

## Final Sanctuary Gaulon – Chapter Four

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## Chapter Four

There was a time when my life was a lot less complicated. The world made sense and in some ways I was a happier person. All it lacked was purpose. RavenCroft gave me that and a whole lot more.

Growing up wasn't easy. To say I wasn't the smartest kid in school was an understatement. To be brutally honest, I was three drinks away from being the village idiot. I came from a family hovering just above the poverty line, barely able to afford the rent. My father was a drunken wife beater and my mother, well, she did her best to keep the family together, no matter how bad things got. My father would gamble and drink away all our money and then come back drunk. I don't know what was worse the verbal abuse or the physical. She'd take it too, I never understood why. The really fragged up part about it was that she'd blame herself for it.

My brothers Jeff and Zach moved out of home when I turned twelve. For the first few years they tried to help a little by transferring funds into my mother's account, but as the years passed the amount of money dwindled till they stopped sending money altogether. Four months after my sixteenth birthday, we lost my father. The old man had been murdered by a loan shark who got a little too impatient waiting to be paid off. I joined the army and for a time things went okay. We made enough money so that the family could make regular payments to that ever so friendly loan shark and my mother started to get her life back on track. Unfortunately I wasn't intelligent enough to get promoted, much less give orders, not until RavenCroft came along. I can only wonder what would have happened to us if it hadn't been for the company, even if salvation came at a price.

Two years into serving with the army I got approached by a man named Graeves. He offered me the chance to command my own special operations team; on the condition that I leave the military and come work for RavenCroft. As part of the offer I would have to participate in a special project. Reluctantly I agreed. I became a patient in project Lazarus, which according to Graeves, aimed to genetically augment the human brain. The idea was to boost a person's I.Q. as well as imprinting memories into the test subject. The process was experimental and involved enhancing the higher brain functions through gene therapy. Genetic engineering of

the brain remained one the few sciences that was frowned upon due to the high death rate; but the lab boys at RavenCroft assured me they had refined the technology. Risks they said were now comparable to laser eye surgery. They told me projects such as this had been done behind closed doors for years. Looking back I can't say for sure if what they said was true, but back then it was an easy pill for me to swallow.

The operation was barely invasive. They poked and prodded my arms with a bunch of needles over the course of two weeks. Not the standard sized needles either, these ones were over-sized and much more painful. After each session I noticed a distinct improvement in my cognitive thinking. I had thought that the process would end with the needles but I was wrong. The final stage of the process entailed me being strapped in an operating chair. The chair looked like the kind you see at a dentist's office, only this one had leg and arm restraints. Once I was strapped in, a large needle on a robotic arm injected a general anaesthetic and I passed out moments later. When I awoke I felt a blinding burst of jarring pain as an assortment of concepts, ideas and thoughts rushed through my mind. It was all a jumble of scattered fragments, there was so much information for my brain to process that I blacked out.

When I awoke the second time I wasn't quite the same person. The information overload had settled down and I was able to focus my thoughts. The memory imprinting didn't quite work in the way I had anticipated. I acquired only the technical knowledge and information but nothing to do with places events or people. I could pilot helicopters without remembering a single lesson. I understood various forms of martial arts but had no memories of a sensei and basic engineering to name just a few examples. The information wasn't just restricted to combat either. I knew all sorts of random facts. I had knowledge on cooking, art and even golf, a sport I've always found about as enjoyable as a threesome with two overweight, hairy truck drivers.

After I'd undergone some psych assessments, Graeves had me transferred to a team of privately owned special operatives known as The Immortals. Like the rest of the team I was trained to use a biosuit - think of it as a specially engineered living combat suit. Mine was designed to generate electrical currents which can then be rerouted as a weapon. On top of that it can create an Electro-Magnetic Pulse capable of knocking out any electrical system within a limited area. When I first joined the team, it's previous commanding officer had been killed off duty, the circumstances were pretty sketchy but allegedly he'd been in debt to an organised crime syndicate for a long time and finally they'd caught up with him.

Our latest mission had gone straight to hell. The team had been sent in to capture a scientist and acquire his research. It was hoped that he was close to finding a cure for what is commonly referred to as the Death Plague. The problem was that the good doctor had defected from our side to that of our leading competitor the one and only, GenFourier. The corporation most likely to be run by Satan and the number one company most likely to finish wiping out what's left of the human race. The bastards at GenFourier had set up a town several kilometers away from the doctor's research facility and had been randomly abducting people for experimentation. We had managed to retrieve one of their dropships that had arrived to clean-up their operation and evacuate their staff. My team had gone in and found

the good doctor, unfortunately he had been infected after his facility had been attacked by the Infected. Eidolon and KillSwitch had managed to escape while Vulcan covered them. Vulcan barely made it out alive, in fact he'd probably be dead if he hadn't had help from some teenage runt he teamed up with. Graeves has heard all of this, everything except for what the frag I was up to when the shit hit the fan.

The debriefing had been going well and Malcolm's statement hadn't contradicted my mission report. We were all in the clear assuming of course that Graeves believed us. He'd been taking a lot of notes during the debriefing. Man, I'd have given a week's salary to find out what he'd been writing down.

"Mr. Parker, would you be so kind as to tell us what happened to you after you sent the rest of your team to the research facility?" asked Graeves.

"Sure I can do that. Hell, I'll even throw in a free set of steak knives. It's all yours if you give me my pay cheque in the next fifteen minutes" I replied. Liam struggled not to laugh.

"Just get on with it," snarled Graeves impatiently.

"I guess my story begins after Eidolon, Vulcan and KillSwitch boarded the GenFourier dropship," I said as I started to recall the events.

As soon as my team had left I checked the bodies of the men we'd neutralized. I took a security card from one of the men. I entered the facility via the main entrance using the card.

I was determined to find out why GenFourier was in the town and whether they had any connections with Doctor Addler. The building looked like it had been at one stage a four star hotel. It was three stores high. The doors were made of grey marble and white pillars throughout the lobby. There was an elevator at the far end of the hallway, a snazzy staircase with flowing carpet, a counter which had been turned into reception, the cheesy GF insignia on the wall and a bellboy named Chet. Okay, no bellboy but it did have a water fountain with two angels standing in the middle.

Suddenly a bullet streaked through the top of my hair narrowly missing my skull. Adrenaline started pumping through my veins and I could feel my heart beating wildly. I turned to my left and saw two GenFourier troops moving into position behind a leather couch, one armed with a rifle and the other with a pistol. I ran behind the statues returning fire as I made my move. Bullets whizzed past me as I ran, one slicing a hole through my coat but only hitting material. I didn't expect to hit them with my shots, just to keep them distracted.

Once I was behind the statues they took aim and shot back at me whilst I reloaded. Their bullets smashed through the statue with ease. Dust and debris fell down on me as I reloaded.

I was going to get one chance to take them out. Once it was their turn to reload I ducked out from behind the statues and opened fire with several shots. I hit the troop with the pistol in the shoulder and the other in the ribs. I got up and ran towards them firing as fast as I could.

I only stopped shooting after I had unloaded a full clip into the two men and was satisfied that the danger had passed.

I scanned the room for other hostiles. The room was clear save for a very scared brunette cowering underneath the reception desk. I walked over.

"Get up, I'm not going to hurt you," I said as I lowered my gun.

She slowly crawled out from under her desk, sobbing and shaking as she did. The woman was somewhere between her late twenties to mid thirties and had a body to die for. She had shoulder length black hair, a slim build, legs that went on forever and was dressed in a black skirt and top. Under different circumstances I might have been buying her a drink.

"How many people do you have left in this building?" I asked as she stood up.

She looked terrified though I could hardly blame her, "If I help you how do I know you won't kill me after I've told you all that I know?" she asked shaking.

"Lady, in just under an hour this town's going to be swarming with the Infected. When that happens anyone left here's gonna have a really bad day. You want to live I suggest you do as I say and maybe, I'll let you hitch a ride out of here. Or I can leave you as a tasty snack. I bet you could feed a family of Infected for a whole week," I replied.

The woman nodded. "This job's not worth dying over. There's still a few troops left in the building including Trevor Clifton. He's the regional director. If you're looking for information he's your man. He's the one that carries a silver suitcase with him everywhere," replied the secretary.

"Now that's more like it. What's your name?" I asked her.

"Lucy, Lucy Grey," she told me.

"Call me Lazarus. Where do I find this Trevor Clifton?" I asked after completing my introduction.

"Third floor," said Lucy her nerves having seemingly calmed down.

"Thanks for the heads up," I said as I generated an EM Pulse around me, thus frying any communication devices which Lucy could use after I left.

I walked over to the elevator, knowing damn well that it was probably compromised. Instead I placed two timed explosives on the sides of the elevator and sent it up to the third floor. After it went up, I waited five seconds, then detonated the charges, taking the lift out of commission and anyone who was stupid enough to go inside and investigate. There was a loud explosion, followed by a few screams and the sound of debris falling down the elevator shaft. After which I took to the stairs.

I stepped onto the second floor to find that it had been converted into a series of corporate work stations. Nearly all of the walls segregating rooms had been knocked down so that the hotel rooms could be converted into cubicles, complete with computers, stacks of paperwork and other office junk. I scanned across the room looking for hostiles. It seemed safe so I walked inside to take a closer look.

The floor had obviously been evacuated in a hurry. Cups of half empty coffee were left on some of the tables, and there were hundreds of shredded documents. At the far end of the floor I could see the offices and quietly sprinted towards them.

Suddenly someone leapt onto my back from behind and tried to tackle me. The joke was on him. I ran an electrical current through my biosuit. I snapped my head back, hitting him in the face and rammed my elbow into his stomach. I turned around and grabbed him by the neck and thrust him against a fire hydrant knocking him out. I was about to neutralise him when another trooper opened fire and I dived back into the hallway to get out of the firing line.

A couple of his bullets hit me in the ribs. I was sore, but the biosuit absorbed most of the impact. I grabbed one of my revolvers and returned fire but my opponent took cover behind a desk. Using my biosuit I charged up my gun with plasma. It's a little trick that's saved my ass on more than one occasion. Charged bullets travel straighter and pack a much heavier punch. I fired off five rounds into the desk, one of which hit him in the leg. He staggered out firing his rifle as I ran across the room taking cover behind a filing cabinet as I returned fire. When he lined me up with what could easily have been a killshot, he fired as my last shot hit his gun blowing apart the nozzle. His gun backfired, shrapnel ripped through his forehead and neck. I stepped out from behind the filing cabinet and finished him off. His partner who was regaining consciousness reached for his gun but I fired first finishing the job.

I ran down to the end of the floor where the management offices were located and kicked down one of the doors. I opened up the filing cabinet only to find all the files gone, the desk was empty and the computer had been trashed. I checked the next two rooms only to find them in much the same condition. I walked over to the nearest window and opened it. I stuck my head out and looked up. There was a window on the third floor directly above but nothing I could use to reach it. I continued to scan the floor while I planned my next move. I located an air vent inside one of the offices. The vent travelled between the second and third floors. I opened it up and set a canister of tear gas inside. I quickly sealed off the vent. In addition I set up a trip wire on the stairs just to make things a little more fun. I stepped back around the corner and waited. I heard people upstairs coughing and choking, followed by footsteps rushing down the stairs. They hit the trip wire. I stepped out from the corridor and trained my twin revolvers on the three men. There was a middle aged man with short blonde hair, slight pot belly and dressed in a suit. He was accompanied by two GenFourier Troops.

"Toss the guns down the stairs," I ordered and the two troops complied.

"So you must be Clifton," I said nodding at the man in the suit.

"We're not telling you anything," shouted one of the troops. I fired two shots, one into the leg of each troop.

"Shit! You fragging asshole..." protested one of them. I shot him in his other leg.

"Anything else to add? What about you?" I asked pointing my gun at the other troop. He quickly shook his head.

I gazed at the man in the suit. "Throw up some I.D.," I ordered as I placed one of my guns back in its holster. The man tossed up his wallet. I flicked through it and pulled out his ident card. Everything checked out.

"Get the frag up!" I shouted. He complied and I threw him down the stairs. I followed him down and picked him off the ground. I checked him for weapons. He was clean.

"Your suitcase. open it... now!" I ordered.

Trevor looked at me with disdain. "Open it yourself," he grunted before spitting in my face.

I punched my fist into his stomach. "I'm sorry. The correct answer was, no problem sir. Which means you lose twenty points. I'm running out of patience. Open the fragging suitcase or I get really nasty," I warned.

"Go frag yourself," he replied as he regained his composure.

I opened his wallet to a picture of his wife and teenage daughter. "This your family? Think I'll pay them a visit. Tell them of your passing and how your stubbornness led to your death and theirs. If I'm feeling charitable, they'll die quickly, if not... I could drag their suffering out for hours... even days."

Trevor undid the manual lock and flicked it open. A computer was built into the suitcase much like a laptop. He flicked on the power switch and a timer reading a little over eleven hours was ticking down.

"That counter is a timelock. You won't be able to open it until it reaches zero. After that, to login you'll need the computer to scan either my living brain or that of a GenFourier board member. If you want what's on that computer you take me with you, and you stay the frag away from my family," he said as he tried not to tremble.

"Well, now you've gone and offended me. I was hoping you'd invite me down for a Sunday roast. What have you got on that computer? Give me a sales pitch, after all I'd hate to have to drag you all the way out only to find that it's just got your kid's homework on it."

A sinister grin crossed Trevor's face. "Since you asked, this computer holds in it all the dirty little secrets I've dug up on the company. A man has to protect his interests. Secrets are

power and the contents of this suitcase are filled with them. Face it I've got you by the balls, you take that suitcase without me and it's useless," he said speaking in a raspy voice as he closed the suitcase.

I considered his proposition for a moment. I clenched my fist and punched him in the stomach again.

"Sorry about that. You know how it is, old habits die hard. Tell you what. You let me know what you folks have been up to in Ragnus and I'll take you out of here," I replied feeling proud to have wiped that grin of his face.

"Alright, I'll play ball... for now. We knew that The Infected have certain genetic traits that give them an advantage on the battlefield. So we decided was we needed to recode the virus. Create a strand that gives the subject all of the positive traits but none of the bullshit. Think about it; faster, stronger healthier human beings! The possibilities are endless," he said his eyes lighting up with delight.

"You sound like a fragging commercial. Let me get this straight; you set up a town filled with hillbilly hicks and when you needed a guinea pig, you'd send your boys to grab a couple of chumps, expose them to altered strands of the virus and then see what happens. Nice plan! Suppose one of these viral strains had broken containment? You fragheads were running the risk of releasing an even deadlier strain," I snapped feeling the urge to punch him again.

"We took every possible precaution to prevent a containment breach. I made certain of that myself," Trevor replied.

"So how far did you get with this pet project of yours? And what would you have done with this new strain of the virus?" I asked.

"Sorry, that information's classified. You got the down payment, you don't get the rest till I get to safety. So we done here?" asked Trevor.

"For the moment," I replied as we started back down the stairs.

When we got back down to the lobby, I could hear gunfire from outside. I rushed back over to Lucy who was sitting behind her desk watching a security monitor.

"What the frag's going on out there?" I asked her.

"It's ...it's the Infected, they've broken through into the town. By the end of the hour they'll be no one left alive. I never should have taken this assignment," she cried hysterically.

"She's right. We need weapons. If we're gonna get out of here. We need the means to defend ourselves," argued Trevor as he walked over to bodies of the fallen GenFourier troops, most likely looking for a gun he could use.

I lined up my revolver with his crotch. "Wouldn't try that if I was you" I said as Trevor backed off.

I turned to Lucy "Do you have any experience with semi-automatic rifles?"

"Just the basics. They gave us a brief run-down when I joined the company. Never thought I'd actually need to use one," I walked over to a GenFourier troop body and pried his gun free.

"You're seriously going to give that bitch a gun and leave me unarmed? " stammered Trevor.

"Yep," I replied as I tossed her the gun. "The ammunition clips slot into the compartment on the bottom. If you see someone who's Infected don't hesitate, pull the trigger and don't stop until you're certain the target's dead," I explained.

"We're going to take one of the vans outside and rescue as many of the survivors as we can. I get the slightest hint that either of you are planning on moving against me and I'll use the two of you for target practice," I added as I stepped outside and walked to the parking lot followed by Trevor and Lucy.

The sun had set in Ragnus, but there was still plenty of light from street lamps on the street. It wasn't so much what we saw that disturbed us but rather what we heard. The terrified screams of people outside the complex seemed to come from all directions. If I listened more carefully I could hear the chilling sound of the Infected gnawing on human flesh. "Span out and search for a van," I ordered as I scanned the parking lot.

The majority of vehicles in the parking lot were employee cars which would be of limited use. I carefully moved through the parking lot. I noticed two Infected climbing through the hole in the wall which Vulcan had made earlier. Had to neutralise them before they saw us or signaled more Infected. I attached a silencer to one of my revolvers and carefully lined up my shot. I fired the first shot hitting one of them in the forehead. The other Infected spotted me and ran back the way he came. I fired three shots after him but only succeeded in hitting his arm. I knew what would come next.

I ran back to the parking lot frantically and spotted a black minivan ideal for our needs. That was when I heard the sound of the assault rifle going off. Had to be Lucy. I ran over to the van. Smashed in the window with my gun and unlocked the door. I climbed inside and hot-wired the engine. I backed out and headed towards the sound of the gun fire. Four Infected were heading through the gap in the wall including the one who I had previously shot in the arm. It wouldn't be long before we were overrun. I screeched on the brakes and swerved around the corner. I spotted Trevor and Lucy. There were about a dozen Infected on this side of the parking Lot. They'd broken in through the main entrance. I turned the van around and climbed into the back. I opened the back doors and started firing with both revolvers.

"Get in!" I shouted as I jumped down from the van to lay down some cover fire. Trevor was the first one in, his face dripping with sweat.

"About fragging time you showed up. What were you waiting for an engraved invitation?" snarled Trevor as he climbed into the back of the van.

"Just shut up and stay in there!" I shouted as I ran over to Lucy.

She was firing the gun like a pro. I watched her movements intently, she would fire short bursts at one group and then scan for the next target closest to her. When I saw how she held the gun I was mesmerised watching her movements. For a moment time seemed to slow down. I could see the bullets passing out the barrel of the gun as the casing broke away.

I felt a disorientating flash of light. My surroundings and perceptions altered around me. Blinding fragments of light and sound flashed through my mind. I saw things that I'd never experienced. The flash was brief yet vivid like a dream. I was at a military training camp somewhere in the middle east. I remember hot wind and dry heat. Most of the finer details are gone now like a dream upon waking. There was a battle hardened woman training a group of recruits how to fire assault rifles. Specifically in hitting large groups of enemy targets. She fired the gun at straw dummies bunched into groups. Her tactic was to fire short bursts at a single group before moving to the next. The memory melted away in bright light and I was back in Ragnus. I blinked for a moment getting my bearings.

Graeves' raised an eyebrow "Have you had anything like this happen before?" he asked.

I thought back over the last two years and my time with the Immortals. "Nope, never. I've had the occasional feeling of Deja-vu but nothing like this. Any thoughts on what it means?" I asked.

Graeves looked up at me "It's probably nothing. If it persists we'll have Doctor Fisk look into it," he said looking genuinely concerned. "Continue with your report," he added.

What I told Graeves next is a lie, in fact the majority of what I tell him next is a complete fabrication. One that I hope he bought. I tell him that I shot Lucy and left her for dead. She clearly was more than just a secretary and I didn't have time to question her. I got back to the van only to find that one of the Infected had killed Trevor. I killed the Infected and drove the van back to the extraction point. When I arrived back at the Valkyrie I prepped it for launch. When the rest of my team arrived in the dropship we headed back to RavenCroft. Picking up Vulcan along the way. About an hour into the return flight we ditched the GenFourier ship and transferred everyone to the Valkyrie. I fried the dropship with a few thousand volts of electricity, making it look like the ship went down in one of the electrical storms. That's what I told Graeves at least. It's all very tidy and it's what the asshole wants to hear. Unfortunately for him the majority of the story is about as accurate as a book on quantum theory written by a three year old.

"So what you're saying is that you decided against the option of evacuating refugees and that

you let the people of that town be slaughtered?" asked Graeves with a hint of skepticism in his eyes.

"By the time the dropship headed back into town the attack was well under way. There wasn't much in the way of people left to save. Besides if we let people know that we had two ships at our disposal, we'd run the risk of getting swamped with people trying to get on board. We had a job to do and it didn't involve organising an evacuation," I replied.

"Very well then. I believe I have everything I need. I'm sure you'll be interested to know that we are in the process of decoding Addler's research. It will take us time to crack his encryption algorithm but we'll get there. I imagine the contents of Clifton's computer will prove just as valuable. In the meantime you've all earned yourselves some rest. I'll contact you in the next few days for your next assignment. You're all dismissed."

The worst part of the mission wasn't the combat, it wasn't the killing and it wasn't the fear of not knowing whether we'd make it out alive. When you're a member of The Immortals, that's just another day on the job. The worst part of the mission was the uncertainty we felt as to whether our deception would come back later to bite us in the ass. Which brings me back to what really happened...

I didn't kill Lucy after I came out of my memory flash. The temptation was there but I knew I might need her later. One of the Infecteds was moving up on her slowly from behind. His body had withered away from malnutrition his ribs and bones jutted out the skin barely seeming to cover them. His clothing, a chequered shirt and jeans, had been reduced to rags and he limped from a wound on his left leg which he dragged along the ground. He rapidly slouched towards Lucy trying to get the jump on her. I fired my revolver through the heart of the Infected.

"Nice shooting. Did Chuck teach you to fire a gun like that?" I asked trying to decide whether or not to take her with me.

"Beginner's luck I guess. Thanks for the save" she answered.

"Don't mention it.. We're moving out," I shouted as I lobbed a grenade at a car near a group of infecteds. As the car exploded we ran back to the Van.

I scrambled to the drivers seat only to find that the engine had stalled. I quickly tried to hot wire the engine again. We could hear the Infected running up to the van smashing at the windows trying to get in.

"What the frag's taking you so long!" shouted Lucy before shooting at the Infected at the back of the van. The engine sprung to life and I hit the accelerator. Lucy fell back as the van sped off and I swerved around to the front gate. We rammed straight through a crossing barrier on our way out. It was chaos outside with the Infected rampaging through the streets.

We'd barely driven outside the complex when we saw an elder man have his legs torn off by two of the infectees. Lucy climbed halfway out the van and took aim and fired a short burst at the Infected and the old man as we drove past. Easy kills.

As we moved further into the town we could see that the streets were in total chaos. It was impossible to get an exact count on the number of Infectees rampaging through the town but I'd say there were dozens. If not hundreds tearing the town to pieces. There were dead bodies scattered everywhere. Whilst others were being eaten alive. The Infected were everywhere. The people of Ragnus didn't have a chance. I wanted to save as many people as possible but we were too late. My hope of mounting a rescue operation had gone down the toilet. My focus now had to be on getting Trevor's suitcase back to The Vault. I held my revolver out the side of the window taking pot-shots at any Infected that came within range. We could hear the sound of gunshots from various parts of the town, mixed with screams of pain and cries for help. Some of the buildings had caught fire. There was also the smell of burnt flesh in the air, body parts littering the ground and pools of blood.

As we reached the outskirts of town we hit a major problem. About thirty Infected stood blocking off our path. I stopped the van expecting them to run towards us, but instead they just stood there motionless. Their sole purpose seemed to be to stop us from leaving.

"What the hell do we do now?!" asked Trevor as he gazed out the window.

I put the van into reverse and hooked a left turn at a junction just before the blockade of Infectees. They held their ground much to my relief. This new road was narrower but not devoid of the Infected. Lucy climbed halfway out the window to get a clean shot at them before mowing them down.

"You two know this town better than me. Are there any other roads leading out of town?" I asked.

Lucy slid back into the van before answering. "Take the next right turn and then a left at the second junction. I know a way out."

I followed Lucy's directions. Until the van came out on a poorly lit dusty road which seemed to be taking us further and further away from the Valkyrie.

"Hey stop the van! Turn it around, there's nothing out here except for the abandoned gold mine!" shouted Trevor.

Lucy turned to me and placed her hand on my shoulder "Don't listen to him Lazarus! For all we know the company could have some troops stationed somewhere nearby. He could lead us into an ambush. There's a narrow entrance into the forest further up ahead. I go there all the time."

One of them was lying through their teeth, possibly both. One thought struck me though, an old abandoned mine could easily be used to plot an ambush or alternatively it could be used

as a potential hiding place for townspeople escaping from the Infected.

My eyes caught a signpost warning of an unsafe mine up ahead. I lifted my gun to Lucy's head and hit the breaks. "Get out," I said.

"About bloody time," chimed Trevor.

"You too Trevor," I added as the van came to a complete stop.

"You're making a mistake," butted in Lucy.

"I don't think so. Now get out!" I shouted to Lucy. Slowly she complied and stepped to the side of the road. I kept my revolver trained on her head and snatched her rifle with my free hand. I stepped out of the van followed by Trevor clutching tightly onto his suitcase. I was about to start questioning Lucy when a group of Infecteds scrambled out from some bushes on the side of the road.

"I am so going to regret this," I replied as I tossed Lucy her rifle. She opened fire immediately taking out the first three. I finished off the remaining two then Lucy spun around to face me.

"Didn't your mother ever tell you not to give guns to strangers?" She said sarcastically as she raised the rifle to my head.

Before she could say anything else I returned the favour and targeted her, aiming my gun directly at her forehead.

"Drop it and turn around" I ordered.

"Now this is what I call a show," said Trevor gleefully.

"Shut up!" I and Lucy shouted back simultaneously.

"Oh Lazarus, we could have been great together," she said as her finger tightened around the trigger.

I lined up my revolver making sure I could take her out with a single bullet. "Figured you were a little too good with that rifle to be just a secretary. I take it you're after that suitcase," I replied as I pieced it all together.

"I've got to thank you Lazarus. I couldn't have done this without you," she said smiling.

"And you still need me. I'm the only person who can fly you out of here and Trevor's the only person who can open the case," I replied.

Lucy rolled her eyes "Trevor's a fragging idiot," she said before being interrupted by him.

"What did you call me!" he grunted.

"I've been playing you since day one. I used your computer to hack into classified GenFourier files. I've got dozens of files hidden on your hard drive, but guess what? The company traced me yesterday. They weren't coming to save you."

"You bitch. You set me up!" shouted Trevor his face red with anger.

"Guilty as charged. Now give me the suitcase," replied Lucy grinning like a schoolgirl possessed by the devil.

"Don't do this Lucy. We can still get out of this mess together," I replied. Knowing exactly what was coming and what I would have to do.

Lucy looked me firmly in the eyes. "You drop your gun. I'll give you to the count of three. One... two..," said Lucy time slowing down as her lips said two.

Everything phased out for a split second as I was hit by another flash of blinding light. Just like before disjointed images and sounds streaked through my head taking me away from my settings. Disjointed and timeless, the vision seemed to last for minutes but compressed into the fraction of a second. I stood in the rain somewhere in Gaulon. There was a blonde dame standing in front of me holding a revolver with a scorpion etched onto the side. It was about the size of a magnum. We both had killshots lined up. This memory wasn't quite as clear as the earlier flash. The blonde said something but I couldn't quite focus on the words and then the guns went off. I remembered a blinding flash of pain, then everything faded to black.

When I came out of the memory flash my vision was slightly blurred for a moment. Then everything came into focus. I could smell the gunpowder wafting through the air and see the smoke coming off the gun. A single line of blood ran down from a bullet hole on Lucy's left temple. She staggered for a moment before collapsing. I ran over to her body and caught her. For a moment her eyes locked onto mine, filled with fear, as though it were the only thing holding her from death. Then slowly her eyes slid closed. No last words, no final requests only a brief moment of shock and fear, then she was gone.

"Frag!" I yelled as I punched the side of the van, my hand throbbled with pain. I pushed the thoughts out of my head. I had another problem to deal with. I still needed a way back to the Valkyrie.

Trevor walked over and spat on her. "Lousy bitch," he muttered under his breath.

In the distance I could see the dropship heading in our direction, It shone bright lights illuminating the area a little though I had no way to contact them. Then I started to hear the sound of voices. I looked back down the road to see a large group of survivors from the town running our way and they were being followed by the Infected. This time the number looked closer to the hundred mark.

"You wanted a gun. Now's your chance to gain my trust," I told Trevor as I tossed him Lucy's assault rifle. "And don't get any ideas," I said giving a nod towards Lucy's body at the side of the van.

"Frag that! I'm getting out of here," replied Trevor as he ran towards the mine entrance carrying the suitcase. I took aim at his legs and then decided screw it. He's right. There's no stopping that many Infected. The civilians started to run past me following Trevor's lead. I turned back to the Infected but there were too many civilians in the way for me to get a clear shot. I moved against the crowd until there was nobody in the way, took aim and fired off a few shots. I managed to take out a couple of them before the roar of the dropship filled the air. It's lights shone down on us and I got a closer look at the horde of Infected bearing down on me. Their clothes were stained with the blood of the innocent some with the fleshy remains of their victims. The dropship swooped down out of the sky flying in low. It's twin railguns opening fire. The sound of it's bullets mowing down The Infected was deafening. Not the most powerful weapon on the market but more than sufficient for pest control. The dropship eliminated the majority of The Infected as it made its pass. Some of them turned and ran escaping the barrage. The dropship turned and flew overhead landing in a clearing near the mine.

The hatch at the back of the ship opened up and Eidolon stepped out with her head gear retracted.

"You know one of these days I'm not going to be around to save your ass," she declared smiling as she stepped off the ship.

"Hey! I could have taken them, might have lost an arm or two, possibly my legs as well but I'd have stopped them. How did things go up at the lab?" I asked her.

My words initially brought a smile to Eidolon's face but it sunk once I asked her about the mission. "Bad, Addler's dead. All we got was his research. Vulcan stayed behind to cover our escape. What's next?"

"Load up the two ships with civilians, women and children first. Leave room for Vulcan, myself and one other person. Have the Valkyrie pick us up in twenty minutes," I replied as the crowd started to move towards the ship and away from the mine.

I stepped into the crowd which consisted of around eighty men women and children and fired a shot into the air.

"Listen up folks. We've got two ships here but that's not going to be enough to accommodate you all. We didn't come here to save you, but we'll take as many as we can."

The crowd started grumbling but I pushed through towards the mine looking for Trevor.

The mine was lit up by electric lighting enabling me to see down the shaft. I noticed fresh footprints in the mud. One made with high heels and two others with larger shoes. One most

likely belonging to Trevor. I followed the footprints down the mine-shaft until it came to an opening. There was a large room up ahead filled with food rations, water, weapons and enough provisions to keep someone alive down there for months. Standing in the corner was Trevor. Holding the assault rifle.

"You wanted to know who that bitch was working for? Here's your answer," he said holding out a flyer from the Protocol Four movement. I'd heard of the movement only in passing. It was a phrase derived from a few hundred years ago when there was a hacker using the alias BlackPhoenix. He broke a series of scandals on the corporations and single-handedly turned public opinion against them. The hacker was never found, but before he disappeared he left a manifesto of sorts. From what I remember it was pretty well thought out, and not some innate drivel cobbled together from online blogs. The gist of it was that he believed in four protocols to keep the society and corporations in line. The first one being the corporations themselves, the second was the Governments, the third something else and the fourth one being the people themselves. He said that if the system ever got totally fraged, the people would have to band together and stir up some shit. Revolt against the system and rebuild it from the ground up. The Protocol Four movement formed as a sort of Government and Corporation watchdog.

"We're heading out. Get a move on," I ordered Trevor.

"I don't think so. Thanks to that bitch I'm a dead man. This suitcase is my only collateral, once you get the contents you'll have no reason to keep me alive," he said as he pulled the rifle on me.

"Don't be a fool Trevor. I can offer you amnesty," I said.

"I'm through listening to you. I'll take my chances in the mine. That bitch rigged the entrance with explosives. I just blow them and wait till the infected move on," he replied holding a remote detonator in his hand.

"Now turn around and drop your guns," ordered Trevor waving the rifle.

I did as he said. Trevor walked over and began to pat me down whilst holding the rifle to my head. I generated a strong electrical charge through my biosuit and punched him in the stomach. I grabbed him by the neck and threw him down before he had the chance to recover. He dropped the rifle as he fell and I picked it up.

"You just don't know when to quit do you?" I said as I picked up the suitcase.

"Can't blame a guy for trying," he said as he winced over in pain.

I kicked him in the stomach and took the detonator out of his hand. "Sure I can. Now get to the damn exit" I ordered before kicking him again.

Trevor nodded reluctantly and walked out of the mine in front of me. By the time I got back,

the Dropship had left and there were about thirty survivors remaining. They huddled together, most with nothing but the shirt on their backs, some armed with anything from a pitchfork to shotguns.

"Listen up folks. Down that mine there's enough water and food rations to last a large group of you for about a month. Somebody set that mine up as an emergency bunker in the event of something like this happening. Now my advice is that you go down there and seal yourselves in. The mine goes down pretty far so you shouldn't have a problem with air. Wait a week or so and hopefully by then the Infected will have moved on in search of other food sources," I said as I walked over to the group.

An underweight elderly man stepped forward. "Wait a week and there won't be anyone left alive down there. Those conditions are inhumane, the air's stale and the shaft is unstable. That's why we closed the thing down in the first place. People won't last more than a day down there!"

"You can do better than this!" cried out a woman.

"You think I like this situation?! If I could save you all I would. I'm sorry but for those we can't take it's either the mine or you take your chances above ground!" I shouted to the angry, fearful faces.

"He's right the Infected will be back. We've got to get in that mine now it's our only chance!" shouted another one of the men who then ran towards the mine. The other town's people started to follow after him.

"What about him? Why should we all rot and suffer when he gets a free ride out of here?!" shouted another man in the crowd, referring to Trevor.

Before I could say anything an overweight man with a shotgun, pumped his weapon and people began to scatter.

"This is bullshit. Ya aint lettin that asshole outta here, not if I have anything ta do about it," he shouted before shooting Trevor's head off. It happened so fast I didn't even have time to react. All I could do was watch Trevor's headless body topple over.

I pulled out my revolver and returned fire shooting the fat man in the chest. He staggered for a moment before collapsing.

A woman at the back of the crowd called out "They're here! They're here!" she shouted repeatedly and frantically as she pointed down the road. I turned and looked at a giant swarm of Infected running up the road.

"Everyone get in the mine! I'll hold them off and blow shut the entrance!" I shouted.

Most of the civilians scrambled towards the mine but a few armed civilians stayed behind. We

opened fire at the Infected trying to hold them off. I couldn't wait any longer so I hit the detonator. The explosion was deafening. We had barely recovered when the Infected were on top of us. Two of the civilians were soon being mauled by the Infected. The remaining three turned and ran. Suddenly the Valkyrie swept down and opened fire ripping the Infected to pieces. It dropped down in front of me hovering off the ground. The back door opened up with Eidolon at the entrance. She lay down cover fire as I jumped on board.

"Next time I'm staying on the ship," I said as the door shut behind me.

When we passed over the town from the air it was almost unrecognisable. Buildings were on fire, dead bodies were scattered across the streets along with a number of body parts from people who'd been torn to pieces. It was almost enough to make me sick.

We managed to locate Vulcan after he detonated his jeep and were able to transfer him to the dropship. The rest of the tale plays out the same as what I told Graeves.

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Graeves activated the phone in his desk and punched in the number for Santos RavenCroft, the current head of The RavenCroft Humane Trust.

Santos answered the phone with audio only. He seldom showed anyone his face, Graeves included.

"Sir, I've just finished the debriefing of The Immortals. Everything seems to be in order, though I am concerned about whether or not the team can be trusted in regards to their claim that no civilians were evacuated. As noted in the report, Addler appears to have died at the hands of the Infected and as far as I can tell the only positive outcome from the mission was the retrieval of his research and the suitcase of project director Trevor Clifton."

"I'm not concerned about the civilians. Their lives are irrelevant. Provided they believe they were rescued by scavengers and nothing more, their well-being is meaningless. Addler's encrypted files are to be transferred to me immediately, as is Clifton's computer. I will oversee the decryption process personally," commanded Santos. "Now, update me on the Cloak project."

Graeves scratched his head. The cloak project had been one of his own initiatives and in spite of numerous breakthroughs it wasn't going quite as smoothly as he had hoped.

"There have been a few hiccups concerning our test subject and his state of mind. I'm afraid integrating his mind into the biosuit is making him emotionally unstable and unpredictable. Would you like me to terminate the project or keep working towards stabilising him?" asked Graeves.

"If we can stabilise Cloak, he will be a valuable asset to the corporation. Continue with the project for the time being and inform me if there are any further developments. We need to look to the future and push our Biotech projects as far as we can. Our competitors will do no less. I have the next assignment for The Immortals. A dictator in Pakistan is causing some problems ..."