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THE LAZARUS VENDETTA

A COVERT-ONE NOVEL

PATRICK LARKIN

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SERIES CREATED BY

ROBERT LUDLUM

WRITTEN BY

PATRICK LARKIN

ST. MARTIN'S GRIFFIN NEW YORK

www.stmartins.com

ISBN 0-312-31679-8
EAN 978-0312-31679-2

First Edition: October 2004

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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THE LAZARUS VENDETTA

Prologue

Saturday, September 25

Near the Tuli River Valley, Zimbabwe

The last rays of the sun were gone, and thousands of stars shimmered weakly against a dark sky hig above a rugged, arid land. This region of Zimbabwe was dirt-poor, even by that troubled nation's roc bottom standards. There were almost no electric lights to illuminate the night, and there were fe paved roads connecting southern Matabeleland's isolated villages to the larger world beyond.

Twin headlights suddenly appeared in the darkness, briefly illuminating thickets of gnarled scru trees and scattered patches of thorn bushes and sparse grass. A battered Toyota pickup truck swaye along a worn dirt track, gears grinding as it bounced in and out of a series of deep ruts. Drawn by th flickering beams of light, swarms of insects flitted toward the pickup and spattered against its dus streaked windshield.

"*Merde!*" Gilles Ferrand swore softly, wrestling with the steering wheel. Frowning, the tal bearded Frenchman leaned forward, trying to see past the swirling cloud of dust and flying bugs. H thick glasses slipped down his nose. He took one hand off the wheel to push them back up and the swore again as the pickup nearly veered off the winding track.

"We should have left Bulawayo sooner," he grumbled to the slender gray-haired woman beside hin "This so-called road is bad enough in daylight. It is a nightmare now. I wish the plane had not been s late."

Susan Kendall shrugged. "If wishes were fishes, Gilles, we'd all be dead of mercury poisoning. O project requires the new seeds and tools we were sent, and when you serve the Mother, you mu accept inconveniences."

Ferrand grimaced, wishing for the thousandth time that his prim American colleague would sto lecturing him. Both of them were veteran activists in the worldwide Lazarus Movement, working save the Earth from the insane greed of unchecked global capitalism. There was no need for her treat him like a schoolboy.

The truck's high beams silhouetted a familiar rock outcropping next to the track. The Frenchma sighed in relief. They were close to their destination—a tiny settlement adopted three months ago b the Lazarus Movement. He didn't remember the village's original name. The first thing he an Kendall had done was rename it Kusasa, "Tomorrow" in the local Ndebele dialect. It was an apt nam or so they hoped. The people of Kusasa had agreed to the change and to accept the Movement's help returning to a natural and eco-friendly method of farming. Both activists believed their work he would lead a rebirth of wholly organic African agriculture—a rebirth rooted in absolute opposition the West's toxic pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and dangerous genetically modified crops. Th American woman was certain that her impassioned speeches had won over the village elders. Ferran more cynical by nature, suspected that the generous cash grants the Movement offered had carri

more weight. No matter, he thought, the ends in this case would amply justify the means.

He turned off the main track and drove slowly toward a little cluster of brightly painted huts, ti roofed shacks, and ramshackle cattle pens. Surrounded by small fields, Kusasa lay in a shallow vall edged by boulder-strewn hills and tall brush. He brought the truck to a stop and lightly tapped th horn.

No one came out to meet them.

Ferrand killed the engine but left the headlights on. He sat still for a moment, listening. The villag dogs were howling. He felt the hairs on the back of his neck rise.

Susan Kendall frowned. "Where is everyone?"

"I do not know." Ferrand slid cautiously out from behind the wheel. By now dozens of excited me women, and children should have been thronging around them—grinning and murmuring in glee at th sight of the bulging seed bags and brand-new shovels, rakes, and hoes piled high in the Toyota's carg bed. But nothing stirred among Kusasa's darkened huts.

"Hello?" the Frenchman called. He tried out his limited Ndebele. "*Litshone Njani?* Good evening?

The dogs only howled louder, baying at the night sky.

Ferrand shivered. He leaned back inside the pickup. "Something is very wrong here, Susan. Yo should make contact with our people. Now. As a precaution."

The gray-haired American woman stared at him for a moment, her eyes suddenly wide. Then sh nodded and climbed down out of the Toyota. Working swiftly, she set up the linked satellit phone/laptop computer they carried in the field. It allowed them to communicate with their hom office in Paris, though it was mainly used to upload photos and progress reports to the main Lazar Web site.

Ferrand watched her in silence. Most of the time he found Susan Kendall intensely annoying, b she had courage when it counted. Perhaps more courage than he himself possessed. He sighed an reached under the seat for the flashlight clipped there. After a moment's reflection, he slung the digital camera over his shoulder.

"What are you doing, Gilles?" she asked, already punching in the phone code for Paris.

"I am going to take a look around," he said stiffly.

"All right. But you should wait until I have a connection," Kendall told him. She held the satelli phone to her ear for a moment. Her thin-lipped mouth tightened. "They've already left the offic There's no answer."

Ferrand checked his watch. France was only an hour behind them, but it was the weekend. The were on their own. "Try the Web site," he suggested.

She nodded.

Ferrand forced himself to move. He squared his shoulders and walked slowly into the village. H swept his flashlight in a wide arc, probing the darkness ahead. A lizard scuttled away from the bean startling him. He muttered a soft curse and kept going.

Sweating now despite the cool night breeze, he came to the open space at the center of Kusas There was the village well. It was a favorite gathering place for young and old alike at the end of th day. He swept the flashlight across the hard-packed earth … and froze.

The people of Kusasa would not rejoice over the seeds and farm equipment he had brought ther They would not lead the rebirth of African agriculture. They were dead. All of them were dead.

The Frenchman stood frozen, his mind reeling in horror. There were corpses everywhere he looke
Dead men, women, and children lay in heaps across the clearing. Most of the bodies were intac
though twisted and misshapen by some terrible agony. Others seemed eerily hollow, almost as thoug
they had been partially eaten from the inside out. A few were reduced to nothing more than torn shre
of flesh and bone surrounded by congealed puddles of bloodred slime. Thousands of huge black fli
swarmed over the mutilated corpses, lazily feasting on the remains. Near the well, a small dog nuzzl
the contorted body of a young child, vainly trying to rouse its playmate.

Gilles Ferrand swallowed hard, fighting down a surge of bile and vomit. With trembling hands, h
set down his flashlight, took the digital camera off his shoulder, and began taking pictures. Someon
had to document this terrible slaughter. Someone had to warn the world of this massacre of th
innocents—of people whose only crime had been to side with the Lazarus Movement.

■

Four men lay motionless on one of the hills overlooking the village. They wore desert camoufla
fatigues and body armor. Night-vision goggles and binoculars gave them a clear view of eve
movement made below while audio pickups fed every sound into their headsets.

One of the observers studied a shielded monitor. He looked up. “They have a link to the satellit
And we’re tapped in with them.”

His leader, a giant auburn-haired man with bright green eyes, smiled thinly. “Good.” He leane
closer to get a better view of the screen. It showed a series of gruesome images—the pictures tak
only minutes before by Gilles Ferrand—slowly loading onto the Lazarus Web site.

The green-eyed man watched carefully. Then he nodded. “That’s enough. Cut their link.”

The observer complied, rapidly entering commands on a portable keypad. He tapped the enter ke
sending a set of coded instructions to the communications satellite high overhead. One second late
the digital pictures streaming up from Kusasa froze, flickered, and then vanished.

The green-eyed man glanced at the two men lying flat next to him. Both were armed with Heckl
& Koch PSG-1 sniper rifles designed for covert operations use. “Now kill them.”

He focused his night-vision binoculars on the two Lazarus Movement activists. The beard
Frenchman and the slender American woman were staring down at their satellite hookup in disbelief.

“Target acquired,” one of the snipers murmured. He squeezed the trigger. The 7.62mm round h
Ferrand in the forehead. The Frenchman toppled backward and slid to the ground, smearing blood an
brains down the side of the Toyota. “Target down.”

The second sniper fired an instant later. His bullet caught Susan Kendall high in the back. She fe
in a heap next to her colleague.

The tall green-eyed leader rose to his feet. More of his men, these wearing hazardous materia
suits, were already moving down the slope carrying an array of scientific equipment. He keyed h
throat mike, reporting through an encrypted satellite link, “This is Prime. Field One is complet
Evaluation, collection, and analysis proceeding as planned.” He eyed the two dead Lazarus activist
“SPARK has also been initiated … as ordered.”

PART ONE

Chapter One

Tuesday, October 12

Teller Institute for Advanced Technology, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan ("Jon") Smith, M.D., turned off Old Agua Fria Road and drove up to th Institute's main gate. He narrowed his eyes against the early-morning glare. Off on his left, sunlig was just spilling over the dazzling snowcapped peaks of the Sangre de Cristo range. It lit steep slop carpeted with gold-leafed aspens, towering firs, ponderosa pines, and oaks. Farther down, at the fo of the mountains, the shorter piñon pines, junipers, and clumps of sagebrush surrounding th Institute's thick sand-colored adobe walls were still cloaked in shadow.

Some of the protesters camped out along the road crawled out of their sleeping bags to watch his c go by. A handful waved handmade signs demanding STOP KILLER SCIENCE, NO TO NANOTECH, or LI LAZARUS LEAD. Most stayed put, unwilling to face the chilly October dawn. Santa Fe was at seve thousand feet and the nights were growing cold.

Smith felt a momentary twinge of sympathy for them. Even with the heater in his rental car goin he could feel the cold through his brown leather bomber jacket and sharply creased khakis.

At the gate, a gray-uniformed security guard waved him to a stop. Jon rolled down his window an handed over his U.S. Army ID for inspection. The photo on his identity card showed a fit man in h early forties—a man whose high cheekbones and smooth, dark hair gave him the look of a haugh Spanish cavalier. In person, the twinkle in Smith's dark blue eyes shattered the illusion of arrogance.

"Good morning, Colonel," said the guard, an ex–Army Ranger staff sergeant named Frank Dia After scrutinizing the ID, he leaned forward, peering through the car windows to make sure that Smi was alone. His right hand hovered warily near the 9mm Beretta pistol holstered at his side. The flap o the holster was unsnapped—freeing the Beretta for a quick draw if necessary.

Smith raised an eyebrow at that. Security at the Teller Institute was usually more relaxed, certainl not up to the level of the top-secret nuclear labs at nearby Los Alamos. But the president of the Unite States, Samuel Adams Castilla, was scheduled to visit the Institute in three days. And now a huge ant technology protest rally had been organized to coincide with his speech. The demonstrators outsi the gate this morning were just the first wave of thousands more who were expected to pour in fro all over the world. He jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "Are you catching flak from those peopl Frank?"

"Not much so far," Diaz admitted. He shrugged. "But we're keeping a close eye on them anywa This rally has the folks in Admin spooked. The FBI says there are some real hard-core troublemake heading this way—the kind who get their kicks tossing Molotov cocktails and breaking windows."

Smith frowned. Mass protests were a lure for anarchists with a taste for violence and proper destruction. Genoa, Seattle, Cancun, and half a dozen other cities around the world had already see

their streets turned into battlegrounds between masked rioters and the police.

Chewing that over, he sketched a rough salute to Diaz and drove toward the parking lot. Th prospect of being caught in a riot was not especially appealing. Not when he was in New Mexico o what was supposed to be a vacation.

Strike that, Smith told himself with a lopsided grin. Make that a *working* vacation. As a militar medical doctor and expert in molecular biology, he spent most of his time assigned to the U.S. Arm Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) at Fort Detrick, Maryland. H affiliation with the Teller Institute was only temporary.

The Pentagon's Office of Science and Technology had sent him to Santa Fe to observe and report o the work being done in the Institute's three nanotechnology labs. Researchers around the world wer locked in a fierce competition to develop practical and profitable nanotech applications. Some of th best were right here at Teller, including teams from the Institute itself, Harcourt Biosciences, an Nomura PharmaTech. Basically, Smith thought with satisfaction, the Defense Department had give him an all-expenses-paid ringside seat to scope out the century's most promising new technologies.

The work here was right up his alley. The word *nanotech* carried an incredibly wide range meanings. At its most basic, it meant the creation of artificial devices on the smallest of imaginab scales. A nanometer was just one-billionth of a meter, about ten times the size of an atom. Mak something ten nanometers across and you were still looking at a construct that was only one ten thousandth of the diameter of a single human hair. Nanotechnology was engineering on the molecula level, engineering that involved quantum physics, chemistry, biology, and supercomputing.

Popular science writers painted glowing word-pictures of robots only a few atoms across prowlin through the human body—curing diseases and repairing internal injuries. Others asked their readers imagine information storage units one-millionth the size of a grain of salt yet able to hold all huma knowledge. Or dust motes that were actually hypercapable atmosphere miners, drifting silent through polluted skies while scrubbing them clean.

Smith had seen enough during his weeks at the Teller Institute to know that a few of thos seemingly impossible imaginings were already hovering right on the edge of reality. He squeezed h car into a parking space between two behemoth SUVs. Their windshields were covered in fros evidence that the scientists or technicians who owned them had been in the labs all night. He nodde appreciatively. These were the guys who were working the real miracles, all on a diet of strong blac coffee, caffeinated soda, and sugar-laced vending machine snacks.

He got out of the rental car, zipping his jacket up against the brisk morning air. Then he took a dee breath, catching the faint smell of cooking fires and cannabis on the wind wafting across from th protest camp. More minivans, Volvo station wagons, chartered buses, and hybrid gas-electric car were arriving in a steady stream, turning off Interstate 25 and heading up the access road toward th Institute. He frowned. The promised multitudes were assembling.

Unfortunately, it was the potential dark side of nanotechnology that fed the terrified imaginations the activists and Lazarus Movement zealots gathering outside the chain-link fence. They we horrified by the idea of machines so small they could freely penetrate human cells and so powerf that they could reshape atomic structures. Radical civil libertarians warned about the dangers of "sp molecules" hovering unseen in every public and private space. Crazed conspiracy theorists fille Internet chat rooms with rumors of secret miniaturized killing machines. Others were afraid th runaway nanomachines would endlessly replicate themselves, dancing across the world like an endle parade of *Sorceror's Apprentice* enchanted brooms—finally devouring the Earth and everything on it

Jon Smith shrugged his shoulders. You could not match wild hyperbole with anything but tangibl results. Once most people got a good close look at the honest-to-God benefits of nanotechnology, the irrational fears should begin to subside. Or so he hoped. He spun sharply on his heel and strode towa the Institute's main entrance, eager to see what new wonders the men and women inside had cooke up overnight.

■

Two hundred meters outside the chain-link fence, Malachi MacNamara sat cross-legged on colorful Indian blanket laid out in the shade of a juniper tree. His pale blue eyes were open, but he s calmly, without moving. The Lazarus Movement followers camped close by were convinced that th lean, weather-beaten Canadian was meditating—restoring his mental and physical energies for th crucial struggle ahead. The retired Forest Service biologist from British Columbia had already wo their admiration by forcefully demanding "immediate action" to achieve the Movement's goals.

"The Earth is dying," he told them grimly. "She is drowning, crushed beneath a deluge of tox pesticides and pollution. Science will not save her. Technology will not save her. They are he enemies, the true source of horror and contagion. And we must act against them. Now. Not later. Nov While there is still time …"

MacNamara hid a small smile, remembering the sight of the glowing faces fired by his rhetoric. H had more talent as an orator or an evangelist than he ever would have imagined.

He observed the activity around him. He had carefully chosen this vantage point. It overlooked th large green canvas tent set up as a command center by the Lazarus Movement. A dozen of its to national and international activists were busy inside that tent—manning computers linked to i worldwide Web sites, registering new arrivals, making banners and signs, and coordinating plans fo the upcoming rally. Other groups in the TechStock coalition, the Sierra Club, Earth First!, and the lik had their own headquarters scattered throughout the sprawling camp, but MacNamara knew he was precisely the right place at precisely the right time.

The Movement was the real force behind this protest. The other environmental and anti-technolog organizations were only along for the ride, trying desperately to stem a steady decline in the numbers and influence. More and more of their most committed members were abandoning them join Lazarus, drawn by the clarity of the Movement's vision and by its courage in confronting th world's most powerful corporations and governments. Even the recent slaughter of its followers i Zimbabwe was acting as a rallying cry for Lazarus. Pictures of the massacre at Kusasa were bein offered as proof of just how much the "global corporate rulers" and their puppet governments fear the Movement and its message.

The craggy-faced Canadian sat up just a bit straighter.

Several tough-looking young men were heading toward the drab green tent, making their wa purposefully through the milling crowds. Each carried a long duffel bag slung over his shoulder. Eac moved with the wary grace of a predator.

One by one, they arrived at the tent and ducked inside.

"Well, well, well," Malachi MacNamara murmured to himself. His pale eyes gleamed. "How ver interesting."

Chapter Two

The White House, Washington, D.C.

The elegant eighteenth-century clock along one curved wall of the Oval Office softly chimed twel o'clock noon. Outside, ice-cold rain fell in sheets from a dark gray sky, spattering against the ta windows overlooking the South Lawn. Whatever the calendar said, the first portents of winter we closing in on the nation's capital.

Overhead lights glinted off President Samuel Adams Castilla's titanium-frame reading glasses as h paged through the top-secret Joint Intelligence Threat Assessment he had just been handed. His fac darkened. He looked across the big ranch-style pine table that served him as a desk. His voice w dangerously calm. "Let me make sure I understand you gentlemen correctly. Are you *seriously* proposing that I cancel my speech at the Teller Institute? Just three days before I'm scheduled t deliver it?"

"That is correct, Mr. President. To put it bluntly, the risks involved in your Santa Fe trip ar unacceptably high," David Hanson, the newly confirmed Director of Central Intelligence, said cooll He was echoed a moment later by Robert Zeller, the acting director of the FBI.

Castilla eyed both men briefly, but he kept his attention focused on Hanson. The head of the CI was the tougher and more formidable of the pair—despite the fact that he looked more like a bantam weight mild-mannered college professor from the 1950s, complete with the obligatory bow tie, tha he did a fire-breathing advocate of clandestine action and special operations.

Although his counterpart, the FBI's Bob Zeller, was a decent man, he was way out of his depth i Washington's sea of swirling political intrigue. Tall and broad-shouldered, Zeller looked good o television, but he should never have been moved up from his post as the senior U.S. attorney Atlanta. Not even on a temporary basis while the White House staff looked for a permane replacement. At least the ex-Navy linebacker and longtime federal prosecutor knew his ow weaknesses. He mostly kept his mouth shut in meetings and usually wound up backing whoever h thought carried the most clout.

Hanson was a completely different case. If anything, the Agency veteran was too adept at playin power politics. During his long tenure as chief of the CIA's Operations Directorate, he had built a firm base of support among the members of the House and Senate intelligence committees. A great man influential congressmen and senators believed that David Hanson walked on water. That gave him lot of maneuvering room, even room to buck the president who had just promoted him to run th whole CIA.

Castilla tapped the Threat Assessment with one blunt forefinger. "I see a whole lot of speculation i this document. What I do not see are hard facts." He read one sentence aloud. " 'Communication intercepts of a nonspecific but significant nature indicate that radical elements among th

demonstrators at Santa Fe may be planning violent action—either against the Teller Institute against the president himself.' "

He took off his reading glasses and looked up. "Care to put that in plain English, David?"

"We're picking up increased chatter, both over the Internet and in monitored phone conversation A number of troubling phrases crop up again and again, all in reference to the planned rally. There constant talk about 'the big event' or 'the action at Teller,' " the CIA chief said. "My people hav heard it overseas. So has the NSA. And the FBI is picking up the same undercurrents here at hom Correct, Bob?"

Zeller nodded gravely.

"*That's* what has your analysts in such a lather?" Castilla shook his head, plainly unimpresse "People e-mailing each other about a political protest?" He snorted. "Good God, any rally that mig draw thirty or forty thousand people all the way out to Santa Fe is a pretty damned big event! Ne Mexico is my home turf and I doubt half that many ever showed up for any speech I ever made."

"When members of the Sierra Club or the Wilderness Federation talk that way, I don't worry Hanson told him softly. "But even the simplest words can have very different meanings when they a used by certain dangerous groups and individuals. Deadly meanings."

"You're talking about these so-called 'radical elements'?"

"Yes, sir."

"And just who are these dangerous folks?"

"Most are allied in one way or another with the Lazarus Movement, Mr. President," Hanson sa carefully.

Castilla frowned. "This is an old, old song of yours, David."

The other man shrugged. "I'm aware of that, sir. But the truth doesn't become any less true ju because it's unpalatable. When viewed as a whole, our recent intelligence on the Lazarus Movement extremely alarming. The Movement is metastasizing and what was once a relatively peaceful politic and environmental alliance is rapidly altering itself into something far more secretive, dangerous, a deadly." He looked across the table at the president. "I know you've seen the relevant surveillance a communications intercept reports. And our analysis of them."

Castilla nodded slowly. The FBI, CIA, and other federal intelligence agencies kept tabs on a host groups and individuals. With the rise of global terrorism and the spread of chemical, biological, a nuclear weapons technology, no one in Washington wanted to take any more chances on bei blindsided by a previously unrecognized enemy.

"Then let me speak bluntly, sir," Hanson went on. "Our judgment is that the Lazarus Movement ha now decided to attain its objectives through violence and terrorism. Its rhetoric is increasing vicious, paranoid, and full of hatred aimed at those whom it considers enemies." The CIA chief sl another piece of paper across the pine table. "This is just one example."

Castilla put his glasses back on and read it in silence. His mouth curved down in disgust. The she was a glossy printout of a page from a Movement Web site, complete with grotesque thumbna photos of mangled and mutilated corpses. The banner headline across the top screamed: INNOCEN BUTCHERED AT KUSASA. The text between the pictures blamed the massacre of an entire village Zimbabwe on either corporate-funded "death squads" or "mercenaries armed by the U. government." It claimed the killings were part of a secret plan to destroy the Lazarus Movement efforts to revitalize organic African farming—lest they threaten the American monopoly

genetically modified crops and pesticides. The page ended by calling for the destruction of those wh would "destroy the Earth and all who love her."

The president dropped it back on the table. "What a load of horseshit."

"True." Hanson retrieved the printout and slid it back into his briefcase. "It is, however, highl effective horseshit—at least for its target audience."

"Have you sent a team into Zimbabwe to find out what really happened at this Kusasa place' Castilla asked.

The director of the CIA shook his head. "That would be extremely difficult, Mr. President. Withou permission from the government there, which is hostile to us, we'll have to go in covertly. Even the I doubt we'll find much. Zimbabwe is a total basket case. Those villagers could have been murdere by anyone—all the way from government troops on down to rampaging bandits."

"Hell," Castilla muttered. "And if our people get caught snooping there without permissio everyone will assume we *were* involved in this massacre and that we're only trying to cover o tracks."

"That is the problem, sir," Hanson agreed quietly. "But whatever really took place at Kusasa, on thing is quite clear: The leadership of the Lazarus Movement is using this incident to radicalize i followers, to prepare them for more direct and violent action against our allies and us."

"Damn, I hate to see this happening," Castilla growled. He leaned forward in his chair. "Don forget, I knew many of the men and women who founded Lazarus. They were respected environment activists, scientists, writers … even a couple of politicians. They wanted to save the Earth, to bring back to life. I disagreed with most of their agenda, but they were good people. Honorable people."

"And where are they now, sir?" the head of the CIA asked quietly. "There were nine origina founders of the Lazarus Movement. Six of them are dead, either from natural causes or in suspicious convenient accidents. The other three have vanished without a trace." He looked carefully at Castill "Including Jinjiro Nomura."

"Yes," the president said flatly.

He glanced at one of the photographs clustered on a corner of his desk. Taken during his first ter as governor of New Mexico, it showed him exchanging bows with a shorter and older Japanese ma Jinjiro Nomura. Nomura had been a prominent member of the Diet, Japan's parliament. The friendship, founded on a shared taste for single-malt Scotch and straight talk, had survived Nomura retirement from politics and his turn toward more strident environmental advocacy.

Twelve months ago, Jinjiro Nomura had disappeared while traveling to a Lazarus-sponsored rally Thailand. His son, Hideo, the chairman and chief executive officer of Nomura PharmaTech, ha begged for American help in finding his father. And Castilla had reacted quickly. For weeks a specia task force of CIA field officers had combed the streets and back alleys of Bangkok. The president ha even pressed the NSA's ultra-secret spy satellites into service in the hunt for his old friend. Bu nothing had ever turned up. No ransom demand. No dead body. Nothing. The last of the origin founders of the Lazarus Movement had vanished without a trace.

The photo stayed on Castilla's desk as a reminder of the limits of his power.

Castilla sighed and turned his gaze back to the two somber men seated in front of him. "Oka you've made your point. The leaders I knew and trusted either are dead or have dropped off the face the earth."

"Precisely, Mr. President."

"Which brings us again to the issue of just who *is* running the Lazarus Movement *now*," Castil said grimly. "Let's cut to the chase here, David. After Jinjiro disappeared, I approved your speci interagency task force on the Movement—despite my own misgivings. Are your people any closer identifying the current leadership?"

"Not much closer," Hanson admitted reluctantly. "Not even after months of intense work." H spread his hands. "We're fairly certain that ultimate power is vested in one man, a man who cal himself Lazarus—but we don't know his real name or what he looks like or where he operates from."

"That's not exactly satisfying," Castilla commented drily. "Maybe you should stop telling me wh you don't know and stick to what you do know." He looked the shorter man in the eye. "It might tak less time."

Hanson smiled dutifully. The smile stopped well short of his eyes. "We've devoted a huge amou of resources, both human and satellite, to the effort. So have MI6, the French DGSE, and several oth Western intelligence agencies, but over the past year the Lazarus Movement has deliberatel reconfigured itself to defeat our surveillance."

"Go on," Castilla said.

"The Movement has organized itself as a set of ever-tighter and more secure concentric circles Hanson told him. "Most of its supporters fall into the outer ring. They operate out in the open- attending meetings, organizing demonstrations, publishing newsletters, and working for variou Movement-sponsored projects around the world. They staff the various Movement offices around th world. But each level above that is smaller and more secretive. Few members of the upper echelo know one another's real names, or meet in person. Leadership communications are handled almo exclusively through the Internet, either by encrypted instant messaging … or by communiqués poste on any one of the several Lazarus Web sites."

"In other words, a classic cell structure," Castilla said. "Orders move freely down the chain, but n one outside the group can easily penetrate to the inner core."

Hanson nodded. "Correct. It's also the same structure adopted by any number of very nasty terrori groups over the years. Al-Qaeda. Islamic Jihad. Italy's Red Brigades. Japan's Red Army. Just to nam a few."

"And you haven't had any luck in gaining access to the top echelons?" Castilla asked.

The CIA chief shook his head. "No, sir. Nor have the Brits or the French or anyone else. We've a tried, without success. And one by one, we've lost our best existing sources inside Lazarus. Some hav resigned. Others have been expelled. A few have simply vanished and are presumed dead."

Castilla frowned. "People seem to have a habit of disappearing around this bunch."

"Yes, sir. A great many." The CIA director left that uncomfortable truth hanging in the air.

■

Fifteen minutes later, the Director of Central Intelligence strode briskly out of the White House an down the steps of the South Portico to a waiting black limousine. He slid into the rear seat, waite while a uniformed Secret Service officer closed the car door behind him, and then punched th intercom. "Take me back to Langley," he told his driver.

Hanson leaned back against the plush leather as the limousine accelerated smoothly down the driv and turned left onto Seventeenth Street. He looked at the stocky, square-jawed man sitting in the rea

facing jump seat across from him. “You’re very quiet this afternoon, Hal.”

“You pay me to catch or kill terrorists,” Hal Burke said. “Not to play courtier.”

Amusement flickered briefly in the CIA chief’s eyes. Burke was a senior officer on the Agency counterterrorism staff. Right now he was assigned to lead the special task force on the Lazar Movement. Twenty years of clandestine fieldwork had left him with a bullet scar down the right sid of his neck and a permanently cynical view of human nature. It was a view Hanson shared.

“Any luck?” Burke asked finally.

“None.”

“Shit.” Burke stared moodily out the limousine’s rain-streaked windows. “Kit Pierson’s going t throw a fit.”

Hanson nodded. Katherine Pierson was Burke’s FBI counterpart. The pair had worked closel together to prepare the intelligence assessment he and Zeller had just shown the president. “Castil wants us to push our investigation of the Movement as hard as possible, but he will not cancel his tr to the Teller Institute. Not without clearer evidence of a serious threat.”

Burke looked away from the window. His mouth was set in a thin, grim line. “What that reall means is that he doesn’t want *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* , and Fox News calling hi gutless.”

“Would you?”

“No,” Burke admitted.

“Then you have twenty-four hours, Hal,” the CIA chief said. “I need you and Kit Pierson to dig u something solid that I can take back to the White House. Otherwise, Sam Castilla is flying to Santa F to confront those protesters head-on. You know what this president is like.”

“He’s one stubborn son of a bitch,” Burke growled.

“Yes, he is.”

“So be it,” Burke said. He shrugged. “I just hope it doesn’t get him killed this time.”

Chapter Three

Teller Institute for Advanced Technology

Jon Smith took the wide, shallow steps to the Institute's upper floor two at a time. Running up an down its three main staircases was pretty much the only exercise he had time for now. The long day and occasional nights he spent in the various nanotechnology labs were cutting into his usual worko routine.

He reached the top and paused for a moment, pleased to note that both his breathing and his hea rate were perfectly normal. The sun slanting through the stairwell's narrow windows felt comfortabl warm on his shoulders. Smith glanced at his watch. The senior researcher for Harcourt Bioscienc had promised him "one seriously cool demonstration" of their most recent advances in five minutes.

Up here, the routine hum from below—phones ringing, keyboards clicking and clattering, an people talking—fell away to a cathedral-like hush. The Teller Institute kept its administrative office cafeteria, computer center, staff lounges, and science library on the first floor. The upper level wa reserved for the lab suites allotted to different research teams. Like its rivals from the Institute itse and Nomura PharmaTech, Harcourt had its facilities in the North Wing.

Smith turned right into a wide corridor that ran the whole length of the I-shaped building. Polishe earth brown floor tiles blended comfortably with off-white adobe walls. At regular intervals, *nicho* small niches with rounded tops, displayed paintings of famous scientists—Fermi, Newton, Feynma Drexler, Einstein, and others—commissioned from local artists. Between the *nichos* stood tall ceram vases filled with brilliant yellow chamisa and pale purple aster wildflowers. If you ignored the she size of this place, Smith thought, it looked just like the hall of a private Santa Fe home.

He came to the locked door outside the Harcourt lab and swiped his ID card through the adjace security station. The light on top flashed from red to green and the lock clicked open. His card was on of the relatively few coded for access to all restricted areas. Rival scientists and technicians were n permitted to stray into one another's territory. While trespassers were not shot, they were issue immediate one-way tickets out of Santa Fe. The Institute took its obligation to protect intellectu property rights very seriously.

Smith stepped through the door and immediately entered a very different world. Here the polishe wood and textured adobe of courtly old Santa Fe gave way to the gleaming metal and tough composi materials of the twenty-first century. The elegance of natural sunlight and recessed lightin surrendered to the glare of overhead fluorescent strip lights. These lights had a very high ultraviol component—just to kill surface germs. A small breeze tugged at his shirt and whispered through h dark hair. The nanotech laboratory suites were kept under positive pressure to minimize the risk o any airborne contaminants from the public areas of the building. Ultra-efficient particulate air— "ULPA"—filters fed in purified air at a constant temperature and humidity.

The Harcourt lab suite was arranged as a series of “clean rooms” of increasing rigor. This outer ri
was an office area, crammed full of desks and workstations piled high with reference books, chemic
and equipment catalogs, and paper printouts. Along the east wall, blinds were drawn across a floor-t
ceiling picture window, obscuring what would otherwise be a spectacular view of the Sangre de Cris
Mountains.

Farther inside the suite came a control and sample preparation area. Here were black-topped la
benches, computer consoles, the awkward bulk of two scanning tunneling electron microscopes, ar
the other equipment needed to oversee nanotech design and production processes.

The true “holy of holies” was the inner core: visible only through sealed observation windows o
the far wall. This was a chamber full of mirror-bright stainless steel tanks; mobile equipment ski
loaded with pumps, valves, and sensor devices; vertically mounted disk frames for osmotic filters; ar
stacked Lucite cylinders packed with various grades of purification gels, all connected with loopi
lengths of clear, silastic tubing.

Smith knew that the core could be reached only through a succession of air locks and gownin
rooms. Anyone working inside the production chamber had to wear fully sterile coveralls, gloves ar
boots, and an air-displacement breather helmet. He smiled wryly. If the Lazarus Movement activis
camped outside ever saw anyone wearing that alien-looking getup, it would confirm all their wor
fears about mad scientists toying with deadly toxins.

In truth, of course, the real situation was exactly the reverse. In the world of nanotechnolog
humans were the source of danger and contamination. A falling flake of skin, a hair follicle, th
wafted particles of moisture breathed out in casual conversation, and the shotgun blast of a sneeze a
could wreak havoc on the nanoscale, releasing oils, acids, alkalines, and enzymes that could poison th
manufacturing process. Humans were also a rich source of bacteria: fast-growing organisms th
would consume production broths, clog filters, and even attack the developing nanodevic
themselves.

Fortunately, most of the necessary work could be done remotely from outside the core and th
control and sample preparation chambers. Robotic manipulators, computer-controlled motorize
equipment skids, and other innovations greatly reduced the need for humans to enter the “clea
rooms.” The incredible level of automation in its lab suites was one of the Teller Institute’s mo
popular innovations, since it gave scientists and technicians far more freedom of movement than
other facilities.

Smith threaded through the maze of desks in the outer room, making his way toward Dr. Phil
Brinker, the senior scientist for Harcourt Biosciences. The tall, pale, rail-thin researcher had his bac
to the entrance, so intently studying the image relayed from a scanning electron microscope that h
didn’t catch Jon’s cat-quiet approach.

Brinker’s chief assistant, Dr. Ravi Parikh, was more alert. The shorter, darker molecular biologi
looked up suddenly. He opened his mouth to warn his boss, then closed it with a shy smile when Smi
winked at him and motioned for silence.

Jon stopped just two feet behind the two researchers and stood at ease.

“Damn, that looks nice, Ravi,” Brinker said, still peering at the image on the screen in front of hi
“Man, I bet our favorite DoD spook is gonna bow down before us when he sees this.”

This time Smith did not bother hiding his grin. Brinker always called him a spook—a spy. Th
Harcourt scientist meant it as a joke, a kind of running gag about Smith’s role as an observer for th

Pentagon, but Brinker had no clue as to just how close that was to the truth.

The fact was that Jon was more than just an Army officer and scientist. From time to time he toc on missions for Covert-One, a top-secret intelligence outfit reporting directly to the president. Cover One worked in the shadows, so far back in the shadows that no one in Congress or the offici military-intelligence bureaucracy even knew it existed. Fortunately, Jon's work here at the Institu was purely scientific in nature.

Smith leaned forward, looking right over the senior Harcourt scientist's shoulder. "So what is exactly that's going to make me worship the ground you walk on, Phil?"

Startled, Brinker jumped six inches in the air. "Jesus Christ!" He spun round. "Colonel, you pu that ghost act on me just one more time and I swear to God I'm gonna drop dead right in front of yo Then how would you feel?"

Smith laughed. "Sorry, I guess."

"Sure you would," Brinker grumbled. Then he brightened. "But since I'm not dead, despite yo best efforts, you can take a look at what Ravi and I have cooked up today. Feast your eyes on the no yet-patented Mark Two Brinker-Parikh nanophage, guaranteed to zap cancer cells, dangerous bacteri and other internal nasties … most of the time, anyway."

Smith moved closer and studied the hugely magnified black-and-white image on the monitor. showed a spherical semiconductor shell packed with an assortment of complex molecular structure A scale indicator on one side of the screen told him he was looking at an assembly that was just tw hundred nanometers in diameter.

Smith was already familiar with the Harcourt research team's general concept. Brinker and Parik and the others were focused on creating medical nanodevices—their "nanophages"—that would hu down and kill cancer cells and disease-causing bacteria. The interior of the sphere he was examinin should be loaded with the biochemical substances—phosphatidylserine and other costimulat molecules, for example—needed either to trick the target cells into committing suicide or to ma them for elimination by the body's own immune system.

Their Mark I design had failed in early animal testing because the nanophages themselves we destroyed by the immune system before they could do their work. Since then Jon knew the Harcou scientists had been evaluating different shell configurations and materials, trying hard to find combination that would be effectively invisible to the body's natural defenses. And for months th magic formula had eluded them.

He glanced up at Brinker. "This looks almost identical to your Mark One configuration. So wh have you changed?"

"Take a closer look at the shell coating," the blond-haired Harcourt scientist suggested.

Smith nodded and took over the microscope controls. He tapped the keypad gently, slowly zoomin in on a section of the outer shell. "Okay," he said. "It's bumpy, not smooth. There's a thin molecula coating of some kind." He frowned. "The structure of that coating looks hauntingly familiar … b where have I seen it before?"

"The basic idea came to Ravi here in a flash," the tall, blond-haired researcher explained. "And lik all great ideas it's incredibly simple and freaking obvious … at least after the fact." He shrugge "Think about one particularly bad little mother of a bacterium—resistant *staphylococcus aureus*. Ho does it hide from the immune system?"

"It coats its cell membranes in polysaccharides," Smith said promptly. He looked at the scree

again. “Oh, for Pete’s sake …”

Parikh nodded complacently. “Our Mark Twos are essentially sugar-coated. Just like all the be medicines.”

Smith whistled softly. “That is brilliant, guys. Absolutely brilliant!”

“With all due modesty, you are right about that,” Brinker admitted. He laid one hand on th monitor. “That beautiful Mark Two you see here should do the trick. In theory, anyway.”

“And in practice?” Smith asked.

Ravi Parikh pointed toward another high-resolution display—this one the size of a wide-scre television. It showed a double-walled glass box secured to a lab table in an adjoining clean roo “That is just what we are about to find out, Colonel. We have been working almost nonstop for th past thirty-six hours to produce enough of the new design nanophages for this test.”

Smith nodded. Nanodevices were not built one at a time with microscopic tweezers and drops subatomic glue. Instead, they were manufactured by the tens of millions or hundreds of millions even billions, using biochemical and enzymatic processes precisely controlled by means of pl temperature, and pressure. Different elements grew in different chemical solutions under differe conditions. You started in one tank, formed the basic structure, washed away the excess, and the moved your materials to a new chemical bath to grow the next part of the assembly. It require constant monitoring and absolutely precise timing.

The three men moved closer to the monitor. A dozen white mice occupied the clear double-walle container. Half of the mice were lethargic, riddled with lab-induced tumors and cancers. The other si a healthy control group, scampered here and there, looking for a way out. Numbered and color-code tags identified each mouse. Video cameras and a variety of other sensors surrounded the box, ready record every event once the experiment began.

Brinker pointed to a small metal canister attached to one end of the test chamber. “There they ar Jon. Fifty million Mark Two nanophages all set to go, plus or minus five million either way.” H turned to one of the lab techs hovering close by. “Have our little furry friends had their shots, Mike?”

The technician nodded. “Sure thing, Dr. Brinker. I did it myself just ten minutes ago. One good ja for each of them.”

“The nanophages go in inert,” Brinker explained. “Their internal ATP power cell only lasts so lon so we surround that section with a protective sheath.”

Smith understood the reason for that. ATP, adenosine triphosphate, was a molecule that provide energy for most metabolic processes. But ATP would begin releasing its energy as soon at it came i contact with liquid. And all living creatures were mostly liquid. “So the injection is a kick start?” H asked.

“That’s right,” Brinker confirmed. “We inject a unique chemical signal into each test subject. Onc a passive sensor on the nanophage detects that signal, the sheath opens, and the surrounding liqu activates the ATP. Our little machines light up and off they go on the hunt.”

“Then your sheath also acts as a fail-safe,” Smith realized. “Just in case any of the Mark Twos wi up where they aren’t supposed to be—say inside one of you, for example.”

“Exactly,” Brinker agreed. “No unique chemical signature … no nanophage activation.”

Parikh was less certain about that.

“There is a small risk,” the shorter molecular biologist warned. “There is always a certain error ra

in the nanophage build process."

"Which means sometimes the sheath doesn't form properly? Or the sensor is missing or set receive the wrong signal? Or maybe you wind up with the wrong biochemical substances stored insi the phage shell?"

"Stuff like that," Brinker said. "But the error percentage is very small. Ridiculously tiny. Hec almost nil." He shrugged. "Besides, these things are programmed to kill cancer cells and nas bacteria. Who really cares if a few strays go wandering around inside the wrong target for a couple minutes?"

Smith raised a skeptical eyebrow. Was Brinker serious? Low risk or not, the senior Harcou scientist's attitude seemed just a bit too cavalier. Good science was the art of taking infinite pains. did not mean writing off potential safety hazards, no matter how small.

The other man saw his expression and laughed. "Don't sweat it, Jon. I'm not crazy. Well, n completely, anyway. We keep our nanophages on a damned tight leash. They're well and trul contained. Besides, I've got Ravi here to keep me on the straight and narrow. Okay?"

Smith nodded. "Just checking, Phil. Chalk it up to my suspicious spook-like nature."

Brinker shot him a quick, wry smile. Then he glanced at the technicians standing by at variou consoles and monitors. "Everybody set?"

One by one, they each gave him a thumbs-up.

"Right," Brinker said. His eyes were bright and excited. "Mark Two nanophage live subject tri numero uno. On my mark … three, two, one … now!"

The metal canister hissed.

"Nanophages released," one of the technicians murmured, watching a readout from the canister.

For several minutes nothing seemed to happen. The healthy mice moved here and there, seeming at random. The sick mice stayed put.

"ATP power cycle complete," another technician announced at last. "Nanophage life span complet Live subject trial complete."

Brinker breathed out. He glanced up at Smith in triumph. "There we go, Colonel. Now we' anesthetize our furry friends, open them up, and see what percentage of their various cancers we ju nailed. Me, I'm betting we're talking close to one hundred percent."

Ravi Parikh was still watching the mice. He frowned. "I think we may have a runaway, Phil," h said quietly. "Take a look at test subject five."

Smith bent down to get a closer view. Mouse Five was one of the healthy ones, a member of th control group. It was moving erratically, repeatedly stumbling headlong into its fellows, mou opening and closing rapidly. Suddenly it fell on its side, writhed in apparent agony for a few secon —and then lay still.

"Crap," Brinker said, staring blankly at the dead mouse. "That's sure as hell not supposed happen."

Jon Smith frowned, suddenly resolving to recheck Harcourt Bioscience's containment and safe procedures. They had better be as thorough as Parikh and Brinker claimed, so that whatever had ju killed a perfectly healthy mouse stayed locked away inside this lab.

■