

# **Robert Ludlum's The Lazarus Vendetta**

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# 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 high above a rugged, arid land. This region of Zimbabwe was dirt-poor, even by that troubled nation's rock-bottom standards. There were almost no electric lights to illuminate the night, and there were few 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 scrub trees and scattered patches of thorn bushes and sparse grass. A battered Toyota pickup truck swayed along a worn dirt track, gears grinding as it bounced in and out of a series of deep ruts. Drawn by the flickering beams of light, swarms of insects flitted toward the pickup and spattered against its dust-streaked windshield.

"*Merde!*" Gilles Ferrand swore softly, wrestling with the steering wheel. Frowning, the tall, bearded Frenchman leaned forward, trying to

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see past the swirling cloud of dust and flying bugs. His thick glasses slipped down his nose. He took one hand off the wheel to push them back up and then 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 him. "This so-called road is bad enough in daylight. It is a nightmare now. I wish the plane had not been so late."

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

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

The truck's high beams silhouetted a familiar rock outcropping next to the track. The Frenchman sighed in relief. They were close to their destination—a tiny settlement adopted three months ago by the Lazarus Movement. He didn't remember the village's original name. The first thing he and Kendall had done was rename it Kusasa, "Tomorrow" in the local Ndebele dialect. It was an apt name, or so they hoped. The people of Kusasa had agreed to the change and to accept the Movement's help in returning to a natural and eco-friendly method of farming. Both activists believed their work here would lead a rebirth of wholly organic African agriculture—a rebirth rooted in absolute opposition to the West's toxic pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and dangerous genetically modified crops. The American woman was certain that her impassioned speeches had won over the village elders. Ferrand, more cynical by nature, suspected that the generous cash grants the Movement offered had carried more weight. No matter, he thought, the ends in this case would amply justify the means.

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He turned off the main track and drove slowly toward a little cluster of brightly painted huts, tin-roofed shacks, and ramshackle cattle pens. Surrounded by small fields, Kusasa lay in a shallow valley edged by boulder-strewn hills and tall brush. He brought the truck to a stop and lightly tapped the 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 village 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 men, women, and children should have been thronging around them—grinning and murmuring in glee at the sight of the bulging seed bags and brand-new shovels, rakes, and hoes piled high in the Toyota's cargo 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. You 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 she nodded and climbed down out of the Toyota. Working swiftly, she set up the linked satellite phone/laptop computer they carried in the field. It allowed them to communicate with their home office in Paris, though it was mainly used to upload photos and progress reports to the main Lazarus Web site.

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

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"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 satellite phone to her ear for a moment. Her thin-lipped mouth tightened. "They've already left the office. There's no answer."

Ferrand checked his watch. France was only an hour behind them, but it was the weekend. They 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. He swept his flashlight in a wide arc, probing the darkness ahead. A lizard scuttled away from the beam, 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 Kusasa. There was the village well. It was a favorite gathering place for young and old alike at the end of the 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 them. 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 looked. Dead men, women, and children lay in heaps across the clearing. Most of the bodies were intact, though twisted and misshapen by some terrible agony. Others seemed eerily hollow, almost as though they had been partially eaten from the inside out. A few were reduced to nothing more than torn shreds of flesh and bone surrounded by congealed puddles of bloodred slime. Thousands of huge black flies swarmed over the mutilated corpses, lazily feasting on the remains. Near the well, a small dog nuzzled the contorted body of a young child, vainly trying to rouse its playmate.

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

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Four men lay motionless on one of the hills overlooking the village. They wore desert camouflage fatigues and body armor. Night-vision goggles and binoculars gave them a clear view of every 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 satellite. And we’re tapped in with them.”

His leader, a giant auburn-haired man with bright green eyes, smiled thinly. “Good.” He leaned closer to get a better view of the screen. It showed a series of gruesome images—the pictures taken 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 key, sending a set of coded instructions to the communications satellite high overhead. One second later, 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 Heckler & 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 bearded 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 trig-

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ger. The 7.62mm round hit Ferrand in the forehead. The Frenchman toppled backward and slid to the ground, smearing blood and 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 fell in a heap next to her colleague.

The tall green-eyed leader rose to his feet. More of his men, these wearing hazardous materials suits, were already moving down the slope carrying an array of scientific equipment. He keyed his throat mike, reporting through an encrypted satellite link, "This is Prime. Field One is complete. Evaluation, collection, and analysis proceeding as planned." He eyed the two dead Lazarus activists. "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 the Institute’s main gate. He narrowed his eyes against the early-morning glare. Off on his left, sunlight was just spilling over the dazzling snowcapped peaks of the Sangre de Cristo range. It lit steep slopes carpeted with gold-leafed aspens, towering firs, ponderosa pines, and oaks. Farther down, at the foot of the mountains, the shorter piñon pines, junipers, and clumps of sagebrush surrounding the 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 car go by. A handful waved handmade signs demanding STOP KILLER SCIENCE, NO TO NANOTECH, or LET LAZARUS LEAD. Most stayed put, unwilling to face the chilly October dawn. Santa Fe was at seven 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 going, 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 and handed over his U.S. Army ID for inspection. The photo on his identity card showed a fit man in his early forties—a man whose high cheekbones and smooth, dark hair gave him the look of a haughty 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 Diaz. After scrutinizing the ID, he leaned forward, peering through the car windows to make sure that Smith was alone. His right hand hovered warily near the 9mm Beretta pistol holstered at his side. The flap on 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, certainly not up to the level of the top-secret nuclear labs at nearby Los Alamos. But the president of the United States, Samuel Adams Castilla, was scheduled to visit the Institute in three days. And now a huge anti-technology protest rally had been organized to coincide with his speech. The demonstrators outside the gate this morning were just the first wave of thousands more who were expected to pour in from all over the world. He jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "Are you catching flak from those people, Frank?"

"Not much so far," Diaz admitted. He shrugged. "But we're keeping a close eye on them anyway. This rally has the folks in Admin spooked. The FBI says there are some real hard-core troublemakers 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 property destruction. Genoa, Seattle, Cancun, and half a dozen other cities around the world had already seen their streets turned into battlegrounds between masked rioters and the police.

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

Strike that, Smith told himself with a lopsided grin. Make that a *working* vacation. As a military medical doctor and expert in molecular biology, he spent most of his time assigned to the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) at Fort Detrick, Maryland. His 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 on the work being done in the Institute's three nanotechnology labs. Researchers around the world were locked in a fierce competition to develop practical and profitable nanotech applications. Some of the best were right here at Teller, including teams from the Institute itself, Harcourt Biosciences, and Nomura PharmaTech. Basically, Smith thought with satisfaction, the Defense Department had given 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 of meanings. At its most basic, it meant the creation of artificial devices on the smallest of imaginable scales. A nanometer was just one-billionth of a meter, about ten times the size of an atom. Make 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 molecular level, engineering that involved quantum physics, chemistry, biology, and supercomputing.

Popular science writers painted glowing word-pictures of robots only a few atoms across prowling through the human body—curing diseases and repairing internal injuries. Others asked their readers to imagine information storage units one-millionth the size of a grain of salt yet able to hold all human knowledge. Or dust motes that were actually hypercapable at

mosphere miners, drifting silently through polluted skies while scrubbing them clean.

Smith had seen enough during his weeks at the Teller Institute to know that a few of those seemingly impossible imaginings were already hovering right on the edge of reality. He squeezed his car into a parking space between two behemoth SUVs. Their windshields were covered in frost, evidence that the scientists or technicians who owned them had been in the labs all night. He nodded appreciatively. These were the guys who were working the real miracles, all on a diet of strong black 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 deep breath, catching the faint smell of cooking fires and cannabis on the wind wafting across from the protest camp. More minivans, Volvo station wagons, chartered buses, and hybrid gas-electric cars were arriving in a steady stream, turning off Interstate 25 and heading up the access road toward the Institute. He frowned. The promised multitudes were assembling.

Unfortunately, it was the potential dark side of nanotechnology that fed the terrified imaginations of the activists and Lazarus Movement zealots gathering outside the chain-link fence. They were horrified by the idea of machines so small they could freely penetrate human cells and so powerful that they could reshape atomic structures. Radical civil libertarians warned about the dangers of “spy molecules” hovering unseen in every public and private space. Crazy conspiracy theorists filled Internet chat rooms with rumors of secret miniaturized killing machines. Others were afraid that runaway nanomachines would endlessly replicate themselves, dancing across the world like an endless parade of *Sorcerer’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 tangible results. Once most people got a good close look at the honest-to-God benefits of nanotechnology, their irra-

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tional fears should begin to subside. Or so he hoped. He spun sharply on his heel and strode toward the Institute's main entrance, eager to see what new wonders the men and women inside had cooked up overnight.

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Two hundred meters outside the chain-link fence, Malachi MacNamara sat cross-legged on a colorful Indian blanket laid out in the shade of a juniper tree. His pale blue eyes were open, but he sat calmly, without moving. The Lazarus Movement followers camped close by were convinced that the lean, weather-beaten Canadian was meditating—restoring his mental and physical energies for the crucial struggle ahead. The retired Forest Service biologist from British Columbia had already won 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 toxic pesticides and pollution. Science will not save her. Technology will not save her. They are her enemies, the true source of horror and contagion. And we must act against them. Now. Not later. Now! While there is still time . . .”

MacNamara hid a small smile, remembering the sight of the glowing faces fired by his rhetoric. He 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 the large green canvas tent set up as a command center by the Lazarus Movement. A dozen of its top national and international activists were busy inside that tent—manning computers linked to its worldwide Web sites, registering new arrivals, making banners and signs, and coordinating plans for the upcoming rally. Other groups in the TechStock coalition, the Sierra Club, Earth First!, and the like, had their own headquarters scattered throughout the sprawling camp, but MacNamara knew he was in precisely the right place at precisely the right time.

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The Movement was the real force behind this protest. The other environmental and anti-technology organizations were only along for the ride, trying desperately to stem a steady decline in their numbers and influence. More and more of their most committed members were abandoning them to join Lazarus, drawn by the clarity of the Movement's vision and by its courage in confronting the world's most powerful corporations and governments. Even the recent slaughter of its followers in Zimbabwe was acting as a rallying cry for Lazarus. Pictures of the massacre at Kusasa were being offered as proof of just how much the "global corporate rulers" and their puppet governments feared 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 way purposefully through the milling crowds. Each carried a long duffel bag slung over his shoulder. Each 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 very interesting."