

The Burning Zone

"Satan's Locust"

Original Teleplay
by

Philip Kassel

WGA Registered

Property of:
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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT AGROTECH, INC. RESEARCH FACILITY DAY

A modern, single-story building, out of place in this rural, agricultural setting, ominous under an overcast sky.

INT AGROTECH RECEPTION DAY

A male, suited RECEPTIONIST sits behind a large counter, a gun within easy reach. A steel door with a wire mesh-filled observation window leads to the inner building.

INT SECURITY ROOM DAY

SECURITY STAFF attend to a complex, computerized security system and numerous monitors. Move in on a monitor displaying Stephen Dortort pushing a supply cart.

INT LEVEL 3 HALLWAY DAY

STEPHEN DORTORT pushes the supply cart down the hall, passing white-coated TECHNICIANS. He is in his late thirties, unassuming, very average and fighting to conceal his nervousness. Dortort enters a supply room.

INT SUPPLY ROOM DAY

A room of open shelves with lab equipment and steel cabinets. Dortort quickly opens a cabinet, moves some supplies in the bottom shelf and removes a small backpack. He removes a tranquilizer dart pistol from the backpack, checks the load, then conceals it on the cart. He conceals the backpack on the supply cart. Dortort moves to another large cabinet, opens it to reveal several bio-hazard suits.

INT LEVEL 3 HALLWAY DAY

Dortort exits the supply room. He is wearing the bio-hazard suit, the helmet resting on top of the supply cart.

INT DR. QUENTINO'S LAB DAY

The lab is well-used and equipped with the latest high-end research equipment. RESEARCHERS go about their work.

CONTINUED:

MANDELLA and KOPP, each wearing a bio-hazard suit but holding the helmets, stand in front of an electronic wall safe.

Kopp punches in a code on the keypad. CLICK, the door swings open.

Inside the safe, two specially designed racks hold four sealed flasks each. Flasks in the first rack contain a blue liquid and are labeled AGTCH 1293. Flasks in the second rack contain a yellow liquid and are labeled AGTCH 1294.

Mandella carefully removes something from the safe (we don't see what) as DR. QUENTINO approaches from across the room.

DR. QUENTINO

Run the numbers up to me soon as you have something firm.

KOPP

You got it. Kopp closes the safe door and resets the security pad.

INT LEVEL 3 HALLWAY DAY

Dortort pushes the supply cart to an elevator, punches the UP button. The doors open and he enters. The doors slide shut, the indicator lights display upward movement.

INT ELEVATOR

Dortort anxiously waits. The elevator doors open revealing Mandella and Kopp. Mandella carries a covered tray. They look at Dortort curiously as he pushes past them with the cart.

MANDELLA

What's Dortort doing in a suit? The elevator doors close.

INT RESEARCH LAB DAY

An artificial sunlight source illuminates a large, glass tank housing several rows of wheat growing from a bed of rich soil. An amateur artist has drawn a locust with the head and horns of the devil and taped it to the side of the tank. The light source glow gives the lab an eerie appearance. Mandella and Kopp enter and proceed to the soil tank. Kopp places the flask containing blue liquid in a chamber adjoining the soil tank and equipped with a robotics device.

INT LEVEL 2 HALLWAY DAY

Dortort parks his supply cart in front of an enclosed panel towards the end of the corridor. He secures his helmet, then opens the panel door. Control labels and displays indicate a ventilation filter override control station.

Fumbling nervously, Dortort opens the backpack and removes a small device that has three small canisters, the size of CO2 cartridges, mounted on a thin, stainless steel box. A small valve-stem extends from the rear of the box.

INT RESEARCH LAB DAY

Mandella and Kopp secure their helmets.

KOPP

Ready to go? Mandella nods.

Kopp operates the robotics controls to remove the flask seal, then activates an air pump that draws air from the chamber into the soil tank.

INT LEVEL 2 HALLWAY DAY

Dortort inserts the valve stem of the device into a receptacle in the wall panel. He pushes a panel button labeled ALTERNATE DUCT A - OPEN, then pushes the circulation fan button to HIGH. Dortort flips a small switch on the device and a small green light flashes on.

INT SECURITY ROOM DAY

Dortort's image is displayed on one of the monitors. Security Man 1 peers at the display.

SECURITY MAN 1

What's this crap? The other two look.

(quickly)

Level 2, corridor J. Have the section guard check it out.

The second security men reaches for the phone but chokes, staggers dizzily. His eyes roll and he passes out. Then the third man. Security Man 1 dizzily reaches for an alarm button but doesn't make it. He falls to the floor with the others.

INT AGROTECH OFFICE DAY

OFFICE WORKERS pass out, tumble to the floor, sprawl over computer keyboards and drop mugs of hot coffee.

INT LEVEL 2 HALLWAY DAY

Dortort hurries down the hallway.

INT LEVEL 1 HALLWAY DAY

TECHNICIANS and other STAFF collapse to the floor.

INT RESEARCH LAB DAY

Mandella and Kopp, unaware of the gas because of their bio-hazard suits, watch the wheat in the tank. Each stalk is acquiring tiny bubbles over its surface as the wheat begins to liquefy. Mandella and Kopp have seen this before but are still somewhat horrified.

MANDELLA

We've got twelve minutes until stage 2. Why don't we bring down the T43 unit while we're waiting.

KOPP

Might as well.

INT DR. QUENTINO'S LAB DAY

Dr. Quentino and his staff lie unconscious throughout the lab, some equipment upset from when they fell.

The electronic door lock CLICKS loudly and Dortort enters holding a crumpled piece of paper. He hurries to the safe, consults the paper and operates the keypad. The safe door swings open. Dortort quickly grabs the AGTCH 1293 and AGTCH 1294 racks, then exits.

INT LEVEL 2 HALLWAY DAY

Dortort anxiously hurries down the hallway stops next to the ventilation station. He flips the switch on the gas device; the green light goes out. Dortort tries to force the flask rack inside the backpack. It doesn't fit. He opens the rack, removes the flasks one-by-one and carefully places them inside.

The elevator doors open revealing Mandella and Kopp.

CONTINUED:

First they see unconscious bodies in the corridor, then Dortort who is still holding one flask of blue liquid. Mandella and Kopp recognize the flask, react with great alarm.

MANDELLA

Dear God!

They hurry towards Dortort. Dortort sees them coming and frantically hunts for the tranquilizer pistol. He just gets it in his hand but they are on him. Kopp manages to knock the gun from Dortort's hand while Mandella attempts to hold the arm with the flask. Kopp's eyes are riveted to the flask.

KOPP

(terrified)

Careful! For God's sake, careful!

Dortort lands a lucky kick to Mandella's knee, breaking his grip. Dortort shoves Mandella violently away. Mandella hits the wall hard, the air knocked out of him.

Kopp grabs for Dortort. Dortort twists to get away and the flask flies out of his hand. The flask hits the wall near Mandella, shatters. Most of the blue splatters on the wall, some of it splashes onto Mandella's bio-hazard suit. Mandella is alarmed but makes another rush for Dortort. Dortort dives for the pistol, gets it and FIRES. The dart penetrates Mandella's suit. Mandella staggers, then falls.

Kopp runs towards an alarm button on the opposite wall. Dortort aims and FIRES. The dart strikes Kopp. He reaches for the alarm button, staggers, falls, manages to hit it as he passes out. An ALARM sounds.

Dortort is shaken as he drags Mandella into a room off the hallway, careful to avoid contact with the blue liquid. He returns for Kopp, dragging him to the same room. Dortort quickly picks up the backpack and runs for the elevator. We move to the ventilation filter station. The fan is still running.

FADE OUT

END OF TEASE

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT ROAD DAY

The gray panel truck speeds down a country road bordered by grain fields and an occasional farm. The same stormy sky.

INT TRUCK CAB DAY

MICHAEL HAILEY is at the wheel, EDWARD MARCASE and KIMBERLY SHIROMA passengers.

HAILEY
ETA in about ten minutes.

CASSION (O.S.)
(over speaker phone)
Just good luck you were in Cedar
Rapids. Time could be important.

MARCASE
What are we looking for here?

INT CASSIAN'S OFFICE DAY

CASSIAN is grim, hovering around his speaker phone.

CASSIAN
No one's exactly sure. Shortly after
nine this morning there was some
kind of security breach. Their
computer system sealed the facility.
They haven't been able to communicate
with anyone inside. No one's come
out.

INT TRUCK CAB DAY

SHIROMA
(puzzled)
We're talking a company doing
agricultural research here, right?

CASSIAN (O.S.)
Well... yes. Agrotech's been a leader
in agricultural research and
development for years. Most of their
work involves developing ways to
improve crops, evolve new hybrids...
the usual.

CONTINUED:

MARCASE

So why won't they go in to check it out themselves?

INT CASSIANS OFFICE DAY

CASSIAN

One of Agrotech's research teams, stumbled across a virus. A rather nasty one

MARCASE (O.S.)

(through speaker phone)

Define nasty.

CASSIAN

Extremely effective at breaking down the cell structure of grains. Agrotech management thought it might be profitable to approach the research with a bio-warfare slant. The Pentagon agreed. Interested in something that could efficiently destroy crops, collapse an enemy country's economic base. They helped Agrotech set up this security research center.

INT TRUCK CAB DAY

Marcase and Shiroma exchange concerned looks.

SHIROMA

But these guys are afraid to go into their own facility.

CASSIAN (O.S.)

The research team leader, a Dr. Quentino, very recently introduced a new element to the virus.

INT CASSIANS OFFICE DAY

CASSIAN

The people we're talking to only know it intensified the effect of the virus. They don't have details.

CONTINUED:

CASSIAN (CONT'D)

Testing was still in early stages and anybody who knows anything is inside the building.

MARCASE (O.S.)

They've got reason to be afraid.

CASSIAN

Take every precaution. No one really knows the extent of the problem.

INT TRUCK CAB DAY

CASSIAN (O.S.)

I've instructed Agrotech to keep local authorities out of this until we know what we're dealing with. Keep me informed as you go.

MARCASE

Right.

EXT AGROTECH PROPERTY ENTRANCE DAY

The panel truck turns into an isolated driveway. A sign reads: AGROTECH, INC. - PRIVATE PROPERTY IDENTIFICATION REQUIRED AT SECURITY GATE. The panel truck approaches the guard hut. The gate arm is smashed, dangling. TWO GUARDS stop the truck. Hailey flashes ID and is waved on.

EXT AGROTECH, INC. RESEARCH FACILITY DAY

A few Agrotech SECURITY GUARDS are placed strategically around and near the building. ROBERT LYNDON, thirtyish, Agrotech executive, hurries anxiously forward to meet the panel truck. Marcase, Hailey and Shiroma exit the truck.

LYNDON

Dr. Marcase?

Marcase shakes his hand.

MARCASE

That's me.

LYNDON

(agitated)

Robert Lyndon. I'm the senior VP here.

CONTINUED:

MARCASE

Dr. Shiroma... Michael Hailey.

LYNDON

Yes, hello.

They all begin walking towards the main entrance. Lyndon is a bundle of nerves.

LYNDON (CONT'D)

Look, we need to find out about our people in there... and we need to verify status of 1293.

MARCASE

The viral substance we were briefed on?

LYNDON

Yes. We gave your Dr. Cassian everything we have on it.

SHIROMA

Which isn't much.

LYNDON

We've only had it about four months. The government gave it a top secret classification so it was just a project number here. The staff started calling it Satan's Locust. You know, sort of a bad joke. We know it's carried airborne but we don't have much data on potency or virus life span. And Dr. Quentino threw something new into the mix just a few days ago. Testing was hardly even underway.

SHIROMA

Was an antidote developed?

LYNDON

Yes... 1294. But again, it's only been through the most preliminary testing.

MARCASE

So, what happened this morning?

CONTINUED:

LYNDON

What we know for sure is about 9:20 this morning our emergency alarm sounded. The gate guard, Bill Glaser's his name, tried to raise main security but couldn't get an answer.

HAILEY

The line was dead?

LYNDON

It just rang. Glaser stays with the phone a couple of minutes, then decides to check out the main building. He no sooner starts up the driveway when a car coming down almost flattens him. Broke through the gate.

HAILEY

The driver?

LYNDON

A lab technician, low level, named Stephen Dortort. His car. They reach the main entrance.

Marcase, Shiroma and Hailey peer through the double doors. The lobby is eerily empty, the reception counter abandoned.

LYNDON (CONTD) (CONT'D)

We found the guard out cold. Tranquilizer dart. We've got him at the local clinic.

SHIROMA

What's past the reception door?

LYNDON

Security control. A couple of offices, then another sealed door. The corridor's designed sort of like an airlock between the labs and reception. We're pretty sure the lobby's uncontaminated. The research labs are below ground. We think Dortort crashed the security programs. We can't even open the outer doors.

HAILEY

(to Lyndon)

Can you give me access codes?

CONTINUED:

LYNDON

Some.

HAILEY

I'll start on getting us in.

Marcase nods agreement. They all head back towards the truck.

EXT COUNTRY ROAD DAY

Dortort's car makes its way down the road.

INT DORTORTS CAR - MOVING DAY

Dortort is stressed to the max. He unconsciously rubs an area near his shoulder. A cellular phone on the seat next to him RINGS and he picks it up. He listens, saying nothing.

KRENDEL (O.S.)

(through phone)

Why have you made me call you,
Stephen? And where are you?

Dortort is immediately more agitated, angry.

DORTORT

What have I taken, Krendel? What do
I have here, exactly.

KRENDEL (O.S.)

I asked where you are.

DORTORT

Just past Walker, heading west.

INT HANGER DAY

ANTHONY KRENDEL, cellular phone in hand, expensive suit immaculate, stands in the corner of an airplane hanger, empty except for a few small crates and an open jeep. His appearance is hawk-like and cruel. Behind Krendel waits his personal muscle, AL BOCK. Bock is a large man, also wearing a suit.

KRENDEL

Why the delay?

DORTORT (O.S.)

(through phone, upset)

Kopp and Mandella were in bio suits.

CONTINUED:

DORTORT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 I don't know why. Nothing was
 scheduled. They didn't even know
 the gas was in the air. They were
 scared I had it!

Krendel maintains a poker face but his voice is concerned.

KRENDEL
 You were seen with the flasks. So
 they already know what's missing.

INT DORTORTS CAR - MOVING DAY

Dortort's frustration and fear grows.

DORTORT
 You don't understand! Some of this
 stuff got on his bio-hazard suit,
 Mandella's... and I had to use the
 gun.

INT HANGER DAY

Krendel stiffens, very concerned.

KRENDEL
 A flask was opened? How?

INT TALMADGE'S DEN DAY

A dark, shadowy, expensive room. BENNET TALMADGE, his
 features mostly obscured by the shadows, sits at his desk
 listening to a state-of-the-art telephone communication
 system.

DORTORT (O.S.)
 (through speaker phone)
 Broken. They tried to stop me. The
 dart went right through his suit.
 They were scared of it.

KRENDEL (O.S.)
 It's upsetting you allowed the flasks
 to be disturbed. Not to mention the
 waste.

INT DORTORTS CAR - MOVING DAY

DORTORT

With the hole in the suit and that
stuff on it I might have killed him.
Now tell me what it is, what it does!

INT HANGER DAY

Krendel paces slowly, thinking.

KRENDEL

For a million dollars, Stephen, I
not only buy your services but the
privilege of not being asked too
many questions.

DORTORT (O.S.)

He might be dead and if he—

KRENDEL

(interrupting)

If someone's dead, all the more reason
for you to meet your flight, isn't
it? You'll be out of the country
and safe soon enough. Now, I suggest
you calm yourself. You're already
twenty minutes behind. The jet's
due at two-thirty as planned. See
that you get here on schedule.

Krendel punches a button on the phone.

INT DORTORTS CAR DAY

Dortort turns the phone off and tosses it on the seat. Again,
he rubs his shoulder.

INT HANGER DAY

Krendel again has the phone to his ear.

KRENDEL

You heard?

TALMADGE (O.S.)

Very little I liked.

INT TALMADGE'S DEN DAY

Talmadge remains in the shadows, a disembodied voice.

CONTINUED:

TALMADGE

This has not gone well, Mr. Krendel.
It seems the abilities of your Mr.
Dortort are somewhat less than you
described.

KRENDEL (O.S.)

But he's got the product and—

TALMADGE

(interrupting)

We can't land before two-thirty.
That's our airport contact's
requirement. If Dortort has killed
anyone our risk has increased ten-
fold. I hope you're capable of
handling that, Mr. Krendel.

Talmadge's hand emerges from the shadows, disconnects the
line.

INT HANGER DAY

Krendel listens to the dead line, perspiration beaded on his
brow. He glances at Bock who remains expressionless.

INT TRUCK LAB DAY

Hailey sits in front of a powerful computer and other hi-
tech monitoring gear. Lyndon sits nearby.

HAILEY

(into radio mic)

I'm tied into the building's security
program. I think I can spring the
door.

MARCASE (O.S.)

(through radio)

Copy that.

INT AGROTECH RECEPTION AREA DAY

Marcase and Shiroma, in bio-hazard gear and carrying testing
equipment, approach the inside door. They peer through the
glass, wire mesh security window. The hallway is empty,
lifeless, a foot is visible extending from an office doorway.

MARCASE

Open it up.

INT TRUCK LAB DAY

Hailey executes a couple of keystrokes.

INT LEVEL 1 HALLWAY DAY

BUZZ, and the door swings open. Marcase and Shiroma quickly enter, shutting the door behind them. They check their instrument readings.

SHIROMA

I'm picking up traces of gas. Non-lethal.

INT SECURITY ROOM DAY

Marcase and Shiroma appear in the doorway. The bodies of the three guards, face-down on the floor. Marcase and Shiroma kneel next to the nearest body and carefully raise an arm. The guard's hand extends from his sleeve, the skin replaced by a thin ooze. Shiroma moves to another man, begins to turn him over but gets a glimpse of his face, grimaces and backs off.

MARCASE

Safe to say the gas didn't kill them. Mr. Lyndon, you've got fatalities here.

INT TRUCK LAB DAY

Lyndon's face shows that his fears are confirmed.

LYNDON

1293 is kept in a special safe in Dr. Quentino's lab. Room 20. Level 2, corridor L. Please check there immediately.

INT LEVEL 1 HALLWAY DAY

Marcase and Shiroma make their way down the hallway, stepping around an occasional body. They glance into open doorways as they proceed. The sterile atmosphere and deathly, hollow silence is unsettling. Bodies, grotesque, in varying stages of liquefaction from the virus. Marcase and Shiroma punch the elevator button. No response.

MARCASE

Can you give us elevators?

CONTINUED:

HAILEY (O.S.)
 (through radio)
 Just a second.

They wait. The elevator position lights come on.

HAILEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 You got it. They push the button
 and the doors open. They enter.

INT DR. QUENTINO'S LAB DAY

Marcase and Shiroma enter, survey the bodies. They walk to the open safe and see it is empty.

MARCASE
 We won't be needing the safe
 combination. Open and empty.

LYNDON (O.S.)
 (through radio)
 Even the 1294 samples?

MARCASE
 Empty, Mr. Lyndon.

INT TRUCK LAB DAY

Lyndon loosens his collar, perspiration beading on his face.

MARCASE
 (through radio)
 How many people were scheduled for
 work today?

LYNDON
 Seventeen, counting Dortort. Four
 office support staff... the rest
 researchers and techs.

INT DR. QUENTINO'S LAB DAY

MARCASE
 We're going to locate them.

INT LEVEL 2 HALLWAY DAY

Marcase and Shiroma make their way down the hallway, checking any body they come across for life. Shiroma spots the gas device in the ventilation panel.

CONTINUED:

Shiroma examines the device, then spots the blue stains on the wall and floor, then the ventilation controls.

SHIROMA

This is how it went through the building so fast. Marcase joins her. Shiroma reaches up and turns off the fan.

MARCASE

(to Lyndon & Hailey)

Dortort used a ventilation override system to distribute the gas. Somewhere along the line some of the 1293 got away from him. It's all over the wall here.

INT TRUCK LAB DAY

Lyndon pales even more and sinks into a chair.

LYNDON

Oh, my God.

SHIROMA (O.S.)

(through radio)

He never turned off the fan.

INT LEVEL 2 HALLWAY DAY

Shiroma takes a closer look at the blue stains, then stands next to Marcase. They begin to retrace their steps down the hallway.

SHIROMA

I'll take a sample. If I can get into Quentino's computer files...

A door opens to the hallway and Kopp lunges out at them.

Shiroma SCREAMS.

INT TRUCK LAB DAY

The SCREAM comes through the radio. Hailey is alarmed and Lyndon practically jumps from his chair.

HAILEY

What is it? Talk to me, guys!

INT LEVEL 2 HALLWAY DAY

Marcase and Shiroma catch Kopp, lowering him to the floor.

MARCASE
 (to Hailey
 and Lyndon)
 We've got somebody alive here.

Marcase and Shiroma examine Kopp.

Seen through the helmet face plate, areas of the skin on Kopp's face appear to have been replaced by a thin ooze. Areas of his bio-hazard suit are slightly bubbled.

MARCASE (CONT'D)
 Stay with him. I'll see what else
 we've got in there.

Shiroma nods as Marcase heads into the adjoining room.

INT LAB DAY

Marcase approaches Mandella's body, face down on the floor.

MARCASE
 Kimberly. A moment, then Shiroma
 joins him. Marcase carefully turns
 the body over.

His face grimaces with horror.

Shiroma GASPS but can't turn away.

Seen through his helmet face plate, Mandella's skin condition appears as Kopp's but considerably more advanced. Where the face used to be is just a glob of ooze.

Where the blue liquid touched the bio-hazard suit, the suit has liquefied, along with the body beneath it.

Marcase and Shiroma stare grimly down at the body.

MARCASE (CONTD) (CONT'D)
 (to Hailey and Lyndon)
 Uh, looks like we have another problem
 here. Off the dissolved areas of
 Mandella's bio-hazard suit we...

FADE OUT

END OF ACT ONE