

Ishmael II : Pandora

Chapter 24 – Mutually Assured Destruction

“Mateo Lopez had never been that keen on horses. All the ones he’d had contact with when he was young, had been skittish brutes. Mindless creatures who’d react to a sweet wrapper in a bush, as though it was a wolf waiting to pounce.”



“If the doors won’t fold back, we’ll need to break off the hinges.” Said Barwood.

“No problem, we’ll be leaving here soon anyway.” Said Lianne.

No matter how long they were there, Lianne Verga had no intention of bringing her Nostromo back into the hangar. It wasn’t just the doors; the underground hangar was showing signs of years of neglect. There was water coming down one of the walls, origin unknown, unless they took down the wall to find out. Plus, it had been designed for smaller craft, like helicopters or small fixed wing aircraft. Her Nostromo wasn’t huge, but it was many times larger than anything the hangar was designed to hold.

“Getting her out will be a nightmare.” She said. “I’ll leave her outside once I’ve tested her. I’m sure we can put together a few camouflage nets.”

“I just wish I was coming with you.” Said Nigel.

“The next time, I promise.”

Her statement to her dad about going into orbit on the first launch, had been fuelled by bravado and annoyance. Once she’d cooled down, it seemed wiser and a lot safer, to climb to about twenty thousand feet and do a few circuits of the Priozersk Base. If the worst should happen, she just might survive using the ejector seat at that height.

“Yes.....The doors are opening.” Someone said.

“Alright....Reverse in the truck.....Carefully !” Said Barwood.

The gradient of the exit road was severe, they’d never be able to drag out her project by manpower. The idea was to use one of the hydrogen powered trucks to drag it out. Luckily someone had already added a towing ring to the front wheel strut of Nostromo. Of course, her father refused to tell her how he and Dimitri Minasyan had intended to get the shuttle out of the hangar.

“Telling you would be cheating.” He’d told her.

Her guess was that in the way of eccentric geniuses the world over, they’d never considered how to get their beast into the air. Lianne tied the tow rope to her beloved Nostromo and waved at the woman soldier driving the truck.

“No jolts.....Everything nice and smooth.” Lianne yelled.

It crossed her mind that the spacecraft she was worried about jolting, was probably going to be subject to about three Gs at sometime during her test flight. Her dad pretended not to be worried, so she kept up a show of confidence. In reality she was scared, though even more scared that after all that work, her Nostromo might not get off the ground.

“You did a good job Lianne.....She looks a beautiful aircraft.” Said Barwood.

“Thank you.”

Sergeant Barwood hadn't really changed. He was just in what Lianne realised was his ideal environment. A lot of soldiers to order about, with him in full control of the situation. Barwood was happy, or as close to happy as he was likely to get.

"I need her on the concrete area." Shouted Lianne.

The truck driver waved to show she understood and within a few minutes, Lianne's craft was on the hard standing. Her father wandered over to meet her, he'd already said he had no intention of being involved with dragging Nostromo out of the hangar.

"You've a good day for it, the weather has been kind to you." Said JV.

"Russian weather either freezes you, or bakes you." She said. "Today I've a rare comfortable day to test my Nostromo."

He didn't want her to test fly the spacecraft, it was the huge elephant in the room. Neither of them would mention it of course, it was how they were. The Vergas were tough and clever, it was how her family had been so successful.

"Are you still going up on your own?" He asked.

"Yes, Nigel can come up on the second flight."

"I could come with you." Said JV. "I always did want to see how she flew."

"Another time dad, once I've got rid of the bugs and quirks....There are bound to be a few of those." He hugged her and she hugged him back.

"Be careful."

"I will dad, I promise. One critical red light on the panel and I'll eject."

Of course, the red light might indicate the untested ejector seat had a malfunction, though she didn't want to think about that. Lianne climbed into the aircraft she'd grown to love as though it was a piece of herself. No, actually she loved it like a child, something wonderful she'd given birth to. No using the radio, it would yell her position at the aliens. No air traffic control, though there was nothing up there to run into, not anymore.

"Move back dad, move back."

There was a whole list of things to check and everything looked fine, a board of green lights. When she started the engine, everything changed in her mind. The steady throb was as if her child had a heartbeat. All of doubts went away, Nostromo was going to fly.

"Straight up on full throttle." She muttered.

Push it hard and if her project fell apart, at least she wouldn't have time to worry about it. Not that Nostromo was going to let her down. Lianne released the brakes and hit the throttle. Her beast rushed along the concrete for a few yards, until she pulled back on the stick and fired the vertical take-off thrusters. Up went Nostromo, like a huge firework rocket. She hadn't strapped herself in tight enough, she felt her back shift in the seat. Nothing serious, though she'd suffer for it later.

"Wow, come on baby.....Show me what you can do."

She tried to shout, though the G force prevented her from yelling as loud as she'd have liked. Over powered and she'd lightened Nostromo as much as she could. Up went her beast and it was so tempting to carry on up, to see the darkness of space once she was outside Earth's atmosphere.

"No, next time." She mumbled.

She levelled off at a little over sixty thousand feet and she seemed to have got there in the blink of an eye. No red lights on the board, not even a yellow one. The main worry now was getting lost. No reliable working beacons, no radio link, no nothing of much at all. If she lost track of where she was, it might mean a dangerous call to base. Lianne throttled down and went into a long descending curve, heading back the way she'd come. There was a twinge in her back as the G force lessened.

“Yep, that is going to hurt when I get out of bed tomorrow.”

Three times as high as intended, yet it didn't take her long to recognise where she was. The Gulf of Finland was like a huge finger of ocean, pointing the way home. Even descending quickly, she'd covered a lot of miles before levelling off at about a thousand feet. Probably not far from where her dad kept his Ekranoplan, she could see the island it had blasted apart.

“I have weapons too.” She muttered.

A small island, really just a few rocks sticking up out of the water, though it had two large trees in the centre. Lianne came in low, just above the waves. The front cannons were powerful, never intended for a craft like hers. She gave a quick burst and little was left of the trees. There had been a little vibration as she'd fired, but nothing much.

“Oh, I love you Nostromo.”

By the time she was circling the Priozersk Base, there was a small crowd waving up at her. In theory it was possible to land her craft vertically, though her dad had mentioned that was purely theoretical.

“When I've had more practise.” She mumbled.

Using a mix of thrusters, she brought her forward speed down low, probably no more than forty miles per hour. Down came the wheels and she rolled along the concrete standing, before applying the brakes. Up with the canopy and she could hear everyone cheering.

“Well done, I knew you could do it.” Yelled JV.

Her dad was grinning at her, though he let Nigel come to her first. There was a lot of hugging and a few kisses. Lianne had been stressed and scared, quite scared. Now though.....Now she knew Nostromo not only worked, she worked wonderfully well.

“Wow, that landing.” Said Nigel. “Does she handle well, is she good to fly?”

“Oh yes, like a dream. One more flight in the atmosphere, then we're going up there.”

She said, while pointing her finger up, towards space.

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Ishmael and Pandora had tried to comfort each other. There had been a lot of conversations, often in the early hours of the morning.

“Vicky's children killed over three hundred aliens in Paris.” Ish had said. “We never got particularly upset about that.”

“They set out to wipe out humanity.” She'd replied.

There had been a lot of similar attempts to justify what they both knew was something that couldn't be justified, but they would do it anyway. If Metro pushed them to do it, they would use an alien base to demonstrate their doomsday weapon. There was a huge difference to a kill or be killed situation during a war, and using dead aliens to prove they could do it, a huge difference. Neither of them had mentioned Nazi atrocities, but it had crossed Ish's mind.

They'd begun to talk to Metro directly via the AI system, once Horace had softened him up a little. Allowing Horace to be their voice indefinitely would have caused its own problems, though it seemed Metro would take a lot of convincing.

“If I told you to agree to a truce, because I had the means to kill you all if you didn't. Would you believe me?” Metro had asked.

“So, you really want us to kill everyone in one of your bases?” Pandora had asked.

“I'm merely saying.....Convince me.”

Metro was one of their elites, he probably viewed a few losses as acceptable, provided his kind didn't lose the war. Convincing him he might lose everything, would require just about all their

stores of their version of the green death, the one that killed aliens. It was an empty threat to use it globally, they simply couldn't manufacture enough of it. That was why the demonstration had to be something huge, impressive and effective.

"On the screen we're looking at your base to the south of Manchester." Said Ish. "Does the word Manchester mean anything to you?"

"Yes, we've been looking at your cities for some time, the base is near....I might get the pronunciation wrong.....Is it Heald Green?"

"Yes, that is where we know you have your main base for Northern England." Said Dora. "Do you still wish us to destroy it?"

"There must be several hundred of your kind in there." Added Ish.

"Again, what I wish is....Immaterial. Convince me you can do it."

"Very well." Said Dora.

Ish wasn't sure if Metro knew he had a parting gift from the original Horace, an ability to tell if aliens were around and roughly how many. From a scavenging trip in the area, he knew the base held over two hundred aliens. The knowledge was a card he intended to keep up his sleeve for later.

"Alright, we call these large greens." Said Ish. "Your Bio-Bot, though now fully controlled by us. If I use terms you don't understand, please let me know."

"Large green is descriptive and accurate, as is Bio-Bot. I understand." Said Metro.

If Metro was shocked at them using his own creatures against him, he was very good at not showing it. It would take most of their force of converted Bio-Bots to destroy the Heald Green base, though once again, Metro didn't need to know that.

"Thank you for sending so many large greens against us." Said Dora. "We've converted hundreds of them to obey our control."

"We were aware of this." He said.

Vicky had given them a gift while they were in Paris, a far more efficient way of using one key converted creature to act as squad leader. If they died, another picked up the box and became the new squad leader. It made the converted creatures far easier to control, while allowing them to act independently, to deal with a specific threat. Ish currently had four split screens on the large screen, the view four large greens were currently looking at.

"The building we're seeing is your Heald Green Base." Said Ish. "Two hundred and four of your kind are there, several hundred feet below the surface. Do you wish to see them all die?"

"There is no need for this to end that way." Said Dora.

"I can only say it so often.....Convince me you can do what you claim to be able to do."

Everything was pre-programmed into the wonderful box of tricks Vicky had give him, and the organic memory of the large greens. Not just those four, another fifty assorted alien Bio-Bots would be with them, acting as guards and protectors. All of that effort was about delivering two canisters of gas to the lowest level of the alien base. Ish pressed a key on the transmitter box in his lap.

"It is now set in motion; nothing can stop it now." Said Ish.

"We shall see." Said Metro.

It had taken every helicopter the scavenger team possessed to deliver the converted creature to Manchester. Those crews and their copters were now gone though, back on scavenging duty. There were no humans in the area for the alien bombers to hurl their vengeance at.

"First they will get inside." Said Ish.

They'd managed to convert some of the creatures who looked like people. The advantage they had was hands that worked pretty much as well as genuine human hands. A little less dexterity, but you

didn't need to be that dextrous to plant shaped explosive charges. No sound on the screen, but the sight of the explosions and several holes in the base wall, seemed to bother Metro. He began to bob about quite quickly, on his dozens of tiny feet.

"They're all going inside now.... Where your bombers can't get at them." Said Dora.

"Unless they want to destroy the base for us." Added Ish.

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Mateo Lopez had never been that keen on horses. All the ones he'd had contact with when he was young, had been skittish brutes. Mindless creatures who'd react to a sweet wrapper in a bush, as though it was a wolf waiting to pounce. One girl in the sixth form of his school had been left with a permanent limp because of an over skittish horse. Maybe the ones they'd acquired from their neighbours were older, perhaps wiser than the horses he'd known. It might have been that the alien invasion had given so many opportunities to be skittish, that they were skittished out. Whatever reason, the two horses pulling their cart, were proving to be clever and useful.

"Bella is twitching her ears." Said Tom.

Sugar and Bella were the names the horses had come with, both quite mature females. Of course, Tina had wanted to rename them, but Helen had joined him in banning that.

"They already have names dear." His wife had said. "Names they know."

Sugar was pretty good at letting them know there might be trouble ahead, but Bella was by far the best. Probably by scent and acute hearing, though Mateo didn't really care how it was done, as long as it helped keep his family safe. Bella's ear twitching was followed by a little snorting.

"Stay with Jill while your dad and I take a look." Said Helen.

It was a well-used routine, with Jill looking after the children and the cart that held all their worldly goods, while they scouted ahead.

"Who's turn to go first?" Asked Mateo.

"Yours, definitely yours."

Mateo was getting better with a shotgun and it tended to be the best weapon against small greens. Even if his aim was a little off, the spread of shot still knocked the damn things off trees and walls.

"It'll be another small green." Said Helen. "The aliens must have made millions of them."

They still had a long way to go to reach Filey, they were aiming to get to Stroud in Gloucestershire before nightfall. There was a Civil Defence stores marked on the Kingdom's map and even a six-digit code for the front door. Of course, the lock might not work, which meant using the sledgehammer to break down the door. Noise wasn't something they were that worried about. They'd used shotguns on a few small greens and, so far, nothing had come to investigate the noise.

"I see it." Said Mateo. "A small green about twenty foot up that tree."

He pointed and Helen nodded when she saw it. Always a tree close to the path or track, the dreadful creatures had obviously been programmed to find such spots and wait. Most had been waiting for so long that they were now fairly harmless, their energy run down in some way. Not all were harmless though and they all needed to be dealt with. Mateo aimed and fired his shotgun at the Bio-Bot and was rewarded by seeing it fall from the tree.

"Oh, I hate it when they begin sparking like that." Said Helen. "It really gives me the creeps."

"We'll need to drag it off the track." He said.

Always a risky thing to do. The creatures never seemed to have a point where they're dead and no longer a threat. His shotgun had taken away a lot of what looked like its head, yet there was all the weird sparking. As he grabbed one of its legs and dragged it, a razor-sharp claw ran over his arm. Right through a tough jacket and his shirt, the cut felt deep.

“Damned things.....Another new scar.” He said.

No chance to give up on the idea of moving it, the sparking small green had to be well clear of the track. They’d decided to keep well clear of main roads, which might have not been their best decision. Helen pulling with him, they dragged the brute into the undergrowth.

“Alright, jacket off.....Let’s see what it did to you.” Said Helen.

She had the first aid things in her pockets, mainly for the kid’s inevitable scrapes and cuts. Mainly out of date alcohol and out of date plasters, though there were also some lengths of gauze bandages. Once he had his jacket off and his shirt sleeve rolled up, the wound didn’t look that bad.

“Ahh, it was just playing with you.” Said Helen. “It won’t even need a stitch.”

Mateo was glad about that. Helen seemed to think she was the world’s best and most painless stitcher of wounds. Twice she’d put stitches in him and he still remembered the pain. Lots of alcohol cleanser and a plaster that had lost a lot of its stickiness, though a length of bandage held it in place.

“There, you’ll live to fight another day.” Said Helen.

“Look....You can see it now the sun has come out.” He said.

Not far from the track, it looked like a large child, or a young person, crouched up among the bracken. Helen began to walk towards whoever it was.

“No, it’ll be one of them.”

“But it’s a child Mateo.”

“I bet it isn’t.”

Stones weren’t hard to find, he picked up a large smooth pebble. As he threw it at the crouching figure, Helen gasped. He knew he was right and if he was wrong ? He’d make a huge fuss of the poor kid. It wasn’t a child, of course it wasn’t. The stone missed, but the Bio-Bot was up and running straight at him. It looked so real, yet there was something about the way it moved, the way its knees bent. Mateo fired at the same time as his wife and the creature that looked like a young person, fell to the ground.

“These ones don’t spark.” Said Helen.

“Strange that it didn’t attack until I disturbed it. We’ll need to tell the kids to stay close to the cart.”

“Getting Tina to behave....That’ll be fun.” Said Helen. “Do you ever wonder if we should have stayed in Big Town ?”

“No, never.....It’s made me more sure that we need to get to Fifth West in Filey.”

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Pandora Gray had noticed another way Metro showed stress, apart from the whole bobbing about on tiny feet, thing. He didn’t really have a neck, but it happened about where a neck should have been. When their converted Bio-Bots had a significant victory, ripples of skin formed on Metro’s neck. It was probably unconscious, a nervous tick of some kind.

“We’re about halfway down to the deepest part of the structure.” Said Dora.

“You’ve lost quite a few of your mechanicals.” Said Metro. “I’ve been watching.”

“We allowed for losses.” Said Ish.

The AI on her personal data screen was underlining mechanicals and suggesting it was a more accurate translation of the alien language than Bio-Bot. Dora added mechanicals to the thesaurus, but left Bio-Bot as the standard term to use. It didn’t really matter and changing vocabulary just added another layer of potential confusion.

“I’ll release canister one when we’re fifty feet from the bottom.” Said Ish.

It wasn’t per the plan, but she could see why Ish wanted to do it. They were doing well, very well, but there was no telling what final defences the aliens might have waiting. Why they’d suffered so

few losses was something she was going to analyse later, until she fully understood it. Her initial idea was that their converted creatures were fighting as a team, fighting to protect the entire team, while giving preference to the large greens who carried the canisters. For the alien Bio-Bots it was different, they fought as individuals, every creature for itself. It had to make a huge difference, their converts had a kill ratio of one of them for every twenty or so alien creatures. It did cross her mind that Metro was watching it all too and he wasn't a fool. He might be watching and learning.

"Canister one dropped and releasing its pathogen." Said Ish.

The structure was strange to human eyes, all long curving ramps and no stairs. Then again, looking at Metro, they weren't designed to use stairs. Some areas were like huge open plans, but with strange looking equipment rather than work cubicles. In other places there were sections of floor, which ended at huge drops. No fencing or guards, the aliens obviously weren't big on health and safety. Dora tapped on her screen, a private message to Ish.

"Shall I bring down the gecko?"

"Yes, perfect timing."

Large and awkward to transport, they'd only brought one and that had needed a helicopter all to itself. Not very bright, Ish said they were thick as a post, but indestructible. It had been quietly waiting on the ground level, occasionally taking a swipe at any alien creature who came too close. Dora let it off the leash, giving it the command to find and support the large greens. It had just the right destructive capability to deal with whatever the aliens might be saving for their last-ditch defences.

"Gecko away." She said.

"What is a gecko?" Asked Metro.

"You'll see."

As if from nowhere, a large group of metal men, the bronze-coloured robots, ran towards their converted large greens. Not very strong, though it seemed their enemies were finally using tactics. The metal men had powerful laser weapons and all of them were concentration their fire on one of the large greens.

"When it falls, they'll move onto the next." Said Ish. "Tell the small greens to form a swarm."

Metro looked very interested, if his bobbing amount meant more than just being a bit stressed. They were teaching him how to beat his own defences, which meant he was also learning how to beat their converted Bio-Bots. Dora was beginning to realise that if Metro refused their offer of a truce, he could never leave the campus alive.

"I see.....Very clever." Said Metro.

The small greens were small, but actually quite strong for their size. They swarmed all over the metal men, using sharp claws to tear and rend. Cables, connectors, gaps between armour plating. The small greens knew every weakness of every enemy creature. They quickly turned the metal men into a mass of immobile garbage.

"The gecko is there." Said Dora.

"Good, let it go in front." Said Ish.

Metro understood what they were calling a gecko, when it moved into the view of a large green. He became so agitated, that the skin of his neck became a mass of huge wrinkles.

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"Hi, I'm Jake....You in for tests?" Asked the young man.

He was pleasant looking, with a nice smile. She'd been told so often by her mum that boys were her weakness, her undoing, that she now rarely smiled back. Jake seemed nice though, so she gave him a kind of half smile.

"Yes, I'm new....They want to make sure I'm healthy."

"Just routine, you look healthy enough. What's your name?"

"Ela."

"Where have that got you working?"

"Shuttle assembly, if I pass the aptitude test."

"Everyone passes....I'm in shuttle assembly. See you later Ela."

Elaheh was now called Ela by just about everyone. Only Bren sometimes used her full first name, usually when she wanted to tell her off about something. As for her family name, that had never been asked for and Ela was happy to keep it that way. There had been trouble in Indonesia, something to do with her father. To her, being asked lots of questions by official looking people, usually meant something bad was going on. Then there had been the problems in Sri Lanka, the boy's parents had threatened to have her killed. Probably all paranoia, but when the woman asked her for her full name and had a whole form full of questions to follow.....

"How much information do I need to give you?" Asked Ela.

The woman in the clinic seemed kind, they were going to give her a few tests, which she was assured were routine. She and her friends had travelled the globe after all, there was no telling what they might have picked up. All routine she'd been told and to be honest, Ela didn't mind the tests, she had been feeling a bit unwell. It was the forms.....Forms caused her to be anxious, very anxious. Her heart was already racing, she could feel it.

"We're here to help you." Said the woman. "I need just enough information to get you onto the system. You are quite welcome to be called whatever you wish to be called, if that helps?"

It did, she'd had a teacher with a second name that had always sounded beautiful. A teacher from India, but if she was being invited to pick a name, why not.

"My name is Elaheh Jaiswal, though I prefer to be called Ela."

She gave her correct date of birth and was amazed to find out she'd gone through three birthdays, without realising it.

"I'm now twenty.....I'm really twenty?"

"So, it would seem Ela. A lot of new arrivals have no idea of the year."

Her address was the campus and as no one had an F-Phone anymore, the rest of the form was left mostly blank. There was a whole page about previous medical history, anything horrible she might once have had. Ela admitted that she hadn't a clue, but she remembered having measles as a toddler.

"Blood and urine tell us everything Ela and we should get a quick result."

"I have been feeling unwell."

"Probably from a poor diet.....Tinned food might last forever, but the nutritional value drops off dramatically."

Half an hour of sitting in a waiting area and Ela had the results. She was a fit and healthy twenty-year-old, with no underlying condition. Her nutrition had been crap for so long, that she hadn't realised it was making her tired and unwell.

"A few food supplements and you'll be fine." The woman told her.

No mention of the scars from her fight with the creature who looked like a man. If seemed the campus clinic deliberately had no curiosity about anything, unless you chose to tell them.

“Where have they got you working ?” She was asked.

“I have an aptitude test later, for shuttle assembly.”

“Oh, hard work and long hours, but you’ll meet a lot of people your own age.”

Ela no longer hated the idea of mixing with people her own age. It was now official; she wasn’t a child anymore. Matt and Bren still felt like...Not her parents, more like a favourite aunt and her husband. She’d quite liked the look of Jake and she was a grown woman now.

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Jada Lopez had been through all the form filing and had been staggered to learn she was now fifty-six years old. The entire Lopez extended family, including Steve and Daisy, had been put on the campus system and been give a few medical tests. There was nothing they could do about Jada’s arthritis, but there was hope that Maria’s rigid knee could be fixed.

“She’s such a lively child, full of energy.” She said. “So sad to see her limping around...I do hope they can repair her knee.”

“Oh, they can do wonders here.” Said Marvin. “We have some of the best doctors left in the world.....Right here, on the campus.”

To Jada it didn’t feel like work, though Francine seemed pleased with her. People came in and talked to her, usually harmless gossip. In her turn, she told them about her family and their travels since the invasion. Occasionally the visitors to the Room of Remembrance would talk about the missing members of their family, or the dead. For most just sitting and talking for a while seemed to be enough. Surrounded by pictures of people’s loved ones in a quiet environment....Jada actually enjoyed her time in the room. She never asked, but when they talked, she listened.

“Nothing they can do for arthritis.” She said. “All the medical miracles, but they can’t fix my painful joints.”

“Maybe there won’t be arthritis on the new planet.” Said Marvin.

Such a weird idea, but it made her laugh. To some the new home they were going to be soon heading for, was a kind of paradise in their minds. Everything good was going to be there, but nothing bad.

“Garden of Eden without the snake.” Steve had said. “There will be illness there, but by the time they find out, the new planet will be.....Home.”

Jada had never considered herself to be a people person, but she’d always been a good listener.

“I hope you’re right Marvin.” She said. “No wasps either, or mosquitos.”

“Yes, definitely no mosquitos.”

Marvin’s wife was missing, as were his two children, their pictures were on the wall. Jada had noticed on her first day, that there were lots more pictures on the missing wall, than the wall of those known to be deceased. A lot more, as many as five times the number. So many that the pictures were beginning to go over the top of one another. Every new arrival seemed to have a few pictures of the missing to add to the wall.

“Everyone needs hope Jada.” Francine had said. “Having the picture among the missing, means they can still have hope.”

Jada patted the back of Marvin’s hand.

“One of the new arrivals saw someone who looked just like my Ingrid.” He said. “She was heading this way with two other people. Probably not her, but you never know. Just like the picture on the wall they said.”

“You have to keep hoping Marvin.....Always keep hoping.”

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Ishmael McGrath had a dreadful moment, right after the second large green was destroyed by laser fire. Was it all over, would Metro witness their failure, live onscreen ? One of the two surviving large greens, the closest, picked up the control box and the canister. He was the boss now; all their converted Bio-Bots would give their lives to protect him. Not that Ish knew if it was a he, from memory they had no gender. In his mind though, the huge lizard like creature was a he. The gecko tore through the group of laser armed metal men, and.....Their small army was on the move again. "How many more can you afford to lose ?" Asked Metro.

"We haven't even needed the reserves, yet." Said Dora.

There were no reserves, but Metro didn't need to know that. It would have been nice to have a few hundred extra creatures, waiting to pour into the building, but there weren't any. A silly lie really, though for some reason it made Ish feel better. The gecko was huge and none too bright. After clearing the metal men, it had accidentally ripped apart a ramp leading down. Ish caught a glimpse of a row of creatures sitting in front of machines, creatures who looked exactly like Horace and Metro. Another private message to Biff.

'I can see aliens, directly below the gecko. Get it to attack them.'

'Will do.'

They could push and nudge, but if they saw a juicy target, their creatures tended to lose focus. Not a bad trait, it probably accounted for their high kill rate. The gecko might attack the aliens, or it might well go after something else. Ish nudged the large green towards the ruined ramp. He had seen them, there they were. Probably over two hundred of the aliens, now within range of their pathogen. The first canister looked to have been effective, very few of the aliens were moving around.

"Activating second canister." He said.

Their army of assorted Bio-Bots would still protect the large greens and they'd still fight to get deeper in the alien structure, until there was nowhere deeper to go. They'd agreed it in advance, no withdrawing their forces, until Metro was convinced they could do, what they'd threatened to do. He had to believe they could turn the war into mutually assured destruction.

"Finally....The gecko is at the deepest part of the building." Said Dora.

"Do you really need to kill them all ?" Asked Metro.

"Too late, we did warn you." Said Ish. "The pathogen has no cure and our creatures will kill anything that moves."

Not that much was moving, the pathogen was quick in doing its job. The gecko didn't have a high-definition image facility, but it was good enough to see row after row of lifeless aliens. Occasionally a large green would pass by, but with no sound, there was a nightmare quality to what they could see. All seen with a low-resolution grey tinge, they saw several rooms full of dead aliens. None of them were moving, nothing was moving down there.

"Alright.....You've convinced me. I agree to you truce; you have my word." Said Metro.

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