

## Ishmael II : Pandora

### Chapter 19 - Paris

**“The creature that had once been human, still thought of herself as Vicky. The word had a deeper meaning now though, than simply being the name her mother had chosen for her. To her children and their children, and their children.....The word meant mother, leader, the one whose word was law.”**



Deb hadn't really expected to be doing research, but at least she was working with Ish and Dora. One of her science teachers at school had once told her a career in scientific research tended to start off with five years of washing test tubes and labelling samples. It was one of the main reasons she'd gone into nursing, which had been hands on from day one.

Sometimes the alien everyone called Horace was brought into the Delta Labs. Her and the translation machine travelled in a sedan chair on wheels type of thing, like some potentate of old. It even had its own biohazard tent, which gave Horace the same protection as Deb's suit gave her. Despite early misgivings, she was actually growing to like the strange creature. Mainly because Horace talked to her properly.....Really talked to her.

“Hmmm, well.....My people have noted how similar we are to humans in so many ways. There are several theories why that should be, all of them probably wrong.”

The synthesiser gave Horace a weird mid Atlantic accent, which made her sound like an old time DJ. Deb never intended to be rude, though she did stare at the creature which looked like a huge grub with the legs of a centipede.

“You think you're similar to humans ?” She asked.

“Ignoring the physical differences, we are remarkably alike. Dora has often commented that like you, I have a single tube that runs from my mouth to my bottom. I have a cell structure unlike yours, though it is still recognisable as a cell structure. I have a kind of DNA to copy and replicate my cells, though again, it is different to the way your DNA works. My eyes see in much the same way as yours do and, ignoring my sub sonic ability, my ears hear what you hear. You have a symmetrical body.....I have a symmetrical body. Trust me, we have explored a large number of planets and symmetry is far from being universal.”

“That had never occurred to me.” Said Deb. “I suppose we take so much for granted.”

“You do, but then again....Mankind has never seen any alien races, until now. Fifth West had a few dead bodies and fossilised remains to work with, but never the real thing. Do you know what the most amazing similarity is ?”

“Ish said our use of language was very similar.” Said Deb.

“It is, yes it really is.....But the most amazing thing is that I can eat a wide variety of your foods. Not only will I survive eating them, I'll thrive on them. My digestive system can use them just as well as it used foods grown on my planet. Some foods give me discomfort, but I can still eat them. Very few of your foods are toxic to me. I am certain you could eat most of the food native to my world.”

“What are your theories about why we're so similar ?” Asked Deb.

“Like you, we do have a large number of philosophies on my world that resemble your organised religions. I believe you'd call their argument intelligent design.”

"You have people who believe in God ?"

"Yes, and not just one God. Some believe in one God, while others worship huge numbers of them. Not something I believe in, though some of the arguments have been.....Interesting."

"Tell me about your ideas Horace, what do you believe ?"

"Well... There are two prevailing theories and I think the most popular is wrong. That is the idea that a crude form of life formed on a planet in the early stages of this universe. That planet was blown apart, sending those primitive life forms on a long journey across the cosmos. Some reached your planet and eventually became you humans, while others arrived on my world."

"Sounds feasible."

"It does, about as feasible as your human idea that an infinite number of monkeys could write the works of Shakespeare. I do read a lot of your old PopNet archives by the way, the campus computer is full of them. That idea is ridiculous."

"Tell me your theory then, oh wonderful and wise Horace."

"I recognise when I'm being teased. I believe a truly ancient race deliberately genetically seeded many worlds. The problem is they couldn't have come from here. How could an ancient race seed a brand-new universe ? Unless of course they arrived from somewhere else. That begins to undermine the accepted understanding of the universe, maybe even of our understanding of reality....."

"Don't get her started on bubble universes or dark matter, Deb." Said Ish. "She nearly made my head explode the other night."

Deb had a sudden feeling of guilt. Ish had given her work to do, which had been largely forgotten while talking to Horace.

"Your science is so blinkered Ish." Said Horace. "I don't know how you get anything done with a mathematics system that gives Pi as a never-ending fraction."

"See.....Get her onto red cabbage recipes, Deb. That's much safer." Said Ish.

Ish seemed brighter lately, less prone to periods of dark melancholy, everyone in Delta Lab had commented on it. Sadly, it wasn't because they're cured the infection in his hip. One of the Fifth West teams in Southern Europe had come up with a fast acting and non-addictive pain killer.

"I like the idea of an ancient race of ancestors." Said Deb.

"Yes.....Another convert." Said Horace.

"Well Horace.....Did your virus idea pass the Sebastian test ?" Asked Ish.

"Yes, switching from a modified cold virus worked, as we hoped it would. I've used the shingles virus as a delivery agent for our Green Death immunity agent. The Sebastian suffered no ill effects, apart from an implied mild rash."

"At least we can stop taking those damn puke pills." Said Deb.

"Maybe....Once we get results back from the outlying regions." Said Ish. "The pills may have unpleasant side effects, but we know they work. There's certainly no harm in carrying on using them for a while."

"Oh dear, I knew you were going to say that." Said Deb.

They made a good team and using a virus to deliver the Green Death immunity agent had been Dora's idea. Ish had worked on linking the agent to a modified flu virus, which Horace had decided was nowhere near infectious enough.

"Besides, people can shrug off a dose of the flu in a day." Horace had said.

Deb had mentioned shingles, because an aunt of hers had never managed to get completely free of it. They'd modified the virus to make the illness far less severe, just a mild rash on most people. It was Horace who'd managed to make it just about the most infectious virus in history.

“By touch, breathing it in the air, the virus can survive for weeks on surfaces.” Horace had said. “I’m still working on it, but once I’ve finished.....Walk into a large crowded room with just one infected person in the room, and you will catch it.”

Now it was finished, though she was sure Ish would want to replicate the full test with a Sebastian. Belt and braces was the Ish way, if there was time. The problem was that far too often, they didn’t have enough time to totally prove an idea.

“And the Green Death immunity is definitely passed on with the infection ?” Asked Ish. “I hate to think we might just give every surviving human on the planet nothing but a mild rash.”

“Every test subject has the immunity after just two hours of being infected.” Said Horace.

“And we used, what was it.....Seven test subjects ?” Asked Ish.

“Yes, just seven.” Said Deb.

They all knew seven wasn’t enough, but those seven were being kept in quarantine until the people at the top signed off on releasing their virus into the general population. A virus that infectious was likely to span the globe in a few months and once it was released, there was no stopping it.

“What does the AI say about numbers who’ll develop serious side effects from our virus ?” Asked Ish.

“Still consistently saying about one in a hundred thousand.” Said Horace.

“Better odds than many common surgery procedures.” Added Deb.

For some reason Deb felt a need to be protective of their virus, as though the modified form of shingles was in need of protection. She understood why Ish was being cautious, but too much caution was likely to harm far more people than one in a hundred thousand.

“Just how bad is this mild rash ?” Asked Ish.

“All the test subjects say it’s just mildly itchy.” Said Deb.

“So, we’re either going to be the heroes who beat the Green Death, or the guys who gave the entire world an itch.....Wonderful.” Said Ish.

“Or the heroes who got rid of the need for the puke pills.” Said Deb.

“We could run one more Sebastian trial.” Said Horace.

“Yes, one more trial, we can run it overnight.” Said Ish. “If that looks alright, I’ll recommend to JV that we release the virus into the surviving population. We have no idea what’s happening on much of the globe. There could be millions hiding in remote regions and we have no way on contacting them, or the resources to make enough pills if we could. This virus has to work.”

“There is another issue.” Said Horace. “Once the saturation level of added gasses makes your atmosphere comfortable for us, my people will come out of their sealed buildings and bunkers. The war will begin again in earnest.”

“Sometimes I wonder if.....Is everyone left behind going to die ?” Asked Deb.

“There are the devil creatures, Deb.” Said Ish. “And when you’re hanging on by your fingernails....We just have to do what we can and hope for the best.”

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“All that and we’re going to end up back where we started.” Said Daisy Lorhan.

“Life has a tendency to do that sort of thing.” Said Steve Penboss. “I read once that most people die five miles from where they were born, even if they’ve been all over the globe during their life.”

“That sounds like a DJ Steve comment from the Bruce Grove Radio days.” Said Daisy.

“Oh, how I’d love to wake up as DJ Steve and realise this, all of this, had just been a nightmare.”

“We did have some fun times in Jersey though, while it lasted.”

"Which once again.....Just about sums up life. And this is DJ Steve Penboss, signing off for the night."

Daisy gave him a playful thump, before joining him on the large comfortable chair, from where he was keeping their boat heading north. The chair was only designed for one, but he wasn't about to complain. A rainy night with a storm heading in from the west, they'd seen the dark clouds building all day. Everyone else was in bed, trusting him to get them safely to somewhere near the Weymouth area. In truth, the plan was just to head north until they ran into something. Hopefully that something would be Weymouth harbour and not a rocky headland, or any one of a dozen other hazards. There were no lighthouses anymore, or any other navigation aids.

"We should have headed for the Isle of Wight." Muttered Daisy.

"I've had more than enough of small islands." Said Steve.

The torrential rain was drumming on the cabin roof, yet he still heard the sound of waves hitting a shore. After carefully shifting Daisy a little, he reached for the throttle and slowed their boat down to a crawl.

"Time to get the waterproofs on." He said. "I need you out on deck."

"Really.....In this weather?"

"Do you hear that sound? We're not that far from land."

"Oh, alright then."

"And be careful Daisy."

"I will."

Visibility was just about zero with the rain and the approaching storm, he doubted if Daisy would be able to see much from the front of the deck. She returned quite quickly, looking drenched and fed up.

"It doesn't sound like waves on rocks, but I can't see my hand in front of my face out there."

Boats don't have brakes, was something he'd picked up quite young, after ramming a rowing boat into a bank of the Medway near Yalding. There was reverse of course, but against forward momentum, the tide and the prevailing current.....Steve knew they were too close to the shore to avoid it.

"This close to the shore.....We're committed now. Time to wake up the others." He said.

"How will Jada get ashore?"

"She can jump like the rest of us."

"I don't think she can."

"Oh, she will....Once the alternative is explained to her. Now hurry up, get everyone awake and ready to leave. Great.....Now the storm arrives."

The flash of lightning wasn't welcome, nor was the thunder that followed it. Steve still hoped they were somewhere near Weymouth, he remembered there were some sandy beaches in the area with a nice gradual slope. He'd once spent a long weekend with an old flame in the area, at a place called The Smuggler's Inn. The next flash of lightning showed him trees and a foreshore, both far too close for comfort. He stopped the engine, the tide and currents would take them in.

"Hurry up Daisy.....Tell them there's no time to pack." He yelled.

No good, she probably couldn't hear him through the noise of the storm. He put on his own waterproofs, the point was fast approaching, the time for him to abandon their boat to its fate. The bump when they hit the shore was quite gentle at first, until there was the jolt of a few tons of boat stopping, suddenly and instantly. Steve braced himself against the wheel and hoped no one had been injured.

“At least they’ll all now be wide awake.” He muttered.

Everything was deceptively still for a moment, until the first wave rammed into the stern. The boat was modern and well built, but it wasn’t going to survive a battering by the storm. He nearly went to look for Daisy, just as she appeared with a scared looking Tracy and her daughter Maria.

“What about our things ?” Asked Tracy.

“We’ll come back tomorrow in the daylight.” Said Steve.

A harmless lie, the boat would be gone by then. Most likely bashed to pieces, or swept along the coast. Steve could hear the ferocity of the storm increasing with every minute. Daisy moved close enough to be heard if she talked softly.

“What do I do with them now Steve ?”

“Go as far forward as you can and just after the next wave hits.....Jump. Get up the beach as far as you can, above high water. Find shelter if you can.”

“In the dark ?”

“Yes, in the dark.”

He kissed her, just a quick peck on the lips.

“And stay with Tracy and her kid, don’t try to come back. I’ll make sure everyone else gets off the boat.”

Daisy had to persuade Tracy to go out into the rain, but soon he had the cabin to himself. It only then occurred to him that one way or another, he might never see Daisy again. Annoyance and a little anger drove him to walk towards the sleeping quarters at the back of the boat.

“No fucking about people.” He yelled. “We’re going ashore.”

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The pickup by the scavenger team had gone perfectly, despite the weather being rainy. Judy Gray had been surprised that the Bates family had refused her offer to join her. No, surprised didn’t cover it, she’d been amazed to the point of not quite believing it.

“But they’re getting ready to go to a new world and you can come.” She’d said.

“We’re quite happy with this world, despite the unwanted guests.” Liza Bates had told her.

The Bates family did seem very good at surviving the dangers of a world under attack, so far. No matter how many sensible arguments Judy came up with, the Bates family seemed intent on remaining in their house in Kent.

“We could never leave Tonya.” Tirsia had muttered at her.

“They’ve made their decision Judy.” Rod had added.

Dear Rod, he didn’t say much, but he was a good listener. The Bates children had told him all about their sister who’d died of, probably, cancer at the age of thirteen. The garden where she’d been buried was now the family’s holy place, almost their church. Once Rod had explained it all to her, their decision made more sense, even if she still thought it was crazy. There had been a lot of hugs before she’d clambered inside the helicopter and she’d called them crazy a few more times. In the end though, it had just been Rod and her on the helicopter heading north.

Judy was currently stood next to Rod in a hangar in Filey. The man in overalls had told them to wait by a set of doors, so they were waiting. He had provided two chairs, though Judy preferred to stand while waiting for her daughter to arrive.

“I hope she likes me.” Said Rod.

“Oh, she’ll like you well enough, it’s me she had a problem with. I was a bit.....Over judgemental. I even tried to get her to stop seeing Ishmael.”

Judy felt grubby and it worried her. Everyone in the hangar looked smart, no doubt freshly showered too. Judy's clothes felt tatty and she hadn't washed them in quite a while. Her daughter, who already might think of her as being over picky, was about to arrive. Only to find her mother looking grubby, tatty and maybe a bit smelly too.

"Whatever you're thinking, stop it." Said Rod. "Pandora is your daughter and she has probably thought you were dead for years. Nothing but love and good feelings are going to come through those doors."

Three people came through the doors. Ishmael, her daughter and a woman she didn't recognise. Only Dora ran towards her though, arms open to hug her. It felt a little surreal and very wonderful, to be hugged by a daughter she'd never expected to see again.

"Oh...Mum." Said Dora.

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The creature that had once been human, still thought of herself as Vicky. The word had a deeper meaning now though, than simply being the name her mother had chosen for her. To her children and their children, and their children.....The word meant mother, leader, the one whose word was law. Vicky had chosen to ignore the warnings of all her children and stride through Paris as though she owned the place. Soon her kind would claim the city as theirs.

"If you have to join the battle, at least keep to the back." Said her daughter Drei.

"I have a good feeling about today daughter." Said Vicky. "Nothing can harm me today.....And if I am wrong, then so be it."

Moving quickly seemed to be the key to her survival, giving her orders and then moving on before the aliens could organise their high-altitude bombers. Moving quickly was becoming a problem though, now that her warriors were leaving streets full of burning rubble in their wake. It was one of the reasons that Vicky had tried to keep up with her fastest soldiers.

"Here.....We're close right here." She said.

"Shall I call for the tunnellers ?" Asked Drei.

"Not yet, not yet.....I am getting so absent minded. How long is it since they tried to bomb us ?"

"Longer than usual, at least half an hour."

"HmMMM....We're close.....Very close."

Her people were clever and not using weapons had been a choice, to begin with. Sharp teeth, a tough hide and wicked claws, had been more than enough to throw the aliens out of most of Indonesia. They'd found Fifth West weapons in Malaysia, quite a lot of them. Some had been dropped by dead and dying soldiers of various armies. Some had been in stores and armouries, still wrapped in protective layers of wrapping. As her children had marched through the ruins of Singapore, they had found yet more advanced weapons.

Her kind had a gift, no doubt from one of the various strands of DNA in their makeup. Vicky had eaten the mortal remains of a lot of very clever people, mainly on lunar. What they had known she knew, then what she knew was passed onto her children. A remarkable process that meant their young arrived in the world with a head full of useful skills.

They in their turn, had fed on the remains of a large number of skilled fighters, engineers and scientist. Bottom line was, they could not only use Fifth West weapons, they'd actually improved many of them. Flying alien drones were no longer a problem, they could easily clear them from the sky. As for high altitude bombers ? So far, they had no answer for them, other than simply trying to have moved on before the missiles or bombs arrived. Vicky had noticed though, that the bombers avoided bombing anywhere near bunkers containing the alien commanders. All the way in from just

outside the Université Gustave Eiffel, to the Porte de Vincennes, she'd been waiting for a significant pause in the bombing. No matter how hard the fighting, she had kept an internal clock running, counting the seconds and minutes. Now it had arrived, a definite lull in the bombing.

"Find Fünfte, tell him I have need of him." She ordered.

"Yes Vicky." Replied one of her personal guards.

Fünfte was small but clever, the smartest of all her original offspring. He'd work out the best places for the tunnellers to begin their work. In many ways the Porte de Vincennes was the perfect spot for the aliens to put their command centre for the whole of Western Europe. All the train bridges, tunnel and siding for them to dig into and extend. They'd be deep of course, incredibly deep under the ground. Fünfte would find them though, her fifth born child never failed. That didn't stop her getting things organised though, for when he arrived.

"You really should move to a new location Vicky." Said Drei.

"Nonsense, nothing can harm me today, I told you. If you want to stay safe, keep close to me during the fighting."

And if she was wrong....Her children were quite capable of driving the aliens out of Europe, for a while. There were too many aliens for them to be beaten and when they decided to pour out of their hiding places in their millions ! Vicky had faith that in the end, even if it became a thousand-year war, her descendants would eventually win.

"I want this area cleared." She yelled. "The tunnellers will be here soon. I want a mile from this spot cleared in every direction. Anything alien must be dealt with, any enemy structures on the surface, destroyed."

"Yes Vicky."

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The arrival of Judy Gray had stopped them thinking about nothing but work for a while. The sex had been sensational and Ish realised he probably had Biff's mother to thank for that. Strange really, considering she'd always seemed to disapprove of him. The slightly awkward weird kid, who everyone thought might do something really bad one day. He hadn't even really blamed Judy for trying to get her daughter to find someone with better prospects. All that euphoria though, all that delight at seeing her mother again. Yes, the sex had been really good, the best for a very long time. Ish looked at Biff, her face red and drenched in sweat.

"Good to have your mum here." He said.

"Do you mean that ?"

"Yes....I like Rod too. Am I allowed to like Rod ? I can say rude things about him if you like."

"He's alright I suppose, though he is younger than her. Did you notice that ? Still...He makes her happy."

Ish knew he was going to do it, even if it was one of the greatest relationship no-nos of all time.

"I love you Biff."

There, he'd said it. Of course he loved her; she'd just spent ages under the sheet doing wonderful things to his dick. The real wonder would be if he didn't love her at that moment. The endorphins released during sex made it almost impossible not to love someone. It made the declaration of love tainted, like thinking the guy at work who bought everyone doughnuts was nice, even if he's a total creep. If she didn't say it back.....

"I love you too Ish."

Phew....He could feel the stress in his shoulder release. He kissed her, the sort of long slow, lingering kiss that goes on for some time. Ish actually fell asleep cuddled up to Biff, knowing his shoulders

would be painful the next morning because of it, maybe his elbows too. Despite being really tired.....He went straight into a dream, a bright, vividly coloured dream.

It was the kind of dream he knew wasn't a dream, although sometimes parts of them were dreams. Such dreams were a confusing mish mash of dream, true events, all mixed in with a good measure of prophecy. He'd had more of them as a child, though the gift the original Horace had given him, seemed to make the dreams more intense and less frequent.

Oh Horace, why tonight of all nights. His dream persona moved through burning streets, a city full of flames and the vicious looking devil creatures. The dream took him where it wanted, Ish felt like he was just a passenger in his own dream world. There were no human bodies, just living devils and lots of dead and dying Bio-Bots. It seemed the creatures were winning, taking back a city from the alien invasion. Ish had no idea what city, until the dream took him down a wide boulevard, with a street sign still hanging off the remnants of a brick wall. Boulevard Haussmann, it was Paris the devils were fighting for, the capital of the European Federation.

Pity that they seemed to be destroying the historic city in the process, but so much of the world had been destroyed already. His position suddenly changed, as it had a tendency to do in dreams, even if they're not just dreams. Another part of Paris he was sure of it, though he didn't recognise the small park. Half a dozen of the devils were using disruptors to destroy a large robot, a mechanical creature with no hint of the usual Bio-Tech mixture. Ish was no expert on Fifth West weapons, but the disruptors looked like the ones carried by the campus guards. The devils with high tech weapons, he hadn't seen that one coming and neither it seemed, had the aliens. The devils were making a quick and thorough job of destroying the mechanical monster. His view shifted again.....

"The tunnellers have begun Vicky, at the three most likely places."

He knew she was called Vicky before he heard her name. He also knew she was more of a conglomeration of animal DNA than human, though that didn't matter. Her core was a mixture of human and alien and the human part of her was in control. Ish suddenly had control of his dream. He moved close to the creature fighting and winning the battle for Paris.

"I feel them Vicky, they fear you. I can see their thoughts.....You terrify them."

Could she hear him in a dream ? She certainly seemed to react.

"They rely too much on their computers and AI systems. Everything was foreseen by their vast thinking machines, every eventuality expected and planned for. Not you and your kind though, your existence wasn't planned for. They're making mistakes Vicky and then using the wrong data to make other mistakes, then another, then another....."

"Who are you." Asked Vicky.

"Call me Ishmael....I can help you, I know where your tunnellers need to dig. Fifty yards north of you is a building with a huge F-Phone advert on the wall. Dig straight down from their basement and you'll hit the tunnels. The rest is up to you.....Remember how the builders hid Tutankhamun's tomb."

"What do you mean Ishmael ?"

"You'll see, it'll make sense at the time. I need a favour in return though. I need you to....."

Ish told her what he wanted her to do, but there was no way of knowing if she understood, or had even heard him properly. His dream became reality, with a worried Biff looking at him.

"Lots of squeaking and a little scream.....Bad nightmare ?" She asked.

"We'll need MaLaren, she's the best. I need to go....No we need to go; you should come too."

"What's wrong Ish ? Where do I need to go ?"

"Paris of course. We're going to Paris to see Vicky."

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There had been goodbyes early in the morning. Even Matt had felt sad at leaving Fabian, Sophia and their kids. Ela had even given Kevin a goodbye hug without being prodded into it by Sophia. Bren had been really quiet as they'd trudged back to The Eleanor and he understood why. They'd had nothing but each other's company for so long. Then, out of the blue, a family had arrived in their lives, a fairly happy, normal family. He was feeling a slight sense of loss, so he could imagine how Bren felt. "We could have stayed another night." Said Ela.

"Probably not safe to stay there, we'd been running a lot of electrical items for nearly twenty-four hours." Said Bren.

"They're nice people.....I'll miss them." Said Doug. "I think Ela was actually getting a bit fond of Kevin."

"I am armed now Doug." Snapped Ela.

It had felt like leaving part of an extended family behind, as Sophia and Fabian had led their family away from the house, following Mudeford Lane as it headed west out of town. They had no clear destination or aims, apart from surviving. As Sophia had shouted as she'd left.

"No idea where we're going, but we'll know it when we see it.....Namaste."

"Namaste." Ela had shouted back at her.

Everyone loaded up with supplies, it was a relief to find the jetty and The Eleanor, pretty much as they'd left them. A gang of gulls were having a fight on the cabin roof, but otherwise their floating home looked the same as when they'd left it. Since the incident with Ela and the wounded Bio-Bot they were taking no chances.

"I think it's Doug's turn to be monster bait." Said Matt.

"Fine....Fine." Muttered Doug.

Doug sang and shouted about general nonsense, as he went through every room below decks. Matt and Bren watched as best they could and listened as Doug tried to flush out any unwanted visitors. If Doug went quiet, he was in trouble, though the main aim of him singing, badly, was to draw out anything wanting to kill humans. Once Doug returned unscathed, they all began carrying supplies down to the store room.

"Where do we go now ?" Asked Ela.

"East for a while and then north." Said Bren, "We've still a long way to go, almost the entire length of England."

"Can we go to the Isle of Wight...? Sophia said it's nice there."

"She was talking about before the invasion." Said Matt. "We have a long way to go and it might not be a nice place now."

"There will be lots of people about your age in Filey." Added Bren.

"I'm not interested in people my own age." Snapped Ela.

She stormed off, though The Eleanor didn't have that many places to storm off too. Matt looked at Bren and they both shrugged. It seemed they were now the proud parents of a teenager, without all the fuss from birth to puberty.

"Leave her for now.....I'll find her later." Said Bren.

When they left Mudeford Harbour, the gulls were still with them for a while, before flapping off to find somewhere else to squabble. Bren was at the wheel to take them out to sea and they were about a mile away from Mudeford at the time of the explosion. Matt didn't see it, just the column of smoke rising up after the loud bang. It seemed that the aliens weren't happy about the electrical emanations from the house, the smoke was rising from roughly where they'd slept the night before.

Only one bomb though, the aliens only felt the house was worth one bomb. Matt felt mildly insulted. Ela came running on deck, from wherever she'd found to be on her own.

"I knew we'd used too much electricity for too long." Said Bren.

"Oh no.....Do you think they're alright ?" Asked Ela.

"Yes, they'll be miles away by now." Said Matt.

"Fucking aliens." Muttered Doug, as he stared at the rising cloud of smoke.

"Yeah....Fucking aliens." Said Ela.

She said it out of the corner of her mouth, the way a bad guy in a western would have said it. If she'd had a cheroot hanging out of her mouth and a Stetson, the effect would have been perfect. Matt laughed, everyone laughed, including Ela.

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"We've checked, several times." Said Drei. "It's just a passageway with two turns and three sets of wide stairs. It seems to have once been an emergency exit from a part of the Metro that isn't used anymore. We've been right down to the tracks Vicky, there is no alien bunker."

Vicky didn't know why, but she trusted the voice in her head calling itself Ishmael. Trusting a voice in her head was crazy of course, but he had given them a location and digging there had taken them into a disused tunnel. The problem was the clue he'd given her. There had been a lot of scientists in Base Albion, but only one competent historian. It seemed that Vicky hadn't eaten them, so she was relying on her secondary school education about Tutankhamun's tomb, and it wasn't good enough. It felt so long since Mrs Wheeler had taught her Egyptian history, and a hell of a lot had happened since then.

"Where is Fünfte ?" She asked.

"On the surface Vicky, examining one of the alien robots."

"Bring him to me, I'll be examining the passage again.....We're missing something."

Fünfte was clever, though he might not have picked up much knowledge of Egyptian history on their journey from New Guinea. If all else failed she'd resort to explosives to find the hidden passageway. There had to be one, she knew the voice in her head hadn't lied to her. Explosives would warn them though, every alien for miles would know her tunnellers were on the way.

"Why couldn't you have given me a sensible clue Ishmael ?" She muttered.

She was Vicky and her word was law. If any of her guards thought she was going crazy, they'd never have dared to say it. Fünfte found her as she did her third walk along the passageway, while looking at the walls for anything strange.

"You needed me Vicky ?"

"Yes, how did the builders hide Tutankhamun's tomb ?"

Their faces weren't able to show much emotion, but her son did manage a look of surprise. He blinked at her a few times, though he didn't ask why she needed to know.

"The entrance was hidden behind a passageway leading to another tomb, so no one had bothered to even look for it. Rumours persist that it was purely by accident....."

"Where..... Where was the entrance to Tutankhamun's tomb ?" She asked

"Sorry ?....I don't."

"At the end, or maybe the beginning of the passageway ?"

"Yes, I understand now. It was on a turn in the passage....The route to Tutankhamun's tomb was hidden behind a strong false wall."

"Good....Good...I need a dozen of the strongest tunnellers. Tell them to bring sledge hammers."

"Yes Vicky."

The hidden tunnel could logically be in only one of two places. It couldn't be on the inside of the turns in the passage, which left her just two walls to examine. Luck was with her, the wall in the right place, at the first turn, sounded odd. Not necessarily hollow, just odd. She had one of her guards thump the wall, while she kept her ear against it.

"Hmmmmm...A very thick partition wall I think." She muttered.

When they arrived the tunnellers made short work of bringing down the wall. Behind it was a set of stairs, which led to yet another dark passageway. There was a scent in the air. A musky scent she knew, all her people had begun to recognise it. A little unpleasant, like a mixture of damp, mould and decaying fruit. She grinned at her brightest son.

"Aliens Vicky, the stench of aliens." He said. "We've found them."

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