

I quickly made my way to my room and hurriedly stripped out of my suit. Despite being tempted to just throw the fancy stuff into a pile in the corner of my room, I carefully laid them out on my bed to take care of later. I had a sneaking suspicion that I would need them again eventually, so I was better off storing them properly. I quickly got dressed, pulled on my bulletproof vest, and clipped on my belt, double-checking that I had everything that I would need.

After confirming for myself that my pistol still contained all of its bullets, despite having used it to execute Valentine, I rushed back down to the first floor. Alissa and Molly were still sitting in the dining area, and after a quick goodbye, I left the bastion behind. As always, the rising tension I felt as I crossed the large field surrounding the bastion was hard to fight through. It urged me to turn back, to hide where it was safe. Thankfully, I could still shake it off, though part of me did question my choice in rewards. After all, if I had chosen power strike, I would have had a better chance at survival, a way to fight back.

I shook my head and pushed the self-doubt down and out of my mind. Increasing the abilities of the bastion was the right call to make. Every improvement increased the chances that it would survive and prosper, and the ability to use small electronics without worrying about generators or anything was a significant boon.

I just hope that the following few rewards were ones that helped with individual survival, myself included.

I slowly but surely made my way through the streets of Danten, crossing through yards and sneaking behind buildings as I went, making steady progress to the high school. I was definitely pushing for speed a bit more than I would have normally felt comfortable with, but I wanted to get there before they left. Jessica didn't quite feel like the most patient of people.

When I finally arrived at my destination, I paused at the last row of buildings that encircled the school. The exterior of the large place of learning had changed a lot since I had been a student, but the clearing it was built in had primarily remained the same. In front of the building was a small park-like area, centered around a flagpole. The paths in the park led to the school's front entrance, which was built along one side of one of the campus's large structures. From this distance, I could see into more than a few classroom windows, all of them dark.

Beyond the first structure were two more wings of classrooms, a large structure that I was pretty sure housed the school's gym, as well as three smaller buildings built out of and connected to the three main wings. There was also a large football field, a track, and a baseball field, though I could only see the baseball field from where I was standing. All in all, the Danten Public High School was significantly bigger than it had been when I was a student. From where I was, I had no idea what part of it Barry and Jessica were staying.

Thankfully, as I was watching the building, I spotted just a split second of movement.

I froze, squinting slightly to focus, and sure enough, I could see a shadow slowly walking around inside the front entrance, past the main doors. Taking a risk, I looked around to make sure there wasn't anything stalking around me before making a beeline through the front park area, directly to the front entrance doors. As I got to the entrance, I stopped, putting my hands up on the glass door, and peered inside. For a long moment, all I saw was the dark interior of the school. Finally, after a few seconds, I spotted Barry. He was dragging a cart, something meant to be hooked up to some sort of small vehicle behind him.

I lightly tapped on the glass door, and he whirled around. The cart he was dragging continued moving, however, and collided with one of his legs as he suddenly stopped. The young man stumbled for a moment before jumping up and down on one leg, clutching the other, cursing loud enough to be audible through the doors. I couldn't help but wince in sympathy. Eventually, when the pain receded, he stomped his way over to the door, pushing one of them open just enough for me to slip inside.

"Sorry about that, Barry," I said as I stepped into the building, the door shutting behind me.

"It's fine," He grumbled. "Come on, help me pull the cart."

I nodded and followed him, stopping at the side of the cart, idly noting Barry's spear was lying down inside it. The high schooler went to grab the front end of the cart, but I shook my head.

"You get the doors," I volunteered. "I'll get the cart."

He quickly agreed, and with both of us working at it, we quickly worked our way deeper into the school, the cart easily fitting through the larger-than-average double doors the school hallways used. When we finally stopped, it was by what would have been a seemingly random room, if it wasn't marked out by a pile of desks that had clearly been dragged and thrown aside, along with a grim splatter of blood along the opposite wall. Barry immediately opened the door and stepped inside.

"He's here, Jessica," He said, the taller, seemingly slightly older young woman looking up from what she was doing. "Got the cart too."

As I stepped into the room behind Barry, I scanned around, taking the improvised living space. Along one corner was a series of beds, only one of them filled, that looked like they were from the nurse's office, covered in blankets and linens to make them more comfortable. Two couches, both facing away from me, had been dragged inside as well, along with computers that looked to be in the process of being stripped for parts. I could see that a wall of cabinets and a stack of boxes were filled to the brim with non-perishable food.

"Good, alright. Let's get Ames on there first," Jessica said, nodding to the only occupied bed. "Give me a hand, Barry."

Barry nodded, moving further into the room, following Jessica to the occupied bed. Together, they dragged the bed, which was clearly on wheels, through the room and out of the door. I stepped back and out of the way, which put me close enough to one of the couches to see that it was occupied by another kid, just about Barry's age. His arm was in a sling, and his leg was wrapped tightly. His face was also bandaged with a single patch along his cheek.

"Hey," He said, slowly sitting up on the couch and reaching out with his hand, the one not wrapped up and tucked against his stomach. "Names Roger. Guess we are moving in with you?"

"Yeah... It's someplace safe," I assured him.

"That's what Jessica said," He responded with a shrug, only to wince as he moved. "If you got someone who can help with Ms. Wensor, it's worth the move."

"Ms. Wensor?" I asked with a curious look.

"Oh, right. Amelia," He corrected. "Still not used to using her first name. She was my homeroom teacher."

I nodded and looked around the room, watching Jessica and Barry lift the unconscious form of who I assumed was Amelia from her bed, lifting her with the sheet that was under her and laying her down in the cart. When they were done making sure she was secure, they stepped back into the room.

"C'mon Roger, you're next."

Roger nodded and slowly started to stand up. I held out my hand and he took it, letting me help him to his feet. He leaned heavily on me, slowly hobbling to the doorway where Jessica was waiting. She helped him through the door, then let him sit on the back end of the trailer. I followed them out of the room, walking around to the other side. There, I got my first real look at Amelia.

Her blond hair was messy, cut roughly short like Jessica's, and tangled from being bedridden. She was dressed in pants and a sports bra, with bandaging around her stomach, left arm, and right leg and left foot. Her skin was incredibly pale, and her breathing was slow and shallow. She was also closer to my age than any of the others here, which made sense if she was a teacher. I shook my head and turned to Barry, who was looking back into the room with a frown, while Jessica helped Roger slide further into the cart.

"What is it?"

"Should we bring some of our supplies with us?" He asked, sounding conflicted. "Do you have enough food for everyone?"

"We have enough for a few days at least," I assured him. "If you have anything light, you can bring it, but we need to hurry and get back. The sooner we get to the bastion, the sooner Alissa can take a look at your friends."

He nodded and quickly returned to the improvised living space, quickly heading to the cabinets and boxes. Trusting him to only take what we could fit on the cart, I turned to Jessica, who was just finishing up getting Roger in place.

"Barry is just grabbing some supplies," I explained, getting a nod in response. "Is there anything you want to bring?"

"Grab my axe," Roger said from behind Jessica. "And some clothes."

Jessica nodded and walked back into the room, quickly grabbing things from various places around the room. About five minutes later, both she and Barry were done, dropping a few backpacks onto the cart before stopping by me.

"Do you have a plan in mind, or are we just winging it?" Jessica asked, feeding a shell into her shotgun.

"Beyond staying quiet, taking it slow, and trying to avoid any problem areas, no. There's not really anything we can really do beyond that, anyway," I admitted reluctantly. "I'll pull the cart, and you guys keep watch as we move. You're also gonna have to help if we need to go around cars or anything like that."

Jessica and Barry both nodded, and I made my way to the front of the cart, trying to puzzle out the best way to pull it without hurting myself. The front end was basically just a metal pole that jutted out from the front, meant to hook up to a trailer hitch. Eventually, I settled on using the cables that looped around the pole as an impromptu harness, looping them around my shoulder. I grabbed a bunch of cloth and jammed it under the cable to keep it from biting into my shoulder, before nodding to Jessica and Barry that I was ready.

The cart was significantly more difficult to move with two people and various supplies stored on it, but once I managed to pick up some momentum, I was able to move at a decent speed. Unfortunately, it was immediately clear, especially before we left the school, that stopping and starting again was going to be a pain in the ass every time it needed to happen. The momentum of the cart, now that it was laden with people and stuff, was much more difficult to stop, forcing me to either slow down over several feet or endure the cart nearly knocking me to the ground by smashing into my legs. Still, we set a decent speed, leaving the school after a

few minutes before making our way around the front park area, following the road as best we could.

It quickly became apparent, as we were forced to cut through yet another yard in order to pass an accident, that this was not going to be an easy trip.

"Keep your eyes open," I said, casting my own gaze forward, trying to spot any incoming trouble. "We are making way too much noise to stay completely hidden."

Barry cursed under his breath, and Jessica clenched at her shotgun, both of them nodding in understanding. Both of them stayed vigilant, though, easily stamping down any sort of panic. It was honestly impressive, especially considering their recent brush with the creatures hanging around Danten.

By the twenty-minute mark, we were no more than a third of the way to the bastion. Progress was steady but slow, with frequent stops to navigate the clogged streets. So far, we hadn't seen anything we needed to be worried about.

At the thirty-minute mark, Barry insisted that we change positions, the young adult shouldering the cables and lifting the front end of the trailer, struggling for a moment against the large contraptions inertia, before finally getting it going. I accepted his spear as he took the reigns, spending a few minutes swinging it around as we walked. I didn't know anything about wielding a spear, but it didn't take long for me to realize that I desperately needed to get my hands on one of my own. This one was simple, just a pole with a metal spike bolted and welded to it, and I could already tell it was a serious weapon.

Plus, not having to get so up close and personal would be great.

We eventually passed by what I was pretty sure was the halfway point, finally finding a long stretch of road that was clear enough to pass unhindered. We were making good progress when Jessica suddenly stopped and raised her shotgun, sighting in something I hadn't seen.

"What is it?" I asked, quickly moving to her side.

"I thought I saw a raptor," She said quietly. "But it's gone now."

"Fucking hell... let's pick up the pace," I said, looking at Barry. "You need me to switch in?"

"No, I can handle it," He said, now nervously looking around as we moved. "Just keep an eye out."

I nodded, and we quickly picked up speed, all of us constantly looking around, tensions rising. Only a few minutes after Jessica spotted a raptor, I spotted another one, peaking around the corner of a house we had passed a minute ago.

"Dammit," I said, shaking my head. "We are being hunted."

"What should we do?" Barry asked, his nerves starting to fray.

"Keep moving," Jessica answered, her voice heavy but calm. "Stay calm, and keep moving."

Again, we sped up, making up a lot of distance, almost three quarters of the way back to the bastion. By then, Roger and Barry had both spotted two more raptors, and Jessica spotted her second. Finally, like a final boss walking in from off-screen, a trio of raptors stepped out from behind a burnt-out home we had already passed, silently stalking us but no longer hiding.

"Damn... looks like the hunt is over," I said, stopping to let Barry pull the trailer past me. "Barry, don't stop pulling, but keep your eyes open, or we might just walk into a 'clever girl' ambush."

He nodded, almost visibly holding back his panic. Jessica let him pass, walking backward next to me, her shotgun at the ready.