

## Ishmael

### Chapter 10 – Mordor Two

**“UniConsortium Moon Base Two had been built against the edge of the Pavlov crater. Everyone knew where it was, there were no secret bases on the moon. It was impossible to shuttle stuff up from Earth without it being seen.”**



Mateo Lopez had agreed with the military about the various criteria indicating it was time to enter the bunker. Even so, it was still awful when he'd told his two children it was time to put everything they couldn't bear to lose into a small backpack. There were cases already packed of course, they'd been packed and ready in the cupboard under the stairs for some time.

“Look daddy..... Horses.” Shouted Tina.

His eight year old daughter was excited; she'd rarely seen horses and had never travelled in a horse drawn cart. His six year old son Tom, just stared open mouthed. His wife was scared, but was putting on a brave and excited face for the children.

“They've forced us back to using horses for transport.” She'd said, the night before. “Runners from the military putting notes through letterboxes and we don't even know what's happening in the rest of the world. Actually, screw the rest of the world; we don't even know what's happening in Westward Ho!”

“That's why we're entering the bunker tomorrow.” He'd told her.

There were at least twenty criteria to cause the evacuation of key council personnel to the bunker and half of those had occurred. Phones failing, civilian deaths assumed to be caused by the aliens and worst of all; an electricity dead zone that stretched for miles. The object had landed just south of Westward Ho! holiday village and within an hour, all power was off in most of Devon and Cornwall. Nothing that relied on electricity in any form was working; they were reduced to relying on medieval methods of transport and notes delivered by runners.

“Who will look after Barney ?” Asked Tom.

“He's gone to live on a farm with all the other pets.” Said Helen.

It sounded lame to him, but the kids smiled and seemed convinced. There would be little space in the bunker and food rationing for the humans inside. No pets were allowed and Helen had taken Barney to the vets the day before. She'd cried for an hour after getting home.

“I'm sure he knew.....The look in his eyes.” She'd told him.

“Better that than simply abandoning him.”

Barney hadn't been the sort of dog to survive going feral, he'd been the softest mutt he'd ever known.

“Can I stroke the horses ?”

“Ask the man on the cart Tina.” Answered his wife.

There were four other people and their bags already on the cart, though Mat didn't recognise any of them. The council employed a lot of people and various other public servants were being evacuated too. The cart driver had obviously said it was alright, his daughter was gently stroking the neck of one of the horses.

“We need to be moving, I've another half dozen families to pick up today.”

Mat put their last case on the cart and went back to lock the door of their house. They might never be returning, but there were so many things in there with sentimental value. Some people say things don't matter, but they probably weren't leaving everything behind to live in an underground bunker. He thought about the line of cheap paperbacks on a shelf near the coatrack. Every day her saw those cheap Sci-Fi paperbacks he'd bought as a child, with his pocket money. He knew every title on that row of books, every picture on the covers. Yes they were just things, but things he loved, even if he hadn't read them for nearly twenty years.

"Sorry to hurry you Mr Lopez." Said the cart driver. "We need to be leaving..... Others are waiting for me."

"Yes, sorry..... Of course."

Horses don't do reverse, so the cart went across his immaculate lawn, demolishing a few shrubs before it managed to turn round and head back towards town. Helen looked at him and he knew how she was feeling. They were leaving their home on the back of a cart, like refugees in parts of the world they'd always felt sorry for.

"You've probably got no traffic to worry about."

"No, not really.... Lots of army guys on cycles in town. There's an abandoned milk tanker on the road out to Paignton, but I can just about get round it."

The four horses pulled them at a decent speed, though it was probably only ten miles per hour. Torquay had been lucky, quite a few horses for various tourists attractions and rides. Other town probably hadn't been so lucky.

"Will we see grandpa today ?" Asked Tina.

It was a question they'd been dreading, the kids didn't know that Luis and Jada weren't joining them in the bunker. Not his decision, he'd begged them to go. Luckily Helen wasn't above the occasional white lie.

"They're going to another bunker."

"Is it nice there ?" Asked Tom.

"Yes, just as nice as ours."

None of his family had wanted to go into the bunker, or Helen's extended family. The two extra places had been allocated by the council. There were times when he wondered if they should have taken their chances in the home they loved. No one knew if the aliens would try to slaughter the entire human race, but it seemed unlikely.

~ ~

The shuttle they'd taken from Mordor One was comfortable and spacious, but it felt a little sluggish compared with Billy. It had a much longer flight duration time though and plenty of atmosphere suits that didn't have a slight odour of the last three people who'd worn them. Their shuttle had been talking to the Mordor Two systems for the last ten minutes, which might be a good thing, or it might not.

"Look at the size of that place, imagine the cost of bringing it all here." Said Norma. "They kept telling me how much it cost to get my equipment to the moon, but this...."

"There's obviously a lot of money in off world research." Said MacLaren.

"Are they scanning us ?" Asked Gene.

"The AI is, but there hasn't been a peep out of the UniCon personnel down there. We've been well looked over and no weapons lock from their defence systems." Said MacLaren. "I count that as a really good sign."

UniConsortium Moon Base Two had been built against the edge of the Pavlov crater. Everyone knew where it was, there were no secret bases on the moon. It was impossible to shuttle stuff up from Earth without it being seen. What was a surprise was how far Mordor Two had expanded away from the original base up against the crater wall.

“That has to be three times the size of Mordor One.” Said Gene.

“At least.” Added Norma.

Bigger and heavier meant more momentum, the shuttle was seriously sluggish on the turns.

MacLaren needed to do a few circles around the base to assess damage though. There had to be damage as so far at least, no human had said hello or asked them what the hell they were doing.

“There.....A hole near what looks like their main airlock.” Said Gene.

“Their AI is trying to divert us to an airlock close to the edge of the crater. This is your mission Gene, do we accept the invite ?” Asked MacLaren.

Sometimes it was nice to be able to offload those sorts of decisions onto someone else, as long as it didn't get them all killed. Gene watched the screens as the shuttle grudgingly turned for another fly past.

“This damn thing has a mind of its own.....” Said MacLaren. “We're burning fuel at a scary rate Gene. I can land us away from the base and we can walk in, if you want ?”

“Do that.....Give us a bit of distance from whatever might be in there.”

A few grumbles, but far fewer than MacLaren had been expecting. Gene's small army of eager students were obviously beginning to trust his judgement. Walking any real distance in an atmosphere suit was hard work.

“Oh, this thing doesn't like being told no.” Said MacLaren.

“I did my best, but I couldn't completely lobotomise it.” Said Norma.

MacLaren knew the controls were fly-by-wire, but she still yanked hard on the control stick. It felt like trying to get a sailing dinghy to turn into the wind, but eventually the shuttle stopped trying to fight her.

“Everywhere looks covered in loose rubble.... What fool builds inside a crater ?”

It wasn't perfect, but there was an area of solid ground, even if it was a quarter of a mile away from the base. MacLaren landed, almost feeling relief as she killed the motors.

“A bit more lobotomising before we take off Norma.” She said. “That was too much like hard work.”

“I will..... I've already got a few ideas to make Bess a bit more user friendly.”

“Bess ?”

Gene just shrugged and no one was arguing, so it looked like the shuttle from hell was going to be called Bess. Order turned to chaos as twenty or so keen and eager students, began to look for suits that fitted them. Bess had an internal speaker system, which was a definite improvement from Billy.

“I will only be taking a small reconnaissance party to enter the base.” Said Gene.

A few mutters as Gene's voice echoed around the main seating area, but they did all sit back down again. MacLaren was actually beginning to like ferrying the kids about, there was never a dull moment.

“If it looks safe you'll all be inside fairly quickly, but for now I'm just taking Norma with me and two others. Any volunteers ?”

Kitty MacLaren didn't put her hand up, but everyone else did. They'd brought Theo with them, the Romeo to Sylvie's Juliet. It had been done to split up the leaders of the revolt. For some reason Gene chose Theo and Ferdinand, a quiet lad from somewhere in the Midlands.

~

~

Brenda Grundy had expected Dundee Downs to be a small town, but it felt more like a name for an area of scrub, trees and water logged ground. There were houses, but they were spread out over a large area. It probably made it less of a target for the aliens, though trying to find someone to open up the medical centre had been a nightmare.

"You do understand that I usually just help out ? The doctor usually comes in from town, but none of the phones work."

"We've a lot of injured people Michelle and I'll help you."

"How many people ?" Asked Michelle.

Bren felt sorry for Michelle. She'd dug her out of her house to tell her there was a helicopter full of wounded people, all needing medical treatment. It turned out that Michelle was only first aid trained and just helped the doctor out when he was there. She felt even more sorry for her, as they came out from a path between the trees and Michelle saw the helicopter for the first time. It was hot and humid, most of the injured were now sitting on the ground.

"Christ ! I can't look after that many people." Said Michelle. "We're just here for the tourists really, bug bites and kids with tummy ache."

"You have to do your best. There's nowhere else to go, you must have heard about what happened to Darwin ?"

"No not really, the phones have been out for hours. Some army guys passed through on foot last night, but they weren't saying much. How bad is it ?"

"The hospital is gone, we're the only survivors..... Other towns have been attacked too, you're our only hope."

"What about the rest of Darwin ?"

"There isn't much left..... Did you have people there ?"

Of course she did, Bren could tell by the way she reacted.

"My mum..... Everyone has family in Darwin. I can't be here now....."

Bren held Michelle by the shoulders, noticing a name badge for the first time. Michelle Pumpa had to be fairly proud of her role in the health centre. Proud enough to make sure the badge was on her blouse before she left home.

"You're our only hope Michelle Pumpa. Our pilot tells me there is nowhere else to go that probably hasn't already been attacked. I'm sorry about your mum, but whatever has happened to her, has already happened. Please..... Will you help these people ?"

"Yes, I can do that..... We'll need to carry out a quick triage first."

It was impossible of course, but there did look to be more injured people now they were out of the helicopter and sitting or lying on the ground. Michelle changed in front of her eyes, going into professional medic mode.

"We've only got a small clinic, so most of you will be treated outside. I promise you though that everyone will receive the best care we can offer. First though, Bren and myself will need to see who has the worst injuries."

They discovered that the injured nurse had been holding the hand of a man who'd died. From the plastic hospital tags on his wrist and ankle, the deceased was a Michael Harman, probably Mike to his friends.

"We need to get Mike buried." Said Bren. "Sorry to lumber you with it Liam, but you and the pilot will have to be our burial team."

"We can't do that." Yelled the nurse. "He must have family somewhere."

"There is no morgue here, he needs to be buried." Said Michelle.

The nurse went quiet and she had been holding a cold dead hand for hours. There was a lot of blood coming through the bandage on her leg and the definite smell of an infection.

“Liam.... Get Mike buried.... Nice and deep. Then whoever wants to say a few words over him can do it.” Said Bren.

Bren felt the nurse’s hand, it was cold and clammy.

“I think we have our first patient Michelle. Ideally she needs a transfusion, but antibiotics and a clean dressing will have to do.”

“Then you came to the right place.” Said Michelle. “We don’t have much, but we’ve plenty of clean bandages and antibiotics.”

~ ~

Once they were walking under the shield domes, the damage was more apparent. The main building was still intact, but one structure was destroyed, the equipment it contained spread over the lunar surface by the forces of explosive decompression.

“We’re seeing a lot of damage here.” Gene told MacLaren. “Some sort of annexe has been destroyed. I’m going to look for an ISN hatch in the main building.”

“Probably safest..... Be careful.” Replied MacLaren.

The general idea among the public is that walking on the moon is easy because of the low gravity. The early NASA missions were probably to blame, guys in suits the size of an SUV, playing golf. In reality joints and muscles were being worked in direction they’d never been intended to. Just keeping a steady footing over the rubble was damned hard work. Gene was tired by the time he was stood in front of the ISN hatch.

“Everyone alright ?” He asked.

“Fine.” Said Norma.

“Can we get the bus back ?” Asked Theo.

Ferdinand just grunted. Gene reached up and pulled a cover off an inspection panel. He saw three green lights and praised whatever deity was looking after his luck that day.

“Three greens on the ISN MacLaren, we’re going inside.”

“Alright, shout if you need help.”

Three greens meant enough air to breathe, enough heat so they wouldn’t freeze and an internal pressure about that of planet Earth. Before he opened the hatch, he said a few words to them about using the weapons they’d been given.

“You just gave them MAG74s.... You might as well have given them pea shooters.”

MacLaren had yelled at him in the relative privacy of the lower storage area on the shuttle.

“There might be UniCon employees there who see us as intruders.”

A good argument considering he’d made it up on the fly, though even he didn’t believe it. He had given the kids the high tech equivalent of pop guns, because they weren’t experienced fighters. He had a pulse rifle and he was hoping not to use it inside Mordor Two. Explosive decompression was almost always fatal to everyone involved. There were sometimes survivors, but they were usually saved by nothing more than dumb luck.

“Keep your weapons pointed at the ground and don’t fire unless you have to.” He said. “There might be survivors in uniforms you don’t recognise. They might be making strange sounds if they’re wounded..... Don’t shoot unless they shoot first. Understood ?”

Lots of nodding heads, though he couldn’t see their faces through the tinted visors. For all he knew they might all be pulling faces at him. Gene spun the wheel to open the outer door of the ISN hatch and they went inside.

~ ~

Tyler Bates had never thought of himself as a violent man. There had been the sound for a few nights, of someone trying to open ground floor windows in the middle of the night. He was currently feeling tired, angry and a little scared. He had a hammer in his hand, hoping there was no need to use it. Liza had a kitchen cleaver in her right hand and they were both prepared to use them to protect their children. The noises began again at what had to have been three or four in the morning. The time was only approximate as there were no working clocks in the house, or working anything at all for that matter.

“They’re trying the window in the back place.” Liza whispered.

The back place was the utility room where the washer and tumble drier lived. It was also home to the assorted tools and mower for the back garden, plus a heap of the kid’s shoes. Tyler went first, feeling his way in the dark. The one good thing about nothing electrical working anymore was that whoever was trying the windows wouldn’t have a flashlight either. Liza pulled at the back of his shirt. “Don’t hurt them if they’re kids.”

He grunted but didn’t say anything. His wife was a good person, an idealist who believed there was some good in everyone. She’d even been putting food out to feed a feral cat. It might well have been those saucers of food that had attracted more than hungry cats to their house. There was a glow coming from the north every night. Not much light and its source was a mystery, but the blue glow showed the outline of a head outside the window.

As he heard the sound of the window being forced open, Liza squeezed his arm. He loved his wife and they both wanted to protect their kids. Would she use the cleaver on someone invading their house though ? Tyler doubted it and as the second head appeared at the window, he knew he had to act quickly and without mercy. Not without a warning though.

“Get out of our house !” He yelled. “We have weapons and we’re not afraid to use them.”

Someone was coming at him. Tyler put out his left hand to fend them off and felt pain just above his wrist. They’d used a blade on him, he was certain of it.

“Bastard.” He yelled.

A head was visible against the window. It was a mercy there wasn’t enough light to see the blood, there had to have been a lot of it. Tyler used the hammer, hitting the head three times as hard as he could. The sound of the hammer hitting bone, cracking it..... As the body fell and hit the ground he wanted to vomit. There was another person in their house though, a second invader of their home. He could hear a scuffle to his right.

“You bitch..... You’ll pay for that.”

A female voice, not his wife’s. Tyler couldn’t see anything, they were fighting up against the tumble dryer, right in the darkest corner of the back place. He really wanted to use the hammer on whoever was threatening his wife. All he could see was a confusing mass of arms and shadows.

“Get off me !”

His wife’s voice coming from right in the corner and someone moving close to him. He struck and struck again, feeling the hammer connect with something solid. Tyler was relieved that the yell definitely didn’t come from his wife. He used the hammer again and again, until the shape on the floor stopped moving.

“Liza, are you alright ?”

“I think so, just bruised..... Crap she could punch hard.”

“Well she won’t be hitting anyone else.”

She found him in the dark and hugged him. The hug was nice, it restored him, even if he did wince when her hand found his wounded lower arm.

"What is it?" She asked. "Are you hurt?"

"He stabbed me with something."

"Come on, there are candles in the bathroom."

Going upstairs in the dark wasn't a problem, they'd become experts at moving around the house in total darkness, so had the kids. Two candles in the bathroom, one beside the bath and another brighter one on top of the cistern. Liza used one of their precious matches to light them both, which broke a rule of the house. She rolled his shirt sleeve right up.

"Oh, that looks deep..... Not very long though..... I'll get the first aid box."

His wife vanished quietly into the dark, they were all getting good at that. The bathroom had a constant background smell of pee and crap. They were only putting a bucket of water down it every third day, which wasn't enough.... They'd run out of bleach fairly quickly after the power had gone off. Liza returned with the first aid box and a bottle of water.

"We need that to drink." He said.

"Don't be stupid honey.....The wound is deep and needs cleaning."

She hurt him, pulling at the stab wound just above his wrist. Liza used the whole bottle of water to make sure the wound was clean. Eventually she seemed happy.

"Good..... A hospital might put in a stitch or two, but a plaster and a nice tight bandage and I think you'll be fine." She said.

As she bandaged his arm, he noticed how bruised her face was. The flannel she'd used on him was still damp. He used it to wipe her forehead.... It might have been a romantic moment if a candle hadn't arrived in the room, carried by his daughter Tirsa.

"What are you doing up young lady?" Asked Liza.

"I heard something, yelling..... Is dad hurt?"

"Someone tried to get into the house." He said. "It's alright though, we stopped them..... No, don't go down....."

His daughter had gone and his wife was sighing at him.

"She's eighteen now honey..... Telling her not to do something will just make her want to do it all the more, maybe twice."

There was no scream from downstairs. His kids were becoming hardened by what they'd seen on the streets of North London. Too hardened for their age. They might survive better because of it, but it just seemed too much, too soon. Tirsa was soon back, crying and looking upset.

"You know them, you both know them..... It's Karen's parents..... They're white mum."

He vaguely remembered a jolly woman from school open days and her husband who rarely spoke. It hurt him that his daughter had mentioned them being white.

"Black, white or yellow, people are hungry and desperate Tirsa." He said. "We prepared for this, but a lot of people didn't."

"Don't go back down there, we'll deal with it in the morning." Said Liza.

"What will you do with them?" Asked Tirsa.

An idea had been forming. Not only did the bathroom have a bad smell, the whole house stank. They couldn't wash their clothes or shower, so they stank too. Plus there seemed to be a growing number of crazies as he called them in the area, half-starved scavengers.

“Nothing, leave them to rot down there.” He said. “The truck is still at the far end of the street, with enough fuel to get us anywhere we might want to go. Things are bad here and they’re going to get much worse..... And I’m fed up with living on cold food out of tins.”

“Amen to that.” Said Liza.

His plan relied on his wife agreeing of course and at that moment he knew she wasn’t going to fight him about it.

“In the morning, before we’ve had a chance to over think it.” He said. “We’ll load up the truck with our things at first light, before the crazies are up and about.”

“Will the truck start ?” Asked Tirsa.

It did when I tried it two days ago, it must be just outside of the dead zone.

“Where will we go ?” Asked Liza.

“Anywhere, pick a direction. We drive and keep on driving until we’re a long way from London.”

~ ~

The lights turned on as soon as they entered the main building of Mordor Two. The central lounge area was even more impressive than Mordor One, though the bodies on the floor took away any feeling of comfort.

“MacLaren..... Maclaren.”

“Sorry Gene, they must have..... Blocking.....”

Noise reminiscent of frying bacon and the line went dead. Gene looked across at Norma.

“I’ll get right on it.” She said.

“Not alone, no one goes anywhere alone, ever.... Take Ferdinand with you.”

Quite a few large congealed bloodstains and two decomposing bodies that had once been people.

Gene ran his suit camera over them, knowing his comms would send it all to MacLaren, once Norma had unclogged the comms network.

“Wow, look at the size of that.” He said.

No answer, Theo was halfway across the room.

“Hey, where do you think you’re going ?”

“I need to pee.”

“Then pee in your suit.....It’s what they’re designed for.”

“Ewww.”

“Don’t ewww me, look at the size of this thing. Think how long you’ll last if you find a live one.”

“Ok.”

“Stay here Theo..... That’s an order.”

The third broken body in the room had never been human. Two times the size of a man at least, it had to have come in through one of the large airlocks. The skin was doing tricks with his eyes, bending the light in some way to make its shape less easy to see. Three legs and two arms, though there looked to be the stub of another leg.

“Fucking weird..... Wait until MacLaren sees this.” He muttered.

They obviously had decent weapons somewhere in Mordor two, the creature had been killed by weapons fire. Something had penetrated the outer skin, going in deep before exploding. Two hits in the chest and once in the head, Gene got it all on his suit camera. What was left of its jaws showed several rows of razor sharp teeth.

“Oh wow, I never want to meet one of you guys in a dark alley.”

He heard the comms come up, a mixture of a beep and a buzz as his suit connected with everyone within about a mile. Norma was first to call him.



“Someone deliberately shut down everything but life support.” She said. “I can get everything going, but it’ll take a while.”

“Stay where you are then. I’m going to ask MacLaren to bring over a few more to help us search this place.”

“Ok.”

Gene had finished examining the dead alien when MacLaren came through crisp and clear.

“That is some beast Gene.” She said. “I just hope we can send some of the information to the science guys on Earth.”

“For all we know they might have their own dead aliens to examine. We need more of us to go through this place.... I need to know we’re alone here. Is there someone there you can trust to be babysitter.”

“Probably, if I threaten them enough.”

“Good, bring four students with you, preferable ones with a little weapons training. Bring a decent weapon with you too..... No pea shooter.”

“Will do, though it’ll take us a while to get there, unless I move Bess closer.”

“No, leave her there and walk.”

Gene turned, expecting to see a bored Theo sat on one of the lounge chairs.

“Help on the way Theo.....”

The kid had gone, Crap ! Norma was busy and he didn’t want to leave her on her own. There was no option, he’d have to find Theo on his own and he had a pretty good idea where he’d be. There was a sign at the far end of the lounge, pointing down a wide hallway.

‘Washrooms.’

The nice non-gender specific sign that seemed to be going up just about everywhere. Gene powered up his pulse rifle. Partly to get it ready, but mostly because the low hum made him feel ready for anything. He pushed open the washroom door.

“Theo..... Are you in there ?”

No answer, but the sounds of movement, lots of movement. Gene stomped into the washroom, a mix of stalls and stand up urinals, with a round hand wash fountain in the centre.

“Stop fucking me about Theo, I’m.....”

Theo was in the water fountain and he looked to be dead. Gene hoped he was dead, as a small alien creature was feeding on the contents of his chest. The water was a nice shade of red.

Gene fired the pulse rifle, but his aim was hurried. The creature lost a leg and grew it back almost instantly. The pulse rifle needed a count of three to recharge, there’d be a beep when it was ready.

The alien made a noise like an angry bird, as it climbed off the fountain.

‘Beep.’

He was agitated and his training with the weapon was only the basics from MacLaren. His second shot was worse than the first. Gene missed the alien, hitting the fountain, causing water to spray everywhere. More bird like shrieking as the creature changed, its front claws becoming larger, wider. It leapt at him.

‘Beep.’

Later he took credit for the shot, but really it had been luck. His third shot took off the creature’s head. No more shrieking the alien became a dead bundle of flesh on the wet floor. As he watched it changed, becoming viscous, running away down the drain with the deluge from the fountain. Gene began to tremble.

“Fuck..... Fuck !” He yelled.

He stood there for a while, trying to get his head together. Norma and Ferdinand ran into the washroom, MAG74s up and ready.

“What happened ?” Asked Norma. “We heard the sound of your.... Cannon.”

They looked confused and he didn't blame them, he still felt confused by a solid creature that could become liquid when it died. There was just him and Theo in the room and Theo was lying in the ruined hand wash fountain, with his chest opened up.

“It was one of the aliens, a small one.” Said Gene. “It killed Theo and then I killed it.”

“Where is it ?”

“It melted..... They do that..... MacLaren saw one do it.”

No good, they were still looking around, weapons up as though expecting an alien to appear out of one of the stalls. Gene had to take charge before they began to think he was completely crazy.

“We'll cover up Theo and go back to the lounge.” He said. “MacLaren is on the way with reinforcements. We're going to stay together until they arrive.”

“Poor Sylvie, she's going to go crazy.” Said Ferdinand.

~

~

Ishmael McGrath had realised Fifth West employed a well-trained private army, he just hadn't realised how large it obviously was. They'd arrived in groups right through the night, brought by helicopters modified to resist the electrical dead zone. He'd slept better than usual and the next morning he was ready to go with them, to attack the alien structure near Stourbridge.

“No Ish, you have to stay at the main camp.”

A breakfast link up on the big screen with JV wasn't going as he'd hoped or expected.

“But they need me to find him..... It I mean, the alien. I have to go JV.”

Biff wasn't backing him up. She'd already told him going was a bad idea. At least she was being neutral, ignoring both sides of the conversation.

“They know about you Ish, you're probably high up on their list of humans they want to kill. You see them and they see you watching..... Think about it Ish, you know I'm right.” Said JV.

Some of it was about putting him in his place, Ish was sure of it. He'd led the group of soldiers into the centre of Stourbridge and rescued several families. JV was deliberately undermining him, holding him back. Ish was beginning to feel angry.

“Ridiculous JV, complete crap. I can feel the thoughts of the alien and take your soldiers right to it. That will save lives..... Otherwise they'll have to clear out the entire building. I insist on leading the attack.”

Biff simply sighed and shook her head at him. Had he got it all wrong ? No, JV was being a pompous idiot.

“Insist all you want, it's not happening. The Fifth West forces are under the command of an experienced special ops colonel. He will lead them, not you.”

“I'll follow them then, you can hardly lock me up.”

“I can and I will, those are my troops Ish. They are under orders to restrain you if you attempt to leave the camp. Sadly there isn't a jail to put you in, but they will tie you to a chair if necessary.”

That was it, fuck JV and fuck working for him. Ish was about to resign from whatever his job was supposed to be with Fifth West. Biff squeezing his shoulder and shouting at JV stopped his loud and probably profanity strewn resignation.

“No, enough JV !” She yelled. “I agree that Ish should stay here. He's told me the future time lines are changing, the aliens are adapting plans because of him..... Tell him about his eyes and ears in the battle JV, tell him about my idea for Peter.”

Peter, who the hell was Peter ? Ish had a good memory when he wasn't agitated. He vaguely remembered the young soldier who had been with Biff on the crashed plane. He'd half carried her for miles to bring her to him and for that..... Ish owed him a lot.

"I think I thought of using Peter..... Sorry, this really isn't a competition." Said JV. "I'm not trying to do anything other than keep you both safe. Peter will be given a constant link to the big screen. You can watch everything through his eyes, hear everything he hears. He will accept your commands and help lead the troops to the alien..... Does that help keep you there Ish ?"

"Yes JV..... Sorry.....It's just that I did lead the last..... I'll stay here and talk to Peter."

Ish was finished, the argument pushed to the back of his mind, though not forgotten. It was his beloved Biff who wasn't finished with JV.

"No more splitting us up JV, I mean it. I want your word on that, no more thoughts about sending me to help in Penrith."

"I can't guarantee that Dora, you may be of more use somew....."

"No, you agree or you'll have to tie us both up."

"Fine, I agree."

JV angrily dropped the link without even saying goodbye. Ish felt happier than he had earlier that morning, he made the score slightly ahead for the Ish-Biff team.

They'd finished breakfast before a slightly wobbly picture of the outskirts of Stourbridge appeared on the screen.

"This is Peter..... Please confirm that we have a link ?"

The camera was moving around as Peter moved his head. A line of burning alien robots was quite close, the bots on spherical wheels, the ones Inka's kids called the metal men.

"We can hear you Peter." Said Ish. "It looks like you've already been attacked."

"My orders are to keep to the rear for now, but they're throwing everything at us. So far we're dealing with the attacks, but..... Here comes....."

The camera showed a burning flying drone, as it went overhead. Peter turned and they saw the drone bury itself into the hillside. Again the view changed, showing Peter's hands brushing mud off the front of his uniform.

"They know why we're here and where we're going." Said Peter. "Now seems a good time to say that if anything happens to me, someone else will take over the link."

"Just make sure nothing does happen to you Peter." Said Biff.

"Oh believe me, I will..... The vehicles are going by road, but we're keeping back for now. As you can see if I shift my head about..... There's already fighting near the railway station."

There was an explosion that made the camera flare for a second. Several columns of smoke were rising from somewhere to Peter's right. No gunfire though, just the occasional crackle of someone using an energy weapon fairly close by.

"That's us..... We're being waved forward. Wish me luck."

"Good luck."

~ ~