

## Bradford

### Chapter 5 – Samuel

**“A Camila in tears he could have handled, but she just had a single tear, running down from her left eye.”**

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The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor apartment was ideal for Camila and her children; it even had a fully equipped kitchen. Bradford knew that Lou, the building manager, rose early, so he was viewing the apartment at a ridiculously early hour.

“Has it had a thorough clean ?” Asked Bradford.

“Yes it has.” Said Lou. “You’ve lived here for years, you know my boss always gets the apartments cleaned properly. I’d let my own mother live in here.”

Bradford opened a kitchen cupboard and it was spotlessly clean, but several unopened boxes of pasta had been left on the shelf and the obligatory tin of bug spray.

“I thought your mother was dead Lou ?”

“Yeah, yeah, you’re sharp for seven am. If she was alive, I’d be happy for her to live here.”

Bradford knew how it worked. The apartment really needed fully redecorating and most of the furniture had seen better days. To get a top end rent, Lou’s boss would need to spend money and most landlords in San Pablo hated spending money. It was easier to let Bradford rent it out at a more reasonable rent.

“Two decent sized bedrooms and a sofa bed in the lounge.” Said Lou. “Your maid will have lots of room for her and her kid.”

“Kids.” Said Bradford. “She has two, a girl and a boy, both quite young.”

“Still plenty of space for two kids and the local school is pretty good.”

Bradford wandered into the lounge and looked at the familiar view out of the window. The apartment faced the same way as his and had the same view of the eight storey car park and of course, the expressway exit ramp.

“Also conveniently located for the expressway.” Chuckled Lou.

“Some of the graffiti looks new.”

“Yeah, bloody gangs.”

Bradford’s apartment was a few floors higher, he couldn’t see the red and gold graffiti masterpiece on the exit ramp support. It was ‘Samuel,’ in red lettering, edged in gold. There was even the stickman drawing with a sword. It looked new, but the wall scrawl might have been there for months.

“The data points are still connected.” Said Lou. “She can still watch her favourite films and connect with the outside world.”

Lou was actually dangling the keys in front of him and rattling them about.

“We know you as a good tenant. Sign the paperwork and the boss said I can give you the keys, today, now if you want.”

Bradford had almost decided to take the apartment, it was perfect for Camila. But there were rituals to go through, like kicking the wheels before buying a used car. He walked into the bathroom and opened the cabinet above the sink. A small, sealed bottle of CompZed was all on its own in there, complete with a ribbon and a ‘Compliments of San Pablo East Realty’ card. It was an odd welcome to your new home present, but a useful one.

“One day they’ll have to do something about the skin bugs.” Said Bradford.

“Oh yeah, make me shudder, damn things.”

Satisfied that the bathroom was clean, he entered the main bedroom and noticed the bed had sheets and blankets. An elderly lady had rented the apartment for years, though Bradford couldn’t recall her name. It was how it was in San Pablo, if you had no relatives, everything went to the next tenant. If he died in the line of duty, someone would probably be sleeping on his sheets within the week.

“Has it been sprayed ?” He asked.

“Yes, my boss always obeys the regulations. It’s had two chemical treatments and I’ve been right through it. Mrs Lowell was a clean lady anyway, you won’t find anything nasty in here.”

Mrs Lowell, yes, Bradford remembered seeing her carrying food a couple of times. He shoved the bed away from the wall and saw the white powdery residue the spraying left behind.

“I’ve got the certificates if you want to see them ?” Asked Lou.

“No, it looks fine to me. Have the locks been changed ?”

“Yes, two brand new key locks and an electronic dead lock.”

Bradford signed the paperwork and was given the two metal keys and a key card. There was also an envelope with a second spare set.

“I’ll get her moved in later today.” Said Bradford.

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Roland was waiting outside his office and looking miserable. Bradford could see why his predecessor had given the PA access to his office. It saved him from seeing that miserable face the moment he stepped out of the elevator.

“I know.” Said Bradford. “There are lots of worried people, all asking where the brand new and expensive, armoured vehicle has got to.”

He unlocked the door and turned down the heating and turned up the aircon. It was obvious that Chris Dudley had enjoyed working in a warm and stuffy environment. Roland followed him in, but didn’t immediately start fussing, they were making progress. Before Bradford had time to fully open the window blinds, an intern had placed a tray on his desk.

“Coffee and flapjacks, squad leader.” Said the intern.

“Bradford, I’m Bradford to everyone.”

The intern bobbed his head slightly and was gone. He noticed Roland smiling slightly and knew his PA was trying to impress him and it was working. Bradford poured his own coffee and one for Roland, but he did keep the largest flapjack for himself.

“So, who wants to chew me out ?” Asked Bradford. “I take it someone wants to see me about the lost vehicle.”

“No one Sir..... er Bradford. Events have moved on since last night and Captain Cottingham has given you full control of any and all PD489 assets and equipment.”

“He did what ?”

“A few internal messages were sent and at one time you were the subject of a bolo, but then the President became involved.” Said Roland. “The outcome is that you can now do pretty much as you please with our equipment.”

So Wild Bill had talked to the president. It was great news, he might be able to grab stuff from stores, rather than buying it with his own money. He’d just begun to think about buying a new top of the range hydrogen cell bike, when Roland coughed at him. His PA was pushing a piece of paper across the desk.

"I took the liberty of preparing this." Said Roland. "It simply says that the vehicle was destroyed in the line of duty. I take it the vehicle has been destroyed?"

"Yes Roland, it's a pile of burnt debris in the middle of nowhere."

"Then sign the form and you'll never hear about it again."

Bradford was about to sign it, but he knew about governments and their forms. He was still paying off a fine for putting the wrong type of glass jar in the recycle chute. He narrowed his eyes as he looked at Roland.

"They're not going to ask me to pay for this, one day are they?" He asked.

"No, definitely not."

Bradford signed the form and expected Roland to begin going through more routine crap, but there was something more urgent.

"Maria Gonsalves has been carrying out an autopsy this morning." Said Roland. "She asked that you see her when you get in, it appears to be important."

Bradford leapt up from his chair and almost ran for the door. He was keen on seeing what Maria had found, but he was just as keen to avoid any further paperwork.

"I'll be with Maria in the lab, if anyone needs me." He said.

He was almost out of the door, when he waved his hand in the direction of the coffee tray.

"Can you arrange that every morning?"

"Yes, I had two cameras moved to cover where you park your bike. I can now see when you arrive and have coffee ready."

"Brilliant."

As he walked towards the bank of elevators, Bradford decided that Roland wasn't a pain in the backside after all, he was an asset.

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Maria had the extractor fans on maximum, but the lab still had the autopsy smell about it. Bradford wondered how medical examiners coped with the smell, day after day. Another cop had once described the smell as being like almonds. Bradford never understood that, unless the almonds had been coated in human excreta and left in a hot box overnight. He wrinkled his nose and tried to concentrate on whatever news Maria had for him.

"I'm just glad we didn't bring back two bodies." He said.

The dead female had been divided into her body segments, or at least that's how it looked to Bradford. It all looked disgusting and smelled worse than it looked. Maria actually looked happy as she wiped the blood off her surgical gloves and went to a keyboard.

"I found it." She said. "Nearly destroyed by decay, but this is it."

The path lab screen covered nearly an entire wall. The picture Maria pushed onto it was clear and in full high definition, but it still looked like a speck of dirt to Bradford.

"What is it?" He asked.

Had he known it, Maria was right and had found the pathogen. It didn't look much in death, but the organism was there, complete with its mysterious cell structure.

"I have no idea." She said. "And neither does the central medical database. It must be too degraded to identify."

Bradford looked at the ruined face of the woman on the autopsy table. For the first time he wondered who she might have been and wondered if Camila might have known her. The hair had been pulled back with the scalp, so that the brain could be removed. It all looked so undignified.

"Or, it might be a brand new type of organism." Maria was saying.

Bradford gasped as a picture of Michael M Reece appeared on the lab screen. It had been a silly response from being caught unawares and Maria was staring at him.

"Do you know him?" She asked.

"Only by reputation." He said. "One of the government's top bio-weapons guys and we recently had a notification that he'd gone missing. Do you think he's connected with this?"

Another picture appeared on the screen, of a burned out lab.

"I used your log in." Said Maria. "It's amazing what you can access now. The lab was his and the talk on the geek net is that Michael Reece was working on some sort of biological doomsday weapon."

"Half the stuff on the net is crap."

It fitted and he knew that Gillian had been lying to him.

"Not this time Bradford." She said. "It's too much of a coincidence. I'll bet you lunch for a year, that our pal Mr Reece is behind this. My guess is that we stumbled onto some kind of test."

He had to sit down before he fell down. Gillian had felt like family and in many ways LabSinc4 had been the one reliable part of his life. They'd used him and lied to him.

"Or Reece was killed." He said. "His work stolen and someone else is using it."

"Yeah, I like that."

He was being stared at again.

"Do you know something?" She asked.

"Only making guesses." He lied.

Maria had more pictures and more info, all of it implicating Reece with whatever biological agent had been used in Longmont.

"I need to go out on a personal errand." He said. "Are you around later to discuss this further?"

"No, I'm invigilating exams for a group of sixteen year olds this afternoon."

"Ok, I guess we can meet up tomorrow. I'll have coffee and flapjacks in my office at about nine, if you're passing."

She was giving him one of her best smiles.

"For flapjacks, I'll be passing that way." She said.

It was another day with a lot to get done and probably not enough sleep. It seemed to have been years since he last got a full eight hours sleep. Bradford paused at the lab door.

"Can you send me your autopsy results before you go?" He asked.

"Sure, no problem."

This time he wouldn't pass the information to Gillian, though he wasn't ready to confront her about her lies, not yet.

"And change my password to something more secure and stick a note under my office door." He added.

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Mike wanted daily updates and he wanted results. Gillian knew that Mike Lakey was an impatient man and those who frustrated him, were sacked, or worse. In her early years as a doctor, she'd worked on seemingly insoluble problems. How to create a vaccine for this or that disease, create an anti-bacterial for the growing list of resistant strains. In a way this was easier, they had the solution, they just needed to find the problem.

"Sit in your teams." She said.

Every red badge holder was in the staff canteen and there weren't as many as she'd hoped. Eight teams of four, they'd been separated into and each team would be assigned a project to investigate. A stage would have been nice, something to emphasise that it was her meeting and that she was in

charge. Getting them all to sit, while she stood, would have to do. They weren't used to working as groups. Some were excited by it and others looked sullen and pissed off with the whole idea. There were a few serious mental health issues with some of her employees, but that didn't really worry her, they often made the best researchers. The people sat in front of her, on uncomfortable plastic chairs, were probably the best collection of medical minds on the planet.

"Quiet please !" She shouted.

She turned on the screen behind her and it showed the note that Michael M Reece had once given her.

'Gillian, Now that I think about it, the marker is obvious. I'll have the organism ready in less than a month. Michael xx.'

She gave them a few seconds to register the tone of the note and the kisses. They'd all know she'd lost someone who was more than just a colleague.

"You're all red badged." She said. "You've all seen the recordings of the tests. I shouldn't need to remind you that everything you see or do at LabSinc4, never goes beyond these walls."

A lot of nodding heads in the room. Some she knew would be uncomfortable with testing on live human subjects and a few would enjoy it far too much.

"We need results quickly." She continued. "But you've seen what the organism can do. Work fast, but work safely. I want to see you all at the Christmas party."

A few chuckles, but also quite a few serious faces. They had all just watched people die horribly from the organism they were about to play with. They were talking amongst themselves again, so she banged her hand on the table.

"I will restate the problem." She shouted. "We have an organism that will kill all with a certain marker. We also have another strain that will kill all those without the same marker..... Our job is to identify that marker."

Her recent conversation with Mike Lakey had left her feeling tired, he could be a very unpleasant man. But how unpleasant ? She shivered as the idea crossed her mind, that Mike seemed far too keen on identifying the marker. Once he had it, he could effectively decide who lived or died. Was he unpleasant enough to release a last great plague upon the earth ? The room was restless again.

"You will work in teams." She shouted. "Once we agree on the brief and parameters for each team."

She pushed one of her notes onto the large screen. A simple drawing of a subversive and a man in jail, complete with prison uniform and a bag of swag.

"Our only clue is that an old man who spent time in jail, was also targeted by the organism." She said. "So, what has an old jailbird, got in common with a subversive ?"

"Do we have his body ?" Asked Gregory.

"No, and there is little chance of it being recovered. There was an incident with subs in the area and a lot of wet weather. Any biological evidence is likely to be ruined or contaminated."

"Diet." Someone shouted. "Most prison inmates are vitamin D deficient."

"So is half the population."

"Diet is too broad an area."

Gillian let them argue, it was what they needed to do. Eventually they'd come up with eight ideas. Nice tight and specific ideas that could be scientifically tested. She found herself shouting again, to restore order.

"Diet is too wide, impossible to cover with our resources." She yelled.

"Drugs then." Someone shouted.

"Too broad again." Said Stefan.

The voice was one of the youngsters and he wasn't about to be silenced.

"No ! Specific drugs." He said. "Like the ones given to control violence. I've heard of the mass use of those drugs in the water supply to certain areas."

"Rubbish !"

"You're watching too much prime time."

It was nonsense, but she let it continue. From her experience, groups needed to argue and get the crap ideas out of the way.

"We're looking at it the wrong way round." Said Gregory.

"Continue." Said Gillian.

"We should be looking for what the general population has, that subs and ex-cons don't."

"So, how do you propose we do that ?" She asked.

Gregory was off, his brilliant mind turning over ideas. Soon they'd have a few research teams running and testing assumptions. Soon Mike would have his answer, or God help all of them.

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Bradford took advantage of being able to choose any vehicle he liked out of the garage. An armoured personnel carrier was a bit over the top, so he'd gone for a huge electric powered saloon, with a trunk you could have held a party in. He hadn't seen the abandoned building in daylight, its front door broken, leaving it open for anyone to walk into. It was ok though, they slept during the day, safe and secure behind a jammed office door.

He found blood on the stairs, quite a bit of blood. He turned the corner on the landing, expecting to see a body, but the blood just ended in a dusty pool. They'd either survived or been carried away and buried, whoever they had been. It all looked different in the day, some of the partitioned offices looked more wrecked than he'd remembered. One more flight of grubby stairs and he recognised a green sign, 'Accounts Department,' that pointed down the hallway.

"Camila." He called, as he tapped at the door.

Three times he had to tap and call before he heard any movement. It was like waking most people in the middle of the night. Their lives would be different now, kids at school during the day and Camila doing a job of some kind. He didn't want to think of the blood on the stairs. She had a blaster and knew how to use it, they'd be fine. The door edged open and she peered at him, her eyes squinting against the light.

"Bradford." She said smiling at him. "Push the door, I've moved the wedge."

Her daughter held the blaster, still comfortably wrapped up in her blankets. She lowered the weapon and rolled over, once she recognised him. The boy gave him a slight wave, before he too, tried to get back to sleep.

"We haven't been asleep long." Said Camila. "There was trouble last night, someone selling drugs was cut."

"I saw the blood on the stairs."

She closed the door behind him and pushed the wooden wedge back under it.

"I don't think he died." She said. "This isn't a safe place anymore though; we'll pack up our things and look for somewhere new."

How much stuff did they have ? Bradford just hoped the vehicle he'd come in was big enough.

"I found you somewhere." He said. "A proper apartment, with a decent school only a few streets away."

She didn't react the way he'd hoped, but could he really blame her for being cautious.

"I won't be your mistress," she said, "or your informer."

They hadn't had the conversation about why he was helping her, though he knew it would have to happen. Women were like that, always over thinking everything. He looked out of the window and checked on his car, he couldn't lose two in one week.

"No, you've got it wrong." He said. "I have someone in my life. You'll be moving in as my maid. Not that I expect you to be my maid of course.....it's just a cover story."

She was smiling now, but still not waking the children and telling them to pack up their things. She did kiss him on the cheek though.

"You want to do something for me, I understand that." She said. "My children are not a project though, to be forgotten and discarded as soon as your conscience feels better."

"I promise you Camila, the apartment will be yours for as long as you want it."

She looked at him and then turned and watched her children sleep. She watched them for so long, that he thought she was going to refuse his offer. Finally she moved and woke the children, telling them to pack everything.

"Bradford has found us a new home." She told them.

They packed in silence, bundling everything into a few bags and using blankets to wrap the few fragile items they owned. It took him a few minutes to realise the silence wasn't because they were well behaved, it was essential to surviving in the world they'd grown up in.

"We're ready." Said Sofia.

"Me too." Repeated Mateo

Camila put a few clothes into a battered suitcase and they were ready, in less time than it usually took him to shave in the morning. Like modern nomads, they had a routine for packing up and moving on. They all had something to carry, even young Mateo. Bradford took a bag from Sofia, she seemed the one carrying most for her size. Camila opened the door and they began the slow trip down the stairs.

"Hello, what have we got here ?"

They were on the stairs, two young men with expensive looking clothes. The one who'd spoken picked up a nasty looking machete. Bradford had no doubt that he was looking at the victors of the recent drug turf war.

"Been for a bit of jiggy have you ?"

Bradford wasn't in the mood to waste time, or put the children at risk. He dropped the bag he was carrying and drew his Ion blaster. He was so fast that the two thugs didn't have a chance to react. One moment Bradford was just another victim, the next he had a powerful weapon aimed at them.

"Fuck off !" He shouted.

"Ok, we're going. You want a bit of jiggy in peace Huh ? I get that."

They went, picked up their stuff and almost ran. They carried on down the stairs and saw no more of the drug dealers. He opened the car's trunk and put their stuff inside, everything they owned, it barely filled a quarter of it.

The drive across San Pablo was uneventful and gradually the streets became less grimy and the graffiti less violent. There was no one street, nowhere that could be called a line from the bad part of town to the tolerable part of town. The air definitely smelt better when the car pulled into the car park of Bradford's apartment block. The children were becoming animated now, as Bradford lifted their things out of the trunk.

"There are a few decent local stores." He said. "You'll soon find your way around."

Through the car park doors and along a covered walkway and they were at the apartment door.

Bradford allowed Sofia to open the bottom lock and use the electronic card, he unlocked the top

lock. The children ran in, dropping their things in a heap and looking down the hallways towards the bedrooms.

"Is it all our ?" Asked Sofia. "Does anyone else live here."

"It's all yours." He answered.

They were gone and he could hear the sound of their squeals of delight, coming from the direction of the bedrooms. It was the first proper childlike sounds, he'd heard from either of them. Bradford turned and didn't know what to do. A Camila in tears he could have handled, but she just had a single tear, running down from her left eye.

"I can never repay you for this." She said.

"You haven't seen the view yet."

He grabbed her hand and took her to the lounge window, with its panoramic view of the expressway ramp and the car park. She was actually laughing with him.

"That is bad." She said. "I feel much better now."

They watched the traffic hurtling along the expressway. Most of it electric powered trucks of one kind or another. There were problems in San Pablo, but it was a thriving community, compared to many places.

"I met him," she said, "only a few weeks ago."

For a minute, he thought Camila was talking about the local council member; his election poster was still in every car park. Then he realised she was looking straight at the graffiti about Samuel.

"Samuel you mean ? You've met Samuel, here in San Pablo ?" He asked.

"Yes, can't say I was that impressed, a bit full of himself. Kept going on about beating some kind of super warrior, the cops sent after him."

"Bastard !"

Camila was holding his hand tighter.

"Stay away from him Bradford, he's crazy. You can see it in his eyes."

He undid his shirt buttons and pulled it open, allowing her to see the ragged scar, that went right across his body.

"You were the super cop ?! You did worse to him." She said. "He keeps a scarf tied over the left side of his face. They say it's to hide what you did to him."

"I intend to finish the job." He said.

He needed to get back to work and he was feeling agitated. He gave her the keys and the envelope with the spare set.

"The data points are connected." He said. "I'll bring you terminal with voice hook-up tomorrow. I must get back to the office now."

He was almost out of the door, when she grabbed his arm.

"I'm no traitor, but I owe you something. Six weeks ago, maybe seven, he was at Jimmy's Trainers."

"Where ?"

"The big one, opposite Herbert Stadium. Samuel always stays at places in the centre of San Pablo. He seems to get off on it, being right there in the middle of things. He pays the manager to use a couple of rooms at the top of the building."

All his years as a cop and with PD489, yet he'd never heard a rumour about the subs being in City Central.

"Thank you." He said.

"He won't be there now, he moves around a lot." She said. "But some of his people will be there, you might get lucky and get a lead."



He almost had the door closed, when he heard her call out;

“Be careful Bradford.”

Bradford sat in the car for a moment, wondering what had been different with Camila. There had been women among the subs before and he'd never hesitated in killing them. It was families; the subs had never brought their children into the fight before, as far as he knew. It made it different; it turned Camila into someone who had dependents. He wasn't used to examining his own motivations and it was giving him a splitting headache. That was one for Gillian, the next time they spoke. Subs didn't tend to have children and neither did convicts who were jailed for years.

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He arrived back in the office, his head full of excuses about where he'd been and why he'd been late getting back. It took him a while to realise that he was the boss now, he didn't have to explain the way he used his day. Roland merely looked up and nodded as he unlocked his office.

“Maria isn't in this afternoon Roland.” He said. “Do we have a decent scene of crime person in the office?”

His PA picked up his tablet and followed him into his office and sat down. Roland was now allocating resources to missions and doing a far better job of it than Chris Dudley ever had.

“Let me see.... There's Yasmine. She's new, but everyone talks highly of her.”

He sighed inwardly. Yasmine, the tiny and excitable new edition to the team. She'd only been with PD489 for about six weeks and he'd already had to put twenty dollars in her birthday collection.

“No one else?” He asked.

Roland tapped away for a while longer and shook his head.

“She's very good Bradford. Give her a chance.”

“Fine, fine allocate her to me for the rest of the day. Is Gupta in?”

More tapping and then Roland looking happy.

“Yes Gupta is free. Shall I create a new mission on the system?”

Part of him wanted to keep it secret, but if he couldn't trust the people he employed, things were getting pretty bad.

“Yes Roland, I'm going to raid Jimmy's Trainers at about three pm. The large mega store, the one right opposite Herbert Stadium.”

Roland blinked at him a few times, but didn't object. His PA started typing, creating a new mission and allocating resources to it.

“I have intelligence from a reliable informant.” Said Bradford. “That the subs are using the top floor as a bit of a drop in centre. Clever Huh? Their guys just look like more losers buying overpriced footwear.”

“Yes very, is this from a regular informer?”

“No, just someone who owed me a favour. Want to know the best bit Roland?”

Roland was nodding furiously.

“The informant saw Samuel there, just a few weeks ago. So, no messing about with this one, it'll need a full team.”

“A full team raiding a store, likely to be full of the public, many of them young adults.” Said Roland.

“We'll need to warn the cops and make it a joint operation.”

“No! Warn the cops and we both know the subs will be warned. There are just too many cops, looking for a few extra dollars. We'll be careful and if it does go wrong..... I guess I won't get to meet the president on Saturday.”

Roland looked unhappy, but he wasn't pushing the point. He was tapping away at the tablet he called his battle box.

"Schneider should be going off duty soon," said Roland, "but I bet he'll jump at the chance to go along."

"Call him."

Roland used his phone and sure enough, Schneider was keen to be included in the raid. Dear crazy Schneider, who'd once attacked and destroyed a sub commander's base, all on his own. Bradford suspected that Schneider was genuinely insane, but that didn't stop him being a first class operative. "Tell him to keep the mission to himself." He said.

Roland repeated the order and he heard Schneider's whoop of delight. It had to be a secret mission, or they'd find two empty rooms. Bradford just hoped they didn't kill any of the general public.

President Herbert had a real bug up his arse about that.

"Get them all to the garage Roland and into two APCs. I'm going to get myself dressed and armed for the occasion."

Roland simply nodded, his PA was going to be busy. Getting a full team of a dozen people, armed, dressed in armour and on board armoured personnel carriers, was hard work. Doing it all with no notice and in a few minutes, was almost impossible. He had confidence in Roland, as he left his office and headed for the locker rooms. He found Schneider, strapping on layers of Kevlar.

"Well done Bradford." Said Schneider. "Chris Dudley was always too timid. Now I can see we're really going to go after the subs."

"Wild Bill and the president want action."

"Yahooooooooo."

Schneider bashed one of the lockers so hard, the side bent in. Bradford had no idea of the man's first name, he'd always been just Schneider to everyone. Sometimes Crazy Schneider, or Mad Dog Schneider, but never a first name. Schneider left, running to get to his personal weapon rack and pick something huge and lethal.

Several other officers were stripping off and fitting their body armour, so Bradford opened his locker and took off his own clothes. The mixture of carbon fibre and Kevlar was like a second skin. Each suit was made to measure for the individual and fitted like a glove. There was a bit of flex, but put on too much weight over the holidays and it could pinch and chafe in all the places you didn't want things to pinch and chafe. Bradford never put on an ounce and to him, fitting his armour was an almost spiritual experience.

"Joining us for the raid Sir?"

"Wouldn't miss it and I'm still just Bradford."

Straps checked and he moved about, crouching and twisting, making sure his movement wouldn't be restricted by the thin layer of life saving armour. He added a mask that covered his entire face from the eyes down. No use having a secret department, if your face appeared on the evening news.

"I heard Schneider's going." Someone shouted.

"Yeah man, it's going to be wild." A voice answered.

Bradford still had his weapons rack in the room he shared with Maria. Once dressed, he went there and picked his usual Ion blaster and a backup piece. It might be a tough fight, Samuel always seemed to have the elite of the sub army with him and no doubt, they'd be guarding the rooms above Jimmy's Trainers.

"Well done Bradford. I knew we could count on you!"

A female voice that he didn't even recognise. Wild Bill had told him to turn them into a fighting force and he was doing just that. He just hoped he wasn't about to fuck up on his first major raid. He strapped on his comms unit and called Yasmine to test it.

"We're all on board and ready." She told him.

Bradford was ready himself, so he took the elevator down to the garage and looked into the back of the nearest APC. A row of smiling faces looked back at him.

"Good luck." He said.

"Thank you Sir."

He didn't bother to correct them, he walked to the second APC and there was just about enough room for him to climb inside.

"Ok, let's go." He said to the driver.

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Herbert Stadium had been known as 'The National Stadium,' for years, or simply as 'Nationals,' to most football fans. President Herbert owned a company, who paid for some essential refurbishments and it was renamed Herbert Stadium. A few journalists muttered, but most people were just happy to get a football stadium with toilets that worked.

"The car park looks full." Said Yasmine.

"They do cage fighting mid-week." Someone commented.

Their APCs got a few curious looks, as they slowly drove across the car park and pulled up. No emblems of course, just two unmarked, grey painted, APCs.

"This is as close as I can get us." Said the driver. "Without knocking anything out of the way."

In front of them were two rows of cars, a feeder road for the car park and then Jimmy's Trainers.

Trainers had gone through periods of being cool and being the things your dad wore. Now trainers were the footwear of choice for young adults once again and Jimmy's was thriving.

"This is perfect." Said Bradford.

He opened the doors himself and leapt onto the tarmac, frightening a lady out walking her dog. The others followed him and then the other APC unloaded it's cargo of eager PD489 operatives.

Schneider calmed the lady down, much to everyone's surprise. There was no time to waste, word of a dozen heavily armed operatives in the car park, would spread quickly.

"You know where you're going !" Shouted Bradford. "Those going in the front door, follow me.

Those going to the rear, follow Schneider. Check your targets carefully ! There are a going to be a lot of scared citizens in there."

Even the driver followed him, everyone eager to get to grips with the damn subversives. Bradford ran between the cars and across the road, watching scared people scatter in all directions. He held his Ion blaster up and ran into Jimmy's, running into the mission that would bring him fame or ignominy. He hoped and prayed it was going to be fame.

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