

Death of Heroes

Story by Digital Doom, inspired by Blackout a collaborative Podcast between Opti, Ziggi, and Deniable Assets.

Yaoi is a small orc that lives in the slums of Chicago. He is also far too young to be living the life that he is living, the life of a 'Shadowrunner'. Or at least, he thought he was a runner. After all, both of his parents were runners.

At 10 Yaoi is far too young to be running on the streets of Chicago. Especially with the increased violence from gangs, ghouls, and the lack of law enforcement moving through the area since the power went out and the matrix went offline.

Two weeks and still now power. There has been no resupply of food, no way to charge devices, no working electric vehicles. Even Yaoi's scooter was dead. There was nothing to do but watch the neighborhood go to hell and hope that you and the family make it out alive in the end.

Yaoi's friend Pug had been doing some jobs for a Mr. Johnson in the area. Pug isn't much older than Yaoi, but like Yaoi, the streets have made him grow up fast. No he is doing shadowruns, so he has grown up faster. One night he told the group of his friends that he may have gotten us a job helping to protect a neighborhood in town.

"I know this Mr. Johnson, good guy, who is looking for help keeping his neighborhood 'Anarchboro' safe from the gangs and such dreck. I think I have it where he will pay us and feed us and our families if we help him. I know this Johnson and I think we should take it." Pug was saying enthusiastically.

The kids, there were ten of them ranging in age from 7 to 13 and just as varied in metatypes. These kids were all friends, orcs, trolls, dwarves, elves, and humans alike. It was strange to see such a mix of metahumans getting along at such a young age. They all had other things to worry about than race.

Jimbo, a fairly large troll who was only 12 spoke up first, "Ifs it means food for me's and me mudder than I's is in."

After Jimbo spoke up, everyone else in unison agreed to help for a cut of the pay and food for them and the family.

Pug told them, "Meet me at the old school house tonight and I will give you your assignments. We will not be fighting, but being used as lookouts. I have a way for us to communicate with each other, and we will be sending runners back to this Johnson and his crew warning them of incoming danger."

The kids all agreed and started wandering off. Pug spoke up again, "If you have armor or weapons you might want to bring them. I know the gangs and ghouls in the area are acting up so we might need to defend ourselves. I just hope we all make it through on this job."

Yaoi ran home to let his father know that he may have a way to get some food. His father has been out of work since a run gone bad. He took a round in the spine and was now paralyzed from the waist down. Without the money to get the cyber he needed, he would never walk again. To make it harder, his mother had died on the same run, breaking his father. He is now just a shell of the man he once was.

Yaoi's dad just looked at him deadpanned and nodded. He didn't even seem to know what Yaoi had just said. Yaoi moved through the shack they shared and collected a few items his father came back with after his last run. A pistol, an armored jacket, and a pair of glasses that had built in AR feed and connectivity to the weapon for aiming. He thinks it was called smartlink system or something. Yaoi checked the glasses, they were still powered. Good thing no one was using them. Now he had an advantage for this job.

Yaoi decided to look the part. He put on his dad's gear, and did up his hair the way his mother used to. He put it up in bright red white and blue liberty spikes all in a row like a mohawk. If the Mr. Johnson is the guy he was thinking of, then Opti will appreciate the hair.

"Pops, I'm going out for a job. I will be back with some food for you." his father didn't even blink, just continued to stare at the black void that was the tridio screen. He was really missing the Shadowrunning hero that was his father.

He stepped out and locked the deadbolt behind him. It wasn't as good as the cross beam, but you could only lock that from the inside.

It took Yaoi a few minutes to find the old school. Along the way he had to duck behind some rubble a few times. The Silver Spoons were out in force. Yaoi also noticed the ghouls were out during the day, which wasn't normal. They were getting antsy too, we all were.

He got to the school and waited with the other kids. Pug wasn't around yet. Yaoi knew he would be, he is always dependable.

The kids were all chatting amongst themselves, showing off their gear and bragging how they got a hold of it. Yaoi, when asked, said it was his father's, but he was in no condition to fight anymore. That was all he would say on the matter.

Just before sundown, Pug showed up. He was handing out bags of food for everyone here. They had the logo of the old Sang Noodles on them. It smelled amazing.

“You can bring these home after we discuss the job Mr. Johnson set up for us. We are going to be the eyes and ears of the ‘Anarchburo’”, he airquoted as he said it, “and we will be paid well for the job. I will make sure everyone gets a fair share and we will continue to get food as long as it lasts.”

Yaoi looked around, every seemed to be excited and ready to go to work, or eat the noodles.

“I have set us all up in teams of two. We will NOT,” he stressed the not, “ I repeat, we will NOT be going off on our own. We will always be in teams of two. I have also set up overwatch positions for some of us, along with a way to communicate without the electricity.” He pulled out old style lighters. “These use a fuel instead of power. If you see anything light it and hold it up, that will give us a clue that a runner is coming.”

“That tells you about the second job, the runners. I have assigned our fastest team members to be runners. You are to run straight to the command post and let me and Boris,” he indicated a short dwarf that hasn’t even grown his beard yet, “know what is going on. We will then forward the messages to Mr. Johnson and his command post above the old Sang Noodles restaurant.”

That confirmed it, Mr. Johnson was the Neo-Anarchist, Opti or one of his runner friends.

“We are to keep our eyes and ears open for anything going down. Gangs are looking at us and wanting what we have here. Ghouls are looking at us like food, and who knows what else is out there without power. From what I can gather, we are the only place in this part of the city with light, and that is magical light from Opti.”

“We are not to fight, just gather information and get it back to the CP. Now everyone Boris has your assignments. After you get them, run the food home and then doubletime it back here. We need to be in place before the sun is all the way down.”

Pug turned and started walking back up the road toward the old Sang Noodles.

I ran the food home to my dad. He was still sitting in his chair just staring at the screen. I checked to make sure he was breathing. I left the food on the table in front of him, if he wakes up he can eat it. Then I went to meet up with Dahn. We were to take the roof of the old apartment building at the northwest side of the neighborhood.

That night one of the gangs decided to come at us. Opti and a huge troll, Ziggy I think, handled them. The next night it was ghouls. I had to shoot a couple just so we could stay on the building. They were trying to climb up the fire escape that we used to get up here. I still had half a magazine of ammo come morning.

The next day a convoy of vehicles came rolling into the neighborhood. There were two scary looking men leading a bunch of civies. Opti didn’t look happy.

The good news is there are now reinforcements, the bad news is that food is running out.

Yaoi found out that the two scary men were shadowrunners that Opti knew. Wolf and Mr. Clean. Somehow they got everyone more food and ammo before things got worse. Not sure how they pulled it off, he really didn't want to know.

The group, each night would go to the lookout positions. There were also had a few kids that would wander around the neighborhood. No one except the ghouls seemed to notice a couple kids on the streets, and we could outrun a few ghouls. On my day, Yaoi heard a voice in his head. It was yelling at him to go home and see his dad in his mother's voice. It was unnerving to say the least. He realized it could not be her, and he pushed through the voice. Then he ran to the CP and let Pug know what had just happened.

Pug said, "Are you sure what you heard?"

"I am."

"Okay, I will be with Boots and the Sang's tonight. I heard voices too and need to make sure they are ok. Bring any news to Boris if you have any. He will team up with Dana."

"Okay, I will get the word out to the others before I go back on rooftop duty."

"Thank you Yaoi."

Yaoi told everyone of the change of plans and then took his place on the rooftop after checking on his father. He had eaten everything brought but every time Yaoi had seen him he was staring off into the black void of the tridio.

Back on the roof, just after sundown the signal went out. Creatures were coming. Voices were screaming at us all in our heads. Yaoi's head was pounding, but he once again got through the onslaught of mental control. Dahn wasn't so tough.

Dahn was a small human who didn't have any parents. He lived on the street, behind the noodle shop. Back when it was open, Boots would sneak out food to him. He had a huge crush on the girl, even if she was 5 years older. If his friends knew, they would have teased him for liking an old lady.

Dahn jumped up and went after Yaoi. He swung a roundhouse at Yaoi's head, just missing. Yaoi was screaming at Dahn to stop. Dahn continued to press the attack.

Dahn could hear the voice and nothing else. The evil voice was shrill and high pitched, but it was telling him what he knew to be true. "Dahn, Yaoi is trying to get Boots. She will never like

you. You are too young for her, but Yaoi is closer to her age. He has a chance unless you take him out of the picture.”

Dahn couldn't cope anymore and started swinging. He couldn't tell if he was going after Yaoi or someone else, his vision was a blur of reds and yellows. He felt like his arms weren't his. He knew he was fighting, but couldn't stop himself.

Yaoi watched Dahn as he came forward. Yaoi was backed against the half wall ringing the roof. “Please stop this Dahn. We are friends.” Dahn took another step forward and let out a quick kick. It connected with Yaoi's face. Dahn was pressing the attack coming at Yaoi with a roundhouse kick. Yaoi dove down, and Dahn went over the half wall. Yaoi ran over to the wall and saw Dahn's body being trampled by the creatures from the darkness. Dahn was dead.

As the sun came up, news was coming out as to what was going on. There were a lot of losses, mostly among the adults, but some of the kids group as well. Dahn and Boris were both gone. But the hardest to take was Pug.

Pug had gone to the Sang residence to keep them safe after the voices told him they were going to get them. He brought his pocket knife, his lucky one, and that was it. He just knew he had to be there.

That was when Xsavier had succumbed to the voices in his head. He started going after Boots and Mrs. Sang. Pug was yelling at him to stop, but Xsavier kept going forward. He had grabbed Boots and was starting to hurt her. Pug couldn't take it anymore, he pulled out his knife and buried it into Xsaviors neck, but not before Xsavier hit him with a blade of his own. Pug bled out before anyone could get there to help him. Pug had died a hero.

Yaoi knew that Pug was the reason all the kids came together to help defend the neighborhood, without him there was no one to keep the group together. He was a natural leader, a good tactician, and a great friend. Yaoi looked at the other kids gathered after they found out. Some of them were crying, all of them had a look of loss.

“Dahn, Boris, and Pug. We will miss you all. You all died fighting the good fight. You were all heroes in my book.”

Opti runs the Neo-Anarchist Podcast at: <http://neo-anarchist.com/>

Ziggy runs Radio Free Detroit at: <https://ziggydatroll.podbean.com/>

Wolf and Mr. Clean run Deniable Assets at: <https://deniableassets.podbean.com/>

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<https://t.co/d1Unpm9s8m> Thank you SmittyHalibut for this.