

Proprietary

by Gary Hardaway

One by one the hundred matte black drones hummed awake. The buzz was loud on the tiny airfield but died out soon among the waving amber heads of Kansas wheat that surrounded the unsigned base. The light of the half moon showed as a faint sheen from all the wings. One by one the black drones taxied and took off. The one low building, half hangar, half digital flight center, could be seen as moonlit silhouette only. There were no lights and no lighted windows. The computer stations didn't need a view of the field or the sky and the drones make their own light with data streams.

Drone 33, its ID neatly white on black on the left side of the fuselage, buzzed along toward its target. As the lights that shine human occupation intensified, particles so small they behaved as a gas dispersed as a cloud from the underbelly of 33. The cloud glistened with moonlight and fell, dusting the streets of Peoria.

The networks reported outbreaks of respiratory problems, vertigo and headaches in small to medium sized cities throughout the American Midwest. Hospitals and clinics isolated an unknown fungus as the probable source of the outbreak. A few elderly patients and infants with pre-existing conditions died as a result of the mysterious disease. In fully developed cases, the tear ducts and mucous membranes of the eyelids became iridescent black with spores. The disease became known as the Black Eye Fungus.

Fox News reported that the source of the Black Eye infection crippling the Midwest and Canada and spreading quickly on both coasts is "something Al Queda cooked up." Other news

organizations refuted as “speculation” the notion that Al Queda or any other identified terrorist organization was responsible for the grotesque, debilitating illness. Fox continued to report its assertion.

Clear Skies, Inc., announced a line of filtering masks, a vaccine, and a series of injections effective against the still unidentified fungal epidemic throughout the North American Continent and erupting across Europe, South America, Australia, Africa and Asia. In answer to questions about how they were able to respond so quickly to the outbreak, Clear Skies officials replied, “We were focused and persistent. We are small and nimble, and that allowed us to act fast.” Questions about FDA approval of the vaccine and treatment regimen were ignored, as were questions about previous products the company might have developed.

Epidemiological studies by the CDC showing that the Black Eye fungus could not have been a naturally occurring phenomenon were leaked before being formally presented. Highlights of findings spread faster than the disease itself across the Internet. Fox News declared its earlier Al Queda/ terrorist network hypothesis as the obvious answer to the artificial nature of the outbreak. Major media networks argued that the pattern of the epidemic was more consistent with a domestic source. Because the disease was seldom lethal and the Clear Skies prevention and treatment products, though extremely expensive, were highly effective in prevention and control of its debilitating symptoms, the sense of focused urgency a new Bubonic Plague or devastating strain of influenza might have generated was missing in the investigation and coverage of the epidemic. Had there been thousands of impromptu morgues across the continent, mass burials, mass cremations, the fear and outrage might have been more resolute. Instead, it followed the usual socio-political fault lines. Those on the right were certain that an international Muslim conspiracy was responsible and that the quick

response to the catastrophe by Clear Skies proved the efficiency of the free market. With all their Government resources, where was the CDC, after all? Those on the left were extremely curious about Clear Skies and where exactly had they been and what exactly were they doing before Black Eye? The CDC politely reminded everyone that congressional budget cuts had reduced its funding by 60% and the private donations used to justify the cut never materialized.

Black Eye disease exacerbated the schism between haves and have-nots in horrific ways. Because the vaccine and treatment were considered experimental, insurers would not fund or reimburse their use. Administration of the vaccine and each subsequent year's booster shot averaged \$5,000 per patient across the continental United States. The treatment, which could never fully eliminate the infection, averaged \$6500 per patient per year. Poor and lower middle class families could not afford the vaccine or treatment. The debilitating symptoms prevented most sufferers from being able to work and when the spores blacked the eyes every two to three months, the infected were barred from facilities, public and private, despite the Americans With Disabilities Act. The bulk of the middle class was forced into extraordinary debt in order to acquire prevention and treatment. The affluent grew more removed and insular. Their biggest complaint was how the Black Eyes whined so much in the news.

The corpses of murdered Black Eye sufferers first turned up in Southern cities of the United States. The phenomenon quickly spread to major cities throughout the country. "Shiner Snuff" videos showed up online soon after the first reports. What appeared to be clean cut squads of college boys were filmed on smart phones as they taunted and beat two or three "Shiners" (as sufferers of Black Eye infection during an episode of spore eruption came to be called) and then hammered a spike or stake through each eye of each victim

as a grim finale. Initially, it was thought that the videos were staged but police reports of spiked or staked “Shiners” confirmed that the Snuff videos depicted actual killings.

On the second anniversary of the first reports of the Black Eye fungus outbreak, an elaborate hypertext appeared at multiple internet sites which vigorously and systematically showed, with internal memos, email, real estate deeds and leases, patent applications, audio recordings of phone calls, photographs, invoices, and elaborate accounting spreadsheets, that Clear Skies, Inc., was created and funded by Monscamto in a joint venture with Hollowburden. According to the heavily annotated Summary Narrative of the hypertext, the fungus responsible for the Black Eye outbreak was designed, created, tested, and perfected in Monscamto laboratories. The vaccine and treatment program were developed concurrently with the fungus. All three genetically engineered products were patented by the shell entity, Blue Skies, Inc. The filter mask marketed as an inexpensive alternative to the vaccine was designed and developed by Hollowburden. The drones used to distribute Black Eye fungus spores throughout the Midwestern states and south central Canada were built by various suppliers to specifications and schematics provided by Clear Skies as a joint venture contribution.

Fox News denounced the Black Eye Fungus Hypertext as an elaborate hoax, comparable in skill and scope to the staged lunar landings delivered by NASA in the Nineteen-seventies, perpetrated to besmirch the reputations of three highly effective and profitable American companies. Other networks interviewed teams of experts enlisted to analyze the authenticity of the hypertext and the complex array of documents it assembled and annotated. The consensus among experts was that the documents were authentic. What most impressed them was how the authors of the hypertext were able to access so much highly confidential primary source corporate data

and work product. It was as if the person or group that used Counterforce 2020 as its electronic signature had entered the deepest chambers of each corporation's digital records and recorded everything there related to the Black Eye outbreak.

In response to the release and assessments of the Black Eye Hypertext, Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT) assembled the chairmen and representative members of the seven standing US Senate committees on Environment and Public Works to organize Senate hearings on the roles of Monscamto, Hollowburden, and Clear Skies in the biological weapon attack against the citizens of the American heartland. Executives with each company identified in the Hypertext as having direct responsibility for the infectious outbreak were summoned to appear before the Senate Special Committee on the Black Eye Fungus Outbreak of 2018.

Senator Sanders gaveled the first hearing of the Special Committee into session. None of the executives summoned-- all well known figures after widespread media coverage—were present in the Senate chamber. Three grey-suited anonymous men seated themselves at the witness table instead.

“Who might you gentlemen be?” asked Senator Sanders.

“We represent the executives you summoned”, said the tallest of the anonymous men.

“They cannot appear before you. They are out of the United States on pressing corporate matters in Europe and Asia. They have directed us to tell the Committee that any questions it has will not be answered due to the highly proprietary nature of the information being sought. Answering these questions would compromise the competitiveness and profitability of three significant contributors to the economic wellbeing of the United States and the developed

nations of the world.”

“The men and companies you represent systematically and ruthlessly infected millions of American citizens with a debilitating synthetic disease in order to create massive corporate profits. They are a cunning bunch of criminals as far I can tell. Communicate to your clients that they are in contempt of Congress and when found will be jailed until they testify before this committee. Pending the outcome of criminal indictments, trial, and conviction, they may be jailed for the rest of their natural lives”, retorted Senator Sanders.

“Bernie, your mouth shouldn't write checks that your authority can't cash.”

“Vice President Palin, I didn't notice you back there before. Why are you here?”

“Why, I'm President Pro Tempore of the Senate, Bernie. Besides, President Paul asked me to come down here and let you know that Homeland Security will be handling this little episode from here on out. This Hypertext thingy has the Executive branch up and at ‘em, ya know? Can't have good business people being harassed by that anonymous Counterforce 2020 geek now can we? Why don't you and Barbara just wrap up this little show today and let the pros handle it? OK, Bernie?”

“Are you honestly saying that the White House and Homeland Security think whoever authored the Hypertext is the criminal here?”

“You betcha and yessiree, Bob, Bernie.”

