

Ishmael II : Pandora

Chapter 12 – Baby Boom

~ This chapter marks the end of the first year after the alien armada arrived. The next chapter will begin a year later, when construction of the fleet to escape planet Earth is progressing well. ~



“They’re changing tactics again dad.” Said Tirsas Bates. “We haven’t seen a flying robot in ages and they haven’t demolished the rest of the town.”

“Yeah, must be changing tactics.” Said Zane.

Something had changed, though Tyler Bates wasn’t sure what. They’d been using the assault rifles, just a single shot on most of the half dead Bio-Bots who still posed a threat. So far nothing unpleasant had arrived to investigate the noise. A small green was hanging off the rear wall of the supermarket, it had been lurking there for months, barely moving. It was one of his daughter’s test subjects to see what happened as it expired and how long it took to die, if it ever did.

“Can we sacrifice Old Faithful Tirsas ?” He asked. “I know you’ve got a soft spot for it....But let’s make sure nothing rushes to turn up.”

“Nothing will dad, not anymore.” Said Zane.

“Alright, but I want to shoot it.” Said Tirsas.

“Fine.”

His daughter was good with the rifle, probably a better shot than him. The weapon has been designed to be the best at what it did, though being silent obviously hadn’t been a requirement. The loud bang as she fired seemed to fill the air and reverberate off every building left in that part of town. There was a spurt of the green ooze the creature used for blood, as the small green fell off the wall, presumed finally dead.

“Now we wait.” Said Tyler.

They were using a burned out car for cover. Tyler lay down on the ground and closed his eyes, hoping his kids allowed him ten minutes of peace and quiet. Of course they didn’t.

“Why do you think they didn’t return dad ?” Asked Tirsas. “To demolish the rest of town I mean.”

“Maybe we’re no longer a juicy enough target, I don’t know. They might have a bureaucracy as bad as ours and someone refused them planning permission.”

“Oh, dad.”

He opened his eyes to find his daughter giving him the same sort of look his wife sometimes gave him.

“I have no idea Tirsas, really....How would I know ? It does mean we can probably dig in here rather than looking for a new home. We’ll need a family vote on that though.”

“I like our house.” Said Zane.

“So do I and as mum always votes with dad, we’re probably staying where we are.” Said Tirsas.

Tyler closed his eyes again and didn’t comment. If he denied that Liza always voted with him, they’d list half dozen examples of her doing just that. After what he thought felt like about ten minutes, he opened his eyes and carefully watched that part of town, mainly the supermarket.

“Do either of you two see anything ?” He asked.

“Nothing, there never is anything.” Said Zane.

Once a dozen of the metal men would be swarming all over the place, with a couple of flying bots giving them support. On a bad day a few of the human looking Bio-Bots would have arrived to help investigate the gunshot. As his kids kept saying, the aliens had changed their tactics.

"We'll need to dig in a bit, just in case they return in numbers." He said. "The outside of the house can be toughened up a bit....And didn't the young couple who died have a cellar?"

"It isn't that big dad, they used it to store tinned food." Said Zane.

"Most of those tins are now in our house." Added Tirsa.

"Then it will be empty." Said Tyler. "We can probably enlarge it and fit a solid door.....As a bolthole, a last resort if we're likely to be overrun at the house. I seem to remember the young couple had nowhere to run to. Didn't you think that Tirsa?"

"Yes, they were surrounded.....I don't mind digging out the basement."

"We could put in a few traps." Added Zane.

"Yes, but we'd need to be careful.....We don't want to be caught by our own traps. Of course we'll need to discuss all this with your mother."

"Oh dad, we know mum will vote with you." Said Tirsa.

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Kitty MacLaren had no problem with Jarvis and his scavengers running things, just so long as they kept her in the loop. Ish was still on his feet, despite being told to find a quiet corner and rest. Not that there were any particularly quiet corners. As for those guarding the helicopter; Becca had taken cover from the rain in a ruined house, which had saved her life. Sadly Crossley had been inside the helicopter during the bombing. They'd barely found enough of the body to identify.

"If we can get the doors open, are you sure you can get them running?" Asked Jarvis.

"It's our only option...Unless you fancy walking back to Filey." Said Kitty.

"Let Ish answer for himself." Said Jarvis.

"I've relied on your scavengers to do the legwork." Said Ish. "All the trucks we need were examined and certified as ready to use, though that was a month or two before the invasion. The good news is that unlike a tank full of gasoline or diesel fuel, hydrogen tanks don't suffer loss from evaporation. There are five trucks and an APC down in the second basement, all fully fuelled and.....Hopefully ready to go. I know a few tricks to get around the odd dead power pack, but in theory at least, they should all start."

"So, we load everything up on two or three trucks and drive back. I like the sound of that." Said Jarvis.

"We should take all six vehicles, it'll mean we can almost empty this place." Said Ish. "Load everything up and spread the essential stuff about, just in case we lose a truck on the way back."

"Yes, the campus needs everything we can load up, especially the clothing." Said Kitty.

"Hmmm, six vehicles will make us a pretty big target." Said Jarvis.

She was getting to know Jarvis, she'd met his kind before. Fierce as a tiger for quick in and our raids, a knight on horseback type of guy born in the wrong age. Nursing a strung out convoy of trucks moving slowly through dangerous territory wouldn't appeal to him.

"There's the APC to consider, the campus will love that." She said. "A state of the art military vehicle with two heavy weapons built into the turret."

"Even the trucks are better than anything we're currently using." Added Ish. "We had to get an old sixteen wheel diesel truck out of a transport museum to haul the Bio-Bots around."

"Yes, and all that clothing.....They'll probably name a holiday after us." Said Kitty.

“Alright.....Alright, I’m convinced.” Said Jarvis. “I’ll get everyone loading anything even vaguely useful onto the trucks.”

“I’ll work on opening the doors down there.” Said Ish. “There must be a backdoor hack to bypass the door code. I can still be of use.....As long as I can do it sitting down.”

“How is the wound ?” Asked Jarvis.

“The blade tip broke off the knife. It’s probably still in there.”

“Crap.....I’m not too worried about the doors, so rest up as much as you can.”

Not worried about the doors, that surprised Kitty. The layout of the civil defence base was fairly standard. The door to enter the road tunnel wasn’t a full blast door, but it’d be pretty damn tough. A short roadway with a fairly high gradient would lead to another door, just as tough as the first. Usually the exit would be inside a nondescript looking warehouse or what looked to be a closed down factory. Both doors would normally be opened by an eight digit number, which they didn’t have. Even if they did have it, the power pack was likely to have been fried during the gang war.

“You’re not worried by the doors.....Why ?” She asked.

“We’re good at these sorts of doors, we have the scavenger’s master key.”

“I didn’t know there was such a thing.” Said Ish.

“Of course there is Ish.....It’s usually known as a few ounces of high explosives in just the right spot. Works a treat....Every time.”

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“You’re back sooner than I thought, is everything alright ?” Asked Deb Newman.

Kata was back in the clinic without an appointment, which was fine, very few people ever bothered to make a proper appointment. The clinic worked on a ‘come and see us when you’re sick’ policy, which actually worked quite well. In another way it wasn’t fine, if Kata was worried about the child she carried. Darius was sat next to her with a serious look on his face. In Deb’s experience it was the usual expectant dad face and nothing to get unduly worried about.

“I’m fine, everything is fine.” Said Kata. “I just couldn’t keep the baby a secret from Darius for weeks, so I told him.”

“Ahh the expectant dad..... You are allowed to smile Darius. Having a baby isn’t the end of the world, just the end of a decent night’s sleep for a very long time.”

Deb knew from past experience that her sense of humour wasn’t to everyone’s taste. It was a bit of a relief when Darius smiled at her.

“I think it’s great news, I like the idea of being a father.” Said Darius. “Kata said you told her taking the baby on the shuttle won’t be a problem.”

Everyone had started calling the Valkyrie Diaspora craft shuttles, which was understandable. Every name for just about everything gets shortened and abbreviated. Plus Deb had always thought the official name was a bit of a mouthful.

“No problem at all.” She said. “I’ve no idea what Andy and his team are doing, though he assures me they’re making adjustments so that all the new children will be able to travel safely.”

“All the new children.....You were right then, there is a baby boom ?” Asked Kata.

“There is, though as I said before, there will be no list on the wall. Some expectant mums might tell you, but I’m duty bound to keep my mouth shut.”

Deb didn’t want anyone to know her period was a little late and Iris was already calling her a fool for not being more careful. Her husband on the way from Australia and she was probably expecting another man’s child. Another man that to be honest, she wasn’t sure she liked that much.

“I’m quite glad it’s not just us.” Said Kata.

“No, quite a few babies will be born in the next year and to women of all ages.” Said Deb. She’d been tempted to add ‘not just to horny teens.’ It was her weird sense of humour though, she was becoming quite careful of it, as if it was a weird feral pet that was known to upset strangers. She really didn’t want anyone rushing off with a complaint to Francine.

“We were wondering....” Said Darius.

“Is it too early for a scan ?” Asked Kata. “It would be nice to see our baby.”

So that was it, the proud parents wanted a picture to show everyone. Even if the picture looked like a blob, they’d still be proud of it for the rest of their lives.

“No, of course it’s not too early.” Said Deb. “Darius, be my assistant and lock the door please, let’s give Kata a bit of privacy. Hop up on the table Kata and loosen your clothing enough so I can get to your tummy.”

Deb wheeled the scanner from the other side of the clinic, which wasn’t far away. It was the same generation as the scanner she’d used in hospitals and Deb was rather proud of the device. It was certainly going to see a lot of action during the baby boom. The Autodocs would usually have done the bulk of the routine scanning and testing, but they were still playing up. The last time anyone had tried to use one it had been for a twisted ankle. The Autodoc had diagnosed an incurable cancer and tried to amputate the patient’s foot. It might well have succeeded if someone hadn’t had the good sense to hit the kill switch.

“Alright.....This might feel a little cold.” Said Deb.

“No gel ? My mum said there’d be gel.” Said Kata.

“Not these days....Just a cold end on the scanner.”

No longer ultrasound, though the device had that as an option. All the new scanners used a neutron beam of some kind that was safe and best of all....The pictures were clearer and in colour. Deb kept the screen in her direction at first, just in case. It was rare to find an abnormality in healthy young mothers, but it did happen. Deb actually smiled at the perfect foetus on the screen. It was a blob of course, but it was their blob and they’d love it. She spun the screen around.

“Perfect Kata, though I will do a routine blood test while you’re here.”

Kata and Darius didn’t care, they were looking at the screen and grinning from ear to ear.

“I’m conserving toner stocks.....But as it’s you I’ll print you off three pictures.” Said Deb.

“Fantastic.” Said Kata.

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“This is it, after this trip you’ll be expected to walk.”

Said the old man with the cart, the same old man who’d brought them and their belonging from the quayside. Jada kept feeling they’d insulted him in some way, he never seemed particularly pleased to see them. Jessica Chase had mentioned he’d been quite chatty with her family, genuinely helpful.

“You will bring us back though won’t you ?” She asked.

“My mother isn’t as.....Sprightly as she once was.” Added Alejandro.

“I will be bringing you back, but after today.....You’ll be expected to walk. It’s only a mile or so around the bay to St Helier. A nice walk on a good day.”

“Supposing it isn’t a good day ?” Asked Tracy.

“I don’t make the rules lady.....I don’t make the rules.”

“It would seem that on a bad day, we’ll get wet.” Said Steve Penboss.

“Maybe we can get our own horse and cart.” Said Daisy.

“Anyone can own a cart, but ownership of horses is strictly controlled.” Said the old man.

After that the man seemed to remember another way the Lopez family had insulted him without realizing it. He refused to answer any further questions and even ignored little Maria when she asked if it was alright to stroke the horses.

“Maybe we should have tipped him last time.” Muttered Steve.

“With what ? There’s no money here.” Said Daisy.

Jada actually enjoyed having a sullen driver. A chatty one would have spoiled her chance to enjoy the trip to St Helier without constant interruptions. Steve and Daisy kept noticing the obvious, such as ‘isn’t that tree huge,’ or ‘Wow, that’s a bright red.’ She was used to tuning them out though and could normally ignore them without causing offence. The edge of the bay was perfect, there were huge trees and the house they’d passed was painted in a bright vibrant red. St Helier really was only a mile away and the journey ended all too quickly. The driver suddenly came back to life, in a sullen sort of way.

“They’re using the Jersey College for Girls, as there are quite a lot of new arrivals. Not room for you all anywhere else and....Last week’s introduction speech was cancelled because of the storm. The week before too come to think of it.”

He stopped the cart on the opposite side of the road from a large sign that told them the building was the Jersey College for Girls.

“Down that road.....Follow the others.” He told them.

Several other carts and other assorted horse drawn vehicles were dropping off, it seemed the introduction to Jersey speech had been cancelled a few times. Jada needed help to get going, her bad hip had seized up a bit during the trip.

“Where do we meet you for the trip home ?” Asked Luis.

“Don’t worry I’ll find you.”

They followed the small crowd of people who appeared to be heading where they were going. The college turned out to be a fairly large campus.

“Are we going to see the king ?” Asked Maria.

“Yes, I think we are.” Said Alejandro

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“We’ll stop here for the night and bury him properly.” Said Vicky.

“There might be bombing in retaliation.” Said Einer, her eldest daughter.

None of her children had ever directly questioned her orders, she was Vicky after all, the word they seemed to use as their word for mother. Einer was her first born, which she seemed to think gave her a right to subtly ask ‘are you sure mother,’ in her own particular way.

“If they bomb, they bomb.....They’re always bombing. I want everyone here to say a final goodbye to Siebte. It’s important to me.”

“Then it shall be done Vicky.”

Siebte, her seventh child and the first of her beloved children to die. He’d died in battle against the alien machines and creatures, though not before he’d destroyed hundreds of them. He deserved a proper burial, a hero’s burial, and Vicky was going to make sure he got one.

“Drei.....Find a temple, even a ruined one will do. We’ll bury him there. Singkawang is also known as the City of a Thousand Temples, there has to be at least one of them still standing.”

“Yes Vicky.”

They’d driven the alien creatures and robots out of most of Indonesia, though their high altitude bombers were still a threat. After Pontianak, they’d funnelled their enemy towards the ocean, the final decisive battle taking place in Singkawang City. Not that there was much left of the city, though

there had to be a temple or place of worship where her son could rest in peace. There simply had to be. The God or Gods worshipped there didn't matter; it was the ritual of burial that mattered. Vicky had set up camp on one of the small hills to the south of the city, a perfect place to watch over the burning city and merciless destruction of the alien creatures.

"I can see you Fünfte, hiding in the bushes." She said. "I am tired....I will eat here and rest until we bury your brother."

"I will have food and drink brought to you."

All her children had been fussing over her since the death of Siebte. His violent death in battle must have reminded them that they were all mortal. Incredibly strong with hides tough enough to resist most battle damage, but Siebte had proved that they could die.

"Where next?" She muttered.

North probably and into Sarawak to continue wiping out the alien presence. After that probably west to Malaysia, though she hadn't ruled out going north to Vietnam. Taking her huge army across an ocean brought its own problems, but there were bound to be cargo ships and other ocean going vessels in Brunei. The surviving humans in Singkawang City had been left alone and most had eagerly taken to the most rickety of boats. If they were happy to take to the oceans, then so would she and her people. Drei returned just as she was enjoying her meal.

"We found a temple near the sea." He said. "There seems to be very little damage. A shrine to a woman God I think, there is a statue of a woman wearing robes."

"That will do fine, have his body taken there."

"Yes Vicky."

There had been deaths before, many of her children's children had died. All had been given as good a burial as time allowed, but the death of her son had to be different. Her people needed a dignified and solemn ceremony to remind them they were more than just savage beasts. Someone had put a blanket on the grass, she had no idea who. She lay on it and hoped to sleep for an hour or two, but her mind refused to rest. They'd come for her when the ceremony was ready to begin.

"If only I understood more." She mumbled.

Her people now numbered in thousands, all descended from her and the first seven children she'd given birth to while walking in the near vacuum on the lunar surface, while making her way to the Chinese Mao Zedong Base. If anything was guaranteed to toughen up a new species, it was that kind of beginning.

Vicky was now certain that she was the result of a deliberate experiment to create a lifeform capable of doing what she was doing, fighting and beating the alien creatures and their machines. As for the mouse DNA? That was obviously a lucky and fortuitous accident.

Mice had a strange mechanism for increasing their number of births during times of plenty, but reducing births in the bad times, or simply when they were sharing a home with cats. No one fully understood the process and it definitely wasn't an intelligent decision by mouse mothers. She and her descendants had the same ability and like the mice, they had no control over it.

They'd lost a lot of fighters in the battle in and around Singkawang City. She knew those numbers would be quickly made up by a period of intense breeding. Such large numbers from such a small gene pool worried her, but so far at least, there was no sign of the abnormalities normally associated with inbreeding. Were they immune from it? Some creatures were.... And there was the weird mollusc DNA in their mix. Vicky had decided she'd probably never understand what the hell they were before the mouse DNA had gone into the pot, let alone understand what they were now.

"We're ready for you now Vicky." Said Sechste.

Good, it looked like all her children would be there. She'd guessed they'd delay the ceremony until all the remaining six of her children who were born on the moon, were in the city.

"Is all prepared?" She asked.

"Yes, we dug a deep hole in the centre of the temple and lined the bottom with flowering plants."

"Good, that sounds excellent."

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They had intended to take the Eleanor through the Singapore Strait at night. They'd already seen enough wreckage to make that a bad idea. There had been large vessels too, seemingly drifting with the currents after their crews had either abandoned them or been killed. Add it all up and they'd decided to go through the southern side of the strait at either dusk or dawn. In the end and mainly by luck, they were looking at the ruins of Singapore at half an hour after dawn. Bren was steering and keeping their speed down to try and look like just another piece of wreckage being swept along by the currents.

"The whole city has been destroyed." Said Ela.

"People will have survived, you'd be amazed how many." Said Doug. "They probably escaped inland, heading for towns further north."

"Whatever happened here was a while ago." Added Matt.

Two nights before they'd seen the flash of an explosion, as part of Singapore began to burn. They'd been a long way out to sea then and it was just a flash and an explosion in the distance. Probably a gas tank at a hydrogen filling station, the plume of smoke was still there, rising up into the sky. A lot of smoke coming from the city and the occasional flash of fire, but Matt was right....The war had crushed Singapore and moved on.

"Can we go a bit quicker?" Asked Ela. "I mean....If the aliens went somewhere else."

Bren was steering deliberately a little erratically and changing their speed from fairly slow to a downright crawl. She could understand why their new crewmember might be irritated by her driving style. Bren simply pointed upward towards the clouds.

"There'll be up there, with satellites and high flying drones." She said. "We have to look like a piece of drifting junk, or....."

"Or what?"

"Boom." Said Matt.

Poor Ela, she looked terrified. Bren didn't want the girl to live in constant fear, but a little healthy paranoia might keep her alive.

"Don't worry Ela....We'll go up to a sensible speed once we're well clear of Singapore." Said Bren.

"You really think they're watching?"

"Yes I do." Said Bren.

The strait was wide and they were trying to keep to the southern side. They all heard the sound though, a loud rumble as a building in the city collapsed. The burned out and blackened building seemed to collapse in on itself, before send up clouds of dust and smoke.

"I know that building, or I knew it." Said Doug. "The Marina Bay Sands hotel, I went to friend's divorce party there. All those memories....."

"Boom." Said Ela.

"Yes indeed.....Boom." Said Doug.

No one asked her to speed up again. Bren steered like a drunken sailor and it took all day before the burning husk of Singapore was well behind them. Bren didn't get the Eleanor running at a sensible speed until they were several miles away from Singapore and heading for Belawan, where Doug

claimed to know someone who'd have fuel and supplies. Doug's connections didn't have a good track record so far, though she was willing to forgive him. After all, even she had to admit, there was a war going on.

"We'll be low on fuel when we get to Belawan." She Said. "I hope your friend has enough drums of fuel to fill the deck Doug. Otherwise we're probably not going to make it across the Bay of Bengal to Sri Lanka."

"She'll be there....Joanie Stefano knows how to keep her head down."

"She sounds like a gangster." Said Matt.

"Of course she is....Otherwise Doug wouldn't know her." Said Bren.

"Oi." Said Doug.

No good, everyone was having a good chuckle at his expense, including Ela.

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They'd disconnected the weapons from the control panel, just to be safe. Lianne Verga was determined though, they'd be connected up again once her dad's old shuttle prototype was ready to fly. Not that she was particularly bloodthirsty or warlike, she just wanted the craft to take to the air in perfect condition, with everything working as intended. Usually she worked most of the day on her own, with her dad turning up to give her an hour of his time before everything stopped for their evening meal. Even Sergeant Barwood had begun to leave her to get on with it, now he realised she wasn't likely to injure herself or blow up the Fifth West Priozersk facility. It was a rare thing, her dad had been with her most of the day, though he did seem preoccupied. One of the scavenger teams hadn't reported in, though he refused to give her any details.

"So.... Have you decided on a name for it ?" Asked JV.

"Her dad, definitely a her....I wasn't that fussed about gender, but now I've been working on her for a bit....Our craft feels like a she."

"Did you know the guards are running a book on the name ?" Asked her dad. "Top at the moment is Apollo 13."

"Yep, they're betting bottles of beer, one even tried to bribe me to call her the USS Enterprise. I was tempted....But he stopped at six beers."

They were there, about fifty names on a whiteboard. Some from fiction like The Enterprise and Firefly and some from the real world like Apollo 13 and the ill-fated Ophir Seven, which had disappeared on the way to mars with three hundred colonists onboard. One of those names would end up painted on the side of her shuttle. She was delaying the decision until she thought of a way of making a few beers out of the guards.

"I thought you were going with Firestorm." Said JV.

"Still on the board dad, it's still in with a chance."

It wasn't even in the top three, though Lianne wasn't going to tell her dad that. For all she knew he might have a few bets going on her choice himself. Her father's communicator buzzed, which as usual, meant him vanishing into a quiet corner of the hangar for a few minutes. When he returned he had less of the almost permanent frown he'd been developing.

"Good news ?" She asked.

"Yes, that scavenger team sent a brief message from a military APC they seemed to acquire from somewhere. It seems they lost the helicopter and are now driving back to Filey."

"That really is good news."

"I can tell you now, Ishmael was with them....The idiot. He was wounded, but apparently not too badly hurt. They should be back at the campus in a day or so."

“He’s a wild one.....You’ll never be able to stop that.” She said.

“What do you mean a wild one ?”

What did she mean ? Now she’d said it out loud rather than just thinking it, she needed to work out what her feeling had always been about Ishmael McGrath.

“It’s..... There’s something different about Ish, we all know that dad.” She said. “It’s why I worked so hard at talking you into hiring him. It was a good idea, think of how much he’s achieved. Deep down though, he’ll always be wild and hard to control. You have to accept that dad.”

“You too.....I had a similar conversation with Pandora, a very long time ago. Do you know he once told me to fuck off.....No one ever, ever told me that before. And I’m willing to admit, I quite admired him for saying it.”

Lianne pushed home some new connectors on the wiring harness and the interior of The Nostromo was filled with the glow of lights. Yes, she had decided on the name for her shuttle....It had to be The Nostromo, that old film was always on rerun somewhere, it was a classic.

“So underneath all the grouching, you really like Ish ?” She asked.

“I don’t grouch ! Well, not that often and I’ve always liked Ish, up to a point. I’d call him a free spirit rather than a wild one, though we both have the same idea. I need to clip his wings a bit to keep him from taking crazy risks, but if I clip them too hard....I’ll kill the creativity in him.”

“Sometimes he and Dora will both need to be wild people. Accept that dad and they might surprise you.”

“That is what worries me.” Said JV.

Lianne pressed the internal diagnostics, expecting a few red warnings. She’s already disabled the audible warnings so there were no alarms bells or klaxons. She looked at the flickering screen in front of the pilot’s chair and saw months of hard work in front of her.

“Oh Crap.....That’s worse than I thought. Six major faults, including the life support systems. It’s a pile of junk dad and should really be broken up for scrap.”

“Sorry....I did warn you.”

“Of course I’m not going to do that. It’ll mean more work than I’d hoped, but The Nostromo will fly again....I’m determined it will. Can I borrow a few of your guards, the ones with engineering skills ? I know the ones I want.”

“Yes of course, grab who you need, but do it through Sergeant Barwood. The Nostromo ? Have you decided on that as a name ?”

“I have, though don’t tell your guards. I’m sure I can get more than six beers as a bribe.”

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The room was large enough to seat everyone with ease, it had probably been some sort of assembly hall for the college, or maybe the refectory. Old metal and plastic fold up chairs though, the sort that made Steve’s backside sore after just a few minutes.

“That’ll be the king.” muttered Daisy. “The big guy at the back who hasn’t been introduced yet.”

“Him....He looks a bit nondescript.” Said Steve.

“What did you expect, a guy in a crown with a shiny sword on his hip ?”

“Will you two be quiet.” Hissed Jada.

Steve looked over the middle aged guy with short dark hair and thought Daisy might have a point, though he wasn’t fully convinced. Everyone on the stage area at the front of the room was ignoring the guy, but ignoring him in a meaningful way. He’d seen it at meetings before, the way no one wants to get the attention of the boss, but wants to look effective while he or she is in the room.

“Yeah....The way he’s looking over the room Daisy.” Said Steve. “You might be right.”

"I told you."

"Shush." Said someone behind them, probably Luis.

There had been so many introductions of people who ran this or were in charge of something else that Steve had lost track of what name went with which smiling face. All of them repeated some of the previous person's speech and the rules of course, the constant repetition of the rules to being a good citizen of the new Kingdom of Devon and Cornwall. With part of his brain turned off due to boredom and his backside going numb from the chair, he almost missed the formal introduction of their king.

"I know many of you have been asking when you'd see him." Said a woman on the stage.

"I told you." Daisy hissed in his ear.

The middle aged guy with dark hair had stepped forward. He didn't look like a king in his sports jacket and flannel trousers, but there probably wasn't an approved uniform for kings.

"So....I'm pleased to introduce the King of the Devon and Cornwall.....King Gideon."

A bit of a cliché, but everyone in the hall did go wild, or at least there was a lot of clapping and cheering.

"Gideon....I quite like old biblical names." Muttered Daisy.

King Gideon waved his hand at them a few times and everyone became silent. Steve thought Gideon might do well as a monarch; he had a certain gravitas about him, the kind that demands respect.

"Welcome to Jersey, I hope you all quickly feel at home here." Said Gideon.

Steve picked up the hint of what was on the way, though being able to say 'I told you so' for the next few years wasn't much of a comfort.

"Firstly I need to apologise, there is no destination better than Jersey. We were in contact with a Fifth West base about everyone leaving in their fleet of ark ships. We'd been invited to leave for a new planet, a new home among the stars. Sadly we haven't heard from Fifth West in quite some time."

"Sorry.... You were right." Daisy whispered in his ear.

A few people were quite agitated, but when King Gideon waved at the room for silence, they gave it to him.

"Give us two months, that's all I ask." He said. "You have good homes here and fresh food and water. We're about to open our second primary school. See what life here has to offer and if after two months you want to go back to England, you will be taken back to Combe Martin. I have to point out that it's very rare for anyone to want to leave once they've lived here for a while."

"The King is right, there's a good life here for you and your children."

Someone on the stage shouted and fairly quickly most of the crowd were cheering King Gideon. Not all, some looked a bit shocked by the news and a little unhappy. They were the minority though, mostly Steve just saw a lot of happy faces.

"Oh well, it looks like we're becoming Jersians." Said Daisy.

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