

You may pronounce us guilty a thousand times over, but the goddess of the eternal court of history will smile and tear to tatters the brief of the state prosecutor and the sentence of this court, for she acquits us.

Condemn me. Condemn me. Condemn me. History will absolve me.

Singing "this will be the day that I die".

Yeahhhhhhaaaa

(If your grandmother or any other member of your family should die whilst in the shelter, put them outside, but remember to tag them first for identification purposes.)

Go to war. Go to war. Go to war.

Hey, just think, war breaks out and nobody turns up.

(If any member of the family should die whilst in the shelter, put them outside but remember to tag them first for identification purposes. If your grandmother or any other member of the family should die whilst...identification purposes.)

Heh heh, it's enough to make you wonder sometimes if you're on the right planet.

Let's go, when two tribes go to war a point is all you can score.

When two tribes go to war a point is all you can score.

Two Tribes, 1984

Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Welcome to the Pleasuredome

January 8, 9:50 p.m.

"Cold War," Imran guffawed. "I've never understood the decision to be in one. Allocating a significant portion of your resources to armament accumulation is a sure sign of insanity as far as I'm concerned. And to get into an unwinnable competition with others in doing so is just asking to overburden your citizens with ever-larger deficits and for the weapons to be used eventually by some crazed, power-hungry group in government; if not seized by some group outside of government. Just look at how many Western-manufactured weapons ended up in the hands of those groups the West was supposedly fighting in the Middle East--to say little about how many were intentionally sold to them."

"I couldn't disagree with you over the lunacy of such things," Joel agreed. "Empires are funny animals though and often, if not always, use violence to sustain themselves or grow. They have arisen on our planet numerous times over the past few thousand years. Rising. Expanding. Falling. Rinse. Repeat. It's a pattern we seem intent on repeating again and again. We consistently ignore our history."

Joel paused for a moment before finishing his thought and listened for the wind from the storm. He seemed to have recovered fully from his ordeal and although he and the group he was with appeared protected from the storm's rage, he worried about the weather's intensity. He could hear no sign of it at the moment suggesting it had perhaps peaked and dissipated noticeably. A good thing to be sure.

“As my eldest son use to tell me,” he continued, “even though we know the history of past empires and civilisations we keep making the same ridiculous mistakes, repeatedly. It's like déjà vu all over again. For all our intelligence, we're not a very smart species.”

“You know, I spent my life in policing, believing it was a noble profession,” Joel stated, shifting to a much more melancholy tone. “The changes I witnessed the last few years, however, really had me rethinking some long-held beliefs. Especially regarding money and politics. We continually moved away from community service-type policing towards security maintenance for vested interests, particularly the political and corporate classes. Investments in military hardware for domestic police forces far surpassed what I would consider necessary, especially in some of the more novel technologies. I was amazed at how much we were spending for A.I. software and drones just before I retired.”

“I've read a lot of alt-media denouncing the militarisation of U.S. police forces but I didn't realise it was happening here,” Imran responded, frowning his brow.

“Unfortunately, Canada wasn't far behind the U.S. in that regard. In fact, I'd argue--as an insider--that we've been on a slippery slope towards a totalitarian surveillance state like many other regions of the world for some years now. And our media has been blind, perhaps purposefully so, to much of the change around security and policing issues.

“You'd think they would hold the government to account, especially with the increasing intrusion of U.S. interests on our soil. I just,” Joel shook his head, pausing in mid-thought. “I don't know, I became increasingly disenchanted with our media and how they seemed to have become just mouthpieces for our politicians and large corporations. They seemed to be trumpeting government talking points almost all the time but rarely, if ever, calling them to task for their positions. Very, very different than what I believe the role of media should be.”

“It's all a racket,” Al interjected.

“What do you mean?” Joel asked him. Joel had heard a similar saying somewhere but couldn't immediately recall where.

“*War is a Racket* was a short book my sister had me read a few years ago. She's a,” he paused, taking a deep breath. “Sorry, she was in the Canadian military, she passed away a couple of years ago. She was starting to become very cynical about the whole notion of ‘interventions’ by our military, well everybody's military, and that geopolitical manoeuvring was all just about ensuring our economic well-being at the expense of others.”

“That's what empires do, I'm afraid,” Joel confirmed with a nod.

“They do don't they,” Al continued. “Anyways, *War is a Racket* is a treatise written by a former U.S. Marine Corps Major General by the name of Smedley Butler. After years of service in the American Empire's military he wrote a very damning short novel arguing that war was rarely if

ever fought for the reasons our leaders provided, like democracy or freedom, but for the monetary and territorial gains afforded a small elite group of individuals. Jessica even believed that the arming up of our own domestic security forces was just an extension of this economic imperative.”

“Can’t argue with you there,” Joel agreed. “It sounds eerily similar to a warning issued by U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower during his farewell address to the American people in the early 1960s. As he was leaving office he warned the public about the power and influence of the military-industrial complex although you could probably now have called it a military-security-surveillance-intelligence-energy-industrial-financial complex. His basic concern seemed to be the intrusion of this powerful lobby into the halls of government and its attempts to guide policies but especially foreign affairs towards actions that it profited from, particularly war.”

“With the information about an explosion in the D.C. area and a possible EMP,” Joel continued, “it could be we have been caught up in the beginnings of a period of war. Possibly a global war given the level of rhetoric, proxy wars, and troop and armament movements over the past few years. Hell has been breaking out all over the place. The Middle East was looking ready to explode with all the major players ramping up both their rhetoric and troop numbers. Southeast Asia was getting quite tense as border wars, especially as they pertained to sea lanes, seemed to be just around the corner.”

“Anyways,” Joel began, changing the path of the conversation, “I’ve been droning on here way too long. Whether it was an EMP or not--and I know there’s controversy over whether such capabilities even exist and that the threat of an EMP taking down the grid is greatly over-exaggerated, perhaps even a total hoax--it’s a fact that our grid has gone down and does not seem to be coming back anytime soon. And that’s what’s important. It’s been a couple weeks now without power. That fact is the more and most immediate concern. And more bluntly, how is your food situation?”

Marie looked at the others and answered, “Not good. We have another day or two before we need to leave and find some other store of food. We actually had just begun deliberating which way to head to try and locate another home that might contain some food for us.”

“Yeah, we were thinking of heading out tomorrow but given the severity of the storm,” Al began, “we might just be stuck here for a while.”

“If your food situation is as precarious as you say, you may have to stick with that plan. You don’t want to be in an even worse predicament like fighting hunger while fighting the weather,” Joel suggested. “First thing’s first, though. What’s your winter clothing situation?”

Hayley suddenly jumped into the conversation since she had more or less been the one responsible for inventorying their supplies, “We’ve got plenty of layers of clothing for all of us as whoever abandoned this house left most of their clothes. But,” she paused, taking a deep breath before sharing the tougher fact. “We’ve only got proper winter footwear for one of us.”

“Well,” Joel responded, thinking quickly how best to address this latest dilemma, “perhaps I could scout the area with the individual lucky enough to have good boots and bring back supplies to the rest of the group. Food, obviously, being at the top of the list but good footwear a close second. Especially if travel is required.”

Everyone looked at Hayley .

“Looks like I win. Or is that lose?” she quipped.

“Hey, I know very few of us have been schooled in dealing with emergencies like the one we're experiencing,” Joel quickly responded. “Believe it or not, I've trained for such situations for most of my life.”

“That's great for you,” Imran interrupted, “but we've been taught within a Neoliberal world that emphasised technology and other touchy-feely crap that's looking pretty useless at the moment. Christ, we don't have a clue how to feed ourselves beyond scavenging abandoned homes for a few cans of tuna.”

“Take solace from the fact that none of us have been raised in a culture that incentivized self-sufficiency or self-reliance, I'm afraid,” Joel began in response. “We've all been enculturated to depend upon various complex systems to provide for us, from industrial agriculture to socialised medicine. Very few, if any of us, have the skills or knowledge to feed or take complete care of ourselves. And almost everything we have grown to depend upon relies on electricity to function. Without such power we are in a really difficult bind. It's a truly systemic problem.”

“My eldest son has actually been warning me about these dilemmas for years. I think I choose to downplay his concerns for a long time, obviously too long. I mean, I've trained in survival-type living and stressed them with my family since I can remember. Of course, I really wasn't doing it thinking about this type of world. It was more because we camped a lot, and sometimes in really off-the-grid locations where such skills and knowledge could be the difference between life and death.”

“Can't disagree with you regarding our lack of basic skills required for feeding ourselves but I'm curious as to why or who would knock out our grids,” Imran pondered.

“It makes for an interesting discussion like we've been having but may be quite moot in the end. And that's why I think you should join me at my son's northern property. It's got everything we need to not only survive but prosper. He's been preparing for this kind of thing for a few years now. Never thought I would admit it, but he seems to have been correct in his paranoia about an imminent collapse of industrial civilisation.”

“How far is it?” Marie inquired. “Because the car that got us here is no longer useful. We ran out of gas a few kilometres away and just happened upon this place.”

"It's a pretty healthy trek from here but if we can get to Fenelon Falls there should be a way that can get us all there. A small recreational vehicle, actually. It'll be tight with all of us, but if the roads are clear it's a relatively short drive."

"And you don't think he will mind another half dozen people?" Marie asked.

"Oh, he might mind but I'm willing to cross that bridge later."

Sara came running into the room, obviously excited about something. She interrupted as soon as she had Al's attention, "You have to see how much snow has fallen, it's almost up to some of the windows."

"That could be just a bit of drifting, nothing to worry about," Al assured her, smiling slightly.

"The windows upstairs," Sara countered with a touch of bravado, pointing at the ceiling. "The ones on the first floor are already buried."

"What?" Imran exclaimed, moving to the nearest window to try and get his own perspective on things. "Well, nothing to see here," he commented, pulling the hanging drape aside and shining his flashlight towards the window to display the snow that had indeed buried it as Sara had declared.

"Holy shit!" Al declared. "Is it still snowing?" he asked, turning towards Sara.

"Yeah. I, ah, couldn't see very far because it's still coming down pretty hard and appears to be blowing like crazy. I just couldn't believe that it was approaching the second floor windows."

"I assume that the chimney flue for the fireplace is above the second floor roofline," Joel stated. Although he had seen the house from the outside he recalled few facts from his ordeal in the storm and immediately after he had entered the farmhouse.

"Flue?" Al asked.

"It's just the technical name for the vertical passage that allows the smoke and burnt debris to escape the house," Joel responded.

"I have no idea. Why?" Al asked, although as soon as he had asked he knew what Joel was thinking and he quickly continued. "Shouldn't the heat from the fire keep the exit clear of any snow?"

"Perhaps," Joel began. "I guess it depends on how much more falls and the blowing and drifting. The last thing we want is for that passage to get blocked while a fire is going. Might I suggest we try to get a look."