

Day of Vengeance

The third Jack Christie Time Travel Adventure

'Save the Past, Control the Future'

Johnny O'Brien

THE YEAR: 1940

THE PLACE: PARIS, OCCUPIED
FRANCE

THE MISSION: TO STOP WW2 GOING
NUCLEAR

In Jack Christie's third adventure, Jack and Angus time travel to World War 2 where they take part in the Battle of Britain and end up in occupied Paris where they witness an attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler.

But can they stop a premature Nazi Vengeance weapon programme and prevent World War 2 going nuclear?

Jack's Adventures so Far

It has been eight months since Jack and Angus discovered that their school, Soonhope High, is a front for a team of scientists who control the most powerful technology ever conceived: the technology of time travel. At the heart of this technology is a machine called the Taurus, and Jack's father, Professor Tom Christie, led the team that originally designed it. Jack hasn't seen his father since he was six, when the scientists who formed the Taurus had a fatal disagreement and Christie was forced into exile, leaving Jack and his wife, Carole, behind at Soonhope in the Borders of Scotland. Christie's plan was to harness time travel to make changes to the past – like stopping wars – and so make today's world a better place. He attracted some passionate and brilliant supporters from the original team, including Dr Pendelshape who, until recently, was Jack's History teacher at Soonhope. Pendelshape and Christie, together with their small band of followers, who call themselves 'Revisionists', have developed sophisticated computer simulations to model interventions in the past that can benefit mankind. Their former colleagues, on the other hand, continue to believe that changing events in the past, however well meant, is dangerous and may have unforeseen consequences. Once Christie was out of the way, they formed a group called 'VIGIL' to ensure that the Taurus was kept secret – but in working order should it ever be needed. They housed the Taurus in an underground complex beneath an old school on the Soonhope estate which they later re-opened to act as a front. The teachers have ordinary jobs at the school, but have second lives as members of VIGIL. They stand ready to use the Taurus should it ever be needed. Jack and Angus became embroiled when, unknown to VIGIL, Christie created a second Taurus and proceeded to try to stop the event that triggered the First World War – the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand, in Sarajevo in June, 1914. Pendelshape acted as Christie's partner, continuing to teach at Soonhope and

leading VIGIL to believe that he was loyal to them. Meanwhile, Jack and Angus were used as pawns in a battle between the two camps. Jack's loyalties were torn. In the end, having witnessed at first hand the dangers of time travel and intervening in the past, Jack decided that the right course of action was to side with VIGIL. Not knowing the whereabouts of Christie's base, VIGIL can do nothing about the second Taurus. Christie, on the other hand, will not use his Taurus while Jack is under the guard of VIGIL. The members of VIGIL know that Christie will do nothing while there might be a threat to his son, in retribution for any action the Revisionists take.

But soon after the failed attempt to intervene in the assassination in Sarajevo, Pendelshape hatched a new plan to intervene in time – this time in Elizabethan England. Pendelshape and the Revisionist team were excited about these new plans but became frustrated when Christie refused to take part in them, again concerned about the consequences for Jack. Christie became isolated from the Revisionists and finally decided to leave, concerned for his own safety. Knowing that Pendelshape and his former friends would press on with the new plan, Christie took the unprecedented step of warning VIGIL and Jack of this new plan to intervene in the past. Jack and Angus found themselves once again caught up in VIGIL's attempts to thwart the Revisionists. In the end they succeeded. But the location of the Revisionists' base and Taurus are still unknown to VIGIL and Jack's father remains a fugitive. Although the architect of the Taurus, he finds himself cast out both by his former colleagues in VIGIL and now by the Revisionists. Meanwhile, Pendelshape is thought to have died, but his body was never found...

Gottschalk Farm

Germany - March 1918

It was Axels' favourite game. Mother had finally released him from his early morning chores on the farm and he raced across the garden into the narrow strip of woodland which separated their place from the Stockel's next door. The woods held a secret. At least it was a secret to Axel and his friend Hans. A little stream dipped and darted its way through the undergrowth of the woods – a miniature assault course of gurgling rapids and twinkling pools criss-crossed by fallen branches from the old trees above. He had shown it to Hans who often came up from the village to play and they once tried to find the source of the stream up in the low rolling hills above Kulsheim until they had got stuck in a muddy bog. Mother had not been happy when they got back – late and dirty. Today, Axel wasn't going to wait for Hans. Spring was arriving, but there was still a bite in the air and there had been a downpour the night before, which meant that the stream would be swollen with water. Perfect.

Axel prized his way through the hole in the fence and pushed on up to the starting point where the stream rounded the gnarled roots of an old oak tree. He opened his bag and carefully removed its precious contents. He held the object up with both hands so that it caught the morning sunlight filtering through the branches above. A model battleship. Even at ten years old, Axel was an expert on all the big ships of the German High Seas Fleet. He could remember the big excitement after their victory at Jutland over the British. That had been two years ago, and now, although he sometimes found it difficult to follow what Mother and Father said, he knew that the war was nearly over. General Ludendorff had launched a huge attack in the west and the talk was that Germany would soon win the war. The gossip in the village was that the prison camp to the north might soon be expecting another wave of prisoners from the frontline. Father was very excited. The shortages would

be over and Germany would be victorious. Father had volunteered right at the start of the war and there was a picture of Axel standing next to him in his uniform before he went to fight with some of the others from the village. After he had been away for a while, the atmosphere in the house changed. Mother seemed tired and anxious. Then they got the news. Father was in hospital - he had been injured and had to be operated on. He lost his lower leg. But, of course, it could have been much worse. Axel remembered the day he returned. Everyone was very excited. His father was a hero; and Axel was very proud. But when he arrived home, Axel was disappointed. His father did not really turn out to be the great man of Axel's memory and imagination. There was the injury of course. He could walk OK, but he limped and needed a stick and this made him stoop. But it wasn't that, he did not talk very much and when Axel looked into his eyes, it was if there was no-one there. His father was strangely distant and Axel didn't really know why.

Axel inspected the battleship. Father had helped him build it originally and Axel had made a number of important modifications since its last voyage, and he was convinced that it would now be a winner. After much consideration, he had even given the ship a name. *SMS König*. A Kaiser Class battleship that had been at Jutland. It had ten twelve inch main battle guns. To anyone else, the ship may have appeared a little more than a series of crude wooden blocks and matchsticks. But in Axel's mind his own *König* was more than worthy of the German High Seas Fleet. Now, it was about to undergo sea trials and Axel was convinced that this version would have the edge on Hans's ship when they next raced them down the stream.

With precision, Axel cupped the hull of the boat and leant down to the bubbling stream. He allowed the bow to nose the water where it eddied into a small pool away from the main current and then, *König* was launched. The boat glided forward, gently at first, but suddenly the current grabbed it and it was off. Axel could scarcely keep up as the boat bobbed and weaved its way down the swollen stream, crashing over the miniature

waterfalls, sometimes lost from sight completely as the stream became lost under moss heavy branches and vegetation which overgrew the banks from both sides. As the boat descended, quicker and quicker, Axel followed, racing down through the woodland, sometimes jumping from one bank to the other to get the best view. In a few minutes, the stream would enter the thicket at the bottom of the woods from where it would exit into the fields beyond. Axel needed to get there before the boat so he could be sure to pluck it from the water before it escaped into the field and then sailed bravely on, who knew, to the Rhine and then possibly to the North Sea itself.

Luckily, there was a small pool just before the thicket at the bottom of the wood which temporarily slowed the boat's progress. This was the effective finish point for all their races and gave ample opportunity for the boat to be rescued. Axel got there, pink and out of breath, just as *König* arrived triumphant (and surprisingly, upright) with a little splash into the pool. In a manoeuvre which he had executed many time before, Axel leapt from one side of the pool to the other whilst deftly reaching down and plucking the proud vessel from the water. On this occasion, as Axel's foot planted itself on the opposite bank, he slipped on the damp undergrowth and both he and the boat went flying. Axel felt himself tumbling downwards out of control, but oddly, the only thing that flashed through his mind was what fate would befall *König*. A second later he crashed head first into the thicket and came to rest, scratched and dazed.

Axel blinked and looked up.

He was not alone.

Before he could react. A large, dirty hand clamped onto his mouth. Axel felt a wave of fear pulse through his body. A man was leaning over him, very close, and was peering into his eyes. The man was thin, dirty and dishevelled. He had hunted eyes that flickered back and forth nervously. His clothes were tatty and wet, but even though Axel was

suddenly very scared, he registered that what the man wore may at one time have been some sort of a military uniform.

The man leaned close to Axel, put a grubby index finger to his lips and hissed. "Ssshhh."

The man paused, breathing heavily. It was as if he was weighing something up in his mind. Suddenly, he hauled Axel to his feet and pushed him back through the thicket. Instinctively Axel started to wriggle, but despite his emaciated state, the man was far too strong for him and Axel felt himself being bundled forward. From the corner of his eye, Axel caught the sight of his boat in the undergrowth. Axel gave a little squeal as the man clumsily drove *König* into the ground with his boot as they pressed forward. The man stopped at the edge of the woods and looked up towards the farmhouse. It was all quiet. With a grunt, he forced Axel over the fence and frog marched him to the back door of the farm.

They entered the porch and then crashed through into the kitchen beyond. Axel's mother wheeled round in fright. She took one look at Axel and the strange dishevelled man and screamed. It was a mistake. It seemed to make the man even more panicky and he suddenly took out a large black pistol from his trousers and pointed it at Axel's mother. She stepped back and held her hands to her face and started to sob uncontrollably.

The man spoke in a language that Axel did not understand, but he could tell that he was scared. "Please. You must be quiet."

Axel's mother was shaking in fear. "Mein Gott, mein Gott..." she said, over and over again.

The man pointed to his mouth. "I am sorry for this. I need food, water and clothing. Then I will go. Do you understand?"

But neither Axel nor his mother did understand and his mother was too panic-stricken to respond. The man was becoming more and more agitated. He knew that he was running out of time.

“Please, give me what I want, and I will go. Food and water. No harm will come of you.”

Suddenly, Axel heard the front door open and he heard the distinctive knock of his father’s wooden leg on the floorboards. He heard his father’s voice call out, “Ich hörte das Schreien.” and then, a little more urgently, “Maria - was ist es?”

Axel could clearly hear his father’s footsteps approaching. Axel saw his mother’s eyes darting to the door. Suddenly, the door swung open. Axel’s father stood there, a look of horror on his face. He raised his stick. The man panicked, swung the gun around and fired a single shot. Axel’s father slumped to the floor. His mother screamed. For a moment, the man stood there... and then, he ran.

Axel’s mother knelt over her husband, pawing at his shirt, crying and screaming. It had happened so quickly and for a moment Axel did not understand. The body of his father, the great war hero, lay sprawled awkwardly across the floor of the kitchen. His eyes stared lifelessly at the ceiling and a trickle of blood oozed from one corner of his mouth. At first, Axel did not cry and did not feel any emotion. It was as if the violence of the act was such that it was beyond the capacity of his young years to acknowledge.

Trance-like, Axel walked from the kitchen and through the back porch and down into the garden. It was only then that he started to run. He ran faster and faster, until he reached the wood and the little stream. He ran down the stream, and the trees flashed past him on either side. As he ran, tears started to form in his eyes and the faster he ran, the more he cried. Finally, he stopped at the bottom of the woods next to the little pool. He jumped across the pool and there he saw it. Half buried in the mud and partially crushed lay the battleship *König*. He reached down, picked it up and held it tightly to his chest.

Their Finest Hour

Kent, England – August 1940

Then Jack spotted it. A single BF 109 heading for home.

“This is Red two. Snapper ten o’clock low. Tally Ho! Tally Ho!”

“Good luck red two.”

“Breaking - port 45 degrees.”

Jack tipped the Supermarine Mark 1B into a steep dive. The twenty seven litre Merlin III engine screamed as the Spitfire topped four hundred miles an hour, slicing through the freezing air. As Jack levelled out the g-force crushed him into his seat. Surely the wings would be ripped from the fuselage. But he had managed it perfectly. He peered through the spinning disc of the airscrew at the yellow-nosed Messerschmitt 109 only a hundred metres ahead. The German pilot hadn’t noticed Jack on his tail so focused was he on his run for the Channel. Jack flicked the gun button to fire and put the reflector sight on. He eased the dot in the middle onto the 109’s fuselage and as he eased closer the Messerschmitt grew into the cross hairs. Jack pressed the button. The four .303 Browning machine guns and the two 20mm Hispano canons let rip and the cockpit filled with the smell of cordite. The flank of the 109 was peppered. Instantly, glycol from the cooling system ignited and there was an explosion of white vapour. The 109 flipped onto its back and started to arc into a long, lazy dive. A few seconds before, the German pilot had been heading for home – free. Now he was dead and plummeting to an icy grave, still strapped to his seat. It was no better than cold-blooded murder. Jack was hypnotised and trailed the 109 towards the metallic grey of the sea, far below.

It was a school boy error.

The first Jack knew about it was the streaks of angry tracer inches above his perspex canopy. A second 109. He should have known better. They always hunt in pairs.

“Red one, Red one – Snapper on my tail.”

But the R/T just crackled. Red One wasn't coming to his rescue any time soon.

He remembered Angus's words to him not an hour before: “Never fly straight and level for more than twenty seconds. If you do, you'll die.”

The Supermarine Spitfire and the Messerschmitt BF109 were the best fighter planes of their day. They were comparable but each had particular strengths. Jack's training cut in as he remembered the one strength of the Spitfire which might just save his life. He threw the Spit into a savage turn. He glanced over his shoulder but the 109 was still with him – a dirty orange flash from its guns showed the German was still clamped to his tail like a limpet. Jack heard rounds rip into his fuselage and suddenly a bullet passed right through his canopy, inches from his face. Jack cursed his luck. Trust him to pick a fight with a real pro. He gulped in oxygen from the clammy mask.

Jack tightened the turn and glanced at the instruments to see how badly he was hit – glycol at 100 degrees; oil pressure 70lbs – miraculously still OK – but suddenly his head felt heavy... the brutal speed and tightness of the turn meant that he was blacking out. If he could hold on he might just survive. Words from his training flashed through his head, “*A Spit can turn tighter than a 109 – hold it long enough and the 109 can't stay with you - he will trace a gradually widening circle in the sky and you may just live...*”

Suddenly, the Spitfire started to shake – a high speed stall. Jack bit his lip to stop himself losing consciousness and a drop of blood trickled down the inside of his mask. He knew you could hold it in the stall... *if you were good enough*. He was about to find out if he was. Jack made a fourth turn and snatched a glance at the pursuing 109. Suddenly he saw it wobble – he was *also* stalling – Jack's heart soared... the German pilot was forced to ease the turn to avoid engine failure. It was a matter of inches but it would save Jack's life. A few more mad loops in the sky and Jack started to gain on the 109. His neck muscles were screaming for him to stop but in seconds the tables would be turned and Jack would have

the 109 in his own cross-hairs. Sure enough the 109 crept into the sight. Jack felt the adrenaline surge through him and he stabbed the fire button. Again, he heard the staccato rip of his guns – but he had fired prematurely and the rounds flew high and wide. He tried again. Nothing. The ammo was out already.

Abruptly, his adversary released the 109 from its turn and just for a moment Jack caught his eyes peeking out from the white strip of face between helmet and mask. The German pilot touched his temple briefly with an outstretched palm – it was a rye acknowledgment which meant simply, “Until next time, my friend.”

The sun flashed briefly on the grey tailfin of the 109 as he finally broke for home and then... he was gone.

Jack was again alone in the great blue emptiness, ten thousand feet above the green meadows of Kent.

Alive.

The Project

Angus thumped Jack on the back, "Great dog-fight. He nearly had you. What do you think?"

"Love it - very realistic." Jack replied.

"Yeah - these guys also make proper flight simulation kit, you know, for training pilots. I've used it on my pilot's course." Angus said.

Jack paused the simulation session and put the joystick down.

"How's that going?"

"I'm up to forty hours now. We were up at the airstrip yesterday near Edinburgh."

"But no Spitfires, eh?"

"Well, there is one up there - owned by some enthusiast. But he's the only one that's daft enough to fly it - it's nearly seventy years old after all. Would you fly a plane that old?"

Jack nodded at the console, "Wouldn't mind if it's anything like that."

"Dad says he's talked to the guy who owns it - apparently it's still great to fly - even after all those years. Anyway, if you wait long enough, you might have a chance..." Angus grinned.

"What do you mean?"

"Come on, I'll show you - you're going to love this."

Angus bolted from his bedroom at the top of the old farmhouse and Jack followed as he tumbled down the stairs which creaked under his weight. They passed the living room where Angus's dad had his feet up on a stool, puffing a pipe, reading the Soonhope News.

"Dad - I'm just showing Jack, you know, your *project*..."

Mr. Jud put down the paper as they hurried passed. "OK, but don't touch anything... might join you in a sec..."

They crossed the courtyard of the farm and made their way down to one of the old barns. It was a beautiful June day and the Jud's farm looked idyllic next to the wood fringed pond surrounded by the low rolling hills of the Border hill country.

Angus heaved open the large barn door, "Here..."

He switched on a light and Jack adjusted his eyes to the gloom. Scattered about there were some large sheets of metal, bits of engineering equipment and some sort of enormous engine suspended by two chain hoists hanging from the roof.

Angus spread out his arms like a magician, "Duh-nuh!"

"What is it?" Jack asked.

"Isn't it obvious?"

It wasn't. Then Jack saw it. To the rear of the old barn resting on a series of wooden trestles was what looked like the fuselage of an aeroplane. There was only one problem – it didn't have any wings.

"A plane – that's your 'project'?"

Mr Jud came into the barn, sliding the door open a bit wider. Sunlight flooded in.

"Not just any old project Jack, and not just any old plane."

He spoke in a rumbling voice with a strong Scottish accent. He had the same powerful build as Angus, but his face was leathered and creased from years working the sheep farm.

Jack looked at Mr. Jud. "No?"

Mr. Jud marched over to the fuselage and patted it firmly on the flank as if it was a prize cow he was fattening up for market.

"She's a legend."

Angus couldn't hold back any longer. "A genuine Battle of Britain Spitfire!"

"A Mark 1B." Mr. Jud added, a note of reverence in his voice.

"Incredible." Jack stared in wonder at the old plane. "You're restoring it?"

Angus laughed, "Trying to... a bit of a labour of love, eh Dad?"

Mr. Jud shrugged. "Right son – it'll take years... but one day..." Mr Jud looked up at the ceiling of the barn as if he was having some sort of religious experience, "one day she will fly and we shall touch the face of God..."

Angus looked at his feet self-consciously. "Er, right Dad."

"Where are the wings?" Jack asked, trying to bring him back down to earth.

"Well there's the story, Jack. An incredible story really." Mr. Jud ushered them over to a cork message board on one side of the barn which had all sorts of old photos and diagrams stuck to it. He pulled down one photo.

"See that?"

Jack squinted at the old black and white photo.

"The Eiffel Tower. In Paris?"

"Yes. But look again – what do you see there," Mr. Jud stabbed a thick dirty finger nail at the top of the photo, "... towards the top section of the tower?"

Jack narrowed his eyes. He didn't see it at first, the picture seemed to have been taken on quite a misty day, but then, yes, he was sure of it – there was a tail fin of an aeroplane sticking out of the tower. Somehow the main fuselage must have been buried inside the metal latticework of the great Paris landmark but the tail fin was still hanging out.

"You're not telling me..."

Mr. Jud laughed. "Aye – Jack... and this was the very plane. *The very plane.*"

"Unbelievable. What happened?"

"There was a German air raid on Uxbridge which is now Heathrow airport, near London. It was in June – during the early part of the Second World War, just before the Battle of Britain broke out properly. This Spitfire was scrambled and was in a rare old dog fight. Later, and it is a bit unclear, it pursued the attackers out over the Channel. But it got

caught in cloud. Very disorientating. It made it all the way to Paris but could not put down for some reason. Anyway, it flew straight into the Eiffel Tower."

"The pilot died obviously?"

"Actually, no-one knows who he was. He was never found. It is possible that he bailed out before the crash. It's one of the strangest things about the story."

"I suppose that explains the wings."

"Aye. The wings were both ripped from the fuselage as the plane flew into the tower. It was a miracle really. Presumably because there was no fuel left, or very little, there was no fire. Shortly after the photo was taken the whole thing dislodged itself from the tower in the wind and it fell to the ground. After the war, they found it in bits in some warehouse and it was transported back to the UK. It was a gift from the French to the British."

"And you have it here now?"

"Cost me a bob or two - but yes - there she is. It's taken me this long to assemble it even to this stage."

"And that's not all, is it Dad?" Angus said, enthusiastically. "Tell him."

"Well, son, you know about my grandfather, Ludwig."

Jack gave a furtive glance at Angus, "Oh yes, Mr. Jud, Angus has told me all about him."

"Well, as you know, he was a German soldier. He fought in the First World War. But he was injured and captured by the British and ended up in a British hospital. There he met Dot. My grandmother. She was a nurse in the field hospital. She was Scottish. The war ended. They got married and he never went home. Eventually he moved here and took over the farm. He became a British citizen. He liked the Brits - thought we were an eccentric lot. He was funny - I remember when I was a kid - he'd do a great impression of an English upper class toff."

Angus interrupted, "He fought in the Second World War as well - but on the *British side*. Amazing, eh?"

"Yes - he was interested in machines of all sorts - bit of a family tradition, as you know," Mr. Jud continued, "he got into flying, joined an amateur club and before the war he joined the RAF. He was posted up here, but as the war got closer he was re-assigned to the South East. They had to rent out the farm - good pilots were scarce and very valuable."

"That's amazing."

"If you come back up to the house, we'll show you some of his old stuff. Come on."

Mr. Jud and Angus turned and walked back out into the sunshine.

For a moment, Jack lingered in the musty old barn, surrounded by the metal detritus of the rusty old fighter plane. Jack didn't know a lot about the history but he knew enough. Seventy years before, this little plane and others like it, piloted by a few hundred airmen, had swooped and soared over the gentle countryside of south east England in a grim battle for survival as Britain stood alone against the Nazi war machine.

Jack slid his outstretched palm across the smooth metal of the fuselage and with his fingers he traced the outline of the red and blue concentric circles of the RAF roundel - worn but still visible. He touched the ragged, rusted outline of the breach in the fuselage where the port wing had been ripped free in the crash into the tower. He peered through the crack in the side into the bottom of the cockpit and he could make out the seat, dials and controls. He noticed that on the side of the cockpit and on the seat and in the foot well there was curious brown staining. But Jack didn't know what it was.

"You coming or what?" Angus stuck his head around the barn door, "You've got to see this stuff of Dad's. So cool. Come on!"

Jack followed Angus back up to the farm house. In the living room Mr Jud had opened up an old wooden box and had distributed its contents all over the floor. There were lots of old black and white photos: pictures of airmen in uniform, aerodromes, Spitfires

and Hurricanes taking off or being prepared, pilots playing cards and even some blurred pictures of aerial combat.

“Look at that one. Some fighter planes had cameras in them that were triggered when the guns were firing. That’s a German Heinkel bomber being clobbered.” Mr. Jud said – possibly with a little more enthusiasm than was warranted.

“So your grandfather Ludwig – he was allowed in the RAF? Even though he was German, you know, by birth.”

“Oh, he gained British nationality after the First World War. When he married Dot. I know it sounds a bit strange. But he kind of renounced his past and became a Brit. Eventually he made it to Flight Commander.”

“But wasn’t he too old to fight by the Second World War?”

“You’re right that most of the pilots were very young – eighteen or nineteen even. But they were desperate for qualified pilots so he ended up doing his fair share of operational stuff. Like the Uxbridge raid I was talking about.”

“Yeah - what *was* that?”

“A bit of a wake-up call for the RAF for sure. The RAF’s communications usually gave them a big advantage – radar gave warning of incoming aircraft and fighters could be scrambled into the air to meet them. But this time it broke down. They think it was some sort of intelligence leak. They did find out about a German spy ring at that time that may have had something to do with it. Something about scientific secrets. Anyway, the Uxbridge squadrons were caught hopping. A number of aircraft were destroyed on the ground and pilots killed. But old Ludwig didn’t hesitate. Jumped into a waiting Hurricane and got it into the air and shot down a number of enemy aircraft that day – won a medal...”
Mr. Jud pulled a shiny metal cross from the box, “...there you go - Distinguished Flying Cross. Don’t know why I have never put it up on the mantelpiece.” Mr. Jud buffed the

medal with the cuff of his old jumper and placed it next to the jar which still had the piece of Ludwig's shin bone from his injury in the First World War.

"Why was it was all such a big deal – you know, the Battle of Britain." Jack asked.

Mr. Jud shrugged. "In some ways it wasn't. Actually only about four hundred and fifty allied pilots died in the four or so months it took place, which in military terms was quite few. Compare that to the millions who died in some of the other campaigns, like on the Eastern front between the Soviet Union and Germany."

"And Britain won the Battle?"

"In so much as the Germans called off Operation Sea Lion which was the plan to invade Britain after France had surrendered. In fact, just before the Battle of Britain, France had surrendered to Germany and quite a few people had lost hope. Winston Churchill was determined that Britain should fight on, alone or not."

Angus stared at one of the old photos, "So what happened?"

"The Germans launched air attacks from their new bases in France and the Netherlands – they needed to get control of the skies before any sea invasion could take place. But try as they might the German Luftwaffe could not break down the RAF. Then, in return for British planes bombing Berlin, Hitler changed tactics to bomb British cities - this gave the RAF a breathing space. Eventually, Hitler gave up and then in 1941 he turned his attention to the East – the invasion of the Soviet Union. So the Battle of Britain kept Britain in the war, and because Britain was able to hang on, they could fight in North Africa and later on in 1944, it meant the Allies were able to launch D Day and re-occupy Western Europe. Without those pilots, Britain may have needed to agree a humiliating peace with the Nazis, or face invasion, and the world would have been a very different place."

"Hey – what about this one?" Jack held up another photo.

Mr. Jud took it from Jack and looked at it. "That one is quite famous too. It's a picture taken from a plane of a V2 rocket just as it is taking off from its launch site in Northern France."

"I've heard of that too, you know, V1s and V2s..."

"Yes - the German Vengeance programme. Towards the end of the war, German scientists developed flying bombs - V1s - and then actual rockets - called V2s which they launched from sites in Northern France onto London, Paris and the Netherlands. By that stage they were losing the war and Hitler was desperate to find a miracle weapon that could somehow tip the balance."

"But it didn't work?"

"No. For the time, the technology they developed was incredible. But it also drained resources from the production of more ordinary, but better tried and tested weapons. Although the V1s and V2s were very scary - they could not be produced in the numbers to really have much of an impact."

"So the V2 - it was like a proper rocket, like a missile?"

"Yes - in fact after the war the Americans and other countries recruited many of the best German scientists to help on their own weapons programmes. It was quite a scandal. Many worked on the Apollo space programme - you know that put people on the moon. The design of the moon rockets isn't so different from a V2 - just a lot bigger."

"There's loads more newspaper cuttings and pictures here," Angus said, working his way through the box, "That's Hitler - isn't it?"

"Certainly is - standing in front of the Eiffel Tower in June 1940. The only time he visited Paris... I think you can see the old film footage of his visit on the internet. Apparently, when that photo was taken, Hitler is supposed to have said to the photographer, 'take one of me here, take the next one in front of Buckingham Palace and then the one after that in front of the skyscrapers in New York.' "

“What a nutter.” Angus said.

They were interrupted by Mrs. Jud. “Dear – we must go now. Lads – there’s some soup left over if you want it...”

“I nearly forgot...” Mr. Jud said.

“What?”

“Mum and I. We’re driving up to Edinburgh. We’re gone over night.”

“Oh yeah – the show, what is it again?”

“The Sound of Music, the son of one of Mum’s friends is in it – Peter. He’s playing Friedrich. They’re touring all round the country.” Mr. Jud put his mouth behind his hand and whispered sarcastically, “Can’t wait.”

Mrs. Jud shouted from the kitchen, “Are you ready dear?”

Mr. Jud was already up the stairs, “I’ll meet you at the car.”

Mrs. Jud popped her head round the door, “Where is he?”

“He’s just coming Mum.”

“So you two will be OK?”

“Yes Mum.”

“There is more in the fridge and that’s Mark’s number if you need any help with the animals. You’ll be OK?”

“Yes Mum. Go. Have fun.”

Mrs Jud checked her make up one final time in the hall mirror and shouted up the stairs. “I’m going. Now!”

Finally, Mr and Mrs Jud left the house and in few minutes they saw the old Subaru kicking up dust from its back wheels as it disappeared up the farm track to the main road.

Angus rubbed his hands. “OK - lunch. And then we can go and have another shot on the Flight Simulator...” Angus smiled mischievously, “Or we can always take the bikes out...”

"I'll give that one a miss, thanks."

Soon they were sitting around the big wooden farm table digging into the soup."

"I'm going to sort out some toast. Want some?"

"OK." Jack said, "So how long do you think it will take to restore the plane?"

"Maybe it can't be done, you know finding or re-making some of the parts...there is a lot missing. It's really expensive. To be honest, I think Dad might have overdone it this time."

"So you reckon you'll have your private pilot's license before then?"

"For sure - only another few hours to go - but paying for it is another matter."

"I'm sure VIGIL will loan you some cash, you know, for services rendered." Jack said, smiling.

Angus looked up and waved his spoon in the air, "You know what that is a VERY good idea. We *should* be paid. After all VIGIL can't possibly have any problem with cash..."

"No problem at all... if they get a bit short, they can just time travel to the vaults of the Bank of England and pick up a gold bar or two..."

Angus gazed into space, contemplating the exciting possibilities that time travel might offer for financial remuneration, "Imagine that... sometimes I think our Revisionist friends might have the right idea..."

"Sadly, I don't think they're in it for money... they have other reasons... like changing the world."

Angus turned back from the toaster and sat down and started to slurp his soup.

"That's gross by the way." Jack said.

"Efficient though. Mind you, I'll tell you something," Angus wiped his mouth, "I like how VIGIL keep coming up with cool stuff..."

“They haven’t got a choice... the Revisionists are still out there... they never found Pendelshape, in theory they could strike again. VIGIL need to keep on their toes, keep innovating.”

“Right.” Angus did not seem to be that interested in Jack’s point. “Like, have you checked out the new I-Phone thing they’ve dished out to us all...” Angus pulled an I-Phone from his pocket and started to slide his finger around on the screen. “So it *looks* like a normal I-Phone and is a mobile and has all the apps and stuff, but then you put in the special code and it turns all VIGIL and you can access all these cool VIGIL apps...”

Jack rolled his eyes, “Yes – I *was* in the same training session... and remember it’s not just for ‘cool apps’ – it’s for VIGIL keeping an eye on us, security, tracking where we are... and for access to the history archives, a bunch of stuff...” Jack pulled out his own VIGIL I-Phone, “see – here’s mine...”

“Oh God – the toast!” Angus exclaimed.

Smoke billowed from the toaster by the window. Angus raced over to mount a rescue attempt... but all that was left were two bits of charcoal.

“Great.”

“Hello - what’s this?”

Jack was peering at his I-Phone screen. “I’ve got a message.”

“First time for everything, Jack.”

“Funny. Probably Mum hassling me.”

Jack tapped the screen.

But it wasn’t his Mum and Jack’s heart missed a beat when he saw the message.

JACK – GET TO SAFETY. VIGIL IS ABOUT TO BE ATTACKED. AM ALSO WARNING VIGIL COMMAND. DAD.

Big Air

Jack nudged Angus and flashed the text in front of him. The colour drained from Angus's face. Jack looked up from the I-Phone and it was right at that point that he noticed something strange in the smoky kitchen air. A thin beam of red light traced a line from the window to the wall at the back of the kitchen. It was only visible where it caught the smoke in the air. Jack's eye followed the beam of light to where it formed a tiny red dot which danced on the wall opposite.

"Look. What's...?"

But Angus had already grabbed him and was manhandling him to the floor.

"Down!"

Jack and Angus hit the ground just as the first round from the sniper rifle shattered the kitchen window and embedded itself in the wall opposite.

"Someone's *shooting* at us from the woods..."

"I've got another message."

EMERGENCY MESSAGE FROM VIGIL: CODE RED. ALL VIGIL PERSONNEL TO ADOPT EMERGENCY PROTOCOL AND REPORT TO VIGIL COMMAND. REMOTE SECURITY DETAILS MAY HAVE BEEN COMPROMISED.

Angus held up his phone.

"Same. Says maybe we might be without security..."

"That means trouble."

Suddenly, a second piece of mortar dislodged from the wall. They hadn't even heard the shot.

"Another!"

"It's coming from over there. Maybe if we can go out through side door... to the outhouses."

“But maybe there are others, maybe they have us surrounded.”

“Well we can’t just wait here for them to come and get us. If we can get to the outhouse, we have a chance. We keep the bikes there.”

They raced from the kitchen and through the house to the side door. Angus pushed it ajar and sneaked a look.

“Can’t see anything. Who are these guys?”

“Got to be some sort of Revisionist assault. They’re taking a big risk.”

“Why would they do that? Everyone knows VIGIL is impregnable.”

“Maybe they’re targeting VIGIL personnel. We have to get out of here. See there – the door to the outhouse is just over there. We can make it.”

They burst from the door and sprinted to the outhouse. Shots rang out and plumes of dirt spat up from the ground. They tumbled through the outhouse door, sprawling onto the dusty floor beyond. The outhouse adjoined the garage which housed Mr. Jud’s Land rover. Next to it were the bikes they used on the farm – including Angus’s old two stroke 125 Husqvarna. Next to this was Angus’s Dad’s big new Triumph Tiger 800.

“We’ll take the Tiger – Dad will forgive me.” Angus panted.

“We have to get to Soonhope and link up with VIGIL. No idea what’s going on and no sign of our security guys. Maybe they got them. If we stay here, we’re toast.” Jack said.

“I reckon they’ll have the main track down to the road covered and the back way too.” Angus mounted the Tiger 800, fired the engine and twisted the throttle. The three cylinder gave a low, torquey, growl, “We’ll have to go cross-country...”

Jack reluctantly clambered onto the back of the bike.

Angus half turned, “Ready?”

“No...”

“Hold tight – I’m not hanging around.”

Without warning, the garage doors in front of them flew open. Two men stood there. They were carrying assault rifles.

Angus did not hesitate. He pulled in the clutch lever, kicked down to select first gear, and twisted the throttle. The engine wailed. But instead of aiming for the open garage door, he released the clutch, threw the bike round and the spinning back wheel spewed gravel and muck up into the eyes of the two men, who jumped back in surprise. The bike now pointed towards the back of the outhouse. A point of exit was not obvious. The bike shot forward and Jack shut his eyes, waiting for the impact with the rear wall. But Angus had other plans. They raced up a wooden ramp built into the wall on the inside of the building. It led to an upper floor – a sort of mezzanine level. It was surprisingly large and they slalomed through old hay bales and bits of rusting farm equipment. Jack opened his eyes, then, when he realised what was about to happen, he closed them again. Dead ahead there was a large open doorway built into the back wall – a large access hatch from the upper floor. Angus pointed the bike straight at it and two seconds later they were airborne. The bike, Angus and Jack flew from the second storey hatchway into the open. Jack braced himself. The bike hit the ground with an almighty crunch; the front forks compressed fully and then recoiled violently as the bike bounced. Incredibly, they remained upright.

Angus yelled in exhilaration. He redlined the engine as they powered on towards the farm track that led up Goat Law. Jack snatched a look behind and nudged Angus.

“They’re on to us – they’ve got quad bikes.”

It looked like they had a clear run to the hill track. But suddenly another man emerged from the woods just ahead on their right. He stared straight at the bike bearing down on him and fumbled for his weapon. Angus dropped a gear and the front wheel of the bike popped into the air. Standing proud on the footrests, with Jack clinging desperately to his torso, Angus pulled an impressive wheelie straight at the man, who dived for cover.

The front wheel touched down again, and they started to weave up the track to the crest of the hill. Jack looked behind again.

“They’re still coming.”

Two quad bikes were following them up the track in hot pursuit, plumes of dust spraying up from behind.

“We’ll have to head up to the old drove road and down over the Grey Mare’s Tail.” Angus shouted. “Five miles at most.”

Angus gunned the Tiger, it pounded upwards and in under a minute they crested the hill. They were already two thousand feet up and there was a light breeze. Beyond them, there were only the endless rolling, bare hills of the Border country. Two parallel dry stane dykes about fifty metres apart marked the course of the old drove road. In times past it was used to drive sheep to market – it was like a giant heather and grass motorway that went directly over the hills. It made a natural thoroughfare and, more importantly, led directly to the uplands above the Soonhope High School estate – VIGIL HQ. The only trouble was there was little cover on the hill tops and they would be easily spotted by the pursuing quad bikes.

They raced on and in only fifteen minutes they could see the village of Soonhope way below, its windows glinting in the midday sun. Jack turned. The quad bikes were still there - now only five hundred metres behind and closing. A rough track led down from the old drove road to Soonhope, hugging the steep sided valley. Nearby was the Grey Mare’s tail - a series of cascades that drained a small loch that nestled between the summits of the surrounding hills. The waterfall’s biggest drop was over thirty metres high and in winter it grew to an impressive torrent. Now though, the water was low and the stream traced a silver thread down the granite outcrops of the hillside.

The track down from the old drove road followed the waterfall most of the way, giving the occasional hiker stunning views of the Soonhope valley below. At points the

track would contort into a series of steep hairpins in order to regulate the descent. As they went down, Angus expertly worked his way up and down the gears to maximise speed and control. The Tiger handled superbly, but it was no use, the pursing four wheeled quad bikes had better grip and stability on the steep track and steadily narrowed the distance between them.

Jack pummelled Angus on the back.

“They’re closing... we’ve had it.”

Angus pulled the bike up onto a rocky outcrop that overlooked a spectacular section of the waterfall. A crude wooden bench sat on top of the outcrop. It allowed Sunday walkers a chance to rest and enjoy the view. Directly in front of it, there was a dilapidated fence that, in theory anyway, prevented you from getting too close to the edge. Nearby, a sign gave thoughtful health and safety advice:

DANGER - CLIFF

To help those challenged with written English, there was a picture of a man upside down tumbling down a slope, surrounded by an avalanche of rocks. The man’s survival looked to be in some doubt.

Although steep and craggy, the waterfall was only about ten metres across at this point. On the other side of the waterfall, but some way below the outcrop the track re-appeared and crossed the stream over a narrow bridge.

Angus looked round. He powered the bike a few metres back up the track from where they had just come. He revved the engine. As he did, the two quad bikes came round the last hairpin. Their pursuers had finally caught up. The quad bikes pulled up and Jack saw the men getting down and reaching for their weapons.

“Hold on!” Angus said.

He twisted the throttle and the engine screamed. The Tiger shot down the track and back onto the rocky outcrop, it passed the bench and the warning sign, smashed through the

wooden fence and soared at an angle across the waterfall. Jack's feet flew off the foot rests and he found himself in mid air clinging to Angus's torso, twenty metres above the waterfall. For some strange reason, a helpful motivational tip that Angus had once given to him on riding a motorbike floated through his mind,

"Remember - when you're in the air, it doesn't hurt..."

Jack had no time to be frightened. With an almighty crunch the bike hit the track on the opposite side of the waterfall – rear wheel first then front wheel. They had made it. Angus hit the front brake and then the rear a split second later. As he did so both tyres lost grip on the loose surface. In a split second, the bike, Jack and Angus were sliding horizontally along the ground. They came to rest twenty metres on – their forward momentum finally interrupted by a large slab of rock that rose up beside the track. Jack had been thrown free but Angus was stuck under the heavy bike. Jack jumped to his feet and rushed over to where the bike had come to rest with Angus underneath it. He reached down and tried to heave up the machine. With difficulty, he managed to pull the bike aside and he peered down at Angus's mud caked body. The side of his face was badly scratched from where it had scraped along the track.

Angus did not move.