

## **THE DAMNED**

The smell of rusted metal, decaying wood, and dust permeated the air. It was daybreak and the boatyard, left desolate for all these years was now occupied by two men - and only one was leaving.

A dim spotlight pierced through the openings of the harbormaster's roof, illuminating a bruised man chained to a chair. On the far side of the room, his captor lounged at an empty table reading an old James Bond novel, patiently waiting for his captive's awakening. Unfortunately, his leisurely reading was interrupted by grunting.

Putting the book down with an annoyed thud, the captor stood up and slowly walked toward the restrained man. He smiled viciously. "Oh, how pride does come before the fall...but you would know wouldn't you? I mean steal from me once and get away with it, steal from me twice shame on you, but three's a charm. Ain't that right Ryder?"

A bloodied Ryder glared up at his captor. "Aw *Sally*...you look great did you do something to your face? I love the whole 'scarface' look..." Ryder uttered condescendingly.

"Don't patronize me, Ryder, right now the only thing stopping my boys from beating you to a pulp is me and I've waited a long time to watch you die." Salvatore said proudly.

Ryder smirked and replied sharply "You and half of what's left of the world, but as all good stories go the hero doesn't die. Bad news *Sally*, you're gonna have to wait longer."

Whip-quick, Salvatore unholstered his pistol swinging it across Ryder's face "You've always been an arrogant son of a bitch, even in the face of defeat." Ryder could feel a mix of blood and his own sweat sting the new cut across his cheekbone, yet he remained indifferent and raised his head to smile at Salvatore.

"Do you know what the term subversion means?"

"Don't care..." Salvatore hissed.

"Neither do I, but if I had to describe it using a situation, it'd have to be this one. You see you think I'm gonna die a horrible death when in reality the only one dying today is you."

Salvatore crouched opposite Ryder and burst out laughing.

"You're obviously an alcoholic too huh? That, or you're a complete idiot. You haven't even realized I have you-"

Ryder interjected. "Surrounded? Because unless *you* realized it's just you and me..."

Salvatore suddenly changed his expression from bravado to panic. "What are you playing at Ryder?" Salvatore slowly whispered

Ryder cheerfully continued his explanation. "As I was saying about subversion, you see it's like, taking a pre-conceived idea and showing its reality to be completely different. Kinda like what's happening here. Ain't that right boys?! " Ryder shouted suddenly. A cacophony of men, mimicking wolf howls echoed from outside. Salvatore's panic peaked and sweat drenched his tattered suit shirt. "Now *Sally* I'm sure you don't wanna die here. Do yourself a favor and get me out of these chains?" Salvatore stood up, angry, and clenched his teeth before he unholstered his gun once more to aim at Ryder. Two loud cracks comparable to that of thunder shook the room. The door swung open to one of Ryder's men standing at the only exit, wearing a torn biker uniform and gun prepared. "Easy Wyatt..." Ryder said slowly, in an effort to calm down the gunman. Ryder stood up and the shackles previously binding him seemingly fell off.

"You're a real scumbag Ryder" snarled Salvatore.

"Tell me something I don't know" Ryder passively uttered.

"You and your damned boys got ten seconds Ryder; ten seconds to get outta my town and never come back."

Ryder calmly walked to the door while he cheerfully whistled Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture. "Ah *Sally* we really gotta work on our relationship...but 'til next time *adieu*, old friend."

Ryder and Wyatt both exited the office. Despite it being early morning there was no semblance of sunlight or any natural light for that matter. In an ideal world, birds would have been merrily chirping, children playing at the boatyard and most importantly the human race would still consist of...humans. As they made ground away from the dock, a cathartic emptiness occupied much of the ruined town revealing itself. Finally, Wyatt spoke.

"Ryder, what happened to resolving things?!" Wyatt exclaimed.

"Wyatt. As the leader of the pack, I had to make a '*unanimous*' decision. We needed the resources more than him and you know I'm not one for resolutions."

"You mean '*selfish*' decision. You know this means any chance of striking a truce with them is gone."

"A necessary sacrifice" Ryder assured Wyatt with a pat on the back. "Good heart to heart but let's get the rest of the gang and get the hell out of this town--"

A bloodcurdling growl echoed in the air and in the distance, a group of ominous sanguine lights decorated the darkness on the obscured road leading to the town hall.

Ryder and Wyatt immediately knew what that meant.

It was time to leave.

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Deep beneath the town the other members of the gang were given strict instructions to blow the town to high hell in the event Ryder was still in captivity, however, unbeknownst to them he wasn't.

Ari, the youngest member of the pack, lethargically dug a path as Morgan; much older and wiser, strategically placed the explosives.

"What the hell does Ryder think we are, spelunkers?!" Ari sarcastically remarked

"Hey, the faster we do this the better."

"I don't wanna be here, I'd rather be out on a raid- "

From above the loud clattering of bullets interrupted Ari mid-sentence and both men looked at each other before swiftly exiting the crevice to investigate. Once on the surface, they were greeted by a horrific scene, the town was now infested with '*them*' - the parasitical entity that controls dead tissue and fed off living ones.

"Holy shit!" One of the creatures had spotted Ari, towering over his tiny frame

Ari's eyes widened like a deer in headlights and in his state of panic he clenched his fists, and in the process armed the explosives. Morgan shot the creature stunning it and the pair swiftly made a break for it to the town hall.

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Both Ryder and Wyatt entered what was left of town hall "So it looks like the town has gone to hell", Wyatt spoke disparagingly.

"No thanks to us though. I blame Salvatore for using a gun knowing it attracts the wrong attention"

"True, they follow sound- "

A loud crack raged through the empty hall, gun smoke filled the air, and Wyatt almost magnetized to the floor-collapsed.

A massive hole now occupied the space of his forehead.

"I said *ten seconds* Ryder..."

From the smoke, Salvatore emerged. Ryder, paralyzed by Wyatt's demise did nothing but stare at Salvatore.

"It ends here...you robbed me...killed my men and now you brought '*Them*' here!"

Salvatore raised his gun and Ryder stared dead ahead at Salvatore. From the back of the hall, Ari and Morgan entered.

"...What the hell do you mean you armed the explosives by accident!?"

Morgan concernedly questioned Ari

Spooked Salvatore turned and shot Ari, as the young man fell, his grip loosened immediately.

The armed bomb trigger rolled to Salvatore's feet.