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POLITICS

Enter the Killdozer: how a 2004 rampage inspired today's right-wing preppers

By [Bradley Garrett](#)
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Since the 1990s, doomsday preppers have been stockpiling and building bunkers across the USA. But increasingly, they are taking pre-emptive action into their own hands, often inspired by a 2004 event known as the “Killdozer” rampage



For the past three years, I have travelled to four continents collecting stories from people who are preparing for the worst: doomsday preppers. Some of the preppers I met had built elaborate deep-level bunkers. Others had moved to remote locations where they were growing, canning and honing wilderness survival skills. One group in Utah, at a place called Plan B Supply, had kitted out armored trucks that could serve simultaneously as a hardened bolthole and escape vehicle.

Though their strategies differed, all of the preppers I interviewed were frustrated by the frenetic pace of modern life, sure that it could only end in disaster. Many felt betrayed by the nebulous government and corporate entities that have created a dizzying array of existential risks for us to cope with – from nuclear threats to artificial intelligence to global warming. Far from acting in our interest, these malign actors seem oblivious to the psychological and economic harm they are inflicting on everyday citizens.

Unable to have any meaningful impact on a future in decline, building for the end times enables preppers to control aspects of the present. But in some cases – as detailed in this extract from my book, Bunker: Building For The End Times – regaining agency takes a dark turn as they stop preparing for a disaster and instead create one.

My partner Amanda's dad had a cabin that she used to visit just outside the 1,700-person town of Granby, Colorado. There, just before 3 p.m. on Friday, 4 June 2004, locals heard a deep rumble coming from a shed on the property of a car-silencer repair shop on the western outskirts of town. Moments later, the wall of the shed crumpled to the earth under the grinding treads of the Killdozer, setting out on its first and only mission.

A four-metre-tall, 410-horsepower Komatsu D355A bulldozer weighs in at 49 tons. This one, reinforced with poured concrete and three-inch-thick bullet-proof windows, was 61 tons. Inside, it was equipped with an air conditioner, a front and rear camera system streaming to video screens, a stockpile of food and water, a gas mask, and several weapons including a Smith & Wesson .357 revolver and a Kel-Tec P-11 pistol. A .50-calibre Barrett M82 anti-materiel rifle was mounted on the front of the vehicle and an FN FNC NATO assault rifle and a Ruger Mini-14 semi-automatic rifle protruded from port-holes on the vehicle's sides, all protected by half-inch steel plate. Inside the 'Killdozer', fifty-four-year-old Marvin Heemeyer, a brawny 240-pound, 6' 4" mountain man with a grey goatee, was fuelled by fury, determined to destroy the lives of those who, he contended, had destroyed his. Heemeyer was a prepper pushed over the brink.





The Killdozer (right), post-rampage

© Hyoung Chang

At a sauntering five miles per hour, the Killdozer made its way to a concrete plant down the road, where Cody Docheff, the plant's owner, tried to upend it with a front-loader tractor. Docheff was pushed aside with ease just before bullets began streaming from the Killdozer's embrasures, chasing him off into the woods.

The neighbourly bone of contention was as follows. Heemeyer's exhaust repair shop had had its access cut off by the construction of Docheff's concrete plant. To add insult to injury, the plant's construction also prevented the repair shop from connecting to the municipal sewer, for which Heemeyer was fined by the city government. When he signed the \$2,500 cheque for the fine, he wrote 'COWARDS' over it before putting it in the post. For Heemeyer – like many preppers – the social contract itself was a kind of latent disaster, thwarting his ability to survive by his own talents and merits.¹² Having developed an acute sense that his freedom and livelihood had been under siege from bureaucracy for years, he had finally arrived at the point at which he felt he had nothing to lose. He was determined to take revenge, even if it cost him his life.

FOR HEEMEYER – LIKE MANY PREPPERS – THE SOCIAL CONTRACT ITSELF WAS A KIND OF LATENT DISASTER

Over the next few hours, Heemeyer systematically demolished a dozen buildings in the centre of town, including the Liberty Bank, the Sky-Hi News headquarters, the library, the town hall, and the home of the former mayor.

During this time, officers from the Sheriff's Office, the Colorado State Patrol, the US Forest Service, and a SWAT team all attempted to stop Heemeyer, but the Killdozer proved immune to small arms fire and even explosives. The homemade tank was sealed so tightly that even Heemeyer couldn't see much outside through his tank vision.

At one point, Granby undersheriff Glen Trainor scrambled up the shell of the Killdozer and found it was coated with oil: Heemeyer had anticipated this tactic. Trainor nonetheless made it to the top and shot thirty-seven rounds from his service pistol into the plating. His colleagues watched as he then slipped off the greased shell into the road, defeated. Just

after 5 p.m., two hours after setting out on its mission, the radiator burst on the Killdozer and Marvin Heemeyer made one last push into the Gambles Hardware Store, where he got stuck, then shot himself in the head with his .357. It took twelve hours of cutting with an oxyacetylene torch and a tug from a crane to crack the armoured hatch that Heemeyer had welded shut.

Killdozer Helicopter News Footage



In the aftermath, as teams were clearing through the rubble of an entire town now transformed into a crime scene, a note was found in the shed where the Killdozer was built, which simply said, ‘I was always willing to be reasonable until I had to be unreasonable. Sometimes reasonable men must do unreasonable things.’

While the Killdozer rampage seems a bizarre isolated incident perpetrated by a man pushed over the edge, much about it reflects wider societal pressures and anxieties. Heemeyer, indeed, was hardly alone in appropriating construction equipment, and even military vehicles, to mete out street justice. The stories proliferate, whether about an Australian civilian making off with armoured personnel carriers to take revenge for perceived injustices, or a US army veteran going on the rampage in a stolen M60A3 Patton Tank. The catalyst for these Mad Max-style acts of violence was almost invariably societal: increasing work hours driven by ‘always on’ technology; stagnating wages, skyrocketing rents and a massively expanded police state – one area, funnily enough, which rarely sees government cutbacks.

**WELDING HIMSELF IN, HEEMEYER
CLEARLY NEVER INTENDED TO EXIT HIS
BUNKER**

Heemeyer's case, though, was especially unusual. Welding himself in, he clearly never intended to exit his bunker. Like the Idaho Mountain Boys at Almost Heaven, LaVoy Finicum at the Malheur Wildlife Refuge stand-off, and the hundreds of school shooters that have turned campuses into war zones, he became obsessed not with pre-paring for a disaster but in bringing one about. He had morphed from a prepper into a domestic terrorist, having more in common with a martyr driving a car bomb than a prepper determined to survive at all costs. Same methodology, different ideology.

As SUVs become larger and more hardened, people are beginning to envisage stockpiling and armouring the bug-out vehicle as the ultimate form of prepping – a way of bugging in and out at the same time. Scenes from *Grand Theft Auto* being enacted in real life, like Heemeyer's suicidal wrecking spree, help drive this vision; so, too, as I saw at Plan B Supply's warehouse, does a consumer market which serves up ever-more luxurious armoured vehicles to meet consumer demand. The evolution of the exclusive apartment to the gated community to the bunker-burb is being mirrored by the move from trucks to SUVs to urban assault vehicles.

***Bunker: Building For The End Times* by Bradley Garrett is out now.**

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