



To End all Wars

Ferggus

Prologue

1 January 2084: A meeting of The Lords of all the Galaxies. They are debating the future of the human species.

“... Over the last decade on Planet Earth mankind’s system of power and control has begun to show signs of distortion. Their power system has until now served the Elite very well and so, whilst the farmyard animals may be a little on the skinny side, the pigs at the trough are thriving and content. However, and this is the reason for this meeting, there is no doubt in our minds that determined efforts are being made to destabilize the status quo and it will have serious, but as yet uncertain, consequences. Actually, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that it will bring an end to this civilisation. Before we discuss what to do about this, if anything, let us for a moment look in more detail at how the 0.1% control the 99.9%:

.... Each of the six power blocs - Australia, China, Israel, Russia, Europe, and America - are managed on a day to day basis by a division of Government Inc. The CEO of each division sits on the G6 board. Above G6, at the apex of mankind’s power hierarchy, is R85, which operates quite independently of the bloc structure.

Government Inc. is the public face of this hierarchy, and is allowed the appearance of acting as a free agent. However, and be clear about this, all Government Inc divisions are so strongly influenced, both directly and indirectly, by R85 that we can say they are controlled by them.

.... The repression of the masses has a single aim – to grind out all resistance. To reduce them to a slavish obedience. To justify this extreme subjugation the blocs appear to be in a state of constant conflict, though with R85 controlling them all this is of course not the case.

.... In each bloc there is an Internal Security Agency which keeps a blanket record of all communication by all persons up to, but not including, G6. ISA surveillance AI flags any communication that veers outside the proscribed band of opinion, the terms of which were defined some years ago by the Agency itself. They have a subordinate organisation - The Defence Agency - which exists to

clamp down on any individual or group whose actions are considered a threat to Government Inc.

The Internal Security Agency are the ears: it listens. The Defence Agency is the guardian: it acts. There were times when the two agencies did not work in concert but that is no longer the case. They now function as a Lernaean Hydra and serve R85 well. Please note, and I want to emphasise this point, The Agencies of all blocs ultimately report to R85, not to their respective Governments, as is portrayed to the masses....

.... Let us for a moment look at R85 in a little more detail. They rule this planet Earth and every living thing on it. They comprise a discrete group, numbering of course eighty five, of like thinking men and women. Their wealth has been established for tens of generations. Their actions demonstrate they are clinically insane - acutely so. But how often have we seen that in this and other galaxies? One primitive but brutally violent – psychopaths that will not hesitate to kill – that control a more advanced group, however much larger they might be. The principal motivation of the R85 is not about the gain of material wealth. They already have it - being the eighty five richest individuals in the world. For R85 the human condition is about one thing, and one thing only: their power, and the perpetuation of it.

.... To R85 The People are their primary threat. One might say they are R85's natural adversary. And though it is an undeclared war, a war it is nonetheless: R85 v Humankind.

The R85 plan at least a hundred years in advance. Their actions are directed at neutralising any threats to these plans. The People are invariably the threat - one might say they are R85's natural adversary. To some extent this explains the hysteria of R85's reaction to any perceived risk to their authority over them, since of course they are vastly greater in number.

.... On Earth there are wise people operating outside the global power structure I've described. Understanding its true nature they either attempt to fight it, ridicule it, or expose it. These people - though they have the same appearance as homo sapiens - are in fact a wholly separate species, which we named Utopians for reasons you are all aware of. All of their efforts have so far failed to shift the status quo. But they persist, I presume because they have no alternative: being so much more advanced they cannot help but try to counter the insanity they see

played out before them. Presently, however, R85 wield absolute power over all living things. It is therefore they alone that determine the future of human civilisation....

.... Now, having observed humans for some considerable time, we can conclude that this species is one of the most primitive in the galaxy. I think it is going too far though, as some of you have done, to say they are the most primitive on the planet. But the problem rises not from their limited evolution but that they exist under the delusion that they're an advanced race. Since humankind is so weak minded that they're unwilling to address the consequences of their actions it's quite foreseeable this primitive civilisation will remove the threat it poses simply by destroying itself. One might reasonably ask, Does it really matter? A species so inept that still, after more than ten thousand years of domestication they remain a village in which every person speaks a different language. And they wonder why there is so much distrust and misunderstanding between them. So much violence and hatred.

However - and this is why we are here - if this group R85 is allowed to gain permanent and absolute ascendancy, they have the potential in the long term to threaten The Balance. We will not, of course, allow that to happen. To guard against this possibility a solution was today proposed. Having now all the facts before you I therefore ask you to decide on this proposal. Your votes please.....”

Chapter 1

Djibouti, Africa

January 1, 2117. 05h00. A full tank brigade is advancing on the Israeli base. Colonel Ben Silver was unaware, as were his tank captains, that the army of Bin Islam, the last remaining warlord in the country still at large, possessed any mechanised capability at all. In fact he did not. But overnight the collective forces of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia assembled alongside bin Islam's infantry their respective tank battalions under the leadership of Ethiopia's inspirational young leader, Arafat. As has been recognized on numerous occasions, with him in command when the attack begins it is as if the disparate forces of the warlords have always been one. As they gallop towards the Israelis across an empty plain, bearing down on what had once been the bustling city port of Djibouti, there's not the slightest indication that the four armies had only very recently being doing their best to pound each other into oblivion.

It is a city which now exists only in name. Because General Jakob, commander of Israel's Eastern Army in Africa, had over the previous weeks razed it with a clinical campaign of carpet bombing. Though the number was never counted - because Jakob had not the slightest interest, and nor it seemed did anyone else - in fact well over a million innocents, mostly women, children, the old and infirm, were killed. Jakob had never contemplated a ground attack. It was all too easy to imagine the chaos of an attempted advance of infantry through the maze of narrow, high walled streets that used to comprise the old city, made only more hazardous by the clutter and debris of a teeming human existence.

The onslaught started without warning, catching the residents of Djibouti completely off guard. First the bombing, immediately followed by the locust plague of ground troops. The massacre that ensued left the dead strewn over the streets or buried beneath the rubble of collapsed buildings. However, after that first wave of attack a portion of the population, on Jakob's direct orders, was allowed to escape the city before the next bombing. It was a policy repeated again and again across the continent. It is part of a comprehensive plan calculated to the detail. One honed over several previous campaigns. These terrorized innocents are his Messengers. He knows they will spread - to all corners of the continent - the story of the demonic horrors committed by his troops against the defenceless civilian population.

Following Arafat's orders to the letter, in perfect formation the rebel tank brigade executes a series of complex maneuvers which successfully blunts the effect of an Israeli artillery bombardment. To the trained eye of Colonel Ben Silver each enemy tank commander appears to possess an uncanny ability to anticipate what the other is going to do. The attack is in fact bad timing for the Israelis. With the port the only infrastructure in the city still standing, and having only been occupied for a few days, no solid defences have yet been erected. There was delay also because there was considered no great urgency to build them, since it was believed there was no force of any size left in the country.

Supported by bin Islam's infantry brigade - though one might better describe it as a cavalcade - the rebel tank force heading towards the port is clearly capable of inflicting heavy casualties on the Israelis, if not actually causing defeat. The only obstacle to slow progress of the advancing Africans is a hill rising steeply on the landward side of the city, which then falls away gradually to the sea. This hill forms a circumference bounding the old city limits. Though, before its destruction, a rat's nest of narrow streets and alleyways - with mud brick houses stretching sometimes to five storeys - had spread some distance beyond its thousand year old walls. Following the city's bombing all is now gone, and only the virgin plains and hillsides, as in ancient times, remain.

As Arafat's tanks storm up towards the mountain summit the natural terrain, enhanced by the work of engineers, forces a number of tanks into dead end funnels where Israeli artillery on the mount pummel them into oblivion. Over a third of the leading wave of African tanks are destroyed in the dead end gulleys and anti tank pits. Before starting out Arafat had instructed his tank captains, "Leave tag markers for the squadrons behind you. They can then use auto to avoid their traps, and that way we'll still be in force when we peak the ridge." Always leading from the front, he's fortunate to make it through as part of the first wave. The deaths of some of his closest friends and several of his own siblings is in some way compensated by the timeless view that greets him as he crests the last ridge. In the near distance the sea is a shimmering blue, the sun dancing on waves. A fleet of dhows is just disappearing the horizon: an identical scene recreated times innumerable over the millennia. Beneath him, approximately five kilometres distant, is a sight no African has seen or ever should have to see. A sprawling military complex, in the centre of which a mobile command centre bristles with satellite dishes and radio antenna, over all of which flutters a blue and white flag with the Star of David emblazoned in its centre.

On the perimeter of this makeshift camp lies a series of hastily constructed defences behind which - barrels all pointing in the direction of the approaching enemy - is an array of medium and heavy artillery. In front of that in two columns wait a brigade of tanks in readiness for battle with Arafat. He looks over his shoulder. Behind him, spread across the narrow summit are the remnants of the first squadron. Everywhere the rebel infantry are engaged with the Israelis in vicious hand to hand fighting. The Africans are attempting to disable or take over the Israeli artillery which, if they're successful, would be well placed to launch a bombardment onto the Israeli camp. And if not could be used against the first tank wave on its descent towards the city. The second African squadron is already advancing, adding weight to the infantry still attempting to wrestle control of the artillery.

"Spread out. Full speed ahead!" shouts Arafat into the headset clamped to his ears. An identical prayer - to Allah, an exhortation to all they believe in - is repeated by each tank commander. It is as much a part of the preparation for battle as the mechanical and weaponry checks. For with god on their side how can they fail? Perhaps surprisingly it never occurs to one of them at this or any other stage of the conflict to claim foul play of the Israelis for all the atrocities they've committed against their people. Nor to seek the moral high ground. These warriors have never sought it; never valued it.

A wave of battered tanks career down the shallow slope, reaching speeds the manufacturers not even in their wildest dreams would have claimed. Shells from the Israeli base start to fall, but with the wide spread and breakneck speed of the front it's rare that any strike their mark. Where they do the occupants are instantly vaporised as the tank explodes in a ball of flame and pyrotechnic of cannon and bullet. By the time the African tanks reach the wide flat plain - now barely three kilometres from the Israeli defences - Arafat feels a surge of confidence as he counts the number of tanks to be almost exactly what he'd predicted would make it through. Over the radio Arafat hears - amidst the roar of machines and explosives and the screams of the maimed and dying - that the second wave of tanks and infantry support has reached the summit, with far fewer casualties than the first squadron. Almost three quarters have made it through, and most of the Israeli artillery has been captured intact. Shortly the Israeli tanks will be getting a taste of their own arsenal.

Just at that moment Arafat sees movement ahead, the surge of the first line of Israeli tanks out onto the open plain. They're in tight formation at first, confined as they are by their light defensive wall. But they quickly fan out across

the plain, and in so doing form their own impressive wave of destructive power. "Aim the artillery at their gates, try to get as many of their tanks while they're still boxed in." The artillery officer acknowledges the order and almost immediately Arafat sees the results of his command. A satisfying thud, followed by an explosion in the very centre of the narrow channel through which the Israeli tanks had until then been rolling out, a stream of white metal. For a few minutes there's chaos as the other tanks try to force their way around their stricken comrades, before the engineers manage to chain up and drag the crippled tanks out of the way. These in fact add some much needed weight to the blockade construction.

At this stage of the battle the rebel forces are clearly in the ascendancy: throwing up a sandstorm behind them, and with smoke grenades tossed ahead by mortar it's almost impossible for the tanks and gunnery in the camp to pinpoint the rapidly advancing line of the rebels. With the Israelis a more static target, already accurately located by laser guidance systems, the gunners in the African tanks are able to shoot blind with considerable success. Within minutes the advance of the Israeli metal falters. Colonel Silver, his voice calm and matter of fact, crackles across the radios of the men under his command. "Retreat, rapid retreat. Take up defensive positions". Still firing in the general direction of the enemy forces, the Israeli tanks immediately make an orderly withdrawal from a battlefield now little more than a kilometre from the gates of the Israeli camp. They leave behind a smoking wreckage of twisted metal - nearly half of their brigade. When they can the crews of crippled Israeli tanks scramble aboard any of their own passing within proximity. Otherwise they have to make a desperate gauntlet run. Few make it: if not gunned down, they're simply run over by the advancing rebel forces. Their piercing death screams can be heard through the thick fog, even above the roar of battle. The retreating Israeli tanks scuttle through the gap in the camp's light perimeter wall, and form a semi circle around the central command posts, from where the Israeli general directs operations.

Arafat knows, from intelligence gained the previous night, that the Israeli's had only just started digging tank traps, and that whilst a few of his tanks might be caught, the majority of them would be able to drive through, or even straight over, the heavy artillery divisions inside the camp. Before ordering the launch of the smoke grenades, Arafat had counted fifteen units of heavy artillery still operational at the camp, and had instructed his own cannons on the hill to concentrate their shelling on these sites. Not more than five hundred metres from the Israeli camp now, and still protected by smoke screen, Arafat orders the first squadron to halt and form makeshift artillery batteries, thus directing even more

firepower against the Israeli defensive line, whilst waiting for the second brigade to join them for a final assault on the Israeli base. Shells rain down on the Israeli infantry brigades confined inside their base, creating devastation amongst the troops. Trapped and unable to pinpoint their enemy's positions the Israeli's situation looks hopeless.

Colonel Silver is standing atop his tank, in the centre of the defensive barrier around the Command Post created by the Israeli tank brigade. Overlooking a sea of blackened, tired faces, he's calling for volunteers for an infantry recon squad to get a location on the enemy tank positions. It is a suicide mission, but willing hands are raised, and an infantry captain is picking out the men to accompany him to death. But just at the moment when the men have said their farewells, formed up, and are about to march into the hail of rebel cannon and machine gun fire, a whispering breeze fans the coast. Barely noticed before, this light sea wind comes up every morning, always at just this time. On this occasion it saves the lives of fourteen Israeli soldiers. For it blows a gap in the smoke screen thrown up by the Africans just long enough to enable the Artillery Commandant to get a bearing on the enemy tank squads, rendering the need for the suicide mission obsolete.

Within minutes Israeli anti tank platoons have advanced, closely supported by two light infantry battalions. Now with their own laser guidance, Israeli light transport is able to use the smoke cover to move rapidly up, completely unnoticed, to within a hundred metres of the rebel tanks. With the element of surprise - using anti tank rocket and mortar - they manage to take out fifteen of the African tanks before being detected. Arafat, who only just misses being blown up in his tank, reacts quickly and orders his tanks and artillery to redirect their fire onto the Israeli's forward position. Supported by rebel infantry, the Israeli anti tank platoons are quickly neutralized, but not before they've reduced the 1st African Tank Brigade to little more than a tenth of its original force. However, with the 2nd armored squadron in formation now at their rear, Arafat is now in a position to attack the base, with more than sufficient fire power for victory.

In fact, Ben Silver is up against only half of Arafat's forces. The rebel tank corps had been split into two brigades and earlier that day a similar assault had taken place at Djibouti's other port, Obock, where a smaller Israeli force had also established a military base. The long term plan is to construct the main port at Obock as it has a deeper harbor and already boasts a natural breakwater extending a kilometre into the sea. However, there are no natural defences and as with Djibouti construction of tank traps and the like had been given low

priority. With the camp effectively undefendable as soon as the advancing rebel army is spotted the CO of the base orders an immediate and full retreat to Djibouti, without a single shot being fired by the Israeli troops. And so, just as Arafat is about to launch the final assault on the Djibouti base, an almost complete Israeli tank battalion, having followed the well maintained coast road from Obock, arrives just in time to provide much needed reinforcements to the remnants of Ben Silver's tank brigade.

A lull settles over the battle for a moment. At the sight of the newly arrived Israeli mechanized forces, which almost doubles their total strength, a ripple of uncertainty flows through the officers and men of the combined rebel army. Arafat, quick to spot the wavering of his troops, reacts by jumping onto the turret of his tank and, through a loud speaker, exhorts his troops, "Men, they may now have the weapons to match us, but they do not have our hearts. They are cowards that rape and kill our women and children, but against men you only see them run like frightened dogs." Whilst sporadic machine gun fire can still be heard, the relative quiet allows Arafat to be easily heard by his troops. He roars, "But this time they have nowhere to run, and we can serve revenge for their atrocities by killing every one of them. Not one must be allowed to escape. Not One! You may not have this chance again, because this time they must stand and fight! They have nowhere to run but into the sea! Today we will see them for what they are, and we will spare none of them. Did they show mercy to our children? To our women. Death to the infidel!"

The roar is taken up by Arafat's men as they renew the attack on the Israeli base. As the advance gathers pace Arafat maneuvers his tank to the rear of his armor in order to adjust plans for the final stages of the assault. So far Arafat's strategy has proved successful and the Israelis have responded as anticipated almost to the letter. However the unexpected early arrival of the armor battalion from Obock requires adjustment to his plans. After brief discussion Arafat returns to lead his army. As the Israeli forces - determined to prevent the African advance - once again emerge from behind its defences the battle takes on a new level of ferocity. A sense of finality, of everything being at stake, hangs over the Israeli camp.

Two hundred kilometres to the North, just outside Alexandria at Israel's main base in Africa, a fast jet squadron is going through preflight checks for an operation to provide relief to Israel's small occupation force at Djibouti. Almost equidistant, but to the North West, a rebel fighter squadron is going through an

identical preparation. Twenty five minutes later the two forces meet up in the clear blue skies over Djibouti. A vicious dogfight ensues. The rebel planes outnumber the Israeli's, but with their vastly superior technology it should have been easy for the Israelis to outmaneuver and outgun the rebels. But what they lack in machinery they more than make up for in heart, daring and a readiness to die in order to rid their country of the animals of Israeli invaders. Therefore what should have been a foregone conclusion instead becomes an intense battle. One played out in the skies while tank and infantry scrap in the dust and heat of the desert below.

For half an hour the air battle rages, neither side able to assert their superiority. However, always struggling to match the better trained and better equipped Israeli pilots, the African pilots are gradually worn down. With the slightest mistake, a moment's loss of concentration, they pay with their lives. On the ground, however, the battle is more finely poised. The hills overlooking the Israeli camp are now all held by the rebels so African and captured Israeli heavy cannon are effectively pinning down any forces still inside the camp, as well as inflicting heavy casualties on the Israeli counter attack.

Still smarting from their crushing defeat, the tank captains of the Israeli Brigade from Obock are desperate to restore their regiments' pride. But for the moment luck is on the side of the African troops. And so, time and again, they get off a shell a split second ahead of their adversary, or the Israeli round that does hit only causes only minor damage. Arafat senses victory and orders his tanks to make a final, concerted push, exhorting them not to allow anything to stop them breaking through the Israeli line.

But then suddenly – completely unexpectedly, against the flow of the battle - the Israeli tanks retreat rapidly but in orderly file back into the Israeli camp. A well directed smoke screen provides effective cover which minimises casualties for both infantry and tanks. Arafat orders a briefing with his senior military advisers to discuss their options. He tells them, "Our air force is almost completely destroyed so we can expect their planes to turn their attention our way shortly. Dig in the anti aircraft companies here and get the troops we're leaving here to support them working on trenches. Men, we go forward now into death or victory. If in the next hour we can take the Israeli camp we will be able to defend ourselves from ground and air attack until reinforcements arrive. If not we will be an easy target and we shall depart this life before the day is out."

As if in prophesy, at that moment three Israeli jets scream overhead and both tanks on either side of Arafat's explode. Arafat and his high command dive

underneath his tank as chunks of metal smash into it from both sides. As the Israeli attack jets head out to sea, preparing to circle around for a second attack, the anti aircraft batteries launch guided missiles, catching two of the jets. No more than a hundred metres above the ocean, the pilots have no chance to eject, and the aircrafts cartwheel in a flame pyre across the shimmering water like skipping stones, before plunging into the water, snuffing out in a billow of thick black smoke.

Barely a hundred metres separates the two sides now. "Keep going, forward. Don't stop!" Still leading from the front Arafat urges his men on. "Drive straight through their defences. They do not exist! Men, before you lies an empty road, and beyond there is the beach where you will play with your children next festival. Brothers how close we are to victory! Seize the day. Victory that is ours!" Arafat knows their chances of ultimate success are negligible. Even if they do win this battle the Israelis will simply come back at them with ever more fire power. And then, once victorious, they'll ensure their defences are impregnable. But, looking into the sky, his heart swells with pride: the few remaining rebel planes, completely outnumbered, continue to harass and pursue. Or when damaged beyond repair simply fly into any Israeli jets they can intercept before tumbling out of the sky.

Squadron Leader Joe Adler knows the chances of him living for more than a few minutes longer are very slim. "Hawk 3 and 4, once you've cleared your run I'm going in on the anti aircraft batteries. I'll follow straight after you, but, don't forget, your target is the tanks." Within a few seconds the two Israeli jets have complete their run, taking out four rebel tanks, but another jet fighter, Hawk 5, who was also targeting the anti aircraft guns, takes a hit and goes down. For a second a rocket flares and then, in the middle of all the carnage playing out at fast forward, suddenly appears the sedate descent of a parachute. So often when he sees this he can't help picturing a an elegant old lady in white, ballooning dress. A smile from Joe, but then a grimace: what chance does the pilot have of survival, and what kind of death does she face if the black bastards capture her? It's worse for the female pilots - they must have even greater courage than the men. Knowing what will happen to them if captured is far worse than any fate their male comrades will face. We all need something to fight for. And as Joe begins his run these fears for one of his team concentrates his anger onto the nearest gun crew. As he magnifies the screen viewer he can now separate them into individual

beings. Heads; waving arms. Two of them frantically reloading the missile launcher.

Too late he's upon the first crew: two rockets score a direct hit, sending a ball of flame high into the sky. As he flies through the wall of fire he braces for a hit from debris, but nothing strikes. But he's no time to think of his good fortune because immediately he's locked onto the next target and preparing to fire. After releasing the rockets, immediately Joe yanks the stick sharply to the left, but this time he doesn't escape shrapnel from the exploding missile launcher. For a split second it's all around him. Surreal. Lumps of metal shooting past an arm's length from the cockpit. Then a heavy thud which seems to lift the plane bodily. He checks right - nothing. Left - a massive hole in the wing, close to the fuselage. Suddenly the controls of the plane stiffen and she becomes heavy to maneuver, an almost dead weight. No longer the nimble hunter, she's now wounded, perhaps fatally: easy prey. Gritting his teeth, Joe pulls the jet around, the left wing flexing alarmingly. He lines up for the reverse run, dropping his trajectory a little lower this time. A movement to his left catches his eye; Hawk 4 tumbling out of the sky, in an out of control spin, crashing uselessly into the desert a few kilometres distant. Looking ahead he begins his run, almost immediately losing off rockets at the lead battery, and then the one behind it. With the plane bucking, almost impossible to control, his aim is off. As two heat seekers simultaneously score a direct hit on each engine of his jet Adler sees both salvos of his rockets pass harmlessly overhead of the missile batteries. Adler has no time to eject: the fighter disintegrates low over the African artillery, showering them with chunks of white hot, molten metal.

While the Africans' heat seeker missiles make every attack on them an almost suicidal mission, the Israeli jets have had considerable success against the advancing line of rebel tanks. It has the effect of severely slowing their progress on the Israeli base and creating gaps in their once solid line. By now the battlefield has reached the camp perimeter. It offers no serious obstruction to their advance, except in two large gates - thick, shell proof metal hung off heavy steel columns driven deep into the sand. But to the Israeli general observing the rebel advance it's as if the enemy tanks are blind to them. As if the obstruction doesn't exist. The driver of the lead tank, commanded by Arafat's youngest brother, has his foot pressed to the floor. With the whole tank shaking, the engine roaring, thirty tonnes of metal slams into the three metre high gates. Whilst some of the more modern, lightweight tanks might have crumpled, there's barely a break in the tank's progress. A knife through butter. The lead tank bucks over the

broken and twisted gate, then surges forward. At the same time the turret swivels as the gunner lines up the cannon on the cluster of huts less than fifty metres away that form the Israeli Command Post. The gunner has his thumb on the trigger, about to fire when his tank tips forward on its nose as it plunges into a deep tank trap. Arafat had been misinformed about the Israeli defences. Jakob, warned of the rebel plans, had ordered - under cover of darkness and in strict secrecy on pain of death - the construction of two lines of tank traps, just inside the camp perimeter line and extending the entire landward side of the base. To hide their presence lightweight accommodation blocks had been placed over them.

Unable to stop, the rest of the front line of tanks suffer a similar fate to Arafat's brother. Even those that do manage to track over their comrades' tanks, using them as a bridge over the trap, they become bogged in the next line of pits. Perfectly set up as target practice for the waiting Israeli tanks and light artillery which have taken up defensive positions around the inner core of the military base. As the rebel tank assault falters the rebel infantry take over the advance. But the battle is already over. The rebel air force has been annihilated. The hill top artillery razed by Israeli jets. And now, with the destruction of the tank brigades, the infantry are defenceless against a superior Israeli combined force.

With Arafat having being forced to leave the battlefield to direct another operation in the North, the acting commander of the African Forces, safely behind his troops, orders a retreat. But the battalion officers, to a man, refuse. When he re-issues the order one of the tank captains draws a gun from her holster, puts the gun to his face and pulls the trigger. Each officer then joins their men, leading them in a suicidal assault on the Israeli base. To a man they are slaughtered. Dismembered, many will have their heads skewered on spikes which are planted prominently outside the perimeter wall of the Israeli camp. As warning of what will happen to any forces that dare to take on Jakob's Eastern Army.

Arafat, in safety several hundred kilometres away - having been picked up by helicopter and flown under smoke cover from the battle front - receives the report of the last stages of the battle, and the ensuing slaughter. He vows revenge for every one of those brave men and women. From the glamorous fighter pilots who exits the stage in a fiery blaze of glory. To the lowest foot soldier - their body trodden into the soil, unrecognisable, uncountable, but never forgotten. And says a prayer for the soul of his youngest brother, whom he had once doubted, but had surprised him with his courage. Arafat reflects that when we are Called -

irrespective of how we might have behaved until then – none of us know how we will respond at the moment of our true testing. He has no doubt now of his young brother's color, and his heart swells with pride. And fills with love for the rest of his siblings who in their different ways have followed him into battle. Taken up the fight to drive this barbarous, inhuman infidel from their land.

The next day the Israeli flag is also once again flying above the camp at Obock, the rebel troops having taken to the hills on hearing of the failure to capture Djibouti. A glorious death is one thing, the pointless slaughter of an army merely a foolish show of pride. There would be other battles in which to die as heroes.

January 1 2117. 17h00. Later that same day General David Jakob is standing just outside his office. Of hardwood paneled walls lined with book laden shelves it used to be the study of the headmaster of one of Alexandria's most prestigious private schools. He rarely allows himself the luxury of relaxation, but on this occasion he permits himself a few moments of light conversation with his Chiefs of Staff. And then a more intimate tete a tete with one of the more attractive staff officers, Second Lieutenant Ibrahim. No comment is made when he pats the young man lightly on the posterior and invites him into his office, drops the shutters on the outside windows and, with a loud crash, kicks the heavy wooden door shut.

After a few minutes of violent love making the leader of the Israeli Expeditionary Force, breathing heavily from the exertion, collapses onto a large sofa upholstered in the softest leather. He indicates for the young man to join him. Stroking Ibrahim's hand Jakob reflects that whilst his victories - the leveling of Djibouti's capital city and the defeat of a large African rebel force - might be small in the scale of the overall campaign they both represent crucial steps towards the ultimate goal. Occasionally he'll make a point more forcefully by stabbing a finger into the young man's chest. Djibouti, the country, might be nothing more than a bridgehead. For what else could one call a semi desert of little more than six hundred square kilometres on one of the largest and most violent continents on the planet? But after six months of bloody conflict - which has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Israeli soldiers, alongside nearly fifty thousand native troops - The Forth and Fifth Divisions of The Africa Corp have finally removed all evidence of the original occupants of the country. Not a single human or material relic remains. And in the process he has drawn into battle - and

subsequently destroyed - a large portion of the armies submitting fealty to the warlords that have for generations asserted brutal control of North East Africa.

Jakob continues to stroke Ibrahim's hand, almost unconsciously now, while explaining, "I would be a fool to underestimate the threat from our enemy, however disorganized they may appear. But the greater enemy remains my own political and military masters." The young man nods sagely, having overheard enough phone calls to know who and what his lover is referring to. Following such occasions invariably he would be subjected to the savage out take of Jakob's fury. An assault on his body which would leave him battered and bruised. A sense of having been used. It is something, however many times it happens, that he still finds perverse pleasure in. Jakob, however, reserves his greatest frustration for his ultimate boss, Defence Secretary Dayan. A man whom he considers to possess the foresight of a nine year old airhead schoolgirl. And clings to a suspicion - for Jakob is prone to conspiracy theories - that the man has never wanted Jakob to lead Israeli's invasion of Africa, despite all his assurances to the contrary. "At least now we should get some peace from that quarter for a while. Even those fools should be able to see now that flashy military escapades are not going to create a landscape in which we can safely establish settler communities that are going to last. Or that don't require such expense on defences they will eventually become unsustainable."

It had always been his intention once he had been handed command of The Africa Corps - a position he had coveted from the day President Moses proclaimed the occupation of Africa as a divine right of the Jewish people - that the campaign should pursue a long term political agenda rather than chase short term military glory. Whatever else they may be termed, to Jakob the armies under his command are and always will be The Israeli Settler Force. So it was that, with ruthless determination, even when all military textbooks might point toward a different action if it did not fit with his strategy he would resist all and every demand from his chiefs of staff. With them he was forced to bite his tongue somewhat, but when one young upstart of an officer had the temerity to question this strategy the young captain - after a severe dressing down in front of the rest of them - was transferred to the command of an infantry company in Liberia. Here, within only days of his arrival, he suffered a gruesome death at the hands of a warlord notorious for cannibalism. Jakob took delight in reporting it to his other staff officers, "Let that be a warning and a lesson to you. Opinionated fools sitting in an aircon office in Tel Aviv reading outdated books on military strategy do not win wars here. A new strategy is called for, because we are not fighting human

beings. No, we are against animals. And the only way to win this kind of fight is to exterminate them. Every last one of them."

Reclining on the sofa in his comfortable office Jakob lets out a deep sigh, at the same time patting Ibrahim in a fatherly manner on the thigh. Despite what he's said to Ibrahim, Jakob wonders how much longer he will need to waste precious energy countering the devious machinations of these burdensome armchair critics. Thinking aloud he concludes, "At least I can expect the other generals to be a little more circumspect next time they contemplate launching an operation without my sanction. But if they're stupid enough to rely on the backing of a pen pusher in Tel Aviv, I suppose anything's possible. There's reasons some people get promoted."

The unauthorised offensive Jakob is referring to took place a month earlier, and was an ill conceived operation from the start. A flashy, lightning raid on the nearby Eritrean city of Assab lead by one of Jakob's former adversaries in Israeli High Command, General Avi Renard. Despite the pen pusher supporting Renard being a three star general, and he currently a personal favorite with Moses, the other Generals of IEF contemplating rebellion would at least now know such distant support would not shield them. Could not help them should - as happened to Renard - they get twelve thousand Israeli troops stuck far behind enemy lines, and facing an enemy eager to realise the rare opportunity to engage in open battle with a sizeable Israeli force.

Jakob chuckles to himself as he recalls the pleading in Renard's voice coming down the crackling line as he begged for air and ground support to save the lives of his men. The shelling by the Israeli Navy stationed sufficiently distant from the coast to be out of range of the rebel's occasional rocket attacks provided defensive artillery but this in fact did nothing more than slow the relentless advance of the African Army. Arafat's divisions, well disciplined on this occasion, steadily forced the Israelis back on to the beaches, where there was no escape. After so much inhuman brutality having been inflicted on their women and children, the rebel troops succumbed to a frenzy, at which point all discipline and order was abandoned. The sand turned red. A thick sludge. And the sea was covered to a distance several hundred metres offshore with the floating remains - hacked off limbs, heads and torsos - of the massacred Israelis. The last of the invaders somehow managed to survive for twenty four hours. But in the end the annihilation of over twelve thousand Israeli troops was complete. Not a single prisoner was taken. Not a single Israeli soldier escaped with his life.

On Jakob's strict orders it was left to the following day before his Forth Division launched a massive retaliatory attack, which comprised nearly fifty percent of the entire expeditionary force. Massively outnumbering the enemy by at least 10:1, and supported by both sea and air assault, Israeli success was a foregone conclusion. The ensuing massacre inflicted the largest casualties the African forces had experienced so far - since they were still collected in force, celebrating. And so, a day which had heralded victory over the infidel for the beleaguered African troops, who were without any significant victory up to that point, was immediately followed by their greatest defeat to date.

On the still blood red beach Jakob stood before his troops and told them that none of The Fallen would be left behind. That it was the duty of The Forth Division to collect the savagely dismembered remains of their men at arms. This operation took the best part of three days, under constant enemy harassment. By the end of it every one of the soldiers had emptied the contents of their stomachs several times over. With rumors carefully circulated, it didn't take long for it to be commonly accepted by the troops on the ground that Renard's incompetence as a General and his irrational haste was responsible for his men's deaths.

In Israel things did not go quite as smoothly for Jakob. It was noted by some of his senior officers that if the general's retaliatory attack had taken place the previous day at least some of those twelve thousand Israelis would still be alive. Jakob doggedly continued to claim it had been impossible to release his troops any earlier. And there was no one in seniority there to disprove him. Among the officers of The Israeli Invasion Force rumors spread quickly of his refusal to help the trapped forces. But anyone guilty of repeating them quickly found themselves the attention of the notoriously heavy handed military police. The Machiavellian tactics had the desired effect. Whilst not defeated, Jakob's enemies within the Israeli military elite from then on were certainly more cautious in their efforts to unseat him. It had been easier than he'd expected. They had underestimated Jakob. They had mistaken his painstaking methods for military incompetence. And paid dearly as a consequence. As all his enemies would who misunderstood his ambitions, which went far beyond what they imagined of him.

Having thus unequivocally established himself as Supreme Commander of Israel's Eastern Army, Jakob returns to his previous operation, which is the consolidation of the bridgehead at Djibouti. This involves the construction of massive defensive facilities and the significant expansion of not one but two deep water ports. The one at Obock, and at Djibouti. Both would be capable when completed of docking even the largest of Israel's aircraft carriers. This is followed

up by the development of infrastructure and defensive facilities along the entire perimeter of the kingdom.

April 2117. With the bridgehead secured, Jakob begins the war he'd always intended to wage. It commences with the terrorization of the remaining natives in the region of North East Africa. Who either flee to neighboring areas or are captured and suffer atrocities for which the Israeli troops are by now notorious. Decapitation, with the prominent display of heads at market places and other places of public gathering. The rape, sexual disfigurement and murder of men and women alike. The destruction of all property, down to the smallest farming implement. As in Djibouti, Jakob allows a significant portion of the region's population to escape these atrocities. This in order to spread the word of what any civilian population would face should they be foolhardy enough to remain in their homes.

In May of the same year, 2117, with the rainy season now upon them, the transformation of Djibouti into one vast military camp is complete. At the same time Marshall Jakob begins secret negotiations with hard line right wing groups in Israel. His personal ambition, almost unlimited, lies beyond the capture a few million square kilometres of uninhabitable bushland and desert. But only once his supremacy is established will he make his full intentions public, and claim himself Commander of the Israeli Settler Force.

Chapter 2

Libya, West Africa

September 2117. Towards the end of the rainy season, and while Jakob's star is rising in the East, General Goldberg - leader of the Israeli Western Army and one of the few associates of Renard to survive the purging following the debacle in Eritrea – has pushed rapidly through Sudan and the southern portion of Egypt. These countries were two of the most moderate Islamic states. That was until the Israeli invasion force brutalized in particularly barbaric fashion their women and children, ensuring they are now two of the most radicalised.

One should in fact be particularly revolted by the bestiality of Goldberg's troops. Why? Are they not merely mirroring the actions of Jakob's soldiers? Though it in no way a justification for the atrocities committed in his name, there is at least a calculated reason for the brutality. It is a key strategy of Jakob's master plan to force the entire population to evacuate their land – to make Africans extinct in the North East - in order to repopulate it with Jewish settlers. But Goldberg has no such strategy. Thus his soldiers' actions are nothing more than an inhuman bloodlust. One fed on an attitude that the African people are animals, a subhuman species not deserving the consideration humans normally accord one another. Let us be in no doubt. There is a racism in its most primitive form. A frightening ignorance and awful heartlessness that a section of Israelis have long been known for since their extermination of the Palestinian people. They claim to be a race chosen by God. But this element of the Israeli national character gives no clue to why God would select them above the rest of us. Except, one might perhaps say, as example of how coldly and calculatedly hateful humans can be to one another.

Ignoring Jakob's more painstaking strategy Goldberg has followed a more classical military plan. He adopts tactics of advancing as rapidly as possible, with a focus on capturing key strategic sites. His current targets include the largest cities in Libya - Tripoli and Benghazi. Having once achieved this, his next move will be to establish a military port at Algiers. The main purpose of this is to secure a maritime supply line, to add to the coastal land link through from Egypt. This is a crucial preparation for the western offensive since it is only with supplies so strongly secured that the rest of West Africa can be tamed.

There can be no dispute that Goldberg's strategy has achieved more stylish military successes than Jakob has ever managed to attain in his campaign. His forces a tsunami, city after city has raised the standard of the Israeli flag. As Goldberg's dashing tank brigades crush all opposition before them lightning victories follow one on another. Inevitably this strategy leaves large gaps in which the enemy are able to move quite freely. And leaves open the, albeit remote, possibility of counter attack. High Command and the politicians in Tel Aviv are impressed and discussion begins about replacing Jakob with Goldberg as Supreme Commander of IEF. With well placed spies among both Goldberg's staff and in the corridors of political power, Jakob is aware of each and every one of the shifts and ebbs. But he – the most devious, the most pitilessly ruthless - holds his hand. He had already anticipated this, and has a plan to deal another crushing blow to his enemies. From one of his informers comes a report that Moses has ordered a cabinet meeting in which his leadership will be brought into question. In the same report it states that Moses has the numbers to unseat Jakob. The meeting is arranged for three days hence, on the morning of September 14th.

Jakob's supporters urge him to defend himself but he remains silent. Some even begin to question his courage. Others remind them of the occasion when, still in his early twenties, Jakob commanded a company against a rebel incursion force from China several times larger than his. How his troops marched into a hail of fire, with Jakob at their head. Finally, barely metres from their trenches, the enemy dropped their weapons and fled. Prisoners were more than usually terrified, almost beyond reason. When questioned it transpired they fully believed Jakob's force to be ghosts – it were as if bullets passed through them without causing the smallest injury. Whenever Jakob's name was mentioned they would prostrate themselves. Sensing an opportunity, Jakob ordered that only a small portion of the prisoners be mutilated and decapitated, which was just one of several brutal traditions Jakob established early in his career. The remainder of the captives were to be given safe passage back to their homeland. Rumor quickly spread. Legends formed. This infamous episode was determined as the turning point in a war that, though inconsequential in the larger scheme of things, had been an annoying drain on Israel's military resources and shown infuriatingly little sign of conclusion. It also signaled the beginning of Jakob's meteoric rise up the ranks, until he became the youngest General in Israeli military history.

12 September 2117. As the political rumblings back in Tel Aviv continue the Libyan cities of Tripoli and Benghazi fall. Goldberg sends self-congratulatory reports to his superiors claiming both Libya and Chad defeated and under Israeli

protection. Victory against the rebels until recently had been achieved with little difficulty. However - with Egyptian and Sudanese troops now joined up with other defeated armies under Arafat's banner – Goldberg's forces have begun to face somewhat stronger opposition. Particularly from the troops of the more hard line Muslim states. Furthermore, the increasingly religious overtone of the conflict in Africa has begun to heighten tensions amongst Israel's large Muslim population, particularly in the provinces once known as Saudi Arabia. It is one reason why the politicians are keen for a swift conclusion to the conquest of Africa. Why Goldberg's rapid advances are preferred over Jakob's more pedestrian progress.

Not unexpected, during the rainy season the situation in West Africa was made harder for the IEF. Seeing their own territories threatened the warlords of several nations on the west coast, including Senegal and Mauritania, threw their forces into the war. This put an additional army of several hundred thousand at Arafat's disposal. With such a huge increase in his forces Arafat had hoped to put a halt to the Israelis locust spread over West Africa. But Goldberg, in a series of brilliant military maneuvers, simply sidestepped the enemy's numerically superior infantry divisions and in this way manages to deliver the bulk of his army - refreshed and energised by the recent victories in Chad and Libya - to the outskirts of Algiers. With these two countries annexed Goldberg now has a continuous land supply line extending along the north coast through Egypt to the Homeland. He is well prepared for his largest offensive yet in West Africa. And once Algiers and the supply line from the sea is secured Goldberg will be strongly positioned to attack Morocco and the African states further west: "Before we drive south to mop up the smaller coastal nations, finishing in Benin. With my forces thus consolidated Nigeria will be trapped within a pincer, completely surrounded." This is Goldberg's plan for the domination of West Africa.

On an unusually cool evening with two days to go before the meeting in Tel Aviv, and with the bright lights of Algiers in clear view, Goldberg can be found with his senior staff officers discussing the final details for the assault on the well defended city. Now, to protect their land supply line, Goldberg had been able to afford only the lightest defences in Tripoli and Benghazi once the cities were captured. In addition, there being no recognisable strategic positions in Chad, he had simply ordered the construction of an equidistant matrix of temporary forts - their location having benefit of natural defences was only by chance. However Goldberg reassures himself that with Jakob in the East - and the rebel forces

appearing to have shifted their entire strength behind the battle front at Algiers - this troop dispersal will be sufficient to defend the supply line through to Egypt.

Measured against Jakob's ponderous progress in the East, with victory in Algeria Goldberg's promotion to supreme commander appears assured. There is talk amongst even Jakob's own high command that he is past his best. Or is unsuited to such large scale conquest. That he would be better employed in The Homeland, using his now well established techniques to rid Israel once and for all of its barely tolerated Arabic presence.

13 September 2117. Goldberg, sensing victory on all fronts, nonetheless takes the precaution of requesting Jakob release a light infantry division of The Southern Army to beef up defence of the supply line against counter attack, until Algiers is captured. Thereafter the need to keep it open will be less critical since the bulk of supplies would then be delivered by sea. In fact already a flotilla of supply vessels is queued up off the Algerian coastline in anticipation of Goldberg's victory over the rebel armies. Jakob suggests two divisions might be necessary to defend Goldberg's positions in Libya and Chad. But he warns this would involve slowing down his own operations in the interim. Goldberg, not wanting to give Jakob an excuse for his sluggish progress, repeats his order to provide only one division, to be directed to the defence of western Egypt. Thus continuing to leave Chad and Libya only lightly defended.

Lying back on his bunk, hands behind his head, a young soldier, a private in one of the infantry brigades newly stationed in Tripoli, jokes: "What are we gonna do tonight, boys? Seems to me like we've fucked all the live girls there are to be had. Emo's allright, he's got the pick of five hundred corpses. But me, I don't care the look on her face - she can be wishing me fucking dead I don't care - but fuck it, she's got to be breathing. It don't matter how much she fucking hates me, how much she doesn't want it, they can't stop their cunts getting wet." He's surrounded by a handful of his mates, as bored as he is and looking for something to break the monotony. One pretends to fuck a mattress, and another jumps on his back. "Yeah, fucking threesome," The other roars, "Get the fuck off." Falling off the bed then they begin wrestling on the floor. Laughing, the others join in. The mood lightened by the release of energy one of them yells, "Hey! Who the fuck said we have to stay here all night! Why don't we take the transporter and head over to Benghazi? We've got a twenty four hour pass, we should make the fucking most of it. Who knows when we'll get another chance to get the fuck out of this hole."

The platoon leader, Sergeant Levin, walking in at that moment and overhearing the conversation, barks at his men, "Orders are Tripoli, and that's it. We're thin as it is. If we fuck off it's only gonna make it worse." A few light hearted jeers, which Levin stares down, but one of the drunker of the troop rolls off his bunk and confronts Levin, "What difference will it make, we're not gonna be on camp either way? If we get the call we can be back in a few hours. Come on sarge, who's gonna attack here? It's all going off around Algiers from what everyone's hearing. Fuck that's gotta be a thousand clicks from here." Levin - after several months of continuous fighting - has himself been itching for some R+R so in fact he doesn't need much persuasion to agree to his platoon's plan. And so it is that less than an hour later, along with several hundred other soldiers looking for some fun and fuck, Levin's platoon are piled into a transporter and are making the short hundred kilometer trip to the port of Benghazi. Though the city is famed for the beauty of its women there are scant few of them left. This after Jakob ordered the brutal rape and murder of the majority of them. Following his well established tactic he'd allowed a small number, his Messengers, to escape and spread the word. The pursuit of pleasure could thus only be directed by the most inventive and corrupted of minds. In Corporal Emo they have their Ringmaster.

The previous week. Benghazi. The battle over. A mop up operation through the residential quarters. Moments ago stun and smoke grenades were thrown in through the front door of the run down tenement. Corporal Emo, followed by the rest of the four man squad, run in yelling. The two in front have guns blazing. As the smoke clears a picture of dull squalor emerges from the clearing smoke. An almost bare room. In the corner a high bed. A baby in the middle of it, screaming. His mother, back riddled with bullets, had provided a human shield to her son. Slumped against the wall, two men. Thick smears of blood glisten in the early morning sunlight angled through the single window. In another corner, frozen in the middle of cooking the family breakfast, a wrinkled crone - probably no more than fifty, but looking ninety. Her head turned she stares blank faced at the soldiers standing in the doorway.

Emo gives a yell of delight, "It must be someone's fucking birthday! Enough for all of us, and just what we fucking ordered." He turns to the three behind him and gives a broad grin. In the middle of the room, huddled together, stand two children, a boy and girl of nine or ten. The soldiers laugh. As two advance on the children, backing them into a corner, another makes an immediate beeline for the old woman. Seeing this she goes to grab a saucepan of soup steaming on an open

fire. But Feinstein is much too quick for her, and kicks it out of her hand. The doused fire hisses and steam and smoke momentarily envelop the old woman. Feinstein grabs her by the hair and throws her to the ground, at the same time ripping off the shroud of black cloth that covered her. Naked, she lies on the floor at his feet. For a moment Feinstein hesitates, grimaces – the woman’s body is firm, her breasts prominent, her olive skin smooth, unblemished. But then he looks at her face. He lets out a short grunt, snarls, and starts tearing at his pants.

Emo appears to be content to watch, leaning casually against the wall, grinning, looking from the old woman to the children, a look of indecision on his face. The two soldiers grab the children, screaming now, clinging desperately to each other. One of them smashes a rifle butt in the boy’s face and he goes down like a sack. The other yanks the girl free and throws her on the bed. He grabs the still screaming baby and hurls it against the wall. A loud crack – then instant silence. Emo watches the other soldier, Fenster, strip the boy naked and throw him over the open window. He smiles as he starts raping the silently screaming boy. On the bed the girl lies still as death, eyes wide open, unblinking. Dlayahu slaps her hard across the face. The sharp crack, over loud in the small, low ceilinged room, still echoes as Fenster gives a satisfied grunt as he climaxes into the boy. The girl turns and stares at her brother and then her mouth opens wide and she starts screaming. Dlayahu, pants around his ankles, smirks and then throws himself on the child.

At that same moment Feinstein lets out a piercing scream. He jumps to his feet clutching himself, blood pouring through his fingers. Swaying, a moment later his eyes roll to the back of his head and his legs give way. He falls back into the still smoldering fire. His hair catches alight, a halo of flames around a face darkened almost black by the African sun. For the first time the old woman shows emotion, a broad smile accompanied by a cackling laughter, her whole body shaking. Blood seeps from her vagina. On his back, arms at his side, Feinstein’s penis is like a peeled banana, where the razor the old woman had secreted inside her sliced almost through the shaft with Feinstein’s first thrust into her. Emo doesn’t hesitate. Grabbing Feinstein’s discarded rifle, a heavy boot on her chest, he rams it inside her and holds the trigger down. The woman’s body convulses as the bullets rip through her. Her cackling laughter continues as she stares up at Emo, until her eyes go blank, empty.

Emo turns to Dlayahu, still pumping into the girl, so young her breasts have only just started to bud, the faintest wisp of hair at the join of her legs. “Fucking finish her!” Emo screams, excitement rising in him at the sight of the dead bodies.

“Kill him!” The boy still lies slumped over the window sill. With one hand the powerfully built Fenster grabs him by the throat, lifts him up and holds him in front of the tall, lanky Emo. With the grip around his throat tightening the boy’s feet start kicking frantically, then suddenly his body goes limp. As Fenster releases the boy Emo grabs him, starts smothering his face with kisses - on the lips, his staring, sightless eyes. Placing him gently on the ground he carefully arranges the boy’s lifeless body – arms above his head, a pillow under his lower body. Staring, oblivious to anything else, Emo strips naked, drops to his knees and starts sucking on the boy’s limp penis, at the same time caressing the silk smooth skin of his arms and legs.

But suddenly a switch flicked transformation comes over him. Face twisted in a snarl, an animal roar, his teeth clamp round the boy’s penis. Tearing it from the root it comes away in Emo’s crimson smeared mouth, leaving an oozing gore of a stump. He flips the boy over. Starts to rape him, at the same time biting into the soft flesh of the boy’s body and arms. His face and body is soon covered in blood. A look of ecstasy as he savors the taste of human flesh. By the time he’s finished with the boy – Emo is never able to climax except by masturbating himself – the boy’s torso is a mass of bloody gore, bone and sinew visible. Getting slowly to his feet Emo is unable to take his eyes off the bloody corpse. But then there’s a shout from the street, from their platoon leader Sergeant Levin. Emo looks up, for a moment still in an unseeing trance, and then stares around the room. Dlayahu has long finished with the girl, though she remains on the bed, legs spread, semen oozing from her, still screaming.

Fenster and Dlayahu are already dressed. Emo screams at them, “Get out! Get the fuck out.” Fenster stares at Feinstein, writhing, moaning weakly, obviously in an agony of pain. He looks unsure, wanting to say something, but unable to speak. “Get the fuck out! I’ll clear this.” The two soldiers grab their weapons and start to leave. “Keep your mouths the fuck shut. Stand guard at the door.” As Fenster’s closing the door there’s a burst of gunfire. Silence, and then a minute later the door opens and Emo backs out. As he slams it shut there’s a dull thump of an explosion. Emo shouts over his shoulder, “Feinstein got it Sarge. A booby trap. Fucking mess – nothing left.” He holds up a thin chain, a metal disc momentarily glitters in the bright sunlight. “I got his dogtag sarge. Send it to the folks back home. And tell them...” Emo glances momentarily at Dlayahu and Fenster. “Died a hero sarge. Led the way in and caught the full blast of it. Should be up for a medal. Right boys!” The other two grunt and nod dumbly. But Levin isn’t interested. Has no delusions about what happened. Not of the details – but

they never matter. But that Emo could be guaranteed to have orchestrated with the other two soldiers – the three of them already notorious – something so horrific, so barbarically unhuman that news of it would wildfire spread. Would add to the already terrifying reputation of the Israeli invaders. Their lust for blood, to desecrate, seeming to have no limit.

The requisition order for a troop carrier that Levin completes indicates their fifteen tonner will return in six hours, having completed a security recon following a route along the perimeter of Tripoli's city limits. As a group soldiers are the least imaginative of the human type. For that is the way they are trained to be. Therefore, any officer caring that evening to take the coast road, which winds up to the picturesque mountain peaks overlooking the city, should have encountered five large patrols. It is in fact entirely deserted. All five are a hundred kilometres distant, engaged in entirely different activity.

Now, it should be pointed out that whilst The Western Army is certainly a formidable force it is not as impressive – does not justify the hysterical nationalistic fervor it ignites in The Homeland - as its victories would suggest. Over the preceding months Arafat had ordered that only minimal resistance be put up at the cities attacked by Goldberg, but sufficient to give the impression that it was a real fight. It had been exceedingly difficult to restrain some of his generals, particularly among the more firebrand adherents of Allah, who typically lack the patience and foresight that has made Arafat such a formidably successful leader. After Goldberg took the initial bait to attack the Egyptian cities along the Nile Delta, costing the lives of almost 20,000 soldiers and civilians, and by these easy victories was drawn beyond Marsa Matruh towards Egypt's western border, it became gradually easier to deceive him. It required the sacrifice of fewer and fewer. In Libya, entire cities were evacuated before the brutalising Israeli troops could make repetition of the animal behavior for which they've quickly become notorious.

Having become accustomed to - and having developed a grudging respect for - Jakob's painstakingly thorough tactics, it was a trap Arafat had not believed the Israelis would fall for. But the alternatives were few, and if they did nothing, very soon there would be little left for his people to fight for anyway. The loss of life - of innocent women and children and the soldiers that had stood no chance against the vastly superior Israeli forces - was hard for Arafat to bear. And, as the body count continued to rise, within his own ranks he faced increasing resistance to his plan. But, as the possibility of its success became more apparent, opposition

to it fell away. Thereafter it became simply a matter of a patient wait for the right moment. That moment has now arrived: the trap can be sprung. As a consequence of Goldberg's rapid advances in addition to severely stretched and weakly defended supply lines his troops are well beyond the support that Jakob's divisions were once able to offer. On the outskirts of Algiers Goldberg is alone. Isolated.

September 14 2117. The sentries taking over the four am guard at the sprawling Israeli military base established on the outskirts of Tripoli are running to their stations a good fifteen minutes before they're required. Once in the high watch towers they're shocked to see, illuminated by flares fired high into the pitch black night sky, an army comprising tank and infantry stretching in all directions to the extent of the horizon. They are unable to see the rebel heavy artillery - positioned five hundred metres above them, just behind the mountain peaks overlooking the city - but it's the explosion of 75 mm shrapnel shells, and the accompanying screams of their injured and dying comrades, that had brought them to their posts. In the skies overhead came the roar of fighter jets, which initially the sentries had quite reasonably assumed were their own on mission to support the offensive in Algiers. But not for long. Accompanying the artillery bombardment napalm, incendiary and high explosive bombs begin falling on both the Israeli military base and the city of Tripoli itself. There are few civilians left in the city, most having either escaped or been brutally slaughtered – like the victims of Emo's squad.

As the bombs began raining down Israeli troops attempted to escape the annihilation by surrendering to the African troop lined up outside the city gates. Captured alive, in full view of the main entrances to the city the poor victims are skinned alive before being sexually mutilated, and finally decapitated. Their severed heads become footballs kicked around by the African troops. This has the desired effect. And so within hours of the conclusion of the short but devastatingly destructive bombing raid on the city the plains surrounding Tripoli are clean of any military presence. The fertile land is once again silent save for the chirping of birds feeding in the groves of date palms. Within the dense confines of the smoldering ruins of Libya's once elegant capital only twisted metal and the charred logs of bodies of the troops remain to give any indication a military force was ever there.

For the time it took to blast to oblivion a division of over 10 000 troops the rebel army remained in drawn up, parade ground formation. In silent observation,

as at a funeral. With the bombing now ceased Arafat orders the firing of three red flares into the sky to signal the advance of the infantry. As the flares arc, reaching their zenith and then start their descent, a roar goes up, and the front line surge forward. Any civilian survivors are taken to a military hospital in the hills. The few remaining Israelis are not so fortunate, suffering a similar fate to their comrades who'd tried to escape earlier. By the early afternoon Arafat is justifiably able to claim not only the recapture of Tripoli and Benghazi – where the Israelis suffered a similar fate - but of Libya in its entirety. Chad, in reality, was never under Israeli control. Of the network of bases which had been constructed within natural defences, such as in the bend of a river or on the highest ground, these Israeli forts had put up slightly stiffer resistance. The others, essentially defenceless, either capitulated without a fight or their forces were massacred in battle. These died a far less painful and more honorable death than those that had surrendered. Arafat, more cognizant of the military advantages Chad offers, quickly strengthens or rebuilds forts which for centuries have controlled passage along the well established trade routes. Since they connect the only perennial water supplies they are essential to enable troop movement through the inhospitable and almost barren desert landscape. This reinforced network of defences creates a considerable barricade against future attack from Jakob's forces in the East, and any strike from the south through Niger, thus effectively cutting off the Israeli Western Army from reinforcement by land. Arafat's recovery of a significant portion of West Africa has taken less than twenty four hours. And immediately on its conclusion he orders an army of fifty thousand men to march on Algiers. He does not make the same mistake as Goldberg, leaving three complete divisions to discourage any Israeli counter attack attempting to provide reinforcements to Goldberg's now completely isolated forces.

Chapter 3

Ballarat, Australia

Whatever people may say about him, John Fury is my ideal of manhood. He comes from another age, a time of chivalry and honor, of constancy. There are times in history when the world needs men like John Fury and this is without doubt one of them. John was never one of those psychopaths that joined up for the buzz of killing people, though there's plenty I could name that we've both served with. Fortunately, most of them get themselves killed quick enough. Always an idealist he will volunteer for missions he believes in. The danger never comes into the calculation. More instinctively, he joined up to preserve a status quo which he didn't fully understand but which gave him a sense of solidity. His father, an agricultural manager, instilled in him from an early age many of the traditions which powerfully connected him to the short colonial history of his ancestors. It gave John his sense of place in the world. Consequently he never experienced the shifting sands that upset the shallow foundations of so many of his friends and contemporaries - as they failed to piece together a framework that would render their lives anything more than meaningless. Purpose is never something he's had to strive for.

Fury's father was a man of fixed morals and conservative values. He trained his son to shoot at an early age and instigated in him a respect for the animals, large and small, he killed. Adopting his father's moral construct Fury had been proud of the stuffed fox's head on the study wall: his first kill. He could never understand why one day, without any warning or explanation, his mother had taken it down and set fire to it. It was the first time he saw his father beat his mother. This caused a fine crack in the boldly simple world his father had created and had instructed his son to reside in. And which until then he'd never questioned. Since these beatings happened infrequently enough Fury was able to retain his love and respect for his father. Yet as he grew his mother's more complex world began to encroach. She, it can be said, transformed him into the unpredictable warrior and greater human being he would become.

In his childhood his father banned him from fighting, whatever the provocation: he was to walk away and step the high moral path. Fortunately, Fury was a natural fighter and could easily protect himself without actively retaliating. But one boy, Silas, vindictive and persistent, learned of his father's unshakable

rule and decided to test Fury's loyalty. Fury was walking to school with a friend of his, Marie. Not yet twelve, already he had long felt attracted to girls. Now, they weren't exactly girl / boy friend but he hated to look foolish in front of Marie, whereas with his friends he loved to play the clown and didn't care how he appeared. On the day in question they were approaching school, which was located in the centre of a small town close to the farm that Fury's father managed. Down the side of one of the school buildings lay a narrow dead end alley, and it was along this the two friends were walking when the drama began.

It's early morning and Fury and Marie are engrossed in conversation. Suddenly Silas appears in front of them with a pail of liquid which he throws over Fury. What at first glance appeared to be nothing more than water turns out in fact to be horse piss. It mostly lands on Fury but Marie is also splashed. She screams in fury at Silas and chases after him down the dead end alley, calling on Fury to join her. Though he wants to kill Silas for what he did to Marie he can't move - bolted to the ground by his father's strict code to not fight. When she sees Fury won't help her Marie gives up the chase and turns back. As she passes Fury she gives him a withering stare and hisses invective that Fury would still remember years later. The boy does his best to dry his clothes and some of his friends lend him some spares they have in their lockers, but he still reeks and a few of his class mates started mocking him. He can put up with this. After all, he knows they have short memories and he'd have probably joined in if it had happened to someone else. But when Marie stops him at their first recess and accuses him of being a coward he sees red.

Silas, a crowd around him, is over by the swings still bragging about what he'd done when Fury finds him. Marie is in the group, enthusiastically joining in the laughter at Fury's expense. Though his father's words are pounding in his ears Fury pushes through the large crowd of children and launches himself at Silas. Until then no-one had seen Fury fight in earnest so he'd always been considered a little soft. As the fists rain down relentlessly on Silas' head, and kicks batter his plump body, the bully tries to escape. But the crowd won't let him through. "Not on your life. Not when this looks like being one of the best fights there's been in ages." one of the children would explain to their teacher later. In the end Silas, unable to defend himself against the frenzied attack, lies face down on the ground squealing like a pig. Even as his strength wanes the rage won't dissipate and in a kind of trance Fury continues to give vent his anger. He punches and kicks Silas almost senseless: the years of pent up emotions and wounded pride spill out. It

takes one of the teachers to pull Fury off. By then recess is well over and the crowd has long since dispersed.

Fury is sent home, and he now faces his father in the study. He cannot understand how his boy has turned into the monster his teacher described. Unfortunately, though knowing he's gone against his father's word, which is something he's never done before, the boy feels rebellious. He's convinced himself he was justified in what he'd done. Towering over John, his father wags a stern finger at him, "You have disobeyed an order son, and you must never disobey an order. Everything breaks down if you disobey orders. I don't want to do this but it is the only way. Otherwise you will forget. The world is full of people doing whatever they want. They are individuals without consideration for others. They will cheat and lie to each other and climb on the backs of people weaker than themselves. They have no principles or honor by which to be guided. To them the world is an ocean full of boats aimlessly drifting and crashing into each other. Most of the time they don't even realise when they're doing wrong by another person."

The boy is silent, head bowed, only nodding occasionally at a familiar piece of advice from his father. The man continues, "My son, I am determined you will not be like them. One day it will be your duty to stand strong and protect those weaker than you. When that happens you must have an unshakable, rock solid, grasp of what is right." The man gets slowly to his feet, taking up a heavy whip as he does so, and indicates for Fury to bend over the front of his desk. His father then slowly walks around it, his feet heavy, and positions himself behind the boy with one arm raised. The boy closes his eyes and clenches his teeth as the whip cracks moments before lashing across the back of his legs. A second later he feels a searing pain run through his whole body. It pulses in waves. The rhythm of the pain is quite independent of the cuts of the whip. Its thick plaited hide tears at the flesh, from Fury's calves all the way up his back to his neck.

His father, Fury's hero, relentlessly beats the boy, hoping to somehow inject the strength of character he believes the boy lacks. The will to live an honorable life. A life of which he, his father, would be proud. Each time his arm falls the boy steels himself, never once letting out a sound, even as the blood begins to trickle down the back of his legs, soaking into the grey socks around his ankles. Eventually Fury can no longer feel the cut of the whip, his backside and legs rendered numb. He allows his mind to wander, to the outside, The Bush, alive with animals and the stunning colors and smells from the trees and plants. It is the place he feels most at peace. Still drifting he begins to wonder not when but

what might cause his father to stop beating him. When he looks over his shoulder he doesn't see his father – instead a man lost in a trance, demons dancing before his eyes.

Fury turns away, now more afraid of his own feelings than the beating itself. Suddenly, through a haze of pain and wild emotion he hears his mother's voice commanding his father to stop, then finds himself pulled roughly into the soft folds of her dress. He keeps his eyes tight shut as his mind reels, frozen in shock, while his body remains tense, expectant of another blow. He hears them arguing but takes no notice of what they're saying. He then feels his father's hand on his shoulder: it's shaking, and Fury fears the beating is about to resume. His father's deep voice growls, "Come here, boy". Fury opens his eyes and looks at his father, who is now seated on a chair by the window, still breathing hard from the exertion of the beating. "Sit down. No, here John." The man indicates to his son to sit on the chair beside him, then commands his wife, "Leave us alone woman."

After his mother leaves Fury limps over and sits gingerly on the corner of the chair. The boy's father, eyes full of sadness, rests a heavy hand on Fury's arm. "Son, I was wrong. There are times when it is justified to defend yourself, but you must never attack a boy as you did today. If a boy attacks you again, then you are to tell me. Walk away, come home, tell me. Understand?" The boy nods, still unsure where this is leading. "If I think it is appropriate I will give you permission to retaliate. You may only attack if I give you an order, is that clear?" Fury nods again. Until that day Fury had unthinkingly followed his father's instructions. Now, suddenly and without any leap of thought, he feels a distance between them, one that enables him to consider objectively what the man is saying to him. He no longer thinks of him as his father, in the sense of being infallible, and perfect. Years later, it would be for his admission of wrongdoing that he would be most proud of his father. As an adult and understanding his father better it wasn't hard to imagine how difficult it would have been for the man to admit his failure. At the time, however, he saw it as a weakness, and his loyalty shifted unconsciously to his mother.

Chapter 4

Sydney, Australia

It's an unusually cool January morning in the year 2116. Along with his two companions Colonel John Fury is comfortably sprawled out on a large leather sofa on the first floor balcony of an old style pub on Newtown's main drag. For the last hour they've been enjoying the singing of a ganglingly tall and ugly as sin girl with the voice of an angel. Leaning casually back against the balcony railing she busts out, without any apparent effort, an old Blues number. As people pass by on the street below several look up and smile: the sound of her voice has that effect on people. Suddenly, however, she stops, silenced by the waving hands of the landlord who's just turned up the volume on a vast media screen which takes up almost the complete wall behind the first floor bar.

A familiar figure fills this and the screens in homes across the bloc. The face – one peculiarly devoid of emotion – is accompanied by a trademark northern drawl the spin doctors like to label "folksy". How many people are watching out of choice is impossible to tell, since all media channels have been instructed to broadcast her speech. Known by many but revered by few, President Lisa Bart is the longest serving CEO of Government Inc. (Australia) in that nation's history. "My fellow citizens, I have to report that Internal Security has advised us of a heightened threat and it is therefore necessary that counter terrorism measures be once again enforced. Friends, we must never forget the threat is ever present and will continue as long as evil men want to destroy our freedom. And so, unfortunately, The Defence Agency has ordered that 6pm curfews will be enforced from today. And full in home surveillance will be in operation until the danger level has been lowered. Of course none of us in Government want these measures but if we are to defeat evil and bring freedom to all the world we must all be prepared to make sacrifices. Think TEAM. Think Team Australia. Fighting the enemy as one we can defeat them. Because God is at our side." She pauses for a moment, allowing a slightly imbecilic smile to spread across her face. "Because we, my fellow countrymen, we are the good guys and the good guys always win!"

Bart pauses, allowing muted applause in the studio audience to subside before continuing, "The Axis of Evil has raised its head again. A considerable number of Australians are known to have traveled to Africa during the course of fighting over the last twelve months. Intelligence has discovered that a large,

radicalized group that fought for the African forces are planning to return to Australia shortly. It is of course the duty of any responsible government to respond appropriately to any threat posed to its people and so, in addition to the security measures already mentioned, a budget of \$1 Billion has been allocated to deal with the threats their return poses."

A journalist in the audience can be heard asking how many terrorists are expected to return. Bart hesitates then looks pointedly at a grey suited individual standing on her left. Looking straight ahead, the camera picks him up giving an almost imperceptible shake of the head. Bart turns slowly back to the audience and opens her mouth as if to speak but then closes it. You can almost see her mind working: the wheels ponderously rotating. But then, a toss of the dyed blonde hair, indicating a decision made in rare defiance of her minders, "I think it's important to provide the facts wherever possible. Transparency in government is after all a watchword for this administration. And as a leader it's important to make these judgement calls from time to time." Bart pauses, takes a deep breath and gathers herself, "Please do not be alarmed my fellow citizens, but initial intelligence suggests at least ten terrorists are expected to return from Africa in the next few weeks, and over the next four years the number is expected to rise to at least twenty five." Pausing again she looks around the room, this time with an expectant expression. Fury picks up the nearest empty can and throws it in the direction of the screen whilst his friend Wilce, more the worse for wear, falls off the sofa and rolls around the floor in a fit of hysterics, tears of laughter pouring down his face.

The three men are regulars at the bar and their backgrounds are well known. So it's with unusual deference that a group of wide bouncers - uniformly attired in black and bling - ask the trio to leave. As they step out into the glaring mid morning sun, Hugh Ferris is the first to speak, "Why is that woman still our Boss? She's a dumbfuck. Name me one character trait of a good leader she possesses." He doesn't wait for an answer, "Don't bother: she's got zero percent of all of them. How do you explain it then, boss?" Although the streets are quiet, no one within immediate earshot, Colonel Fury puts a restraining hand on Ferris' arm, laughing a little but obviously wary of someone overhearing him. "Mate, keep your voice down. But, yeah, there's a lot of people asking the same question. The confusion is understandable. I guess you're not aware of the politics. Why would you need to be? If you know that, well, then it makes sense, mate." Ferris nods, "No. I've never heard anything about that, but it sounds like I should have. Go on."

“Another time, mate. I’m that pissed I wouldn’t be making any sense. But, short version: she’s not the boss, there’s minders that play on her weaknesses and very effectively control what she says and does. She’s a puppet, mate, but a dangerous one. But don’t get me started.” John Fury is a man easily roused to anger when it concerns the reputation of the Australian Army. And particularly if it relates to the Special Forces regiments, ASAS. Hugh Ferris, a sergeant in the same regiment as Fury, responds dryly, “Mate, I’ll need to work through that but, mate, she looks like she’d be a lot more use on her back.” ASAS Sergeant Pete Wilce nearly chokes on his stubbie, still unable to get used to Ferris’ quirky, dry humor. And also because Pete Wilce, unlike John Fury, has never been able to see warRODs, of which Ferris is one, as anything other than a machine. “Mate, where did you get that one from? Off the comedy channel?”

Ferris shrugs and gives Wilce a blank stare, “Mate, these are all originals but, yeah, when I hang up my holster I’ll be going on the stage. I’ve got enough material to last me ten years. And most of it is from your fuck ups, mate.” Wilce snarls, anger flaring in his eyes. Turning then to Fury, his voice tight, he says, “Mate, I might be pissed. But for the fucking life of me - though I can see you have no problem with it - I can’t get my head around being mates with a fucking robot.” Sergeant Pete Wilce has had this conversation a number of times with his commanding officer.

Fury nods blankly, “Mate, when it comes to soldiering, there’s no difference between a ROD and a human soldier. You know I’m not going to tell you what to do but I’ll tell you how it is for me. So you can understand why I value Hughie just as much - in the context of war mate - as highly as you and any other human soldier.” Fury pauses for a second, observing Wilce’s reaction, before continuing, “Mate, we’ve known each other a very long time – more than a hundred years now - and I can categorically say I know you better than any other man alive.” He doesn’t say it - he’d be too embarrassed to - but he loves Pete Wilce like a brother. For who he is as a man but also because, without care for themselves, each of them has saved the other’s life so many times both have lost count. “But despite that, there’s still a part of me that is uncertain how you will react. Which I’m just as guilty of, because of how much our behavior will be influenced by emotion. Instead of purely on the dictation of logic, which is how Hughie responds. In fact because of that, as a soldier, it puts you a step below him.” Wilce shakes his head emphatically, “Mate, who can argue with that, I’ve got no problem with it. But what about going beyond what logic tells you to do, which can often be the only difference between one man beating another? Who will risk

the most, everything, and with the least hesitation. It's that which determines who comes out alive. You can't have all the data on the enemy: there's an element, a huge element mate, of unknown. How strong their position is, their individual capability, and their willingness to risk it. Would a ROD just go for it?"

Fury nods, "Mate, I get your point. That's what I'm not sure about. If they ever build a warROD CO, let's say they could perform better in the heat of battle, tactically and so on. But what about leadership? Who would the men perform best for? Because it's only partly - a big part fair enough - but only partly what happens on the battlefield that cements loyalty between a CO and his men. A hundred men willing to risk their life - in fact wanting the opportunity to prove it. That would make a big difference. Have to mate."

As so often happens when this topic is discussed the conversation ends inconclusively, with Pete Wilce still in his head, as much as in his heart, unable to forge a connection with RODs. Even though they've saved his life, and he's witnessed them time and again successfully defend a position against all the odds. "Isn't this the point, mate: a man doesn't have to do it. He could just turn his back on his mate and say, fuck you, I'm gonna save my own arse. I don't give a shit what happens to you. It's that he has a choice to walk away from his comrade - but he doesn't. But a ROD would always stay, because that's what he's been programmed to do. Loyalty and sacrifice don't come into it for them."

For John Fury, things are not so clear cut, "Whilst they might be identical when they come off the production line, every ROD like Hughie here is unique because their life experience is different for each one of them. So, mate, their behavior is not as predictable as you think. And think about this, mate. When we start as babies it's hard to tell them apart, right? And it's only through life experience, our environment, that as adults we become noticeably differentiated from one another."

Back in the bar, President Bart continues her prepared speech. Her tone remains flat and she appears over rehearsed. From time to time her eyes dart nervously towards the man standing at her right. "Fellow Australians, there are times when as leader I am forced to make unpopular decisions, and this is one of them. But as you know I will not pander to short term opinion polls. I will always do my duty as President and do what I believe is right. What The Bible tells us is right. We do not want to spy on our own citizens but as long as there is a threat to the law abiding majority from a small minority of radical extremists, we must do all we can to protect our children and our homes. I know these measures are unpopular in some quarters but we all know - if you've done nothing wrong then

you have nothing to fear." It would seem a fiction that such a person could be placed in a position of supreme power but History has many examples to prove otherwise. Of The Fool, sometimes innocents with good intent, thrust into roles for which they are dangerously unsuited by the small elite that are the true rulers of humankind. The Puppet masters.

Chapter 5

Somalia/Ethiopia border

Six months prior to The Battle of Algiers.

1 February 2117. We'd just got back from an operation in Nigeria - about throwing my bags in the back of the SUV - when the call came through to our driver. Thirty minutes later there were five officers and their senior NCOs in a meeting room getting a briefing from The Boss. "They're all important. But this mission is crucial and time is against us. Your job is to neutralize the terror groups in and around Mogadishu. A dealer has managed to cultivate contacts in a weapons factory just outside the city, so they're all swimming in the latest gear. Going around like kids in a fucking computer game. Your job is to terminate their supply line."

Rage never far below the surface, the Boss's voice quivered. "Now you could rightly say the place has been fucked for centuries, so what's the big deal? But this is larger, on a whole new scale. Having a knock on effect into Kenya, all the way down to Mandelaland. And we're not talking just suicide bombings. Bad enough, but with what they've got they're mounting full scale assaults - a thousand armed troops and light artillery against police stations, military bases and the like. But there's more. From reliable sources we're hearing of a planned nuclear attack. That's when we got pulled in. We don't know where they plan to get the nuclear devices from, but at least by destroying the factory we cut their main weapons source. Panic them into a move which brings them out into the light. That's how we're playing The Game."

"More. With what's going down even more so we need a political leader we can work with. Somalia is one of the most unstable countries on the continent. There's been seven changes in government in the last decade, and that's when it's had a government at all." Now, it always sounds good on paper: replace crazy anti western warlord with one more pro us. But when in the history of geopolitical conflict has that strategy ever worked? You got to let kids fuck up some. It's the only way to learn. Fair enough, give them training wheels and a good push to start them off, and be there with the wipes when they fall off. That's how you've got to treat these Africans. Accept it, they're gonna fuck up but eventually they'll learn. Just like we did a thousand years ago. Though even then they'll have their own way of doing things. Don't expect them to ever be the same as us. Forget your

value system. You've got to find a way to work around theirs that gives you what you want or something close enough to it. And however much you do for them, don't expect loyalty. Sure, pro The West today. But only for as long as it's convenient for them. When it suits them – ie. when they get cocky enough to tell their western backers to fuck off - they'll switch sides. On the up side, I've never seen this game of musical chairs make a big difference either way to what happens down on the ground. So for me this is just another mission. Though of course the nuclear angle is a worry. It's the reason I'd insisted on Wilce being on the team.

We first visited Somalia back in May 2116 to look at expanding the influence of Somalia's leader Al Sharif. With the destabilization caused by the Israeli invasion the mission then was to facilitate a consolidation of the power jigsaw in the region into fewer hands. With that the African forces should be able to put up stiffer resistance. A brake on the Israeli advance which at that point was steamrolling. Now, Al Sharif is a fucking religious bigot: our President Bart's black twin brother. Anyone tells you there's a difference between a Christian fanatic and a Muslim one - they're talking shit. That aside, as soon as I met him it was obvious that Al Sharif was no different to any of the other warlords around here. Mad as a cut snake. Oceans of blood on his hands. But he'd proved himself as a military leader. Smart like a cornered rat. But no vision. But our political elite like it that way: we provide the vision.

18 May 2116. 04h00. The Somalia/Ethiopia border. A billowing white tent perched on the edge of a low, rocky escarpment that looks out over an endless empty desert – The Guban. The sun was just starting to drag itself up over the horizon. A meeting: I was leading our team, all ASAS operatives, and on the other side is Al Sharif and his entourage. Its purpose: to bring the other warlords around Somalia to heel. Specifically, we were there to determine what logistical support - personnel, weapons and so on - Al Sharif needed. Of course, when we got down to it no one was shocked to find our goals were a lot different to his.

The interpreter took his time translating everything we said into a local dialect that Al Sharif insisted on using, even though we knew he was fluent in English. Some head nodding, then a minion stepped forward with a typewritten list of Al Sharif's demands. Of course we'd already seen it: our intel was way ahead of theirs. The minion spoke in English: "We require biological and chemical warheads on Crusader missiles, plus small arms, transport and supplies for an army of twenty thousand for at least a month." Just to humor him I asked, "The supplies and small arms are no problem, they're already on their way. But, why do

you need intercontinental missiles? And why not just explosive warheads? This is to be contained to a local engagement. President Bart is insistent there should be no possibility of an escalation into an international conflict."

Al Sharif started screaming at the interpreter. Minion dropped to the floor - a thick red Persian carpet laid over the sand - and pleaded with us as if his life were at stake. Which no doubt it was. "Please! He must rid Africa of the infidel! Once victory over them is achieved we will spread the word of Allah across all Africa. Your President Bart agreed to help us do that." Yeah, like the other warlords that swear allegiance to General Arafat, Al Sharif had agreed to stop the internal fighting and instead make their main mission to stop the fucking Israelis annexing North Africa. Sure, once they've done that, they'll go back to killing one another, which seems to be what usually passes for entertainment around here. But at that stage Australia wasn't interested in a decisive defeat of the Israeli Invasion Force. We saw it as a containment operation. Like the Russians and Americans in Afghanistan. Wear them down until the lost interest and went home.

Now, in the past I've found that when it comes to religion Bart has a blind spot. But it was hard to imagine even Bart agreeing to Al Sharif's demands. "President Bart does support your cause, as she too is a believer. But many things can be achieved without the need for violence. If diplomacy fails, then we may consider escalating our support. However, in the short term only conventional explosives on short range rockets will be provided." The warlord Al Sharif was lying on a low couch. In a semi circle either side of him stood his high command. Behind them was his notorious bodyguard: a ruthless, well trained personal army. This early you only had a sense of the heat to come. As yet the air was still cool; a crisp edge to it. With the sun coming up behind them in silhouette they were an intimidating sight. A still moment; absolute silence. And then Al Sharif gave the pre-arranged signal. Light weapons were drawn. Myself and four negotiators, unarmed and in direct line of fire, must have appeared an easy target. But before the massacre he'd got lined up for us could start I pressed a button on the pen I was holding and a small but powerful implosive device detonated under the warlord's throne. Al Sharif is suddenly a Was. Vaporized instantly.

At a signal from me, from the bewildered group standing beside the throne the warlord's younger brother Al Bashir stepped forward and instructed the bodyguards to disarm. From bully to bullied, things were moving a little too fast for them. These bearded, hooded men are used to simple violence - a little intrigue, yes, but not such sudden shifts of absolute power. A few of them were

looking confused enough to do something stupid, so instinctively my hand went to my pistol. Al Bashir saw the movement. He put his hand on my arm in a calming gesture, said what needed to be said to the bodyguards, and then took the seat his brother recently 'vacated'. With things settled down, a group of international journalists were escorted in and photos taken of the new President of Somalia in pose, surrounded by his newly loyal bodyguards and commanders. This was followed by an interview of sorts. Mostly a prepared statement ending with the usual call to arms for his people to continue the war against the Israelis.

We can only hope that this most recent incarnation will lead the Somali people onto a path of enlightened self government. If nothing else through sheer chance. Fuck, statistically at some point a real leader must emerge. Perhaps it's Al Bashir. You have to keep trying. And in fact, driven by Arafat – and some weight kicked in by our military support – Al Bashir did manage to persuade the warlords in the region to come under his command against the Israelis. The armies in North Africa are starting to look like a cohesive force. Enough to offer genuine resistance to the Israelis. Though I can't see anyone putting money on them ever defeating the most technically advanced military in the world. The South of course is still in chaos. And we want to keep it that way.

Look, I know I've been treating the politics as something of a joke, but that's where things have got to. Bart is a complete clown. You can't take seriously anything she has a hand in. But, and I still find this hard to believe, as President of Australia she is one of the most powerful people on the planet. Has the ability to fuck with the lives of hundreds of millions of people. So you can't, as we should be doing, just laugh at her and tell her to piss off.

It's simple: Lisa Bart was never cut out to be a leader. Of Australia; of any country. Fuck it, I wouldn't trust her to punch the library cards. Life - every day life - is hard yards for her. The clue's in the religion, right? Someone fucking help us - Bart believes she is guided by the hand of fucking God! He's as real to her as you and me. So what chance has she got of making a fist of running our country, one of the most powerful nations on Earth? Fuck all of course, and you've only to look at her track record for the evidence. Of course, her minders spin a different story, but I've heard rumors that would make your hair turn white.

Of course, as with any military operation it always comes down to the big picture. The armies under Al Bashir make up nearly 30% of Arafat's North African total force. They need to be fighting the Israelis, not embroiled in a civil war. Add to that, a year on from Al Bashir's coming to power the rest of the world is waking

up to the full extent of what Israel is up to. Enough that our leaders are talking about destabilization of the balance of world power. And they're not going to sit around and let that happen. Unfortunately the Israeli military and political elite have badly misjudged the will of the leaders of the other blocs. That leads to fuck ups. But also to opportunity. Which makes me think that our small operation in Mogadishu could well be the kick off for something much bigger by Government Inc Australia. Maybe what The Boss told us is a smokescreen. Then again, I'm just a soldier. What do I know? What am I supposed to know?

Chapter 6

Mogadishu, Somalia

February 15 2117. 04h47. We're running up the beach, Wilce on my left, the two warROD platoons fanned out behind us. Sun coming up off the horizon behind us: pictures of a silhouette. To the south the beach stretches as far as the eye can see. Along the length of white sand – washed clean by the tide, glistening in the sunlight - there's not a soul in sight. At the northern tip of the beach, where we landed, a low, rocky headland nudges out into the crashing waves of the blue green sea. Down there, tucked out of sight in a cave just above the high water mark, we've left two RODs to guard the transporters. Who'd envy the squaddie back home with that gig, controlling the pair of warRODs? Three days with only the sand, a grubby blue sea and our kit to look at. The RODs would be on auto most of the time, but not their controllers. How can you respect a man that claims to be a soldier - who sits behind a computer screen, who's only life threatening is dying of boredom or falling asleep and breaking his neck when he falls off a chair. Controllers are usually ex troopers too fucked up to make it on the front line any more. Basket cases, their nerve lost along with whatever limbs they had blown off. If only it was as simple as sticking on a replacement arm or leg. But it's not. I know. Lying there alone, unable to move, with death offering you the bony hand, the whole time hoping it'll be a quick one. That fucks with your head.

I learned a lot about myself the first time that happened to me. What I'm *really* capable of. As well, I got a life lesson we all need, and should do well to never forget if you've any sense. In this world there is in fact no such thing as right and wrong, only consequences. What I mean by that is that as a soldier you start off by setting yourself boundaries - what you will and won't do. But after a few years - when you've crossed so many you've lost count - you get to realise you'll do anything in the right circumstances. I've killed a defenceless child that got in the way of a mission, and I'd do it again in a similar situation. No one knows - unless you've been there yourself - what it's like on the battlefield. And out there I answer to no-one. Like I said, it's all about consequences and they're not always good. There's not a day goes by – even after sixty years - when I haven't thought of that little girl, hands held up, pleading. I guess it will always stay with me: better that way.

My offsider on this mission is Sergeant Pete Wilce. It was a personal request to The Boss. I've always had him as my Right Hand on the ops that count. And for this one I'm not taking any chances. There's too much at stake. You wouldn't take Pete for a killer. Short, wiry, a quiet one - most of you would feel confident you could win over the little fucker. Biggest mistake you could make: he's had the best training, by the elite of the elite, and he's not afraid to take on anyone. Timing, technique, attitude, he's got it all. Sure, like anyone, he can lose it after a few too many months on the front line. I've been by his side when he's lined up a family against the wall - shooting the children first, then the women, and saving the men until last - so they got to see their entire lineage, their past, present and future, wiped out. Someone had killed his best mate, which I agree is no justification, but worse, he's got the wrong house, hadn't he? What can you do? Mistakes get made. Collateral damage.

The beach we landed on is not far from Berbera on Somalia's north coast. Our first goal is to get into a town and blend in as quick as possible. Once we're up over the sand dunes and onto the road there's zero cover - the land so flat you can see for clicks. We're completely exposed, sitting ducks, but fortunately the minivans are there ready and waiting for us, and it's only a short journey to the nearest town. It's not much, just a single line of high rise blocks cluttered around the intersection of a road and the railway line. Most only half finished the buildings look as if they're about to collapse. But of course they're spilling out, people everywhere. Even up on the roof with their tin sheds of hovels making up a small town in itself. The whole place has a step back in time feel. No one takes any notice of us since we're all in African BPODs and the RODs are programmed to talk in the local dialect. Without incident we catch the first train heading south to Mogadishu, the nearest city to the weapons plant where the rebels are getting their gear from.

Now, add this to the mix. Somalia is hosting the Soccer World Cup. TV cameras everywhere and millions of visitors. I'm in no doubt that whoever has plans to set off a nuclear bomb factored this into their plans. The competition has been going on a month and the Final is being played in Mogadishu tomorrow. The trains are running hours late. And as we get closer to the city the carriages start to fill up with opposing fans. Immediately they start taunting each other. Soon enough fights have broken out in almost every carriage. It was bad enough already. The train was an intercity from Nairobi. Some passengers have been on the train for hours. There's kids pissing on the floor, and the women screaming at

them. Fucking carnage. Good news is that the cops are too busy trying to control the fans to be checking IDs. With us posing as football supporters attending the Finals, with the influx of so many people it's easy to get lost in the crowd.

But now someone's asking for results. Bright eyed, laughing, a scrawny old fella with a thick mop of grey hair. Conversation I don't want, but we have no choice. What the fuck do I know? I make some up, but the old man is persistent, wants a blow by blow of one of the games. Suspicion. Why so fucking persistent? We get off at the next stop, to switch carriages, but the old bastard gets off with us. Down in the toilets, no time for finesse, then pick up the next train.

The rest of the gear's already been dumped near the operation site a few days back by another team. And getting close to the weapons production factory itself is going to be no problem either. Unbelievably they built it slap in the fucking middle of a downtown suburb. Makes it easy for us to get close, but what the fuck. Our problems will start once we get inside the facility - a Chinese funded and managed factory. Security there is tight and we've got very little intel. In fact a low level QA manager, Steve Liu, is our sole source of information. We plan to make our way around in service tunnels running in a grid pattern under the site. But like I said, the intel is sketchy. On top of that, I've never trusted Liu: a bitter man, feeling he's been overlooked for promotion. I met the guy once. It'd have to be clear to a blind fucking monkey why he never made it up the ladder.

We finally make it to the city and spill out with the rest of the crowd. We're to spend the rest of the day in the city, going in tonight. Of course the place is buzzing. Holiday mood. As the day progresses the place becomes overrun with fans from every nation under the sun. They keep pouring in. Feels like at a crowded party when the walls are bulging, nowhere to move. Mostly they head to the bars. After that it's carnage up another level. Fighting, knives out; sporadic gunfire. The local authorities are out of their depth. Drowning. The squads spend the morning spread out in a couple of quiet downtown pub. But by lunchtime the whole city is crawling with drunken football fans, so me and Wilce end up relocating to a local café down a side alley. You wouldn't feed your dog the food they serve us. But at least it means we mostly get the place to ourselves, save a few locals. Fuck they must be starving, or have teflon lined stomachs. As night falls the random fighting escalates to gang warfare. Team against team. But like anywhere you can avoid it. The girls are out in force and working overtime. Making the most of the influx of foreign currency. With nothing else to do me and Wilce, in a cheap hotel down from the café, we skin a few.

February 15 2117. 22h00 : Go Time. Another train. This one to the edge of town. Two pickups are waiting for us. The squads pile in and we're on our way. Suburbia. Still the crowds but not to the carnage level of the city. On the move going somewhere. Or a mass of them. Around the markets. At the gaudy lit, bright as fucking day bars and restaurants. Along the half lit roads, hitting patches of black where all the light's sucked out. Bone dry. Dust in the air. See it. Smell it. The men, plain clothed, moving silhouettes. But even in the thin, dirty glow the women and girls stand out. Bright blurs of color. With the cops chronically outnumbered in the city they'd given up all pretence of checking ID so we were able to move around the city freely. It gave me a chance earlier to take a taxi out to the site and do some recce. Particularly, to check the entry points into a mains tunnel system which runs close to the factory.

As I said, some lunatic thought it would be a good idea to construct a full on weapons production plant only a few clicks from the suburban sprawl. To the north of the factory is a rail line, and to the south an eight lane highway, the main N/S arterial out of Mogadishu. Busy would be an understatement, with every imaginable vehicle ploughing up and down it 24/7. The mains service tunnels - electric, comms and so on - run both sides of the freeway and are interconnected by tunnels under the road every hundred metres. We'll then access the factory through its own service tunnel which connects off the mains tunnel system. Sounds easy enough but out here beyond the city fringe it's a flat wasteland with zero cover. Making like a breakdown we park the pickups a few hundred metres from the factory entrance. The site is brightly lit with armed guards patrolling all around the outside perimeter. But with the two vehicles between the road and the manhole we're using to enter the mains we've got the cover we need to get in undetected.

I lead the two squads along the Mains tunnel under the freeway - so close you can hear them pounding over our heads – up to the entrance to the factory service tunnels. Punch in the codes we got from the factory insider. A heart skip moment but then the big metal door, like a bank vault, slowly swings open. Twenty metres inside the factory perimeter this main splits into six smaller tunnels, three running into each of the two sections of the factory. One section produces weapons, the other ammunition, bombs, rockets.

There's a reason we stop here. The mole Steve Liu gave us a map of the three service tunnels running into each sector. He warned us that along with the access tunnel – which contains electrics, comms cabling, water supply - the other two carry highly dangerous waste in open channels to a treatment plant just

down the road. Now, the map indicates which are the two access tunnels. But I've never trusted the mole: just call it instinct. So I order a ROD to check the one that leads to the weapons sector that's marked as safe. No problem accessing the tunnels, the codes Lui gave us work fine again but after that it goes pear shaped. I get a few seconds of video from the ROD's head cameras as he drops into the tunnels. But as soon as he lands his legs start to melt. Fuck knows what the waste was but that was it, a few seconds and then the screen goes blank. You might say, OK it was only a ROD, but it could just as easily have been me or Wilce. The cunt Liu.

Stuck at the split of the factory tunnels. I've got to assume nothing Liu gave us can be trusted. Eenie, meenie, miniee, fucking mo. In two minds whether to abort. We don't have time to recce the whole place. But then again we only need access to the production plants where we'll lay the explosives. The access tunnel has got to lead there. The storage sites – which we've also got to blow – we can find once we get into the factory. They should be at the back near the railway siding. Problem there will be getting access to them - security's biometric there. Yeah, naked feeling - you're fucked without good intel. Upside we have Liu in a safe house at head office. I put a call through to the Boss – tell them to get what they can out of the cunt. The Boss must have anticipated something like this happening. Because as soon as I tell him the story he transfers the video call down to The Interview Room, where they've got Liu strapped down. One of the interrogators confirms what I'd guessed from the drugged out look on Liu's face, "Yeah, he's had 10ml, and it's all good what he's telling us." After letting him know what happened he says, "What the fuck did he hope to achieve? Or maybe he just didn't fucking know? Don't worry mate, if he's got anything I'll get it out of him."

The interrogator turns around and smacks Liu across the face and immediately he starts crying and pleading, like we were already ripping his toe nails out. The interrogator grabs him by the hair and brings him close, "Shut the fuck up or you'll have your balls to chew on, you fucking nothing. Tell us the truth and you'll be alright, anything else and that's it, you're dead. Easy, right? Right!"

Not fully there, you can see Liu's eyes go wide as he pushes back in his chair. When I start talking, coming out of the speakers, he's looking around wildly like he's hearing a ghost. Keeping my voice slow and flat, I tell him, "Liu, we're in the service tunnel, where it splits. Which are the two safe ones?" He mumbles something and slumps forward. The interrogator grabs his hair again, wrenches his head back and screams in his face, "Which fucking ones, you cunt! Or do you

want to go for another swim?" They must have given him a go at the waterboarding because the reaction is immediate. Liu throws himself back in the chair and topples over, screaming, "No, no, please, please." Lying on the floor, strapped to the chair still, his body starts convulsing. By the hair, Interrogator pulls Liu back upright, "Which ones! Count of three!" Liu starts shaking again, "I don't know. I only ever got a glimpse of the service tunnel layout. It was top secret." I believe the cunt: trying to make himself more important than he was. Couldn't admit he knew almost fuck all. It fits with his character. But of course this doesn't help us. I tell the interrogator, "Mate, we're gonna have to do some more trial and error." Already with only just enough men to complete the operation, I can't afford to lose any more RODs, but we don't have a choice. "Get back to me if you get anything useful out of him. Anything he can remember."

23h30. Leaving two RODs to guard the mains junction the rest of us jog back to the six access covers. Nearly a fucking hour wasted and we're still not inside the factory yet. We know one is no good, but that still leaves five. 20% chance. A risk too high. I tell Wilce, "Change of plan mate. Cut the odds down if we all enter by one tunnel. Two tunnels left leading to the weapons factory. 50/50 then. And then you find a way into the bomb and ammo production section once we're above ground." Tunnel #2 and #3: simply marked 'Waste'. Shit would be the least of our problems right now, we're already deep enough in it for fuck's sake. Torchlight shows up nothing, the light petering out before it reaches the bottom. Of course, I'm gonna send another ROD down, so it's not a life or death, but at some point we've got to get this fucking factory destroyed. With what they've had access to these gangs are getting ambitious. Fuck, nuclear! Where the fuck are they getting that from? We're not talking in the thousands then. One of those going off in Mogadishu, the most populous city in Africa, we're talking millions. I'm looking at the squad of RODs wondering who to choose when one steps forward. "Alright Ferris, what do you have in mind?" Ferris doesn't do anything without a reason that's backed up by cast iron logic. He smiles grimly, "Nothing clever mate. Someone's got to do it, so it might as well be me." Wishing I could send someone else instead, I tell him, "All right mate, we'll head back to the mains junction. I'll radio you when we've closed the air seal, then you go down. Give us your base Geiger reading." Wilce is already running back down the tunnel with the other RODs in tow. "Alright mate, good luck." He nods and pats me on the arm, "Don't worry about me, you better start thinking what you're gonna do if this one is a no go too. You're running out of men to get this job done in time."

When I reach them Wilce and the RODs are already back into the mains tunnel outside the factory. I radio through to Ferris and then slam the heavy metal door. Wilce looks at me, “Was this a sick fucking joke by Liu, or something worse, mate? A setup?” I shrug, distracted, wondering whether Ferris is going to make it, but also why he stepped forward at all. I’m still pondering this when there’s a sharp tap from the other side of the door. Wilce opens it and the pair of them stare blankly at each other, then Wilce pushes past Ferris, at the same time calling over his shoulder, “Come on, let’s get going boys, we’ve got some time to make up.” Wilce is taking six, and I the remaining five, which includes Ferris. Two teams, each of us responsible for laying explosives to take out the two production plants. Enough to do the job, surprises aside. Then again, in our business setbacks are the norm not the exception. If it was a piece of cake they’d be sending in the regulars, right? And I wouldn’t have two lines of medals dangling off my chest, and seven scalps on a leather belt in a padlocked war chest back home. Yeah, we take chances. Life and death. Every day. You just gotta shrug it off and get on with the job. But this. I dunno, even before we got here – but more so once I saw the carnage of all the soccer fans – it’s been in the back of my mind that if we don’t get this factory blown up some kind of serious shit is gonna go down.

At the entrance to the service tunnels Wilce lifts off the lid to #3, but Ferris puts a hand on his arm, “No, mate, you’re in #4 for the other side the factory.” Wilce throws his hand off, “No fucking way cunt. You think I’m gonna risk my fucking squad...” Stares at Ferris. Wide eyed, always ready for a fight. But then he gets it. All the anger gone, he hesitates a moment then shrugs then and pushes past Ferris; says to me. “Mate, I still don’t like it. We can’t trust any of Liu’s intel.”

“I agree. I want drone cameras across the two plants. We need to confirm an exact layout of the production facilities. What they’re manufacturing, where. It’s going to delay things but we don’t have a choice.” Wilce nods in agreement. “So, meet back here in one hour then, mate? Agree the layout for the explosives, yeah?” I don’t need to tell Wilce, he could do this on his own. Still, we’re a team and we got to know what the other hand’s doing. “Yeah, mate. OK nothing for it, let’s find out if anything that cunt said was the truth.” A few minutes later and we’re underneath the factory. Each sector stretches over five hectares, so the RODS are running, spreading out to get in position under one of the access manholes. From other sources we know there’s never any one about in the factory since it’s all automated. So after putting the camogear on - which turns them invisible to any video feed - up the shaft, off with the covers and the boys are into the factory and launching the drone cameras.

All going well with the recce. I'm starting to think that finally the luck is going our way and we could be back at the rendezvous with Wilce early. But then the happy fucking ending movie stops. As the RODs are wandering around the factory I've been getting a feed from their head cameras. Immediately I know something's wrong. Very fucking wrong. I don't say anything to the boys, letting them complete the mission, because I'll still need the intel. That is, unless we abort the whole operation. Which to be honest is my first reaction after what I'm seeing from the facecams. And it's what I'm still thinking as we head back down the tunnels. After what I've just seen there's a whole lot more at stake than we first thought. But Time is the fucking killer. I need a lot more intel than we're getting from the cameras. And the only way I'm going to get that is by going into the factory and talking to someone in the know. And this all needs to happen before the start of the day shift. Now, we'd planned for this contingency. Basically we - me and Ferris - are going to walk into the factory manager's office and he is going to tell us everything we want to know. Gun to the head? No, something a little more subtle. He won't even know he's been fucked over. All well and good when we had some time spare, but we chewed most of that up thanks to Liu. I just don't know any more. But this is now millions of lives at stake. We don't have a choice.

They say, *Who Dares, Wins*. And, yeah, there's times in all special ops when it comes down to nothing more than a roll of the dice. You win - OK. You lose - no other options, you're dead. Sure there's always luck, but you tilt it your way some. It's also who's got the instinct. Who can think the quickest and smartest. Well, we're about to find out. And despite everything, I'm feeling confident. When you know you've got the best of the best - men you can trust in the most extreme circumstances - you've got to back yourself to win.

With the rest of the RODs heading back to the rendezvous point, Ferris and I, both of us in the camogear, climb up into the factory. It looks like any other large scale production facility. Concrete floored warehouse. Long production lines with massive machines going at full bore. Deafening. A few workRODs around each machine but they don't matter. In the middle of a full on busy street with the camogear on you're invisible to anything except the natural eye. And of course only animals have that now. Actually I'm not paying much attention to the production floor. What I'm interested in is where they store the finished product. Because that's what I need to be absolutely fucking 100% sure about if we're going to get something positive result out of this fucking mess.

From the original map and the drone feeds I've got a general layout of the factory in my head. The manager's office is on a mezzanine floor of a structure in the middle of the factory. Underneath it there's a toilet. We duck in there, strip off the camogear and, after a quick heads up with Ferris, he leads the way up to the manager's office. Half way up the stairs there's a woman coming down. I hold my breath; can't help my hand sliding towards my pistol. She looks at Ferris a little surprised, then smiles, barely glancing at me, then steps aside to let us pass up. Now, why the fuck would she do that? Only because we got up Ferris in a transplant so he's a face and body replica of the big boss of the factory. Mate, you never know if things are going to work out until you try them. And there's always that moment of uncertainty, like when she first looked at him. But she was completely fooled, so I'm feeling a lot more confident as we enter the Production Manager's office.

Seeing Ferris the manager - who'd had his feet up on the table, playing with his phone - looks thoroughly caught out and nearly falls off his chair. Ignoring his confusion straight up Ferris says, "Chan, I don't have a lot of time. This is a bean counter from head office," pointing at me, "He's here to check production records. Why? Because, Chan, there's a discrepancy between your production figures and projections from HO. A very large one. Take him to the storage compound." Chan mumble something I don't catch. Ferris towers over the small, rotund chinaman, who's skin has a blotched, unhealthy pallor like he rarely sees the sun. "Yes, of course you'll need an inventory, you idiot. How else do you expect him to be able to do the check?" I keep my head down. Hugh is playing the part like a champion. Chan is totally taken in, and I'm finding it hard not to piss myself laughing.

At that Chan jumps to his feet, grabs a thick red folder and thrusts it into my hands. "Lead the way, Chan. Yes, I'll join you, I want to get to the bottom of this as much as anyone." Chan starts to remonstrate but Hugh cuts him off, "Stop worrying! No one is accusing you of anything. At this stage." Gives him a beady stare at which Chan goes white. "It may be nothing more than a balls up with the production planners." Ferris grabs him by the shoulder and pushes Chan to the door, "So, save the excuses for when you might need them." Chan cringes, ducks his head and almost falls down the stairs in his hurry to get to the warehouse. Ferris and me follow close behind him. Of course, neither of us is keen to stay any longer than we have to. So far we've been lucky to catch Chan off guard but at some point the brain is going to kick in and some awkward questions are going to start popping into his head. By then we need to be long gone.

It's not complicated. We need a look inside the storage warehouse to get a layout. And find out exactly what in there so we can put a demolition plan together. But if we fuck up... Let's put it this way, any disaster in the whole of human history is going to be nothing compared if we do. Sounds like an overblow? A couple of hunches alright, but I'm almost 100% sure. And it's a completely different situation to what we'd planned for. It's almost impossible to exaggerate the carnage if this factory and everything in it isn't neutralized before The World Cup Final starts. And they kick off in a little over seven hours from now.

Chan is almost running, and in no time we're in front of a set of thick steel doors. We'd have had no chance of getting through them ourselves because they require a full face scan. With Chan we're through there no problem. Now down two levels and into the warehouse. Which if my geography is correct puts us on the north side of the complex next to the railway line. And yeah, there it is. Wall to wall, covering a huge area, are unmarked steel crates being loaded into a long line of rail containers. All very ordinary looking with a whole range of company logos and markings. A very slick operation. Not wanting to waste any more time now I've got what I need, I tell Chan, "I'll be back in four hours, at 06h00, when the Dayshift Manager clocks on; you'll then be free to help with the inventory check." Ferris interjects, "Don't tell anyone about this inspection, Chan. If there is a problem I don't want anyone alerted that we're on to it, understand?" Chan nods his head, "Good. Just remember, every call you make, everyone you talk to, will be monitored and recorded. You don't want to make this any worse for yourself Chan. No one must know."

Chan's head is now bobbing like a chook and it looks like he wants to say something, but Ferris cuts him off, "Later, Chan. Take us back to the office. There's a few documents we'll need for the investigation and then I'll be on my way." Dutifully Chan leads us back the same way we came. As before no one takes the slightest notice of us. As we pass through the factory I take the opportunity to check. The RODS have done a good job. The drone cameras are all fixed now, and none obviously visible. Back in the office, and still flustered, Chan again quite willingly hands over several top secret documents to Hugh. He obviously still absolutely takes him for the boss. Ferris, though he doesn't openly accuse, is still sounding like it's all Chan's fault. Curtly he orders, "Chan, go back to the warehouse and make sure the inventory records are up to date. We don't want to waste any time when we come back." Chan scurries off, allowing us to head down to the toilet, don the camogear and make a quick exit into the service tunnel without being spotted.

As soon as we're back in the service tunnel all the tension's released and I can't help it, I'm pissing myself laughing. Clapping him on the back I tell Ferris, "Mate, that was the best one. How did you fucking do it? Mate, if I hadn't known I'd have been taken in just as much as Chan. Mate, if that had been me I would have fucked up at some point, I'm sure of it." Ferris shrugs and shakes his head, "No idea, boss. Something must have happened in my life, but I couldn't tell you what. We don't get programmed to do that kind of shit, that's for sure." Back at the junction with the mains tunnel, Wilce is already waiting with his crew and the rest of mine. By the look on Wilce's face I can see he's got his own story to tell. Based on what I've already seen I'm pretty sure how it's gonna go. In answer to my question Wilce laughs, "Mate, what didn't we find? It's a fucking toy shop in there. It's not just ammo and rockets and conventional bombs. They're manufacturing high grade fucking warheads! Nuclear, chemical, bio. I got some more bad news - two of the RODs stumbled across the stockpile warehouse and set off an alarm. Yeah, yeah, they were in camogear, so nobody saw them. And I did an auto destruct so they'd have found nothing. Let's hope they think it was nothing more than a faulty alarm."

"Well, we'll find out soon enough, mate, we're still going ahead with the operation." At first Wilce looks at me like I'm insane, but when he sees I'm serious he says, still incredulous, "Mate, with the gear I found, it would be enough to wipe out the whole country, and make East Africa a no go for the next two hundred fucking years. What the fuck are you talking about?"

I explain, though still not quite believing what I'm saying, "Mate it's worse than that. They've also got a full on ICBM production plant. At first I thought it was just the Crusader pilot plant, which our Government so thoughtfully provided the blueprints and technology for. You won't know about this but I was involved in the negotiations. They go back twelve months, when Al Sharif was still flavor of the month. Of course, our military were screaming against the idea, but the bean counter from Crusader Inc. said it would lead to a 7% drop in production costs if they had a plant operating out of Mogadishu. When she said that you'd imagine she'd just offered to take it up the arse, by the way the Government Inc. mob reacted."

Wilce looks surprised but says nothing, "Anyway, the military managed to persuade them to make it only a pilot plant. See how it went before upgrading. Unfortunately, looks like we were right again. Without telling anyone Sharif somehow managed to expand the pilot plant into full scale production. All that bullshit about wanting ICBMs was a fucking smokescreen. The cunt already had

his own factory gearing up to produce the shit.” Looking around I can see everyone’s getting the picture of how serious it is. “The only – and I mean the only – upside is that, according to the production manager, they’re still not operating the plant at full capacity and haven’t shipped anything out yet. But this is a slick operation mate, and already they’ve got a warehouse full of missiles. Transported in unmarked containers. Imagine mate - Crusader missiles plus the warhead of your choice on the black market for any lunatic with the cash. And all this so Australia Inc. could add a few fucking per cent on the bottom line. And the fucking idiots will stand there wringing their hands and claiming they couldn’t have known what would happen.”

“Mate, as we worked our way through the factory we found more and more missile lines, but no warhead production. I knew they had to be somewhere. Missiles without warheads is chicks without cunts: no use to anyone. I figured they must be in your section of the factory. Fuck, if I could get hold of that cunt Liu, I’d strap him across a missile launcher and pull the fucking trigger. But hey, you can only die once, right mate?” Wilce laughs briefly but then looks serious again. It doesn’t take much imagination to know what’s at stake. To foresee what will happen if we fail. “Still, mate, even if we set off an implosion device, we’re still talking about leakage.... With the number of warheads we estimated and being so close to the city.... Mate, and with the World Cup on, we’re talking about tens of thousands of people, right mate?”

Ferris interrupts, “You’re not thinking this through. What’s the alternative? If we allow any of this onto the street we’ll be talking about millions of lives. And the nuclear terrorist attack, it’s got to be connected to The World Cup Finals. If they detonate a nuclear at the stadium it’s that close to the factory it will set off the whole stockpile of bio and chemical. Hundreds of millions. And spreading.”

Ferris pauses to let it sink in, “Mate, I’ve looked at a few scenarios. Worst case, if we don’t destroy this factory, on its own it could turn the whole world order on its head. Leaders running scared and making stupid decisions. Who knows how it could end, mate.” Wilce looks blankly at Ferris then says to me, “Mate, we can’t be making these kinds of decisions. We should be telling the Boss. Let him decide what we should be doing. Mate, if we blow the place up and foreigners get killed.... Mate there’ll be repercussions. Implications we can’t predict. Fuck, it’s not our job to!” Wilce looks frightened. Only ever see that when he feels out of his depth – usually, like now, when politics gets in the way of military tactics. “Mate we’re talking about a lot of innocent people. Do you want

their blood on our hands, mate?” As he’s talking Wilce’s voice rises and an urgent edge comes into it.

The tension between Ferris and Wilce is never far below the surface, and this situation is more than enough to boil it over. But before I can say anything Ferris interjects, “Getting emotional about this is the last fucking thing we need. Clear, calm heads is what’s called for, yeah?” Wilce thrusts his face into Ferris’, “Mate it’s alright for you, you’re just a fucking robot. But humans, mate they take over. It’s what we fucking do!”

Ferris, manner placatory, his voice flat: “Sorry, mate. But this is too big.” He turns to me then, and in the same tone says, “We’ve got to make a decision and we don’t have much time.”

Wilce is about to say something to Ferris but stops himself. His manner cautious, uncertain, he says to me, “Yeah, mate, you were right, I can see who’s the most use to you right now. But, mate, you get what I’m saying?” Putting a hand on his shoulder, I tell him, “Mate, this is just as hard for me. My whole life I’ve taken orders, and followed them to the letter. But Ferris is right. In this situation it doesn’t make sense to do that. You know what Bart is capable of. If we don’t do things our way, who knows what the orders would be. As he said, people high up could get jumpy and make the wrong decisions. We do it our way, minimizing casualties, and tell them about it after. What can they do?”

Wilce shakes his head, “Mate, that’s the point. What do we know? All sorts of fallout we never guessed at. Mate this is close to fucking treason, you know that? Why don’t we talk to the Boss?” Time is running out. The window of opportunity getting smaller by the minute. Not long before we don’t have enough time to lay the explosives. But to do this I need Wilce on board, heart and soul. I try a different tack, “On something as big as this it won’t stop with him, he’ll pass it up the food chain. All the way up to Bart. And we know how unpredictable Bart is. Who knows, she could authorise the bio and chemical to be blown up with conventional explosives for one of their fucked up political games. Put the blame on someone else. You know how it goes mate, she’s done it before. They didn’t think twice about taking out a million in Dacca, Bangladesh, and tried to blame it on China. What’s there to stop her doing the same here? And then there’s the nuclear to think about. The fucking carnage if some of those get detonated....”

Ferris interjects, as usual reeling off facts and statistics. “Anyone within a two hundred kilometres radius will be vaporised. With wind spread, people dying from bio and chemical, within twenty four hours the number is into the hundreds of millions. Across the continent and further. And Bart. Statistically, if there’s a

fucked option more than 63% of the time she will take it.” Though his voice is still calm, measured, there’s a sudden intensity in him, “We’re talking Mogadishu, population thirty seven million, turned into a wasteland. And with the bio and chemical, at the very least the whole of Africa is at stake.” Ferris shrugs, “No one in their right mind, right? But that’s who we’re dealing with.” Wilce still looks unconvinced but says nothing. “And all along the Australian Government denied all involvement with Dacca. There have been more since, but that was the first major terrorist act by our government. You don’t forget something like that. A million people killed in your name. And no one said anything. The blood is on your hands just as much as theirs.” Wilce stabs Ferris in the chest with a finger, “Mate, what the fuck are you talking about?”

There’s no denying what Ferris is saying: “Mate, there’s something else. Bart’s minders like to keep a tight lid on this, but if she gets it into her head that this is some kind of divine prophesy she’s fulfilling, she’ll do it. I heard this from the Boss. Bart told a fellow G6 leader, word for word: “Everything I do is simply following God’s word. I have given myself to him and if you follow him all doubt, all uncertainty, is removed. I am a greater leader for it. Of course, I never question His advice. How could I? Only a disbeliever, a terrorist, would question.”” Again the frightened, cornered look. But I sense now that Wilce would go along with whatever I tell him. But as he said this could easily be twisted into mutiny. We have to be rock solid between us. He has to get it, the implications of going to the Boss. “Mate, I’m a soldier, so it doesn’t come easy for me to criticize a boss. Mate, our Commander in Chief has such a low intellect she had to cheat the finals to pass out of high school. She’s so psychologically fucked she has to take drugs to face life. Spaced out half the time. I’d have laughed at anyone telling me someone that fucked could be the President of Australia. But ten years on mate. No one’s laughing now, are they mate? You want the decision to be in the hands of someone that fucked.”

Wilce is about to respond, but Ferris puts up his hand. Wilce snorts, “Fuck, what is it now, robot, you going to order us what to do?” Ferris shakes his head, “I’ve got a question for you, Colonel. I’ve never heard any of this. Is everything you’ve said true. 100%? Not gossip or hearsay, you know it to be 100% fact.” I nod, wondering where Ferris is going with this, “Yes, it’s all true, which is why we can’t leave the decision up to Bart. Maybe I could speak to the Boss, persuade him to our point of view.” Ferris shakes his head vehemently. Then, staring at us, face set, speaking very slowly, he says, “From what you’ve told me, there’s only one logical action to take. Treason or not, we can’t risk talking to the Boss. He will

have to report to Bart. The probability is 87% she would order us to blow the warheads up.” Wilce erupts, “What the fuck are you talking about? This is fucking anarchy. What the fuck...” I don’t know if it was Ferris’ manner or what he said but despite Wilce’s reaction – what he’s saying is just as valid – everything is suddenly very clear. We don’t have a choice. “You’re right.... He’s right, Wilce. We can’t let Bart loose on this. There’s too much at stake.” Wilce shoulders sag. He stares at me then, shaking his head, “Mate, you’re ordering us into treason.”

“Yes it is, mate, and I can’t believe I’m saying it. But if you want out - now is the time to say so. I can do this on my own.” Wilce takes a step back, his expression blank. He hesitates before he replies, “Mate, you know as well as I do I wouldn’t get across the road if I do that. You can’t take the risk of letting me walk away.” I try to say something but he shakes his head, “Mate, this is fast, too fast for me. But I trust you mate, alright?” He stares at me hard, unblinking. Nothing’s said, we just look at each other. Neither of us quite believing where we’ve got to. “Mate, when this is over the three of us can talk about what this means. For now, we’ve got a deadline to work to. Fucking tight one. The Night Manager knocks off at six am and - I don’t care what he says - I don’t trust him not to say something or put two and two together and realize he’s been had. Time running out and the stakes sky fucking high. Remember? The World Cup is on later this morning. We need to get this wrapped up before then, otherwise the entire planet could be watching when we blow the factory up.” I let him take the image in - something easy to picture - before going on, “If this blows – hundreds of millions killed – this could be the beginning of the end of us as a species. I’m talking the politics of it.” Can’t help laughing at Wilce’s wide eyed look. “Yeah, insanity mate. But all possibilities are on. The Chinese get blamed again by Australia. Or Israel. I’ve heard rumors Australia Inc want a slice of the Africa pie for themselves. Don’t want Israel walk in and take over the whole fucking continent. This might be a good way for them to start. But we’re still doing our job. What we signed up for. Put our lives down for. Don’t ever forget that. Whatever they throw at us.”

February 16 2117. 03h00. This part of the operation is standard enough - me and Wilce have done it a hundred times. Normally it takes a full team of specialist explosives engineers for a job this size to do it properly but of course this has to be finished tonight and there's only a handful of us. But, when you've been doing it for as long as we have you learn the short cuts, ones you won't find in any of the manuals. All of us in camogear with backpacks full of detonators, explosives and the new implosive devices. Wilce has taken his crew to the

warhead plant while my crew starts working our way methodically through the ICBM factory laying explosives out of sight under the machinery. Again there's no one about so we're able to work fast, but with the stakes so high the tension is wire taught. To be honest it's not just the risks and the tight deadline: despite what I said to Wilce, I'm still wondering if we're even doing the right thing. Don't get me wrong, I trust Ferris. He doesn't get it wrong. But I'm a soldier and the hierarchy is there for a reason.

I'm still not getting the answers I want to the questions buzzing round in my head when, an hour in, we have all the charges laid and are back at the rendezvous. Wilce isn't there and with nerves raw I start to imagine the worst. But only a couple of minutes later he appears, but minus two of the RODs. I look at him questioningly. He looks grim but doesn't explain. Just gives me the thumbs up, "I'll tell you later mate, it can wait. We're ready to do the stockpiles?" We're down to eight RODs, plus Ferris, me and Wilce. With the men gathered in a tight circle around me I give orders for the last part of the operation. "Two of you get back to the pickups and have them ready. We'll be back at 06h00. The rest of you in camogear with all the implosives you can carry. Any questions?" Heads nod. A few glances between them but nothing said. Looking expectant, completely focused, each of these men know exactly what they have to do. I don't need to give any big speeches, they're smart, highly self motivated professionals. They understand the importance of what we have to do. And the sacrifice they must be prepared to make to complete the mission. "OK, let's go."

04h00. Leaving the RODs in camogear at the foot of the stairs, Wilce, me and Ferris are once again walking purposefully up to Chan's office. Two hours left before he knocks off. Standing in the doorway, Ferris growls out, "Chan, I hope you're ready for the inspection?" With all the noise from the production plant Chan hadn't heard us come up the stairs, and he'd not been expecting us for another two hours, so again we catch him off guard. Like a pantomime he's falling over himself when he sees Ferris, who's dropped straight back into Boss role. Chan, bobbing, replies, "Yes sir, everything appears in order but, of course, I don't have the current production projections. When do you want to start, sir?" Pointing to Wilce, Ferris says, "I've brought another bean counter along to speed things up. We'll start with the missile warehouse and then move on to the warhead stockpile." Chan turns white. "But you didn't mention anything about the warheads, I haven't checked those yet." Ferris, tells him calmly, "Change of

plan, Chan. I got an update from HO and there are discrepancies there too. Come on, we all want to get home. Watch the Cup Final, heh?”

Chan smiles uncertainly, surprised by the sudden familiarity. “Yes sir. Follow me, sir.” Once again he leads us down to the ultra secure storage warehouses. This time there’s also the team of RODS in camogear to get through the security gates, and of course we can’t see them. I dawdle at the back, feigning an injury to my leg, to let them slot in between me and Ferris. Just gotta hope for the best. Once down in the warehouse I feel a hand on my arm, all fingers spread - a signal that the RODS are all safely inside. For the next forty five minutes we keep Chan busy while the RODs lay the implosives.

04h50. Another tap on the arm tells me five backpack loads of state of the art implosive devices have been set up so that when they go off the warehouse containing the weapons and short and long range missiles will be sucked into a space the size of a family car. Of course it’s important to take out these ICBMs. Otherwise once the dust settles on Mogadishu the warlords will have capability to cross borders. Draw the whole fucking region – China, Israel, Russia – into the inferno. But the overriding priority is the warheads stockpiles in the other half of the factory. That’s where we get Chan to take us next, via a short interconnecting tunnel. The job is much the same here, so the RODS have it finished a little quicker.

05h40. We’re all back in Chan’s office and he’s looking a little more relaxed after Ferris tells him everything looks in order. “Good job, Chan, I think this calls for a celebration. Now, don’t argue man, it’s been a long night for all of us. You can drive us to my hotel, we’ll all have a few drinks and watch some of the game, and then we’ll all be on our way. What do you say, Chan?” He looks a bit hesitant at first, obviously not used to getting this kind of treatment from his real boss. Ferris reassures him, “No need to worry about the time, Chan, I’m sure nothing’s going to happen between now and when the Day Shift Manager arrives at six. Leave him a note and we’ll be on our way.”

With the RODs in camogear already on their way back to the pickups, the four of us head out to Chan’s car. Outbound security is lax, so we get through no problem and Ferris orders Chan to drive us to a hotel not far from the factory where he directs him to an underground car park. Still oblivious to the real forces at play Chan has been chatting away the whole journey, no doubt relieved the night’s ordeal is over. He looks a little smug even. It crosses my mind he’s got some scam going. Could it be him selling weapons to the gangs? No, not the ringleader, but involved at some level.

Ferris has kept up the smalltalk while Wilce and I in the back stay quiet the whole journey. The place is deserted as Chan pulls the car into an empty parking space. He's still laughing at a joke from Ferris when Wilce, immediately behind him, leans forward, grabs him by the head and with one sharp twist expertly snaps his neck. The crack echoes loud inside the confined space of the car. Chan's eyes go suddenly blank, staring, and the amused expression on his face becomes fixed. No one says anything. After throwing his body in the trunk in single file we make our way up to the hotel lobby. From there grab a taxi which takes us to where the pickups are waiting for us with the rest of the team.

February 16 2117. 06h30. The job completed. The World Cup Final starts in two hours. Yeah, weird time for a game of footie, but usual story it's prime time where it counts. Anyway, it gives us plenty of time to get far the fuck away, for when we remotely set off the two explosions. The first set is the implosives, to destroy the warheads and everything else in the storage warehouses. The two factories, laid with conventional explosives, will make a nice fireworks display - enough of a distraction to give us time to make it to Berbera and the sub waiting for us there.

We're driving north, another hour to go before the explosives are detonated. I turn to Wilce, "Well, mate, at least Bart won't have a chance to do dickhead this time round. And nice operation mate, a few dramas but nothing we couldn't handle, yeah? Disaster averted, thank fuck." The whole journey he's been withdrawn, pensive. I see now I hadn't convinced him. He was still just following orders. Or just saving his skin? He was right of course - I would have had to neutralise him if he'd walked.

Chapter 7

Continent Africa

February 16 2117. 08h35 local time in Somalia. An earnest looking news reader, her voice breaking, reads from the teleprinter. *"... Let me repeat, this is not a dramaTV... This is breaking news. On an aircraft carrier off the Somalia coast, four hundred and fifty two RAAF have been killed by a massive explosion just inland from the coast centred on the city of Mogadishu. The tragedy was witnessed by viewers around the world watching The World Cup Final. The entire population of Mogadishu city has been wiped out. I repeat, this is not dramaTV. President Bart has denounced the attack as the worst terrorist atrocity in history. A hot line has been set up for any relatives to contact authorities about their loved ones. The President will be addressing the nation later this afternoon."*

Appearing genuinely shocked by what she's reading off the autocue the news reader stares down at some papers before, a little wild eyed, she looks back up into the camera. *"It is believed the disaster was caused by an explosion in an armaments factory on the outskirts of Mogadishu, which then set off the arsenal located on the same site. There are reports that chemical and biological were in the stockpile, along with several nuclear warheads which were somehow detonated at the same time as the explosion. The cause of the disaster is unknown, but previous accidents have been reported at the factory. However there are reports emerging that it was not an accident. That it was in fact the work of the terrorist organization our troops were recently deployed to Indonesia to weed out. However, there have been no claims of responsibility yet. World Cup officials are insisting they were not made aware of the factory's presence so close to the city."*

07h00 local time, Australia. *"This is the latest update on the Mogadishu tragedy. Viewers, we have to report that nearly one thousand of our troops have been killed, and another five thousand seriously injured on the offshore base. The president will be speaking to you all in less than one hour from now. However, if we have any further updates on this, one of the darkest days in our military history, we will report them to you straight away. In addition it has been confirmed that nuclear, chemical and biological warheads did indeed explode at the armaments factory outside Mogadishu. Reports are already coming in of*

attributable deaths as far away as Nigeria and Egypt. Strong monsoonal winds, common at this time of year, are only going to make matters worse. However, officials are categorically denying alarmist claims by some scientists that the whole of North Africa will be reduced to a desert.” The newsreader tries to laugh off this last statement, but her voice cracks, leaving the impression that such a nightmare scenario is in fact quite possible. More upbeat she concludes, *“We would like to reassure viewers there is no need for alarm. The Health Department has confirmed that there is no risk of toxic fallout reaching Australia, as the winds are fortunately in a northerly direction.”* At this the blonde haired newsreader looks up and smiles broadly into the camera.

08h00 local time, Australia. The President is wearing a dark suit. Just before the cameras go live she rearranges her naturally blank expression into a somber mien. *“Good morning my fellow Australians. We are all in deep shock at the loss of so many of the brave men and women of our Armed Forces in what appears to be a freak accident. If they had died in the defence of our nation we might have understood God’s purpose, but this apparently random act can only reinforce our conviction that His ways are, as always, inscrutable to mortal beings.”*

Bart pauses, looking expectantly around the packed room, before continuing, *“It is still possible that it was a action. If this is the case and we find any nation state culpable, we will not rest until that country, and it’s responsible leaders, are brought to justice. Though, praise be to God, we can rest assured that they cannot escape His justice, for He will root out all evil and shine the light on those responsible. Fellow countrymen, let me assure you, WE WILL NOT REST until those responsible are brought to justice.”*

Bart speaks for a further hour, repeating much of what she'd said in her opening remarks. Predictably enough, later that day the catastrophe is used to justify further spread of Surveillance State. And in a new development over the ensuing weeks she takes advantage of the situation to enact legislation that for some crimes – which ones is left unspecified – there will no longer be a presumption of innocence. These are times when it doesn't pay to be your average joe minding his own business. Once it used to be that if you kept your head down and nose clean it was an easy life. But those days are gone and so long as Bart and her string pullers hold the reins of power I see no chance of their return. You might have noticed that at no time does President Bart mention the thirty seven millions of Africans that died, nor the environmental devastation of a region that had been the bread basket of North Africa. So that anyone surviving

The Holocaust will have no means of subsistence. A half a billion people will be starving until the agricultural industry can be reestablished in an area where the soil hasn't been poisoned, the waters polluted. This will be the enduring tragedy. But this is clearly of no concern to the President of Australia Inc.

Of course the death of nearly a thousand of our military is a terrible loss. But with no mention of the Somalis killed made by either Bart or any of the local media, no one can be left in any doubt their lives count for little against the Australians. How can that be? As if the lives of this relative handful of Australian soldiers somehow equates to more than 37, 000, 000 Africans. It makes me wonder, how many Somalis is equal to one westerner's life? Perhaps the victims would matter more if we knew their story? If we had seen them grow from a baby to boisterous adulthood. Heard her talk. Heard his parents reveal their secret, shattered hopes they'd had for him. Their child who, inevitably, will be forgotten in a handful of years. And so, can we say, never existed? Someone who perhaps might have cared about the suffering of others above her own. That we might one day have heard him called a Saint. Would, then, their value equate to the bigoted soldier whose only discernable act was the murder of a fellow soldier who caught him raping an old woman? What wishful thinking. After all, wasn't he a White? One of us. And they: Not.

16 February 2117. 19h30. The President is aboard her plane flying back to Sydney, Australia's financial hub, to discuss the economic fallout of the disaster with fellow directors of Government (Australia) Inc. Advisers are plying her with alcohol and placatory words to calm her. Even the toxic barbiturate of her religious conviction is not strong enough on this occasion. As yet, exactly what happened at Mogadishu - who is responsible and their purpose - is still unclear. This much they know, however. One hour before the start of the World Cup Finals an ASAS squad, the best of the best according to the Army Chief, attempted to perform a remote destruction of the armaments stockpile. But the implosives failed to detonate. Instead one hour later, when the cup final was due to start, the city of Mogadishu vanished from the face of the earth. Three nuclear had been detonated. And all the bio and chemical warheads exploded. Around the world the blast was seen by an estimated seven billion football fans who had tuned in to catch the game. But instead of that they witnessed the vaporization of the stadium and every one within it before, mercifully perhaps, the screens went blank. Every inhabitant of planet Earth knows the story of Mogadishu.

As the plane makes its final approach into Sydney Private Airport, President Bart makes concerted effort to respond in the decisive manner expected of the CEO of Australia Inc. But with little success. The words of her advisers float like bubbles over their heads, forming random and quite meaningless sentences. This is not, in fact, wholly unusual. In Bart's world even the most cast iron of truths become malleable to whatever direction spins most conveniently to support her viewpoint. It is for this reason that anyone of intellect forced into her company excuses themselves at the earliest opportunity. It is said it's impossible to conduct rational conversation with because in the face of a barrage of opposing proof she will doggedly persist in clinging to whatever position she originally entered the argument with. Naturally, for those able to wedge in her brain an opinion which suits their purpose this is an admirable trait. For the rest of us, we face the immeasurable risk of being represented by a leader utterly ill equipped for the delicate task of balancing the opposing demands of the other G6 leaders. When an incompetent is placed at the helm consequences on a catastrophic scale are of course inevitable.

On this occasion even Bart is dimly aware that she is unequal to the moment. And her instinct to bolt for the hills is only exacerbated by the suggestion, coming from several advisers, that covert Australian action was responsible for the failure of the ASAS operation. That she is therefore responsible for the single greatest loss of life in the history of mankind. Out of desire for atonement individuals of a greater humanity might have contemplated adding their own meagre carcass to the pile. One might say, I think without fear of contradiction, it would be the fucking least they could do. Not for one second does this cross Bart's mind. She is a woman with strong instincts of self preservation. With all the resources she can call upon there's so much she could have done to alleviate the suffering of the African victims. But already her mind has turned inward. Working assiduously on the relief of her own confusion and pain. There is never a thought for the families of those that died. Or those that have yet to experience the appalling aftermath of The Holocaust.

Who does she turn to for the relief of her suffering? In this, her darkest hours, she naturally turns to Him. He who can ALWAYS be relied upon. She recalls the words of her favorite pastor. *Never look back. Face the present and plan for the future.* She would later gush that it was this simple homily that sparked - in the face of disaster on a scale of human tragedy never before seen - the germ of an idea which in an instant completely restored her sense of divine conviction. It calmed the hysterical urge to flight. It set her on the path which, in her mind,

provided full and complete justification for the destruction of one of the world's most populous cities. And the assassination of each of that country's thirty seven million inhabitants.

Whilst many rational individuals will go on to label the Mogadishu attack as Man's Greatest Shame, as her plane taxis over to the Government Inc terminal Bart has already managed to reconstruct events in a definitively positive light. Her heart is lightened. The fog of confusion blown away. In jovial mood Lisa Bart turns to the man sitting next to her and without explanation says, "You know, Richard, I don't think Mogadishu is such a disaster after all. In fact, I believe it will prove to have been something quite essential. An essential catalyst to what will lead, I am convinced, to the conclusion of His greatest Victory. His greatest Glory." She laughs, a tinkling sound free of all cares, "Isn't this just one more example, as if any more proof were needed, of God's indomitable Will, and the mystery of His infallible Wisdom?"

The man, more familiar than most with Lisa Bart's religious conviction, still finds himself shocked into silence by her words. He tries to think of an appropriate response. But when confronted by such stark lunacy - of course there is none. He smiles wanly, but Lisa doesn't notice. Her mind now freed from the burden of having to confront awful reality, she has already made her way to the exit where she jokes lightheartedly with several of her advisers. When they, still in shock at the unfolding disaster, do not respond in kind, humming a tune she dances a light tango across the tarmac to a waiting limousine.

Over the ensuing days the tragedy takes on a more human scale. At those half built tower blocks at the coastal town of Berbera where Fury's sabotage squad first landed, though most of the inhabitants were killed outright or have since died, the buildings themselves somehow survived the explosion. They stand as lopsided gravestones. One survivor from them - a wrinkled, aged faced woman - is splashed across the media silently grieving over the body of her dead child. In stark isolation she sits on the family bed, her only remaining possession - a huge affair which accentuates her diminutive size. A doctor and three nurses stand around, looking helpless. Tens of thousands of soldiers from all over the globe are sent to engage with the impossible rescue task. By their side freelance journalists film in close up the drawn out death rattles of those beyond help. They, either victims of the immediate disaster or its consequences: starvation, polluted water sources, or through lack of safe shelter.

March 2117. After the initial horror, we collectively hold our breaths for the inevitable retaliation. We don't have to wait long. And when it comes it is swift and predictable, though its extent shocks even the most pessimistic of commentators. Terrorist groups across the Israeli bloc unite, some of which have lain dormant for more than a century. They respond to the call to arms to seek jihadist revenge for the killing of their Muslim brothers in Somalia. The reason? Within days of the disaster rumors began to spread that Marshall Jakob was in fact responsible. That he'd ordered a counter offensive by Israel's own specials forces: The infamous Mistaarvim. The story goes that having disabled the carefully controlled implosions designed by John Fury they'd set time delayed detonations of the nuclear, bio and chemical weapons to coincide with the start of the soccer match. Apparently, the Israeli elite were prepared to sacrifice the lives of thirty seven million people in order to lay the blame at Australia's door. In turning opinion against her they hoped to put a halt to Australia's expansion plans, which of course would interfere with Israel's own aims.

Whoever was responsible quickly becomes immaterial as isolated pockets of conflict dotted across Israeli territory rapidly merge into a full scale civil war between Jew and Muslim. The conflict extends as far north as Istanbul. Turkey was initially declared a neutral humanitarian aid zone, but after Israeli forces bombed the refugee camps there - which were full of Israeli Arabs fleeing the civil war - the city becomes a desperate beach head. European forces form a blockade across the narrow spit of land separating the two blocs in a last ditch effort to prevent the conflict spreading into Europe. As the bombing continues and the land conflict escalates the defenceless refugees have no means of escape. Who will ever know how many millions died. To the East, Chinese forces have an almost impossible task of containing their fifteen hundred kilometre long border with Israel. But determined they are - fanatically so - not to give up any of their territory to either Arab rebels or Israeli forces. Of course this is understandable, since this land was first won by them at such massive human cost over half a century of vicious conflict with Israel. Here the mountains of the Hindu Kush no longer sing with the call to prayer. And a bastardised version of the Taliban fighter - billeted in the border cities of Herat, Zaranj, or as far south as Karachi - swears fealty not to Allah, but their military commanders in Beijing. Islam has long been eradicated from this territory. No doubt, without this shift - resulting from China's well tested strategy of ethnic cleansing of new dominions - the Israeli civil war would have spread into China. Even so, whilst initially the Chinese forces are successful in containing the conflict, as the war drags on inevitably the Chinese

wall of resistance gives way in places. In Europe, with a less extensive border, their army is able to maintain an impenetrable barrier against the shift of freedom fighters seeking relief from battle, and safe haven for their families. And so, unable to spread and dilute itself, within Israel itself the violence escalates on both sides to ever higher levels of atrocity.

But who could claim to be surprised by such inhumanity? Haven't the IDF - the bullied turned bully - behaved like animals for more than two hundred now? They drown in the blood of the innocent. The number slaughtered now in the millions. And yet they still claim this infamy an act of self defence. In this conflict there is no longer even a pretence of ethical war. The puny resistance of the freedom fighters is met with an Holocaustal extermination of entire Arab communities by Israeli forces whipped up - by the propaganda of their political and religious leaders - into performing acts no human being should be ever found guilty of. This war is history revisited.

June, July 2117. It is at this time, when the world is most delicately poised, that President Lisa Bart - enthused by Marshall Jakob's scorched earth strategy in North Africa - considers it most opportune to establish her own vision of Utopia for the African continent.

Bart's first move is a tentative one. Over a period of months Special Forces make contact with a group of warlords in the far North West of Africa, about as far away from the Israelis as it is possible to be. Australia Inc. provides their armies with considerable military resources and, perhaps more importantly, a sense that they are not alone. In fact quite the reverse: they have the support of one of the most powerful armed forces the world has ever known. In return for the equipment and intelligence she agrees to supply them Bart makes only one condition. The rebels must convert to Christianity. Her particularly Fundamentalist brand of it. After initial reluctance - after all these are to a man hard line Muslims - the rebels' Imams discover in this fucked up, turned upside down and backward version of the teaching of Jesus, very little difference with their own bigoted, exclusive, narrow minded and ruthlessly heartless view of the world. The marriage is a surprising success.

Now, Israel's Marshall Jakob had always believed that with a comprehensive victory in North East Africa his army would be in an unassailable position to take West Africa. And with the whole of Northern Africa firmly secured the invasion of the South could then commence. Psychologically success in the north east would put the rebels in West Africa on the defensive. In such circumstances he felt he

could reasonably expect - in his terms at least - a quick victory. He had not anticipated the presence of another powerful invader force, certainly not one bent on a similar long term strategy to his own.

With Africa now centre stage it's not long before that continent - with all it represents in political and military power, and its considerable resources - resembles something akin to a shark frenzy. Because suddenly, it seems, every one of the six blocs – either directly or through Israel or Australia as proxies – is vying for a slice of the pie. Tensions between the blocs - when there's been decades of relative calm – escalate. There's talk of global stability being threatened. Once an empty desert, to a frustrated Jakob Africa feels suddenly very crowded.

Chapter 8

Sydney, Australia

18 August 2117. 12h00. It's a few months after Mogadishu. Tensions between the six blocs continues to rise. The civil war in Israel shows no sign of abating. Surprised to find himself still alive, Fury can be found among his closest friends in a small bar off the main drag on George St in Sydney's CBD. It's their current regular: *Happy 7*. As usual when they first get there Wilce jokes, "Me I've only ever got up to 3, what the fuck can you do with 7, mate?"

They've been here most of the day downing cold beers and talking shit. The girls are starting to look fuckable. John Fury is telling the boys about his most recent operation, "Another one typical of the grey wars mate. When it's impossible to tell who's on the right side. Or even if there is one. Those days - when it was easy to tell the good from the bad guys - they're almost gone." He jokes with Wilce, "Why don't you get it, mate? Still the true believer, yeah? Mate you're going to get yourself killed for nothing if you stay on." Wilce shakes his head, but says nothing. Fury puts an arm around his friend's shoulder, nearly falling off the bar stool as he does so. "Everything I told you is true. Ronnie, back me up, mate." Ronnie nods but says nothing, immediately going back to speculatively sipping his pint while eyeing one of the bar girls on her knees sucking an old fella's semi limp cock.

Wilce seems content to listen, so Fury continues, "You need – we all need - to understand the way the wind is blowing. Otherwise we'll get caught in serious shit. Not from a bullet. Politics is starting to encroach where it shouldn't. But the result mate: it's the same. Boys, you know I've no reason to bullshit you. The report that came out about Mogadishu says The Boss was after my arse. Never on paper, but I heard some in the hierarchy were saying I'd gone rogue." Ferris nods, "Confirm it. Heard it over the radio. Order from The Boss to have you taken out. You were lucky that by the time we got back to Berbera they must have decided we weren't responsible for what happened. But, mate, it could have gone the other way just as easily. They wouldn't give a fuck if they got it wrong. We're Expendibles, can't you see that?"

Fury reverts to a theme familiar to both men, "Boys, you have to realize the traditions we used to fight for died the day a platoon from our regiment got away with raping women in a town they were supposed to be protecting. Those

cowards of cunts got their arses covered by top brass. For the sake of the regiment's reputation they said. Most of those girls were barely bleeding for fuck's sake. We're the biggest terrorist army there fucking is." Ronnie, having lost interest in the bar action, comments. "One thing Hughie said is right. 100%. We're expendable. Anyone still believes they give the smallest shit about us will end up some day high and dry with no mates in sight and dodging your own side's bullets. Mate, I've heard stories. Seen it for myself enough times. The way things are going, anyone that stays on - there's only one way it can end." Suddenly, the piss getting to him, Ronnie starts to cry. "Mate, haven't we fought together, the three of us, side by side, for more than fifty years? Together, been through some of the bloodiest conflicts in the world. For what it's worth, we've built a reputation for being the most successful SF leaders in ASAS. That used to mean something. Maybe to some people it still does. But it means fuck all to me. And that's the truth."

After that, Sergeants Ronnie Smith and Pete Wilce become engaged in a heated debate comparing the relative merits of the various girls draped over the bar. Meanwhile Colonel John Fury and Sergeant Hugh Ferris are occupied in a conversation on a quite different topic. Fury tells Ferris, "That moment, when I knew what I needed to do – ordering the blow up of the factory, which I knew would cost tens of thousands of innocent lives, but would save millions more - I couldn't do it. It was loyalty and duty, but something else too: fear. Because I knew I was out of my depth to make the right decision. But just as much, I knew if we went back to the Boss for orders then Bart's minders would use it for political gain. So I couldn't just follow orders. Take the easy way out. And then you cut through it. After that it was easy, mate. And it's getting easier to question. Not a specific order, but the direction we're taking. The big picture - that's what's fucked." Fury smiles at Ferris, "You got a lot to answer for, mate."

Ferris laughs, "As you once said boss, no emotion has its advantages. I've often wondered why humans have them. What's the purpose? Fear, makes you act quicker? No, I can decide and act logically just as fast. On a battlefield there's no advantage I can see." Fury nods, smiling ruefully. "You're right, but I'm still not sure it's a total disadvantage for a CO. A leader - the bond of brotherhood, you know? But I want to talk about something else. About something you said out there. And this would be a good time to do it." For several hours Sergeant Hugh Ferris talks animatedly to Colonel John Fury. Only occasionally does he allow the latter interrupt with a question, which spurs the discussion off in a new direction. Ferris opens Fury eyes to ideas he'd never for a moment contemplated. It's a

matter of simple fact that had this conversation between a warROD S3 and Australia's most decorated front line soldier not taken place then John Fury would not have acted as he subsequently did. This is hardly the place one would expect the course of human history to be altered. But these are unusual times. Humanity is in dangerous, uncharted waters. Unprepared and as a civilisation ill equipped to deal with events hastened by the Mogadishu Massacre.