

\*The Cyborg de Milo and the Aliens\*

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The Cyborg de Milo crept silently down the tortuously-twisting streets of the ancient metropolis on Henry V. The city had been built ten millennia ago by a long-vanished race, and had stood empty until the aliens set up their headquarters there after decimating the Navy.

She was tempted to use the torch that had been embedded in one of her fingers, but torches attracted attention, and Men with torches weren't supposed to be here, so she resisted the temptation.

The Cyborg had no particular destination in mind, just a general pattern of destruction. But it couldn't begin too soon. There were at least five hundred aliens stationed in the city, and she didn't want to broadcast her presence until she lowered the odds a bit.

She had hoped to keep to the alleyways, but there weren't any. Her next notion was to go underground and make her way via the sewer system, but she had no map of it, and she didn't relish trying to find her way with no maps and no landmarks. So, keeping as near to the irregular structures as she could, she continued stalking silently among the ancient buildings.

She was fast approaching a very sharp corner, and suddenly she could hear voices -- alien voices -- somewhere up ahead of her.

The voices grew clearer and louder, until she estimated that they were no more than thirty yards from the corner. Her first inclination was to duck into the doorway of the nearest building until they passed. Then she discovered that it didn't have a doorway. She backtracked a few steps, found a small alcove between the building and the one she had just passed, and darted into it. Then she crouched down and waited.

Five aliens in military uniforms suddenly came into view as they turned the corner. One of them had an extremely high-pitched voice, but she couldn't discern any other difference among them.

She looked up and down the street, made sure no one else was around, then pointed two of her deadly fingers at the group. Three fell to the laser, two to the incredibly powerful beam of solid sound.

She ducked back into the shadows and squatted down, waiting to see if anyone had spotted the carnage. Before long her calves and thighs began cramping up, and she carefully leaned forward, momentarily assuming the position of a runner in the starting blocks, alternately stretching each leg out behind her.

The Cyborg waited for almost three minutes, then carefully stood erect, stuck her head out, looked in both directions, and quickly walked to the corner.

The street soon made a 160-degree turn, almost doubling back on itself, and simultaneously narrowed to a point where it was less than ten feet wide. She felt very claustrophobic as she kept walking and the street kept narrowing. Within another hundred yards she had to walk sideways, with her back pressed against a wall, to pass between buildings on the opposite sides of the alien street.

Then it broadened again, not slowly and gradually, but abruptly, and in a single stride she went from a street so narrow that it seemed like a corridor to a thoroughfare so wide that she thought for a moment that she was in a large public square.

There was no artificial illumination, but the moon Catherine de Valois was directly overhead, and none was needed. It was almost bright enough to read by the moonlight, and she realized that she had almost three hundred yards to walk before the street narrowed again, three hundred yards in which there were

no lampposts, no benches, no trash atomizers, nothing to hide behind, and she would be the only living, moving thing.

She considered traveling via the rooftops, but very few of the buildings were remotely similar in height and structure. The sewers were out, too: even if she had a map, which she didn't, she didn't know how to go about finding an entrance to them.

Finally she decided that there was no alternative to crossing as quickly and silently as she could, and this she proceeded to do, staying as close to the buildings on the left side of the street as possible. When she had covered slightly more than half the distance, she saw an alien staring at her from a fourth-story window.

She pointed her finger at him, and he tumbled down to the ground, the hole between his eyes still smoking. She expected to hear outraged screams, or alarm sirens, or approaching footsteps, or something, but nothing happened, and in another ninety seconds she had turned another corner and found herself on a street that, for a change, seemed neither too wide nor too narrow.

She stepped into some deep shadows as two more aliens came into view. She was taking aim at them when they entered a small building. Curious, she approached it and tried to peer in, but the windows were too high.

Then a trio of aliens began approaching, and she once again hid in the shadows and watched as they entered the building.

This had to be it -- the enemy's barracks.

She went around back, looking for a less conspicuous entrance -- and couldn't find one. She spent a few more minutes trying to figure out how to gain surreptitious entrance to the building, and couldn't hit upon a solution. At last she leaned against a wall while considering her options -- and almost fell over backward when a four-foot-wide section of the wall slid behind a miscolored part of the building.

She looked around quickly, before the wall slid back and plunged the interior of the building into total darkness, and found a narrow staircase. She shone her finger's torch on it just long enough to fix the height of each stair in her mind, and then slowly, carefully, began ascending. Eighteen stairs later she reached a landing.

She activated her torch again and examined the landing carefully. There were four doors -- one open, three closed. She walked to the open one and looked in. There was no one there.

She returned to the landing, studied the other three doors, and chose one at random. She opened it, found herself facing some twenty aliens in various stages of sleep and undress, and began firing. This time a number of them screamed before dying, and she raced back to the landing, waiting for more aliens to burst out of the other two doors.

As quickly as they ran out, she mowed them down.

"Who are you?" cried one of the aliens who had not yet emerged.

"I am your death, come to seek you out," she answered. "As I seek out all who attack the race of Man."

The alien yelled something in his own language, and got an immediate response from a different room.

The Cyborg decided that since her presence was probably known to the whole city by now, secrecy was unnecessary. She aimed a finger at the ceiling, fired a ball of energy into it, listened to the screams from

within the rooms as the building began collapsing, and raced down the stairs.

She walked out into the open, surprised that there wasn't an armed battalion waiting for her.

"It can't be this easy," she muttered -- and sure enough, it wasn't.

As she rounded a corner, she found herself facing a dozen aliens. She heard a scuffling sound behind her, turned, and saw that five more aliens were behind her.

"You are our prisoner!" said one of the aliens in front of her. "Make no sudden moves."

She looked around as the alien approached her. There was no chance of reaching the temporary safety of a building before they gunned her down.

"Where are your weapons?" demanded the alien.

"I have none."

"Do not lie to me. You have killed more than twenty of us."

"More than forty, actually," she replied.

"Where are they?"

She pointed toward the aliens that were facing her. "Beyond that building," she said.

The alien peered ahead of him. "Which building?"

She looked at the armed aliens. They were relaxed, secure in the knowledge that she was unarmed, that their commander was in complete control of the situation.

She lowered her finger until it pointed directly at them.

"That one."

And then, before anyone quite knew what was happening, she sprayed the aliens with a laser beam. In one motion she pivoted, crouched, and turned the beam on the five aliens behind her. One of them actually managed to get off a shot -- a wild one -- before he died; the others all lay where they had fallen.

"I don't believe it!" said the alien commander. "You are a mere female!"

"There's nothing mere about me," she said ominously. "Drop your weapons."

He did as he was told.

"Have you got a knife or a sword?"

He leaned down and picked up a knife from the pile of discarded weapons.

"You're about to learn what a motivated female can do," she said, as a shining blade sprung out from one of her fingers.

"And you will use no weapon but that?" he asked.

"It's all I need."

A smile cross his alien face, and he charged her, knife extended. She sidestepped and slashed his forearm.

He spun around, swiped at her with the knife, then charged again -- and got slashed again for his trouble.

"I would not like to be your mate," he muttered, approaching her more cautiously this time.

"It's not something you're ever going to have to worry about," she said, feinting with the blade and landing a solid kick to his knee.

"You are already dead," panted the alien, barely able to support his weight on his crippled leg. "You just don't know it."

"I never liked braggarts," she said, slashing his left cheek. "Especially pompous male braggarts."

"I am not bragging," he said. "I know I cannot defeat you. But I don't have to. I just have to keep you here for another minute, and then more of my warriors will arrive, so many that even your weaponry will be useless against them."

"Then we've no time to waste, have we?" she said, stepping in close and burying her blade deep in his chest. He groaned once and fell lifeless to the ground.

The Cyborg de Milo wiped off her blade, then allowed it to slip back into her artificial finger.

She began counting. There were the first five she had killed. Then the one in the window. There were seventeen here on the street. And despite what she'd claimed, she was sure there at least fifty more inside the barracks building.

Seventy-three total. Maybe even a few more. Not bad at all.

And the night was young yet. She looked up and down the street, ready to add to the total.

There were no aliens in sight. Possibly they were hiding. Or regrouping. Or plotting strategy.

It made no difference. Wherever they were, she would find them. Whatever attack they planned, she would face it. She was the Cyborg de Milo, and this was what she was created for -- what she had created herself for.

She began walking slowly down the middle of the street.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are," she called ominously.