

Undead Knight

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Summary: Alternative-power!Taylor. After triumphing against the challenges of Drangleic, and conquering every soul she could, Taylor finds herself at yet another bonfire, but this time, it is back in Brockton Bay. How will the world, Cauldron, and the entities, react to this Chosen Undead?

Chapter 1: Bone-Fire

Knowledge of Dark Souls isn't needed to enjoy this fic (even if it will make the omake scenes way more amusing), but I'll try to bring together in a way that somewhat makes sense the Lore of the two worlds (you'll likely know by now that it is one of the part of fanfiction that I enjoy the most).

Extreme Summary of Dark Souls Lore:

In the beginning, the universe was a grey expanse of lifeless stone, with no light, no warmth, and no life if not for the presence of Archdragons.

Then the equivalent of the Big Bang: the appearance of the First Flame.

Said flame brought life into the Grey Era, and we went from the Age of Stone into the Age of Fire.

Eventually, the First Flame started to fade (=entropic death of the universe), but by magic bullshitery, the biggest badass around decided to feed himself to the Flame as a fuel, prolonging the Age of Faire and staving off the Age of Dark.

The whole Dark Souls games are about a 'Chosen Undead', which, for reasons that I can't properly explain in a summary, has the power of eating the souls of what he defeats in order to grow stronger.

In the end, the Main Character has to decide between offering himself as the fuel to keep the First Flame Going, and becoming a Lord of the Dark instead, leading those still alive in the Age of Dark.

The DARK SOULS lore works by cycles that follow the previous summary.

As to the choice of the game to make references to: DS1 is out because it kind of requires min-maxing in order to be played effectively, and I haven't played DS3. So references will be geared towards DS2, and I will talk about them if needed with Author Notes at the end of the page.

Anyway, for those that are unfamiliar with the DS games, imagine the MC as an errant knight that respawns at a bonfire (checkpoint system) when killed. Said errant knight is a build grown around a lot of attributes, but for the less genre-savvy, the magic is divided in Pyromancy (Technically Named the Flame of Chaos, is about tossing around deadly shit, not controlling fire that already exists), Miracles, Curses, and Charms, which are respectively Lightning-based, Darkness-based, Energy-based.

And since nobody really wants to hear about the adventure in Dark Souls (either you've played it, and you already know it, or you don't care, and it's okay), I'll simply toss my alternative-power!Taylor back in the Worm-verse.

I've played some Dark Souls recently, and like for everything else, I thought about how I could slot it together with Worm. There is another DS2-Worm crossover, in which Taylor channels the Dark, manifesting Nadalia's Idols and even Ramie (Fume Knight). It is written beautifully, but I fear it is abandoned.

I'll make her gear up differently each time she heads out with a clear objective, but I won't be spending too much time on her equipment, but keep in mind the kind of monsters that you face in Dark Souls, pair it with the fact that each time you die you can simply try again until you lose all of your humanity.

That's fucking OP right there.

Bone-Fire

A city of reasonable dimensions never truly slept. Between those that worked at night, and the criminals that poked their head out of the woods only during the relative cover of the dark, the only discernible difference between day and nighttime was the number of crimes committed.

It was almost like an unwritten agreement that everyone knew about: the day is silent if you don't rock the boat too much, the night is quiet if you look the other way. That was the truth for your everyday joe, for capes, the rules were just that tidbit skewed in order to account for the necessity of violence that slept more or less deeply within every *homo sapiens sapiens*, a necessity that awoke irreversibly when one became a *parahuman*.

Such convention was widespread across every civilization since the presence of capes became an undeniable part of the world. Sure, it differed from city to city, villains were noticeably more tame in Los Angeles, where they could be casually hammered down faster than they could process by Alexandria, while they were more chaotic in New York, where, despite the constant presence of Legend, the situations in which people could Trigger were surprisingly high, causing the birth and death of uncountable minor gangs that never even reached the fame that almost every parahuman seemed to lust after.

In Brockton Bay, this particular configuration took the form of a constant cold war slowly grinding against both the Protectorate and PRT personnel and any other parahuman, no matter if Hero, Rogue, or Villain. The lines in the sand were stark clear since, no long after Marquis's defeat and capture years before, Lung had cut for himself a slice of the city, humiliating every hero in town, and after the more or less smooth transition from Allfather to Kaiser at the head of the Empire 88. The Merchants were there too, sure, and from time to time they made a mess, mostly because being intoxicated with tinker made drugs made for an awful application of superpowers, but also because intoxicated or not, the Merchants had a weak enough presence that neither the E88 nor the ABB truly ever came around to popping them like the annoying zit they were.

The sounds of the city at night were a known constant in the life of everyone that spent enough time in Brockton Bay, sirens, occasional boom, grinding of steel, gunshots, gangs posturing, and parahumans snapping at each other, like peacocks preening in order to show of their own worth.

The low rumble of Armsmaster's motorcycle was yet another of these sounds, both a deterrent for the gangs, and a rallying call for the Heroes.

The Tinker crossed the city following the directions of his software, thusly being able to keep a high speed and quickly nearing the objective. The Brockton Bay main cemetery wasn't far from Capitol Hill, but it wasn't that the one where he was needed.

The smaller and less known cemetery that rested just shy of what had once been the industrial area near the Docks, the small and often ignored place was quite the catch for the dead. Or, it would have been if the dead cared, one way or another, for the sea breeze and the sight of the uninterrupted horizon.

Armsmaster parked his tinkertech bike right next to the slightly rusted gates, and made his way in with a confident stride, his trusty halberd ready for battle, while he prepared himself mentally for any possible outcome.

As far as first contacts went, this one promised to be unusual.

Generally, the first appearance of a cape, when not dictated by a public trigger event, immediately set them up as either Hero or Villain. The first appearances also tended to happen without interacting with the Protectorate, until the new cape wisened up enough to seek to join a group. The call to the PRT had been made by across the street, where a resident had spotted a *knight* of all things, sitting at a bonfire.

Which would have been strange, but it turned extremely sinister when said bonfire sat in the middle of a cemetery.

Dramatics or not, showmanship or not, defiling graves wouldn't look good on anybody's resume.

Armsmaster walked the slightly uphill path between the rows of tombstones until he reached what he deemed a safe distance from the objective. Just when he started to feel a warmth that was immediately classified by his suit and support system as a shaker effect, he stopped cold, and lowered his halberd, ready to use it at any given moment.

"Hero or Villain?" the situation had to be cleared immediately, because if this new cape wanted to make a mess in Colin's city, the Tinker sure as hell wasn't going to let him... *her*, he corrected himself reading the info his helmet provided, do as she pleased.

When the silence stretched, and new info was fed to Colin by his helmet, he spoke again: "Defiling the Tombstone of Taylor and Danny Hebert is petty revenge, in any case,

you'll need to give a statement and follow me to the Headquarters."

The knight didn't answer, she didn't even give a sign of having heard the Tinker. Her closed helm remained pointed at the small bonfire, which burned too hot for it to be a natural effect, and, now that Colin had access to the scans, was burning off *bones* of all things.

A steely kite shield was resting next to the unknown cape, a rose blossom occupying its center, looking like it was made of a tinker-made material, that Colin's scans couldn't identify. The cape wore a tattered bluish cloak that was frayed on the edges, matted with all manner of things that Armsmaster's scanners didn't manage to identify. Red leather boots covered the unknown cape's feet, while on the cloth resting over the chainmail was depicted a stylized stag's head.

As Armsmaster took a careful step forward, both in order to establish dominance in the rather one-sided conversation he was trying to have with the new cape, he slowed down, and felt the will to fight leave his limbs.

The Tinker stopped, his armor's warnings blaring loudly in his ears, and stepped back until the shaker effect no longer hit him.

"Console, confirmed shaker effect from the bonfire, it seems to 'pacify' forcibly those that come too close." he relayed to headquarters.

"Confirmed. Status of the Parahuman?" the flat voice of someone that had seen too much shit to be bothered spoke back in the earpiece Armsmaster carried within him at all times.

"Not Hostile, but she's not reacting to me, I cannot get too close lest I fall to the shaker effect."

"A squad is on route to isolate the new cape, from your feed temporarily named 'Rose Knight', but there may be problems in..."

In that moment, the unknown cape moved.

It rose methodically from her slouched position next to the fire, and turned her head to the city. A second later, a loud rumble confirmed the info that was being fed to Colin from console.

"... downtown, nest to Ruby Casino, Lung is on the move."

Colin didn't give his shoulders to the unknown cape, but his plan of abandoning the knight to the incoming PRT squad died immediately, for the cape plunged her right hand into the bonfire, and when she pulled it back, a sword came with it.

Only, it wasn't a sword at all, it was more like a statue resting on the back of a slab of stone that was at least one handspan thick, depicting the delicate features of a woman.

But the unknown cape wasn't done, for her hand, dipped again into the bonfire. This time emerging with a hook, shaped like a dragon's head, at the base of which was situated a small chime.

"Are you going to fight me?" Armsmaster questioned when the knight secured the chime to her belt and lifted again the giant stone slab that had to weigh at least half a ton like it was a twig, resting it on her right shoulder while she secured the shield to her left vambrace, which seemed like stone gauntlet strangely engraved.

Only when Armsmaster made clear that he wouldn't be moving from the path intended by the new cape, the Rose Knight spoke, and her voice, while flat and uncaring, seemed to be struggling to hold back a peal of laughter: "It wouldn't be a fight."

A second later, the cape started running, faster than it should have possible, leaving Armsmaster to scramble to his motorcycle, which immediately was directed towards the last reported position of Lung.

AN

Ideas, hopes?

Chapter 2: From the Ashes I

From the Ashes I

What does one do, when everything that could be done has been accomplished?

Where does anyone go, where any place is as meaningless as the next?

I had known hope, what seemed a long time ago. But then again, what was time? Reality was thin in Drangleic, and time, in particular, followed a very curious set of rules. Stretches and pieces of me broke in my home city, and like thousands and more like me, I attempted to walk the Path put before me by Fate and Chance.

I had remembered my name at the beginning of my journey, and a few other things. Truly, in the beginning, silence had been almost a blessing, it helped me trying to remember, but it wasn't long after my first steps in the unknown realm of Drangleic that I had understood that silence was just another facet of the curse. Loneliness, which I had suffered for a long part of my first life was nothing new, but it grew me weary, stealing slowly but surely anything that made me myself.

In the beginning, it had taken me a long time to recognize that exchanging words with others felt... something. Not a bonfire's warmth, nothing like that. And yet, it made me feel... it helped, somehow. Knowing that there were others attempting to fight back the Dark, knowing that some wielded it with purpose and not meaningless hate for anything bright, knowing... feeling.

The first time I had died had left me with sharper memories than most, trapped, eaten alive, suffocated. It wasn't pleasant, it had, in fact, *shattered* me. But it was solid, something sharp and exact in my mind that not easily was forgotten. And even if I had been tempted to surrender it to the Dark, along with myself, circumstances had changed...

Slowly, almost unaware, I had started staving off the Dark, if only because of a sense of stubborn determination. Something in me hadn't wished to just... stop. And even more slowly, fighting off the dark translated into fighting *anything* that I found on my path. I had been unable to talk back most of the time, the meaning and the purpose of words escaping my mind, but the interactions, carried on with nothing but gestures of the head, hadn't been... *bad*.

Some people helped me, some people I helped, some people I summoned, out of pragmatism if nothing else. Camaraderie wasn't something that I would have recognized at the time, empty as I had been, but it was there nonetheless. Outrage against the invasions had too been outside of my mind, but the natural reaction of fighting back when challenged had allowed me sharp moments in which I *felt*.

And that had been enough.

I had fought, I had scraped and battled and haggled and died. And after each death ...*eaten squashed, burned, beheaded, exploded, pierced, cut apart, torn to shreds, tossed from the tallest peaks, poisoned, stabbed, slaughtered*... I had managed just enough to keep going, to slowly find my own strength at the expense of the dying realm of Drangleic.

And even more slowly, my mind started to piece together the pieces. Who was who, why this or that one would help me, and by extension, I slowly came to realize my own role. Almost too late I found out about Vendrick's scheme to deny his cunning and lying queen her prize.

Shadow is not cast, but born of fire, and the brighter the flame, the deeper the shadow. So, in desperation Vendrick, with his brother Aldia, had sought another way to break the cycle of the Curse that had eroded and destroyed so many kingdoms before him. To do this Vendrick peered straight into the essence of the soul. Both the siblings sought a way to overcome the Curse and pursued any means of attaining it. And at the end of the day, the choice had fallen into my own hands.

To Burn, and Nurture the Flame, or to Lead the Age of Dark.

Was it any wonder, that after all the pain and fatigue, after the sacrifices, after fighting for my life and against the Dark, I refused to surrender to either fate? What was the meaning of protecting the weak, the only action that allowed me to keep my sanity, if any of my choices would have destroyed them?

Seeking through the Flame for a bonfire not only unlit, but also beyond the reach of the Cycle was foolishness, and yet, with Aldia's soul, the scholar of the First Sin, I had found a way: to simply cast an ember beyond the reach of Dark. Letting it light a bonfire on its own, and Hope. And what was the meaning of the Age of the Dying Flame, if not to hope in the face of the hopelessness?

Again, the meaninglessness of Time in Drangleic had allowed me to succeed where Eons should have consumed me long before, and I had found that the Ember was ready.

I knew that this bonfire was the furthest from Drangleic, if the presence of an actual sun instead of a sunset over my head, and the quick turning of the day into night instead of never-ending dusk. More than that, it made some sort of cruel sense, for me to return to what was once my home, now that my home was the few people that I managed to save from the Dark, or the few that kept it off on their own.

What did it mean for me, to be here? Here, where there was not only a Sun, but also Stars? Here, where Time was almost a linear thing, and Reality seemed to be written in the same stone of Vendrick's golems? Unyielding and still?

The souls here felt... dim. Almost meaningless, truly. Transient, lacking direction, unknowing and hopeless to the inevitable turning of the Wheel.

Once I had settled to wait, and think, and hoping to see in the Flame a direction that could save Drangleic without condemning me or others, a traveler had stumbled upon the bonfire. Lit from the bones of a father that died in my long (or brief?) absence, it was no different than any other, calming and reassuring with its warmth, a pause from the infinite struggle.

He was of no consequence. While he was weak as any other, he wasn't on the verge of becoming hollow. And that was a promising sign as any other. Would there be hope here? Hope for me to find a way to save Drangleic? Hope for an escape for the others, even if they were no Monarch? My decision could only be one.

To wait for new developments.

I was no longer a young and lost undead, but Vendrick's counsel was sound: *Seek Strength. The rest will follow.*

After some time, or no time at all, a rumble at the edge of my senses made me glance away from the Flame, my attention finally brought back to this city, which should have been so familiar, and was yet so alien to anything I felt I knew.

It was faint, and yet... *warm*. There was hope there, something had changed, an opportunity had presented itself, and I wouldn't let it slip.

I reached into the Flame, my hand shifting among my belongings with precision and determination, until I found my heaviest blade, if not because of the weight, also because it reminded me of the price of Trickery, and the Chime I received once I had defeated the Darklurker, back when I was lost and didn't truly understand what was going on around me.

I started moving in the direction where I perceived something... *important*, when the traveler offered his pitiful challenge.

Hilarity had little place in the world, but it was a moment so unexpected, and so *meaningless*, that I almost laughed: "It wouldn't be a fight."

The traveller was lucky, was I not a defender of the weak, he would be a smear on the ground.

The strange city, made with materials that were extremely frail, echoing the lack of souls that went into their creation, almost blurred around me, and I almost paused in surprise: I could run for a long time, requiring very little to recover thanks to the magic of my own shield, but this kind of speed was...

Of course. I laughed hollowly inside of my helmet: in a reality so rigidly defined, where distance was just as meaningful as the challenges I could find on the Path in Drangleic,

my strength wasn't imposed on the world only when matched against another, but stood starkly against the unbending yet frail world around me.

All too soon, I found the origin of the disturbance, and I blinked in surprise, for he wielded flame effortlessly. *Mad Pyromancer? No.*

Under my gaze, I saw the man-like figure in the middle of the ongoing conflict growing steadily taller while a trio of demons appeared to gang up to tear him apart, with little to no success.

I blinked in surprise seeing the demon hounds apparently follow the commands of a single woman that didn't sport any particular characteristic worthy of note, even as another in the group that was allied against the rapidly growing... monster... in the middle of the small plaza.

From time to time, a cloud of pitch-black smoke seemed to provide temporary support, allowing the others to retreat more and more, but the steadily growing enemy was unrelenting, and while his fire didn't feel like the Flame of Chaos, and appeared too superficial for it to be the fabled Flame of Sorcery that the Witch had used before... I scoffed, reprimanding myself for letting my thoughts wander.

"It matters not." I spoke quietly to myself, my thumb gently caressing a ring that I had chosen to carry a long time before. It was engraved with the crest of the Way of Blue, symbolizing the dignified oath to defend the weak. Sure, these people were no candidates to be Monarch, and the man slowly morphing into a silvery lizardlike being was no dark invader, and yet...

I secured my Blossom Shield to my back, feeling it resting tightly against my worn cloak, and briefly touched the chime resting on my belt, before discarding the option. Better to spare my strength for healing, the people attempting to subduing the monster in the center of the small plaza would need healing eventually.

Holding my blade with two hands, I noticed a blonde woman dragging another, defeated companion towards, me, despair written clearly on their faces.

With a nod in her direction, I jumped in.

I sprinted almost as fast as my legs could carry me, still somewhat surprised by my own speed, and spun on my left in order to deliver a powerful blow with the flat of my weapon against the strange enemy I was going to face. I was surprised when my opponent was simply swatted away, very much like I would have been from a much larger opponent, instead of simply tanking my blow.

Somewhat confused, I pointed towards safety for the two weak souls that were about to be burned away, it wouldn't do for them to die when my intention was to save them.

Besides, I think that death would be permanent for them.

My strange opponent returned to the fray at least three meters tall, with sharp claws instead of fingers, and a shroud of flames over the steadily growing steely scales. Unimpressed, but curious to know how far he could go, I took a step back, avoiding a feral swipe, quickly pivoting on my left foot once more to skirt by a fireball, and an instant later I slammed the stony pommel of my blade on my opponent's head.

He fell like a tree with rotten roots. I kept my distance, shielding myself with the flat of my blade from the sudden wave of flames that all pyromancers resorted to when they wished to buy some space. I jumped up and forward as soon as I felt the pressure lighten.

I swished down, letting my opponent rolling to one side, and I felt myself smile under my helm, how far could he go? The warmth had grown considerably, there was no denying it. Would it translate to a bright soul? If so, how powerful could it grow? I had to admit, finding such a ready solution to stave off the Age of Dark sounded almost too good to be true. Could I manage to trick him into sitting on the Throne of Want if he proved himself strong enough? Or would I need to subsume his soul and giving up a part of me?

I studied my opponent, whose neck was starting to grow longer while a tail sprouted from his tailbone. I ignored his taunting or menacing words in order to try and figure out what exactly he was becoming. *Might it be? A drake?*

I somersaulted over a swipe of his tail, rolled in position, and kicked him in the chest while he was unbalanced, noticing with interest that a blow that would have broken him in two at the beginning of our fight now simply made him stagger. *How much can he heal?*

A swing later, a scaled arm fell to the ground, followed by a small fountain of blood and a wave of flames that I shielded from with my sword. Immediately, he roared in outrage and tried to strike, but to no avail, as I kept myself on the side that I crippled him on, making it much easier to avoid his blows.

I lifted my weapon, holding it oblique in order to let the first strike slid off, only to roll under a second swipe and hopped back in order to not get stamped on. I felt the drake wannabe strength even as I deflected his blows, and I could tell that it was building up. But he was predictable, as all mindless beasts were, and not as fast as he thought himself to be.

He roared, to which I simply replied with a swing strong enough to cause a deep trench on his chest, which immediately began to steam and sizzle as it closed.

I rolled backwards, avoiding the snap of teeth that rested now on a draconic jaw, and kicked his face when he attempted to bite me again, using the momentum I gained to return to my feet.

I took a step forward and swung down my weapon, which the dragon-man avoided with a serpentine movement that brought a grin on my face. *He's faster.*

I left the blade embedded in the frail ground and rolled on one side of it, freeing my shield from my back and swinging it against an incoming swipe from the beasts, which cause him to stagger momentarily, long enough for my right hand to close on the handle of my weapon, which I swung once more, turning the momentum of my swing in an anticlockwise turn.

I smiled when I felt my blow bit through my opponent, the blood falling like a small river over Vraengar's boots while I kept spinning, this time using the edge of my shield as a cutting tool, that the drake-wannabe avoided narrowly, just in time to try and oppose my follow upswing with his tail, which was cut off with ease.

I jumped back and dodged another swipe, my enemy seemingly ignoring the loss of his tail while he once more breathed fire at me. I dug my blade in the far too frail ground, opting to hold my shield with two hands and sprint from behind my cover too fast for the beast to follow. My first kick landed on his forefront leg, making him fall a bit forward as he realized that I was no longer behind my weapon, and he turned his head to me, his jaw starting to take the form of an unholy, open X, revealing row upon row of teeth.

I smashed him with my shield, forcing him back and jumping over his spiked back, using the edge of my shield to slash open what seemed to be a budding wing sprouting right next to my feet.

I kept moving around the budding drake, enjoy the steadily growing warmth that he was giving off, and my curiosity was more than picked: *How far can he go?* Hope is such a frail thing, but I found myself eager to see what kind of soul would I hold at his death.

The foolish creature laid his paw-like hand over the hilt of my blade, still embedded into the ground, and attempted to hit me with it, more to mock me than because he had any idea about how to use it, I was sure. Keyword being 'attempted', because he didn't manage to even lift it.

I sprinted and rolled, slashing against his arm once I was near enough to my objective.

Titanite is sturdier than his scales? I asked myself in surprise while the lower side of my shield went more than halfway through his arm, forcing him to give up on his attempt to take possession of my weapon. Before I had hit him in a weak spot, the wings are always frail, but that his scales would part so easily even on his arms... that was a surprise.

I retrieved my weapon and hopped back, keeping my distance from what was clearly becoming a drake of sorts: his scales were extremely frail, each held a metallic sheen, but there was very little of their promised strength when I struck. I poked the drake, I slashed only to jump back, I fainted, I rolled, and generally made a nuisance of myself, still unwilling to put an end to this fight.

Without any telling movement, just as I spun out of the way of the drake-wannabe's last swipe, the creature whirled on itself, its tail coming to me at speeds my position left me at odds to avoid. With a grimace, I lifted my shield, and tried to brace myself.

The beast struck with extreme strength, and as my feet slid immediately off the ground, I was flung away.

The world spun almost too fast for me to understand what was going on, and once I rolled to a stop, I lifted my eyes to see the fool that challenged me fighting the beast. *I have to act quickly, hoping that he can survive for a few seconds.*

I pulled the dragon-chime free from my belt, falling in the familiar mindset necessary to Heal myself, and cast the Miracle. I sighed in relief as I felt the broken arm return healthy, and I smiled serenely at the warmth that coursed through me.

Once I rose from my kneeling position, which wasn't all that necessary but made things easier, just in time to see the drake's strangely X-shaped mouth close on the fool that had challenged me right outside of my bonfire's influence.

Without thinking, I raised the dragon-chime high up in the air, and brought forth lightning. The Fragmented Lightning Spear rained down on my opponent before he had a chance to react, wounding him deeply and earning me back his attention.

Bolder because of his success, the drake lunged at me once I came close enough, his mouth attempting to repeat what he had done to the hopeful fool he had just killed.

I was no fool.

Sidestepping was an obvious motion, and swinging down my blade the only conclusion possible.

I cut, and the Drake lost its head, dead.

I walked briefly around, trying to find something of worth in the surroundings.

A minute or two after the death of my enemy, I turned with a defeated sigh: I had hoped that letting the pretender grow enough would make his soul something *more*, but there was nothing more than a broken husk in my hands once I was done searching for anything of worth. I frowned in surprise when the enemy didn't disperse in a cloud of ash, reclaimed by the cycle, only to almost slap myself in the head for my mistake.

The cycle here has little to no weight.

"Well hello there!" a blonde woman hopped up to me almost out of breath, clad in a skintight garment that surely provided little as an armor. *Maybe it is enchanted.*

Then the tiny soul smiled, and for an instant, I was reminded of Shalquoir, the annoyingly unnerving but helpful and knowledgeable cat in Majula.

AN

Explanation about the rambling at the start:

It's a fucking hassle to write from the perspective of an undead, even one with so much humanity as Taylor.

For those not lore-savvy: in dark souls, your character is basically a zombie. In the lore, said zombie retains some part of a will, and the more conscious the zombie is, the more 'humanity' he has left, the more conscious he is of the surroundings.

With each death, the character loses some humanity, recovering it through victory over other souls and through the use of 'human effigies' to reestablish the appearance of humanity. When someone loses too much humanity, or loses it all, he becomes 'hollow'. Basically, a mindless beast trying to kill everything it can get away with.

Taylor as I write here is the biggest soul around Drangleic (the realm where DS2 is located), so she has a very strong sense of self compared to the other undead, but, as time is meaningless in DSII, she tends to get lost in her thoughts whenever there isn't a clear objective.

Explanation about the Bonfire:

As for the chat about the Fire... ugh... how to explain it briefly? In game, there is a check-point system that is made of bonfires, which heal you, restore your equipment, and allow you to travel from one to another. Said bonfires, lore-wise, are a small manifestation of the First Flame, which is the thing that the character has to burn himself (literally) for.

Not just anyone can do so, it isn't a normal flame, you can't simply toss random meat on it. You need, in order to stave off the Age of Dark, to immolate a true Monarch, otherwise known as a big-ass soul.

The process of kindling a bonfire outside of where the Cycle is taking place is magic bullshitery that Taylor has been capable of (only this time) because she kind of used the soul of a certain Aldia. Who is someone on the calibre of a Monarch, that spent who knows how long looking for a solution that wasn't burning himself alive nor giving up and letting the Age of Dark come forth.

Really, these summaries of the lore are so brief they're almost wrong. It's fucking annoying to write.

Why is she a brute?

Again, difficult to explain briefly to those that don't know the lore, but I'll try:

In DS, as I've written, reality is *thin*. That isn't a slang. The greatest buildings were built from the souls of their rulers (three crowns plus vendrick), and the land itself was part of a cycle in which the strenght of the souls defined the characteristic of the 'people'. Drangleic (the map in DS), is divided in areas defined by those that inhabit (rule) them, and the character has to move around, following the 'characteristics' of these areas.

Brockton Bay, and Earth Bet at large, has no 'Ruler' as it is meant in Dark Souls, there is no 'path' through the map. And if Taylor wishes to go wherever, the characteristics of her soul (stats if I was considering this a gamer!fic) translate over everything, not only the conflict with others.

Having a strength of 60 (reasonably high in game) doesn't translate only to strong blows: her legs are strong too take it like that.

I hope I managed to make sense.

How did the fight go (I thought it would be more impressive from Tattletale's POV)? Did my brief explanations make sense? Hopes for the immediate future?

Chapter 3: From the Ashes II

From the Ashes II

[Tattletale POV]

[Coil planned to let you hang]

Sometimes being a tinker doesn't help. Lisa admitted to herself not for the first time as she ran from Lung: "Grue! Cover Bitch's dogs when they need it! We need to book it! The PRT is going to box us in if we miss this chance!"

She ignored the affirmative grunt she received from the official leader of the Undersiders while her eyes landed once more on Lung: [Wants to make an example] [Willing to go all out]

Fuck! She grimaced, wondering what the fuck would push the most powerful but usually laid-back cape in Brockton Bay to pursue them so fiercely, only to immediately shut down her power at the best of her ability. She didn't need that information right now. While she looked around, hoping for an escape route that carried a high enough probability of letting everyone get out of the fight alive, she saw something *new*.

Standing just outside of the closest cone of light projected by the city lamp, there was *someone*. [curious] [confused] [confused by Bitch's dogs, Lung, Lung's fire] [not impressed] [seen worse]

When the cape took a step forward, walking into the light, Lisa's breath caught in her throat, her power briefly flaring before it dumped another truckload of info in her mind: [equipment handcrafted, no tinker tech, esoteric properties] [sword as a mockery of the statue on one side] [cape killed the person depicted by the statue] [not a person] *What?* Tattletale groaned as her power kept adding shit to her already overworked mind: [is lost in thought] [doesn't feel in danger].

The Thinker scrunched her eyes closed while she started to drag Regent towards the cape, opening them only to check Lung and warn the two Undersiders that were providing cover to their much less combat-capable companions. Namely, herself and Regent.

"Grue!" she shouted blindly, "Bitch! This way!"

When the new cape nodded in her direction, Lisa did her best to ignore the [is used to nonverbal communication in fights] [used to silence] [dislikes solitude] her power fed her, and almost let out a breath of relief, when the knight started running, only then spotting the rose blossom on the kite shield she brought on her back [esoteric effect...] "Oh, shut up!" she hissed at her own power, watching as her proverbial savior swatted Lung clear of his feet with the flat of her far too large, and far too heavy blade-like slab of stone.

[could have gone for the kill] [wishes to buy time for the weak to escape] The knight remained standing, both hands on her weapon, while she pointed the remaining Undersiders to Lisa's location, who quickly gestured for them to reach her location.

Still, the Thinker didn't move her eyes away from the new cape, knowing that it was likely her debut in the Bay. [experienced] Her power confirmed. [doesn't fear death] *What?* Lisa found herself focusing her power on the knight, even knowing that she would pay dearly for it: [has been dead before]

WHAT? Her mouth open in disbelief, she felt Regent being picked up by Grue, who quickly checked his unconscious companion, finding that he only had taken a nasty blow to the head, but her attention couldn't be taken away: [death is temporary]

Lung returned to the fray at least three meters tall, with sharp claws instead of fingers, and a shroud of flames over the steadily growing steely scales. The new cape took a step back, avoiding a feral swipe, quickly pivoting on her left foot in order to skirt by a fireball, and an instant later she slammed the stony pommel of her weapon against Lung, who crashed on the ground, his flames flaring out to provide cover for his healing and ramping up to act.

Without hesitating, the knight held the blade in front of her, the flat side more than large enough to part the flame, only to jump forward a second later, faster than it should have been possible, and slamming the sword down, barely missing Lung, who rose once more to his feet, the beginning of a tail sprouting from its back, and his flames burning hotter. [is holding back] [wishes to see how strong Lung can become]

"Tattletale!" Grue shaking her brought her back to the present, "We need to go! The PRT will be here soon!"

Lisa could only half nod: "She'll win."

"What?"

"The new girl." Tattletale replied, "She's sandbagging massively."

"We still need to move, Regent needs ice on his head." Grue replied while Bitch and her dogs kept watching.

Lisa grimaced: "I need to talk with the knight."

"What?" Grue asked, half outraged and half disbelieving, just as the knight somersaulted the swipe of the Lung's tail only to deliver a punishing kick to its solar plexus, gaining just enough space to swing the sword-club-like-statue-thing, removing clearly the dragon man's left arm.

"Yeah, she... she's a she? Doesn't seem to be having problems, but we still need to go!" he insisted, yanking heavily on Tattletale's arm, who glared at him in turn.

"She's..." Tattletale began to reply when she heard a familiar rumble that barely managed to peek through the chaos of the battle between the knight and the dragon-to-be.

"Shit!" Grue hauled her on the back of one of Bitch's dog, throwing up his darkness on one side of the street in order to let them retreat into an alleyway, only for Lisa to rattle against a service door: "Here!"

"What the hell are you doing!?"

"The place is surrounded, the PRT waited in order to form a perimeter, Armsmaster is going to jump the gun." Lisa spoke quickly, her hands already at work in order to open the locked door.

"This wouldn't have happened if..."

"If what?" Lisa replied without even looking, finally managing to open the door: "If we didn't hit Ruby Casino? Get real, risks are a part of the game! Bitch, let your dogs go small, we hide inside, we'll leave by the roofs on your dogs if needed."

"I'm the leader, am I not?" Grue gritted out, his hand clamping down on Tattletale's shoulder, who didn't pay attention to her power, which nevertheless proceeded to inform her about the 'leader's' insecurities and freak out because of Lung.

"Only when you don't lead us in prison." Lisa hissed, entering the back of what was clearly a laundromat under the protection of the ABB, "We need to go up, from the upper floors we'll be able to watch the fight and now when to bolt."

Grue audibly gritted his teeth, but nevertheless followed Lisa's lead, soon imitated by Bitch, that dropped Regent unceremoniously on her leader's awaiting back in order to dedicate herself to return her dogs back to normal.

Soon enough, the Undersiders were able to watch the battle going on in the small plaza from the third store of the commercial building, safe from prying eyes while ready to bolt to the roof, and from there, Bitch's dogs could carry them the rest of the way back to base. Lisa however, was far more interested in studying the new cape, that thus far

presented the standard package of a brute, coupled with some form of immortality (or at least Lisa's Thinker Power thought so), and something else, something that brutes generally didn't have: skill.

It was remarkably difficult for that kind of cape to learn hand to hand of any kind, mostly because when in a fight a brute met another, it went down to who could take more punishment, and otherwise the brute was able to break through whatever skilled resistance he encountered.

There was some nagging worry at the back of Lisa's mind when she confirmed once more that the Knight wasn't pulling all the stops, waiting to see how far she could push Lung. [hoping to obtain a bigger prize if he's stronger]

That didn't make much sense, but Tattletale recognized, through the pangs of her budding Thinker Headache, that she likely lacked context. So she simply resolved to observe the cape, that occasionally left behind her sword as a distraction for Lung only to engage with a shield that had no business at all in parting the scales of the Dragon of Kyushu with such ease.

Even more extraordinary, was the apparently subconscious manner in which the Knight held Lung in position. For all of his growing, his ramping up speed and strength, the steadily warming flames that he was sprouting, he was being forced to turn mostly on himself, unable to bring his much greater frame to bear. [experienced with fighting monsters of all sizes]

Then Armsmaster entered the fray, abandoning his motorbike at the edge of the plaza, just behind a corner in order to avoid it being struck by random swathes of fire, that somehow the new cape was managing to keep contained by offering a convenient target just in the nick of time.

The armored Tinker ran on the edge of Lung's range, disturbing the rhythm that the Knight had managed to build and causing something that had yet to happen: the dragon, which now had sported the second set of wings and counted a total of 6 legs, turned to face the incoming threat with all the speed he was capable of, abandoning his previous attack all the while moving his tail powerfully in a tight, whipping motion.

The new cape was, for the first time, caught by surprise, and had to brace herself behind the small shield she had used thus far only to deflect the incoming blows. Needless to say, the ground didn't provide enough grip for her, and she was tossed off at speeds resembling those of a bullet.

Armsmaster engaged Lung with no hesitation, the blade on his halberd skidding off the thick scales of the beasts ineffectually while he attempted to create an opening of some sort. [has tinker tech tranquilizers] Tattletale's power informed her, [wants the credit for the defeat of Lung].

The experienced Tinker weaved and dodged, until he misstepped. The concrete of the road, that with the heat of Lung's flames had turned into something resembling tar, and Armsmaster slipped.

With a serpentine motion, Lung's X-shaped mouth closed on the suddenly screaming figure of the cape in blue armor. And just like that, Armsmaster died.

Then the sky broke apart, yellow lightning falling like rain from a circular, slowly turning a sequence of symbols that Lisa couldn't make either head or tails of. Each small lightning resembled a sunray cloaked in electricity, and their effect on Lung was devastating.

Where the lightning struck, scales exploded, revealing deep gouges in the dragon's flesh that didn't heal, spouting fountains of steaming hot blood. Lung, far from being dead, whipped his head towards the Knight, that was back into the fray, this time with her shield secured once more on her back, and the strange dragon-shaped hook with the white ampoule-whatever attached to its base. [weapon used for the lightning attack]

[wasn't going all out] [is pitying Armsmaster] Tattletale's power informed her unnecessarily of the Knight's situation even as she sidestepped the last attempt of Lung to bite her in half, swishing down punitively with her stone-club-sword on the outstretched neck, faster than ever.

And just like that, Lung was dead, leaving the new and largely unknown cape to walk around, looking for something. [feels no guilt for killing Lung] [is irritated by... Lung's weakness?] [would have kept him going if Armsmaster hadn't butted in] [always confident in her ability to strike him down]

"We'd better go now." Grue spoke from her side, "The PRT will fall on her like a ton of bricks, giving us an opening."

"Listen, if we escaped before, we would have slammed right in the face of the PRT, and now that Armsmaster's dead we'll be implicated anyway, do you *want* the potentially friendly cape that could go toe to toe with an Endbringer to go on her merry way and leave us to the sharks?" Lisa snarked while she turned already hopping merrily down the stairs: "Go ahead, I'll meet you back at base."

[isn't used to talking] [isn't used to social interaction] [enjoys social interaction] [is disinterested] [plans to go back to waiting] Tattletale could feel her own smile almost ripping her cheeks apart even as she sprinted along the street.

"Well, hello there!" she greeted the massively powerful cape.

A second later, the sirens of the PRT blared loudly to their senses.

Chapter 4: Smoke in the Air

Smoke in the Air

The irritating wailing of the sirens made me adjust the grip on my weapon instinctively, ready to face this next challenge, even if I didn't feel that foreboding typical of those battles that had actually meant something in Drangleic.

"Don't kill them." the voice of the blonde woman at my side stole my attention from the surrounding.

At my tilted head, she went on: "They're no match for you, but they have countless others that will hunt me and my companions if these ones are killed by you."

"Very well." I acquiesced, remembering a shadow of this world that once upon a time made sense. Why making so much noise, if not to invite a challenge? This was no song for the dead, no endless repetition of words that a lost undead that clung to in order to not become hollow.

They are alive. I remembered suddenly, pieces that had been lost suddenly clicking together. There were no Great Souls among humans in this Realm. None of them had ever taken part in the Cycle, and while I could feel the Darkness, for it was everpresent, it was faint, it didn't weight upon the shoulders of the people here, it didn't loom in their shadows, it didn't lurk just beyond the reach of Light.

"Hey!" Tattletale's voice made me shake my head: "Don't...!"

Apparently, whatever she had been about to say became unimportant when several vans that sported the same pattern surrounded us: "Drop the weapon and keep your hands behind your head! Tattletale and unknown parahuman, this is the PRT, you will comply or we will use containment foam!"

I listened to the words that were blaring from a man placed behind a turret on the top of one of the vans, and while I could understand almost each words, they simply didn't make sense when taken together. Asking for an opponent to surrender? That was... *They're humans.* A part of me realized, and I relaxed my hold on my weapon.

Did they not recognize the sigil on my finger? *Obviously not.*

"They're going to take us prisoners if we don't leave." Tattletale's voice made me focus once more, "And I'm not as fast as you are!"

Self serving little soul. I could feel my lips twitch upwards as I understood what she was unwilling to ask out loud. *But then again, did I not decide to protect the weak?*

I quickly pulled the Dragon Chime from my belt, falling into the warm security of my own hope in face of the Dark, and let it go.

The wave of force followed the chiming of my Miracle across the street, leaving Tattletale untouched while it slammed harshly against the vans round us, cleanly felling them on their sides.

An instant later, the Dargon Chime was secured once more to my belt, I grabbed the midsection of the blonde woman at my side, and ran away. The Realm around me proved itself once more too empty to oppose the slightest resistance to my will, and the streets seemed to blur away under my feet.

After a while, I stopped, dropping the blond woman to the ground, where she immediately puked.

"Never again..." Tattletale wheezed, then wincing as she brought a hand against her hip: "Oww... you're insanely hard did you know that?"

I tilted my head to one side, not understanding what was her point.

"You just..." she sighed, "Nevermind, I know where we are, I can lead you to my base, so we can thank you properly for saving us."

"No thanks are necessary." I was confused, I thought it obvious that I didn't help them out of any wish for a reward. The hot presence of the drake-wannabe had been what roused me from my rest at the bonfire, helping them had merely been... not a collateral effect of my actions as much as a natural implication.

"I insist!" the blonde countered my objection, "Besides, it will be safe there, and as I said, my companions would feel bad if we separated without thanking you."

"Very well." I nodded, curious to see what this thanks would amount to.

It wasn't like I had any pressing matters to attend to at the bonfire.

The meeting room of the PRT, where Director Piggot chose to hold this particular debriefing, was one of the larger ones. It was circular, and the steely grey walls were equipped with concealed containment foam sprayers and cameras, while the cold, white lights kept anyone from sliding into anything that could resemble even a single moment of levity.

In short, it was a stark and sombre environment, perfectly suited to the news that were going to surely break the balance in Brockton Bay.

"Fucking Lung." Assault gritted out once the videos of the fight, taken both from Armsmaster's armour and the cameras of the PRT vans that had failed completely their attempt to stop the new cape and to apprehend Tattletale.

"Is it true then?" Aegis spoke somberly, an heavy frown on his features.

"Yes." Director Piggot replied, ignoring Assault's outburst, "Armsmaster gave his life fighting Lung, action that ultimately brought to the death of the Villain."

"Fucking hell, his corpse isn't even cold yet and you're already talking PR." Assault hissed out while he attempted to raise from his seated position, only for his wife to yank him back.

"It is precisely what he would have wanted." the Director pointed out, "Not that I have to justify myself to you. The Bay however will explode, Kaiser is going to seize the power vacuum as soon as the news get out."

That statement seemed to bring a renewed weight upon the shoulders of all the Protectorate members present, and even Assault grimaced, knowing that his boss wasn't lying *per se*. Still, using Armsmaster's less than stellar social skills in order to keep everyone working around the clock was a dick move.

"What about the new cape?" Battery cut in, "This Rose Knight?"

"Villain or Hero?" Velocity forced himself to ask, trying to compartmentalize his feelings, "In any case, how are we going to approach the brute-combat thinker-blaster that deep fried Lung?"

"She engaged Lung as soon as she found him, but she didn't esitate when it came to break through the PRT blockade, all the while defending the Villain Tattletale." Director Piggot resumed, bringing on the monitor the high quality video of the PRT van closing in on the duo of capes in the aftermath of the battle with the Dragon of Kyunshu.

The local Protectorate heroes observed along with the upper echelons of the PRT ENE Branch as the knight, whose armour was covered in streaks of ash, simply stared down the troopers while they parked in a rough circle, leaving only one route of escape as to not force an unknown parahuman with his shoulders against the wall. One could never know when a standard approach turned into a suicide mission.

Everyone looked with worry and interest as the cape seemed to swing the strange contraption, generating a wave of force strong enough to topple the vans on one side.

"It looks like some esoteric effect tied to the... whatever that thing is." Velocity observed: "At least it isn't telekinesis."

"So... Tinker?"

"Tinker." Piggot confirmed, "Dragon report based on the results of Armsmaster' scanners... the materials are unknown, the thermal readings made no sense, if only because they were perfectly contained."

"And we don't want to make an enemy of her, from our records it was her first night out, even if her base is that creepy bone-fire." Assault offered, trying to insert some levity with the horrible pun, even if his attempt fell flat.

"For now, we approach cautiously, trying to not worsen the effect that our first contact may have had on her, if only because of the fact that she apparently ran faster than Armsmaster could go with his bike, all the while carrying a stone slab the size of my car." Director Piggot replied: "If you can ask her to retell the events of tonight, do so, but do not press her until we have a better idea of her powers. She should return to that strange bonfire of hers sooner or later, and I've given order to let her through when that happens."

"Is it wise? To leave her alone with a known Villain, no matter how minor?" Velocity asked, with pursed lips clearly visible in the opening of his mask.

"Wise? This is the only option we have, unless any of you could keep up with Lung when he was so far ramped up and hasn't told me?" Piggot's sarcasm cut down the hero's opinion, "And Aegis, we'll keep giving you time, but I fear that you'll have to step up sooner rather than later."

"Are we completely ignoring the part in which this knight pulled out equipment from the fire?" Assault asked as he rose from his seat, mimicking the other heroes now that the debriefing was complete, "I mean, it sounds like a stupid mechanic of a class B videogame."

Like often happened, Assault's words were ignored as yet another joke in poor taste.

AN

I didn't want to do again the same scene under two different point of view, and following an actually brilliant suggestion, I opted to view those events as a 'flashback' of sorts with the excuse of a debriefing.

Chapter 5: Information

Information

The curious woman that introduced herself as Tattletale was a talkative sort. And not like Pate had been, only to cover his own ass while trying to con me at the same time, even if her interest was obviously not born out of selflessness or genuine preoccupation.

While she kept covering me in her inane chatter, we strode across the city that I had once known, in a time that seemed at once emptier and brighter than the one I spent in Drangleic. In this Tattletale, there was little to none of the feral grace that I had learned to recognize in experienced warriors, while the way in which she carried on the conversation, interpreting most of my answers before I could utter them, kept reinforcing the memory of Sweet Shalquoir.

Still, her words were welcome. It was something to listen to the repetitive speeches of those that had lost too much to the ever-encroaching Darkness, this... *this* was what it used to feel like. Walking in Majula, with the illusion that things were going to get better on their own was exactly that: an illusion.

"This is where me and my team live." she changed topic suddenly, and I tilted my head towards the lacklustre building. I didn't know what I had been expecting, it had been so long since I last witnessed uncursed humans go about their own way. A part of me remembered that this city was where I was born, where I had once walked, but it felt... hazy and grey, lifeless and meaningless.

The brighter the flame, the deeper the dark. I remembered with a sudden realization: but it didn't seem to be true here. Here, where the moon shone with the bright reflection of a very present sun, here, were time spun constantly and reality was empty. Here, where a Monarch such as I... *no.*

"Okay guys!" she crooned as we entered a loft: "She can be trusted! She also saved me from the PRT, and we'll all be safer with her!"

A man with dark skin seemed to almost take a step forward, his hands twitching as if with the barely repressed urge to strangle the blonde woman that led me here, while his companion remained unconscious on a couch, his head bleeding a bit from a cut hidden in his hair.

I took a step forward, the Dragon Chime sliding into my hand, and I knelt next to the wounded. *Is it really faith if I've walked into the First Flame without surrendering myself to it? Is it faith if I know of the faults and failings of those that came before us?*

Yet, I had faith in myself, and in those lost people that I had brought together in Majula, from the thief to the wayward scholar. From the daughter of the smith to the chieric that had lost her way. And apparently, it was enough: warmth that I could feel within me, so close to the one of the First Flame, echoed in my catalyst as it chimed, a golden wave blossoming as I healed those around me.

I rose from my seat to notice that Tattletale had slapped a hand over Grue's mouth, and that another had walked in. She seemed wary, but as she didn't make any move towards me. I turned my attention back to the blonde woman.

"Well, you know that I'm Tattletale when in costume." she said as she removed her purple mask, "But my name is Lisa. Nice to properly meet you!"

"That is Hellhound or Bitch when in costume, and her name is Rachel, the one you healed is Alec, but with a mask he is Regent, and..."

"I'm Grue." the dark skinned man spoke, "Thank you for helping us with Lung. My name is Brian."

My eyes lingered for a few seconds on the one that I had healed. *Such a lofty title.* "... my voice felt far away to my own ears even as I lifted my Heide Mask with my free hand, "... am Taylor."

"Uh." Alec blinked in surprise now that he found himself looking upside down to the knight that had messed up Lung. "Hi."

Taylor's head turned down even as she took a step back, leaving the recently healed parahuman some space: "Greetings." she nodded.

"Well..." Grue scrambled as he tried to recover some semblance of control over the situation, "Lisa brought you here, and you helped us a *lot.* So... I guess we only have to make it official."

He looked around trying to gauge the reactions of the rest of his haggard team, and while Rachel was blatantly against someone else joining the Undersiders, she kept quiet, her eyes not quite meeting the ones of the new cape. Lisa grinned her usual grin, making it clear that all of her efforts were to bring this girl on board, while Alec quickly sat up from his sprawled position, indifference plastered on his features even as he turned towards the TV, turning it on with a click on a remote.

That was a yes if Brian ever saw one: "Welcome to the Undersiders? If you want to join, I mean."

Taylor tilted her head even as she overcame her surprise for the sudden images and sounds coming from the television, but her focus remained on the weak souls around her. Lost, each one of them, broken, in one way or another, just enough for them to be open to the wider world, but there was something...

She crossed the room with a couple of strides, sitting down at the table in the kitchen, where she gently laid down her Heide Mask. Her fingers then dipped in one of her pouches, finding what she hadn't even realized she had taken. After the battle, she had been looking for some object that she could use, or that could at least give her some inkling as to what those strange humans were capable of.

A couple of small souls rested in her hand, making her widen her eyes in surprise. They didn't look special. They barely qualified as souls at all. Greysh-white, the both of them, a bit cracked, with *something* moving underneath, in their core. Something paradoxically larger, something...

A loud thud made Taylor rise her eyes towards the source of that sound: Tattletale was on the ground, unconscious.

It looks like following the Way of the Blue will keep me busy with this girl.

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You are viewing:

- Threads you have replied to
- AND Threads that have new replies
- OR private message conversations with new replies
- Thread OP is displayed
- Ten posts per page
- Last ten messages in private message history
- Threads and private messages are ordered by user custom preference.

You have 4 infractions and 1 warnings. Your probationary status expires on March 7, 2011.

Topic: Knightly Parahuman

In: Boards ► News ► Capes ► America

Bagrat (Original Poster) (The Guy In The Know) (Veteran Member)

Posted on February 16, 2011:

So we've got another new cape in Brockton Bay. I don't know what they put in the water over there but they seem to crawl out of the woodwork. At least it appears that this one does not belong to a gang (yet). However, she's not a member of the Protectorate, given that she had to be saved by Armsmaster (RIP). In any case, they have way too many capes in Brockton as it is, on the bad side, apparently this chick disappeared after the DragonSlain'.

Here's what we know so far:

-She's a knight, armour, shield and giant stone sword.

-Straight up she is an upper-tier brute

-Not a hero, since she barreled through the PRT troops that were cordoning the battle between Armsmaster and Lung.

I think that about covers it. Not a lot of footage of this one, so I'll try to provide links to videos and pictures as soon as they pop up.

► **Lolitup**

Replied on February 16, 2011:

I saw that news broadcast live, there his half of footage made with a low-quality cellphone, not really enough to identify her, but the Protectorate released a picture of her ([LINK HERE](#)) not much to see.

► **Insect Inspector**

Replied on February 16, 2011:

They say she set up a camp fire in a cemetery, that's her 'base'? I don't know, looks like a creepy statement to me.

► **Antigone**

Replied on February 16, 2011:

Insect Inspector

Dude, give it a rest already with the paranoia, who are you, XxVoid_CowboyxX?

► **HOTH3AD (Temp-banned)**

Replied on February 16, 2011:

She's likely E88, with all the shiny armour and whatnot.

► **Camera Shy (Film Fanatic)**

Replied on February 16, 2011:

The point is that apparently she *is* being left largely alone, maybe the PRT will wait a while before reigning in this one, there is the fallout of the A vs L battle to consider. On one hand, big hero gets done in by the one that fought Leviathan, on the other, said hero killed Lung. So void of power in ABB ranks, and the Empire is already starting to push for territory.

► **Out of Nothing (procrastinator)**

Replied on February 16, 2011:

Armsmaster was the best of them all.

► **Specific Protagonist (Cape Groupie)**

Replied on February 16, 2011:

I heard that she killed both Lung and Armsmaster.

► **GreatMan**

Replied on February 16, 2011:

No way man. It would be on all the news.

► **Not Banned Yet**

Replied on February 16, 2011:

GreatMan

Dude, that was crazy even for you. In which part of this madness does it look like she is strong enough to do that? I mean, Armsmaster plus Lung are basically Triumvirate level.

► **spekulator (Power Guru)**

Replied on February 16, 2011:

So what do we think about her ratings?

End of Page. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

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Chapter 6: Behind the Curtain

Behind the Curtain

My eyes peered curiously into the two small orbs I was holding on the table.

"Such little shells..." I mused curiously, observing the weakness of the mortals souls I held. They appeared to be so frail... Oh, they weren't meaningless, not by far, each crease, each shallow dip was a sign forged by history, by the unique mortality facing the outside world. And yet, there was something... *flat*.

As if a great pressure had slowly but surely forced itself on the little, mortal souls.

What I could barely see behind the eerily similar cracks that the two souls bore, however, deserved much more attention: "Almost like a shadow... but a shadow of what I couldn't say..." I turned my attention back to the mortals around me, and now that I knew how to look, I could see. They were almost as easy to read as the souls that I held in my hand. Their minute dimension making it easy for me to read them.

In the heavy silence of the apartment, I blinked, shifting my attention from my study of their souls in order to look around, finding that Tattletale was being attended to by Grue while Alec (I refused to use the title of Regent, for it brought too many memories with it) was busy with the Television, and Rachel (she seemed to not care about the names she was referred to), quietly cuddled with her dogs (which had surprised me as I didn't need to fight them).

"Lisa didn't explain much about this city." I spoke lightly, slipping once more the strange souls into my pockets while I rose from my seated position, "Would you explain to me what threats we will have to face?"

"Uh," was the eloquent answer of Brian, who eyed me strangely once he had finished to tend to his suddenly unconscious companion.

"Okay, well..." Brian seemed to be in difficulty, so I turned my attention towards Rachel, that had just grabbed something to eat from the fridge.

"Nazi cunts, Merchant assholes, Hero bastards." she spoke quickly, her eyes briefly twitching to my shoulder before she returned her attention to grooming one of her canine companions.

I blinked at her bluntness, my eyes falling on the almost-knight's soul that I was still holding in one hand: "And the man with the halberd, he was..."

"Armsmaster." Grue took it upon himself to sit at the table, his eyes tight as he worked through the ever-fleeting emotions that so easily plagued the living.

Emotions that ARE the life of any mortal. I corrected my instinctive disregard for the frail existence that was trying to explain the circumstances surrounding us.

"He's... he was, one of the heroes."

I felt a simmer of curiosity shape up within me at the interesting implications raised by the tone of one of my latest wards: "And from my understanding, Heroes defend the weak, yet he was allied with those that tried to stop me and Lisa from walking away after I slayed this fake-dragon?"

Grue snorted, "They claim to be heroes, but... it's all a sort of business." he passed a hand into his hair, scratching briefly at his scalp: "Chance and the kind of power Parahumans develop determine more often than not if they end up as 'Heroes' working for the government or 'Villains', who break the law for a multitude of reasons, not least the fact that is the only way to obtain something."

He seemed to hesitate next, pursing his lips thoughtfully as if he didn't know what to tell me, so I simply smiled translating what I was being told even as my mind started to recall things that I had believed lost forever to the ever-encroaching Dark. I remained open to his tiredness, to the rage that I could see so clearly resting just beneath his skin, and slowly, he started to talk again.

I listened with a frown as he explained the subject of 'Trigger Event' and 'Power Classifications', instinctively associating the cracking of the soul to the first topic and the shadow that I could see in the cracks with these 'Superpowers' he was talking about. Superpowers that were admittedly unsettling given their variety, but that seemed... frail and false in a way that I couldn't quite understand.

Maybe it was because I had faced the dragon-wannabe with an ease that shouldn't have been possible, maybe it was because the thin mantle of power that these 'Parahumans' dragged around themselves was far from having any hope to affect one such as I, but mostly it was because of the clear lack of any given order to this world. *How do I protect the weak if the system in place is part of the harm?*

"Power seeks power." I stated bluntly in a pause of Grue speech, frowning minutely when I noticed that he was somewhat flabbergasted at my lacking any knowledge about what he deemed where common events, "This Triumvirate seems to be fooling themselves by applying their power only when it comes to battle, don't they have the responsibility granted by their might to look over the weaker?"

"What? No!" Grue seemed confused by my question, which only made me more curious about this sloppy sort of status quo that this world seemed to enjoy, "Not at all, I mean, the Triumvirate tends to be in charge when it's time to fight an Endbringer, but... are you talking about governing people?"

I half listened as Brian, who called himself Grue, kept talking about how everyone had a saying in this 'democracy' he was fuzzily explaining. *How can the strongest here not Rule? Even this Golden Man, who apparently is above these Endbringers, appears to refuse to... Oh,* Taylor realized with a sigh, once more remembering the different circumstances and rules of the world she was in, *there is no Monarch here, Light and Dark are ever-present, but there are no Gods, only men left to their devices, with this recent development in powers, I wonder how it is associated with the Cycle.*

"Why has none of the 'Triumvirate'," I spoke their title with a pedant sort of mockery, I was well aware of it, but I couldn't quite keep myself from disregarding their methods, "dealt with the false-dragon before me? He didn't look like someone capable of fighting against these Heroes you spoke about."

"I told you," Grue seemed frustrated for a moment, "it's a game, as Tattletale would say, that's why there are Unwritten Rules that everybody follows: if the Triumvirate caught every Villain, there wouldn't be enough people at the Endbringer fights."

"Cowardice doesn't seem like a good reason to allow the weak they claim to be protecting to be hurt." I frowned, my eyes returnign once more to the small souls I still held in my hand, "This Armsmaster, did he not try to protect the weak?"

"Protect the weak, fight villains..." Grue's hands tightened as he stared at the table almost as if he was capable of burning a hole through it with nothing more than his glare, "If I was strong, I wouldn't need to do this to try and look after my sister, I'd..."

I tried to purse my lips in a thoughtful manner, knowingly attempting to copy the expressiveness of his face while I rose one of the two souls I held between two fingers, trying to see the world Grue spoke me of in the variegated surface of this 'Armsmaster' fellow.

Tattletale had apparently talked to all the Undersiders about the main elements in the City, and this 'Parahuman' in particular, while a glory-hound, had done nothing to deserve a meaningless death at the rage of the false-dragon. *How can I follow the Way of the Blue here?*

Sadly, I knew the answer.

"Would you like to change it?" I asked, bringing the still-frowning Grue to snap his head towards me.

"What?"

"This world that prevents a brother from caring for his sister." I spoke, smiling kindly at the feeble mortal that felt so brightly for everything around him, from the still unconscious Lisa, whose undercurrent of despair had coloured her tone despite the skillful manner in which she had managed to divert my attention from it, "Would you join

me, in preventing the weak from being devoured by the uncaring? In saving your sister?"

As I spoke honestly to the man sitting at the table, I noticed how the rest of the Undersiders had suddenly started lending an ear to me: Tattletale, her face still pale from her tiredness, was gaping at me openly, outraged beyond belief by the scope of my power and ambition, Rachel, whose hands had stilled over the nape of her animals, and Alec, who had turned off the TV, and was looking at me as if he had never considered this option before.

They were all coming to terms with my offer in their minds, I could see it. I could see how they didn't even try to deny that I would be able to bring about this change I spoke of, this change they had been to fearful to imagine. I could see how the sheer vastness of my Monarch Soul redefined the limits of what was and what could be simply by virtue of existing in close proximity to them.

An answer to the cycle can be found here, I recon. I thought to myself, *But I have enough time to save this world before I'll need to choose between burning or seeking once more a new solution.*

One after another, the Undersiders approached me, still wary at perceiving in my words a reality so different than the one they knew.

"I'm not going to save kittens from trees." Alec spoke with a half-smile that wanted to be mocking of my words, but with a tone that lacked any emotion, revealing just how deeply his life had shaped his soul even before the Cracking that Grue had referred to as 'Trigger Event', "It sounds boring... I want to... I want to..."

"I assure that you'll be entertained." I nodded with a smile at the Broken Man, turning my attention to Rachel, who still didn't wish to look me in the eye.

She'll follow. I knew, I didn't need to peer at her soul to know that much, the limited scope of her understanding enough only to make sure she understood my position on a scale of power that she couldn't imagine.

"I follow The Way of the Blue." I smiled while I thumbed the ring on my hand, "I'll protect the weak, wouldn't you wish to do the same? Fame and fortune mean very little once enough time passes, but the adventure you can find your honor in is something to be celebrated, even when driven by necessity." I eyed Grue while I spoke, seeing his determination to find a way to protect his sister turn from steely to adamant with the strength of his conviction, and his perspective of the world growing to understand, if only partially what I was talking about.

"Hypothetically," Lisa was the last to talk, her tone serious and hesitant, maybe for the first time not hiding a sequence of manipulations turned towards her own benefit, "What would we need to do to... accomplish this?"

"Everything that has a beginning has also an end. No flame, however brilliant, doesn't one day splutter and fade." I quoted easily, remembering the underlying tones of surrender and helplessness that Straid of Olaphis had once appeared to be unable to shake off: "Wouldn't it be better, to burn brightly against the dark, until we have the strength to do so?"

With those words, so alien to the life Lisa had known, so different from any empty platitude that she expected me to leverage in order to manipulate her as she had tried to manipulate me, I could almost see the pressure that her own fears weighted on her soul lighten. We both knew that I was far beyond the power of whoever could once claim to hold her leash.

I rose one of the two souls in front of my eyes, showing it to the small group around me before I spoke: "Armsmaster was misguided, but he still decided to do what he could to follow the Way of the Blue, something that he knew nothing about. I'll give him a chance."

My attention shifted to Lisa, whose eyes had grown fearful while his mind and power put together what I was going to do: "I'll need his body, if he manages to make it through... that will be up to him."

"I don't know." a female voice admitted openly, for the first time in years something resembling genuine human emotion peaking through the hollow facade that the Path had turned her life into.

In a blank room furnished with an assortment of things that didn't manage to give the faintest hint about the purpose of the people sitting at a large table in the middle of the open space, the silence was telling.

As a rule, the owner of that female voice was the only one who *always* knew what to do. The implications of her power were just *that* staggering. Still, the other people present in the room eyed the parahuman who last spoke with varying degrees of worry, each expressed in a different manner.

"What do you mean, you don't know?" one of the members of this extraordinarily secret group let the outraged surprise sound clearly in her voice, her own control over her tells and natural reactions refined to the point that she was closer to a puppeteer of her body than an actual person.

"Exactly that." the first voice replied, "It is different than the other two exception to my power, this one... the Path is evershifting, disappearing under deep shadows only to shine brightly after a number of steps that I cannot perceive."

"And the cause?"

"The scale on which this happens extends throughout all of my power, I cannot pinpoint it." the parahuman that had revealed her inability to steer the direction of Cauldron admitted easily, her tone blank as she spoke the words that her power indicated would work best to convey the necessary information.

"So..."

"We continue as we always did, pulling on other resources to cover for the blanks on the Path."

"Reasonable." a male's voice butted in the conversation, "I have calculated the probability of the origin of this last change, it's somewhere in the USA, we'll keep our feelers ready to snatch up new info. The Think Tank might be useless, but at least we can read their blanks as a trail, no? They don't have a multidimensional scale of perception to check from."

"Agreed."