

Chapter 9 - Harlem shake

Quite a while later I was sitting on a bench in Harlem, a few blocks away from the Apollo theater, chewing on my last slice of pizza. The pizza was exactly how I remembered, though the shop looked a little different. As I ate I watched the people on the sidewalks go about their business, the sun slowly setting. Eventually the crowds started to thin out, the sky getting darker as the day started to wind down.

I wiped my hands of grease and pulled out my phone, starting to scan through a map of the area. I was going to have to move around quite a bit, not spend the night practicing my martial arts while keeping half an eye on a street or two. I was probably going to skip the stealth suit until I found the shop, no reason to wear it anyway until then and it was likely to get more attention rather than less.

As I planned I was tempted to find a more private place so I could bounce ideas off Ema. Unfortunately the streets were still too crowded. After a while of planning my route on my phone, I jerked at a distant sound that reverberated through the street. It was baffled and muffled enough that it was impossible to figure out what it was, save that it was loud. The street grew hushed as everyone listened, looking around confused at the sounds. Eventually the pops and cracks of distant gunfire joined the reverberations, ending with an explosion.,

"Fuck..." I muttered, slowly standing from the bench.

People around me started to move, slowly at first but quickly gaining a fervor that was borderlining on dangerous. And then the sound of screaming reached us.

"Fuck fuck fuck fuck"

I called out, rushing to the nearest alley way, giving a quick look up and down it before carding away my clothes and pushing Ema out.

"Ema, connect to my phone and fly straight up. Fly around but don't go too far. Be my eye in the sky." I said quickly, cutting off her greeting. "Remember what I said about getting pulled into stuff? Well it's here."

"Oh dear. Okay, I'll play recon." She replied before quickly flying straight up.

I nodded, pushing my bluetooth earphone into place, pulling my armored beanie over it. I got dressed quicker than I ever had before, pulling the scarf over my face in record time. I pulled my new quiver over my back as I left the alley. Noting where everyone was running, I ran the other way, towards the explosions in the distance.

"Tell me what you see Ema"

"Lots of fire, people running from- oh my! That's a large man. What is wrong with him?"

"Describe him Ema. Which way should I go next?"

"Keep going straight for another block, before turning left." She answered before continuing. "He looks to be about ten feet tall. Covered in muscles and bone protrusions. A dark tan greenish."

"Fuck! That could be the Abomination!" I cursed, pushing my bike out and riding on it as fast as I could. "Do you see the Hulk? About the same height, very green with no bone mutations. Built like the patron saint of steroids?"

"I don't see... wait no on the other side of the street!"

I cursed and pedaled harder, eventually turning the corner. The street was in chaos, people screaming and running while cars and buildings burned. I hopped off my bike and pulled it into a card.

"They are charging... Hulk just got put down hard."

I cursed again, running down the street, blasting several fires with my gloves as I went by. I got closer and closer to a busted fire hydrant, spewing water high into the air and across the street. On a whim I pushed my bow into my hand, reaching back for an arrow.

"Ice!"

I called out and nocked an arrow, turning and firing it at the broken hydrant. The deep blue arrow impacted and exploded into a blue mist that instantly froze solid. The hydrant was encased in ice, three feet of the spray frozen as well. I couldn't help but smirk before continuing to run, just in time to see a green blur get punted off the street through an empty lot and the Abomination leaping after him.

"Fuck! Follow them Ema. I can't help if I can't catch up!"

I kept running, carding a few cars that were in my way. I almost stumbled the first time, not expecting the effort it took. I grabbed five more before I made it to the lot, just in time to see a helicopter unload on the Abomination, who responded by scaling the building even faster. I watched as the helicopter rose and continued hosing the monstrosity with bullets, flying alongside the building while the Abomination disappeared onto the roof.

"Abomination is crossing roofs, jumping the gaps... He is going for the helicopter!"

I watch as the mutated looking behemoth of a man left from the building to get to the helicopter, only to get grabbed by the Hulk. Even still he managed to grab the landing struts, both him and the Hulk hanging from the now struggling aircraft.

"Oh fuck, Ema tell me where it's going to crash!" I shouted, watching as the helicopter started spinning and falling, making it over the building and beyond.

"Follow around the alley, it's coming down in another abandoned lot a few blocks away!"

I pushed my bike out again and followed, huffing by the time I got around the buildings. I could see the smoke, and I pushed harder. I could feel my heartbeat pounding in my chest, my body alight with anxious energy. When I finally found the abandoned lot the helicopter was not moving, broken and smoking near an old ruined building. I kept riding, pulling the bike into a card when I made it to the pillars of whatever this building had been.

From where I was I could hear the two behemoths fighting but not see them. I could, however, see the copious amounts of gas and sparks the helicopter was spewing. With surprisingly little thought I pulled my bow out and called out, putting two ice arrows into the wreckage. One by what remained of the blades, the other near the fuel tanks, both freezing over and stopping their targets from starting an inferno. Which was good because I could see a woman struggling inside, who with Marvel luck was probably Betty Ross

"C'mon!" I shouted to be heard past my sound muffling suit. "You guys need to get the hell out of here!"

I ran to the helicopter, my boots splashing in the puddle of gas that had leaked out of the fuel tank. I quickly rushed closer, climbing up the wreckage carefully.

With a grimace I quickly checked the slumped over gunner. When I realized he had no pulse I winced and tried to pull him to a card, shuddering when it worked. I looked back to find wide eyed stares focused on me. I quickly push the corpse out of its card on the ground nearby.

"C'mon!" I shouted again. "You guys need to get going! It's not safe here!"

I grabbed the armored door blocking the way and yanked it open. I turn around to see the mutated mess that was the Abomination jamming an elbow spike into the Hulk's chest. He looked different from what he did in the comics, but it could really only be him. I stepped down the pile of wreckage, calling for an explosive arrow and firing it at the back of his head. The explosion rocked his bald, off color skull but didn't do any obvious damage. It did distract him enough for the Hulk to get a devastating barrage of hits in before he grabbed and pulled, slamming him halfway through the wall he had been pinned to.

The Hulk stepped forward toward us, confused now that he didn't have to rush to save who I was almost positive was Betty, which meant the old guy was probably her father.

"I'll get them out of here so you can cut loose big guy!" I called out to the angry green goliath.
"I'll be back to help!"

I started to turn before noting that the Abomination was starting to stand, hand gripped on some sort of massive chain. I pulled an arrow and fired it, one of the two shotgun slug arrows slamming into his hand. The chain shattered, the slug arrow blasting his hand, leaving it a bloody battered mess, though mostly intact. The Hulk reacted poorly to me firing the arrow, but turned when it streaked by him and roared at the Abomination as he saw him standing.

"Fuck him up big guy!" I called out, rushing back to the helicopter.

"Let's go, C'mon, there you go..." I said, guiding the woman out before practically dragging the older man. "You guys need to leave the area."

"No! Bruce!" She said, calling out to the Hulk, who flinched just long enough to take a fist to his jaw. "I can't leave him!"

"Yes you can!" I call out before turning to the older man.

"Sir! These two are punching out buildings and throwing cars like skipping stones." I explained, fighting back a grimace. "Danger close is atleast a couple blocks! You need to get to better cover!"

I explained trying to appeal to his soldier sensibilities, pointing out away from the wreckage. He seemed to struggle for a moment before nodding and tugging at Betty's arm.

"We need to go Betty, we can't help him like this." He said, the familiarity in his voice meaning that this was almost Thadeus Ross.

She tried to pull away, trying to walk closer to the ongoing fight, but I blocked the way.

"I'm going to help him the best I can, but if you're that special to big green and you get hurt..."

I trail off, looking at both Ross and Betty. Betty finally looks me in the eye, and Ross tenses, realizing what would happen if his daughter was killed.

"He would never stop..." Ross says, fear starting to show in his eyes. "Betty we need to go! Now!"

Slowly, hesitantly, Betty let herself be pulled away. She clearly didn't want to go, but with that final realization she knew she couldn't stay. As they both stumbled across the rubble to relative safety I turned back to the slugging match behind me. Abomination had recovered from the

blast to his hand, though it still dripped blood and looked like he had tried to shake hands with a belt sander.

"She is all clear Hulk! Time to cut loose!" I called out, pulling out a shock arrow and shooting it at the back of Abomination's knee.

The skeleton-like muscle bound monster roared, his knee giving for a moment, just long enough for the Hulk to drop low and deliver a wall shaking uppercut that lifted him up into the air and threw him back twenty feet against one of the huge pillars that I had just walked past. The Hulk angrily looked at me and I held up my hands.

"Just helping you kick his ass big guy. Not that you need any help."

The green mass of muscles and rage looked confused for a moment before refocusing on the Abomination, who was slowly starting to stand. I crossed behind the Hulk, heading up a set of stairs that were somehow still standing.

"You hit him hard and I'll keep him honest Hulk!" I called out, pulling out another. "Kick his ass for hurting Betty!"

The Hulk roared a challenge, charging and slamming into the Abomination, pummeling his stomach. The pillar cracked under the blows, collapsing away from the two massive brutes. The Abomination managed to recover as a large chunk of stone smashed down into the Hulk, staggering him long enough for the Abomination to kick him back. The Hulk smashed across the ground, digging a furrow into the concrete. He struggled to stand, before collapsing in exhaustion. The Abomination turned to me with a scowl.

"Now it's your turn."

With a smirk he started walking toward me, completely confident as I fired another shock arrow, an explosive arrow and an ice arrow. The ice arrow slowed him down the most, only long enough for him to flex and shatter the ice.

"Arrows won't work -"

I cut off his monologue by throwing a card at him, the card disappearing as soon as it left my hand, replaced by a damaged car. It flew at the same speed the card was going though, smashing into him and driving him back a few feet. Before he could recover I threw another, and another, and another. He started punching and tearing through them as fast as I could throw. Finally I threw my last one, forcing me to climb higher and pull out another shock arrow.

"All out of scrap to throw?" Abomination asked, mocking as he kicked his way through the cars.

"Yeah... but those were just a distraction."

"Wha-"

A massive slab of stone, the pillar that had fallen earlier, slammed into the side of the Abominations head. The blow again lifted him off of his feet, sending him slamming into the wall. I sagged for a moment before pulling out arrow after arrow, combining them as fast as I could. The Hulk just kept slamming into him, the stone pillar crumbling under the strain, each blow shaking the foundations of this building and all those around us.

Meanwhile I just kept combining, slapping together fifteen armor piercing arrows with my final shotgun slug arrow, nocking it and pulling it back.

"Hulk! Hold him steady!" I called out as loud as I could.

The massive green man dropped the pillar after another few smashes against his chest. The Abomination tried to stand but the Hulk smashed him and dragged him into a headlock. He struggled, smashing his elbow back into the Hulk, who roared in pain but managed to keep his hold strong as the Abomination tried to pull free. The Hulk smashed and pummeled him harder, arm wrapped around his neck to hold him steady. For just a moment the Abomination was facing me perfectly, held steady even as he roared in defiance.

I focused, holding my breath and releasing the arrow. It streaked across the gap and slammed into the Abominations eye socket. The crack of a shotgun going off echoed across the ruins as the arrow buried itself a foot into his skull. The Abomination flailed, spasming and obviously weakening before dropping limp.

There was a long moment of silence, before the Hulk rolled him to the ground, bellowing out a roar into the sky, arms spread open like a challenge to the world. When he finally stopped he looked down at the corpse, breathing heavily. I walked down the stairs and got closer, standing on the other side of the corpse.

"It had to be done Hulk... and Bruce, I know you're probably listening in there too." I assured him, meeting the green giants' look. "He was a bad copy of you, he wouldn't have stopped and there is no real way to contain him."

The Hulk nodded, seeming to understand what I was saying, but I couldn't help but wonder what Bruce was thinking under there. Hulk seemed confused about how to react to me and what to do now.

"You probably want to get the hell out of here, right?" I asked, leaning down to card the Abomination's corpse, tearing it in half without any hesitation. "Any desire to stick around and help pull people out of the rubble? I'll help you escape if you change back or if Ross gets any funny ideas."

The Hulk seemed to get even more confused, seeming internally conflicted. I wonder if they were having an argument in his head. I shook my head and stuck out my hand.

"Don't worry about it buddy, I get it. You don't trust me or anyone else yet. I don't blame you."

I admitted with a grin, watching the Hulk look down at my hand before tentatively reaching out and engulfing it in his. I smirk as he gives my hand a single shake before releasing me. I had to bite my cheek to keep from yelping, he had squeezed my hand hard enough to feel the bones rub against each other. Before I could say anything motr Betty rushed up beside me. I smirked as the Hulks attention shifted completely to her. I stepped back with a small smile, only to turn and stand face to face with General Ross.

"Son, what-" He started

"Sir, there are fires to put out and people to pull out of rubble. With all due respect, now isn't the time for any of the conversations you're looking to have." I said, cutting him off.

I had a feeling that this incident was affecting him, especially when a man known for his bullheadedness said nothing to my interruption. He seemed lost, conflicted and unsure.

"A piece of advice though sir. You catch more flies with honey than vinegar. And being the good guy is easier on the soul than being the necessary evil."

I said before walking past him. I kept walking, making it around the corner before my legs gave out and I stumbled. I barely managed to catch myself and lower myself to the ground.

A few moments later Ema flew down from the sky, hovering around me. She did a scan as I sat there, saying nothing when it came clean.

"I just stood up against the Abomination, shook hands with Hulk and verbally backhanded Thaddeus Ross"

"Big night." She eventually responded. "You did well sir."

I nodded before standing up, leaning heavily against the wall before pushing off. I took a deep breath and pulled my bow back into a card before pushing out my bike.

"You know emergency services will-"

"No, I can help so I will. I'll have to stop at some point, probably pretty soon, but for now..."

I rode my bike back to the street where the fight started, where most of the damage was. I carded the bike and walked to the nearest fire, carding the flames and spraying the spot down with my gloves to keep it from sparking back up.

"Ema, scan the rubble for survivors and note any corpses."

We worked for a few hours more, joined by fire fighters, police officers and soldiers. I was surprised when they agreed to work with me so easily until one of the soldiers explained.

"General Ross said to leave you alone unless you were doing something illegal."

I nodded and thanked him for his explanation, shaking his hand. We managed to pull a handful of people from the collapsed buildings and put out some fires before they could spread too far. Eventually my exhaustion was too much to fight anymore and I slinked away into the darkness.