

What a Way to Go

life at the end of empire

**Written and Directed by TSBennett
Produced by Sally Erickson**

2007 VisionQuest Pictures, LTD

Chapter 1: Voices in the Dark (Opening Credit Sequence)

Karl Menninger (archival clip)

The picture you are about to see deals with the problem of self-destruction. Its purpose was to enable people to better understand the nature of this strange, tragic act. We shall not be able to diminish this great human affliction until more people do understand it and appreciate its seriousness.

Hannah Bennett

A lot of things about the world these days are very scary.

Patrick Henry (quote)

For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst and provide for it.

Jack Bennett

My generation may be one of the first generations where a lot of us die not of old age. Because a lot of us may not make it there.

VISIONQUEST PICTURES

Kate Bennett

Global warming... it's gonna do this and our climate's gonna go weird and... like another ice age or something.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH BUTCH AND REGGIE

Sally Erickson

I think the scariest things aren't for me. The scariest things are thinking that I might leave a world to my children that would be really difficult and painful for them.

A STORKBOY DECLARATION

Tom Grizzle

I think we're all fucked. All of us... I think most of us in this room are gonna die before we reach...

Tui Hayes

I don't believe that we would wipe ourselves out entirely. I believe that... I believe that we can probably fall down to...

Stacey Emerick

There's gotta be a way. There's gotta be a way to live through it...

Jim Senter

Once we're able to look at the world without blinders and see the really horrific mess we're making of it...

Sarah Erickson

We have got to change our whole idea of the way that the world works...

Hannah Bennett

I generally just feel like everything is out of balance.

Tom Grizzle

Nothing that I can do will make any impact on the planet.

Jack Bennett

We're living a way that doesn't work. We have to live a way that does work. So it's gonna change.

Barbara Lorie

You can't change what's happening in Washington. You can't change what's happening over in Iraq.

WHAT A WAY TO GO
LIFE AT THE END OF EMPIRE

THE VIEW FROM THE SLEEPING CAR

Jim Senter

We've met the enemy and he is us.

ORIGINAL SCORE BY CHAMBER CORPS

Andy Erickson

I guess I just tell myself that it's all gonna be OK. You kinda have to to keep going.

PRODUCED BY SALLY ERICKSON

Kate Bennett

It's not a happy thing to think about.

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY TSBENNETT

Chapter 2: What a Way to Go

There was a time in my life when I was having this recurring daydream. I'd be sitting in my car, radio blaring, slowly making my way forward through a fast food drive thru. I'd

get to the window and they'd hand me my drink and my burger and fries. And as I waited for my change... off in the distance... a bright flash... and a rising cloud. And as the full force of the nuclear blast washed over me, as the icy cold of my overturned Coke seeped into my jeans, I'd think to myself... what a way to go.

Sarah Erickson, Student

Yeah I think that we might wipe ourselves off the Earth. Definitely. I feel like that's where we're headed.

Carla Royal, Beyond Therapy

There's an emptiness that other needs... the real needs... the real desires aren't being met. And we're just scrambling with what our culture offers us. And our culture tells us... you know our culture tells us we will find love if we buy this lipstick and that make-up and these clothes and this car.

Stacye Leanza, Artist

I think it would be OK if we gave the Earth back to everybody else who is not as destructive. All the rest of the life on Earth.

Part One: Waking on the Train

Chapter 3: Born on the Slope

I was born in the American Midwest, central Michigan, the "water winter wonderland". I was raised in the arms of an extended rural family: mostly farming folk - solid, hard working, quiet, giving. I was born into warmth and plenty to eat, a sense of place, and a surety of security.

And I was born into stories. Stories about the value of work and the right way to live. Stories about god and country, about community, loyalty, steadfastness, and resolve. Stories about the role and place of humans on this planet. Stories about our relationship to something we called "nature". I was born into stories.

Nobody told me these stories. They didn't have to. The stories were the air I breathed, the water in which I swam, the ground upon which I walked. They were all around me. We didn't even know they were stories. We just thought they were the way things are.

My world was a playground. There were fish to catch, boats to row, parades to watch, trails to hike, lakes to swim, snowmobiles to ride, games to play, presents to open, and family to share it all with. The days would end with sunsets and fireworks and sometimes I would dance until I collapsed with joy.

It was a magical land, cherry Popsicles and warm milk, birthday cakes and store-bought costumes and brand-new chairs under the tree. A land of giant geese, well-dressed poodles, talented birds and even more talented people. The Earth was our merry-go-

round, our monkey bars, our swing set. As long as we didn't look down, everything would be just fine.

I was born halfway up the population explosion. I was born on the slope of rising CO2 levels. I was born in the foothills of a mass extinction. I was born on the rocky rise of oil production. I was born facing forward, looking ever upward, my first step a step upslope, a step into progress, a step into a vast and glorious human future. We were movin' on up. There was no looking back. There was a mountain to conquer, and conquer it we would. All we had to do was climb a bit further.

But the mountain we were climbing was not what we thought it was. Rather than rising from natural forces, the slopes up which we were headed were the results of imbalance and shortsightedness. In our efforts to progress, to succeed, to improve, to strive, to overcome, to manage, to shape, to solve, and to grow, we wielded huge new forces across the globe. We walked as giants upon the Earth; unaware of the footprints we left behind.

I have walked that path, unaware of my own big feet, enacting the stories of our culture, not stopping long enough to feel the instability of the slope underfoot.

But in the late 80s, news of the ozone hole and global warming first hit me, and the ground began to shake. I stopped and looked around me for the first time. I got scared. I got involved. And then the shaking subsided. Or rather, I just got used to it. Life got more complex with the births of my three children. And there was climbing still to do. So I continued to climb.

But the tremors were still there, underfoot. At night I slept, but fitfully, clenched with worries, my dreams assaulted by vague rumblings from the future. In my dreams, I would stand at the pinnacle of the present, and look out over the surrounding terrain. And it did not look like I had thought it would...

Chapter 4: Worry Beads

A faint howling in the distance pierces the night
The monsters we have created
Lumbering to rampant life
Are heading even now toward our village

Nuclear weapons
Biding their time
Itching with purposes unfulfilled
As hopeful fingers tremble near buttons
Bunker Busters and Tactical nukes
Suitcase bombs and terrorist acts
Power plant accidents and leaking wastes
Plutonium launched into space in rockets known to explode
And depleted uranium poisoning the battlefield

Depopulating the land

Chemical warheads
And biological black magicks
Sarin and Soman and VX and phosgene
Anthrax and smallpox and plague
Enough to take out entire cities
Enough to cover the planet
And they don't care who lets them out
As long as they get to play

Others nasties lurch toward us on their own
Old friends, new creations and recent escapees
Ebola, Marburg, Lassa and SARS
Swine Flue, Bird Flue, HIV and AIDS
The rebound of tuberculosis, cholera, malaria, and typhus
Prions and mad cows, scrapie sheep and chronic wasting disease
Cancers that eat away our lungs, our brains, our breasts, our testicles, and our ovaries

And new monsters peer over the horizon
Good intentions spliced to blind arrogance and numbing greed
Frankenfoods and Terminator seeds
Herbicide tolerant and pesticide laced crops
Patented Life
Barely tested, quietly ticking...
Let loose upon the land
As if their creators, having looked at the world,
Managed to learn nothing at all

The monsters' howls grow frenzied
Chemicals in our land, our sky, our rain, our rivers, our food, our bodies, our babies
Rising male infertility rates and Superfund sites and ozone depletion
Rivers dammed and salmon doomed
Topsoil loss and fertilizer run-off
Huge oceanic dead zones and depleted fisheries
And the ghosts of silent whales scraping over the corpses of coral reefs

The monsters advance and forests collapse under their feet
Leaving indigenous cultures battered, homeless, soul-sick, or dead
Disrupting water and oxygen cycles and turning soil into deserts
As tigers and salmon and tree frogs and falcons
Stumble down the path toward extinction
Their heartrending voices lost in the chatter of chainsaws
And the coughing insults of bulldozers

And all the while the climate is changing...

Angry summers, insistent floods, belligerent blizzards
Grudging droughts and pissed-off hurricanes
With poles warming and ice shelves calving
Permafrost slumping and glaciers receding
Sea levels rising and big cities sinking
As ocean currents halt and superstorms gust, deserts expand and rabbits run and locusts
horde and army ants march and mosquitoes hunt and rodents overrun
The balance undone
Leaving crops destroyed and diseases vectored and famine and rioting and looting and
war
The ocean turns acid and corals and shellfish and planktons dissolve
The disruption of food chains, the collapsing of ecosystems
Tonight on the Weather Channel

Watch it now, while you can
Because oil is peaking, with no clear replacements
Production will falter as demand keeps increasing
And the price, which is rising now, will just keep on rising
Imagine the impact to the global economy
To the truckers and farmers, to your neighbors, yourself
Watch the bidding war rage from trade floors to battlefields
Watch the Pentagon plan and the patriots act
Go look out the window. Do you feel a draft?
World population is fueled by the input of oil
We could reach 7 billion by 2013
That's billions of bodies more than the planet can sustain without oil
We're consuming the planet and poisoning the soil
And the air and the water that we all need to live
We're driving a high-speed train to the end of life
And we're taking the rest of the planet
Trillions upon trillions of living souls
Along with us

And all of this
All of this
All of this
All of this
Is wrapped tightly inside a culture of denials and lies
And absurdities so complex, and so powerful
That we can barely see through the smog
The monsters are screeching at the village's edge
So huge and so horrible
That we cannot bear to look at them
And we,
Bound in a cultural straightjacket of our own making,
Slumber on as they draw near

Working jobs we hate
Consuming products that do not fulfill
Distracting ourselves as best we can with television
Drugs food sex and entertainments
Hoping our leaders will find some answers
Awakening, finally,
In the still hours of early morning
To the shapeless realization
That they will not

Ah...what a nightmare...

Judge to Juvenile Delinquent (archival clip)

Well, Johnny, you're in a pretty serious situation. But we believe, your mother and Mr. Benton and I, that you can make good without being sent away.

Chapter 5: Alarm Clocks and Snooze Buttons

There has always been a part of me that has suspected that I would see the end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it in my lifetime. It seemed built into the situation, a certainty of population dynamics, the inevitable end to Mr. Malthus' musings. At some point we would near the sun, our wings would fail, and we would plummet back to the earth.

Icarus/DaVinci Man (animation)

Fuck!

New voices spoke of possible futures.

Wooden Ships (animation)

Hey can I have some of those purple berries?

Crosby, Stills and Nash sailed the Wooden Ships.

Wooden Ships (animation)

Shit! Not again.

Ridley Walker wrote his connexions. And Charlton Heston ate Soylent Green with the Omega Man on the Planet of the Apes.

Planet of the Apes (animation)

You maniacs!

The world looked insane to me but nobody else seemed to notice so I buried my thoughts and muddled on.

Deep inside, this was tearing me to pieces. I remember looking in at night on my sleeping children, and feeling a deep and gnawing terror for their futures. But I locked my fears tightly in my heart, hit the snooze button, and slept a while longer.

And then I came across Daniel Quinn and Derrick Jensen, two writers who helped me, with books such as *Ishmael* and *The Culture of Make Believe*, to recognize the stories of our culture, the beliefs and assumptions and fables that have shaped our lives, the fairy-tales we have told ourselves, the madness we have made manifest in the world.

Quinn speaks of the Nazi regime, of Adolph Hitler and the story he told the German people: a story about the lost destiny of the Aryan race, a story of oppression and defilement, a story of victory and vengeance and greatness regained. And Quinn explained how the entire nation, oppressors and oppressed alike, Jews and Good Germans and Gypsies and Gays, were all held captive by that story.

We who live today inside the dominant global culture are similarly captives of stories: stories that surround us like the air we breathe; stories that we enact at our own peril; stories that threaten the community of life itself.

Have you heard the one about humans being separate from “nature”, different, special, the pinnacle of creation? Or about humans being innately flawed - violent, selfish and greedy? How about the one that says that the world was made for human beings, to manage, control, and exploit as a resource, and that the world has no value beyond its utility? Or the story about there being only one right way to live, and one right way to understand and view the world? Or about how unlimited growth, competition, and production are all unquestionably good? Or the story that tells us that we can have and do anything we think we want, because there are no limits?

There were people in the world looking squarely at our cultural stories, and at the global predicament, and seeing what I saw: our culture, in its present configuration, could not last.

I was not alone.

But the transformation, or the collapse, still seemed far away. It would come one day. But not now. There was time. There was hope. Somewhere, there were people taking care of it all.

And that's how it was for me, year after year. I lived the middle class American life. I lived the stories I had learned as a child and tried as best I could to ignore the rumblings of fear that haunted my depths.

And then I started to work on this documentary...

Three years later, having chewed our way through a mountain of books, articles, websites, magazines, newspapers, and documentaries, having attended lectures and

meetings and salons and rallies, and having interviewed friends and neighbors, scientists and researchers and writers and activists and thinkers and feelers and more, and having talked and written and laughed and cried and worried and despaired and regained our power to plunge ahead again, one thing seems clear: the global environmental, political and economic predicament we live in today is critical, the possible scenarios range into the highly disturbing, and the timeframe seems... well... imminent.

It's as though we've awakened to find ourselves on a runaway train, hurtling wildly down the tracks, held in place by powerful cultural stories and fueled by our desperate consumption of the very heart, blood, bones and flesh of this planet.

If we don't find some way to stop this train soon, we're going to reach the end of the line.

Part Two: The Train and the Tracks

Chapter 6: Peak Oil

So what do you see when you wake up on the train? I can tell you what I saw. I saw the ground beneath the pavement, the man behind the curtain, the monster under the bed, the real below the rails.

The culture of Empire works every moment of every day to distract my attention, like a magician using sleight-of-hand. What happens when I look where the conjurer does not want me to look? I see the trick. I see the reality behind the illusion. I see, if I look long enough, that the Empire has no clothes.

Ride with me a while. Look more closely at the train, and the tracks, and the terrain through which we're speeding. If we are to respond effectively, we'll need a clear understanding of the whole of the situation.

For me, four aspects of our predicament stand out: peak oil, climate change, mass extinction, and population overshoot. In the fall of 2005, Sally Erickson and I circled the country by train, meeting with people to talk about these issue, and many others.

Tom Grizzle, Scientist

At some point you reach the place where you can't get it out any faster. So, when you get to that point you've reached the peak. Then we start downhill. And once we start downhill that's when economic collapse will occur.

THE BASICS OF OIL DEPLETION

That's my friend Tom, talking about oil. Peak Oil. And Economic Collapse. At first I didn't get it. So I started reading. And on our trip I met with some people who knew more about the situation.

Richard Heinberg, New College of California

Over the last 150 years we've created a society that runs on oil. And it's inevitable that we would have done so, because it's just such incredibly inexpensive, convenient, energy-dense stuff.

I spoke with Richard Heinberg, a core faculty member of New College of California and author of three books on Peak Oil.

Richard Heinberg

The problem, of course, is that oil is a non-renewable resource. So even when we first started using the stuff we knew that eventually we'd run out.

I met with the journalist Paul Roberts, who wrote a book about oil depletion in 2004.

Paul Roberts, *The End of Oil*

At some point, since oil is a finite resource, you can't keep raising production. Usually this is about the halfway point. When you've depleted half of the resource it becomes harder and harder to raise production. Doesn't mean you run out. And a great deal of oil is still coming out of the ground. If we were to peak tomorrow we'd still have eighty-two and a half million barrels coming out of the ground every day. But it would be really hard to get eighty-three and a half million barrels.

Gerald Cecil, a professor of Astrophysics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has been so taken by the oil situation that he's now writing a book about it.

Gerald Cecil, Professor of Astrophysics UNC-Chapel Hill

The rate with which oil has been coming out of the ground has stagnated. It's stagnated at eighty four million barrels of oil a day, which sounds like an incredible number. But that's what we use to power ourselves at today's rate of use. And as the world population continues to grow, and as prosperity presumably continues to grow and people power up in their energy use, we get to a situation where there isn't any excess capacity to keep that powering going. And at some point you end up with a flat supply and a growing demand and you have serious problems. And that's the nature of peak oil.

ARE WE THERE YET?

Are we at or near the peak of oil extraction? There are many signs that we are.

Richard Heinberg

Discoveries of new oil peaked right around 1963, '64. That was a long time ago. So we're not talking about a couple years of bad luck in exploration. This is a long-established trend. We've been discovering less oil with every passing year, to the point now where we're extracting and using about four or five barrels of oil for every one that we discover.

Paul Roberts

Now the oil industry responded in a number of ways. But one of the things it did was begin developing some amazing new technologies to help it find more oil faster. And despite this huge investment in technology, and these great leaps forward, the rates of discovery are still declining.

Richard Heinberg, *The Oil Depletion Protocol*

Country after country is reaching its own national all-time oil production peak and going into decline. The US was one of the first to do it back in 1970. And now something like 30 or 33 countries are past their peak. And so it's inevitable that within the very next few years we'll see the global peak in oil production. Nobody's ready for that.

Not ready for what, exactly? What will the end of cheap oil mean for the world? I went to speak with the writer and activist Jerry Mander. I'd let myself believe that the real problems were decades away. Turns out they're probably right around the corner.

ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*

All the structures that now exist - our urban formations, our transportation systems, our means of getting food, globalization as an economic model, capitalism as an economic model, which depends on constant expansion and growth and ever-more resources - cannot possibly continue to exist. Because they're all based on - the root base of all of it - is the existence of cheap energy.

Richard Heinberg, *Powerdown*

In order to avoid a deflationary depression we have to have continual growth in the money supply, which has to be based on continual growth in economic activity, which must be based on the continual growth in available energy and raw materials. We've built an economy based on the idea that it has to grow every year or else collapse. So, soon, the economy won't be able to grow. And all signs are that we may be facing a kind of global economic collapse because of peak oil.

AGRICULTURE INTERRUPTED

It seems that, if our economy is poised for meltdown, our agricultural system is doubly so. I spoke with local sustainable designer Harvey Harman and with writer Richard Manning about what he calls "the oil we eat".

Harvey Harman, Sustenance Farm

The average piece of food in your supermarket has traveled 3,000 miles or more to get there. So not only is it based on petroleum to grow it, but then it's transported, and refrigerated. And, you know, it's a system that's very dependent on cheap energy, and it's very energy-intensive.

Richard Manning, *Against the Grain*

If we take a look at about 1940, and an American farmer, that farmer was using roughly a calorie of fossil fuel to make a calorie of food. Today that same farmer uses something like 10 calories of fossil fuel to make a calorie of food. That means that petrochemicals, fossil fuel, have become embedded in our food supply. If we run out of fossil fuel that strategy will collapse in a heartbeat.

Sadly, with so much at stake, oil grows increasingly worth fighting for. My friend Ray said it best.

RESOURCE WARS

Ray Milosh, Scientist

Prices will naturally begin to rise and people will probably fight over it more. And the US will, almost certainly, with whatever means are necessary, make sure that we get everything we need. And so that will probably make for an unhappy rest of the planet. It's a permanent state of affairs. You know? The fuel crisis will be over in a couple of hundred million years. When everything has settled down and there's a lot more having been made from all of us having, you know, been squished back under. It takes a long time.

Peak oil got my attention. The ramifications are enormous. And if the oil situation is bleak, some say that the natural gas situation is even worse. As writer and professor Otis Graham said:

Otis Graham,

Professor of History, Emeritus, UC-Santa Barbara

We've had three or four hundred years of fossil fuel - it's coming to an end. Is that an historic turning point? It's breathtaking!

Chapter 7: Climate Change

Even more breathtaking is what happens when we burn the stuff.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Scientists used to talk about climate change in terms of centuries. Now they're talking about decades. Now they're talking about next year. Now they're talking about now.

My friends and neighbors are talking about it too.

Ray Milosh

We've increased the levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Stacye Leanza

Which traps heat in the earth's atmosphere. Which raises the temperature.

Kevin Mayer, Artist

The glaciers are melting. The sea ice is melting. You know, the polar ice caps are basically melting.

Sofia Simons, Student

And I hate it. I hate feeling like we've done this to nature. Not to mention all of the animals, all of the wildlife, that are going to die.

Barbara Lorie, Teacher/Activist

It'll begin to happen. It's already beginning to happen. It's happening everywhere, you know. It's happening!

Kevin Mayer

It's terrifying.

Stacye Leanza, Artist

It's a drag.

That's putting it mildly. The only good thing I can think to say about climate change is that when I understood the climate situation, I spent less time worrying about oil.

Richard Manning, *Against the Grain*

Some people have said, and I think they're right about this, we're gonna run out of air to burn before we run out of fossil fuels to burn. In other words, the fossil fuels are creating the global warming problem, the CO₂, and the pollution problems. And, if we keep using those, it's not really a matter of when we run out of fossil fuels. It's when we befoul the atmosphere so much, and create so much global warming, it's irrelevant how much gas we've got left.

There. See what I mean? You feel better already, don't you?

So, whom else could I speak with about the climate? Turns out I didn't have to go very far. William Schlesinger, Dean of the Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth Sciences at Duke University had this to say.

THE BASICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

William Schlesinger, Dean,

Nicholas School of the Environment, Duke University

We have raised, globally in our atmosphere, the concentration of carbon dioxide from about 280 parts-per-million in the late 1800's to close to 380 parts-per-million today. That's roughly a 30% increase. And the projection is that it will be 550, 560, in the year 2050.

Schlesinger's colleague at Duke, Professor of Conservation Ecology Stuart Pimm, added this:

Stuart Pimm,

Professor of Conservation Ecology, Duke University

There is now a strong scientific consensus that that has caused warming over the last several decades, maybe centuries, and there's a strong expectation that it will continue to do so.

So...greenhouse gases on the rise. Temperature on the rise. More floods. More droughts. Rising sea level. It's been in the news for some time now. How does this impact the community of life?

IMPACT ON LIVING THINGS

Stuart Pimm, Duke University

Birds are arriving earlier in the spring time. Plants are flowering earlier. Species' ranges are moving northward. We are seeing an extraordinary, strong signal, biological signal, of what global warming is doing for us.

William Schlesinger, Duke University

Crops and trees will grow in places they don't grow today. We have a lot of suspicion that they may not grow as well.

Stuart Pimm

And we're beginning to see extinctions of species that have literally no place else to go as the climate gets warmer.

There's one impact I found particularly sobering.

Ran Prieur, *Civilization Will Eat Itself*

The carbon in the atmosphere. The carbon in the atmosphere goes into the ocean, it gets absorbed in the ocean as, I want to say, carbonic acid...

Douglas Crawford-Brown,

Director, Carolina Environmental Program

Changes in the atmosphere, for example, of carbon dioxide can be buffered by absorption of the carbon dioxide into the oceans. That as you do that, you do change the acidity of the oceans. And we are finding that there's a measurable change in the acidity of the oceans.

Ran Prieur

And that is making it harder for the plankton to form their shells. And if there's a plankton die-off... that's the bottom of the food chain.

Plankton, as well as corals, are threatened not only by rising acidity, but by rising temperatures. Phytoplankton levels have declined by as much as a third in some northern oceans. And this has resulted in significant impacts to fish and krill and bird populations.

But the reported dangers go far beyond a breaking of food chains, which is bad enough. Phytoplanktons produce half of the oxygen we breathe. Half. And they are a major carbon sink. When plankton dies, more carbon remains in the air. Which means more warming.

On top of this, new evidence shows that climate can shift very rapidly. Slow changes can build...to a tipping point...and the system can then shift abruptly to a new state. This is happening in the oceans, where a global current known as the grand conveyor belt is now being impacted, with possibly disastrous results.

As Douglas Crawford-Brown, Director of the Carolina Environmental Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill told me:

ABRUPT CLIMATE CHANGE

Douglas Crawford-Brown,
Director, Carolina Environmental Program

The amount of carbon dioxide that we're putting out into the atmosphere is rising to a point now where most scientists would agree that we may be at a sort of tipping point. We may be at a point where we're going to start to get so much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere that feedback mechanisms that control the temperature of the earth will start to be stretched a little bit too far. The classic one is you get too much melting of ice, it flows into the ocean, and you shut off the conveyor belt. And if that happens, this will cause dramatic changes in the climate in England. I mean, England would literally become Norway or Sweden, if you look at them on the globe, if the conveyor belt were to be slowed down. And we're starting to see changes of those magnitudes.

This is why I tend to use the term climate change, rather than global warming. A warming planet can have heating and drought in some areas, and freezing in others, such as Europe and North America would experience if the Gulf Stream shut down.

The impact of that would be huge.

William Schlesinger, Duke University

Those portions, much of which supply the agricultural bounty for Europe and the US, would have dramatic changes in climate, particularly affecting agriculture.

There are a number of self-reinforcing feedback loops now in operation. Here are two such processes.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK LOOPS

Richard Heinberg, *The Party's Over*

You know the polar ice melting, which is opening huge areas of sea in the polar regions. Without that ice, which normally reflects sunlight, that polar sea is now going to be absorbing a lot more sunlight and, therefore, heat.

Douglas Crawford-Brown,
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

We have a lot of carbon stored in the permafrost. And those permafrosts are starting to defrost. And when they defrost that carbon dioxide – that carbon – is going to be oxidized to carbon dioxide, or brought out as methane and so on. And that will be a dramatic increase in greenhouse gases.

Stuart Pimm, *The World According to Pimm*

This may get out of hand and we'll suddenly be looking at a very rapid warming of the planet.

This MAY get out of hand. Given that there seems to be a consensus that we need to reduce carbon emissions by 70 percent or more, and given that we live in a world where economies must grow or die, and given that our carbon emissions grow along with our economies, and given that many countries are working feverishly to emulate the American way of life, it's difficult to see a way to STOP it from getting out of hand. I've yet to see a proposed solution that even comes close to realistically addressing the situation. Talk about a snowball's chance in hell.

OVERWHELM

Paul Roberts, *The End of Oil*

I mean, it's like, I used to take this martial arts class. And a lot of these guys, it was kind of a kung-fu thing, a lot of the guys in class would be saying, "well, what if I meet a guy that's really good in tae-kwan-do?", or "what if I meet a really good boxer?" And the teacher would say, "well, you're going to get your butt kicked". You know? You say, "what if we run into a tipping point where we have this kind of accelerated scenario of climate change?" We're going to get our butts kicked.

Richard Heinberg

It's very possible that global climate change is out of our control at this point no matter what we do. Whether we implement Kyoto, or Kyoto on steroids, or whatever it is.

Jerry Mander, *The Case Against the Global Economy*

I don't know how it will be manageable. If they can't manage the fallout from the New Orleans catastrophe what's going to happen when they try to manage a society-wide catastrophic situation?

Richard Manning, *Grassland*

We can take a lot of punches. Nature takes punches pretty readily. Global warming is a really severe punch. And all that we depend on for natural systems and agricultural systems is about to be wiped out pretty drastically.

About to be? What is he saying? Do we dare speak of such disasters as inevitable? If we speak of inevitability, will that overwhelm people? Will they slide into apathy and diversion? Isn't that where people already are? I don't feel like I can afford to look at anything less than the truth. And then I must ask: what are we made of? Who will we be in the face of such truths?

If we don't look at these things, one thing seems certain.

Stuart Pimm, Duke University

Generations to come are not going to be very happy with us for refusing to get serious about these hugely important issues.

Chapter 8: Mass Extinction

MASS EXTINCTION

What really gets me is it's not just our human descendents. Millions of species and more are now threatened by our behavior. And for many of them, there will be no "generations to come".

Barbara Lorie, Teacher/Activist

We're killing off all the life forms that give *us* life. We have black holes in the ocean. There are no fish in places in the ocean. What's happened to the fish? What's happened?

That's my friend Barbara, who spent her life as a teacher and activist, working for the life of this planet. The thing is, we know what's happened. My son Jack knows. He's known since he was a kid.

Jack Bennett, Writer

I mean, everyone knows the problems – the deforestation, the pollution of rivers, the garbage, overpopulation. All of these things the planet isn't built to - for us to do that. It's not built in such a way that it can take that. I mean, we have to live on the planet, so if we're going to destroy where we're living then that's going to be a problem.

Hmm. Destroy where you're living. A problem? What are the analysts and scientists saying?

THE BASICS OF MASS EXTINCTION

Richard Manning

Geologists mark geological time by catastrophe. When did the comet hit and wipe out all those species? When did the fossil record change? So what was there yesterday was not there the next day? And we're in one of those periods right now. But it's human-caused. And we're seeing an order of extinctions now that ranks with the great catastrophes on the planet.

Stuart Pimm, Duke University

Currently we are driving species to extinction probably a thousand times faster than they should be. We will lose somewhere between a quarter, maybe as many as a half, of all the species on earth within the next century.

I think what he's saying is: that would be bad. When I spoke with Daniel Quinn, he seemed to agree.

Daniel Quinn, *Ishmael*

If this goes on, and on and on and on, there's going to become a point when the system is going to collapse.

What is it that's going on and on? Nothing less than the people of Empire devouring the world. As my friend Kevin put it:

DEVOURING THE WORLD

Kevin Mayer, Artist

Humans are taking over the whole planet. And everything else is being crowded out.

Crowded out. Felled and milled. Caught, cleaned and canned. The numbers show that the culture of civilization is eating itself out of house and home. On land, we consume forty percent of what's known as the primary productivity of the planet.

Stuart Pimm, *The World According to Pimm*

If you look at how much green "stuff" the planet produces every year, we use about two-fifths of that. We consume it, our domestic animals consume it, and we use wood, and fibers like cotton.

I drive through the country and see it. Forests are now fields and parking lots and box stores. We grow crops and livestock and billboards and cell phone towers, bulldozing and bush-hogging our way around the globe.

Stuart Pimm

And it's the destruction of the places where species live that's the principal cause of species becoming extinct.

It's the same story in the oceans.

VACUUMING THE OCEANS

Stuart Pimm

Many people think that the oceans are vast and untouched. And in actual fact we take about a third of the production from the oceans, too.

Douglas Crawford-Brown,

Mathematical Models of Environmental Risk Modeling

Our fish stocks, all over the coast of the United States and certainly around the world, are getting perilously close to collapsing.

William Schlesinger, Duke University

Most of the desirable, large, predatory fish – snapper, swordfish, and the like – have been reduced down to ten percent of their previous population.

Down to ten percent? Maybe that's why we're now eating tilapia instead of cod. The cod is almost gone.

And with your tilapia may I suggest a big tall glass of drinkable water?

DRAINING THE WATER

Stuart Pimm

When it comes to fresh water we probably take about half of the available fresh water.

Richard Manning, *A Good House*

Part of the way we've fed the planet over the last thirty years, as we've doubled population, is to use a whole lot of water. Our agriculture's now the leading user of water in the world. And in this nation as well.

Douglas Crawford-Brown, Director,
Carolina Environmental Program

Our watersheds in the United States have been so highly developed that even small changes in the amount of water that falls are beginning to cause large implications for society's availability of water.

Multiplying the impact of consumption and habitat destruction is the fact that, with fuels, with pesticides and herbicides and industrial chemicals, with noise and with electromagnetic waves and with human activity and with structures of control and domination, Empire is literally and metaphorically poisoning every square inch of the planet.

POISONING THE PLANET

Stuart Pimm, Duke University

Yes, life will recover from what we are doing to the planet. But don't hold your breath. It's going to take millions of years. It's going to take an incredible number of human generations. Trillions of people will live in a biologically impoverished world if we don't stop our human impacts now.

I spoke with Daniel Quinn about this mass extinction. He gave me a metaphor that has haunted me since.

THE BRICK BUILDING

Daniel Quinn, *The Story of B*

We are like people who live in a very tall building... brick building. We live on the top floor. And every day we go out, go down to the lower floors and at random we knock bricks out, take them upstairs to the top, and build higher. Every day. Downstairs, 200 bricks. Take them upstairs. And the building is perfectly stable. But it's not going to be stable forever. Because we are attacking the structural integrity of the building. Two hundred species a day, day after day after day, year after year... And as our population increases it's going to turn into 400 species a day, a thousand species a day. And there's going to come a day when the system is going to collapse. Two hundred species a day!? This is calamitous.

Chapter 9: Population Overshoot

We may already be well above 200 bricks each day. And it looks to me like the building is not far from collapse. Everything in me wants to run out of the building before it comes crashing down around my ears. But where would I run? Empire now covers the planet. The building is everywhere. And almost all of us are inside of it.

All of us. All six and a half billion of us.

One of the hardest things to talk about is the human population explosion. The friends and neighbors I spoke with all seemed to agree that the enormous increase in human population would soon have to be reckoned with.

FULL TILT

Stacye Leanza, Artist

We're approaching full tilt, I think, in terms of what the planet can sustain.

Tony Mayer, Naturalist/Builder

Any species that has outgrown its environment is pressed for resources.

Laurel Hopper, Student

Is it just all going to end, and is that going to be the solution? You know, are we gonna become extinct like the dinosaurs?

John Delafield, Solar Designer

Equilibrium will be re-achieved. Unfortunately, nature is a harsh taskmaster.

Ray Milosh, Scientist

Because we're so intelligent, because we're such a different class of animal, with such a big brain, we have the ability to understand and foresee and prepare and stuff for these things. Doesn't mean we will.

How *will* we face into the issue of human population? I went to speak with William Catton, a professor of Sociology & Human Ecology at Washington State University, now retired, and author of an amazing book on ecology and human population called *Overshoot*. According to Catton's assessment of the carrying capacity of the planet:

TEMPORARY OVERSHOOT

William Catton, Professor Emeritus,
Sociology and Human Ecology, WSU

I think the way we're living now; the world was overpopulated already by the time of our civil war.

The population at the time of the US Civil War was just over one billion. So we've now overshoot that number by more than 5 billion. As Catton told me:

William Catton, Professor Emeritus,
Sociology and Human Ecology, WSU

It is possible to exceed carrying capacity. But only temporarily. If you exceed carrying capacity you then damage the environment upon which you're depending.

Looking closely, I've come to see that population numbers for humans, in and of themselves, are only part of the story. As Catton points out, it's the damage those numbers do that counts. And that damage is intimately connected to our way of life. The Earth supports as great a collective mass of ants as it does people. It can do so because ants aren't building 6000 sq ft homes, driving two hours to their jobs, buying plasma TV sets, and killing each other with depleted uranium munitions.

OUR OWN BIG FEET

Otis Graham, Professor of History, Emeritus, UC-Santa Barbara

We in the developed world have 32 times the footprint on the planet, on resources depletion, 32 times a person in India. I think we all know that though the figure is stunning. And it ought to make us really think, and start to talk with each other about this.

William Catton,

Overshoot: The Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change

You talk about how many “energy slaves”, per capita, do we have. In this country we’ve got something like 70 times as many energy slaves per capita as people in Bangladesh. Instead of thinking of Bangladesh as the overpopulated country, if you multiply each of us by seventy – take that 290 million, or whatever number of us there are now, multiply it by seventy - wow. We are an overpopulated country.

In those terms, the US is a nation of 21 billion people. And my own three children add 210 to that number. To speak of population, then, as the root cause of our problem makes little sense to me. It conjures images of crowded third-world cities and teeming masses of human flesh, while the global impacts of rich first-world lifestyles go unexamined.

Big feet. More and more feet. And more and more feet getting bigger and bigger. And if these feet just keep on walking, one of these days they’re gonna walk right into oblivion.

It cannot be sustained for much longer.

There are any number of catastrophic forces that could lower our numbers, as oil depletion, climate change and environmental collapses play out. One thing large populations are especially prone to is disease.

CATASTROPHE

Richard Manning, *Against the Grain*

Microbes are gonna have a lot more to do with it than humans have to do with it in the end. Nature - we’re still governed by natural rules, we like to think we’re not, but we are - when you put together the kind of biomass that humans represent on this planet, we’re an asset to somebody. We’re a resource.

But it may be possible to meet the situation with consciousness and intention.

CATASTROPHE OR CONSCIOUS INTENTION?

Otis Graham, *Unguarded Gates*

Once we get to the peak human population, wherever that is – I hope it is 81/2 billion rather than 12 billion but it’s gonna be high - whenever we get there, what – do we have a vision of what we should do? I mean, we got to the peak, and there’s trouble all around us! What should we do?

William Catton, *Overshoot*

Somehow we’ve got to devise a way for obtaining a soft landing as we reduce the population from six-plus billion down toward one billion. If we decide we want

to reduce it we can see to it that the reduction occurs in a more humane way than it will occur if we just try to keep on business as usual.

Otis Graham

Humanity has never been in this. This is new. This is new. And this is big. And this is not being talked about.

And because it is not being talked about, we have no clear idea how we might devise that softer landing. Talking about it, then, clearly and honestly, is the first step. Without that, catastrophe is inevitable. But either way,

INEVITABILITY

William Catton

Our global population is going to be reduced.

This is what I had to face: the population of my species is going to be reduced. I had to face it just like the grizzly bears have had to face it, and the wild salmon have had to face it, just like the right whales and the piping plovers and the mountain gorillas have had to face it, just like the great auks and the golden toads and the blackfin ciscos had to face it before they went extinct.

And I had to face something else: I have a choice about how I meet it.

My friend Lyle gave it some perspective.

CHOICE

Lyle Estill, *Biodiesel Power*

The fact is that there have been die-offs of civilizations. There have been collapses of great, mighty civilizations. Sophisticated, powerful, unbelievable civilizations have collapsed. And it's a choice. It's a choice that we can decide to succeed or fail. And I'm going to go ahead and decide to succeed, thank you. And I'd really like it if you'd come with me.

What choices do we now have? What would that success Lyle speaks of look like? What is inevitable at this point? And what remains to be created, if only we awaken to our power?

Most importantly, why have we not already awakened?

Doctor to Young Boy (archival clip)

And you know something? The more you talk about your problems the easier they are to solve. This bottling things up inside is bad!

Carla Royal, *Beyond Therapy*

We can't survive apart from the earth. And so... we're killing it!

Sally Erickson, Producer

I think part of looking at things exactly the way they are is feeling how isolated and alienated we have become from ourselves, from the people around us, and from the natural world. And when you look at that, and experience that, the natural response is deep grief. Deep grief at the loss of connection.

Part Three: The Locomotive Power

Chapter 10: Ancient Origins

ROLLING LIST

There are other issues we could have looked at. How do we face into all of this information? It looks as though our very survival as a species is now in question.

As I gaze unflinchingly at the world situation, the information goes right into my body. I feel shaken to the core. I feel like running away. I feel, at times, like I've been hit head on. I know I'm not alone.

I wish I had some magic potion. I wish I had some easy fix. I wish I could just tell you that everything is going to be OK. But of course I can't tell you that. And probably, deep down, you already know that.

Patient to Doctor (archival clip)

What chance do I really have, doctor?

Doctor to Patient (archival clip)

Mr. Marshall, I have no desire to mislead you. I'm sure you realize that recovery is not a sure thing.

Thirty-six years after the first Earth Day, forty-four years after *Silent Spring*, the planet is closer now to ecological meltdown than it has ever been.

If what we want is to stop the destruction of the life of this planet, then what we have been doing has not been working. We will have to do something else.

Sally Erickson, Producer

When we stay focused on the question, "what do we do?" we don't ask the more basic questions about "how did we get here?" And if we don't ask those questions I don't think we've got much chance of effecting the kind radical change that we're going to have to effect if we're going to make it.

Patient to Doctor (archival clip)

Well, I appreciate your being so frank with me, Dr Swenson. I guess I don't have to tell you how I feel.

From my experience, talking about how we feel is exactly what we need to be doing. And we'll also need to question some assumptions.

One assumption I question is the one that tells us that, since scientists can help us understand the situation, they are automatically equipped to tell us how to solve it. But there are forces at work in the world that cannot be understood through a microscope.

What are the forces that brought us to this point? And what are the forces that keep us stuck here? I went to speak with the people who are trying to answer these questions. I realized that I would have to step outside of the culture, so that I could see it from a new perspective.

Deep inside the tangle of problems that threatens the entire world there rages a boundless blaze of cultural fire, the locomotive power for the cultural train we're all now riding: an engine not of steam or diesel, but of story, and myth, habit and belief. An engine racing out of control.

It's time to look more closely at the culture of Empire.

So, how did we get into this mess?

Stacye Leanza, Artist

Wow. That's a cosmic question.

Many analysts think it started about ten thousand years ago when humans began to engage in a new and fundamentally unsustainable style of food production.

TOTALITARIAN AND CATASTROPHIC AGRICULTURE

Daniel Quinn, *Tales of Adam*

What we invented was something that I call totalitarian agriculture, which is predicated on the notion that it all belongs to us. We can kill off anything we don't want on the land, put a fence around the land. We can grow the food we want on the land and nobody else can touch it.

Richard Manning, *Against the Grain*

That slippery slope that we're on right now... we started walking on that ten thousand years ago. And it is because of an inherent problem in agriculture. Agriculture really depends on disturbance. There's no way you can do agriculture without doing that catastrophic damage. So it makes agriculture fundamentally unsustainable.

The surplus from this new way of getting food had immediate effects...

POPULATION GROWTH

Daniel Quinn

It has fueled this tremendous population growth of ours. Our growing population is always catching up with our food production. We have a food race on our hands.

We grow more food and the population increases. So we grow more food. It's a race that can't be won. On top of that, totalitarian agriculture also consigned its practitioners to a life of hard work and poor health.

HARD WORK AND POOR HEALTH

Richard Manning

As a species, we had food before us for all of our history, which is two hundred... three hundred thousand years. When you look at ten thousand years it's relatively minor in that space. But we were hunter-gatherers. So nature grew our food in its way. As opposed to our way, which is agriculture. We didn't grow food. Food grew.

Daniel Quinn, *My Ishmael*

It's hard for people to accept the fact that the more you base your society on agriculture, the harder you work.

Richard Manning, *Against the Grain*

If we look at archeological sites around the world - and people have done this - in all the locations - this is not a cultural issue - in all the locations where agriculture began, in Asia, the Mid-East, South America, and Central America, we will find people who are stunted, short, their teeth are invariably gone because of the carbohydrates they're eating turn into sugars and rot their teeth out, they're misshapen, they're asymmetrical, they show every evidence of suffering all sorts of disease.

This new type of agriculture both required and allowed more settlement, and with that came the beginnings of wealth and inequity.

WEALTH AND INEQUITY

Richard Manning

If you go to pre-agricultural towns you'll see a series of houses, all about the same size. And almost instantly, when agriculture occurred, you can go to any town, in any agricultural site in the world, not just in Western culture, and see a few very large houses with granaries connected to them, and a whole series of smaller houses. That kind of social inequity began almost immediately with agriculture.

As Quinn and Manning point out, early agricultural peoples were *not* better off than their hunter-gatherer predecessors. This was news to me. The psychologist and cultural analyst Chellis Glendinning points to other consequences of settlement and agriculture.

EXPANSION AND WAR

Chellis Glendinning,

My Name is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization

Before, when women were moving around, and very athletic, and carrying their babies, and having a diet that wasn't so high in carbohydrates, and nursing their babies for long periods of time, then women didn't ovulate very often. But when women became sedentary, women began to have regular cycles. And so, more babies were born. And so guess what? Then you have to make more farms. And then you have to expand the area that's fenced off. And then, ooh, maybe you're going to meet up with someone else who's coming that way, another group, and so then you have to have a war.

We're taught to regard agriculture and settlement as the normal and natural way for humans to live. So it was a bit of a shock, to learn how these basic cultural changes were the fundamental cause of so many of the problems that have dogged us through the centuries.

Derrick Jensen speaks to the end result of all of this cultural change.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION

Derrick Jensen, *Endgame*

I think one of the best lines I ever wrote was that *forests precede us and deserts dog our heels*. When I think of - or when you think of - the plains and hillsides of Iraq, is the first thing that you normally think of cedar forests so thick the sunlight never touches the ground? I think for most of us that's not the case. But the first written myth of this culture is Gilgamesh cutting down those forests to make cities.

Cities. Settlements begat villages which begat towns which begat cities. Totalitarian and catastrophic agriculture, the accumulation of wealth and power, and increases in population all came together to give rise to a new form of human culture: the culture of cities, the culture of civilization, the culture of Empire.

THE RISE OF EMPIRE

Derrick Jensen

I realized, as I was writing the newest book, *Endgame*, that I'd been bashing civilization for probably, oh, ten years now. And I'd never defined it. I didn't know what I was talking about. And so I define it in that book as a way of life

characterized by the growth of cities. I've defined a city as a collection of people living in numbers large enough to require the importation of resources.

William Catton, *Overshoot*

A city could be defined, almost, as a human ecosystem that grossly exceeds the carrying capacity of its local environment.

As Jensen and Catton point out, because cities exceed the carrying capacity of their local environment, and because they require the importation of resources, then those who live in cities are locked into the inevitability of getting those resources from somewhere else, from somebody else, by whatever means is necessary.

Often that means is trade. But trade requires transport, and transport requires energy, and energy has to come from somewhere, and it eventually runs out. And trade requires willing partners. But people do not always want to trade. When trade breaks down, and you need those resources, what remains is war.

We now need oil to keep our cities going. Watch the bidding war rage from trade floors to battlefields. Watch the Pentagon plan and the patriots act.

Let's stop for a second and regroup. I told you I've had to challenge some assumptions. We've been doing agriculture and expanding and growing and building cities and accumulating material wealth for so long now that it just feels like this is how things are supposed to be. But how can a way of life that is destroying its own support systems be considered "how things are supposed to be"?

Narrator (archival clip)

They did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees, and there remained not any green thing.

Let's move on.

Chapter 11: Science and Technology

Once our native human intelligence and creativity was combined with the defining impulses of empire, things began to snowball.

THE FANTASY OF "NO LIMITS"

Sally Erickson, Producer

We kept using more and more sophisticated technology so we could put off the inevitable. Which is: we've got physical limits.

Using the power of technology, we could break through the limits and laws and rules that kept the community of life in balance for millions of years ...temporarily...

Young Boy (archival clip)

Rules! All the time rules! I'm sick of them.

Narrator

Excuse me for interrupting, boys and girls, but maybe you would like to find out just what it would be like if there were no rules.

Young Boy

But how could we do that?

Narrator

By going someplace where there are no rules.

Young Boy

There's no such place.

Narrator

But maybe there is a way we could go to a place without rules.

Boys and Girls Together

How?

Narrator

By using our imagination. Now let's all pretend real hard...

And pretend we did. Thinking we had no limits, our power to control went right to our heads. As historian and "geologist" Thomas Berry put it:

POWER AND CONTROL

Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*

We here in America are fantastically absorbed in the fact that we can - are in control, in a sense, of the destinies of the universe. And that whatever we do is what needs to be done.

Boss/Fat Cat (archival clip)

What I say goes, see? I'm the law around here! (laughs)

FAULTY ASSUMPTIONS

Thomas Berry

Science has given us a way of understanding the Earth in such a way as to enable us to use the planet. That's the challenge: the use of the planet. And that's the

fatal aspect of science - is that science gives us the power but it doesn't explain how to use the power.

I've been confused about technology. I've heard all my life that technologies themselves are neutral, that it all depends on how we use them, that they can be used for good or ill, depending on the wisdom and intelligence of the user. But, as Jerry Mander explains:

Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*

That's completely wrong. You can do an analysis of every technology and find its beneficial aspects and its negative aspects. The idea that it's just about the way we use it is absurd. Because these are built-in factors.

As an example, the difference between nuclear and solar is more than in how we use them. Each technology has built-in characteristics that determine how they end up being used, and who uses them, and for what. Military scientists are not now working on a solar powered warhead. And neither am I looking to put a nuclear water heater on my roof.

Because of this misunderstanding, it's easy to get trapped in the myth of the technofix...

THE MYTH OF THE TECHNOFIX

Chellis Glendinning, *Off the Map*

Ever since that division of humans and human space away from the rest of the world, there's been one problem arising from that situation after another, you know. "Oh dear, we have to pipe in more water for the more farms", you know. "Oh dear, now we have to travel great distances". "Oh dear, now we need more resources, we need more land". Whatever. It's been one technological fix after another. And then as soon as you try to answer something with some kind of a technological fix that doesn't really go to the root of the problem then there's going to be new problems. And then it just rolls along, you know. And so now, I mean, you look at the state of the world now and half the people in the world are living in urban areas, you know. So how do you answer that? You know. And the population explosion has gone to such an extreme. How do you answer that, but with another technological fix?

Half the people in the world live in cities. And cities, by definition, exceed the carrying capacity of their local environments. I don't think most people know this.

Businessman to Rancher (archival clip)

But you'll agree that to make up your mind fairly you have to know all the facts. See, I don't think you know all the facts.

If we knew all the facts we'd have discarded the myth of the technofix a long time ago. To my eye our crisis, at its deepest levels, is a crisis not of technology but of meaning and purpose. We keep acting like all we need do is throw more technology at it while we fail

to understand, or even see, the clearly cultural issues that doom to fantastic failure these ever more desperate attempts to keep the present system going. We've been pretending for so long we've forgotten what we once knew: you can't survive in the long run if you don't follow the laws of life.

Chapter 12: Disconnection

As we settled into agriculture and civilization, agriculture and civilization settled into us. We fenced ourselves off from the world...

FROM "NATURE"

Chellis Glendinning

And everything inside the fence became what we needed to survive. And everything outside the fence became threatening, wild, you know, uncontrollable, keep it out!

And our technologies cut us off from our own experience...

FROM OUR EXPERIENCE

Ran Prieur, *Superweed*

We can build a culture that sits between us and the world. And it mediates our behavior toward the world. And it mediates what we do and what we perceive. If you have a spear, it becomes a lot easier. You don't have to kill somebody right in front of you. You can kill somebody thirty feet away. And that distance makes it easier to kill.

And if you've been sent into war with a B2 bomber strapped to your back and an array of high-tech sensors at your fingertips, you can kill Iraqis with no more thought or feeling than you might have wasting the Covenant on your X-Box at home.

This disconnection from the world, from other people and other creatures, altered our relationships, and left us confused and wounded.

A WOUNDED RELATIONSHIP

Thomas Berry

Our relationship with the universe becomes a "use" relationship. Now that's disastrous. Just like, to say to another being, human, "you used me", is about as terrible a thing as a person can say. Now the planet earth is telling us: "you used me".

Chapter 13: Cultural Stories

At what point do we stop and listen? And if we stop and listen, what will we be able to hear? Disconnection has stopped our ears. The planet's voice barely registers. Our minds are clogged with stories.

Central to my understanding of the world is this: all cultures are based on stories. The culture of civilization and empire comes with its own unique set of beliefs and impulses. Listen to some of the stories that have brought us to our present predicament.

STORIES OF GROWTH AND PROGRESS

John Delafield

“There's never quite enough”

Sarah Erickson

“We're innately flawed”

William Catton

“It's heresy today to say, 'let's stop growing'”

Ran Prieur

“Hard work is morally virtuous”

Paul Roberts

“More is better”

Ray Milosh

“The physical world as I see it is everything”

Sally Erickson

“We can solve any problem”

Jerry Mander

“And they actually say that the way to be happy is to own more stuff”

Nancy Harman

“And we are to subdue the earth and have dominion over it”

Barbara Lorie

“We own... we own the planet. We own everything here. We own these resources”

Thomas Berry

“Humans have rights. Nothing else has rights”

William Catton

“There are many times in which people just don’t want to be told that such-and-such a place is off-limits to them”

Living with stories like this, is it any wonder we’re devouring the planet?

Sally Erickson, Producer

In some ways we’re kind of - we’re in a culture of two-year-olds. Where we just won’t look at the limits.

William Schlesinger, Duke University

Dominion over the Earth, in Genesis, didn’t mean to leave this pillaged and smoking.

Daniel Quinn has named some of the basic stories of Empire.

STORIES OF EMPIRE

Daniel Quinn

The ambient voice of our culture tells us that this is the best that humans could ever hope for – what we’ve got right now, where we’re going. It’s just unsurpassable. Ergo, any alternative has got to be worse.

There were other civilizations besides ours; they did not think that they had the one right way to live, and that everyone in the world should be made to live that way

We’re taught to think that we are humanity. If there are other people out there that are different from us, well they’re degenerates, or they’re just not as far advanced as we are.

We came along, and began doing things, and building civilization, and this is the way humans were meant to live from the beginning. Which is one reason why we can’t give it up.

Here, perhaps, is the most dangerous story of them all...

THE MOST DANGEROUS STORY OF ALL

Daniel Quinn

We are superior to all other creatures and our lives are independent of theirs’.

Narrator (archival clip)

Through his intellect man has developed a superiority over every other form of animal life.

Chapter 14: Expansion and Colonization

With the stories of Empire in place, civilization was ready to spread around the planet. Ran Prieur explains the core idea of *The Parable of the Tribes*, which reveals how the culture of Empire prevailed in a process of cultural evolution that selects for power.

ANDREW BARD SCHMOOKLER'S "THE PARABLE OF THE TRIBES"

Ran Prieur, *www.ranprieur.com*

Imagine there's a bunch of tribes that are living together peacefully. And one of the tribes, for some reason, instead of living in balance and in peace, they decide that they're going to make a bunch of weapons and conquer the next tribe and turn them into slaves. The next tribe has three choices. If they run away the paradigm of the violent tribe expands into their territory. If they submit into slavery the paradigm of the violent tribe expands into their territory. If they build weapons to fight back the paradigm of the violent tribe expands into their territory. And that just goes on until the whole world is made up of people who make weapons and fight and enslave other people.

After ten thousand years of this, we've forgotten who we are...

"THE GREAT FORGETTING"

Daniel Quinn, Ishmael

How could three million years of human life be meaningless? The way people were living at that time, during that vast period; they were living in a way in which humans could live for millions of years. Tens of millions of years. And that's something! Man, now we're saying "how many decades can we have?" And if we go on living this way, it's not many.

Chapter 15: Cultural Blindness

It strikes me as critical that we remember who we really are. We have these huge brains and a great capacity for innovation and adaptation. But we can get trapped inside of stories and fantasies that block us from our own greatness.

CULTURE MEDIATES HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Richard Heinberg, *The Oil Depletion Protocol*

Well, human beings can act either as members of climax ecosystems, where we integrate ourselves into everything else that's going on, or we can act as invasive species, like the cane toad. The classic example of human beings acting as an invasive species, of course, is Europeans over the last five hundred years or so.

It doesn't have to be this way. Not all human cultures have followed this path. When I look closely, what I see is that human capacities and characteristics have always been mediated by the larger society. Always.

One person I spoke with who discussed our present predicament in terms of inherent human characteristics was Richard Manning.

Richard Manning, *Last Stand*

To survive in our hunter-gatherer days... a very narrow field of vision. You had to be concerned with what was happening around you in the immediate hundred yards. You had to be worried about what was going to happen in the next ten seconds or five minutes. Where was that tiger going to come from that was going to bite your neck and kill you? So our strongest instincts are geared to the immediate. Our adrenaline doesn't start to flow when we read about global warming. It starts to flow when somebody put a fist in our face.

And yet the Haudenosaunee evolved a culture that balanced those strong instincts. They make decisions based on their impact on the seventh generation. Contrast that with the culture of Empire.

Paul Roberts, *The End of Oil*

What we've never been able to do is recognize a limit coming from thirty or forty years out and behave accordingly.

And so we haven't seen climate change coming. And most people don't see oil depletion coming. And there are other forces in the universe that play out over the long term. Exponential growth and population dynamics can both unfold over generations making them, for humans blinded by their own culture, difficult to see. William Catton explains another long-term process.

LONG-TERM PROCESSES

William Catton

C. Wright Mills of Columbia University - kind of a maverick - gave a nice sociological definition of fate. Fate is what happens when innumerable people make innumerable small decisions about other matters that have a collective, cumulative effect that nobody intended. Ok. That's what's happened when we overpopulated the world. Nobody intended to overpopulate the world. Nobody intended to pollute the oceans. Nobody intended to start the greenhouse effect.

So this is part of what I've come to about how we got here: a snarl of assumptions and behaviors and beliefs and stories that form the backbone of the culture of Empire, a fusion of forces that severed us from the laws of life.

Chapter 16: Systems and Structures

This culture tells us that we can live apart from those laws. Without limits. Without rules. But doing so has left us, and the planet, battered and beaten. It isn't working out the way we've been taught to think it will.

Narrator (archival clip)

Well boys and girls, how do you like living without rules?

Girl

I hate it!

First Boy

This is no fun.

Second Boy

It stinks.

Over and over I've had to ask: why do we keep destroying the planet, even now, when the evidence that we are doing so is overwhelming? The first thing to note is that all of these historical forces are still in play. And some new forces have arisen in our time.

It's sobering to consider that we're trapped in an economy that must grow or die.

THE GROWTH ECONOMY

Richard Heinberg, *The Party's Over*

The economy will, can and must continue to grow. Now of course this is an absurdity. Because we live on a finite spherical planet. So there's only so much stuff to chew up and spit out.

We're assaulted by corporately controlled media that keep us delusional.

THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*

People tend to think that they have a choice about what information they take from television. And we are sitting and receiving a form of information, which is very very powerful. It comes in the form of images. And once the images go in, they don't come out. It's almost science fiction in its implications. It's Big Brother. And yet we think it's perfectly normal.

Kevin Mayer, Artist

As people's real lives become more and more degraded and unsatisfying and petty and vulgar and irritating and sterile, then the appeals of those glorified images become all the more powerful.

Derrick Jensen, *The Culture of Make Believe*

There's a great line by Zygmunt Baumann that - he says that rational people will go quietly and meekly into a gas chamber if only you allow them to believe it's a bathroom.

THE GOVERNMENT

And I've lost all hope that my government is capable of looking clearly at the situation.

THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Sadly, it looks as though much of our educational system leaves us totally unprepared to question the dominant culture.

Ran Prieur, *Civilization Will Eat Itself*

It numbs our critical thinking skills, instead of developing them. And it goes along with technical, industrialized society because you need to turn people into interchangeable machine parts where you can pull one person out, stick another person in the same spot.

Narrator (archival clip)

These children are being taught to accept uncritically whatever they're told. Questions are not encouraged.

I've certainly never been encouraged to question how our culture creates disconnection.

STRUCTURES OF DISCONNECTION

Richard Heinberg, *Powerdown*

Every one of us is living in this little comfortable bubble that's completely disconnected from the real world of animals and plants and soil and water and natural forces that produces everything that's of any meaning whatsoever on this planet.

Derrick Jensen, *Endgame*

If your experience is that your food comes from the grocery store, and that your water comes from a tap, you will defend to the death the system that brings those to you. Because your life depends on it. If your experience is that your water comes from a stream and that your food comes from a land base, you will defend to the death that stream and that land base because your life depends on it.

Chapter 17: Disconnection and Delusion

Systems of manipulation and exploitation. Structures of disconnection and delusion. Institutions of domination and deceit. I had to ask: who would create such things? Only

people who have become almost wholly disconnected from their world. People who have forgotten who they once were. People who have been deeply wounded.

We've gotten lost in a hall of mirrors.

THE HALL OF MIRRORS

Derrick Jensen

Everything that we receive - everything we see, hear, smell, taste, feel - originates in, or is mediated by, humans and machines.

Sally Erickson, Producer

That affects our consciousness. It gives us an inflated sense of our own importance and of what reality is. As if, because we've made it, it makes it most real. As any narcissist knows, it's endless. We can never get enough of that: enough of that reflection of ourselves. What we're really aching for is real relationship.

Our animal bodies, I think, formed by the Earth itself, want and require a real relationship to the world. To the water, wind and soil. To the animals, plants and fellow humans that comprise the community into which we were born. But we're stuck in the hall of mirrors. And we've begun to lose our sanity.

DISTORTED REFLECTIONS

Chellis Glendinning, *When Technology Wounds*

So that you see the beginning of something like dissociation, like post-traumatic stress disorder, like schizophrenia, like multiple personalities, you know. You see that the fragmentation in the world today is being mirrored in all of these kind of very severe psychological disorders.

Derrick Jensen, *A Language Older Than Words*

If you're in that sort of solitary confinement you're going to start hallucinating. And you may end up believing strange things. Like the idea that human are superior.

Acting out of that belief of superiority, of entitlement, of invincibility, Empire has conquered the world. But that conquering has bounced back on the conquerors, leaving everyone wounded.

THE WOUNDS OF EMPIRE

Chellis Glendinning,

My Name is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization

If the world, the system that we're living in, is harming other people, then that's something that, you know, you can't live with that. So if you look at the people

who have been assimilated into Empire, and if you look at the Imperialists themselves, you find an incredible dissociation from reality.

Dissociated from the reality of the planet, we don't act on its behalf.

DIMINISHED FEELINGS

Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*

Feeling for nature is diminishing to the degree that people are less desiring and less able to influence policy about nature, to do anything to protect nature, to have any feeling for nature. It's hard to have feeling for it if you never have any contact with it.

And it's hard to have any contact with the rest of the world because we're living like an animal in a cage.

THE CAGED ANIMAL

Richard Manning, *Against the Grain*

Just think about an animal in a zoo. An animal's deprived of the very things that keep that animal going: the smells, the sights, the sounds, the instincts, the hunting. And they become psychotic. Literally psychotic. I think that we've done something to ourselves that is exactly analogous to that. We've put ourselves in a cage – this cage of civilization, of cities. And it's made us, in a way, psychotic. That if you would have a group of hunter-gatherers – and this has happened a lot – hunter-gatherers watch behavior of people in our society, they would think we were crazy for the way we behave. Because we are.

I stop. I listen. I watch the world. The disconnection is everywhere.

DISCONNECTION EVERYWHERE

Chellis Glendinning

You learn it as a child, you know. You learn to not feel the kind of pain that is inflicted upon you by the lack of connection. By being in a crib by yourself in a dark room, you know. By not having the breastfeeding. By not having the constant contact with other people's bodies.

Jerry Mander

Television viewing for children, and I think to some degree for adults, is a training for more hyperactive lifestyles and hyperactive informational systems. And that is putting people into a kind of emotional psychological state, which makes it impossible to relate to nature. So, I mean, it's concrete alienation again.

Sally Erickson

Most of us don't have a human community where we can rest and feel safe and feel like "I'm going to be taken care of".

Ran Prieur, *Superweed*

In our culture there's so many things that are set up to stop us from connecting directly. If you go to a bar – we take this for granted – if you go to a bar it's dark. There's really loud music playing. Because if it were quiet and there were good light people would get freaked out to have to deal with each other so directly.

Our economy thrives on this. It's pretty easy to sell stuff to people who are so disconnected from the things that they most need. The stores are filled with bandages for the wounds of Empire.

Chapter 18: Abuse and Addiction

There are other ways to look at this wounding. Derrick Jensen sees the dominant culture as an abusive system, leaving its members suffering from Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

COMPLEX POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Derrick Jensen, *The Culture of Make Believe*

What happens if you're not traumatized once or twice, but if you're actually in captivity for a long time? If you're held as prisoner? One of the things that happens is you become afraid of all relationships and you have to control everything around you. You forget that mutual relationships are possible and you begin to believe that all relationships are based upon hierarchy. Because that was your experience. And you come to believe that all relationships are based on power. And, of course, when we look around that's what we see. So we are too frightened to enter into a relationship with these trees, with all of our neighbors. And so we call them resources: those to be exploited.

Everything within an abusive family structure is set up to protect the abuser. Everything. And by the same token, everything within this culture is set up to protect the rich. That's what this culture is about.

Why do so many victims of abuse stay with their abusers? Because they're identified with the system and they've been taught since they were very - since early on - that everything is about protecting that system. With civilization, we've been taught to identify with this larger whole that isn't us. We identify more strongly as "civilized" than we do as living beings.

Over the years I've begun to break my own identification with the dominant culture, to reconnect with myself as a living creature walking the Earth. I'm still not finished with the task. A daunting challenge. And yet one of the most rewarding things I've ever done.

I've also learned to view this culture through the lens of addiction.

ADDICTION

Sally Erickson, Producer

Addiction is based on continually seeking more of what it is we don't really want.
And therefore, never being fully satisfied.

Chellis Glendenning, *Off the Map*

There's a deep need. There's a deep hole, a deep longing, a deep fear, a deep grief, a deep rage.

Kevin Mayer, Artist

And so there's food, there's cigarettes, there's alcohol, there's drugs, there's computers, there's TV, there's movies, there's shopping, there's music...it's endless.

Chellis Glendenning

All of that, that we've now determined people can be addicted to, it's like a technological fix.

Kevin Mayer

So as long as that's working, why would I stop? I won't stop. An alcoholic doesn't stop. A drug addict doesn't stop as long as it's working. But you reach a point where it doesn't work any more.

After centuries of abuse, disconnection, delusion and addiction, it looks as though we're desperate to hit bottom.

Sally Erickson, Producer

It's almost as if we're wanting to hit bottom so hard that we either shift or die.
Cause it's not worth continuing like this.

Derrick Jensen

So many people are so very, very unhappy. And they want this nightmare to end.
And they don't recognize that the death that they want is a cultural death, and is a spiritual and metaphorical death.

Chapter 19: The Response So Far

That would explain why we continue to foul our nest. If what we want is to hit bottom, we've found the perfect means to get us there.

TRYING TO HIT BOTTOM

Denial... William Catton

...denial... Laurel Hopper

...denial... Tony Mayer

...denial... Derrick Jensen

...denial... Chellis Glendinning

...denial... Sally Erickson

Iain Walsh, Musician
... denial in huge neon letters that blink on and off like the old Rocky and Bullwinkle credits at the end of the show!

Again I stop. And listen. And watch as I move through the landscape of Empire. The denial is so thick that you could cut it with a paper knife. If only you weren't still using it to frost that cake.

THE DOWNSIDE OF DENIAL

Derrick Jensen
Denial takes tremendous energy. And if you have to work really, really hard to not acknowledge the fact that this culture's killing everything, you're not going to have much energy left over.

It's the energy I freed up when I stepped out of my own denial that has made this documentary possible. The more I let down my defenses, the more I find the power to look more deeply at the world.

And when I look I find the story of *somehow*, a fantasy that keeps us passive in the face of the world situation.

SOMEHOW

William Schlesinger, Duke University
We've muddled through things before. And somehow we'll muddle through this one.

Kevin Mayer

Somehow, everything's ok.

Derrick Jensen, *Endgame*

Somehow? How do we get there? You know? It's like - it doesn't do any good to fantasize if there's no way to get from here to there.

Is there a way to get from here to there? And where is there, exactly? Where do go from here? As world events break through our walls of denial, voices of helplessness and resignation fill the air.

HELPLESSNESS AND RESIGNATION

Iain Walsh

If we knew some way to get out of it we would. But we don't.

Sofia Simons

Whatever's gonna happen is gonna happen.

Judith Lessler

There's gonna have to be some sort of catastrophic event.

Kevin Mayer

A meltdown of all of these systems that we've been depending on.

Iain Walsh

We figure there's no way to stop the train from heading off the end of the bridge, you know. We're just gonna go down screaming.

Steve Erickson

And finally you just say, "Aww fuck it. This is... you know... let's just fuck it. Who cares?"

Tony Mayer

You know, we might as well go out and party and have a good time. Because the world's not going anywhere good.

This system feels like a trap, a madhouse, a prison. With resignation this profound, it seems as though there is little left to do but to make the prison as comfortable as is possible.

PADDING OUR CELLS

Narrator (archival clip)

Personalized. And with accessories engineered to our personalized taste. For convenience. For comfort. For convenience and safety. With protection from

rain. Blocking out the wintry gale with comforting warmth. To hold out the searing heat with cooling comfort.

Stacye Leanza, Artist

Capitalist culture is telling us to buy. And we will feel better if we buy more.

Tony Mayer, Naturalist/Builder

...that we are incomplete and that we need to fill this emptiness within us by consuming.

Sarah Erickson, Student

Consume, consume, consume.

We've looked now at the train that is hurtling us to destruction, at the tracks that constrain us, at the locomotive power that drives us to oblivion. And we see more clearly now exactly where we are headed. It all adds up to this: this culture is not only killing the planet, it is destroying us as human beings.

The train plunges forward at blinding speed. Charlie stole the handle.

So who are we going to be?

First Psychologist (archival clip)

In the film I see a man standing on the ledge. Do you think he really wants to live?

Second Psychologist (archival clip)

The answer, of course, is yes.

Ran Prieur

I don't think humans are going to go extinct. We can't kill ourselves off. I just don't see any plausible way it could happen... well... I guess... yeah... What we could - what might happen is the earth could get into a serious runaway greenhouse effect that could turn the whole planet like the planet Venus. Where it's like a thousand degrees and full of methane.

Part Four: Walkabout

Chapter 20: "If we don't change our direction..."

"If we don't change our direction, we are likely to wind up where we are headed."

Chinese Proverb

A powerful creative tension arises when we hold two things at the same time: a clear assessment of where we are, and a clear vision of where we want to go. I don't see that the culture of Empire has either. Trapped in a fantasy of domination and control, any

clear assessment of the world gets trampled underfoot in the mad march toward the scam of progress. Traumatized by disconnection and abuse, the people of Empire now hold visions that are unhinged and insane. Born and raised in captivity, we're now so institutionalized that few of us can even see the prison bars. But we all know our cell numbers.

Waking on the train, we find that we don't know where we are. And we don't know where we're going. We hear the whistle blowing. And we can see the world speeding by. Some of us want to stop the train. We want to get off before it reaches the end of the line. But we have no idea how to get from here to there.

Chapter 21: "Let us pray we have the wisdom..."

Daniel Quinn, *Tales of Adam*

The secret plan is that we're going to go on this way, no matter what, for as long as we can. I likened it to the secret plan in Nazi Germany. It was an open secret. Everyone knew that those Jews weren't going off to resorts or to have picnics in the woods. But no one talked about it. And no one talks about this either.

Barbara Janeway, Art Teacher

This is scary! We're in a democracy! We're in the biggest democracy on the planet and we're not getting informed. And we're not looking, either. We're not asking.

Richard Heinberg, *The Oil Depletion Protocol*

As civilization has provided more and more for us, it's made us more and more infantile. So that we are less and less able to think for ourselves, less and less able to provide for ourselves. And this makes us more of a herd... where you develop more of a herd mentality... where we take our cues from the people around us, from the authority figures around us.

"One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly."

Woody Allen

The situation is desperate. It's the World-Wide Eco-Slam, where Climate Crash goes head-to-head with The Peak Oil Kid and Overshoot tears into Mass Extinction. It's the Smackdown at the End of the Universe and tickets go on sale this Friday.

The American lifestyle is unsustainable. That means that it *can't be sustained*. It's coming to an end. Remember how thirty years ago we looked to the future and said "thirty years from now, if we don't act, we're going to be in trouble"? Well it's now and we are because we didn't.

The fundamental laws of life have been broken. The consequences of that are now apparent.

Remember the Secret Plan: the dominant culture is not going to stop until it destroys everything. It can't. It's built on a foundation of faulty assumptions. I see no way that it can be reformed. It can only be discarded, so that something new can grow in its place. We have to look at this.

Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*

We have lost a whole range of human understanding. Before there ever was science, humans understood the universe. How to relate to the universe. And then they had this idea of how to relate to the universe, something which is thrown off base when science comes in and tells you, "I'll tell you how to *run* the universe".

Daniel Quinn, *The Story of B*

We've got to understand that we are part of a living community. We're not the masters of the living community. We're not the guardians of the living community. We are just another species. And we have the power to destroy that community. And when we do that we destroy ourselves.

Kevin Mayer, Artist

If we don't figure out what our place in the universe is we're not going to have a place in the universe.

Chapter 22: "I didn't say it would be easy..."

"I didn't say it would be easy. I just said it would be the truth."

Morpheus, *The Matrix*

I have read many books about the world situation. And I have noticed a curious thing: the happy chapter. After an entire book of dire prognostications and appalling facts comes the chapter at the end that says that if we only do this and this and that we'll find the solution, that while there is much to give us concern, there is also much about which we can be hopeful.

I don't like happy chapters. They've lulled me back to sleep. They suggest that somebody somewhere somehow is handling it. I can just go on with my life. And hey, we've got thirty years or so, right? That's lots of time.

I'm sorry, folks, but I think time's up. I have no happy chapter to offer you; no list of quick and painless fixes; no plan that will keep the train rolling forever on this track. I see no way for that to happen. If there is going to be a happy chapter, we shall have to write it together, with the rest of the community of life, on the pages of the living world.

Otis Graham, Professor of History Emeritus, UC – Santa Barbara

I sometimes have dreams about my grandchildren coming also. And these dreams sometimes turn unpleasant. Because the grandchildren come from a North Carolina and from a California that is polluted, the air they can't breathe. And they say, "Granddad, did you let that happen?" And they're angry when they get there.

Sally Erickson, Producer

I think they're going to look back and shake their heads and say, "what happened to those people? How did they lose sight of such basic things?"

Chapter 23: "We are the ones we've been waiting for..."

The time of the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves!... We are the ones we've been waiting for.

A Hopi Elder Speaks

There is a new story arising in the world: the story of the Great Turning, the turning away from a culture of domination and death, and the turning toward a culture that is life-sustaining and life-renewing.

All over the planet, people are now telling this story. The Buddhist scholar and deep ecologist Joanna Macy tells this story in her workshops. The writer and activist David Korten tells it in his book by the same name. It's a story to be told by our descendents, looking back on this present time.

Will we be the monsters of our great-grandchildren's nightmares? Or will we walk, as the story of the Great Turning says, as heroes and healers in the epic poetry of those still-unborn voices? Will we be reviled for our entitled, destructive ways? Or will we be lovingly remembered in the songs of our descendents as they recount the story of this lost and very wounded tribe that stepped back from the abyss and found its way home to the community of living souls?

We get to choose. Who are we going to be?

Kevin Mayer, Artist

Part of me still wishes that someone would just take care of it, you know. That it's their job. That's what we pay them for. They're supposed to be the wise parents of us. It's going to come as a really rude awakening when people realize that a) they can't and b) they won't.

Sally Erickson, Producer

I don't think life for most Americans, despite our affluence, is all that it's been cracked up to be. And people are afraid to talk about that. They're afraid they're the only ones that are experiencing deep dissatisfaction.

Richard Heinberg, *The Party's Over*

It's really so sad, you know. You look at – and particularly American culture is emblematic of this – go to a typical shopping mall and look at the people around you and the environment around you. And the utter shallowness and hopelessness of it all is profoundly depressing.

Chapter 24: “Be bold...”

“Be bold, and mighty forces will come to your aid.”

Basil King

Look.

Is this who are we? Consumers? Shoppers? Workers? Voters? Does our identity lie in Nielson numbers and box office receipts and the Gross Domestic Product? Are we on this Earth to sell cheeseburgers to each other and yell at our children and drive around in clown cars and fall asleep in front of the tube? Are we destroying the planet, as Dmitry Orlov asks, just “to be somewhat more comfortable for a little while”?

I keep having to remind myself: this culture is not humanity. It is only one culture out of the tens of thousands that used to exist on this planet. Only one culture out of the many that are still hanging on. That it has overrun the world means nothing about its rightness, its greatness, or its destiny. It means only that we live in a system of social evolution that selects for short-term power rather than for compassion, or for sanity, or for long-term survival.

I think we are much more than we've ever been allowed to believe. Denied the connection and meaning that nourishes us, we've grown small and stunted in the shallow soil of this culture.

It's time to revitalize that ground of our being.

Harvey Harman, Sustenance Farm

What really is important, and what adds value and what adds you know...what does a life well-lived look like?

Chellis Glendinning, *Off the Map*

Humans have a history of living much more in touch with the natural world, with the planet. Much more sustainable. Much more spiritual. Much more communal. That's who we are.

Richard Heinberg

As of all this starts to shift and change and disintegrate and collapse, there's the opportunity, in fact, to come back to ourselves. To grow up, fundamentally, as people and as a culture.

We're in a time of initiation, folks. A mass initiation at the level of culture itself. A Vision Quest for the collective mind. This culture's arrogance, its adolescent sense of invincibility and entitlement, must be sloughed off to make room for a more mature sense of interdependence with, and responsibility to, the community of life. This is the work of initiation.

Stepping into this cultural maturity, we will take our rightful place in the community of life. And we will fall back in love with the world.

We can do this. But only if we choose to. Only if we lay down our weapons in this insane war against the world. Only if we surrender control and move back into relationship.

Thomas Berry

The grandeur of the human is not in controlling the planet Earth but it is in being integral with the planet Earth.

You want unlimited growth? You can have it. All you've ever wished for and more. Growth in relationship and experience. In self-awareness and spirit and love and community and connection. Growth in purpose and meaning. Growth in vision.

When we step back into the community of life, we will find out immediately what has always been true: all of life is on our side. We'll have polar bears on our team. And Elm trees. And condors and salmon and dragonflies and plankton. We'll walk with the wind and the water, with mountains underfoot and stars overhead. The tiger's blood will course through our veins. The horse's breath will fill our lungs. We'll be more connected to real power than we've ever dreamt possible in our sick fantasy of domination. Power with. Not power over. The power of a species that has passed through initiation and into maturity.

Sally Erickson, Producer

I think we need to look at what is it we want and see if civilization as we've created it is giving us that. And if it's not, what might give us that?

Derrick Jensen, *Endgame*

What does it mean to dismantle civilization? What it means is depriving the rich of the ability to steal from the poor and to destroy the world. I can't give a better definition than that.

Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*

There's no real reason why the entire country of the United States couldn't face reality. You just have to drop the idea of capitalism. You have to drop the idea of corporations running things. You have to drop the idea of economic growth. It could be done. It could be done.

Chapter 25: “And the day came...”

Derrick Jensen

There was a great tradition among the Cheyenne dog soldiers called the picket pin and stake. They would get a tanned rope, called a dog rope, and a picket pin, that's used to stake horses to the ground, and they would attach the picket pin to the sash, the dog rope that was attached to them. And then in battle they would drive the picket stake into the ground. And that was done as a mark of resolve. Because once it's driven, you can't leave. Until either you're dead, or you're relieved by another dog soldier, or the battle's over and everyone is safe. So the question I ask people is, you know, at what point, you know, where will you drive your picket pin? Where will you stake yourself out and say “I'm not going to retreat any more”?

“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”

Anais Nin

Our descendents are watching us.

How will we be?

It's time to be thoughtful, coming together to learn about the world as it really is. Reading between the lies. Doing the math. Studying the world situation. There will be a quiz. A paradigm shift will require that we question our deepest and most fundamental assumptions. And that will require that we take our current worldview gently in our arms and hold it while it breathes its last

Step into a new story. Walk away from the pyramids. Get out of the crumbling building. Break out of prison. Choose your favorite metaphor. Choose your own adventure. But choose.

It's time to be truthful. Millions of sensual pulsing animal bodies are now living trapped and used and starved in cities and cubicles and sweatshops and food courts and traffic jams and suburbs and public school classrooms.

People who are not rich and white already know this.

What would happen if we let ourselves feel our feelings about all of this? The entire community of life of this planet is now being threatened. Where do we stick our picket pins? Where do we take a stand? When do we find the courage to let ourselves feel what is going on?

Our feelings are the swiftest path back to our forgotten selves.

It's time to be open and humble. There are huge forces at work in the world, both seen and unseen. It's time to ask for help. Ask the ancestors. Ask the gods. Ask your God. Go outside and lie down on the Earth and ask the land, and the sky, and the life of this place.

And then listen for a response. Listen to the voices of soil and stone, wind and water, the voices of cirrus clouds and chickadees, of red squirrels and wood beetles and Russian olives and hickories. The world will tell us what it knows, if only we will be still. And listen.

And then speak. It's time to show up in our own lives and tell the truth. It's time to talk about the world situation with everyone we see. We're all in this together. What a relief it'll be, to discover that we are not alone.

It's time to act with great intention. There is work aplenty to do in this weary world, and people engaged in that work. Find those people. Join in. Save rivers and stop bulldozers and stand up at city council meetings to tell your truth. Share skills. Evolve local economies. Move from agriculture to permaculture and grow your own food. Learn about medicinal herbs. As Derrick Jensen says, "we need it all." Find your work, and do it. It's time.

But what about that speeding train?

How will the Great Turning turn?

We can wait for the train to crash on its own and hope that it doesn't kill us, and everything else. But with the children grown, perhaps we can come together and decide to dismantle, joyfully and with conscious intent, the rusty and dangerous old swing-set of a culture that no longer serves us.

This may seem an impossible task. But if the alternative is extinction, then we have nothing to lose.

We humans once knew how to live on this planet. A few still do. And that's the good news. It can be done. We can do way, way better than Empire.

Chapter 26: "Lose sight of the shore..."

"One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time."

Andre Gide

Let's jump off the train and build a boat. The train is constrained to rigid tracks and its momentum makes it almost impossible to steer. But the boat? Ah, the boat is a very different thing. Boats set sail into the unknown, subject only to wind and wave and weather. Boats can be lifeboats, preserving wisdom and understanding while the storm

rages overhead. Boats can be arks, safeguarding the life of the world as the floodwaters rise. And boats can carry us into adventure, away from the shores of the current paradigm and to those unseen shores of a future not yet written.

Find your people and build a boat. Build a local community to serve the world and preserve the life of a piece of land. Or set sail in the wider world, interrupting the destruction, healing the wounds, crafting connections and changing minds.

Build a boat. A lifeboat. An ark. A galleon of adventure and imagination destined for unknown lands. Build it now. The ice is melting. The waters are rising. We're going to have to let go of the shore.

I do not know if I will survive the crash of industrial civilization or the impacts of the climate change that that civilization has unleashed. I do know this: I have a choice about how I meet it. I have a choice. We have a choice.

I can meet it with a burger in my hand, a French fry in my mouth, and a cold drink spilling onto my jeans. Or I can meet it with consciousness, integrity, and the sense of purpose that is my birthright. I can meet it on the far side of initiation, a mature and related member of the community of life, standing tall, doing my best to protect and serve this Earth that I love.

This is the course I've chosen. This is my picket pin: I will show up and I will tell my truth.

But it's hard to sail alone, when the seas rage so fiercely. If you sail with me, we shall both be made stronger. And when others join us, then our crew will be made strong indeed.

Together, we will set forth, to find that new land.

What a way to go...

Chapter 27: End Credits