

# Herd on the Street

by Les Swift

## The Undisclosed Location

*Perhaps hunkering down in the bunker is not the smartest move, after all.*

It took a lot of effort, given the current paranoia level over the angry public reaction to the Obama Administration's health-care and economic policies, but with some small fibs and misrepresentations, and a hefty campaign contribution, I finally managed to gain an audience with one of the Administration's vaunted behavioral economists. He asked that I not reveal his name, and I won't—not because I am protecting my source, but because the man refused to give it to me. As said, the paranoia level is high.

He proved his *bona fides* by the simple act of holding the meeting in one of Dick Cheney's infamous "undisclosed locations." It was, admittedly, one of the smaller of the "Cheney holes," as they call them in Washington, but word is that all the bigger ones are already occupied by higher-ranking figures.

One juicy rumor, which I was not able to confirm, is that President Obama is occupying the fanciest of them, dubbed "Buckingham Palace" by his staff, and that an actor playing Obama is actually making all the public appearances. We studied all the video and photos we could find, but admit to being stumped—we can't tell if it is the real Obama, a pretend Obama, or just an empty suit with a voice track. Some of the photos did show traces of what we in the trade call "massive Photoshopping." We are pretty certain that it was the real Obama in those pictures of the little British Queen, who seems to get smaller and smaller as her treasured finan-

cial empire vaporizes.

Anyway, back to the story. The behaviorist shepherded me through security at the facility, which is located under a mountain somewhere on the East Coast—at least that's what he said. My blindfold was not removed until I was securely inside, about three hours after we left the Executive Office Building.

I guess it takes a while to change all the pictures, because there were nearly life-sized pictures of Dick Cheney all over the walls, along with a few of the little guy who had been his puppet. The security guards were all private, judging by the Halliburton logos on their uniforms. It was as if nothing had changed.

The behaviorist's office was little more than a cubbyhole, with Spartan military-style furnishings. The art on the wall appeared to be a combination of Rorschach blots and motivational posters.

One of my slick journalist techniques to put my prey at ease is to make small talk, so I asked him about the art.

"So what's with all the dirty pictures?" I asked, pointing at the ink blots.

I thought the joke would relax him, but instead he freaked,

"They're not dirty!" he exclaimed, way too loudly. "They're erotic art, legitimate art. It's not porn!"

Whoa, I thought. Must have really hit a nerve there. But since I was more interested in his professional fantasies than his sexual ones, I

quickly changed the subject.

"What are you doing here," I asked. "Wouldn't it be easier for you to work out of the White House? That's got to be more convenient."

"We're all here, the whole Behavioral Economics staff," he said. "We've been here since the town meetings went off script. The President wants us to figure out why."

With the last sentence, he puffed himself up a bit. He wanted to seem important, but instead he came across as one of those little fish that puffs itself up to try to keep from being eaten.

"Why do you think the meetings have gone off script?" I asked. "Do you think the population no longer buys your propaganda line?"

With that he shuddered, and practically screamed: "No! No! Absolutely not! The people are on our side, under our control."

"Gee, it doesn't seem that way to me," I replied. "Looks to me like they hate you. At least that's what they say. They're not buying it."

His eyes rolled back in his head, only the whites showing. For a moment, I thought he was having a seizure, but he suddenly jumped up, and began a rant that reminded me of Dr. Strangelove. "We will do what we must, and the people will obey," he concluded.

With that, he declared the interview over. As I was being blindfolded for the return trip, he handed me a copy of *Nudge*, instructing me to read and obey. Then I felt a prick in my upper arm.

When I awoke, I was in the clinic in the Executive Office Building. The staff tried to persuade me that I had fainted, and never gone on the interview—all a dream, they said. I remained silent, clutching my new copy of *Nudge* under my coat. These guys may be proper fascists, I thought to myself, but they're not very smart.

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