

Operation: Snowball



REVOLUTION

by MultiMapper

Revolutions Universe

Paradise 2 - Operation: Snowball

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Chapter 1

Alvin had become accustomed to working long hours and grabbing a few hours of sleep when it was absolutely necessary for him to do so. However, this day was different in that he couldn't seem to get fully to sleep because something was nagging at the back of his mind.

Finally giving up, he went to his computer to go over all the relevant facts one more time in hopes of discovering whatever had been eluding him.

"Alvin, please excuse the interruption, but I believe that I may have just uncovered something rather disturbing." Daisy said suddenly, breaking him out of his concentration.

"That's fine, Daisy. What have you come up with?" Alvin asked as he maintained his gaze on the various maps on the screens in front of him.

"By all indications, enemy forces are massing to stage an offensive."

"Yes. I'm aware of that. I'm just trying to figure out what they're up to."

"From the way that they're staging their assets, I have concluded that they're planning to launch a major offensive against Edwards Air Force Base. But that's not what's concerning me."

Alvin quickly looked over the maps, before saying, "You're right. From where they've positioned themselves, Edwards would be the perfect target. Hold on while I contact them."

"As I said before, that's not what's concerning me." Daisy informed him rather urgently.

Alvin finished his high-speed spate of typing before asking, "What's bothering you?"

"From all the information that's been gathered, there appears to be a very deliberate effort to stage a sustained battle. They're not planning on winning, they're planning on keeping us busy and distracted." Daisy said somberly.

"What do you think their *actual* target is?" Alvin asked as he looked at his maps again.

"I have insufficient information upon which to base a cogent theory. But it stands to reason that if they're trying to keep our attention diverted, that it would make most sense for them to launch either a surgical strike or covert incursion team to achieve their actual objective." Daisy said somberly.

Alvin looked over the maps again, then paled as he said, "If this is that important to them, then that might also explain their recent activity in the south."

"That would seem to be a reasonable conclusion." Daisy agreed.

"I'd better alert the commanders along the border to brace for an attack." Alvin said as he started typing again.

"Agreed. But I believe that this is yet another distraction. Perhaps we should consider dispatching a team from here to deal with whatever is the true objective." Daisy carefully suggested.

"Everyone's stretched pretty thin right now. Actually, that might be another part of their strategy. If we're fighting on all fronts, that makes it the perfect time for them to launch a new offensive." Alvin said consideringly.

"I hope you'll forgive my presumptuousness, but I've compiled a list of available personnel that could be dispatched to deal with a developing situation." Daisy said as she opened a window on one of Alvin's less important screens.

"Some of these people aren't medically fit for combat." Alvin said as he looked over the list.

"If it comes down to a hand-to-hand struggle, then we've probably already lost. We need people with experience on the ground to assess the situation and make split-second decisions." Daisy said seriously.

"You know what? I'm just going to go with you on this. There's a chance that the forces massing to attack Edwards aren't anything more than they appear to be. But in the event that you're right, and that they're trying to achieve some greater goal, we might be grateful to have a team in the air once we've discovered what their actual target is." Alvin said as he began typing again.

There was a moment of nothing but clickety-clicking sounds in the air as he typed, then he suddenly said, "Daisy, contact Fairchild Air Force Base and let them know that we're going to need a C-130 ready to take off ASAP."

* * * * *

"Does anyone know what our mission is?"

"We were just told to scramble."

"Everyone, get strapped in, we're waiting for one more person to arrive. We're going to take off as soon as he's aboard."

"Yes sir!"

"It would help us to prepare if we knew what our mission was."

"Right now, our mission is to get into the air. As soon as I know more, I'll pass it on."

* * * * *

"Do we have anyone here who knows the communications equipment?"

"Yes sir. Staff Sergeant Barnes, I'm an IT specialist."

"Go to the forward compartment and get your equipment up and running. We're supposed to report directly to Colonel Hayes as soon as we're in the air."

"Yes sir."

"Lieutenant Miller?"

"Yes sir."

"According to this, it looks like you're my second in command. So far the only information I have about our mission is this roster. Take a minute to verify that we've got the right people."

"Yes sir."

* * * * *

"Major Stanley?"

"Yes. What is it Lieutenant?"

"We seem to have someone aboard that's not on the list."

"Oh, yes. The list I gave you was Air Force personnel. Sergeant Douglas was brought in from the outside to be included on this mission. He was the one that we were waiting for."

"He looks so young. What's his specialty?"

"All I know about him is his name."

"Would you like for me to ask him?"

"Until we know what our mission is, I can't see that it matters."

"Yes sir."

* * * * *

"Major Stanley?"

"Yes Sergeant?"

"I've established a secure connection with Colonel Hayes."

"Good work."

"He insisted that I remain here while you're being briefed, for security reasons."

"Understood."

* * * * *

It took incredible effort for Major Stanley to achieve a standing position. He never had a moment of regret for the actions he had taken in the heat of battle which led to his injuries. And he was grateful that the field medics and doctors had been able to keep him alive and eventually patch him back together.

But the nearly constant pain and new physical limitations imposed on him sometimes made him feel that it would be better if he had chosen to take the easier path and continue his military career behind a desk.

As Major Stanley slowly walked into the forward cabin, his eyes went wide with surprise when he saw the man looking back at him from the laptop computer screen.

"Mr. President?"

"Major Stanley, let me be frank with you, there is a situation developing and I have the feeling that time isn't on our side."

"Yes sir."

"Edwards Air Force Base has just reported that they are under heavy attack."

"I don't see what good a handful of airmen will be in that type of conflict."

"None whatsoever. The fact of the matter is that we were anticipating the attack, as well as increased activity along our southern border. But it has been suggested that all of this chaos might have been staged to mask another objective, a covert incursion into our territory."

"Do you know what the target is?"

"Not yet. But from the way things are developing, I'm expecting them to make their move anytime now." The president said seriously.

After a moment to consider, Major Stanley cautiously asked, "And once you've determined their objective, you're going to divert us to try and stop them?"

"As soon as we've determined what the target area is, we'll dispatch the appropriate troops to mitigate the situation. Your group is in the air so that you will be the first

on the ground to evaluate the target and report back so that we can determine the appropriate response before we're committed to a course of action."

"Yes sir. You can count on us."

"From this point forward, you and your team will be coordinating with Colonel Hayes. Don't be put off by his young age. He's the one who alerted me to the possibility of an attack on Edwards. He's aware of the bigger picture and other ongoing operations and may be able to put the pieces together with the information you provide him. I'm going to hand you off to him right now to continue your mission briefing."

"Yes sir. Thank you sir."

Major Stanley watched as the president leaned forward and pressed a button, then the screen split to show a bright-eyed boy looking back at him.

"Alvin, it's in your hands now. Contact me if you need anything."

"Yes sir. I will." Alvin said professionally.

The president nodded once, then his side of the call disconnected and the view on the computer went full screen with Alvin's image.

"Major, before we start, I need to explain something to you. The enemy forces wouldn't go to all this trouble unless they were promised a worthwhile return on their investment. That means that they'll be willing to fight to the death to achieve their goals. Your primary mission is to gather intelligence for us. Once we've determined what their true objective is, we can react appropriately. Go in, gather intel and report back. That's the mission."

"Yes... sir." Major Stanley finished uncertainly.

"If you can't make yourself say it, you can just call me Alvin. We don't have time to be screwing around with age-based prejudices."

"No thank you sir. I'll find a way to manage. What else can you tell me?"

"Not much. We don't know where or what their objective is. The most that we can do is be prepared. That's why I've chosen the team that I have for you. You have experts in weapons, tactics, explosives, bioterrorism, and a few more things that you hopefully won't be needing."

"I noticed on the roster that I have two Security Force officers. Do they have some specialized training that I should know about or are they just here to provide a police presence?" Major Stanley asked cautiously.

"I was thinking that if you happened to secure an enemy combatant, that they might be of use to you." Alvin said frankly.

"What about the other one... Douglas. What specialty does he have that was important enough to delay the entire operation?" Major Stanley asked curiously.

"I'm afraid that that's on a need-to-know basis, Major. At this point in time, you don't need to know. But if a time comes when Sergeant Douglas feels that it is appropriate to do so, he will brief you on that."

"Understood."

"Major, if that time does come, I'm asking that you put aside any misgivings that you might have and listen to what he has to say. Remember that I *chose* him for a reason. Even if what he tells you sounds impossible, trust in what I'm telling you now. Trust in the president's judgement."

"Yes, sir." Major Stanley said confidently.

"Good. That's all, then. If you'll investigate the cargo area, you should find that you have weapons, explosives, full containment gear for a biohazard or hazmat situation and equipment to deal with a dozen or so other worst case scenarios. I suggest that while you have the time, you and your team get familiar with the tools at your disposal."

"We'll do that."

"Major, you and your team are my top priority right now. Call me if you need *anything*. I'll see that you'll have it as quickly as I can get it to you." Alvin said firmly.

"I get the feeling that you have some idea what this is all about, otherwise you wouldn't be placing so much importance on this one mission."

"No, Major. Actually, I don't. That's one of the things that's bothering me the most. When you look at the resources being thrown at the diversion that the enemy forces are kicking up, it must be something really important to them. So whatever this turns out to be, we've got to make sure that they don't get it."

"I'll consider that to be another part of our mission objective." Major Stanley said soberly.

"You do that. But the information is the most important thing that we need right now. Once we have that, we'll know what other actions are possible."

"Yes sir."

"Hey, you almost said that without choking on it this time." Alvin chuckled.

"Practice makes perfect."

"Hayes, out." Alvin said with a smile before the screen went blank.

Major Stanley took a moment to consider his orders before leaving the forward communications area.

* * * * *

Major Stanley walked back to the main cabin, putting forth the extra effort to walk normally, hiding the evidence of his decrepit physical state. As he entered the room, he noticed that his team were all standing in formation, awaiting his return.

"For those of you who don't know me, I'm Major Stanley. I've received our mission briefing. The stage seems to be set for the enemy to launch forces into our territory to achieve some sort of goal, most likely by means of a covert insurgence or strike team. Our job is to discover what they're really after and report back to base so that troops can be dispatched to prevent them from getting it, whatever it is."

"So we're just supposed to investigate and report back; not intervene?" Lieutenant Miller asked to confirm.

"At this stage of things, that's the plan. As we begin to understand what we're dealing with, it may be necessary to redefine our objectives."

"Any clue about what type of situation we're going to be walking into?"

"None." Major Stanley said simply, then continued, "I don't know any of you and there's a very real possibility that I'm going to need to call on you and depend on you in the very near future. Would each of you introduce yourselves and state your specialty so we'll all know who to go to when we need your expertise?"

"Yes sir. I'm Second Lieutenant Paul Miller. I spent eight years in the Air Force as a munitions specialist, then I've spent the last six years doing architectural design in the civilian world. When Ashwood started attacking, I re-upped."

"Good to have you aboard." Major Stanley said firmly, then looked around the group as he said, "Lieutenant Miller is my second in command. If he tells you something, it's the same as hearing it from me."

After a long silent moment had passed, Major Stanley looked to the next person in line. He felt an immediate kinship with the man. This was a seasoned veteran. Even without the scar tissue visible on the left side of his face, Major Stanley would have known from the war-torn weary look in the man's eyes.

"Chief Master Sergeant Eddie Carrol. Military weapons and tactics." The man said smartly and Major Stanley couldn't help but respect the man's professionalism.

Major Stanley responded with a firm nod in Chief Carrol's direction, then looked toward the next person in line.

"Master Sergeant Courtney Green. Logistics and resource allocation."

Although he did his best to hide it, Major Stanley was a little surprised. If he were to guess, he'd say that Sergeant Green probably worked in an office or behind a desk for her entire military career. But to her credit, she carried herself well, looking professional and prepared to do whatever needed to be done.

He betrayed no expression and said nothing as he looked to the next person in line.

"Technical Sergeant Melissa Strickland, IED and explosives expert."

Major Stanley had heard Sergeant Strickland's name mentioned before. Although he couldn't remember what he had heard verbatim, the gist of it had been that she was not only knowledgeable on a technical level, but also had gained a wealth of experience in the field.

In meeting her for the first time, Major Stanley felt confident that she would be an asset to the team.

A nod from Major Stanley prompted the next person in line to say, "I'm Captain Molly Stewart and I'm a flight surgeon."

"I'm used to having to make do with a field medic. Having a doctor along will be something of a luxury." Major Stanley said with a quick smile at her. He owed a debt to the doctors and medics that he could never adequately repay and would always treat them with the utmost respect.

He looked past Captain Stewart to the first of the two uniformed Security Force officers.

"Senior Airman Thomas Day, Security Force." The man said smartly.

"You know, when you're deployed, you should wear your BDU's." Major Stanley said in a more informative than chastising tone.

"We were at our duty stations when the orders came through. We didn't want to delay takeoff, sir."

Rather than give a response, Major Stanley turned his inquiring gaze toward the next man in line.

"Senior Airman Jared Greer, Security Force."

Major Stanley let his eyes drop disapprovingly to the man's uniform before looking toward the final person in line.

"Master Sergeant Douglas, United States Army, on loan."

Although Major Stanley had intellectually known that Sergeant Douglas was young, he was taken aback at just *how* young the string bean of a boy was.

"What's your specialty, Sergeant Douglas?" Major Stanley asked, trying to maintain the same tone of voice that he had used with the others.

"Weapons, sir."

Major Stanley let his dubious gaze settle on Sergeant Douglas for a moment, then said to the entire group, "Until the enemy makes a move, we won't know our exact destination. Use this time to familiarize yourselves with the equipment that's been provided. Dismissed."

* * * * *

"Major Stanley, I've received an encoded communication from Colonel Hayes."

"What is it?"

"Just two words. 'Hoover Dam'."

"If they're trying for maximum devastation, that would do it."

"Yes sir."

"Lieutenant Miller!"

"Yes sir."

"I need to go forward and talk to the pilots for a moment. I've just received word of the target, Hoover Dam. Let the team know. Once you have them on task, get with Sergeant Barnes and see what you can come up with as far as blueprints. If they're planning to bring it down, we need to know where the weak points are."

"Yes sir."

* * * * *

After telling the pilots their destination and asking them to try and find a place to land as close to the dam as possible, Major Stanley stopped in the forward cabin where Sergeant Barnes had established communications.

"Were you able to find what you need in regards to the dam?" Major Stanley asked Lieutenant Miller as he approached.

"These blueprints aren't very detailed, but I think they're good enough for me to get a general idea of the most likely locations to place charges if you wanted to bring it down." Lieutenant Miller said thoughtfully.

"Sergeant Barnes, contact Colonel Hayes and ask him if he can get us more detailed and up-to-date blueprints. We need to know as much as possible going in." Major Stanley said firmly.

"Yes sir." Sergeant Barnes immediately responded.

"Excuse me sir, but I have a feeling that there's more to this than what we're seeing at first glance." Lieutenant Miller said cautiously.

"How so?"

"If their objective were *really* to bring down the Hoover Dam, they could just bomb it from the air. I don't see the advantage of creating a diversion or sending an incursion team." Lieutenant Miller said frankly.

"So you believe that this might be yet another distraction?" Major Stanley asked slowly.

"Possibly. I don't know what their true objective might be, but this seems to be a lot of wasted effort to take out one non-military target. They could accomplish the same thing with a simple air strike."

"I suppose that that's why we were scrambled instead of just sending in a bunch of fighters. We need to find out what they're really after."

"Yes sir."

"Is the rest of the team taking stock of our gear?"

"Yes sir. Since we know our destination, we're placing more of an emphasis on the equipment dealing with explosives and demolition."

"Sir, I have an incoming file from Colonel Hayes. They're the most detailed, up-to-date blueprints of the Hoover Dam that he has access to." Sergeant Barnes said quickly.

"Thank you Sergeant." Lieutenant Miller said as he made a quick move to accept the incoming file on the computer he was using.

"I'll leave you to it. Dismissed." Major Stanley said before leaving the room.

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"Chief Carrol, report." Major Stanley said as he approached.

"We've been going over the supplies that were provided. Those trained with explosives are gathering the gear that they will need. The rest are outfitting themselves with the equipment that they believe they'll be able to make the most use of." Chief Carrol said professionally.

"Good. If we get a better indication of the nature of our mission, I'll see to it that you're notified so that you can make any necessary adjustments." Major Stanley said simply, then added, "Carry on."

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"Major Stanley, I've got us set up on an encrypted communications network." Sergeant Barnes said as she handed the Major a communication device.

"Good work. Make sure that everyone is up-to-speed on how to use the tech. It won't do much good if they don't know how to use it when they need to."

"Yes sir."

"Dismissed."

* * * * *

"Major Stanley."

"Go ahead."

"We've just received a report from the Hoover Dam staff that they are under attack. They are currently barricaded in their control room and are requesting immediate help."

"Do you know our ETA?"

"Ten minutes as the crow flies. But I can't estimate how long it will take us to reach the dam once we've landed."

"I'll talk to the pilots. Keep me posted."

"Yes sir."

* * * * *

"All personnel, you might want to strap in. We've found a stretch of road to use as a landing strip. This could be rough." One of the pilots said over the intercom.

Major Stanley keyed the mic button on his handheld device and said, "Lieutenant Miller?"

"Yes sir."

"Gather a team. As soon as we gain entry to the dam, be prepared to seek out the target areas that you've been able to identify. I'll take the rest of the team to try and secure the control room."

"Yes sir."

* * * * *

The landing was a bit bumpy, but all things considered, the pilots did an admirable job.

"We should be less than a quarter of a mile from the dam." Sergeant Barnes said as she walked into the main cabin, wearing her full 'communications' gear.

"Were you able to get a map of the area?"

"Yes sir. It's available to the team on their communication devices."

"Do we have contact with the flight crew?"

"Yes sir. I have us patched into the onboard communications system."

Major Stanley looked over his team, all wearing their full gear and ready to go.

"Let's move out!"

* * * * *

"Major Stanley, I have some information for you." Alvin's voice called over his comm device.

"Go ahead." Major Stanley said while keeping careful watch for any sign of a sniper or likely traps set for them.

"From the reports that I've just received, it appears that an undetermined number of helicopters flew in, close to the ground. By all indications, their landing location was a parking lot northeast of your current position. I received subsequent reports of the helicopters returning by the same route, which may mean that they've already gotten what they came for. It's possible that in all the rush, they might have left us some sort of clue as to what their true objective was."

"Understood. Stanley out." Major Stanley said firmly, then called out, "Sergeant Green, Airman Day, there's a parking lot that was used as a landing zone by hostiles northeast of this location. Use full stealth on approach. Investigate and report back. Remember, this is an intelligence gathering mission. Any detail might be significant."

"Yes sir." They said in unison.

Major Stanley made a gesture toward the northeast, bidding them to go, then continued to lead his team to the northwest.

* * * * *

"No signs of trouble so far." Lieutenant Miller said as they got their first clear view of the entire face of the dam.

"Do you have your team?"

"Until we know what we're dealing with, I believe that Sergeant Strickland and I should go to investigate. Once we've found something, I may need more personnel."

"Get with her and be ready to break away as soon as we're inside."

"Major Stanley, this is Sergeant Green. We need the doctor here with us at the parking lot."

"Report."

"There's fifty or sixty bodies here. It looks like they were just mowed down with a machine gun. There are one or two of them still alive. Could you send the doctor?"

"She's on her way. Stanley out." Major Stanley said firmly, then stopped and motioned for the doctor to come to him.

Major Stanley brought up the map on his comm device so that she could see it before saying, "Captain Stewart, proceed to the parking lot due east of here. Sergeant Green has reported a massacre there with a few isolated survivors."

"Yes sir." Captain Stewart said professionally.

"Captain, remember that this is an intelligence gathering mission. Make your treatment decisions accordingly."

"Excuse me sir, but what *exactly* do you mean by that?" Captain Stewart asked cautiously.

"I'm saying that we will need your patients to be conscious and coherent enough to answer a few questions. Even though heavy pain medication or an induced coma might normally be indicated, I'm asking that you take into consideration that we will need to interview your patients as soon as it is medically allowable. Airman Day should be able to manage that side of things for you."

"Understood."

Major Stanley seemed to be satisfied with the response. He looked over his dwindling troops and finally said, "Chief Carrol. Escort Captain Stewart to the parking lot where our other team is located."

"Yes sir."

"Once she's been safely delivered and you've verified that the area is secure, I want you and Sergeant Green to return. I have a feeling that we're going to need all hands for this job."

"Yes sir." Chief Carrol repeated.

Major Stanley gave a firm single nod, then motioned for his group to continue forward.

At the same time, Chief Carrol and Captain Stewart started walking in the opposite direction.

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As they approached the entrance, Major Stanley quietly said, "Strickland. Check the door. Everyone else, be on guard. If they were going to set up an ambush, this would be an ideal place for it."

Although they had only been a team for a few hours, Major Stanley couldn't be more proud of them.

"Clear." Sergeant Strickland finally said.

Major Stanley made a hand motion to Lieutenant Miller, indicating for him to lead the way.

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Once inside, Major Stanley was pleased to find that a rudimentary layout of the structure was loaded into his comm device. It took a moment, but he was able to discern their current location as well as the most direct route to the control room.

Lieutenant Miller and Sergeant Strickland moved off in another direction as Major Stanley led his team deeper into the structure.

"Major Stanley, we've got a problem." Sergeant Douglas said quietly as he approached.

With a raise of his hand, Major Stanley halted the group before asking, "What have you found?"

"There's an auto-destruct sequence counting down." Sergeant Douglas said seriously.

"How can you possibly know that?" Major Stanley asked dubiously.

"I don't have time to explain that right now but trust me, that's the priority. What I can also tell you is that the people in the dam control room are fine. They're scared and keeping the door barricaded, but there aren't any enemy combatants trying to get to them. Once the self-destruct was activated, the hostiles bugged out."

"In other circumstances I'd demand to know the source of your information. But I was specifically told to listen to what you had to say, so go on."

"There was a secret base built within the structure of the dam during its original construction. There are people trapped in there... I can't tell how many. But I get the feeling that they've already determined that there's no way for them to abort the self-destruct from their location. So It will be up to us to disarm the explosives before they go off."

"Do you know where the explosives are?"

"No sir. But by all indications, they were embedded into the structure when the dam was built, so they're probably not going to be easy to find."

"How much time do we have?"

"I'm sorry sir. It's counting down. That's all I know."

"Is that everything?"

"Sir, if I may, I'd like to see to releasing the captives from the secret base while the rest of the team works on disarming the explosives. If we can't get the explosives disarmed, then the next best thing will be to evacuate the captives as quickly as possible."

"How much help will you need?"

"I should be able to do it by myself."

"I'm not letting anyone go off on their own. Take Airman Greer with you to cover your back."

"Yes sir."

"When this is all done, we're going to have a long talk."

"I'll look forward to it, sir."

Major Stanley gave a single nod, then keyed his comm device and said, "Lieutenant Miller, we have some new information..."

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"Do you know where we're going?" Airman Greer asked as he noticed that Sergeant Douglas kept referring back to the map on his comm device.

"Yes and no. I know where we're going, but I'm not one hundred percent sure on how to get there. The entrance might be a mislabeled closet or an actual hidden door."

"So we're looking for secret passages?" Airman Greer asked dubiously.

"Yes." Sergeant Douglas confirmed, then quickly said, "This way."

* * * * *

"Are you sure that this is it?" Airman Greer asked as he watched Sergeant Douglas struggle with the locked steel door.

"No." Sergeant Douglas admitted, then took a step back.

"You'll need a battering ram for a door like that."

"I've got one." Sergeant Douglas said before kicking the door with all his might.

Airman Greer stared in wonder as the door was not only opened, but also ripped off its hinges.

"Come on!" Sergeant Douglas said urgently as he led the way.

* * * * *

"Are you sure about this? It looks like no one's been in here for a hundred years." Airman Greer asked as he turned on his flashlight.

"No. I'm not sure. I'm just hoping that this leads to where we need to go."

"How do you know that there's something down here?" Airman Greer asked as they made their way down a dusty stairway.

"I'm psychic." Sergeant Douglas said simply.

After going down several flights of stairs, Sergeant Douglas stopped at a door and tried to open it.

Airman Greer watched his companion kick the locked door open, then quietly muttered, "...a psychic battering ram..."

* * * * *

They emerged into an abandoned control room.

Although there was no one else present, the lights were on and the room appeared to have been recently used. Several of the control panels and screens were active.

"What do we do now?"

"Find the door control. We need to get those people out of there."

"What people out of where?"

"Them." Sergeant Douglas said as he pointed toward one of the CRT monitors.

Airman Greer stepped closer and was shocked to see more than a hundred people scrambling around.

"They're kids!" Airman Greer gasped.

"Yeah. Scared kids. If that bothers you then help me get them out of there."
Sergeant Douglas said as he moved from one control panel to the next, desperately searching for the door controls.

"What the FUCK is going on here?!" Airman Greer barked as he started searching.

"To be honest, I don't know. I told you that I'm psychic. Well, I can pick up some of their thoughts and emotions. But the thing is, those kids have been drugged with some kind of psychic inhibitor. I'm getting muddled voices on top of voices, it's like listening to two hundred screaming whispers at the same time. I'm picking up bits and pieces, but not enough to make sense of everything."

"Is this it?" Airman Greer asked suddenly.

Sergeant Douglas ran to his side and looked at the control panel.

"It looks like it could be..." Sergeant Douglas began to say, then gasped, "Oh shit!"

"What?" Airman Greer asked in panic.

Sergeant Douglas pointed to a neighboring CRT which was displaying the self-destruct countdown.

"Oh shit." Airman Greer whispered.

Sergeant Douglas keyed his mic and said, "Major Stanley, we've gained entry to a control room where the auto-destruct is counting down and we've found the hidden base. There's just over five minutes left on the countdown, not enough time to get all these people to safety. Once I open the door it's going to be chaos. Is there anything we can do to help you disarm the explosives before we release the captives?"

"We have one explosives package disarmed and we've discovered three more that we're working on now. We should be able to disable the detonators within five minutes. Unfortunately, we can't be sure that these are the only embedded explosives. Release your captives and get them as far away from the dam as possible... Save as many as you can." Major Stanley finished gravely.

"Yes sir." Sergeant Douglas said, then pulled the lever that Airman Greer had discovered.

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The groaning sound as a mechanism activated was loud enough to be felt, as well as heard.

"Come on!" Sergeant Douglas barked as he ran for the door.

"Where are we going?" Airman Greer asked as he followed.

"The door is opening. We need to find out where it is." Sergeant Douglas said as he hurried into the hallway, then suddenly stopped.

Airman Greer looked around in confusion and couldn't do anything but wait.

Finally, Sergeant Douglas said, "This way!" As he took off running.

"You really *are* psychic, aren't you?" Airman Greer asked as he followed.

"Yeah. But that's less helpful right now than you would think. There are several telepaths and empaths scared half out of their minds right now all calling out at once. It's almost impossible for me to think clearly."

When they approached double doors, Sergeant Douglas didn't even bother with trying the handle, he simply kicked with all his might and it was as though the doors had been hit with an explosion. Both doors were knocked off their hinges and went skittering across the floor in different directions.

"You're more than a psychic, aren't you?" Airman Greer asked suspiciously.

"Now's not the time!" Sergeant Douglas said as he hurriedly looked around, then said, "Over there!"

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The room was vibrating with the sound of heavy machinery to a degree that walking was difficult.

Airman Greer followed Sergeant Douglas on unsteady feet to the source of the sound just as it stopped.

"What now?" Airman Greer whispered into the suddenly silent room.

"Now we get to be the heroes." Sergeant Douglas said simply, then started walking down the long ramp.

Chapter 2

"Are you here to save us or kill us?" A sandy blond haired boy dressed in blue asked cautiously when he noticed Sergeant Douglas' multiple weapons.

"Listen, we've got people disarming the explosives right now, but we can't be sure that we've found them all. We need to get everyone out of here and as far away from this place as possible. We've got less than five minutes." Sergeant Douglas said urgently.

"Got it." The blond boy said, then turned and started issuing orders with a general's authority.

"Korbin! Will you get some of the stronger guys together to help carry out the unconscious?"

"Yeah, I'm on it. Kyle, I need you over here!" The boy in red called.

"Kenyon, will you and Jason lead the way out? Get everyone as far away from here as possible."

"We're not leaving without you." A boy in orange responded.

"I'll be right behind you. I just need to be sure that no one's left behind."

"Luke, stay with Joseph and make sure that he gets out. We're trusting you." The boy in orange, Kenyon, said firmly.

"I'll make sure he stays safe." The young man dressed in brown said earnestly.

"You ready?" Joseph asked Sergeant Douglas seriously.

"Yeah. Come on. This way." Sergeant Douglas said as he turned and hurried back up the ramp.

"Anyone who's ready to get out of this place, it's time to go! Follow Kenyon and Jason!" Joseph called loudly.

* * * * *

When they reached the stairway, Sergeant Douglas instructed Airman Greer to stop and help guide any stragglers to go in the right direction.

Once Sergeant Douglas had crested the last flight of stairs, he led the seemingly never ending flow of teenagers through the darkness and finally out to a main hallway.

"Follow this hallway and it should take you to an exit door. I need to make sure that no one gets lost in the dark." Sergeant Douglas said to Kenyon.

"No. You know where we're going. You need to lead the way. Teddy and I can make sure that people are going the right way from here." An older looking boy in gray said from beside Kenyon.

"Theodore." The boy in white corrected his companion under his breath.

"Right." Sergeant Douglas said, then handed the boy in gray his flashlight.

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As soon as the first of them exited the main doors, Sergeant Douglas called out, "Anyone who's able, you need to run! We can't have more than a few minutes left and we need to get as far away from here as possible! Go that way!"

"Jason was right, you need to *lead* them. I'll let people know which way to go." The boy in orange, Kenyon, said as he stopped outside the exit door.

"All personnel, we've disarmed the last known explosive but there's no way to know if there are any more. Rendezvous at Captain Stewart's location in the east parking area." Major Stanley said over the comm device.

"Major Stanley, I'm leading the captives from the secret base away from the dam. There's about two hundred of them. Do you want them at the parking lot or should we go directly for the plane?"

"There's too much we don't know. As soon as we've sussed out the captives' situation, I'll contact Colonel Hayes for further instructions. Remember, we were sent here to gather intelligence. It's not up to us to decide what's going to happen next." Major Stanley said firmly.

"Yes sir. I'll do what I can to compile a summary of their situation for you." Sergeant Douglas said professionally as he glanced behind him to see that the seemingly endless marathon of running teenagers was still following.

* * * * *

There was a sudden low ::boom::, then a distant rumbling.

"What was that?" A girl in blue asked fearfully as she approached Sergeant Douglas from behind.

"I'm guessing that that was one or more of the bombs that were originally intended to destroy the dam, and kill you in the process." Sergeant Douglas said frankly.

"But what about everyone else? Shouldn't we go back and see if anyone's trapped?" The girl asked desperately.

"My team has been ordered to rendezvous in a parking area not far from here. Once everyone has assembled, Major Stanley may decide to send teams back to search for survivors. The best thing we can do right now is to be where we're expected to be." Sergeant Douglas explained seriously.

After another minute or so of running, the girl at his side said, "I'm Zarah."

"I'm on duty right now, so I'm Sergeant Douglas. But off duty, I'm Lee."

"You're awfully young to be in the army, aren't you?" Zarah asked cautiously.

"Not too long ago, I might have told you a long story about how that happened, but right now it doesn't matter. We're all just doing our best to handle the situations we find ourselves in." Sergeant Douglas said frankly.

"That's true." Zarah easily admitted.

"The parking lot should be just up ahead." Sergeant Douglas said, then was relieved to hear a voice on his comm device.

"Team members, report in and give status." Major Stanley called out over a roar in the background.

Lee keyed his mic, then calmly said, "Sergeant Douglas, proceeding toward rendezvous point."

"What's that rumbling sound?" Zarah asked nervously.

"I'm guessing that the dam was either breached or that some mechanism was triggered to allow a sudden unscheduled release of water." Sergeant Douglas said frankly.

"Are we going to drown?"

"No. I doubt that. The people downstream may be at increased risk, but we're high enough up that the water shouldn't bother us."

* * * * *

Sergeant Douglas and Zarah entered the parking lot rendezvous point and froze in place.

All that could be heard were gasps of horror from those who approached from behind them.

Before Sergeant Douglas could think of what he might possibly be able to do, Zarah loudly called out, "Oranges! I need for every one of you to grab a Gray and get to work! If they're even a little bit alive, I need for you to do what you can for them!"

Before Sergeant Douglas could question her orders, Zarah continued, "Greens and Yellows, start helping to get these bodies separated and laid out. If you catch any indication that they're still alive, call an Orange over to help them."

Sergeant Douglas looked at Zarah curiously and did a surface scan of her thoughts. What he found shocked him.

"Everyone else, get to work helping where you can. I know it's gross, but there's a chance that these people might have some answers to explain what's been done to us." Zarah said firmly.

When several people continued to stand around looking at her stupidly, she said more loudly, "Our answers are dying. Move!"

"You're *all* psychic?" Sergeant Douglas asked cautiously.

"Yeah. All in different ways." Zarah confirmed, then added, "Listen, now that I've had a few seconds to focus on you, I *know* who and what you are and where you're originally from. I understand that you've got lots of questions about us, so you have my permission to look into my mind and find whatever answers you might need. But right now, my people need me."

Sergeant Douglas vacantly stared at her for a long moment, then said, "I need to make a call."

"Do what you need to do..." Zarah said to him, then called out, "Come on everyone! There's got to be wounded mixed in with all these bodies! Let's help them while they've still got a chance!"

* * * * *

"Colonel Hayes, this is Sergeant Douglas from the Firebirds."

"Go ahead, Lee. Tell me what's going on there."

"I'm sure that Major Stanley will be giving you the official report soon, so I'll leave those details for him to explain. What I need to tell you right now is that the secret base hidden within the Hoover Dam was filled with about two hundred teenage psychics that were bred in the outside world, then abducted when Ashwood started his attacks. Their genetic material has been 'harvested' and from the look of it, retrieving it was the actual objective of the incursion."

"Did they get away with the genetic material?"

"It appears so. The genetic material was collected, the staff overseeing the collection and imprisonment of the psychics was slaughtered. And the self-destruct

mechanism was triggered to eliminate any evidence or useful genetic materials from falling into enemy hands."

"I've received a report that there was an explosion at the dam. How many were you able to save?"

"I don't know. We started leading them out before the explosion and they're still arriving. There are at least a hundred here at the rendezvous point and there could be another hundred making their way here."

"And they're all genetically enhanced?"

"No. It's been speculated that people with naturally occurring psychic abilities were identified as early as the 1900's and recruited for this program. They were selectively bred to produce the desired offspring with increasing psychic potentials."

"I assume that since you're contacting me directly that you haven't shared these facts with Major Stanley."

"No. But I spotted the hidden base and knew about the self-destruct when we entered the dam and he's suspicious of how I knew about it. I'm going to have to tell him something."

"Give him the UNIT standard line. I'll back you up. Do your best to keep him from finding out that your new friends have abilities."

"I'm afraid it might be too late for that. Some of my 'new friends' are able to perform psychic healing. Right now they're working to find survivors among the slaughtered lab workers."

"Then we're going to have to debrief the whole team and give this entire event a 'Top Secret' classification. I didn't want to have to do it that way, but it looks like it's out of our hands."

"What are we going to do with all of them?"

"Give me some time to work on that. It might help if you let me know what they would 'like' to happen next."

"I'll ask around."

"I have another call, probably Major Stanley, I'll get back to you when some decisions have been made."

"Thank you, Alvin. Lee out."

* * * * *

"What are you doing there?" Captain Stewart called out as she looked up from the patient that she had been working on.

Sergeant Douglas noticed and hurried to explain.

"Captain Stewart, I know it's going to be hard for you to believe, but some of these kids have psychic healing abilities. If you had a full hospital and staff at your disposal then there wouldn't be a need for them to do anything, but with things being as they are..."

"I've got a live one over here!" A girl in green called out suddenly.

As Captain Stewart started to move away, Sergeant Douglas quietly said, "Watch."

As much as Captain Stewart wanted to go and investigate, she held herself back and watched as two girls, one dressed in gray and the other in orange, hurried to where the green girl had called out.

"Doctor." Sergeant Douglas said to gain her attention, "These kids have a legitimate healing ability, but they can't do *everything*. It looks to me like the best way to help the most people will be to use the healers where they'll do the most good, then focus your expertise on doing what they can't."

"I need to get back to work." Captain Stewart said tersely as she walked away.

Although she hadn't given any outward indication of it, Sergeant Douglas could tell that she *had* listened.

* * * * *

"What happened?" Zarah asked suddenly, catching Sergeant Douglas' attention. When he turned he saw that she wasn't talking to him.

"There was an explosion. First there was a loud noise, then we couldn't see or breathe." The dirt covered boy said past gasping breaths.

"Are you okay, Aaron?" Zarah asked with concern.

"Yeah. I've been running. I just need to catch my breath." Aaron said as he sat heavily on the ground.

"What about the others? Did everyone get out?"

"I think so. Joseph is right behind me. He's helping people who can't keep up."

"That sounds like him." Zarah said fondly.

"What happened here?" Aaron asked as he looked around.

"It looks like the people who were keeping us captive were massacred when their masters came to collect our genetic material." Zarah said frankly.

"That brown guy with Joseph, is he one of them?"

"Yes. But don't worry. Luke's a sweet guy." Zarah assured him.

"What should we do now? Should we keep running?"

"No. We need to stay here but... Aaron, I need your help with something."

"With what?"

"The Browns are Luke's friends and family. He doesn't need to see this. We need to go back and stop him before he gets here." Zarah said decisively.

"You're in charge here, aren't you?" Aaron asked as he looked around.

"I'm doing my best to see that everyone has something to do to keep them from worrying." Zarah said frankly.

"I'll take care of Luke. You stay here and keep everyone doing what they need to do."

"Okay. Thanks Aaron."

* * * * *

"What was that all about?" Sergeant Douglas asked Zarah quietly.

"I'm just trying to spare a good person some unnecessary pain." Zarah said simply.

"But what if it's *necessary* pain?" Sergeant Douglas asked curiously.

"I'm not going to let it happen, so it doesn't matter." Zarah said simply.

"You're a lot more than you seem."

"So are you. What's your point?"

"It's not often that I run into someone on my own level."

"I assume that you're not referring to military training."

"I'm talking about those of us who've been manipulated and improved, sometimes it's hard for us to relate to unmodified people."

"How old are you?"

"Don't you already know?"

"I was just trying to make a point. We're both fifteen. In that most basic way, we *are* on the same level. But I don't want to make the mistake of reading more into it than what's really there."

"Maybe I *am* over analyzing it."

"And maybe you're not." Zarah said simply, then turned suddenly when a dirt covered boy in green ran up to her with a look of urgency.

"What's up, Wade?" Zarah asked with immediate concern.

"Lee, I need your help." Wade said quickly.

"Do you know who I am?"

"The greens are all telepaths. I thought you already 'read' me." Zarah said cautiously.

"It was quite a bit to take in all at once." Sergeant Douglas told her, then turned to Wade and asked, "What did you need, Wade?"

"I've been able to sense you since we left the dam. From the strength of your shields, you've got to be the strongest and best trained telepath here." Wade said quickly.

"I suppose that's true." Sergeant Douglas said warily.

"On the way here, I was able to pick up enough psychic chatter to find out about the Browns and what was done to them. I don't know if anyone has thought of this yet, but we've got a lot of unanswered questions and they *might* have some of the answers. You need to scan them, I mean *really* scan them. Go deep and find out everything that you can as fast as you can. Every minute that you wait could be another important fact that we're going to lose when one of them dies." Wade said firmly.

Sergeant Douglas looked to Zarah for her opinion of what Wade was asking him to do.

"It could turn out to be important. If even one of them knows who's behind all of this, it would be worth it." Zarah reluctantly agreed.

Sergeant Douglas looked over the parking lot strewn with corpses and finally said, "We'd better do it before my team arrives. They don't know anything about psychics and I doubt that they'll do anything to improve our situation."

"Wade, gather as many greens as you can get and start doing your own research. Lee doesn't know all the questions that we have, so he might not recognize the answers we're looking for when he comes across them." Zarah firmly instructed.

"Come on, Lee." Wade said urgently.

"Right behind you." Sergeant Douglas immediately responded.

* * * * *

As Sergeant Douglas dipped into the first mind, he was sickened by what he found.

Although the man had a name, it was mostly meaningless. Regardless of what potential this person might have once had, the ruthless indoctrination and constant reinforcement of bizarre religious programming made him into nothing more than an obedient slave for the elders; one of many.

After sifting through the revolting belief system, which seemed to center mostly on rules prohibiting any healthy form of sexual expression, Sergeant Douglas determined that the man didn't have any clue about the 'big picture' of what he had been trained all his life to do.

Any curiosity that the husk of a man might have once had, had been whipped out of him, mostly figuratively, over the course of his pathetic wasted life. He didn't question. He didn't speculate. That which didn't directly impact him or what he was expected to do, was consciously purged from his thinking.

By the time Sergeant Douglas withdrew from the mind, he felt like he might vomit. He opened his eyes and looked at the face of the man that he had been scanning and noticed a gray girl and an orange girl working to save his life.

He had to fight the urge to stop them. In his opinion, the man they were devoting so much care and attention to wasn't worth saving. He was less than an animal. Alive or dead, he was barely more than a broken mannequin, no longer fit to serve any purpose.

With more than a little trepidation, Sergeant Douglas delved into the next mind. There was a slight flicker of life left in the body, but he gave a little of his own mental energy to coax the mind to awaken.

The woman he scanned was no less vile or irredeemable than the man had been.

Along with the archaic religious teachings, there was also a formidable amount of self-loathing simply for the fact that she was a woman. She had the same incurious nature and single-minded dedication to her specific job, to the exclusion of all else.

In the woman's case, Sergeant Douglas found it curious within her memories that she had a family, but she seemed to have no emotional attachment to them whatsoever. In fact, she had no emotional attachment to anyone. She had her duty, which was monotonous and repetitive and in no way fulfilling.

"That one." Wade said as he pointed to a man with multiple abdominal wounds.

"What?" Sergeant Douglas asked as he withdrew from the woman's mind and tried to somewhat center himself.

"Read him. I think he might have something, but I can't go deep enough. I don't know if it's because I'm so new at this or if it's the drugs they gave me." Wade said seriously.

Rather than question further, Sergeant Douglas insinuated himself into the man's mind and immediately found that Wade had been right. The man had at least *some* concept of self-worth and was in some sort of supervisory or middle-management role within their organizational structure.

Although what he came across wasn't as much as he had hoped, he was at least able to come up with *something*.

"Doctor, report." A stern voice commanded.

Sergeant Douglas withdrew from the man's mind and turned to see Major Stanley approaching.

"Since we've been here, eight survivors have been located, two of those have since died. Only one has achieved consciousness, although I wouldn't count any testimony he might give as being credible. All he's really done is babble religious nonsense." Captain Stewart said clinically.

"Major, I may be able to help you with that." Sergeant Douglas reluctantly interjected.

"Report, Sergeant." Major Stanley said firmly.

Sergeant Douglas glanced around as he considered the information he was about to divulge. He finally determined that regardless of his decision at that moment, everyone present would be brought into the secret eventually.

"Major Stanley, I am part of a group that was genetically engineered to be enhanced soldiers and infiltrators. We're all highly telepathic and exceptionally strong." Sergeant Douglas said calmly, then paused for a moment to allow Major Stanley to process what he'd just been told.

"Colonel Hayes?"

"He's one of us, although he's been modified even further than I have."

Major Stanley slowly nodded and finally said, "I'm not accepting everything that you're saying as verifiable fact, but I'll continue to listen."

"Thank you sir." Sergeant Douglas said sincerely, then continued, "Although I wasn't told as much, I assume that I was included on this mission in case my *unique* skills might be of benefit."

"With them not knowing what the true objective was, I can see why they'd want someone like you on the team to gather intelligence." Major Stanley conceded.

"I wasn't able to gather too much information from the injured, mostly because they didn't have any. But I was able to get an overview of the operation inside the base; the chain of command and various different duties that needed to be regularly performed. I don't know how much use it will be to us, but it might be of interest to some of the captives." Sergeant Douglas said carefully.

"What can you tell me about the captives?" Major Stanley asked as he looked around.

"Although they're not from the same program that created me, they are from a similar program. All two hundred of them have a psychic ability..." Sergeant Douglas trailed off as he watched carefully for Major Stanley's reaction.

"Two hundred telepaths?" Major Stanley asked to verify.

"No sir. Two hundred people with different psionic abilities. From what I gathered from talking with them, only twenty to twenty five of them are telepaths... they're the ones in green." Sergeant Douglas added as an aside.

Major Stanley looked several feet away at Wade, who was leaning over a body.

As soon as he did, Wade looked up and said, "Yes, I am."

"Sir, I've contacted Colonel Hayes about the two hundred captives, so that he would have time to consider the options."

"On whose authority?!" Major Stanley barked.

"His, sir." Sergeant Douglas stated simply, then continued, "I have no doubt that this entire matter is going to end up being classified as 'Top Secret'. He needed to know the facts from the beginning if we were going to have any chance of containing it."

Major Stanley seemed to be considering for a moment, then looked around the parking lot littered with corpses.

"What are they doing?" He asked as he pointed to a gray boy and an orange girl at the side of a body.

"They're a healing team. The people wearing orange have a psychic healing ability. The ones in gray can sense pain and direct the healers to where the healing is needed." Sergeant Douglas said slowly.

"Can the doctor verify any of that?" Major Stanley asked cautiously.

"You'd have to ask her. Unless I'm given a compelling reason to do so, I don't read the thoughts of the members of my team." Sergeant Douglas said seriously.

"Is that it? Is your report complete?" Major Stanley asked cautiously.

"Yes sir."

"Then let me tell you what *I* think." Major Stanley said slowly. "You came into this knowing *exactly* where we were going and what our mission was. You knew about the self-destruct countdown and were sent here to rescue those captive teenagers. All this crap about psychic abilities is just a smoke screen to keep anyone from demanding answers to inconvenient questions. Everything from here on can be explained away as being a 'psychic vision' or some such nonsense so you'll never have to reveal who's pulling your strings and what you *really* know."

Sergeant Douglas remained silent as he watched the Major's facial expressions carefully.

After a moment to calm himself, Major Stanley said in a more reasonable voice, "Either way, the explosives were disarmed... well, most of them. Although there was *some* damage, the dam wasn't destroyed. Beyond that, the captives were rescued. The presence of supposed *psychics* doesn't change those facts. And since the president and Colonel Hayes seem to be supporting you in your story, I'll consider it a moot point."

There was a long silent moment as Major Stanley considered his next words.

"I think that since you claim that you are psychic and that these children are as well, that you should be in charge of them. You speak their language. I'm going to contact Colonel Hayes and see what he wants us to do next. Try to keep the kids from wandering away or getting into too much trouble." Major Stanley said firmly.

"Yes sir." Sergeant Douglas said smartly.

"Dismissed."

* * * * *

"Colonel Hayes, we've left the dam and have rendezvoused at a parking area to the east. There was an explosion at the dam and some release of water."

"I've just been in contact with the staff at the dam. They report that the damage to the dam is significant and are requesting aid to make repairs. I've already dispatched work crews to assist them. The staff assured me that their personnel have all been accounted for and that they will be able to manage until the work crews arrive."

"Sergeant Douglas mentioned that he had already reported to you about finding the secret base. Are we going to evacuate them or establish a camp for them in the local area?"

"Considering the lengths that the enemy forces have gone to to eliminate them, I think that evacuation is our best option. I've dispatched two more planes to aid in their evacuation. All tolled, how many casualties are you reporting?"

"Captain Stewart reports six survivors among the fifty or so who were massacred at the parking lot. On my way here, I counted approximately eight unconscious children being carried by their comrades. It's possible that there are more, but those are all that I'm aware of."

"Major, we can't be sure that there isn't an airstrike inbound. Load the casualties and the leaders from the secret base on your plane and take off as soon as possible. Return to Fairchild and await further orders."

"Yes sir."

* * * * *

"Sergeant Douglas, we have new orders." Major Stanley said as he approached.

"Yes sir." Sergeant Douglas said as he snapped to attention.

"Walk with me." Major Stanley said as he started walking, not waiting to see if Sergeant Douglas was going to follow.

Sergeant Douglas fell in beside Major Stanley, matching his pace.

"Can you really read minds?" Major Stanley asked cautiously.

"Yes sir. I really can." Sergeant Douglas said simply.

"And all the other stuff that you claimed about your new friends, you really believe all of that?"

"Yes sir. They're young and their abilities have just awakened, so they don't have the power or the skill to use their abilities effectively, but they *do* have abilities."

"If what you're saying is true, and I'm not saying that it is, then humanity may have just taken a fatal turn. In their quest to create a better person, they've lost what it

means to be human. In essence, they've made themselves obsolete by creating creatures that can surpass them in every way." Major Stanley said thoughtfully.

"Sir. We're looked upon as genetic experiments... or weapons. We weren't created to replace you, we were created to be controlled and used by you. *We're* not the monsters." Sergeant Douglas said calmly.

"I suppose it's the age-old question of the sins of the father. You had no say in your own creation, yet you still have to bear the consequences."

"Yes sir. But regardless whether we were conceived in a womb or a petri dish, we're still people. Despite how or why any of us were created, we've each got a personal responsibility to help each other and try to do what's best for all of us."

Before they could say more, they arrived at Captain Stewart's side.

Major Stanley keyed his comm and said, "Sergeant Barnes, I need you to meet with me at Captain Stewart's location in the east parking lot."

"I'm right here, sir." Sergeant Barnes answered before Major Stanley had released the mic button.

"I've been given our new orders. More planes are being dispatched to evacuate the captive children back to Fairchild. To do that we're going to need to split the load *at least* three ways. That also means splitting the team three ways. Sergeant Barnes, if you have the equipment to do so, I'd like for you to make arrangements for us to be able to stay in contact with each other whether we're here, on the plane or in Washington state."

"Yes sir. It may take a few minutes, but I think I have everything I need." Sergeant Barnes responded.

"Get to it then. Dismissed." Major Stanley said simply, then turned and continued, "Captain Stewart, we're going to evac all your patients to the plane, they'll be going out on the first flight. Commandeer anyone you need to help you relocate the survivors and start moving them as soon as you're ready."

"Yes sir." Captain Stewart said immediately.

"Sergeant Douglas, Colonel Hayes has said that he would like the leaders of the captive group out on the first transport. Gather them and get them loaded."

"Yes sir."

"I noticed on the way back from the dam that they also had some casualties. Make sure that they also get loaded and that Captain Stewart has a chance to have a look at them."

"Yes sir." Sergeant Douglas said again.

"Dismissed."

* * * * *

"Zarah, do you have a minute? I need your help." Sergeant Douglas asked cautiously.

"What do you need?" Zarah asked while keeping the majority of her attention on what was going on with the Browns.

"We've been ordered to gather the leaders of your group and take them back with us on the first flight out. I'm just not sure... is that going to throw everything into chaos for your people when you leave?"

"I won't be leaving. You need to get with Joseph. He's the leader of the blues and beyond that, he's had the most contact with all the other leaders." Zarah said simply.

"Oh, from the way you automatically took charge, I thought that you were running everything."

"I usually am. I take charge when Joseph's off dealing with other situations... like he is now."

"Do you know where he is?" Sergeant Douglas asked as he looked around.

"I've heard that he made it here, but I haven't seen him yet. Try backtracking the way we came and you'll probably run into him." Zarah said thoughtfully.

"I'm probably going to have to leave with the first plane as soon as we can get everyone loaded. So, just in case I don't see you again, stay safe."

"You too."