

FIRE WITH FIRE

A NOVEL

CANDICE
FOX

#1 NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLING AUTHOR



**FIRE
WITH
FIRE**

CANDICE FOX



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For the *Troppo* team

FOUR DAYS AGO

Something in the water grabbed her calf. Her brain screamed the word.

Shark.

Mina's body collapsed inward from her elongated freestyle. She twisted and kicked out, the cliffs above and the dusty, gold-lit horizon off Abalone Bay smashing together in her wide-eyed panic swirl. A yelp escaped her throat, making way for sea-foam to be sucked back in. It was a man who'd grabbed her. Not the dreaded white pointer, haunter of her early-morning, high-kneed dash into the dark waves. She was coughing as she tore his hands off her, kicked him in the stomach, the alarms in her brain still sounding even as some other corner of her mind slumped with relief.

"Oh my god! Oh my god!" she gasped. "What the—"

His tattooed, bloodless arm reached for her, and he blew out seawater with the word, "Help!"

He went under again. Mina kicked into high gear: out of survival mode and into rescue mode. She reached blindly into the depths, grabbed a handful of long hair. A wave lifted them both, sea gods thrusting them together, and she caught him under the armpits, clambered around behind him.

"I can't." He shuddered. "I can't keep going."

"I've got you," she said.

She didn't. He was impossibly heavy, not kicking, his head lolling against her shoulder. Now that he'd reached her, he'd given up. She went under, struggled upward, twisted back and forth looking for assistance. When she'd entered the waves only an hour earlier, the horizon smeared red above the slate-gray sea, there had been people everywhere. Fishermen standing like black-coated cormorants on the rocks around Portuguese Point. Joggers pounding the distant trails and a small gathering of regulars at the edge of the tidal pool in the cove. Now it seemed as if an uninhabited coast spread before her, the steep hillsides beyond the beach apocalyptically motionless. Mina had no choice. She hugged the man around his chest, turned, and kicked.

She hauled and kicked, hauled and kicked, floating frequently, his naked backside against the hips of her wet suit. She kept telling him that she had him, though time and again when she straightened and kicked down, hoping to feel sand beneath her feet, there was only ice-cold emptiness. East Beach, her destination, grew no closer. Her terror ratcheted higher and higher as she noticed the wounds on the drowning man. A chunk torn from his chest. Bruises and gashes on his arms. Mina waved and waved. No help came. She scanned the swell, every tip a flicking, ink-black fin.

When her feet hit sand, she cried out in triumph.

The man seemed to tap into some reserve of strength as they hit the rumbling breakers, planting his feet, stumbling, hanging a hairy arm around her shoulders. She helped him hobble a few steps before two surfers materialized just in time to stop him from collapsing on top of her.

On the sand, his ribcage expanded and contracted as he fought for breath, making the sprawling blue tattoos rise and fall. She kneeled by him, shaking with exertion, her eyes wandering over skulls, eagles, guitars. The surfers were oblivious to the inked landscape, one brushing strands of lank brown hair from the man's battered face and beard, the other heaping a pile of towels and gear at Mina's side. She held a towel against the chest wound while the first surfer spread another towel over the man's naked waist.

"Hey, buddy? Buddy? You all right? Stay with us, bro!"

"Was it a shark?" The second surfer touched Mina's arm. He was older than the other surfer, his bare shoulders peppered caramel.

"No ... Uh, no," she said. "I don't know. I don't think so."

"So what the hell happened?"

"I don't know."

"Where are his clothes?"

"I don't know! I don't know!"

The drowning man grabbed Mina's forearm, the same death grip he'd used in the sea.

"Phone," he said.

"An ambulance is coming, bro. Just hang on," the younger surfer said. Mina followed his gaze to a pair of joggers who were watching from the trail, one with a phone clamped to her ear, her eyes wide as she recited details, pointing as though the operator could see. Nearby, a flock of seagulls stood watching, wings folded, disapproving.

Mina looked back at the bearded man. His eyes were bloodshot and fixed on her.

“Phone. Now. Please.”

Her bag was in her car. But the older surfer produced a phone, put it in Mina’s hand, and shrugged. Mina realized a ring of observers had formed around them. A flash of anger. Where had all these people been while she was out there in the waves, struggling? The raw exhaustion dragging at her limbs made her feel as if she’d been fighting the current for hours. But maybe not.

Mina handed the phone to the bearded man. With difficulty, he rolled onto his side, one badly trembling hand gripping the phone as the other struggled to dial.

Mina, the surfers, the gawkers, the gulls, they all watched as the man from the sea lay in the sand and defied unconsciousness, waiting for the call to connect. The morning was so still, so quiet, that Mina heard the woman’s voice on the other end of the line.

“Hello?”

“Hellfire, hellfire, hellfire,” the bearded man said. Once the words were out, he let his head fall back. He was taken so fast, Mina couldn’t tell if he was asleep or dead. She pulled the phone from his limp fingers and held it to her ear.

“Hoss?” the voice on the phone said. “Jesus, Charlie! A-a-are you sure?”

TWO DAYS AGO

The sewing needle penetrated the thick, starchy fabric of Lamb's coal-black uniform shirt too fast, spearing the soft flesh of her index finger. She yelped, sucked the digit, looked around the locker room to see if anyone had heard. She was alone. It was her nerves that had driven everyone away, she guessed. Nerves were contagious, and this was a job in which trembly hands, a sickly pallor, and a jolting step weren't useful.

She hunched in her underwear on the worn wooden bench between the stacks of lockers, replaying the past few humiliating moments in her mind. Arriving at the Van Nuys police station and presenting herself at the spit-screened front counter, as she'd been told to do, rather than swiping through the staff doors at the back. Being shown to the locker room to change, her nostrils flaring like a spooked horse at the unfamiliar sights and smells of the ground-floor bullpen. Tripping and stumbling on an electrical cord taped to the carpet, right in front of two plainclothes detectives.

She had noticed the button on her breast pocket hanging loose from a curling black thread as she changed out of her civilian clothes. *Christ. Why now?* All weekend, she'd darted back and forth to her bedroom closet, staring at the uniform, reverently touching its spotless sleeves, without noticing the loose button. The sewing kit had been at the bottom of a backpack bulging and sagging with precautionary items. Hydralyte tablets, aspirin, Band-Aids, tampons, snacks, a spare set of civvies, three types of hair ties, in case the one she'd used wasn't regulation. *Why the fuck didn't the handbook say anything about hair ties?* Lamb finished sewing the button back into place with numb fingers and pulled on the shirt, smoothed it out firmly.

She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror inside her locker before she closed it. There was still no color in her face. She went to the paper towel dispenser, ripped off a handful, reached into her shirt, and dried her pits for the tenth time that day. Then she walked to the door and put a hand on the knob.

She closed her eyes and whispered to herself.

“You deserve to be here.”

Lynette Lamb, P1 officer in the Los Angeles Police Department, drew a deep breath and let it out slow. Then she pushed the door open and walked into her very first day on the job.

In the hall outside the locker room, she was the new kid in the schoolyard; frozen, vulnerable. When she reached the bullpen, the officer who’d led her to the locker room was standing at the coffee station, one hand on the counter, the other pinching the bridge of her nose. The *fuck my life* pose. The colleague she was listening to touched her elbow in a consolatory manner and walked away.

Lamb straightened and jutted her chin. She understood. This woman, whoever she was, had probably just been told that Lamb was her baby to sit for the day. Lamb appreciated the disappointment. Rookies were annoying. But Lamb was a fast learner, had excellent retention and an eye for detail. Her grades from the academy proved that. It was black and white, on paper: *she deserved to be here*. Lamb forced a smile and went to the officer, standing at attention.

“Ready when you are”—Lamb looked at the older officer’s ID badge —“Officer Milstone.”

Milstone wouldn’t meet Lamb’s eyes.

“Come with me, Lamb,” she said instead, and walked away.

Lamb followed eagerly, nodding and smiling at officers who were watching from their cubicles, some on the phone, some peering around their computer screens. Milstone and Lamb took a corridor to a stairwell and climbed in silence to the upper floor. Offices, a row of interrogation rooms, a waiting area. Milstone stopped outside a frosted-glass door with a nameplate that read *Lieutenant Gordon Harrow*.

Of course, Lamb thought. *Meet the boss first*. She gave silent thanks to the universe that the terror in her heart was slowly transforming into excitement. Her cheeks felt hot. She’d studied up on Gordon Harrow in the weeks since she’d been informed of her assignment to Van Nuys. She knew his history, major cases, marital status, love of surfing and golf. Lamb was eager to hear a speech about the valley, how the team operated. *Around here, we work hard and we play hard*.

Lamb was ready to do both.

Milstone rapped once on the door.

“Yeah,” a voice said.

Milstone held open the door. Lamb waited for her to go in first. She didn't. When Lamb didn't move, Milstone swept the air, annoyed. *Get in there!* Lamb scooted inside. Behind the battered metal desk stacked with papers sat a tired-looking version of the Gordon Harrow that Lamb had been staring at on her computer screen for a fortnight. He seemed strangely incomplete without the peaked police-issue cap he wore to press conferences. He ran a hand over the brushy cut that crowned his small head and offered Lamb a surprisingly limp handshake.

"Sir, good morning," Lamb started. "It's really nice to meet—"

"Sit down."

She sat.

He consulted the computer screen to his left, appeared to be reading. Lamb felt the wave of excitement that hit her at the door cresting, pausing, plunging.

Harrow turned away from the computer and folded his hands.

"Lynette," Harrow began.

That's when she knew.

Lynette. Not Officer Lamb.

This was bad.

"I have to ask you some important questions," Harrow said. "And, look, I want you to understand: how you answer these questions isn't going to affect the outcome for you here today. That's already all sewn up. It's out of my hands. I'm just the messenger."

"Okay," she said.

Lamb waited for a punch line. There wasn't one. Beyond the frosted glass of the door, people were walking by, talking, laughing, answering phones. She listened, hoped to hear the telltale whispers and snickers of her future cop buddies that would reveal this to be some harmless initiation prank on the new rookie. None came. The world out there was carrying on without her. The wave was crashing down. Down and down and down, impossibly heavy, impossibly fast.

Harrow's gray eyes were fixed on hers. "A week ago, on the evening of the eleventh of October, you went out in the city. You were celebrating your graduation from the academy. You were in the company of some of your friends. Fellow cadets. Is that correct?"

Lamb tried to nod, but her neck and head were locked in place.

"Yes," she said.

"You went to a few bars in the West Hollywood area?"

“Uh. Y-yes. Yes.”

“And in the early hours of the morning, around 2:00 a.m. on the twelfth of October, you split off from the group,” Harrow said. “You booked an Uber. You traveled home with a man who told you his name was Brad. You and Brad went to your apartment in Koreatown. Correct?”

Lamb couldn’t speak. Her tongue was dry, adhered to the roof of her mouth. *It’s just a prank*, she told herself. *A hilarious prank!* Cops were about to come bursting in and slap her on the shoulder, ruffle her hair. There’d be a welcome party in the break room. Cake. Harrow waited for her to emit some kind of response, letting the silence drag on and on. When he decided she was incapable, he gave the sigh of a farmer tasked with shooting a sheep that’s wedged in the combine harvester.

“Let me just put this all out there.” Harrow made a sweeping gesture over the surface of the desk. “The guy you took home that night was a very, very bad man. It’s not clear to us whether he targeted you specifically or if he was just trying to get any one of the girls in your group to take him home. But he knew for a fact that you and your friends were all recently graduated probationary officers.”

“What—” Lamb’s words hitched in her throat. “What is this all about?”

“That guy, Brad Alan Binchley? He’s a patched member of an outlaw motorcycle gang called the Death Machines,” Harrow said. “You heard of them?”

“N-no,” Lamb stammered. “Y-yes. Uh, I’ve maybe seen a news article —”

“Yeah, well, they’re bad.” Harrow cracked his knuckles. “And they’re clever. Brad flirted with you and you took him home, and while you were asleep, I assume, at approximately four o’clock in the morning, he accessed a computer located at your residence.”

“He *what?*” Lamb yelled.

Her mind raced. She remembered Brad’s body. His cigarette breath. His laugh. She’d been strangely thrilled to find her apartment empty the next morning, the flipped-up toilet seat the only evidence that he’d ever been there. *Naughty, naughty, Lynette!* She’d smiled to herself. This wasn’t her. Nights out in the city, meaningless hookups, her dream job, payment plan paperwork for a brand-new car on the coffee table. This was the new Lamb. The grown-up Lamb.

Harrow continued, shattering Lamb’s memories and bringing her tumbling back to the present. “Brad Binchley used your secure LAPD log-

in to access your staff email account.”

“That’s not possible,” Lamb said. “It’s just not possible. My password isn’t written down anywhere. It’s not—”

“There are ways to get around that.” Harrow flicked his hand. “Keystroke trackers, whatever. Binchley’s a hacker. They’re modernizing, the gangs. Bringing in people like him. They have to.”

Lamb swallowed.

“Binchley sent an email to a detective named Christopher Keon over at the Civic Center,” Harrow said. “Keon opened it. It was internal mail, so he trusted it. The email contained a virus. Brad Binchley and his gang were able to access top-secret police documents through that virus.”

“I don’t know about any of this.” Lamb held her face in both hands, and peered through her fingers at Harrow. “I don’t know about *any of this!*”

Harrow plowed on. “Among other compromising details, the gang learned about an undercover officer police had planted in their gang approximately five years ago.”

Lamb doubled over, pressed her face into her knees. The wave was crushing her, rolling her, smashing her into the sand.

“They took that officer out to sea on a boat and tortured him,” Harrow said.

At this, Lamb reached forward, grabbed the wastepaper basket sitting on the floor at the corner of the desk, and retched into it. Nothing came up, but the retching wouldn’t stop. Dimly, she was aware of Harrow lifting a phone on his desk and asking someone to bring her a glass of water. When the retching finally eased, Lamb realized the crotch and armpits of her uniform were drenched in sweat.

Officer Milstone was there with the water and then gone again, wordlessly, leaving the glass on the edge of Harrow’s desk. Lamb didn’t trust herself to pick it up. She just stared at it, trying to breathe.

“Is he dead?” she managed eventually.

“No. Oh, no, he’s not. Sorry. I should have said that.” Harrow gave a short, awful laugh that he reconsidered and choked off. “He escaped, swam for shore. Prevailing currents and his efforts ended up bringing him in to a beach near Palos Verdes. He’ll be okay.”

Lamb nodded, holding her stomach with one hand and gripping the edge of the desk with the other. Harrow sat back in his chair with the groan of a man relieved at having performed his coup de grace and wanting to begin the process of forgetting it.

“I’m going to have to ask you to go back downstairs now,” he told Lamb, “and take off that uniform.”

1

Two seconds after Dr. Gary Bendigo pulled into his parking space outside the Hertzberg-Davis Forensic Science Center and turned off the car's engine, a bird shat on the windshield. He looked at the thin white splatter, heard the unmistakable woodwind cooing of mourning doves in the trees above, and instead of recognizing it as the omen it was, he bitterly counted back the hours since he'd washed the now-soiled vehicle. It was nine.

He sighed. Half the reason he'd washed the car in the first place was because, only a week earlier, he'd been blindsided in this very location. Arriving at his parking space outside the lab, McDonald's cappuccino in the cup holder, tie undone, hanging around his neck. A young male reporter with waxed eyebrows and a painted-on suit had ambushed him about the backlog, cameraman hovering behind him. Bendigo had watched footage of the stunt on *Dateline*. He'd noticed, alongside the nation, that the neighbor's kid had traced *WASH ME!* in the dust on his back window.

None of it looked good.

Dr. Gary Bendigo: can't find the time to tie his tie.

Or make his own coffee.

Or wash his car.

Or get through more than five hundred untested rape kits for the Los Angeles Police Department.

He'd hoped he could easily change America's perception about one of those things. The birds thought otherwise.

There were no suited reporters in the parking lot today. And, strangely, there had been no security guard manning the open boom gate, though Bendigo had seen an officer on duty the past three Sundays when he had pulled into work. Another omen he ignored. Beyond the fences, State University Drive was quiet and the freeway was dark. For three weeks, seven days a week, Bendigo had been clocking in before the morning mist in Los Angeles's University Hills district had cleared and clocking out to walk the lonely stretch to his car under the glare of orange sodium lamps. He was growing accustomed to spotting the occasional racoon or possum,

other nighttime creatures braving the open plains of concrete.

He swiped his entry through one of the large glass doors and walked across the airy foyer, glancing out of habit at the big Cal State crest over the reception desk, a happy yellow sun wedged beneath insignias for the sheriff's and police departments. The door to the wing of the building that housed the Trace Evidence Unit gave him trouble, as usual, requiring him to swipe his access card three times before the little red light went green and an approving bleep sounded. He flipped on lights as he walked down the hall, his shoes squeaking on the linoleum. Fluorescent tubes blinked on over sprawling, sterile evidence-collection rooms.

He flipped more lights, illuminating a computer lab, a file room, and then a plaque on the wall advised that he had passed into the forensic biology and DNA section of the building. Bendigo went right to the break room and turned on the coffee machine, scanned the noticeboard above the sugar, sweetener, and tea canisters for anything new. Since yesterday, here had appeared a sign-up sheet for a staff Christmas barbecue, divided by unit. Three people had already put their names in the "Salads/Sides" column. Bendigo looked at his watch and sighed again. It was mid-October. Only scientists planned a salad three months in advance.

Mug in hand, he was still thinking about the distant-future salad neurotics when he turned into lab 21 and stopped at the sight of people standing there in the dimness. It took a moment for him to put it all together, for his mind to begin screaming. Because what he was seeing wasn't unusual, in a sense. There were plenty of guns in the lab. Guns moved in and out of Bendigo's section by the dozen every week. But the particular gun he was looking at now, held by a man wearing a denim jacket, wasn't tagged.

And it was pointed directly at Bendigo's face.

That was unusual.

A woman was holding another untagged gun, this one pointed at a security guard who was curled on the floor with his arms bound behind his back.

It wasn't the guns, or the blood, or the zip-tied wrists that terrorized Bendigo. It was their assembly. Their unique composition. Bendigo felt his stomach plunge. The man in the jacket, whom Bendigo didn't recognize, moved the pistol's aim from Bendigo's face for an instant to gesture to his coffee mug.

"Good idea," the guy said. "We'll need some more of that."



They told him to get on his knees. Bendigo just stood there like an idiot, the coffee mug still clutched in his fist, wondering how the hell a person does that. How they stop being, say, a regular guy in his midsixties who's just arrived at work, en route to the inevitable slog through his email inbox, and become—what? A *hostage*? The couple looked as if they'd stepped into the lab straight from a leisurely morning dog walk. She was wearing skinny jeans and had gathered her yellow-blond hair into a messy bun, and he was sporting thick-rimmed black spectacles, the square, Clark Kent kind that young men wore these days with their fades and their manicured beards. There were no catsuits, no balaclavas, no bomb vests. Bendigo jolted when the man snapped at him.

“Get *the fuck* down!”

He set his coffee on the steel tabletop, hitched his trousers, and kneeled. When the woman came around him and gripped his chubby wrist, slid the cable tie around it, Bendigo got a whump of adrenaline in his belly. The zipping sound of the cable ties set Bendigo's teeth on edge. This was real. The young security guard on the floor looked to be unconscious. There was a big gash on his forehead, blood drying on his heavily stubbled jaw. He was snoring in that thick, vulnerable way Bendigo had seen once when he was a kid and his buddy got knocked out cold by a fly ball at the local park.

Bendigo's throat was suddenly dry as chalk.

“We don't keep cash here,” he rasped. “This is a research and testing facility for—”

“We know, Gary. We know,” the woman said. The sound of his name in her mouth ratcheted up the fear. Bendigo trembled as she took off his watch and set it on the table beside his coffee. She reached into his pockets, took his phone and wallet. Bendigo thought of dead bodies, the way their possessions were taken off like that and set down in a neat row on hard surfaces. Waiting for bagging and tagging.

“Who are you people?”

“I'm Elsie Delaney, and this is Ryan,” the woman said. “You'll understand everything that's going on soon. I'm gonna help you get up now. I want you to go over there beside Ibrahim, and si—”

“No. Don't do that,” Ryan cut in. “Don't sit them next to each other. Put him there.”

“Oh, right.” Elsie nodded. “I just thought they might want to be near each other. For support.”

“They’re fine,” Ryan said. “We’re fine. Go make the coffee. Take it nice and easy.”

Bendigo stood shakily and let Elsie help him hobble to the side of the room, ten feet away from the security guard, Ibrahim. Every word the couple said was echoing in Bendigo’s brain, as if they were talking in a tunnel. Sounds bouncing out and then rippling back into him. He kept picking over the interruption. The sharpness. *No. Don’t do that.* Ryan was in charge here. Elsie was new at this. Maybe they were both new at this. He didn’t know which he preferred—inexperienced hostage-takers or experienced ones. A droplet of sweat ran down Bendigo’s jaw.

Elsie went and made the coffee. One cup for her. One for Ryan. They sat steaming, untouched, on a nearby table.

“Listen,” Bendigo began. “I’m not—”

“No talking.” Ryan was setting up a laptop on the steel bench, beside Bendigo’s coffee and watch. “That’s the rule. You sit tight. You shut up. You speak only when you’re spoken to.”

Bendigo shut up. He worked the cable ties between his wrists, feeling useless and embarrassed and guilty somehow, like a kid plonked down in the naughty corner. There was one tie around each of his wrists and a third between them, linking them together. That was good. It gave him space to maneuver his shoulders, turn his arms, didn’t require the tightness that a single band around both wrists would. They’d thought about some things, these two. Other things they were working out as they went.

They drank the coffee. Two sips each, eyes locked over the rims of their cups, mouths downturned, as if they were forcing down poison. Telling themselves, each other, wordlessly, that they were fine.

Then Elsie went to one of three huge duffel bags on the floor and started unpacking objects—shiny black U-shaped bike locks that she hung off her arm like enormous bracelets. She walked away with six of them, disappearing through the double doors by which Bendigo had entered. Out of another duffel bag, Ryan was heaping electronic equipment on the tabletop—more laptops and a tangle of cables, two iPhones, and huge battery packs. Bendigo heard a groan, looked over, and saw that the young security guard was waking, dragging his head on the linoleum, trying to sit up. He flopped back down. Ryan had followed Bendigo’s gaze and shrugged a shoulder, unsmiling.

“We don’t want to get violent, but we will if we have to,” he said. His eyes bored into Bendigo’s. “You see that, right?”

“Yes,” Bendigo said.

“Just do what you’re told and you’ll be fine.”

“What is this all about?” Bendigo asked.

Ryan looked away, didn’t answer. He sipped from a water bottle he’d taken from the second duffel bag. Bendigo also spied the corner of a box of food poking out of the zippered flap.

Rations. This was a long-term engagement. The way Ryan sipped delicately at the water and screwed the lid back on carefully filled Bendigo with foreboding. They were conserving their water in a building filled with sinks.

Elsie returned, gathered up more bike locks, then dashed away. Ryan tapped and poked at the laptop, pulled up a bunch of gray windows divided into boxes. They looked like CCTV feeds.

When Elsie returned, there was a tight pause, the couple watching each other, their faces grim. Elsie took a deep breath and exhaled hard.

“Are you still all right to do it?” Ryan asked.

“I think so.”

“It has to be the mother,” Ryan said. “People get on board with it right away when it’s the mother.”

“I know. I know. I remember.”

Ryan took up one of the phones. He pointed it at Elsie, and Bendigo saw the white light next to the camera flick on.

2

The bottom of Saskia Ferboden's computer screen was wearing a tutu of yellow sticky notes covered in her lacy handwriting. As the chief of police put the receiver of her desk phone down in its cradle, she took a note from the very corner of the screen, one that simply read "Hoss." She crumpled the note and dropped it into the wastepaper basket next to her desk. There was nothing more she could do for Charlie Hoskins right now. The undercover cop, one of her own, was reportedly sleeping off the aftereffects of his unplanned marathon swim across the Californian coastline. The Kaiser Permanente nursing staff had informed her that his "levels" were back up, which was "pleasing." Whatever that meant. He'd also consumed "solids." That was good. Saskia came from a family of dog breeders; some of their German shepherds formed part of the ranks of the LAPD dog squad. She knew from tending to puppies all her girlhood that the runts that were going to make it were the ones who ate. Hoss would be okay.

She flipped through the remaining sticky notes, deciding what to tackle in her regular Sunday-morning check-in before she went to enjoy her day off. Saskia hated to start her Monday already sandbagged with unfinished business. The rest of the sticky notes related to the twelve men Saskia had in custody, each and every member of the Death Machines that her strike team had been able to round up in the ninety-six hours since she received that breathy phone call from Hoss telling her that Operation Hellfire was over. Last night, Saskia had toured Men's Central Jail, wanting to go and look at their haul. She'd felt a heavy sense of disappointment. Twelve wasn't nearly enough, and none of the big fish were there. Dean Willis, Franko Aderhold, and Mickey Randal, the top trio, had disappeared after their attempt to make shark food of Charlie Hoskins had failed. Those members of the outlaw biker gang who were left for Saskia's team to scoop up were either too stupid to heed the warning from their superiors that a raid was coming, or not worth the effort by those same superiors to be forewarned.