

Bradford II – Badlands

Chapter 22 – Hell Awaits Him

“It was dark in the hide, completely dark, the darkest place Maggie could remember ever being in. Things were in there with them, the bugs that called the topsoil home. The things squirmed under her hand, every time she touched the floor.”

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There were a few rumours circulating that Maggie and Chip were no longer an item. Such daft pieces of news are often used to ease the tension in combat situations, even Bradford had mentioned it. The two kids were loves young hope, the prospective parents of the next generation. Roxy had been more than a little upset, when Camila had hinted that all didn't seem well with the young lovers. “They're not in each other's pockets anymore.” Camila had commented. “My guess is that Mags is no longer as keen on the boy as she once was.”

Roxy just hoped it was their current living conditions. Living in a cramped APC with five or six other unwashed people was hardly romantic. In Roxy's experience teenagers would happily copulate just about anywhere. The world outside of the APC was scrubland though, probably infested with dozens of unpleasant hybrid creatures. All that added together was enough to cool anyone's ardour, even horny teens.

“I knew it.” Roxy muttered, quietly.

Only Maggie's quiet whimpers of delight had stopped Roxy from walking right into their love nest. They'd picked a good spot to throw their blankets on the ground. A gap among some rocks, with some thorny scrub to deter anyone looking for a spot to pee. Maggie had mentioned waiting for the right moment, during one of their talks about such matters. Mags wasn't the sort to tell everyone about her private life, but Roxy was surprised to see her having some energetic sex with Chip.

“There, that's it.....I love you.” Whispered Mags.

Roxy had been looking for a spot to pee and she wasn't by nature a voyeur. It was just surprising to see Chip really going for it. The boy had always struck her as timid, but his pasty white bottom was going up and down like a piston. Roxy guessed that anyone who could couple up was doing so, she'd already spent time screwing with Hector. They were outnumbered and even if they succeeded in sealing up Base Omega forever, they might all die in the process. Mags and Chip had volunteered for one of the most hazardous parts of Bradford's plan. Crap ! They deserved their intimate time together, it might well be their last. Roxy turned and walked quietly away, looking for a secluded place to empty her bladder.

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There had been no farewell sex for Vincent, though he had spent some time with Nina, his wife. He had thought about making time for a few intimate moments, but he always seemed to be surrounded by people needing orders. He had talked to the crowd before leaving town of course, giving one of his motivational speeches from the back of a truck. Vincent had a way with people, he'd always had the gift. He just hadn't appreciated how valuable a gift it was, until he'd seen a group of raiders wipe out a settlement, purely because he'd told them to.

“.....We have our enemy outnumbered..... We have better weapons and this land is ours, we know every hidden pathway....We will destroy those who have attacked us. I'm not just confident, I know this will happen. I had a vision of victory, God showed me the bloody bodies of our enemies....”

There had been a lot more to his speech, the people of The Ranch had come to expect his speeches to last a while. His sermons too were famously rambling and his flock seemed to like them that way. "They'd all gladly go after the enemy if you asked them father." Said Luke. "Your people father, they'd fight with bare hands and rocks if you asked it of them."

"Let's hope it doesn't come to that. Get us moving son, slowly, quietly and using as little light as possible."

All the vehicle drivers had night vision glasses, but the rarely used track was dangerous even in full daylight. There had been no time to scout out the route, no opportunity to remove obstacles. Twice they'd had to use the combined strength of a dozen men, to push fallen trees out of the way. It all made noise to give away their position, it all used up precious time. Vincent thought the holdups were over, until one of the heavier trucks found a crack in the ground.

"We'll need to use lamps to see well enough get it out." Said Stephan. "No room to drive around it and anyway, we need the generators it's carrying for the railguns."

"And there will go any element of surprise." Said Vincent. "They're bound to see the lights and hear the noise."

"We have enough men, we could push the truck over onto its side and leave it behind." Said Stephan.

"That would be noisy and we'd lose the generators." Said Luke. "What are your orders father?" Lights and noise might mean an attack from their enemies, it was what he'd have done.

"Get everyone ready and form a defensive line further up the hill. We'll use as much light as we need to get the truck moving again."

It took half an hour to get the truck out of the hole in the ground and no one fired a single shot at them. It made their enemies look like fools and Vincent was sure they weren't.

"Why didn't they attack us, or at least send a patrol to test our defences?" He asked.

"Sometimes luck just goes your way." Said Ernesto.

Fifty yards from the enemy camp they turned on every light and travelled at speed. There was no one there though, not a single tent, no gun emplacement waiting to fire, no battle hardened troops, nothing.

"Damn, they obviously knew we were on the way here." Said Stephan.

"It's too empty, everything too dark and deserted." Said Vincent. "There'd have been a few camp fire embers.... I think they left hours ago to attack The Ranch."

The camp wasn't quite empty, a civilian APC had been left behind, the sort used by wealthy tourists who wanted to tell their friends they'd explored the Badlands. Such vehicles rarely strayed more than a few miles from civilisation. The vehicle was damaged and looked abandoned, its doors left wide open.

"I'll get the APC checked out." Said Stephan.

"Carefully, our enemies might have left a few unwanted presents."

"I'll look it over." Said Ernesto.

Vincent clambered down out of the truck, just in time to hear the explosion. The flames appeared a few seconds later, as part of his town began to burn again. It might have been a trap, yet he found it impossible not to run to the edge of the track and look down on The Ranch, the town he'd built and loved.

"There..... Look another one." Someone shouted.

"I see movement."

There was gunfire, as the flames showed two figures running through the rocks on the hillside. Vincent only cared about one thing though, the second wheeled device which was running straight and true, straight towards the watchtower in front of the bunker. In an instant Vincent understood just how clever the trap had been.

“Back on the trucks !” He yelled. “They’re going to attack the bunker.”

His men were moving when it happened. Ernesto was one of his best men, a skilled expert with explosives, the best Vincent had ever met. The enemy must have had someone better though. The abandoned APC exploded with a bright blue light, which quickly became a wall of scorching heat. The present left inside it by their enemies must have been huge, Vincent’s world became nothing but burning and pain. He was thrown through the air and began to tumble down the hill.

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Amoe wasn’t sleeping properly at night, probably because she was napping during the afternoon. She was bored with being in one room all day. So bored that she’d talked Gillian into letting her go home in the morning.

“I’ll get Tamara to visit you every day.” Gillian had told her. “Nothing too invasive, but there will be a few tests to do on you and Rosa.”

Tamara in their home every day, Bradford would think Christmas had come early. Amoe quite liked the idea of a daily visit, but she was already fed up with needles and blood tests.

“No Gillian, no more daily blood tests for Rosa or me, we need some blood left in our veins.”

“These tests are important.”

“No, weekly, quickly becoming every three months. I know Bradford is unique, a one off. I can appreciate how important that makes Rosa. We’re not going to end up as anyone’s science project though.... I mean it Gillian.”

“Fine, weekly blood and urine, becoming quarterly after six months.”

“I can cope with that.”

Amoe looked at the wall clock and it was showing just a little after four in the morning. About five hours until a PD489 car was due to take her home and she was wide awake. She did wonder if Bradford was awake, lying under canvas out in the Badlands, or maybe snug inside an APC. Strangely it didn’t occur to her that he might be fighting for his life.

“And you..... You’re fast asleep.”

Amoe was sure Rosa smiled in her sleep, as she tickled her tummy. There was always a nurse in the room opposite her and they invariably fell asleep watching late night TV. Amoe walked across the hall and it was Edith, an agency nurse who looked to be in her fifties. Fast asleep of course, with half a cup of Devil’s Promise on the table in front of her. The intention had been to wake the nurse for a chat. There was the bottle of Devil’s Promise though, even if it had to be warm.

“I know I mustn’t..... Just a sip.” Muttered Amoe.

Warm cheap wine out of a plastic cup, it was too wonderful to resist. Amoe filled the cup and picked it up, enjoying the smell before the cup had reached her lips.

“Drinking while breast feeding, you’re going to hell Mrs Scott.” She mumbled.

Edith moved about on her chair, but didn’t wake up. Amoe took that as a sign from a friendly, boozy deity. She took a sip from the cup, followed by a mouthful. It really was foul tasting muck, but wonderful too. She drank half a cup, before placing the cup back in front of Edith.

The taste reminded her of boozy nights with Bradford and his PD489 friends. That had been before they’d been married of course, wine and pizza days in her apartment in 11 Ocean. Sometimes there were others, but usually there was Bradford and her, with Gupta and Maria. Warm Devil’s Promise

in a screw top bottle had been Maria's drink of choice. Amoe returned to her room, using Rosa to mutter at.

"Maria and I were good friends then Rosa, though I knew they'd come close to having a fling. I could see it when they talked..... Maria might have been your mum."

How close had they come to being lovers ? Amoe remembered the articles in the press after the Joyce's Green bombing, all the journalists assuming they were more than just work colleagues. It had all probably come down to a throw of the dice, whether she became his wife or Maria.

"We were good friends, I should be able to handle it better Rosa."

Amoe found her phone and called Maria's number, knowing it would go to voicemail.

"Maria, it's Amoe. Rosa is with me, but outside me now and sleeping soundly. You probably know that though..... I'm going to be at the 7 East Central place from tomorrow and Bradford is off on one of his.... Things. Please come over and see me, I mean us."

Amoe didn't think she'd be able to sleep, yet ten minutes after ending the call, she was sleeping soundly.

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Vincent must have been unconscious for a few seconds. He coughed the dust out of his lungs and got back on his feet, just as the dust was beginning to settle. Some of their trucks were burning, their tyres giving off a dark acrid smoke. Bodies were burning too; quite a lot of his men wouldn't be going home. No screams from the wounded yet, that would begin once the initial shock had worn off. It always looked worse than it was, war was invariably like that. Vincent had been through enough battles to know that he still had a powerful fighting force, once they were organised.

"Put out the fires on the trucks." He yelled.

"Yes Reverend, right away."

He was used to the reaction, the way his mere presence could make meek men brave. The chaos of war began to submit to order, as his men tackled the burning trucks. Vincent found only a hole in the ground where the abandoned APC had once stood.

"I've men searching the area father, that many men must have left tracks." Said Luke.

Vincent was still mentally dealing with the death of Ernesto. For years the man had been with him round the clock, looking after him like a doting son. Now he was gone and it was unlikely they'd find enough of him to bury.

"I want to know what remains Luke, how many men and trucks that are still useable. The dead we can deal with later. Have you seen Stephan ?"

"Yes father, he has a wounded hip, but nothing slows Stephan down."

"Good, get him to help with the status report, I'll be sat in the truck..... And be careful, we're obviously not dealing with just a few raiders looking for food. There might be other traps."

"Who do you think they are ?"

"The same people who opened up Theta Lab and now they've arrived here. They'll be after the tech in the bunker, I'm sure of it. Get me the reports Luke, I need to know what forces we have left."

"Right away father."

Father, Reverend, both words that implied something Vincent wasn't feeling. He was supposed to protect his flock, yet he'd taken them into mortal danger. He stopped by the edge of the track, watching The Ranch by the light of two rapidly spreading fires.

"I will need to split our forces." He muttered. "Perhaps that too was part of his plan, the leader of these warriors. I have been left with no option though, if I'm to save my town."

There was an old army tank in the centre of the main square, though it hadn't moved in living memory. Its gun was regularly cleaned to get rid of bird droppings, but the tank wasn't going to be any use against their current enemy. Similarly there were two ancient APCs in front of the bunker. They'd been stripped of their weapons and were really just for show. He'd relied too much on the watchtowers, he realised that now. Luke and Stephan took about twenty minutes to bring him the bad news, though it could have been much worse.

"We lost two heavy trucks, but they shielded our men from the blast." Said Luke. "One truck had our last long barrelled railgun and the other carried a Tri-Beam. One light truck is useless with a snapped axle, but otherwise, we got off lightly."

"And the men ? How many fighters did we lose ?" Asked Vincent.

"Twenty one dead, another nine so badly wounded they're unable to fight." Said Stephan.

It wasn't good, a quarter of his fighters gone, killed or wounded by a trap that should have been spotted. Vincent forced himself to smile. Who was he going to take with him in pursuit of the enemy ? Luke was a good organiser, but The Ranch now needed those kinds of skills. Stephan was limping quite badly, but nothing seemed to slow him down, ever.

"Stephan will be going with me." Said Vincent. "I'm certain they've taken their heavy APC towards where the track leads to the back of the bunker. I will need two trucks, one of them carrying the rocket launcher. A light truck too, one with just a plasma blaster will do. They'll both need to be loaded up with as many able bodied men as they can carry. I will be going after these people who've attacked us and I will kill them all."

"What do you want me to do ?" Asked Luke.

"There is no use destroying our enemy, if there is no home to come back to. Protect The Ranch Luke, get the fires put out and begin rebuilding the walls. This enemy is tricky, they might still attack our town. Use the trucks where the watchtowers used to be. Defend our people Luke."

"I will father."

"Good, come and get me when everyone is ready to leave."

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Maggie was happy that their mission had been a success. Roll the devices towards the town fence and then get in the hastily dug hide. She'd known the fire from the first explosion would enable her and Chip to be seen, there was no avoiding that. Chip being hit by blaster fire shouldn't have surprised her, but it did. Chip had seemed to lead a bit of a charmed life during their trip into the Badlands, avoiding injury while everyone else was cut or burnt.

"They must have all gone by now. My leg hurts Mags, it hurts really bad."

A modern Ion blaster shot, it must have been. They didn't cauterise the wounds they inflicted, they were designed to leave torn veins and arteries to bleed. It was dark in the hide, completely dark, the darkest place Maggie could remember ever being in. Things were in there with them, the bugs that called the topsoil home. The things squirmed under her hand, every time she touched the floor.

"I'll look, we might have left it long enough..... Be brave Chip."

"I'll try."

She'd cut up her jacket in the dark, using it to tightly bandage his wound by feel. Her hands still felt sticky and smelt of his blood. The bleeding hadn't stopped though, her makeshift bandage was saturated. Maggie opened the top of their hide, the side of a wooden crate hidden under a few layers of green canvass. The fire was still burning in some places, her plan for Chip required fire.

"We'll go now, get ready to walk..... I know it will be painful."

"I'm not sure if I can Mags."

Her filthy hands found his face in the darkness, followed by her lips. She kissed him, a long hard passionate kiss.

"I can't carry you Chip. You must walk, or you'll die here....Do you understand?"

"Yes, are we going far?"

"Just into what's left of the camp, your leg wound needs treating."

"You're not a medic Mags, can we find Yasmine?"

He seemed to be drifting with the blood loss, he knew as well as she did that Yasmine had gone with Cruz in the group sent to cause a diversion. There wasn't time to explain, or be gentle.

"Shut up Chip..... Follow me or you'll die in this fucking hole."

Maggie threw open the door to the dark damp hide, her eyes blinking at the light from a fire in what had been their camp. She shook a few wriggling things off her assault rifle, the damn wriggling things seemed to have claimed her and her equipment. She helped Chip, pulling him up and onto his feet.

His trousers were saturated in blood.

"Oh Christ Mags, that hurts!"

Of course he'd yelled, but hopefully the enemy were too far away to hear him. She lacked the strength to carry him, though she could take the weight off his wounded leg. Maggie led him towards the closest fire, before realising it was a burning body.

"This way Chip, towards the truck tyres."

"Why? That's further."

"Don't look Chip, this isn't a good place."

Someone had pulled a few bodies into a pile, but they'd obviously done it in a rush. Some fires had been put out, but a few still burned. The burning tyres had a hot yellow flame above them, perfect for her needs. She tried to lower Chip to the ground, but dropped him. Again he filled the night with a scream.

"Oh, just let me die Mags. I'm going to die anyway."

She ignored him and wedged her knife so that the blade rested in the hottest part of the flame.

Ignoring his yells, she undid the bandage to get her first look at the hole in his thigh. He was struggling, of course he was and still yelling.

"Stop fighting me, I'm going to close the wound by cauterising it."

"But..... You're not a medic...."

"I'm not, but I'm all you've got. I might cripple you for life, or kill you. There's also a good chance that I'll save your life..... Now keep still."

"I love you Mags."

"Oh..... Just shut up."

She sat on him, it seemed the easiest way to stop him squirming about. Maggie rested her bottom against his hips, before pulling the red hot knife out of the flames. The wound was dreadful, she could see a torn blood vessel pumping out his precious blood. Maggie pushed the blade hard against the bloodiest part of the wound. Luckily Chip only screamed twice before passing out.

"I love you too..... You idiot." She muttered.

She put the knife back in the flames to heat up again. The bleeding was stopping, but there was still a lot of work to be done.

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Bradford got out of the APC and waited while Camila rigged the driver's side seat. It was unlikely that Vincent's people would fall for the same trick twice, but it was worth trying.

"Done." Said Camila. "Anyone trying to drive away in our vehicle, will get a nasty surprise."

One day he'd ask her where she'd learned all her skills. She had run with Samuel for a while and he probably ran a course in Terrorism 101.

"Right, you all know the plan." Said Bradford. "Quiet going in, then we make for the bottom floor as quickly as we can. Make as much noise as you like, once we're inside the bunker."

"Why the bottom floor Bradford?" Asked Hector. "You never did explain that."

"Intelligence from a source I can't name. A source that has been reliable in the past."

"Fair enough, did they say what was down there?" Asked Roxy.

It was awkward, lying to people he trusted and needed to trust him. He could hardly say his watchers had told him in a weird dream.

"Hell is down there, that was the phrase they used." He said. "We need to find out what is down there and deal with it accordingly."

"Sounds like the long way of saying we blow it up." Said Sequel.

Bradford had to chuckle, Sequel had claimed what used to be his job.... Telling it like it was. There were just six of them, seven including himself. Plus seven heavily armed PD489 operatives. Not much of an army to fight their way down to the lowest level of an unknown bunker, but it would have to do. With luck Vincent had a lot less fighters now and he'd probably split his forces into several groups. Yes, an army of fourteen just might be enough.

"We watched them for hours Allison." He said. "Two guards on the back utility door. Take them both out with no noise."

"Thank you." She replied.

She meant it, there was that certain look in her eyes. Missiles on wheels and traps had proven to be effective. There was no substitute though, for getting up close and personal to an enemy. Allison was back quite quickly, dangling a large set of keys.

"The small blue one opened the door, I thought the rest had to be useful."

"All keys go to Roxy, that way we know where they all are." Said Bradford.

Roxy didn't look happy, but she had agreed to be their key monitor. Normally Gupta revelled in that type of job, but he was with Yasmine and her diversion creation team.

It was quiet outside the bunker, the back door was a good two miles from the front door. There was the occasional sound of someone firing cordite bullets, probably a worried local shooting at shadows. Otherwise it was quiet, an almost eerie silence. Allison was first inside.

"We won't need the oil lamps, there are emergency lights." She said.

It was nice to see electric lights, even if they were fairly feeble emergency lights. It meant a generator was running somewhere, which meant internal powered doors should open. There was a short corridor leading into a large grubby room.

"We'll check our kit here." Said Bradford. "Buddy up, get someone else to check yours, then..... Oh, you know how it's done."

"The other bunker was so clean." Said Roxy. "This place is filthy, I think someone even took a dump near the door."

Most bunkers Bradford had seen were filthy and usually inhabited by subversives. The smell was different though, the tang of something hot, sweaty and feral.

"It stinks of those creatures." Said Hector. "The huge brutes we sealed up in the other bunker."

"Shoot any you see, but we're not here to hunt them." Said Bradford. "No sightseeing, no diversions to look at something interesting. You all follow me and I'll be taking the stairs down, there are too many of us to risk using elevators."

"Not after what happened to poor Jim." Added Roxy.

“Yes, remember that everything in here was built when your great grandfathers were young, don’t trust any of it to work.” Said Bradford. “Only call out if I miss a set of stairs going down. I won’t be stopping until we get to the bottom.”

“How do we know when we’ve reached the bottom ?” Asked Sequel.

“Oh, I think when we reach hell, it’ll be easy to recognise.” Said Hector

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Yasmine DuClare had been given command of the nuisance and diversion squad, which didn’t seem to worry Cruz. Gupta was a different matter, he did technically outrank her and she’d once been his rookie trainee. After about the third spiteful comment, she’d found a quiet spot to let him hear a few hard words.

“We’re the hit and run people Gupta and you’re not too good at running these days. You’re only here because I insisted that leaving you hiding somewhere was a waste of your talents. Don’t prove me wrong.”

She knew it was hard for him; he was usually the guy in the van who coordinated everything, or the guy in the APC, or the VTOL. Only now there was no van, no cosy and safe APC. Gupta had changed his attitude after their chat and was now more like his old self.

“Is it time to move yet ?” Asked Cruz.

He’d asked her the same question at least six times, though she wasn’t letting it irritate her. He was just being keen.

“No, the good people of The Ranch need to settle down a bit more.” She replied.

Bradford had given her Cruz and five PD489 operatives, with Gupta being her idea. Eight people wasn’t much of a guerrilla force to sow fear and disquiet, but it would have to do. Bradford had given her his orders in his usual fashion, after spending an entire day watching activity in the enemy town.

“Be a nuisance to them Yasmine, don’t give them a moments peace. Make them wonder if you might be just a small group, or an army about to attack in force. You’ll be an unknown for them to worry about. Keep on worrying them, so that the last thing they’ll do, is send more fighters to guard the bunker.”

A column of trucks had returned to The Ranch, followed by a lot of frantic activity. Yasmine had chosen an area to wait, where a small orchard was quite close to the town fence. She’d seen the railguns replace two watchtowers, as prefabricated sections of fence were quickly erected. There was still some activity, a few stubborn fire being extinguished. On the whole though, the town looked to be asleep.

“Time to wake them up.” She said.

Night vision glasses were precious, they only had one pair. Their blasters had built in night sights though and Gupta’s Long John didn’t need to be aimed, just pointed. They were all going to fire together, the Long John dropping incendiary grenades deep inside the town. After a few seconds of creating chaos and mayhem, they’d run for cover behind some rocks about fifty yards away. Do it right and they be hidden away behind the rocks, before their enemy knew what had hit him, or at least that was the theory.

“We all know how this is going to work.” She said. “Begin firing when you hear Gupta launch the first grenade. Continuous fire for a count of three and then run like fuck.”

Cruz was armed with an old assault rifle, which could spit out old fashioned bullets at a truly prodigious rate of fire. The rest of them were armed with plasma blasters, apart from Gupta. His Long John was new tech looking like old tech. A grenade launcher with several different selectable

magazines. It was heavy and unpopular, though the weight wasn't why few soldiers wanted to use it. It was rare, but Long Johns had been known to malfunction, dropping a live grenade at the feet of their user.

"Fire when ready Gupta." She said.

Yasmine could see heads looking over the fence, the guards walking their sections of the town's defences. As she heard the thump of Gupta launching a grenade, she began firing at the heads on the fence. It helped just thinking of them as targets in the dark, there wasn't even the disquieting flash of red, as her blaster found two good targets.

"That's it, run..... Run !" She yelled.

Gupta could move quickly enough, just so long as he kept moving. Yasmine kept close to him, waiting to help, but knowing he probably wouldn't appreciate it. They were behind the rocks, before the enemy began destroying the orchard with withering fire.

"I think we upset them." Said Cruz.

"Just imagine how pissed off they'll be when we've done that another half a dozen times." She said. The town guard were firing everything into the orchard, enough energy weapons fire to ignite a few of the trees. Behind its wooden walls, the town was on fire again. Gupta's grenades had found combustible targets, three columns of smoke were beginning to rise, illuminated by the fires below. Eventually the guards might send out a patrol to look for them, though Yasmine didn't think that would happen. Her real worry was going to appear in the East, the coming dawn. They had to be well away from The Ranch before daylight arrived.

"Is it time to move yet ?" Asked Cruz.

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To Luke it seemed sensible to check over the APC their enemy had left close to the rear door of the bunker. They had skilled people with them, experts far better than poor dead Ernesto. His father had reached that point though, where it wasn't worth trying to reason with him. Luke had already disobeyed his father by not returning to The Ranch.

"No, we will leave their vehicle alone." Said Vincent. "It is not to be touched, those are my orders."

"There might be a timer on any explosives father."

"No, what is so hard to understand ? I will not risk underestimating our enemy again. Take the men into the bunker, or I'll put Stephan in charge."

It was a common threat, though Luke didn't hold a grudge against Stephan. They were both victims of his father's stubbornness and foibles. Like all great men who are loved by their people, his father could often be hell to live with.

"Very well, but we can't ignore their APC forever father. Eventually someone will have to check it for traps."

"Later though..... Please Luke, obey me on this matter."

Argue it further and his father would go into his maudlin self-pity stage. That was the side of Vincent his loving flock never saw.

"I'll assemble everyone in the old guard room." Said Luke.

The old guard room was the first chamber inside the bunker. Once a clean and cheerful place, the escaping creatures had broken what they could and crapped over what they couldn't. The room was filthy and stank of the abominations his father had let loose. Luke had wanted to seal the bunker up tight, but Vincent had to have his high tech weapons. His father had a certain persona to talk to his men, he pulled it on like a cloak. By now Luke was only pretending to believe in his father's famous visions.

“Our enemy are here to steal our weapons, I am sure of this. I have been given a glimpse of them taking everything from the stores on Floor G.” Said Vincent. “They can’t be allowed to steal our tech, our future.”

There were too many men in the room really and they were all cheering. Ideally they’d have split into groups to do a proper search for enemy fighters, but his father was mentioning yet another vision sent by God.

“I will lead and there will be no deviating from the path. I have been given an image, a clear image of our enemy breaking into the stores. It is our destiny to stop these thieves.... They will be destroyed.” Luke almost felt shame, as he joined in with the applause. He’d often found that his father was more inclined to say yes to a request, after hearing a room full of applause.

“I would like to take a small force deeper father.” He said. “I don’t doubt what you were shown, but the enemy might go deeper to escape you. There is a risk that they might release more of the foul brutes.”

“Yes, I can see the sense of that.”

Luke knew the men he wanted, just a few good fighters who he trusted. He collected them and left, before his father had a chance to have another vision and change his mind.

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