

Ishmael II : Pandora

Chapter 15 – A Stowaway

“The argument about whether they were leaving Tripoli on a Saturday or a Sunday hadn’t gone away, it had simmered away beneath the surface.”



Deb Newman had become obsessed with the idea that there was something important about the storage facility in Moston, an important something they’d missed. They’d returned with a few chemical burns, but most importantly, they’d ticked everything on Andy’s looting list.

“There’s no reason to go back Deb.” He’d told her. “The clinic is busy with the baby boom and anyway.....It’s Moston Deb, in Manchester. That must be one of the most dangerous places on the planet, if you’re a human.”

Being told something is crazy wasn’t the same as accepting that as a fact. No good asking Kitty MacLaren to risk her life on a trip to Manchester, she’d been assigned to moving a few key personnel around the various surviving Fifth West facilities. Dangerous, but some facilities needed someone with expertise in certain fields, if they were to finish building their shuttles. Kitty had given her an idea though.

“For the record, I think you’re nuts.” Kitty had told her. “Go and see Jarvis though, if anyone can help you, he can. He’s allowed almost full control of where he goes looting and he has his own pilots and helicopters.”

Jarvis had thought she was nuts too, but he did owe her. One of his best pilots had been injured, a wound that should have finished his days as a copter pilot. With a little surgery, Deb had managed to give the guy a knee joint that bent again. Although nothing had been said, Jarvis would know he owed her. It took a few days to organise, but Deb found herself on a scavenger’s helicopter at about one am on a dry moonlit night.

“We’re going to set down in the central courtyard.” Shouted Jarvis.

Kitty flew the fastest and best helicopters Fifth West had, though the scavengers had some fairly impressive transport too. Their copters weren’t that fast, but they were well armoured. A must when you might be leaving a location loaded up with supplies, while under fire.

“What are we looking for ?” Someone asked.

“That’s restricted information.” Said Jarvis. “We just keep Deb Newman safe while she looks for it.”

Deb knew why he was lying and she thought it was a damned good idea. Telling his team that they were guarding a crazy lady who had a feeling about something important, wasn’t likely to boost their confidence and morale. Jarvis had brought a few extra soldiers, all of them assigned to following her about while she searched the facility, lit only by a few flashlights.

“We’re coming in to land.”

The landing was a bit rough, night time landings often were. No matter how the good the pilot, nothing can replace seeing every detail of the ground below you on a nice sunny day.

“Alright....You know your assigned duties.” Yelled Jarvis.

The soldiers looking after her were nice and at least they didn’t all look too young to be fighting a war. They kept Deb back until the main scavenging team had been inside the facility for a good fifteen minutes. There had been the occasional noise of an electromagnetic weapon being fired. Eventually her guards were waved inside. Deb walked into the centre of the building and looked at

the painted letters and numbers on the wall. They all indicated different parts of the huge warehousing facility. There was a large dayglow arrow below each set of characters, indicating which way to go. Deb just looked at the wall, hoping for a moment when she understood why the hell she was there.

"Take as long as you like." Said Jarvis. "We'll make sure you're safe."

Section ZG-4 had a ring to it, but....No, it wasn't right. It was all so difficult looking at the wall with nothing but a flashlight.

"I need more light, just for a minute or so." She said.

"The lady needs more light." Someone yelled.

They had lights, fairly huge hand held ones that lit the wall up as good as daylight. The soldiers weren't happy; it was obvious from their nervous looks. The building was reasonably intact, though nearly all the windows had lost their glass. All those holes where windows had been, all full of light to indicate someone was inside the facility. Luckily the letters and numbers in one place looked special, it was almost as though the arms of the Y were waving at her.

"There.....We need to go to section YE-22." She said.

The lights went off so quickly, it felt as though she was stood alone in stygian darkness. Slowly her eyes became used to the glow from flashlights once again.

"That's the other side of the courtyard." Someone shouted. "No one has cleared the small greens from over there."

"Then we'll be very fucking careful." Said Jarvis. "Won't we Parker?"

Parker was female, a pretty girl with her blonde hair trying to fight its way out from under her helmet. Deb would have bet one of her few remaining bottles of Potemkin that everyone else called Parker by her first name. It was as though Jarvis had been through a mandatory gender equality course and was determined to get it right.

"Yes sir." Shouted Parker.

Jarvis held her back until everyone else was out in the courtyard.

"Are you sure Deb? I hate to ask, but that side of the courtyard is supposed to be just storage for Manchester City Council."

"It's over there, I know it. Get me there and I'll show you."

"Alright, I'll get you there."

Her small cloud of protectors kept close as she entered the building. She could hear disruptor fire, someone had found small greens to finish off. It was as if Deb had worked in the building for years, she knew exactly where to go.

"Slow down, we need to check the doorway." Someone said.

They'd all been expecting to find half dead small greens, the remnants of the first wave of the invasion. The creature that leapt at one of her guards wasn't half dead and it looked like a man. Deb kept her flashlight on the creature, while drawing her pistol and firing four times into its head. The soldiers had reacted, one even had a weapon up, ready to fire. It had been her though, she'd killed the monster. Matt had taught her how to shoot, way back in what now felt like a lifetime ago. The rest, the skill and reaction time...Surviving since the start of the war had taught her those. Sadly she hadn't been quick enough to save the soldier.

"Oh shit, it's Dean." Someone said.

Two of the soldiers helped her drag Dean away from the dead creature. They all knew that death didn't always make them harmless. Deb knelt next to the dead young man and went through the motions, even though she knew it was pointless. The alien creature had only had a matter of

seconds to do the soldier harm, but that had been enough. Long metallic claws had dug deep into Dean's chest; her flashlight showed her a heart cut almost in two.

"The bastards know what they're doing." Said Jarvis. "Impressive shooting by the way."

"Thank you."

She'd be one of them now, she knew that. She'd seen one of them die and used her skills with a weapon to destroy one their enemies. No more treating her like a spoiled woman from the Filey Campus, she was a scavenger now. She left others to put Dean in a body bag, while Jarvis led the way deeper into the building. The door leading to section YE wasn't even locked, though there were caged off areas.

"Found it.....YE-22." Someone yelled.

Not exactly impressive, the wire cage wouldn't have kept out a determined amateur looter. There was even a sign on the gate saying everything inside was the property of Manchester City Council's Cleansing Department. There was a padlock on the gate, which one of the scavengers cut off with a pair of bolt croppers. Inside the caged off area was quite large, though only four crates were important.

"Good, no one has damaged them." She said.

Four large crates, she hadn't expected there to be four of them. Heavy too, judging by the effort Jarvis had to put into simply wobbling one a little. Each crate had Fifth West stencilled on the side and a twelve digit reference number.

"Too damned heavy Deb." Said Jarvis. "We could take two and come back for the others."

"No.....Call in another copter."

"That will mean loading up after dawn. Being here in the daylight could be very dangerous."

"Can we open them ?" Someone Asked.

"No !"

Deb looked straight at Jarvis, making sure she had eye contact in the glow from several flashlights.

"This.....What's in these crates. It could change everything." She said.

"Alright, make yourselves comfortable everyone." Yelled Jarvis. "I'm calling in to get a second helicopter."

"I saw a crate in the other building marked tinned hotdogs." Someone said.

"Yay, the perfect breakfast." Said Parker.

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There were advantages to being the daughter of Jaroslav Verga, the CEO of the Fifth West Corporation. The heavily armoured APC had the latest stealth technology, including a 7th Gen hydrogen engine that was almost too quiet to hear. Best of all, their small convoy of three vehicles had screening so good that it was unlikely alien drones or satellites would spot them. Two APCs with a couple of large trucks between them, which would double as somewhere to sleep if the weather turned bad. Of course it was Northern Russia, so the weather was certain to turn bad.

"We need to head east for a while." Said Sgt Barwood. "There's a continuing bombardment of the freight yards in Novyy Beloostrov."

"Fine, just get us to St Petersburg in one piece." Said Lianne.

He gave her a look, there was going to be friction. Like it or not, it was her convoy and Barwood was going to do as she asked. She just about felt the vibration as the engine needed to move the heavy APC forward.

"Nice morning weather, no rain and about nine degrees." Said the driver.

Not that the driver needed to look outside, the screens in front of him had all the climate information. Screens to show him every possible angle, though the rear gun was operated independently. It was the whole left right thing that meant it was easier to get someone in the APC to use the rear facing weapons. Lianne preferred to open up one of the armoured slits to look outside. To her the weather only felt real with the cold Russian breeze on her cheeks.

“With a bit of luck, we’ll be having dinner somewhere in St Petersburg.” Said the driver.

He had a bit of a crush on her, she could always tell. She might have been tempted if he wasn’t one of her dad’s guards, it had been a while. He was pleasant and like most soldiers, his belly showed no sign of growing over the belt of his trousers.

“There’s a chemical storage bunker in Ruch’i.” Said Barwood. “Not the ideal place to spend the first night in St Petersburg, but the walls are thick and reinforced.”

“As long as there’s food and a bed.” Said Lianne.

A night in a chemical store was hardly the stuff of anyone’s dreams, but she had mentally prepared herself for living fairly rough for a few days. No talking to her dad either, though there were going to be daily databursts. They were also going to experiment with an idea the Americans had come up with during the cold war of the nineteen sixties. Bouncing data off of meteorite trails worked in theory, but not in practise. Computers then simply didn’t have the speed required to perform the calculations required. Now Fifth West had computers that could think faster than a meteorite could move across the sky.

“You can help perfect it Lianne.” Her dad had told her. “Such a device could give us global communications on a planet with no existing technology.”

“Like our new home ?”

“Yes, like our new home.”

The APC jolted as it crossed an area of the road nature was trying hard to take back from mankind. A patch of broken asphalt so bad that a normal car would have to have found a way round it.

“Remember your yellow pills.” Shouted Barwood. “If you feel ill for no obvious reason, take one of the pills.”

The driver rolled his eyes at her. Yes, they were probably all going to be rolling their eyes about Barwood over the next few days, but his heart was in the right place.

“Sorry, I should know your name.” She said to the driver.

“Eastwood.....Nigel Eastwood mam.”

“Please....Call me Lianne.”

He had a nice smile, was age appropriate and she was certain an opportunity for a little privacy wouldn’t be hard to arrange. It really had been a while.

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The argument about whether they were leaving Tripoli on a Saturday or a Sunday hadn’t gone away, it had simmered away beneath the surface. Most of the local stores had calendars using the Muslim year and printed in Arabic. Ela could read and understand them, but the problem was an agreed start point. One of Doug’s contacts in Sri Lanka had the days, weeks, months and years scribbled on a wall in his lounge. Yes, he had felt it was that important to know the correct date. A lot had happened since leaving Sri Lanka and although it felt ridiculous to admit it, proving what day it was had become almost impossible. Not that Matt was really that worried if it was Saturday morning or Sunday, there were bigger problems.

“Crap.....They’re all over the place.” Shouted Doug.

Doug fired his shotgun and nearly cut one of the creatures in two. Not that it stopped the thing from moving, still crawling along the ground to get to them.

"Headshots Doug, scramble the damned things brains." Yelled Matt.

Jeez, he was beginning to sound like a bad zombie movie. They'd been ready to leave the boatyard just after dawn, everyone wanted to get back to the relative safety of the open sea. The Eleanor's engines had been started, maybe that had triggered the attack. The loud sound of both the engines being used to reverse the boat out of the small dock, might have been enough to cause them all to come clambering over the gates. One was actually stuck on the barbed wire, struggling and squirming until Bren used her Kalashnikov to blow its skull apart.

"Get on the boat, we're leaving right now." Shouted Matt.

Ela still had some bedding in her arms, which she threw into the living quarters of the Eleanor. At one time seeing her grab a shotgun would have made him duck for cover. She'd learned well though and killed one of the brutes with a single shot.

"Move towards the river wall, I'll bring her round to you." Yelled Doug. "You might need to jump."

Of course he and Bren would need to jump, the boat was a good six feet below the top of the river wall. Matt ran towards Bren rather than towards the river wall, she needed help with the horde of creatures coming over the gate.

"Fuck Matt, there are millions of them." Said Bren.

Not millions, but enough to easily overrun the boatyard.

"Stay together, we'll move backwards towards the river wall.

"What then?"

"We jump down onto the Eleanor."

"Crap.... Sounds a good way to break an ankle."

It probably was, though it was infinitely preferable to being torn apart by the alien creatures that looked like men. Side by side they kept firing taking it in turns to reload. There did seem to be an inexhaustible supply of alien creatures still coming over the top of the gates and unlike human enemies, they seemed to have no sense of self preservation. There came a point when they were still a few feet from the river wall, when Matt heard Bren's weapon make a clunk sound instead of firing. He knew the stats, about one in every sixty thousand rounds was a dud, a misfire. No way to clear the dud round in a hurry.

"Run Bren.....Run !" He yelled.

Matt could hear Bren breathing hard and he could also hear the creatures like men pounding after them. Luckily the mast of the Eleanor just about showed over the top of the river wall. Good to get his bearings, but it meant the drop was going to be more like ten feet than six. He didn't stop at the edge of the wall; it was one of those occasions that required a little blind faith. Matt leapt and hoped Bren had leapt with him. As he tumbled across the deck of their boat, he heard the sound of Doug firing his automatic shotgun.

"Get them all.....Keep firing Ela or we're all finished." Yelled Doug.

Matt felt his shoulder hit something and suddenly the right side of his body was engulfed in pain. The creatures had jumped with them, of course they had. The Eleanor was moving away from the river wall. He saw one of the monsters in human form hit the deck's guard rail, before falling backwards into the water. There were so many of the brutes though, their numbers seemed endless.

Ela was doing well; he saw her take the face off one of the creatures with her shotgun.

"Bren..... Are you alright?"

She should have been his first concern. Doug and Ela seemed to be coping with the brutes who'd landed on the deck. Rolled up in a ball, Bren had collided with one of the barrels of fuel kept on deck. Matt could see her chest moving as she breathed and there a strong pulse in her neck. Satisfied she wasn't dead or about to die; he picked up her Kalashnikov, cleared the misfire and joined the fight. By the time none of the creatures were still moving, he could count at least thirty dead alien brutes on various parts of the Eleanor.

"We were lucky, very lucky." Said Doug.

"Look, they're still swimming towards us." Said Ela.

They were still leaping into the water and trying to get to them, though they were moving with the flow of the currents now and no one swimming stood a chance of catching them.

"They're crazy." Said Doug.

"No, they're alien Bio-Bots with no fear of death." Said Matt. "Come on let's throw the dead ones into the ocean and clean the decks. I need a wash too, that goey blood of theirs is irritating my skin."

"Yep, I'll make sure they're all dead." Said Doug.

The strange thing was that Ela had been focused on killing the monsters, never once showing any emotions. Now that Doug was using a 9mm handgun to make sure none of them were playing possum, she was covering her head with her arms and screaming.

"Sorry Ela.....It has to be done." Said Doug.

"Go and get cleaned up Ela." Said Matt. "Doug and I can handle this."

First Matt turned a deck lounge the right way up, before lifting Bren into it. Her eyes opened just as he was using a few cushions to try and make her more comfortable. She started trying to fight him.

"Hey, it's me.....They're all dead Bren, or trying to swim across to Sicily."

Her eyes still looked a bit out of it, though she did nod at him. He kissed her gently on the lips and much to his relief, she responded.

"Have a rest Bren, you had a run in with a steel fuel barrel, and lost."

Throwing the dead creatures overboard was hard work and there was still a need to be careful. Even dead the razor sharp claws of the brutes gave them a few nasty scratches. After getting rid of the bodies the deck needed washing down. Only then did he and Doug get a chance to wash the blood of their enemies off their bodies. By then Bren looked to be alert and taking an interest in what they were doing.

"Where's Ela ?" She asked. "Did she survive the battle ?"

Matt looked at Doug, it felt like hours since the girl had gone below to clean up.

"Crap.....She should have been back by now." Said Doug.

"She might be taking a nap." Said Matt.

Even as he said it, he wasn't convinced by his own idea. They both ran for the stairs down to below decks, with Bren limping after them. All those years in the army and all that regular exercise paid off, Matt reached the stairs first. He ran down the stairs and along the short corridor, finding Ela lying on the floor, her back against the wall. She was covered in blood, her blood, red human blood. Alive though, she pointed through the open door of the small toilet.

"It was wounded and hiding in there." She said.

Ela still had the nasty looking blade in her right hand, the one she'd found in Sri Lanka and thought no one else knew about. She was holding it close to her chest. Dear little seventeen years old Ela had obviously found the stowaway and killed it with her blade. She'd slashed at the beast until its head was almost severed from its body.

"Crap ! No need to check if it's dead." Said Doug.

"How did you ?.....Jeez Ela you killed it...All on your own." Said Matt.

Ela hadn't escaped the claws of the brute, even if it had already been wounded. There were several deep gouges in her chest and upper arms. Matt knelt next to her.

"Are you alright Ela ?" He asked.

"She might be if you stop asking stupid questions." Yelled Bren. "One of you get me the medical kit....And hurry or she'll bleed to death."

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It was widely hoped that lighting up the towns and main streets would cause a decline in crime, but it seemed to have the opposite effect. It seemed that the worst elements on both sides preferred to have some light to fight by. Jersey still was a safe place to live, but giving the yobs well-lit streets definitely hadn't helped.

Jada Lopez had been the one to insist on going to a classical music night, at what had been one of the large hotels on the St Helier Waterfront. The building had been repurposed by the Kingdom as a Cultural Centre. The Kingdom had gone in for a lot of repurposing and some of it had caused a ground swell of ill feeling. The owners of the hotel had been French nationals and although ownership was now a fairly meaningless concept, the inhabitants of the east side of Jersey didn't see it that way.

"Oh..... More of this nonsense." Said Luis.

Not so much an angry mob as an irritable gang of regulars from the bar down the road. A bar run by a particularly vocal family on the Anti-Brit side of local politics. They were waving posters, which were aimed at them, but were for some weird reason written in French.

"Steve thinks it will all calm down." Said Alejandro.

"He's probably right, but this isn't a nice end to what was....A really nice evening." Said Tracy.

They'd done the traditional thing for a musical evening. Dressing up in the best clothes they had, a horse and cart had even been hired to take them both ways. Steve and Daisy claimed to have things to do back at the house, though Jada suspected they were both philistines when it came to classical music. They had agreed to look after Maria for the evening though, which had redeemed them a little. It meant the four of them could enjoy the recital right through to the end. After quite a good night of music that was really good considering all the players were Jersey locals, they'd come out....To be greeted by a gang of yobs.

"Disgusting behaviour." Shouted Jada.

"Don't provoke them." Said Luis. "Old Joe will be waiting for us just up the street."

Bartering had made a huge comeback on Jersey. In a world where everyone worked for the Kingdom, for credits that could only be spent in Kingdom stores, bartering had become a must. Old Joe had a horse and cart, both of them fairly elderly. He was happy to work for food and was particularly partial to tinned soups. Six large tins of soup had secured Old Joe's services for the night.

"Are you sure we're in the right place ?" Asked Jada.

"Yes, I'm certain of it." Said Luis.

"He picked Daisy and I up here after a girl's night out." Said Tracy. "We're definitely in the right place."

Still on the water front and the angry mob appeared to have grown, judging by the amount of shouting from the direction of the Cultural Centre. Jada was feeling out in the open and exposed. Then there was an explosion and a bright flash of light.

"Was that....." Began Luis.

“Homemade petrol bomb by the smell of it.” Said Alejandro. “Things are obviously getting nasty, we need to get out of the area.”

“I can’t walk home, no use in suggesting it.” Said Jada.

“I’m just saying we need to get further away from the trouble mum.” Said Alejandro.

Jada could walk a reasonable distance, as long as the pace was quite slow. The problem was that trouble seemed to be following them, the noise of the angry mob actually getting louder. A lot of the nearby buildings had been repurposed as Kingdom government buildings. It meant the places that once been hotels and restaurants were now closed and locked up for the night.

“I know....Daisy was talking about her job at the Information Ministry.” Said Tracy. “It’s not far and she mentioned the building was open right through the night.”

“I’ve seen that place, always guards outside.” Said Luis.

“A government building with guards sounds perfect to me.” Said Jada. “Lead on.....Before the damned mob catches up with us.”

“It’s a bit of a walk mum, a few streets away.”

“I’ll be alright, just don’t expect me to run.”

No matter how fast they moved, the noises behind them seemed to be getting closer. As they turned into a fairly dark street, they ran into a gang of yobs on the other side of the argument. A gang of people carrying British flags and banners full of hatred against the French.

“Well what have we here ?” One of them asked.

The leader of the group, or at least the one who looked to be in charge, took a few steps towards Luis.

“What’s your name then ?” He asked.

“Luis Lopez.”

“What the fuck does that make you then ?”

“I’m.....We’re British, though we came from Spain.”

For some reason that must have made sense to him, Luis started walking towards the leader of the mob.

“We’re on your side.” Yelled Tracy.

Were they ? Jada didn’t want to be on the same side as any of the yobs on the street that night.

There was another explosion that sounded close by, followed by the tang of burning petrol in the air. The leader of the mob seemed to treat that as some kind of provocation. He had a large knife, more of a sword really, it had to be at least eighteen inches long. A nasty thing with a serrated edge to it. Jada screamed as he stabbed Luis in the chest with that terrible knife. He carried on stabbing, again and again, until Luis fell to the ground.

“You bastard.” Yelled Alejandro.

Jada was born a catholic in Spain, which meant she believed divine intervention was a possibility. As the bright light of the explosions filled the street, to her it felt as though God had sent his angels to avenge the death of her husband and father of her children. The flashes of light appeared to be everywhere and then the explosions began. None of the gang who’d killed Luis were injured though; the angels appeared to have made a mistake and were attacking the government buildings. As everyone began to run away, Jada felt strong arms lifting her, almost dragging her.

“We need to go.....They’re attacking.” Said Alejandro.

Her son one side, with his wife the other. They had her almost up off her feet, as they ran with her. Of course the angels were attacking; they were destroying the evil people who had killed Luis.

“We don’t need to run, they won’t hurt us.” She said.

The explosions continued and Jada began to wonder if the angels really were on their side. They ran past dead people and those with dreadful injuries. She actually screamed when she saw one man who appeared to be nothing but burnt skin. She wanted to rest so badly, but they carried on lifting and dragging her out of St Helier.

“We have to wait for Luis.” She said. “He can’t be far behind us.”

They were ignoring her; she wasn’t going to put up with that.

“Stop struggling Jada, we need to get well away from town.” Said Tracy.

“But we can’t leave Luis behind.”

No matter how often she said it, they kept ignoring her. Finally they let her rest when they were about halfway home. They sat her on a bench outside the Old Railway Café, with its graffiti covered walls.

“A few minutes rest, no more.” Said Alejandro.

As Jada sat on a rusty metal bench outside the café, she remembered that Luis wouldn’t be waiting in St Helier, wondering why they’d deserted him. Her husband was dead, she’d seen him killed by that.....Low life. The bright lights had nothing to do with the angels either, Steve had been right.

Lighting up Jersey like a Christmas tree had attracted the attention of the aliens.

“He’s dead....I remember now.” She said. “I’m just a stupid old woman.”

Jada wept and Tracy hugged her as she cried for poor Luis. Eventually they began walking towards home again, though no one seemed to have a plan for what to do when they got there.

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Deb had found a piece of paper attached to one of the large crates and it had been a game changer. Hidden behind a wooden outer shell that had been added to the crate somewhere on its journey. A scruffy piece of paper with ripped edges, as though someone had once tried to rip it off the crate.

Deb knew the name; it was often mentioned in hushed whispers by a few of the science team. After a particularly heated exchange, Jarvis had let her make a direct voice call to the Filey Campus. Only a quick call to leave a message for Ishmael, he’d understand the significance.

“Please tell Ishmael that the crates were intended for Dimitri Minasyan in Mordor One.....Yes, I really did say Mordor One, it’s on the dark side of the moon, or rather it was. The crates were sent just before the invasion and there was obviously a mix up. The specimens ended up in a council storage facility in Manchester.....Look, stop asking silly questions. These crates are probably why the aliens have been trying to remove Manchester from the map. Send help; get us the fuck out of here.”

Not her best or most professional message, she’d have been the first to admit that. They had been under attack at the time though, with all the scavengers blaming her for being in Manchester during daylight hours.

The message had worked though, no less than three fast helicopters had arrived, complete with Fifth West soldiers armed with the latest disruptors. Quite quickly the crates had been loaded up and they were on the way back to Filey. Deb imagined having a shower that evening, before a meal with Iris as she held her child. Deb was given the bad news during a whispered conversation with the pilot.

“We’re being sent to Hangar J.” He’d told her. “Complete isolation until the decontamination equipment can be set up. I’ve been told Iris and your son are both well and looking forward to seeing you...Eventually.”

Hangar J was at the end of an escape tunnel, separated from the campus by a long road tunnel and two blast doors. It was the way out if everything else was overrun by an enemy, or too compromised

by an infection for anyone to remain. Too far from the campus to be useful, Hangar J was rarely used. The scavengers understood what was going on, as soon as their helicopter began to descend. "Oh crap, Hangar J." Someone said. "Hours of being tested and having our bumps felt."

Everyone off every helicopter was packed into the tunnel. Deb knew they were in for a long wait when men in hazard suits arrived with a row of chemical toilets. That confirmed it, they were all being held in the best place on campus to keep them isolated. Deb had heard all the horrific stories about the corrupted DNA and infections that had wiped out just about everyone in Mordor Two. Luckily a nurse she knew arrived with the decontamination equipment. It felt strange talking to someone she knew who was dressed in a full hazard suit.

"We're going to fully decontaminate everyone Deb, twice. It's been ordered by Francine. We'll let people out once they've been through the procedure, though Ish has asked you to remain here."

"Why?"

"I have no idea, he just said he wants to see you."

Shower units were set up and someone had been sensible enough to provide separate showers for men and women. Scrubbing first of course, Deb teamed up with a female soldier to make sure the chemical cleanser got everywhere. It stung and there were quite a few moans, though a shower and fresh fatigues seemed to cheer everyone up. No phones where they were, though Deb did get a few more assurances that Iris was looking after Ramsay.

"I just hope what's in those crates is worth all this." Said Jarvis.

"I'm sure it is." She replied.

The scavengers still liked her, even if they were fed up with being scrubbed and tested. All of them made a point of saying goodbye to her before they were taken to the campus. Eventually Deb was the only one left, apart from a few technicians packing up the decontamination equipment. Then the heavy brigade turned up, a dozen of them in a military APC and all dressed in top of the line hazard suits. She knew which one was Ishmael by his constant limp. It had become so bad that he couldn't walk without using a crutch. He walked up to her.

"So Deb Newman, what have you brought me?"

"I have no idea Ish, I just know it's important."

"I feel that too....You mentioned specimens in your message."

She shrugged.

"Just a feeling."

Ish turned towards the people who'd come with him. She probably knew some of them, though the suits hid their faces.

"Get the cameras set up." Said Ish. "We're going to record everything, just in case."

No one asked in case of what.

"We've spare suits Deb, you can join us." Said Ish. "It seems only right to have you there as we open the crates. It might be a long time until you see Ramsay again though, depending on what we find. You can think about it, it'll take us a while to get everything set up."

"I'll stay." She said.

"You're sure?"

"Yes."

"Alright, get suited up."

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