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### Static

As the sun sets across the land, the howls of wolves can be heard echoing through the dark. The last rays of light beam through the window onto a table. The faint hum of some old country song heard in the air. The remnants of a game of solitaire are visible next to a radio, a glass of whiskey and a .44 pistol. The howling increases in intensity as a gloved hand turns down the radio. With the sun setting and darkness growing across the forests, the residents of this small northern shanty town settle in for the night.

The small town is not a pleasant place at night.

The glass is picked up and downed in one go, the lady shuddering as it goes down.

Grabbing her pistol and putting on her duster, she lights a cigarette and heads out the door. Darkness fully entombed the region, the howling dies at once. The yelps and growls of the wolves fighting heard in the distance.

She reaches in her satchel, retrieving an old military grade walkie talkie, raising it to her face she hesitates before speaking, changing the channel twice before finally speaking.

"Come in Lieutenant this is Tori over," she sighs, cursing quietly before continuing "put the petty shit aside for a second this is business, they're heading towards you, just thought you should know."

"This is bullshit," said to no one but herself.

Tori Beckett, 25, surviving day to day in the wastes of Canada, part time alcoholic, full time

marksman, and completely done with her life. Working as a mercenary for hire in Challenger Peak, a small survivalist town in northern Canada. With the cities destroyed, taken over, or under martial law, the survivors, few as they may be, fled to the wilderness with what they had and dug

in. Challenger Peak, a former shadow of Canada, could claim less than 230 residents. A mix of people, it managed to claw a hold in the new world, and while not thriving, they managed to get by, almost.

The attacks started towards the beginning of winter. While not completely remote, the town was still an almost two hours drive from any city or military compound. Tori's father, Lt. Morrison, took a group of soldiers under his command and left what remained of Montreal, they numbered only 16, they're the ones that protected the Peak from raiders and the wildlife, and not even their training could help then predict what would happen.

Livestock began to go missing, first chickens, then pigs. Alarm bells only started to ring after one of the night guards claimed to hear voices luring the pigs out. Footprints were found the next day in the pigpen, measuring twice the size of any normal man. And finally, a young boy was found eviscerated on the outskirts of the shanty town, his sister claimed he was hearing strange noises and whispers at night. The town erected walls, called in all people into the protected areas and set up permanent watches. Everyone in the area was living inside, all except one.

Tori climbed the old wooden watch tower slowly, pistol hand extended upwards as she went, an unlit flashlight held in her left hand, the only light emitting from the embers of her cigarette. Reaching the top she kicked the door open, a sigh of relief at the empty sight. Her bag jingled as it hit the floor. Glowing embers falling to the floor alongside it. Holstering her impressive piece, she placed her radio down on the table, tuned it to the same old country station, somehow still managing to gain signal despite the end of the world. A thought not lost on her.

"Guess someone's still out there." Whispered in the exhale of smoke.

The only reply being the static of her walkie talkie and the scraping of her muddy boots on the door mat. The butt of the cigarette coming down in the ashtray as she thought, the flick of her lighter coming to life in reflex to the new one in her mouth. Sitting in the chair she let another puff it as she shouldered her rifle and scanned the horizon. Her father had wanted her in town, trying to order her back when they closed up. She refused, choosing to stay in the tower rather than deal with the baggage of living with him. They were similar, she took more after him than her mother in almost every sense. They often fought and argued, her mother having to work as a mediator. A soft stoic, level headed woman of Indigenous descent. Polar opposite to her father, a loud and brash man hailing from Ireland. An odd couple, she couldn't imagine how they met, and she never got the chance to ask, not wanting to talk to her dad about their subject after she was killed.

Her thoughts broke as static filled the night, drowning out the country music until it faded into the high pitched beep of an emergency broadcast.

"-ead me? Reporting to anyone in the area, I repea-"

Static filled the night once more. The glowing embers rising into the night as the cigarette bounced off the floor. Scrambling with the tuners, the message fading into static of some forgotten radio station. Whiskey dripping to the floor, her glass knocked over, forgotten in her mad rush to the radio. Cursing as she tried to gain signal once more.

"-eed help, I'm all alone, I found this radio, is there anyone out there? Anyone? Please? There's only five of us left, we're running low on food and medicine. We ran into one of those things, we thought it was dead, but it got my brother, he's hurt. We're near the American border, one of those things was tied to a truck. We need help, plea-"

"Poor people." The only thing she could think to say.

Whiskey sloshed into the glass as she readied another drink. A new cigarette between her lips as she settled back into position. Those messages weren't all uncommon, people pleading for help, once in awhile a military broadcast. Information for herself if nothing else. Taking her last drag from the cigarette she dropped the butt into her empty glass as she scanned the view. To her left, wilderness, trees, mountain and rivers as far as the eye can see. Her right, the fires and smoke billowing from the fires of Challenger Peak. In the far off distance, barely noticeable even with her scope, the remains of some city, forgotten and empty after the global disaster. And next door to the city lay an abandoned military base, its secrets unknown.

Nostrils flared in the dark woods as the gentle breeze brought with it the sweet scent of prey. Carefully treading through the underbrush, fake eyes focused on the tower. Nostrils flaring again as the scent grew even stronger. Pale hands touched the wooden stairs, claws gentle raking across the surface. Carefully making its way up, the predator had found prey, and was certain it would feast tonight. Saliva dripping from between its mangled teeth, long, thin limbs carried the creature towards the stairs, careful to avoid making any noise. The shackles around its wrists and ankles rusted and bloody, long from being any use to holding it. Saliva dripped from its mouth once more as it began its ascension.

Her first clue that something was off was the forest. Always noisy, even in the post apocalyptic world, with the sounds of animals, but now there was nothing but the breeze. Animals were rarely quiet, only silencing themselves when a predator was nearby, and always quickly.

Her second was the breeze itself, it carried with it a powerful odour. The pungent odour of dried blood and decay. The smell of death. Of a corpse long since gone.

Suddenly cursing those glasses of whiskey, she turned on her heel and raised her sidearm, her rifle too large and heavy to be used in close quarters. Hammer cocked and ready she walked towards the stairs, ready for anything, almost. She stood aiming at the trapdoor in the floor, waiting for something to enter the shack. Seconds edged on. The shack was not particularly large, but it was high off the ground and required a ladder to get into the structure atop the struts, not being accessible by the stairs, and generally being able to deter any curious animals.

Pale clawed hands attached themselves to the struts of the tower, pulling itself upwards, the creature was careful, desperate to survive. The beasts had destroyed the world, but it was one of the last of its kind. A failed military experiment, stored away in underground compounds in Siberia, accidentally let loose on the world. The beast was one of the largest of its kind, standing close to eight feet in height, frail looking, yet deceptively strong, it carried itself upwards. Looking through the window of the tower, it watched its prey, her back turned, facing the hatch in the floor. The beast pulled itself up past the window silently, on the roof. It peered down, watching as its prey took a gun out of its bag. The bullet holes aching in its back at the sight of it.

Tori quickly loaded her Benelli M4 shotgun, eyes never leaving the hatch in the floor, expecting an attack at any moment. Shouldering the shotgun she let herself breath slowly, waiting for her attacker to show itself.

An explosion of wood and glass erupted behind her as the creature sprung its attack. Smashing through the window and tearing away the parts of the wall. Tori spun on her heel and quickly fired a pair of shots at the frail looking humanoid as it leapt at her, easily tackling her to the ground, the beast was nearly three feet taller and much stronger. Tori twisted away from its snapping maw, her arm shooting forward as her Bowie knife slashed. The creature stepped back, snarling as it leapt. Using its own momentum against it, her arm shot forward as the beast leapt at her, spearing itself on her knife. An inhuman shriek filled the night as it clutched its side. A clawed arm slashing forward, sending Tori flying back, disarming her and leaving a gash across her left eye. Gaining distance from the beast she unholstered her Ruger Blackhawk and emptied the gun into the creature. Dodging another swipe from the claws she dove for her rifle. A clawed hand wrapped around her ankle and began pulling her back. Twisting around she plunged her knife into its eye. The grip around her ankle lessened and she grabbed her rifle. The creature stood to its full height, screaming as it began to pounce. Tori braced herself and pulled the trigger. The deafening retort of the .50 caliber rifle echoing through the night as the bullet tore

through the creature mid flight, tearing through its abdomen and launching it out of the tower. With her head pulsing and blood leaking, Tori slowly began to lose consciousness.

At the height of the cold war, the Soviet Union began experimenting with various ways to improve their soldiers' strength. From drugging them to the point of near death to extreme training. No experiment made it to the field, with soldiers either dying or being physically destroyed by the experiments. Operation Ulysses was an attempt to genetically alter the soldiers' DNA to make them stronger, faster, and more agile. It had some promising results at first: soldiers gaining growth in strength, agility, better hearing and smell. The makings of true super soldiers. Thousands of soldiers were genetically altered, the Soviet Union had its own super army. In an attempt to surprise its enemy, the USSR deployed these soldiers to hidden bases, strategically placed around the globe, however, unforeseen after effects began to show themselves months into the deployment. Soldiers began to experience growths and began to become disfigured. Appearing gangly and inhumanly thin. Pale in complexion. Growing in height and size, maintaining a vague human appearance. Then the soldiers began to go insane. Their brains began to deteriorate to an animalistic level. The experiment was deemed a failure and shut down. The former soldiers, barely recognizable as human, were locked away in underground containment sites across Siberia, as well as in global military sites. Locked away in the hopes they would never see the light of day.

The creatures would remain in banishment until a group of terrorists attacked a Russian military base, learning of these creatures and foolishly thinking they could control and use them for their own agenda. However, upon releasing the creatures, they would learn they could not be controlled, and inadvertently let them loose upon the world.