

Greg's plan had been to meet up with Taylor at school the next day and discuss a meeting. That plan was derailed by the fact that Taylor didn't show up. Her absence had him nervous and Sophia positively on-edge, and it wasn't until after computer class that Sparky had an update for them. Clustering in the computer lab at the end of the day, the three students read updates on PHO regarding Bloodmoon's latest exploits.

Emma's own plans were sabotaged: if Taylor wasn't at school then obviously the little bitch was hiding at home, and that meant Emma couldn't go there and steal the pistol. Her anger was only further enflamed when she saw Sophia accompanying not just Greg Veder but that utter waste of skin Sparks. Whatever Taylor had done to Sophia, Emma's friend was coming fully undone, rubbing shoulders with not just prey but human carrion.

She'd had a scheme in mind for what to do with the pistol, but now that plot was shifting, fed by vindictiveness.

(BREAK)

Sergeant Wachowski knocked on Director Piggot's door and opened before she gave permission. "Sorry for barging in, Director, but you'll want to see this. We've got movement on Bloodmoon."

Her plan of braining him with a paperweight was postponed for the moment. "What's she up to now? More hobo massacres?"

"She's moving at about a hundred miles an hour along Interstate 90, ma'am."

That brought her up short. It was such a bizarre statement that she couldn't help but pause. "Walk me through what we have. You have your laptop?" At the shake of his head, she clucked her tongue. "Tell me the files and I'll pull them up here."

Once they had the feeds set up, Wachowski continued. "Camera algorithms provided by Dragon pinged Bloodmoon in the dockyards area." The video showed the vigilante take up a runner's pose and then bolt forward, arms pumping as her legs pistoned beneath her. She quickly vanished from the camera's frame of view. "We've had a few more shots of her, juking around cars and running over the top of freight trucks." Brief clips from traffic-helicopter cameras corroborated: Bloodmoon zipped between cars like one would expect a motorcycle to maneuver in an action movie, slipping between cars and leaping up to run atop trailers. Updates showed that Bloodmoon had turned off Interstate 90 and onto 81.

I-81... That set Piggot's teeth on edge for a reason that hadn't yet caught up to her conscious mind. "Remind me, Wachowski. I-81, which direction is she heading on it?"

"Uh, north, Director."

Every bit of Emily Piggot's significant, damnable stomach dropped out of her. Her eyes widened and her skin grew more pale. She hammered her intercom. "Get me access to the Ellisburg cameras! Every angle you can get!" She ripped her phone off its cradle, dialing the quarantine zone. She needed to warn the staff there: Bloodmoon was on her way!

(BREAK)

Colonel Lance Henry, liaison between the Parahuman Response Team and United States Armed Forces, hung up the phone with his mouth set in a grimmer line than usual. It was his duty to monitor Ellisburg and make certain that the monsters within weren't tunneling underground or in some other way plotting to invade the rest of the country. But, for the first time in a decade, someone (*Or perhaps*, his rebellious subconscious noted, *something*) was coming to break in.

"Alright people," he bellowed into the facility-wide PA, "we have a visitor coming. Bloodmoon, a woman with long black hair in gray leathers, is on her way. If you follow current events, you'll know her as the woman who beat the Simurgh black-and-blue. So I recommend you all stand down and let her pass. Whatever she wants to do, we're probably not even going to slow her down. And based on her record, I expect she's here to evict our squatter."

Across the exclusion zone surrounding the quarantine dome, soldiers shifted. The joint operatives of the PRT and Army all eyed each other through their clear armored visors. PRT troopers on deployment typically wore black polarized face coverings for the intimidation factor, presenting a faceless front against enemies. If a cape couldn't see his enemy's fear, it was easier to convince him to stop fighting. Clear visors were used at headquarters and during any Master/Stranger deployments where there was the risk of an enemy imitating a trooper. While Nilbog had never imitated troopers, it wasn't unfeasible that he could make a fully human-shaped creature. However, odds were good the creature would still be colored like a technicolor night terror, so clear visors were one more precaution.

And now, mixed expressions of fear and excitement marked nearly every face. The idea of a visiting cape with no compunction against killing was a frightening one. But such a cape, one able to defeat an Endbringer and leave a hero casualty rate in the single digits, might finally be able to end the aforementioned technicolor night terror.

There, in the distance, they could see her approaching. Moving far more quickly than any human being should, but without the strange blur of a cape like Velocity, she approached. Hair and ragged coat whipped in the air behind her, creating her own parade banners. Colonel Henry stepped out, hoping to meet with the vigilante and offer her welcome.

She blazed past him, vaulting into the air and leaping with unbelievable delicateness from tentpoles to get the needed air. Her hand whipped to the small of her back and drew her cannon.

"Oh sh—" Henry couldn't even finish his expletive before the boom deafened him. The quarantine dome shattered, a human-sized hole blasted through its roof, and Bloodmoon dived inside.

Colonel Lance Henry ran back inside to check the camera feeds. In New Hampshire, Director Emily Piggot was likewise watching and listening from the few microphones that Waldo drones had managed to install.

Bloodmoon drew a lopsided weapon, a thick blade somewhere between a club and a khopesh. She smacked it against the ground and it broke apart, turning into a whip sporting enormous bladed sections. Her hair blew in nonexistent wind that didn't affect her coat, and then her shadow *writhed*. The ink of her hair and shadow intermingled. Someone stepped out of her shadow.

An old man, garbed in yellow with a dark-brown shawl around his shoulders and sporting a large tricorne hat, stood to just taller than Bloodmoon's own stature. His eyes were covered with white bandages, crossing his face like eyepatches. "Well," he wheezed while drawing a saw-bladed cleaver, "these are new. I suppose many hands make light work, regardless of what beasts we slay."

"New places, new creatures. I don't know, Henryk, this promises to be entertaining." A deeper, confident male voice spoke up as a new man stepped out of Bloodmoon's shadow. A bit taller still than the yellow man – Henryk – this one wore an outfit reminiscent of an old British bobby. His hair was shoulder-length and greasy, his face unremarkable except for the unpleasant smile on his face. As he grinned wider, his teeth were better revealed. Upon rewatching and zooming in, the reason for an observer's discomfort was made clear: he had jagged, lupine teeth set in his jaws. He licked his lips with a tongue that moved too much and hefted a massive buzzsaw.

One more person stepped out of Bloodmoon's shadow. Taller than Henryk but shorter than the dog-man, dressed similarly to Bloodmoon, with long black hair likewise tied back, the woman brandished a bizarre weapon reminiscent of both a pickaxe and scythe. "Well, you actually did it," spoke a soft and gentle feminine voice, the voice of a woman in early middle-age. "You did promise to take me to interesting places, Little Owl, and you didn't disappoint."

Bloodmoon surged forward and the others joined her. The original vigilante cut a swathe straight through the kingdom of monsters, while the other three flanked and seemed dedicated to ensuring the creatures didn't breach containment.

The yellow man moved methodically, lashing out with throwing daggers to bleed his opponents. Once in close combat he was a force of nature, darting around the monsters and sawing them apart. From creatures as small as puppies to atrocities as large as trucks, no size daunted nor hindered him. His extermination was calm and measured.

The long-haired man leapt into combat with aplomb, a joyous laugh on his lips as his saw roared. He sought out Nilbog's largest creations – those few that weren't trying to block Bloodmoon herself – and shredded them. His jaw distended and he bit into the monsters' hides, tearing off great chunks and gulping them down like a Komodo dragon might devour its prey.

The taller woman worked rather like a lesser version of Bloodmoon, darting and dancing around her enemies. Her pick whistled as it sped through the air, tearing great rents in her targets. When her opponents went to retaliate, she was simply not there.

Nilbog's kingdom, referred to by observers as "Evil Dr. Seuss," no longer had normal buildings. Multicolored and lopsided heaps, constructed as if drawn by a particularly untalented child, dotted the landscape: the asphalt and gouged earth were the only real proof that this had once been an American city. And now those same buildings were uprooting. Angry-faced turtle monsters, deformed stick insects, and far less explicable creatures revealed themselves as the internal workings of these buildings. The structures charged, towering over the largest of Nilbog's typical creations, yet the capes didn't panic.

The monsters converged on the center of the city, where Bloodmoon was a mobile storm of blood and gore. Effortlessly swinging a weapon clearly so heavy that it left visible shockwaves when the whip impacted, she tore through everything with equal contempt. Childlike creatures patterned with dots and stripes huddled in on themselves and cried, until the whip tore them apart and they felt no more.

Massive amalgamated abominations, composites of wolf and lizard and eagle and human, stood little more chance. Bloodmoon swung her whip at one of the buildings, and the weapon bounced off! She didn't pause or so much as flinch. Casting aside her whip, which disappeared in mist, she drew a far worse weapon.

The world tilted on its axis. The saber sang as it parted previously impenetrable hide, the curved dagger biting just as deep. Bloodmoon had opted to skip the metaphorical double-dog and triple dares and gone straight for the nuclear option. Observers outside began to spasm or violently vomit, sobbing as they felt a baleful gaze upon them.

And they weren't the only ones: for the first time anyone had ever observed, Nilbog's monsters hesitated. Then they panicked, stampeding out from the city center, only to be waylaid by the other capes. The woman moved like an acrobat and dancer, leaping up onto the monsters to tear great rents from their upper bodies. The long-haired man ripped at their legs with his saw. And the yellow man was the medium between the two, surgically striking wherever he saw an opening.

A monster imitating an office building tried to make a break for it. The woman drove her pick into it again and again, using the pick as a sort of trapeze swing to ascend higher. The creature slapped at her, trying to crush her, but it was quickly waylaid by combined attacks hacking at its multiple ankles. Its meaty arms were put to use preventing it from falling while the men tore at its legs. The woman completed her rise and drove her pick into what passed for the monster's brow. She thrust her hand at its eye and the cameras stuttered, digital noise obscuring exactly what happened. There was a bright light and a significant part of the creature's head exploded. It fell back and the three leapt upon it like ravenous animals.

Bloodmoon, instead of giving chase after the monsters, drove her weapons into the ground. She twisted them, smoke rising from the asphalt, then released a great bellow as she tore the swords back skyward. An explosion and gout of flame accompanied her efforts, ripping a deep gouge in the asphalt and revealing an organic multicolored tunnel system that had once been the city's sewers. She leapt inside and the last image that the cameras picked up before she ran out of sight was the flesh of the tunnels flexing, trying to pull away from her.

Some of the buildings had reached the quarantine dome's walls and were beating on them, trying to get out. Bleating incoherently in some imitation of words, their tones sounded begging. Instead, the armed forces outside prepared tanks and missile launchers to beat back the impending storm. The trio of capes picked apart one after another like rapacious wolves, but there was no guarantee they'd finish their work before the creatures broke through.

Even amid all the cacophony, the microphones and even the soldiers' own ears could easily pick up as the sewer tunnels themselves screamed "HELP ME!" in a burbling male voice. The creatures stopped their attempt to escape and turned back, trying to fight the capes as they moved back toward the city center...until Bloodmoon burst through the asphalt, at which point the few surviving behemoths once again wheeled on their hind legs and barreled for the dome's walls. The primal fear that she evoked overrode even the Goblin King's commands.

Bloodmoon wrenched upward, dragging an amniotic sac with her. She gripped the sac and tore it open, fluorescent fluids pouring out, and she ripped a man from within. Doughy, balding, slathered in the fluids, Jamie Rinke stared at the devastation with wide eyes as he sobbed uncontrollably. She gripped

him on both sides of his head, forcing him to look around at the dead and dying, the devastation surrounding him.

“Do you feel that?” she asked softly. “That’s one fraction of the pain that you visited upon the people of Ellisburg. Every single person lost his friends, his family, suffered in agony as he died and you rebuilt him into a monster to kill *more*. With your power, you could have changed the world. You could have brought such joy. You could have been loved by everyone, sharing your creations with the world. But instead you chose to harm, to torture, to rule over your little fiefdom where only you are loved: you share it with no-one.”

“P-please,” Rinke sputtered, spitting through thick mucus that spilled from his nose. He sobbed and begged like a child. “I’m sorry!”

“You’re sorry you were punished!” Bloodmoon snapped. She wrenched him over to see one of his little creations, a polka-dotted child, still breathing shallowly as life left her. “Watch them die. Everything you feel now is the equivalent of merely one of the people you murdered as they watched their home destroyed. You are a parasite with delusions of royalty.” She breathed hard. “I could make you watch more, but I’m not that cruel.” She flexed her arms and her hands came together, shattering his skull and brain into paste.

Casting his remains aside and setting the corpse alight with a molotov cocktail, she drew her double-sword again. Moving with the same terrifying pseudo-supersonic speed she’d displayed against the Simurgh, Bloodmoon joined her companions in finishing the giant monsters.

The monsters had succeeded in breaking open the dome, but a wall of guns and explosives prevented a single escapee from breaching the quarantine zone.

Her companions stepped around corners and never returned, each one vanishing as soon as they were no longer observed. Bloodmoon herself crouched down and seemed to touch something, once again obscured by digital noise on the cameras. She seemed to swirl before the noise extended to her, and then Bloodmoon was gone.

Emily Piggot sat back heavily, tears silently dripping down her face. The nightmare that had haunted her dreams, her memory; the monster that gnawed at her conscience and consciousness every hour of every day, it was dead and gone. Wiped from the Earth.

Two states over, Colonel Lance Henry had no idea what to say regarding what he’d just seen, let alone how to react to a decade-long hell having come to such a sudden and violent end. He’d be lying if he said he hadn’t felt somewhat sorry for those beasts. Those that could reasonably emote, the terror on their faces...

(BREAK)

In the computer lab at Winslow High School in Brockton Bay, Sparky didn’t notice the shocked and frightened expressions of his companions as he read the headline gracing not just Parahumans Online but nearly all American and American-oriented media:

NILBOG SLAIN BY VIGILANTE “BLOODMOON”