

## Bradford II – Badlands

### Chapter 21 – Attack The Bunker

**“As Hector pointed, she instinctively looked where his finger was pointing. It was there, stood watching them with its unsettlingly human eyes. Maggie reacted instinctively, firing three times at the bear that appeared to be part human.”**

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Conditions in Camila’s hired APC weren’t as cosy and comfortable as they had been. Hector had liberated a canvas cover from one of the enemy trucks and used it cover the holes in the roof, using a quick setting filler to finish the job. It looked awful, but it would keep the rain out. The real problem was being the overflow home for equipment from the doomed VTOL. Spare clothing and rations they were alright with, but not the six missile warheads. It wasn’t nice to know they were carrying enough explosives to vaporise the APC.

“Bradford said they might be needed to attack the bunker.”

Camila had said, as half a dozen PD489 guys had arrived with the warheads. Maggie had covered the lethal devices with some leftover canvas, but they all still knew they were there.

Not just equipment had been placed in the APC; they were also carrying one of the wounded PD489 operatives. Unconscious and unlikely to recover, he had a disquieting habit of groaning in his sleep, with the occasional scream for good measure. Add in Maggie’s bad temper because of the painful wound to her ear and the APC wasn’t a fun place to be. Roxy was driving, following the PD489 military APC. Hector saw it as his role to improve morale a little.

“I knew Bradford would save us.” He said. “Swooping in, like John Wayne at the head of the US Cavalry.”

“Who ?” Asked Chip

Normally he could have expected a smile of sympathy from Roxy, a look that said ‘you and I understand your odd ways,’ but not now. Everyone was being pulled down by their cramped conditions and the wounded soldier. Hector watched, as the PD489 APC led the way along the track, which gradually made its way up the hillside.

“Elis might have been telling us a little of the truth.” Said Camila. “The track does seem to be heading towards where the bunker is supposed to be.”

“I can see it all from up here.” Said Maggie. “They had at least four trucks and a guard post to protect the track. If Bradford hadn’t turned up, we’d have all been killed.”

She had a higher viewpoint than him, but Hector could see burning trucks and a guard post which had been obliterated by a missile.

“No signs of the enemy now though.” Sais Roxy. “The VTOL seems to have scared them off.”

“If they were born and raised in the Badlands.” Said Camila. “It might have been the first military aircraft they’ve ever seen. Imagine how terrifying that must be.”

“I just hope they stay terrified.” Said Cruz.

They were at the far side of the hill when the VTOL exploded. There was an initial explosion which was fairly loud, enough to get everyone in The Ranch wondering what was going on. The secondary explosion was huge, large enough to make the ground shake. The APC rocked a little, swaying gently from side to side.

“Jeeez that was bigger than I expected.” Said Roxy.

There was an after echo, the sound bouncing around the hillside.

“The good thing, is that the enemy won’t know what the hell to make of that.” Said Camila.

Hector would have preferred to have had a working VTOL to attack Omega Base, but he wasn’t about to say so and risk making the atmosphere in their APC any worse.

“Look at that, “said Maggie, “everything is scared by loud noises.”

They came out of the scrub on the hillside, before crossing the road and vanishing into the scrub on the left. No one fired at the Scorpioids for some reason, not even the normally trigger happy Maggie. The two dozen monstrosities ignored the APCs and they in their turn were ignored. The real enemy was further away, about two or three miles if Allison’s memory of the VTOL short range scanners was correct. They only drove on for a further mile, before the PD489 vehicle pulled up and Yasmine came to inform them why.

“The pilot just died, we’re going to bury him here and say a few words.”

His name had been Ben and he’d probably owned a second name too, though no one mentioned it. Maggie remained in the turret as there was no way of knowing what monsters might have been disturbed by the exploding VTOL. Only time to dig a fairly shallow grave and Bradford said a few words. It didn’t seem much of a send-off for a brave man, but Hector had seen worse.

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Gillian McBride allowed Bobby to spend as long as he’d wanted with Amoe, with the understanding that he had to leave if Amoe needed to rest. Bobby seemed good for the new mother, his latest vase of exotic blooms brightening the maternity room. It was the visit by Amoe’s mother which had caused concern, Haunani Lee could be an emotional landmine when it came to her daughter.

“Can you tell her I’m not well enough Gillian ?” Asked Amoe.

Tempting to tell Haunani to go home, Gillian still didn’t believe she hadn’t been aware of her husband’s criminal activities. As far as Gillian was concerned, no woman could spend decades with a man, being intimate thousands of times, without seeing the darkness hidden inside. Not that Gillian was about to tell Amoe that her mother was a liar.

“I could tell her that and I really hate to give unwanted advice.” Said Gillian. “If you’d like my advice I will tell you what I think you should do.”

“I know what you’re about to say Gillian.” Said Amoe. “You’ll say my mother will only come back tomorrow, maybe even later today. You’ll advise me to see her and get it over with.”

She had to laugh, it was word for word the advice she’d intended to give.

“Oh dear, have I become that predictable ?”

“It’s just sensible Gillian, correct advice if we were dealing with anyone apart from my mother.”

“Is she that much of a monster ?”

“Oh, she can be.... Most of the Hyenas who drive her about are terrified of her.”

“Has she hurt you Amoe ?”

“No, nothing like that.... She’s just not happy unless she’s controlling my whole life. She’s not going to do that with Rosa, wheedling her way in, becoming the indispensable grandmother, who tells her who to be friends with and what to wear. And....This may sound paranoid, but I’m sure she was part of what my father did, his criminal activities.”

“You’re not paranoid Amoe, I’ve often thought the same. What if I stay in here, running a stethoscope over Rosa, and doing a few other simple tests. I can then get her out of here after ten minutes by saying you need to rest.”

“Make it five minutes.”

Sometimes you can look at someone every day and how they look in profile can surprise you. Gillian had seen Haunani Lee a few times, but always full face, always looking straight at her. Amoe's mother was sat in a chair, talking to one of the nurses. There was something about seeing her in profile, it caused a memory to rise to the surface. For a few seconds Gillian froze, before her mind worked out how to use her memories to the best advantage.

"Mrs Lee, you can see your daughter now." Said Gillian. "She's tired today, so it'll be a short visit I'm afraid."

It wasn't a long walk to the room where Amoe was looking after baby Rosa, barely more than a minute's brisk walk. Haunani Lee still managed to use the time to offer criticism of her daughter.

"I'll sort her out now Gillian." Said Mrs Lee. "My daughter has always been a bit....Let's just say she knows nothing about bringing up a child. I'll get her organised though."

"I need a quick private word with you, if that's alright?" Asked Gillian.

"Yes, of course."

Haunani Lee obviously thought she'd found a new ally in her efforts to control Amoe. She didn't even complain about being taken into a small room used for medical supplies.

"Memory can be strange, affected by things such as perfumes and sounds." Said Gillian. "I've only just realised that we have met before, three times actually."

"When was that? My memory isn't as good as it once was."

"They were quite some time ago, on Lakey Island, before the government took it over."

"I've never heard of Lakey Island, you must be confused."

Haunani could never have fooled a polygraph, her forehead was already showing signs of perspiration. Gillian leant back against the door, stopping Mrs Lee leaving if the thought occurred to her.

"Mike Lakey had a summer house on the Island then. He used to invite his friends there for long weekends, even ferrying them out by boat from the mainland."

"Why are you telling me all this?" Asked Haunani.

"Shut up and listen.... I was tipped for the top in those days, so Mike was inviting me out to the Island a lot, cultivating me in his own way. I remember your husband arriving quite a few times, we all now know he was caught up in Lakey's treason."

Mrs Lee was no longer protesting, she looked terrified.

"I've changed since those days, shorter hair now and thanks to surgery, I no longer need to wear glasses. You don't recognise me, but I recognise you....There was a woman your husband brought out to the Island a few times, hiding her away in his bungalow. There was a lot of amused gossip about him cheating on his wife. You've changed a lot since then too, but no one can change their profile, the way they hold their head. That woman was you Mrs Lee, you attended the pep talks for the faithful. You were part of the Lakey circle of treason."

"What are you going to do?"

What was she going to do? Gillian had been part of that treason for years, still officially on the wanted list. Only Bradford and PD489 had saved her from spending the rest of her life in one of San Pablo's notorious prisons.

"Nothing Haunani, I intend to do nothing." She said. "As long as you leave your daughter alone. Amoe will bring up her child as she wishes, without constant sniping and control freakery from you. Otherwise..... Let's just say I still know people who like to tidy up loose ends."

The look in Mrs Lee's eyes had changed from fear to pure terror.

"Are you threatening to kill me?" She asked.

“Yes, I am..... You will go in and see Amoe, you may even hold Rosa. You will leave after five minutes. One negative word though, one spiteful comment..... I’m sure you understand.”

Gupta Saunders hadn’t wanted the job of driving the heavy APC, it was just that saying no to Bradford wasn’t an option. The power steering was effective, but every jolt, every bump in the track, was causing his long standing back problem to act up. Complaining did no good, everyone seemed to be moaning about something since they’d lost the VTOL. The track had taken them high up onto the hillside, well above the treeline and Yasmine was getting excited about something.

“Look Gupta, down the hill.... Look..... Stop, Bradford needs to see this.”

Gupta didn’t instantly jump on the brakes. The following APC needed time to react, so he pulled slightly off the track, before gradually coming to a stop. By then Bradford was leaning over him to see what was causing Yasmine to become so animated.

“That is bigger than I was expecting.” Said Bradford. “We all need to get a little exercise, even you Gupta.”

Bradford was gone, yelling for a volunteer to remain in the APC and use the turret weapons if anything nasty showed up. Allison volunteered, but Bradford ignored her and gave the job to Sequel. Only then did Gupta have the opportunity to release his seat harness and look down the hill.

“That isn’t a ranch.” He muttered. “It’s a town, a large town.”

“Impressive huh ? Do you need help to get outside ?” Asked Yasmine.

He felt torn between feeling insulted and a warm fuzzy glow from her attention. The warm fuzzy glow won of course.

“I’m fine Yas, but I appreciate you asking.”

Gupta was just stiff from being harnessed into the driver’s seat. A few paces and he was fine, though no one would ever accuse him of being sprightly. It looked like everyone was standing on the hillside, looking at the raider town below them. He remembered that the girl with the bandaged ear was called Maggie. The girl seemed quite feral, but she had managed to find herself a pair of binoculars.

“They have farms and a whole town down there.” She said. “All built around what is probably the Omega Base we’ve been looking for.”

“Medieval, right down to the trench and wooden wall round the outside.” Said Roxy. “Guard towers too, it’ll be a hard place to attack. I assume we are going to be attacking them ?”

Gupta borrowed some binoculars and examined the town, while the others discussed the best way to attack a well prepared enemy. The track they were following did eventually snake down the hill towards the raider’s town. The strange thing was that the track was empty.

“If we can see them, they must be able to see us.” He said. “Yet they’re not attacking us, or even sending any vehicles to see what we’re up to.”

“The explosion must have scared them,” said Cruz, “I know it had me worried.”

“No one moving about, they’ll be hiding from the VTOL and its railguns.” Said Bradford.

It was quiet in the town, not a single person seemed to be willing to risk stepping out of their home. Gupta caught sight of movement in one of the watchtowers, but all seemed peaceful in Raiderville, or whatever they called the place.

“So, what’s the plan boss ?” He asked.

“We watch and wait, but mainly we watch.” Said Bradford. “It would be nice to avoid a full scale battle, many of the settlers probably aren’t that keen on Vincent and his raiders. I can see damage to

some of the building and the signs of fresh digging in the graveyard. They haven't been immune from attacks by the abominations let out of the bunker."

Bradford was good at that, seeing quickly what others missed, or didn't realise was important. Gupta looked again and saw the spoil heaps in the town cemetery. It did seem likely that Vincent was no longer flavour of the month.

"Anyone know what they call the place?" Asked Allison.

"The Ranch," said Maggie, "the guy we captured said they call it The Ranch."

"That's a big ranch," said Camila, "there must be over a hundred people living down there. We can't just go steaming in and kill them all."

"I doubt if we could, they've got a bunker full of high tech weapons." Said Hector.

Bradford had that thing leaders are either born with or acquire as they go along, he only had to clear his throat for everyone else to be quiet.

"That is a huge bunker, there will be access doors they never use, air vents open and unprotected. We'll watch them when they realise there is no death from above waiting for them. We'll watch where they go and more importantly, where they don't go. We'll see the quiet places in their town and when we do attack, we'll make straight for a back door way into the bunker."

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Vincent did have a full name, quite a fancy one actually. He'd been christened Vincent Excelsior Willard and his great grandfather had founded the settlement of Willard Springs. In a time when there had been quite a lot of religious intolerance, his great grandfather had sought a place in the Badlands, to practise some intolerance of his own.

"They're not doing much of anything boss." Said Stephan. "Just stood around watching the town. I've got the best men in all the watchtowers."

"How are my people doing Stephan, my flock?"

"More worried than likely to revolt boss. The explosion has caused a lot of talk, some calling it a sign from God, though a good sign or a bad one seems open for debate."

"A sign from God, good I can use that in my evening sermon. Carry on watching them and report to me if they do anything other than watching us."

Stephan was a good second in command, even if he could be a little too brutal sometimes. It was brutality which had made Vincent run away from home when he'd been just fourteen. There had been too many beatings for what a young Vincent had considered natural desires and inclinations. His father had cracked a couple of his ribs with the buckle on his belt and all for enjoying a kiss with Jenny Beech. True he had been feeling her breasts at the time, but Jenny hadn't been averse to the pleasure of getting herself felt.

"God did tell us to go fourth and multiply." He muttered.

Vincent had been in his thirties by the time he'd gone back to Willard Springs. The settlement was empty, every building a ruin. A lifetime of being a God fearing man, made the ruined church particularly hard to bear. Someone had used paint to write a message on what was left of the altar.

'They woz all basterdz

Now theyz all dead'

Vincent hadn't found much in that simple note to argue with, he still hadn't. Willard Springs had left him with a deep love of God, but a deep loathing for most forms of organised religion. Finding the bunker with all its treasure was surely a sign from God. Vincent had decided to become the first

minister of his own form of religion, one with more fluid rules about many of the Ten Commandments.

"Maybe these people on the hill are a test?" He muttered.

Vincent had an office in the Town Hall, one of the few stone built buildings in the town everyone knew as The Ranch. Vincent Excelsior Willard left his office and walked out into the street, closely followed by Ernesto, his guard and almost constant companion.

"We'll take the long way home Ernesto." He said. "Let my flock see I'm not scared."

"They still believe Reverend."

Everyone tended to call him Reverend, or Boss. Everyone had forgotten his full name or never knew it to begin with. Just as well, he hated Excelsior which meant something about being elevated. He certainly didn't want to be known by his last name; Willard had become a toxic memory. The Reverend used a muddy path to bring him round the back of the main square. People would see him walking by and venture out of their homes, or at least that was the idea.

"Good day Reverend.... I hope we've seen the last of that flying machine. It seemed to almost spit fire."

"I hope so too Bethany. I'm sure the soldiers on the hill will have seen our well defended town and decided to move on, looking for somewhere less well defended."

Bethany Pitt had been a politician somewhere, before running away from whatever was chasing her. Nearly everyone in the Badlands was running from something, few lived there by choice. Bethany was literate and knew her bible, so Vincent had made her the town's teacher. Not just children, a lot of adults were beginning to realise squiggles on paper actually had meaning.

"And the dreadful explosion Reverend, it made everything shake. Was it an omen, should we be worried?"

"No, it was a sign, I realise that now. It was a warning to our enemies, that our God will smite them if they dare to attack his people."

"I knew it had to be something like that."

"It will be the theme of tonight's sermon Bethany."

People had to come out of their homes, a thriving town needs to keep moving, crops to plant, buildings repaired. Holes needed to be dug to bury the dead. He regretted the deaths caused by opening up the deep sections of the bunker, but it had to be done. If his destiny was to be fulfilled, he needed to get down to the deepest level of Omega Bunker, his visions had told him so.

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Bradford was having what appeared to be his own visions. He'd always thought each visit by a watcher was by someone unique, a different one every time. Now he was stood in a wood, surrounded by watchers he recognised. The young girl who looked barely seventeen, the old lady who'd been in Dimitri's apartment, the woman in her twenties who'd been outside his apartment. Those and many more were there and they were talking at him. Talking at rather than to, they were ignoring his questions.

"Vincent doesn't know it yet, but hell awaits him at the bottom of that bunker."

The girl talking, her voice like her image, sounded too real to be real. There was a strong wind in the wood, yet her quiet voice was easy to hear.

"How do I stop him?"

No good, they were ignoring his questions.

"What you must do will seem dreadful, but it has to be done."

"You might die Bradford.... We can't help you this time."

“They can move and build again, perhaps an even better town.”

They all vanished, apart from the woman in her twenties. He remembered her not just from outside his apartment, she'd also been there on the top of Pandan Bridge, when Hector had been trying to set off his bomb.

“Whatever you choose to do, it has to be your choice.” She said.

“Talk to me.... What will be my choice ?”

“Your choice Bradford.... Always your choice, it always was.”

“Your choice.”

“Your choice.”

“Your choice.”

Bradford Scott woke up, still sat in a chair on the roof of the PD489 APC. He jumped so much when he woke, that it was a miracle he hadn't fallen from his precarious perch. He hadn't known he was dreaming and as with most dreams, the memory was quickly wiping itself out of his mind. He remembered enough though, the girl telling him time after time, that whatever was going to happen was going to be his choice.

“Good, you've stopped squeaking in your sleep.”

Allison, sat quite near him, her legs dangling over the edge of the roof. She seemed to have appointed herself the role of his personal guard. Sometimes he didn't mind, though recently she did seem to be haunting him like Banquo's ghost.

“What did I say ?” He asked.

“Just a lot of noises really and something about a choice.”

His night vision glasses were still there, hung on a strap around his neck. He looked at the town below. It was so peaceful down there, the people confident enough to leave a few lamps burning in windows.

“What time is it Allison ?”

“I'm not certain, about three, maybe three thirty.”

“We can't just be two groups of people looking at each other through binoculars Allison, we need to stir them up a bit. Make them constantly look one way, while we go the other. Could you wake up Gupta for me ?”

“Yes, of course.”

“And Camila, she'll know how to rig a detonator.”

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Maggie didn't mind being disturbed, her ear was stopping her from sleeping anyway. Camila being woken in the early hours meant everyone else being woken up too. Mags was sure that seeing Hector in just his underpants so often, was going to cause lasting emotional damage.

“Yes, Bradford is right.” Said Hector. “Two of the trucks do have intact double wheel setups. A bit scorched, but still useable.”

“Fine, you get those and I'll talk to Bradford about how to set the things off.” Said Camila. “You'll need help Hector and a decent jack.”

“I'll go with him.” Said Maggie.

“No offence Mags, but Cruz should go,” said Camila, “he has a bit more muscle.”

“She can come, we could do with someone to watch out backs while we work.” Said Hector.

“Fine.”

Mags decided to forgive Hector about the whole underpants thing, he was her hero once again. Allison was stood just inside their APC, pointing at the things kept under a few pieces of canvas, the missile warheads.

"We have some in our vehicle," Said Allison, "but we've got more space than you, so we might as well take two of yours."

"Only two ? You're welcome to them all." Said Roxy.

"Maybe later, Bradford wants to see how well it works."

There were two PD489 guys with Allison, who effortlessly carried the warheads out of the APC. Each warhead was supposed to explode with the force of about five hundred pounds of high explosive, or at least that was what she'd heard.

"Come on Mags and don't forget your rifle." Said Hector.

"I won't."

There was more muttering between Hector and Allison as she dressed, everyone seemed to be taking it all very seriously, whatever it was. Cruz found the wheel jack for the APC and they were ready to leave. An oil lamp again of course, the flashlights were too precious to be used up on long night time journeys.

"The trucks are about a mile or so back down the track." Said Hector. "It's where I found the canvas cover. Just to warn you, no one has dealt with the enemy bodies."

It was a long mile along a rough track in the dark, with the constant threat of enemy patrols and feral creatures, both natural and unnatural. There were a lot of snarls coming from nearby scrub at one point, but nothing attacked them. There was no moon, but Hector seemed to have good night vision.

"There," he said, pointing, "the truck looks burnt out, but the back axle was undamaged."

"What are they going to do with the wheels ?" She asked.

"Bradford has an idea for delivering missile warheads, without having any missiles." Said Hector.

"You'll see what happens, you'll be there when they're used, if they work."

"Do you think they will work ?" Asked Cruz.

"Hmmm sounds good in principle.... Here, get the light under the back of the truck Mags."

She tried to get the light where they needed it, though there is only so much you can do with a single oil lamp. Cruz didn't seem impressed with Hector's choice of truck.

"There's been a lot of burning," he said, "some of the tread has melted."

"They aren't going to be under load," said Hector, "they only have to roll. From what I remember, there is another truck about forty feet in that direction, but that might be in worse shape."

As Hector pointed, she instinctively looked where his finger was pointing. It was there, stood watching them with its unsettlingly human eyes. Maggie reacted instinctively, firing three times at the bear that appeared to be part human. It screeched at her, before falling to the ground. Maggie fired twice more, needing to be certain the brute was dead.

"Christ Mags, I never even saw it." Said Hector. "I'm glad you wanted to come."

"You're fast, remind me not to upset you." Said Cruz.

"Someone needs to kick it." She said. "I don't think I can, but someone needs to make sure it's dead."

Hector kicked the dead creature three times, once in the head. It didn't flinch, so she could finally relax.

"We'll take the wheels off." Said Hector. "You can keep watch Mags, in case any of its friends turn up."

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Bradford had wanted something to give the inhabitants of The Ranch a jolt over their breakfast. Camila had told him that doing a crap job with the missile warheads was likely to turn their makeshift camp into a hole in the ground. She'd talked him into accepting that the two devices were going to be mid-morning surprises, if they worked. Not that she'd said anything about not working to Bradford, though she had told him to leave her alone until the job was finished.

"I'm tired Bradford, you had me dragged out of my bed in the middle of the night. Electro chemical warheads are notoriously fiddly to work with and.....Go away and I'll let you know when they're ready."

Gupta was fine, almost the perfect assistant. He gave her the tools she asked for and didn't feel a need to fill every minute with silly questions. He was scared though and anxiety can be contagious. Camila had no idea how the warhead made such a good job of going boom, she just knew the yields were miraculous for such a small device. Not that she needed to be a tech expert, she understood detonators and that was good enough.

"Can I watch?" Maggie had asked at around breakfast time.

"Ok, as long as you're quiet."

Camila liked Maggie, there was something she recognised in her, the determination not to be ignored. Chip didn't seem to be her constant companion anymore. Either they'd reached a comfortable stage in their relationship, or Mags just wasn't that into him anymore.

"I guessed why we went for the wheels.... That is so cool, the warhead looks like it was made to go in there."

Tempting to tell Mags to shut up, but the girl had just saved Hector and Cruz by killing a large hybrid.

"It fits well Mags, though rigging a detonator was a bit tricky. It might fall over, get pushed out of shape by a boulder, or go off early. Apart from that the device is perfect."

They both laughed as Camila used more duct tape and epoxy resin to hold the warhead inside the double wheels from the truck. With luck the wheel would build up enough spin speed to make it stable. The detonators should work, she'd spent quite a lot of time over those. As for an arming switch? There were just two bare wires that needed to be twisted together and taped to the wheel rim. After that it was simply roll it down the hill and into the wooden fence surrounding the town. Boom then, if they were lucky, or a long embarrassing silence if it didn't work. Camila had made two of the devices, in a ridiculously short period of time.

"I'd really like to run it up to speed on a wheel balancer." She said. "But we don't have one of those. I think our missiles on wheels are as good as they'll ever be Gupta, time for you to tell Bradford."

He looked so relieved to go that it was almost insulting. Maggie stayed though, staring wide eyed at the duct tape covered device. It looked an untidy mess, but Camila had faith in her work.

"The warhead is so small, how does it work?" Asked Maggie.

"Can you keep a secret Mags?"

"Yes."

"I have no idea, something about ultra-high voltage and clever modern polymers. I just know that when the detonator fires, it should produce a pretty big bang."

"How big?"

"We're about to find out, here comes Bradford."

Not just Bradford, half the people in the camp were following him, eager to see The Ranch given a mid-morning surprise. Bradford got down on his knees to look over the device and much to her surprise, he seemed pleased with her duct tape missile on wheels.

“How is it armed ?” He asked.

“I twist those two wires together.”

Even that didn't take the smile off his face.

“Arm it Camila and roll it at.....The wall to the left of that watchtower.” He said, pointing.

Hector helped her aim the wheels as best they could, before giving the device a good shove. The hill was steep with nothing growing at all, apart from a few bushes close to the town. The device picked up speed, bouncing a few times, but not deviating from its course. By the time it hit a bush, it was travelling fast and had enough momentum to knock it out of the way. Her device, her metal collage built out of steel, duct tape and epoxy resin, held together and as she'd hoped. Speed took it over the trench and into the bottom of the town fence.

“Well done.....Hell, that will have woken them up.” Shouted Bradford.

Camila had briefly shielded her eyes from the intense blue flash, as the warhead had detonated. Dust followed the flash, which in turn was replaced by smoke as that part of the town burned. A fifty foot section of the fence had gone, along with the watchtower that had stood behind it. The wooden debris was alight, as were the two buildings close to where the fence had once stood.

“Where did you get the idea to do that Bradford ?” Asked Sequel.

“It just sort of came to me, as I woke up from a weird dream.”

Energy weapons have a very long effective range, accuracy is the problem. Their camp was uphill from the town and well over four hundred yards away. An almost impossible shot with a plasma blaster, but the defenders of The Ranch had reason to be angry. No sounds at that distance, just the smell of burning as a plasma shot found something to ignite.

“Get behind the APCs.” Shouted Bradford. “Give them time to realise they've no targets to aim at and calm down a bit.”

Bradford helped her roll the second device behind the PD489 APC. They sat there, the device between them like a strange piece of modern art. It was odd to sit in silence, watching the occasional flash of light, as a blaster shot found a piece of rock. One found a bag of rubbish, instantly igniting the contents.

“I think we upset them.” She said.

“Their lunch will probably have been disturbed.” Said Bradford. “The second device can give them a mid-afternoon surprise. If I send Sequel to get more wheels, can you build two more ?”

“Yes, when do you need them for ?”

“Tonight, late tonight Camila.”

Like everyone else in his life, she found it almost impossible to say no to Bradford. He was just so good at that puppy left out in the rain look.

“Fine, I can do that. Once they're built I need a full night's sleep though.”

“That will be a problem.”

“Why ?”

“Because we're going to attack the bunker tonight.”

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“He'll think it's because you don't trust him.” Said Nina.

Vincent knew his wife was right, he had appointed his first born son as head of town security. He'd also let it be known that Luke was to be his successor, the next Reverend to rule The Ranch and every farm for several miles.

“I do trust him, but an event of this magnitude.... The people will expect to see me.”

He hugged his wife, mother of his five healthy children, two of them boys. He loved Nina and listened to her advice, but she was too emotionally attached to Luke. Trusting Luke was one thing, but his flock were scared and needed him.

"I'm going to look at the repairs, come with me if you want." He said.

"I've other things to do..... Don't reverse our son's orders."

"I will do my best not to."

His wife actually snorted at him, as he left their home. There has been Nina or her younger sister Andrea, girls from a respected family and both ready for marriage. Vincent had chosen Nina for her looks, but he sometimes wondered if Andrea might have been a better choice.

"I'll inspect the repairs to the wall first."

Nina had banned Ernesto from the house, saying she was fed up with his personal guard being there all day every day. Poor Ernesto now waited for him in a small purpose built lodge in front of the house. Ernesto didn't seem to mind, though Vincent increasingly wondered if plump little Andrea had been blessed with a better temperament than her older sister.

"The blue flash caused a lot of fear Reverend." Said Ernesto. "Some are calling it the Devil's fire."

"I will explain it to them in tonight's sermon. Energy weapons Ernesto, just like the ones we use, nothing more."

Devil's fire was worth remembering for his evening sermon, though it came with some risks. It would be all too easy to credit Satan with having weapons better than theirs.

There were a lot of people erecting sections of new fence, all protected by a multi-beam laser on the back of a truck. The rebuilding work was professional and well organised, just what he'd expected from Luke. Vincent saw nothing to criticise and would have simply shaken a few worried hands and returned home, if the second device hadn't been seen rolling down the hill.

"Don't just look at it ! Fire you fools, hit it !" He yelled.

A small target moving at speed over rough ground, it would have been an impossible target even if it wasn't bouncing after every bump in the ground. They did their best, though he hadn't expected them to hit it. Trying was the thing though, trying turned a vacant looking group of sheep into warriors.

"Please Reverend, you should get under cover." Said Ernesto.

"Nonsense, my son is still out in the open.... I'm staying where I am."

The device ran fast and steady for the last fifty feet, before hitting a lip on the edge of their defence trench. It bounced high, though he hadn't thought it would clear the perimeter fence. It did though, bouncing even higher as it clipped the top of the fence. Vincent had expected it to explode as it hit the guard tower, but again he was wrong. The strange device on wheels veered off to the left, before hitting the centre of the main square. There it exploded with the intense blue light many were calling Devil's fire.

"Ernesto, Get my son and Stephan. I don't care what they're doing, I want them here, now."

"Yes Reverend."

Vincent wasn't in a good position to see the main square, but he could see that the front third of the Town Hall was either blown apart or burning. His building, the Town Hall he'd had built with stone quarried over ten miles away. He had no idea who the enemy were, but he was now determined to kill them all. His son arrived in a mood of course, though that trick wasn't going to work today.

"Father, I was right in the middle....."

"I don't care, you and Stephan will now obey my orders and only my orders. Is that understood ?"

"Yes father."

“Yes Reverend.”

“Tonight we will attack the enemy, taking trucks up the back road they don’t know about. We’ll show them we know the local area far better than they do. We’ll load the best weapons we have on those trucks. Railguns, rocket launchers, multi-beam lasers. We will attack them without mercy.”

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