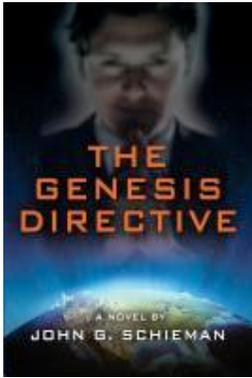


THE GENESIS DIRECTIVE

A NOVEL BY
JOHN G. SCHIEMAN



Discover the eminent threats of cyber terrorism endangering free will and personal freedom perpetrated by Genesis, a stealth organization of global proportions intent on establishing a new world order. A New Jersey town is rocked by horrific events, indelibly scarring the community for future generations and serving as a precursor to circumstances challenging the investigating detective's moral fiber, fortitude, and altering his life forever. This story will leave you guessing until the very last page.

The Genesis Directive

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The Genesis Directive

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First Edition

Chapter 1

Blind-Sided by Unforeseen Events

That fateful September Morristown morning began in unremarkable fashion as had the day before, and all the days that preceded that one. South Street, the primary two lane road through the center of town, was already a beehive of activity as employees scurried along the sidewalks entering the more than two hundred small businesses and dozens of restaurants that lined the road.

Commuter traffic, comprised largely of expensive sports cars, sedans, and sport utility vehicles was flowing through the town at a measured pace on route to other business destinations. The traffic lights were synchronized in such a way that as one light turned green, the light following it in either direction turned amber to prevent speeding and affording the townspeople a sense of predictability that would soon be lost forever. Traffic volume was lighter than usual that day since many companies offered their employees the option of working from home on Fridays.

New Jersey's Morris County was the eighth-wealthiest county in the United States by median household income. Morristown exuded a vibrancy that made it a wonderful place to live and work. Centered on its historic Green, the town of Morristown embodied a socially and ethnically diverse community offering a wide range of amenities to residents and visitors alike.

That morning on the Green a young mother relaxed on a park bench smiling proudly at her beautiful two year old baby boy sitting comfortably in his expensive blue stroller. Across the Green sat a retired couple sipping designer coffee from their favorite barista observing a young man exercising his Golden Retriever on the grass. Everything was as it should be.

John G. Schieman

The main courthouse building stood just off the Green, a stately, two-story red brick Colonial, with a glistening white steeple at its center. The windows were framed with large, white moldings complementing the steeple. A new three-story wing had been completed earlier that year to the right of the main building with architecture perfectly matching the main section. The expansion was an indication of the growth and vibrancy within the community.

The sun shone brightly in the crystal blue morning sky completely devoid of clouds. Detective James Ryan, known as “Jimmy” to friends and family, strode through the opening in the natural stone fence framing the Judicial Center on the corner of Washington and Court Street. His pace was measured with an air of personal pride.

As Jimmy advanced along the glistening red brick walkway still damp from early morning sprinklers, the aroma of freshly cut grass was in abundance. Jimmy detected the faint aroma of nitrogen being released from the wet grass reminding him of spring time afternoon rain showers. Overhead, birds had collected in the trees providing him with a welcoming serenade. The leaves had already begun changing colors as a result of the unusually dry summer that year.

The date was Friday, September 13, 2013. Jimmy wasn’t a superstitious person, but come on, Friday the 13th in the year 2013.

The tranquility emblematic of that quaint Morris County town would shortly experience an unimaginable series of events rocking the community to its core. Detective Jimmy Ryan hadn’t a clue that the chain of events soon to be unleashed would indelibly scar the County of Morris and traumatize the residents of Morristown for a generation to come. Those horrific events would serve as a precursor to future circumstances that would test the detective’s moral fiber, challenge his fortitude, and alter his life forever.

The Genesis Directive

Jimmy's heart always beat a little faster whenever he approached the massive front doors of the courthouse as he reflected on his responsibilities for the day and of all those detectives who had come before him. He lived for days like that.

Once inside the courthouse, Detective Jimmy Ryan focused on more tactical matters as he promptly gazed forward evaluating the security queuing lines. Two courthouse full body scanning machines stood side by side in front of the marble staircase that provided access to the upper floors. The scanner to the left was for the general public. The one on the right was also for civilians however police and civil servants were always afforded priority access.

Jimmy removed the gold shield from his lapel pocket, the cell phone from his inside suit jacket, and the thirty-eight caliber pistol from its dark brown leather holster strap. He placed all three items inside the briefcase he was carrying to expedite the security process.

As Detective Ryan approached Officer Keats the security guard on duty, he was motioned to the queue on the right. Two attractive, female reporters were to Jimmy's left, waiting in line, discussing plans for the upcoming weekend. The woman furthest from Jimmy was a slender, redhead in a blue pinstriped business suit that failed to conceal her curvaceous body. She was angered by Jimmy's priority access, commenting rhetorically under her breath as not to create a scene, "Hey what the Hell, what makes him so important?"

The second woman, a more captivating brunette with blond highlights whose beautiful countenance could stop a clock, responded as she caught a glimpse of Jimmy out of the corner of her right eye, "Are you kidding, I'd let that guy come to the front of my line any day of the week."

Her voice was sufficiently audible for Jimmy to overhear her.

John G. Schieman

Detective Ryan was the spitting image of actor Channing Tatum so he was somewhat accustomed to comments like those made by the brunette. Jimmy turned to his left casting a brief smile toward the shapely brunette. While he enjoyed her compliments that was all they would ever be. The detective was a devoted married man who had taken himself permanently out of circulation. Still, her comments were a terrific start to the day thought Jimmy. Ryan turned back toward Officer Keats as they continued exchanging greetings.

Keats was a man in his fifties who had worked the courthouse first shift security detail for as long as Jimmy could recall. He handed Keats his official, Morris County police department issued blue, burlap briefcase. Keats inspected every civilian's briefcase contents as part of the security protocol since September Eleventh two thousand one. Police, lawyers, and county employees were generally exempt from the process. At least the ones Keats knew and he knew Detective Jimmy Ryan extremely well.

Detective Ryan exited the security detection station without incident as Keats returned the detective his briefcase exempt from examination.

"Have a great day," said Keats.

Jimmy waved his right hand in acknowledgment as he began to ascend the marble staircase to the upper floors. As Jimmy proceeded, he returned his shield, cell phone, and gun to their rightful places. The redhead and brunette took pleasure in watching Detective Ryan's butt ascend the staircase.

As Jimmy reached the second floor landing, he glanced up at the Court's Mission Statement etched into the center section of the wall in bold, gold script lettering.

The Genesis Directive

The mission of the Superior Court in the Morristown is to serve the people by providing a system for the just, orderly, and non-violent resolution of disputes. People bring an enormous range of problems before the court. We handle all sorts of criminal cases from murder to petty offenses. They determine people's property rights. They define the limits of government's power.

Detective Jimmy Ryan endeavored to live by those values every day of his life. It grounded him, reminding him of the importance of his testimony that day. He bounded the final set of stairs to the third floor courtroom. As Detective Ryan entered through the massive, wooden courtroom doors, he instinctively turned toward his usual position in the last row of the wooden benches to the right of center.

As Jimmy sat down, he began silently rehearsing his testimony for the day. To the casual observer, Detective Ryan presented an impression of a person deep in thought, oblivious to everything around him. That evaluation would have completely missed the mark since Ryan had already scanned the courtroom creating a mental image of the entire room and all its occupants. He took particular note of two poorly dressed men of obvious Middle-Eastern descent sitting alone far to his left.

Jimmy possessed exceptional perceptive ability enabling him to recognize and deduce investigative clues that other detectives were incapable of comprehending.

Judge Robert Thomas was seated on the bench, hearing his second case of the day. Judge Thomas was a man in his late fifties, with snow white hair, silver wire rimmed glasses, and tipped the scales at approximately two hundred-fifty pounds. His tone was raspy and direct. His reputation was one of a judge who consistently delivered fair, unambiguous pronouncements. Jimmy was pleased Thomas

John G. Schieman

was on the bench because he also had the reputation of being a “kick ass” judge who took a hard line on crime.

Rows one through three of the courtroom were filled with friends and family members of those whose cases would be heard that day. All the seats were occupied. The remaining rows of benches contained the usual looky-loos with nothing better to do that morning and the two female reporters who were now seated.

In the two rows closest to Jimmy sat a Morristown High School social studies class on a research project outing to better understand the operations of the U.S. Judicial System. To his far left sat an elderly gentleman with a cane accompanied by a younger woman who looked to be his daughter. Everything was the way it should be, even for Friday the thirteenth.

Jimmy was thirty-eight years young, sporting brown hair cut very short and riveting brown eyes to match. He stood six foot two and two-ten pounds of solid muscle. He took pride in maintaining top physical conditioning, working out in his home gym at least five times a week, a ritual he had followed since being a standout halfback in high school. Ryan’s face was covered with a scruffy beard because in his line of work, detectives never knew when they could be called upon to go undercover. He came from a long line of cops including his grandfather who had passed seven years earlier, his father Bill who was still on active duty, and his younger brother Jack who was a detective in New York City.

Most Morris County detectives arrived at work in business casual attire or undercover garb. However, the County required all detectives to wear business suits whenever participating in courtroom proceedings. Detective Ryan was dressed that day in a modest blue suit he purchased at Sears for just such occasions, a powder blue shirt, and a muted grey tie. He blended into the courtroom audience as much as his good looks would allow which

The Genesis Directive

was exactly the result Jimmy strove for. He calculated that dressing flashy in the courtroom could engender a lack of sincerity on his part to the court and create visual distractions.

Detective Ryan was an expert at delivering testimony. All the lawyers respected his case work support. Jimmy customarily partnered with his long-time friend and Assistant District Attorney (ADA), Alexandra Burns. Detective Ryan consistently entered a courtroom fully prepared, always 'nailing the facts' during his exacting testimony. He had been one of the most productive detectives in Northern New Jersey for the past three years with more arrests and convictions than any of his peers.

Morris County was the beneficiary of few major cases, another positive sign of the community's stability. The case Detective Ryan was providing testimony for that day certainly didn't qualify as major either, but that was fine with Jimmy. Periodically, Ryan had been offered detective positions in the Big City however he was perfectly comfortable just where he was. He was confident in knowing he was making a difference in the community. That was paramount for him.

Jimmy was an avid sports fan, mostly interested in college teams although he was a diehard New York Giants fan. His decision to remain in his present job instead of relocating to the big city, to Jimmy was analogous to those great college coaches who declined offers to go to the pros. The college experience was 'just better' as was his role in Morris County.

His wife, Shannon Maureen Ryan was also comfortable with Jimmy's decision to remain local because to her, remaining in Morris County meant they would have more quality time together. More importantly, his police career would be much less risky.

John G. Schieman

Jimmy and Shannon first met during high school. They were at once each other's best friends. People who knew the Ryan family well realized no two people could be more in love.

Detective Ryan's case that September morning was Docket NT 30023-13. Billy "the Kid" Jackson was a small time stickup artist. Five years ago, Jimmy tracked the Kid down following his robbery of an after-hours liquor store. The Kid stole two hundred dollars and a case of booze. The Kid's inexperience prevented him from detecting the store's surveillance equipment that enabled Jimmy to nail the Kid within days. As a consequence, the Kid did six months in county jail.

Two years later, the Kid robbed a liquor store in broad daylight, threatening the owner with a knife. Once again, Jimmy apprehended him within a week of the robbery. The Kid's sentence was a year in Rahway prison.

The Kid's most recent robbery was a clear indication of his continuing escalation with physical violence. The Kid robbed another liquor store beating the store owner, Jose Cruz, to a pulp with his fists and a baseball bat. His tenure at Rahway had exacerbated his propensity to inflict physical violence.

Through his testimony that day, Jimmy hoped the Kid would be taken off the streets for a long time. If the Kid was convicted, it would be his third strike. Unless he was incarcerated for an extended period, Jimmy was certain the Kid's violence would continue escalating until he finally murdered someone. Jimmy was also prepared to counter any offer of leniency or motion of premature release from prison.

Detective Ryan glanced at his wrist watch noticing it was nine forty-six. He was certain the Kid's case would be heard within the hour. There was always the slight window of opportunity for a plea

arrangement between the prosecution and defense lawyers. If so, the case could be wrapped up quickly.

Sometimes cases like that one could drag on for weeks. Occasionally a case would even wind up being heard in Trenton, New Jersey Superior Court.

Detective Ryan began rehearsing his testimony one last time when his concentration was suddenly shattered by an inexplicable, horrific sound cracking the air. As the thunderous noise reached its crescendo, the din became deafening. The force of the blast lifted Jimmy off his bench seat almost to the point of standing. He fell back down onto the bench's hard, wooden surface with a thud as did everyone in his row appearing as if the entire bench had just completed the wave at an athletic event.

The concussive power of the blast thrust the courtroom doors open crashing against the walls shattering plaster in all directions. Two windows at the far end of the courtroom exploded outward as the sound wave permeated the room. The stunned silence in the courtroom soon gave way to shouts and screams of desperation.

"What the Hell is going on here," roared a man in the second row.

"Kenny, are you okay," shouted a high school teacher to one of her students who had fallen to the floor.

Jimmy's instincts kicked in instantly realizing that a significant explosion had occurred somewhere in the building. Inside the courtroom, papers were flying through the air resulting from the temporary vacuum caused by the rush of air escaping through the demolished windows.

Before Jimmy had time to gather his thoughts, a single gunshot rang out that Jimmy recognized as most likely emanating from a pistol.

John G. Schieman

Within seconds, the sound of an additional series of pistol shots reverberated throughout the courtroom prompting more screams.

“Are we under attack,” shouted one of the female reporters?

“Let’s get the fuck out of here,” yelled a man at the end of Jimmy’s row.

Jimmy’s eyes connected with Judge Thomas whose white hair was disheveled and his bench totally in disarray. Detective Ryan gestured with an inaudible whisper, “I got to go”.

The Judge read Jimmy’s lips shaking his head in response as if communicating, “I understand”.

“Judge, we have to go now. I need to escort you out through the rear chambers,” shouted the Bailiff with authority grabbing the court stenographer by the arm as he ran toward the judge.

With a single fluid motion, Jimmy stood up, turned to his left, and jogged toward the exit at the back of the room. He had always positioned himself in the last row of the courtroom to enable a rapid exit if necessary. Jimmy never thought anything like what was unfolding that morning could have actually occurred in Morris County.

The courtroom was chaotic. The once orderly room based on the rule of law was replaced by people running frantically in every direction, pushing, and shoving one another. As Jimmy reached the exit doors, he glanced back into the courtroom.

Near the front of the room, Jimmy noticed the brunette reporter he observed earlier that morning had been pushed to the floor between the rows of benches as the unruly crowd rushed toward the exit without regard for human suffering. Detective Ryan considered going back to assist her, but quickly assessed there were

likely more pressing priorities requiring his attention elsewhere in the building. Screams were emanating from all directions now, each louder than the next.

As Jimmy rushed through the space vacated by the double doors, he turned back into the room one last time. Instinctively, he paused raising his badge, shouting above the din in the room, "I'm a cop. Please try to remain calm. Right now the safest thing you can do is to remain in this room until I can find out what is going on."

"You have to be fucking kidding me," shouted a man running past Jimmy.

Since nine-eleven, no one felt safe anymore remaining in any building that had just been bombed. That day was no exception. Jimmy's message of restraint went unheeded by many of the occupants within the Morris County courtroom that morning. As Jimmy turned running from the room, he heard the sound of numerous footsteps rapidly approaching from behind him. The corridor directly outside the courtroom had already filled with dark grey smoke making safe escape problematic.

Suddenly the sound of another gunshot pierced the air. Everyone in the corridor froze, including Jimmy. In that instant, no one was certain which direction provided safety. People frightened by the gunshot attempted to return to the apparent safety of the courtroom as they collided with others stampeding from within.

"Get the Hell out of my way," barked a man running from the courtroom to a woman blocking his egress.

"It's not safe out there, they are shooting at us," responded a woman fearful for her life attempting to re-enter the courtroom.

Detective Ryan recognized the recent gunshot as another pistol report as he darted toward the large, wood framed, six-panel

John G. Schieman

window at the far right side of the hall. He instinctively focused his sights downward toward the location where he calculated the shots emanated. On the walkway, three floors below, directly beneath the large window, the detective observed a Caucasian civilian with shoulder length black hair. He was dressed in brown slacks, a blue and grey plaid shirt, and black Converse sneakers. He was lying motionless face down on the ground.

Jimmy noticed that the man was handcuffed and bleeding profusely as a result of a head shot. A pool of dark, red blood had already begun oozing around his skull or what was left of it. Jimmy was certain that victim, whoever he was, had been killed.

To the right of the civilian lay a cop face down on the pavement. The cop's body was motionless with the exception of his right hand which was twitching slightly as he continued clutching his service revolver.

Jimmy pushed away from the window flying down the flight of stairs between floors three and two, barely touching the steps. He took pride in his ability to assess most crime scenes within a matter of minutes. Not so that day as he was completely incapable of processing what was unfolding before his eyes. Events of that magnitude just didn't occur in Morristown.

As he approached the second floor landing, a multitude of loud sounds, putrid odors, and horrific visual images bombarded his senses.

The roar of fire emanating from the inner offices overwhelmed most other sounds. Ironically the roar of the fire competed with the fire and smoke alarms resounding throughout the floor. Underlying those deafening sounds were the screams of injured office workers and staff who were horrified by the sights of dead co-workers.

The Genesis Directive

As Jimmy hit the second floor landing, the smoke-filled area overwhelmed his nostrils making it difficult for him to breathe. His vision became distorted as his eyes filled with tears. The overhead, recessed florescent lighting flickered as many fixtures dangled precariously from the ceiling. Some fixtures continued to illuminate, others were blinking, and many had shorted out completely when the overhead sprinkler system had activated.

Jimmy glanced left into the main work area on the floor. The heat emanating from the inner office forced Jimmy to raise his arms protecting the face. He peered through the narrow, horizontal slit formed by the junction of his right and left arms observing that the right corner of the inner room was consumed in flames. Furniture was strewn across the entire area. Through the smoke and flickering lighting, Jimmy saw the outline of people walking around aimlessly, struggling to regain their bearings.

The uninjured second floor staff who had worked nearest the exits stampeded to the stairway pushing and shoving fellow workers without regard. Jimmy considered attempting to organize their exit but soon realized that would be futile.

The faces of many staff were covered in blood making it impossible to assess the extent of personal injuries because the fire sprinklers exaggerated the amount of bleeding. The bodies of the injured were covered with caked-on grey debris from the exploded sheet rock causing their movement to resemble a scene from one of those zombie movies.

A man who looked to be in his forties staggered toward Jimmy. The hair on his head was singed and his eyebrows had been completely burned off. His face was severely reddened and bruised. The man appeared in severe shock, staggering erratically from right to left. Jimmy realized he must take pause to assist that victim.

John G. Schieman

“Sir, do you know where you are?”

The man stared at Ryan with a dazed look on his face. His voice connoted obvious pain, “Yes, it’s the courthouse. This is where I work.”

“What is your name sir,” shouted Ryan above the other noises in the room?

“Everett Montrose,” responded the injured man.

“Good, I’m Detective Ryan. Everett, do you think you are capable of walking down those stairs?” said Jimmy as he pointed in the direction of the stairs.

“I’m in such pain, can you help me?” pleaded Montrose.

“Everett, the emergency squad is on the way. I wish I could help but there isn’t anything I can do for you right now. The best thing you can do is safely make it down to the first floor. What about the stairs, can you make it on your own?” asked Jimmy.

Another muffled explosion emanated from the center of the second floor replacing Everett’s indecision with a sense of urgency.

“Yes, I think I can do it,” shouted a frightened Everett.

“Good, Everett I want you to do that now,” responded Jimmy.

Jimmy guided him forward. Everett took his first step toward the stairs as Jimmy continued watching his progress until he was confident Everett would be successful.

The second floor scene was utter chaos now as people pushed and shoved one another attempting to escape the burning building. Civility was rapidly disappearing as Detective Ryan noticed a woman who had been pushed to the floor by her co-workers. She remained

motionless on the hallway floor seeming incapable of returning to her feet. The left side of her face was burnt and still smoldering.

She tried to speak but her voice could only manage a whisper, "Help me, please."

Jimmy bent to his knees, lifting the woman in his arms as he attempted to comfort her, "What's your name?"

"Carol Carson," the woman responded faintly.

"Carol, I'm a cop, my name is Detective James Ryan. I think the worst of this may be over. The medics should be here shortly to ease your pain and provide treatment. I'm going to carry you down to the first floor. Would that be okay with you?"

The woman could only shake her head in approval.

The wonderful aromas that had welcomed Ryan to the courthouse earlier that morning had been replaced with the acrid smell of smoke, demolished plasterboard, and burning flesh. The sounds of chirping birds were replaced with crying, whimpering, and screaming that came from every direction.

Jimmy cautiously, but hastily navigated down the stairs to the first floor with Carol in his arms. He had all he could do to maintain his balance as people behind him were pushing him forward. Carol's arms were around Jimmy's neck so tightly that it was challenging for Jimmy to catch his breath. He evaluated her tight grip as a positive sign that she was still alive. He darted through the security check point area that was no longer operative. Officer Keats was leaning against the far wall, gazing blindly into the center of the room.

Jimmy shouted, "Keats, are you all right?"

John G. Schieman

Keats offered an uncertain response, but appeared to be in good physical condition. "Yes, I think so."

"This is Carol Carson. Please stay with her and provide whatever comfort you can until the medics arrive. Make sure you tell them that she is a priority."

Keats acknowledged Jimmy's request with a nod.

"Carol, I will stop back to see if you are okay. I have to go now. Officer Keats, please put your jacket on the floor for Carol to lie on."

Jimmy gently placed Carol on the ground alongside the security guard. As he did, he caught a glimpse of Everett twenty feet to his left as other, less injured workers continued racing toward the exit. No one in the lobby that morning had stopped to offer assistance to Everett. He was alone with his pain.

Pointing toward Everett, Jimmy made another request of the security guard who was being called upon as an impromptu care giver.

"Keats, see that man over there. His name is Everett. He's badly burned. I think he is still in shock. Please keep an eye on him. Make sure he is attended to promptly once the EMTs arrive, okay?"

As Jimmy spoke, he struggled to keep his wits about him.

Still shaken and wondering who was going to take care of him, Keats responded, "Sure Jimmy ... hi Carol, my name is Officer Keats."

Carol could barely speak but managed a whimper, "Detective Ryan, thank you."

Ryan looked back in her direction briefly forcing a small smile giving her the "thumbs up" sign. Ryan blasted out the side door to the location where he had seen the bodies from the third floor window.

The Genesis Directive

Across the street from the courthouse, a sniper ducked out of sight behind the two-foot high, red brick façade on a four-story, thirty-six apartment complex roof. He was an African-American male, sporting dark sun glasses, a black beard, and eight-inch black dreadlocks. He wore a black, light-weight, vinyl jacket, a dark black long sleeve polo shirt, black denim pants, black latex gloves, and dark brown Timberland boots. The jacket was fully zipped and the hood was tied tightly around his head.

Seconds earlier, the man in black had observed that one of the cops leaving the courthouse that morning had peered in his direction after his first shot hit its mark. The shooter couldn't risk identification so he rendered the cop collateral damage. While not included in his mission for the day, the shooter had efficiently disposed of the risk. He was certain the second cop exiting the courthouse hadn't seen him. Even if he had, that didn't matter now.

The man in black's allotted time on the roof had now expired as he disassembled the metal gun stock from the sniper rifle within six seconds. He dis-connected the gun barrel and noise suppressor four seconds later. All three pieces of the broken down rifle were promptly deposited into the black, burlap travel bag resting on the roof to his right. He extended his arm retrieving the two spent shell casings placing them in the bag.

The shooter zipped the bag as he ran in a crouched position toward the dark brown metal door at the center of the flat, black top roof. Once inside the building, he stood erect as he cautiously descended the unpainted cement service staircase.

The man in black glanced at his wrist watch recalling that the schedule required him arrive in the parking lot four floors below within thirty-seven seconds after breaking down the rifle. He descended the stairs quickly, but at a measured pace to avoid drawing unwanted attention should someone unexpectedly pass

John G. Schieman

him on the stairway. For if he ran the risk of being recognized by an unfortunate looky-loo, there would certainly be additional casualties. It was just the cost of doing business.

The man in black opened the heavy brown, metal, ground level, exit door to the outside. Although he was wearing sunglasses, his eyes required time adjusting to the bright sunlight from the muted light of the stairway. The parking lot was full to capacity as had been anticipated by the man. A full lot provided coverage making it less likely that anyone would recall his vehicle. He turned left, walking deliberately to the green MW garbage dumpster. He hid his travel bag behind the dumpster as planned. He removed the size fifteen Timberland boot from his left foot, then the right one, revealing the size nine socks worn inside the boots. He placed the boots to adjacent the bag.

He slowly pivoted one hundred eighty degrees as he glanced across the lot for signs of life. There were none. He weaved his way slowly through the six aisles of parked cars. His vehicle was located at the far right end of the parking lot in the extreme outside stall removing any risk of being blocked in. He hit the vehicle's remote with his right hand opening the driver's side door while sliding into the front seat and slipping on shoes with one fluid motion.

He exited the parking lot onto South Street turning left. As instructed, he drove with clear intent toward the entrance to Route Two Eighty-Seven South. The entrance to the highway was three and a half miles ahead and slightly to the left. As he navigated the exit, he observed the first responders arriving across the street, approaching from both directions. The man in black knew he must act with controlled haste to avoid the roadblocks that would soon be constructed across every major roadway.

Forty-five seconds later, a second man appeared from behind a tall row of hedges at the far end of the apartment building parking lot.

He walked with a deliberate pace toward the dumpster. Once he arrived at his anointed destination, the second man retrieved the travel bag and boots that had been deposited there only seconds earlier. The second man wore only heavy woolen navy blue socks, the type provided to international first class airline passengers. He placed the boots over his socks grabbing the black bag in the same motion as he proceeded to his pre-assigned destination for that day.

Neither man had been aware of the other's presence.

Meanwhile, across the street, Jimmy shouted as he ran out of the courthouse, "Officer, tell me what's going on?"

Officer Charles Terrel, clearly shaken knelt beside his fallen partner. The blacktop driveway that stood adjacent the courthouse parking area contained two substantially formed pools of blood. Radiating outward from the pools were two defined patterns of blood spatter and grey matter behind each victim. Jimmy estimated the conical shaped spray to be approximately five feet in length, radiating outward in the same direction indicating the shooter or shooters were positioned high above ground.

There was also blood spatter on Officer Terrel's uniform and face. It looked to Jimmy as if Terrel had the measles but he knew better. On any other day, he might have seen the humor in that sight, but not that day, not with what had transpired.

Jimmy recognized from the sound of Terrel's voice that he was extremely distraught, "Our prisoner was shot. I'm certain he's dead."

He pointed to the man with the hole in his frontal lobe.

"My partner Ken Stevens was hit next. He's dead too I think. I'm sure or at least I think the shooter was on the apartment roof," said officer Terrel as he pointed across the street.

John G. Schieman

Terrel's voice reeked with fear and uncertainty as he continued rambling, "Why us? Why were we the intended targets? How did they know we would be here at this time? Was it a random shooting? Was this an act of terrorism?"

"Officer, please calm down, tell me what else you remember," shouted Jimmy as he grabbed the officer's shoulders.

Terrel fought to regain his composure, "I'm sure my partner Ken saw the shooter immediately. He must have observed the rifle flashes or a reflection or something. I can't be sure. The first shot dropped our prisoner. Ken drew his pistol returning fire. That's when Ken was hit with a single shot to the head. I returned fire too. Three shots I think. I'm not sure. By then, the shooter had disappeared from sight. That's all I remember until you arrived."

Later, it would be determined that Terrel had temporarily frozen when the shooting started. He would have difficulty living with that fact although there was nothing he could have done to save the life of his partner.

"We need to take cover 'just in case'," Jimmy said sternly.

"I can't leave Ken like this," shouted Terrel.

"I know what you're thinking right now but we need to go back in the courthouse," demanded Jimmy.

"Are you shitting me, the place is on fire," shouted Terrel with a distinct tone of fear as he pointed upward and to the right.

Flames were now darting in and out of the second floor rear window of the courthouse.

“I know, but we’re too exposed out here in the open, c’mon,” ordered Jimmy as he grabbed Terrel’s arm, pulling him toward the courthouse side door from which he had exited minutes earlier.

So much for preserving the crime scene, within seconds office staff and civilians were streaming out of the building not knowing which direction offered safety. As they hit the light of day noticing two bodies on the ground, the fear, the screaming, and the chaos intensified. Within minutes, the sound of police sirens, ambulances, and fire equipment added to the confusion and fear levels. The intensity of the sounds made it almost impossible for Jimmy to think straight.

Under normal circumstances, he would have kept his wits about him. That skill had always enabled him to assess a crime situation in seconds determining instinctively what had to be done. The magnitude of events unfolding before his eyes that day made it impossible for him to calculate any next steps. He was certain of one thing; he and Terrel were too exposed, they needed to take cover. Within seconds, both men reached the safety of the courthouse.

Once inside, Jimmy said, “Terrel, see what you can do to help these people.”

“I’m not sure I can do that... I didn’t sign up for that,” said Terrel sheepishly.

Jimmy looked him square in the eyes, “Do it. You’re a cop. People are counting on you. I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

“Wait, where are you going,” challenged Terrel?

“I left some people on the third floor. They are my responsibility. I have to bring them down to safety now.”

John G. Schieman

As Jimmy spoke, the realization that he had told them to remain in the courtroom may not have been his best decision. Ryan yanked the grey tie from around his neck. He ran to the water fountain at the far end of the room soaking his tie. He secured the widest section of the tie around his nose and mouth as a make-shift filter against the smoke and debris he would soon be confronting.

In seconds he reached the third floor courtroom door operating on pure adrenalin by that point. As Jimmy swung open the double doors quickly scanning the room, he shouted, "Get away from there."

Jimmy observed one of the young high school students preparing to jump from the third floor window with two other students in queue directly behind the first one. As he ran toward the students, he noticed the man with the cane to his left and the two hot women he had passed at security to his right. He estimated there were also eight to ten other high school kids remaining in the room as well. Everyone else had left the courtroom including the Middle-Eastern gentlemen.

As Jimmy approached the window where the 'jumpers' were congregating, he blocked the window opening preventing additional students from attempting to exit. He turned peering through the gaping hole in the wall where the window had stood to the manicured lawn three floors below.

Two students, a young boy and a girl had previously jumped to the ground below. A third student, a boy with blond hair clung to the building's brick facade between floors three and two. His feet were positioned above the window frame on the second floor. His fingers were bright red from the pressure of maintaining his grasp between two rows of bricks.

The Genesis Directive

Jimmy extended his arm attempting to grab the boy's hand as he cautioned gently, "Stay with me. Look into my eyes. I'm going to grab your wrist."

Jimmy's efforts came up short as he turned back toward the students inside the courtroom.

"Hold my belt. I'm going to extend my body out the window to reach your friend."

The boy on the ledge whimpered realizing his grip was slipping.

"Stay with me," repeated Jimmy as he began stretching his body even further outside the window with the assistance of the boys inside the room who were grabbing his belt.

Jimmy's hand was within two inches of the young boy. Detective Ryan realized the boy's grip was separating from the bricks, first the right hand, then the left. Jimmy's eyes were riveted on the boy's face as he plummeted backward toward the ground. In that moment, the dreadful sounds of the morning momentarily dissipated. The boy's body was in free fall as if in slow motion. Jimmy recognized the fear in the young boy's eyes as he fell backward.

The boy remained silent until he hit the ground. His head made impact with the ground first with a loud thud. His head immediately bounced upward as the boy's body continued making contact with the lawn in the next instant. The grass cushioned the boy's fall somewhat. The force of the overall impact produced a loud cracking sound as the young boy's neck snapped rendering him unconscious.

Ryan's eyes were drawn immediately to the boy's left where a second jumper resided. The red-haired, freckled student was curled up on his left side, holding his right knee with both hands grimacing

John G. Schieman

in pain. From Jimmy's vantage point, it appeared the boy's knee had snapped, most likely when he made contact with the ground.

Jimmy's focus shifted once again to the blond-haired girl who was positioned closest to the building. She appeared to be the youngest of the three. She was screaming in obvious pain. Jimmy surmised that the girl's right ankle had snapped during her fall. He noticed a jagged bone protruding at least three inches through her skin just below the bulge in her ankle.

Jimmy widened his field of view looking at all three students shouting in a consoling tone, "Stay where you are. Don't attempt to move. The worst is over. The medics will be with you shortly."

In that precise moment, Jimmy felt completely overwhelmed. These young kids required his assistance. He wanted desperately to offer more reassurance to the kids but there wasn't time. There was so many injured on the first floor. There was the matter of the people still remaining in the courtroom. Most importantly, there was the business of apprehending the shooter or shooters.

Ryan turned back into the room, "Remember me, I'm a cop who was in the room earlier this morning. I told you I would be back. I'm going to escort you out of the building now."

Jimmy walked toward the elderly man who was now at his right, "Sir, do you need help?"

"What I need is to get the Hell out of here. Lead the way," said the man with the cane.

"Good," responded Jimmy as he lifted his head to face the crowd, "listen up there's been an explosion on the second floor but the stairway is passable. Two people have been shot. We believe the shooter is long gone from the area so you are not in any imminent danger. Form a single line. Follow my lead."

The Genesis Directive

Pointing to the elderly man with the cane, Jimmy said, "I want you directly behind me."

Looking back toward the others, Jimmy shouted, "Be careful and watch each other's backs."

Everyone listened intently in silence as a number of gasps could be heard above the noise. Jimmy led them down the two flights of stairs in single file. He positioned them near the side door on the first floor.

"Please remain here until the medical staff checks you out."

The high school students paid little attention to Jimmy as they bolted out of the building in the direction of their fallen classmates who remained on the front lawn.

Jimmy spotted Keats once again as he shouted above the din of the room, "Officer Keats, three kids are badly hurt on the front lawn. They attempted to jump to safety from the third floor. Make sure the medics know they are out there."

Keats nodded that he understood Jimmy's request having regained his composure rising to the level of execution required that day.

Jimmy surveyed the room in search of Terrel, spotting him, and yelling above the noise, "Terrel, come over here."

Terrel heard Jimmy's voice and at once moved in his direction taking comfort in seeing Jimmy once again.

As Terrel closed the distance between himself and Jimmy, Jimmy began firing questioning at him, "Who was the prisoner?"

Terrel's hands were still shaking as he leaned against what had previously been the security station for support, "The perp was a 'nobody', some small time computer hacker or something like that."

John G. Schieman

“He was scheduled for arraignment today. When my partner and I arrived, we were told the arraignment had been postponed until next week. Ken, my partner, proceeded upstairs to complete the required release paperwork.”

“We were in the process of escorting our prisoner back to jail when all hell broke loose.”

“What’s the prisoner’s name? Who’s the prosecuting attorney?” shouted Jimmy one question after another.

“Travers, Neil Travers was our prisoner’s name. The ADA was Alexandra Burns.”

“Alex, are you sure?” said Jimmy with concern in his voice.

Jimmy and his wife, Shannon were very good friends with Alexandra and her husband Patrick. Alexandra preferred to be called Alex in personal life. Jimmy first met Alex on the job four years earlier. Since then, Jimmy, Shannon, Alex, and Patrick frequently went to dinner at each other’s homes. Last year, the Burns and Ryan families vacationed together in the Bahamas.

Alex was one of the reasons Jimmy enjoyed such a high conviction rate. He always told his fellow officers, “Do your job right, obtain the necessary information, and Alex will nail the bastards every time.”

Many of the judges also recognized the value of their team working.

Alex looked the part of an ADA. She dressed impeccably, was stern-faced when she needed to be, and always on the move. She was a ball of energy. Jimmy realized immediately that he should reach out to Alex informing her about what had just transpired.

Just as Jimmy’s thoughts were finally coming back into focus, his mind was jarred once again by a second explosion heard off in the

distance. The reverberation traveled rapidly through the center of town to the courthouse. The second blast was more muffled than the first one. Jimmy estimated the source of the second blast was less than a half mile away.

“What the Hell was going on here?” thought Jimmy as he began to wonder if Terrel was correct about the reference to terrorism.

It sure felt like acts of terrorism. If it was, it was extremely effective. Everywhere Jimmy looked, there were signs of terror. Terror was in the eyes of the staff running down the stairs. Terror was reflected in the moans of the injured who were seated or lying on the floor all around him. He counted twenty-two people in the courthouse lobby who were injured or just too frightened to leave the protection of the building regardless of the fire above them.

Ryan was frightened as well, but kept his emotions bottled up inside. He couldn't allow himself the luxury of letting that fear out. People were relying on his strength. He attempted feverishly to remove his cell phone from the inside right pocket of his suit. His hands were trembling so much that he lost the grip of his cell phone as it fell to the ground at his feet.

Jimmy was a very good detective, but that had been no ordinary day in Morristown or anywhere else for that matter. Jimmy recovered his phone, opened his contact file, and scrolled to Alex's number.

Alex was in transit in her brand new, two thousand thirteen white BMW. She was slowly approaching the center of Morristown wearing her favorite dark blue power suit that morning. She was speaking through her car's Bluetooth communication device with another colleague when Jimmy's incoming telephone signal activated in her car. Alex was alerted by the “beeping” of the interrupt code through the car's speaker system at the same time Jimmy's picture appeared on the car's dashboard display panel.

John G. Schieman

Alex momentarily placed the active call 'on hold' activating Jimmy's Bluetooth signal, "Jimmy, I really can't talk right now, I'm on another urgent call."

Jimmy immediately sensed the fear in her voice.

Before Jimmy could say another word, Alex continued, "There's been an explosion at my office."

Jimmy now understood full well the source of the second explosion, "They bombed your office?"

"Yes Jimmy, I have to hang up now," responded a distraught Alex.

"Alex, hold on, are you prosecuting some computer hacker named Travers?"

"Yeah, Neil Travers, it's an open and shut case. I really must call you back, but why are you asking about him?"

Alex responded as her car came up to a stop at the intersection of Sussex Turnpike and Speedwell Avenue as the light turned red abruptly, almost as if it had been controlled.

"He's dead Alex. He was shot by a sniper at the courthouse a few minutes ago. I'm at the scene right now," said Jimmy somberly.

"Jimmy, what's going...?"

Those were the last words Jimmy heard as a bullet pierced the passenger side window of Alex's BMW with such velocity that it didn't shatter the glass. The bullet entered Alex's right temple, exiting from the left side of her neck, and shattering the driver's side window. The impact of the bullet snapped Alex's body against the driver side door with tremendous force. Her lifeless body recoiled back to the center of the seat from the pressure of her seat belt.

Her head or what remained of it came to rest against the seat of the white five-series BMW. Grey matter and blood splatter stained the entire driver's side Beamer interior. As Alex's lifeless body finally came to rest, her right foot fell lifelessly on the BMW's car mat. The absence of foot pressure on the brake pedal enabled the car to roll forward. Inertia then took over.

The Beamer rolled through the red light controlling the intersection, gradually increasing speed since the gear shift was still in drive. The roadway also sloped slightly downward at the intersection of the two roads adding to the car's momentum. The BMW abruptly stopped as it collided with a blue Toyota Camry illegally parked at the far left side of the intersection. The powerful impact of the two vehicles activated the BMW's air bag system located in the steering wheel and side panel surrounding Alex's lifeless body.

As if the sound of the crash wasn't enough, the BMW's alarm system howled, drawing the attention of passers-by who were rapidly vacating a town that had just been rocked by two previous explosions. Alex's horrific death was further confirmation to them that Morristown was indeed under attack.

Jimmy stood paralyzed with the reality that his friend had become another victim of the heinous events unfolding that Friday the thirteenth morning. This time horror hit closer to home as his friend and business partner was likely a fatality.

In that moment, Jimmy felt as if he were frozen in time and suspended in disbelief. He feared the worst for his good friend and legal partner Alex Burns, speculating that the wailing sound of the BMW's security system might well have been Alex's death knell.

Jimmy's legs grew weak and unstable as his body slid slowly down the wall abruptly coming to rest on the courthouse floor. Jimmy glanced at his watch now indicating ten twenty-two am. Within

John G. Schieman

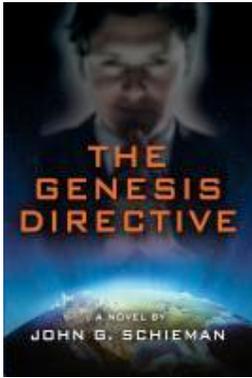
thirty-six minutes, Morristown had been transformed from a comfortable, suburban town into a war zone. He tried blocking out all the chaos around him in an effort to organize his thoughts.

Victims remaining within the building could be heard moaning or openly weeping. Those with the fortitude to do so ran from the protection of the courthouse. During the next few seconds, Jimmy remained in a state of suspended animation as all sights and sounds were blocked from his psyche.

“What the Hell was happening?” thought the detective once again as the rapidity of violence became overwhelming and the uncertainty of future horrific events was debilitating.

Distraught from the events still unfolding that morning, Detective James “Jimmy” Ryan understood in that precise, solitary moment that he must dedicate his life’s work to solving this heinous case, bringing those responsible to justice, and restoring tranquility to the community he loved so much.

It would have been impossible for Detective Ryan to foresee in that moment of reflection, the toll his commitment would exact on him, his family, and those closest to him.



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