

<< BROCK >>

Brock sat alone at his table in the seedy back street pub. The oversized trench coat he was wearing bunched up slightly on the ground - he wasn't very tall, but had needed something broad enough to cover his shoulders and chest. He pulled his fedora down more in the front, hoping that shadows and poor lighting would prevent him from being noticed. How would the half dozen or so rough necks handle discovering there was a five foot badger sitting in the corner? The waitress - a young aggressive goth girl that seemed safe only because she was the owners daughter - approached him, the bitter scowl on her face saying she'd rather be anywhere but here.

"Whaddyawant?"

Slightly giddy in his happiness, Brock quickly threw the five dollar bill on the table. It had been in the pocket of the worn trench coat he'd found in a dumpster. He had never had money before, and an out of the way dive like this was the only place he dared try to spend it. Anywhere that had more lighting or better people meant risking being discovered.

"Uh... how about something hot? Or warm, eh?"

The young goth stopped, ducking her head slightly and squinting to try to peer into the shadows hiding his face.

"What's w'the accent? You Canadian or somethin'?"

Panicking, Brock snatched the bill from the table and muttered a "never mind" while quickly walking to the door. He burst through it, not realising until after the door slammed shut behind them that he had run through the back exit. Standing in a dark alleyway, the cold snow swept wind cut through his jacket. The fur underneath kept him warm enough, but reflexively he pulled the jacket tighter.

"Damn," he said louder than he had intended. Did he dare try to find another place? Was he being too paranoid to have leapt up like that and left?

A strong gust of wind came up and blew the hat off his head and began rolling it down the alley. Startled, he chased after it without watching where he was going. Bent over and focused on the rolling fedora as he was, he didn't notice there was someone else in the alley until his hat came to rest at their feet.

<< ARTHUR >>

It's winter and my mind is telling me that the wind is cold but I don't feel it. He thinks as he stares at his hands now covered in a tough gray skin. Where 5 fingers used to be there's only 2 and a thumb. How did my day go from being fantastic to being utterly alone.

The huge figure paces back and forth, trying to get his bearings, his breath coming in quick gasps. I think I finally lost them his inner voice says to himself, why did his wife call the police? Why did she scream? I didn't hurt her husband I am her husband. This all started when I took that last load of chemicals for that little rat of a boss. Sure it was an easy three thousand in my pocket. But off the books I knew that sounded bad. Than that green goop got on my skin as I closed the cargo doors of my van I washed it off .But I was blinded by the money I mean my son needed medicine and the doctor bills were pilling up. But the looks on his face when I took him to the zoo made it all worth it the next day, watching him touch that rhino horn with me that was on display. I'll never forget how big his smile was when we took the subway. It almost made me forget about that awful headache I had. So what is happening to me? I just went to take a nap hoping that the pain would stop when I woke up to her screaming at me. More questions is the only thing I have right now.

A torn piece of newspaper caught up by the wind stops at his feet he picks it up and reads the headline. "CRAZED RHINOCEROS ESCAPES FORM ZOO." He skims the article "this rampaging beast has already been blamed for the death of Arthur Woodvale A resident of the neighborhood the body has yet be found.

"But that's me!" He says out loud "I'm not dead"

A sound catches his attention further down the alley as a small man exits from a door As the strong wind catches his hat and blows it away. Towards the spot where Arthur is trying his best to hide. Arthur holds his breath hoping that the man will not notice him.

<< BROCK >>

Leaving his hat where it lay, Brock stared at the massive figure standing before him. How tall was it, anyway? Much more than his own five feet, for sure. He had never seen a rhinoceros up close, but he had a pretty good idea they didn't normally walk on two legs. Tilting his head back, he looked up at the creature's face. He recognized the look in it's eyes from the mirror. This creature felt alone.

A sharp winter wind rolled down the length of the alleyway, rustling the newspaper in the giants two fingered hands. They both glanced down at it. Brock managed to read the headline before the huge hands crumpled it into a ball.

"Hey, you're famous." Brock grinned, hoping for the same in return. Only after the words escaped his

mouth did it occur to him that those might not be the right words to say. How would the stranger respond?

He decided to slowly pick up his hat, hoping if he acted casual it would make the huge rhino feel more at ease. He knew his own upbringing as a lab animal had left him skittish when he first escaped to Canada, and he had no idea how long this person had been free. Surprising that someone so big could remain hidden, even in a city this large. Maybe he was new to the area as well?

Pushing the hat down on his thickly furred head, he turned and walked away from the stranger and towards a nearby dumpster. His eyesight was poor, but he felt confident he would hear if the creature moved towards him. His relatively small head - grey, striped with black and white - pushed forward slightly as he squinted into the gloom of shadows. He managed to find his walking stick close to where he had left it, fallen over and half buried in snow. Picking it up, he walked back over to his new friend hoping he was more comfortable.

Brock extended his hand. "Brock."

The stranger's response was cut off as Brock heard footsteps from the mouth of the alley, crunching in a crusty layer of snow. Quickly turning his head, he took a few quick sniffs. He smelled strong aftershave, not completely masking offensive body odour. Tucking his cudgel behind the tied belt of his trench coat, he leapt up and caught the bottom rung of a hanging fire escape ladder. Quickly he scrambled up a few feet, then froze hoping not to be seen.

Years on the run had left him very skittish. He had left Canada because he had been hunted, and the hunter had gotten too close. Only after he was hidden did he think to worry about his new large friend.

<< PENDERGAST >>

It flies through the night, blind but for the bright lights below. Yet it sees everything. A sudden dip and a mouth of crunchy yummy, but too small, too small... it is so hungry.

It keeps looking down to the lights below, the streets of the biggins, the creeters, and it is afraid, but still so hungry. Even though it does see darker streets, with creeters walken all alones, it wonders if they are dark enough? Is it worth the risk?

The rumble in its belly finally draws it down into the city below to prowl the back allys for meat. And it finds it, a big meal stomping stupidly through darkened back streets of garbage, unknowingly followed by a hungry predator.

Then it stops, growls to itself as it sees more of the biggins around the corner. One is so so big! It

trembles, crouches in a corner of the rooftop and waits for the meat to move on alone once again.

Its so hungry...

It waits...

<< SASHA >>

Perched upon the roof of the Hangman's Pub, Sasha had a bird's eye view of the scene below her. Men, she thought, always stumbling and stammering over themselves. Somebody ought to teach them some social skills. Smiling to herself, she realized it wouldn't be her. A sudden shiver passed over her as she realized that Canadian weather was more similar to her native Russian homeland than she thought. Smoothing the tawny brown down that covered her face and neck, she wrapped her wings around her and stepped to the edge of the rooftop. She watched curiously as the Badger scurried up the fire escape. Gazing down the alley she noticed a tall gangly form walking towards the alley. He looked as gruff as the feeling that exuded from him. Could be trouble. She hoped so, as she was always ready to finish a fight someone else started.

<< NARRATOR >>

In a seedy part of The City, there is a thirteen story apartment building that is two broken windows away from being legally condemned. The owner has managed to bribe the right people to building open, with a liberal helping of guilt. If the building is closed, where will the low income families live? The husband that works 80 hour weeks at the docks to feed his wife and children? The widowed senior with her dozen cats? Single parents barely making ends meet?

The bribery and guilt are about to end, however. The cost of drawing attention away from the building isn't worth the income. The owner has instead decided the insurance money is worth more.

For miles, the sound of an explosion flies through the cold winter night air! Anyone glancing to the sky sees the clouds lit from beneath from a raging fire. Where are the sirens? Where are the fire departments and police? Why are they taking so long? Why is no one rushing to help anyone that might be trapped inside at this hour?

<< BROCK >>

Watching the drunk man stumble around the mouth of the alley, Brock prayed he didn't come any closer. In his state, he likely wouldn't notice a freight train passing three feet in front of him. Still, no reason to tempt the fates. All it would take would be one person to insist they had seen a walking, talking animal

and people might start keeping their eyes open. He would hate having to leave the city so quickly.

Suddenly, a large explosion echoed across the rooftops! Even muffled as it was by snow and wind, it was loud enough to cause Brock to recoil in surprise. Looking up the fire escape - there didn't seem to be any lights on in the windows it passed - Brock quickly climbed to the top of the building. Standing on the rooftop, he rested his hands on the waist high wall border and looked across the city. Not more than three blocks away, a fire was already raging in an apartment building.

Running to the edge of the roof above the alleyway, he shouted down to the man-rhinoceros.

"There's a fire! It looks serious! I'm going to see if anyone needs help!"

He then spun around surprisingly quickly and sprinted across the roof. When he reached the edge, he planted one stout foot on the ledge in with a strong stride through himself across the alleyway. Rolling as he landed on his feet on the opposite rooftop, he began to make his way to the flickering fire a dozen rooftops away. Snow and wind whipped around him as he ran, and more than once he thought he saw movement above or to the side in the sky. The storm must really be bad for it to look like people were flying about. How long would it take the fire department to come in this weather, to a part of town most had given up on?

<< SASHA >>

Standing in the shadows, Sasha saw the Badger leap from the edge of the rooftop. She held her breath and took to the air expecting to have to save him. Surprisingly enough, he was more agile than he looked as he made it to the other side. Looking at the fire in the distance she could see a woman hanging out the window with a baby. Here we go again, she pondered. What kind of mother is going to let ME rescue her? Scanning the area, she decided to grab her from above and keep her face hidden. Who would believe the frantic woman anyhow, when she claimed that a giant owl had picked her up and carried her to safety? She would have to work quickly, as there wasn't much time left...

<< PENDERGAST >>

Its so hungry... what is all the craziness...

Why don't the bigguns leave its meal alone...

It waits, tense and shivering...

Cold, perhaps excited, a bit of both...

They is leaving, a big boom and... and they is leaving... They is going...

And one is flying?

The thought of how strange this is passes

quickly, shuffled away by the rumbling in its belly... The meat supper below stumbles through some more trash, deeper into the dark alley, the others gone gone and the feast to begin! It rises, waits for a moment, always cautious, and then takes to the air...

Then it strikes, from above, from the dark, from behind...

The winged nightmare slams into the drunken fool, dragging him down and sinking fangs into the depths of the meat's neck flesh and then yummy hot blood...

It feasts quickly, interrupted by sporadic glances around, always paranoid...

What remains is stashed under some trash bags and then once more to the safe reaches of the dark sky above...

Hunger sated... for now, it seeks the strange flying creeter... creeter's don't fly... they is meat on the ground...

The thought bouncing around his brain, it swoops about the big burning, looking for the strange creeter...

<< ARTHUR >>

This almost too much I want to collapse run and find a hole to hide in and hope this is a bad dream. Yes that's it! But now there's a furry creature talking to me. He shakes his head. This is all too much, there's a rustle down the alley snaps him back to reality, squinting to see, all he can make out is vague shapes and shadows. Oh no it's the police they found me I'm not safe. Arthur looks around for a place to hide but can't escape there's the other end of the alley. He looks and the little guy is gone. Where did he go? I didn't even see him leave, BOOM!!!!!!

The sound rumbles through his feet and rocks his ear drums. An instinct takes over one he can't explain but there is another voice inside his head telling him to run down the alley. He charges down the alley away from the rustling form. As he reaches the street he sees people screaming and running. Arthur turns his massive head an intense heat hits face, His eyes water and he raises his arm up trying to block blast. Then it hits him the people are not running away from him, there running away from the fire. The voice in his head gets louder a deep growl starts to form in the bottom of his massive barrel chest and explodes out of him. Arthur or the man in side the beast looks out, a passenger no longer in control of this new vessel he sees the beast charge like a tank towards the fire. People jump out of the way as it plows towards the fire. Primal rage erupts from the giant beast. Almost there just a little further the heat is getting more intense the

closer he gets the hairs on his head start to scorch the pain registers and it stops. His mind registers the horror in front of him an old 5 story apartment is engulfed in flames. The lucky people stumble out of the front entrance coughing and hacking but alive. He looks up and sees a woman on the 4 floor pleading for help. Looking around Arthur searches for a plan what do I do I'm not a hero I'm lowly delivery guy I'm not a Firefighter. Than it hits him scanning the area he sees the object of his dreams and this ladies salvation.

"Hold on Lady!! Please don't jump"

Arthur runs towards the light pole he looks at his hands.

"I hope this works." He mumbles to himself. "What have I go to loose."

He bends his knees and places his massive hands around the base of the light pole. He grunts and his tree trunk arms tighten the muscles grow as tight as steel cables. Arthur groans and pulls harder. He is rewarded by the sound of metal stressing and it as sweet as choir of angels, with a wrench it tears free from the base. He takes the pole towards the building and holds it in front of the window.

"Grab it. Slide down." Arthur hollers at the lady. "It's your only chance"

<< BROCK >>

The small crowd of people watching the fire kept a distance from the actual building. Sections of wall had fallen into the street - almost hitting three people - and since then, everyone else had kept back. They were definitely safer, Brock thought to himself, and it did make it easier for him and the other two outcasts that had appeared to help people without drawing too much attention.

The rhinoceros had effortlessly plucked a street lamp from the ground and was using it as a fire pole, allowing people on higher floors to slide to safety. Brock was happy the rhino had followed; he was definitely helping in a way nobody else could. What was more surprising was the appearance of a flying woman with feathered wings sprouting from her shoulder blades. While Brock hadn't been close enough yet to see more detail than that, the flyer had been lifting people from the highest floors to safety. All in all, the difference these two were making was amazing. In fact, Brock felt almost useless pacing in front of the building and staring up at the red flames reaching for the sky.

It seemed most people had already been lifted to safety. The winged woman was circling the building close to the top, looking to see if anyone else needed help. The bright light from the fire shining upwards

caused shadows to dance around her as she flew... unless that was a second, dark flyer up there - which Brock doubted. The massive rhino was resting the pole tip against the ground, scanning the higher windows to look for signs of life. The way he was squinting, Brock doubted his eyesight was any better than his own. They would have to rely on the winged woman to point out anyone else in need of assistance.

His eyes drying out from watching the fire, Brock closed them and gently rubbed them with his fingers. His hearing perked up to compensate. He could hear the crackling of the fire and the heavy breathing of the rhino. Farther away, he heard people talking and shouting as they watched the spectacle. At the sound of a lady crying loudly, he focused his hearing on her. What he heard snapped his eyes open! He ran to the rhino.

"Hey! Uh..."

"Arthur," he rumbled.

"Arthur. I just heard a lady say she can't find her neighbour. An older gentleman, on the seventh floor. Can you get me up there?"

Grimacing at the short length of the light pole, Arthur dropped it to the ground with a loud clunk. Flexing the muscles in his arms as if testing them, he seemed to steel himself. Lacing his fingers together, he held his hands palm up low enough for Brock to step on. Smiling, Brock stepped one foot up and looked towards one of the open windows. In the next instant, he was flying through the air!

Catching a window ledge with his thick fingers, Brock scrambled until he stood on the ledge with his chest pressed against the window glass. Pulling his cudgel from his belt, he smashed in the glass and cleared the entire rectangle of the frame from shards. Smoke poured from the now open window, joining the cloud hanging over the building. Taking a deep breath, Brock ducked inside.

He re-emerged minutes later with an older man unconscious across his shoulder. The bird lady was waiting for him - she had the face of an owl, he noticed - and she took the older man from him.

"I'll be back as soon as I can. My name is Sasha."

Standing once more on the window ledge, Brock leaned as far out as he could. He didn't tell Sasha the flames were literally at the window. Wrapping his hand in his now blackened and torn over coat, he held onto the inside of the window with one hand and leaned out farther still. He could feel the heat through the cloth, and he thought his wrapped hand may be on fire.

"Be as quick as you can, please," he asked her. Then she was gone.

Would he be able to hold on until she came back for him? Could he survive jumping? He doubted Arthur could catch him without injury. His only hope lay in an air rescue, and unless another flying person happened by he was forced to wait for Sasha.

<< PENDERGAST >>

What tha...

Theys not biggun creeters...

Theys is freeksy, like its is...

But whats they doing helping the creeters from the big burn?

It continues to circle above in the dark, warming itself and gliding about the updrafts... Watching the other freaks...

Then it sees one of them hanging from a flaming window far above the street and it acts, almost without thinking...

It dives from the dark above and latches onto the furry freak, wrapping leathery winged arms and gangly clawed legs around the furry's body. Pulling them both from the ledge, they plummet...

hangs on tight, furry don want to fall

The curious voice echoes within the furry's head, no sound issued from its' open fanged maw...

The winged arms let go of the furry body, leaving him to hang on by himself, the leathery wings catch air and lift them up into the dark night skies, far above the burning building...

Once more its' strange voice echoes in the furry's head, ***what is yous freeksy's doing, saving the creeters when day will be putting yous in da cages?***

There is a pause, during which the horrid fanged maw continues to work, almost as if it is saying something, yet there is no sound, just the awful sight of those stained fangs.

***Is yous sent to get Pendergast, to bring its' back to da cages? *** The odd voice carries no tone to it as it echoes about furry's head, but the winged nightmare's legged grip seems to slacken just a bit suddenly...

<< BROCK >>

Holding tightly to Pendergast's waist and legs, Brock stared wide eyed at the bat-creatures face. Although it's mouth moved, no sound was issuing forth. The voice he heard was in his mind. Having this creature inside his head made him uncomfortable. It had saved his life, though; if it meant him harm, it would have let him burn or dropped him.

"No, Pendergast. I'm not going to try to put you back in a cage. I've only recently gotten out of one

myself."

The creature didn't drop him, which he supposed meant it believed him. Twisting his head to look down, he saw them flying away from the fire - and away from Arthur and Sasha.

"Pendergast, could you put me down on that rooftop to the left?"

Brock noticed that Sasha had landed and was standing next to Arthur. They were pointing up to where Pendergast was landing on the rooftop. Hopefully that meant they would be here soon. He hoped they would. After months of being alone, he was excited to find other experiments that had managed to escape. He hoped they would continue to spend time together; maybe they could start a support group or something?

As they were landing, Brock looked up to Pendergast's face. "Pendergast, I have five dollars in my pocket and I think we should spend it on some sort of celebratory meal. We've just done something wonderful!"

<< PENDERGAST >>

Pendergast thinks...

The furry speakses with words and helps the creeters, but is deffinatly a freeksy and not one of the bigguns, so...

Pendergast glides down to land both of them safely on the pointed out rooftop. It quickly steps into the shelter of nearby shadows and wraps its wings tight about itself to keep warm...

Its mouth continues to open and close a lot, its large ears perked always, but no sound comes from the creature's mouth even as the strange voice continues to echo in Brock's head...

Eat, what eat... meat is burning in the fire and yous saved them... why? Does the furry miss its cage, does it want to be caught and put back again? Does it miss getting da treaty yummys for being a good boy?

The look on the winged freak's face could never be described as happy, of course having a batface, how could it be anything but horrific looking, but right now the face is looking both horrid and quite angry.

Does the furry forgets the bad cages? Does it forgets the pokey needle stings and the kicking and screaming? Why does it help the biggun creeters? Why? Why?

The bat's furry body is heaving now, whisps of steam from its open maw as it takes deep breaths and huffs them out. It takes an angry step forward towards Brock, hands clenching in and out of fists, but then

swivels its head to the side and quickly steps back into the shadows, as if sensing the impending arrival of the others. Sure enough, moments later they arrive on the rooftop.

<< RABBIT >>

The frail young woman clutched her coat shut tightly as she walked through the friggged weather. The temperature was beginning to plummet and she could feel a sharp pain searing through her chest. "I have to find some place to rest." Rabbit thought as she moved her way past shoppers fighting through the Christmas rush. Every one was holding some sort of gift package or food stuff, but this year the slight vagabond knew that none of those things would be for her. In fact, Rabbit couldn't think of any one who cared that she may die out in the cold, grey, streets all alone like an animal. She was human, "But no one, not animal or human should meet a fate like this." Rabbit looked at man with a bell in a Santa suit "I could try asking this guy for help, but he will probably just tell me to get a job like the last guy did." She shook her head "I really would like to but...Most people tend to be a little put off by meeting a sickly albino girl...Let alone hiring one."

Just then Rabbit felt her chest pains get worse. She would have to sit for a while. "I just hope the temperature doesn't drop an lower. With that the sickly young woman pulled her old coat around her and tried to find sleep and she leaned against the wall of the red brick building.

<< BROCK >>

Standing atop the red brick building, Brock rested his hands on the ledge and looked down at the people milling about in a Christmas Eve rush. There was a time when he would have wished he could be among them... well, maybe part of him still did. At least now he had some people he could call friends: Arthur, Sasha, and even he supposed the elusive Pendergast that always seemed to be around if never in sight. They had even agreed to get together for a Holiday dinner, the first he had ever had with others.

There was one little girl that kept drawing his attention down amongst the masses. She was pale to the point of being white, huddling against the wall as if she had no place to go. Furrowing his furry brow, he leaned forward on his elbows for a closer look... then waited.

The sun began to set. The crowds began to thin. Still the girl sat there.

Snow began to fall. A few nearby street lamps clicked on. Still the girl sat there.

Finally, the girl sat there alone in a dark snowy night.

Pacing back and forth, Brock wrestled with what to do. Likely she wouldn't accept help from a five foot badger, no matter how badly she needed a warm meal. Then again, maybe if he was wearing his hat and coat she might not react right away and he could prepare her for it. Did he dare risk it? Could he live with himself if he walked away and left her?

He heard a flapping noise in the night, then a voice whispered in his head.

"There's a girl down there, Pendergast. I think she's homeless, and alone, and new enough at it that she's lost."

Again, the hissing voice in his head.

"You're right. People would find her easy prey. I suppose I can't let that happen." Brock thought maybe Pendergast was suggested she could be prey for himself, but better to not delve too deep into that. "Could you do me a favour? Find Sasha and Arthur, and tell them to set a place for one more. It's Christmas Eve, and I've got to find a miracle."

Resting one hand on the building ledge, Brock vaulted over onto the fire escape and began to swing down to the ground. He wasn't quite sure how he'd do this, but he had to try.

<< PENDERGAST >>

Everyone seated around the makeshift table, chewing on christmas dinner...

Perhaps glancing uneasily at the makeshift crew of friends... Misfits and freaks...

In the corner away from the others, Penderghast sits like a crumpled bit of gnarly leather and gnaws noisily on a chunk of cornish gamehen, wondering if the feathered one will eat the tasty birdmeat...

His dark small squinty eyes watch her and everyone hears a hiss of dark laughter slipping through their minds like a greasy eel...

No one knows why he sticks around the group, some may wish he wouldn't... But he is always skulking or flying around them...