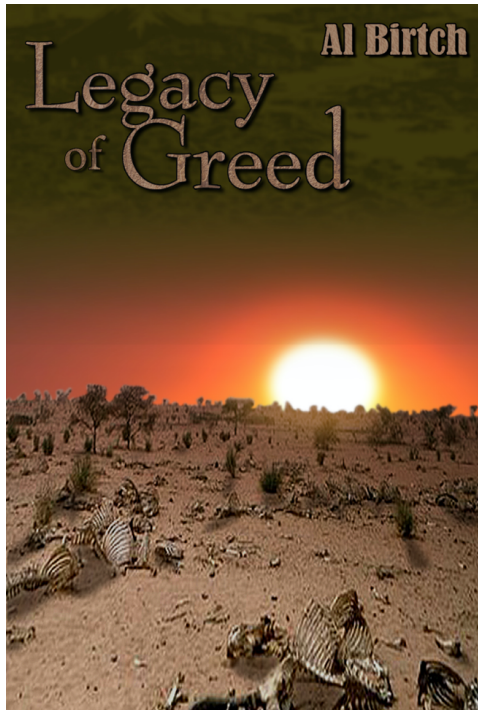




Genre: thriller

Our protagonist, Peter Franklin is a Pulitzer prize winning investigative journalist. He is about to be drawn into the story of his lifetime. A week earlier billionaire chemist Jeffrey Sloan had committed suicide leaving behind a hand-written note "*I can never forgive myself for what I have done.*" Sloan had started his company 45 years earlier and with hard work, and the help of a few drug patents, had built it into the largest pharmaceutical company in the world. Investigators believed his suicide was related to the death of his wife of 38 years. 5 years earlier Emily was visiting Paris when she was involved in a serious car accident. She had received an emergency blood transfusion and the blood was contaminated with what they believed was the HIV virus. It was later determined to be one of the very first confirmed cases of the Greeson's Disease outside of the Africa. Sloan began treating her with a drug that he said had shown some early promise for Greeson's. But she was gone within the year. A week after his suicide, Peter is asked to come to the office of Doug Thompson, Sloan's personal attorney. Thompson hands Peter a sealed envelope and explains that 2-months before his death, Jeffrey had given him the envelope with instructions to deliver it to Peter upon his death. That Peter would know what to do with it. Peter is confused as he has never met Sloan. Out of the building Peter opens the envelope. It contains a thumb-drive. Back home he plugs in the drive but it quickly requests an encryption key. He rechecks the envelope...nothing. That evening Peter's partner, Detective Janet Kingsley suggests..."*try his name? His wife's, daughters?* All attempts fail. Why in hell would a man about to commit suicide for '*something he obviously felt guilty about*', leave a thumb-drive, but lock the file with a password. Janet muses that perhaps it's like the man who goes into the cathedral and slips into the confessional when the priest is occupied. He unburdens the dark secret he's been hiding. That simply the act of saying it out

loud gives him some relief. Janet suggests her X, Professor David Kingsley, Dean at MIT might be able to help. Their divorce had been amicable and they had remained good friends. Peter agrees. Two days later David calls to let him know that the data on the file is encrypted and Sloan had used the highest level available. David proposes an option. MIT has the largest computer processing power in the country. It's largely unused overnight. He can use some of that surplus capacity to run an algorithm of decryption codes against the thumb-drive. But given the millions of potential encryption keys, he does not have high expectations of success. Peter realizes that whatever Sloan's deep dark secret was...it was probably going to stay that way. But the thumb-drive had simply been a brief distraction anyways. Peter was just starting a new investigation. The 2-year old total embargo and military blockades on the continent of Africa. Greenson's Disease blended the worst of several deadly diseases from HIV to SARS and H1N1 and it was deadly - a 68% mortality rate. It was transmitted through direct contact with an infected person but also through biting insects. But so far it was contained to the continent of Africa. It was Avian Bird Flu racking up a body counts throughout the Asia-Pacific countries while the Dengue and Zika viruses were rampant in South American. Before the medical science was even complete on Greenson's, they had closed their borders to immigrants and all imports from the continent. They enforced it with a military blockage. It was as if they knew something the rest of us didn't. Travel to or from Africa required special VISA permits. Peter's instincts told him there had to be more to the story. 4 weeks earlier he had published an article about his new project. That article caught the attention of someone the key to Peter's question. Soon this anonymous source tells him he must go to the village of Chitungwiza in Zimbabwe, then simply follow the clues he finds there. Peter cashes in a favor owed to him be a member of the State Department and he gets his VISA. His work often had him in the shadows; clandestine meetings with sources that needed protection. Peter had grown accustomed to looking over his shoulder. And he cannot escape the feeling that he is being followed. Chitungwiza is a small tribal village of only a few hundred people. It had once had over 5,000 but, as the locals called it, '*the thins*' as both HIV and then Greenson's made people lose weight rapidly. The village elder trusts Peter and confides in him that there were 3 members of the tribe, the Blessed Ones, that had overcome the disease and were now healthy. That 4-years ago a man he called Dr. Sam had come to their village and stayed with them for 3-months. He had treated those 3 people with a new medicine. But then Dr. Sam was notified that his research partner had been killed in a car accident. The elder said Dr. Sam had returned to America for the funeral but had promised to return right after. They never saw him again. He gives Peter the Doctors business card that he had kept. Back at the hotel Peter researches Devon Pharmaceuticals. They were a small-start up drug research company with a focus on Greenson's. Some of their initial research shown promise. At the urging of the government, they sold out to the much larger Sloan Research. But within 6 months of acquisition, Sloan had fired the original 2 doctors and saying their research was flawed. 4 months later, Dr. Sam arrived in Chitungwiza. A few days later Peter is back home and his anonymous source reaches out again. Peter shares what he has learned and it turns out the tipster is Dr. Sam. Suspicious about the death of his colleague, he has been in hiding for the past 3 years in a small town in Colorado. Peter heads west and is meeting with him when Janet calls in tears. There's been an explosion at MIT. David is dead. But Janet has even bigger fears. She says that 2 hours before the explosion, David had called her. He sounded terrified. That he had broken through the encryption but couldn't say more over the phone...

that he was going to fly up that night. 24 hours later Peter and Janet understand why he was so terrified. David had taken the precaution of sending the unlocked thumb-drive by courier to their home. On it was a series of video files that, from the date stamps, had taken place 24 years earlier over a period of 8 months. 7 people sitting around the table. From the accents and ethnicity, Peter, Janet and Dr. Sam soon determine that 6 of them were from Russia, England, China, Germany, Japan, and India. In the case of the America, the 7th man didn't need an introduction to them. He had been the Secretary of State back then. They sit through the entire 10 hours of videos, pausing only for bathroom breaks or to get another drink. For decades the public had wondered how leaders could be faced with growing scientific evidence of climate change, reducing global agricultural production, dwindling fresh water supply and simply do nothing. Targets set, then broken. Nothing tangible was being done, or so the world had thought. But in the videos, it was clear that these countries had taken the science deadly serious. A mere 4 hours in, the people at the table had seen in stark numbers that within 40 years...maximum, the planet would only be capable of sustaining a population of 2 billion people. That was the window they had to reduce the world's population by 70%. But each leader knows that mandatory limits on family size would never fly in a democracy. Any leader putting such measures in place would be quickly voted out. The representative from Germany muses *"what we need is the Black Death that wiped out 50% of Europe in the 1300's" No politician was blamed for that. It was an act of nature.* That comment was seized upon. The balance of the videos were short meetings held every few weeks to evaluate options. The discussions were cold, mathematical, like examining a mortgage amortization table. It was decided that, for the good of humanity, this reduction had to be targeted. Unproductive members of society had to go. The 'untouchable class' in India. Peasants in China. The African continent was deemed unworthy of saving, it was all expendable. The first videos established 'the what', the final video dated 8 months later 'the how'. They had bio-engineered a virus to specific genetic-profiles and had a vaccine formula ready to mass produce when needed to bring it back under control. But how to distribute it to the target populations. The World Health Organization was the perfect unwitting partner. They had vaccination programs in every 3rd world country in the fight against malaria, tuberculosis and others. And this would be done in stages to avoid detection. HIV in Africa which for the next 20 years killed millions. Avian Bird Flu in China. Cholera in India. The death toll steadily grew, but it wasn't fast enough. It was 7 years earlier when they released the deadliest yet, Greenson's Disease in Africa,. Two years after its introduction, it had cost Sloan the life of his wife. It was at that point that he discovered the virus had mutated and their on-the-shelf remedy drug was no longer effective. Peter, Janet and Sam have the evidence of this global conspiracy. And the drug that Sam has developed a few years earlier. Not knowing who they can trust, they elect to announce their evidence live on the national program 60 Minutes. Leaders of the original 6 countries quickly deny any knowledge of the conspiracy hatched two decades ago. Manufacturing of Dr. Sam's formulation goes into overdrive and a global vaccination program begun. For the first few months it works. But viruses are living organisms and like every living thing, fights to survive. Soon it has mutated yet again and the vaccine has no impact. The new strain is now airborne and spreading like wildfire. Hospitals and hotels around the world are quickly converted to quarantine facilities, not for the infected, there are simply too many, but to isolate the uninfected. It's a fight for survival of the species. Fortunately a lot of work had been done on

building self-sustaining biosphere for an eventual manned-landing on Mars. This knowledge was put to work. Every major mine and natural cave system, were converted into these biospheres. Tunnels excavated back to the surface and topped with bio-sealed geodesic domes. These would be the greenhouses to grow the necessary crops. The largest cave systems had natural underground lakes and rivers flowing through them. The mines were connected to aquifers. Within 12 months the work was finished and the just over 5 million uninfected were divvied up between the 31 habitats based on their skills sets. Peter is among the survivors, Janet and Dr. Sam are not. Peter, along with 9,400 others, is sent to the former Tau Tona gold mine in South Africa. It's 500 miles of tunnels ready for habitation. With all of the uninfected now sealed in their new homes, the few scientists still well enough to work, continue their search for a cure. But with no one left to maintain the orbits of the communications satellites, within a few months Tau Tona's connection with the outside world and the other habitats goes dark. **The End**

Or is it? **Legacy of Greed Part II – The Return Home**, set 70 years into the future is coming soon.