

**Freedom™**

ALSO BY DANIEL SUAREZ

*Daemon*

# Freedom<sup>TM</sup>

a novel

Daniel Suarez



DUTTON

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For Generation Y



*“Behind the ostensible government sits enthroned an invisible government owing no allegiance and acknowledging no responsibility to the people. To destroy this invisible government, to befoul the unholy alliance between corrupt business and corrupt politics is the first task of the statesmanship of the day.”*

—Theodore Roosevelt in 1906





# Part One

## December

|                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Gold:                 | \$1,057USD / oz.   |
| Unleaded Gasoline:    | \$3.58USD / gallon |
| Unemployment:         | 16.3%              |
| USD / Darknet Credit: | 3.9                |



# Chapter 1: // Dark Pool

InvestorNet.com

Profits in Milliseconds—“**Algorithmic stock trading** is the future of finance,” according to Wall Street titan **Anthony Hollis**, whose **Tartarus Group** employs sophisticated **software** that responds to market conditions, trading equities with sub-millisecond speed. Due to its extraordinary profitability, **Hollis’s** form of **programmatic trading** grew from 14 percent of all equity volume in 2003, to 73 percent of all volume in 2009. However, critics contend that **high frequency trades**—where a single stock may be bought and sold multiple times an hour—only increases market volatility while **producing nothing of value**.

**A**n elderly man emerged from the crowd and aimed a revolver straight at Anthony Hollis’s face. As the old worker’s thick index finger squeezed the trigger, Hollis sat up in darkness—breathing hard.

He glanced at the clock on the nightstand: 3:13 A.M. Motionless, he listened to his own rapid breathing.

He started to calm down as he looked around his bedroom. It was illuminated only by the soft glow of large flat screen monitors mounted on the far wall, scrolling stock prices for the Nikkei, Shanghai, and Seoul exchanges. The monitors weren’t necessary anymore. They were merely a comfort to him.

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Hollis took one more deep breath and tried to shake off the nightmare. He was just about to lie back down when the unmistakable crackling of gunfire somewhere in the night came to his ears.

He sat up again.

The phone beside his bed warbled. He grabbed the handset. "Metzer, what's going on?"

The calm voice of Rudy Metzer, his security director, came over the line. *"We have a situation by the service gate. It's being contained."*

"What kind of goddamned situation? Who the hell is shooting?"

In the bed next to him Hollis's latest girlfriend looked up at him sleepily. She was a third his age. "What is it?"

He ignored her and tried to listen to Metzer.

*"Mr. Hollis, as a precaution, I want you to move into your secure room as soon as possible."*

"Are the police on the way?"

*"Sir, the estate's outside lines have been cut. Cell phones and radios jammed. We're isolated for the moment. I need you to move quickly and calmly to your safe room. I'll phone you on the landline. Do you understand?"*

Hollis absorbed Metzer's words and felt actual fear. "Yes. Yes, I understand." He returned the phone to the cradle and stared at nothing for a moment. The screens on the far wall now showed only video snow.

"What's happening, Tony?"

Kidnappers? Assassins? Two months ago a retired autoworker had tried to kill him in Chicago. Metzer's men saw the guy make his move, and they tackled him before he could pull the trigger. Some pension fund loser bent on revenge. Tonight's intruders sounded more serious.

"Tony!"

He turned to her. "Relax. Somebody tried to break in." Hollis got out of bed and put on his slippers and a robe.

“Where are you going? I don’t want to be left alone!”

“Don’t be a pain in the ass. They caught the guy. I just need to take a piss.” He ignored her frightened look and headed to the master bathroom.

He nudged the door closed behind him, turned on the lights, and padded across the Italian marble floor, headed toward the walk-in wardrobe. He opened twin doors to enter a sizeable room lined with H. Huntsman and Leonard Logsdail suits and rows of Edward Green and Berluti shoes.

Hollis avoided his reflection in the wrap-around mirrors as he closed the doors behind him. Yes, he felt a twinge of conscience, but then, he didn’t really know this girl. He hadn’t done a backgrounder on her yet, and he wasn’t about to bring her into his secure room. She could be a plant. People were capable of anything for money.

Hollis walked quickly to the far wall and opened the faceplate of a wall-mounted digital thermostat. It revealed an alphanumeric keypad where he tapped in his security code—the exact amount of his first investment. A section of the wooden wall rolled aside, revealing a hidden room whose lights flickered on automatically. The door was solid steel, nearly six inches thick—the reinforced concrete walls of his secure room were even thicker. A sign of the times.

He moved inside and tapped a large red pressure switch near the door. The opening slid closed and locked with a dull *boom*. A large bank of monitors glowed to life on the far side of the room above a security console. From here he could watch the action through dozens of surveillance cameras. There was also a dedicated emergency phone line, a radio base station, and a house phone. The room also had a sofa, a wet bar, and flat-screen television—not to mention shelves of emergency provisions and a narrow door leading to a Spartan restroom.

Hollis had everything he needed to await rescue.

The house phone rang, and he tapped the speakerphone button as he clicked through monitors, trying to find the service gate cameras. "Talk to me."

Metzer's voice came over the speaker. "*Can you get a dial tone on your emergency line?*"

Hollis grabbed the emergency phone and held it to his ear. Nothing. Some cultural instinct compelled him to stab repeatedly at the hook switch. "It's dead. This was supposed to be a buried cable. How did they know where it was, Metzer?"

Hollis heard talking in the background. Then Metzer came back on. "*We'll talk about that later. Right now I've got men missing, and motion detectors in alarm all over the estate. I'm pulling everyone back into a perimeter around the master suite.*"

"How did these people get through the gates?" One of the security monitors showed the estate's front entrance, which stood wide open.

*"I don't know."*

"It's your *job* to know! I wasn't supposed to ever *need* this room, damnit." He fumed for a moment then added, "Send someone up to get Mary."

*"She's not with you?"*

"I can't have her in here. Just put her in a closet or something. And figure out a way to contact the police. I don't care if you have to use fucking smoke signals!" He hung up and kept flipping through security monitors. He'd spent a fortune on security, and he wasn't getting much of a return on his investment. He was going to sack the entire security team after this was over—starting with Metzer.

As Hollis cycled through cameras, the monitors showed various rooms on a dozen screens—multicar garage, pool patio, pub room, dining room, driveway . . .

He stopped cold. In the middle of the driveway one of Metzer's

suited security men lay in a pool of blood, still clutching a submachine gun. His head was missing.

“Jesus Christ!” Hollis picked up the house phone and dialed Metzger’s extension. It rang several times and went to voice mail. Hollis pressed the call button on the radio base station but heard nothing but static. “Fuck!”

Then the power went out.

Here in the safe room backup batteries instantly kicked on, but on the security monitors he saw most of the lights kick off around the estate. Now only interior emergency lighting remained. Outside was blackness.

Hollis clicked around the interior security cameras. There—he saw two security people in the grand foyer with Metzger locking the ornate front doors of Hollis’s twenty-three-thousand-square-foot mansion. Metzger was racing upstairs, pointing and shouting to position men at the top of the staircase. They all carried MP-5 submachine guns. The second floor was apparently going to be their Alamo.

Just then the front doors blasted open sending door hardware, wood, and glass fragments silently spraying across the polished stone floor. Something the size of a man had burst through the doors at high speed, taking out the large antique table just inside the door and crashing into the far wall. The room started to fill with smoke.

The surveillance camera showed security men opening fire from the second floor railing. More shadows were already racing through the front door. Hollis couldn’t get a good look at them in the dim light and smoke. They moved fast—through the doorway and up the wide staircase. In mere moments they exited the frame. Hollis clicked around in frustration to find a suitable camera to see what was going on.

He soon saw his own bedroom on one monitor—he’d had this

security camera installed as a precaution against sexual assault charges (one never knew what visions of rape young women might dream up after-the-fact). It wasn't on the rotation available to the security team, but here he could see Metzger grabbing Mary by the wrist and pulling her from the bed. She was nude and screaming, but the muscular German was having none of it. On camera Metzger noiselessly shouted at her and pointed under the bed, letting go of her hand as he reacted to something in the hallway.

Metzger trained his weapon on the door as Mary crawled under the bed behind him and moments later Metzger opened fire on the doorway in short bursts. Through the thick concrete walls of the safe room Hollis could hear the dull thud of the shots less than thirty feet away in his bedroom. A blade of fire stabbed forth from Metzger's weapon, illuminating the intense expression on his face—but only for a few moments before a dark form raced into frame and lashed out with twin blades in a lightning fast one-two strike that cut Metzger into three sections, head, torso, and legs. The blades crisscrossed again, inhumanly fast, chopping the pieces into pieces. Metzger's body fell apart like quarters of beef, spraying the room with gore.

Hollis stared in shock at the screen.

The dark silhouette of the attacker moved farther into the room, twirling the twin blades to shed excess blood—spattering the walls into a macabre modern art display.

What the camera revealed beneath the emergency lights was a machine—both familiar and alien. It was a powerful racing motorcycle, but it had no rider, just a series of whip antennas and sensors. The entire bike was covered in blades, which bristled like cooling fins along both sides. Where handlebars would normally be, it wielded twin swords at the end of mechanized gambols. The entire length of the machine was drenched in blood, as though it had hacked its way in here through every security man Hollis had.



And every inch of the metal appeared to be engraved with symbols and glyphs—like some sort of high-tech religious relic.

The machine stood with the aid of hydraulic kickstands it had extended. After spinning its blades clean, it folded the blades back behind its bullet-pocked cowling. Two more identical machines rolled into Hollis's bedroom behind it.

Hollis collapsed into his console chair and stared in incomprehension at the monitor. What he was looking at made no sense.

Swirling green laser light issued from the headlight assemblies of the bikes. The scene took on the appearance of a laser light show as the beams spread through Metzger's lingering gun smoke and traced brilliant lines along the walls and furniture in the shadows—scanning for something.

Without warning one of the bikes roared through the bathroom doorway. Hollis could see in the mirror where it crashed through the thin wardrobe room doors. The ornamental doors caved in like paper, and now Hollis could actually hear the muted throbbing of a powerful motorcycle engine just beyond his panic room door.

It knew where he was.

He swiveled his chair to face the solid steel door ten feet away. That door was the only thing that stood between him and a gruesome death. His heart was hammering so hard it felt like it had moved up into his throat. Hollis dug through the desk drawer and produced a Sig Sauer P220 Super Match pistol. He chambered a round and took another glance at the bedroom monitor.

The other two bikes had flipped the bed over with their sword arms, revealing the naked and helpless Mary beneath. She lay curled up, silently screaming beneath the blinding laser lights.

*Oh god. No . . .*

But would this appease them?

The bikes just stood observing Mary, as she shrieked in terror at the sight of Metzger's butchered remains on the floor around her.

Hollis decided he would do something for Mary's family after this. He would find out more about her. He'd help her family.

But the machines didn't attack. Instead, they just stood watching as she got to her feet, and fled the room.

*Maybe she was part of this after all . . .*

Hollis tapped buttons on the console, bringing up the image outside his safe room door. There he could see the third machine waiting. It seemed to know exactly where the concealed door was. From blueprints? There was no doubt that whoever was behind this had serious power. Access to his communications and electrical layout would have been no problem for someone who could do this. It was his secure room that had saved him, and there was no home automation link to its steel door. Once locked, it could only be opened manually from the inside.

Suddenly the house phone rang on the console next to him. Hollis recoiled from it. He glanced up at the screen again. The bloodstained machine stood impassively outside, still aimed at the secret door.

The phone rang again, and Hollis just stared at it. Perhaps it was someone on the security team? Hollis pressed the speakerphone button. "Hello?"

The line was silent for a moment—but then his own voice came back to him, talking fast, as Hollis always did on business calls . . .

*"Even if the U.S. markets crash, we'll make money. Movement is all we need—positive or negative makes no difference. . . ."*

It was definitely Hollis's voice. Someone had tapped his phone calls. Another clip immediately followed. . . .

*"What a company does is irrelevant. What a company makes is irrelevant. The market is a math problem we solve through value extraction."*

Someone somewhere had intercepted his words. But why?

Looking at the remorseless killing machine outside, he somehow couldn't picture it being spawned by human rights activists. Whoever was behind it was decidedly more dangerous.

His laughing voice came to him again over the speaker. *"We made it legal. Our people wrote the congressional bill."*

On the security monitor a different type of bike entered the wardrobe room. This machine wasn't covered in blades, but in piping and pressure tanks. As it came in, the other bike moved aside. The new arrival slammed down hydraulic jacks to plant it firmly just outside the panic room door. Then, instead of twin blade arms, it extended a single robotic nozzle arm, with hoses trailing back along its length to half a dozen pressure tanks. A spark flashed, and then a white-hot flame suddenly stabbed out from the nozzle—instantly turning the wood paneling in front of the panic room door into a solid wall of flame.

Hollis stared at the machine on screen, paralyzed in fear. He knew what it was. He'd owned stock in steel mills in the nineties. It was a plasma torch. Someone had mounted it on this terror machine, and it now stood before his safe room door, blasting aside the wooden millwork surrounding his bunker as though it were nothing more than ash. Already the scores of fine suits and leather shoes and carpeting in the wardrobe room were engulfed in flames as the twenty-five-thousand-degree cutting head on the machine penetrated the steel door like a knife through modeling clay.

The sprinkler system leapt into action, spraying water over the outside room, but the fire's intensity vaporized it. The surveillance camera showed the remorseless machines standing their ground, one cutting, the other waiting, but soon, even the camera started to fail—and melt. The screen turned grainy and then went black.

Behind him, Hollis was suddenly deafened by a burst of pressure and a cracking sound as a white-hot jet of plasma burst through the steel doorway and began tracing a molten line along the length of the door. The sofa and wet bar beyond it burst into flames, and the glass cover of the flat-screen television shattered—the whole thing folding over itself like a big wax candle. Blue-hot sparks of molten steel scattered like marbles across the concrete

floor. The safe room sprinklers popped and started raining over everything to no effect.

Hollis's recorded voice still spoke to him over the speakerphone as he sat in a catatonic state, while the sprinklers soaked him with freezing water.

*"Pure math frees us to create unlimited profit."*

Already the torch had finished cutting through the vault-like door. In a moment a huge section of steel fell forward with a crash that shook the concrete floor. The door's edges still glowed red. Hollis turned to watch with the detachment of someone on morphine.

As he began to feel the heat of the flames outside and inside, even through all the water raining down on him, the killing machine entered his safe room and unfolded both sword blades with swift precision. The bike was stained with cooked blood and charred flesh. Steam rose from its metal frame.

Hollis put the pistol against his head as the killing machine moved toward him. It raised its blades in the same way he'd seen it do with Metzger.

There was no escape. Hollis pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened. The safety was on.

Hollis's own words were the last thing he heard as he fumbled for the gun's safety switch. . . .

*"The beauty of it is: they can't afford to let us fail. . . ."*

## Chapter 2: // Operation Exorcist

Reuters.com

**High-profile Assassinations Stun Financial Community—Attacks** that left scores of financial **executives dead** worldwide have rattled the reclusive billionaire's club. Security services in the **U.S., Great Britain, Japan,** and **China** have withheld details of **sixty-one** nearly simultaneous **killings** that appear to be part of a coordinated campaign reminiscent of last year's **spammer massacre**.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attacks. However, the **murders** highlight growing resentment over outsized executive compensation in the midst of **skyrocketing unemployment**.

**T**he surveillance video showed a man screaming as a robotic motorcycle wielding twin swords chopped him to pieces.

A voice spoke in the darkness. "Who was he?"

"Anthony Hollis—ran a highly successful hedge fund."

"Has his name been in the news?"

"Yes. Lots of detractors in the business press. Four hundred and six negative mentions in the past year alone." A pause. "You think the Daemon botnet is behind this?"

"Play it back. Slowly."

The video replayed in slow motion, frame-by-frame. A blade-covered motorcycle advanced on the cornered man. The image

stopped then zoomed in. Though motion blurred, the screen was frozen in mid stroke, a sword leveled at the man's neck while spiraling lasers in the bike's headlight assembly illuminated his terrified face.

"Unmanned vehicle. Like some sort of ground level Predator drone. Daemon operatives call them 'razorbacks.' The same type Dr. Philips described in her report on the attack at Building Twenty-Nine."

"So the Daemon is conducting class warfare now?"

"I don't think so. These people were all engaged in a specific type of financial activity."

"Sobol *did* say his Daemon would 'eliminate parasites in the system.' Could it have viewed Hollis and the others as parasites?"

A third voice joined the discussion. "With all due respect, these killings are just a distraction from the real problem."

"Perhaps, but they reveal something important about the Daemon's purpose.

Bring up the lights, please."

Suddenly the room illuminated, revealing the heads of America's intelligence services sitting around a circular boardroom table in Building OPS-2B of National Security Agency headquarters. Plaques stood in front of everyone present—NSA, CIA, FBI, DARPA, DIA—as well as several visitors from the private intelligence and security sectors; suited executives from Computer Systems Corporation (CSC), its subsidiaries—EndoCorp and Korr Military Solutions—and a principal from the lobbying firm, Byers, Carroll, and Marquist (BKM).

Their host scanned the room.

NSA: "The late Matthew Sobol created his Daemon as a news-reading computer virus. It activated two years ago at the appearance of Sobol's obituary in online news, and has since spread throughout the world, siphoning capital from corporate hosts to sustain a network of human operatives who distribute and protect it. It has

already used these operatives to destroy the data and backup tapes of companies that try to remove it. The question is: how do we kill the Daemon without precipitating a 'digital doomsday'?"

DIA: "That's the dilemma. If we act, the Daemon will *react* and destroy the corporate networks it's infected."

DARPA: "But we can't just do *nothing*. It continues to launch attacks—like it did against the Daemon Task Force at Building Twenty-Nine and these recent assassinations."

NSA: "Thousands of people are already dead worldwide—dozens of federal officers are dead. And I have to ask myself how a software construct with the intelligence of a tapeworm managed to do this to us. The free market quest for efficiency has made our infrastructure vulnerable."

BKM: "You can't expect the market to operate *inefficiently*. Efficiency is what makes modern life possible."

NSA: "Yes, but we might need to place a greater emphasis on resiliency."

CSC (gesturing to the screen): "Why? Because a few people have died? These machines are not militarily significant. They're glorified toys."

NSA: "I was speaking more in terms of network security—but these razorbacks are becoming a serious public relations problem as well. Witnesses have seen these machines navigating at night on highways. They're uploading videos to Web sites."

BKM: "We're already aware of these videos, and are taking steps to minimize their public impact."

NSA: "My point is that we may soon have no choice but to reveal the existence of the Daemon to the general public."

BKM: "That will be difficult, Mr. Director—especially after going through so much effort to convince the public the Daemon was a hoax. How would you explain executing Peter Sebeck for a crime that never occurred?"

FBI: "That wasn't our doing."

BKM: "Nonetheless. If word got out that the Daemon had taken control of thousands of corporate networks, it would cause a stock market panic."

CSC: "Mr. Director, we can assure you that none of these razorback videos will ever gain credibility by appearing in mainstream news."

NSA: "But they're being shared over the Internet. Millions of people have already seen them. "

EndoCorp: "That's a manageable problem."

NSA: "What do you mean it's *manageable*?"

EndoCorp: "We've copyrighted the razorback."

NSA: "How does *copyrighting* them solve anything?"

EndoCorp: "Owning the IP gives us legal control of their image. We're spinning these viral videos as stealth advertising for an upcoming video game."

CSC: "Which means the general public won't take them seriously."

NSA: "Whose idea was this?"

CSC: "We don't get down in the weeds. It was done by our psyops division. As far as the Millennials are concerned, these razorbacks are just guerilla marketing."

CIA: "But people have *witnessed* these things. People have *died*. How do we explain that?"

BKM: "Fact and fiction carry the same intrinsic weight in the marketplace of ideas. Fortunately, reality has no advertising budget."

CSC: "Persistence and presence create truth online."

EndoCorp: "We've neutralized eyewitnesses in Web forums by flaming them as shills for the game's whisper campaign. We've created 3-D models, and fictitious how-it-was-done videos to 'prove' surveillance clips and cell phone videos are fakes."

BKM: "So the public knows about razorbacks, but they don't really know what they know."



FBI: "Then we're using some of Sobol's jujitsu, then?"

BKM: "We might even see net revenue on the resulting video game."

CIA (shaking his head): "When I hear this crap, I start to understand why Sobol is attacking us."

FBI: "Don't even joke about that."

CIA: "Seriously, you're going to sit there and tell us your idea for combating the Daemon is to develop a video game around it? If Sobol were alive, he would be laughing at us."

CSC: "You said yourself that in the short term we can't remove the Daemon from infected networks without triggering catastrophic data loss. Until a reliable countermeasure is available the only thing we can do to avoid panicking the populace and further disturbing capital markets is to make sure everyone thinks the Daemon is just a fiction."

NSA: "And what happens when the Daemon's army of followers takes more aggressive action?"

CSC: "Then we call them terrorists—anything but 'Daemon followers.' But we cannot risk direct action against the Daemon itself until we find a way to disrupt its grip on corporate networks."

NSA: "We agree on that much at least."

DIA: "The U.S. dollar is already sliding. How do we know word hasn't gotten out among key investors?"

DARPA: "Sooner or later word *will* get out that the Daemon exists—or foreign powers will decrypt the Daemon's *Ragnorok* module and use the Daemon as an economic weapon against us. What do we do then?"

EndoCorp: "You've already got your answer: the *Ragnorok* module contains the key to destroying the Daemon. To crippling its command and control."

EndoCorp: "There are flaws in Sobol's code. Flaws we can exploit. We should have a Daemon countermeasure in a matter of months. But it's vital we not provoke the Daemon before we're ready."

NSA: “And you really suggest we do *nothing* to counteract these razorbacks or the Daemon’s human operatives in the meantime?”

BKM: “Gentleman, let’s not forget what’s at stake here. Yes, it’s regrettable that people have died—and will die—but we must defend the core of our civilization: which is *commerce*. And commerce requires *capital*. That no longer means gold bars in a vault; it means ones and zeroes in a database. Purely financial transactions moving through global markets on any given day outweigh transactions for *real world* goods and services by twenty-to-one, and that money moves automatically and instantaneously across borders. By disrupting the world financial system, the Daemon could destroy fiduciary trust. It could create global economic chaos in minutes. From that point of view the real-world manifestations of the Daemon—like these razorbacks and its human followers—are minor; dangerous only insofar as they threaten the public’s belief system. But if we kill the *digital* core of the Daemon, then its physical manifestations disappear along with it. This is what Operation Exorcist is designed to accomplish, and why it will succeed where the government effort failed.”

DARPA: “No one has ever successfully exterminated a botnet.”

EndoCorp: “Technically that’s true, but what we’re contemplating is disrupting its key communications to render it defenseless. In particular the *Destroy* function of the *Ragnorok* module. The logic that initiates a corporate data destruction sequence on demand.”

NSA: “Which would take away the Daemon’s claws. . . .”

BKM: “Precisely.”

DIA: “It’s interesting that Sobol designed online game worlds. Worlds with millions of players buying and selling virtual objects. I just never realized how similar his game economy was to our own.”

BKM: “The chief difference is that *our* world is real—with real consequences. And unless we preserve faith in capital markets all

economic activity ceases. Society disintegrates into anarchy. And millions perish.”

Silence prevailed as the others digested this. Finally their host spoke.

NSA: “There’s one more item we need to discuss. A new development.”

He picked up a remote and turned off the video screen.

NSA: “Not all corporations are fighting the Daemon.”

BKM: “What do you mean?”

NSA: “Sixteen lawsuits were filed by Daemon-infected multinationals yesterday in federal district courts.”

Now the corporate side of the table fell into stunned silence for a moment.

BKM: “Which companies?”

NSA (handing over a list): “They’re filing suit against the U.S. government. Its lawyers claim that the Daemon has a constitutional right to exist under the precedent of corporate personhood.”

CSC: “Holy hell . . .”

BKM: “The Daemon has *lawyers*?”

NSA: “And it’s retained lobbyists. We’re negotiating with the courts to keep these cases classified; however, we can’t be certain what the judicial branch is going to do about them.”

BKM: “This is insane. The Daemon is a computer virus, not a corporation.”

NSA: “But it’s not the Daemon that’s filing suit. These are multinational corporations that *host* the Daemon. Their management feels that the Daemon gives them an advantage.”

BKM: “What advantage?”

NSA: “Survival, for one. They feel that the Daemon has a better handle on cyber security and might help them weather an anticipated period of coming chaos.”

BKM: “This is extortion. The Daemon will destroy their data

if they don't comply. RICO statutes cover this. And I see several firms on this list that some of our clients hold significant stock positions in."

NSA: "But not a controlling interest?"

BKM: "It doesn't matter. The management of these firms has no right to defend the Daemon."

NSA: "They cite their right as 'artificial persons' granted in an 1886 Supreme Court ruling on the fourteenth amendment . . ." (he flipped through documents) ". . . *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad*. You're a lawyer. You tell me if the courts will throw it out."

EndoCorp: "These attorneys are agents of the Daemon—a known terrorist organization."

NSA: "Maybe. Or maybe the attorneys are just following instructions from the corner office. We don't know yet. Either way, we should be able to the courts to close a nineteenth-century loophole that has unanticipated twenty-first-century consequences."

BKM: "Wait. Let's just wait a second. There are complex considerations relating to an entire body of legal precedents on corporate personhood, and the rights of free speech to corporate interests have a necessary and guiding effect on policy. Let's not do anything rash. We should let these cases run their course. We'll have neutralized the Daemon before they get their day in court, and then these companies will be back in the fold."

CIA: "Is there something about that 1886 ruling we should know?"

BKM: "We don't want to rehash established precedents. This is part of the Daemon's effort to sow chaos."

CIA (writing notes): "What was the name of that case again?"

BKM: "*This* is a perfect example of why government isn't nimble enough to deal with the Daemon. It's using our own laws and government institutions against us. To divide us. We should be helping one another."

NSA: "Wait a minute. Nobody's dividing anyone. Does corporate personhood expose us to danger?"

BKM: "That's not the point. What I'm saying is that we can't follow legal niceties in dealing with this thing. We cannot demonstrate weakness. *Ever.*"

FBI: "Our laws demonstrate weakness?"

The corporate side of the table conferred for a moment, and then the lobbyist turned to face the intelligence directors again. He took a calmer tone.

BKM: "Look, the current economic crisis has crippled state governments. States have begun to sell off assets to balance their budgets. They're outsourcing services and selling their highways, bridges, prisons."

NSA: "And?"

BKM: "We are buying them. We're *investing* in America. We—and the chairmen of intelligence funding committees in the House and Senate—hope you will defend our legitimate interests while we help America through this difficult period."

NSA: "Of course, you know that we will."

BKM: "We need wide latitude to deal with these dangers. I think you'll agree that it's in the best interests of the nation to make all tools available to us."

The two sides viewed each other across the table.

BKM: "I hope we can count on your support, Mr. Director. . . ."