

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Tokyo, with a massive, fiery nuclear mushroom cloud rising from the horizon in the background. The city is densely packed with buildings, and a prominent skyscraper is visible in the center. The sky is filled with the intense orange and yellow flames of the explosion.

To End all Wars

Ferggus

Chapter 1 – A Distant Galaxy

1 January 2084. We join a meeting of The Lords of all the Galaxies as they discuss the future of mankind:

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

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

Government Inc. is the public face of this organisation, and is allowed the appearance of acting as a free agent. However, and let’s be clear about this also, all Government Inc. divisions are so strongly influenced, both directly and indirectly, by R85 that we can say they are controlled by them. To justify Orwellian controls of the masses, the blocs appear to be in constant conflict, but in reality the blocs, since they are so closely controlled by R85, are effectively one body....

.... In each bloc there is an Internal Security Agency which keeps a blanket record of all communication by all persons up to, but not including, G6. ISA has analysis software to flag any communication that veers outside the proscribed band of opinion, the terms of which were defined some years ago by the Agency itself. They also have a Defence Agency which exists to clamp down on any individual or group whose actions are considered a threat to Government Inc.

The Internal Security Agency are the ears: it listens. The Defence Agency is the guardian: it acts. There were times when the two agencies did not work in concert but that is no longer the case and now function as a coordinated team that serves

R85 well. Please note, and I want to emphasise this point, The Agencies of all blocs ultimately report to R85, not to their respective Governments....

.... Looking at R85 in a little more detail, we see that they comprise a discrete group, numbering of course eighty five, of like thinking men and women from global industry, the military, Old Money, who, by their nature, are driven by a psychopathic need to destroy anyone who raises the smallest challenge to their authority. I'm sure I've no need remind you, but for the members of R85 it is not about the gain of material wealth – they already have it, being the eighty five richest individuals in the world. For R85 the human condition is about one thing, and one thing only: their power, and the perpetuation of that power.

The actions of R85 are derived from perceived short to medium term threats. Not threats to The People, The People are invariably the threat, but challenges to their individual and collective power. One might say society, The People, is R85's natural adversary, and to some extent this explains the hysteria of R85's reaction to any perceived risk to their authority over them.

This is an undeclared war, but in their view they are at war, and as such, war absolves them of all moral responsibility. No actions are inadmissible, and are judged solely by their outcome. If an operation results in a catastrophe in which say two million of their species dies, but the goals of the project have been achieved, then the action is deemed justified, and the operation a success....

.... On Earth there are wise people operating outside the official global power structure. Understanding its true nature, they either attempt to fight it, ridicule it, or expose it. These people, though they have an appearance identical to homo sapiens, are in fact a wholly separate species, which we named Utopians for reasons you are all aware of. All of their efforts have failed to shift the status quo, but they persist, I presume because they have no alternative: being so much more advanced, they cannot help but resist the insanity they see played out before them. Presently, however, R85 wield absolute power over all human beings, in fact all living things on the planet. It is therefore they alone that will determine the future of their civilisation....

.... Now, having observed humans for some considerable time, we can conclude that this species is one of the most primitive in the galaxy, and is in fact one of the most primitive on its own planet. But the problem rises not from this, but that they

exist under the delusion that they are an advanced race. Since humans are so ignorant, and so weak minded that they are unwilling to even contemplate the consequences of their actions, let alone address them, it's quite likely this primitive civilisation will remove the threat it poses simply by destroying itself.

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

Chapter 2 – Ballarat, Australia

Whatever people may say about him, John Fury is my ideal of manhood. He comes from another age, a time of chivalry and honor, of constancy. There are times in history when the world needs men like John Fury and this is without doubt one of them.

John was never one of those psychopaths that joined up for the buzz of killing people, though there's plenty I could name that we've both served with: fortunately, most of them get themselves killed quick enough. Always an idealist, he will volunteer for missions he believes in; the danger never comes into the calculation. More instinctively, he joined up to preserve a status quo which he didn't fully understand but gave him a sense of solidity and continuity.

His father, an agricultural manager, instilled in him from an early age many of the traditions which connected him with his ancestors, and their nation's, Australia's, short colonial history. It gave John his sense of place in the world. Consequently he never experienced the shifting sands that upset the shallow foundations of so many of his friends and contemporaries, as they failed to piece together a framework that would render their lives anything more than meaningless. Purpose is never something he's had to strive for.

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

In his childhood his father banned him from fighting, whatever the provocation: he was to walk away and step the high moral path. Fortunately, Fury was a natural fighter and could easily protect himself without actively retaliating, but one boy,

Silas, vindictive and persistent, learned of his father's unshakeable rule and decided to test Fury's loyalty and conviction.

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

It's early morning and Fury and Marie are engrossed in conversation. Suddenly Silas appears, alone, with a pail of liquid which he throws over Fury. What at first glance appears to be nothing more than water turns out in fact to be horse piss. It mostly lands on Fury but Marie is also splashed. She screams in fury at Silas and chases after him down the dead end alley, calling on Fury to join her. But he can't move, after all, his father has told him never to retaliate, however great the provocation. He wants to kill Silas for what he's done to Marie, but his father's strict instructions hold him back.

When she sees Fury won't help her, Marie gives up the chase and runs into the school grounds, as she passes him hissing words in his ear Fury would still remember years later. Fury does his best to dry his clothes and some of his friends lend him some spares they have in their lockers, but he still reeks and a few of his class mates started mocking him. He might have put up with this: after all, he knows they have short memories, and he'd have probably joined in if it had happened to someone else, but when Marie stops him at their first recess and accuses him of being a coward he sees red.

Silas is over by the swings, a crowd around him, bragging about what he'd done, when Fury discovers his whereabouts. Marie walks over to the group and joins in the laughter. His father's words still pounding in his ears, Fury pushes through the large crowd of kids enjoying their morning break, and launches himself at Silas. Until then no-one had seen Fury fight in earnest, so he'd always been considered a little soft. As the fists rain down relentlessly on Silas' head, and kicks batter his plump body, the bully tries to escape, but the crowd won't let him through. This is, after all, the best fight they've seen in ages: in the end Silas, unable to defend himself against the frenzied attack, lies face down on the ground, wailing like a girl. Even as his strength wanes, the rage won't dissipate, and in a kind of trance Fury

continues to give vent his anger, punching and kicking Silas almost senseless: the years of pent up emotions, and wounded pride, spill out. It takes one of the teachers to pull Fury off; by then recess is well over and the crowd has long since dispersed.

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

The boy is silent, head bowed, only nodding occasionally at a familiar piece of advice from his father, who continues, "My son, I am determined you will not be like them. One day it will be your duty to stand strong, and protect those weaker than you. When that happens you must know what is right and know the consequences of wrongdoing."

The man gets slowly to his feet, taking up a heavy whip as he does so, and indicates for Fury to bend over the front of his desk. His father then slowly walks around it, his feet heavy, and positions himself behind the boy, with arm raised. The boy closes his eyes and clenches his teeth as the whip cracks before lashing across the back of his legs: a second later he feels a searing pain there. But then it seems to fill his entire body, pulsing in waves again and again, their rhythm quite independent of the cut of the whip that tears at the flesh from his calves all the way up his back.

His father, Fury's hero, relentlessly beats the boy, hoping to somehow inject the strength of character he believes the boy lacks, and the will to live an honourable life: a life of which he, his father, would be proud. The boy steels himself again and again to receive the man's blows as the blood begins to trickle down the back of his legs, soaking into the grey socks around his ankles. In fact, after a minute of this,

he no longer feels the cut of the whip; his backside and legs are numb. He allows his mind to wander, to the outside, The Bush, alive with animals and the stunning colors and smells from the trees and plants, where he feels most at peace. Still drifting he begins to wonder not when but what might cause the man to stop beating him. When he looks over his shoulder he no longer sees his father: the man appears in a trance, demons dancing before his eyes.

Fury turns away, now more afraid of his own feelings than the beating itself. Suddenly, through a haze of pain and wild emotion he hears his mother's voice commanding his father to stop, and then he finds himself roughly pulled into the soft folds of her dress. He keeps his eyes tight shut, as his mind reels, frozen in shock, while his body remains tense, expectant of another blow. He hears them arguing but takes no notice of what they're saying, then he feels his father's hand on his shoulder. It is shaking, and Fury fears the beating is about to resume.

His father's deep voice booms out, "Come here, boy". Fury opens his eyes and looks at his father, who is now seated on a chair by the window, still breathing hard from the exertion of beating his son. "Sit down, here, John." The man indicates to his son to sit on the chair beside him, then commands his wife, "Leave us alone woman." After his mother leaves, and Fury has limped over and sat himself gingerly on the chair, Fury's father, eyes full of sadness, rests a heavy hand on Fury's arm. "Son, I was wrong. There are times when it is justified to defend yourself, but you must never attack a boy as you did today. If a boy attacks you again, then you are to tell me. Walk away, come home, tell me. Understand?"

The boy nods, still unsure where this is leading. "If I think it is appropriate I will give you permission to retaliate. You may only attack if I give you an order, is that clear?" Fury nods again. Until that day Fury had unthinkingly followed his father's instructions, and accepted his wisdom. Now he feels a distance between them, one that enables him to consider objectively what the man is saying to him. He no longer thinks of him as his father, in the sense of being infallible, and perfect. Didn't, in his own words, his father say he'd been wrong? Years later, it would be for this admission that he would be most proud of his father. As an adult himself, and understanding his father better, it wasn't hard to imagine how difficult it must have been for the man to admit his wrongdoing. At the time, however, he saw it as a weakness, and his loyalty shifted unconsciously to his mother.

Chapter 3 – Sydney, Australia

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

A familiar figure, peculiarly devoid of emotion, accompanied by her trademark northern drawl the spin doctors like to label "folksy", fills this and other screens in homes across the region, though how many are watching out of choice is impossible to tell, since all media channels have been instructed to broadcast the speech.

Known by many but revered by few, President Lisa Bart is the longest serving CEO of Government Inc. (Australia) in that nation's history. "My fellow citizens, I have to report that Internal Security has advised us of a heightened threat and, therefore, counter terrorism measures must once again be enforced. Friends, we must never forget, the threat is ever present and will continue as long as evil men want to remove our freedom. And so, unfortunately, Internal Security has advised that 6pm curfews will be in force from today and full in home surveillance will be in operation until the danger level has been reduced. Of course, none of us in Government want these measures, but if we are to defeat evil and bring freedom to the world we must all be prepared to make sacrifices. Think TEAM, think Team Australia. Fighting the enemy as one we can defeat them, because God is at our side." She pauses for a moment, allowing a slightly imbecilic smile to spread across her face. "Because we, my fellow countrymen, we are the good guys and the good guys always win!"

Bart pauses, allowing muted applause in the audience to subside before continuing in, what she takes to be, a more statesmanlike tone, "The Axis of Evil has raised its head again: a considerable number of Australians are known to have travelled to Africa during the course of fighting over the last twelve months and Intelligence has discovered that a large, radicalized group are planning to return to

Australia shortly. It is of course the duty of any responsible government to respond appropriately to any threat posed to its people and so, in addition to the security measures already mentioned, a budget of \$1 Billion has been allocated to deal with the threats their return poses." A journalist in the audience can be heard asking how many terrorists are expected to return. Bart hesitates then looks pointedly at a grey suited individual standing on her left, who shakes his head imperceptibly. Bart turns slowly back to the audience and opens her mouth as if to speak: you can almost see her mind working.

A toss of the trademark blonde locks indicates a decision has been made in rare defiance of her minders, "I think it's important to provide the facts wherever possible, transparency in government is after all a watchword for this administration. And, as a leader, it's important to make these judgement calls from time to time." Bart pauses, takes a deep breath and gathers herself, "Please do not be alarmed my fellow citizens, but initial intelligence suggests at least ten terrorists are expected to return from Africa in the next few weeks, and over the next four years the number is expected to rise to at least twenty five." Pausing again she looks around the room, this time with an expectant expression. Fury picks up the nearest empty can and throws it in the direction of the screen, whilst his friend Wilce, more the worse for wear, falls off his chair and rolls around the floor in a fit of hysterics, tears of laughter pouring down his face.

The three men are regulars at the bar, and their backgrounds are also well known, so it's with unusual deference that a group of wide, uniformly attired in black and bling, bouncers, ask the trio to leave. As they step out into the glaring mid morning sun, Hughie is the first to speak, "Why the fuck is that woman still our Boss? She's a dumbfuck, and as a leader, name me one character trait of a good leader she possesses." He doesn't wait for an answer, "Don't bother mate, she's got zero percent of all of them. How do you explain it then, mate?"

Although the streets are quiet, and there's no one within immediate earshot, Colonel Fury puts a hand on Hughie's arm, laughing a little, but also wary of someone overhearing him. "Mate, keep your voice down but, yeah, there's a lot of people asking that question too. The confusion is understandable, I guess you're not aware of the politics, why would you need to be? If you know that, well, then it all makes sense, mate." Hughie nods, "No, mate, I've never heard anything about that, but it sounds like I should have. Go on."

Fury replies, "Another time, mate, I'm that pissed I wouldn't be making any sense. But, short version: she's not the boss, there's minders that play on her

weaknesses and very effectively control what she says and does. She's a puppet, mate, but a dangerous one. But don't get me started, mate." John Fury is a man easily roused to anger when it concerns the reputation of the Australian Army, and particularly if it relates to the Special Forces regiments, ASAS.

Hugh Ferris, a sergeant in the same regiment as Fury, responds drily, "Mate, I'll need to work through that but, mate, she looks like she'd be a lot more use on her back." ASAS Sergeant Pete Wilce nearly chokes on his stubbie, still unable to get used to Hughie's unexpected humor. Unexpected because Pete Wilce, unlike John Fury, has never been able to see warRODs, of which Hughie is one, as anything other than a robot, a machine. "Mate, where did you get that one from, off the comedy channel?"

Hughie gives Wilce a blank stare, a retort ready on his tongue, but he decides against saying anything, not wanting to set off another confrontation between the two of them. "Mate, these are all originals but, yeah, when I hang up my holster, mate, I'll be going on the stage. From what I've experienced, mate, I've got enough material to last me ten years, and most of it is your fuck ups, mate."

Wilce grimaces, the anger flaring in his eyes. Turning to Fury, his voice tight, he says, "Mate, I might be pissed, but for the fucking life of me, even though I want to, and I can see you have no problem with it, mate, I can't get my head around having a relationship with a fucking robot." Pete Wilce has had this conversation a number of times with his commanding officer.

Fury nods blankly, "Mate, when it comes to soldiering, there's no difference to one between two human soldiers. You know I'm not going to tell you what to do, because it's not going to make any difference to how you'd feel, but I'll tell you how it is for me, so you can understand why I value Hughie just as much, in the context of war mate, as highly as you and any other human soldier." Fury pauses for a second, observing Wilce's reaction, before continuing, "Mate, we've known each other a very long time, close to a hundred and fifty years now, and I can categorically say I know you better than any other man alive today." He doesn't say it outright, because he'd be too embarrassed to, but he loves Pete Wilce like a brother, for who he is as a man, but also because, without care for themselves, each of them has saved the other's life so many times both have lost count. "But despite that, there's still a part of me that is uncertain how you will react to something, like just then when I said I value Hughie as much as you in a battle situation, in fact any situation to be honest. You see it's the uncertainty, which I'm just as guilty of, because of how much our behavior will be influenced by our

emotions, instead of purely on the dictation of logic, which is how Hughie responds. In fact because of that, as a soldier, it puts you a step below him.”

Wilce shakes his head, “Mate, who can argue with that, I’ve got no problem with it. But what about going beyond what logic tells you to do, which can often be the only difference between one man beating another? Who will risk the most, everything, and with the least hesitation, and it’s that which determines who’s the winner, and who gets killed. You can’t have all the data on the enemy: there’s an element, a huge element mate, of unknown. How strong their position is, their individual capability, and their willingness to risk it. Would a ROD just go for it?”

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

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

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

Back in the bar, President Bart continues her prepared speech. Her tone remains flat and she appears over rehearsed, though from time to time her eyes dart nervously towards the man standing immediately to her right. "Fellow

Australians, there are times when as leader I am forced to make unpopular decisions, and this is one of them. But as you know, I will not pander to short term opinion polls. I will always do my duty as President and do what I believe is right, what The Bible tells us is right. We do not want to spy on our own citizens, but as long as there is a threat to the law abiding majority, from a small minority of radical extremists, we must do all we can to protect our children and our homes. I know these measures are unpopular in some quarters, but we all know, if you have done nothing wrong then you have nothing to fear." It would seem a fiction that such a person could be placed in a position of supreme power but History has many examples to prove its true extent: of leaders, innocent fools with good intent, thrust into roles for which they are dangerously unsuited, by wealthy and powerful individuals with only self interest their motivation.

Chapter 4 – Djibouti, Africa

05h00. January 1st 2117. A full tank brigade is advancing on them. Colonel Ben Silver was unaware, as were his tank commanders, that the army of Bin Islam, the last remaining warlord in the region still at large, possessed any mechanised capability at all. In fact, he does not, but overnight, without any direct communication with Islam, the collective forces of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, assembled their respective tank battalions under the leadership of Ethiopia's inspirational young leader, Arafat. As has been recognized on numerous occasions, with him in command, as the attack begins, it is as if the disparate forces of the warlords have always been one: as they gallop towards the Israelis, there is not the slightest indication that the three armies had only very recently being doing their best to pound each other into oblivion.

Arafat's tanks sweep across an empty plain, bearing down on what had once been the bustling city port of Djibouti, and capital of the region bearing the same name. It is a city which no longer exists, because General Jakob, commander of Israel's Eastern Army in Africa, had over the previous weeks razed it with a clinical campaign of carpet bombing, killing every one of its inhabitants that had been unable to escape. Though the number was never counted, because Jakob didn't care, and nor it seemed did anyone else, the number killed actually amounted to well over a million innocents, mostly women, children, the old and infirm. Jakob had never contemplated a ground attack, for it was all too easy to predict the carnage that would have ensued had an advance been attempted through the maze of narrow, high walled streets that used to comprise the old city, made only more hazardous by the clutter and debris of a teeming human existence.

The first raid started without warning, catching all the residents of the city completely off guard: the massacre that ensued left hundreds of thousands of civilians dead, strewn over the streets, in public buildings or in their homes. After that first, devastating raid, however, a large portion of the population was, on Jakob's direct orders, deliberately allowed to escape, a policy which was repeated again and again across the continent. Why? Because these terrified refugees would spread, to all corners of the continent, and in ever embellished form, the stories of horror that the Israeli troops had inflicted upon the defenceless civilian population immediately following an attack.

Following Arafat's orders to the letter, in perfect formation the rebel tank brigade executes the most complex manoeuvres and, even to the trained eye of Colonel Ben Silver, each enemy tank commander seems to possess an uncanny ability to understand instinctively what the other is doing. The attack is, in fact, bad timing for the Israelis: the port, the only infrastructure left standing, has only just been captured and no effective defences have been erected, partially because there was no expectation of a force of any size capable of attacking them.

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

As Arafat's tanks storm up towards the mountain summit, the natural terrain, enhanced by the work of engineers, forces a number of tanks into dead end funnels where artillery proceed to pummel them into oblivion. The remainder run the gauntlet of the well positioned light artillery. Over a third of the leading wave of African tanks are destroyed in the dead end gulleys and anti tank pits. "Leave tag markers for the next squadron, then they can switch to auto to avoid the traps and dead ends, and that way they'll get a clean run over the ridge." Arafat commands the remaining tank captains. Always leading from the front, he has been fortunate to make it through, and the deaths of some of his closest friends, and several of his own siblings, is in some way compensated by the view that greets him as he mounts the last ridge. In the near distance the sea is a shimmering blue, the sun dancing on waves, and a fleet of traditional fishing boats is just disappearing the horizon: an identical picture recreated countless times over the previous millennia. Beneath him, approximately five kilometres distant, is a sight no African has seen, or ever should have to see: a sprawling military complex, in the centre of which a command centre bristles with satellite dishes and radio antenna, over all of which flutters a blue flag with the Star of David emblazoned across it.

On the perimeter of this makeshift camp lies a series of hastily constructed defences, behind which, barrels all pointing in the direction of the approaching

enemy, is an array of heavy artillery. And behind that, in neatly formed columns, wait a brigade of tanks in readiness for battle with Arafat. Arafat looks over his shoulder. Behind him, spread across the narrow summit are the remnants of the first squadron. On the ridge the rebel infantry are engaged with the Israelis in intense hand to hand fighting, attempting to disable or take over the artillery which, if they're successful, would be well placed to launch a bombardment onto the Israeli camp below. The second squadron has been ordered to provide assistance in capturing this weaponry, both to avoid attack on the first wave from the rear, and to establish their own artillery capability. "Spread out and put your foots down!" shouts Arafat into the headset clamped to his ears. An identical prayer to Allah and exhortation to all they believe in is repeated by each tank commander; it is as much a part of the preparation for battle as the mechanical and weaponry checks. For with god on their side, how can they fail? Perhaps surprisingly, it never occurs to one of them, at this or any other stage of the conflict, to claim foul play of the Israelis for all the atrocities they've committed against their people, or to seek the moral high ground. These warriors have never sought it, never valued it.

A wave of battered tanks career down the shallow slope, reaching speeds the manufacturers, not even in their wildest dreams, would have claimed. Shells from the Israeli base start to fall, but with the wide spread and breakneck speed of the front, it's rare that any strike their mark, though some do, causing the unfortunate occupants to vaporise instantly as the tank explodes in a ball of flame and pyrotechnic of cannon and bullet. By the time the African tanks reach the wide flat plain, now barely three kilometres from the Israeli defences, Arafat feels a surge of confidence, as he counts the number of tanks to be almost exactly what he'd predicted would make it through.

Over the radio Arafat hears, amidst the roar of machines and explosives, and the screams of the maimed and dying, that the second wave of tanks and infantry support has almost reached the summit, and with far fewer casualties than the first squadron. Almost three quarters have made it through, and some of the heavy artillery has been captured and so, with any luck, the Israeli tanks could soon be getting a taste of their own arsenal.

Just at that moment Arafat sees movement ahead, the surge forward of the first line of Israeli tanks, in tight formation at first, confined as they are by their defensive lines, but then they quickly fan out as they emerge onto the plain, and in so doing form their own wave of destructive power. "Aim the artillery at their gates, try to get as many of their tanks while they're still boxed in." The artillery

commander acknowledges the order and almost immediately Arafat hears, and then sees, the results of his command. A satisfying thud, followed by an explosion in the very centre of the narrow channel through which the Israeli tanks are emerging on to the field of battle. For a few minutes there's chaos as the other tanks try to force their way around their stricken comrades, before the engineers manage to rope up and drag the crippled tanks out of the way, thus adding some much needed weight to the defensive line.

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

Arafat knows, from intelligence gained the previous night, that the Israeli's had only just started digging tank traps, and that whilst a few of his tanks might be caught, the majority of them would be able to drive through, or even straight over the heavy artillery divisions inside the camp. Before ordering the launch of the smoke grenades, Arafat had counted fifteen units of heavy artillery still operational at the camp, and had instructed his own cannons on the hill to concentrate their shelling on these sites. No more than a kilometer themselves from the Israeli camp now, and still protected by smoke screen, Arafat orders the first squadron to halt and form makeshift artillery batteries, thus directing even more firepower against

the Israeli defensive line, whilst waiting for the second brigade to join them for a final assault on the Israeli base. Shells rain down on the Israeli infantry brigades, who are still confined inside the Israeli base, creating devastation amongst the troops: trapped and unable to see their enemy the Israeli position looks hopeless.

Colonel Silver is standing atop his tank, in the centre of the defensive barrier around the Command Post created by the Israeli tank brigade. He's overlooking a sea of blackened, tired faces, whilst calling for volunteers for a reconnaissance infantry squad to get a location on the enemy tank positions. It is a suicide mission, but willing hands are raised, and an infantry captain is picking out the men to accompany him to death. But, just at the moment when the men have said their goodbyes, formed up, and are about to march into the hail of rebel cannon and machine gun fire, a light breeze starts up. This sea wind comes every morning, barely noticed, at just this time, but on this occasion it saves the lives of fourteen Israeli soldiers, for it blows a gap in the smoke screen thrown up by Arafat, giving Silver and the Artillery Commandant just enough time to get a bearing on the enemy tank squad, rendering the need for the suicide mission obsolete.

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

In fact, Ben Silver is up against only half of Arafat's forces. The rebel tank battalion had been split in two and earlier that day a similar assault had taken place at Djibouti's other port, Obock, where a smaller Israeli force had also established a military base. The long term plan had been to construct the main port at Obock as it has a deeper harbour and already boasts a natural breakwater extending a kilometre into the sea. There are no natural defences, and construction of tank traps had been scheduled for some time in the middle of the following month. With

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

A lull settles over the battle for a moment. At the sight of the newly arrived Israeli mechanized brigade, which almost doubles their total strength, a ripple of uncertainty flows through the officers and men of the combined rebel forces. Arafat, quick to spot the wavering of his troops, reacts by jumping onto the turret of his tank and, through a loud speaker, exhorts his troops, "Men, they may now have the weapons to match us, but they do not have our hearts. They are cowards that rape and kill our women and children, but against men you only see them run like frightened dogs." Whilst sporadic machine gun fire can still be heard, the relative quiet allows Arafat to be easily heard by his troops. He roars, "But this time they have nowhere to run, and we can serve revenge for all their atrocities by killing every one of them. Not one must be allowed to escape. Not One! You may not have this chance again, because this time they must stand and fight! We will see them for what they are, and we will spare none of them, for they showed no mercy to our children, to our women. Death to the infidel!" The roar is taken up by Arafat's men as they renew the attack on the Israeli base.

As the advance gathers pace, Arafat maneuvers his tank to the rear of his armour, in order to adjust plans for the final stages of the assault. So far Arafat's strategy has proved successful, and the Israelis have responded as expected almost to the letter, however the early arrival of the armour battalion from Obock has required adjustment to his plans. After brief discussion Arafat returns to lead his army and, as The Israeli forces, determined to prevent the African advance, once again emerging from behind its defences, the battle takes on a new level of ferocity. The sense of finality, of everything being at stake, hangs over the Israeli camp.

Two hundred kilometres to the North, on Israel's border with Egypt, a fast jet squadron is going through preflight checks for an operation to provide relief to Israel's small occupation force at Djibouti. Almost equidistant, but from the North West, a rebel fighter squadron is going through an identical procedure. Twenty five

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

For an hour the air battle rages, neither side able to assert their superiority. However, always struggling to match the better trained and better equipped Israeli pilots, the African pilots are gradually worn down, and with the slightest mistake or a moment's loss of concentration they pay with their lives.

On the ground, however, the battle is more finely poised. The hills overlooking the Israeli camp are now all held by the rebel artillery, so African and captured Israeli heavy cannon are effectively pinning down any forces still inside the camp, as well as inflicting heavy casualties to the front of the Israeli line.

Still smarting from their crushing defeat, the tank commanders of the Israeli Brigade from Obock are desperate to restore their Battalion's pride, but luck is on the side of the African troops, so time and again they get off a shell a split second ahead of their adversary, or the Israeli round that does hit only causes peripheral damage. Arafat senses victory and orders his tank commanders to make a final, concerted push, exhorting them not to allow anything to stop them breaking through the Israeli tank line. But suddenly, and completely unexpectedly, the Israeli tanks, following an order from their Brigade Commander, retreat rapidly but in orderly file back into the Israeli camp, a smoke screen providing effective cover which minimises casualties for both infantry and tank brigades.

Arafat orders a briefing with his senior military advisers to discuss their options. He tells them, "Our air force is almost completely destroyed so we can expect their planes to turn their attention our way shortly. Set up half the anti aircraft brigade here and get the troops we're leaving here working on trenches. Men, we go forward now into death or victory. If, in the next hour we can take the Israeli camp, we will be able to defend ourselves from ground and air attack until reinforcements arrive. If not we will be an easy target and we shall depart this life before the day is out."

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

dive underneath his tank as huge lumps of metal slam into it from both sides. As the attackers gain distance, heading far out to sea, the anti aircraft battery launches guided missiles, catching one of the jets as it starts to circle around for a second attack. No more than a hundred metres above the ocean, the pilot has no chance to eject, and the aircraft cartwheels in a ball of flame across the shimmering water like skipping stones, before disappearing below the surface.

"Keep going, forward. Don't stop!" Now only a few hundred metres from the Israeli camp, and still leading from the front, Arafat urges his men on, knowing the closer they get to it the probability of death increases exponentially. "Drive straight through their defences. They do not exist! Men, before you lies an empty road, and beyond there is the beach where you will play with your children next festival. Brothers how close we are to victory. Seize the day. Victory that is ours!" Arafat knows their chances of ultimate success are negligible: even if they do win this battle the Israelis will simply come back at them with even more fire power, and this time, once victorious, they'll ensure their defences are impregnable. But, looking into the sky, his heart swells with pride: the few remaining rebel planes, completely outnumbered, continue to harass and pursue, or when damaged beyond repair simply fly into any jets lining up to make a bombing run against the ground troops.

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

the screen viewer, he can now separate into individual beings. Heads, waving arms, two of them frantically reloading the missile launcher.

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

While the heat seeker missiles make every attack on the artillery an almost suicidal mission, the Israeli jets have also been targeting, with considerable success, the advancing line of rebel tanks, which has the effect of severely slowing their progress on the Israeli base and creating gaps in their once solid line. But now the battlefield has reached the large gates, of thick, shell proof metal, and supported by heavily reinforced concrete columns. But, to the Israeli commander observing the rebel advance, it's as if the enemy tanks are blind to them, and as if the obstruction doesn't exist.

The driver of the lead tank, commanded by Arafat's youngest brother, has his foot pressed hard to the floor. With the whole tank shaking and the engine roaring, thirty tonnes of metal crashes into a section of the two metre solid concrete wall which forms the landward perimeter of the Israeli base. Whilst some of the more modern, lightweight tanks might have crumpled, there's barely a break in the tank's

progress, like knife through butter. The lead tank trundles over the broken and twisted gate, then surges forward; at the same time the turret swivels as the gunner lines up the cannon on the cluster of makeshift huts that form the Israeli Command Post. The gunner has his thumb on the trigger, about to fire when, thirty metres inside the Israeli camp it comes to an abrupt halt, tipping forward on its nose into a heavily camouflaged tank trap. Arafat had been misinformed about the Israeli defences: Jakob, warned of the rebel plans, had ordered, under cover of darkness and in strict secrecy on pain of death, the construction of two lines of tank traps, just inside the camp perimeter line and extending the entire landward side of the base. To hide their presence, lightweight accommodation blocks had been dropped over them.

Unable to stop, the rest of the front line of tanks suffered a similar fate to Arafat's brother. Even those that do manage to track over their comrade's tanks, using them as a bridge over the trap, they simply become bogged in the next trap, and are then perfectly set up as target practice for the waiting Israeli tanks and light artillery which have taken up defensive positions around the inner core of the military base, within which the camp command and the remaining infantry battalions had been awaiting their fate.

As the rebel tank assault falters the rebel infantry take over the advance, but the battle is already over. The rebel air force has been annihilated, the hill top artillery razed by Israeli jets and now, with the destruction of the tank brigades, the infantry are largely defenceless against a superior Israeli force. With Arafat being forced to leave the battlefield to direct another operation, the acting commander of the African Forces, still outside the Israeli camp, orders the African troops to retreat, but the battalion leaders, to a man, refuse. When he re-issues the order, one of the tank captains draws a gun from her holster, puts the gun to his face and pulls the trigger.

Each battalion commander then joins their men, leading them in a suicidal assault on the Israeli base. To a man they are slaughtered, dismembered, and many will have their heads skewered on pikes which are planted prominently outside the perimeter wall of the Israeli camp as a warning of what will happen to any forces that dares to take on Jakob's Eastern Army.

Arafat, in safety several hundred kilometres away, having been picked up by helicopter and flown under smoke cover from the battle front, receives the report of the last stages of the battle, and the ensuing slaughter. He vows revenge for

every one of those brave men and women, from the glamorous fighter pilots who exits the stage in a fiery blaze of glory, to the lowest foot soldier, their body trodden into the soil, unrecognisable, uncountable, forgotten. And says a prayer for the soul of his youngest brother, whom he had once doubted, but had surprised him with his courage. Arafat reflects that when we are Called, irrespective of how we might have behaved in normal life, most of us have no idea how we will respond at the moment of our true testing: as cowards or heroes? He has no doubt now of his young brother's colour, and his heart swells with pride, and fills with love for the rest of his siblings who in their different ways, have followed him into battle. Taken up the fight to drive this barbarous, inhuman infidel from their land.

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

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

After a few minutes of violent love making the leader of Israel's Expeditionary force, breathing heavily from the exertion, collapses onto a large sofa upholstered in the softest leather, and then indicates for the young man to join him. Whilst stroking Ibrahim's hand Jakob reflects that whilst the day's victory, the leveling of Djibouti's capital city, might be small it represents a crucial step towards the ultimate goal. Occasionally he'll make a point more forcefully by stabbing a finger into the young man's chest. Djibouti, the country, might be nothing more than a bridgehead, after all what more could one call an area of little more than six hundred square kilometres on one of the largest and most violent continents on the planet? But, after six months of bloody conflict, which has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Israeli soldiers, alongside nearly fifty thousand native troops, The Forth and Fifth Divisions of The Afrika Corp have successfully removed all

evidence of the original occupants of the entire country: not a single human or material relic remains. And, in the process, he has drawn into battle, and subsequently destroyed, a large portion of the armies claiming fidelity to the warlords that have for generations claimed control of the entirety of North East Africa.

Jakob continues to stroke Ibrahim's hand, almost unconsciously now, while explaining, "I would be a fool to underestimate the threat from our enemy, however disorganized they may appear, but the greater enemy until this moment has been from my own political and military masters." The young man nods sagely, having overheard enough phone calls to know who and what his lover is referring to. On such occasions he would be subjected to the savage out take of Jakob's fury, an assault on his body which would leave him battered, bruised and with a sense of having been used, all of which he finds perverse pleasure in.

Jakob, however, reserves his greatest frustration for his ultimate boss, Defence Secretary Dayan, whom he considers to possess the foresight of a nine year old child, and has a suspicion, since Jakob is prone to conspiracy theories, that the man has never wanted Jakob to lead Israeli's invasion of Africa and, despite all assurances to the contrary, had in fact been pushing for someone else to lead the conquest of Africa. "At least now we should get some peace from that quarter for a while. Even those fools should be able to see now that flashy military escapades are not going to create a landscape in which we can safely establish settler communities that are going to last, or that don't require such expense on defences that they will eventually become unsustainable."

It had always been his intention, once he had been handed the command of The Afrika Corps, a position he had coveted from the day President Moses proclaimed the occupation of Africa as a divine right of the Jewish people, that the campaign should pursue a long term political agenda rather than chase short term military glory. So it was that, with ruthless determination, even when all military textbooks might point toward a particular action, if it did not fit with this strategy he would resist all and every demand from his chiefs of staff. With them he was forced to bite his tongue somewhat, but when one young upstart of a staffer had the temerity to question this strategy the young captain, after a severe dressing down in front of the rest of the officers, was transferred to the command of an infantry company in Liberia. Here, within only days of his arrival, he apparently suffered a gruesome death at the hands of a warlord notorious for cannibalism.

Jakob took delight in reporting to his other staff officers, "Let that be a warning and a lesson to you. Opinionated fools sitting in an aircon office in Tel Aviv reading outdated books on military strategy does not win wars here. A new strategy is called for, because we are not fighting human beings, people that respect the Geneva Convention. No, we are fighting with animals, and the only way to win that kind of fight is to exterminate them, every single one of them."

Reclining on the sofa in his comfortable office, Jakob lets out a deep sigh, at the same time patting Ibrahim in a fatherly manner on the thigh, whilst wondering how much longer he will need to waste precious energy stifling resistance from these elements. Thinking aloud he says, "At least I can now hope the opposition will be a little more circumspect next time they contemplate launching an operation without my approval. But if they're stupid enough to rely on the backing of a pen pusher in Tel Aviv, I suppose anything's possible. There's reasons some people get promoted." The unauthorised offensive Jakob is referring to took place a month earlier, and was an ill conceived operation from the start: a lightning raid on the nearby Eritrean city of Assab, lead by one of Jakob's former adversaries in Israeli High Command, General Avi Renard. Just because the pen pusher supporting Renard happened to be a three star general, and a current favorite with Moses, any of the other Generals of The IIF contemplating rebellion would now know such distant support would not help them should, as happened to Renard, they get twelve thousand Israeli troops stuck far behind enemy lines and facing an enemy eager to realise the opportunity to inflict severe casualties on them.

Jakob chuckles to himself as he recalls the pleading in Renard's voice down the crackling line as he begged for air and ground support to save the lives of his men. The shelling by the Israeli Navy stationed sufficiently distant from the coast to be out of range of the rebel's occasional rocket attacks provided artillery support, but this, in fact, did nothing more than slow the steady progress of the African Army. Arafat's divisions, well disciplined on this occasion, steadily force the Israelis back on to the beaches, where there is no escape. After so much inhuman brutality having been inflicted on their innocent women and children, the rebel troops succumb to a frenzy, in which all discipline and order are abandoned. The sand turns red, a thick sludge, and the sea is completely covered, to a distance several hundred metres offshore, with the floating remains, hacked off limbs, heads and torsos, of the massacred Israelis. Not a single prisoner is taken. The invaders somehow managed to survive for twenty four hours, but by the end of it the

annihilation of over twelve thousand Israeli troops is complete. Not a single Israeli soldier escaped with his life.

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

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

In Israel things did not go quite as smoothly for Jakob. It was noted by some of his senior officers that if such an assault had taken place the previous day twelve thousand Israelis would still be alive, but Jakob doggedly claimed it had been impossible to release his troops any earlier. Among the officers of The Israeli Invasion Force, rumours spread quickly of his refusal to help the trapped forces, but anyone guilty of this quickly found themselves the attention of the notoriously heavy handed military police. Whilst not defeated, Jakob's enemies within the Israeli military from then on were far more cautious and thorough with their plans to unseat him. They had underestimated Jakob, mistaking his painstaking methods for military incompetence, and paid dearly as a consequence, as all his enemies would who misunderstood his ambitions, which went far beyond what they imagined of him.

Having thus unequivocally established himself as Supreme Commander of Israel's Eastern Army, Jakob returned to his previous operation, which was the consolidation of the bridgehead at Djibouti, by construction of massive defensive facilities and the significant expansion of not one but two deep water ports, at Obock and Djibouti City, capable of docking even the largest of Israel's aircraft

carriers. This was followed up by the development of infrastructure and defensive facilities along the entire perimeter of the kingdom.

April 2117. With the bridgehead secured, Jakob begins the war he'd always intended to wage, which commences with the terrorization of the remaining natives in the region of North East Africa, who then either flee to neighbouring areas, or suffer atrocities for which the Israeli troops are to quickly become notorious: decapitation, with the prominent display of heads at market places and other places of public gathering, the rape, sexual disfigurement and murder of men and women alike, and the destruction of all property, down to the smallest farming implement. In Djibouti, as elsewhere, it is Jakob's intent that a significant portion of the population should escape these atrocities, in order to spread the word of what any civilian population would face should they be fool hardy enough to resist.

In May of the same year, 2117, with the rainy season now upon them, the transformation of Djibouti into one vast military camp is virtually completed. At the same time Marshall Jakob begins secret negotiations with hard line right wing groups in Israel. His personal ambition, almost unlimited, lies beyond the capture a few tens of thousands of square kilometres of uninhabitable bushland and desert, but only once his supremacy is established will he make his real intentions public.

Chapter 5 – Libya, West Africa

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

One should in fact, be particularly revolted by the inhuman behavior of Goldberg's troops. Why? Are they not merely mirroring the actions of Jakob's soldiers? But that is the point. Though it is in no way a justification for the atrocities committed in his name, there is at least a reason for their brutality, as part of Jakob's plan to force the population to leave their land in order to repopulate it with Jewish settlers. But Goldberg has no such strategy, and thus his soldiers' actions are nothing more than an inhuman bloodlust, fed by an attitude that the African people are animals, themselves a subhuman species not deserving the consideration humans normally accord one another. Let us be in no doubt, it is in fact the Israelis, as demonstrated by their actions, that are the subhuman species. In fact, one should ask oneself: for the sake of peace, how can the world contain the effects of their most primitive traits, which may be summarized as racist, dishonest and completely self centred to the exclusion of all other people? It is racism in its most primitive form: a frightening ignorance and awful heartlessness that Jewish Israelis have long been known for. They claim to be a race chosen by God, but the nature of their national character gives no clue to why God would select them above the rest of us, except as an example of how misguided humans, by their ignorance, can become.

Now, ignoring Jakob's more painstaking strategy, Goldberg follows a more classical military plan, with the aim of advancing as rapidly as possible, and with a focus on capturing key strategic sites, the latest of which include the largest cities in Libya, Tripoli and Benghazi. Having once achieved this, his next move is to establish a military port at Algiers, the purpose of this being to secure a second supply line by sea, in addition to the coastal land link through to Egypt, which Jakob

holds. This is a crucial element of the western offensive since it is only with supplies so strongly secured that the whole of West Africa can be tamed.

There can be no dispute that Goldberg's strategy has achieved more stylish military successes than Jakob has ever managed to attain. City after city have raised the standard of the Israeli flag, as Goldberg's dashing tank brigades crush all opposition before them: lightening victories follow one on to another. Inevitably this strategy leaves large gaps in which the enemy are able to move quite freely, and leaves open the, albeit remote, possibility of counter attack. However, High Command and the politicians in Tel Aviv are impressed and discussion begins about replacing Jakob with Goldberg as Supreme Commander of IIF. Jakob, with well placed spies in both Goldberg's high command, and in the corridors of political power, is aware of each and every one of the Machiavellian shifts and ebbs, but he holds his tongue. From one of his informers comes a report that Moses has ordered a cabinet meeting in which his leadership will be brought into question; in the same report it states that Moses has the numbers to unseat Jakob. The meeting is arranged for three days hence on the morning of September 14th.

Jakob's supporters urge him to defend himself, but he remains silent, and some begin to question his courage. Others remind those that question his heart of the occasion when, in his early twenties Jakob led a full company against a rebel incursion force from China several times larger than his, and his troops simply marched into a hail of fire, with Jakob at their head. Eventually, barely metres from their trenches, the enemy dropped their weapons and fled. Prisoners were more than usually terrified, beyond reason it seemed. When questioned it transpired that they believed Jakob's force were ghosts, since their bullets seemed completely ineffective, and whenever Jakob's name was mentioned they would prostrate themselves. Sensing an opportunity, Jakob ordered that only a small portion of the prisoners be mutilated and then decapitated, with the remainder given safe passage back to their homeland. Rumour quickly spread and legends formed. This infamous episode was determined as the turning point in a war that, though inconsequential in the larger scheme of things, had been an annoying drain on Israel's military resources and shown infuriatingly little sign of abating. It also signalled the beginning of Jakob's meteoric rise up the ranks, until he became the youngest General in Israeli military history.

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

under Israeli protection. Victory against the rebels until this point has been achieved with little difficulty, however, with Egyptian and Sudanese troops joined up with other defeated armies, the Israelis begin to face increasingly stronger opposition, particularly from the more hard line Muslim states only recently joined the fight. Furthermore, the increasingly religious overtones of the conflict in Africa have begun to heighten tensions amongst the Israel's large Muslim population. It is for these reasons that the politicians are keen for a swift conclusion to the conquest of Africa, and why Goldberg's rapid advances are preferred over Jakob's more pedestrian progress.

Though not unexpected, a month earlier the situation in West Africa had been complicated by the warlords of several nations on the west coast, including Senegal and Mauritania, seeing their own territories threatened, throwing their forces into the war, thus putting an additional army of several hundred thousand at Arafat's disposal. With such a huge increase in his forces Arafat had hoped to put a halt to the Israelis rapid spread over West Africa but Goldberg, in a series of brilliant military manoeuvres, simply sidesteps the enemy's numerically superior infantry divisions and delivers his the bulk of his army to the outskirts of Algiers. With Chad and Libya under Israeli control, Goldberg has a supply line to support the attack on the fortified city, his largest offensive yet in West Africa. And, with Algiers and the supply line from the sea secured, Goldberg will be strongly positioned to attack Morocco and the other western states, before driving south to mop up the smaller coastal nations there, finishing in Ghana. With his forces thus established, the stronger west African nations, such as Nigeria and Mali, will be trapped within a pincer, completely surrounded. This is Goldberg's plan for the domination of West Africa.

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

have shifted their entire strength behind the battle front at Algiers, he is confident this will be sufficient to defend the supply line through to Egypt.

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

13 September 2117. Goldberg, sensing victory on all fronts, nonetheless takes the precaution of requesting Jakob release a light infantry division of The Southern Army, in order to consolidate Israeli positions in Egypt and to protect the supply line until Algiers is captured. Thereafter, this force will be superfluous, since the bulk of supplies would then arrive by sea. In fact, already a flotilla of supply vessels is queued up off the Algerian coastline in anticipation of Goldberg's imminent victory over the rebel armies. Jakob suggests two divisions might be necessary to strengthen Goldberg's presence in Libya and Chad, but warns this would involve slowing down his own operations in the interim. Goldberg, not wanting to give Jakob an excuse for his sluggish progress, repeats his order to provide only one division, to be directed to the defence of Egypt, and thus leaving Chad and Libya only lightly defended.

Lying back on his bunk, hands behind his head, a young soldier, a private in one of the infantry brigades newly stationed in Tripoli, jokes. "What are we gonna do tonight, boys? Seems to me like we've fucked all the live girls there are to be had. Emo's alright, he's got the pick of five hundred corpses. But me, I don't care what the look is on her face, she can be wishing me fucking dead I don't care, but fuck it, she's got to be breathing. And it don't matter how much she fucking hates me, how much she doesn't want it, they can't stop themselves getting their pussies wet." He's surrounded by a handful of his mates, who are all bored and looking for something to break the monotony. One pretends to fuck a mattress, and another jumps on his back. "Yeah, fucking threesome," The other roars, "Get the fuck off." They both end up falling off the bed and begin rolling around on the floor.

Amidst the laughter one of them calls out, "Well, we're not fucking staying her all night, why don't we take the transporter and head over to Benghazi? We've got

a twenty four day pass, we should make the fucking most of it. Who knows when we'll get another chance to get the fuck out of this hole."

The platoon leader, Sergeant Allon, walking in at just that moment and overhearing the conversation, barks at his men, "Orders are Tripoli, and that's it. We're thin as it is, if we fuck off it's only gonna make it worse." A few light hearted jeers, which Allon stares down, but one of the more sobre of the troop rolls off his bunk and confronts Allon, " What difference will it make, we're not gonna be on camp either way? If we get the call we can be back in a few hours. Come on sarge, who's gonna attack here? It's all going off around Algiers from what everyone's hearing. Fuck that's gotta be a thousand clicks from here."

Allon, after several months of continuous fighting, has himself been itching for some R+R, so in fact he doesn't need much persuasion to agree to his platoon's plan. And so it is that, less than an hour later, along with several hundred other soldiers looking for nothing more than a little fun and fuck, Allon's platoon pile into a transporter and make the short hundred kilometer trip to the port of Benghazi, for the pursuit of pleasures which could only spring from the most inventive and corrupted of minds. After all, though the city is famed for the beauty of its women, there are scant few of them left, after Jakob ordered the brutal rape and murder of the majority of them, and the expulsion of most of the remainder.

The requisition order for a sixteen man troop carrier that Levin completes indicates the fifteen tonner will return in six hours, with a route taking it around the outer rim of Tripoli's city limits, for the purpose of security reconnaissance. As a group soldiers are the least imaginative of the human type, for that is the way they are trained to be. Therefore, when records show there should be at least five patrols on this route, any officer caring to take the coast road which winds up to the picturesque mountain peaks overlooking the city, would find the road completely deserted. In reality of course all five are at least a hundred kilometres distant in Benghazi, similarly engaged in entirely different activity.

Now, whilst The Western Army is no doubt a formidable force, it is not as impressive as its victories would suggest. Over the preceding months Arafat had ordered that only minimal resistance be put up at the cities attacked by Goldberg, but sufficient to give the impression that it was a real fight. Thus while their progress might have been impressive, as Goldberg advanced his troops through Egypt and then into Libya, inevitably his supply lines became stretched and poorly defended and was drawing Goldberg ever further away from the safety of

Alexandria and Cairo, where Jakob had had the foresight to establish almost impenetrable defences for the supply bases there.

After Goldberg took the bait during the attacks on the Egyptian cities along the Nile Delta, which cost the lives of almost 20,000 soldiers and civilians, it became gradually easier and easier to deceive him, requiring the sacrifice of fewer and fewer, as he was drawn across western Egypt. In Libya, entire cities were evacuated before the brutalising Israeli troops could make repetition of the animal behavior for which they'd quickly become notorious for.

It was a trap Arafat, in his heart, never believed the Israelis would fall for, having become accustomed to, and having developed a begrudging respect for, Jakob's painstakingly thorough tactics. But the alternatives were few, and if they did nothing, very soon there would be nothing left for his people to fight for anyway. The loss of life, of innocent women and children, and the soldiers that had stood no chance against the vastly superior Israeli forces, was hard for Arafat to bear. And as the numbers went up and up, within his own ranks he faced considerable resistance to his plan. But, as the possibility of its success became more apparent, opposition to it fell away, and then it became a matter of a patient wait for the right moment. That moment has now arrived: the trap can be sprung.