



“What’s she doing?” Dad gasped at the TV, which showed Andrea Rio actually heading *towards* one of the giant robot dinosaurs, the camera on her shoulder. “She’s mad!”

“Brave,” I corrected him.

Before her, the robot dinosaur lifted one of its vast feet. Broken pieces of car, tree and masonry rained from the sole of the foot as it rose into the air. Andrea was undeterred. No giant robot dinosaur was going to stop her doing her job. She kept filming and describing the action as several military aircraft swooped past, firing rockets into the monster. Its foot came down again, crushing more cars, and people fled. Clouds of fiery smoke erupted where the missiles struck, but the robot dinosaur didn’t flinch and, as the smoke cleared, we saw that it was undamaged.

A host of superheroes swarmed into view now. One flew at the dinosaur like a spear. This was Armour Piercing Man. His name says it all but, on this occasion, he failed to pierce the armour, and bounced off it like a plastic toy. He disappeared through the wall of a nearby building, leaving an Armour-Piercing-Man-shaped hole.

From a walkway high above the city, Volcano Woman leapt, blasting the beast with great volcanic jets of magma that erupted from the palms of her hands. The magma settled on the beast’s body and began to blacken as it cooled, but it turned and whipped Volcano Woman away with its tail as if she were just a pesky fly.

Each hero took their turn: Gamma Girl, Glacier Man, Earthquake Woman and Death-Ray Darren—and each failed to harm the beast.

Andrea Rio pointed the camera at the pavement where a circular patch of it was cracking apart and, as we watched, the figure of a man came blasting out of it like a fish leaping out of the ocean. He did a somersault in the air and dropped to the ground, his feet either side of the hole he had made. His hands were on his hips and he was panting, but grinning. He wore a black suit with the emblem of an earthworm on his chest.

Beside me on the couch, Dad rolled his eyes. “Might’ve known he’d turn up,” he said. Then, remembering I was there, he said, “I mean... Yay! It’s Dave!”

“Ah,” Andrea Rio said. “Here is Earth Man to shed a little more light on the situation.” From the bottom of the TV picture, her arm extended, holding a microphone towards Earth Man. “Earth Man, what can you tell us?”

Earth Man—or Dave, my stepfather—took a moment to get his breath back and flicked a lock of his golden hair away from his eyes. Grinning into the camera, he said, “Giant robot metal dinosaurs!” and pointed at the towering beast, as if we might not have noticed it yet.

“Absolutely,” Andrea Rio agreed. “But where did they come from? And what do they want?”

“This is an alien invasion,” Earth Man announced. “A huge spaceship landed in the desert this morning, and these things have been spreading across the land ever since. There are hundreds of them. It seems they want our planet, and they are here to take it from us.”

“And how can we fight them?” Andrea Rio asked from out of shot. Behind Earth Man, the giant monster had swatted away all the superheroes who had attacked it and was gazing around with its glowing red eyes.

Earth Man shrugged, “No idea, Andrea. This might be the deadliest invasion we have ever had to face! Gotta go!” And with that, he dived back into the pavement as if it were a swimming pool, and he was gone.

Andrea Rio placed the camera on a bench and stepped back into view. Speaking directly to the camera, she said, “So there you have it. An invasion of giant, metal dinosaurs. Have the military and our superheroes finally met their match? We’ll keep you up to date as developments unfold. For now, it’s back to the studio for the weather and traffic.”

Andrea reached forward to pick up the camera. Behind her, the beast’s foot, which was the size of a military sky-drone, lifted and swung overhead. The air went dark as it blocked out the sun. The TV picture had not yet cut back to the studio, and Andrea could be heard saying to herself, “If that doesn’t win the News Anchor of the Year award, nothing will.”

As she grabbed the camera, it pointed upward for long enough to show the underside of the enormous foot filling the sky and descending with unstoppable force until the picture went black and, from the TV speakers, there came a buzzing, whistling sound. The news studio reappeared. The newsreader, a gentle-looking old man with white hair and a pink tie, was sitting at his desk with his mouth and eyes wide open. After a few seconds of staring at the camera, he managed to produce the words, “And now, the weather.”

“Buddy,” said Dad. Buddy chimed softly. “TV on silent.” The TV screen was now just a huge, silent weather map.

“Well,” I said. “That was all a bit...” I didn’t know how to finish my sentence.

“Yes,” Dad agreed. “Don’t worry about Dave, love,” he said. “He’ll be fine.” I wasn’t worried about Dave. Not one bit. He was having a whale of a time. I was still holding the bag he had given me though, so I could imagine why Dad felt I might be thinking about him.

Outside, over the city, several clouds of smoke now rose like rapidly growing trees made of soot. Military aircraft buzzed around them, and superheroes silently whizzed this way and that. Dad and I walked out onto the balcony and watched as more explosions shook the city. With each one, the building seemed to shudder. Among the tower blocks, we began to see sunlight glinting on the metal skin of the monsters as they came into view, and we heard the thumping of their feet.

From the balcony, Dad and I watched the plumes of smoke and heard the booming explosions getting ever closer. Between the buildings we could now see, with our own eyes, several of the metal monsters stomping along the streets, shattering the peace of the city. We could hear the screams of people fleeing for their lives. We could feel the ground beneath us shaking as if the building itself were trembling in fear. The robot dinosaurs had a deadly weapon: their eyes were sending fiery rays into the buildings, melting whole walls and spraying the streets with flame.

In the far distance, more and more explosions erupted into the sky. There must have been an army of these things!

“We should probably...” I began.

“Yeah,” said Dad. “We should.”

I turned and ran back into the flat, but Dad didn’t follow. “Come on, Dad!” I commanded, but he was still just standing there leaning on the balcony rail with one hand.

“I... can’t...” he managed, and he looked desperately sad. “You go.”

Behind him, a giant robot dinosaur was stomping towards the building. From the glowing eyes in its massive metal head, it was sending rays of death everywhere it looked, turning its head from side to side and blasting holes in buildings. The noise was ferocious, and I could taste dust and smoke. I shouted, “Dad! Come on!” Why was he just standing there?