

*Excerpt from "Dapper Documents" by Andrew Lee*

It had been nearly two years.

Two years of chaos and bloodshed that turned the oceans red. Relationships severed by the urgency of survival in a world that was as violent as the creatures that have invaded it. Those who remained after the Calamity fought for scraps, which themselves were echoes of the Old World. A survivor in a world like this could never rest, never trust. Trust only led to more betrayal, after all.

Even so, a few scattered individuals deigned to challenge the new norm. Rather than kill or steal, they healed and gave. They offered protection, and a solid chance at survival, to those who were weak and willing. Through these pioneers formed the foundations of a new society. And though weak at its inception, this society grew larger and larger. Its members slowly fought back the chaos that encircled them, and carved out a haven within the ashes and ruins of the Old World. They called it the "Sunrise Republic."

One of these pioneers, cloaked by both darkness and by cloth, was on a mission. Standing on a sheer precipice, he overlooks the chaotic wastes below. With one motion, he pulls out a worn metallic box the size of his gloved palm, and flicks it outward with a flourish. From this motion flicks open a small flap of the metal, and from the newly revealed opening he draws a cigarette out. He flicks the case of the metal box closed, pushing the cigarette against the flap's flinty edge as he does. A spark flies out, giving him the go-ahead to take a drag from the cig.

"You ready, Cosmo?" A coarse voice called out from beside the shrouded figure. It sounded rough and robotic, almost scratchy. Looking beside him, the hooded man gazed at his companion wordlessly for a moment, before answering. "Of course I am," the cloaked figure croaks, a dense puff of smoke escaping as his lips part. His face is framed with a smile that is steeped in malice for the creatures that killed his old self. His old, fragile self.

His companion, a freakishly large housefly, hovered silently over the cliffside. Though his wings buzzed like any fly's would, the howling wind that lashed against the two was enough to mute the otherwise piercing drone of his wings. Around his neck was a metal collar with an almost illegible nameplate that read "Fido." The rust nipping at the edges of the tag, the dulled iron edges, and the faded lettering betrayed the age of the collar, which had only been acquired rather recently.

Though, perhaps the most notable aspect of the fly's collar was the small, nondescript cube attached to the collar's buckle. Though otherwise unassuming, the box emanated a nearly imperceptible static noise that could be heard by putting one's ear directly on the box's surface. To those versed in the devices of the New World (most everyone living in a "modern" community), it was known as a Radiometric Interpreter, or more simply, an "Interrad." A way for non-humans, humans, and everything in-between to communicate.

The hooded figure, still standing on the cliff's edge, drew a large quarterstaff from a makeshift canvas bag strung across his back. Looking towards his companion, he removed his hood, revealing the distinctive froggy face beneath. A thin, hollow smile decorated his face; and that same thin veneer that hid his hatred and disdain for the monsters he now pursued, coupled with it. The monsters that took everything from him. "Let's go, Fido." He says, as he looks back to the wasteland below, leaping off without another word.