

Magestic 2

Copyright © Geoff Wolak

www.geoffwolak-writing.com

Part 1

**** NOTE.** Magestic Book 2 follows on closely from Book 1, so you will need to have read Book 1 first. There is no review.

The prophet returns

Jimmy slowly started to come around from the sedative we had administered to him, lying now fully-clothed on a medical bed, a nurse in the background watching monitors. The year was 2047, and he was on my world – at the portal facility in Manson, Canada.

And he was now safe.

Meanwhile, I was exploring the old hotel in Manson where Jimmy used to live and work, but in post-apocalyptic Canada, and not safe at all. At first glance, the hotel had reminded me of an old western saloon, and then one that had seen better days. I had met his former assistant earlier, and had informed her that he was not only alive - but now elevated to godlike status on another world. It had taken some explaining, quite some explaining, the lady sent back to my world along with many others.

I now sat at Jimmy's old desk as US Marines explored the hotel, flicking through dusty papers relating to refugees and medicines, food stocks and supplies, and I recognised his handwriting – there were few working computers here. A hand-drawn calendar had been pinned to the wall above the desk, hanging at a slight angle, a few days of the month crossed-off.

Back on my world, that calendar would have fetched millions. Back there, early documents signed by Jimmy were sought-after relics. Here, he had to make his own calendar after they had stopped printing them; a global nuclear war will do that to the local stationery business.

And, back on my world, they had always figured that it would have been hard to persuade to him leave this world; they figured that he would have wanted to remain – and to fight to save what was left of this world. Well, there was more to it than that. There was also something else, something we had discussed in private before his return to my world to re-join Dr Singh and the others; there was the small problem of his godlike status, the problem of *our* godlike status.

Everywhere we went back on my world we'd stop the traffic, people gawking at us like a pair of living gods. Like a pair of freaks. The others, those who had worked with us, had also been the subject of many books and films, and now they all found it very hard to simply get on with their lives. Jimmy would have a hard time back on my world, a hard time living in a glass case and being gawked at.

I lifted up from Jimmy's old desk and inspected an old US Army jacket, extra-large size, SILO on the name tag written in felt pen. In a pocket I found a bloodstained lock-knife, a morphine vial, and a needle and thread; Jimmy's first aid kit.

Jimmy opened his eyes and turned his head, finding a pleasant young man in a smart suit smiling down at him.

'Welcome back, sir,' came a refined English accent. 'You're quite safe, you're here on the world you saved, not in Manson, Canada. Well, actually *you are* in Manson, Canada, but our version of it.' Jimmy waited. 'I'm Timkins, Shelly sent me to act as your liaison and assistant until such time as ... well, you decide you may wish hire other staff.'

Jimmy eased up and let his legs fall of the bed, still in the clothes he had been in, a dark blue suit. He took in the Spartan and clinically-white room, and the various monitors relaying heartbeats - presumably his - although he wasn't wired up to anything. He heaved a big breath, rubbing his face. 'What year is it here?'

'Twenty forty-seven, sir. April. A fine spring morning,' Timkins enthused. 'We didn't want your first day back to be cold or wet.'

Jimmy slowly nodded to himself, and then thumbed towards the door. 'Would I be right ... in assuming that there are a million people outside that door, and that's just the Press Corp?'

'Ah. Well, yes, sir. I'm supposed to brief you on things ... on the here and now, and then lead you outside, where many of your old friends are waiting for you - including Helen, Shelly and the family.'

'I would have thought they'd be here when I woke, if they're outside,' Jimmy commented as he stood and stretched, towering over Timkins.

'We discussed it, but decided that you should have some privacy, a shower, a meal; things like that.'

Jimmy pointed at a door that said "toilet".

'Yes, sir. It's a ... toilet.'

Inside the toilet, Jimmy pulled a piece of paper from his pocket, sat down and read both sides of the hand written note, recognising my handwriting - as well as struggling with a few words and cursing me. Hell, he got the gist. When done with it he dropped it down the toilet bowl, the paper quickly effervescing and dissolving, soon nothing left. He peed over it and flushed. Washing his hands, he took a moment to stare at his reflection, nodding to himself.

Back in the main room, he said, 'Well, best get it over with.' He stopped and turned his head. 'Is that ... singing I can hear?'

'There is a choir, sir, from Africa,' Timkins enthused with a smile. Adopting a puzzled frown, he added, 'But ... they're quite a way away, and ... I don't hear them, sir.'

'Never mind. Lead on.'

'As you are, sir?' Timkins broached, a glance at the creased suit.

'My best dress is at the cleaners,' Jimmy stated with some attitude as he headed towards the door.

The door was opened by a guard the other side, a nod given as Helen and Shelly now stood up, huge beaming smiles for Jimmy.

'Been sat there long?' Jimmy asked as he approached.

'No, it all happened quite quickly,' Helen said, closing in and giving Jimmy a big hug. 'I missed you.'

'I've only been gone a few hours,' Jimmy quipped, holding Helen by the shoulders.

'Twelve years this side,' Helen said, Shelly pushing in and grabbing Jimmy for a big hug.

'You haven't changed,' Shelly noted.

'You've put on weight, young lady.'

'Only a little,' Shelly said defensively. 'Hell, I have five kids, and I'm almost fifty!'

'Don't remind me,' Helen quipped. 'I'm over eighty.'

'When you both hit three hundred ... then you can complain,' Jimmy told them. They led him to a table, an assortment of food laid out. Fresh tea was made, everyone sitting.

'So, what have you two been up to?' Jimmy asked. 'Besides breeding like rabbits!'

'I returned to office, serving as the British Prime Minister for eight years,' Shelly informed him. 'I've been out of office a year now, working out of New Kinshasa. Well, trying to work.'

Jimmy shot her a quizzical look.

'They dog us everywhere we go,' Helen put in. 'It's hard to get anything done. And if we try and start a new project they accuse us of using our fame. You know, there's actually a special UN committee to monitor us, *and* to influence us.'

'Us ... being who, exactly?' Jimmy nudged as he tucked in.

'My family, Jack and Sykes, Mac, Rudd, Anna and Cosy; all of the original members. And all of our kids are affected. Even Cookie is a freak show these days.'

'Cookie?' Jimmy puzzled.

'The old house is used for state meetings, kept in a trust that Paul set up after you went,' Helen explained. 'They also allow paying guests in to raise money for Rescue Force, and ordering

pancakes from Cookie is something of a must for them. He quit once and came back; he's well paid.'

'They're all here,' Shelly mentioned. 'Each afforded a chat with the living legend and prophet.'

'Don't you start with that crap,' Jimmy warned. 'Bad enough the public do it. Are Lucy and Liz here?' Helen nodded. Jimmy lifted his head to the hovering Timkins. 'Bring in the girls, and their kids.'

A minute later the gang entered, and what a gang. Lucy had brought in her two daughters and five grandchildren, Liz shepherding her four daughters and eight grandchildren of various ages.

'Bloody hell,' Jimmy softly let out. 'Christmas at your house must be fun.'

He stood and hugged Lucy and Liz in turn, hardly recognising Liz. Then a long list of introductions began, fifteen minutes worth, Jimmy finally sitting with a three year old girl dressed up as if off to church.

Jimmy pointed towards Helen. 'Who's this?' he asked the girl.

'Grandma.'

'Great grandma,' Jimmy corrected the girl.

'There's no need to correct her,' Helen quipped. Extra food was brought in, tables dragged around, the kids now noisily attacking the food meant for Jimmy.

'Do you ... mind if we bring a camera in, sir?' Timkins delicately broached.

'Five minutes, then out,' Jimmy said without looking up, now feeding the girl on his lap.

A man in a smart suit stepped in, something resembling a bicycle helmet on his head, a small camera and light attached to it. He stood off to one side. Jimmy lifted the girl's hand towards the camera and waved, the image flashed around the world, and to some of the two billion people sat glued to their screens awaiting their first glimpse of the returning prophet.

Half an hour later, Jimmy stepped through to the second room, finding Cosy, Anna and Rudd. He smiled genuinely, closed in and hugged them all. Sitting, he said, 'Do you carry your glass cases around with you, old friends?'

They exchanged looks. Anna said, 'We're not unhappy for all we achieved, but ... we have outlived our usefulness.'

'And if you could go back and do it all again?'

'We'd not change a thing,' Anna firmly stated.

Jimmy slowly nodded to himself. 'And if you *could* ... go back, but to someplace else...?'

Their eyes widened, looks exchanged.

Jimmy added, 'Maybe ... a world just like this, but in say ... 1920?'

'My god, Jimmy,' Anna gasped in a whisper. 'You'll go?'

'Only if I have a little help,' he whispered. 'So, think about it – but discreetly.'

'How long would we be there?' Rudd asked.

'Maybe as long as a hundred years. But here, it would be a month. Your families wouldn't miss you, but you'll miss them.'

'You'd fight through the Second World War,' Cosy noted. 'Altering the outcome.'

Jimmy nodded. 'Now, let's change the subject.'

They chatted for ten minutes and caught up on news and gossip; families, houses and work.

In the next room, Jimmy found Jack and Sykes, a few of the old house guards, and Big Paul. 'Well, what an ugly bunch to greet me on my return,' Jimmy let out as he closed in. He shook Big Paul's hand. 'You've aged a bit, and put on some weight.'

'Sat behind a fucking desk now, that's why,' Big Paul complained. 'Ain't allowed to do anything dangerous.'

'Family?' Jimmy asked him.

'Got married, had a kid, got divorced.' Big Paul shrugged.

Smiling widely, Jimmy shook Jack's hand. 'How's the garden?'

'I visit now and then and check in on it. I'm living in the Cotswolds with my wife, well away from the crowds.'

'How do you make a living?' Jimmy puzzled.

'They make sure that we're taken care of, the government.'

Jimmy shook Sykes hand. 'Looking old, Mister Sykes.'

'I haven't had an injection for ... well, since yours. Growing old gracefully. I've written a few books, and we all do the lecture tours – when we can stomach them.'

Jimmy nodded his understanding before greeting the former house guards. Thirty minutes later, and after a few beers, he left a raucous group and stepped into the next room in sequence in this odd building. Abdi and Ngomo, plus their aides, stood. Jimmy shook Ngomo's giant steak of a hand. 'My god, man, you're twice as wide as when I saw you last.'

The other men laughed. 'He is sitting on his arse a great deal,' Abdi commented.

'Look who's talking, Mister President without portfolio!' Ngomo joked.

‘Ah, it is a sad state to be put out to stud,’ Abdi lamented.

‘Uh, Abdi, that’s *put out to pasture* ... not to stud,’ Jimmy corrected him as they shook. Jimmy greeted all of the aides in turn as Ngomo and Abdi ribbed each other. Sitting, the men chatted for fifteen minutes like a bunch of teenagers, not the venerated elder statesmen they now were.

In the next room, Jimmy greeted twelve of the current world leaders, including the leaders of America, Russia and China, Mister Han still operating as Chinese Ambassador to the UN and warmly greeted.

Jimmy had decided to steer the conversation away from politics. But, when the Indian leader kept getting back to current problems and gripes, Jimmy sent for the three year old girl and Shelly. The Indian leader got a gentle kick in the shins, all caught on camera and flashed around the world. They would be embarrassed in India later.

With the various leaders, past and present, lined up for a photo, the world’s Press got their cover image for the news websites, printed newspapers largely a thing of the past now. Jimmy was then led outside, that fine April morning now a late April afternoon, and to an area of neatly mown grass crammed with paying spectators.

Singing began, a choir of children from Ebede. Jimmy smiled and waved at the crowd, then stopped, lowering his head with a frown. ‘Something’s not right.’

Timkins was worried, but controlled his reaction. ‘Not ... right, sir?’

Jimmy frowned over his shoulder at the choir, the children now singing “If I had the words to make a day for you...” He stepped over to them as they finished. ‘Again, please,’ he called, the teachers delighted, the kids starting up again, all now being watched by two billion people worldwide.

Jimmy turned his head to Timkins. ‘Do me a favour, and find out if there are any problems in space, anything threatening the earth.’

Timkins stood rigidly shocked for a moment, and then lifted his phone.

‘Who?’ General Hughes asked, a phone to his ear.

‘Jimmy Silo just asked if there was anything in orbit threatening the planet.’

‘He what!’ the General loudly exclaimed. Softer, he said, ‘He ... doesn’t have any knowledge of this time period. Still.’ The General slammed the phone down and stepped out into the nerve centre of

Space Command, operating now the Near-Earth Collision Monitoring Programme. 'Listen up, people: Jimmy Silo just asked if there was a threat to Earth from space.'

The staff all glanced at each other, shocked and puzzled. A man stepped forwards. 'There is that small gas cloud that may graze our atmosphere. Besides that ... no threats listed.'

'I want to know everything about that gas cloud. And today! Move it, people!'

With the choir still singing, Jimmy walked along the line of enclosed spectators, smiling and saying hello, the meandering stroll taking half an hour. Back inside, the world leaders were worried, concerned, and downright horrified that Timkins had called Space Command without their consent.

US President Gilchrist lead the group. 'Mister Silo, you ... want to tell us what's going on, and why we're all worried?'

Jimmy shrugged. 'I had an image flash up ... of a disaster from space when I heard that song. That, in itself, is a bit odd, but when I came around from the sedative I could hear the same song.' He turned to Timkins.

'One of the first things he said was that he could hear music,' Timkins confirmed.

'And that dream was about a space threat to the planet,' Jimmy added.

'But you have no knowledge of this time,' they pointed out, Jimmy agreeing.

An assistant to the US President pushed forwards. 'Sir, there's a gas anomaly heading for Earth, be with us in ten days. They say it could disrupt our satellites.'

Could have heard a pin drop, everyone now focused on Jimmy. Jimmy shrugged, 'Don't look at me, I dreamt it.'

'Could your numerous trips through time have given you a perception of ... other things?' the Chinese leader asked.

'It's possible,' Jimmy agreed.

'We'll need to plan for some satellite disruption,' Gilchrist mentioned, deep in thought and staring out of focus.

Jimmy said, 'I dreamt of a lot more than just disruption, a hell of a lot more.'

Gilchrist stared hard, his mouth opening. 'You've only been back a few hours!'

'May I suggest ... a planetary state of emergency,' Jimmy told the assembled leaders with some emphasis. 'And a meeting tomorrow of world leaders and scientists to discuss a plan.'

Still stunned, the leaders scurried away, Gilchrist cursing Jimmy as he went.

Jimmy faced a shocked Timkins. 'In at the deep end, eh?'

'I figured the worst I'd have to deal with would be the choice of sandwiches.'

'Do me a favour. Call Rescue Force HQ, and tell them to cancel all leave, and to put all rescuers worldwide on standby.'

'Sir, could I ... ask that you address the world. This will leak in a micro-second and ... there'll be panic.'

'That's the first sensible thing you've said, and you said it from the heart. Keep doing that and you'll go far.' Jimmy headed towards the bank of cameras and called them forwards. 'I wish to address the people of the world, all of the people.'

'We're live,' came back.

'Ladies and gentlemen, citizens of Earth,' Jimmy began. 'When I arrived back on this world and woke ... I remembered a dream I had whilst asleep. That dream involved singing, the song that the children have just performed for me. I woke ... dreaming of something that had not yet happened, and *that* should have been impossible.

'Later, I remembered part of the dream, part of the dream about a threat to Earth from space. Well, a short while ago Space Command confirmed that a gas cloud is heading towards this planet -' Everyone watching stopped breathing, all two billion of them. '- and that gas cloud will arrive in ten days, disrupting our satellite communications. Please do not be alarmed, either by the threat that we now face, or by my ability to dream up the future. There will be a meeting of world leaders and scientists tomorrow to discuss the problem, and I'm confident that they will find a solution.'

The camera operators were now all looking stunned, and stood motionless as Jimmy walked off.

After enquiring with Timkins about directions, Jimmy was led to a large reception centre, many people from Jimmy's old world now being attended by doctors, injections given, Geiger counters swung around for any signs of lingering radiation. Jimmy walked past Dr Singh as modern-era doctors attended the scientist, a smile exchanged, a quick grasping of hands and a nod given. The lady technicians and portal operators were still tearful, the various babies now wrapped in clean blankets, resting in cots. The ladies all smiled up at Jimmy as he walked past them.

At the end of the room he found his old assistant, the lady fifty and grey, the hard years in Canada having taken their toll; she

looked haggard and ill. The doctors smiled at Jimmy and moved aside, the lady standing, a hand to her mouth as she welled up. Jimmy gave her a big hug.

‘You’ve put on weight,’ she got out between sobs. ‘And you look so well, and so young.’

‘I’m well over three hundred years old,’ Jimmy softly informed her. ‘That slave-driver, Dr Singh, he had me going back and forth to many worlds. But I finally got it right. Anyway, you get yourself injected and some decent food, then you take yourself on a long holiday, to the Seychelles – you always said you wanted to visit. You had that old calendar of the Seychelles up on the wall for years, a golden sunny beach on each month. Tell them I sent you.’

A hell of a first day

Many decades earlier, Jimmy had bought a hotel near Manson, a giant hotel, isolated in its own grounds and on its own lake, spectacular views offered to its guests of the nearby mountains. I had visited it several times, and had visited with Jimmy when he first revealed the location of the portal to me. As with the house in Wales, it was now held in trust, but his credit was still good. He claimed a room with a view over the lake and mountains.

Shelly knocked, let in a moment later. ‘Christ, Jimmy. What the hell’s going on? And how come you knew about the threat?’

‘Slow down, young lady. Slow ... down.’ He kicked out a chair for her. ‘It’s ... a bit strange. I haven’t been to this time period, at least I don’t think I have. I have ... memories that are jumbled.’

‘When you came back through the portal, could there have been a ... cross-connection or something?’

‘When you step through your molecules are altered - their resonance frequency. Mine have been altered seven times, well, more like thirteen with the two way trips, so ... maybe I am wired into somewhere else.’

‘And this threat?’

‘I ... think it will be bad, very bad.’

‘How bad?’

‘Fires on the ground, electrical storms.’

‘My god. But this is just too weird, to be timed with the day you get back!’

‘Who decided on the day?’

‘Dad did, I think. The general time was delayed for better weather, then the world leaders moved things around, people flew

in, and it got delayed by two days – but that was not Dad’s doing. It was ... random.’ She eased back. ‘Gilchrist is hopping mad,’ she said with a smile.

‘Do tell,’ Jimmy nudged.

‘He’s been trying to persuade the UN to enact powers to curb you, and what you may say or do – especially to sitting American Presidents! And now you just put the whole world on panic alert without so much as discussing it with him. He’ll be pissed alright.’

‘He’s a US President: they’re there to be worked around.’

‘I’d missed this, your magic touch.’

‘I never touched you before, young lady,’ Jimmy softly stated, making eye contact.

‘If anyone else called me *young lady* I’d either knock them on their arse ... or have them locked up.’

‘Yes, well I changed your nappies.’

‘And now I’m a grandmother.’

‘You still look good, and not a day over thirty-five.’

‘How ... good do I look?’ Shelly toyed.

‘Not so much that I want to give the Press anything to gossip about,’ Jimmy insisted. ‘You’re family.’

‘Hmmm,’ she let out.

At the evening reception, many past leaders were in attendance, US President Harvey, Art Johnson, Hardon Chase, all looking old, yet in good health. The former UK Prime Minister from 1997 put in an appearance, as well as many Africa leaders, Kimballa looking old despite the injections.

When Steffan Silo turned up, Jimmy led his brother to one side. ‘How’re they treating you?’

‘It’s hard to do anything because I look like you,’ Steffan complained, making a face.

‘Well, then it’s a good job that I have a task for you off-world.’

‘Off ... world?’

‘Think about it, but keep it quiet. You’d accompany my team back to 1920s Africa, and build roads, railways, dams, bridges, the works.’

‘Be starting from scratch,’ Steffan noted, staring past Jimmy and into the distance. ‘They’d be steam engines.’

Jimmy smiled. ‘But you’d have a massive head start, and advantage. Anyway, think about it.’

With the party in full swing, Jimmy cornered Big Paul. Taking him to one side, Jimmy said, ‘I have a job for you, a difficult and

dangerous job, and not on this planet. Get yourself fit, and not a word to anyone.'

'Fucking 'ell, boss.'

'Unless ... you'd rather stay here of course.'

'Just say when.'

'Good man.'

Finding Ngomo and Abdi still ribbing each other, he led them to a quiet corner. 'I have a job for you, both of you, and a few trusted aides. Get yourselves fit, and not a word to anyone.'

'This ... job?' Ngomo asked.

'Would be difficult, lengthy, very dangerous, and some of us would not come back.'

'Back?' Abdi asked. 'Back from ... where?'

'Not from where, my friend, from *when*. Unless, of course, you want to grow old and fat ... and useless.'

Jimmy left them with that thought, finding Sykes. 'So, how's life treating you these days?'

'Given that it's you asking, I'd say that you already know how my life is.' He waited, but so did Jimmy. 'My wife and I have ... grown apart, and I while away my time reading military history or writing my own books.'

'Whilst feeling that you're not really contributing to a great struggle,' Jimmy finished off.

'We did it, we won, and no one can take that away from us,' Sykes proudly pointed out.

'Start getting yourself fit, and study everything that Winston Churchill ever did.'

'Churchill? What in blazes for?'

'When I go back, you'd be my liaison to him.'

'Back?' Sykes gasped. 'Go back ... with you ... and meet Churchill?'

'I'd need you to help me win the Second World War. I know we won it last time, but maybe we can shorten it a whole hell of a lot. Oh, and not a word to anyone.'

'They'd never let us go,' Sykes whispered.

Jimmy smiled enigmatically and winked as he walked off, finding Cosy approaching.

Cosy began, 'Regarding the *holiday plans* ... we're all in.'

'Correct me if I'm wrong, but the brain trust kids were experimenting with synthetic diamonds when I left.'

Cosy smiled. 'They would be worth a great deal ... *on holiday*. And no one would know the difference. How many?'

‘A tonne of them. Literally. And fake currency of the period, 1920; a shit load. And some period clothes for us all. Oh, what are weapons like these days, pistols that are light to carry?’

‘Laser pulse pistols are good for two or three thousand discharges, and they’re light. I’ll *borrow* a few dozen.’ Smiling, Cosy headed off.

At dawn the next day, Jimmy was sat on his balcony with a coffee, admiring the view of the lake. It was cold, but the spectacular view made up for the cool Canadian breeze. When Timkins joined him, Jimmy said, ‘Fix a meeting with NASA for later today, I’d like to give the world the idea that we’re trying to find a solution.’

I’ll ... try and arrange that.’

‘Don’t *try* ... make it happen, drop my name, be insistent.’

Timkins headed off.

President Gilchrist called an hour later. ‘Jimmy, you telling NASA what to do these days?’

‘What I’m trying to do, oh great leader, is to reassure the public that we’re on the case, and to ... you know, *reassure them*. You do the real work, I’ll keep the public on your side with a little PR. Would that not be a prudent approach, oh great one?’

‘Well ... I suppose, yes. Panic is spreading, markets are falling.’

‘Then I shall do what us useless ageing figureheads do, and smile nicely for the cameras. Bye bye.’ He hung up. ‘Knob head.’

Timkins arranged a flight, direct to Houston aboard a Boeing 828 Dreamliner, a bulbous aircraft made from composites and plastics. It resembled an old 767, except that the body was much fatter, people able to walk around freely inside, and not crammed in like sheep.

Timkins keenly explained en route, ‘This plane is all composite, materials that came out of Africa. I’ll tell you an interesting fact: if the engines died, we’d drift down at no more than a ninety miles per hour and crash, but the crumple effect would mean that no more than ten percent of the people onboard would be killed or injured.’

‘Let’s ... not put that to the test, eh?’ Jimmy quipped.

At NASA headquarters, Houston, Jimmy was given a quick tour, many of the projects on the drawing board being near-Earth orbital aircraft made from composites, fuels advanced these days, no dated solid-stage rockets in sight. Inside a large room, reminiscent of a lecture theatre, Jimmy took a few minutes to greet many Africans –

brain trust kids now working for NASA. Also present were the permanent representatives from Russia, China, India and Europe.

In parallel to NASA, the International Space Programme ran just about all the same projects, but successive generations of US Presidents had insisted that NASA be kept alive, and that America did its own thing. Long-range space flight was not being considered, at least it had not been, but new technologies and fuels had made an old idea quite feasible these days. The blood was helping as well; people could be put in stasis without the risk of cell damage on long flights. Pigs with the blood had been frozen and brought back to life, for the most part, no astronauts keen to try it.

What those astronauts did try, however, was being put to sleep for three months and woken up. Most felt like shit for three months after waking up, and agreed that although they could survive the long space flight they'd be pretty damned useless when they got there – needing three months on Mars to recover before attempting any scientific experiments.

In the lecture theatre, Jimmy finally took the podium, a White House representative sat to one side – just to keep an eye on things. 'Ladies and gentlemen, boffins, geeks and eggheads.' They laughed. 'We're here today ... to try and make a few plans, to float some ideas, and to reassure the world that its best brains are doing something to cope with the current threat. And it's no good asking me how I knew about it, because I don't have a clue. Perhaps you lot have some theories. OK, coming back down to Earth – no pun intended. There is, according to you lot, a gas cloud heading our way, which sounds pretty harmless, but – unfortunately – my dream was not of something harmless.'

Jimmy turned his head and frowned towards the door, others looking to see what he was staring at. Facing the assembled scientists again, he commented, 'They're still playing that song. Guess it's caught on.'

People glanced towards the door, no sounds emanating from beyond, then glanced at each other.

'Catchy tune,' Jimmy commented. 'Anyway, that gas cloud is just a ground-up meteor, a huge cloud of iron filings. At its core are solid pieces, acting both as magnets and gravity centres for the lightweight particles. Unfortunately, the sun's solar wind is acting on the particles, the iron and other compounds, and creating a large electro-magnetically charged ball of dust. When it hits us it will wreck every satellite it comes near, its particles electrically discharging, as well as creating mini EMP pulses as the sun's radiation reacts with the particles. Firing nukes at it now will help

to disperse the cloud and to burn out the reactive particles. If not, it'll get caught in our gravity well and spiral down to lower altitude, creating electrical storms that will cause wildfires all over the world.'

Everyone sat staring, in silence.

Jimmy glanced towards the door again. 'Guess someone must really like that song.' Turning back, he said, 'So, we're here today to discuss the threat to us from this gas cloud thing. Anyone got any clues as to how to deal with it?'

They stared back at him.

'Don't all speak at once,' Jimmy quipped after ten seconds.

'Er ... Mister Silo, you just gave us the answer,' someone said.

'No, I don't think so. I don't know what it is, and I'm no scientist.'

'You ... just told us what it is,' they insisted.

'Did I?' Jimmy puzzled as the scientists exchanged stunned looks. Jimmy lifted his hand and stared at the back of it. 'Who wrote on my hand the word ... paradox?'

The lead scientist was on his feet and closing in. 'Did you ... did you just jump the time line and come back?'

Jimmy stared at him. 'No, silly. Well, least I don't think I did. And why am I so damn hungry; I feel like I haven't eaten in days. Is there a canteen? If you'll excuse me for an hour, I really have to eat before I fall over.' He headed towards the door, the security detail jumping up and following.

With the door closed, the White House aide closed in on the head scientist. 'Did he ... did he just jump through time?'

The scientist nodded. 'Yes.'

'And what he said, about what the gas cloud is?'

The scientist again nodded. 'Yeah, makes perfect sense.'

'And the solution?'

'Easy enough, now that we know what it is.'

The White House aide pointed at the door, but addressed the head scientist. 'He was stood there the whole time, I saw him!'

'We all saw him. But he could have been gone for half a second here, but days someplace else, someplace where they told him the answer.'

'He jumped through time?' the aide repeated. 'The President is going to fucking love this.'

As the aide stepped out, phone to his ear, scientists burst out laughing, some crying, many slapping each other on the back, a party starting up.

‘There’s another possibility,’ an Indian scientist loudly called. ‘You’re forgetting the music.’

‘Music?’

‘The music that he could hear and we could not hear,’ the man said, others now closing in. ‘If he had a latent memory planted into his subconscious, the music could trigger the answer.’

They agreed, it could. So who had implanted that knowledge, and when.

The NASA press officer considered his career for a moment, said “fuck it”, and sent a message out. Within a few minutes the message hit billions of computers around the world: “Silo jumps through time, gets solution to gas cloud threat, and comes back!”

President Gilchrist was now aboard Air Force One and heading back down to Washington from the UN meeting in New York. His aide explained what had happened. Twice.

‘You’ve got to be shitting me,’ Gilchrist let out, staring wide-eyed up at his aide.

‘He jumped out of time ... and came back with the answer, they’re saying. And ... it’s gone all around the world.’

Gilchrist rubbed his face with both hands. ‘But no one saw him flash and disappear. It could have been a trick.’

‘I ... think the world is going to err on the side of ... fanatical religious fervour, sir.’

‘Could he somehow have got the knowledge of the future from someone?’

‘The time portal is closely monitored, sir. We’d know.’

The National Security Advisor knocked, and stepped in. ‘Mister President, we recorded a partial message, Silo at the evening function; seems that he’s planning on going back through time, to another world.’

‘He’d never get permission,’ Gilchrist stated. ‘And if he went and died over there ... the people would string us all up. There’s no way the UN would ever allow it anyway.’

‘Er ... sir, you are forgetting the orbital light show that’s going to hit us in ten days or less,’ the aide stated.

Gilchrist took a moment. ‘Even if he fixed it they’d still not let him go.’

‘Your forgetting one very, very small piece of information, sir: what was written on his hand, that just magically appeared in front of a room full of witnesses, the word “paradox”. If he doesn’t go *somewhere* – to complete the circle, then this planet suffers a fate.’

Gilchrist started to laugh, focusing on the window. 'Oh, well played, Jimmy, well played. You ... son of a bitch. He knew we'd never let him go, and now the whole world believes that if he doesn't go then we'll suffer for it.' He shook his head, smiling widely. 'He's three hundred years old, so I should have figured he'd outsmart us.'

'He ... has been about a bit, sir,' the aide admitted.

'Son of a bitch,' Gilchrist repeated, still smiling. 'He came back loaded. He probably had this idea a hundred years ago.'

'If you try and oppose him ... your ratings would -'

'Plummet, yes, thanks for reminding me.'

An old house

Jimmy landed back in London the next day, a brief meeting with the current Prime Minister, all of the questions about time travel and paradoxes. So far, Jimmy had not suggested that he go anywhere, and even seemed to discredit the idea.

After a one-hour helicopter ride he landed back at the old house, touching down on the grass by the lake. It all looked the same. He walked across to Paul's house and had a nose around, the house still used by Helen and Shelly on a regular basis. In the main house he turned right into the office, and stopped dead, finding Sharon sat behind her desk.

'I'm sure I gave you some time off,' he quipped.

She eased up and smiled, seeming tired; old and tired. 'They kept me on, the trust that runs this place. I order the toilet paper.' She gave him a hug. 'You've been back a few days and already turned the world on its head again.'

'It's what I do. So,' he took in the office, sitting. 'Who's here that I would know?'

'Cookie and Sandra, and ... that's about it.'

'Big old empty house, all the kids grown up and gone. How're *your* trouble makers?'

'Middle aged, with kids, and divorced.'

'Ah well.' He stood. 'I'm here tonight, so eat with me later. Then ... then I ... won't be back this way for a hundred years or so.'

Sharon gazed back at him. 'Jack said you wouldn't stay, that you'd go to another world.'

'There are lives to save,' Jimmy flatly stated.

'If you meet my younger self, then make sure I don't marry Phil, that I take that tour-guide job I always wanted.'

'If I meet your younger self, I'll make sure you *do* marry Phil – and end up as my secretary. Again.'

In the diner, Cookie smiled widely and came around the counter. 'Here comes trouble.'

They hugged.

'Pancakes, Cookie?' Jimmy asked.

'If I had a bleeding pound for every time I heard that...'

'I'm here tonight,' Jimmy began. 'Then...'

Cookie slowly nodded. 'Jack always said you'd go.'

'This place seems a bit ... empty without Paul's family and the "M" Group.'

'It's bugged me a few times, but the tourists keep us busy, as well as the world leaders when they come.'

'If you and Sandra are not happy...'

Cookie stared back. 'What ... go ... to another world?'

'I need a good team, people I can trust.'

'But ... but what about the other me?'

'1920.'

'1920?' Cookie repeated. 'I'd ... not be around for a while. And, they'd have outdoor toilets and bedpans.'

'With our money ... indoor plumbing and Jacuzzis!'

'We'd ... well, we'd be there when the Second World War was on, in the Blitz an all!'

Jimmy lifted his eyebrows and nodded.

'Shit. You'd ... you know, alter it an all.'

Jimmy again nodded.

'If one more world leader says "Pancakes, Cookie" I'll deck the fucker, so help me. Count us in, boss.'

'You want to talk to Sandra?'

'She's thinking of leaving me ... well, mostly because of ... you know, all that happened and the publicity. I reckon she'll go with you.'

'Formal meal, 7pm, small select group. A ... *last supper*.'

Jimmy walked down to a lounge, finding it empty – and lonely. The gym was empty, awaiting a few tourists, the pool's blue water still, his old room preserved as a museum piece, small labels adhered to things for the tourists to understand their significance. On his bed he found new clothes, shirts in packets; Sharon's thoughtful handiwork.

After a shower, and a change of clothes, he walked around the grounds – security following at a discreet distance, and down to the river, each step counted and measured, the emptiness growing in

his chest. At the ponds he found guards fishing, taking the time to stop and chat, idly enquiring after the fish stocks.

Back at the house, he got Sharon onto the phones and invited around a few people, including the old managers of the Cardiff nightclub, the accountants and solicitors, and a few others; he wanted the house to have a buzz.

The meal went off well, much talk of old times and good times, not of the gas cloud or of time travel. Photos of kids were dug out, many now adults themselves, but most unknown to Jimmy. Jimmy encouraged everyone to stay as late as they could, and finally headed up to his old room, no joy in the steps he took. He closed the door to an empty apartment, the ghosts of the past ever present. Fortunately, he had drunk enough to catch some sleep.

At 6am he stood outside the house with Cookie and Sandra, who had just this minute resigned and packed their bags. They all took one last look before boarding the waiting helicopter. That helicopter dropped Cookie and Sandra off at Bristol Airport, flying Jimmy on to Mapley, the helicopter setting down in a very busy base, Rescue Force on full alert.

Jimmy knocked on Bob Davies old door and entered. 'Jimmy!' Doctor Susan Hicks shouted. She gave him a big hug.

'At least someone appreciates me,' Jimmy quipped. 'So, you made it to the top, eh?'

'No one else wanted the job,' she joked. 'You look just as you did.'

'It's only been a few days for me,' Jimmy reminded her.

'Yeah, well we're all in a flap around here, just in case this gas cloud goes arse-up on us.'

'They say – if it's bad – that it could cause thunder storms, nasty ones; floods, fires, and the four horsemen of the apocalypse.'

'We'll be ready, and dispersed,' Dr Hicks promised.

'Did I hear that troublemaker, Silo?' Doc Graham loudly asked from the corridor.

Jimmy turned and shook Doc Graham's hand. 'Still here?'

'They couldn't find anyone daft enough to want my job! Twenty-five years in the seat.'

'Might need a new seat,' Jimmy joked. He led Doc Graham to his office. 'So, how're you and Hildy these days?'

'She works out of Africa and ... we don't talk.'

'Oh. Your kid?'

'A doctor, here in the UK.'

Jimmy slowly nodded to himself. 'Listen, I've ... put together a team for a ... lengthy and dangerous mission ... to another world.'

Doc Graham's eyes widened as he eased forwards onto his desk. 'Are you ... suggesting what I think you're suggesting?'

'You'd be gone a long time, and ... it'll be dangerous. You might just get yourself killed.'

'And ... what would I be doing, specifically?'

'You'd be starting Rescue Force in ... 1945.'

'1945? My god.'

'But we'd be landing in 1920, so you'd have a few years in colonial Kenya first.'

'You said a team...?'

'Most of the original team are coming along, you already know them all.'

'Where do I sign?'

'After this crisis is out of the way, resign and get yourself to Mawlini, pack a bag.'

From London's Heathrow airport, still a congested passenger hub, Jimmy flew to Paris, thereafter on to Berlin, and then to Moscow, greeting the leaders whilst reassuring the public. In Russia he inspected their RF unit, spent half a day at the world's largest industrial farm complex, eventually flying on to Delhi. There he again pressed the flesh, gave a speech, the International Space Consortium just about to fire a series of rockets towards the approaching gas cloud.

Flying on, Jimmy landed in Beijing to much fanfare and celebration, Han waiting at the airport in a private room. Jimmy had the aides sent out, just the Chinese President left with Han.

'Mister President, I would like you to release Mister Han to my service.'

Han was surprised.

'To ... do what?' the President asked.

'To talk with Chairman Mao when I step back through time.'

The President almost fell off his seat, Han hiding a smile. 'Go back? You'll go back?'

'If I don't ... then the paradox will be broken and this world will be at threat. It's not a case of *if I go back* ... I have already been and come back. There are ... things that I'm not revealing to the world. I need to complete the circle, or you, sir, will pay a heavy price.'

The President was stunned. 'And ... if you go back, is it also assured that you will return to us?'

'Yes, hence the paradox. Don't worry. As for Mister Han, are you amenable to him assisting me, as he did before?'

'You already know the answer,' the President stated.

‘Still, I have to ask ... and at least make it seem that you have a choice.’

The President cocked an eyebrow. ‘You may have Mister Han, and ... you may complete the paradox.’

‘Thank you, oh great leader.’

‘Don’t start treating me like a US President!’ the Chinese Premier told Jimmy.

‘I hold all political leaders in equally high regard,’ Jimmy quipped.

Han packed a bag very quickly, accompanying Jimmy down to Hong Kong, where Po awaited. Actually, Po awaited with Yuri, our Russian friend now out of favour with the Kremlin and in exile, Yuri residing either here in Hong Kong or at his house in Gotham City.

From the airport, a helicopter whisked Jimmy and Han to a rooftop helipad, Po and Yuri waiting in the bar one floor down. Hugs and greetings were exchanged at length, jibes made, Po’s rotund body coming in for much poking and prodding. Settled, they sat around a table, Jimmy dismissing the aides and guards.

‘I’ll get straight to the point,’ Jimmy began, ‘Since we only have a week.’

‘A week?’ Yuri asked. ‘This gas cloud – it will be a big problem?’

‘No, I gave them the solution.’

‘Then it be true, you jump through time!’ Po stated.

Jimmy shook his head very slightly. ‘A week from now I’ll be going through the portal in Africa, the one Paul used for re-supply. I’m going back to Kenya in 1920 ... on another world, and not to fix any paradox. I’m going to fix that world as I fixed this one, but starting in 1920. I’ll be fighting through the Second World War, and I’ll need a few good men to buy property here in Hong Kong in 1920 ... to build up businesses to make us some money.’

Po was staring, Yuri salivating. ‘I’ll go with you,’ Yuri stated, getting a look from Po.

‘I have many big business here,’ Po stated.

‘You would be back in a few weeks,’ Han pointed out. ‘Over there, a hundred years would pass.’

‘Po,’ Jimmy called. ‘The trip would be dangerous, we may all get ourselves killed, but there are six billion people over there who may end up dying, your family included. I’m asking you to help me fix that world, and for you to write your name into the legend.’

Po grew an inch. ‘When I come back, I am traveller like you,’ he realised.

‘Well, not as tall, obviously,’ Jimmy pointed out.

‘OK, I do it,’ Po agreed, nodding.

‘For the next few days, you and Yuri should study old maps of Hong Kong from 1920 to 1925, and think about what businesses would do well if you bought them. We’ll be taking back synthetic diamonds to buy things with.’

‘Shipping,’ Po stated. ‘Always shipping. We must buy the shipping companies!’

‘That sounds like a start,’ Jimmy approved with a smile.

Taking Han to one side, half an hour later, Jimmy said, ‘I won’t be interfering with Chairman Mao, I desire China to be communist; in fact, it’s necessary and ... essential. But, I do want you to influence him, for him to be less ... provincial, and more commercially minded.’

‘I ... would try and influence Mao?’

‘You would, by convincing him that you’ll support his cause, and by bringing in money and weapons from Po. You’d be popular ... and have his ear.’

‘And would I reveal the future?’

‘No.’

‘And if he decided to shoot me?’

‘We’d drink at your wake.’

Han lifted an eyebrow. ‘I see.’

‘Helping people ... comes with risks. Helping a great many people ... comes with great risk.’

‘But, nonetheless, we must try,’ Han stated.

‘Read a book on Mao’s early years -’

‘I am expert in this area, and have written my own book on his early years.’

Jimmy smiled. ‘I knew there was a reason I liked you. Put your affairs in order, and meet us in Mawlini in five or six days.’

The next evening, the rich of Hong Kong rubbed shoulders with Jimmy at a black-tie charity gala held for Rescue Force, Po and Yuri already well ahead in their planning of how they would conquer the world from their Hong Kong base, plotting and scheming in hushed tones and ignoring their guests.

Jimmy flew on down to Singapore, a huge turn-out afforded him, before touching down in both New Zealand and Australia for quick visits, RF units inspected. The first rocket had now been fired at the approaching gas cloud, its detonation revealing the true size and extent of the cloud, which was just a big pile of iron fillings. Still, the images frightened a great many people.

Jimmy landed back in Africa to a mass turnout; everyone was on the streets. His plane had touched down first in Zimbabwe, a bus tour followed by a meeting with President Solomon.

From Harare, Jimmy journeyed to New Kinshasa, a flight taken over Mining City, the metropolis below now one of the world's largest cities and an economic powerhouse itself. Landing at Goma Hub, Jimmy noticed little change in the airport and the surrounding area. He stayed the night at the old Mansion, Helen, Shelly and family in residence – and much nagging of not attempting any fool-hardy paradoxes, before touring the city by helicopter the next day. Helen pointed out places of interest, new suburbs or factories, interesting facts and statistics about the place.

Over lunch, Helen said, 'Promise me you'll not try and complete this rumoured paradox.'

'Wouldn't dream of it.'

She held her fixed stare on him for a moment, then sighed. 'We all figured you'd have trouble adjusting to being back here. But if you're planning on some foolish stunt, you will let me know, won't you.'

'You'd be the first to know. Don't worry.'

'Hmmm.'

A tour of the Pentagon building meant meeting a few old faces, still in their jobs and running sub-Saharan Africa. The cooperation group was now a country in itself, the real power, the economic might of the group rivalling China and America, as well as greatly influencing world politics. The current President was an old administrator from The Corporation; we were keeping it in the family. Trade was steady, crime low, housing and education very good. And the volunteers were still hard at it, always inventing something new, along with the brain trust kids, most of those 'kids' now grandparents.

They built aircraft that flew quietly, economically, and safely. They built cars, buses and trains, hydroelectric turbines, and worked on any new diseases that popped up. Visiting one group, Jimmy found Cosy in attendance.

The chief scientist presented a large wooden box that appeared to be very old. Opening it, Jimmy found a gramophone player, a look exchanged with Cosy. Cosy smiled as the scientist explained, 'Push this lever, and say: identify Jimmy Silo.'

Jimmy did as asked. The lid popped open, a screen and keyboard displayed.

‘It will ask you a set of passwords that you and your team will know. All of the world’s inventions are listed, as well as maps and details particular to 1920 onwards.’

Jimmy smiled, closing the lid.

Cosy closed in. ‘Diamonds are waiting, some gold, ruby necklaces; enough to buy the planet in 1920.’

‘The computer will illustrate the positions of all oil and gold deposits, sir,’ the scientist pointed out. ‘As well as stock market movements from 1920 onwards.’

‘Good,’ Jimmy commended. ‘Because I’m getting on a bit.’

A second box was handed over. ‘Period glasses, sir. But these are night vision and thermal. A period pen, inside of which is a weapon designed to cause a heart attack.’

‘I’m familiar with the toys,’ Cosy pointed out. ‘So you won’t kill yourself writing cheques.’

‘The weapon is unlikely to kill Mister Silo,’ someone pointed out.

‘But would affect people without the blood,’ Jimmy noted. He faced the team. ‘Thank you for your efforts at such short notice.’

‘We wish you a safe trip, sir,’ they said. ‘We’ll have these items shipped to Mawlini.’

Landing at Mogadishu, Jimmy made like visiting royalty and inspected the troops with a fit-looking Abdi. After a lunch with the current Somali President and his cabinet, Jimmy flew up to the Palestinian enclave, an unscheduled trip. Flying in, he could see that it was now twice as big as his last visit, now a high-rise metropolis on the coast.

These days, some eighty-five percent of the world’s Palestinians lived here, thriving as part of the Africa cooperation group. Israel was peaceful, the occupied lands peaceful – more or less, a stability achieved. The two states even had diplomatic relations, and embassies in each other’s capitals. Representatives from many Arab states flew down to meet Jimmy, each afforded a ten minute chat at a reception party.

Lightshow

The second and third nukes had impacted the gas cloud, their explosions visible from Earth with the naked eye, the third explosion noticeably smaller due to the dissipating cloud. A fourth nuke hit the cloud as Jimmy sat eating a meal in New Palestine,

quite a light show on display above. Later that night, with all of the people of the world watching, the remnants of the cloud grazed the Earth's atmosphere and created a spectacular light show, a few satellites affected. An hour later it moved off and finally dissipated, the world celebrating, celebrating being saved by Jimmy.

What they didn't know, was that the cloud would have done no more than affect a few satellites. By hitting it with the first nuke they made it more of a threat, finally dissipating it with the last nuke. Jimmy was smiling inwardly, the world now very focused on where he wanted them to be focused, the detail of the gas cloud coming from Doctor Singh, who had taken a peek at the future when he found a sensor bounce. Doctor Singh was also now smiling inwardly, planetary cooperation back at the forefront of people's minds; no one was assured of their safety.

After being rescued from Jimmy's old world, Singh had joined his other self in India, his other self's six kids now very confused, but happy with all the gifts. So what if they now had two fathers.

The next morning Jimmy landed in Mombasa, an official tour made of Ebede, Anna leading the tour whilst whispering comments of preparation with Jimmy. They lunched at the marina, Jimmy's party flying up to Nairobi afterwards. The city's roads were lined with almost a million people, a certain rooftop bar reclaimed, waves given from the top, a quick TV interview held.

Jimmy stated, 'I'm very glad to be back in my beloved Kenya, back to where my real work started all those years ago. Tomorrow I will journey up to Mawlini to review Rescue Force there, and to return to where it all started.'

'When will Mister Paul be returning?' a reporter asked.

'I believe he asked that they scan for his signal in a few weeks. So he will be back with you in a few weeks.'

Various dignitaries were led out to Jimmy as he sat in the sun, each afforded ten minutes, a few old friends welcomed.

Ngomo stepped out an hour later. Sitting, he asked, 'Should I be considering ... a few select men ... for my *holiday*.'

'You should. Twenty of them.'

Ngomo nodded. 'Men without ... family commitments.'

'Men you may have to bury over there.'

Ngomo took a moment. 'Kenya, in 1920, will be ... most different, as far as the *white folk* ... are concerned.'

'Most different,' Jimmy agreed. 'Stealth is necessary, as well as a smile when you're treated like the toilet cleaner.'

'And my ... role?'

‘To build up an army and to take the Congo, to protect my business interests around Africa, then to fight the Italian Army.’

‘The Italians ... in Abyssinia and Libya,’ Ngomo thought out loud. ‘And when that famous German general lands in North Africa?’

‘You’d welcome him with open arms and a cheery smile,’ Jimmy said with a grin.

Ngomo nodded. ‘It will be many years of fighting.’

‘Any second thoughts?’

‘If you are going, I am going; you cannot have all the fun yourself. Besides...’

‘Besides, right now you’re washed up and useless, an old soldier that everyone pulls the chair out for and treats like their infirmed grandfather.’

‘You cut deep ... when you speak, Mister Silo,’ Ngomo unhappily stated. ‘Unfortunately, you tell the truth.’

‘And Abdi?’

‘Is salivating at the mouth, telling me how much better his army will be to mine.’

Jimmy laughed. ‘Can’t let that camel shagger have a better army, now can you?’

‘No, indeed not; I would never live it down, he would not let me.’

‘Are the CIA aware of the plan?’ Jimmy asked, sounding none too concerned.

‘I am sure of it, since they ask delicate questions. Will they interfere?’

‘No, I have a trick or two lined up.’

Ngomo stood. ‘Then I shall see you in Mawlini tomorrow.’

‘Pack just period clothes, a laser pistol, food and water for a long hike, medical kit. And that’s it.’

‘We will see how I look ... in traditional robes.’

‘You’ll like a big black guy in a girly dress. So get some earrings!’

At Mawlini, Jimmy’s plane touched down on the second runway, the first still temporary host to a mobile time portal, the original portal in Canada. This portal had been specifically designed so that it could sit at the end of the runway here, a place where I knew I would need the supplies, not in Canada. Those supplies had gone through a day ago. I had been gone a week in this world, six years on that side, six years fighting The Brotherhood.

The supplies dispatched to me consisted of advanced weapons, no care about corrupting the time line on Jimmy’s original world,

his post-apocalyptic world. The portable portal now awaited my return signal, but they would not look for it through time and space for another few weeks.

Rumours had leaked of Jimmy's desire to travel, leaked by Gilchrist, who now passionately suggested that the planet's great saviour should not risk himself, and that a specially prepared team should go. In the space of a few hours, everyone was involved in the debate, every news outlet running it, some citing the paradox – and what may happen if he doesn't go. Gilchrist also had a trump card, an electronic override fitted to the portable portal.

Arriving at the old base, Jimmy was met by the press, dozens of them. He decided to get it over with in one go, calling a snap press conference with the backdrop of the time portal.

'Ladies and gentlemen, citizens of this Earth,' he dramatically began. 'I am here today, not only to visit my old base and to meet again old friends, but to step through the time portal once more, and once more to do what I am destined to do.

'There is another world that I know about that is at risk, another Africa that needs saving, six billion lives that have to be saved. Some of you, especially here in my beloved Africa, will not wish to see me go, nor wish to see me risk myself so soon after my return to you. But who here will stand in the way of the doctor as he tends the sick baby? Who here ... says that the lives of African children in this world ... are more important than the lives of African children in another world?

'Who here ... wishes my company at a cocktail party, when six billion people are about to die? Who here ... wishes me to open their parliament building ... when a hundred million Africans face hunger, starvation, warfare and misery? What politician here would wish me tethered to a comfortable bed ... when the people in the world I go to have only dirt to sleep on?

'Through that portal is a world just like this one. But when I came to this world to save you ... everyone was urging me on, urging me to come and save the people here. You may all be glad that they did, because you can look down at your children, now well fed, well educated, and with a good future. Through the portal, the world I go to has nothing but warfare and misery ahead for it.

'And, once I have saved them, they will suffer a gas cloud in orbit, the solution to which I have already been given. It is not a case of will I go – I already went and came back. I go now to complete the circle. If I don't, then this planet will suffer a paradox, and an uncertain future. I do this for them, and I do this for you, but with no regret at leaving. I am saddened at leaving my people

here, but overjoyed at the chance to save so many on the other side. Don't be sad, be happy for what you have, and be happy for me.

'When I came back, a choir from Ebede sang me a song. I would like all the children of Africa to learn this song, as well as church congregations. Sing it ... and think of me when I am in dark places far away. I will hear you.'

He turned and headed to the rooftop bar, the press kept away by the Rifles. In the bar he found Po being very discreet in a Pith helmet and period clothes, looking like a small chubby game hunter from 1920. 'Very discreet,' Jimmy told him.

'I say I go safari.'

'And did anyone sober actually believe you?'

Yuri closed in, stood in period clothes, but more westernised. 'We're ready.'

'Take nothing except those clothes, food and water in a rucksack.'

'Nothing else? We have maps and plans!' Yuri protested.

'Burn them, now; if they fell into the wrong hands over there it would alter the time line. Oh, and ditch the clever wrist watch, huh.' Jimmy greeted Anna, Cosy and Rudd, and closed in on Big Paul as he sat stuffing his face.

'Right, boss,' Big Paul said with detracting from the face stuffing. 'Been a while since I had camel steak.'

'Are you fit?' Jimmy asked as he sat, accepting a cold beer.

'Been clocking fifty miles a day, lost loads of weight.'

'Got a team together?'

'Twenty of the meanest toughest arseholes you'd not want to meet on a dark night.'

'They all briefed and keen?'

'Yep, well up for it. I want to assassinate Hitler.'

'Hitler ... did more to lose the war for them than a decent general would have done.'

Abdi and Ngomo stepped out in traditional robes, swinging lion-hair fly swatters. Halting, they exchanged looks before lifting their robes. Underneath they were armed to the teeth, Jimmy shaking his head.

'I have selected twenty good men,' Abdi reported.

'Someone has to hold the hem of his dress,' Ngomo commented. 'But there is a problem. There are many Rifles who wish to attend this party. Say ... twenty thousand of them.'

'They would be noticed,' Jimmy pointed out. 'We work in secret.'

'Indeed, yes.'

'I'll address them later, and put them at ease,' Jimmy offered. 'Go practise walking in a dress, and calling yourself *chief*.'

'In order to play the part of a chief ... I would need many wives,' Ngomo pointed out.

'At least a dozen,' Jimmy agreed. 'If not two dozen.'

'Let us all agree that ... wives taken over there ... do not become the subject of gossip for wives ... over here,' Ngomo suggested.

Big Paul lifted his head. 'She'd cut your balls off.'

'Of that, I have no doubt,' Ngomo agreed.

Mac stepped in, and came straight over. He had retired a few years earlier, and now played golf a great deal, still living in the estate down the road. 'You're a rat bastard, you know that; you need me on a trip like this. The military skills, munitions, my knowledge of Africa of the seventies -'

'Sit down, Mac,' Jimmy firmly pressed. Mac sat. 'So, you want to come along, I gather.'

'It's that, or play golf till I die. These fuckers want me opening supermarkets!'

'Your daughter?'

'Working as a doctor, no time for her old man.'

'Wife? Sweetheart? Local charitable interests...'

'Aye, bollocks.'

Jimmy sipped his beer. 'Do you think, Mac, you could design and manufacture an AK47?'

'No problem. But wouldn't that look odd in fucking 1920?'

'I was thinking of 1930, and no – it would not look odd; the First World War advanced weapons a great deal.'

'Are we taking this old fucker along?'

 Big Paul asked with his mouthful.

'Still whip your arse, sonny,' Mac told Big Paul.

'Mac, you'll be gone for a great many years,' Jimmy emphasized. 'No in-door plumbing, no decent women for a few decades, crap food.'

'Just like this place when *you* arrived!' Mac pointed out.

'If anything, better,' Jimmy pointed out. 'OK, I'll take you. And Handy if he wants in.'

'He's on his way here.'

'Find some clothes that won't look odd in 1920s Kenya, a backpack, tins, and plenty of water. And fuck all else; no documents, no watches.'

Mac stood and rushed out, a rude comment towards the outfits of Abdi and Ngomo.

Timkins appeared, stepping over, Jimmy having dismissed him in America. 'Shelly would like a word, as well as President Gilchrist.' He offered Jimmy an A4 data-pad.

Jimmy tapped the image of Gilchrist. 'Can you hear me, oh great one?'

'Cut the crap, Silo. As much as I'd like to see the back of you, we'll do what we can to stop you – or we'll feel the heat if anything happens to you.'

'Touching, it's almost as if you care. Anyway, how're your crime statistics, because I was thinking about criticising you on the air – at length – in an hour or two. I figured that ... if I was going to go anyway, I should at least screw-up your ratings before I went.'

'You can't bully me, Silo.'

'You may have considered ... that I had someone in place in your inner circle a while back, oh great one.'

'What?'

'Yes, and they have evidence about the inducements you made to senators regarding the revised pension bill.'

'You ... son of a bitch!'

'If I don't step through ... you get impeached. Take your pick, *arsehole*. And the electronic cut-out you have fitted to the time portal – my people have already removed it. Both of them. Have a nice day.' He ended the call.

'They won't let us back to this world,' Big Paul grumbled, still eating.

'We'll worry about that in ... oh, sixty or seventy years.'

'I wanna meet Howard Hughes; he sounded like a fun guy. Los Angeles in the 1920s and 1930s, roaring parties.'

'You'll find ... that the women back then looked terrible, had bushy pubes and hairy armpits, a tonne of make-up, and didn't give blowjobs.'

'Yeah? Fuck...'

'Anyway, we go at 3pm if everyone's here. I'll go address the Rifles.'

Ten minutes later, Jimmy found the Rifles lined up on their parade ground. He took to the podium and its microphone, greetings issued in a few dialects. 'Brothers, fellow soldiers, Rifles. Many of you would like to come with me, to help me fight again for Africa. But if you travelled to that world you would not help my cause, because I need to work in secret for many years, building up businesses and money. You would have little to do for thirty years.'

‘But, if I get into trouble, and I have need for a few good men, I will send a signal. Have your officers watch out for the message, and if I call come running, armed ... and dangerous. I would call no one else but my blood brothers when I need help.’ He gave a thrust-fist salute, getting one back with a deafening chant.

Back at the RF base, Timkins was again nagging about calls, including Helen and Shelly, the British Prime Minister, and a few hundred others.

‘Tell Helen and Shelly that I apologise, but this must be done. The rest of them can all go to hell.’

‘I understand, sir. It’s a numbers game; six billion there, a few people here needing a crutch in their daily lives.’

Jimmy stopped dead and took off his sunglasses. ‘Everyone is good at something, Mister Timkins. What are you good at?’

Timkins made a face. ‘My first passion was politics, something of an activist in school, and I joined the Labour Party at eighteen.’

Jimmy took a moment. ‘If you were a senior politician in the British cabinet in 1935, could you make a difference?’

Timkins stared back. ‘A ... politician, through the war years?’

Jimmy nodded. ‘You up to sixty years of hard work?’

‘My god. But ... why me?’

‘I have a time constraint on recruitment, and you have the right attitude. Could you make a difference?’

‘Well, yes, I’m sure that with my knowledge of the future I could.’

‘But would you do it for the right reasons?’

‘Which are...?’

‘A selfless desire to help fix that world ... and to save lives.’

Timkins took in the security staff, then focused on the housing of the portable portal, his hands clasped behind his back. ‘Upon my return, Shelly would beat the crap out of me at length.’

Jimmy laughed. ‘That she would.’

He blew out. ‘If you want me, I’m in.’

‘And the consequences for your career here?’

‘After sixty years over there, I seriously doubt that I’d give a damn about my career here.’

‘Very true. Stick close.’

Handy tooted from a jeep as he passed. ‘Don’t fucking go without me!’

Timkins noted, ‘They’re very keen to accompany you.’

‘They’re very keen to go somewhere where they’ll not be recognised, nor asked to open a supermarket. They’re very keen ... to work for a cause, one that gives them their self-respect back.’

And, in the case of Mac and Handy, somewhere where they can get falling down drunk without it raising any issues.'

Timkins smiled as they progressed. 'God help 1920. Hope they're ready for Mac.'

In the rooftop bar the gang were now assembling, backpacks readied. A few RF staff had wanted to join the trip, all turned down. Doc Graham now had a pith helmet on, Jimmy shaking his head at it. But it was, after all, what would greet them on the other side: boys own Tarzan adventurers heading for the jungle to find interesting people and creatures, and to shoot and stuff them. Mounting them was optional, before or after shooting them.

Sykes appeared, dressed in a 1920s suit, but Jack popped out from behind him.

'Jack?' Jimmy called. He stood and waited.

'My wife believes that I'm on a lecture tour of the Far East, which will keep her quiet for a few days at least.'

'And then?' Jimmy nudged.

'And then ... I'd rather be dead than stay here.'

Timkins lifted his head to Jimmy, who had not taken his fixed stare off Jack.

'You're assigned to Sykes, as his assistant. Oh,' he faced Timkins. 'This is a future British Prime Minister.'

'I am?' Timkins asked as Sykes and Jack shook his hand.

'We've met,' Jack told Timkins. 'Some function.'

Timkins lifted his gaze to Jimmy. 'You never said I'd be the Prime Minister.'

'Why do you think Shelly sent you to spy on me?' Jimmy asked.

'You know?' Timkins asked.

'Of course I know; I'm me. You'll be working closely with Jack and Sykes in England.'

Jimmy turned and took in the faces, checking that everyone was ready. Mister Han was suitably attired, Big Paul and his gang now changed into more suitable clothes, Skids now with him – a nod exchanged with Jimmy. Ngomo and Abdi were taking a ribbing in their robes, their men kitted out in a similar fashion.

'What about Paul Holton?' Timkins asked.

'He may join us in a year or two, after he's had a break from fighting. Time ... is all relative.'

With a final check made, Handy and Mac now in attendance, Jimmy led everyone out, a few last cold beers downed in haste from bottles. At the side of the runway everyone halted for the press, a million images taken, waves given. Jimmy refused to be drawn on comments, and entered the portal's control room up metal steps.

Inside, he found the scientist responsible for it, most of who were brain trust kids. In the portal's Coil Room he gathered together all of the technicians, many of whom were either European, Chinese, or Russian.

'Ladies and gentlemen, I don't have the time nor the inclination to piss about. There are enough of you loyal to me to operate the machine, so if anyone tries to oppose our leaving I'll have you removed, or killed. I don't care. If you're in my way, you're in a bad place to be.' He pointed at a black scientist. 'You know the frequency I want. Start it up.'

They got to work, two Americans walking out to save their careers.

Facing the gang, Jimmy said, 'Don't think, step though and be done with it. Big breath, it doesn't hurt.'

With the portal open, Jimmy ran through, landing softly on hot and dusty sand, taking several steps away from the shimmering ring of light. The others followed him through.

'Move away quickly!' Jimmy shouted. They were soon all through, Jimmy walking forwards ten yards, a hand over his eyes, Ngomo's men spreading out in a defensive formation. They were alone, very, very alone, not so much as a camel on the horizon.

The portal crackled and disappeared.

'Eh ... Jimmy?' Mac called. Jimmy turned. 'Who're the fucking refugees?'

Jimmy strode forwards, finding that ten of the black technicians had jumped through. Since they were suitably attired and carrying backpacks, he figured that this was not just a spur of the moment thing. 'This is not a walk in the park, people. What's on your mind?'

'You will need scientists to invent things early on,' one said, the others nodding. 'Besides, we are here now, sir.'

'True ... on both accounts. And here you'll be for a very long time, assuming that we got the coordinates right and this is not 1520, or one million BC. Stay close.'

People stood in the heat with hands over their eyes, taking in the desert that one day would house Mawlini base.

Jimmy marked a line where the portal's event horizon had been. 'OK, people: go find some rocks and mark this line – your lives depend on it.'

With a line of rocks created, Ngomo placed a small nuclear-powered transponder underneath the rocks.

'OK, someone pace out one hundred yards due south, west and north ... and start digging while we have the daylight. C'mon, get the lead out!'

With deep holes dug at each location, large bags of diamonds were buried and covered over. Back at the main camp, Jimmy called everyone together. 'OK, spread out and sit down.' He waited. 'Go on, sit where you are.' They sat in the sand.

'OK, now everyone try and remember where the diamonds are. We'll take plenty with us, and come back for these in years to come. But I want no one coming here without contacting me first. The diamonds are one hundred paces in every direction except east, the portal is here, marked with rocks and the transponder. We don't have the technology to locate that transponder electronically yet ... not for thirty or forty years, but that's fine. In the years ahead we'll return to this place and make a base, making sure that the runway gets built in the exact same location. Now, many of you are black -'

'They're not, are they?' Mac asked, causing few laughs.

'So in this day and age you'll be treated badly by the white colonial English. Ngomo and Abdi, posing as chiefs with a bit of money, should do OK, but don't expect the use of hotel rooms or train carriages, not for around twenty years or so. And don't even think about talking to white women. Anna, you're built like a tank -'

They laughed. '- so god help any amorous white man who tries it on. Still, you *will* be treated like a lady, and not expected to comment on man-talk. Cosy, keep your wench in check.'

Everyone laughed.

'Anna and Cosy will start the orphanage, and they'll educate our foot soldiers of the future, as well as future leaders, workers and engineers; that's one of the priorities of the next five years. Abdi, you and your team can leave after this briefing, and head for Baardheere or the smaller border towns, thereafter to cause as much trouble to the Italians now in Somalia as you can.

'Use the diamonds and gold you have with you to cause insurrection in every village and town, it won't be too hard. Kill every Italian you come across. There are only a few thousand in the area, with just camels for transport, and they've taken a few kickings in recent times at the hands of the locals. Work your way up the coast, go around Mogadishu to start with, and cause dissent up to the border with British Somaliland, then work your way back down.

'Infiltrate Mogadishu, attack the Italians, and force them out. If they send more troops, let them land and settle before attacking them. You have five years, but I think a man of your calibre could

do it in less. If not, Ngomo will make fun of you for being a lazy bastard.'

People laughed, Ngomo wagging a finger towards Abdi.

Jimmy continued, 'Build up a spy network far and wide, start on roads and rail links when the Italians have gone and when the locals have both requested *and welcomed* the British. Oh, and a large orphanage. I don't expect to make contact with you for five years. We'll meet in Nairobi on January first, 1925. Don't be late!

'OK, everyone else I'll brief with their individual assignments as we progress, the first stage being to get ourselves to Nairobi, to buy a hotel, and to get used to things in this century.' He pointed at the scientists. 'I'd like two of you to volunteer to go with Abdi, to advise him on current politics, geography, and to invent things for him.'

Two raised their hands.

'OK, Abdi, take good care of them; I want them back in one piece. Everyone else, I want you now to check your pockets and bags for any future technology ... and to declare it to me.'

People stood. The scientists said, 'We have our laptops, with all of the world's technical data.'

'That could be a problem,' Jimmy pointed out.

'They are password protected, and we've fitted a self destruct mechanism.'

'Self ... destruct?'

'If not used by us ... they explode.'

'Shit,' Mac let out. 'Don't press the wrong fucking key!'

'OK,' Jimmy agreed. 'Everyone else, check what you have.'

'What about paper-backs?' Sykes asked.

'Study them for the next few weeks, make notes, but then burn them.'

'We have our watches and mobile phones,' the scientists admitted.

'Dig a hole near the line of rocks, and put them all in it. And anyone else with stuff they shouldn't have ... dump it in that hole. Make it a deep hole, four or five feet, rocks on top. The rest of you set up camp, we'll leave at dawn.'

Abdi stepped closer. 'We'll be going now.' They shook.

'Play the spider. Look and listen, learn, don't attack the British.'

Everyone bade Abdi and his men farewell, a few rude comments made about goat shagging.

With the camp made, bedrolls laid out and numerous fires going, Ngomo's men took the perimeter, Big Paul's men sat around.

Everyone was soon under the stars, the temperature falling, but spirits were high, plans being made and discussed.

At dawn the party broke camp, marched a hundred yards southwest and halted, Ngomo's men sent back to check the camp and to remove any traces of the group's presence. A pair of glasses were found, no one admitting to them since all had been injected with the blood, and a piece of plastic equipment that no one could figure out what it came off. They set off again, walking briskly.

'Uh, boss,' Timkins called to Jimmy. 'I was never injected with a strong variant of the blood, just the basic to keep the germs away.'

'I know. And as a politician with a long period in office we'll need you to age gracefully.'

'Oh.'

'How old are you now?'

'Twenty four, sir.'

'You'll live long enough, don't worry. You may end up looking like Mac, but you'll survive.'

'Fuck off,' came from somewhere, people laughing as they humped their heavy loads across the sand.

Ten miles on, they neared the town that they knew would one day supply Mawlini in their era. Ngomo and his men went forwards, soon back with eight horses, feed for the horses as well as grain, and a few freshly killed chickens.

'Put the packs on the horses and walk them. Ngomo, put two men on horses to scout around, and up ahead. OK people, it's a three day walk to the nearest train terminal, so just grin and bear it.'

They skirted around the small town, soon heading southwest, sweating in the midday heat. They halted from 2pm to 4pm, marching till sundown. Finding a road that was easy enough to follow at night, they elected to continue onwards – Anna cursing her choice of dress. At dawn they halted at a green oasis, faces splashed with cool water, camp made. A local herder was offered gold for a few goats, the animals soon killed, and cooking over an open fire.

'This is how the original explorers did it,' Sykes remarked, nibbling on goat meat. 'Under the stars with a compass. It's quite ... nostalgic.'

'It's beautiful here,' Anna commented. 'I miss things like this. I camped in Africa as a girl, under the stars.'

'I miss the jungle sometimes,' Cosy admitted. 'But in the French Foreign Legion it was all desert training, West Africa.'

'I hate the outdoors,' Timkins admitted. 'And ... heat and bugs.'

‘Not to worry, you’ll soon be in chilly old England,’ Jimmy assured him. ‘Your battleground will be smoke filled gentlemen’s clubs, and town halls in Wales, pounding out the rhetoric.’

‘What’s he going to do?’ Mac asked.

‘He ... is our choice of future British Prime Minister,’ Jimmy explained.

‘What ... during the war?’ Jack puzzled.

‘No, that will be Churchill. Timkins will be part of the opposition, but in the coalition government.’

‘Have it sewn up from all sides,’ Sykes noted.

‘Stack the deck,’ Jack said. ‘And after the war?’

‘Hopefully, young Mister Timkins will become Prime Minister for one or two terms,’ Jimmy explained.

Ngomo stepped over. ‘There’s someone on a horse in the distance, watching us.’

‘Kill him,’ Jimmy said. ‘And double the guard.’

Big Paul got his arse kicked up, stag duty started.

‘Who do you think it could be?’ Timkins nervously asked. Not the outdoors type.

‘In this time period ... Arabs from Ethiopia and Sudan raiding south,’ Jimmy suggested. ‘It was common. I mean, it is common ... for this time.’

An hour later, the roar of horses could be heard. ‘Incoming!’ people shouted.

Jimmy eased up. ‘Kill the riders, not the horses! Try and capture the horses!’

Ngomo’s men opened up from four hundred yards with laser pistols fitted with night sights, something of a mismatch. It took several hours, but most of the horses were eventually rounded up, soon most everyone riding, just five left walking, forty bodies left in the sand for the vultures.

The following day they reached the train halt, the horses simply let go to wander around. The train halt consisted of just a small brick building, a local man with a telegraph machine offering a puzzled look at the rich white folk on foot.

‘We’d like passage to Nairobi, please,’ Jimmy said in a local dialect, surprising the man.

‘Tomorrow, sir.’

‘Will the train stop?’

‘Yes, sir, I put up the flag.’

‘Will there be a box car big enough for us all?’

‘Yes, sir, but you go in the First Class.’

‘Of course. Do we pay you, my friend?’

‘No, sir, the conductor man.’

‘Thanks.’ Jimmy faced the gang. ‘Make camp, train will be here tomorrow. Ngomo, buy some local livestock, there’re a few farms around.’

The conductor stared incredulously at the scene, at white folk camping in the dirt.

With a good supply of local water available – albeit a little brackish, goats bought and killed, and news of the train, spirits were high, something of a party atmosphere around the various campfires.

At noon the following day the gang were stood waiting ready, a cover story decided upon for any inquisitors on the train, everyone briefed, Mac and Big Paul asked to pretend that they had their tongues cut out. Many of the scientists would act as bearers to the white folk, the rest assigned to Chief Ngomo.

They heard the train before they saw it, soon a smoke stack visible on the shimmering horizon. Steffan Silo was salivating, Sykes keen to ride again in a steam train; he had been born on one in India. The locomotive trundled into the halt, hissing steam, an image seen in many dated films. Ngomo led his people towards the rear of the train and boarded a boxcar that already housed a few local blacks. The remainder followed Jimmy to the forward carriages of the train. The soldiers in the group headed for Second Class, Jimmy and the others in First Class, a tight squeeze with them all aboard.

With the train pulling off slowly, the conductor was sent towards Jimmy, who was paying for everyone.

‘Sir, the gentlemen in Second Class say that you will be paying for everyone in your party, as well as the blacks.’

‘Of course, they are with me,’ Jimmy responded. ‘How much to Nairobi?’

‘How many are there, sir?’

‘Thirty in Second Class I believe, twelve here.’

‘That would be ... forty shillings in total, sir.’

‘Will you accept British Pounds?’ Jimmy asked.

‘Yes, sir.’

Jimmy produced a wad of old English pounds, handing over four pounds. ‘That should cover it.’

‘I’ll fetch your change, sir.’

‘No need, put it towards our tea and food. Any left, and it’s a tip for you and the staff.’

‘Very generous of you, sir.’

With the conductor gone, and the train chuffing along and picking up speed, a voice said, 'Where did you come from back there? You seem to have sprung out of nowhere?'

It was a British Army captain in a beige uniform, sat near Jack and Sykes.

Sykes turned to the officer. 'Our party was on a hunt for the ruins of a lost city in the desert - some are archaeologists down from Cairo. But one evening the wretched locals watching our horses stole the lot. We walked a day and a night to the train stop, lucky really.'

'You *were* lucky, lots of raiders in these parts. I'm Captain Houhgton-Smythe, Thirteenth Lancers.'

'The Thirteenth?' Sykes queried. 'I thought they were still in India?'

'The Regiment shipped over six months ago. And you are..?'

'Sir Reginald Arthur Sykes, of Cambourne. Where did you school?'

'Marlborough and Oxford.'

'Ah, Marlborough. I was there for two glorious years before my father shipped me out here; finished my education with tutors here in Africa, a degree in Cairo. Still, it made a man of me. This is my assistant, Jack, and the rather large and menacing looking gentleman is the legendary Jimmy Silo.'

At that point, a black waiter stopped near Jimmy, Jimmy exchanging many words in a local dialect.

'You ... speak the lingo,' the captain noted.

'It would be rude not to, it is their country,' Jimmy responded.

'Something of a sympathiser, are we?' the captain asked in a disapproving tone.

'It would be unwise to upset him,' Sykes pointed out. 'Mister Silo ... was found as a baby in the deepest Congo jungle, raised by a local tribe, his parents unknown. Missionaries found him when he was eight years old and educated him in the Congo. Since then, Mister Silo has been the only outsider allowed to get near the fabled diamond mines of the Congo, but each time he returns he has to fight the strongest warrior in the tribe, hand to hand to the death. Of course, what came next shocked me when I went with him on a trip.

'It took us three months to reach the place, hellish area. Anyway, once Jimmy had killed the strongest warrior he cut out the chap's heart, cooked it and ate it, right in front of me.'

People hid their grins.

‘Quite ... quite a tale,’ the captain remarked, as if he might not believe it.

Jimmy handed over a huge diamond.

‘Crikey! That’s worth a king’s ransom.’

Jimmy took it back.

Sykes said, ‘He brings back as many as he likes - after he’s killed the strongest warrior of course - which is why he’s so rich.’

The waiter brought out silver teapots, dry biscuits and cake, everyone soon tucking in, the captain still taken aback by the very tall tale, yet seemingly believing it. And Sykes had made it up on the spot, enjoying the captain’s discomfort. And for the next six hours Sykes pumped the captain for information about local movements, attitudes and personalities in place around Kenya, the rest of the gang just enjoying the scenery.

Approaching Nairobi, Jimmy called for the conductor. ‘Where, in Nairobi, would be a good hotel for my travelling companion, Chief Ngomo, to stay? Which hotels take blacks?’

‘Well, sir, if they’re educated blacks then a few hotels will take them, but he best try the hotel opposite the station.’

‘And the largest hotel in the city?’ Jimmy asked.

‘The Empire Hotel, sir.’

‘The owner?’

‘Mister Duval, I believe, sir. From Belgium.’

The wooden huts of a shantytown began to appear as the train slowed, the train soon squeaking to a halt in a Nairobi without any high-rise hotels, or rooftop bars, or an airport. Exiting the crowded station, Jimmy led his people to the street, waiting for the blacks. When Ngomo drew near, Jimmy pointed at the large hotel opposite. ‘Get rooms for a few days, I’ll come back when ready.’

Ngomo nodded, leading the blacks across the road, dodgy museum piece cars curiously observed by the gang, the gang itself observed by armed police and numerous soldiers. Jimmy asked directions to the Empire Hotel and led his team off, a ten minute walk, few features seeming to remind him of the modern-day city. Inside the hotel’s spacious foyer, Jimmy approached the desk.

‘Mister Duval, please.’

The white manager bowed his head and fetched the boss as Jimmy took in the white colonial stock sat about in wicker chairs, reading large newspapers and sipping lemonade.

‘How can I help?’ Duval asked with an accent.

‘I’d like rooms for my party, and I’d like to buy this hotel.’

‘This hotel, sir, is not for sale.’

Jimmy pulled out a pouch, and sprinkled a long line of diamonds onto the counter. Duval stared at the diamonds for a moment, before finally picking one up and examining it. He retrieved an eyepiece and examined a diamond in great detail.

‘Excellent workmanship. European, I believe. And these are worth four times the value of this hotel, sir.’

Jimmy took back a third of the diamonds. ‘Those ... are yours if you sell your hotel to me right now.’

Duval took a moment, but then placed the diamonds into a white envelope, pocketing them. From a back room he retrieved a set of deeds and handed them over. ‘I will be gone in the morning.’

‘No hurry. But please, move out the guests, compensate them, put up a “closed” sign.’

‘As you wish.’ Duval faced the manager, who stood looking worried. ‘Arrange rooms for your new master.’

‘*You* ... will be kept on,’ Jimmy told them man. ‘What do you earn?’

‘Three shillings a week, sir.’

‘That’s now four shillings a week. Kindly show my staff to their rooms.’

A few people had to double up, three soldiers in one room, but everyone got in, Po and Yuri sharing a room. The guests objected to being moved on, some actually living in the hotel full time, but they were well compensated. By noon the next day the hotel was both owned by Jimmy - and now closed to the public. The last few guests were kicked out, word sent down to Ngomo’s party, who now all moved across, many doubling up, some making use of the staff quarters for now.

That evening, everyone ate in the main restaurant, the white staff a little put out by the blacks in the mix, even the black waiters puzzled. Still, their wages had been doubled. Rudd was put in charge of the hotel for now, told to go out with Cosy and buy decent food and booze in the morning, whilst everyone else was told to start reading the local papers and to get up to speed on events and attitudes of Kenya in 1920, as well as world politics.

In small groups, people ventured out over the next few days, to get a feel for the city, many buying new clothes from local shops. Those clothes were odd, to say the least, and took some getting used to. There were no boxer shorts, just itchy woollen undergarments that the guys cut the legs off. Having done that, they itched all the more. Finding ladies silk underwear, shaped like boxers, the guys took to wearing those. Shirts came without collars, the collars separate and very stiff. Collars were attached

after a shirt was placed on, a bow tie the norm. Hats around Nairobi were often straw and lightweight, light beige suits common, not too many dark suits - and no grey suits evident. And trousers, they had button flies, not zips, and took a little getting used to.

Jimmy bought two cars, everyone getting a turn at driving them at the rear of the hotel, the scientists fascinated by them. Then Jimmy tackled the local bank. He wandered in with Rudd and Cosy, Big Paul providing backup, and told the bank staff that the new owner of the Empire Hotel wished to open an account.

An old English gent appeared, showing Jimmy's group to a side office. 'How can I be of service?'

'I'd like to open an account here, as well as establishing lines of credit in Mombasa - and many other cities in Africa.'

'Very good, sir. And how much money did you wish to deposit?'

Jimmy handed over a wad. 'Those English pounds for now, but I would like a loan against the diamonds I possess.'

'Diamonds, sir?'

Jimmy handed over a pouch, pouring the diamonds onto the desk.

'My, my. They ... would be worth a very great deal, sir.'

'Would it be possible for you to arrange the sale of some of them for me, perhaps in Europe. I would offer a ten percent fee.'

'Ten percent ... would be most generous, Mister Silo.'

'If that process worked well, I would sell diamonds like that through you on a regular basis. In the meantime, please have them appraised and valued, credit given to me for ... say, fifty percent.'

'More than acceptable, sir. I'll get the forms and open the account ready. You say ... Mombasa? We have a branch there.'

'I'll be buying land to start an orphanage down there. This is Rudd and this is Cosy, my managers, and they will deal with you here and in Mombasa in my name.'

'An orphanage? How much land do you wish to acquire? We could, naturally, handle the transaction and legal arrangements.'

'I would like ten thousand acres of land.'

'Ten ... thousand?'

'Yes, for the orphanage and its farmland.'

'I ... will send a telegram today, sir, to our branch in Mombasa.'

'There is land near a village called Bel-ooto. I want land east of it, towards the sea.'

'Very good, sir.'

'And if you can recommend a building firm in Mombasa...'

‘Colonel Sir Clive Dawson, a member of my club, could accommodate you there. He has interests here and in Mombasa.’

‘Fine, kindly arrange a meeting at my hotel when it suits him. And, in the meantime, I’m also interested in buying a hotel in Mombasa; perhaps you could handle the detail and sale, charging me a commission.’

‘Indeed yes, sir. Leave it with me.’

Toy trains

Steffan Silo travelled down to Mombasa with two bodyguards aboard a delightful old steam train, and found an office that said, “Mombasa Steam Company”. He entered, asking for the owner.

The owner, a British aristocrat, came out a few minutes, rudely looking Steffan over. ‘How can I be of service?’ he begrudgingly got out.

‘I’m Steffan Silo, *adopted* step-brother of Jimmy Silo – we grew up in the same missionary. He’s ... very rich, and I’m an engineer – trains and track. My brother has business interests in many places, including the Congo -’

‘The Congo?’ the man puzzled. ‘What ... interests in the Congo? Does he collect flies?’

Steffan forced a polite smile. ‘He was raised there.’

‘Raised there?’

‘Yes, and as such knows where the diamond mines are.’ Steffan handed over a large diamond.

‘By god, that’s ... that’s priceless.’

‘That, sir, is yours to keep, a gift from my brother.’

‘A ... a gift. This?’

‘A ... down payment towards future business deals. We would like you to lay track for us, and with our guidance and assistance.’

‘Track ... to where?’

Steffan produced a map that he had brought. On it he drew the existing railroads around the region, adding in the planned first stage of a new stretch.

‘That’s difficult country, as well as a great deal of track,’ the business owner cautioned. ‘Does your brother have deep pockets?’

‘Very deep pockets. And we have a gold mine.’

‘Dear god. And you say he’s called Jimmy Silo?’

‘Yes, he now owns the Empire Hotel in Nairobi, you can find him there. So, just as fast as you can, we’d like you to apply for permissions and licences, and to start laying track; for each section

of a mile completed we'll pay you an agreed rate. Oh, send your estimates to the hotel when you can, but you can consider this a formal engagement of your services. Also, are you interested in having my brother as a financial partner in this business, a limited company with shares?'

'It sounds like he would be a very worthwhile partner.'

'Have that diamond valued, and if it's enough issue us fifty percent of the stock. We'll then make a director's loan in to the business.'

Steffan left a stunned aristocrat holding a large diamond.

A few days later the man was at the hotel and asking for Jimmy, let in and offered a table by Rudd, cool lemonade brought out. The man came with his Nairobi solicitor and his existing partners in the business.

'So, how much was that diamond worth?' Jimmy asked straight out.

'Enough to buy my business three times over,' the man admitted.

'Then you won't mind issuing me with fifty percent.'

'We have the certificates with us. And, as honourable men, we'll sell the diamond in Europe and then put the money into the new venture.'

'As you see fit, but take a little something out for yourselves.' Jimmy handed over small diamonds to each of the men. 'For wives and girlfriends.'

'Most generous, Mister Silo.'

'Now, let's talk about roads. As the train track progresses through various places, we'll need good road access to place the track, but I'm also thinking that a good new road would help in the future to move things by truck. I'd like you to arrange for roads to follow the track, tarmac roads, good quality so that I can run trucks up and down.'

'If we expanded the business, we could handle the roads as well, we have the gangs ... and it's similar work.'

'Fine, but involve my brother every step of the way; he's excellent at these sorts of things. And, you can build the orphanage as well if you like.'

'Orphanage?'

'I'll be raising an orphanage near Mombasa, a rather large one, so you can get cracking on that if you like. I have a line of credit with the banks around here, so you can get bills paid easily enough. If you deal with my manager, Rudd here, you can make a start

when ready – he has the designs. The orphanage will be run by a lady doctor from Holland, name of Anna – bit of a missionary.’

‘We could meet you there in a day or two,’ they keenly offered; Jimmy was giving them enough work to keep them occupied the rest of their lives.

With the guests gone, Jimmy said to Rudd, ‘Find another hotel, one with a large ballroom, and offer to buy it. We need our own nightclub to meet the powerful local *white folk*.’

Rudd nodded, heading out.

Jimmy found Anna and Cosy in the warm conservatory, joining them. ‘Builders are sorted for the orphanage, they’ll meet you down there in a day or two. So ... pack your stuff, get a hotel room in Mombasa, and ... build a ruddy great orphanage. First, a big fence, then hire some guards. Then a house for you two, large and secure – and comfortable of course. Then builder’s shacks, barrack rooms for workers, and ... well, make a start on the layout.’

‘I’ve found a few teachers already,’ Anna keenly reported.

‘To start with, try and use the scientists that came back with us. There are a few educated black teachers around the place, so ... hopefully not too many questions. And they all grew up in Ebede – or in an orphanage, so that helps. I want a block built for just them – a very nice block – complete with workshops and a garden.’

‘As they had in China, the original group,’ Cosy noted.

Jimmy nodded. ‘For now, just keep them safe – and away from prying eyes. But let them start building things in the workshops as well as teaching. And for now, Doc Graham is the orphanage doctor. Oh, take two of Ngomo’s men, and be careful – this is 1920!’

With Yuri and Po wandering in, Jimmy excused himself and joined them. ‘Are you ready?’

‘We’ve read the newspapers back to front,’ Yuri complained.

‘We know what we do,’ Po insisted.

‘When you’re ready ... take two of the British guards and get the train down to Mombasa, steam ship to Singapore and then Hong Kong. Hide the diamonds well, I’ll send more on.’

‘We go tomorrow,’ Po insisted. ‘I want see old Hong Kong.’

‘Have a good trip, and stay safe. And remember, a slow and steady build up.’

A week later Jimmy bought another large hotel, but this time he didn’t kick out the resident guests. The hotel received a lick of paint, a few new curtains, and the dancehall received a modern touch. Side rooms were created, small wine bars set up, a balcony built. The club was advertised in the local paper - which was read

by the local white folk - and would be open on a Friday and Saturday night. Its rival, the only other decent spot to hang out in, suddenly burnt down. What a mystery.

The club opened the following Friday, Rudd playing host and manager, a few of the British soldiers acting as bouncers – if need be. The numbers were good, the atmosphere good, many British officers turning up in uniform. Sykes and Jack worked the room, meeting many people, and spreading the word about the roads and rail links into the hinterland.

At one point, the British Governor put in an appearance, now keen to meet Jimmy having heard the rumours. ‘Mister Silo.’ They shook.

‘Please, let me get you a drink,’ Jimmy told the rotund and elderly Governor, a retired General. They sat. ‘Glad that you’re here actually, I wanted your help.’

‘Oh yes?’

‘I operate mines - as you may have heard - but I fancy having a go at oil.’

‘No oil around these parts,’ the Governor said dismissively, wiping his brow with a handkerchief.

‘So people think, but I know of a spot where it seeps out the ground, so there must be oil underneath.’

‘Well, yes, I suppose. In Kenya?’

‘No, in Tanzania and in the Congo.’

‘Well, not much I can do to help you there.’

‘Could you get me an audience with the right people in Tanzania?’

‘I could write a letter of introduction, send you down to my colleagues in Dar es Salaam.’

‘That would be start,’ Jimmy acknowledged. He handed over a modest diamond, but still worth a few year’s pay for the Governor. ‘For the woman in your life.’

‘I hope that this does not come with strings attached,’ the Governor warned.

‘If it worries your conscience, throw it away.’

‘I understand you’re now on the board of the Mombasa Steam Company.’ The Governor pocketed the diamond.

‘Yes.’

‘What are your intentions there?’

‘I aim to pay for new roads, and for a new railway track to cross Africa near the Equator, starting with the track into the Congo jungle.’

'You'll lose half your workers to Malaria in the first month,' the man scoffed.

'Then I'll hire more,' Jimmy said with a false smile. 'And I'll keep hiring them. I aim to open up that region. And, as Governor of Kenya, you could be of great service to me ... and to the British Empire.'

'Indeed?'

'Where I lay track and roads, British businessmen will follow, and our soldiers can make use the track.'

'Our ... soldiers? They say you were raised in the jungle.'

'I was, but I was found with British clothing, so I guess that my parents were British.'

'Have you tried to identify them?'

'No, I have no interest. But I shall visit England soon.'

'You've not been?' the Governor struggled with.

'I've been to China, Russia, but not England yet. Although I have read many books, and studied the maps.'

'And they say you speak Nilote and Bantu.'

'I speak fifteen dialects.'

'Fifteen?'

'As well as fluent Russian and Chinese.'

'Crikey. And these stories of fights to the death?'

'Oh, they're true enough.'

'Well, I wouldn't advertise stuff like that if I was you.'

'One should never hide one's darker side, Governor; it always slips out. I'm a dangerous man ... when provoked.'

'And yet you're set to build your own orphanage, something of a contradiction in character.'

'Not at all Governor. I love the local people, and wish to help them with a good education and a Christian upbringing, firm discipline and guidance – as I benefited from.'

The Governor cocked an eyebrow.

An hour later, one particular young officer got himself a bit drunk. As Jimmy walked past, the officer said, 'Hey, you ya big ox.' Jimmy turned. 'They say you were raised by the wogs.'

The man's companions sniggered.

'That's correct,' Jimmy confirmed. 'Did you ... have something to say?'

'Yes: get back to the jungle, wog.'

Jimmy stepped closer. 'Perhaps you would like to back up your words.'

'I'd give you a good thrashing, my man.'

'I'd like to see that.'

'I boxed for my college, you big dumb ox.'

'So, you should be able to knock me down then,' Jimmy suggested, taking off his jacket. Those in earshot moved back, Rudd waving to the band to stop playing. The young officer put down his drink and unbuttoned his tunic. Jimmy pulled off his bow tie and unbuttoned his shirt, the Governor now keenly observing.

With Jimmy's shirt off, the young officers seemed less sure of themselves, the loud mouth swallowing. Still, he put up his fists and stepped closer.

'Take the first punch, your best shot,' Jimmy offered the officer.

The young officer hit Jimmy, hardly a reaction from the big guy.

'Harder please, that was like a mosquito flying into me.'

The man struck again, everyone now focused on the scene.

'Again, you punch like a girl.'

The young officer took a good swing at Jimmy, landing his best punch with little effect.

'Keep going, and I might eventually feel it,' Jimmy encouraged.

The officer hit Jimmy a dozen times, cutting Jimmy's lip, but failing to move him.

'If that's the best you have, we'll be here all night. I've been hit harder by ten year old girls.'

The officer tried one last time. Jimmy caught the man's forearm, breaking it like a twig, the audience gasping – and horrified. The young officer yelped, falling to his knees.

'You may wish to have that seen to,' Jimmy commended. He faced the guests. 'I'll give a thousand pounds to any man that can knock me down.' He waited, but he had no takers, putting his shirt back on as the music started back up.

The Governor closed in. 'Dear god, man. I can see those stories about you are no stories.'

'I apologise for that vulgar display, Governor. It was ... crude of me. I'll compensate the young officer.'

'He learnt his lesson well enough.'

'Will I still receive your kind assistance, Governor?' Jimmy asked as he put his jacket back on.

'I ... retire in six months, officially,' the Governor thought he might mention.

'I'd always have a use for a man with your experience and connections, on the board of the Steam Company – with a good salary.'

'Then I think we understand each other,' the Governor said before he retired for the night. And Jimmy, he found himself

cornered by an attractive twenty-three year girl fresh from England.

‘My dear,’ Jimmy began. ‘Are you trying to bite off more than you could chew? I am ... older, larger, and I eat young ladies for breakfast.’

‘You don’t scare me,’ she teased.

Jimmy cocked an eyebrow. ‘Is ... your family here?’

‘Yes, my father is a Colonel stationed here. I’ve just graduated in medicine, one of the first ladies to do so, and now I have a placement here; Nairobi hospital. My uncle is senior registrar there, otherwise I would have never been accepted.’

‘A doctor, eh? And what do you know of me?’

‘Just what I’ve heard, and what I just saw.’

‘What you just saw ... was a vulgar display that should not have happened.’

‘They say you speak the local tongue.’

‘I do.’

‘I came here to help the local people; I’m not a snob. In London, I gave my time freely on weekends for a clinic in the East End. And, since you have a great deal of money, plus a natural fondness for the locals...’

‘Yes...?’

‘I was wondering if you would like to fund a small clinic for the poor, on weekends.’

Jimmy called over Rudd. ‘Rudd, this young lady doctor from England would like to build a clinic for the poor locals, to be operated on the weekends. Give her everything she needs and asks for.’

‘OK, boss.’ Rudd faced her. ‘I’ll find a building tomorrow.’

‘Just like that?’ she asked.

‘Ask the right question, of the right person, at the right time ... and you can get anything,’ Jimmy told her.

‘Tuesday evening, 7pm, dinner, here.’ She walked off.

‘Pushy for this day and age,’ Rudd noted, watching her walk off.

‘A true missionary, and there were many of them.’

A week later the “Silo Clinic” was created, Doc Graham recalled from Ebede to run it. The young lady, Helen Astor, worked weekends, and Jimmy bought her dinner every Tuesday night. And Doc Graham, he injected the sick locals with a blood product – but only when no one was about.

Mac and Handy were itching to get started and to do something, Jimmy indicating that they would come with him to Canada in a

year or so. In the meantime, he agreed to let them start work with a local munitions manufacturer, the company making both bolt-action rifles and the required ammunition.

A month later Jimmy bought fifty-one percent of the munitions business, and duly made a large loan to the company as a director, Mac and Handy on the board and busy refining the bolt action technology. When everyone at the company was convinced that the two men were just mere mortals, as well as a pair of rude drunks, Mac and Handy started work on a simple automatic rifle. Such weapons already existed, as did machineguns, but this little baby would someday be an AK47. Jimmy then sent Mac off to visit the brain trust kids, now housed at the new Ebede orphanage, and the scientists advised on the metallurgy of the weapon. Having made it clear that the existing steel wouldn't do, Mac bought a foundry in Mombasa, the steel being reworked to a formula given by the scientists.

A few weeks later they had a barrel that might suit automatic fire, and a crude mechanism. Ammunition was specified, 7.62mm standard, and its quality slowly improved over the weeks. With cordite based ammunition, and a basic mechanism, Mac fired rounds at sandbanks till the mechanism jammed, and then refined the mechanism, wearing down a few barrels in the process. The scientists advised Mac with sketches and dimensions, being asked to invent some suitable grease from the oil products of the day.

Meanwhile, Ngomo was also requesting something interesting to do, more interesting than protecting the hotel. Jimmy went to see the Governor, the man now promised a good job when he retired in a few months.

'Governor, I'd like to recruit some blacks, and to train them to fight in the Congo. As you know it's a hellish place, bandits aplenty. They'd be a private army, under my control.'

'You don't really need my permission for that, there are many such men here used to protect various estates.'

'I'd like it done properly, well organised, with former British Army officers. And, they'd be available for the British Army to use if need be.'

'I'm sure that we could sanction such a regiment. And, with former officers, no one would have cause for objection.'

'I have a group of black sergeants that I trained myself, and they would be utilised, working under the British officers.'

'These ... blacks?'

'Would run you down and eat your heart, yes. They are a tough bunch, hardy fellows suited to the rigours of the jungle.'

'I'll write up a formal permission.'

'I'll call them ... the Kenyan Rifles, and give you patronage as honorary Colonel in Chief.'

'Kind of you.'

'But keep in mind that these men would ... fight my kind of war, no Queensbury Rules. They'd go into the jungle and hunt down the bandits, no mercy shown.'

The Governor eased back in his chair. 'Killing is killing, whether it be with a rifle, or an artillery shell. I ... lost a son in the Great War, and my notion of civilised warfare went with him.'

'If you could, kindly find a dozen officers nearing retirement,' Jimmy requested.

'Just try the local bars; there's plenty of them just sat there propping up a stool!'

'Indeed.'

Jimmy found suitable land north of Nairobi and bought it, Ngomo soon hard at work clearing it with his men, labourers brought in. Rudd organised supplies, barrack rooms soon under construction, a fence erected. The Kenyan Rifles had been born, in late 1920.

Mac and Handy then whinged about the formation of the Rifles – and their lack of input, Jimmy relenting and agreeing that they could have a hand in the new regiment for now. They were destined to travel to Canada with him.

Rudd bought bolt-action rifles easily enough - no license needed, and shipped a thousand to the new Rifles base, an armoury created. Uniforms were cheap to buy, but Jimmy wanted a new design. Hell, the people here had never seen the uniforms of our era, and they were just uniforms. Jimmy was also busy interviewing suitable officers, either retired at a young age - or those about to retire. He selected ten men, plus a Colonel with an advanced attitude for the day. That man favoured sneak attacks and snipers, having served in the First World War's ghastly trenches.

Warfare, but not as you know it

Doc Graham had inoculated all of the new officers with Jimmy's blood extract, a clear liquid. They all fell sick for a day before recovering. A week later they were stood in front of Jimmy at the new base, puzzling the blacks in odd uniforms, Mac and Handy also now in uniform.

‘Gentlemen,’ Jimmy called. ‘Like some of you who fought in the last war ... I do not favour trenches, nor static warfare. We are putting together a new regiment to fight in the jungle, and the first thing that you will learn is that there are no rules – it’s the law of the jungle. Your enemy will sneak up on you, try and poison you, set trip wires, and hide in the bushes. If you try and fight like British soldiers you’ll die, and it won’t be a quick death.’

‘I have a great deal of experience of soldiering, so do the men you can see, and we all have a great deal of experience of the jungle and the deserts; these black soldiers that you can see have been fighting in the jungle for twenty years. It would be foolish to assume that you could teach them anything. They all speak perfect English and are well educated; you will have no problems with them. But if you disrespect them, then they’ll have my permission to leave you in the jungle.’

‘Now, I don’t believe that an officer should ever ask his men to do anything that he’s not prepared to do himself. So, before you can lead men, we need to see that you can do everything they can. Starting today we’ll exercise you, working up your strength and endurance. We’ll then teach you to shoot and fight our way, including hand to hand. If you have a problem with that, then you should leave now. Those that stay, and do well, will get an annual bonus equivalent to a year’s pay – as a bounty. You’ll all get houses, all of your food and drink covered, even cars to use. So, first things first: Mac, Handy, take these fine gentlemen for a run, please.’

With the officers heading off, and about to discover that they were suddenly a lot fitter, Ngomo closed in. ‘How long do we have to mould them?’

‘You’ve got ten years, so no hurry. When we do have a few decent men they’ll protect convoys in the Congo. Then, around 1930, we may pick a fight with the Italians. By then I’ll want around four thousand men. So, start with a select few, hoping to make them good officers and NCO’s in five years.’

‘And weapons, jeeps?’

‘We’ll have an AK47 prototype in a year or two, but we need to be very careful with it; can’t have anyone else producing them. In Canada I’ll set up a decent munitions plant, because they’re not geared up for it around here. When we have enough soldiers we’ll go for the gold in the Congo.’

‘A long hike!’

‘That’s why the train track is taking priority, old friend. Relax, take it slow, do it right.’

A week later Jimmy returned, observing white officers being barked at by black instructors on a live-firing range. Jimmy stepped up to the Colonel. 'How's it going, Colonel?'

'Well, we're all running like mad march hares, ten or more miles a day. And your blacks - they know their stuff alright. This fast and loose warfare I like, small formation attacks.'

'We'll have a few better rifles for you soon enough. In the meantime, I want each of you to shoot a playing card at four hundred paces.'

'We're expending around three hundred rounds a day each. It was never like this with the Army; you do have deep pockets.'

'And I look after those who look after me. How are the cars?'

'Great, thanks for allocating them to us. We each have one to get back and forth, a truck for supplies. Canteen here is OK, and I think Mister Ngomo has found the first ten black soldiers.'

Jimmy went and found Ngomo. When Jimmy entered the barrack room, Ngomo jumped up. 'Stand up!' The recruits jumped up, Ngomo saluting. 'Mister Silo, sir.'

'Thank you, Mister Ngomo,' Jimmy offered. 'Please, sit.' Jimmy sat, soon conversing in a local dialect, pleasing the local men greatly, each man made to feel welcome and needed. They were also well paid and well fed for Kenyan blacks in 1920.

Outside, Jimmy bumped into Mac. 'How they doing?'

'The lads? They're thick as two short planks!'

'Start classes for them; now that they've been injected they can stay up late and study. Get local teachers, work them hard.'

'Ain't like the modern day Kenyans, wees starting 'em from scratch. They don't speak no English!'

'Yours is not great either.'

'Aye, bollocks.'

'What timescale you on for the AKs?'

'Six months to make them reliable, no point otherwise. And the local manufacturer could only make ... say, ten a week.'

'We don't need many to start with, but we do need them to be reliable. Expand that company a little, and get some lathes and metal presses sent down from Europe.'

'You still seeing that young bird?' Mac broached.

'We have dinner each week and ... that's all. I have a nice black girl at the hotel for massages and oral.'

'We found the local brothel,' Mac said with a grin. 'Some ain't too bad when you're pissed.'

'Mac, you're a credit to the British Army.'

'Where's Cookie been?'

'He's at the nightclub, trying to teach them to cook. Food here is ... unimaginative. He's importing sauces and spices.'

'Aye, that should help. Dry chicken is just dry chicken.'

'There is an Indian restaurant,' Jimmy pointed out.

'Where!' Mac shouted.

'Beyond the hospital, down a lane. It's not too bad.'

'Fucker, you kept that quiet.'

'I told them at the hotel, so don't blame me. Sykes and Jack are always there.'

'Thursday night is curry night from now on then! The lad gone?'

'Timkins? Yes, off to England. He's found a family that died down here, a son about the right age, no close relatives - we checked. He's going to assume that identity. Back in the UK he'll buy a house, and then get started on local politics; Sykes and Jack will back him up when they go. For now they're spying on a few people for me. They checked out these officers before we took them on.'

That Friday night, our officers were sore and bruised, tired, but enjoying it so far, each man amazed by their newfound strength and vitality. Jimmy introduced them to the Indian restaurant, two of the men having served in India and used to the food.

Jimmy sat with a pint of beer in hand, a finished curry on the table, taking in the restaurant. He shook his head; it could have been England in 1984, Big Paul now on seconds.

When Jimmy mentioned the modern appearance of the place to Sykes, Sykes informed him that the first Indian restaurant opened in London in 1850, serving people who had returned from the colony.

New Year, 1920

The New Year was celebrated at the club, a full turnout of the great and the good of Nairobi, both the club and its infamous owner now known to everyone. If you wanted to be connected, you attended the club.

After New Year, Big Paul was dispatched with six of the British soldiers, a list of people to *dispatch* around Europe, a few in England itself. The team would be gone for up to a year. Skids had been sent off to buy safari land, right where River View would be someday,

and was now organising safaris for the British nobility to keep himself busy.

A group of eight of Big Paul's gang were then dispatched to Zanzibar with laser pistols. There, they massacred all the adult males in three villages, including an elderly Sultan. None of the local men were spared, their houses burnt, all of the men from the ruling clan perishing. And none of the offspring, from what would have been the troublesome ruling tribal faction, would reach a position of power on the island, their rivals would. The great grandfathers of the terrorists of 2010 would not produce offspring.

The old governor of Kenya had retired, only to then start work at the Steam Company part-time, but had worked a deal with the Governor of Tanzania to secure oil rights for Jimmy. A new company, Central Africa Resources Ltd was duly created, the former governor now on the board. The new company was granted oil exploration and drilling licenses for Kenya and Tanzania, Jimmy sending for American oil workers and the latest equipment, the first test well sunk close to a now-deserted village at the southern tip of Zanzibar Island.

The engineers struck oil in February, Jimmy insisting that it be kept quiet, and that just limited amounts of oil be shipped out for now, and even then just to Mombasa and Dar es Salaam. Selling oil on the open market was not yet done, so Jimmy utilised the oil for Kenyan vehicles, boosting the economy a little with cheap petrol.

Rudd was now on first name terms with everyone at the bank, as well as with most all of the whites in Nairobi, the polite Dutchman seen as a man who could get things done, as well as get the best tables at the club. Without Jimmy's consent, Rudd bought up businesses around Nairobi, often casually mentioning the fact to Jimmy weeks later. Rudd was enjoying it, his new role as de-facto mayor of Nairobi.

One day he walked into the police headquarters, shown straight into the British Colonel who ran the police, a cold drink poured. 'I was thinking, Colonel, that we can never have enough police officers, and that I might recruit some from England. And by that I mean that *you* might recruit some from England and bring them down – but I would pay their salaries and housing. They would be your men, but I would help out. And another hundred blacks, one on every street corner.'

'Are you out to turn this place into the safest city in Africa?' the Colonel asked with a smile.

'If I am to have many businesses here, then I want my guests taken care of, and the streets safe to walk.'

'I can see no problem with the local business leaders funding extra officers; it eases the burden on the Army. I'll make the request.'

Rudd had nudged the British Army with cold hard cash, and the Army got into gear, soon many more black police officers to be glimpsed on street corners, saluting the whites when they wandered past. Jimmy's hotels now offered six officers positioned outside at all times, Ngomo's men and the British soldiers inside. Our gang slept securely.

With Sykes and Jack sent down to Dar es Salaam to sniff around for a few weeks, Jimmy travelled down to Mombasa on the train, heading for Ebede. The train halt was a good twenty miles from the orphanage, a local taxi used for the final leg, a wobbly ride along poor roads. Anna met him at the main gate, two armed police officers saluting. With his bag placed in a room in Anna's house - Anna's large and sumptuous period-colonial house - they did the tour, Anna dressed in a long and flowing period dress and a wide-brim hat, tied on with a bow.

The entire area of Ebede, past, present and future, had been fenced off, twenty armed guards now permanently patrolling its perimeter in the heat. Anna's house sat just inside the fence, next to it a red brick apartment block, three storeys, and now occupied by the scientists. Stepping inside the scientists block, Jimmy was surprised to find an open central courtyard and a pond, seats and benches spread around.

'Very nice,' he commented, a few of the scientist waving as they lounged around.

The men showed him next door, and to their workshop, a period car now in pieces, its suspension being reworked with a little modern know-how.

In the orphanage grounds, Jimmy followed a familiar road that branched off left and right, each branch terminating with a two-storey barrack block for the kids, ten built so far. When Anna blew a silver whistle, the teachers directed the kids outside, all looking well-fed in either their blue t-shirts or blue dresses. They lined up in their various classes, a familiar chant given.

Jimmy took time to talk to a few in a dialect, and to converse with a few of the local teachers, surprising them with his language skills, each teacher now made to feel welcome and appreciated. At the top of the road, Anna and Jimmy wandered into the farm, neat lines of crops being tended by locals, as well as a few of the scientists.

'Green fingers?' Jimmy asked one, the man stood under a wide-brim straw hat.

'I am ... experimenting,' the man said with a coy smile.

'Ah. Are they going to be ... rather large?' Jimmy asked.

'I should think so,' the man said with a grin.

'You make enough food locally ... for the kids?'

'Yes,' Anna replied. 'But we need more meat; that's still bought in. Soon we'll have more animal pens.'

'And the kids are all in good health?' Jimmy knowingly asked.

'Remarkably ... good health,' the scientist replied. 'Three hundred so far.'

'Ten years from now, I'll want sixteen-year-olds for the Rifles, so find some five or six year olds, not babies.'

'How is the regiment progressing?' the scientist enquired, taking off his hat and wiping his brow with his sleeve.

'The first fifty are in there, but educational standards are zero.'

'We could try a cadet programme,' Anna suggested. 'Ten year old boys, maybe twelve, and a four or five year programme of education and training.'

'That may help,' Jimmy agreed. 'Try it with a hundred lads, even if they go home on weekends, or if they day-school here. And give them a few pence to take home, because their parents *will* want them in the fields rather than here. Oh, there's a ruddy great shantytown north of the train station in Nairobi: go pinch some wandering kids from it, lots of them if you like.'

'How's Doc Graham?' Anna enquired as they strolled about the grounds.

'His small weekend clinic for the poor has become ... a large full time clinic for the poor. Within ten years there'll be no more sickness in Nairobi the way he's going.'

'Will that cause a population spike?' Anna worried.

'I hope so; it's necessary. Besides, in this day and age it's a small amount ... of not very much. I want the economy boosted, as well as the population. They won't be fighting The Brotherhood, they'll be fighting Italians and Germans.'

'Is there not a way ... to prevent the war?' Anna broached.

Jimmy glanced at her as they walked. 'Any attempts to avoid it ... would just delay it. No, the rise of the Nazis was not down to any single individual or group, certainly not Hitler – although he was a good orator. No, the German people feel bad about the First World War and the conditions imposed upon them after the armistice. That feeling won't simply go away. It could – in time – but that's unlikely given the political mood over there right now.'

‘And ... Israel?’

‘That’s been giving me some sleepless nights,’ Jimmy admitted. ‘Part of me wants to block their return to Israel, to ship as many as I can to America. But the Israelis back on our world would not be ... *best pleased* upon our return.’

‘No, they wouldn’t,’ Anna agreed, peering up from under her hat.

‘So I might just create a home for them in Israel and push out *all* of the Palestinians. One argument for having Israel there is to counter-balance the rise of the pro-Russian states in the Arab world; Egypt and Syria. I can deal with Egypt from here, but Syria would be harder to influence. And there’s no easy way to halt the creep of communism till it has run its course. No matter how much we batter the communists militarily, it’s the idea that spreads – not the Russian advisers.’

‘You have a plan for the war?’

‘I’ve had *that plan* a long, long time.’

They walked on, the day pleasant.

‘Doc Graham asked about an orphanage in Nairobi,’ Anna mentioned as they strolled.

‘We need teachers and staff, and they need to learn from their experiences here first. But I’ll sanction a small one for him to play with. You can get involved, but don’t start going back and forth; it’s a day each way.’

Arriving in Mombasa, near the docks, Jimmy stepped down from a rickety old taxi and peered up at the sign: “Mombasa Steam Company Ltd, connecting Africa”. He smiled; that last part was Steffan’s doing. Inside, the directors welcomed him, Steffan and the former governor waiting.

Settled around a large table, brass ceiling fans whirring, Jimmy said, ‘So, how’s progress, gentlemen?’

The Managing Director reported, ‘We’ve pushed eighty miles of track beyond Nairobi.’

Steffan explained, ‘It will split. One line heading through Tanzania and west, one north around Lake Victoria and through Uganda, and down towards Goma.’

‘Gentlemen, when that track hits Goma you all get a bonus,’ Jimmy announced. ‘And, to speed things along, an extra two hundred thousand pounds of credit has been arranged at the bank.’

‘Crikey!’

‘So use it, let’s not be shy about expanding ... and pushing ever onwards into the bush.’

‘The Belgians are interested in the track,’ someone said. ‘They seem to fear a *land-grab* by the British Government.’

‘Then perhaps, gentlemen, it’s time to find a Belgian national with significant interests in the region ... and to offer him a seat on the board here.’

They glanced at each other. ‘It would ease their concerns, I suppose,’ the former governor stated.

‘And, no doubt, the gentleman in question would ask for some staff based here so that they can spy on us,’ Jimmy suggested. ‘Fine, let them look over our shoulders, we have nothing to hide.’

‘I know just the Belgian,’ a man said. ‘He has a hotel in Nairobi. I’ll meet with him.’

‘Claude Ronson?’ Jimmy asked.

‘Yes, that’s the chap.’

‘I think I met him at the club. Fine, make the approach. OK, next I would like a spur line to Ebede Orphanage, another spur to my new army barracks north of Nairobi. Both spurs would be just twenty miles, and there’s no hurry. But what I *would* like you looking at with the extra money is a line down the coast towards Dar es Salaam, a spur or two inland. Are you getting the oil from Zanzibar?’

‘Yes, it comes in by ship once a week – a great cost saving,’ they stated. ‘The small refinery here is doing a roaring trade.’

‘I’ll buy it, so then it can do more of a roaring trade. Steffan, make the approach please.’

‘The fighting in Somalia has a few worried,’ a man broached. ‘It may scare off a few potential investors.’

Jimmy puzzled the man’s meaning, his true meaning. ‘First, we don’t need investors, and second ... I think the Italians bring these problems upon themselves. Kenya ... is not Somalia, and I seriously doubt that local black dissent will be a problem here.’

A conversion to the team

The young lady doctor, Helen Astor, made the odd visit to the Empire Hotel, but was generally too tired to visit the club, always up early on a Saturday morning to attend Doc Graham’s clinic – where she was also learning new medical techniques, and constantly fobbed off with where the new science had come from.

She met with Jimmy for dinner once a week, and Jimmy had introduced her to the Indian restaurant – on days when Mac and the gang were not around; she was not ready for them yet. And so far, Jimmy had not so much as kissed her.

Doc Graham drove around to the Empire Hotel one day at noon, finding Jimmy in the courtyard sat reading the papers. He sat. 'Two things. First, Helen Astor is ... very curious and not stupid. Second, I think she has Typhus.'

Jimmy carefully folded his paper, staring out of focus at the shrubs. He heaved a sigh. 'Bring her here. Drag her if you have to.'

Doc Graham rushed out. He returned half an hour later, Dr Astor at the point of collapse, people gathering around. Jimmy led them all to a side room, sitting Dr Astor down, cold water fetched for her.

'You don't seem well, Helen,' Jimmy noted.

'It's just the heat, I'll be fine ... tomorrow.'

'She's burning up,' Doc Graham stated.

Jimmy slowly unbuttoned his shirt. Seeing it, Doc Graham opened his bag, a syringe made ready. Jimmy offered up his arm as he maintained eye contact with Dr Astor, the young lady sipping her water. With a glance at two guards she was restrained, not able to put up much of a fight anyway, her dress loosened, her arm exposed.

'What are you doing?' she weakly protested.

'Saving your life,' Doc Graham firmly told her. She struggled a little, but was slowly injected a full vial.

'Put her in a room, tend to her, and send word to her father and the hospital that you – Doc Graham – are tending her here.'

She passed out just as they lifted her up.

'She'll remember being injected,' Rudd mentioned.

'When she has recovered, I'll convert her to the cause,' Jimmy stated. 'Besides, we need more doctors to send off around Africa. Rudd, go reassure her father.'

The next day she was awake, just a little bit of a fever, Doc Graham assuring her that she was fine, a local nurse attending. That evening she washed, dressed herself, and came downstairs, finding the gang sat eating in the restaurant. She stormed over to Jimmy. 'You, sir, abducted me and ... and injected me with your own blood!'

No one reacted, Dr Astor puzzling that.

'I am not of this world,' Jimmy casually stated, Dr Astor trying to make sense of the odd statement. No one reacted, and she was now worried by their lack of reaction. Jimmy continued, 'You've been asking questions about the miraculous recovery of the patients that Doc Graham injects. Like any good scientist ... you trust what you can see and measure, and don't believe in superstition.' He

turned to Rudd, who opened the gramophone box, entering a series of passwords.

'Computer,' Jimmy called. 'Display holographic image of a human adult without skin.'

The six foot tall image came to life right in front of her, causing her to gasp and step back.

'Computer, remove muscles.'

The image changed, the figure's beating heart visible, lungs breathing in and out, Dr Astor stood with a hand to her mouth, transfixed.

'Computer, display a single cell, with annotation.'

The body disappeared, replaced by a large 3-D diagram of a human cell.

'Computer, display a cell infected with AIDS.'

The image altered, components of the cell swimming around.

'Computer, display aerial view of Nairobi, year 2030.'

People found themselves bathed in the image, sat between buildings as they ate. Aircraft came into land, stared at by Dr Astor as she watched them approach the airport.

'Computer, display rolling images of the Second World War, 1939 to 1945.'

A ten-minute presentation ended with the atom bombs dropped on Japan.

'Computer, display pandemic images from Singapore, 2011.' They all watched the show in silence. 'Hong Kong. China. Nairobi.' After a moment, Jimmy said, 'End images.'

Rudd closed the box.

Facing Helen, Jimmy said, 'You'll run a fever for a day, and your urine will smell bad for a week as your body adjusts. Drink plenty of water, eat protein, and when you feel well ... come back with a few questions. I would, however, appreciate that you not tell anyone what happened – and what you've seen - until I have had the chance to explain it all.' Doc Graham took her home, the gang carrying on with their meals.

'Will she convert?' Rudd idly asked.

'How would I know?' Jimmy retorted.

Four days later she returned, smiled at and welcomed by the gang. She sat opposite Jimmy without a word as he slowly folded his newspaper. He opened a box, revealing enough diamonds to buy the world twice over.

'If you had such wealth ... what would you do with it?' he asked her.

She picked up a huge diamond and examined it. 'I would ... probably open a large hospital of my own.'

'OK, do it – I'll pay. What else?'

'I ... would spend money on research into new drugs.'

'No need, I have all the drugs the world will ever need.'

'Then why not use them?'

'What effect would such use have ... on population growth in slums?'

She took a moment, and nodded gently to herself. 'It may cause problems, yes. There are not many jobs for them.'

'Rapid population growth means a strain on food production, followed by starvation if the supplies are not available. Starvation causes civil unrest, followed by political unrest, followed by war. You're not stupid, you read the history books, and you know how it works. And the Great War, that was not even down to starvation. Just think what the next war will be like, how many millions will die. And someday, when they've invented a bomb that can level whole cities, how many will die then? Why save the child now ... so that the adult he becomes later dies in a war?'

'Who are you ... really?'

'I, and my team, are travellers through time. When we left our homes behind it was the year 2047. And in that year there were no wars, no starvation, and no disease. The question you must be asking is ... why travel back through time?'

'So why? And why tell me this?'

'Why tell you? Because I want you to help me to cure millions of Africans of disease, as Doc Graham has already begun. Now that I've injected you with my blood ... if you extract your own blood - and remove the red cells in a centrifuge - you can inject others.'

'And ... they will mysteriously recover, as they do for Doctor Graham?'

'What do you think he's injecting them with?'

'His blood!'

'Yes, his own blood. A month from now, extract some of your own, inject a dying patient ... and wait and see.'

'I ... I could cure thousands,' she gasped.

'Welcome to the team.'

'Team? They ... your staff -'

'Yes, all like me.'

'You showed me images of a great war, a future war...'

'Yes, part of my purpose in being here ... is to alter the outcome, to lessen the suffering, and to get the world ready for even greater

problems in the decades to come. It will take us a hundred years to fix it all.'

'You'll all be dead and buried by then!'

'No, we won't, and neither will you. With my blood in you ... you'll look as you do now in fifty years.'

'What? I ... I won't age?'

'My dear, I'm over three hundred years old. So, you need to consider that you'll live a very long time, able to inject others all the while. You need to consider ... how you'll live your life, what you could achieve, and how best you could help the people of the world. The first step ... will be to build your own hospital. My bank will fund it to the tune of a hundred thousand pounds; all you need do is present yourself to them. And the diamond in your hand ... is yours to keep. But ... don't show it off, you'll be robbed and killed.'

She put the diamond back in the box, and closed the lid. 'You never once tried to kiss me.'

'I figured that ... you were being nice to get some money for the clinic.'

'Maybe I was,' she admitted. 'But I have grown to like you.'

'My dear, I enjoy your company, I enjoy female company, I enjoy sex, but I won't be getting married any time in the next hundred years or so.'

'Oh. I see.' She took a moment. 'Tomorrow is Tuesday, so dinner. Don't be late.' She trotted out.

Rudd approached. 'Will she be OK?'

'The lads have been spying on her, and she hasn't told anyone. And now she knows that she can inject the sick with her own blood. So ... all considered, I think she's on the team.'

'I'm designing a new hotel,' Rudd announced. 'Metal girders, concrete, twelve storeys high, rooftop bar, nightclub underneath.'

'Excellent, a bar with a view. When it's ready we'll turn this back into a proper hotel.'

'I've also hired street cleaners, and commissioned two parks,' Rudd mentioned.

Jimmy cocked an amused eyebrow. 'Are you out to create the Garden of Eden here?'

'It will be good for business if the city looks good,' Rudd insisted with a shrug. 'Shall I put the diamonds away?'

'Please, before *someone* spends them all.' Jimmy ordered a taxi, grabbed two bodyguards, and headed towards the Rifles base.

After twenty minutes, one of the men said, 'We've got company, ever since the hotel.'

‘Get ready,’ Jimmy told them, pistols withdrawn. ‘Driver, turn right at the next junction, please.’

‘Yes, boss,’ came back.

‘Still with us,’ came after the turn.

‘Driver, is there a petrol station along this road?’

‘There be a place for dee car, sir.’

‘Stop there, please.’ Jimmy made eye contact with the two guards. ‘Discretion, gentlemen, discretion; blind them, and question them.’

At the garage they eased to a crawl and finally halted, Jimmy asking for a top-up of the forecourt attendant as the tail vehicle pulled up ten yards away. Jimmy then sent the black driver into the garage for drinks. Two men hopped out of the tail car, white men with fixed stares and bulging jackets. Our guards had opened the car’s rear plastic flap, and now fired blinding shots, the two would-be attackers soon staggering around as if drunk. The driver, who had remained at the wheel, jumped out, soon also blinded. Laser pistols were adjusted to “cut-mode”, Jimmy’s guards rushing forwards whilst checking over their shoulders.

‘Thank you,’ one of the guards said as he pulled out a man’s pistol. ‘You won’t be needing that.’ The other would-be attackers were disarmed as they staggered about, soon led to a bushy grove and inside, away from witnesses, the forecourt attendant pretending he saw nothing when Jimmy stared at him.

Ten minutes later the guards re-appeared, walking back and meeting Jimmy in the garage’s small diner, the resident blacks giving them all odd looks.

‘Well?’ Jimmy asked.

‘They worked for a jewellery fence, some French guy,’ the first guard said.

‘After the diamonds,’ the second mentioned.

Jimmy nodded. ‘That’s the problem with a reputation; it’s good for business, bad for thieves like that lot. You get the name of the fence?’

They nodded.

‘Then you have an assignment.’ He stood, walking to the counter. ‘Is the garage owner here?’

A black man stepped out, dressed now in overalls and covered in grease and sweat. ‘All OK wid dee food, sir?’

‘Fine, but I need a word outside.’ Jimmy led the worried looking man out. ‘I’m Jimmy Silo. You know this name?’ Jimmy asked in a dialect.

‘Oh, yes, sir. Everybody know dee name, sir.’

‘Three men just tried to rob me, white men, and my people killed them; the bodies are in the bushes. I want you to do something for me: bury the bodies deep, and never talk of it.’ Jimmy handed over five English pounds. ‘Earn your pay, never say a word – or I will be back.’

Terrified, the man accepted the money, about a year’s income, and headed off into the bushes.

Arriving at the Rifles base, Jimmy called the team together. ‘We just killed three men intent on separating me from my diamonds. Tool up, check the base and the perimeter, stay frosty. Mac, drive back and warn everyone to be on their guard, telegram Anna and Steffan.’

Mac rushed off as bolt-action rifles were hurriedly made ready, clanking as loaded, Ngomo’s men rushing off in all directions. Jimmy motioned Ngomo inside, the white officers now having a lesson on homemade bombs and timers.

‘How’s it going?’ Jimmy asked the earnest students.

‘Never knew it was so easy to make a bomb,’ one officer commented.

‘Improvisation ... is a part of every soldier’s arsenal,’ Jimmy stated. ‘On a side note, there are rumours of a few jewel thieves roundabouts, keen to separate me from my treasures. Whenever practical, wear pistols on your hips, and watch out for strangers around the club and Nairobi.’

‘We’ve been learning to throw knives and kill with our hands,’ they said. ‘If we find the perishers they’re in for it.’

‘Good,’ Jimmy said. He left them to it. Next door he found a class of recruits practising their English, another group jogging by in a squad and singing.

‘Two hundred and growing,’ Ngomo informed him. ‘Keen because we look after them, their bellies full and a few coins to go home on the weekend with. Each man gets a chicken as well.’

‘Why don’t you build married quarters at the edge of the base, outside the fence, simple rooms?’

‘I was ... thinking of building myself a house here,’ Ngomo delicately mentioned.

‘I have no problem with that. And the other men?’

‘Would also prefer to be here.’

‘I see. No one calling them wog or boy, eh?’

‘It is a different time.’

‘It’s your city, not the whites.’

‘Not for a few decades yet.’

They climbed the steps to the top of the admin offices, a flat roof affording them a good view of the base and surrounding countryside.

Jimmy said, 'There's plenty of money, so build an officers mess; two or three storeys, forty rooms for single men, and a good bar. Then build a sergeants mess, same deal, and keep building the barrack blocks so long as we have warm bodies to put in them. Build yourself a nice house, and one for the Colonel – who may wish to live in it when he sees it.'

Ngomon nodded. 'These white boys talk funny, but they are changing; a face down in the dust will do that to a man. Their attitude is better.'

'When will they be ready to lead a platoon?' Jimmy asked as she scanned the green and lush horizon to the south.

'I would trust them with the men now to do the right thing, but they need small team exercises, and right now the new men don't speak a hell of lot of English.'

'You have the advanced sign language you use in the jungle, so teach them all the signs and give them a few platoon exercises when you can. Those white officers in there will get itchy feet soon enough, so I'd like to send some up the train track for a few weeks with a platoon, rotating them.'

'We could do that in a few weeks,' Ngomo agreed.

'Is the Colonel handling all the paperwork?'

'Yes, he's good with organising, busy with the building work and happy enough.'

Jimmy tipped his head to one side. 'You and he...?'

'He is often surprised by my knowledge, but I say that I worked with French and Belgian officers and ran my own tribal army.' Ngomo shrugged and made a face. 'He accepts that.'

'Uniforms OK?'

'We are now getting more, and they are better, a choice of sizes.'

'Have the tailor make-up desert pink and jungle tiger-stripes ready, face veils and rifle veils. Oh, I've bought some weapons, a variety of those available in this time period; make sure everyone is familiar with all the differing types. I even have a few old Maxims, although I guess they're not so old right now. Has fitness improved?'

Ngomo laughed. 'They never knew what their legs were for; now there is no stopping them. Two of the white officers - they run with the men at dawn; very fit. And they grow muscles, proud to arm-wrestle each other.'

'Sounds like progress. I wonder how Abdi is doing?'

Command review

A month later a few letters and telegrams arrived, Jimmy calling a command review, Anna, Cosy and Steffan up from Mombasa, Dr Astor being introduced to everyone and sitting in on the meeting.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ Jimmy called. ‘And Mac.’ They laughed. ‘This is first major command meeting, so settle down and shut up. First, we all welcome Dr Helen Astor to the “M” Group, although she’s still a little bewildered. Having said that ... she’s been keenly extracting her own blood – in private – and curing the locals.’

They applauded her, making her blush.

‘Doc Graham is teaching her modern medical techniques, for those things that simple injections won’t fix. And, as you know, Doc Graham has taken it upon himself to cure every ailment in Nairobi, his small clinic growing. As an aside to that, we’ve cut ground on a new hospital, which will be named the Nairobi General Hospital. It will offer a thousand beds or more and - I’m hoping - will offer up a few suitable doctors, suitable for the cause.

‘Next, Rudd. He hasn’t been caught stealing jeeps -’ They laughed. ‘- but has set for himself the task of buying every damn business in Nairobi, policing the streets ... and keeping them clean. At least it gets him out of our hair. As you know, we’ve also cut ground on a new hotel, a modern steel and concrete hotel with a rooftop bar and nightclub.’

They cheered.

‘When it’s ready we’ll all move over there, those that wish to live there. OK, train track. We’re now laying a mile every three days, faster where the ground is level, which is good going. Steffan, I only have two words to that: *faster and cheaper!*’

They laughed.

‘Don’t you start with that,’ Steffan mock complained. ‘I had enough of that with Paul.’

‘OK, that track will penetrate deep into the Congo once its gone around the top end of Lake Victoria, a few bridges needing to be built. But, we now have the kind assistance of the British Army and their engineers, who make no claims to the Belgian Congo. We also have the kind assistance of a Belgian businessman, who says we’d *better not* have any claims on the Belgian Congo.’ They laughed.

‘The track to the south will be the more important one, crossing Tanzania, Rwanda – as it will become – and heading for the south of the Congo and the gold mines. I expect that the Kenyan Rifles, in

uniform, will set foot there in around six months - just as soon as our old Rifles can get out of bed in the mornings and train us some men.'

The Rifles jeered, getting laughed at.

'On that note, a note has arrived from Abdi in Somaliland.'

'He started a war yet?' Mac shouted.

'Not quite, but he is ruffling feathers with the British there. He's bought a hotel, or two, a large house, and started a large orphanage. He has also bought up some land suitable for bananas, and raised a small security detail to protect his empire, known as the Somaliland Rifles.'

'How many?' Ngomo asked.

'Over four hundred apparently, the British now nervous.'

Ngomo and his men jeered. 'They are only good for attracting flies!' Ngomo shouted.

'As an aside, the Italian Governor in Somalia, and all of his staff, suffered the sudden onset of blindness -' People laughed. '- and had to be sent home by ship. It would appear ... that the Italians tried to spy on Abdi, who then practised his diplomatic skills. And let's face it, he's about as diplomat as Mac. Abdi sends word that all is well, and asks if the lazy fat Kenyan Rifles are making any progress.'

The Rifles jeered again.

Smiling, Jimmy put down the letter. 'OK, Sykes and Jack are touring Europe as we speak, getting a feel for the politics. They will then journey to England and assist young Mister Timkins for a while, as well as recruiting a few people for our cause; quite a few people. Big Paul and his team are also in Europe, and they're *curtailing* the political careers of a few people.'

'What about Hitler?' Mac asked.

'Hitler made many bad choices, which helped our predecessors win the war, so he's not a target. If someone else takes charge, someone with half a brain, then we're in trouble.'

'Moving on, Po and Yuri send their best regards, and it sounds like they're having as much fun as Rudd. They've bought twelve large hotels, hundreds of acres of land, and several shipping companies. Some of the goods landing in Mombasa now come via their line.'

'P & O Ferries?' Doc Graham asked, people laughing.

'Wang Novak,' Jimmy informed them. 'OK, we've had a note from young Mister Timkins, who now has a nice house, a nice housekeeper, and a nice dog, and has joined the local Labour Party'

– not so nice. For prying eyes, we’ve created a paper trail for him here, to say where he was schooled.

‘OK, oil. I’ve increased slightly the oil coming from Zanzibar to Mombasa – no complaints from the local Sultan, since we have a use for it on road surfaces and in petrol engines. I’ve bought the small Mombasa refinery, and we now have our own petrol distributor, called CAR Petrol.’

They laughed.

‘That’s a pun, yes?’ Dr Astor asked. ‘Since you have a business named CAR?’

Jimmy nodded towards her. ‘We will expand that business as quickly as is prudent, based on customers. Rudd is on the board along with myself and Steffan, and we fuel Po’s ships very cheaply. Po is even asking about tankers for Hong Kong, which we can look at next year.

‘OK, unless plans change, I’ll be heading for Canada in three months. I’ll want at least six of our scientists, Mac and Handy, and at least eight of the British soldiers. Doc Graham, Anna, arrange local police as security for yourselves, although I don’t see any problems with your security here. Rudd, Steffan, keep a British soldier or two around, see who wants to stay or go.’

‘What’ll we do in Canada?’ Mac asked.

‘Open a munitions factory, and buy an aircraft factory. Our aim ... is simple: to defeat Imperial Japan, communist Russia, and Nazi Germany.’

‘Oh, is that all,’ Mac grumbled, people exchanging looks.

‘And before you ask, killing their future leaders now will achieve nothing. The causes of the wars are all ... ideas, and you can’t kill ideas, you have to show people another way. You have to show that war is ... horrific, and to be avoided. Those who fought in the Great War don’t want to go back to violence, but twenty years from now the next generation will have forgotten the horrors – and it will start all over again. I have a few ideas, something of a plan, but it’s flexible, and we’ll experiment as we go.’

‘When do you make contact with the British and American authorities?’ Doc Graham asked.

‘When the time is right, and when I’m in a position of power, but most likely around 1938.’

‘When they’re gearing up for war,’ Mac noted.

‘When they can see that I have aircraft flying at thirty thousand feet ... and atom bombs!’

‘Shit...’ Mac let out, people exchanging looks.

'Never forget what's ahead, especially what's ahead if we screw this up. World War Two, wars of independence before and after, Vietnam, The Cold War, Middle East tensions, and the Rise of The Brotherhood.'

They all blew out.

Jimmy took questions for half an hour, and ideas were kicked around, drinks brought out, the business side of things taken care of, everyone given a chance to air their opinions.

A week later, three scientists appeared at the hotel with a fridge. They wheeled it in and set it up, before connecting the wires to a petrol engine dynamo that chugged away in the courtyard. Having loaded the fridge with bottles of beer, they sat and waited for the gang to return at 5pm.

An hour later, Jimmy and Rudd accepted a cold beer, a very cold beer, and sat to sip the cold liquid.

'Excellent,' Rudd commented.

Jimmy did not look pleased. 'Gentlemen,' he called to the scientists. They assembled like naughty schoolboys. 'You seem to have missed something.'

'The technology is basically available now, and it's very crude,' they insisted.

'But what have you missed?'

They exchanged looks.

'The commercial aspect of fridges in Africa...' Jimmy nudged.

'You ... want us to sell them?'

'Could you see a need for them?' Jimmy toyed.

'Well ... yes. It's ... warm.'

Jimmy shook his head. 'Rudd, open a new company, call it ... Kenyan Refrigeration Ltd, and put the usual suspects on the board. Liase with this lot, and get a production line going. Either sell them, or lease them with maintenance offered. Whose idea was it?'

A scientist timidly raised his hand.

'You ... stay in Africa. I want a million fridges keeping drinks cold for people around the continent, units then sold in the Middle East. First, I want them sold to hospitals.'

'For blood storage,' they realised.

'Get to it and ... well done, guys.'

Smiling, they filed out.

Jimmy faced Rudd. 'Grab the next few fridges off the line for the hotel, then Doc Graham's clinic and the Rifles. Make sure *we* all have cold beers before the general populace.'

'When were they due to be invented?' Rudd asked.

'They already have them in America, but expensive. British housewives would not have received one till ... well, around 1955 I think.'

'Progress,' Rudd said before sipping his very cold beer. 'And when you are gone ... what would you like me to do?'

'You saw what Paul did in the Congo? Well, the same for here. Your job is to grow the businesses, make money, fund the Rifles, and to expand Zanzibar. Oh, start building a deep water port off Zanzibar, and one at the tip of British Somaliland, then ship oil up and allow Royal Navy ships to refuel at half the going rate.'

'And the Americans?'

'There are no American warships around these parts, not yet, a few around the Philippines. And that Somali port is a five-year project, it's not a priority. Priority is to get the gold out of the Congo without the Belgians seeing us do it. I'll want that gold in Canada. Oh, ask the bank to extend a line of credit with banks in Vancouver and Toronto. That will need to be in place before I go.'

'Right, boss.'

'You enjoying it?' Jimmy asked with a grin.

'Very much; I always liked building up things. And I like this time period. I never used to like the colonial attitude, but I am changing that bit by bit. I like the old cars, the houses, the slow pace and afternoon tea.'

'It is a slower pace, fewer worries; no damn mobile phones or emails, no air travel yet, no traffic congestion. But it'll change, and soon enough.'

Ngomo appeared an hour later with three local ladies, mother and two daughters, the daughters aged around sixteen and seventeen. 'We are to be married.'

Rudd blinked. Jimmy said, 'To ... which lady?'

'To ... all three.' Rudd blinked again as Ngomo explained, 'Aisha is a great cook, Selambo and Juju are ... well, they'll get better as time goes on. We'll live at the barracks.'

Jimmy said hello in a local tongue, surprising the ladies. With Ngomo and the ladies gone, Rudd and Jimmy exchanged a look.

'Dirty bugger,' Rudd commented.

'It's not unusual for tribal chiefs,' Jimmy commented. 'Still, cheeky bastard; mum and both daughters.'

'Would it ... be appropriate for me to take a local wife?' Rudd delicately broached.

'It would be a benefit, since your kids could work for you – and be trusted.'

‘And the local laws...’ Rudd mentioned.

‘Apply to the locals; the white folk suffer bigamy laws. So, get a nice young housekeeper ... or two.’

Ngomo came in for some serious ribbing, as well as some serious jealousy from Mac and Handy, Ngomo’s men taking young local wives and housing them at the base’s married quarters. At an evening meal, Jimmy mentioned that Abdi had eleven wives. That shut-up Ngomo, who now received even more ribbing. And Dr Helen Astor began wearing men’s clothes to the clinic, and boots. She’d tell people: ‘Dresses are terrible to clean the blood out of, or to operate in.’ She even came across to the Empire Hotel in her smart trousers and shirt, sleeves rolled up, but with a feminine hat on her head – compete with bow. She also started attending the club and drinking, now that she was just about indestructible and sleeping four hours a night.

After one good Saturday night at the club she cornered Jimmy, and would not take no for an answer, marriage or not. Jimmy went down on her, at length, and the good doctor passed out. It was her first time. Recovered, she now understood why people made such a fuss over the whole sex thing. And Dr Helen Astor, twenty-four, and Jimmy Silo, a tad older, became an item – a discreet item.

Helen Astor was actually Lady Helen Astor, her family worth a fortune, a fact she thought she had kept hidden. Jimmy had, of course, recognised the name. With rumours spreading, her father, Colonel Astor, came calling.

‘May I enquire ... as to your intentions towards my daughter?’

‘I have no intention of marrying her ... or any other woman.’

‘Oh. I see. And yet ... you and she seem ... close.’

‘There is no risk of her falling pregnant, Colonel.’

‘Oh. Well, that’s good to know. But you have lavished a great deal of money on her.’

‘Not on her ... personally, Colonel. Does she have a large amount of cash to hand?’

‘Well, no, she’s always short and asking me.’

‘That’s because she follows her heart ... and spends every last penny to help the poor and sick locals. She also tries hard to spend my every last penny doing the same – when she could be living the high life.’

‘She is ... stubborn and headstrong, she gets that from her mother, God rest her soul. She’s here doing ... this kind of work, when she could be married in England -’

‘And what? Treated like a trophy wife? Used for breeding the sons and heirs of some ungrateful suitor?’

‘That ... was uncalled for.’

‘She’s doing good work, Colonel, following her heart. If you were to try and stop her ... you’d lose her, and her respect for you.’

The Colonel looked away. ‘Of that, I have little doubt.’

‘As for our intentions ... you’d best ask her, because she bosses me about and tells me what to do, and when and where to do it.’

‘I would have thought that impossible with you, sir, but knowing Helen I can quite well believe it.’

‘Should anything happen between us, it will be as a result of her holding a pistol to my head and being insistent. So don’t blame me.’

‘She does embarrass me sometimes.’

‘It’s a new world, Colonel, times are moving on quickly. It’s the roaring twenties, as they say, women’s liberation and all that.’

The Colonel blew out. ‘I have no wife, and Helen is all I have left. I was thinking of resigning my commission and staying down here to be close to her.’

‘I could use a good man along the new train track, helping to organise the police and soldiers as we open up the interior.’

‘I was kind of hoping to move away from soldiering.’

‘Well, there is a new venture just starting that you could help with. They make these new fangled fridges -’

‘I’ve seen one, got a cold beer out of the darn thing. Marvellous idea.’

‘You could sit on the board and help organise sales around Africa.’

‘Be delighted to. I want one for the house, but they’re as rare as snow in the jungle.’

‘I’ll arrange one for you soon. So, as soon as you’re ready – we’re ready.’

‘Good of you, Mister Silo.’

‘Call me Jimmy.’

Blast that sand

Stood at the firing range in the Rifles base, Jimmy watched Mac load a prototype AK47, the English officers wondering just what the heck this new rifle was supposed to be.

‘Single shot,’ Mac called. He fired three rounds. ‘Automatic fire.’ He blast away with several long, and loud, bursts.

‘Crikey!’ came from two of the officers.

Mac turned. ‘This little rifle is good to six hundred yards, single shot or automatic. And ... it’s reliable in the heat and the desert.’

When you go on your first mission you'll have these to play with. In the meantime, you need to learn how to tend for it like a baby.'

A week later the first mission was launched, the teams checking the jungle ahead of the tracklayers, shooting at inquisitive tribesmen with their AK47s. It was a milestone, and Jimmy gave Dr Astor the bad news. She cried at length, and then asked to go to Canada with him. She had known this day would come, but that was before she had fallen in love. Jimmy cited the mission, and saving lives, and pointed out that he would be back. Still, it was a sorrowful time. For both of them.

Mac and Handy packed up, as did six of the scientists. The gang held a farewell dinner in Mombasa, a ship bound for Singapore boarded the next morning. Jimmy stood on the stern with the British bodyguards, Sandra and Cookie, watching Africa shrink on the horizon.

'I'm a little sad to go,' Sandra admitted. 'I was getting used to the place.'

'More challenges ahead,' Jimmy said. 'And I need my best people around me.'

The black scientists were housed in the ship's worst cabins, and on the lowest decks, but Jimmy reassured them it would not be a long voyage. Still, many were seasick. They ate with the ship's crew, all Indians, and avoided the rich white folk. At Singapore the gang changed ship, one of Po's freighters taking them up to Hong Kong. Arriving at the colony's harbour, Jimmy and the others stood on deck and peered at green hills.

Big Paul said, 'You can actually see the hills.'

'Yes,' Jimmy sighed. 'Back in our time there's hardly a blade of grass left.'

Big Paul pointed. 'Is that where the Rescue Force unit will be?'

'Yep, just a lone shack at the moment,' Jimmy responded. 'Awaiting some thirty-storey high company.'

'Harbour still seems busy,' Big Paul noted.

'It's full of junk,' Cookie said, getting a look from everyone.

'Where's the airport?' Big Paul asked.

'There won't be any aircraft large enough to warrant an airfield for a decade or so, and then just seaplanes; the golden age of the flying boat is about to dawn. In 1938 it will take – oh – around five days to reach here from London.'

'Ya bum'll be sore,' Big Paul noted.

'Very sore,' Jimmy agreed.

Waiting at the dockside was Po, Yuri and Han, and twelve cars - plus around twenty Chinese bodyguards. Po stood in a white suit and hat, making the gang smile, Yuri and Han in sombre suits.

'Welcome Hong Kong!' Po let out. 'My city, my city.'

'What're the girls like?' Big Paul asked.

'I have arranged for you, no problem here,' Po insisted.

'We're only here for two nights,' Jimmy reminded everyone as they selected cars. 'So don't get comfortable.'

The ride to Po's mansion was lengthy and slow through bustling streets, a journey that would not get much better in the decades ahead. Bicycles and rickshaws were tooted and nudged aside, but at least they didn't give each other the finger yet. Everyone was warm by time they reached the mansion, a period colonial house on a grand scale.

'Come, come,' Po urged, many ladies in traditional dress stood waiting to attend the every need of the gang.

The blacks didn't cause much of a stir, the locals used to racial integration, and used to being on the receiving end of prejudice from the Europeans. The doorway opened to a large internal courtyard with a glass roof, a carp pond at the centre, a balcony running right around the edges.

'Very nice,' Jimmy commented. 'Let's hope they don't pull it down and stick a shopping centre here.'

Bags were taken to the various allocated rooms, tea offered, or cool beers.

'Beer's not very cold,' Big Paul complained. 'In Kenya we have fridges.'

'You have fridges?' Yuri asked.

'We invented them early,' Jimmy explained. 'We'll ship you some. And now that we're selling them ... so can you.'

'We can sell many,' Po complained, unhappy at being left out of the technological leap.

'Guys, we've been here less than a year. It's a long road, so slow down,' Jimmy firmly told them.

'We can ... make here, from design?' Po quietly risked.

Jimmy nodded. 'And make us all some money. So, how goes the empire building?'

'We have many hotels now,' Yuri began. 'Already making an operating profit without capital considerations.'

'And shipping, good shipping business,' Po insisted.

'How good?'

'We're on track for almost a million US dollars a year,' Yuri proudly stated. In 1921 that was a large figure.

‘Good.’ Jimmy faced Han. ‘And what have you learnt?’

‘I have taken many trips to Shanghai and across the border, to ... *smoke out the territory* and to learn of the people and politics.’

‘And how have these two been behaving?’ Jimmy asked, a finger wagged at Po and Yuri.

‘I help to ... *temper their excesses* on occasion,’ Han commented.

‘You won’t be needed across the border for ten years or so,’ Jimmy told Han. ‘So set your skills to business here. Get involved with the fridges - act as international salesman to nearby countries, as well as all the major Chinese towns and cities along the coast. Build up a network.’

‘I can do this,’ Po suggested.

‘No,’ Jimmy firmly stated. ‘You have enough to do here, as well as work in other areas that I’ll give you in the future. Always keep in mind the difficult path ahead, my friend: the Second World War, pandemics, and The Brotherhood. Nothing is certain, everything is dangerous, and we have a very long way to go yet.’

‘Now, oil. Your tankers going to East Africa can re-fuel cheaply, also any going to Suez – we can arrange ship-to-ship refuelling for you. Make best use of that route and that oil. If you buy a passenger liner or two, have them refuel in Mombasa. I also want you to start buying up good oil drilling equipment from America and shipping it to Africa. OK, aircraft -’

‘There no aircraft, only biplane,’ Po complained.

‘In the years ahead there’ll be large seaplanes, routes from here to London. I want you to buy the airlines and to operate the routes, stopping in Kenya; you must dominate that operation when the time comes. So that’s freight, passengers by ship and air. And start a base of operation in Singapore and Sri Lanka for stopovers.’

‘But your main task is to build up an industrial base here, to make things, and to then ship them around the world in your vessels, making a good profit as you go. Look at what’s selling, think about the future applications – like fridges – and corner the market first. And in a few years you can start a small militia, because the Japanese will be on their way in 1937.’

‘Can we hold them?’ Yuri puzzled.

‘When the war starts we’ll have developed advanced weapons, so don’t worry. We’ll tie up the Japanese armies.’

Han asked, ‘Is the aim to do more than just *tie-up* the Japanese?’

‘Yes, the aim is to massacre them, drawing out their reinforcements.’

‘And my link to Mao, and the Rifles?’ Han asked.

‘The Rifles may operate in support of Mao.’

'We support Mao?' Po puzzled.

'Yes, we need China to be communist. Without communism they'll split into smaller countries and alter the economy of the region beyond a point where I could predict it. There would also be a population explosion, followed by famine and civil wars. Our aim is to have a communist state ... with less of a purge on the educated.'

'We will be safe here, our businesses?' Yuri asked.

'Yes, because Britain will defend its colony, nuclear armed. Communist China did not invade before, so is unlikely to do so in this world.'

'Why Canada?' Yuri asked.

'Close enough to America, but not inside America and subject to certain laws – and prying eyes, in the future.'

'It's a long term base?' Yuri asked.

'Yes, home from home for quite some time. Now, get some food on and we'll talk more.'

They talked late into the night, plans made – and adjusted. And Po did provide ladies for Big Paul and the British soldiers, two for Jimmy. Well, when in Rome. And there would be no reporters around for ... oh, eighty years or so.

The next day, Po showed Jimmy around many of the hotels, the shipping offices, and several construction sites. That evening, after the meal, Jimmy sat down with a map and discussed which areas would be most profitable in the future to build on, arguing a few points with Po. Any and all profits that Po and Yuri were making were to be ploughed into further expansion for now, many diamonds not yet sold.

With a terrible storm raging, the gang boarded a freighter bound for Vancouver and Seattle, the boat aiming to bring machinery back to Hong Kong. They pulled out of harbour without taking in the scenery, and set off east across the pacific, fair weather promised.

The weather turned bad as the freighter approached the US coastline, choppy for a day as they headed around to Vancouver. Customs were pretty basic in 1921, few people having passports, but the gang had all brought along several good fakes of the period. Jimmy explained away the blacks as studying farming in Canada, and the gang spent the night in a small hotel, journeying on the next day to a small town called Trophy, the town's only employer being a modestly successful tractor manufacturer, the owner having a passion for flying and his own small grass airstrip.

Booked into the town's only hotel, the gang attracted a great deal of attention, especially the blacks. Jimmy ventured out the next day with a letter of credit from a Vancouver bank, and to a hunting lodge, a hotel of some thirty rooms and chalets. Finding the owner, Jimmy asked if the place was up for sale.

'Well, no,' was the answer.

'Mind if I ask what it's worth?' Jimmy pressed.

'With the land and the lake, upwards of forty thousand dollars. It's a lot of land.'

'I'll give you seventy-five thousand dollars for it.' He handed over the letter of credit with the bank, credit for two million dollars.

'Jeez, fella. Seventy-five?'

'I like my fishing. And the staff can stay on.'

'You serious, fella?'

'Very. If you don't sell, I'll just buy land up the road. I can have the money handed to you in cash, in Vancouver, tomorrow. Meet me at the bank at 2pm, bring the deeds of ownership.'

'Jeez. 2pm you say, this address?'

'That address, 2pm, or I go elsewhere.' With that Jimmy and the guards left the man to consider that his property, worth thirty-five thousand at most, could net him a tidy profit.

The next day the owner sold - he would have been mad not to - and duly turned-out the few resident hunters, compensating them. Jimmy and the gang moved in, the resident maids and cooks surprised by the well-spoken blacks, or Negroes as they were referred to. Cookie and Sandra took charge of the housekeeping, moving into a chalet. Jimmy grabbed a room, guards next door, the scientists spread around rooms and chalets. That evening they ate on a long dining table backed by a roaring log fire, being stared down at by the stuffed heads of various animals.

'Canada, ladies and gentlemen; I spent a great deal of time here,' Jimmy commented. 'And the most trouble were likely to get around here in the next few years ... is a randy moose wandering in.'

The next day Jimmy ventured through the rain to the town, and bought just about every spare car that was for sale, having them delivered to the lodge. The scientists were immediately on the case, getting to grips with the cars. Jimmy took one, practising for a while before driving two of the guards down to the tractor manufacturer. At the office he asked for the owner.

He was shown into an inner office, waiting ten minutes before the man arrived, a young man to be the owner at just forty. 'Ted Baker.' They shook.

'Jimmy Silo. I just bought the hunting lodge up on the lake.'

'Nice spot, but it don't make much.' They sat.

'I have other interests, a great many. Now, I've done my homework, and I like your tractors; I fancy them for my farms in East Africa.'

'Africa? You'd ship them?'

'Sure would. I'd like a hundred.'

'A ... hundred?'

Jimmy handed over the letter of credit from the bank. 'I appreciate that you'll have to make them, so I'll pay cash this week towards your costs, say ... fifty thousand dollars?'

'Hell, an order like this would keep us busy for two years! When do you need them?'

'In three months.'

'Three months?'

Jimmy eased back. 'OK, let's get down to it. If I bought half of your business, and invested enough money, could you do it – if you took on the extra staff and brought in extra equipment?'

'Wow, you don't hang around. Buy half the business?'

'What's it worth?'

'I reckon ... close to two hundred thousand.'

'I'll offer you three hundred thousand if it's a quick sale. Then I'll invest half a million dollars straight away.'

'Mister, you have deep pockets, that's for sure. Where did you make your money?'

'In Africa; I'm involved with oil, gold and diamonds.' Jimmy handed over a modest diamond. 'Keep it.'

'Keep it? It looks like it's worth a bit.'

'Then you won't object to buying me a beer now and then.' Jimmy stood. '2pm at the bank tomorrow, if you're interested. If not, I'll have to buy my tractors elsewhere.'

The owner, Ted, stood. 'If I'm there, Mister, it's a deal. Now ... now I'll talk to the managers; they were with my father a long time.'

'Loyalty is important, and I would not expect changes in staff.'

With that, Jimmy headed off, a second night spent in the lodge, the scientists now told to study Canadian-made tractors of the time period. After the evening meal, Jimmy sat on the porch with a beer in hand, staring out across the calm lake, mist enveloping and caressing the nearby mountains, ducks calling out.

‘Back in Canada,’ he let out. ‘But where’s home?’

The next day, Ted Baker turned up at the bank at 2pm; he would have been foolish not to. He shook Jimmy’s hand. ‘The thing that’s most important to me ... is securing the future for my workers.’

‘A good attitude; my staff have been with me a very long time.’

They stepped into the bank, a lawyer waiting, the shares signed over, the bank raising a cheque – a very large cheque. That was signed by Jimmy, then immediately paid into an account in the same bank, handshakes exchanged.

Jimmy said, ‘As your new partner, I would like everyone to get a ten percent pay rise, effective next week, and voluntary night shift offered. And I guess I don’t need to remind you to start recruiting more staff. If the existing workshops are used, then we could end up with three shifts of eight hours a piece.’

‘Sounds like I’ve got my work cut out for me,’ Ted said, but with a smile. ‘Join me and the wife later for supper.’

‘Love to.’

At supper, Jimmy noticed the model aircraft around the house. ‘You like planes, Ted?’

‘It’s a hobby; I have two bi-planes.’

‘For me, it’s a passion,’ Jimmy stated. ‘In fact, next week I was going to look for a small airfield to buy, and to try making a few planes.’

Ted stared, wide-eyed, salivating. ‘I know of a field, and a seaplane maker. They’re struggling.’ He stood. ‘Don’t move.’ Back a few minutes later, he said, ‘Bill’s on his way, be thirty minutes. Can you stay?’

‘I can if your dear lady wife has more of this excellent pie. Madge, you keep cooking like this I’ll offer to buy you off Ted!’ She blushed and stepped out. ‘Ted, if your wife can make a few of these pies and send them up to the lodge we’ll pay for them.’

‘She runs a small bakery in town, started it when the kids started schooling.’

‘Consider this a firm order.’

‘She’ll be pleased.’

Bill arrived half an hour later, shown in, handshakes given. He was in his fifties, greying, a thin face that suggested an ailment of some sort. He coughed. ‘Glad to meet ya. I heard ya bought into Ted’s factory.’

‘That’s work. Tell me about these seaplanes.’

An hour later Bill had agreed to sell seventy-five percent for a good sum, Ted Keener on the planes than his own factory, more pie downed with coffee.

The next day Jimmy sent four scientists to the tractor factory, under the pretext that they were African farm managers keen to learn how to use the tractors. They caused a few odd looks, not least because of the smart clothes they wore. Their English was perfect, and by the end of the day there was a problem, Jimmy called to the factory.

'Problem?' he asked Ted in his office.

'Well ... no. But these black fellas, they know more about tractors than we do! They even suggested a few improvements, and they fixed a few engines we couldn't fix.'

'They're all degree educated, very smart.'

'Degree educated ... Africans?'

'They're no different to us, Ted. In Kenya, I have many doctors who are black. Anyway, why don't you make the buggers earn their keep, give them something to do.'

'They're already earning their keep. They fixed our lighting, and aligned a lathe that was out of kilter.'

'Fine. Where are they now?'

'In the canteen I think; it's end of shift.'

'Lead on,' Jimmy said.

They found the six scientists in the canteen, chatting away to engineers, a debate going on about how to improve fuel adhering to the metal.

Jimmy sat. 'Earning your keep?' he asked the scientists.

'They sure are,' a foreman said. 'Fixed a few things we'd given up on.'

'Good, they can earn their supper. Don't be afraid to put them to work, whatever you think.'

A scientist said, 'Given the correct facilities, we may improve the engine lubricant.'

'You specify it, I'll buy it,' Jimmy told them. 'Ask Ted for what you need. What ... beakers and tubes and stuff?'

'Things ... of that nature, yes. A small chemical laboratory, a few sources of heat.'

Jimmy faced Ted.

'I'll sort it; if the engines turn smoother, then great.'

Jimmy faced the foreman. 'My Africans ... are all god-fearing church goers. Perhaps ... you could arrange a few places for Sunday.'

'Be a pleasure, Mister Silo, sir.'

'But before that day, have some prayer books and song sheets brought up - so that they are familiar with your practices.'

The foreman nodded. Back at the lodge, the scientists enquired if they had gone too far.

'No, just take it slow. Your main aim is the aircraft, but the tractors will go to Kenya and, in years to come, we'll make our own over there.'

'When do we do something?' Mac asked.

'Soon, so just kick back, go fishing.'

Jimmy sat in a seaplane the next day, moving the joystick. In the main office, he called together the managers and partners, Bill still coughing. 'Gentlemen, I don't want anyone to worry about making a profit and selling these planes; I'm in this for the long haul. As such, I have a few ideas about the future of aircraft, I also have some of my educated Africans with me.'

'We heard,' Bill said. 'Right smart fellas, you know, for blacks.'

'They are ... very smart, degree educated, god-fearing and law abiding; you'll have no problems with them. Now, I noticed the land behind this place, and I aim to buy it and make a concrete runway, a very long one - so that someday when planes are bigger we won't have to make *it* bigger. Guys, that's your first priority, because I want a whole host of planes in here that I can play with.'

'That's old Mack's land,' Bill put in. 'Could get that for a beer.'

They laughed.

'Make him a low offer, but try and get it, and the surrounding area.'

'If I get him drunk he'll sign anything.'

They laughed again.

'Give him a fair price, we don't want a bad reputation,' Jimmy suggested. 'Then we need to level it, dig foundations, and get a load of concrete laid. While that's going on, I'd like four more shed's like the one outside of this office, kind of sharpish. Then, I want lathes bought, the best quality you can find, and a few metal presses.'

They took notes.

'Then I want a small foundry created, so that we can make metal to our own shapes, and I'll need a good rolling mill set up.'

'You ... realise the cost of all this?' Bill nudged.

'I've lodged two million US dollars with the bank.' They blinked. 'Don't be afraid to spend it, but do be afraid if you tell me things are delayed. Take on more staff, because I have more money than I have patience.'

Jimmy left them to it. The next day, three of the scientists turned up, poring over a seaplane and examining it in detail, peering at part-finished airframes and making notes. By the end of the day they had suggested a redesign, stating that a wing may fall off if used in a steep turn. They left a perplexed group of Canadian engineers behind, Negroes telling them how to make planes. What a cheek!

The following day, Jimmy and Mac set off fishing in a small boat, a great day out had by the both of them, fresh salmon brought back for Cookie.

That evening, a Friday, Jimmy grabbed Mac and Handy, four of the bodyguards, and ventured into town and to the rowdiest bar – which was just about the only bar.

Stepping in, they found a lady singing on the stage, people glancing their way as the gang walked along the bar. These were not factory workers or engineers, they were lumberjacks or logging workers, big and mean, dressed mostly in blue or red checkered shirts. Jimmy walked right up to the stage, onto it, and nudged the lady away, the band halting. He had their attention.

‘Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Jimmy Silo, and I’ve just bought the tractor factory and the seaplane factory, and the hunting lodge. Since I’m new in town, all drinks tonight and tomorrow will be on me.’ The crowd cheered. ‘Now, I can see some of you arm-wrestling, and I’m a bit of an arm-wrestler myself. So, any man that can beat me gets a hundred dollars. Line up, if ... you’re tough enough.’ He stepped down.

Taking off his jacket, he sat opposite a bear of a man with a long black beard, offering his hand. They took positions, took the tension, and started. Twenty minutes later, eleven men had sore arms and elbows, cursing at length. One had not been too happy at losing, so Jimmy had broken his arm and nose. His friend had objected, and so Jimmy broke that man’s arm and nose. Now stood at the bar with the gang, the town’s Deputy stepped in.

‘Mister Silo, yes?’

‘Yes,’ Jimmy answered, shaking the man’s hand.

‘We’ve ... got two men in the infirmary, and they say you’re the one who did the damage.’

‘And they’d be right. I will, however, compensate them.’

‘My reports says that they attacked you.’

‘Oh? Why does it say that, Deputy?’

‘My father works at the tractor factory, my uncle, my brother ... and my wife works at the seaplane factory.’

'I see.'

'I did have the one request.'

'What's that, officer?'

'I like to fish, but I can't afford the lake fees.'

'You, and anyone who works for me, can fish in my lake whenever you like. Let that be known.'

'I will, sir. And ... thank you.'

'Thank you, Deputy. I would have hated to have been arrested in my first week in town.'

Jimmy and the gang walked around to a diner that was closing up. 'Do you mind staying open a little later?' Jimmy asked, slapping twenty dollars onto the counter.

The lady glanced at the money. 'What you boys after?'

'Pie, lots of homemade pie.'

And they munched through twenty dollars worth of tasty pie, sampling a variety, a good tip left, the lady making more in a night that she typically made all week.

The town's folk gradually got used to the strange English people with their odd accents, and black Africans with their slow and deliberate speech, and the small church congregation was swollen by six blacks, always dressed very smartly, always polite, always the best donators to the church. The factories hired every available spare hand, and skilled workers were brought in from Vancouver, housing in the town now at a premium. The boarding house had men doubled up in rooms, its small kitchen kept busy all day.

When Jimmy heard about the boarding house he offered them a loan to build an outbuilding, a kind of motel with twenty rooms in it. Several commercially-minded old widows hired out rooms, and three old widows moved in together, two houses hired out. Jimmy then organised a free bus to and from the factories, even a free bus to Vancouver itself on weekends. The canteens were expanded and improved, free cooked meals now provided for the factory staff, free coffee all day long. Jimmy was becoming popular. When workers accidentally sliced off their fingers they were compensated, well compensated.

Weekends, Jimmy and Ted messed about with the seaplanes, flights taken, the pair often making fishing trips down the inlet that the seaplane factory rested on.

A month into the new project, the first aluminium arrived at the seaplane factory, already rolled to 1mm and 3mm thickness. The staff puzzled it. Some aluminium was already used in this time

period, and they had seen tubes of it used as cross-struts. But still, they puzzled it. For two weeks the scientists toiled away, their handiwork peeked at by the curious staff. They finally finished what they had started, a small bridge over a stream, and made entirely from aluminium. People walked over it, jumped up and down on it, but it held. Since the insides of the bridge struts were visible, holes cut out, engineers peered at the bridge's internal structure ... and flight technology took a small leap forwards.

Jimmy then set the Canadian engineers a task, and a competition. Teams were set up, given aluminium, and asked to build a similar bridge to span the stream. It seemed straight forward enough. Four weeks later a few very wet engineers went back to the drawing board, cursing, Jimmy's prize money still in his pocket.

The next set of bridge designs were better, but still crumbled. Jimmy sent in the scientists, and they explained their research into structures. Lessons were started, nudging the Canadian engineers to fathom out a few things by themselves. The engineers experimented with thickness, square or round tubes, cross-tubes, beams and supports, welding or rivets. And they got used to upstart Negroes teaching them, a few arms folded when lessons were in progress.

A month later a bridge held, just a slight buckling evident. Jimmy then explained that in order to win the competition their bridge needed to weigh the same as the scientists' bridge. They weighed the first bridge, cursed, and went back to the drawing board.

Mac and Handy had finally been let loose, and they had grabbed the metal presses and lathes at the seaplane factory, sharing them sometimes, and they re-started their earnest efforts on the AK47 with the help of the scientists. Seeing a modicum of progress, Jimmy asked them to buy up land and to build a factory, a large factory, complete with offices, research labs, and suitable firing ranges. They halted their efforts on the AK47 and diverted their energies into the factory, where they would then work in peace, and with a few staff to hand.

The first two new staff members were taken on before the ground was even cut on the new factory, the new men both experts in munitions. They soon fashioned presses to make brass shells at 7.62mm Russian standard. Every week Jimmy would visit, blast a few rounds down the range at the sand, and then suggest slight variances. Mac and Handy were soon to be seen in white coats, measuring things to the tenth of a millimetre.

Called down to the seaplane factory one day, a worker sat looking up at Jimmy with a bloodied and bruised face, Bill concerned. Mac had done the damage, after the man had referred to Mac's age, other comments about "niggers".

Bill explained the comments made. Jimmy calmly handed the man the equivalent of three months wages. 'That's your severance, and compensation for the broken wrist.'

'He didn't break his wrist,' Bill pointed out.

Jimmy moved quickly, grabbed the man's arm, and broke his wrist, a loud scream issued. Facing a terrified Bill, Jimmy said, 'Have a word with the rest of the staff, about my *niggers* from Africa. And replace this man.'

'Sure will do, Jimmy. Anything you say.'

As the days ticked off the calendar, word came from Africa of rail track advancements, the new hotel, the number of kids in orphanages, and the number of recruits in the Rifles. Jimmy then bought a hundred American hunting rifles with basic telescopic sights, and shipped them to Ngomo, a second batch for Abdi, both deliveries made with ten thousand rounds of ammunition. The first batch of tractors were now ready, sent to the coast and put aboard one of Po's ships for direct passage to Mombasa. When dispatched, Jimmy didn't know that Steffan would pinch the lot on delivery and use them for hauling train track or digging roads.

Six weeks later, the engineers at the seaplane factory, now renamed to Trophy Aircraft, had a bridge that weighed the same as the scientists' bridge. It buckled. They went back to the drawing board, but had now started to incorporate aluminium frames and struts into their seaplanes.

A young man with a mathematics degree then turned up, being offered a well-paid position by Jimmy. He was put straight to work, being told to work out stresses and load distribution of aluminium frames. The scientists sat with him on occasion, the young man giving advice to the engineers about stress, loads, and breaking points. On his own initiative he built a machine that bent and broke frames, whilst measuring the force at work very accurately. The engineers would make a basic frame, clamp one end into solid structure, and then slowly apply pressure to the opposite end till the frame buckled. Our new mathematician would then give them a load-bearing graph, and the engineers would re-design their frame.

Stood watching them one day, Jimmy said, 'Why not put a skin on it, under a little tension. See what happens.'

They did, and it helped. They then received six additional engineers with suitable experience, and a drawing from Jimmy, a drawing of a wing that would be almost twenty feet long when made.

‘Build that as fast as you can, and with skin.’ He then headed off to New York via Toronto, to sell some diamonds and to formally request Canadian Government permission for a few things.

Upon Jimmy’s return to Trophy, the wing was ready. So was a solid wall to mount it on. The main spars were clipped in and bolted, the wing supported four feet off the ground, drooping a little at the end. The assembled engineers stood proudly watching their creation.

‘Climb up,’ Jimmy told the first man. That man clambered up. ‘Stand at the end of the wing.’ He did. ‘Now bounce up and down.’

The wing gave a little, the man wobbling.

Jimmy pointed at two engineers. ‘You two, join him.’

They glanced at each other and clambered up, soon holding each other’s shoulders and bouncing up and down, the wing flexing.

‘Another two, please.’

Now the engineers looked worried, Ted Baker closing in to observe. The five men bounced on the wing for a few seconds before a crack was heard, the wing drooping significantly.

‘Jump down, please.’ He faced the group. ‘What does the wing of gull do in a storm? Does it bend, or does it snap?’

‘It bends,’ they agreed.

‘It’s always better to bend, than to snap. If the wing is under high stress, bending is less of a problem than snapping. Something bent ... can bend back. Examine where it broke, and think about flexing. I want another one just as soon as humanly possible.’

He led Ted Baker to Bill’s office, pulling out a drawing and flattening it out.

Ted closed in. ‘Oh ... she’s a beauty; mono-wing, swept design for speed.’

‘But that one wing will need the loading.’

Ted nodded. ‘Twenty feet?’

‘A larger wing, but thinner; you get the rate of turn, plus speed.’

‘How fast do you think it could go?’ Ted keenly asked.

‘Well over two hundred miles per hour I’m hoping.’

‘Wow. I can’t wait to get behind the controls of something like this.’ He eased back. ‘You’re ... wasting a hell of a lot of money on this.’

‘Investing, Ted, investing. If it flies ... well, it could be sold to the Americans, maybe in Europe. I have some engines coming in

next week, pop down and have a look. They're the most powerful engines I could find.'

'All OK with the government?' Ted asked.

'Fine. We now have licenses for munitions manufacture and export, export of planes. Anyway, I have something I want you to make for me, for Africa.' Jimmy pulled out another drawing.

'What the blazes is that?'

'A truck with no roof, and with tracks at the back for going across mud and swamp in the jungle. We'll call it ... a half-track.'

'Looks a bit like a bulldozer.'

'It needs to be strong, to haul stuff as well. Can you put a team on it?'

'Sure, but they're stretched.'

'Ease off on the tractors a bit, we got the first batch away OK.'

Whilst at the aircraft factory, Jimmy went and found Mac and Handy in their new spacious building. 'How's it going?'

'Reckon we got the AK47 reliable,' Mac said, Handy nodding. 'I stuck a thousand rounds through one before I screwed up its barrel.'

'Good. Start on hand grenades.'

'Grenades?'

'Standard grenades, and create a grenade range. When you have a three second grenade, start with longer fuses, anything up to eight hours.'

'Good Morning grenades,' they said with a smile.

'And then, a grenade with a long pin and concussion fuse, to stick down the end of the AK47 and fire.'

'What range?' Handy asked.

'Whatever is practical, but if it's not over a hundred yards then you're a bunch of slackers. And Mac, the white coat is fine, but do you have to wear black and white stripped shoes?'

'They're common, it's the fashion,' Mac protested.

'For the local dance maybe, not to work,' Jimmy pointed out.

He left them laughing at each other, shaking his head. Bumping into Bill, he found his partner in the business coughing, and looking most unwell. 'OK, Bill?'

'Doctor says I need more tests, maybe in Seattle.'

'Come by tonight, we'll have a catch-up and a drink.'

Later that night, with Bill drunk and unconscious, Jimmy injected him in the leg with Sandra's blood, a lower potency than his. They put Bill to bed and called his wife, who was not a happy bunny, returning an apologetic husband in the morning. Good job it was a Saturday.

As Bill's health slowly improved, Mac and Handy made grenades, the scientists assisting with fuse design. When ready, each grenade was dropped into a water tank, the lid closed, its effects monitored, i.e. the pressure pushing up a dial. After each blast the pieces were fetched out by a young assistant and counted, large lumps handed to Mac for study. The iron casing was adjusted several times so that fragmentation was truly fragmentary. They then worked on the pressure; the blast power.

That Sunday, shouting caused many to see what was up at the lodge's reception.

'Mac, you go fishing with grenades again and I'll stick one up your arse!' Jimmy barked.

'I saw it on the telly, Crocodile Dundee whatsit. Keep your panties on!'

Jimmy slammed the door on his way out.

With the basic grenade working well, machines were made ready, a nightshift employed, and a batch of two thousand grenades were duly made ready, shipped to Ngomo with the fuses out. The white officers of the Kenyan Rifles soon learnt to throw a grenade and duck, the men familiar with them from the First World War, where crude variants were used. Ngomo also received two hundred AK47s of the latest design - the weapons now reliable, as well as a great deal of ammunition.

The recruits of the Kenyan Rifles switched from bolt action rifles to AK47s, something of a step up. They also received an early batch of Thompson machineguns with both straight and round magazines. But now that the men had delivery of the AKs, tactics changed for training, live fire exercises starting to push both the men - and the officers.

The new Governor of Kenya was disturbed by the Kenyan Rifles, since insurrection was a problem, memories still fresh about the Italians being pushed out of Somalia. But, with presence of the white English officers - most of them well-connected - his fears were played down. His predecessor was also the Honouree Colonel in Chief; Jimmy had planned ahead.

Meanwhile, at the lodge, the British guards received AK47s, and now hid their laser pistols. Hunting took on a whole new meaning, unwary local low-flying ducks now subject to bursts from AKs, the local fish subject to grenades from Mac.

The first winter in Canada saw a great deal of snow, life either revolving around work at the factories - or the Friday and Saturday

nights out, the security staff left with little to do. Jimmy assigned many of them to Mac to test weapons, some given flying lessons in the seaplanes when the weather permitted.

But, with a great deal of complaining, and a great deal of snow, Jimmy relented and organised a boat to take them all down to Los Angeles for a few months. A small boat picked them up at the inlet, transporting them down to Vancouver docks and to a steamer, the scientists electing to stay behind.

South of San Francisco the weather improved, and Los Angeles was reached in fine weather, a plush hotel booked into. The guys were soon on a terrace, girls in one-piece frilly bathers to be seen, and stared at.

'Fucking 'ell,' Mac said. 'I'd have to be drunk, prohibition or not!'

'Girls in our time period are ... different, and better in many ways.'

'Any decent clubs?' Mac asked.

'Many, but – you know – the music is –'

'Naff,' Mac finished off.

'And I doubt you'd find an Indian restaurant, although Chinese restaurants are plentiful.'

'Laurel and Hardy here?'

'Yep.'

'Abbot and Costello?'

'Yep.'

'Marylyn Monroe?'

'She'll be born in around ... twenty years.'

'So who's the tasty chick on the wall poster in the lobby?'

'Greta Garbo.'

'Was she banging the dude with the long dick?'

'Errol Flynn? No, he's in school right now.'

'So how come Paul didn't come with us?' Mac asked.

'He may join us later, after a bit of a rest. See the lady sat on the side of the pool? That's Joan Crawford.'

'She famous?' Mac asked, slurping his drink.

'It's like taking the blind to an art gallery,' Jimmy sighed. 'Just don't say anything ... to anyone.'

'We could go to Vegas,' Handy suggested.

'You could do, but why?' Jimmy posed.

'Hotels, casinos,' Mac suggested.

'Which will be built in around ... oh, twenty five years.'

'Nothing there?'

'Nothing at all, save a road and a gas station.'

'Bugger,' Mac let out.

The gang tried a Chinese restaurant, not recognising many of the dishes. Still, the food was OK. And the next morning they walked along a beach that someday would have bodybuilders, roller-skaters, and nutcases aplenty. Now it had people in odd bathing costumes, families, fathers in suits. There were no high-rise buildings yet, and no traffic jams to the valley.

Noticing a poster on a wall, Mac stopped, calling over the gang, who stood reading the detail of an all-comers prize fight, a \$1,000 purse for whoever could stay in the ring against a giant knuckle-head of a man.

‘How much is a \$1,000?’ Big Paul asked.

Jimmy gave him a look.

‘No, I mean in ... real terms. Is that a lot?’

‘It’s a lot for this time period, about a year’s wages for most people around here,’ Jimmy commented.

‘I can take that guy,’ Big Paul stated, straightening.

‘Come on,’ Mac urged Jimmy. ‘It’ll be fun.’

‘It’ll be fun, if Mark takes him down,’ Jimmy stated.

Everyone turned to face Mark, the shortest of the bodyguards. He edged closer to the poster, studying the image of the boxer presented. ‘What if he spoils my good looks?’ Mark dryly commented. ‘Am I insured for that?’

‘You don’t have any looks,’ Jimmy pointed out.

Mark shrugged. ‘I’ll give it a go.’

Later that evening they found the venue, eventually, finding thick crowds lined-up outside. They went around the corner and to a side door, a bribe paid for entrance, as well as for good seats. Inside, the crowds were thick, the air thick with the smell of sweat and testosterone. Mark paid his \$10 entrance fee, and convinced the organisers that he could box. They placed him down the list because he was short, way down the list, so he handed over another \$50 to be third on the list, being shown where to change, Big Paul soon rubbing Mark’s naked shoulders.

‘Duck, weave, bob, then kill the fucker,’ coach Big Paul offered, getting a look back.

Sat in a row at the back, the gang asked about betting.

‘It’s illegal,’ Jimmy reminded them. ‘So go talk to the big ugly fucker down there at the back door.’

Several of the gang placed illegal bets, soon back with hotdogs and sodas; the organisers of this fight risked gambling, but not bootleg beer. The title defender, a real monster of a man, clambered into the ring to much cheering.

‘He’s big, but not fit,’ Mac noted.

The first contender was shown in, soon knocked out cold with a heavy punch, but not a fast or skilful punch. The second contender did not fare any better. Mark eased into the ring, the difference in his physique to the first two poor victims immediately obvious, the big lump opposite stood sizing up Mark – and Mark's odd tattoos.

With the bell clanked twice, the referee stood back and gestured both sides together. Tapping his gloves together, Mark moved forwards, close enough to be hit. The giant threw a punch as expected, Mark ducking under it and around, a good punch to the side delivered, a second blow to the side of the head before he jumped back, the crowd cheering at this odd turn of events.

The monster turned about, taking a moment to consider his strategy against his smaller - but obviously faster, opponent. He closed in. Mark waited for the punch, sidestepped it, and then launched himself up and onto his toes, almost leaving the canvass, a good left hook to the monster's jaw. The big guy wobbled back, the crowd cheering and jeering in equal measure. Now the monster looked less sure of himself.

He also appeared angered, and now lunged forwards. Mark slipped to the side, but cut upwards as he did, a good tap to the chin snapping the monster's head back. With the big lump stunned, Mark again launched up onto his toes, and landed a good blow to the side of the monster's face, forcing the big guy to stumble towards the ropes and bounce off them. Bouncing back, Mark was ready, a good right hook launched on tip-toes, straight to the jaw front on. It was all over, half the crowd pleased, many not pleased. The event's organisers were in the camp of "not pleased".

The referee reluctantly lifted Mark's arm into the air as the giant lay unconscious, Mac and the guys moving down to collect their winnings. And there started a problem. The big guy who had taken the bet was refusing to pay out, suggesting a sting of some sort, or that Mark was a professional boxer. Mac pointed at the large sign on the wall: all comers welcome, professional or amateur. The bookie was having none of it, a protesting Mac soon surrounded by three heavies.

Frustrated, Mac hit the first heavy in the throat, sending him to his knees, Mac getting hit across the side of the face as Handy knocked cold the second heavy. Big Paul and Jimmy had been sat down, and now jumped up, launching themselves over the side of the seating stand. Mark was out of the ring, now with three of our men, and walking back to the changing rooms when he saw Jimmy move. He burst through the crowds.

Mac was dazed by the blow, well past his prime by about eighty years or so, Handy just as old. Big Paul launched a flying kick at the bookmaker, sending him backwards, Jimmy hitting both heavies nearby, soon a dozen more heavies closing in and intent on either stopping the fight, or beating the crap out of Mac and Jimmy.

Big Paul punched quickly, left and right handed, Jimmy doing likewise, a wall of bodies on the floor slowing up the progress of the venue's bouncers. Mark still had his boxing gloves on, but now struck out at anyone who looked like they worked at the venue, the others doing likewise, soon a large brawl breaking out, and soon a large number of unconscious men on the floor being stepped over. Several of the guards carried pistols, but they were not drawn.

With a break in the fighting, and some thirty men in varying states of consciousness, Jimmy grabbed Mac and shoved him towards the door. 'On me!' he shouted at the others.

Outside, Jimmy punched down two staff trying to get in, those people stood nearby now moving away as the gang emerged. Jimmy turned, 'Is everyone out?'

The gang glanced around at each other quickly.

'Mark, your clothes,' someone shouted.

'No time,' Jimmy countered. 'Mark, anything to identify you in them?'

Mark shook his head, now trying to undo the boxing gloves with his teeth, stood in just his shorts and boxing boots.

'Let's go,' Jimmy shouted, leading the men around a corner and towards the quietest side street he could see. Around the second corner, Jimmy stopped the gang, checking everyone was still with him, Mark now shaking off one glove. Facing Mark, Jimmy said, 'We won't get far with you looking like that, numb nuts.'

He crossed the road, and stopped three men. 'My friend here needs some clothes, and quickly. A hundred dollars for yours.' Jimmy produced the money.

'A hundred? Jeez.' A man started stripping, Mark soon in trousers over his boxing boots, a jacket on his top, a cloth cap placed on his head.

Jimmy led the sports fans around the corner at a pace, spotting a restaurant. They ducked in, Jimmy shoving fifty dollars towards the head waiter. 'Cops are after us. There a back way out?'

The man took the money, counting it. 'Through the kitchen, into the alley, left and down, go into the back of Malley's, ask for Richie.'

The gang trailed through in a long line, being stared at by early patrons of the establishment. In Malleys, a secret drinking joint, Jimmy handed Richie a hundred dollars, and asked for a few drinks. As well as a shirt for Mark. The gang were shown to a private room upstairs, food offered and accepted as the gang settled, many now laughing, a few nursing cut faces and cut hands.

Mac lifted a wad of dollars. 'I grabbed these from the fucker who wouldn't pay me. Fucking beers are on me, lads.'

The bodyguards cheered and laughed, Jimmy shaking his head as he tended bloodied knuckles with a napkin. 'That was a stupid thing to do,' he commented.

'Come on, it was a great fun,' Big Paul countered. 'Need to let our hair down once in a while.'

'A few years in a prison cell ... will do nothing for the cause we're on,' Jimmy pointed out.

At 1am they left in four taxis, soon back at the hotel.

Bored after a week, and bored of trying to keep a low profile, the gang elected to try Hawaii, Jimmy explaining that there wasn't much there yet. Still, they boarded a liner and headed off, arriving a week later. They booked into the best hotel, but then split up, exploring the islands in small groups. Surf boards were bought from locals - the only surfers at this time, and members of the gang received lessons, riding waves on beaches that would not see any "surfer dudes" for a very long time.

The roads were quiet, the food cheap, but beer was illegal under prohibition. It could be found, brought in from Asia by ship, and the lads had deep pockets for the bottled Chinese beer. Jimmy explored the islands, enjoying the peace and serenity it offered, many sailing trips taken in small yachts.

No one was in a hurry to return to the frozen north, a ship boarded for Mexico two weeks later, and Acapulco visited before it became famous. No one bothered to dive off the rocks, but the beer was cheap and plentiful. With a few of the gang wanting to see the Panama Canal, passage was booked through the canal, the gang heading for the Bahamas next, but finding it very basic on arrival.

Electing for Florida, they sailed west and stopped at the Keys, the fishing enjoyed. Miami Beach was yet to attract tall hotels and tourists, the gang heading north to Washington. There they found old men who had actually fought in the Civil War as young men, the gang asking about the battles. The various historical buildings were peered at, as well as the monuments, but local people were perplexed at the notion that the city had been laid out like a

pentagram, and that it was all run by freemasons. And who the hell was this Dan Brown fella anyway?

Bored with Washington, the men headed up to New York, where the skyline looked very odd. There was no Empire State Building yet, the Twin Towers were not even a concept, and skyscrapers had not reached much above twenty floors. They caught a few shows, recognising the names, and bribed their hotel's doorman to get them into a few genuine alcohol clubs, run by gangsters. Central Park looked familiar, the zoo little more than a collection of birdcages, and the subway was presently passing through tunnels that would be abandoned and replaced soon.

Jimmy refused to let Mac go to Chicago to meet Al Capone, who had not yet reached fame, and - finally bored with New York - they headed back to Canada by train.

March saw the return of the gang to Canada, the factories having struggled with production deliveries in the winter snow. Another batch of two thousand AK47s had been shipped out with forty thousand rounds of ammunition and five hundred grenades, Ngomo soon to be well stocked. When Jimmy saw the production stats of the AKs he had them stockpiled, switching the teams immediately to the sniper variant, giving Mac and Handy the task of designing an automatic fifty calibre sniper rifle, akin to an M82 from 2010. It would need a good telescopic sight, most of which originated in Switzerland.

Sykes and Jack were sent a telegram, dispatched to Switzerland via Germany - to get a feel for the politics of The Fatherland en route. In Zurich they found suitable lenses, but asked for custom attachments. Having ordered the sights made, the rifles own attachments would have to be adjusted to suit. Sixty were ordered and paid for - to be shipped to Canada, where they were to be used for "hunting" - as the export license claimed.

Two Swiss scientists, just leaving university in Geneva, were made offers they could not refuse, jobs in Kenya that paid very well. They would be working on steam engines, and were destined to meet with accidents once in Kenya. These future rocket scientists would never light the blue touch paper, but they would retire.

Meanwhile, in Somalia, the Italians had taken heavy losses, a full uprising now an indisputable fact. The territory that they effectively controlled was now simply a strip of coastal plain around Mogadishu. Their withdrawal was inevitable, the ruling families of Somalia bribed to invite in the British, a surprise to the British agents in the area. Abdi's name was now known to the Colonial

Office that ran British Somaliland and Kenya, but they feared him as much as the Italians would have if they knew Abdi, and what he was up to. A full withdrawal of Italian troops was just a few months away.

With AK47 production temporarily halted, Mac and Handy worked on several variations of fifty calibre rifles, informing the puzzled staff that the weapons were to be used for elephant hunting in Africa.

The aircraft engineers had whiled away the cold winter months and long Canadian nights making a wing that bent and stretched instead of cracking. Jimmy was pleased with their progress. He gave them the drawing of the aircraft he had designed, and they smiled. They would now make a start on a project that would fly, and not just be tested to destruction.

‘You received the engines before winter,’ Jimmy told them. ‘I want them improved, tuned to perfection, and we’ll use them for this new plane, which we’ll call the Trophy Mark One. Bill, split the teams: wings, fuselage, tail, elevators, and undercarriage. And yes, once the first airframe is built we’ll bust it up just to see how easy it is to bust it up. Go to work, people.’

Jimmy led Bill away. ‘You’re looking well.’

‘Chest cleared right up. Stupid doctors, what do they know?’

‘Yeah, what do they know. Anyway, I’ve made more money available -’

‘We ain’t spent the last lot,’ Bill pointed out.

‘No, but I want more land, and more hangars, large ones. I want one which is a sixty yards wide.’

‘Jeez.’

Jimmy took out a drawing. ‘It’ll need tall towers with anchor wires, and in the winter we’ll need to keep the snow off it. It’ll be for these new planes; I’ll want four or five in there being worked on. And while I was in Los Angeles I spoke to a man about plastic. You know much about plastic, Bill?’

‘Comes from oil?’

‘Yes, so I’ve hired a guy to start soon, see if we can use this new fangled plastic in the planes.’

‘Wees got plastic twelve inch rulers about here someplace now. And a plastic slide rule.’

‘It’s the future, Bill, and we need to be right up there with the latest technology. My guys will experiment with it.’

‘They got the tractor engines running smooth, and changed the oil on those engines you brought in. They’s reckon there’s less heat.’

‘Always a good thing ... when in close proximity to aircraft fuel.’

‘There’s air shows in the summertime, so maybe we’d be ready for next season.’

‘Let’s hope so. And let’s hope we have something worth showing off.’

A few days later, Jimmy had a word with a scientist before the man headed off to work. In the plane factory, the scientist attached a battery to two wires, the wires to a strip of copper, a volt metre in the circuit. Calling over a group of engineers, he showed them the experiment.

‘I have noticed that heat affects resistance in metals. If you will watch the volt metre, please.’

He applied a flame to the copper strip, the metal changing colour as it warmed up, the volt metre rising.

‘When hot, the copper is less of a resistance to the electrical current.’

‘If we placed it on an engine part, we could measure the temperature,’ someone said.

‘And if it’s over-heating,’ another said.

‘Perhaps worth some experimentation,’ our scientist said. ‘I will create a simple device, and we can see what happens. Would someone like to assist?’

A week later, and our new engines were wired to a panel of ten dials, each labelled with the engine’s particular part. Green, amber and red strips had been placed on the dials, an engineer now watching the dials as the engine was revved up to full power. Cockpit-placed engine heat warnings had just been invented.

That evening, at the lodge, Jimmy called a group of our scientists together. ‘Guys, I’m thinking about a few shortcuts. How about aluminium glue?’

They were surprised. ‘That was not invented till 2027, sir. A long time from now.’

‘If we use it, then our competitors can’t copy, and we’d have the weight advantage in the aircraft,’ Jimmy argued.

‘Molecular acid, targeted molecular acid, is hard to produce,’ they said. ‘We would need a laboratory and chemical facility.’

‘That’s not a problem. But how easy would it be for someone to copy it?’

‘It would impossible to copy it. They would need the right formula, the correct equipment, the right matrix make-up.’

'Good. One of you specify what would be needed, then create a facility tucked away, trusted people only to be working there. And I don't want anyone out of the group to know how to make it; keep it in your heads, not on paper.' He took out a drawing and unfolded it, showing them.

'My god,' they gasped.

'You have fifteen years.'

'Would this not ... significantly alter the timeline?'

'That's why we're here, gentlemen. And besides, our boys in Europe have ... *dispatched* half of the next decade's political leaders.' Jimmy tipped his head, making a face. 'And the following decades leaders for that matter.'

Jimmy received the East Africa Times and Nairobi Herald newspapers on a regular basis. They came by ship, and were always at least ten weeks out of date. If they were just eight weeks out of date Jimmy was excited, staying up late and scouring the detail. The other team members would then read the newspapers after him, finding them left about the coffee tables in the mornings, smiles caused by the detail of Rudd's empire building, or simply by the reported progression of train track.

Jimmy also received newspapers from Hong Kong, in Chinese and English, although they were typically only four weeks out of date, the papers from Britain around six weeks behind the times. The detail was delayed, but Jimmy kept an eye on what the various satellite operations were up to, the detail of stories often causing a telegram or two.

The summer of 1922 saw the outline of an airframe actually become an airframe, some sixty people working on the first prototype Trophy Mark One. With the engine mounted, fuel tank fitted, the plane looked like a human with no skin. With most of the gang watching, the engine was started and run up, engineers checking the vibrations - and their effect on the airframe. With the engine off, and a suitable body sat in the cockpit to simulate the weight of a pilot, the centre of gravity was carefully measured.

Jimmy then arranged for a crane to lift the plane, about its centre of gravity, to a height of just twelve inches off the floor, and had it dropped. It bounced on its wheels and settled as the engineers looked on like expectant fathers. He then had it dropped sixty times, the height growing. The undercarriage eventually buckled.

'Gentlemen,' Jimmy called. 'Someday soon some young hothead of a pilot is going to land that thing harder than it was meant to be

landed. Have a good look at the undercarriage and make it spring loaded, and make sure that if something is going to break ... that there's a chance that the pilot will get out and walk away. Swap the undercarriage, check the airframe for any damage, and then have it dropped again.'

He faced Bill. 'How's our wind tunnel?'

'Be ready in a few weeks. It's got six different engines all lined up ready to make one hell of a wind.'

'Gantry ready?'

'Just about,' Bill replied.

'Good. You can start work on the thermal room now.'

'This *thermal room*...?' an engineer puzzled.

Jimmy explained, 'When aircraft fly high they get cold, the engine hot. If they sit on a runway in the desert they heat up. When we have a skin for it we'll make it cold, then hot, then cold and hot all day till something stops working. We'll also make sure that the poor pilot is not too cold in the cockpit. As soon as there's a skin on this prototype I want the second and third started straight away. Go to work people.'

Bill took Jimmy to one side. 'I was wondering ... if it would be possible ... to borrow some money.'

'For what?' Jimmy puzzled.

'With all the new folk in town there's a dollar to be made from building houses and selling them, or renting them.'

'Sounds good so far.'

'And I wanted to ... you know -'

'Cash in. Bill, use company money, build a few houses and rent them out or sell them, and build a boarding house with forty rooms. If anyone is to profit from our workers, then it should be us.'

'Right, right.'

That evening, Jimmy sat thinking as he sat facing the lake, Cookie at his side with a cold beer. 'We're building more houses for the workers. There's a dollar to be made from them as well.'

'How about a hotel?' Cookie asked. 'This place is OK an all, but winter here is ... fucking impractical.'

Jimmy glanced at Cookie, then out across the lake. 'A nice big warm hotel. Yes,' he sighed. 'It would be more practical. But where?'

'Other side of the plane factory, on the road to Vancouver. There's a headland that would a nice spot.'

'Cookie, take tomorrow off, take Sandra for a drive, check it out - see who owns it, get a price. Then find a building company that can handle a ruddy great hotel.'

‘Can I design it?’

‘You can have a hand in it; I don’t want it looking like Po’s first hotel.’

Cookie laughed. ‘No, more traditional Canadian style.’

A few days later, Cookie had both a drawing and a price for the land, plus a price from the builders. The lower floors of the hotel would be concrete and steel, clad in traditional stone, the upper floors clad in wood, the roof wood. It would be five floors with a basement, a conservatory facing the lake, and would offer a 15m heated indoor pool. Jimmy had added a large ballroom for dancing, complete with stage; bands were live in 1922. Security was then considered, windows on the ground floor made smaller and higher, and all rooms facing the lake would offer their guests balconies.

Jimmy altered the design to have a restaurant/diner on the top floor, reserved for the gang, as well as a study and reading room; our black scientists would not rub shoulders with white guests. Happy with the design, he called the builders to the lodge.

‘Gentlemen, we’ve decided to give you the go ahead on the hotel. We’ve bought the land, and we’re looking forwards to the hotel being ready. Now, as some of you may know from my reputation, I have more money than patience. As such, I want you to devise a shift system of three eight-hour shifts.’ They blinked. ‘That’s right, I want building work going on around the clock. I want you gentlemen to break a world record in how fast you build this hotel.’

‘Now, I’m not an unreasonable man, so I’ll pay upfront for all materials and much of the men’s pay. There’ll also be a big bonus when the hotel is complete – if it opens for Christmas.’

‘Christmas!’

‘Yes, gentlemen, Christmas. And I’m happy to look at all reasonable claims for extra costs; I don’t mind you paying men time and a half at night. If that’s not acceptable, I’ll find other builders.’

They swallowed, but got to work, the road towards Vancouver soon congested, and muddy. A temporary worker’s camp sprung up, wooden huts strung out in neat lines. The hotel gave Jimmy an idea, and he sent for Mac and Handy.

‘Guys, go into Vancouver this weekend, find the best hotel and stay at it, then see if there’s one worth us buying.’

‘No problem,’ they offered, Big Paul tagging along.

A week later, Jimmy bought a hotel in the centre of town, renaming it to “Silo’s”, its ballroom getting a lick of paint. The new nightclub opened that Friday, the drinks free. It was well attended.

The local business leader came and found Jimmy through the crowds. 'Mister Silo, yes?' They shook. 'I'm Brice LeBonte, the leader of the city's business group, and a councilman.'

'It's always useful to know the important people.'

'I say that often, which is why I'd like to talk to you.'

Jimmy led the man to a table.

Brice said, 'You're employing a great many people, which is good for the district. If there's anything we can do to help...'

'Roads could be better. If they were expanded over the years then it may help.'

'We were thinking along those lines; you've created a great deal more traffic. There was talk of a rail spur a long time ago, before you arrived.'

'I'd be happy to contribute towards one.'

'Then I think we should have a formal meeting at some point.'

'Whenever you're ready,' Jimmy told him. 'And I aim to employ a great many more people in the future. I just hope the noise of the aircraft is not an issue for people.'

'Jobs and full bellies are an issue, noise we can live with.'

'A good attitude. Now, how do you think the Canadian Government would react to me *sponsoring* an infantry regiment?'

Brice puzzled Jimmy's meaning. 'Sponsoring ... infantry?'

'It creates jobs, but I'm interested for my own selfish reasons. I need well-trained and well-disciplined men who could operate under license in Africa, and other parts of the world where I have mines. You see ... the local police and army can't be trusted; they're the ones causing the trouble.'

Brice nodded. 'You need men with honour and discipline. But why do that through the Government?'

'They have the officers, the bases, the existing structures. And, when I don't need the men, I don't want them out of work – I'd want them back here and employed as soldiers. I don't want gunmen, I need a disciplined and cohesive unit, and loyal to Canada. We'd train them here, house them here and – god forbid should Canada be involved in war – they would be your soldiers.'

'But you'd pay for them?' Brice queried.

'Yes, and I'd have a few ideas about how they'd be trained.'

'The Prime Minister is here next week, on a tour, so I'll mention it. We went to school together in England.'

'I'd appreciate it.' They shook. Jimmy turned to find Sykes and Jack. 'Made it then?'

'Long old journey, but pleasant,' Sykes said.

‘Love the trains,’ Jack put in. ‘Boat crossing was a bit rough, but good to see New York. It looks like our New York – but with a hair cut!’

They laughed. Jimmy said, ‘Get a drink, and we’ll talk later. Booked in?’

They nodded, Mac and the others closing in to greet our British team, a fuss made of the long lost members of the gang.

The following evening, back at the lodge, Jack said, ‘Pancakes, Cookie?’

‘Jack!’

Cookie and Sandra came around the counter and hugged the wandering sheep, pancakes soon on, something of a party started.

An hour later, sat with Jimmy, Sykes said, ‘Britain is dreary in the 1920s. And the food is ... well, like my old school dinners. Only good thing about the place are the road races down to Brighton on a summer’s day, some wonderful cars to mess about with.’

‘And Timkins?’

‘Known as Peter Forsyth, a party activist, and nominated as member of parliament for Sheffield, his original home town.’

‘How’s he coping?’

‘Fine. He has a nice house, a housekeeper, and travels a great deal.’

‘He travels?’ Jimmy queried.

‘On the liner back up to the UK he made a point of getting to know some of the passengers, recognising a few names before I did.’

‘They have a role?’ Jimmy puzzled.

‘Some are destined to be wartime cabinet members,’ Sykes emphasised.

‘Good work then.’

‘Very. He’s best buddies with ten future power brokers and industrialists, including the future head of the wartime RAF.’

‘That is good going.’

‘He’s joined a few gentlemen’s clubs in London, and makes a point of getting to know certain future leaders, the “chaps” unknown at the moment. Unknown and unimportant.’

‘They know his background and money?’

‘Oh, hell yes. That story of being raised in the jungle – that’s told many times over a whisky late at night, your name bandied around a great deal as well; they know you’re his sponsor and mentor. He’ll get elected next year, and then it’s a case of bidding his time, gentle interference, a word in the right ear at the right time.’

'Layers of an onion,' Jimmy commented.

Sykes nodded. 'He's fitted into the role like a glove. I've been to some of the meetings, and he thumps out the message to the working class and the liberals alike with a passion and fever. If he ever needs a job as a priest he could get one.'

'You think he could last the test of time?'

Sykes took a moment. 'He said something the other day, that this was his life now, and that the other life was just preparation. Said that he hardly thinks of his old life, and doesn't miss it.'

'That does happen; I had to keep reminding myself of what was to come. At times ... at times I could have easily closed the door on the other world and just stayed where I was.'

'No danger of that with him.' Sykes assured Jimmy.

'And Jack?'

'Loving it. He even dabbles with the ladies on occasion.'

'He is changing.'

'Well, sixty years the same woman... ' Sykes broached.

'And you?'

'Hell, I have no conscience to worry about. Paris offered a few nice ladies for some pleasant distraction.'

'Ngomo now has six wives,' Jimmy mentioned.

'Six! The dirty bugger.'

'That's what Rudd said. Ngomo first married a mum and her two daughters at the same time.'

'Crikey, I have the wrong colour skin. And ... Dr Astor?'

'I can't get involved, I'll be moving around too much.'

'And here?' Sykes risked.

'Couple of ladies of ill-repute in Vancouver after a beer, that's it. Po laid on some nice ladies for us. That's where you're heading next, yes?' Sykes nodded. 'There are a couple of British gentlemen there, and in Singapore, that need their careers cut short, and I need you to assess a few British companies and their directors for me.'

'And after? Kenya for a visit?' Sykes suggested.

'Why not. But smoke out India on the way, make some friends for later, and spend some time with the Brits in Cairo, make connections.'

'Love to see Cairo in this decade, and Delhi! So, are the tractors going OK?'

'They're making me a half-track for the jungle and desert.'

'Ah, wondered what you were up to. And planes I understand.'

'First single-wing high-speed fighter should fly in the spring, maybe sooner. Aluminium.'

'No ... questions?' Sykes nudged.

'No, they accept it, because we make it look like we tripped across the technology. We're now developing molecular glue -'

'What? Are you crazy? That was invented a few years or so before we left!'

'It looks and smells like grey paint, and it sticks. What the hell do they know about it? The factory making it will be kept secret, the formulas in the heads of our guys, nothing written down. Oh, when you reach Kenya, send word to Abdi that I want his scientists here in a year or so.'

The next day, Jimmy showed Jack and Sykes the aluminium airframe.

'Looks a bit like a P51 Mustang,' Jack noted.

'This type of shape was due to appear in ten years or less, so its no big deal. What's important ... is the inside, and the Japs and Germans won't be able to reproduce them. This will turn tighter than a Jap Zero.'

'I'm damned jealous,' Sykes admitted, sticking his head into the cockpit. 'I'd love to build something like this.'

'In a few years you can fly around in one. Oh, did you buy shares in De Haviland?'

'Yes, and they were surprised, but they do have a good order from the British Government for a large mono-plane; wood, glue and string!'

'They'll grow quickly,' Jimmy said with a smile. 'And when in Nairobi with Rudd, get him to order a few aircraft from them for the British Army there, making it known to De Haviland that it was your doing.'

'Air service down to Mombasa?' Sykes asked.

'Sure, just don't send anyone you like.'

'Ah.'

'Give it a few years, for safety to improve.'

Sykes and Jack ate with Jimmy at Ted's house that evening, tales of Africa and Jimmy's upbringing; being found by savages in the jungle, hand to hand duels to the death, the diamond mines. Bill and Ted got the full works, the legend spreading. Still, it was far more believable than the truth about Jimmy. Sykes and Jack got in some fishing time during that week, a seaplane trip up the inlet and a glimpse of a bear or two.

'We drew the short straw with Britain,' Sykes complained one day over coffee.

'And I thought you a loyal subject,' Jimmy teased.

'You try going to a toilet down the end of a garden during the winter nights!' Jack countered. 'And carrying a candle or paraffin lamp!'

'You guys can set your own agendas,' Jimmy pointed out. 'So winter in Kenya or Cairo, do some proper spy work and earn your bloody keep.'

'Any German spies in Tahiti?' Jack asked.

'No, but there'll be plenty in Africa from 1933 onwards. Their networks will be in place before then, so they'll need to be ... nipped in the bud.'

'PACT,' Sykes noted. 'And Unit 402.'

'Operating out of Nairobi,' Jimmy agreed. 'And before then ... a small war with the Italians in Abyssinia. Go see Abdi in a year or so and see about loosening the Italian influence there. Get geared up ready.'

'Abdi's Rifles up to it?' Jack asked.

Jimmy lifted his eyebrows and nodded. 'Complete with AK47s, grenades and grenade launchers, sniper variants and fifty calibre sniper rifles.'

'Italians won't stand a chance,' Sykes noted. 'Save the British Indian Army the job of doing it in 1939. What about the Italians in Libya?'

'We'll rout them a year later,' Jimmy replied. 'The aim is to convince the Italian populace that the desert is not worth bothering with, coming on top of their other losses in Africa. Part of me is kind of hoping that the Germans are daft enough to send an expeditionary force before 1939.'

'Same lesson?' Sykes asked.

'Well ... no, I don't want the Germans to back off starting the war. I want the German's arrogant and aggressive, because any delay is ... simply a delay of the inevitable. We need the boxer in the ring, then knocked down in such a way that the German people will never want to go to war again.'

'A lesson they failed to learn in 1918,' Jack noted. 'No aerial bombing of their cities, or firestorms; no Dresden.'

'Exactly,' Sykes agreed. 'And Somalia?'

'The Italians have nothing left to govern other than Mogadishu,' Jimmy said with a shrug. 'Only a few hundred men left. Rumour has it they'll be gone in a few months.'

'And the British in Somaliland?'

'Will wait a few months, and then be invited in – all above board. And, oddly enough, the Italians don't believe that their fate

is down to the British, since the British are fighting with the locals as much as they are.'

The gang all travelled to Vancouver to see Sykes and Jack off, the pair bound for Hong Kong next, via Honolulu and a little holiday in the warm.

Returning to work, Jimmy observed the growing foundations of the new hotel every week, encouraging faster work. Steel girders were being employed, and the skeleton soon took shape, a giant grey metal frame delineating the outline of the final hotel.

At the aircraft factory, the undercarriage had since been agreed as being as tough as practical, dampeners and springs employed by the scientists. When the new silver prototype was dropped from five feet, it bounced and settled better than most modern aircraft. It was almost time.

The engineers ran the engine till fuel ran short, topped it up and ran it again, breaking several of the engines. The engines were made externally, but one type seemed OK, Jimmy asking Ted to perform high speed taxiway testing in the prototype. With that test satisfactorily completed, Ted took off with a bump and flew a low circuit of the airfield, landing with a bump – and a cheer from the engineers. Champagne was issued by Jimmy, everyone sent home early.

The next day, a crisp and fine morning, saw Ted don a pair of dated goggles and start the plane with a burst of smoke. With quite a crowd watching, he took off and performed a few circuits with flaps up and down, and then flew off down the inlet, two of the factory's original biplanes following. Ted soon outpaced the seaplanes, and came back across for a high-speed pass, two hundred and forty miles per hour. He landed safely, reporting everything well, but Jimmy ordered the speed kept a secret for now.

One of Ted's pilots was then selected, the man performing circuits all day, a few high-speed passes. With that under his belt he performed a few tight turns, then just went for it and performed a barrel roll over the airfield. Climbing to three thousand feet, he looped the loop and landed.

All that week the man took the plane up and tested it, making a few comments. Jimmy then insisted that the plane be placed in the thermal room, pilot inside. It was baked and frozen for twenty-four hours, the engine cutting out several times, fuel freezing. Vibrations had also caused cracks in the main engine supports. Jimmy ordered the plane taken apart and examined in fine detail.

‘How about rubber tubing for the fuel lines,’ he suggested. ‘But with a covering of fine wire mesh to make it strong.’

They got to work, and brass fuel lines were replaced. With the second and third prototypes just about complete, Jimmy had one wheeled out to the taxiway one day, Mac stood by with an AK47. The engineers assembled.

‘Gentlemen, it’s my hope that someday we might sell this to the Army. As such, it will see some action and dog fighting. During those dogfights it will be shot at. Mac.’

Mac stepped forwards, readied the AK47 and shot the plane full of holes, the fuel catching alight, the engineers horrified. The fire truck dosed the flames, eventually.

‘Gentlemen,’ Jimmy called, facing a horrified group of engineers, smoke hanging in the air. ‘If we expect an army pilot to sit in the damn thing, then we should consider how we can make the damn thing a little safer for when it’s hit by bullets. Go back to the drawing board.’

They went, cursing as they did. The third prototype was used to assess landing and take-off speeds and distances, a pilot’s handbook created. The pilots tried landing with or without flaps, and tested their rate of climb and descent in various configurations, as well as the plane’s rate of turn. Within a week the engine had gone again.

Jimmy went and found Bill and Ted. ‘Guys, could we make our own engines, these are dangerous.’

‘Well, we make engines now,’ Ted pointed out. ‘Just not performance engines.’

‘Ted, let’s not waste our time with someone else’s poor engines. Set aside ten acres, build a factory and offices, and let’s start designing our own damn engines, huh? Be next year before we have one, but that’s fine. In the meantime, let’s send people off to find and buy the best engines, ones that will last more than a week.’

Trophy Tractors was now in the aero-engine business. And those tractors, two hundred of them, had found their way to Kenya, Rudd issuing them to various interested parties. Anna accepted a few for her orphanage farm, Steffan received more for the train track, and many were sold cheaply around Kenya, Rudd accruing favours and becoming even more popular.

In September, the latest variant of the half-track was presented to Jimmy, Mac and Handy testing it at length. They suggested modifications, driving the prototype till it broke. Once fixed, they drove it over rough ground till it broke, needing to be towed back by a tractor. Still, it was coming along.

Then Brice the councilman turned up with the state governor, permission finally granted for a Canadian Rifles brigade to be formed under government control. There was an existing barracks near Vancouver, derelict, and they nudged Jimmy towards some money to take it over. He agreed, sending in the builders. Posters went up around Vancouver and throughout the state, advertising for young recruits, the Canadian Government to send a few NCOs and officers when the barracks were ready.

Jimmy got together Mac and Handy, and the British bodyguards. 'Gentlemen, we've been given permission to start the Canadian Rifles.' They glanced at each other. 'Anyone ... know anything about soldiering?'

'A bit,' Mac said. 'Will they ... you know ... go all the way with the training?'

'No, they won't. They'll be injected with quarter strength, they won't get AK47s yet, they will get sniper training, and they will be toughened up. They'll learn to climb, and they'll spend time in the desert and the jungles.'

'What'll you use them for?' Big Paul asked.

'My aim is two fold. First, they'd be a group that we can dispatch if we need to, and second, NCOs for the Canadians who take part in The Second World War; they'd have experience, and better tactics. And, former members would join our motley crew in Africa. Any sixteen year olds joining now would be thirty-seven or younger in 1939, but fit because of the drug.'

'All of you will be involved, and taking an active role in training. Go have a look at the barracks, and start thinking of assault courses, running tracks, ranges. Mac, buy an assortment of all of the worlds weapons so that each man is familiar with ... all the worlds weapons. And a shit load of ammo.'

'Uniforms?' Handy asked.

'Make them close to British Army specs, 1980s.'

'Standard weapon?' Mac asked.

'Something like the Lee Enfield short barrel for now. But guys, this is a long term project, so no need to have them ready for spring.'

'We stick with the munitions?' Handy asked.

'Yes, but split your time. And when the half-track is ready ... get the new soldiers used to it, give the Rifles a fleet of them. Two of you bodyguards I'll want at the barracks permanently as instructors, if not four of you.'

That following week, Big Paul informed a clothes maker in Vancouver of what he wanted. He must have looked crazy. Still,

they needed the work. He then visited a boot importer and manufacturer, specifying what he wanted, and how many – in varying sizes. It was their biggest ever order.

The fence around the barracks was replaced, replaced with one eight feet high and topped off with barbed wire. The gatehouse was revamped and extended, barrack blocks now being touched up and painted. A boiler room had its dated boiler replaced, hot water to be pumped to each barrack block. Figuring on inclement weather, often, a large hangar was commissioned, somewhere where the men could train, or march around, when it was wet and dark outside, a climbing frame to be built around its inner wall and roof.

The officers quarters, what they were, were touched up, additional rooms to be built. A bar or two were commissioned for the NCOs and men, and a large communal canteen. Figuring that the base may be here a while, Big Paul designed a gym and pool - a large structure, the builders wondering about the odd luxuries that these foot soldiers might enjoy.

Mac designed an assault course using the readily available supply of huge logs. It was a long assault course, some six hundred yards long, complete with tunnels and swings. Noticing the depression that it sat in, Mac had an idea, and organised high brick walls to be built around the course, earth placed behind the walls. Many smaller walls were built jutting out from the main sidewall, allowing targets to be placed behind, the targets not visible till the trainee had drawn level with the wall. This would be both an assault course, and a live firing range.

Jimmy had a look around the new base as the autumn nip started to bite, making a few suggestions, not least that the men wear standard Canadian dress uniform when off duty, and when not engaged in an activity that involved mud. Combats were fine for training, but not to be worn off the base and around Vancouver.