

The Sleeper



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Sci-Fi/Spy novella 16yrs+

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First Edition

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Synopsis

It is 5p.m. on Friday 20th of June 1969, the weather is hot and during construction work near Denver, Colorado, three underground caverns are uncovered. They contain many items of modern life and records from the past, but the discovery of a man, apparently in a state of suspended animation, sealed in a life support system sparks off a full-scale investigation. Archaeologist Max Bauer is assigned to investigate, and when a coded manuscript is found hidden inside the complex, he invites his Scottish friend Professor Angus McCutcheon from Hull University, England to join in the investigation. Angus accepts the invitation and travels to the U.S.A.

All items from the caverns, including the sleeper, have been removed to a military base nearby, and it is here that Angus begins his work. He succeeds in breaking the code and finds that the manuscript is the sleeper's autobiography. The man alleges that he has lived for over ten thousand years, his ageing process having been slowed down by an accident just prior to the flood. As the decoding continues the manuscript is found to contain reports of the writer's participation in many historical events. But Angus soon realises that he is caught up in a few dangerous situations, and as time goes by it becomes more complex, bringing mystery, crime, infidelity, and the involvement of dissident members of a secret worldwide organisation.

The story reaches its climax showing the lengths those in power will go to in order to achieve their aims.

Present Day - 21st June 1968

Max Bauer listened impatiently. Already he had counted twenty ringing tones and was about to replace the handset when a voice answered, "Angus McCutcheon." The accent was British, with just a trace of a Scots burr.

"Hi Angus, it's Max Bauer. How are things in good old England?"

"Did you know it's bloody nearly midnight here? Surely you haven't got me out of bed to enquire after my wellbeing?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry Angus, I was forgetting the seven hours' time difference. My call is very important I assure you, so why don't you get dressed and I shall call you back, say in five minutes. You'll find what I have to say well worth losing sleep for."

There was a pause, then Angus laughed, "You always were hopeless when it came to timing, Max. OK I'll do as you say, call me back in five."

The phone went dead, and Max replaced the handset. He thumbed through the pile of documents on his desk, then rose and left the study, making for the kitchen. His wife Glenda was supervising the preparation for supper, and looked almost as harassed as the agency cook, she and Max had hired for the evening. "Honey, can you hold supper for a while? I've got to make a call to Professor Angus McCutcheon in England."

Glenda looked even more harassed, "Oh, how long will you be? Dinner will be ruined if it overcooks, and our guests are arriving at any time, we're due to eat at eight."

Max glanced at his watch. "It's seven forty now, I won't be more than ten minutes at the most. I'm sure you'll be able to entertain them for a couple of minutes."

"OK, but not a minute longer, is that clear?" Glenda pouted.

"Right" Max grinned and headed back to the study. He

dialled Angus's number, and it was answered immediately.

"That you Max?" Angus asked, "well, I'm fully clothed now. So, what extraordinary occurrence possessed you to disturb my beauty sleep at such an ungodly hour? Go ahead, I'm all ears."

"I believe you were directly involved with the translation of the Dead Sea scrolls," Max began.

"Hardly," Angus replied, "I was just a kid at the time. My father was involved, and he took me along for the ride. What's all this about Max?"

Max paused, then continued, "There's been a discovery on the site of the new treasury complex near Denver. The whole site is littered with caves and potholes, and the excavators opened up three underground caverns. At first it was thought that some long-lost remains of an ancient society had been brought to light, but the sight of modern household articles, all made within the last ten to fifteen years scotched this idea."

"Go on," Angus urged, becoming more intrigued.

"I was called in with a working party from the university," continued Max, "as head of Archaeology I was a natural choice. I was amazed to discover that the caverns proved to have some sort of power system. At first, we couldn't make out how it was generated. Eventually we found the generator, it was about the size of a moderate suitcase, and its modus operandi is far beyond our ken. The driving force seems to be sort of crystal. There's a team of scientists working round the clock trying to discover what makes it tick."

"... these three caverns," Angus interrupted, "were they naturally formed, or was some outside assistance in evidence?"

"Max replied, "So, initially they had been carved out by nature, but they had been added too, i.e., by way of stanchions and cross beams, some metal, as well as some wood. The first cavern contained all the household articles, the second had the generator."

"What about the third?"

“In there we’ve found a man sealed in a self-contained life support system. Tests showed him to be alive, but in suspended animation.”

“How long do you reckon he’s been there?”

“I’ve absolutely no idea, pal. But somebody knows and that’s all I’m prepared to say on the matter.”

“What’s his age?”

“Yes, about that, so, tests proved him to be about thirty-five years old. We thought of waking him but decided against it. Now here’s where you come in, the boffins have also found a handwritten manuscript with several hundred pages. They said it had been tied up with some picture wire and was placed behind one of the many paintings. So, it’s been written in some code or language which no-one here can decipher. We need you Angus, your success in the translation of ancient scripts is widely known. Will you help us?”

“Of course, so is everything left as you found it?” Angus asked.

“It’s all been removed and is under guard at the military airfield in Denver.”

“Then I’ll be on the next available flight, and I would like to get stuck in as soon as possible, if that’s OK?”

“Yep! Thought so. Oh, and before I forget you’re coming to Stapleton International Airport.”

“Great! Speak soon,” replied Angus as he replaced the handset.

Present Day - 22nd June 1968 - Part One

By 12.10 a.m. Angus had managed to book a standby flight to Denver. As he quickly packed his valise he thought of his friendship with Max and how they had met at Balliol College, Oxford some twenty years earlier and had taken an immediate liking to each other. Max was so typically American, and his extrovert personality seemed to counterbalance Angus's outwardly dour attitude. They differed physically, Angus being six feet tall and inclined to podginess, whilst Max stood only five feet six and was slightly built. Not surprisingly they were known to their friends as Laurel and Hardy.

At exactly 12.45 a.m., Angus started his journey to Heathrow Airport, pausing only to leave a message on the universities' answering machine to say that he needed to take a few days leave. He also made a quick call to Max to tell him he should get there by 1.40 p.m.

He arrived on time and passed quickly through customs and immigration. Max was waiting for him at the barrier; they hugged and then walked outside to where a hired black Porsche was parked. "Where are you taking me?"

"First to my place. We'll put you in the guest room, it'll save you a fortune in hotel bills. After you've eaten and showered and if you're up to it we'll drive out to the base. Believe me Angus, this thing is big. The government have slapped a Top-Secret label on it, so we shan't be bothered by the media."

"Well, believe it or not I did manage to get some sleep, so aye, I'm all ready to go, so has anything been further discovered about the sleeping beauty?"

"Not a thing," Max replied, "but a few more items were found in the second chamber."

"Such as what?" Angus enquired.

“Old newspapers articles of prominent persons dating back to World War One. These seem mainly to concern important events and some entertainment,” Max replied.

“How soon before I can study this manuscript you spoke of?” Angus asked.

“Whenever you like, the base commander has orders to co-operate fully, so we’re getting the red-carpet treatment.”

It was about half an hour’s drive to Max’s home, and they were met at the door by his wife, a striking redhead in her late thirties. “It’s good to see you again Angus,” she smiled, giving him a massive hug.

Angus showered and changed and then joined his hosts in their plush dining room. A full English breakfast had been prepared. “You really know how to make one feel at home, Glenda, that was delicious.”

“Surprise number two coming up,” Glenda said, disappearing into the kitchen. She returned carrying a tray on which stood a bottle of Irish Guinness and an empty glass. “It might be a bit early, but I remember this was your tippie when we visited you in England three years ago.”

“Where did you get that?”

“Trade secret,” she winked.

“You’re an absolute marvel. If ever I decide to get married it will have to be to you, or someone just like you,” Angus smiled.

“You could be in with a chance,” Glenda whispered, and Angus couldn’t help but notice the sharp glance she directed at her husband; he knew instinctively that all was not well between them, so immediately changed the subject. For the next half hour all three chatted on the usual stuff friends do when they haven’t met for some time, then Max phoned the base to advise that he and Angus were on their way.

“I’ve hardly seen you during the last four days. Will you be back tonight?” Glenda asked.

“Don’t know yet,” Max shrugged, “I’ll phone you

later, it all depends on how quickly we can get things moving. Oh yes, and before I forget, at some point during today the chief of security will be introducing himself to you, his name's Harry Blackett."

"OK, I'll look forward to that, now, is there anything else I need to know about?"

Max nodded, "Actually yes. Always bring a change of clothes and a Dopp kit, with you."

"Sorry, but what's a Dopp kit?" Angus chuckled.

"A Dopp kit is a toiletry bag," Glenda smiled, "Anyway, talking about work, what on earth have you got locked up in there? A couple of Martians?"

"Ha! You wish. Bye honey, I'll be in touch."

"See you later," Angus nodded as he and Max walked to the car.

For a while they drove in silence, Max swearing occasionally under his breath as other vehicles which got in his way. "Things haven't been all that good between Glenda and of me of late, is it all that noticeable?"

"Slightly." Angus replied, "have you spent much time away from home lately?"

"Only since I've been involved with this project, you see, Glenda has always wanted kids, and I don't. she's been harping on the subject for some time, and we had quite a nasty row last month. I didn't help matters by telling her that she'll soon be past childbearing age anyway. I wished I hadn't said it almost as soon as the words were out of my mouth."

Angus felt embarrassed, "I'm sure things will work out. You've been together a long time."

"Sure, hope you're right,"

Their arrival at the base put a stop to any further conversation. Max was obviously well-known, as the guard only glanced at his I.D. card. "Who's your passenger?"

"Right, this is Professor Angus McCutcheon of Hull University, England. He's working with me on Project Rip Van Winkle, and is security cleared to level six."

"Will you follow me please sir, and if that's your

valise, I'll need to check that too."

"For Goodness' sake! Do we have to go through all that bullshit? I've known him for over twenty years. Isn't my word good enough?"

"Sorry, but I'm just following orders," the guard snapped.

"Calm down Max. I'm sure they won't keep me long." Angus got out of the car with his valise in hand and followed the guard to a small office where his details and belongings were checked. His photograph was taken, and he was issued with a pass. When he and the guard got back to the car, Max looked uptight, his knuckles showing white as he leaned out of his side window, "And I don't expect for that to happen again! Do you hear me?" the guard nodded and waved them through.

Max gripped hold of the wheel, "They make me sick! Red tape always has bugged me."

Five minutes driving brought them to a large, light-grey hanger, isolated from all other buildings. Well, here we are, Angus, Project Rip Van Winkle. You'll find it difficult to believe what you see," Max said.

As they entered the building, Harry Blackett approached them, "Max!" he greeted, with his right hand outstretched.

"Harry," Max nodded, and shook Harry's hand.

"And you must be Professor Angus McCutcheon, nice to meet you, and thank you for coming all the way from England as well."

"Aye, I am. It's nice to meet you too and I wasn't doing much anyway."

"Look, I'm sorry, but I'll leave you now, because I'm running late for a meeting," he apologised then continued, "someone else should be with you soon," and promptly left the building.

Just then a young man possibly in his late twenties, entered. "Hi Adam," Max said, then continued, "Angus, this is Adam Hoffman of Denver University. Adam, meet Professor Angus McCutcheon."

“Pleased to make our acquaintance,” Adam seemed nervous and reminded Angus of a fieldmouse scurrying back to its hole. “Come this way, please,” and he directed Max and Angus to a door which bore the sign ‘Strictly No Admittance to Non-Authorized Personnel’. Adam tapped out a number on the panel and the door opened silently. They walked through to a corridor and entered a large room halfway along. “Here we are. All of what you’ll see here was transferred from the site.” Angus saw that one corner of the room was stacked high with canned food. “Where’s the generator. I’d like to see it.”

“Sure,” Adam entered a door to their left. He nodded towards what at first sight, looked like a filing cabinet, except that the front was transparent. “So far we haven’t been able to find out how it works.”

Angus stared at it for some time, finally he asked, “I’d like to see the sleeper.”

“He’s through there under constant monitoring by our medical team,” Adam answered, “follow me.”

The figure lay in what could be described as a glass coffin. It was male, of Caucasian appearance. The heart and brain were wired to monitoring screens. “Just look at that heartbeat,” Max said, “about ten a minute. It seems that this guy has slowed down his metabolism sufficiently to achieve a state of suspended animation.”

They all stood together observing the figure for some minutes then Angus asked, “Have any attempts been made to wake him?”

Adam shook his head, “No, we can’t take the risk, we want him to stay alive.”

“So, I’ll need somewhere isolated, can you arrange it, Adam?” Angus suggested.

“No problem, you can use my office, you won’t be disturbed there,” Adam nodded.

“Look, there’s one more thing. The President doesn’t want you to use a tape recorder or cinecamera, so you’ve got to have a typewriter I’m afraid,” Max apologised.

“That’s OK, I don’t mind typing,” Angus replied,

then continued, “you’d better make my apologies to Glenda. I shan’t be leaving here until I’ve cracked the code.”

“Glenda will be so disappointed; she was looking forward to showing you off to all her tennis pals and what have you. Will you phone me when you strike lucky? I’d stay with you, but with things as they are at home, I can’t risk it.”

“You’ll be the first to know.” Angus promised, “Go home Max, I’ll be in touch.”

After Max had left, Adam took Angus to his office. “The washroom is through there,” he indicated a door behind the desk, “when you get hungry phone security and they’ll arrange a meal for you, how long do you think it’ll take you to crack the code?”

“On occasions it has taken up to a month. But you can never tell. Sometimes everything falls into place within a couple of hours. Thanks for your help, I’d better get down to business now.”

Adam left and immediately Angus started to work on the manuscript. The code was a combination of equations and letters and he worked solidly for eight hours with no success. Then realising he was hungry he phoned security, and within twenty minutes a meal was brought to him.

After eating he slept for a while and then started work again; the breakthrough came about an hour later. “God, how simple,” he thought, and dialled Max’s number. The phone was answered almost immediately, Max sounded tired. Briefly, Angus told him the news. “Was it a difficult code?”

“At first, yes. It’s based on a quotation from the Bible, the New Testament in fact. You know the one, God so loved the world etc. I can explain it to you if you’d like?”

“No, it’s OK. Maybe later when this is all over. I’m on my way, see you soon,” Max yawned.

Angus then set about decoding the first few pages of the manuscript. As he progressed the more intrigued, he became; he continued his work even when Max arrived.

Finally, he leaned back in his office chair and removed the last sheet away from the typewriter. “Well, Max, we’ve certainly got something here,” Angus said, then he pointed to the wastepaper basket. “Oh, and before I forget, I’m sorry, but it looks like I’ve gone and used up all the paper you’ve given me,” he remarked.

“Don’t you worry about that, I can give you some more,” Max suggested. “Now, what have you found out so far. Like for instance – what’s his name? And when did he write it?”

Angus nodded, “Aye, it’s signed and dated; Major Bill Armstrong, and the seventh of May 1965. Wow, Max, this manuscript is truly, unbelievable. Just let me read you what I’ve got,” he picked up the pages and began.

Summer 9,966 BT

Let me say straight away that I am not immortal. I appear to be about thirty-five years of age, but I have in fact lived for almost ten thousand years. To whoever may find and decipher this manuscript I ask them not to dismiss me as an eccentric or mere maniac.

As I have already stated, I am not immortal, I age one day in twenty years. Today before preparing myself for sleep, I looked in the mirror and was pleased to notice that I had a few grey hairs. It was a relief to know that I am ageing, albeit slowly. During my long life I have been known by many names. Some of them may be familiar to you, but I digress, let me start at the beginning.

I was born in Oranda what is now known as America almost ten thousand years ago. My name at that time was Theodore Carmine, and both of my parents were prominent scientists. At the time of my birth, humans had progressed to a high degree, both mentally and in technical matters.

We were far more advanced than you for the twentieth century. The internal combustion engine had long been outmoded, and our power source was drawn from the earth itself, utilised, and then returned to the earth. In no way did we abuse the planet as you now do and have done for many years. I fear that by the time you have discovered our process, it will be too late.

But again, I digress. Shortly after I attained my thirty-fourth year, I was assigned to a team devoted to creating weapons of war. My continent had been at war with Zegrio now known as the Soviet Union for over twenty years, and already millions of people on both sides had been killed. My team had succeeded in creating the so-called ultimate weapon, (named the 'E' Weapon). I won't bore you with the technical details, but let it suffice to say that it was powerful enough to destroy this planet. Simon

Caleb Flores, the administrator was concerned and pointed out the dangers of using this weapon. Fortunately, the ruling Council took note, and it was agreed to shelve the whole idea.

My annual medical examination fell due, and I had no worries; after all, I was young and healthy, or so I thought. I was somewhat surprised, therefore, when less than a week after the medical, I was summoned by the Chief Medical Officer. “Sit down Theodore,” he said, indicating the chair opposite to him. “How long have you worked here?”

“Eight years,” I answered, “I came here immediately after my graduation.”

“Have you been at all concerned over your recent loss of weight?”

“Not really, I exercise quite a lot to offset the sedentary nature of my work.”

“Have you felt completely fit during the last few months?” he mused.

“Why yes, a little tired sometimes, but I do on occasions work for long periods without a break. What’s this all about?” I enquired.

He gazed intently at me for long moments. “I’m sorry to tell you, but your tests show that you have Rom disease, it’s an inherited genetic condition,” he said finally.

I sat in silence, the panic rising within me; the Rom disease caused a wasting disease for which, so far, a cure had not been found. “How long have I got?”

“From three to five years if you’re careful,” came the reply. “You can, of course leave your post if you wish.”

I shook my head, “No, I’d sooner work for as long as I can,” I said.

The doctor thought on, “Hmm, OK, I’ll arrange for you to be transferred to the power area, they’re consistently wearing protective gear in there obviously you can’t continue in your present work.”

“Thank you.”

He smiled, “Make yourself comfortable whilst I see

the director.” He left the office, and I sat alone thinking of the hardship to come. The medical controller returned within a short time. “All right Theodore,” he said, “your transfer to the power section is with immediate effect. Make your way there and report to the overseer.” I was to find my new position very boring, I took charge of small section which virtually ran itself, so I had little to do. I became lethargic and left most decisions to be made by those working under me.

The winter of my thirtieth year was very cold, and on occasions we had problems dispersing the power throughout our area, the demand was so great. One evening as I was about to go off duty, one of the engineers entered my office. He seemed very agitated. “We’ve got an overload which we can’t correct, will you come and observe, please?” I followed him to the control area and was immediately aware of the danger. The dials on the control panels were indicating a critical level of overload. I knew that I had to make an immediate decision. “Shut down all systems, RIGHT NOW!” I ordered. I remember that the screens glowed a bright red, then there was deafening explosion.

I recovered consciousness four days later in hospital, as I subsequently learned. I first became aware of persons standing around me. “What’s happened?” I managed to ask.

“There’s been an accident,” came the reply, “the whole area where you worked was devastated by an explosion and was subjected to high levels of radiation. Many people were killed. You survived but absorbed a massive dose of radiation. How are you feeling?”

“Very tired,” I answered, then added, “I’m in a terminal condition, I have Rom disease, it’s hardly worth your while bothering with me.”

“Our job is to preserve lives,” the young doctor said. “I am aware that you have the disease, but according to tests carried out on you when you were admitted, it is only

in a mild form, it can be controlled by drugs, you could have many years of near normal life.”

“That’s not what I was told earlier,” I retorted.

When the doctors left my bedside, I lay for a long while thinking over events of the last few months. I was surprised to discover that my appetite had returned, and I ate with great enjoyment the meal I was giving during the evening. Loss of appetite was one of the main symptoms of the virus. Night fell and the hospital was quiet. I found that I was unable to sleep and finally pushed the button above my bed to summon the night orderly. She arrived promptly, a tall, dark-haired woman in a plain blue uniform. “Are you in pain?” she asked.

“I can’t sleep, would it be possible to give me something to help?” I pleaded.

She tapped the keys of the computer in the corner of my room; all my data was stored in it. “I’ll give you an extra strong draught,” she smiled, and left. She returned shortly, “Drink this,” she ordered, handing me a glass, “you’ll be asleep before you know it.”

I drank the liquid in one gulp and settled down to sleep, but without success. I lay sleepless for the rest of the night but strangely enough felt fresh and alert when morning finally came. I was also very hungry and was relieved when a meal was brought to me. I ate it quickly and asked an orderly if I could have more to eat. When the medical controller visited me later, I told him about my insomnia. “Hmm,” he grunted as he checked my paperwork, “the draught you were given should have knocked you out for about eight hours. Do you feel tired?”

“Not a bit,” I nodded. “In fact, I feel healthier than I’ve done for some time.”

“There are no telling what effects a large dose of radiation will produce,” he mused, “I’ll have you constantly monitored, if you have any problem sleeping tonight, I’ll arrange for the hypnotherapist to visit you. I don’t want to make you reliant on drugs.”

I was unable to sleep again that night and the hypnotherapist duly arrived. After an hour of unsuccessful attempts to hypnotise me, he gave up. "I've never encountered a situation like this before," he said, "are you sure you haven't been deliberately resisting my efforts?"

"I've tried my hardest to co-operate," I assured him. "Do you feel tired?" he asked.

"No, I'm wide awake and bored with just lying here," I replied. He scratched his chin, "I'll speak to the medical controller tomorrow and we'll get more tests run on you. Try and relax if you can, goodnight," he said as he departed.

On the following day I was transferred to a special unit for the tests to take place. The former adverse effects of the virus grew less each day, and I felt a lot fitter. Finally, I was summoned to the medical controller's office. "You had better sit down, Theodore," he told me.

"What's happened to me?" I demanded.

"Firstly," he began, "I have excellent news. The effects of the Rom disease have virtually disappeared. The condition is reversing, there's every possibility that you'll be completely free from it very shortly."

"So, I'm not dying then?" I remarked.

"Indeed not," replied the medical controller could be that the accident is responsible for your cure. Your ageing process has also slowed down drastically. We are feeding the latest data into the computer and hope to have a full diagnosis by tomorrow."

I was completely stunned, "Do you mean I'm growing younger?" I gasped.

"Not exactly," came the reply, "but it is fairly evident that your ageing process has undergone a change. Let's wait for the results, I'll inform you as soon as they're ready."

I went back to my room and sat for a long time thinking on what the doctor had just told me. As a child I'd often wished that I could live forever, and now it

seemed that the wish could come true. The situation was quite bizarre as the accident had not only cured me of a hitherto incurable disease but had also presented me with the prospect of eternal life.

The doctor sent for me the following afternoon. "I have the results of your tests," he began, indicating that I should stay sitting down. "As I have already told you. The effects of the Rom disease have reversed. You are now in perfect health. Now, as regards to your insomnia," he glanced at the data in front of him, "it is confirmed that your ageing process has definitely slowed down."

"So, I'm not exactly going to live forever?" I joked.

"Not quite, your data shows that you are ageing one day approximately during every twenty years. That's why you've been unable to sleep. In your new status, the day isn't over yet."

"Oh my God! But I will sleep eventually?" I enquired, "when is that likely to happen, and for how long will I sleep?"

"Right, we estimate you should be ready for sleep in around fourteen years' time," the doctor said, "and according to all factors you will sleep for about six years."

"That's going to be rather awkward. Where am I going to find somewhere safe enough to sleep for that length of time, I could be killed in an enemy attack! Who will monitor me?" I was getting very anxious.

"I've already considered that," the doctor said, "I think it would be safer for you to live here in the complex. Your family will be told you are dead when time comes for you to sleep. Your condition must remain a secret except to a chosen few. Don't worry your family will be well provided for."

"What happens when I wake up?" I asked.

"They have decided to transport you to another area whilst you sleep. When you awake, you will be advised of events which have been taken place and given help to integrate into your new surroundings."

I felt that the government should at least consult me

before they plan my future.

“I assure you it’s for the best reasons,” the doctor smoothed.

“I feel like a freak!” I snapped bitterly, but I realised that his words made sense, and I stood a chance of surviving a six-year sleep by agreeing to co-operate.

Arrangements were made for me to work with Samson Buford, a scientist. At first, I felt completely overshadowed by him. He was highly regarded throughout the world, but as I grew to know him, I found him to be a good friend. With his guidance I gathered knowledge which I never dreamt existed and my liking and respect for him grew each day. My association with Samson lasted for two moons. I remember well the day it ended. I had risen at my usual time and was about to set off for work when a knock came on my door. A security guard stood outside. He saluted and said, “Compliments of central council; you are requested to attend a meeting of great importance.”

“When?” I asked.

“I’m instructed to escort you to the meeting area immediately,” he replied. Pausing only to collect my briefcase, I accompanied him to his vehicle. When we arrived, the meeting area was so crowded, that I was unable to find a seat and stood in one of the aisles. On the raised section I could see Cassius Alden, the Regional Director together with some other dignitaries. Samson was also there, accompanied by a few members of government. “This must be important,” I thought, as Cassius walked to the stage and held up his hand for silence.

“The world faces a serious situation,” he began, “Some two years ago a medium sized asteroid was observed moving through the Axian Galaxy. At that time its course was estimated to take it close to this planet. We were satisfied though, that it would by-pass us by a safe margin. Then six moons ago the asteroid was in collision with another asteroid. This had the effect of knocking it

off course, and it now confirmed that it will strike this planet in three moons.”

Silence followed, then I queried, “What will be the effects?”

“Disastrous,” came the reply, “certainly there will be worldwide flooding and severe earthquakes. It’s possible that eight tenths of the population will be wiped out.”

“Can anything be done to prevent the asteroid hitting us?” Samson asked.

“That’s why this meeting has been called,” replied Cassius, “certain proposals have been made, and our hostilities with Zegrio been suspended so that we may work together to prevent such a disaster occurring. We are going to attempt to blast the asteroid from its present course by use of the ‘E’ weapon.”

The assembly gasped. “What!! Use the ‘E’ weapon!” shouted a man from the middle.

Cassius nodded, “Yes, our calculations show that if the missiles are fired simultaneously at a certain time there is every chance that the asteroid’s course can be changed.” There followed uproar and I saw Samson walking towards the stage. He spoke for some time with Cassius, then faced the audience, which immediately fell silent. “It would be both foolish and dangerous to use these missiles,” he began, “there is no proof that the asteroid could be diverted, but there is every change that they could have a disastrous effect on this planet, even if they are detonated several thousand miles away.”

“The planet faces disaster, anyway!” replied the same man, “we should at least try to save it and ourselves.”

Samson urged, “I ask you to think again; if you must use missiles, then use those of a more conventional nature.” Cassius conversed briefly with the members of the council, then walked up to the stage.

“Thank you, Samson, for your concern. We are aware of your extensive knowledge, but we have made our decision. The use of the ‘E’ weapon is approved by the

council and that of the Zegrions. We will inform all citizens when this takes place.”

Then I disassociate myself from this project,” Samson said sadly.

I felt that I should also make known my feelings. I entirely agreed with Samson regarding the possible dangers facing us if the weapons were used; rather, I’d prefer to take our chances with the asteroid. I pushed my way through the crowded aisles towards the stage. My legs felt strangely heavy, and I realised suddenly that my sight appeared to be failing, then I suddenly found myself on my wearily knees. “Help me!” I shouted, then I became aware of the floor against my cheek, the lights faded, and finally all was dark.

Summer 9,960 - 9,946 BT

I awoke gradually, aware at first of a foul taste in my mouth. Wherever I was it was dark, but to my right I could see the flicker of firelight. I explored the area where I lay with my hands and touched cold rock. I tried out my voice, at first with little success. Finally, I managed a feeble call, "Is anyone there?" I noticed a light bobbing towards me and realised that was a firebrand. When the bearer reached my side, I saw in the light that it was a man, bearded and clothed with some type of animal hide. It covered him shoulder to knee.

"Where am I?" I asked. He answered in a language unknown to me and gestured for me to follow him. This I did and realised that I was walking through a series of large caves. We passed a bonfire round which several persons, clothed similarly to my guide, were sitting. I wondered in what strange world I was. We stopped at the entrance to another cave and my guide indicated that I should enter. The cave was quite small and had but one occupant, a man who like the other persons I had seen, was clothed in animal skins. I was relieved when he addressed me in my own language, "Ah Theodore, it's good to have you back. Listen - I have much to tell you, so please be seated. Help yourself to food you must be hungry," he continued indicating a bowl of fruit which stood on a rough wooden table. I selected a fruit of a deep red colour and bit it somewhat apprehensively, for I had not seen anything of its like before. It was delicious, and I relaxed and waited for my host to continue.

"Do you remember all that took place before you slept?" he asked.

"Of course," I replied and briefly recounted my experience in the assembly area.

"He nodded, "I've got much to tell you. So, I go by the name of Alpheus Garcia, and I was a member of

Council. During your long sleep you have been mostly in my care.”

“But you still haven’t told me where this place is!” I shouted.

“Patience,” Alpheus chided, “when you began your sleep the Council had you placed in the Medical Headquarters under constant monitoring. As you recall Samson was totally opposed to the use of ‘E’ weapon. He was certain that nothing could divert the asteroid from its course, but equally certain that the weapons would also have a disastrous effect. He tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Council to abandon their plans. He pointed out that there would be some survivors from the asteroid’s collision with this planet, whereas the ‘E’ weapons could prove totally destructive. Certain members of Council, myself included agreed with Samson, and secretly we selected persons with special qualities and transported them into mountain regions. After the holocaust we intended to distribute them amongst the survivors in the hope that they could assist in the rebuilding of the planet. Three days before the asteroid was due to strike, we removed you and medical HQ and brought you all here...”

“... how many were saved?” I interrupted.

“Only a few thousand,” answered Alpheus, then continued, “the ‘E’ weapons were fired simultaneously by our continent and Oranda. They reached their target but did not divert the asteroid, instead the explosion had the effect of tilting our planet from its axis. You can imagine the destruction which followed, and shortly afterwards the asteroid hit in the Southern Ocean. Mountainous waves swept over the land, the only survivors were those who lived high in the mountains, and those who had been removed to such places of safety. The waters covered the planet for many days and when they finally receded much damage had been caused. Virtually all life had been destroyed, but there were some pockets of survivors, and amongst those were placed the persons we had saved.

“Again, where is this place?” I persisted.

“We are high in the mountains in the north of the continent,” replied Alpheus, “the people you have seen all survived as the waters did not reach us.”

“Are there many?” I enquired.

“There’s a few hundred only.”

“They appear very primitive,” I remarked.

“All former technology was completely destroyed in the flood,” replied Alpheus.

“It will take many hundreds of years to rebuild the world, the waters washed away a large amount of the soil, and much of the former vegetation no longer exists. Large areas of the lower ground now consist of marshes, but certain tribes have moved there and are cultivating some areas with success.”

“What methods of travel exist?” I enquired.

Alpheus nodded, “Travel is mainly on foot, horseback, or oxen. Some other species of this planet also survived, and these are now breeding successfully once again. Life has reverted to primitive style it was thousands of years ago.”

I spent many hours talking with Alpheus, and he arranged for horses to be available on the following morning in order to take me on a tour of inspection. “I would suggest,” he remarked, “that you adopt a name and identity indigenous to this area, as indeed I have. You’ll find that the natives will accept you more readily.” After some thought we agreed on the name of Pylos. “You’ll be instructed in the language,” Alpheus told me. “And you’ll undoubtedly become a leader in view of your knowledge.”

“What happens when it’s time for me to sleep again?” I asked.

“Arrangements have already been made for that eventuality,” replied Alpheus. “You’ll be in my care during your present period of wakefulness. So, when the time comes for you to sleep, the administration will take over.”

“Then there is some form of government,” I replied.

The next day Alpheus and I set out on horseback. We rode down the mountain track, and as we reached lower ground the devastation caused by the flood became apparent. For as far as the eye could see huge rocks lay strewn about. We picked our way through a seemingly endless marsh and Alpheus remarked, "It'll take many years for the ground to dry out completely. In many areas huge inland seas have formed and will remain perhaps for thousands of years."

"How do you know all this?" I asked, "if the horse is now the main means of transport you cannot have travelled to see all you speak of."

"Like some of my colleagues, I'm a telepath," replied Alpheus, "and by that method I'm in constant contact with them."

We came to an area where vegetation was starting to grow again. Alpheus told me that many of the former plants which were in abundance prior to the flood would never grow again.

As dusk fell, we made our way up the mountain track. Later, I sat talking to Alpheus for many hours. "Do you know if my parents were amongst the survivors?" I asked.

"Who can say," he answered, "your parents were, I know prominent scientists, but I have no knowledge if they survived." I was told that my duties would consist of attempting to teach the old skills to the community. I knew what a task this would be, as the disaster had so affected their minds that most of them were unable to remember their lives before the flood. "We can't say how long it'll take them to regain their former knowledge and intelligence," Alpheus said, "it'll be our task to guide them. You, Pylos will be of particular importance, as your life span is liable to last for many thousands of years."

On the following day I was formerly introduced to the members of the settlement. I was then given instruction in their language. It was very simple, having a vocabulary of only three thousand or so words. It took only a matter of

weeks for me to become proficient, particularly as Alpheus taught me by the hypno-teach method.

As time passed, I became accepted and liked by the community, and towards the end of my third year's residence, I was appointed as second in command, being responsible only to Alpheus.

It was on his advice that I decided to look for a partner. In my life before the flood, I had never wished for a friend, and more so when I discovered I had the Rom Virus. Alpheus stressed the importance of procreation. "Approximately nine tenths of all living things were destroyed," he said, "it's important that all species reproduce as often as possible. The loss of knowledge of former medicines means that death is now caused by ailments which previously would've been only of a minor discomfort."

I chose my mate, a fine tall woman named Mya, and we promised to be honest and truthful to each other. Alpheus, as head of the community, witnessed our promise. It would be untruthful to say that I ever loved Mya, but over the years I grew to respect her. She, poor girl, was besotted with me, and I often felt guilty that I was unable to return her love. We had three children, two boys and a girl, whom I loved dearly. The numbers of the community had increased tenfold and had been taught the art of farming, so with the meat acquired by our hunting party we were self-sufficient. Alpheus and I tried hard to help the people regain their former knowledge, but even Alpheus was forced to admit that his earlier opinion that it could well take thousands of years for them to remember their past skills, was correct.

As the time grew near for my sleep, I realised how much I would miss my family, and I spoke of this to Alpheus. "I suppose they'll be told that I'm dead," he said bitterly. "You'll just disappear, and be assumed dead," he replied, "I've the matter well in hand and have already

prepared a safe place for you to sleep. When you awake, you'll be in another area of the world. Believe me, the arrangements are all for the best." Reluctantly, I was obliged to agree with him. My circumstances could never be accepted by my family, their minds were not yet sufficiently advanced to accept such data.

Some improvements were becoming apparent. Many of the cave dwellers developed the art of decorating the walls of the caves with bright paintings of animals and other articles pertaining to their daily life. I wondered if in years to come the paintings would survive and be regarded as items of historical value.

Many people had decided to move to other areas, so settlements were now springing up in various parts of the world. Alpheus told me that the population had increased to approximately three million, and that all species were now breeding successfully.

Time passed, and during my thirteenth year at the settlement I realise that the time for my sleep was fast approaching. On many occasions I longed to tell Mya and my children of this, but remembering what Alpheus said on the subject, I always bit my tongue and said nothing. I pressed Alpheus to tell me to what new location I would be moved for my next awakening. He shook his head, "It's not for you to know."

I had already amassed some possessions; I owned three horses, many sheep, and goats, so I had the knowledge that my family would be well looked after despite feeling increasingly a sense of guilt when I remember the endless nights, I had lain beside Mya feigning sleep. I realised how much I would miss her and my children.

The tell-tale signs of sleep came during a summer afternoon of my fourteenth year at the settlement, I contacted Alpheus, and he escorted me to the area prepared. My last conscious thought was one of great sadness that I would never again see my family.

Present Day - 22nd June 1968 - Part Two

Angus leaned back in his chair. “That’s as far as I’ve got, what do you think of it?”

Max gave a long whistle, “Wow, well that’s very interesting. Do you think it’s all a gigantic hoax, or is the guy telling the truth?”

Angus smiled wearily, “At face value, I think the document is authentic. The theory that civilisations as advanced as ours, or even more so, have risen and fallen certainly holds water.”

“Hmm, if this manuscript is ever published, it’s going to knock the bottom out of some theories. It would certainly cause some raised eyebrows.”

“Well, fortunately the decision to publish or not doesn’t rest with us. No doubt a lot of politicians will get quite a headache making the decision. I’m very tired Max, I think I’ll pack it in for the day. Can you run me home please?”

“Sure thing, after I’ve called the President’s office and informed them of the breakthrough. No doubt they’ll need to chew the fat about it, I also think I should get Adam along. If you make him au fait with the code, he can continue working on the manuscript while you rest. The President is sure to want it finished off as quickly as possible, and it’ll take some of the work from your shoulders.”

“Is Adam’s security clearance sufficient?”

“Yeah, he’s worked on a few Top-Secret Projects. Look, you take a shower, I’ll send him along. I shouldn’t be gone for more than an hour, so during that time you can put him in the picture.”

“OK,” Angus yawned.

Max left the office so Angus decided to shower. As he was dressing, Adam arrived. “Hi, Adam, I’m just going to shave, so if you care to browse through these pages I’ve

decoded, I'll be with you shortly."

Adam settled himself at the desk, and Angus made his way to the washroom.

When he returned some fifteen minutes later the young man sat staring at the desk. "What's the matter, Adam?"

"If this is ever made public, certain religious factions will regard it as blasphemous."

"You're Jewish, aren't you?"

The young man shook his head, "No. I haven't followed my religion since my teens, to be honest. However, I do believe in God. If the manuscript is genuine, it could offend many denominations. I hope the powers that be think carefully before publishing."

"Max suggested that you assist me because of your knowledge and high security clearance, but he said nothing about your high standard of diplomacy."

The arrival of Max put a stop to any further conversation. "Is everything OK?"

"Adam's concerned that the manuscript may offend a few religious denominations and I'm afraid Max, I'm inclined to agree."

"Ha! Well, whatever happens the decoding must continue so you'll be burning the midnight oil for some time."

Angus then realised how tired he felt, "Max, I'm ready for home, can you give me a lift?"

"I'm sorry, I can't go, I've got to wait for the arrival of Senator O'Brien, but I've arranged for a car to take you back."

"Senator O'Brien? Man, or a woman?"

"Man." Max replied, then continued, "he's personally representing the President in the manuscript and our sleeping beauty; he should arrive within the hour. I'll phone Glenda and make my apologies. She's expecting you and has promised to look after you. OK, let's go, your car is waiting outside."

During the drive home Angus realised with a shock that his work so far on the manuscript had taken almost thirty hours and it was now past 6 p.m. on the day following his arrival in the U.S.A. It always amazed him how time flew when he was engrossed in his work, and he remembered the occasions he had lost track of time; “lost weekends,” his father used to call them.

Glenda was sitting on the porch when Angus arrived at the Bauer’s home. It was a warm evening, and she was wearing very short shorts and a halter top blouse. He eyed her appreciatively, “Hi, Glenda. I’m sure Max won’t be detained for too long.”

“It’s something I’ve got used to recently, but I’m glad you’ve come home. Come on in, there’s southern fry on the menu. After we’ve eaten, we can chat about old times. Do you want to shower before eating?”

“No thanks. I took care of that at the base. I’m so hungry I could eat a horse.”

The meal passed pleasantly; Glenda was not only a good cook but also an excellent conversationalist. She entertained Angus with some humorous reminiscences of her time at university, and the early days of her marriage to Max. “Ha, you’d really make a first-rate comedian. Why don’t you take it up? I’m sure you’d be in great demand,” Angus laughed, then continued, “Anyway, what do you do now? I often wondered what kind of job you’d end up doing.”

“Actually, I’m a part-time librarian, and I really love it there,” Glenda smiled.

After the meal they sat on the porch. “I suppose you’ve notice that Max and I aren’t exactly hitting it off at the moment?” Glenda remarked after a while.

“Aye, Max has mentioned you have some problems, but I’m sure everything will turn out OK Glenda. Those things happen in the best of partnerships.”

“No, it’s over Angus, there’s virtually nothing between us now, and hasn’t been for some time. Max has changed; he no longer seems to care about our marriage. I

want a child more than anything, I admit that when we first married, we both agreed that we didn't want children, but I'm getting older and the thought of dying a lonely old woman frightens me. Max is so pig headed, he just won't listen to my point of view, all he thinks of is his work. He's hardly been home during the last few weeks, and he's missing again tonight. What is the time, by the way?"

"Nearly ten o'clock,"

Glenda stood up, "I think I'll retire, what about you?"

"I'll sit here a while longer," Angus replied.

"OK good night, then, see you in the morning,"

Glenda sighed.

After Glenda had left Angus sat for half an hour and then made his way to his room. He lay in bed thinking over the events of the last two days. He had no doubt that the manuscript would cause quite a stir and wondered what action the President would take. A knock on his door interrupted his thoughts.

Glenda entered; she was wearing a night gown of flimsy material through which her body contours were plainly visible. She sat down on the bed, "I can't sleep. Do you feel like talking for a while?"

"Be my guest," Angus remarked.

Glenda ran her fingers through her hair, "How long do you think it'll be before you return to England?"

"Who can tell? I've made a very good start on my work, so it's just a question of keeping my nose to the grindstone until it's finished. Maybe a month, or perhaps a little longer."

Glenda swung her legs onto the bed and lay close to him, "Take me with you when you go. It's finished between Max and me, I'm sure you and I could make a go of it."

"Take it easy, Glenda. You're upset right now. You and Max have been my pals for a long time, I'd hate to think I'd taken a hand in splitting you up. I'm sure you don't regard me as any more than a friend, it's your present emotional state that you believe you're attracted to

me.”

“Maybe this’ll convince you,” and moving closer she kissed him passionately. Despite of his objections Angus found himself responding and was relieved when the phone downstairs rang.

“Goddam it,” snapped Glenda as she rose and made for the door.

“Whew!” he thought, “talk about being saved by the bell.”

“Angus! It’s Harry, he’s saying you’re needed back at the base.”

“OK, I’ll be there in two secs!” he quickly got dressed, and ran down the stairs to where Glenda waited, the handset extended towards him. “Thanks, Glenda. Angus speaking,”

“Angus. I’m sorry to call so late. I don’t have authorisation to say, but it’s imperative you come in. I’ve taken the liberty of sending you a car, it’ll be there soon. I’ll brief you when you get here, see you in a few minutes,” Harry said, as he put down his phone.

Angus saw the headlights of a vehicle through the glass of the front door. “Looks like the car’s arrived.”

“What’s happening?” Glenda asked.

“There’s a flap on. Don’t worry, Glenda. I’ll contact you. Take care, I’ll see you soon.” He replaced the handset, picked up his valise, donned his coat, kissed Glenda goodbye, and headed for the car.

When they arrived at the base the guard waved them through saying, “Go ahead Professor, the chief of security is waiting for you in his office.”

Harry was a tall, well-made man in his early forties. The dark blue uniform he wore seemed to make him look even taller. “Come in and take a seat,” he greeted. Indicating a podgy, balding man seated at the desk he continued, “this is Senator O’Brien.”

“Senator,” Angus said, and he received a curt nod in reply.

Without further preamble Harry began, "There's been an incident, and Max had been taken to hospital he's unconscious, he's been put into intensive care."

"Oh my God!" Angus shouted, "What happened?"

Harry continued, "Let me explain. About half an hour ago Adam called security and asked for food for himself and Max. He says he then went into the washroom, and shortly after that he heard a lot of scuffling noises then he smelt burning. He was unable to open the door, as it appeared to be locked from the outside. He called out numerous times asking if someone could get him out, but no one came. When the security guard entered the room with the meals, he came across some sheets of paper burning in a tin bucket, an opened window, Max slumped unconscious across the floor, and a chair up against the washroom door handle. Now, Adam could be involved or he's a possible witness, either way; we're keeping him under lock and key for now."

"What are you going to tell Glenda?"

"We'd already thought of that," the senator said. "So, we're going to say he tripped over, banged his head on a nearby table, went unconscious and now he's in intensive care section at the hospital, and we've decided to put a government protection order on him, so therefore no visitors are allowed at the moment."

"I see, so what about the manuscript?"

"A third of it was destroyed; a report will be sent to the President," Harry replied.

The senator cleared his throat, "You're no doubt aware that the President regards project Rip Van Winkle as of the highest priority. We rely on you to continue decoding the manuscript. Would you be able to finish the work in possibly seven days?"

"I should imagine so," Angus shrugged, "it should be fairly straightforward, but whether or not any sense can now be made of the manuscript with a proportion of it destroyed, remains to be seen."

"Good," the senator approved, "so, can you arrange

for Angus to be accommodated here at the base?"

"No problem," Harry replied.

"I'd like to contact Glenda and break the news; I feel it only right, having been a guest in their home after all," Angus stressed.

Harry glanced at the senator who shook his head. "We'll take care of the formalities with his wife. Rest assured we'll keep you up to date with any new developments."

"All right," Angus conceded. "I suppose I'd better start work. Are there any further details I should know?"

"No, nothing further. Anyway, I'm wanted back in Washington so I'll be leaving now, Harry will take care of you," the senator replied.

Later, when accommodation had been allocated, Angus was taken by Harry to the work area. Everything in the room had been left as it was, even to the charred remains of the pages which had been destroyed. Angus was relieved to see that most of the manuscript remained undamaged. "Hmm," he mused, "let's hope I can make something of what's left. OK, Harry, I'll get down to it if you'll excuse me."

"Of course. I'll leave you to it," he then left the room and Angus settled himself at the desk.

Winter 970 BC

Feeling down and frustrated, I remarked. "I can't understand why the king permitted such carnage. The wars with the Philistines have cost thousands of lives! Ira!"

The king's personal priest smiled, "We can only follow orders Reuben, the burden of responsibility, borne by the king." Ira held high position in the government and was well informed.

"It would be pleasant," I sighed, "to live an uncomplicated life." Ira placed a hand on my shoulder. "Reuben," he said gently, "you know that only a few selected members of government know of your history. In future years you'll no doubt be a great asset, therefore, when your period of sleep arrives, only a selected few will have charge of you. Certainly, somebody will always be available when you awaken, to brief you on the area to which you have been allocated, and on what has transpired during your sleep."

"Ira," I answered, "I've been quartermaster at the court of King David for almost fourteen years. I regard Adonijah and Solomon as my friends. What objections do your friends have to them being my friends? And what objections do your friends have Adonijah succeeding David? He's a fine young man; so is Solomon for that matter, but Adonijah is, after all, the king's eldest son, and has right of succession."

"We know," Ira answered, "that Adonijah is highly regarded by a leading high priest and the king's counsellor, Abiathar and the king's nephew and military commander, Joab. They are both powerful men, and plan to take power, using Adonijah as their front. Solomon, on the other hand, has been schooled since his early years to rule wisely."

"On your orders I suppose."

"Yes, on our orders. Hear me out Reuben, don't

condemn the plan before you know what its purpose is. If Adonijah becomes king, he'll be no more than the puppet of Abiathar and Joab. They'll drain the man and will rule the nation justly.”

“Why do we have to use deception? Would it not be easier to ask the people to vote for the king they prefer?” I asked.

“You know how fickle the people can be,” replied Ira, “they would vote for anyone who gave them a holiday or a free feast. No, we'll proceed as planned, ensuring that events appear to take place normally. Do not think of the plan as deception. We are relying on your co-operation.”

“All right,” I conceded, “Who do I speak with first?”

“Concentrate on Adonijah, tell him that he is favourite with the people and that he has the support of a large section of the army. When he declares himself king the rest of the plan will be put into operation.”

“I will do as you say.” I agreed, then continued, “I realised this morning that at my last awakening I had aged physically by one year but really, I have lived for over six thousand years. Sometimes I am tired of life and almost hope that I won't awaken from my next sleep.”

“That time is very near,” Ira soothed, “which no doubt accounts for your present sadness. You should regard yourself as lucky, Reuben. Many a person would envy you your longevity if they knew of it.”

“I suppose so,” I sighed. “When do you want me to speak to Adonijah?”

“The sooner the better. He will be far from pleased if his latest decrees are not ready on time. Farewell for the present.”

Ira departed and I sat for a while thinking of the distasteful task I had in hand. Finally, I rose and made for the exercise area, where I knew that I would find Adonijah at this time of day. I saw him immediately I entered, a tall bronzed young man with pleasant features. He was wearing only a loin cloth and was engaged in his favourite

pastime, wrestling. He saw me and beckoned me. “Why Reuben old friend, would you like to have a bout with me?” he joked.

“Indeed no,” I laughed, “I’ve no wish to have my head broken. Such sport is better left to the professionals such as yourself.”

“Will you stay a while and watch?” he asked.

“Of course, my duties are somewhat scarce today so I have plenty of time to spare.”

I watched three bouts, and in each one Adonijah was victorious, there was no doubting his fitness and courage, and he really was a likeable character. I felt ashamed of the deception I was about to use on him. When the third bout ended, we walked together and afterwards relaxed in the garden with a flagon of wine.

“I haven’t seen you for some time,” he said. “Has your work taken you away from the city?”

“I shook my head, “No, your father, the king decided that he wanted a complete inventory of all items in the palace, so until recently I have been busy.”

Adonijah laughed, “I believe old age is affecting my father’s wisdom. I spoke with him only this morning, and he didn’t recognise me. I had to remind him that I was one of his sons.”

“Perhaps the pressures involved in ruling the kingdom have something to do with his state of mind,” I remarked, seeing a chance to raise the matter in hand.

“Many of the king’s ministers are also concerned and think he should abdicate in favour of yourself.”

Adonijah shook his head. “I’m in no hurry to take on the responsibilities of kingship. Physically my father is fitter than many men half his age. Hopefully, he will live for many years to come.”

“Have you not considered the threat to the state if he remains king? Look, Adonijah, I’ve been approached by a few ministers who are most concerned at the king’s lapses of memory. We won that last war with the Philistines, and the king claimed credit for that. I’m told

on good authority that the generals were responsible for our success. On many occasions the King's mind wandered to such an extent that he was unable to approve any plans for the final battle. Most of the recent legislation of the court has been approved and implemented by senior politicians."

"Surely that amounts to treason?" Adonijah frowned.

"It was necessary. There were times when the state was near to foundering because of the mental condition of the king. I will be truthful with you. As your friend, I've been asked to tell you that most of the court are in favour of you taking over the throne. The king will never abdicate, so the suggestion is that you go to Hebron and declare yourself king. This court will agree. Abiathar the high priest is confident that no blood will be spilt and that the king will be persuaded to retire gracefully. No doubt he will spend his remaining years happy in the company of his concubines," I suggested.

Adonijah stared at the ground for long moments, then raising his eyes said. "I am distressed that you, my friend should be urging me to seize my father's throne."

"I am but a messenger of those who wish to save the state," I replied. "Nobody is asking you to make an immediate decision but promise me that you'll think the matter over. When you have done so, whatever way you think, let me know. Abiathar is anxious to meet with you. He is far more competent than I to explain fully all the various implications. I'll leave you now. Please send for me when you are decided."

I walked back to my quarters and lay for a long while considering my actions. I felt deeply ashamed of my part in the deception of Adonijah. During the early evening Ira visited me. "Have you spoken to Adonijah?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"What is his attitude? Is he in favour of staging a coup?" Ira enquired.

"Right now, he's undecided. I've known him since

his childhood. He is very honest, and, in my opinion, I don't think he'll agree to your plan."

"Then we'll have to encourage him. Does he attend the exercise area every morning?"

"I believe so, to the best of my knowledge," I said.

"Then you will go to him there tomorrow and persuade him to accompany you to the armoury. Tell him you need his advice on taking stock of the weapons stored there. Make sure you are not followed. I'll meet you both there together with Abiathar and Joab," Ira ordered.

"I do not like this deception," I replied, bitterly. "It smells of corruption and I am distressed to be involved with it."

"You'll see eventually that all is for the best," Ira replied. "Can I rely on you for tomorrow?"

"I suppose so," I answered, "leave me now, I'm in no mood to discuss the matter further."

When Ira had left, I thought of going to Adonijah and telling him how certain politicians intended to use him. I was surprised that Ira, a trusted minister, should approve of such deceit but he obviously had orders from his superiors, so perhaps there was good reason for the plan. I decided to co-operate, but with reluctance.

The following morning, I spoke with Adonijah, "I apologise for disturbing your leisure, but I need your advice regarding the cleaning a few weapons. The king expects this to be completed by the end of today. I have no idea where to start."

"The weapons are in the armoury I imagine," Adonijah laughed. "If you will allow me to run one more bout. I'll accompany you and give you the benefit of my knowledge."

I waited impatiently, and finally we set out for the armoury. The building seemed deserted, and at first, I feared that Ira and his companions were, for some reason, unable to attend. The sound of the doors closing and being secured caused us both to turn round, to see Ira, Joab and

Abiathar facing us.

Walking up to Adonijah, Ira remarked, "Good day, Lord Adonijah, forgive us our small deception in bringing you here, but the matter is of the utmost importance."

Adonijah whispered, "What are those two doing here? I've the highest regard for you Ira, but they are both evil in countenance and manner. It's not my wish to converse with them."

"Patience, my Lord," Ira urged, "their presence here is, I assure you, most necessary. Let us sit in the inner chamber, where we may discuss the situation without interference."

We entered the chamber and sat around the large table. "Well, Ira, what is your business?" Adonijah asked.

"It concerns your father the king, and the matter that Reuben discussed with you yesterday. Have you given the plan your consideration?" Ira enquired.

"If you speak of my seizing the throne, I've no intention of doing so," Adonijah replied.

"My Lord, listen first to the report of Abiathar before you make your decision. Speak Abiathar," Ira urged.

"My Lord," Abiathar began, "you should know that your father, the king is no longer fit to rule. His mind is weak, he becomes each day more of a danger to the state."

"What proof have you?" Adonijah demanded, "the king, I agree is old and at times forgetful, but I refuse to believe that his mind has gone."

Abiathar turned to Joab, "Tell my Lord of the occurrence with the horses," he ordered.

Joab wiped the sweat from his face with the sleeve of his tunic. "The king today ordered the cutting of muscles on horses' legs so that they could not be used for war chariots against him."

Adonijah shrugged, "I can't believe that."

"It's true!" Abiathar shouted.

"Then I challenge you to attend the king with me; we will see if there is any truth in your accusation."

I glanced towards Ira and saw his almost imperceptible nod. "We'll accompany you, my Lord," he said. "It will not be good news for any of you if your tale is false," warned Adonijah, "let us go to the king."

When we arrived at the Royal Palace, we had no difficulty in gaining admittance to the king's chamber, the court chamberlain ushered us into the king's presence. King David was obviously having one of his bad days, he lay on a pile of silken cushions, caressing the girl who lay beside him, and occasionally feeding her sweetmeats. She was his latest concubine and was all of seventeen or eighteen years old.

"What do you want?" he demanded irritably, "why do you have to disturb me during one of my few moments of leisure?"

"I must ask a question of you my Lord," Adonijah insisted.

"Who are you?" asked the king.

"Your eldest son, Adonijah," he replied.

"Oh yes, I remember. Do you bring a message from your mother?" the king enquired.

"No," Adonijah replied, keeping his patience, "I heard that you, my father, had ordered the cutting of muscles on horses' legs. I merely wish to ask you if this was true?"

The king frowned, "I remember no such incident," he began, but was interrupted by the girl. "Oh yes, my Lord. You ordered the horses for my personal guard. I remarked how they could be used as war chariots. You became angry and demanded the captain to immobilize all but one hundred of them."

"If you say that is what happened, then it is so, my love," the king purred.

The prince looked white and drawn. It was well-known that amongst his other sporting activities he was also a brilliant horseman and had a great love for the animals. "How dare you demand such brutally! I will

never forgive you for doing this. Never!”

The king waved a hand impatiently, “Now all of you, leave me, I am tired of your words.”

We left the chamber and made for the terrace. Ira enquired, “Do you now agree that the king is unfit to rule. Will you, for the sake of the nation go to Hebron and declare yourself king?”

Adonijah paced up and down for a few moments, then finally agreed. “I will do as you ask. Can word be taken to all who support me?”

“That will be done,” Ira said, “Joab and Abiathar will go with you to Hebron.”

“Are you certain that I have the support of the army?” Adonijah asked.

“You have my word. Once you declare yourself king, they will rally to you at Hebron.”

Adonijah replied, “Then let it be. Come Abiathar and Joab.” The three left us and I noticed to look of satisfaction on Ira’s face. “I still dislike my involvement in this, but I suppose you know what you are doing. Do you have any further tasks for me?” I asked.

“No, go back to your duties. I will now put the next part of the plan in motion,” Ira replied.

“When will that be?” I enquired.

“It will take all of ten days for matters at Hebron to come to ahead. I’ll not contact you again until after this has occurred. Your work, I believe, keeps you often in the presence of the king. Open your ears and eyes but do nothing until you hear from me.”

Twelve days later, I was attending the king in his inner chamber when Bathsheba entered. She was the king’s favourite wife, a fact made obvious by the smile of welcome he gave her. Observing protocol, I back away and bowing low at the same time. “There is no need for you to withdraw entirely, Quartermaster,” the king said, “seat yourself by the door whilst I converse with my beloved wife.” This I did, and from where I sat, I

overheard most of the conversation.

“What is your pleasure, dearest one?” the king asked.

“My Lord, do you recall some moons ago you promised that my son Solomon should succeed you as king?”

The king was obviously enjoying one of his more lucid periods, for he nodded, “Indeed I do, why do you ask this?”

“Because your son Adonijah has declared himself king at Hebron. He is accompanied by Abiathar, Joab and a large section of the army.”

King David looked incredulous, “Are you sure of this? Adonijah has always said that he has no wish to become king.”

The doors to the chamber opened abruptly and the prophet Nathan entered. “Your pardon my Lord,” he said bowing low, “I did not know you were giving audience; I will return later.”

“No, stay and state your business,” the king ordered sharply.

Nathan bowed again, “My Lord, I am distraught that you saw fit not to inform me that you had decreed your son Adonijah should be your heir.”

“I have made no such decree!” he snapped.

“But he has given a great feast at Hebron in honour of the occasion. I thought naturally that this was on your orders,” praised the prophet.

When King David was in his right mind, he was an efficient but ruthless ruler. His features hardened. “Thank you, Nathan, leave us now and you also, my love,” he said turning to Bathsheba. He then pointed at me, “You Quartermaster,” he ordered, “send in your chamberlain and tell Zadock the high priest to attend me. We will investigate thoroughly the occurrences at Hebron. All of you, bear witness that is my wish that Solomon be king following my death. It will be proclaimed throughout the land. Now all of you leave me.” As I left the chamber, my concern for the safety of Adonijah grew, and reached a

peak later when I heard military preparations for the march to Hebron.

For the next ten days the city was very quiet, as most of the military had departed, and only a few token guards remained. I saw nothing of Ira during that time, as he visited me late in the evening of the tenth day. “I thought you said that it would be best that we were not seen together. Why have you come here?” I asked.

“I have received word from Hebron. When Adonijah’s supporters heard that the king and his force were approaching, they all deserted him.”

“What has happened to Adonijah?” I asked.

“The king spared his life, in fact he appeared to make a joke of the whole issue. But Adonijah talked, and has implicated yourself and I, along with Abiathar and Joab as perpetrators of the coup. The king is furious and has ordered the three of us our arrests. The other two are already in hiding, but even now advance guards are coming to arrest me. If I remain, I will be killed for certain!” Ira shouted.

“Where shall you go then?” I asked.

“To Egypt, transport awaits us at the edge of the oasis,” he replied.

“Awaits us?” I enquired.

“Yes, us. Look, you are a good friend to me, so your life could be in danger too. Well then? Are you coming or not?” Ira urged.

“Um...yes, I will then. But how will we get past the guards at the city gates?” I enquired.

Ira smiled, “We will travel in disguise as merchants.” He unwrapped a bundle he had brought with him and produced clothing such as worn by the merchants of Egypt, namely cloaks which covered the body from head to foot. Ira continued, “It will be necessary to wear these for our journey, for we shall travel by the trade routes. Anyone who challenges us will hopefully believe our story. As for our journey to the oasis, the only persons

likely to see us will be a few shepherds, so we should meet no difficulties. Come, time grows short, so put on the clothes and let us be gone,” Ira said.

Quickly we dressed, and then made our way through the darkened streets towards the city gates. We met no one until we reached the gates, and two guards emerged from the darkness. “Halt!” one of them called, “explain what you are doing about the city at this late hour.”

Ira smiled and handed some silver coins to the guard. “We wish merely to make an early start, as we travel to Egypt.”

“Huh... Egyptians,” the guard growled, “be off with you, open the gates and let them pass,” he ordered his companion.

Leaving the city, we hurried towards the oasis. It took us less than an hour and we met no one during this time. We hid along the palm trees. “Our transport will be here shortly,” Ira told me. Even as he spoke, we heard movement and a man arrived leading two camels. Ira moved forward cautiously and spoke with him then turned and beckoned me. “We have food and water to last five days. If all is well, we will be in Egypt by then. Come follow me.”

Present Day - 23rd June 1968

At first the insistent tone of the phone did not register, then as it finally penetrated his sleep, Angus reached out for the handset. "Who is it?"

"Professor," came Harry's voice, "Senator O'Brien has returned to the base. He'd like to see you in my office, soon as possible."

"For God's sake, I've not had any sleep since I arrived." Checking his watch, he noted that it was 2 p.m. "Can't the man wait at least until tomorrow morning? I've been on the go for almost twenty-four hours!"

"Sorry, but the senator says it's urgent, shall I tell him you'll be along shortly?"

"I suppose so," Angus sighed. He dressed, after considering whether or not to shower and deciding it against it.

Some twenty minutes later Angus walked into Harry's office. The security chief looked flushed, and the fat politician was tight lipped, and as usual sweating heavily. It was obvious that the two had recently been arguing. "Harry, senator," greeted Angus, then sitting on one of the chairs he said, "well, senator, what can I do for you?"

"Professor, I appreciate that you have worked on the decoding virtually non-stop since you got here. Can you tell me what progress you've made?" the senator nodded.

"I'm doing pretty well; but whoever wanted the manuscript destroyed chose some of the earlier sections, so they will be missing for the finished product," Angus reported.

"I see, then that makes my request somewhat easier," the senator smiled.

"How do you mean?" Angus replied.

"The President is kicking my butt; he wants a result by next Tuesday. He realises it'll be impossible to

complete it in that time, so he asks that you can do just enough to give a general outline of the contents that is, decode a section, skip two or three, and continue in that matter. The President has called a meeting of top government officials on Tuesday, so he wants to have something to tell them.”

“I can try, but I must warn you that the text is likely to be somewhat scrappy,” Angus admitted.

“That’ll be fine. When will you get back to work?”

Angus, with some effort kept his temper. “As you’re aware, I’ve had little or no sleep since I started here. So, I intend to sleep until at least tomorrow morning. Hopefully, by that time, all my faculties should be back in working order.”

“My apologies, I know the dedication you have shown so far. The President is anxious to get a quick result, as I said earlier, take your rest. I’ll leave it to your own judgement as to when you’re fit to resume,” the senator replied.

Back in his quarters, Angus prepared a meal, and having eaten went back to bed, noting that it was 3 p.m. He slept solidly until 10 p.m. and decided to shower and make coffee. He was about to return to bed, when he suddenly thought of Glenda being all one on her own, he picked up the phone and rang Harry. He asked him if he could go and visit Glenda.

“Sorry, you’ve got to remain on base until the decoding is finished, Senator O’Brien’s orders,” came Harry’s reply.”

Angus fought back his anger. “OK, Harry, I understand. Can you get hold of the senator? I know it’s late but it’s imperative that I speak to him. It’s a personal matter, it’s important, I assure you. Please, Harry, try and raise him. I shall be by the phone,” Angus pleaded.

“Oh, very well. I’ll try, but I can’t promise anything,” Harry sighed.

“Thanks, I really appreciate your help.” He made more coffee and sat watching the T.V an hour passed

before the phone finally rang. “Senator O’Brien to speak to you sir,” the operator said.

“Thank you. Put him through.” Angus could tell that Senator O’Brien was very angry. “What the hell do you mean by getting me out of bed at this hour? I’ve had an ass of a day, so it’d better be a very good reason.”

“Apologies for disturbing your beauty sleep, you’ve heard about Max I suppose?”

“Of course, everything connected with this business is reported first to me. And I’m sorry, but your request to visit Glenda has been denied. Work on the decoding must continue whatever else happens.”

“Then I’m sorry, but unless you allow me to visit her, there will be no more decoding. I hold all the aces in that connection, so don’t push me too hard, senator, I might just lose my temper sufficiently to destroy everything.”

Angus listened to the strangled noises made by Senator O’Brien, “All right, I’ll give the OK for you to visit her, but two hours is all I can allow you; I want you back on the base before one a.m.”

“I’ll return as soon as I can,” Angus replied.

“Two hours I said, and two hours I mean. Don’t try to ride rough shod over me, I’m a dangerous man when I’m crossed, and I shan’t forget your conduct tonight, remember that.”

Angus winced as the politician slammed down the handset, then he phoned Harry who confirmed that a car was standing by to take him to the Bauer’s home.

The vehicle arrived shortly, and the journey was soon completed as there was very little traffic on the road. Upon arrival Angus noted that every light in the house appeared to be on. “Do you want me to park in the driveway?” the driver asked.

“Thanks, but no, can you pull on the hardstanding at the end of the street, please.”

“Yes, of course,” the driver obeyed.

“Thanks again, I won’t be long.” As Angus

reached the front door, it was opened by Glenda. She looked pale, but otherwise composed. "Harry has phoned to tell me that Max is in hospital he's in the intensive care unit! He said he had tripped over a table, banged his head and now he's unconscious; and worst of all we can't go and visit him yet."

"Aye, that's right," Angus nodded, "I wanted to tell you myself, but they wouldn't let me. I'm so sorry Glenda."

"He has been working non-stop just lately, I wished he never got involved with this thing you're working on."

"So do I," Angus replied.

"Are you going to stay over tonight?" Glenda nodded.

"No, I've got to return to the base. My driver is waiting nearby, is there anything you want me to do?" Angus enquired.

Glenda sighed, "You know what I want. Do you really have to return tonight? I could do with some company."

"Harry was insistent that I do, but I'll phone him and see if I can stay over until tomorrow morning," Angus smiled, as he picked up the phone.

Harry, however, wasn't happy. "Sorry Angus. I do have my orders."

"Drat you, Harry, I refuse to be treated like an errant schoolboy, I'll stay as long as I like, and to hell with you." Angus slammed down the receiver, "That's told him, come on I could do with a glass of your Irish Guinness."

"Listen!" Glenda said holding up her hand. From outside came the sound of a number of vehicles drawing up, followed shortly by the chime of the doorbell.

"I'll go," Angus sighed. When he opened the door, the garden seemed to be filled with base security personnel. "Professor McCutcheon?" asked the guard.

"Aye, what do you want?" Angus replied.

"You are to accompany us back to base

immediately,” the guard ordered.

“I’m not ready to go yet, I’ll be back by nine in the morning at the latest, and you can tell my driver I shall be arranging my own transportation.”

“I’m sorry Professor, I hoped you wouldn’t make any difficulties, but believe me, we do have the means of carrying out our orders.” The guard dropped his hand toward the weapon he carried on his hip.

Angus was appalled, “Do you intend to march me back at gunpoint?”

“If we must. Please make it easier for all of us. You can complain as much as you like once we’ve got you back at the base.”

Glenda by now had entered the hallway. “Go with them Angus. I wouldn’t want you get into trouble not on my account.”

“OK I’ll go, but only if you’re sure, Glenda.”

“He’ll be in touch,” the guard smirked, “let’s go Professor, we’re wasting time.”

When he arrived back at the base he was taken straight to Harry’s office. The security chief looked grim. “I’m sorry about all this, Angus, but my orders came direct for the President’s office. And I’ve got to tell you that until your work is completed, you’re not to leave this base.”

“What? I refuse to be kept under lock and key. As far as I’m concerned, the decoding can go to hell. Let him get someone else. I’m phoning the British Consul. You’ll find out, soon enough that Her Majesty’s Government doesn’t take kindly to British citizens being treated as I’ve been.”

“Calm down, Angus. There’ll be no phone calls. Your government has already been informed of the project, and they agree that you should be kept incommunicado until the work is completed,” Harry replied.

“I just can’t believe this is happening! I came here at the invitation of a mate to assist in the project, and now

he's been attacked, and I'm being held prisoner. I say again Harry, there'll be no more decoding done by me. You tell the senator I want to speak to him."

"OK Angus, get some sleep, and I'll try and get him to contact you."

Back in his quarters, Angus smiled as he thought of the first few copies of the manuscript he had made and hidden under his closet in the Bauer's home. He hadn't told Glenda about it, time enough for that later.

He slept well, and after breakfasting made his way back to the project area. He noted that a few pages of the section of manuscript he was working on remained to be decoded. In view of the prevailing time factor, he decided to leave them, and quickly thumbed through the manuscript, skipping several sections before selecting one for decoding. As he took his place at the desk, the phone rang. It was Harry, "Morning Angus. The senator says he can speak to you, but he hasn't much time to spare."

"I'm on my way," Angus replied. Before leaving the office, he made sure that all paperwork was locked away in the safe. When he entered Harry's office, Senator O'Brien stood looking out of the window. He turned round, and Angus noted that his face was flushed and that he was sweating even more than usual. "Definitely a candidate for a heart attack," was Angus's immediate thought.

"Leave us please Harry," the senator ordered, "I'd like to speak to Angus alone." The security chief left, and the two men sat facing each other across the desk. "Well Angus, what's your problem? Be brief, I've a lot on my plate as you're no doubt aware."

"Firstly, I object being kept a prisoner here. I was brought back from the Bauer's home under armed escort. I've told you already that if you push me too far, the decoding can go to hell. Don't forget that without me the decoding will stop."

The politician slammed his hand on the desk.

“Listen to me. You’ll do exactly as I say.”

“How do you intend to make me?” I asked.

Senator O’Brien handed over a document. “Read that, it’s a letter from the British Foreign Office.”

Angus scanned the letter. One paragraph stood out starkly. It read, ‘During Professor Angus McCutcheon’s attachment to project Rip Van Winkle, it’s agreed that he will be subject to legislation and security regulations of the U.S. Government’. “That means nothing to me. I can still refuse to work for you.”

The politician smiled, “You’re quite friendly with Mrs. Bauer, aren’t you? We know, for instance of your little tete a tete with her in the bedroom, and that she wanted to leave her husband and return with you to good old England.”

“My God, you’ve bugged Max’s home!” Angus shouted.

“Look, if Max dies then Glenda will receive a nice fat pension, and if you two do eventually get together, you’ll be quite well off. However, if you decide to be awkward, and Max survives then, of course....”

“Unspeakable pile of filth, the only good thing you’ll ever do is to die!”

“I take it that means you’ll co-operate. Very sensible of you. Look, I’ll see what I can do, regarding visiting Max, but I’m not promising anything. Well, I must be going. Keep up the good work!”

Later, back in the project area, Angus calmed down. He realised that he thought too much of Glenda to allow her to face the problems outlined. He decided to co-operate; perhaps work would take his mind off the seriousness of the situation. With a sigh he sat down disconsolately at the desk.

Winter 303 - Summer 304

The fog seemed to penetrate to my bones, and I thought wistfully of warm nights in Rome and cursed whatever ill fortune had caused me to be ordered to Britain to reinforce the garrison at Verulamium. I had assumed the identity of one Quintus Amata and had recently been promoted to the rank of Decurion in the Fourth Legion of Emperor Diocletian's army. My duties when in Rome had been mainly ceremonial and when my Centurion told me of my promotion and my impending posting to Britain, I received the news with mixed feelings.

The British winter did little to restore my spirits, even though the feast of Saturnalia was but a few days distant. I vowed, as I walked through the gloom towards my quarters, that I would spend as many of the twelve days of Saturnalia as possible in drunkenness, at least the cold weather might not then feel so obvious.

I arrived at my house, and my slave Rubio awaited me at the door. "Welcome Master," he greeted, "do you wish to bathe before eating?"

"Not tonight, Rubio, I'm cold and hungry. Have you lit fires in all the rooms?"

Rubio nodded, "Yes Master, the house is warm, go through to the central hall, I'll bring your meal immediately."

"Thank you," I replied. I had a great affection for Rubio, (so-called, because of his red hair) and although I disagreed with slavery, I had purchased him at an auction merely to save him from being sold to the galleys. I tried hard to treat him as an equal, but this was difficult, as he always insisted on observing protocol. Nevertheless, he was fond of me and no doubt grateful for the easy life he had as my slave.

The meal was typical for a Roman, goat meat, fruit and cereals and an endless supply of wine. This was

imported from Rome as the climate was not conducive for the growing of grapes. “Join me in a cup of wine, Rubio,” I coaxed.

Rubio shook his head, “No Master, I thank you, but I shall neither eat nor drink until your hunger has been satisfied.”

After the meal I lay for a while relaxing and was almost asleep when Rubio shook me gently by the shoulder. “You have a visitor, Master, Decurion Alban, do you wish to see him?”

“Please escort him here.” Alban was a good friend, and like me, was a Decurion in the Fourth Legion.

He was a man of middle height with pleasant features and was also a confirmed practical joker. Nearly every member of our Century had at some time, been on the receiving end of Alban’s jokes. When Rubio ushered him into the hall, his flushed face betrayed a large intake of wine. “Well, Quintus,” he greeted, “I thought to find you in the tavern, surely a little fog does not prevent you from enjoying your leisure?”

I hate the fog, the climate, the country, and its natives,” I moaned, “it is true when they say the climate of the country is reflected by its inhabitants. These British are a cold people, just like their accursed weather.”

“Feel grateful my friend that you are not patrolling the wall which defends us from the Caledonians. I am told that Northern British are bleak, and the weather even bleaker, so Jupiter alone knows what the Caledonians must be like.”

I laughed, for Alban’s joviality was infectious. “I’m pleased to see you, and I won’t bother to ask you if you’d like some wine, your complexion suggests that you are just getting into your stride.”

I handed him a cup of wine, which he downed in one gulp. “I’ll have another Quintus; the cold is in my bones as well.”

“I suppose the town is quiet as usual, it dies with every sunset,” I remarked bitterly.

“There are a number of persons on the streets tonight,” Alban said, “mainly the Christians, I would say. The sign of the fish has been daubed on nearly every building in this street, your house is one of the few exceptions. What is your opinion of the Christians?”

“I have no liking or dislike. Their illegal gatherings cause us problems, but I wouldn’t regard them as a danger. I think that the movement will soon be forgotten, and they will return to their old ways.”

“I’m not so sure,” replied Alban, “the Christian religion has been in existence for over two-hundred and fifty years and is gaining popularity all the time. I’ve heard that even a few Romans have already embraced it, although they received short shrift from the emperor.”

Agreeing I replied, “Yes, I’ve heard that Diocletian has a maniacal dislike of Christians. He stages mass executions for his own pleasure and gives everybody a day off to attend them.”

“It is no joking matter,” Alban said gravely, “I am not a Christian, but I have friends who are. They advocate friendship and peace, surely that cannot be a bad thing?”

“As I’ve already said, I have no aversion to the Christians. I regard them as somewhat foolish to continue their meetings despite the penalties involved. They seem to have no fear of death, believing that their God will protect them and raise them from the dead to live forever. I take the view that death is final, and oblivion follows.”

“Ah, well, may each follow his own dictates.” said Alban, “let us speak no more of religion or politics whilst we are in our cups.”

The evening passed quickly, and it was almost midnight when Alban left. We had consumed a large amount of wine, and Rubio had difficulty in awaking me in the morning. I arose quickly and donning my uniform, which Rubio had washed and cleaned, made my way to headquarters and reported to the Centurion, Marcus Flavius.

He rose to greet me as I entered his office, “You

may leave now,” he told the three Decurions present, “I wish to speak to Quintus in private,” he motioned towards a stool, and I sat down. When we were alone Marcus first walked to the door and opened it, checking to see that no one remained within earshot outside. “We have an unpleasant task today,” he began, “Marcellus Portas the Council has ordered that all Christians in Verulamium be arrested and confined in the Arena.”

“Will they be tried?” I asked.

Marcus shook his head, “Marcellus regards them as being guilty of treason so there’ll be no trials. He is staging games in two days to promote himself in forthcoming elections. The spectacle of a few hundred Christians being eaten by lions will doubtless bring him many votes.”

“What do the consul’s aides think of this?” I asked, “surely they will not permit the execution of harmless and innocent people.”

“You know the rules, Quintus, they only advise, whatever they think, the consul’s word is law. You say the Christians are harmless, but they do pose a threat to the state. Their members grow daily, and Rome grows weaker and is constantly abandoning parts of its Empire.”

“You surprise me,” I replied, “I was of the opinion that the Christian religion would endure only for a short while, just like many other new ideas.”

“Marcus smiled, “I think that will be far from the truth. In the meantime, whatever our personal feelings, we must obey orders. This Century has been directed to Creoda’s estate. He and his family are to be arrested and his property confiscated.”

“Creoda!!” I gasped, “but he is one of the wealthiest and most respected of British nobility. Is he then a Christian?”

“Yes, in fact he has been practising as priest,” replied Marcus.

I asked, “How did this come to be known? Creoda has mostly confined himself to his estates, and

seldom takes part in any public functions of the town.”

Marcus smiled, “The consul has appointed Bucca to Chief of Intelligence and has granted him the honorary rank of Centurion. We act today on information supplied by him.”

I frowned; Bucca, another British noble was a detestable person. He had always co-operated with the occupying forces, and there was very little love lost between him and the majority of his compatriots. Only last year the emperor had honoured him by bestowing a Britannic name on a settlement to the west of the Watling Way, the great road which led to Cambria. Bucca-Inge-Haeme the settlement was called, (the town of Bucca be the bend in the river) and was yet another addition to Bucca’s growing fortune. “So, the consul relies on information from a traitor,” I said, “to my mind, Centurion, that does little to enhance the character of our administrator.”

“Quietly Quintus,” Marcus warned, “your tongue will lose you your head.”

“My apologies, I do but echo the remarks of Scipio, namely that the enemy loves treachery but despises traitors.”

“We must waste no more time,” the Centurion continued, “to your duties Quintus; the Century is to assemble immediately, pass this order on to all Decurions.”

“Yes, Centurion.” I saluted and left the office. Within a short time, the clash of armour and arms grew to a crescendo as the Century assembled on the open ground bordering the barracks. When they were in position, we ten Decurions reported to Marcus, and he accompanied us to the parade ground. Briefly, he outlined the exercise; the Century was to proceed to Creoda’s house, and whilst Marcus, myself and twenty men were to arrest the chieftain and his family, the remainder of the force was to surround the area to prevent any escapes. Without further ado, we marched off, and within the hour had reached our

destination. "Creoda and his family are to be treated at all times with courtesy," ordered Marcus, as we made our way towards the house.

The door was open, and a tall, fair haired woman of dignified appearance stood awaiting us. I recognised her as the wife of Creoda. "I greet you good day, Lady Wanda," Marcus said, saluting, "by orders of the consul, all members of this household must be detained. Where is the Lord Creoda?"

"He has been away from home this last four days," answered Wanda; she spoke good Latin with only a slight accent.

"Lying barbarian," hissed one of the soldiers.

Marcus turned abruptly, "Who spoke?" he demanded. Shamefaced, the man admitted his guilt.

"Escort him back to the barracks," the Centurion ordered the two men on either side of the soldier. "He is to be confined, and when I return, we will see if thirty lashes will put a curb on his tongue." He continued, "My apologies, Lady Wanda, have you any idea where your husband is?"

"He tells me little of his business, but I believe he is visiting Londinium," Lady Wanda replied.

"Then I must ask you to prepare yourself and family for transportation to the Arena. Take only the necessities," I told her.

Later, as we escorted Wanda and her children to their place of confinement, I could not help but admire her bearing. When we arrived at the Arena, many prisoners were already there, and the weeping of the women and children was distressing to hear. We formed part of the guard and were ordered to remain there until further orders came from the consul. The consul, in fact, visited the Arena later in the day. Marcellus Portas was a short, thick set man, with a florid complexion. He addressed the prisoners from the balcony overlooking the Arena. "Christians, you are guilty of treason, and are sentenced to death. You go

to the lions tomorrow, at the fifth hour.”

The Lady Wanda pushed her way to the front of the assembled prisoners. “Do we not even have the courtesy of a trial?” she called. Marcellus was furious, “Who is that woman?” he said to a member of his staff.

“She is the wife of Creoda, and is widely respected by both Romans and Britons,” came the answer; “you would do well, consul, to consider leniency in respect of her and her family, their execution might well cause an uprising of the local populace, even those who are not Christians.”

“Is Creoda also a prisoner?” the consul asked, motioning Marcus to the base of the balcony.

“No, consul; he is away in Londinium.”

“Then we must keep vigilance, he must be taken immediately he returns. Will you see to that?” he turned to Bucca, who stood by him. The chieftain was small, dark haired and of sallow complexion. His eyes were narrow, and shifty. He was disliked by Romans and Britons alike and it had long surprised me that no one as yet tried to kill him.

“I will, consul,” Bucca promised, “Creoda will be caught.”

Marcellus nodded, then addressing the Master of the game asked, “Is all in readiness for tomorrow?”

“Yes consul, fifty pairs of gladiators will fight to the death in open combat, the Arena will be flooded, and a marine battle staged, and the lions are already hungry.”

“Marcellus,” Marcus called, “I ask a favour.”

“What is it, Centurion?”

“The Lady Wanda and her children; might they be spared death?” Marcus pleaded.

Marcellus thought for a while, and finally said “Centurion, you have always shown loyalty to me, they will be sent to the quarries of Aquae Sulis.”

I thought that perhaps death would have been kinder. Already hundreds of slaves had died working in the quarries, where the stone was taken to construct

massive bath houses. Many more had been killed in raids by the Cambrians, whose territory lay within marching distance. The guard was relieved in the late afternoon, and on my way home I visited a tavern. Only a few persons were there, these were dangerous times and most of the population kept to the safety of their homes. I sat for an hour and decided to go home; a tavern empty of clients and without conversation is a dreary place. As I was about to leave, Alban entered, "What Quintus," he joked, "leaving so early?" Are you ill or have you forsworn Bacchus."

"This place depresses me," I answered, "but as you are now here, I will remain and drink with you."

Alban glanced around the tavern, "I agree with you, there is as much jollity here as in Hades. Shall we go to my house and drink in a more agreeable atmosphere?"

"Yes, let us be going," I agreed.

Later in Alban's house, my spirits had lightened, and I felt better in myself. "Were you involved in the arrest of the Christians today?" I asked.

Alban nodded, "Yes, it was a sad duty, and it sickened me."

"Me also; I felt ashamed to be a Roman. I was deeply grieved by the treatment of the Lady Wanda. I hope that her husband avoids capture, he is a Briton I have always admired," I told him.

Alban was silent for a while; then he rose and walked to a window and stared out at the garden. "Quintus, you have always been my good friend. If I tell you some news, will you promise to say nothing of it to anyone? My very life will depend on it."

"Your secret will be safe with me my friend," I nodded.

Alban walked back to the table and drank from his cup. Finally, he announced, "Creoda is not in Londinium, he's in my house, Quintus. I have given him sanctuary. Death in the Arena is not for a man of his stature."

I felt the colour drain from my face. “You must be mad! You are no Christian, so why should you risk your life to defend one?”

“I think it wrong that anyone should be persecuted for his religion. Christians appear harmless, and Creoda has done me many favours,” Alban replied.

I rose, “I must leave, Alban. You are my friend, but I cannot remain in your house while you harbour an enemy of Rome. I advise you to ask Creoda to leave.”

“Are you suggesting that I deliver him to Marcellus?” asked Alban angrily.

“No, tell him to go, for your own sake. I will not visit you here again Alban, until I know that the fugitive is far away from here,” I urged him.

These are not the words ----” began Alban, when from outside came the clink of arms and the clatter of horses. We looked through the window; a force of perhaps thirty men were in the courtyard, and at their head, clearly visible in the torchlight, was Bucca. Alban turned towards me, “Quickly, follow me,” he ordered.

We made our way to the rear of the house, and cautiously Alban opened a door which led out to a small, paved area surrounded by a wall. “Go, Quintus, make for the large oak tree yonder, climb the lower branches and they will assist you in surmounting the wall. Make sure that none of Bucca’s men are patrolling before you drop down from the wall. You will find yourself in a little used road which borders the forest. I suggest you follow the boundary of the forest until you come to your area. You can hide amongst the trees if you meet any patrols.”

“Are you not coming with me?” I pleaded.

“Alban shook his head, “No, I shall remain. Creoda is hidden in a secret room, Bucca will never find him.”

“Then you think that Bucca suspects that Creoda is here?” I asked.

“I can think of no other reason for the patrol visiting my home. Now go Quintus, and may Jupiter go

with you.” He pushed me through the doorway and closed the door.

There was sufficient light from the moon for me to find my way to the oak tree. I clambered to the lower branches and thence to the top of the wall. Carefully, I checked for the presence of any soldiers in the street below, but there was little light, and I could not see clearly. I hesitated for a while, and decided to take the chance, lowering myself to arm’s length from the branch and dropping the rest of the way. I made little noise but remained still until I was sure that I was unobserved, and then made for the trees, which I could discern against the night sky.

My journey home was uneventful, but lengthy, as the route around the edge of the forest was circuitous. I saw no one and at last thankfully gained the safety of my home. Rubio lay sleeping in the hallway but awoke immediately I entered. “Is all well, Master?” he asked anxiously.

“Yes, I have been delayed, that is all,” I answered.

“I feared you had been caught in the unrest of the town. The military have been on the streets since dawn, and many soldiers were injured by mobs who wished to protect the Christians,” he said.

“I encountered no difficulties, although I was involved in the arrest of Christians. Tell me, Rubio, what are your feelings of today’s events?” I asked him.

Rubio hesitated then replied, “Master, I have been a Christian these past five years. To my shame, I have been too afraid to make this public, but I have attended many meetings, and have been successful in converting many persons to the faith. Now I have told you this will you deliver me to the consul?”

“No, of course not, I have no dislike of your religion, in fact it has many good points, but the emperor has ordered the destruction of Christians throughout the Empire. I regard you as a friend, not a slave, and would not like to see you suffer the same fate as many of your

faith," I told him.

Rubio smiled, "Have no fear, I will do as you ask, at least for the present; but the time will come when I have to proclaim that I am a Christian."

"When that happens, you must take care. I have no wish to become involved, although if you decided to leave, I would no doubt delay reporting your absence to increase your chance of escape," I smiled.

"I understand," Rubio replied, "and now it is time you retired, your duties start early."

I was surprised and perhaps a little shocked by Rubio's disclosures. He had been with me for a long time, and I had grown both to like and admire him. My last thoughts as I drifted into slumber were that I would do all I could to help him should his secret ever be discovered.

Despite of the current up evil, time has quickly passed this year and already it's the 22nd of June. The Centurion looked drawn and haggard as he addressed us. "This Century has today the duty of providing the guard for a double execution; one of the condemned is a former Decurion and the other a British noble. "Quintus, you are a friend of Alban, so I excuse you this duty."

I felt shocked but kept my composure. "I ask no favours, Centurion: I will carry out my duties as ordered."

"I thought merely to spare your feelings, Quintus, but if that is your wish, then so be it," he replied.

We marched to the Arena, where a large audience had gathered to watch the executions. Our Century was paraded in a 'three-sided square' and the condemned men were brought in. Marcellus the consul arrived as he was going to pronounce the sentences. The trumpets blared and silence fell. "People of Verulamium," the consul began, "you are assembled to witness the execution of traitors. Both are enemies of Rome. You Creoda, used your position as British noble to nurture the vile cult of Christianity. Decurion Alban, you are the worst kind of traitor, a trusted officer in the Fourth Legion, you betrayed

this trust by harbouring Creoda knowing that he was a fugitive. Have either of you anything to say before I pronounce sentence?"

Alban shouted, "I do not regard myself as a traitor! Consul. I am not a Christian, but I cannot agree that they are a danger to the state. Their whole philosophy appears to consist of non-violence. When I gave sanctuary to Creoda, it was as a friend; it was his intention to appeal to the emperor for an end to the persecution of members of his faith."

Some of those present cheered but were soon silenced by the threatening attitude of the guards. "Very touching," sneered Marcellus, "do you have anything to say Creoda?"

"Only this," the Briton replied. "Rome may kill us by the thousand; but Christianity will live on. I place my soul in the care of the Master."

"That is quite enough," the consul shouted, "Creoda, Decurion Alban, you are sentenced to be beheaded, which is a dishonourable death, let your fate be a warning to others who would work against Rome. The execution will proceed."

Creoda was made to kneel, and his head was smitten off in one blow by the soldier who had been detailed as executioner. A groan arose from many of those assembled, and Alban was taken to the place of execution. The drama was not over, as the executioner first hesitated, and then stated that he could not put Alban to death, as he was a brother in arms. The consul was furious, and the reluctant soldier was seized, another man was detailed from the ranks, and in no time both Creoda and Alban lay dead. The attitude of a few spectators made it apparent that the executions would bring about unrest. The Arena was cleared quickly, and guards patrolled the streets of the town to ensure that no demonstrations took place. After we were dismissed, I asked Marcus if I might speak to him privately. When we were alone, I began, "Today's happenings have sickened me; is there no way the

executions could have been stopped?”

Marcus shook his head, “No, Quintus, I could not interfere. Even the Emperor does not know I am a member of a group of senators which controls internal affairs. To have intervened would have disclosed membership of this group.”

“I no longer wish to be part of a tyrannical regime, as soon as I can leave here I will. Is there any way you can help me?” I asked.

The centurion thought for a while, then replied, “The group is aware of your special qualities. I would suggest that you try to reach Cambria, as Rome has no foothold there. I cannot transport you, but I will get word to a colleague there. If you arrive safely, he will contact you in due course.”

“Thank you,” I answered, “I will return first to my home as I have some matters in hand before I depart. Thank you for your friendship, Marcus, and your help, farewell now.”

Marcus rose and gripped my arm, “Farewell Quintus, I wish you success for the future.”

I left and walked quickly to my house, and summoned Rubio. “What do you wish Master?” he asked.

“I am no longer your Master Rubio, as from this moment you are a free man. Wait whilst I write the document of your manumission.”

“What has happened?” he asked.

“I have no time to explain,” I replied to whilst writing, “I am leaving the Legion and Verulamium for ever.” I handed my document to him.

“It is today’s events which have brought about your decision, is it not?” he nodded.

I agreed, “I am going now Rubio, under cover of darkness, my thanks to you for your loyalty; you may accompany me if you wish.”

“No, Quintus, my place is here. I can tell you now, opinions are changing. Even the policies of Diocletian and others of his like cannot prevent the

movement from growing. In years to come it will thrive all over the world. Today's events have only strengthened the Christians' resolve. Alban and the other martyrs will not be forgotten. Already many are referring to Verulamium as Alban's town." I could think of nothing more to say, and as quickly as I could, gathered the few items I would take on my journey. "Farewell, Rubio," I said, "may your God guard you."

"And yours guard you," Rubio replied. We gripped arms, and I made my way cautiously through the streets. I met with no hindrance, and soon Verulamium lay behind me. Ahead lay the hazardous journey to Cambria.

Winter 1069 - 1070

In spite of the logs burning in the fire space, the room was cold, and I shivered and threw a cloak around my shoulders. The February of this year was the worst within living memory. In fact, the whole of winter to date had been severe. Snow had fallen during the early days of November the previous year, and lay waist deep as there had been no thaw.

I'm in my fifth year – happily single and now known as Richard De Viges also had recently been dubbed a minor baron by William Duke of Normandy and King of England. This was in recognition of the assistance I gave him during the invasion of England three years earlier. William was always generous to those who helped him, despite of his reputation of being mean. My good friend Rufus De Commines had, early in 1067 been appointed as Earl of Northumbria, and had been sent to England to keep all the northern peoples in order after a series of uprisings.

A knock on the door disturbed my reverie. “Enter,” I called, and the door opened to admit Hugh, my steward. He bowed and announced, “A messenger is here from England. He has a letter from the king.”

“Then bring him to me immediately,” I ordered.

“Would you wait, sir, whilst he eats the meal, I prepared for him? He was cold and hungry after the journey, and it is wise to show all courtesy to the king’s men.”

“Of course, Hugh, forgive my impatience, and my thanks to you for observing the law of hospitality.”

Hugh left me and I walked over to the fire and kicked the logs into a bright blaze. When Hugh entered with the messenger the room seemed a little warmer, but I took precaution of placing two chairs close to the fire.

“Master De Bourcy,” Hugh announced, and bowed his way from the room. Master Toby De Bourcy was a tall

man in his thirties with a dark complexion.

“Well, Master Toby De Bourcy, how may I be of service to you?” I asked.

“This should explain all, Sir Richard,” he answered, handing me a scroll, “my apologies, Sir, but do you have the gift of reading?” he asked hesitantly.

I smiled, “Yes, I am quite literate.” It was not unusual in these times for members of the aristocracy to be unable to read or write, as most households employed a scribe (normally a friar) for the purpose. I unrolled the scroll and read quickly. The king commanded that I return to England with the bearer of the letter, and report to the court at Winchester. It was signed by the king himself. “Is there trouble again in England?” I asked.

“Toby nodded, “Indeed yes, only last month the Earl of Northumbria and nine hundred of his men were burnt to death in the Bishop’s Palace of Durham. There is also unrest in York. Prince Edgar, son of the late Saxon King Herald, has a large following amongst the northern people”.

“That’s tragic news,” I replied, “the Earl of Northumbria was a close friend, and it is only a short while ago that he visited me here. He was, in fact, on his way to England to over his new estates.” I rose and walked to the window and looked for long moments watching the activity of the serfs in the courtyard. Finally, I turned to Toby, “It will take me perhaps seven days to muster the men and equipment. Until then, you are my guest. Please avail yourself of all the facilities of my home.” I rang a small handbell, and Hugh entered almost immediately. “Show Master De Bourcy to a guest room. I take it that you have one prepared?”

“As always sir,” Hugh replied, who was without doubt a very efficient steward. “Will you accompany me please Master De Bourcy?”

“I will see you tomorrow,” I said to my guest.

“My thanks, Sir Richard,” he answered, “I have little spare clothing with me, is it possible that you might

have a warm cloak you could loan me? The frost has eaten deep into my bones.”

“My steward will attend to your needs. I breakfast at sunrise and would have pleasure in your company if you are sufficiently recovered from your journey to attend.” Hugh and Rufus left, and I sat before the fire and read again the king’s letter. It was almost two years since I was last in England, and I wondered what changes I would find there, I had, of course, lived in England during two of my previous lives, and was fluent in the Britannic tongue, but the harsh Saxon language fell strangely on my ears. I knew I would have to learn it and hoped I would do so quickly. I sent for Hugh and gave him the task of assembling the men and equipment. My estate was spread over a wide area so I knew that it would take some time. Nevertheless, in six days he reported back to me that all was ready, and on the eighth morning we set out for Calais, where we would attempt to acquire a vessel for the voyage to England. This did not prove too difficult and within fourteen days we had reached Winchester and I sent my respects to the king and informed him of our arrival. I was speedily given audience, and I noticed that the king appeared to have aged since the last time we met. William did not have a pleasing countenance; he had a swarthy complexion and close-set eyes which gave him a cold appearance. Indeed, his reputed mean manner was a common joke amongst his close friends and courtiers. I bowed and waited for him to speak. He strode towards me, both arms outstretched. “You are most welcome, Sir Richard,” he said embracing me, “I must congratulate you on the speed with which you have answered my summons. I did not expect you to arrive for at least another thirty days.”

“I endeavour always to serve you with the utmost speed, Your Grace,” I replied. “May I ask what task you have in mind for me?”

“Let us be seated, Sir Richard and first enjoy a cup of wine,” answered the king ushering me towards the

table. When the servants had been dismissed, he began, “You have been told, I suppose, of the troubles in Northumbria and the evil fate which befell Rufus De Commines?”

“Yes,” I answered, “he was a good friend, and I would much like to avenge his death.”

William nodded, “To that end I am despatching you to York. You will re-enforce the garrison there, and because of your knowledge of intelligence matters will assume the duties of constable. The uprising has been quelled but Prince Edgar and Earl Gospatric are known to have made a few visits to the area. They encourage the Saxon population in treasonable acts. We have heard that Gospatric has negotiated in secret with King Swein of Denmark, and we expect at any moment that he will send a fleet of ships carrying several hundred men to join the rebels. Our army is thinly stretched, as there are pockets of rebellion all over the country. Your task Sir Richard will be to seek out the traitors. If this can be done, we may well be able to prevent further problems.”

“You can rely on me Your Grace,” I replied.

The audience ended and I assembled my men and briefed them on our duties. We were to leave at the earliest opportunity, and I set about acquiring horses, carts, and supplies for the journey. On the third morning we set off, taking the shortest route to our destination. Even so, it took ten days to reach York, and the number of burnt-out settlements and villages we passed on the way was evidence of the problems that beset the country.

I reported to the garrison commander Michel De Boeuf upon our arrival and presented my credentials. He seemed genuinely pleased to see me. He was a thick set man in his middle forties, who had distinguished himself during the invasion of England in 1066. “Your arrival is providential, Sir Richard,” he told me. Every day we are called upon to put down insurrections in this area. Tomorrow you will leave for Kyningestun; (now known Kingston-Upon-Hull or simply Hull) the Saxons

slaughtered our garrison there and have declared it a free town. Your men will form part of a force of one thousand which is to retake the town and bring to justice those who led the rebellion. You will be under the command of Guillaume De Salvat. He is a fine soldier, although I admit that I find some of his methods un-necessarily brutal. The king, however, holds him in high esteem, and there is no doubt that he obtains results.” I felt slightly ill at ease; but I had no liking for the Saxons, especially in view of their treatment of my friend Rufus, I had always found them to be an honourable enemy deserving every courtesy when defeated. “I have no wish to partake in needless brutality towards our enemies, Sir Michel,” I began, but the commander silenced me. “You will follow orders of De Salvat without question, Sir Richard. Surely you do not condone Saxon atrocities, such as the massacre of De Commines and his men?”

Obviously, my feelings on this subject were known to De Beouf, and he was trying to exploit them to the limit. “I will, of course obey orders and in no way allow my personal feelings to enter into military matters,” I replied.

De Beouf agreed, “Good, I am glad to hear it, now I suggest that you report to De Salvat.” The Commander opened the door and called a guard. “Escort Sir Richard to the battalion Commander,” he ordered. I saluted and followed the guard through a maze of corridors until finally we arrived at a room far below.

Guillaume De Salvat looked every inch a soldier. He was a good head taller than most of his men, and this, coupled with his military bearing, made him an imposing figure. I noticed that his eyes were hard and close-set, and his face, when he rose to greet me, showed no emotion. “Well met, De Vigés,” he greeted me, “I am glad to have you join the battalion. Your meritorious service during the invasion is common knowledge amongst most military commanders. How think you of your men?”

“They are good and loyal subjects of the king,” I replied, “you will, I am sure find them an asset during the

forthcoming campaign.”

“Then I will lose no time in giving you your orders. We leave at dawn for Kyningestun. The rebels now occupy the town. I understand you are somewhat of a linguist; do you speak the Saxon tongue?”

I shook my head, “My knowledge of the language is at present limited, but my sergeant at arms speaks it fluently. He is instructing me when his duties permit.”

“Then you will relieve him of all other duties and assign him as your assistant and interpreter. I am informed that you are an expert in intelligence matters, so your task will be that of interrogating prisoners. We know that the Earls Gospatric and Waltheof are in contact with Swein of Denmark. If we can discover their evil intentions, we may be able to thwart their plans before they are put into operation.”

“I am at your service, commander, may I go now to check that my men have been fed and allocated quarters?”

“Of course. I would suggest that you all retire early and leave alone the wine. Everyone must be alert and clear headed for tomorrow.”

“As you wish, commander.” I saluted and took my leave and made for the barracks where my men would, hopefully be billeted. I found that they had already eaten, and a large fire had been lit in the courtyard. No doubt they intended to spend an evening in carousing. I summoned the sergeant, “Assemble the men,” I ordered, “and douse the fire, there will be no drinking this night.” The sergeant looked downcast, and as he called for assembly, it was obvious from the mutterings from the men that they were displeased. When the parade had been brought to order I addressed them. “We march at dawn for Kyningestun. We are now under the orders of De Salvat. It is his command that we retire early and take no wine. Heed this order, for it is certain that any of you showing signs of drunkenness tomorrow will be given bloody backs. The commander is a strict disciplinarian and does

not tolerate disobedience. Now, to bed, for we parade one hour before dawn.” I dismissed the men, and with bad grace they made for their quarters.

My orderly woke me in the early hours, and I shivered in the bitterly cold rain that fell on the courtyard. In all about seven hundred men were assembled, and for fully an hour we stood awaiting the arrival of De Salvat. When he finally appeared, it was apparent that he was in a black mood. He inspected the ranks and dispensed floggings and other punishment to those men whose dress did not attain the standard he required. Two men from the local hundreds were found to be drunk, and De Salvat ordered their execution, ignoring the pleas of their officer that the punishment was too severe. The men were beheaded in the presence of the parade, and I could sense the hatred directed at De Salvat.

We marched off finally at a forced pace and rested only briefly during the journey. Kyningestun was a two-day march from York, but De Salvat insisted we complete it in one. We covered the last ten miles in darkness and camped in a wood on the outskirts of our destination. Horses and men were exhausted, and I was thankful that all seemed quiet in the town, as to have fought a battle in our condition would have proved disastrous.

We entered Kyningestun the following morning. De Salvat ordered all buildings to be searched and the occupants brought to the main square. After three hours only two hundred or so persons, consisting mainly of women, children, and a few old men, had been rounded up. The commander was furious, and with the aid of an interpreter addressed the assembly. “Where are the men of this town?” he asked. The crowd remained silent, and the question was asked three times more. Again, silence prevailed, De Salvat nodded, “Very well,” he barked, “I shall put the question more clearly.” He pointed to a group of women and children at the front of the crowd. “Bring one of those children here,” he ordered, and a

soldier duly obliged. "Now," the commander continued, "I ask again. Where are the men of this town?" A woman, obviously the child's mother, stepped forward, arms outstretched, but was pulled back by other women, whilst an angry murmur rose from the crowd. De Salvat drew his sword, "So you still choose not to answer," he said, "so be it!"

When he ran the child through the mother's piteous cries made me feel sick to my stomach, and I felt bound to intervene. "Commander, surely you carry the interrogation to the extreme. These people are not likely to co-operate if you pursue these inhumane methods."

"Silence! Bring another child hither," he ordered. He raised his sword, and a woman broke free from the cordon and ran towards him, a stream of Saxon words falling from the lips. The commander waited, "What does she say?" he asked the interpreter.

"Sir, she says the men are hiding in the settlement on the far side of the river opposite this town."

"Then we proceed there immediately," De Salvat said at the same time plunging his sword into the child's stomach.

"What of the prisoners?" enquired an officer.

"Kill them," the commander replied, "they are all traitors." We marched away, leaving behind a detachment to despatch the unfortunate residents, whose screams could be heard even when we were some distance from the town.

My mind was in turmoil, I was ashamed to be involved and intended to speak of this to the king when I next saw him. It was only a short march across the river to the settlement and at first, we met with fierce resistance; but gradually our superiority in numbers and ability told, and the rebels surrendered within the hour.

Guillaume De Salvat ordered that we took but few prisoners, and those from amongst the officers. The remaining rebels were put to death and the settlement burned. Our return to York took three days, and as intelligence officer it was my task to interrogate the

prisoners. Without exception the Saxons refused to divulge any secrets, preferring to face death rather than betray their comrades. I could not help but admire their courage. When a tall, scholarly looking Saxon was brought to me, I was furious when I saw the bruises on his face, and the iron fetters around his legs and arms. "I want the names of those responsible for this brutality," I snapped at my sergeant at arms. "Remove those fetters immediately, can you not recognise an honourable enemy when you see one?"

The sergeant hastened to comply, and then stood awaiting my orders. "Leave us," I demanded. "I would speak with the prisoner alone."

"Sir, that would be to disobey the orders of the battalion commander," the sergeant protested.

"I will answer personally to the commander, now leave us," I replied.

"As you wish, sir."

When we were alone, I invited the prisoner to sit. "I apologise for the ill-treatment you have received, and I trust your wounds are not serious. What is your name?"

The tall Saxon smiled, "I am known by many names. At present I am known as Baldric, Thane of White Lea. This, however, should prove of interest to you." He reached inside his doublet and produced a bronze medallion. I gasped when I recognised the triangle and sphere, the sign of the secret organisation which I knew had charge of me. "What were you doing fighting with the rebels?" I enquired. "Surely your colleagues would not wish you to put your life at risk."

The prisoner smiled, "I took no part in the fighting, our society works in mysterious ways. Even the king knows nothing of our existence. We could in no way prevent the Norman invasion of England but hoped that integration between the two factions would take place quickly; this has not happened. The Normans have stripped the Saxons of most of their possessions, with a few exceptions. We consider the balance of power unfair.

Whilst we hope for co-operation between both sides, we have nevertheless encouraged many so-called rebel groups in their efforts to redress the balance. Such a group exists in the Isle of Ely, in the east of the country. It has been successful on a number of occasions in bringing about changes of policy by the Norman administration. The group leader is replaced every six months, but always assumes the same name, Hereward. This makes it virtually impossible for him to be identified.”

“How does this concern me?” I asked.

“It is our wish,” Baldric continued, “that you leave your position here and travel to Ely and join the rebels. We will ensure that you are elected as group leader. It is felt that your knowledge will be of great value, the Normans in that area are guilty of many atrocities, so firm resistance is needed to cause them to re-consider their actions.”

“It is well-known that you are a master of disguise, so there is little chance of you being discovered. We know also that you find your duties distasteful. The choice, of course, rests with you whether to stay or leave.” I knew that he was right, my duties saddened me, and I wanted no further part in them. “When do you wish me to leave?” I asked.

“Immediately, if that is not inconvenient,” answered Baldric. “How do I make my escape?”

“You and I will travel together disguised as Saxon traders. Trade still goes on, and as long as we observe the curfew, we should remain undetected. All the necessary items await us in this garrison, including a horse and cart. We shall have to break the curfew tonight to put distance between ourselves and De Salvat. Fear not, a diversion has been arranged to cover our departure.”

“Then let us not delay further.” I walked to the door and summoned the sergeant, “I shall escort the prisoner to my quarters and will be responsible for his security overnight. I leave you in charge, report to me at the second hour tomorrow.”

“As you command.” the man replied.

“Where do we go?” I asked Baldric when we were out of earshot.

“We go to the servant’s area,” he replied. The Normans employed many Saxon civilians to perform the menial tasks of the garrison, and when we arrived it was obvious that he was known to them. We donned the dress of Saxon serfs and stained our faces to make better the disguise. Then cautiously, we made our way to the rear gate. I was concerned to note that four soldiers stood guard there. “How do we elude them?” I asked. My question was answered by the noise of battle from the centre of the garrison. Shortly afterwards an officer arrived and withdrew three of the guards, saying that rebels had managed to penetrate the defences. We easily overpowered the remaining guard and obtained the keys to the gate. In no time Baldric and I were out of the garrison and travelling in the darkness. The cart seemed to make much noise and I feared that we would be detected. My fears proved groundless and by dawn we were many miles into our journey and hiding in a small village. It took thirty days to reach our destination, such the route we were obliged to take, we were relieved when we saw the fens and reeds of the Isle of Ely. “Where are the rebels?” I asked.

“We remain here and let them find us,” Baldric answered. For two days and nights we camped out in the damp atmosphere, and on the third we awoke to find ourselves surrounded by men of fierce appearance. Baldric identified himself and we were received courteously and escorted to their camp deep in the fens.

We spent the next few days familiarising ourselves with our new companions and the area, and then took part in a raid on a nearby Norman encampment. These attacks were designed to cause inconvenience more than anything, as well as to obtain supplies of weapons. Our raid was successful on both counts, and we lost only about a dozen

men, whilst our enemy lost over double that number.

We made many raids over the ensuing months and were joined on occasions by the Danes, who were active along the east coast. My knowledge proved useful, and just before Christmas I was elected as leader. During the following two months the weather was very severe, and we were forced to remain within camp. Then in early March the thaw came, and our scouts reported a large Norman force assembling at the edge of the fens. It was apparent that our whereabouts was known to them, and we soon realised that we would be fighting for our very existence.

On the morning the Normans attacked us our men were already deployed amongst the reeds. The enemy had acquired the services of a witch, who was transported at the head of their number in a siege tower. She was an ugly being and the curses she screamed upon us made me fearful. We drew the enemy deep into the fens and manoeuvred ourselves to their rear. Then, at a given signal, the reeds were fired. Many dead reeds remained standing from the previous year and were as dry as tinder. Aided by a strong westerly wind the fire spread rapidly and soon engulfed the Normans. We withdrew to safety and waited until the fire died, then cautiously we advanced to inspect the result of our actions. The charred corpses of over a thousand of the enemy lay scattered on the smoking terrain. We also found the remains of the siege tower, so we could but assume that the witch had met with the same fate. The fire had destroyed our camp, so after deliberation it was decided that we disband. Baldric and I made for the coast, where we hoped to meet with the Danes. "It is too dangerous for us to remain," he said, "you are a wanted man under both your names. We will endeavour to reach Demark where we shall be safe."

"I agree," I replied.

We hid for some weeks in villages along the east coast. In some of them notices had been placed offering 1000 crowns reward for information leading to the capture of Hereward the Wake. Eventually, we met with a party of Danes who, after hearing our story, agreed to take us in their ship to Denmark. As the misty shores of England disappeared, I was relieved, but could not help but wonder what my future held.

Present Day - 24th June 1968

Back at the base, Harry sat at the large meeting table, stared across the room, and thought, "The guy looks really sick." The politician was profusely sweating and appeared to have a problem with his breathing. The security chief enquired, "Can I get you a drink, senator?"

The senator shook his head, "Thank you, but no thanks. Anyway, now that we're alone what I'm about to say must remain in the strictest confidence, Harry. Even the President and his advisers have not been put in the picture. I feel however, that I can trust you."

Harry was intrigued, "What's this all about then?" he demanded.

Senator O'Brien settled himself more comfortably in his chair. "You are aware," he began, "that the President has scheduled a meeting with the senate committee to discuss the project. As I said earlier, he knows nothing of the manuscript's contents. Certain members of the committee believe that the less known about the manuscript the better. Nevertheless, the President wants it decoded, so to keep him happy we'll play along with him. When it has been completed the organisation, I represent will decide just how much of the information it contains should be released."

"Do you really intend to keep the President in the dark?" Harry asked. "And just how do you think I can help?"

"You're an ambitious man," replied the senator. "I know for instance that your rapid promotion within the security service wasn't all due to hard work. Your so-called friendship with Andrew McCormac hasn't gone unnoticed, and I am aware of the palms he greased to put you in your present position."

Harry felt uneasy, it was common knowledge that Andrew's recent resignation was not entirely due to ill

health. There had been rumours that considerable amount of money had gone missing from his department and that he was clearly involved. No administration likes scandal, so the matter was swept under the carpet. “It would seem that I have the choice either of helping you or losing my job.”

“How very astute of you,” sneered the senator.

“What is it that you want me to do?” Harry sighed.

“Angus is being a little awkward,” the senator replied. “He’s trying to pressure me into meeting certain of his demands. I don’t want to lean on him too heavily, or I’ll upset the British Government, so I want you to be sympathetic to him, gain his confidence and jolly him along,” moaned the senator.

“OK,” agreed Harry, “Angus tells me that he has your permission for him and Glenda to visit Max in hospital and he can stay overnight at Glenda’s house too. Is that right?”

The politician smiled, “Yes, that’s correct.”

“But what if he awakes and starts telling them what really happened?” Harry asked.

“All covered, one of the nurses is working for us, so there’s no worries on that score,” the politician continued, “but make sure they’re always shadowed; then tomorrow morning bring them both back here. Obviously, we can’t ever let Angus loose in view of what he knows. It’s possible he hasn’t told her anything, but we can’t take any chances.”

“What do we do with them?” Harry shrugged.

“Angus can continue decoding, it’ll keep him occupied. You can take Glenda to the detention centre. Make sure she’s put into solitary, and on no account are she and him to meet. I’ll contact you with further instructions later. Right, I’ve got a flight to Washington standing by. In the meantime, you’ve got a free hand here. If you consider that anything is getting out of hand, you have my permission to take whatever action you consider necessary. Goodbye for now, I’ll be in touch.”

Harry watched the fat politician waddle down the corridor until he disappeared through the main exit. "Careful, Harry," he thought, "you're dealing with disaster here," he then headed straight towards Angus's office.

"About bloody time!" Angus snapped, "I take it I'm now allowed to go out today."

"Sorry," replied Harry, "I've been tied up with all sorts of problems. I'll have a vehicle ready for you in ten minutes, "and sure, enough a car was called for Angus within that time.

Harry in the meantime briefed two of his staff to shadow Angus. "I want them tailed at all times," he ordered. "The Bauer house is already bugged, but I want to know the movement of Angus and Glenda when they are away from home."

Glenda was already waiting by the front door when Angus arrived. "I was beginning to think you weren't coming," she smiled.

"Well, I'm here now and I'm planning to stay overnight if that's OK with you."

"Of course."

Glenda locked the front door and as they headed for the car, Angus whispered. "Look, when we come back, we'll have to watch what we say. I believe the house has been bugged, so let's make sure that those who are listening only get to hear what we want them to."

Glenda whispered back, "Who's responsible for this? How dare they infringe on my privacy. I've a good mind to complain directly to the President."

"Keep cool, Glenda. Let's not give them the satisfaction of thinking they've got you rattled," Angus soothed.

The visit to the hospital seemed to take no time at all, then Angus noticed a large black Lincoln pulled out from behind a line of vehicles adjacent to them. It followed at the discreet distance, but Angus had no doubt that they were being tailed. He said nothing to Glenda, but

after they arrived home and the guests were seated in the lounge, he peered cautiously from an upstairs window. Sure enough, the black Lincoln was parked farther up the street.

Later when everyone had left, Angus held a finger to his lips and said, "Do you fancy a walk, Glenda? I feel a little boxed in after my stay on the base."

"Sure, we'll walk down to the river," said Glenda.

They strolled slowly down the river and glancing casually behind, Angus saw a figure leave the Lincoln and follow them. "We're being shadowed Glenda," he warned, "just try and act as if everything is normal. So, I've got to tell you something. Right, have you heard of Senator O'Brien?"

"Yes, why?"

"Well, he's been into the base. And I'm telling you, he's up to something shady. He's a very dangerous man. And it's him who's being so reluctant about me leaving the base. But I've got one ace up my sleeve though. Now, you can't tell anyone what I'm about to say. Promise?"

"I promise," Glenda repeated.

"Look, I've been working on a manuscript, and I can't say what it's involved," Angus said, then continued, "but, I've got some copies done and I've hidden them inside your house."

"How did you manage that?"

"It was quite easy really. I'm quite a fast typist, so I've made two copies, and then I just put mine into my valise. Well, I didn't know for certain, but I gambled in not getting checked again because of Max's outburst at the entrance gate, and luckily for me - it worked."

"Ha, oh yes, I know all about that incident,"

Glenda laughed, "does Max know of this?"

"No. And I even made up an excuse for using up all the paper, just in case," Angus smiled. "Anyway, I need it to be sent to my solicitor back in England, with strict

instructions the contents will be known to the public in the event of my death. Mailing it would be the obvious way, but”

“...I could mail it,” interrupted Glenda.

“They’d suspect you.” They walked for a while in silence then Glenda snapped her fingers, “Mrs. Wotak!”

“Who’s she?” Angus enquired.

“The woman who comes in to clean once a week. She’s due to visit tomorrow morning. I could ask her, I’m sure she wouldn’t be suspected.”

“It might work. I suggest you ask her to delay mailing it until the following day. It will be addressed to my solicitor in Hull, but if she questions it, just say it’s for business reasons, that’s all she needs to know.”

By now they were on their way back to the house. “We must watch our conversation when we get inside,” Angus warned, “just talk about everyday things.”

“I’ll be careful,” Glenda promised. For the rest of the day, he and Glenda remained indoors mostly watching TV and at 10 p.m., just before retiring, Angus looked out of the lounge window. The black Lincoln had gone, its place having been taken by a grey Chevrolet.

For a long while he lay in bed unable to sleep. Finally, he got up and made his way to Glenda’s room. She was awake, and without saying a word lifted the bed covers. As he got in beside her, he noticed that she was naked. Later as they lay together, he thought of whoever had been listening, and hoped, sardonically, that they had enjoyed what they heard, although he and Glenda had made little noise.

They lingered over breakfast in the morning and were still seated in the kitchen when Mrs. Wotak arrived. She was a short middle-aged woman of typical east European appearance. Angus placed the retrieved, a slightly bulky package and placed it onto the kitchen table then looked at Glenda. She nodded almost imperceptibly, and he knew that she would wait for an opportune moment

to approach Mrs Wotak.

This came two hours later when the woman had almost finished her duties and had gone to the back yard to empty the garbage. Quickly, Glenda grabbed the package and walked out to the yard. "Would you mail this for me please?"

"Why sure, Mrs Bauer. I'll call at the Post Office on my way home."

"There's no hurry. In fact, it would be better if you left it until tomorrow. It's some business papers Professor McCutcheon is sending to England, and he did say something about wanting tomorrow's post mark. He could have mailed it himself tomorrow, I know, but he's completely exhausted by all the work he's had over the last four days and nights. I want to make sure he rests during his stay here."

"I understand," Mrs. Wotak smiled, taking the package.

"I'm sorry, but I currently don't have anything on me, so would it be all right if I could owe you? I'll be able to pay you next week, with a little extra for your trouble, of course," Glenda pleaded.

"Yes, that's fine," Mrs Wotak replied.

"Thanks, Mrs Wotak," Glenda smiled, as they re-entered the house.

"When Mrs. Wotak had left, Glenda decided to it was time to get in some groceries. "I'll need extra provisions with you eating me out of house and home, let's give our follower a nice long trip to the shopping mall," joked Glenda. Neither of them referred to the events of the previous night, but Angus had the feeling that their relationship would continue to develop.

They spent two hours shopping and stopped for a drink at a tavern on the way home. Directly they entered the street they saw another vehicle parked near the house. "It's Harry and his crowd," remarked Angus, recognising the security chief, "what the hell does he want?"

Glenda parked the car, which was immediately surrounded by Harry and his men. Ahead, the street was blocked by a large truck, and glancing behind, Angus saw that the black Lincoln was also preventing any passage. Harry made no answer but indicated that Angus and Glenda should vacate the vehicle. When were they standing on the sidewalk Angus asked, “What’s going on Harry?”

“Sorry, Angus. I must place Mrs. Bauer and yourself in protective custody.”

“To protect us from whom?” Angus pleaded.

“You’re both considered a security risk. We know of your feelings for Mrs Bauer. It’s highly likely that you’ve told her at least something of your duties.”

“I’ll remind you that I’m a British Citizen! I demand to see the British Consul!” Angus demanded.

“Look, Angus, I can’t explain out here on the sidewalk. Co-operate, and I’ll give you all the details when we get back to base. You’ll gain nothing by being awkward,” Harry remarked.

“OK, but you haven’t heard the last of this!” He was concerned when he and Glenda were put into separate vehicles.

“Just a necessary precaution,” Harry said to Angus who was also travelling in the same vehicle. “We’ll send someone to the house later to collect clothes and essential items for you both.”

The journey to the base was soon completed, and Angus watched anxiously as Glenda was led away by two guards. “We’ll go to my office,” Harry suggested, as he laid a hand on Angus’s shoulder. When they were seated the security chief poured two glasses of Bourbon. “Try to relax Angus.”

“How can I? I’m a prisoner and so is Glenda. Who the hell do you lot think you are?” Angus sighed.

“I’m only obeying orders. If it’s any comfort to you I think you’ve been treated disgracefully. I’ll do

whatever I can to make you as comfortable as possible whilst you are here.”

“Could you contact the British Consul?”

“Angus, I’d be putting my head on the block. But maybe I could do something if you agree to co-operate.”

“Co-operate be damned. As far as I’m concerned, I’ve finished with the project. I demand that you release Glenda and myself immediately.”

“Look Angus, from what I’ve learned I guess we’re dealing with a very powerful and dangerous organisation. I’m playing along just to keep myself safe, and I suggest that you do the same.”

“I want no part of it.”

“Be sensible, perhaps I can sort something out, but I’ve had orders to detain you and Glenda. Make the best of a bad job and continue with the decoding.”

“You’re living in a dream world, Harry, if Senator O’Brien is as dangerous and powerful as you think do you honestly believe that he’ll ever let you, me or Glenda ever leave this place?”

“The thought has crossed my mind. But let’s play it cool for the time being.”

“I suppose there’s not much else we can do, but perhaps you could ask Senator O’Brien to let Glenda go. I’ve really told her very little about my work here.”

“Sorry Angus, she stays. Senator O’Brien’s bound to contact me soon and I’ll see what I can do then, but for now you’ll just have to be patient.”

“OK, I’ll continue working on the manuscript. You’ll keep me posted if anything turns up, I trust?”

“Sure, I’ll ask somebody to escort you back to your quarters.” When Angus had left, the security chief sat for a long time thinking over all that had occurred. He could see no way out of this predicament and wondered how it would end. The phone rang, startling him. One of the guards from central control was on the line. “Chief, we’ve received a radio message. Senator O’Brien is on his way from Washington. E.T.A one hour.”

“Thanks Clive,” Harry replied, “make sure he’s brought to my office directly he arrives and ensure that everything’s tight. The senator is a stickler for procedure.”

“Will he be staying over?” Angus asked.

“Who knows, better have accommodation prepared, we can’t afford to upset the good senator.”

Harry replaced the handset and poured himself a drink; then he wrote a full account of his discussion with Senator O’Brien and a covering letter to his brother, who worked in the offices of the Chicago Tribune. “If anything happens to me, hand this enclosure to your editor. On no account should you read it. Believe me, Rupert, it’s real dynamite. I’m treading on dangerous ground even writing to you, but I know I can trust you to follow my wishes. Hopefully, I’ll be in touch soon.”

He sealed the envelope and decided that he had time to mail it from outside the base. He phoned the main gate, “Harry here, I’m leaving in about half an hour, I need to go home and get a change of clothes, I’ve been wearing this shirt for two days now. Victor Jenson will be taking over until I return.”

“OK chief, could you bring a paper back with you? The boys want to see what’s happening in the Major League.”

“You’ll get me shot, but I will for a quiet life. Oh, go on then, you can rely on me.”

“Thanks chief, the guy on the gate will pass you straight through, no need to come to the office.”

Harry’s errand took only twenty minutes, and when he returned at the base, he went straight to his office to await Senator O’Brien. The politician arrived within ten minutes, “Have you carried out my orders?” he enquired.

“Yes, both the Angus and Glenda are confined here. Angus has agreed to continue working on the manuscript,” Harry replied.

“Now, as regards the project the President has given me a free hand to do what I consider has to be

done.” The senator smiled.

“Just like having him on your payroll,” Harry said.

“You could say that. I’ll speak to you in the morning about future plans, but right now I need to sleep. Be here at eleven a.m., we’ve a lot to discuss.” When the senator had left Harry, he sat for some time pondering over the events of the day. He had no doubt he was walking a tightrope and knew he would have to tread very carefully.

Present Day - 25th June 1968

Harry was in his office just shortly before 11 a.m. When Senator O'Brien hadn't arrived at 11.45 a.m. he began to wonder what had happened. He was about to phone central control when the senator entered the office accompanied by the deputy security chief, Patrick Brady. "Yours, I believe," he said, tossing an envelope on the desk. With apprehension Harry recognised the letter he had posted to his brother the previous day, and his apprehension was heightened when he saw it had been opened. "That was pathetic. Surely you didn't think I trusted you sufficiently not to have you tailed. You're relieved of duty. Patrick, I'm putting you in charge from now on. Place him in custody immediately. He can join Angus; they'll be good company for one another."

"Come along," smirked Patrick. He was feeling good. He had always been angry at the way Harry had been promoted so quickly to chief. Patrick has been number two for over five years and considered that the position of chief should have been his, instead of a comparative newcomer. He took Harry's left arm and steered him towards the door. "There's no need for that," snapped the erstwhile chief, pulling free from the offending grip, "I've every intention to coming quietly."

Outside the office Patrick made Harry walk ahead of him. "Keep moving. You know, I've never liked you. Your job should've been mine long ago. I'd like to know what strings you pulled to get it. Still, I've got it now, and I intend to keep it. So don't get any funny ideas. Behave yourself, and you'll have no trouble from me. Step out of line and I'll have your hide."

"I've no intention of giving you the pleasure of shooting me. Bear in mind, however, that you keep your present position only whilst Senator O'Brien wishes. Believe me you're sitting on a volcano. I wish you all the

luck in the world because you're really going to need it."

Five minutes later, they arrived at Angus's quarters. "Here's a roommate for you. Senator O'Brien's promoted me. I'm now in charge, at last! Harry can explain everything!" and promptly left the room.

"So?"

"Yesterday, I decided to post a letter to my brother, Rupert, saying if anything happens to me."

"Oh right."

Suddenly Harry tapped Angus's shoulder and mimed, 'This place is possibly bugged, so be careful what you say,' and Angus nodded.

"OK, so I was just about to start work on the manuscript again. Why don't you come along too?"

"OK, but you'll need to phone central control to see if it can be arranged." Angus did this and within a short time the reply came that his request had been approved. Shortly after, Patrick and a guard arrived to escort them to the project suite. "Let's have no nonsense from either of you. I want to know when you finish, and I want to see what you've done. Cross me and you're in big trouble."

"We've no intention of causing you any inconvenience," Angus replied.

When they arrived at the suite and Patrick left the guard outside the door with strict instructions that the detainees were to be checked every hour. When they were alone Angus unlocked the filing cabinet, he retrieved the manuscript, and sat at the typewriter. "For the moment I'm going to continue decoding in good old chronological order. I can always go back over the missed sections some other time."

"Whatever you say Angus time is one thing we haven't got plenty of."

Fall 1781

Williamsburg was virtually deserted as I made my way home on that cold September morning. The fall had come early to the State of Virginia, and most of the trees were already denuded of leaves. There was a definite chill in the air, and for this I was grateful, hoping that it would clear my mind. My brother officers had insisted that I celebrate with them the defeat of the British fleet at Chesapeake Bay. This celebration had extended over days and nights, and I blessed the fact that as a Quartermaster in General Washington's army I would be able to cover my absence by the excuse of searching for victuals.

I had been stationed in Williamsburg for six months and had recently rented a house in the town so that my wife and child could join me. My wife, Elizabeth, had soon settled in her new home, and had already made many friends. She was a born leader and had set about organising sewing circles and reading sessions amongst the officer's wives and ladies of the town. I had remarked on one occasion to General Washington that she would have made a good company commander. The general had laughed and replied that the days when women be called upon to serve in the military were extremely distant, but should this occur during his lifetime, he would keep Elizabeth in mind.

As I neared my home, my steps slowed, and I turned over in my mind a number of excuses which I hoped would explain my absence to my wife.

When I approached the front door, it was opened by Jesse, my negro houseboy. "Where you been, captain Duggan? Miss Lizabeth and Missy Veronica been worried out of their wits."

"Has Mrs. Duggan made any enquiries to Headquarters?" I asked, hoping that this was not the case.

"No, sir," Jesse replied, "Miss Lizabeth done nothing but cry since you been gone. She in the kitchen,

you best go make your peace, captain.”

“All right Jesse,” I answered testily, “I’m not in the mood for one of your lectures. You go about your chores.”

“No good going to come with all this staying away from home,” mumbled Jesse as he walked away.

When I entered the kitchen Elizabeth was assisting Maddy our cook to prepare breakfast. A captain’s pay did not permit the purchase of many slaves. We only had Jesse and Maddy, which meant that Elizabeth had to help with many household chores.

“Well sir,” my wife said, “I see that you have decided to honour us with visit. I trust you are in good health after your ‘business meeting’.”

I could see that she was in no mood to trifle and motioned to Maddy to leave us. “My apologies, Elizabeth,” I began, “the proceedings took longer than expected.”

She tossed her head. “Indeed, sir, then it was fortunate that Joshua Hall gave you the use of his tavern for such lengthy proceedings.” I flushed; my wife obviously knew what business I had been conducting over the last four days. “You should know by now the ways of soldiers,” I said lamely, “it started as a harmless celebration, and I’m afraid it got somewhat out of hand. What can I do other than apologise and promise that there will be no similar occurrence.”

“The promise of a soldier is like the wind, here today and gone tomorrow,” my wife replied, but I could sense that her anger was subsiding.

“Let us not be bad friends,” I coaxed her, “you have my word of honour that I did not betray you during my absence.” The barrier finally came down and she laughed and ran to my arms.

“You have the tongue of a nightingale, Jack Duggan. I wonder that George Washington has not suggested that you try to talk the British into leaving.”

I relaxed, feeling relieved that Elizabeth had forgiven me. We had been married for eleven years and I loved her deeply. Our daughter Veronica had the same milky

complexion and dark hair as her mother and would doubtless break many hearts in years to come. I called Maddy back to the kitchen, "Can you manage on your own?" I asked, "the mistress and I have important matters to discuss."

"Surely, captain," answered the plump negress with twinkling eyes, leaving us in no doubt she was fully aware of the important matters we had in hand. "I'll call Miss Veronica," she said, "her tutor is coming at half past nine. Shall I get the study ready?" I nodded, and Elizabeth and I made our way upstairs.

It was mid-day when we joined our daughter and her tutor, Miss Skelton, in the living room. Miss Skelton was a tall angular woman with a stern countenance. She had been teaching Veronica for just three weeks, but already our daughter showed great improvement in all her subjects.

Veronica ran to me, "Oh father I'm glad you are home, I was so worried about you," she cried.

"Sit down at once, young lady," Miss Skelton said sternly, "you know that you do not leave the table without first asking my permission." Elizabeth looked annoyed and was about to say something, but I stopped her with the warning pressure of my arm. Children did, after all must learn discipline. "Good day to you Miss Skelton," I greeted her, "you must forgive us for interrupting Veronica's lessons, but I have been away from home for several days and was anxious to see her."

"No need for apologies captain," the tutor replied, "lessons are finished for the day. You may leave the room Veronica and practise your numbers for one hour. I'll see you in the morning."

"Yes Miss Skelton," Veronica answered as she gathered up her books. Then making a polite curtsey to the three of us she left. "How is our daughter progressing?" I asked.

"She is such a joy to teach, and her manners are impeccable."

"I am pleased to hear so," I nodded, "we are also

delighted with the progress Veronica had made under your tuition.”

Miss Skelton flushed with pleasure, “Why thank you captain. Now if you will excuse me, I am already late for my next appointment. Good day captain, and to you Ma’am,” she curtsayed and made for the hall, where Jesse waited with her cloak and hat.

When we were alone, I took Elizabeth’s hand. “I thought we might take Veronica for a drive after luncheon. Shall I ask Jesse to make ready the carriage?”

“Oh yes,” my wife agreed, “can we drive to the woods? I love the different colours of the leaves in the fall.”

“Anywhere you wish you may go my love,” I answered. Elizabeth blushed prettily and replied, “I’ll go and tell Veronica. She’ll be really pleased.”

Our drive, however, was not to be. After luncheon I heard the clatter of hooves in the yard and looking out of the window, I saw Sergeant O’Mara dismount. Shortly afterwards Jesse ushered him into the dining room. O’Mara was a black bearded Irishman of some thirty years. He stood six feet four inches and was popular with the ladies. He saluted and made a polite bow to Elizabeth. “Your pardon captain, and yours Ma’am. Sir, the commander-in-chief has called a conference of officers, and you are to attend.” Elizabeth and Veronica looked disappointed but said nothing, knowing only too well the uncertainty of a soldier’s life. “Very well sergeant, I’ll be with you shortly. Jesse, take the sergeant and ask Maddy to provide him a measure of corn liquor. Then saddle up Hector and bring him to the front door. I’ll change into a clean uniform. Is one available?” I asked Elizabeth. “Surely,” she answered, “I’ll help you; your sword and scabbard could do with cleaning.”

Twenty minutes later, I was riding with Sergeant O’Mara to waste ground on the edge of the town, where the conference was to be held. “Have you any knowledge of what is to be discussed?” I asked. The big Irishman smiled,

“nothing official, captain, but rumours in the ranks say that we’re going to attack Cornwallis at Yorktown.” I smiled back, O’Mara’s information was usually correct, and I often wondered from where he obtained it, but always refrained from asking for reason of courtesy,

There were many officers present when we arrived at our venue, and I immediately picked out General Washington. I was amazed to see that he was accompanied by General Rochambeau, the commander of our French allies. When the assembly was complete Washington stood on a tree stump and addressed us. “Gentlemen,” he began, “as you are aware most of the British fleet sustained severe damage at Chesapeake Bay on the seventh of this month and has withdrawn. Earl Cornwallis,” he continued “has dug in his forces at Gloucester Point, just across the river from Yorktown. It is the opinion of General Rochambeau and me that an attack would bring about the defeat of Cornwallis.” This announcement caused some excitement amongst the audience. “When do we march, general?” a major asked. “Today is the 22nd,” replied Washington, “it will take perhaps five or six days to make ready our force. I would like to see us on the road to Yorktown by the 28th at the latest. Now, gentlemen, we have much to do, so I will not detain you further. I believe that this forthcoming battle could be most crucial in our War of Independence. Go to your chores and may God be with you.”

Sergeant O’Mara was awaiting me by the smithy. “Well captain, at last we have work to do again I was getting tired of kicking my heels in Williamsburg, I can’t wait to get into action,” he said.

“You are a bloodthirsty devil, sergeant,” I replied, “and as for action, I hear that you have had plenty, both with the ladies and the taverns of this town.”

O’Mara grinned broadly, “Can I help being popular,” he retorted. He rode with me to my house, and we then parted company. I hesitated before entering. I was not looking forward to telling my wife and child the news.

Elizabeth was at her embroidery in the parlour; she put down her work when I entered and rose to her feet. "I have something to tell you," I began, but she interrupted me. "I know of the coming action, such news travels fast in a small town. Jesse told me of it shortly after you left with Sergeant O'Mara. Will you be able to spend some time with us before you leave?"

I shook my head, "No, I shall be fully employed, the acquisition of victuals and equipment for a force of seven thousand is no small matter. Hopefully I should be able to be with you in the evenings, but Washington wants us to be on the march by the twenty-eighth at the latest. I'm sorry, Elizabeth."

She smiled bravely, "I knew of the problems of a soldier's wife before I married you. I'll survive, never fear. Do you wish me to stay here in Williamsburg, or would you prefer I returned to my family in Vermont?"

I was about to reply when Jesse knocked and entered. "You got a visitor, captain. Corporal Wilks is waiting you in the study."

"Thank you, Jesse, tell him I'll be with him directly. I'll speak to you later, my dear," I said turning to Elizabeth. I had a dreadful feeling in my stomach. Corporal Wilks was, a representative of the secret organisation, as I had learned when he contacted me on a previous occasion. I wondered, with some trepidation, what the purpose of his visit entailed.

Wilks was looking out on the garden when I entered the study. "We will walk in your orchard," he said by way of greeting, "I do not wish to risk being overheard by your family or your servants."

The fruit in the orchard had long been gathered, and the bare branches gave the place a haunted, desolated appearance. "What do you want of me?" I asked when we were out of earshot of the house. Wilks looked at me sadly. "As you are aware," he began, "it is almost time for your rest period."

"I know, I don't want to think about it," I replied.

“It is something that you cannot escape,” Wilks continued, “and in view of the forthcoming action we have decided that it will be a good time for you to disappear. You will, of course, be reported missing, presumed killed in battle.”

“No!” I shouted, “there is at least four months to pass before I sleep. Let me spend a little time with my family, it will be hard enough to leave them even then.”

Wilks shook his head, “It has been decided, I am sorry.”

“I was silent for a while; “What if I am in truth killed in battle?” I asked, “what then of your plans?”

“You will not be killed, we will prevent such an eventuality,” Wilks said.

“Then what if I put a pistol to my head and blow out my brains?” I continued.

“I know you for the logical man you are,” replied Wilks, “your special knowledge is needed for the guidance of future generations, and you would not deny them that guidance. Be assured, however, that I would discover if you intended such action and would prevent it.”

“Yes, your organisation is everywhere,” I retorted, “have you ever thought of the torment I have suffered over the centuries. Leaving loved ones to mourn me, fathering children who I never see attain full adulthood, it is more than a man can endure.”

“But you are no ordinary man,” Wilks answered, “you are a special person, and as such must be prepared to accept special circumstances. We are aware of the suffering you have incurred throughout your long life, and of that you are likely to incur in the future.”

“The only reward for a person such as yourself is of little comfort to me,” I retorted bitterly, but I realised that there was no way out of my present situation. “Leave now Wilks – I must prepare myself and ensure that my family will be well provided for when I am gone.” Wilks walked away without saying anything further and I returned to the house. I set about making preparations

immediately. First, I told Elizabeth to book passage for herself, and Veronica on the next available coach to Vermont, and similar transport for the servants. "I will be easier in my mind knowing that you are with your family whilst I am away," I said.

Over the next few days, my military duties took up most of my time, but I was able to arrange with the paymaster for my salary to be paid to my wife during my absence. I also wrote to my lawyer instructing that all my wealth and possessions be ceded to Elizabeth in the event of my death. I wrote letters of manumission for Jesse and Maddy, stating that it was my wish they become free persons upon my death.

By the 27th all preparations were completed, and Washington decreed that we leave for Yorktown on the 28th.

On the morning of the 28th I first said farewell to my wife and daughter. Both Elizabeth and I disliked partings and at my suggestion she and Veronica were driving to visit friends in a neighbouring town before the troops marched out. I cannot describe my sadness as I stood by the door waving to my family until the carriage was out of sight.

Jesse and Maddy were leaving on a later transport, together with our households' items. Before departing myself, I called them both to the study. "I rely on you both to take good care of Mrs Duggan and Miss Veronica while I am away," I began.

Maddy, unable to control her bold face, "Don't you worry, captain, we look after your ladies really good," he said.

"If I should not return," I continued, "my lawyer has instructions to give Maddy and yourself freedom. Do you understand me, Jesse?"

"I understand, sir," answered the big negro, "and I could see Miss Elizabeth and Missy Veronica whether you come back or not. You and the missis always treated

Maddy and me kind, we as good as free persons now, so what we want to leave for?"

I felt a surge of affection, and on the spur of the moment I hugged Jesse. "I must go now," I said, "God bless you both." I left the house and made for the assembly point.

Two hours later our ranks set out on the thirteen-mile trek to Yorktown. We passed my home, and I turned and looked at it until it was out of sight. The thought that I would never see it again was unbearable. Fortunately, my duties as Quartermaster took up most of my time and prevented me from dwelling on my misfortune.

Sergeant O'Mara rode with me for part of our journey. He was in high spirits, for, like many of his compatriots he enjoyed nothing better than a fierce battle. "I think we'll have the British on the run this time," he exulted.

"Don't be too sure," I cautioned, "Cornwallis is an experienced soldier, and most of his force are likewise."

"Yes, but don't forget we've got Johnny Frenchman fighting alongside us," replied O'Mara, "I just know that we're going to pull the British pigtails really hard."

The journey took most of the day, as our force was well strung out, and when the advance guard entered Yorktown, we were surprised to meet with only sporadic firing from the British. We observed them on the far side of the river and could see that they were an imposing force. There was little doubt in our minds that the forthcoming battle would be hard.

During the next few days, we prepared for siege. There were occasional bombardments from both sides, but none of a serious nature. Then, on the 16th of October, the battle began in earnest, and casualties were heavy, as Cornwallis made desperate attempts to break out and make

his way to New York and safety. We held him, and shortly before dawn on the 17th of October, almost as if at a given signal, all firing ceased. As the sun rose, a British party, under flag of truce, was conducted to the commander-in-chief. Quickly, the news ran round the ranks that Cornwallis was negotiating terms for surrender, and we were all in high spirits. To have defeated such a staunch enemy as Cornwallis was no small achievement. The talks continued all that day, and well into the next, and we finally heard that the surrender would take place at 2 p.m. on the 19th of October.

O'Mara visited me on the evening of the 18th, and I was both surprised and pleased to learn that he received a battlefield commission because of bravery shown during the main attack. "Congratulations Lieutenant, you will have to behave yourself now that you are an officer."

"Sure captain," he replied, "I have no intention altering my ways. Indeed, I told General Washington so, and he is prepared to accept me as I am. What's good enough for him must be the same for the rest."

Punctually at 2 p.m. on the 19th of October Cornwallis and his entourage crossed the river to surrender formally. He was a brave enemy and a good soldier and there were not many in our ranks who bore him ill will. Washington and Rochambeau awaited him at our Headquarters, and he first tendered his sword to the Frenchman, but was quickly directed to Washington, who gallantly returned the weapon. "Please retain your sword, My Lord," he said, "it is your right as a brave and honourable enemy."

So ended the battle of Yorktown. Arrangements were made for the British to lay down their arms. It was estimated that this would take the better part of two days, so many of us decided to take advantage of the cease-fire by attending to our personal needs, such as bathing and the maintenance of weapons.

Shortly after dark, Wilks came to my tent. "It is time to go," he said, "we will not be missed during all this

to-ing and fro-ing of the British.”

“What is our destination?” I asked.

“We travel on horseback to Boston,” he replied, “I have horses standing by and a change of clothing for us both. We will take a roundabout route to avoid detection and will receive further instructions later.”

“Do I have time to write a little to my wife?” I requested, “if I leave it here in my tent, it will be found and forwarded to her.”

Wilks shook his head. “No” he replied, “we must not delay further. Gather what essential items you require. The horses await us in the woods to the north of the town.”

We made our way on foot to the woods, and nobody gave us a second glance amongst all the other military personnel who pervaded the town. The horses were waiting when we arrived; whoever brought them had departed, leaving the animals tethered to a large tree. Quickly, we changed into the clothes Wilks had obtained, carefully burying our uniforms. Then we set out on the long ride to Boston. Behind us, the campfires lit up the night sky, and the sound of the movements of the troops could be clearly heard. We rode in silence for a while, carefully avoiding the main trail. We stopped after two hours to rest the horses and refresh ourselves.

“Have you any idea what is in store for me?” I asked.

“No,” replied Wilks, “but it is obvious that you will be taken to another part of the country, or even somewhere out of the country.” I sighed and nodded thinking of my wife and child, and my ill fortune. How many times more, I wondered, would I have to bear such sorrow?

Present Day - 26th June 1968

In the semi-darkness Senator O'Brien could not distinguish the features of the man seated opposite. He could see that the room contained a desk and two chairs, but little else, and was somewhat annoyed that the meeting could not have taken place in better surroundings. He had made his way to the disused warehouse on the outskirts of Washington in response to a letter delivered to his home by messenger two hours previously and had followed the instructions written in it. As soon as he walked into venue a man approached him and asked. "You are certain you were not followed here?"

"Yes definitely," the senator answered, "I've obeyed your instructions to the letter."

"Good," answered his companion approvingly. "Now, how are matters proceeding on the base?"

"Angus and Glenda are both in custody, and Angus has agreed to continue decoding the manuscript."

"Then, for the present your task is complete. If you check with your bank tomorrow, you'll find that the agreed amount has been deposited in your account. I won't detain you further, carry on as normal until you're contacted again. You've done well, so for the present--."

"Just a moment," the senator interrupted, "I think I deserve to be told at least something of what's going on, don't forget, I'm putting my job on the line."

The shadowy figure was silent for some time, and then replied. "Yes, I suppose some sort of explanation is in order. However, I'll tell you only what I consider necessary for you to know. Don't forget, that my organisation is fully aware that your election to the Senate wasn't all due to your personality."

Senator O'Brien shifted uncomfortable, "Who the hell are these people and how do they know so much?" he thought.

“You have already been informed of the special qualities of the subject of project Rip Wan Winkle,” the man continued.

“Yes,” the senator replied. “But I find the whole idea quite bizarre.”

“Nonetheless, the facts are certainly true. The subject has indeed lived for more than ten thousand years.”

“Impossible! No-one-----.”

“Listen,” the man interrupted, “these qualities were discovered shortly before the biblical flood. The flood was, in fact, a side effect of an even bigger disaster which occurred. Our ancestors at that time were, believe it or not, highly advanced in technology, medicine, and in all other aspects. Even more so than we are today.”

“How do you know this?” the senator asked incredulously.

“We have it straight from the horse’s mouth, or rather from the subject’s mouth.” The man replied. “Look, the organisation to which I belong was formed before the disaster which befell this planet some ten thousand years ago. The founder members knew that most life on earth would be destroyed, but that there would be some survivors. These people had the knowledge and the means to be among the survivors and set themselves the task of re-educating what remained of the human race. They knew that it would take centuries or even thousands of years to raise mankind to the level it had achieved prior to the disaster. To this end they vowed to pass on information from generation to generation until finally the inhabitants of this planet progressed to the standard of their ancient ancestors. You see, from the outset the organisation was top secret. The members consisted of several persons each at the top of their professions, who were inhabitants of this very country. Over the years the organisation spread worldwide. The identities of the members have always been kept from even the leaders of their respective countries.”

“Do you know who they are?” the senator asked.

“No.” came the reply. “Each member knows only the

identities of those subordinate to him.”

“So only the top man knows the names of all with the organisation.”

“That’s correct, and he selects replacements in the event of the death of members.”

“Who chooses the top man, if the present one dies?”

“The second in command automatically fills his position. Ah! Yes, now there is a reason why an underground complex was constructed for our friend.”

“Why was that then?”

“I can’t tell you, if I did, I’ll have to shoot you, but it was because of this exact reason why we also decided to place him there a month before his next sleeping period.”

“But then the construction work started.”

“Exactly, and we just couldn’t do anything about it, so we’ve had to go along with the President’s demands to investigate the matter. So, about the manuscript itself, now we were unaware that he was writing about his life. We fear that it might well contain certain details, that I’ve just been talking about. We couldn’t act, but when the President insisted that the decoding went ahead, we had to do something.”

“Then it was your people who tried to destroy the manuscript and attacked Max?”

“That was unfortunate. The person we employed panicked. He has been disciplined. Now, don’t interrupt me again. Your task is to ensure Angus continues to decode the manuscript. It must appear to the President that things are proceeding the way he wants.”

“OK, so just to carry on as normal then.”

“Yes, and you’ll be contacted when further action is needed. You can go now, and don’t try anything funny, such as hanging around to see me leave. Remember, senator, you’ve been well paid, and you’re being watched. Don’t cross us, for if you do, you’ll be very sorry.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” the senator replied, and thankfully he left the building and walked to where his vehicle was parked.

His companion waited for half an hour, and then cautiously vacated the building and walked to where his vehicle was parked. He walked back towards the city and entered a phone booth near a shopping mall. "Yes," answered a male voice.

"Number twenty here. Just to say all is going to plan."

"Excellent! Keep an eye on him; he's devious, and likely to try something stupid. Contact me again on this Friday at ten a.m. I'll give you the telephone number." When the man left the telephone booth, he entered the shopping mall and made his way through the crowded concourse to the area where his car was parked. As he drove away, he felt satisfied that so far, things were keeping to schedule.

Spring 1945

It was rumoured that between them generals Zhukov and Konev commanded a force of over two and a half million. Berlin was almost completely encircled, and on the 16th of April, the Russians launched an all-out attack.

As I made my way to the Fuhrer Bunker during the evening of the 18th of April, I feared, on a few occasions, that I would never reach my destination. The shelling was becoming even heavier, and when we reached the north end of the Unter Den Linden, my driver flatly refused to go any further. "I have a family to consider, Herr Hardtman," he said, "if you'll take my advice, you'll forget about trying to make it to the bunker and look after yourself. There's a deep shelter just round the corner in Koenig Strasse, let me drive you there."

I shook my head, "Thanks Paul, but no. I understand your feelings and in no way blame you for having them. I might not agree with all the Fuhrer's policies, but he does, nevertheless, employ me, and I feel obliged to see this thing through. You may drop me here; I'll do my best to dodge the shells and go the rest of the way on foot."

I got out of the car, and pausing briefly to bid goodbye to Paul, began to pick my way through the rubble which littered the streets of Berlin.

I worked as an administrative clerk on the Fuhrer's personal staff, and for most of the month we had been billeted in the underground bunker, which was allegedly bomb proof. I had been sent, two days earlier, to obtain important documents from the Chancellery, and such was the intensity of the Russian attack that I had been forced to take shelter. I hoped that Hitler would not regard my enforced absence too seriously. It was a matter frequently discussed amongst staff in the bunker that the Fuhrer's mind was going. He flew into violent rages at the slightest

provocation, and a colonel told me that since taking over control of the military he had been 'playing games with non-existent divisions. "I tell you this in the strictest confidence, Hardtman, many high-ranking officers are already making plans to surrender. We have a garrison of twenty-five thousand here in Berlin. It is obvious that we can never hope to last out against the combined attack of the Russians and the Americans."

"The Yanks seem to be a little reticent to push forward, they've come to a full stop well short of Berlin," I remarked.

"That may be," the colonel answered, "but the Russians alone outnumber our garrison by at least ten to one. I've already planned for myself, and I suggest you do likewise." It was the same story all over, the rats were literally leaving the sinking ship.

There was a temporary lull in the shelling, so forty minutes of brisk walking brought me to my destination. "Your papers please," requested the SS guard at the main entrance to the bunker. I handed them over, and he studied them intently. "I understand you left the bunker two days ago, and at that time you stated that you expected to return within three hours. I must ask the reason for the delay." We both jumped as a shell hit a row of houses a hundred metres away.

"That's reason enough," I replied sarcastically gesturing towards the still smoking rubble. "I suggest you let me pass without further delay. Martin Borman has ordered that I report directly to him upon my return." Grudgingly, the guard returned my papers and motioned me through the door.

Martin Bormann was regarded by many as Hitler's second in command and enjoyed the Fuhrer's confidence and his friendship. He was, in fact a member of the organisation, and used his position to cloak his identity. He rose when I entered his office and came to greet me. "You may leave, Trudi," he told his secretary, "I have confidential matters to discuss with Herr Hardtman." When we were

alone, I handed over the items I had been sent to collect. "Sorry to have taken so long," I apologised, "but things are a little hot upstairs. I had to wait until the shelling had eased before I could risk coming back."

"I understand," Martin replied, "nobody else has missed you. The Fuhrer has been having his tantrums, so that's kept us all fully occupied."

"You've no idea of what it's like up top," I continued, "the city is virtually a heap of rubble. I still find it difficult to understand how your organisation can permit such destruction. Then there's the concentration camps; I'm told that over six million jews have been slaughtered in the so-called death camps. If you and your crowd are as powerful as I'm led to believe, why have you allowed this to happen?"

"I'm aware that you've asked similar questions many times during your long lifetime," replied Martin, "the answer has always been the same, namely that we do not interfere. We operate all over the world, unknown to the leaders of the nations. For myself, I dislike entirely the role I am obliged to play at present. History will no doubt record that Martin Bormann was a psychopath, like Adolf Hitler. I will be glad when the role is ended."

I felt somewhat ashamed of the way I had spoken to Martin. "I'm sorry, of course I realise that you must find your position distasteful. Perhaps history won't regard Martin Bormann as much an ogre after the war," I remarked.

"Only time will tell," Martin replied, "but let's not delay further, Hitler will be anxious to know whether your mission was successful. Come with me, and we'll see if he will grant us an audience."

We made our way through the spider's web passages, and Martin spoke with the guards outside the entrance to the Fuhrer's quarters. We waited whilst Martin's request was relayed, then an SS Colonel beckoned us to enter. As we did so, I observed a sad faced woman leaving in company with an SS Hauptsturmfuhrer. "Who is she?" I whispered to Martin.

“Fraulein Eva Braun,” Martin whispered back, “she’s been mistress to the Fuhrer for some time. He’s had her brought here to escape the shelling.”

Hitler was in conference with a few high-ranking officers but beckoned us to approach when we entered. “Well, Martin, what news have you?” he smiled.

“This is Karl Hardtman,” Martin said by way of introduction, “he has just returned from the chancellery having obtained from there the documents you require.”

“Well done, Hartman,” the Fuhrer replied, “what was the situation in the city?”

“Chaotic,” I answered, “the shelling was non-stop. Many buildings have been destroyed and some roads are impassable. It has taken me two days to understand, but this is only a temporary setback.” He returned to the table and looked intently at the map spread out on its surface. “The Russians appear to have the city encircled, but the solution is simple.” He addressed a colonel, “Get word to General Steiner immediately. He is to bring his division to re-enforce our garrison here in Berlin.” The officers looked at each other in consternation. It was common knowledge that no contact had been made with Steiner for over a month, and his division had been virtually wiped out earlier during the Allied assault on the Rhine.

The colonel licked his dry lips, “It will be impossible to contact General Steiner, Mein Fuhrer. Communication is non-existent right now.”

“Nothing is impossible if you have the will to pursue it, colonel,” Hitler replied sharply, “I expect this order to be carried out. It is up to you how you do it. I do not accept failure, so be warned that you will pay the penalty if you don’t succeed.”

“With respect, Mein Fuhrer,” the colonel said, “I can hardly be blamed if there are no means of communication. “Well, in any case we are not aware of General Steiner’s precise location.”

“What? Are you disobeying me, colonel?” Hitler snapped. His body had begun to quiver, and it appeared that

he was about to fly into one of his rages.

One had to give credit to the colonel for pluck. He made ready to reply, but then an SS Gruppenfuhrer placed a restraining hand on his shoulder. The Fuhrer glanced at his watch, "I must leave you; I promised Fraulein Braun I would join her in the study. Come, Blondi," he called to his Alsatian bitch, which emerged from under the table and followed him from the room.

When Hitler had gone, all the officers looked at one another and the colonel said to Martin, "I think our leader has finally blown a fuse, Steiner is nowhere to be found, and his division exists only in the Fuhrer's mind. How long do you think it will be, Herr Bormann, before the Russians overrun us?"

"We'll have no more of that defeatist talk, Kruger," the SS Gruppenfuhrer broke in angrily, then turning to Martin continued, "but it would be interesting to hear your opinion, Bormann." I could sense that Martin was picking his words carefully. "We do face quite a serious situation," he said, "and it's possible that the Fuhrer lacks the means of communication he requires here in the bunker. The Russians are fanatical fighters, and although I am certain our garrison will put on a good show, they will have their work cut out to contain Zhukov and Konev."

The Gruppenfuhrer smiled thinly, "What you imply is that we haven't a hope in hell," he remarked.

"I didn't say that" retorted Martin, "but as a military man you should be able to make a fair appraisal of things."

There was silence for some time, then we were disturbed by the entrance of a messenger. "Where is the Fuhrer?" he asked, "I have an important message for him."

"The Fuhrer is otherwise engaged at the moment," the Gruppenfuhrer replied, "you may hand the message to me, I'll ensure it reaches its destination." The messenger handed over the typewritten sheet, saluted and left the room. For long moments the Gruppenfuhrer studied the message, and even in the poorly lit room I could see that his complexion had turned ashen. "My God," he gasped, "news

has come from Bavaria; Goering has attempted to negotiate an armistice with the Americans. Who's going to tell the Fuhrer? I don't think I can face him with such news?"

"I suppose I'll have to if none of you are willing. Come with me Karl," Martin said, "a little moral support won't come amiss."

"We made our way to Hitler's private quarters. When we were seated at the table, I could not help but notice how sparsely the room was furnished just the table and three wooden chairs, a small electric stove and a sink. The walls were bare except for one which contained a large map of Europe. "What can I do for you, Martin?" the Fuhrer asked.

"I have very grave news," Martin warned, "perhaps it would be advisable for Fraulein Braun to leave us."

"Always the stickler for protocol," Hitler joked, "would you mind leaving us, my dear?" he nodded to his mistress. Eva smiled and left the room.

When Martin broke the news there was silence for at least a minute, then suddenly the Fuhrer swept the cups from the table. "I am surrounded by traitors!" he screamed, and I saw that his lips trembled. "I trusted Goering, and this is how he repays me. He is to be arrested, Bormann, and you will arrange his trial and subsequent execution. It is fortunate that I have taken personal control of the armed forces; who knows what could happen had I left such cowards in command? Now, both of you leave me and see that my orders are carried out." This we did and from outside we could hear the Fuhrer venting his fury on the furniture. Back in the operations room the Gruppenfuhrer asked, "How did he take it?"

"He's ordered Goering's arrest and execution," replied Martin.

"Herr Bormann," a brigadier said, "the situation is hopeless. Even Meyer," he indicated the Gruppenfuhrer, "now agrees that we can continue no longer. We have a line of communication to the Russians. Would you be prepared to negotiate with them for a cease-fire? I'm sure the Russians would listen to you."

“Do you realise what you are asking, is this the opinion of you all?”

The officers looked at each other and finally nodded assent. “This will take some thought,” Martin continued, “you must give me time, come with me Karl, we’ll discuss the situation and I’ll give you my answer, gentlemen, as soon as I can.”

We left the operations room and went to Martin’s quarters. Once there he poured two glasses of schnapps and motioned me to be seated. “Karl,” he began, “I believe that I have no option but to do as the officers ask, but I will take the opportunity to make myself scarce. I suggest however, that you remain here for the present. If the Fuhrer enquires as to my whereabouts, tell him I have gone to Bavaria to arrest Goering. The news of my disappearance will get back within a few days. When it does it will be time for you to make good your own escape.” He opened a drawer and produced a document. “This,” he continued, “is a safe conduct pass signed by the Fuhrer, which will get you out of the bunker. It states that you are travelling to Bonn on his orders.” He then handed me a passport, “Once you reach Bonn make your way to the address, I will give you. This passport is in the name of one Wolfgang Dussault, a scientist. Use it to get to Switzerland. Once you are safely there, you’ll be contacted regarding to future plans. I doubt that we shall meet again, Karl, at least during your present lifetime, so I’ll bid you farewell.” We shook hands and I felt great sadness, for Martin was a good friend. “I’ll pray for your safety,” I said, “take care of yourself.”

We went back to the operations room where Martin told the officers that he was prepared to comply with their wishes. They seemed greatly relieved and immediate plans were made for his departure. Not wishing to prolong the parting I returned to my own quarters.

For the next few days, I busied myself with some mundane tasks, then on the morning of the 28th of April I was summoned by Gruppenfuhrer Meyer. Everyone looked

very grave when I entered the room. "Bormann seems to have disappeared without trace," he said, "it's my task to inform the Fuhrer, may God help me. Hardtman, will you accompany me? You are somewhat in the Fuhrer's favour at present, so your presence may make my task easier."

"Yes Gruppenfuhrer," I replied.

"We will go now, no sense in delaying the matter further," Meyer said.

We made our way to Hitler's suite, and when Meyer broke the news, we were relieved that the Fuhrer did not fly into one of his rages. He sat down at the table and remarked, "So it seems that Martin has also betrayed me; I suppose it is only natural that he should try to preserve his own safety. Tell me Meyer, what is the situation in the city?"

The Gruppenfuhrer looked nervously at me before replying. "It is not good, Mein Fuhrer, the last intelligence report stated that the Russians had continued to advance. Their forward position was about five hundred metres from this bunker."

Hitler sat for some time in silence then rose from the table. "Thank you, Meyer, and you Hardtman," he said, "your loyalty does you credit. Is there a Minister of Justice on the staff?"

"Yes," I replied, "Herr Neumann, he works in the communications centre."

"Bring him here," the Fuhrer ordered, "you will remain, Meyer, I have matters of some importance to discuss."

I left and returned some twenty minutes later with Neumann. "You are empowered to carry out civil marriages?" Hitler asked him.

"Indeed yes, Mein Fuhrer," the minister replied.

"Then you will perform the ceremony for Fraulein Braun and myself. Meyer, Hardtman, you will be our witnesses," Hitler smiled.

The ceremony took only a few minutes, and when it was ended the Fuhrer thanked us for our assistance.

“Leave us now,” he ordered, “I have much to do, but I would like Meyer and Hardtman to remain on call outside the door. On no account am I to be disturbed, no matter what transpires. You will know when it is time to enter. Now please go.”

Meyer and I managed to acquire a chair each and sat in the corridor outside the suite conversing with the guard. When perhaps thirty minutes had elapsed, we heard the dog yelp many times, as if in pain, then there was silence. “That’s unusual,” remarked Meyer, “the Fuhrer quite often smashes things during his tantrums, but that’s the first time I’ve even known him to take it out on the dog.”

We sat for another three hours, then suddenly a gunshot rang out from inside the suite. Immediately we were on our feet. “Are you alright, Mein Fuhrer?” called the guard knocking on the door. By way of answer came another gunshot. We tried to enter but found the door was locked. “Break it down,” ordered Meyer. This took time as it was made of heavy steel, and it was at least fifteen minutes before we were able to gain entry. The scene inside halted us in our tracks. In one corner of the room lay Blondi the Alsatian, her body hideously contorted in death. “It looks like she’s been poisoned,” Meyer remarked. Fraulein Braun was slumped half out of her chair and Hitler was sprawled across the table. Both were dead and bore gunshot wounds in the head. “Touch nothing,” Meyer ordered, “it would appear that the Fuhrer first shot Fraulein Braun and then himself.”

“What’s that?” I asked pointing to numerous sheets of closely handwritten paper on the floor. Meyer gathered them up and glanced at them briefly. “It is the Fuhrer’s testament,” he replied. “Hardtman, go to the Ops Room and bring everyone here. Say nothing of what has happened, only that you are carrying out my orders.” Quickly I obeyed and returned shortly with the personnel.

“The Fuhrer and Fraulein Braun are dead,” Meyer announced. “In his testament the Fuhrer has appointed Grand Admiral Doenitz his successor. He has also

requested that his body and that of his wife (yes, they were married about four hours ago) are not allowed to fall into enemy hands.”

“So, what are we to do now, Herr Gruppenfuhrer?” a Sturmabfuhrer asked.

“I think the time has come,” replied Meyer, “to leave. The Russians will overrun this bunker in a short time. I suggest that all military personnel change into civilian clothes. Other members of staff will burn their papers, and we will all attempt to make our escape. As from now gentlemen, it’s every man for himself. I do, however, require volunteers to help me dispose of the bodies of the Fuhrer and his wife.”

“I’ll stay,” I replied, “and so will we,” two SS Obersturmfuhrers said.

Already the bunker was in turmoil as everyone made ready to leave. Meyer, I and the two men carried the bodies of Hitler, his wife, and the dog outside. “There is no time to bury them,” Meyer said. We covered all three bodies, which had by now been doused with petrol with a large sheet, then we stood awaiting Meyer’s orders. Finally, he nodded, and one of the men ignited the make-shift funeral pyre. As it burned the shelling ceased, and looking a few hundred metres east, we could see the enemy clearing from house to house, the few snipers that remained.

“It is time to go,” Meyer remarked, “Hardtman, do you have any plans? I would be pleased to give you a lift.”

“Where are you heading?” I asked.

“West, of course,” came the reply.

“Then thank you, I’ll avail myself of your offer.”

We bade farewell and drove off in Meyer’s staff car. He had a good knowledge of the city, but such was the route he took to avoid the enemy, that it took over five hours to reach the countryside. We stopped and Meyer shook my hand. “Goodbye, Hardtman,” he said, “where are you making for?”

“Switzerland,” I answered, “and you?”

“Eventually South America, if I survive,” Meyer

replied. I hoped he would make it. He certainly didn't look like an SS officer in the civilian clothing he now wore. We parted company, and I watched until the car was out of sight, then I set out on foot for my destination. After an hour I was picked up by a farmer driving a truck who apologised for the fact that the windscreen was missing. "I've got what few valuables I have left with me," he said, "this area has always been my home, but I can't face life under the Russians. I have a brother in Aachen, that's where I'm going, the British and Americans are at least human." We stopped to eat and looked back towards Berlin. I saw black smoke rising over the city and I felt great sorrow. With our meal finished we continued our journey.

Present Day - 27th June 1968

Brigadier General Richard Case sat alone in his New York office, thinking of the meeting he had recently with President Willard Merton. The President was a difficult man to deal with in many ways, he had certain fixed ideas, and it was virtually impossible to persuade him to change his mind once it was made up. The brigadier general had stated his concern over the money being spent on the Rip Van Winkle project. "Surely, Mr President," he pleaded, "more finance could be released for the armed forces? Much of the equipment and weapons are outdated. I fear that if something big suddenly blew up we'd be hard put to face a determined enemy. The money allotted to the Rip Van Winkle project could in my mind, be better spent."

The President smiled, "You Generals are always the same, any finance directed to anything except the army is wasted, according to you. I consider this project important, for reasons I'm not prepared to divulge at present."

"Look, we still have the Cold War, the Soviet Union, China! And don't forget how Great Britain was caught with its pants down in 1939?"

"Different circumstance altogether. They just ignored all the signs that Hitler was gearing up for war, and very nearly left it too late to do anything about it. No, I'm sorry, my decision stands."

"So that's that," the brigadier general said. He had already told his secretary and other staff that they would not be needed further that day, so he was the sole occupant of the office suite. He made a decision and reached for the phone but then changed his mind, and putting on his forage cap, left the building. "I'll walk back tonight, sergeant," he told his driver who waited in the staff car outside the building, "It's a fine night."

"Very good, sir. What time do you need me tomorrow?"

“It’s an easy day, so you needn’t be too early. Pick me up at ten o’clock in the morning, goodnight.”

The brigadier general waited until the vehicle disappeared round the end of the block, then donned a blue raincoat he was carrying. He removed his cap and put it in a pocket of the raincoat. He then walked swiftly towards the city and stopped at a booth to make a phone call. A male voice answered. “It’s number thirty. It’s important that we talk as soon as possible.”

“Very well, meet me at eight o’clock tonight at the shelter in Ross Park.”

“OK. It’s just after six, so I’ll go home, shower, change and make some excuse to my wife for going out again.”

Leaving the booth, the brigadier general hailed a cab and gave his address. His wife opened the front door as he walked up the entrance drive. “What’s happened to your car, Richard? It’s unusual for you to take a cab.”

“I’ve given the sergeant the rest of the day off, and then remembered I had business in the city,” he replied.

“I’ll get you something to eat.”

“Sorry honey, you know how it is.”

“I hardly get to see you these days even the dog is beginning to regard you as a stranger.”

“Tell you what why you don’t rustle me up some scrambled eggs while I shower; then I can book my cab later.”

“As you wish,” sighed his wife, and made for the kitchen.

At 7.30 p.m. the cab drew up outside the brigadier general’s residence. “Drop me at the corner of Ross Park, please,” he instructed the cabdriver. The area was deserted when they arrived, after paying the cabdriver the brigadier general made his way towards the entrance. He was now wearing a dark executive suit, and topcoat to match. He soon reached the entrance, went through the gates, then entered the park. When he arrived at the shelter, it appeared deserted, but when he looked inside, he could

just make out his successor George Wells in the gloom on a seat at the rear. “Yes, I’m here, so what have you to report?”

“I’ve spoken at length with the President, and I’m certain he is in no way involved. He genuinely believes that the decoding of the manuscript should continue. He isn’t aware that Senator O’Brien has that English Don confined at the Denver Base.”

“That’s good, it’s vital that he is not made aware of all the facts just at the moment.”

“What do you want me to do about Senator O’Brien?”

“Make an appointment to see him as soon as possible. I’m certain that in view of your earlier conversations with him he’ll be convinced you’re in sympathy. Try and get as much info as possible from him even if it means you giving orders that you find distasteful.”

“I’m a new member to the organisation. How do I know you won’t throw me to the wolves when this is all over?”

“You have my word, and that of the organisation. Leave now, I know I can rely on you not to hang around trying to catch a glimpse of me.”

The brigadier general made his way back to the park entrance, went through the gates, then headed straight towards the city centre. The road was again deserted, and he walked at least a quarter of a mile before he spotted a cab, which he hailed.

When he got home, he noted that it was nearly 10 p.m. so decided to contact Senator O’Brien in the morning.

Present Day - 28th June 1968 - Part One

After his 8 a.m. breakfast the brigadier general phoned the senator's Washington office, knowing that the staff would be there at that time and made an appointment to see him at 10 a.m. and was told that the senator would see him immediately.

Exactly at 10 a.m. the brigadier general entered the office and noted the senator was casually dressed in a dark-blue tracksuit. "Please excuse my attire, but my doctor is concerned that I'm a little overweight. I'm having an hour's run every morning before I start the day. Come in, let me take your jacket and how was your flight? Good I hope?"

"Yes, it was very good thanks for asking. I've got a private plane hired for the day."

"Hmm, nice one! Would you like a drink, a coffee perhaps?"

"No, thanks, I've had one of those on the plane," replied the brigadier general.

"So, tell me, what I can do for you? And please take a seat."

"Thank you," said the brigadier general as he sat down, then continued. "I know senator that you have a good relationship with the President."

"Yes, I do, and?"

"Well, I spoke with him yesterday regarding the critical financial situation with existed within the armed forces. The President refused point blank to allocate any further funds to the army," the brigadier general said.

"Hm, I'm aware that he thinks too much is spent on defence. Did you pursue the matter further?" the senator enquired.

"I did, but it was like talking to a brick wall. I'm afraid I lost my temper and voiced my concern. The President told me that finance would continue to be

allocated to the project, and that my request would for the moment, must be shelved,” the brigadier general replied.

“Right, so where is all this leading to?” the senator shrugged, beginning to wish he had never got involved.

“I know senator, that you are deeply involved in the project. I’m not aware how you regard it. I think money could be better spent. My hope is that you will intercede on my behalf with the President. Perhaps a portion of the finance could come the army’s way if you are persuasive enough.”

“Hmm, you have my sympathy, I too have my reservations regarding the money spent on the project. I have told the President of my concern, but he is adamant that things should go ahead. There’s little I can do to change his mind, especially as he has the support of many members of the senate.”

“Look, senator, I know how powerful you are within certain circles, I know also that the President takes note of a lot of what you say. Surely there’s something you can do?” the brigadier general persisted.

“I didn’t realise you were such a fan of mine. Tell me, if I were to help you in this matter, would you be prepared to reciprocate?”

“What do you mean, senator?”

“I mean would you be prepared to stick your neck out for me, as I would for you? Frankly, I might ask you to make some very unorthodox decisions.”

“That depends on what they might be.”

The senator leaned forward, “So, tell me, in all honesty, what is your opinion of the President? Would you regard him as a strong leader, or do you think that many of his policies lack fibre?”

The brigadier general sat back in his chair, and then answered, “The Present is basically a good man, but I must admit that some of his recent policies have caused many high rankings officers concern.”

“I see that in some things we are of the same opinion. Leave it with me for the moment, I shall make a

point at speaking to the President and a few associates, but I can't do it today because my son Charlie has very kindly offered to pick me up in his helicopter to take me from my house to Denver. You see, I've got a four o'clock meeting to attend to back at the base."

"Yes, I know, that's why I've hired the plane because I'm doing the security for it. Well, anyway, thank for your time and I shall see you later," he shook the senator's hands, stood up from his chair and left the office.

When the brigadier general had gone, the senator sat in thought for a while then said. "Yes, that's it! I've got a phone call to make," he left the office and headed for a nearby telephone booth and dialed a Portland number. A voice answered almost at once. "Number thirty-two speaking. I think we should meet. I'm in Denver for a couple of days, so can I come tomorrow will that be, OK?"

There was a pause, and the male voice replied, "Midday."

"Yes," replied the senator, then continued, "shall I meet you at the usual place?"

"Affirmative," came the reply, "I'd sooner you didn't contact me by phone again, I'll take it for granted that you'll be on time."

"Tomorrow it is then," the senator left the telephone booth, walked to his parked car and drove two miles to his home to quickly get ready for business weekend trip away.

Back at the base it's 3.45 p.m. and Angus had just finished his coffee, the third in half an hour. Both he and Harry were feeling the strain of imprisonment. "At least," Angus thought, "I have the manuscript to take my mind off things."

Both had noticed the decline of noise in the complex over the last few days. Normally, the corridor outside their quarters was bustling at all hours but was now quiet except when security visited the bring food. "I wonder what's happening?" Harry shrugged, "there's been hardly any movement outside for some time."

“Your guess is as good as mine,” Angus answered.

“What’s going to happen to us? I can’t see Senator O’Brien turning us loose when your work is completed. I can imagine there is nothing very pleasant in store.”

“Cheer up, Harry. He did promise we would be freed when this is all over. No doubt we’ll both have to sign some official document preventing us from revealing what’s happened,” Angus suggested.

“You don’t know him like I do,” Harry sighed, “he’s completely ruthless. Look, what if you slow down the work? It would give us more time to try and figure a way out of this mess.”

Angus shook his head, “I can’t do that, he knows how far I’ve got with the decoding. I’m worried too, don’t forget Glenda is still being held.”

Harry punched the wall in frustration, “If only we could get a message to the base commander,” he moaned, “I’m sure he’d insist we were freed.”

“I don’t think so,” Angus shrugged, “don’t forget he’s under orders to co-operate with the complex.”

Harry was about to reply when Angus held up his hand, “Quiet,” he whispered, “somebody’s coming in.”

The door opened to reveal Victor Jensen accompanied by Senator O’Brien. “How are my star guests today?” he sneered. Senator O’Brien pushed past him impatiently, “Leave out the sarcasm Victor, you’ve got plenty to do. Make sure that the meeting room is prepared for our visitors, all thirty of them.”

“Who are they?” Victor asked, “I understand they’ve come from all over.”

“They are important persons from many countries and are members of some world organisation,” the senator replied. “Now off you go, and I shall join you later.”

“Oh, OK, then,” Victor replied, then turned around and left the room.

The senator settled himself in a chair. “Well, I can see that you’ve been busy, so do you think the decoding could be finished by today?”

“Aye, indeed. Not long now, then it’ll all be ready to go,” Angus replied. “Look,” he continued, “could you at least do us the courtesy of telling us what plans you have when the work has been completed.”

The senator glanced at his watch, “OK. I do have a few minutes before the meeting starts. So, why don’t you both make yourselves comfortable.”

Angus and Harry seated themselves and Senator O’Brien began. “What would you say if I told you that all the work carried out on the manuscript had been a waste of time?”

“I wouldn’t exactly be overjoyed,” Angus shrugged.

“What’s your game?” Harry enquired.

“Exactly what I’ve just said,” the senator replied. “All your hard work has been a front to keep the President happy. I’ll start at the beginning, recently I was approached by a representative of a powerful worldwide organisation. It was, in fact, shortly after the complex was discovered. Certain members of this organisation were in favour of destroying the complex, and our sleeping beauty, but the manuscript had been found and the President informed. He gave Max the job of getting the manuscript decoded, and that’s where you came in, Angus.”

“I suppose this organisation is paying you well for your services,” Angus nodded.

“Yes. And not only in hard cash, but in other ways too. I could become one of the most powerful men in this country, if things go as planned, which of course, they will,” the senator replied. “Oh, and before you ask, I didn’t have anything to do with Max going to hospital and about the manuscript.”

“Yae, about that. Sorry, but why try to destroy it?” Angus enquired.

The senator replied, “I was just about to say, before I got interrupted.”

“Oh, sorry,” Angus apologised.

“That’s OK,” the senator continued. “So, it was feared that it might contain certain information which the

organisation didn't want published."

"What is to happen now? It seems a waste of time to continue the decoding now," Harry asked.

"No, I'm sorry, but it still needs to be finished," the senator ordered.

"I suppose there is no chance that we'll get released when this is all over!" Harry shouted.

"None whatsoever. We certainly can't let you two, Glenda or Adam for that matter loose," the senator was adamant.

"What about the rest of the staff?" Angus asked.

"They know nothing of what is going on here. Over the last few days, they've been returned to their departments, believing that the project is being wound down," the senator replied.

"There's one thing you're forgetting," Harry pointed out, "the President won't go along with your scheme once he hears of it. You'll be in deep trouble then."

"Not at all," answered the senator, he glanced at his watch and continued. "In a few minutes' time the Vice President will take over. Oh, yes, he's with us, in answer to your unspoken question."

"You must be dreaming," Angus retorted. "I can hardly see the President resigning without a fight. What about the army are they just going to stand by and let this happen?"

"That's all been taken care of. The organisation has recruited a high-ranking officer. He will be on hand to see that the takeover goes smoothly."

"You'll never pull it off!" Harry shouted, "there'll be trouble directly the news gets out. The people of the U.S.A. won't take kindly to being taken over by an extremist."

"You're wrong, plans are already in hand to ensure that the public behave themselves. Members of the organisation who support the causes are at this very moment arriving at this complex." Just then a guard entered the room and walked up to the senator and whispered in the senator's

right ear. "Thank you," the senator said to the guard, then smirked. "Well, well, well, what a surprise, and guess what? The Vice President has now taken over, statements will be issued. The ultimate aim of course, is to have worldwide control!"

"It'll never work! People will resist!" Angus shouted.

"The brigadier general will arrive shortly with a token force to secure this complex," replied the senator, "and we'll see what happens then." He then rose from his chair and abruptly left the room.

Spring 1965

Colonel Brian Smart poured two glasses of bourbon and handed one to me. "I don't normally start this early," I joked.

"I think you'll need it after you've heard what I've got to say," he replied grimly.

"Just what's going on colonel? My next sleep period isn't due yet, there's still a month left to go," I demanded. "And what is this place? I know it's somewhere near Denver."

Colonel Smart rose from his chair and stood for a while with his back to me. Finally, he turned and faced me. "You know now to what organisation I belong," he began.

"Yes," I replied impatiently, "I've known of the organisation for most of my life. It's been responsible for caring for me during my rest periods and deciding to what area of the world I'm assigned when I awake. I'm still wondering why I was brought here so early."

The colonel slowly nodded, "I understand your frustration, Armstrong, and I'll explain as far as I can. Throughout your long life my organisation has monitored you constantly. For over ten thousand years it has guarded your safety whilst you slept. For obvious reasons it has given you a new identity and a different homeland each time you awake."

"You're telling me nothing I don't already know," I interrupted angrily, "are you going to answer my question or not?"

The colonel sat down at the desk, and for long moments stared at the carpet, then raising his head he replied. "You've got some knowledge of technical data from your past."

"Yes, that's correct," I answered.

"Have you ever passed this knowledge on to anyone?" enquired the colonel.

“No, I haven’t, why do you ask?” I enquired.

The colonel regarded me thoughtfully, “During your first sleep,” he began, “it was decided that it would not be advisable for survivors of the flood to be given all the knowledge you possessed. Your mind was conditioned so that you would only remember details of technology a little at a time. In this way mankind would progress to the standard of its ancestors. So, throughout the years the organisation insisted that your knowledge was passed on in a manner considered to be in the best interests of the planet.”

“So, games have been played with my mind for centuries,” I retorted angrily. “What gave you lot the right? I suppose you regard me as some sort of freak!”

“As I’ve already said, it was considered to be for the benefit of the planet,” the coronel replied. “Look, Bill, I understand your anger, but just think of the consequences of unleashing all your knowledge on a population which had reverted to its primitive origins. It would have been a disaster.”

“I can think of nothing but how I’ve been used for most of my life,” I replied, “so don’t expect me to agree with you. I still don’t understand why you’ve brought me to this place so long before my rest period. I dislike being kept a prisoner, colonel. I demand you release me, at least until my sleep is due.”

Colonel Smart shook his head, “That can’t be,” he said sadly, “listen Major, since the end of World War Two we carried out some experiments on you whilst you slept, trying to over-ride you’re conditioning and extract the information stored in your mind. Recently, we had a breakthrough, using a new drug. We were amazed at the details you revealed, particularly how you got the source of power in use prior to the flood.”

“So, what is the significance of that?” I enquired. The colonel paused, then replied, “Certain members of our organisation, me included, feel that should details of the power source be revealed at present, it would cause irreparable damage to the power industry. That is why you

have been brought here, to prevent you from revealing these details.”

I felt my anger rising, “So, not only do you intend keeping me a prisoner, but it appears that you are also betraying your organisation. What of my next sleep period, do you intend that I don’t awaken from it?”

“Calm yourself,” the colonel soothed. “Just cooperate and I’m certain that no harm will come to you.”

“How can I be calm!” I shouted, “when my future seems so uncertain. What plans do you and your friends have for me?”

Colonel Smart rose abruptly from his chair, “I’ve no time to discuss this matter further, you’ll be afforded every comfort until your sleep period arrives. Just ask for anything you want.”

“What about my freedom?” I said bitterly.

The colonel made no reply, but pressed a button on his desk, and withing a short time a security guard entered.

“Take Major Armstrong to his quarters,” the colonel ordered, and the guard took me by the arm and led me from the office. I had wild thoughts of escaping during the journey to my quarters, but the place was honeycombed with corridors, and I knew that even if I managed to break away from the guard, I would never find my way out of the complex.

Later as I sat in my quarters, I knew that I would have to attempt to get news to the outside world. But how could I do this? I was certain that I would be always constantly monitored in my quarters. Luck, however, was to be on my side. Colonel Smart visited me on a few occasions, and always asked if there was anything I needed. An idea had been taking shape in my mind for some time, and during one of his visits, when he asked his usual question, I replied. “Well, I’ve been thinking that these dreary walls need brightening up. So could you provide me with the necessary equipment like wood, picture wire that sort of stuff to make up a few picture frames, a thick medium size

quality sketch pad; I do tend to make a lot of mistakes, oh and some paints, brushes, picture hooks, you know the kind of stuff.”

The colonel was silent for a time, obviously giving the matter some thought. Finally, he agreed. “OK, I’ll see that the items you require are sent along. I look forward to seeing your work. Perhaps you can give me a painting to hang in my office too.”

“I’d be delighted, thank you,” I replied, trying hard to control my excitement.

The materials arrived shortly, and I was pleased to note that a large quantity of paper had been supplied, for this was what I needed. It was my intention to record some of my history, using the paintings as my cover. That indeed is what I have done during the time I have been in this complex. To the best of my knowledge no one knows of the manuscript. The colonel had visited me numerous times and always showed great interest in my paintings, but luckily for me never once queried the amount of paper I was using.

Early this morning I sent a message to the colonel informing him that my sleep period was imminent, and I now await the arrival of doctors and technicians to prepare me. I thought of my hidden coded manuscript, and hoped that if I should I not survive, then it will be found. I wonder what my future will be. Perhaps I will not be allowed to awaken. Whoever finds my manuscript, will, I trust, see fit to publish it. For myself I have no regrets, death in fact is almost welcome, considering the length of my life.

Present Day - 28th June 1968 - Part Two

Back at the base, Angus leaned back on his chair. “Well, Harry, that’s it and for the record that was the longest hour, no sorry, that was the longest week of my life!”

“Phew! You can say that again! So now we’ll just have to sit tight,” Harry smiled.

They sat in silence for some time, then the sound of movement outside caused them both to stand and face the door, which opened to admit Senator O’Brien, Victor Jensen and Brigadier General Richard Case. “Hello, you two, so is the decoding completed?” the senator asked.

“Aye,” Angus replied, indicating the desk, “it’s all there.”

“So, then it seems we no longer require your services,” the senator continued. “Victor, take them to the vehicle compound, and you can take Adam and the Glenda there too.”

“What do you want done with them?” Victor asked.

“You’re to await my further instructions.” Then turning to face the brigadier general, he said, “Your men will take over from here.”

The brigadier general did not reply but opened the door and called out. “Right sergeant let’s have you here at the double!”

Within seconds the sergeant entered the room. “Sergeant, take Senator O’Brien to where the Vice President and the other rebels are, then you’ll need to contact Lieutenant Hogen. Tell him to secure the area,” the brigadier general ordered.

“OK senator,” the sergeant replied. “You’re now going to the lecture hall.”

“The security staff have all been relieved,” the brigadier general announced, “this complex is now under military supervision. Victor, you had better go along with Senator O’Brien.”

The senator asked. "So, what's gone wrong? Has the President resigned?"

"The President is still very much in control. However, the Vice President has just resigned, and Senator Blake has now been appointed in his place," the brigadier smiled. "You see, it's been known for quite some time that certain members were attempting to sabotage the project. So, I was given the task of playing along with you to get you to show your hand, which you've done very satisfactorily."

Senator O'Brien looked completely defeated, "Then it's all over," he mumbled.

"Yes, most certainly. Now sergeant if you wouldn't mind," the brigadier general waved impatiently.

"Come on you two this way," the sergeant ordered.

The brigadier general then turned to face Angus and Harry. "You must be bewildered by all this."

"I'm just worried about Glenda and Adam," Angus replied, "they're being held somewhere in this complex."

"They have been released; they're waiting in the visitors' lounge. I'll get a guard to escort you both there," the brigadier general replied.

Harry asked, "Can you tell us exactly what's been happening?"

"When you get to the visitors' lounge, you'll get a full explanation. A member of the Attorney general's staff travelled with me from Washington, and he'll be speaking to you." The brigadier general then walked to the door and peered into the corridor. "One of you, here," he called. A soldier entered and saluted. "Soldier, take Professor McCutcheon and Mr Blackett to the visitors' lounge," he ordered, "and the remainder of your squad will accompany me to the lecture hall."

"Sir!" shouted the soldier. "Please follow me," he requested.

They walked through many passages to the front of the building, and out of the door, to where a vehicle waited. "If you please, gentlemen," the soldier said, opening the rear door.

In less than five minutes they were entering the visitors' lounge. Angus immediately saw Glenda sitting at one of the tables in company with Adam. She jumped up and ran over to him, "Are you OK?" Angus asked.

"I'm fine, Max has just been discharged, and he's been told to take two weeks off work too," Glenda smiled.

"That's good news," Angus replied.

"...I'm sorry Glenda, for interrupting, but what's going on here?" Harry shrugged. "I think we're all owed an explanation."

"I agree," Adam said, "but here's someone who can explain it better than me." He indicated a tall man possibly in his late thirties who had just entered the lounge and was even now approaching them. "Why don't we all sit down and introduce ourselves," the newcomer said by way of greeting, "well, perhaps somebody can arrange for coffee?" Adam glanced towards one of the soldiers who left and returned shortly with the drinks.

"So, as you've just heard I'm Chris Selwyn and I'm shall we say a government employee. Now Angus, you and Adam and Harry for that matter are aware of the project entailed, although Glenda, I don't think you could possibly know anything. So, for some time now the U.S. government has been aware of an organisation so secret that even the C.I.A. was unable to gather much information concerning it. No action was taken however, as it seemed to pose no threat. Communication with the U.K and other European countries revealed that they too were aware of the existence of the organisation. They also took no action. Then the complex was discovered, and the contents moved here. When the President decided to have the manuscript decoded, that's when thing began to hot up. A series of phone calls were received at the White House from someone claiming to be the top dog of the organisation. He said that certain members were out to prevent the completion of project Rip Van Winkle to line their very own pockets. Eventually the President was convinced that the

guy was telling the truth.”

“Hmm, he must’ve been very plausible,” Angus remarked. “I wonder what finally got the President to believe him, it must’ve seemed a pretty tall story.”

“I’m not at liberty to tell you,” Chris replied, “that’s where you came in Angus. Max was appointed head of the project and he insisted that you be recruited. Now this will be news to you all, especially to you, Glenda.”

“Is it about Max?” Glenda nodded.

“Yes, unfortunately I’m afraid he was attacked, and the person who did this also tried to get rid of a very important manuscript that Angus was working on, but luckily they only destroyed about a third of it,” Chris remarked.

“I see, well thanks for letting me know,” Glenda sniffed.

“Aye, and the senator seemed anxious that I skip certain passages and decode enough to present a fairly comprehensive picture,” Angus began. “Then he told me that all my work had been for nothing, and that the whole exercise was just a front to keep the President happy. I’d like to know why.”

“I can’t go into much detail. Except to say that Senator O’Brien and his crowd feared that the manuscript might contain information which for their own benefit, they didn’t want published,” Chris replied. “Also, they knew about that package you wanted Mrs Wotak to post on your behalf.”

“Wonderful! So that didn’t get posted then, great!” Angus snapped. “What happens now? Do we all go home and resume our lives as if nothing had happened?”

Harry shrugged. “Obviously, you’ll be under orders to say nothing of what you have learned. I’ll get you to sign official documents in that connection....”

“.... I don’t agree,” Angus interrupted. “After the trauma we’ve suffered I think the whole country should know how we’ve been treated.”

Chris shrugged. “Well, if you made public your

involvement, how many people do you think would believe your story? Your credibility would be gone. You, Angus, do you honestly think you would keep your job at the university? Harry, Adam, and Glenda, so what are your chances of holding onto....”

“.... OK, OK, but I’m telling you, you’re all as corrupt as each other!” Harry interrupted, “there’s no difference between the government, the organisation, or Senator O’Brien’s crowd. All of you just want to MANIPULATE AND CONTROL!!”

“Calm down! Harry,” Adam soothed, “violence won’t help us at all.” He waved back the soldiers who had moved menacingly forward, “Let’s keep it cool,” he pleaded.

“Sorry,” Harry apologised. “Being shut up here hasn’t improved my temper.”

“I can understand that. Look, it’s been decided to abort the project, and as nothing has been released to the media, no harm will be done if the whole thing is forgotten. Regarding yourselves, you will all be compensated for the inconvenience you’ve incurred.”

“Inconvenience!!!” Angus exploded, “that’s under playing it. There’s no doubt in my mind that Senator O’Brien intended to kill all of us, and you have the nerve to call it inconvenience.”

“You’ve had a rough time. But you’ll only make things worse by not co-operating.”

“So, the whole thing’s going to be swept under the carpet,” Harry remarked.

“I know how it must look to you, but that’s the way it is. The President would like to speak with each of you personally, so shortly we’ll be flown to Washington. Will you be returning with us also, Brigadier General Case?” Chris enquired.

The brigadier general who had just returned glanced at his watch, “I think so,” he replied, “my men won’t take much longer to clear things up here. I’ll be leaving the base commander in over-all charge, and Lieutenant Hogan as my

liaison officer.”

“Then as soon as you’re ready....” the sound of vehicles approaching interrupted the government employee’s speech, then shortly afterwards the base commander entered accompanied by a lieutenant. The brigadier general returned their salutes, “Well colonel,” he said, “I leave you in charge of the project hanger. Ensure that none of your men pass the inner perimeter fence.”

“As you wish sir.”

Brigadier General Case turned to face the lieutenant, “have you secured the project area?”

“Yes sir,” came the reply.

“You’ve made certain that no guards remain within the perimeter,” persisted the brigadier general.

“Yes, sir. All your orders have been carried out,” the lieutenant replied.

“Well done. Now you and your men will remain here to assist Colonel Blake.”

“Very good sir,” the lieutenant answered. “What do we do about the personnel confined in the lecture hall? For instance, when do we feed them?”

The colonel will receive further instructions,” the brigadier general nodded, “so until then carry on. I’m now ready to accompany you.”

Chris walked over to the door, “Now, everyone soon we’ll be getting into a red minibus, and then I shall be driving you to the military airfield. So, if you wouldn’t mind following me, please. Thank you.”

Within twenty minutes Chris had brought them to a small passenger aircraft which was warming up on the main runway. Then after parking the vehicle on the grass, he indicated the aircraft. They all boarded and then almost immediately received clearance for take-off. As they circled the military airfield air Angus glanced through the porthole and noted how the project building stood out, isolated as it was from all the other buildings on the base. He turned to Glenda who sat next to him, “I’m glad to see

the back of this place,” he remarked, “but I’m far from happy with the way things have turned out. I object to being legally gagged.”

“Perhaps it’s just as well,” Glenda soothed. “At least we’re free, and although I know very little of what you Max and the others were involved in, there’s possibly little to be gained by telling the world.”

“It’s just the principle of the thing,” Angus began, but he was interrupted by Adam who shouted, “Oh God, look at that!” Everyone looked through their portholes and were almost blinded by the flash of the explosion which ripped through the project area. The pilot instinctively banked the aircraft away but was ordered by the brigadier general to circle the military airfield again. When they were over the area, they could see that thick smoke and flames had completely enveloped the buildings. “Why isn’t anything being done?” Adam asked, “Look, you can see the guards still outside the perimeter fence, and they’re not moving. There’re no fire tenders moving in either. Is the place just going to be allowed to burn?”

“It doesn’t look as if there’s much left to burn,” Harry said, “the explosion seems to have almost destroyed it. I wonder what caused it?”

“Lots of these military airfields still keep explosives stored in underground bunkers,” the brigadier general replied, “they’re relics of World War Two. In many instances buildings were erected over them. It’s possible that the project area was built over such bunkers. Explosives are very volatile and become more so if kept for long periods. It’s more than likely to be the source of this destruction.”

“You’re lying,” Angus said, “this was deliberate sabotage. It’s the work of your dumb organisation. It’s just the sort of action they’d take, without any thought of the people confined in that area. Very convenient to wipe everything and everybody out. “I’m right, aren’t I?”

“Your imagination is running riot,” the brigadier general answered, “you’ve been watching too many James

Bond films.”

Angus was about to reply, but Glenda caught his arm, “Let it go, Angus,” she pleaded, “whatever we may think, they’ll always have an answer ready,” Harry and Adam nodded in agreement.

“Glenda’s right,” the security chief said, “the events of the last few days would make fantastic reading if published. No one would believe us, and now there’s nothing left to verify our story. It’s been a nightmare, but at least we’re alive. I suggest we try to get on with our lives and forget the project ever existed.” Angus didn’t answer but remained sitting stiffly in his seat.

“Please, don’t rock the boat. Anyway, I’ve decided, I’m going to leave Max. We’re still OK, aren’t we?”

“Don’t know, I’ll need some breathing space before I make any decisions,” Angus replied, “we’ll keep in touch, Glenda, and I’ll see how I feel in say, six months’ time. I’m sorry, but right now I wouldn’t consider furthering our relationship.”

Glenda had more to say but decided to say nothing. “I’ve lost him,” she thought as she stared out of the porthole.

The brigadier general felt a profound sense of relief that none of his passengers intended to cause problems. He glanced at the pilot and nodded. The man lifted a finger in acknowledgement and set course for Washington.

Present Day - 27th July 1968

Approaching from behind the stewardess enquired. "Would you like something to drink sir?" Brigadier General Case came to with a start, he had been almost asleep, but he smiled. "No thanks," he replied, "I think I'll try to get some sleep. Perhaps you'd give me a call about half an hour before we're due to land."

"Certainly sir," the stewardess smiled, "I'm sorry if I disturbed you."

The brigadier general settled down again. It was his first visit to England, and he wondered if he would have enough time to visit Maidenhead, the birthplace of his grandmother. He received a phone call two days before from his superior in the organisation, advising him of the forthcoming meeting. "So, why England?" he enquired.

"I'm just passing on the message," the male caller answered, "you'll find tickets awaiting you at the reservation desk."

"Surely it's unusual for a meeting such as this to be held and especially on a Saturday of all days," he persisted, "I was given to understand the organisation never met and that each member knew only the identities of those subordinate to him."

"No more questions," the caller snapped, "just follow instructions. Transport will be waiting at Gatwick to take you to the venue." The brigadier general sank deeper in his chair and thought of the events of the past few weeks. Nothing had been leaked to the media, and the sudden absence of the Vice Pretendent had been explained away on grounds of ill-health. He was allegedly recovering in a hospital in San Diego. Certainly, his wife and children had been taken there supposedly to be near him. He wondered what the outcome would be and what had happened to Victor and the other persons who had backed the renegades. He thought again of the destruction of the complex. Had it been

an accident or a deliberate act of sabotage? There was no doubt that the elimination of those opposed to the organisation, and everything connected with the project, including the sleeper would prevent awkward questions being asked. The explosion had been reported by the media, but no mention of anything else was made, so it was possible that it had been engineered by the organisation. Harry had been transferred to the security force within the White House and Adam had returned to his former position in the Department of Agriculture. Angus returned to England and to his job at the university. Glenda and Max have decided to do an amicable trial separation. They had all signed documents stating that they would reveal nothing of the work of the project. Angus had done so with a very bad grace, and no doubt government security in the U.K. had been asked to keep close eye on him.

Sleep finally overcame the brigadier general, and he awoke when the stewardess shook him gently by the shoulder. "We're due to land at Gatwick in thirty minutes sir," she advised

Following the landing the process of customs and immigration was quickly complete and he looked for the signs directing candidates of the World Fund for Marine Life as per instructions and followed them outside the terminal building. A coach bearing the same sign waited there and he boarded it. There were already quite a few passengers already seated, he then spotted his immediate successor George Wells who had waved for him to come over. Soon enough all the seats were occupied, the driver boarded, and they left the airport. "Any idea where we're headed?" the brigadier general asked.

"No, I'm afraid not," came the reply. His question was soon answered, for when they had been travelling for some ten minutes, the driver spoke through the intercom. "Welcome aboard," he said, "we are on route to a conference centre at Brighton, which is about an hour's journey from here. When we arrive, ushers will give you directions to your seats."

The brigadier general and his companion sat in silence for most of the journey, until they reached the outskirts of Brighton. It was a warm day, and the traffic was heavy. Finally, the coach stopped outside a large building on the sea front. "We've arrived," the driver announced, "make your way into reception, you'll be directed from there."

They both entered large conference room and made their way to their seat numbers. Many people were already seated, and the many seats gradually were filled. The driver of the coach entered later and took a seat near the front. Then when the curtains behind them were closed two guards and a small elderly man in a dark-grey suit made their way to the stage, and although neither of them recognised him, but many of the occupants of the room did, judging by the buzz of conversation which arose. "Obviously number one," thought the brigadier general as the man stepped up onto the stage and headed towards the lectern. The man held up his hand, and the audience fell silent. "Welcome to you all," the speaker began, "for those of you who don't recognise me, I'm number one. This is a very important event for the organisation. I'm now going to outline as briefly as possible the reason for this meeting, I'll answer any questions later." The speaker paused then continued. "This organisation is the oldest in the world. It was formed over ten thousand years ago, shortly before the flood, to monitor survivors and to re-educate mankind to the level of civilisation it enjoyed prior to the disaster. As you know, we were assisted in this connection by a scientist who, due to an accident, received a massive dose of radiation. He survived, and it was later found that due to this, his ageing process had been drastically slowed down. He aged only one day in every twenty years. It was decided that the organisation take charge of this person by placing and caring for him in a safe environment during his periods of sleep, which would last for approximately six years. We would then transport him to a new area shortly prior to his awakening, and this we have done to the present time."

The speaker was interrupted by a member of the

audience, “Most of us are aware of the person in question, he’s known to us as the sleeper. Are we to understand that either the man had died, or that the organisation has decided against using his talents further?”

“I asked you to hear me out. But to answer your question, he was killed in an explosion at the complex where he was confined, along with thirty members of this organisation,” came the reply.

“Why were they there?” another man asked.

The speaker paused, then continued, “For some time six members of this organisation were intending to withhold information given by the sleeper for their own gain. This was a deliberate contravention of our directive, namely that his knowledge be passed on so that mankind could eventually progress to the standard they enjoyed prior to the flood. To this end the sleeper was confined well before his period of sleep was due. The complex was accidentally discovered when construction work was being carried out above the site. A manuscript was also found containing much information from the sleeper’s life. Obviously, he knew something of the plan to prevent him passing this on. The President naturally wanted the data from the manuscript published, and recruited an English Professor, Angus McCutcheon, for the task. This made things somewhat awkward for the rebels, and they realised that the manuscript would have to be destroyed, if their plan was to succeed. In fact, an attempt was made to do just that, and unfortunately this also resulted in American Archologist, Max Bauer being attacked.”

“We all know about Max!” a man shouted from the audience. “Look, just tell us the reason for this meeting!”

“I am getting to the point if you’ll just remain patient for a little longer,” came the reply, he then continued. “I thought it advisable to bring you all up to date with the situation. However, as you wish to know the reason for this meeting, I’ll not delay any further. When certain members of an organisation work against all its principles, which has happened to our own, it’s time to consider whether the

organisation should continue. To that end I've held many lengthy discussions by telephone with these six members. Following this we decided that any organisation which has become corrupted, even by only a small percentage of members, should be disbanded. That indeed is what is to take place with immediate effort. This organisation is hereby disbanded."

Several members of the audience seemed disturbed, and the conversation grew loud and animated. A rather large, irate man stood up at the back and shouted, "This is the oldest organisation in the world! What right have you and your colleagues to disband it without prior consultation with us all?"

Several other men voiced agreement, "Yes," shouted someone in the middle, "what gave you the right?"

"We thought it advisable that we should disband as quickly as possible. Enough harm has been done recently to warrant it," came the reply.

There were a number of objections from the audience. "No!" insisted one member, "to disband an organisation because of one lapse by certain members would be wrong. Especially one that has survived as long as ours. Think again, number one."

"What happened at the Denver complex proved that once an organisation is split by dissension, it can no longer be trusted to function efficiently," came the reply.

The uproar that followed lasted for several minutes, until a tall man with short brown hair made his way to the stage. Gradually the audience quietened. "I'm number eighty. Gentlemen! I agree in principle with much that number one has said. Our organisation had, so to speak, a few rotten apples in the barrel which could have infected the good ones. Maybe it's time to disband, but in my own opinion I think it would be better to suspend the operation of this organisation temporarily; shall we say for a period of two years. Perhaps we could take a vote on it right now? What do you say, number one?"

Number one didn't answer immediately but then said.

“I have already decided to resign, which I do immediately. In accordance with our rules, I appoint number two as my successor. He’ll consider your suggestion, number eighty.”

There was complete silence as number one left the hall. Number two then took position at the lectern. “I accept the honour and responsibility of leading this organisation,” he began. “Number eighty, I’ve considered your suggestion and I’m afraid I don’t agree. I think we should stay as we are, but with stricter rules put in place. Look, I’m a fair man, so I think a ten-minute break is in order and when we get back, the final decision will then be made. So those of you that wish to resign may tender their resignations in the usual manner. Those in favour for the meeting please show.” Many hands were raised, and a count was taken. “Those in favour against the meeting please show.” Again, the count of hands was noted.

“The vote is in favour for the meeting. Thank you.”

“Right, that’s it! I hate this organisation George, I’m resigning. I shall hand in my resignation in as soon as possible. I’m due to retire from the army in three months anyway, and it’ll be pleasant to take things easy for once.”

George nodded, “The part you’ve played in recent events hasn’t gone un-noticed. Are you sure about this?”

“Yes, I’ve made up my mind. My wife has put up with the inconvenience of being an army wife for many years. So, George - what are you going to do?”

George replied, “Well, I’m like most members, I don’t want to leave. I don’t think we’ll get suspended or even worse disbanded - but who knows.”

The two men walked from the hall into the reception area, “Can I offer you a drink?” the brigadier general asked.

“I thought you’d never ask,” George smiled, and they made their way to the lounge.

Once in the lounge the brigadier general remarked, “It seems a pity that everything was destroyed at the complex. The testament left by the sleeper would’ve been a legacy for the world. Now nobody will ever know of his remarkable life, or the achievements of our ancestors.”

George smiled, "Yes, I'm afraid so. Anyway, I'd better be getting back. Take care, and enjoy your retirement," the two men shook hands, said goodbye, then George rose from his chair and walked back into the hall.

When George had left, the brigadier general sat for a while in thought, then checking his watch he noticed it was 8 p.m. he walked to the phone booth and dialled his home number. "Hi honey," he said when his wife answered. "Where are you, and when are you coming home?"

I'm in a town called Brighton, look, would you mind if I stayed on for a few days? As you know, my grandmother was English, so I thought I'd visit her hometown and see if I can find any relations."

"You deserve a break," his wife agreed, "you do just that, but don't take too long."

"Phone you every day, I'm staying at the Hilton tonight, but then who knows. Bye honey, I'll be in touch." He replaced the receiver and made his way to reception. "May I help you sir?" the receptionist asked. "You can. I left a valise with you for safe keeping, I'd like to retrieve it please. My name is Richard Case." A porter brought the item, and the brigadier general thanked the man and handed him a banknote. "Wow! You've given me one pound! Thank you, sir! That's very generous of you," the porter smiled.

The brigadier general glanced through the glass entrance door to the street, "Is it always this bad?"

"No, sir," said the porter, "it's the first wet day we've had for over a week, and the forecast is quite promising."

"I hope you're right," the brigadier general replied, and donning his trench coat and turning up the collar he walked out into the rain.

Present Day - 10th August 1968

Back in Denver it's midday and in the Charlie Brown's Bar & Wine Grill, Max is sitting alone at the bar enjoying a well-deserved, hearty dinner. A man from behind approached him, "Excuse me sir, but are you, Max?" he enquired.

Turning round, Max replied, "Yes, and you are?"

The newcomer remarked, "You don't know me, but we do have a mutual friend - Victor?"

"Oh, right," Max shrugged.

"Look, I have a job for you. So, it's in Egypt, and if you choose to accept it your contact will be Olivia." He placed a card on the bar, "This'll be the number to call. You've got until six o'clock tonight to decide. Nice meeting you," he bowed his head and left the building.

The End