

MISSION 3-R

BY

J. MICHAEL

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CHAPTER 1

Congressman Thomas (Ted) Turner was in a foul mood as he drove down the eerily empty and quiet Pennsylvania Avenue towards the White House. As chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, he had a daily hectic schedule that had been worsened by the festive season of Christmas, a stressful period during which he always ended up shuttling between endless official and social engagements. By the time he invariably got home late each night and dropped his tall lanky frame unto his orthopedic bed, the last thing he expected or tolerated was to be awoken very early in the morning.

On this particular day of 1st January 2008, the Honorable Congressman from Texas had had a very difficult time falling asleep. He had tossed and turned for a while before finally dozing off around 2am. At 3am on the dot his bedside phone began to ring insistently. Turner buried himself deeper under the sheets expecting that as usual his wife would be quick to pick the call. And then he remembered that his wife was away for a few days on a visit to her sister in Oregon. As the phone continued ringing, he sat up with a curse and reached out for it, managing in the process to knock down the bedside lamp.

“Who’s this?” Turner barked, and then sat up abruptly when he heard the voice at the other end of the line. It was the President of the United States of America and he was, without preliminaries, requesting him to rush down immediately to the White House for a meeting on a matter of extreme urgency.

As Turner drove himself to the White House, he wondered with much irritation what could be so urgent that it couldn’t wait

till a godly hour in the morning. Was the US about to be attacked or planning to attack someone? Only something on such a scale would, in his view, justify getting him and other key people to the White House that early on the first day of the year.

He should, he knew, not normally be part of a crisis team but then his relationship with the President ran way back to high school days and his views were constantly sought on various arising issues, many of which had nothing to do with his congressional duties. Equally important was the fact that he was constantly lobbied by the President and other top members of his party to support budgets that he found to be excessive and unacceptable. He could not think of any pending budget request that would warrant the early morning summons.

Unlike other visits to the White House, Turner was welcomed at the White House entrance gate and quickly cleared through the phalanx of security check points and agents and briskly ushered into the Situation Room, where he was surprised to find a group of men and women chatting in hushed tones.

The Vice President, National Security Adviser and the Director of National Intelligence were huddled together, heads bended and talking in low tones. They all looked up when he entered and the Vice President welcomed him with a halfhearted thumbs up wave of his hand. Other notable figures in the room included the Admiral in charge of the navy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense and the leaders of the two houses of congress.

Turner was being welcomed by the head of the FBI, Derek Croman when the President walked in from one of the side doors and everyone in the room turned towards him, with those that were

seated hastily standing up.

“Sorry guys. Hate to get you all out here at this ungodly time of the morning and on this day in particular but we... the country may be facing a clear and present danger and we need your help. Grab a seat if you can find one. It may be a long night or rather morning.”

Most of the people in the room sat down after the President took a seat but several of the men stayed on their feet.

The President had a black coat on a white T shirt that looked rumpled. Before resuming his speech he nervously rubbed his hands together, his face unusually somber and his normally sparkling eyes looking somewhat troubled and tired with noticeable puffy bags.

“Ladies and gentlemen we have a situation on our hands that calls for urgent action and massive expenditure that can’t be routed through congress.”

Turner reclined further on his chair. The only other time, a few years ago, that he had been invited, albeit during the day, to the Situation Room it had been to get his buy-in to a substantial increase in the black budget.

The money had been required to urgently counter what the intelligence officials described as the ultimate laser attack weapon, which according to them, the Russians had developed and successfully tested. Turner was skeptical but reluctantly agreed to a huge increase in the black budget after strident overtures from the President.

Not much was heard of the weapon long after the budgetary increase and after hundreds of millions of dollars had been spent

on research and intensive intelligence work, the government came to the conclusion that no such weapon had been developed in the first place and that its own research efforts were leading nowhere.

Turner was determined to be less gullible and accommodating this time around. He leaned back on his swivel leather chair and waited for the President to continue.

“You all know the drill guys. Nothing said in here gets out in any way or form, particularly to the press.”

The President saw the group of puzzled faces staring intently at him and continued without pause. “Some of you may know or may have heard of the Infinity Time Machine. In case you’ve heard and dismissed the rumor about the existence of the machine let me start by assuring you and Ted squared, in particular, that the machine actually exists. It was developed and it has carried out a few journeys back in time, the details of which remains highly classified.”

Several of the questioning looks in the room turned to skeptical expressions that the bearers hoped would not be noticed by the President. Chief among the cynics was Turner or Ted squared as he was widely called by friends and foes alike.

Turner had over the years been badgered to concur with more and more funding for the mythical Infinity Time Machine, which he did not believe in but whose funding he had each time reluctantly agreed to support, based on intelligence reports alleging that both Russia and China were close to completing and launching theirs. He still remained unconvinced and had thus far not seen or heard anything to sway him in the opposite direction.

“I had to get you all up here because we have a problem with the ITM and we’ll need a whole lot of undeclared funding to fix it,” the President said.

“You’ll all see what I mean in a minute but let me first call on our distinguished Professor William Cranston to bring us up to speed on where we’ve got to thus far with the incredible machine.”

The President turned sideways to beckon a short potbellied man, with snow white hair and big rimmed spectacles, to the podium.

Professor Cranston walked briskly to the President’s side and waited until the President moved over to take a seat close to the stand before switching on a computer and turning to the screen to which it was connected.

As if by cue the lights dimmed and, a few seconds later, the screen was filled with a huge ship-like contraption that, at first glance, looked like an aircraft carrier. It was big, black and intimidating in sheer size.

“Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen,” Professor Cranston began in a strong assured voice.

“As you’ve just been told my name is William Cranston. I am the leader of the team that conceptualized and built the ITM, which is one of the greatest, if not the greatest machine ever built.

Simply put the ITM can go back in time, for now, as far as 600 years and return back to the future from which it had departed.

Thus far the machine has made about five trips of different duration and those that went back in time with it returned with

proof of where they had been to.”

William Cranston’s eyes shone brightly with unmistakable pride. “A lot of effort, time and money have gone into bringing the machine into being and I’m proud of the teams I’ve worked with over the years. They’ve been nothing short of awesome. The Russians and the Chinese started around the same time as us but I doubt if they’ll be ready to launch within the next one or two years.”

Most of the people in the room had in the past heard something or the other about the existence of the Time Machine but hardly any had bothered to give it a thought. It seemed to be nothing more than a rumor that got talked about, often jokingly, at cocktails or in office conversations.

The exception was Congressman Turner who had had to fight fruitlessly to contain the alarmingly high cost of the project. He therefore asked the first question as the learned Professor was about to resume his lecture.

“What’s the whole purpose of spending over a trillion dollars just to go back in time; assuming that’s even where your ship went to?” he asked.

“The President may perhaps want to address your question later, but let me on my part say that I believe the machine is extremely useful for the future wellbeing of our great nation,” Professor Cranston replied firmly and then continued.

“One readily obvious benefit is that we can go back in time to establish, without any iota of doubt, the facts of unresolved crimes.

More importantly future wars will, I predict, be fought in the

past in order to either protect or reshape the present and the future.”

“But why go back in time to fight for our future? Why not go directly to the future to do so?” someone asked from the back of the room.

Professor Cranston tried to make out the speaker and then responded.

“We’ve tried but have given up on trying to build a machine that can go into the future because no such machine can ever be built. The reason ladies and gentlemen, is simple, although some of my learned colleagues may disagree. You cannot go into something that does not exist. We can go into the past because it had existed, which is not the same as the future.....”

“Great subject, but time travel is an extremely complex subject that we can’t begin to go into here,” the President interjected.

“What Professor Cranston has confirmed to us is that the ITM project has been successfully carried out, though at great cost. We can get to talk some more, some other time, with our good friend, on the intricacies of time travel but for now we’re here because we have a major problem with the ITM.”

“What problem?” Turner asked, suspecting that the answer would lead to a request for more money.

The answer made him sit up as the Professor and many others in the room gasped with surprise.

“The ITM has disappeared,” the President said quietly.

He waited until the shocked reaction of the roomful of people had died down before continuing.

“Information thus far at our disposal, is that around 1am this morning the ITM, which we christened Genesis, suddenly went into departure mode and then vanished. We are working at various levels to determine what happened and the information that has come in within the last two hours is that the machine may have been hijacked and taken back to a time and place that we will soon be obtaining from the backup system in place. It is imperative that we find out as quickly as possible the answers to two vital questions: why was the ITM stolen, that is if it was stolen, and why has it gone to wherever it has gone to?”

“Do the Russians or Chinese have anything to do with this?” the President Pro term of the Senate asked tightly.

“We don’t think so,” the President replied. “Thus far we know that the Head of security for the ITM, along with hundreds of soldiers were on board the machine when it disappeared. We do not see how they could have been overpowered by foreign agents.”

“Could it be that they have something to do with the theft Sir?” the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked icily.

“Could be,” the President replied promptly. “Whatever may be the case, the fact is that we must move swiftly to locate the machine and deal with any attendant fallout.”

“How do we do that?” Turner asked.

“We’ve been working on a second time machine for some time but now we have to accelerate matters and get the second machine into operation as soon as possible so it can go in search of the first

one.”

“That would be about one additional trillion dollars from tax payer’s funds,” Turner replied. “Must we go in search of it? Must we really continue with this time machine business? I’m still not convinced of its usefulness.”

The President folded his arms, leaned forward on his elbows and tried not to sound irritated or impatient.

“It’s useful Ted. There’s still a lot we have to learn about what happens if the past is tempered with. What is clear is that most of the top time travel specialists believe that a lot of changes can happen in an already existent future if even a little but important change is made to take place in the past.”

“Like going back to assassinate Columbus; so as to preempt the existence of the US?” Turner asked.

Most of the people in the room laughed but the President did not. “Something along that line,” he said seriously. “My job and yours could be on the line,” he added with a smile, to increased laughter from the assembled group.

Turner smiled politely. “I see the problem and the need for urgent steps to be taken but what baffles me Mr. President is how this could have happened in the first place. One would have expected that the approval processes and hurdles to getting the machine launched would be complicated and at the very least time consuming. Surely your approval is required for any mission?”

“Good question Ted. The approval process is water tight and it ends with me but no process can be failsafe if the key executors conspire to sabotage it, which seems to be the case we’re

dealing with. Naturally we'll minutely reexamine the entire system and introduce additional safeguards."

The questions continued for another hour and most were directed at Professor Cranston.

What possible harm could the ITM cause to the US and how could the authorities know where and to what period Genesis had been taken? Assuming the need to intervene was established, how soon could the construction of the second ITM be completed and the machine launched?

"The aspect of harm to the US can be better answered by our security experts," the learned Professor replied. "As to where it went and what date it has returned to we shall be able to obtain that information from the ITM data center which duplicates and stores any information that is keyed into the machine. We should have the information this morning but it will be classified. In my view the ITM under construction is very far advanced and hence can be completed within a year if additional resources can be pumped in to fast-track the construction."

The meeting had run for about three hours before the President brought it to a close with the key recommendations being that the President should set up a crack team to work on unraveling the facts surrounding the disappearance of the ITM and to work on determining exactly what steps were to be taken to deal with the missing ITM. The team was to be carefully selected, with key highly screened participants from the appropriate arms of government and it was to be given extraordinary powers so as to effectively carry out its assignment within a matter of days. The team would report directly to the President with the involvement of the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Adviser.

The equally important consensus arrived at was that the President should be allowed to use as much funds as was necessary to bring the second time machine into service and ensure a successful execution of the recommendations to be made by the two teams.

The President had already signed a Presidential order setting up the team which was to carry out the assignment that had been code named Eureka but he had refrained from executing it until he got the recommendation of his early morning crises squad. Although he had brought the meeting to a close, the President requested that the exact identities of the members of the team to be set up be established and the officials be put to work immediately.

On the recommendation of the respective heads of the governmental institutions, the list of specially selected staff was immediately drawn up from the Navy, CIA, FBI, Home Security and National Security Agency. Calls to the designated staff began shortly after the Situation Room crowd dispersed. They were all told to get to rendezvous immediately at the FBI to commence work on a matter of high national importance named Eureka.

CHAPTER 2

The Eureka team of experts began its work a few hours after the President's meeting.

Just a few blocks away from the White House, in a nondescript conference room of the FBI building, Christopher Collins, a tall heavy set man with a thin narrow face and sharp probing eyes was seated at the head of an oblong shaped table, with three men seated on the right side and two men and a lady on the left.

The men and the woman all had open note pads and pens ready for jotting down the information to be dished out by Collins, the leader of the team.

Collins took a few seconds to glance through the report lying in front of him before looking up.

“Good morning and welcome. My name is Christopher Collins, Special Operations Director, FBI, and it's a pleasure to meet you this morning. I take it you've all been briefed on why we're here?”

Several heads nodded and Collins continued. “I've been saddled with the task of driving the work of Eureka and I think that we shall over the next few days be working closely together to achieve results. How about we start by getting to know each other?”

The introductions took a few minutes. Collins made ticks on his paper as the men and lady briefly gave their names, titles and the agencies from which they came. One of the men was, like Collins from the FBI, the lady from the NSA and the remaining three men from the CIA, Navy and Home Affairs.

With the introductions out of the way, Collins brought them up to speed on the status of the crisis the team had been set up to deal with.

Based on closely guided research by MIT and military scientists, work had started about ten years back on two ITMs. After seven years the first ITM, named Genesis, was successfully tested and was subsequently used to carry out several return-to-the-past missions.

The first number of trips covered only a few years' time frame but the last two carried out by Genesis covered one hundred and two hundred years respectively. All the trips were to European locations.

The second ITM was still under construction with completion expected within a year. Genesis had virtually the same size and holding capacity of an aircraft carrier and was capable of carrying up to 2500 troops and significant quantity of arms and ammunition as well as several landing crafts that can each carry up to 10 people ashore.

"I have the list of all those who we believe were in Genesis when it disappeared very early this morning. They had to go through very tight security to get onboard. The list includes the Chief Commanding Officer, Gen. Ben Jackson, his aide-de-camp Major Bruce Jones and in all about a hundred and fifty people, most of whom we don't know anything about and may not need to know.

We need to quickly have answers to quite a number of questions. Did Gen. Jackson and his men deliberately steal the Genesis? If yes, why and equally important, why have they gone to the location and time that is being established from the ITM's data

room?

If they did not steal the vessel, were they kidnapped and forced to take Genesis to the location they've gone to?"

The lady from the NSA, Caroline Shepley raised her hand. "How do we know they've really gone back in time and not to a hideout in Russia or China?"

"As I said earlier the Genesis has been sent back in time several times with proofs that it did indeed go back. It would be difficult for either Russia or China to have the vessel sent back in time to their country without such information being accurately captured in the Data Room."

"So where has the vessel been taken to?" the CIA agent asked.

"Well for now I don't know. But even if and when I do know I shall still not be at liberty to disclose that as such information is for now classified. Besides, our focus for now is on finding out who is behind the theft or disappearance of Genesis."

"Do we have home addresses and any other information that may be helpful to our investigations?"

"We certainly do," Collins said switching on the projector in front of him. He turned sideways to watch as all eyes turned to the screen behind him.

The first figure to appear on the screen was that of General Ben Jackson.

General Jackson appeared to be about six feet tall with broad shoulders, a muscular physique and a black rugged face. His two

dark, intense and unsmiling eyes seemed to bore into each member of the Eureka team.

“General Ben Jackson was the Chief Commanding Officer of the Genesis. He is a five star highly decorated Vietnam war veteran who was associated with the ITM project right from inception and was ultimately put in charge of overseeing the affairs of Genesis, with particular emphasis on security.” Collins said

The screen moved on and a tall but slim and clearly much younger man than Jackson appeared. He had a handsome boyish face and a low hair cut that went very well with it.

“This is Major Bruce Jones,” Collins continued. “He is the Aide-de-Camp of General Jackson. He’s been with the general for years and he’s one of three people, including the General, who knows the activation code of the Genesis on each trip.”

The slides that followed contained the pictures of two other blacks and one white, all male and in military fatigues except for the white man who was in a dark suit.

“From what we’ve been able to gather before you all arrived, Doctor Derek Mullins, on the left, is the only white guy that left with the Genesis and he’s known to be very close to Jackson who got him recruited as one of the key civilian staff of the ITM program. It would seem that several other civilians, all black were also on board the vessel.

Collins paused for questions and when none was forthcoming he plunged ahead.

“The guy in the middle is Retired Colonel Kevin Stone, the Chief Security Officer on board the vessel and the one on the right

is Staff Sergeant Ben Givens. These and most of the other guys are or where all members of the US armed forces,” Collins informed the group.

“Exactly how many people departed with the vessel?” the Home Security agent asked.

“What we have thus far, from surveillance video records that we obtained a short while back, show that about 150 men, all of whom except for Dr. Mullins are black, boarded Genesis under the supervision of Jackson and Jones. Most of them had military carriage and I suspect they are ex GIs or people with fighting experience.”

“What in the world are they up to?” the CIA agent asked with surprise.

“That’s what we are supposed to find out and communicate to the President within the next 48 hours,” Collins replied. “We need to get on with the job and dig out all we can about the five guys and Jackson in particular.”

“Except for the one white guy all the others, well over one hundred of them are blacks. Why? There’s got to be something to that.” The NSA lady Shepley opined.

“Again that’s the sort of puzzle we are expected to unravel,” Collins replied. “I’ve drawn up a tentative work schedule which we can now review and then get to work.”

Collins had all the necessary clearances, so the next morning he was at the ultra-secret location site where the ITM 2 was being constructed. Since the disappearance of ITM 1 or Genesis, security had been beefed up. Heavily armed soldiers patrolled the perimeter

of the construction site, with orders to shoot on site if need be.

The Chief Security Officer at the site, Col. Jerry Bentley, was a tall hard faced man of few words. He had been informed beforehand of Collins' visit and was waiting for him on the area to which the ITM 2 had been moored.

"Thank you for receiving me. I..."

"I was instructed to or I wouldn't have," Col. Bentley interrupted brusquely. "What would you like to know or see?"

"I just have a few questions and then I'll leave you to continue with your job. I know the urgent need for completion."

"So shoot. Let's get on with it."

"Were you in any way linked to the security of ITM 1?"

"Yes I was... directly. I've been one of the Chief Security Officers that have accompanied Genesis and General Jackson on some of the trips that have thus been taken." He turned and briefly surveyed the bustling activities behind him. "Now that Genesis is gone I've been given the job of securing ITM 2."

"Knowing what you know about ITM 1 how come it was that easy for it to be stolen?"

"We don't know that it was. Jackson and his men may have gone for a fun ride and may show up any day from now, for all we know."

"If that's the case, it still leaves my question valid. How come it was that easy for Jackson or anyone for that matter to take off in the damn machine? Where there no checks and balances?"

“Oh there were, many in fact but Jackson, if he was the one who deliberately made off with it, could have cleared all the hurdles and at the last minute changed the agreed period and destination of the machine.”

“Is that what happened?”

“I hear so but I’m not the one to confirm that. You need to check with other guys on your clearance list.”

“I will, but from what you heard could it be that Jackson turned rogue at the last minute and did that?”

“Yes. That’s what I heard but you didn’t hear it from me.”

“Fair enough. Just a few more questions and I’ll let you get back to work.”

“Ok I’ll appreciate that. Got to keep an eye on things.”

“The normal procedure is that Jackson gets instructions to take the machine along with some experts to a particular time and place and to come back at a given time, right?”

“Right.”

“Can you please give me a brief rundown of the process through which approval to launch the machine is obtained and...”

“Why?”

Collins ran his hand through his hair in exasperation but held back a nasty retort. “Listen. I have all kinds of security clearances and authority from the President to find out exactly what happened and report back to him within the next 48 hours.”

“I know that.”

“So I need amongst other things to find out if one or more of possible saboteurs may have facilitated the theft of the machine during the mission approval process. I need at a minimum to know who gets to approve what, etc.”

“Ok, ok. I hear you loud and clear. From what I know, the question of when and where the vessel should go is handled by a small select team that reports directly to the President. Once his approval is obtained, it is communicated by the National Security Adviser to the Chief Commanding Officer of the ITM, General Jackson, to execute. The CCO oversees and participates in the preparation, departure and return activities.”

“So the CCO cannot on his own have the vessel launched without the express written approval of the President?”

“No, he can’t.”

“Who stops him in the absence of such an approval?”

“The Chief Security Officer of the ITM, who must be shown and must keep a copy of the approval.”

“Was this done in the case of Genesis?”

“Yes and No. Apart from me, there are four other CSOs that work on rotational basis. One of the CSOs, Col. Jenkins, was due to go on the next ITM trip. He was shown and given a copy of what was supposed to be the original copy of a Presidential approval but the document has turned out to be fake.”

“Who gave him the copy?”

“The CCO General Jackson himself. According to the fake document that Jackson gave Col. Jenkins, Genesis was supposed to go back to somewhere in the Middle East. As we now know both the destination and date on the document had been doctored and our good old CSO was fast asleep when Genesis departed for somewhere else.”

“Would you know if Jenkins had any inkling or suspicion that something was not quite right with the document he was given?”

“You’ll have to find out from him.”

“Where can I find him?”

“You may want to check the military hospital at Fort Myer. I hear he’s undergoing shock therapy.”

“Thanks. I’ll check him out. Who is responsible for actually steering the machine to and fro?”

“There’s nothing to steer. You simply key in time and location and the ITM resurfaces where you’ve programmed it go to. To be able to key in anything you have to have a code which only three people on board would have access to; Jackson, the CSO and the Deputy CSO.”

“Was any of the other CSOs on board Genesis when it disappeared?”

“Yes, one that was not supposed to be going with it.”

“Can you tell me anything about him?”

“His name is Kevin Stone. He’s black, a Captain from the armored corps in Fort Bragg. Nice chap. I find it hard to see him

participating in any fraudulent activity and making off with Genesis. Well you never know.”

“And Mullins? What do you know about him?”

“He’s the only white guy that took off with them.”

“I know that. What was his role, his character?”

“He was the Chief Medical Doctor and like Kevin I find him to be highly professional and honest. I can’t imagine him willingly participating in the theft of Genesis.”

“How soon will this second ITM be ready to undertake a trip?”

“It’s difficult to be precise. All I can say with certainty is that work has been accelerated since early this morning and if the construction of the missing one is anything to go by, then we’re looking at about six months down the line for completion. It’s taken about five years to get to this stage.”

Collins asked a few more questions and then handed over his card.

“Thanks buddy. You’ve been very helpful. I would appreciate your getting in touch if anything important turns up.” He turned to leave and then stopped. “Oh, one last question. What can you tell me about General Jackson?”

“Not much. A great soldier with impeccable credentials. We got on well but were not friends, which is how the top brass wants it to be.”

“Thanks once again.”

Collins took one last look at the ITM 2 and then walked slowly out of the construction site. Security checks were even more intense on leaving than when he got in.

Getting back home, Collins undressed quickly and headed for the bathroom. Exhausted, he stretched out on the floor of his bathroom as the bathtub slowly filled up and stared listlessly at the ceiling. The evidence was all pointing in the same direction. Unless he was blackmailed or forced into stealing the ITM, Jackson had planned and executed the theft on his own. But why? Where could he have considered to be so important that he decided to go out there knowing that on his return he would be court martialed and at best put away for life? Or did he have no intention of getting back?

The more he thought about it the more Collins became convinced that his immediate focus should turn to the carrying out of a forensic examination of Jackson's background and activities leading up to the disappearance of the Genesis.

He was about to get into the bathtub when a call came from the NSA operative.

Ms. Shepley wasted no time in getting to the point. "We've been able to look into Jackson's background and surprisingly he was deeply involved in the Back to Africa movement that used to be highly in vogue with many African Americans some years back. It appears he was the founder and arrowhead of a secret Club X whose members, as far as my sources can tell, were all black."

"A secret club? What was the Club into?"

"We tracked down some members who got disillusioned and

left. Seems the objective of Club X was how to get Africa to, as they put it, take its rightful place in the world, whatever that means.”

“Interesting. Why do they have to work towards that noble objective secretly?”

“I guess he knows the top army guys well enough to know that they would react with much suspicion to his being involved in such a movement or any movement for that matter.”

“Anything on any of the other guys that left with him, Bruce Jones, Kevin Stone, Derek Mullins?”

“Yes, seems they all spent months on end learning all they could about the African country of Limbaki and the country’s language Limbakiki. Something tells me that’s where they must have headed to but that information should be available to the President.”

“Right. Anything to suggest that they may have been working for a foreign country like Russia or China?”

“Nothing yet but we’ll keep digging.”

“Thanks. Good job,” Collins said cutting off the line and getting into the bathtub.

Through with his bath but still undressed, Collins was in the kitchen trying to figure out the easiest dinner to make. It was at moments like this that he acutely missed his wife who was away with their kids on a brief vacation. He should have been with them but for the Genesis crisis. He opened the top drawer and was reaching for the package of cereals when he heard his phone ringing

in the bathroom. He had taken it in there and forgot to take it along with him to the kitchen.

Walking quickly back into the bathroom he looked at the ringing phone and noticed that it was coming from an unknown source. He wondered who the caller was as he picked up the phone.

“Collins here.”

The voice at the other end sounded agitated and garbled. Collins had to shout at the caller to calm down as he was not making sense of what the guy was saying.

The caller took a few seconds to calm down before speaking again. “This is Col. Jerry Bentley. ITM 2 has gone up in flames. It’s been blown up.”

“Blown up! What do you mean blown up?” This time it was Collins who found himself shouting.

“Soon after you left an alarm went up from the ship and the few men close by had just a few minutes to get away before the machine blew into pieces. Some kind of timing device must have activated the alarm and subsequently ignited the explosion.”

“Was anybody injured or killed?”

“No. I’ve done a quick count and we’re good on that score.”

“Do you think that the disaster could have been due to a technical problem?”

“Absolutely not. I have a feeling that the guys that left with Genesis wanted to make sure that we don’t go looking for them anytime soon.”

“What does this new nightmare mean for urgently getting another ITM in place?”

“The construction program has now been blown away with this explosion. We have to start all over and that means no less than five years of work at a highly accelerated pace and no worries about the funds being available. We certainly are in deep shit at this point.”

Collins blew out his cheeks, thanked Bentley and sat down to make the one call he had not expected to be making until a day or two later. He dialed the number given to him by the President of the United States of America only a few hours back.

It was almost midnight and the situation room of the White House felt like the world was about to come to an end. Everyone looked intently at the president, waiting for him to give a directive.

The Vice President, National Security Adviser and the Director of National Intelligence were sitting together with files opened in front of them and just staring at the president who seemed lost in thoughts. It was Derek Croman the head of the FBI who finally asked the question...

“So what do we do Mr President?”

The president lifted his head and took a sweeping look at everyone seated around the table for what seemed like eternity and then...

“It will take another five years or more to get a new ITM up and running if we can pull out a fresh budget for it. We don’t have that luxury of time and even if we do, we still don’t know what the plan of those in the Genesis are...”

The team around the table stared worriedly at the president as they waited for him to continue.

“I think we have no other option but to wait for fate to take its course, while throwing everything we have into getting a new ITM ready to go after the bastards.”

CHAPTER 3

Word on the disappearance of the US ITM did not get to Moscow until a day later. Comrade Petoskey of the KGB was on his way to Katrina late in the evening after a stressful day in the office and was looking forward to an hour or two of delicious infidelity. Making sure the sound proof partition with the driver was up he got out his phone and called Katrina. Her low husky voice sent the blood rushing to his head.

“On my way, sweetheart. Should be there in about thirty minutes.”

“Hope you’re not too tired. I like my man to be strong and active,”

Petoskey laughed. “I’m strong enough to at least take off your clothes.”

“You don’t have to worry about that. I’m already stark naked. It’s what you can do thereafter that I’m more concerned with.”

Petoskey was about to give a saucy reply when he heard the beeping sound of an incoming call. Irritated, he told Katrina to hold on so he could see where the call was coming from and tell the caller to get lost. Putting the call with Katrina on hold he took a quick look at his phone and was about to cut off the incoming call when he saw from whom the call was coming. He barked at his driver to move out of the lane and park.

“Good evening my blessed President,” he said lightly in Russian. “I hope that all is well?”

Both the Russian President and Petoskey had an extremely close relationship, one that went all the way back to their childhood. They were cousins who had gone through the same schools and had ended up working for the same government institution, the KGB. They both served as the best man at each other's wedding and they spent most nights drinking together and sharing stories about their latest escapades. Petoskey always addressed him as my Blessed President and he in turn always laughingly replied with 'my Blessed Infidel.'

As his driver got out of the car to chat with the security guards that had parked behind Petoskey's car, Petoskey leaned back his tall big frame against the soft leather of the car's back seat, expecting the usual light hearted riposte. He was surprised at the President's response

"You need to come see me right away. I've asked the army and intelligence chiefs to join us. Please hurry,"

"On my way, boss," Petoskey replied without hesitation. He waited to be sure that the President had cut the line and then leaned over to press the horn of the car, which got the driver to start running back.

"To the Presidency," Petoskey barked. "Signal the advance team to get the horn blaring and move fast." Regretfully he returned to the call with Katrina and told her he would be getting to her much later than planned. She cut off the line without responding.

The car swerved out of the curb and made a U-turn that got other drivers cursing until they realized who the passenger was. Petoskey wearily closed his eyes. Once again he was being denied

the pleasure of bedding Katrina. The sexy new recruit, who had served in his office as an intern before she got recruited into the agency as an administrative officer, had thus far escaped from his yearning arms by playing the shy and extremely respectful card. He had managed to break through her contrived façade and was all set to enjoy the fruit of his patient labor until the baffling call from the President.

The Russian President had a big frown on his feline face as he paced up and down the grey tiled floor of the Crisis Room. Petoskey and the other men in the room looked expectantly at him.

“You all know about the bloody time machine of the US right? We’ve discussed it several times here in this room.”

“Sure,” Petoskey replied. “Ours should be ready in about a year or so.” In meetings with the President, Petoskey was always deferred to by the other participants. His well-known closeness to the President had in such meetings accorded him the privilege of being the first and the last to speak.

“Yes ours can be ready much sooner if our lazy scientists would get off their fat asses and fast-track matters. We’ve waited long enough and all we get is the increasing cost of the damn thing.”

The President looked at the baffled faces staring at him and added. “I’ve just been informed an hour ago by the Potomac that the time machine of the US disappeared yesterday and the White House is in panic mode.”

General Alexey, pudgy face, grey, sharp and highly alert eyes, was the first to react. “That’s happened a few times before and each time, as you know Mr. President, we have been able to get details

of where they sent the machine. So far they've all been short exploratory trips and..."

"I know that Alexey," The President cut in. "But this time the scenario is different. The White House and all their army and security chiefs cannot be in panic if the government had authorized the disappearance. The word from our boys is that the machine was stolen and taken back in time to a place that is yet to be determined."

The head of the Russian Intelligence agency, Col. Botagyr, cleared his throat. "We would know where it has gone to as soon as the Yankees know. Meanwhile we should as Mr. President has rightly said get ours ready as a matter of emergency."

"Sure we should," General Alexey chipped in. "But I'm yet to be fully convinced that the Americans are not up to their usual tricks with the machine. Their time machine is about the most protected thing in the US; protected much more than even their nuclear weapons. How could it have been stolen?"

"So why the crisis meeting in the White House or you don't believe our source?" The Prime Minister, Mr. Vasily, asked brushing back his black oily hair with his big palms.

"The Potomac is the most reliable of them all. He's always on target," cut in Petoskey before General Alexey could answer.

"So why the crisis?" the President asked again looking at the general.

"I can't think of anything right away, other than we need to get ours ready, like last year."

“That’s why I’ve called you all here,” the President said firmly. “We should firstly consider that we are in a state of emergency until we know for sure what the time machine is up to. We should secondly henceforth commit whatever time, effort and financial resources that are required to get our own machine ready and I should be briefed weekly, through the Prime Minister, on progress being made.”

In Beijing, five grim faced officials were also discussing the disappearance of the US time machine. The Chinese President was not wasting time in getting to the point. “Comrade Shi has never been proven wrong. His sources have confirmed that the US time machine has disappeared and we must take that seriously. The machine could be on a mission to destroy China.”

“How can it destroy us by going back in time?” one of the officials with a name tag of Yingjie asked, trying to hide his cynicism.

The President’s frown got deeper as he stared for a few seconds at Yingjie. “It goes back and the Americans that take it back carry out actions to reshape our destiny and China suddenly wakes up to find itself another hundred years behind the US in development. We must not let that happen.”

Yingjie put on a concerned look. “You’re right Comrade President,” he said. “We need to rush through our own machine and immediately go to wherever the US machine has gone to.”

“That’s a must,” The President said. “We must remain masters of our own destiny now, as well as in the past and future. Several teams have been put together to handle this urgent assignment. One will focus on finding out what has happened to

the US time machine; where it has disappeared to and what its mission is, another will drive the urgent completion of our own machine while the third one will begin training the special forces that will go with our machine to counter the objective of the US mission no matter what it may be.” He turned to one of the officials in the room and continued. “What is the status of our machine...?”

The official shifted uneasily. “We are almost 90% completed. The remaining 10% is the most complex and time consuming, but we recently managed to get some vital engineering information from our cowboy friends and that would help us to complete the job within the next one year at the latest.”

“One year is too long,” the President said rubbing his forehead with concern. “We need to move much faster than that.”

He received nods of approval from most of the people in the room and continued.

“In one year China as we now know it may not be there because we may have been defeated by forces we may be unable to see or do anything about. We must aim at completing the job within the next three to six months.”

“Yes Mr. President. We certainly will try to do that.”

“I don’t want you to try. I want you to do it!”

The President’s head swiveled slowly, his eyes making contact with each man in the room as he picked up a clean sheet of paper in front of him. “I expect full-fledged support from all of you.”

CHAPTER 4

AFRICA – YEAR 1510

On the misty early morning of 1st January 1510 AD, Genesis appeared, as if from nowhere, a few nautical miles off the African coast of Limbaki.

About 10 minutes after the materialization of the time travelling ship, General Jackson, his two closest comrades, Captain Kevin Stone and Colonel Bruce Jones and his lifelong friend, Dr. Derek Mullins were huddled together in a room on the second deck reviewing their plan of action as the ship self-propelled its way towards the Limbaki coast.

Over one hundred black men in battle fatigues were also already up and busy retrieving their weapons from specially sealed steel cases. The cases and their contents had, along with the men, undertaken the incredible time journey deep into the heart of Africa.

Most of the men appeared to still be in a daze on what had transpired since the time, which seemed like only hours ago, when they had boarded Genesis and then seemed to go to sleep only to awaken close to the advancing African coastline.

For Bruce Jones it was a case of *Déjà vu* but with a difference. He had, with Jackson, been on all the previous trips back into time. On his first trip he was as dazed as the guys who were now shuffling around in the deck below him. The sheer thought of having travelled back in time had left him trembling with awe while at the same time marveling at the wonders of science and the mysteries of the universe.

The amazement never wore off but he got used to time travel and on subsequent trips spent most of his time assisting Gen. Jackson to ensure that Genesis got back safely to base.

The trip to Africa was completely different in scope and intent from any that he had taken before or was ever likely to take again.

He remembered the first time he was selected and asked to meet with and be interviewed by Gen. Jackson for the possibility of serving as his aide-de-camp. He was then a young and brash Lieutenant who was eager to climb up the military hierarchy and believed that he had all the requisite attributes to be at the very top within a very short time.

And yet he had been very apprehensive and indeed fearful when he was summoned for the interview with the highly decorated general. Jackson was widely known for being a tough son of a bitch, who had a reputation for pushing his staff to the limits of endurance. Although he was overly ambitious, Jones was easy going and not particularly keen on being pushed to the limit hence his consternation at being selected as one of, as he saw it, the unfortunate soldiers to be interviewed by Jackson.

Matters were not helped for him by the fact that he had to wait in Jackson's outer office for about half an hour before Jackson returned from an unplanned meeting with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was literally sweating with anxiety by the time he was ushered into Jackson's Spartan office.

He was taken aback by the warm smile on Jackson's tough looking face and the friendly way he stood up and came around his table to shake his hand and tap him on the shoulder.

“At ease, son. You’re in my office and not on the goddam parade ground. There’ll be enough time for you to salute all you want in the months ahead.....that is if you end up being my aide-de-camp.”

With his nervousness fast disappearing, Jones answered questions about his family and his stint thus far in the military. He informed Jackson that he was single with no kids or other family ties to interfere with his job and that it would be a great honor for him to serve as his aide-de-camp. After asking a few more questions about his views on US politics and posture around the world, Jackson leaned back on his chair and studied him with intense brown eyes that gave away nothing.

“What do you think about Africa?” he asked suddenly.

The question caught Jones by surprise. He had prepared for all manner of questions but something about Africa had never crossed his mind.

“I think it’s a continent with great potential sir.”

Jackson remained silent and Jones was forced to continue.

“I read sometime back that Africa has much more natural resources than any other continent but that Africans have to get their act together and get the right leadership to be able to gainfully exploit the resources.”

“Have you ever been to Africa?”

“No Sir. I’ve always wanted to but somehow I’m yet to find the time to do so.”

“I see from your profile that you’re good in languages. Do you understand any African language?”

“No sir. Just French, German and Italian.”

“Impressive. Where did you pick them from?”

“Mainly Google and Friends.”

Jackson slid down further in his chair and closed his eyes.

“I’ve been to Africa a few times. It’s a fascinating continent that’s still in chaotic evolution but yes it has the potential to be on a par with Europe and other continents if...”

Jackson’s voice trailed off as he absentmindedly tapped his fingers on his desk. “Limbakiki and Swahili are beautiful languages. Check them out.”

“Will do Sir.”

Jackson remained still for a few more seconds and just as Jones wondered if he had fallen asleep he suddenly sat up straight and opened his eyes.

“What do you think or know about me?”

“About you, sir?” Jones asked, caught off-guard by the unexpected question.

“Yes me,” Jackson replied.

“Well what I know is what I’ve read in the military journals about your impressive career to date. The rest is from hearsay and locker rooms.”

“And what are they saying behind my back?”

“That you’re an unrelenting task master or Sonofabitch that one should steer clear of sir.”

“So why have you taken the risk of coming close?”

“I acted on instruction sir.”

Jackson smiled. “Honest answer. Now be even more honest. Would you like to take the job?”

“Yes, sir. I would love to.”

“Why?”

“I love challenges and more importantly I would be foolish to tell you otherwise sir.”

Jackson laughed loudly and leaned back on his seat.

“I think you’ll do son. I’ll send in my report today and you should be ready to start tomorrow.”

“Thank you very much, Sir. It will be an honor for me to serve you.”

“Thank your sterling profile and smart responses,” Jackson said standing up with a smile. “I think you’re the guy I’ve been looking for.”

Jackson turned out to be a tough but likeable task master who seemed to know when to push one to the limit and when to help those around him to relax. Jones liked working for him and gradually became his most trusted confidant. Before his interview he had carried out research on Jackson’s profile; his steady rise in the military, particularly after his Purple Heart service in Vietnam.

He was surprised to read that Jackson was a widower who had lost his wife and two children in a helicopter crash in which he was the only survivor. Military friends told him that Jackson had become rather cold and withdrawn following the tragedy. Although that was over 15 years back, he was yet to remarry and was not known to be dating any one.

The years leading to the launch of Genesis were exciting and memorable ones for Jones. The utmost secrecy surrounding the construction of the mammoth machine was sustained through Jackson's tight control of everything concerning the project. And when it was finally commissioned and undertook its maiden voyage to the Italy of the early 19th century, Jones was thrilled to be selected by Jackson to accompany him on the trip. He was subjected to an additional extensive security clearance exercise before being allowed to take part in the maiden and subsequent trips of Genesis.

The trip and everything else concerning Genesis was highly classified and Jones was extremely careful to keep it that way. Hence not even Jones's closest friends had an inkling of that aspect of his work.

Several years into his close working relationship with Jackson, Jones had settled down to the usual day to day grind of an aide-de-camp and apart from some occasional stressful periods, was quite happy with what he was doing. More satisfying to him was the fact that he had become very close to his boss and had risen in rank from Lieutenant to captain and then to major which was no mean achievement.

Jones was therefore in a relaxed and contented mood as he drove one Sunday evening to Jackson's home in Fort Myer, Virginia, not wondering or bothering much about the purpose of

his invitation. He guessed that it would most likely be to have a drink with the bored general, who had still not been associated with any female companion long after the death of his wife.

Jackson was seated in his study looking very relaxed in faded blue jeans and a white T-shirt and he had company; a tall frail looking black man with bushy white hair on his small head and eye brows.

Jackson invited Jones to take a seat and then turned to the man. “Prof, this is Major Bruce Jones, my aide-de-camp. He’s now more like a younger brother to me than a staff, right Bruce?”

“Right, Sir.”

“Bruce, meet Professor Johnson. You’ll get to know and be close to him in the days ahead. Good man.”

“Pleasure to meet you, Professor.”

“The pleasure is mine.”

Jones was surprised at the direction of the discussion that followed.

Jackson informed him that Professor Johnson was the leading authority on African art, culture and history. He was a founding member of the Back to Africa (BTA) movement. Jones had not really given the movement any attention and as far as he was concerned it had died a long while back and was safely buried away.

Jones was also surprised to learn that Jackson had been actively involved in the BTA movement right up until the time he

was selected to oversee the security and intelligence requirements of the Genesis project.

The BTA movement was in philosophy and thrust, aimed at getting African Americans as well as Africans in the diaspora to work toward enhancing the socio-economic fortunes of Africa. Multination institutions were also encouraged by BTA to carry their businesses to Africa and African governments advised to welcome them.

Jackson had on being selected to oversee the security of the Genesis project, withdrew from active involvement in the affairs of BTA movement. He was nonetheless still very much interested with what was happening in the continent of his ancestors. He stayed in touch, albeit infrequently, with the distinguished Professor and exchanged views on political and economic developments in Africa.

Jones sat and watched with some degree of amusement as Professor Johnson succeeded, after a lengthy back and forth session, to get Jackson to finally promise to find the time to deliver a lecture to Johnsons' students, in the near future, on the militarization of the African continent.

As soon as Professor Johnson left, Jackson shut the door of his study and looked pensively at Jones.

“How long have you been with me Bruce?”

“Going on six years and some months, sir.”

“What has been your experience son? Feel free to tell me as it is. I won't hold anything against you Bruce. I see you as family and in a way the return of the son that fate took away from me. Do

you understand?”

“I understand Sir. It couldn’t have been better. I’m glad to be working for you sir and I wouldn’t exchange my job for any other, even if higher.”

Jackson seemed to Jones to be wishing to tell him something but finding it difficult to do so, for one reason or the other.

“Is there something wrong sir?” Jones finally asked.

Jackson seemed to battle internally for a few more seconds and then stood up to get a drink. He came back clutching a glass in one hand and a bottle of cognac in the other.

“Get yourself a drink son,” Jackson finally said, stretching out on the sofa he had been sitting on. “I wanted you to meet the learned professor. He’s a great guy with great knowledge of the African continent. We’ll have time to talk about Africa another time but for now tell me what the schedule is for this week.”

They chatted long into the night until Jackson started yawning and Jones gladly took his leave and drove home still wondering what Jackson must have been debating whether to tell him or not.

Matters stayed that way for the next two weeks until Jackson again invited Jones for a drink on another Sunday evening.

This time it didn’t take long before Jackson put down his drink and leaned back with his hands behind the back of his head.

“I want to tell you something, Bruce. It’s extremely confidential but I know I can count on you to keep it strictly to

yourself.”

“You can count on me sir, a 100 percent and more.”

“Good. Now listen carefully to me. Some of the things I’m about to tell you would sound strange to you and some would sound down right crazy and even treasonable. But all you have to do is listen and let me know what you think at the end of it all, ok?”

Jones nodded and Jackson began to talk.

He had right from his high school days been very interested in finding out all he could about where his forebears came from. His hunger for the knowledge of Africa and everything African was constant and intense. He was at a very young age proudly sporting a big Afro and wearing colorful dashikis. At that time the dream of many African Americans was to return to Africa with their knowledge and skills so as to help fast-track the development of the continent.

As he grew older and embarked on more structured research, Jackson began to get disillusioned with the backwardness, constant wars and general disorder in Africa. He also realized with some shock that the Africans were not in the same frame of mind as their African American brothers and sisters who in fact they preferred to keep at a distance.

Gradually Jackson began to lose interest in Africa as his preoccupation began to center on his career in the army where he was seen and admired as a fast rising star.

Africa had completely faded from his focus of interest when two developments suddenly arose to revive it.

The first development was that he met Professor Johnson at a Howard University Alumnae get together and found himself talking to the learned professor about Africa and his disappointment at the chaotic state of affairs in the continent. He listened, captivated as the professor outlined the underlining reasons for Africa's failure: the unfortunate encounter between the more advanced European culture and the naturally evolving one of the Africans. A classic evolution that was abruptly cut short, as a result of this encounter, by military superiority and slavery.

During the following six months after their meeting Jackson and the professor met several times over drinks to talk about Africa and where the continent seemed to be headed, which essentially was nowhere.

In the meantime another more decisive event occurred when Jackson, after being rigorously screened, was brought into the Genesis project. All through the hushed construction of the ITM he never believed it would actually work until to his amazement it finally did and he found himself undertaking trips back in time to some European cities.

It had been a long drawn out battle to get the pentagon and the other agencies that were involved with the Genesis project to allow Jackson to get Jones on board the highly secretive machine but he ultimately prevailed and made the first few trips along with Jones who, on each of those trips, had to be the third man on board with a duplicate copy of the activation code; in case something happened to his boss and the Chief Security Officer.

It was after one such trip that Jackson lay on his bed in the evening trying to wade through Walter Rodney's 'How Europe

Underdeveloped Africa.’ Unable to concentrate on the book or to sleep he put a call to Professor Johnson and in the course of their lamentations about Africa, Johnson said something that made him sit up with a start, his heart pounding.

“It’s a hopeless case, Jack,” Professor Johnson had said. “Short of immediately undoing the harm that Europe did to Africa, which is impossible, it may take another one or two centuries before Africa can catch up with the other continents, particularly that of Europe and America.”

In a flash, Jackson saw how the harm could be undone through Genesis and hurriedly ended the call. Thus far, the trips of Genesis had been confined to Europe but nothing stopped the machine from going to Africa or anywhere else it was programmed to go to. Jackson decided there and then that he would plan a trip back to Africa and back to the period just before the whites got there. The planning and execution of the trip would be time consuming and highly challenging but Jackson was sure he could overcome the hurdles to undertaking such a bold trip.

The fortuitously expressed despair of Professor Johnson, Jones was told, was the catalytic statement that led to the conception of **“Mission Three-R”** in the mind of Jackson. The conception was bold and simple: *Return, Redeem* and *Recast* Africa’s destiny. What was not simple was how to achieve this objective.

Jackson took almost an hour explaining his amazing story to Jones and then asked the question that was at the back of Jones’s mind.

“Why am I telling you all this? Because I would like to know if you would be interested to go along with me?”

Jones was stunned. He was suddenly faced with a situation he would have considered absolutely improbable only hours ago. General Jackson who he always considered to be one of the most loyalist soldiers in the US army was proposing to commit treason in the most dramatic of manners.

What Jones had heard was just so incredible he did not know what to think or how to respond to the direct question of Jackson. Had he not been involved in the last few trips of the Genesis he would have laughed the whole story off as science fiction. In addition to the difficulties of achieving what Jackson had in mind, the *Mission-Three-R* project was tantamount to a pure act of betrayal which would involve stealing the Genesis and possibly incapacitating or even killing some of the guards of Genesis. He did not see how he could bring himself to join in committing such acts.

“It would always be an honor to be by your side, sir, but right now I need to sort through and be satisfied with the answers to so many questions that raced through my mind as you spoke. One of the most important is what would be done about the white crew members of Genesis?”

“I would be surprised if you didn’t have questions or serious concerns about the mission. I’ve given the matter a great deal of thought and believe I’ve worked out acceptable solutions. One thing for sure, no one’s going to get hurt but yes I’ll welcome going over all your questions once we settle the question of whether or not you would like to join me on the great adventure.”

Jones made to speak but Jackson cut in before he could do so. “You don’t have to decide right now. Why don’t we do it this way? You sleep on it and come back with your list of questions and

worries. We go over them before you make up your mind and let me know your decision. But remember that no matter what you decide, not a word of this discussion should come out of your lips.”

“I’ll definitely keep it all to myself. I’m still in a daze and yes I’ll need some time to think this through and talk some more about it before making a decision, if you don’t mind.”

“Great! Time is of the essence so I’ll expect to hear from you within the next twenty four hours, so I can move ahead at full speed with the planning of this trip which I’m determined to undertake even if I have to do it alone.”

Jones thought about it all night and early the next morning called Jackson to say he was ready with his questions and would like to discuss the mission. Jackson told him to see him at home before heading to the office.

Jones had several questions beginning with the worry about the white crew members but Jackson had satisfactory answers ready.

“Like I told you the last time, none of our colleagues white or black would be hurt by the time we leave. I’ve been working quietly on this for a long time Bruce. Genesis, as you know, is like one massive nuclear powered robot. You simply key in your instructions and go to sleep. It effectively requires no more than two people to get it to where it’s programmed to go, the CCO and the CSO. All the other guys are just hangers on or specialists concerned with the different objectives of the mission.”

“That’s right sir but they’re still required to be on board and most of them are white.”

Jackson gave a mirthless smile. “They’ll be on board if they’re given the opportunity to be but the way I’m planning this they’ll be fast asleep in their homes by the time Genesis takes off. Don’t forget Bruce that I get the travel authorization directly from the President and have to personally see to it that all designated officers are informed and made to get on board. I shall have the authorization to go somewhere with a set of people and will go elsewhere with another set of people. No one will get hurt.”

The subsequent questions of Jones centered on how the mission itself would be carried out in the chosen African country. Would they have enough men, weapons and requisite material to transform the African country into one that could withstand the onslaught of the Europeans of the selected period? Jackson had ready and convincing answers as he outlined his plan for the noble mission.

At the end of almost two hours of discussion Jones had one final question. “Assuming all goes well and we make it safely back to Africa and achieve our objectives, do we then continue our lives in the past or return to the future we departed from?”

“Good question. For now my thinking is that our actions in Africa will engender changes that would make our present future a much better place to be in. But if we stay long enough out there and if we’re a 100 percent successful then we may need visas to get back into the USA because by our efforts slavery would have been avoided and there will be no African-Americans to speak of except for those that would have arrived on their own, just like the pilgrim fathers.”

“No matter what happens, I’ll like, if I do go, to be back to

the US once the job has been successfully completed.”

“Me too,” Jackson responded. “America is home and the best place on planet earth if the stigma of racism can be prevented from occurring.”

“Thanks for inviting me to go along with you, sir. It will be an honor and a great pleasure for me to be by your side.”

Jackson blew out his cheeks. He was clearly relieved and happy. He congratulated Jones on his decision and told him to stop by in the evening to be further briefed on the proposed timing for the trip and what needed to be done before the D-day.

Jones was to find out over the subsequent week that Limbaki had been selected because of its strategic location and the fact that it was the first African country from which the slave trade was launched. He also found out that Jackson and his main collaborators had for over a year been studying the Limbaki language of Limbakiki. He had to immediately begin studying the language himself but he had no difficulties in mastering languages and within months was even more fluent in it than Jackson and the men that he introduced to him as his bosom friends and collaborators on the Genesis trip.

The men were three. Retired Col. Kevin Stone, staff sergeant Ben Givens and Chief Medical Doctor, Derek Mullins. Stone and Givens were black and Mullins white. The two blacks were ex GIs who had served time with Jackson in Vietnam and who like him had developed a passionate interest for Africa and everything African. Dr. Mullins was one of the few civilians that travelled each time with Genesis.

Mullins had grown up in a tough black neighborhood in the Bronx. At the age of twelve, he was on his way back from school when he got picked upon by two black boys that seemed to be high on drugs. Mullins was quick on his feet and fast with his hands but the boys were tough and before long they had Mullins pinned to the ground. It was at that point that Jackson, several years older and much bigger in size, appeared, as if from nowhere, and screamed at the boys to stop. When they ignored him he went after them ferociously until they took to their heels.

A very close relationship running through high school and college developed between the two boys from that point on with Jackson subsequently joining the army and Mullins heading for the medical profession.

The straight forward plan for the achievement of Mission Three R was for Jackson, the three men and Jones to be the vanguard of the roughly 150 man team of black ex vets and civilians that had been clandestinely put together and trained over time, by Jackson, to undertake the mission.

The role of the team would be to build a strong African army in Limbaki, educate the Limbakikies and work with them to get the country well organized and prepared for the arrival of the whites; the ultimate objective being to stop the commencement of the slave trade and in its place engender normal commercial relationship between the Africans and the white visitors. Limbakiki and English would be the official languages of Limbaki.

Jones recalled how concerned he was initially when Jackson had presented him to Mullins and informed him that he would be part of the mission. Jackson had laughed at his concern and assured

him that Mullins was one white who hated the slave trade with uncommon passion and would do anything to have the reality erased through the help of Genesis. He had been handpicked by Jackson to serve as the resident doctor of Genesis.

With the help of Professor Johnson the arrival date of the first set of whites in Limbaki was estimated and five years before the estimated arrival date was selected for the landing of Genesis in Limbaki.

No one was sure of how developed Limbaki would be in the selected period but what the team was certain about was the fact that it would be able to subjugate a poorly trained Limbaki army with Stone Age weapons.

Careful reflection and planning had gone into the decisions on what to carry along on the mission.

Along with large supplies of medication, food and clothing, time and effort was made to put together the main items of a mobile telecommunications system based mainly on fibre and some microwave equipment. The team took along core network radio access and backhaul equipment as well as passive infrastructure consisting mainly of solar powered battery banks, shelters, battery operated air conditioners, generators and external alarm panels. Large quantities of mobile phones, video cameras and musical systems were also taken along.

The achievement of the first of the Mission Three objectives, their arrival off the coast of Limbaki, called for a lot of hard, long and difficult work the most important of which was the gradual assembling, indoctrinating and training of the completely black team of ex GIs and civilians who they had ended up taking on the

trip with Genesis. Doing so in absolute secrecy was very difficult but that was one of Jackson's main strengths.