

Magestic 2

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Part 3

Nappies and bootleggers

Winter, 1928, saw baby Mary toddling, an early walker, and she was growing rapidly. She held a Canadian birth certificate, and people did talk behind closed doors because we were not married; it was 1928 in small town Canada. Still, they knew not to say anything, or I'd have them dropped from a plane.

The first contingent of British NCOs were now being housed in Kenya and enjoying the desert, having undergone a gruelling six months of training in Canada. They had all completed basic parachute training and had grown to like it, many going on to sample freefall. With a permanent British Army liaison now at the Rifles base, Big Paul suggested that twelve of the men come back as full time instructors, to be based in Canada. The Brits agreed, the men destined to return to us after a holiday in England, and then only if they so desired a holiday in chilly old England.

The FBI had departed, sorry to leave us, and were now sneaking about the border in their white snow smocks and catching the bootleggers. They benefited from accurate and timely intel' from their counterparts across the border, and the FBI were growing in stature and reputation, Washington delighted. The various insert teams would cross the border to Canada to meet the Rifles on a regular basis, and to have a party out of the cold when their bosses figured them sat freezing their nuts off watching bootleggers. Cross border co-operation was at an all-time high.

Jimmy then convened a war council. 'Ladies and gentlemen, baby Mary.' They laughed, Mary waving as I moved her hand. 'The secret airfield will now be extended with numerous underground facilities, more hangars, including one eighty metres across. It will be needed for an aircraft with a thirty metre wingspan.'

'Shit...' they let out.

'A road will be laid some ten miles east, where an underground facility will be made. Actually, it will on the surface, then covered in dirt and moss, and will operate all year round. Those working there in the winter will have to stay there for five months at a time, but that will not be for a year or two.'

'Atom bomb,' Mac stated, looks exchanged.

Jimmy nodded. 'Come 1939 I want ten operational bombs, but I have no intention of using them.'

'You don't?' I asked.

'No, not unless absolutely necessary. We will, in the spring, start developing advanced fuel-air explosives, binary liquid. If necessary, *they* will be dropped on Japanese cities -'

'Cities that are all made of wood,' Hacker finished off.

'Exactly,' Jimmy said. 'The effect should be similar, but with a lower loss of life: people could flee. We'll also be developing bombs that will detonate below the water's surface.'

'Crack the back of a battleship,' Big Paul put in.

Jimmy nodded. 'And we'll drop them near warships. We'll also develop knockout gas for aerial delivery. If the US Marines can send people to sleep ... then they need not kill them when they storm ashore. Now, unlike the aircraft, we *will* teach the British and Americans how to make atom bombs, around 1938. Any sooner and it risks getting out. The Manhattan Project was started in 1940 and completed in 1945, as you know. We ... are accelerating that process by a few years. We'll also develop a plane that can deliver the bomb, ready for 1939.

'Between now and then, my greatest fear is that we leak technology and start an arms race, or that the war is started earlier or later. We'll need to be flexible. Unfortunately, showing our weapons too soon will not deter the Germans or Japanese; they'll simply wait till they have their own. If the war is delayed till they all have nukes ... we lose the planet. So between now and 1939 we need secrecy, and we need to monitor the Germans, the Italians, and the Japanese.

'Sykes and Jack are handling that for us, but we may have altered things with our passenger aircraft, which are seven or eight years early. The Germans, and the Japanese aircraft companies, will be trying to copy us, to some degree.

'OK, starting in the spring we'll begin collecting Uranium ore; there's a place up near the Arctic circle where it lays on the ground in lumps. We'll then start refining it. All those working on it - not from this group - will need my blood. Big Paul, we'll want permanent patrols and security at that base from the spring onwards. It may get cold in the winter, but it will operate all year round. Paul, arrange stored supplies up there, enough for at least nine months. And let's start testing snow skids on Dash-7s.'

I raised a hand. 'How about a big oil furnace underground, spraying warm water on the runway before a landing; it'll be good for half an hour.'

'Try it, since the base needs extra heat in the hangars.' He faced the scientists. 'Start working on air blowers, and insulation for the hangars and buildings. You could rig up parachutes suspended

from the ceiling to keep in the heat. Some of you will find it very cold up there, so make it comfortable; home from home. And use tents; large tents inside the hangars with heaters inside them. And if the hangars get really cold, run a jet engine for five minutes.'

The following afternoon I accompanied Jimmy over to the secret plane factory. He assembled the senior staff. 'Guys, I'll not want any more jet prototypes of this design, so you can test them to destruction. I want the basic fighter thirty percent bigger, and then we'll test its range - and the weight of bombs that it can carry. The speed is fine, so use the same engine in a heavier aircraft. Going very fast is exciting, but at that speed you can't shoot down another plane or drop a bomb and hope to hit a target.

'So, we want a jet fighter with a maximum speed of six hundred, but bigger wings to carry bombs and rockets. Then, I want you to take the same design and make it two-seat, one behind the other, with duplicate controls. It will be used for training, but I also figure that one guy could fly while the other navigates and drops bombs. Thank you, and go to work, people.'

And four hundred people got to work, not including the people they could call upon to make parts. Mac, Handy, and the scientists designed a one thousand pound bomb, and it would be tested on the jet next year. For now we rigged up a rack to a seaplane and bombed the Canadian moss, disturbing the wildlife.

For a test, they made up dummy one thousand pound bombs and strapped two to a jet prototype. On landing they cracked a main spar in the wing, a valuable exercise. A redesign of that spar was on the cards, but I suggested that the bombs should be closer to the fuselage; that way less stress. They used the second jet prototype to test my theory and failed to crack anything on landing. Progress: we had a fast jet with a really crap payload.

The next thirty production Dash-7s and twelve seaplanes all went down to American Airlines. Since they were leased to ourselves, late payment was not an issue. We now offered more routes, Dallas becoming a hub. Toronto to Washington was added, Washington to Mexico City, Washington to the Bahamas and Bermuda, New York to San Francisco non-stop. Smaller airlines folded, and fledging airlines gave up before they even got started.

Seeing that Boeing was struggling because of us, we moved quickly and bought shares, offering them contracts to make planes for us, less technologically advanced planes. We also offered to teach them some of what we knew. They accepted, since they had no choice. A handful of our engineers travelled down - it wasn't far

– and began to organise Boeing. Their first aircraft for us would be aluminium, but with rivets and no honeycomb. It would have our engines, and would be a high-wing monoplane with a high t-tail and large flaps, and would operate as a rough airfield aircraft, large wheels and sturdy undercarriage. It would also have rear loading clamshell doors and detachable ramp.

We gave them plenty of money - no one would be let go, and a three-year timescale. Basically, it was a three-year learning curve for their staff, who would probably advance around six years in their skills. Ours were twenty-five years ahead. And we now informed them that we owned the land next door, so they could build on it.

Meanwhile, our gold deposits were growing, as was the rate of extraction, but a British mine engineer - well paid to shut his gob, told the Belgians what we were doing. Ngomo quickly moved tonnes of gold ore to the mine in Zambia, tin ore back. A Belgian team reached the mine in Zambia and examined the gold, as well as our mine, examining the tin. The man had been wrong, and they went away. The man also went blind, shipped home.

Seeing that our bauxite, used for aluminium production, came mostly from Australia, I arranged to buy up most of it. Jimmy then showed me the world's largest deposit on the map; Guinea, West Africa. We got Rudd on the case, and our trusty Dutchman bought land that covered the future deposit, not due to be discovered till around 1950. He bribed a few people and received permission to mine for gold, for which Guinea had plenty, and bauxite was duly discovered. We'd corner the market in the decades ahead.

We were also causing a stir with our cars. They were not cheap, but everyone wanted one, especially the richer Americans. As production increased the vehicle's purchase price fell, the factory expanding. Again. We shipped the cars down to Los Angeles and across to New York, where the people loved them. If you were not driving a Trophy car, you were nobody. A "trophy" wife or girlfriend in the car with you was optional, as were furry dice.

Jimmy then intervened and specified a lorry, a large lorry, and since the engines were powerful it was the logical choice. It would help with moving heavy parts. The lorry would drag two wagons, a joint between them, both wagons offering four large wheels. He then specified a simple and long lorry with a separate cab, for lumber, of which there was a great deal around these parts. We would soon be in the trucking business.

An October stock market crash

Spring, 1929 saw us make plans for the October crash; history repeating itself. How many times had I traded a crash in our era, and always in October?

We drew up lists of US companies that we were interested in, and they included banks with futures, ship builders, telephone and radio companies. We even had an eye on a few film studios. That was months away, so I concentrated on the aircraft, but also paid regular visits to the Rifles. Another fifty FBI guys had turned up, and we had put them through their paces. They were followed by another two hundred British NCOs being welcomed – or shouted at – by former British NCOs.

That led to another visit from Mister Churchill, this time with Timkins - aka Forsyth. 'We'd be interested in a training depot in Kenya,' Churchill began, lighting a cigar.

'We could organise one quickly,' Jimmy offered. 'But our best people out there are ... black.'

Churchill took a drag. 'We know, we've spoken to returning soldiers and officers, most of whom had high praise for these black soldiers, not least their physique and fitness. But the officers are white, I met one.'

'What would be your aim ... and what are your hopes for such training?' Jimmy asked.

'You make men like you make machines, Mister Silo. I won't profess to understanding how you achieve either, but you do – and in good measure. So if we had soldiers that were tougher, and better trained, it could only be a benefit.'

'True,' Jimmy agreed. 'But I will restrict numbers, since – as with my aircraft – we have no wish for our enemies to observe our training techniques. And that chap Herr Hitler seems intent on stirring up trouble.'

'I have an eye on him,' our host declared. 'And both Forsyth here, and I, agree that re-armament is important.'

'So do I,' Jimmy agreed. 'Traditional armaments.'

Timkins said, 'And we'd like more of your planes for the empire routes.'

'I'll see what I can do,' Jimmy offered our man in parliament. 'But they are popular.'

'Especially with the Americans,' Timkins noted. 'American Airlines is growing rapidly.'

‘We’re all one big happy family,’ Jimmy commented. ‘A common language, and a common purpose.’

‘Well, you’ve raised some eyebrows in Downing Street with your gold,’ Churchill stated. ‘You’re easily the richest man on the planet.’

‘Would they like a larger cut?’ I asked.

‘It may be prudent,’ our guest suggested, ‘to place some elsewhere, or risk your wealth becoming tea house gossip.’

‘I trust the Bank of England completely,’ Jimmy said with a false smile. ‘So unless they wish to alter the arrangement ... it will stay in place.’

‘As you see fit, it’s not my concern. So what of Kenya, and our soldiers?’

‘We’ll assist, starting with five hundred men a year in Kenya, increasing the numbers of men visiting here to say ... four hundred a year?’ Churchill nodded, Jimmy adding, ‘I’ll arrange a base in Kenya within weeks, and increase the size of the base here pro-rata.’

‘We brought with us an order for fifty of your single engine aircraft, thirty of the twin engine types,’ Timkins explained.

‘Would you stick guns on them?’ I puzzled.

‘No, they’re for observation and communications around the empire’s hotspots,’ Timkins explained.

‘Ah.’

With Churchill and his team looking again at the sports car, we took Timkins upstairs, hugs and greetings exchanged with the gang, a thousand questions fired at him. The car kept our guests busy for an hour, after which they ate and rested, giving us time to chat to Timkins at length.

‘All on track?’ I asked him.

‘All on track,’ he confirmed with a smile. ‘And now Churchill quotes Jimmy, even in speeches.’

‘He names him?’

‘No, just pinches a few lines.’

‘Cheeky blighter,’ I mocked with an accent. I introduced Timkins to Susan, their first meeting, and my daughter - now running around and under everyone’s feet. I sat her on a stool at the counter and Cookie fed her, Holton family girls always quiet when food was around.

‘Churchill had been advocating a *peace approach* in recent years, but he can see the Nazis taking power in Germany, so he’s coming around to the idea of re-armament.’

‘It happened before, so it’ll happen again,’ I said. ‘What, 1934?’

Timkins nodded. 'The Germans will re-arm around 1933. But you caused a hell of a stir with these planes and new weapons. They're pleased that you're on our side, but scared as hell that others may get hold of them first.'

'They won't, it's a bitch of a manufacturing process to copy,' I assured our man in London.

Jimmy joined us. 'I hear congratulations are in order.'

'What?' I asked.

'I'm engaged,' Timkins replied. '*And* to a Tory heiress, Lady Helen Chastleton. We met on a flight back from Cairo aboard a Goose.'

'If the British establishment is trying to rope you in ... take one for the team,' I encouraged, checking where Susan was.

'I'm an odd mix of high society ... and socialist values,' Timkins confessed.

'Have you altered anything over there?' I asked.

'Oh, yes, a great deal. Where I knew that our overseas polices would be unpopular I've influenced things, averted a few uprisings in far off corners. I've affected trade and industry as well through businesses I have seat on the board with, pushed them in a few new directions.'

'To the benefit of the British?' I asked.

Timkins nodded. 'For now we need Britain stronger, to take on the Germans, and Jimmy has plans for the empire. If left unchecked, the war will leave Britain broke, whilst loans from America become dependent on Britain giving up its empire.'

'Ah...' I let out. I faced Jimmy. 'You figure that a post-war Britain would be easier to influence than America, especially around Africa.'

He nodded. 'It's a work in progress. But keep in mind that right now the British Empire is stronger than America. It's not until the US industrial machine gets going during the war that America truly takes over, and that's down to Britain shrinking in the war and going broke. Right now the Americans are jealous of the British Empire; they want it down-sized.'

Sykes stepped in with Jack. 'Didn't know you were here?' I said.

'Just landed,' Sykes said. 'Fresh from Hong Kong.'

'Congratulations,' Jimmy said to Jack.

'He's been married a while,' I pointed out.

'A son,' Jack said with a smile.

'A son?' I queried. 'Lucky bugger; I just produce girls.'

'I wanted a girl,' Jack admitted.

'How's Hong Kong?' I asked.

'Po and Yuri are buying up every damn business they can afford,' Sykes reported. 'Their ships go everywhere. They even have a few cruise liners, and they bought mining rites to Papua New Guinea.'

'It's a good area,' Jimmy agreed.

'But what happens when the Japs invade?' Jack asked.

'The Rifles would defend it, along with their little air force,' Jimmy said with a grin.

'Ah,' Jack let out. 'That'll give them something to think about. But won't our people be cut off and surrounded?'

'Feel sorry for the Japs,' Jimmy told him.

We held a formal meal downstairs for all of our guests, Sykes and Churchill having been members of the same club for almost nine years and now great friends. The British establishment knew that Sykes also worked for us, but the intel' he provided to them was too valuable to complain about.

The group discussed aircraft, there was no getting away from it, and our British guests seemed a bit jealous of American Airlines. Well, they had British Airways, so what was the problem? Seemed that they wanted to fly to South America as well, and every other bleeding point on the compass. There's no pleasing some people, I thought, keeping my thoughts to myself. Jimmy promised to expand British Airways, and asked about a runway closer to London, maybe west of London, round Heathrow way. They would look into it, since there was a small strip there already.

Churchill told stories of the Boer War, and of daring exploits in his youth – and he liked the sound of his own voice. Sykes would then make up incredible stories about Jimmy killing someone hand to hand and pulling an arm right out the socket and beating the man with it. I had to hide a smile. And Sykes, he was so sincere in his story telling that Ted and Bill were both fascinated and horrified in equal measure. At least there were no ladies at the table; this was 1928 and business. Man talk, as I later described it to Susan, getting a slapped head.

'You're courting the British Government,' she said in bed, 'yet not the Americans.'

'We need their help in Africa. No Americans in Africa at the moment, love. Or later, come to think of it.'

'And talk of propping them up after the war, holding onto some of the empire.'

'Only around Africa, and only till *we're* ready to take over. Besides, right after the crash we're going to give the US economy a

significant boost that'll put them years ahead. 1940 will seem like 1950.'

She dropped the issue, my spy in from the cold. I wasn't unhappy with what I knew about her, I was enjoying my family life and sex life greatly. It was like ... a second chance, a second time around, and I was very grateful. Those twelve years fighting had reset all my registers, and I was like a twenty-year-old again, not the ninety years I actually was.

Our guests had a good look around the huge Canadian Rifles camp, and again tried a few weapons, Churchill always keen to have a go at anything. He drove a half-track - and damaged a jeep, before eating in the men's canteen; he wanted to see what conditions were like. He was impressed, the food great. It needed to be; our people had been injected and they ran twenty miles a day.

At the end of the day our guests admitted that they had grabbed the returning British NCOs from Kenya and formed their own Airborne Brigade, parachutes bought from us and Dash-7s to jump from. The teams would be used for advanced recon, which was the whole point. Jimmy promised them a plane that would carry eighty paratroopers, within a year or so. It was news to me, but it turned out that a variant of the seaplane had been sidelined. It would have a more shallow float, but still be able to land on water, and benches instead of luxury seats. Two new doors at the rear would allow paratrooper egress. At the moment, it was still on the drawing board, but would prove an easy enough conversion.

Our guests signed a deal for more jeeps, and now half-tracks for use in Africa, and we bade them farewell at the inlet, Sykes and Jack catching a lift back to cold old England. If that particular plane crashed we'd have a problem.

But our safety record was excellent; it was why people wanted to fly our planes. And when the Goose fleet did have a problem they set down on water. Some flew their entire routes on three engines, some limped in on two. One had landed next to a battleship when a fuel line broke, and so far the only fatalities had been a heart attack, and some guy who had missed his footing and fallen into the water between the plane and jetty - and drowned.

A few of our Cessnas had ploughed into the ground in bad weather, but our guys had not been flying them at the time. And of those accidents, many lives had been saved by the aircraft's crumple zones. A few Cessnas had hit hard, the passengers surviving, one or two Dash-7s hitting things without splitting apart or catching fire.

The "stretched" Goose, known affectionately as Mother Goose, was very stable, both pilots sometimes going back to calls of "who's

flying the damn plane?” Passengers were amazed by the auto-trim, and it became known as the plane that flies itself. The US Navy came calling, desiring the aircraft for maritime patrol, and we could not build them fast enough.

When I had a quiet moment I helped Hal with the flying bedstead, which was looking more and more like a Huey every day. ‘We’re seriously taking the piss with the timeline,’ I commented one day.

‘Instead of Vietnam, US Marines will use them on Iwo Jima.’ Hal remarked. ‘No big deal. That’s only – what – twenty years early.’

The bedstead now had a skin, and was looking like a helicopter. When Jimmy saw it he ordered it moved to the secret factory, not to be flown over the town. He was, however, pleased enough with it, and no one thought the helicopter strange. Since many people had tried in recent years to make one it was no great shock. Hal told the engineers what he thought may help, and they argued it around, Hal always making it appear as if it was their idea.

With a heat-boned honeycomb skin and aluminium frame, it was a safe bird to crash land in, something we kept reminding Hal of. We even advanced basic Huey technology along with springs and dampeners in the skids. If you hit hard, the bird bounced. We enclosed the tail fan, but high-speed rotor tests often ripped the main axle apart or tore off the blades. Where was carbon fibre when you needed it? Hal opted for more blades, wider, and less radial speed. It did the trick, and the helo behaved like it should. Jimmy would not sanction a second prototype yet, so testing had to be gentle.

I took her up with Hal sat left seat, and this all felt familiar, as well as feeling like something I did sixty years ago. The bird behaved, and hovered, slipped sideways, backwards and forwards. I flew her out over the woods behind the factory and up the inlet, returning without incident. It brought back a lot of memories, but I didn’t inform Susan of the stunt; spy or not, she nagged like a real wife. The only problem with the Huey was the sound effect, and I told Hal, ‘It’s got to sound like a Huey.’

‘They were twin blade, so a different sound. In time.’

When Big Paul saw it he wanted them for the Rifles, and pleaded with Jimmy to the point of raised voices. It was 1929, for fuck’s sake; we couldn’t risk releasing them yet.

My home life was busy, in that there were no modern conveniences, and always something to do. Vegetables had to be cleaned and peeled; there were no processed foods yet. Fruit needed washing and careful examination, floors needed sweeping - I had a

mind to invent a Dyson vacuum cleaner. The heating boiler needing fuelling and kicking on a regular basis, garbage had to be driven to a spot where it was handed in, milk needed to be picked up each day – it didn't keep, and floors needed washing regularly. There was no washer-drier, just a place you took them to be washed, a launderette in town or in Vancouver. I was forever threatening to invent things, getting the pointed finger from Jimmy.

October crash

The news of the October crash came by rumour, phone call, and finally newspaper. People started to fear for their jobs. We waited to see what the effect would be on our flights, but instead of being booked ten times over we were now booked five times over. A few advanced orders were cancelled, naturally, but we focused on British Airways and on Hong Kong flights – and aircraft that had been cancelled were sent that way. And we were still short of damn aircraft.

Jimmy said that the crash would take months to affect the UK, a year to affect the rest of the world; we were not yet an integrated digital world. And with many companies going to the wall, or about to, we pounced, buying stocks in a great many companies before offering them loans. We picked up more Boeing stock, a film studio, two ship builders with Navy contracts, and a shit load of property from people who were desperate to liquidate their assets. Tall towers in New York, and many other cities, fell into our hands, whole apartment blocks with hundreds of apartments in.

It was a fire sale on a grand scale, and we bought property around Los Angeles for next to nothing, large estates that movie bosses had owned. In Seattle, we just decided to buy the whole damn town; apartment blocks, hotels, businesses, they all went for a song. We knew what we would need in years to come, and bought a few Texas oil companies, as well as a few mines. Those of our suppliers that came to us cloth cap in hand, literally, were bought into.

In the space of three months we had increased our value more than fifty-fold, if you used the factories as a start point. And we still had money in the bank. Since we now owned that bank's parent bank, it was all in the family.

Bill and Ted could not believe, nor fathom, how much money we had spent – nor where it had come from. With the winter turning

bad for many American factory workers, we made a move that would make the newspapers; we started soup kitchens. First in Seattle, none needed in Vancouver yet, then in San Francisco, dozens of them. They snaked ever south across the map, but we concentrated on the north, right across America. By time we had hired the staff to run them we were numbering twelve thousand staff.

They doled out bread and soup each day, the sign above their heads making it clear who was paying for it. By time April came around we were feeding two hundred thousand people a day. And that was just the start.

Jimmy then sent a note to the US President himself. 'Sir, as you may be aware I sponsor a Canadian Infantry Regiment, who turn out fine and disciplined men. Given the current crisis, and the good men out of work, I would like to sponsor a US Regiment in Washington State, say twenty thousand men. They would get three meals a day, a bed, and would be far from temptation and trouble. I would require your officers to run it, but would fund food, fuel, and additional equipment where needed. I await your response. Your servant, Jimmy Silo.'

The response came back within days; we had a go, an existing base selected, the officers and NCOs notified. We sent a team of our own roughnecks to advise on barracks and assault courses, running tracks and canteens, and the builders moved in.

The recruitment process began in earnest, newly recruited men encouraged to help build their own barracks. The pay was terrible, even for 1929, but they got fed and they had a roof. They also received an inoculation organised by Susan, a puzzle to the US Army doctors at the base. We indicated that the men may train or exercise in Africa, and that seemed to do it. The first two hundred men assisted the builders, and got fed. Each had a twelve-month signing, renewable if we wanted them back.

Our own Canadian Rifles were increased towards two thousand, most of the original intake now corporals or sergeants, some now even officers. Twenty were dispatched to Washington State, to bring the training along. We bought bolt-action rifles and plenty of ammo, sending it down to the base, several armouries needing to be built. The base received a better fence, and we insisted that there be a few internal bars for the men; it was not a prison.

As soon as a barrack block was finished, additional recruits would be signed up, stuffed inside, and asked to work on the next block. Inside a month of starting the base we had over a thousand men, all busy building things. At the end of the second month we

had three thousand willing volunteers, uniforms brought in. The first batch of men to have been recruited were now fit, scaling the assault course a few times a week. Big Paul was stretched, but enjoying it all. Mac and Handy stopped designing weapons and put their boots back on, even Hal and Hacker went south and helped at the base. They were, after all, ex-US Army.

The Rifles NCOs, being Canadian, did not cause a stir with the enlisted men, but the US officers were not best pleased. That was until they started measuring themselves up against our guys. Then they were just downright moody and miserable. Our guys offered the US NCOs money if they could knock them down, and kept their money. They challenged US NCOs to running competitions, and showed them up. The testosterone was thick in the air, but the groups eventually settled. Jimmy popped down often and made it clear that he spoke to the President regularly, and any officer who pissed him off would be scrubbing floors as a junior cook's mate.

The men were kept busy learning new bits of kit; jeeps, half-tracks, mortars. But, most of all, they appreciated the food and the roof over their heads. Threats of being kicked out were taken seriously.

By June of 1930 the base held twenty-two thousand men, the fence pushed back time and time again. That led to the US Army opening a new base a hundred miles south of the original, in California, and eight thousand men moved down to it. So we hired another five thousand for the old base, just to be awkward, the sprawling base now creeping more than four miles end to end.

Then we asked for a base in the desert, near our parachute school in New Mexico. A fence was thrown up, wooden huts knocked together, water wells sunk. The first five hundred men moved down, housed in tents to start with, and started building another camp from scratch. Supplies had to be brought in, but the camp soon took form, a hive of activity, dust scuffed up by boots. Jimmy sent down the existing Goose aircraft that had a rear door fitted, and large numbers of men were put through parachute training on a voluntary basis, six or seven flights a day.

Palestine

The British had relented after a little arm-twisting, and more Jews were allowed into the region. Jack then made a visit, finding the Jewish elder responsible for recent immigrants.

'You are Joshua Krevsky?' Jack asked.

The man looked Jack over suspiciously, noisy kids running around the table he sat at. 'Yes. You are a British official?' he asked with a heavy accent.

'Not really.' Jack handed over a large bag of small diamonds, making Joshua's eyes widen. 'Sell those in Europe or America, and bring as many Jews as you can from Europe, from Germany.'

Joshua pointed a hand to the diamonds. 'This ... is worth a great deal. A great deal.'

'Then you should be able to bring many people here. Now, there are some conditions. We want you to buy land from the Palestinians, we don't want any locals to feel that they are ... being pushed out. If you help me with that, then there will be more diamonds like this, many more, from my boss.'

'And who is your boss?'

'His name is Jimmy Silo.'

'Silo, the one the newspapers say is world's richest man?'

Jack smiled. 'Yes.'

'He is a Jew?'

'No, not a Jew. I will be back in six weeks.' Jack then presented a letter to the military governor of the mandated region, explained that Jack would do just about what the hell he pleased, signed by the Prime Minister. On land that had been simply allocated to us by the British mandated governor, Jack commissioned five large hotels, three where the modern-day Tel Aviv would one day sit. Ships had already docked, and men and materials were pouring off.

Those British labourers were tasked with improving roads, as well as the port facilities at Haifa. They had also been asked to employ local Jews, "Sabas", as well as recent immigrants. The ancestral land was getting a makeover.

And there Jimmy made a mistake, or maybe he knew. Maybe he weighed up the odds and decided to go ahead with it anyway, and to hell with the consequences. His action in Palestine would have ramifications for us all.

Six months into the new military endeavour in the States, we arranged for the best men to be made Corporals, one stripe, some made up to full Corporal, since we needed the supervisors. Some men were natural born leaders, big and tough, and they were selected, more pay received. NCOs were segregated, and each base offered several bars for the corporals.

By modern standards we had more Indians than chiefs, often twenty-five or thirty men to a corporal, four sections to a sergeant, twelve sections to an officer. We were in a hurry to promote. Our

Canadian Rifles had reduced in size temporarily with many NCOs posted down to America, but a year with our Rifles made a man a sergeant for sure. Our people found the training for the Americans tame compared to the tortures they had endured in the Canadian mountains, something of rest for them.

I was busy these days, running the empire, our own empire. Managers had been hired, and now toured all of our properties around the States. Our hotels were not making much at the moment, if anything, but we didn't care; this was a long haul. Our apartments were in the hands of agencies, and I kept an eye on them. The properties in Los Angeles were boarded up, or rented out - often at good rates, and I turned my hand to the movies. Dragging up the head of the studio we bought, I sat the man down.

'I want you to make a film about US soldiers fighting Japanese, or similar. So long as the bad guys look slanty-eyed. On some island in the Pacific.'

'Why?'

'Because I'm the damn boss.' I held my fixed stare.

'Oh. OK.'

'And then a film about the rise of these Nazi fellas in Germany; make them look real nasty, and intolerant of outsiders. Then I want a film about these Russian communist idiots. They think everyone's money should be shared, that everyone is equal. Write a story about a hard working communist factory worker and corrupt bosses; I want the people to see these arseholes for what they are. Oh, and make them all loves stories, or with a love interest. And always kill the hero at the end.'

'What kinda budget?'

'A big one, we're not short of money - use the best stars for them. Kindly get on it quickly.'

I went and told Jimmy only after I had commissioned the films.

'Good to keep the studio busy, but the world will produce enough propaganda films in the next few years. You're just a few years early - again. Does Susan ... complain about you being early?'

I wagged a warning finger.

'So ... how *is* married life?' he asked.

'Great, second time around. And, considering just who she is, she nags more than Helen did.'

'Your girl is growing rapidly,' he sighed. 'Sneaks behind Cookie and takes whatever she wants.'

I smiled. 'Holton girls like their face stuffing. How are we money wise? We stretched?'

'Nope, we have more than we know what to do with. The gold is at a good level, Rudd sends us money from Nairobi, Abdi has sent some back, and the fridges made good money, very good money. Po could send us more money, but he's expanding rapidly. And we still have half the diamonds. This year will see the DOW Jones pick up a bit, so I'll trade a few stock's that I know will do well.'

'Microsoft not listed yet?'

He smiled. 'No. But Bell Telephones is, and the forerunners of many computer companies. We have a large slice of Coca Cola and others, so should make a killing. We have the navy dockyards for the war years, and our airlines are also making a killing.'

'No competition, that's why! How's the bomb?' I asked, glancing around.

'The scientists made basic Geiger counters, and we have a few tonnes of ore. They're refining it as we speak. They're also working on C4 and similar, and complex detonator circuits. That ... is basically it. The original Manhattan Project took longer because of a great deal of experimentation and theory, which we bypassed. A separate group have developed a fuel-air explosive, and they have a lab working on binary-liquid.'

'That may do it by itself,' I suggested.

'And with no lingering radiation,' Jimmy keenly pointed out. 'It'll be the first type of attack we try.'

'Why are we not milking the fame in the US? Everyone knows us now.'

'What need do we have? We don't need the people behind us. Remember, this is 1930, and public opinion counts for jack shit right now. We need the man in the White House on our side, not public opinion.'

'So why the soup kitchens?'

'For when we do need public opinion on our side, and because we help where we can those less fortunate than ourselves.'

I turned my head, and there stood Anna and Cosy, a baby cradled and a child walking. We leapt up. 'Another one?' I asked.

'Yes, a child needs a sibling,' Anna said.

I kissed her on the cheek. 'That's a talk I should have with Susan.'

'Where is she, we haven't met her yet?'

I shook Cosy's hand. 'Looking after the kid, I guess. How did you get here?'

We found them seats, the girl shy and hiding behind her mother.

'We thought about the new planes, but then took a cruise liner to Hong Kong, a nice enough break. Po persuaded us that the

planes were all safe now so we flew across to Hawaii, had a little holiday, then to Los Angeles and had a look around, and a train up here – great scenery.’

‘Bit of a trek,’ I said.

‘First big trip for a long time,’ Cosy said, others now noticing them and coming over.

‘How’s the orphanage?’ I asked.

‘Stable, and growing,’ Anna responded. ‘Three thousand children, plus those in Nairobi.’

‘And their education?’

‘The first batch are now very bright,’ she confirmed. ‘And we had ten of our fifteen year olds join the Rifles. But most are very young still.’

I asked Cookie to call Susan, and she brought our own sprog down, Mary studying the strange faces and the young girl. A three-hour long party began, plenty of food for the kids. We resumed the party in the morning, not much work getting done, tales of Rudd and of Kenya. And Anna had previously met Susan in the volunteers group, her cover story confirmed.

Cosy tried the sports car, and marvelled at our family car, jealous as hell. He took a ride in Hal’s Huey and was amazed, and glimpsed jet fighter assembly in the secret factory. I took him down to the Rifles the next day and he fired an assortment of weapons, Cosy glad to be back with the boy’s crowd. We even had a few beers with the soldiers.

That evening they told us about the mine in Guinea, and what they knew of the gold mine in the Congo. Ngomo now wore the rank of Major, and all of the white officers accepted it. The white officers outside the Rifles didn’t, but our bunch knew Ngomo’s capabilities. Dr Astor was still working at the hospital, and had been briefly engaged. I exchanged a look with Jimmy. Dr Graham was creating a teaching hospital with a reputation that attracted doctors from Europe, and Abdi was running Somalia like a business, but still playing nice with the British. When he created a golf course and hotel the British were most put out. Still, Abdi graciously allowed the British Governor the first tee-off. Mogadishu was becoming a good place to be posted for the diplomatic types. It was safe, clean, and offered good hotels with fridges.

And Rudd, he had the fridge makers create air-conditioning on the roof of his hotel. Now, in the rooms below, you could turn on cold air. Progress.

Steffan was busy with new track, a line up to Tunisia through the worst parts of the Sahara. As a passenger, you could go for a day and see nothing but sand. Instead of boarding a troop transport in Mogadishu or Kenya, British forces could go all the way up to the Mediterranean. Soon, they'd be able to take a train from Mombasa, through the Congo, Zambia and to the coast of southern Angola.

Terrorism

One morning I received a call, and my heart sank. A bomb had gone off aboard one of our planes, a Mother Goose headed for London from Washington.

The bomb had gone off in the cargo hold, and had blown a hole some ten feet wide through the fuselage, killing twenty passengers and injuring the remainder. The blast had popped out the cockpit windows, our pilots suddenly in a hell of a breeze.

But the bomb had not damaged anything critical, just the float and the passenger section; all of the control wires were in the top of the fuselage. With no windows, and powering down and descending, the pilots pointed the nose back towards Washington, radioing ahead. When the co-pilot ventured back into the cabin he could see the hole in the floor, so they decided not to land on water, heading for American Airline's new concrete strip. The wheels came down without a hitch, the plane making a smooth landing considering the breeze, passengers soon carried off, the bodies covered over.

Our aircraft were not pressurised yet, so explosive decompression was not an issue; they flew at ten or fifteen thousand feet. They did, however, have small pressure values and a constant pump running so that the air was pressurised by a small amount to keep the cabin pleasant.

Images of the plane, and the hole, were soon in the newspapers, and glimpsed in the new Movietone News. The press had come to see us and Jimmy gave them a statement, a hand-cranked movie camera present for the first time.

'This has been a tragic event, and we all feel for the families of those who lost their lives in this wanton act of terror. It's not clear yet who planted the bomb on the aircraft, or who the target was. There were diplomats from America, Britain and South America on board, as well as few rich individuals – any one of which could have been the target of the criminals behind this.

'But we make our aircraft tough, and built to last. The bomb did a great deal of damage, but our aircraft kept flying. And our flight attendant was trained in basic life saving, giving the wounded passengers medical assistance whilst she herself was injured. She worked in terrible conditions, yet fought bravely to save the lives of others. She - and our brave pilots - are the true heroes of the tragic episode.

'But make no mistake: we will hunt down those responsible - to the ends of the earth if necessary. I am hereby offering a fifty thousand dollar reward for information that leads to the arrest of the people behind this, or information that is of any use. That's fifty thousand dollars.'

High ranking US officials popped in to see the survivors in hospital, our trolley dolly now a national heroine, her picture in the papers. We nudged the US administration, and they organised a medal for her and the pilots. And the reward money did the trick, a hoodlum from New York coming forwards; he'd say what he knew if he got the money, and was in Canada at the time, no extradition south. We put pressure on the administration and they agreed, the man paid in Toronto, our people nearby.

He had sourced the explosives for two German gentlemen. My heart sank; we were on Hitler's wanted list, and it was only 1930. Then I remembered that Hitler wasn't even in power yet, now right confused.

The real reason for the bomb attack would not come out for a while, after we had pieced a few things together.

It started with the diamonds in Palestine. The Zionists had used the diamonds to assist their communist brethren in Germany, even to the point of bribing prison guards and busting out a few activists. After being held and tortured, the pipeline operators had given up Jimmy's name as the sponsor of this breach of security, a bit cheeky of them. Jimmy Silo was now wanted in the Fatherland for subversion - and for being a communist!

The US administration offered us an FBI liaison straight after the attack, and we immediately housed him in the hotel. He started on vetting our staff, helping to check identities and family histories for any German blood. No one proved a liability in the main staff, but a subcontractor had a German man working for them, and he had only become a Canadian citizen a year before.

While the man in question was at work, our boys snuck into his small apartment, finding many newspaper cuttings about Jimmy. That sealed it. The man was picked up by Big Paul and the SAS, taken to the woods and made to talk. The man had a phone number

contact in Toronto, codename “Brown Bear”. The Canadians traced the number - in those days there weren’t that many telephones, and our boys set up the observation of a fishing tackle and bait shop on the outskirts of Toronto.

An elderly couple of German origins ran the store, and one younger man was seen coming and going, but he did not look like the fishing type. He was followed to a boarding house in the city. Jimmy ordered them all picked up, and in one late-night swoop we grabbed all three. The couple did not resist long, explaining that they were simply paid to collect mail and phone messages; just gofers. Brown Bear was a real party fanatic, and died under interrogation, revealing nothing. Security was stepped up at all of our businesses around the world, and we asked for more FBI guys.

The blame of the attack was laid firmly at the door of the Germans - by us, but both the British and the American Governments tried to distance themselves from accusing the German Government for the actions of a few individuals. Jimmy wasn’t bothered by that response, he had expected it. Still, both the US and British Governments knew who had killed their diplomats.

We instigated bag searches and body searches for our paying passengers, and for now stopped international parcel delivery unless the parcels were open. If someone wanted an unopened parcel sent, they would have to fly with it. The passengers didn’t mind the searches; they were for their safety. We sent warnings to Kenya and Somalia, and to Hong Kong. Po found a handful of Germans he thought looked suspicious and killed them all, just to be safe. Rudd took a similar view, and Ngomos men – dressed like street corner newspaper vendors – started following Germans.

Within two weeks, Rudd had identified a well-organised ring of German spies operating in Kenya, and the men had been seen near all of our interests. Jimmy gave the OK, then men picked up and interrogated at length. We had soon identified a network of some fifty Germans around Africa, Sykes and Jack on the case. Since some of the Germans were sniffing around British facilities, the British Government now took a more active interest.

The German spy ring in Africa soon ran out of warm bodies, and they must have figured that it was down to either us or the British. They must have also figured that anyone with a German accent in Kenya would stand out. Jimmy warned everyone to watch out for Dutch, Danish, French, all sorts.

Meanwhile, in Canada, our FBI guys had unearthed a German cell in Seattle. Jimmy ordered them watched for a few weeks, then ordered their men’s apartments raided. When raided, the FBI had

enough evidence to warrant formal charges of spying on US interests, including Boeing. It was an embarrassment for the pre-Nazi era Germans, who wished to maintain good relations with the Americans.

Our black and white movie about the Germans was then released. It hit the screens first in Los Angeles, and made its way slowly east through small town cinemas. When it reached Washington the President had it pulled; he did not wish to antagonise the Germans. We understood, and Jimmy sent him a note apologising for causing diplomatic problems.

Then a funny incident occurred. The Italians, for reasons best known to themselves, ordered their fighters into the air to intercept our flying boats. Those flying boats flew from Cairo to London over southern Italy, with permission. No one had told us that permission had been rescinded. The new Italian monoplanes flew up to the flying boat, but could not catch it, even on a good day.

Next they made sure that they were waiting at their best altitude and planned on swooping down to force our plane down for a search. Their planes swooped down, having been too low to start with, flew past ours – our passengers waving down at them, but were soon left behind. And we were not even trying to outrun them. The Italians, now frustrated, tried firing anti-aircraft artillery on our flight path. Seeing the flack exploding below them, our pilots got the message. We altered their course, so that our aircraft skirted around Italian airspace in future.

The gang were now at odds with Germany and Italy, and we figured it was because of the planes; the real reason would take a few years to emerge. Jack and Sykes had been granted formal permission to carry pistols under their suits around England, and to keep them at home. I kept a hunting rifle over the fireplace, and a pistol in the bedroom. But all of our staff had been warned about strangers, and someone suspicious would not have got to within thirty miles of us.

Jimmy was concerned, because this was unexpected – and not wished for at all. He could not have suspected at the time that the Zionists would drop his name, or that the Germans would be so vexed about it.

Jack, meanwhile, was offering poor German Jewish families in London a free trip to Palestine and some money to settle there. They started to flock to The Promised Land. The British authorities in London were not fussed, they didn't particularly want them anyway. But many cabinet members argued against allowing an influx of Jews to British-mandated Palestine, saying that there

would be trouble. The Prime Minister pointed towards benefits that outweighed that “strip of sand”. Still, he was often in a minority in the British cabinet, tension growing. The one thing in his favour was Timkins, who said: ‘House them in the slums of London till we burst, or house them in Palestine.’

Summer, 1930

The summer of 1930 was great, the Canadian summers opening up some wonderful scenery, especially where we were located. Canada was great - in that the views were spectacular, not so great in other areas – like the winter weather! The US economy was still falling, the knock-on effect now being felt around the world. Our aircraft were still busy, but the odd empty seat was now evident. We lowered prices by ten percent, and moved a few aircraft to Hong Kong and all points west of us, where the US economy and “The Great Depression” was not having such a dramatic effect.

Most of our regular airline passengers were still diplomats, and they would always travel, so we were not worried, and we were still expanding British Airways and adding more routes. I then hit upon the idea of having our own hotels placed at each destination and refuelling point, soon buying up modest hotels local to the various airstrips – but boutique hotels; passengers flying with us received cut-price accommodation.

It was an immediate success, most passengers opting for our hotels - since they saved money. One hotel, in Cairo, was a right hotbed of intrigue, with diplomats from all over staying a night before moving on; French, Germans, Italians, British and Americans, all rubbing shoulders at the breakfast bar, and all being falsely nice to each other.

The Germans were always there, probably trying to glean some intel’ off the others, no doubt with a monocle and a cigarette in a long holder. Still, the Third Reich was contributing a few Marks to our bank balance. And one of Ngomo’s men from our era, who oddly enough spoke German, took up a job as cleaner and waiter, playing dumb. He met with Sykes once a month or so, a long list of names and details to go through, and was kept very busy. His buddies, the scientists left at Ebede, rigged up suitable listening devices. They didn’t record – no magnetic tape yet, but our man could listen to people in the next room, or at a distance using a directional microphone.

That led Sykes to nagging us for a “Q” Branch to be created, since time was running short. Jimmy agreed, and the scientists left at Ebede were tasked with creating spy toys - not just for Sykes, but for other British agents as well. When I heard about it I suggested some toys for the FBI, to keep them sweet. Jimmy agreed, and we requested a pinhole lens that could see around corners, miniature telescopic lenses, etc. I then stopped dead, an idea forming.

I grabbed our own scientists and asked for a pinhole lens for seeing inside aircraft, and to make it sharpish. A week later they had a few prototypes, our engineers trying them, the lenses used to see around frames, and our men were absolutely bloody delighted by them. I ordered up four hundred lenses, Jimmy quietly pleased with the innovation, our engineers now avoiding taking things apart to inspect them.

As a direct result of the pinhole lenses our guys started to make small holes in the skin, plugs to fill them afterwards. Areas that would have taken days to inspect could now be inspected in hours. And from now on, all new designs would consider this method of inspection, small holes popping up everywhere in our aircraft.

Each of our aircraft was subject to a routine annual inspection, but I now insisted that crews be sent to every regional hub, and that the pinhole lenses be used to check frames on-site every three months. Then, if they found something, they’d bring the birds back to us. Annual full inspections would become bi-annual.

The Canadian Rifles were still growing, but jobs with them were a fast track to a promotion, better pay and conditions. A year with the Rifles now meant a man would become a corporal, and six months as a corporal often meant a spell in the US, or teaching the British soldiers here. Many had been made up to officers.

I often visited the Canadian Rifles, but would also journey south for a quick flying trip to the main US Army base, now with its own dirt airstrip. Some of the American recruits had been with us a while and appeared fit and strong, and they were getting the kind of training that normal US enlisted men would never touch. These guys sampled twenty rifles, a variety of pistols, machineguns, grenades and mortars. They learnt how to drive the jeeps and half-tracks, and many of them learnt to parachute in New Mexico, a few jumping for fun from a Dash-7 at the base.

Back at our own munitions factory, Jimmy had ordered a field cleared and a massive concrete arsenal to be built, half sunk in the ground. Now finished, I wandered over for a look. The building

offered no windows at all, mud banks reaching halfway up the walls. The main door was steel, and big enough for a truck to drive into. Stepping through a man-sized door, being saluted by a few Rifles on guard, I peered down a dimly lit corridor, a pearl-string of lights seemingly going on forever. A few people were coming and going, and I stuck my head into the first room. Thousands of AK47s sat in racks, all shining in the reflected bulb light. I found them covered in grease on closer inspection.

The next two rooms were also stuffed with AK47s, followed by pistols, then fifty cal rifles, RPGs, and mortars. The final room had been painted white and offered two ceiling vents, plastic containers filled with knockout gas. I withdrew before I fell asleep on the floor. Walking back down the central corridor, I figured there was space for maybe a few hundred thousand AK47s here.

‘We gearing up for a war?’ I asked Jimmy at the hotel.

‘We need to keep the munitions guys active, but we don’t want the weapons out there yet. So ... we stockpile. They pick one or two from production and test them, the rest stockpiled ready. And the weapons also ready for any small wars if need be, some going to Abdi and Ngomo, and now the British depot in Kenya. Oh, I asked Abdi and Ngomo to open up the oil near Mawlini, and to create a joint training base on the border, the British training there as well. We need the lily white colonial boys used to operating with blacks.’

‘Won’t be easy after years of prejudice.’

‘No, but they need to first know the capabilities of the blacks, then maybe some begrudging respect; or at least tolerance. I’ve asked for officers with experience from India, so that should help. Oh, and Sykes goes to Nepal soon, to start the Nepalese Rifles.’

‘Ghurkhas?’

‘No, it’ll be our unit - not a British unit, although they will have British officers. A few of our white officers from Kenya will go, a few of Ngomo’s men. The Nepalese should not have a problem with blacks, and they’ll train in Kenya. You know, there are now forty-five white officers in the Kenyan Rifles, a preferred career after a short commission with the British Army.’

‘How’ll you use the Nepalese?’ I puzzled.

‘They’ll land in Hong Kong in 1937, and the Japs will invade Canton in 1938. I haven’t asked Po to create his own Rifles yet because he always goes too far and too fast – a bit like you.’

I smiled. ‘He’d have ten thousand men in the first month.’

‘In 1941 ... he’ll need them. And, we may spark a war a year early. Well, that or let the Japs take Hong Kong –’

‘And our business interests,’ I finished off. ‘What’ll happen if Japan *does* take the colony?’

‘The colony wasn’t too affected the last time, but last time the greatest surge in the colony’s growth was after the war, and the greatest surge in refugees was when the communists were clamping down.’ He checked no one was listening. ‘Han has made contact with Mao, and met him face to face. He gave Mao diamonds, and then arranged to send weapons and supplies. If the Chinese authorities found out there’d be hell to pay. Well, they’re already mad at the British so ... mad at us afterwards as well.’

‘And the plan with Han?’ I nudged.

‘Get into Mao’s good books, help after the revolution, and try and tone down Chinese attitudes for a few decades. See if we can’t keep them out of Asia.’

‘Like Vietnam and Korea.’

‘Korea then Vietnam. Anyway, the French colonial dictators in Vietnam are brutal; they deserve to be kicked out. Our roving fridge salesman may have had a hand there already, and will do so when the Japanese are distracting the rest of the world.’

Security remained tight after the various German spies had been unearthed, and Canada offered plenty of German immigrants for us to worry over. So did the States. The Dow Jones was supposed to bottom out around now, but our activities were having an effect, the DOW ticking upwards because we were buying into stocks that would have fared better than the rest, causing our own rallies.

With US World War I veterans staging a sit-in around Washington - for not being paid what they were due, we were tempted to get involved, but that would have upset the new president. And with that new president in office less than a month, we received a visitor, his Chief of Staff, flown up aboard their dedicated presidential Goose, not yet named Air Force One - they had no Air Force, but An Army Air Corp.

I welcomed the man into the hotel bar. ‘Figured you’d be busy, just moving in and all.’

‘It’s always hectic to start with,’ he said. ‘New appointees.’

I knew exactly what he meant, but kept quiet. ‘How can we help you?’

‘Mister Silo not around?’

‘I speak for both of us, unless it’s his round at the bar.’

The man laughed. ‘Well, we’ve heard about these new aircraft, secret aircraft.’

'We're always developing new aircraft, and they are always secret. Otherwise ... our competitors may copy them.'

'Your competitors, Mister Holton, do nothing all day but try and copy you!'

I laughed. 'So we must be doing something right. Which secret plane were you interested in?'

'One that has the British and Canadians concerned.'

I decided to be clever. 'You know the Super Goose?'

'Yes, I've been in one.'

'We have one that can fly non-stop from here to London – at thirty thousand feet – drop six tonnes of bombs and fly all the way back.'

'Jeez.'

'There are no aircraft that could stop it. So you see the concern. Still, we are working on the military version with you guys in mind. When we've got it sorted we'll be trying to sell it to you.'

'How long till its ready?'

'Oh, not long, maybe two years.'

'So we could be talking about the procurement of these planes in 1932?'

'Thereabouts, yes. Problem is, when it carries a lot of bombs it fractures bits of the main spar, so we're working on it.'

'It's a hell of a weapon, but how accurate would the bombs be at that height?' he asked.

'Not very, but we are working on that aspect as well. You could hit a city in daylight, but we couldn't get the bombs within three miles of the target yet.'

'Pity. Still, it would have an effect on the morale of the enemy, their capital taking a pounding day after day.'

'It certainly would,' I agreed. 'But they're not cheap. If we made a lot of them ... then they'd be cheaper to produce.'

'You build them solid alright. I was in a Goose over Hawaii in a storm, and the damn thing was just about upside down. It took a hell of a beating and came right through it. I used to stare down through the windows when flying, but now I sleep soundly. Could hit one of those planes with an artillery shell and it would still keep going.'

'We won't be using that as an advertising slogan.'

The man laughed. 'So when you have something -'

'We'll be trying to sell it to you, and building them through Boeing; jobs for American workers!'

'Good of you.'

I eased back. 'What effect are our soup kitchens having?'

'The effect is ... we're damn glad you're not running for office!' We laughed. 'But they are helping. And the soldiers you employ, that all helps; it gets them off the streets and gives them something to do. Say, we've seen them try out these new automatic rifles of yours, but you're not selling them.'

'They're expensive, and their ammunition. You could mass-produce them, but the quality would drop off. Besides, in the hands of enlisted men they just spray the bullets around, and before you know it they've burnt up fifty dollars in hot lead. Better to take single, well-aimed shots. We keep the automatic rifles for sergeants.'

'The army policy is well-aimed single shots, and probably for good reason. We've not adopted the Thompson yet.'

'Would you like to see my sports car?' I asked.

'Sure would,' he enthused, and I distracted him with a ride in the beast, the wind in his hair. He loved my family car, so after his brief overnight visit I arranged for the next twenty to be given over to the White House as a gift. The presidential motorcade had arrived.

Jimmy was concerned that they were asking questions, figuring that someone in the Canadian Government may have leaked the information of the jet. But he was pleased with my decoy, pleased till he rolled up a magazine and attacked me with it.

'They're more interested in long-range bombers than jets, you moron! We'll get no peace now.'

'I told him two years! Keep ya panties on.'

'They'll want to see the prototype!'

'So let's make one. Always hide a big lie...'

He sighed. 'Yeah, may as well. I was heading that way anyway.'

And the next day we commissioned a new design. It was a Super Goose, not a Mother Goose, but was not much larger. It did, however, have a rear glass bubble, a top and bottom glass bubble, and a massive bomb bay. The crew would consist of three to start with, a rear gunner to be added on the second variant; the navigator would double as bomb aimer. With no passengers, we hoped for a forty thousand pound bomb load.

The biggest aspect of redesign would be the float, but Jimmy asked them to allow the plane to crash land on the water without sinking. They removed the float aspects, but toughened the lower half of the fuselage and bomb-bay doors. If this bomber was damaged over Tokyo, it could ditch quite safely in the Pacific.

I then suggested that the bomb-bay be made watertight, so too the other compartments, and with airtight doors to help keep the thing afloat if it ditched. We discussed making the cockpit

pressurised, but opted for oxygen and partial continuous pressure as a first stage, since Japanese Zeros topped out at ten thousand feet! A tunnel would lead from the cockpit to the rear gunner, and would allow an eyeball check of the bombs, to see that they had all been released.

I suggested a manual release for stubborn bombs, just in case, and several hatches were built into the roof of the bomb bay. The toilet was kept, so too the cooking galley, and two bunks would be fitted. Auto-trim was kept. The top bubble would be above the navigator's station - behind the pilot, and it allowed only a view of above and to the sides through a low Perspex dome. The lower bubble involved lying on the floor and peering down after opening a strong watertight hatch, a map-view of the world. Bomb aiming would be done through a powerful telescopic lens in the nose, the scientists working on a formula to predict where the bombs would land if released at certain heights and speeds. The first prototype was ordered, the workforce now back to thinking about military applications for the planes.

'Does this affect things?' I asked Jimmy. 'I mean, if the Americans do have these in 1940?'

'Not really, they had the B17 before. This will have better performance, range and speed, better bomb load - and definitely better bomb aiming!' We laughed. 'Before the war they said the B17 could hit a barrel at ten thousand feet. They would have been lucky to hit the right country. Ours *will* ... hit a barrel, and at twenty thousand feet. But we still want Boeing to invent the B17 and other aircraft.'

I took a keen interest in the Super Goose, because it was genuinely interesting. I thought about what a long-range bomber would need, then realised that we had already covered it all; if you could deliver fifty passengers around the globe, you could deliver bombs. That was why the Goose had been designed all along, I realised.

Reading the papers, I kept abreast of what Gandhi was up to in India, his peaceful protests, being arrested, released, then arrested again. And Germany was up and down, leaders coming and going, Herr Hitler now a German citizen and allowed to stand for office.

Mary was in nursery, and very bright according to the teachers, but no one was teaching her any foreign languages yet. Susan was still involved with medical kits, both for our planes and for the Rifles. Many packs were produced each month, and shipped out to Africa for Ngomo and Abdi, the British Army in Kenya then asking

for more – to supplement the ones that had been pilfered away. We were now selling first aid packs.

The sale of cars and fridges had slowed with the depression, and prohibition did nothing to help fridge sales. Still, we only sold them around the southern states - and they were still selling well enough. With plenty of money from the gold pouring in we bought US stocks, and the markets started to recover; it was fair to say that we had bought at the bottom. The new president took credit for the up-turn, although they did hold a meeting to discuss European bank woes, something that sounded oddly familiar. I could not put my finger on it, but a US crash followed by a European banking crisis seemed familiar.

Since we had bought stocks when they were at twenty cents, and now topped a dollar twenty, we had made a few bucks. And Boeing, they had turned out a monoplane early. It was ugly, but it flew well enough, and it was reliable. So I nudged a company we owned to buy a few, just to get the ball rolling. I repeated that nudge with two other companies, and Boeing's staff turned that frown upside down.

The monoplane they produced was not the one we had commissioned, that was still being tinkered with. This was a potential fighter, and came with machineguns, the plane possibly for overseas sales. I spoke to our chief engineer down there, and he explained that it was a prototype, which would now be tested to destruction and modified. I suggested a swept wing, and a larger tail.

They did test it to destruction, and its sister prototypes, and Boeing got used to busting up the things they produced prior to release. God knows whatever possessed them to produce the Boeing 727 in our era, but I made a note not to repeat history. And as for the DC-9, as I was going to have that banned. I did, however, spy on Douglas, and the DC series were alive and well and on the drawing board. Where would the Second World have been without the DC3 Dakota?

Then I stopped, and went and found the oracle. 'Douglas, DC3, wartime; should we ... improve it?'

He eased back. 'It would be hard for the US administration to buy them when compared to our aircraft, and we'll have a parachute bird.'

'Does it matter if Douglas Aircraft keep going?'

He made a face. 'We altered that page of history with our aircraft; the genie is out of the bottle. Besides, D-Day is something

that I aim to avert. And the plane that Boeing is developing for us, that will be an excellent parachute delivery plane.'

'So ... we don't do anything,' I realised.

'Not unless we wish to work against ourselves, no. Besides, as soon as the war is over we'll give the technology away and move on from it.'

We suffered no further terror attacks, and the Germans must have known that we had taken care of their spy network, here and in Kenya. Aircraft cockpit doors could now be locked, and pilots had pistols tucked away – just in case. I remembered Jimmy warning the British and Americans in 1985 through Magestic letters, so we were ahead of the curve by a long way.

Jimmy organised a meeting a week later, some of our best engineers in on it, plus a few of our scientists.

'As you may know, a few people around the world are experimenting with radio direction finding. In simple terms, you turn the radio antenna till you find the strongest reception from an aircraft that's currently transmitting. That gives you their direction, which you can then radio to them. If they're lost, they can set a reciprocal course and find you. Now, I don't want us to be second place to anyone, so let's get on it quickly. Once it works, I want it at every airfield, and I want every pilot to know about it.

'Next, there are scientists in England who are experimenting with a high-frequency radio burst that they say will bounce off a metal plane and come back to a receiver. So, if a plane was not transmitting, such as an enemy plane, you could still see what bearing they're on. I want that looked at quickly as well.'

Out of the meeting, I asked Jimmy, 'When was that due to be invented?'

'Radio direction finding is being experimented with now, and RADAR would be with us by 1936.'

'No big deal then,' I realised.

Kenya

With winter coming on, Jimmy suggested we go around the world and check on the state of preparations. We would, however, maintain some degree of secrecy about our plans. Susan elected to come along, rather than be by herself for two months, and we packed up Mary's favourite toys. In this day and age that consisted mostly of cloth or wooden dolls.

We grabbed a Goose, three senior pilots and two stewardesses, Big Paul and a buddy, and set off for Los Angeles, a group of engineers catching a lift down with us. In Los Angeles we booked into a hotel we now owned, and I even spotted a few of our cars about. After a night in the hotel – inspecting it as if we owned it – we toured one of the movie studios we now owned, meeting a few stars of the day. The producers presented us with figures, and we pretended to be interested. They had a dozen scripts on the desk, so I told them the ones I liked after flickering through. They would make them – or else.

We spent an enjoyable afternoon on a sun terrace, Mary just as aquatic as her stepsisters had been at this age. Jimmy recognised a few stars, but I had no idea who they were. At dawn the following day we lifted off, taking four invited guests with us over to Hawaii, a group of rich people who had missed their previous flight. Hawaii appeared at sunset, our guests grateful, as well as very pleased to meet the pair of us; two of them had our cars.

I booked us into a hotel that the other travellers had recommended, enjoying the local cuisine that evening – mostly fish, and sat watching dancers in traditional dress – grass skirt and coconut bra – laid on for the rich tourists. It would be a long time before cheap flights flooded the island with “Hoolies” from the mainland.

Powering up at 7am, we headed towards Guam, where we could refuel if necessary. We didn’t need to stop, or to ditch in the Pacific thankfully, and landed in the Philippines, in Santa Cruz in the north, a dirt strip operated by the US military. We took on fuel, more than enough left to get us to Hong Kong, a short hop north. But we stayed the night on the plane, taking off at dawn, soon landing in Hong Kong and at the airport Po had built, concrete runway and all.

It also offered weary travellers a variety of shops, as well as two large hotels with rooftop bars, so we dumped our pilots and stewardesses in them, our plane door locked with a key. Like a group of tourists, we boarded a boat, Po’s mansion across the lagoon, and Mary stared out at the colourful junks as we made the crossing. Po and Yuri met us at the harbour side, three of our own cars waiting. These cars, however, had rear-facing seats as well forward facing, and you could squeeze six people in the back. Po made a fuss of Mary, and we caught up a little as we negotiated the traffic up the hill and to Po Mansions.

His aircraft fleet were doing well, no depression in these parts, but the communists in China were worrying him. Han met us at the

house with a polite bow, food being prepared, lots of food; Mary would be quiet and appreciative for an hour. Everyone settled about a large table and we settled, little talk of work yet, general chat about the colony, of aircraft ... and of pending wars and invasions.

'Next year,' Jimmy told Po and Yuri, 'I want you to create a barracks ready, big enough for ten thousand soldiers – I'll clear it with the British. Tell them it's for British reinforcements should the colony be threatened, and that you like to plan ahead. Then I want tunnels dug in secret, up to each mountain's top. Cover them up and leave them till later, but create good firing positions towards the border. But do it in secret!'

'When you send soldiers?' Po asked.

'Some in 1936,' Jimmy responded. 'You'll have British, Canadian, and Nepalese Rifles, advanced weapons and aircraft.'

'Aircraft?' Yuri puzzled.

'Fighters,' Jimmy said. 'Even a few bombers. And guys, in 1936 I want tunnels dug to house wheat, lots of wheat, enough for a year or so.'

'Japanese surround us 1938!' Po said.

'Yes, but they will then meet some Rifles, and who will surround who?'

'We will stay and fight?' Yuri asked.

'You don't have to, but if things turn bad then you have the seaplanes to escape on at night. They can reach Guam or Papua New Guinea, or even India.' He faced Po. 'Just think ... what the people will think of you afterwards ... if you stay and fight.'

Po grew by an inch right in front of us, and I hid a smile.

Our man in Hong Kong now owned thirty-six hotels, forty warehouses, the airport and the seaplanes, fifty apartment blocks, two-dozen mansions, and eight shipping companies. The total number of ocean going tubs was close to a hundred, three of them sizeable passenger liners.

And over the next three days we viewed the damn lot. After a while, one building looked much like another. Jimmy liked the airport, but asked Po to extend it into the water a little, a longer runway, and to have large sheds made up for aircraft maintenance. We inspected the airport hotels, finding our crew sat sipping cocktails, later inspecting a tall control tower that was well ahead of its time. We mentioned the new radio direction finding sets to Po and promised to send one down.

From the tall control tower the airfield looked very efficient, coloured lines painted onto the runway, buses to ferry passengers to aircraft. Po showed us his "arrivals and departures" lounges, and

they were well ahead of their time, luxury separation of those coming or going. Flyers who had to wait because of a storm were given a free room and a free meal, and Po's airline had a hell of a reputation already for its quality of service.

That afternoon, Big Paul, Jimmy, and myself climbed the hill behind Po's mansion and stared down at the Chinese side.

'Get a map of this place, and start thinking about fire positions,' Jimmy told Big Paul, the wind buffeting us. 'Snipers will have fifty cal, and they'll make a mess of the initial attacks. RPGs can rain down on the Japanese, mortars, the works.'

'They'll have artillery?' Big Paul asked.

'They'll have artillery, and dive bombers, so sniper positions need to be small and hidden. They'll also have a hundred thousand men over there.'

Big Paul and I exchanged looks.

Jimmy added, 'If you have a cave with a few holes facing out and down, you can snipe at them without worrying about artillery. They'll also have ships offshore to blockade this place, but our aircraft could chop them up.'

'What aircraft will you place here?' I asked.

'The prop fighters, fifty of them, with plenty of spares and ammo.'

'Be a siege,' Big Paul stated, heaving a sigh.

Jimmy explained, 'We'll have around six thousand men with AK47s, sniper rifles, RPGs, mortars, grenades, even knockout gas for when the wind is right. And bomber air support from Burma if necessary.'

Hiking back down, we discussed war preparations, and I was tempted to suggest that I be here in 1941 when the Japanese were due to attack; I fancied the defence of the colony. Susan might have issues with it, but we were on a mission.

A final look around the airport impressed me, and I made a note to send Ted out here. Back aboard our Goose, the pilots powered up, no cocktails in hand, and we climbed into dark clouds, heading east and to Nepal.

The route we were taking was a worry because it was mountainous, and there was just the one runway to land on, the one we were headed to, and getting there involved crossing a great deal of jungle. I trusted these aircraft, but I had the family with me, and that always worried me more than my own safety. A storm soon buffeted us, and the pilots tried to skirt around it, finding the

airstrip in dying light. After a bumpy landing we found a fuel truck, driven to Nepal for us and arranged by Sykes.

Sykes was stood waiting with a British Army officer, the men stood next to four of our own open-top jeeps. Good job it was not raining. They whisked us around to an old stone hotel, the weary travellers soon booked in and sat in the bar with Sykes, ceiling fans whirring.

‘How’re the preparations?’ Jimmy asked Sykes.

‘Jobs are hard to find, so recruitment is easy enough. We have four hundred young men ready, uniforms and boots being checked, fitness worked on. Doc Graham is with them now.’

‘Doc Graham?’ I puzzled.

‘Yes, inoculating the men,’ Sykes explained. ‘In this day and age inoculations don’t travel well, although Po has a fridge on a plane I understand.’

Jimmy faced me. ‘Doc Graham will be here for two months or so. Bit of a break for him, he’ll do some hill walking.’

Sykes added, ‘I brought up six officers from Kenya, and two of Ngomo’s men. We also have twenty-five NCOs that left the British Army and joined the Kenyan Rifles. They’ve all done at least three years, and they look like they can handle themselves. And there are thirty black Kenyans from the Rifles, good men with ten years experience. And, as part of the deal, we have twenty British Ghurkha officers.’

‘Sounds like a good start,’ Jimmy approved. ‘You get the weapons?’

‘They have a variety to train on, and we have two thousand bolt-action rifles, pistols, a dozen fifty cal, and fifty AK47s for training – plenty of ammo. There are grenades and RPGs as well, mortars, and 105mm.’

‘Will they receive jungle training?’ I asked.

‘In Burma,’ Sykes informed us. He faced Jimmy. ‘What number are we aiming at?’

‘At least four thousand of those should be of a high standard. Two thousand men will go to Hong Kong, the rest on standby ready. Closer to the time they’ll receive more weapons, and when they go to Kenya they’ll receive parachute training, as well as desert training. I’d say six to nine months here – with English lessons – then around six months in Kenya. That would be the basic grounding of each man.’

‘That’ll take us till 1932 to have a decent force, 1934 before we have NCOs out of them,’ Sykes noted.

'Gives you three years to play with before 1937,' Jimmy commented.

We chatted for an hour before dining at the hotel, the food spicy – but not like anything I had tried before; this world or ours, this was my first trip to Nepal. Mary gobbled down the offerings, so they must have been OK. In the morning we looked about the town, Susan loving the old buildings, especially the monasteries.

At dawn the next morning we lifted off, a long but single leg down to Mogadishu, flying right across India, down the edge of Oman and to Mogadishu's airport, arriving before sundown on a concrete runway that Abdi had built. Unfortunately, Arrivals and Departures were nothing like Hong Kong, the terminal basic and dusty. A line of our military jeeps brought us to Abdi and his palatial home west of the city.

His sprawling compound rested mostly on one level, but seemed very large, many internal courtyards and gardens, armed bodyguards tucked away into discreet corners. And many wives wandering around in black veils. The ponds and fountains were relaxing, a nice touch, our rooms on the second floor of the central building, all done out in a traditional style of stone and marble; it reminded me of Saudi Arabia. Unpacked, we headed down, finding a large table packed with food.

'Come, come, my friends: eat, drink, tell me of the cold place,' Abdi let out, dressed now in traditional robes.

'Do me a favour,' I said. 'Fly to Hong Kong and have a look at their airport. You may ... get some ideas.'

'Mister Po has a good airport?'

'He's ... had a few innovations put in,' Jimmy said. 'But worth a visit.'

'I will fly there, it will upset the British,' Abdi said with a smile. 'A *wog* on holiday!'

'How *are* things with you and the British?' I asked

'I enjoy greatly upsetting them with my civility,' our host explained. 'And when we started to pump oil near Mawlini there was much grinding of teeth. You see, I bought the land first – from the British. Ah, yes, their teeth do make a most agreeable sound.'

I laughed. 'You're becoming a diplomat.'

Jimmy faced him. 'And your new emperor to the north?'

'I met him at the border and we talked; he thinks I should start a revolution against the British and take the country. Will he attack the British?'

‘There’ll be border skirmishes, but he’ll help the British fight the Italians,’ Jimmy agreed. ‘And in a few years the Italians will invade Abyssinia.’

‘I have many spies there, and Italian businessmen are always to be seen.’

‘Yes?’ Jimmy puzzled. ‘They may be ahead of schedule because of Libya.’

‘Should I increase my spies?’ Abdi asked.

‘Yes, the Italians may invade sooner,’ Jimmy agreed. ‘And create a base on the north coast, close to the border. Keep some men there.’

‘I journeyed to Tunisia and back, to see this marvellous new railway line that Mister Steffan created. It floats on a sea of sand.’

‘When the Italians and Germans invade Libya, use it to move troops up,’ Jimmy told our host as we ate.

‘I found a German spy ring, my friend, six men,’ Abdi reported. ‘They confessed when left in the sun for two days, names for Mister Sykes and Mister Jack to use.’

‘Good work,’ Jimmy commended. ‘Keep watching them.’

‘Mister Sykes has given my men the James Bondage toys.’

‘Uh ... Abdi, that’s James *Bond* toys,’ I corrected him.

‘Yes, yes. They look with the small lens around the corner and listen from across the street.’

I exchanged a look with Jimmy, hiding a smile. ‘And how many wives do you have now?’

‘I lose count. Maybe thirty or so.’

‘Thirty?’ Susan queried.

‘Yes, but one ran away and I shot two.’

‘You shot them!’ Susan barked.

‘What?’ Abdi asked.

‘When we get back to our time I’m going to have a word with a few people,’ Susan threatened.

‘I am playing the role, behaving like someone like me should ... in this time. What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.’

‘What!’ Susan shot me a look.

‘Don’t look at me love, I’m being a good boy ... in Vegas.’

‘You do not marry this fine sturdy woman,’ Abdi noted.

‘Sturdy?’ Susan asked. If looks could kill.

‘Different times, different customs,’ Jimmy cut in with. ‘Abdi is a method actor, a good one. He fully embraces the role.’

‘Yes, see,’ Abdi said defensively. ‘I often sleep in a tent to play the role, to be with my people.’

'You'd best be back through the portal first, and running,' Susan said.

Jimmy faced Abdi, tipping his head. 'Not everything that happens in Vegas ... stays in Vegas. She may write a book.'

'And I may stay here,' Abdi said. 'This time is more agreeable; no reporters.'

'I still appreciate you,' Jimmy offered. 'And after the war you'll be a national hero, and president.'

'Ah, political office again,' Abdi lamented. 'What a burden it is to be the chosen one.'

After the meal we sat in the garden, Mary inspecting ponds and fountains, Jimmy and Abdi plotting and scheming. I joined them when Susan took Mary to bed.

'What you plotting?' I asked.

'War,' Abdi responded. 'But not for a few years, I'm afraid. But I look forward to these Germans, they are a most disagreeable people. I aim to meet the German soldiers and cut out their hearts.'

'How many soldiers do you have now?' I asked.

'Less than two thousand now, as Mister Jimmy asks. But after 1935 we make ready for many years of fighting.'

'The problem with soldiers,' Jimmy began. 'Especially of Rifles quality, is that they are hard to turn back into good citizens afterwards.'

'Yes, yes, they like their fighting,' Abdi agreed. 'So we keep numbers to a small group of well-trained men, and after ... to be the policemen as before.'

'Sounds like you learnt a thing or two,' I noted.

'Second time is easier,' Abdi agreed.

The next day we reclaimed the Goose and flew down the coast to Mombasa; the Navigation was easy enough. Big Paul spent an hour at the controls and brushed up, one of our three rotating pilots landing us smoothly at a dirt strip that would someday become Mombasa Airfield. It was a far cry from Hong Kong airport.

Cosy met us, now driving one of our cars, and drove us to a nearby beach hotel that Rudd had built. And it was a beauty. The aircrew were in the same hotel, and yes – it even had a rooftop bar with a great view of the ocean. The land around the hotel had been landscaped, mown grass and tall coconut trees, the beach backed by a handful of coconut trees bending lazily down towards the inviting ocean, the sand clean and white. This could have been our era.

Susan took Mary to the beach, our daughter stripping to her pants and plunging in with a scream as I accepted a cold beer, a

very cold beer. Steffan turned up ten minutes later, joining us as we sat drinking.

‘Hello stranger,’ I offered. ‘Been a while.’

‘Been a long while,’ he agreed. ‘I’ve ... taken a wife, second kid due.’

Jimmy was surprised. ‘A local?’

‘A half-caste local.’

‘Nice house?’ I asked.

‘I designed one: eight bedrooms, on the coast, with gardens.’

‘When in Rome,’ Cosy commented.

Steffan made a face, and commented, ‘I figured I’d be here till we open up the Congo.’

‘You can travel if you like,’ Jimmy offered his brother.

‘I like it here,’ Steffan replied.

‘How’s the track?’ I asked.

‘Were not far off the coast in Angola,’ he reported. ‘Now laying extra track around here and in the Congo, and down towards South Africa. But I work on roads mostly, and bridges, even started a dam in Uganda.’

‘It all helps,’ Jimmy said.

‘And the war?’ Steffan asked.

‘Will hardly touch this place,’ Jimmy emphasised. ‘But develop Mombasa field to a concrete runway; taxiways, hangars. During the war we’ll house heavy bombers here. And underground bunkers for munitions storage. But while you’re doing that, keep in mind that as soon as the war is over we’ll want it operating as Mombasa International Airport.’

‘Rudd is developing Nairobi Airport,’ Steffan mentioned. ‘Concrete runway.’

Jimmy nodded. ‘And put a concrete runway at Mawlini for emergency landings during the war. No hurry. Although, with the combined base there now, we could use it for re-supply.’

Steffan showed us his house the next day, Susan and I jealous. As well as jealous of the weather here.

When Jimmy noticed our looks, he said, ‘You can spend the winters here if you like, a second home like this.’

‘It’s a long flight, and a dangerous flight,’ I said. ‘If we had a second home ... then maybe in San Diego, or Hawaii.’

‘It’s your call, we’re not short of cash.’

The drive to Ebede was in one of our own cars, powering along the roads that Steffan had helped to improve. And what an orphanage it was now. We clambered up to the roof of the main

admin building, finding a small bar and a few seats. And east of us stretched out forty buildings, the farm beyond.

‘How many now?’ I asked Anna, her daughter entertaining Mary in the yard below.

‘Now we top four thousand, but there are some boarding school students as well.’

Jimmy asked, ‘Between now and 1936, how many eighteen year old boys?’

‘I think we have a hundred sixteen-year-olds next year, and around a hundred and fifty become sixteen every year, a few more in Nairobi. I think we can only produce maybe a thousand soldiers.’

‘Offer boarding school for twelve-year-old boys, a separation from the others, and in two years time start a cadetship, a small wage paid. Get the numbers up. How about nurses?’

‘There are more girls, so a good number of nurses,’ Anna reported.

‘Again, in two years start a nursing education programme; we may deploy them as early 1937. Sit down and do the numbers, make some plans. War ... is coming.’

The kids chanted at us and sang as we toured the orphanage, greeting many of the teachers. Back at the hotel we hit the beach, and it had been a while since I had been swimming here. The waiters brought out cold drinks, and the day was just great, sat with a beer under a coconut tree in the sun, the sound of the waves, Mary playing in the sand.

We delayed our trip up to Nairobi by a day and enjoyed the hotel, Anna and Cosy joining us, their own kids soon playing in the sand. We eventually took our own train to Nairobi, First Class, and I remembered when we first arrived in this world, the pompous English Army officer. Now we chugged along in comfort, enjoying the scenery in regal splendour.

Nairobi station had grown, many new buildings to be found around it, a few tall towers visible in the distance. They weren’t tall by modern standards, but tall for this era in Africa. Rudd met us off the train, a line of police officers with him, cars waiting. He whisked us around to his hotel, *our* hotel, and I was soon fiddling with his air conditioning. It worked, cold air seeping out.

Up in the roof bar we ordered cold beers, mingling with guests, Big Paul and his mate armed with pistols under jackets. This all seemed familiar. But where was Judy in a bikini? And where was the damn pool?

‘Come,’ Rudd requested, and we walked to the wall. He pointed. ‘That tall tower is another hotel, but with offices on the first three

floors. That building is apartments, so it that one, and down there is the fridge company headquarters. That tower is just all offices, and that's the hospital. Over there you can see the airport, now a long concrete runway and hangars, your aircraft there. They fly to many places, the small ones and the bigger ones. And now some private owners.'

'Progress,' I said.

'And many new roads,' Rudd enthused.

Back at the tables, we reclaimed our beers and sat.

'How's money?' Jimmy asked.

'The businesses make good money, but profits go to the orphanage or the Rifles.'

'What's the balance?' I asked.

'There is some money left over, and we own the buildings and land. That does not include CAR, which sells the oil. That makes good money, but the British Navy takes a lot of oil.'

'That's OK,' Jimmy said. 'Keep fuelling the Navy, and keep building up around here. But we'll want the diamonds sold before 1938, as many as we can.'

'I'll dig some up and send them to America,' Rudd offered. 'Oh, the fridges make good money, I did not include that.'

'Show me the figures in the morning,' Jimmy suggested.

A man approached. 'Mister Silo?' he asked with an accent.

Jimmy stood and shook the man's hand. 'Yes.'

'I am the Belgian Ambassador to East Africa. Am I ... disturbing you?'

'No, not at all, have a seat.'

Big Paul and his mate moved away after a nod from Jimmy, the Ambassador sitting.

'How can I help you?' Jimmy asked.

'Your manager here, Rudd, asked about land for sale in Eastern Congo.'

'He did?' I asked.

'Yes,' Rudd answered. 'For new mines.'

'Do you wish to sell land?' Jimmy asked our guest.

'It is not very valuable land, and is plagued by rebels. You would need an army to defend your mines, which I understand you do now.'

'There may be more ore under the ground,' Jimmy said. 'We won't know till we look.'

'True. And in answer to your manager's question, we would consider selling land.'

Jimmy took out a piece of paper and a pencil, drawing a crude map of Eastern Congo. 'What area would you sell?'

The Ambassador circled a few areas.

Jimmy drew a line straight down, a swath of land about two hundred miles deep. 'How about that area?'

'That ... is a large area, sir.'

'That ... is swamp and jungle and hostile natives.'

'And what would you offer for it?'

'Twenty million English pounds, paid over ten years.'

The Ambassador's eyes widened. 'You would need a hundred profitable mines operating ... to recover that.'

'I would need twenty years to recover that,' Jimmy admitted.

'I would guess longer, but it is your money.'

'Convey my offer, please. There's no hurry.'

'Do you believe there to be valuable mines in the area?'

'The mine in Zambia has gold, and it's close to the border, so yes.'

'A costly gamble, but I think one that you can afford; I fly on your aircraft all the time. Bravo Monsieur, Bravo.'

Jimmy bowed his head. 'Enjoy my hotel, and cable me of an answer.'

With the Ambassador gone, Rudd cautioned, 'That is a lot of money.'

'It's over ten years, and we've already nicked more than that. Beside, it's worth it for the long term. In 2020 people will pay that for a house there. And within the next five years we'll make treble that in the US stock markets.'

'We could take it by force,' I suggested. 'A revolt here and there.'

'When we start to profit from the region the League of Nations would kick up a fuss,' Jimmy suggested.

Big Paul jumped up, pistol out, a kick to a man's groin. His buddy jumped up, and we all closed in. 'Frisk him,' Big Paul calmly stated, his buddy removing a pistol from inside the man's jacket.

Jimmy stepped closer, the other guests now nervous. 'Who are you?'

'Henri Duchain, a businessman,' was squeezed out, the man's ball sore, his face contorted.

'Why do you have a pistol in your armpit?' Jimmy asked.

'It's ... Africa, it's ... a dangerous place.'

'Nairobi has armed police officers on every street corner, and the local by-laws prevent the unlicensed wearing of a firearm,' Jimmy pointed out. 'So ... you are under arrest.'

They lifted him and took him out, Rudd calling down to reception for the police officers that always stood outside the hotel.

Sitting, I said, 'Belgians?'

'No, probably Herr Hitler,' Jimmy said, none too fussed. 'But we'll find out.'

The man was shown out of the back of the police station and taken to the Rifles barracks, the police all in Rudd's pocket these days. By time we had finished our evening meal he had confessed, an agent of The Reich, still pissed at Jimmy trying to bust out communists. If only they'd come and sit down for a nice cup of tea and a chat.

Dr Astor stepped in as we sat drinking, striding over. We stood for her, fetching a seat, but Jimmy led her away from us for a quiet chat.

'Why doesn't Jimmy just marry her, for fucks sake?' Big Paul asked. 'Good looking girl.'

'She's from this era,' I sighed. 'But, you never know with Jimmy.'

We left them to it, and the two of them sat there for hours. She spent the night with him - I saw her leave in the morning, but I didn't ask; he could be a moody bugger when it came to balancing women and the cause.

That day we inspected the hospital, Doc Graham now off enjoying Nepal, and I spoke to Dr Astor at length. She had created several small clinics, and now trained nurses to go off and work in remote villages, our first aid packs carried. She even had a flying doctor service running, a few of our Cessnas ferrying doctors to outlying regions when necessary, the odd breach birth or appendix. I asked her to ask Rudd to expand the service. 'Call them ... flying doctors,' I told her. 'Paint the planes white, put red crosses on them, and have a team of doctors and nurses fly around visiting villages.'

She liked the idea, but delicately asked about life in Canada, Jimmy's life in Canada, surprised that Jimmy was not married yet.

'He's dedicated to the work,' I told her. 'All work, all day, always trying to invent something new.'

'I had a lover, a doctor,' she admitted. 'But I did not respect him ... as much as I should have.'

'And you were engaged once, I hear.'

'Yes,' she sighed. 'A nice enough man, but grounded in his ways and old fashioned. He lamented the old times, whilst I embrace anything new - such as your cars. I tear around in them, and the police try in vain to tell me off.'

I smiled. 'Women drivers.'

‘What?’

‘Nothing,’ I quickly got out. ‘Do you fly?’

‘Yes, I’ve had lessons. I aim to try this parachuting next, that looks like great fun – floating down to earth.’

‘You are adventurous,’ I admitted. ‘You’re more like a woman from our time period. We have women soldiers and pilots, and prime ministers and presidents. One of my daughters became Prime Minister of Britain.’

‘Sounds like things change a great deal,’ she noted.

‘Well, it takes another eighty years, but pioneers like yourself help the cause for women.’

‘Pioneers ... like me?’

‘Lady doctors running clinics.’

‘Well, yes, I suppose.’

‘What ... are your long-term plans?’ I broached.

‘I had fully believed that I would be married with children by now. I am rapidly becoming an old spinster.’

‘You’ve been injected, and you’ll live to be a hundred a fifty, so you have plenty of time. First time around I didn’t get married till I was forty.’

‘Forty? That does sound old, but I shall not age, as you do not.’

‘So never say never, doc; you’ll be around a long time.’

The gang had a nose at a few offices, inspected a few fridges, and glanced at the airport buildings. Jimmy and Rudd studied figures, Jimmy making a few changes to Rudd’s master plan. Ore would now be mined from Tanzania, a big push for the next two years, and the bauxite mine would be expanded, even if it meant that we stockpiled the aluminium bars in Canada. Rudd had built a large plant in Guinea, the chemical process of extracting Aluminium a complex one.

Jimmy took Dr Astor out to dinner that evening and the rest of us kicked back and relaxed, a pleasant warm evening in the rooftop bar, old acquaintances greeted. I hadn’t noticed them on the first night, but the bar had fly traps, sticky paper that would not let go of a curious fly attracted to it. It was another invention of the scientists at Ebede, and was selling well. Fly Paper had arrived in Africa.

The next day we drove our own jeeps up to the Rifles base, Major Ngomo and his men greeted, hours spent in Ngomo’s sumptuous house, drinking and chatting, his kids running around in the garden. In the evening we enjoyed a meal in the officers’

mess, chatting to the British officers, some of who had only just signed up – looking for a bit of adventure.

We stayed the night in the officers' mess after drinking till late, inspecting the men in the morning. The base was now huge, well laid out and organised, and with signs everywhere: British Liaison, Medical Bay, Motor Pool, HQ Company, Education Wing, Canadian Liaison, Parachute School, Armoury, 1st Brigade, 2nd Brigade, Support Brigade, Airfield, Bar, Canteen. It had changed a great deal.

Big Paul greeted the Canadian Rifles permanent liaison officer and the man's team, the men all having trained under him. There were now always four hundred British NCOs here being trained, usually a few hundred Canadian Rifles. And the base now supported a combined bar, where anyone of any rank or any nationality could drink and swap stories, they even allowed the Kenyan soldiers in.

The gang fired off RPGs, 105mm, and we fired AK47s at targets, greeting the men and NCOs, taking the time to talk with many of them. There now seemed to be a hundred of our half-tracks housed here – many covered in sheets, something of a stockpile. At sundown we drove back in convoy, police at the front, a short drive back down to Nairobi.

Packed up, we grabbed a quick bite to eat, used the toilets, and took off at 11pm, aiming to hit UK airspace in the daylight, whilst avoiding Italian airspace. Everyone believed that we would fly to South Africa, but that was a rouse, and we turned north after flying south for ten minutes.

The dawn came up over the Mediterranean, southern France ahead of us. Our Goose cruised over France at fifteen thousand feet, the other aircraft of the day not being able to intercept us if they had wanted to, and the aircraft's high vapour trail must have been a puzzle to many on the ground. The Goose landed at this new place west of London called Heathrow, a strip of land we had recently purchased.

There weren't any of our cars to be seen in England yet, so we bumped along in old bangers, winding roads leading towards London, no motorways yet. It took almost an hour. Thinking about it, I realised that when they did install fast motorways – it would take just the same amount of bleeding time. We booked into the Dorchester, Sykes, Jack and Timkins coming around that evening, not having expected us.

A little arm-twisting of the hotel staff and some hard cash secured a function room, food brought out as we caught up and

gossiped till late. Jack's child was growing, Sykes had a lady friend – a countess no less, and Timkins now had two sons.

Timkins, our man in Parliament, was now part of the coalition government – the Industry Minister, a good position for his apparent age; most of his colleagues were pensioners. He was slowly building up British industry ahead of the war, and gently nudging people towards re-armament early. He was also pushing hard for an expanded air arm, and now asked Jimmy for some suitable aircraft.

'We'll improve the Boeing monoplane, and sell you that in a year or so,' Jimmy offered. 'It's a leap, but not as much as our other aircraft. We'll also develop a larger version of it as a medium range bomber. That should do till you commission heavy bombers like the Lancaster and Wellington, around 1936.'

Timkins was happy enough. 'What about tanks?'

'We'll start work on them in a few years, but a better policy will be jeeps and half-tracks with 105mm; mobile and effective.'

'The traditionalists like tanks,' Timkins cautioned.

'We'll develop one in time,' Jimmy offered.

'Not aluminium ... I hope,' Timkins said, making us laugh.

'No, no Shermans,' Jimmy assured him. 'An alloy with layers of honeycomb, advanced stuff. But we have to be careful, we don't want the Germans getting ideas.'

Sykes put in, 'They're developing a seaplane that looks just like yours.'

'Good luck with that,' I scoffed.

'They may get a few ideas, but the frames will never compete with ours, or with our reliability,' Jimmy said. 'And I have the feeling that theirs will crash a lot. And if they don't...'

'We'll make sure they do,' Sykes finished off. 'A laser hit from two miles away.'

Susan was aghast at the idea. 'You'll bring down passenger planes?'

'They'll land,' Jimmy assured her. 'On fire, but they'll land in time; we're not monsters.' He faced Timkins. 'What of the Jews?'

'A trickle has become a flood, and now few stay here,' Timkins reported. 'And Jack here, he's been busy creating the Garden of Eden in The Promised Land, concrete runway to boot.'

'And the politicians here?' Jimmy nudged.

Timkins answered, 'Are not happy at the thought of giving up the mandated territory, but they like the gold and the fuel. They can't have it both ways.'

Jimmy faced Sykes. 'How many German Jews arriving in Palestine?'

'A thousand a month now,' he reported. 'I guess they see Hitler as ... not an ideal potential leader. Some of his speeches were a little ... racist.'

'No...' I mocked.

Timkins said, 'Many Russian Jews heading for the Promised Land, now that the rumour mill is in full swing. And the poor old Governor there ... he just doesn't know what to do; his soldiers have been ordered to stay in barracks. Jack has food and grain ships docking every week, and the place has more concrete now than New York.'

'And the Palestinians?' Susan asked.

'Not a happy bunch, but they sell land – it's not yet taken,' Timkins explained. 'Besides, most of it is unoccupied, scattered villages and farms. But for now, the Palestinians find work in Jewish project areas, so they're happy enough.'

In the morning, Jimmy and I travelled around to the Foreign Office, to a meeting that included Timkins, the aim of the meeting being to see what we could do to assist each other – especially in Africa. They were impressed to hell with the railway lines, and grateful, and glad of the air service we provided on the continent. Whereas they used to send telegrams, now they flew down for meetings; a long sea voyage had become a one-day flight.

After two hours of detail, the head man got into politics, and the future. 'May I ask a direct question, Mister Silo?'

'Of course.'

'What are your *intentions* in the region?'

'To make consumers out of Africans; to educate them, to give them jobs, and to have them buy my products.'

'And any *political* intentions?' the Foreign Minister broached.

'I have no interest in public office, nor in overthrowing British governors in power. I will, however, assess the situation at the time, and if the majority of an educated black populace wished for independence I would nudge you towards that, but ensuring that my people got in there first. Your governor would swap to one of my chosen leaders, and business would go on as normal. Any black leader hostile to whites, or to the British, would not get my support – they would feel my wrath.'

That caused a pregnant pause. 'I see.'

'It's about doing business and making money, it's not about ideology or politics. I would hope ... that when the African nations

do learn to stand on their own two feet, that British companies would be at the fore, selling goods and services in the former colonies.'

'We are not unaware of your connection to Mister Wang Po in Hong Kong, or the fact that he now owns half the colony.'

'More like two thirds,' I said, getting a look.

'And his intentions?' they asked.

'To make money, not to become a politician; he's more of a capitalist than we are. He seeks to buy influence, not to cause a revolution.'

'Indeed. And the good gentleman has just informed us that he intends to build a bigger and better barracks for our troops, as well as defences along the border.'

Jimmy smiled. 'He's worried that the Chinese may wish to take back the colony at some point, or that there may be trouble from these new communists. He's keen for *you* to protect *his* interests.'

'We're not there ... to protect his interests,' the Foreign Minister stated.

'His interests, and yours, as one and the same,' Jimmy insisted. 'A safe – and prosperous – colony.'

We left them to worry over Po, and had lunch back at the hotel, soon heading around to Downing Street, and to a meeting with the Prime Minister and his senior staff. It looked pretty much like the Downing Street of my era, except no gates, or armed police, or thronging reporters, or placard-waving nutters. They welcomed us in, tea made, six of them sat opposite us around a large oval table.

'You should call this the Oval Office,' I quipped, getting odd looks.

Settled, the Prime Minister formally welcomed Jimmy to England, his first time in their eyes. 'From your ... *most unusual* roots, you have done very well for yourself, Mister Silo. I dare say some regard you as the world's richest man.'

'Numbers in a ledger, Prime Minister,' Jimmy replied. 'It's how you feel when your head hits the pillow that counts.'

They puzzled that. 'And how are your marvellous inventions coming along?'

'We're always working on aircraft that can fly higher or faster or further,' Jimmy responded. 'But it's hard work keeping the American administration at arms length; they seek closer ties each week.'

That had them ruffled, and I hid a grin, sipping my tea.

'I understand that the White House operates several of your aircraft. Gifts ... to them, no less?'

‘America is a large country; they need planes to get about. And the gifts were to encourage assistance on a few projects.’

‘Projects..?’

‘It would be rude for me to discuss their business with you, or yours with them. I keep separate mistresses in separate rooms.’

The Prime Minister cocked an eyebrow. ‘A good policy, for political leaders – and mistresses, I’m sure. May I ask if they have seen the special aircraft?’

‘No, they haven’t, but they are suspicious, possibly from information supplied by the Canadians. We will keep those planes secret for as long as we can, even from US presidents.’

‘That seems ... an odd policy, since you make aircraft to sell to them?’

‘We have aircraft that are more capable than those of ... say Germany, and we also have aircraft that are very much more capable than those of Germany. Should a threat occur at some future date, I would hope to roll out the middleweights in advance, then the heavyweights afterwards, causing a deep shock to whoever they go up against.’

‘My greatest fear ... is that I create a race amongst nations to build ever more powerful machines for killing people. And rest assured, that in a time of conflict I could produce many, and quickly. We will, however, be sending you aircraft next year on evaluation, aircraft that are a significant step forwards compared to those you operate now.’

‘But not ... the best aircraft you have,’ the Prime Minister delicately mentioned.

‘Do you wish others to see those aircraft, to get ideas, and to then catch up to you?’ Jimmy asked. ‘The better the equipment you have, the more others will want to copy it.’

‘I must confess, it’s a policy that I don’t fully grasp.’

‘I’ll make it easy for you then,’ Jimmy offered with a false smile. ‘Our special aircraft are not available to you ... or anyone else yet. That’s my choice, as the designer and owner of the product. But, should the empire find itself in a conflict – a significant conflict, my full resources would be committed one hundred percent, and with aggression.’

‘These Canadian Rifles are a most excellent infantry unit, the reports quite incredible. You push them into becoming automatons that run twenty miles a day, and seek painful endeavours at every turn and opportunity. Our returning NCOs have been described as *indestructible*.’

‘As with building aircraft, there is a technique to moulding men,’ Jimmy explained. ‘I developed that technique over twenty years, and we take the fear of death away from the men, and that helps.’

‘And this new unit in the Nepalese highlands?’

‘The Ghurkhas are excellent fighting men, so I wish to tap some of that spirit. Besides, I have them in mind for Hong Kong should the Chinese threaten us there. They can garrison well enough, and at my expense.’

‘You aim to save us a few pounds, Mister Silo?’

‘Your cut of the gold has already saved you a few pounds, Prime Minister,’ Jimmy floated.

‘Indeed, and we are ... grateful for the business.’

‘There will be greater *business* year by year. Your Chancellor may factor that into his budget.’

‘Our Belgian friends have made gentle enquiries about you over the years,’ the Prime Minister thought he might mention.

‘I recently met with their Ambassador to East Africa, and offered him twenty million pounds for a stretch of land in the Congo.’

They all blinked.

‘That ... would be a very expensive stretch of land, Mister Silo.’

‘I think there’s more ... *business* to be had there. It’s difficult land to tame, but if you have a few well trained soldiers ... it is less of a jungle.’

‘And they say that the tribal chiefs welcome you.’

‘They do, or we fight to the death.’

They blinked again, exchanging looks. ‘We’ve all heard some quite colourful tales. But do you seriously aim to tame that area?’

‘It will take twenty years of hard work.’

‘And twenty million pounds!’

‘Yes, but I aim to live long enough to see the mines profitable.’

‘Planning on living to a hundred, Mister Silo?’ the Prime Minister asked.

‘And beyond,’ Jimmy answered with a smile, making them laugh.

‘And what of British Airways? Will the corporation expand its fleet of aircraft and its routes?’

‘We aim to create a base in this Heathrow place, and to fly to all parts of the globe. Perhaps, gentlemen, you could improve road and rail links to it. That way, Londoners could reach it quickly and then catch a flight to far off places.’

They made a note. ‘We will, most certainly,’ they offered.

‘And if you assisted with concrete runways in Edinburgh, Belfast, Penzance, Jersey – then we could offer services to those locations.’

They were keen.

With the meeting concluded, we journeyed through the trams and around to Jack's London home, a fine Georgian building over three floors and with a cellar, even a coal-chute for coal deliveries. His wife, the nurse, cooked us a meal, Sykes popping around with Timkins for a private chat. As well as a little plotting and scheming.

In the morning we enjoyed a cold walk around Regents Park and its zoo, a glimpse of the Thames later for Mary. She threw a stick in. It took us another hour to reach Heathrow, some things never change, our plane sat waiting. With the air crisp and chill we set off, soon heading northwest and over the west coast of Scotland, on towards Iceland.

Beyond Iceland we glimpsed Greenland, the windows a little frosted on the outside, and entered Nova Scotia's airspace. Refuelled in Toronto, we started the last leg, back to a snowy airfield. Warned-off risking a landing on the ice, we touched down on the inlet safely, in sight of the hotel, our round the world jaunt complete. My house was nice and warm, the maid in attendance, the food on. It was a week before Christmas, and Mary was excited.

The next morning I visited all of the factories in turn, enquiring as to how various things were progressing. Radio direction finding was working, some early experiments with radar underway - a man walking in front of an antenna with a large metal plate to see if the radar saw it. Well, at six feet away I would have been disappointed if they didn't see it. In the alloys research facility they called to me keenly, a new alloy to show me.

'Guys, a bit of metal looks like a bit of metal,' I said.

'This is a new alloy, and we think it would be great for a rifle barrel. Feel this.'

They handed me what looked like the barrel from an AK47. 'Shit, that is lighter; half the weight. It won't explode if fired?'

'It would be stronger, if anything. And we'll put fins along it at the thicker end, covered by the grip.'

'Guys, make up an AK47 - or ten - immediately, using this stuff, even for the body. I want a folding stock, and hard plastic pistol grip and barrel grip. You have a green light.'

'They would be expensive production weapons,' they cautioned.

'I only want a hundred. Go to work.' I was pleased with the new alloy, and its potential, finding Hal and Hacker wrapped up warm and working hard. 'Fuck me. All we need is some dodgy Vietnam War music,' I told them.

'Like it?' Hal asked.

'Hal, it's a bit of a leap from the bedstead; it looks like a fucking Huey on a diet.'

'They had thirty spare engineers from the jeeps and half-tracks, so we pinched them while you were off enjoying yourself.'

'How're the US soldiers you were training?' I asked.

'Most are down in the desert,' Hacker reported. 'Staying warm.'

'They coming along?'

'They're not Rifles, but they're better than they should have been for this era. There's an airborne unit now, five hundred men, and they *are* good. When their stint is up we'll pinch some of them.'

'You keep the Huey out of the skies around here, fly it off someplace quiet,' I warned.

'Sikorsky is already tinkering with them,' they argued.

'He's tinkering with flying bedsteads, not Apocalypse Now!'

'She'll take a year or two to get right,' Hal admitted. 'Besides, Jimmy has commissioned anti-aircraft missiles.'

'He has?' I caught up with him later. 'Missiles?'

Jimmy reported, 'Unguided, altitude detonated, but I am thinking about a simple magnetic proximity detonator as well.'

'What the hell for?'

'To shoot down planes. What's the one characteristic of warplane strategy in this era?' I waited, Jimmy adding, 'They fly in tight formations.'

'So a big bang in the right spot gets them all,' I realised.

'They teach formation flying as a safe strategy; many eyes looking for the enemy, many tail guns brought to bear.'

'All bunched up nicely,' I realised.

'It's like flak, only more effective if well aimed and adjusted for wind and speed.'

'They just invented an alloy for rifle barrels that's half the weight,' I mentioned.

'And it doesn't blow up when fired?' he puzzled.

'Nope.'

He led me back to the alloys people, and received a briefing. 'See your department manager, tell him I said to make this a priority. Make airframe shapes and spars from it, and give them to the aircraft boys to test as a priority.'

'Yes, sir,' they enthused.

'How did you make it?'

'We mix things up at random all the time, and this one we cooled very slowly under high pressure.'

Leaving the excited men, Jimmy said, 'They didn't even have that alloy in our day, not that I know of. They may have stumbled across something by accident, a leap forwards. But, as far as rifle barrels were concerned, people were always mindful of mass-production, so quality was secondary.'

We returned to our daily routines, and a week later I was presented with an AK47 at the indoor testing range. It was light, very light, partly alloy and partly plastic grips. I loaded it, cocked the weapon and fired, finding no practical differences to any other AK, except the weight.

I took it back to the hotel, unloaded, and showed Big Paul. I think he had an erection. 'It's a new special alloy they found. A bit expensive, but ... it works.'

'Shit ... she's a beauty. When can we test them?'

'Just as soon as they make a few. Go show the gang.'

And he did, everyone amazed by the new alloy. Then everyone started nagging for them. I confirmed the order for a hundred, and each of our military types had one issued; the SAS given twenty, the SBS given twenty, some held back, a few sent to Ngomo and Abdi to test. The boys in the alloys research facility all got a bonus equal to three months pay, the man directly responsible receiving six months pay – and were all told they'd be shot with their own rifles if the formula or methods were released.

Then the aircraft engineers called me down. 'Jeez, boss, this new metal is great.'

'And expensive,' I mentioned.

'We could use it just for certain things, like engine mountings, main spars,' they offered.

I held up a hand to them, and found the department manager for the alloys. 'How much is it to make, compared to the aluminium alloys?'

'Well, it takes a lot longer, but that's just time, not money. Cost wise, it's about ten percent more.'

'That all? Shit, I want loads of it made up. I want it tested to destruction, especially corrosion.'

'Oh, it'll never corrode.'

'No?'

'No,' the man said with a smile.

'Then get testing it for tensile strength; twist, break, heat and chill it.' I gave him all the largest dollar bills I had on me. 'Good work.'

'Thank you, sir.'

I found one of our scientists. ‘What do you make of this new metal?’

‘There are millions of various combinations, many yet to be discovered, even in our era. When we left, they were slowly cooling metal casts whilst surging electrical currents through them, an attempt to influence lattice formation.’

‘That ... sounds expensive, but we have this, and we’ll use it on the aircraft.’

‘And in the jet engines,’ he added. ‘Possibly a great benefit, as well as one that would be hard to reverse-engineer by others.’

I waved a finger. ‘That’s a good point.’ I found Jimmy sat with Cookie, having a coffee. ‘This new metal is cheap, just takes a while longer to make it. And ... it couldn’t be reverse engineered; they’d never get the mix and process right.’

‘Excellent,’ Jimmy said. ‘Now instead of being way too forward in our plans, we’re way way too forward.’

‘There’s no pleasing some people,’ I quipped.

‘We risk an arms race,’ he said. ‘Still, it strengthens our arm – no pun intended. And some of our people have mild radiation poisoning.’

I was immediately concerned. ‘They OK?’

‘They have the blood, so symptoms go after a few days. Still, procedures will need some tightening. Since they have the blood, they’re not as careful as they should be.’

‘How’s that project progressing?’

‘They’ve refined some ore, got the chemical process going, and now centrifuges going. They should have enriched Uranium in a year, but they’re inventing and building the support equipment first.’

Cookie said with a smile, ‘They call themselves The Lemmings.’

‘Lemmings?’ I puzzled. ‘Why?’

‘They live under the tundra,’ Cookie explained. ‘Coming up in the spring.’

‘Ah. They need to get out more often. Literally!’

Cookie added, ‘They would, if there wasn’t six feet of snow over them half the year. Still, it’s well camouflaged from satellite recon.’

‘I don’t think they’ll be any satellite recon for a year or two,’ I told our out-of-touch cook.

Christmas with the family was great, an occasion that I had missed in the past twenty years or so. I was now making up for it and going all parental in the festive season. I arranged bonuses and gifts for the workforce, a crate of beer for everyone, mince pies, the

works. Decorations went up around the offices, and in the last week before Christmas nothing much got done, one long round of parties.

Susan was a traditionalist, and she got into the spirit of things as well. But Christmas Eve she sat me down in our well-festive lounge. 'I think we should have another child.'

'Yeah? Well, yes, they need siblings, or they're ... *the only child*.'

'Mary seems fine, but ... I think two. Or three.'

'Three's a handful, even with help. Trust me, I know.'

'Do you ... want more?' she asked.

'Yes, but I'm thinking about ... well, whether this is the best place to raise them; winters are no fun here.'

'Where were you thinking of?'

'I don't know. I need to stay close to the work, but ... there are things that I could be doing in the winter if there wasn't six feet of snow outside. I'll chat to Jimmy, see what he thinks.'

The next day we journeyed down to the hotel after lunch, gifts exchanged, lots of gifts. I got a knitted jumper that said "too much, too soon", and other equally useful items. Later, I mentioned to Jimmy a warm climate for the kids.

'I know you've had enough of building up Africa...'

'Yes, and I don't want to be in the Congo in this day and age with kids!'

'We could do with a testing ground near San Diego, a pilot training school. A lot of our staff head down that way to test things they can't test here in the snow. You could build up a large-scale testing facility.'

'Miramar!'

'That's a way into the desert,' he pointed out. 'But the same idea.'

'I'll take a holiday down there after New Year and ... get a feel for the place.'

'There are dockyards we own down there. You could make a start on a few warships.'

I wagged a finger. 'Aircraft carriers!'

'There you go, you had an idea. A bit early...'

'Fuck ... right ... off.'

After the endless rounds of parties I needed a holiday, and on a fine crisp morning a Goose carried myself and my family south, along with two bodyguards and a bunch of engineers that were due in Los Angeles. I also persuaded our nanny to come along, since she also longed for a warmer climate. We spent a day in L.A. at a hotel near the seaport, and I checked in on the airlines operation there,

mention of how good Hong Kong airport was. They got the message. I signed off on nearby land that would hold a concrete runway, and travelled on down to San Diego.

We booked into a hotel for a week, not sure how long it would take us find a house to rent or to buy. I set out the next day with Susan, a drive around the various neighbourhoods. Then, thinking like a parent, I grabbed a map and marked all of the schools. Only one posh suburb seemed to fit, so we journeyed to it the next day, finding a cliff top with a view to die for. It was close enough to everything, so I enquired about land at a realtor down the main road leading to it.

A lady showed me twenty-six plots that had been set aside for building on, shaped into an avenue that was yet to be laid. 'OK,' I said. 'I'll take the lot. Do you know a builder?'

She was bemused. 'You'll take ... them all, sir?'

'I'm Paul Holton, business partner of Jimmy Silo.'

'Oh my word.' She needed a glass of water, her boss coming out.

The guy said, 'Figured we'd take a year or two to sell the plots and build on them.'

'Now you can have a nice long break. I'll want the paperwork tomorrow, then to meet the builder. You'll arrange the avenue as it's laid out here?'

'Yes, sir, we can get right on that with the town council.'

'Good. So, tomorrow: paperwork and builders. And ... *have a nice day.*'

I made the morning edition of the local paper, a loud announcement of my arrival. Susan and I met with the builders after signing a large cheque, and each plot was joined to its neighbour to make larger plots. Our plot would be at the end of the avenue, and would cover four of the proposed plots joined end to end. It would also be the first house started. I drew a quick sketch, and asked the builders to improve upon it and come straight back – as in two days time.

That evening, I said to Susan, 'Why don't you design the other houses, each one different. And you'll have to help me out with the internal decorating, because I'm crap with that stuff.'

Her feminine side was tapped, paper grabbed off Mary, as well as a few coloured crayons. Mum and daughter scribbled quietly on paper in our hotel suite.

Studying a map of the area the next day, I headed towards the town clerk, a map rolled up.

'Mister Holton,' he said with a smile. We were off to a good start.

I opened the map. 'I'm looking for land to buy, big enough for an aircraft factory. If the land is owned by the government then that's fine.'

He raised a pointed finger, smiled, and drew the outline of a large area that was only three miles inland from my proposed new house. 'It's owned by the Navy, but the town doesn't allow them to bomb it any more.'

'Quite wise too.'

I headed off to the nearest telegram office, and after waiting in line asked the nice lady to send a telegram to the President. She stared at me, and called her boss over.

'You wish to send a telegram ... to the President, sir?'

'Yes. Is there a problem?'

'People don't normally send telegrams to the President, sir.'

'Oh. Well, I do. Name is Paul Holton, business partner to Jimmy Silo.'

'I'm ... terribly sorry, sir, I didn't recognise you. I heard you had moved into town. Would you like to dictate the message, sir.' He readied a pencil.

'From Paul Holton and Jimmy Silo, stop. Want to buy abandoned US Navy land in San Diego to build factory, stop. That's it, the rest they can work out.' I handed over a few dollars.

Two days later the US Navy came to the hotel, an Admiral and his staff. I was invited out to lunch. They were delighted that I was going to build an aircraft factory here, quoting the newspaper story about it.

I began, 'We're interested in an airfield, a pilot training centre, an aircraft testing centre to start. That should create plenty of jobs locally. Then I'll be looking at ship building, we own yards here.'

'What kinda ships?' they asked, keenly attentive.

'Aircraft carriers.'

'For your planes, no doubt.'

'We're working on planes suitable for aircraft carriers,' I lied. 'Fighters and bombers, and spotter planes.'

'Spotter planes?'

'They'd fly out a hundred miles and find the enemy ships for you,' I explained to my keen and attentive audience. 'Besides that, I have to keep quiet for now. You know, secrecy and all.'

The Admiral said, 'We have a few of your Goose aircraft on maritime patrol. Damned fine aircraft, damned fine; we never have a problem with them. I've flown them to Hawaii and back, and the foods better than at home!' They laughed.

'You need to be comfortable on long journeys,' I commented. 'So what land do you have for me?'

They opened a map and showed me, an area similar to that which the clerk outlined, a square with a bulge, some two miles long and three miles wide. And it already possessed a fence. It also offered a few unexploded bombs, which they said would be removed.

'We have bomb disposal experts, leave it to us,' I said.

They offered to mark the areas where ordnance was still to be found.

'So, how much?' I finally asked.

'The Department of the Navy is asking for only two hundred thousand dollars, but will strike a good deal on the next order for your aircraft. It's just a case of how many.'

'I'll discuss it with Jimmy, but I'm sure we can come to an agreement.'

After lunch I travelled out to the proposed site with a keen young naval officer, the man showing me the existing buildings, water wells, roads, and the dirt airstrip. That dirt strip was solid, almost like concrete. I got a call through to Jimmy, eventually, and he would look at aircraft for the Navy, a mix of the maritime Goose and a few Dash-7s. Since we had a few old ones to get rid off, it would be a good deal.

Jimmy struck his own deal with the Navy the next day, the land signed over, an army of builders engaged. As Susan sat drawing houses, I stood directing builders. I started with the access road, which was fine, the main gate OK, and I knew what I wanted first. I commissioned a large motel just inside of the wire, and ordered the wire moved. The motel would be "outside". Next, I asked for fifty temporary workers huts to be brought in and assembled.

Thinking about a parachute school down here, I commissioned eight two-storey barrack blocks in a corner, a mess hall and armoury, an admin block, a separate fence around it when done. Using the existing buildings between the gate and the dirt strip, I created a civilian flying school, the buildings already suitable. Six veteran pilots came down from Canada, along with ten Cessnas and six Dash-7s. Lessons were offered immediately, to local paying students.

That attracted an odd mix of people, mostly rich men who flew as a hobby, a few young men hoping to get jobs flying, a few sent by their bosses to learn on our aircraft. That gave me an idea. I informed the Navy that we had a flying school, and that their guys could learn on our aircraft at low rates. They ran their own basic

flying school, but that was still based around biplanes, and they always needed cross-training onto our aircraft. I offered to take a pilot right through from Cessna to flying the Goose, and they agreed, the first young men destined to stay at a nearby naval base whilst coming out to us by bus.

Our pilot instructors started teaching the first naval aviators in the classroom, advancing on to the Cessnas, the dirt strip now busy. That led to the start of a control tower and admin building beneath it, the installation of good radio equipment and radio direction finding. The Navy's pilots would soon be trained on the equipment.

Jimmy then sent down a hundred willing volunteers from the US Army regiment we sponsored, and a note: "Can never have enough pilots." I found the men temporary accommodation in workers huts, ordered more huts, and hurriedly expanded the small canteen, hiring six new ladies. Ten old Cessnas flew down, four more Dash-7s, and we had 1939 in mind.

I then altered the course structure and made it a bitch. They'd now each need eighty hours on Cessnas, not including certain exercises, a hundred and twenty hours on the Dash-7s, parachute training – which some already had, and forty hours on a Goose. By time they left they would be good pilots, but also experienced pilots.

We now had the Army and the Navy on the base, the men getting on well enough, all talking about aircraft. I brought in Navy meteorological staff, and they gave lectures to both groups whilst the base grew in size. I commissioned five large hangars in a row, workshops behind them, and parallel to the dirt strip we made a start on a concrete runway.

All day long the place buzzed with aircraft taking off or landing, a few near misses, hops and bounces performed by the beginners. Seeing the men waiting their turn to try, I commissioned a spacious pilots room with a rooftop bar. The men would soon be able to sit with a cold drink and watch their colleagues bounce and hop.

A thousand builders toiled all day, buildings going up at a steady pace. Water pipes were laid, electrical cables hung off posts, phone lines added. Dawn would see the soldiers running around the airfield, the navy lads turning up at 9am in a bus. My own future dwelling was also reaching skyward, the pool dug out and covered in concrete, tiles now being set. I didn't interfere in the house, and Susan didn't comment on runway directions.

With just about enough new accommodation at the airfield to spare a few rooms, our service engineers moved in and set up home.

Once a week, a Goose with wheels would land and have something swapped or repaired. Po took delivery of the old Goose variants, those without wheels, since we were now phasing them out. These aircraft, the ones needing minor repairs, were mostly from the Hawaiian and Pacific routes. Store sheds appeared, lorries bringing in parts after they had journeyed down by train, including entire engine assemblies, and tarmac roads crept ever onwards around the dirt airfield.

The concrete runway was completed at around the same time as my house, and I was delighted with what Susan had achieved. The road outside still looked like a builder's yard, but the house was great. My bodyguard had his own room, and two private guards patrolled both the cliff path and the builder's yard outside, day and night. The first few houses in the avenue were under construction, their designs down to Susan.

My new house offered a lounge with huge glass doors that opened onto the poolside, a great view down the coast, great sunsets laid on each evening. My bedroom offered similar glass doors to those of lounge, opening onto a large balcony above the lounge, the same view. Coffee in the mornings would be spent on the balcony, listening to the ocean below.

All pilots needed first aid training, so I started taking Susan to work with me. She had the first aid packs sent down, and gave talks and lessons, exams held: what would you do if a passenger had a heart attack? She also stitched up damaged fingers for engineers messing with planes, being kept busy, and was glad to be back home and on the poolside each evening. We started to appreciate the weekends.

Settled into the house, Jimmy flew down and stayed the night, explaining that the Boeing team would open up shop the next day. They opened a shed and grabbed spare office space, three of their ugly fighters landing later in the day, as well as one of their prototype twin engine transports. Their pilots would put the aircraft through their paces in the good weather, and some of our pilots would also test them, offering comments.

That Boeing transport plane had been designed by us for the most part. It offered large wide wheels for dirt strips, an undercarriage designed for rough landings, and a sturdy frame. And the damn thing took off on a dime. With huge flaps, it landed on a dime as well, and I watched the thing come in at a steep angle and land, power up and take off again, over and over. In order to

assist Boeing - to assist us in the long term, we ordered thirty of these transports for Africa, Ngomo to receive five.

When the US Army brass came down to the airfield for a visit, I showed them the Boeing transport plane. 'You could use them in jungle and desert – they can land on any surface. And they only need a short runway. They'll carry forty soldiers, or a jeep or two.' An idea had been planted.

We numbered a great many parachute-trained soldiers in residence at the airfield, and so they geared up and took off in the Boeing one morning, the aircraft now called the B13, and jumped over the scrub near the base. With static line chutes wired up to an overhead rail, they managed to all get out in a minute, landing in a tight group. Two of these prototype B13s were duly dispatched to the New Mexico parachute school.

Boeing's ugly monoplane fighter, the B11 – no "F" designation in sight, was given a thorough testing by our staff, the second variant of it utilising our materials and techniques from the B13 transport. Boeing had no buyers for it yet, the US Army having two on trial, but the B11 Mark II fighter would be better. And much better than the Stearman biplane that the Army were now using.

The flying school down here soon attracted would-be pilots from all over the States, and even abroad, and more of our own pilots started to teach private students. Class sizes were around twelve pupils per instructor, a great deal of time sat around waiting your one-hour thrill and post-flight analysis. But, with the Cessnas offering four seats, I had people sit in the back and observe, two or more in each Dash-7. It speeded up the process. And our pilots got used to modern day flying:

"Pattern is full, go around."

"Look out!"

'What are you doing, idiot!'

Both the dirt strip and the concrete runway were in constant use on weekdays. You turned left off the concrete, right off the dirt, and a few screams were heard when the pupils mucked that up. And if a Super Goose was coming in, you got out of the way or you got squished. I decided on a third runway, on the far side, and work started on another concrete runway in earnest.

Not everyone learning to fly understood why they should also learn to parachute, and a few refused. We explained the benefits, and the confidence of having a chute, but they still refused to try it. In time, a few private planes appeared on the airfield, licenses granted, a few biplanes sat about for weekend hobby flyers.

Mary attended a nursery each day till 3pm, now four years old, and made a few new friends. She was, however, booked in as Mary Blake, her mother's name and not mine – for security reasons. I met a few of the parents and invited them around on weekends, a while since I had done this whole school thing. I made out that Jimmy had all the money and that I was just his assistant, conscious of the security – that and not wanting them to be a right pain in the arse. I just wanted to be an ordinary Joe.

Hal and Hacker paid a flying visit to the airfield one day, delivering a Goose for the Pacific route, and we caught up for an hour; seemed that the new metal was revolutionising a few things. It also seemed that Mac had made a fat grenade, the metal twice as thick as normal, and when thrown it blasted twice as much metal around. It just looked a bit stupid, the size of a baseball and hard to grip.

They were now using the new alloy for aircraft parts, and the jet engine boys had pinched much of it. Main spars would now be made of the material, and dorsal spars - up to the tail. Since it was half the weight, they made the spines twice as thick for extra strength. Now you *would* need an artillery shell to bring down one of our planes.

Hal informed me that an engineer had designed a baby Cessna, and had built it in his spare time. It was two-seat, smaller than ours, and made use of a smaller engine. It would, however, be great for private users. Jimmy had signed it off and production would start soon, the planes cheap enough. They would also benefit from a main spar and spine made from the new alloy, but would be so light they would blow over in a strong wind. Since we'd all seen Cessna 152s upside down after a storm in our era, we just didn't care.

And the new AK47s, they were so popular that Jimmy had banned talk of them for the nagging. They had more of a kick and recoil than their heavier counterparts, but were nonetheless sought after.

Spring, 1931

In the spring, I began visiting our shipyards more often, and peered at the designs for a new destroyer. I ordered a redesign. 'If any compartment below water is holed, I want it isolated and watertight. I want you to tell me that a hole in one area won't sink the ship. And if I don't accept that, I'll stick you in one, and blow a

hole to see what happens.' I was conscious of Pearl Harbour, and of battleships sinking after being hit by just the one torpedo.

Studying the design of a small coastal craft, I drew hydroplanes onto it. 'Try that for me,' I said. 'Experiment. Weld them on an older model, and see how she fares. Call me when you're ready to test her.' They looked at me as if they thought me mad.

Called back a few weeks later, they had an older boat with hydroplanes attached, and had fixed silly smiles on their faces. We walked down the dock to the boat and boarded, taking her out without scraping the hydroplanes. Outside the harbour they opened her up, the nose rising, the speed increasing.

'Fast, eh?' I said. 'That's because I think like an aircraft engineer.'

She powered around, other naval crews now staring at the boat racing along on top of the water instead of in the water. I asked for the planes to be hydraulic, so that she could be berthed dockside, and left them to experiment. But I returned a day later and had strips welded onto her hull in dry dock, strips that would catch air and bubble it under the hull. Small holes were made in the hull, and high-pressure air would now be pumped out as she progressed. Even without the foils she was much faster through the water. And that technique had first been used by the Vikings in their Longboats, and was employed by our seaplanes.

Looking at aircraft carriers, they were way too expensive for me to piss about with, so I went back to the airfield to see what else I could do. With the second concrete runway now finished, I moved people over there, hoping to avoid a few crashes, and the statistics suggested that we would qualify upwards of three hundred pilots a year. I sent Jimmy a note, and he said, "More, please."

After whinging, I found more instructors – all of them working for us, good financial incentives offered, and asked for more soldiers. Canadian Rifles came down, a dozen at a time, the rest of my guests being US Army enlisted men or officers. And the Army, bless 'em, they looked at the report cards and pinched the best men for the Army Air Corp. Well, that was the whole point, so I assisted them.

A few of the men had originally enlisted with the sponsored regiment for something to do, being promoted to corporal, had then passed the pilot's course and were now NCOs or officers in squadrons. But the Army had a hard time when handing the pilots biplanes to fly; there was dissent in the ranks. That was eased with the first two squadrons of the Boeing fighter, the ugly one, soon to be followed by the much better variant. We gave the Army Air

Corp twenty-four on trial, two whole squadrons, and the Department of Defence began looking at the Boeing B11/2 as its basic fighter, some fifty ordered.

Jimmy then ordered sixty for the British Army in East Africa, as a standard fighter; it would carry two .303 British standard machineguns fitted, and two small bomb racks. Since we were paying for them, as well as opening a flight school in Mombasa, the British had little to complain about.

Not many B11/2s would ever be made, since the B11/3 was on the drawing board already. It wasn't a Spitfire, but was a decent fighter. Our own prop fighter was back in production, a surprise when I found out, and they were being stockpiled. There was also a new variant being worked on, with spars made out of the new alloy, guns of the new metal, and a larger wing with greater load capacity. It would offer four fifty calibre machineguns, generous ammo storage, and bomb racks on the wings and belly; it was a Spitfire on heat. It was also ahead of its time, with armour plating for the pilot and the fuel tanks - made from the new alloy, its Perspex canopy twice as thick as normal and moulded with fine wire mesh. Jimmy was designing it to survive a good kicking and to come back smiling.

He then sent me a note: "Pilot survival gear, rubber rafts, etc." I got to work, looking at the existing kit. Thinking of the future, I grabbed two engineers and told them what I wanted. They stared at me, but got to work. A week later, with a group of pilots observing, the crude prototype was tested. It looked like a large yellow rubber football with a red cord. When I yanked the cord it hissed loudly, everyone stepping back, and it burst into life as a one-man dinghy. It came with a sea anchor fitted, a whistle, a hood, and a paddle that could be unfolded and clipped together. The production model would have a tin of water and dried biscuits, fishing line and hook, a mirror to signal. I told the men to make four prototypes and to fetch me additional staff from Canada.

I pencilled a design for the Goose series and sent it to Canada, to our chief engineer, ordering the changes. A compartment, in fact three, would be fitted to the planes. Anyone outside the plane, unhappily bobbing in the cold surf, could put a finger in a hole with a red arrow pointing at it, pulling open a hatch. If they grabbed the handle inside and yanked, a door burst open and a four-man dinghy burst out and inflated. There would also be a release from inside the aircraft.

Next came a similar approach for the Dash-7, a standard wilderness survival kit and dinghy. The dinghy would be in the

rear fuselage, the survival kit next to it; water and dried biscuits, fishing line, matches, plastic sheets, etc. Our prop fighter would get a dinghy behind the fuselage fuel tank, same design, for pilots ditching in the sea. Considering Boeing, I sent them a note and the designs for their fighter and transport, the transport to have four dinghies in the top of the fuselage.

I then designed a jungle survival kit in a green bag, and would have them issued in Africa only. Jimmy sent a “thank you” note, so I took a long weekend off with the family when I received it.

A month later I was sat chatting to a Super Goose pilot back from Africa, and he mentioned the flying school there – and the size of it. There were now twelve Cessnas operating, six Dash-7s, and already twelve Boeing B11/1s and /2s. And they were teaching dog-fighting and ground attack to British pilots. I was near Miramar, and the damn action was in Mombasa.

I asked to borrow Hal for a month, and grabbed a few Boeing B11/2s. Hal spent a few days getting used to them, and their limits, then devised a dog-fight programme. Now, Army and Navy pilots would receive dog-fight training and ground attack scenarios. Hal put the instructors through their paces first, and taught a few basic techniques for shaking a tail and getting position, which he admitted was great fun. He’d want to spend more time here in the future.

When Hal headed back north, on a Goose needing some fixing in Canada, Jimmy flew south aboard a new prototype. One sunny morning, a Super Goose Bomber landed at the field, its distinctive bubble domes quickly identifying what variant it was. Powered down, everyone wanted a peek at it.

Jimmy stepped down and came over to me. ‘She’s been flying with thirty thousand pound bomb loads, no problems so far.’

‘Bomb bay doors OK?’ I asked.

‘They stick now and then, but there’s a team on just that. They open and close them for twenty-four hours, sat watching them.’

‘Bomb release OK?’

‘They mocked up a ten thousand pound bomb, and it got stuck, so they had to redesign the release. Smaller bombs drop OK, but if you load it with forty one-thousand pound dummy bombs then one always gets stuck. That’s no big deal because they won’t go bang unless they strike something very hard. Still, you wouldn’t want to land with one in there. The rear gunner, who doubles as a secondary navigator, has been known to open the hatch and kick loose the odd bomb.’

I smiled at the image. 'How's the bomb sight?' I asked, leading Jimmy towards the tower.

'They regularly drop bombs from ten and fifteen thousand feet, into an oval shaped lake to the northeast, and so far it looks good. Was a problem when a few guys went fishing on the lake; they got the surprise of their lives. Our crew only spotted their boats after the bombs had been released.'

I laughed. 'Cold drink?'

'Definitely.'

We climbed up to the roof, cold beers grabbed, and stared down at our monstrous creation.

He pointed. 'We now have a thin sheet of the new alloy fashioned with fins over the fuel tanks, around the engines, around the pilots, and they make tubes of it to put the control wires in. If an ME109 shoots it up from above it'll take a beating.'

'I think an ME109 tops out around ten thousand, if that.'

'The problem would come if one of these was caught somewhere low, maybe landing or taking off. That's why they have a tail gunner.'

I sipped my beer. 'What'll he have to play with?'

'Twin fifty cal with a good rate of fire, long barrel, tracer and phosphorous rounds. He'll have armour plating around himself as well, but his Perspex is still vulnerable. Next I'll put countermeasures on it.'

'Countermeasures?'

'Chaff - aluminium strips to confuse radar - as well as a grenade launcher. It'll fire out grenade-like shells, and they explode five hundred yards back, hopefully convincing an enemy fighter to bug out; a kind of mini-flak. They'll also have bright lights to blind night fighters.'

'Max altitude?'

'They're working the partial pressure system, that helps, and the inside is kept warm. Oxygen would be a partial demand-value system, a good supply onboard, but they're thinking about a pressurised cockpit as well. It's been to thirty-two thousand feet already.'

'Nothing will fly above twenty during the war, if that,' I scoffed.

'The next variant will have a swept wing, ten degrees, swept tail and fins, a bit faster.'

'Will we lose some load?'

'No, because the wing will be larger, almost delta,' Jimmy explained. 'Oh, I've just sanctioned the main spar, dorsal spar and

tail strut of the Boeing B11 Mark Three to be made in Canada from the alloy, and we'll make their undercarriage.'

'Should improve things, although their Mark Two hasn't fallen apart on us yet.'

'The Mark Three will handle better. So, is your missus cooking?'

Jimmy nudged.

'I'll telephone ahead.'

At the house we sat around the pool, Mary fishing up nickels and dimes, never quite figuring out where they came from. Susan came and joined us, cocktails handed out.

'It's a nice spot,' Jimmy commented, 'but Canada in the summer is unbeatable.'

'We thought we'd pop up there when the nursery closes for the summer,' Susan mentioned to Jimmy.

'The factories are still growing,' he responded. 'But in a few years more of the production will switch to Boeing. The Mark Three and Four fighters will be the standard around the world till 1939.'

'Will the Germans copy them?' I wondered out loud.

'They're already looking at monoplanes, and they were ahead of the game before with the ME109 and others, so I don't think they'll be any different this time. Remember, it's Hitler setting the tone and pace, so he'll opt for what *he* thinks is best. Last time they didn't opt for long range bombers, or big bombers. Since they were just bombing London – why would they? Their designers won't have a plan to bomb New York.'

'Any progress on radar?' Susan asked.

'Yes, we have a crude set-up in the control tower. It shows up a Goose well enough, the Cessnas are hard to spot unless they're only a mile away. But they did jump the gun and give the Germans a hand.'

'How?' I puzzled.

'In Hawaii they have a beacon on continuous transmit. A smart Goose pilot can use his radio to fix its exact heading, guiding them in if it's cloudy.'

'The RAF used that in the war, to triangulate German cities,' I stated.

'Till it was jammed,' Jimmy pointed out. 'Still, it makes commercial flying safer. They're now rigging up sets for aircraft to find the beacons, and they're going to install them all around the world. We could land at night, in bad weather, or fog.'

'Progress,' I said. 'Safer air travel; this period wasn't exactly known for its safe air travel.'

'Ted went out to Hong Kong after you criticised Los Angeles airport. Now L.A. is much better, and Washington, hotels at the airports. The VIP lounge has rooms above it, so if your flight is delayed you can book a room with a shower.'

'Couldn't even do that in our era,' I moaned.

'Hawaii's transit hub has a hotel being built, and new lounges, a rooftop bar, the works. The age of luxury seaplane travel is with us. Oh, and we think we know why the Germans are mad at us, and Herr Hitler didn't have a hand in it.'

'No?'

'No. Jack gave money to Zionists in Palestine, to get more people out. They used some of the money to bust out communist Jews in prison, and killed a few officials. When caught, the pipeline operators said that I had funded it.'

'Shit...' I let out. 'How many Jews are getting out of Germany now?'

'The main exodus occurred after 1933, when Hitler came to power, so we've started the process early with the money. It's not enough, but around ten thousand a month leave; Palestine can't cope with them all, poor old Jack flat out busy. Half the poor buggers are in tents, some living in old cruise liners in the ports. But we're not managing to persuade anyone from the Netherlands or Belgium to leave – and why would they; they can't see a war coming yet. And Polish Jews ignore the requests. We'll do what we can, but history is unlikely to remember us well.'

'No?'

'Given what we know, they may argue that we should destroy Germany now. Still, the Jews will only be attacked in a long, drawn out war. I aim to end the war in a few weeks.'

'Do you have a plan?' Susan asked.

'I have a very detailed plan, one that I've considered since I stepped through a portal the very first time; I had notions of accidentally ending up in many eras. But ... but it depends on the starting line-up, and before we get to the starting line-up in Europe there's Japan invading Canton in 1938. If we used our best weapons against *them*, the Germans will see it – and will redesign their own.'

'So we have to fight the Japs with one hand tied behind our backs,' I said with a sigh.

'If we can hold out in Hong Kong, inflicting casualties, it will look like an infantry fight. But, if the Japs get pissed-off and send everything they have at Hong Kong we'll bomb Tokyo, and the Germans will start considering long range and high altitude bombers.'

‘Complicated scenario,’ Susan admitted.

‘There’s also Pearl Harbour,’ Jimmy began. ‘Before it, very few Americans were interested in the war in Europe, or wanted a war anywhere else; a great many US politicians were against getting involved. If the Japs don’t attack Pearl Harbour, the American delay could be ... costly to the world.’

‘You’d allow Pearl Harbour to go ahead?’ Susan queried.

‘Without it, or something similar, the Americans will sit and wait till the Japs land in Los Angeles – which is a distinct possibility. And in this era, the American Army is skewed towards their old bases in the east; they have very little in the west. And one of the Jap plans was to seize the Panama Canal, where the Americans have only a few thousand soldiers right now. And let’s not forget – the Japs attacked because of deliberate provocation from the Americans.’

‘Come again?’ I said, not a history buff.

‘The Americans were against a war in Europe so soon after the First World War – and rightly so, and their isolationist movement would have modern day US presidents in fits. In 1941, the Americans were more Woodstock, and less Vietnam. But they could see Japanese expansionism, and they secretly helped the Chinese to fight the Japanese in Manchuria. That pissed off the Japs. When the Japs took Canton they were close to the Philippines, and that was a worry, but the White House was at odds with Congress.’

‘Ah, how times have changed,’ I sighed loudly, getting a smile from Jimmy.

‘So when the US blocked oil sales to Japan – a nation very short of oil, and froze all their assets in the US, war was inevitable, Congressional support or not. And the White House promised Churchill *significant* help and assistance in the Far East. What that help was ... was never made clear. The White House wanted a fight, and the history books were purged in a manner that would make Stalin proud.’

‘So how do we play it?’ I asked.

‘It all comes down to Hong Kong, and the Jap reaction. But the radar atop the hill in Hawaii will be a little better attended this time around. And, I may have a Goose in the wrong place at the wrong time. Pearl Harbour will still go ahead, but with the US fighting back. Without it, the pacifists could keep the US out of the war for a year or two, and that would cost the world. It would also mean that a few good old movies would have to be re-made, with

John Wayne sat on the sidelines being a pacifist, a flower in the barrel of his gun.'

'Not quite seeing that for the big fella,' I said.

'History is written by the victors,' Jimmy said with a sigh.

'In post-apocalyptic Canada,' I began, 'I had a look at where you lived, that old hotel that looked like a Wild West saloon.'

He smiled, thinking back. 'How did Muriel take it?'

'Your assistant? She was shocked that you were still alive, stunned that the time machine worked and that you had gone through, but pleased that you had made it. I sent her back, don't know where she went in my world.'

'It was a cold hotel in the winter,' Jimmy sighed. 'You went to bed fully clothed.'

'And your room stank.'

'I can imagine; hot baths were a luxury. I popped over to Manson a few weeks ago, had a look around, drove past the hotel – same as in my day. But if you dwell on stuff like that it screws with your head. But ... but I don't know when it was that I changed, changed to thinking that wherever I was ... was home. Maybe sailing, or after, but I never really miss a place once I move on.'

'I'm the same now, although I do have fond memories of the old apartment, the old house, the kids growing up.'

Susan looked my way, but made no comment.

I faced her. 'They grow up ... and don't visit and don't call. And ten or eleven years from now, our little limpet won't want anything to do with her boring old parents.'

'Well, good job I'm pregnant then.'

I eased up. 'Yes?'

She nodded. 'I think so.'

'I want a boy, who I can teach to fly,' I said.

'Not while I'm alive you won't,' she threatened.

'What? Flying will be safe by then,' I quietly protested.

A week later, and with the nursery selfishly closing down for the summer holidays and handing us back our noisy daughter, we hopped on a Goose bound for the factory and soon reclaimed our dusty old house. Mary repossessed her old room without so much as a word or question, and I checked the suits I'd left behind.

The next morning I visited the hotel, catching up with Cookie and Sandra on the gossip, soon heading for the factories to see what they were up to. The jet fighter was now a large jet fighter, and looking a little like a Mig 21. The first prototype was up at the remote airfield and being put through its paces. Despite the extra

weight - for the same engine, it pelted along at six hundred and fifty miles per hour at sea level with no difficulty.

This second prototype came with a new engine, or rather the same one with a few parts made of better materials; the engine itself now lighter. The aircraft's flaps were a little bigger, and I noticed supplementary flight surfaces; this version had an auto-trim for long distance flights. Next door, in the engine bay, a larger engine was being tested.

They explained, 'It's about the same weight as the original, but it has larger fans and more burners. There's also a new alloy that glows white hot - positioned in the outlet, so that it helps to burn up any fuel not ignited in the burners. There's always some waste, you can't help that, but this new feature gave us seven percent more power. Overall, this engine has thirty percent more power than the original. We're now looking at this new alloy for the burners themselves, since it glows hot and helps to ignite fuel.'

'Do they wear out?' I asked.

'Yes, you need to replace them, but you'd get a thousand hours from it at least.'

'What range does the fighter have now?'

'If steady, just around eight hundred miles; we've reduced fuel for bomb racks, although we do have these new drop-tanks that can be fitted. It carries a lot of ammo for the fifty cal guns.' He smiled. 'We've had it dog fighting with the prop fighter.'

'And?'

'At low speed and low altitude the prop fighter wins every time; better turn circle. But the jet stays high like a vulture, then swoops down and fires, pulling up at speed. The prop fighter can't chase it.'

'It's a tactic, I suppose.'

'A prop fighter could never intercept the jet, not on a good day,' the man said. 'If you see it, it's already a mile past you and gone.'

'And auto-trim?'

'Yes, it works well at high speed and high altitude. Up there it would be bad for a pilot to turn too hard.'

I raised my eyebrows. 'Wings would fall off. What are you working on next?'

'Better payload, larger wing, capped speed of six hundred.'

'What payload are you aiming at?'

'At least six thousand pounds under the wings, three two-thousand pound bombs; the munitions boys have them ready. They explode under the ground, so will make a big hole in a runway.'

'So ... our jets could reach a target without being intercepted, bomb the enemy runway, and leave without being intercepted.'

The man nodded. 'The propeller fighter has dropped those types of bombs, and if you nose down at speed the bombs dig deep, making a crater thirty yards across and ten yards deep. It's the preferred tactic. They practise it with the Boeing fighters – to attack other airfields.'

In the munitions factory, I had a look at a new fifty cal rifle, and she was a beauty, the metal gleaming. And light! The previous model needed lugging around, but this variant was easy to handle.

'Detachable barrel,' they enthusiastically reported. 'Longer barrel, so better range and accuracy. And now a fifteen round curved magazine – but it's heavy and falls out now and then.'

'Stick to eight round magazines, that's plenty for a sniper,' I said.

'And now a fifty calibre machinegun for mounting to our jeeps and half-tracks.'

'What's that?' I asked, pointing towards a rifle.

'It's a new sniper rifle, sir. It's point two-two-three, high spin, and high velocity. It's very light, easy to carry in its case, and comes with detachable barrel. Mister Paul Baines specified it.'

I tried the weight, finding it surprisingly light. It came with a clip-on bipod for the muzzle, and a telescopic sight. 'Good workmanship.'

'He shoots deer with them,' they informed me, and in this day and age no one cared much about animal welfare.

In the control tower, I found the radio direction finding kit, an aerial on the roof. Looking at a basic cathode ray tube display, a line reached upwards when you turned the dial.

'That's the transponder of an incoming Goose, sir,' the operator informed me. 'Bearing ... two hundred degrees.'

I lifted my head and peered out of the glass, seeing the Goose in the distance. The glass had small signs with compass degrees to help, and the plane was just about on two hundred degrees. 'It works.'

'The equipment is going out to all airfields now, sir.'

'And the radar?'

He took me to a darkened room below, three men sat behind crude screens with orange glows. Pointing at a screen, he said, 'That's the same Goose, sir.'

I observed the fuzzy blip moving. Hell, we now had basic radar working. 'How far can you see out? What range?'

'At the moment it's about thirty miles, sir,' they informed me.

'Keep at it; be able to see planes over Hawaii soon.'

'No, sir, curvature of the earth,' they pointed out, looking embarrassed for me.

'I was joking.'

In a hangar, I found a Super Goose being fiddled with. 'How are the escape rafts?' I asked, noticing the red arrow on the side of the aircraft.

'They work well, sir.'

'How well?' I took out twenty dollars.

'Ninety percent of the time.'

'And that ten percent, when someone is drowning?'

They glanced at each other as I pulled the cover off, yanking the lever. The dinghy burst out hissing, people looking around as it inflated on the concrete. I handed over the twenty dollars.

'They take two hours to re-pack, sir,' they thought they'd mention as I walked off.

Noticing a few people with bandages on fingers, and cluttered equipment, I went straight to Bill and asked for a dedicated Health and Safety Officer, with two staff assigned to the guy. He instructed his assistant to recruit from within, but then informed me that he was thinking of retiring.

'Bill, work as many hours or days as you like, you'll get the same salary and dividend.'

'Kind of you, Paul. I was kinda hoping to get a nice place down in the sun near you.'

'Then instead of retiring, help out at the airfield in San Diego a few days a week.'

'Wife is keen, so ... yes, probably will.'

'I have a house ready and waiting, so you can stay there to start with. Pop down in September and stay a while.'

I made a point of taking time with the Health and Safety chief, raising my voice; I wanted fewer accidents. I wanted an accident logbook in each section, I wanted fire training, and I wanted the factories less cluttered. And I wanted the Health Inspectors to shout. I then supplemented him with a welfare officer, who listened to gripes and moans of the staff, and would report the consensus to myself or to Jimmy.

Bill's deputy stepped up as Managing Director of the aircraft factories, a man Jimmy had worked with for six years or more. It was a seamless transfer of power. The Health and Safety department grew quickly, and a team of inspectors were put together to travel out to all airfields and to check on safety. They would have a small outpost in San Diego, and I keenly waited to see what they would make of our side-by-side runways and regular near misses.

Sept, 1931

September was noteworthy, in that we tested the first fuel-air explosive. These types of bombs did not do well in strong winds, or any kind of wind, and they would need to be dropped with parachutes, timed fuses so that they would go off above the ground – not an exact science.

These first tests were conducted by simply rigging the bombs to wooden towers that resembled the fire towers you might find in the forest. The first device, a small one, made a big bang as we stood watching from half a mile away, a mushroom cloud rising. Driving to the blast zone, we found trees on fire, but those trees that had been within a hundred yards were all grey and scorched from the super-heated air that had enveloped them. The soil was grey with ash. Two old cars that we had positioned nearby were now melted and warped, and they both looked like they had been sat under an atom bomb as it detonated.

Trees had been knocked down up to two hundred yards away, and a brick building we had cobbled together was just rubble. Goats, tethered at various distances from the epicentre, were in various degrees of “cooked”. Those closest to the centre were black and charred, those at two hundred yards dead, but appeared normal. Their lungs had experienced a pressure wave, followed by super-heated air, followed by the air being sucked out of their lungs. At three hundred yards the goats were dead, beyond that just a bit wobbly on their feet. Poor little things.

It had been a good first test, and the scientists and engineers were happy enough with their destructive handiwork. They'd now step up a size and make a bigger bang at the remote base.

On the way back, I said, ‘Timing will be critical.’

‘Yes,’ Jimmy agreed. ‘They could only be used when we know the weather conditions over the target. We need less than a ten mile an hour breeze, ideally five; a pleasant calm day. Still, we have ambassadors in foreign cities for that, and they can radio the weather conditions without raising suspicion. And we only need the one day.’

I set off back to San Diego, not least to put Mary back into nursery – she was missing her friends. We reclaimed our new house, which now felt like home, and searched top to bottom for anything out of the ordinary. It all seemed OK.

Bill was now occupying a house down the avenue, and we met at the airfield for a planning session. My first headache was that my own Health and Safety inspectors were unhappy with the crowded strips. Training was progressing, Army and Navy pilots put through their paces. I eased up on the Canadian Rifles and US enlisted men, now with a full airfield. I did, however, send six instructors to New Mexico, to the parachute school, and they opened a flying school there. It eased the pressure on San Diego immediately.

We still operated Boeing transports on the field, and parachute training took place over the scrub a few miles inland. We also trained our own pilots for Africa here, the men landing the transports before powering up and climbing steeply, going around and around all day. They would each need sixty hours minimum.

Getting the transports to Africa would have been by ship, wings detached, but an engineer had a good idea. He rigged up a huge fuel tank in the rear hold of a plane and anchored it securely. It came with a hand pump, and when the main wing tanks were low you could top them up, and no doubt keep yourself warm in the process. They loaded enough fuel to reach Europe, and a team of four men set off one morning, portable toilets onboard, food and water.

They flew slowly across America, taking on a small amount of fuel in Nova Scotia, then reached Iceland and kept going, down over Scotland to Heathrow, where they took on fuel. And, no doubt, emptied the portable toilets. They made Cairo and took on fuel, still with plenty left - I think they just wanted to stretch their legs, and they reached Mombasa safely, a journey that had taken almost three times as long as in a Super Goose. Who said being a delivery pilot was glamorous.

Ngomo grabbed the plane and rigged up parachute lines, his boys soon practising large inserts over the deserts, thirty to forty men jumping at a time. The Boeings that following the inaugural flight all reached Africa safely, and would now be used in remote areas either as a passenger transport, as troop transport, or simply as cargo planes. They began landing at the gold mine with men and equipment, but also began flying the gold out. Jeeps could now be delivered to remote locations, many vehicles being moved to the interior.

The British depot in Kenya took delivery of two Boeing transports, and parachute training took a new dimension, large inserts being practised. In Mombasa, the flight school started cross-training pilots to use the Boeings.

At my airfield, we received the first Boeing B11/3 in late September, and it was now a nice aircraft, reliable and tough. It was faster than its predecessors, but topped out at a maximum speed of two hundred and eighty – and deliberately so; we did not want a race amongst our competitors to build faster aircraft now that the Schnieder Trophy was no longer run. And Mister Schnieder was French, not a German as I had believed.

The final two winners of the competition had been Supermarine Swifts, seaplanes, and the forerunner to the Spitfire. They had topped three hundred and forty miles per hour. But, like my sports cars, their planes were not production models – nor very practical yet. It would be a while before the Spitfire graced the skies, another four years or so.

With the new Boeing B11/3s now showing off at the airfield we received an order from the British RAF for a hundred of the new variants, and the RAF got them at a good price. The new variants were duly shipped over, assembled and painted, tested by our pilots in Britain, and then handed over with their logbooks. Six new RAF squadrons received their planes, a central flying school for conversion and training created. It was 1931, and the RAF had a plane that could hold its own in a scrap, the Germans having little to match it at the moment, their military in as much disarray as their politics this year.

The British Prime Minister was happy enough, or more rather contented with the aircraft, but he knew we had better. Still, right now the RAF was dominant, and that they liked. The US Army Air Corp followed the RAF, and took delivery of eighty aircraft on advanced evaluation, a potential order for two hundred behind that. Since their pilots had already trained on it, conversion would not be an issue. Our Canadian Air Force friends bought forty for themselves, and the Boeing was getting a name for itself.

Orders followed from Argentina, Mexico, Australia, but we were selective of who the aircraft went to. A French request was turned down, since the aircraft might have been nosed at by German spies in the years ahead. I argued the case with Jimmy, since we wanted the Germans to think that these were the best aircraft we had. He relented, and the French ordered two hundred. Most were destined for their African colonies, where they would be used to shoot up unruly tribesmen on camels.

Boeing expanded, again, and more hangars and production plants were duly built, the company and its workforce delighted with the orders. They made gentle enquiries about equipment and practises that we restricted, and it would continue to be a source of

tension between us – for a few years at least. Jimmy commissioned a prototype of a large transport, the B14a. The workers had dubbed the transport the “Buffalo”, because it was short fat and ugly, and the name stuck. The Super Buffalo was on the drawing board, some thirty percent bigger, larger engines, but still just two engines. Boeing had their hands full with the fighters, so the Super Buffalo was given a low priority, and deliberately so.

The US President made a point of visiting Boeing, revelling in their success, and using it as a rallying cry for the country – still in a recession. He even flew to Washing State on the Goose we gave him, cheeky bugger; he was stealing the limelight from us.

As the weather turned poor around Vancouver, I was enjoying the sun with a cold beer – an illegal cold beer from Canada, often to be found just sat thinking. Susan was showing a bump, and Mary asked if mummy was getting fat. We explained to her that she would have a sister, so she searched the house. No, there was no sister around. The fact that it would come out of mummy’s tummy took some explaining.

Bill and his wife popped down often, and we’d sit and chat around the pool, a slow pace to life down here. Many of the houses in the avenue were now sold, all completed, and a few of our engineers shared in two of them, a few rich folk moving in. I greeted them all, since I was selling the houses, and asked our friendly FBI guy to check out the new neighbours. With the houses nearly all sold, I placed a barrier with a guard on the start of the avenue – which was a private avenue, and increased the security. The other residents were fine with the barrier - it made their friends jealous, and made them appear more important. Life was good, life was quiet, but I knew that next year should see a change in pace, especially in Germany.

Jack was busy moving Jewish emigrants, the money available to him topped up. They now emigrated at a good pace, the world finally aware that Palestine might become a Jewish state. The numbers of Jews in the region now outnumbered the indigenous Palestinians, and the League of Nations debated the matter at length. Since the territory had been mandated to the British after the withdrawal of the Ottoman Turks, and the British were not protesting, there were few others protesting about the influx – countries that mattered that was.

Syria was still under the French mandate, as was Lebanon, but Iraq had been independent since 1925 and protested the Jewish influx, but quietly. Jordan, known as Trans-Jordan, was under

British mandate, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia not yet vocal about the matter – but snuggling up to the Americans, who sought its oil reserves. Despite America being an oil exporter at this time, it had seen an agreement in place with the Saudi kingdom since 1920, a nice bit of forethought.

Jimmy increased the number of people assisting the Jewish exodus, knowing that the building of the Dachau concentration camp was only a year or two away. He offered incentives to the British Government, and they allowed more Jewish refugees in, the Low Countries happy to see refugees pass through without stopping. A trickle of Polish Jews started to take to the boats, at the promise of jobs and houses more than anything else. And in Palestine, Jack had built many large apartment blocks, the new immigrants put to work quickly and gainfully employed.

This was only possible now because the Arab nations were not free or independent yet; that would come after the war. For now they were under British or French mandates, Egypt run by the British; there would be no 1948 style war. And this time around there would be a hell of a lot more Jews to fight.

But opposition to the influx came from Greece and Italy, worried about the change in ethnic make-up and politics of the region. Since the land still held British soldiers, albeit sat in barracks getting a tan, no one was about to attack the small strip of disputed land. Those soldiers watched helplessly as Jack threw up buildings, repaired roads, and sunk water wells. Jack also worked hard at buying up Palestinian land in what would be Gaza and the West Bank someday soon.

The world watched with puzzlement at the Jews returning to Zion, then one day a Movietone Newsreel showed the building work, and labelled it all as having been paid for by Jimmy Silo, the world's richest man. People started asking if Jimmy was Jewish, a communist Zionist, and what the hell was he up to. When a few US Congressmen questioned the action, Jimmy went public, a statement made.

'We've all been watching with some trepidation the rise of the Nazis in Germany, and their intolerance for others. I'm not a Jew, but I can see what's happening ... and I don't like it. The Nazis are driving out the Jews and others, anyone who is not a member of their fanatical cult, and mark my words well: there will be trouble from this Herr Hitler fellow if he gets into power, a lot of trouble for everyone.

'I'm not a Zionist, nor a communist, but I will help people in need, as I feed a half a million Americans in my soup kitchens. If the

US Congressmen who question my credentials have issues, they can go to those soup kitchens and do an honest day's work for a change, instead of sitting on their fat backsides in Washington and drawing good pay for talking nonsense.

'The people of this country need leadership in this time of crisis, they need hope, and they need jobs. Their taxes go to pay for the salaries of those in Congressmen ... who blow out hot air all day, so they deserve better. I create jobs in America, thousands of jobs, and I will create more and more every year. That is, of course, unless I am no longer welcomed here by your Congress. Then I'll take my jobs elsewhere. Thank you.'

I read it in the morning papers. It was to the point: *what the fuck are you doing? I'm creating jobs, and I could take them away as well!*

The US Army regiment that we sponsored had crept slowly towards forty thousand men, housed in several bases around the country, and Jimmy could pull the plug, putting the men on the streets. The White House knew it, and we knew. They would be nervous in the corridors of power.

Jimmy then made a move that stunned me. He sent our good buddy Herr Hitler a telegram, the man not even in power yet. We knew that there were six million unemployed in Germany, and that the German economy was screwed and suffering hyper-inflation – a loaf of bread now costing a million Marks, and so hard cash was always going to be an incentive. Jimmy's telegram was straight to the point: allow the Jews to leave, and you get ten million English pounds to play with.

I was aghast at the idea, since they would use the money to re-arm. Jimmy insisted that the money would not make such a massive difference, and that we had only a year left to do something. History would judge us, because we knew what was coming.

That part was worrying me, since I knew all about time travel and history. And the death camps, they were warmed-up well before the war started. The cold hard reality of why we were here was starting to bite, hard to comprehend sat around my pool in the sun. It was now like the build-up to 2025, that horrible feeling that the party must end. And then reality got even closer, and tried to punch me on the nose.

One pleasant Saturday afternoon a car pulled up to the barrier. A shot rang out. I heard it, so did my bodyguard. He ran to the street, 9mm pistol out, and I grabbed a new lightweight AK47, magazine slapped in. I rushed downstairs, Susan horrified at the sight of the weapon, grabbing Mary. Outside, my bodyguard had reached

halfway down the avenue before he started to exchange fire with the men in the car, our gate guard dead.

I stepped brazenly out into the cul-de-sac, angered, very angered. I lifted the muzzle, gripped tightly, and fired an entire magazine into the car as it sat beyond the gate. With the final empty click I lowered the weapon, staring hard at the car, my bodyguard running towards it with his pistol prone. I waited as he checked the car from the side, its occupants now quite dead. Paul Holton, armed with an AK47 alloy special edition, had just killed Machinegun Kelly and his gang, the four men armed with Thompson sub-machineguns.

Sirens registered as I dumped the AK inside my door, soon walking down to the bullet-ridden car. Neighbours were peering out, Bill now on his flat roof with a pistol.

‘You OK, Paul?’ he shouted.

‘Yeah, we got them. Go wait with Susan for me.’ I approached the car, walking around the barrier as a patrol car pulled up, its siren wailing. Two officers ran forwards, pistols drawn.

‘You OK, sir?’ they shouted.

‘These men killed our guard, so we fired back. I used a machinegun I keep in the house.’

They holstered their pistols and examined the men. ‘Jeez, what a mess.’

The bodies were pulled out as other patrol cars arrived, just the one assailant still with a recognisable face. ‘That’s Machinegun Kelly, sir.’ I was, apparently, now due a reward.

The local police chief turned up, reporters kept back, and he walked me to my house. ‘You got Machinegun Kelly.’

‘He ... nearly got my family,’ I pointed out. In the house I showed him the AK47, Bill with Susan and Mary, his pistol stuffed down his belt.

‘Wow, what a ... strange gun. Pretty though.’

‘Am I in trouble?’ I asked.

‘They came for you, Mister Holton, shooting up the place. You have the right to defend yourself, so don’t you worry about those stiffs. Did us a *big* favour getting Kelly.’

‘Drink?’ I risked, breaking the law.

‘Well, a small one.’

I fetched a cold beer from my fridge. ‘Can you leave some men around for a day, I’ll have some of my own brought down.’

‘Sure, no problem.’ He sipped his illegal beer. ‘Nice house. But I kinda pictured you in something ... larger.’

‘Jimmy and me, we don’t waste money, it goes to the poor.’

‘Right good of you, sir.’

I made the national newspapers for all the wrong reasons, and four men from US Army Airborne Brigade came over from the airfield, men chosen by Big Paul. There were a few houses unsold as yet, so the soldiers now had one to share.

After the shooting one neighbour moved out – I gave him back his money and apologised, but two moved in. And Susan, she asked for her own 9mm pistol and practised using it down the beach. An AK47 was kept in the car, and I took to wearing a pistol on occasion. I spoke to Jimmy on the phone, and the gang were concerned.

Shootings aside, Jimmy indicated that the Belgians would now sell the Congo, and if the League of Nations didn’t like the fact, then that was tough. The bank of England paid the Belgians the first two million, and Jimmy was Governor of Eastern Congo again, land that included Rwanda.

Ngomo was told to quell any and all fighters in the region, and Steffan made plans to tame the jungle. A Kenyan Rifles base was established near the old Forward Base – at the end of the existing northern train route, and a Congo Rifles Regiment would now be formed. A concrete runway would be built quickly, Goma Hub now on the drawing board. Timkins then sat down with the British cabinet on Jimmy’s behalf.

‘Prime Minister, I’ve been instructed by my good friend Mister Silo to negotiate on his behalf. He would like your assistance in the Congo, and points out that he knows where gold mines exist, mines far larger than the one already tapped. Far ... larger. There are also diamonds, and ores. He did not buy the region for nothing.

‘Further, he intends to open an airport in the region, and to allow flights from London to land there for refuelling before flying onwards to South Africa or Rhodesia. He points out that the hidden wealth in the Congo is considerable, and that he wishes us to be his first and preferred business partners – for a few concessions.’

‘Concessions?’

‘He ... would like us to leave Mandated Palestine in 1938.’

That caused a stir.

‘Prime Minister, is that strip of dust and sand worth what Mister Silo indicates is in the jungle? The deal in the Congo could net us four million pounds a year, not including the indirect business benefits, which I believe would net us at least as much again, growing year by year. And he promises to help us safeguard the British presence in the region.’

They went off to think about it, but they had little choice; they feared what may happen in East Africa and Hong Kong if they said no. Sykes had been working his magic for ten years, and we now had many of the cabinet members in our pockets.

My quiet family life had been shattered by Machinegun Kelly, but Susan was not too bothered, she was more angered that someone might come for us. And unlike Helen, she would have shot him herself! The police decided that Kelly had come to kidnap us for ransom, and the case was slowly forgotten about.

Jimmy hired mining engineers, a thousand of them, and put them on a ship bound for Kenya. Equipment was bought from around the States and shipped out, including our stockpile of tractors that we couldn't sell. They could have shovels fitted to the front, and before you knew it you had a bulldozer. Four hundred were dispatched by ship to Kenya, and production resumed on our tractors, many of the men having been moved over to other things. Half-tracks were shipped out, chainsaws, and thousands of shovels and pickaxes.

In a move that would kill two birds with one stone, if not four, Jimmy started hiring Americans to work in the Congo; two year contracts, all costs met, a bonus at the end. With the recession still biting, and some people having been hungry for years, we had a willing army of volunteers.

The natives of the Congo were not yet an option, education and skill levels very low. So we raised an army of two thousand out-of-work Americans and shipped them out. That led to enquiries from the British about the jobs for Americans, and we pointed towards the unemployment situation here. They pointed towards the unemployment situation there, so we hired a few hundred British workers, and promised to hire more.

We did, however, buy steam engines from Britain, to be shipped out, and that created jobs. They made good steam engines, so we would have probably used them anyway. Around Kenya, Rudd advertised for British NCOs and officers for the new Congo Rifles, immediately finding willing takers, not least those after a little adventure in the untamed frontier. Existing members of the Kenyan Rifles, and a few Kenyan police officers, were recruited to the Congo Borders Police, and we started to check those coming and going in our region.

By the Christmas of 1931 we had shipped some six thousand people into the Congo, tented cities everywhere. Doc Graham was busy inoculating people in the territory, Anna starting the first small orphanage there. All day long, trees were cut down and cut

up, jungle track cleared, roads made, a relentless creeping invasion of the jungle. We knew where oil seeped to the surface, and cut a road straight to it, northwest of Forward Base, which was now a tented city.

They found the oil, tapped it, and started to collect it. A small refinery was created nearby - little more than a big distillery, and petrol for our vehicles was duly produced. Jeeps and halftracks now enjoyed cheap fuel, the first tangible benefit. That fuel went by truck to Forward Base, and then south so that all of the vehicles in the region would benefit.

Coal for the trains came next, and we knew where it lay just under the surface, soon extracted and fed to the trains at various points. With that phase achieved, we dug down where we knew there was tin and copper, the ore to be refined on-site, and shipped the finished ingots to either Kenya or down to the Angolan coast. It all seemed familiar.

Spring, 1932, saw the British “agree in principal” over Palestine, the flow of oil and ore in the Congo helping in their decision making process. They would look at a staged withdrawal, “with honour”, by 1938.

Jimmy then sent them a note, asking that they leave some troops and an airfield behind, since it would benefit both the British and the Jews. Jack then informed a stunned Jewish leadership in Palestine: the British had agreed a withdrawal by 1938 – and between now and then ... could you please be nice to the British?

We had no answer from Hitler yet. He wasn't in power, but he wielded the power, his party holding a majority of seats in their parliament. I then met with Jimmy in San Francisco, checking out the new civil airfield there.

‘If he does let them go, then ... Palestine ain't big enough. They'd be at modern day levels of population,’ I pointed out

‘True, but many would go to America, and we're talking about German Jews, not Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Russians or those from the Baltic states, or from France. The German Jews probably number two million.’

‘Because he hasn't invaded those other countries yet,’ I realised.

‘The current exodus is at a good level, but many still stubbornly doubt that he'll actually get into power. Anyway, we need pilots for the war, so recruit and train bright eighteen year olds; they'd be the right age in 1939. House them, feed them, and give them a small wage, but cut them loose at the end; when war breaks out they'll have a head start. Train them on the Cessna, Dash-7, Boeings, the

works – a six-month course, or make it a year. In England, I've created two flying schools linked to Oxford and Cambridge Universities, so future RAF pilots with large moustaches are learning to fly.'

I smiled at the image. 'Chocks away, chaps. Tally ho!'

'And the British Army is now sending larger groups down to Kenya to get the experience and training, all inoculated. There should be a good batch of NCOs for 1939 – or earlier. Some will be garrisoned in Hong Kong from 1937 to 1941.'

'Six years,' I noted. 'Getting closer.'

'Quite a few of the Canadian Rifles have applied for the Congo Rifles, veterans with a lot of years under their belts.'

'Itching for some action,' I noted.

'Most of them are still busy teaching the Americans, but there are now a few Americans who are NCOs and officers themselves. I've reduced the size of the British groups travelling to Canada in favour of training them in Kenya. And some of the sponsored American soldiers are quitting, and heading to the Congo to work; the depression is helping us there.'

'Stocks doing OK?'

'DOW Jones has recovered far more than it would have otherwise, now three times what it should be at this point thanks to our buying. Those stocks that I knew would recover well have made us money, but I'm hanging onto them for now. Our radios are selling well, now on the fourth variant, and fridges in the south are making a killing. We're now shipping them to Europe, competing with Rudd and Po.'

I laughed. 'Our airlines are competing as well.'

'It's all good,' he sighed. 'All in the family.'

'Han still selling fridges?'

'Yes, and radios; he's making a killing. And he's sending money and weapons to Mao.'

'If he gets caught by the British...'

'He won't, he's just the front. Po is sending the weapons, making it look like he's fighting the Japanese in Manchuria – applauded by the British Governor in Hong Kong.'

'Did he build a barracks?'

'Yes, several of them, and on a grand scale. He's now making tunnels into the mountains, and smaller tunnels zigzagging up to the top, fire positions ready. There'll be plenty of good fire positions available for 1941. Problem will be the airport.'

'They'll bomb the crap out of it on day one!'

'They will, so he'll dig a large tunnel into the mountain behind it, large enough to get our fighters in end to end.'

'We'll use the best prop fighters in 1938 if the Japs attack early?'

'We won't have a choice, unless we want to lose the colony. It'll be a difficult enough siege with the planes there, but without them the Japanese can sail into the lagoon and pound the hell out of our positions with their destroyers, and they have more than a few tubs to play with; they could level the colony if it holds out. Still, we'll paint the planes like Spitfires - and people will think them Spitfires.'

'And the jets?'

'Strictly a reserve, and for 1940 in Europe,' Jimmy emphasised.

I flew back aboard a Goose seaplane, out from San Francisco bay, a glimpse of the new bridge being built as we took off. Back at home, and sat with a cold Canadian beer, I considered the world at large, and what horrors awaited it.

Back at work, I performed a review of the airfield, and thought about what else I should be tackling. Seeing an America Airlines Super Goose land, probably for a repair, I decided that a trip to Washington DC was in order. I grabbed Susan and Mary, packed a case, and we flew the AA Super Goose back to Washington via Dallas. Booked into the hotel that the airline had placed on the edge of the airfield, I met with the managers. On a large table, they had laid out a map of the States ready, aircraft models and red monopoly houses indicating airfields and aircraft.

'Which are the profitable routes?' I asked.

'They all make money, or we don't fly the route,' they insisted.

'OK, then where are they most popular - and in most need?'

'That would be the South American routes,' they said.

'Fine. Which do we cover?'

'Here down to Rio and Buenos Aires, Mexico, and the Caribbean. That's it.'

'Then let's think about the following routes: Florida to each Caribbean island that warrants it, then Los Angeles down to Peru and Chile, stopping along the way. Internally in Brazil they must want seaplanes on the rivers, so our Goose seaplanes should be popular. Then let's look at each capital in South America and fix a weekly route, going down on a Monday and back on a Wednesday; there must be plenty of diplomats wanting to travel.

'Then there are the routes from capital to capital, and between the major cities. We can try them, and then we'll see, so ask for permission to operate the routes. Then let's think about Brazil up

to Europe; non-stop to Madrid, to London, or to Paris. OK, US cities. How many hotels do we have at airports?’

‘Six at the moment,’ they informed me.

‘We should be aiming for a hotel at each, and to be making some money from passengers staying at our airports. But what long distance internal routes could we be flying ... that we’re not?’

‘We don’t cover Chicago to the west coast, and we have little in Colorado, Utah, and down to Houston.’

‘And those routes would pay for themselves?’

‘Chicago to the west coast would,’ they agreed.

‘Fine, organise it, I’ll find some aircraft. What else?’

‘Florida to Houston to San Diego would help. At the moment, people have to fly north first. And we don’t touch many of the southern states.’

‘I’ll sanction the aircraft, you work out the best routes, and let’s experiment. But how about an east coast city route? Washington, to Philadelphia, to New York, to Boston - aiming at the domestic market.’

‘Should have enough passengers.’

‘Feel free to ask for aircraft guys, I want us to dominate this industry. But think first of long distance passengers who can pay, like Brazil to Europe, or Washington to West Africa. Make use of the diplomats.’

A week later Jimmy received a note from Rudd, the main gold seam now located and tapped. It was the gold seam that needed little refining, and was the main reason for us being there. Gold leaving the Congo increased six fold, and the “chaps” at the bank of England must have been whispering in the corridors.

With a surge in available funds, I hired a team of managers who knew the real-estate business. I sat down with them, marking several places on a map of Los Angeles, places I knew would be good for house prices in years to come. I then marked a few places in Florida, and the Upper East Side in New York, or around Central Park. They were dispatched with instructions to find bargains, and to haggle.

I then recruited a team to fly to Cuba and to buy up land and plantations.

Jimmy sent me a note: “What, pray tell, are you up to?”

‘Trust me,’ I said.

I sent out our American Airlines staff, and they began expanding a little used dirt strip near Havana. I bought hotels on the coast, the

place already a holiday destination for rich Americans, but mostly I bought plantations and cigar factories.

Having bought the plantations, I would control them – and their workers welfare. I installed a doctor or nurse in each, raised wages a small amount, created welfare officers to listen to gripes, and removed any managers that were unpopular. Holidays were extended, hours cut, and my competitors in the country must have thought me mad.

West of Havana, on the coast, I bought land and sunk an oil well. After two weeks of drilling they found oil. I ordered up a refinery, US workers and equipment sent out, the aim being to provide cheap fuel, and to boost the local economy. I had learnt a thing or two from Jimmy.

He sent me a note. “Well done.”

Without clearing it with Jimmy, I sent Rudd a note, telling him to keep back five percent of the gold, and to develop Kenya and Tanzania, and routes down to South Africa. We needed consumers for the Congo ore.

In the months that followed, I sent American workers by ship to what would become modern-day Angola, and to the end of the railway track. They were to build a deep-water port and an airfield with a concrete runway. That was the fun part of my work. The bad part was reading the newspapers sent over from Britain and elsewhere, and the rise of the Nazis; we were letting them get to their feet just so that we could knock them down.

Seeing a photo of one of our trucks being used for logging in Canada, I asked if we could send a few to Kenya, quite a few. Jimmy agreed, twenty shipped out, more earmarked for Africa in general. I then paid a flying visit up to our factories, and to the people who knocked together our half-tracks.

‘Could you put a big shovel on the front of those, a detachable one?’

‘Sure.’

‘And a large rake behind it, and a large roller for flattening things behind.’

‘For road laying?’ they asked.

‘Yep.’

They got on the case, and I requested fifty for Africa. At the hotel, I sat with Jimmy for a coffee.

‘Congo administrators,’ I said. ‘British, local mayors, town planners?’

‘Ask Jack to find some, send them down. But it will take time, there’s very little there at the moment.’

‘The *work* ... will attract *workers*,’ I pointed out.

‘True, there will be a draw from surrounding countries. But between now and 1980 will see the largest growth in population. It’s still quiet around there, not many consumers.’ He took out a typed letter, from the Nazi Party representative in Toronto.

‘There’s a Nazi Party representative in Toronto?’

I read the note: Herr Silo, we are willing to discuss your desire to expedite and assist with the emigration of certain members of our society who may have entered our country illegally in the past. The natural return of those who do not belong here is desirable, and meeting the administrative and practical costs would help to expedite the process.

‘That it?’

‘So far.’

‘It doesn’t say anything directly.’

‘They don’t want to be seen to be pushing people out, or taking the money. So, as we speak, I have some people off to see the *Chancellor in waiting*. He’ll give the nice chap a big bag of diamonds, and ask for the forced expulsion of two hundred thousand Jews, on boats through Hamburg.’

‘He won’t have the authority yet,’ I puzzled.

‘No, not till next year, but what he’ll do is harass the Jews to leave using the Brown Shirts. It’s that nudge that I want – if he plays ball. Thing is, the diamonds are in the party’s hands, not the country’s, so that’ll please him no end. It also keeps the transaction off the books.’

‘And Palestine?’ I asked.

‘Is starting to experience problems. The Palestinians can see what’s happening and they’re kicking off a bit, so too their Arab neighbours. Those neighbours have camels - and guns from 1850, so it’s not a problem yet. And there’re two differing Jewish groups fighting each other, even the odd shot exchanged. All is not well in the land of milk and honey. I asked Jack to smuggle in old bolt-action rifles, and there’s now a small Jewish militia keeping the peace in some areas.’

‘There’s no easy solution to it,’ I sighed.

‘Money,’ he said. ‘You taught me that. So we’ll use money. The airport will now be used to transit and refuel passengers bound for India, jobs created. We’ll also offer holidays to the Holy Land.’

‘Hotels on the Dead Sea?’

‘Why not, but the Dead Sea is part of Trans-Jordan right now. But we may need to nudge the British aside before 1938. That, again, comes down to cold hard cash, and they’re making good money from us – when they know full well that we could go elsewhere. The British economy is getting a significant boost from us.’

I stayed for a bite to eat, and to meet the gang.

‘Hello stranger,’ Mac said. ‘Back off holiday already?’

‘You earning your bloody keep, old man?’

‘More than some; I go to bed tired each night.’

‘Give your wrist a rest,’ I quipped. ‘What you up to these days?’

‘Working with the Rifles, the US Airborne, some munitions. Always fucking busy.’

Big Paul came and sat with us. ‘She dropped yet?’

‘Baby is due in a few weeks,’ I replied. ‘Doc Graham heading over for a bit of a holiday – and to perform a “C” Section.’

‘Not long till Hong Kong gets interesting,’ Big Paul noted.

‘You fancy being there?’ I puzzled.

He made a face and shrugged. ‘Be a good fight; outnumbered, surrounded, limited supplies.’

‘If they send in their battleships ... they’ll flatten the place,’ I reminded him.

‘Air power is critical,’ he said.

‘And they’ll bomb the hell out of our runway on day one!’ I suggested.

‘There are roads that our fighters can take off from, fuel trucks that can disperse. It’s doable.’

I faced Mac. ‘You think it’s doable?’

‘We know the layout, we know the timing, we have the caves now, and we have Rifles with advanced weapons.’

‘*They’ll* ... have a hundred thousand men, four hundred aircraft, and a large fleet of battleships,’ I said. ‘Still be fucking hard.’

‘I have some ideas,’ Big Paul said.

Jimmy came and sat with us.

‘You think we can hold out in Hong Kong?’ I asked him.

‘Key ... is to keep their ships well away, and that means a first strike on their tubs, *after* defeating the local air patrols. With the improved RPGs, anti-armour, we could make a mess of a tub. We could stay high and swoop down, or come in at wave-top height at speed. A few hits side-on with the RPGs would set the tub ablaze. Now, if you attack the tubs at night, or dusk when they’re silhouetted, you have an advantage. If the first strike on their ships is good, they’ll stay further out. Then it’s a siege.’

'But Hong Kong is a crucible, the key to the entire war – both there and in Europe. We can make heroes of a few groups, and we can affect public opinion. A defeat rallies people, but not so much as a victory against difficult odds. Hong Kong ... is the first move, and the most important one.'

'You're up to something,' I said.

'Definitely,' Mac agreed. 'That's why we're creating an American Rifles outside of America.'

'Outside of America? Mercenaries?'

'Of a kind,' Jimmy answered.

'Where will you use them?'

'In Kenya to start with, maybe Abyssinia, the Congo for sure. By time we get to 1938 they'll be well trained and very experienced – those that stay. And they'll be trained to fly a Cessna, maybe fighter aircraft. Those fighters need pilots with balls for brains, not *nice chaps* flying them.'

An hour later I sat with Hal and Hacker. 'What toys you playing with these days?' I asked.

'Jimmy took us off the soldiers, so we're back on aircraft,' Hacker said.

'Jets?'

'All sorts,' Hal said. 'But we test the jets.'

'And the latest jet?'

'The first one felt OK, but this one feels much better. You have a greater wing surface ... and a better response to turns, and we can hang on four thousand pounds of bombs without an issue. We're up there tomorrow to greet the new British team.'

'British team?' I queried.

'Jimmy asked the Brits for a cooperation group, a group of pilots to learn the aircraft – keep the old fucker in Downing Street happy. Ten of them arrive tomorrow, in at the fucking deep end.' They both smiled.

'I'll come with you,' I said. 'Be worth it to see their faces.'

At dawn we lifted off in an old Goose, relief crews on board with parts for the base, and made good time as we flew northeast. It was a fine day, a clear sky, but came with a chilly bite to the northerly wind.

Landing, I noticed additional buildings, but each was just a single storey, most with mud banks up their sides, many half-submerged. The hangars threw up tall towers at each corner, sturdy towers with wires supporting the hangar roofs, taut anchor wires down to the ground. They made me a coffee in the pilot's

lounge, a cartoon motif on the wall of a Lemming flying a jet, "Hal" painted on the side of the jet.

With half an hour to spare, I wandered down a set of steps, many signs indicating places and functions: canteens, toilets, workshops, hangars. It was an underground city, people coming and going. I said hello to one of our scientists, then noticed a man holding a wriggling Lemming by its tail.

'You're not going to cook that, are you?' I asked.

'They find their way in then get stuck. Come, have a look.' He led me on.

In a large communal lounge, sofas spread out and men sat reading, he dropped the Lemming into a large wire-mesh cage that ran along an entire wall. It offered earth at the bottom, small wooden houses, runs and climbing frames. And a dozen Lemmings.

'You guys need to get out more often,' I told them.

'I am studying the habits of the species, and writing a paper,' the black scientist informed me. 'They like cheese and lettuce, and large juicy worms.'

'Smells a bit in here guys,' I said.

'That's us, not the Lemmings,' they joked. 'You get used to it; damp concrete and body odour.'

'And in the winter the toilet outflow freezes, so we have that as well. The crazies go and shit in the snow.'

'Does that oil furnace work OK?' I asked.

'Yeah, warm as toast in here in winter,' they admitted. 'Hot showers. Have a look at the spa.'

'Spa?'

A man led me along the corridor, past the canteen and a few dorms with men sat reading, and to a door labelled as "Spa". Inside, we were met with warm and pungent air, soon passing through a locker room with benches and hooks – a man dressed in gym kit nodding. He looked like he was policing the spa. Through the next door, fashioned from white plastic, I found a sauna, steam room, and a large communal pool of steaming water, three men sat in swimming trunks. They waved lazily.

'All the creature comforts,' I said.

'Gets a bit chilly up top in winter,' my guide said. 'So half an hour in here sorts you out. People sell or trade their rations.'

'Rations?'

'You get three half-hour slots a week issued. Rest is barter.'

We withdrew, now with moist faces. 'Do you live up top in the summer?'

'Most do, but some can't be bothered moving rooms, so they stay.'

'Do they go a bit crazy in winter?' I asked as we negotiated the concrete-lined corridor, passing many people.

'They've developed a few odd habits, and a few odd games. Many hunt, or go on overnight treks and sleep out – in summer I mean. Some spend downtime with the soldiers and learn to strip weapons, and some rig up parachutes to skis. They tear around at high speed, and sometimes take-off and have to be rescued miles away. Still, it breaks the routine. We have huskies here and the men adopt them, sled races in the snow for money.'

'Got a good library?' I quipped.

'Very well stocked, and Wednesdays and Saturdays are movie nights.'

'You get booze?' I asked as we found daylight again.

'It's rationed ... just in case.'

We exchanged looks as a Super Goose came in, the bird having flown from Britain. Ten RAF pilots in their blue uniforms stepped down, bags lugged. They looked around, wondering what the hell they had let themselves in for. With the "chaps" welcomed, but none with a big moustache yet, they stood in a line for me to address them, Hacker at my side and smirking.

'Gentlemen, welcome to Lemming Base,' I began. 'What you are about to discover will change your lives forever, and scare the hell out of you.' I had their attention. 'You're here ... to study our aircraft, and to fly them. First, you'll need detailed briefings, then some parachute training – who's parachuted before?' One had. 'You'll also need to learn to free-fall. That means jumping at fifteen thousand feet, opening the chute at one thousand.'

'Crikey.'

'But that's not the most scary thing you'll do.'

A high-pitched wine began from beyond a hangar.

I continued, 'You will learn to fly our slow aircraft, then our fast aircraft, then our very fast aircraft, even our very large aircraft.'

The larger version of the jet taxied out, Hal at the controls. I should have brought a camera to freeze the moment; they all that that "fuck me!" look etched into their young faces. Hal taxied around to the end of the runway, powered up and blasted down the runway, disappearing into the distance.

'That, gentlemen, is a jet fighter, second variant. It flies at six hundred and fifty miles an hour straight and level, faster in a dive.'

Hal came back over at two hundred feet, our new arrivals ducking. Looking up, they saw Hal climb, with smoke on, up to twenty thousand feet and come around. We had their attention.

I led them inside, getting the kettle on in the pilot's lounge, and discovering that they all flew the Boeing fighter, and that this lot were the best of the best. Hacker wound them up, Hal joining in when down. I left the poor saps to be taunted, and flew back with a few engineers being rotating out, certain that the posh British pilots would return to England with a few new colourful words and phrases in their vocabulary – as well as plenty of bad habits.

At the hotel I phoned Susan, down in San Diego, talking with Mary for ten minutes about swimming in the sea, large birds, and where seaweed came from.

That evening Jimmy took me to the town's new Indian restaurant, the Indian chefs found in Seattle and pinched. Locals to the town of Trophy, Canada, 1932, were now tasting chicken curry and rice. After drinking in the local bars - and there were now seven, the men could have an Indian meal afterwards. Progress.

Back in San Diego, we made plans for a "C" Section in a local clinic, rooms hired, and nurses. Doc Graham arrived a week later, given a room in our house, Mary fascinated by the newcomer – and his gifts from Africa; shields and spears.

'How's Rudd behaving?' I asked, sat by the pool with a cold beer.

'You gave him a bigger budget, so now he thinks he's you in 2010 in the Congo. And for the money he gets from the gold he can't find enough to buy with it.'

I laughed. 'Good old Rudd.'

'He's bought farmland near Ebede, a massive project, but Steffan has nicked a lot of Rudd's budget for big projects. They're improving the port, deep water jetties, and the road up to Nairobi is now four lanes in most places, a good road up to Mawlini, and now a good road heading through Tanzania to Rwanda and Goma, a big bridge being constructed over the river between the lakes. And Steffan is pushing the train track south along the coast, down to Mozambique and South Africa.'

'And in the Congo?'

'There're three trains a day taking things in, a small town growing up around Forward Base, mines popping up everywhere. And now British companies being allocated concessions to mine, in areas where we know there's ore. Some sections of train track see ten trains a day. And where the trains have refuelling stops, small villages grow up.'

'The relentless creep of civilisation. Be a MacDonaldis soon!'

'Mombasa is growing quickly, always full of ships, and CAR is buying up many businesses, Zanzibar growing. And the directors of CAR have mining concessions as well.'

'We own seventy percent of CAR,' I reminded him.

'Mogadishu is receiving money as well - and growing! Its port is bustling as well - I flew up there. You know, it's odd to see police on street corners in this era, you know, our type of African police. And clean streets, taxis, buses.'

'Abdi must be doing a good job.'

'He has schools everywhere, colleges, and they all learn English. He has a large central hospital to rival ours, and he hires doctors from Europe. And you see kids walking around in neat uniforms, books in hand. It's well ahead of where it should be.'

'How's Dr Astor?' I asked.

'She went back to England a while back, her father now dead. She inherited the entire family fortune, they say.'

'And ... did she get a full briefing on what lies ahead?'

'Apparently, yes. She always seemed very knowledgeable about it when I spoke to her in private. Sykes is watching her, just in case.'

'And her flying doctors?'

'I run them now, forerunner to Rescue Force. We have ten Cessnas, and two Dash-7s for passenger transport; we can get two stretchers in the back. Got twenty good doctors, and they travel around conducting village medicine.'

'Anna's nurses?' I asked.

'She's started a nursing college with about thirty of the brightest girls, aged sixteen to eighteen, and there's a cadetship programme for young soldiers. They start as young as fifteen, education and military training, go on to the Rifles. Oh, there's a Rifles Air Wing now.'

'Air Wing?'

'They have a few Boeing fighters, Cessna spotter planes, a few Dash-7s, and four Boeing Buffalos. About thirty pilots - a proper little air force, at an airfield north of Nairobi, and now one at Forward Base. But some of the British officers in Nairobi are quietly concerned; they think Ngomo could start an insurrection. He has as many armed men as the British!'

'Many of those will move over to the Congo soon,' I said. 'Besides, we have the British Parliament sewn up.'

'Palestine sounds ... tricky,' he broached.

I gave him a look. 'When was it not tricky?'

'Rumour of a Jewish state in a year or two.'

'The British have agreed to hand over power in 1938, but Jimmy thinks it will happen sooner,' I explained. 'We've offered Hitler money if he kicks out Jews.'

'That ... could be an interesting footnote in history.'

We exchanged looks. Nodding, I said, 'We have to try and get as many out as we can, or there'll be another footnote in history – the condemnation of us lot.'

'Well, yes, I suppose.'

'We knew, we should have acted' – will be the headline.'

A letter arrived, handed to me by Susan. 'Thanks, babes.' I opened it.

'All OK?' Doc Graham asked.

'Boeing have made their Buffalos look nice, and sold them to United Airlines. Twenty of them, so I guess we'll have competition on a few domestic routes. Still, good for Boeing. And ... oh, we've given thirty Boeing fighters to the Canadian Air Force, offered them fuel, and pilot training here in the winters. Good of us.'

'Canadian Air Force can hold its own now,' Doc Graham noted. 'But, more importantly I guess, they'll have experienced pilots for 1939. Many flew with the RAF in the war, my mother married one.'

'Then your father – on this world - could be amongst these guys.'

'Strange to think of it like that, but no - he was twenty-one in 1942. He flew Wellingtons, then Lancaster bombers. Shot down twice, and escaped twice.'

'When you were a kid, did you ... make model planes?' I teased.

He gave me a look. 'I could name every damn aircraft of the Second World War!'

'My father did his National Service in the RAF, a radio technician. He spent most of his time in the pub.'

The following day I received a parcel, a large parcel delivered to the house by Bill; it had been brought down by a pilot. Opening it, I found a phone, a plastic one, and a box. Scramble on, or off. It was simple enough.

I called the operator, asking for an international call to Jimmy, the ladies in the exchange familiar with me now. When Jimmy came on, I said, 'I have the little box plugged in.'

'Switch ... now.'

'Hear me?'

'Yes, just a slight distortion, but to any nousey exchange operators – or the FBI – this will be gibberish.'

'Technology, eh?'

'I've sent twenty to England, so that our people can use them, but also so that our politicians can make long distance calls discreetly.'

'So what's new up there?'

'Jack has been on, using his scrambler -'

'He got one before me?' I teased.

'*He* does real work.'

'Ouch!'

'The Nazis put seven thousand Jews on a boat designed for five thousand, standing room only, and many were beaten, their possessions tossed over the side.'

I took a deep breath. 'And this was our doing.'

'Better than the alternative ... I'm sure the passengers would agree. It's at least a ten day sail to Palestine. Jack sends in another cruise liner as soon as one leaves, and they fill up quickly. He now has four from Po, and a few hired, but we're trying to keep it from the media.'

'Why, for fucks sake?'

'We don't want it stopped because of bad publicity,' he said. 'At this rate we'll get out a hundred and sixty thousand this year at least.'

'And the rest?'

'Crossing into France and the Low Countries in droves now, and that's causing a stir. But I struck a deal with the Belgians, who we owe money to – so they're being nice. They'll allow in any number of Jews and put them on liners, billed to me. I gave them a few mining concessions. And Jack has a boat in Marseilles; when it's full – it sails, and then comes straight back.'

'And the British Government?'

'Can finally see what's going on, and what I was on about. They're now starting to be concerned about Hitler coming to power.'

'Takes a while with some people,' I quipped.

'They've ordered more Boeing fighters, which is good, and will order twelve Boeing transports for the RAF's transport wing.'

The line went dead. 'Hello?' I called him back.

'Don't worry, the operators do that when they test the line and find static,' he explained. 'Up here we have dedicated lines to various places. We're working on a radio scrambler for aircraft now, already have the prototype on the jets. And Bell telephones will be installing them for transatlantic calls for paying customers.'

'And if the FBI got hold of a box?'

'Have a look on the top for a long number. See it?'

'Yeah.'

'You have an eight bit code, and this box has fifty eight-bit codes programmed in. I selected "Paul-home" to talk to you.'

'Clever.'

'Every year we'll alter them, and the algorithm used – which is created with valves and resistors at the moment. If they want to, they'll waste a great deal of time trying to decipher one.'

'I was thinking ... of air-to-ship missiles,' I broached.

'They'd be no good without sensors and directional stabilizers, and that's a bit advanced for now. But the modified RPGs on the prop fighter have a better rocket now, tungsten alloy head, and they'll punch a hole in a ship if fired from twelve hundred yards out. If they don't, they explode and punch a hole, second charge going off a fraction of a second later.

'Mac is also looking at Teflon fifty cal rounds, Tungsten fifty cal rounds, and phosphorous fifty cal rounds. They'll make a mess of a lightly armoured ship, fired from new long barrel fifty cal machineguns; high velocity. We're also looking at thirty millimetre cannon pods for the fighters, and they'll slice through the tub's armour. The prop fighter is a bit small for them, and tends to stall when you fire it.'

I laughed. 'Laws of physics, backward force.'

'The larger fighter will have a thirty mil cannon pod and high velocity tungsten rounds. That'll tear-up a ship nicely, but some of the older tubs have an inch of steel, half an inch on the vertical sides, less in some places.'