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Mafia puts enemy in the hot seat

11 December 1993 by VERA RICH

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Moscow's mafia has come up with a high-tech alternative to the concrete overcoat. Last month a leading Moscow businessman died in what police are treating as a mafia execution. The weapon was an unnamed 'radioactive source', inserted into the back of his office chair.

The unnamed victim was director of a new Western-style company manufacturing various kinds of packaging. He fell mysteriously ill and was admitted to hospital. When his deputy visited him, he overheard a doctor remark that, unlikely as it seemed, the case looked remarkably like radiation sickness.

When other staff members began to fall ill as well, the deputy bought a cheap over-the-counter radiation dosimeter and toured the building making measurements. The readings went off the scale. Investigations by the civil defence department revealed high levels of radioactivity in the 12 rooms nearest the director's office, and a lump of radioactive material implanted in the director's chair at neck level.

The police say the material could not have got into the chair accidentally, and have launched a full-scale investigation.

'If the mafia are really using radiation, it's a horrible thing,' says Alexander Lutsko of the International Sakharov College of Radioecology in Minsk. 'Can't they stick to traditional methods - guns and knives and so on?'

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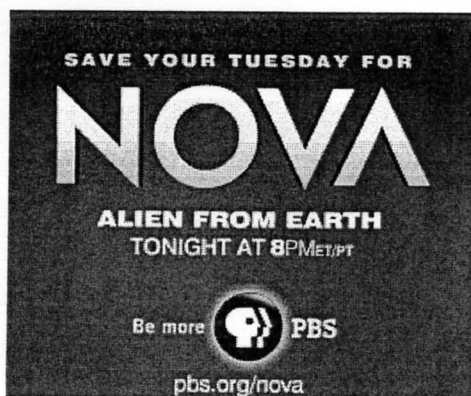
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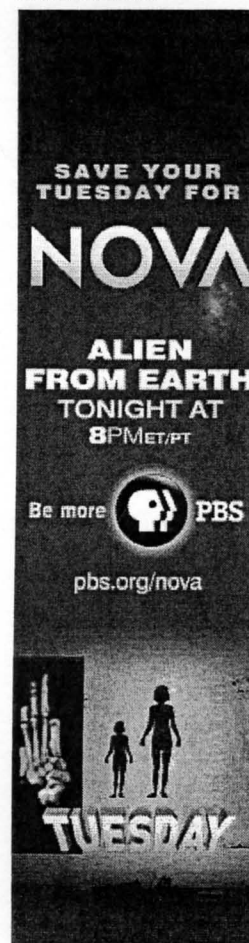
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