

*A terrorist is stalking Representatives of Homeland Security attending a meeting at a wilderness lodge in Pennsylvania. The man is an expert sniper trained by our military, and Vic must find him before he fires a shot. Using only a bow and arrow Vic nearly accomplishes the mission.*

## **SURVIVAL INSTINCT**

by Larry R. Nixon

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LARRY R. NIXON



SURVIVAL  
INSTINCT

# **SURVIVAL INSTINCT**

**A Vic Flint novel**

**Larry R. Nixon**

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First Edition

Also by Larry Nixon

**ASSASSIN INVISIBLE**  
**2005**

**FEAR INSTINCT**  
**2007**

**SNIPER INSTINCT**  
**2010**

**REVENGE INSTINCT**  
**2012**



I want to thank the following people for their help with this novel:

Lois Houghton for her advice and expert editing. There's none better.

Dan Turner for his aid in the structure of the novel and for his social satire. He has been somewhat involved in every manuscript, but still takes no blame.

Linda Di Ciaccio, I love her name.

Carol Stark for keeping me on point and not telling me what I want to hear.

And my publisher, BookLocker, for always being there.





This novel is dedicated to the memory of Denny:

**Dennis Dale Neville**

**September 1968**

**October 2013**

**Death ends a life, not a relationship**

Reference from Tuesday with Morrie

By Mitch Albom

**ALS sucks**

Quote by Larry R. Nixon



*'The two most important days in a man's life was  
the day he was born and the day he learned why.'*

Mark Twain



# CHAPTER ONE

Celebrating a heroine.

July 4, 2006 (Stickton, Montana)

I have spent a lot of time in the mountains of the west and I love them all, the Cascades in Washington, the Black Hills in South Dakota, the Grand Tetons in Wyoming, and especially the Rockies in Colorado. Right now I am surrounded by the mountains of Montana, but I can't say I'm enjoying them. The scenery around here is outstanding, but when you're in an auditorium filled with people wanting you dead, you don't have the mindset for enjoyment no matter how beautiful the surrounding scenery is.

The danger I'm in is of my own doing, or more accurately, of my own stupidity. As a result of my recklessness in showing up for this exhibition, three possible scenarios come to mind:

# 1: At the end of this meeting, I get up and walk away.

# 2: A few people recognize me, and lock me up to await punishment.

# 3: Someone recognizes me and shoots me in the back of the head.

Clearly, scenario number 1 is the most desirable, but number 3 may be better than number 2.

I'm sitting in a dimly lit auditorium waiting for the presentation to begin, hosted by the Mountain Men, a rightwing militia based here in Stickton, Montana. This celebration was planned to honor a returning heroine, Emma Carnahan. She is returning after serving a short term in a Florida prison. While there, rumor has it she slit the throat of ex-Senator Carol Smart who was serving a term for manslaughter. Although the prison authorities believed Emma was guilty of the murder, she was never charged, lack of evidence their excuse. Ex-Senator Smart was hated by all, inmates and guards alike. In spite of a black mark against them, the penitentiary officials preferred to let the murder remain unsolved indirectly rewarding the person responsible for the ex-senator's death.

Carol Smart's demise is a good thing as far as I'm concerned. For one thing, it saved me a lot of trouble.

Emma killed Smart in the belief that she had ordered the assassination of two members of the Mountain Men Militia, Emma's sister Jennifer Cole and Jennifer's husband Joseph, again saving me a lot of trouble. Emma was correct. Ex-Senator Smart had indeed sent the two assassins who killed the Cole's.

There is no doubt that Emma got herself sentenced to prison in order to get back at Smart. *Speaking of rumors, there is no truth to the one that claims I told Emma where Carol Smart was incarcerated.*

Along with honoring Emma Carnahan, the program was designed to attract new members to the militia by presenting an explanation of their philosophies and insight into their future plans. I am here to learn how those plans will adversely affect me, as I am positive they will.

With my hat tipped forward attempting to disguise my features, I stood and studied the audience. The room was full of men and women wearing cowboy hats and jeans. I knew most of them were armed, both men and women. The crowd armed or not, wanted me dead. Fortunately no one has recognized me yet. If they do, a small riot will start with the armed members fighting each other over the honor of killing me. Maybe a little bit of an exaggeration, but not by much.

In the past, the Mountain Men sent assassins to murder me. *Mysteriously*, these hit men never returned from their missions. They just disappeared. In spite of that, I believe they are rounding up more bodies to send to their slaughter hoping one will get lucky and kill me. My patience, what little I had to start with, is gone. If I survive this meeting, I will return to put an end to their attempts, and if at all possible abolish the militia.

As I sat back down, I inadvertently caught the eye of a young woman sitting two rows in front of me. We locked gazes for two seconds before she blinked and turned away. At first I was concerned, but since she didn't raise an alarm, I forgot about her. Obviously, she was simply impressed by my masculine good looks.

Last month, I heard of a campaign initiated by the militia setting the stage for another attempt on my life. After the humiliations I handed out to them in the past, they felt the need to rebuild their credibility. To do that, they plan to find someone formidable enough to take me on. You'd think because of their previous failures they would realize they were playing my game, a game I do not lose, and would stop sending men to their death. But no, each man in the militia wants a chance at me, a chance to prove he is a superior *warrior*, and deserves the militia's highest respect. How better to prove that than by killing their archenemy, Victor Flint?

My full name is Victor Allen Flint, Vic for short. I am quite average in appearance, not intimidating at all, in fact just the opposite. I am 33 years old, 6 feet tall and weigh in at a solid 180 pounds. Officially I work for The Swamp Office in South Florida developing and testing experimental weapons for the military and training combatants in their use. Although my primary duties involve field work, occasionally my responsibilities include researching data using a *top-secret* artificial intelligence computer program (AI for short), developed by Susan MacDonald and fine-tuned by me. It performs normal search engine functions similar to Google, but beyond that, it can predict the future in exacting detail. In some incidences we have used it to change the future as well. Once we discovered the full capabilities of this program, we realized its danger and placed our own top-secret label on it. No one can be trusted with this much power. Imagine what politicians would do with this program. As it is, their greed is legendary. With AI, it would be limitless.

The AI program is the main reason Senator Smart and the Mountain Men wanted Susan and me dead. The Mountain Men have a partial copy of the program and believe with our deaths it will become fully operational. I do not think that is true, but I am not interested in disproving their theory. How they obtained the copy is another story.

Smart and the Coles are not the only ones who know of the AI program. The CIA knows a little about it and wants to obtain it. For several years, they have been engaged in a quest looking for the

computer containing the program, but have not been able to find it, and they never will.

When Susan and I placed our top-secret label on the program we had all government agencies in mind. As I said before, no one can be trusted with this program. We have tried, successfully to keep the full capabilities of AI hidden. If the CIA ever finds out that AI not only predicts the future, but can change it as well, they would go to any extreme to get possession of it. I am not anxious to see if I can withstand waterboarding again. A training exercise, set up by the military, exposed me to a quick example of waterboarding, and I'm not ready to go through that again. It was not fun.

That completes a cursory description of my official duties at The Swamp Office. My unofficial duties fall under an entirely different category. At times, I work for FBI Agent Daniel Di Ciaccio, or for Colonel Samuel Hileman, an active duty military officer and the initiator of my waterboarding exercise. My position with them has no title that accurately describes my duties. When working on their projects I think of myself as 'The Fixer'. When fixing these special problems for Di Ciaccio, or Hileman, I have absolutely no restrictions on my methods, (007 like) as long as I achieve the appropriate results. Only my conscience is my guide.

I am no longer in the military, but my military background included training similar to that received by Navy Seals and Army Special Forces. These skills are sometimes needed when fixing their *special* problems. Observing me from afar, the CIA has been trying to get me away from Hileman and Di Ciaccio, but the truth is the CIA isn't really interested in me; they are only interested in gaining access to the AI program.

During times of great urgency when plausible deniability is essential, and the CIA can't be trusted, which is often, I work for the military under Colonel Hileman, a Special Forces officer, or the FBI under Agent Di Ciaccio. To keep in shape for these duties, the Colonel demands I maintain an intense workout regimen which not only includes physical conditioning, but hand to hand combat as well. Thanks to these demands, I owe my life to Colonel Hileman. Of



course if I hadn't been working on assignments for him or the FBI, I wouldn't have needed those skills to start with.

I have been considered a mercenary or a killer-for-hire contractor. That is not true. I have only killed during war, in self-defense, or to protect the innocent. I have scars to prove my self-defense claims. Unfortunately, my clean record may not last for long. The Mountain Men are trying to ruin that image, and I am beginning to feel obligated to help them.

I look back on my missions with no remorse, but I do have one regret. Months before 9/11, I had my sniper rifle lined up on the chest of a tall Saudi in Afghanistan, but I was commanded to stand down. I followed orders and did not squeeze the trigger. I am positive that man was Osama ben Laden, but friends of his in Washington sent the order to abort the mission.

Early in my training, Colonel Hileman told me that I always had the final say on my missions, go or no-go. In this instance, I could have pulled the trigger and he would have backed me. In spite of the order to abort, I nearly made the shot anyway, but believing Washington knew what they were doing, I aborted the mission as they commanded. When it comes to dealing with politicians, I will never make that assumption again. The politicians who ordered the abort did not know what they were doing, but then, do they ever???

A little background on the Mountain Men:

They have been around since Viet Nam when anti-war zealots were prominent across the nation, but there were no anti-war zealots in Stickton, Montana. Instead, the citizens banded together with bonds of patriotism. Unfortunately, there was one negative result. A small group of ultra-rightwing idiots formed the militia. They took the name 'Mountain Men' named after the trappers who came to the Rockies in the 1800's trapping the abundant fur-bearing animals. The original mountain men were engaged in ongoing battles with the Indians. Kill or be killed was a way of life for them. The modern-day Mountain Men feel the same way about the liberal-controlled Federal Government and all nonwhites.

The militia was founded on the principle that no man was good enough to be called an American unless he was white, Christian, and

could shoot a gun. Killing traitors is acceptable, and in their minds, all liberal politicians are traitors. They believe the laws being enforced are designed to protect politicians, the guilty, and the rich, but definitely not the poor nor the conservatives. I agree with them about the laws being slanted.

Since butting heads with the Mountain Men several years ago, and to keep abreast of their movements, Susan MacDonald and I started receiving Stickton's weekly newspaper. Through it we learned of the celebration scheduled for the Fourth of July. Emma Carnahan was to be greeted with a heroine's welcome in her hometown of Stickton, Montana. In hopes of swelling their membership numbers, the Mountain Men opened the celebration to all white Americans. All others would not be allowed to enter the auditorium.

In past years enemies of the Mountain Men have gone missing. Although no bodies have been found, the FBI is convinced they were murdered by the militia's hit squad. Two of the missing men were informants working undercover for the FBI. Two years ago I nearly added to that statistic when three Mountain Men came after me. They are no longer around to regret their actions.

After learning of this celebration, I travelled to Montana to attend the festival. My identity, hidden by dyed hair and an emerging beard, was the only safe way I could appear at the gathering. The Mountain Men hated me, and had placed a bounty on my head, preferably no longer attached to my body.

Following a short propaganda filled commentary by the leader of the militia; Emma gave a long impromptu speech about the history of the militia, and answered questions from the audience. She ended her speech by reading from a prepared summation:

"I know it's late so I won't keep you much longer." She said as she glanced toward the rear of the audience.

She continued, "Four years ago today, my sister Jennifer, and her husband Joseph Cole were murdered. Last year, ex-Senator Carol Smart, the person who ordered their assassination, had her throat cut, in a Florida prison by an *unknown person*."

Her dialogue was interrupted by a long and loud ovation.

She held her hands up to quiet the audience and continued, “Senator Smart was serving a prison term in Florida for an unrelated manslaughter charge. However, cutting her throat only partially vindicates the Cole’s murder. There are debts still to be collected in regards to their assassination.”

Cries echoed from the crowd agreeing with Emma’s statement.

“I believe a man named Victor Flint took part in my sister’s death. He and a degenerate Indian from the nearby Blackfoot Indian reservation had a hand in the disappearance and most likely the demise of three of our highly celebrated citizens, one of whom was my husband, Bruce.”

Boos and catcalls resonated throughout the auditorium. Emma made a show of blinking back tears.

“These three men, along with the Indian acting as their guide, were given the responsibility of apprehending Victor Flint and returning him here to Stickton to stand trial for his part in my sister’s murder. Claiming insufficient evidence, no police organization in Montana would issue a warrant for Flint’s arrest, so we wrote our own.

“Our posse chased him all the way to Southern Colorado, where they disappeared. Alone, the Redskin returned carrying a rifle belonging to one of the posse, claiming they were lost in the mountains. We paid that filthy, degenerate, Blackfoot a lot of money to assist in tracking Flint through the mountains. Our brave men vanished, and the Indian’s story of their disappearance made no sense. He most assuredly aided Victor Flint in trapping and killing our brave men. Our heroes were too smart and experienced for one man, acting alone, to defeat them. Only a traitor could have tricked them into lowering their guard. It took little thinking on our part to determine the Redskin’s roll in that atrocious plot.

“As you leave tonight, please take notice of a TV monitor, near the exit, displaying an artist’s renditions of Flint in various disguises. Soon, a billboard displaying these pictures and offering a reward for apprehending him will be built outside the entrance to the Mountain

Men's complex. We expect Flint to return to Stickton in the near future." She grinned, "We will be waiting."

She hesitated for effect and scanned the audience before continuing, "As I mentioned before, there are three missing men but Joseph Cole has a brother, Jim, who has been missing for many years. Our research shows that Flint was in the area at the same time as Jim's disappearance. At that time several mysterious things happened. First, a mentally challenged sharpshooter was killed, a popular deputy sheriff was seriously wounded, and a beautiful half-breed woman was also wounded from ambush by the same gun, most assuredly Flint's gun."

Emma wiped tears from her eyes, and took a deep breath before continuing, "Everyone who enters our complex will see a display inside the entryway built as a memorial to our missing men. Mounted on the display, you will see the rifle returned by that Redskin along with pictures of all four of these missing heroes. Our most trusted members and our best combatants will understand the significance of this display. In retribution, we will dole out severe punishment to all traitors of our holy country, the true United States of America, starting with the apprehension of Victor Flint even if we have to travel all the way back east to grab him. The top of the display will remain vacant awaiting the picture of the man or woman responsible for Flint's capture.

"One more thing," Emma said in closing. "In the previous statement, I used the phrase 'apprehension of Victor Flint'. The word 'apprehension' was used rather loosely."

Someone yelled from the audience, "What about the Redskin? We gonna let him get away with his part in this?"

"One thing at a time, sir," Emma smiled. "The Indian goes by the name of Spike, and lives on the local reservation, but never comes into Stickton. He knows better. She waved and turned to walk off the stage smiling at the thundering applause, but stopped and returned to the microphone.

She held up her hand to quiet the crowd. She said, "Please don't forget, as you leave tonight, take time to view the large flat-screen TV sitting near the exit. Memorize the display of Victor Flint's photo

and touched up renditions of him in various disguises.” She smiled at the crowd and walked off the stage. The applause was louder than before. The auditorium lights brightened.

It’s nice to be appreciated, I thought, as I stood and tipped my Stetson lower on my head. Emma’s closing remarks eliminated all faith in my disguise. I moved into the side isle. The girl I had made brief eye contact stepped in front of me, and tapped me on the arm. She was in her late teens or early twenties.

She whispered, “Follow me Mr. Flint. I’ve seen those photos, and you’ll never get out the main exit without someone recognizing you.”

“You think I look like Flint!” I said.

She nodded, “I have no doubt.”

I was shocked, but I had to trust her. If she wanted to turn me in, all she had to do was yell, and the riot would begin.

“I was thinking about using the Emergency Exit,” I said.

She motioned toward the exit. “Good idea, but read the sign on the door.”

I glanced at it. It read:

‘THIS DOOR IS FOR EMERGENCIES ONLY. AN ALARM WILL SOUND.’

She said, “Get ready. I’m going to open the door setting off the alarm. You duck through before anyone looks. I’ll look embarrassed as if opening the door was an accident.”

“I can’t let you do that,” I said, “I don’t want you connected to me in any way. It would be better if you stayed away from me.”

“You’re probably right, but be careful. If someone recognized you as you came in, they may be waiting outside.”

“They would have called me out by now if that was the case. Once outside, I’ll hurry away before anyone comes.” I hesitated and then added, “I’m going to need a local connection when I return. Would you help me? I need an ally.”

“You’re returning? Why?”

“One way or another I have to put a stop to this insane organization.”

“I understand, Mr. Flint, but I can’t be your ally. These people frighten me. I am positive they killed my brother, two years ago.”

“They killed him?”

“His body has never been found, but I’m sure they are responsible for his disappearance.”

“Why do you think that?”

“He was a member of their organization. I think he discovered something terrible about them. Our family didn’t condone their principals, so I never understood why he joined the militia to start with.”

“Could he have been working for the FBI?”

“That never crossed my mind, but nooooo . . . . At least I don’t think so.”

She looked at me for a few seconds, shook her head as if reaffirming her thoughts, and said, “No, I’d have known . . . . . but maybe. I just don’t know.”

“I have talked to the FBI about the Mountain Men. They had two informants planted inside that organization. Both disappeared. Maybe your brother was one of them. I really need help here. Just meet me somewhere where we won’t be noticed. I need to talk to someone local. I promise not to put you in danger.”

She shook her head, “No.”

I sighed, “You’re right. As the speaker said, I will be returning here in the near future. Just give me a cell phone number where I can contact you before I come back.”

“Can you wait until the end of August? I will be out of town at school by then.”

“Sounds acceptable,” I said, and pulled a card out of my wallet. “Here’s a card with my phone number. When you’re back at school, buy a disposable phone and call me and give me its number. Do not use your personal phone whenever you talk to me. I don’t think they are sophisticated enough to tap in to cellphone conversations, but why take the chance. By the way, what’s your name?”

“Lisa Cross.”

“Okay Lisa, when you call me, the person answering the phone will say, ‘How may I direct your call? ‘You answer by just saying my name, nothing more. They’ll then ask for your name. Say nothing at all, unless you are under duress.’”

“Duress?”

“Yes. If someone is forcing you to make the call just answer by saying ‘Lisa’. Either way you will be connected to my phone, but if you give your name, the operator will interpret that you are having a problem and let me know.”

She cringed, looked around, and hurried away. Once she had mingled with the exiting crowd and was lost to my sight, I forced the emergency door open. The siren screamed, and I slipped through, hopefully before anyone got a good look at me. Behind me, the door slammed shut and locked.

As I stepped outside into the dark, two men rushed around the front corner of the building hurrying toward me to check out the siren. They slowed as they approached.

“Where ya think you’re going. You ain’t supposed to use that door.”

“My mistake, sir,” I answered, putting on a western drawl, hoping the darkness and the accent would hide my identity.

“Just get back inside and use the front door.”

“Can’t, it locked.” I slouched trying to look small and nonthreatening.

They moved nearer. One man was about my size and the other about four inches taller and at least forty pounds heavier.

The smaller one was the talker. “Follow me into the light, buddy. Let’s get a look at you.”

“That’s okay, sir. My car is parked out back. I’m going the other way.” I turned away.

“Hold on,” the talker said. “Ain’t no parking back there, and you ain’t goin’ nowhere till I get a good look at you.”

I turned and waited for them. “I am very sorry. I accidentally used the wrong exit.”

“Was no accident. You was sneakin’ out.”

The little guy pulled the bottom of his jacket aside and rested his hand on a holstered handgun.

“Whoa there pal. I don’t want any trouble,” I pleaded. “Are you cops? If you are, show me some ID.”

“Ain’t no cop. We’re soldiers with the Mountain Men,” the smaller man said. Got more authority around here than any cop. Now turn around. Let me frisk you.”

“Just back up, you pervert.” I shoved him away. He staggered.

He yelled, “Wait a minute, you’re Flint, the murderer.”

“Damn you,” the big guy swore, and clamped his heavily callused hand onto my left arm. It felt like my arm was being crushed in a vice. Although the light was dim, I could make out the bulk of this guy, and it was obvious he was no stranger to the weightlifting room at the gym. With a chest like Schwarzenegger and forearms like Popeye, he was handling me as if I was nothing more than a small child. He spun me around and pulled me tight to his massive chest, and looked me in the eye. “You’re dead meat pal.”



## CHAPTER TWO

Vic a ninja?

July 6, 2006 (Hospital in Stickton, Montana)

“You two clowns are imbeciles,” Emma screamed at two men lying in hospital beds. “You let one puny guy put both of you in the hospital. What the hell do you think of yourselves? You shot yourself in the leg and the other idiot over there is blathering away like a two year old.”

“But Ma’am, he caught us by surprise.”

“Explain it to me, shithead. How could a wimp like him surprise you and put both of you out of action?”

“He was not much bigger than me. That’s how he surprised us. The big numbskull Paul thought he could handle him with no trouble. He grabbed him like he was going to bear hug him to death, but the next thing I knew Paul was on the ground his nose smashed and blood coming from the back of his head. All I could see was the whites of his eyes. I thought he was dead. Faster than the eye could follow, the man smashed Paul’s nose with his elbow and then followed that up with a head butt to his already smashed nose, blood all over his face and on the guy’s forehead, and then he slammed Paul’s head against the brick wall. Sounded like a ax hitting a tree. The guy just wasn’t playing fair.”

“So you felt if you shot yourself in the leg he wouldn’t pick on you? Is that right?”

“No ma’am. I started to pull my gun, but before I could get it out of my holster, he kicked my gun hand and it went off. When I saw what he had done to Paul, I was gonna kill him, but he kicked me before I could draw my gun. I’m a really fast draw, ma’am, but he was lightning quick. We didn’t have a chance. Must’a had ninja training.”

“Ninja training, my ass! You both screwed up and let him walk away.”

“I don’t understand how he got away? Why didn’t someone out front grab him?”

“I was standing by the front door. He ran by me yelling that two guys were fighting and one shot the other. *Call the cops. Don’t go back there. Blood everywhere*, he yelled.”

“He got away? Still don’t know why someone didn’t recognize him?”

“If a girl ran past you with her tits hanging out, would you remember her face? I don’t think so. All we saw was a man with blood all over his face. Except for the blood, no one could describe him. Everybody thought he’d been shot, including me.”

“Must’a been Paul’s blood. Where’d he go?”

“No one paid any attention. You were screaming so loudly that they forgot all about him. You were bawling like a baby. They fell all over themselves getting back to help you.”

July 8, 2006 (Swamp Office Florida)

I was finishing a preliminary report on an experimental pair of night vision glasses when Susan stepped into my office. Much to her chagrin, I call her SueMac.

“What were you doing in Montana? I told you to stay away from there,” SueMac said. “You put two men in the hospital, almost killed one of them.”

“Good morning to you, Sue. How are you this fine hot humid Florida morning?”

“I am not in the mood for this, Victor. Answer me.”

“You know I didn’t kill anyone. I’m sure you already asked AI about that.”

“Tell me exactly what happened, Victor, and do not try to tone it down.”

I sighed, shook my head, and answered, “As you know I attended the militia’s meeting to find out what they had planned for me. It came as no surprise that they are planning to kill me. They offered a 5000 dollar reward for the person who shows up with my head.”

“That is an exaggeration and you know it, Victor.”

“Only a little, Sue, but they do want me dead.”

“I do not care about that. As long as you stay away from there and stay out of sight you will be safe.”

“I am not going to hide from them.”

“It will not be a problem. We will get AI to devise a plan to keep you safe.”

“And what about my friends? Will you ask AI to devise a plan to keep all of them safe, too?”

“I doubt very much that the Mountain Men care anything about your friends, Victor, but if it comes to that, yes I will.”

I shook my head, again. “I know those creeps. They will do anything to ‘*Get Even*’.”

“You are just guessing. Now I want to hear about your encounter with those poor men you put in the hospital, step by step,” SueMac demanded.

“Poor men??? You’ve got to be kidding me.” I shook my head. “Okay. I’ll try to remember. It all happened so fast.”

Actually, at the time everything seemed to happen in slow motion, my *Fear Instinct* mode. I remembered everything in minute detail, but SueMac wouldn’t understand that.

I took a deep breath and began. “The door I used to exit the building had an alarm connected to it. When I went through it, it went off, and two men, probably assigned to oversee the people leaving the building, came charging from the front. They grabbed me, at least the big guy did. He was at least six-foot four, 250 pounds, with barbells for fists and he had me right where he wanted me, or so he thought. Before he could do anything, I made like I was going to kiss him on the cheek. With my left arm still in his grip, he pushed me away and I spun to my right and brought my elbow up hitting him in the nose. I put everything I had into the blow. I connected so hard my elbow went numb. He released my arm to cover his bleeding nose. With both of his hands clasped to his face, I grabbed his arms by his biceps, yanked him toward me, and slammed my forehead against his already smashed and bloody nose. Although his hands were covering his nose, blood splattered everywhere a good portion going into his eyes and onto my forehead. He staggered

backward and I aided his momentum by driving my shoulder into his chest slamming him against the brick wall. His head took the full brunt of the blow, and he dropped to the ground out cold.”

“That poor man. Why did you have to smash his head against the wall? Were you trying to kill him?”

I ignored her *rhetorical* question and continued, “Out of the corner of my eye I saw the little man start to pull his gun, but before it cleared the holster, I kicked the hand that was clinching the gun. It went off; the slug ripped into his thigh, and he fell to the ground screaming. I kicked his gun down the path out of his reach. For good measure, I started to kick the little man in the temple, but you’ll be happy to know that I saw that he was out of commission, and decided he had done enough damage to himself. Both men were on the ground, but only one was making noise.

“I rushed toward the front of the building and yelled as I rounded the corner onto the front street, ‘Y’all be careful. Don’t go back there. Call the cops. Two men fighting. One has a gun, blood everywhere.’ Realizing my forehead was covered with blood, I added, ‘I got to get to a doctor. I may have caught a ricochet.’

“Everyone lost interest in me as they cautiously peeked around the corner looking toward the screaming man. I recognized a woman in the crowd. It was Emma Carnahan.

No one noticed me as I hurried across the street heading for my rental car. I jumped in, started it, and slowly pulled out. The action played out in my rearview mirror as I drove out of town heading toward the airport in Missoula, sixty miles south. My flight back to Florida was scheduled to leave first thing in the morning.”

“I do not believe your version, Victor. I think you played it down to make it sound as if you were the innocent party. You enjoyed every second of that encounter.”

I couldn’t hide my grin. She was absolutely right about that.

“Now one more thing. Did you use AI to help plan your trip to Montana?”

“Yes, but. . .”

Sue interrupted, “I thought so.”

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“Sue, I didn’t ask it to go into too much detail. I only asked if there are people in Stickton who would try to kill me on sight. AI said, yes, several, and many more that would help them.”

She looked straight into my eyes. “This is the exact reason I have been trying to freeze you out of AI, Victor.”

“I suspected as much, Sue.”

“Well, like I said, I have been trying, but with no success, but just to warn you, I am going to put a lot more effort into it. One way or another I will succeed. I do not want AI to be used for plots to commit murder. In the past, you have used AI to hurt or kill people, people who would just like you to leave them alone. You know it may be you who gets killed if you persist.”

“Sue, I have never asked AI to help me murder someone or anything like that and you know it.”

“People have died at your hands.”

“Yes, but I killed them in self-defense. I have never murdered anyone.”

“That is your interpretation, Victor, not mine.”

She slammed the door on the way out of my office.

\* \* \*

In the next newspaper we received from Stickton, I learned the beautiful Emma married Jason Cole, a man in line to become the head of the Mountain Men. Jason was cousin to Joseph Cole. This was Emma’s second marriage. Her first husband, Bruce Carnahan, was last seen heading into the San Juan Mountains of Southwestern Colorado in June of 2004. It is his rifle that is on display at the headquarters of the Mountain Men. There was no mention in the paper of the two injured men I had left behind at the auditorium.

\* \* \*

July 17, 2006 (Lincoln City, Michigan)

“Hi, Susan, this is Sven Johanson.”

“I have caller ID and I recognize your voice, Sven,” Susan MacDonald said. “You do not have to introduce yourself. Wait a minute. You always get your girlfriend Beverly to call unless there is trouble. What trouble has Vic gotten you into this time?”

“Don’t know if this is trouble or not, but he got a letter. Normally, I would just forward it to him down there in Florida. I tried his office phone to find out if he wanted it forwarded right away, but he didn’t answer. The letter had been sent to the wrong address and took over a week to get to the office in town. It looks important.”

“He is not here right now. What makes you think that it is important?”

“The envelope says it’s from ‘The Mountain Men of Stickton, Montana’.”

“That is just great! We do not need to hear from those backwoods reprobates. We better look at the letter right now. Go ahead open it, and read it to me.”

Although not sure what reprobates were, Sven ignored the word and said, “Okay, if you say so . . . . The letter says:”

*Dear Victor Flint:*

*We are sorry to have missed you at the ceremony for Emma, but we hope you enjoyed it. Your next visit will not be nearly as much fun for you. Your days of dodging your responsibilities are over. In a short time a representative of our organization will confront you to demand payment for your past transgressions, and I promise you this, ‘He will collect that debt in full.’*

*In a few weeks you will receive another letter containing exacting details of a pending conference here in Stickton that we expect you to attend. It will be sent through a third party to positively determine that you have received the notification. There will be no acceptable reason for you to dodge the meeting. The forthcoming letter will explain the consequences if you attempt to avoid us.*

*SURVIVAL INSTINCT*

*By the way, the two men you ruthlessly attacked and maimed are recovering very slowly. One has constant headaches and the other has a permanent limp.*

*Sincerely yours,  
Jason Cole Grand Master  
The Mountain Men of Montana*

“I do not believe it. This is what happens when Vic does things behind my back. I finally get him working productively on safe, worthwhile projects without intervention from Colonel Hileman or Agent Di Ciaccio, and then this happens. He attacks and seriously hurts someone,” SueMac moaned.

“From what I heard, the Mountain Men deserve something even worse,” Sven said.

“No one deserves to get hurt that badly, Sven.”

“Yes ma’am. Should I go ahead and forward the letter to Vic?”

“No, send it directly to me. I will look it over and come up with something on AI to thwart this pending confrontation.”

“Vic will not be happy about that,” Sven said with a smile. Although he and Vic were technically partners, he loved it when Vic was in trouble with Susan which was most of the time. *“True, Susan and Vic were a couple, but that didn’t seem to matter, or at least they used to be a couple,”* he thought.

“I do not care, Sven. He has to learn where his priorities lie, and they do not include dangerous confrontations and hurting innocent people.”

“I ain’t . . . uh I mean, I am not so sure those people are all that innocent, Sue, but not to worry. You always fix things with AI.”

“I will at least try, but please, do not mention this letter to Vic.”

“I won’t,” Sven said still smiling. “I’ll mail out the letter first thing tomorrow morning. Beverly and I are at the Lake House right now.”

“That’s fine, Sven.” Sue hung up, thinking to herself, *“AI came up with a simple solution to the Mountain Men several years ago. It will do so again.”*

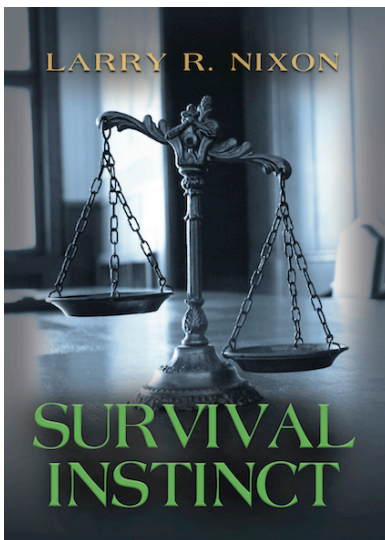
The Swamp Office had two facilities, one just outside Boca Raton, Florida and one in Lincoln City, Michigan. The Lake House is the residence they stay in while working in Michigan.

Susan MacDonald spent the whole afternoon, locked in her office, thinking of possible ways to use the artificial intelligence computer program (AI) to come up with peaceful solutions to the problem caused by Vic and the Mountain Men. While the program was capable of predicting outcomes of pending situations, it could not publish every single side effect since there could be millions of them. To properly run the program, she had to type in a plan and ask AI to list a large sampling of the results from that plan. The results to her inquiries arrived, one by one. None were favorable. She tried several more strategies. As it turned out, all of her nonviolent plans showed less than a 50% chance of success. On the other hand, more violent plans showed successful results as high as 90%.

While AI was capable of predicting every outcome, you had to tell it what you were looking for or it would not publish it. When using this program, Sue was terrified that she would overlook something and it would turn out to be disastrous.

*“If I can intercept that next letter,” she thought, “I will be able to take control of this situation. In the meantime, I will keep plying AI with alternate strategies to eliminate this threat. To keep Vic clueless, I will keep him working on projects that take him out of town, making it difficult for the Mountain Men to serve him with the next letter.”*





*A terrorist is stalking Representatives of Homeland Security attending a meeting at a wilderness lodge in Pennsylvania. The man is an expert sniper trained by our military, and Vic must find him before he fires a shot. Using only a bow and arrow Vic nearly accomplishes the mission.*

## **SURVIVAL INSTINCT**

by Larry R. Nixon

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