

Ishmael

Chapter 5 – Mordor One

“It was chaos in the canteen, the government had finally admitted what everyone had known for a long time, but had refused to admit to themselves. Earth was under attack from an unknown alien enemy..... Priorities would be altering all over the globe.”



Ishmael had thought he was dying up on the roof. No matter how much he'd tried to relax, his throat refused to allow his lungs to pull in air. It wasn't asthma; he'd never suffered from that. It was almost as though his mind couldn't cope with what he was seeing and had decided to commit suicide. Lianne had been to visit him in the small office sick bay, but the next person through the door made him question whether he was hallucinating.

“Biff..... Am I dreaming about you ?” He asked.

“Oh Ish, you look dreadful.”

He knew her well; the scent of the fabric softener her mum used confirmed it was Biff hugging him.

“How did you find out ? Aren't you supposed to be in class ?” He asked.

“Your new employers are efficient, or at least Lianne is. She called your mum, who called my mum.... And you can guess the rest.”

It was nice to see her, though her presence at Fifth West still felt a little surreal.

“I'm glad you came, but didn't McGregor threaten you for skipping his lectures ?”

“He was actually alright, for McGregor. Besides my tutor thinks we'll be sent home tomorrow, permanently.”

They kissed and Ish felt all the muscles in his chest and throat relax. There was no need to ask her why the medical school was closing.

“Three months Biff and then you need to be out of London. The main invasion will still be a long way off, but the major cities will be hit long before they arrive. Power, water, communications, they'll destroy the infrastructure.”

“You see all that Ish ? Have you started seeing things again ?”

“There is so much to tell you....Fifth West aren't what they seem.”

“No... I like to think we're much better.” Said Jaroslav Verga.

The CEO of Fifth West Corporation could hardly help overhearing as he entered; it was a very small room.

“Sorry....I didn't mean to intrude.” He said.

“This is my boss Biff, Jaroslav Verga.” Said Ish.

“JV, everyone calls me JV.... And do I call you Pandora ?”

“Dora will do nicely.”

Biff didn't like JV that much, there were tell-tale signs if you'd known her since she'd been tiny, which he had. Lianne chose that moment to enter the already crowded room and she was pushing a wheelchair.

“Ahhh.... Your transport has arrived Ish.” Said JV. “If you're up to it, there has been more news, more information from the Indian Space Research Organisation satellites. We're having a meeting about it. Dora can come too if she'd like to, I'm beginning to realise you two come as a pair.”

“You make us sound like odd socks, but yes, I'd like to come.” Said Dora.

"I don't need the chair, I can walk just fine." Said Ish.

Halfway to the elevator he wished he'd accepted the offer of the chair, but it was too late by then. His head still felt a little woozy and his legs had a worrying rubbery feel to them.

"A bit slower please.....Was I given any meds?" Asked Ish.

"No, we had them but never gave you any." Said JV. "You were stressed, your system full of adrenaline. Your body will still be coming down from that."

Biff held his hand and he felt better once the elevator reached the sixth floor. They were using one of the general meeting rooms, but once again the doors were locked and the security cameras turned off. Ish sat down without waiting to be invited.

"Invoke AI interface one eighty seven Lianne." Said JV.

It meant nothing to Ish, but the other dozen or so people in the room reacted, sitting up in their chairs and staring intently at a four metre wide view screen.

"One eighty seven is the computer network for our preparations." Lianne told him.

"Please Dora, sit next to Ish..... We have newcomers everyone, make them feel welcome." Said JV.

Ish recognised no one, though he remembered one or two faces from walking around the building. The view screen came to life and showed the Fifth West Logo, but in black on white, rather than the usual blue on yellow. It seemed that JV was going to talk them through what appeared on the screen.

"Firstly, I'd like to introduce Ishmael McGrath and Pandora Gray. In just a few minutes Ish managed to double our knowledge about what is to come. I'm hoping to persuade Dora to join our short staffed medical team."

There was general applause, which seemed odd as none of them knew him. Ish felt like a rock star who still hadn't played his guitar or sung a note.

"We'll come on to what the future holds, but for now.... This is a short recording of something the Indian Arundhati Roy satellite saw hiding behind Uranus. Actually two things and they were really hiding, moving to keep the giant planet between them and Earth."

The recording was surprisingly good for an image of something hiding in the cold darkness of the outer solar system. Two large spherical objects which looked like large asteroids, or small moons. Just two ordinary looking eight mile diameter space rocks.

"These are new, let's get that dealt with." Said JV. "These aren't the twenty seven or so natural satellites of Uranus, their orbits are well known. These objects are new to the area and they move intelligently. So... If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck...."

"They're two bloody huge ducks." Someone shouted.

There were a few laughs, but the recording on the screen was repeating the same minute or so, showing the size of the objects against the surface of Uranus.

"We're looking at the command vessels for the invasion, the flagships of the alien fleet." Said JV.

"I'm certain of that, though I'm sure Ish will be able to confirm that once he'd practised his precog skills."

"Why are they hiding?" Someone asked. "Our military are no threat to them."

"Even after watching us for decades, they can't be sure of that." Said JV. "We have space vehicles capable of delivering nuclear warheads. My guess and it is only a guess, is that their main force will stay some distance from Earth until our defensive capability is destroyed."

"Two small moons, both eight miles across." Said Pandora. "There must be millions of them waiting to invade."

“Yes, maybe tens of millions, this definitely isn’t a quick hit and run expedition.” Said JV. “They’ve watched and observed for a long time before arriving in force. Colonisation is my first guess, but I might be totally wrong. Once again, Ish should soon be able to tell us their motivation for coming here.”

“Why space rocks ?” Asked Pandora. “Maybe it’s TV and films putting ideas into my head, but I thought their craft would look a lot more..... High tech I suppose.”

A man walked forward and muttered to JV, before taking ownership of the view screen controller. “Most of you know me, but for those who don’t. My name is Andy Korenberg and I was previously with the European Federation’s space team.”

“We were very lucky to get him.” Shouted JV.

Poor Andy, he was actually blushing a little. He looked to be about forty, with long black hair tied into a pony tail. Ish knew the name, he’d read one of his books on the architecture of long flight duration spacecraft. Andy Korenberg was thin, tall and fidgety, but his books had been non-fiction bestsellers.

“First let’s get a disturbing fact out of the way.” He said. “Every time we send a spacecraft out of Earth’s nice protective atmosphere, we’re throwing the dice. There is a lot of debris out there, so much that meteorite trails were once used to bounce covert military signals into places out of the range of satellites. There have been mercifully few losses, but hit a small lump of rock at fifty thousand miles per hours and your expensive spacecraft is instantly turned to junk, a coffin for those onboard.”

Andy pressed the controller and a picture appeared on the screen. It was a spacecraft everyone recognised, in the same way that people still recognised an image of the Titanic.

“The Sir Patrick Moore, I’m sure you all know the sleek lines and silver dart shape. It looked the way people expect spacecraft to look. A Nikola Tesla XTC7, known popularly as the Prairie Schooner class. Five were built to land and take off from Earth and Mars. Four have been extremely successful at taking people to the Mars colonies. Not the Patrick Moore though.”

Another click on the controller and the image of the spacecraft was replaced by a collage of the media headlines at the time of its disappearance.

“The Patrick Moore is now probably a wreck heading out of the solar system, we’ll never know its fate for sure. The last messages from the crew indicate a sudden and catastrophic breach of the hull. It seems more than likely that a small space rock caused the loss of all fifteen hundred passengers and crew. I believe it could have been a piece of rock no larger than a football.”

The room was silent for a while, until Andy brought up an artist’s impression of the asteroid belt.

“That’s why they hollowed out space rocks.” Muttered Pandora.

“Yes, give the lady a prize, even if she did step on my big reveal.”

Another picture appeared on the screen, which could have been a small moon anywhere in the solar system.

“Meet Adrastea, one of Jupiter’s ever growing list of moons. Definitely a piece of captured debris from the formation of the solar system, it has a diameter of about twenty kilometres. You could in theory at least take this moon away without destabilising Jupiter in any way at all.”

“Twenty kilometres fits the Doyle Equation.” Someone yelled.

“Someone else stealing my thunder, you’re a tough audience today.” Said Andy.

Ish liked the chemistry between the audience and the speaker, with Andy appearing not to mind being heckled a little. Another picture came up, a blotter covered in tiny scribbled calculus.

“The Doyle Equations dealing with planetary resources and intergalactic travel.” Said Andy. “They’ve been disputed but those we can verify have proven to be pretty accurate. To fit in a population likely to breed and survive during the trip to another world, the equation second from the top says you’d need a sphere about twenty kilometres across.... Why a sphere ?”

“Maximum internal space for minimum external area.” Three people yelled at once.

“You’re good, best audience this year. You’d need space for a balanced eco system guaranteed to last for centuries. Then you’d need sustainable power for a clean propulsion system.... Easy stuff like that. Oh, and space for another Doyle number, the three hundred thousand healthy humans to go into the ark. Of course you all know the Doyle resource theory..... Anyone ?”

“There simply aren’t enough resources in our entire solar system to build such a craft.” Said Ish.

“Yes, huge planet busting spacecraft look good in the movies, but there simply isn’t enough metal to build them. So..... Our alien friends have hollowed out asteroids and other space rocks. The Americans have been playing with the same idea, but propulsion has been their major problem. You’d need an AI guidance system clever enough to avoid anything really big, but you could cross the universe at a fairly sedate seventy thousand miles an hour or so for centuries. Plus space rocks don’t look threatening. If they’d turned up in something like Kirk’s Starship Enterprise, people might have noticed.”

For people discussing the potential invasion of Earth by millions of aliens, there was a surprising amount of laughter. It was all theory though, none of them had seen an alien craft destroying whole streets in Central London. Ishmael had though, even if it was in one of many possible futures.

“Andy has got up a good head of steam.” JV whispered. “I’d like to take you and Dora to my office, if that’s alright.”

They both agreed of course, though it would have been nice to hear more about the Doyle numbers. Ish had read Doyle’s book the way he read science fiction, devouring it all in large bites. Doyle was old school, born at the start of the millennium he’d worked everything out with just a pencil and a notebook.

“Sorry....But you will get a chance to talk to Andy again, both of you.” Said JV.

Jaroslav Verga had succeeded in that difficult balance. His office was large enough to state he was the boss, but not so large that it made a comment about his ego. JV led them to a corner table with several comfy leather chairs around it.

“Again, sorry to drag you away, but I need to fly to Washington tonight and I wanted to talk to Dora before I left.”

“Me ?!” Said Pandora.

“Well it affects both of you. I know you haven’t taken your finals, but no one will care about that when the shit hits the fan. I need more doctors for my medical team Dora and I’d like one of them to be you. It will mean separating you from Ish for a few weeks though. Have you ever been to Penrith ?”

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The shuttle had been designed to fly Earth to Moon and back again, a trip all their shuttles had done successfully dozens of times. Sometimes there was a pilot, but usually the shuttle’s AI took control, even easily avoiding the passenger jets and military aircraft over Southern England. Every shuttle had a pet name, people tended to build up affection towards a machine that took them home at the end of their rotation. The shuttle on the hard standing next to Base Albion was known to everyone as Billy, though no one was certain why.

“Billy wasn’t designed for short hops across Lunar.” Said MacLaren. “It’ll be manual control all the way, with probably an unassisted landing at the other end. You need to get everyone well strapped in.”

Pamela Rath trusted MacLaren, she wasn’t just the best shuttle pilot currently at the moon base, she’d received an almost perfect score on her final pilot assessment. She was a little hostile and humourless on occasions, but Pam had learned to live with that.

“You heard the pilot.” Shouted Pam. “Buckle up and stay buckled up until we land. Make sure the crap you carried onboard is secured too.”

Half of them were students who’d arrived at Base Albion to carry out various projects for their colleges back home. None of them had expected to be part of a lunar rescue force, though some of them had been excited when given a weapon.

“Just hope none of them kill each other.” Richard had muttered.

Once her mix of anxious and excited conscripts had settled down, Pam strapped herself in and nodded at the pilot. Of course MacLaren just glared back, it was MacLaren after all. The shuttle took off and instead of hurtling straight up towards Earth, it went into a low lunar orbit.

“How long until we get there ?” Someone asked.

Great, it was already becoming a school outing. Luckily Richard had the flight plan printed out on his lap and he was in a good mood.

“Billy will get us there in about forty five minutes. We should be landed and waiting outside the UniConsortium Moon Base’s airlock in under an hour.”

“Wow, quicker than my usual trip from home to college.” Someone said.

Only there was probably an atmosphere on the way to college and the bus or train probably wasn’t designed to do a completely different journey. Not that Billy would fight MacLaren, his AI just wasn’t going to be of any help.

“Try and rest if you can.” Pam shouted. “Stay in your seats and stay buckled up.”

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No one had touched their vehicles, all six of the brand new four by fours was exactly as they had left them, apart from a thin layer of dust.

“A lot of the dust will be our handiwork.” Said Chris. “Muck from Glyde Point, mixed in with a lot of Ripley.”

Brenda Grundy trusted the Doc’s theory that the muck was harmless and wiped some of the dust away with her hand. They’d probably all breathed in a lot of alien dust, so if it was dangerous the harm was already done.

“I know we’re all banged up and it’ll be hard work.” Said Matt. “But we should each drive a vehicle and take anything useful out of the three we leave behind. We don’t know when or if we’ll get resupplied.”

“I’ve got a feeling that when we see an army helicopter, there’ll be arriving to arrest us.” Said Brenda.

“Do I get a decent weapon this time ?” Asked Chris.

“Yeah grab what you want, two of everything if you like.” Said Matt.

It was hard work to carry everything from the vehicles they weren’t taking. Brenda noticed the beginning of a worrying pain in her back, close to where her ribs met her spine.

“When we get home I want a week in a health spa.” She said.

“I’d settle for a couple of pints at my local.” Said Matt.

Chris led their small convoy, he had insisted on telling his loved ones he was alive and well, if you ignored the bruises. There was a cop car outside the small house on the outskirts of Gunther Springs, with two uniformed officers sat inside it. One of them got out and began a conversation with Chris, until the woman ran out of the house.

“Jeeezzz the local radio said you were missing..... You bastard.” She yelled.

Wife, lover, maybe mistress ? There was no way to tell, but the long passionate kiss implied she wasn't his sister. They weren't introduced and she and Matt kept out of it all, merely rolling their eyes at each other now and then. More kissing and an argument between Chris and the cops, before they were on the road again, heading for Kakadu National Park.

“I'll let your mum know you're alright.”

The woman yelled as they drove away. It took them until mid-afternoon to reach the national park. It was wonderfully green, an unspoilt wilderness of trees and lakes that would make the search for a space rock a nightmare.

“Watch for crocs, we've had a few incidents with tourists recently.”

Said Chris the instant he got out of the vehicle he'd been driving. Incident might mean anything from being scared to being eaten, but Brenda had fought an alien, so she wasn't going to let a croc scare her. It took another twenty minutes to walk to a small clearing in the middle of fairly impenetrable terrain. Searching the area really was going to be a nightmare.

“This is the place.....The hikers found the body over there...Nothing there now of course.” Said Chris. A river had dug a deep gorge quite close by, there was the constant rumble of a water fall. For tourists it might be a little bit of croc infested Eden, but it was also perfect for hiding a Ripley and his space rock.

“Right, this isn't going to be easy.” Said Matt. “We'll go back to the vehicles and set up camp.

Because of the crocs we'll sleep in the vehicles. We all need a rest and a decent meal, even if it is just army rations. We'll begin a search pattern in the morning.”

“Good idea sleeping in the vehicles.” Said Chris. “It'll help keep the midges under control. You're in the Northern Territories, if the crocs don't eat you, the midges will.”

“Doesn't worry me,” said Brenda, “I've been on a holiday to Barry Island.”

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Deborah Newman had seen the trucks arrive. A long convoy all painted green, even the bits normally not covered in paint. The army trucks looked more like something belonging to an old war film than the car park of a modern hospital. Everyone had smiled, they looked friendly and they'd come to help. But as Daisy had said....

“We're being taken over by the army Deb. There's even talk of rationing care to civilians if things get really bad.”

“People will adjust Daisy, their priorities will alter.” She'd told her.

“What the hell are you talking about ?”

Deb hadn't tried to explain, those who hadn't seen wars could never understand. Matt had fought in some truly dreadful wars in some awful places. He talked about it to her, telling her that sharing it helped keep him sane. Her husband had kept his sanity, but some of his experiences had given her sleepless nights. She knew that once the public saw casualties from the war with the aliens, they'd stop complaining about not being able to get an outpatients appointment for an ingrown toenail.

“There will be altered priorities, there will have to be.” She muttered.

“I didn't know you were on duty today.”

A doctor who'd made a pass at her at a Christmas party, she couldn't even remember his name. Bob she thought, though she wouldn't have sworn to it.

"A few nurses have called in sick." She said.

He wanted to start a conversation, but she just carried on walking across the car park and into the door closest to the canteen. Deb was early and had decided to treat herself to a coffee and a sticky bun.

"That one." She said, selecting a fix for her sticky bun addiction.

Once she had her coffee, Deb found a table near a view screen, she'd missed the news that morning. It would be the usual of course, the media showing clear evidence of some kind of attack by an unknown force, while the government shouted 'fake news' all the time. Only it wasn't the same, something had shifted, the minister for health was on the screen and looking worried.

".... Yes we are sending the military to help improve resources at some regional hospitals. It would have been foolhardy not to. Everything is in line with our published risk assessment..."

Good old Robin Crosby was a typical career politician whose knowledge of the health service had probably come from reading a few back issues of The Lancet. Sadly he was fairly typical of the health ministers appointed by various UK governments over the past hundred years. Robin was incompetent and ambitious, but he was a long way from being the worst minister the health service had ever had.

"..... Is this in response to an actual threat, or just part of a contingency plan minister?"

Deb sipped her coffee and nibbled at the sugar on top of her bun.

"I think that after the recent aviation attacks, we can say there is a clear threat. Twelve aircraft brought down, half of them domestic flights in North America.....Plus the American Airlines flight that crashed in North London."

Deb almost choked on her coffee.

"Did he just say we're being attacked by aliens?" Someone asked.

"He fucking did."

The lady interviewer seemed lost for a few moments, until someone probably shouted a prompt into her earpiece.

"Are you telling the viewing public that the recent aircraft crashes weren't accidents?"

"I am, there was a deliberate attack with a weapon that destroyed their electrical systems."

"Could it be the Russians minister, or the Chinese? There are always tensions....."

Robin was shaking his head at her. He might have mediocre knowledge when it came to medicine, but he understood modern weapons.

"All the major powers know each other's capabilities. There is no military force on this planet with the capability to fry an aircraft's electrical systems in flight."

"For Christ's sake..... Ask him the question.... Is it little green men?" Someone yelled.

"Let me make sure I'm understanding you correctly minister. Does our government believe that twelve passenger aircraft were attacked and brought down by an extra-terrestrial enemy?"

"That would seem to be a logical assumption."

"Will we see a ban on all air travel?"

"Unlikely at the present time, our society relies on air travel for essential supplies, though there is likely to be a recommendation to avoid unnecessary journeys by plane."

The interviewer looked lost again, the government simply wasn't supposed to say things the minister had just said. The news channel did what they usually did at such times, they broadcast a few unplanned adverts.

".... There goes my trip home to Nairobi..... Fuck!...." Someone yelled.

It was chaos in the canteen, the government had finally admitted what everyone had known for a long time, but had refused to admit to themselves. Earth was under attack from an unknown alien enemy..... Priorities would be altering all over the globe.

"It's huge, I had no idea." Said Richard. "There must be room for hundreds of them down there."

"A bit better than our two up and two down under a shield bubble." Said MacLaren.

Billy wasn't a tourist craft, there wasn't a view screen built into the back of every seat. Richard Martucci had tried hard to select the best to use as a rescue party, but they weren't military trained.

"Stay in your seats." Yelled Pam. "The pilot needs a stable craft for the landing."

They'd wanted to see the base everyone knew as Mordor One, probably even some of the UniCon staff who lived there. There was only one view screen and twenty people trying to look at it at once could have been disastrous.

"You'll all see the base soon enough." Said Richard. "Just be patient."

There wasn't even a curtain to pull across, the pilot was sat only a few feet from the seating area, with Richard and Pam stood behind her. Unless they whispered there was no privacy at all and whispering agitated their conscript army.

"Any response from down there?" Asked Pam.

"Nothing and Billy has been trying to connect with them since we were a few miles away. I even sent a short range emergency message and there was no response." Said MacLaren. "Mordor One are living up to their name and breaking all the rules in the book."

"So their comms system is still working." Said Richard.

"Oh yes, Billy gets a connect response, they're just ignoring us."

None of the nations on the moon had built inside a crater. Craters meant impact by something huge and heavy, which meant loose debris and unstable ground. UniConsortium had ignored that unwritten rule and built a large and well shielded base at the bottom of a deep crater. Their large sprawling base now filled half the crater's bottom.

"You've got to admit the place is impressive." Said Pam.

"I heard Mordor Two is even bigger." Said MacLaren.

Building at the bottom of a crater made it difficult for surveillance drones, you had to be right overhead to see anything. Not that Richard had heard of any nation using spy drones in a while. A weird kind of truce had developed on the moon. Just surviving on lunar was hard enough.

"Can you pop their main airlock?" Asked Richard.

MacLaren actually chuckled.

"Not a chance and as I said, they ignored my short burst plea for help. Fuel is an issue of course, we can't circle their base for long."

"They'll have plenty of liquid oxygen and hydrogen down there." Said Pam. "Bound to, it's the only fuel mix there is up here."

So they either went back to Base Albion or landed and tried to break into a base everyone thought was involved in dangerous off world research. It wasn't much of a choice, but it had to be made fairly quickly.

"Land next to their main airlock." He said. "And keep getting Billy to tell them we have an urgent medical emergency. If they ignore that I might hunt down Gregory Ustinov and shoot him myself."

"Are we taking everyone?" Asked Pam.

“No, just the few who have weapons training.” He replied. “You and I will go of course and MacLaren can stay and babysit the rest.”

“Oh crap!” snapped MacLaren.

None of it said quietly, everyone must have heard. As Richard turned around, he saw just about everyone raising their hand. It looked like a happy stadium rock crowd waving at him.

“Hands up only if you have genuine weapon skills.” Said Richard. “I will be asking for details, so put your hand down if you just hunted squirrels with your dad.”

“Does being college paintball champ count?”

“No.”

He was left with six hands waving at him. It was arbitrary and totally unfair, but he decided to ignore the two who looked the youngest.

“Alright, if I touch you on the shoulder go and suit up..... After we’re on the ground of course. And what do we do when we suit up?”

“We check everything three times and get someone else to check everything another three times.”

Over twenty voices talking like one, all the mind numbing training and repetitions had sunk in.

“We’re about to land, there might be a little jolt felt in economy.” Said MacLaren.

More than a jolt, the landing jets always seemed to cut out a few feet too soon. His knees threatened to give way, he’d been in lunar gravity long enough for his muscles and joints to begin adapting to low G.

“Sorry to leave you on the bus MacLaren.” He said.

“That’s alright, though I might need to beat them a little... Come on I’ll help you both get suited up.”

Richard didn’t like guns himself, but he chose a MAG74 at random off the rack and made sure Pam had one too. Guns that fired cordite bullets didn’t work in a vacuum and low G was a problem too.

Bullets travelled further and penetrated deeper in low G, a problem if you were in a spacecraft.

There had been a lot of work put into creating a small atmosphere bubble to surround an off the shelf assault rifle, but they’d all ended up with unintended fatalities.

A small company in North American had played around with magnetic induction and came up with something that fired non-ferrous slugs at a velocity unlikely to pierce anything tougher than skin and body parts. After a few versions and mishaps, the MAG74 was only slightly bulkier than an assault rifle. It had an advanced battery and a magazine that held a hundred slugs. It was a bit like a military railgun, but nowhere near as powerful and strictly one shot at a time. MAG74s killed people well enough, but it might just annoy an alien.

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Inka Malovic quite enjoyed her job as a part time receptionist at her local dental surgery. She could walk to work, which meant no queuing for buses on cold wet mornings, or cold wet nights. Wetness was becoming something she was developing a little mild OCD about, Stourbridge seemed to have been having a lot of rainy days.

“Damn, the rain is bouncing off the pavement again.” She said.

The building was a shopfront with a room at the back for the hygienist and two treatment rooms upstairs. Inka had a desk close to the front door and it was her job to run the diary, take payments and survive the occasional stropky patient.

“There’s only one more appointment.” Said Owen. “Get off home early, there’s a bad storm forecast for this evening.”

“Are you sure? It would be nice to get home before the kids get in.”

“I’m sure.”

She liked Owen, he was the senior guy in the practise. He could be a little pedantic at times, but once you got past that, he was alright. She put on her coat and picked up her umbrella.

“Goodnight Owen, see you tomorrow.”

Stourbridge was quiet and peaceful in the rain. They did say heavy rain was worth a thousand policemen, it kept trouble off the streets. Inka ignored the siren call of fast food places along the high street, she had time to cook her kids a proper meal. Her street was quite busy, one of her neighbours taking in a parcel when the air began to vibrate. It was a strange sensation, like being in front of a fan that was generating static electricity. She felt the hair on her head tingling and rising. “It might be lightning, get under cover.” Shouted the delivery guy.

The ground began to vibrate as the object went overhead. There was smoke coming off it, the occasional burst of flame, otherwise it was uniformly dark black. Its size and height were difficult to judge, but it felt low and far too close. Inka held onto her garden gate and waited for the vibrations to stop. By the time they did the street was empty apart from the delivery driver climbing into his van.

“It must have been a meteorite.” He said. “Big one though, wouldn’t like to be under it when it hits the ground.”

“It’s them you fool, the aliens.”

She wasn’t normally that rude, but so many people still seemed to be in denial. If an alien walked right up to them, they’d probably insist it was a guy in a Halloween costume. The delivery driver merely shrugged at her before driving off. Her neighbour was back at her door again.

“Get indoors Inka, there might be more of them.”

She so wanted to tell her that being indoors wasn’t a good way of avoiding huge alien meteorites, but she didn’t. Inka went indoors and put on her radio and of course there was no unscheduled news item about a large flaming rock passing over Stourbridge.

“It was low and heading south towards Hagley.” She muttered.

She badly wanted to call someone, but who ? She couldn’t think of anyone who’d react well to a call about an alien invasion of the Midlands a little to the west of Birmingham. She could phone Owen, he might have seen it go over the town. No, he’d just think she was crazy. Inka ran upstairs, into the bathroom and pulled open the window.

“Crap !”

There was a plume of smoke rising into the sky somewhere near Hagley. That was close, she could walk that far, had done on a Sunday walk with the kids. It was going to be Owen, she had to talk to someone or go crazy. She used her F-Phone, tapping the icon with ‘work’ underneath it. She heard his voice just before her phone died. Not cut off, it was dead, as if the battery had been taken out.

“Fuck, Fuck !” She yelled.

Downstairs was quiet and it took her a while to realise what was wrong. There were no stand-by lights on the view screen or any of her kid’s gadgets. The noisy fridge in the kitchen was infamous for stepping on quiet parts of films as it started up, yet now the house was totally quiet. She flicked the light switch in the lounge and nothing happened.

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