

Monster Bowl

By:

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Thunder clashes in the blackened sky above. The rain pierces the earth with sharp icy cold stabs. Six black hooded figures stand in a circle perched up on a cliff, high above the tides below - unmoved by the dangers above. Flashes of hot light rip through the darkness. They simultaneously begin chanting words of another time. Their voices are synced and grow louder and harsher as the thunderous sky booms above them. The wind rips through the circle causing a few to stumble. A hood blows off a person's head revealing an aged woman. Her hair is as bright as a shined silver dollar and eyes as dark as the

clouds roaring above her, "Stand your ground!" the wind cyclones through the circle. A lightning bolt rips through the sky and strikes the cauldron in the middle of them. Four of the six are thrown backwards and smash against the rocky ground.

One girl is thrown off the edge of the mountainside, the girl looks down at the terrifying free fall plunge she's about to undertake. She reaches up for help, "Cynder!" but the lady with the crisp silver hair looks back at her, unable to move. A tear drips from her eyes and she looks away. Another person races to her aide, but the girl loses her grip. A heart piercing scream rips through the atmosphere, but as if the Gods curse back, the thunderous bombs muffle her out. Cynder looks down at the remnants of the cauldron. A mixture of white and black smog forms above the wreckage. She's drawn towards it; everything around her fades as the thick smog engulfs her. Images of the Species War appear; she whips around with every sound and images that blasts into her view.

A Warewolf locked its jaws on a human's neck. A cackling vampire, drunk on blood, spied her next victim. Blood stained her mouth and down the nape of her neck, but her eyes glazed over with a euphoric cast and she zipped through the war field. She snatched the young girl up from

her stance mid swing and pierced her neck, tearing out her esophagus before she dropped her down fifteen feet. The body crashed down in front of a group of humans, who were cornered by two devilishly handsome warlocks. They chanted a similar sounding spell before one of their faces begun to melt. They tried to move, but were stuck in their places. A man stood to the side; his hand shook with fear-laced power. "Run!"

The humans fled, just as one of the warlocks broke free, "Traitor!" He extended his arm and clutched his fist, the man crumpled into a ball.

Cynder watches froze in the compelling spell, as the Master of Wizardry and President of the Humans, clash in the center of the fight; "You will never get your grimy paws on this city!" The President stood tall on a collapsed wall above the battlefield, but significantly below the Wizard.

The brooding Wizard sneered down at the human. He flipped backwards and raised his sword as he ascended higher into the sky, his pupils bled to the corners of his eyes and a black stream surged down from the sky latching onto his weapon. It trailed throughout his body as he aimed his sword at the President, a middle aged man who's seen his share of tragedies. The President's clothes were burnt

carrying the tales of the battle with each ripped seam and bloody patch. The President's drained eye's glared harshly at the Wizard unwilling to show an ounce of fear as the blackness shot.

The Queen of the Vampire Covenant, an ageless beauty with luscious crimson red hair and fuller red lips, glared over at the fight from a cliff above. She watched as the dark venom bled from the sky. "No," she said in a quiet disbelief. She tore through the battlefield towards them. Monsters of all species blurred around her as she zipped past them. The black spell latched a hold of The President's body and dragged him into the suffocating air. Lunging at the last second she snatched the President in her arms. They tumbled to the desert earth and she glanced over the human, but it is too late. The blackness seeped deep into his veins stretching from underneath his collar shirt up his neck. He placed his cold trembling hand over hers and smiled faintly, "Take me to the Grand Witch." She nodded, quickly picking him up, and dashed away from the fight. The Wizard glared at the traitor vampire, but within seconds she's lost within the chaos. He scoured the ground for her. He pulled the negative energy from the war and shouted with a booming voice, "This is the end! Victory will come to us after annihilation of the human race!" The

mob of monsters below shouted and roared in a rage.

Two men atop of a fallen pillar shout, "Fall back!" The army looked up at the monsters as they roar in a fit of insanity. They urged the others to run faster as the monsters unleash themselves ravaging the land; executing the humans. A little girl cowered underneath two suited up humans. Their tough silver suits were dented and dipped in blood. They survey the crowd, "Where's the President?"

The other scanned the crowd and peered back over to his friend, "Look out!" A wolf leapt from the broken rocks and crashed down on the man. Its snout penetrated the man's neck ripping a chunk out of his head. The girl screamed in fright as the wolf extended on his hind legs towering over the poor human. He sneered, showering the girl with bloody fear. She whimpered. The other man snapped out of his trance and glanced down at her, and with the last bit of his raspy voice he let out a fear drenched warning, "Run," the girl scampered away. The wolf ignored the man and dropped down advancing slowly on the clumsy girl. The intensity of the man's powerlessness overcame him and he lost it; the human screamed on top of his lungs and jumped towards the beast. The wolf retracted his claws and like a slingshot, slammed the human into the rock wall behind him. The wolf howled in victory before he continued his blood

thirst after the little girl.

A group of vampires descended from the high rises cutting off a batch of humans. They smiled, flashing their sharp fangs. The humans gripped their weapons of choice in their sweaty palms. The vampires laughed at them and flashed to the human's sides sinking their teeth into their necks.

A vampire licked the blood from her lips, "mmm, tastes like sweet sweet victory."

"And a hint of... fear." They laughed like drunken fools. A vampire glanced at her sisters and smiled, but her lips began to burn and blister. She cried out in pain and collapsed to her knees. The little girl slowed; she watched in horror as the vampires screeched out in a mix of fury and pain while they sizzled from the inside out.

"What is this?"

"They poisoned their blood!" the words barely escaped the vampire's mouth as the wolf behind her howls in agony. The girl glanced over her shoulder; the blood stained on the wolf's mane sizzled against the fur and he keeled over. An Earth shaking smash shook the soil underneath her torn up sneakers. She peered over as goblins and gargoyles took up the slack ahead. They ripped the humans from the ground snapping their neck before dropping them. They stomped and

crushed their bones as they stormed towards the city lines. The little girl zigzagged through their feet and sprinted towards her leaders, her military, her city.

A deranged smile cracked through the mucky faces of the humans as they watched the monsters collapse. She fled past them leading the goblin's eyes right towards them. The human's smiles fell in a grimace line and they turned tails and raced towards the large crumbling city walls, bodies fell from the sky as the furious vampires flew above, scooping up the humans and dropping them from a hundred feet. The young girl warrior looked over and made eye contact with her biggest fear - the banshees. They stood at the edge of the fight and set their scopes on their victims. With their ghostly pale skin and corpse like features; they puffed up their chests, cracked and broke their faces as they extended their elongated jaws and exploded an ear-piercing screech. Their victims gripped their ears and curled up on the ground. The girl covered her ears and sprinted with her head down. She glanced ahead and saw people drop like flies with blood pouring from their ears. She leapt over the poor soul and breached the city walls. Only a few hundred humans made it inside the city lines. A very young man stood at the edge, he raised his gun and shouted, "Sanctuary!" the monsters stopped at

the wall snarling in anger. The wizard descended in front of them.

"Sanctuary? This is war!" His voice vibrated the city's walls. He raised his sword as the mob behind him broke sanctuary, invading the city. The monsters raced past the young man and the Master of Wizardry slowly stepped down to the boy. He sneered at him, but instead of drenching the crumbled city with his fear; the boy drew his sword and struck the wizard across the face slicing a clean cut into his jaw. The wizard's charcoaled eyes stared back at him. The boy rose off the ground and hundreds a little cuts slice his skin. He yelled out in agony as his blood drained out of his body slowly at first like the dyke in the dam, but as the cuts grew the hot blood drained out of every pore.

The young girl fled; she scurried over and under the fallen stones and ducked into the nearest shop. Her loose pants and brown over-shirt made her look bigger, but she showed her true size as she curled up and cowered underneath the desk. She shut her eyes trying to block out the horrid scene playing outside. Screams of agony and fright haunt her heart. She plugged her ears, but a smash jolted her back into reality. She sucked in her breath and the sounds of a light footstep tapped closer to her.

"Oh poor little girl," the woman's voice had a tinge of ruse behind her calm words, "Haven't you've read the ghost stories..." the girl waited anxiously for the woman to finish her sentence, but nothing came. She opened her eyes and shifted in her hiding place. A ghostly white face hung over the top of the desk. Her auburn curls bounced against gravity, "you can never hide from a vampire." She hissed the end of her sentence and the girl jabbed her knife into the vampire's chest and fled. The vampire cried out in pain. She played the part well, crying and screaming as she ripped the blade from her chest and tossed it to the side. She collapsed to her knees and whimpered.

The little girl paused at the door and looked back over at the vampire with the human sense that the monsters completely despise - concerning sincerity. The veins around the monster's eyes stain jet black and she sneered at her, "Ha! Fool!" the vampire zipped to her side and pulled her off the ground by the neck. The girl squirmed in her grasp as the vampire cocked her head like an animal as she sniffed the girl's aroma. She let out an orgasmic sigh, "Oh it's a shame. All you little ants poisoned your blood." She shrugged, "Oh well." With a flick of her wrist the girl's neck twisted backwards and she fell limp. The vampire let out an eerie cackle and sped towards her next victim.

Cynder cries as the world around her fades to black. She wipes the tears away as she spots a small light glimmering in the darkness. She follows the light to a small hut, an ancient hut in her time, but in its glory now with plush greens filling up the yard and firefly lights lighting the path to the front door.

The Vampire Queen stood outside, anxiously pacing back and forth. Her luscious curly hair swayed with every step. The door creaked open; she whipped around her crisp amber eyes flash to a very old lady who emerged, "I cannot save him, Vira."

"May I?" the old lady let her pass her threshold. They walked up to the President's body, "Is there anything—"

"Child, there is many options. But only one that will promise the demise of this war."

"Let's do it."

"Understand child, this is very risky and will hurt many youths."

"If it stops this madness then just do it," she said, her voice hardened by the war.

"All right child," She raised her arms to the sky and a blinding light shined. Vira covered her eyes hiding her body with her leather cloak. The light dimmed and she

peaked around at the old witch, "I've made a Star. This Star will promise the unity with humans and monsters."

"Thank you," Vira reached forward to take the tiny glowing orb, but the old lady released it. It rose above them and shot up towards the sky, "What the hell was that?"

"My child. The star will reveal itself when a human selflessly risks their life to save a monster from the hands of another, and will only truly take affect when a monster does the same," she paused and they both look out the hut, "You must go. They disobeyed sanctuary," With that Vira was out the door and ascending above the destruction of the war. As Cynder looked down, through the eyes of Vira, at the scorched lands the view faded to complete darkness.

Cynder stumbles backwards a hooded man catches her from behind. She looks up at him in dismay, "Son, the fable it true."

"Zackary!" Zackary rolls over covering his body with the warmth of the blanket, "Zackary Lawlor! Get your lazy butt up!" His world impales through his mind. The sounds of the waking city - the shouts, the curses, the typical morning greetings bleed through his taped window. He can smell the sewage seeping from the cracks through his walls. The sewage mixed with the fresh sweet scent of the bloody carcasses from downstairs. Today will be another normal hellish day. *The day? Please make it Friday, no better yet Saturday. This whole Monday thing has a worse dilemma than you'd normally think.* This Monday is the long stretch of the Monster Bowl, which only means one thing - Hellish bets and Hellions rising. He didn't have any time to think of what else this Monday was going to bring before a body fell

onto him. He shoves her off. He squints at the rays streaking into his room from the tattered blinds. *Okay no Hellions exist, well, not inside the walls of this city, but there's one in particular who Zackary swears was dumped in the waterhole and drifted ashore.*

Verena thumbs through his magazines, "Seriously? No hybrids?" She stands with one leg supporting her body and the other balancing on the box of old magazines. The bottom of her ribs peak out from the bottom of her shrunken tank top, leaving a good four inches from her cargo pants, that hung loosely on her hips. And it's not like she tries to show off her belly. It's impossible to find new clothes in this city. *Either way, she looks as amazing as always with her perfect imperfections. Mocking the rays of the sun with her glistening smile.*

"Jeez Verena. I'm up," he says rubbing his eyes.

"Good, Treydon is downstairs ransacking your livestock."

Zackary leaps out of bed and jumps down the stairs taking on three steps at a time. He spins around the corner to see his buddy frying up some meat, "Treydon! You can't—"

"Oh, but I can," he looks his friend up and down and smirks, "I pegged you as briefs not boxers." Treydon stands with a bloody apron draped over his black on black outfit.

His brown hair spiked to perfection leading down a thin line of facial hair that complements his hard jawbone structure. Needless to say, he's handsome, as handsome as they come, fitted with muscles for bonus points. Zackary looks down then his eyes focus behind Treydon seeing a room full of unsatisfied customers. He feels the blood underneath his skin begin to boil turning his face a brilliant color matching the flame-tipped ambers.

His father, taken on a couple dozens of pounds with the poison called bourbon, looks over at his son, "Jesus son! Go get pants on!" Zackary meets his eyes only for a brief second, but enough to read the lines in his brow to know how many lashes he's going to get later that night. The crowd doesn't burst into laughter no they are too sick for that. They simply stare and glare in their disgusted judgmental gazes sending Zackary feeling like the smallest of the pathetic prosaic humans. Zackary's mind finally connects to his limbs and he flees back upstairs. He shuts the door as quickly as he left looking as mortified as the cow staring in the butcher's backdoor. Verena sits at the edge of his bed skimming the pages when she meets his eyes she bursts out laughing.

"Not funny!"

Verena pitches her fingers together, "Just a little."

Zackary shakes his head and pulls on a pair of pants. He rips a shirt from the drawer and droops it over his head. The black tee shirt is like everyone else's. Colors don't really last long in a city as dark and damp as theirs. He walks over to his chair and pulls on a black and blue vest. He ties a chain from his buckle to his wallet.

"Ya done yet?" Verena asks walking passed him flipping her blonde hair as she passes by.

"I'm going out the back," he says ripping back the tape he steps out of his window; Verena follows as they scale down the side of the rustic building. Zackary looks back up, rustic was probably giving it too much flavor; it's more like a forever aching eye sore. Zackary's feet splash down on the blackened muck. It splashes up staining his grungy pants.

He reaches up and catches Verena as she drops into his arms. Her sweet smell of fresh flowers clouds his head. He'd never knew why or how she always smelled like a fresh rose garden, but in a rotting city of sewage her presence always makes it that much more tolerable. It's not that he's in love with her or anything. He glances sideways at her as they walk towards the main street; she's his best friend. He doesn't think he's in love anyways; he's never felt any different with her - no gushing at the heart head

of heels stupid love. He just feels warmth and happiness with her. They walk through the streets without talking. Zackary still trying to shake off his embarrassment and Verena thinking about God knows what. Probably Hybrids. There's this ever-growing debate about the monsters and a new hybrid species said to be more powerful than their predecessors. Zackary glances over at a shriveling poster of two monsters ripping each other's throat out. To him, hybrids monsters, they were the Hollywood of today's hellish world around them and they were slumming it up in the pits of a NYC gutter. Zackary never voices his opinions about the topic whenever it comes up he just mindlessly preaches what they wrote in their history books.

A cursed shout slams into Zackary as a woman holding the most intolerable scent trips and tackles Zackary to the ground, "Sorry," Zackary apologizes as he scoots away from her. She sneers at him.

"Move it!" Verena snaps at the woman and shoves her out of her way ripping Zackary's wallet from her death grip. She smiles, handing it back to him. Verena is not only the prettiest girl in his school, but also the fiercest. She doesn't take shit from nobody, *and she's my best friend*. Zackary smiles over at her taking the wallet and fumbling with the broken chain.

The density of the city could be a little overwhelming at times as people races past each other making sure to spread the negativity and displeasures as they go. A nasty looking fellow emerges from his out-cove and stomps in front of Zackary. "You. It can't be you. You will die. You need to die." Zackary is awe stuck his brow curls trying to figure out this crazy. Verena on the other hand is a bit more forward, "back off witch." She shoves past him dragging Zackary along with her. A crash reverberates off the smog and echoes down the street. They look down and witness a trailer tipped to its side and the crazy old man standing there unfazed that he just got hit. He stares back at them eyes glossed over.

"Uh is he-"

"Nuts? Yeah, let's go." Zackary and Verena duck past the shouts and the anger as they reach the end of their block.

The sun peaks over the half torched and demolished buildings that stood on their last beams. Zackary looks back wishing they didn't have to endeavor this crap every time they left their apartments. Maybe that's why they stuck their noses inside those stupid magazines every chance they got - the magz of the fantasies - the glimpse of the Monster Bowl, victors and victims, and the

candidates for the new moon. In other words, the monsters put on this Bowl every year, it's like a tournament for the fiercest creatures competing for the fame, power, or what sick thing they had in mind.

Verena's bet goes on the sheer possibility of hybrids; most of the other bets are split between the vampires and werewolves. Zackary doesn't care about the statues or the abilities; his money always goes on the underdog. Treydon - well, actually come to think of it, Zackary doesn't recall him ever actually putting his money down on any monster. He always jokes about the winners and losers, but never actually serious about any of it. He looks over at the most recent collapsed buildings as the people pack up their belongings from the street. He bites his lip pulling up his shirt as they pass the dusty debris. He looks back wishing there was something that he could do to help them. But he tried that once and let's just say he got more than he bargained for. Being nice in Starleton means wolf bait.

He watches the shopkeepers sweep off the debris from the sidewalks and startup their shops for yet another day in captivity. People emerge from the old subway stations and into the streets as if walking out of hell itself. Verena tugs on his shirt. He takes in everything before retreating into their school, again, for another torturous

day.

Verena locks her arms with Zackary's as they walk up the steps and into the high school. Kids, of all ethnicities, walk the halls of this wretched school. The teachers are forced to be in classrooms as much as the students, the thrill seeping from their greasy pores, as they slug past the students. The only difference for them is at least the teachers get along... for the most part.

Zackary's eyes fall into the teacher's lounge. Mrs. Cupnae and Mr. Akson had it out one-day last year; it was the fight of the year. Straight up comparison to the Monster Bowl hype, but it was over as quick as it started. Rumor has it that they had an affair, but one wasn't as serious as the other and then it was gone. Romance is hard in this city. Being nice is Starleton means being dead.

Zackary spots Walfred waiting at his locker. Walfred, a loser punk, who has nothing better to do in this world than pick on the weak to try to prove his strength to the world - figure that one out. His greasy white boy dreadlocks tied back into a ponytail to him and all his friends, looks sick, but to Zackary - he looks like a complete idiot.

"He's starting early, huh?" Zackary ignores Verena and takes in a deep breath. He walks up to his locker.

"Move."

"Excuse me?"

"My locker?"

"Oh sorry man, I didn't know."

"The hell you didn't. You are here every day bothering him!" Verena gets inches from Walfred's heavy exterior.

Zackary grits his teeth hoping Verena would just shut up.

Walfred smirks at Verena like she's cute kitten ready to pounce, which irritates her even more. "Oh your little bodyguard doesn't think I'm telling the truth Zackary."

"She's not the only one," Zackary smiles at the friendly voice startling Walfred. Treydon walks in between Walfred and Zackary. He looks over at his friend dressed up like some character out of a sci-fi anime. Black tank top covered by a black and grey trench coat. His black trip pants hang on his hips showing off the tip of his boxers. His pants tied tightly with a rope and fall over his black shoes. Zackary swears when he found those shoes they were green, but with the grunk of the sewer they live in it eventually stained black like the rest of the world here.

Walfred smirks, "Whatever. I'll see you later Lawlor." He shoves himself through the trio.

Zackary opens his locker and takes out a book; "hey bud-" Zackary slams the locker shut and stomps away, "Is it

something I said?" Treydon says looking after him confused. Verena shakes her head and walks the opposite way. Truth is Zackary loves his friends, without them he would never survive, but that's just the problem; he wishes that he just had the strength and courage to stand up for himself. He stares at the ground as he walks into his classroom. He takes a seat in the cracked chair at the back of the room.

Zackary drops his books next to his seat and glances up at Mrs. Cupnae, her hair salted white with a tint of her natural blonde color. The bags under her eyes tease the age lines across her face - showing signs of the DEEK. The DEEK is what they call their parent and grandparent's generations. They've all succumbed to the city falling into its dirty little claws. Some turn to the drugs, others just disappear into the cracks of the sidewalks, and others just turn psycho screaming at random people in the streets, like the lady from this morning. No body knows the cause of it all, some rumors have it in their minds that the monsters are behind it all; others think its some kind of chemical in their city or their brains triggered at an older age from constant exposure. Zackary doesn't have an opinion; he probably won't survive until that age anyways. But for now, Mrs. Cupnae holds on to what little she had left. She sits behind her desk like a statue, there just to take up the

space of being a teacher. She usually never talks, numbing them with textbook answers when she does.

The class starts and a boy is called on. He stands at the front of his class reading word after word of a prewritten paper and when he's finished he absentmindedly mopes back to his seat. Zackary watches him; everything about this boy is prime example of what living in this city does to you, no wonder our parents go so numb. Other kids throw balled up paper at the boy, he doesn't show an ounce of acknowledgement.

Zackary, with more fear than **cohonas**, never once voiced his inside thoughts and opinions about this city - this world. He honestly never lets himself even think about it. The fear of being exiled chills any signs of sparks within his creative mind.

"Zackary your turn," Zackary takes in a deep breath before pushing himself out of the chair. The classmates snicker at him and mock him by pretending to puke. He looks away and begins reading the paper that's clenched in his sweaty palms, "I'm for The One City. I believe that giving us a whole city is a blessing because the monsters could have killed us all at the Species War. Instead, out of the goodness in their hearts they allowed us to live peacefully in the sanctuary of our city--"

"Bull!" a couple students readied their ammo and chucked their lunches or rotten leftovers at Zackary. The class erupts in hyhenic laughter; the embarrassing heat grows over his body once more. *Uh oh*. The last time he felt like this he - he rushes over to the trash bucket and heaves, mostly nasty yellow liquid, because, even though he's the butcher's son, he never gets to eat their 'profits' his father wouldn't want anything to go to waste. The class erupts into a mixture of moans and cackles.

"Thank you Zackary, wipe your mouth and take a seat. Next?"

The kid handling a rotten sandwich stomps up to the front of the room with his oversized shoes, "That's a line of bull." He says poking Zackary in his pathetic chest. "The monsters are imprisoning us in the city. We stay here with the fear of the next war. There's no goodness in their hearts; we claimed sanctuary that's the only reason why they can't attack us."

Zackary shamefully takes a seat. He doesn't think he believes in what he said, but he needs to stay under the radar, he doesn't want to be the next sap that's exiled. He listens to this wanna-be tough guy. Bursting with rebellion at the seams. Most kids his age still have that fire. Treydon, does, he doesn't let that shit show, but his

wheels are always turning. He has undying hate for the world for allowing a whole species to '*fiddle with their own scum*' all these centuries. But Zackary's fear snuffs out all that fire.

Stumbling out of his classroom his fellow classmates mock him throwing up and shove him into the set of broken lockers dropping his books. He waits until the blows pass by before he bends over picking up his things slowly. He looks around regretting the next class before it even starts. He slips in the last open seat that happened to be next to Walfred's girlfriend, which is an identical bitchiness to his bulliness.

"Ew," She says sliding her chair away from him. She whispers to her friends, "I can't believe I am going to be partners with him. This is a dream come true."

"What about Walfred?"

"Psh, seriously? He's too caught up with himself to even notice me. But this boy is dreamy." Zackary looks over at Jenipher and smiles.

"Ew, no!"

"As if she was ever talking to you." They laugh hysterically at him. Zackary drops his smile and looks at his reflection through the grime in the window beside. His plain face looks back at him. He isn't scrawny, but not yet

strong. He isn't ugly, but also not handsome. To sum it up, average is the only compliment that he'll ever receive.

Zackary mopes through the halls and find his place next to Verena and Treydon in the cafeteria. The black glop on their plates look as if the cafeteria lady went outside and scraped the slime off the pavement behind the dumpster.

"Hey, I heard the shipments coming in early this month we should get down there before the rest of the city trash."

"Trey, is this like last time, where'd we thought we were getting something and ended up staying there all night."

"Yea, we almost got caught."

"Psh, wimps. No, this time I'm sure of it. Plus the Bowl Reaping will start soon, so it only makes sense." The teacher walks past their table and they bite their tongues until he's out of ear shot. It's not like he cares enough to say anything, but they can't risk him trying to get there before them. Plus Treydon is way passed his warnings and Verena is closing in second place. They don't want to end up like the last sap exiled. Zackary grimaces at the thoughts of that night. He stayed up all night listening to the guy's screams. Idiot didn't deserve being exiled. He was just a pathetic little scavenger who had a

weakness for the shinny bits. Not his fault just how he was wired, but he was caught one too many times and the way the President looks at it's one less scumbag taking up space in his city.

Treydon glares down the teacher until he faces the other way, distracted by two bickering classmates. "Let's go." Treydon slips from the metal lunchroom bench with grace and walks with stealth in and out of the forming crowds. He glances over his shoulder at Verena and Zackary leading them out the back door of the cafeteria and into the vacant hallway. Zackary glances at the beat up lockers and shaky lights. As they walk down the hall Zackary traces his fingers over the lockers, his hand drops when they reach a row that were bent back and twisted. He probably shouldn't complain about his locker sucking anymore. They sneak out the back door, Treydon smirks as he slips out a knife from his pocket and jimmies it into the lock. The door flings open and a large burly garbage man glares down at them. Zackary freezes stone cold frozen in his shoes. Treydon tosses a handful of the trash next to him at the man's face and rips Zackary from his paralyzing fear and they book it down the alleyway. Zackary's heart pounds in his chest fighting the urge to look back, he watches Treydon and Verena laugh out loud like they just got away

with stealing from the President himself. They race through the broken streets and grungy alleyways. To Zackary, there's no difference. This is what he grew up in - filth and trash. Basically what they were to the rest of the world. Their little city is a wasteland and the other monster cities are just waiting until they eat each other alive. But he's comfortable, the worst thing is Walfred. He can live like that. But Treydon is itching to be better than all the other bastards before him. Verena, she has a thirst for more. More of what? Zackary hasn't really figured that out yet. But he knows she's not happy living like this either.

They pass by a large coliseum type staircase. The stairs lead high above the streets to set in stone that it's residents are more important, but not too tall to decay and crumble like the rest of the buildings. Zackary glances over the edifice hard in thought. At one point this building could've been extraordinary, like the rest of the city. The lion statues on either side of the staircase were probably amazingly detailed; polished every day. Now, the scum from the streets below slithered its way into the crevices of the stone. The other sits half intact. It's said that the Master of Wizardry smashed it; the one who started the revolution against humanity. Either way, this

is the home of our great leader - President of the withering human race. Treydon has his skepticism about him. He doesn't think he really exists. They never see him and when they do it's on a broadcast at school or on a screen at the center marketplace. Verena on the other hand, tells him that he's delusional they need a President, so why fake one? Zackary never thought hard about it, he just hopes that tonight they won't have to meet him.

Treydon ducks down the next alley and slows to a crawl. They creep around the broken crates and peer over towards the dock. The dock stretches a few miles long both ways with crates tossed to the side and large empty broken barrels. The water was a gift from the neighboring city, they dug a trench around half of the city to create an easier way to deliver, but they knew better. It was just another way to prove to them that they are dependent on the monsters. Granted with an epic failed attempt, this was also supposed to be our drinking water. But now the water looks as if their sewage keeled over on itself. In Zackary's life it always looked like this, but rumors have it, that it used to be crystal clear. Now they have to result into distilling their own bottles of water. Zackary's father has a process they use for the butcher shop, but not for Zackary's lips. For that, he has to sneak

out to Verena's or Treydon's houses.

The overwhelming stench of the gross swamp burns through Zackary's nostrils. It takes a while for him to get used to it every time, but every time he watches as Verena and Treydon walk up unaffected by the stench; he holds his breath silently.

"It's not here."

"Give it time, trust me."

Verena rolls her eyes and pulls herself up on an unstable barrel. She picks at the wood and chucks little pieces into the black water watching it at first refuse the strange clean object, but within seconds the black liquid seeps through the wood and drags it down to the depths of the murky hell. Treydon leans up against the wall raising one foot to support himself. Zackary looks at him, how come he looks cool just standing around? He looks down at himself unimpressed. Zackary feels something shift in the air and it wasn't the smell. He picks his head up and squints at the steady water.

"You feel something?"

They don't know why and Treydon teases him for it all the time, but whenever something monstrous is close Zackary knows it before anyone else. It's like a twist in his stomach or a tingle against his skin like his hairs