

The proud proclamation of her victory died before Twilight could even think of uttering it, her gaze falling on the pair of corpses lying only a few feet away. Unlike the dead bodies from earlier, which had been stripped of valuables and tossed aside, these new ones had yet to be looted. So fresh were they that Twilight could still smell the gun smoke, and fresh blood which was beginning to pool on the dirty highway.

The deathclaw wanted to shout, to demand an explanation, but quickly realized that this was likely self defence. The way the bodies were laying face down on the ground, sporting a few new holes seemed to back up this assumption. There was also the fact that they had been armed when Janey had killed them, and as if answering the unspoken question, Janey herself approached right after.

"We had a couple who didn't feel like surrendering!" shouted the courier over the rage of the dust storm.

Twilight grunted, and gently dropped the unconscious jackals on the ground before pointing at the one she had intimidated already. Thankfully her command could be understood easily through the howling wind which whipped at everyone present.

Janey didn't seem pleased, though she also didn't seem surprised and simply turned towards their 'help'. "Round these ones up and add them to the line! Twilight and I will be on overwatch!" barked the courier.

The three NCR soldiers swiftly got to work, handcuffing those who were awake, and swiftly waking those who were not. While they worked to bind them all together Twilight tried to ask Janey about what had happened but discovered that was impossible to do. The dull tink of her claw hitting a peice of discarded metal was washed away by the ocean of noise that was the dust storm.

"Sorry, but it seems like we won't be able to talk until we get back inside!" Janey shouted, gesturing forward and to the right. "Just remember to stay at the back and keep an eye out for wildlife! There is a giant ant colony to the left, and apparently some roaming radscorpions on the right!"

Twilight nodded, and gave the courier a thumbs up before turning back around and making her towards the back of the group once more. All of whom were miserable, especially the newest additions, who were stumbling slightly, still a little rattled from their recent fight. Thankfully none attempted to escape, and after a few seconds to orient everyone, they set off once more.

With Janey at the front, and their escort on the sides, Twilight was confident they would be safe from any creatures they may cross paths with. That confidence wavered somewhat when the wind grew so loud that the deathclaw could barely even hear her own thoughts. Not only that but the sand and dirt stung the few spots on Twilight's body which were not covered by thick

scales. She could also hear the occasional click of Janey's geiger counter, indicating that the storm was not only irritating but also potentially dangerous.

Thankfully they were moving sooner after, and in no time at all they had established a decent pace. It wasn't quite as fast as Twilight would have liked, but it was at least faster than a casual walk. Twilight however, had much longer legs so to her it was barely faster than a crawl, giving the deathclaw ample time to inspect her surroundings.

Not like there was much to see, as the visibility had fallen to the point that Twilight couldn't even make out the silhouette of Janey anymore. The former unicorn could at least keep an eye on most of the prisoners, as well as two of the three NCR soldiers traveling with them. Those mostly obscured forms, and the ground beneath her feet were really the only things Twilight could detect with any degree of clarity.

This continued to be the case for several minutes, until she heard a yelp of surprise followed by the sharp pop of a gun. Recognizing it as Janey's weapon of choice, Twilight quickly sprinted up towards the front of the chain gang. Running past the shorter of the three ex raiders, Twilight stopped him with a claw and pointed to the prisoners.

The man nodded, keeping his weapon up while also stopping himself from helping Janey before resuming his duties. Twilight didn't slow down to make sure her command was heeded however, and had continued on to the front of the pack. Where she saw Janey wrestling with a giant ant who had gripped her leg and was attempting to drag the woman to the ground.

Twilight released a roar, and stomped on the creature, shattering its exoskeleton and pulping the majority of its organs. She didn't get a chance to relish her victory however, as something large and heavy had slammed against her upper thigh. This was followed up by a pair of pincers jabbing into the deathclaw's midsection, bruising, but not piercing Twilight's scales.

With a fresh wave of pain rolling through Twilight's mind, the former pony only just barely resisted the urge to give in to her instincts. Instead she focused on fighting her newest foes to the best of her abilities, starting with the one that had jabbed her in the stomach.

Dodging out of the way of the next strike, Twilight reached down and grabbed the creature's head. Her powerful muscles clenched, and the ant had mere moments to resist before its brain was turned to mush. The ant battering itself against Twilight's side was dealt with shortly after, though it at least got the chance to give the former pony a few more bruises before then.

Twilight stopped its assault from continuing any further by punting it with enough force to send it flying onto its back. Dazed, and confused, the ant struggled to right itself, legs flailing in all directions. The deathclaw didn't get the chance to finish it however, as a male scream alerted her to the fact that there were prisoners in trouble.

Spinning on her heel, Twilight ran towards the source of the noise and found that an ant had managed to grab a jackal's foot. The guard she had passed earlier was standing nearby, but seemed to be struggling to deal with a jammed rifle and wasn't much help. Twilight didn't require such maintenance on her weapons however, and ran over, slashing the ant with her claws.

For once the deathclaw's sharp appendages did not immediately eviscerate her target, though the wounds were deep enough to make the ant drop its prey. Turning towards Twilight, the deathclaw noticed that this insect was even larger than the others, who had been about the size of the average full grown wolf. This one was different, and came up to Twilight's waist, while also sporting a thicker exoskeleton as well as a mean look in its eye.

The ant reacted before Twilight could, swinging its head like a club and actually managing to make Twilight stumble back. The deathclaw wasn't about to let her foe get another chance to strike her however, and Twilight slashed not at the ant's torso but instead at its foremost legs. Two quick swipes was all it took to sever the ant's closest limbs, though it did leave her open to a counter attack.

Seemingly unfazed by the loss of two of its legs, the ants clamped down on Twilight's wrist with its two gigantic mandibles. The deathclaw roared in pain, her flesh crushed by a surprisingly powerful grip. When next Twilight felt the call of her instincts, she allowed them briefly to overtake her, giving her the edge she yearned for.

In an instant the pain was gone, and Twilight felt her body move as if being controlled by someone else entirely. Her one hand shot down to the ant's neck, grabbing it tightly and lifting the entire creature into the air. Once aloft, she then opened her jaws wide and bit the side of the ant's face with all the force she could muster.

The ant released its own hold, and immediately tried to free itself, though without its two foremost limbs it struggled to do so. Even still, the powerful creature almost managed to escape, but Twilight stopped this plan dead in its tracks. A crunch followed by a squelch signalled that her jaw had finally beaten the ant's exoskeleton, and a second later her mouth was filled with bug brains.

Twilight dropped the ant, and spat out its insides before spinning back around, already looking for new foes to fell. Her wariness was not needed though, as the rest of the ants were laying dead all around them. Varying from the size of a small dog, to a full grown wolf, none came close to the one that Twilight had fought and killed.

Janey appeared out of the roaring storm, and upon seeing Twilight, sprinted up to her, a stimpack in hand.

"Were going to move up to the right!" She shouted, jabbing the needle between two scales on Twilight's lower arm. "If we stumble on a whole swarm of these guys we'll lose at least a few prisoners!"

Twilight nodded, her counter arguments dying the second she realized the truth to her companion's statement.

"There might be a few radscorpions though so I want you on the right flank while the other three take up the rear and the left!" Janey continued.

Again, Twilight nodded.

The group set out almost immediately, with Janey striding into the storm, one hand gripping her pistol while the other shaded her eyes in an effort to keep out the dust. An effort that was only mostly in vain, as the swirling mass of debris seemed to sneak its way into every nook and cranny. Even Twilight wasn't immune from this, as the deathclaw swore she could feel the fine particles slip under her scales.

Brushing such an uncomfortable thought aside, Twilight focused on maintaining a careful vigil, taking up a spot to the right of the chain gang. Her presence seemed to bring relief to most of the convicts, who were happy to have a deathclaw between them and any radscorpions they may stumble upon. Twilight herself was more than happy to do this, though part of her was worried that these scorpions would prove difficult foes.

It wouldn't be long before Twilight would find out for sure, though before that could happen they first had to ascend a steep slope. From there they continued further right, giving the ants a wide, careful berth in the process. It was at this point that Twilight heard the distinct scuttle of insectoid feet which had somehow managed to pierce the howling gale of the storm.

Spinning toward the source of the sound Twilight found herself face to face with the largest scorpion she had ever seen. The creature seemed as surprised as Twilight and for a moment it did nothing, before lurching forward in an effort to sting the deathclaw. Twilight however, was not so easily startled, and dodged to the left before swiping at the tail, intent on removing the potential danger early.

The radscorpion, having recovered from its shock, recoiled the limb, and swung one of its large, grey claws at Twilight. The blow was surprisingly powerful, making Twilight wince in pain, and clutch her midsection while swiping with her other claw. Pushed back, the scorpion and lizard began to slowly eye one another up, each seeking to find a weakness in the other.

The scorpion was large, easily as long as a man was tall and with claws bigger than a human's head. Its hide was a dark bluish grey, and its twin claws sported sharp points that it likely used to grab its food. Its stinger hung back, bobbing gently as the radscorpion attempted to find some manner of opening.

Which it located only a few seconds later, jabbing the deathclaw square in the chest and nearly knocking the wind out of her. The sting of poison was immediate, as was the remarkable weight

carried behind the insect's attack. Twilight wasn't about to give it the chance to follow up however, and attempted to stomp on the creature's midsection.

Once again the insect moved to dodge, but was slightly too slow, inadvertently putting its left claw in Twilight's path. The deathclaw's attack cracked the chitinous exterior of the scorpion's appendage, causing the insect to screech in pain and try to pull away. It didn't get far before Twilight raked her claws across the top of its body, scoring a lucky strike on both of its eyes.

Now blinded and clearly in pain, the radscorpion swung wildly, clipping Twilight with its claws in the process. With its ability to see now gone, the creature couldn't dodge, giving Twilight the opening she had been looking for. Accepting two more glancing blows, Twilight leaned forward and stomped with all of her might once more.

This time her attack struck true, and the radscorpion was crushed, though it got one last sting in before it perished. Hurt, and now slightly woozy, Twilight yanked out the tail which had been stuck in her chest before tossing it aside. She stumbled briefly before shaking her head, removing the cobwebs clinging to the inside of her skull before turning around.

Looking over her companions, Twilight realized that they were no longer right behind her. A yell of shock alerted the deathclaw to the proximity of her friends, and she ran to its source only to nearly run over a prone human. Dodging out of the way at the last second, Twilight chose to ignore the bleeding male as he was at least alive and conscious.

Preceding on, Twilight found that the chain gang was in shambles, with everyone pulling each other in a different direction. Smaller scorpions nipped and stung at any who neared them while the remaining guards attempted to restore order. A sudden urge filled Twilight, one so strong that she had no choice but to allow it to take command of her body.

Claws extended, Twilight roared with all her might, pouring her pain and irritation into a single mighty yell. The lesser scorpions fled immediately, while the majority of the chain gang stopped dead in their tracks. A few were still trying to escape, but their number could be counted on one hand, and were soon cowed into obedience by a fierce glare from Twilight.

Without having to worry about accidentally shooting a captive, Janey and the others were able to mop up what little resistance was left. Twilight merely stood there silently, glaring at each one of the convicts in turn, keeping them in line until Janey and the others had taken up their positions. The downed human from earlier returned, revealing that he had been stung and had taken a break in order to use an anti venom and apply a bandage.

Without a word being spoken, the group set out once more, with Twilight running along next to the group. Keeping a close eye on those few who had not heeded her shout, Twilight watched the convicts almost as much as the storm. Her diligence was ultimately unneeded, as their path did not cross another dangerous creature, only more dust, debris and the burnt out remains of a car.

Blinking in surprise, Twilight found that she was standing at the bottom of a long ramp occupied by a dozen or more vehicles. Each one had succumbed to time and were clearly non functional, though their presence did at least give some manner of cover from the storm. Without the constant assault of sand, Twilight breathed a small sigh of relief, and made her way to the front of the line.

Looking up, Twilight noticed that a pair of shadows now loomed over them, immediately setting the deathclaw on edge. Thankfully she was able to restrain her panic long enough to reach Janey. Now standing next to the courier, Twilight grunted, and gestured up, towards the end of the ramp.

"Just some big ugly statues!" Janey shouted. "I'll tell you more once were out of the storm!"

Twilight nodded and fell back to the end of the line once more, allowing her human companions to take the lead. A move which turned out to be a good one, as Twilight could hear the startled sound of a surprised conversation. Thankfully whomever Janey had run into was not a trigger happy fool, and soon they began to move once more.

Passing by the burnt out husks of vehicles, and their more intact neighbors, Twilight silently marveled at the strange objects. Like carts, only without any way for them to be pulled, Twilight remembered the explanation she had gotten from Janey. Sure she may have seen cars since her arrival, but here there were just so many, and in a number of different styles as well as sizes.

Trucks rusted next to cars, and busses, tempting Twilight to stop and inspect the strange vehicles. Her duty to the convicts, and for Janey stopped Twilight from being too distracted by the wondrous machinery all around her. Focusing on the road ahead, Twilight was thankful to see that the storm dissipated somewhat near the top, giving way to a grey sky.

"She should be coming along any second now," Twilight heard someone say.

Cautiously stepping out from between a pair of rusted cars, Twilight saw that Janey as well as a pair of NCR soldiers were waiting for her. Though startled by her appearance, the guards did not raise their rifles at Twilight. That didn't stop them from gripping the weapons a little tighter, their fear clearly evident on their faces.

"Don't shoot. Remember, she's the one from the radio," Janey repeated, the courier speaking slowly and calmly.

"R-right," one of the guards muttered, clearing his throat. "Wilkins. Go inform the rest of the base that we'll be having a... unique visitor."

The other soldier nodded and sprinted off.

"Well that was rather hair raising, wasn't it?" Janey offered.

Twilight nodded, though she barely gave the woman's words any thought as she was busy looking around. She noticed that the convicts, and other raiders they had captured were being assembled into a group outside the larger of the two structures sitting atop the hill. With her charges now taken care of, Twilight released a long sigh of relief and continued the inspection of her surroundings.

Starting with the enormous pair of metal humans looming over the entire highway, casting the ramp in shadow. One wore a long metal duster and what looked like a helmet, though Twilight couldn't see that far due to the lingering presence of the storm. The other was a bit more visible, and that statue looked the part of a cowboy, complete with wide brimmed hat. The pair were shaking hands, giving Twilight the impression that this was to commemorate some cooperative achievement.

Behind it were a pair of squat, sandblasted pre war buildings surrounded by chain link fences, at the head of which stood a bright red sign. Marking this location as NCR ranger outpost mojave, Twilight quickly summarized that was their true final destination. On the other side of the four lane highway were numerous rusted out vehicles, and a few chain link cages.

There were also several booths likely used to collect tolls at one point, though they had long since been boarded up. The final structure Twilight could see was a building made of scrap which lay at the far end, its purpose obscured by the haze of sand. The odd gnarled tree, and dark brown bush could also be seen dotting the area, though most greenery had been cut away.

There were also very few people left outside, with only a trio of ncr soldiers directly observing the ramp up to the outpost. Not like they needed a lot of them given the fact that it was a natural choke point, and had towering walls of rock on either side of the road. The nature of the naturally defensible position was likely why there was little in the way of fortifications, with the only major one being a sniper nest on the closest building.

Twilight snorted, and pointed up at the statues curiously.

"There was a group called the desert rangers who protected New vegas, that was until Caesar's legion came for the first time. Realizing they were no match for the barbarian hordes, the rangers chose to make a deal with the NCR. Folding their forces into the new california republic rangers, they became a single organization under the control of the NCR," Janey explained. "I can't say I blame them for not trying to stick it out alone, but that doesn't mean I'm happy about it."

"Watch it, lady. The NCR is the only thing keeping New Vegas from the wrath of Caesar," retorted the guard.

“And what a wonderful job of that you’ve done,” Janey muttered, turning to Twilight. “Come on, we gotta check in with the brass before we find a drink and wait out this storm.”

Twilight gave the soldier an apologetic shrug and followed after her companion.

Together they marched down the shattered highway, stopping next to the group of convicts, and the NCR sergeant standing pensively nearby. Upon noticing Twilight’s presence the NCR soldiers noticeably stiffened, while the captured raiders relaxed. The higher ranking trooper waved to the deathclaw, his facial expression conveying a desire to speak with the former pony.

Which Twilight obliged, stopping next to the convicts, and glancing down expectantly at the sergeant.

“I uh... wow Mr New Vegas was right,” muttered the dark skinned, middle aged man. “Fuck me, thats ten caps I’ll never see again.”

“Is there a reason these men are standing outside in the storm?” Twilight asked, tapping out her question on a hunk of metal she found lying on the ground.

“What, you want us to bring them inside?” exclaimed the soldier in shock.

“They probably don’t even have room for them all,” Janey remarked.

Twilight snorted, and pointed to the shack at the back of the outpost.

“I mean, I guess we could renovate the old barracks into a jail, but our resources are going to be spread thin with just feeding them all,” replied the soldier.

Twilight turned to Janey and opened her hand. “May I have my cut from the job?”

“Hold your horses. I haven’t even had a chance to get paid yet,” Janey exclaimed, waving a hand in the air. “Just stay right here for a minute, I’ll be right back.”

Twilight nodded slowly, slightly confused by the expression, and unsure of its meaning.

Without the ability to translate Twilight’s tapping into english, the deathclaw could do little but sit there and wait for her companion’s return. The NCR soldiers seemed just fine with this arrangement, standing quietly nearby, gripping their weapons tightly. The convicts were also mostly silent, though with one familiar exception.

“You intend on paying for the renovations yourself,” exclaimed the self declared preacher.

Twilight nodded.



"You don't have to do that. We are unworthy of such kindness," he continued.

"Shut it," hissed his closest neighbor, who elbowed him in the gut. "If the broad wants to make sure we got food and a roof over our heads then I say let her."

"But we have already been graced by her mercy. We do not deserve such comforts," pressed the preacher.

"I said shut it old man," whispered the other convict, who readied himself to strike the man again.

A harsh snort, and a firm glare from Twilight stopped the male before he had a chance though.

"R-right. Sorry," he whispered weakly.

"Don't worry my queen. I shall make sure that everyone respects your authority soon enough!" proclaimed Twilight's lone preacher.

The deathclaw merely sighed, and shook her head, silently thankful that she could hear Janey returning.

"Here," Janey exclaimed, dumping a small mound of caps into Twilight's open hand. "A few of these guys had bounties on their heads so the haul was a bit bigger than anticipated."

Twilight nodded, turned to the sergeant and gestured to his own hand.

The man dumbly did as he was told, allowing Twilight to dump nearly every last cap into his waiting grasp.

"Make sure they are comfortable, and well fed," Twilight declared, gesturing to the prisoners.

"I err..." The sergeant shrugged. "I guess we do need another holding area, what with all the escaped convicts on the loose. Private, make sure these funds make it back to Williams, and inform her of what they are intended for."

One of the few soldiers standing outside quickly sprinted over to the sergeant, took the caps and jogged back inside.

"I will be returning soon in order to ensure that my money has been spent appropriately," Twilight declared.

"Don't you worry. I'm certain no one will oppose your proposition," replied the sergeant.

"Is your heart done bleeding?" Janey deadpanned. "Cus we got a bottle with our names on it back at the barracks."

Twilight sighed and rolled her eyes. "Yes. We may go," Twilight replied, discarding her peice of metal now that it was no longer useful.

"Thanks for saving me by the way," exclaimed the rather short ex raider who Twilight had rescued from the grip of an ant less than an hour ago.

"Please reconsider your career," Twilight tapped out before turning and walking away, too tired to even try to locate the soldiers who had been accompanying them on the trek to the outpost.

Following Janey towards the smaller of the two prewar structures, Twilight did her best to ignore the stares of the soldiers. Some were inquisitive, others guarded, while a few seemed outright hostile, and were merely waiting for a chance to attack her. Twilight hadn't noticed how many of them had hate in their eyes, though Twilight did her best to ignore them and focus on Janey.

Who had just walked inside, and was wearing a smile for the first time in a long time. Twilight followed after her human companion after giving her a minute to warn the barrack's occupants of the deathclaw's arrival. Once enough time had passed, Twilight cautiously pulled open the door and peered inside at all the faces she saw within.

"Well holee shit," muttered a younger NCR trooper. "You were right."

"Now where are my caps?" Janey exclaimed, hand already extended.

Twilight sighed, and slowly walked inside, making sure to bend her knees slightly so her horns didn't pierce the ceiling tiles. While not much to look at, given all the boarded up windows, broken overhead lights, and general grungy appearance, the prewar building was at least well caref for. There were no piles of dirt or debris kicking around, and at the center of it all stood an at least partially stocked bar.

A few soldiers milled about, though their body language was relaxed, indicating that they were off duty. Most crowded around the far side of the bar, leaning to one side in order to get a better look of Twilight and Janey. The sole individual who did not appear to be enlisted with the NCR was a woman wearing a straw cowboy hat.

She sat alone with a glass of some dark brown liquid clutched tight in her grip, despite the fact that it was nowhere near nine o clock. Twilight wanted to continue her inspection of the various bar's inhabitants, but her gaze lingered on the lone hallway extending from the main area. There she saw an open area which had been converted into storage as well as a pair of seemingly functional bathrooms.

“Well I’ll be damned,” muttered the woman. “A deathclaw that doesn't immediately want to bite my head off. This day could not get any weirder.”

Twilight sighed, getting the distinct sense of deja vu from the short interaction.