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# The Great Escape

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I remember seeing movies as a kid about great escapes. Stories where the prisoners were slow, methodical, and determined ... and had nothing but time on their side. I imagine this is what they felt like, trapped, and trying to get free.

Tunnels. They're one of the hardest things you can build and we'd been at it for years. Slowly, ever so slowly ... and quietly we crept along. Sometimes weeks would go by without any meaningful progress. Sometimes the time blurred and it felt like we traveled a thousand miles in only moments. Most of the time, I didn't have a clue where we were or how much progress we were making.

Unlike the prisoner escape stories of my youth, time wasn't on our side. We had a precise coordinate, one of

$3.4 \times 10^{38}$  possible locations in our world, and we had a moment in time when we had to be there. And we had our machine.  $3.4 \times 10^{38}$  coordinates. That's a mind-bogglingly large number, and yet China had been mapping the world this way since shortly before 2008. While I couldn't know exactly where we were, I knew that we were still thousands of miles away, with a clock that kept ticking.

There were others too, close to us, quietly working in the dark. We could hear them, but couldn't see them. "Sound is a pressure, it's energy," I remember one of our German allies telling me in a thick accent during a training exercise. Of course, that was back when we had allies. We knew that if we stayed quiet and went ever so slowly, our enemies wouldn't find us either,





(Composite graphic by Chris Gardner, Army University Press; original graphics courtesy of pixabay)

post was suddenly talking about Xi and his announcement. I tapped over to Twitter to see what was going on and found a feed of the press conference translated in real time. Xi had started less than a minute ago. My gut said something wasn't right. The internet is fast, but if you're on a lot, you get a sense of the velocity of information. People have to see it, think it, type it, and then come up with some click-bait title. This was almost right, but not quite. It was preloaded

unless through pure dumb luck. We'd prepared for that "eventuality," and trained for it. We knew it could happen at any moment and we'd be winked out of existence. Our tunnels were rigged to collapse if they didn't get our beacon every few hours. If we were found, they would be able to trace us only so far. It would be nearly impossible for them to find out where we came from, how long we'd been there, or where we were going.

Of course, there were other tunnels too. We were in North Macedonia, I think, when we nearly stumbled into one of them. Like everywhere else, it was black as sin. How eerie it is to watch someone who can't see you as long as you're quiet. It's truly like being invisible, like wearing Gollum's ring. As long as they didn't know we were there, we were safe and could slip into their traffic. We couldn't tell exactly what they were moving, but they were almost as quiet as we were, with very little movement ... just enough traffic that we could slip into it without being found, but small enough to stay quiet and unnoticed. From the packing, we guessed they were moving money ... lots of it. Criminals? Military? It didn't matter: it could be anyone. The skills were the same. The "why" didn't matter; we just couldn't get caught. Using someone else's tunnel is dumb. It's always a gamble, and we knew it. There's no guarantee that it will bring us closer to where we want to be, and the "other" can destroy it at any time to hide that the "other" was ever there. But people build tunnels for a reason. They're kind of like a rainbow that way. Sometimes they just appear, and when they do, there should always be something at the end.

Life had been s--t since that Vietnamese guy died in 2024. I was drinking coffee and reading Reddit headlines when, in the span of about a minute, every top

news bots. The top eighteen Reddit comments were in English, and they all said something about a new coronavirus and how Xi was demanding the World Health Organization come to Taiwan immediately. New pandemic? I wanted to throw my phone. A few moments later, Russia's president was announcing at his own press conference that he was implementing Russia's pandemic protocols in partnership with China. The borders would be closed and all flight traffic grounded immediately. He was turning on their national defense firewall too, to avoid another "infodemic," a mass spread of disinformation, like what occurred with COVID-19. I wanted to throw up.

What we didn't know then was that China had secretly achieved break-out with its quantum computing technology

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just shy of nine months prior in 2023. For decades, the Chinese had been capturing the world's internet traffic, waiting for the time when they could unlock it. Quantum gave them the keys. They'd immediately built hundreds of quantum machines buried deep underground where the climate was stable and they could achieve the near-absolute zero temperatures needed for their exquisite calculations. They were out of sight of surveillance and out of reach. Within months, they were unlocking everyone's secrets.

Once they started decrypting the world's internet traffic, they started to execute their new approach to warfare, a quantum-enabled version of their "informatized" war that focused on using information to control the global economy.

Their first step was creating the COVID-24 crisis, which started when the Vietnamese man died in a Taiwan hospital, prompting Xi's seemingly spontaneous press conference. Soon, the World Health Organization reported that the Vietnamese man had recently travelled there from the United States. This was true. He had been in Akron, Ohio, visiting a factory as part of a Vietnamese business venture. Days later, security footage from a local restaurant was leaked to the press that showed the Vietnamese man sitting a few feet away from an older local man who coughed periodically. That local man had recently spent time with his daughter, a virologist working with the U.S. military. There were no "smoking guns," just dozens of pieces of information that when looked at from a distance, told a convincing story of an American strain of the COVID-19 virus that had escaped. But there were problems too. The older American man was fine and there was no record of the Vietnamese man going to a restaurant that day. It was years later, when we finally developed our own

quantum machines, that we found the video artifacts to prove it had been a deepfake. By that point, it was completely irrelevant.

The world had gone into full pandemic-panic mode, and billions of dollars were flooding into the American markets for safekeeping under the tried

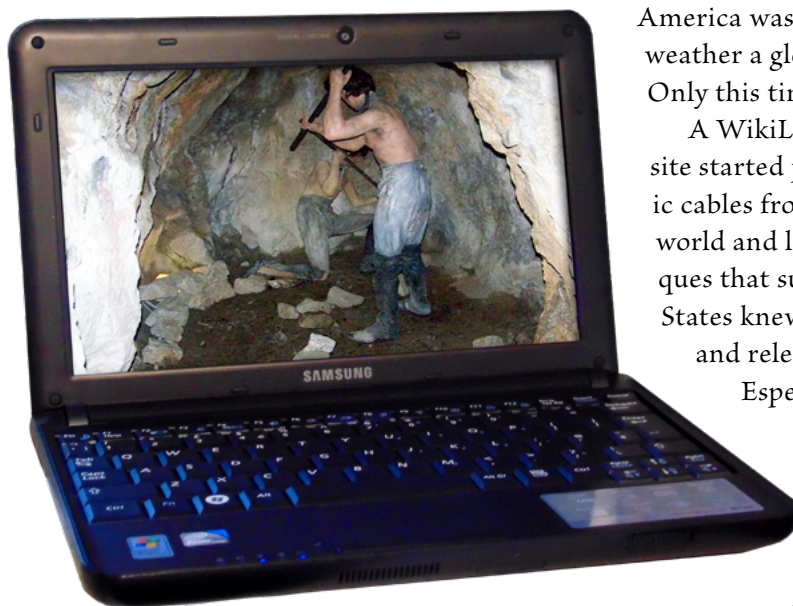
and usually true assumption that America was the best place to weather a global financial crisis. Only this time, it was different.

A WikiLeaks-like internet site started publishing diplomatic cables from nations across the world and leaking communiqués that suggested the United States knew about the virus and released it intentionally.

Especially damning was when U.S. COVID deaths were shown to be negligible compared to those in other countries.

It was soon discovered that an emulsifying compound, which was added to the U.S. COVID-19 vaccine since early 2023 and which converted it to be used as a nasal mist, had included material resembling this new COVID-24 strain, supporting the appearance that the United States knew about the virus and had postured itself to benefit from this new pandemic. Never mind that the compound had been added by industry chemists in China, where nearly all U.S. pharmaceuticals were manufactured, a fact that was suppressed and obfuscated by the disinformation appearing all over the world about the new virus.

The U.S. government had fully embraced liberalism as its model of international relations and quickly shifted its attention to an effort it called "Warp Speed II," a whole-of-government effort to create a new vaccine, which it said it would share with the world. Simultaneously, in an effort that mirrored the 2021 crowd-sourced effort to short GameStop stock and



**Above:** Composite graphic by Chris Gardner, Army University Press; original photos courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.





(Photo courtesy of CYISRNET)

“stick it” to the hedge funds, a massive online troll army emerged urging the victims of COVID-24 to “short the dollar” by moving the world’s investments and transactions to Bitcoin. Within only a few days, the U.S. dollar was experiencing an unprecedented drop in value against Bitcoin, and Bitcoin was pushed to replace the U.S. dollar as the world’s reserve currency.

Then China made its move. In a twenty-four hour blitz, China dispatched its “Wolf Warrior” diplomats to every nation in the world with a simple message: the blockchain that was the cornerstone of Bitcoin was compromised by China’s quantum technology; however, China had a new quantum-secure blockchain. If each country agreed to use the DigiYuan, China would buy its American dollars on a dollar-per-dollar value basis. Those who purchased early would be on the ground floor of an exploding new market in Chinese “DigiYuan” QuantCoin. With the U.S. dollar in freefall and global opinion of the United States at an all-time low, many countries immediately agreed to move to the DigiYuan. Nearly all countries had moved by 2025.

It was a bloodless coup for world economic domination. Although the Americans and Europeans pushed

back with all their financial strength, they simply couldn’t fight against a new, secure currency using existing financial instruments and technology. China’s blockchain algorithm, built on quantum-enabled, fully homomorphic encryption, was open source and provably cryptologically secure. The United States had been working on its own quantum-computing tech for a while, but hadn’t reached breakout. Any nation could have done this; China simply got there first. Now the rest of the world was stuck trying to fix a uniquely twenty-first century problem using twentieth-century technology. China had not only won the quantum race, it won the race to weaponize quantum security as the new currency in place of the U.S. dollar.

The Americans refused to adopt China’s DigiYuan and pushed hard to develop their own quantum currency using their fledgling quantum computers and “homebrew” computer chips. The challenge was immense because by 2024, well over eighty-five percent of the world’s fastest computer chips were built in China, and by 2029, China had nearly cornered the market on access to rare-earth metals. America was forced to fight this economic conflict with slower processors and fewer resources. The years 2025 to 2030 were a real struggle.

There was only one vulnerability we could find in the blockchain algorithm, one “ventilation shaft” in their quantum “death star.” China’s blockchain seed is recursively recalculated at an exponential rate of one year, two years, four years, eight years, and so on; the time between recalculations doubled with each “recalc.” Our researchers determined that if some error could be induced in the calculation at precisely the right moment, the blockchain would go out of sync, which would destabilize the currency.

The U.S. government decided that destabilizing DigiYuan was the only way to counter the global economic advantage China now holds and is using against the United States. If we miss this chance, at the recalc moment at the end of 2039, it will be sixteen more years before we’ll get another chance, and thirty-two years after that.

That’s why we are tunneling. Quantum needs nearly absolute zero degree temperatures to work. Our mission is to cause a moment of heat to flash the environment in order to destabilize the trinary quantum calculation as it recalculates the seed. We’d been tunneling through the electromagnetic spectrum to reach the prime quantum machine for years.

Our most recent leap took us through one of the air-gapped networks using the electric power supply of one of their computers. It was an old trick, but it’s amazing

how many old tricks still work. Now that we were inside, we would use sound to create heat. The combination of getting in through the electrical system, and using device audio to create heat was about as perfect as any attack could be. I always liked using sound. It’s the apex of hiding in plain sight, blasting a frequency that people can’t hear and can’t see, but that calls to the machines through energy and slowly destabilizes them. If our ultrasonic assassin wasn’t enough already, I added one more payload: fun.mp3. Moments before the blockchain recalc, it would trigger across all our infected machines and repeat at full volume in the human hearing range AC/DC’s “T.N.T.” The crash of drums, cymbals, bass, and electric guitar followed by a pulsing beat that starts within the first quarter second would be more than enough to heat-flash the system. They’d know it was us. That was the point. This was a digital Doolittle raid executed by cyber sappers. I tapped the external services control (ESC) key on my terminal three times to arm our implants, tapped the space key once, and then pressed the ESC key hard for five full seconds to trigger the recursive tunnel collapse. *The Great Escape*, I thought as I watched my reverse shell flicker out of existence. They’d crashed our economy and imprisoned us with their currency. We were breaking out. ■