

Sally woke up everyone who was going on the Resident Evil jump early the next morning. We met downstairs in the kitchen, where we had a simple light breakfast of leftover raptor meat. A big meal now would only slow us down.

In total, there were ten people coming with me, four of whom would be returning home almost immediately after seeing proof of the jump. George, Barry, and Jessica were a given, so much so that Jessica had just rolled her eyes when I confirmed she would be coming with us. We would also be joined by Danny, as well as Kate, the female firefighter. She was apparently a veteran, having returned from overseas two years ago. She had short brown hair that didn't even reach her shoulders and a mean case of resting bitch face. Even so, she seemed nice enough, and even more importantly, she confidently accepted her weapons when we were arming up. Combat experience was something we desperately needed.

All of us would have pistols on our hips and either a shotgun or rifle on our backs, strapped tightly so they would get in the way. We carried spare mags as well, though only one for our heavies and two for our sidearms. The fact of the matter was the guns were for emergencies only. Shooting any of our guns was sure to attract attention, both from more monsters and people wandering around, trying to survive. This was a zombie movie at the end of the day, which meant humans were just as big a threat as the monsters, if not more so.

We also were all wearing leather jackets, something that we had been accumulating since we started scavenging for clothes. The leather would help protect against bites while still letting us stay mobile. We left the kevlar and stab vests behind since they would slow us down and wouldn't do much against the primary threat.

We did bring stab vests and jackets for our targets, Dr. Patricia Salinado and her daughter, as well as leather gloves. Their main focus would be to stay safe, meaning slightly less flexibility in exchange for better protection was a worthwhile trade.

The last thing we did was get everyone hooked up with magic who wasn't already, as well as changing everyone's spells to spark and bramble. Fire would be next to useless against the zombies, as it really wasn't intense enough to do any hard damage. When we were finally all ready, we gathered back in the kitchen. Sally was waiting for us, bobbing above a table.

"Are you ready?" She asked, bouncing when I nodded. "Very well! Just a final warning, should any of you be bitten, you will be infected until I pull you back, but transitioning fully into a zombie will count as your death, returning you automatically."

"How long would it take for someone to zombify?" Barry asked, clearly unhappy about the concept.

"Between twenty-four hours and a week," She responded, continuing when he snorted. "The T-Virus affects people differently depending on several factors, including a person's compatibility with becoming a Tyrant level weapon, but mainly other genetic factors."

"But we will know it's happening if it happens fast," I stated, looking at Sally for confirmation.

"Oh absolutely, the symptoms of late-stage infection in still living people is obvious," She assured us. "You and everyone around you will notice, as long as you're not being trope levels of dumb."

"Good. If someone gets bitten, say something. No reason to hide it since we don't have to kill you, but you might need to go home early," I said, looking among the crowd, getting nods in understanding in return. "Now, the people just coming to check things out, I would like a volunteer to stay long enough to convince Dr. Salinado that we are a big deal. Having someone return home while we watch is an... interesting experience, but it convinced John McClane we were something special pretty quickly. Anyone?"

Almost immediately, Sarah and Charles both raised their hand. The other two civilians looked like they were considering it but shrugged when their leaders got to it first. I nodded before looking back at Sally.

"Where exactly will we be arriving?"

"Your jump location is the roof of their apartment building. Dr. Patricia Salinado is three floors down."

"No room number?" Danny asked with a wince.

"Unfortunately, no."

"Well... At least we got the floor," Barry said optimistically. "Better than nothing."

"Unless anyone has any other questions, I think that's everything, Sally," I said, giving one more look around at the large group. When no one said anything, I nodded. "Send us over."

"Alright! Commencing Avatar Reality Projection!"

The shift in location was always interesting, but I quickly shook off the slightly disconcerting feeling of being in two places at once. I could see the experienced members of the team doing the same, while the newer ones took a few seconds longer. As they did, I looked around, studying our locations. The rooftop was empty, save a pair of chairs and a single plastic table between them not far from myself. I could see a door tucked along one corner, but beyond that, the only notable feature of the roof was all the bird shit I could barely make out in the darkness. It was late at night, with a thick covering of clouds blocking out any moonlight.

Satisfied with my look around the roof, I stepped closer to the edge, looking down into the street below, which was surprisingly well-lit. I could see cars, streetlights, newsstands, and all the normal fixing of a city street. I could also see people slowly shambling down the road or standing still, staring off into the distance. I could see one of them braining themselves on the side of a brick building, blood dripping down from where their head slapped against the wall.

As I looked down at the street, a few others joined me, looking down at the zombies as they shuffled about. I heard one of the civilians stifle a gasp when they spotted the brain-dead woman across the street, trying to paint the wall red with her own forehead. I stepped back and motioned everyone else to follow.

"Alright. We went over all of this yesterday, but it bears repeating. The key to surviving a zombie apocalypse is directed paranoia. Every door has a zombie beyond it, every shadow has one hiding in it, and every corner has one just waiting to catch you as you walk around it," I said, keeping my voice down. "We take this slow but steady. Fatigue is a killer, so if anyone gets tired, say something."

Most of these points had already been made over the few talks we had about the setting and zombie settings in general, but at this point, I was a big believer in the pre-mission speech. It seemed to calm everyone down and tighten resolve, at least from my own recent experience.

"The goal is to clear as we travel so that if we need to retreat, we have some buffer at least. Keep in mind that sticking together is important, but if you need to step away, no one goes anywhere alone. Most of the threats are going to be normal zombies, but there are other threats here." I reminded, getting a serious look from everyone. "If you spot something other than zombies, get people's attention, but stay calm. We have been fighting raptors, monsters, and dragons. We *can* do this. Those of you who don't want to stay, this is where you say goodbye."

The two extra civilians nodded and gave a small wave before both of them vanished. This time, I look away, letting them disappear from this reality without mixing up my brain like a stand mixer. Once they were gone, I turned to the rest of the group. A few more words of the agreement later, I lead the group to the doorway. It was locked, of course, and for a moment, I couldn't help but chuckle. Of course, the first door of the Resident Evil jump was locked. Thankfully, I didn't have to spend an hour working through half a dozen puzzles to find the super special, one-of-a-kind key.

With Barry's help and some extra leverage in the form of our spears, we managed to snap the door's lock and open it. Together, we made our way down the stairs, counting the floors until we reached our destination, the seventh floor. After peeking through the window on the stairwell door, I slowly stepped out into the hall, looking up and down to confirm there was nothing immediately dangerous in our vicinity.

Rather than immediately starting to knock on doors, we split into two groups of four, with George, Danny, and Charles with me. Slowly but surely, we made our way through the

apartment halls, making sure the entire floor hallway was clear. Once we had verified that the seventh-floor hallways were clear, we started knocking on doors.

It was risky to possibly alert any zombies inside these rooms, but as much as taking it slow and being careful was important to make it through this jump successfully, we also did have a time limit. I wasn't ready to drop four hours slowly checking on all of these doors.

We had knocked on a dozen or so doors, four of them responding with their own knocking, only with a lot more bestial violence, before we heard a voice coming from behind a door.

"Hello?" It responded quietly.

"Dr. Patricia Salinado?" I asked.

"Um... that's my mom. Should I-"

"Baby girl, Amanda, what are you- Oh no, come away from the door, baby."

Pumping my fist, I waited a few seconds, hoping the doctor would respond on her own. When she didn't, I reached out and reluctantly knocked again.

"Dr. Salinado, we are Bastion Corps," I said, ignoring Jessica's look at the statement. "We are here to escort you and your daughter out of the city."

"...Why?" She asked, her voice full of worry and anxiety. "We were told to hunker down and wait for the National Guard."

"Ma'am, with all due respect, I think a look out your window will tell you all you need to know about how truthful that is," I responded. "If we could talk for a moment..."

After a long pause, the sound of a heavy locking bolt was audible through the door. I leaned my spear along the wall by the door before waving Sarah and Charles forward. Both of them nodded and stepped up behind me. After a moment, the door opened, revealing a middle-aged woman, around forty years old, with long, swirly black hair, thick glasses, and freckles. Behind her legs was a girl of maybe six, peaking around to see us. Dr. Salinado was also clearly armed, a simple kitchen knife pointed at the ground but clearly very ready. As the door opened, the woman seemed surprised to see so many people standing in the hall. Before she could get nervous, however, I turned to the rest of my team.

"Jessica, Barry, and George, do a walk around the hall and make sure it's still clear," I said, all three of them nodding, leaving immediately. "Danny, Kate, keep an eye on the door for me. Knock if we have company."

When both of the firefighters who came with us nodded, I turned back to Dr. Salinado, who paused before stepping back, gently pushing her daughter back as well to make room for us. I nodded and stepped inside, looking around for a moment before focusing on Dr. Salinado as she walked behind us.

"What do you want?" She asked. "We... Do you have any idea what's going on?"

"Raccoon City's water was contaminated by a virulent mutagenic virus," I explained. "In most humans, it reduces them to relatively simpleminded animals, hungry and violent. A small percentage of them mutate into much more disturbing creatures."

"The water..." She muttered to herself, looking back at me. "Just what kind of virus is doing this?"

"I'm afraid I don't know much more than that, Dr. Salinado," I responded. "Medicine is not my specialty."

"Why me? How do I know I can trust you? The National Guard-"

"Isn't coming," I finished, shaking my head. "Unfortunately, Raccoon City will be declared a lost cause and destroyed. The government cannot risk the spread of the virus, and they panic. We have approximately three days before they drop a small nuclear device into the city and wipe it off the map."

Her eyes went wide, and she dropped to her knees, reaching for her daughter seemingly on instinct. The quiet girl eagerly hugged the shocked woman back as if sensing her fear and horror.

"I... I don't know what to say..." She admitted, shaking her head for a moment before repeating an earlier question. "Why me?"

"We can't really answer that, unfortunately," I admitted with a frown. "All we know is that if you survive, you will help prevent situations like this in the future."

"I.. if? What..."

"Ma'am, we... well, to be honest, who we are doesn't particularly matter. But we have reliable information that you will be instrumental in some aspect of prevention or similar in the future."

"How could you possibly know that?" She asked, now sounding a bit annoyed. "You say that like your source knows the future, how... How could you possibly..."

"Dr. Salinado, I know this is a lot, but we are offering a chance to get you and your daughter out of this city," I pointed out. "If we could prove that we... are more than your average group, would that help?"

"I... suppose it might help?" She responded a bit thrown off by my offer.

"Fantastic, you might want to cover your daughter's eyes," I said, turning to look at Sarah and Charles. "Well, I'm sure this was enough of a trip?"

"Yes, this... thank you for indulging us," Sarah responded, her eyes darting to Dr. Salinado as she talked to me. Charles just nodded.

I was tempted to look away as they began to fade from this reality, but if I was going to make Dr. Salinado watch, it was only right that I did as well. When both of our temporary members vanished completely, I shook my head a bit, looking back at the doctor.

The older woman was staring at where Sarah and Charles had just been standing, her jaw wide open. Her daughter was just managing to pry her mom's hand away, frowning at having missed whatever it was, only to realize that two people had just vanished. Eventually, after a full minute, I coughed to break her out of whatever mental stun lock she was stuck in. She started with a shake, blinking rapidly, before eventually looking at me.

"Do we have time to pack?" She asked, any doubt about us knowing things we shouldn't, or more accurately, couldn't, seemingly gone.

I nodded and pulled off my own backpack, which was where we had stuffed the protective gear we had brought for her and her daughter. I pulled everything out and passed it to her with a nod.

"Pack some sealed, stable food into a small bag," I said. "Beyond that... You're going to have to leave it all behind."

She frowned but nodded before turning to give her daughter another hug. When she released her, she stepped away and started going through the cabinets, stuffing a few things into my bag. Once she had enough food, she stuffed in a few bottles of water. When she was done with that, she made her way back to us, handing me the bag.

"Is that good?"

"It will have to do," I responded, pulling the pack on easily, its weight barely noticeable to me. "Let's get you guys suited up."