

Rather than take the bikes or golf cart, we left the bastion on foot. While we all would have been able to fit on three bikes and the golf cart, I wanted to approach the fire station as quietly as possible. Our pipe bombs really depended on our targets staying more or less in one place to work. There was no way we could time the fuse well enough to take one out if it charged us, so catching them off guard was our primary option.

Before we left, Roger stopped Barry, Jessica, and me at the stairs.

"I finished three of the dragon's teeth spears," He explained, which was obvious considering he was holding them. "You guys have the most experience using spears, so I figured they should go to you."

He passed us each one of the weapons, accepting the old spears Barry and I used in return, nervously watching our reactions.

Like their predecessors, the weapons were mostly metal, though they were a good two feet shorter than the originals. This would cut down on their reach but would make them lighter and easier to use. Since the originals were a bit on the long end, I considered the new length to be a win all around.

Each of the spears had a dragon's tooth that was around eight or nine inches long at the end. The teeth were attached by a metal anchoring system that was bolted and welded to the rest of the spear, which connected to the teeth with two thick bolts. These bolts went *through* the teeth, two holes carefully drilled at perpendicular angles. Roger had then wrapped metal wiring around the tooth as well as the entire connection point to distribute the force of stabs through the whole connection.

He had even solved the gripping issue that both Barry and I had noticed, the metal of our old spears getting slippery and hard to hold on to when they got wet. The dragon's tooth spears had two rubber gripping points, one in the middle and one at the base opposite the tip, epoxied to the metal. The gripping point really held on tight and would probably be easier on the hands than just directly gripping metal as well.

"Roger, this is well done," I said with a smile, patting his back. "Honestly, good work. When you can, work on making a few more of them so that we can train everyone else on them."

"These are going to make killing stuff a whole lot easier," Barry said, taking a few steps away and testing the weapon out, thrusting a few times and swinging it around. "Kickass, Roger!"

"Thanks... it was honestly kind of fun making," He admitted. "I'm gonna try and make knives from their claws next."

"Sounds like a plan. Don't get lost down in the workshop space yet, though. We still need you to keep your eyes open around here until we get back," I reminded him.

"Yeah, I know. I'm heading up to the roof with some binoculars," He assured me. "Um... good luck?"

"Thanks, Roger," Barry said, slapping the smaller kid on the back. "We'll be back soon."

Beyond our spears, I had one of the AK-47's that we found at Crazy Abe's on my back, while Barry had a pump action shotgun around his. Jessica was still using the same shotgun she always had, loaded with slugs just in case, while George had an AR-15. Alissa had the high-caliber hunting rifle, and everyone had pistols on their hips, glocks for most, and 1911s for George and me. We were packing some extreme heat, and somehow, with what we were about to hunt, it still felt a little light.

Thankfully, the pipe bombs fixed that pretty well.

Once we left the bastion, we made our way through the town center in a direction we had only gone a few times. Because of this, it didn't take long for us to cross into areas of the town that we hadn't been to since the world came crashing down around us. It was nerve-wracking, traveling on foot after spending the last few days flying around the town on bikes. I didn't realize how the added speed had made me feel safe until it was gone, and we were sneaking around buildings, worried about stumbling on raptors or cat monsters.

Eventually, when we started getting closer to the fire station, we slowed down even more. Jessica, our resident hunting expert, had us change our direction once we realized the wind was blowing at our backs.

"They will smell us coming," She explained, having stopped the group. "The wind is carrying our scent towards them. We need to attack them from a different angle."

"Damn... Yeah, good call, Jessica," I acknowledged with a nod before looking around and pointing at a road that split off from the one we had been walking along. "Let's get on that road, and we can walk that way for a while. Then we can attack from the east."

We quickly crossed the street and started moving in the new direction, just as tense as before, but now with the hope of ambushing the Dino-Dogs just a bit higher than before. Since the hope was to kill them with our pipe bombs and not face them directly at all, everyone but Alissa had two homemade explosives with them.

Finally, after walking for nearly thirty minutes, we were only a few blocks away from the station. By then, we had split up, with Barry and me on one side of the street and Jessica, George, and Alissa on the other. As we got closer, according to our plan, we split up even further, going down different side roads. That way, even if one of the Dino-Dogs didn't go down

to our bombs, one of the teams would be able to attack while the other focused on dodging and running.

Alissa would eventually split off from her group to get on top of a sturdy building since she had a long-range rifle. She didn't have much physical fighting experience, so having her separate from the front line made sense.

After ten minutes of nearly crawling through the streets, we finally reached the fire station. Or rather, the chunk of space that surrounded the fire station, where Charles had described the canine monsters patrolling. Barry and I settled in, upwind and hopefully undetected, keeping watch from behind the corner of a house and a crashed truck.

The area around the fire station was mostly like how I remembered, save that one of the stores was a burnt-out and partially collapsed husk and that a few cars had crashed and caused a traffic jam. There was still a lot of open space, surprising considering how packed other parts of the central part of town were, meaning I could see most of the area clearly, other than what was hidden by the fire station, as well as the few cars in our way.

Still, even with our view slightly obscured, it didn't take long for us to spot our targets, the large canine Dino-dogs wandering around the park area beside the station, on the far opposite side from us. Part of me was shocked they were still there but glad they were easy to spot. If the area around the station had been empty, we would have been forced to wait with no idea where the monsters were.

The canines themselves were big, just as Charles had described and I had seen before, but now, having witnessed the dragon, they didn't seem nearly as impossibly dangerous. They were still clearly huge, and I was nervous about taking them on, but they were not the unbeatable monstrosities that they had been back when one had almost unknowingly crushed me.

Silently, Barry and I watched the two large creatures as they ambled around, nosing at cars, digging in the dirt, and occasionally barking and snarling at each other. It was intimidating watching them jostle and shove cars around, and I could feel Barry becoming more and more tense.

The both of us watched the large monsters move about until, eventually, after nearly an hour, the beasts started to move in our direction. It was slow, as they were ambling about, sniffing at the ground and watching every shadow around the fire station, but they did get closer. Soon, they were so close I could feel the urge to hold my breath, forcing me to fight against my instinct in order to remain calm.

Finally, after what felt like ages, it was time. I reached down and grabbed my first bomb, Barry copying my movements. I pulled out a lighter and, after giving Barry a look, flicked it on

and lit both of our fuses. Together, we both stood up, pulled back, and threw the homemade explosives, the fuses burning with a hissing sound that sparked and snapped.

From where we had taken cover, we could see the monsters standing between us and the fire station. They were nudging at the side of the brick building as if testing its resiliency, trying to find a weak point to get inside. The tape-wrapped explosive devices flew through the air, spinning and over end across the street and towards the dogs. Barry's was near perfect, landing just behind the closest canine. It impacted the ground and rolled closer, stopping just underneath Barry's target. The only way he could have gotten a better shot was if he had walked up and taped it to the monster's stomach. Mine, on the other hand, was just a bit off. Rather than land directly under one of the canine monsters, it impacted and tumbled forward, coming to rest just a half dozen feet away from the Dino-Dog I targeted.

Both of the dogs jerked and tensed, either feeling or hearing the impacts and hissing.

It didn't matter, though, because we barely had time to duck back behind the truck we were hiding behind when the bombs went off, one a second later than the other. The explosions were bone-rattling, hard enough for me to flinch despite the fact that I was already tense and waiting for it. The sound of whirring, whistling shrapnel filled the entire area before everything settled.

Eager to see what the situation was, I stood and looked, finding a double cloud of smoke that was already blowing away to reveal the damage. One of the creatures, the one that Barry might as well have handed his bomb to, was almost completely disemboweled. Its flesh was burned, blackened, and on fire in a few places. It was clearly already dead, unsurprising since I was pretty sure I could see its heart.

The second creature was slightly better off, though it was definitely a case of choosing between the frying pan and the fire because the explosion had still torn into its face, neck, eye, and side. It was bleeding heavily, on fire, and had made it a few steps before collapsing onto its side. I could see that it was still breathing, but it was shallow and barely noticeable.

"Holy hell... That worked..." Barry said, his eyes wide as he looked over the truck before standing up straight. "I can't believe that worked, we-"

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw movement, and my still-rattled brain struggled to put it together with the encroaching vibrations I could feel. It finally connected in my head about the same time it did for Barry. Still, I was faster. I dove forward, slamming into Barry and carrying us both to the side, the *third* Dino-dog slamming into cover hard enough to shove it to the side.

Both of us scrambled to our feet, Barry pulling out his shotgun while I swung my spear around, bringing the incredibly sharp dragon's tooth to bear. As Barry fired his first round, we both paled when it punched into the massive canine's side, and it barely even flinched. It lashed

out with its spined tail, forcing us to dive back again. The weaponized tail slammed into the back side of the truck, crunching the metal, its spikes punching through easily.

Again, we both quickly climbed back to our feet. I stepped forward, holding my spear out before slicing at its tail. The sharp spear sliced into the flesh of the monster's tail, causing it to let out a roar and whirled around in a surge. It climbed on and over the vehicle, the suspension failing with a loud cracking and whining, the truck collapsing until the bottom was on the ground. Its cab crumbled as the monster put its weight on it completely. I jabbed forward again, reaching out as far as I could and lunging, the spear slicing along the monster's nose, causing it to howl and almost screech in pain as it recoiled.

"Go for its eyes or nose!" I called out to Barry, and hopefully any of my other team members who could hear.

The creature recovered from its minor wound quickly, jumping off of the truck and forcing Barry and I to run and retreat. Thankfully, since there was no way we could outrun it, this was when Jessica and George arrived from their cover, opening fire on the monster, peppering its back and side with bullets. I could even hear the more distant sound of Alissa firing her rifle.

Together, we harassed it, confusing the monster until finally, it was too much, and the creature roared and lunged at Barry and me, ignoring all the others. Even as it charged, I jabbed out with my finger, sending a spark of electricity to zap its leg. The creature stumbled, swinging its tail out to balance itself before recovering completely. Still, it was enough time for me to lunge forward and slam my spear into its eye socket. I could feel a popping sensation before my spear slammed into the bone of its orbital socket, punching through that with a crack.

Before I could even try to remove the spear or, better yet, drive it in further, the creature roared and shook. I tried to hold on, only to get thrown off and slammed into the side of a car, the air completely knocked from my lungs. The creature screeched and howled, swinging its head and spraying blood all over, trying to dislodge the spear but not able to touch it without sending a spike of pain into its brain.

I tried to stand but failed, so instead, I raised my hand and jabbed my fingers forward, sending out another lashing of electricity. Like a magnet, the decently powerful spark of electricity latched onto the metal spear, carrying the charge directly into the creature's skull.

The reaction was instant, the creature throwing itself to the side, shaking and twitching like it was having a seizure. I thrust my fingers out again, sending my third and final spell for the day right into my spear, causing the creature to shake, seize, and twitch all over again.

By the time Barry started to help me up, I was able to fight through a shaky breath, and George, who had also taken the zap spell, dumped all three of them, one after the other, into the beast's brain.

As I shakily stood, my back already feeling bruised, the entire street was silent. We waited, eyes peeled, for a fourth Dino-dog to reveal itself. When none did, we slowly unclenched, our tension lowering just a notch.

"Alright...well... let's meet the neighbors," I said, getting a laugh from Barry.