

# THE ESSENCE OF DESIRE

By James Millward

## Area 69

Blip, blip, blip bleep...

The red security light changed to neon green as the airtight door hissed with the release of escaping air from the vacuum-sealed, germ free environment of the Ministry of Defence's chemical and biological warfare division. As the door slid open, an armed guard standing with a loaded Heckler and Koch MP5 sub-machine gun stood forward to check the identification of the two VIPs.

"Thank you, sirs." The guard handed the two men their IDs back. "Straight ahead past decontamination, the viewing area above the main labs is just to the left, please stay on the yellow line at all times."

The armed guard took a precise step backwards allowing the two men to pass by. The security door hissed as it closed and then clicked shut behind them as they continued further into the labyrinth of tunnels and corridors of the secret research testing facility. The way ahead, clearly painted on the green concrete floor with a bright yellow line. Above them rows and rows of dimly lit strobe lights, barely adequate enough to light up a small storage room glowed just brightly enough to show the men the direction of travel in which they had to proceed.

Following the yellow line for what felt like a good hundred metres, the two VIPs eventually came to another security door on the left-hand side of the corridor.

A small sign printed in white capital lettering on a blue background read, 'VIEWING ZONES FOR LABORATORIES O1, O2, O3, O4 AND O5 BIOLOGICAL AND CHEMICAL WARFARE DIVISION: AUTHORISED PERSONNEL ONLY: CLEARANCE LEVEL: O5'

"Your pass card or mine?" The strange smartly dressed visitor turned and spoke to his colleague in a lazy American droll; his level O5-security clearance access card was already in his hand.

"Just get the fuck on with it, Jim!" The other man snapped back in broad Yorkshire. "The sooner we get this vile business over with the fuckin' better."

"Look. I've told you before, 'DICK!' when were in the bloody field you call me by my God damned code name, got it?" The American pointed his card at his colleague's face as if using it would somehow help to stress his point. His strong Texan accent however struggled to sound intimidating within the confines of the deep Scottish underground complex, and more so now the two men were back on British soil having just landed at the airbase direct from a meeting with some of the top military research scientists within the United States government.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Washington, but call me Dick again and well have to re-evaluate our partnership, do we understand each other?"

"Sure thing Richard. I'm sorry 'Mr. London'."

Jim grinned and punched his security code once more into the keypad before swiping his key card through the thin slot.

Bleep... hiissssss.... The door opened as the light changed color indicating the acceptance of the agent's code. The blast of vacuum-sealed air expelling out into the corridor was a sure sign the room beyond was a sterile or 'clean room', as the two men stepped into the brightly lit observation area.

The door re-sealing its self, locking the agents inside caused the two men to turn around. The green light on the security door had again changed back to red with a prevailing hiss as the room locked down. Richard clutched tightly at his key card as he walked over to the large bulletproof glass partition that separated the upper viewing areas from the test laboratories beneath. The glass ran the full length of the room and returned up both the left and right sides enabling the agents a near perfect view of all four laboratories that spread out underneath them. The labs were divided neatly into four individual testing areas. Zones O1 and O2, as indicated on the lab doors on the far northerly side as the men faced the main window, consisted of an assortment of plants, flowers and propagation equipment. A fine mist was spraying lightly onto some of the plants growing in beds of earth while vines clung desperately to an intricate wire structure that was secured to one of the walls. Scientists in white paper overalls and facemasks were busy taking cuttings from the stems of others before bagging them and marking it with the name of the plant that the leaf came from.

In zone O3 or the 'western' quadrant as the agents were standing, the distillation process appeared to be taking place. Bunsen burners were boiling large jars of water that seemed to be piping steam along through clear glass pipes to where containers filled with vaporized water and objects resembling the leaves grown from some of the plants in zones O1 and O2 were bubbling away in even larger glass beakers. Running away from these were other clear glass pipes that ran around in tight coils down to individual funnels. The dripping of a strangely colored liquid plopped slowly into smaller glass jars that appeared to be half-full of the familiar oily yellowy liquid. Both men had seen this sight many times before at other test sites across the US and European research facilities.

Zone 04 in the 'eastern' quadrant appeared to be the 'testing area' for the whole operation. An elaborate-looking maze had been set up in the centre of the lab, while on top of each of the lab stations that ran the length of the sidewall were numerous cages, each housing an individual mouse or rat. At no time did any single cage appear to contain any more than one rodent at a time, a fact that appeared to be somewhat strange to one of the spectators in the sterile environment above.

"Strange..." Richard pondered aloud.

"What's that?"

"I don't understand why they've got all the mice and rats separated from their own species. Usually rodents prefer to be in a group environment to their own company." Richard scratched his head as though deep in thought.

"Take a look around, Mr. London, we aint in Kansas any more, this place looks more like a God damned drug manufacturer than a science research facility. Christ, if we're not careful we might end up getting high on the fucking fumes of whatever shit they're concocting down there. I mean, isn't that a God damned marihuana plant I can see growing down there?" Jim laughed aloud at his own joke knowing the plant was a similar looking Motherwort herb.

The silence that he received back from Richard however forced his laughter to trail off into the back of the empty room.

Richard shook his head and leaned forwards pressing down on a red button, the static from the intercom connecting the observation deck and the main lab crackled into life as he spoke into it.

"Brian, can you come up to observations please?"

One of the bespectacled scientists scurrying about on the lab floor looked up in surprise at the armored glass window. He made a quick nod of his head in response. His face remained well hidden from view beneath the surgical mask that he was wearing to protect his lungs from any unnecessary inhalation of whatever his researchers were brewing in the laboratories' distillery. Walking briskly to beneath the window where the two agents were standing, he momentarily disappeared out of sight, the only noise that could be heard was the hiss from a security door opening and closing through the open intercom speaker.

A brief moment later, this time from within the observation room, another hiss was heard as a tiny platform suddenly rose up out of nowhere through the floor in the corner of the room. The same scientist observed in the main lab was now standing on the rising platform lift.

Whooooosshhhh. The lift came to a complete halt as the room re-sealed.

"Good morning, gentlemen...or is it good evening? I can't remember the last time that I actually set foot outside of this--"

"The project, Brian!" Richard cut the scientist off mid-sentence. He was becoming increasingly impatient with the 'secret joint project' between the two governments, and the constant traveling between facilities. The American scientists had told him nothing about what 'Operation Eve' had been about and what it really entailed. Each one he spoke to insisted on showing him figures, numbers, data, chemical reports, and the analysis of more mice and rat pheromones. Strangely enough, they were all female pheromones, but what he really wanted to know were the straightforward facts. He wanted to know when, where, why and what. Especially 'the what!'

"Please take a seat, gentlemen." Brian Jones, the head research scientist, politely ushered the men to two chrome chairs pulled into the table positioned in the centre of the brightly lit room. Taking a seat opposite the agents, he finally took off his surgical mask and placed a thick brown file on the glass tabletop, the red stamp 'TOP SECRET' had been stamped on the front cover.

Jim and Richard exchanged a sideways glance, before Richard slowly and deliberately exhaled, running cold hands over his forehead and through his thick, black hair.

“With all due respect, Brian, if you’re about to show me yet more numbers and mice pheromone analysis charts then, I swear by almighty God, one way or another, your going through that window.”

Brian’s smile immediately dissipated as he realized the roughly shaven man sitting opposite him was not in a joking mood. The British agent’s icy cold stare gave the scientist cause to avert his eyes immediately down to the manila folder. Fumbling through the documents inside for something of relevance that might appease the two impatient men in matching black suits, the professor lifted his glasses onto his perspiring forehead and looked up. Quickly switching a perplexing glance back and forth between Jim and Richard he looked back down and continued his frantic search for any small shred of worthwhile intelligent information that the two ‘non-scientific personnel’ could understand without a PhD in microbiology, and a degree in scientific genetic studies.

“Look, Bri’, just start at the beginning man, just start at the beginning.” Jim winked reassuringly: he guessed he would be playing the ‘good guy role’ that day, as Dick had obviously gotten out of the wrong side of bed that morning.

“Err, that’s Professor Jones if you don’t mind...OK...well...err as you may or may not know the field tests in Iraq were a complete disaster. The V1X Agent wasn’t any where near ready for human application but because we were in the middle of a war at the time the timetable for field testing the agent had been...”

Brian held up both hands and performed twin commas in mid-air as he made the quotation. “Deemed necessary to take forward to the human testing stage, and as I just mentioned, with disastrous results. The subjects that were tested ended up going insanely mad. Six killed each other with automatic weapons; one threw a grenade into a mess hall. Thankfully that never went off, and six subjects were injured when a violent fist fight broke out in a recreational area.”

“Jesus! What in God’s name are you guys doing down here?” Jim questioned, forgetting for the moment that he was still working for the American government.

“And,” Richard snapped. “Why do you keep calling them, ‘subjects’?” The professor had touched a raw nerve. “I was in the Gulf during that ‘incident’.” He mocked Brian’s mid-air quotation marks and continued. “The ‘subjects’ that you so casually write off as an expendable asset were all women! They nearly tore each other to fucking pieces in that gym. And as for the girls that blew each other’s brains out with the SA80s I only hope to God I never have to witness anything as savage and bloody as that for as long as I live the rest of my natural haunted life.”

An uneasy stillness descended onto the room. The only noise came from the whirring of a tiny wall mounted camera that had turned its position to refocus its lens onto the three men that were now sitting in silence at the polished round glass table.

Jim, out of the corner of his eye, noticed it move – the steady blinking of the red light indicated to him that it was recording every word they were saying.

“Hey! We’re all on the same team here right?” He slapped his partner hard on the shoulder as if trying to break the intense atmosphere that had suddenly enveloped the claustrophobic airtight room.

“Whatever, Jim. Just show us what the hell you’ve been up to down here for the past two years, Brian.”

The professor paused, about to correct the agent again as to his correct title but decided it might be in his best interest if he let it go for the time being. Thinking for long moments, he sat racking his brain for the easiest way to explain what he and his team had been researching for the last twenty-eight months. He hadn't realized that Richard had been serving in the Gulf at the time that 'Project Eve' had been given the green light to begin testing on live human host subjects. Having a loose cannon like Richard in overall charge of which department was pulled from the project could endanger the entire experiment.

"Eureka!" Brian clicked his fingers and jumped out of his seat, excited at the thought of what he had just come up with might explain to the two agents purely and simply what his team had accomplished since the Middle East disaster. "I think a practical demonstration might be in order, gentlemen."

"Did he just say eureka?" Jim whispered mockingly into Richard's ear as the excited professor walked over to the intercom button to get the attention of a lab assistant who was busy feeding the mice and rat specimens.

"David, hello David...yes this is Professor Jones in observations. Could you be so kind as to initiate protocol Eve 0 1 0 Alpha, please?"

A faceless assistant wearing one of the white paper overalls and surgical masks nodded and gave a thumb up to the three men that were now standing looking down over the Eastern, zone four quadrant, of the testing area of the facility.

Carefully opening two of the tiny cages that were home to the little white rats the lab assistant gently picked each one up in turn by its long slender tail. The ear-piercing screech from each rodent was barely audible to the three men that were spectating from the observation room. The intercom, although left in the open position, muffled out much of the inaudible screeching noise that was being generated in the labs beneath but picked out with crystal clarity the working assistants voice as he gave a step by step account of what he was about to do with each of the test subjects.

“Test subject 01, ‘Janice’ now being positioned at the top left sector of the maze network. Test subject 02, ‘Emma’ now being positioned at the bottom right sector of the maze network. Test subject 03, ‘Steven’ now being placed in the central area within the maze network. Subjects 01 and 02 are now ready for V1X Alpha application.”

The lab assistant looked up at Professor Jones who gave him a good to go with a nod and thumbs up.

“Now commencing with V1X Alpha application.” The assistant swapped his surgical facemask for a respirator before reaching up with his latex gloved hand. Pulling down from above his head he brought down a device resembling a spray gun, hanging on a coiled spring and thick rubbery hose. Gripping the device as though it were a handgun he then brought it into shooting distance of the first mouse.

“What’s he doing?” Richard asked the professor

“What David’s about to do now is spray our two female rats with a newly developed essential oil combination that we’ve been formulating. It’s so simple it’s actually quite frightening.”

“And what does this new oil do exactly, Brian?”

The professor pointed in irritation to his assistant in Zone 04, busy spraying a very light mist on each of the two female rats.

“Watch!” he replied.”

Almost instantaneously, each rat raised herself up onto her back legs and sniffed the air as though searching for the scent of the male that was secured away in the centre of the complicated maze. A second sniff seemed to confirm to each of the females the definite presence of the male rat that was hidden away some where within the central section of the labyrinth of differently positioned miniature walls and doorways that the two females had just been released into and were now immediately scurrying through. A sixth higher sense had appeared to have been actuated as they both took in the full scent of the other rodent, the invisible pheromone seemed to be guiding them both to the centre of the maze, closer and closer, faster and faster. The two agents in the observation room above were amazed at how each of the slender nimble white rodents never once took a wrong turn or tried taking a short cut over the top of the Perspex panels that anyway would have been too high to climb over should either have attempted the impossible feat. Each rat seemed to be working on a combination of heightened instinct, adrenalin, and intelligence.

“They’ve found him already,” Richard said. “That was bloody fast.”

“That wasn’t the experiment, Mr London,” the professor replied again pointing down to the centre of the maze.

The two female rats had completely ignored the male rat that was in plain view to them through the clear Perspex partition in the centre squared area. Instead both of the females chose to negotiate their way quickly towards each other using the most direct route possible around the central section. Continuously sniffing the air for one another’s scent the two female rats eventually met head on in one of the tight Perspex corridors, the ear piercing-shriek that blasted through the intercom system caused both Jim and Richard to jump in unexpected shock as both rats suddenly launched at each other’s throats in mid-air.

Crashing to the maze floor in a white flurry of gnawing razor sharp teeth and slashing claws the two screeching rodents tore and scratched violently at each other, each rat trying repeatedly to bite into the other’s throat, neck and back. The fight for dominance between the two aggressive females was bloody and vicious as the fur from their tiny bodies flew off in all directions. Emma seemed to be gaining the upper hand as she pinned Janice onto her back, the other rat scratched and screeched wildly as she tried desperately to regain her frontal position to remount a counter attack. It was all a desperate effort however as Emma, using her full body weight to prevent Janice from moving, finally sank her long front teeth deep into the throat of the other rat and ripped out a huge spurting chunk of dripping red flesh from her tiny trachea, a crimson plume of blood sprayed and spattered across the clear Perspex wall of the corridor that was keeping the two caged animals from escaping the vileness of the maze.

Emma, now victorious and the new alpha female, stood once again on her hind legs sniffing the air for any remains of leftover scent from other possible rival females, the bloodied jellied chunk of flesh she had just torn from her bunk mate's throat stained her brilliant white fur into a sickening mixture of deep black, carmine and smeared rose pink.

The limp dead body of Janice lay spasmodically twitching on the sticky red maze floor as Emma, now uninterested in her potential as a rival, had ceased her vicious attack. Whatever had been driving her to want to destroy the other rodent that had been happily occupying the cage next to hers for the past six months now seemed to have subsided almost as quickly as it had begun as Emma wandered around the dead body sniffing at the remains of her former lab partner, her tiny paw prints left an inadvertent trail of bloody evidence where she had walked through the pool of blood that now oozed slowly out of Janice's gaping wound.

Richard, his mouth agape in horror, stared in disbelief at what he had just witnessed. It was like Iraq all over again, except with loving, sociable intelligent animals. Without even looking at the professor he pointed a shaking finger in his direction, unable to control the acrimonious manner in which he voiced each trembling disgusted word.

“After...what...I...just...told... you... about, what I... had to pull... out of that...fucking camp in Iraq, you have the... BALLS to show me what it would look like, if two rats were to fucking go at it. You... son of a fucking bitch!” Richard spat out the last half dozen words with such vehemence his face turned scarlet purple and a vein in the temple of his forehead suddenly appeared, pointing out the fact that he was either extremely stressed out or was extremely very angry, at that moment in time both guesses would have been correct.

“I don’t think you quite understand, Mr London,” the professor timidly replied as though each word could be his very last. Carefully he picked each and every word as he responded back to the volatile agent. Moving to the side he purposely placed Jim between himself and Richard before continuing. “The test we just witnessed was a complete success.”

“SUCCESS!” Jim exploded slapping the palm of his hand hard against the armoured glass partition as he viewed the carnage that was being immediately cleaned up by the lab assistants beneath. “What was so bloody successful about watching two intelligent animals trying to rip each other to pieces, and why did they have to be female again, you bloody sick bastards.”

“Steady, Richard, hey maybe we should take a five to clear our heads for a few minutes, what do you say?”

Jim placed a reassuring hand on his partners shoulder. An inner voice was telling him that there was more to the Iraqi incident than Richard was letting on. He just needed some time alone, away from that damn spy camera to ask him straight out what the deal was. He also had to warn his partner to chill out before his emotions got him into some serious trouble.

The smell of death in that test lab had left a really bitter taste in Jim’s mouth along with a cold uneasy feeling. They had both seen animal tests performed before but this was brutally different and whatever the scientists had been doing at this particular facility had been enough to push a serious button in his partner’s head to get him so wound up. He’d never seen Richard go off on one like that since they’d been assigned to each other over two years ago.

“All I’m saying, gentlemen, is that, that was the first stage of three test stages. And, yes, I apologise profusely for what you just had to witness, but it was necessary in order to appreciate testing stages two and three... Please, you have my word as a gentleman there won’t be any more bloodshed.”

Richards his icy cold stare remained transfixed on the maze below, which had now been completely cleaned of any trace of the ‘success’ of the bloody number one experiment. “You’d better hope to God that for your sake there isn’t,” he replied acrimoniously.

Emma had been unceremoniously placed back into her cage and the limp bloodied remains of Janice’s tiny corpse had been removed outside of the laboratories viewing area. Professor Jones spoke once again into the intercom to the lab research assistant beneath.

“David, this is Professor Jones in observations again, could you initiate protocol Eve 0 2 0 Beta please?”

Once again the same lab assistant in the white paper overalls gave the professor a nod and a thumbs up before walking around to the smaller cages that appeared to be housing the individual mice. Opening the doors to two of these cages he pulled out two squirming white mice, again by their slender pinky white tails before giving a running commentary almost identical to when he had placed the two white rats into the maze.

“Test subject 01 ‘Larissa’ is being positioned at the top left sector of the maze network. Test subject 02 ‘Clara’ is being positioned at the bottom right sector of the maze network. Test subject 03 ‘Martin’ is now being placed within the central area of the maze network. Subjects 01 and 02 are now ready for V1X Beta application.”

The assistant looked up at the professor who gave the obligatory nod and thumbs up signifying the order 'good to go.'

"Commencing with VIX Beta application." Again he reached up for the spray gun that had now been re-fitted with a different glass canister to the other one used on the rats. A fine mist was then applied to the two mice in the top and bottom sectors of the maze before the assistant once again released the spray gun so that he could open each of the two trap doors that would give the mice access into the vast maze complex.

The mices' reaction to the spray was as identical as it was in the rats. Both Larissa and Clara lifted themselves up onto their haunches, their tiny pink noses seemingly sniffing the air for the scent of the male in the central chamber. Richard, by now though, was suspiciously well aware of the male diversion tactic and kept his eyes firmly riveted on the two female mice as they quickly scurried off with lightening speed through the complex maze of Perspex passageways. Again with highly intelligent efficiency, each mouse seemed to know well in advance the most direct route possible that would take them to the central chamber without connecting with any of the numerous dead ends or wrong turns that would have made them go around in constant circles.

They found the male in record time, faster seemingly than the rats did and again chose to ignore completely the male mouse that was sniffing curiously at the air above his clear Perspex prison. Richard held his breath, his fists clenched tightly above his head as they rested against the coldness of the window. Larissa and Clara had found each other. A bead of sweat rolled down Richard's brow as the two female mice eagerly approached each other.

"Oh, my God, I don't believe it!" Jim exclaimed, giving his partner another hard slap on his broad shoulder.

“What the hell are they trying to do?” Richard questioned, pushing his head tight up against the thick armoured plate glass, his hands cupped around his face to block out the glare from the bright luminescent strobe lights that were reflecting his image back into the room.

“They’re cuddling, Mr London, simply put, they prefer each other’s company to that of the male that is desperately trying to get their attention in the central chamber – Larissa and Clara just prefer female mice to male mice for the time being.”

The two white mice were almost in the very same spot where the violent bloody fight between Janice and Emma had taken place just moments earlier. Now there appeared to be a different atmosphere within the maze, as the two mice seemed to be adoringly licking at each other’s faces and ears in a continuous affectionate grooming action. Although they were both females they still snuggled and nuzzled deeply into each other’s soft furry bodies as though the other mouse were a mate. Each tiny creature appeared to have actuated an invisible, pheromone-enhanced response from the other as they both curled closely into one another, the gentle heat radiating from their tiny bodies appeared to give each mouse some small amount of warmth and solace from the cold sterile ambience of the laboratory.

Richard exhaled hard against the armored glass window and watched as his breath dissipated across the toughened surface like a frozen film of water, reminding him what the freezing panes of glass on the outside of his windows at home on a crisp winter’s morning would have looked like. He wished that he were at home right now instead of trying to decipher whatever the hell it was that the scientists had done to the mice, rats and soldiers.

Christ the soldiers, how does this all link in together. He pondered deeply to himself as he stared down at the two mice that remained curled up together, still sniffing and licking at each other with a strange affection in the maze below.

“So Brian...” Richard began, as he turned to face the professor. “Basically, thus far you’ve developed two ‘formulations. VIX Alpha and VIX Beta’. Obviously for some sick reason you’re only using female subjects. Formula Alpha turns them into psychopathic killing machines while formula Beta turns every female mouse on the face of the planet into a docile lesbian. Either that or you’ve created one hell of an expensive perfume. Am I right so far, Brian? Is this what the British and US governments have spent ten billion pounds and dollars of scientific research on?”

The professor nervously adjusted his glasses before responding to Richard’s crude statement.

“I wouldn’t have put it quite like that Mr London. I accept it’s a lot to take in, but I cannot stress how important it is that you see all three of the test stages before making any decisions about the continuation of this project. We’re now well beyond the stage we were at when our Governments gave us the green light to go ahead with ‘Project Amazon’ in Iraq.”

“Whoa... stop right there Brian.” Richard cut in holding his hand up like a police traffic cop before the professor could continue any further. “What are you trying to tell us? That you’re preparing to take whatever this...” he pointed down to the two sleeping mice curled up together in the maze below, “...is to the next stage of testing?”

“Exactly, Yes!” The professor nodded his head excitedly at the sudden prospect that agent London was finally beginning to understand what he had been trying so desperately to explain for the last twenty-eight minutes. Richard simply shook his head, placing his hands once more against the coldness of the observation room window as he peered down into the laboratory beneath.

Drumming his fingers against the inch-thick clear partition he pondered the significance of the research that Professor Jones and the other research scientists had spent the past two years developing. Should he recommend that the plug be pulled on the whole project? He couldn’t seem to get the images of those dead female soldiers out of his mind. ‘Jennifer’, the raw recruit from his village had been like a sister to him. He’d done what he thought had been the right thing by taking her under his wing when they’d both ended up at the same posting in Basra. It was a million to one shot that two people who had both grown up in the same village had somehow ended up being stationed at the same base camp nine months later in the middle of a war zone.

Nobody ever complained when they were all called in, one at a time, into the med-tents for the obligatory blood tests and so called anti-viral shots, many of which were allegedly responsible for the ‘Gulf War Syndrome’. In the army you didn’t question the orders you were given, you just followed them out, and if that involved some nurse in med-bay sticking you with a needle full of God knows what then so be it.

The memory that haunted Richard the most was the day that all the female soldiers were ordered to go for an anti-viral shot that would have supposedly helped to boost their immune system against an Anthrax attack, or so they were told. Several hours later, however, and six of the women were dead. They’d killed each other with their automatic rifles; a further six had almost torn each other to pieces with their bare hands and, like that fool of a professor had so politely put it, one of the women had thrown a dud grenade into a mess hall full of female medics, but for the grace of God it had never exploded. It was complete and utter chaos that day, with blood, limbs, and bodies everywhere.

Richard shook his head as if trying to force the haunting images from his mind. Jennifer had been one of the unfortunate girls that had flown into an uncontrollable rage, picking up her SA80 automatic rifle when she and five other women had suddenly for no apparent reason, considered one another as ‘the enemy’, and without any hesitation emptied their full clips into one another.

Richard had assumed that the memories from that day had been put to rest along with the brave women. That was however until the moment he was forced to endure a rerun on a miniature scale of that bloody hot brutal day in Basra.

“No fucking way.”

The professor and Jim both looked at Richard in surprise at his acrimonious statement, although the American was less shocked at his partner’s sudden remark than the professor who took a step back, distancing himself even further from the agent after Richard’s sudden refusal.

“I don’t quite understand.”

“How many different ways do you want me to say it so that you do understand? IT’S NOT GOING TO HAPPEN, PROFESSOR! That’s it, Jim, we’re out of here.” Richard made for the security door, his emotions, and the suffocating atmosphere of being locked underground for so long finally getting the better of him.

“Wait...I mean...you can’t leave yet...you haven’t even seen the third—” The Professor begged although remained at a fixed distance from Jim and Richard, making a point of not following the two agents over to the security door that they had initially entered through.

“Save it, Brian,” Richard growled through gritted teeth as he punched in his access code.

“Yeah, don’t call us, we’ll call you.” Jim quipped as he pointed an imaginary gun with his fingers towards the professor’s head, pulling down with his thumb he jerked his hand off up into the air as though simulating the recoil from firing an invisible round at the temple of the professor’s large cranium.

“You buffoons!” The professor screamed as he stepped back onto the platform lift to take him from the observation deck back down to his secure office in the testing area of the laboratories beneath.

“This project is far bigger than you or I, or the Prime Minister... or the President of the United States. It will take bigger and badder men than you two apes to stop this project from continuing!”

Richard ignored the professor’s wild rants and swiped his level 05 security clearance card through the machine.

Dooooop...The light remained red...

“What the fu—” Richard tried again.

Dooooop. The light remained red.

“Jesus, here try mine.” Jim handed Richard his pass card.

“You’ll have to put your number through, Jim,” Richard said standing aside to give his partner access to the security panel. The whoosh of the floor sealing shut beneath the observation room caused the agent to jerk his head around at the sudden noise, his senses had gone into overdrive and were now on heightened alert. The disappearance of the professor down into the sealed room beneath along with the denial of his exit from the observation room had given good cause to activate his adrenal glands, secreting the fight or flight chemical of adrenalin. Richard’s senses, vision and reflexes suddenly seemed to quadruple as every image within the room appeared clearer, sharper, Richard noticed a large painting on the wall that he had missed on his arrival at the laboratories. Turning away from the Perspex encased print he glanced down through the laboratory window; the mice and rats were eerily all up against the fronts of their cages seemingly sniffing the air for a scent that for the moment appeared to be eluding his own heightened senses.

“How’s it coming with that door Jim?” Richard asked, his eyes following the erratic movements of Professor Jones as he walked between his scientists and lab assistants seemingly trying to ensure that all his team were fully aware of a situation that was about to occur in one of the laboratories.

IRAQ! ...MED TENT! ...ANTI VIRAL SHOTS! ...Richard span around, his heart pounding hard against his rib cage as the triggered images flashed into his head with unrelenting clarity. A faint smell of something floral had stimulated the hidden memory from deep within the recesses of his cerebrum. ‘The male soldiers...’

The thought of what he suddenly suspected made him feel sickeningly lightheaded. The walls within the room started to move and the floor slowly began to spin, as the sweet scent of lavender seemed to be seeping from the air vents above.

Staggering drunkenly across to the opposite wall Richard looked up at the large poster of the human reproductive system that had been inset into a huge designer Perspex sheet, it almost looked like an enormous piece of art against the sterile ambience of the immaculately clean, germ free, dust free, observational area. Richard had other ideas as to the usage of the ‘observation’ room.

He tried refocusing on Jim as he reached inside his jacket for his Glock 19 automatic sidearm. His partner however was completely out for the count. Slumped in a crumpled heap on the cold green concrete floor Jim's pass card remained in the slot of the security machine. The continuous drone of the failed code echoed chillingly around the room, a further reminder to Richard of why he was taking out his firearm. His enhanced adrenalin levels were the only thing that was, for the moment, keeping him from crashing in an unconscious heap on the floor beside his American comrade.

Slipping the safety from the trigger he cocked the gun back, chambering the first round into the barrel before once again trying desperately to refocus on the target he was aiming at. His vision came and went, as the sweet aroma of the lavender appeared to be increasing in potency as the room became more saturated in its now sickeningly sweet floral aroma.

Richard aimed for the centre of the huge colourfully painted diagram and squeezed the trigger.

BANG!

The large Perspex picture of the male and female reproductive systems exploded into a thousand smithereens as the bullet hit its mark.

Ducking his face in against his chest Richard was sprayed with thousands of the flying pieces of clear crystallised shards of plastic glass. Coughing and spluttering he lifted his head just in time to hear the intercom crackle into life. Above his head where the obliterated poster had been, a giant bright red number 05 was painted onto the wall behind.

“You’re too late, Mr London. As I told you before, this is far bigger than you or I and can’t simply be switched on or off as though it were a mere lightbulb. Project Eve is already a go. I have a field agent in the general populace as we speak. Her orders, to initiate protocols Eve Alpha and Eve Beta. If these tests are a success then the subjects shall be used to initiate ‘Project Eden’ it’s rather unfortunate for you that you’ve become so emotional about the whole situation and decided not to witness the final test. I think what we need to do is go right back to the beginning and show you what test O 1 0 Alpha was like and take it from there.”

The intercom clicked shut and a deathly silence enshrouded the room with the exception of the continuous bleeping from the security panel. Richard felt his eyes go heavy and shut for a split second, he shook his head trying to fight off the effects of whatever was effecting him. Maybe the soothing relaxing qualities of the lavender was causing the drowsiness, perhaps it was something else?

Richard turned suddenly as the floor opened up with another whoosh of an air sealed unit being opened. The lift platform rose up out of the room below but this time there were no people to be seen on it. The agent began to stumble blindly over to his only means of escape but as he got closer he stopped, noticing the large cylindrical object that had been placed onto the platform. The inaudible screeching and scratching that was coming from within told him instinctively to back off.

As he stepped back Richard checked the magazine in his pistol, making sure he had plenty of ammo. As he did so he stumbled and fell backwards, smashing his head hard against the concrete wall behind. A warm sticky rivulet of crimson blood poured openly from the gash and oozed in a bloody stream down his scalp before it finally eased its way down into the crevice of his neck. Pooling in an uncomfortable saturated bright red stain through his expensive Armani suit.

Richard fought desperately to stay conscious, trying in vain to keep from falling into the oblivion of never-ending eternal sleep.

Hiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii....

The tall cylindrical canister slowly slid open at the sides releasing the escaping clouds of compressed air. Dozens of secret compartments immediately opened in a single explosive cacophony. The screeching seething mass of teeming white bodies that came out seemed to be in their hundreds as the surging wave of voracious rats suddenly descended into the laboratory.

Richard fired wildly into the massing sea of white bodies, their eyes gleaming an evil brilliant red under the glare of the luminescent lights. Realising that he was going to be over run by the sheer power of the numbers that were tearing towards him he somehow managed to find the presence of mind to count every single shot until he'd reached his last remaining bullet. The finality of his last decision was unhesitant as he immediately placed the barrel of his gun to the temple of his forehead.

The rats were upon him in an instant savage flurry of gnawing teeth and claws as a single muzzle flash could be seen lighting up laboratory number 05 from the main labs below. Professor Jones looked casually away and continued to retrieve a cutting that he was taking from the lavender plant in Zone 01.