

Day of Rebellion

The fourth and final Jack Christie Time Travel

Adventure

'Save the Past, Control the Future'

Johnny O'Brien

THE YEAR: 1860

THE PLACE: CHINA, TAIPING
REBELLION

THE MISSION: TO FIX A TIME-SPLIT
THAT THREATENS THE WORLD

Join Jack and Angus on their final
explosive mission. Travelling to 1860s
China they land in the midst of the
Taiping Rebellion: a world of Chinese
warlords, decaying Empires and
revolution.

But time has fractured, altering history
and putting the future of the world in
jeopardy. Can Jack and Angus discover
the Point of Divergence in time to save
the future?

Jack's Adventures so Far

It has been several months since Jack and his friend, Angus, discovered that their school in Soonhope in the Borders of Scotland, is a front for a secret team of scientists, called 'VIGIL', 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 which controls 'time phones' used by time travellers to move from one historical period to another. Jack's father, Professor Tom Christie, led the team that originally built the Taurus. However, having perfected the machine, Christie's team had a fatal disagreement and Christie was forced into exile, leaving Jack and his mother, Carole, in Soonhope.

Professor Christie's plan was to use time travel to make changes in the past that would alter the future for the better. He had big ideas – like going back in time to stop entire wars from starting in the first place. He attracted passionate supporters from the original Taurus team, including Dr Pendelshape, Jack's old history teacher. Pendelshape, Christie and their small band of followers called themselves 'Revisionists'. They used computer simulations to help plan the changes they wanted to make in the past in order to change or 'revise' the future. But others from Christie's original Taurus team believed that changing events in the past, however well meant, is dangerous because it is impossible to fully predict the consequences. They formed a separate group – called 'VIGIL' – to ensure that the Taurus and the ability to time travel was kept a very closely guarded secret. They housed the Taurus machine in an underground complex beneath the school in Soonhope. Today the teachers have ordinary jobs at the school, which acts as a front for VIGIL, and second lives as VIGIL agents.

Jack and Angus became embroiled in the conflict between VIGIL and the Revisionists when, unknown to VIGIL, Tom Christie and the Revisionists secretly created a second Taurus. Using plans drawn up from their computer simulations, the Revisionists used their

Taurus to go back in time to try and stop the First World War – and so save millions of lives and change the course of history. But VIGIL got wind of the plans and managed to stop them. Jack and Angus found themselves caught between VIGIL and the Revisionists and Jack's loyalties were torn. In the end, having witnessed the dangers of time travel and intervening in the past in order to change the future, Jack decided that the right thing to do was to side with VIGIL, even though this meant he was unlikely to see his father again.

Having failed in their first attempt to intervene in history and so change the future, the Revisionists made two further attempts to change the past. The first of these was in Elizabethan England and the second was in 1940 – during the early part of the Second World War. As a result of these events, Pendelshape, who by now had become leader of the Revisionists, was killed and the Revisionists were finally defeated by VIGIL. Tom Christie survived, however, and a reconciliation is now underway between him and his old colleagues at VIGIL. Tom has seen how intervening in the past might have tragic consequences and also recognises how much his actions and those of Pendelshape and the other Revisionists have endangered his own family. However, relations have not yet thawed sufficiently for him to return to VIGIL, or to his family in Soonhope.

In their last adventure in 1940, Jack and Angus were forced to leave a VIGIL time phone in 1940s London on top of Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square. VIGIL agents are now planning to recover it, in case it falls into the wrong hands...

The Summer Palace

Beijing, China - 1860

Jack was speechless. Stretching before him was an astonishing fairy tale world of gardens, lakes, fountains and pavilions. There were hundreds of structures – all of them extraordinarily beautiful. But the peace was temporary. Jack felt a tremor in the earth like a rumbling earthquake. He glanced round. A whole posse of Imperial cavalry had spotted the two of them and were hurtling towards them through the gardens.

“Come on!” Angus screamed.

He led them off the main path and into a narrow, hedged passageway. Beyond, there was a wide, grass bank, which rose gently in front of the most astonishing building they had yet seen – a miniature palace. But there was no time to stand and admire it. They climbed up the marble steps and through the lavish entrance, dashed inside and into a long, vast hallway. Lining one side were a series of huge jade vases. They were twice Jack’s height and yet so delicate and thin the light shone straight through them.

They paused for breath halfway along the hall.

“What now?” Jack said, his chest heaving.

For the first time Angus, did not seem to know what to do or where to go.

Suddenly, there was a loud crash behind them. They wheeled round. A huge lancer sat astride a muscular black horse at the end of the great hall. He had ridden up the steps and into the pavilion. His steel helmet glimmered and its long, feathered plume quivered. The horse bucked, and the cavalryman balanced his lance in his right hand, digging his heels hard into the flanks of his horse. It reared... and then it charged. The horseman skilfully manoeuvred the lance, angling it towards Jack and Angus. Jack dived for cover. But Angus was too slow. Crying out in horror as the lance pierced his friend’s chest. Jack raced to where Angus lay slumped on the floor and cradled his head in his hands. It lolled

back uselessly, his eyes staring up into the gilded rafters above. Fired up with rage, Jack leaped up, reaching for the sword at his belt. But the lancer was already well into his second charge. The horse snorted as it thundered at him and all Jack could do was stare down the shaft of the lance as its cold steel tip entered his chest, just below his heart.

Contact

“That Lancer Boss is impossible to get past .” Angus threw his controller away in disgust.

“I know... but what do you think?” Jack glanced away from the screen with its frozen image of Jack and Angus prostrate on the marble floor of the Yuan Ming Yuan Haiyan. It was one of the most extraordinary buildings ever constructed and the makers of *Point-of-Departure – Day of Rebellion, China 1860* had lovingly brought it to life as accurately as they could.

Angus inspected the plastic games case.

“It’s good. Multiplayer is awesome. Those big battle scenes with the Chinese Imperials against the Taiping rebels...”

“Bit different to the other POD games. And the alternative history scenarios I’ve got to say, they’re brilliant.” Jack smiled. “You know why that is, don’t you?”

Angus scooped up a huge handful of popcorn and stuffed it into his mouth, “No – why?” He spat half of the popcorn back out of his mouth as he spoke.

“That’s nice.” Jack tried to ignore it. “I found out something very interesting yesterday. I was called into VIGIL – they wanted me to go through the whole Second World War thing with them again...”

Angus rolled his eyes, “What? We’ve been through it, like, a billion times already.”

Jack shrugged, “You know what they’re like. They’re worried about the time phone...”

“What? The one you left up on top of Nelson’s Column?”

“Yes.”

“Well, it was a pretty stupid thing to do... I mean leaving a working time phone back in 1940... unlike you to mess up like that, Jack ... you must feel pretty bad – putting the whole of the human race at risk...” Angus shook his head.

“Thanks for that. You might remember, I don’t recall you being much use – you just jumped off.”

“I’m winding you up –” Angus narrowed his eyes as he relived his BASE jumping experience from the top of Nelson’s Column “ –but it was pure adrenaline. And the look on your face as you hit the ground... priceless!”

“Hilarious,” Jack deadpanned. “Anyway, VIGIL is still going on about it. I think they’re going to send an agent to get the time phone. As you say, it’s not ideal for it to just sit there...”

“Must be a bit rusty by now too. Who will they send to get it?”

Jack shrugged, “Tony... Gordon – one of the happy couple probably.”

“Good luck to them. Anyway, you were going to tell me something.”

“Oh yeah, you won’t believe this, but guess who’s really behind *Point-of-Departure*?”

Angus flipped the games case over in his hand, “Dunno. Some evil global corporation?”

Jack cleared his throat. “Nope – the world famous POD series – biggest game series of all time with huge global sales and its first film coming out next year... belongs to VIGIL”

“What?”

“It’s VIGIL. VIGIL is behind POD!”

Angus looked stunned, “But...”

“Inchquin told me yesterday when I was up at VIGIL HQ.” Jack explained. “He thought it was funny that we’ve played all the different games, and we never knew. It makes sense though, doesn’t it ? All the historical stuff – super accurate with all the

alternative histories caused by different things you could do in the past... only VIGIL would have the knowledge to design a game like that.”

Angus was agog. “Wow! I never thought... but... why would they do that?”

“Easy. They can make money out of it. Loads of money. It can’t be cheap keeping VIGIL going, so they’ve built up a nice little side-line in software and gaming.”

Angus shook his head and stared at the screen. “You’re right – all this – it’s a bit like the stuff we’ve seen in the Timeline Simulator. Makes sense.”

“And, Inchquin said that Dad wrote some of the original software years ago, when he was at CERN with Mum. The algorithms used in VIGIL’s Timeline Simulator are apparently quite similar to the ones they’ve used in the POD games – you know, for the alternative histories. They were way ahead of their time.”

“Must have been nice for them, coding together, the happy nerds,” Angus grinned.

“Anyway, do you want to have another shot – see if we can get past that cavalry guy?”

But as Jack picked up the controller and turned his attention back to the screen, something odd happened.

The frozen image of Jack and Angus dead on the floor of the Chinese palace disappeared and the screen went completely black.

“Uh-oh...” Jack got up to approach the console, but then stopped in his tracks.

The black screen flickered and then, from the top left, a message appeared.

Msg from timetraveller01: Hope you guys are enjoying the new game. Sorry to disturb you. I have made some decisions. They affect us all. For now I don't want VIGIL involved. Small steps first. Short notice, I know, but would like to meet at the Edinburgh Museum at 2 pm this afternoon. Just you two. I will explain everything when we meet. Nothing to worry about, but make sure you come alone.

There was another flicker of the screen as the mysterious message signed off, with one final word:

Dad.

Memories of Heaven

“What does it mean?” Jack stared at the screen.

“Your dad wants to see us. Sounds like he’s been doing some thinking. Cool way to get in touch, eh? Through the game.”

“But...”

“Come on.” Angus looked at his watch. “It’s half twelve. I’ve got a spare helmet. We can be there in less than an hour.”

“I don’t know what he wants...”

“And if you don’t go you never will.”

“What about Mum?”

“She’s out – right?”

“Yeah – she was going on about locking up if we went anywhere.”

“Well, she doesn’t need to know and that’s how your dad wants it.” Angus was already climbing back up the stairs from Jack’s cellar. He stopped half way up and turned back to Jack who was still staring dumbfounded at the screen.

“Come on. It’ll be fine. In fact, this could be it – your dad’s plan to finally end the fight with VIGIL... Maybe he’s going to come home.”

Jack followed Angus up the stairs. His mind was so pre-occupied that he forgot to turn off the console and the message from ‘timetraveller01’ lingered on the screen behind them.

Jack clambered onto the back of the bike – Angus had ‘borrowed’ his dad’s KTM – and they powered up the old drive from Cairnfield. It was a fine summer’s day and soon

they were racing their way through the countryside towards Edinburgh, with Jack still trying to make meaning of his dad's strange message.

He was nervous, but exhilarated. It was less than a month since Jack and Angus had travelled back from 1940. With his dad's help they had prevented a Revisionist attempt to intervene in World War Two from going disastrously wrong. They had also saved VIGIL from defeat by the Revisionists. It had been a close run thing. Jack should have felt elated at the result, but actually he was in a state of limbo. Things which should have been sorted out still weren't. Pendelshape was dead and they believed that the Revisionists had been destroyed; for a moment it had seemed that his dad would be reconciled with his old colleagues, Inchquin, the Rector and the rest of VIGIL. Jack had witnessed a moment of tenderness between his mum and dad and had fleetingly hoped they might get back together. But then, at the final moment, his dad had decided that it was all too much, too soon, he couldn't come back... yet. It had been back to square one.

But now this strange message had arrived, only a few weeks later. So maybe Angus was right and his father had finally made up his mind. The Revisionists' attempts to intervene in history to control the future had failed, but more than that, they had almost wiped themselves out in the process. With Pendelshape dead and many, maybe all, of the other Revisionists either dead or captured by VIGIL, perhaps his dad had finally decided enough was enough; and it was time to come in from the cold.

Two giant warriors stood either side of the entrance to the museum. The models were very lifelike. One was dressed in a red jacket, blue trousers and boots. He wore light leather and metal armour on his top half. His helmet had leather chin straps and he was carrying a huge black banner. Jack read a small plaque beside the figure:

Taiping Rebellion Women's Infantry - 1855.

He did a double take as he realised that the figure was not a man but a replica figure of a female warrior. Opposite, there was an equally ferocious Chinese soldier carrying a green flag. His plaque read:

Imperial (Qing Dynasty) Infantry – 1855.

Ahead, above the information desk to the museum there was a large banner:

Memories of Heaven – The Heavenly Kingdom comes to Edinburgh

Welcome to the Taiping Experience

“Do you think this is Dad trying to be funny?” Jack asked.

“Why?” said Angus.

“This... big China exhibition thing. China in the mid-nineteenth century – Taiping rebellion, Opium Wars, all that...”

“What about it?”

Jack sighed, “It’s the same as the game, the new *Point-of-Departure – Day of Rebellion.*” Jack tapped his temple with his index finger, “Duh. It’s all the same period of history. Dad knew we were playing POD China and so he thought it would be funny to meet us here where they’ve got a big exhibition about it.”

“Oh right... I get you.” Angus said, then grimaced, “Do I?”

Jack shook his head in despair.

“Anyway, what do we do? Just hang around for him?”

“He’ll probably be keeping a low profile. I suppose we should wander round.”

They approached the front desk where a young assistant was pointing a couple towards the far end of the huge atrium, “...introductory lectures are in the open area at the end of the hall there, then there’s a guided tour of the main China exhibit, the guide is just starting one now...” the woman nodded towards the far end of the hall where people were seated in rows in front of a large screen.

Jack shrugged, “Might as well take a look...”

As they moved through the main hall towards the presentation, they could already hear the amplified voice of the guide talking to the group.

“... the Taiping rebellion in China was the second bloodiest war of any kind in history,” she announced. As she spoke a series of images were scrolling by on the big screen behind her. There were pictures of great throngs of soldiers holding black flags, Chinese cities with amazing architecture, astounding works of art, peasants at work in fields... The guide kept talking: “Some estimate that the total number of deaths during the Taiping rebellion, between 1850 and 1864, may have exceeded thirty million. That’s three times as many as died in the First World War. Yet, in the West, few have even heard of the Taiping Rebellion...”

“Do we really want to listen to this?” Angus sighed. “I mean, people talking about history is OK and everything, but they should really ask the experts – people who’ve actually been there. Like me.”

Jack smiled and tuned in to the guide’s talk.

“...There were many amazing things about the Taiping, and their enemies – China’s ruling Qing dynasty. Take, for example, Taiping rebellion’s leader, Hong Xiuquan,” the guide paused and a line drawing of a Chinese man in an elaborately embroidered robe and an ornate hat appeared on the screen. “It is said that Hong Xiuquan fell into a trance and saw visions of heaven that inspired him to over throw the Qing. He and his followers practised their own version of Christianity And because the Taiping were Christians, they attracted some European support. For a while the Taiping were very successful. They had a good army and they moved north, eventually taking the city of Nanjing in 1853. But the rebellion left China weak and open to exploitation by the British, French and others...”

The guide droned on and after a while Jack found his attention wavering. With the words, “Now, let me welcome you to the Heavenly Kingdom – and the *Taiping Experience...*” she suddenly stopped talking and the screen rose upwards, revealing two large glass doors

which swung open to allow visitors into the dimly lit exhibition areas. The crowd drifted forward.

Jack nudged Angus, who was gazing distractedly at the floor. "We're on."

It was an impressive exhibition. There were intricately patterned silk costumes of all shapes and sizes. Then there was the full model layout of the Third Battle of Nanjing with an Imperial army assault on the city battlements. It was all laid out in miniature with row upon row of soldiers, cannons and cavalry. The city was being defended by the Taiping – in their red jackets and blue trousers. Further down the exhibition hall, there were more figures, this time representing the Taiping's enemy – the Imperialist Qing. There was a bit on punishment and torture, including photographs of 'slow slicing', where a series of precise incisions cut away the victim's flesh before he was left to die.

Suddenly, Jack felt himself being jostled by the crowd behind. He half turned in irritation and suddenly something was thrust into his hands. It was an envelope. He scanned the faces behind him but whoever who had delivered the envelope had already slipped away into the throng.

Tantallon

Jack barged through the crowd out of the gloom of the exhibition hall and into the light of the atrium. He ripped open the envelope. Inside, there was a single sheet of folded paper. It read:

Meet you at Tantallon

“What does that mean?” Angus said, finally catching up with Jack and peering over his shoulder. “Did you see who gave it to you?”

Jack looked anxiously around the museum, but it was just the same scene of visitors and tourists quietly milling around. The mystery contact had vanished into thin air.

“He’s gone.” Jack stared at the piece of paper. “Didn’t even see him. Was it Dad?”

“No - he wouldn’t have just left. Anyway, what’s Tantallon?” Angus pressed.

“It’s a castle on the coast... Mum and Dad used to take me there when I was a kid.”

Angus gunned the KTM due east and the Edinburgh suburbs peeled away into the East Lothian countryside which spread out from the bare, rolling hills of the Lammermuirs down to the grey-blue sea of the Firth of Forth. It was a fine day, but Jack worried about what they would find when they arrived.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out his VIGIL Smart Device. He’d lost the previous model in Paris in 1940, but VIGIL was issuing new devices to all their personnel. Jack had received his the day before at VIGIL and Angus was fed up that his had not yet arrived. The device looked like a smart phone and it gave the user access to all sorts of apps. But it also gave VIGIL agents access to a number of special VIGIL applications about history, technology, inventions and most fields of human endeavour. It was like having a whole

encyclopaedia in a little box and, for any VIGIL agent called on another time-travel mission, it would be invaluable.

Jack had shown Angus an amazing VIGIL app that had detailed descriptions of how things worked, with technical drawings, cutaways and animations of different car and bike engines, aeroplanes and just about anything you could think of. The app also showed how these technologies had developed over time. It was of important for VIGIL to understand, study and record such things, so they knew how things developed and fitted together and their impact on history. Right now though, Jack was only interested in the device's Sat Nav, which he was using to guide Angus towards Tantallon.

An hour later they were well into the countryside and had turned off an isolated coast road onto a dirt track. It was a flat, treeless landscape and there was no-one around. They could see the sea in the distance and smell the fresh salt air.

After ten minutes, they pulled up to a simple wooden shack built next to a small turning circle.

"There." Jack said

There was a rusty sign next to the shack:

Tantallon Castle

"Not much of a castle."

"That's not it. That's where you get in. The castle is further on." Jack looked around and took off his helmet. The breeze ruffled his hair. "I remember it now. It's ages since I was here."

They walked towards the shack.

"Can't believe there's anyone in there." Angus knocked on the window of the shack. Inside they could see an assortment of yellowing postcards, a few souvenirs and a mouldy fridge with some soft drinks way past their sell-by date.

Angus knocked again. "Anyone at home?"

Suddenly a head popped up from behind the counter and the window slid open. Angus jumped. The attendant was old and grey and he had a pipe in one hand which he rested on the counter. He stared at them with beady eyes.

“On your own?” He looked at them suspiciously and then craned his head out of the shack to check there was no-one else around.

“Yes...”

“Follow the track up to the castle.” He nodded at the bike, “You’ll have to leave that here. And you’ll need this.” He handed them a small package. “Go to the pit prison. It’s inside the castle; you’ll find it easy enough. Only open the package when you’re down there. Don’t worry, there’s no other visitors today...” he flashed a toothless grin, “Like most days.”

“But...”

“Go!” The man hissed and he slammed the window shut and the hut shook.

“Polite here, aren’t they?” Angus said.

They opened an old gate next to the hut and set off down a track through a mown field. Ahead was a vast, grassy rampart. Jack and Angus rounded the rampart and suddenly there it was – a massive ruined castle. In fact, it looked less like a castle and more like a solid wall of red sandstone. It towered over twenty metres into the sky and extended across a large promontory hanging over the sea.

“Impressive.”

“Yeah. Beyond that huge wall there is just some land which juts out to sea. There are cliffs on all the other sides. But I don’t get it – why has Dad sent us here – where is he anyway?”

“Yeah – why not just meet us at the museum?” Angus said.

“Maybe he’s still afraid we’d be followed or something. Maybe he’ll be waiting for us in the pit dungeon, or whatever it’s called. We’d better try to find it.”

Suddenly, a worrying thought flashed into Jack's head. What if the note hadn't been from his dad at all...?

"Pit prison - sounds pleasant. Look - there's a plan of the castle on that sign."

They crossed the drawbridge over the ditch at the front of the castle and passed through the gate into the central courtyard. There were breath-taking views out to sea, which sparkled in the sunlight.

"Look at that."

Angus pointed at a huge rock rising vertically from the water only about a mile out from the castle.

"That's the Bass Rock. It's an island. I remember going round it in a boat once. Nearly threw up. You should see it close up - the cliffs are incredible. It's got a lighthouse. See?"

"People live on it?"

"No. I think there used to be a prison - would have been impossible to escape. Come on - this hanging around is making me nervous."

They entered the ruined state rooms at the west end of the castle site.

"Down here..."

"You going to open that package now?"

"The old guy said to open it when we got down."

Jack could scarcely see his way as they stepped from ground level and brilliant sunlight into the dank bowels of the castle. They descended a steep spiral staircase before finally reaching a small room. A single electric bulb up on the wall gave off a faint light. The room was empty.

"Grim. Is this it?" Angus asked.

Jack nodded. "Time to open the package."

He peeled back layers of brown paper and out slipped a thin plastic object. His heart jumped when he saw it and he glanced knowingly at Angus.

“Interesting. Looks just like a VIGIL access device. You going to give it a go?”

Jack’s thumb twitched on the device and suddenly a small opening appeared in the floor beneath Angus’s feet.

Angus jumped aside, “Whoa!”

Where Angus had been standing, there appeared a circular metal covering set in a concrete base. It looked a bit like a large drain cover.

Jack pressed the device a second time and the metal cover slid open to reveal a hole in the ground. It led onto a steeply raked spiral staircase.

Angus gawped, “Identical to the VIGIL entry portals.”

“Yeah. But I don’t think this one goes anywhere near VIGIL. I think it goes somewhere else altogether.”

Subsea

As they walked onto the spiral staircase, the steps began lowering automatically and the aperture closed silently above their heads. After a few minutes of descent they came to a gentle halt. Ahead of them was a door. Jack pressed the device again and the door opened into a short metal-clad corridor lit by a dim blue glow. At the end of the corridor was a circular metal door. Jack and Angus exchanged glances.

"I'm assuming your dad intends us to keep going..."

"Incredible – everything's just like VIGIL." But then Jack noticed that the door did not have the familiar 'V I G I L' logo etched onto it. Instead, there was a phrase:

Change the Past. Save the Future.

The door opened without a sound, revealing a long tubular passageway which melted into the darkness. The passage walls at the VIGIL complex were brilliantly engineered – completely smooth with no rivets and no seams. But this place was different. The passage was hewn directly from the rock. Water dripped down from above and every few metres the roof was supported by old and rusty steel struts. It was like a badly maintained mineshaft.

"This tunnel has got to go right under the sea."

"It's giving me the creeps... and it all looks pretty rickety. Are we just going to go on?" Angus said.

"What the...?"

Jack jumped as, suddenly, a small open car appeared out of the gloom and glided to a halt right in front of them.

"It's on rails..."

"Nearly gave me a heart attack... it's just like a ghost train."

"It must be automatic. Do you reckon we just get in?"

Soon they were trundling through the claustrophobic tunnel and after a few minutes the mysterious rail car came to a halt next to a low concrete platform.

“Guess this is it, then.”

“I don’t get it, Jack. I mean, why isn’t your dad here to meet us? It’s almost like he’s set us a weird test or something.”

Jack gave a shrug and looked around. “What now?”

“Maybe we go down there – it looks like there’s some sort of lift?”

At one end of the platform a mesh cage rose up from the platform directly into the roof. They approached it and Jack craned his head upwards.

“It’s just a big black hole – can’t see a thing, which is really weird, because I swear the tunnel was going in the direction of the sea. So I don’t get how we’re not under water now – that hole just seems to go up.”

“Maybe it’s the Bass Rock,” Angus said. “Maybe we’ve gone under the sea and now we’re under the rock itself. Look – there’s a button. Shall I give it a go?”

Jack nodded. Angus pressed the button and there was a mechanical whirring from above.

“Well, something’s working up there...”

They waited with baited breath as they heard the lift cage rattling down the shaft from above. Suddenly, the bottom of the yellow-painted metal cage appeared and jolted to a halt in front of them. Jack’s heart missed a beat.

Inside the lift cage was a man, with his back turned to them, leaning heavily against the latticed door. Without warning, the door slid open and the man tumbled out, slumping over the access gate. He did not move. Jack and Angus rushed forward. The man’s head fell back, his eyes stared unblinking at the tunnel roof.

Jack’s heart was racing. He peered closer and then turned to Angus, his face etched with fear.

“God Angus – he’s dead. Looks like he’s been shot.”

They laid the man out onto the platform.

“Who is he?”

Jack shook his head. “No idea.”

“What are we going to do?”

Jack felt his chest thumping. “Dad. He must be up there. Maybe there’s been some sort of fight... maybe he’s in trouble. I think we need to go up.”

“Hold on, Jack, is that clever? Maybe we should go back... get help... get VIGIL here.”

“But what about Dad?”

“Jack – we don’t even know if it was really your dad who sent the message... maybe it’s a trick...”

“Well, I’m going up – you can go back if you want.”

They climbed into the cage. There were three buttons one above the other:

Ground Exit

Complex

Top Exit – Rock

“What do you reckon? I’m going to try ‘Complex’” Jack pushed the button.

There was a jolt and the cage started to ascend through the lift shaft hewn into the rock. Minutes later the cage came to a halt with a lurch. Jack pulled back the gate and they stepped into a narrow tunnel. After a few metres they arrived at another metal doorway.

“Guess this must be it. Entrance to the ‘Complex’. Whatever that is.”

“Try the access device on this door. But get ready – we don’t know what’s behind it.”

The door opened and for a moment there was just pitch darkness. Then, one by one, lights started to flicker on.

Jack and Angus stood dumbfounded at the scene before them.

The room was similar to the underground library at Jack's house in Cairnfield. It was oval shaped and there were books and papers on shelves and stacked up everywhere. There was all sorts of paraphernalia on display in various glass cabinets.

Angus found his voice. "This is it, isn't it? It's the Revisionist base. What VIGIL would give to see this."

"Buried somewhere beneath the Bass Rock in the middle of the Firth of Forth... mind blowing," Jack said. "How did they build it all?"

"And keep it secret?"

Jack bit his lip. "It's like the *Marie Celeste*."

"Yeah - too creepy."

Jack stepped further into the library and suddenly stopped in his tracks. He felt his insides convulse.

"Oh God... another one."

The Rock

The second body was lying face up next to a low table in the library. The man's lifeless eyes stared at the ceiling and a dark pool of blood oozed out from beneath him. Jack's shock was tempered by only one thing. The body wasn't his father's.

"That blood looks fresh... it must have just happened."

Jack didn't want to look any closer.

Angus pointed to the floor, "You're right, dark drops... it's a trail of blood... goes through to the next room."

"Must be from that guy..."

"No. Look. It stops well before where he's lying. Someone else must be injured."

Jack trembled in shock, "It could be Dad's blood."

Suddenly, from deep inside the underground complex, they heard a dull mechanical whine. It was rising quickly in pitch and volume, like a jet engine preparing for take-off.

Jack glanced at Angus. They recognised the noise and knew it meant only one thing.

Without saying a word, they rushed through the doorway at the far end of the library. The scene before them was strangely familiar. Directly in front of them, was a solid wall of thick green glass that extended from the floor all the way up to the ceiling. The glass had the same hue and texture as the Taurus blast screen at VIGIL HQ. Beyond this was a large machine embedded within a network of interconnecting pipes, cables and gantries. They were standing in front of the Revisionist's time-travel machine. It was just like the VIGIL Taurus, but, if anything, even bigger. Jack and Angus stopped in their tracks and stared in amazement. They could tell by the shrill scream of the generators and the throb of the alert lights that the Taurus was already fully powered up. Jack looked up to the transfer platform in the upper level of the machine. The atmosphere above the platform within the semi-enclosed transfer chamber was changing. It was as if the air had become molten and

was moving and wobbling like some sort of super-heated plasma. Up on the platform, Jack could see a man. His image distorted and then, suddenly, he was gone. Almost instantaneously they heard the generators power down and in seconds the Taurus returned to normal.

“That guy up there – I couldn’t see clearly – but are you thinking what I’m thinking?” Angus said uneasily.

“I know...” Jack agreed his voice trembling with fear, “It looked just like him...”

“Pendelshape.”

“But it’s impossible. Pendelshape is dead. We saw it with our own eyes – we saw him die in France in 1940.”

“Maybe it was a trick of the light.”

Suddenly the blast screen started to lower and in seconds it had encased itself back in its housing. Now Jack and Angus could see the Revisionist Taurus in all its detail. It sat there, brooding and waiting, like some powerful mythical beast.

“What a monster.”

“Look...” Angus said, and pointed.

The trail of blood from the library led directly up to the Taurus and onto the steps that accessed the gantry to the transfer platform.

“So it was the guy who was hurt...” Angus said.

“Or maybe someone else...”

Angus looked at Jack quizzically.

“I don’t know, Angus, but there’s been a serious fight here. Two guys are dead. Maybe Dad wanted to meet us here but something went badly wrong. Maybe when he got here he found these guys – I don’t know... maybe they’re the last of the Revisionists? Maybe that one we saw up on the transfer platform actually *is* Pendelshape. When you’re meddling with time-travel – anything can happen.”

"Can't be. It makes no sense... and anyway... where was he going?"

Jack thought for a moment. "That's what I'm saying. It could be they had a fight with Dad and... I don't know... Dad ended up using the Taurus to escape. That man we saw is going after him. Perhaps it's Dad who's hurt. Maybe badly hurt." Jack turned to Angus his face set in grim determination. "I'm going after him, Angus."

"Hold on - that's nuts. We don't know where they've gone. Anyway, your dad knows how to look after himself."

"Not if he's badly injured." Jack challenged Angus, "You going to help me or not?"

Angus paused and looked back at Jack, "What do you think? Let you go off on your own, getting into trouble and having all the fun. I'm in."

For a split second a smile shaped Jack's lips.

He turned to the Taurus control area. "See there - all those time phones are ready in their pods, but two are missing... if I can get into the system the online activity log should tell me where they've gone..."

Jack tapped at a keyboard. Over the last few months he had become more and more proficient with VIGIL's astonishing technology - and the Revisionist systems seemed to be just the same. He was no expert but he knew enough.

"I've got it... the summary activity log..." His eyes narrowed at the screen, "But I don't get it."

"What?"

"It can't be..."

The information on the recent Taurus time-travel event blinked back at them.

Taurus Activity Log

Departure summary:

Time Phone Serial: 009 Time Phone Holder: Fenton P.

Departure Date: June 23rd 2013 / Time: 2:45 p.m.

Departure Location: Firth of Forth, Scotland.

Arrival summary:

Time Phone Serial: 009 Time Phone Holder: Fenton P.

Arrival Date: July 15th 2046 / Time: 11:23 p.m.

Arrival Location: Firth of Forth, Scotland.

“Fenton P. Is that the name of the guy we saw on the transfer platform...?”

“Could be... but look again... look at his *arrival date*.”

Angus peered at the screen. “Well there’s the date and time – but, hold on, it says 2046. But that’s in...”

Jack finished Angus’s sentence “. . .the future...”

“That’s...”

“... impossible?” Jack said.

“You think your dad has modified the Revisionist Taurus so it can transport people to the *future*?”

“Look, if I scroll down, I should get the previous time-travel event...”

Jack tapped the mouse. “Yes... Look!” He said, triumphantly.

Taurus Activity Log

Departure summary:

Time Phone Serial: 002 Time Phone Holder: Tom C.

Departure Date: June 23rd 2013 / Time: 2:29 p.m.

Departure Location: Firth of Forth, Scotland.

Arrival summary:

Time Phone Serial: 009 Time Phone Holder: Tom C.

Arrival Date: July 14th 2046 / Time: 10:09 p.m.

Arrival Location: Firth of Forth, Scotland.

“This proves Dad was here. There’s hardly going to be another Tom C. – and it shows that he left here just before that Fenton guy followed him. Looks like it was a close call. He also went to the future – and Fenton followed him there. But that’s interesting... the arrival date is different. Dad got there a day earlier.”

“Why would that be? I mean, if Fenton was after him, why not arrive before and surprise him?”

“Yeah... it must be the time signal constraints. You know – you can’t just go when and where you want. You set the parameters you want and the Taurus is programmed to do its best to meet them. But it tries to avoid people flying repeatedly in and out of the same space and time.”

“Armageddon scenario.”

“Right. The VIGIL guys say the Taurus tries to manage it, but it’s risky. The constraints can vary. So Fenton probably got as close as he could to when Dad arrived.”

“So now what?”

Jack’s brow furrowed as he stared at the screen in front of them. “I think it’s pretty obvious, don’t you?”

“We’ll need some kit... packs, clothing... let’s get on it.”

Jack’s breathing was becoming heavier and his whole nervous system buzzed as if it was wired to the mains. The fact that he had endured this experience several times before

did not make him feel any better. Nor was he comforted by the fact that, for the first time, the mighty Taurus would transport them not to the past, but to the future. Or so they hoped. Jack started to notice the physical changes around him in the Taurus chamber as they approached the event horizon – the point of no return. He could hear the shrill scream of the generators, but for some reason the sound was more muffled in their position on the transfer platform high up on the Taurus. Around his feet he could see shimmering eddies of light – the electrical disturbance caused by the temporary wormhole: ion-charged curtains of blue, red and green light. As the shimmering became stronger, it was as if he was standing in the rippling waters of an illuminated whirlpool. The atmosphere within the Taurus structure was also changing and the control room beyond appeared darker and fuzzier. Jack clenched his fists and gritted his teeth...

3... 2... 1

2046

The scene before Jack and Angus seemed little different from the one they had looked out on only seconds before. There was one other important change however, and it only took Jack a single glance at his time phone to confirm the incredible truth. The readout winked back at him:

Date: July 16th 2046

Time: 2:33 p.m.

Location: Bass Rock, Firth of Forth, Scotland.

2046. That was the important number. The year. It meant they had travelled more than forty years into *the future*.

"You okay?" Angus said.

"That usual sick feeling. But I'll be OK. The place looks empty - but there seems to be power."

"Yeah. But we can't be too sure."

"Look - the blood trail again..."

Jack pointed to the entry gantry leading off the Taurus transfer platform. The thin spattering of blood, now dried, continued all the way along, then down and into the room below. It then traced its way through to the exit that led back into the library.

"I guess we follow it and we'll discover something soon enough."

"Or someone... we need to be careful."

Jack studied the time phone readout. "The Taurus has sent us here on 16th July - that's two days after Dad and a day after Fenton."

“Yeah – but we don’t know where they’ve gone. They could still be here. We need to be careful.”

The trail of brown-red drops continued through to the library and into a whole separate area of the Revisionist underground complex. The place seemed deserted. There was no sign of Jack’s father or the mysterious ‘Fenton’. The complex contained a large storeroom, kitchen and sleeping quarters. But the trail led them to a small infirmary where it was evident, from some loose bandages and an open bottle of disinfectant that someone had attempted a hasty patch-up job.

“The blood trail stops here. If it was him, it looks like your dad managed to stem the blood flow.”

Jack bit his lip. “That’s one conclusion...”

The library was the central hub of the complex and there were a number of further rooms leading off it. One of them was some kind of large laboratory. There were computer terminals everywhere, papers strewn around, whiteboards with diagrams and equations scribbled across them, and lots of scientific equipment. Amongst the mess, Jack caught sight of a few historical artefacts which looked a bit out of place. There was an earthenware pot, some medals and an assortment of old firearms.

“What a mess,” Angus said.

“The place looks deserted but something’s happened in here recently. Everything’s on standby.”

“Yeah – look at those screens over there, they look like CCTV pictures showing bits of the complex. But I can’t see any sign of life. And those ones seem to show the outside – see?”

“You’re right...” Jack’s eyes squinted as he stared at the monitors, “But it’s weird, maybe the colour isn’t right or something... looks to me like outside, well, it’s difficult to make anything out. It’s just white.”

"Maybe we should go outside and see what's up there?"

"Worth a try."

They entered the lift and Jack pressed the button that said *'Top Exit - Rock'*. The contraption groaned and started to shake its way up through the shaft. After a few minutes it slowed.

"You ready?" Angus said.

The lift ground to a halt at the top of the shaft.

"There's some sort of access hatch through there."

They clambered up through the hatch into a short passage.

"Over there - a door."

"Solid. We're not going to get through that." Angus said.

"Unless..." Jack still had the access device in his pocket which had opened the door from the Tantallon side. Taking it from his pocket, he pointed it at the door and pressed.

"Works - nice one."

It opened and they were suddenly hit with an icy draft of air.

"Gees - that's cold!" Angus said. "Look - more stairs over there."

They climbed up and they stepped out in a strange room with curved walls. Ahead was a spiral staircase.

Jack reached out and ran his finger along the wall.

"I think I know where we've come out," He said. "You remember when we were standing at the castle and looking out at the Bass Rock? I think we're inside the lighthouse that we saw built on the rock. Those steps must go right up to the top. Up there we should get a view of everything around. Come on."

They crept forward and slowly climbed the spiral staircase. They could hear nothing except for an occasional breath of wind that caressed the outside of the lighthouse.

They reached a door at the top. Jack threw it open and gasped at the sight before them.

A few hours before, Jack and Angus had looked out from Tantallon Castle across on the mainland, onto a glistening blue-grey sea at the Bass Rock in the middle of the Firth of Forth. It had been a bright summer's day. Now, the view was quite, quite different. They were standing above a desolate landscape of ice and rock. The sea that surrounded the Bass Rock island, and which extended off to the horizon and to the land masses on either side of the Firth of Forth, was completely frozen. It was as if they were looking straight down onto a vast Antarctic glacier. There was ice and snow everywhere. The sun blazed out strongly from a cloudless sky and Jack had to squint and then shield his eyes. He stared in disbelief, and then looked at Angus who wore the same expression of shock.

He felt himself starting to panic. "Angus - I don't get it - it was summer when we left, I know we're forty years in the future... but everything's changed... it's like there's been a new ice age or something. The whole world's changed - what's happened?"