

parallel

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a novel

by

John Hefner

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parallel

For my grandson, Zachary.



parallel

“Australia.... but why Australia, Donna?”

And she replied, “we *are* a converging, and soon to be,  
parallel culture: Mister President, Sir.”



parallel

And I, Jeffrey Hancock, sit confused.  
Much-a-muddle.



parallel

*parallel*



# Chapter 1

“IT WORKED in the sixties and seventies didn’t it?”

U.S. Vice-President, Ira Theodore Calhoun questioned, following a lengthy debate on the parlous state of the country’s economy. He was in conference with the President of The United States of America, and senior members of the administration in the Oval Office of the White House

Ira, or Bubba, as he was usually addressed, was once a fine example of a man, tall, strong, smiling.

These days? Well he *was, once*, a fine example.

President Harlan Wilton listened in silence, leaning back, his jacket draped over the back of the chair, shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, tie loose and askew.

Habitually, his hands are cupped at the back of his rap-

idly greying head. His eyes darted from his underlings, one to the other, in rapid succession.

Bubba Calhoun was an ambitious opportunist and very much the populist politician. He had risen through the political ranks by means less than honourable, and sometimes, questionably legal, to be the President's running mate, a position in which this Vice-President was the one who attended state funerals, coronations and such, representing the nation when the President had better things to do. But Bubba *could* be the president himself should something like what had happened to Kennedy or Lincoln, or nearly to Reagan, occur. That possibility was, for most of the diminishing erudite population of the world, a possibility that did not bear thinking about.

His method was crash, or crash through. He was whatever it takes. Whatever lies, whatever deals, but nearly always, *only* political. He stayed away from blatant quid-pro-quo. Some said he wasn't smart enough to enter that field. Not from honesty, but more for self-protection. He thought, if money does not change hands there is no paper trail. Strangely, he was not monetarily greedy. And so it was, but as for the facilitation of certain things, Bubba would protect his job. More so though at the local level, his own state, the people who elected him to Congress. But having got there, then his rise to the Vice-Presidency *was* his greed. His quid-pro-quo.

Bubba was the keeper of Democrat slush funds and dirt files that didn't exist and had no real function in the administration, a typewriter? Too much technology for Bub-

ba. In the digital world, he was a dinosaur who relied on staffers to open and print his emails. He was infinitely more comfortable with a fountain pen than a laptop.

As a true believer in the second amendment, Bubba always packed a pistol. His hand was in the left side-pocket of his jacket, stock taking? Yes, the Colt was still there, and armed. A wry smile appeared thinking about.....

But, President Harlan Wilton, is *still* a fine figure of a man, disciplined, dieted and exercised.

The President replied to his most direct subordinate. "It may have worked then, Bubba, but people are a lot more worldly, and, certainly much more sceptical than they were forty or fifty years ago. And, although I am not disagreeing with the concept, I don't know if we could ever keep it from this century's media scrutiny."

The rest of the assembled inner circle listened intently, the President continued: "the historians are still coming down hard on our predecessors from events all those years ago."

Bubba shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"Remember the Bay of Pigs, Bubba? Remember Chile, Nicaragua, The Chicago School of Economics? Sure Bubba, those events were not of *our* making, although you were there in the early days of your political career, but those events were of this country's making, and, do we go down that well-trodden path again?"

Bubba squirmed in his chair at the memory of those morally misguided, but hugely profitable - so therefore forgivable, political decisions

“*This* Administration’s minutes, and other such papers, have to be de-classified some time, Bubba, and the media, right now, are having a ball analysing the latest tranche of our predecessors’ military, financial and diplomatic fuck-ups....”

The President paused as if acknowledging those past mistakes to himself; “and remember Bubba, we are all living longer. Kennedy is dead, Eisenhower is dead, they went to their graves without having to answer to the people for sins they may have committed. Nixon was caught out though, just as *we* could be, and probably will be.....Nixon publicly paid the price, and we will live long enough to have to answer for *our* misdeeds someday, and” ..... he paused as trained by his drama coaches..... “and, *I* don’t choose to spend my retirement in, at the very least, disgrace. Like Nixon, or in a federal prison.”

It occurred to Bubba at that moment that the President of The United States of America had changed his position on yet more policies that Bubba and the rest of the Administration thought were core mandates from their voters. They were mandates from the party’s financial backers.

This president was elected on a policy of financial growth and less government, less regulation a move towards the right, a worldwide trend that the so-called left (but moving ever subtly right) Democratic Party, was also following. And now it appeared from earlier discussions that the President was about to move further to the left and back-flip on financial policies that would have favoured free enterprise, the pharmaceutical and chemical

manufacturers, oil corporations, arms manufacturers the National Rifle Association, and the private medical industry, over the best interests of the vast majority of the population, the working class. Working class if they were lucky enough to have employment. Or if they didn't, they were reduced to being a sub-class of beggars. Lately, President Harlan Wilton wanted to revisit medical health care policies that a previous president had had to abandon because he didn't have the numbers in either the House or the Senate to get his legislation through. And, he had indicated to those present earlier during this meeting he was looking at a radical federal government funded public housing scheme.

“We are not a socialist country Harlan,” replied the Secretary of Defence to that bombshell.

The President drank a great gulp of Coca-Cola.

With the taste of the inky, sugary, black fizzy liquid on his lips, it occurred to him this product, was the most successful product ever marketed, and was probably the start of where the realisation, that the modifying of the culture of a foreign country could be brought about by his own country's corporations, corporations in cahoots with certain government departments and agencies, in return for very generous tax and energy concessions, and keeping a lid on wages.

He loved Coca-Cola, it was his only real indulgence.

Well he was from Atlanta. And American corporations and marketing could, and had, changed other countries cultures and tastes. Somehow, somewhere, America had

infected many other countries with the worst, and most unhealthy, of its commerce and culture.

Certainly, President Harlan Wilton was a politician, just like the rest in the room, and had been just as ruthless as all of them to get to where he now sat, in the highest office in the land; some would say in the world, he realised this was as far as he could go. He had reached the pinnacle. The only higher entity was the divine, just like middle-America had been indoctrinated, and was such a powerful political force with its religious dogma and fundamentalist philosophies, especially where firearms and race, and sexuality were concerned.

Harlan Wilton had even recently had the temerity to quote from an Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, regarding gun control legislation. Howard, although a conservative, had implemented the toughest gun control laws in the western world following the deaths of thirty-five innocent locals and tourists at the hands of one crazed gunman, Martin Bryant, at the historic Port Arthur site in Tasmania in 1996.

One wonders, however, if Howard would have had the balls to face the rednecks of his constituency and implement his gun laws if there were a firearms manufacturing industry with its powerful lobby group, and a second amendment, in Australia.

Harlan Wilton saw the merit in Howard's hard line on guns (there had been numerous mass shootings of innocent people, including children in schools, on his watch), but now he had, with many years in politics, climbed his

own Everest and slain his own dragons. And now, he was mellowing and in divesting himself of his ego and ambition driven practices and the modifying of his policies to that of a more benevolent nature. His only enemies now were the voters. Would they return him for a second term, or were his evolving, more socially oriented policies, a bridge too far?

For those present in the Oval Office at this time, his revisited policies were un-American. They were too left-leaning, socialist almost. The policies were too intrusive on business; on Wall Street. There would be too much government, too much regulation, especially in the banking and finance industry.

Wilton was not at all popular these days on Wall Street, and equally the public couldn't come to grips with just what he was trying to achieve. There were too many mixed messages coming out of Washington and Wall Street. Internationally, Harlan Wilton was being hailed as either, a reformer or a demolisher, depending on which foreign country's analysis was subscribed to.

He continued his dialogue, cautiously, to the Secretaries and senior bureaucrats: "You see, people, although *we* believe in our system and philosophies, and *we* might believe the world would be a better place if *we* ruled it, we must remember, our allies are still sovereign nations"

A long pause to allow that to sink in.

"These foreign nations have their own beliefs and philosophies. Who's right and who's wrong Bubba?"

"But Mr. President, we can't just sit around playing with

our dicks waiting for America to go broke, can we?”

Notably, he hadn't included the Secretary of State, Donna Kennedy, in that observation and paused and looked at the President who, it was obvious, had very much lost the support of his Vice-President, and most of the others in the room.

“We *are* broke Bubba,” replied Wilton.

But historically, wasn't it the American way to plunder other nations' resources in times like this? Wasn't it the American way to expand and exploit? It worked in South and Central America didn't it? Survival of the most powerful, ideologically, it is 'The United States' right!

The other Secretaries of the Wilton administration were in varying states of disbelief at the president's earlier revelations, and of the realisation of a potential financial supernova. Although the signs of the failing economy had been present for many years, no-one was prepared to acknowledge it. The spin doctors and economists will fix it.

Won't they?

They must.

Or at least they would find a three word slogan that pointed the blame at the Republicans, or Russia, or China or North Korea or Iran, or even Australia, if it suited their purpose. They would have the public relations consultants point the crisis anywhere but at the administration and the decaying system that both sides of American politics had presided over for decades.

There would be no *mea-culpa* here thank you.

The historical panacea was to simply print more money. They had a new euphemism for that these days, the money boffins at the Federal Reserve had been calling it quantitative easing since 2009.

As most developed nations' governments (and even the Chinese to a certain extent these days), are a conglomeration of short sighted populist opportunists who care little for the future of their country's well-being, ten, twenty, one hundred years into the future, all their policies are directed at the next election, and the proliferation of their own personal power.

However, there *are* some thinkers amongst them. There *are* some with moral responsibility, but few.

Harlan Wilton realised, these days the ordinary citizens of the world regarded most of those who sit in legislatures with their carefully coiffed comb-over pates, breasts surgically enhanced/rejuvenated, and hopelessly orthodontic smiles, and their bureaucrats, as mere egotistical mouth-pieces for corporations and lobby groups.

It is the American, and increasingly, the way of the Western World.

President Harlan Wilton paused, gathering his thoughts and the Oval Office went almost silent, with only a few mumbling amongst themselves and waiting for an executive response. The president stood, pushed his chair back, and walked to the window. He was a relatively young man of fifty six but the pressures of office had been ageing him noticeably in recent months.

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North of Washington DC, on the banks of the Potomac in Langley Virginia, Director of the CIA George Anastis was watching a (very) closed circuit monitor.

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Outside the multi paned bulletproof window of the Oval Office was the vast expanse of lawn, the gardens of the White House. The 'back yard', as Harlan Wilton chose to refer to it.

Marine One was parked in its usual spot.

There were three other identical helicopter decoys (out of sight) but ever present. He studied the surrounds wondering if the next two years would be his last. He saw shadows cast by rooftop personnel with laser sighted automatic rifles patrolling the ramparts of the White House. He looked at the Great Presidential Seal of the United States of America woven into the light blue carpet in the centre of the office. There are nine or ten carpets in different colours that in-coming presidents can choose from.

He thought about the Constitution and The Bill of Rights. Would he be a one term President?

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George Anastis flicked off the monitor and removed his Wi-Fi bud earpieces and the screen disappeared into

the slot at the end of his desk. He marveled at the workmanship involved in keeping this, his very private monitor, a hidden part of the desk. This was his own precise workmanship. Not even his secretary or the cleaner would have known of the screen hidden in the desk, so good was his joinery. If he hadn't become what he now was, he would have been just as happy with a hammer and chisel and length of fine timber.

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Harlan Wilton's Democrats had lost their majority in the Senate in the last, recent mid-term elections, mostly over gun control legislation he had tried to implement, but got rolled, as always, by the National Rifle Association, and he was now a lame duck President. He had become too left thinking, even for a Democrat.

He had recently read biographies of past world leaders including, Churchill, Disraeli, Gandhi, Hitler, Stalin, yes, even Stalin, and Australian Prime Ministers, Gough Whitlam, Bob Menzies, Paul Keating and Ben Chifley. A mixture of right and left, he had recently come to the belief it was proper to look at both sides.

Or, was it a matter of keeping your friends close and your enemies closer?

This President was, at this most powerful but also vulnerable time in his life, widening his perspective. And like Galileo Galilei discovered by looking out of his private and limited world through his rudimentary telescope, that the

world did not revolve around his own personal tiny diameter.

Harlan Wilton, like all presidents, had executive powers, and could affect changes by by-passing the Congress and issuing executive orders, but on most, and *the* most important issues, he was hamstrung.

“My policies are dead in the water and the best I can do is to try to negotiate with my political adversaries,” he said to Bubba Calhoun recently, to get *some* watered-down, heavily amended legislation through.

A past President, America’s first black President, also suffered a similar fate, but he at least had his two full terms in office. And, there was always the tension of not only race, but religious ethnicity towards *that* president. And then, as had been the norm since the Civil War, the never ending animosity between the north and south of his own country. Would the United States ever be over that, or would it forever, be fighting the Civil War?

This President was not in a good place.

He turned to face the others.

“Lady, and gentlemen,” the Secretary of State was Donna Kennedy, a distant relative of the once all-powerful Kennedy dynasty, “I have been advised that this country can’t afford to fix its own infrastructure, we *owe* big-time. We are supposed to be the western world’s largest economy.....yes?.....We *were* the *world’s* largest economy until China usurped us in 2014.....yes?.....”, the rest of those present were wondering where this was going, was Wilton losing it?

“I need facts people, I need to know how bad it is. I want reports from all of you by Friday. That’s three days you’ve got, and no.....and, I mean..... *no*, spin or bureaucrat speak, just the bland facts and figures. Understood?”

They understood.

“Now, Donna, you stay, I want more on this.....er.....idea of yours.”

Did she have an idea? She had no clue on what he was talking about but recognised it was probably his cryptic way of not letting others in on his thoughts. She was right. It was. The other senior members of the administration filed out of the Oval Office leaving the President and his Secretary of State alone in the room. The doors were closed.

“Coffee Donna?”

“Thanks Harlan, straight black.”

The President poured them both straight blacks.

“Australia?” He asked, “but why Australia Donna?”