

## **Coffee Addict**

### **Chapter 24 – Enemy Soldiers**

**“Lidia had been worried that Julie might have the hacienda to herself. It was a strong old building, with a lot of alterations to make it stronger and more comfortable. No panic room though, as far as she was aware. Definitely not the place for Julie to be there on her own.”**

Σ

Lidia had left her in the huge poultry shed with Rocky. Not that Teresa minded, it had been her decision to stay with their unusual pet. Lidia would show her face at the defence perimeter and look in to see her mum. I was all about being seen, so no one started asking questions about where the hell she'd been. Everyone knew Teresa was a bit of crazy girl, but Lidia was still respected and it had to stay that way; she was a cop after all. Teresa was stuck where she was, without even a change of clothing, until Lidia returned to take her home. There was a shower though, probably put in for the workers who looked after a shed full of chickens. The shower seemed to excite Rocky; she even tried to get in with her.

“No, shoo.....Go away.” Said Teresa. “Once you'd have fitted in here with me, but now you're too big.”

Rocky grabbed one of her trainers from her pile of discarded clothing, and started playing with it. Great, she might end up going home with just one shoe. Her mum would ask a thousand questions about that.

“Behave, Rocky.....Don't damage my things.” Shouted Teresa.

“Sorry.” Said Rocky.

Even though she knew Rocky could speak, it was still a shock when she did. Her voice sounded more human with every passing day. Her pet put the trainer she'd been playing with, on top of her pile of grubby clothes. Putting them back on wasn't going to be pleasant. It wouldn't be her first time going home from Jaimie's in the clothing she'd put on to go to one of his party nights.

“Good girl..... I need my grubby clothing.” Said Teresa. “If I asked for a towel, do you know what I want ?”

She did, her weird pet brought her a towel, which Lidia has put over a bail of straw to dry. It wasn't the cleanest towel in the world, but it was better than nothing. All the time Rocky was watching her and making her chortling happy sound. Luke thought the creatures might well be more intelligent than people and Teresa tended to agree. A lot brighter than some of kids she'd been to school with. “There, showered and sort of clean.” Said Teresa, as she did up her jeans. “Now I think we both deserve a really good breakfast. Sadly I think it's tinned hot dogs for both of us.”

Teresa had invented the idea, though Lidia kept claiming it was her. Teresa put an entire tin of hot dogs in one of Rocky's clean bowls. She then boiled a kettle full of water and poured the water over the hot dogs. Leave the hots dogs in the water for ten minutes, before draining. Voila, you had a bowl full of tasty, hot, hot dogs. Teresa sliced them up and ate with her finger from the same bowl as Rocky.

“No eating fast and getting them all.” Said Teresa.

“I won't.....Love hot dogs.” Said Rocky.

Teresa thought she probably ate a third, of a very large tin of hot dogs. It was enough food to get the day started. Rocky didn't seem at all put out, to have a human eating her food. Rocky appeared to have a morning routine, breakfast was followed by flying around the disused poultry shed for a while. Teresa only knew something was going on, when Rocky stopped at door H and started making her friendly noise.

"Hey, do you have a problem over there ?" Asked Teresa.

"Not a problem.....A friend."

That was alarming, as Teresa suspected she wasn't talking about a human friend. She rushed over to door H and sure enough, there were Rocky type sounds coming from outside.

"A friend.....They won't hurt you." Said Rocky.

Male and female had never been discusses, but Lidia had once teased Teresa about her sex life, in front of Rocky.

"Is it a girl out there, or a boy ?" Asked Teresa.

"A boy." Said Rocky.

Teresa found herself grinning, even though it did complicate things. Or maybe it didn't ? Rocky would need a friend one day, when she was too big to keep in the shed. It all seemed a bit fast though; according to Luke; their pet was still a way off puberty.

"Ahh, now I know where you went on the days I let you fly away in the woods." Said Teresa. "A boyfriend huh ? Are you sure he's safe to let in ?"

"Yes, a good friend, a safe friend." Said Rocky.

There were more noises coming from outside and Rocky was obviously keen for her to open door H. No matter what Rocky might say, it was a risk, maybe a ridiculously silly risk. To let in an unknown male creature was crazy, but Teresa did it anyway.

"Don't let him eat me." Said Teresa.

"He's a nice friend, a kind friend." Said Rocky.

The door was large enough to allow a fair size truck to enter the shed. Rocky's friend was a little larger than her, which meant he was probably a little older; though like her he might well be a little way from puberty. His feathers were darker than Rocky's, his voice about the same. He came in crouched close to the ground, as if emphasising he wasn't a threat. Teresa felt like Rocky's mum, giving her first boyfriend the once over. Teresa remembered from somewhere that large intelligent birds tended to mate for life. How had Rocky's boyfriend found her ? That was something to discuss another day. She closed the door to ensure there were no other surprise guests.

"So, this is your boyfriend ?" Asked Teresa.

"He is a friend, who is also a boy." Said Rocky.

Was Rocky being subtle and diplomatic ? It definitely sounded like it. The two of them did a lot of cheek rubbing and many happy sounds were made. Teresa found herself having the boyfriend's cheek rubbed against hers. That was strange and a little scary.

"What is his name, Rocky ?" Asked Teresa.

"You could never speak it properly.....Choose a name for him ?"

For some reason Teresa's mind thought of Rocky movies and the eponymous hero shouting Adrian, over and over again.

"Can I call him Adrian ?" Asked Teresa.

"Yes, I'll let him know."

Rocky spoke to the newly named Adrian in their own bird like words. The only word Teresa recognised was Adrian. It seemed her boyfriend liked being named; he began making the same

happy sounds Rocky made. There was more cheek rubbing, though it wasn't scary this time. For some reason she now trusted Adrian not to take a bite out of her, or use his sharp claws on her face. "Does he like hotdogs ?" Asked Teresa.

"He's never had them, but I'm sure he will." Said Rocky.

There followed a weird kind of picnic with them all eating hotdogs, though Teresa only ate one; she was a bit hot dogged out. The two creatures ate all sorts, including a few dried bugs from a bag Luke had given Michelle.

"Try Rocky on these, I think she'll love them." Luke had told Michelle.

They did love them, which set Teresa's mind racing on how to tell Luke there was another creature now; Rocky had found herself a boyfriend. It might have been easier to chuck him out of the shed, but he'd keep coming back. That might be more dangerous; someone was bound to see him.

"Do you want Adrian to stay here ?" Teresa asked.

He was as bright as her; Adrian's face reacted at the mention of his name.

"Yes, that would be nice." Said Rocky.

"He'll need to stay in the shed." Said Teresa. "If he keeps going outside, someone will see him. Then the soldiers will come and kill you both. Make sure he understands that."

"He does, he's been shot at many times." Said Rocky. "He'll stay indoors and be good.....I promise." Adrian seemed really keen on the dried bugs, there's no accounting for taste. There had been a bombing run on the fake farm the previous night, Lidia had told her it was on the way. That had made the disused chicken shed shudder. They were obviously bombing there again, but the vibrations were stronger, the sound louder. The fake farm wasn't that far away, two to three miles at most. Close enough to feel and hear carpet bombing by the Colombian air force. Rocky didn't seem scared, just curious.

"Bunker buster bombs, I think." Said Teresa. "They'll get deep down and destroy everything."

"Good." Said Rocky.

She seemed no keener on whoever had created the farm than the army. It had to be hard to like someone who'd created you as an egg and then abandoned you in the woods. Adrian hardly reacted at all; he was too busy eating dried bugs.

~ ~

Yoon Choi had breakfast, which was pretty good for a quickly built army camp under constant threat of attack. Strangely the coffee was awful, but everyone mentioned that. She'd then sort of reported for duty and after finding out that Mateo Rodriguez was too busy to talk to anyone, she went in search of Captain Sánchez.

"I heard you're pretty god with the supergun." Sánchez had remarked.

"Should be, I did design it." She'd replied.

The upshot was that someone with her skills was best used by putting her on the fence. It seemed when the serious creatures attacked, they came from the north. There were huge rats everywhere, but they were stupid creatures. If they attacked the defence perimeter, they ended up killing themselves by trying to get through the electrified fence. The only worry was the huge creatures and as Sánchez told her.

"They always come from the north."

Yoon was currently in the main gun position on the part of the fence which watched the north. It was late morning and Julian was with her, purely because like her, he liked being busy.

"Can't stand just sitting about." He'd told her.

Michelle and Jaimie were there too, for much the same reason. No one could be said to be in charge. Once the order came up from Mateo in his command vehicle, to fire on any attackers; they'd fire on those attackers. So far, it had been a combat free day.

"I told them the tree line needed clearing further back." Said Michelle. "These clowns have got far too close, without being noticed."

"Can I borrow your field glasses ?" Asked Yoon.

"Sure." Said Michelle.

They were coming out of the trees at a gentle jog, as if wanting to be thought of as just another group of friendly soldiers. They weren't though, they didn't look right, or move right. She could see that, despite them wearing fairly normal looking combat armour.

"Are they our guys, the soldiers from Bogotá ?" Asked Julian.

"No, but they're hoping we'll think that." Said Yoon. "These are the human looking creatures. We haven't seen much of them, until now."

"Playing a little you attack our base, so we attack yours." Said Jaimie.

The fence they were defending wasn't around a base; it was protecting several thousand scared civilians, many of them children. Yoon knew what Julian meant though, whoever had sent the humanoid fighters would view it as tit for tat. Michelle grabbed the link to Mateo when it rang, purely because she reacted fastest.

"Yes, we think so too.....Definitely human like creature." Said Michelle. "Probably several hundred of them, with maybe more on the way."

Michelle hung up the link and there was a certain look on her face. Whatever Mateo had ordered, the ex-military woman from Ottawa was looking forward to it.

"Well, what are our orders ?" Asked Jaimie.

"We're authorised to fire at will.....Destroy anything we don't like the look of." Said Michelle.

"Brilliant." Said Yoon.

Humanoid creatures armed with assault rifles and wearing body armour, were a different kind of creature to fight. Easier in some ways than the incredibly tough mega fauna. Harder in that they were firing back with fairly impressive firepower. Whether they were skilled with their weapons was yet to be discovered. Yoon was going to assume they were; it just might keep her alive. The heavy weapons began firing, as soon as the creatures were in range.

"The heavy weapons will soon finish them off." Said Jaimie.

"Assume nothing." Said Yoon. "Jess faced one and killed it, but she said it was tough, really tough."

"I know where the grenades are kept." Said Julian. "I'll go and get a box of them for when these things get closer to the wire."

"That's a darn good idea." Said Michelle.

The humanoids were dying, but there always seemed to be more coming out of the treeline. Jaimie was the first to start firing his supergun, though Yoon was leaving it until she could see the whites of their eyes, as the old saying goes. Ammunition was limited, but there seemed to be a lot of creatures coming out of the trees. The heavy weapons were earning their keep, but even they were needing to use a lot of ammunition, to bring down the humanoids.

"Yay, did you see that ?" Asked Jaimie. "These superguns really rip them apart."

"Yes, they do.....But it took you three shots." Said Yoon. "Ammunition is limited, let them get closer."

Yoon hadn't designed the pocket howitzers for accuracy at a distance. Even version 4 was still a prototype, designed for close quarters fighting, against a certain type of enemy. It was a mega fauna

killer, definitely not designed to clear the fence of several hundred human type creature. Yoon waited until she could clearly see the enemy creatures.

"Wow, Yoon.....Glad you're on our side." Said Jaimie.

One shot, in the gap between the body armour and the humanoid's helmet. Its head sort of exploded, as did some of its chest. As if showing it wasn't a lucky shot, she repeated it four more times.

"Superb.....We'll soon finish them off." Said Michelle.

"I think that all our combined ammunition might kill fifty of them, sixty tops." Said Yoon.

"Then pray that the heavy weapons get the rest." Said Jaimie.

Michelle was a good shot, but Jaimie was too excitable. Many supergun rounds hurtled past their intended target and buried themselves in the ground.

"Can't you get more ammunition, Yoon ?" Asked Michelle.

"Only if you can hold them off while I fly to South Korea.....And back." Said Yoon.

In fairness the heavy weapons were destroying more creatures than the superguns, but that was all so impersonal, mowing them down without seeing much of the enemy. With the superguns they could see the enemy ripped apart and falling to the ground. In a way it was horrific, but Yoon felt no sympathy for the human looking brutes.

"I'm out of ammunition." Said Jaimie.

"I've only a few rounds left." Said Michelle.

"When we're out of supergun rounds, we use assault rifles." Said Yoon. "Hopefully Julian will soon be back with some grenades. When we run out of everything.....Then we're in trouble, but not yet."

Julian was gone for a while, but he obviously knew how to persuade military types to give him what he needed. He arrived with several soldiers carrying several boxes of grenades and half a dozen grenade launchers.

"Good.....Very good." Said Yoon. "Now I think we stand a chance of seeing the sun come up in the morning."

"Great, so I did well ?" Asked Julian.

"You did very well." Said Jaimie. "Does Mateo know we have all this ?"

"Hmmmm, sort of." Said Julian.

The launchers had arrived at the perfect moment; Yoon had fired her last round of supergun ammunition. Despite never designing a grenade launchers, she knew how they worked.

"Then we need to use them, before he asks for them back." Said Yoon.

The humanoid fighters were getting close to the fence, but not so close that grenades might damage the electrified fence. Yoon loaded up the grenade launcher, which looked fairly old and made in Eastern Europe. So was the famous AK47, so the origin of the launchers didn't concern her. It looked clean and ready to use. She aimed up and out of the gun position, through one of the visual slits in the armoured exterior.

"I reckon an angle of about 25 degrees." She muttered.

The grenade went up and dropped into the main body of the approaching human type fighters. The grenade exploded, causing carnage rather than a lot of instant kills. It seemed that the fake humans did yell out in agony, if they were severely wounded. One of them was using their hands to claw their way back north, because they no longer had any legs. There seemed to be some evidence of panic among the creatures.

"A little to the left and 23 degrees." Yoon muttered.

That grenade hit a large fake human, who was probably a general, or least a major. Splattering bits of him all over the battlefield, definitely upsetting the humanoid fighters. The others were cheering her, but they weren't doing something really important.

"Come on, shift into gear." Said Yoon. "There are enough launchers and grenades for everyone."

"Sorry.....Aim at 23 degrees you said ?" Asked Julian.

"Or increase the angle for the grenade to go further." Said Yoon. "All basic ballistics."

"If you say so.....Someone pass me a launcher." Said Michelle.

Jaimie seemed experienced with grenade launchers; Yoon was beginning to wonder if there was any major conflicts he hadn't fought in. Some grenades went wide of their target, but they had a lot of grenades. It was carnage and the heavy weapons were becoming more accurate as they gained experience of the terrain and the targets. Despite not wanting to, Yoon did feel some sympathy for the fake human fighters. They yelled when hurt, which made them people to her. Once or twice she'd mumbled it to herself, much to the amusement of Michelle.

"I feel pain, therefore I am."

René Descartes had to be spinning in his grave, or maybe not. He'd enjoy the notion that fake people just might still be people. It was close to dusk when Jaimie noticed an important fact.

"There are no more of them coming out of the trees." Said Jaimie.

The trees had suffered too, the trees line had effectively been moved back about twenty yards, by the constant detonation of explosives. In front of Yoon was an abattoir of humanoid creatures. One or two were still moving, but most were dead. A few were still trying to pull their way out, to anywhere away from the hell of the grenades.

"Oh, I am hungry and thirsty.....And I'll sleep for a week." Said Julian.

"A few will have got away." Said Michelle. "They'll be running back to the fake farm, to find it blown apart."

"In all fairness, it was our turn to put the fear of God into them." Said Jaimie.

"Surely you mean the fear of Muisca ?" Asked Yoon. "This is the plantation after all."

That caused everyone to laugh, though after all the happenings up on the high plateau; a few of them might now be believers. A runner arrived from Mateo Rodriguez.

"The general is now a general again." Said the Runner. "General Mateo sends his compliments and congratulations on a good job, very well done. Samples are being taken of the dead humanoids for Luke Walsh, so please cease firing."

"I haven't heard about Luke in a while." Said Julian. "Nice to know he's still in one piece."

"We'll stop firing." Said Jaimie. "Give the general our congratulations on a well-deserved promotion."

So, Bogotá had finally made Mateo a general again. Not that Mateo seemed into titles, but it would probably give him a pension he could live on, when he decided to retire. Of course, that was reliant on him surviving long enough to retire.

"The general also wondered if we could have our grenades back ?" Asked the runner.

"No, we've put most of them to good use and might need the rest." Said Yoon.

Yoon felt like going to bed, but she didn't, not right away. She joined the others for some awful coffee and some really good food.

"I know you designed the supergun, but where did you learn to fire a grenade launcher that well ?" Asked Jaimie.

"It really is all basic ballistics." Said Yoon.

Lidia Fernandez had promised to look in on Julie Yago, to tell her that her daughter was alive and well. Exactly where she was couldn't be mentioned, but Teresa had given her permission to lie to her mum.

"If she asks where I am.....Be creative." Teresa had said.

Being at Hacienda Yago hadn't been on her orders, but whoever was now in charge of the local police would like that. Keeping Julie safe was worth a lot of points with the high ups in Bogotá and was likely to please Julie too. A happy Julie Yago meant far less aggravation. Lidia had picked that up fairly quickly. Someone had been trying to incinerate dead creatures where they'd probably fallen. A large adult version of Rocky had died in the middle of the croquet lawn. It was a large body to burn and looked more like it had been cooked than incinerated. Lidia ignored it and rang the doorbell, as though it was just another ordinary day. Julie opened her own door, which was surprising.

"Lidia, how nice of you to visit." Said Julie. "Come in.....We've still got the essentials, like coffee and a decent breakfast."

"I just wanted to let you know Teresa is safe." Said Lidia. "Though now you mention it.....That coffee and breakfast sounds good."

Lidia sort of knew the house, but was glad that Julie was leading her to the kitchen.

"So, where is my troublesome girl child ?" Asked Julie.

"My apartment." Lidia lied. "It's an old building, but very strong. I'm sure she'll be safe there. Is your husband with you ?"

"Gustavo put on a shirt and tie and left home at seven." Said Julie. "He really is amazing.....Left like it was just another day on the plantation."

Lidia had been worried that Julie might have the hacienda to herself. It was a strong old building, with a lot of alterations to make it stronger and more comfortable. No panic room though, as far as she was aware. Definitely not the place for Julie to be there on her own.

"Here we are.....The best breakfast in town since Café Loco closed." Said Julie.

It was a relief to see a room full of people. The house staff were there, Lidia recognised one or two of them. There were a few gardeners, who'd decided to inhabit the kitchen until the current problems were over. Not just Julie's staff in the kitchen, Teresa had mentioned staff arriving from a few other local Haciendas. Hardly surprising, Julie Yago did have a reputation for being tough and fairly indestructible.

"You seem to be feeding the neighbourhood." Said Lidia.

"My own people know where everything is." Said Julie. "The others mostly arrived with one change of clothing in a small bag. First thing was to make sure they knew how to find the laundry room. I'll feed them and house them until this is over; I even managed to get sleeping bags from the army. My only rule is that they don't go through my things. If I catch them at it, they'll be dumped outside and hoping not to get eaten by anything unnatural."

Lidia almost laughed, until she realised it wasn't a joke. Julie Yago, mother of her lover; was famed for her ruthlessness.

"How do you like the breakfast ?" Asked Julie.

"Perfect, thank you." Said Lidia.

"You can do me a favour while you're here." Said Julie.

"Yes of course, anything." Said Lidia.

Damn, never say anything; it was almost the eleventh commandment if you were a cop. The number of cats Lidia had retrieved from trees in her early years in the job; yet she was still saying it.

"I do a walk around the outside of the hacienda about this time." Said Julie. "I take the famous ancient sword with me and destroy any massive rats scratching at the doors and walls. Easy to kill, but there are always quite a few. Care to join me ?"

Of course Lidia had to say yes, it was Teresa's mum. Besides, everyone was saying the huge rats were out there in large numbers, but they were very easy to kill.

"Yes.....Happy to tag along." Said Lidia.

Julie kept the sword in an umbrella stand in a closet. It had been wiped over, but was still red with the blood of whatever she'd recently killed with it. The sword glowed for a moment, as Julie picked it up.

"Is that the sword you found in the temple ?" Asked Lidia.

"Difficult to say, there is another sword that Jess seemed to claim." Said Julie. "This one seems happy for me to use it and.....I've killed a fuck load of rats with it. I think the rats are cannibals, their furry bodies are always gone by the next morning."

They stepped out of the hacienda and into the grounds, which covered several acres. It was a hot day and likely to get hotter. The forecast was for some serious sunshine. Julie was armed with an ancient sword, reportedly used by a Muisca angel. Lidia had her service handgun and several spare clips. Considering what might be out there, Lidia considered their weapons weren't enough, not nearly enough.

"I went clockwise round the building yesterday." Said Julie. "We'll go anticlockwise today."

They'd only gone a few feet and there was a huge rat, trying to get inside a narrow drainpipe.

"They're definitely not that bright." Said Julie.

What seemed to be a gentle swipe with the sword and the rat was dead, almost sliced in two from head to tail. Julie prodded at the body, as if the rat might be feigning death.

"I used to count them, but there are so many." Said Julie. "I just kill them now, in large numbers."

"The sword is amazing." Said Lidia.

"I dream about fighting with it." Said Julie. "Sometimes I dream of being back at the temple. An angel is telling me the trouble with the creatures is almost over."

It was a real jaw dropping moment, Lidia stopped walking and Julie stopped too.

"Are you alright ?" Asked Julie.

"I never went to the temple, but I've been having much the same dreams." Said Lidia. "Last night I dreamt than an angel told me not to worry, that the trouble was almost over."

"Crap.....Are you a religious person ?" Asked Julie.

"In the Fernandez household you had to be religious." Said Lidia. "If you weren't my grandmother used to beat you until you were."

They both stopped and laughed, before dealing with another huge rat. Julie simply handed her the sword, without saying a word. The sword glowed for a second or two, as Lidia held it. No hesitation, she cleaved the rat in two. The sword was wonderful, like cutting through soft butter. The happy glow went when Julie Yago took her sword back.

"I'm glad you're seeing my daughter, you make her happy." Said Julie. "I can always tell how she feels about this guy, or that woman. She thinks you're a keeper."

"I'm glad about that; I feel the same way about her." Said Lidia.

"Just don't expect her to change, she won't." Said Julie. "Love my daughter for what she is and you'll be fine."

"There is nothing about Teresa that I'd want to change." Said Lidia.

It was a mild lie, there was always something, even if it was minor. People married for half a century, were probably still irritated by something their partner did. Lidia thought the secret was to live with it.....And plenty of sex of course, there was no such thing as too much sex.

“What the hell ? That’s not a man is it ?” Asked Julie.

“No, it’s not.” Said Lidia. “I had V-Boom on the car radio on the way here. I think these are human looking creatures. Judging by the look of them, they were injured when their base was bombed.”

“Looks like I’ll get a chance to see if the sword will kill them.” Said Julie.

Both of the human like creatures had been injured, but they were wearing body armour and helmets. They were fake humans, but still bled bright red blood. Lidia saw that as encouraging; if they bled enough of it, they’d die. The closest one was having trouble walking. Male or female was impossible to tell with any certainty. Lidia brought her gun out of its holster and aimed at the closest humanoid fighter.

“They seem covered in armour.” Said Lidia. “I’m going to aim between the helmet and the body armour.”

It was an experiment, to see if she could hit the gap at a range of about thirty feet. Lidia hit the creature’s helmet and it was suddenly much more animated, maybe angry in its own way. It came at her much faster and the other one limped after it.

“Time to test the sword on these things.” Said Julie.

Julie swung her sword at the creature Lidia had shot at. Its armour on its left arm was torn apart, probably during the bombing of the fake farm. Julie’s ancient blade opened up the armour more and ripped into the human like creature’s flesh. It yelled, until Julie found its throat with the tip of her sword. It went down on its knees, probably drowning in its own blood.

“Get past the armour and these things aren’t that tough.” Said Julie.

The one behind must have seen its fellow fighter killed, but it didn’t react, or even speed up. Neither of the humanoids had guns, but the one still alive; had a piece of metal pipe in its right hand. Lidia was taking no chances, not with Teresa’s mum being there. She knelt down and fired six rounds, aiming at the gap between helmet and body armour. At least one of her round must have found its target.

“Wow, when they bleed.....They bleed.” Said Lidia.

“I need to know what these things are.” Said Julie.

It was dead, but blood was still spreading out over the ground. Julie grabbed the helmet and pulled it up and away; revealing the face of a woman. Short hair and no makeup, but definitely the face of an attractive young female.

“Crap, without the iffy walk; she could be one of us.” Said Lidia.

“Luke said they’re sending prototype creatures at us, to see how they do.” Said Julie. “The human looking creatures will be altered and adjusted. Eventually you could be stood behind one in the queue for coffee and not realise it.”

“Fuck, that’s pretty terrifying.” Said Lidia.

“Come on, we need to finish a circuit of the house.” Said Julie. “Otherwise the rats will be gnawing at the French windows again.”

~ ~

Mateo Rodriguez had been sent pictures of what was left of the fake farm and the enemy base below it. All of the pictures had been taken from the air, by an aerial reconnaissance plane. The farm had just about gone, just a few walls remained and they were on the outer edges of the destruction. The bombing had gone deep, leaving a crater that looked surreal, like something from World War

Two. The woods hadn't done too well either, the trees that hadn't been knocked flat, were still burning in the pictures.

"Well.....When the Colombian air force bombs somewhere, they don't mess about." Said Jaimie.

"Not sure if you should be seeing these, I didn't ask." Said Mateo.

Not that he was worried if it was confidential intelligence, he was a general again. He'd been promoted for services to the people of Colombia. No here today, gone tomorrow politician would dare to say a word against him, at least not for quite some time.

"Is that it ?" Asked Yoon. "Job done, base destroyed ?"

"Maybe, no one is quite sure." Said Mateo. "There will be another bombing run today. Then troops will be going into what's left. The chance of them finding anything.....We may never know where they came from, or who sent them. My guess is that they flew in, but they might have arrived in trucks."

"There must be a lot of creatures to kill before I can return to my home." Said Valeria.

Valeria had arrived with Yoon and Mateo had no real idea who she was. She'd fought the creatures though and Yoon was willing to vouch for her. As far as Mateo was concerned, she'd earned a seat at his table.

"I believe you live not that far away from Café Loco ?" Asked Mateo.

"Yes, about two blocks." Said Valeria.

"All of that area is being given priority." Said Mateo. "The military want Main Street opened up as soon as possible. Mopping up might take months, but you should be in your own home again fairly soon."

"Is any of this getting out to the international news media ?" Asked Julian.

"Some, but not all." Said Mateo. "I'm already hearing strange rumours and weird happening being invented. Give it a few months and very little of this will have officially happened."

"Crap.....Bloody politicians." Said Jaimie.

"Indeed, damned politicians." Said Mateo. "We'll know the truth though, we'll know what happened. Though I doubt if you could find a paper willing to print it."

Mateo knew he was giving the official subtext, to the official line. In many ways the politicians were the pawns in the game; feeding people the sort of fake truth they wanted to hear. Not that Mateo ever voiced those kinds of ideas, not any more.

"We'll never know who sent these things, that killed so many of my neighbours." Said Valeria.

"Sadly.....I think you're right." Said Yoon.

~ ~ ~

© Ed Cowling ~ January 2026

~

'Unless otherwise indicated, all the names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents in this book are either the product of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.'

~