

## 1. June 10th

Sheets of snow gusted across the landscape like frozen ghosts seeking refuge. A polar bear's yellowed muzzle stood out against white in the hunter's cross hairs. The hunter, a large man—also in white—lay flat against the ice, the rifle gripped loosely in his hands. He turned to a similarly camouflaged man who studied the bear through small binoculars. They waited. The bear slowly wended its way closer with steady, rhythmic steps of black claw and shaggy leg. The hunter's rifle contained tranquilizer darts, a botched bullet being so dangerous to the coveted pelt. He liked to wait until the last possible minute, that way he didn't have run too far to deliver the final, surgically precise blow. No part of the animal would be wasted. The skin was headed to a real estate broker in Hong Kong. The organs were likewise bound for Hong Kong, where they'd be packaged and sent all over the world. This bear was going places.

The second man gave a questioning look, which the hunter caught and ignored. He liked scaring his partner, it was half the fun. He pushed it a little further every time, no matter what the prey. The bear, however, would soon be too close for comfort. The hunter eased the rifle's stock into his shoulder and placed his eye to the scope.

With a sudden impact the rifle was gone and the hunter was flipped over. He stared into the face of another bear, this one much closer. Blood-matted fur peeled back from mountains of teeth. The bear roared. There were popping sounds as the second man fired a pistol. The bear turned and bounded towards the gun-wielding poacher.

The hunter reached for his handgun. The gun wasn't there, neither was the holster. He looked down his body to see the weapon right where it should be. It was his hand that was in the wrong place. The hunter's right arm was severed below the elbow. Bone and ragged flesh protruded from a shredded down-filled sleeve. His disembodied hand and forearm lay a few metres away,

its path across the ice marked by a long red smear. A combination of shock and hard will clamped down, crushing panic. His own scream stopped, and he heard wet ripping sounds from his right. The hunter turned his head and saw his partner being torn apart like a padded rag-doll. Feathers fluttered gently in the wind as the bear tossed the man back and forth, losing one jaw hold and finding another.

A roar from above flipped the hunter onto his stomach. The first bear, the pelt and organs, was charging. Gobs of saliva flew from its mouth to spatter and freeze on the hard terrain.

Kate Thurlow dropped the sponge in a bucket. The dirty water resisted at first, then accepted and swallowed the offering.

“Noah, c’mon. I need some clean stuff,” she called, slight irritation in her voice.

“Coming, Mom,” said a sandy-haired boy of about ten. He held a second bucket by the handle with both hands. The bucket was levered off his stomach and it sloshed sudsy water with every knee that hit it.

Kate rubbed a hand through her short, blonde hair. She pulled it out quickly, looking at the grime covering her fingers. The jeep she was washing was filthy. Sticks and leaves clung to racks mounted on its top and back. The winch on the front looked like it was growing a small bush. She plucked futilely at the embedded foliage while Noah dropped the bucket near the front wheel. A third of the water still remaining splashed out, taking with it the last of the surface suds.

“Remind me never to have you fetch beer,” said Kate.

“Huh?”

“You’ll get it when you’re older.” She dumped the water out of the first bucket and groaned when the sponge hit the driveway. Sure enough, the sponge picked up pebbles and bits of gravel like a magnet in a pin box. She handed the empty bucket to her son.

“Get me another bucket of water. Don’t fill it all the way, you’ll hurt yourself. Get me a new sponge. Your dad’s probably hogging them all in the backyard. Tell him to forget about his precious kayak and come help me.”

“Okay, Mom.”

Kate picked a few pebbles off the sponge, then gave up and dropped it in her clean bucket. “Mom?” Noah said from behind her. “I think there’s something wrong with Sharky.”

Reflected in the jeep’s window, her son stood in front of the dog. She crossed the front lawn and put her hand on Noah’s shoulder. A few feet away, Sharky, a seven-year-old Golden Retriever, stood tensed, alternately growling and whining.

“What’s wrong, Snucks?” asked Kate, squatting a little.

A look of almost human indecision held the dog's face, then something settled in Sharky's eyes and the strange expression was replaced by one of vacuous hunger. Kate pulled Noah behind her and backed away, slowly.

"It's okay, Sharky, it's us, it's just us...*Randy!*" she called to her husband, praying he wasn't wearing his MP3 player. "It's just us, Sharky. *Randy, I need you!*"

Sharky cleared the distance between them in the blink of an eye. Noah went sprawling as the dog struck Kate in the chest with all its weight. She fell backwards over her son. Kate pushed at Sharky, then pulled, not wanting to hurt the animal. By the time she realized she would have to harm her beloved pet, she'd sustained too much damage to do so.

Brad and Darcy stood near the end of the line, hands interlocked with the people on either side of them. Both of them were sixteen, and among the youngest that made up the human chain between the loggers and the timber line. For Darcy, this was heaven. This was right where she wanted to be, protecting Mother Earth from greed and destruction. For Brad, this was a chance to show his new girlfriend how sensitive he was to Gaea's plight and, hopefully, earn some major boyfriend points. He scanned the faces of angry lumberjacks to see if any of them were checking out Darcy's legs, so nicely bare below her denim cutoffs.

"We've got the law on our side," said a wide-faced man, heading the wedge of loggers. "The last batch of you tree-huggers was hauled off to jail, and the same will happen to you. I'm trying to be polite here, but you people are really starting to piss me off!"

At the far end of the line from the teenagers, stood an off-duty RCMP officer named Sid Halbert. He eyed the Chinese hand gripping his black fingers and thought it looked like a multicultural society's logo. He knew he was risking his job, but the cause he'd joined was more important, it was bigger than him. If things got out of hand, he didn't know what he was going to do. He couldn't allow violence to occur, but at the same time, he'd be arrested himself if the authorities were called in. Two weeks ago, he'd been one of the authorities doing the arresting.

"We're not going anywhere," said Dr. Monroe, a woman of about sixty, standing in the centre of the line. Her silver hair hung loosely, just past her shoulders. "Our reports have been bogged down in committee hearings, but you're over-cutting and you know it."

"Oh this is ridiculous," said the logging foreman. He threw down the court order he'd been brandishing like a cross and stomped off to his truck. The other loggers remained and the staring contest continued.

Brad looked at Darcy's curly, reddish-brown hair and squeezed her hand. She smiled at him and squeezed back. Sunlight glinted off a silver dolphin necklace Brad had given her the week before. While waiting for the impending convoy of land rapists, Dr. Monroe had tried to teach them a couple of protest songs. Except for Darcy, none of the new recruits could sing all that well, so they'd settled on a silent resistance.

At his truck, the foreman loudly explained his situation into a CB mic. He struggled through a miasma of political correctness training. Essentially, he was trying to get permission to bust some heads. This was the third time in a month his men had been blocked. Though the other faces changed, Dr. Monroe was always in the middle. Injunctions and restraining orders didn't phase the woman. The jail time she was surely facing would only add to her valiant sacrifice. The farther behind schedule his crew became, the more careless they'd be in their haste to catch up. Accidents happened. Lives were lost because of these eco-freaks. Why couldn't they understand that?

A scraggly blond man to Sid's right spat a wad of tobacco at the feet of the nearest logger. Sid could almost hear the clicking of wheels in the logger's head as he weighed consequences versus crime.

A raccoon appeared from the tree line and wandered boldly between the opposing sides. It stopped over the glob of spit.

"What are you going to do?" asked the blond man. "Kick it?"

The logger, who towered over his antagonist, squinted and looked away, straining to maintain his composure. His head jerked down and he yelped as the raccoon bit through denim into tender flesh.

"Yahoo!" called Brad. "Nature gets her own back!"

The logger brought his leg up and swatted at the animal that held on strong.

Dr. Monroe broke the line and rushed to assist the logger. The bitten man was sitting now, pushing with both hands at clamped jaws, tearing his own tissue in an effort to dislodge the raccoon.

"No, stop, you'll hurt it," said Dr. Monroe as she slapped at the logger's white-knuckled grip. "It doesn't know what it's doing!"

The raccoon had reached bone. The logger clung to macho like it was a lifeline. The scream he held back with his teeth was coming out his eyes.

"What the hell is going on here?" said the foreman as he jogged back from the truck, leaving the mic dangling out the window. "Jesus! Get that off his leg!"

Dr. Monroe gripped the raccoon on the top and bottom of its head. "Everybody back away," she ordered. "This animal is rabid."

The foreman pushed Dr. Monroe away and broke the raccoon's skull with a steel-toed boot.

Brad sneered at the gasping logger, but when he looked for approval from Darcy, he saw only sympathy in her eyes.

Dr. Monroe cradled the animal in her arms. She steeled herself and spoke to the foreman. "You'll have to take this man to a hospital as quickly as you can. You might as well give this up for the day."

The foreman, applying pressure to his man's wound with a handkerchief, looked at Dr. Monroe with contempt. "I don't believe this. I've got a man down, and you use it to...fuck off, Doc."

"Don't you talk to her like—" Whatever else the blond man was going to say was cut off by his scream. A second raccoon was chewing into his leg.

The line of protesters split and scattered as raccoons raced from the tree line, clamping onto anyone not fast enough. Brad, who'd lost Darcy the moment panic ensued, tripped over a fallen protester and landed face to face with a brown squirrel. Brad blinked. The squirrel growled, then bit a chunk out of Brad's nose with teeth designed to crush walnuts.

"*Jesus fucking Christ!*" yelled the foreman as his men flew in all directions. People screamed and fell under a wave of fur and bushy tails. There were hundreds of woodland creatures. They dropped from trees and flowed out of the forest. Cougars joined the squirrels and coons, and the mammoth frame of a grizzly bear lumbered from the timber and into the fray.

Sid held a bleeding arm tightly to his chest and smashed at animals with the butt of his back-up piece; a snub-nosed revolver. He aimed the gun at the bear, then something landed on his back and bit his shoulder. Something else bit his ankle, and Sid fell into the swarm of critters.

Dr. Monroe, a strip of flesh dangling from her cheek, looked into the face of the cougar that stood on top of her. "Why are you doing this?" she asked, voice choked with panic and confusion. "We were trying to help you!"

The cougar hissed and made Dr. Monroe the martyr she'd always wanted to be.

The waves were gentle, just the way Lena liked them. The *Xingyun Shui Shou* rocked just the right amount. The sun was far past its zenith and whitecaps sparkled in a cone that came from the horizon and stayed with the boat despite its passage. She leaned over the railing and cast her eyes at the water, imagining the wonderful mysteries that transpired beneath its opaque surface. Her father joined her at the rail.

“It’s a nice night,” he said.

Normally he didn’t waste breath on stating the obvious. Lena knew he was working up to something.

“*Ni zhida Luis jia xia zhou yao juxing yici wuhui—*”

“Father,” said Lena, “I’ve asked you to speak English while Marty’s around. Please. It’s impolite.”

Mr. Wong inhaled, then spoke in English, but in a much lower voice.

“The Luis are having a party next week. I would like it if you would come with us.”

“A night avoiding Mia and Sue-Ling? Delightful. The Luis don’t even put out a good spread. What’s the point?”

“Henry’s back from Harvard. He plans to stay for a while before returning to his thesis.”

Lena pushed away from the rail. She flicked a strand of long black hair away from her face and grimaced at her father. “Dad, Marty is just below deck. How can you be so rude?”

“Oh, please,” he said as he put his hands on her shoulders. “He’s fine, Lena. He’s a nice boy, but you’ll be graduating soon and you have to think about what you’ll be doing afterwards.”

“Is that what you think? That Marty is just my university boyfriend? No, that’s what you hope.”

“*Nandao shi wo cuole ma?*” he asked.

Lena dropped into her father’s native Mandarin.

“*Yes, you’re wrong. He’s white, Dad. He’s a bright white man and I love him.*”

“*But don’t you want to give your mother grandchildren?*”

Lena didn’t understand the question for a moment. Mr. Wong misinterpreted her lack of response.

“*Lena? Are you...?*”

This she understood perfectly. “*No, but I wish I was. You’d have to accept him then.*”

Feet pounded up the stairs that led down to the tiny galley and lower bridge. Marty stepped out onto the deck. He had a nicely shaped face, but it held more freckles than would be considered attractive by most people.

“Mr. Wong,” said Marty, “there’s something funny on the sonar. I think it’s pretty big.”

“*I told him to watch the sonar to keep him out of the way,*” said Mr. Wong. “*He can’t even do that right.*”

Lena shook her head, then said to Marty, “My father doesn’t think you can read a sonar.”

Mr. Wong looked wide-eyed at his daughter, then turned to her boyfriend and stammered, “Come on then, let’s see what you’ve found.”

The two men went below, and Lena watched after them. Her father was making this so difficult. He'd promised to behave himself when she'd agreed to this trip. Lena felt the boat slow to a drift. Mr. Wong came up the stairs, he smiled and waved excitedly.

"Look over the side, look over the side," he said.

Marty emerged, followed by Mrs. Wong, who'd been doing the piloting.

Lena's face lit up as the back of a killer whale broke the surface not twenty feet from the boat. Its massive tail rose in a spray of brine, then it sank beneath the waves. The four people scanned the water in all directions, hoping for another glimpse of orca's majesty. Water covered their backs as the whale leapt from the ocean on the far side of the boat. As they spun, the whale crashed down and an even greater deluge hit them in their faces.

Marty gasped and rubbed salt water out of his eyes. "Wow! Do you get to see this often?"

Lena and her father were at the other side of the boat, searching for the next appearance. Mrs. Wong wrinkled her nose as she wrung out her sweater. There was a dull thud from below and the boat rocked violently. Marty and Mrs. Wong fell, but Lena and her father kept their footing by clinging to the rail. A few feet from the boat, the whale surfaced. Its huge dorsal fin curled over near the top. It fixed one eye on the boat, then opened its mouth and water roared as it rushed out. The whale let out a high pitched squeak—so incongruous to its bulk—then melted into the sea.

Mr. Wong ran from one side of the boat to the other, anxiously searching for the leviathan. Marty went below deck.

"Dad," said Lena, "why did it do that?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's protecting young." He turned to his wife. "Nancy, take us out of here."

Mrs. Wong hustled up the steps that led to the upper bridge. She fired up the engines and turned the boat towards shore. Land was far away, it would take them at least forty minutes at full speed to reach the docks. From below deck, Marty's voice called urgently.

"Mr. Wong? You've got to see this!"

Lena's father pulled himself from watching the ocean and went below. He was back up in a shot. He yelled at his wife as he jumped the steps to the upper deck. "Turn around! Turn around!"

The boat shuddered and heaved as a killer whale slammed into the prow. There was a crunch of wood and fibreglass. Mr. Wong was hurled to the deck. Lena fell and slid back and to the right. Mrs. Wong somehow kept her balance and hauled at the wheel. Another impact tossed the boat starboard and a third almost rolled it over. Mrs. Wong was thrown into the sea.

"*Mother!*" screamed Lena.

The *Xingyun Shui Shou* lurched and groaned the first of its many death rattles. It was taking on water fast. From all around, orcas rose and watched the boat founder. Mr. Wong pulled himself to the lifeboat—a zodiac with a motor—and tugged at its restraining ropes. Lena stumbled to the stairs. Water lapped at the bottom.

“Marty!” she screamed. “Marty!”

The boat was almost lifted into the air by the next impact. It split the *Xingyun Shui Shou* in half. Icy water knocked the air out of Mr. Wong’s lungs as he fell in and under. His chill was short lived as mighty jaws cut him in half.

On that first day, millions died. The military was desperately needed, but military bases in most places had their own dogs, and rats—thousands of rats. People barricaded their doors and pulled whatever firearms they had from top shelves of closets and basement gun racks. Zoos around the world were chaotic, but none more so than San Diego Zoo, where a clever gorilla got its fat fingers on a keeper’s keys and deftly jangled the other animals to freedom. The main thoroughfares of most cities were clogged by accidents—so many people drove with pets in their cars. It didn’t matter anyway, where would anyone run to? The woods certainly weren’t an option.

People in the sprawling metropolises discovered the exact meaning of commensal wildlife. Mice and rats, once content to hide in the walls and occasionally wander into a snap trap, now flowed from holes behind fridges, and up the pipes of baseboard heaters. For some people, locking their doors was the worst thing they could have done. Stray dogs joined feral cats in taking care of the homeless problem once and for all. Animal rights activists everywhere got their fondest wish as research animals turned on their tormentors. Petting zoos were a tragedy of children versus strong-jawed and hard-hoofed ponies. Old goats gained new strength and steers smashed through fences to reach those who’d stolen their virility. In Spain, the running of the bulls started early, and didn’t stop. What few circuses that still had animal acts gave audiences a taste of what was happening in villages all over Africa.

At a marine centre on Grand Bahamas Island, one of their best attractions, swimming with the dolphins, turned into a nightmare. Bystanders’ cameras dropped to the ground as their family and friends bobbed in the water, held up by BCDs and blood-soaked neoprene. Aeroplanes and helicopters alike fell from the sky like meteors as flocks of birds hurled themselves into flight paths. Wild animal preserves offered a variety of horrors. In Tenaru Nature Park, a keeper wet himself beside his jeep as he watched gibbons tear through the roof of a rag-top car and dismember its occupants with hideous enthusiasm. By some quirk of fate, that keeper’s

torso wound up draped over a sign that read, “Please Do Not Feed the Animals.”

On the evening of the first day, sparse lines of gun-wielding troops and volunteers prayed to their gods as they faced relentless waves of slaving creatures that worked their way towards the hospitals, backlit by burning cities.

For the first twenty-four hours the single most common emotion felt on the planet was mind-numbing panic. Overnight the world had become a giant ball of widows, widowers and orphans. By day two, the death toll was immeasurable. By day three, some control had been reestablished in certain areas. Fenced refugee camps had been set up and tanks rolled through city streets, pushing and crushing cars as soldiers leaned from turrets and sprayed machine-gun fire down dark alleys and into rustling bushes. Small towns everywhere were a complete loss. Any hamlet unlucky enough to be exposed to its native predators was on its own. For dingos, jackals and hyenas, jubilee had come, but for humanity, it was Hell on Earth.

China blamed the CIA. Religious zealots glowed with vindication—Sodom and Gomorrah were once more being swept clean. Old survivalists locked in their underground bunkers blamed the Commies. The younger ones knew it was terrorists. Xenophobes screamed that aliens were using animals as a first wave before colonization. Some people said the Japanese were behind it. None of these people lived in Japan, where animals behaved just like everywhere else, and even the gentle snow monkeys sprang from the trees to gore soldiers and civilians alike. In every part of the world, someone blamed the Jews.

Where there was power, people stared in glossy-eyed droves at their window on life; the television. Somehow, it was still more real for people to watch transmissions of the Change on the tube, than it was for them to just look outside.

On day four, a new force joined the attack on mankind, an army whose soldiers numbered in the billions; the insects. Not all of them, just one lowly order; the hymenoptera—bees, wasps and ants.

The last station to go off the air, supported by satellite access far exceeding that of other networks, was CNN. It was an historic moment, the kind of thing that would be replayed again and again by those with the equipment and the power to do so. Tom Westlaw, a field reporter whose hair was perfect even after three days of chaos, stared straight into the camera as angry swarms rose behind him. There was nowhere left to run and he and his cameraman had decided to make their last stand amid the streets of Anywhere, Europe. As tiny bodies lit on his skin, Westlaw raised his hands and screamed, “If you’re out there Lorne Greene, here’s your God-damn New Wilderness!”

## New Wilderness

Even though most people didn't know Mr. Westlaw was referring to a naturalist long in the grave, the vehemence of the statement could not be denied. Despite being made on June 13th, the declaration was made retroactive by its audience. Many titles the world over were attributed to June 10th, but the name that stuck and held was New Wilderness Day.