

## Bradford II – Badlands

### Chapter 13 – Sub Level 3

**“Apart from kneeling in a puddle, examining a guy who’s been tortured and mutilated, while the rain pours down... I’m perfect Roland, everything is tickety-boo.”**

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Bradford didn’t know he was dreaming, though he did wonder why he was in his old college room, sitting on a sofa with Juliette. Juliette Casaceli who’d seemed almost certain to join one of the many subversive groups, but hadn’t. He’d often felt disappointed in her, as if all her rants about the evils of their government had been fake, hot air she hadn’t really believed in.

“Seriously Brad, haven’t you ever worried about your lack of curiosity ?”

“I’m curious about the things that matter.”

Dreams are odd, his mind accepting that the sofa was bright, almost luminous yellow and Juliette appeared to have a cream coloured aura surrounding her. His dreams had always been in vivid colours, even the recurring dreams about being abandoned by his dead father.

“But how do you know something matters, if you don’t think about it ? Do you ever wonder why there are so many subversive groups ?”

The walls of his old college room went from beige to bright pink, before settling for a green that was almost fluorescent.

“I’m curious about my college work Juliette. I want to be a good cop, just like my dad. There will always be those opposed to the government and to be honest, politics is boring. It doesn’t affect my life, any of it.”

His sleeping mind accepted that Juliette’s face now had a red hue. He tried to touch her arm, but his fingers went right through her.

“A good cop, can you hear yourself?! You’re not the type to be a cop Brad and never will be. Where did that idea come from, who put it in your head ? Was it your dad, did he give you a list of things that didn’t matter ?”

There had been a similar conversation, just before she’d decided to take a break from their relationship. He’d never become that angry though, or grabbed her arm. He grabbed her in the dream though, enjoying seeing fear in her eyes.

“Don’t you ever speak crap about my dad.” He yelled. “He’s better than you’ll ever be, with your sub friends who want to change the world.”

She was fading away, as was the entire room. He suddenly realised it had all been nothing but a dream, although Juliette still had something to say to him.

“Someone stole your curiosity Brad.....”

He woke angry, his face red, his heart beating hard against his chest. Bradford gave himself a few minutes to calm down, before turning and looking at Amoe. Good, she was asleep and hadn’t heard anything. There had been times when he’d talked and growled in his sleep, calling out Juliette’s name. Not surprisingly Amoe had asked him quite a few questions about those dreams.

He kissed his wife gently on the forehead, before getting out of bed. He was naked of course, they both slept naked most of the time. San Pablo had a hot humid climate for eight months of the year and being naked helped with their nightly bug checking ritual.

“Why do I still dream about her ?” He asked the bathroom mirror.

He peed and stared at the tiled floor, counting the tiles. He hadn't done that for years, since the last batch of dreams involving Juliette. He still did have feelings for Juliette, though he'd never mention that out loud to a living soul. He had some feelings for Jenny too, the nurse who he'd once thought might be 'the one.'

"It's over Bradford, finished." She'd shouted at him. "You scare me, I can never tell what's going on in your head."

He had a theory that everyone had residual feeling for those they'd been intimate with. Not for one night stands or hookers of course, but for the people they'd had relationships with. There was always a little love felt for those people and it would be there until you died. He just didn't think it was a theory he could share with Amoe, or anyone else for that matter.

"I will be more curious Juliette, I promise." He muttered.

He'd been up for too long, he now felt wide awake. Bradford headed towards the kitchen, picking up his PD489 communicator on the way. He made some coffee and stood in front of an open refrigerator for a while. Flapjacks, store bought and a little stale, but he took two of them over to the kitchen table. Coffee and flapjacks were better at waking him up than caffeine pills.

"Poor Roland, he's going to hate me."

It had been decided that Chris Dudley would be allowed to get on his plane to New Borongan and followed once he arrived. Yasmine had been given the job, with Chet tagging along as backup. Bradford was about to tear up those orders and a good chunk of the rule book. He typed into his communicator, knowing Roland would be annoyed, but still carry out his wishes.

'Roland, I'll be following Chris Dudley, please arrange the air tickets.

I'll be taking Allison Chapman with me, she'll need paperwork.

Finally and the hardest part. No one must know where I'm going.

Bradford.'

He'd almost pressed send, before remembering his promise to Maria. Bradford added a copy to her and sent the message. He suddenly felt tired, as though he'd just completed some sort of herculean task. He went back to bed, carefully folding himself around Amoe, loving the way her hair smelled of apples. Two seconds later, he was asleep.

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Chip had opened the secure doors in Sub Level 3, all the secure doors. There was no sound to confirm anything had happened, just a line of text on a computer screen, telling them that 'All Sub 3 security doors now open.'

"All doors, what did you just open Chip?" Hector had asked him.

Poor Chip, he looked like that guy, the one who always gets blamed for everything. Roxy had to put her hand on his shoulder and offer a little support.

"We all thought it was a good idea." She'd said.

"Fine, but no one mentioned anything about all the doors."

"There's no way of confirming it." Chip had said. "We might get back there and find the doors still locked."

Maggie had then needed time to copy the map on the screen, the one which showed the route to Base Omega. It was all carefully copied onto more of the flimsy paper they'd been given in Pile o' Bones. There was another delay when Chip had found the internal memo, ordering the evacuation

and transportation of all essential equipment to Base Omega. Roxy was currently looking at the screen and cursing the military for being so clandestine.

“Why did they leave here Chip ?” She asked. “Is there anything more about it ?”

“Probably, if we had days to dig through every file.” Said Chip. “All they say is that Protocol Ouroboros had been triggered.”

“What the hell does Oryboros mean ?” Asked Jim.

“No idea, but I bet it’s something bad.” Said Maggie.

“It’s Ouroboros.” Said Hector. “The Egyptians depicted it using the image of a serpent eating its own tail. It’s widely thought to mean the end of everything.”

Roxy thought she knew Hector fairly well, yet she was staring at him, as were the others.

“What ? I’ve done a bit of time and San Pablo’s penal system encourages education.”

“You are full of surprises.” Said Roxy.

“It’s the only thing to do in jail.” Said Hector.

“Orywotsit sounds like something fucking unpleasant.” Said Jim.

Chip spent a while longer, digging through the system for anything else on Protocol Ouroboros, but there were literally thousands of memos, emails, orders and directives and the search function was slow.

“I think we have everything we need.” Said Roxy. “Time to see if we can get past the doors on Sub Level 3.”

The freight elevator was only about twenty five yards away, but the lighting wasn’t good and they’d walked right past it a few times. Once again it was Maggie’s young eyes, which spotted the doors hidden away in a corner. Next to the elevator was the double set of doors, which gave access to the emergency stairs.

“I don’t fancy leaving the precious filters in all the heat and humidity on Sub Four.” Said Hector. “We should take the trolley up to Level 1.”

“That makes sense.” Said Roxy.

“All of us and the trolley..... I have a bad feeling about the freight elevator.” Said Maggie.

“It’s designed to carry seventeen people.” Said Roxy.

“When it was new.... I’m scared Roxy, something bad will happen if we all get in there.”

“We could split up, use the elevator a few of us at a time.” Suggested Chip.

Roxy wasn’t keen on splitting up, though she had no idea why. The base appeared to be totally deserted and safe, yet.....Maybe Maggie’s nerves were getting to her ? Luckily Jim made a sensible suggestion, which seemed to satisfy Maggie.

“I’ll take the trolley up, push it into an empty room and come straight back.” He said.

“Please let him do that Roxy, please.” Said Maggie.

“Can you manage the trolley on your own ?” She asked.

“Yeah, no problem. I’ll be back in five minutes, maybe less.”

“Ok, fine, do it.”

They helped him wheel the trolley in to the elevator and made sure he could open the cage gates on his own and the outside doors. It was hardly the VIP elevator, but Jim seemed confident that he could get the trolley out on his own.

“I could go and help.” Said Hector.

“No, I’ll be fine.”

They heard the motor start up and the elevator was gone, taking Jim and the precious filters up to Level 1. He must have had a few problems. It was about fifteen minutes before they heard the motor start up again.

“Now another trudge through Sub 4 to look forward too.” Muttered Chip.

“Listen, the elevator motor sounds different.” Said Maggie.

It did, far louder and there was a grinding sound along with the usual motor rumbling sound. Roxy thought they might have to rescue Jim from a jammed elevator. All sorts of thoughts came into her mind, but none of them considered the problem might be serious.

“Looks like you were right about the elevator Maggie.” She said. “We’ll use the fancy high speed ones from now on.”

A loud bang turned a worrying sound into a potentially serious problem. It all happened so quickly, no one had time to react. Three or four more loud bangs, followed by a rush of air through the gap in the elevator doors. The elevator was dropping like a stone and there was nothing they could do about it.

“What’s happening ?” Asked Maggie.

No time to answer her, the elevator doors shook, as the elevator hurtled past with Jim inside it. There was a whirring sound for a few seconds, before the elevator hit the bottom of the shaft. The noise wasn’t that loud, but Roxy felt the floor vibrate slightly. They all simply looked at each other for a while, knowing Jim was dead. Maggie broke the silence by crying.

“Poor Jim..... I knew it, felt it.... I should have stopped him.....” She said.

“You saved all our lives Maggie.” Said Hector. “We need to get down to Sub 4 though. There might be a chance that Jim isn’t dead.”

“I agree, a slim chance but we owe it to him to be sure, either way.” Said Roxy.

“I’m not getting in another elevator, at least not today.” Said Maggie.

“Neither am I then.” Added Chip.

An impasse and now it was two youngsters facing down two adults. Roxy had known Jim for years and would miss him for many reasons. At that moment she missed him, as yet another adult voice. Hector wasn’t helping either.

“We can get down the stairs, in the time it would take us to walk to the express elevators.” He said.

“Fine, we’ll use the stairs to go down, but we’ll find and use the elevator to come back up.” Said Roxy. “I’m not walking back up thousands of steps..... Agreed ?”

“Agreed, but I’m testing it first.”

“Testing every time we want to use it sounds sensible.” Said Hector.

Roxy led them through the doors to the stairs, finding them clean and free of obstructions. They’d descended past Level 5, when they began to hear the strange sounds.

“It sounds like an animal howling.” Said Chip.

“An angry, pissed off animal.” Added Hector.

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Bradford had taken away her trip to New Borongan and now she was being used to examine a routine crime scene. Not that New Borongan was supposed to have been a holiday, but you can always find time for a little sightseeing and leisure, if you’re careful about it.

“Might not be routine.” Roland had told her. “Bobby had a tip from one of his connections. He’s not saying much, but he’s rarely wrong about these things.”

“What things Roland ?”

“HmMMM best if you arrive with an open mind.”

Bad moods can be hard to shake off, especially if life keeps throwing lemons at you. She couldn't find the right street, the weather looked set to move from torrential rain to a full blown monsoon and worst of all; she'd already bought a new swimsuit for the New Borongan trip.

"I hate this fucking weather." She yelled, while getting out of her car.

The case was a body in a parking lot, a straight forward battery homicide, according to the cops who'd found him. The cops should have been out in the rain, preventing people like her from walking all over the crime scene. It was beyond the normal heavy rain for that time of year though and the two cops were sat in their car. Yasmine had to bang on the car window to get their attention.

"Sorry miss, you're not supposed to be here, didn't you see the tapes?"

Yasmine flashed her laminated card at him, instantly noticing a change in attitude.

"I'm Yasmine DuClare, scene of crime consultant with PD489."

"Oh yes, of course. Sorry, we were told someone was on the way. I'll show you where the body is."

She wanted him to stand in the rain and suffer too, her mood was demanding it. The rain had begun to drip down the gap between her jacket and the skin of her neck, dripping right down her back. It was clammy, cold rain, like standing in a shower at a cheap motel. Yasmine was a professional though and examining the body on her own, might be an advantage.

"Just point me in the right direction." She said. "No point in both of us getting saturated."

"Thanks, call if you need help."

The body was male, fully dressed in a cheap polyester suit. He was lying face down in a small stream of water, where the car park drained into the sewers. Or tried to drain, the stream was quite wide and looked likely to grow. Wide but not deep, it meant wet shoes, which wasn't going to improve her mood. Yasmine decided the rain had already ruined the crime scene. She pulled the body clear of the stream and turned him over. It was a good job she'd come alone, her surprise was genuine and audible.

"Fuck!" She yelled.

Hundreds of cops had been looking for him and there in front of her was Jason Cerone. Half his face was missing, but she'd spent days carrying out his security vetting. She'd seen so many pictures of Jason, that even with half a face, she knew it was him. The body didn't look right, the suit didn't fit properly and was far too cheap for someone like Jason. She undid the jacket and opened it, finding a blood stained shirt. Quite a bit of blood, considering the rain had been washing the corpse for quite a while.

"They didn't even do your buttons up right." She muttered.

They'd dressed him a hurry, getting his shirt buttons wrong. The top button was in the second hole down and they'd carried on, buttoning them all up wrong. Yasmine undid the buttons and opened his shirt. The simple battery homicide became abduction, torture and murder. It took time to torture someone if you wanted get the truth out of them. Too much pain too quickly and they'd tell you any old rubbish to make the agony go away. Whoever had cut the holes in poor Jason, had been an expert. Yasmine undid his trousers, lowered his boxer shorts and winced.

"Christ Jason, no one deserves that."

Dreadful things had been done to his genitals, truly awful things. She wrapped his clothing back round him, covering up the horrors that had been inflicted on him. It was time to talk to Roland.

"You could have warned me." She told him.

"I wasn't certain. If it had been Bobby himself, but it was one of his contacts. Is it definitely him?"

"Oh yes, no doubt. He never did run Roland. Someone picked him up and spent days torturing him. Nasty stuff Roland, you wouldn't wish it on your worst enemy. What do I do now?"

Roland was obviously thinking and the rain had gone right down her back, entering the cleft at the top of her panties.

"Ohhhh."

"Are you alright?" Asked Roland.

"Apart from kneeling in a puddle, examining a guy who's been tortured and mutilated, while the rain pours down... I'm perfect Roland, everything is tickety-boo."

"Sorry about the New Borongan trip."

"Not your fault. Ok, do I give this guy to the cops, or bring him in?"

"Someone has been tidying loose ends Yasmine, which gives us a problem. Was it his own people or someone else, someone we might know. I'm sure you understand what I'm saying."

Or half saying, because no one knew if their communicators were totally secure. President Herbert might have had Jason tidied up, having him tortured first to see how deep the treachery had gone. Not that Yasmine blamed him, she was a Herbert supporter, voting for him every time. It even crossed her mind that Bradford might have done the deed.

"I understand Roland." She said. "I'll call for one of our clean-up teams to bring the body back and tell the cops we're handling it. No mention of any identity or cause of death."

"Perfect Yasmine, perfect."

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They had at least two weapons each, Hector had four if he counted the knife down the side of his boot. He still felt nervous though, as the sound of howling became louder as they descended the stairs.

"I think we let something out." Said Chip.

"Maybe a whole lot of somethings." Said Roxy.

"Nothing can survive being locked up for decades with no food and water." Said Hector. "Just think about it for a minute. It must be something that got in from outside."

It sounded convincing, but he wasn't sure if he believed it himself. Maggie had talked about seeing something large behind the sealed doors and she didn't seem the sort to invent tall stories.

"We need to pick up the pace." Said Roxy. "Jim might just be badly injured and waiting for us to turn up."

No one really felt like running and they found a partial ceiling collapse near the entrance to Level R1. Nothing they couldn't get round, it was just an obstacle requiring some care to negotiate and that took time. The only good thing was that the howling had stopped by the times they reached the entrance to Level R2. Maggie pushed open the doors to reveal another lobby area, complete with a few sofas and more bunny posters.

"I know we're going down stairs, but I'm still tired." Said Maggie. "Can we rest for a while?"

Getting round the rubble from the ceiling collapse had left them all tired and covered in dust.

"I'd like a chance to shake some of the dust off." Said Hector. "I've got a large tin of fruit cocktail in my pack.... We could open it up and share it."

He exchanged a look with Roxy, they both knew Jim was dead. No one could have survived an elevator crashing like that. They were on their way to seeing something dreadful that had once been Jim, before collecting it for burial out in the Badlands.

"Fruit cocktail huh?" Asked Roxy.

"In its own natural syrup."

"I suppose ten minutes wouldn't hurt." Said Roxy.

Hygiene comes about tenth on anyone's list of priorities if they're hungry and tired. They shared one grubby spoon, taking it in turns to eat the wonderful tinned fruit. They'd found crates of it, quite close to the boxes of tinned hotdogs.

"This is..... Delicious." Declared Maggie.

They shook out their fatigues and rested on the dusty sofas. It was wonderful to relax and they were all feeling restored when Roxy said their rest time was over.

"Come on guys, time to get moving." She said. "I left my Rolex in Desperation, but I think we've been here longer than ten minutes."

They all chuckled, no one had a working wrist watch. You could buy a pretty good Rolex copy in some of the best San Pablo stores, but people in the Badlands lived by when the sun rose and set. Sadly there was no sunlight underground.

"Did you find any more tins of that stuff?" Asked Chip.

"Crates full of it." Said Roxy.

It was just as well that they were ready, weapons in their hands as they walked towards the door to the stairs. There was no howling, no advance warning that the creature had probably been waiting for the right moment to attack. The door crashed open, as something large and covered in fur, ran straight at Roxy. It roared as it leapt at her, teeth glistening in the lobby lighting.

No one ordered all three of them to fire their weapons, it just seemed to happen by instinct, mixed with good reflexes. Hector heard the deafening sound of three assault rifles firing at once, before the creature hit Roxy, throwing her to the ground.

"Stop firing, you'll hit Roxy." He yelled.

Maggie helped him to grab the creature, though it was too heavy to push it far. They got it off Roxy though, stabbing it several times in the process. It was dead, probably had been since the first few bullets had hit it.

"Jeeezzz, what is that thing?" Asked Roxy.

"Are you alright, did it bite you?" Asked Hector.

"No, it just winded me a bit as it hit me.... I will need a new set of fatigues though."

Roxy stood up, her front covered in the brute's blood. They'd all been sprayed by some of it, as their bullets had torn up the beast. Only Chip seemed to have escaped being stained by hot red blood. He was stood some distance away, his rifle still aimed at the dead creature. Hector kicked the brute hard in the side.

"It's dead Chip, you can relax." He said. "Nothing comes back after being hit by a dozen rifle bullets." Chip did relax a little, but he was still staring at the fur covered monster.

"What is it?" He asked.

"The Badlands are always producing new weird creatures." Said Hector. "It probably got in before we put razor wire over the hole in the fan cover."

"Crap, it's human, or at least some of it is." Said Roxy. "We all saw the brochure with its section on human augmentation and hybridisation. No pictures, but that is it..... They made that.... Fucking Deoxy Research."

"That thing..... That's not human." Said Hector.

"Roxy is right, look at its hands." Said Maggie.

"Yes, look at its hands Hector." Yelled Roxy.

For the first time he looked at the monster they'd just killed, really looked. There were few animals in zoos in San Pablo, so he was relying on his memory of pictures he'd seen in books. The brute's snout looked like a bear, but there was something definitely human about the eyes.

"See what I mean?" Asked Roxy.

"Give me a few seconds will you." He snapped.

It was long and far heavier than any man, but its rear feet looked incredibly human. They had claws and were covered in fur, but the big toe was identical to his. Roxy was right though, its front paws were extraordinary. Claws yes and fur, but there was a thumb, on a hand just like his, right down to the fingerprints. A beast that could use machinery and fire weapons, every insane general's wet dream.

"You're right Roxy, this is some kind of created hybrid." He said. "And there won't be just one of them, nature doesn't work that way."

"There's nothing Mother Nature about that thing." Said Maggie.

"He's right though, it won't be a on its own." Said Roxy. "We need to have a look at Sub Level 3 and kill any others we find."

"What about Jim?" Asked Chip.

"Bless you honey." Said Roxy. "It's taken us so long to get this far, that I really doubt if he's still alive."

"We really came to make sure he gets a Christian burial." Said Hector.

"Was he religious?" Asked Maggie.

"I don't suppose he'd mind a few words said over him." Said Roxy. "We'll take him outside and bury him near the main door."

Hector led, out of the lobby to Level R2 and down the stairs. There wasn't a sound coming from below, apart from a faint sound of dripping water.

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"I think you're making a mistake." Said Gillian. "We know she can be very dangerous."

Allison was out of her cell and fighting Sequel on a nice thick practice mat. So far she'd thrown him to the ground about eight times. No changing though, no homicidal rage from Allison.

"She knows Sequel isn't an enemy, that's the difference." He said. "The street people were trying to hurt her and her unconscious mind knows the difference. She'll be fine and she's really keen on coming."

"Only because she wants to kill Chris Dudley. What then though? If she runs or doesn't want to return? Try and make her and she might see you as a real enemy."

Gillian had a good point, a very good point. He wanted Allison on the PD489 payroll though and he hoped she'd see the advantages that could bring her. If she did refuse to return, he'd already decided to let her go. They had a kinship of a kind, she was his sister by virtue of augmentation.

"I'm going to offer her a role with us Gillian." He said. "A decent salary, somewhere comfortable to live and our help in smoothing over any accidents."

Gillian was giving him that look again, the one that called him a monster, who she didn't understand.

"You can't give her permission to kill without consequences Bradford."

"Then find a reliable way to control her."

"She should be locked up until I find the key to what weaponises her." Said Gillian.

"Not going to happen. What have you learned from the lab tests?"

She was angry, creasing up the reports as her hands twitched. Her anger and pious attitude might have been more convincing if she hadn't once poisoned a colleague to save her own life. That had been years before on Lakey Island, but she was hardly an innocent.

"She's not like you, her augmentations are by surgery and chemical adjustments, not through her DNA. That means she's strong, but her bone structure is under a lot of stress. I think whoever made her what she is, intended her to be a top level assassin, only used for the most important targets."

"Can you alter her Gillian, add support for her skeleton without making her look like a robot?" He asked.

"There was some work we did at LabSync4, something to help soldiers carry more weight. A graphene lattice absorbed into their bone structure. It never went into general use because of the costs involved, but initial trials were very positive."

"Think about it while we're in New Borongan and do what you can for her." He said.

"I will, but trigger her too often and she might spend her old age in a wheel chair. I still think you're making a huge mistake Bradford, taking her with you."

"I know."

He walked closer to the practise mat, noticing that Sequel was breathing hard and had a nasty looking bruise under his left eye. As for Allison Chapman? She looked as though she'd popped out for a gentle walk after lunch.

"May I step in?" He asked.

"Yes please, she's stronger than she looks." Said Sequel.

Bradford didn't use all his strength or speed, it was only a friendly contest. Allison tried to land a few blows, which he easily avoided. Thumping her on the arm just made her grin with glee.

"You're augmented like me." She said.

"Different to you, but yes, I'm augmented."

She looked so happy, as they prowled round each other, using feet and fists to probe for weaknesses. Bradford actually felt sorry about spoiling the moment. He took a thin knife from his belt and used it to make a shallow cut in her upper arm, before throwing the blade away.

"Bastard!" Yelled Allison.

He held his hands up, but no homicidal attack occurred, he didn't think it would. She wasn't stupid, she understood why he'd cut her. She held the small wound, blood covering her fingers.

"You could have warned me." She said.

"Then it wouldn't have been a proper test. We'll be on an aircraft for hours and in New Borongan for a few days. There might be accidents, I had to know."

"And now you do."

"Yes, now I do."

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Something had happened to the lobby for Sub Level 3. Hector and Jim had kicked in the doors from the stairs and someone had finished the job. One door grimly hung on, one hinge stopping it from falling over. The other door was now flat on the ground.

"Are we really going in there?" Asked Maggie. "We have the filters, so why can't we just leave this awful place?"

The dirt and footprints worried her the most, along with the trail of debris going down the stairs. All the signs were that whoever or whatever they'd released had gone down to Sub Level 4.

"We created the problem, we need to take care of it." Said Hector. "Otherwise these things will eventually get out and spread out across the Badlands. Imagine what they'd do to somewhere like Pile o' Bones."

"There's probably just one or two like the one we killed." Said Roxy.

Maggie watched as Hector picked up some of the dirt the creatures had created. He sniffed it and pulled a face.

"Stinks like animal crap." He said. "They all seem to have gone down to Sub four for some reason."

"Maybe they like hot damp places." Said Chip.

The lobby looked to have been deliberately ripped apart, nothing had been left intact. Even the laminated bunny posters had been ripped from the walls. The sealed doors were now open. Thick power driven metal doors, which had slid back into the walls. Beyond the doors, the red warning lights were still flashing.

"The doors must be three inches thick." Said Roxy. "They really didn't want anything to escape."

Maggie held up her assault rifle. Just pointing it down the hallway made her feel better, safer.

"You can stay here with Chip if you want to." Hector told her.

"No, I'm coming with you."

More dirt on the floor, with what looked like the scuff marks left by something with large feet. Roxy was leading, being methodical about their search. They followed her into the first room on the left. The stench was overpowering.

"Christ ! What have we let loose on the world ?" Exclaimed Roxy.

It was a large room, with six cages along the back wall, cages big enough to hold a large man. The cage doors had been broken open, letting something get out into the room. The stench was caused by a deep layer of excrement, which covered most of the floor. There was an ammonia smell mixed in with the stench, which stung her eyes.

"I think they left these things caged when they left." Said Hector.

"They didn't stay caged." Said Chip.

There were another four rooms, all the same, right down to the stench of crap marinated in urine. Every room had red lights above the door, angry flashing red lights. Another thick set of metal doors were open, leading into what had probably once been a fully equipped lab. What hadn't been taken in the great evacuation, had been destroyed by the monsters. Beyond the lab, Sub Level 3 ended at a room with 'Surgical,' written above the door. It was empty, apart from the now normal covering of crap over the floor. Not quite empty, there was a sink in one corner, a deep old fashioned sink. A tap had been left dripping and the drip had become worse over the years. The sink was overflowing, forming a puddle six feet across, which ran off through a crack in the floor.

"Once out of the cages, they had fresh water." Said Roxy.

"How did they survive ?" Asked Chip. "We've seen nothing they might have been eating."

An idea had been forming in her head, something which sounded bizarre, but it was the only explanation she could think of.

"Maybe they ate each other, only the meanest and nastiness survived." She said.

"That sounds a scary idea, but it's not very likely." Said Roxy.

"I didn't think bears with thumbs were likely, until today." Said Hector. "There are none of them left here, so I suppose we'll have to hunt them down on Sub Four."

"I get the feeling they'll come looking for us." Said Chip.

Maggie saw it before the others, a male from its dangling genitals. It was in the centre of the lobby, examining them with intelligent eyes. It was the same as the one they'd already killed. Being upright

was the shocker, or at least it was for her. There it was, staring at them, while standing a good seven feet tall. Maggie didn't hesitate, before firing a short burst into the brute, about six, maybe seven high velocity bullets. It howled as it fell, howled like a dog left tied up in the rain.

"Did you see that?" Yelled Chip. "It was upright, walking like a fucking human."

"It was human, or at least part human.... I think." Said Roxy.

Hector seemed to be their official monster kicker. He kicked the thing in the chest and again in the rear. The beast didn't respond.

"It's dead." Said Hector. "Well done Maggie for reacting so quickly."

"Yeah, you saved our asses." Added Chip.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that."

They looked at the dead beast for a while, until Hector broke the silence.

"We've killed two, how many can there be left down there?" He asked. "A dozen tops I reckon and we know they die if you shoot them. We really do need to kill the rest of them."

"They might have bred down here." Said Maggie.

"Let's hope not." Said Roxy.

Chip led them out onto the stairs and began the journey down to Sub Level 4. The heat and humidity began to rise almost immediately.

"There was a lot of crap back there." Said Hector. "They had to have been eating something."

"Who knows, maybe careless adventurers." Said Roxy. "We may never know."

Maggie noticed that no one was talking about saving Jim anymore, or giving him a decent burial.

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