New York Times best selling author William R. Forstchen now brings us a story which can be all too terrifyingly real...a story in which one man struggles to save his family and his small North Carolina town after America loses a war, in one second, a war that will send America back to the Dark Ages...A war based upon a weapon, an Electro Magnetic Pulse (EMP). A weapon that may already be in the hands of our enemies. Months before publication, One Second After has already been cited on the floor of Congress as a book all Americans should read, a book already being discussed in the corridors of the Pentagon as a truly realistic look at a weapon and its awesome power to destroy the entire United States, literally within one second. It is a weapon that the Wall Street Journal warns could shatter America. In the tradition of On the Beach, Fail Safe and Testament, this book, set in a typical American town, is a dire warning of what might be our future...and our end.

My Personal Review:
I live in Black Mountain, NC, and am a personal friend of Dr. Forstchen, so I read this latest book of his with considerable interest. I would highly recommend it.

The EMP event he describes might presently be improbable, but is certainly possible. Nicholas Taleb would undoubtedly recognize it as a Black Swan event: something that lies outside the range of normal experience, but that has a catastrophic impact. Taleb pointed out that humans have a tendency to excessively discount and underestimate Black Swans, so I would encourage readers to be careful not to dismiss Forstchens book just because the scenario he paints is improbable. Furthermore, an EMP attack is hardly the only thing that might result in the substantial or total collapse of the economy and civilization; there are a range of possible scenarios, and the practical effect of living through them and their aftermath might not differ all that much from what Forstchen describes.

Some might be tempted to feel depressed after reading One Second After, or to consider Forstchens outlook to be excessively pessimistic. On the contrary, I consider his to actually be a rather optimistic view. Importantly, his story line assumes that the townspeople DO come together and cooperate with each other; the town government does hold together, and the town leaders do lead. The town does not devolve into every person for themselves anarchy, as so many other post-apocalyptic visions presume.
It is also optimistic in that the townspeople do actually win in a horrific battle against a nightmarish roving gang. It is optimistic in that the protagonist and the other characters do succeed in the struggle to maintain their humanity and deepest held values.

So, read the book. But then what? Don't just set it down and forget about it. If it doesn't spur you to action, then you've wasted your time. The fact of the matter is, there ARE things that each of us could and should be doing in all of our communities right now to prepare ourselves and our communities from a whole range of vulnerabilities.

Some people are going to be tempted to rush out and stock up on non-perishable foodstuffs. Fine, but remember that those will eventually run out. What you and your community really need is to build up your local food production capacity; that is where you will find true food security. Plant fruit trees, and transform your yard into a vegetable garden. If you rent and don't have garden space, then participate in a community garden; if there is none in your community, then start one. Patronize local farmers through local farmers markets and CSAs. Learn to can and dehydrate food, store what you grow and eat what you store -- think in terms of a whole system, operated on a long-term basis. Consider how you are going to cook food when the electricity and natural gas and propane and coleman fuel all run out; there are alternatives, including wood stoves and solar ovens.

Consider your water supply, and have a backup. Bottles of water are fine for a couple of months, but nobody can store enough water to last a lifetime. Consider having some sort of filtration system in case one must rely on surface water, and some sort of cart and barrels to haul it.

Consider how you are going to keep warm in the wintertime. Now is the time to weatherstrip and insulate. Consider getting a woodstove and laying up a few cords of wood - and having the axes, saws, and carts to cut down and haul more wood when your supply runs out. Consider installing some solar space heating panels if you have a good southern exposure.

Consider how you are going to keep well and healthy. In Forstchen's novel, many people die of disease and what are presently treatable medical conditions. Get yourself a good first aid book, maybe take some Red Cross first aid classes, and set yourself with a good set of first aid supplies. While some herbal remedy claims must be taken with a grain of salt, there are some that do work; learn the difference, and be prepared to grow or gather whatever is useful for health and healing.

Maintaining communications can be useful. In Forstchen's novel, all electronics are fried, and the town is left with no working communications. I do wish that Forstchen had mentioned that it is possible to protect sensitive electronic devices with a Faraday Cage. Put a portable radio in a cardboard box, put that inside a bigger box, wrap the package completely
with aluminum foil (every square inch, no exceptions), attach a ground wire (secure metal-to-metal contact), and attach the ground wire to a ground (a cold water pipe is not ideal, but will do). He mentioned one person in a distant town having a working shortwave receiver; if several of the townspeople in his novel had the foresight to store portable radios with shortwave bands (along with some way to recharge the batteries, either by crank power or solar panel), they would have been able to get important outside news much sooner. Even more importantly, if several people had hidden away a few pairs of FRS/GMRS 2-way radios in faraday cages, then the town government, police, and militia would have had valuable 2-way communications. Do yourself and your community a favor and consider doing this; after an EMP attack is too late.

This is not a complete list; Amazon.com has a number of books with more extensive recommendations for disaster preparedness. Take this opportunity to take advantage of the time you have before something unexpected, but maybe inevitable, happens.

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