

ADRENOTROPIC MAN

Keith Brooke

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They assassinated me at about midday on 22nd June, 1997. I was on my way for a working lunch with a regional director, in the city for a few days for what we called "consultations"—his private bank account was too fat for his salary and I was having him checked out. I paused in New Carnaby Street to look in a window at the closing down sale of the Macco Man's Boutique. I grinned. My shares in Macco had gone for a good price only weeks before; my little push had apparently sent their whole house of cards tumbling and I planned to pick up the pieces in a month or two at a knock-down price. But that was before my assassination.

My reflection grinned back at me from the window. Thirty-six, but I still looked mid-twenties; no sign of businessman's spread, I kept in good shape. Control your body and you can control your mind. Since early teens I had disciplined myself to a strict regime of exercise and healthy eating—I attribute much of my later success to the resulting strength of mind and body. I turned from the window and set out along the sidewalk. My reflection followed me, leaping from window to window.

A jolt, and someone had walked into me. A small guy in pin-stripes, ferret-faced, silvered hair held in place by a mixture of Brylcreem and natural grease. "What the fuck are you at?" I yelled, staggering away from the unexpected force of the little man. "Sorry, guvnor," he muttered and disappeared into the crowd of lunchtime shoppers. Our eyes met for an instant during his mumbled apology and I knew. I just knew. This was the guy they had sent to kill me. Mow me down with an automatic from a black Cadillac, blow up my apartment. Do it with style. But no, they send a small, aging Cockney, more at home on a market stall than as an assassin.

My exposed forearm tingled momentarily and I rubbed at it anxiously. Max Riesling, young American entrepreneur, founder and managing director of GenGen. I knew they were after me, they put a notice on me in late May, and still I let them at me in the open. Not even any muscle to look after my interests. No, I let them right at me.

I must stay cool, all this excitement will do me no good at all. Yeah, all this excitement. Relax. Slow the pace.

They sent my notice by old-fashioned mail. No vidphone, no 'lecmal, just a piece of paper in an envelope, delivered by Pronto Postal Co. Second class.

Mr Riesling,

Your actions leave us no alternative. Discussion is pointless with you people.

You won't live to speak at the Inquiry. Details are attached.

Love and best wishes,

Green Action Group.

Details were not attached, but a paper clip was. I looked in the envelope and found the detached document, an old advertising circular for one of our more lucrative ventures. The leaflet had been altered to fit the present situation.

I spent most of my youth in the States, mainly in the cities of Washington and New York, but then Rick, my father, landed a big industrial job and we moved to Chicago. The Windy City can be a tough place to grow up. Our apartment was in a glitzy condo development on the Southside, a rough neighbourhood to grow up in but the streets provided some good schooling. I had a few jobs in the States working my way up the corporations, but when the opportunity came I moved to London. I had spent two years here as a boy, while Rick was on the diplomatic staff at the Embassy. I liked it and always tried to keep up with happenings in England. In early '89 the Evening Post, which I had mailed to

me from London, ran a story on Biobuilders, a small biotech firm close to bankruptcy.

I called my bank but they didn't want to know. I visited Rick's bank in person. "Maxwell Riesling. Son of Mister Riesling? Why, of course we'll help you, sir." I bought Biobuilders, secured the lease of an apartment in Chelsea, and moved the firm from Ealing out to rural Dorset, picking up several government development grants on the way. New staff, new location, new management, all I had really bought was some obsolete equipment and a company name. I changed the name.

General Genetics Research had humble beginnings but we soon shrugged them off. Biobuilders had specialised in mass production of medical products, their engineered microrgs produced blood plasma, insulin, all the basic medical products. Minimum effort, minimum skill, zero innovation. They were a second rate outfit. GenGen clung onto the medical contracts at first but we quickly dropped them for more adventurous schemes. We extended ourselves to medical research rather than just production, we entered agricultural development, we created a new range of degradable cosmetics that dissolve overnight.

What pushed us to the top of the field was a product of our times. AIDS was still rife at the turn of the decade and we cashed in on the accompanying commercial boom. It was a simple matter with the available technology to splice up a few microrgs with the appropriate gene complex and select the best latex producers. Further manipulations produced a reliable neolates. A few alterations to the traditional aerosol can, rigorous testing and GenGen held patents to the world's first spray-on condom, trade-named the Come On. Organic, usually non-allergenic, just spray it on and peel it off when your passion is spent. We sealed our success by booking Anita Alveaux for the commercials. Anita, pouting out of the screen and saying, "Give him the Come On and see what he gives you," was just too much for the punters and the sales secured GenGen's future for years to come. To say "Come On," carefully stressing the capitals became the joke-cliché of the early '90s.

GenGen's only commercial failure was next off the production line. The mindless masses just didn't like the idea of microrgs built for personal hygiene. No more hair washing, no more brushing of the teeth, the microrgs would do it all. But it didn't sell.

No-Cee foods, our next major product, were a massive success. Again, they weren't a great technological innovation—all it took was the idea and then development and production were relatively straightforward. All organic molecules have a certain bias. Simple sugars, for example, tend to be right-handed or dextrorotatory; most amino acids, on the other hand, are left-handed or laevorotatory; it's all a matter of three dimensional molecular structure. As digestive enzymes work on a structural basis they cannot latch onto wrong-handed molecules: left-handed sugars, right-handed proteins, anything that doesn't fit goes right through the system, undigested. Zero calories.

In '96 Mel Slaney, one of our Bright Young Brains at the new Buxton plant, started a whole new line of development. Infusers had been around for a while but they had never been practical for large-scale use. Mel changed all that. Her version was a bit like a ballpoint pen with a pad, about one cee-em square, at one end. The drug cartridge was inserted at the other end and the pad was pressed against the appropriate body surface; a minor electric jolt transferred the drug across the skin and into the body. Injections became a thing of the past and the Third World.

Mel and her newly allocated team followed up this success with a variety of infusible drugs. Perhaps appropriately, after GenGen's earlier success with the Come On, we began to market an infusible female contraceptive, Ovoidance, which cornered the market, now growing again after the demise of AIDS.

Another of our infusibles was produced under government contract, although it also found a large market overseas. The Disciplinfuser is a masterpiece of biotechnology. It infuses adrobate, an adrenotropic drug developed by Mel and her team. Adrobate lies dormant in the blood until adrenalin reaches a certain level, then the drug steps in, negates the effects of the adrenalin and returns the body to a normal, calm state. National Prisons Incorporated were quick to see the potential of the Disciplinfuser and their clients were soon unable to have violent outbursts. The Disciplinfuser also became a standard part of the psychiatric ward's medical cabinet. Pressure groups caused a few problems when the use of

the Disciplinfuser was publicised. They argued that adrenalin surges were not only the result of anger; a valid, although irrelevant, point. These groups had little influence; some of the more vociferous protesters were arrested and given a first-hand taste of the Disciplinfuser. The protests died down.

The advertising circular the Green Action Group sent me was for the Disciplinfuser. Their alterations to the leaflet made the point that it was me who was to be infused. But they had removed all references to adrobate. They did not name the substance that they would use, they just described it in scrawled handwriting in the top margin:

Our drug will kill you. Adrenalin above a Fulvian concentration of 0.36 will trigger a chain reaction. Adrenalin production will increase at an exponential rate. You will overdose on Adrenalin. Stay cool, brother.

All because of that time-wasting length of red tape, the Public Inquiry.

Actually, I know that sentence to be untrue. My situation is the inevitable result of years of battle between Industry and the eco-freaks. Eco-fascists, I've heard them called: they have The Answer and we must all do as they say. Fuck. They just don't like change, don't like progress. Cool it. Will you just fucking cool it?

This is no good. I must not get excited. I must stay calm. Control of the body is control of the mind. That's been my mantra since the 22nd. Control of the body is control of the mind.

That's better. I'm not going to let them beat me. It's now 27 hours since my assassination and I have stayed in control. My mind is relaxed. My adrenalin has not reached that fatal level. I am in command.

My first reaction was that I must get revenge, but I now know that would be fatal. Too much excitement. My first taste of revenge was enough to warn me against such a course of action. I missed my meeting with the regional director, but later I was informed that his bank balance had been fattened by a certain wealthy individual known to have strong connections with environmental groups. My ex-employee has been disciplined. Or perhaps I should say disciplinfused. But the stimulation of instigating such action was too much for me. My pulse quickened, my scalp tightened, my adrenalin was flowing. It took me several minutes to regain full control, the problem exacerbated by the fear that I had gone too far. But I stayed within the limit. I live.

That experience taught me that a level of 0.36 is high. They didn't want me to drop dead in the street from the adrenalin flow caused by bumping into the assassin. I have some leeway.

I now plan the sweetest form of revenge: I am going to defeat them. I am going to survive until the Inquiry and I am going to win at the Inquiry. I'm lucky that my attendance is only required for one short session. I can make it.

The Inquiry is only a testing ground. They've been after it for a long time. Confrontation. The Inquiry itself is only a standard release-of-genetically-engineered-organisms-into-the-environment case. It has an amusing irony that our engineered algae are intended to process sewage and then be harvested and turned into paper. This one is to clean up the environment. But the greens don't see it like that. They claim that the algae may take a fancy to other things, we may be releasing some unstoppable menace into our fragile world. The end is nigh! (Cool it, just cool it.)

But there's more to it than just the GenGen algae. If they can stop this one they can stop anything. They have been building up to this one for a long time. They will take some stopping. But I can do it. The judge told me so.

All the pressure groups may be lining up against me but I have some very powerful people on my side. People with connections. We are too big for the greens. All the judge wants is for there to be good reason to decide in our favour. That is understandable. All he is asking for is that there must be a strong speech from the GenGen camp. One to put the people—or at least some of them—behind us. That duty has fallen on my shoulders. I am the obvious choice. Apart from being managing director I am good at what I do. I have been advised to go into politics, they say I have the sort of charisma that comes across on TV. In all honesty I must agree. I can talk the pants off anyone and I spent my teens doing just that.

My speech at the Inquiry will be recorded and transmitted into millions of homes, prime time news bulletins, everything in my favour. All I have to do is sell GenGen to the public and I have been doing that for years. The greens don't stand a chance.

All I have to do is survive. I stay indoors, in my apartment. No one can get to me. I have always had good security, but now I have the added comfort of hired muscle at the entrance to my apartment and at the entrance to the building. I have set Mel and her team to work on a remedy and they've multiplied samples of my blood so they can test their potions.

Mel told me that I should just infuse some adrobate to keep the levels down, but I said, "No". I don't play hunches per se, but I always check them out. This time I was right. Adrobate produced bubbles of nitrogen in my contaminated blood. I saw the sample: it fizzed. The prospects are not bright for a cure. Certainly nothing before the Inquiry.

I stay here. I am learning to meditate. It is easy when you have as much control over your body as I do over mine. Control the body and you control the mind.

I have now been in my apartment for five days. I am getting good at this meditating business. Control the body and you control the mind. My existence has changed remarkably since the 22nd. I used to be the classical high-powered businessman: sleep five hours, working breakfast, work, business lunch, more work, evening meal with clients and then catch up on my schedule before my next five hours sleep. Now I cannot risk such activities. The stimulation might be too much for me, too much adrenalin.

And I would be leaving myself exposed to the Green Action Group. There is a lot of work I could do by computer, my console is before me. But somehow it would be wrong, I can't only work part-time. I am too isolated to fiddle about at my computer, knowing that the real world of GenGen is beyond my grasp.

Still little prospect of a cure for my condition. I must stay calm. Breathe deeply. Sometimes I find it getting too much for me. Constant relaxation can cause a great deal of tension. I find my pulse racing, sweat prickling the surface of my skin; I have to relax.

I read a lot. Call them up on the console and run off a hard copy, fuck the expense. Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, I like the old Russians, they're so heavy, so distant from my experience. I listen to music, too, called up on the console again. I'm working my way through the classics, something I'd never have done before. Mozart's best so far, I find his melodies strangely haunting for some reason, eerie. As though they are calling to me. Softly.

Sometimes I am struck by moods of blackness. Once I called up a medical encyclopedia. Adrenalin. Stimulant hormone secreted by the adrenal glands, sympathomimetic action. Also known as epinephrine. Quickens the heart, dilates the blood vessels of the heart and muscles, constricts all others; hence the increased blood pressure. Raises blood sugar, produces heat (calorigenic is the term), dilates the pupils. Increased sweat and saliva production, the smooth muscle of the skin contracts. That's enough, I must stay calm.

What would be the result of an overdose? Overheating, oversweating, would I drown in my own saliva? Would my skin tighten too much and strangle me to death? High blood pressure, increasing exponentially. Visions of bursting veins, popping capillaries. Or would the strain be too much for me, a simple heart attack as my exit from life? Relax. Pulse quickening, skin tight, such thoughts come close to self-fulfillment. I worry too much.

"*Om mane padme hum.*" A phrase I have picked up from my reading. Used in meditation, it helps focus the mind on nothingness. It is good. It relaxes me.

Om mane padme hum.

I see birds through my bullet-proof glass. There's one in particular with a mud-nest near to my

window, under an overhang. Hard blue-black with crisp white underparts, dashing about in the late June sky. My console tells me it's a House Martin. Dull name for such a striking creature. I sit and watch.

A knock on my door and one of the muscles comes in with a piece of paper. I easily stifle the upsurge of anger at his lack of manners. He cannot be using my condition to exert power over me, none of them know of my condition. That is a well kept secret. He hands me the paper—I now see it's an envelope - and says, "Pronto Postal delivered this." Then he turns and walks out. The letter was sent second class.

Om mane padme hum. Control the body and you control the mind. All the mantras at my command. Relax.

Forcing calmness to wash over my actions I open the envelope and unfold the single sheet of paper that is inside.

Mr Riesling,

Congratulations. You are still alive. You must have a strong will. But the excitement of the Inquiry will kill you. If we don't get there first.

*Love and best wishes,
Green Action Group.*

No attached details this time. I am scaring them. I am winning.

The Inquiry starts tomorrow, but that's just the introductory stuff. My speech is the following day. I am looking forward to it. Until then, I wait.

Om mane padme hum.

Tomorrow I give my speech. I am thoroughly rehearsed. My adrenalin flow is increasing, as would be expected. But I am learning to control it. I meditate, let the world just spin while I focus on nothing. *Om mane padme hum.* The essence of meditation is to let yourself be at one with the world. With the Cosmos. You just let things be. Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream. It is not dying. It is not dying. My range of music has expanded. Lennon knew what it was all about. Lay down all thoughts, surrender to the void. It is shining. Man, I've found it and I tell you it shines.

It all seems meaningless. All these people running around as if it all means something. I used to think I had everything. But I had nothing. All you can do is go with the drift, let things go as they will. My meditations have revealed the void that was once my life. It is a truly transcendental experience. *Om mane padme hum.*

Time is irrelevant in meditation. I look up and it's dark outside.

Tomorrow. Tomorrow I have to ... to what?

The darkness is a curious pattern of shadow upon shadow. It wasn't dark a minute ago.

Must have been a long minute.

Noises outside disturb me. The sky is shading itself a delicate early-morning blue. Muscle comes in and he is followed by a smaller man. Ferret. Still in his pin-stripes, and carrying—of all things—a plastic bag from Harrods. I smile. "This gentleman says he has some unfinished business with you, Mr. Riesling." Muscle cannot resist a grin of achievement, power. He leaves. I pity him.

The world keeps spinning.

"You received our letter?"

I smile at Ferret and he seems unsettled. I am happy, content. I am at peace with the world for the first time. I am ready for the shining void.

Om mane padme hum.

Ferret settles on one knee and fumbles in his green plastic bag. I wonder how he'll kill me this time.