

They're watching you. They're watching everything you do. They're watching me, they're watching us, they're watching everybody.

My name is Clyde Wilcox. I should start this off very simple so it's easy to understand. My entire life I've done everything right. I've always followed the rules, that's what got me into this mess.

Breaking the rules is what's going to get me out.

All of this started almost a year ago. I had just come home from work. At the time I worked at the SureSystems copy and messenger service. I wasn't a messenger. I was one of the poor saps that would be in the office for 8 to 9 hours a day smothering under the choke of the florescent lights. For 8 or 9 hours everyday I would organize, copy, bind, staple, rebind, and recopy documents. But that doesn't matter. What matters is that one night after another day at that job, I came home.

I had been at home for a while. I was eating dinner. Nothing glamorous. To tell you the truth it was cup of noodles. Not the actual brand "Cup-of-Noodles". It was some cheap Korean version I got at the bargain store. They were really cheap and I was on a budget. I had to be on a tight budget all of the time because of my job at the copy place. But that doesn't matter. What matters is that one night while I was sitting there eating yet another package of the generic ramen noodles someone knocked on my door. I answered the door and no one was there.

No one was in the hall. No one seemed be anywhere around who could have knocked on the door. That's when I found it. On the ground, on the floor in front of my apartment door was a package. It looked blank except for a tag on the front, which had my name on it. It was printed and addressed neatly to Clyde Wilcox. That's me. And that's when everything changed. The night I found that package at my front door.

I suspiciously brought the package into my apartment and didn't open it for a while. I sat it on my table and in my head went through all of the scenarios of what could be inside. Could it be a bomb? Who would send me a bomb? I don't even know anyone who ever remembered me enough to hate me and send me a bomb. You really have to love or hate someone to send them a bomb. Could it be an old fruitcake or some relic from a Christmas a long time ago, something from a relative I didn't know I had who mysteriously came fourth to send me something? I spent some time wondering if it could be smallpox or maybe anthrax. Everybody is always worrying that someone is going to send them some disease they don't want. Well, why not me? Someone could have sent me a disease. I ruled that possibility out. So I opened the box.

Inside were two compact discs. The kind you put in a cd player or a computer. They had the same neat labels on them. White label, black simple print. On one of the discs were the words "Play Me". I looked at it for a second, and then I plugged it into my compact disc player. Nothing happened. Who would send me a cd that doesn't play in a cd player? So I decided to place it into my computer.

Once the disc was spinning in my computer a window opened up on the desktop. On it was a man I had never seen before. His name was Mr. Williams. I never found out his first name. I never found out if Mr. Williams was even a real name. The strangest thing is that the message he recorded on the disc was to me. He was speaking to me.

-Hello Mr. Wilcox, you may find this unimaginable at first. I suspect you will find it very hard to believe. But please, bear with me. We have your best interests at heart. Right now you are probably asking yourself, "Who are we? How does this man on my computer know who I am? Why did they send this to me?" Well, it's simple Mr. Wilcox. We want to offer you a job. You have lived a model life. You have been the utmost morals. You have been the best possible citizen you could possibly be. And that's why we are contacting you. That's why we have chosen you to be rewarded. And now you're probably asking yourself, "How does he know all of this about me?" It's simple Mr. Wilcox. We've been watching you. That's what we do. That's what we've always done. We watch over everyone. And now that's what we would like you to do.

So that was the beginning of the end of me. At the time I was very confused. What did he mean they were watching me? How did they know who I was? How did they get into my building? How? What? Why? When? Where? And did I mention Why? Why?

-Mr. Wilcox, my name is Mr. Williams. I am responsible for an agency called the Network. You probably have never heard of the Network. There's a reason for that. No one is ever supposed to know of the Network. That's how it works. That's how our system works. We represent a vast network of the highest technology developed by this glorious government. The reason the Network exists is simple. To watch for and prevent anti-government activity. We at the Network are the eyes and ears of the nation. We are the silent shepherds always keeping a watchful eye on our beloved herd. It's an honor for you to even be made aware of the Network. It means we've been watching you for years and that we approve of you and trust you with our sacred secret. It is even more of an honor to be asked to join the Network. To be made one of our agents whose sole purpose is to be that watchful eye. We are extending that offer to you Mr. Wilcox. Without even knowing it you have passed the ultimate screening. A test you weren't even aware of taking. If you choose to be one of us, if you choose to be an agent in our network you will never have to report to a normal job again. Housing, food, income, vacations, transportation. It will all be awarded to you. In return we ask for two things. The first being your watchful eye for five to six hours a day. You can work from home, at your convenience, whatever hours you choose. In this job you make your own hours. The second thing we ask is your silence. You may never discuss what you see, what you do, or what the Network is to anyone. It is vital to our organization and to our government that you would never discuss the Network. As I've said, we've watched you, we know you and we trust you'll make the right decision. That's why we have contacted you. If you choose to join us. If you choose to work for the solidarity of your country then place the second disc into your home computer. It will install the proper software to combine your computer into the Network. After that you and your computer will work with us to make a better America. Thank you for your time Mr. Wilcox.

And with the last of his words the image blanked off. I sat there staring at the computer screen for hours. Surely it had to be someone's idea of a cruel joke. Maybe it was one of the guys from the office. They were always messing with me. Maybe they made all of this up. But, what if they weren't making this up? What if it wasn't a joke? I deserve something like this. At least that's what I thought at the time. So I stuck the second disc into my computer. It began to spin. It dialed up something through the modem and then the computer screen went black. It was black for two days. Until another package showed up at my door step.

A knock on my door. I got up from what I was doing at the time and answered the door. No one was there but this time in front of the door was a box. I looked down the hall each way. No one there. I then brought the box inside.

Inside was more equipment to attach to my computer. Beside the hardware was another disc. I plugged it in to my computer.

-Hello again Mr. Wilcox. I can't tell you how pleased we are that you have decided to join us in our ongoing campaign to keep this country and its people safe. It will take you a short while to get the hang of navigating the software running the Network. If you have any questions you can e-mail to the link provided. As promised, your living expenses will be fully compensated. Check with your bank tomorrow to find that over the evening we have made an electronic fund transfer straight into your account. Keep up the good work and every two months the Network will make a substantial deposit into your account. And don't worry. We give raises yearly and bonuses for jobs well done.

Was that it? Was it that simple? The next day I did find a large deposit of money into my account. It wasn't even a deposit. It was just there. There was no record of it being entered, or deposited. From that point on every two months there was just more money in my account. After the first deposit without haste I went into my horrible job and quit. It was a great feeling. I was being taken care of now. I did the right thing all my life and was finally being rewarded for it.

My job was simple. I would get up every morning and work in two shifts. When I started I tried doing one long shift but found that my eyes would hurt from staring at the screen too long. Staring and watching. With the voice command and microphone they sent me (that worked with my computer) I could give the command for different camera locations anywhere in the country. ANYWHERE. I don't just mean busy traffic intersections or bank lobbies. The Network was larger than I could have imagined. They had cameras everywhere. EVERYWHERE.

Streets, houses, hotels, libraries, police stations, apartments, bathrooms, bedrooms, shopping malls, bars, farms, parking garages, airports, backyards, front yards, grade schools, kinder gardens, high schools, colleges, day camps, summer camps, nightclubs, government facilities, governors' mansions, consulates, embassies, you name it and the Network had a grid of camera locations inside and out.

As you can imagine that's a lot to take in. There were no rules for me to follow, except for two. Watch for anti-government activity and never communicate with anyone about the existence of the Network. I could bounce around looking at whatever,

whoever, or wherever I wanted. If I found something suspicious I would mark it by hitting a certain key and it would be flagged. I guess at that point it would be passed through the Network to some kind of superior or upper management and they would assess if it was potentially dangerous to the security of the country.

It was very hard to adjust to the idea that I was watching people. Watching them live. Watching them eat, sleep, shit, screw, walk, talk, work, you name it. It was now my job to watch them at their jobs (offices, factories, shopping malls, hospitals, etc.). It was now my job to watch them on the streets (dark late night street corners, subways, highways at rush hour, etc.). It was now my job to watch them in their homes (apartments, houses, kitchens, living rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms, etc.).

As you can imagine this incredible freedom at times could be very distracting. For me it was very distracting. I've narrowed some phases I went through into four categories.

1. Pervert Phase: This of course is the most obvious phase. You would think it's great. All of the sudden I had access to any act of lust, lovemaking, or debauchery the Network's camera system could catch. The montage of images I saw was unforgettable. It was like having a free subscription to a porno channel. It's a big country and there always seemed to be someone somewhere who was getting it on. But, here's the thing. I saw everything. Everything. Every shape, every size, number of participants, sexual preference, tricks, toys, boys, girls, goats, even an attempt at a feline. What I'm saying is that the pervert phase didn't last very long. Very quickly the subjects you are watching become just that. They are like meat. Or like animals. You loose the human connection with them very quickly. I'm sure there were others like me. I'm sure some of them never got through their pervert phase. As for me, after you see all those different people hump each other in all of those different ways, you kind of loose your taste for watching it.

2. Fine Art Phase: After the dehumanizing aftertaste I had from my pervert phase I decided I should become more cultured. I spent most of my time during that phase looking at art in museums. Or graffiti in alleyways. I would connect to cameras that were in movie theaters. I would boost my sound output and watch movies. I watched all kinds of movies. I tried to limit it and focus on work but sometimes needed the release. The most notable part of this phase is Jazz music. On camera 17-A in the NYC set up I found an old man. He was special. He had a saxophone and would play in the subways. It sounded incredible. Even through the crappy sound of the surveillance microphones. This old Jazz Man, like me, was a creature of habit. I could always find him on the same trains on the same nights playing music for tips from people. I envied him. He lived in a much more simple world then the one I was now part of.

3. Stalker Phase: The longer I worked for the Network the less I was going out into the real world. My view of the world was very much through the little porthole of the surveillance system on my computer. I was becoming much more accustomed to seeing the world through the Network's black and white monitors rather than on my own, on foot, in the real-life color-world. I went out maybe twice a week, usually for groceries. I began to realize that I was very lonely. It was like I was in a cage at the zoo. I could see

all the others walking around and living around me but I was stuck in the cage and couldn't communicate with them. This is a feeling I had much of my life. Even before I started working for the Network. In school while growing up, at work. Everywhere. I realized that with the help of the Network I could finally start meeting people. I needed a good woman in my life. My entire life I never had anything in common with the girls and never knew what to say to them. Well, with the Network I could find girls, follow them via the camera, find what they were all about, find out their patterns, where they would be and then accidentally bump into them and "hit it off". This plan didn't last too long for obvious reasons.

GIRL A: She lived near my building. I ran into her at a coffee shop. After instantly knowing about and demonstrating my knowledge of everything she liked she was freaked out, to say the least.

GIRL B: After working out the kinks of my last attempt I planned to run into Girl B while waiting in line for a movie near her college campus. I had learned from my last attempt and would make it a point not to be overzealous. Although better, I was still too much. It's safe to say I freaked her out as well.

GIRL C: Was an absolute success. I had all of the knowledge about her and her needs, wants, and desires, and I had worked out a system to play it cool and let on a little at a time as not to freak her out as was the case for Girls A and B. The only problem is that it worked so well that it freaked me out. Without any real effort this young lady was eating out of my hand. It didn't feel right. I had to get the hell out of there.

Now, I didn't move into my next phase for a while. I'll get to that in a moment. For a couple of months I was a model employee or agent for the Network. It took an adjustment period but I really got the hang of the equipment, the camera placement, and strategies for surveillance.

I would spend more than the minimum required time on the decks per day watching for things. I had developed a kind of pattern for looking through different areas of different cities. Depending on what was on the news at the time, I would focus on different parts of the country. Sometimes I would focus on an area that had a high amount of press and sometimes I would focus on an area just because it didn't have a high amount of exposure.

Here's the thing. Much of the time you're looking at nothing, a whole lot of nothing. Empty streets, people watching television, people sleeping, people eating, shitting, walking, talking about the most mundane things. A whole lot of nothing.

If you weren't watching people do nothing, then you were watching them be bad. I was constantly watching acts of disrespect. Vile acts, disgusting acts, embarrassing acts. People violating rules, each other, and themselves. I began to see just how disgusting we can be as a species. This is where I first started to loose it a little.

I saw:
Beatings
Theft

Sexual Assault
Vandalism
Animal Abuse
Wastefulness
Littering
Spousal Abuse
Child Abuse
Murder

Now, here's the thing. I witnessed all of that, and none of it has anything to do with "Anti-Government" activity. So that means the only thing I could do is watch. Sit there and watch. One can imagine how that would make me think less of the human race. After watching all of this thoughtless crime it really made me realize how we are not that different from animals. In some ways we are worse because we should know better.

I hadn't heard from anyone at the Network. I had to assume they were happy with my performance because the money kept re-appearing in my checking account. I would watch and flag down "suspicious activity". Not being able to do anything about all of the crime I was seeing is what led me into my fourth phase. But, I'll get to that in a minute. First I should discuss my first successful "bust".

The time of my first successful bust is also when I heard from Mr. Williams for the first time since he offered me the position with the Network. It is ironic because I was watching two cases very closely at the same time. Two groups of men. I had already flagged one of the men and was sent an e-mail from an unknown contact within the Network to keep following his activity. With the software the way it is I had the ability to flag certain camera locations like a normal person would place a bookmark on his or her internet browser.

I would get up in the morning, fix a cup of coffee for myself, boot up the computer and open up the link to this man's apartment. I had other camera locations noted like a dry-cleaners he frequented and a diner he would eat and meet other men. I can't recall what about him seemed suspicious, if anything really, but I was told to continue following his progress so I did.

Now the other group of men I was watching at the time I had come across on accident. Sometimes when I would get bored I would just type in random camera locations into my surveillance system. I would just pull up any location and camera number that popped into my head. One night at about eleven thirty I found this group of men. The camera location was the back house of some apartment building and they were using it to make methamphetamines. They were drug dealers and drug makers. This isn't considered anti-government activity.

I e-mailed my faceless contact at the Network and was instructed that this was indeed a crime but not a concern of the Network or it's representatives. I was also noted to cease surveillance on these subjects and focus on the other man that I had been observing. I got this job for following the rules and that's what I was going to do. So I focused on group one, the group of men who hung out at the dry-cleaners. It did bother me that here was a group of people obviously breaking the law and endangering people and that it didn't matter.

I kept following via camera the “dry cleaner man”. That was now my nickname for him. With the Network I had mapped out him, his friends, his hangouts, and some appealingly suspicious behavior.

On one particular night very late in the evening the dry cleaner man awoke by alarm. He got dressed in dark clothing and picked up a duffle bag. I watched all of this through the Network. As he left his residence I had the instinct to flag him again and send a warning to my superiors. I followed him via camera until he got to a warehouse with some of his other regular contacts.

Almost immediately, right before my eyes, the building was stormed by some type of SWAT team. There was a lot of confusion, a lot of smoke, and gunfire. I very clumsily navigated through different camera locations and angles on my computer to see what was going on inside the warehouse. When I got to a certain camera I saw one of the SWAT members gun down the dry cleaner man. Watching all of this unfold on the monitor was surreal. It was almost interactive. I was removed from it, yet I was a part of it. It was like a video game where I was killing bad guys. Only it wasn't a video game. It was real. These people were dying and it was my fault.

I never found out what exactly they were up to. I never found out who the dry cleaner man was or what was in his duffle bag that night. I never found out why they had to be killed or why it was important that I pointed them out. I never found out who exactly those guys in the SWAT uniforms were. Nothing. I was never told a thing.

There was a knock on my door the next day. I found a letter addressed to me. Blank envelope. Plain white label, with my name printed in black letters. Inside was a letter from Mr. Williams.

Mr. Williams
Sector Five
Third Division
Lead Officer

Dear Mr. Wilcox,
Congratulations! You have proved yourself a valuable addition to our team. You made your first bust in record time for a new agent. You have excelled not only in your training to the Network protocols, but also my personal expectations. Keep up the good work! If there is anything you need or request please feel free to e-mail your contact and he will forward the message to my desk.

Sincerely,
Director Williams

So that was that. I did my job well, congratulations they said. I was responsible for people dying. That isn't easy to just forget or let go. If I hadn't said anything that guy would still be alive. Of course, if I hadn't said anything he might have done something horrible. Other people could have been killed. I may have prevented it. But it didn't matter either way because I didn't know. I needed to know. But they would never tell me.

I didn't turn on the computer for a few days after my "first successful bust"; I didn't watch a monitor. I didn't "look out for the welfare of the nation". I didn't do anything. I just walked around the city. I walked around my neighborhood. Walking around and seeing everything in the neighborhood I almost felt like I had just gotten back from a long trip. I looked around with a feeling of reminiscence that I hadn't see the old place in a while. Maybe in some ways I hadn't.

I was angry for the first time in my life with the system. I wasn't even aware of it myself. But I was angry on the inside. I felt like I was being kept in the dark. Well, I was, we all were. When I finally booted up the computer and prepared myself to get back to work there was a message awaiting me.

The incoming notice blinked on and off on the screen. I knew it was from my "contact" within the Network. What could he want? The light kept blinking. What could he want? Maybe they were going to fire me, maybe they realized I couldn't hack it? Maybe something else came up, some special case? I kept looking at that blinking light. I then opened the message.

- MR. WILCOX, WE CAN TELL YOU ARE HAVING SOME GRIEF ISSUES OVER YOUR LAST CASE. THIS IS TO BE EXPECTED. FEEL FREE TO TAKE A FEW DAYS OFF AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING WE CAN DO TO MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER PLEASE JUST E-MAIL THE REQUEST.

What could they possibly do to make me feel better? What could they say or do that would make me feel like I did the right thing? What I wanted they wouldn't give me. The Truth. That's all I really wanted. But, still they obviously had vast resources. They were somehow run by the government, they had the power to make money appear in my bank account when I needed it. They had the capability to give me what ever I asked for. I started thinking they were probably used to it. They had to keep their people happy. So I asked for the one thing that would make me feel free, the one thing that would take away my cares and anxiety for small periods of time.

A scooter. I e-mailed my contact and asked him very politely and professionally for a scooter. Two days later, in the morning, a deliveryman showed up at my building. He had a scooter, ready to go. It was electric, resource conserving, and already registered in my name. To anyone else it would have appeared that I had made the purchase. But I knew better.

So that would help. I would take rides here and there in between my shifts. Sometimes I'd ride at night, sometimes during the day. The funny thing is that while I was riding I was essentially doing the same thing I did when I was working in front of the surveillance monitors. I was looking around at the people and the places. I couldn't help also feeling like I was somehow bought off. Like this was to appease me and get me to

go back to work, which it did. I was back on the decks. Back looking at the doings of people on a day-to-day basis. But, I couldn't help feeling like something was wrong.

- MR. WILCOX, WE CAN TELL YOU ARE HAVING SOME GRIEF ISSUES OVER YOUR LAST CASE. THIS IS TO BE EXPECTED. FEEL FREE TO TAKE A FEW DAYS OFF AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING WE CAN DO TO MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER PLEASE JUST E-MAIL THE REQUEST.

After that experience I would go back time and time again to the apartment back house and the men who were making methamphetamines. I would start to loose time watching them make the drugs. It fascinated me that there they were. Breaking the law. Doing bad things. And nothing was still being done about it. The dry cleaner man and his friends very well could have been committing heinous crimes. Who knows? But here these guys were still obviously breaking the law. And, nothing was being down about it. That's what leads me to my next phase.

4. Angel Phase: Now I didn't come up with this term. This is actually one of the terms used by those working in the Network. I have learned many terms that are only used in the Network. Plugs, Cams, Decks, Opps, Watcher, Location Magnet, Sealed Area, Sealed Arena, Movement, Central Stem, Standard, Moving John, Fritz, Fritzing. Some of these are proper terms and others are slang that had been used so long by agents in the Network that the terms had just stuck.

The important term for me to discuss is an Angel. I'm sure it was slang used by upper management to discuss a certain type of employee of the Network. An employee like myself.

I had been continuing to watch the movements of the meth dealers. It was so frustrating not being able to do anything about them. At first, I felt I was just upholding my duty when obeying the rules not to interfere with "Standard" crime (that was another term. "Standard"; it means a crime not having to do with terrorism, conspiracy, or in other words anti-government activity). But, more and more I was becoming frustrated not being able to really help people.

What good was this damn system for? We had the ability to look into the homes, lives, and secrets of everyone in the nation. Right or wrong, I wasn't always sure, but as long as the Network existed why couldn't we just use it to help people? Why not prevent so many of the horrible things we knew were going on? It was really starting to affect me.

One evening while eating Chinese take-out and working a shift I had given myself between 7 and 8 PM I witnessed a man strike his wife repeatedly in the head with a clothes iron. The pixilated images of her demise were burned into my mind. But it wasn't a crime. It was a Standard crime. Once again, there was nothing that I should be doing about it. I never ate Chinese food again after that night.

The next day I woke up with an idea. It was one of those ideas that you just cannot get out of your head. It kept nagging so I got on my scooter and drove down to the cellular phone store. I made a purchase. I never bought myself anything like this

before. My savings account was now very substantial from the money that was coming from the Network. I was always so busy with my work that it never even dawned on me that I could go out and afford to spend on items like cellular phones. On my way home I also stopped by a record shop and purchased some John Coltrane records. It was nice having some money for once. I could enjoy things a little. My appreciation for jazz was growing very much. I still watched and listened to that old man on the subway every Tuesday evening.

He was great. He would play all of these songs and improvisations from memory. In a way Jazz was my one release. It was my one true escape from the world I now know existed. Jazz was like this secret language that the cameras and the Network couldn't pick up or understand. Jazz was like a secret language that only a few could understand--the surveillance equipment I ran could never pick it up. I liked that.

I tested the cell phone when I got home. I didn't have anyone to call. I didn't really know anyone. So I called and ordered a pizza. I then sat down and pulled out a piece of paper that I had been writing phone numbers down on. Then with a blip turned on my computer. I feel funny even calling it my computer. It was really just a part of the Network now. Anyway, I turned it on and went immediately to the camera located in the back house meth lab.

There they were. The same guys, making the same drugs, the same old routine. There were a few new faces as well. But, all of the regulars were there. I watched them for a while and then picked up my phone. I looked at my watch and calculated the time difference and then called the local police in their area and made a report.

I then sat there, ate my pizza, had a beer, and watched the police department storm the place and take all of those men down. I hadn't felt that great in years. I couldn't believe I hadn't thought of the solution earlier. So that was the beginning of a few really good weeks of what would be called my "angel phase". Until, of course, it all ended badly. Very badly.

I had spent the next two months performing my duties in front of the surveillance monitors like clockwork. I didn't always need to use the cell phone to help anyone, but it was nice to have the option if I needed to. Many times I was looking and watching nothing anyway. There was always a lot of nothing going on in those black and white images.

I did however prevent one mugging and one fire in a suburban household. I was scanning through a different set of camera locations that I had pre-determined for myself when I saw the craziest sparks. I couldn't tell what they were coming from. I just remember the look white, white and odd. Almost like they were dancing in front of the cameras secret location.

Two days after the fire incident there was a knock on my door. I opened the door to find two very large and intimidating men in suits. They looked like secret service agents on some exaggerated steroid.

"Mr. Wilcox. Mr. Williams sent us. We're from the Network." One of them said to me. He then revealed he was holding a disc. It looked similar to the first disc I had ever received from Mr. Williams or the Network. They sat down to make sure I viewed the disc immediately.

The image was the same. It was him, looking all smug in his chair behind some big fancy desk in some faceless location-less office.

-Mr. Wilcox, It has come to my understanding that you have been doing some of your own work on the side while utilizing our cameras and systems. This must cease immediately! Although you have the best intentions in mind when interfering in hostile situations you witness, it is not your duty or the duty of the Network to prevent these acts from happening. Your very actions jeopardize the security of the Network. The most important factor in keeping the Network a successful and operational system is keeping its secrecy. That is the only way. When you try to be a Guardian Angel using the system you raise great suspicion from the populous. The Network has remained strong and steadfast for many years because of the secrecy and loyalty of its agents. I'm sure you understand. You must cease your actions at once and focus on the job at hand. We must protect the stealth of the Network at any price. Thank you.

When his message was over I ejected the video-disc from my computer. One of the two large men took it from me. He then insisted I remove my cell phone from the desk drawer and give it to him. He placed it on the desk and smashed it with one quick blow from a small hammer he had brought with him. Looking at me menacingly he placed the small hammer back in his coat. Then the two men left.

I was alone in my apartment. I sat there and looked at the scattered mess of broken plastic and circuit board on the floor. I couldn't believe what had just happened. All of the sudden I wanted out. I wanted to quit. I wanted to never be that guy who had followed all of the rules and ended up here. I felt like I was suffocating. I kept looking around at the walls all around me.

- MR. WILCOX, WE CAN TELL YOU ARE HAVING SOME GRIEF ISSUES OVER YOUR LAST CASE. THIS IS TO BE EXPECTED. FEEL FREE TO TAKE A FEW DAYS OFF AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING WE CAN DO TO MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER PLEASE JUST EMAIL THE REQUEST
- MR. WILCOX, WE CAN TELL...
- MR. WILCOX, WE CAN TELL...

I sat on the floor paralyzed. Something felt wrong. It had felt wrong ever since they told me about the Network. It had felt wrong ever since I quit my normal job. It felt wrong ever since my life changed and this is what I did for a living.

And then I had a realization that changed *everything*. I had one single thought that made everything in my mind snap to the reality of everything that was going on around me.

THEY WERE WATCHING ME RIGHT NOW.

They had always been watching me. That was how they knew I'd be good for their job. That's how they knew I'd be good for their damn Network. It was never a good thing. I wasn't rewarded for a life of following the rules. If, anything I was just put

in a prison by the truth. The truth that they were watching me, they were watching all of us, and for what? For their vision of the truth.

I kept looking into the corners of my apartment. Where was the camera that they used to watch me? Those bastards. They were watching me watch other people. That's how they knew I was helping people. That's how they knew everything. They were always watching all of us. And to think that I was one of them. They didn't even trust their own.

It was just then when I had a second realization almost as disturbing as the first. "We must protect the stealth of the Network at any price," Mr. Williams said. For people like myself. For those who are chosen to watch, there is no way out. It's a job you take for life. There is no way they can afford for someone to leave the Network. If I even tried or acted like I wanted to... They would send those two men for me again, and they wouldn't be using that hammer on just a cell phone.

So that was the end of my so-called Angel phase. It was also when I really started losing it.

I had to keep going. I had to keep working and carrying on as normal. I couldn't let on that I wasn't happy at the Network. But inside, there was a storm of disgust starting to gather. Sometimes it was almost paralyzing. This was the nation that I worked so hard all of those years to be positive member of? This is what it meant to be a model citizen? This was the huge cage that I now not only new about but was working to keep closed on so many people?

It is a horrible realization that you are being watched at all times. All times, no matter what you are doing. Or, at least, to have the realization that there is the possibility of being watched at any time. Wherever, whatever I was doing they could be watching. Kind of like when I am watching other people.

So, whether I was at home relaxing (toilet) or somewhere trying to be incognito (subway, picking nose) or working out my libido (at home, porno-mag) they were watching. I got to thinking about how many other watchers there were. I really had to wonder, how many were out there like me, where are these other watchers located, were there others who were as disillusioned as myself?

My only salvation at the time was jazz music. It really saved me. I felt guilt stricken every time I got on the scooter so I wouldn't ride it anymore. It was a symbol of my silence. A silence I was no longer proud of. It was a reward for always following the rules. Now that I truly understood what that meant I wasn't so sure I wanted to follow the rules anymore.

But, I had jazz. I was using much of my money on records, cds, tapes, anything. It was like a drug I was using to forget about the truth. Jazz was like this to me. It was like a secret language that the cameras could not pick up. A language that would keep me sane and be my salvation.

I no longer had faith in my country. I no longer had faith in the system or the rules or even myself. The one thing I had, the one thing I had faith in was jazz. Every Tuesday night was like church for me. I would tune in my standard pre-sets of camera locations and watch the jazzman play on the subway. It was kind of like his sermon to me, to secretly tell me to keep going.

It was about this time that I first heard from Larry. He was another watcher. I don't know much more than that. I don't know how he spotted me, how he could tell I wasn't happy, or where he was located.

It was a Tuesday night and I was watching the Jazz Man, he was somewhere on I believe the E train. I could barely hear him because of the mic location in the train car. If anything I was just watching him, not listening. A knock came at my door.

I was really nervous about knocks on the door at this point. I was really nervous about everything. I was terrified that those in charge of the Network had been keeping a close eye on me at that their cameras told them of all the insecurities I had.

My paranoia had really gotten the best of me. Every street I walked down the street I was now looking for camera locations. Every person I saw who looked at me in that face I was sure was out to get me. I even went to a sporting goods store, purchased a tent and put it up inside my apartment. It was the only way I could fall asleep without feeling like someone was watching me. Essentially I moved into the small two-man tent. I would eat my dinner as well as sleep inside of it every night. I would sit inside my tent, listen to jazz records, and read books, when I wasn't at my post in front of the computer watching other people.

So hearing an unannounced knock always freaked me out. But, I was no stranger to the system. I made it a point to have all the camera locations in my own building fully mapped out (watching my cute neighbor have sex with her boyfriend was an early motivator in this act). But, now it served well for my security. I checked the hallway cam to see if it was the two thugs who broke my cell phone. To my surprise it was a pizza delivery person. I didn't remember ordering pizza?

I answered the door and found him holding my usual order. He said that it was paid for over the phone but I still had to tip him. After he left I watched him on the Network cameras to insure he left the building. I then opened the box of pizza (I was so paranoid at this point that I really truly expected it to explode or something). On top of the pizza was a note. It was a grease-stained piece of paper with a note written in sharpie.

Clyde,
I know You're
unhappy. Me
too
Grid 72 CAM
40 B

I went to the camera location noted at the bottom of the note. On it I saw a very large man sitting in front of a computer much as I was. I could see that on his monitor were images of me looking at him. He was watching me look at him. He turned toward the camera I was viewing him on and gave a subtle look. I could tell he was trying not to raise suspicion in case anyone else was viewing either of us.

And that is how I met Larry. For the next week I received two more pizzas, some Chinese take-out (which I didn't eat), some Thai food and a pasta dinner from the same pizza place. Contained in each of these were notes from Larry. Like I said I'm not sure how he came across me, or what he wanted from me. Maybe he was just lonely? Maybe he wanted someone he could talk to about this crazy work we were doing? I really didn't know.

From what I could tell of the monitor image it didn't look like he got out very often. It's not like I did either. His last note was simple. It said that if I was truly unhappy with the Network that I should meet him.

Maybe they were testing me, maybe after the "Angel" incident they were uncertain in choosing me to work for the Network? Maybe this was a test of my loyalty? Maybe if I showed up to meet him, there would be a faceless army of men to take me down just as I saw the dry cleaner man go down. But I was unhappy with the Network. I was unhappy with my entire sense of personal freedom. He wanted to meet in a public place just to be safe. Maybe he was onto something, maybe he didn't trust me as well. Who knows? I made the decision to meet him.

We met at a soccer game. It was some type of school activity or league. I really didn't know. What I did know is that he was terrified. He seemed much more nervous than me. He sat next to me and we both had our conversation while looking forward toward the game. If my head started to turn toward him at all he would bark "keep looking forward" under his breath. He was convinced that even here with all of these people around that they were keeping tabs on him with a satellite feed or something.

If you were out in public, and someone from the Network spotted you using a satellite you were in trouble. It meant that they not only could very efficiently follow you but you were considered enough of a security risk to warrant them using the expensive technology. I only used a satellite feed once, and I had to e-mail my superior first to gain access. It all happens quickly but you have to go through certain procedures.

Anyway, he kept looking forward. He confessed to me that he had become totally obsessed with the idea of shutting down the Network. I was amazed how willing he was to tell me this information. He really seemed freaked out. I really couldn't tell if he was all right upstairs. Not that it mattered. Not that I was. I was as much a risk to him as he was to me. During the course of the game I let on to him that I too was very unhappy with the Network. I was careful not to say too much just in case it was some kind of test or set up.

TWO PARTY DELIVERY

Toward the end of the game Larry also confessed why he contacted me in the first place and why he needed me. He apparently was some kind of hacker. A master programmer, it was one of the reasons that the Network had put him to work. He was supposedly some kind of computer genius.

Larry had created a virus. One, that was meant to enter the Network from one of the watcher's computers, crippling the entire Network in a manner of just under an hour. It sounded too good to be true. That's where I came in.

The Network was, of course, safeguarded from these types of attacks, both from outside sources as well as inside sources. That is why Larry devised a virus that would depend on a two-party delivery. It was simple. Two viruses--the first introduced will alert the system as a decoy, while the resources move to defend from that attack the second is introduced from another watcher's station. The second attack wouldn't be registered, it will enter silently. But, the computer belonging to the first person to introduce the virus will be flagged and they will be found out.

Like I said, it sounded too good to be true. I told Larry I wasn't sure about anything he was telling me. He said that he wasn't brave enough to be the first one to insert the disc and that he hoped I might be. I told him I thought he was insane.

Sure I hated what was going on. Sure I wanted it to all just go away. But, I couldn't help wondering if this was some kind of test. I also couldn't help wondering what would happen if his miracle virus didn't work. It would be one thing to attack the Network and shut it down. It would be another to attack it, fail, and then try to get away from them while it was still operational.

Larry reassured me that after one of us inserted the disc there would be an instant cease of operations on the grid we were in. I told him that he was crazy. He left the soccer game crestfallen. Before he did, he told me to look under my seat before I left.

I waited until the end of the game and found a disc taped under my seat. It must have been my half of the virus. Could it be for real? Could he have really come up with a salvation for all of us? I didn't know. I hid the disc in fast-food bag I was holding and headed home.

I very casually set the disc with some mail I was holding on my coffee table. That was the trick with these bastards. You have to camouflage everything you do as casual. Those are the movements that don't raise suspicion. If I was to come home and hide the disc in a crevice in the wall, or under my mattress, or something it would look like I was up to no good. If I just come in and toss it on the table with my bills it looks like nothing. This was the kind of logic that was now ruling my world.

What had come of me in that world? My entire life I thought I was a "positive". And it turns out that I am just a "negative". Just like everyone else. I always believed in the system. I thought it was positive. It turned out to be more negative than me. My world was crumbling.

My behavior in society had completely deteriorated. Funny to think that the job they gave me for following the rules pushed me to the point of not wanting to follow the rules. I was almost a hoodlum in my behavior. I had no more care for their rules. Fuck their rules. They had been lying to us for a very long time.

I was still covering my shifts. I was still in front of those damn computer screens for eight hours a day. I wasn't breaking my shifts up anymore into smaller shifts. I would just want to it over so I would do it all at once. No breaks for the bathroom, for coffee, for food. I would just sit there and watch the black and white images for the entire duration of the shift.

The images were becoming hypnotic. I wasn't even watching for anything particular anymore. For all I knew I was watching eight hours a day of "Anti-Government Activity", it didn't matter. All I saw were moving images, pixels, blacks, whites, and grays. All of it was nonsense. Like someone talking but you can't hear them.

I wanted out. I knew if I tried or even acted like I wanted to try and get out they would come and kill me. That was the most simple retirement plan I figured those at the Network had. It's that simple, you can't just stop working for them.

I let Larry's disc sat on my coffee table for two or three weeks, I can't remember exactly; I was starting to really lose track of time. That poor guy probably thought I was going to turn him in or something. He had to really be sweating. I didn't try to contact him and he didn't try to contact me. The disc just sat there. I wondered if poor Larry was watching me on his system trying to figure me out. It's not that I wasn't willing to change things. It was more the fact that I was kind of paralyzed. I was like a walking dead man. I stopped caring about everything, even jazz. We were all just prisoners in their box anyway.

And then something happened...

It was a Tuesday night. I tuned in my standard pre-sets of camera locations and looked for the Jazz Man. He wasn't in any of his normal spots. I had gotten very good at finding him so I was puzzled. I went through the motions and scanning techniques that I had used many times before when I was still good at my job. I used deductive reasoning and clever camera positioning to find him. And I did.

He was on the run, as fast as an older gentleman such as himself could run. Some assailants were chasing him. I'm not sure what they wanted. It's not like he had that much money to rob him of. That's why he played those subways in the first place.

He didn't get very far. The location where he stopped was dark. There was nothing I could do. They looked like they were really going to hurt him. I HAD TO DO SOMETHING. But what? Those bastards at the Network smashed my cell phone.

CRACK!

One of the men just smashed him across the face. I had to do something. If I had the phone I could call the police.

CRACK!

Another one of the men just kicked him in the stomach. Now one of them was trying to take away his horn. I had to do something. Fuck it. I hit the panic button that goes straight to my superior. It will flag the camera location. Surely they can't just let him get beat to death.

CRACK!

CRACK!

CRACK!

Where was my response? Where the hell are the others at the Network? Someone had to be seeing this besides me. And then an e-mail came back to me from my contact at the Network. It was an automated message.

We at the Network along with you grieve for the loss of any innocent life. Unfortunately the Network cannot be used for the prevention of Standard Crimes.
Thank you for the concern for your fellow man and the human condition.
Superior 854

The Jazzman now was lying on the ground in a puddle of his own blood. Then men who attacked him were long gone. He was not moving. I hit the panic button four more times. I had to help him. For every time I hit the panic button more of the same automated message was delivered to me.

That was the last time I saw the Jazz Man. I watched the monitor for an eternity. His body was still on the ground until much later when some people passing by found him. I watched up to the point he was placed into a black plastic body bag. That was the point when everything changed for me. I knew what I had to do.

I finally had focus again. I finally knew what I must do. And that's what brings me to here and to now. That's what brings me to writing this letter. In case my plan didn't work I needed someone to know **The Truth**.

My plan was simple. A final escape. I would shut them down and then go to somewhere they could never get to me. In some ways I knew it was coming to this all along.

At this point Clyde Wilcox kept a low profile for one more week. During the time besides writing this letter he also wrote some other documents hidden inside the security of his tent. He very secretively planned many things inside of that tent. Including the purchase of a handgun. At one point Mr. Wilcox took a hammer to the upper northwest corner of his apartment and broke the wall into pieces. Inside he found the fiber optic camera that was used to view him. He pulled it from the wall as much as possible. He then removed the disc from his coffee table and walked over to the exposed camera. He gave a very righteous speech to those invisible men on the other side. He gave a beautiful speech of right and wrong without knowing if he ever had an audience. Mr. Williams and the faceless superiors would now see what they had created by pushing Clyde Wilcox to the edge. He walked over to his computer placing the first virus-containing disc into the disc drive. He could only hope that his only ally Larry would follow up by also placing the companion disc. Then Wilcox walked over to the camera. He smiled, laughed, yelled, then flipped off whoever was watching. As their system

started to break down and their video images of him flickered from the invading virus, he raised the gun to his head. The computer image blanked out.

As their cameras momentarily regained control a few hours later, images could be seen of Wilcox's body being placed into a black plastic body bag by a coroner crew.

What couldn't be seen after the cameras permanently blanked out was this:

- *Actors who had recently been hired taking off their phony coroner outfits.*
- *A young man who looked strikingly similar to Clyde Wilcox emerging from a black plastic body bag and getting on his electric scooter.*
- *A lone figure heading south for the border on his scooter.*
- *A happy ending*