



# Dark times

## Surviving

*An unexplained phenomenon, called "the Change", has caused all energy or ignition powered machinery to stop working. All means of communication have ceased, water cannot be pumped, even guns cannot be fired. In this post-apocalyptic environment, Havel and a group of people are travelling in search of a place where to settle.*

The tiny hamlet<sup>1</sup> sat at the junction of the Lochsa and the Clearwater<sup>2</sup>; in normal times it was a jumping off point for the wilderness areas around, and for white-water rafting. Now half a dozen of its residents stood across the roadway; three of them had hunting bows, the other axes or baseball bats.

Havel reined in his horse and flung up his right hand with the fist clenched. He could hear Angelica's whoa! to her team, and the hoof-falls of the rest behind him ceased, dying away to an occasional clop or a crunch as a horse shifted in place.

"Afternoon," he said.

"Afternoon," the burly middle-aged man who seemed to be the leader said. "Lot of road people already been through."

Road people? Havel thought. Then: *Well, yeah, there must have been millions caught away from home when the Change happened...* [...]

"I've got to warn you though, we don't have any food to spare. Barely enough for our own."

Havel nodded. He'd expected nothing different. This was hard country, well away from farming and ranching areas further west and south. The locals could probably survive on hunting and fishing until winter, but not many passersby could.

"We're fixed for now," he said. "Got plenty of meat."

Several of the men stiffened with suspicion. Already? Havel thought, and went on aloud: "Elk, venison and bear" – he touched the long wound that ran across his forehead and into his scalp – "which the bear brought on himself. We could trade some jerky<sup>3</sup> for flour or rice or beans."

The little band of townfolk relaxed. Their leader looked at the swords the travelers all carried, and the bows. [...]

"You folks are together then? Looks like you're loaded for bear!"

That brought a few chuckles from his townsmen; Havel smiled thinly – it still hurt to move his face much "We ran into some survivalists, original-sovereign types. They seemed to think they could do anything they wanted, now that things are Changed. We're taking precautions to avoid another incident like that."

The leader's eyes took in their various bruises and contusions and spat eloquently. "Those crazy bastards? What happened?"

Havel shrugged. "Coyotes have to eat too, so we didn't bury the bodies," he said, and got another, louder chuckle. "We'd like to camp for a few days and work on our gear before we move on. We're heading towards Lewiston. If anyone wants to trade, we can do farrier work or such".

A nod, and the leader leaned on his axe. "We have a couple of horses that could use shoeing. Head on down that lane, there's a campground by the river and some cabins – use 'em if you want, but the plumbing's not working. There's some other folks who got caught on the road staying there, too."



S.M. Stirling, *Dies the Fire* (2005)

1. hamlet: very small village

2. Lochsa and Clearwater: rivers in Idaho

3. jerky: dry meat