

FIGHTERS - FUTURES - FREEDOMS



THE ORIGINAL STORY...

THE WAY IT WAS MEANT TO BE WRITTEN...

THE ENHANCED RE-RELEASE OF WHAT STARTED IT ALL...

DEFINITIVE CANON  
**STREET FIGHTER BLACK™**

EPISODE II: STREET'S WARFARE



LIFE FOREVER

A DIGITAL SHORT NOVEL BY  
**DEFORREST**



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***You are reading the first chapter of  
the 2013 Re-Release entitled  
Street Pedal Black - Episode II: Street's Warfare [Definitive Canon]***

*This is the official canonical story set in the SPB Universe.*

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*The 2007 paperback Collectors' pilot edition:*



*Is no longer a part of the actual series.*

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**Narrated by Street**

***A.D 2140...***

The same damn thing every day... Just a city of ash... I thought, looking over the broken-down city of Metal Stereo. I'm standing on top of an unfinished skyscraper getting ready to do my morning routine, but I'm not sure what suddenly brought me back that memory. I know Missus P.M. Jackson's birthday is coming up in a few weeks, but she's been gone for so long...

And I haven't really changed a thing since then.

The Government is still in control, and after all these years, I still have no idea what I can do about it.

Every day when I come up here, I see the same things: Barely any color in the sky, usually just the grey mix of fog and dust with some sun... The condemned buildings near the point of randomly collapsing... Various smoke plumes from fires set to keep warm... Adults attacking kids to get whatever rations they missed during the drops... Rival gangs fighting each other for something to do... The occasional murder and/or rape...

And my favorite part: The perfectly paved roads and highways.

Yeah, the Government loves keeping their little pathways in top condition. After all, how else are they going to get their SWAT cars through the city for the random *sweeps*? Without their smooth roads, how else can they give us our food rations during the *drops*—I mean we all just *love* the little pasty, grayish, packaged biscuits and small bottles of fresh water. Hell, if we're lucky, we might find a barely molded banana or some old ointment in the pile the truck drops off. The Government loves its people *so much* that we just might be privileged enough to get the scraps from their well-nourished military.

If that sounded like bullshit to you, you get where I'm coming from.

But in short, this is what the world is.

Back to my morning run, I did one last stretch and tightened my skates a little more snug before making sure my backpack and swords wouldn't fall off of me. I was completely loose after I cracked my neck.

"Alright, Street..." I sighed, looking at the stories of bare rafters all the way down to the skyscraper's foundation. I'm gonna grind its bent steel beams down to the street. I think I'm up 900 feet this time.

With the wheels in my shoe-skates extended, I stepped onto a diagonal rafter using the metal plates in the center of the soles. After that, I let gravity start me off.

That beam led me to a corner without a direct way down, so I had to jump onto a vertical rafter and propel myself off. I flipped and landed on another beam, grinding backwards on it. Hanging on and swinging around a corner beam, I jumped to land on a lower one. That began a spiral decent down the building, leaping from pole to pole as new ones came. After a few more cycles of that, I jumped off the last rafter at about 15 feet in the air, and skated to a stop on the sidewalk, leaving a dustcloud as I skidded on my brakes.

"Y'know, it's much easier to kill yourself with rope."

I didn't even need to turn around to recognize that voice. As much as we've grown together over the years, I'd probably still trade her to get Missus back.

"What do ya want, LaTonya?" I groaned while stretching my sore ankles, not even bothering to face her.

"I saw you pulling off that stunt down the road," she gingerly skated in front of me with silver boots similar to my shoes, "and I was just worried that you might get hurt."

Her fake-concerned face was pretty good this morning. So, my "and..." face has to be better.

"Plus, I ate my last ration this morning and got too late to a drop, so..."

"Starve, then," I walked over to a brick wall to get leverage for another stretch—my right leg was cramping. There was a familiar sight posted next to me: A propaganda poster with the Government's hawkhead logo surrounded by the phrase "*Your Life - Your Allegiance - The Government Is Triumphant.*"

"C'mon, Street! Just half of one?" she pleaded. "That'll get me through to tomorrow."

Now she was just being greedy. The rations are palm-sized rectangles of nutritional putty—nobody has any idea what they're actually made of, but one of those things can give you energy for at least three days before going hungry.

"Find your own or take them from somebody," I suggested, bringing my foot against the wall to retie my skate.

A second later, my face was against that wall with my arm being forced behind and up my back!

"Good idea," LaTonya whispered directly into my ear. This girl can't do anything without flirting with me. We mess around every now and then, but I don't let it be more than that. "I always said I'd paint you on a wall."

"Shitty follow-up." Before she could reach into my backpack, I managed to reverse the hold and have *her face* on the wall, with a slam for emphasis. "The hell's the matter wit' you!?"

She tried to kick her heels at me, but I pressed her into the wall further until she made a squeal. I let her go at that point, and she dropped to her knees on the sidewalk, rubbing any sore spots.

"Jackass..." LaTonya muttered, defeated. I rolled my eyes while looking at her slumped back. Normally, I'd just walk away at this point, but she's lucky I did pretty good in the drops this week. I pulled a ration out of my backpack's side pocket and crumbled the packaging to get her attention.

She stood up and exhaled, "Finally. You could've just given it in the first—"

Then, I rubbed it on my crotch and threw it at her, landing square on her glasses.

"Hey, what the fuck?!" she screamed.

"Be happy you're gettin' that one," I readjusted my backpack and let the wheels out my skates, turning toward the open road.

"After that, I'd be happy if you got caught up in a sweep!"

"Nah, you'd miss me too much." I charged up the engine in my skate by a running it along the ground a few times. But during that time...

CLOK!

A can of spraypaint hit me right on the back of my head.

"NOT THAT TIME!" LaTonya yelled, skating away in the opposite direction. I decided to do the same and get back at her later.

She didn't have a bag or a holster, so I don't know where she was hiding

that spraycan. But I shouldn't be too surprised: LaTonya's an awesome graffiti writer, and I've rarely seen her without one. She'll even use them in fights, and trust me: That shit hurts in the eyes. She's known in the city as the "Graffiti Spirit."

As the morning went on and the longer I skated around, the more people came out of whatever they called "homes." There isn't much to do during the day, so this is pretty much how everyone in Metal Stereo spends their lives. Just wandering around, looking for food, and trying not get to killed is all you can do under the Government's rule. Normally after my morning run, I go back to one of my two garages to let the day drain. My west one is the closest right now.

*Man, can't they at least leave them alone?...* I thought, as I passed a group of young pregnant girls. Just looking at the ones half my height got me even more pissed. Their babies will probably be stillborn, and I doubt the mothers will even survive the birth. This isn't the first time I've seen this, and it definitely won't be the last; they were the best evidence of how the Government turns everyone into animals.

On top of that, rubbers are illegal AND overpopulation propaganda has been showing up recently! And this leads to the "sweeps," where the Government of the City (or GOTC) kidnaps little kids and kills the disabled, elderly, or whoever else they feel like. They sometimes happen as often as the drops, and if it happens to be a good day, the best way to avoid being hauled off in their trucks is to try and bribe the officers. They've been after me since I've pissed them off and rescued a few people over the years. I remember saving a 5-year-old boy from getting stabbed after he broke one of their car windows. Using my two broad swords, I've been fighting these guys ever since I escaped the Child Pound, but I have no idea what my personal death toll is.

And it looks like I'm gonna add one more.

"FINALLY!" A guy in tattered clothes with a horrible stink suddenly jumped out of an alley. He was wildly swinging a sledgehammer around. "I finally got you! A-a-a-and I'm gonna g-get a l-l-lot from the Government-t-t-t fo' killin' you!"

This dude must be just a few years older than me, but he already looked halfway decayed. He kept scratching his face, and all the sores gave away he was a meth-head; he could barely stand up straight or hold the hammer without wobbling...

Regardless, he's trying to kill me.

"NAAA!!!" was his battlecry as he clumsily swung—I simply skated to the side. He wasn't even that fast, but the force was enough for him to lose

balance. After leaning back up, he quickly hobbled over to try again. This time, I simply caught the hammer and yanked it from his grip.

“So, what you tryin’ ta get outta this? More shitty food?” I asked. “Get outta here before I-” He then pulled a small carving knife from behind him. I instantly drew one of my swords. “You wanna know what a real blade can do?!! Back the fuck down or-”

He ignored me again and tried to charge. All I had to do was bump him with the sledgehammer’s handle to daze him and then slice at his chest, all within two seconds.

“AHHHHH!!!” He dropped the knife and fell back on his ass, screaming and clutching at the bloody, foot-long gash I left. The drug addict got really smart really quick and decided to crawl away from me, but with how deep that wound was, he was probably gonna end up bleeding out. I just exhaled and packed away the hammer and knife.

After that, I had to deal with avoiding more junkies, prostitutes, and other varieties of crazy people, but I finally got within sight of my garage. There are large cracks in the walls and the roof is leaky, but at least it’s a solid structure, being my home for years. There aren’t a lot of people around right now, but I always do a perimeter check just in case. With swords in hand, I headed toward the side alley.

Everything seemed fine when I got closer, but suddenly... I thought heard a random noise go silent, like it was just found out. Somebody’s hiding around here, so I picked up a nearby rock.

If it’s a Government soldier, I need to stun him or her before moving in. There weren’t any more sudden sounds, so it was hard to pinpoint. But one of the garbage bags up against the wall suddenly jerked, and I flung the rock as hard as I could.

“AWWW!!! A-HOLE!!” Another voice that needs no introduction, X. Hoodo jumped up, rubbing the top of his turbaned head, “Street, what the fuck?! You know how much that hurts?!”

I put my swords away and dusted my hands off, “Sort of. ‘Tonya hit me with a can earlier.”

“That wasn’t a fucken can!” He jabbed me in the side with the end of his skateboard.

“You’d do the same,” I commented, moving past him toward the back of the garage. I’m sure the GOTC knows where I live by now, but since I don’t want troops seeing me walk through the front door, I hooked up a rail that runs

up the side wall to the roof. After making some running space, I ran toward it as fast as I could and grinded all the way up. Undoing the lock to the roof's opening was simple, but landing the right way on the giant cushion after falling two stories was sometimes a challenge. I went and let X in.

“Street, you gotta get a better way in here,” X. Hoodo said, carrying his tools and skateboard.

“Maybe some other time,” I said, closing the door and turning on the lights... well, they flickered a little before sparking and going out. It's the least the Government can do to give us free power and lightbulbs, but they almost never do shit to maintain it. X came over to try and fix my electricity problems.

X. Hoodo Hood is a great mechanic, and he and his crazy older brother Hoodie-Bo are always making machines out of whatever scraps they find. They've made about 50 bikes and skateboards so far, and they trade them with people for rations and other supplies. X even invented the engines in mine and LaTonya's skates along with his custom skateboard.

“Has it been raining in here?” he suddenly asked, looking up at the ceiling. “How the hell did those wires rust so quick?”

“You've actually found a dry roof in this city?” I sat on the side of the couch that wasn't torn and turned on the cracked TV. It never has a picture outside of grainy rectangles, but I could sometimes pick up signals from Government radio waves. Usually it's just soldiers' ramblings, but I sometimes get the heads up on drops and sweeps.

<...wonder... lightning conduct..... blade.....> It was all static after that.

“AIN'T SHIT ON!” X. Hoodo kicked the TV off the milk cart—his usual reaction. He then went over to the fuse box and started pulling out damaged wires. “How'd these burn so quick? I just replaced these!”

“You know this is the shit garage,” I replied, checking out what was left of the circuits.

“Both of your garages are ‘the shit garage,’” he said back. X got to work replacing some of the fuses and wires while I tried to take the motor out of my small refrigerator.

“At least I don't live in ‘the shit basement.’”

“Hey, my building's sturdy as hell, and it's a good thing it's tall. That corn is actually growing now.”

“Seriously?”



X. Hoodo collects any seed he can find, which is rare even in the few times fruit is in the drops. Even the good food for the soldiers is genetically modified, and growing anything by ourselves is punishable by death. X finds whatever good soil he can and has a few plants up on his roof, out of sight of the ground and helicopters.

“I think, in a few days, I can try and make a little hemp oil, too. The tomatoes are struggling, but yo, I found *a single seed* inside an apple a few days ago! I might be able to do something with that.”

“Don’t those things grow on trees though? Where the hell you gonna hide that?”

“I’ll find a place,” he flashed his signature cocky smile. “I’ll have an entire forest on my roof tellin’ the Government to fuck off!”

We call X. Hoodo “the Risktaker” for all the crazy shit he tries to pull off.

“Aww, fuck! I forgot it!” he suddenly yelled.

“What?”

“Thought I had eight fuses on me, but I only got seven,” he sorted through his tools and dropped the fuses on the floor. “Can you go get a few of these yellow fuses from Bo? I’ll work on the fridge while you’re gone.”

I stood up and stretched, “It stinks extra bad outside today for some reason.” Then, I looked around for my swords, “you just can’t work with what you got?”

“Not unless you want this to catch fire... again.” X. Hoodo threw the damaged cords to the side and grabbed a fresh spool.

I shook my head and put my backpack/sword holster on, wondering what nonsense I’ll run into on the way. I can’t remember the last time I went anywhere without somebody trying to attack or beg from me. Hell, LaTonya did both today!

The sun is straight up in the sky, but the streets just seemed grayer and darker. Extra plumes of smoke are rising from near the Child Pound, so I guess the kids just started their forced labor. Lately, the smog’s been thicker and thicker and gone on longer during the day, so something big must be happening. I remember a special project for older kids during my time in the Pound, but I heard it’ll probably be another five or ten years before it’s done.

“YA’BOY!!!” Hoodie-Bo shouted when he opened the giant steel door to his basement. “Street, why don’t you come over more often and sooner?!”

“I was just here two days ago...”

Hoodie-Bo’s a great guy—he took care of me and LaTonya along with X. Hoodo growing up, but...

“But your goggles were much more foggy, then!”

He’s incredibly..... off. I think Bo has breathed more toxic fumes over the years than any of us combined. Because of his wild, thick dreads that stick out with bent wire hangers, he calls himself the “Palm-Man.” He’s also lives up to that name by being lanky and taller than all of us.

“Yeah, alright... uh, Bo,” I tried to get him to focus, “X forgot some fuses over here. Where ya do keep ‘em?”

“Eeeeeeeehhhhhhhh, somewhere,” he turned and ran into another room. I noticed the lights flickering here, too, so I guess his little brother is gonna be busy all day. “X-boy managed to jack some from Government people a few weeks ago while they fix stuff, so we got several! AND HERE!” The Palm-Man reappeared just as quick with a small bag full of the fuses.

And with that, I left.

Hoodie-Bo is a loving older brother to all of us, but that was enough nonsense today.

BOOOMMM!!!

... From him, at least. I barely got two blocks away from Bo, and a sudden smoke plume was in the sky farther down the road. It’s just another day around this time of year when people light almost anything on fire for warmth—every now and then, somebody fucks up. A few random people decided to go check it out while everyone else, including me, just stayed put. It is strange that we don’t care that much about explosions?

“DROOOOOOOOPPPPP!!!” Someone screamed.

*That* got us all to stampede! I quickly let out my wheels and skated as fast as my legs would take me. I had to dodge whole families and random people who tripped and got stomped. Others threw bottles and random trash to slow everyone else down. The closer the drop truck came into view, the more puddles of blood showed up on the asphalt. While the mad dash to get food and medicine is always this serious, it’s always easier just grinding on the rails and powerlines instead of wasting time picking fights.

People were already on top of the huge pile of rations like vultures. I was about to dig in too until I noticed something kinda strange. Usually, the truck dumps out supplies while it slowly moves down the road and then speeds off, leaving a short trail of straggling rations. It'll even mow over anyone in its way, but for some reason, the truck stayed put and even has a few soldiers on motorcycles surrounding it.

*What're they doin'?* I asked myself, watching them form a circle.

Between the rations, I saw some gauze I desperately needed for my ankle, but I'll have to let it go this time. Everyone else had stuff in their pockets or bags while I kept my distance near an alley. I've never seen a drop turn into a sweep, but I have a real uneasy feeling about that truck.

The soldiers lined up along the passenger-side door, saluting when it flung open.

"Ugghhh!! What a horrid smell!!" a tall, slender man in a gaudy uniform stepped down onto the road. Not even five seconds, and he's already pissing me off with his loud, overdramatic voice. One of the guards handed him a small cloth, and he held it to his nose for a few seconds. "I don't understand how you people can live here!"

This guy has to be a high Government official to be acting out like this. Nobody *lives* here, honestly.

While everyone fought over the pile, he went on with his speech, "Yes, citizens of Metal Stereo, help yourselves to the generosity that the Ringblads have provided you! And please show some class and be grateful for my rare presence today! Ughhh!!" He went back to covering his nose.

At least that explains his uppity act. The Ringblad family owns the Government Forces and is the whole cause of this mess. They took over this country and the majority of the world after a crazy war about 50 years ago, and they're still rebuilding from that. They usually only appear in propaganda posters, so why the hell is this guy here? At a drop, for that matter?

"For those ignorant enough not to know, my name is Cosine Ringblad, Commander-in-Chief of the Government's Western Region! But please, go about your business as I'm only here to survey how you... people... live," with the soldiers surrounding him, following his every move, he went over to the pile and opened up one of the rations. After one small bite of, he spit it back out, exaggerating the whole time. "Egghhh!!!! That's disgusting! And this is what you eat every day??!!!"

*Try the purple ones, jackass, I thought. They taste like sheet metal.*

The drop is winding down, but there's no way I'm letting the soldiers see me... not without a plan, at least. I would LOVE to kill a Ringblad, and when else am I gonna get this chance?! This guy's gotta be here for more than just a drop, so there's gotta be something else I'd stop in the process.

I'm definitely gonna make some kind of ambush...

... As soon as this dumb motherfucker stops talking.

"There is no way I could live like any of you!" A few people gave him looks, where the soldiers responded by raising their swords, but just went back to hoarding. "But there is better food for those able-bodied enough to join my armies. If anyone's willing, they may approach one of my soldiers for information."

With that, Cosine tossed the ration over his shoulder and hit some guy next to a woman and baby.

"Hey! Stay out of my way!" He pushed the woman, who then bumped into a soldier, who brushed up against Cosine.

"Wha-what is this?!" the commander shouted, glaring at the woman. "What is wrong with you?! You dare to *attack* ME?!"

She grabbed her baby boy, trying to shield him, "N-n-no, I'm sorry!"

*Oh well, she's dead*, I thought. The way this guy spazzes, I wouldn't be surprised if this turned into a sweep.

"Get me my baton!" Cosine ordered. The second a soldier handed him one, the commander swatted her right across her lip! She pretty much ragdolled as she hit the road, blood spraying across her cheek. But that wasn't enough: he then stomped on her rib cage and kept taking swipes at the woman's face! The other soldiers started joining in.

And no, nobody moved in to help her. It would be suicide to try... but I somehow found myself holding both of my swords.

At this point, the woman's entire face is wet with crimson, and the only way I knew she's alive was from the bloody bubbles popping out her mouth. When the toddler tried to reach her, Ringblad grabbed him by the back of his shirt, dangling him around.

"Now, if you don't want the same to happen to him, you will stand up and give me praise!"

I couldn't even see her eyes through all the blood, and he wanted her to get up?! The boy made a mix of crying and choking.

My eyebrows furrowed, and my grip got tighter.

“P-please...” she managed to spit out, rolling over onto her front. Cosine then took the chance to step right in the middle of her back, laughing the whole time!

“C’mon, you filthy bitch!” he stomped on her again when she screamed. “Get up, NOW!!!”

“HEY, JACKASS!!”

I had enough.

All eyes turned to me when I ran out of the alley, jumped off a trashcan, and landed just feet away from the soldiers. They’re all a little younger than me, each with standard-issue machetes. It’s been a long time since I’ve seen any Government guys carry guns—I guess their egos are just that big. Regardless, I’m sure the Ringblads have the best of the best guarding them, but I doubt they can do what I can do with blades.

“S-Street Pedal Black!” one of them yelled.

Cosine Ringblad’s eyes widened for a second, but then, he put on a cocky grin, “So, it’s you... Right in front of me?!” He let out a few chuckles, “I’ve heard a lot about you, but I honestly thought you’d be taller.”

“And I honestly thought the Ringblads weren’t such whiny cunts,” I spat back.

He actually shook for a second, mad at what I said, “How dare you say my family’s name without permission!”

“Well, Ringblad, do you see these two swords, Ringblad? Because I’m about to shove them through your soldiers, Ringblad. Permission to do that, Ringblad?”

He was vibrating at this point. Was this the first fight he’s ever been in? Cosine responded by kicking the woman in the ribs.

I readied my swords for a fight.

“Soldiers, KILL HIM!!”

But strange enough, none of them moved. The one closest to his leader told him, “Sir, with all due respect, we’re under strict orders from your father not to kil-”

SWAPP!!! Cosine shut him up with one swipe of the baton.

“Don’t you disobey me! I SAID ATTACK!”

## TARGET ONE: GOVERNMENT TROOPS

While that one dealt with a swollen lip, the nine remaining officers all drew their blades. Four of them stepped up while the rest guarded their leader.

The drop was practically forgotten as spectators abandoned what was left of the pile and cleared out of the road.

“GET HIM!” Cosine screamed. The closest soldier lunged at me with his machete, but I managed to dodge and follow-up with a kick to the back of his head, sending him down. I barely had time to react when the second troop swung right toward my neck. I met the blade with my own sword, and we locked in a stalemate before pushing away. He followed up with a few more swings, and I was losing ground fast. Quickly popping out my wheels, I skated toward the front of the truck for more room, but those three troops were right on my tail. Then I decided to bring the fight to them.

**SWINGGG!! CLASH!! CLASH!!!**

Before they could focus, I boosted right through the line of soldiers, landing slices on their sides and necks. My blades were painted red when I got to the other side, and the troops were on their knees trying to hold blood in.

I turned right to Ringblad, who (if he hadn't already) looked like he was gonna shit himself, “If this is the best you got, I should've done this a long time ago!” I ran right toward him, but the other guards were ready. Once I clashed swords with the one in front, the remaining four surrounded me! I managed to attack back, but they kept getting good hits through my shirt, cutting my arms and chest. One of my swords got a good thrust through a soldier's throat, and I kicked another one away, giving me a chance to escape their circle. I followed up by ducking another swing and then slicing that troop's ankle.

Right then, the soldiers got a good look at the scene: Blood everywhere, six of their guys down, and me, standing ready for more. When I took one step forward, they took three steps back.

“What do you think you're DOING?!!” Cosine was flipping out, almost dropping the baby. “KILL HIM!!” Those three troops raised their swords slowly... but did nothing else. “YOU COWARDS!!” The commander grabbed the guard he hit earlier and threw him right at me.

And I just stabbed him through the stomach and out his back, the troop fainting moments later. After that, I heard three swords drop to the ground and a few distant cheers from the crowd.

“W-w-what t-t-the...” Cosine was left stammering as I walked forward.

“Put the baby down, now,” I was close enough to spit on him.

“MAKE ME!” he yelled. I raised my sword, but the commander drew a knife and pointed it an inch away from the baby’s head. “Go ahead,” he whispered, just begging me to make a move.

“No, please... don’t!” the battered woman managed to breathe. I couldn’t believe she hadn’t drowned in her own blood yet.

“Be QUIET!!” In one swift motion, Ringblad took the knife away and stabbed the woman deeply into her neck.

“AAAHHHH!!” she screamed in agony. I watched in horror as the blood gushed from her body!

*Not again... I had a vision... NOT AGAIN!*

“Hmph! Disobeying your superiors,” Cosine taunted. “What nerve.”

Before I knew I was doing, I brought my sword down and sliced off his left thumb!

“AAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!!!!” he shrieked, dropping everything and grabbing his injured hand through spurts of blood. The crying baby boy bounced on the bloody woman while the once-cocky commander dropped to his knees. Before his soldiers could help their leader, I got both of my swords crossed over in front of his neck.

“Now-now-now... wait just a minute!... We can work this out!!” Cosine was wailing.

“Should’ve thought of that before you killed that woman,” my swords pressed into his skin.

“I can do whatever I please!” he told me, sounding even more pathetic.

“Fine with me,” I said, seeing a small line of liquid red slowly appear. Man, I’m just seconds away from slicing his windpipe in three—I’m gonna savor this!

“Wait a second, Street,” I looked over, and Ringblad’s soldiers stood around the baby, “Go any further and we’ll kill the kid!”

I glanced at the kid for a second, but went back to Cosine, “Go ahead. He’s not mine.” I wasn’t giving up this opportunity for nothing.

“We mean it!” One of them had the boy by the neck with a sword at his side. “Aren’t you supposed to be the city’s savior or something? What do they call you?”

I gripped my swords tighter.

“Wait, I remember... ‘The Fire of Metal Stereo.’”

My face contorted when I looked back to the baby. He had no idea what that meant or what was going on, but he stared right at me, his crying eyes begging for help.

“So, how about a trade? The baby for our leader?”

Suddenly, the entire area went dead quiet waiting for my next move. *So what if the kid died? I’d have a dead Ringblad, too. What’s more important?* The debate in my head went faster than I thought... and a little unexpected.

“... I need a guarantee you won’t hurt that kid,” I began. “So back off over to the truck.” The lead soldier nodded to the others, and they slowly moved the blade away.

“Take away your swords,” the soldier still stood over the toddler. “We’ll move at the same time.”

I went ahead and backed up one. They started to move as well.

“Better hurry up before this piece of shit bleeds out.” That got ‘em going. “Alright... good.” Both of my blades were at my side when they made it.

KICK!!! With the wheels out, right into Cosine’s ugly mug!

Grabbing the boy, I sped down the street, and hauled ass into an alley. The people scattered, keeping both of us out of sight.

“Get him! Nobody makes a fool of MEEEE!” I heard the injured commander yell.

*Ringblad, I put the boy down to pry open a sewer cap. There ain’t shit in this decaying city, so what’s he doing here?*

“Y’know, I only asked you to bring back *one thing...*” X. Hoodo looked at the crying boy on my couch. “And neither of them should be covered in blood.”

I ignored that as I climbed down into the garage’s hidden shelter. It’s in the center of the floor, hidden under a large vent, and I hide my food and supplies down there under my mattress.



“A lot of crazy shit went down. Long story,” I grabbed a bunch of my rations and packed them away. “We just need to get the fuck outta here!”

“So, what’s so special about this kid?” X asked from the floor.

“A woman got killed at a drop, and I guess that’s her son.”

“WAAHHHH!!!” the baby cried louder.

“X, shut him up!” I yelled.

The entire shelter vibrated with sound.

“Hey, he’s your problem! You do something!” he yelled back. The boy cried even harder as I climbed out.

And I missed my big chance for this?!

“WWW-WHHHOOOOAAAAAAA!!!!” A girl suddenly screamed, and that shut all of us up. A bunch of trashcans clattered around a second later.

“LaTonya,” X. Hoodo and I concluded.

I picked up my backpack, swords, and the kid, and we went out the back door, automatically locking when it closed. We turned around the corner and saw her lying on the ground almost motionless. She must’ve hit one of the cans pretty hard. I sighed and gave the baby to the Risktaker.

“...mmm...” she stirred and slowly opened her eyes as I lifted her head. “Wha-? Street?”

“Girl, the hell did you do?” I asked her, picking up her glasses. One of the lenses was knocked out.

“I was grinding up your wall, but your shitty rail broke,” she said. LaTonya pointed at the dangling piece of metal, and I exhaled at her stupidity.

“How many times I told ya to just do *the knock*?!”

“I wanted to get in by myself!”

She held out a hand to help her up.

“To steal my shit again?” As I lifted her off the ground, I saw her blush halfway.

I dropped her.

“Hey, jackass! What was that for?!” she yelled.

“For actin’ stupid,” I said, picking her up again.

“Why you...” She then noticed the baby in X. Hoodo’s arms, just giggling

at us. “Oh, my...” The Graffiti Spirit was quiet as she and the boy just smiled at each other. “He’s... so... CUTE!”

I froze, and X could’ve dropped him in shock. We’ve never seen tough-as-nails LaTonya Ski act so *girly!* She went over and grabbed his little hands, laughing along with the kid.

“Uhh... yeah... Street saw a woman get killed, and he was her baby,” X. Hoodo explained.

LaTonya gasped and looked back at me while I kept trying to fix her glasses. Right when the lens snapped back in, she looked at me with her best pair of sad eyes. I hated when she did that.

“Are you okay? I saw a trail of blood near the front,” she said, glancing back at the road for a second. As much shit as she gives me, that look always showed her worry for me. Fortunately, it only works when her glasses are off—one reason I hurried to give them back.

The baby tapped at her face once they were on.

“Easy,” LaTonya said, moving his hand away and taking him in her arms. “What’s his name anyway?”

“We don’t know... or care,” I said, checking my skates before taking off. X. Hoodo followed on his skateboard with LaTonya trailing right behind.

“Well, I guess we’ll have to name him.”

“Have fun doing that yourself, and go away.”

“Well, since you found him, I guess that makes you his dad, and he can be named after you!” LaTonya said.

I should be using every precious second to put as much distance between me and Ringblad’s incoming troops as possible...

But that stopped my wheel in place, twisting around on its axis.

“FUCK... THAT..... and fuck you and your brain for suggesting it!”

“You found him, Street, and you can’t say no to a face like this,” LaTonya held his confused look up to mine.

I stared right into his eyes, “How ‘bout *hell* no?”

“How ‘bout *we keep goin’?*” X. Hoodo sped past us, and we followed in his direction.

After we passed several blocks and some random onlookers, LaTonya tried again.

“Look, Street, I’m not much for mom material, but I’m not letting him get anywhere near the Child Pound, so he needs us!”

I shook when I heard that place out loud. Think of a playground mixed with a labor camp, and then add all kinds of “fucked up.” The Child Pound is worse than any orphanage you can think of, but we managed to escape together about 6 or 7 years ago. I was only there for a few months, but X. Hoodo and LaTonya were there for most of their lives. We’re grown now, but to this day, we even avoid the buildings around it.

But I guess we can’t *send* anybody there either... and maybe Missus would be proud of me.

“Fine, I’ll help,” I shouted back. “But you’re the one taking care of him, LaTonya.”

“You hear that? You have a new daddy!” she told the kid. I heard X snicker in front of us. “Alright, but we still have to give him a name.”

“I thought you were gonna name him after Street,” X. Hoodo reminded. I grimaced at him, but he just smiled back.

“Oh yeah, that’s right, but I just don’t want to call him Street Pedal Black Jr.” LaTonya said, laughing a little.

I was stonefaced through this whole conversation.

“Steet....ped-ped.....blaaaaa!!” the baby tried to yell.

“Oh, look at that! He likes you!” LaTonya came up and skated beside me, the boy enjoying the entire ride.

“How ‘bout we just call him ‘Ped?’” X. Hoodo suggested.

They looked at me, asking for approval. The baby was looking at me, too, reaching his arms out for me and giggling.

Not sure what was, but he kinda grew on me right then—like he was meant to be part of the crew. I patted his head with a smile, “I guess we can call him that.”

“Ped-ped-ped!” he squealed.

“Aww, he likes it,” LaTonya suddenly shoved him into my arms and took off down the road, ahead of the Risktaker.

“I said he’s staying with you!” I shouted at her.

“I know, I know! But can we stay at the east garage tonight?”

“You already stay there every night,” I said, rolling my eyes.

The Graffiti Spirit came back to me, “Good, because you have to come with me tonight,”

My eyebrow raised, “Why?”

“You think you’re not gonna be there the first night?” LaTonya skated backwards, looking right in my face. “Recognize, Street! You’re gonna help me out.”

X. Hoodo suddenly appeared by me, “She *told* you.”

The Risktaker and I shook hands (where we pound the undersides of our fists and snap our little fingers to the side), and he went down a separate road toward his building. It’s a special handshake we use, but we need to get a name for it one day.

“You ready to go?” LaTonya asked.

“Yeah, I guess,” I said. Just when I was gonna charge my skates, she shoved Ped into my chest again. “What’re you givin’ him to me for?!”

“So you can put him in your bag,” she tightened her skates one more time. “I’m gonna try out some new tricks, so you have to carry him.”

I didn’t feel like arguing anymore. We got Ringblads in the city, probably heading to both of my garages, and this chick adopts a kid and wants to do flips...

After rearranging my more dangerous stuff, I settled Ped into my backpack and headed toward the east garage. The plan is to wait and patrol it in case any soldiers show up. Hopefully, I’ll get another chance to finish off that bitch-ass Cosine.

Ped kept tugging on my cornrows as I skated, and LaTonya grinded on rails and curbs as she went. She didn’t look like she was losing her balance or anything, so I guess she’s been practicing lately. I remember back when she fell every time she tried to jump with wheels, but with barely any people around right now, she has all the space she needs.

... Why weren’t there any people around?

“C’mon, Street,” LaTonya called. “You’re too slow!”

“Why don’t you carry him then?!” I yelled.

Suddenly, I heard a loud engine and what sounded like marching around

the corner. It was right ahead of us!

“The Fire of Metal Stereo can’t even keep up with me?!” LaTonya taunted, grinding right toward it. “I haven’t even-”

I jetted onto the rail and grabbed her before she reached the intersection.

“Street, you shouldn’t be doing tricks with a baby in-”

I covered her mouth and brought her up against a wall on the corner. “Shut up and look over there.”

We peeked around, and at least 30 men and women in GOTC uniforms stood down the road! It’s been a long time since I’ve seen this many at once!

“What is this? A mega-sweep?” LaTonya asked, shaken by the sight.

“Don’t know, but if they see us, we’re dead,” The troops were about two blocks away from us. From the looks of it, we weren’t that far away from where the last drop was. “Listen, take Ped and go straight to the east garage. As much as I don’t wanna tell you this, there’s a key to the back door inside the wall rail.” I took the boy out of my bag and grabbed my own can of spraypaint. “I might hafta play tag wit’ these fools.”

“The fuck are you talkin’ ‘bout?! You’re not really ‘bout to challenge ‘em?”

“Something big is happenin’ today since a Ringblad showed up, and they’re probably even more pissed after what I did. Ain’t that right, Ped?” the baby smiled at me. “I’m gonna hang around and see what they’re doin’ right quick.”

“You just said it yourself: You’re gonna get yourself killed.”

“Tonya, you wanna protect that kid? Then, get ‘em outta here! I’ll do my part and see if they’re hittin’ my garages next.” I kept my eyes on the soldiers. They’re in front of a burning building, and there are even a few fire trucks and ambulances on-site. It’s been about three or four moons since I’ve seen some of those.

LaTonya sighed and stepped closer to me, “Fine... but,” she suddenly grabbed the hem of my shirt, and I felt a soft pair of lips on mine. It was over as soon as it happened, and there was a stern look behind her glasses. “Be careful, alright.” She then skated away with the boy in tow.

Now keep in mind: We aren’t some kind of stupid vigilante group, but the last thing we need is for shit to get worse around here.

*If any of them see me, I’ll just have to take out what I can,* I thought, shaking my spraypaint. I skated up about a block closer, sneaking behind

whatever I could. Soon, I could overhear their sergeant's orders.

"-and leave no stone unturned!" she announced, "Team B is to retrieve the conductor research. And Team C, you must search the area for this man," she held up a picture, but I couldn't get a clear look at it. "His name is Philly Wonder. He has extensive knowledge of the Lightning Conductor, but unconfirmed security footage shows him possibly leaving after the blast. Commander Ringblad was set to meet with him today, so it is imperative that he or his corpse be located immediately. Understood?"

"YES, MA'AM!"

When the troops split up, I started looking for ways out of the area. I'm way too tired and sore from fighting earlier to take on an army. The closest sewer cap is near the fire, so that's out. I don't see an easy way to get up and grind on the powerlines without being seen, so I'm stuck on the ground. Plus, I hear more and more emergency trucks coming, so I'm practically surrounded...

I tucked the spraypaint into my pocket and grabbed one of my swords. It's stained with enough blood already, but I'll probably have to wet it some more. I backed into a darkened alley and watched a few troops pass right by me, with more showing up in the area. Just what the hell is this "Lightning Conductor" thing anyway? And what's so special about this Wonder guy?

"HEY, WHO'S THAT!?" I froze when I heard shouting at the other end of the alley. "YOU THERE, IDENTIFY YOURSELF!"

## TARGET TWO: GOVERNMENT TROOPS

Five of them stepped toward me with machetes drawn. These guys looked even younger than the earlier soldiers, on average about 4½ to 5½ feet tall.

*Round 1...*

When they got within ten feet, I pointed my sword to one of their faces. They all backed up a little when they got a good look at me, realizing who I was.

"S-S-Street Pe-Pedal..." the one in front dropped his blade.

"Yeah." With that, I sliced across his face and kicked him right in his chest. The remaining troops charged forward, but I brought my spraypaint to their

height and tagged across.

“Ahh! My eyes!”

“I can’t see!”

“Where is he?!”

They all had a huge, collective black stripe on their faces, and that gave me the chance to slam them against the walls, slice their jugulars, and leave the alley without getting more troops on my ass.

<Please repeat last transmission! Over!> One of their radios buzzed behind me. <Unit November, approach the coordinates of 8th and Climb Aven->

I didn’t listen to the rest, but having one of their radios might come in handy. The back roads were full of troops dealing with random folk, killing some and questioning others. They seemed busy enough, but I know they’d easily recognize a bloody black dude carrying two swords. Don’t have much of a choice, though...

Wheels out, I charged down the road as fast as possible. About 10 or 11 more troops tried to stop me, but I sprayed some of their faces and sliced their sides when I passed. I jumped on the street’s side rail and grinded past more, dodging their attacks.

But that strategy didn’t last long since an entire group of soldiers was waiting at the end. I jumped off and skidded to a stop, ready to defend myself.

“Oh, this is too good,” the lead troop brandished his machete. “We’ll all get promotions for bringing you in!”

The second he stepped forward, however...

The edge of a familiar red skateboard hit the direct side of his head, causing him to faint a second later.

“Whasup, Street?!” X. Hoodo yelled from a fire escape, tapping a crowbar on its ladder. “Saw you runnin’ around from my rooftop! What’s goin’ on?!”

It’s been a while since I was so happy to see his arrogant mug, “Ah, y’know... bullshit from *these guys*...”

His board managed to roll all the way to my feet. He jumped down next to me and recovered it, “You don’t look so good, man. You got this?”

I looked behind me, and more troops were coming for their chance at us. I whispered, “Right through them, into a sewer.”

“I heard that!” X. Hoodo just couldn’t stop fidgeting with that crowbar. Then, he turned and laughed at the soldiers in front of us. He officially got the bloodlust! “The hell they think they gonna do with just one machete?!”

They all reached behind them and drew another one.

I just sighed, “You just had to piss ’em off, didn’t you, Hood?”

“GET THEM!!!”

They all charged, but X and I split up and skated right around them. A few managed to catch up, and I had to either dodge their swings or try and trip them. At this point, my arms are too sore to attack.

We covered about 3 more blocks until we finally found another sewer cap, and X. Hoodo immediately got to work on it.

“Fuck!! This one’s stuck! What the hell?!” he was struggling to loosen it up.

I looked back down the road and two troops were headed right for us. X is still trying to find a leverage point.

“Alright...” I stood between the sewer and the soldiers, readying for one last attack. Holding both swords, I brought my arms across my chest with the blades facing away and parallel to the ground. I have to time this right... they’re still too far away, and my shoulders feel like they’ll break any second. Just a little more...

“Street!!” The troops were 10 feet away when The Risktaker looked up.

“I call this...”

Just in time to see it.

“The STREET WINDER!!”

I threw my swords as fast and hard as I could toward their upper bodies, the spin forming metallic circles. The troops then held their position, just staring at me when the swords hit the ground right behind them.

It was very quiet at that moment. I could hear the wind blowing and see the dust flow along the ground. X must’ve even stopped working with the sewer cap. Everything seemed perfectly still.



About a second later, blood leaked from the soldiers' necks.

And then their heads collapsed when they hit the asphalt.

*Wow... their bodies followed with a soft thud. I've REALLY gotten better at that...*

<Unfortunate setback, Ma'am!> With all the excitement, I forgot I was carrying that radio. <The lab with Lightning Conductor plans has been completely incinerated! It was possibly the point of the blast! Over!>

"The Lightning what?" X. Hoodo was back to prying open the cap.

<Unfortunate, indeed,> the commander called. <Continue the search for Philly Wonder! Over and Out!>

"And who the hell is-"

"THERE THEY ARE!!" More troops caught sight of us. And by "more," I mean around 30 to 40!

I put my swords away and quickly went to help X. We only have seconds to get away.

POP! WHOOBLLLEE!

"Fuck yes!" X. Hoodo grabbed his skateboard. "Street, get down there!"

I rushed over and climbed down the ladder as fast as my sore limbs could go.

"OWW! Damnit!" But I slipped and dropped hard to the concrete floor. When my vision straightened out, I saw X hanging on the ladder with the cap back on. He wasn't climbing down for some reason.

"X, what're you...?" I struggled to stand back up. When I got halfway to my feet, he was suddenly pulling me to move.

And his bald head was showing, "We gotta GO!!"

The Risktaker gave me a shove, and I got some skating momentum going. I took a quick glance back at the ladder, and X. Hoodo's signature turban was tied around one of the rungs. It was glowing red like a light was inside it.

We were at least 100 feet away at this point, but we had to keep going for what X. Hoodo most likely had planned...

“Ya’boys have REALLY DONE IT NOW!” Hoodie-Bo looked down at the block-wide sinkhole filled with hurt GOTC soldiers a few blocks away. He didn’t seem too happy.

“C’mon, bruh. You know Dad would be *thrilled* to see his arsenal used like this!” X. Hoodo was busy watering his plants and moving them to sunny areas on the rooftop. “Plus, they’ll be here to start fixin’ all that first thing tomorrow. I say we celebrate now!” He walked over to me and dropped a round red fruit into my lap. “Here, Street. You can have the good tomato! Not a lot of flavor, but it’s juicy as hell!”

I was sitting in a corner exhausted, but I looked up in time to see him bite one with a huge grin on his face. It must be better than any ration.

*Ringblads... Lightning Counductor... Philly Wonder...* my mind drifted. “What happens next...?”

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