

A werewolf, with an assault rifle. That absurdity had been passed up the chain. Still, the report had been delivered with a boy's dying breath. The death wasn't what mattered: Lung was not so sentimental as to mobilize to honor a child's death. Oh, certainly, he'd intimate that it was part of the reason. But the truth was far more primal, yet another reason why his status as a dragon was well-earned: this newcomer had taken from him. And that must be punished. An armed cape had made a statement and Lung would make his own in reply. His runners were mobilized, Lee set to patrol. They would find this cape, Lung would cauterize the stumps of its limbs, and he would publicly execute the one so foolish as to take from the Dragon.

*"I found it, boss!"* the radio crackled. *"Near, uh, 1160 Packard, heading south!"*

Lung didn't have to give the order. His driver was already pulling out to intercept.

*"You sure?"* a different voice spoke up. *"I just got eyes on a werewolf with a gun and some ratty body armor. He's heading west, through a warehouse alley, looks like on a beeline toward Captain's Hill. Don't think he made me. Should I pursue?"*

Lung contemplated for a moment. "I'll divert Lee toward Captain's Hill. Use frequency 44.8 to keep him updated. Get an address." He stopped transmitting and nodded to his driver. "Keep going," he said in Japanese.

*"Shit! Fuck! Can anybody hear this!?"* Yet another new voice intruded on the radio communications, panicked and screaming. *"We found another werewolf! No guns – this one was big and black, like the size of a car! It ate Yoshi! I–"* His sentence was interrupted by a saliva-thick growl. *"Oh gods... I'm in an alley off Gilbert Avenue. My name's Eddie Kim. Tell my mom I love her."*

This was not just one cape trying to take territory. This was a movement. Perhaps a single Master, or some sort of themed group. Regardless, this demanded a different response. Lung opened his radio to wide-band communication. "Break off and retreat. Get to the nearest safehouse or bolthole. You can't handle these creatures. The Dragon hunts tonight." He clapped the driver's seat-back. "Drive faster."

Kenta, though it had been more than a decade before he had last used his birth name for any real purpose, could feel the scales rippling beneath his skin. Other than the occasional skirmish with the Empire, he hadn't had any real challenges since establishing himself in the Bay. His body burned for the chance to fight, to kill.

As his body readied itself for battle, his senses sharpened as well. And it was through his enhanced hearing that he detected the heaving breaths and the sound of claws sparking and digging through concrete. "Swerve left!" he shouted reflexively in Chinese. By the time he realized he'd spoken the wrong language and his driver didn't entirely understand him, it was too late. A shaggy beast roughly the size of the car body-checked it and sent it flipping top-over-bottom. Claws dug into the chassis and a snarling, drooling maw smashed through the back-seat window. Glowing red eyes bored into Kenta's own. He lashed out and grabbed it by the bottom jaw, holding it in place as best he could while the car tumbled so its one-ton weight would repeatedly crush the wolf.

The beast had impacted forcefully enough to make the car flip several times, and it came to rest with a violent crash as the car smashed into other parked cars on the other side of the street – the wolf trapped beneath as the vehicle ended on its side.

Already nearing seven feet in height, Lung smashed out the other rear door and crawled free. His driver was likely dead: he cared little either way. He reached down and grabbed one of the wolf's legs, wrenching the creature out from beneath the slightly mangled steel, and hurled it against a nearby wall. The beast left a thick trail of viscous blood, deep red like wine. So thick it was almost like it had already coagulated.

The monster quickly righted itself, folding in an unnatural manner far more suited to a contortionist than an animal. It didn't move correctly, squat like a frog or lizard rather than properly canid like Hookwolf. It snarled and Lung answered with a sparking growl of his own. Fearless, it leapt for him and he met it with a flaming haymaker – his claws were growing in but he didn't yet trust to pit them against the massive scythes on the beast's paws. Better to beat it backward rather than try to slice it open.

The beast lunged again, this time dashing forward on its hind legs while its scything claws went for his arms. It grappled him, superior weight bearing him to the ground where it began to chew on his collarbone.

Lung roared and exploded, struggling free. He breathed a torrent of flame into the wolf's face and tore away for just a moment to let his wound begin to close. Most of him was covered in silvery scales, and he could feel new scales growing in to cover the bite. He closed the distance this time, grabbing the beast by the face and lifting its head. He punched downward, through its neck into its chest cavity, and doused its innards in searing flame. Once flame began to spew from its mouth and nose, he cast it aside.

As he stood, the beast took in a breath with lungs that were charcoal briquettes. It exhaled through a throat with a massive claw-hole in it. It tilted back its head, revealing its bare spine amid charred flesh and ash, and let out an echoing howl. This was not a mournful howl, nor one of desperation: it was a signal. As Lung's scales shifted in lieu of hair standing on end, he realized exactly what sort of signal. It was a dinner bell.

The creature collapsed and began to dissolve, rapidly rotting away like Spree's clones. Its smeared blood bubbled and disintegrated. While part of Lung was glad to have his opponents coming to him, something deeper in him – something more primal, the instinct that tells man to stay near the campfire and to walk faster until you get back to the light – shuddered with fear.

Lung stretched and roared in response to the howl, bellowing his challenge to the wolves. *I'm here*, he declared. *Come and claim my head, if you can!* The knowledge that more opponents were coming, that the fight was not yet over, kept him fueled. He grew perhaps a bit larger, which was still less than necessary when another wolf burst through the asphalt up from the sewers! The monstrosity was big enough to cover one side of an entire house! Immense jaws and claws shone in the early-evening light as the beast tore at him, drawing gouts of blood while he doused it in flame.

Lung was insensate during the fight, acting entirely on instinct. He juked and dodged and snarled and breathed fire, clawing at his opponent until finally he outsized and out-massed the wolf. He ripped the creature's head off and launched a torrent of triumphant flame into the sky. His elongated neck lashed, his new wings flexed.

Then more wolves poured out from the sewer, from the alleyways. Dozens at least, possibly hundreds, ranging in size from barely larger than men to the house-sized abominations! Where had they all come

from? Lung hadn't heard anything. The alleyways were filled with some sort of fog, like thick cigarette smoke or dry ice. The sky was suddenly overcast with the same fog.

Just like wolves, they fought as a group and worked to wear him down. Their sheer mass in numbers exceeded his, making him topple into buildings as they crawled all over his growing body. Claws tore off his wings, ripped through his scales. Even if he could regenerate, they were dealing so much damage that it was taxing even his body. He incinerated them, clawed through them. There were always more. Even when he was killing them instantly, two or three replaced every one dead, and soon he could sense nothing but wolves.

The monsters covered him like a shag carpet over a floor, clawing and drooling and draping over every inch. He could not escape: leaping into the sky or through the alleys only resulted in a return to whence he came.

Kenta was trapped. Helpless. Overwhelmed and outnumbered. His existence was pain and fear. His eyes, clenched shut in a desperate attempt to protect them from claws, snapped open – wide and unseeing. The world held no interest for him, as in his mind's eye he observed two immense crystalline forms weaving and undulating around one another in a beautiful and terrible dance. Above them, casting the pair in crimson light, hung the red moon. And the figure within looked down on him.

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Kenta spasmed on the unbroken asphalt, gasping and choking on his own fear. Such a simple creature, so driven by fear, was an easy mark. A wolfman approached and readied his rifle, sniffing Kenta. Satisfied that this too was a sufferer of the scourge, it continued on its way.

Enough of Taylor's nightmares, in the purgatory of sleep between Yharnam and Brockton Bay, had centered around parahumans falling to the beastly scourge. One of those nightmares had found Lung. Meanwhile, a contingent of actual beasts began to gorge themselves on his territory.

(BREAK)

“Werewolves,” the dispatcher on the other end repeated back to Stormtiger. “As in multiple?”

“Three that I can see,” the aerokinetic replied. “Two look a bit more human, ripped up PMC clothes – all black – with rifles. My bet is some sort of Russian surplus, or maybe South African.”

“Don't get lost in details please, sir,” the dispatcher reminded him. It was always difficult to keep capes on-task, especially when there was the risk of them murdering you for backtalk. “What about the third?”

“I think the other two're screening for it. It's a big fucker. Car-sized, shaggy, moving on all fours. It doesn't...doesn't move right. More like a frog than a wolf.”

“Fenja and Menja are en-route, sir. Please keep in contact if you need further backup. Ah, wait... Um, ignore that. Apparently we can't send more backup, sir. There's another attack ongoing. Kaiser is taking Rune and Hookwolf to respond.”

“Fuck me,” Stormtiger murmured under his breath. “What happened? Did the chinks get a new furry Spree? Some other Master with a werewolf fetish? Blasto decorating for Halloween?” He pulled out his phone and sent a text to the sisters. *ETA?*

*Approx. 3 min,* came the swift reply from Fenja.

He felt much more like Stanley than Stormtiger as he crouched in the darkness, watching as the gunmen shot up houses. Someone screamed, drawing the wolves’ attention. The big one tried to fit inside the brownstone, scuttling up to crawl along the wall and fit through the narrow door.

Stormtiger was no hero. He didn’t really care for the people he was supposed to be protecting. But letting them die would make the Empire look weak. It would be proof that he’d been too weak to prevent it. And that was a personal affront he could not abide.

Something that Kaiser drilled into each of them was that they could not afford to be cape-killers. Killing at all was to be frowned upon, hence why they kept their initiations as secret as possible. Rune still had yet to carry out hers, the girl too fragile to be trusted yet. Hookwolf was their one known killer, and even he limited himself to non-apes – mostly law enforcement. Too many killers would draw too much heat, and the Empire couldn’t survive a raid by the Triumvirate. So Stormtiger had to carefully modulate the force and concentration of his wind, not strike too hard. Strike to wound, maybe leave them maimed and dying, but leave any deaths as due to the incompetence of their responders rather than his outright lethality.

This was not such an occasion. The wolfmen were armed with guns and already shooting, which meant he was fine to match force with force. Tiger exploded into motion, sprinting out of the alleyway. Each hand was wreathed in churning air, which he launched outward in two scything arcs aimed directly at the wolfmen’s necks. Two direct hits, blood aerosolizing as the monsters were borne off their feet before crashing down into the street. He didn’t have the time to gather more force: his power came primarily from concentrating the air currents and then directing them. The wolf was getting inside the house, and he needed to draw its attention. Two blasts of air, more equivalent to daggers than scythes, pierced the beast’s flank and it drew itself back to face the new threat just in time to take a wind scythe to the face...and shrug it off.

“Oh fuck me.”

The wolfmen began to get up, heads lolling on partly-severed necks but still moving – and aiming. Stormtiger flung waves of air, not having the time to aim as precisely. His goal was to knock them off-course, and perhaps the concussive force could finish breaking their spines and kill them. The gunmen tanked the blows and raised their guns, firing wildly but in his general direction. Tiger had to draw the wind in around him, create alternating tornado-like currents to hopefully guide any lucky bullets away from his body.

The big wolf gave chase, pursuing Stormtiger down the street as its enormous foot-long claws tore through the asphalt. It pounced onto cars, shredding them; alternated sides; bayed at him... The creature was pursuing him just like a wolf, working to wear him down while he tired himself dodging the bullets.

*Fuck this,* he thought to himself. At the last moment, he changed direction and charged at the wolf. More than ever he regretted his choice to go shirtless, as he tossed himself beneath the beast. Sliding on

his back, screaming through the road rash as the asphalt flayed him, he unleashed all of the concentrated circulating air upward in a drill – piercing through the wolf’s torso and quickly ripping it in half! Immediately tucking his arms to cover his face in a stop-drop-roll methodology, he tumbled to the side to avoid the inevitable hail of bullets. He bellowed again as a shot found purchase in his right shoulder, cracking the bone and leaving his arm all but useless.

Is this how he’d go out? He lived through all those bare-knuckle brawls in the pits, grappled in life-or-death matches against enemy capes, but he’d die to some no-name shaggy shitters?

An open-top Jeep roared around the corner, containing two armored lingerie models far too big to properly fit inside the vehicle. Menja swung her spear like a bludgeon, reaching far enough to decapitate one wolfman while Fenja plowed the Jeep into the other. The beautiful blondes were unaffected by the crash, already reducing damage as they were enlarged, and continued to grow once they stepped free.

“Tiger!” Menja stooped down to scoop him up, able to easily hold the pit fighter in one massive hand. “Jesus Christ, what’d you do to yourself?”

He chuckled weakly. “You should see the other guy. Over there, and there, and there.” He limply gestured with his left arm at the several chunks of wolf. “What’s the play now?”

“We’re mobilizing in full,” Fenja replied, scanning the various angles of attack. “Krieg, Victor and Alabaster are organizing an evacuation. We’re breaking out the APCs and everything.”

“Ev-” Stormtiger grunted in pain as he tried and failed to sit up. “Evacuation? Of what!?”

“Of our territory,” Menja answered. “We protect the people under our aegis, but we can’t take the fight to these things and defend our people. And just reacting will do nothing.”

“Fuck my donkey,” Tiger muttered. “How big is this?”

“Big enough that Victor already negotiated a truce with the PRT. We’re cooperating with the white hats. Supposedly they’re calling in outside assistance. These things keep pouring out of the underground.”

“...How many?”

Fenja picked up the answer this time. “Dozens, at least. Possibly hundreds. Nobody’s sure. Apparently Tattletale of the Undersiders has an idea, but she really hopes she’s wrong so she’s looking for another answer.”

Stormtiger made a noise of acknowledgement. “Get me back to Othala so I can back you up sooner rather than later?”

“Sure,” Menja smirked. “You’re paying for our Jeep, by the way.”