

## Ruby V : Machu Picchu

### Chapter 24 – Fractalis

**“Like everyone else trying to get a slice of the local building work, the fencing company had turned up the day after the phone conversation. A fence just within the local height limits and strong. It had to surround the digging area and have two gated entrances.”**

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Ruby had given everyone a little settling in time, a chance to get to know Vista Alegre and its peculiarities. Every town has its own peculiarities, if you look hard enough. Vista Alegre had the staggering number of fast food delivery services and a bakery that delivered cakes well into the night. There'd be others too and Snowy had needed an extra day to add his finishing touches to the drones. Even with the assumption that the missiles would never be used.....

“We'll give everyone a day or two to settle in.” Ruby had told Todd. “No rush now, I trust Charlie to keep to the agreement. The drones are the key, with luck; they can give us an exact spot to start digging.”

There was Snowy to think of too and Newman, his assistant. They had to be well away from Peru before the digging reached, whatever was waiting under a quiet piece of wasteland in Vista Alegre. Not really wasteland, more a piece of land no one had started building on yet. Yes, Snowy had to be at an American airforce hub, or back in Britain, before they began getting down to the nitty gritty, as Todd called it. Foxy might never forgive her if he had to beg DINI for the return of his expert.

“If it is a trap, if they come pouring out of the ground.” Said Ruby. “You and Lorenzo are to use the missiles on the drone.”

A quiet morning a little way from Vista Alegre and a good distance from the San Juan Airport near Marcona. They were going to launch a drone from the trailer behind the truck Eugenie and Lorenzo were driving. Not illegal, they even had the right official permits to fly a civilian archaeological research drone over the area. Their drone wasn't civilian though; there was nothing civilian about it. Like most small planes, it would be almost invisible to the military, who were looking for the big stuff, huge transport planes loaded with drugs and contraband. A small plane had once flown low over the Russian border, to land in Moscow's Red Square. No one took any interest in a tiny blip on the radar, but the airport at San Juan was used by the Peruvian airforce. They might take an interest, so Snowy's drones would keep well to the north.

“If who comes pouring out of the ground ?” Asked Eugenie.

“I honestly have no idea, we might find nothing.” Said Ruby. “This might be a trap, another tomb, or something genuinely wonderful. Until we know, we'll assume the missiles might be needed. No hesitation.....If I send a message asking for a strike, you launch the missiles.”

“Even if you're still there ?” Asked Lorenzo.

“Yes, even if I'm still there.” Said Ruby.

“Another tomb might be fun.” Said Todd.

“Come on Eugenie; show us what you learned from Snowy.” Said Ruby. “Get drone one into the air and heading towards Vista Alegre.”

Only one drone for the time being, though the trailer did have the ability to launch both and pass the information to separate control screens. Their destination was locked onto at least three different

global positioning systems, including the one in the drone. A quiet piece of road about eight miles away from Vista Alegre. Unlikely they'd be disturbed, though Todd had a some pre-prepared notes on using drones to investigate ancient sites, just in case a bus full of tourists spotted them. Eugenie parked the truck just off the road.

"Alright, just as Snowy did it." Said Eugenie. "You take off the security locks, Lol. I'll use the screen in the truck's cab. If you want to go outside and watch it launch ? Back away a little everyone, these ladies put out a really hot exhaust."

Ruby had been on the non-friendly end of a few drones. One had tried to attack her on the wrong side of the Caspian Sea. What is the wrong side ? Every side.....It wasn't a good joke, but it suited the place. Ruby had managed to turn the drone into a cloud of shattered parts and fire, before it had fired its missiles. She knew what a drone could do; she'd almost seen it at very close range.

"I'll stay in the truck with Eugenie." Said Todd.

"After the launch, I'll join you." Said Ruby. "I want to watch our drone hurtle into the sky."

Lorenzo's job didn't look that high tech. He pulled and tugged, to remove rods and security tags, which were obviously there to stop its engine from starting up by mistake. Good old Snowy, he'd given Lorenzo a laminated instruction sheet. Lorenzo then got well away from the drone and Ruby joined him.

"Snowy trained us, but there was no launch." Said Lorenzo. "This is our first.....We're launch virgins." Eugenie had to know the drone was ready, probably something on her screen. The drone's engine fired and produced the hottest white flame Ruby had ever seen.

"Wow, I can see why people love drones" Said Lorenzo.

It really did shoot up into the sky. Not quite straight up at ninety degrees, but pretty close to it. The acceleration was the big thing; no human pilot could have survived the G force. If it came to a sticky end, Ruby would have an unpleasant meeting with Foxy, but that would be it. No need for human resources to deal with a grieving family. It was just a machine and Ruby understood why drones were the big thing, beloved by politicians of all persuasions.

"The big thing is to return it in one piece." Said Ruby. "Then they might let us have another one if we need it. Come on, let's go and see what our new toy can see."

The truck had a sleeping area behind the cab. Not a huge amount of space, but enough room for a screen and a comfortable looking chair for the operator. Eugenie had the chair, the rest of them were standing. The screen was showing the dry brown ground of the Nazca dessert, as the drone hurtled towards Vista Alegre. Without seeming to need any help from Eugenie, the drone crossed a road and turned to follow it.

"Looks a bit low.....We don't want to panic the locals." Said Ruby.

"The drone is flying high, up in the clouds, if there were any clouds." Said Eugenie.

"Newman took us through everything." Said Lorenzo. "The drone's cameras are amazing.....If there's something you want to see in Vista Alegre, it will show it to you."

"Can I have a go at flying it ?" Asked Todd.

"No.....Not today." Said Eugenie.

Ruby hadn't expected to be that excited by the drone. It was just a fast moving camera platform at the end of the day. Seeing it on the screen though, the road rushing under the drone as though it was flying at tree top height. She began to get a little adrenalin rush.

"It's there, the wasteland Kallina mentioned in her journal." Said Eugenie. "The drone will begin to circle the area, all on its own. Anything strange about the terrain, will be examined and recorded."

"Impressive huh ?" Asked Lorenzo.

“Oh yes, everyone on a vacation should have one, or two.” Said Todd.

Todd began talking to Eugenie about the technical specifications of their borrowed drone. Ruby was happy to lean on the cab wall, while watching the screen. She had to keep telling herself that the drone wasn't buzzing the town and causing panic and hundreds of calls to the cops. It was high up in the sky and probably unseen by everyone in Vista Alegre. The screen was showing her what the best cameras could achieve, with a little help from the on-board AI.

“It's found something.” Said Lorenzo. “Something it thinks is interesting.”

“Flagging it as some kind of underground bunker.” Said Eugenie.

“Could it have found a new sewer and be confused ?” Asked Ruby.

“No.....Our drone is super clever.” Said Lorenzo. “It's working on disturbances of the ground.”

“The way they found all those old temples in Egypt.” Said Eugenie. “It might not be a bunker, but it definitely won't be a sewer.”

Lorenzo had said our drone and Eugenie seemed just as protective of their very expensive toy. Ruby thought they'd both be moody for weeks, when their new toy was reclaimed by British intelligence. The screen was showing a typical piece of dry hard soil, that would one day be more housing, or a shopping mall. It was behind a row of stores, but still very close to some new housing. The screen was indicating a structure quite deep in the ground.

“How deep is this alleged bunker ?” Asked Ruby.

“Keep in mind, that the AI is making a few assumptions.” Said Eugenie. “It looks like we'll be digging down to about a hundred and fifty feet.”

“Not good, the hole will need supporting timbers.” Said Todd. “Plus there might be rocks below the topsoil. We can do it, but that much digging.....It's not going to be quick, or easy.”

“If it was easy, they'd all be doing it.” Said Lorenzo.

“I'm assuming we can find this bunker again ?” Asked Ruby.

Eugenie actually tutted at her, which sadly, wasn't a first. Ruby remembered when the wunderkinds hung on her every word and considered her to be some kind of wise woman. Now Eugenie was tutting at her.

“Of course we can, we could drive there, right now.” Said Eugenie.

“Good.....Time to get the people with shovels organised.” Said Ruby. “Recall the drone, it's shown us what we needed to see.”

“Oh.” Muttered Eugenie.

“For today, Eugenie.” Said Ruby. “I'm sure we'll need to use it many more times.”

Eugenie smiled and Ruby realised that she and Lorenzo would definitely develop a moody once their toy had to go back in its box.

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Cal didn't have a problem about being one of the boys. After all, she was stronger than any of them. The problem was the people who kept asking her if she was alright with being one of the shovel and pickaxe gang. It made sense really; she was strong, tough and had incredible stamina. As Spider, bless him, had pointed out.....

“A hundred like you and they could have dug the channel tunnel by hand.”

Every explanation that she was fine with the job Ruby had given her, sounded like making the best of things. It wasn't, but even Cal thought it sounded like that. Now she glared at would be givers of sympathy, until they went away. Day two of the digging and Cal had asked Todd to make her site foreman, which he'd agreed to. They all looked legit, subcontractors for the local power company, come to do what people expected power companies to do.....Dig holes in the ground and make a lot

of noise. There was a convincing looking sign on each of the trucks, saying they were doing engineering work on behalf of the power company. They even had some paperwork that would get past a fairly casual inspection. The uniforms were the clincher. They'd been obtained by Lily, from a woman in Lima, who knew people, who knew people.....They looked perfect. As long as they kept to themselves and didn't cause too much annoyance, no one was likely to bother them. Sophie had come up with an idea that would screen the digging from the general population of Vista Alegre.

"The fencing people are here." Yelled Caleb.

"Great.....I'll need Sarah." Shouted Cal. "If you can find her, I'd be grateful."

Like everyone else trying to get a slice of the local building work, the fencing company had turned up the day after the phone conversation. A fence just within the local height limits and strong. It had to surround the digging area and have two gated entrances. The big motive for the exceptional service? Ruby hadn't quibbled about paying their first quote, which was on the high side. Cal had a little Spanish, but needed Sarah so that things would go smoothly.

To say that Peru was a country that spoke Spanish, was fine, until you came across the Portuguese speakers, or those who spoke Quechuan, or Aymara. Even the Peruvian version of Spanish, had been known to confuse the natives of Spain. Luckily, Sarah spoke just about every language on the planet and a few dead languages.

"Hi, I heard the fencing guys are here?" Asked Sarah. "The woman I gave the quote to was American, so this might be easy-peasy."

It wasn't, or wouldn't have been for Cal. The man driving their truck was a Serbian and two of the fence building team were Brazilian. They'd have muddled by, but having Sarah there avoided any chance of ambiguity. When you were paying a hell of a lot of money for a fence that had to be strong, there could be no room for ambiguity.

"It needs to be strong, Sarah." Said Cal. "Make sure they understand that. None of it can be blown over if there's a strong wind one night, coming off the desert."

In truth the fence was only needed for a short time, but that wasn't supposed to be general knowledge. Plus, a section of fence going walkabout, would be bad news. Sarah had a conversation with one of the Brazilians, who seemed to be in charge of getting the fence up.

"They know, they all seem scared of their boss, the American woman." Said Sarah. "The fence will be strengthened and able to withstand strong winds."

One of the Brazilians muttered something at Sarah.

"He said it will be built to survive a cyclone." Said Sarah.

"Good.....Tell him to get started." Said Cal.

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Todd believed in getting every option on the table. There had been talk of hiring some of his ex-army friends as guys with picks and shovels, to speed up the digging. A non-starter really, there was no time to hire them and get them to Peru. Even if corners were cut and fake passports obtained. Plus, as Ruby said and she was totally correct, they had done a lot of digging in Africa. There had been no hiring of outside help then. It wasn't as if the heavy digging was going to be left to people with shovels. They had a large trailer, full of state of the art mining equipment. Mining, excavation, or good old fashioned digging of holes. The equipment could do it all and do it well.

"Look at it gleam, Spider." Said Todd. "It seems a crime to get it dirty."

"Definitely the high quality end of equipment to dig holes." Said Spider. "Everything looks designed to work forever and even I understand the owner's manual. Likely to be noisy though."

“Yes, especially when running at full speed.” Said Todd. “I can see us having to use it during what passes for the working day, in Vista Alegre..... Safest.”

“Yes.....Not sure if there is a local chamber of commerce.” Said Spider. “There will be something similar and gaining their animosity could cause trouble.”

“Agreed.....We run the mining machine from nine to five only and never at weekends.” Said Todd.

“I think we could push that to nine to six.”

“Fine.....Nine to six it is.” Said Todd.

Lily had been hovering, then mooching about, followed by more hovering. Todd knew she was dying to see the mining machine in action. Come to think of it, so was he.

“Come on guys, let’s see this thing work.” Said Lily.

“Well.....It does need to be moved over where we want it to excavate.” Said Spider.

“Come on then Lily; help us get the mining beast where it can start digging.” Said Todd.

The machine was on rails, which came out of the back of the trailer. In theory and according to the instructions, getting it in position was a quick, two person job. Todd had seen the same on the leaflet for a flat pack wardrobe and putting that together had aged him. Sophie came into view and he felt no shame in adding her to the group. Belt and braces was the name of the game.

“Sophie.....Please help us shift the mining machine.” Said Todd.

“Yeah, no problem.” Said Sophie. “What do I do ?”

“Just be there.....Make sure it doesn’t fall and squash me.” Said Lily.

“Yeah.....Pretty much what she just said.” Added Spider.

It was the kind of conversation that would have a health and safety inspector going crazy. At least everyone had a hard hat; they were part of the fake uniform ensemble. A few had proper work boots, but Sophie was wearing bright coloured trainers. When Todd looked around he thought everyone looked about the same as the average construction site he’d seen.

“I’m going to extend the rails.” Yelled Todd.

There was almost visible tension, as the rails went out and the digging machine was pushed away from the trailer. A couple of tons of shiny metal, with lots of sharp edges. It could have gone badly, but it didn’t. The instruction book was accurate and it really could have been done by two people. Two who knew what they were doing of course. Todd never regretted involving so many in moving the machine. Eventually the high tech and expensive mining machine, was over the spot where they wanted to dig.

Boutique mining, Spider was calling it. There were even pipes and vents to take away most of the dust it was inevitably going to create. Nothing could be done about the noise though.....Everyone knew it was going to annoy everyone in a half mile radius. Even the manual recommended ear defenders for those working close to the machine.

“Come on then.” Said Sophie. “I’m needed elsewhere, but I want to see it work before I leave.”

“I think we should check the alignment with the target object.” Said Todd.

“It’s a clever gismo.....It’ll work that out for itself.” Said Lily.

“Oh.....Just turn it on and see what happens.” Said Spider.

To Todd, that sounded like the kind of comment quoted at an inquest. The final words of an idiot cousin, before the outhouse fell over and crushed him to death. Health and safety were given a back seat though. Todd was as curious to see their expensive beast dig into the ground as the others.

“Alright, everyone move back a few feet.” Shouted Todd.

It was going to use a lot of power, so they’d linked it into the main cable that fed power to the nearby stores. That was fine, the kind of thing a genuine maintenance crew would have done.

Someone had to be monitoring power use though and they might turn up to investigate. It was yet another potential problem to add to the growing list. Although there was talk of a fortnight or more of digging, ideally they'd find the 'whatever' and be gone in a two to three days.

Todd turned on the digging machine and understood the need for ear defenders. It was pushing down into the topsoil and general rubble. The dust was being taken away to be spread over an area behind the machine. That was an easy fix though; they had quite a few lengths of plastic piping. There was no talking near the beast though, it sounded like a helicopter was about to land, maybe several helicopters. Todd gave it five minutes and turned it off.

"I saw it going down.....It works." Said Sophie.

"The noise though.....Get ready for lots of complaints from angry locals." Said Spider.

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Two days later and their boutique mining operation was going well. The dust was now being fed to the other side of the waste ground along a series of large plastic pipes. There had been a small deputation from the local businesses operating close to their digging. But after talk of a discount on their power bills, they'd gone away. Ruby had talked to them and one of her smiles had done wonders for their attitude. One of the women in the group had mentioned making an angry call to the power company. How long was their response time on such things ? It might well be forever, or someone might turn up the next day. Wunderkind smiles were a great temporary fix, but it wasn't possible to put the whammy on a whole town.

It was another potential problem that could only be cured in one way.....Finding the 'whatever' and getting out of town. The mining machine had been pushed back onto the trailer. Just two of them to do it, with Cal looking on, just in case. They were all getting used to their noise machine, which dug nice straight shafts through soil and rocks. The fence building company were back, though not to build fences.

"Keep the timbers looser." Yelled Gabriela, who liked to be called Gabi. "Everything will need to be lowered as they dig deeper."

Gabi was the owner of the fencing company. Ruby had thought she was USA American, which was sort of right. Gabriela was Bolivian American, born in La Paz. She'd gone on to study at a college in the USA, which accounted for the accent. Gabi had no experience with mining, but her ex-husband had dug wells for local farmers. Deep wells and deep wells needed liners to stop them collapsing. It was enough experience to make Gabi their expert consultant on putting in timbers to stop their ever growing shaft, from falling in on itself. She'd brought two of her own people with her.....By the look of things they were mainly there to yell at. Gabi was a tough lady and Ruby wondered if her ex-husband was at the bottom of a deep well somewhere.

"Oh, these main timbers are useless.....Where did you get them ?" Asked Gabi.

"They're the ones you sold us." Said Ruby.

"Hmmm, maybe they'll be alright then." Said Gabi, with a grin.

Officially Ruby was still a senior manager with the power company, there to oversee the maintenance work. It gave Gabi plausible deniability if the kaká hit the spinning air mover. Did Gabi still believe they were anything to do with the power company ? Probably not, but a few of Ruby's smiles and she still pretended to believe. They were all being paid well too, Gabi and her guys. It would buy their loyalty and silence, for a while.

"Can we have Cal helping with the long timbers ?" Asked Caleb.

"Yeah, I'm on my way." Shouted Cal.

It was how it was done, according to everything Ruby had found online. There had even been a call to Ellie, who'd dug more than her fair share of shafts into the ground. Dig the hole and put in a timber liner, when your hole looked likely to collapse in on itself. Dig deeper and drop the liner further into the ground. Add another higher layer of timbers and.....Rinse and repeat until you'd dug your way to China, or found the 'whatever.' Gabi was giving Cal a strange look, as the girl lifted the timbers up about a foot.

"So.....The little one has strength." Said Gabi.

"Oh yes, don't challenge her to arm wrestle.....You'll lose." Said Ruby.

With luck they'd have just one more extension to fit to the timbers and they'd be able to reach the now famous 'whatever,' or at least get a look at it. Ruby thought the day was going well, until Sarah arrived.

"The mayor is here, out by Eugenie's truck." Said Sarah. "He's arrived with.....It looks like half the town. He asked to see you.....Actually he asked to see the person in charge."

"Crap.....Are we in trouble already?" Asked Ruby. "I was hoping for another two or three peaceful days."

"Not sure, he won't talk to me." Said Sarah. "He's smiling though, smiling a lot. There are press people there too.....And photographers. All of them out by the trucks."

"Can you get rid of them?" Asked Ruby.

"No.....I don't think anyone could.....Please come and talk to them, Ruby."

It seemed that not only was life about to hand her a lemon, it was a lemon in the shape of a mayor and half the town council. Ruby briefly considered giving them all her whammy sized smile. That was overkill; it was easier to do what Sarah wanted.

"Get the machine digging as soon as you can." Said Ruby. "It seems I've a mayor to talk to."

"The mayor of where?" Asked Cal.

"Here I think, Vista Alegre."

Through the gate in the fence, which was the only thing stopping several people with cameras from photographing the digging operation. The expensive fence had earned its keep, probably preventing their boutique mining operation from going viral on social media. The man in charge was obvious, they usually are. Tall, with quite a bit of gravitas, charisma some called it. Plus, he was the only one wearing a suit and tie during a hot day in Vista Alegre. He smiled and handed her his card, which Ruby might read, one day.

"Mr Mayor, I hope we haven't caused problems while in your town?" Asked Ruby.

"No problems.....We're here to say welcome to Vista Alegre." Said the mayor. "Your offer of discounts on power bills to so many.....Wonderful news. I just had to come and say thank you.....In person."

Lily had been the one promising discounts to those moaning about the noise. A bit over the top, though it had cured the problem. At least six cameras took the picture of the mayor shaking Ruby's hand. It was awful, it was dreadful, but at least.....It wasn't the local police asking awkward questions.

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When someone from the power company did turn up, it was early in the morning. Ruby and Todd were likely to be still enjoying a leisurely breakfast, when Cal heard someone banging their hand on the main gate to what everyone now thought of as their site. Since being made site manager, Cal had been getting in early and leaving late. Thio was there too, she suspected he was developing a bit of a crush on her. The car in the road wasn't that flashy, but it didn't look the sort of car the power

company gave to its junior staff. The middle aged man wearing a jacket and tie, gave her his card. He began to speak Spanish, very quickly and with lots of words Cal didn't understand. She smiled at him and used the phrase that had got her out of similar situations.

"Mi español es pobre. Conseguiré a alguien." (My Spanish is poor, I will get someone.)

Cal had practised the phrase and after getting some useful criticism from Sarah, she was confident about saying it. The man smiled and nodded at her. Cal yelled for Thio, who was there in an instant. She handed him the card and nodded in the direction of the man wearing a tie. Ties were significant at such times, only bosses tended to wear ties in hot weather.

"He's a regional manager for the power company." Said Thio. "A Mr Alves."

Cal looked into the mind of Mr Alves and picked up a lot, all of it in Spanish. A few images of a woman with a young girl, probably his wife and daughter.

"Ask him what he wants." She told Thio.

Mr Alves appeared to be quite relaxed about a mysterious group of engineers digging holes and saying they were doing it on behalf of the power company. The signs on the trucks did look genuine and Cal was wearing a power company uniform. Actually just overalls with a logo and a hard hat, but Mr Alves seemed to accept that Cal was what she said she was.

"Our systems are far from perfect." He'd said. "Often the right hand, has no idea what the left hand is doing. There have been complaints though and the article in the local papers."

It seemed there had been other times, when maintenance crews had been in parts of town the power company hadn't sent them to. Lots of comments from Mr Alves on the useless internal systems. Never once did Cal sense any animosity from him, until he insisted that her boss had to call him very urgently. His brow had actually furrowed, as he repeated 'urgently.' Cal had waited until his car was heading back towards town, before leaning against the fence and relaxing, just a little.

"Fuck !" She said.

She quite liked the multipurpose expletive, though her mother would have knocked her across the room for using it.

"It's bad, isn't it ?" Asked Thio.

"Not too bad, he thinks we're a glitch in his systems." Said Cal. "I'll call Ruby, she'll know how to sort it out."

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Sophie drove the truck, she thought Caleb had been monopolising it a bit. After a frantic everyone to the ramparts call from Lily, they had Spider and Sarah with them in the truck. The love birds were annoying Sophie. Holding hands and giving each other the look, the one that meant they'd had time for early morning sex. She and Caleb had been too busy getting everything essential onto the truck.

"What have you heard, Sophie ?" Asked Sarah. "Are we really heading back to Lima ?"

"There's something down there, in a side passage off the main shaft." Said Sophie. "We've all seen the pictures from a fibre optic camera. Nothing that clear, but something is down there. If we can, Ruby wants to get down there today and have a look at it. Then she'll decide if it's worth risking another visit from the power company."

"And if it isn't.....Worth it, I mean ?" Asked Spider.

"Then we head out of town tonight." Said Sophie. "No sense in waiting for the inevitable visit from the Vista Alegre police department."

Sophie would have put the whammy on the visiting power company executive, but Lily had seen it Ruby's way. The whammy was like fooling people. You could whammy some of the people, some of



the time.....But you couldn't put the whammy on an entire town. If it came to it, running away was the best thing to do.

"What about the drones?" Asked Sarah.

"The drones will be flying today." Said Sophie. "Ruby wants them both in the air."

"In case we disturb something nasty." Added Caleb.

Their easily recognisable bus was parked a couple of streets away from where they were digging and the motor home was even closer. It seemed that Ruby was definitely preparing to leave Vista Alegre in a hurry. It did make sense.....Spider had once given them all a lecture on dealing with the police, that was valid for just about everywhere on the globe. His basic premise was that avoiding being arrested was the key thing. Explaining was fine, to a point, but always at a distance. Avoiding arrest was far easier than trying to get out of a police cell, once you had been arrested. That lecture had left Sophie with a deep respect for Spider.

"Everything is quiet." Said Caleb. "I imagined a mob outside the gates, complete with pitchforks and blazing torches."

"Lily offered them a discount on their power bills, so they went away." Said Sarah.

Sophie parked well away from the gates, just in case everyone needed to leave running. Thio must have heard the truck; he opened the gate before Sophie could bang on it.

"Everyone is here, even the lady from the fence company." Said Thio.

Ruby must have asked Gabi to be there, in case the timber lining of the shaft needed attention.

Eugenie and Lorenzo wouldn't be there. They'd be on a quiet desert road not far away, preparing to launch the drones. Ruby was close to the digging machine.

"Turn it up to full, or whatever, Cal." Said Ruby. "To hell with the noise, I want to get down there today and into that side chamber."

"There will be vibration if it goes flat out....The whole town will feel it." Said Cal.

"At this point, I don't care." Said Ruby. "Crank it up to full power."

It took a while; the vibration seemed quite mild at first. When Sophie could see particles of sand dancing about, the noise had become truly deafening. Ruby had to take her to the far edge of the fence, to have a conversation.

"I'm relying on you, Sophie." Said Ruby. "No one must be harmed in any way, but the digging must be kept secure. No gang of angry locals can be allowed inside the fence. Can you do that for me?"

"Hmmm, I can think of a few ideas to do that." Said Sophie.

"No paralyzing them or making them sleep." Said Ruby. "If you can?.....Make the fence impregnable."

Ruby was asking her to do the impossible with her hands tied behind her back. Not the first time though and Sophie was already thinking of applying a shield of some kind to the Vista Alegre facing side of their fence.

"Yes, Ruby.....I can do that." Said Sophie.

Sophie added a layer of force to the outside of the fence, mainly the gates. It would take a lot of energy to maintain, but Cal had volunteered to help. No one arrived or left and despite the noise, everything seemed to be going well. Until the noise and vibration stopped abruptly at just after midday. There had been a high pitched whining noise and then nothing. Cal examined the digging machine and looked up the error code it was displaying.

"It's basically vibrated one of its own bearings apart." Said Cal. "Not a hard job to replace, if we had one."

"I'm assuming we don't have one?" Asked Sophie.

“No, it would need to be ordered.....We could probably get it flown in from Lima.” Said Cal. Ruby was there, glaring at their mining machine as though it was deliberately frustrating her plans. “Move the machine and we’ll take a look.” Said Ruby. “The side chamber might just about be reachable.”

Now it was relatively quiet, Sophie could hear the noises from outside the fence. Car horns and the sound of fists being hammered against the gate. Shouting too, including insults about the ‘noisy bastards’ who were showing no respect for local businesses.

“To think.....Not long ago I was their hero.” Said Ruby. “Shaking hands with the town mayor no less.”

“Do we need to talk to them ?” Asked Lily.

“No !” Shouted Ruby. “Everything outside the fence no longer exists, not to us. Sophie is dealing with keeping us insulated from the trouble, if not the noise.”

Cal made a good site manager and had the machine quickly back on its trailer. The angle of the sun wasn’t perfect, but it clearly showed a hole of about five feet across, that gave access to the side chamber.

“I’ll get the fibre optic camera down there.” Said Cal.

“No cameras, I’ll go down there.” Said Ruby. “I know Gabi brought a rope and harness.”

“I did and it’s uncurled and ready to use.” Said Gabi.

“Good.....Lily, tell Eugenie to get a drone above us.” Said Ruby. “I want it there in case I disturb something unpleasant.”

It was strange how Todd hadn’t spoken, yet he had everyone’s attention. Merely by not rushing about, he’d managed to bring everything to a halt.

“No Ruby, not again.....You can’t always be jumping into volcanoes, or setting off bombs that are almost guaranteed to kill you.” Said Todd. “There’s been far too much of that, for far too long. I’ll go down the hole.....I’m expendable and you’re not.”

“He’s right; you always do it, Ruby.” Said Sophie. “Sometimes.....It feels as though you don’t trust anyone to get things done, that you don’t trust us.”

“Of course I trust you.” Muttered Ruby.

Sophie was talking and trying to keep anyone from breaking through the gates, or smashing down the fence. One local hard guy had already run his truck into the rear gate. Their fence was still in one piece, but she hadn’t noticed Spider putting on the harness.

“You’re idiots, the lot of you.” Yelled Spider. “Ruby is needed if there is an attack of some kind. Todd will be needed too. Yet the pair of you keep finding these grand gestures and one day, you’ll pick a pointless.....Futile gesture and die. I’m going down there, no fucking arguments about it.”

“No, you can’t.” Said Sarah.

“Shut up.....Sorry, Sarah.....Get the fibre optic camera and tell me how to use it.” Said Spider.

“I’ll get it for him.” Said Sophie.

Really a camera for looking into blocked up pipes, the fibre optics could be pushed through tiny holes. Not that good for looking at their unknown ‘whatever,’ but it was all they had. Everything had been organised in a rush, but the camera would WiFi link to Todd’s laptop.

“I can’t allow this.” Said Ruby.

“Why.....Don’t you trust any of us ?” Asked Todd.

“Of course I trust you all.....It’s just that.....”

Todd led Ruby away, before she could say what she wanted to say. They sat next to the dead digging machine, on the back of the trailer. Sophie couldn't resist hugging Spider, as she gave him the fibre optic camera.

"Just turn it on and aim it at our 'whatever.' I'll monitor what you're seeing on the laptop."

"Thank you Sophie."

She couldn't resist a quick kiss, just the quickest touch of her lips against his.

"Come back safely, Spider." She muttered.

"The drone is on its way." Yelled Lily.

Ruby had the laptop, so Sophie was going to have to rely on what Spider could convey by shouting about what was down there. Cal grabbed the end of the rope, while Gabi gave Spider pointers on using the harness. When Spider decided it was time to descend into the shaft, he moved quickly. Sophie almost missed the moment. Sarah was close to her, sat on the ground and staring at the hole in the ground, as if willing Spider to return.

"We have the camera link." Said Todd. "Just rubble and dust at the moment, a lot of rubble."

"He'll be fine, Sarah." Sophie Muttered. "He's good at this sort of thing."

No answer, Sarah just kept staring; no glaring at the shaft that Spider had vanished into. It was deep now and the timber liner wasn't really strong enough. Sophie looked at Cal.

"Any hint of a problem and you pull him out, Cal." Said Sophie. "Even if he shouts at you and goes crazy.....You will pull him out."

"Of course I will." Said Cal.

It was silly really; she should have kept away from the edge. It was Spider though and Sophie wanted to see what he was doing. She knelt on the edge of the shaft and watched Spider, as he clambered over the rubble and the dust created when the machine pulverised rocks.

"I'm there.....If I turn sideways, I can get inside." Shouted Spider.

"We need more light." Shouted Ruby. "The harness has a light.....Tell him to turn it on."

"Spider.....Turn on the lamp on harness." Sophie shouted down at him.

Sarah was with her now, looking over her shoulder as Spider was lit up by the powerful lamp on the harness. She gasped as her partner vanished into the side chamber.

"What can you see ?" Shouted Sophie. "What's in there ?"

"We can see it.....There's a Fractalis down there, a huge one." Said Todd.

A small Fractalis had brought Cal all the way from London, in an instant. Not that they were always gateways. Ruby had been given a tiny Fractalis, almost like a piece of jewellery. That one had shown them images of Africa, which had led to most of the wunderkinds travelling to the rift valley. A spinning cube inside a triangular enclosure, with some intricate mechanisms that even Nazili didn't understand. Build by the long dead ancestors of the wunderkinds, for purposes unknown.

"It's starting to glow." Yelled Spider.

The green pulsating glow was lighting up the entire shaft. As Sophie saw the light and heard a loud whirring sound, she knew what was happening. It was building up to something and had been waiting in the ground for a very long time, to do it. The light was pulsating faster and faster.

"It's a trap ! Run !" Shouted Sophie.

Kallina had probably guessed, or had her suspicions. It was why she'd never gone back to the Nazca Desert. She'd even destroyed most of the key information in her journal. It was a trap and they'd been stupid enough to set it off. Probably a trap to destroy Kallina, but that was the problem with traps. They tended to kill anyone who triggered them. Sophie picked up Sarah and carried her, as she ran towards the rear gate.

“Run.....It’s trap.....Run.” Yelled Sophie.

Sophie had intended to jump over the fence and carry on running. The blast hit her in the back and sent her tumbling to the ground. She rolled a few times, but never lost her grip on Sarah. Pieces of rubble were falling from the sky. Dust too, so much dust. She sheltered Sarah with her body, until the rubble stopped hitting her back.

“Stay down, Sarah.....At least until we know it’s over.” Said Sophie.

Sarah had a steady, if fast, heartbeat and she was breathing. That would do for now, Sophie would check her for broken bones once things had quietened down a little. There were sirens and alarms going off, probably every car and burglar alarm in Vista Alegre. The hole in the ground was at least four times the size it had been and there was thick grey smoke pouring out of it. Sophie didn’t think Ruby was going to get any more pictures of her shaking hands with the town mayor.

“What happened ?” Asked Sarah.

“A trap.....Probably not intended for us.” Said Sophie.

“Spider.....Where is Spider ?” Asked Sarah.

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