

Bradford II – Badlands

Chapter 11 - Hydroelectricity

“The room had that military look, but there was also a hint of something else. The position of the reception desk, the chairs which must have been quite comfortable, before time had covered them in a layer of grey dust. It reminded Roxy of an electric car franchise she’d once visited.”

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Yasmine wasn’t going to waste all the effort and she carefully collected forensic samples. She opened up the rear hatchback door of the car and placed the sample cases carefully inside. The cases would keep everything inside at just above freezing, though she did check the temperature and made sure the power pack was fully charged. It showed 90% and three green lights, which was good enough for her. She had been wondering why Bradford hadn’t been fussing around, trying to speed her up, until she saw him opening up the panel in the floor.

“Best to do this here guys.” He said. “Grab your favourite piece of serious weaponry; we might come under fire as soon as we arrive at Allison’s apartment block.”

She picked up a large military plasma blaster. There was no finesse with the powerful weapon, no low setting to carefully pick off the enemy at a distance. It was designed as a room clearer, which could blow in a heavy metal door on its medium setting.

“Good choice, would madam like fries with that ?” Asked Chet.

Chet had been good during the investigation into Jason. She still thought of him as a bit of an arse, but he had been useful to her, saying the right things at the right time. She handed the plasma blaster to him, knowing it was his favourite.

“Just don’t kill a civilian.” She told him. “We’ll be filling in forms for months.”

“Wow, thanks boss.”

It didn’t surprise her that Bradford chose the larger version of the Ion blaster he normally carried. Ion blasters were designed for precision fire, knocking snipers out of trees and assassination at a distance. To use an Ion blaster at close quarters, you needed to be fast and Bradford was very fast. Preternaturally fast some might say, though Roland discouraged such talk. It was obvious that their boss had been augmented in some way.....But if he wanted to keep it all secret.... He was the boss.

“This has my name written all over it.” She said.

A hand held railgun, still being developed and prone to jamming. It was heavy, due to an extra-large power pack, which still only lasted for two or three minutes of continuous fire. If it worked properly and you still had power left, it would fire aluminium slugs at hypersonic speed. Used right it could penetrate just about anything, including an armoured APC.

“Good choice Yasmine.” Said Bradford. “You can drive.”

That really did surprise her; Bradford usually loved to get behind the wheel. He sat in the back though, allowing Chet to claim the front seat next to the driver. Yasmine started up the powerful electric motor, giving it a moment to get up to speed.

“Are you sure you don’t want to drive ?” She asked.

“We’re in a hurry and your urban driving test scores are far better than mine. Now put your foot down, before I change my mind.”

There wasn’t much chance of burning rubber in a four wheel drive electric car, but there was a button to the left of the steering wheel. Her hand hovered over it, savouring the moment. The two guys were grinning at her, knowing that it was one her guilty pleasures. Yasmine thumped the

button and a siren began to wail, as blue, white and red lights began to oscillate at the bottom of their front and rear screens. They now looked and sounded like an angry Christmas tree, which was perfect for getting through the traffic. Yasmine held the gears in low, hurtling away from the curb at an impressive speed.

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Hector wasn't ready to wake up. He objected to being prodded awake, his dream had been pleasant and had involved a weekend with Roxy, in a five star hotel. A clean hotel with no bugs and food that didn't come out of tins.

"Wake up..... I've found something.... Something really important."

"Oh Maggie, let me sleep girl. It's still dark."

"It isn't outside; I opened the door and looked."

"She really did find something amazing." Said Roxy.

Jim was still asleep; he'd even turned himself towards the wall at some time during the night. Hector sat up and realised he still stank of sweat, but the women didn't. As Maggie was the closest, he leant towards her and took a good sniff.

"Hey, don't you start that. It's so rude."

"Maggie found a working shower." Said Roxy. "The toilets flush too and there's a working tap in the kitchen."

"Did you guys explore everywhere ?" He asked. "You need to be careful, we don't know what there might be in the lower levels."

"There's a door that won't open." Said Maggie. "The handles move, but the door won't budge. It's at the bottom of some stairs, so I'm guessing it leads to the lower levels."

"This place is huge Hector." Said Roxy. "Even this level must cover several square miles and we've only looked at a small amount of it. Come on, wake up..... You will really love what we found."

"What I found." Corrected Maggie.

Hector felt so stiff as he stood up and Jim looked so content, fast asleep under his blanket. He followed the women, out of the door, past the kitchen and into parts of the bunker that Maggie had been exploring. They had two lamps, though he had no idea where the new one had come from.

"There are signs everywhere." Said Roxy. "I've never seen a bunker with signs before."

"Neither have I." He replied. "I suppose you need them, in a place this big."

There was a sign pointing to 'The Chapel,' another to 'Stores,' another to 'Administration.' Maggie was unerringly following the signs that pointed towards a 'Generator Room.' Power, if they could get the lights on, they could really begin to explore. Despite being stiff and still half asleep, part of him was beginning to get excited.

"You found all this on your own Maggie ?" He asked.

"I found the generators by accident..... The noise. You'll soon hear what I heard."

Lots of open doors, it was easy to see that Maggie had already explored the route. He felt the vibration first, as his hand had touched a wall. The roaring sound began soon after that, as though they were heading towards an underground tornado. Roxy turned and grinned at him.

"You wait Hector..... It's amazing."

Through two large heavy doors, which had been left open and they were on a walkway, looking down onto an underground river. The water was moving fast, crashing over a waterfall right under their feet. It was why the shower worked of course and the kitchen tap.

"Hydroelectricity, of course, it makes sense." He said. "Simple and low tech, the generators will run for a thousand years if you build them right."

“The control room is up the stairs.”

He followed Maggie, up two flights of metal stairs and into a room that looked like something out of the age of steam. No computer screens, everything was levers, large buttons and lights. None of the lights were on though.

“It all looks dead.” Said Roxy.

“It looks to have been shut down, which is worrying.” Said Hector. “You have this super bunker with power, running water and lots of food. So you shut it down and move out.... Not a good sign. We need to be really careful in the lower levels.”

“Can we get it going ?” Asked Maggie.

“We need to get the water flowing through the generators.” He said. “Did you notice any big valve wheels anywhere ?”

“I did.”

Maggie was off, running down the stairs, as they tried to keep up with her. They found her near the falls, standing in front of six large brass wheels. The builders seemed to have done a good job and he just hoped the valves hadn't corroded up.

“One valve at a time, be nice if we can get them all open.” He said.

He needed their help, to turn the first wheel, noticing the sound of the falls change. Water was now running through the generator chamber, coming out of a duct in the far wall. It took a lot of effort to open up all six valves. He walked slowly back to the generator room, cursing the fact that it was a steep climb all the way. Maggie ran on ahead of course.

“She reminds me of a young me.” Said Roxy. “Though I don't think I ever had that much energy.”

“No one has that much energy.... She's a one off.” He muttered.

Only about a third of the ceiling lights were working in the generator room. They provided a far better light than their oil lamps though and enabled him to get a good look at the control panels. It was all designed to be simple, with one pointer giving the total power being generated, and another giving the power being used.

“Wow people, we've got ten gigawatts to play with.” He said.

“That sounds a lot.” Said Roxy.

“It is, a hell of a lot.” He said. “Makes you wonder what the hell they were up to. The panel tells us about the layout of the place too. Six levels and then two more lower levels called R1 and R2. I'll start by giving power to this level and hopefully give us some decent lighting.”

“I bet it wakes Jim up.” Said Maggie, chuckling.

“Ahh, the fan. I was forgetting the broken fan.” He said. “It will try to start up and might jam up our only door to get out of here.”

“I'll turn it off.” Said Maggie.

She was off, running down the stairs at quite a speed.

“There should be a large switch.” He called. “On a nearby wall.”

“I'll find it.”

Maggie must have woken up Jim, who came back with her. He looked the way Hector had felt, when he'd been woken up by Maggie prodding him. It seemed she'd needed help to move the corroded switch, but the broken fan was now switched off.

“Let's do this.” He said.

They had full output from the generators and every warning light was green. Hector pressed the button to give power to level 1. The needle for power used hardly moved and there were now lights along the outside walkway. Only some of the lights, but enough to see by.

"They probably have a huge room somewhere." Said Roxy. "Full of new lights."

"Nice to get some proper lighting." Muttered Jim.

Hector sent power to the six main levels and still the power usage had barely moved. Everything on the board was still green, which was encouraging.

"Damn, they made these places to last." He said. "Shall we power up R1 and R2?"

"Go on." Said Maggie.

"What does the R stand for?" Asked Jim.

"We have no idea." Said Roxy. "Research probably, two levels of labs, doing all sorts of weird shit."

He still pressed the buttons, giving power to whatever R1 and R2 really were. The usage indicator flicked a little, but returned to indicating they were using too little power to bother about.

"What next?" Asked Maggie.

"I want a shower and something to eat." He said. "Then we'll look at this door you found, the one that leads to level 2."

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All wasn't well at Ocean Vista Apartments in 6 Ocean. Bradford could see an electric car up on the pavement, blue smoke rising up from its electric motors. It was one of their cars, a PD489 pool car and there was no sign of his operatives. The local police must have been caught up in whatever had happened. A two door police car had hit the bollards in front of the building and had come off worse. The bollards were still standing, but as for the cop car? The front end was crushed, flattened right back to the windscreen.

"No sign of our guys, though one of the cops didn't make it." Said Chet.

"Message from Roland." Said Yasmine. "Our backup are caught up in a delay on the expressway, another vehicle fire."

Just great, but there was no sign of his watchers, which was usually a good omen. Bradford still left their vehicle cautiously, his Ion blaster aimed at the entrance of Ocean Vista Apartments. Pointless of course, no one can survive having their neck almost severed by the sharp edge of a broken windscreen. He felt for a pulse in the cop's wrist though and found nothing, the flesh was even beginning to cool down.

"We're going in." He said. "Call the local cops Yasmine and tell them very politely..... To fuck off and stay out of the building."

"He was one of the front desk security team." Said Chet.

A body in front of the shattered entrance doors. The guard had tried to do his job, probably locking the doors and calling the cops. His body was covered in blaster wounds, enough to make it pointless to check for signs of life.

"The local cops are happy for us to deal with this." Said Yasmine.

"I bet they are..... Where the hell are our people?" Asked Bradford.

It was as though the explosion was in answer to his question. A blast of hot air went past them, followed by the sound of a heavy blaster recharging. Something was happening above them, up inside the large entrance hall. It was an open plan arrangement, showing every floor, right up to Dimitri's expensive suite. It should have been idyllic, exotic foliage hanging from planters on every floor. There were flames up there now though and lots of burnt plants.

"We'll use the stairs..... Run people, we need to get up there before we're too late to stop it.....

Whatever it is." Yelled Bradford.

There was a scream before they'd reached the stairs and the sound of something heavy hitting the ground. The back of the man's head had hit the tiles; again there was no need to check for a pulse.

Blood was spreading out from his shattered skull, forming a burgundy coloured pool. Bradford cursed himself again for not knowing all his people, but PD489 was growing all the time.

"He wasn't one of ours." Said Yasmine.

Bradford ran up the stairs, wondering who was throwing bad guys from the upper floors. He was yet to see one of his watchers, so he ran without caution. Real or delusions created by his own unconscious, he now trusted their presence as a prediction of personal danger. He came off the top step and ran towards the door to apartment 17, Ion blaster up and ready to fire. The door was slightly ajar, but the body in front of it was claiming all his attention.

"Crap ! It's Dawkins." Said Yasmine.

She'd been right behind him, but Chet wasn't quite as fit. He arrived a few seconds later, breathing hard and staring at the body.

"Oh, he only got married three months ago." Said Chet. "Poor bastard."

Operative Dawkins had died from one of the dozen or so blaster holes in his chest. His people didn't routinely wear body armour for babysitting duties. They were hot to wear, cumbersome things, though Dawkins might have been going home to his new wife, if he'd been wearing his.

"We'll mourn him later." Said Bradford. "We're still here to save Allison Chapman."

It happened, that mental switch, which took away most of his instinct for self-survival. His reaction times speeded up too, as his brain no longer ran everything through tedious processes. Would he die if he did this or that ? Would he be badly injured if shot and how much would it hurt ? Would he look stupid if he was shot too easily ? All those thoughts and more, caused the average human to react at the fraction of the speed of most large primates. The humble chimpanzee could react fifteen times faster than most combat troops. Bradford was different though, he could turn off most of that crap.

"Our guys might be in there." Said Yasmine, as he kicked the door open.

"If they raise a blaster in your direction.... Shoot them." He answered.

It was a simply solution to identifying bad guys, that had served him well over the years. Anyone trying to kill you was the enemy. He ran into the apartment, shocked at the almost total destruction of all the expensive furniture. Something had happened there, something huge and weird.

"The guy to the left is DaSilva, one of ours." Said Chet.

DaSilva looked badly wounded, though he was still moving and pointing towards a door at the end of the room.

"She took them in there." He muttered.

She took them ? Nothing was making sense, which made it just another ordinary day in San Pablo. Yasmine was shrugging at him, which he remembered was her short hand for 'fuck it, let's do it.' He could have listened outside the door, but where was the fun in that ? Bradford turned the handle and ran into the master bedroom.

"Fuck ! What the hell ?!" Said Yasmine.

He could hear Chet making gagging noises, probably about to throw up. Disgust was another useless cognitive response, which Bradford could easily turn off. The sight of blood and gore affected most people, though the smell of a dismembered body could make battle hardened troops throw up.

There were at least six bodies in the room, some of them probably his missing operatives, his people. It looked like a crazy person had been let loose with an axe and a chain saw. They were all dead of course, no one could have survived being ripped apart like that. The worst thing about the entire scene, was seeing one of the watchers, quietly sat on the blood soaked bed. Now he knew, that things were really bad. He heard the whine, as Yasmine turned on her railgun.

"She's gone crazy, must have." Said Yasmine.

“Put the sick bitch down.” Added Chet.

Allison Emily Chapman appeared to be the only person left alive in the room and the large, bloody meat cleaver in her hand didn't make her look like an innocent victim. She was covered in blood, yet looked quite calm, almost serene. Allison could move as quickly as him, which was unusual and disconcerting. She ran to the centre of the bedroom, the cleaver held high above her head. There was a look in her eyes though, of someone screaming for help. Bradford heard Chet power up his military blaster.

“Don't fire.” Yelled Bradford. “Unless she gets past me.”

The watcher was an elderly lady, who looked bored by the carnage around her. Her presence and the dead men, told him very clearly that Allison was dangerous, maybe even too dangerous to take alive. In a sane world he'd have already fired, two in the head and two in the heart. He needed what was in her head though, or it would all have been for nothing. Besides, he had to know how good she was. Bradford dropped the heavy Ion blaster and help up his hands.

“We're not here to hurt you Allison, Dimitri sent me.”

Only a minor distortion of the truth and she didn't need to know that her lover was dead. She looked at him and blinked a few times, before trying to bury the cleaver in his head.

“Fuck you're fast.” He yelled.

Anyone else and they'd have been dead, but Bradford was far from ordinary. Allison looked shocked, when his hand grabbed her wrist and twisted. She was strong though, resisting the pain, refusing to drop the cleaver.

“She'd crazy Bradford.....Or possessed or something.” Said Yasmine.

“Don't fire..... We need her.”

Possessed indeed..... How quickly modern minds revert to old ideas, once they meet something inexplicable. Bradford didn't think Allison was possessed, he knew she'd been augmented in some way.

“I don't want to kill you.” He told her.

Chance would be a fine thing, she might even be stronger than him. She pushed him back and raised the cleaver again. From nowhere a memory forced itself into his mind, the words on Dimitri's note.

“Allison, Dimitri said that you will always be his one true Babushka.”

She stopped, a look of amazement in her eyes. Allison looked around, as if noticing the horror for the first time. She screamed and would have fallen to the ground, if Bradford hadn't caught her. He looked around and relaxed a little, the watcher had gone.

“How did you know that would work ?” Asked Yasmine.

“Luck really, mixed with a little desperation.”

There was a lot of noise outside and Sequel arrived with the reinforcements. About a dozen of his operatives, the most that could be squeezed into one of their small APCs.

“Late, but not unwelcome.” Said Bradford. “There is a lot of cleaning up to do and a lot of searching. We'll take Miss Chapman back to headquarters, while you go through everything and I mean everything. Dimitri lived here for too long, not to have left something we can use.”

“We need a scene of crime person, can Yasmine stay ?” Asked Sequel.

“No, we're doing this by the book. Female prisoner, so we'll need a female officer.”

No so much as by the book as there being a woman there if Allison woke up screaming. He was no use at dealing with such things and he knew Chet was probably worse. Allison didn't wake though, even when they put her in the basement room, the same one Hector had used.

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“Now that really is..... One hell of a door.” Said Roxy.

It had taken a while to get to the door. There had been breakfast and both men had wanted to shower. There was now hot water, so Maggie had wanted to shower again and of course Roxy had got under the hot water to keep her company. Hector had been a nuisance then, demanding to clean up and test the assault rifles they’d found.

“Saves running down the power packs on our blasters.” He’d said.

Three hours after turning on the generators, they were stood in front of the most serious looking doors that Roxy had ever seen. Blast doors Hector called them, usually power assisted.

“They need the generators running to open.” He said. “A second line of defence, in case the nukes destroy the top level.”

Over confidence was his undoing of course, as he pulled at the two handles and nothing happened.

“It’s stuck..... Give me a hand.”

Maggie pushed the handles back, while the three grown-ups pushed any part of the door they could get hold of. It didn’t exactly roll smoothly open; there were a lot of grinding noises and crunching sounds. Eventually the door was as far back as it intended to go. More stairs in front of them and a long corridor leading off into the distance. Again only about a third of the lights still worked, but that was enough, even if there were some areas of unsettling shadows.

“The corridor goes on and on.” Said Maggie. “This place is enormous.”

“Are we looking for anything in particular ?” Asked Jim.

“Filter spares.” Said Maggie.

“Yes, snag them if we see them.” Said Hector. “It would be nice to go right down to R2 though, just to see what’s down there. Then we can begin looking for stuff we can carry out of here. We’ll need to bring a full team here eventually, probably most of the able bodied people in Desperation and Pile o’ Bones.”

“The other settlements too.” Said Roxy. “There must be enough stuff here to help everyone.”

“We need to look first though, go right to the bottom.” Said Hector.

“That makes sense.” Agreed Jim.

The air was circulating now, fans everywhere replacing air that had probably been trapped in the bunker since before the time of troubles. It was clearing, but there was still a slight musty smell in the air. There was a sign saying L3, pointing down a narrow corridor to their left. They found the stairs, though it was Maggie’s young eyes which spotted something far better.

‘Freight Elevator – Strictly No Passengers.’

It said on the sign, which was nearly hidden in a gloomy corner. Roxy pressed the call button and they waited, listening to the elevator’s motor running. Eventually the doors opened, making a loud scratching sound.

“Dare we use it ?” She asked.

“I’ll send it all the way down and bring it up again.” Said Maggie.

Maggie leapt into the elevator, pressed a button and leapt out again, just before the doors closed.

“I sent it to Sub 4.” Said Maggie. “There was R1 and R2, but the bottom button said Sub 4”

“That’s weird, it wasn’t on the power grid.” Said Hector. “No Sub 3 on the buttons ?”

“No, I’d have noticed it.”

When the elevator’s motor stopped running, Maggie pressed the call button and they waited for it to return. A full twelve minutes it took to arrive and it hadn’t arrived alone. As soon as the doors opened, a wave of warm moist air hit them.

“That isn’t good.” Said Maggie. “Are we really going all the way down.”

“Where’s your spirit of adventure ?” Asked Hector. “If it’s too hot and sticky down there, we can come straight back up to R2.”

“It would be nice to explore every floor.” Agreed Roxy. “Even if it’s just a few rooms near the elevator.”

They entered the elevator and Maggie pressed the bottom button, the one marked as Sub 4. The elevator made a worrying grinding sound, before descending at a fairly sedate pace.

“Why did it say strictly no passengers ?” Asked Maggie.

“It’s just an insurance thing.” Said Hector.

Poor Maggie, she didn’t look happy with the answer. The lights began to flicker about halfway down, though they never went out completely. It seemed a very long twelve minutes, before the elevator stopped and the doors opened. There were puddles of water in the corridor outside the elevator. Warm water puddles probably, as the temperature had to be at least forty degrees. Roxy instantly felt sticky, sweat beginning to run down her back.

“Something happened here, maybe a flood of some kind.” She said.

“How about the heat ?” Asked Jim.

“At least some of the lights still work.” Said Maggie.

They’d come to explore and Maggie was already ten feet away from the elevator and pointing to a sign on the wall.

‘Bio-Hazard Area
Do Not Enter
If Red Lights Are Flashing.’

There was a bank of three red lights, which weren’t flashing. Jim noticed the potential problem.

“The green lights aren’t on either.” He told them.

“This place was shut down and abandoned, probably before the troubles.” Said Hector. “There won’t be anything dangerous down here, not after all that time.”

“Why is it so fucking hot ?” Asked Jim, again.

“We won’t know if we don’t explore a little.” Said Roxy.

She moved ahead of Maggie, walking towards the nearest room with an open door. The first level had been so clean, but the heat and humidity had created havoc on Sub 4. Weeds had taken root under the lights, green shoots desperate to find nutrient to survive. One plant had grown enough to touch the ceiling, its roots cracking apart the concrete floor.

“Nature always wins.” Said Hector.

There had been posters on the walls once, though most had rotted away. There was just one notice still readable, lamination seemed to have saved it from the mildew. There was a picture of rabbit, still just discernible.

‘Remember – This is an ethical research facility.’ Were the words below the rabbit.

“Research facility ! What the hell were they doing here ?” Asked Jim.

“Nothing nice, I bet.” Said Maggie.

There were laboratory benches in the room behind the open door. There had been instruments on those benches, though everything made of steel had become nothing but rust. Some pieces of stainless steel still glittered under the lights, but there weren’t many of those. The small animal cages must have been made of something other than steel, only the door hinges were red with rust.

“They cleared everything out and abandoned all this.” Said Hector. “It just doesn’t make sense.”

“Not everything was taken away.” Said Roxy.

She’d found the one cage with evidence of its former occupant. Rabbit bones, she recognised the skull and jaws. A complete skeleton from the times before the world had gone crazy.

“Probably worth a fortune to some rich collector.” Said Roxy.

“Ewww.” Replied Maggie.

There were several doors leading out of the room with the animal cages, but they didn’t want to risk getting lost. Out of the door they’d come in by, the freight elevator still visible in the flickering lights. There was something green growing on the walls further along the corridor, where the light was brighter. Lichen of some kind maybe, or a covering of Algae ? Roxy wasn’t really sure and the doors in the distance were more interesting.

‘Emergency Stairs.’ Said the sign.

Next to the stairs was what interested them all, a proper elevator, one meant for people. No sign saying freight only, its stainless steel doors looked almost inviting. None of them wanted to admit to being defeated by Sub 4, but as Hector remarked.

“All we’re likely to find down here, is more long dead bunnies.”

“Same test, send it all the way up Maggie.” Said Roxy.

The elevator smelt of damp air as Maggie pressed the button to open the door. The elevator was empty though, no horrific remains in there, or something equally nasty. Maggie jumped inside, but didn’t press the top button and leap out again.

“Hey, this one goes to Sub 3.” She said.

“Maybe all the proper elevators go there.” Said Jim.

“Or maybe only this one.” Said Hector.

“Send it up to the top Maggie, we need to test it anyway.” Said Roxy. “Then I think we should have a look at what Sub 3 has to offer.”

There were numbers for the floors above the elevator, just like in the fancy hotels in San Pablo. The red light behind number 4 flickered a bit, but they knew when the elevator reached level 1. Maggie pressed the call button and nothing happened, the light refused to move from level 1.

“Crap, looks like we’re using the stairs.” Said Jim.

“No, look, it’s coming down.” Said Maggie.

“Something delayed it, something got into the elevator.” Said Hector. “We should move back and have our weapons ready.”

“Are you sure ?” Asked Roxy. “What would be up there ?”

“We did leave the hole in the grill over the fan.” Said Maggie.

They moved back, holding up their newly acquired assault rifles. Roxy quite liked rifles that fired real bullets and had been hoping for a chance to use hers. The elevator never did open its doors for them. The lights for levels 5 & 6 remained on at the same time and didn’t seem likely to change.

“No one got on.” Said Roxy. “The damn thing is fucked.”

“That’s why we tested it.” Said Hector. “If we want to look at Sub 3, it looks like we’re using the stairs.”

They hadn’t definitely committed to visiting Sub 3, but it wasn’t a democracy. Roxy led and the others followed her through the door marked ‘Emergency Stairs.’ The stairs were clean and quite well-lit and the temperature dropped quite quickly as they climbed.

“That’s better, my shirt has stopped sticking to my back.” Said Jim.

Six separate short flights of stairs, before they reached the double doors for Sub 3, which was simply described as 'Research,' by the large sign over the doors. The doors were locked though and there was a Bio-Hazard sign on each door.

"Bio-Hazard warnings again." Said Roxy. "We could go back to the freight elevator and begin our exploring on the next floor up."

"We've been through this Roxy." Said Hector. "Nothing nasty will still be active.... No after all the years this place has been sealed up."

Roxy had heard that germs could lie dormant for years, but she wasn't sure about it. She was no expert and anyway..... She really wanted to see what was beyond the locked doors.

"Not even a serious looking set of doors." Said Hector. "I can easily kick them open."

"What's on the other side?" Roxy asked. "Before we start kicking anything."

There were two small windows, one in each door. Glass reinforced by wire, they gave a view of a lobby area, with seating and a few desks. There didn't seem to be anything there that might be dangerous, if Hector send a few chunks of wooden door hurtling into it.

"Look, just a few desks." Said Hector.

It was her mission after all, Maggie and Jim were her people. She felt the need to obstruct Hector occasionally, just to remind him who was boss.

"Fine, kick it open." She said. "Just be careful though."

"We will, Jim can help."

Was it possible to carefully kick in a door? The guys certainly tried, taking it in turns to kick the doors, just above the keyhole for the lock. There had been two bolts too of course, which they should have realised. About two dozen kicks and twenty minutes later, the doors flew inwards. A few pieces of wood flew into the room, but the pieces of lock and bolts, fell quite close to the doors.

"See..... Carefully done." Said Hector.

It was a large lobby and time had been kind to the notices on the wall. Most had faded, but the air was drier and nearly all of them were still legible. There was the bunny poster again, another laminated version. A fluffy white bunny, with a reminder underneath it, that their research was ethical.

"Tell that to the poor rabbits." Said Maggie.

The room had that military look, but there was also a hint of something else. The position of the reception desk, the chairs which must have been quite comfortable, before time had covered them in a layer of grey dust. It reminded Roxy of an electric car franchise she'd once visited. There was even a pile of brochures in a pigeon hole under the reception desk. Roxy pulled out one from the middle of the pile, not quite believing the first picture. She threw several of the old brochures onto the desk, a few falling onto the floor.

"You all need to see this, or you won't believe me." She said.

The cover announced that the colourful brochure had been produced by Deoxy Research Inc. There was a picture of three very fit looking people in military fatigues. Two male and one female, all smiling and looking happy.

'Over forty years of research, to keep our armed forces safe.' It said under the picture.

Page three was where Roxy had seen the picture, which was likely to give her nightmares. It wasn't an artist's impression; it was a picture of the same photogenic soldiers, leading a pack of strange insect type creatures.

'Our hybrid creations will never replace our brave warriors, but they will save lives.'

Roxy recognised the creatures. They were exactly the same as the things which had nearly killed Maggie. There was the scorpion front end and the rear that looked vaguely like a huge possum. There was no mistaking what she was seeing; they'd even been given a name, Scorpoids. Crap, some sales guy had probably been paid a fortune to come up with that.

"Christ, it's the bugs that almost ate me." Said Maggie.

"Look at page seven." Said Hector.

An artist's impression or something put together by Deoxy Research's PR team. It showed a military squad dressed in uniforms that bore no national emblems. They were being protected against an enemy by huge creatures, monsters. Spider like, but they all had at least twenty massive legs. Once again the monsters were using massive scorpion like pincers and jaws, to kill the unidentified enemy.

"There's even a section on human augmentation at the back." Said Jim.

"Do you think they ever made these spider things?" Asked Maggie.

"We need to explore the bunker and find out where they went." Said Hector. "There were a lot of people here once, someone will have left a clue."

She nodded at Hector, the time for enjoying obstructing him had passed.

"I agree, we need to find where they took their research people." She said.

"Further into the Badlands is my guess." Said Jim.

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