

BioComputer

by Michael P Calligaro

Sometimes I do what I do for fun. Other times I do it for the money. It's usually for the challenge, but sometimes I do it for spite. There are times when all of the above apply. I'm very good at what I do. At one time I thought I was the best.

Every once in a while Fate will let you live through a bout of such stupid pomposity. I'm starting to believe this is not one of those times.

* * *

Darrek watched the security camera's output in a window on the left lens of his sunglasses. The image panned passed a large drum--the one he hid behind. The second his hiding place left the camera's vision he got up and sauntered across the room. Some high security installation this turned out to be. One camera per room. What a joke. He checked the floor plan overlay on his right lens. Red, purple, and green dots representing guards, security robots, and miscellaneous people moved around on it. None, however, were anywhere near the white dot in the center, himself. At first this job had seemed like a crazy scheme. Now it was starting to look easy.

A slight movement in the camera's eye caught his attention and shattered all thoughts of this being an easy job. At the extreme edge of its vision, just before it panned back toward the center of the room, Darrek saw a dark-clad figure stand up and point something in his direction. Without a millisecond's hesitation, Darrek dove to the floor. Bullets wizzed over his head and blasted into the wall. He rolled sideways, putting another drum between himself and his opponent.

Where in Hell did he come from? He's nowhere on the security schematic! Darrek quickly took in his situation. The closest exit from the room was a door about two meters to his right. No sooner did he look that way when three holes appeared in the door in what looked like a perfect equilateral triangle. He's a good shot too, damn. That's okay, I've got an edge on him.

The camera panned over Darrek, but he didn't have time to trifle with hiding himself from it. They already knew he was here. It reached the far end of the room and started back. Now we'll find out who you are. It reached the center of the room and another shot rang out. The image in front of Darrek's left eye became static. Cursing, he blinked and the image went away.

Why did he do that? No one knew the truth about Darrek's fancy mirrored sunglasses. But here was a guard that had somehow kept himself off the schematic, was an excellent shot, and had only fired as many bullets as he needed. He was definitely a pro, a good one. He didn't take out the camera just for the fun of it. That could only mean that he knew an awful lot about Darrek, while Darrek knew nothing about him. Sun Tzu favored his adversary in that case, and the ancient general was rarely wrong.

So what's your next move, my phantom friend? If you know me so well you should know I'm not armed. So you could just walk into view and get me. But you won't do that, will you? You gain just as much by sitting there in the dark where I can't see you and letting the other guards come take care of me. So that's what you'll do.

The guard didn't move.

* * *

Jimmy Newcombe stormed into the director's office and slammed the door behind him. "What we're doing is fucked up!"

Max looked up from his screen and put on a patronizing stare. In a calm voice, he asked, "Jimmy, why don't you sit down and tell me what this is all about?"

Ignoring the offer of a chair, Jimmy started pacing. "I just learned what we're really doing here and it's--"

"Fucked up?" Max offered.

"Yeah, that's right!"

With a sigh, he responded, "Jimmy, what we're doing is advancing the knowledge of science."

"Oh, can it, Max. I may be naive, but I'm not stupid. What I'm doing is 'advancing the knowledge of science.' But what you're doing is--"

Max cut him off again. "Funding you." A trace of anger seeped into his voice. "And let me remind you that--" The sound of machine gun fire erupted from his screen.

"What was that?"

"It seems we have an intruder. Meagan has him pinned down in Lab 6A."

"An intruder?" Fear crept into Jimmy's voice. "How did he get so deep into the compound?"

Max shrugged. "Obviously he's a skillful intruder."

"Well, what's he want?"

"I don't know. Meagan hasn't asked him yet."

"Well--"

Max looked up from the screen, obviously annoyed. "Listen, Jimmy, I'm sure you're worried about something important and I want to sit down with you and talk about it. But right now we've got this situation and I feel we need to deal with it. What if there are more intruders? Are they armed? Frankly, I'd feel better if you were safe at home right now."

More gunfire rang out from the screen's speakers. "Okay, but we'll talk, right?"

"Of course we will, Jimmy. I can't have my star scientist unhappy."

"Don't forget that." He spun and left the office. Security guards and robots rushed by and he watched them recede down the hall. Then he headed back toward his lab. There was no way Jimmy was going home. Besides, Meagan seemed to have the situation under control.

* * *

The schematic showed red and purple dots converging on this room from all directions. He'd better find another way out soon. He glanced down at the magnifying glass icon in the right corner of his vision and blinked. The schematic zoomed in and became a wireframe 3D view of the room. The phantom guard stood somewhere near the door Darrek had originally used to enter the room. So that was out. The guard had also aptly demonstrated the futility of trying for the opposite door. There was a ventilation shaft on the wall behind him, but there was no cover for it. The guard would cut him in two before he even got

the first screw off the screen. That left a medium sized grill on the floor in the center of the room.

He focused on the grill and blinked, enlarging it. It covered a small waste chute that dropped a few stories into some sort of container. The chute would be tight, but he believed he could fit into it. Given the nature of the genetic experiments performed in this room, Darrek was not sure he wanted to learn first hand what occupied the waste vat. But whatever it was, it had to be less dangerous than small pieces of lead traveling at high velocities.

Now to find out if the DNA vat he hid behind could be moved. Darrek leaned into it with his back and pushed at its base with his hands. The liquid inside splashed against the lid and the vat slid back a centimeter or so. Now this was starting to look up. The guard had orders not to shoot the container. His job was to protect this stuff from the likes of Darrek, not to destroy it himself. Would he be smart enough to disobey those orders? Maybe he wouldn't even figure out what Darrek intended. He was good, but was he a genius? Only one way to find out.

But how to time it? Damn him for shooting the camera! Darrek craned his neck around and tried to peer around the side of the vat. This gave him a short glimpse of the guard pointing his gun at his face. He pulled his head back behind the vat just as the gun went off. The bullet wizzed by the edge of the vat, practically skimming it. Darrek's heart pounding, he shoved back with all his might, breaking past the vat's static friction with the floor and sending it sliding toward his opponent. The guard fired a shot over the approaching vat. Darrek paid him no heed and continued to push, crabwalking as he went. When his feet passed the grate on the floor, he hefted the vat from the bottom and toppled it over at the guard, sending him diving out of the path of the splashing liquid. Darrek yanked up the grate and threw it over his shoulder at the sprawling guard. Then he hopped into the chute feet first.

It was too dark to see in the conduit, but a blink set Darrek's glasses to Computer Aided Vision. The CAV masked Darrek's body out of the picture and showed just a graphic of the chute as he slid down it. He pulled the view outside the drainpipe and was relieved to find that it had a slight bend to it. He'd be out of sight from above in another 4 meters. The curve in the chute would also account for the slime scraping along his back and finding its way up under his shirt.

"You did say this was better than high velocity lead, right?" Darrek asked himself aloud.

With a shudder, he replied, "I'm starting to wonder."

The CAV showed that this chute was about to merge with another and the combined duct would then dump into the holding tank. Darrek kicked his feet out to the sides and shoved his back harder against the rear of the chute, forcing more slime up his shirt. He slid to a halt just below the junction.

"They'll be expecting me in the tank down there. I guess I'll just have to disappoint them." Using his feet to shove his back against the conduit and his hands to pull himself up, Darrek inched his way into the other chute. It would be slow going, but boy would they be surprised when he arrived in the lab adjoining the one he'd just left. Not that they'd notice, of course.

* * *

So, why'd I come on this crazy job? You wouldn't believe me. Then again, I don't really care what you believe. I'm recording this for you because I'm actually afraid I might not make it back. Would I lie to you on my death job? Don't answer that.

Truthfully, I had to do it. In my own twisted view of morality, this job is self defense. If I let them continue what they're doing, they'll ruin me. Sure, I could claim altruistic purposes as well. Their work will ruin many people, though most of the stupid masses are too ignorant to see the threat,

let alone understand it. So yes, if you must remember me in a good light, you could say I did this for those masses. But it would be a lie. I am who I am, and while I'm not always proud of that person, I never try to hide him. Selfish or not, I'm doing this for me.

My computers will forward this to you if I don't get back. They'll also forward a lot of other info about me. I'm sorry this is how you learned who your son really was, but I have a feeling you suspected anyway. Mom, please don't berate yourself for how I turned out. With what little you had, you did a fine job raising me, and I love you.

* * *

Darrek pushed back with his aching legs and wedged himself in the chute. He wiped his slime-covered brow with a slime-covered sleeve. He couldn't afford too long of a rest break. He took the guard by surprise in diving down the chute, but dots had reached the holding vat already. Maybe they'd realize that he hadn't come out there, or maybe they wouldn't. Either way, he had to move quickly now that they knew he was in the compound. With a grunt he forced himself a little higher up the chute.

His muscles aching and his body reeking, he approached the top of the alternate chute. Though the climb had been physically demanding, he had done it mechanically. That left him time to use his optical and vocal interfaces to his computers to study the security system again and set up some secondary and tertiary plans. Then he'd tried to answer some worrying questions. Where had that guard come from? And who was he? One thing was for sure, he was no ordinary rent-a-gun. He had been quick, light on his feet, and an excellent shot. Your average night watchman was none of those. And since when did guards start dressing in sporting head-to-toe black outfits? Darrek made a mental note to compliment his tailor the next time he ran into him. He glanced down at his own ruined suit and sighed.

But the biggest tip-off as to the specialty of this guard was the fact that he didn't appear anywhere in the security logs. There was always a record of every employee somewhere! Could he have been another cat burglar, like Darrek? It was possible, but unlikely. Not only would he have not betrayed his existence by shooting, but Darrek would almost definitely have seen him snooping around the building's computer systems. That is, unless the gunner was better at this sort of thing than Darrek. What a scary thought.

He reached the grating and stopped. Watching two passes on the security camera convinced him that nothing was amiss. He recorded a pass and fed the recording back into the system's inputs. It was an old trick, but it worked exceedingly well. When sure the camera would not see him, he pushed the grate aside and pulled himself out of the chute. He briefly stretched his aching muscles, then, despite their complaints for more rest, replaced the grate and moved on. The camera switched back to correct vision automatically when he got out of its view.

Darrek's initial plans had counted on him not being seen in the building. Being caught by the phantom guard threatened to derail this whole thing. He'd just have to switch to the backup plan and hope beyond hope that it worked. He wondered how much good hoping would do. If not for being such a devote atheist, he would have prayed. Then again, this job threatened to move him up to agnostic.

The security computer told him that most of the guards and secbots were wandering around near the holding tank wondering where he went. Suddenly they got a report that he was nearby and moving quickly toward the storage rooms. The storage rooms held valuable rare metals that might interest a lesser burglar. They also happened to be on the opposite end of the building from where he was really heading.

* * *

There were some on the Net that wanted to blow up the BioLab. I tried to explain to them the

futility of this action. They'd need to kill all the scientists here and even then, they'd probably still fail to stop this. You can't destroy information. At least, not in this day and age. Besides, killing someone is such an amateurish way to get what you want. I've never needed to kill anyone before and don't intend to start. There's a limit to how far I'll stretch my morality. See, you didn't do too bad a job in raising me.

So I came up with a far more elegant plan, and thus volunteered to execute it. And here I am, contemplating the merits of elegance over a nice tactical nuke. This is the first time I've ever transmitted my thoughts while on the job. This is also the first time I've ever wondered if I'd make it back from the job. Coincidence? I think not. Besides, I thought I should give you a feel for how I work.

I wonder where my competition is? He doesn't show up on the system, so he's effectively invisible to me. Great, I'm competing with a ghost. A ghost with a machine gun, that is.

* * *

Jimmy paced angrily back and forth in the main lab. He felt like a living cliché, the naive scientist, too caught up in his work to realize how people were going to use it. At least they weren't going to make anything so melodramatic as a weapon. It was unlikely that anyone would die as a direct result of his work. But still, you no longer needed bombs to control people.

Alarms roared to life and a voice trying too hard to stay calm came over the loudspeakers. "Please evacuate the building. This is not a drill. Please evacuate the building." Other scientists looked uncertainly at each other, shrugged, and left. Jimmy did not follow them. Instead he slouched into his lab chair.

* * *

So it seems that on his way from the holding vat to the storage area, Darrek stopped off at environmental control and dumped some potentially dangerous substance into the air system. At least that's what the computers think. What a bad man that Darrek is. In reality I'm far from the environmental control room and heading in the opposite direction. Ninety percent of what I do is fool stupid people and even stupider computers into thinking things are different than they really are.

* * *

Darrek smiled in spite of himself. The last of the scientists hurried past his hiding space to find their way out of the building. He scanned over the main lab one more time then crawled out from under his desk and snuck in. On the other end of the building a reprogrammed secbot was removing some precious metals from storage and hiding them. There were no guards around to see this, as they had all left the building. This job might work out after all.

Once inside the lab, Darrek wasted no time heading for one of the large generator vats in the center of the room. Then one of the big leather chairs swiveled around, showing a young man in a lab coat too big for him.

"You're the intruder, aren't you?"

Darrek barely heard him over the blaring alarms. He blinked and they cut out. He then looked over the kid in the chair. "You're, Jimmy Newcombe, the one who's responsible for all this, aren't you?"

He nodded.

"Damn it, kid! Why didn't you leave with everyone else?"

The scientist shrugged. "I didn't feel like it."

Darrek pulled at his hair. "I've never had to kill anyone before," he muttered, "but I'm running out of options here." Behind him, he heard the tell-tale sound of a bolt sliding into a breach. Darrek didn't even look back. Instead he said, "Damn, he's good."

Jimmy raised his eyebrows. "He?"

The phantom guard spoke. "Thank you, Darrek. That means a lot coming from you. But what-da-ya mean 'he?'"

Darrek turned around and took his first good look at his adversary. The gunner was dressed from neck to foot in black, with dark eyes and even darker hair. And 'he' was definitely a she. "A woman?" Darrek stammered.

She stood up a little straighter, fixed him with an intense stare, and motioned toward him with her gun. Through clenched teeth she asked, "Is there something wrong with that?"

Darrek shook his head slowly. "No, it's just that I think I'm in love."

This caught her off guard. She blushed slightly and smiled beautifully.

"I'm feeling outclassed here, or at least underprepared. I hate that." Some anger crept into his voice. "You seem to know everything about me, but I don't even know your name."

"That's Meagan," Jimmy interjected, "she's our new security chief."

Megan nodded her head slightly, keeping the gun trained on him at all times.

Darrek pushed the anger aside and replaced it with his natural charm. "Meagan, you're extremely good at this. Have you ever considered a life of crime?"

She laughed. "I've toyed with the idea from time to time, but I don't think I'll give up my day job just yet. Speaking of which, I think we need to be getting you down to security."

Darrek's mind raced with the possibilities, of which there were few. He had a crack shot across the room from him, one possible hostage on the far other side of the room, and a shoestring plan that required neither of them know he had ever been in this wing of the building. Things were not looking good at all. He turned so that he could simultaneously see both of them and continued searching for an escape.

Jimmy stood up. "Hold on a second. Meagan, do you know why . . . what was your name again?"

Megan said "Darrek" before Darrek could speak.

"Right, do you know why Darrek is here?"

She shook her head. "No. I just heard through the grapevine that he'd likely be trying to hit this place. I wanted a crack at him, so I applied for the job." At least that explained why she knew so much about him.

Jimmy nodded, "Then why don't you explain to her what we're doing here, Darrek? I'm afraid I just learned myself."

Darrek looked suspiciously at the scientist and shrugged. "They're researching ways to use DNA to perform difficult calculations."

"And you're here to steal the technology?" Megan asked.

Darrek shook his head. "No, I'd rather this technology was never invented."

Confusion flashed across Meagan's face, but it never caused her to waver with the gun. She was good. "Why?"

Jimmy answered her. "Because the technology should allow us to factor extremely large numbers."

She got that. "Ah, letting you break encryption schemes. Darrek, you encrypt the communication between you and your base computers, don't you?"

He nodded. "I encrypt just about everything."

She laughed, "Ever consider a life of lawfulness?"

Darrek gritted his teeth and Jimmy saved him the trouble of replying.

"But, Megan," the scientist responded, "if I can read Darrek's encrypted communications, I can read yours too. I'll be able to get your credit card numbers, to see your bank accounts and transfer money from them to my own. I'll be able to listen in on your phone calls. I'll be able to assume your identity on the Net and make you say things that would get you fired. If you've ever recorded your darkest secrets anywhere, I'll be able to get at them. It's not just the criminals who will be hurt by this."

Not even trying to keep the shock out of his voice, Darrek said, "You sound sympathetic."

"Yeah, well, I was too dumb to see where we were going. Now that I know, I don't like it any more than you do."

"So what do you suggest we do?"

Jimmy coughed. "I was kind of hoping you'd come up with something. What would you have done if neither Megan nor I had been here?"

Darrek looked at Meagan and reached slowly into his pocket. She stiffened, then relaxed when he pulled out an aluminum vial, not a gun. "I would have dropped this into your adenine generation vat and left."

"What would that have done," Megan asked, "made it explode?"

Darrek shook his head. "No, destroying this place wouldn't accomplish much. Others would just pick things up where Jimmy left off. What this will do is corrupt a small percentage of the adenine made in the vat. When they use it as one of the bases in their experiments, they'll get slightly wrong answers."

Jimmy nodded. "Clever. And we would spend months trying to figure out what's wrong with our theories and never think to check if our million dollar generators were putting out bad DNA. And so long as we're unsuccessful, no one else would bother to spend the money on these expensive labs to test our theories." Darrek nodded. "But that's only a short term solution. Eventually we'd check the bases."

"We only need a short term solution." Darrek assured him. "The long term one is already worked out."

"How's that?"

"You guys have been secretive and caught the hacker community by surprise. But now that we know what you're doing, we're working on a response. By the time you find your way around the corruption problem, we'll be using new encryption keys. And these keys will have strings in them that are harmless as 1's and 0's, but not so harmless as DNA."

Jimmy snapped his fingers in excitement. "You could stick a DNA virus in the key. When we find the key we'll have replicated the virus and it would eat itself, nullifying the work!"

Darrek nodded slowly. "We just need some time to perfect the procedure."

"How can I help?" Jimmy asked.

"Well, you can let me drop this into the vat. And you can pretend you never saw me and that you don't know about the corrupted adenine. You could even subtly steer people away from checking it to buy us some more time."

"Yes, yes, of course. But I want to help with the DNA Killer keys too. I already have some ideas on how you could do that."

"Then we'll be in touch." This was working out better than he could have hoped. "And that leaves Meagan."

"What about me?"

With a frown, he replied, "If I get away, you'll probably lose your job."

She shrugged. "I just wanted to see if I could catch you. Now that I've done that, I don't need the job anymore." She lowered her gun.

Definitely working out for the better. Darrek sauntered over to the adenine vat and dropped the device into it. It disappeared in the muck and sank to the bottom.

"But what about the security cameras in here?" Jimmy asked. "Won't everyone know what we've decided to do?"

Darrek smiled, "What them?" he pointed to the cameras. "They're malfunctioning right now."

Meagan ignored the dried slime and put her arm through his, "shall I see you to the door, sir?"

"I'd be delighted, madam."

They both laughed and headed for the exit trading secrets--or at least attempting to learn each other's.

"So that's why you programmed the security robot to steal the platinum from the storage room. People would think you were just a petty thief and were never on this side of the building."

"Yes. But how did you know did that? I thought I covered myself pretty well."

"I'll never tell!"

"I figured as much. By the way, nice suit."

"Thanks. It's much nicer than yours." She turned up her nose at the smell of dried DNA slime.

* * *

So it all worked out. You won't be getting this any time soon, but I think I'll keep it around in case I don't make it back from some other job. This one was successful and I got out with my hide intact. Better than that, I converted a man on the inside and now have one of the world's best DNA scientists working to combat the problem I went in to address.

But best of all, I've found some real competition. I have no idea how Megan caught me, but I intend to find out. I'll be ready for her the next time we cross paths. The world of crime has become considerably more interesting.

I wouldn't have it any other way.

From the comfort of his own room, Darrek finished reading over his transmissions. He'd sent that last one from the car on the way home. Did it sound too silly? He moved the cursor over the delete button and paused with his finger raised. Who cares, no one'll read this until I'm dead anyway. Instead of "delete," he clicked on "encrypt."

The End

Copyright Michael P. Calligaro

All Rights Reserved

If you enjoyed this story, there are over 35 more available for free download from <http://www.mystikeep.com>

About this Title

This eBook was created using ReaderWorks™ Publisher, produced by OverDrive, Inc.

For more information on ReaderWorks, visit us on the Web at "www.readerworks.com"