

Day of Deliverance

The second Jack Christie Time Travel Adventure

'Save the Past, Control the Future'

Johnny O'Brien

THE YEAR: 1587

THE PLACE: LONDON

THE MISSION: TO SAVE ELIZABETH
1ST - ENGLAND'S GLORIOUS QUEEN

Catapulted back in time to Elizabethan
England, Jack Christie and his friend
Angus must foil a plot to assassinate
Elizabeth 1st.

Joined by playwright Christopher
Marlowe and a young William
Shakespeare, Jack and Angus must
prevent a change in the course of history
and keep their heads in the face of
intrigue and war.

Day of Deliverance

A Jack Christie Adventure

Cast of Main Characters

Jack Christie – Our hero

Angus Jud – Jack's loyal friend

Carole Christie – Jack's mother

Professor Tom Christie – Jack's father

Dr Pendelshape – The slightly unhinged history teacher

Counsellor Inchquin – Leader of VIGIL

The Rector – Headmaster of Soonhope High and

VIGIL second-in-command

Secondary Characters

Edward Alleyn – An actor

Miss Beattie – English and Drama teacher and nuclear physicist

Belstaff – Games teacher and VIGIL security

Elizabeth I – Queen of England

The Fanshawe Players – Harry Fanshawe's failed group of travelling actors

Harry Fanshawe – An actor

Philip Henslowe – A businessman & theatrical impresario

The Henslowe Players – Philip Henslowe's professional acting troupe

Theo Joplin – VIGIL historian

Thomas Kyd – A playwright

Mary, Queen of Scots – Queen of Scotland

Christopher Marlowe – A playwright

Monk – An actor

Jim de Raillar – Bike shop owner and VIGIL analyst

Tony and Gordon – School janitors and VIGIL minders

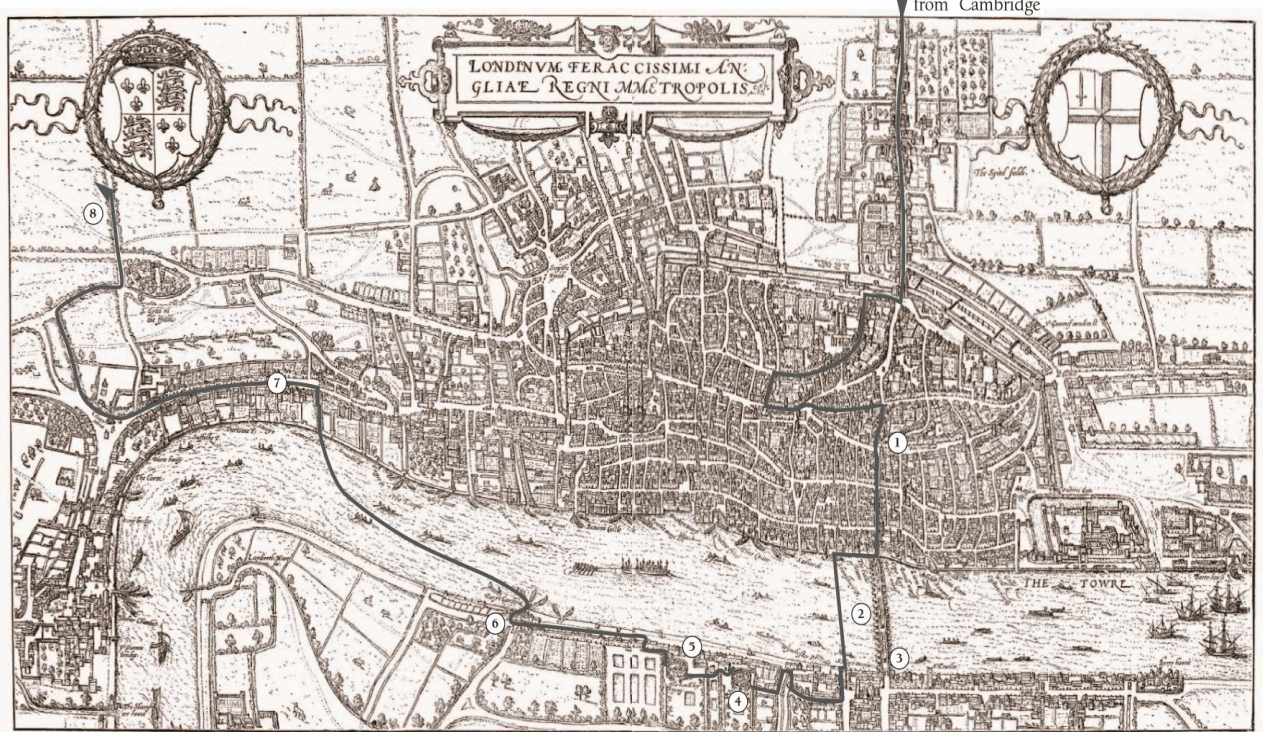
Trinculo – An actor

Professor Gino Turinelli – Italian bistro owner and Professor

Sir Francis Walsingham – Principal Secretary of State and Privy Councillor

Whitsun and Gift – Revisionist agents

William Shakespeare – A playwright



JACK'S FIRST TRIP

1. The Cross Keys, Gracechurch St
2. London Bridge
3. Heads on Sticks, London Bridge (south)
4. The Rose, Liberty of Southwark

TO LONDON

5. Bear Baiting, Liberty of Southwark
6. The Paris Gardens
7. Into Thin Air, north bank of the Thames
8. To the site of present-day Wembley Stadium



A chart of the Armada's course from Calais and around the coast of Scotland and Ireland, 1588.

Prologue

It has been six months since Jack and Angus made the mind-boggling discovery that their school, Soonhope High, is a front for a secret team of scientists who control the most powerful technology ever conceived by man. The technology of time travel. At the heart of the technology is a machine called the Taurus. Jack's dad, Professor Christie, who he hasn't seen since he was six, was part of the team who originally designed the Taurus. But there has been a big bust up between him and the other scientists. Christie wants to use the technology to make changes in the past which will make things better - like stopping wars. He has attracted some passionate and brilliant supporters, including Dr Pendelshape, who until recently, was Jack's history teacher. Pendelshape and Christie, together with their small band of followers, who call themselves the 'Revisionists', developed very sophisticated computer simulations to model changes in the past that could benefit mankind. Their ideas clash with the other scientists, their former colleagues, who believe that changing things in the past, however well meant, is dangerous and will have unforeseen consequences. These scientists tried to do away with Christie who escaped into exile - leaving Jack and his Mum, Carole behind. With Professor Christie out of the way, the scientists formed a group called 'VIGIL' to ensure that the time travel technology was kept secret - but still in working order should it ever be needed.

Jack and Angus became embroiled when, unknown to VIGIL, Christie created a *second* Taurus whilst in exile and proceeded to try and stop the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo in June 1914 - the event that triggered the First World War. Christie was being secretly helped by Dr Pendelshape who VIGIL believed to be loyal and who remained at Soonhope High. Jack, and then Angus, found themselves as pawns in a battle between the two camps. Jack's loyalties had been torn. In the end, having witnessed

the dangers of time travel and intervening in the past at first hand, both Jack and Angus had decided that the right course of action was to side with VIGIL.

There followed an impasse. VIGIL could not do anything about Christie, Pendelshape and the second Taurus – because they did not know where their base was located. Christie, for his part, would not use his Taurus whilst Jack was under the guard of VIGIL. They all knew that Christie would do nothing whilst there might be any threat that VIGIL might harm Jack – his own son - in retribution if they did anything. But Christie is unaware that increasingly Jack's loyalties are with VIGIL and his mother, Carole, is also firmly inside the VIGIL camp. The atmosphere at VIGIL is tense. Although, their security is highly sophisticated they are worried about what the Revisionists' next move may be and when it comes they know there will need to be a final reckoning...

A Poisoned Sword

Jack thrust the rapier forward. Angus jumped back, but this time he was not quick enough. The blade pierced his flesh and an ominous red patch appeared on his white shirt. Angus glanced down at the wound and looked back at his opponent with rage on his face. A frisson of excitement rippled through the crowd. The contest was proving better than they could have possibly wished for. Jack was exhilarated – a final blow and it would all be over.

His confidence was short-lived. The strike had found its mark but had also unbalanced him momentarily and Angus came back with a violent counter-thrust. His blade flashed through the air and caught Jack in the ribs. There was a gasp from the crowd. The foil was so sharp that Jack scarcely felt it. But in only a few seconds his own blade felt much heavier in his hand and his breathing quickened. Sensing his chance, Angus darted forward once more, again his sword aimed at Jack's chest. This time Jack spotted the move and swayed to one side. Angus's forward momentum presented Jack with an opportunity. He grabbed his opponent by the arm and heaved him onwards whilst simultaneously thrusting out his leg. Angus tripped over Jack's extended leg and spun through the air landing with a crunching thud, his sword spinning from his hand. Jack pounced on him and they became locked in a deadly struggle. But he should have known better than to take on Angus in a wrestling match. He was much too strong and soon he had Jack pinned on his back beneath him. Angus grasped Jack's sword hand and banged it hard on the ground until Jack relinquished his grip. Angus lowered his face towards Jack's and sneered between his teeth.

"You will die."

Jack was nailed to the ground. He was wounded and he had no weapon. Angus's massive bulk pressed down on him. But it wasn't over yet. He gritted his teeth, and with a

super-human effort jerked his knee upwards into Angus's crotch. Angus wailed in pain and Jack seized the moment to wriggle free. He snatched up a sword and wheeled round. The sword felt different – heavier and unbalanced – but it didn't matter now. Angus jumped back to his feet and grabbed the other sword and the two of them circled round and round, panting at each other like wounded animals. The crowd jeered. Jack's remaining energy was melting away - he knew he only had seconds left. There was blood all over the floor and Angus slipped. He was only distracted for a split second but it was enough. Jack leapt forward to land a second, and this time fatal blow. Angus screamed as blood from a second wound spurting from his chest. He dropped to one knee, and looked up at Jack. It was an unexpected expression – almost apologetic,

“The poison... I have been killed by my own treachery...” He stammered.

Jack glanced down at the sword that dangled loosely from his hand – and suddenly he understood. He had snatched up Angus's sword which he must have dipped in poison before the contest. Jack had already been injured with the same sword, which meant that in less than a minute, both of them would be dead.

But there was still time to see to unfinished business. Jack knew what he had to do.

Clutching his chest to stem the bleeding, he staggered across to where his uncle sat cowering behind the long banqueting table. The food and drink was laid out – still untouched. Jack mounted the table and fixed his eyes menacingly on his uncle who sank back into his chair, shaking. There was to be no mercy and Jack did not hesitate. He thrust the sword into his uncle's heart.

Words, words, words

Miss Beattie scurried onto the stage, "Well done everyone! Lights!"

There was a spontaneous round of applause from the cast and crew. Nothing was being left to chance. The week before, Mrs. Beattie had even arranged a special fight choreographer to come in and help them with the sword fight between Hamlet and Laertes in the last scene. It was all perfectly safe, of course, and the flashing swords reassuringly blunt, but there was always tension in the air during the famous scene and everyone stopped what they were doing to watch. And today, with Angus a reluctant and unrehearsed stand-in for Laertes (off sick), who knows what might have happened.

"That's all coming together quite well." Miss Beattie was pleased with progress.

"Only two weeks to go now..."

Jack looked down at Tommy McGough from his position still perched up on the table. Tommy was playing Claudius, Hamlet's uncle, and he nervously opened one eye.

"Did I survive?"

"Looks like it." Jack said. "Don't know how you get away with it. Every rehearsal I somehow manage to miss."

"Dangerous business this Shakespeare stuff..."

Angus bounded over from centre stage, flushed with excitement from the sword fight with Jack.

"That was awesome..."

"Told you..."

Miss Beattie removed the pouch of stage blood from under Angus's shirt which was almost completely red.

"What a mess." The English teacher fussed.

Angus grinned, "I thought I would go for Hamlet meets Terminator... Everyone likes a bit of blood, don't they Miss?"

Without looking up, she replied, "Actually, you're right. When they did these plays in the old days they wouldn't have skimped on the blood... used goat's blood probably. The audiences loved gore. There's even a story of actors using a real musket in one production. It went off and someone in the audience got his head blown off by mistake."

Miss Beattie was always coming out with stuff like this. It was one reason why drama was popular at school - and successful. The whole town of Soonhope would likely turn up for the end of term performances of Hamlet.

"Is that true, Miss?"

"Apparently. They just dragged the body out. Next day, they were on again - but I doubt they used the musket. They didn't really go in for health and safety in the Sixteenth century..."

"I could get into that." Angus said.

Jack elbowed him, "See - told you it was worth coming."

"Well - the fighting was good fun, but I couldn't stand Shakespeare for too long - you know, all those... words."

Miss Beattie looked up at Angus with a steely eye. Her good humour evaporated and a shadow passed over her face. Although at nearly six feet, Angus towered over her, it was as if he physically shrank by a good six inches when he saw her expression.

"You've done it now..." Jack murmured and glanced sidelong at Tommy, who returned the look, grimacing.

"Words!" Miss Beattie rolled the 'r' in her strong East Scots brogue. "WORRRDS!" She repeated it - louder - and it came from her lips like a dart from a blow-pipe. "Is that all you have to say on the matter - WORRRDS!"

Everyone around the stage stopped what they were doing and turned towards them. Miss Beattie, for all her boundless enthusiasm, was also prone to dramatic changes in mood. As a result, Angus was about to receive what was popularly termed by the pupils of Soonhope High School as a 'Beattie - Beating.' It was never pleasant.

"But Miss..." Angus bravely tried to stand his ground, but it was too late. It was if he had inadvertently triggered a small thermo-nuclear device.

"I'll tell you this - laddie - not any old words... nearly one million words in forty plays and more than one hundred and fifty four sonnets and poems... and not just any old plays and sonnets, but the most sublime writing the world has ever read - even after four hundred years. Words? Shakespeare invented them. Lots of them... like: *critical, frugal, dwindle, extract, zany, leapfrog, vast, hereditary, excellent, eventful, lonely...* and phrases... new phrases like: *vanish into thin air, brave new world, fool's paradise, sea change, sorry sight, in a pickle, budge an inch, cold comfort, flesh and blood, foul play, baited breath, cruel to be kind, fair play, green eyed monster...*" she paused only to take a deep breath. Then she was off again. "These are WORDS and phrases that have been used so much they have become clichés... they are words and phrases that I use - God help us - even *you* use, my lad - Shakespeare was the world's greatest writer and helped define the world's richest language - the English language - *your* language - and so gave us the very *tools* to think and feel. He gave us the *essence of humanity...* do you get it? Do you understand? So please don't talk to me about WORRRDS!"

There was stunned silence around the stage as everyone wondered if there might be more - whether this was to be a tactical nuclear strike - or the full blown strategic version that would take out the whole of Soonhope. Thankfully, the colour in Miss Beattie's cheeks normalised from a deep purple to its more usual pink hue. Nevertheless, Angus continued to stare at a spot on the end of one of his shoes for a full ten seconds before he finally mumbled,

"Yes Miss. Sorry Miss."

Miss. Beattie gave a final sigh of indignation and said, "That's alright Mr. Jud." She looked around and clapped her hands, "Now everyone – let's get this lot cleared up - it's nearly four o'clock."

But something that Miss Beattie had said stuck in Jack's mind and as he and Tommy put away the props, his curiosity overcame his fear of re-lighting the blue touch paper.

"Sorry Miss – did you say a *million* words? I mean written by one man – Shakespeare?"

"Yes Jack, I think that's about right."

"But it just sounds like an awful lot for one man to do..."

"It is. There are lots of theories – generally rubbish – that he did not actually write his material, but that others did. Shakespeare lived during the 'English Renaissance' – it was a boom time for plays and playwrights and art and artists generally. More than fifty candidates have been suggested as the 'real' Shakespeare – people like Christopher Marlowe."

"Who?"

Miss Beattie was overseeing the flow of props back into the store cupboard, "No, Tommy, put the swords *properly* into the sword trolley, or they'll get damaged." She looked back at Jack, "Sorry Jack – what was that?"

"Marlowe – was he like Shakespeare, then?"

"He influenced Shakespeare, but he died before Shakespeare really got going, in 1593, I think, when he was only twenty nine... he was murdered. He was a spy."

"A writer and a spy?"

"Yes, maybe even a double-agent. I know it sounds odd, but there were quite a few writers that were at the time. They often studied at Oxford or Cambridge, although actually Shakespeare didn't, the universities were hot beds of radicalism."

“What do you mean?”

She sighed. “You’re insatiable, Jack.” She turned to lock the store cupboard and then looked at him sympathetically. “Look - we don’t really have time to go into the whole of sixteenth century politics right now... but next lesson - we’ll maybe do it in more detail.” She thought to herself for a minute. “Tell you what, come over here...” She scurried over to her things at the side of the stage and pulled out a large book.

“There you go, that should get you started.” She handed the tome over to Jack. It was entitled, simply, ‘Elizabeth 1st.’ On the front there was the famous ‘Armada’ portrait of the auburn headed Queen in an elaborately decorated dress covered in jewels with one hand draped over a globe and pointing to Virginia in the Americas, England’s first colony in the New World. Behind the Queen, the Spanish Armada could be seen - sailing to its doom.

“Knowing you, Jack, you should be able to finish that off in a couple of hours. It’s all there. And it’s not just about Shakespeare and Marlowe you know. It was a period of deep religious conflict - between Catholics and Protestants - a struggle for the very soul of man. And this religious conflict was intertwined with the political struggles between states. Spain was the global super-power and England was a back-water by comparison. But when England defeated the Spanish Armada, that all started to change. If it hadn’t been for that, we might be living in a Catholic country today and speaking Spanish - and so might most of the world. We would probably be having tapas for school dinners.” Miss Beattie stopped, “There I go again... prattling away...” she tapped the book, “Anyway, I’ll leave it with you.”

Jack leafed through the book.

“Who’s that?” He pointed to a picture of a confident young man in what he took to be flashy Elizabethan clothes.

“That’s the man - Marlowe - only portrait of him - only twenty one and dressed up to the nines.”

“What does that mean?” Jack pointed to some Latin words beneath the picture.



*The auburn-headed Queen Elizabeth I
in 'the Armada Portrait'*



*Christopher Marlowe:
'What feeds me destroys me'*



Miss Beattie laughed. “ ‘What feeds me destroys me’ – apparently. Just about sums Marlowe up – he was, how shall I put it, he was a bit *edgy*...”

Jack didn't really understand what the words meant but was already leafing through the rest of the book. There were pictures of ships: great Spanish galleons stuffed with treasure from the New World, terrifying fire ships let loose by the English on the anchored Spanish fleet off Calais, the de-masted '*Revenge*' in the Azores, where, in a fit of macho bravado, Sir Richard Grenville, took on twelve great Spanish galleons alone, only to die. There were extraordinarily beautiful new buildings, soaring edifices of glass and stone – a far cry from the brutal castles of the Middle Ages. Then there were the people: Kings and Queens, princes, players and poets... One chapter was called 'The English Renaissance' – and it seemed to live up to its billing. As Jack leafed through the volume, he noticed a small frame to the bottom of one of the pages. The caption read, 'Elizabethan Troupe'. It was a colour plate of a group of actors in various costumes. There was one dressed as a court jester and next to him, in stark contrast, another dressed as a priest or more like a monk. There was a third that looked slightly more important – a country gentleman with a fine cloak and a neat, pointed beard.

“Head in a book again?” Angus leaned over Jack's shoulder. It looked like everyone else had nearly gone. “Do you want to get something at Gino's?”

Jack snapped the book shut.

“Why not?” He stuffed the book in his bag.

“Well stop reading that rubbish and let's get on with it.”

Gino's

Jack sat pillion on Angus's motorbike. He was nervous. Usually trips on the back of Angus's bike did not go well. Angus was seventeen now and had passed his bike test. His old two stroke 125 cc Husqvarna WRE had been left in one of the sheep sheds at his place up at Rachan and he had taken to riding one of the farm's more powerful four stroke Yamaha 250F's. When he could afford the petrol he took it to school – avoiding the one hour bus journey that picked its way painfully round the hamlets of the upper Soonhope valley.

Angus turned back the throttle and the engine wailed; he dropped the clutch and they set off. Thankfully, Angus avoided the obligatory wheelie which he usually performed just to frighten Jack. Soon they reached the bridge over the river which was quite low from a dry spring. The big Presbyterian Church at the head of the High Street loomed ahead of them and Jack remembered what Miss Beattie had been saying about the 'struggle for men's souls'. Even in Soonhope, with less than two thousand inhabitants, he knew of at least five churches, all of different denominations. It occurred to Jack that he hadn't actually been inside any of them, and he wasn't sure how many of the local population had either.

The High Street was busy but Angus managed to squeeze the bike right in front of Gino's and as they went in, the welcoming smell of coffee and ice cream wafted over them. Gino was manning the espresso machine whilst Francesca, his daughter, polished glasses grumpily. Gino was as jolly as ever.

"What can I get you, lads?"

"Hi Gino," Angus looked up at the endless menu of drinks and snacks pinned to a board above the counter. But he already knew what he wanted. "I'll have the double Gino-chino, extra shot, full fat, with caramel and extra cream... and don't forget the cherry." He looked over at Francesca and winked provocatively adding in a deep voice, "shaken... not stirred..." Francesca rolled her eyes and tutted loudly.

"You have no chance there, Turinelli family outta your league, son."

Angus shrugged. "Oh well – just give me four chip butties."

"Cutting back?" Jack asked.

"Not exactly. We're playing Melrose tomorrow – last game of the season. If we win – we win the league. Need to bulk up."

"And Jack, my friend, what are you having?"

"Thanks Gino, what the hell, I'll go for a Gino-chino as well – but without the bells and whistles and make it just one chip butty..."

"Is coming... take a seat, lads."

Gino had recently tried to convert his popular Italian bistro into an American diner – he had even got himself a juke box (which didn't work). It had been a brave attempt, but somehow it all looked a bit out of place in the traditional High Street of Soonhope. Jack and Angus settled into one of the booths and soon, in hushed tones, they were discussing their favourite subject.

"Do you think we did the right thing?"

It was Angus's favourite question. Jack came up with his usual answer.

"Yes – we did the right thing. I'm sure of it. The computer simulations that Dad and Pendelshape created to model the changes they wanted to make in history were good, sure, but you could never be certain that by going back in time you might not do something that would have unforeseen consequences for the future. That's the risk. That's the whole reason that VIGIL was set up. And that's why we sided with them in the end."

"Suppose. Pity though."

"Why?"

"Well... I know going back to 1914... Well, it was dangerous and stuff, and a lot of bad things happened..."

“Yes Angus,” Jack said slowly making sure the point sank in, “that’s why nobody wants to be doing it again. Time travel and especially using Taurus to make changes to history... it’s a bad idea. Remember your Great Grandfather Ludwig in the trenches... if that bayonet had been a few inches to the right, he may have died and, you wouldn’t be here.”

“I know, but...” Angus grinned, “You’ve got to admit, it was... *awesome*.”

Jack shook his head. “I wonder about you. We can say that sitting here now. But it didn’t feel like that at the time. We nearly died. Meddling in time should be avoided. VIGIL – and their leaders – the Rector, Counsellor Inchquin, all of them, they’re trying to do the right thing. Dad and Pendelshape, the Revisionists, for all their brains and good intentions, are just plain wrong. We’re on the side of VIGIL now.”

Angus shrugged.

Gino ambled over to their booth. “Two Gino-chinos, one chip butty for you and... four for you.”

“Great – thanks Gino.”

Jack looked at Angus’s plate, “You’re not seriously going to eat all that are you?”

“I don’t really want to... I’m doing it more out of a sense of duty to the team.” Angus replied regretfully – as if he was making some terrible sacrifice. He opened one of the butties and poured salt, vinegar and ketchup onto the chips inside before quickly re-sealing them within the bread. He then took a large bite and the contents leaked out from each side.

“Gross.”

“Actually, very tasty.” Angus replied, his mouth full. It didn’t stop him from continuing their conversation.

“But what about your Dad? Don’t you feel bad about him... if VIGIL ever gets hold of him – they’ll do him for sure.”

Angus was never one for subtlety and Jack grimaced. “Thanks for reminding me.”

There was an awkward silence and then Jack shrugged. “I try not to think about it.” He

swallowed. "And I don't know, maybe one day there will be a way... a way that VIGIL and Dad can be reconciled..." he looked down at his plate, "maybe then Mum and Dad could even get back together."

Angus swallowed and took a swig of his Gino-chino. "Sorry Jackster - didn't mean to," he shrugged, "Well - you know."

"It's alright. Anyway - we're fully signed up members of VIGIL now. Don't forget what that means."

Angus wiped his mouth and his eyes lit up. "How could I forget?"

Jack remembered the VIGIL inauguration ceremony that he and Angus had participated in after they had returned from Sarajevo. As things settled down, they learnt that VIGIL's role was not only to be ready to counteract any attempts by the Revisionists to meddle in history, but also to identify and train promising students and enrol them into VIGIL. This was one reason for secreting the Taurus complex and VIGIL headquarters in an ordinary school: it was easy to identify potential candidates. In this way, VIGIL would ensure the continuation of the VIGIL cause from one generation to the next and ensure the future safety of mankind. This was critical - particularly whilst the Revisionist threat was still alive. Jack and Angus's experiences in 1914 had made them instant VIGIL veterans and obvious candidates for enrolment.

Jack's mobile went off and he pulled it from his pocket. "Text from Mum probably - wondering where I am..."

Angus returned to his chip butty.

Jack peered at the screen. "Don't recognise that number..." He opened the message. "Funny..." Jack's brow furrowed. "What do you reckon of this?"

"Of what?"

Jack read out the text. "Jack - meet at old look out. Very urgent. Come now."

“What can that mean?”

“You’ve got an admirer – finally.”

“Funny.”

“The old look out – that’s the fire tower, isn’t it, you know, top of Glentress... we used to go up there on the bike...”

“Yeah – but who’s this from? There’s no name...”

Angus grinned mischievously. “Only one way to find out.”

“But I can’t do that without alerting VIGIL ... I’ve got this stupid tracker on my ankle – remember?” Jack pulled up one leg of his trousers a little to show Angus the discrete wireless tracker that ensured his whereabouts was always known to VIGIL. Jack was a valuable asset to VIGIL – and the tracker was just one of the ways they made sure he was properly protected. Most of the time he forgot about it, but sometimes it made him frustrated and even angry that he had been put in this position.

“Oh yeah – I forgot about that.” Angus thought for a moment and then a twinkle came to his eye. “On the other hand – you could just say you temporarily forgot about it or something – might be a laugh to see how quickly they send in air support when they know you’ve gone AWOL... it’s good to keep them on their toes.”

Jack was not sure, “I don’t know Angus...”

“Come on Jack – who dares wins and all that...” he nodded at Jack’s booty, “scoff that,” he stood up. “And let’s go find out who your mystery girlfriend is.”

The Tower

In a moment they were back on Angus's bike heading out of town and towards the forest. The forestry commission owned large tracts of land above Soonhope, and had populated it with a pine and spruce monoculture that spread for many square miles across the hills. Soon they were powering up one of the forest tracks, a plume of dust rising from the back tyre. At intervals there were fire warning signs with a picture of a red flame and lists of "DON'TS" beneath. "DON'T DO" this and "DON'T DO" that. It was as if they had been put there by VIGIL themselves. But you needed more than that to deter Angus. He worked his way up and down the gears as they ascended steadily. At one point the forest track swept round to the right and a steep path rose through the thick woodlands at an angle from the bend.

Angus pulled up and shouted through his helmet. "Hold on – I'm going to take a short cut."

Before Jack had time to object, Angus had re-selected first gear and the bike shot up the narrow path. All Jack could do was hang on. After a while the steep path levelled off and they picked up speed – the densely packed conifers whizzing passed on each side of the narrow track.

Suddenly, a shape appeared in front of them – right in the middle of the path. It was a man, just standing there, looking at the oncoming bike as if caught in a trance. Angus hit the front brake and then the rear a split second later. He twisted the handlebars to avoid the man and as he did so both tyres lost grip on the loose track surface. In a split second, the bike, Jack and Angus were horizontal and sliding along the ground. The man leapt free moments before impact and the boys slid to a halt in the tall grass on the verge. Jack's heart was pounding and his leg hurt from where the bike had pressed down on it as they had

scraped along the track. Thankfully nothing seemed to be broken. Angus was first to his feet.

“What the...?”

Jack groaned and pulled himself into a seating position. He looked up, and immediately wished he hadn't – he felt nauseous.

The man looked at them from the side of the track – they had slid passed him by a good twenty metres. He was maybe mid-forties, slim and fit looking and wore jeans and hiking boots and a grey fleece jacket. He had not shaved for a few days and his yellow hair was ruffled.

“What the hell are you doing – you trying to get us all killed?” Angus bellowed.

The man did not reply. It was as if he was weighing something up in his mind. Then, saying nothing, he turned and melted back into the thick, dark woodland.

Angus was apoplectic. “What! He's just run off...!”

Jack pulled himself to his feet, dusting himself down. He could see the grazing on his leg through rips on his jeans.

“You OK?” Angus said. “Can't believe that guy!”

“We probably shouldn't be on this track anyway.” Jack looked down at the bike, still lying on its side. “Will it start?”

Angus hauled the machine up, inspecting the scrapes to the petrol tank and chrome.

“What a mess. If I ever see that bloke again...”

He straddled the bike and tried the engine. It fired immediately.

“Thank God for that.”

“What now?”

“Well we might as well finish what we came up to do.” Angus looked at Jack's pale face. “If you're still up for it.”

"I'll survive." Jack mounted the passenger seat gingerly and Angus set off - this time at a more sedate pace.

After a while, they left the dark-green canopy and were released onto the open heather moorland above the tree-line where they re-joined the main forest track. Apart from the mystery hill walker who they had nearly hit on the way up, there was no-one around and the fire look-out tower loomed into view as they crested a final ridge.

Angus cut the engine and the air became still. They took off their helmets and walked towards the tower. Jack moved with a slight limp but Angus seemed to show no effects of coming off the bike. Sometimes it was like he was indestructible.

"Doesn't seem to be anyone here at all. No sign of your mystery admirer."

Jack shrugged. "Weird. Shall we go up?"

"Why not?"

They clambered up the wooden ladder to the look-out cabin.

Angus knocked on the rough wooden door. "Hello! Anyone at home?"

There was silence - except for a light spring breeze which teased the top of the trees in the distance.

"Nothing - come on let's check it out."

The door opened into a crude wooden room which gave panoramic views of the surrounding forest and hills. It was like being in a small boat in a big green ocean. Far below you could see the river meandering its way down the valley, shining like a sliver ribbon in the late afternoon sun. In the middle of the cabin was a three-dimensional model, it was pretty rough, a sort of topographical map of the entire surrounding area. It showed the hills, the main plantations, tracks, streams, river, each peak, each village and the position of the other fire towers. The whole world was suddenly defined in detail across three

square feet of plastic and modelling paint. From this lofty position you could see how the fire wardens would have a sense of control... of watchful power.

“Nothing here. Certainly no clue as to your mystery texter...”

Jack peeped into the one adjoining room. It was a bedroom – but it was more the size of a large cupboard.

“Hey – looks like there’s been someone sleeping rough here.”

In the room, there was a sleeping bag, a gas burner and a couple of books.

“One of the wardens?”

“Bit early in the year.”

“... and I’m not sure they’d be reading these.”

Jack picked up a couple of books that had been left behind. One was entitled, ‘*Principles of Quantum Mechanics.*’ It looked old, and was by someone called Paul Dirac. The other book was a complete works of William Shakespeare. It was open at one page and the reader had circled an extract in pencil. Jack peered down at the book.

“That’s funny - this guy’s been reading Hamlet.”

“Please no – I’ve had enough of Hamlet for one day,” Angus looked around furtively, “Beattie’s probably got this place wired, just to check I don’t say anything dodgy.”

Jack read the circled extract from the book.

‘Let us go in together,

And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.

The time is out of joint – O cursèd spite,

That ever I was born to set it right!

Nay, come, let’s go together.’

“Sorry Jackster that sounds like complete gobbledegook... as per usual.”

Jack smiled. "It's actually one of my lines from Hamlet."

"I suppose you're going to tell me what it means and make me feel clever."

"Of course. From what I remember from what Beattie said, Hamlet's basically saying that things in Denmark, which he calls 'the time', are all messed up because of what his uncle, King Claudius, has done – killing Hamlet's father and marrying his mother. Hamlet's thinking about what he has to do to put it right... and he's kind of worried and also resentful that he's the one that's got to sort it out. Do you understand?"

"No."

Jack rolled his eyes.

"All I can say is it's a bit weird that this guy's up here and maybe we shouldn't hang around too long. He might come back. I don't want to bump into some hobo living here all on his own who reads Shakespeare and does maths for fun..."

"So who sent the text – do you think it was the guy that's been hanging out here?"

"It's all too creepy. I think we should go."

They turned to leave. As they did so, they noticed an envelope pinned to the inside of the wooden cabin door. Jack's heart leapt when he saw what was written on it. It was in an italic scrawl and read simply:

"Jack Christie."

Jack pulled the envelope down and ripped it open. Inside was a letter.

"Jack,

I hoped that I would be able to meet you in person and that we would have time for a proper talk. However, I fear that VIGIL may soon learn of my location and therefore I have left in haste. This is a sad time for me. As you already know, I have been exiled from my former colleagues in VIGIL and as a result have not seen you or Mum for nine years. This is a cause of great sorrow. But

now, I also find myself in disagreement with my friend Pendelshape and the Revisionist team which I set up in opposition to VIGIL.

Some months ago we started work on a new timeline simulation – one that aims to bring about great good for humanity. However, I could not accept further development of this simulation, before I knew that you could be safely isolated from VIGIL and be brought over to our side.

Pendelshape and my Revisionist colleagues have become frustrated by my attitude. To say the least. We have argued and now fearing their retribution I have left them. Furthermore, with your safety in mind, I have, as of today, taken the unprecedented step of warning VIGIL of what I know of Pendelshape's plans. I now find myself alone in the world – a fugitive.

I never wanted you to have been put in this position or to have experienced what you have done. However, I live in hope that we can one day meet and that you will join me in my mission.

- Dad"

Jack stared at the letter in stunned silence. It all came together in his head – the strange books in the tower... the man on the track...

"Your Dad... he's been *here*?" Angus said, incredulously.

"Yeah. And I think that was the guy we nearly ran down. I thought I sort of vaguely recognised him. He was running away..."

"From what?"

"...From just about everyone I think."

Suddenly, from away in the distance they heard a faint mechanical whirring. Jack and Angus peered out from the front of the fire tower towards the direction of the noise.

"...and probably from that thing..."

The whirring rapidly crescendoed into a pounding 'whup, whup, whup' as below them a large helicopter skimmed the top of the trees and headed up towards the fire tower. In seconds the helicopter was hovering right above them. The noise was deafening and the

whole wooden structure of the tower shook on its foundations. The pilot circled once and then the aircraft descended, the thrashing rotor blades throwing up a maelstrom of dust and debris. Finally, it touched down on a flat patch of ground near the tower and the pilot cut the engine. Jack and Angus opened the door of the cabin. In the distance, they could see a convoy of three Land rovers approaching along the forest track. As the noise from the helicopter engine subsided and the Land rovers pulled up near the tower, Jack could hear loud barking from the back of the vehicles. Dogs.

Pendelshape Panic

Two figures stepped from the helicopter. They crouched low to avoid the rotor blades which were still spinning at a dizzying speed. One was a tall man in his forties, with fine features and a head of silver hair. He had an air of distinction and authority about him. It was Counsellor Inchquin. He was the Chairman of VIGIL and oversaw all its operations. Next to him was another tall figure – slimmer than Inchquin with a bald head fringed with thinning wisps of grey hair. By day he was Soonhope High’s headmaster – the Rector – and he was still wearing his trademark black gown. The Rector was VIGIL’s second in command.

Mr. Belstaff and Mr. Johnstone stepped from the leading Land rover – they were games teachers from the school - but they also formed part of VIGIL’s security and response team. All members of VIGIL had day jobs which belied their second life as key members of the VIGIL network. All four men converged on Jack and Angus who stood nervously at the bottom of the fire tower.

“Is he in there?” The Rector said, a mixture of concern and aggression in his voice.

“He’s gone.” Jack replied.

“Damn.” Inchquin hissed. “No sign at all?”

“He left this letter.” Jack handed the letter they had found inside to the Rector who scanned it quickly.

“Well – it confirms the message we received earlier.” The Rector said. “You saw nothing else, boys?”

Jack was torn. The dogs cooped up in the Land rovers were in a frenzy. Was Jack really going to admit that they had nearly run down someone who they thought to be his father – only for VIGIL to release a pack of hounds on him in some brutal man hunt?

The thought had not even crossed Angus's mind. "We think we might have seen him." He nodded down the hill. "But I don't think you'll find him now."

Inchquin looked at Jack sympathetically. "Sorry Jack - we have to try. He's too important to just let go." He turned towards Belstaff and Johnstone. "Take the other men and the dogs - see if you can track him down. He may not have got far. Hurry."

"What's going on Sir, how did you know he would be here?" Jack said, "... and... what does the letter from Dad *mean*?"

"We intercepted your phone message. And then the tracker alarm indicated you were exiting the Soonhope safe zone. Sorry Jack - you know we can't take any chances." The Rector waved the letter in the air, "and this letter basically means trouble. We will explain back at HQ." He nodded at the helicopter. "You need to come with us. We have very little time."

"Hey - what about my bike?" Angus said.

"The men will take care of it. I can assure you we have much more important business. Now, let's go."

The sun was low in the west sky above Broad Law as Angus and Jack peered from the helicopter as it swooped in above Soonhope High's extensive playing fields. Jack was pretty sure no-one had arrived at school in quite such style before. Pity there was nobody there to see it. They had a bird's eye view of the austere Victorian building which sat in secluded grounds some way out of the town. Until ten years ago had been empty. It had been re-developed by an endowment from a charitable trust - which they now knew, of course, had been a front for VIGIL. Since it had been bought, the building had spawned a number of modern appendages around its Victorian core - the science block and the gym and also the theatre, of course, where Jack would be appearing in Hamlet in two weeks' time. It all seemed very normal. Just like all the other schools in the border country against

which Angus regularly played rugby. There was one difference. Soonhope High housed the most advanced technology known to man – a working Taurus. A time machine. As a result, the site had tighter security than a US nuclear missile base. But it was completely unobtrusive. And that was the idea. Nobody, apart from a select few knew of the astonishing secret within.

The helicopter touched down and Jack, Angus, the Rector and Inchquin climbed out.

“Keep your heads down.”

In the distance, two familiar figures stood waiting to welcome them – their old friends, Tony Smith and Gordon Macfarlane. They waited at one of the school’s side entrances. Tony took up almost the entire doorway. Gordon stood beside him. He was shorter but still built like a tank. Officially, they were the school janitors. But Jack and Angus had learnt their true identity six months before. Along with Belstaff and Johnstone, they were part of VIGIL’s elite security squad.

“Gentlemen – please escort these two through entrance B to the Situation Room. We will join you shortly.”

“An escort – good.” Angus replied. “You two should have blue flashing lights on your heads...”

“That’s funny, Mr. Jud. Look,” Gordon clutched his stomach with both hands, “I’m in stitches.”

The Rector scowled. “Gentlemen – I would advise less levity – we have an extremely serious situation here. Do I make myself clear?”

Gordon looked at his toes, sheepishly. “Yes sir, sorry sir.”

Jack and Angus followed Tony and Gordon into the old Victorian part of the school.

“Right here we are.” Tony announced.

They had reached a store cupboard half way along one of the main corridors and Tony proceeded to take a large set of keys from his belt and jangled them loudly as he searched for the right one.

“Isn’t that a bit low tech for VIGIL?”

“Now son,” Tony replied in a hushed voice, “You know better than to mention that name in an open corridor – even if no-one else is here. Anyway, it’s all part of our image, you’re not supposed to see all the high tech stuff.”

Tony located the key, inserted it into the lock and opened the door. The cupboard smelt of, well... school. That stale, dusty smell of text books, old bits of computer equipment and stationery. Tony reached inside his pocket and pulled out a thin piece of plastic – a bit like a pocket calculator. He gently pressed a button on the device and the cupboard door closed automatically.

“That looks more like it.” Angus said, knowingly.

“I think this procedure will be familiar to you all – step to the back, please.” Tony pressed the device in his hand a second time and without warning an aperture formed in the floor. Soon the entrance had opened completely and a steep spiral staircase appeared, leading downwards. It was lit by a ghostly blue glow, just bright enough to make out the position of the steps.

“OK – all clear – on you go...”

One by one, they stepped onto the spiral staircase. The steps began to descend automatically. As they dropped beneath floor level, the aperture above them closed silently and after a couple of minutes they came to a gentle halt. Ahead of them was a door. Tony pressed the device again and it opened onto a short metal-clad corridor illuminated by the same dim blue light. At the end of the corridor was a circular door like the entrance to a bank vault. It had five letters etched on it:

‘VIGIL’.

The door opened without a sound, revealing a tubular passageway that curved off symmetrically both to the left and to the right. Jack noticed that there were no markings on the passage walls – no rivets, no seams – it was perfectly, uncannily smooth.

“Round to your left, please.” Tony said. They followed obediently and as they walked, the passageway bent round and away from the entrance which re-sealed itself silently behind them. They had only taken twenty or thirty paces when Jack noticed a strange marking on the wall at about head height. It appeared uncannily like the outline of a figure – a stylised hominid figure of some sort. There was something other-worldly about the marking. Jack stopped and turned to Tony.

“What does that symbol mean, Mr. Smith?”

Tony stopped suddenly and approached the figure on the wall. He turned to Gordon, “Have you seen this, Macfarlane?” He said apprehensively.

Gordon moved closer and inspected the strange marking, running his fingers tentatively over it. “Mmmm - the latest experiments must be more advanced than we thought...”

Tony turned back to Jack and Angus, “VIGIL has been using their worm-hole technology to experiment on new applications...”

The boys’ eyes widened.

“Yes – the figure on the door is indeed a symbol...”

“The alien symbol.” Gordon added reverentially.

“Signifying a portal to a whole new universe...”

Angus’s eyes were on sticks, “you mean... space travel?”

Tony put them out of their misery, “No, you plonker, that’s the Gents’ toilet – and the Ladies is opposite – look. Do either of you need to go?”

Gordon laughed raucously and the boys shuffled on their feet self-consciously.

The party moved on, Tony and Gordon much buoyed by their joke at the boys' expense.

Finally Tony announced, "Right, here we are."

The passageway had continued to curve round and they had reached a point where the grooving on the wall indicated another doorway. Jack reckoned that if they continued on they would eventually re-join where they had originally entered the underground complex. Essentially, they were in a giant subterranean donut from which all the various VIGIL control rooms and annexes could be accessed.

Jack read the lettering on the door:

'Situation Room'

He felt his heart beat tick up a notch. This was it.

Tony pressed the device in his hand and the door slid open.

On each wall of the large underground room there were screens – some showed maps, some complex looking historical timelines and others just row upon row of computer programming language that Jack could not even begin to understand. Most of the VIGIL team were already seated around a large central board table, like a war council, but others manned computer terminals or other scientific equipment at pods in separate areas of the room.

Jack spotted a number of familiar faces: Miss Beattie, their English teacher, was in an animated conversation with, of all people, Gino Turinelli, from the cafe in the High Street. Jim De Raillar, who ran the mountain bike shop two down from Gino's, was also there and finally, Jack's mother, Carole sat at one of the computer terminals. In fact, as Jack looked around he recognised everyone, and they all either worked at the school or in the local village of Soonhope. Since their inauguration into VIGIL, Jack had learnt that VIGIL's network was quite pervasive and extended into the local community. It made sense.

Clearly, you would need a lot of different skills to create and maintain a working time machine - and even more if you ever happened to need to use it. Each member of VIGIL had their everyday persona - whether it was a teacher, shopkeeper, janitor or some such and then their other, secret, role in the VIGIL organisation - scientist, analyst, technician or security guard. For example, Jack had learnt that Miss Beattie was not just an expert on Shakespeare... but had a first class degree from Cambridge and had done stints at MIT and CERN. Gino - actually *Professor Turinelli* - was a computer expert and Jim De Raillar and Carole, Jack's Mum, were analysts.

Just then, the Rector and Inchquin came into the room through a separate entrance. Soon a tense discussion was underway, facilitated by Inchquin who sat gravely at the head of the table.

"Jim can you give us an update on the analysis of Tom Christie's message to us from a couple of hours ago, please."

"Certainly. To re-cap, the message confirms that Christie and Dr Pendelshape have fallen out. It also explains that following their failure to stop the First World War they started to work on a new timeline simulation some months ago..."

"What period does the simulation focus on?"

"Late Elizabethan."

"Interesting..." Theo Joplin, the historical analyst interjected, and the Rector flashed him an angry glance for interrupting.

Jim De Raillar ignored the inter-change and continued. "Anyway, it appears that the Revisionist team have refined the computer simulation software so they can make much more precise re-creations of how interventions can be made in history and the consequences modelled. Christie's message referred to it as 'surgical' historical modelling. It seems that the Revisionist team were very excited about these advances... but then Christie got nervous

when Pendelshape started to talk in terms of progressing the simulation to the implementation phase - an *actual* intervention in history. Pendelshape wanted to target the late sixteenth century using their replica Taurus. Of course, it was clear from the message that Christie does not want the Revisionists to do this..." De Raillar looked at Inchquin and then at Carole and Jack uneasily. There was an edgy silence in the room.

"Carry on."

"Well, it appears that Pendelshape and the rest of the Revisionists have no such concerns and it looks like they have decided to go it alone. Christie felt that the Revisionists have moved against him and he decided to leave them some weeks ago. Concerned that they would quickly refine the simulation and we might think him responsible, he took the unprecedented step of sending us a warning message today - and then contacting Jack directly by phone. It is a big step for him. Christie knows he is risking his life - betraying his own team in such a way. He is now isolated from both VIGIL and the Revisionists."

Inchquin arched his fingers in front of him, deep in thought. "So - Pendelshape has usurped Tom Christie as the leader of the Revisionists. He has a plan to make some intervention in history - in the sixteenth century. OK, two things to check. First, Carole, what is the latest forecast on time signal availability?"

Carole looked up from her terminal, "We have had no time signal availability for a number of weeks now, but as you are aware, we are forecasting the availability of time travel signals of carrier strength over the next forty eight hours - although, as you know, forecasts are not accurate - in terms of timing, duration or strength."

"Time signal forecasting - it's worse than the damned weather forecast..." Joplin moaned.

"Shut up Theo - you're not helping." The Rector said. "This is why Christie has chosen to contact us now. The Revisionists will also know that we are entering a period of potential time signal availability... so Christie must think they will use this opportunity to

carry out their plan." He paused. "Do we have any details on the actual intervention in history that they are planning?"

"No - apparently when Christie left them there were a number of open scenarios still being analysed - but they were not complete. He had no final detailed plans."

"So Theo - now is the time to say something sensible - you're the historian, any particular views on why they would choose that period of history to make an intervention... between 1580 and 1600?"

Theo Joplin looked up from a laptop that he had open in front of him. He was only twenty seven but looked like a relic of sixties hippiedom with his long hair, goatee beard and flowery shirt. But appearances were deceptive and encased within his mop of messy black hair was an encyclopaedic knowledge of history.

Joplin curled his lip. "A good choice if you want to make some structural changes to the future course of history - many, many options. Lots going on. Overall, a very cool period..." he turned back to his laptop assuming that this would be a more than sufficient contribution to the conversation.

The Rector tried to contain his frustration, "Would you mind being a little more *specific?*"

Joplin shrugged nonchalantly. "English Renaissance, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Spanish Armada - or Armadas - I should say, Mary Queen of Scots, the Babbington Plot, the Player's Plot, Drake, Raleigh, Howard, Grenville, Treasure Fleets, First English colony in America, religious conflict, Ireland... I could go on... and no doubt you'll want me to..."

"We don't have time for all this..." Inchquin said irritably, "Jim are we sure that Christie's message did not say anything more specific about what Pendelshape and the other Revisionists might be trying to do?"

"He said that Pendelshape had a well-developed theory that if the Spanish dominance of the period could have been extended somehow, then it could have been

harnessed to usher in a period of peace. Perhaps for centuries. A strong Spain would have defeated the Netherlands and then colonised all of the Americas... and also they would have been better able to enforce a single religion – Catholicism. This would have reduced religious conflict.”

“Interesting theory,” Joplin piped up, suddenly interested. “It’s true that the period was a bit of a turning point for Spain. She was the most powerful country in the world, but from that point her power declined – gradually mind you – pretty much from then onwards...”

“Since when, specifically?”

“The defeat of the Armada, really, in 1588. The fact that Queen Elizabeth reigned for so long, as a protestant Queen, and the fact that the Armada failed... it meant that the balance of power – certainly naval power - slowly transferred to England, then Britain. And Britain by the nineteenth century was the most powerful nation on earth.”

“So you’re saying that without Elizabeth... without England, then the world would have been a different place.”

“Very different. The common language of the West would be Spanish not English – just as it is in much of South America today. The influence of Protestantism would have been substantially weaker and we would have many different habits and customs. We might even have a regular bull fight in Soonhope.” Joplin chortled.

“Theo this is not funny,” Inchquin growled, “Jim do you think that is what Pendelshape is trying to do?”

“It’s something along those lines – it marries up with his communication to us. But the details were clearly not fully developed at the point Christie left – I think he just did not know the specifics. But the main thing he wanted to make clear was that he just did not want to be associated with any of it... and more than that he wanted *us* to know that he was

not associated with it... So that we would not take... retribution on him..." Jim paused and then added bluntly, "Or his family."

"I understand." Inchquin said, moving on swiftly. "Well, we really need more data than this - it is all too sketchy at the moment. Tony - can you radio the team up on the hill - perhaps they have managed to track him down..."

Suddenly Carole called out from behind her terminal. "Counsellor. There is some sort of reading. We have an emerging time signal. It's faint but it looks like there is a possible deep time disturbance... possibly time travel initiation."

"Can you pinpoint it?"

"Difficult to identify it precisely - but the impacted year is 1587. Looks to be earlier on in that year."

"Location?"

"England - definitely. South East. Must be London."

"Well that decides it then. It looks like Christie was right and the Revisionists are making their move. They are about to time travel and try and change the past... and therefore the future. We must not waste any more time. We need to mobilise immediately." Inchquin rose to his feet and placed both palms on the table, his voice grave.

"I feared it would only be a matter of time before this would happen again. Everyone - security protocol is Triple Alpha. VIGIL is now on high alert. You all know what to do."