DESERTER

It was 1862, and the bloody American Civil War was deep into its second year.

Tennessee -- on June 8, 1861 -- had been the last state to succeed from the Union. The state had earlier been split into two factions: The eastern portion was mostly pro-Union, while the western portion was mostly pro-Confederate. The middle portion of the state majority, however, leaned pro-succession, so that concluded the issue. It should be noted that twenty-five percent of Tennessee's population were slaves. Perhaps surprisingly, the state also provided more soldiers (51,000) for the Union Army than any other state in the newly-formed Confederacy. Meanwhile, 187,000 Tennesseans eagerly enlisted in the Rebel Cause.

On April 16, 1862, Confederate President Jefferson Davis ordered the First Conscription Act, which would draft all Rebel men between the ages of 18-35 for military service. Davis needed substantially more soldiers to fight for The South, to add to those who initially volunteered after Fort Sumter fell a year earlier.

Jonas Baxter lived with his father, Amos, a tobacco sharecropper, in Shelbyville, a Tennessee town near the center of the state. Jonas' Ma and younger sister were lost to fever when Jonas was eight years old.

But when the military draft was announced, Jonas was unsure if he should fight. The Confederate concepts of state's rights and the established system of slavery were not issues that immediately concerned him. Besides, slaves were only affordable for big plantation owners -- not poor folk like himself and everyone he knew. His passing interactions with slaves in town had never been a problem. Were they equal to white folks? Should they be freed? The young man wasn't sure. So Jonas shared his real doubts about the new Conscription Act with his father. What exactly could I possibly be laying down my life for? he wanted to know.

"Look, son, you got to do your duty, whether you want to or not. The future of our new Southern Nation is at stake. Fightin's part of being a man, Jonas. Besides, you know it's the law, now that you're 18," Amos firmly stated.

So, with heavy reluctance, Jonas Baxter went as ordered to the Bedford County courthouse and was enrolled in the Confederate army.

Basic training was a mere three weeks. It consisted of learning the manual of arms, having a bit of target practice, doing company and regimental drills in basic maneuvers, and learning brigade drill and skirmishing tactics. In terms of rifle shooting, Jonas had previously shot only at squirrels, possums, woodchucks, or deer for food. He was an average marksman with his new Springfield rifle, which used percussion caps to fire, unlike the old flint and powder musket he was used to shooting. Like most of his young fellow conscripts -- many with pimpled faces, and just beginning to shave -- he had never shot at a man. Why would he ever? I guess I'll have to now, he nervously realized. The prospect worried him. His new gray wool uniform and marching boots felt odd and uncomfortable too.

In early June, young Baxter's 250-man, Company D was assigned to join up with 1150 troops under the command of Brigadier General Nathan B. Forrest and Colonel John Hunt Morgan, who were coming northwest from Chattanooga. An assault was planned on a Union garrison and supply depot in Murfreesboro, a town located about 25 miles north of Jonas' home in Shelbyville. The Federal forces were under the command of Brigadier General Thomas T. Crittenden. He had freshly arrived in Murfreesboro on June 12.

The Confederate surprise attack occurred at 4:15 a.m. on June 13. It would be the first time that Jonas would participate in bloody battle.

The hellish chaos of war was shocking -- the deafening sounds of roaring cannons and blasting rifle shots; the Calvary charges with frenzied horses, their riders slashing at the enemy with flashing swords; the eerie death groans from the dying, and the agonized screams from the wounded; brutal hand-to-hand combat, with blue and gray-uniformed men viciously struggling to kill each other; deadly waves of bayonet attacks and stabbings; and, mostly, the horror of blood everywhere -- splattering terrified faces, oozing from wounds, or pooling in red puddles under fresh corpses.

Jonas Baxter was splayed on his belly behind a fallen log with three other men from his Company. He was frozen with fear, and had yet to even fire his musket. A grizzled Rebel veteran named Sam was beside him, on his left. A squad of determined Yankee soldiers was charging right at Baxter's position.

"Shoot your goddamn rifle, boy! Shoot now or they'll kill us!" the old-timer yelled, as he frantically tried to reload. The other two boys behind the log fired their guns, and likewise fumbled to reload in time before they were overrun.

In the unfurling panic, Jonas saw a Yankee boy about his own age charging at him, his bayonet poised to strike. The young Blue-belly was perhaps fifteen feet away.

As if trapped in a bad dream, Baxter automatically aimed and fired his rifle. His shot hit the blue-uniformed lad in the chest, and Jonas instantly saw the boy's warm blood streaming out. The Yankee went down, dead, dropping his bayoneted rifle as he collapsed.

The immediate attack was repelled. Jonas had no need to recover and reload, because a bugle call suddenly announced a ceasefire.

The Union forces had surrendered.

The losses would be later be tallied as 890 Yankees killed, compared to 150 Rebels. It was a welcomed victory for the Confederates. The captured Union soldiers would soon be transferred to a prisoner-of-war camp in Georgia.

As the usual post-battle clean-up and troop re-organization was underway, Baxter went back for a quick moment to the place where he had killed his first man. The Yankee boy's corpse had yet to be removed. Jonas noted that the lad's eyes were frozen open in a vacant death's stare. Who was he? What was his name? Where was he from? When would his family realize that their boy was never coming back, except in a pine box? the bewildered farmer's son wondered.

Jonas, in shock and disgust at his regrettably ordered deed to kill, dropped to one knee and vomited in a nearby clump of bushes.

The grizzled veteran that had earlier been behind the log with Jonas happened to appear just then and caught the boy's elbow. He helped Baxter rise and steady himself. "It's O.K., sonny...the first time is always the toughest. You'll get used to it, though," the old-timer decreed. "Now go wash out your mouth with some water, and then get some grub. Some hot food and a good night's rest will fix you up sure, believe me. Plus, we won today, so it's time to cheer up...We sure showed them Yankees how to fight, I'll say!" Sam gave the distressed lad's shoulder a fatherly squeeze and drifted back to his unit.

But Jonas didn't feel like eating or sleeping. He thought over and over instead about the killing he had earlier committed. Didn't the Bible say: "Thou Shalt Not Kill"? It was understandable if you were forced to kill someone like a murderer who was attacking your family. That was self-defense. Or if you had to kill to protect innocent people from lethal harm. But how about killing someone who had done absolutely nothing wrong to you or yours?

By the time dawn broke the following morning, Jonas Baxter knew he would become a deserter. No more of this insanity! He knew well -- as all soldiers learned -- that desertion during wartime was a capital offense under military law, and was therefore punishable by trial, court-martial, and the death penalty. And he knew that his Pa would be ashamed of him for the rest of his days. But that was the price that Jonas was willing to pay for his moral convictions. He knew that he wasn't really a coward. He had faced dangers before with manly courage, like the time he shot an angry male cougar point blank that had surprised and charged him while out hunting in the woodlands near home.

Jonas spent the rest of the day carefully planning his escape. Company D would not be moving east until the following day, according to his immediate commanding officers. Jonas secretly saved up some provisions and filled his canteen to the brim. He would tell none of his comrades. He would head south, twenty-five miles to his home back in Shelbyville. He figured he would travel at night for two nights. He would then explain to his Pappy why he did what he did, and beg his advice as well as his forgiveness. Then he would be on the run -- first north, then west -- to the neutral U.S. territories, hopefully to freedom and the start of a new life.

Under cover of darkness and a lucky new moon, Jonas abandoned his rifle at its neat tripod stand near his tent and cautiously slipped past a lone napping sentry as he exited the soundly sleeping bivouac area. He headed south, the only sounds heard being an occasional hoot owl or some crickets.

Two night later, he reached home.

His Pa was alarmed when Jonas confessed his actions.

"Don't you realize what you've done, son? They'll be coming here first thing to look for you. They catch you, they'll hang you. You got to skedaddle tonight, boy. Take off yer uniform and those army shoes and dress back up into some of yer old farming duds. I'll bury yer outfit at sun-up far out in the woods, so no one will ever find it. When the search party comes, I'll convince 'em that you ain't shown up here as yet." Amos swore.

His father next assembled some fresh food and water to be added to Jonas' supply pouch, while the lad filled a battered canvas haversack that his Pa offered with some spare clothes, a slouch hat, and a bedroll. Amos then gave his son an old but clean 1851 Navy Colt revolver and some cartridges for its six-shot cylinder. "You'll need this fer protection, seein' as yer on the run," he advised. "Stick it in yer belt behind yer back under yer shirt. Keep an eye out for robbers, boy, and always be careful with who you kin trust."

As a final act, Amos gave Jonas some money. "It's not much, but it's all I kin spare." It amounted to $38 dollars and some change. The cash was mostly in the form of three gold eagles (worth $10 each), a gold half-eagle ($5), a paper dollar Federal Greenback, and a new, two-dollar paper Confederate Grayback.

"Now mind you, son, you avoid going west through Memphis. The Union got control of that city now and the river there. Best go north into Kentucky. It's still a neutral border state. But don't cross the Ohio River -- that's going into the Yankee states. Get yerself into Missouri if'n you can...that's another border state. From there, maybe try Nebraska, or..." he stopped, then started to sob. "I figure I might never see you again, boy..." he cried. Father and son hugged long and hard, then stepped back and shook hands.

"Good-bye, Pa," Jonas Baxter said, realizing it was time to go. "I'm sorry for the trouble my decision has caused you. I'll try and write you someday to let you know I'm safe." He took a last glance at his father's emotional face and around the one-room house where he had grown up. Then the deserter stepped out the door and slipped silently into the night.

He came up with the idea while fleeing of feigning a serious limp with his left leg whenever he was around others, as a way of explaining to any authorities who might stop him why he wasn't in uniform. ("I was born with a crippled bad leg.") To assist in helping him remember this ruse, Jonas found a foot-long straight piece of smooth tree branch and tied it above and below his knee under his trousers with some torn rags he found. This rendered his leg stiff and unbending.

Baxter's route was basically back north towards Murfreesboro, for he knew that the Confederate Army had already moved well east by now. He was able to move carefully but easily from town to town. With his father's gifted money, Jonas was also able to buy food when his stores ran out. At night, he slept rough on the ground in fields or forests. He filled his canteen -- and bathed when needed -- in any convenient stream or pond.

On his sixth day on the run, Jonas arrived in the Tennessee town of Portland. He knew that he was close now to the Kentucky border, and the next town of Franklin. Once over the line, Baxter would head west to New Madrid, in far southeastern Missouri. [New Madrid had made the national news back in 1812, when an enormous earthquake destroyed the town and damaged buildings as far away as St. Louis.] Because Missouri was a neutral border state like Kentucky, Jonas could feel relatively safe on his journey. But he could never really relax until he continued on into Nebraska Territory and hence be afforded legal immunity for his desertion from the Confederate Army.

That night, in the wilds outside of Portland, young Baxter heard someone moving around in the shadows as he sat by his campfire munching some jerky and hardtack and drinking some boiled chicory coffee out of a tin can. He slowly drew his Navy Colt revolver and cocked it.

"Alright now, y'all come out where I kin see you. And come to me nice and slow," he warned.

After a moment, a large, middle-aged Negro man stepped forward. He was dressed in ragged clothes and was barefoot. He looked exhausted and hungry.

"Don't shoot, Mister. I means no harm. I smelled your coffee is all. They calls me Jubal. You ain't a runaway slave hunter or nothing, is you?" he asked warily.

"No, Jubal. I ain't going to hurt you. Come on in," Jonas uncocked his pistol and stuck it back under his belt behind him, under his shirt. "M'name's Jonas. I kin spare you some of my chicory coffee and a bit of jerky if'n you like."

"Oh, yes sir, Boss...I sure is hungry and thirsty. Much obliged," Jubal replied.

While the men ate and drank, Baxter asked Jubal if he was a runaway slave. The Negro admitted that he was.

"I's tryin' to git into Kentucky. From there, I aims to keep a'going, all the way cross the Ohio River an' git my freedom. I run away from my master 'bout five nights ago, from his tobacco plantation near Smyrna. I's been followin' the Dipper north. That's how I knows I's goin' the right way," Jubal revealed, his stained white teeth grinning in the campfire light.

Jonas figured that the Dipper Jubal was talking about was the Big Dipper in the night sky. Everyone knew that its edge always pointed up to the North Star.

"Well, Jubal, I'm a kind of runaway too, just like you, I reckon. I deserted from the Rebel Army. I simply couldn't kill total strangers who had done nothing wrong to me personal. I'm on the run to Kentucky, then Missouri, and finally I'm headed into Nebraska Territory -- if'n my luck holds out, that is."

"Lord a-mercy! I hopes you git all your wishes then, Mr. Jonas. I best be movin' along now. Even if we's headed in the same direction fer awhile, I reckon we cain't be seen together runnin' without raisin' suspicions if'n we's spotted. But I likes to thank you fer sharin' yer vittles with me, a poor stranger. The Good Lord will smile down upon you fer yer kindness, I's sure o'that." The big man shyly smiled, then offered his hand to shake, and Jonas took it without even thinking. It was the first time young Baxter had ever touched a Negro. Jubal's strong hand was thick with calluses, as one would expect from a hard-working field slave. His black skin, however, felt just the same as a white man's hand, Jonas realized. Quickly, Jubal slipped quietly away into the night.

Baxter traveled for many weeks. He needed to take a ferry boat across the mighty Mississippi to reach New Madrid. Meanwhile, summer had turned to autumn, and Jonas witnessed the Missouri crops being harvested as he passed through. He thought about his Pa, and prayed that he was in good health as he likewise was probably bringing their family's tobacco crop in back home. The young man also hoped that no Union soldiers had invaded or -- even worse -- completely destroyed Shelbyville.

Jonas begged short rides on farmer's wagons whenever possible to give his aching feet a rest from walking his many hundreds of miles. He was, however, stopped and questioned several times by curious county sheriffs in various towns. His limping ruse paid off, though, for he was never threatened or suspected of being an army deserter. The fact that he had some money -- and admitted to having a continual, if somewhat vague, westward destination -- proved that he wasn't a troublesome vagrant or a wily outlaw. Yet through it all, Jonas was always looking over his shoulder. Some fright-filled nights, he dreamed that a band of gray-coated soldiers had caught him, and were dragging him back to Tennessee for hanging. And what was worst, in such nightmares, Amos Baxter was forced to watch his only son die on the gallows!

It was mid-October when Jonas finally stepped into the southwestern corner of Nebraska Territory. Freedom, at last! To celebrate, young Baxter removed his fake limp set-up from under his trousers and threw it away. He wondered if Jubal had also made it to freedom in Ohio. Jonas was immediately surprised that the land on the far horizon here looked so flat and treeless. The lad had entered the beginning edge of the vast American Great Plains.

The nearest substantial town he encountered was named Beatrice -- population around 2100. Here, he might get a job and settle down at last, Baxter hoped. The town appeared well-organized and looked poised to become prosperous. The U.S. Congress had recently passed the Homestead Act, which would allow anyone to purchase 160 acres of government land for a modest fee, beginning on January 1, 1863. Hence, more settlers were expected to be pouring in soon. Beatrice hosted two houses of worship, five saloons, a bank, two hotels with dining facilities, a proper schoolhouse, a livery with blacksmith, two large general stores, a doctor, a sheriff, and a barber with bathhouse. No bawdy houses in sight, either -- this last fact, Jonas knew, made for a nicer and more peaceful, family-oriented community. Finally, Beatrice had its crucial fresh water supplied by the Big Blue River, which ran adjacent to the town. The rushing waters additionally turned water wheels for various Beatrice mills.

Back in Tennessee -- like most boys then -- Jonas had gone to school up to about the third grade, so he could read and write and cipher numbers on a fundamental level, but no higher. He knew everything about growing tobacco from his father, of course, but young Baxter had no other skills -- and that specific crop could never be grown here in the soil and climate of Nebraska, he soon realized. This was cattle grazing and ranching land. Still, Jonas was healthy and eager to learn any new trade that might be offered. His melodic speaking accent from Tennessee was agreeable too -- not deep and thick like those from Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, or Texas. Some folks were a bit uncomfortable with that, he had learned, so his immediate goal was to blend in as a newcomer.

The first person Baxter spoke with was the town sheriff, a widower named Clyde Russman, age mid-40s, a solidly-built man with graying hair and a full mustache. Clyde called him over as Jonas initially walked down the main street fronting the lawman's office. After determining that the Tennessee native was not a wanted fugitive or a drifter, Sheriff Russman's manner became more cordial.

"So yer lookin' for work and a place to settle down, eh? Well, son, you done came to the right place. No bloody Civil War battles to worry about here. No slavery arguments neither. You'll find that we mind our own business out here in the Territory," Clyde offered. "Peaceable and law-abiding...that's how we like it in Beatrice."

The sheriff sent Jonas over to the livery to inquire about a job, seeing as the young man admitted that he knew his way around horses. The owner-blacksmith there -- Ned Booth, a bald, muscular, bull of a man -- took to the easy-going lad right off, so young Baxter was given a starter job mucking the stables, currying and shoeing horses, and running errands for his boss. As a result, Jonas earned his room and board, plus a dollar a day. The work would be steady. ("I'm always real busy...there's always somethin' to do, or make, or fix," Booth vowed.) Ned promised that if things worked out over time, he might be willing to train the young man in the noble art of blacksmithing. Jonas was intrigued at the prospect of learning a useful and valuable trade, and admitted as much. The young man then asked Ned where he could post a letter -- to make good his promise to his father, and let Amos know that his son was safe and sound. Booth gave Jonas the requested directions.

But on Jonas' eleventh day in Beatrice, trouble hit the pleasant community.

A volley of gunshots broke the afternoon calm out on Main Street.

"Help! Help! Someone's robbing the bank! He's killed two clerks and the manager already. Somebody get the sheriff...quick!" A lone townsman staggered out the front door of the First Security Bank. The poor soul was gunshot and bleeding, and collapsed moments later in the muddy street, dead.

Sheriff Russman immediately ran out of his office when he heard the gunshot commotion. His trusty revolver was drawn and at the ready.

Instinctively, Jonas Baxter also raced to grab his Navy Colt, which he kept for safety in a desk drawer in Ned Booth's ramshackle office. The pistol was loaded with five bullets, but the first chamber in the cylinder was wisely kept empty, as his Pa had taught him. No accidents that way.

A scruffy, red-haired outlaw, probably in his late-20s, appeared with a sack of stolen money as he ran out the bank's front door, clutching a six-shooter in his right hand.

"Drop the gun and that loot and get your hands up!" the town sheriff sharply ordered, from about twenty yards away. He fully expected to be obeyed.

But, in panic or desperation, the robber shot on the run from his hip instead. Clyde went down, gut-shot from the bandit's lightning-fast move. The lawman's sole return shot went wide, then the sheriff's gun dropped from his fist as he reeled and fell.

The bank robber caught up to his horse and leapt into the saddle. He quickly spurred his mount into a gallop and headed west down Main Street, trying to get out of town and escape to the deserted wilds of Nebraska Territory.

Bewildered townsfolk -- men and women -- lined the street, unsure of what to do next with their sheriff down and hurt. One of the women yelled, "Somebody do something! Don't let that son-of-a-bitch get away! He's got all our money!"

Jonas Baxter, meanwhile, was crouched down by the livery near a hitching post, partially hidden by some tethered horses. He carefully assessed the situation. He knew he needed to shoot the fleeing bandit, and even kill him if that was necessary. It was a clear moral case of acknowledging the lives of the dead innocents from the bank, while also protecting others from the potential continuing harm of the armed outlaw.

The bank robber raced by Jonas' position, kicking up dust, spurring his horse faster and faster. As the murderous mounted outlaw passed by, however, Jonas carefully braced his gun hand on the wooden hitching post, cocked his Navy Colt past its one empty chamber, then fired twice. His first shot went slightly wide, but the second hit the robber squarely in the center back of his neck. The brazen thief immediately fell off his horse, badly wounded, his stolen money sack flying.

Jonas and some of the onlookers cautiously went to the downed outlaw, while others went to check on the wounded sheriff. The bandit was still alive as he lay collapsed in the muddy street, but he weakly bawled, "I cain't move my arms and legs. One of yous done paralyzed me!" He helplessly gazed around for pity, but not unexpectedly, got none.

The town's only doctor rushed over to tend to the sheriff, who fortunately was still alive but in bad shape. "Can't tell yet if he'll make it...getting shot in the gut can be tricky," old Doc Wintergreen announced as the sheriff was gently carried by four men on a rolled up blanket, as directed, to the doctor's office. "Depends on where the bullet lies, and if I can get it out before too much blood loss or later infection sets in. Best for Clyde if the slug went clear through. We'll soon see..."

The Doc returned ten minutes later to the street and examined the outlaw. "Well, this robber will live...I'll patch his neck wound. But the bullet severed his spinal column. He's paralyzed from the neck down permanent. When he's fit to be moved from my office, I'll rig up a wheelchair, and we'll transport him to the jail. Otis Longbaugh, the Gage county judge, will be notified, and he'll come to Beatrice from Omaha to preside over the trial of the four murders committed by this man during the robbery. Then the outlaw'll surely have a date with the hangman."

One of the townsmen -- Chester Nash -- asked, "Do you really think they'd hang a paralyzed man, Doc?"

But another citizen -- Mabel Dunsworth -- interrupted instead. "They can wheel him up on the gallows and drop him and his chair together, for all I care...that bastard killed two of my best friends working there at First Security! He has to pay for that!" she exclaimed.

The Doc calmly replied, "Yep, they'll hang him anyway they can, Mabel...Justice will be served regardless, you can be sure of that."

Meanwhile, Ned Booth and several others gathered around and congratulated Jonas Baxter for his bravery at stopping the bandit from escaping. "I take no real pleasure in it, but I reckon it had to be done. I was in the right place at the right time, I figure," the lad modestly explained. "A lucky shot."

Jonas went next to visit Sheriff Russman at the doctor's office. Clyde was weak from loss of blood. He was also in great pain, despite being given a heavy dose of laudanum by Doc Wintergreen. He winced as he spoke low, in sentence spurts.

"I heard what you did, Jonas...You showed guts when everyone else was too scared to act...You saved the town, son...Now, if I don't pull through, I need you to consider becoming the new town sheriff...You have the quick-thinking judgment and steady temperament that this tough job requires...Think on it, my friend..." Clyde slowly closed his eyes. "I think I'll catch some shut-eye now, if you don't mind...Say a prayer for me, Jonas...Christ, I wish my late wife, Lola, was here with me right now..." The sheriff then drifted off.

Whether Russman heard him or not, Jonas Baxter replied, "You know, Sheriff, I think I might like something like that...But I need you to pull through, because I'd rather be your deputy instead, and learn everything I can from you, over many years together as your new partner. You rest now, Clyde, and I just know you'll get better soon..."

Jonas Baxter gave the sheriff's nearest resting hand a friendly, quick clutch, as Doc Wintergreen wisely looked on, smiling, when Jonas left the room.

The whole town of Beatrice was relieved when the Doc announced that the bullet had passed completely though Clyde's body, and that he would likely live if he rested for at least six weeks. But it was clear that Russman's sheriff-ing days were over. Though no one ever faulted him, Clyde was saddened and professionally ashamed that a raw punk kid had gotten the drop on him with a faster gun hand. It was clear that time and age had caught up with Clyde, so he retired. He did, however, teach Jonas all the ropes as the new sheriff of Beatrice, Nebraska. He remained valuable as a strong mentor to young Baxter in the coming months.

The paralyzed outlaw was later transported one-hundred miles from his jail cell to Omaha for his execution, after the no surprise -- Guilty! -- verdict was pronounced by Judge Longbaugh at the big trial in Beatrice. And, as Mabel Dunsworth envisioned, the criminal was wheeled up to the specially-enlarged gallows while still in his wheelchair. A noose was then fastened around his neck, and the killer was dropped to perdition while initially seated, the then empty chair continuing down until it crashed. Folks later said that they had never seen the likes of such an odd hanging.

Jonas and Clyde had naturally attended the trial, but they both skipped going to the hanging -- unlike more than half of the town of Beatrice, who journeyed three days overland (there being no rail service yet) to witness final justice being served in Omaha.

About a month after the outlaw was hung, Sheriff Baxter was given an old newspaper which earlier detailed the bank robber's execution. He learned that the red-headed bandit he had shot was named Liam O'Malley, age 27, whose family of eleven emigrated to America during the 1840s, due to the Great Potato Famine in Ireland. The killer reportedly wept as he emotionally repented of his murderous crimes and attempted robbery, and had asked God's forgiveness for his horrible sins. "I know I'm headed to Hell for my bad actions and wrong decisions," he was quoted as admitting. "Jesus, I wish it all never happened. I'm so very sorry."

When asked by a curious reporter exactly why he had turned to crime, O'Malley mentioned that he had been on the run for months, and that he had no other viable means of obtaining money or food.

This was because Liam confessed that he had been a deserter from the Union Army of the Potomac while they were fighting the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia at Williamsburg, Virginia on May 5th.

After reading that final disturbing revelation, Jonas slowly put down the newspaper and went outside of his office for a moment, and stared out at the cold, windswept plains of Nebraska...

THE END

by Jack Karolewski

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