



Tap. Tap. Tap.

Mick's fingers sluggishly trudged across the keyboard, typing a series of letters and numbers he was only vaguely cognizant of. Day after day, week after week, for years Mick lived in the same city, rode the elevator to the thirty-second floor of the same office building, and sat behind the same desk, all for a paycheck he barely considered enough to live with.

He wasn't even sure what his job consisted of anymore. He just entered data into a computer for hours on end. Where it went, much like where it came from, Mick had forgotten with time.

His only respite was the people around him, the poor souls who, like himself, were locked in the eternal wheel of corporate servitude. Each and every one of them had been given a prison cell, a small partitioned cubicle arranged perfectly across the office floor. His fellow inmates made the time they served together somewhat bearable, although today one of them was noticeably absent.

It wasn't until the elevator pinged open and the doors parted that Mick realized his co-worker was merely running late. The tardy man approached their work area with a hurried shuffle to his steps, but it was the large gauze bandage taped over his eye that drew Mick's attention.

"Damn, Luis," he said. "What happened to you?"

Luis slipped into his seat behind Mick and swiftly turned on his computer. "Had a fishing accident yesterday. Caught a hook right in my—"

"You know what?" interrupted the woman who sat behind him. "You don't have to tell us. We can fill in the rest ourselves."

"Thanks, Sam," Luis responded, sarcastically. "Always good to know you care."

She flashed him a closed smile. "Anytime."

"Could they save it?" Mick asked, concerned. "The eye, I mean."

"Nope. I'm officially a Cyclops. Wanna see?"

Luis leaned into Sam's cubicle with a hand on his bandage, ready for the big reveal.

"Hard pass," she said, rolling her eyes.

Having given up on work for the time being, Mick spun around in his chair to face them. "Right back to the office the next day too. Take note, Sam. Someone's gunning for employee of the month."

"He can have it," she said, her face buried inside her cubicle. "The last thing I want is my picture on the wall of this place, better known as the seventh circle of..."

Sam let her sentence trail off and turned to the aisle where their boss approached. He relaxed against the side of Mick's cubicle, smugly caressing the cheap suit that was a size too big.

"How's everything going?" he asked in an obnoxiously chipper voice.

"Just fine, Jamal," Luis replied, doing a fairly decent job at sounding cordial.

Jamal leered down at them, an eyebrow raised and his lips half-smirking. "I hear an awful lot of chatter over here."

"We're not allowed to talk to each other?" Mick asked, too annoyed to hide the disdain in his voice.

"Of course you are," Jamal replied, pushing off of the cubicle. "As long as you're working. But this trio scored the lowest numbers in the company last week."

Sam glanced at both Mick and Luis before looking back to Jamal.

"We're...sorry?"

"Management doesn't want apologies. They want results. Think you can turn those frowns upside down today?"

"We'll certainly try to," Mick grumbled under his breath.

"That's the spirit, Mick!" Jamal playfully clapped him on the shoulder before shooting Luis and Sam a finger gun with each hand. "Stay frosty, gang."

He went back down the aisle.

"Frosty?" Luis repeated.

"Those 'how to be cool' lessons he's taking are really paying off," Sam said with a laugh.

The men tried to restrain their chuckles but failed. Within moments they were all laughing together, and the giggles persisted until the office secretary tore in between their cubicles, her aghast face white with shock.

"You guys seen it yet?" she asked, her panicked words jumbled together.

Sam perked up in her seat and stared at the woman with a wide-eyed, theatrical smile. "Hey, Gwen. Good morning, Gwen. Nice to see you, Gwen."

"Can you not be sarcastic for one second?" Gwen scoffed while leaning over Sam's desk. "This is serious."

She took over the keyboard and typed into the web browser until a video appeared on the screen showing a bizarre aircraft hovering over a city.

"What the hell?" Mick said, the words just slipping out of his mouth.

He stood and moved slowly towards the computer as if he were being pulled into it. As he drew closer, he realized the aircraft was unlike anything he'd seen before. That wasn't exactly true, though. He'd seen plenty of UFOs, in movies and TV shows. Never in a video, which Mick was just now noticing wasn't a video at all but a live feed. He leaned closer to the screen, and the familiarity of the skyscrapers hit him. He was looking at his own skyline. This was a live shot of his own city.

A wave of grumbled conversation rippled across the office. Mick looked up and saw a series of worried faces. It was only a matter of time before the brewing anxiety became all out panic.

"This is a joke, right?" he said, looking to Gwen.

She swallowed and shook her head. "I don't think so."

Her eyes were now transfixed beyond him, focused on the tall floor-to-ceiling windows at the end of the aisle. Mick followed her gaze and was struck by the large shadow cast over the city. He remembered it being sunny on his walk to work, and beyond the shadow the day's weather still seemed beautifully bright. It was only after approaching the glass did Mick spot the massive alien craft hovering in the sky.

"I...I don't believe it," he stammered, speaking more to himself than anyone around him.

"What do we do?" Luis asked, standing beside Mick with the same jaw-slacked expression.

"Everyone, just stay calm and remain at your desks," Jamal's voice bellowed out from the center of the office. "Any second now we'll be getting a call from corporate on how to handle the situation."

The commotion around the office only grew louder as people moved about the cubicles, completely ignoring their boss.

"Is he for real?" Sam asked on the verge of laughing.

Jamal raised his hands in the air, desperately vying for attention. "Seriously, people. Return to your workstations until—"

A loud boom outside the building cut him off. Everyone's eyes snapped back out the window to see a fireball in the distance rip a building in half. Scores of tight red lights shot from the ship overhead, indiscriminately blasting the city below. Explosions erupted across the urban landscape. Buildings, roads, cars, nothing seemed to be spared from the random destruction and chaos.

"This can't be happening," Luis said, shaking his head.

Mick glanced over his shoulder to find Jamal standing beside him. His jaw hung open, his eyes wide and paralyzed by fear.

"We can't stay here," Mick said, grabbing his terrified boss' shoulder. "We gotta get out of the building. We have to—"

Another boom, near-deafening this time, shot up from below. The floor beneath their feet rumbled and shook, teetering gently from side to side before slowly tipping over. Panicked screams rang across the office as the entire building began leaning. Computers, chairs, and desks flew through the air like projectiles before smashing through the windows and plummeting to the street.

"Hold on, everyone!" Mick shouted while reaching for the cubicle beside him.

Everyone followed his lead by grabbing ahold of the partition walls, which were secured to the floor. The building continued to lean further and further until it snapped completely. The skyscraper's top ten floors separated from its bottom half and began its slow, awkward descent through the air.

Perpetual shouts and cries for help were the backdrop to snaps and cracks as the cubicles buckled under the strain. One section behind Mick broke off completely, and he looked back over his shoulder to catch one last glimpse of Jamal dropping through the window. As his boss disappeared beneath the building, Mick could hear his screams right until the leaning building slammed into the skyscraper next door.

A cloud of dust instantly filled the office. Mick lost all sense of direction as he was tossed around like a ragdoll, spiraling head over heels in a jumbled mess of debris. Up was down and left was right. All Mick cared about was cradling his head while being thrown forward, colliding into who-knew-what in his path.

The chaotic noise subsided in an instant. From Mick's perspective he got right up after the crash, but the dust had vanished and the two collided buildings were already settled into one another. He must've been out for at least a couple of minutes. Everyone had been, for it seemed that the other survivors had only just begun to stir as well.

Mick looked up and saw one big blurry canvas. Everything was out of focus except for a single object floating in front of him. The white orb, a sphere, was roughly the size of a soccer ball and hovered peacefully in the air. If Mick didn't know any better, he could've sworn the thing was watching him through a lens that shifted and turned in and out of focus. When the camera orb was satisfied, it turned and flew out the giant hole in the side of the building, back to whatever bizarre master it came from.

The strange interaction left Mick with a million questions on top of the million he already had before his office building was shot down. They would have to wait, though.

He looked around and saw he was in an office space nearly identical to the one he worked in, minus the fact that all the desks, chairs, and cubicles were tossed around like a tornado swept through the room. Mick briefly found it ironic that he survived his building collapsing into another by being tossed into a clone of a work environment he hated, then he became thankful for the coincidence when he spotted the dozen or so bodies littered across the floor.

"Everyone, okay?" he asked the three blurry figures wobbling in front of him.

"Yeah. Absolutely," Sam's voice shot back from a hazy face. "Just trying to survive the alien apocalypse is all."

Mick rubbed his eyes, which brought Luis, Sam, and Gwen into focus. Their battered faces were covered in scratches and scrapes, their torn clothes thinly darkened

with blood. They appeared exactly as he felt, and Mick imagined he looked much the same way.

"We'll be okay," Luis said as he examined a gash in his arm.

As Mick rose he noticed nobody else besides the four of them were moving. They were the only ones to survive.

"Think the elevator is safe to take?" he asked while brushing himself off.

Gwen made a pained face and shook her head. "I'm not getting in that death trap."

"How're the stairs?" Mick asked Luis, who was already walking towards the stairwell.

Luis poked his head through the door. "Blocked with debris."

"What about up?"

Luis's swiveled as he looked in the opposite direction. "All clear."

"You really want to go to the roof with that ship up there?" Sam asked.

Mick shrugged. "I don't see any other option, do you?"

Luis joined the group, but nobody had any response.

"All right," Gwen said, her voice completely devoid of cheer. "Roof it is then."

The four of them entered the stairwell and began climbing. No one said a word, and their steps echoed in the concrete shaft. Muffled explosions continued to penetrate the building's thick walls, signs of the massacre still taking place across the city. Mick would've called it a battle, but he didn't want to get his hopes up.

Luis was the first to reach the door at the top of the stairs. He plowed into it without slowing down and everyone stormed onto the roof, stopping short when they saw what was waiting for them.

The ship looked gigantic up close, casting a shadow so dark Mick could easily mistake it for night. The alien craft continued to blast all around the city, which he barely recognized. It had become a wasteland of wanton destruction.

"This was a bad idea," Luis muttered at no one in particular.

"Look!" Gwen shouted.

It took a moment for Mick to make out the blemish drifting across the sky, but the whirling blades were unmistakable. He was looking at a helicopter.

"Help!" the group desperately shouted in unison while running to the edge of the roof and waving their arms. "Over here! Come help us!"

For a brief instant it seemed like the helicopter was veering to them when it exploded, engulfed by a massive ball of flames. A loud whizz cut through the air as a smaller alien ship, about the size of a car, zoomed through the floating wreckage on its way to the building.

"Run!" Mick screamed. "Get back inside!"

The group turned and began sprinting back, but the alien craft reached them in a second. It soared overhead, dropping a passenger on the roof as it passed. The alien landed in front of the four fleeing humans, stopping them in their tracks.

After everything that happened—the arrival of the alien ship, watching his boss fall to his death, surviving his office crashing into the building next door—Mick was somehow still shocked by the skinny figure standing nearly eight feet tall before him. The alien's legs appeared to be inverted, its knees protruding in the wrong direction. The being didn't have arms so much as long, gangly tentacles that continuously moved in all

directions. There were two necks that extended from its shoulders and held up a single head that oddly reminded Mick of a fish he owned as a child.

While he continued to stand in awe of the alien species, Luis let loose a battle cry and charged forward. Mick didn't know what he was thinking, but the move inspired him to do the same. The alien flicked Luis aside, but Mick was right there to punch the thing in its chest. Its flesh felt wet and squishy, but Mick's hand jerked back as if he'd just punched a brick wall.

Gwen and Sam charged too, jumping on the alien's back. The alien flailed and rocked side to side while continuing to fling its tentacles at the two men. It shook the women loose, sending Sam tumbling close to the edge of the roof. The alien didn't let up, though. It strolled to her and lifted its tentacle, preparing for a killing blow.

"Sam!" Mick shouted.

He lowered his shoulder and collided into the alien's back, sending them both flying towards the edge.

"Mick, no!" Sam's voice screamed as his body left the roof, beginning its free fall.

Mick closed his eyes. He didn't want to see the end coming. All he wanted was to feel the wind rushing against his face as he fell.

But it never came.

Mick opened his eyes and found himself engulfed by a yellow beam of light instead. He wasn't falling at all. His body was still, suspended in the air just below the roof. Mick looked up and saw the light pouring on him from the large alien ship above.

His body began floating upward, drifting higher and higher until he was over the edge of the roof and saw three more beams of light lifting his companions, as well. Gwen, Sam, and Luis rose towards an opening of bright light that emanated from the alien ship. Mick reached the light first and felt himself being absorbed into it. Glowing warmth enveloped his entire body until his eyes closed and all he saw was white.