

“How much further?”

“I don’t know. The minimap’s in the storage room.”

“Why couldn’t you have built the line gun instead? The explosive feature would be nice.”

“It’s not nearly as iconic. Keep swinging.”

“Next time, Ben? You can be Gordon Freeman and *I’ll* be Isaac Clarke. Okay?”

Ben, more widely known as the villain Leet, just sighed. “Ian, just how often do you expect *fucking hell-wolves* to come pouring out of the shadows?”

“This is Brockton Bay,” Uber replied. “Apparently, at least once.”

In the sealed Dead Space engineering hardsuit, Ben kept shooting the plasma cutter. The weapon, while iconic, could be hilariously lethal in the wrong hands just as it could be used for actual engineering and demolition work. So he’d tied its power to the suit, ensuring that the weapon’s internal battery couldn’t produce more than an electrical cutting torch on its own. Since the suit was sized to his body, he was unable to simply doff it and pass it to his friend. So Ian was stuck in Half-Life armor with a kinetic-amplifying crowbar while they tunneled through rubble.

Hindsight being 20/20, an underground lair wasn’t the brightest idea, especially when the servbot had crapped out before finishing the back exit. It had been a stroke of desperate genius to collapse the tunnel when the wolves had started pouring in, but now they were trapped inside with nothing but a kinetic crowbar, a plasma cutter, and the proximity-sensor from Halo. And a lot of soda and junk food, so at least they wouldn’t starve.

Internet and phone connection worked, and they’d updated their fans on their survival. But while they could call for help, that would entail revealing their location. So the two friends continued to slowly cut through the rubble until they could get through, to Leet’s heavily-shielded storage room. Then they could grab the Garry’s Mod grav-tether and just haul the rocks out of there.

“So,” Ian started, “I’ve been thinking.”

“That tone fills me with dread.”

“Look, we just had to deal with hell-wolves. Now we’re tunneling our way out of our own hideout. Bloodmoon’s wandering around doing God-only-knows-what: I don’t fancy her showing up and turning one of our streams into the creepypasta version of the game.”

Ben sighed again, switching on the cutter’s safety and turning to face his friend. “What’re you saying, man?”

Uber held up his hands placatingly. “Not that we hang up our hats, dude. But that we find somewhere else to hang our hats. The Bay’s too dangerous. Even if Wolf Day never happens again, Bloodmoon still lives here.”

Leet paused to think on his friend’s words. “...I hear Delaware’s nice this time of year.”

(BREAK)

Bloodmoon had not been active over the last few days. The presumed reason was that she was unneeded. The ABB was broken and survivors tended to surrender themselves to police or PRT forces in exchange for medical attention – either for themselves or their loved ones.

Lung was still missing, though more than one extraction team had called in a preemptive warning due to the feeling of malevolent eyes watching them.

The National Guard and several local PDs had been called in to help with the population's return to their homes. Surprisingly, there had been very little damage to homes once the people within had been evacuated: the wolves had pursued humans to the exclusion of all other potential targets. Death was their intent, not destruction. At the very least, this meant that in many cases there was little to do in order to make the homes safe and livable. With the best assurances from WEDGDG that there were no more of those monsters in the city, and Bloodmoon's word that the invasion had been halted, Mayor Christner worked with Director Piggot to help return people to their homes – and, more importantly, to their businesses.

Max Anders, CEO of Medhall Pharmaceuticals, generously offered up significant donations to help maintain the city's functionality. Not only did this ingratiate him to the people and further establish Medhall as a positive institution, but big movements of money helped cover up the smaller bribes and transfers from Gessellschaft as the footsoldiers of Empire 88 covertly fled to nearby small towns. Anders would fund their departure, aid with the logistics, and then wash his hands of the gang. With someone like Bloodmoon on the loose, being associated with a criminal enterprise was only a health hazard.

The event now widely referred to as Wolf Day had lasted fewer than 24 hours, yet was on track to permanently change the structure of Brockton Bay. The people of the city could only hope that it wouldn't be another incident like the capture of Marquis, where the Bad Old Days gave way to the Worse New Days.

(BREAK)

Taylor, of course, seemed to care for none of this. Having borrowed a bicycle from another dockworker family's house, she made frequent trips from the Hebert family home to Brockton General to visit her father. Danny was recovering well, but his brain still showed an amount of swelling and the doctors wished to monitor him. Kurt, Lacey, and Frankie alternated keeping the vigil for Dan, Alexander, and others at the hospital: all of them took the time to compliment Taylor's choice of clothing.

Not currently at Winslow, Taylor didn't bother with the oversized hoodies and loose jeans. A button-up shirt and narrow slacks comprised her outfit, long hair spilling down her shoulders and back – and, of course, no glasses. The girl looked confident, healthy, strong. None of her father's friends, her family friends, questioned that Taylor could look after her home while Danny convalesced. Of course, they all presumed that she was at one of the shelters, not that she was still living at the house.

Brockton General, of course, was also where Alan Barnes was being looked after for his lost hand. Emma stayed with her dad as often as possible – not simply to keep him company, but because she'd rather not stay in one of the trailers, piled in with other women and girls. Until she could sleep in her

own bed, she'd be bitter. However, on the day when people were being ushered back to their homes, Emma was the one on rotation to spend time with her father. And as she impatiently paced through the halls to try and burn off her boredom, she caught sight of someone passing through another hallway. It took a double-take, but there was no denying it.

Taylor strode through the hall like a model on a catwalk, back straight and head high as her hair trailed behind her like coils of smoke. Her clothes were decent, fitted to her body. While Taylor still didn't have much of a feminine figure, she was slender and elegant, and her powerful frame reminded of a world-class athlete.

What right did she have to do that? What right did she have to be beautiful, while Emma's family couldn't even get regular showers? What gave Taylor the right to be confident and look well-rested? Why did she think she could get away with that?

By the time Emma shook off her shock and gave chase, the elevator doors were all closed and she had no idea which one was Taylor's conveyance. But that had reignited her rage, and Emma would follow through on her plan the moment things went back to normal enough for her to slip away.

(BREAK)

Only a few days was nowhere near enough time to train someone to fight. Greg was a surprisingly quick learner, however, and while he was still a wet noodle he at least knew how to throw a proper punch more often than not.

Once he was exhausted, Sophia would keep going through her own katas to keep her skills sharp, and Greg would talk at her – with her. He started out yammering about that Space Opera game just to fill silence, but then he moved to TV and movies, surprising her that he liked a lot of the same stuff that she did. Greg approached things from a different angle, however. Sophia liked big explosions, flashy fight scenes and gratuitous violence. Greg enjoyed all of that, he was a typical teen boy after all, but his weird conspiratorial obsession applied there as well and he'd babble about the symbolism of certain scenes or characters' underlying motivations. She didn't always believe him, but it was interesting, the idea that there could be greater purpose to kicking ass than just beating down bad guys. She'd heard various PR stuffed-suits waffle on about sending the right message, but it didn't take root until she saw Greg Veder's eyes shine.

“Do you think that's what she's doing?” Sophia suddenly interjected, looking past Greg.

“And– W-wait, she? What?” He completely lost his rhythm.

“Taylor. Do you think she's doing this to make a point? For...symbolism?”

Greg shrugged. “I don't know about symbolism, but there's definitely a point to it. She's never just gone after random criminals. I don't know how she finds out, but her targets have always been important: weapon shipments, sex slavers, drug distribution. It's like *Taken*: she has a very particular set of skills. And she's using those skills to clean up the city.”

“More than the city. Don't forget Ziz and Nilbog.”

He smiled. “Yeah. I think she’s trying to use her abilities to do the most good. Somehow she’s a stone-cold killer, and she’s leveraging that to make the world a better place for everyone else.”

Not just taking opportunities to hurt and kill acceptable targets... Hunting and selecting her prey to maximize the good done for others... More than the realization of Taylor’s power, thinking about the taller girl made Sophia feel very small.

(BREAK)

Bribery was a good way to get police and military to look the other way. A powerful Master effect was more reliable. “Let us through. We are more refugees, from the...” Elijah trailed off for a moment before his mother Christine’s voice whispered in his ear. “...the trainyards. You will provide us escort back to our hovels.”

“*Good boy,*” Mama Mathers whispered in his sense of hearing. “*Don’t forget the insurance.*” He never would, but his self-compulsion to enjoy his subservience prevented the normal bitterness he would feel at her presumption of his incompetence.

“If anyone finds out about our arrival, kill them and then yourself.”

Christine called the rest of her cult to join in the immigration. They would infest Brockton Bay, find Bloodmoon...and then the various aspects of the Fallen would test her to see if she was truly as worthy as Mama Mathers seemed to believe.

In the dying light from the overcast evening sky, dozens upon dozens of haggard souls poured into the city like gangrene into a wound.