

## Bradford

### Chapter 4 – Biohazard

**“Gillian had seen many strains of hemorrhagic fever, some man made. Nothing acted as quick as this though, or caused so much damage to the soft tissues.”**

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When the phone rang, the description ‘Security 7,’ came up on his phone. Bradford guessed that was internal code for the president’s office. With some trepidation, he picked up the phone and tried to sound confident.

“Good morning, Bradford Scott here.”

There was a slight delay.

“Just connecting you with the president, please stay on the line.” Said a female voice.

A few clicking sounds and then the warm reassuring voice of President Herbert himself. Maria had likened the president’s TV voice to sounding like hot chocolate drizzled over freshly baked profiteroles. It was certainly one of his best assets and gained him many votes.

“Good morning Bradford.” Said the President. “Thank you for sparing the time to take my call.”

“Not at all Sir, I’m honoured that you’d call me, on my first morning in my new role.”

President Herbert chuckled and even that sounded warm and sincere. He either had the best voice coach money could buy, or he was born to be a politician.

“I do appreciate how hard your job will be Bradford. You’ll have a hard and dangerous career, with no public recognition.”

Bradford never had wanted medals and commendations, it was part of his police career that he was glad to get away from.

“I’m not looking for medals Sir.” He said.

“We all need recognition for doing a good job Bradford.” Said the President. “I’m having one of my house parties on Saturday night. You’re invited and bring your partner along. It’ll give us a chance to have a few minutes in private at some point.”

“Amoe, my partner, isn’t aware of the true nature of my work.”

Again the chuckle, like molasses poured slowly over watermelon.

“Half the partners there will have no idea what their wife or husband really does for a living, Bradford. No one talks business at these things; tell her you’re invited because of your police work. I’m sure Amoe will appreciate a chance to meet the president.”

“Yes of course Sir. We’ll both be there.”

“Good. I’ll send a car for you both.”

Bradford could hear President Herbert talking to an aid, asking about travel times from the East Central area.

“An official limousine will pick you up at seven. I look forward to meeting you on Saturday.”

“Yes Sir, thank you Sir.”

The line went dead for a second and then the female voice was telling him to expect a limousine at seven pm on Saturday and that the dress code was formal wear. She confirmed his address and a full name and date of birth for Amoe Lee.

“Just for ID verification.”

As soon as she was off the line, Bradford reached for his own phone. He’d almost pressed the icon for Amoe, but then gave himself a few seconds to think why they’d been invited to a presidential

house party. His finger was actually trembling with excitement, as he pressed the tiny picture of her face.

"It's me. Sorry I know you must be busy. How would you like to meet the President ?"

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Gillian couldn't resist another long look at the organism on the screen. Magnified thousands of times by the latest scanning photon device, the pathogen was beautiful.

"Hard to believe it's so deadly." Said the Lab Tech.

"Did you follow full cherish procedure ?" Asked Gillian.

It was Gregory who answered her, the head of LabSinc4's research and development Lab.

"Yes, done as soon as the organism was shown to be viable. Three samples have been sent to separate secure locations and we've begun working on replication." He said.

It was dark green on the screen, though Gillian knew the colour was false. It wasn't a virus, or a bacterium, it didn't fit any known class of organism. The computer analyser was describing it as likely to be a prion type of infection, but she knew that was nonsense.

"Do you think you'll be able to replicate it ?" She asked.

"No. We don't even know what it is, or if it even works as intended. It would help if we were allowed to talk to its creator."

"That will never happen." She snapped.

Oh Michael, why did you have to take the damn case yourself ? He'd given her the perfect weapon, though she still had no idea who he'd intended to give it to. The microscopic organism was supposed to kill subversives and kill them in their thousands, while leaving the general population unharmed. She badly needed William to explain it to them, but Bradford had killed him. One simple change of orders and they'd have had all the information they needed. She put her hand on Gregory's shoulder, ashamed at herself for barking at him.

"Does it..... Grow ?" She asked.

"Yes. We put it in a standard nutrient solution and it has already replaced ten percent of the amount we removed. Though I have to admit..... I have no idea how it's growing."

"How about killing it. Have you tried yet ?" Gillian Asked.

"We've only had time to do a few basic tests. It'll survive boiling and all the main anti-bacterials and anti-fungals. High intensity gamma destroys it and high temperature incineration, but little else bothers it."

Gillian changed the focus on the imaging device, looking deep into the organism's cell structure and recognising nothing.

"So, it's a tough critter ?"

"Oh, it is Gillian, it is !"

Michael had made the organism, created it in his huge government laboratory. He'd created it for her, they'd agreed on a price and a date for delivery. Then the fool had developed a conscience and destroyed his notes and burned out his lab. Vanity had been his undoing though, he couldn't see his creation completely destroyed. Who had he intended the sample for ? They might have more information than the few scribbled notes that Michael had given her over the years.

"Red badge the room." She instructed.

Gregory stood up and shouted across the lab;

"Red badge holders only. All others must leave the lab. Now !"

While the room cleared, Gillian called Stefan and asked him to come to the main research lab. By the time he arrived, there were just four lab techs left, out of the usual eighty or so.

“Ok, let’s see if this stuff works.” Said Stefan.

She let him run the test, he had obtained the test subjects and she found the whole matter distasteful, even if it was essential. Gregory pressed the shutter button on test chamber one and part of the lab wall appeared to fold up into the ceiling.

“Where did you get them ?” Asked Gregory.

“We have our sources, best if you don’t know.” She answered.

Bradford has brought her the two male subversives, though she’d told him it was to test their blood for parasites. The two students, one male and one female, had actually applied to take part in a clinical trial. However the test went, none of the four would be alive for very long. All four had been stripped and dressed in hospital gowns, before being sedated and strapped to hospital trollies. A single nurse, moved between them, monitoring the various devices attached to each subject.

“They need to be awake. We need to see how they react to the pathogen.” Said Gillian.

Gregory pressed an intercom button, telling the nurse to administer an anti-dote to the sedative.

“And then get out of there.” He added.

One of the subs woke first, pulling at the straps that bound him to the trolley. He said nothing though, just glared at them through the glass. The girl was next, looking confused and shouting at Gillian.

“Why am I strapped down ? Who are you ?”

She looked straight at Gillian, assuming another woman might be sympathetic perhaps. When the girl started to become hysterical, screaming to be released, Gillian turned off the external speakers.

“The recorders will pick everything up.” She said.

When they were all awake, both the subs just looked sullen and resigned to their fate, whatever it might be. The students though. They were going crazy, screaming and struggling. They were both only nineteen or twenty and Gillian could see the veins on their necks standing out, as they screamed. Not actually hearing the sound made it worse in some way. Gregory was just looking at his computer, but Stefan was watching her.

“We could cancel today.” He said. “Obtain criminals from one of our contacts and reschedule the test. If you want to ?”

He was testing her, looking for weakness, some tasty piece of gossip to pass onto Mike Lakey, their ultimate boss. Mike wanted to know if the organism was the genuine article and he wanted to know today.

“We’ll try airborne at five parts per million, release the Adrasteia organism.” She said

Gregory pressed a button and a tiny amount of the organism was sprayed into the test chamber. The movement and breathing of the test subjects would circulate it around the room, their body heat would also be creating a convection affect.

“Signs of distress in female subject S4, at twenty five seconds.” Said a lab tech.

The subs looked confused when the girl began to arch her back and scream. Her friend took another five seconds, perhaps body weight was a factor. They both looked very sick after a minute and then their skin began to melt. Gillian had seen many strains of hemorrhagic fever, some man made.

Nothing acted as quick as this though, or caused so much damage to the soft tissues.

“Christ !”

A lab tech turned and vomited over the floor, but at least she had the sense to turn away from her computer.

“Death occurred at two minutes twenty seconds.” Said Gregory.

The tissues continued to melt away, even after death. At four minutes, the leg bones could be seen protruding through the liquefied muscles.

“No virus can do that !” Said Gregory.

“Nothing can do that so fast.” Said Stefan.

The subs looked terrified, but completely unharmed. Michael had told her the marker the organism looked for had been obvious once he’d given it some thought. Something that subversives experienced in their way of life, which ordinary members of the public didn’t. He’d never told her what that marker was. They had two version of the organism, the Adrasteia organism, which killed everyone who wasn’t a subversive and a Fravashi organism that killed only subs. Michael must have been going through a religious phase, to pick such ludicrously theatrical names. Both strains of the organism died thirty minutes after being released.

“Wait an hour.” Said Stefan. “Then gamma the room and wash it out. Then we’ll try the good guy organism.”

Gillian preferred Fravashi, which meant guardian angel in some long dead ancient culture, or at least that’s what Michael had told her. An hour later, the test chamber was hosed down and four new subjects were wheeled in and revived. This time the subversives melted and the married, middle aged couple were left alive and looking terrified.

“The damn thing actually works !” Said Stefan.

“Now we have to work out how it works.” Replied Gillian.

“We need a proper test, in a real world situation.” Said Gregory.

He was right and that would mean involving Bradford and his new squad.

“I’ll call Mike.” She said.

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Mike Lakey didn’t enjoy being disturbed while he exercised, but his PA seemed quite agitated.

“It’s Gillian McBride on the secure line Mike. She says there are developments in the Guardian Angel project, astounding developments.”

Everyone called him Mike, he insisted on it. He’d once read that it improved staff morale, so he’d made calling him Mr Lakey a sacking offence. He got off his exercise bike with some relief, he was feeling a bit tired anyway.

“Tempus fugit darling.” His wife never ceased to enjoy tell him.

He used a towel to mop his face a little and followed his PA out of his private gym and along the corridor.

“How long until my next meeting Shereen ?”

“You have Leon Erstwilder, but he’s not due for two hours.”

Good, plenty of time to talk to Gillian and shower. There was no way for the secure line to be brought to him, he had to go to it. Part hardware and part complex software AI, the computer sat on its own desk in his office. It had cost a fortune to develop and he’d poached several top guys from government research.

“Nothing is impossible to hack Mike, but this comes pretty damn close.”

His head of IT had said to him on the day he made his first call on the system. Every CEO of every subsidiary of Lakey Pharmaceuticals had one of the computers and so far, there had been no evidence of any call being intercepted.

“Stay and take notes Shereen.”

He continued mopping sweat off his face, as he sat down and saw Gillian looking back at him. He'd insisted that the system had to be face to face. You could tell a lot about a person, by their body language in stressful situations.

"Hi Gillian, good news I hope ?"

The picture quality was good, it showed most of the room, in case a small conference call was required. He could see Gillian looking at Shereen, as she sat behind him.

"Can we speak in private Mike ?" Gillian asked.

"I asked Shereen to take notes. I'm sure I can trust the lady who remembers my wife's birthdays for me."

He gave a reassuring smile, but he could see Gillian wasn't happy. Too bad, she worked for him and he set the rules.

"So, tell me. Is the organism everything we hoped ?" He asked.

"We tried both versions and they worked perfectly on small samples, in a test chamber. To be certain we need to test the organism in a real world situation."

"What are you suggesting ?"

He could hear Shereen's pencil moving over the page of her pad, he found the sound quite relaxing.

"Testing the Adrasteia organism is obviously out of the question, Michael Reece gave it the ancient name for Nemesis for a reason. We can however, test the Fravashi organism. It can be released in one of the subversive camps we know of."

"Are you going to use Bradford Scott to release the organism ?" He asked.

He noticed unease in her movements, a slight frown too.

"Bradford is developing an emotional response to some of his work. I would prefer to use another of our people to release the organism and then ask Bradford to investigate the results. He is a squad leader now and can use all the resources of PD489."

"Can't you do something about this emotional response ? Surely he's less use to us if he's getting a bit of a conscience ?" He asked.

"Not at this stage, he's more use to us with his true feelings intact. Trust me Mike, I know Bradford very well."

He sat back in his chair and looked at her for a good minute. His people were used to it and never interrupted his thinking time.

"Yes Gillian, carry out the test and use Bradford as you wish. This organism is your baby after all. Just a pity you misjudged Reece so badly. He burned out the lab I hear, the government must be aware he hasn't merely gone a bit vegan and run off to live in the hills."

"I do have some of his notes, but yes, I did make a mistake with Michael."

"What's done is done. Get the test carried out and then perhaps we can meet up next week ? I'll have Shereen talk to your people and arrange a day."

He killed the connection and spun his chair round.

"What do you think ?" He asked Shereen.

"She fancies Bradford."

He gave a long genuine laugh and threw the damp towel over the back of his chair.

"What a wonderfully uncomplicated world you live in." He said.

Shereen picked up his towel and walked towards the door.

"She does though," she said, "fancy him. No doubt about it."

"Gillian has no children, no husband and no real family. Yes, she does love him, but not necessarily in the way you're implying. It's much more complicated than that."

Shereen snorted at him and went to get him a clean shirt and a freshly pressed suit.

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He'd had a good lunch with Maria and Bradford had thought that as first days in a new job went, his had been pretty near perfect. About four in the afternoon Gillian had called and now he was briefing Maria.

"Just you and me in a light armoured vehicle. Oh, Gupta can come if he wants, Wild Bill says he needs more experience at the sharp end." He said.

She wasn't looking happy, a trip that entailed a three hour drive north wasn't the ideal way to end a Monday.

"So, the Longmont cops see a load of people running away from a subversive base and want us to investigate?" Asked Maria. "And they're talking about someone seeing melted bodies!"

Maria was tapping away at the computer, no doubt looking for recent reports from Longmont.

"Not exactly the local cops Maria, I have an informant who has proved reliable in the past."

"Oh great. We go miles out of our jurisdiction to get involved in something that isn't even on the system. Come on Bradford, that's plain crazy."

She had a point, but he'd promised Gillian he'd investigate events at the old Longmont bus station.

"The local cops aren't going to leave their coffee and donuts to investigate a few dead subs." He said. "If the subs have been experimenting with bio weapons, there could be all sorts of raw intelligence for you investigate."

He could see her softening and becoming interested.

"You'd let me do that? Investigate everything we find?"

"Yes, we can spend all night there if we find anything interesting. You can even bring a couple of bodies back and have the full run of the path lab." He said.

"Really?!"

She was giving him the kind of look that most women reserve for men who've given them a free spa day, with a pedicure thrown in.

"Ok, I'll get my things."

"We'll need Gupta to help lug stuff about." He said. "Have you seen him today?"

"Yes, I'll grab him on the way. He's been pestering the blonde on the front desk. We're probably saving him from a sexual harassment complaint."

When she'd gone, Bradford quickly called Gillian and told her they would be at the incident site in about three hours.

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There were still busses in Longmont and people who used them, but less than there had once been. The old bus garage had room for over a hundred busses to be parked up overnight and it had an entire floor of offices for the bus company. The mistake had been building it on the edge of town, near the junction of a dozen major roads, but miles from anywhere the police considered worth protecting. After the umpteenth burglary and the death of yet another night guard, the bus company built a smaller garage, in the heart of town.

"No basement, at least we're not going underground on this one." Said Maria.

She had the plans of the garage on the big screen in the back of the armoured vehicle. It showed a simple layout of a large open building, with offices on the first floor.

"Subversives have been reported in the area for about five years." She said. "But as they're in a bit of town that has effectively been abandoned....."

"No one could be bothered to clear them out." Added Bradford.

"I don't think we'll need the hazard suits." Said Gupta.

They'd parked quite some distance from the garage, but they could quite clearly see groups of people congregating near the old garage.

"They've obviously returned to where they consider to be their home." Said Maria.

"I'll drive us closer." Said Bradford.

The vehicle caused some panic when the homeless people saw it, but they soon settled again. Some pointed at them and shouted abuse, but most simply ignored them.

"I can see at least three bodies near the garage doors." Said Gupta.

Bradford could see dozens of healthy looking people and three sets of remains. He'd been trained to use a hazard suit in any case involving a suspected chemical or biological weapon, but the suits were unpleasant to wear and restricted free movement.

"Anything coming up on the air analyser Maria ?" He asked.

"Nothing. None of the usual chemical agents, bacteria or viruses. But this may not be the usual stuff."

"They look happy enough out there." Said Bradford. "And it'll be dark soon. I tend to agree with Gupta, we'll go out without the hazard suits."

There were no complaints, they all hated the hot and heavy contraptions. They collected their kit, Maria had the largest back pack full of gadgets. The air was warm as they left the vehicle, but not unpleasantly so. Bradford walked the twenty yards to the nearest body and knelt down to look at it properly.

"Looks like he's been dowsed in acid." He said.

Maria fitted the HD camera of the personal video archive device and joined him, running the camera over the corpse.

"I'll take a few samples." She said.

They waited while Maria dug into the melted flesh, removing samples and putting them into small sterile containers. Bradford kept a watchful eye on the upper floor windows of the garage, but there was no sign of any living subs. They carried on towards the main garage doors, when one of the homeless approached Bradford.

"Got anything to eat ?"

He looked old and only had two teeth, but Bradford knew he might not be as old as he looked. The drugs they often took and the hard life, made forty five years, old age among many of those who inhabited the edges of society. Bradford almost said no, but then he remembered having a chocolate bar in his pocket.

"It's not much, but you're welcome to it."

"Thanks mister."

He ate voraciously, the way a hungry dog eats.

"What happened here ?" Maria asked.

The old guy finished his chocolate before replying.

"Got any more ?"

Maria dug in her pack, bringing out another bar, waving it about.

"Tell us what you saw first." She said.

"They did it, the bastards on the motorcycle." Said the old boy. "I saw them fire something through the doors and then ride off, as though Lucifer himself was after them. They did it, the guys inside started to die after that."

"But you've all come back here !" Said Gupta.

"This is where we live. I waited a few hours, but many came back here before I did. Whatever gas or stuff they fired in here, seems to have gone away. It killed Mac, who never did anyone any harm, but the rest of us weren't harmed."

He was pointing at a body quite near the doors, dressed in the familiar layers of worn out clothing, which all the homeless wore.

"Was he a subversive?" Asked Bradford.

"No, not Mac. He did a bit of time once, but he was a patriot, hated all these trouble making bastards. Although they did sometimes give us food."

He was eyeing the chocolate bar, which Maria let him have. He only ate half, pushing the rest inside his shirt for later. They left him, Bradford leading them through the large set of open doors and into the huge garage. It was approaching twilight, the time when the mind can play tricks, turning shadow into threats, but not showing real threats with enough clarity.

"I know everyone looks dead," said Bradford, "but stay alert."

There were at least seven bodies in the garage, all barely recognisable as people. Flesh had melted away from bones, liquefying into their clothes and oozing across the floor around them.

"Mark a couple of juicy ones to take back and we'll bring the vehicle in here." Said Bradford.

Maria took samples from all the bodies, while Gupta kept alert, watching for any subversives who might not be dead. It took Maria a good hour to take her samples and put yellow markers on two of the bodies, one male and one female.

"I'm ready for upstairs." She said.

On the stairs they found the delivery device for the pathogen. The remains of a small hollow projectile, which Maria carefully bagged and put in her pack.

"Not gas in something that size, has to be a biological agent of some kind." She said.

The offices had obviously been some kind of command centre for the subversives. About twenty rooms, each with at least two or three dead bodies, most melted and already beginning to decay.

"Christ! One of them shot herself." Said Gupta. "I guess she saw what it was doing to everyone else."

"It's better than melting to death." Said Bradford.

Maria took a few samples and then they found the computer and Maria couldn't resist removing the memory cubes. Getting past the security devices and anti-tampering traps took a couple of hours. By the time she cheered with triumph and put the cubes in her pack, it was almost midnight.

"Ideally." Said Maria. "We should use incineration devices and destroy this place."

"It's home to a lot of homeless people."

Bradford had said it without thinking and it took him a few seconds to realise they were staring at him. Was the comment that out of character?

"I suppose they'll bury the dead and save us the bother." Said Maria.

"Like they do in the desert bunkers." Added Gupta.

Before anything else could be said, there was the sound of an explosion from the front of the building.

"Oh shit, our vehicle!" Shouted Bradford.

He ran to one of the rooms facing the front of the building and was just in time to see another explosion, which tore their armoured personnel carrier apart. The others had followed him, all keeping their heads down and watching the flames where their vehicle had been.

"Fuck!" Shouted Bradford. "First day in the new job and I get one of our vehicles destroyed. I bet those damn things are worth a fortune."

"About a million." Said Maria. "And that's without the electronics."



Bradford began punching the wall in frustration.

“Fuck !!”

There hadn't been any glass in the windows for years, so he set his Ion blaster to its highest setting and began to fire blindly into the nearest ruined buildings. By blind luck he must have hit someone, as a pitiful scream came back out of the darkness.

“They've obviously come to see what happened to their friends.” Said Maria.

In answer to Bradford's shots, several blasters returned his fire, turning the rooms around them into a death trap of high energy beams. Gupta began firing his weapon, but Maria kept her back to the wall.

“There are a lot of them and they have the advantage.” She said. “And they've had hours to get into position.”

She then turned and fired a long sustained burst, being rewarded by another scream in the darkened building opposite.

“What do you suggest we do ?” Asked Bradford.

“We need to get out of here.”

“I agree with her.” Said Gupta.

Bradford hated running from a fight, it was what he lived for. He put his head up and scanned the area beyond their burning vehicle.

“Run!? Really ! How many of them can there be ?”

As if to answer him, a railgun began to fire from close by, a powerful one, judging by the electrical whine as it fired. The magnesium alloy bullets moved so fast that they could penetrate almost anything. They certainly had no difficulty in blasting through the two layers of brick in the outside wall, before chewing up the office walls and furniture.

“Run !” Shouted Maria. “Get downstairs. I have an idea.”

Bradford ran, noticing that the railgun bullets were actually going right through the entire building. Whoever was firing the weapon was on the ground, firing at an upward angle. As he ran, Bradford saw a burst of fire go over his head and through the roof of the old bus garage. For a brief moment. He could see the night sky through the holes and then he was running down the stairs.

“Another couple of bursts and they'll come in looking for us.” He said.

They could hear the railgun, turning the upper floor into a hell of flying bullets and debris. Crouching on the stairs, the burning vehicle outside gave enough light to see the interior of the building, even if not in much detail.

“We go out of here in that.” Said Maria.

She was pointing at a large and very ancient military armoured car. Bradford had noticed it on the way in and he'd even briefly looked inside the museum piece.

“It might not even go. And we don't have the key card.” He said.

Maria was twiddling a key card in her fingers and looking a little smug.

“I took this when I was getting samples,” she said, “Just in case.”

“It still might be a derelict.” He said.

“No, it was too clean inside. Come on Bradford, those old models have better armour than our new armoured vehicles. You two can pick up the body, while I get it started.”

It was Gupta's turn to argue with her.

“Pick up a body, you're joking !” He said.

“I'm not going home empty handed Gupta.” She said. “Grab the yellow tagged female and I'll spin the APC round and open the doors for you.”

She didn't give them time to object. Maria ran towards the old APC, up on her toes and moving silently.

"Come on Gupta, it's easier to do as she wants, I know from experience." Said Bradford.

He ran towards the yellow tagged corpse, hearing Gupta's heavy footsteps behind him and hoping the clumsy trainee didn't fall over anything. Bradford went to the head end and grabbed hold of the dead woman's jacket, using it to lift her off the ground.

"Grab her legs Gupta; use her jeans to pick her up. Hurry up about it!"

He was pleased that Gupta didn't seem squeamish about grabbing hold of the woman's puss filled jeans. Bradford turned his head to see where Maria was and heard the wonderful sound of a methane burning engine coming to life. They were banned in the major cities; the engines were just too dirty for a world trying to clean up several millennia of fossil fuel damage. Out in the fringes it was a different matter, there were still small production plants running. Bradford loved the smell and the sound; it reminded him of ancient recordings of drag race meetings.

"Keep your head down Gupta, they must have heard that." He shouted.

As Maria revved the powerful engine, the building was filled with the sound. The heavy APC moved quickly, Maria swinging it around to cover them. By the time the subs began firing, Bradford and Gupta were screened by the thick armour plate. Maria opened the doors and leapt out to help load the body.

"Started like a dream and a full tank of methane." She said.

Normal bullets and blasters didn't bother them, but a burst from the rail gun, just might hit something vital. They hurried! Maria ran for the driving seat as Bradford closed and bolted the doors. Maria didn't avoid the subs; she drove straight at them, running down those too slow in getting out of the way. The railgun was large and required its own small generator. Maria drove the APC into the gun, clipping the generator, producing a small lightning flare as it came apart.

"Hold onto something you guys!" She shouted.

They weren't supposed to escape, the subversives had blocked the road with at least a dozen of their cars. Maria just hit the throttle and ploughed straight through, enjoying the way the heavy APC didn't even slow down.

"Try doing that in an electric powered shit box." Said Bradford.

When they reached the main road, Bradford helped Gupta to move the body to the back of the vehicle. He then went through the recordings Maria had taken, examining the details of the device and where it had landed. At the same time he secretly made a copy of the memory cube for Gillian.

"I'm starving." He said to Maria. "Is there a drive through burger place on the way back?"

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Gillian was still at the LabSinc4 offices. She didn't need to be, but she wanted to make sure that Bradford was unharmed. The news had nothing about events in Longmont, but that didn't surprise her. She doubted if the San Pablo news would cover a nuclear detonation, if it was more than twenty miles out of town. No one was interested in what a few squash growers were up to, it just wasn't news.

"More coffee Miss McBride? It is fresh."

"Yes, thank you."

The security guard put a fresh mug of coffee in front of her. She wasn't sure of his name, Joe perhaps. She just didn't want to sit in her office alone, while she waited. He didn't say much, which suited her, he just kept her supplied with coffee and sweets from the vending machine. It was almost dawn when she saw the front headlamp of a motorbike bobbing across the car park.

"Can you do your rounds or something ?" She said to Joe.

"The rules say I need to monitor the screens."

"Just go ! Give me thirty minutes."

"Yes Miss McBride."

She was alone when a very grubby looking Bradford entered the security office. She wanted to hug him, but it didn't seem appropriate.

"I didn't expect you to be here at this time." He said.

"I had things to do and I wanted to make sure you got your money."

She handed him an envelope with a large amount of cash in it. She was beginning to realise that over paying him eased her conscience in some way.

"Thank you."

He put the envelope in his pocket without counting it and handed her a small transparent cube, about half an inch square.

"Everything Maria recorded and she is very thorough. The biological agent was delivered by two guys on a motorbike. They fired it into the building in some way." He said.

"Were there many deaths ?" She asked.

"At least fifty, mostly subs. Maria will begin looking at the samples this afternoon and I'll keep you informed. We even managed to grab a female body, before being attacked."

"Attacked ?"

She moved closer and it felt an appropriate time to hug him. To her relieve, he hugged her back.

"But..... you all returned in one piece ?" She asked.

"Yes, though I still have to explain losing a brand new, top of the range armoured vehicle."

She stepped back from him, she wanted to see his face.

"Were all those killed subversives ?" She asked.

"As far as we could tell. There was an old guy called Mac, we were told he was just a homeless guy. He had spent some time in jail though, if that helps ?"

"It might."

"I'm shattered Gillian, another night with about two hours sleep, if I'm lucky. I'll call you later today."

"Yes of course, get some rest."

"With my luck, I'll have another couple of skin bugs to dig out, when I get home."

He was almost at the door when he turned back towards her.

"I recognised Michael Reece from a missing citizen circular." He said. "Famous bio-weapons scientist. I have to ask you Gillian, is his work and the case I delivered, connected with this ?"

"I'm not sure, it might be. I'll let you know if I find a connection." She Said.

"Normally I'm not curious, as you know. It seems strange though, the subs developing a weapon that only kills their own people."

"A agree it does. I'm sure it'll all make sense, once I've had a chance to look at the recordings."

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Bradford arrived home at about two hours before his normal waking up time. There were at least twenty messages on his phone, probably most of them asking why the armoured vehicle hadn't been returned to the PD489 garage. They'd kept the sub's old APC, it was tucked up in Maria's huge swanky garage over in 26 West. The ancient APC broke just about every piece of green legislation in San Pablo, which made Bradford love it all the more.

"Jeez they're sending me letters now !"

He picked up the note and it was from the building manager. It appeared they did have an apartment on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, which might be suitable for his maid and her child. He'd look at it once he woke up and had a bit more energy. If it looked safe and clean, he'd move Camila in, though he wouldn't tell her she was supposed to be his maid.

Bradford removed his clothes and was surprised to find that he hadn't picked up any fresh parasites. A quick shower and he was between the sheets and dreaming of Amoe. He did have a little curiosity about the case he'd delivered to LabSinc4 and the weapon that had been used on the subs, but it didn't stop him getting two hours of sound sleep.

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