

"Footvote' for me was a way of capturing what seemed to be the general mood of the time," Peter Hamilton said when he sent us this story. "Dramatizing the dilemma which so many people were living through was simply too good an opportunity to ignore." For a science fiction writer who normally sets his stories in the far future, it was clearly enjoyable to do something both topical and set in the real world... with just one slight twist. "But the real fun part," Peter went on, "was getting to parody the European Constitution which was also being published at the same time—and doing it in true If-I-Ruled-The-World style."

Footvote

Peter F. Hamilton

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v1.0 by the N.E.R.D's. Scanned, page numbers removed, paragraphs joined, formatted, common OCR errors have been removed and a full spell check is complete. Full read-through still required.

v1.1 Full read through completed by N.E.R.D's.

I Bradley Ethan Murray pledge that starting from this day the First Of January 2003, and extending for a period of two years, I will hold open a wormhole to the planet New Suffolk in order that all decent people from this United Kingdom can freely travel through to build themselves a new life on a fresh world. I do this in the sad knowledge that our old country's leaders and institutions have failed us completely.

Those who seek release from the oppression and terminal malaise which now afflict the United Kingdom are welcome to do so under the following strictures.

- 1. With citizenship comes responsibility.*
- 2. The monoculture of New Suffolk will be derived from current English ethnicity.*
- 3. Government will be a democratic republic.*
- 4. It is the job of Government to provide the following statutory services to the citizenship to be paid for through taxation.*
 - a. The enforcement of Law and Order; consisting of a police force and independent judiciary. All citizens have the right to trial by jury for major crimes.*
 - b. A socialized health service delivered equally to all. No private hospitals or medical clinics will be permitted, with the exception of 'vanity' medicine.*
 - c. Universal education, to be provided from primary to higher levels. No private schools are permitted. Parents of primary and secondary school pupils are to be given a majority stake in governorship of the school, including its finances. All citizens have the right to be educated to their highest capability.*
 - d. Provision and maintenance of a basic civil infrastructure, including road, rail, and domestic utilities.*
- 5. It is not the job of Government to interfere with, and over-regulate the life of the individual citizen. Providing they do no harm to others or the state, citizens are free to do and say whatever*

they wish.

6 Citizens do not have the right to own or use weapons.

* * * * *

Jannette

It was the day Tony Blair was due to give evidence to the Hutton enquiry. The *Today* programme on Radio Four was full of eager anticipation, taunting their opponent to come out and face their allegations full on, confident he would screw up. Over in Iraq, what was left of the British Army contingent had suffered more attacks from the population overnight. And I'd forgotten to buy Frosties for Steve.

"Not muesli!" he spat with the true contempt only-seven-year-olds can muster. If only the TUC leadership had that kind of determination when facing Gordon Brown's latest abysmal round of budget cuts.

"It's good for you," I said without engaging my brain. After seven years you'd think I'd know not to make that kind of tactical error with my own son.

"Mum! It's just dried pigeon crap," he jeered as I stopped pouring it into the bowl. Olivia, his little sister, started to giggle at the use of the NN word. At least she was spooning up her organic yogurt without a fuss. "Not nice, not nice," she chanted.

"What do you want then?" I asked.

"McDonalds. Big Cheesy One."

"No!" I know he only says it to annoy me, but the reflex is too strong to resist. And I'm the Bad Mother yet again. Maybe I shouldn't preach so hard. But then, that's Colin speaking.

"How about toast?" I asked.

"Okay."

I couldn't believe it was that easy. But he sat down at the table and waited with a smug look on his face. God he does so look like Colin these days. Is that why he's becoming more impossible?

"What's *the prim?*" Olivia asked.

Today had moved on from snipping at their public enemy number one to cover the demonstration at Stanstead.

"Public Responsibility Movement," I said. "Now please finish your breakfast. Daddy will be here soon." *He'd better be.*

I put the toast down in front of Steve, and he squirted too much liquid honey over it. Golden goo oozed down over the table. Both of them were suddenly silent and eating quickly, as if that would speed his arrival.

The flat's back door was open in an attempt to let in some cooler air. The summer was damn hot, and dry. Here in Islington the breeze coursed along the streets like gusts of desert air.

"Poooooo," Steve said, holding his nose as he munched down more toast. I had to admit, the smell which drifted in wasn't good.

Olivia crumpled her face up in real dismay. "That's horrid, mum. What is it?"

"Someone hasn't tied up their bin bags properly." The pile in the corner of De Beauvoir Square was getting ridiculously big. As more bags were flung on top, so the ones at the bottom split open. The SkyNews and News24 programmes always showed them with comparison footage of the '79 Winter of Discontent.

"When are they going to clear it?" Steve asked.

"Once a fortnight." Though I'd heard on the quiet that nearly ten per cent of the Army had already deserted, and that was before they had to provide civic utility assistance squads along with fire service cover, prison guard duties, engineering support to power stations, and invading Iraq. We'd be lucky if the pile was cleared every month. I'd seen a rat the size of a cat run across the square the other day. I always thought rodents that big were just urban legend.

"Why can't they take rubbish away like they used to?" Olivia asked.

"Not enough people to do that any more, darling."

"There's hundreds of people standing round the streets all day. It's scary sometimes. I don't like the park anymore."

She was right in a way. It wasn't the lack of people, of course, it was money, and the frightening way the pound was collapsing. What would happen when the true tax revenue figures came in was anyone's guess. Officially, tax received by the Treasury had only fallen by ten per cent since that little *shit* Murray opened his racist, fascist, arseholing wormhole. Nobody believed that. But naturally, the first thing the Treasury reduced was local government grants, with Brown standing up in Westminster and telling the councils to *cut back on wastage*. What a pitiful joke. Central Government has been saying that for the last fifty years at least -- because it's never their fault.

As a way to finally get the UK to sign on for the Euro, it couldn't be beaten. We desperately needed a currency that wasn't so susceptible to our traitors. Except that suddenly, France and Germany were blocking us from joining. The two biggest offenders when it came to breaking the budgetary stability arrangement. Bastards.

For once Colin actually turned up on time. He did his silly little ring tune on the front door, and both kids shot off from the table screeching hellos. Did they do that when I turned up to his place to collect them? I doubted it.

He came into the kitchen wearing a smart new sweatshirt and clean jeans; his curly brown hair neatly trimmed. I hated that old non-truism, that men just get more handsome as they get older. But they did seem to preserve themselves well after thirty. Colin hadn't put on a pound since he had started jogging and visiting the gym on a regular basis again. I supposed that bloody twelve-year-old he was shackled up with didn't appreciate a sagging beer gut. *Damn: why did I always sound like a stereotype bitch?*

He'd scooped Olivia up under one arm and was swinging her around. "Hiya," he called out to me. "Seen my daughter anywhere?"

She was shrieking: "Daddy, daddy!" as she was twirled about.

"Don't do that. She's just eaten."

"Okey dokey," he dropped her to the floor and collected a happy kiss from her.

"Come on then," he clapped his hands, hustling them along. "Get ready. I'm leaving in five... four... three..."

They both ran downstairs to collect their bags.

"How are you doing?" he asked.

"Never better." I gave the kitchen table and its mess a weary look—beyond it, the work surfaces were covered in junk and the sink was a cliché of unwashed pans. "How about you, still servicing the rich?"

His expression hardened, that way it always did when he had to speak slowly and carefully to explain the bleeding obvious to me. "I have to work at the BUPA hospital now. It's the only way I can earn enough money after your lawyer took me to the cleaners in that sexist divorce court of yours."

I almost opened my jaw in surprise—I was the one that always made the needling comments. He was Mr Reasonable through everything. "Oh fine, sure," I said. "I thought it would be my fault."

He gave one of those smug little victory smiles that used to annoy the hell out of me.

"What time do you want them back tomorrow?" he asked.

"Um, in the afternoon. Before six?"

"Okey dokey. No problem."

"Thanks. Are you taking them anywhere special?"

"I thought *Pirates Of The Caribbean*, tonight. The reviews have all been great."

"As long as you don't take them for burgers."

He rolled his eyes.

I glanced out through the window, seeing his new BMW 4x4 parked on the pavement outside. The stupid thing was the size of the tanks the Army rolled into Basra with. There wasn't anyone sitting in it. "Is she coming with you today?"

"Who's that, then?"

"Zoe."

"Ah, you remembered her name."

"I think I read it on her school report."

"As a matter of fact, yes, she is coming with us. She took the day off to help out. The kids do like her, you know. And if you ever find yourself someone, I won't mind them going out with him."

Oh well done Colin, another point scored off your shrew of an ex, especially with that emphasis on 'ever'. Aren't you the clever one.

The kids charged back into the kitchen, hauling their overnight bags along the floor. "Ready!"

"Have a lovely time," I said, *ever* gracious.

Colin's smile faltered. He hesitated, then leant forward and kissed me on the cheek. Nothing special, not a peace offering, just some platonic gesture I didn't understand. "See you," he said.

I was too surprised to answer. Then the door slammed shut. The kids were gone. The flat was silent.

I had fifteen minutes to make the bus. I was going on a protest for the first time in years. Making my voice heard, and my feelings known. Doing exactly what Colin despised and ridiculed. God, it felt wonderful.

33. There will be no prisons. Convicted criminals will spend their sentence in isolated penal colonies, working for the public good.

34. New Suffolk will use the Imperial system of measurement for length, weight, and volume. Use of the metric system is a criminal offence.

35. Police are required to uphold the law and apprehend criminals. Police will not waste all their time persecuting motorists.

36. Citizens are not entitled to unlimited legal funding. Citizens facing prosecution can only have their defence fees paid for by public funding three times during their lifetime. They may select which cases.

37. The intake of alcohol, nicotine, and other mild narcotics is permitted. Citizens found endangering others when intoxicated, e.g. driving under the influence, will face a minimum sentence of four years in a penal colony.

38. New Suffolk laws will not be structured to support or encourage any type of compensation culture.

39. Any lawyer who has brought three failed cases of litigation judged to be frivolous is automatically sentenced to a minimum five years in a penal colony.

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Colin

The finance agency's solicitor was waiting on the doorstep, talking to Zoe, when I drove up in front of the house.

"Who's that?" Steve asked as I started to manoeuvre the BMW up the gravel, backing it up to the horsebox.

"Bloke from the bank," I told him. "Got a few papers to sort out." At least the agency didn't stick a For Sale sign up outside the house. That tended to earn you a brick—or worse—through the window these days.

Zoe smiled and waved as I stopped just short of the horsebox. "Wait in here," I told the kids. I didn't want them to see the empty house. Last night we'd used sleeping bags. Zipped together. Very romantic.

The solicitor shook my hand and produced a file of documents for me to sign. He glanced at the kids, who were pressed up against the BMW's window, but didn't comment. I guess he'd seen it many times before.

Zoe opened the garage door, and picked up the first of the boxes stacked on the concrete floor. She carried it over to the rear of the BMW, and put it in the boot.

The solicitor wanted five signatures from me, and that was it—the house belonged to the agency. A four-bedroom house with garage and a decent size garden in Enfield along with all the contents, sold for

£320,000. Maybe two thirds of what I could have got last year. But that gave me enough to pay off the mortgage, and leave me with £30,000 in equity, which the agency had advanced me. That's what they specialized in, one of many such businesses to spring up since January. A Franco-Dutch company who sold a little bit of England to people who weren't going to be accepted on the other side of the wormhole.

I'd bought the BMW on finance from the garage. My pension portfolio had been sold to another specialist agency based in Luxembourg—God bless our EU partners—giving me £11,000. That just left the credit cards. I'd applied for another two; more than that and the monitor programs would spot the new loan pattern. But they'd given me an extra £15,000 to spend over the last month.

It had all gone into a community partnership I signed up for at www.newsuffolklife.co.uk. Most of the stuff was being shipped out in a convoy, with all the personal items we'd need crammed into the horsebox. The website recommended using them, they could take a lot more weight than a caravan.

The solicitor shook my hand and said: "Good luck." I handed him the keys, and that was it.

Zoe had jammed the last box in the back of the BMW. There were just four suitcases left. I picked up two of them. She was giving the house a forlorn look.

"We're doing the right thing," I told her.

"I know." She produced a brave smile. "I just didn't expect it to be like this. Murray surprised all of us, didn't he?"

"Yeah. You know I grew up with a whole bunch of sci-fi shows and films; it's amazing how their vocabulary and images integrated with modern culture. They all had bloody great ships flying through space; captains sitting in their command chair and making life and death decisions, shooting lasers and missiles at bug eyed monsters. Everybody knew that was how it would happen for real. Then Murray found a way to open his wormhole, and the bastard won't tell anyone how he does it. Not that I blame him. He's quite right, we'd only misuse the technology. We always do. It's just that... this isn't the noble crossing of the void I expected. It feels almost like a betrayal of my beliefs."

Zoe looked embarrassed. She was nothing like Jannette made out: some piece of underage nurse totty I pulled because she was blinded by the title of Dr in front of my name; all big boobs, long legs, and no brain. In fact, she was training to be a midwife, which required just as much dedication and intelligence as was needed to become a doctor. And she was small, the top of her head only coming up to my chin. I was bloody lucky she even looked at a life-wreckage like me. The fact that she would take me on with a couple of kids in tow made her extraordinary.

"I meant the way this finally split the country," she said quietly. "Everyone always talked about the North South divide, and the class war, and the distance between rich and poor. But it was just ideology, politicians lobbing spinning sound bites at each other. Murray went and made it physical."

I put my arms round her. "He gave us the chance politicians always promise and never provide. God, can you believe I actually voted for Blair. Twice!"

She grinned evilly. "Wish you'd voted Tory?"

"Stop putting words in my mouth." I gave her a quick kiss; then we shoved the suitcases in on top of the boxes.

Steve and Olivia looked unusually solemn when we got into the 4x4. Zoe gave them a welcoming smile. "Hi guys."

"Where are we going, daddy?" Olivia asked.

"I'm going to take you to see something. Something I hope you'll like."

"What?"

"Can't explain. You have to see it."

"What's in the horsebox?" Steve asked. "You don't like horses."

"Tent," I said. "Big tent, actually. Food. Solar panels. Four brand new laptops, one with a widescreen display and multi-region software."

"Cool! Can I use it?"

"Maybe."

"What else?" Olivia asked, excited.

"Some toys. Lots of new clothes. Books."

"What's it all for?" Steve asked.

"You'll see." I put my hand on the ignition key, and gave Zoe an apprehensive glance. This was such a huge step to be taking, and there didn't seem to be any defining moment, just a long sequence of covert events that had deftly led to this point in time. I didn't feel any guilt about bringing the kids with us; in fact I'd have been remiss as a father if I hadn't included them; there was never going to be an opportunity like this again. I wasn't stupid and naive enough to believe New Suffolk was going to be paradise, but it had the *potential* to be something better than what we had in this world. We were never going to evolve or progress here, not with so much history and inertia shackling us to the past.

As for Jannette... Well, as far as I was concerned she hadn't been a mother to the kids for years.

"Let's go," Zoe said. "We chose a long time ago."

I turned the ignition, and pulled out of the drive, the overloaded horsebox rattling along behind.

"What's that ring?" Steve asked suddenly, sharp and observant.

"This?" Zoe held her finger up.

"It's an engagement ring!" Olivia squeaked. "Are you getting married?"

"Yes," I said. It was the first thing we wanted to do on the other side.

"Does mum know?" Steve asked.

"No."

62. In order to prevent the mistakes of the old country being repeated on New Suffolk, no organized religions will be permitted. All citizens must acknowledge that the universe is a natural phenomenon.

63. In order to prevent the mistakes of the old country being repeated on New Suffolk, members of extremist political parties and undesirable organizations are banned from passing through the wormhole, as well as criminals and others I deem injurious to the public good.

Examples of prohibited groups and professions include (but are not limited to) the following:—

- a. Labour Party.*
- b. Conservative Party.*
- c. Liberal Democrat Party.*
- d. Communist Party.*
- e. National Front,*
- f. Socialist Alliance,*
- g. Tabloid journalists.*
- h. European Union bureaucrats.*
- i. Trade union officials.,*
- j. Traffic wardens.*

* * * * *

Jannette

Abbey was waiting for me at Liverpool Street station. It was a miracle I ever found her. The concourse was overrun by backpackers. There didn't appear to be one of them over twenty-five, or maybe that's just the way it is when you're looking at young people from the wrong side of thirty-five. And I certainly hadn't seen that much denim in one place since I went to the Reading Festival in the late eighties. Their backpacks were *huge*. I didn't even know they manufactured them that size.

I gawped in astonishment as the youngsters jostled around me. Nearly all of them were couples. And everybody had a Union Jack patch sewn on their clothes or backpack. I don't think one in ten was speaking English; and they certainly weren't all white.

Abbey yelled, and walked towards me, pushing her way aggressively forwards. She wasn't a small woman, her progress was causing quite a disturbance amid the smiley happy people. Her expression was locked into contempt as they flashed hurt looks her way. It softened when she hugged me. "Hi comrade darling, our train's on platform three."

I followed meekly behind as she ploughed onwards. The badges on her ancient jacket were clinking away; one for every cause she'd ever supported or march she'd been on. The rusty Pearly Queen of the protest nation.

Half the station seemed to want to get on our train. Abbey forced her way into a carriage, queuing being a bourgeois concept to her. We found a couple of empty seats with reserved tickets, which she threw on the floor.

"I don't know where this lot all think they're going," she announced in a too-loud voice as we settled in. "Murray doesn't approve of poor foreign trash. There's no way he's going to let Europe's potheads live in stoner bliss under an alien sun. They'll get bounced right off his hole for middle-class worms."

"His restrictions are self-perpetuating," I said. "He doesn't actually have lists of all the people he doesn't like. And even if he did there's no way of checking everyone who goes through. It's pure psychology."

Tell Thatcher's Children that no big bad pinkos will be allowed, and they'll flock there in their hundreds. While the rest of us see who is actually going and we steer the hell clear. Who wants to live in their world?"

"Ha! I bet the security services sold him our names."

You couldn't argue with Abbey when she was in this mood, which admittedly was most of the time.

She pulled a large hip flask out of her jacket and took a slug. "Want some?"

I looked at the battered old flask, ready to refuse. Then I remembered I didn't have the kids tonight. I wasn't stupid enough to take a slug as big as Abbey's. Thankfully. "Jesus, what the hell is that?"

"Proper Russian vodka, comrade," she smiled, and took another. "Nathan went through to join Murray last week," she said sourly.

"Nathan? Your brother Nathan?"

"Only by DNA, and I'm not even certain of that after this. Little prick. Mary and the kids went with him."

"Why?"

"Why do any of them go? War in Iraq, crap public transport, psycho Bush threatening North Korea, the congestion charge, council tax. The real world, in other words, that's what he's running away from. He thinks he's going to be living in some kind of tropical tax haven with fairies doing all the hard work, the dumb shit."

"I'm sorry. What did your mum say? She must be devastated."

Abbey growled, and took another slug. "She says she's glad he's gone; that he and the grandkids deserve a fresh start *somewhere nice*. Can you believe that? Selfish cow, she's gone senile if you ask me. And who's going to be looking after her, hey? She can't walk to the bus stop even these days. Did Nathan ever think of that? Oh no, he just took off and expected me to pick up the pieces, just like everyone else left behind."

"I know, Steve's school is talking about classes of sixty for next term. The Governors have been having emergency meetings all summer, so I know how many staff have left." I hesitated.

"It surprised me, I thought they were more dedicated than that."

"They would be if they were paid properly."

"The Principal has to recruit another fifteen teachers before term starts, or they won't be able to open at all."

"Fifteen? He wouldn't have got that many in a normal year."

"He said he's quite confident. There's all sorts of new placement agencies starting up to source overseas professionals for the UK. Life's going to go on pretty much the same as before once the exodus is over."

"Great," Abbey grunted. "Just what we're fighting for."

Our train started to pull out of the station. The backpackers were squashed down the length of the aisle, nobody could move anywhere. There was a big cheer when the PA announced the stop at Bishop's Stortford.

Abbey took another swig, and muttered: "Wankers."

"Don't worry," I said. "If we ever get our own wormhole to a new world, we wouldn't let any of this lot through."

"That's the whole fucking point, isn't it?" Abbey snarled. Her anger was directed at me now, which was kind of scary. She gulped back another mouthful of vodka. "We wouldn't want to have a new world even if we could open a wormhole. It's a stupid waste of talent that could be used to help people down here. We have to solve the problems we've got on this world first, starting with the biggest problem there is, that bloody warmongering Tory: Blair. Colonization is Imperialism. We've got to teach people to have social responsibility instead." She jabbed an unsteady finger at a badge on her lapel. It was one showing an Icelandic whaler being broken in two by a suspiciously Soviet-looking hammer; but above it was a shiny new Public Responsibility Movement badge. "That's what today is all about. Murray isn't building himself a new world, what he's doing is ruining ours. You can't just do that, just open a doorway to somewhere else because you feel like it, it's fucking outrageous. They've got to be stopped."

"It's the scale that's the problem," I said. "You can't stop people leaving, that's Stalinist. What we're not ready for is this mass panic exodus that the wormhole has made possible. Emigration to North America was slow, it lasted for decades. This is fast. Two years, that's all he's giving us. No wonder the UK can't cope with the loss as it happens. But it'll settle down in the long term."

"We can stop them," Abbey said forcefully. "There's enough people taking part in the movement today to block the roads and turn back all those middle-class bastards. Murray didn't think it through; half of the police have pissed off through the wormhole. People power is going to come back with a vengeance today. This is when the working class finds its voice again. And it's going to say: no more. You see."

p. Stockbrokers.

q. Weapons designers and manufacturers.

r. Arts Council executives,

s. Pension fund managers.

t. Cast and production staff of all TV soaps.

u. All sex crime offenders,

v. All violent crime offenders.

w. Call centre owners and managers.

* * * * *

Colin

As ever, the M11 was horrendous, a solid queue of bad-tempered traffic. Nearly two hours from the M25 to the Stanstead junction. Not *strictly* as ever because I was smiling most of the way. It just didn't bother me anymore. I just kept thinking this was the last time I would ever have to drive down one of this country's abysmal, pot-holed, clogged, nineteen-sixties anachronisms. Never again would I come home ranting about about why we couldn't have Autobahns, or eight lane freeways like they had in America. From now on my moaning was going to be reserved for sixteen-legged alien dinosaurs wandering over the garden. The estate car in front had a bumper sticker with a picture of an angry Gordon Brown hammering on the side of the wormhole, with *Tax for the memory* printed underneath. We'd been

seeing more and more pro-exodus stickers as we crawled our way North. I reckoned that all the vehicles sharing the off road with us were heading to New Suffolk. After all those months of furtive preparation it was kind of comforting finally being amongst your own kind.

"It's the wormhole, isn't it?" Steve asked cautiously. "That's where we're going."

"Yeah," I said. "We're going to take a look at what's there."

"Are we going *through*?" Olivia asked, all wide eyes and nervous enthusiasm.

"I think so. Don't you? Now we've come all this way, it'll be fun." I saw the sign for assembly park F2, and started indicating.

"But they're bad people on the other side," Steve said. "Mum said."

"Has she been there herself?"

"Noway!"

"Then she doesn't really know what it's like on the other side, does she?"

The kids looked at each other. "Suppose not," Steve said.

"Just because you don't agree with someone, doesn't make them bad. We'll take a look round for ourselves and find out what's true and what's not. That's fair isn't it?"

"When are we coming back?" Steve asked.

"Don't know. That depends how nice it is on the new planet. We might want to stay a while."

Zoe was giving me a disapproving look. I shrugged at her. She didn't understand, you've got to acclimatize kids slowly to anything this big and new.

"Is mummy coming?" Olivia asked.

"If she wants to, she can come with us. Of course she can," I said.

Zoe let out a little hiss of exasperation.

"Will I have to go to school?" Steve asked.

"Everybody goes to school no matter what planet they're on," Zoe said.

"Bummer."

"Not nice," Zoe squealed happily.

I found the entrance to park F2 and pulled in off the road. It was a broad open field hired out to new suffolklife.co by the farmer. Hundreds of vehicles had spent all summer driving over it, reducing the grass to shredded wisps of straw pressed down into the dry iron-hard soil. Today, twenty-odd lorries were parked up at the far end, including three refrigerated containers, and a couple of fuel tankers. Over seventy cars, people carriers, transit vans, and 4x4's were clustered around the lorries; most of them contained families, with kids and parents out stretching their legs before the final haul. The fields on either side replicated similar scenes.

I drew up beside a marshal, who was standing just inside the gate, and showed him our card. He looked

at it and grinned as he ticked us off his clipboard. "You're the doc, huh?"

"That's me."

"Fine. There's about five more cars to come and we're all set. I'm your community convoy liaison, so I'll be travelling with you all the way to your new home. Any problems, come and see me."

"Sure."

"You want to check over the medical equipment you'll be taking, make sure it's all there? Your new neighbours have been going through the rest of the staff."

I drove over to the other cars and we all climbed out. Several men were up in the lorries, looking round the crates and pallets that were inside. Given how much we'd spent between us, I was glad to see how thorough they were being checking off the inventory. In theory the equipment and supplies on the lorries was enough to turn us into a self sufficient community over the next year.

"This shouldn't take long," I told Zoe. "We need to be certain. In the land of the new arrivals, the owner of the machine tool is king."

"We'll go meet people," she said.

I met a few of them myself as I tracked down the two crates of medical supplies and equipment. They seemed all right—decent types. A little over-eager in their greetings, as I suppose I was. But then we were going to spend an awful long time together. The rest of our lives, if everything went smoothly.

Half an hour later the last of the group had arrived, we were satisfied everything we'd bought through new-suffolklife.co was with us, and the marshals were getting the convoy organized for the last section.

"Where's the wormhole?" Steve asked plaintively as we got back into the BMW. "I want to see it."

"Two miles to go," Zoe said. "That's all now."

The lorries were first out of the assembly park and onto one of the new tarmac roads that led to the wormhole, with the rest of us following. There was a wide path on the left of the road. Backpackers marched along it, a constant file of them. I couldn't see the end of the line in either direction. They all had the same eager smile on their faces as they moved ever-closer to the wormhole. Zoe and I probably looked the same.

"There!" Olivia suddenly shouted. She was pointing at the trees on the other side of the backpackers. For a moment I was confused, it was like a dawn sun was shining through the trunks. Then we cleared the end of the spinney, and we could see the worm-hole directly.

The zero-length gap in space-time was actually a sphere three hundred yards in diameter. Murray had opened it so that the equator was at ground level, leaving a hemisphere protruding into the air. There was nothing solid, it was simply the place one planet ended and another began. You crossed the boundary, and New Suffolk stretched out in front of you. That was the notorious eye-twister which made a lot of people shiver and even flinch away. As you drew near the threshold, you could see an alien landscape dead ahead of you, inside the hemisphere. Yet it opened outwards, delivering a panoramic view. When you went through, you emerged on the outside of the corresponding hemisphere. There was no inside.

It was early morning on New Suffolk, where its ginger-tinted sun was rising, sending a rouge glow across the gap to light up the English countryside.

We were half a mile away now. The kids were completely silent, entranced by the wormhole. Zoe and I flashed a quick triumphant smile at each other.

The road curved round to line up on the wormhole, running through a small cutting. Police lined the top of each bank, dressed in full riot gear. They were swaying back and forwards as they struggled to hold a crowd of protestors away from the road. I could see banners and placards waving about. The chanting and shouting reached us over the sound of the convoy's engines. Things were flying through the air over the top of the police to rain down on the road. I saw several bottles smash apart on the tarmac. Backpackers were bent double as they scurried along, holding their hands over their heads to ward off the barrage from above.

Something thudded onto the BMW's roof. Both kids yelled. I saw a stone skittering off the side. It didn't matter now. The first of our convoy's lorries had reached the wormhole. I saw it drive through, thundering off over the battered mesh road that cut across the alien landscape, silhouetted by the bright rising sun. We were so close.

Then Olivia was shouting: "Daddy, daddy, stop!"

81. Government may not employ more than one manager per twelve front line workers in any department. No Government department may spend more than ten per cent of its budget on administration.

88. Government will not fund any unemployment benefit scheme. Anyone without a job is entitled to five acres of arable land, and will be advanced enough crop seed to become self-sufficient.

89. There will be no death duties. Dying is not a taxable action. Citizens are entitled to bequeath everything they have worked for to whoever they choose.

* * * * *

Jannette

It took us bloody hours to get from the station to the wormhole. The Public Responsibility Movement was supposed to lay on buses. I only ever saw two of them, and they took forever to drive around the jammed-up circuit between the station and the rally site. As for the PRM stewards, they'd got into fights with the backpackers streaming out of the station, asking directions and wanting to know if they could use our buses. The police were separating the two factions as best they could, but the station car park was a perpetual near-riot.

Abbey used the waiting time to stock up at an off-licence. By the time we got on the bus she was completely pissed. And she wasn't a quiet drunk.

As we inched our way across the motorway flyover I could look down on the solid stream of motionless vehicles clotting all the lanes below. There were hundreds of them. All of them waiting their turn to drive up the off road. Each one full of people who wanted to go through the wormhole. *So many?* They said it was like this every day.

The bus finally made it to the rally area. A huge 747 flew low overhead as we climbed out, coming in to land at Stanstead just a couple of miles north. I had to press my hands over my ears the engine noise was so loud. I didn't recognize the airline logo; but it was no doubt bringing another batch of eager refugees from abroad who wanted to join in with the exodus.

I tracked it across the sky. And there right ahead of me was the wormhole. It was like some

gold-chrome bubble squatting on the horizon. I squinted into the brilliant rosy light it was radiating.

"I didn't realize it was that big," I muttered. The damn thing was intimidating this close up. Now I could finally understand how so many people had vanished into it, swallowed up by Murray's stupid promises.

"Let's get to it," Abbey slurred, and marched off towards the long scrum of protestors ahead of us.

Now I remembered why I'd stopped going to protests. All that romance about bonding with the crowd, sharing a purpose with your fellow travellers; the singing, the camaraderie, the communal contentment. It was all bollocks.

For a start, it wasn't just the PRM supporters who'd turned out to make their voice heard. There were a lot of unaffiliated comrades looking for trouble. Real serious trouble. I got batted about like some cheap football. Everybody wanted to score points by shoving into me. The shouting was loud, in my ear, and unending. I got clobbered by placards several times as their carriers dropped them for a rest.

Then we got real near to the police line, and a beer can landed on my shoulder. I jumped at the shock. Fortunately it was empty. But I could see bottles flying overhead, which made me very nervous.

"Let me through, you arseholes!" Abbey thundered at the police.

The nearest constable gave her a confused look. Then she was banging on his riot shield in fury. "I have a right to get past you can't stop me you fascist bastard this is still a free country why don't you piss off and go and bugger your chief constable let me through." All the while she was pushing up against his shield. I was pressed up behind her. Our helpful comrades behind me were making a real effort to add their strength to the shove. I shouted out in pain from the crushing force but no one heard or took any notice.

Something had to give. For once it was the police line. I was suddenly lurching forward to land on top of Abbey, who had come to rest on top of the policeman. A ragged cheer went up from behind. There were a lot of whistles going off. I heard dogs barking, and whimpered in fright. I hated dogs... really scared of them. Policemen were moving fast to plug the gap. Several wrestling matches had developed on either side of me. Protestors were being cuffed and dragged off. Clothes ripped. I saw blood.

Someone tugged the neck of my blouse, lugging me to my feet. I was crying and shaking. My knee was red hot, I could barely stand on it.

A police helmet was thrust into my face. "You all right?" a muffled voice demanded from behind the misted visor.

I just wailed at them. It was pathetic, but I was so miserable and panicky I didn't care.

"Sit there! Wait!" I was pushed onto the top of the bank. Ten feet below me backpackers were cowering as they scrambled along the path. The vehicles heading for the wormhole were swishing past, their drivers grim as they gripped the steering wheels.

I saw a big BMW 4x4 towing a horsebox. The driver was peering forward intently. Visual recognition kicked in.

"Get your fucking hands off me dickhead this is assault you know I'll have you in court oh shit get those cuffs off they're too tight you're deliberately torturing me help help," Abbey was yelling behind me.

"It's Colin," I whispered. "Abbey that's Colin!" my voice was rising.

"What?"

"Colin!" I pointed frantically. There was Olivia sitting in the back seat, face pressed up against the glass to look out at all the mad people. "He's taking them. Oh God, he's taking them through the wormhole."

Abbey gave her arresting officer an almighty shove. "Get them," she screamed at me. "Move." Three policemen made a grab for her. Her shoulder slammed into me. I tumbled down the bank, arms windmilling wildly for balance. My knee was agony. I crashed into a backpacker, and fell onto the tarmac, barely a foot from a transit van which swerved violently.

"Grab them," Abbey cried. "Grab them back. They're yours. It's your right."

The vehicles along the road were all braking. I looked up. Everybody was stuck behind Colin's BMW, which had stopped. The driver's window slid down smoothly and he stuck his head out. We just gazed at each other. A whole flood of emotions washed over his face. Mainly anger, but I could see regret there as well.

"Come on then," he said in a weary voice. The rear door opened.

I looked at the open door. I got to my feet. I looked back up the bank at Abbey's snarling features. I looked back at the BMW. The wormhole was waiting beyond it. Cars were blowing their horns in exasperation, people shouting at me to get a move on.

I started walking towards the BMW with its open door. I knew it was morally wrong. At least, I thought it was. But what else could I do?