

IGLOOLIK

BY CULEX PIPIENS



IGLOOLIK

Copyright © 2013 by Culex Pipiens. All rights reserved.



Igloolik is a work of fiction.

Any resemblance to real people or events is purely coincidental. Names, characters, places and incidents portrayed in this story are imagined or used fictitiously.

Cover photo credits:

Native in Regalia, Ansgar Walk, Wikimedia Commons
Research Center, Mike Beauregard, Wikimedia Commons

Cold. Bitter cold. A bone chilling feeling that never seemed to leave your body. Warren knew of no other way to describe it. He rolled over and looked at Gail still asleep, noting her deep even breathing. The small shelter provided a break from the wind and a bit of trapped heat, both from their bodies and from the propane heater.

Just a single main room and a bathroom, the insulated metal building had resisted the fierce winds and snow for years upon years. Peeling blue paint adorned the walls along with a few bookshelves and pictures, all faded now. The bed was the main piece of furniture and covered with many layers of blankets and elk hides. A kitchenette off to the side and a simple dark blue laminate counter with a couple of stools served most of the domestic dietary needs while also filling in as a workspace when not eating.

Warren stared at the ceiling knowing he'd be getting up soon anyway but not wanting to encounter the cold he knew was waiting for him. His mind started working through the checklist. The vehicles, the teams, the supplies, the lists. Always the lists. Their mission would not be easy. It never was. Even worse, Gail was going with and she'd be carrying their unborn child with her.

He glanced down at the blankets covering her but couldn't decide if the ever so slight bulge was her or just the blankets. Wasn't it too early for her to be showing yet? Thinking back through his years in school Warren recalled that usually around ten to twelve weeks was most common and by their best estimate Gail was at almost ten weeks so it just might be their unborn child starting to show.

Staring back at the ceiling, he thought over all he had once known, now mostly forgotten. Working in the top hospitals, saving lives, it was what he once thrived on. Now, at best, he did what was, at one time, called ditch medicine. Surgery was mostly a thing of the past although in extreme emergency he still did what he

could. People once more died of appendicitis and infections. The supplies and equipment simply were not available. At least not yet.

He hoped to change that. If the mission went well they'd no longer be practicing medicine as a third world country.

Two loud bangs, followed by multiple blasts of at least a few air horns woke Gail from her sleep.

“Go back to bed dear. It's just the patrol.”

She turned over and tried to settle back in but realized it wasn't going to happen. Sleep had evaded her. Pushing the many layers of covers off she scampered off across the freezing floor to the bathroom.

Past

“You will not sleep. You will not eat. You are here to do a job and that is all you will do.”

Warren listened to the senior doctor explain to him and the others how they would be working thirty six hour shifts with barely enough time off between to rest let alone anything else. For the next year his personal life and other activities would be nonexistent. Not that he was going to complain, far from it. Too much time had been put in studying, learning and testing. He was in debt so deep that he had to make it through or he'd never be able to pay it off.

After an exhaustive interview and matching process he was accepted to a residency program and would be working on infectious diseases. His dexterity and steady

hands were well suited to a surgical career but his mind, ever seeking to solve puzzles, found the challenge of diagnosing and curing just a bit more exciting.

He formed bonds with his fellow residents but the year flew by and they all parted going on to join other hospitals and clinics. For the first time in ages, Warren, working a semi normal shift at the University of Minnesota Medical Center, a top ranked hospital in the state, found himself with disposable income and free time.

As most bachelors do, he started with an apartment and a well provisioned home theater setup along with a pool table and a leather sofa. On his first weekend off everything was delivered and the installers spent the better part of the day connecting all the wiring between the components and neatly placing it all in high end cabinetry.

“Sir, we have finished the installation and if you have a few moments, we can go over the universal remote and usage of your system.”

“Certainly.”

The tech demonstrated how to turn everything on.

“Let’s start with normal broadcast TV.”

He pushed a single button on the LCD screen of the universal remote and the devices came on, reconfigured their inputs and outputs and in glorious surround sound he had... the news. The tech demonstrated the volume and other video modes, adjustments and tweaks while it played in the background.

“...police are investigating the attacks and are planning a joint news conference with the Department of Homeland Security later this evening. Now over to Diane.”

“Thanks Norman. Here’s something new for your smart kids to do. Form your own biotech company. A sixteen year old and his friends have formed a biotech company and are researching a cure to West Nile Virus, and get this, they plan to use mosquitoes to deliver the vaccine. Also, in health watch today, the CDC is reporting a strange outbreak of a SARS like virus. Four people in Africa have died, all in the same family with additional extended family members showing symptoms. Authorities believe this was spread via human to human contact. Moving on to weather a tornado outbreak in...”

“Now here is how you switch to Blu-Ray mode. We have your one hundred disc changer loaded with your movies and if you look here on the remote you can browse through by title or genre.”

They continued on for a half hour going over all aspects of the system to Warren’s complete satisfaction before leaving. He ordered a pizza and flipped on the TV. Running briefly through all the broadcast and cable stations just once took just as long as it took for his pizza to be delivered. He kicked back on the black leather couch, switched to the newest comic book superhero movie and grabbed a slice. Within ten minutes he was sound asleep.

Present

“Gail, how many eggs?”

“Two and two links of sausage,” she called back, still in the bathroom.

Warren, bundled up in his pajamas, socks, slippers and heavy robe could still see his breath even with the heater and the stove both running. The sunlight was low in

the sky and it would only be getting lower for the next few months. This far north you learn to live with months of darkness and months of light.

The pan had warmed enough and he dropped in a half dozen elk meat sausages to cook. While they sizzled away he mixed in a bowl three scoops of powdered eggs, dehydrated chives and a bit of water until the consistency looked about right. The sausages were ready to be turned and he did, then going to the cabinet and taking out a couple of plates.

A few minutes later, the sausages fully heated through, he transferred them to the plate and poured the egg mixture over the remaining grease in the pan. Grabbing a spatula he continued to scrape and move them around until, less than a minute later, the scrambled eggs were done. The equivalent of two eggs was put on one plate with a couple sausages. He took two more sausages for himself and the remaining eggs.

Like most mornings they ate their breakfast in silence, each engrossed in different book. When Gail finished her plate and looked at Warren's with a hungry look in her expression he got up, went to the stove and returned with the final two sausages for her. She gave him a smile that said 'thank you' and wolfed them down while they were still warm.

Gail finished the chapter she was on, arose and cleared the dishes to the sink where she washed them.

"Is the schedule set yet?"

"Not in stone. We're thinking early November but haven't picked a specific date yet. The mission time line is still the same, ninety days max until we return."

"So, I'll be at eight months or so when we get back."

“I can’t talk you out of going?”

Gail simply gave him the look.

Hands raised in defense, “OK, OK. I just had to ask. It’s going to be uncomfortable out there on the road.”

“Like sitting here is going to be any better?”

Past

Warren, still young in his field, was quickly making a name for himself. His income reflected this and within eighteen months of accepting his first position he was able to pay off all of his student loans. His income was such that he was actively looking for ways to spend it. On a day off of work he was out driving his new sports car, an Audi S6, and took it to the country where he could really open it up with no one else around. Racing down one road after the other he was well over one hundred miles an hour on each one.

Finally the thrill wore off, but the sports drinks he’d been gulping down didn’t. It was either find a bathroom or use the side of the road. Just when he decided to water the weeds in the ditch he saw a sign indicating the regional airport just a mile ahead. Thinking to himself he figured besides a bathroom he could probably get a sandwich or at least some snacks to munch on.

The parking lot was nearly empty. Only a dozen cars, then again full it would barely hold a hundred. He parked and quickly ran into the small terminal and located the bathroom almost immediately. Relieved, Warren found the small

restaurant only fifty feet further down the terminal. There were half a dozen tables overlooking the single runway and a bar that would seat about ten. He took a place at the bar, ordered a beer and looked over the pub style menu.

“Here’s your beer. Anything else for you?”

“How about your pulled pork sandwich?”

“Chips or fries?”

“Fries.”

“It’ll be up in just a few minutes.”

She left with his order, dropping it by the kitchen window on her way to seat two more guys who just came in.

Warren took a drink and then gave the place a more thorough once over. It had fairly nice carpet, the wood tables and chairs were all in good condition and it did look clean. The bartender wasn’t too bad on the eyes either. If it wasn’t such a long drive out here he’d ask for her number. He overheard the other two patrons talking and listened in.

“Did you know what you did wrong?”

“I think so. I had the nose too high, didn’t I?”

“Yep. Your flaps were good, airspeed was just about right and your angle was good until you pulled up the nose, that cause too much loss of speed and you nearly stalled out. At the height we were, a stall would have resulted in a crash.”

“I guess that’s good that you grabbed the controls then.”

“Well, let’s just say neither of us would have had a good day. Now, let’s put that behind us and order.”

Warren’s sandwich arrived including cheese, jalapeños and pickles and a generous side of BBQ sauce. He was pleasantly surprised at how good it was and took his time finishing it.

The bartender cleared his plate and asked, “Anything else?”

“Just the check. Oh, and if I can ask, do you know those guys over there?” he said gesturing to the other patrons.

“Roger? Yeah. He’s a local flight instructor. The other one is probably a student as I haven’t seen him around here much.”

“Instructor? As in he teaches you to fly planes?”

“Well, yeah. This is an airport after all,” she said with a smile and a smirk.

Warren noticed they too were almost done eating so he took his time finishing his beer and paying.

When they were leaving he was happy to see John go one way and Roger the other.

He called out, “Roger!”

Turning with a puzzled look, “Yes? Do I know you?”

“Uh, no. But the bartender in there gave me your name, said you’re an instructor.”

“That’s correct. I teach single engine air craft. Mostly Cessna planes, everything from your base model up to the Cessna Caravan. Although if you know how to fly one plane then you have the knowledge to fly any other similar aircraft.”

“Could you teach me?”

“Lessons are \$350 each, three hours long, plus fuel, figure about another \$50-\$100 per lesson. You’ll need at least three months worth, at twice a week, to be able to pass the tests and get your pilot’s license. If money is a problem we can cut back to one a week or even one every other week but then you’re looking at six to twelve months before you’ll meet the minimum qualifications.”

“Can I sign up right now?”

“Sure, I have a few openings. You can write a check for the first lesson, for \$350, and then pay for the fuel after the lesson. Our first few are done in a classroom so there won’t be any fuel charges.”

“Well, you said two per week at \$350 for three months, that’s \$8,400. Let me just make the check for \$10,000 to cover fuel usage. If we go over that let me know and I’ll get you the rest.”

“Um, uh, yeah, sure. That’s fine.”

“You seem surprised.”

“Sorry, most students pay on a lesson by lesson basis as they can afford it.”

Present

Warren headed off to the community coordination center while Gail went to check on the motor pool.

Entering the mushroom shaped building, he ascended to the main level and stopped to take in the view and activity while he recalled the history. At one time the building served as a research center but now, after what happened, research was low down on the list. Very low. Survival was the new norm.

“Naktuk, anything new?”

“Nope. The patrol drove off a few bears earlier this morning. They got the message and didn’t hang around.”

“Yeah, we heard. I was already up and the shots woke Gail.”

“A wise man once say, being tired is better than being a bear popsicle.”

“A wise man?”

“OK, I just came up with that,” he said breaking into a big grin.

Changing subjects, “How’s the mission coming along?”

“Hey, Peterson?”

“What?” came a voice from across the building.

“Warren wants to know what’s going on with the mission.”

“We’re having our first planning session tomorrow. He should attend. I’ve got the preliminary lists here,” said the voice from the cubicle with a hand held up above the wall clutching a handful of papers.

Warren headed over and took them.

“Oh, hey Warren.”

“Peterson. You look like crap.”

“Yeah, didn’t get to sleep until late, then the horns and gun shots this morning woke me early.”

“Us too. You really need to take better care of yourself. You don’t want to be getting sick.”

“Yes Doctor,” said in a semi patronizing, but friendly tone.

Gail walked past the red overhead door to the smaller service door and entered the large grey steel building noticing that it was just as cold inside as outside, but at least there was no wind. Filling most of the space were four large wheeled vehicles looking like some unholy cross between a school bus and a monster truck. A shop space, actually another smaller building grafted onto the side of the main building, had the small group working in there.

Nukka, Dian and Tullik were hard at work fabricating yet another repair job. Parts were not something you could just get anymore. Something wore out or broke and you either repaired it or made a new one yourself.

The building smelled of grease, oil and hot metal. While generally clean, dirt, metal shavings and oil stains could be found around the edges and underneath cabinets.

“Hey, how are the tundra buggies coming along?”

“Hi Gail,” said Dian. “After what you all did to them last time I’m surprised we’re as far along as we are.”

“It wasn’t thaaaatt bad,” she said with a mischievous grin.

“That bad?! Hell, I got no idea how you even made it back here with them.”

“Well, we were pretty loaded up and it was stuff that we needed.”

“That might explain the suspension damage, but what about the bullet holes, broken glass, burnt sides and engines leaking more fluid than a drooling bear with a fresh seal kill?”

“You saw the report. Apparently someone thought they needed the supplies more than we did.”

Tullik joined the conversation, “You think they took a toll on the remaining survivors? There can’t be that many more still people still around.”

“You’re probably right, except those that are left have done what it takes to live and will continue to do so. Each time out the groups we encounter are better prepared and more dangerous than the previous ones.”

“Well let’s hope this time around you get what you need and won’t have to go out again.”

“Unlikely. You know as long as we stay here we’re safe, but the longer and further we head south the more likely we are to die and we don’t have enough on hand here to sustain us indefinitely. Asset reallocation is the only option.”

“Should we show her?”

“Yeah, might as well, they’re going to need to know about this and sooner is better than later.”

“Know about what?” Gail responded with just a hint of concern.

“Follow us.”

She did so while biting her tongue at the questions she wanted to ask. They led her across the dirt and gravel road to another steel building, almost the same size as the one they had just left, painted in a similar fashion and with double sliding doors in place of the overhead door. Nukka and Tullik each took a door and pulled them apart while Dian just stood and smiled.

“Those look like more buggies?”

“No, better. Trailers. Now you can take twice as much with the same crew. More buggies would mean more drivers, more guards and more fuel. This gives the increased cargo capacity with only a small increase to the fuel needs.”

“Does coordination know about these?”

“Specifically, no. Just that we’re experimenting with some ideas in here. We didn’t want to say anything until we knew we could pull it off.”

Gail was almost giddy with joy over the possibilities.

Dian finally pointed, “Go, tell them. We know you want to. You’re better at the people stuff. We just want to play in our shop and be left alone.”

Gail gave them each a big hug and rushed off towards the coordination center with the good, no, great news.

Past

Warren hated clinic work, but every so often he was required to help or offer a consult on a difficult diagnosis. One particular patient was quite perplexing and when no one could figure it out he was called in.

The patient was presenting with such a wide variety of symptoms and rapidly declining health that doctors were at a loss. Warren reviewed the case notes, test and reported symptoms and offered a highly unorthodox diagnosis. The patient, he claimed, was suffering from Yellow Fever, Chikungunya and Dengue Fever, all concurrently.

His colleagues were quite unimpressed. The patient, in years, had not been any further south than St. Louis, had a desk job in Minneapolis and simply including multiple diseases to explain all the symptoms was, they all felt, taking the easy way out.

Warren insisted and ordered tests for each different viral infection. Unfortunately for the patient, he was ultimately proven correct as test after test came back positive. They isolated and quarantined the patient and attacked the infections with very aggressive treatments but they were too late to save him.

Eventually his colleagues had to concede he had been correct and rarely were his diagnosis's ever questioned again.

Another incident, a few months later, gave Warren something to consider. A patient, again with a mysterious illness, presented. He eventually diagnosed her as having Lupus. That in and of itself wasn't the surprising part. Instead it was a simple request from the patient. After being prescribed corticosteroids and immuno-suppressants, in doses and quantities in line with the government insurance program mandates, she asked the Warren for two more years of prescriptions and she would buy those out of pocket.

He knew doing such a thing could be grounds for severe censure, if not suspension, or worse, of his medical license.

"I'm sorry but I can't do that. We are only allowed to prescribe what is covered by insurance."

"I know, but I'm willing to buy the rest out of my own pocket."

"That makes no sense. Insurance will pay. Why would you waste your money buying more? Are you planning on selling these on the illegal market?"

"No! Absolutely not. These are for my use."

"But why two years worth? Pharmacies all carry these. You can get them quite easily and not have to pay for them."

"What happens when the pharmacies are closed?"

"Oh, you don't need to worry. Many are open twenty four hours a day and..."

“No, I mean what happens when they close and never reopen? Or at least don’t reopen for weeks or months?”

“That is impossible. They wouldn’t close down and not reopen.”

“Power outage?”

“Sure it might affect them for a day or two but...”

“Hurricane?”

“Well...”

“Hurricane Katrina? Greece rioting some years back? Detroit, New York and Atlanta riots from last year?”

“Yeah, but...”

“Doctor, let me level with you. I’m what you might call a prepper. I believe in being prepared for disasters. I stock up on food and water and bandages and even toilet paper so if something bad happens I don’t have to rely on our fragile systems to see me through. A bad tornado outbreak or a hurricane can cripple a part of the country for months at a time. Even worse, look at our national debt. It’s twenty three trillion dollars. They can’t pay it back and still keep borrowing more. Eventually the world is going to lose confidence in the dollar. When that happens and inflation really takes off I may not be able to afford the co-pay, let alone the drugs themselves. Please, I’m begging, do a bit of research on the Internet about prepping and if you still feel my request is foolish I won’t ask again.”

Warren found the conversation both alarmist and uncomfortable and figuring the quickest way to get her to leave would be to agree.

“Sure, I’ll take a look. I’ve got your phone number in our files here. You have a good day.”

Present

A call came in on the FRS radio.

“Come in tower.”

“Tower here, go ahead Naartok.”

“Tower, can you locate the doctor? Belinda is having pains and I think the baby is coming.”

“He’s standing right next to me. I’ll send him right over.”

Warren was already headed for the stairs. He jogged home, grabbed his bag and headed out to Naartok and Belinda’s home about a quarter mile from the mushroom.

Naartok greeted him at the door and looked very uncomfortable with the situation.

“Why don’t you wait out here, I’ll see how Belinda’s doing and call you if we need anything.”

“Yeah, that sounds good. Thanks. Thanks for coming so quick,” he said appearing quite relieved.

He went in, closed the door behind him and went straight to Belinda who was laying on the bed in obvious distress.

“How far apart are they?”

“About 3 minu...ooooohhhhhh!”

The doctor, following the usual procedure, laid out his instruments, checked the heartbeats and made sure he had towels ready but otherwise mostly let nature take its course. He would only intervene if something went wrong and was threatening the mother or child’s life.

Just a few minutes after he had everything ready Putyuk arrived and came in to assist. She had some limited medical training and was helping Warren with everything she could so the community would have a backup for when Warren was away.

Like the last half dozen deliveries, this one went fine with Putyuk assisting and Warren mostly just watching and offering encouraging words and instructions at the right times.

When everything was done, the doctor left Putyuk to finish up with Belinda while he took his bag, exiting the small home that could have been a mirror of his own and congratulated Naartok on the birth of his new son.

Past

Warren was in his Audi on the way to the airport for a relaxing afternoon flying around his new Cessna 182. It wasn't actually a new plane, just new to him. Low flight time and quite a bit cheaper than buying new, he couldn't pass it up, especially now that he had his pilot's license. Roger referred him to a couple of other instructors who were offering dual engine flight classes and Warren figured in another few months he'd be certified for just about anything that could land at this airport.

He took out his MP3 player and turned it and the radio on. About to switch the input from radio to MP3 input, he paused to listen to the news story.

“...launched a missile headed towards Anchorage. The US launched their counter missiles from the Fort Greely anti missile defense installation and destroyed the inbound threat while still over open ocean. China announced that since no one was harmed there would be no need for retaliation against North Korea's launch. They reiterated that North Korea is under their protection and any attack against them would be seen as an attack against China and responded to accordingly. The White House has yet to comment on China's statement or the missile launch itself.”

The news report continued on to local mundane topics and Warren put on his MP3 player but couldn't recall a single song he heard. His mind was on the possibilities of a missile strike on US territory or even war with China. Ever since becoming the new superpower and stepping into the largest country in the world role, in terms of GDP and most other ways of measuring, China was becoming more and more of a, the best word he could think of was, bully.

He filed his flight plan, did his preflight inspection and topped off the fuel. Slowly he taxied to the end of the runway, got clearance and was airborne fifteen seconds later. Warren finally admitted to himself that he just wasn't into it today, cut his flight short and returned to the airport. After returning the plane to the hanger and

securing it, he walked back to the terminal and headed for the restaurant, saying hi to Roger when he passed in the terminal.

“Hi Warren. What can I get you?”

“My usual beer and a chicken avocado on focaccia.”

He had eaten here many times over the past year and pretty much knew the menu and a number of regulars by heart.

She put the order in and came back with his beer.

“Just you today?”

“Yeah. Why?”

“Last few times you had that pretty blond with you.”

“Not anymore. She really just wanted my money. It took me a few months to realize that.”

“If you don’t mind my asking, I assumed you had some since lessons aren’t cheap, but are you really that well off?”

“I guess you could say that. My job pays quite well.”

“And you do what?”

“Doctor.”

“Ah. Yeah, I guess you would be making a good buck then.”

“You sound a bit surprised.”

“I guess I am. Most doctors I’ve ever met had an attitude, some kind of superiority complex. The rest of us are treated like we're beneath them and have no clue. You’ve never talked or acted that way.”

“I think that was a compliment.”

Laughing a bit, “Yes. It might not have sounded that way but it was,” she replied hearing the bell ding and turning for the kitchen to get his sandwich.

She returned, placed the sandwich on the counter in front of him and asked, “Did you hear about that missile?”

Present

“All right! Listen up! Everyone, settle down.”

The side conversations stopped and the three dozen people quieted down in response to Franklin.

“We’re only a week away from deploying. Let’s run down the schedule, assignments and see what we’ve forgotten. Naartok, lead us off with security.”

“Yeah. Um. OK. Let’s see here,” he stalled while shuffling papers. Finally finding the one he wanted he looked up and started.

“We’re going with six armed people per vehicle including the driver, navigator and two warriors. Standard load outs including rifle and shotgun for each and a personal side arm. We’re not expecting any resistance until we cross the border and even then probably not until the Duluth area at the soonest. In the Twin Cities we’re definitely expecting to take some fire and not just while moving. Probably also while camped and while scavenging too.”

“Taking that into account we will have two teams of two out patrolling and four more guarding the vehicles and scavenge location while the other eight actually do the scavenging work. To be fair we’ll either switch off at each new location or every four hours if we stay in one place that long. This helps spread the work and the stress of watching.”

“We won’t shoot first unless it’s obvious we’re about to be attacked but we will return fire for anyone who does fire upon us. Last time out we tried to negotiate in each encounter but discovered a few people didn’t believe in that. I guess the flying Molotov cocktails should have been the first indicator. That is one mistake that will not be repeated.”

“OK, Thanks Naartok. Next up, logistics. Warren?”

Standing to make sure all could see and hear him, Warren started speaking, “First priority, food and preservation items, mostly canning jars. We’ll be looking to replenish our ammo stores, picking up any useful firearms if present, and getting parts or accessories for the current ones. Next will be medical supplies and equipment. Anything even remotely useful we’re grabbing. Paper products, toiletries, clothes, boots and baby products.”

“We expect, with the addition of the trailers, to have room for as much alternative energy equipment as possible. Solar panels, even though we’re going to have limited use of them each year, and wind turbines along with batteries, cables,

inverters and every grow light we can find. We'll try to get a few large or multiple small green house kits and seeds. Lots of seeds. Finally, all types of gardening accessories, pots, tools and fertilizer will be sought."

"Moving on to our homes we'll be looking for building supplies, lumber, sheet metal, insulation, fasteners and fixtures. Of course all the hand tools we can find too. For heating, propane once again and also as many wood burning stoves as we can find. We believe we can either make a second trip in spring or wait until fall and harvest timber for the stoves. Now, if we have space we'll fell and gather some trees on the way home. In order to do so, that means chain saws and everything that goes with them including fuel and spare parts."

"Thanks Warren. Now leading the savaging team will once again be Joshua. Josh, any comments?"

"No, not really. We've been through this before and I'm sure we'll be doing it again. Standard procedures just like we've done before and have once again been training these past few months. Everyone on the team has been out at least one before and we all know what to do."

"Good enough. Last up, vehicle and communications. Dian?"

"Thanks Franklin. As I'm sure you've all heard by now, in addition to the four buggies, we've got four trailers to go along with them. This will pretty much double our carrying capacity with only a minor impact on fuel usage. We're estimating twenty percent more and most of that will be used on the return trip when loaded down. We've repaired them all back to one hundred percent functionality and have, hopefully, enough spare parts. Worst case, as long as we can make it near the border we should be able to scavenge tractor and combine parts for anything mechanical that might break that we didn't already plan for."

“Comms will be the standard GMRS handhelds and ear pieces that we’ve used before. Charging will be off the buggies batteries.”

“Good. Then unless there are any other issues or concerns....No? OK, then we’re a go for the mission. Carry out as planned.”

Everyone in the room rose and either broke into small discussion groups or headed out to their work.

Past

He looked at his schedule and was dreading the mandatory staff meeting. These were quite boring, had nothing to do with someone in his position and Warren could happily live without them. Knowing he had no other choice, he trudged over to the auditorium and found a seat near the door. Everyone was at least prompt as walking in late to the director’s presentation was not a good way to get yourself noticed.

The first few minutes were normal formalities, a few anniversary announcements for long time employees and other trivial information that Warren couldn’t care less about. Finally, the director announced that FEMA would be giving a short presentation and he turned the meeting over to them.

A perky upbeat presenter started with, “Hi! How’s everyone doing?”

At best a few groans were heard.

“That good? Well, I’m here to let you know that an F5 tornado is currently on the ground and making a path straight for the hospital. We expect it to hit in about ten minutes.”

Many people jumped up, a few screamed, others just sat there dazed. It took a few minutes of banging on the podium and shouting before order was restored.

“I’m sorry to scare you like that, there is no tornado coming or even storms predicted today, but that did get your attention. Now, what if that wasn’t a lie? What if I had been telling the truth? Unlike a fire, this isn’t an evacuation event. Rather, it’s what is called a ‘shelter in place’ event. “

“Now, let’s assume this fictional tornado did indeed hit the hospital and a wide swath of the city too. Most windows are blown out, there is substantial damage to the infrastructure of the building and no power. The backup generators were all damaged by flying debris. What are you going to do with the people here? How about the hundreds or even thousands out there that need help? For that matter, how are you going to take care of yourself? If you can’t adequately provide for yourself how do you expect to help others for any length of time?”

“First, I want to present you with a 72 hour and a two week emergency kit. These are what we recommend for short term and longer term emergency needs. You might hear the terms survivalist or prepper if you research these. Some of them take this to the extreme and have months and months of supplies but at FEMA we suggest between three and fourteen days as sufficient for most people. “

“The 72 hour kit is basically some first aid supplies, which I don’t think I have to explain to this crowd, a few changes of clothes and food and water. In climates, such as here in Minnesota, you’re also want something to keep warm, perhaps a cold weather sleeping blanket and appropriate clothing. The two week kit is similar but has, of course, more supplies, more food, more water and even includes

recommendations for a small shelter such as a tent. This would be very useful if you could not get home or found your home destroyed.”

“I’ve got some hand outs that we’ll be passing around detailing further information and if anyone has questions you can reach me by email or phone as listed on the bottom. Thank you for your time.”

The director came back on stage, thanked the FEMA rep and said that the hospital was pursuing a preparedness plan in conjunction with FEMA and that smaller meetings with each department and each floor would be scheduled in the near future.

The meeting broke up and Warren, looking over the documents on the way back to this office, thought about the ‘prepper’ that had asked him for larger prescriptions. Since FEMA was supporting this and it was the second time he'd heard this term, perhaps he should look further into it and what it meant.

Present

Far north of Hudson Bay, in an area known as the Northwestern Passages, there is a small island known by the native Inuit name, Igloolik. Located in the Nunavut territory of Canada, the small island has a single town by the same name. This island has been inhabited for at least four thousand years and currently sits around 2500 people, of which about twenty percent are not of native descent.

Until recent events, the non native population was closer to five percent but many southerners, as pretty much most of the world’s population was, fled north and those few hardy enough and well prepared enough sometimes stumbled upon the island and have since made it home. The swell in population by nearly five

hundred was not as detrimental as one might think since those who could get here also could take care of themselves and didn't need handouts when they arrived.

The Climate is considered primarily a polar climate with nine months of the year below freezing with summers, if you could call them that, rarely breaking fifty degrees or ten degrees Celsius. The record high is only in the low seventies. This is a harsh environment on a good day and downright deadly for those not able to handle it.

With the cold fall temperatures, the ocean starts to freeze and vast fields of sea ice form. By mid December all of Hudson bay is also frozen. The team is counting on this as they board the tundra buggies and plan a mostly straight south run down the frozen ice. The route will take them all the way to the southern tip of Hudson bay before heading south west across Ontario towards Lake superior and eventually into Minnesota with a final run south to the twin cities.

Warren, Gail, Dian, Naartok, Aguta, Deniigi and the crews of the other three buggies all boarded their vehicles and started the pre mission checks. All gauges were reporting normal with the engines operating as expected. The radios all checked out and the trailers were tracking nicely behind the buggies.

Warren marveled at the buggies. Each the size of a large bus, and the trailers equally as large, sitting up giant tractor tires they were capable of driving over many obstructions as if they were mere bumps. Even the arctic giants, the polar bears, could barely reach the undercarriage of each vehicle. Certain areas had extra plating welded on in anticipation of an assault but the majority of the vehicle was still essentially a stock body.

Deniigi was driving and Gail functioned as the navigator. For the most part, head south was all the navigation necessary but since the season was still early, she was responsible for watching far head and making sure that the ice was solid. If they

saw open water in the distance they'd either have to find a way around or back track and work their way to land, which was a longer and slower route. Warren sat with the others making small talk.

“How's your son doing Naartok?”

“Good. Putyuk is checking in on Belinda while I'm away.”

“You know, I once asked Putyuk about her name and she said it means ‘great medicine woman’ as everyone felt she would one day be a healer of the village. What does Naartok mean? “

Aguta started to laugh and after a moment Naartok finally joined in.

Warren and Dian were both obviously not in on the joke which made it even funnier to the others.

Finally Naartok answered, “Obese. I was a chubby boy.”

“Ah. I can't see how it fit since you're definitely no longer obese by any definition of the word.”

Naartok was indeed quite fit. He had outgrown his baby fat and while still big-boned, it was all muscle attached to his bones now.

“How about you, Aguta?”

With a solemn answer, “Gatherer of the dead.”

Warren raised his eyebrows in question.

“Some trace the meaning to our rituals in how we handle the bodies of the dead. Others claim it has to do with those around us, think caretaker of the elderly, and some say it’s more of an impact we have on those around us in that we bring or cause death.”

Even in the winter gear with the heaters on full, Warren felt a shiver go through him.

The caravan stopped to refuel as necessary, but otherwise, in the vast open nothing of the sea ice they continued south switching drivers as necessary. Each vehicle maintained approximately a half mile of separation from the others as an unseen crack or weakness in the ice would be even more disastrous if the vehicles were all bunched together. The loss of one would instead be a loss of all.

Past

Warren was reviewing the reports from the CDC and comparing against their own diagnostic analysis. Sure enough the trend line was there. Subtle but present. A slight uptick in the number of reported cases of various diseases, usually tropical in origin, was clearly there. The reports from institutions further south were even more pronounced. Higher levels and trends were more obvious. Nothing alarming, nothing worth issuing any press releases, but definitely something to watch. Perhaps the wet summer and the warmer than normal fall allowed the carriers of these diseases, primarily mosquitoes to spread a bit further or survive a bit longer and infect a small but statistically noticeably larger group.

Continuing to review the data, Warren filed it away in his head for further consideration. Now it was time to go shopping for a new car, only this time he was

thinking of a Hummer, Land Rover or perhaps Mercedes SUV to replace his sports car.

Present

The caravan made excellent time and were already on land, in Ontario Canada, by mid December. Gail was responsible for the route that would take them to highway 11. She had to use Topo maps, GPS data and other resources to find a way across the wilderness that would permit passage of the buggies. On occasion, the route required chain saws and labor to clear short stretches that would otherwise require very lengthy detours.

As practiced, half assumed guard duty, some on top of the buggies, others roaming much further out, while the rest did the work to clear a path. In previous years they had covered much to the east and already had established routes. This was their first western attempt and the route was documented and marked, as they went along, on their maps for future use if the resources are as plentiful as hoped.

They found the wilderness roads and started following them slowly working their way to larger and larger roads until finally making it to highway 11. Up to this point only one gunshot had been heard and it was off in the distance. Perhaps a hunter who didn't even know they were passing through or someone who wanted to see what their reaction would be. Either way they simply drove on.

They reached the outskirts of the Twin Cities by the end of December leaving them two full weeks of scavenging before needing to start back.

Past

The following spring the temperatures warmed, the rains came, people died by the thousands. Warren and dozens of other infectious disease specialists were all working closely with the CDC and each other trying to figure out what happened. The first suspicion was a biological WMD attack by some rogue group or nation, however this problem seemed to be affecting all countries equally.

More and more research, more and more deaths. The puzzling part was the cause. It wasn't a single disease but instead a whole cocktail of traditionally tropical diseases. The only one not seen was West Nile Virus.

Warren picked up on that fact and started researching WNV wondering what was different why didn't that one spread with the others. His research pointed to mostly dead ends. Nothing was panning out.

One day, by pure luck, he read, yet another article about mosquitoes, but this one from almost a decade ago, discussed a teenager with the idea to genetically modify mosquitoes to allow them to function as flying syringes to deliver a vaccine for West Nile Virus.

“What if the GMO mosquitoes cross bred and mixed their vaccine proteins with other diseases. Could those diseases have become more prevalent? Perhaps able to survive more environments and ranges? If so, then a mosquito bite, any bite, could be swimming with much more deadly diseases than before,” thought Warren.

He immediately poured himself into the problem, analyzing data, vectors and patterns. It wasn't long until he felt this might indeed be the cause. GMO mosquitoes. He quickly shared his findings with the other specialists and with the CDC.

Within two weeks the data was confirmed, the death toll was well into the millions just in the US alone, and massive campaigns were undertaken to spray the mosquito out of existence. They seemed to be successful and by fall the infection and death rate had dropped dramatically.

Next spring, however, they were back and worse than ever. The spraying had helped natural selection along quite quickly and those mosquitoes left were immune to anything they hit them with. By July the southern states had seen 90% human lethality with literally no one escaping a bite. The summer temperatures helped the mosquitoes move north through all of the US and into southern Canada.

Warren knew to stay was to die, but where could he go? He headed to the country airport with the goal of loading up his plane and heading north. In the past few years, finally open to the idea, he had learned a few things about prepping and had built up a healthy stash of food and supplies that he kept in his private hanger. As a doctor his medical supplies and equipment were second to none.

The airport, in fact just about everywhere, had people panicking and acting reckless. The desperation in their eyes told Warren the situation was rapidly getting ugly. He went through the terminal and past the restaurant heading for his hanger when his name was called.

“Warren! Wait! Warren!”

Stopping, he turned, it was the bartender, Gail, running towards him.

“What’s going on? All the deaths these past few years and now the CDC is issuing a warning about mosquitoes! They say to avoid them but how can you? They’re everywhere?”

“Slow down Gail. Yes, the mosquitoes were genetically modified a number of years ago as a way to quietly mass administer a vaccine. That in and of itself was reckless, but even worse, it looks like they mutated and also mutated the other diseases they carried. They’re now super bugs. One bite runs the risk of a whole cocktail of diseases. You’ve got to get to shelter.”

“But where? I have nothing. No family. Just my apartment and it doesn’t even have air conditioning.”

Warren pondered for a moment, then responded, “Where do you live?”

“Just about five minutes away from here. Why?”

“I’m planning on getting out of here to somewhere safe. Do you want to come with? If so, you can probably never come back. I don’t mean to put you on the spot but there isn’t time to ponder this. If you’re in we’ll go to your place, pickup whatever you want and we leave, by plane, today, and probably within an hour.” She looked at him with a frightened expression, a single tear rolling down her cheek.

“Gail! What’s it going to be? This may be your only chance or we might not make it either. I, for one, am going to take whatever chance I can to survive instead of just giving up.”

“OK” was the quiet and meek response.

“Good. I’m parked out front, let’s go. You’ll have to give me directions to your place.”

They ran out of the airport and into Warren's G class Mercedes SUV. He got them to her place and she packed just essentials and a few mementos. On the way out she reached behind the door, pulled out a shotgun and a box of shells.

He gave her a surprised look.

"Hey, girl's got to have protection," she responded back with the first smile he'd seen on her face today.

As they approached the airport it was apparent that others were planning on getting out too and the small parking lot was now overflowing with cars and getting worse by the minute with at least one fist fight already in progress.

Taking advantage of the off road capabilities, Warren bypassed the lot and drove across the field, right through the fence and kept on going to the hanger. He slammed it into park, ran out, opened the hanger door and then drove in. After parking inside he closed the door and slumped down on the ground against the door.

"Warren, are you alright!?"

"Yes, just not used to this much physical excitement and activity. We have a lot more to do before we can leave."

"You mean check the plane over?"

"Well, technically, yes but I was thinking a much more physical activity."

Her expression quickly changed from concern to anger. "If you think I'm gonna sleep with you just..."

“No! no! I’m sorry. I guess that didn’t come out right. Here, look, I’ll show you.”

She grabbed her shotgun and followed him, at a distance to the wall where there were many large chests and lockers. He started opening each one revealing bucket after bucket of freeze dried food. Other with a red cross insignia and other cryptic markings were stacked up along with boxes and some bags.

“I learned about this thing called prepping and I’ve got years of food and supplies here. We need to load all this on the plane as I don’t know where we’ll end up. We’ll probably need all of this just to survive.”

She finally realized he really was looking out for their best interest and set her shotgun to the side and began helping to load everything into his plane, recently upgraded to a twin engine Beechcraft 1900.

“Wow, I knew you had some money, but you can afford this?”

“Used, and with monthly payments, yes. Then again I have a feeling in the next few months money is going to become worthless.”

They continued loading everything on the plane and did a full preflight. The tanks were already topped up and they were ready to go.

Violating safety rules, Warren started the engines and then exited the plane, walking past the spinning propellers, to open the hanger doors. As he expected, people saw the aircraft preparing to leave and rushed towards it. He hurried back on, closed the door and strapped in. The lead people were almost to the hanger when he forced the throttles forward and shot out the hanger and down the tarmac. A few dropped down to avoid getting hit by the wing as he blasted past. He looked out the windows planning to taxi to the runway when he saw trucks pull across blocking it from use.

Throwing caution, rules and his license to the wind, he advanced the throttles and used the taxiway instead as a runway catapulting them forward and soon into the air up and away from the near riot down below.

Present

“Damn! I’m hit!” yelled out the driver of buggy three.

“Hang on, I’ll come take a look!” yelled Warren.

“No! It’s not that bad. I’m getting a pressure bandage on it. Wait until we’re secured!”

Nartook and Aguta worked their way around the building hoping to come in from behind and catch the shooters unaware. Foot step by foot step, they advanced on the frozen ground trying to avoid the patches of snow. Each step in the snow sent out a resounding crunch potentially giving away their position. Ever so slowly they approached the crumbling edge of the warehouse structure.

Aguta popped his head around the corner, looked around and pulled it back quickly.

“Clear.”

Nartook needed nothing more, he stepped boldly around the corner, over the broken bricks and into building followed by Agutu. Together, back to back, nearly touching, they stepped in sync down the aisles of pallets and boxes working their way towards the gun fire and the front of the warehouse.

The five attackers finally came into view, none aware of the two men behind them. Agutu slipped his rifle over his shoulder and pulled his bow from the other shoulder and smoothly drew an arrow placing it against the string. A quick pull back, a momentary pause and the metal tipped shaft lanced its way forward as it sprung from the bow. Just a fraction of a second later it pierced the neck of the rear most shooter silently crumpling him to the ground

He repeated the same attack twice more before the remaining two shooters realized their firepower had substantially diminished. They turned, saw the two men and stood to shoot back. The standing profile they presented to the others outside was unmistakable. A handful of bangs and they too both dropped to the ground.

Aguta took his knife and slit the throat of each person, not wanting to waste another arrow or bullet on them.

Nartook called out from inside, “Clear! Bring up the buggy and let’s get loading.”

Past

Warren and Gail flew north stopping at every remote airport and landing strip that had fuel. Eventually they came to Hudson bay and he started up western shore heading north, again stopping at landing strip after landing strip. The last few, and with progressively larger distances were Chesterfield Inlet and Repulse bay. Finally it was a long stretch to Hail Beach and then a short hop on to Igloolik.

They’d start with a fly over and if fuel tanks or a fuel truck were visible they’d circle around, land, refuel and continue north. They finally stopped at Igloolik when, for the first time, they encountered a few people on the ground. They spoke a broken English but it was enough to get across the message of welcome.

Warren met with the town council and explained the crisis yet no one seemed concerned.

“But you don’t understand, if the mosquito is infected and bites you, the resulting diseases will probably kill you.”

“No, you don’t understand. No mosquitoes. Too cold.”

“You do know what a mosquito is?”

“What do they teach you? You think we are ignorant natives?”

“No, no. Please don’t misunderstand. I just want to make sure something is not getting lost in the language or translations. Our very lives depend on this.”

It took some convincing but finally Warren accepted that they did indeed understand what he was talking about. The council directed him to a research center in the middle of town for further assistance. Inside he talked with more people and they showed him yearly records for temperature that literally every month, even in the summer, had at least a few days at or below freezing. Conditions that would be inhospitable to mosquitoes.

He knew that they had found their new home.

Overtime the community came to accept Warren and Gail as new members. The assistance and specifically the training he provided to Putyuk, the village medicine woman, helped her do more than basic care and rituals and solidified their position as valued and contributing members of society. The stores of medical equipment and supplies he brought with definitely helped their cause too.

Nearly weekly for almost a year, more and more people managed to find their way north by plane or boat. Warren established a quarantine process to ensure new arrivals were clean and the community established policies that required new arrivals to show worth to the town or they were politely but firmly asked to move on. The harsh environment was not one that allowed for freeloading.

Present

The scavenging group was quite pleased with their efforts. Everything on the list in even greater quantities than planned was loaded and secured. They found enough fuel to refill their tanks and drums and even added a few new ones to their supplies. Warren had acquired many new medical supplies, medications and even some portable equipment. He reviewed the loads and with barely any room left felt it was time to head home.

Each buggy started the long journey home retracing their route back. Along highway 61 well north of Duluth, the lead buggy entered a tunnel and had to pull up short as two large trucks appeared at the exit and turned to effectively block the tunnel.

Deniigi shifted into reverse and attempted the slow and difficult maneuver of backing up, in a curving tunnel with a trailer and combined vehicle length over two buses long.

“ccchhhhtttttt..... crackle..... Blocking the sout..... ccchhhh..... not back..... ccchhh”

“Damn, the tunnel is blocking the radio. Can anyone see out back? Did they block the entrance?”

“No, I can’t see... wait! Stop! Yeah it is blocked and people are heading this way with guns!” yelled Gail.

Aguta and Naartok immediately popped the roof hatch, grabbed their rifles and started to climb out the top.

BANG!

A shot echoed back and forth in the tunnel.

BANG! BANG BANG!

Aguta returned fire before dropping back inside.

“No good. They’ll knock us off as we climb out. I shot and they backed off but they’ve got the advantage. We’ll have to hope the other vehicles can do something.”

Gail was on the radio, “May Day! May Day! Buggy one taking fire. Evade and escape!” She repeated it multiple times.

“I don’t know if they got the message. It sounds like Buggy Two saw the trap, hopefully they others can get away. The supplies are more important than us.”

The group hunkered down, each armed and watching either forward or rearward for signs of movement. Hours passed with no signs of life outside of the cramped space.

“Should we try to ram the trucks out of the way?”

“Dian, you work on them so you’d know best. Will the buggy handle that?”

“Maybe is the best I can give. The faster you go the better chance it’ll bust through however the faster you go the more damage we’re going to take.

“Let’s not get hasty,” said Naartok. “We’re not in any imminent danger and by now the other buggies have to be aware of our condition.”

“Unless they too got caught.”

“Oh crap. I hadn’t thought of that.”

“Let me see if they’re still paying attention.”

Aguta crept up the ladder and popped the roof hatch. Using an old trick, he placed a hat on the end of his rifle and slowly raised it up the hatch.

BANG! Zing!

Pulling it back down he found a nice hole in his hat.

“Yeah, that way is still out.”

“Movement in front!” called out Gail.

Moments later shots started to ring out once more.

Aguta and Naartok opened the windows and returned fire with Naartok yelling out, “Might be a diversion, watch the rear!”

Gail and Dian moved into position to watch while Warren and Deniigi checked over their weapons prepared to help out in which ever direction they were needed.

More shots came their way, all from the front, some pinging against the armor, one coming through the window putting an interesting spider web pattern around the small hole.

“Warren! She’s hit!”

Turning back he saw Gail down and bleeding!

“How did it happen?!”

“She kept popping up to check toward the rear for attackers.”

Warren scrambled for his trauma kit and went to work on Gail. Stripping off her coat and cutting through the layers underneath, he exposed her chest and well swollen abdomen with their unborn child. It was a nasty wound just below the right breast, apparently entering from her back and exploding out her chest. He could see fragments of bone and by her severely labored breathing knew the lung had been punctured.

“Oh crap, this is bad! Guys, we got to get out of here! I need to attempt surgery on her.”

Warren temporarily sealed off the wounds allowing for a bit of comparatively easier breathing before starting the process necessary to attempt a repair to her body. The baby’s heartbeat, along with hers, were both way too fast and he was sure she was going into shock. He covered her back up to keep her warm while elevating her legs.

“Dian, you’re going to have to assist me.”

“Me!?! I, uh, I can’t. I, um, don’t know what to do.”

“You don’t have to. Just listen to my words and do exactly what I tell you.”

“But I…”

He reached over, grabbed both shoulders and shook her until she looked at him.

“She will die if we don’t act fast. I. Need. Your. Help.”

Realizing that it was her friend on the floor dying, Dian meekly nodded yes.

“Naartok, what’s the plan? I have to do surgery, it’s going to take awhile and I can’t do it if we’re bouncing around. Are we staying or going?”

Naartok paused a moment.

KA BOOM!!

The gun shots from in front ceased and one of the trucks was laying on its side, smoking and in flames.

The decision made for him, “We go!”

“Deniigi Go! Go! Go!”

He slipped into the seat, started the buggy and floored it for the opening. Loaded down and dragging the trailer, it still surprisingly accelerated fairly quickly.

He ended up clipping the fender of the other truck as the opening was just not quite large enough but only cosmetic damage appeared on the buggy as it raced through.

Aguta was on the radio, “Buggy One to caravan, status report!”

Deniigi slammed on the brakes throwing almost everyone standing to the floor.

“What the...”

“Paul and Jack!”

The door was quickly opened as Paul and Jack scrambled aboard. Shots were starting to ring out from back in the tunnel.

“Go! Go!”

Deniigi didn’t need the urging as he already had it in gear and was driving off.

“Buggy Two, we’re all fine. We saw the ambush and diverted onto the lake. It’s still frozen solid. We’re ten miles north. Make sure you get Paul and Jack, they should have blown you an exit”

“Just got ‘em. We’re on the way. Continue on and divert back to the road when possible. We’ll catch up. Gail was hit and we’re going to need to stop for awhile.”

“Warren, how long until you’re ready?”

“I’m ready now but once I start we shouldn’t move until I’m done. I can hold her for a bit longer I think. Get us a safe distance away.”

Naartok leaned over and quietly conversed with Aguta for a moment before receiving a nod and heading forward to talk to Deniigi.

After a moment the buggy pulled to a gentle stop and Aguta headed for the door carrying two large duffel bags. Naartok joined him taking one of the bags.

“You guys go on a few more miles and then find an out of the way place to hole up. We’ll cover the trail and buy you the time you need.”

Warren looked at them for a moment and then gave a slight nod mouthing the word, Thanks.

They nodded back and stepped out of the buggy disappearing into the trees almost immediately. Deniigi put it back in gear and drove on almost four more miles before pulling down a side road and off into the woods out of site from the main road. Since most people and thus services were no longer around and the road had not been plowed in years the enormous tire tracks in the snow leading off into the woods were pretty obvious but only if you were on the road to begin with.

Warren immediately began to prep Gail scrubbing her down and hooking up a couple of portable monitors and instructing Dian on what her involvement would be.

After making sure she wouldn’t wake up in the middle, he started to explore the wound and stitch her back together. The bullet had just missed her liver and her womb was untouched prompting a momentary pause on his part to give thanks.

At one point a single distant explosion was heard but nothing more.

In all he spent almost four hours getting her patched up but knew this was just the beginning. First off he could have missed a contaminant in the wound channel or

not set the wound up to drain properly or maybe she'd just get an infection even with his best efforts. He had antibiotics and gave her a precautionary injection before covering her and trying to make her as comfortable as possible.

Aguta and Naartok quickly removed a number of weapons and gear from each bag and headed back down the road toward the tunnel. When they got within sight it was apparent not all of the attackers were dead. A small group was milling around and it appeared a few others were back in the tunnel. They were dressed for the cold and snow although, strangely enough, a few wore Tyvek suits. Neither knew if it was for the camouflage affect when in the snow or as a possible mosquito barrier during warmer weather.

Each man had a rifle of some type, most appeared to be either bolt action hunting style rifles or ARs with the standard thirty round magazines. All had scopes and most carried them like they knew how to use them.

The two warriors each setup their own scoped rifles, using a bi-pod for stability and took up positions in the snow next to or behind good solid trees for cover. Both had their FRS radios on and their ear buds in. A single click by Naartok told Aguta all he needed to hear. Settling deeper into the snow, in a prone position, he slowed his breathing until it was regular and steady. Focusing through the scope he picked the right most target knowing Naartok would be working in from the left.

He paused his breathing preparing to fire and as he heard the report of the other rifle he fired his own. Two men dropped as they moved to the next targets. The rifle crack had reached the men just as he fired his second shot. The target, reacting, ended up taking the round in the neck instead of the head. Watching through the scope as the blood pumped out like a fountain in rhythmic spurts Aguta moved on knowing this one would very soon be out of the fight too.

The remaining two guys disappeared into the tunnel.

A few minutes passed before a high pitched revving sound was heard.

Into the radio Aguta said, "Snowmobile," as he was already releasing the rifle and reaching for his bow.

Naartok repositioned and waited. Two snowmobiles came shooting out of the tunnel like they had been shot out of a canon. Each had a driver and a rider and they were approaching the warrior's concealed position. Tracking the driver of the first, Narwook gave him just a bit of lead before firing. As the driver collapsed the vehicle turned sharply and smashed into a tree tossing the passenger.

Aguta pulled out a steel tipped arrow with a stick of dynamite taped to it. Crude, but hopefully effective. He lit the fuse, pulled back his sixty five pound draw bow and paused just a second to also lead the other snowmobile before releasing.

The arrow flew true and embedded itself in the leg of the passenger who had just enough time to look down at it before it exploded, setting off the gas tank resulting in a much larger explosion.

Naartok and Aguta gathered up their gear and slowly left the woods approaching the crashed snowmobile first. The passenger was still alive and trying to crawl away with a broken leg. One quick slice of Aguta's knife ended the attempt.

They spent the next hour exploring the tunnel and vehicles but determined no others were around. The keys were still in the cabs so they moved them clearing the tunnel once more. Satisfied the area was once more safe they turned to head back towards the route the buggy had taken.

"You know you didn't have to wreck the snowmobile, it would have saved us a long walk."

“Yeah, well you can use the exercise, Naartok the obese,” said Aguta back to his friend in jest.

Well after midnight they finally found the buggy and wisely camped out a safe distance away waiting for light before they approached. Deniigi returned the buggy back to the road and the long journey home continued.

Future

Gail did get a nasty infection and was able to fight it off but nearly lost the baby in the process. By the time the buggies finally returned to Igloolik she was well on the way to good health once more.

Not long after returning, the time came and Putyuk helped Warren deliver his new baby daughter who they named Tunerk-Buniq. The townspeople all approved of the name, which meant Gift of Sweet Daughter.

All around the planet people either adapted to a cold far northern, or in a few cases southern or mountain top, existence or they died. The people who tried to shelter in place or otherwise wait out the deadly mosquitoes found that supplies were not infinite. When they did emerge they got bit and they usually died. Some work full body tyvek suits with face masks making sure absolutely no skin was exposed.

They lived longer but the suits wore out or accidentally tore. Worse, other survivors saw them and, figuring they had supplies, followed them home frequently bestowing a worse faith on them and their families than the mosquitoes ever could have.

Of course in any population a very few proved immune to the cocktail injected into them but even they, without the support of a community usually perished. The human population had shrunk to a few hundred thousand individuals living in communities and at first even that number was slowly decreasing but with knowledge of what once was and dark nights lasting many months, the remaining people got to work on attempting to repopulate the world.

Needless to say, each following fall, Warren and Putyuk found themselves quite busy, both with trip planning and welcoming the next generation.



Culex Pipiens (pen name) is an amateur fiction writer focusing on PAW (Post Apocalyptic World) themed stories. Culex's work can be found on www.culexpipiens.com where many of the stories are available as free downloads. A number of Culex's stories are also available in the Kindle format on Amazon.com (search Kindle books for 'Culex Pipiens'). In addition, select stories are only available in Kindle format. If you like the stories and want to support Culex's work, consider buying one or more in the Kindle format which is readable on Kindle devices along with the free Kindle app for PC, Mac and many different tablets.

Culex Pipiens can be reached through the web site, via facebook (Culex Pipiens) and at Twitter (CulexPipiensPAW) and is regularly found on a handful of forums under the screen name of CulexPipiens.