

The Seraphine river flowed for at least 2000 miles, her unmistakable girth immediately recognisable by admirers from near and far. This year, moody weather ran the Seraphine dry, chapping Redmayne's incorporated state lips. Though rare, the Seraphine would vomit if pushed too far, overflowing her banks in a terrifying manner. Last time it happened was in '83. In the surrounds, the Seraphine historically offered a naturally arising solution to irrigation, and many flocked from distant lands to partake in her treasure. The fine sediments offered fertile land; the river, a good source of freshwater.

The Seraphine built Laramie; industrialisation slapping the city into shape. The people turned the tables and grabbed technology and innovation by the scruff of the neck, before any outsiders managed to gain a foothold. Laramie was a beacon of advancement. However, the echoes of the river remained. Though dimmed, they slowly awakened.

"That damned El Nina, or whatever it is, came in flush and cost us an entire harvest", Mr Brian Kazmeer, a local farmer, told Jaime Salinas, a reporter working for Laramie's oldest newspaper, the Laramie Flyer.

Jaime was investigating the drought's harsh effects.

"Mr Kazmeer, do you see a future here?" Jaime enquired.

"Well as long as the river doesn't run dry we'll be okay. I've really been hurt this year, crop yields from maize have been dreadful", Mr Kazmeer replied.

As Jaime stopped recording he received a notification: 'Espejo Azul leak'.

"Apparently there's a leak at Espejo Azul", Jaime told Mr Kazmeer, "Thank you for the interview, I have to go".

In true journalistic fashion, Jaime raced to the scene to investigate.

The Espejo Azul Dam, set along the Seraphine river, existed for at least 15 years. El Niño hit the state of Redmayne particularly hard, exacerbating the Mediterranean-like climate and slowly turning it into a wasteland. The reservoir levels crept lower and lower as general discontent ascended higher and higher. A water crisis was beckoning.

"Simi, Espejo Azul had a leak, I thought we were supposed to be approaching day zero", Jaime remarked on a virtual call with Simi Minata, a fellow colleague at the Laramie Flyer.

"I've been skimming some of the public records, it seems like this has been an existing problem for some time now", Simi replied.

"You already there?" Simi asked.

"Already on I-97, will update", Jaime replied.

"Cool".

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The absolute mammoth that was the Blue Mirror stretched out, rising before Jamie's eyes as he approached, until it was the only thing his sight would allow him to witness. The staggering concrete structure was a marvel of engineering, the monolithic slab sloping with a seemingly insignificant solitary stream trickling to the bottom. The water bubbled along, harmonising with the machinery. He continued his approach, from the north-west entrance, on the gravel; his shoes sounded like a carrot being chewed. Suddenly, a voice sliced the air.

"Excuse me sir!" The security guard clad in blue ventilated, bringing Jamie to a halt.

"Excuse me, my name is Jaime Salinas, a journalist. I've been looking into the dam project and all the recent reports of irregularities", Jaime said to the security guard.

"Sorry sir, this area is off-limits. We've got some safety concerns. Please turn around and vacate the premises", the security guard replied sternly.

"Understandable. Safety first. But could you tell me a bit about what is going on? There was a public announcement about the leaks", Jaime asked, wriggling for any smidgeon of information.

"It isn't out of the ordinary for construction projects like this to have a few hiccups along the way. The engineers are already on it figuring it out, don't think it's too serious", the security guard replied, shifting uncomfortably.

"Of course, accidents happen all the time. Rumours have been circulating about the foundation, of the dam I mean. Can you perhaps shed any light on that?", Jaime enquired, peering slightly behind the security guard to observe the leak.

"I'm just doing my job, I don't have all the information, I only do what I'm told. From what I've been told, this is just a minor inconvenience, and it will be fixed", the guard replied, tight-lipped.

"I appreciate your reassurance and understand. It's just that people are concerned about the water supply, especially the city's residents", Jaime responded.

Pausing, the guard said, "Yeah, the river used to be our lifeline, but times change."

"I see. You realise that I have to look into this further right? The people deserve to know", Jaime stated.

"You have to do what you have to do. I'll say this, not everything is as straightforward as it seems", the guard replied, his tone laced with a tinge of caution.

Jaime walked away under the guard's watchful eye, as he muttered to himself, "Behind the scenes... That's exactly where I intend to go".

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At the office, Simi and Jaime shared information about recent developments.

“What happened?” Simi enquired.

“I talked to a guard, he couldn’t tell me much but I had this feeling you know, something’s up here. He also said that not everything is straightforward, whatever that means”, Jaime narrated.

“He’s definitely on the money with that one”, Simi replied.

“I decided to look for other records and there isn’t much, it seems like some records simply don’t exist on the public domain”, Simi told Jaime, “not even a rating on how satisfactory the current state of the structure is.”

“Who owns the dam?” Jaime enquired.

“Some company called AquaTech, not much is known about them, but their CEO is a guy called Arthur Hawthorne. He did his undergrad in environmental engineering at UR and an MBA at SU”, Simi replied, “their website lists a bunch of stuff they’ve done.”

“You got an in?” Jaime asked eagerly, squinting his eyes.

“Yeah, she’s kind of an expert, but she can get cranky so be careful”, Simi replied, smiling, observing the glint in Jaime’s eyes.

“Let me give her a shot”, Jaime said.

“One more thing before you leave, Jamie”, Simi paused, “don’t forget that there’s a nuclear reactor downstream of Espejo Azul.”

“What!” Jamie reacted in shock.

“Yeah, its rarely ever addressed”, Simi said.

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Jamie grabbed his umbrella and opened it as the heavens unravelled, pouring onto the glistening streets. He walked as briskly as possible, on the way to Ginnie's Cafe, trying his best to avoid the patter of rain.

The clack of heels, clunking boots and thumping shoes cackled as people cleared out of the open air; hands, plastic bags and umbrellas over their heads. Others huddled in close proximity to sheltered buildings, with their backs against the wall.

Ava Thompson watched on, seated comfortably, while enjoying her latte. Jamie entered, panting.

“You must be Jamie, the journalist. What do you want?” Ava bluntly enquired.

Stretching his wet hand to greet, “Yes, that’s me. I heard from a colleague that you’ve been looking into Espejo Azul too. Thought we might be able to share insights.”

“What makes you think I’ll share anything with a journalist?” Ava replied, sceptical.

“Fair point. I believe we share a common objective — uncovering the truth. You know as well as I do that there’s a helluva lot more going on than what we can see”, Jamie replied, with a tinge of indignation.

“Fine, you’ve got my attention. But I’m not saying anything just yet”, Ava stated.

“I respect that. Look, I visited the site. Saw the leak they’re trying to downplay. The guard fed me the usual spiel, but he said something intriguing about something ‘behind the scenes’, as he put it”, Jamie explained, his fingers making out inverted commas.

“That’s an odd choice of words. What else did he say?” Ava pried.

“Not much more than that. It’s clear that they’re hiding something about the construction”, Jamie said.

With a deep sigh Ava shared, “That lines up with my findings. The official report and public statements don’t add up. There’s evidence of rushed construction and negligence, you know, a lack of thoroughness. I’ve got sources within who’ve been whispering about structural integrity concerns.”

“That matches what I observed at the site. There’s something bigger here. There’s a reason we’re all in the dark about this”, Jamie leaned in, lowering his tone.

“Let’s go. I’ve got something to show you”, Ava whispered in a pleasing tone.

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Everything was colour-coded. Charts and flow-diagrams describing a myriad of topics related to water systems were adorned on the walls. The chaos was organised, however, some papers lay on the table, lonely, with unintelligible symbols scribbled on them; at least to those who were unfamiliar with them.

The soft glow of computer screens lit the room. It looked like a 90s hacker paradise: if not for books on hydrogeology, water engineering and various miscellaneous topics stacked in a corner. Research papers, open notebooks and half-empty coffee cups cluttered Ava’s desk. Amongst all the clutter a framed photograph of Ava’s father sat in silence. Intricate visualisations were displayed on the screens, along with satellite imagery.

“Thanks for meeting me here. I’ve tried my best to keep a low profile”, Ava said nervously.

“No problem, I appreciate your willingness to share your information with me”, Jamie responded.

Ava pulled up the satellite images for further discussion.

“I assume those are cracks in the foundation and spillway? I mean, I’m no expert or anything”, Jamie enquired.

“Yes, if you look closely, over there, they tried to patch it up”, Ava replied, signalling with her free hand.

“Those patches are just band aids over the real problem, but they’re hiding something devastating”, Ava said.

“Do you think the emergency spillway will hold?”, Jamie asked.

“I’m not aware if it’s been tested or not. Either way we’ll find out”, Ava answered.

Jamie began to get very concerned, examining the images intently.

“This is a disaster waiting to happen”, Ava said, “Look over there. Yes, that’s the GeEnergy Nuclear Facility.”

Jamie felt a lump in his throat.

“There’s one more thing”, Ava spoke with a dreadful pause.

“What is it?” Jamie asked.

“Wait. Rain.” Jamie said, finally realising the true gravity of the situation.

“We’ve had a year’s worth of rain in three days, the reservoir is teetering on the edge. With the leak and everything... I think whatever is going to happen is inevitable”, Ava spoke, her face pale.

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Crunch.

The echo resonated throughout the valley like a sustained explosion. Water began to sweep down rapidly, like a disciplinarian’s back hand, along with rubble from the dam wall — decimating everything in its path with conspicuous brutality. The Seraphine, long held back, curled her pronged tongue to swallow all of her unwilling victims in close proximity. The surrounding land was consumed by a cascading flood, great and terrible in its might. A few brave American Dippers entered the body of water, hunting for perch within the now perilous depths. Soon, there would no longer be much to eat.

Jamie pulled up his vibrating phone.

On it a terrifying message:

**URGENT NOTICE**

Citizens of the state, please remain calm and stay indoors. A rapidly escalating weather anomaly is causing unprecedented rainfall and flooding across the city and its surrounding areas. Do not attempt to travel or venture outside unless it is absolutely necessary.

“Simi. Are you okay?” Jamie called to check on her.

“Just got a notice that says to stay put, so that’s what I’m going to do”, Simi replied, stranded at the office.

“You have to leave. Now!” Jamie commanded, confused and shocked.

Another message popped-up:

**URGENT EVACUATION NOTICE**

**Nuclear Plant Meltdown Imminent**

Evacuate now. Gather essential items, follow evacuation routes, and proceed to designated shelters. Stay calm and assist those in need. Do not use vehicles unless necessary. Stay tuned for further instructions.

The state of Redmayne, home to at least 15 million people, was in a state of total pandemonium. The roar of rushing floodwater was the remaining instrument being played by the orchestra of devastation; twisted metal and submerged streets left in its brutal wake. The sight of bloated corpses, filled with water, marked a new block. Live power-lines floated like eels, some twisting like a crocodile’s roll of death.

Laramie, like Redmayne, succumbed to the chilling darkness.