

It wasn't often, but on occasion some fool charged into the fight before marching orders could be given. Alexandria was half-tempted to order this cape's armband detonated before he set things fully wrong, but the Simurgh would already be prepared based on his actions so killing the Edwardian-style cape would accomplish nothing. Besides, the top-hatted individual hadn't charged without preparation: he had knelt down and done *something* that Alexandria couldn't make out, so he was making some sort of plan even if it only made sense to him.

Then the sword transformed. Then the beam: Alexandria could feel the bizarre energy, the pressure as a manhwa character might put it, and apparently the Simurgh could as well since she dodged out of the way and abandoned her activity.

Then, for the first time on record, the angel's calm facade cracked when her telekinesis apparently slipped off the attacker. The sword carved a shallow furrow, then the explosion sent them both flying. Already Alexandria was impressed. This was no foolish glory-hound, or at least not just that. And then the cape crossed his arms above his head.

The blasts that resulted were worthy of Eidolon. The one that missed, it leveled an entire city block – not just toppling the buildings, but outright shattering them. The Simurgh hit the ground and carved a divot, wings and limbs already scrambling to get beneath herself. As she hoisted upright, the cape was on her. Strike after strike, leaving visible wounds, the most damage any one combatant had ever done to the Simurgh – and none but the most telegraphed attacks had once been dodged!

Alexandria actually found herself crying out in protest as the cape's strike was arrested midair, as the first injection of hope was defeated. The cape died with dignity, wiping the Simurgh's smirk with a cannon blast, but was still killed with the fragments of his own sword.

*Bloodmoon deceased, GO-7.*

They couldn't mourn. They needed to capitalize on the cape's – Bloodmoon's – sacrifice. They still had a little over half an hour to win this fight before Ziz's song infected people's minds. If they were lucky, they could drive her away. Already, Rebecca Costa-Brown was pondering if it would be worthwhile to add her voice to Bloodmoon receiving his own statue in Canberra.

Years of experience saw her organizing the parahuman forces, letting Legend take his own forces while Eidolon did his thing. She began directing the grounded ranged combatants before leading the charge with her own contingent of flying Brutes.

Eidolon shot forward, propelled by a gravitic power that gave him flight and a ranged attack. One of his power slots was dedicated to preventing the Simurgh's song from affecting him, and his third was some manner of kinetic blast to crudely counteract the angel's telekinesis. In a motion that he'd later learn was reminiscent of Goku from an old Japanese story called Dragon Ball, he braced the heels of his hands together to form a pocket for his power to recurve on itself before releasing what was essentially a graser beam. The Simurgh twirled away, giving a wide berth to the energy that tore through the Australian landscape.

*Bloodmoon active, HO-4.*

What!?

There, already closing the distance, moving almost as quickly as Battery at her maximum charge, Bloodmoon left a trail of dust as his slim but powerful legs propelled him. His hands were on the hilt and sheath of a long, curved sword.

“Wooo!” Assault bellowed between hurling chunks of debris. “Round two, girl!”

It took a significant amount of Alexandria’s concentration not to do a double-take. Alright, apparently the slim and boyish figure was a woman. *Not everybody gets a power-assisted makeover, Becca*, Dominic would surely have admonished her if he could hear her thoughts. Then again, if he could hear her thoughts, she’d be in a lot more trouble than her prejudice against a woman lacking in curves.

A telekinetic pulse threw the current crop of fighters off-course, scattering them as the Simurgh turned to face Bloodmoon. In every other fight, when she prioritized a non-native fighter, it was always Eidolon. What did Bloodmoon bring to the table that made him- made *her* a more important target?

The ground under Bloodmoon’s feet tore up and into the air, causing the cape to stumble. Two more boulders came from the sides to crush the sword-wielding parahuman. Bloodmoon raised her left hand and snapped her fingers.

The boulders crashed together, shattering against one another. Bloodmoon appeared above the destruction in a cloud of mist. How many powers did this woman have? Then again, the sword could just as easily be Tinkertech or an empowerment like Dauntless. Still, Alexandria had no knowledge of a cape called Bloodmoon, so it must be a relatively recent cape. Someone new, with this much power, and fighting like this? As if to punctuate Alexandria’s thoughts, Bloodmoon slid under a rock and then leapt, kicking off of more debris and using the Simurgh’s attacks as stepping stones to approach the Endbringer. Bloodmoon leapt, bending forward, every bit of her body lining up for a textbook battojutsu strike. A spear made from compressed computers and research equipment shot up from beneath. Bloodmoon teleported to the side, keeping momentum, not even fazed.

The blade unsheathed. Even Alexandria’s superhuman senses couldn’t track the strike, but the results were self-evident. A sword longer than the cape herself, made primarily of blood so dark it was nearly black, completed the arc of its strike. The Simurgh’s forearm was cut halfway through, gouting blood. And one of the angel’s wings came crashing to the ground, neatly severed nearly at the base.

The Simurgh’s counterattack was blown off-course by a kinetic wavebreaker, followed closely by a gravitic haymaker that sent her momentarily reeling.

“New plan,” Alexandria bellowed on the wide-band channel. “Movers, anyone who can take a passenger, back up Bloodmoon! She has a weapon that can hurt the Simurgh!”

Eidolon continued to hammer the Simurgh with pure force, knocking the Endbringer down again and again but dealing no real damage. Two storms of telekinetic debris struck from above and below, forcing Eidolon to divert his attention. He had to blast upward while pressing down with gravity to keep from being shredded.

Then the entire battlefield was momentarily blinded and deafened when another volley of stars hit the Simurgh. The angel hit the ground and bounced twice before coming to a stop, floating back upright with a scowl on her stunningly beautiful features. Legend and Eidolon double-teamed the Endbringer, blasting her from both sides until she telekinetically grabbed Legend and shoved him in the way of

Eidolon's graser. While Legend was able to turn into light particles, the man still ended up collapsing on the ground. Numerous other heroes and villains had been downed in the chaos, caught in the Simurgh's area-based attacks, but hopes still dipped when the armband spoke:

*Legend down, FM-2.*

(BREAK)

Hookwolf had gotten his start in pit fighting, but his mind had proven itself to work on a level far higher than street-fighting tactics. He was a strategist at heart, organizing battle plans for Empire 88. While he was a pagan at heart, revering the Norse pantheon, the neo-Nazi organization had become a home for him in a way that he had never felt before.

His strategic mind often clashed with his pride, and all too often he'd had to make the decision to let someone else take the glory because it would bring greater victory, with fewer losses. And now he felt the same. Turning to the twins, he spoke gruff but clear. "We need to back up Bloodmoon. I don't care what the Jew bitch did to us: in this moment, she's our best chance to bring down Ziz. If killing this thing means I have to play horse for someone we hate, I can live with that." He lunged forward, outermost layer of skin already rupturing to let the blades spill out, galloping closer to the fight. The twins would follow. They would see the wisdom of his words. Or they'd see that he was committed and would join in to save face. Either way.

The harder part was flattening his back, making it somewhat passable as a platform. While he was called Hookwolf, he was nowhere near as distinct as forming an actual lupine head: he had four limbs made from various blades and hooked barbs, typically a scything tentacle like a tail, and a grinding beartrap that could pass as a head. He wasn't good at holding a concrete form, much less something that lacked sharp edges. But he could try. He could try and he would succeed, because this was bigger than him. It was bigger than the Empire. This was about killing a false god that wanted them all dead.

"Get on!" he bellowed through the shrieking clamor of his metallic parts grinding against one another. "I'll get you in close, you kill the bitch!" To her credit, Bloodmoon didn't hesitate. With a simple leap she was planted firmly on his back and Hookwolf began to close the distance. As the Simurgh ascended, he leapt, putting all of his force and mass into the jump. At the apex, Bloodmoon kicked off him and continued to rise.

She snapped her fingers again, turning to mist and flowing through each projectile the Simurgh brought to bear. The angel even tried to interpose other capes to turn away Bloodmoon's swings, but the killer cape simply teleported through them. Then an entire apartment complex ripped from the ground and the Simurgh brought it hurtling upward. Not only was this an unprecedented escalation of pure telekinetic power, it was a clear taunt: 'dodge this, then.'

Bloodmoon did not dodge. She sheathed her sword, turned midair, and drew. The blood on her blade rushed down faster than the eye could track, extending outward to split the entire building in two! So anointed with her blood, the structure slipped from the Simurgh's grasp and tumbled back down to earth.

Bloodmoon followed suit, her arrested momentum and nothing provided by the Simurgh to serve as a jumping-off point leading her to plummet from the sky.

Then her coat split in two at the back.

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I hoped this would work. I understood the principle of it, having seen the Orphan's trick, and I had something significantly more solid to use as a base. But I had no experience fighting with this kind of verticality. In a fit of pique, I reached back and removed my hair tie, letting it spill freely through the air.

I pressed my shoulders backward into the cloth, the leather of my first Yharnam coat. Logarius had levitated. Maria had shown a similar ability. The Orphan had flapped its ragged diaphanous pseudo-wings. The coat split and flew open like the limbs of a bat, beating at the air. It couldn't perpetually keep me aloft, but with the new momentum and a push of quickening – I drew again from the power of the old hunter's bone, transitioning to mist to allow the push from my 'wings' to launch me skyward much more than their beat should have allowed – I could give chase.

The Simurgh's attention was focused on me. She was still calling up torrents of kinetic force, striking down other fighters, defending herself. But I could feel her scrabbling at the metaphysical glass of the exhibit, trying to break in and examine me from all sides. Much as I would have liked to welcome her in, I didn't know enough how she'd respond and I didn't want her surviving and learning from the experience.

Another storm of debris came in, moving too fast. It would only cause superficial damage, but...of course! It would shred my coat, deprive me of my kludged flight. I drew in a breath. I hadn't needed Irreverent Izzy's creation for a long time: my own lungs were sufficient nowadays. I threw back my head and roared, casting aside the projectiles. Another beat of my coat and I was closing on her. I caught sight of movement behind the angel and, instead of going for a slice, I lined up a thrust.

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This was insanity. What was this fight? Was the spirit of Michael Bay somehow choreographing this battle? Still, the Simurgh's attacks on other parahumans were growing more half-hearted and passive. More and more of the Endbringer's attention was focused on Bloodmoon. After Bloodmoon cut the apartment complex in half, Alexandria no longer knew what to think. That was beyond any blunt-force telekinetic application the Simurgh had ever expressed before, and the response was likewise anomalous in the extreme.

Then Bloodmoon's coat started flapping like wings and sense went out the window. "Okay, fine, we're doing this then," Rebecca heard herself spit. Still, as Bloodmoon rose, armed with that sword, Alexandria saw her moment. Putting on as much speed as she could muster, she wheeled around and caught the Simurgh at the base of the neck. She could feel the Endbringer's attention back on her and near-instantly was wrenched away, but the damage had been done. The Simurgh was forced downward. Bloodmoon's blade embedded in her midsection.

The Simurgh looked directly down at Bloodmoon, opening her mouth and letting out a scream. The sheer force was like a sonic sandblaster. Bloodmoon's clothes and skin rippled from the force. Then she screamed in return.

The sound was fundamentally inhuman. It sounded like whale song. But the sound was not what sent a pang of fear through Alexandria. As Bloodmoon's scream passed through the air, the Simurgh's ever-present psychic song went silent.

Slowly, over seconds, a new song entered the minds of everyone present. It was another female voice, wordless and lilting, a combination of comforting and morose.

A psychic hammer sent Alexandria head-first into the ground like a railroad spike. It was everything she could do to pry herself free before the dirt suffocated her. Looking around, she saw that everyone had been knocked out of the sky by the same pulse. Dragon's voice listed most as down and a few as deceased. The Simurgh physically slapped Bloodmoon, knocking the cape's grip loose from her sword and sending her plummeting to the earth.

*Bloodmoon down, DK-8.*

*Bloodmoon active, DK-8.*

The cape cast something aside, likely some sort of Tinkertech. Alexandria wasn't close enough to see. The Simurgh ripped the blood sword from her midsection and tossed it aside, well out of Bloodmoon's ability to retrieve it. She descended, every bit the enraged archangel. Bloodmoon, despite having no melee weapon, drew her pistol and shot the Endbringer in the eye.

Ziz actually flinched from the hit and glared down with her one good eye, the other one bleeding. Bloodmoon stared back, unafraid, hair undulating in no real wind.

Then Bloodmoon held her right hand out to her side.

Something shifted. Everyone felt it. The Simurgh stiffened. The dry grass shuddered.

It felt as if God had turned a dour eye toward their fight at Canberra. Something rose from the ground, from a cloud of mist. Rebecca's vision swam and she could feel His finger descending from on high.

Bloodmoon didn't gesture with the weapon. She held it before her, splitting whatever it was in two, before assuming a strange post. Presuming the smaller weapon served the purpose of the little hand on a clock, Bloodmoon's pose indicated a time of approximately 1:40.

The Simurgh fled. The ground cratered from the telekinetic counter-force that propelled her skyward like a rocket. The evil angel spared no second glance, eye cast skyward, focused solely on escape.

Bloodmoon reassembled her weapon and pushed it back into the ground, returning it to the mist, and finally Rebecca felt the cruel gaze of the Almighty leave Canberra. She let out a breath she hadn't known she'd been holding, nearly vomiting in the process.

"...Dragon, confirm that the Simurgh is fleeing. How long has it been?"

*"I can confirm that she's broken low earth orbit. She...she's retreating higher than usual. It's been...it's only been seventeen minutes."*

Alexandria watched as Bloodmoon turned and began calmly walking back toward the staging area. “What price,” she whispered to herself, “will we pay for this miracle?”