

## Zach

Zach sat on the roof of the building, watching the Night Horror's safe house. It had been almost two weeks since they discovered that the Night Horror might potentially be a shapeshifter. There wasn't much to be done in that time, they had spent a week organizing a group to follow, and if the opportunity presents itself, ambush the suspect. Assuming that it was the Night Horror in the first place, they weren't really sure yet, they had no hard evidence aside from the word of a creature which by its own admission can't really differentiate between people.

While Griss searched for more people to help them, Zach had been spending time with Quell and training. He had focused on his skills, and had managed to increase some of them slightly. He still hadn't finished the **|Greater Evade|** quest, but he was close. He wasn't certain if he wanted to go with the quest or try to evolve the skill on his own, he was still thinking about it. The biggest issue was his **|Sealing Slash|**, it hadn't moved from 9/10 for a while. But he had an idea why that was. He didn't exactly understand how the *sealing* part of the skill worked, and he had only been using it against one person—Griss. He had decided to keep that skill a secret, and hadn't used it when he didn't need to. But he was fairly certain that he needed to both try and understand how it worked and use it on more people, if he was to evolve it.

Then, a week ago Griss returned from the Citadel with only one more person to help them. Edima, the minotaress that had gone to the dungeon with them. Apparently finding people that he trusted that had also not been in the city during the times that the Night Horror was active wasn't that easy. They had also brought in Relas, since they were able to rule him out as a suspect. The night Griss and Zach had first encountered the Night Horror, Relas was one of the first to arrive on the scene when Griss had called for help. He had come straight from the Warden Station along with several other wardens with whom he had been working on another case. Not only was it nearly impossible for the Night Horror to reach the Warden Station in such a short time so that Relas could leave it to arrive at the scene, but the fact

that he had been in the presence of others the whole night made it clear that he was not Night Horror.

It had taken him and Griss some time to figure it out, since they were making a point not to tip their hand. They couldn't just go around asking questions and rousing suspicion.

But with Relas on board they had another advantage. Namely, his telepathy, which would allow him to call the Guard and other Wardens as soon as needed. The issue was that they couldn't warn the Guard and the Wardens beforehand and have them be ready. That meant that depending on where they cornered the suspect the reinforcements could take anywhere from five to twenty minutes to arrive. That was a lot of time for things to go sideways.

They weren't even sure yet that the person they were watching was Night Horror, but hopefully they would get both the confirmation and be able to catch him soon. They had been watching the safe house for a few days, waiting for the shapeshifter to arrive. They had already decided that attempting to ambush him there wouldn't be optimal. One of the main streets was nearby and always filled with people, even at night. It was probably why the shapeshifter picked that building as his safe house. It would be hard to follow someone among so many people, and probably impossible to follow someone who could shapeshift. Forcing a confrontation there would be difficult for the same reason. If the shapeshifter was in fact Night Horror, then he was incredibly dangerous and powerful. They couldn't risk him slipping their ambush and heading into the street with so many potential victims and hostages.

No, they needed to confirm their suspicions, or if not at least find out the shapeshifters real place of residence so that they could watch them. If they saw an opportunity to ambush the shapeshifter away from people, they would. Otherwise, their plan was to follow and watch.

Zach sat on the roof with Relas as it was their turn to keep watch, while Nyathulla, Edima, and Griss were beneath them inside of the building. Keeping watch was a boring part of the job, but it was a necessary one.

Finally, just a few hours after the day turned into the night, they saw movement across rooftops. They didn't move inside their hiding place, and

instead just watched as the shadow on the roof shimmered and became person shaped.

*He is big enough to be a Ravzor.* Zach thought to himself, they couldn't see anything since the person on the roof wore a big cloak that kept their features hidden. The suspect opened the hatch on the roof and dropped down.

"Let's go," Zach whispered. They headed down and gathered the others. All four of them wore nondescript clothes and cloaks that hid them just like the suspect. They waited in the shadows of the building across the street from the safe house until a smaller shape exited. The suspect already had her hood up, but they could see that her size matched the human woman they had seen before.

As she moved into the main street, the five of them followed, making sure to keep their distance. Zach kept his mind focused on his **Wind's Favorite**, the sounds nearby getting amplified, but instead of letting it bring everything to him, he tried to focus on the person he was watching ahead. Soon enough the sounds of the street and nearly everything else stopped and he heard only footsteps of the person ahead of him.

They wove through the crowds, making sure that they kept enough distance between them. The suspect was walking hurriedly, but not quite fast enough to be considered running. They walked for what seemed like half an hour, and eventually reached a more rundown area of the city. It was a district known for its criminal element, and a place where there weren't as many guards around since the gangs and criminal elements ruled most of it.

Zach cursed inwardly, this was the area where the response would take the longest. The suspect led them to a really destitute area filled with abandoned buildings and empty warehouses. It looked like a good place for a lair of a serial killer, but it was also a good place for an ambush. Zach kept his eyes and ears open, looking for any signs of trouble.

The suspect rounded a corner and suddenly Zach couldn't hear the footsteps anymore. They reached the corner and entered a small intersection, but there was no sign of the suspect.

"Damn," Griss whispered. "Were we made?"

Zach wasn't sure, this could be just a standard precautionary measure that the shapeshifter took. He closed his eyes and focused, trying to hear any

suspicious sounds from around them. And then, a moment later something reached his ears on the wind.

“There,” Zach pointed in the direction from where the sound was coming from. “Behind those buildings.”

Griss glanced at what looked like an abandoned storage building made out of gray stone. “Split up?” He asked.

Zach wasn’t sure what to do, they didn’t have a line of sight and his hearing could only take them so far. Finally, he nodded. “You two head right, the three of us will go left,” he pointed at Nytahulla and Griss.

They all nodded and split up, trying to move with haste while making as little noise as possible. Zach wondered if they should call in the Guard and other Wardens, but then dismissed the thought. They still didn’t have a confirmation that the shapeshifter was Night Horror. If they called in the cavalry, but were wrong... they would probably be done with the case. The Guard Commander was already being impatient, especially since the reports they had been sending her for the last month were filled with a whole lot of nothing. The reports said that they were looking over old crime scenes again, going back ten years, trying to find something to go on. Which even to Zach sounded like a waste of time, the Guard Commander was close to the end of her patience. A blunder would have their permission to investigate in the city reworked, or worse.

Zach, Relas, and Edima rounded a corner and walked into a small dark side street. His hearing wasn’t picking up anything strange, but for all he knew the shapeshifter was out of his range by now.

He paused, trying to look around for any sign of their target. And then, suddenly his ears were filled with noise, metal on metal and general sounds of battle. His eyes widened and he looked to the right where Griss and Nyathulla had gone.

“What is it?” Relas asked immediately.

“Call the Guard and the Wardens,” Zach said as he started moving, Edima following immediately. “Gather them and lead them after us.”

Relas closed his eyes and his face contorted in concentration. But Zach didn’t wait, he was running toward the sounds of battle, Edima following right behind him.

## Night Horror

She was being followed, that much was for certain. The question was who was following her and for what purpose. It wasn't the first time someone had decided to follow her, and it wouldn't be the last. She was wearing a human female form, and there would always be those that wanted to take advantage. She usually led them to a secluded part of the city and dealt with them accordingly. People like that were worth even less than her victims.

The part of her that relished in death and in seeing horror on their faces before they died, woke up. The voice that told her that the fear and horror could make her feel better, the desire to devour, they assaulted her. She pushed it all down, her mind was always trying to betray her. Especially when she was in forms other than her cover. It was because that form was more grounded than the others, its memories were fuller, sharper. She could hold on for days without her desires trying to overcome her, and even then they were easier to push down.

Now, she could feel it trying to eat away at her, and she knew that she would need to indulge. The more time she spent denying the desires the worse it would get, until eventually she would blackout and go on a rampage. That hadn't happened in a long time, her hunts and kills were enough to satisfy her, and Illuiy was always present to keep her from falling too far. But she hadn't gone on a kill in a long time, her current target had been frustrating. She hadn't been able to find a good place to ambush and kill him that was away from people.

The people following her would need to be enough to sate her desires.

*"Be careful, we don't know who they are,"* Illuiy cautioned.

She nodded her head, but she knew that she couldn't move from this course now. Her mind wouldn't let her. She turned, changing her direction and leading her pursuers in the more remote area of the city. There she could ambush them and dispose of them before anyone could catch a glimpse of her. She could feel her heart start to beat faster and faster as she walked.

Soon, she would be able to devour, to see the horror in their eyes once they understood that they had messed with the wrong person... it was going to be glorious.

She rounded a corner near an abandoned building, and then with **|Shadow Stealth|** she jumped up, climbing the wall of the one story house and getting on the roof. She jumped away, heading further, preparing to turn from the followed to the follower.

She dropped her stealth and waited, knowing that they would be surprised that she had eluded them. Then, they would perhaps search and finally give up. That was when she would strike. She walked across the roof, looking in the distance to see five cloaked figures on the street. Her mouth twisted in a wicked grin as she felt the anticipation of the hunt.

Then the five split up, surprising her. She blinked as they moved around buildings, heading toward her. She frowned, they shouldn't be able to tell where she was, but they were heading in her direction. One group, made out of two was closer and she decided that perhaps these people were more dangerous than she thought.

It didn't matter, she was going to kill them all the same.

She stalked across the rooftops as the two beneath her entered a large courtyard. She saw them looking around in confusion, searching for her. And then, as one of them moved his head, she saw a glimpse beneath the hood and froze.

*"It's the warden,"* she hissed inside her head as she recognized him. Griss, the warden that had been there with Zacharia when she had been discovered. This complicated things, if she was being chased by the wardens then...

Illuiy gave voice to her thoughts. *"They know."*

*"No, they can't, this... no, no, no. I need more time I can't—"*

*"Calm Naha, calm. They might not know everything, but they most certainly suspect."*

*"How?"* She asked desperately. It wasn't supposed to be like this, she couldn't be discovered, she—

*"It doesn't matter,"* Illuiy said. *"I advise that we run, get out of this city and start again somewhere else."*

She recoiled from that notion. It would mean leaving behind everything that she had built, an entire life, memories, and most importantly it would mean leaving Zacharia. She couldn't, she needed him, it hurt to look at him sometimes, but she needed that. He wanted to rise above the bleak existence of everyone else, to grow stronger and stronger. She needed to see if he they would try to hold him back, needed to see what he would do if they try.

*"I can't,"* she said as she looked down, trying to see if the other cloaked person was Zacharia. Was he among the five that had been following her?

*"It is too much risk Naha, if you kill those wardens, they will hunt you down,"* Illuiy told her.

She had killed wardens before, and as long as there was no evidence to go on, no clues to point in her direction, she would be safe. And it wasn't like she could even follow Illuiy's advice anyway. Her desires grabbed hold of her now, she knew that she couldn't fight them off. Even just standing here without doing anything was torture, if she didn't move soon she was going to black out.

*"Sorry, but I can't,"* she said and her body shivered. Both she and Illuiy knew the signs. She needed to kill, to devour, to induce horror. She needed it, now, now, now, now—

*"Quickly then, don't play with them, you are not a fighter. Kill them before they can act,"* Illuiy voice broke through her mind, clearing it somewhat.

She nodded and moved, immediately feeling relieved as she made a decision. She used **Form Shift**, turning into Velor. For a moment she considered using her drake form, but she wasn't as familiar with it just yet, nor as stable, she couldn't afford mistakes now. Her body rippled, and he clawed his way to the edge of the roof. The two cloaked figured were at the edge of the courtyard, and she needed to act. **Partial Shift** changed his arm, the muscles growing stronger and bigger as it assumed the form of a monster he had killed long ago. With his True Body, the change took barely a second. The snapping of his bones alerted those beneath him, but it was already too late.

**[Devourer's Step]** swallowed the distance between them, Illuiv changed and a dagger appeared in his hand. The drake raised his hand and he saw the tiny flash of light as he used equip to pull out his equipment. It was too late.

With a **[Greater Strike]** his arm shot forward, stabbing his dagger into the drake's throat, deep enough that he severed his spine. The drake's eyes widened for a moment before they went dead, the warden fell to the ground with no chance of being healed, and he moved to the next target. The drake had probably been a capable warrior, but no power in the world could save him from an attack he didn't see coming. And unlike the warden, he wasn't a fighter, but he was stronger than them and a killer.

Under the pale light of the moon, he saw into the hood of the second cloaked figure. He saw the horror on her Cthul face, and his dagger snapped forward. His dagger touched the skin, piercing inside and drawing blood as he went for the heart. And then the cloaked figure was gone in a flash of violet sparks.

*Blink, shit.* He turned around, searching, the range couldn't be that far. He saw his target on the other side of the yard behind him. Her hands were raised and his **|Perfect Danger Sense|** warned him as a barrage of violet bolts flew in his direction.

He cursed and jumped to the side, rolling and coming up with a hand raised as he pulled out a throwing dagger from his storage. He threw it as a prison of violet light fell on top of him. His dagger found its target, hitting the Cthul's shoulder, and giving him time to break free. He punched the prison and on his third strike it shattered.

He looked to his opponent, seeing the rage in her eyes as she prepared to attack and two more cloaked figures entered the courtyard. They saw the dead warden's body next to him, and one of them roared throwing off the cloak to reveal a tall minotaress. In a moment she had her warden's armor on and a great hammer, and then she charged as his **|Perfect Danger Sense|** flared up. The attack came from his side, and he let it connect, pushing off the ground with his feet and moving in the same direction as the attack. Making it seem from the outside like the mighty attack had connected fully. He hit the wall of the building next to him and the minotaress



advanced, and with **|Perfect Imitation|** feigned an injury. He heard a shout and recognized the voice, but he couldn't focus on that. The minotauress came close to him, swung her hammer in a powerful attack that glowed with power. But he was stronger and faster. As the hammer came down, he stepped to the side and struck. A quick attack with his dagger through the hole in the armor and he slit the minotauress's throat. Blood spilled, showering the ground and the wall as well as the warden's armor.

He dodged to the side and allowed himself to stumble as more bolts of violet light smashed into the wall behind the spot where he used to be. He grimaced and bit his tongue, then spit blood on the floor, pretending that he was hurt. The eyes of the Cthul were hungry now, eager to kill him. Behind her Zacharia was yelling, holding a glowing sword and a dagger in his hands, but the Cthul wasn't listening to him.

He saw that both wardens were going to attack, and he turned and jumped at the building behind him as shadow's gathered around him. **[Shadow Stealth]** obscured him, but he knew that they saw him climb to the top of the one story building. He dashed forward and out of view, then turned around with his dagger ready. His Qi moved and he formed a technique, then unleashed it around him.

In a flash of violet light the Cthul blinked to the roof, pursuing what she thought was an injured foe, just as he had expected. His **{Horriying Presence}** hit her, stunning her for a moment. And before she could react, he stabbed his dagger through her eye and into her brain.

He turned around, intent on running. His desires were satisfied by the three deaths. The horror in the eyes of the Cthul as she realized that she had made a mistake had been enough. He could run now, could escape. He didn't want to fight Zacharia. Before he could get away, a blast of wind made him stagger forward, and his skill warned him just a moment before his attack came. He moved his head to the side as a glowing sword punched through where her head used to be. The attack discharged and lightning Qi flashed singing his mane.

His skill cried out again, but he was too slow, and a dagger cut into his shoulder. He grimaced as he used **[Devourer's Step]** to create a distance, he landed at the edge of the roof and looked back to see Zacharia standing

there dressed in full white armor, a sword and a dagger in his hands and just a hint of his eyes seen through the visor, glaring at him with hate. Oh, how it pained him to see that look turned in his direction. Before he could speak, Zach dashed forward, faster than he could react. And he knew that Zach intended to take his life.