

Quaranteam: Phil's Tale – Chapter 1

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a commissioned spin off from Quaranteam

“God, I barely had anything to drink, and I still feel like I'm fucking hung over two days later,” Phil thought to himself as his Tesla slowly crept up towards the military gate outside of the research compound where he worked. “Still, new year, new start. Now to see how badly everyone fucked up during the holidays.”

The sign outside of the gate said Boeing, but the checkpoint was all Air Force. The research facility had done its best to straddle the line between subtle and secure – the work they were doing was very important, and security was of the utmost, but if it *looked* important at a quick glance, the compound would draw attention to itself, and that was the last thing anyone here wanted, so the installation veered towards the external security looking like they were just any other research outpost that had a military contract.

Phil brought his electric blue Tesla to a stop at the gate as a new airman walked out to meet him. The gate staff tended to change every six months or so, and was generally manned by people so wet behind the ears they were still dripping. The airman walking up to him bore the name Jones on his camo'd chest, looked disdainfully into the Tesla as Phil held out his ID to the guy.

The airman walked back to the booth, swiped the ID, then walked back to the Tesla, holding it out to him. As Phil took it, the guy practically shot himself in the face with what he said next. “Have a good day, Mr. Chin,” he said to him, starting to turn back to walk towards the booth.

“Airman Jones!” Phil shouted. “Come here a minute.”

The airman turned back, annoyance on his face, before walking a few steps back. “What?”

“Take a *good* fucking look at that badge again, and why don't you try a second time?”

“Sorry,” the airman said, no apology in his voice, “have a good day, Mr. Marcos.”

“First, it's *Doctor* Marcos,” Phil said, his eyes trying to bore a hole in the soldier. “Second, right below that it says 'Section Chief.' Maybe you didn't do any of your basic reading about where you're currently stationed, but this is a Boeing/Air Force joint research station with over three hundred civilians working on it. There is one project chief, two division chiefs and five section chiefs. That means I am one of the ten most important civilians on the *goddamn* base. Third, and perhaps most importantly, you decided to try out your 'razy lacism' to someone driving a goddamn Tesla, which has external cameras *and* microphones, who just caught and recorded that little slur of yours and could have your ass in a sling if you don't learn to get your shit together. And finally, I'm fucking Filipino, not Chinese, you moron. So unless you want me to tell Major Peters that she's got a racist fuckup manning her checkpoint, I suggest you stow that shit as far down as you possibly can and never let it see the light of fucking day on this outpost ever, *ever* again. You understand?”

“Yes sir,” the man said, anger and embarrassment mixing behind his eyes. “Sorry sir.” The apology felt like Phil had twisted it out of him by force, but he'd still gotten it. Phil had gone through enough shit over the years that he was not going to let some bumfuck redneck hillbilly try and push him around at his own research center.

“Good,” Phil said. “This had better be the last fucking time I or anyone else working here gets shit like that from you, otherwise Major Peters is going to get this little recording and you are going to get yourself a dishonorable discharge.”

As Phil pulled the Tesla forward, he had to laugh a little bit at the hillbilly's gullibility. While he could tell Major Peters about the incident, and the guy would probably take a decent amount of flak for it, he wasn't going to get thrown out of the Air Force for just that. Beyond that, though, while the Tesla did have external cameras on it, it certainly didn't have external microphones, so the recording wouldn't actually show anything incriminating, but the moron didn't know that, and all the better for it.

Most of the people the Air Force had working on site were good people, but it seemed like the

dipshits who were stuck working gate duty often had IQs lower than anyone should be comfortable with for people holding loaded machine guns.

Phil drove his car over to the row of chargers, put his car in park and then opened the charging port, hooking the Tesla up and letting it start to charge. He'd move it to a regular spot after coming back for lunch, but the vehicle needed juice. The charging station at the base was complimentary, so better to get it powered up here than at home.

After he hooked up the charger, he opened up his cellphone and set it to redirect calls to the hardline in his office at the base, then shut the phone down. That had taken some getting used to, not being able to walk around the office with a cell phone, but it was part of the security protocols, and the Air Force felt it was important enough to mandate it, so that's what everyone on the base did. He headed inside of the tiny little building that gave the appearance of being a tiny little standard office, capable of holding maybe a couple of hundred people in cubicles.

The guys in the lobby were Sergeants, Browne and O'Malley, and they'd been working the second checkpoint about as long as the office had been open. Both of them were nice guys and would never pull the kind of shit that the hillbilly at the gate had. "Hey Phil," Browne said to him, grabbing Phil's lockbox from behind the counter, opening it up as Phil waved his ID card over the checkpoint reader to log himself into the building itself.

Phil dropped his house keys, his Leatherman and his cellphone into the lockbox, then took his authenticator out from it, as per usual, before Browne locked the box up and put it into the storage with the rest. When he left for the day, he'd get all of it back. After that, he walked through the metal detector, without so much as a pip, and gave the two men a wave as he headed towards the elevator.

Once inside the elevator, Phil waved his ID badge in front of the little RF reader, and the steel box started moving downwards. There weren't a lot of basements in California, so the idea of a subsurface research station was an unusual one, but the area had been carved out carefully, and reinforced thoroughly so that everyone would be fine even if a relatively major earthquake hit.

A little bit later, the elevator came to a stop and opened into a small chamber. Phil stepped in and the elevator door closed behind him, the steel box starting to work its way back upward. This was The Cage, as it was affectionately known. A small panel opened to the right of the door on the other side of it, and Phil waved his ID once more, then placed his hand against the palm scanner and pressed his eye up to the optical retina scanner. If any of those three things came back at all fishy, the room would be flooded with knock out gas and nice folks with guns and gas masks would be in within seconds to take the intruder into custody. It had only happened the once, and it had been in error, because the researcher in question had come in with a cold, so the palm reader had put the man's body temperature outside of acceptable deviations.

Since then, people had always made quite the point to stay home if they were sick.

As always, Phil passed the third check, and the doors opened up for him with a friendly *ping!* sound that filled the air, a polite signal to go ahead, you're authorized.

Working beneath ground meant there was a complete lack of natural daylight in the research center, much to Phil's annoyance, but he also had to admit the level of security and privacy was necessary. The last thing anyone wanted was their work falling into the wrong hands, be they a foreign government or the less scrupulous members of the private sector.

What had originally started as a way to improve drone pilot response had evolved into a potential neural net interface, a connection between a human brain and a machine, where the brain could direct a drone without the added lag time of physical dexterity. They were still a decent way from getting a fully functioning prototype, but they'd had some early levels of success, enough that the Air Force had doubled down on the research last year, as well as testing to see if individual aspects of their work could be applied to other things.

Phil was just starting to walk down the hallway to head to his office when he ran into the project chief, Adam McCallister, walking towards him, a soft smile on his face. Of course McCallister was

wearing a Stanford t-shirt, which just made Phil hate him even more, as a UC Berkeley grad.

The rivalry between Berkeley and Stanford ran deep and wide, and with enough drinks in him, Phil could occasionally be called upon to tell the tale of the time that Berkeley beat Stanford at a home game, and they had torn down the goalpost and marched it through the streets of Berkeley, bending streetlights as they went.

Sometime great victories required sacrifices through minor acts of vandalism.

“So Phil,” McCallister started in, “what's the hold up? I ran into Hunter earlier this morning, and he said your team was putting his team behind schedule. The last thing I need from you and your team is more delays, if you know what I mean.”

McCallister was, and had always been, a grade-A dick, and there was no excusing it, but unfortunately, he was also the project lead, a decision that Phil had questioned Boeing about multiple times, only to be told, repeatedly, that McCallister was 'their man for the job.'

Of course, it didn't hurt that McCallister was white, straight and came from an affluent family. As a Filipino, Phil had been forced to work four times as hard to get half as far in his career, and some days it was utterly sickening. So one thing Phil had gotten incredibly good at was documentation, and making sure that nobody could put him and his team in a corner.

“Actually, Adam,” Phil said, “my crew's ahead of schedule. The delays aren't on our end.”

“Hunter says you don't have anything his crew can use for initial testing with their interface yet, and that's the reason they aren't set to go into phase two yet.”

“They haven't provided their specs yet for what level of bioelectric currents they need for their interface to work, and we're waiting on them to provide those specs to us. Once they do get them to us, we can have something ready for them basically in a day or two.”

McCallister sighed, as if he was above this kind of petty micromanaging, and that he wasn't entirely convinced by Phil's explanation. “Well, you probably just haven't asked him for those specs yet, so you should definitely just go and ask him for them.”

Here's where Phil's paranoia about documentation came in handy. He'd gotten used to these kinds of bullshit excuses around the office, trying to shuffle blame onto him and his team. “There's an email chain, which you're CC'd on, that shows I've been asking him once a week for two months now, telling him we can't provide anything functional to him until we have the specifics about what level of bioelectric current they need generated, so I don't know how much more I can do, beyond the large amount of emails I've already sent.”

“Well, go ask him again, in person this time,” McCallister said, as if he still didn't believe Phil, despite the fact that evidence was sitting in the man's email box. “He's busy doing the real work around here, and sometimes things slip through the cracks. Be more of a team player, would you, Phil?”

Without even giving him a chance to answer, McCallister walked past him, patting him condescendingly on the shoulder, before heading back towards his own office. It took everything in Phil's willpower not to deck the smarmy asshole.

McCallister pulled this shit regularly, and each time Phil got a little less tolerant of it, but there really wasn't much in the way he could do about it right now, as McCallister was the project chief, even though he didn't full grasp all of the science being done, something Phil still didn't quite understand. But he had friends in high places at Boeing, and that was all that mattered. Boeing had stressed that Phil was a project manager, not a researcher.

What was most annoying about all of it was that it was generally quite predictable who McCallister believed and who he didn't. White dudes? Always right. Anybody else? Probably wrong. But proving that McCallister was a racist jackass had been ridiculously hard to do.

Instead of continuing straight to his office, Phil pivoted and headed over to Hunter Wilson's office down the hall, so if it came up again, he could say he went straight to Hunter's office and told him in person, not that it would make much of a difference.

Naturally, Phil found Hunter at his desk, not working, but watching BMX trick videos on

YouTube of all things. Hunter was the section chief for the electric-to-electronic interface, the stuff that would translate the bioelectric energy into usable signals. It was the most complicated part of the project, which of course meant that it had *never* worked reliably, and Phil had his doubts they were ever going to get it hammered into something usable.

While Boeing had been optimistic that the finer controls would be easy enough to work out, Phil had stressed time and time again that the level of precision they would need would be exceptional, and while the electric currents from their serum could offer some degree of that, he highly doubted they would be able to generate the kind of precision that the Air Force wanted, or that someone would be able to decipher those bioelectric signals into something usable.

Once again, his concerns had been noted and dismissed, and Phil had been told, as he often was, to just make sure his part worked fine and leave the rest to the 'big boys.' It was annoying. "One of these days," Phil thought to himself, "this is all going to bite them in the ass."

"Hunter," Phil said, after watching the engineer engrossed in the videos for at least a minute or so. The guy didn't even have the self-preservation instincts to have his desk facing the door, as if he was so convinced in his invulnerability that he was daring people to say something about his lack of working. "I'm here to check on how soon you're going to send us the specs of what level of bioelectric current you need, so I can have a prototype in your hands."

Hunter had paused the video, but was shameless about leaving it up on the screen as he turned to look at Phil. "It's like I was telling Adam," he said, rolling his eyes, "I sent you the specs weeks ago, and you haven't delivered *shit*."

"You haven't sent them, Hunter, otherwise you'd have had it already."

"I'm telling you I sent them, Phil. Are you calling me a liar?"

"Check again while I'm here, would you?" Phil moved in close, so he had a prime view of the man's screen. "If you sent them, they should be in the sent folder."

After a few seconds of clicking around, Adam found the email and gestured at the screen.

"There, you see? I told you I sent it."

"That's your drafts folder, Hunter," Phil sighed. He leaned forward, took the mouse from Hunter's hand and clicked on 'Send.' "If you don't send the email, nobody gets it. You can't just leave it in your drafts forever and expect us to work from that."

"Oh," Hunter said, as if he still somehow thought it was Phil's fault. "I guess that's my bad then. Was it urgent?"

"It's only been holding you up on getting to the next phase, so I guess that's a matter of perspective," Phil said. "But you're the one who's going to have to explain why you forgetting to click a button meant your team was in a holding pattern for a few weeks. Anyway, now that we have your specs, we'll have a chemical prototype ready and balanced for you by the end of the day."

Phil headed out of Hunter's office and back to his own, so he could finally get a proper start to this day that had been filled to the brim with other people's fuckups until now. As a section chief, his office was of a decent size, and he'd slowly brought in piece after piece of customization into it, to make it feel less sterile, from the Ryu statue on his desk to the Gran Blue Fantasy wallscroll that hung off to the side. People tended to notice them more quickly than they did the carved wooden Jesus on the cross that hung on the wall high above his desk, looking over him protectively.

He reached forward and turned the Ryu statue to one side with a sigh. There were days when Phil missed the simplicity of the fighting game tournament scene. It was one of the few places where he felt he could totally be himself, where he fit in with a bunch of like minded souls. In school, he'd hung around mostly other Asian kids, but being Filipino put him in a minority even among them, as they were predominantly Chinese, with both Japanese and Vietnamese being more common than Filipino. But when he'd been at the stick of a Street Fighter cabinet, he'd been able to just be another competitor, and there he felt like he absolutely fit right in.

Evo 2020 wasn't for several more months, but just knowing it was coming was like a balm for

his nervousness, as he turned on his computer, fishing out the authenticator from his pocket, entering his password and then the 12 digit authentication number that was currently on the little digital keyfob he had to carry with him everywhere around the base. The number changed every thirty seconds, and was designed so that Boeing knew exactly who was using any computer terminal at any time.

The first thing he did was check the Discord where he and his friends chatted, and saw there was a message from Andy, reminding him that it was his turn to buy pizza for next week's poker game, so he'd better not show up empty handed. That reminded Phil to update his calendar.

On the wall behind his desk, he kept a paper calendar with all his non-work related stuff. He pulled down the December 2019 page and looked at the January 2020 page, making a note for next week's poker night that he was up for pizza, before sending a message to the Discord, at'ing Andy that he'd written it down so he wouldn't forget.

Most of his January was pretty empty, although he did have to make a point and visit his mom's grave to put flowers on it near the end of the month, on the anniversary of her death. She'd died four years prior, complications from ovarian cancer, and her passing had left a hole in his heart big enough to park a battleship in, even this far on. His dad had moved down to San Diego a year or so after she'd passed, wanting to be closer to his brothers, and Phil figured his uncles would do everything they could to keep his father from going too crazy. His dad had even sold him the house in Fremont for a song, saying it was more Phil's now than his, because the memories of mom were too plentiful to bear.

That made more than enough sense, so as sad as Phil was to see his dad pack up and go, he understood that his father needed to find his own sense of peace in the world.

After spending a few minutes getting settled in again after the vacation for Christmas and New Year's, Phil opened his email, looked at the specs Hunter had sent over. Of course, Hunter had only sent them directly to Phil, so when he replied, Phil made sure to CC not only his team, but McCallister as well, so the paper documentation continued.

He kept his reply short and sweet, saying they would have a chemical compound for them to begin testing with before the end of day tomorrow, Friday, January 3rd 2020.

Not more than fifteen minutes after he'd sent the email, his phone rang, and he saw it was McCallister, so he sighed and picked up the phone. "What's up, Adam?"

"Major Peters wants to see all the chiefs in the conference room in five minutes."

"All of us? At once? What the hell for?"

"Dunno, but she seemed spooked, so get your ass over there and I'll see you in there."

Major Monica Peters was head of operations for the Air Force at the research station, and had mostly struck Phil as a sensible, take-no-shit officer who was much more concerned with results than people's feelings getting hurt. She hadn't struck him as the kind of woman who spooked easily, so the fact that McCallister had described her as such put him on edge.

Three minutes later, Phil sat down in the conference room and saw all the heads of state were there or just arriving: McCallister, the project chief; Wes Bridges, the division chief for the bio half; Matt Cunningham, the division chief for the electrics half; Hunter Wilson, section chief for the electronics interface; Martin Grant, section chief for weapons engineering; Nate Campbell, section chief for aeronautics engineering; and Charles Daniels, the section chief for biofeedback engineering.

Standing at the front of the conference table was Major Peters, talking in quiet animated conversation with a man at least six inches taller than she was, and with a lot more impressive things on his uniform.

As soon as everyone got seated, Major Peters moved to pull the doors shut, locking them, before returning to the front of the table. "Good morning, gentlemen. I feel like we've made a lot of progress on the project over the last several months, but as of today, we're going to be putting Project Impulse on hold for the foreseeable future." Everyone was looking around, mostly looking at McCallister, but he looked just as confused as the rest of them.

"I don't understand," McCallister started, before the Major raised her hand to silence everyone.

"I know, Dr. McCallister, but Major General Fielder here is going to be assuming operational command of this facility for the time being, and redirecting our efforts into something new, something incredibly urgent. Now if you'll give him a few minutes of your time, he'll walk you through what we're going to be working on moving forward."

"Thank you, Major," Fielder said, picking up a clicker from the table, pushing the button on it as a screen came to life behind him, displaying a map of Asia. He was a lean man in his early fifties, silver hair and a thick bushy mustache, golden rimmed glasses on over his eyes. He seemed equal parts calming and intimidating, like his very presence implied a level of seriousness that no one had previously expected. "Late last fall, we intercepted communiques about a couple of biological contagions that we suspected might become problems, despite best efforts to keep them contained. The first is this Coronavirus, out of China, which we think will be a problem, but we're anticipating having it handled relatively quickly. The bigger concern is the second pathogen, which we're currently calling the DuoHalo virus. We don't have any confirmed point of origin for the DuoHalo virus, but the working theory is that it was extracted from the ice in northern Russia by a research team taking core samples from deep in the tundra, which makes it perhaps millions of years old."

He pushed a button and advanced the slide, this time showing a dead man, blood leaking from his eyes, nostrils, ears and mouth. The image was extremely grisly and Phil suddenly found himself glad he hadn't made the time for breakfast.

"The DuoHalo virus is, as of yet, undetectable during its incubation period, but has a very high level of contagion, and we're fairly certain is spread in an airborne manner. During the incubation period, every carrier is spreading and redistributing the pathogen at an incredibly dangerous rate," the Major General said. "We believe that the Coronavirus will offer us a good smokescreen cover for this, as it's likely we're going to be seeing people quarantining within a month or so, and we have yet to have any cases of the DuoHalo virus here in the U.S. as of yet. The quarantine for Corona will help us keep this more deadly virus, the DuoHalo virus, quiet and off the radar while we're trying to figure out how we can manage and solve it."

"We're not really familiar with the ins and outs of infectious diseases, Major General," McCallister said, in the first thing that Phil had agreed with him on in a while. "This isn't really our area of expertise, so why are you coopting us for this project?"

"We're coopting several teams for this project, Dr. McCallister," the Major General said, "so you aren't the only one. We weighed the pros and cons of having the various teams collaborate, but as of right now, nobody has a good handle on this pathogen, so we want everyone coming at it with no preconceived notions, no expectations in advance that color their thoughts on how to fight it. So yes, we understand that this isn't what this group was formed for, but for right now, it's all this team needs to be working on. We're also going to bring a couple of specialists in to help with some aspects of it, and they should be arriving in a few weeks. Doctor Dev Varma and his wife Doctor Charlotte Varma. He's an expert in weaponized pathogens, and she's an infectious disease researcher specializing in helping people survive exposure to them. They will be assuming the project lead positions from Doctor McCallister, who will be retasked with helping develop some kind of treatment that will enable us to endure and survive this as a country."

"That's pretty strong language there, General," Phil said. "How high is the mortality rate on this DuoHalo virus anyway?"

"We aren't entirely sure, but if the Russian chatter we intercepted is to be believed, somewhere between 50-75%."

That put the entire room into silence. Phil was already doing back of the envelope math in his head, but with a mortality rate like that, it was the kind of death toll that would put the Spanish Flu epidemic to shame without breaking a sweat. Over three billion dead people in a year or two was basically a crisis the like of which the world had never seen.

"That... that *can't* be right," Bridges said. "That would be the deadliest virus this planet's ever

seen, if it's true. How contained is it?"

"We're not sure," the Major General said, "but even if we could convince the Commander-in-Chief to force everyone to quarantine at home immediately, to shut down the borders to any and all entrances or exits, we still anticipate we're going to start seeing cases of it here within a few months time, and once we do, our window to get this thing under control shortens exponentially."

"The guy stared into a fucking *eclipse*," Daniels muttered beneath his breath, quiet enough that most of the room couldn't hear him, but Phil was sitting right next to the man. "He doesn't give a *shit* about what the science says. Fucking Cheeto, he's gonna get us all fucking killed."

"Now all of this information is highly classified, so you cannot go discussing this with anyone off base, and even the amount of information you distribute to your teams should be kept as need-to-know as possible," the Major General continued. "The mechanical engineering members of the project will be working to build detection and testing systems, and Doctor Dev Varma will be that project's chief when he arrives. Doctor Charlotte Varma will be directing the rest of you, who are tasked with developing either a vaccine or a suppression system that can keep the virus in check and under control. The work that Doctor Marcos's team has been doing shows a lot of promise in piggybacking that into some kind of treatment to help us keep this plague from wiping out our country as we know it, so until she shows up, I'd like you to take point for the team, Dr. Marcos."

"Yes sir," Phil sighed, knowing that as nice as it would be to not really answer to anyone for a while, they were also targeting him to be their scapegoat in case anything went horribly wrong. It was a very double-edged sword they were handing him. "How do you want us to spin it to our teams?"

"Give them as much information as they need, but try not to get into the lethality of it unless it turns out to be necessary," the Major General said. "We'll be meeting with each of you over the next couple of days as we work to re-calibrate this team towards its new purpose. You should have a meeting invite on each of your calendars, and we'll meet again in a few days to put together a battle plan. Until then, dismissed."

The Major General still wasn't used to working with civilians, Phil thought to himself, but that was fine. Judging by the sound of things, they were all up shit creek without paddles anyway, so the best thing to do was simply to get to work.

Phil headed out of the office, bypassing the rest of the team leads, who were all chatting among themselves. He suspected there was going to be a certain level of bitchiness about the upending of the project, the complete change in leadership and at least a few pot shots about they thought Phil was likely just to fuck it all up anyway. Let'em sit and stew, Phil thought.

By the time he got back to his office, there was, in fact, a meeting request in his calendar, for tomorrow afternoon, meaning they were meeting with everyone else before him, which meant he was either the most important opinion or the least. Considering he was being put in charge of the team until the two Doctors Varma arrived, he hoped it was the latter.

Also in his email was the data dump the Major General had promised them, and Phil immediately started reading all of it on his iPad, taking notes in a separate window while he did, making sure to keep track of every crucial bit of information they had about this DuoHalo virus. There was a bunch of information about the Corona virus as well, which also seemed bad, but nothing like the DuoHalo virus, which seemed absolutely insidious.

The DuoHalo virus was such an insipidly effective threat, Phil's first suspicion was that it had been engineered, crafted and designed by human hands, but in looking at the data, there were too many wild and loose threads, too many unusual and unpredictable variables for it to likely have been built by people, and instead was likely just some random freak mutation from some existing virus that hadn't previously been dangerous to humans at all. The idea that maybe it had been sitting frozen in the ice several hundred feet beneath the surface for tens of thousands of years seemed as plausible as any.

One hour turned into two which turned into four, and before he knew it, there was a knocking at his door. He looked up to see Doctor Bill McKenna standing in his doorway, a quizzical look on his

face. Bill was generally a good guy, with a beer gut that could hold a couple of kegs, and a bird's nest of silver hair with a giant bald spot in the center of it. "So what's this about us getting retasked?" Bill asked him.

"Yeah, I guess rumor mill travels fast," Phil said to him. "Project's been put on indefinite hold, and we're being retasked onto a new thing. We'll have a meeting about it about it on Monday, after the reshuffling happens. They're probably gonna have the exec team in over the weekend, drafting up a new battle plan."

"Well, I think I need you to take a break from that and come see a bit of video from one of our human test cases earlier today," Bill said, that odd look on his face having only gotten odder.

"We weren't supposed to be *doing* human test cases yet, Bill," Phil sighed. "Who the hell authorized that?"

"Dr. Bridges started us on initial low dosage testing this morning, so I assumed you'd heard about it," Bill said, "and even if you hadn't, he's your boss, so I figured we'd better go along with what he said to do until you said otherwise."

"Well, as of," Phil said, glancing at his Apple Watch, "four hours ago, I'm *his* boss, so we're definitely going to put a stop to human testing, at least in the short term. We'll be doing a *lot* more human testing in the very near future, though, what with the retasking."

"Okay, sure, but you'd still better come and see this," Bill said, his voice getting a little more insistent. "Before anyone else does."

"Bill, whatever it is, I'm sure—"

"*PHIL*," Bill hissed. "For once in your goddamn life, trust me on this and come take a fucking look at it, will you?"

That *definitely* caught Phil's attention. Bill was the kind of man who *never* swore. In fact, Phil had known the researcher for four years, and just using the word 'goddamn' was enough to get his attention, but then he'd taken it a step further and added an f-bomb for good measure.

"Okay!" Phil said, closing the case on his iPad, letting the magnetic pencil cling to the side, as he tucked it under his arm. "If it's that important, let's go take a look at the damn thing."

The two men walked down the hallway, then down a couple of flights of stairs, heading into an area they used as a sort of staging grounds, but off to the side, there were a handful of rooms where they could do clinical trials and keep people under observation while the biological and chemical elements were in their system.

"What sort of amperage were you testing the serum at?" Phil said, trying to get a handle on what exactly Bridges had been testing for.

"None at all," Bill said, "just doing some basic grafting of our baseline serum onto a couple of common steroid and opioids, seeing how the serum worked when paired with another drug designed to do something else. Bridges wanted to see if the serum had any other uses outside of the bioelectrical feedback system we designed it for."

"Well, of course it fucking does, Bill," Phil groaned. "That's the whole purpose of our serum, to be a piggyback deployment measure that we can use to introduce elements rapidly into the human system. Shit, you could've just told him that when he asked. Before we got folded into the drone control program, the idea was that we were going to use the serum to direct nanobots to identify and repair wounds in the field, which is why we knew we could use it to send bioelectrical signals out. That's why they brought us in here in the first place, because the nanobots team couldn't figure out how to get basic fucking diagnostics working for the nanobots to act on. You know all that."

"I *told* him all that, but he said since we'd made so many adjustments to the serum in the last five months, trying to get it to work in tandem with Dr. Cunningham's system, he wanted to be sure nobody had screwed anything up along the line."

"Well, if the serum's sending out minor bioelectric signals through the body, it shouldn't cause any adverse effects, unless it's reacting to something in one of the elements it's been grafted onto."

“That's what I'm telling you, Phil!” Bill whispered, angrily. “We got one hell of an adverse effect out of one of the grafts! One *hell* of an adverse effect!”

“What was it grafted onto?” Phil said, knowing immediately what it was going to be, based purely on how his day had been going so far.

“Just a simple flu shot!” Bill said, leading Phil into an observation room, with the subject, a woman in her late twenties, asleep beneath a blanket. They had a steady flow of volunteers, people eager to put their bodies on the line to make some quick cash, as long as the experiments weren't too dangerous. “She's fine now. Mostly. We think. We hope, anyway, but you should've seen her just after the shot was administered.”

The two men sat down in front of the television, as Phil rubbed his eyes. “Well, let's see it,” he said. “Show me the tape and let's see how fucked up today's really been.”

Bill picked up the remote and turned the television on, before tapping on the keyboard, logging in using his own authenticator before loading up a video file from five hours prior. “Here she is when the shot's administered.” The file started playing and the woman was injected in the arm with a cocktail of flu vaccine and the serum that the scientists had affectionately nicknamed 'Zap Juice,' based on its derivation from the physiology of electric eels. The name on the video file said the woman's name was Caselli, K. Kate, Phil guessed. She looked like a Kate.

“Everything looks fine and normal, Bill,” Phil said, watching the woman get the injection, no adverse effects of any kind, before she sat down on the cot with her book, some Sue Grafton novel, starting to read.

“Sure, now here's an hour later,” Bill said, tapping to advance the time code.

The image suddenly shifted dramatically, as the woman had crawled beneath the sheet on the cot, and there was a frantic rustling going on beneath it.

“Is... is she?”

“She absolutely is definitely masturbating, yes,” Bill said. “And when one of the researchers went in to talk to her, this happened.”

Bill skipped ahead a few minutes, and one of the junior members of the team – Doug? Mike? Shit, Phil couldn't remember his name – went over towards her, and the woman leaped up from the cot and started kissing the man intensely, before he pushed her back and fled from the room, closing her inside, even as she hammered at the door with her fists, yelling and demanding that he get back in there and fuck her properly. The meek little woman who had gotten the shot had been replaced by this furiously worked up warrior.

“Holy balls,” Phil said. “After that?”

“After that...” Bill said, skipping forward again. The woman moved back to lay on the bed, stripped off all her clothes, and masturbated right in front of the camera, rubbing her pussy slowly, thrusting her hips upwards, almost like she was trying to invite a man into the room, and eventually, after what felt like a very long time, even with the video playing at 4x speed, she finally seemed impatient, sped up until she hit some kind of orgasm and then passed out atop of the blanket. The orgasm looked particularly intense, and Phil noted that Bill had turned the volume down sizable, as the woman had let out a rather primal moan, somewhere between release and frustration.

“Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat the fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck...” Phil said.

“About twenty minutes later, Damon felt confident enough to go back in there, and pulled the blanket over her. Said she was completely out like a light, would not wake up. At all. He checked her basic vitals and everything seemed generally within acceptable ranges – breathing, heart rate, eye motion...”

“Eye motion? She's in REM sleep?”

“Yep,” Bill said, stopping the video. “And she still hasn't woken up yet. She passed out almost two hours ago. After he'd checked her vitals, he tried to wake her up and said she was *out* out. Didn't seem comatose, but not being able to be woken up was pretty weird.”

“No, what's pretty weird, Bill,” Phil said, leaning forward to take the mouse from his colleague's hand, scrolling the time back, showing the woman's face right before she grabbed poor Damon and kissed him, pausing at that exact moment. “*That* right there is pretty fucking weird. Look at that expression. That's not a woman who's in her right mind. That's not a woman who's thinking clearly. That is a woman in some kind of delirium state, almost like an altered consciousness state. And you've documented all of this, including the fact that this request came from Bridges?”

“Yeah yeah, it's all in the notes, Phil,” Bill said. “I know how adamant you are about us documenting everything so we've got it all written up. This isn't our fucking fault and nobody can say that it is.”

“And nobody else had a reaction like this?”

“Well, we only did five tests, but yeah, I think if any of the others had turned someone into a hormonal sex maniac, don't you think I would've mentioned it?”

“What were the five combos you ran it with?”

“One with a small dose of insulin, one with a minor steroid, one with a trace amount of morphine, one with a placebo and this last one with a flu vaccine. I mean, it's weird, but it just means it's something we don't go back to, right?”

“Bill,” Phil sighed. “The reason they're shutting down the drone project is to pivot us into working on a vaccine for some kind of super flu they're just finding out about now. This is literally *exactly* what we're going back to, come Monday.”

“Shit,” Bill said. “Okay, let me get started on her bloodwork then, see what exactly the serum and the vaccine did to cause such a reaction, and we'll see if we can get ahead of it. Who do you want me to rope in on this?”

“No one, Bill,” Phil said, scratching his head. “Start looking into it on your own, on the down low, but don't fucking tell anyone what you're doing yet. The last thing I need is this whole office knowing we accidentally found something that turns a rational woman into a raving sex beast. Maybe we'll get lucky, and it was something unusual about the suspension the vaccine was in.”

“Look at it this way, boss,” Bill said with a soft laugh. “Worst case scenario, you just invented Spanish Fly, and became the most popular man alive.”

“That's exactly what I'm fucking afraid of.”

“Spanish Fly to fight Spanish Flu 2,” Phil thought to himself. “Just fucking *wonderful*.”

(This spin-off story from the main Quaranteam story was sponsored by one of my Patrons – <http://www.patreon.com/CorruptingPower> and is being made available to everyone in time with my usual release schedule, a month or so after Patrons get it. Please note that Quaranteam Chapter One is set in May 2020, so this spin-off starts significantly before then, but will definitely cross over with the main story at several points. As always, feel free to drop me a line at CorruptingPower@aol.com)