

Breakthrough

by Dominic Sventor

Dark shadows blanket over sky-high buildings in Manhattan. A large, caked-in-dirt sign, which reads “Happy New Year 2025,” rests across an empty street in pieces. An anti-terrorist training facility resides four blocks away from the World Trade Center memorial.

A distant sound of a dozen bullets clash and clank as they bounce off thick metal walls. Thin tatters of a paper target fly through the air like ocean waves—they scatter in unpredictable directions before they settle down to the floor like slow rain. A silence. A few deep snuffles disturb the peace. The smoke that pours out of the assault rifle’s barrel and into the open air slithers its way into the nostrils of a sweaty nose.

Dillan’s body shivers at the smell of burnt gunpowder. His face slick and muscles as tense as a tire as his gloved finger rests on the trigger.

“Dillan, you ready? We’re initiating the first training for our group. Get your ass in gear,” a suit-armored man says with a gruff behind an automatic door. A glossy black helmet obscures his voice.

With a swift swing of his arm, Dillan plucks his helmet off a nearby bench, attaches it to his suit, and follows the other guard with echoey stomps.

Two fair-length lines of similar armored-men and armored-women cover well-worn and dirty iron floors. Large cargo crates litter the field. Bright white lights hang near the ceiling, which makes the room glow with a heaven-like atmosphere. Two tall and wide rusty doors splay across the end of the room. A strong, musty smell crawls around in the air.

Dillan follows the painted signals across the floor to reach the other members.

The sergeant, Davis, dons a darker gray suit as he walks out. He emits a low growl of a cough before he turns to the layer of suits. “Alright, soldiers, we’ve prepared you for this moment. No turning back, now. There will be four creatures to neutralize. This is no drill, and if you are injured in the process or fail to proceed with action, you are to be annihilated under our specific order. Understood?”

The crowd of suits responds with a firm cry: “Sir!”

Two guards roll out two wagons full of firearms.

Dillan lifts his assault rifle and points its barrel towards the large door, where strange noises emit. The rest of the group glance at him with a stare.

Dillan’s blank, tense face stares at the group.

“Alright. Initiate.”

The group of soldiers snatches and handle their firearms with care as they progress towards the entrance in a tight enclosure. Dillan rushes to the front of the group as he reaches the targets that come through the entrance door.

Three large cloaked figures stumble out with heavy foot stomps. Beast-like growls and screeches echo across the worn iron of the floor and walls.

“There’s one!” a feminine soldier says with a cry.

Within seconds, gunshots pierce through Dillan's helmet as he steps through the openings between the cargo boxes.

Something catches Dillan's eye. Among them, another figure in a tight bundle of gray sheets fumbles near the entrance. Dillan focuses his weapon's reticle on the squirming object. His blood thickens and chills down to low temperatures beneath his moist skin. He steps in front of the figure, which struggles with the sheets to escape.

"Please, don't," a young feminine voice whimpers underneath the sheet.

Dillan freezes.

A snowy pale and frail hand trembles out towards Dillan's legs.

Dillan stands frozen—his usual dark eyes stare with worry at the shaky hand.

Davis steps over and crushes the bony hand under his thick military boot. A horrid screech pierces through all soldier helmets.

"Filthy pests think they can escape."

"What the hell are you doing? She can speak," Dillan says with fierceness. He drops the gun and goes to unravel the sheets.

A young woman, about Dillan's age, with tears that glisten down her reddish, bloody cheeks, lays there. Her eyes lock to Dillan's.

"She's human," Dillan says with a gasp.

"Dillan, just what are you doing?"

"You're making us murder surviving humans! Are you out of your damn minds?"

The rest of the military group runs to the commotion. They remove their helmets and watch with horrified looks as the events unfold.

Dillan holds his hand out towards the young woman. She shies a weak and painful smile as he pulls her to her bare feet.

“Dillan, complete your training, now.” Davis’s face tenses, as he points his assault rifle towards Dillan.

“Hell no. I’m not hunting living beings. I didn’t sign up for this. I’m out.”

Dillan grabs the frail young woman by her waist and flees with her to the large entrance.

“Get the fuck back here, Dillan!”

By the time Dillan and the woman walk through the large entrance doors, Davis opens fire with his assault rifle in their direction.

“Shit!” Dillan says with a grunt.

Dillan bends as he pushes the woman’s head down with him. They flee together as blisters of wood, dirt, and metal blast through the air due to the barrage of bullets.

On a brownish dirt hill, in the skies lies a warm sheet of navy blue. Silent winds flow through the air in a careless manner. A field of mountains surrounds the two. The faint scent of mustiness lingers every few seconds throughout the frigid air.

“I think we lost them,” Dillan says.

“Why did you risk your life just to save me?” the woman says in a faint tone.

Awkward silence ensues. The brisk breeze brushes through each strand of their hair.

Dillan puts away his equipment as he rests down on his side.

“Just get some rest,” Dillan says with a grunt. His eyes glance back at the mountains. Birds spread their wings across the slice of orange-red rays of the sunset. His eyelids shut. Without question, the lady plants a warm kiss on his cheek.

Dillan's face burns as his eyes shoot open. He turns over to see the young woman on her side—her back against his.

He pushes his hand out to feel her fingers.

Her fingers curl around his.

“I'm Samantha. Thank you for saving me. Dillan, right?”

“Yes. Anytime, Samantha.” Dillan feels a warmth shiver along his body.

He sighs.

“Thank you... for not leaving.”

Their fingers squeeze together.

END