

# Neometropoli\$

Issue # 0.04



**“Always sell  
the United  
States short...”**

Featuring:

**JOHN-JACOBS**

**Vera Searles**

**Greg Beatty**

**Michael Grant**

**“Be a bear on  
America!”**

**March, 2005**

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## YET MORE INANE RAMBLINGS

So anyway, this issue is brought to you by [The Radiant Press](#), publishers of a great new cyberpunk thriller called [Mr. Blur](#). If you haven't considered adding that title to your CP collection then you should do so.

I'd also like to put in the good word for Eugie Foster's magazine, [Tangent](#), as well as <http://www.coolarchive.com/> who once again saved my ass when it came time to do the cover by providing me with a plethora of fonts to use.

Now you might be wondering what the cover is supposed to mean, right? Well, it's based on my personal belief that we're on the verge of a global market crash that's going to make 1929 look like a baby cub playing next to momma grizzly. There are a lot of indicators out there that are pointing to the same conclusion as me but the future is yet uncertain, so I'll just get off my soapbox right now. A wise man once said: "belief is the enemy of knowledge," and I attempt to take that axiom to heart every day that I'm alive. Shit, it's the unbalance between belief and knowledge in our world today that got us into this mess in the first place.

But I digress. Anyway the unofficial theme of this issue is "take a dive in '05!", and both of the pieces which I submitted and then most graciously accepted deal with that theme. One of them is a short poem called "Decadence Lost," which was inspired by the vast number of 1920's architectural artifacts scattered throughout Chicago. The other is a short story called "Setting Sun" that talks about some of the social consequences of a financial holocaust. We also have some great flash fiction from Greg Beatty ("CBE vs. CBE") and Michael Grant ("Here is the News"), and we have a shockingly colorful slipstream piece called "The Monkey Pit" from Vera Searles.

All of these will keep you entertained in the event that you end up unemployed when Great Depression II comes around. Just make sure that you have a copy of Neometropolis on hand while standing in the unemployment lines or attending your Neo-Communist party meetings and you'll be okay.

Enjoy!

## DECADENCE LOST

John Jacobs

Slime pours forth from a crystal chalice  
into pools where we once swam.  
I hear the silence of the ballroom,  
screaming in my ears,  
where we once danced, timeless in our youth  
beneath the never-fading bright lights.  
It is dark now,  
and the ornate decorations  
are but crumbling, cobweb-ridden memories.  
When splendor turns to poverty,  
and gold turns to brass—  
behold, what was decadent  
is now laughably innocuous.

On a wooden bridge I held you,  
as petals fell around us like pink snow,  
floating on the water,  
drifting downstream.  
We talked of love and forever,  
we kissed again for the first time,  
but somewhere in the trees  
I heard a strong wind blowing.  
I felt a cold wind blowing.

What I lost I never had,  
for really, it was just a dream.  
Splendor beyond all imaginings,  
then gone,  
drifting downstream.

## CBE VS. CBE

Greg Beatty

“Yes?” Professor Ellis’s tone was imperious; she barely glanced up from her work.

By contrast, her visitor’s voice was quiet and measured. “Yes,” he said. “I believe I have an appointment.”

“Yes?” Ellis’s second query was scarcely less abrupt. Everything in her tone and posture said, “Hurry up! My time is important.”

Her visitor pressed on. “Yes ma’am. Roughly six weeks ago I wrote you regarding a question of nomenclature.”

Professor Ellis gave the stranger her full attention. “You’re with the Council of Biological Editors.”

“Yes ma’am.”

“The other one.”

“Yes ma’am.”

“You wrote that letter.”

“Yes ma’am. As I said.” Each of her questions was a thrust; each of his responses, a refusal to parry.

“The letter asking us, the Council of Biological Editors, to surrender the name of our rather venerable organization, to you.” She glared at him. “You understand that we not only publish the journal *Biology*, we also maintain citation standards

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for academics throughout the life sciences, and organize research findings in a host of sub-disciplines?”

“Yes ma’am. You do good and useful work.”

At last Ellis broke. Shards of genuine curiosity cut through her standing exasperation. “Then why, in God’s name, do you think your obscure association has a better claim on the name of Council of Biological Editors?”

Until then, Professor Ellis’s nameless visitor had stood at a respectful distance. Now he gave a little smile, breathed on his palms, and leaned over the desks to press both hands against Ellis’s forearm. His touch was warm, and a tingle poured from his palms to her skin.

He moved his fingers in a motion that suggested he was conducting unheard music, and Professor Ellis watched as eleven iridescent tiger lilies blossomed in response.

“Because,” he said quietly, “we really are a council of biological editors.”

## HERE IS THE NEWS

Michael Grant

Headline stories for Wednesday the tenth of June 2026:

*Note: This article contains multimedia content that your display is unable to handle.*

The Prime Minister, Lesley Hall, will today address an international conference on the <worsening situation in East Turkestan>. This comes amid further attacks by Uygur militias on the Chinese minority, despite continued efforts, by the UN peacekeeping force, to predict and forestall them. Mrs Hall will speak at length on the need for the international community to maintain its resolve and keep the force present. She will remind attendees of the consequences of letting unanimity lapse, listing past crises in which this led to all the good work achieved being undone. It is important, she will reiterate, that the force's dominant member, the United States, is perceived as acting as the agent of a united world, and not forcing its own will upon everyone else. <Follow this link for more on this story.>

This day sees the <start of preparations> for the seventy-fifth birthday next month of the Lord Protector, Stephen Balcombe. The celebrations, which will be mediacast to the nation, will include a concert in his honour, a public firework display in Kensington Palace grounds, and a thanksgiving service in St Paul's Cathedral. The Prime Minister earlier this year announced that the day will be marked by a public holiday. She had been due to attend the celebrations as guest of honour, until <her untimely death just two days beforehand>, despite preemptive surgery. Lord Balcombe will use the occasion to pay tribute to her.

<An earthquake measuring 6.5 on the Richter Scale will occur near Istanbul> at 17:03 local time. Its epicentre, located in the geological fault running along northern Anatolia, will be just nineteen miles from the city centre. As a result of the strengthening work following the magnitude 5.4 quake in 2006, there will be no severe damage to any buildings, except in the seafront area. This will result

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from the tsunami the earthquake will raise in the Bosphorus. Comprehensive forewarning of residents by the Turkish authorities will ensure no fatalities will be reported.

Sport follows after the economic news; if you do not wish to know the day's results, <click here now to hide them>. The FTSE 100 shares index, having started the day on 3623.3, will climb 17.5 points but fall back by 53.4 following <the earthquake in Turkey>. However, as reports come in confirming the limits to the damage, it will stage a partial recovery, closing the day at 3611.2. This pattern will be echoed across the Atlantic, where the Dow Jones, having started at 5102.34, will climb to 5158.23 before falling to 5034.75, and will close the day at 5078.23. <see accompanying graphs>

Sports news in brief: <Manchester United will play Arsenal> at Old Trafford today. Initial predictions suggested an early goal by Patel followed by a penalty to put United in the lead. Some deft footwork by Johnson would have started Arsenal clawing their way back, with the equaliser scored by van der Velde in the third minute after halftime. However, the result of both sides acting on this information has altered the projected score, to a three-nil victory to Manchester. Neither team has yet incorporated this revised forecast into their strategy, but several more changes are projected to the final score, and it is still too early to predict how it will eventually end up.

Finally, the weather forecast for Newcastle, with times given for Gosforth. The day will start cloudy. There will be light showers from 11:09 to 11:20 and 12:15 to 12:31. The cloud cover will begin to break in the late afternoon, and it will be sunny for the last hour before sunset. The wind will be a light southwesterly, and the temperature a high of eleven degrees.

This news forecast was generated at 18:29 on Monday the second of March 2026 and has an overall prediction index of <75.3>. <Follow this link for a detailed breakdown>, along with a description of how this affects your insurance rating. This forecast was brought to you by Lyman Holland Ltd.



## THE MONKEY PIT

Vera Searles

Margaret walked beneath her large black umbrella toward the monkey pit. The zoo was quiet today, almost deserted. No visitors bought peanuts for the animals from the little machines along the cement walkways. The trees wore swaying veils of Spanish moss, and dark clouds reeled across the sky. As the first plops of rain fell, a shadow crossed Margaret's path, then disappeared back into the foliage. It was small and quick, like a monkey. Margaret shuddered and hurried on.

Margaret went to the zoo every weekend to watch the animals. It was better than staying home alone, or mingling with the other teachers who felt sorry for her and asked her over, trying to match her up with some lonely man. She had become a teacher only because that's what her mother always wanted, and now her mother was gone. Margaret hated teaching, but it was long past time to become anything else.

Ragged splinters of lightning shocked the foliage into a vivid green as the rain came down harder. Margaret walked faster under her umbrella. Plunging forward, she almost knocked the little girl down. The child caught at Margaret's skirt and held on. They stared at each other, Margaret trying to recall if this was one of her students. They all looked alike to her, because Margaret didn't care about who they were, only about getting their papers graded, but they continually pressed at her for time and attention.

The child stood in the shelter of the umbrella, clutching Margaret's skirt. She looked about five or six. "Where's your mother?" Margaret asked, trying to back away, but the child's fingers were clamped into the gray cotton firmly.

The little girl shook her head. She had fuzzy brown hair and moist chocolate eyes.

“Are you crying?” Margaret asked, trying to pull her skirt away, but it was hopeless. They were hooked together like a cat’s fangs into a bird. The image made Margaret shiver. The child said nothing. “Can’t you talk?” Margaret demanded.

The little girl shook her head no. “Oh, fine,” Margaret muttered. It was hard enough dealing with regular children; now she had a mute. “Come on,” she said. “We’ll go look for one of the zoo guards. He’ll find your mother for you.”

They started off. Walking was difficult, because the child held the skirt so tightly that Margaret didn’t have much room to move. The rain beat down around them, enclosing them in a blinding shimmer. Thunder ruptured the air and lightning ricocheted everywhere.

“If you’d let go of my skirt, we could go faster,” Margaret shouted above the thrumming rain.

The child looked up, but didn’t unclench her fingers.

“Come on, then,” Margaret said, feeling her shoes and stockings getting soaked. She peered out from beneath the umbrella to see which way to go. Where were the signs? At every crosswalk had always stood posts with arrows, directing visitors to the monkey pit, the lion den, the security office, and so on. But all the signs were gone.

Margaret stared hard but couldn’t tell where she was. Nothing looked familiar. Strange trees and foliage gushed water from their leaves, and bursts of lightning lit unrecognized flowers. “We’ll go this way,” she decided, stepping forward on the puddled sidewalk, with the child clinging to her. The word leech formed in Margaret’s mind. They advanced slowly.

As she clutched the handle of her umbrella, Margaret wished she hadn’t come today. But she liked the zoo, especially the monkey pit. They always jumped, tumbled, and scampered over the rocks while she stood at the railing and tossed down peanuts. They were far enough away, down there in the pit. The children in class were too close, always clustered near, clinging, like the leech now on her leg.

Abruptly she came to the end of the sidewalk. She faced thick brush and vines. Margaret couldn’t believe it. This was the way to the office, wasn’t it? She turned and looked behind her, dragging the child around as she hung fast to Margaret’s skirt. Here too, the sidewalk ran into a thicket of greenery.

A chill crawled along Margaret’s arms as she felt something give beneath her feet. When she looked down, her shoes were sunk in mud. The sidewalk was gone. Surrounded by dense fronds, Margaret heard water dripping steadily from

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the leaves above onto her umbrella. In the distance, thunder rumbled. The sudden storm was ending.

“What happened? Where is this?” she demanded of the shrubs. When she looked down at the child, she saw the hand had become long and hairy, with clawed fingers. “Ugh! Get away!” she cried, pulling hard at her skirt, trying to free it. Then she looked at the child’s face. It was elongated, the furry simian jaw thrust forward. “Dear God, help me,” Margaret breathed. She felt weak and disoriented. Her grip on the umbrella loosened and it slid into a nearby bush.

The child continued to change. She was now covered with fur that stunk. Margaret felt nauseous and tasted bile. Her heart thudded in her throat. She pulled hard again at the skirt but the paw remained.

Margaret reached for her umbrella and beat the strange creature over the head—one, two, three blows—until she felt the center pole bend. She threw it down and went back to pulling at her skirt. The chocolate eyes gazed at her sadly. Everything blurred together—the jungle, the child-beast, the umbrella. She put her hand out against a wet tree and steadied herself. When everything cleared, the animal was gone, but the paw was still attached to Margaret’s skirt. She tried to shake it free, but it was embedded into the fabric. She’d rip it off when she got home.

Margaret moved forward into the jungle. She pushed aside fronds and tangled vines as large, coarse leaves scraped against her face.

Overhead, the green branches were threaded with narrow slashes of sun-streaked sky. Waves of heat and steam rose around her, and moisture dripped from her nose and chin. Breathing heavily, she knew she had lost her shoes and purse, but she didn’t care. The animal fingers still clung to her skirt, but that wasn’t important now. All that mattered was finding her way out of this awful place.

Strange bird cries came from the thick foliage. Margaret swatted at the mosquitoes that swarmed around her face. Her head itched and she couldn’t stand her own smell, but she plodded on, even though her legs ached from tramping across the soggy ferns. How long she had been walking, she couldn’t tell. It might have been hours. How had this happened? She couldn’t remember, and knew only that she had to find shelter and water. Her muscles trembling, she stopped for a moment to wipe sweat from her eyes, and realized she was now standing on solid ground. Just ahead, a space between the fronds opened on a cluster of rocks.

Margaret hurried toward them, her arms swimming through the leaves and ferns. She came out into an open place where furry creatures scampered about. They came close, bared their teeth and grinned into her face. Two leaped on her and

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clung to her arms while another pulled away the paw that had been stuck to her skirt. They tossed it back and forth, chattering gleefully. Monkey smells and sounds surrounded Margaret.

“Get off me! Get away!” she screamed, shuddering. She pushed at them, almost retching as she touched their horrid bodies. They wouldn’t let go. One wrapped his tail around her neck and hissed his fetid breath into her face.

Her eyes blurred. Through a dim film of sweat, Margaret saw someone throw down peanuts from the railing above. Whoever it was would surely get help when they saw her plight. Margaret looked up. A little girl stared back at her.

The child had only one hand.

## SETTING SUN

John Jacobs

My name's Robert Thorpe. I'm a veteran of the first Gulf War. I hope this message finds you well, whoever you are. Maybe some day you can hand it over to the national archives or something, just so people remember this dark time for America. Hopefully this'll never happen again, but that's what they said last time.

I was born and raised in Chicago's Wicker Park neighborhood, back when it was still a little rough. Well, it's bad again but that has more to do with our present situation, which I'll get to later. Anyway, after I was honorably discharged from the service I went to study business at DePaul. I graduated 3 years later with a degree in finance and a degree in economics. That was also where I met my wife, Janet.

We were married shortly after graduation, then about a year and a half later Brett was born. This was all during the "dot com" boom of the 90's. I was down at the Chicago Board of Trade and Janet, who got her degree in computer science, was making money hand over fist working for an Internet startup. When the market folded the first time around she decided to stay at home full-time for Brett. Fortunately she'd saved more of her earnings than her coworkers, so when the market tanked again in 2007 we had some decent cash on hand to help us get by. Some of it I had in gold futures, which went up like a rocket and some I even used to buy real gold—bricks of it—which I stashed in our basement.

God, I can still remember that day... at first when the numbers started dropping the entire exchange went silent, and then everybody cheered, just like what happened in '87. It's the most natural human response when faced by something so frightening and inexplicable. Like the child laughing at the boogeyman in his closet we had no choice but to joke about it. Unfortunately for us the boogeyman was real, and when the numbers kept dropping smiles turned to screams of horror and delirious panic as traders trampled each other to unload every position they had. Most were screaming incoherently, like they were

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possessed by some demon of capitalism that had taken their souls. Some lay on the ground and wept like infants. By the end of the day countless trillions of dollars had vanished into thin air.

Outside, the building was surrounded by fire trucks and ambulances as paramedics rushed to evacuate people that had suffered heart attacks or were trampled on the floor of the exchange. Down the street there were firemen fishing the bodies of businessmen out of the Chicago river, and further down, past crowds of horrified onlookers the police were setting up barricades around oddly scattered places on the sidewalk and on the street. I even caught a glimpse of one of them as he fell, a little black spot against the skyline, separating from a skyscraper and then disappearing behind some smaller buildings. It was like a dream I was in, a dream I wanted more than anything to wake up from. When I got home Janet had already seen the news on TV. The Dow had dropped some 27% in a single trading day. This wasn't just another mild recession... we were in a fucking depression.

Of course all those market-manipulating rascals that'd gotten us into this mess in the first place were doing just fine. I don't recall hearing about Greenspan, Bernanke, or any of the other monetary illuminati being hard up, while in main street America all hell was breaking loose. In fact, old Ben even made the situation worse than what it was by literally dropping crates of money out of helicopters. Good old Gutenberg Bernanke, printing money like there's no tomorrow. He didn't realize (or maybe he did) that he'd end up rendering the dollar more worthless than the paper it was printed on.

When I saw a homeless man taking a shit in the street and using a \$100 bill to wipe his ass I knew that we were in serious trouble. It'd be a matter of time before John and Jane Doe got tired of hauling around trash bags filled with monopoly money just to pay for a loaf of bread. Sooner or later they were going to opt for a change in government.

That's when I told Janet we were moving to Canada. Brett was 14 and I was teaching him to shoot. He was a surprisingly good shot but I knew he didn't have the stomach to kill a man. Still, two guns was better than one and I had a feeling we were going to need both of them getting out of Illinois, especially with about 75 lbs of gold in the back of the van.

Gold... that's what this whole thing is about now. In the wake of an economic collapse gold always emerges as the universal currency. In fact, its value has gone up so much in the past couple of years that some serious violence has occurred because of it. Whether it be roving militias or gangs of corrupt cops, any one of them will take your shit and leave you for dead if they think you have any "sun" on you. Hence, the Chicago adage that came to replace "vote early, vote often"—don't carry sun without a gun.

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That's why they forced our hand, and why they did what they did to Janet... God I'm sorry, my love. Now we're on the road sooner than I'd hoped and I'm writing this letter to you, whoever you are, from a hotel room in southern Ontario. All for what, I ask myself. A couple of bars of some stupid metal? All because the bonehead policy makers in our country had to dicker with a system that was too complex for them to understand, something they did in the name of greed?

It was about two weeks ago that the incident occurred. I was coming home with some food supplies I'd managed to barter for when I noticed a mysterious vehicle parked in front of my house, a black Lincoln. I had my Desert Eagle on me in my shoulder holster under my coat. I pulled the car around one block over and snuck around the back of the house, feeling some very bad vibes. When I looked through the bushes I saw two men in black suits at the door, talking to my wife.

"How are you today, ma'am?" one of them said. "We're with the Bureau," the other one said, flashing a badge. "We understand that your husband is a veteran, is that correct?"

"Y...yes," she replied.

"We're here on a routine weapons check," the man said. "We just need to see if your husband has any large caliber weapons, that's all... you know, M60's, rocket launchers, assault rifles, that sort of thing."

"To my knowledge he didn't bring anything like that back from the Gulf, so if you gentlemen don't have a warrant..." my wife tried to reply, but one of them pushed her aside and walked through the door.

*Goddamnit*, I thought. *FBI my ass*.

If it really was the feds I wouldn't have cared as much. But first off, federal agents didn't drive around in Lincoln Continentals. Secondly, there were so many weapons floating around the streets these days that they couldn't give two shits if I had an AK in there or not. If these guys were from the Bureau then I was the pope. These guys were syndicate.

"No guns in here, huh?" I heard one of them say as they pushed Janet inside. "How about some sun? Or maybe just some moon?"

*Motherfucker*, I thought.

I crept up to the door and listened. I heard them breaking some things and Janet yelling in protest but I didn't hear any gunshots. And oddly, I didn't hear Brett's voice either. Maybe he was at a friend's house or something? I didn't know. I heard footsteps trampling upstairs and took that as my cue to sneak inside.

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There were some drawers turned over on the floor and some paintings torn down from the walls but that was it. Suddenly I heard Janet scream upstairs and in a flash I kicked into survival mode. A twinge of both fear and rage went through me like a jolt of electricity. I'd felt something similar in Desert Storm and a few times after, but never like this. It was fight or flight, kill or cower, and I wasn't about to let them get away with this unhurt. I pulled out my gun and took out the clip, checking to make sure I had enough rounds to kill both of them. One a piece would do it but I needed to make sure. There's no margin for error when it's a matter of self-preservation.

As I started to make my way upstairs I felt a hand on the back of my jeans and I swung around. It was Brett with tears in his eyes, holding my Berretta in one hand. The poor kid. If I was scared then he must have been terrified. Still, I had to admire the little guy's courage. It takes a lot of stones to go up against two grown men with that pea shooter, especially for a 14-year old. If it were me in his shoes I don't think I'd be able to do it.

"Mom..." he whispered.

"I know," I replied.

We both crept upstairs slowly, trying not to let any of the boards creak under our feet. It seemed like an eternity that we were climbing those stairs, and it only grew longer as we got closer to the noise. I turned off the safety on the gun. My heart was thumping like a jack rabbit's as I gently pushed open the bedroom door, and I heard Brett gulp from behind me. The two men were shirtless, and both in the process of violating my wife. I saw that one of them still had his gun so I took aim at him first and squeezed the trigger. The Desert Eagle went off with a thunderclap so deafening it rang through the whole house. I quickly took aim at the next guy, who was scrambling for his own weapon and I unloaded on him, ending his life like some archangel dispatching the holy wrath of God from on high. You don't want to know what a Desert Eagle does to a person so I'm not going to tell you.

When it was over I told Brett to wait in his room while I dragged the bodies out of the room and then I held Janet. I squeezed her tight while she sobbed but I didn't say anything. Nothing I said could have changed what happened. I carried her into the shower and cleaned her up, then told her to wait in the basement with Brett. I went through my closet and took out the 12-gauge pump action shotgun I had in there.

"You know what to do," I said, handing him the shotgun. "Guard Mom and the gold." Brett nodded and went downstairs.



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Then I busted my ass and gathered supplies as fast as I could, using my hastily scribbled list as a guide. We were leaving tonight. When the van was loaded and ready I went down to the basement where Brett and Janet were holding each other. Both of them were pale white.

I scratched at the stubble on my chin and wiped sweat from my forehead, then I turned to Brett. "I'm gonna need your help, big guy."

"Sure, what do you need Dad?"

"You know where I've got all those old ammo cases, right?"

"Yeah."

"We're going to need every last one of them."

Working together with Brett we managed to put all the gold in the ammo cases and move them to the back of the van, grunting from the weight of the precious metal as we struggled to move it up the stairs, case by case. Before the crash all that gold was worth about half a million dollars. There was no telling how much it was worth now.

When everything was packed and we were ready to go I went back into the van, where Brett had packed away the shotgun and pulled it out. Then I went around and reached through the window into the back seat, holding it out for him.

"Take this," I said. "Point it at anyone that approaches the van, understand?"

Brett nodded.

I peeled out of the driveway and rolled through the first stop sign we came to, never looking back. As I turned onto Belmont I saw a crowd of protesters surrounding a giant papier-mâché George W. Bush. At second glance I realized that it was actually made of money—the now worthless greenback. In the rearview mirror I saw it go up in flames.

"Where are we going, Dad?" Brett asked.

"To your Uncle Jack's cabin," I replied. I turned up the radio and switched it to the news.

I tore through the intersection at Belmont and Milwaukee, nearly running down two old Polish ladies crossing the street. I silently cursed myself, but at the same time I knew I shouldn't stop if I could avoid it, not until we were out of Chicago. There were two middle-aged women on the corner too, both wearing business suits. They were obviously prostitutes but it wasn't far-fetched to imagine that

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they had worked legit jobs some time before the crash, maybe even both had MBA's. But when the pyramid crumbled it didn't matter what you had, because if you were in the one out of three adults who were unemployed then you did whatever you had to just to eat.

"Don't look at them if you can avoid it, Brett," I said as we pulled up to the intersection at Kimball. "We don't want to draw attention."

At the subway entrance an altercation was fomenting between police and a crowd of young men in black shirts and cargo pants. Their shaved heads and shaved eyebrows gave away their affiliation; the eye & serpent spray painted on the glass only confirmed what I already knew—they were Namaath street soldiers. In the past couple of years the Order of Namaath, a quasi-political occult society, had gained shocking support in the Midwest and their numbers were growing. I heard my father's words echoing in my head from a long time ago. We were both watching a World War II documentary on TV. "This could never happen in America," my father had said.

"I'm sorry, Dad," I whispered as we turned the corner.

Going under the I-90/94 overpass I saw row upon row of sleeping bags, together with a sprinkling of cardboard box homes. But then we were on the highway and all of that was behind us. All in all it was the same Kennedy expressway that I'd always known, but with one marked difference—there were no trucks on the road. The Who's "We Won't Get Fooled Again" came on the radio as I flew through the first toll booth. Janet and Brett were both fast asleep.

At the Wisconsin border we stopped for gas and food. I was so tired that I would've let Janet take over had it been under any other circumstances, but I knew I couldn't do that so I got back behind the wheel and we pressed on. I was a little queasy entering the dairy state. Even though I wasn't speeding there was always a chance that a Wisconsin state trooper would pull us over just for being from Illinois. And if they found out how much gold we had back there... holy shit, I don't even want to think what would have happened.

Fortunately, however, we made it up to Jack's cabin without any incident. I sent Brett away to go play with his cousins and then Jack and I unloaded some of the gear. When we had the gold stashed away and secured we went back up to the living room and I flopped down on his couch. Jack lit up a bowl and passed it to me. One hit was all it took for me and then I was coughing.

"Holy shit, man... what do you got in here?" I wheezed.

"We call that Wisconsin gold," he chuckled. "Before the crash it'd have been about a buck forty for a quarter ounce."

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“No shit?” I said.

“No shit. I can feed my family for a couple of weeks on that.”

Jack’s wife Heather came into the room with Janet. I could smell that they were both drunk on wine. Heather glared at my brother.

“Hey asshole, what are you doing smoking our money?”

“Relax, babe. Just treating our guests to some hospitality. Want a hit?”

She didn’t say a word, just grabbed the hitter from him and sparked it. When we were all good and stoned my brother went into the back room and came back with an arm full of wood. Then we all gathered around the fireplace and talked about old times. Jack was an expert bow hunter and had perception beyond that of a normal person. I could tell right away that he sensed something wrong with Janet. When the fire started to go out I told him that we were going to call it a night. The girls went up before us, and before I went Jack put his hand on my shoulder.

“Listen, man. If there’s anything I can do...”

I gave him a hug and patted him on the back.

“You’ve done enough. Thanks again for all of this.”

Jack laughed and replied with a line from an old Johnny Cash song—“If a man turns his back on his family, he ain’t no good.”

I turned and went up the stairs to the guestroom we were sleeping in. I made slow, passionate love to Janet, and when we were done I held her naked in my arms as she cried. I told her not to worry, I told her I was sorry, and then I just kissed her all over and tasted the bitter salt of her tears. This was just a passing phase, I told her, but she shook her head. I squeezed her tight and she fell asleep in my arms. Moments later I passed out too.

That night I had a dream in which all human beings had at last discovered Utopia—a state in which all men and women could live in a state of virtual harmony without fear or desire. This “golden age” was possible through the introduction of cold fusion and the outlaw of fiat currency. Everybody had enough to eat because, ironically, the world was already producing enough consumables to feed itself, as it had for centuries! What had caused all the previous cycles of war/famine wasn’t a shortage of food or any other commodity but an artificially low valuation of those commodities as a result of trading in fiat, or government-backed money. In the past if a group of people were starving it

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was because a farmer had a silo filled with rotting bundles of wheat somewhere that weren't worth enough to sell.

In my dream this was no longer the case. Everybody had enough to eat and much to my surprise... everybody had gold! Yes, mountains of it! Through the use of self-sustaining fusion reactions they were manufacturing pound after pound of solid, authentic gold. They were using it to build everything from houses to roads and from what I understood, they'd even found a way to use the "vibrations" from it as a means of eradicating cancer. The arts and sciences flourished, and it seemed that humanity was at last prepared to take the next step by becoming an intergalactic species.

But a dark cloud descended on my dream, and I saw a group of people emerge from the shadows. They called themselves the Sons of Belial, and they wanted to take control because they couldn't stand living in a world where they were equal to everybody else. In the end they destroyed everything and the world fell into another 10,000 year dark age.

Upon waking I heard a voice in my head:  
*"Utopia isn't profitable..."*

We left in the morning. Most of the gold ended up staying with Jack at the cabin. I kept the petal down the whole way to Minnesota, and by early afternoon we were in Duluth.

We stopped for food and gas, and also to look out at the lake. On the shore of Lake Superior I held Janet in my arms while Brett climbed on the rocks. I was trying not to be bitter but I couldn't help it. I knew that there was a reason for it all, and that it could have been easily avoided. The stock market is a wholly psychological animal, a living manifestation of the herd mentality of human beings. The few that are "in the know" have always manipulated that same market for their own well-being, ever since the United States of America was in existence.

When I was in college I'd learned about the early dollar that had been used to finance the Revolutionary War. A currency in shambles by 1790, Alexander Hamilton had come before Congress with a brilliant idea to salvage it—issue bonds. His idea worked and the dollar eventually did shoot back up in value. However, congress held off until every congressman had toured the countryside, buying up dollars for 10 cents each from the naïve public. Only when they were loaded up did the congressmen approve the sale of bonds, making themselves filthy rich in the process.

If the system was always corrupt, then is there any hope for the future? I don't know anymore. Time and again the thieves on Wall Street dupe the public, enticing them with tales of riches and the "American Dream". And when every

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last sucker has mortgaged his house to play the stock market all the big guys sell off, leaving the small investor holding the bag as the market plummets and his net worth shrinks down to nothing.

I sighed and turned to go back to the van. It was their fault too, I knew—John and Jane Doe in Everytown, America. They wouldn't keep getting fleeced every time around if they'd only spent a small amount of time and effort educating themselves. In this day and age, especially with Internet access easier to obtain than ever, there is absolutely no excuse. But they don't want to learn about how the market works, or why it moves in cycles. There is a world of flat screen TV's, SUV's, and a false sense of security that only a financial mania can provide. And when their world comes crashing down they blame the first scapegoat they can find, a whipping boy for their sins, never realizing that they'd sown the seeds of their own destruction.

*Fuck 'em, I thought. Fuck all of them. I've got my gold.*

By sundown we were in Grand Portage. Before us lay the Canadian border.

I stopped the van so we could look behind us, have one last view of the Land of Liberty before I left it behind forever. Brett was wearing my Big Red One t-shirt from the war.

"So we're never going back, Dad?" he asked.

"Not in my lifetime," I replied. "When the dust clears it won't be the same America."

"What about Uncle Jack, and Aunt Heather..."

"They'll be up here soon, too, I'd imagine."

I was about to get back behind the wheel but Janet stopped me. She grabbed me by my shirt sleeve and pulled me next to her, then pointed.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she said.

I looked up at the fiery orange globe as it settled in the west, and thought again about the life we were leaving behind. She was right, of course. It really was beautiful.

I turned from the setting sun.

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## **About Neometropolis...**

Neometropolis is a free (downloadable in PDF format) 'zine dedicated to the proliferation of good science fiction, articles and insights about technology and cyberculture, as well as general insanity and disinformation throughout this postmodern world we find ourselves in. You can find us on the web at <http://www.neometropolis.com>. The editor can be contacted at [overmind@neometropolis.com](mailto:overmind@neometropolis.com).