, he either did not notice or did not care when on his rare excursions outdoors he would see a huge banner whose slogan had obviously been extracted from one of his more

recent papers or lectures. He was content to be left alone studying, practicing, speaking, and mastering the only thing with which he completely identified: English.

Everything went along regularly for another seven years, his titles continuing to mount, so that a small room in the Foreign Language College's main library was finally dedicated to his works. But in 1976, Seok Dae Jo's life was about to undergo a dramatic change. The North had been recently granted membership into the World Health Organization (WHO) which by association allowed them to send their first Permanent Observer Mission to the United Nations in New York. While great diplomats such as Han Se Hae and Pak Gil Yon would become their nation's ambassadors to the U.N., many other talented and highly trained individuals would be needed to make the mission a success. Amongst these support members, none were perhaps as talented or highly trained as the translators, and amongst translators of the English language, no one in North Korea or perhaps all of Asia could compare to Seok Dae Jo. At twenty-seven years of age he was the youngest member of the North Korean team to land in America amidst the celebration of the U.S. Bicentennial .

For the next thirty-three years, Seok Dae Jo spent almost his entire life in New York. The vast majority of North Koreans find travel within their own country to be highly restricted and controlled, most never traveling outside of it. For the few who do cross borders, their time away is usually discouraged and limited. But he was different, because the State had always viewed him as a double-edged sword. What his masters had originally reported as an alarmingly feverish personal work ethos, the authorities recognized as a potential liability. All workers were valued in the North, but workers who excelled and distinguished themselves sometimes did so at a price. Often those with political aspirations fell into this trap as one's ascent toward Pyongyang could easily trigger retribution from others who were passed over along the way. Even though Seok Dae Jo showed no signs of political interests beyond his writings, his works were becoming so well known that had he ever made a political stance, overnight an instant following would amass around the hermit intellectual. While fighting its enemies on the outside, the State was always on the outlook for potential challengers from within and Seok Dae Jo had been on that short list for quite some time. So when the position for a highly qualified English translator opened at the North Korean Permanent Observer Mission to the United Nations, he was sent packing with blessings from all levels of the country's political and military command. He could just as easily be monitored in New York and, should the situation ever become inconvenient, he could just as easily be eliminated there, too.

In the end, all the fears over Seok Dae Jo were groundless as he took to his new assignment with the same enthusiasm that he originally felt for the secret library. At nine years of age it had seemed to hold an endless wealth of opportunity for him to explore and plunder. But now, after eighteen years, he found himself reading things over for the second, third, and even fourth times, and writing papers that for the most part just re-hashed his earlier perspectives. Undoubtedly, he could have continued on there for many more years before completely exhausting all of the secret library's resources. But rather than continue excavating his intellectual womb, at the risk of unveiling its limitations and tarnishing its memory forever, he was happy to receive his new assignment and immediately prepared

to leave. After all, what better place to continue his educational development than in the Mecca of English: New York.

As in North Korea, Seok Dae Jo's movements and travel abroad were highly limited. In New York, he and other members of the U.N. mission were always accompanied by one or more state agents whenever they left their hotel rooms. This was not as disquieting for him as for the others on his team since he had spent the majority of his prior life concealed in three small rooms within five sub-basements of one building in Pyongyang. There were, however, many great libraries within a few blocks walking distance of their New York residence, and he spent what little free time he had at one or another of these. Though for the most part, he was kept continually busy reading and transcribing official American documents or speeches whenever he was not attending a diplomatic event as the designated North Korean translator. And for the first time, Seok Dae Jo was able to speak English outside of a classroom at the Foreign Language College. He found that his years of study had prepared him well. From day one in America he was able to understand almost everything he heard in his host country's tongue, and soon he was catching even the finer subtleties that only a native speaker would understand. Very early on, this served to cement his reputation with his co-missionaries and their U.S. counterparts.

The election of Jimmy Carter as President of the United States in 1976 was seen as a potential turning point in North Korea and U.S. relations. President Carter had made public statements to the effect that he would like to see all American troops withdrawn from the Korean Peninsula. Though this would never happen, the North's Great Leader Kim Il Sung was eager to capitalize on the new President's wishes. Officially, for decades, all communications between the two nations' leaders had been sent through third party countries such as Gabon, Yugoslavia, or Romania. Unofficially, however, lower level exchanges were now continually being made through the North Korean's Permanent Mission to the United Nations at a rate of twenty to thirty times per year. While Seok Dae Jo was never the one to arbitrate such meetings, he was almost always present at them to translate, and at one of these encounters his value was proven to all who were there.

Unofficial exchanges most often took place along a format known as two-by-two: two Americans faced off against two Koreans, each team comprised of a diplomat and his translator. While the North Koreans always threw in a few state agents to monitor their members' movements, these traveling companions usually waited in an adjacent room while the negotiations were underway. During such a meeting, Seok Dae Jo was translating for a Mr. Lee Hyong Po. Mr. Lee, as he was called, was a patient, well educated, and respectful man with a limited grasp of the English language, and he relied heavily upon his translator's assistance during such sessions. Their counterparts were a pleasant American translator who they had both worked with before and a high ranking U.S. State Department official who they both knew of by reputation, but had never met. The American official was an arrogant man who had little good to say about any Asians, a people he regularly vilified as being secretive and untrustworthy.

As they began their discussions, it was obvious to everyone, including the American translator, that the U.S. official was not in a good mood. This was hardly a productive place from which to start a discussion. Mr. Lee, after considering his options, suggested that they postpone their meeting for one or two days on the grounds that he himself

was not feeling well. Hopefully, by the time they met again, the official would either be in a better mood or replaced by someone more amicable. To this the State Department Official gave his consent, then paused before finishing his agreement with one single word: mystery. The American translator balked at this ending, staring dumbly at his counterpart, not knowing what to say. The official's statement had been a slight against the Koreans in a play on words. On the surface it was what it sounded like, a statement of the uncertain and the unpredictable, both of which were accurate reflections of the official's opinion on North Koreans. But much more than that, it was an insult shot across the table at "Mister Rhee" as a mimicry and mutilation of Mr. Lee's name. Sensing the other translator's consternation, Seok Dae Jo interpreted the word and its connotation respectfully as he could. After the two Koreans exchanged soft glances for a moment, Mr. Lee asked his translator to reply in an appropriate manner as he stood to leave the room. Seok Dae Jo, rising to follow, paused for a moment, then looked straight into the State Department Official's eyes and recited:

Sticks and stones may break our bones

But names will never hurt us

The Americans sat dumbfounded as the two foreigners left the room. They were shamed by what had just happened, but they had also learned two things. The first was to never underestimate the capabilities of the North Korean translator, for they now knew the depth to which he had mastered the English language. The second was that they could always trust Seok Dae Jo to accurately translate everything that they said as there had been no mistake made in conveying the insult nor in constructing its reply. This elevated the little orphan to a position of great value for both sides of the conflict as reliable translation was the key to successful negotiations. From then on, his reputation for truthful and honest work continued to grow throughout his many years in New York, reaching its zenith in 1988, the same year that the World Summer Olympics were held in Seoul, South Korea.

For many decades, the North Koreans had wanted direct diplomatic channels with the U.S., a desire always thwarted by Washington. However, in 1988, for the first time, this changed when President Ronald Reagan finally authorized official mid-level meetings to take place in Beijing. The talks would be conducted between Raymond Burkhardt, the political advisor for the American Embassy in China, and a diplomat from the North. Pyongyang was ecstatic until behind the scenes and on short notice, just three days before the event was to take place, the Americans emphatically pressed one last minute detail: Seok Dae Jo must be the translator for North Korea. If official exchanges were going to take place, the Reagan administration wanted to be sure that the everyone at the table heard exactly, honestly, and completely what the U.S. had to say. Knowing he was stationed at the U.N., Washington proposed to transport Seok Dae Jo from his mission's residence in New York to the talks in Beijing on a high priority military transport.

The North Koreans balked at the request. What if this was simply a ploy to somehow manipulate,

compromise, or, worse yet, eliminate the translator. Contrary to initial fears, his value to the North had only grown with his passage of time in New York. Almost every successful exchange at the U.N. had been done directly through or with the assistance of the once funny sounding kid. Uncertain what to do, the question went directly to the Great Leader himself who, after much consideration, declared that Seok Dae Jo was a national treasure of North Korea deserving the greatest possible respect and safeguarding. After some hemming and hawing by the U.S., one day later, with just twenty-four hours to go before the start of the Beijing talks, Seok Dae Jo secretly became the only North Korean ever to board Air Force One and, along with an entourage of twenty-five secret service agents, he was flown non-stop to China. In exchange, a family member of the U.S. Ambassador to Beijing quietly became the first unofficial American guest in that city's North Korean Embassy until after Seok Dae Jo's safe arrival.

In retrospect, that had been the highpoint in Seok Dae Jo's career. Never crossing over into a direct political position, he remained as his country's main U.N. translator for over thirty years serving a succession of North Korean diplomats. Perhaps it was because he was always in the background, never taking the front seat, that he survived as long as he did. For there was always a high turnover in New York of expatriates from the North, the ever present fear being that too much time in the West might contaminate or distort the resolve of eastern visitors. Yet, year after year he stayed, always translating, always reading, always listening, always learning, always being exposed to more. He even broadened his intellectual horizons through new mediums such as VHS and DVD's, movies of all kinds becoming his favorite past time as he grew older. Never once, though, was he recalled until the end. Perhaps he was just too contaminated to ever come home.

One day in mid-2009, the notice finally came. Two days later, after being away for thirty-three years, a sixty-one year old Seok Dae Jo set foot back in Pyongyang where he would undergo intensive preparations for his final mission. During his return home he learned many things, almost all which he easily understood. Some things, however, like his family's history, were unexpected. Of these surprises, the most disconcerting came after a thorough medical exam when he was told about his advanced metastatic prostate cancer. For several months he had been experiencing severe back pain and now he knew why. The doctors said, sadly, that it was too far gone to effectively treat or cure. But they assured him that it would not be terminal for some time, that they could prescribe him powerful medications to ameliorate the pain, and that none of this needed to interfere with his last great act. And so, everything went along as planned, Seok Dae Jo returning to New York in early January of 2010, where a few weeks later he would be taken into custody.

* * * *

Seok Dae Jo sat in his prison cell facing the silent blank monitor, thinking of his life, that of his parents, and that of his country. The world was about to change dramatically, a change in which he would have no part. His life, having been based upon confinement ever since the agents had removed him from Anju, seemed one in which he had

moved from box to box: first the secret library, then the U.N. mission, and now here. Yet, he had always found freedom on the inside the only way he knew how, being of service to his country. Now, his insides were dying, and soon his remarkable, yet, for the most part unnoticed life would come to an end. He was neither distraught nor did he complain of his circumstances, for his contributions had been many and what little recognition he had received was more than sufficient to quell his need for self-esteem. He had lived a selfless life, one of service to the North, a goal which he would now complete through this final mission in his final days. And so he sat as requested in his cell, a prisoner patiently waiting the end.

He had considered taking one of the pills in the little bottle before him. The pain in his back had been growing steadily, because he had not taken any medication since the day before. Instead, he decided it could wait as the medication sometimes caused a brief lightheadedness. He wanted to think clearly as possible, especially now, for he knew that these first moments would be the hardest and he needed all of his faculties to be sharp and precise. Presently, the pain was annoying at most and he could always take a pill later if it became unbearable. Until then, he would use the discomfort to focus his attention and heighten his awareness, mentally preparing himself for the most important presentation of his life.

After a few more moments of waiting, a series of soft, clear, and repetitive tones sounded from the speakers imbedded within the monitor as if a play were about to start. This was followed by a full-screen image of the American flag waving gracefully against a blue sky with the national anthem starting up in the background. Only five or six notes of the distinctive music played, however, when it and the flag were suddenly replaced by an unsteady picture and the sounds of fifty people in a large room hastily scurrying toward their seats. From what Seok Dae Jo could see, the foreground was occupied by a single long table with nine chairs. Behind it was a riser elevated one foot high, laid out in an arc that encompassed the floor level seating, a curved table with sixteen chairs running its entire length. Finally, a second riser of two foot height arced behind and embraced the first, also having a full-length curved table, but with seating for twenty-five. At each chair's position there was a small monitor, keyboard, mouse, paper, pen, and glass of water. Out of view and behind Seok Dae Jo's limited perspective into the room was a wall full of screens that projected a spectrum of data which the rooms occupants could draw down to, and manipulate on their individual monitors at will. In the middle of this great electronic rampart was a singularly large screen on which was pictured the patient image of Seok Dae Jo. As he watched from his cell, it was impossible to hide the fact that everyone in the large room seemed noticeably uncomfortable, each person hurriedly settling into their designated place facing both their monitor, the camera, and the far away prisoner.

After they were all finally seated, the image steadied itself and zoomed in upon the one individual who was sitting dead center at the lead table. When he stood, so too did everyone else in that room as his familiar American face came into focus. Staring straight ahead, this man forcefully cleared his throat and then calmly he uttered the opening words.

"Hello, Mr. Seok," he said.

Seok Dae Jo rose instantly from his chair and performed a deeply honorable, low, double bow. Rising half way he lifted his face to the screen and respectfully made his reply.

"Greetings, Mr. President."

There are many things which separate traditional American and Korean cultures. Take three simple examples. First, while Americans are superstitious about the number thirteen, Koreans fear the number four, because when pronounced in their language it sounds like the word for death. Nowadays it is common in modern Korean architecture to substitute the letter "F" to designate the fourth floor of a building, much in the same way that many high-rises in the U.S. renumber the thirteenth floor as the fourteenth. For this reason, Seok Dae Jo had always feared celebrating his birthday as it fell on a most un-fortuitous day.

Second the two cultures have developed entirely different ways of looking at a person's age. In the West, each year of life is celebrated by parties and gift giving. In Korean tradition, however, there are only two points worthy of note: the one-hundredth day and the sixty-first birthday. The former is highlighted, because prior to the late twentieth century it was not uncommon for a child to die prior to reaching their one-hundredth day of life. To understand the other date, one must know that Koreans mark their first birthday on the day they are born. Whereas westerners start the aging clock only after leaving the womb, Koreans say you are one year old at birth in recognition that life starts long before the cord is cut. To make it to sixty-one years of age, the equivalent of being sixty years old in the West, was considered a great feat of longevity as most people customarily died long before that point. Seok Dae Jo had passed his sixty-first Korean birthday in 2009. Now, by western standards, he was approaching that same, sixty-first milestone for the second time.

Finally, to western sensibilities, Koreans say their names backwards. While an American would call himself John Doe, in Korea the proper appellation would be Doe John. This difference reveals the philosophical divide between the two nations. Americans value the individual, thereby stating a person's given name first. Koreans, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of belonging to a group by stating the family name first. It was, therefore, proper that the President of the United States should not have mistakenly welcomed his prisoner as Mr. Jo.

* * * *

Formalities exchanged, the President sat, after which all others with him in the top secret situation room reseated themselves. Then, so too did Seok Dae Jo in his holding cell where he had spent the last four hours alone since being taken into custody. As he arrived there almost immediately after being detained, he correctly surmised that he was still in New York City. Obviously, the existence of such a place suggested that he was not the first person of diplomatic consequence to be held against their will. As for his counterparts, they could be almost anywhere, though given their makeup, Washington was still their most likely location. But none of this mattered now as he patiently

waited and watched.

Suddenly, the image on his long screen was divided into three equal parts: a close up of the President in the center, flanked on either side by panning views of the other attendees. For the next few moments they all waited quietly, impatiently eyeing one another on their respective monitors, preparing for the inevitable. It was quite clear from the identities and arrangement of those attending, what was at stake. Nine people were seated at the front table, with the President at its center. To his right sat the Vice President of the United States and to his left was seated the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. To the right of the Vice President were the President Pro-Tempore, the Majority Leader, and the Minority Leader of the United States Senate. To the left of the Chief Justice were the Speaker, Majority Leader, and Minority Leader of the United States House of Representatives. Behind this front table in an arch along the first rise sat all sixteen members of the President's Cabinet. Behind them, arcing along the second level were seated an assortment of Washington's powerful and elite. The left side of the back row was occupied by the entire Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States Armed Forces along with the directors from all branches of the United States Department of Homeland Security, including FEMA, the CIA and the FBI. On the middle and right side of that same row were selected leaders of industry representing banking, transportation, energy, telecommunications, agriculture, livestock, housing, construction, manufacturing, and mining. Finally, on the far right of the back row and perhaps of greatest concern sat the Director of the United States Secret Service. On this day, at this time as the distinction between secret and protective services were beginning to blur, here was the one person who might assume powers second only to the President of the United States much in the same manner his notorious counterpart had in the SS of 1929. Seok Dae Jo looked over this impossible group of individuals, a group never before assembled in one place together, a group that could easily collapse under the sheer weight of its own importance, and he knew that they could only be gathered together for one reason and one reason only: the invocation of martial law throughout the entire United States of America. To this end, with a firm posture, set jaw, and hard tone, the President began the first volley.

"Is it war?"

Seok Dae Jo was both humbled and fascinated by the question. In his own modest way, afflicted with terminal cancer, he felt like the character Babbaluche from his favorite book, *The Secret of Santa Vittoria*. Sitting there, he saw himself as a mirror image of the small town cobbler in that while they were both dying from incurable illnesses, they were both offered up as willing sacrifices to save what they cherished most. At the same time, his humility competed with bemusement at the President's question which in affect and intonation reminded him of a scene from his favorite movie where the White Angel of Death asks the Marathon Man, "Is it safe?" But it was not safe, it was never going to be safe, and things were becoming more dangerous every moment. So here they were, the all powerful angel against the meager cobbler as the one with the most sought assurances from the one with the least. This left Seok Dae Jo with only one reply.

"No Mr. President. There are no more wars."

* * * *

People are believed to have initially inhabited the Korean peninsula over seven hundred thousand years ago. The earliest tool artifacts in the region date back through the Paleolithic period (700,000 to 40,000 BC) with distinctive Korean pottery emerging around 8000 BC. The first organized dynasty to rule over the Korean peninsula evolved from a federation of walled cities around 2300 BC into the centralized Kingdom of Gojoseon around 400 BC. Near 100 BC, Wudi Han of China, the seventh emperor of the Han Dynasty, invaded and conquered the northern parts of Gojoseon, an occupation which lasted some four hundred years. Near the beginning of the fourth century AD, the Chinese were finally repulsed from the peninsula and three separate Korean kingdoms emerged. The Kingdom of Goguryeo occupied land from eastern Manchuria down the peninsula to approximately thirty miles south of present day Seoul. To the south of Goguryeo were the Baekje Kingdom in the southwest and the Silla Kingdom in the southeast. In the mid-seventh century AD, Silla defeated the two other kingdoms to create the first unification of the entire peninsula under Korean rule. Buddhism dominated the culture and this unified period lasted until around 900 AD, when internal turmoil caused the peninsula to revert back into the three preceding kingdoms: Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla. A mysterious fourth kingdom, Balhae, evolved during these times of unification and re-division, occupying northern Korea, northeastern parts of China, and southeastern parts of Russia. Little is known of this kingdom, however, as few documents about its existence have survived.

Near the middle of the tenth century AD, the entire peninsula would again be reunited, but this time under Goguryeo. The re-unified kingdom, renamed Goryeo, would last almost five hundred years. During this period, Koreans invented the first metal movable printing type some two hundred years before Gutenberg's press. The Goryeo period also produced the Tripitaka Koreana, the world's oldest and most comprehensive intact compilation of Buddhist texts. Consisting of over fifty-two million Chinese characters imprinted upon eighty-one thousand wooden blocks organized into nearly fifteen hundred titles covering more than sixty-five hundred volumes, it is considered to be error free in both typesetting and content. The original version of the Tripitaka Koreana was largely destroyed by invading Mongols in 1232. It took a team of thirty scribes fifteen years, from 1236 until 1251, to recreate the entire text. To preserve the birch wood, the individual blocks required six years of soaking and baking prior to being carved, after which they were coated in poisonous varnish to ward off insects and then separately wrapped in metal frames to inhibit warping. In 1995 this second version of the Tripitaka Koreana, currently housed in South Korea at the Haeinsa Temple, was designated a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Near the end of the fourteenth century AD, Goryeo was replaced by the Joseon (a.k.a. Choson) Dynasty which continued to rule a unified Korea until its defeat by Japan in 1905. It was during this last period of self-rule that Hangul, the modern day Korean language was developed and Buddhism gave way to Confucianism. Also, shortly before capitulation to the Japanese, the First Korean-American War took place, predicated by two main events. The

former began on August 18th, 1866, when the USS General Sherman sailed up the Taedong River toward Pyongyang in an attempt to force trade relations upon the Koreans. The Joseon Dynasty, nick-named the Hermit Kingdom, eschewed contact with foreigners including the Chinese and Japanese. However, it was assumed to hold valuable riches that the West coveted, and so the American gun ship sailed up river against many warnings. During the following week, after repeated Korean requests for the foreigners to leave and several attempts by the sailors to subdue the local population by firing the ship's cannons into crowds of native inhabitants along the shores, the entire crew was captured and slaughtered, with the ship burnt to ashes. That same year, the latter precursor to war occurred when French missionaries who invaded the peninsula to proselytize Catholicism against Joseon decree were also slaughtered. In retribution for the Hermit Kingdom's affront to the West's egocentric religious superiority and in hope of determining the fate of the missing General Sherman, in 1871 the United States Navy deployed five warships - the USS Colorado, the USS Alaska, the USS Palos, the USS Monocry, and the USS Benicia - along with five hundred and fifty sailors and one hundred marines to sail up the Han River toward Seoul. In an action Washington titled the U.S. Korea Campaign and the Koreans called Sinmiyangyo (Western disturbance of the Year Sinmi), the Americans, at a loss of three lives and armed with modern Remington roll-block carbine rifles, attacked and killed some three hundred and fifty Koreans who were armed with antiquated matchlock firearms. In contrast to its 1950 counterpart, this original Korean-American War was all but forgotten to history.

After the first war with the U.S. came the first American betrayal of Korea. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Japan had its eyes on taking control of the peninsula, but could not reach this goal without the consent of other major powers in the area. In 1902 the Japanese made their first move by recognizing Great Britain's interests in China, thereby nullifying the strongest colonial power in Asia from protesting the Rising Sun's quest. Next, Japan engaged Russia in a war totaling fifteen major battles beginning at Port Arthur, Manchuria, on February 8th, 1904. They ended on March 28th, 1905, with the decisive naval battle of Tsushima Strait which is located in the Korea Strait between Tsushima Island and Japan. In total, eleven of these engagements went to the Japanese and four were stalemates, with no victories attributable to the Russians. A major upset, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 transformed Japan into a major power broker for the region. That same year, in recognition of their new status and in exchange for colonization rights to the Phillipines, the U.S. granted Japan domination over Korea. This act - the Taft-Katsura Agreement - was secretly arranged by U.S. Secretary of War William Howard Taft, later to be President Taft. It was then publicly codified in the Treaty of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where then President Theodore Roosevelt acted as peace-maker between Japan and Russia. No Koreans took part in this treaty as to the best of their knowledge, eleven years after Sinmiyangyo, they had placed themselves under the protectorate umbrella of the U.S. by enacting the 1882 Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce, and Navigation (a.k.a. the Chemulpo Treaty). This agreement which the Koreans signed with America in response to the growing threat of invasion by their neighbors, stated:

If other powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either Government, the other will exert their good

offices, on being informed of the case, to bring about an amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feelings.

In the end, the U.S. destroyed those friendly feelings in 1905 when it reneged on its promise by serving Korea up to the Japanese in exchange for imperialistic rights to lands farther south.

Japan's rule over Korea and the Far East, until its defeat in 1945, claimed the lives of some thirty million non-Japanese Asians. Between the great wars, during one day in Seoul alone on March 1st, 1919, Japanese police forces slaughter over seventy-five hundred Korean civilians and wounded more than twice that number. When Japan was finally vanquished in 1945, the U.S. and Russia invaded Korea, dividing it at the 38th parallel, and for the next five years, hostilities raged between the North and South. Although both occupiers pledged to reunify the divided country, from the very beginning when U.S. troops landed on September 8th, 1945, General John Reed Hodge openly declared war on any and all communists within the American's southern jurisdiction. Followed by the Cheju-do Island massacre, unprovoked attacks on refugees fleeing to the North, and dozens of other atrocities committed by U.S. and Republic of Korea (ROK) forces, Pyongyang found that the Second Korean-American War had begun long before 1950.

American history is compromised by its own treachery and deceit: the American Indian Wars, 1622 to 1890; the Salem Witch Trials, 1692; Slavery, 1776 to 1865; the Gnadenhutzen American Indian Massacre, 1782; the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1824 to present; the Missouri Mormon Extermination Order, 1838; the Bridge Gulch American Indian Massacre, 1852; Black Ship Gunboat Diplomacy, 1853 to 1854; the Ostend Manifesto, 1854; Tammany Hall, 1854 to 1934; the Mountain Meadows Massacre, 1857; the New York Draft Riots, 1863; the A Lincoln Assassination, 1865; the Ku Klux Klan, 1866 to present; American Poll Tax Voting Disfranchisement, 1870 to 1966; the Los Angeles Chinese Massacre, 1871; the Colfax African-American Massacre, 1873; the Jim Crow Segregation Laws, 1876 to 1964; the JA Garfield Assassination, 1881; Lynching, 1882 to 1981; the Wounded Knee American Indian Massacre, 1890; the Overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, 1894; the Lattimer Mine Massacre, 1897; the California Water Wars, 1898 to 1913; the W McKinley Assassination, 1901; James Strom Thurmond, 1902 to 2003; the Sacrifice of Korea (a.k.a. the Taft-Katsura Agreement), 1905; the Ludlow Mine Massacre, 1914; the Chicago Race Riot, 1919; the Elaine Race Riots, 1919; the Wall Street Bombing, 1920; the Tulsa Race Riot, 1921; the Rosewood African-American Massacre, 1923; Hooverism, 1924 to 1972; the Columbine Mine Massacre, 1927; the General Motors Streetcar Conspiracy, 1932; the Bonus March Rout, 1932; the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, 1932 to 1972; the HP Long Jr Assassination, 1935; the Italian Canicatti Soap Factory Massacre, 1941; the Zoot Suit Mexican-American Riot, 1943; the Tokyo Fire Bombing Conflagration, 1945; the Hollywood Blacklist, 1947 to 1960; the League of Nations Palestine Mandate invalidation, 1948; McCarthyism, 1948 to 1954; Operation Gladio - covert CIA and NATO sponsored anti-communist terrorism in Europe, 1948 to 1990; Multiple covert U.S. military open air tests of biological warfare pathogens on American citizens, 1949 to 1969; Operation MKULTRA - covert CIA mind control research on American citizens, 1950's to 1960's; Operation Condor - United States participation in multinational state-sponsored terrorism throughout

South America, 1950's to 1980's; Operation Midnight Climax - covert CIA LSD experimentation on American citizens, 1953; Operation TPAJAX - covert CIA overthrow of the democratically elected government in Iran, 1953; Operation PBSUCCESS - covert CIA overthrow of the democratically elected President of Guatemala, 1954; the Atlanta Temple Bombing, 1958; the Bay of Pigs Invasion, 1961; Operation Mongoose - covert CIA sponsored state terrorism against Cuba, 1961; Operation Northwoods (planned, not implemented) - covert Department of Defense false-flag terrorism against United States and Cuban citizens to be blamed on Cuba, 1962; the MW Evers Assassination, 1963; the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombing, 1963; the JF Kennedy Assassination, 1963; the LH Oswald Assassination, 1963; the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, 1964; the Malcolm X Assassination, 1965; the Watts Race Riot, 1965; the VF Dahmer Assassination, 1966; the My Lai Massacre, 1968; the ML King Jr Assassination, 1968; the RF Kennedy Assassination, 1968; Operation Menu - the secret bombing of Cambodia, 1969 to 1970; Operation CHAOS - covert CIA campaign of disinformation against United States citizens, 1969 to 1973; the Kent State Massacre, 1970; Project FUBELT - clandestine CIA projects to undermine Chilean President Salvador Allende; 1970; Watergate, 1972 to 1973; the Sacrifice of East Timor, 1975; Koreagate, 1976; the HB Milk Assassination, 1978; the Greensboro Communist Workers Party Massacre, 1979; Abscam, 1980; the Miami Race Riots, 1980; the J Lennon Assassination, 1980; the Iran-Contra Scandal, 1981 to 1986; the Congressional Page Sex Scandal, 1983; the Miami Race Riots, 1989; the Rodney King Race Riots, 1992; the Oklahoma City Bombing, 1995; Extraordinary Renditions, 1995 to ? ; Chinagate, 1996; the Columbine High School Massacre, 1999; the Jack Abramoff Indian Lobbying Scandal, 1999 to 2006; the Cincinnati Race Riots, 2001; the Anthrax Attacks, 2001; Enron, 2001; the Beltway Sniper Attacks, 2002; the Abu Ghraib Prison Abuse Scandal, 2003; the Valerie Plame Affair, 2004; the Foley and Haggard Sex Scandals, 2006; the US Attorney Firings Scandal 2006 to 2007; etcetera.

On July 25th, 1950, seeing the past and fearing the future, North Korea realized it was being betrayed by the Americans once again. Sick of outside intervention, preferring a return to the Hermit Kingdom, and believing that U.S. reunification plans were really a ploy for permanent occupation, Pyongyang crossed the 38th parallel in an effort to drive the invaders off the peninsula. Caught off guard, the Americans staged an ineffectual counteroffensive just north of Osan. Titled Task Force Smith, its objective was to stop and then repulse the North Koreans. However, its ultimate collapse resulted in the U.S. Army being nearly pushed into the sea. Refusing a retreat to Japan, Washington reorganized its troops and then retaliated from a perimeter around the southeastern coastal town of Pusan. Americans then marched north along the entire length of Korea, an area approximately the size of New York and Pennsylvania combined, leaving a wake of death and devastation in their path. During its advance, the U.S. dropped an average of eight-hundred tons of bombs daily on the North, including a total of approximately nine-hundred thousand gallons of napalm, killing massive numbers of civilians and military personnel alike. In addition, from the start of the war, American politicians and military tacticians publicly debated the nuclear option, a prospect which horrified all communist nations in the region. Thus, as U.S. troops approached the northernmost Korean border at the Yalu River, China counterattacked, reacting much in the same manner as would Washington twelve years later when the Russians

brought nuclear weapons to Cuba. Driving the foreigners backward almost to their southernmost starting point at Pusan, U.S. forces once again regrouped and pushed the Chinese into a stalemate near the 38th parallel. General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers in the Pacific, infuriated by China's interdiction, requested permission to drop between thirty to fifty atomic bombs coated in Cobalt 60 just north of the Yalu River so as to create a century long radioactive waste-land through which Beijing would never cross again. Although calmer heads prevailed, in a little over twelve months the warring factions had marched up and down the entire peninsula's length three times, completely and repeatedly destroying most Korean cities and villages along the way. For the next two years, a series of smaller actions by both sides yielded little change in the front line's position until an armistice was signed on July 27th, 1953, establishing the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) at its current resting place. With two and one-half million Koreans dead, the overwhelming majority civilians, the Second Korean-American War did not end. It was simply put on lay-away.

After the armistice, Washington finally brought nuclear armament to the Korean peninsula and by 1972 there were over seven hundred atomic weapons in the South pointing at Pyongyang, Beijing, and Moscow. In addition to deployment capability from Howitzer cannons, rockets, airplanes, and ships at sea, a special nuclear device, the atomic demolition mine (ADM), was placed along the DMZ. About the size of a large duffle bag, weighing about sixty pounds, and packing a twenty kiloton punch similar to the Nagasaki explosion, ADM's were carried in infantry backpacks, stored on jeeps, and loaded aboard helicopters during routine patrols. Seen as the first line of defense in response to an overwhelming advance of northern forces, these lightweight nuclear weapons were also a tactical liability. In 1977, a U.S. helicopter on patrol over the DMZ, strayed over North Korean territory and was shot down. The crew - three dead, one alive - were repatriated, but their equipment remained captive. Luckily, there had been no ADM's along on that particular flight. With at least one other publicly acknowledged helicopter incident occurring in 1994 and other preceding mishaps as constant ongoing reminders of the potential for disaster, the fuse was finally blown out in 1991 when President George Herbert Walker Bush supposedly removed all nuclear devices from the peninsula. However, the atomic option was not subtracted from the Korean equation as nuclear weapons were far more secure and just as easy to deliver from submarines offshore.

In comparison to the ADM, the largest thermonuclear weapon ever built was detonated by the Soviet Union over the island of Novaya Zemlya, part of an archipelago chain in the Arctic Ocean, on October 30th, 1961. The fifty megaton Tsar Bomba as it was called measured over twenty-five feet in length and nearly six and a half feet in diameter, making it two and a half times longer, nearly three times wider, and more than three thousand times stronger than the bomb which obliterated Hiroshima. Loaded onto a Tupolev Tu-95 strategic bomber whose bomb bay doors and external fuel tanks had been removed to accommodate the oversized load, this sixty ton monstrosity was dropped from a height of six and a half miles up and then detonated when it had fallen to within two and a half miles of its target. A three hundred and sixty pound nylon parachute was used to slow its decent in order to allow the five hundred and seventy-five mile per hour release plane enough time to fly a safe distance from the blast zone so as not to be

consumed in the explosion. Upon detonation the ensuing fireball reached from the ground almost up to the original drop point six and a half miles high, and its flash could be seen over six hundred miles away, approximately the distance from the South Side of Atlanta, Georgia, to Downtown Chicago, Illinois. Blast damage also occurred over this great distance, including broken windows in Finland and a heat wave capable of causing third degree burns sixty miles from the detonation site. The resultant mushroom cloud expanded to a width of twenty five miles, rising nearly forty miles into the air, a distance almost two-thirds of the way to the Karman Line which separates our atmosphere from outer space. The seismic shock from this blast was still measurable on its third pass around the Earth.

As the post-1945 cold war enveloped Korea, the North was positioned with a much stronger hand. Having a superior military and somewhat stronger economy, the U.S. could not withdraw from the region without sacrificing the South. This imbalance would continue unchecked until the 1960's and 70's when large portions of Washington's Vietnam War budget passed through South Korea creating an unprecedented manufacturing boom. Providing both direct and indirect military support for its benefactor, the South's economy exploded overnight including bragging rights to owning the world's largest steel-production site. For the better part of two decades Seoul received up to forty percent of its foreign exchange earnings from American war time expenditures. Paralleled by a two fold increase in military spending over the North, America's Korea evolved into the eleventh largest global economy until the Asian banking crisis of the 1990's.

On the other side of the DMZ, faced with China's turn toward market economics during the 1980's and the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991, the North found itself with insufficient financial backing, an aging and antiquated infrastructure, and an economy far outpaced by the double-digit growth of its southern counterpart. By the mid-1990's Pyongyang was in turmoil as the country regressed into famine, despite national austerity slogans such as "Let's eat two meals a day!" Only near the turn of the century through extensive hardships and self-sacrifice was the Juchian Juggernaut able to right itself again. Although still at an economic disadvantage, North Korea had come back from the brink of disaster and returned to the world stage.

As the first decade of the twenty-first century progressed, the Dear Leader Kim Jong Il, son of the late and Eternal Great Leader Kim Il Sung, knew that there was no way to defeat their great aggressor. Being far behind in the global rat-race and with the world's only remaining super-power backing their opponent, the struggle would ultimately end in only one of two ways: the North's military or economic capitulation to the South. Though they could, perhaps, postpone the inevitable another decade or so, China and Russia were no longer reliable counterbalances to either American aggression or a sinking economy. Not wanting to become what they had most hated, had fought against for over half a century, and had died by the millions resisting, something had to change. Unable to fight or buy their way out of this predicament, they would require something far greater than war or money in order to survive. The North, dwarfed by the national armies and international corporations which dominated the world stage, needed something more. Unless that stage could be altered to completely transform the worldwide theater in which these inalienable overlords ruled and performed, then forsaking deconstruction of the very foundations upon which

international commerce and the armies of nations operated, Pyongyang was doomed to become a mirror image of Seoul. But how could the little hermit avoid such calamity? The answer came by way of Tehran in the early spring of 2009.

The Middle East conflict had come repeatedly to a boil for the past sixty-one years, with the Iranian government backed into a corner since 2006 by Western concerns over its nuclear ambitions. Finally, in a desperate show of religious-based fundamentalist defiance, five missiles were launched from the deserts of Iran toward Israel on March 20th, 2009, the first day of Norouz, the Iranian New Year. Fired before sunrise, all loaded with fifteen kiloton Hiroshima size warheads, they rose from the northern edge of the Dasht-e Kavir desert just south of Gasmar. Four minutes later, after one was shot down by a barrage of Patriot PAC-3 surface-to-air guided missiles and another was intercepted by the head-on collision of a self-sacrificing Israeli pilot and his jet, the remaining three weapons reached their targets. Haifa, Nazareth, Nahariyya, and some four-hundred thousand Israelis vanished in twelve mile high plumes of smoke visible from Tel Aviv, northern Jordan, southern Syria, southern Lebanon, and much of the Southeastern Mediterranean Sea.

While the Muslim world initially rejoiced, non-Muslims quickly responded in a feeding frenzy upon Iran. With the goal of massive retaliation by a horrified global coalition, two hours after the Israeli impact and without warning, five ICBM's individually armed with hydrogen bombs ranging in strength from eight to ten megatons - one each from Washington, London, Paris, Moscow, and Beijing - landed atop Tehran. The five blasts which as a group provided coordinated retribution without the assignment of individual blame produced flashes of light visible as far away as Syria in the east, Russian in the north, Afghanistan in the west, and Saudi Arabia in the south. The cumulative mushroom clouds rose nearly thirty miles into the air and satellite imagery recorded a sustained fireball of twenty miles diameter that lasted for nearly three minutes. The heat wave released by the blasts caused third degree burns over fifty miles away and the seismic shocks generated by the explosions were measurable even on their second pass around the planet. As the Muslim world cowered under the threat of immediate, catastrophic consequences to any opposing nations, this signaled the beginning of a six day, around the clock, international aerial bombardment which completely liquified Iran's governmental and military infrastructures. Finally, seven days after the leveling of Northern Israel, the remnants of Persia were equally divided amongst the coalition member states by massive ground invasions. This, of course, excluded a sixty mile radial perimeter around what used to be Tehran, now the World Health Organization's first designated century long radioactive waste-land. Simultaneously, during this period, in return for its non-participation in nuclear retaliation, the ruling powers turned their backs as they ordained Israeli armed forces and civilian militias to descend upon the West Bank and Gaza strip, slaying all of the inhabitants within: men, women, and children. By these means, a final solution was bought to the Palestinian question.

Although no one noticed at the time, while Iran and the Palestinians were in the process of no longer existing, North Korea withdrew its diplomats from around the world, ceasing all communication with the outside. When this fact was finally noticed ten days after the initial assault on Israel, the entire world held its breath in anticipation of what

would emerge from the Axis of Evil's remaining throne. For three days while all nations prepared themselves for the possibility of further nuclear warfare, the planet watched as Seoul, Beijing, Tokyo, and Moscow unsuccessfully pleaded for some response - any response - from the North. With an atomic coalition now strengthened by the previously sidelined India and Pakistan, all eyes strained upon the tiny peninsula in Far East Asia, waiting, watching, with finger tips on triggers and safety switches off. It became perceived destiny that a slippery slope had been crossed into which a downward spiral of nuclear holocaust was awaiting, the only question being where, if ever, it would stop. As the next domino silently sat between two seas, China, Russia, and the South, an answer finally came fourteen days after Tehran's folly began. In a four word message broadcast around the world, Pyongyang decreed its intent: "We wish to surrender."

Immediately, tenuous lines of communication sprang up between Pyongyang and Washington, Pyongyang and Beijing, and Pyongyang and Moscow. Two days later, on April 5th, 2009, a hastily arranged secret meeting was held in the Chinese capital between high ranking officials from the coalition member states and the North. While there, the American diplomats attended a private gathering at Pyongyang's Beijing embassy where they were presented with a most unusual gift, a symbol of North Korea's sincere intent: one fully intact ADM with the fuse removed. Washington had a cow. The first President Bush had ordered the complete removal of all nuclear weapons from the South Korean Mainland in 1991. However, still seen as highly portable devices with the best response time in the event of another ground invasion from the North, ADM's were left behind as part of covert operations. Assigned to special CIA helicopter teams nicknamed Alpha, Beta and Gamma, which respectively patrolled the western, middle, and eastern DMZ, a half-dozen ADM's were in flight over the southern side of the border at any given time. One hundred percent certain that new precautions would prevent any recurrence of the 1977 helicopter affair, three years after the last official nuclear weapon left Korea, intelligence planners turned out to be one-hundred percent wrong.

On December 17th, 1994, another United States helicopter strayed over the DMZ and was shot down some five miles into North Korea. The pilot, having lost his bearings over snow covered terrain, was killed in the crash, with his remains returned five days later. His more fortunate copilot was captured alive and then repatriated in thirteen days. The single, officially non-existent ADM on board, however, was taken into permanent custody by the North Koreans who made no announcement about their new acquisition. Senior CIA officials, in turn, were spasmodic over their apocryphal blunder. While the basis for North Korea's nuclear weapons program dated back to the early 1980's, they had yet to test an actual device. Having possession of a working atomic bomb would radically invigorate their efforts. But though they were ultimately foolish, CIA agents were not complete fools. As a precaution, all ADM's left on the peninsula after 1991 were armed with secret entry codes that would self-detonate if opened by an unauthorized party. The North Koreans, immediately realizing this, continued to say nothing and acted as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred, beyond the repatriations of one soldier and one soldier's remains. Continuing to sweat through the bluff, the CIA also said nothing, not even to the President of the United States, William Jefferson Clinton.

Exactly four weeks later, on January 14th, 1995, the Koreans finally unfolded their hand. Requesting a secret

meeting with high-level CIA operatives, the next day a senior North Korean Politburo member unofficially flew into New York City for six hours. Arriving at four in the morning and joined by Seok Dae Jo as translator, he delivered the following message:

We have obtained one of your nuclear devices from the recent helicopter crash. Recognizing your 1991 policy of removing such weapons from Korea, we have assumed its presence to be part of a covert operation. Therefore, preferring discretion, we have contacted you - the CIA - directly. This device has a lock which will detonate the weapon if opened without the proper code. The bomb is no longer in North Korea. It has been transported to a major city in another country. At noon tomorrow, Washington time, we will open the lock. If you do not give us the code by then, we will take our best guess. We await your decision.

Then, as the two Koreans rose and left the room, the terrorized Americans sat paralyzed. It had been twenty-nine days since the weapon passed into communist hands. By this time, if they were telling the truth, it could be anywhere in the world from the North's embassies in Moscow or Beijing to the hold of a third party's cargo ship at anchor in a Cuban or American harbor. The detonation of a U.S. nuclear weapon under these conditions would be catastrophic. With no way out and acting on their own initiative, six hours later one of the operatives at that morning's meeting delivered a hand written note to the departing Politburo member. On it was the code. Unbeknownst to Congress, the President, or even the Pentagon's Joint Chiefs of Staff, at ten a.m. on January 15th, 1995, North Korea was officially recognized as a nuclear power by a top inner circle of CIA officials.

It would seem impossible for such a thing to happen and, yet, such things are not beyond military minds. In 1962, the Department of Defense proposed a plan to President Kennedy called Operation Northwoods. Classified as a false-flag scheme, it involved U.S. military personnel attacking and killing American citizens while disguised as Cuban terrorists. Falsely believing the murderers to be operating under the enemy's flag, public outcry would justify a full scale invasion of Castro's island to overthrow the communist leader. Although this particular plan was never implemented, it provides dire insight into the diabolic nature of men at war. Hoping to abort an international disaster in 1995, CIA officials altered Alpha, Beta, and Gamma flight documents, changed ordinance lists, and compromised the testimony of potential witnesses in a decision they swore to take to their graves. Thus, it was of little surprise that no one knew what to say when the North Koreans reproduced the misbegotten weapon fourteen years later in 2009 as a gesture of peace. With discretion born of timidity, no one said anything except thank you, secretly and privately, while Washington quietly had its cow far, far away. In recognition of the American's appreciation and knowing their guests would be unable to leave Beijing with this unexpected gift, the North smuggled the weapon back home, understanding that it would be returned to the U.S. at the earliest possible date.

The day after presenting their nuclear gift during the 2009 secret talks in Beijing (at which Seok Dae Jo was

notably absent), the North laid out five requests for peace:

1. Immediate shipments of food, medical, and other necessary humanitarian aid to North Korea from western nations and their allies.
2. Removal of all trade sanctions imposed on North Korea, including the DMZ barrier between the North and South.
3. The establishment of embassy level diplomatic relations with all western nations and their allies.
4. Investment plans from the West and its allies on how to rebuild North Korea's aging infrastructure, agricultural system, and manufacturing base.
5. The right for Pyongyang to openly and freely explore marine migration patterns between North Korea and Antarctica's Southern Ocean, in an effort to stave off future famines by rejuvenation of the North's fishing industry.

In exchange for these items, Pyongyang declared it would recognize the South's right to exist as an independent nation and it was willing to order an immediate and permanent cessation of all hostilities toward their neighbor. In addition, it pledged to stop producing weapons of mass destruction (WMD), biological, chemical and nuclear, with all existing stockpiles of WMD's to be turned over to western agencies on a specified timetable. This, in and of itself, was an incredible proposal as the Korean-American relationship had been continually strained by nuclear issues: the Yongbyon Nuclear Reactor refueling crisis of 1989, in which the North Koreans may have secretly extracted sufficient plutonium from irradiated fuel rods to create several atomic bombs; the Kumchang-ni Mountain inspections of 1999, when the U.S. provided six hundred thousand tons of famine relief to North Korea in exchange for the right to inspect six miles of underground tunnels suspected of being nuclear weapon manufacturing and storage facilities; the Ryanggang explosion in 2004 that produced a two mile wide unexplained mushroom cloud just thirty miles south of the North's border with China.

The opposing diplomats were dumbstruck. Seventy-two hours later, relief supplies were being flown and shipped to North Korea non-stop. During the coming months, millions of tons of food, oil, manufactured goods, construction equipment, and other supplies poured into the once self-isolated nation, its roads, ports, railways, and airfields now open to a flood of outside assistance. With each new arrival, more and more Korean People's Army (KPA) troops were removed from the DMZ to aid in delivery, distribution, and the rebuilding of their country. To palliate old wounds and create an irrevocable alliance, the American led influx of support was so great that by the middle of May, 2009, less than two hundred thousand KPA soldiers remained along the North-South border, from the over one million there just two months earlier. In a single day in May, more than forty cargo planes landed in the once Hermit Kingdom and new ships arrived daily at all of its major ports. Its rail lines were once again full of goods from China and Russia, and major construction projects were underway to link its ailing roadways to Seoul's modern

highway system. In the Axis of Evil's swan song, the fat lady sang in the West while the mouse roared in the North.

On the diplomatic side, a peace agreement between the North, South, and U.S. was finally signed on May 16th, 2009, thereby ending the nearly fifty-six year old armistice. To celebrate the official end of war, Pyongyang issued over one hundred thousand instant visas to South Koreans wishing to visit relatives in the North, the South distributed a similar number to North Koreans wishing to visit families in the South, and the Americans presented both sides with a ten month plan for U.S. troop withdrawal from the peninsula. In a more discreet event that month, one of the many cargo planes to land in Pyongyang from the United States quietly carried back a small package for Washington: one lone ADM. This act of private diplomacy coincided with the North's inventory declaration of its complete WMD programs which included an astounding four hundred and fifty-seven nuclear weapons. In June, one month after the peace treaty signing, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) began its long awaited oversight of the nearly five year process for securing and destroying the North's entire WMD arsenal.

Politically, things moved along just as well, with Pyongyang and Washington exchanging ambassadors shortly after mid-year. The first ambassador from North Korea to the United States of America quietly and reservedly assumed his role on July 6th, 2009. He began his official duties by working from the residence of North Korea's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York as the construction of Pyongyang's new embassy in Washington would take over a year to complete. He was welcomed warmly by the members of the mission, all of whom were at his disposal. With the assistance of Seok Dae Jo as translator, he exchanged daily meetings with his American counterparts over the peace treaty's ongoing implementation, and everything went swimmingly for exactly ten days.

As part of the peace agreement, North Korea was permitted to send research vessels into the southern oceans to study fish migration patterns. Declining marine populations had been a major contributory factor in the country's earlier famine and Pyongyang was eager to learn where and how to restore its aquatic food supply. While not prohibited by decades of hostility, such research was easier to do if the underwater livestock were not being constantly disturbed by trailing enemy war ships. Eager to revive its fishing industry, on July 10th, 2009, the North hastily dispatched four vessels to begin studying the elusive water life. Two vessels, the Goguryeo and the Baekje, left from the port of Nampo on the country's west coast, heading to the southern Atlantic and Indian Oceans, respectfully. Two more ships left from the east coast port of Wonson, the Silla heading to the near South Pacific east of New Zealand and the Balhae heading to the far South Pacific west of Chile. Once at their destinations they would align themselves along the southern 45th parallel as a starting point from which to monitor migrations. Being winter in the southern hemisphere, it was decided they should stay above the 50th parallel so as to avoid the ice hazards of Antarctica's Southern Ocean. Each ship was equipped with millions of dollars worth of the latest marine research technology from around the world. In addition, they were stocked with food, fuel, and supplies sufficient for a two to three month stay at sea while they slowly drifted back home collecting a wide spectrum of oceanographic data all along the way. However, six days out, on July 16th while sailing toward South America the Balhae unexpectedly disappeared at sea after being overtaken by a rapidly developing storm. No distress signal was sent and rescue missions from Chile, Peru,

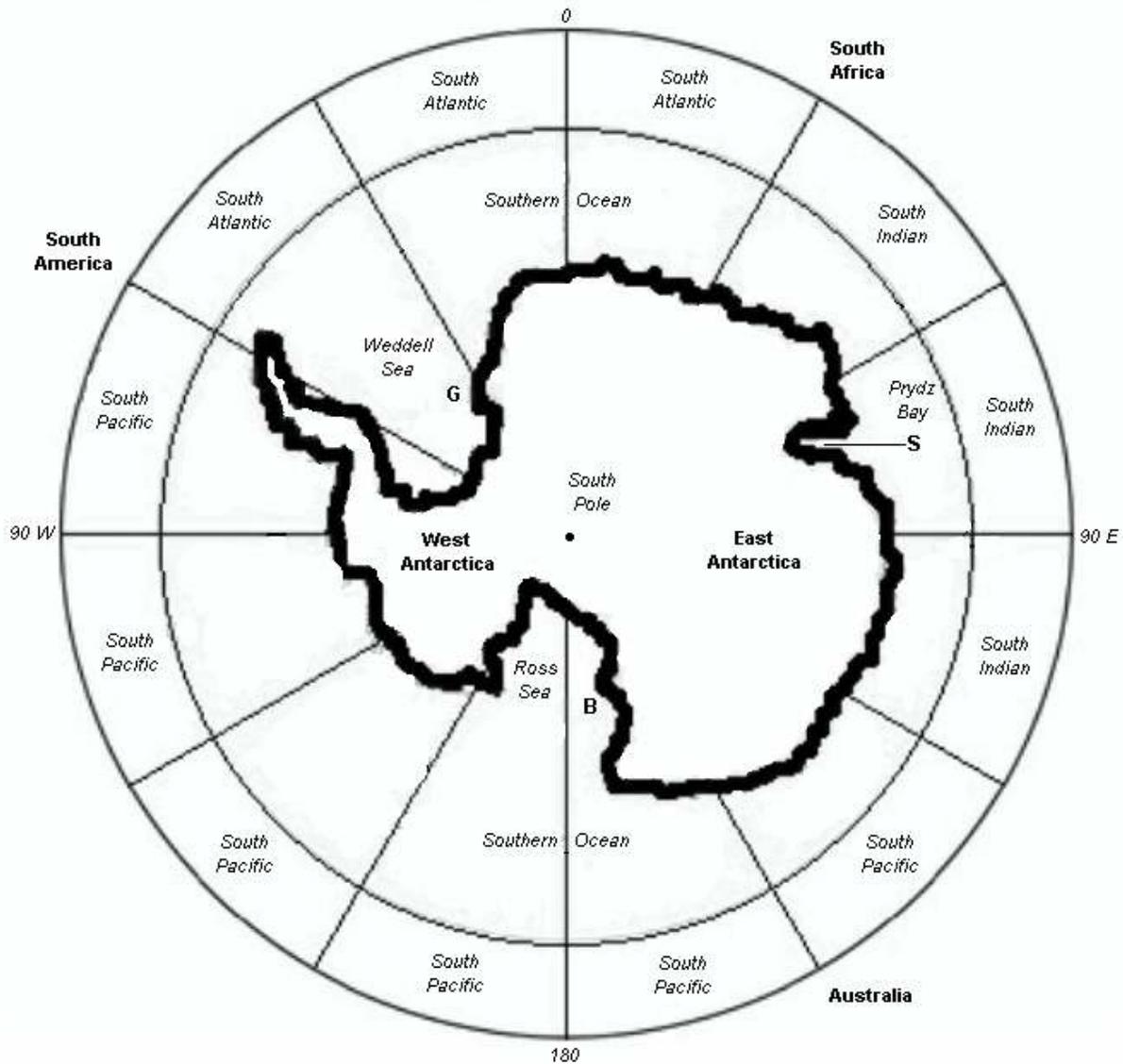
the United States, and Australia found nothing at its last known coordinates. The ship and its entire crew were lost at sea and the three remaining vessels immediately returned to their home ports. Two days later, Seok Dae Jo was recalled to North Korea for the first time in thirty-three years.

Infuriated by its inability to muster a sophisticated undertaking, Pyongyang was determined to redeploy its ships within six months' time. The United States, concerned over its new ally's failure, offered its technical and maritime expertise, but it was politely refused by the North as this project was now a matter of national pride. For five months the ships underwent extensive rebuilding and refurbishing to improve their sea worthiness. Each craft was a five-hold, bulk cargo carrier with a loading capacity of up to twenty-five thousand tons. Being old merchant vessels dating back to the 1960's, they were all in questionable repair, a likely factor in the loss of the Balhae. Working around the clock, seven days per week, their decks, bulkheads, and hulls were completely removed so as their keels, ribs, and inner frameworks could be reinforced with tungsten-steel alloy beams. Simultaneously, solid steel top decks and double-plated hulls were installed, after which lightweight alloy plating was used to reconstruct their inner decks and bulkheads. In an astounding feat of will and manpower the ships were ready to leave dry-dock in late December, and on January 16th, 2010, exactly six months after the Balhae was lost at sea, the rebuilt, re-equipped, and restocked vessels left port again. To mark this momentous occasion, North Korean diplomats from around the world were once more recalled home for a month long celebration that would culminate in the veneration of their Dear Leader's birthday on February 16th, 2010. Even their U.N. Permanent Mission was emptied, except for one lone straggler. Four days before the re-united ships set sail, Seok Dae Jo was sent back to New York City with orders not to return.

Making their ways slowly southward collecting data as they went, the research vessels aimed to take up starting positions at equal distances around the Antarctic coastline. Given the cumulative impact of global warming and it being summer time below the equator, the Southern Ocean's passage, unlike six months ago, was substantially free of ice. While no country is recognized as having permanent sovereignty over any of the frozen continent, twenty-seven nations maintain seasonal or permanent research stations there.

For two weeks the vessels slowly meandered their way down the globe in constant radio contact with home. Having left Nampo, the Goguryeo sailed aimlessly past the southern Atlantic Ocean and into Antarctica's Weddell Sea heading toward Argentinian's permanent base at Belgrano II. Its sister ship the Baekje, also out of Nampo, transversed the southern Indian Ocean on a bearing just west of China's seasonal station at Zhong Shan and into the fjord of Prydz Bay which use to house the Amery Ice shelf. Amery, like all the great ice shelves of Antarctica, including the Roone Ice Shelf in the Weddell Sea and the Ross Ice Shelf in the Ross Sea, had vanished several years earlier, long-gone victims of escalating worldwide carbon emissions. Wonson's sole departure, the Silla headed through the southern Pacific and into Antarctica's Ross Sea on a course taking it dead center between the United States' McMurdo Station and the neighboring Scott Station of New Zealand, both permanent bases. With no sign of hurry, on Sunday, January 31st, 2010, they rounded their ways and came to rest at their destinations approximately five miles from shore. Under clear skies that evening around midnight Greenwich Mean Time, each ship, while holding its position, maneuvered

its bow facing back out to sea as if preparing to start for home. Then, approximately one hour before daybreak in Washington, the Goguryeo, the Baekje, and the Silla all opened the hatches on their number three and four cargo holds. A few minutes later, every monitor in every military base around the world lit up.



Goguryeo (G), Silla (S), and Baekje (B)

Just before noon that day on Monday, February 1st, 2010, approximately nine thousand miles away in New York City, Seok Dae Jo was forcibly taken into custody.

* * * *

"If this is not war, then what is it?" the President of the United States fired back, dissatisfied with the prisoner's response. The leader of the most powerful nation on earth pressed a few buttons on his keyboard changing the pictures flanking his image on Seok Dae Jo's screen. On the left side there appeared an outline of the Antarctic speckled with hundreds of dots clustered in three large semi-circle like patterns. These three improbable shapes radiated outward from centers located at the last coordinates of Pyongyang's ships, covering almost three quarters of the continent's surface area and with two of them nearly touching each other at the South Pole. Opposite this was the video of a snow covered valley completely barren except for a tower of steam at its center unexpectedly blasting into the air. "Do you see that geyser on your screen, Mr. Seok?"

"Yes sir, Mr. President," he replied.

"As we speak, that scene is being repeated at hundreds of locations throughout the Antarctic. That's what all of those tiny dots represent on the continent's map in front of you." He became overtly angry as he continued. "The landscape down there is pockmarked with over five hundred of these holes from your warheads that are shooting steam into the air. From what we can tell, that place is nothing more than one big piece of Swiss cheese just waiting to blow up."

"It will not blow up, Mr. President," Seok Dae Jo said, calmly.

"It won't blow up? Then what the hell is it going to do? I...", the President paused, a look of consternation on his face. Here he was, a man who the year before had overseen the annihilation of one country and two peoples. Now, he sat stymied by a translator who seemed to know more about a world over which he once had total power. With visible self-control, he closed and opened his eyes slowly, then continued by adding, "I apologize, Mr. Seok. You're an icon in diplomatic circles. The story about how you put that State Department official in his place by using a nursery rhyme in '76 is legendary. You're the only North Korean I know of that both sides trust. And you're the first person I've ever heard of who was declared a national treasure by their home country. For God's sake, you flew on Air Force One. There are few foreign heads of state who have even been inside that pile of tin, let alone flown on it. And besides that, you've been around forever. I've just been here for two years. This is not how I would have wanted to meet such a renowned and respected person as yourself.."

"I neither, Mr. President," he exclaimed, regretfully.

"But, here we are and I don't even know if I'm supposed to be negotiating with you. After all, and to our great disappointment I might add, you were not designated as the ambassador for your country."

"It was a position I was not worthy of," he noted, humbly. "And, if I may be candid, it was a position I was glad not to have. It is said, the shy worm avoids the early bird."

"That may well be true," replied the President. "Staying in the background can have its advantages. Maybe that's why you have been around so long. Unfortunately for you, though, you're at center stage right now, because it seems you're the only North Korean that we can talk to. But at this point, we don't even know what we're supposed to be talking about. As much as we may need to be negotiating, for some strange reason as if what's happening at the

South Pole isn't strange enough, your country has cut off all communications with us. Ten hours ago they launched a massive attack on a desolate continent, but we can't get word one out of them. They're still talking with the Chinese and the Russians and the Japanese and even the South Koreans, but they're not saying boo to us or any other western nations. We're totally confused. Our brass over there tells us that you're people haven't even sealed their borders. In fact, they've collapsed them. We've had to close off our side of the zone to prevent a flood of people from crossing over in both directions. Everything is a total mess across the entire DMZ."

"This is not a hostile action against you, Mr. President, or any other nation. The borders of North Korea will not be sealed nor will North Koreans attack anyone entering our country. There is nothing to negotiate as there is no need to attack anyone anymore."

"Then tell me why they left you here all by yourself?" the President asked, exasperated.

"To answer any questions you may have, Mr. President. We knew that this would be a difficult time for you and that someone would have to be here to help you understand what is happening. I was the logical choice to be that person."

"Mr Seok. with all due respect....," and the President hesitated before saying, "...you're dying. When we took you into custody this morning, we found the medical records that you had brought back from Korea. We know that you have terminal cancer. That's why we gave you those morphine pills you have in front of you: to help with the pain. Our doctors tell me they're equivalent to what was found in your U.N. residence when you were arrested."

"Thank you, Mr. President, I am very grateful for your kindness," he stated, sincerely.

"With all due respect to you, sir, why would your country leave a dying man to help us?" the President complained.

"Because the little time I have left, Mr. President, will be more than enough to tell you what you need to understand. Also, I have been here too long to be of any use now back home. On the other hand, if I may be so bold, you are about to make a monumental decision and it would be best if you made the right one."

"What do you mean?" the President asked, pointedly.

"It is obvious from all of those who are assembled with you, Mr. President, that you are considering whether or not to declare a state of national martial law. We anticipated that you might have this reaction, even though it is totally unnecessary. In your country's history, martial law has only been declared twice. The first time was when General Andrew Jackson captured New Orleans from the British during the Battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812. The second time was during World War Two when the Territory of the Kingdom of Hawaii, yet to be your fiftieth state, was held under martial law from 1941 to 1944. Some have said that New Orleans was again under martial law in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina, but this is not true. Officially, only a state of emergency was ever declared. So, as you can see, never before has martial law ever been declared in the United States of America on a nation wide scale. To do so may mean losing your beloved democracy forever in exchange for a dictatorship. Is it necessary to take such a step? What is really in your best interest at this point? Where will you find the answers that you need?"

The President, feeling somehow chastised, settled back in his chair to think this over in the silent room as if all alone. A thousand questions screamed through his head simultaneously, but he needed to ask the right one. So much had happened in the past year, so much unexpected, so much tragedy, that the wrong question might be terminal for everyone. Carefully, he composed his thoughts by asking, "What is it that you've come to tell us, Mr. Seok?"

"Mr. President, I have come to tell you about history, old and new, so that you may understand what has happened and what is likely to happen. With your permission, it may take a while."

"Hell, Mr. Seok, we've got all the time in the world - at least what's left of it," he said sarcastically. Then, correcting himself abruptly, he apologetically asked, "What is it we need to know? Please, tell us."

"To be complete, I must start by going back some one thousand years to talk about the Tripitaka Koreana. Are you familiar with this, Mr. President?"

"If I'm not mistaken, it's a sacred Buddhist text that's in South Korea," stated the President.

"That is correct, Mr. President. Actually, that is the second copy of the Tripitaka. The carving of the original version was begun in 1010 AD and completed in 1087 AD during the Korean Kingdom of Goryeo, the successor to the Kingdom of Unified Silla. The first Tripitaka consisted of over eighty-one thousand carved wooden blocks that contained the most comprehensive compilation of Buddhist texts ever assembled. The Khitan Mongols of China invaded Goryeo three times starting in 993 AD. The Tripitaka was started during the Second Goryeo-Khitan War of 1010 as it was believed that such an act of devotion would bring the Buddha's favor to our side, that we might permanently vanquish the Mongol aggressors. According to history, the effort was fruitful and the Khitans were finally crushed during the Third Goryeo-Khitan War of 1018. Unfortunately, over the next century and a half the reputation of this great work grew as did our enemy's fear of the mysterious role it played in the Khitan's defeat. In 1232, Ogedei Khan, the third son and successor of the great Genghis Khan, sent Mongol invaders back into Goryeo where they took great pains to destroy the Tripitaka Koreana and, therefore, its magical powers. They burned it to ashes, except for a few parts that had been smuggled into hiding around the countryside. Starting from scratch, using a few of these sequestered pieces, it took thirty monks from 1236 to 1251 to recreate the version that now rests at Haeinsa Temple in the southern province of Gyeongsang, South Korea."

"That's all very interesting, Mr. Seok, but what does that have to do with us?"

"Everything, Mr. President. Please allow me to explain."

"Yes, go on," the President said, his patience obviously strained.

"Thank you, Mr. President. It was always thought that the few surviving pieces from the original Tripitaka had all been catalogued during its reconstruction. That was not true. In May and June of 1953, during our second war with you, the American Air Force bombed North Korean dams at Guseong, Deoksan, and Bujeon wiping out countless villages and drowning thousands of civilians. As you will see, we once used this type of warfare many centuries ago. It may also be of interest to note that similar tactics used by the Nazis in 1944 against Holland were declared war crimes at Nuremberg." Seok Dae Jo paused briefly for emphasis and then continued. "While rebuilding one of these

villages near Deoksan in 1955 excavation teams unearthed the foundations of an ancient ruin dating back to the Korean Kingdom of Gojoseon, around 400 BC. Inside the crumbling walls we uncovered a great secret: four hundred and sixteen carved wooden blocks from the original Tripitaka Koreana. Ironically, it was your brutality which led us to this discovery."

"Whether or not the United States of America was guilty of excessive force over fifty years ago hardly seems relevant to what's happening today," the President declared in a frustrated tone. "Is this why you stayed here, to talk about ancient history?"

"Mr. President, with all due respect for any unintended criticism perceived in my remarks, there is no such thing as ancient history. All history is always present, all around us, always influencing us. If you refuse to acknowledge this you can never hope to understand the power it has over you."

"Go on, go on," the President repeated, lifting up his palms in a sign of self-restraint.

"Thank you, Mr. President. The lost tablets we found in Deoksan had been sealed inside those ancient walls long before the Mongol invasion of 1232. Evidently, they were Buddhist writings which described the third and final Goryeo-Khitans War of 1018, a series of battles fought over our ancestors' refusal to pay tribute to the Mongol Emperor Yelu Hongji. Parchments discovered with the blocks explained that their addition to the Tripitaka was a very controversial matter as they differ from the recorded history we know today. Their carving had taken over a year to complete, and after much argument they were removed from the compilation in 1089 under pressure from a large faction which sought their destruction, much like the Mongols would later do to the rest of the Tripitaka in 1232. Fortunate for us, before they could be burned, they were stolen from the temple that housed them and then taken to the ruins where they were sealed inside these ancient walls and forgotten. Upon them, however, we learned what had really happened during that Third Goryeo-Khitans War.

"According to the accepted records of time, in the winter of 1018, the Khitan Mongol General Xiao Baiya prepared to invade Goryeo by building a great bridge over the Yalu River which separated our lands. Once completed, he drove one hundred thousand of his troops across into Goryeo, pushing southward, destroying everything in his path. Knowing of Xiao's approach in advance, Goryeo General Kang Kam-cha ordered his troops to build a massive wooden dam along a stream south of the Yalu that lay in General Xiao's path. When the Khitans finally reached the stream and were half-way across, Kang's troops destroyed the dam, unleashing a cataclysmic flood against the invaders, killing some sixty thousand Mongol soldiers. Shortly afterwards, like Napoleon at Waterloo, Xiao's troops were reduced to a retreat of attrition through the harsh Korean winter from which only a few thousand survived to reach Mongolia. This defeat was final for the Khitans and they never invaded our country again. That is the record of history, but it is not what we found on the lost Tripitaka carvings.

"It is true that the Khitans declared war on Goryeo for the third and final time in 1018, and it is true that General Xiao built a great bridge over the Yalu for that invasion. It is also true that General Kang had built a great dam in anticipation of Xiao's advance. But from there the story on the wooden blocks differs. According to these

carvings, the encounter actually occurred in 1019, one month after the Khitans had begun their march into Goryeo. Kang had not chosen a small stream for his trap, but the great Taedong River in central North Korea. There, his soldiers built their massive wooden dam at a point far up the river where it enters a deep six mile long erosion. This gash in the earth, left by ancient glaciers during a former ice age, is known as the Yong Gorge. It has a narrow opening at its northern mouth, but then quickly broadens to almost four hundred feet in width for the remainder of its six mile length. Its fifty foot high embankments run at steep angles from one end to the other, sometimes straight up, until they level out into low rolling hills that encompass a wide plain where the river spills out at the gorge's southern end. Using the near vertical walls of the Yong's northern entrance as a buttress for their structure, Kang's men began work on the dam shortly after they discovered that Xiao was building his mighty bridge over the Yalu. For almost three months as the Mongols completed their crossing and then began their advance, the dam was under constant construction. Day and night, they denuded the surrounding hillsides of trees for miles around and reduced the wide flowing river inside the gorge to a narrow shallow stream. All the while, millions upon millions of gallons of water were being backed up behind this great wooden wall.

"Kang knew that Xiao's intended path would not take him into the rough terrain of the Yong Gorge, so he sent sorties of between five hundred and a thousand of his troops to continually attack and then retreat from the Khitans to draw them toward his trap. Periodically, he also ordered small parties of soldiers, two or three at a time, to allow themselves to be captured by the Mongols. During torture, but before being killed, they were to tell the enemy that the Goryeo forces were being amassed inside the Taedong's gorge about a mile south of its northern end in preparation for a great and overwhelming assault upon Xiao later that month. These prisoners also stated that the river had nearly run dry that year, leaving the Yong's southern entrance wide open. As his one hundred thousand troops were mostly on horseback while Kang's two hundred thousand men were almost all foot soldiers, Xiao considered that he might rush up the gorge in a surprise attack and destroy the unsuspecting enemy. Reinforced by misleading reports from his own scout patrols which, unknown to him, had been allowed to penetrate all the way to the erosion's northern ledge just shy of the great dam, Xiao took the bait and charged toward a force twice his size.

"Kang's original plan had been to lure the Khitans into the gorge's southern end, allowing them to advance unhindered up the near empty river bed. Goryeo troops had even cleared boulders and other debris that might have otherwise hindered their enemy's speedy entrance into the trap. In addition, Kang had initially positioned nearly all of his two hundred thousand troops inside the gorge where Xiao's scouts could observe and report on them. But as the Mongols rapidly approached, tens of thousands of Kang's men would sneak out of the gorge each night to take up positions atop the southern wall. There, out of sight from the Khitan spies on the northern ledge, Kang arranged some thirty-thousand archers shoulder to shoulder along the entire length of the Yong Gorge. By the time that Xiao's horsemen raced into the wide south entrance there would be just over twenty thousand of Kang's troops still at camp near the north end, counterfeiting the appearance of a force ten times that size. As the Mongols approached within two hundred yards of the remaining Goryeo forces, Kang's archers would unleash a hail of arrows to stop the charging

Khitans. Simultaneously, the encamped troops who had been dressed in light clothing were to scurry like ants from a collapsing colony and flee up hundreds of camouflaged escape paths that had been carved into the gorge's south side. Kang estimated that his rain of arrows should hold the confused Khitans at bay for the few minutes it would take his men to escape, leaving the Mongols trapped as there would be too many of them inside the gorge to execute a hasty retreat. With their enemy alone on the river bed, when the last Goryeo soldier was out, explosive charges would be detonated at the base of the great dam. Unable to breach the embankments on horseback and wearing armor too heavy for climbing, the Khitans would be washed away as the ancient Egyptians once had been.

"Unfortunately for Kang, this did not happen. As planned, Xiao's troops entered the Yong shortly after dawn on the day of the attack. Galloping up the nearly dry four hundred foot wide river bed, his seventy thousand horsemen cavalried fifty abreast in fourteen hundred lines stretching five miles into the gorge, with thirty thousand foot soldiers following quickly behind. As his troops approached the fabricated camp, Kang's thirty thousand arches leaned over the southern rim's wall and drew back their bows. But while waiting for the signal to fire, a series of faulty relays caused the dam's explosives to be detonated before a single arrow could fly. Hearing the approaching great thunder, a small handful of Goryeo soldiers were able to escape, but all the rest, along with nearly the entire Khitan Army, were swept away. In the end over ninety-seven thousand Mongols, forty thousand of Kang's troops, and nearly seventy thousand horses were drowned that day. Kang's men were so horrified by the sight that they immediately dropped their arms in an attempt to help the few survivors of either side that they could find. According to the lost blocks, it was that day and not in the drawn-out attrition of a winter retreat that the Third Goryeo-Khitan War ended.

"During the months following the Yong disaster, many courts were held between the two kingdoms to decide what should be done. Kang with his great dam had called upon the mighty dragon as his protector and savior. In Korean tradition this mythical creature is the master of both water and agriculture. In essence it is a god that has complete control over all life for without water to drink and plants to eat, nothing could exist upon the Earth. But the dragon is more powerful and unpredictable than man will ever be, making Kang's great wall the nuclear weapon of its time: an overwhelming force unleashed from a Pandora's Box with devastating results for everyone. When the four hundred and sixteen tablets were added to the Tripitaka Koreana they were meant to stand as a warning against anyone who would consider entreating the dragon's aid in war again. But ruling parties on both sides soon realized that the published facts were in and of themselves a potential enticement for future leaders. Therefore, they agreed to destroy these carvings and a great propaganda machine was set in motion throughout Southeast Asia to change the recorded history of time into what is considered fact today. It was only through the efforts of a small group of dedicated monks who had been involved in their creation that these disgraced blocks were stolen away to be hidden for over eight hundred and fifty years."

"Are you trying to tell me that what happened this morning in Antarctica is somehow related to a battle that occurred almost a thousand years ago?" interjected the President, incredulously.

"Yes and no, Mr. President, but to explain I must continue."

"Okay," the President acquiesced with a slight huff.

"After the 1953 armistice, with our strong economy and superior army we felt assured of reunifying Korea under the communist flag. Unfortunately, with the massive influx of U.S. financial assistance as part of your Vietnam War effort, everything changed as South Korea's development far surpassed our own. Compounded by our recent famine at the turn of the century, we came to the conclusion that we would never be able to achieve our goal of unification. The ROK with your support is now too powerful for us to overthrow, and any outright aggression on our part would only lead to North Korea's ultimate defeat. On the other hand, if we can not conquer you militarily, then the only other way to defeat you would be on the economic battlefield. This would mean prolonging the armistice while we descended into market-place economics as have the Chinese and Russians. But deprived of the lavish support our communist neighbors once afforded us, we have no great benefactor like our brothers in the South. Lacking such economic strength, we could never hope to overcome your imperialistic supremacy. Either way, we would lose our land through war or our souls through capitalism. We are not strong enough to conquer you, and we are too poor and weak to ignore your influence and wishes. So, it should come as no surprise to you that around the turn of the century we were desperate. We needed something new, something different and powerful, something we had never thought of before, if we were to survive. That is why we have turned to the lost Tripitaka carvings."

"What?" asked the President. "You're going to defeat us with a dragon?"

"Our goal is not so much to defeat you, Mr. President, as it is to deter and repel you. The tale of the Yong Gorge has many lessons, most of them translatable to our nuclear age. For us, the most intriguing part of the story was not Kang's battle plan or the accidental detonation of the dam's explosives, but what happened after the flood had occurred. It wasn't the fact that so many died, but what those who lived did after witnessing the dragon's awesome power. Man is a creature of pain, hate, and fear which if unchallenged will turn this malice upon himself. However, when faced with an overwhelming unstoppable aggressor, he becomes a benevolent, joyful, and caring being who will join arms with any of his kind. Think of it, Mr. President. That day in the Yong Gorge, there were only twenty thousand of Kang's men still in the river camp when the dam burst. But the carvings tell us that twice that number - forty thousand - drowned. The Goryeo survivors were so horrified by the dragon's overpowering terror that they leapt to their deaths by the thousands into that gorge to try and save the men below. It did not matter if they were friend or enemy. Kang's men were transformed by that tragedy, uniting themselves to their Mongol brothers. This is what we learned from the Yong Gorge blocks."

"So, the Antarctic is going to be a tragedy?" presumed the President.

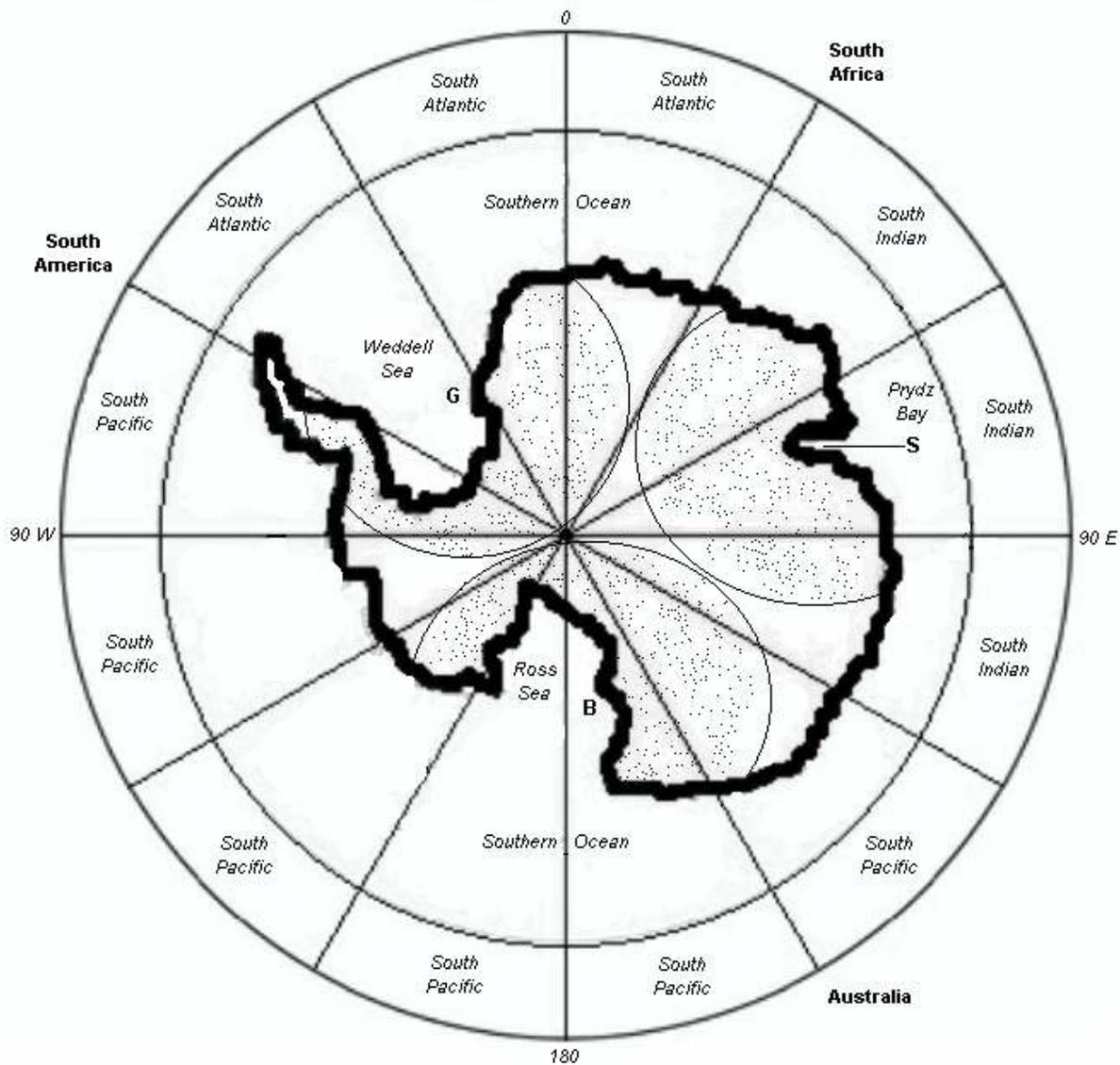
"More than a tragedy, Mr. President, it is the end of the world as we know it."

"Your country has launched some five to six hundred nuclear bombs, not one of which has exploded, at a frozen piece of ice that's nearly one and a half times the size of the United States of America, and you think that's going to be the end of the world?" shouted the President, defiantly.

"No, Mr. President. With apologies, I must correct you. This will not end of the world. All nations on Earth

could launch their entire arsenals of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons upon each other if they wished and that would not destroy the planet. It would simply destroy us. The Earth, the solar system, our galaxy, and the universe would happily go on without us, most likely not even noticing our absence. We are not seeking to destroy this world, but to change it irrevocably through the dragon's will so as to unite mankind against a common enemy much in the same way as Kang's men were changed by the horrible Yong Gorge flood."

"But how, Mr. Seok?" asked the President. "We've been monitoring your warheads since they landed and, like I said, not one of them has exploded. Granted, from what we can tell they seem to be getting very hot, but as we



Scatter Plot Of Goguryeo (G), Silla (S), and Baekje (B) Elements

speak there isn't a single mushroom cloud hovering over the south pole."

"Nor shall there be, Mr. President, for they are not nuclear war heads and we are not trying to blow up the continent."

"Then what the hell are they and what are you trying to do?" the President demanded.

Seok Dae Jo looked down at the table in front of him for the first time since he had been brought to his cell. He stared at the bottle of pills momentarily thinking that now we be a good time to take them. Instead, as his country expected him to do, he quickly raised his head and calmly replied, "They are volatile nuclear reactor core elements, Mr. President. We are going to melt Antarctica."

The President leaned back slowly in his chair as if hit from behind in the back of the head. For the first time since early that morning things were starting to make sense in a strange and very unpleasant way. Taking a few moments to recalibrate his thoughts, the President brought himself back level to the table, staggering unsteadily through his lead sentence. "You... shot... volatile... nuclear... reactor core... elements... into Antarctica... to melt it. Is that even possible?"

"It has been our plan for the past decade to make it possible, Mr. President."

"But how, Mr. Seok?" the President almost whispered. "Our satellites have been watching every movement of your ships, from their initial loading and failed expedition last year to their reconstruction, reloading, and final trip this year. For God's sake, we have no idea how you even got any rockets on board them, let alone nuclear reactor cores. If that is what you say they are, how did you do this?"

"I must report to you, Mr. President, that it was all slight of hand."

"I don't think it's a trick we're going to appreciate."

"If you wish, Mr. President, I will stop."

"No...you have to go on."

"Very well, Mr. President, as you wish. I will start by taking you back to the year 2000. We were just starting to see fruit from our efforts at combating the famine, and though it would take the better part of the next five years to put it mostly behind us, we finally felt secure that our nation would not collapse from starvation. But we were still locked in a battle with you that couldn't be won militarily or economically. Looking for some way out, something that would radically change the world around us, we turned to the lost Tripitaka Koreana blocks. Having had them in our possession for forty-five years, it was only then, at the turn of the century that we seriously considered their meaning. Given the imperialistic rules you have imposed upon the world, there was no way for us to find victory in either conflict or cooperation with you, for on either path we would lose ourselves and the essence of who we are. Only if we could unexpectedly change the game, shake up the board, and extinguish those rules could we then eliminate the need for confrontation or capitulation. But what could we bring to bear of such power so dreadful and devastating in magnitude that it would overcome our shared eternal hatred for one another? The Kyoto Conference gave us the answer.

"America's capitalistic pursuits have placed two great forces at work against one another: globalization and

global warming. Your foreign policy is dominated by a crusade to create a world full of democratic societies with interlinked economies that serve your national interests. It is not enough that a country be democratic, for if a communist party takes power by fair and just elections you will crush it. No, it must be a republic which denounces socialist ideals in favor of capitalist domination. And today, the number one pursuit which dominates capitalism as it has for the past century is oil. The world runs on it. It is more than just black gold, it is black blood. From fertilizers, to engine fuel, to plastics, it has become the king of all commodities. Six and a half billion people survive on this planet today because oil flows not as the fountain of youth, but as the very fountain of life. And as you anoint more and more countries into your global plan - raising the third world into the developing world, and then the developing world into your imperial world - that black blood is pumping harder and faster through the oil fields, through the pipe lines, through the gas pumps, and out exhaust pipes, driving people faster and harder down major arteries and veins, even as it passes through their very own. And all the time as your thirst for oil rises and your burning passion for consumption grows, so too does the world's temperature, increment by increment, slowly upward every day.

"The 1997 Kyoto Agreement was meant to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are seen as the main cause of global warming. Almost every country on the planet has signed onto this agreement and ratified it through their legislative bodies except for one notable exception: the United States of America. Why? Because even though it is in our global interest to abide by such an agreement, it is not in America's national interests to do so. Fearful that under such restrictions your country would lose the economic advantage it has enjoyed for so many years, you plod along down the path toward more global warming. Unfortunately, anyone hoping to keep up with you must plod down that same path and so Kyoto, though almost globally recognized and accepted, is for all practical purposes gutted."

"It would be a great disadvantage for us," interjected the President. "While we'd have to cut back production or pay huge fines, perhaps billions of dollars, countries like China and India wouldn't have any restrictions placed upon their emissions. What kind of protocol is that where we have to give up everything while everyone else can do as they please?"

"Actually, Mr. President, given how far they are behind you economically, their exemptions would only have lasted long enough for them to reach an acceptable level of par with the developed nations of the world, like yourself. But it has never been about fairness or equality with the United States. It has solely been about your national interests. Globalization is only valid to you as long as it serves your country's goals: as long as it is a globalization where you are in control. And you are in control. And the temperature of the planet is rising."

"But there are other ways to deal with that," explained the President. "You don't just shut down a factory and an entire economy when there's a difficulty. You face that problem head on and solve it through science, engineering, and technology. Yes, there's global warming, but we can find a way to reverse it before it's too late. Even the worst estimates tell us we're looking at somewhere between 2050 and 2100 before things get out of hand. Don't you think we have the brain power and know how to fix global warming by then? We shouldn't stop what we're doing. No.

Keep going, keep working, keep looking for the answers and we'll find them. That's how you solve a problem like global warming, not by stagnating economies and stifling development."

"We considered this, Mr. President, and there's a chance you might be right. But if you were, then that would still be very bad for us as by 2100 we would have long been absorbed into your global capitalist scheme. So, we contemplated what if you were wrong? What if 2100 arrived and no solution had been found? What then?"

"You can't be pessimistic, Mr. Seok. You have to believe. We're America. We won two world wars. We brought down the Soviet Union and Walmartized China. We're the most freedom loving nation in the world and we bring democracy to all corners of the globe. We may not win every battle, but with God's help we're going to win every war. And that includes the war on global warming, too."

"Perhaps you could have, Mr. President, but not now. You have polluted this planet with chemicals, radiation, and green house gases, contaminated the land we live on, the water we drink, and the very air we breath. Under the banners of democracy and globalization, every day you have destroyed a little more of Earth in pursuit of your national interests. In essence, you have been in this long drawn out race toward the year 2100 to see who will win: you with your yet to be realized technological solutions, or global warming in its spiraling cataclysmic crescendo. The rest of the world was telling you to slow down, but you charged ahead, invigorating environmental meltdown while simultaneously hoping to prevent it with a weapon you do not yet have. Granted, in time you may have found that weapon, that solution to global warming, but in the end, we have decided it is better if you do not."

"Better for who?" shouted the President.

"Better for us, of course, Mr. President. It is better for our national interests that you do not solve the global warming problem, for if you do we are doomed. Your power grows stronger every day. Though China and India may have faster rates of growth than you, they are still far behind your overall achievements and standard of living. The United States has less than five percent of the world's population, yet it consumes twenty-five percent of the planet's oil and energy, giving the average American almost six times more power than the average non-American. You don't lose that kind of an advantage overnight, not as long as you are defending your national interests. But if you could not protect your own country, if your nation was so devastated that national interests were focused on mere day-to-day survival rather than on international import-export balance sheets, then perhaps you might forget about other parts of the world and leave us alone. Maybe if global warming had already won and you had no way of opposing it, then we would be of little interest or concern to you. After all, people seldom think about their neighbors when their own house is on fire."

"So the Antarctic is on fire, is that it?" asked the President. "Some five million square miles of ice is going to burn up and melt as the world is inundated in a massive flood. And you think that will make us turn tail and retreat for home?"

"My apologies, Mr. President. Your summation is perhaps a bit too simplistic, but it does capture important aspects of our plan."

"And what is that plan, Mr. Seok. You're telling me things I find hard to believe. If you really do have a plan, I'd like to know exactly what it is and how you got this far with it."

"Yes, Mr. President, I will tell you of this plan. We realized that if we could speed up global warming, bringing all of its consequences to bear on a worldwide scale, then perhaps, as Kang's army did in the great Yong Flood, you might forget your aggressions and be more concerned about humanity. As ridiculous as it may sound, we knew that the only way to bring about this proposal was to attack either one or both of the polar caps. This, after all, would guarantee the gravest impact on our planet and, therefore, upon you. So, before even deciding how, we decided where to manifest this apocalypse. After much discussion and consideration we discarded the North Pole as any attempt on our part to get there would bring us uncomfortably close to your county. The South Pole, on the other hand, could be approached by the Atlantic, Pacific, or Indian Oceans, all the while heading away from the U.S. mainland. So we decided to melt Antarctica.

"It turns out that such a proposal is not as hard as one might think. Given that we are a uranium rich nation, our knowledge and experience with nuclear materials is extensive. Just as you assumed, we too incorrectly started by thinking about nuclear weapons as a means to our ends. However, the Antarctic ice is very thick: over two miles deep in some places. There was no way to dig holes and plant bombs under the ice, and exploding a nuclear weapon above ground results in most of its energy being deflected into the atmosphere by the ice-hard covering. Our calculations showed that it would take multiple atomic explosions over the same site to even break halfway through such thick ice. Given the continent's size, tens of thousands, perhaps millions of nuclear warheads would have been needed to accomplish such a massive task. We obviously ruled this out as we had neither the arsenal nor the delivery system for such a project.

"For many months this problem was analyzed by a top secret group within our nuclear energy and materials division. Over and over they returned to the atomic bomb, analyzing every conceivable means of employing it to reach our goal. But every time their efforts were futile. Then, one day, somewhere around the spring of 2001 a member of this team proposed a strange and new idea. Having been to Chernobyl after the accident there, he suggested that we look at nuclear material not as a weapon, but as an energy source to generate heat, much as we do in nuclear reactors. What really mattered wasn't that the ice melted all at once as in the face of a great fireball, but that it melted in a manner that was irrevocable, indefensible, and fast within reason. In other words, if it liquified instantly or over several months, the outcome would likely be the same. As long as no one could stop it, a global catastrophe would occur one way or the other. It took a while to come around to his point of view, but before long everyone was convinced that he was right. So, they set about not to create a nuclear weapon, but a nuclear element that could generate sufficient heat to melt Antarctic ice.

"Again, though this may sound like the dreams of crazy men and mad scientists, it really all comes down to basic engineering. In addition to fuel sources like uranium and coal, North Korea is a land rich in many ores such as zinc, graphite, iron, tungsten, and magnesium. Using what was at hand, including the knowledge we gained from our

nuclear reactors sites which date back to the 1980's, we were able to create small lightweight units that are to heat generation what your ADM's were to atomic weapons. These devices which we called volatile nuclear reactor core elements were very similar in concept to the elements which are found in many nuclear generators today. However, they are much more compact with much less space between the uranium fuel rods, so that when the reaction starts they burn much faster and much hotter. Ultimately, the final design was for individual units that would produce a sustained maximal temperature of about twenty-four hundred degrees Fahrenheit for one to two years."

"But if the uranium was that close, wouldn't such devices just keep heating up until they exploded?" interrupted the President.

"Yes, Mr. President. That was one of the many obstacles we had to overcome. If the elements burn too soon or too fast, then they reach a critical point where an explosion is inevitable. That, of course, would defeat our whole purpose as most of their energy would be deflected into the atmosphere. But our engineers calculated that if the reaction could be started slowly, so that the elements were only at about six to seven hundred degrees Fahrenheit when they landed on the surface, then their heat would cause them to quickly borrow into the ice and sink down to the bedrock a mile or so below. There, under the tremendous pressure from the mass of liquified and frozen water on top of them, they would come to an equilibrium at their maximal temperatures, unable to explode or to stop generating heat until their fuel was exhausted in about twelve to twenty-four months. By then, given several hundred of these elements strategically placed throughout the continent, much of the Antarctic's ice cap would be gone. So, you see, Mr. President, by the time 9/11 changed New York, we already had the blueprints that would forever change the world. The only remaining problem was how to deliver it.

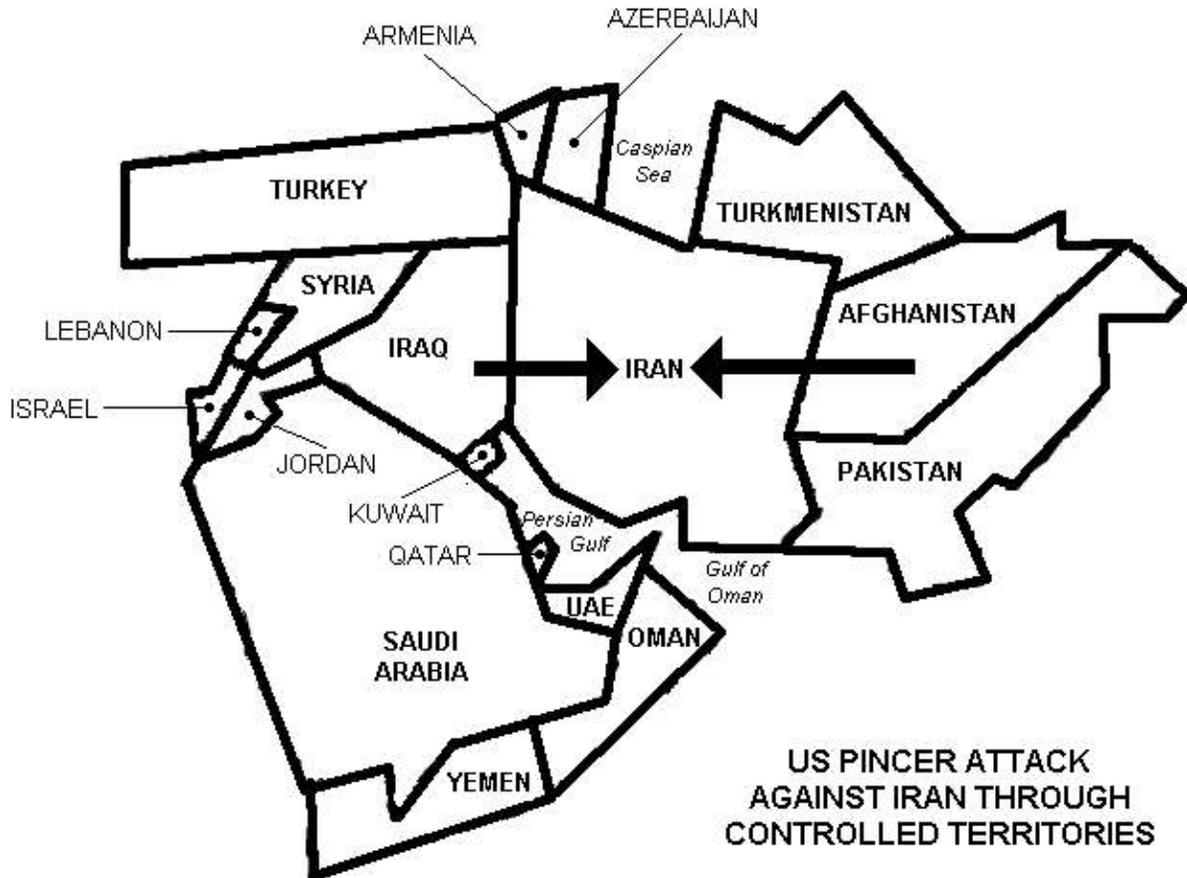
"In 2001, when actual testing began on development of these elements, a process which was completed by the end of 2005, we also started considering how to deliver them to Antarctica. Obviously, we couldn't just send off ships filled with missiles holding volatile reactor cores in their warheads. You would have intercepted them at sea and destroyed them. No, we needed a cover story, a reason to go to the South Pole and a reason for you to give us permission to go there. With the state of affairs in our relations at the time, that would have seemed more improbable than creating the volatile elements themselves. This turned out to be a much harder task than we expected as the final solution came in the form of a five phase plan to create the opportunity we would need in order to irrevocably alter the balance of global warming."

"Before we get to whether or not this really is going to even cause global warming, I'd like to know exactly how you have done what you have already accomplished," requested the President. "If the United States is going to have to rethink its entire foreign policy as you're implying, then I need to know why, which means I need to know everything."

"Yes, Mr. President, as you request. I will begin with the first phase of our plan: Operation Crisis. Before we could change the world, we had to dramatically alter our relationship with your country. The only way we could be in a position to ask for your permission to send ships toward Antarctica was if we were in supplication to you. Of

course our relations since 1945 have never been cordial, let alone courteous, so we needed a way to make ourselves subordinate, without giving up actual control to you. This required a radical change in international politics through a devastating event or a series of events that would place us on the edge of a tumultuous conflict, on the brink of disaster from which North Korea could blink first, thereby backing down while at the same time saving face."

The President jumped up from his chair and banged his fist on the table, shouting, "You put the Iranians up to attacking the Israelis!"



"Actually, Mr. President, we merely facilitated something that they would have done on their own, anyway. The Middle East, as far as we could tell, was a lost cause. After overtaking Afghanistan, followed by your final invasion of Iraq, you had ostensibly divided the region into two strategic zones. On the western side you were neutralizing Syria, Lebanon and Jordan between Israeli forces and your troops in Iraq. Simultaneously, in the central part of the region you were prepared for a pincer attack against Iran by employing bilateral fronts invading from both your Iraq and Afghanistan bases. It was only a matter of time before the Iranians fell, and after them we would be the only remaining faction of your so called Axis of Evil. No, we didn't put the Iranians up to anything. We merely helped

them to finally accomplish something they've wanted to do since 1948. As you well know, we have sold military hardware including missile technology to almost all of the Middle Eastern countries, the Iranians being particularly good clients of ours."

"Military hardware and nuclear weapons are two different things," said the President, waving his hand as he lowered himself back into his seat, a mask of anger still on his face.

"It was hardly a difficult task to send those warheads to Tehran, Mr. President. The Chinese and Pakistanis are always in dire need of nuclear fuel. So, in exchange for two trainloads of uranium ore, a third train was allowed to travel unencumbered through China and Pakistan all the way to Iran. On it was a cargo of magnesite from which the Iranians could extract magnesium, also useful in certain aspects of a nuclear program. Far more important, buried at the bottom of six of those train cars were the individual warheads wrapped in radiation-proof shielding to avoid detection. The Iranians placed five of them in storage and the sixth one they dissected much in the same way we had done with your ADM many years ago. We merely did for them what you had once done for us, the only difference being that your 1994 action was a costly mistake while our's was intentional and quite profitable. It took a bit of negotiation, but for the cost of three train loads of ore, all containing substances which we possess in abundance, the Iranians paid handsomely in order to fulfill their dreams."

"Those dreams cost them their country and the Palestinians their lives," declared the President."

"Ah yes, Mr. President, the Palestinians. If the Iranians were a lost cost, then the Palestinians never had a chance. Once you backed the statehood of Israel in 1948 and killed the League of Nations mandate for the creation of Palestine, they were already as good as dead."

"The world was a different place in 1948", exclaimed the President. "You couldn't expect us to ignore the fact that millions of people had just died in Europe. The League of Nations didn't even exist by that point."

"A different place, Mr. President? Yes, it was a different place, much in the same way as was America after Columbus in 1492. In fact, the Palestinians are simply the American Indians of the Middle East. They never had a chance, they were never going to have a chance, and if they had had any brains they would have surrendered and opened up a bunch of casinos. But that was never going to happen. Though we regret their outcome, we hardly feel in a position of blame since you had already flushed them down the toilet in 1948. And yet, their unexpected demise only heightened the sense of crisis we sought to create. We knew that if Afghanistan was destroyed over the loss of two buildings, then Iran was doomed if they obliterated major cities of your most important Middle East ally. But we never expected that you would allow an entire nation to be slaughtered. That was something entirely beyond our calculations. We merely wanted you to remove Iran so as we could be your last remaining bad guy. The liquidation of the Palestinians only escalated tensions once we sealed our borders in trepidation."

"I'm at a loss for words, Mr. Seok. Do you know how many people have died? Those three bombs out of Iran killed some four hundred thousand Israelis, with another fifty to one hundred thousand expected to die in the next few years from radiation poisoning. As a direct result of that atrocity, the entire Palestinian nation, some eleven

million people, were slaughtered. In addition, our coalition's initial attack on Tehran instantly killed about ten million people, with upwards of another one to two million also expected to die in that region from radiation sickness. And then our countrywide bombing mission and subsequent invasion are estimated to have cost the lives of another three million Iranians." The President paused briefly, then added sternly, "In World War Two it took from 1939 to 1945 to kill sixty-two million people. Yet, in less than two weeks last year, you sacrificed nearly half that number - twenty-six million people - just to make yourselves look like a bunch of cowards?" The President found himself standing again, this time with both hands stretched above his head in front of himself, demanding an explanation.

"They were already the walking dead, Mr. President, with the West spending the last sixty-one years just looking for a way to finally kill them. We simply supplied the means of bridging the gap between you and their coffins. We never told the Iranians to use the bombs, though we knew they would. In fact, we shipped the warheads shortly after we had completed fabrication of the Antarctic nuclear elements. They would hold onto those weapons for three years before launching them. The trains left North Korea in the summer of 2006, using the Israeli-Lebanon conflict as a cover. We knew you would be too distracted to pay us much attention, and by the time you realized that the last train had passed over the Pakistan-Iran border, it would be too late for you to intervene. You need to beware of the Pakistanis, Mr. President."

"Yes," confirmed the President, "we suspected that there was something more than just ore on that third train. I know that my predecessor was in quite an uproar when he heard the news, but we were so bogged down in other issues - shuttle diplomacy, constitutional amendments, extraordinary renditions, prisoner abuse scandals - that there was little we could do about it at the time. That's why we kept pressuring the Iranians so hard. We knew they had nuclear weapons, even if we didn't know exactly how or from whom."

"Well, Mr. President, now you know for sure. And you know that we did not make them pull that trigger. In fact, we had to wait from 2006 until 2009 for you to drive them into a sufficient state of despair and hopelessness for that to happen. They knew that they were signing their own death warrants when they launched those missiles. But after witnessing your actions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and seeing how you were slowly backing them into a corner, they felt like they had nothing else to lose. So, we patiently waited those three long years knowing exactly what was coming. It was Xiao and Kang all over again: two indomitable forces unwilling to admit weakness or defeat, reigning disaster down upon one another. Now, it is done. Irrevocable.

"Everything that happened was necessary to make us look like the final obstacle to your complete victory. And we were. You had vanquished the last of your great adversaries in the Middle East. Who else was left for you to hate? Syria has nothing of value to you, no appreciable oil, and it will never stand up by itself. Saudi Arabia has been in your back pocket for decades. Militarily, Russia and China pose no real threats to you any longer. Cuba? If you wished, you could blow your nose and the entire island would disappear. That just leaves little North Korea: the last spoke on the Axis of Evil's Wheel of Fortune. So we gave you the excuse to slaughter everyone that you abhorred, except us. Given our new position of solitude in the world, it would only seem natural that we clam up after the

dismemberment of Iran, and that's exactly what we did. We wanted you to think we felt threatened, that we were next. We had seen your merciless brutality and had no good reason to believe that it would stop in the Middle East. This was how we wanted you to interpret our actions, and you did. Your coalition had just unleashed an atomic holocaust and you feared that we were prepared to push those dominoes and demons farther. I imagine that nuclear warfare must be addictive, for it is so sinful. Does one perspire with a finger hovering numbly over the button? Does the anticipation make your heart skip and your breath choke? Is the disappointment excruciating when you cannot push forward? Oh, how I would have loved to have seen the expressions on your faces when we surrendered."

"I suppose that was also part of your plan, too," the President said disgustedly, reseating himself again.

"Yes, Mr. President. That was the beginning of phase two: Operation Supplication. In this second part we feigned subordination to your imperialist ambitions, thereby rewarding your desire to avoid further nuclear conflict. Given your bipolar nature of inwardly wanting to destroy us while outwardly wanting to appear peace loving, we knew that you would choose the latter if given the chance. So we capitulated with only meager requests: humanitarian aid, removal of sanctions and barriers, normalization of diplomatic relations, and financial support. Oh yes, and there was one other thing: the right to explore the southern oceans. How odd a request to place on such a list. Why make such a big deal over little boats roaming around the seas? Because we took those little boats, stuck them right in your face and said, 'See, we're going to take these little boats, sail them down to the Antarctic and blow it up!' Of course, we left off the last part, but that didn't matter. You gave us billions of dollars in material aid, removed the DMZ and trade sanctions, exchanged embassies with us, and transferred billions of more dollars into both Seoul and Pyongyang that were earmarked for investment in North Korea. Amongst all that hullabaloo you practically forgot about those tiny ships as they sailed off toward disaster."

"No, we did not," corrected the President. "Our satellites watched each step of their preparation and journey. We recorded everything that was loaded onto those ships including everyone who boarded. We saw you place all of that research equipment, food, and supplies onto those vessels. I was even shown some of the ariel photographs during my morning briefings. There were no missiles placed on those ships, Mr. Seok."

"There were and there weren't, Mr. President. On the first trip in July there were no missiles on board, because there was no way to put them there. The ships were not properly configured to hold and fire this armament. They required extensive restructuring in order to do that job. So, again, we needed your permission or at least your complicity to turn them into warships. You would never do that, but you might let us redo their architecture as long as you didn't know why. Your satellites recorded everything as it actually happened in July. The ships loaded their men and equipment, sailed off toward their southern destinations, then the Balhae sank and the rest immediately returned to their ports. What a tragedy. You even sent a letter of condolence to our Dear Leader. How hard was it after that to get your permission? The ships obviously weren't sea worthy. They needed to be rebuilt. Without a second thought, without even knowing it, you gave us the green light to convert those vessels into missile launchers."

"You had lost a ship at sea...," the President paused, reconsidered, then continued stating, "or should I say

you sank your own crew. The Balhae was part of your plan, too, wasn't it, Mr. Seok? You accuse us of being addicted to nuclear warfare, but tell me this. How easy is it to kill your own people?"

"Like everything else we did, Mr. President, it was a necessary thing. Just like the thousands of young soldiers your nation sent to die in the trenches of World War One and those you sacrificed on the beaches of Normandy during World War Two, the individual must always serve their country. We called these brave men to serve on the Balhae in phase three of our plan: Operation Disaster. On a larger scale, it was really nothing more than a repeat of a 1996 incident when one of our submarines accidentally washed ashore in South Korea. After offloading their human cargo of spies, the sub was unable to get away, so the entire crew allowed themselves to be killed instead of captured, because that was how they could best serve their country under such circumstances. Even the captain, who still had his sidearm on him submitted himself to be shot in the head in the service of his nation.

"We are a dedicated people and we do what needs to be done in order to preserve our land. At that particular moment last year we needed your sympathy, your compassion, and your lack of understanding if we were to turn those vessels into the warlords they would become. Only through sacrifice would you unwittingly give us the final key to success. Besides, we did not kill the crew of the Balhae. To a man, they volunteered to die for their country. Each one took great pride and honor in being part of that fated crew. They sank themselves. No one was there holding a gun to their head. They did as ordered and sailed into the first available storm. There, hidden from view, they set timed explosive charges to scuttle their boat and then locked themselves in a cargo hold where they quickly took poison rather than be drowned. They are heroes and they will all be remembered forever as such. Their parents, wives, and children are now members of heroic families which is quite an honor in North Korea today. Trust me, Mr. President, I understand these things."

"What is there to understand about anything, Mr. Seok?" asked the President. "The more I hear, the more pathetic and confusing the world seems to be. Your country has murdered millions of people, even its own people, and you want me to understand this?"

"Is it really so hard to understand, Mr. President? After all, we are just doing what is in our best national interest. You, of all people, should be able to understand what that means."

"Enough!" shouted the President, banging his hands on the table as he prepared to rise once more, "I don't want to hear another..." Before he could finish, he suddenly stopped and turned quickly to his right in response to tugging at his sleeve. The Vice President leaned over and began whispering into his leader's ear as the President grimaced, squirmed, and beat the table with his fists a few more times. When he had finished, the Vice President straightened himself back in his seat while the Chief sat staring at his own hands. A few moments later the President looked up and flatly stated, "You said there were five phases. Can you tell us more?"

"Of course, Mr. President. Up to that point Operation Crisis had been the most difficult phase of our plan as it required us to move those trains quickly while you were diverted by other obligations. Operation Supplication, on the other hand, didn't cost anyone their lives, but it did require a lot of deceptive song and dance. Overall, Operation

Disaster was the easiest of all five phases, because it was something we could do entirely on our own and it was exactly what it looked like: a disaster. Now, however, we began what was the longest and truly the most difficult of all five phases: Operation Reconstruction. It was here that our slight of hand reached its pinnacle.

"There were three steps to Operation Reconstruction which actually began around the time we shipped the warheads to Iran. The first step started in 2006. It involved building long tunnels which were started from beneath large warehouses located about a half mile outside of the ports of Nampo and Wonson. These tunnels which took two years to construct ran underground into the bay of each port. There, they were attached to pipelines that extended their path to just under where the ships would be docked while loading for their expeditions. On the land side, large amounts of dirt had to be excavated in order to make these underground holes. In the ports, the pipeline extension was laid under the subterfuge of dredging operations. Knowing you would be monitoring our efforts from your satellites and in order not to raise your suspicion, we were able to get the oversized pipes in place by purposefully sinking and then refloating the dredge barges in a series of planned accidents. The pipelines which had water tight hatches at their far ends were put in place first, then anchored and sealed onto each port's sloping bedrock wall. The underground tunnels from the warehouses were then dug into the anchored pipes. Once everything was connected, the water was pumped out to form one contiguous link from the warehouses to just under the vessels' docking positions. Two such passageways were made in Nampo, one each for the Goguryeo and Baekje, and one was made in Wonson for the Silla."

"What about all the dirt from excavating the tunnels?" asked the President. "What did you do with that?"

"We removed it by trucks, Mr. President."

"But we would have seen them. It must have taken dozens of trucks to remove all that earth. That's the type of thing we would have noticed, Mr. Seok."

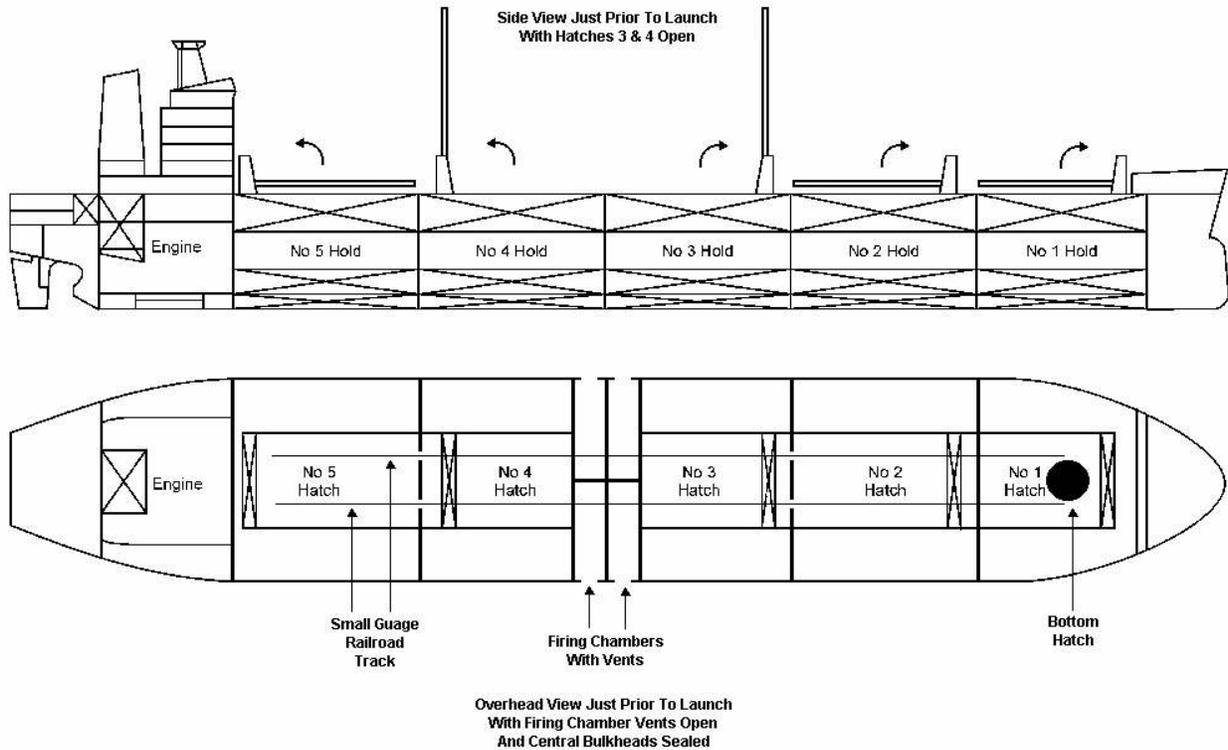
"You did and it did, Mr. President. But it was not what it seemed. Dozens of trucks removing hundreds of loads of dirt from a warehouse would most definitely have peaked your interest. But those same trucks removing dirt from a demolition site would be of little concern. We simply filled the warehouses with the excavated dirt until it reached a certain height. Then we burned them down. From space, it's hard to tell if there's too much dirt beneath a bunch of twisted steel and sheet metal. The two smaller warehouses in Nampo had to be destroyed three times, while the larger one in Wonson only had to be burned twice."

"The firecracker warehouses," exclaimed the President.

"Excuse me, Mr. President?" inquired Seok Dae Jo.

"The firecracker warehouses," the President said, bemused. "I was briefed on those when I first took office. Our satellites did see them burn sometime around mid-2007 and early-2008. I remember. They were in the ports of Wonson and Nampo, just like you said. They kept burning down, but there were no large explosions, so the previous administration ruled out military supplies and assumed that you were just inept when it came to storing low level explosives, like firecrackers. That's why they were nicknamed the firecracker warehouses." The President paused for a moment, disconcerted, before adding, "Anyway, continue."

"Ah, yes, Mr. President, our Dear Leader would have been very pleased to know that. The tunnels were completed just before the end of 2008. From then on, these 'firecracker warehouses' were being slowly and continually stocked with the missiles and reactor elements that were destined for Antarctica. In total, there were one hundred and forty-four missiles loaded onto the three remaining vessels, each projectile having to be delivered to its warehouse in pieces so as not raise suspicions. A business for machinery parts operated as a front from each site, providing the cover for these deliveries. By the time the surviving ships returned from the first failed expedition, the 'firecracker warehouses' were almost completely stocked. This is when we began step two of Operation Reconstruction.



"The second part of this phase involved the ships' reconstruction. Each one had five cargo holds, all of which underwent extensive changes including reconfiguration with small gauge railways on which the missiles could be stored and then rolled into the firing chambers at the middle of each ship. However, the forward most hold needed the most remodeling as it was equipped with a special hatch in its bottom, so that each vessel could be connected to the sunken pipeline tunnel below. From here, through the bottom of that front hold, the dismantled projectiles would be loaded onto the ships. In addition to all of this, each vessel had to have its frame reinforced to withstand the tremendous forces exerted upon it by the missiles' liftoff thrusts. But you did not know any of this, because all your satellites saw was the framework reinforcement. Before we began any internal rearrangements, the top deck and sides were laid on to prevent you from seeing what was going on inside."

"Dear God," slipped the President, exasperated. "So that's how you did it."

"Yes, Mr. President, that is how we did it. After all, you know how good we are at building tunnels. War is a stern teacher. Your relentless bombing of our country from 1950 to 1953 taught us the importance of going underground. Because of that, today there are nearly sixteen thousand North Korean military sites in excavated tunnels and caverns. As part of the famine relief package negotiated in 1999 between your country and mine, you demanded to inspect one such site at Kumchang-ni. It had been dug into a mountain and you feared it was a secret nuclear weapons facility. At the time, however, it was only six miles of empty tunnels laid out in a criss-crossed grid pattern. Today, it is completely filled with some of the aid supplies that you sent to us after we signed our recent peace treaty. Those supplies should come in handy when the world begins to change. So, you can see, digging a mile or so of tunnel from the warehouses to the ports was really no big deal to us."

"But how did you connect the ships to the underwater pipelines at the ends of the tunnels?" inquired the President.

"That was a bit trickier to do, Mr. President. The underwater pipeline portion of each tunnel had a ninety degree bend at its far end which left its opening some twenty feet below the ship's hull. This was done on purpose to allow for any rise or fall in the vessel's elevation due to tides, unexpected waves, and the loading or offloading of cargo. To make the final connection, specially designed collapsible docking sleeves were attached to the end of each underwater pipe. Once the ships were anchored overhead, the sleeves were extended upward through the hatch in the bottom of the hulls, then the water was pumped out to produce continuous tunnels connecting the warehouses to the vessels. I am told it took four years to develop these sleeves, that their construction was from material somewhat like a steel-belted radial tire, and that many lives were lost in their development. The pipelines were already in place when they were finally manufactured, so the sleeves were brought to Wonson and Nampo piggybacked on small submarines. Loaded in neighboring ports, the submarines traveled while submerged beneath large cargo vessels which acted as cover during the sleeves' transport and installation. This way there was nothing for your satellites to see either in excavating the tunnels, laying the pipelines, or installing the docking sleeves.

"Once the three vessels were rebuilt in dry-dock and the tunnels had their docking sleeves in place, the ships were refloated and sailed into their port positions where they were connected to the warehouses. Then, in plain view of your satellites, supplies for the second expedition were loaded onboard from the docks during the daytime through the top hatch of each hold. At night, however, that same cargo was offloaded into the tunnels underwater through the front most bottom hatch. So as not to be seen coming directly back into port from the tunnels' main warehouses, these supplies were then laundered through a series of smaller depots before reloading them the next day. By recycling in this manner, between all three ships, what would have appeared by satellite photography to be some six hundred thousand tons of supplies was really only about one-fifth of that amount. Most of this was finally left on board in the forward holds as actual stock for their ill-fated trips. You might be interested to note that it was your CIA's Project Jennifer which gave us the idea for loading and offloading through the bottom of each vessel."

"Yes," chimed in the President, "Howard Hughes' Glomar Explorer that was used to raise the Russian's K-129 submarine off the Pacific floor in 1974. That was quite a thing: Project Jennifer. That sub sank in 1968, and in 1969 we found it some three and a half miles down, located about seven hundred and fifty miles off of Oahu, Hawaii. The Glomar had huge hatches in the bottom of its hull. I've seen the pictures. Contrary to what was published, Mr. Seok, we actually retrieved most of that sub including its warheads and crew. Dreadful thing, that part of the ocean. There's little to decompose a body at that depth and temperature." The President paused respectfully, then added, "Tell me exactly how you loaded the missiles onto your ships."

"Using the tunnels, the missiles were loaded piece-meal into the ships during the daytime, Mr. President, where they were reassembled and hoisted onto tracks in the front most hold. Then at night, while the fake cargo was being offloaded through the same tunnels, the missiles were carefully rolled through tall doorways in the ships' bulkheads to their storage positions in the four aft holds. The original cargo spaces were only forty-two feet high, but the missiles were forty-eight feet high. During reconstruction, the top decks were slightly elevated and wells were planted through their lowest decks into each vessel's bilge. By raising the top deck and implanting the wells, we were able to achieve the fifty foot clearance needed to place and move the missiles within the ships. There were two such wells in each vessel, one on either side of the keel, running from the front most hold through the four aft holds. Each well which was approximately eight feet wide contained the small-gauge rail track and powerful chain-link drive that were used for moving the missiles inside the ships.

"Once all of the loading and offloading were completed, the missiles were braced for shipping in the following layout. From bow to stern, the five holds on each ship were numbered one through five with hold number one being where the vessel was connected to its tunnel. This forward-most hold was also where the actual supplies for the journey were stored. The four aft holds, numbers two through five, held the missiles. Once loaded, all of the tall bulkhead doors were sealed, except for those between holds two and three and between holds four and five. This meant that these paired spaces each held about two hundred feet of interconnected track on either side of the ship's keel. In addition to this track, on each ship there were four firing chambers, two on either side of the main bulkhead which separated holds three and four. This was also the ship's central bulkhead which divided the two aft holds from the three forward holds. The four separate track lines, two from the back and two from the front, ran into their corresponding firing chambers at this bulkhead. Including the single missile stored in each of the four firing chambers, every track held a total of twelve projectiles spaced approximately three feet apart from one another for a total of forty-eight missiles on each ship. Once they were bolted down to their tracks, a rack-style frame was erected around them for stabilization during their transport to the Antarctic.

"Each missile contained a special ejection package that held four volatile nuclear reactor core elements along with the parachutes needed to slow each element's descent once it was expelled. In total, by using special materials to conserve mass, the entire payload for each missile weighed less than five hundred pounds. Our Rodong missiles which easily reach past Japan can carry a warhead weighing one and a quarter tons almost eight hundred miles. With

such lightweight payloads on the Antarctic mission, we were able to extend that distance to just over one thousand miles. In addition, the small size of these payloads allowed us to reduce the height of each projectile from its traditional fifty-two feet down to the necessary forty-eight feet. Now, you can see that at the end of Operation Reconstruction, we had three ships loaded with a total of one hundred and forty-four missiles that carried an aggregate assembly of five hundred and seventy-six volatile elements. We were now ready for the final phase in our plan."

"Before you go on to that, tell me how you fueled these missiles," requested the President.

"Yes, Mr. President. The fueling was done through the tunnels during the last two days while the ships were in port, after the missiles were all loaded and secured. It was a liquid fuel mixture you classify as TM-185 which is made up of approximately twenty percent gasoline and eighty percent kerosene. Upon ignition this would be combined with an oxidizer similar to your type AK-271 which has seventy-three percent nitric acid inhibited by twenty-three percent nitrogen tetroxide. I only tell you this because these fuel and oxidizer types are extremely hazardous to use in such situations, carrying a high potential for unwanted explosions. In the end, I assume that we were extremely lucky as all three ships appear to have reached their destinations. The tanks on the missiles, one each for the fuel and oxidizer, were filled to about ninety-five percent of their target capacity and then bled of their expanding gases at alternating times during the entire period of transport. Reserve tanks on each ship held sufficient fuel and oxidizer for topping off the missiles one day prior to their launch. Shall I continue, Mr. President?"

"Yes."

"Thank you Mr. President. Once everything was loaded, and the missiles fueled, we were ready to begin the final phase of our plan: Operation Commencement. It was determined that the best firing positions, given the projectiles' maximal range, were at three spots roughly equidistant from one another around the continent's shoreline. As you know, they were just over the horizon at the following locations: in the Weddell Sea near the Argentinian's station of Belgrano II; inside the fjord of Prydz Bay where the old Amery Ice Shelf used to be, just west of China's Zhong Shan Base; and in the Ross Sea between your McMurdo Station and New Zealand's Scott Base. From there the missiles could be fired onto the ice cap in semi-circle patterns that would effectively impact between seventy to eighty percent of Antarctica's surface area. Getting them there from North Korea was a fairly mundane task.

"The ships were instructed to proceed slowly while monitoring weather patterns at their destination sites. Though ice was not a major obstacle at this time of year, we wanted them to arrive when there was minimal storm disturbance as calm seas and clear weather would offer the best launch environment. Taking their time so as to reach the continent under optimal climate conditions, they kept up their front by continually radioing back prefabricated data which was intermingled with real-time measurements of air and sea quality from their various locals. These readings were done with relatively small and unsophisticated devices as the large scale high-tech instrumentation that was supposed to be used on their return trip had already been offloaded via the tunnels before they left port.

"When the ships had reached their designated spots, the final stages of preparation began including dismantling of the frameworks which held the missiles in place during their passage and topping off their fuel tanks

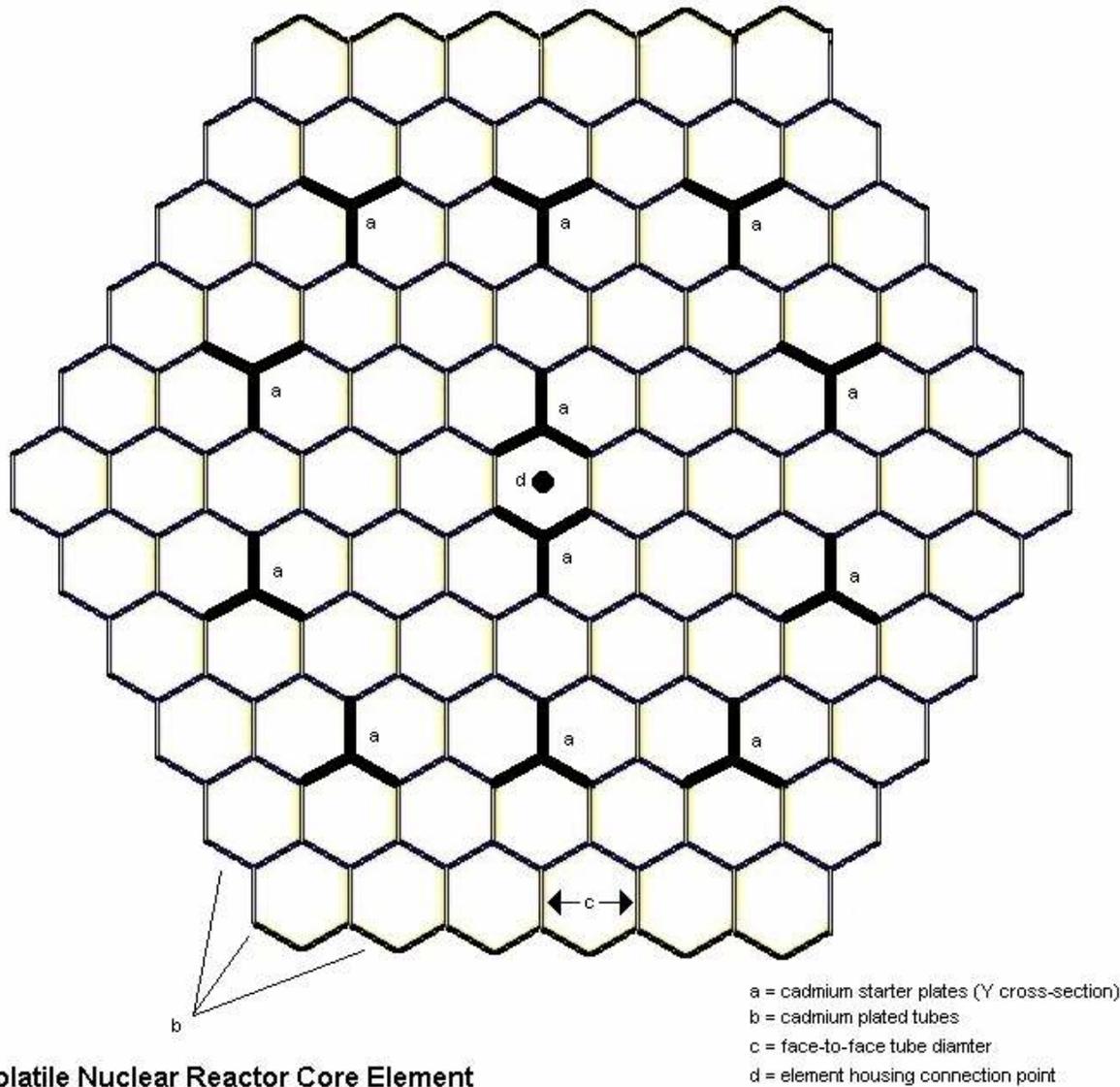
with the surplus TM-185 and AK-271 mixes. In addition, large panels measuring fifteen feet in width and twenty feet in height were opened in the hull side of each firing chamber to vent the propulsion gases expelled during the missiles' liftoffs. An hour before daybreak Washington time, the launch sequence was to begin. Just before the first ignition, each ship opened the hatches on its number three and four holds. Directly under these hatches were the two pairs of firing chambers that were connected to either side of the vessel's central bulkhead.

"It was critical to fire these missiles in pairs. If one were to lift off by itself, its tremendous unbalanced thrust against the ship's side would likely capsize the vessel. Therefore, on each ship the two missiles in hold four's firing chambers were launched first and simultaneously. One such ejection sequence took about a minute, after which there was another minute delay and then the two missiles in hold number three's firing chambers were launched together. As it took just under two minutes to open the doors on each chamber, advance a new set of missile down the tracks into firing position, reseal the doors, and then launch them, a pair of missiles were fired once every minute, alternating between holds three and four. Therefore, it took about twenty-four minutes to launch all forty-eight missiles in sets from each ship.

"Once in flight, each missile's trajectory was limited by the content of its fuel tanks, more fuel being loaded onto the projectiles which had to travel further. When their fuel ran out, the top heavy missiles would plummet nose first toward the Earth. As they approached a thirty degree descent from horizontal flight, onboard gyroscopic sensors would activate the ejection frameworks which housed the volatile elements causing them to be expelled from the falling missiles. Each element's parachute would then open approximately fifteen seconds after ejection to ensure it was far enough away to not become entangled in its parent missile. The elements did not have specific targets and each one was only meant to land within a general region, so they were all allowed to free fall to the surface. Their nose cones were designed to burst apart on touchdown to absorb most of the force from the impact.

"Before I can tell you how each element was activated, I must first explain their design. These elements, based upon the fuel rods used in the nuclear reactors at our Yongbyon Facility, employed a specially manufactured tubing we called magvatun. By mixing magnesium with vanadium and tungsten, we were able to produce a relatively light-weight fuel casing that could withstand very high temperatures of over three thousand degrees Fahrenheit, somewhat similar in properties to high speed steel, only lighter. We acquired these chemicals through naturally abundant mineral deposits within our own country: tungsten as tungsten ore, vanadium as a common impurity of coal, and magnesium from magnesite ore. You may well recall that we used the same magnesite ore as a cover when we shipped those six warheads to Iran.

"The uranium, another abundant ore in North Korea, was stored inside fuel rods made from two foot long sections of magvatun tubing. These tubes were hexagonal in cross-section with each of the six sides measuring one centimeter in length and each rod having a face-to-face diameter of one and a half centimeters. Using the hexagonal shape rather than traditional circular tubing provided the greatest amount of close proximity surface area between these rods for sustaining the nuclear reactions. In an actual reactor, fuel rods are normally separated from one another



Volatile Nuclear Reactor Core Element
Cross-section at Parachute End
 (graphite neutron reflector sleeve omitted)

by half an inch or so to allow sufficient space for the placement of non-reactive control rods. However, in each volatile element, we were able to bundle ninety-one of these hexagonal magvatun rods within two millimeters of each other by electroplating the outside of the tubes with one millimeter of cadmium. Cadmium is a common impurity found in zinc ore, another one of our vast mineral reserves. A millimeter thick coating of this material on the magvatun rods acts as a complete inhibitor to nuclear reactions while at room temperature, but above six hundred degrees Fahrenheit it quickly liquefies and runs off the tubes. Stripped of their cadmium inhibitor at this higher temperature, in such close proximity the magvatun fuel rods generate heat explosively. The trick was in determining how and when to start this

process during the elements' decent to Earth. If it started too late, the elements would not be hot enough to maintain their reactions when they landed in the cold ice and snow. If it started too early, the elements might overheat and explode before they reached the moderating effect of the frozen ground. It took several small-scale and one large-scale test to figure this out."

"Large-scale test?" queried the President. "You mean you actually blew one of these things up? I don't recall being briefed on anything resembling what you're talking about, Mr. Seok, and I think our satellites would have seen such an explosion."

"They did, Mr. President. Don't you remember Ryanggang in 2004?"

"So that was a nuclear test after all?" declared the President.

"Yes and no, Mr. President. The two mile wide mushroom cloud you observed involved nuclear elements, but it was not a nuclear weapon as you had surmised. No, in Ryanggang we allowed one of these elements to overheat so as to verify our calculations on how to best activate them. The final design we came up with involved six inch long cadmium plates 'Y' shaped in cross-section, with each of their three arms being one centimeter in length and two millimeters thick. A dozen of these inhibitor plates were inserted between, and form fitted to the magvatun tubes at the parachute end of each element. The plates were then attached to the parachute's lines, so that when a parachute deployed these inhibitors would be yanked out of the element. The tubes were not coated with cadmium along their surfaces that were in contact with the inhibitor plates, so these became starter points where the heat generating nuclear reactions began. Unfortunately, at the extremely low temperatures that the elements would be exposed to in their free falls, the cadmium often became brittle and snapped apart before it could be completely pulled out. We knew that at least four, but no more than twelve plates had to be successfully removed if each element was to be within the right temperature range when it landed. Luckily, multiple laboratory tests conducted at sub-freezing temperatures confirmed that no more than five of these twelve plates ever failed to deploy successfully. This design for activation provided us with a wide margin of error within which to operate.

"As I have already told you, each element consisted of ninety-one magvatun tubes one and a half centimeters in diameter and two feet in length. These, in turn, were arranged in a hexagonal pattern with six fuel rods positioned along each of the hexagon's six sides. Including the additional millimeter of cadmium coating on each tube, the final element measured approximately seven inches in diameter at its widest. Together, the ninety-one tubes per element contained fifty-seven pounds of uranium. Traditionally, one hundred and fourteen pounds of U235 are required to achieve spontaneous critical mass. However, we did two things to lower the amount needed for criticality. First, we spiced the uranium powder with minute amounts of highly unstable plutonium 240 and 241. Second, we surrounded the ninety-one tube matrix with a graphite sleeve that acted as a neutron reflector. Through these two measures we were able to lower the critical mass for spontaneous fission to just below fifty-seven pounds. You may note that like the magvatun, the reflector sleeves would not be destroyed when the elements reached their operating temperatures as graphite's melting point is well over three thousand degrees Fahrenheit.

“In total, each elemental tube matrix with its graphite sleeve, the cadmium inhibitor plates, a protective outer casing, collapsible nose cone and parachute was one foot in diameter, three feet in length, and weighed about ninety pounds. The four devices per missile totaled three hundred and sixty pounds, and when loaded into their gyroscopically controlled ejection module, the entire payload measured four feet in length, three feet in diameter, and weighed almost five hundred pounds. One of these four-element modules was placed atop each missile inside a compartment which provided radiation shielding that protected the crew and prevented your satellites from detecting our ships’ nuclear cargo. When activated after liftoff, the modular gyroscopes trigger outer panels in these compartments through which the individual elements were then ejected during missile descent.

"After ejection, with their parachutes deployed and a sufficient number of cadmium inhibitor plates pulled from the back end of each element, the nuclear reactions would begin during free-fall. As these units heated up, the cadmium plating closest to the starter points would slowly liquify and run off the tubes, thereby making more of the rods' surface areas available for fission. Given the cooling effect of the free-fall itself, approximately two-thirds of each element's electroplated inhibitor would have melted away by touchdown, leaving each device at between six and seven hundred degrees Fahrenheit. Cadmium itself melts at just over six hundred degrees Fahrenheit, so any inhibitor plates and tube coating still left on the elements would completely liquify at this point. Cushioned by their collapsing nose cones, most elements were expected to land intact and then quickly melt down through the frozen surface. Their parachute lines and outer device casings were designed to dissolve at nine hundred degrees Fahrenheit so as not to delay the elements' descent through the ice. The uranium itself liquefies at just over two thousand degrees Fahrenheit, allowing it to circulate freely within the magvatun tubes so as to ensure maximal fuel consumption over time. The tubes were under-packed by about twelve percent and then vacuum sealed to allow for expansion of the uranium as it melted without bursting the fuel rods. As for the devices themselves, they would attain maximal operating temperatures of about twenty-four hundred degrees Fahrenheit shortly before reaching the bedrock that lay beneath the continent's cover. By this time, the high pressure and super-cooled temperature of the frozen water around them would be sufficient to stabilize the heat generating elements well below the melting points of both the magvatun tubes and their surrounding graphite reflector sleeves."

"I'll grant you, Mr. Seok, twenty-four hundred degrees is pretty hot" acquiesced the President. "But these elements aren't very big. They're just two feet long and only about seven inches wide. Even at twenty-four hundred degrees, how much total heat can one of these things hope to generate?"

"I will try to give you an idea, Mr. President. Most nuclear reactors operate at much lower temperatures than do these devices, so that the heat generating capacity of each element was originally derived from reactors operating at around six hundred degrees Fahrenheit. At that lower temperature we calculated that these units would individually produce about two hundred and thirty thousand joules of heat energy per second or just under one quarter of a megawatt of power. By comparison, the atomic bomb that went off over Hiroshima produced a total of sixty-three million, million joules of energy. That is sixty-three with twelve zeroes after it. Therefore, it would take a single element

almost nine years to generate the same amount of heat as was created by the Hiroshima explosion. However, by quadrupling their operating temperature from six hundred to twenty-four hundred degrees Fahrenheit and successfully dispersing at least three hundred of these elements around the continent, their cumulative energy production will generate the power of a Hiroshima bomb every two to three days. And unlike the heat from atomic weapons, most of which is radiated out toward space, over ninety-nine percent of the elements' energy will be absorbed by the frozen ice. At that rate in the first year alone, three hundred such elements will bathe the continent in the heat equivalence of one hundred and forty Hiroshima atomic bombs. Given these units have a one to two year operating life, by the time they all burn out, global warming should be dramatically advanced and a major portion of the polar ice cap will be gone for good."

"Well, you certainly appear to be actually on your way to accomplishing that, Mr. Seok," stated the President in a dismayed tone as he reviewed a piece of paper just handed to him by the Vice President. "Our satellite data shows that of your one hundred and forty-four missiles, a total of one hundred and forty were launched. Of these, six missiles did not deploy their payload as identified by large radiation fields from scattered element debris at their points of impact. The remaining one hundred and thirty four missiles went through successful deployment stages, ejecting all of the elements in their payloads. Of these five hundred and thirty six successfully deployed elements, fifteen were destroyed on impact as identified by their smaller radioactive debris fields. Another nine did not sufficiently activate and were located buried close to the surface with low heat indexes and pinpoint radiation tags minus any debris fields. In total, the remaining five hundred and twelve elements were successfully activated and reached the surface intact, and they have all melted their way down to within a few hundred feet of the continent's bedrock with heat indexes at or near twenty-four hundred degrees. As you can see on your monitor, Mr. Seok, these elements are represented by all of those dots inside the three large semi-circle areas that cover most of Antarctica. I may not be a physicist, but my best guess is that they may well melt the polar ice cap."

"Five hundred and twelve elements is a much better success rate than we anticipated, Mr. President. I do not know the exact calculations for this many devices, but I was told that five hundred of them would produce the annual heat equivalent of two hundred and thirty Hiroshima bombs. It appears we are moving faster toward polar meltdown than anticipated." Pausing briefly, he then added, "If it is not too much trouble, Mr. President, may I ask a question?"

"Yes, of course," the President replied, frustrated.

"In your recital you only accounted for one hundred and forty of the missiles. What happened to the other four?"

"Evidently, they didn't launch, Mr. Seok. Observers at both the McMurdo and Scot Stations saw a large explosion over the horizon in the Ross Sea. It occurred about twenty-five minutes after the ship there began firing. We presume there was an accident during its last round of liftoffs, and we did find some floating wreckage at that site. It was the Baekje, if I'm not mistaken?"

"Yes, Mr. President, it was."

"Well, it makes little difference. As for the other two ships, we found nothing at their locations either, so we can presume they met the same fate as the crew of the Balhae. You program your own soldiers like rats to self-destruct when their mission is completed, just like the Japanese Kamikazes in World War Two. It's horrible. Barbaric. You have no love or even humanity for your own kind. You sent those poor men out to do this apocalyptic deed and then you had them commit suicide. What kind of people are you, anyway?"

"Loving people, Mr. President, caring people, and very human people. We will remember them always as heroes of our..."

"Yes, yes," the President interrupted Mr. Seok, "you told us all about that heroic family propaganda. But does that really matter, now that they're all dead?"

"It matters very much to me, Mr. President. As I told you, I understand these things. My son was the captain of the Baekje."

The President, caught of guard, stopped for a moment and then tried to say, "My condol...", and "I'm sor...", but was unable to complete his sentences as he refused to allow himself empathy for this man he never knew, but had once so admired. In the end, after a brief pause, he simply stated, "It's been a long day. We'll talk more in the morning." Then the monitor in the prisoner's room went black again as it had been earlier that morning.

* * * *

Overall, Seok Dae Jo was pleased with what had transpired. The fact that only the President spoke was a good sign. It meant that the others in the large room were all unified behind him with little if any dissent. They would need that cohesiveness in order to make the correct choices regarding the decisions that lay before them. Hopefully they would all still be with the President tomorrow.

A few moments after the screen shut off, he was still seated at the table when a well dressed attendant appeared through the door to Seok Dae Jo's left. He asked if Mr. Seok would be dining that evening. Seok Dae Jo politely declined anything, saying he would prefer to wait for breakfast in the morning. The attendant acknowledged his request politely, then went into the two side rooms where he drew a warm bath for Mr. Seok and turned down the bed. He then returned to his original position and requested that Mr. Seok call for him at any time by simply pressing one of the many white buttons located throughout the chambers. Then he bade Mr. Seok a good evening and exited through the same door by which he had entered. It automatically locked behind him.

Seok Dae Jo continued to sit at the table for a few more minutes, staring at the unopened pill bottle in front of him. His whole body ached profusely as he longed to open it and take the pills, but it was not time. Before placing food, water, or anything else in his mouth, he would first observe a proper twenty-four hour fast in honor of his son's passing. Confirming his intent, he finally rose from the seat, soaked himself in the warm bath for twenty minutes, and then laid in bed until he fell asleep. Looking up at the ceiling, awaiting a dream state, he softly sang to himself.

Hidden microphones embedded throughout the room were barely able to pick up the silky lyrics which many years ago had become favorites of Seok Dae Jo's:

Sometimes you feel like a nut,

Sometimes you don't...

(Leo Corday and Leon Carr, 1953)

Day 2

Seok Dae Jo was awakened the next day by a soft melodic tone, seemingly coming from everywhere and yet nowhere, that gently repeated itself until he rose from bed. As he donned a robe he could hear the attendant in the next room making morning preparations. Opening the door and entering the main room, the attendant greeted him and inquired if he had slept well. Affirming that he had, the attendant invited Mr. Seok to the central sitting area where a variety of morning foods awaited him. As he sat in the middle of the sofa and gazed at everything laid out before him on the oval 18th century table, he was amazed at how accurately each item reflected his breakfast tastes and preferences. Over his many years in America, he had been in thousands of meetings, hundreds of which were over breakfasts, lunches, and dinners. Obviously, his counterparts had kept diligent notes about such events including what everyone did or did not eat. Having spent over half his life in New York, in his latter years he had come to favor western foods over those of his homeland. So, it was of great pleasure to Seok Dae Jo that there before him were fresh peeled figs in heavy cream, sourdough biscuits with butter and sorghum sirup, oatmeal with sliced bananas and applesauce, buttermilk Brown Bobby's, and Orange Pekoe tea with no sugar. Next to all of this, off to one side, was a glass of water beside his bottle of morphine pills.

After taking his medication he sat there enjoying his meal while the attendant rolled his cart into the adjacent rooms. There he could be heard making the bed with pristine sheets, vacuuming, cleaning the bathroom, replacing fresh towels and toiletries for Mr. Seok's morning rituals, and then laying out new clothing for that day's use. By the time the attendant reappeared in the main room thirty minutes later, Mr. Seok had finished his meal and was sipping the remaining tea. He asked if Mr. Seok had enjoyed the food, to which Seok Dae Jo thanked him with gratitude. He then informed Mr. Seok that today's session would begin in approximately one hour. Seok Dae Jo acknowledged him by a short, seated double bow, then rose to prepare himself for what lay ahead. While dressing after his shower, he could hear the attendant still cleaning in the main room. When Seok Dae Jo rejoined him, the attendant asked if he would be having lunch that day. Seok Dae Jo declined the mid-day meal, stating that he preferred to wait for dinner that evening after his business was completed. He had not only written the slogan "Let's eat two meals a day," but in solidarity with his people he had taken it to heart. The attendant noted the preference and then reminded Mr. Seok to call him at any time if there was need for further assistance. The attendant then removed himself and his cart from the room, the doorway out locking itself behind him.

Seok Dae Jo sat back at the sofa to await the day's business. He was calm, unhurried, and quite alone. Closing his eyes, he allowed his mind to replay the prior day's events, neither settling too long on any one moment nor considering too deeply any possible consequences. His was a life momentarily at ease. Though this refreshment would not be long, for now he was in repose. It lasted twenty-five minutes. Then, like the day before, a series of soft, clear,

and repetitive tones sounded from the speakers imbedded within the monitor that lay on the table in the corner of the room. As if by invitation, Seok Dae Jo went and sat in front of the screen. When it lit up, his peace was instantly shattered. Unlike the large group he had been confronted with the day before, now there were just three people pictured on the monitor in front of him: the President seated in the center, the Director of the CIA sitting to his left, and the Director of the Secret Service (SS) seated on his right. They had made the wrong decision.

It was unfortunate to witness this outcome, yet it was not totally unexpected. Americans were notorious for overreacting and doing so in a grand way. Whereas others nations were more likely to play through a situation step by step, the U.S. most often jumped right to the end game laying out their hand full force. A cascade of observations followed from what Seok Dae Jo saw on his monitor. The fact that these three men were the only ones present confirmed that the others were no longer needed. The fact that the Vice President, the Senate, the House of Representatives, the Judiciary, the President's Cabinet, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the bulk of Homeland Security, and the leaders of industry were no longer needed confirmed that martial law had been enacted throughout the nation. The fact that only the Directors of the CIA and SS were with the President confirmed that it was going to be a particularly brutal form of martial law akin to dictatorship. In an attempt to stave off the end of the world, they had terminated their own democracy. Though this knee-jerk reaction would have little overall impact upon the North Korean's plans, it was a mistake that could not be undone. Almost sensing the heat radiating from the screen, Seok Dae Jo rose to bow for the new leader of the Fourth Reich when the President suddenly lashed out at him.

"You lied to us Mr. Seok!"

* * * *

The universe began approximately fifteen billions years ago in the deafening lifeless silence of the big bang. Some ten billion years later, the Earth made its debut. A billion years or so after that, the first one celled organisms began our dance of life. That was nearly four billion years ago.

As the Earth's crust cooled, it settled into continental shapes somewhat similar to those we know today. Under the influence of tectonic forces, these elevated fragments would periodically be forced together to form supercontinents. These supercontinents would remain intact for a few hundred millions years and then break apart into their constituent continental fragments. Over time, this process of congregating and dissociating would repeat itself over and over again. Though its existence is debatable, a proto-supercontinent, Yilgarn, may have formed as early as four and a half billion years ago, shortly after Earth's formation. However, the first recognized supercontinent was Vaalbara which coalesced around three billion years ago while single celled organisms still ruled the planet. After its breakup, the second supercontinent, Kenorland, was in formation some two and a half billion years ago when multicellular organisms first appeared. Kenorland, in turn, broke apart and was succeeded by the third supercontinent, Nuna (also called Columbia), around one and a half billion years ago. It then separated and reformed about one billion years ago

as the fourth supercontinent Rodinia which, in turn, lasted for some two hundred and fifty million years before its dissolution. Pannotia, also known as the Vendian supercontinent, may have briefly appeared around six hundred million years ago, but its existence, like Yilgarn's, is also disputed. Either way, from Yilgarn to Kenorland, life was strictly unicellular, while from Kenorland through Pannotia it remained close to the rudimentary multicellular stage.

It was not until Pangea, the fifth and final official supercontinent which started to form around five hundred million years ago that organisms began to evolve rapidly. Trilobites, arthropods with large exoskeletons that bear a striking resemblance to today's horseshoe crabs dominated the land. While early versions of these extinct creatures were less than a millimeter long, later varieties grew up to twenty-eight inches in length. Of note, some trilobites had eyes with upwards of fifteen thousand microscopic lenses in each one. They disappeared around the time that Pangea broke up into the sub-supercontinents of Laurasia and Gondwana, around two hundred and fifty million years ago. By then, evolution had unveiled fish, small reptiles, and a wide spectrum of plant life which covered both land masses. Amongst these reptiles were the theriodontias, our pre-mammalian ancestors.

As Laurasia and Gondwana moved apart, the former heading north and the latter moving south, dinosaurs ruled the Earth until their extinction some sixty-five million years ago. By that time, Laurasia had divided into the major northern continents we know today: North America, Mexico, Central America, Europe and Asia (minus India). Gondwana, on the other hand, would take another sixty million years or so to regress into the southern hemisphere's major land masses: South America, Africa, Australia and Antarctica. About half way through the dinosaurs' age of domination, India, originally part of Gondwana, broke apart from Antarctica and headed toward the northern hemisphere. Along the way, about ninety million years ago, it dropped off Madagascar by the southeastern edge of Africa before slamming itself into Asia. During its journey, the six mile wide Chicxulub Meteor landed near the Yucatan Peninsula, bringing the dinosaurs' reign to an end. Thus began the age of mammals.

In the absence of dinosaurs, mammals proliferated from small reptile-like creatures into a wide variety of shapes and forms. Some, like the creodonts, voracious carnivores which included the bison sized megistotheriums, would only last a few million years before their own extinction. Others, like the primates, would appear early on and evolve into modern day rulers of this planet. The first of these primates, the lemurs, arose around forty five million years ago just as India was making its final approach toward Asia. Lemurs, in turn, would give rise to the first modern monkeys and apes nearly twenty-five million years ago. About this time, the last great Gondwanian shift began as South America broke off from Antarctica so as to also head north. During its transit toward Central America, our direct ancestors genetic line sprang from the great apes approximately seven million years ago. As South America crashed into its final resting place, dredging up the Panamanian Isthmus some three million years ago, the final branches of homo sapiens' evolution were underway. In contrast, the de-evolution of Antarctica was also nearing its completion.

Antarctica, the world's fifth largest continent, traveled through the Vaalbara, Kenorland, Nuna, Rodinia and Pangea supercontinents, ending up as part of the sub-supercontinent Gondwana about two hundred and fifty million

years ago. Having been originally located at the equator during the Pangean era, it released its final companion, South America, around twenty-five million years ago. Without any other land masses to guide warmer tropic waters southward toward it, Antarctica and its inhabitants found themselves totally encircled by the Southern Ocean, cut off from warmer air and water currents to the north. With nothing to counteract the increasingly severe winters, this orphaned continent regressed into an isolated ice age which would claim the lives of nearly every inhabitant upon it. To this day, though it holds ninety percent of the world's fresh water in the form of ice and snow, it is considered to be the planet's largest desert as average annual rain fall is less than one quarter of an inch. Not only is it the least rainy place on Earth, it is also the coldest. During the dead of winter, temperatures at the South Pole can drop to minus one hundred and thirty degrees Fahrenheit while in the summer they can reach a balmy minus ninety degrees Fahrenheit. Snowfalls of four feet in two days are not uncommon. Oddly, sunburns are of great concern in Antarctica as the white ground covering reflects ninety percent of the Sun's energy.

Alone and at the bottom of the Earth, Antarctica has spent the past two hundred and fifty million years being buried under snow. With little means of removing this accumulation, the continent was permanently blanketed in layer upon layer of frozen water. As these strata built up, their sheer weight compacted the individual flakes into sheets of dense ice which also accumulated one on top of the other. As the millenniums passed, this frozen mass grew into an astounding volume equal to just over seven million cubic miles of snow and ice.

Today this polar cap covers the entire continent on average to just slightly over one and a half miles in depth. If that same amount of ice and snow were to be evenly distributed over a flat surface the same size as the United States, it would rise to a uniform average height of being just under two and half miles tall. That is approximately equal to the depth at which the Titanic rests below the surface of the Atlantic Ocean. The stupefying weight from this amount of frozen water has caused the entire Antarctic continent to sink down into the Southern Ocean some two thousand feet below its normal elevation, both crushing the land and deforming the planet's profile. It is so heavy, in fact, that at its base where it rests upon the continent's bedrock, the glacial pressure is too great for the ice to remain solid, causing it to revert back into a super-cooled liquid. Water expands when it freezes, so that frozen ice occupies more space than liquid water. The polar cap is so thick that it actually crushes the bottommost ice back into its more compact liquid form, even though its temperature is still below freezing. Contrary to what one would expect, there are over one hundred giant pools of super-cooled liquid water trapped beneath the polar ice, some in pockets as large as Lake Ontario.

While the rest of the planet was progressing through the evolutionary stages from dinosaurs to suburbia, Antarctica was moving backwards. Trapped in the farthest frozen south, all of its highly developed plants and animals were completely wiped out except along isolated parts of the coastline. Now, aside from a few transient research scientists, over ninety-ninety percent of Antarctica's surface has no permanent residents which walk on two or more legs. However, the interior of the continent is not entirely devoid of life. Within those subglacial super-cooled lakes, there exist billions upon billions of single celled organisms trapped in time. Retrieved from ice cores that have been

plunged over two miles deep into the ice cap, these biological misfits represent a diverse cross-section of prehistoric life. While the rest of the world jaunted off to seasonal habitats, these lost souls adapted to an environment which would crush the average unprotected adult person into the size of a soccer ball. Never seeing sunlight, never breathing air, and never finding water above the freezing point, their evolution slowed to a crawl during the twenty-five million years that their counterpart's were evolving at an exponential rate. Living and procreating at a pace that would make Larry Flynt shiver in horror, these microscopic organisms traveled in a space and time that was within, yet separate from our own. For all practical purposes, they and their genomes might as well have been on Jupiter or Mars. For that very reason, living in one of the most extreme environments on Earth, these life forms are of great interest to NASA in its search to understand how life might thrive under the harsh conditions found on other planets.

Today, the Antarctic Treaty System of 1961 regulates international relations on Earth's loneliest continent. It set aside Antarctica as a scientific preserve and banned all military activity on the polar cap. This treaty system was the first arms control agreement established during the Cold War, and it has now been signed by 44 countries including North Korea in 1987.

* * * *

While Seok Dae Jo was bathing and preparing for bed the day before, things were just beginning to take shape for the President and those who had joined him in the large situation room. In light of what the North Korean had said, and given the implications for national and global safety, martial law was a very real option to consider. The possibility that Pyongyang had actually figured out how to melt the southern pole's ice cap seemed very real to everyone in that room including the President. But beyond Hollywood dramas and Public Television documentaries, no one was sure what the consequences of such an event might actually be. Everyone knew that it would be bad, but where exactly along the spectrum from *On the Beach* to *Waterworld* that bad might finally land, no one knew for sure. So, to seriously consider national martial law for the first time in U.S. history was by no means out of the question.

For thirty minutes after Seok Dae Jo's monitor had been shut off, the group of fifty debated the idea. Two main lines of argument ensued. On one side there were those who preferred to prepare for the worst and pray for the best. They advocated that immediate and total control be given to the President. Not only was no one sure what was likely to happen next in Antarctica, but anywhere else in the world for that matter. If a doomsday plot had actually begun, who was to say how other countries might react to such an event. Unstable governments and political groups might seize upon such news as justification for taking unrestrained actions against their neighbors or perceived enemies. Countries of great national interest to the U.S. might choose to close their borders, leaving America involuntarily deprived of valuable resources. The flow of goods into and out of the nation might come to a sudden halt, throwing both the economy and the public into horrifying tailspins. Local and state officials would be totally overwhelmed under such circumstances, and a strong federal response would be needed to quell internal unrest and

secure vital concerns abroad. In the event of a total collapse in international law and order, centrally governed armed forces that were empowered to act in an unencumbered manner at the international, national, state, and local levels might be needed to ensure the very survival of America. In the minds of those for martial law, there was no way to underestimate the severity of this situation.

On the other side were the ones who advocated a wait and see approach. The very fact that no one knew for sure what was going to happen meant that enactment of martial law might turn out to be total over-kill for this situation. If the U.S. acted calmly and with restraint, then the rest of the world would likely follow their lead. On the other hand, if other nations saw the United States taking drastic unprecedented actions, then they would most likely overreact, too. The enactment of martial law might become a slippery-slope with domino-like consequences, each country reacting and then re-reacting to everyone else's response to its own actions. A tidal wave of international hysteria might then ensue, plunging the planet and its inhabitants back into the dark ages of human thoughts and behaviors.

In addition, even if such powers could be given to the President without setting off a cascade of tragic events, this threshold had never been crossed before for good reasons. Martial law is an all-or-nothing proposition. It is not a lend-lease type of arrangement with trade in dates or specified points of termination. Once given, martial law is permanent until such time as the President decides to hand power back to the government. It is, in essence, a type of voluntary coup where the three branches of traditional federal structure are indefinitely suspended and the President assumes dictatorial control of the nation and its armed forces. While political corruption has always been an underpinning of American politics, it has at the same time always been pinned down by the many layers and methods of counterbalances inherent in the U.S. system. This is not to say that severe cases of political abuse have never occurred, but that even in such extreme instances, this multifaceted mechanism had always managed to right itself sooner or later. The absolute corruption of absolute power, however, might be one abuse from which there would be no return.

It was obvious from the heated debate that a traditional vote would be necessary. Even though the group of fifty could not by itself enact martial law, their recommendation would likely be rubber-stamped by both the House and Senate, given the circumstances. By a twenty-six to twenty-four lead, the wait-and-see group held sway, the President himself voting with the majority. As they contemplated their next move, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court made a suggestion. The only thing that everyone seemed to agree upon was that no one knew what was likely to happen next. The Justice surmised that the reason for this was not because there was a dearth of information available to them, but that there was too much information in front of them which they did not understand. No one in their group had ever even been to Antarctica, and only three of them - one of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Energy, and the industry representative from mining - had ever directly worked with nuclear materials during their careers. It seemed that they were trying to make a decision not based upon the great amount of data that they had, but with the little bit that they really understood. In light of such an impasse, the Justice suggested that they seek outside counsel and, given

the need for expediency, he recommended that the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) be consulted immediately.

The NAS was created by an Act of Incorporation signed by President Abraham Lincoln on March 3rd, 1863, during the height of the American Civil War. Its charter states that "the academy shall, whenever called upon by any department of the government, investigate, examine, experiment, and report upon any subject of science or art." Membership in the academy is life-long and granted by an annual vote of existing members, nearly ten percent of whom are Nobel Prize winners. With a constituency populated by representatives from all imaginable scientific venues, since its inception it has been an invaluable resource for each and every individual to hold the nation's executive office. Perhaps only in the development of the atomic bomb had its advise ever been in such great need as that day. So, by instant consensus, the Chief Justice's suggestion was adopted as a plan of action, and the Director of the NAS was immediately contacted.

By telecommunication uplinks and downloads, the Director was quickly brought up to speed on the situation at hand. He was then asked to answer the following questions:

1. Was the North Korean's plan feasible?
2. If so, what were the likely outcomes including the time frames of such events?
3. If not, what were the likely outcomes including the time frames of such events?

Having the resource of thousands of scientists worldwide at his disposal, the Director graciously accepted this task and informed the assembled group that he would have preliminary answers to their questions within a few hours. When the Director signed off, the President's group recessed for dinner.

At 8:00 p.m. that evening, the group of fifty reconvened, having been notified that the Director of the NAS was prepared to present them with an initial response. His image appearing within the situation room's great electronic wall on the same screen as had Seok Dae Jo's earlier that day, he addressed himself directly to the nation's leader.

"Mr. President, in light of the severity of the situation before us, and after considerable and lengthy consultation with a wide spectrum of renowned and respected members of the academy, with your permission I would like to respond to the questions you have posed to me."

"Yes," answered the President, "please, go ahead, Mr. Director."

"Thank you, Mr. President. I have to begin by telling you that I must deliver both very good news and formidable bad news to you. Let me begin with the good news by answering your first question: Is the North Korean's plan feasible? As presented to me, the North Koreans have plotted to melt the polar ice cap which covers the Antarctic continent. A seemingly impossible task by conventional means, they have taken an unconventional approach by developing what they term to be volatile nuclear reactor core elements. These elements, based upon traditional nuclear energy technology, were designed to act as heat generating units that would borrow their way down through the glacial ice, coming to rest beneath it so as to melt the ice cap from the bottom, up. To fully answer this and subsequent

questions, I will start by examining these elements.

"The elements themselves raised many questions for us. To begin with, the magvatun tubing is a novel material of which we have no direct knowledge or experience. It should be noted, however, that the Korean culture has a long history of working with metals and that, to this date, Korean steel is considered to be some of the best in the world. In addition, the constituent chemical elements on which magvatun is based - magnesium, vanadium, and tungsten - are all abundantly available mineral resources found within North Korean mines. Of particular concern in such a composition is the fact that magnesium has a melting point of around twelve hundred degrees Fahrenheit, well below the volatile elements target operating temperature of twenty-four hundred degrees. On the other hand, tungsten has the highest melting point of any elemental chemical known, at just over six thousand degrees Fahrenheit. Just like the high speed steel referenced by Mr. Seok in his conversation with you, Mr. President, it is possible to combine chemicals so as to produce an alloy which has a melting point that is higher than some of its individual components. So, it may well be probable that the North Koreans had managed to produce a magvatun alloy which would not melt below three thousand degrees. This is confirmed through our satellite data which reveals the majority of these volatile elements to still be fully operational underneath the Antarctic ice. Had the tubes melted, there would likely have been resultant explosions of nuclear materials.

"The second question raised by the elements was the architecture of tubing within each unit. Mr. Seok reported that the individual magvatun tubes were two feet long with a hexagon, cross-sectional diameter of one and a half centimeters from face to face. Each tube had a one millimeter external coating of cadmium which acted as a reaction inhibitor, and these tubes were arranged in a hexagonal pattern with six rods running along each outer surface. The initiation of the nuclear reactions would occur by physical removal of cadmium plates from the rear of each element during the phase of parachute deployment. As the heat of reaction rose, the remaining cadmium coating would liquify and run off at six hundred degrees Fahrenheit, the parachute lines and element casings would melt and separate at nine hundred degrees Fahrenheit, and the plutonium 'spiced' uranium fuel would liquify at just over two thousand degrees Fahrenheit. The units would then achieve operational equilibrium at approximately twenty-four hundred degrees Fahrenheit, still over six hundred degrees below the melting point of the magvatun tubing itself.

"There are two concerns with this scenario, the first being the close proximity of the tubing within each element's architecture, while the second is the equilibrium temperature of twenty-four hundred degrees. The North Koreans have had Magnox nuclear reactors in operation at Yongbyon since 1987. They are called Magnox reactors because the fuel rods are made chiefly from magnesium combined with smaller amounts of aluminum and other chemicals. Therefore, they have extensive knowledge and experience with fuel rod construction and design. However, with the elemental fuel rods being so close together, the possibility of a runaway reaction is greatly increased. As there are no control rods within these elements, like in a nuclear reactor, once the cadmium has melted away, the only thing sustaining an equilibrium temperature would be the surrounding water itself. At the average depth of ice covering the Antarctic continent, these elements would be subjected to over one and a half tons of pressure per square inch. If after

the cadmium melted away, the magvatun tubing collapsed together, there would be no space for the water to run between the rods. Therefore, the tubing probably had some sort of fixed spacers between them which did not melt along with the cadmium, so that they would retain their two millimeters separation and not come in full face-to-face contact with one another. Assuming that the original two millimeter space was still preserved at equilibrium, then the super-cooled pressurized water might be able to flow between the rods to regulate their temperature and prevent a runaway reaction. However, we can't be certain of this mechanism as the elements' extremely high temperatures would likely vaporize any surrounding water. We, ourselves, lack sufficient technical data to make accurate calculations about these questions as even our fourth generation experimental high temperature reactors operate at well below two thousand degrees Fahrenheit. So, we can only presume that their tests such as the large scale explosion at Ryanggang in 2004 provided them with the technical know-how to precisely design and construct these elements with regards to their subglacial performance. Again, given the fact that the majority of these elements are operating as predicted by the North Koreans, we find no basis for contradicting Mr. Seok's statements."

"Excuse me, Mr. Director," interrupted the President, "but you keep stating that the majority of their volatile elements are fully operational. Does this mean that some of them aren't?"

"Yes, Mr. President. As their missile trajectories were only estimations limited by the amount of fuel loaded onboard each projectile, they did not precisely target their landing locations. While the vast majority of Eastern Antarctica is flat ice fields, there are some notable mountain ranges in Western Antarctica. Some of the volatile elements have landed in these mountainous regions where they encountered snow fields that were too shallow to provide the highly pressurized water necessary for stabilization of the reacting units. So far, sixteen of these devices have over-reacted leading to explosions on the magnitude seen at Ryanggang. The vast majority of these came from the Goguryeo and had landed in the mountains that run along the Antarctic Peninsula which juts out toward South America. The others originated from the Baekje and had landed in the mountains that line the coast in front of its firing location. As the Baekje apparently exploded before it could deliver all of its ordinance, we suspect that there may have been other problems in that ship's launch sequences, and that these particular elements landed in the nearby mountains short of their targets due to missile under performance."

"Yes, but that still leaves four hundred and ninety-six operational elements," stated the President. "Is there any chance more of them might overheat and explode?"

"Currently, Mr. President, we don't expect anymore over-reactions. The geysering effect we observed when they initially landed has completely ceased which means they must have already melted vast amounts of ice near their bedrock positions. Also, the remaining elements have been at operational temperature for over twelve hours, and we believe that they would have gone critical by now if they were not in sufficiently deep glacial ice to provide the requisite pressure for stabilization."

"Well, at least things have slowed down a little," said the President, hopefully. "What about their ships, Mr. Director? Could they really have done it the way Mr. Seok said?"

"In some ways it's a moot point to discuss that, Mr. President, as the volatile elements are already where they are. However, several of our members who have extensive knowledge of naval architecture did consider this question. They noted that intercontinental ballistic missiles can be fired from submarines both in a hot or cold sequence. In cold launches, the missiles are ejected from the submarine before their engines fire. In hot launches, the missiles ignite while still inside their holding tubes, subjecting the submarines to the full brunt of blast heat from these liftoffs. Hot launches are also done from surface vessels, but usually with smaller gauge missiles. The North Koreans never quite achieved the technological know-how to create ICBM's, and their smaller missiles, like the Rodong, are a bit oversized for their performance. The fact that they were able to reduce their overall height by four feet to fit them inside the ships was really only due to the small lightweight nature of their payloads. By comparison, we have missiles that can deliver standard warheads the exact same distances as conventional Rodongs, but ours are half the size. Nevertheless, they seem to have optimized the capabilities of what they did have, and there's no reason they could not have adapted these vessels to withstand multiple hot launches. However, one of our experts did raise a question about the use of tungsten beams for reinforcing the ships' frameworks.

"While tungsten is plentiful in North Korea, the amount required to sufficiently buttress each vessel might have exceeded the ships' carrying capacity. Prior to their reconstruction, each one was rated at about twenty-five thousand tons of cargo weight and a single Rodong missile with its payload weighs about thirty-six tons. This meant that with forty-eight missiles, each ship was carrying around seventeen to eighteen hundred tons of ordinance. Even though that seems to leave plenty of leeway - about twenty three thousand tons - given the other items that had to be loaded onboard, we are uncertain that they could have successfully reinforced these ships by using tungsten without exceeding their cargo limit. A much more likely candidate would have been titanium which is about one-quarter the weight of tungsten. However, the North Koreans don't have known mineral deposits of titanium, so if they did use it instead of the tungsten, it might be of political interest to figure out where they acquired that much titanium. However, relative to the questions you have asked us to answer, it is a moot point as to whether they used tungsten or titanium as they did successfully sail to Antarctica and they did, for the most part, successfully hot launch their missiles."

"I suppose the whole thing about the tunnels and bottom loading is moot then, too," added the President.

"Yes, Mr. President. While we've never encountered this mode of subterfuge before on this scale, we could find no reason to question Mr. Seok's story on these matters. As he stated, the North Koreans are master tunnelers and bottom loading hatches are not unheard of today. The description of the docking sleeves peeked the interests of several academy members, yet similar devices are used on the International Space Station and for certain applications in deep sea drilling. So, there's no reason to believe that they could not have figured out a suitable material for connecting the underwater portion of these tunnels to their ships."

"Well, then," confessed the President, "they do seem to have figured it all out."

"Not exactly, Mr. President."

"What do you mean, not exactly?"

"You asked us to answer three questions, Mr. President and, because of the situation's urgency, you needed us to do so in only a few hours. Realizing that there wasn't enough time to approach these problems in a linear fashion, I delegated different teams to look at various aspects of your questions simultaneously rather than doing a more lengthy step-by-step analysis. This meant that I was receiving feedback from teams who had to work under the assumption that the North Korean's plan was feasible. For example, I needed to know what would happen if they succeeded in melting the entire polar ice cap, so I delegated a team to answer that question. Given our time constraints, they couldn't wait around for data from the members who were analyzing the volatile elements' design and performance. Instead, they had to work under the assumption that these devices could in fact melt the entire cap. Otherwise, it might have taken days or even weeks to provide you with the information you need to know right now."

"Of course," agreed the President, "I fully understand and appreciate your position. It's an impossible task we've placed before you and I'm sure you've had to operate under less than ideal conditions. But tell me, Mr. Director, what did they say would happen when the Antarctic ice melted?"

"Mr. President...," and here the Director paused heavily before continuing, "...what they told me was bad. It was very bad. The most obvious direct impact would, of course, be on the world's oceans which would take on unimaginable volumes of water. There was considerable debate over just how high the sea levels would actually rise since the concurrent increase in global warming would allow the atmosphere to draw up significant amounts of this melted ice as water vapor. However, even with this counterbalancing effect everyone seemed to agree that a rise of fifteen to thirty feet was not unreasonable. Most of Florida, including its entire southern peninsula along with major portions of the other southern coastal states would disappear below water. West and east coast ports and cities including their surrounding low-lying areas would, for the most part, also vanish. Between its five boroughs, New York City has an average elevation of thirty-three feet above sea level, but portions of Manhattan's southern end fall well below this. As for the rest of the world, cities like Venice would totally disappear.

"On the weather side, beyond the effects of direct flooding from rising sea-levels, atmospheric water vapor content would possibly quadruple which by itself might raise global temperatures another three to four degrees. With this there would be a commensurate increase in the frequency and intensity of hurricanes and tornadoes, causing untold damage and a corresponding rise in world-wide mortality. In the United States alone, the death tolls from both elevating sea levels and storm flooding could run into the millions. But that's not the worst of it.

"It turns out that there is so much ice resting on top of Antarctica that it has depressed the entire continent some two thousand feet below its normal resting position. It took some twenty-five million years for that much snow and ice to pile up, and if it were to melt in six months or even a year, that whole continent would rise up over one-third of a mile out of the Southern Ocean. Granted, there might not be an immediate response, and it could take a year or two for the entire land mass to elevate that far. But the problem here is that millions of years ago the sinking of Antarctica was so great that it actually deformed the shape of the Earth and helped to push many of the other continents northward. Speaking on a geological time scale, if that ice suddenly melted and Antarctica sprang up like a piece of

bread out of the toaster, then it could, potentially pull those continents back toward the South Pole again."

"In other words," interpreted the President, in an attempt at levity, "South America would become Souther America."

"Mr. President, with all due seriousness, if what had taken millions of years to form on that continent suddenly melted in a matter of months, then this would be a disaster on a never before seen scale. One of our lead geologists calculated that in less than five years the entire continent of South America could be pulled as much as two to three hundred miles back toward the South Pole, a process which would drag all of Panama and much of Central America down toward the ocean floor. Earthquakes of previously unknown seismic magnitudes would level every building - from one floor shacks to the tallest sky scrapers - in the remainders of Central America, Mexico, the U.S., and Canada, and the Rocky Mountains would be reduced to less than one quarter of their current height. California would literally fall off into the ocean, and everything still above sea level in the Carribbean - including the entire archipelagoes of Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, and the Leeward Islands - would be sucked under. Similar earthquakes would happen throughout all of Africa and Australia while India, breaking off from Asia, would come to rest south of the equator tearing most of Indochina and Southern China apart into a series of fragmented islands as it went. A major portion of South Korea would be pulled underwater, and the archipelagoes of Japan, Malay, and Polynesia including Hawaii would share the same fates as the Carribbean Islands. The entirety of Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Northern Asia including Russia and Siberia would be leveled, and Mount Everest would tumble into a shadow of its former self. Although it's impossible to give exact numbers, initial calculations indicate that roughly ninety percent of the world's population - some six billion people - would be killed by the mega-earthquakes and continental shifts spawned by the rising of Antarctica."

An audible hush paralyzed the entire group of fifty as they absorbed the immensity of what the Director had just said. No one knew how to respond, not even the President. After a few moments of silence the NAS's leader realized their predicament and quickly added, "This is where the good news comes in."

* * * *

"My apologies, Mr President, if I have said something that was inaccurate," responded Seok Dae Jo. "My intent was not to deceive you."

"Deceive me," yelled the President, visibly angry. "You outright lead me to believe that you were going to melt all the ice off of Antarctica. Do you have any idea what has happened since I talked to you yesterday?"

"No, Mr. President."

"Well, let me tell you. We were in a panic, Mr. Seok. We had no idea what we should do. We had just spent the last few hours listening to you tell us about the end of the world and we didn't know whether to stand up or shit." The President stopped for a moment as he thought about what he had just said, the directors of the CIA and SS sitting

uncomfortably on either side of him. After a brief moment of calm he continued by adding. "You'll have to excuse me, Mr. Seok, but I don't think I slept more than three hours last night. When you signed off yesterday we spent about a half hour discussing what you had said, then we took a vote on whether or not to recommend that the House and Senate approve enactment of martial law. It didn't pass by just two votes."

"Then you did not enact it, Mr. President?" asked Seok Dae Jo, somewhat confused.

"Yes, of course we did," corrected the President, "but that came later. After the first vote the Chief Justice pointed out that we needed better counsel regarding the difficult issues you had laid out before us. So, we had the Director of the NAS, our National Academy of Sciences, organize and coordinate a series of rapid response teams to evaluate the merits of your explanations. For the most part, what they came back with was quite horrifying. There was nothing in the plan you had cited that they could contradict. In fact, they found most of it quite credible and feasible. And when he told us about what would happen if all that ice did melt, it felt like the entire room we were in had just fallen off the face of the Earth. Granted, one day that ice may all melt, but hopefully it will happen slowly over several hundred or several thousand years. That way, the increase in flooding, storms, and earthquakes will happen gradually at a pace we can adapt to and absorb. But your concept of melting it all at once would have been catastrophic: continents tearing apart, whole island chains pulled underwater, ninety percent of the world's population wiped out."

"It was not my concept, Mr. President," said Seok Dae Jo in self-defense. "It was, perhaps, only your overestimation of what I had actually said."

"Oh, of course, that's true," the President corrected himself. "By the way, have you ever heard of something called intentional analysis?"

"No, Mr. President, I have not."

"Well, me neither, but someone at the NAS had. I'm not particularly well versed in the technicalities of this field, but intentional analysis comes out of logic which is the study of reason. Nowadays when people consider logic, they mostly think of mathematics and computer sciences. But it seems that logic can be broken down into many sub-specialties including first order and second order logic. Now, I don't pretend to know the differences between these two, but the NAS director explained to us that someone had recently devised a new category called third order logic which includes something called IA or intentional analysis. The goal of IA is to go beyond the reasoning, to look at the intent. In other words, where other forms of logic examine whether or not something makes sense, intentional analysis tries to discern what is being attempted. So, for example, if we were to go outside at night and look up at the moon and see that it's white, but I state that it's blue, traditional logic would conclude that I make no sense. But to IA that doesn't matter, because it's concerned with what I'm trying to accomplish by telling you an obvious lie."

"But I did not lie to you, Mr. President."

"That's true, Mr. Seok." agreed the President. "You never did say that all the ice was going to melt off Antarctica. But guess what? They analyzed our entire conversation with an intentional analysis program and it proved that's what you wanted us to think. When you said things like 'We are going to melt Antarctica' and 'We realized that

the only way to bring about this proposal was to melt either one or both of the polar caps,' you never did actually quantify it by saying 'all' of the ice. But you knew that was what we would think you meant. And, indeed, that's what we thought. Was your presentation all just another part of your plan? Was this just another one of your deceptions?"

"My humble apologies, Mr. President," offered Mr. Seok. "You are correct in your analysis. I did not lie, but neither did I tell you the entire truth."

"But, why, Mr. Seok?" asked the President. "You said you were here to help us understand. Why didn't you tell us everything?"

"There is an old Korean proverb, Mr. President. Its direct translation is a bit difficult, but its meaning is that the person who is told knows while the person who discovers understands. We knew this would be a lot of information for you to assimilate, and that you would have to try and grasp it in a very short time. We believed that if I told you everything all at once, it might have been too much for you to absorb which could have caused you to reflexively reject what I had said. That is why I only told you part of our plan, none of which was a lie. We are, in fact, going to melt Antarctica, just not all of it. The reasons for this, we wanted you to find out on your own. So, I gave you just enough information to pique your interest for further investigation. Your choice of the NAS Director was an excellent decision as he was undoubtedly able to help you understand what we are doing. And that is what we wanted most of all: not for you to just know, but for you to completely understand. Coming from me, the full explanation would not have meant nearly as much as it did when coming from the Director of your National Academy of Sciences. He is an authority you can unconditionally trust, one you would undoubtedly believe, and one who could present everything to you in a way that was sure to make you understand our goals and their consequences."

"I must say, Mr. Seok," stated the President, "you never fail to amaze me. You're probably right about our not accepting these things if they came from you. But there was no way for us to ignore it when the Director told us the truth. Originally we had asked him three questions: was the plan you presented to us feasible? if it was, what would happen? and, if it wasn't, what would happen? He began by reviewing all the details you have given us about the volatile elements and their construction. Then he discussed the ships and how they were adapted for transporting and firing the missiles. Finally he explained what would happen if you had actually succeeded at melting the entire polar cap. I'll admit, I was both horrified and speechless when he had finished to that point. But he was by no means done. He continued by assuring us that's what would happen if you did dissolve all the ice, but that's not what is going to happen. It seems there's around seven million cubic miles of frozen water down there, and someone did a pretty straightforward calculation to determine how much heat it takes to melt all that ice. Granted, two hundred and thirty Hiroshima size bombs sounds like a lot of energy, and it is. But it's nowhere near enough heat to melt even one tenth of what's sitting on top of that continent. In fact, there probably aren't enough nuclear weapons on this entire planet to melt all that ice. That place is huge and we're talking trillions of tons of frozen water."

"You should have seen us, Mr. Seok," the President continued, whimsically. "The whole room broke out in laughter when the Director told us that. We were so relieved after the apocalyptic image he had given us that I had

tears in my eyes from laughing so hard. If only he had stopped there, but he didn't. The Director had begun his presentation by stating that he had very good news and very bad news to tell us. For a brief moment we thought he had already told us the worst and that we were in the clear. That wasn't so. He continued by reiterating what we had asked of him: to determine if your plan was feasible, to figure out what would happen if it was, and to figure out what would happen if it wasn't. Since your plan couldn't possibly melt all the Antarctic ice, then the world wasn't going to be torn apart by massive earthquakes and continents moving around. But we had also asked him to tell us what would happen if your plan wasn't what it appeared to be. He was a bit surprised by this part of our request as it turned out to only take one sheet of paper, a pencil, a hand held calculator, and about five minutes to do all the calculations needed to show that the polar cap wouldn't disappear. To him, this was very peculiar. He realized your scientists would have done the same calculations many years ago. If they knew you couldn't melt all the ice and that there would be no catastrophic flooding like in the Yong Gorge, then why would you even do what you did? Why destroy twenty-six million people? Why drown your own sailors? Why spread radioactive waste across a frozen desert? Why place your entire nation on the chopping block, all in the name of a goal you must have known from the start you couldn't accomplish?"

"Because we were not trying to melt all of Antarctica, Mr. President."

"That's exactly what the Director said," confirmed the President. "It seems we have this little known research division called the Center for Space Plasma and Aeronomy Research located at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. The average American doesn't have a clue that they exist, so I don't imagine you'd have any reason to have ever heard of them."

"No, Mr. President, I haven't," admitted Seok Dae Jo.

"Well, neither had I, Mr. Seok, until a few hours ago. They're funded through NASA, our space agency, and their job is to look for different types of energy and planetary atmospheres that exist in our galaxy. Anyway, it seems this CSPAR, as it's also known, is interested in one additional thing: life on other planets. After all, find a place that has the right kind of energy and atmosphere and you just might find extraterrestrial life. A few of their staff are members of the National Academy of Sciences and they were chosen by the Director to look at certain aspects of your plan. At first I couldn't make heads or tails out of why they would be selected, given their specialty is space, not Antarctica. So, I asked the Director how their expertise was relevant to our situation. He told me that the polar caps are of great interest to certain NASA personnel as we probably won't find life like ourselves out in space. Instead, we're much more likely to discover life forms existing under what we would consider extreme conditions: broiling deserts, frozen wastelands, and so forth. It seems these people at CSPAR do a considerable amount of research in the Arctic and Antarctic to understand how life adapts to these types of extreme conditions. When it was finally realized that you weren't going to be able to melt the South Pole, the Director immediately started to try and figure out what you really were going to do. It didn't seem likely that you went to all this trouble for nothing, so his teams looked for another answer. And do you know what someone at CSPAR discovered?"

"The lakes, Mr. President," answered Seok Dae Jo.

"Yes, the lakes," the President reiterated through gritted teeth as if burned by fire. Throughout all of this morning he had still held out a glimpse of hope that the Director had been wrong. But with those two words, 'the lakes,' Seok Dae Jo had shattered any illusions the President had retained. It was true. They had discovered it for themselves, without the North Koreans telling them. In addition, Seok Dae Jo had just confirmed it. Now that they knew and understood what was happening, it was real. After giving himself a moment to relax, the President continued by asking, "Do you know what you should do if you're an astronaut in outer space and you come upon an extraterrestrial life form, Mr. Seok?"

"No, Mr. President, I cannot say that I do."

"You turn around and run like hell, Mr. Seok. Do you know why?"

"No, Mr. President, I must admit that I do not."

"You ask that to the average person and they'll give you an answer that has to do with phasers, neutron death rays, and gobbledy-gook like that. In actuality, it has nothing to do with overt hostilities or acts of aggression. The big concern isn't their weaponry, it's their microbiology. With a single immuno-transparent organism, an extraterrestrial life form could wipe out our entire planet. All they would have to do is shake your hand or sneeze in the same room that you were in. If they carried some sort of bacteria or virus that was harmless to them, but invisible to our immune system, it could kill every person alive and they wouldn't have to fire a single shot. Without even going in to space, we've had some close calls already in our history: AIDS, the flu, polio. But we were lucky. These were all immuno-evasive in that they could bypass our immune systems to a degree, but we were able to find ways to combat them. Immuno-transparency is another story all together. It's like a piece of glass you can look right through without even realizing it's there. An immuno-transparent organism could be eating us alive from the inside out and there would be no immune response to warn us of its presence. Our bodily defenses would look right through it, like a piece of glass, without even knowing it was there. But if it's focusing on you the wrong way, then you could be burned to a crisp, like an ant on the sidewalk underneath a kid's magnifying glass. Now, that's what we all are, just ants on the sidewalk waiting for the magnifying glass. Aren't we, Mr. Seok?"

"It is very possible we are, Mr. President."

"It's that ancient life you're after in those lakes, isn't it, Mr. Seok?"

"Yes, Mr. President."

"And you think that somewhere in that ancient life is a doomsday bug that's going to wipe out the Earth, don't you, Mr. Seok?"

"Yes, Mr. President."

"Because your people believe those frozen bacteria are so old that they'll be totally transparent and invisible to our immune systems. Isn't that correct, Mr. Seok?"

"Yes, Mr. President."

"The Director said he believed so, too," the President admitted, dejectedly.

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"Yes, Mr. President, I do believe this is what they are actually after," confirmed the Director.

"So, they're not going to melt the entire ice cap after all?" asked the President, still somewhat confused.

"No, Mr. President. There's just not enough energy in all those elements to cause that kind of a meltdown. There's so much water frozen in Antarctica that I doubt we could blow up all of that ice even if we wanted to. On the other hand, the accelerated effects of global warming will probably cause as much glacial loss over the same time period as will all of their devices, and the North Koreans had to have known this from the start. It's pretty basic mathematics to calculate how much heat is needed to melt a known mass of frozen water, and there's far too much ice down there for the number of nuclear units they've deployed. That's what made me take your third question more seriously. At first I didn't think I would need to spend much time considering this as their plot was so extensive and elaborate that I assumed it was likely to work. But when the heat calculations didn't match, we looked at your conversation with Mr. Seok from the perspective of intentional analysis. That's when we realized that he never said that they were going to melt all of Antarctica. Perhaps it was just a subtlety in his phrasing, but in politics and science, subtlety can be everything."

"Do you mean he lied to me, Mr. Director?" asked the President, suspiciously.

"Not exactly lied, Mr. President. Think of it as a truthful deception or obfuscation if you will. He meant exactly what he said, but he knew you would overestimate his words. Given the grandiosity of their scheme and its apparent successfulness, at least in terms of transporting and deploying the elements it would be hard not to assume fantastic, even overreaching results. I, too, made the same assumptions as yourselves after my first review of your recorded conversation. But you asked us to look at the details, and we did. That is where we discovered the error of our presumptions. Mr. Seok never did lie to you. He just allowed your mind to elaborate on what he had said."

"Then explain this to me again," requested the President, "because I don't think I fully understand it, yet. Are you saying that instead of melting the polar ice, the North Koreans are after the bacteria which are trapped beneath it?"

"That seems to be it, Mr. President. Nothing else makes any sense. Why would they come up with a plan that would cost millions of lives even if the Palestinians hadn't been slaughtered? They've put their whole country at risk by doing what they've done. Given the consequences Tehran faced after their indiscretions, would the North Koreans expect us to treat them any less harshly for threatening global stability? No, they wouldn't have put all of this on the table if they didn't have a pretty solid plan of action. We were just momentarily sidetracked by our own over-reaction. Now, I think we can clearly see what they are trying to accomplish. It's not the ice itself, but what's under it that is so important to them.

"Two hundred and fifty million years ago, Antarctica was located at the Earth's equator, and it was occupied by much of the same animal and plant life which dominated the other continents. However, as these land masses began to break apart and move in different directions around the globe, Antarctica slowly came to rest all alone at the South Pole, around twenty-five million years ago. Prior to this, South America, the last major continent to separate from Antarctica, had driven warmer tropic waters south along its coastlines to provide seasonal stability to the polar continent. Once it finally migrated north, Antarctica was left alone and completely surrounded by the Southern Ocean which blocked the flow of warmer waters toward the pole. This is when Antarctica began to freeze over for good, leaving it piled under twenty-five millions years of snow and ice as we find it today. In fact, it is so cold down there that it almost never rains, technically making it the largest desert in the world, even though ninety percent of the world's fresh water is locked up in all that snow and ice.

"The fact of why Antarctica is a frozen wasteland today is fairly easy to understand, Mr. President, from a geological perspective. However, what happened to its plants and animals is a bit more difficult to comprehend. At first glance the entire continent appears to be devoid of all life except for a few lichen, marine, and bird species which sporadically populate the coastline. For the most part, everything else died off from starvation or exposure as the snow thickened into ice and the ice deepened to an average one and a half miles depth. But many types of single celled organisms, like bacteria, can and do survive at sub-freezing temperatures and extreme pressures. While the larger land animals and plants perished along with the smaller multi-cellular life forms, these single celled organisms were able to adapt to the burgeoning glaciers. That ice is so thick, in fact, that its weight prevents much of the water at the very bottom from freezing solid, because water has to expand as it turns into ice. The weight of the ice already on top prevents the bottom water from expanding as it gets colder, and without expansion it never transforms from a liquid to a solid. So, it just sits there in great subglacial lakes under tons of pressure as a super-cooled liquid, physically unable to turn into ice. It is there in these over-frozen lakes that the ancient bacteria of Antarctica have survived for some twenty-five million years."

"But what's the problem with that, Mr. Director?" inquired the President. "As I understand it, bacteria and viruses have always been present on the planet ever since life began."

"You are correct, Mr. President, but there are two problems. The first isn't the fact that they're there, but that they've been isolated there for millions of years. The second problem is that we're not just talking about bacteria, but most likely viruses, also. These two problems can be more easily understood in the framework of a new evolutionary theory that was recently proposed. It's called interlacing."

"Interlacing?" the President parroted. "I don't think I've ever heard of that before."

"Well, Mr. President, it was originally postulated in the late 1980's, but it never garnered much support at that time. However, in the last few years some scientists have been giving it serious consideration in explaining the beneficial evolutionary role of viruses."

"I thought viruses caused disease," said the President, perplexed. "How could they possibly play a beneficial

role in anything, if all they do is make people and animals sick?"

"Some viruses do make us ill, Mr. President, but it appears that they may actually be the glue that holds everything together, also."

"I definitely do not understand what you are getting at, Mr. Director," said the President, somewhat miffed. "Who came up with this interlacing idea, anyway? Was it one of our guys over at Walter Reed?"

"No, Mr. President, I'm sorry to say it was not. Although they are quite capable of theorizing such things, no American scientists were actually involved in creating this new line of thought."

"Then who was it?" the President demanded to know. "The British? The Russians? The Israelis? The Chinese? Oh no, please tell me it wasn't the French? You know how they love to shove it in our faces when they one-up us in this kind of thing."

"No, Mr. President, it wasn't the French or any of the others. I must report to you that it was the North Koreans."

"What?" the President shouted, stunned. "The North Koreans? What do they know about any of this? Outside of their nuclear and mining programs, do they even have a scientific community? How could they come up with something like that?"

"It's another one of those inconvenient moot points, Mr. President. We don't know exactly how they came up with the idea. Perhaps it was mere conjecture based upon their review of relevant scientific literature at the time. Obviously, they're not known for microbiological research, but a team of their scientists at Pyongyang University did submit the idea in a paper for publication over twenty years ago, after which they attempted to present it at several international scientific symposiums. Unfortunately, publication was denied and the presentations were ineffectual."

"Ineffectual? Why?" the President snapped in an irritated voice. "I thought you said people were taking this interlacing thing seriously today. Why didn't anyone recognize it as being important back then?"

"Because they couldn't, Mr. President."

"Because why?"

"Because the publication and presentations were blocked."

"By who?"

"By us."

"Us?"

"Yes, Mr. President, us. Up to last year we were still at war with the North Koreans. Prior to the 2009 Peace Treaty as part of our overall policy of hostilities toward Pyongyang, we - and by we I mean all official agencies of the United States government - were obliged to block any potential venues of progress for the North Koreans. In the scientific community this meant preventing them from being published in respected scientific journals and not allowing them to make presentations at important scientific conferences."

"But how did we do that?" the President asked, astonished.

"Mostly through the National Academy of Sciences, Mr. President. Actually, I must correct myself. It was never an official policy of the NAS to participate in this suppression of scientific thought. The academy is a politically neutral organization whose focus is on science, not politics. However, as most members of the academy are employed by large corporations and universities which have substantial financial backing from the U.S. government, the majority of our members are obliged to follow federal foreign policy guidelines. NAS members sit on the editorial boards of the most prominent scientific journals worldwide. They are also major organizers and presenters at almost every significant scientific gathering that exists. So, when the North Koreans submitted their paper for publication, NAS members were there to reject it. And when they offered their idea for presentation at international conferences, NAS members were there to block them again. I and every other director of the NAS has know about this and we've never done anything to stop it. After all, we may be apolitical, but our funding comes from the federal government, too."

"So, they've had this real important evolutionary idea all this time," the President said in dismay, "and we've kept them from sharing it with everyone?"

"Yes, Mr. President, we have done just that. Actually, several yeas ago we weren't able to prevent their participation at a large E.U. meeting, but we did get their presentation pushed to after hours. The American delegation then sponsored a huge celebratory dinner that was scheduled to conflict with the North Korean's presentation time. Only two people showed up for the talk, and as they were both NAS members the North Koreans refused to give their speech. So, effectively, as part of our war effort against them, we've suppressed their concept of interlacing for over twenty years."

"And now you're going to tell me that this thing is coming back to bite us in the ass?" the President shouted in total frustration.

"That is, perhaps, an appropriate assessment, Mr. President."

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"This interlacing thing, Mr. Seok," the President said, "that's what did it. Soon after the Director told us about it we immediately and unanimously voted for national martial law."

"But, Mr. President, do you not think it would be wiser to forego a hostile posture in favor of working together? After all, each and everyone of us faces this same dilemma. It is not just the United States. It is not just North Korea. The entire planet may be decimated by these organisms. The dinosaurs were wiped out by the six mile wide Chicxulub Meteor. We, on the other hand, may be exterminated by a microscopic invasion of sorts. Those things may not come from outer space, like the meteor, but they have for all practical purpose been living on a different planet for twenty-five millions years. That is the crucial importance of interlacing. It is what keeps everything stable. There was no interlacing between ourselves and these isolated life forms. Our lines diverged millions of years ago, and when we shortly meet they may turn out to be like your sneezing Martian."

"I'm no longer sure what to think," the President affirmed. "Right now, I wish we had just left that dam peninsula in 1945 and let you and the South Koreans fight it out. Sure, you'd have won, but looking back what difference would that have made? It turns out that you, the Vietnamese, and the Iraqis were nothing more than civil wars which we stuck our big noses into. And for what? We've allowed ourselves to become so distracted that you've figured out how to destroy the world. I may not be sure of much, but I think under these conditions martial law was the right thing to enact. With it, at least I can do whatever is necessary to defend this country from all threats. Neither Congress nor the judiciary can stand in my way. A snap of my fingers and it's done."

"You're snapping fingers will not deter pathogenic organisms, Mr. President. That is the whole key behind our plan. This is why we've chosen the path we are on. The volatile elements will not melt the entire polar cap, but they will swell the size of the subglacial lakes to over ten times their current volumes. The bacteria and viruses inside will be warmed by the elements' heat causing them to reproduce at exponentially increasing rates. Trapped between the continents compressed bedrock below and the miles of remaining ice above, this incubating broth will be pressed out from beneath the ice as if squeezed from a sponge. Trillions of microscopic organisms, none of which have been in contact with us for millions of years, will pore out into the Southern Ocean. From there they will colonize marine life and migrating birds who will carry these invisible invaders around the world. Our immune system's memory lasts only thousands of years, not millions. We have long forgotten what gave dinosaurs a common cold. Now, we're headed on a collision course with these forgotten microbes, and chances are that at least a few will be, as you said, immuno-transparent. This is the common enemy we now both face, and it, like the Yong Gorge, is stronger than either of us."

"Well," declared the President, abruptly, "if the world's about to end, then maybe we'd prefer to go out on our own terms. If this really is the next Yong Gorge, as you say, then you can jump into it by yourselves. We're not about to forget the last sixty-five years and everything else that has happened."

"That's the problem with Americans, Mr. President. You have such selective memory. You remember that the Jews lived in Palestine some two thousand years ago, but you forget that the Palestinians had lived there for the past two thousand years. You remember that we fought against you since 1945, but you forget Sinmiyangyo and that this is the second time you've invaded our country. You remember that Saddam Hussein was an unruly tyrant, but you forget that you were the ones who kept him in power for so long. What you fail to realize is that we are all in this together, now more than ever. 'United we stand, divided we fall' no longer ends at your borders. We either put down our weapons and work as one to defeat this common evil or surely it will deal harshly with all of us."

"I doubt we're going to need your country's help, Mr. Seok," responded the President. "If anything, it will be the other way around. We have some of the best medical technology and facilities in the world right here in the United States. There isn't a bacteria yet that we haven't been able to get a handle on, and I'm sure a bunch of half-frozen relics aren't going to make that much of a difference to us. You, on the other hand, are another story. You have one of the most backwards and archaic infrastructures of any semi-developed nation in the world. If anyone is going to need help

in all of this it's going to be your country, not ours. And after what you have done, don't expect us to come to your rescue. Those bacteria can eat your nation alive for all we care."

"Those bacteria are not what we are worried about, Mr. President. Perhaps you do not yet fully understand what interlacing is all about."

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"I don't quite get what this interlacing thing is all about," complained the President. "Explain it to me one more time."

"Yes, Mr. President," responded the Director. "Interlacing as originally proposed by the North Koreans in the late 1980's is the process of genetic integration which allows evolution to move forward. Because we live on a finite planet with finite assets, everything must be recyclable or we will run out of resources. For example, we breath in oxygen and give off carbon dioxide, while plants take in carbon dioxide and expel oxygen. If there was no plants to recycle the carbon dioxide back into oxygen, sooner or later we would run out of free oxygen to breath and become extinct. This applies not only to oxygen, but to all organic matter that makes life possible: bones, muscles, intestines, nerves, sweat, feces, urine, and so forth. If any of this were non-recyclable, then over time we would exhaust the limited resources needed to make these things. But they are reusable, because there's something out there to break them down for recycling each time we're done using them."

"So," exclaimed the President, "what's the big deal about that? Ashes to ashes and dust to dust. What is the point of all this?"

"The point, Mr. President, is all about why we return to dust and ashes. There are things out there that eat - and excuse me for being so blunt - the very shit we produce. Thousands of insects and bacteria see our feces as food much the same way we look at vegetables, fruits, meats, and breads. If there were nothing to consume our offal and break it down, then we would literally drown in our own waste. That doesn't happen, because those little shit-eaters are out there. But why? How did evolution know to make something that would eat our excrement? This is what interlacing is all about and it's all based upon viruses."

"Then without viruses," interpreted the President, "my poop would simply pile up until I was buried alive by it."

"It's more than just about our waste, Mr. President. Why do cats eat birds? Why do birds eat worms? Why do snakes eat mice? Why do cows eat grass? Why do we eat cows? For every form of life, there is something it eats, and something which eats it. That way, all organic matter is recyclable and reusable for future generations. Otherwise, this small planet could not have supported three to four billion years of evolution. We are constructed by our genetic code and we must be de-constructed by it as well. For every bit of organic matter in existence there must be a genome to assemble it, and there must be a genome for de-assembling it, too, or you end up with un-recyclable matter."

"But how do viruses play into all of this?" the President asked, quite confused.

"In the West we traditionally view viruses as being pathogenic agents. Unlike bacteria, viruses are not considered to be living and for the most part they are just microscopic packages that contain either DNA or RNA, little pieces of the genetic code for life. The North Koreans took this concept and turned it on its head. While it is true that viruses can cause disease and illness, that's just a side affect and not their true function. Their real goal is the coordination and conservation of genetic material. That's interlacing."

"You see, this is where you lose me," complained the President. "First you're talking about viruses being pathogenic and now you're making them out to be conservationists, like Smokey the Bear."

"Let me try to start over, Mr. President. As you well know, bacteria and viruses can both cause disease. However, unlike viruses, bacteria are single celled organisms that can perform all of the daily activities needed to maintain their lives: ingestion of nutrients, expulsion of waste, reproduction, growth, and development. Now, DNA is the genetic blueprint for life and it is of such importance that it's only found in two places: inside the nuclei of cells and encapsulated in viruses. Inside of cells, such as bacteria, the nucleus acts as a fortress which safely holds this vast library of our genetic DNA codes. However, to be of any good to us the information it contains must be able to travel out from the nucleus for use by the rest of the cell. DNA holds these instructions inside the nucleus, but it is too important to ever leave its fortress, because if it went outside and got lost this would be catastrophic and fatal for the cell. Instead, to prevent the loss of any genetic material, an expendable copy is made of the DNA's instructions. This copy is called RNA and it, rather than the DNA, travels outside the nucleus to other parts of the cell and provides instructions for life sustaining tasks. Is this okay, so far?"

"Yes, Mr. Director," stated the President, a bit more relaxed. "I'm somewhat familiar with the concepts of DNA and RNA. Continue, please."

"Now, Mr. President, every cell in our body contains in its nucleus the entire genetic code for all the bodily functions of our life. However, each cell only uses a small part of that vast library: the portions which tells it how to carry out its own unique life sustaining duties. For example, liver cells only read the parts of the genetic code that tell them how to do liver things while brain cells only follow instructions from the brain portion of this immense library. At least that is how it is supposed to work when we are healthy. It is a highly evolved, disciplined practice where cells only borrow books from those parts of this great library that pertain to their specific role in sustaining life. Now we need to go back in time a bit."

"Very well," agreed the President.

"Millions upon millions of years ago, Mr. President, before any plants or animals existed, life on this planet consisted mostly of simple single celled organisms. Back then each cell had the ability to perform all the functions of life independently without the help of any other cells. The genetic code contained inside each nucleus had all the instructions they needed to live, grow, and produce offspring. For eons this worked fine with single celled organisms living, dying, and reproducing independently from one another. Somewhere along the line, however, things changed.

"Between the era of strictly single celled organisms and today, cells began to live together and work with one another, no longer floating aimlessly about all alone. They found it beneficial to organize in ways which improved their survival and procreation abilities. This started with loose associations in which they congregated near one another for mutual biological support. Then they began to physically merge, first into two celled, then three, four, and more celled organisms. Over the eons as the number of cells in each new species increased, so did the complex abilities of newer generations, along with the growing amount of genetic code needed to keep them alive. In addition, as species became more and more divergent from one another, there was a corresponding increase in the differences between the contents of their genetic storehouses. The DNA library for an albatross, though having many similar instructions, is significantly different from that of a cougar which in turn is not the same as the genetic code for a person."

"I've heard it said that the difference between people and apes is only about a dozen or so genes," stated the President. "Is that true?"

"Yes, Mr. President. Species which are closer to one another will, of course, have very similar genetic libraries. However, each specie of life has different overall needs and ways of living, so, in the end, each keeps a different overall set of genetic codes. Yet, within any multi-celled organism, the DNA code which regulates and defines life is too crucial to either be kept in one place or be divided up into parts that are held only by the cells that use them. To begin with, if there were just one copy, what would happen if it were accidentally lost, damaged, or completely destroyed? If, instead, the library was broken apart and distributed amongst individual cells, what would happen if something went wrong in the complex dividing process and cells got incomplete or wrong parts of the code? To avoid these and other similar disasters from occurring, every cell inside of us contains more than just the genetic data it needs for its particular tasks. Each has a complete copy of the entire DNA record used by it and every other cell in our body. In this way all cells are certain to have access to the DNA they need to keep us alive since each has its own complete copy of all the DNA we possess.

"Evolution has driven life onward from the age of single cell organisms to what we are today. Along the way, countless species have come and gone, each with its own unique way of living and each with its own individualized genetic library. In this process, some earlier species have acted as predecessors to later ones, giving the better parts of their older codes to the newer species' libraries. This passing on of genetic data allows evolution to pick and choose the best of its blueprints for successive generations. However, not all species pass their codes on. Some become extinct and disappear without any successors, and with them go their vast libraries of genetic information. With no one to receive the volumes of experience catalogued in their DNA, billions of evolutionary years are lost when these blueprints are trapped inside a dead-end species. Yet, just as nature has had to be sure that all cells of an organism contain a complete genetic library, nature also provides a way to exchange genetic data between unrelated living organisms. In this way, should a particular species become extinct without a DNA heir, bits and pieces of their codes might at least survive within the library of some other lineage. Thus, nature provides an opportunity for genetic data to be conserved beyond a species, in case that genetic line should become extinct. This method of sharing the evolutionary blueprint

of life is done by a genetic interlibrary loan service called viruses."

"You're saying that viruses act like some sort of messenger service, Mr. Director?" queried the President.

"Correct, Mr. President. According to the North Koreans interpretation, viruses are like little envelopes that contain genetic letters which can be mailed back and forth between single cells and entire organisms. Viruses are smaller than cells and they do not perform all of the functions necessary to sustain life the way that bacteria and other cells do. Viruses are just tiny microscopic capsules which, for the most part, contain only genetic material. Some have DNA, others RNA, and their goal is to transport that genetic information from the nuclear library of one cell - the sender cell - and deposit it in the nuclear library of another cell - the receiver cell. However, the viral postal service is not highly specific and it does not care if the address of the receiving cell is next door to the sender cell or even in the same organism. Amazingly and most importantly, viruses do not even care if the receiver cell is of the same specie or function as the sender cell. They may take the genetic code from a kidney nucleus of a goose and try to place it in a leg muscle nucleus of a cat. Actually, most of these genetic messengers never reach a receiver cell, traveling aimlessly about once they leave the sender cell until they just fall apart. Even if they do manage to find their way to a receptive cell in whose nucleus they can deposit their genetic content, in the process of entering the receiver cell they are often destroyed."

"These viruses, then," the President interpreted, "aren't cells, but they try to carry genetic information in-between cells. In essence, they are just buckshot all over the place in the hope that one of them might hit a target."

"Exactly, Mr. President. At best, one virus can only deliver its contents to just one cell, and most never get that far. Yet, every so often one of these envelopes reaches its destination and gets to place its contents inside the nucleus of a cell. If the virus contains DNA, then its contents go right up on the genetic shelf inside the nucleus, ready to be read at a moment's notice. If, however, the virus contains RNA, then it also carries a special chemical called an enzyme which will convert the RNA into DNA just before it enters the nuclear stronghold. Whether they contain DNA or RNA, a virus' only goal is to deposit its genetic material in the DNA library of a receiver cell. In this way any organism can contain more than just the genetic materials necessary for its own specie's survival. Viruses share data between the living libraries of different species, thus providing a way to prevent the loss of all the genetic codes within any particular lineage that might become extinct.

"Viruses are like nature's little conservationists who attempt to guarantee that the millions of evolutionary years needed to produce DNA will not be for naught, should the individuals who carry and use that DNA not survive the test of time. Once lost, the circumstances that allowed the creation of a particular piece of DNA may never happen again. However, it is impossible to say how useful a particular code may be in the future, so it is better to try and save DNA rather than allow it to become extinct. It is quite possible that we may have the blueprints for the teeth of a brontosaurus or the tusks of a woolly mammoth floating amongst our own genetic instructions. One day we may even find a use for them. For now they just sit dormant inside of us. Since we cannot tell what their past or future applications might be, science labels such unused genes as nonsense or garbage codes. Nature, on the other hand, is

waiting to see if evolution has any further need for the information they contain. Once created, it is much easier to hold onto a code, even if kept locked deep in a genetic library basement, than to try and recreate it all over again. Therefore, viruses constantly bring us new information to add to our ever expanding DNA warehouses. Though we may not use them in our lifetime, there is no telling what value these genes might be to future generations.

"All right, so why is this a problem for us?" asked the President. "What does genetic conservation have to do with the end of the world?"

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"I must admit," said the President, sadly, "I still fail to see how your interlacing theory has doomed us all. And if it has, Mr. Seok, then what would it matter if we cooperated with you or not? Aren't we better off just looking after ourselves and not worrying about the rest of the world?"

"The more you are isolated, Mr. President, the more likely you are to doom yourselves to extinction. The whole key to interlacing is in conservation and coordination. While conservation allows for the preservation of genetic material, it is through coordination that this material is put to effective use. Think of a factory with many workers, with each having a particular job to perform in creating a certain product. If they are coordinated in their efforts, then they will produce this product in an efficient and effective manner. If, on the other hand, they work in an uncoordinated manner, backups and delays will occur throughout the production line causing a complete collapse in output. By staying together and keeping coordinated we may be able to face this new challenge and produce a favorable outcome. Divided and alone our chances for survival are greatly reduced."

"So, this is your gambit, Mr. Seok," flared the President. "You've created this all-or-nothing situation where we either work with you to survive or get eaten alive by these tiny carnivores."

"It is our great hope, Mr. President, that you will realize that the time for hostilities is over. We are no longer a threat to you, nor you to us. The new greater threat comes from the waters to our south. We estimate that the first wave of epidemics will emerge within the next six to twelve months, and that we must prepare to defend ourselves against this common foe or be lost as we continue to squabble amongst ourselves. We could never defeat you militarily or economically, but you will either leave us alone to die in peace or learn to work amicably with us toward our common survival."

"There's a third option, Mr. Seok," warned the President, in a menacing tone. "Since you have taken the initiative to turn the tables upside down, we could choose to respond by decimating your country much as we did in Iran. In less than six months we could level every city within your borders and vaporize ninety percent of your population. Then we could face this microscopic onslaught without ever having to worry about you again."

"Mr. President, I must warn you that we have considered this reaction and we are well prepared to deal with it. While we will not initiate hostilities toward you, if you should launch or promote attacks within our borders, the

United States will almost surely and instantly cease to exist."

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"You want me to believe that our existence is hanging by a thread," complained the President, "and it's all because of some DNA and RNA being shuffled about, Mr. Director?"

"There's more at stake here than things being shuffled about, Mr. President. Yes, DNA is being conserved by this means, but it's also being coordinated. It's because of coordination that there is something out there to recycle everything that exists. Our bodies wouldn't know how to break down the food we eat if we didn't intrinsically know how it was made. The de-construction process is not only a matter of chewing and crushing. It's an intricate series of coordinated chemical reactions that are just as complex as the processes of growth and development. But you can't break down something unless you know how it's put together. Viruses provide this vital information by sharing our genetic data with everyone else and everyone else's genetic data with us. That way we're all working from a similar DNA game plan. The slight differences in one specie's individual genetic library is what makes it unique from all the others. Interlacing preserves all of these differences over time, even in the event of an individual specie's extinction, through conservation of DNA. On the other hand, the similarities between different species' libraries are what allow us to biologically interact with one another so as we are able to consume certain life forms while being consumed by others. Interlacing coordinates these interactions so as to perpetuate the recycling process of organic matter. And viruses are the key to all of this. Their act of cross-pollinating DNA through the eons has kept life interlaced by conserving genetic data and coordinating organic recycling. That way there is plenty of organic matter and genetic material available to meet each and every new challenge as evolution progresses."

"But this doesn't explain the great threat we're now facing," exclaimed the President in frustration. "Those little bugs have been coordinating and conserving for centuries. Why now, all of a sudden, is that a problem?"

"Because, Mr. President, while the organisms under the Antarctic ice have undergone continual genetic conservation amongst themselves, there has been no coordination between their DNA and ours for some twenty-five million years. Genetically speaking, we have no idea what we may be facing down there."

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"Do you have any idea what you're saying, Mr. Seok," inquired the President. "First you're telling us you're going to wipe us out in a year or so, and now you're telling me that you're going to destroy us overnight. I don't need the Director of the NAS to tell me that makes no sense."

"Maybe it makes no sense to you yet, Mr. President, but neither did your actions in Iraq."

"What the hell has Iraq got to do with anything," bellowed the President. "I thought we were worrying about

little bugs in Antarctica?"

"What North Korea is really worried about, Mr. President, is your reaction to what we have done. Given your nations violent history, we realized you were likely to advocate aggression as your response. Everything with the U.S. is about might, force, and your national interests. You're like the big bully on the global playground. Yet, your second invasion of Iraq seemed like a doomed effort from the start. You weren't just overinflating a civil war into another communist domino as you had done with us and the Vietnamese. No, you were attacking a one time ally whom, for the most part, you had already rendered impotent after your first invasion of 1990. That whole propaganda thing about weapons of mass destruction and terrorism was obviously trumped up. Surely if Saddam had possessed WMD's he would have used them, rather than crawl down into the dirt of a spider hole for capture as he actually did. No, by 2003 Hussein was only continuing to terrorize his own people, and that had never been a concern of yours before. Of course, their country did finally deteriorate into a civil war once you took over, but that was only to be expected. The different political factions in Iraq hated each other and you more than they hated Hussein. What else could happen once he was gone, but civil war?"

"We acted on our best intelligence at the time," the President said, defensively. "That war was entirely necessary and justifiable even if no weapons of mass destruction or connections with Al-Qaidah were found."

"How can something be justifiable and necessary, Mr. President, when it never existed. That was no war, even though that's what you called it. You threatened them, amassed your troops just across their borders, then invaded their country, and for the most part they did nothing. Even with all the subsequent insurgent activity and road side bombings, after three years of occupation your side had suffered less casualties than the number of people who died at the World Trade Centers on 9/11. Of course, every single death is an overwhelming tragedy for the loved ones left behind, regardless of how many or few die overall. But the Iraqis were a defeated army long before you took over their land, and their retreat to guerilla warfare was only natural as it had been for us and the Vietnamese. Yet, you portrayed your actions as noble democracy building efforts to ensure peace in the world. You made it sound like all you had to do was remove Saddam, give everyone there a computer filled with two hundred years of American history on it, and everything would be fine. But that's not what the people of Iraq wanted. They wanted Hussein out of the way so that they could have at it with each other and that's what they did. Once Saddam was gone you were just a road block in their outright pursuit of civil war. There was no way you could not have known this, just like there was no way we could not have known that our volatile elements weren't powerful enough to melt the entire South Pole. The only question remaining for us was what were you really up to?"

"What makes you think we were up to anything except what we said," retorted the President. "If you want to accuse someone of lying, why not look at your own track record."

"Mr. President, I am not accusing your country of lying, and there's no need to become so debased in conversation. If we must give it a label, let's just call it politics, for everyone knows that without lies there would be no politics. You see, it was just so obvious that there was no way you were going to turn those brutalized, vengeful,

and angry people into a peace loving, democratic society, at least not in our lifetimes. Then why do it at all? Was it all simply petty vengeance for Hussein's plan to assassinate the father of your forty-third president? Or maybe you were just trying to shift the terrorists' focus of aggression away from your unarmed civilian population at home toward your armed divisions deployed overseas? After all, it did take until late 2006 for them to kill as many of your soldiers in Iraq as they murdered in the United States on 9/11. Unfortunately, these possibilities are too simple in nature to completely answer such a complex question. No, you must have had some grander reason for being there, some unspoken truth, some politicking shall we say. And American politics overseas are guided by one and only one concern: U.S. national interests. But was it really in your national interests to topple Saddam? If there was no war there, then what was going on? How could you benefit from all this wasted time, effort, and loss of lives? We pondered this for quite some time trying to figure out what you were up to. And then it occurred to us that if this was not really a war, then maybe it was just an opportunity to practice war."

"Practice war?" responded the President. "War's our national past time. During our short history, I'll bet we've been in more wars, percentage wise, than almost any other country. Why would we need to practice war? We have enough problems to face already?"

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"What are we facing down there, Mr. Director?" asked the President. "To me it still sounds like a bunch of old bugs stuck under ice."

"They are old, Mr. President, and they are stuck under ice. They've been stuck there for some two hundred and fifty million years: alone, isolated and nearly frozen. But they did not die. To an extent, they even learned to thrive in that harsh, limited environment. It was a sink and swim proposition where they sank beneath the ice and learned to swim in that subglacial super-cooled water. They've been there all this time conserving their DNA and coordinating their genetic libraries so as to continually recycle their limited organic resources. In essence, they've been evolving, but they've been doing so without us. While the rest of the world headed toward the tropics and North Pole, they have been down there millions of years alone and undisturbed. Their cumulative genetic library may have taken a drastic turn away from the path the rest of the planet has been following. There are likely to be many components within their genomes that we abandoned long ago or perhaps never even had. When those volatile elements heat and expand those subglacial lakes and the bacteria start multiplying faster and faster, the remaining ice will force billions of bacterial laden gallons of water out into the Southern Ocean. From there, transported by marine life and avian migrations, it's only a matter of time before they reach us. And when they do they'll release viruses which will impregnate their DNA into our own: DNA that has never been interlaced with us before."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," stammered the President. "What do you mean they're going to release viruses? What are they, some special sort of time bomb bacteria?"

"No, Mr. President, my apologies. I have not been able to fully explain the interlacing theory and all of its implications to you. One of its postulates - a sub-theory called viroception - states that viruses are not just foreign bodies, but that they are normal byproducts of all life. In other words, you are both invaded by and a manufacturer of viruses. From your day of conception you are constantly being swarmed over by millions of these invisible messengers. They enter through your pores, your mouth, your nose, and every conceivable opening, looking for a receiver cell by which they may further interlace you to your environment. At the same time, however, sender cells in your body are continually producing and casting off your own viruses in an effort to interlace others with you. This is a rather controversial part of the interlacing theory as no research has ever been done to confirm or deny it. Several leading scientists in the academy have expressed interest in this line of inquiry, but we cannot fund it as it is an unapproved North Korean concept."

"So, you're trying to tell me that these things are going to interlace with us when they get here?" said the President. "Isn't there some way to stop them? How about the salt water in the Southern Ocean? They live in the fresh water of the subglacial lakes, right? Won't they be killed by the salt water when they're exposed to it?"

"At first, yes, Mr. President. But you have to realize that billions, even trillions of gallons of water contaminated with these prehistoric bacteria are going to flow off the continent from uncountable locations. Within a few weeks or months, the sheer volume of all that fluid will dilute the ocean along the coastline to a brackish quality with a reduced sodium content. While at first they'll be killed by the high salinity of the sea water, when the sodium has become sufficiently diluted by the fresh water outflow, the bacteria will start to thrive, multiply, and adapt to even higher salt concentrations as they push their way farther from the shore. Assuming they only penetrate a few miles from the coast into the ocean, they will establish an infected perimeter millions of square miles wide and long encircling the continent. Marine and avian life on and near these shores will become irrevocably infected, and those that don't die will begin the chain of transmission northward toward us. It will only be a matter of time before we can expect the first cases of human infection, most likely along the southern parts of South America, Africa, and Australia. There are so many possible strains of bacteria locked up under Antarctica that even if millions of them are harmless, that could still leave thousands which are virulently pathogenic. We could be looking at the equivalent of a bubonic type plague every month for years without any effective ways of protecting ourselves."

"So, the ice doesn't all melt," the President summarized, nervously, "but billions of bugs and their viral offspring are still coming this way to destroy us. I'm getting it, but I'm not getting it, Mr. Director. Everything you've said has made sense, but I'm still having trouble putting the big picture together. We've faced bacterial plagues and viral epidemics before. Why is this any different? Could you please explain that to me?"

"Let me try one other example, Mr. President. Do you know what you should do if you're an astronaut in outer space and you come upon an extraterrestrial life form?"

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"You've always had many problems, Mr. President," answered Seok Dae Jo, "but that is nothing new for you, and it has never kept you from going to war. In fact, you had good reasons to go to war with Iraq for a second time, but you never used them."

"What do you mean we didn't use them," demanded the President. "We told the American people everything we could. It was war, for God's sake. You can't tell the public everything you know or the enemy will know it, too. What other reasons could we have had, anyway?"

"Mr. President, for all his faults and weaknesses, Saddam Hussein was in a unique position. Had he had the foresight, in time he might have been able to unify many of the diversified fundamentalist Islamic factions under his nationalistic banner of Iraq. Hitler, who was despised by most Germans during his first attempts at gaining political office, finally conquered all of his foes and enemies within the fractured German state, unifying that nation into a global powerhouse. Similarly, since he alone was in a position to do such a thing, had Hussein been able to pull off a similar coup amongst Muslim nations, you would have likely been facing a third world war. Of course, this new Reich would have been sorely beset to battle you outright, but then again, imagine how strained you would have been to fight the Iraq Invasion simultaneously in Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Pakistan, and many other places. No, you were wise to take him out when you did so as to nip this thing in the bud."

"You'd have to be crazy, Mr. Seok," admonished the President, "to think we went to war because we thought Saddam Hussein was about to become another Hitler. He carried little if any weight with the Islamic jihadists, because he repressed the extreme fundamentalists in his own country out of fear that they might gather strength and overthrow him."

"War and jihads make for strange bedfellows, Mr. President, and we strongly believe that was one of your likely concerns, and a valid one, too. But since you deny it, perhaps you will consider this. Ever since the 1973 Oil Crisis when OPEC wrenched control of world petroleum prices away from the Seven Sisters - BP, Chevron, Exxon, Gulf, Mobil, Shell, and Texaco - you have lived in fear of a second such crisis. After the collapse of the technology stock market in 2000, such a repeat would have devastated your economy. The events of 9/11 gave you the perfect opportunity to break OPEC's back by occupying one of its key member states. After all, since you own Iraq, you are now an unofficial member of the cartel. As long as you hold that land, you have completely neutralized OPEC's ability to influence world oil prices. If they slow production in their territories, you simply increase production in yours."

"That doesn't make any sense either," retorted the President. "We have plenty of oil coming from Venezuela and we've increased drilling capacity in the Gulf of Mexico by nearly fifty percent in the last three years alone."

"Yes, Mr. President, but Venezuelan crude may run out sooner than you think and tripling your Gulf capacity wouldn't make up for that. However, if this was not sufficient reason to invade Iraq for a second time, then perhaps I have an even better explanation. No matter how hard you might have wanted to avoid it, at the turn of the century there was likely going to be a major conflict some time soon in the Middle East. You had two options. You could wait

around until things deteriorated into a quagmire requiring an invasion similar to Normandy Beach in World War Two, or you could embark on a base building mission and take preemptive measures to chip away at the problem little by little. After 9/11, you had ample excuse to occupy Afghanistan which left the entire Middle East squeezed between you and your ally Israel. But there was still too much volatile territory between the two of you, so you decided to take even more control. By invading Iraq you now had double pincer fronts which tied down Iran between your Afghan and Iraq bases while Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon were trapped between the Israelis and your forces in Iraq. With well established fortifications throughout the region, you had effectively divided the Middle East into two controllable sections, placing yourselves and your ally in easy striking distance of any hostile outbreaks or advances."

"I'll admit it's not a bad strategy, Mr. Seok," confirmed the President, "but that's a colonial mentality and we're not colonialists. After all, why waste your time in such a militaristic venture when corporate globalization will get you the same results. This is America you're talking about. We're industrialists and technologists. Sure, we could go around bashing the hell out of the world, but we'd much rather pay you a working wage and reap the profits. Perhaps that sounds a bit cold and callous to you, but one day corporations will rule this planet. Then there won't be any need for borders or armies or weapons of mass destruction. There will just be people working together to produce the goods and services we all want for an enjoyable quality of life: a chicken in every pot, a car in every garage, and a diploma on every wall. This is what people really need and one day this is what we'll give them. Until then, we will do what's necessary in order to bring everyone into the twenty-first century our way. If that means fighting a bunch of rag-tag extremists along the way, then so be it. In the end, we'll win. You'll see."

"Perhaps, Mr. President, but what is it you think you will really win?"

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"There is no way to win this, Mr. President," explained the Director. "Our weapons experts say that those volatile elements are just too far down to be blown apart even with multiple nuclear bomb strikes. As for the decreasing salinity along Antarctica's coastline, in theory you could just dump a bunch of salt in there to counteract the effects of all that bacterial laden runoff. But even if you converted every available boat into a cargo ship and filled them all with salt, there still wouldn't be enough to stop the dilution that's going to occur. And then there's the bacteria itself. That stuff's so ancient that it has become completely unlaced from us in genetic terms. Who knows if our immune systems will even recognize half of it, and there's no guarantee that our antibiotics will have any effect on them at all. We already have bacterial strains like MERSA and VERSA which our antibiotics can't kill, so it is unlikely our modern medicines will be able to defend us against all of those subglacial microbes. Even if they do, antibiotics are useless against viruses and there's no way to predict the types of epidemics we may be repeatedly confronted with once that invasion starts."

"So, this really is the end of the world as we know it, then." quipped the President. "After all these

civilizations and millennia, it all comes down to one disgruntled nation throwing a bunch of over heated reactor cores into an oversized block of ice that has a hidden surprise inside. It's like we're playing some grotesque game of Cracker-Jacks. I still find it hard to believe that it's all going to end this way."

"Maybe it doesn't have to, Mr. President."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that maybe there's something we haven't thought of, Mr. President. After all, we're not the one's who did this. If the North Koreans hadn't gone insane, we wouldn't be having this conversation in the first place. But they did and maybe they did something else, too."

"Like what, Mr. Director," the President inquired, intrigued.

"I really don't know, Mr. President. But since they started this, maybe they know how to stop it. Perhaps they built a fail-safe mechanism into these devices or some means of turning them off. I'm not sure how that might work since normal radio signals won't go through ice that thick. But certain types of deep penetrating radar can, and they may have built in some means of detecting a specific series of such radar signals which would deactivate those elements."

"You mean like a kind of Morse Code?"

"Yes, Mr. President, but I've no way of telling you for sure if they did or did not make such allowances. If the North Koreans aren't talking to us yet, then perhaps Mr. Seok knows. Maybe they're just waiting for us to make some concessions and then they'll call the entire thing off. After all, they're in just as much danger as the rest of the world and I fail to see what advantage they would gain by this process coming to fruition."

"That's a good point, Mr. Director," agreed the President. "Thank you, I'll follow up on that immediately. In the mean time, is there anything else you can tell us?"

"I think I've summarized most everything there is to know, Mr. President. Though Mr. Seok muddied the waters a bit yesterday, it was really only to ensure that we looked more deeply at these quite terrifying issues. And unless Mr. Seok knows some way of stopping all of this, then we may be faced with some very real doomsday bugs in the not too distant future."

"I understand, Mr. Director," stated the President. "I and everyone gathered here would like to thank you and your colleagues for their thorough and exhaustive efforts to provide us this information. With it I think we are in a much better position from which to do our work. For now, however, we will take leave of you, doing so with our sincere gratitude."

"You are most welcome, Mr. President, but before I sign off, there is perhaps just one other thing you might like to know."

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"Whatever we do, Mr. Seok," said the President, reassured, "you need to know that we won't take this lying down. It's not like we don't have any options at our command. After all, we could still eradicate your entire country, if nothing else, then just for the mere satisfaction of it. Or, we could try and be more constructive. Perhaps there is something we could do or offer to you that would make you change your minds. Couldn't this all end up to be nothing more than a prelude to successful negotiations which would benefit both sides? Isn't there anything your country would prefer to have instead of what we're talking about?"

"No, Mr. President."

"No?"

"No, Mr. President."

"What do you mean, no?"

"I mean there is no way to turn them off, Mr. President. You're asking me if this is really just one big bluff to take advantage of you at the bargaining table. Sacrificing twenty-six million non-Koreans would be a little bit much even for us, if that was what we really wanted. No, what we really want is for you to stop your aggressions and leave us alone, but you never have. When the crew of the USS General Sherman arrived in 1866 we asked them to leave, but they wouldn't. When the French missionaries arrived later that same year we asked them to leave, but they wouldn't. When your navy warships invaded our waterways in 1871 we asked them to leave, but they wouldn't. So in 1882 we finally agreed to trade with you by signing a treaty of mutual respect and trust, but in 1905 you offered us to Japan in exchange for control of the Philippines. Thanks to you, from then until 1945 the Japanese killed some thirty-million people during their occupation of Southeastern Asia. But even that wasn't enough for you. The minute they left, you returned and took over the southern part of our country, and for the past sixty-five years we've been at war with you. When does it end? How could it possibly end except in our total and complete defeat? We have neither the power nor the wealth to overcome you. The dragon was our only hope, and once called upon it can only be stopped by its own will."

"Then we might as well blow your country to bits," confirmed the President. "At least that way we'll have one less pest to worry about."

"If you do, Mr. President, you will disappear right along with us."

"How?" complained the President. "Your country is no longer defending itself, from what we can see. Who is going to stand in our way of annihilating you?"

"China, Mr. President."

"China?"

"China, Mr. President."

"Why in God's name would China get involved in any of this," barked the President. "My guess is that they're just as mad at you as we are."

"That may be so for now, Mr. President, but I am sure you will convince them otherwise."

"Why would I do that, Mr. Seok?" asked the President, perplexed. "Hell, they may want to join in the fun of hammering your nation to bits."

"Not after we tell them what we know, Mr. President."

"And what would that be, Mr. Seok?" the President challenged.

"The real and actual reasons you are in the Middle East, Mr. President."

* * * *

"Are you sure about that, Mr. Director?" the President inquired.

"Yes, Mr. President, we checked and it doesn't exist. My guess is that it was meant to act as a metaphor, and it was a pretty good one at that."

"This is interesting, Mr. Director," agreed the President. "Thank you, again."

"It has been my honor to be at your service, Mr. President." And with that, the Director of the NAS signed off, his screen in the middle of the great electronic wall going blank.

The President rose from his chair at the lead table in the large situation room and turned to face the others in the group of fifty who were seated behind him.

"I think it's time we took another vote," he said.

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"If you know so much, Mr. Seok," demanded the President, "then why don't you just come out and say it. After all, time's getting short and we have bugs to fight."

"Very well, then, Mr. President. The only reason for you or any other westerner to go to the Middle East is oil. That is all that matters to you in that part of the world. If there had been no oil there, once the Suez Canal was no longer of great strategic value, you'd have let the Arabs run Israel off into the Mediterranean. But there is oil there and more of it than all the Earth's other reserves combined. It is so rich in oil that you can't turn your back on it, no matter how much you try. That oil is the very blood of your economy and the backbone of your might. Without it, you are powerless."

"You're not saying anything new, Mr. Seok," charged the President in an exasperated tone. "Everyone knows Oil is King, and we're in as much need of it as anyone. So what? And what do the Chinese have to do with any of this?"

"Power is a relative thing, Mr. President. It shifts with the resources that define it. Whoever has the oil has the power. For now, you are in control. But later, who knows? China is growing rapidly. In another ten to twenty years she will outpace your domestic growth. In addition, China has been buying up your national debt at an absurd

rate in the hope that they will conquer you by means of an aggressive balance sheet rather than through military force. The longer they continue to grow, the closer they get to cashing in all those notes they are holding against you, thereby throwing your entire nation into default and bankruptcy. Then they will buy your country right out from under you for pennies on the dollar just like the Jews bought land away from, but would not sell it back to the Palestinians in the early 1900's."

"You sound like a God damn anti-Semite, Mr. Seok," accused the President.

"Not at all, Mr. President. I am a student of history and its long-standing influence on the present. Of course, the Jews weren't doing anything to the Palestinians that you hadn't been doing to African-Americans for centuries. It was just another form of repression, of taking things away from people, just like the Chinese are going to take away your land when your national debt finally comes due. But you know all of this and are planning ahead. That day will never come and that debt will never be called in, because of what you have planned for China."

"And what would our secret Chinese plan be, Mr. Seok?" the President hissed, irritated.

"To collapse their economy before it can reach its peak, Mr. President. To create a financial crisis so large that in their desperate need for liquid cash they will trade in your debt for pennies on the dollar. Sky rocketing inflation in mainland China will evaporate your indebtedness overnight. The Chinese have supported your nation's financial irresponsibility for over two decades, and you're going to pull the rug out from under them before they can collect their just rewards. It will be just like what the Rothschilds and other Jewish financiers did to Germany between the great wars."

"There you go again with the Jews." shouted the President, angrily. "What have the Jews got to do with our national debt and China?"

"Have you ever read any works by Sholem Asch, Mr. President?"

"Who?"

"Sholem Asch, a Jewish novelist from Poland who lived from 1880 to 1957, Mr. President."

"No, why would I?"

"Ah, a very interesting writer, Mr. President. He wrote many manuscripts, my favorite being his 1936 book titled *The War Goes On*. You should read it some time."

"What has Sholem Asch got to do with anything we're talking about?" the President cried. "Who cares about Sholem Asch?"

"Why Yale University does, Mr. President. Do you know that they have the largest collection of Sholem Asch manuscripts in the world. There are more works by Mr. Asch in Yale's Beinecke Library than there are in the Sholem Asch Museum in Bat Yam, Israel, just outside of Tel Aviv. William Howard Taft, Gerald Ford, George H.W. Bush, Bill and Hillary Clinton, and George W. Bush all graduated from Yale, and Beinecke Library is the world's largest building dedicated to the preservation of rare manuscripts. The fact that his works are housed in such an internationally famous place tells you exactly who cares about Sholem Asch. He's a very important writer."

"Well, I never heard of him," roared the President, infuriated. "As usual, I don't get your point and I'm still not convinced that China's going to give a damn whether or not we flatten your country, because of what you've done to Antarctica. Do you care about that?"

"Of course I do, Mr. President. That's why I'm telling you about Sholem Asch. He was a Jew writing about what Jewish bankers did to the German economy between World War One and World War Two. In essence, they devastated it by creating runaway inflation. The German Mark once traded for goods and services much like the American Dollar. When the Jewish bankers were done, it took a wheelbarrow full of Marks just to buy a loaf of bread. Modern banking now has checks and balances to prevent such a crisis, but in the early 1900's there were no restraints against these predatory tactics and the Jewish financiers were free to legally pillage the German economy just like an invading army. Huge numbers of people lost their homes, their livelihoods, and their life savings overnight, because they didn't understand the intricacies and pitfalls of unregulated banking. Hitler did not create the Jews, nor did he create the overwhelming hatred most Germans felt toward them. You can thank the Jewish financiers for that. Their ruthless business practices brought that spite upon themselves and their entire community. It would be wrong to characterize all European Jews that way, because these financiers represented only a small fraction of their entire community. But that tiny group did tremendous damage to Germany and the other European Jews. Hitler simply capitalized upon their misdeeds to unify and resurrect his economically devastated country. Not that that justified his final course of action, but if you don't believe me, let Sholem Asch tell you. He was a Jew and he was there. I'm sure Yale University's Beinecke Library would be more than happy to lend you one of his books."

"So, this is it," said the President. "You think that we're going to skip out on repaying our national debt to China by instigating runaway inflation in their economy. That is an interesting insight, Mr. Seok, but how do you propose we will pull off this grand feat?"

"Through petrolphages, Mr. President."

The President took a moment and, for the first time during their exchanges that day, conferred directly with his two companions. The volume from their side having quickly been turned off, Seok Dae Jo watched the three men silently argue for a few minutes. Then they repositioned themselves in their seats and the sound came back on.

"Petrol-what's, Mr. Seok?" asked the President, unphased.

"Petrolphages, Mr. President. Microscopic bacteria especially designed to eat oil. They were originally developed in the late 1900's to combat petroleum spills at industrial complexes, oil refineries, and at sea. Many microbial species such as *Syntrophus* and *Methanosaeta* have been found to use crude petroleum as a food source for producing the energy they need to survive. And they are anaerobic which means that, unlike us, they do not need oxygen to survive. These are what we call petrolphages: petroleum consuming organisms. You put them on an oil spill and the contaminant disappears. You dump them down an oil well and the petroleum vanishes."

"Is this some kind of conspiracy theory you've cooked up, Mr. Seok." asked the President. "I suppose this is another one of our secret military plans that no one knows about?"

"Not at all, Mr. President. A lot of this work, in fact, is done by the United States Geological Survey. It seems like a strange place to find something like that, but they're involved in all sorts of interesting operations including research into petrolphages and the microbial content of the Antarctic subglacial lakes. A lot of the information we needed for our plan was gleaned through their work. It's all done through different departments within the USGS, like their Toxic Substances Hydrology Program and their Microbiology and Molecular Ecology Team. They don't actually use the word petrolphages. Instead, they talk about bioremediation of hydrocarbons and natural attenuation."

"Something's still missing here, Mr. Seok," noted the President. "You're saying we're going to avoid paying our national debt by derailing the Chinese economy, so that in financial desperation they'll forgive all of that debt for a fraction of its real value. And you're claiming we're going to do this by using these so-called petrolphages. Where's the connection?"

"In the Middle East, of course, Mr. President."

"But we're there to defend the Middle East."

"Are you really, Mr. President?"

"Of course," rebounded the President. "Why else would we be there?"

"To destroy the oil, Mr. President."

"That's ludicrous," shouted the President. "We need that oil as much as anyone. Why would we destroy it?"

"Because when it comes right down to it, you can't have it, Mr. President, and rather than let others have all of that oil and the power it represents, you will destroy it."

Again the screen fell silent as Seok Dae Jo watched the three men voicelessly argue amongst one another. Momentarily the sound returned.

"Please explain yourself, Mr. Seok," the President requested, calmly.

"As I said before, Mr. President, we never quite understood why you invaded Iraq for the second time in 2003. There was no way you could have realistically anticipated that you would be able to remove Hussein and convert that country into a democratic society. If anything, given free democratic reigns, Iraqis would vote themselves into a religious-based oligarchy similar to Iran which would have left your CIA with the uncomfortable task of toppling yet another democratically elected government. Instead, after the occupation you managed to get your hand picked government officials to run a country that has degraded into civil war. Why bother? That is what we couldn't figure out. Then we made the China-petrolphage connection.

"You have many energy resources available to you. In addition to large coal reserves you have anywhere from one to two hundred years of shale oil locked up in your western states. You also have several years, perhaps decades of oil left in your Alaskan and Gulf of Mexico wells, and your National Strategic Petroleum Reserves have been built up to almost one billion barrels. But the Middle East has far more oil than all of that combined, and that's the petroleum the Chinese need in order to become the number one goods producer and energy consumer in the world. If that happens there will be no stopping them and your debt will surely come due. That would be a catastrophe for

the United States: becoming number two in the world and bankrupt all at the same time. So, you need a way to short change the Chinese and that's why you went to the Middle East. The war on terrorism was just a cover. After all, you're the biggest terrorists in the world. Just look at your CIA and what they've been doing for the past sixty years. As for Osama ben Laden, he was one of your creations just like Saddam. Why do people hate you so much? Because in the name of your national interests you have brought more terrorism to the world than anyone else.

"You went to the Middle East to establish proximity to the world's largest oil deposits outside of North America. Your goal wasn't to create democracy in Iraq. It was to be near the major Middle East oil fields. That way, when you can no longer control them, you can destroy them with petrolphages rather than letting them fall into the hands of the Chinese. As long as the balance of distribution favors the U.S., you'll leave things as they are, letting Iraq smoulder in never ending civil unrest. But the minute things turn against you - for example, say the Iraqis finally get organized and ask you to leave - and the petroleum is being unfavorably diverted elsewhere, like China, then you'll contaminate those wells with petrolphages and leave the rest of the world cringing for oil. In the meantime, you'll just fall back on you century or two worth of reserves even if it does mean destroying your native wilderness and environment in the process. What's important though is that if you can't have as much of the Middle East oil as you want, then no one else will get any of it either."

"I can't believe it's coming down to this," the President said in a drained voice. "You're unleashing microbial Armageddon down in Antarctica and you're accusing us of planning to biologically sabotage world oil supplies in order to retain our supremacy in the world. Have you ever thought about the fact that the Chinese already have access to Middle East oil resources ever since we annihilated and divided up Iran. Where does all of that fall into your scheme?"

"It is true, Mr. President, they do hold a large portion of the ex-Iranian oil wells. But it is also true that your claim to the Iranian territory borders that of the Chinese, and this common boundary line splits what was once a single major oil field in two: one half for you and one half for them. By contaminating your side of the fields, it will just be a matter of time before the microbes proliferate and colonize those of the Chinese. Using the proper combination of petrolphages and a supportive nutrient mix - a kind of bacterial fertilizer - you could inject this poison deep into your wells, allowing you one or two years time to abandon the spoiled fields before any effects would be noticed. Then, when the oil starts to disappear, who will be any the wiser? So you see, all we would have to do is share this information with Beijing and they would immediately declare war on you."

"But you have no proof of this," replied the President. "That's a nice story, Mr. Seok, but I think they'd need more than just your word in order to declare war."

"Yes, Mr. President, they will and for that reason we have had spies operating in the Middle East for quite some time now. Of particular interest, they have noted the large number of extra-high-pressure injection well heads which have been imported to Iraq and Iran - or what used to be Iran - from the United States."

"What's so strange about that, Mr. Seok," the President wanted to know. "Injection well heads are used all the time to squeeze out the last remaining oil from aging wells. We use them routinely here in the States. Why

wouldn't we bring some to the Middle East?"

"Some, Mr. President, would be understandable, but you've brought too many. Less than four percent of the current wells in Iraq qualify for that kind of treatment and, yet, you've shipped enough injection caps over there for almost one third of their oil fields. And they're not just any kind of well heads. They're of the extra-high-pressure variety which are used for making particularly deep injections. Given what we know about your petrolphage development programs and the positioning of these well heads, we think the Chinese will find our story quite credible. After all, like you said, you have Walmartized them and, because of that, they cannot afford to lose the oil."

The President sat quietly for a moment while the directors of the CIA and SS turned toward him, both their mouths moving, but with no sound coming out. Once more, Seok Dae Jo could only watch the silent screen as the President finally engaged his companions in a brief, voiceless debate. When they finished, the sound returned.

"Mr. Seok," continued the President, "it seems you've presented us with some rather challenging information. According to you, the world's about to end in the next six to twelve months. If we take retribution on you for this, then you'll tell the Chinese your little petrolphage story and we'll end up fighting the bugs and Beijing simultaneously. In my opinion, that's not a very favorable outcome. On the other hand, if we - and by we I mean everyone in the world - would forego hostilities and join together in fighting the tiny Antarctic invaders, then we'd all surely stand a much better chance for survival. Unfortunately, I'm not sure the world's ready to accept that either. And neither you nor anyone here knows of any way to stop those damned elements from heating everything up. It's not a pleasing situation."

"No, Mr. President, and for many of us it never has been ever since your country has existed. The land of Korea including the North and the South has been invaded over nine hundred times during its long history. We are, in essence, the doormat of the world, having been trapped between the superpowers of China, Russia, and Japan for all of these years. They have fought over us and through us for centuries, and our conflicts go back thousands of years before your ancestors ever arrived in North America. And in all that time we have made a living out of knowing how to die. Now, we are ready to die once more in the belief that we will be reborn without you. Perhaps this seems a bit drastic, but we were facing extinction either way and without this new plan there would be no rebirth, only complete surrender and assimilation. The Palestinians would never have allowed that to happen to themselves, the Iranians wouldn't have either, and neither will we. Your reign has been an immovable mountain, so we have simply had to change the rules."

"Then tell me this, Mr. Seok," the President requested. "What's to keep China from blowing you up on their own? Maybe your threat will hamstring us from attacking you, but how are you going to blackmail them into leaving you alone?"

"You think you know China, Mr. President. Compared to Asian civilizations, your country is just a flash in the pan. You understand so little about us and who we really are. You may have Walmartized China on the surface, but deep down they are still the feudal society they have been for millennia. An iPod and compact car don't erase

thousands of years of tradition. Sure, the young fall easy prey to your trinkets and ploys, but in the end they are always reminded of their inferiority to you. Sooner or later as they grow older, they almost always return to the fold. Even as it drags itself into the twenty-first century, China remains the land of the crouching bureaucrat and hidden hardliner. Deep down inside they want us to destroy you. In fact, certain top members of their Politburo have known of our plans for years. Your NAS Director must have figured out that we could never have reinforced those ships with tungsten beams. Their weight would have been too heavy as I'm sure he told you. So where do you think we got all of that titanium which we needed?"

"The Chinese, I suppose," responded the President, unenthusiastically.

"Of course, Mr. President. They know that you're probably going to default on your debt to them, anyway. But the longer they can play out this whole farce of guaranteed notes, the farther they are along the road toward becoming a developed nation. However, if you're no longer around, then they don't have to bother. Believe it or not, a lot of people liked it better when life was simpler. It may not have been as exciting and they may not have lived as long, but there was a certain quality and closeness that have been completely lost in the pursuit of technology and modernization. Like us, the Chinese have been through many dynasties and if ninety-nine percent of them get wiped out in the process of re-interlacing those lost genetic lines from Antarctica, they'll simply pick up their pieces and rebuild another empire. So will we. You, on the other hand, have never lost everything before. This will be your first time. The Roman and Greek empires never came back. I guess we'll find out whether you're like them or us."

Suddenly, the SS Director lifted up his hand to look at his watch, then he leaned over and whispered something into the President's ear.

"Mr. Seok," added the President. "My companions and I would like to thank you for your thorough and exhaustive efforts to provide us this information. With it, I think we are in a much better position from which to do our work. For now, however, we will take leave of you, doing so with our sincere gratitude."

And with that, once again, Seok Dae Jo's monitor went dead.

* * * *

As he sat there, Seok Dae Jo felt a sense of peace and reassurance that, for the most part, everything had gone fairly well. It would have been hubris to assume the United States would reach out to North Korea under such circumstances, and martial law was likely to cause more problems within American borders than outside of them. In time, the U.S. would likely come around to appreciating the necessity for a major change in their foreign policy, and once the Middle East oil had been eliminated as it surely would be, then they could focus their great scientific and technologic skills on saving the world. Sometimes under the right circumstances, even a bully could be turned into a saint. Yet, Seok Dae Jo was saddened by the realization that he had not been able to tell the President everything. There just had not been enough time. Perhaps they had figured out on their own about the Yong Gorge. Either way,

it was still a nice story even if those lost Tripitaka plates had only contained Buddhist chants for world peace and unity.

It had been an exhausting day, and without announcement the attendant appeared through the locked door to find Seok Dae Jo still seated at the monitor's desk. Pushing his cart ahead of him, he asked Mr. Seok if he would be dining that evening. Seok Dae Jo replied in the affirmative and the attendant began to produce a wide array of plates laden with appetizing dishes which he placed upon the oval table at the center of the room. When the arrangement was complete, he invited Mr. Seok to come be seated at the table. While Seok Dae Jo nourished himself on his favorite dishes, compliments of many years of diligent note taking by his American counterparts at innumerable dinner meetings, the attendant busied himself in the other rooms cleaning and preparing Mr. Seok's bed for the evening. After completing some light vacuuming and drawing the evening's bath, the attendant reappeared in the main room to find Mr. Seok swallowing a pain pill at the end of his meal. Seok Dae Jo graciously acknowledged the wonderful food and the attendant's efforts, to which the attendant responded by reminding Mr. Seok that at a touch of the white call buttons he was available at any hour and for any reason. Seok Dae Jo rose, smiled at the attendant, bowed twice in gratitude, and then retired to the side rooms for the evening.

As he lay in his bath soaking, Seok Dae Jo listened as the attendant cleared his dinner plates, completed vacuuming of the main room, and then left through the locked door. A most pleasant man by all accounts, he wondered what sort of life the attendant had. Was there a wife and children at home or was he one to live alone? Did he find purpose in his work or was it merely a series of repetitive, laborious tasks? When he was not caring for others, who took care of the attendant, and were they as thorough and courteous as the attendant was with his charges? Life presented so many avenues for questioning, yet so few opportunities for answers. In the end, the attendant would simply remain one of those valued mysteries of life to Seok Dae Jo.

When he was finally in bed, Seok Da Jo felt satiated in both appetite and purpose. His mission was fulfilled and his life was imbued with a sense of completeness. He could not see of what further use he would be to the Americans, and his homeland was prepared for a future without him. His accomplishments had been many, yet throughout it all he had retained a sense of humbleness and humility. Even his son whom he had never known until the very end turned out to be someone he thought of with pride. Staring up at the dark ceiling, he was comforted and soothed by these memories as his mind drifted off into a musical reprieve. Lighting upon a 1970's pop classic all but forgotten by 2010, the hidden embedded microphones listened intently as Seok Dae Jo softly sang himself to sleep:

Sometimes the lights all shining on me

Other times I can barely see

Lately it occurs to me

What a long, strange trip it's been

(Truckin, The Grateful Dead, 1970)

Day 3

Late in the evening of Monday, February 1st, 2010, for the first time in history the United States Senate and House of Representatives, on the unanimous recommendation of the fifty member advisory panel, respectively voted ninety-eight to two and four hundred and twenty-seven to eight in favor of invoking martial law throughout the entirety of the nation and its territories. A few minutes later, official notice was given that both Chambers of Congress and the complete Federal Judiciary System were indefinitely suspended. In his first act as Supreme Commander of the United States of America, the leader of the nation and not-so-free world declared that he would retain his previous title of President. Then by edict, he placed the entire Joint Chiefs of Staff and all branches of the United States Military under the direct command of the CIA. Next, he ordered that the operation of all state and local governments including police forces, courts, and prisons, and all non-military departments and offices of the suspended federal government including his Cabinet and Vice President be turned over to his number two in command: the SS Director. Finally, he went to sleep for three hours before getting up to prepare for his second interrogation of the North Korean translator.

* * * *

Two days later, on the morning of Wednesday, February 3rd, 2010, after completing his second interview with the President the day before, Seok Dae Jo awoke to the distant sound of vacuuming in the main room. If nothing else, the attendant was extremely tidy. Getting up slowly, still somewhat exhausted by recent events, the translator meandered about the side chambers doing his morning rituals and then dressing in the casual garments which the attendant had placed out for him the night before. As was he putting on his shoes he could hear the attendant moving dishes about in preparation of the morning meal. But before he could reach the door to the main room, he was surprised to hear the attendant and his cart leaving through the main door which then locked itself behind them. Opening the bedroom door slowly, he found the main room immaculately empty, yet, stepping into it he sensed that something was missing. Looking about carefully, he suddenly realized that the desk he had sat at for the past two days was empty. There was no monitor, paper, or pencil, and there was no bottle of pills. He calmly turned around to look at the night stand by his bed. They weren't there either. He couldn't remember if he had taken them into the bedroom the night before and his unease at their absence enticed his metastatic pain to be unleashed from his morning grogginess. For the first time since entering these rooms he began looking for one of the white buttons by which to summon the attendant when he noticed something else that was strange. There on the oval table in the middle of the room where there should have been an elegant meal similar to the prior morning's sat a single cup of tea. Beside it was placed a bowl of sugar. Somewhat comforted, he immediately realized that he would no longer need his pills as

he never took sugar with his tea.

* * * *

The Green Revolution unofficially began on January 10th, 1901, when the Lucas One Well on Spindletop Hill just south of Beaumont, Texas, reached a depth of one thousand, one hundred and thirty-nine feet, spewing a geyser of oil over one hundred and fifty feet into the air at a rate of one hundred thousand barrels per day. The Lucas Gusher, as it was called, single handedly tripled U.S. oil production overnight and it was officially placed on the National Register of Historical Places in 1966. By the end of 1902 there were over two hundred and eighty active wells in the area and six hundred newly incorporated oil companies sprang up to capitalize on this incredulous flood of black gold. Three of these infant corporations would go on to become Exxon, Mobil, and Texaco who along with BP, Chevron, Gulf, and Shell would become the prima donnas of the oil world, also known as the Seven Sisters. These erudite siblings would retain their reign of supremacy until the crisis of 1973 when OPEC took charge of worldwide petroleum prices. But in 1901 OPEC was no where in sight and the population of that little town in Southeastern Texas shot up like the oil out of Spindletop, rising from ten thousand to fifty thousand people in a matter of months. Little did anyone realize that the Green Revolution was about to do for the rest of the world what Lucas One had done for Beaumont.

Officially, the Green Revolution did not start until 1943 when the Office of Special Studies (OSS) was established as a joint venture between the Rockefeller Foundation and the government of Mexico. Formed in response to concerns over insufficient worldwide agricultural production, the OSS was charged with investigating new hybrids of wheat, rice, and corn for production in third world countries. A nation formally dominated by peasant subsistence farming, in less than ten years Mexico was self-sufficient in wheat production and by 1953 it became a wheat exporter. From there, the Green Revolution spread to India under the auspices of the Ford Foundation, and in 1961 the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations collaborated on establishing the International Rice Research Institute in the Phillipines. At this point, armed with a wide variety of high yield seed species while simultaneously developing improved techniques in both sanitation and irrigation, the Green Revolution trampled across Latin America, Africa, Indonesia, Pakistan, and the non-Soviet Block countries of Asia and the Middle East. In its wake, food production in most countries either doubled or tripled, leading to some rather unpleasant outcomes. Diversified regional strains of wheat, rice, and corn were replaced by a limited number of man-made hybrids, small land owners were displaced by conglomerate and international food producers, native populations and rural dwellers were displaced off their land and pushed into the cities as a form of cheap manual labor, and the worldwide population grew by an astounding four billion people.

At first, it seems perplexing why the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations would be so interested in agriculture. Having gone way beyond their initial humanitarian goal of providing sufficient food supplies to stave off future famines, their efforts appear to have resulted in more food, more people, and more hunger. It ends up that while many

famines gain their initial impetus from natural disasters such as floods, droughts, and pestilence, more often than not they are perpetuated and brought to fruition by man-made factors such as poor land management, political instability, economic disparities, and intra-/inter-national hostilities. The Irish Potato Famine of 1845 to 1849 which claimed the lives of over one million people serves as a perfect example.

While there was a potato blight which destroyed much of the crop in Ireland during the mid to late 1840's, there was actually an overabundance of food being produced within its borders at that time. Unfortunately, two man-made factors came together in creating such massive starvation. The first was the Property Act of the 19th century British Penal Laws which required that Irish Catholic land owners pay rent on their farms to British overlords and that they also divide their estates equally amongst their heirs rather than passing the whole estate onto a single offspring. This meant that over successive generations, large Irish land holdings were successively divided into smaller and smaller portions which by the early 1800's left most plots too small to produce anything sufficient enough to stave off starvation other than potatoes. Many Irish families were unable to support themselves even on this meager crop and were subsequently forced from their tenant property by the British when their unpaid rents came due. This, in turn, led to the second factor which involved the employment of increasingly available and extremely inexpensive Irish laborers to work on the ever growing British plantations. There these men and women who once had farms of their own were put to task producing bountiful crops which were then shipped off to England. Given this combination of factors, it was only natural that when the potato blight hit, millions of Irish would die due to their diet being restricted to a single destitute crop while the vast majority of their homeland's livestock and agriculture products were being sent away to feed the English. The blight itself would not have caused such devastation if the local native farmers had been able to retain larger plots of land on which to grow a more diverse dietary base, or if the occupying army had allowed sufficient foods to remain within the country for local consumption.

Other recent examples of man-made famines include the Mount Lebanon Famine of 1914 (hundreds of thousands dead), the Russian Famine of 1921 (five million dead), the Ukrainian Holodomor Famine of 1933 (up to ten million dead), the Bengal Famine of 1943 (over five million dead), the Chinese Great Leap Forward Famine of 1959 (up to forty million dead), the Sahel Famine of 1968 (one million dead), the Bangladesh Famine of 1974 (over one million dead), the Ethiopian Famine of 1984 (up to seven million dead), and the North Korean Famine of 1997 (up to three million dead). Recognizing the widespread impact of such devastating starvation, it is easy to see why the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations would become involved in the cause of world hunger. But even with the increased agricultural yields of the Green Revolution, famines were not wiped out due to the fact that food availability is all too often secondary to human behavior in determining whether or not a famine will occur. Given that the first written record from such an event dates back to the Egyptian Famine, circa 3500 BC, and the causal nature between such things as hostile human behavior and famine were well known even by that time, the fact that a mere increase in food production would not resolve world hunger could not have been lost on these two great foundations. So, there must have been another reason for embarking upon the Green Revolution crusade as achievement of famine relief was not

possible solely by improved farming. The answer can be found in the mutual cornerstone which anchors the fortunes from which the Ford and Rockefeller foundations were spawned: oil.

Petroleum, or crude oil as it is known, comes from the ground in varying compositions as either a black, brown, or green liquid. A complex mix of hydrocarbons combined with a variety of other ingredients, it is often classified as either 'sweet' or 'sour' based upon whether it has a low or high sulfur content, respectfully. Once attained through a variety of drilling and extraction methods, it can be refined into many different products which collectively are known as petrochemicals. These include such things as fuels (gasoline, kerosene, butane, propane, methane, diesel, etc.), plastics of all shapes and sizes, synthetic fibers (polyesters, nylons, acrylics, Spandex, etc.), asphalts and tars, commercial petrochemicals (ethylene, propylene, butadiene, benzene, toluene, ortho-xylenes, para-xylenes, etc.) and other innumerable byproducts (ethylene glycol engine coolants, synthetic rubbers, acetone, epoxy resins, detergents, etc.). In addition to these, another class of chemicals can be refined from petroleum. Known as agrochemicals, they include both pesticides and fertilizers. It was this class of petrochemicals which made the Green Revolution possible and the Seven Sisters wealthier than they could have ever imagined.

The problem with man-made high yield grain species is that they are less durable than naturally occurring seed stocks. As hybrids, they are more susceptible to infestations and require higher levels of nitrogen than are commonly found in native soils. So, if they are to outperform their indigenous competitors, then the large scale use of pesticides and fertilizers is mandatory. Luckily, these agrochemicals can be readily synthesized from petroleum products. The Haber-Bosch Process developed in the early 1900's by two German chemists, Fritz Haber and Carl Bosch, can use the petrochemical naphtha to transform naturally occurring atmospheric nitrogen into liquid ammonia that can then be directly applied to soil as a fertilizer. Meanwhile, petrochemicals such as benzene, xylene, and propylene are important reagents in the synthesis of pesticides including insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides. In combination with the hybrid seeds these petroleum based agrochemicals guaranteed that the Green Revolution would be a success, leading to a dramatic rise in global population. This procreative boom raised worldwide head counts from around just over one and a half billion people in 1900 to six and a half billion in 2007. The vast majority of this increase occurred after 1950 when the Green Revolution kicked into high gear.

While petrochemicals did provide the agrochemicals necessary for the Green Revolution to blossom, they did not solve the problem of famine, with well over fifty million people having starved to death worldwide from man-made and natural causes since 1950. By comparison, that number is fairly near the sixty-two million people who died in World War Two. In the end, petroleum products could fuel both automobiles and population booms, but they could not solve the relational problems between individuals and nations which germinate famines. However, this was of little concern to the oil and auto industries since their products were in ever increasing demand as the Green Revolution rocketed along. In reality, their charitable foundations weren't growing more food for people to consume, they were growing more people to consume their products: fuels, plastics, synthetic fibers, asphalts, tars, commercial petrochemicals, and automobiles. And so the humanitarian-draped, agri-expansion scheme of the mid 1900's became

an unstoppable green machine which quadrupled the consumer base for both big oil and the auto industry. The problem is, what happens when the oil runs out?

On a geological time scale, the petroleum based Green Revolution has caused the human population to increase at an exponential rate during the past one hundred years. In contrast, it took nearly the entire expanse of human evolution right up until the early 1800's to reach the first billion mark. It took another one hundred years to increase that figure by a little over fifty percent in 1900. But after Spindletop, that number more than quadrupled to six and a half billion. If the entire seven million years since our ancestors' genetic line split off from the great apes were condensed into a one year time frame, then the rise in population from Spindletop until today would have taken place in the final eight minutes. The power of oil is undeniable, yet, in its absence, what would occur?

Today we eat, drink, and literally live in and by petroleum products. The food we consume is grown using petrochemical fertilizers while being protected by petroleum based insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides. It is cultivated, harvested, and transported to market using vehicles that burn petroleum fuel oils while riding around on tires made from petroleum based synthetic rubber. The majority of roads that these synthetic rubber tires roll on are paved with petrochemical asphalts and tars, and the food is packaged and stored in liners, wrappers, storage bags, and boxes that are made from petroleum based plastics. Similar plastic bags are used to package individual food purchases in the supermarket, and they are driven home in a car or bus whose engine parts (excluding the engine block and transmission), body panels, and passenger compartment are also largely made from petrochemical plastics. In our homes, the casings on many large and small appliances including televisions, telephones, stereos, clocks, kitchen counter-top accessories, computers, printers, and faxes are made from plastics as are most of the clothing in our closets including the shoes. The counter tops themselves in both our kitchens and bathrooms are usually plastics as are our toothbrushes, razors (minus the blades), toilet seats, tubs and showers. Most kitchen utensils including knives, forks, spoons, plates, and cups are commonly made from plastics as are the foam filling and quilted outer linings of the mattresses we sleep on. Many of the fillers used in the foods we eat and the pills we take are actually micro-crystalline plastics which have no nutritional value, but are considered safe for consumption. Anyone born in a hospital during the past thirty years had plastics used throughout their entire birthing process, from the syringe that gave their mother an epidural injection, right down to the identifying band which was placed around their tiny wrist. When we die, our corpses will be stuffed inside body bags constructed from petrochemicals, and to commemorate the anniversaries of our deaths, long-lasting plastic flowers will be placed upon our graves. So, without oil, what would we do?

There is nothing on this planet that is a suitable replacement for oil. Nuclear power may be able to supply oodles of energy, but if we tried to substitute all other petrochemicals with depleted uranium - one of the main byproducts from nuclear energy production - then we might as well go directly from birth to body bag and skip everything else in between. Coal is the most widely distributed fossil-fuel around the planet, and it is the number one energy source for worldwide electricity production. But if green-house gases are a problem now, just imagine how bad air pollution will become with coal-powered eighteen wheelers driving up and down our highways. The razzle-dazzle

duo of solar and wind power, though definite feel-good sources of energy, are woefully insufficient substitutes for petroleum as it is doubtful anyone would relish driving a solar powered car home on a rainy day or taking a cross-country flight on a wind powered airplane. As for hydrogen powered fuel cells, think about the *Hindenburg* Zeppelin tragedy ("Oh, the humanity" - Herbert Morrison, 1937) and it is doubtful you would want that parked in your garage. It ends up that we are not only addicted to oil, but that we are sailing on a ship that may well run out of gas.

Peak Oil, the concept of world wide oil production increasing, peaking, and then declining, is based upon the 1956 work of American geophysicist Marion King Hubbert. Globally, Peak Oil is expected to occur for both petroleum and natural gas by the year 2025 with worldwide supplies steadily declining thereafter. As the volume of oil reserves continue to fall, the demand for oil will continue to rise, further enhancing its economical, political, and strategical value. Our planet's population is like an overinflated balloon, one made entirely from petrochemical plastics, and as the petrochemicals disappear, so too will the foundation upon which our lives are built and sustained. When the black gold begins to run out and there is not enough to go around, supplies of black blood will begin to run dry. Of the roughly five billion population increase since Spindletop, many if not most will have to go.

When the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, it did so for good reasons. In terms of national output, the U.S. had already passed its own Peak Oil production point in 1971 and its peak natural gas production in 1974. In addition, in 2003 the U.S. reached the half way point toward complete depletion of its known oil reserves. Venezuela, one of the United States' chief sources of petroleum, is in a similar situation with its Peak Oil having occurred in 1970 while its halfway point to depletion was also reached in 2003. Saudi Arabia, the nation most commonly quoted as being the number one producer of petroleum in the world, is expected to reach its Peak Oil in 2006 with a rapid decline to mid-depletion by 2010. By invading Iraq for the second time, the United States managed to take complete control of the Iraqi reserves, and by 2005 the combined outputs from America's national and occupational oil wells outpaced that of Saudi Arabia. This officially made the U.S. the number one producer of oil in the world and effectively castrated OPEC from ever imposing another oil crisis upon the United States. While this may simply be a matter of moving to higher levels on a sinking ship, the rest of the world is undeniably feeling the pressure of being constrained below decks. As the United States postures under the banners of democracy and world globalization, it is, in effect, positioning itself for a not too distant survival of the fittest. In this struggle, the main challenger comes not from the Arab nations, but from the Far East.

China, America's number one competitor for world oil supplies, is growing at an astounding rate. Meanwhile, roughly three quarters of the world's known oil reserves are in the Middle East. Of that, one third is located in Saudi Arabia with Iran having around half that much and Iraq having slightly less than half. Between them, these three countries represent about fifty percent of the oil on this planet. Given its close ties to the Saudi's and its complete ownership of Iraq, the United States has governing access to almost forty percent of global petroleum supplies (not including Iran). Adding Canadian, Venezuelan, and America's own reserves to the list means that roughly five percent of the world's population is in control of sixty percent of the planet's petroleum. China, on the other hand, with

approximately twenty percent of the planet's inhabitants, possesses less than two percent of the world's oil within its borders. So, at the same time that it is being superficially Walmartized into an oriental version of the world's leading superpower, Beijing continues to underwrite the American national debt in the hope that it will be granted sufficient access to the black blood it needs to satisfy its own petroleum addiction. The paying of tribute in precious gems, livestock, and grains, once the basis of the Goryeo-Khitans War in 1018, has now been transformed into the art of underwriting a faltering empire's economy through inexpensive merchandise and secured notes. Yet, when Peak Oil arrives globally and push comes to shove in 2025, who will be left standing?

If it chose to, with a little belt tightening and given continued access to its own and Canadian reserves, the U.S. could walk away from globalization and still have enough oil for approximately one hundred years. Though this might be sufficient time to find a reasonable and economical substitute for petroleum, it is unlikely that the rest of the world would stop growing just because the United States decided to close its doors. While American heroin addicts continue to get high on 'China White', Beijing will undoubtedly continue to feed the black-blood monkey on its back. Combined with political instabilities in the Middle East, the U.S. may one day in the not too distant future have no choice but to abandon that region, along with all the power that lays beneath its sands. With a more than one-billion-population daily habit to feed, China will surely rush into any void left by America's retreating wake. But will Washington allow Beijing to have what it can not?

From the earliest recorded wars through the American Civil War, two world wars, and beyond, retreating armies have often employed a scorched-earth policy so as to deprive their adversaries of benefitting from resources that must be left behind. If political or economic concerns were to shift unfavorably against the United States' presence in the Middle East, complete abandonment of that region might occur resulting in America losing access to much of the world's known oil reserves. Under these circumstances, it is unlikely that United States Armed Forces would institute a literal scorched-earth policy as global reaction to such behavior might lead to an all out third world war. However, like all dynasties, even in this situation it would be in America's own national self-interests to do everything possible to retain its supremacy in and over the world. Above all else, this would mean preventing the Chinese from gaining control of Middle East oil supplies, for if that were to happen, China would no longer need to underwrite America's national debt and the U.S. would become bankrupt and the number two power in the world all at the same time. If such a challenge were to arise, would the CIA just sit back and let the Chinese have unbridled possession of all that petroleum and the power it represents? Given their history of covert operations, this too is unlikely, though a clandestine 'poisoned well' approach might be the preferred alternative to scorched-earth.

Regardless of who gains or who keeps control of the Middle East, far more serious questions will arise as we pass the year 2025 and global reserves start their descent toward zero. Just like the technology stock market in 2000 and the U.S. housing market the following decade, when oil runs out the world's population bubble will surely burst. However, unlike the disappearance of investment assets and real estate holdings, vanishing petroleum will result in the loss of billions of lives. Without the petrochemicals to fertilize and pesticide the food we need, and without the

synthetic rubbers for tires needed to transport that food to market on our petro-synthetic asphalt and tar roads, and without the plastics to store and serve this food, and without the synthetic fibers we use to make our very clothes, and without the millions of other petroleum based products in our lives that we have come to depend on for our very existence, how long will it be before the 'Greatest Famine On Earth' occurs? Too Malthusian for some to consider, we continue sailing blindly on as the icebergs approach.

On the other side of the coin, there are those who claim without any degree of certainty that fossil fuels - petroleum and natural gas - are constantly being regenerated and renewed below the Earth's crust, leaving an endless supply at our disposal. They assert that as older oil fields dry up, newer ones will be discovered to meet our ever growing demands and needs. Given the declining discovery rate for new fields large enough to replace those that have been, or are about to be depleted, their contention is doubtful. But even if they are correct, would this be good news? The burning of fossil fuels is a major contributory factor to ongoing global warming. An unlimited petroleum resource would lead to further escalation of the Green Revolution with resultant environmental disasters in the not too distant future epitomized by events like the melting of our polar ice caps. And there are bacteria living in the Antarctic subglacial lakes which, for the past twenty-five million years, have not been in contact with any other life forms beyond the confines of their frozen prisons. Their reintroduction into the Earth's global biological milieu will have catastrophic repercussions if any of them turn out to be immunologically transparent pathogens.

Either way, instability in the planet's global petroleum reserves will negatively impact the inhabitants of this planet. Too much oil will cause the Green Revolution to spiral out of control leading to an environmental meltdown with ensuing floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes occurring on unprecedented scales. Too little oil will lead to an implosion of the Green Revolution with declining petroleum products heralding the 'Greatest Famine On Earth.' Meanwhile, nuclear and fuel cell energy can only provide stop gap measures in impeding the Green Revolution's advance or retreat, and the feel-good substitutes of solar and wind power are nothing more than paper tigers in the shadow of the mighty Black King. In the final analysis, to create more oil consumers the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations opened a Pandora's Box of petrochemically dependent high yield grains.

Sadly, the real problem is neither global warming nor dwindling petroleum reserves. It is overpopulation. There are just too many people on this planet needing a substance which either in abundance or scarcity will lead to disastrous results. In the mid 1900's the payoff for the Fords and Rockefellers of the world came about by turning the consumer into the product: make more people and you will sell more cars and oil. In the early twenty-first century the backlash is a consumer producing monster which they can no longer control. Unwilling to voluntarily restrain our rising numbers, we are caught in a never ending cycle of consuming more oil to make more people while at the same time making more people to consume more oil. Of the two, the limiting factor in this escalating spiral will either be the exhaustion of oil reserves leading to global starvation or the overproduction of consumer based pollution leading to an environmental collapse. Yet, there is no world wide effort to reduce our increasing headcounts, and the only modern country to ever attempt such large scale population control - China - has been harshly criticized for its efforts.

Even though overall growth rate trends appear to be slowing, by Peak Oil in 2025 our global headcount will reach the eight billion mark. Amongst this future multitude, it is questionable if many will be cognizant of the dilemma they are facing, just as few people today are aware that we have already fought three Korean-American wars.

* * * *

The First Korean-American War, or Sinmiyangyo, occurred in 1871 when the United States Navy sent five war ships up the Han River in response to the General Sherman's failed invasion of Korea in 1866 and the French missionaries failed crusade into Korea which followed that same year. In the aftermath of the First Korean-American War, the Hermit Kingdom opened its doors to international trade, signed a peace treaty with the United States, and in 1905 was sacrificed by Washington to the Japanese in exchange for colonization rights to the Phillippines. After enduring forty years of brutalization, torture, and murder by Japan, Korea was liberated at the end of World War Two and then divided by U.S. and Russian forces in 1945 under the promise of reunification. However, this division polarized the nation into a communist-imperialist struggle that gave way to the Second Korean-American War in 1950 which American historians, in an attempt to erase Sinmiyangyo from our memories, have mislabeled as being the First Korean-American War. During this second conflict, North Korean and Chinese forces battled the U.S. military, producing a scorched-earth outcome for eighty to ninety percent of the towns and cities on both sides of the 38th parallel divide. After the armistice of 1953 which only muzzled hostilities, small skirmishes continued to broil between the warring factions, reaching a peak between 1966 and 1970, the period of the Third Korean-American War (which western historians have purposefully and mistakenly labeled as the Second Korean-American War). While technically a series of low-level armed clashes occurring on or near the DMZ, the most famous incident of this third conflict played out in the Sea of Japan aboard the USS Pueblo.

During its history, three commissioned vessels in the United States Navy have borne the moniker USS Pueblo. Their story begins with the first ship to be called the USS Colorado which participated in the blockade of Mobile Bay, Alabama, and the capture of Fort Fisher near Wilmington, North Carolina, during the American Civil War. A steam powered vessel launched in 1856, it later went on to become the flagship amongst the five U.S. Navy vessels that sailed up the Han River during the First Korean-American War of Sinmiyangyo in 1871. After twenty years of service, the first USS Colorado was decommissioned in 1876 and sold nine years after in 1885.

The second USS Colorado, launched in 1903, was an armored cruiser which would perform multiple duties in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters during World War One, before its final decommission in 1927 and its subsequent scrapping in 1930. In 1916, in the middle of its career, it was renamed as the first USS Pueblo, so that a newer and larger battleship could become the third vessel to bear the Colorado name.

After the decommissioning of the first USS Pueblo (previously the second USS Colorado) in 1927, the second USS Pueblo was launched in 1944. A Tacoma class frigate, it served for two years as a west coast weather ship until

its decommission in 1946. Sold in 1948 to the Dominican Republic, it was subsequently renamed the *Presidente Troncoso* and then the *Gregorio Luperon* before being scrapped in 1982.

The third ship to become a USS Pueblo was also launched in 1944 as the U.S. Army cargo ship FS-344. In 1966 it was transferred to the U.S. Navy where it was then renamed as the third USS Pueblo. Finally commissioned in 1967, the ship also received the subtitle AGER-2 as it became the second military vessel assigned to Auxiliary General Environmental Research, a spy ship program run jointly by the United States Navy and the National Security Agency (NSA). In January of 1968, this USS Pueblo was on assignment in the Sea of Japan, due east of the North Korean port of Wonsan. As part of Operation Clickbeetle, the captain and crew were charged with spying on Soviet Naval maneuvers and North Korean electronic signal activity. To bolster their opportunity for success, U.S. authorities granted the vessel permission to penetrate within one nautical mile of the communists' shoreline, even though international treaties specified a twelve nautical mile limit. On the 23rd of that month, amidst heightened tensions from preceding skirmishes of the Third Korean-American War (1966 to 1970), Pyongyang dispatched four torpedo boats, two sub chasers, and two MiG-21 jet fighters to commandeer the U.S. spy ship. Though Washington vehemently complained that their vessel was boarded outside the already violated twelve nautical mile international limit, the North Koreans took little notice as they had long declared a fifty nautical mile territorial boundary from their shores. During the chase which preceded their capture, the crew of the USS Pueblo unsuccessfully focused their efforts on destroying the massive volumes of data they held on board, even to the point of not returning gun fire that had killed one American sailor: Seaman Duane Hodges. Ultimately, the vessel and crew were finally seized and taken to the port of Wonsan. From there the naval prisoners were transferred to two different POW camps, spending the next eleven months being subjected to what U.S. President George W. Bush would later described in September of 2006 as valid, aggressive, alternative, interrogation techniques (i.e. - torture). The eighty-two surviving crew members, along with the body of Seaman Hodges, were returned to American authorities over the DMZ on December 23rd, 1968. Their ship, however, suffered a different fate.

Only two U.S. warships have been captured by enemy forces, since the seizure and subsequent burning of the frigate Philadelphia in the Tripoli War of 1801. The first of these was the USS Wake which was launched in 1927 and commandeered by the Japanese in the port of Shanghai shortly after their attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 (after the Japanese were defeated in 1945, the Chinese were allowed to assume possession of the Wake). The second and only other capture of an American war ship since Tripoli occurred during the Sea of Japan incident of January 23rd, 1968. Still held by North Korea to this date, in October of 1999 the USS Pueblo was towed from the eastern port of Wonsan to the western port of Nampo with Washington making no attempts to recapture it, even though the vessel and its escorts passed through international waters. Shortly, thereafter, the American war ship was moved up the Taedong River to the port of Pyongyang where it currently lies at dock, still a commissioned vessel in the United States Navy. The mooring site also includes a display of some items from the ill fated USS General Sherman which had previously sailed up the Taedong in 1866.

Today the USS Pueblo is a popular attraction for North Korean enthusiasts. Guided tours take visitors throughout the entirety of the ship including inspections of the secret spy compartments which housed the now partially disassembled encrypting and special communication devices. The tours' highlights include a photo-opt where visitors can have their picture taken while they man the ship's forward mounted Browning 50 caliber machine gun, and the opportunity to meet one of the North Korean officers who originally captured the vessel. Though a prized possession of the country's public and government alike, many efforts have been made by the North to repatriate the USS Pueblo. In 2000 during Secretary of State Madeline Albright's official visit to the communist nation, Pyongyang reportedly offered to give the ship back as part of a package for establishing normal diplomatic relations with the United States. Later, in August of 2004 during talks with the U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, Donald Gregg, North Korean diplomats once again suggested returning the aging vessel in exchange for a visit to Pyongyang by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. On both occasions, American authorities refused to cooperate with the North, which means that vacationers to Pyongyang can still book tours on the only actively commissioned United States Navy vessel currently in captivity: the USS Pueblo.

* * * *

On July 20th, 2009, some six months before the President of the United States would be transformed into a dictator, it was nearing midnight as the aging Soviet made Ilyushin IL-62M jetliner came to a stop on the tarmac in an isolated section at Pyongyang International Airport. The IL-62M's design was first conceived in 1960, first flown in 1963, and first entered into commercial service in 1967 with Aeroflot, the State owned Russian airline. While somewhat similar in characteristics to the Boeing 707, the IL-62M has rather unique features. With the capacity to hold up to one hundred and ninety-eight passengers and thirteen crew members, it is still considered by some to be the most impressive Soviet produced commercial airliner ever made. Being slightly taller than it is wider, it has swept back wings that are mounted far behind the midpoint of its one hundred and seventy-four foot long fuselage. In addition, all four Soloviev D-30 two shaft, low-bypass, turbofan engines are mounted in pairs at the far rear with two on either side of its fuselage beneath the stubby T-tail. With its single wheel for steering based far forward and a matched pair of four-wheeled landing gears positioned under the wings, the IL-62M's center of gravity is actually located behind its wheel base nearer its engines. To compensate for this imbalance, it is suspected to have a water-filled ballast tank in the front of the fuselage which can be adjusted to varying load distributions so as to keep the plane from tipping up and 'sitting' on its rear-end during high headwinds while aloft or on the ground. Unlike its high-tech British counterpart, the VC-10, which many say was the basis for the IL-62 class design, the Russian ship is decidedly low-tech, employing cables and pulleys rather than hydraulics and electric motors to control the plane's flight. Yet, even at its advanced age the IL-62M remains one of the flagships for the North's State owned Air Koryo Korean Airways.

As the aircraft taxied to a stop, two men, one standing and one in a wheelchair, waited next to their similarly aged sedan some thirty feet from the ramp of steps that had been wheeled forward to the parked plane. Air Koryo had few modern passenger jets, and though the country's Dear Leader Kim Jung Il personally owned a world renowned collection of sport cars, Pyongyang's diplomatic car pool had not received a single new vehicle in over ten years. When the airplane's door opened and its sole passenger made his way to the bottom of the steps, the old man in the wheelchair brushed away his young assistant, staggered to his feet, and then hobbled forward to greet the traveler. Stopping a foot from each other, the primogenitor slowly reached into his coat pocket and withdrew a small, worn, wooden club. Waving it fiercely, though somewhat shakily at the new arrival, he threatened in an unsteady voice, "Will you come peacefully, or must I once again beat you into submission?" Both being somewhat bemused by this statement, they stood for a few moments just staring at one another until they finally leaned forward to embrace warmly. World events were approaching the precipice, Iran had been dissected, the Palestinians were gone, the Balhae had sunk in the Eastern Pacific, and for the first time in thirty-three years Seok Dae Jo had returned home.

On their drive back from the airport, the eighty-two year old Kang Min Do explained much. Having been one of the four state agents who had taken Seok Dae Jo from the Anju orphanage back in 1958, he had never again seen the boy since that day until now. Unsure that they would recognize one another, Mr. Kang was greatly pleased when after his mock threat there was a knowing glint in his guest's eyes. Being a close friend with one the secret library's masters who raised the prodigy child, he was able to follow the boy's early career through their mutual acquaintance. As his own career progressed and he rose within the state's security ranks, Mr. Kang gained new connections in the diplomatic core who kept him abreast of the translator's ongoing progress in New York. However, after Seok Dae Jo's ascension to a national treasure Mr. Kang had heard no more until last month when he unexpectedly learned through unofficial channels that the once funny sounding kid was coming home. Immediately and quietly he made requests to meet the venerable Mr. Seok, and to his great surprise and pleasure, he was ordered to be both the official greeter and host for the duration of their honored guest's stay. In fact, he was one of the few North Koreans who would ever know that Seok Dae Jo was back home. Shortly after the famous 1988 Beijing talks an official statement of mourning had been released concerning the translator's death in a car accident upon his return to New York City. Although a lie, it was seen as a necessary tactic to ensure that his growing popularity abroad and at home were isolated overseas. His was merely a supportive role, and it was both inappropriate and undesirable in the State's eye for such a minor figure to draw such national attention. Therefore, while he was still quite useful in New York, a conscious and paranoid decision was made to erase his memory in the North. While many in the diplomatic and security cores knew otherwise, they also realized that an official pronouncement of death was just as good as the real thing. And so, until recently, Mr. Kang, like everyone else, had relented in his efforts to monitor Seok Dae Jo's life, even though he was most certainly still alive.

"You did not know about this, did you?" inquired Mr. Kang as they drove away from the airport.

"No, I did not," replied Seok Dae Jo.

"Well, I am sorry," apologized Mr. Kang, "it must be quite a shock."

"Not really," admitted Seok Dae Jo. "I left everything here when I went to New York. I never did expect to come back."

"Well, you'll have much to keep you busy while you are here, I have been assured," continued Mr. Kang, "and I have prepared several rooms in my home for your use."

"I am most grateful," acknowledged Seok Dae Jo. "It seems so strange to be here and, yet, it was so very pleasing to see you again this evening. At first, I wasn't sure who you were. But when you took out your club, I immediately knew it was you."

"But not by name?" asked Mr. Kang.

"No, I never knew any of your names," clarified Seok Dae Jo. "Everything happened so quickly that day in Anju, and having been locked in the closet all weekend, I was barely conscious when you found me. Initially, perhaps, I recognized your club more than you tonight. After all, it was the last thing I ever saw before leaving Anju for good."

The two men shared a good chuckle over this before Mr. Kang continued. "There is much you must learn while you are here, but most of it will be brought to you at my home. Every effort is being made to keep your presence a secret as technically you are no longer alive. Other than our little official greeting this evening, I am afraid that is all the fanfare you will get while you are here."

"That is fine," said Seok Dae Jo. "It is just good to be back. Will I be allowed to travel outside of the capital?"

"To a very limited degree," confirmed Mr. Kang. "If there is anything in particular around Pyongyang you'd like to see, I will make arrangements for us to go there in the evenings after closing times or when no one else is around. I have been assured by higher ups in the Politburo that every effort will be made to accommodate your wishes as long as a veil of secrecy can be maintained."

"I understand, but just one other thing, if I may?" asked Seok Dae Jo.

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Kang.

"Will I be allowed to visit my son's grave?" Seok Dae Jo inquired. Though he had only seen the child once shortly after his birth, he had always received constant updates on the boy's progress. Born immediately after the capture of the USS Pueblo in 1968, an omen of his future career, he had a happy childhood being raised by his grandparents. A good student and athletic youth, he went on to enroll in the North Korean Navy where he quickly rose through the ranks to become captain of a sub chaser. Even though decedents of heroic families were treated with deference, his promotions were, for the most part, based upon his own merits. Unfortunately, in 1995 Seok Dae Jo had received an official letter which explained how during preparations for a training exercise in the Yellow Sea, a depth charge had unexpectedly gone off while being loaded onboard ship, instantly killing his son and three other sailors. Consistent with their relationship, this news was only upsetting to the degree that it made him realize how little loss he actually felt, even for his only offspring. However, he did vow, if given the chance, that he would one day make a pilgrimage to his son's grave site to pay his proper respects.

"I am afraid that may be most difficult," stated Mr. Kang, "as he was buried alongside his grandparents on the east coast. We have some time, though. You will be here a while. Let me see what I can work out." Somewhat comforted, Seok Dae Jo smiled at his old companion as they drove the remainder of the way to Mr. Kang's home in silence. Having just arrived after twenty-eight hours of travel involving a commercial flight from New York to Paris, then another from Paris to Moscow, and finally the private Air Koryo Ilyushin IL-62M from Moscow to Pyongyang, he fell asleep shortly after they reached their destination.

The next day when he awoke, their work began in earnest. After a brief morning meal, Seok Dae Jo was inaugurated into a small group of elite individuals who actually knew what was about to take place. While most people involved, including those soon to man the doomed ships, only knew what was necessary in order to perform their part of the overall mission, Seok Dae Jo was told everything. In a series of planned steps designed to make him fluent and competent in all aspects of this operation, he was educated, tested, then re-educated, retested, and educated some more. During the next six months he became somewhat of an expert on subjects such as nuclear weapon design, payload tonnage and explosive yield, naval architecture for mid-sized cargo ships, tunnel construction and maintenance, aerial satellite photography, geological movement of continents, the Antarctic ice cap, subglacial lakes, viral interlacing, petrolphages, and the history of the Middle East conflict. Seven days per week, after breakfast he would spend his mornings reading volumes of briefing materials, followed by a short break for lunch, with the remainder of the afternoon being devoted to interrogations by Mr. Kang over what he had learned earlier that day. In the evenings, the two of them would venture out, sometimes to inspect military or industrial sites relevant to that day's lesson, sometimes for conferences with experts who could further clarify any outstanding questions, and sometimes just to do a bit of nocturnal sight seeing. The first such recreational outing was made in August of 2009 to tour the USS Pueblo.

A major sight seeing destination for visitors to Pyongyang, Mr. Kang had made special arrangements for the two of them to visit the ship after hours. Together they toured it from bow to stern, inspecting each passageway, every room, and all that remained of a vessel that had sailed into history as the focal point of the Third Korean-American War. Now it was a rusting hulk constantly in need of repair, constantly being scraped and painted, constantly looking for a way home. Given Mr. Kang's advanced age and with Seok Dae Jo's continual assistance, it took the two men about an hour to make what otherwise would have been a twenty to thirty minute circuit through the ship. Afterwards, both somewhat exhausted, they ended up sitting on the forward deck to watch the stars on a clear summer night in padded folding chairs that the chauffeur had retrieved from their car. Reaching into a satchel he had brought along for the field trip, Mr. Kang produced two small glasses and a bottle of munbaeju, a traditional Korean liquor that is aged to eighty proof with the sweet fragrance of pear flowers and the kick of pure vodka.

"You know, the South Koreans actually claim munbaeju as their intellectual property when, in fact, its recipe originated right here in our very own Pyongyang province." explained Mr. Kang, as he pored two glasses. "It is sad how far we have come and how much we have lost."

"Yes," agreed Seok Dae Jo, "we can only hope that things will one day be better."

"How true," Mr. Kang said, handing a glass to his companion. "A toast to a reunified Korea." At that, they clinked their glasses and consumed the first of many rounds. For a while they sat in silence, each in his own thoughts, each given over to the warmth of the munbaeju, its sweet stickiness yielding to an energized feeling that permeated every crevice of their bodies. After a few minutes, the translator broke the quiet night.

"As long as she swims, I will cook," Seok Dae Jo half whispered to himself.

"What?" asked Mr. Kang.

"Oh, excuse me," said Seok Dae Jo, "I did not mean to interrupt your thoughts."

"That's quite alright, but what was it that you said?" Mr. Kang wanted to know.

"I was quoting from a Joseph Conrad novel written in 1897," answered Seok Dae Jo, "titled *Nigger of the Narcissus*. It's about a British merchant vessel which runs into a terrible storm while sailing around the southern tip of Africa. During the height of the gale, the ship *Narcissus* is cast over onto its side, but it does not completely capsize. It just lays there, its top deck half-in and half-out of the water. The sailors, all sure that they will perish, tie themselves onto the exposed side rails while the captain, a Mr. Allistoun, mans the ship's wheel through the night by lashing himself to it. But there is a freezing rain that pounds down upon them, and either the sea or exposure are likely to take most of them before morning. To prevent this, the cook scrambles over the high side of the ship, squeezes his way into a port hole, and somehow manages to light a fire in his disheveled topsy-turvy galley. Then, he brews up some hot coffee which sustains the crew throughout the evening storm. Before going off on this venture, the men warn him of the dangers, to which he bravely replies, 'As long as she swims, I will cook.' Somehow, I feel like that is us, now. The whole world has been turned on its side and is in danger of capsizing, but as long as there are those who are still willing to cook, then perhaps we may all yet swim to safety."

"How interesting," observed Mr. Kang. "Tell me, did the ship finally sink?"

"No," stated Seok Dae Jo. "In the morning they were able to hoist some sails on the exposed rigging which they then used to upright the ship by the storm's own wind. It's quite a period piece - one of my favorites actually. Most Americans, however, would find the title and language quite frightful today, even though their history is full of far worse than what happens in this book."

"Ah, yes, the Americans: always in our fears, never in our dreams," Mr. Kang expressed while quietly counting the stars to himself. "They are a troublesome lot. Tell me, what is their fascination with this God thing? It's everywhere for them, even on their money - 'In God we trust this', 'In God we trust that.' It's quite amusing really when you realize that they hardly trust one another."

"It is true," laughed Seok Dae Jo. "It is also very sad. In many ways they are such a smart people, quite enviable in that respect actually. And yet, they can be so misguided and hateful, especially when it comes to their religion. I once saw a movie called *Angel Heart* which had this character named Louis Cypher played by this famous American actor Robert Di Nero. Now, you have to know that when you say that character's name out loud, it sounds like Lucifer, so Di Nero is actually playing the devil incarnate. While the film's story is rather complicated, involving

Cypher hiring a seedy private investigator named Harry Angel - who I think in the movie was played by an actor named Micky Rourke - there is a great scene which takes place between Cypher and Angel while they are in a church. Here you have, figuratively speaking, the devil on one side and an angel on the other, and during their discussion which becomes a heated argument the angel starts to swear. This worries the devil very much, for he finds himself in a church with a swearing angel, a situation which he fears might provoke the wrath of God. To avoid this, Cypher quickly changes the subject by saying what I find to be one of the greatest lines ever uttered in a film. He states that there is just enough religion in the world to make people hate one another, but not enough to make them love one another. In my experience, I have found this to be very true."

"Religion can be quite poisonous," concurred Mr. Kang, "but I find their rhetoric particularly disturbing as much so, if not more so than the Islamic fundamentalists."

"The Americans have a particularly myopic cult in their society," Seok Dae Jo agreed in frustration, "comprised of right wing Christian extremists who have become fervently political in the past few decades. By infiltrating all levels of the U.S. government, they promote their limited radical agenda to the exclusion of all other points of view. Superficially, they express a strong desire for separation of religion and government, or as they call it 'Church and State,' and, yet, these fundamentalists use their political advantage to do just the opposite. The list of their transgressions seems endless. They try to teach religious dogma about creationism in schools instead of scientific facts. They try to get Christian theological icons displayed in public courtrooms as an intimidating reminder that their religious ancestors pushed the American Indians off that land. They try to take a social reform program like Affirmative Action and declare it a form of discrimination when, in fact, it was meant to heal the wounds of slavery, a barbarous practice that was originally deemed a justifiable form of human trade by their Christian Bible. They try to impose their agenda against abortions and birth control upon Americans who have different religious beliefs and people of other countries, even in the face of a world wide population epidemic. Then, most recently, they tried to change their constitution which is designed to grant rights so that for the first time in history it would deny rights to a single specific class of people that they do not like. In truth, these extremists are such a hate-filled group that if there were none, I believe Christian fundamentalists would have had to invent homosexuals, just to have someone to beat up on."

"Given how long you've lived over there," cited Mr. Kang as he pored more munbaeju into their empty glasses, "you do not seem to have a very favorable impression of them."

"Actually, I have a great love and respect for most of the individual American citizens that I have met," explained Seok Dae Jo, somewhat animated by the liquor. "But as the old saying goes, no one snowflake takes responsibility in an avalanche. The average American doesn't seem to realize the power that they have in their own political system. More than that, they don't know their own strength in their daily lives."

"How is that?" asked Mr. Kang, as they both paused momentarily to drink their next round.

"They are constantly voting," continued Seok Dae Jo, eagerly. "It seems every time you turn around there's

a vote for some local official or senator or ballot initiative going on somewhere in America. And then every four years, they put on this big show for about twelve months before selecting their next President. While all of this is important, it becomes a bit draining for the average citizen. They are so busy keeping up with their expenses and their kids' educations and holding their homes together that they don't have all that much time to be involved in the political process. That's why it takes a year or more just to wake them up before the Presidential vote. But in the meantime, they have totally forgotten how they vote most often: with their wallets. Every time they buy something, every time they spend money they are voting for a way of life that is putting the entire globe on a collision course with disaster. They complain about global warming, then they buy gas guzzling cars. They complain about child labor and then they buy cheap imports from far away countries where child labor is still the norm. They complain about their healthcare and then they smoke, eat fattening foods, and drink alcohol to excess. They complain about the problem of world wide hunger while they are the most obese nation on the planet. What they don't realize is that the way they spend their money is as important as who they vote for in their nation's political process."

"Sounds like too much of a good thing is not a good thing," said Mr Kang, decidedly. "If they have all this power, why can't they just change?"

"It's not that easy," said Seok Dae Jo in a fatigued tone. "These Christian fundamentalists are about to completely take over that country. They're trying to destroy their own middle class so as to further consolidate their country's riches amongst the few wealthy individuals who are loyal to their extremist plans. In the process, they keep their masses so terrorized by manipulating oil prices, increasing the cost of healthcare, and draining the coffers of public entitlements for needy citizens, including their military veterans. For a land of riches, the average person over there seems caught up in just trying to get by the best they can."

"So, these right wing extremists want to convert their three-tier society into a two-tier tyranny?" asked Mr. Kang.

"It seems so," confirmed Seok Dae Jo. "As an outsider, it is quite clear to me what is happening to their nation."

"But how do they intend to do this?" wondered Mr. Kang.

"By building a great wall between their country and Mexico," declared Seok Dae Jo.

"A wall?" questioned Mr. Kang.

"Not just any wall," answered Seok Dae Jo, "a great wall. One that will allow them to control the flow of human traffic across their border."

"But how will that destroy their middle class?" Mr. Kang inquired.

"In the overall scheme of things," explained Seok Dae Jo, "it takes a lot of poor people to make a rich person. Wealth, by definition, is the uneven distribution of resources, so that one person can only be wealthy if there is someone else who is relatively poor. Without inequity in the distribution of resources, then there is neither wealth nor poverty. So, if someone wants to be very wealthy, then they must find a way to deprive lots of other people from receiving a fair

share of the available goods and services. Wealthy people don't just exist in a vacuum. They literally ride on the backs of the poor people whom they employ to do their bidding. This is true of all rich people and even great dynasties, whether they be Chinese, European, Japanese, or American. It takes a lot of poor people to make a rich person. Originally, the United States got very rich on the backs of African slaves and imported Asian laborers. In the mid-1900's when that became harder to do, they began seeking out slave-like labor overseas by exporting their sweat shops to poor underdeveloped nations. Now, with the rest of the world revolting over their abusive imperialistic behavior, they have to find a new source of cheap labor to defile. That's where the Mexicans come in."

"How's that?" said Mr. Kang.

"Mexico is a very poor country," stated Seok Dae Jo, "whose citizens will literally risk their lives to cross a hostile, dangerous border seeking employment in the United States. The Americans understand this and that is why they are building this great wall between the two countries: not to keep them out, but to control the flow of Mexicans across the border. That way, when the ruling class feels threatened by any opposition from the middle class, they can open up that flow, like a spigot, and diminish the value of American labor by flooding their market with Mexicans who are willing to work for substandard wages. This will undermine the middle class economically and politically. After all, it's hard to be active in government when your house is being foreclosed and your family is about to become homeless. Slowly, in a series of well timed moves where they repeatedly open and then close that great wall, the very wealthy will use their political clout to beat down and meld the middle class into the lower class, turning a three-tiered society into only two."

"What will happen to the Mexicans, afterwards?" wondered Mr. Kang.

"Nothing. They will still be as poor as they are today," continued Seok Dae Jo, "only they will feel used and betrayed by the Americans much as we do."

"How strange," commented Mr. Kang, "that the greatest nation on this planet is so devious. It kind of reminds me of Adolf Hitler in a way. I always wondered if there was some point before he invaded Russia, before he started the concentration camps, and before he began eliminating indigenous populations where he could have sued for peace and lived in harmony with the world rather than in opposition to it. Perhaps if he had appreciated his earlier accomplishments and changed his rhetoric, he could have curtailed much of the suffering that was later imposed on his nation and the world. Instead, he became the most influential person of the twentieth century, and for all the wrong reasons. Imagine how different the world would have been if all those lives and all that energy had been saved and then used for doing good instead of evil. And now, the very people who worked so hard to defeat him have become the new conquerors, imposing their form of imperialism underneath a hypocritical banner filled with words like democracy, freedom, and globalization. Why can't they just stop and see the need to share with others instead of taking so much for themselves? How can they even claim to have a God when they behave in such a selfish and inconsiderate manner?"

"You know," reminisced Seok Dae Jo, "I once read about an American general who tried to justify the Second

World War by stating that it had given us inexpensive, mass produced ball point pens. How bizarre to think that it should take sixty-two million lives to do such a menial thing."

The two men sat quietly pondering this last statement as Mr. Kang pored yet another round of munbaeju which they quickly downed. Staring up at the night's magnificent display, he quietly wondered out loud, "Do you think that there are other forms of life in space which are more intelligent than us?"

"For the American's sake, I certainly hope so," said Seok Dae Jo.

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Kang.

"If this is the best there is," answered Seok Dae Jo, "if we really are the most intelligent beings in the universe, then their God is a real idiot."

Believing that the need for religion was really a reflection of one's inner self, Mr. Kang smiled warmly at his friend's statement, finally having obtained a deeper understanding about the Americans and their God. They continued talking for quite some time, until a few hours and several rounds later when the two men were driven home by their chauffeur to sleep it off.

Over the next few weeks, Seok Dae Jo's lessons intensified as Mr. Kang continued to add new information while constantly reviewing old material. Considerable time was spent dissecting the composition and structure of the volatile nuclear reactor core elements. The chemical properties of uranium, cadmium, vanadium, magnesium, graphite, tungsten, and titanium were memorized and discussed over and over again. There were lessons on the thermal property of the starter plates, the gyroscopic control of the ejection modules, the melting point of the parachute lines and casings, and the anticipated impact speeds at touchdown. Mr. Kang taught him all about the fuel mixtures in the missiles, the storage method for their transport down to Antarctica, and how the fake supplies would be loaded off the ships while the real cargo was being loaded on.

In mid October after three months of intensive study, Seok Dae Jo asked if they could visit the secret library at the Pyongyang Foreign Language College. Mr. Kang informed him that there had been many changes during the past decade since the great famine. But after some inquiries he was able to get permits for them to see what remained. Late one evening near the end of the month on a cold, drizzly autumn night, their chauffeur driven car pulled quietly up to a side entrance of what used to be the main building. As Mr. Kang ambled from the automobile with the help of Seok Dae Jo, he carefully removed a single worn key from his pocket which they used to open the door so as to enter the deserted building. Inside, changes were evident everywhere, even by the few dim, bare light bulbs which had been left on that night for their benefit. What had once been a bustling center of intellectual growth and development, previously occupied night and day by people of all ages and various nationalities, was now a series of empty corridors and abandoned rooms.

"They moved," explained Mr. Kang, "sometime in 2001. What, with the nation just coming out of the famine and all, the cost of maintaining this facility became overbearing. So, they went to a smaller, more manageable site on the other side of town." Silently, the two men walked slowly, arm in arm, down the large building's central hall, their

footsteps echoing all around them. Turning into the main library which was nothing more than a large, vacuous cavern, they noticed an old dusty sign still hanging over a side chamber to their right which read 'The Seok Reading Room.' Unhurriedly, they approached and then stopped in his namesake's doorway, only to find a small scale replica of the larger main room: emptiness. Faintly, Seok Dae Jo sensed the past liveliness of the space emanating from the dust drawn outlines of bookshelves and reading chairs which had once been pressed up against its walls. "This is depressing," said Mr. Kang. "Let's go downstairs."

Riding on a service elevator which Mr. Kang had been told would be left on for their use, they descended into the empty structure's five sub-basements. When they reached the third level, Mr. Kang pushed the stop button, so that they exited into what appeared to be a never ending series of concrete support pillars extending beyond the eye's reach in every direction. No lights were on down here, beside the dim bulb which hung loosely by its cord from the elevator's roof. Its slow back and forth swinging motion caused by the elevator's sudden, jerky stop made the pillars cast swaying shadows as if the structures were marching back and forth, coming to confront the intruders. Mr. Kang defensively reached into the ever present satchel that he brought on all their outings and quickly retrieved a flashlight. "Come," he said, "it's this way."

Knowing what his charge would be most interested in seeing, they moved with determination, edged along by the overlapping reports of their echoing foot steps while they followed the flashlight's illuminated ring as it glided unobstructed across the dust laden concrete floor. They passed row upon row of lonely pillars with nothing between them but empty space in what used to be a secret library filled with an endless maze constructed from thousands of bookshelves that were interspersed with a sprinkling of reading desks. Many were the times when the young prodigy had evaded the staff and his masters by keeping one or two steps ahead of them as they searched for him in vain amongst the labyrinth of printed works. Now, without any landmarks, Seok Dae Jo felt lost and confused walking through the invisible memories of books and bookshelves that were no longer there. But Mr. Kang knew exactly where they were going and they marched straight ahead out of the elevator until they came upon a green arrow that was freshly painted on the empty concrete floor. Following it's direction, they took an immediate left, their shuffling pace increasing to a slow hobble as their excitement grew with their destination's approach. And just when it seemed like they would never transverse the endless repetition of pillars and floor, pillars and floor, they finally came upon what they were looking for: the far end of the basement. There, to Seok Dae Jo's great dismay, they found the door leading to his old private quarters, broken and hanging awkwardly off its top hinge, the glass in its upper half long ago shattered and swept away. The evacuation had not been done gently.

Mr. Kang stood there patiently waiting as his companion contemplated the trays of uneaten food he used to leave stacked upon one another outside this very door. It was hard for him to image that a place which had once been his complete life, a place from which he had to be forcibly removed by punishments such as swimming or playing with spinning tops, a place where he had recovered after the death of his only spouse was now an empty shell devoid of everything he once knew and loved, save the residue of memories. Slowly, he reached down and withdrew the

flashlight from Mr. Kang's hand which the old man instinctively obeyed as a signal not to follow. Then, unescorted, Seok Dae Jo made his way into his former home.

It was hard to say what went through his mind as he walked through those three empty spaces. They were not large in size, perhaps only one hundred square feet each, and it was easy for Mr. Kang to follow his progress from the broken main doorway. The first room, his old study, was barren of any resemblance to its previous state, reduced to a configuration of cold concrete walls, a ceiling, and a floor. Through the side door to his right, Seok Dae Jo followed the flashlight's beam into the second room, his prior sleeping quarters, which turned out to be an exact replica of the first: barren. Finally, passing through another door in the far wall, he found the smaller bathroom with its shattered porcelain toilet and sink. In stealing away everything they could, someone had left behind fragments of their own anger. Feeling cold, hallow, and violated, Seok Dae Jo turned back into the bedroom to retrace his footsteps toward Mr. Kang when he suddenly spotted a torn scrap of paper lying on the floor. Kneeling down to pick it up, he held the worn shard beneath the light to reveal a single handwritten word still visible through the dirt of a thousand footsteps which had trampled over it. Clearly being his own script from a time so long ago, he continued to kneel almost in prayer as he whispered the sole survivor's message to himself: "why?"

When Seok Dae Jo, appearing dejected and mournful, finally returned to the main doorway, Mr. Kang reached once more into his satchel and retrieved a small, stubby red book. He knew that this would be a trying time for his pupil, so he had brought along something to help ease the pain. Handing it to his distraught friend, Seok Dae Jo accepted the tome and then turned it over to reveal its title: *The War Goes On*, by Sholem Asch.

"I asked if any of your favorite books were still on file," said Mr. Kang, "and they sent me this. Evidently it's a first edition you had read many times. They said you even used to check it out to take along on your speaking tours throughout the provinces. The card's still in the back with your signatures. No one seems much interested in it anymore, so they said it's yours to keep."

Seok Dae Jo burst into tears.

After a brief pause for the translator to regain his composure, they completed the remainder of their tour without speaking. Later, while they were being driven back to the host's house through the on-again, off-again evening showers, Mr. Kang broke their silence by asking, "Why were you always so interested in that book?"

"Because it's an amazing account of what was happening in Germany between the great wars," answered Seok Dae Jo. "Americans have a hard time understanding why others fly planes into buildings, while still others murdered millions in gas chambers, even as their own children gun down their classmates at school. Are such violent people simply mad-crazy, or are they extremely mad-angry? In the end, there are reasons for all of this, if we want to take the time to understand. The reasons don't justify these cruelties, but they do explain why someone, or even a nation is motivated to commit acts that are so horrifying. Usually, in the minds of the assailants, a worse atrocity has already been committed against them by those they are now attacking. And the current victims, in turn, often were the assailants in the past when they were trying to avenge an even older atrocity. It's a never ending cycle in which one

is victimized and then victimizes, only to become the victim again at a later date. Look at the Jewish bankers and the Germans after World War One. Then look at the Nazis and the Jews. Finally, look at the Israelis and the Palestinians. Take our own history as we went from a group of independent kingdoms, to subjects of the Mongols, to yet a free unified kingdom, then to subjects of the Japanese, and finally to our currently independent communist state. It never ends. There is no ultimate war or struggle. There are just alternating periods of being in, and then being in-between wars. Think of it. After sixty-four years we are still at war with the United States. For me, this book sums up that continuity. Like the title says, the war goes on."

"That must be quite some book," remarked Mr. Kang. "Perhaps one day I will read it."

"Would you like to have this copy?" offered Seok Dae Jo, extending the book to his teacher.

"No, no, thank you," Mr. Kang refused. "I am in no hurry. Send it to me after you have had the chance to read it again."

"I will," promised Seok Dae Jo.

"You know, of course," offered Mr. Kang, gingerly, "that book was one of the reasons why you were sent to New York in the first place, don't you?"

"I'm not sure what you mean," responded Seok Dae Jo.

"You were always such a smart child," Mr. Kang offered as a compliment. "Too smart, in fact. Ever since you started writing your grand papers at twelve years of age there were individuals in the Politburo who looked unfavorably upon you. They worried that your mind was too powerful to control, that perhaps one day you might diverge from the party line. You wrote so many things that went beyond the current thinking of those times. You spoke on topics the average Korean would never even bother considering. You read things, like this book, that others showed no interest in. Amazingly, although you always went to the edge, you never did cross over, but the threat was always there in the back of their minds that one day you might. This is why they finally sent you away to New York, to put an end to that threat. Even now they are uncomfortable having you here. That is why no one will officially acknowledge your presence. At one point before you arrived our Dear Leader expressed an interest in meeting you, but he then changed his mind. It was just too risky. The less you are seen and the less who see you, the better. I for one agree with them, even though I am deeply honored to be your host."

"How sad," commented Seok Dae Jo, looking at the closed book that lay in his hands. "We are so threatened by ourselves as individuals, as nations, and even as religions that our only respite is to seek solace in mistrust and violence. The Christians hate the Jews, the Jews hate the Muslims, the Muslims hate the Americans, the Americans hate us, and we, in turn, hate the Christians. Everyone goes around kicking some else, even as they are being kicked, and my own country kicks me out." After a few moments pause, he smiled and said, "I understand why they feel threatened by me. In a way I was happy to go to New York, because to be honest, I've always felt threatened by them."

"How?" asked Mr. Kang.

"I realized it the day I was with my PYEC handlers," continued Seok Dae Jo, "when they asked me to say that

very first English word: dog. Dog. DOG. Those three small letters changed my life forever. Of course, my orphanage school paper had already shown that I had potential, but that one word separated me from everyone else, singled me out as being completely different, and at the same time it turned me into their dog. From my masters in the secret garden to my wife, then my superiors at the United Nations and even now with you, I am always doing their bidding. For I am a good dog, an obedient dog, and a faithful dog. But even good dogs get beaten every so often, and when things get really tough they get eaten, too. I never wished to be mutilated or devoured, so when the opportunity to leave arose, I went gladly."

"You and this country are alike a two headed snake," smiled Mr. Kang. "You need each other to survive, yet each is always fearful of being attacked by the other. You were very wise to go. You will be very wise to leave again when the time comes."

"Yes, I will be very wise," agreed Seok Dae Jo.

As they rode on in silence through the cold rain, Mr. Kang closed his eyes and rested, pleased now that he could report to his superiors with confidence that Seok Dae Jo would complete his mission faithfully. He knew this would be the best night to make such an assessment as his subject would be at his weakest having been exposed to the sorrowful shadows of his past. If there had been any questions left outstanding on the matter, Mr. Kang had been given explicit orders to dispose of his guest immediately with no traces to be left behind. Of course, he was too old to do that sort of thing anymore, but with a mere nod to his chauffeur the task would have been easily completed. Thankfully, it would not be necessary, for Mr. Kang had secretly worried that if his charge proved unreliable, then he might be the one sent packing with answers for the Americans. After all, he had to know and understand the entire plan as well or even better than his student, if he was to be a competent instructor. So, it was a great relief to Mr. Kang that Seok Dae Jo had been able to prove himself worthy that evening. Now, he could enjoy the rest of their short time together.

Over the next few months, all the way through mid-December, they studied and reviewed, adding newer materials to older ones while constantly starting over with even earlier lessons so as to keep everything fresh in both of their minds. It was during this period as the weather began to turn colder, when Seok Dae Jo started to complain of an increasing pain in his lower back, so that one evening near the year's end, Mr. Kang arranged for a private late night medical exam at one of the city's best hospitals. The news was not good: advanced, metastatic prostate cancer. For a few days they stopped their studies to give Seok Dae Jo time to absorb what this would mean. But then, just like his sudden recovery from the impact of his wife's death, he re-immersed himself and Mr. Kang into his indoctrination, reaffirming their confidence in his ability to accomplish the assignment.

In early January, one week before the three ships would finally make their voyage southward, Mr. Kang and Seok Dae Jo ventured to the port of Nampo to inspect the Silla. To their dismay, Mr. Kang's higher-ups had earlier rejected his suggestion that they be allowed to visit one of the ships, with the Silla and Baekje in Nampo being the closest ones to Pyongyang. However, after much persistence on Mr. Kang's part, insisting that such an inspection was necessary to give the translator concrete evidence on which to base his later testimony, the reluctant authorities issued

passes on certain conditions. The visit was to be done at night with the two of them traveling there and back in the same evening. In addition, the selected ship, the Silla, was to be cleared of all personnel during their tour, except for one single guide, and they would only be allowed to visit the upper deck and cargo holds. The engine compartments, the crew's private quarters, and the vessel's operational superstructure were to be off limits. Mr. Kang thanked his superiors for their assistance and then made one more request.

In the winter evening of January 9th, 2010, Seok Dae Jo and Mr. Kang set off for Nampo, driven by their chauffeur. As they settled in for the one to two hour drive southwest to where the Taedong River empties out into the Yellow Sea, Mr. Kang reached into his ever present satchel and pulled out two files. Carefully inspecting cryptic markings along the top edges, he handed Seok Dae Jo the smaller of them while carefully replacing the larger file back into his carrying bag.

"I thought this would be important for you to see before you left," explained Mr. Kang. "I will need it back before we reach the ship, but do not hurry. The roads are bad this time of year and I doubt we will arrive there soon."

Carefully, Seok Dae Jo opened the small file to reveal five pages from around the time he was born. Two were of a medic's report concerning that fateful night at sea. One was a genealogical outline of his families known history which included a few ancestors dating back to the Hermit Kingdom. The last two pages were a series of quotations from those who had made it north after surviving the Yosu Mutiny of 1948 and the harrowing events thereafter. All of the pages were handwritten on both sides, all were cracked and browned with age, and all held an indispensable view into a past which he had never before known. While the ride to Nampo took a little over one and a half hours, Seok Dae Jo ran through centuries of his family's history.

It was neither disappointment nor despair that held him rapt as he read and then reread each page several times. Moreover, it was a sense of wonder at who these people were, people he had never known, yet people who gave him life even in their death. Of his mother, there was little said of her other than those few horrifying minutes aboard the North Korean patrol boat. The medic's report was a graphic, sterile documentation of her unimaginable agony and the resultant boy that was literally carved out of her womb. On the genealogical page, one side of which was devoted to each parent, his maternal line stretched back a scant three generations showing parents and grandparents only, with no mention of aunts, uncles, nephews, cousins, or siblings. On his father's side, however, the family tree stretched back twice that far with a host of distant relatives scattered about all levels of its branches. In addition, the testimonial page gave overflowing praise of his father's actions in Yosu before the mutiny and then in Sunchon afterwards. There was not one incriminating statement to be found, which was strange for a country which raised its young on a daily exercise of self-denunciation as a means toward national humility. It was because of this unblemished record of anecdotal commendations that a red stamp had been placed at the top of his father's side of the genealogical page. In bold letters it stated **HEROIC FAMILY**.

Even though he was rereading some parts of the file for the fourth and fifth times, it seemed like he had just started when Mr. Kang softly placed his hand upon Seok Dae Jo's as they pulled in through the high security gate

which cordoned off a secluded portion of the Nampo piers. Reluctantly, Seok Dae Jo closed the file, its contents still intact, and handed it back to Mr. Kang who gently returned it to the satchel. The two men then sat back and watched as the car's headlights turned several times between rows of dark, nondescript warehouses until, finally, a black behemoth loomed before them. Caught in the outskirts of the headlights' reach as the car came to a stop, large block letters identified the monster before them: SILLA. Never having spent any time around shipyards or sea-going vessels, it was, in a substantially frightening way, considerably bigger than Seok Dae Jo had imagined. With only minimal lighting at its bow, on top of its aft superstructure, and over the midline hatch at the end of a gangplank, from their close distance at night its size and shape seemed to fluctuate in an intimidating and foreboding manner. Enthralled by its presence, Seok Dae Jo found it hard to take his eyes off the ship as he carefully helped Mr. Kang from the car. Once the chauffeur had removed the wheelchair from the trunk, the three men made their way through the crisp, cold air toward the vessel.

Attended to by the one lone sailor who had been left behind to serve as both guide and defender, they were taken into the aft-most number five hold and then allowed to slowly walk forward. Dwarfed by the dual lines of mammoth thirty-six ton rockets whose tail ends sat lodged in massive wells sunk down through the cargo bay's deck, their steel bodies looming up toward the hold's ceiling, even Mr. Kang felt uneasy as their heads turned from side to side trying to take it all in. A slight hissing sound of gas discharge made the missiles seem to breath discontentedly as if unhappy over the restraining framework which had been erected to lock them in place during transport. Leaning carefully over the edge of a well, Seok Dae Jo stared down at the huge flatbed carts that cradled each projectile, their oversized, solid metal wheels firmly gripping the small gauge railroad tracks beneath them. Immense chains made of hardened steel thick as a man's neck, with each link large enough to slip over a person's head, spanned the two foot space between each cart, patiently waiting their turn to pull the string of rockets forward after each successive launch. As they continued moving on, two gargantuan portals on either side of the dividing bulkhead allowed them and the twin trains of missiles to pass from cargo hold five into cargo hold four where everyone, except perhaps the sailor, relived the same queasiness all over again. From there, things got even worse as they approached the central bulkhead whose massive sliding iron doors, replete with hundreds of rivets and yards upon yards of iron cross-strapping, sat ajar before the firing chambers, guarding the gates of Hell. Inside, the four men witnessed the first rockets seated in their firing positions poised to anticipate the end of their sea voyage, so that their final journey might begin. It was, indeed, one thing to read about these missiles, yet, an entirely different matter to see them first hand.

After cautiously passing through both sets of firing chambers, they relived their unsettling trek in reverse. They nervously transited holds three and two, their tension slightly diminished as they moved farther away from the central bulkheads. Finally, they passed into the first cargo hold, and there a sudden transformation came over them. Its empty railroad track wells were devoid of rockets, and several dozen large supply containers were stacked in neat rows along each of its walls, clearly labeled for easy access and retrieval of needed goods. But this was not what soothed their minds. Instead, it was where the empty tracks ended that drew the three visitors' attention, for there lay

a round steel plate about ten feet in diameter sitting on top of a slightly elevated housing: the underwater hatch. Locked down for the journey with what appeared to be a hundred oversized bolts and nuts, they gazed upon the Porta Sancta, the holy door through which all things must pass. What had it been like for the first man to peer down into it, only to see an acknowledging face far below? How difficult had it been to lift the rockets, piece by piece, up from the depths, only then having to reassemble and drag them aft for storage? Had anyone been maimed or killed by a falling load that had surreptitiously escaped its chains and ropes? A thousand questions breached within their minds as, one-by-one, they came forward to lay their hands upon the seemingly dead, yet radiant steel disk. Taking a few brief moments of silence to individually offer atonement for what had already happened and what was still to come, they finally allowed themselves to be lead into a small lift which took them up onto the ship's top deck.

Breathing in the cold night air, Seok Dae Jo walked toward the tip of the bow where he gently brushed snow off the side railing and then watched as it descended into the sea, knowing that the ship would soon follow. With the help of his chauffeur, Mr. Kang rose from his wheelchair and carefully made his way to his student's side. There, he too brushed away the snow and the two of them stood together, holding onto the railing, looking off into the blackness of night. Since it was a restricted part of the port, there was little to see, with few lights to illuminate their surroundings while winter clouds obscured the possibility of any assistance from the moon. As their smokey breaths danced and vanished in front of them, Seok Dae Jo stated in a soft, contemplative tone, "It is hard to imagine human deeds, until witnessed by oneself."

Mr. Kang tried to think of an appropriate reply, but was at a loss to formulate one. Instead, he angled himself to look out over the very tip of the bow. Then he prodded his charge and pointed forward that he might do the same. There, a few hundred yards away, another vessel sat in near total darkness.

"Can you see that ship in front of us?" he asked Seok Dae Jo.

"Yes, though faintly," replied his pupil.

"Then your request has been fulfilled," stated Mr. Kang.

"Which request was that?" inquired Seok Dae Jo.

"You don't remember," admonished Mr. Kang. "The first night you arrived here, it was one of the last things we talked about. You wanted to see your son's grave. It is there in front of you. Take a few moments and have a good look."

Seok Dae Jo stood quietly confused as his companion faced back over the side railing. Turning to look again at the nearby shadowy vessel, the translator suddenly realized what he was seeing. It was the Baekje. And then a great light flashed in his mind: the concealed truth about his parents; the pretense of his own death; the hidden motives that pushed him overseas. His son's death was just another lie. He was not buried on the east coast. He was alive. But he would be sailing on the Baekje, and it would be his grave.

"Is he here?" asked Seok Dae Jo, reluctantly, already knowing the answer.

"No," answered Mr. Kang. "The crew are all being held in their quarters until the departure date, and the

ship's captains were taken to Pyongyang for a final briefing tonight. Your son did not die on that sub chaser. Indeed, there was an explosion and four men were killed. He was not amongst them. At the time, he was on the other end of the ship, but he responded bravely and nearly saved one of those fatally injured men. His career in our navy has always been one on the rise, and tonight he is in the capital as the captain of the Baekje. It was only in their absence that we were allowed to come here traveling by car while they went upriver by boat. There was to be no accidental opportunity for the two of you to meet. When I arranged this trip, I asked permission to tell you about your family and son. The authorities only granted me your family file. I took your son's on my own initiative. It is in the car, waiting for you. Given the great sacrifice you are about to make for all of North Korea, I felt I owed you that one favor."

"But what will happen to you if they find out?" worried Seok Dae Jo.

"The same thing that will happen to me if they don't," replied Mr. Kang. "I will die, sooner than later. I am an old, old man, much more so than you. I have no children, no wife, nor did I ever want any. My way of life was not compatible with these things. But you have a son. I am not sure what that means, for I have none, and I am not sure of his meaning to you since you never seem to have spent any time together. Yet, on the first night that we met, I sensed something special in your voice when you asked if we could visit his burial site. It wasn't so much a yearning for contact as it was a desire for peace. Perhaps I am wrong, but I felt this to be something deeply important to you."

"Does he know that I am alive?" inquired Seok Dae Jo.

"No," confirmed Mr. Kang, "he believes, and he will always believe that you died long ago."

"Thank you, my friend," responded Seok Dae Jo. Then, he turned to face the Baekje and proceeded to bow four times slowly and deeply. When he had finished, he turned back to Mr. Kang and said, "Come, let me help you to your chair. You must be tired and we should go." Once back in Pyongyang he spent the next two days going over the larger second file.

On the morning of January 12th, 2010, Mr. Kang greeted his pupil for breakfast, after which he instructed his charge to prepare for an immediate departure back to the United States. Obediently, Seok Dae Jo went to his room and placed everything he needed into a small suitcase. Being sure to leave his son's file on top of his bed for the old man to find, he took his packed belongings and was about to exit the room when he suddenly stopped. Reopening his bag, he reached inside and drew out a small, stubby red book. Walking back, he placed his copy of Sholem Ashes' manuscript on top of his son's file. Perhaps his friend would have time to read it before he died. Then, resealing his suitcase, he left for good.

All the way to the airport, neither said a single word, the dutiful chauffeur carefully driving them along. Six months had passed since Seok Dae Jo had returned and, in that time, he had learned more about his people, his country, and himself than ever imaginable. Now he would go on to play a vital role in an uncertain future that held a small glimmer of hope for his doomed nation. He was, indeed, a true member of a heroic family. As they pulled back into the isolated section of the Pyongyang International Airport, parking besides the waiting Ilyushin IL-62M jetliner with its four engines droning at idle, Seok Dae Jo turned to his friend who sat impassively beside him.

"Do you think the Americans will understand?" he asked.

"I don't know," answered Mr. Kang, flatly, without looking at his companion. "I don't think you or I will ever know. All we can do is carry out our assignments and hope that they do understand. We are about to violate the Antarctic Treaty System of 1961 which we became members of in 1987. That agreement prohibits everything that we are going to do. But the United States has built its empire on violating treaties and agreements such as this. They did it to the American Indians with the conquest of their native lands, they did it to us in 1905 with the Japanese, they did it to the Palestinians in 1948 with the Zionists, and given the chance they will undoubtedly do it again. Their unbridled pursuit of selfish national interests has brought us all to this end. Remember that."

"I will remember," responded Seok Dae Jo. With nothing else seemingly left to say, he repositioned himself straight in his seat and was about to open the door when, in an afterthought, as if not wanting to leave the old man behind, he added, "Any last words of advice?"

"Yes," said Mr. Kang, turning to face his friend, "they are always listening, even when you think you are alone. It would do you good to have something to say, especially at those times."

"Of course. Thank you." said Seok Dae Jo, half smiling, without returning the look. He then exited the car, boarded the plane, and returned to New York City. It was the last time Mr. Kang would ever hear of him.

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Nearing noon, on Wednesday, February 3rd, 2010, the Supreme Commander and President of the United States of America, having completed his interviews with Seok Dae Jo, sat at his desk as the countdown began for his first dictatorial address. Ever since the Hermit Kingdom's nuclear barrage upon Antarctica, the world froze as it awaited an American response. Even China, who the U.S. longed to appease whenever practical, said and did nothing, uncertain how the greatest and perhaps most unstable superpower on the planet might react. And so, after two days of interrogating the North Korean translator, and after passage of martial law throughout the United States and its territories, and after the transfer of all military responsibilities to the CIA and the assignment of all civilian oversight to the SS, the President addressed his nation and the world in a speech comprised of six hundred and fifty-four carefully chosen words. Keeping in mind the recent tragedies of 2009 and not wanting to admit any inconvenient truths, his words would be broadcast around the globe by every communication media available, impacting the future of all nations, friend and foe. After a brief delay for the last minute additions of more telecommunication lines to provide sufficient live feeds, at exactly 12:04, he began.

Citizens of the free world and my fellow Americans, the struggle for the freedom of our nations, for securing conditions for the future existence of our democracies, for eliminating the possibility of terrorists to make war on us every five or ten years under a new pretext - but

fundamentally always for the same extreme, fundamentalist interests - is nearing its climax and turning point. The United States and its coalition, as well as other states that have allied themselves with us, have had the good fortune of winning, in China, a world power as a friend and comrade in arms. With the amazingly rapid annihilations of both Saddam Hussein and the Iranian Menace, and the occupation of numerous territories and bases in the Middle East by our forces, the war against terrorism now is entering on a new phase favorable to us. We thus also face decisions of worldwide importance.

After the unforgettable and unprecedented 9/11 attacks by the then most dangerous enemy of all time, our armies in the Far East and Middle East must now change over from offensive warfare to defensive warfare, because of the sudden assault by the North Korean's upon Antarctica. Our task will be to hold and defend, until the arrival of reinforcements, what we have gained throughout Asia with immeasurable heroism and with many sacrifices, fighting as faithfully as before. We expect from this new North Korean threat nothing different from that which American soldiers had to do during the prior Korean War over fifty years ago. Every American soldier must set an example to our faithful allies.

Furthermore, as in the past years, new units will be formed and, above all, new and better arms will be given out. Protection of our nation to the threats from abroad, down to the Mexican border, will be increased. The difficulties of organizing forces within this effort, which today spans the whole globe and reaches into the Far and Middle East, must be overcome. This also will be achieved.

Preparations for immediate resumption of offensive fighting in the spring, until the final destruction of the terrorist enemy, must be made immediately. The introduction of other decisive war measures is impending. These tasks require that the armed forces and the home front be brought to the highest degree of performance in one common effort by all. However, the military is the main pillar in the fight against terrorism. I have, therefore, resolved, under the new implementation of martial law, to take over myself, through the CIA, the leading of all our armed forces in my capacity as Supreme Commander of the United States of America.

Soldiers, I know war from last year's gigantic struggle in Iran. We have all lived through the horrors of nearly all great battles as common soldiers. Twice we invaded Iraq, and then Israel was threatened with becoming extinct. Therefore, nothing that is tormenting and troubling you is unknown to me. However, after all these years of struggle I did not doubt for a single second the resurrection of the Iraqi and Israeli people. After years of hard work they have achieved, as democratic nations, and merely with their fanatical will power, the unity of their people and have freed themselves from the death sentence of fascist terrorism.

American people! You will understand, therefore, that my heart belongs entirely to you, that my will and my work unswervingly are serving the greatness of my and your nation, and that my mind and determination know nothing but annihilation of the terrorist enemy - that is to say, victorious termination of this war. Whatever I can do for you, my soldiers of the coalition and American Armed Forces, shall be done. What you can and will do for me, I know. You will follow me loyally and obediently until the United States of America and our allies are definitely safe. God Almighty will not deny victory to his bravest soldiers.

When he had finished, without further comment the transmission ended. As the bright lights dimmed and he rose from his chair, the President walked into an adjoining private room where the directors of the CIA and SS sat awaiting him. Rising, they both congratulated him on his speech, after which the CIA Director handed his commander a small folio. Opening it, the President signed two official supreme orders. The first authorized the immediate and final completion of the American-Mexican Wall within the next four months. The second authorized the covert mobilization and installation of thousands of extra-high-pressure injection well heads throughout the Middle East, accompanied by the deployment of millions of gallons of SHS-127 (*Syntrophus* hybrid species #127), MHS-259 (*Methanosaeta* hybrid species #259), and their supportive nutrient mixes. The United States, under martial law, had now prioritized the optimization of Mexican labor and the neutralization of Middle East oil amongst its foremost national interests. Once these initiatives were resolved, America would then turn its attention to matters farther south.

The CIA Director thanked the President for his signatures and then exited the room. Immediately, the SS Director handed him a second folio. Inside, the President found and signed another official supreme order, even though this one was already well under way.

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At the same time as the world's newest dictator began his first televised speech to the world, Seok Dae Jo, unaware of the events occurring around him, continued to sit in his lavish prison cell on the sofa beside the low, oval, centrally placed table of 18th century colonial craftsmanship. Having long prepared himself for this moment, the translator finally reached forward, grasped the sole tea cup with both hands, and raised it to his lips. Taking a small sip, he immediately realized that its contents were far more bitter than Orange Pekoe should ever be. Pausing for a moment, Seok Dae Jo inwardly recommitted himself to the completion of his mission. Just as he had accepted everything else in his life - growing up in an orphanage, being transferred to the secret library, an arranged and tragic marriage, fathering a child he would only see once after its birth, reassignment to New York City, and then being expelled from his homeland - he accepted this as a final and necessary act. Allowing his gaze to fall one last time upon the bowl of sweetener beside the empty saucer, he closed his eyes and calmly drank the cup's entire content without

stopping. He did not take sugar with his tea.

Setting the vessel down upon its small plate, and knowing that he would not see his second, sixty-first birthday the following day, he slowly rose from the sofa and, with unhurried steps, retired to the bedroom. Laying himself down gently in the bed, he turned over onto his back. His breaths came slower and shallower while he tried unsuccessfully to maintain focus on the ceiling above. Always remembering his old friend's advice, he unleashed his mind to race over thousands of passages which he had once read, known, and understood. Aware of his demise, the room's hidden embedded microphones had already pricked up their ears to corner and capture all of Seok Dae Jo's descent into solitude. Knowing they would not have long to wait, their prey struggled to take in a last deep breath. Then, paraphrasing John Gardner's *Grendel*, one of literature's most misunderstood villains, the funny sounding kid from Anju tranquilly offered these final words:

"Poor Seok's had an accident," he whispered. "So may you all."

His body was never found.

THE END OF BOOK ONE