

OVERWATCH 2

SHOCKWAVES



*A SHORT STORY BY BRANDON EASTON*

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*Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

*The intersection of Yonge Street and Eglinton Avenue East*

*10:05 AM EST*

Sojourn awoke in midair. She had only been unconscious for a split second, but in a firefight that was often the margin between life and death. She'd heard many times before how life flashes before your eyes in moments like this one, but Sojourn knew that to be false. She'd seen enough battlefields to recognize how the mind shifts into self-preservation.

Sojourn slammed into the concrete. The impact rippled across her body, sending an excruciating pins-and-needles jolt from her toes to her teeth. *That's a good thing*, she thought. *My nervous system works*. Then there was a *snap-crackle* in the back of her ear, and the comms system built into her cybernetic implants was intermittently broadcasting static and words tinged with concern and alarm.

*"Chase. It's Tremblay! Do you read? I repeat—"*

Tremblay's voice wavered and was quickly extinguished in a blast of static. This could only mean one of two things: her comms system was damaged from

the shockwave of the explosion, or Agent Tremblay and the command center had been hit. Neither was a preferred outcome—she'd been relying on Tremblay's intel to help her direct the city's defenses and evacuate civilians.

As if on cue, the public emergency broadcast system blasted through the streets. A calm but authoritative voice spoke to the city:

"All citizens, please evacuate to the ferry terminal. There will be ships to take you to safety. I repeat, all remaining civilians, make your way to the ferry terminal. This may be your final chance to evacuate."

Sojourn leapt to her feet, gaining traction and equilibrium as her vision cleared. She raised the rifle in front of her chest, her eye fixing on the sight at the end of the barrel. The heavy smoke and rising flames surrounding her confirmed the worst: Null Sector had dropped a massive heavy gunner unit into the midst of one of the busiest intersections in Toronto . . . and it had achieved its goal.

The streets were now a war zone.

Just ten minutes earlier, a Null Sector command ship had descended from a heavy cloudbank over the city. Within seconds, hundreds of Null Sector units had appeared in Midtown Toronto and in the southern parts of the city on the bayfront. Sojourn's experience with Null Sector had prepared her for their quick-strike tactics: overwhelming their target with sheer numbers while specific squads hit critical power grid junctions and metropolitan security infrastructure points. Though, unlike her last engagement with Null Sector invaders, this attack was far more precise, as if there was some guiding strategy behind this conflict, beyond pure destruction. A propaganda message had been playing on a loop since the attack started, but she hardly had time to listen to it.

As a military tactician, Sojourn was impressed by the ruthless efficiency of Null Sector's assault pattern, but the notion disappeared as an explosion sent another wave of superheated dust and debris in her direction.

Sojourn braced against the blast, strong in her cybernetically reinforced body. Behind her, squads from the Canadian Armed Forces and the Emergency Task Force—the tactical unit of the Toronto Police Service—were advancing. She knew the shockwave would do much more damage to flesh-and-blood soldiers.

"Get down!" Sojourn yelled as the troops dropped. Most avoided the blast,

but an unlucky few were tossed into the sky like confetti, their bodies careening into the manicured buildings of the commercial district. When the smoke cleared, Sojourn stared at the stunned faces behind her. In a split second, several of their friends and allies had been wiped from the earth.

*The margin between life and death.*

Sojourn had to drag the troops out of the emotional shock of instantaneous loss. If she spent another moment thinking about their comrades, the momentum of the battle would swing in Null Sector's favor. The ground rumbled as the gunner unit moved toward their position, its cannon-arms cycling for another catastrophic volley.

"If you can hear my voice, converge on me," Sojourn shouted, the razor-sharp confidence in her voice igniting the troops back into combat form. "Those with small-caliber weapons, lay down a suppressing fire, aim for the base of that heavy gunner unit. Anyone with energy-based weapons and high-grade explosives, line up on both sides of the street. Use abandoned vehicles as cover. Once you're secure, concentrate on the cannons."

Like clockwork, the army troops and Emergency Task Force officers split into a perfectly aligned urban assault formation. Sojourn glanced at the diverse array of police officers and soldiers before launching herself onto the roof of a disabled transit bus.

"I'll run distraction," Sojourn said, leaping from the bus's roof. Her cybernetic legs contained propulsion vents that enabled Sojourn to slide and jump faster than most opponents could track. She poured on the speed as she slid now, skipping across the burning remains of civilian cars and trucks.

As she moved, Sojourn let off several shots from her energy rifle, her well-placed blasts causing the gunner unit to halt its advance. Its cannon arms followed Sojourn's movements, but her speed made it challenging to gain a target lock. Meanwhile, the officers and troops unleashed countless rounds of ammo into the machine, its body rattling like a tin can in a hailstorm. Sojourn fired a final shot into its central assembly, and the gunner unit erupted in an orange plume of smoke and flame.

The stinging, unmistakable odor of burning metal filled Sojourn's nose. It was a smell she'd first known in the Crisis, but one that had persisted through her time

with Overwatch. She turned her attention southward down Yonge Street, where the city's financial and recreational center sat on the shores of Lake Ontario. Toronto's metropolitan region held more than ten million citizens; at least several hundred thousand people could be downtown for any number of reasons, and none were expecting an invasion force to arrive after breakfast.

Sojourn focused on the barrage of Null Sector drop pods silhouetted against the cloudy sky—a deadly shower raining down on the populace. The day would become a massacre if she didn't support the evacuation at the ferry terminal in the southern end of the city. The civic authorities had rightfully organized to move survivors into the northern suburbs, where there was more open space and a mountain range to serve as a buffer from a ground attack.

Yet, for anyone caught south of Eglinton Avenue, there was little chance of escape.

Sojourn had no other option except to move south and push evacuees toward the safety of the harbor, taking the city back from Null Sector, block-by-block.

### *The intersection of Yonge Street and Gerrard Street East*

*6:46 PM EST*

It had taken Sojourn and her allies hours to go a few kilometers south toward the downtown district. Each of the drop pods released a cache of Null Sector combat omnis: Nulltroopers and Slicers, which she recognized from previous encounters as part of Overwatch, though these had clearly been given some upgrades. More heavy gunner units were also emerging from the smoke. But there were larger pods farther away that released omnis Sojourn had never seen before. She didn't have time to consider the ramifications of this new ordnance, not while the older versions were wreaking havoc as far as the eye could see.

Every Null Sector unit had their strategic specialty, and they were being utilized to the fullest extent of their programming. Nulltroopers marched forth as the initial wave of invaders, but she paid closer attention to one of the newer enemies—some sort of hover unit whose mobility made it tough to target their heads or power cores.

# *SOJOURN HAD NO OTHER OPTION EXCEPT TO MOVE SOUTH AND PUSH EVACUEES TOWARD THE SAFETY OF THE HARBOR, TAKING THE CITY BACK FROM NULL SECTOR, BLOCK BY BLOCK.*

The updated Slicers infiltrated smaller areas, cutting through basic defenses with their plasma beams. But they were insects beside another new unit, an extremely large, heavily armored tank with a rhino-like horn protruding from its head. These monstrosities were deceptively fast, despite their bulky frames.

Sojourn's cybernetic eyes allowed her to see much farther than an ordinary human. Yet today she cursed her upgraded senses as it brought greater clarity to the theater of bloodshed. The Nulltroopers herded civilians into the tight concrete canyons of the inner city; the crowds were too frenzied to run or resist—easy pickings for the invaders. The Slicers' plasma beams ripped through any ramshackle barricades or vehicles used to slow the omnic advance. Sojourn had to shut her eyes as a Slicer cleared the way for one of the rhino-like units to flatten an area where terrified civilians huddled in vain.

Things were getting bad. Real bad. Sojourn's makeshift battalion of CAF soldiers and EFT officers had thinned to a force of less than twenty. *We started with more than one hundred troops*, Sojourn thought in grim silence.

It had been a while since she had truly missed the old days in Overwatch, had looked back on that time with any feeling other than regret. Nostalgia felt like an anchor around her neck, and it never made sense to be needlessly sentimental over past experiences.

*And isn't that what you wanted, after it all came crashing down? To be alone?* Sojourn asked herself with considerable spite. Yet it'd be a lie to say she didn't wish she could look over her shoulder and see Winston swinging into battle from a streetlight, or Jack, with his never-say-die attitude and tactical acumen, watching her six. There was a slight pang in her gut, a pang of yearning.

*But Overwatch is dead. And with good reason.*

A missile from a gunner unit soared over Sojourn's head. The haze of chemical propellant caused her eyes to water, snapping her out of her ill-advised reminiscing. The projectile zoomed into a crowded coffee shop where a group of civilians had taken refuge from the firefight on the street. The explosion rocked the entire block, shattering windowpanes, sending a spray of glass at her troops.

Sojourn had no time to grieve the fallen as she raced toward two little girls frozen in fear near a subway exit.

*Move!* Sojourn thought. She jumped with all her cybernetic strength while firing countless shots at the nearby Null Sector units. After she downed one Nulltrooper, she picked up its body to use as a shield, landing in front of the children with a millisecond to spare. The snowstorm of glass tinkled against the Nulltrooper's body as Sojourn used one hand to corral the kids and the other to balance the unit's body above them all.

"Where are your parents?" Sojourn demanded.

The first girl spoke through quivering lips as she grabbed her sister's hand. "They . . . were in there."

The second girl pointed to the ball of flame and smoke that remained of the café. Whenever she tried to speak, a torrent of painful wails erupted from her lungs.

Sojourn did nothing but pull the two girls to her. She had no words of encouragement as she whispered instructions to the older sister—told her to avoid the open streets and follow the path Sojourn was clearing southward. The girl nodded, eyes distant, as she wiped away tears.

Sojourn could only make them feel safe in this moment, hope they would live long enough to see their trauma heal. But experience had taught her that war leaves a mark on us all. No matter how long you manage to survive.

*The intersection of Bay and Wellington Streets*

10:18 PM EST

When the sun dipped below the smoke-filled horizon, Sojourn believed she'd



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made a dent in the invasion forces. She and her rapidly decreasing band of allies had personally taken down hundreds of Null Sector units in roughly three hours. At last, they'd reached the lower end of Yonge Street, where she could see the crisp, rough waters of Lake Ontario through the grid of skyscrapers. With Yonge Street seemingly cleared, Sojourn and the others made a sharp turn to the west on Wellington, past the Hockey Hall of Fame and local courthouses to Toronto's commercial and recreational center on New Queen Street. Here the concrete paths were a haphazard mix of confusing avenues that led to cul-de-sacs and dead ends packed with tourist attractions.

The perfect kill zone for the enemy.

Although emotionally exhausted, Sojourn had to be certain the civilians had a chance to escape. As a soldier, she knew the cost of urban warfare: for every person she saved, there were three who perished out of sight. In a world of energy blasts and emotionless robots with no sense of mercy, there was no such thing as "bulletproof." Null Sector weapons cut through concrete, glass, and steel like soggy tissue paper.

An errant blast could slice through a hospital's power supply or penetrate the walls of a school or cause a subway tunnel to collapse during rush hour. In a case of cosmic morbidity, there was an endless array of ways people could suffer in an

invasion of this scale.

Five minutes had passed since their last engagement with Null Sector. Sojourn checked on the status of her remaining squad. Although she didn't know them personally, they had quickly banded together on the battlefield.

As they continued their march westward along Wellington Street, Sojourn counted bodies beneath the rubble; the footprints trailing into what was now an inferno; the leveled buildings where many likely remained alive; and the troops she couldn't spare to rescue them.

It was a textbook presentation of why warfare was truly awful. There was no glory to be found here, only innocent lives snuffed out by a conflict they couldn't yet fathom. Sojourn thought of her own dog, Murphy, left behind in the safety of her fortified apartment. Just yesterday she was frustrated by late-night walks, but now she would give anything to hear her pitiful whine at the door.

Yesterday might as well have been a decade ago. This was no longer the Toronto she adored and protected. It was now a massive graveyard dug by cold steel hands. Not unlike her own cybernetic ones. She remembered the darkest days of the Crisis, when Toronto had nearly become a potter's field and thick columns of black smoke reflected upon the surface of Lake Ontario. She blinked several times to remove the dismal shroud of déjà vu overlaying this new scene of devastation.

*WHOOM!*

Five gunner units landed on the burned-out husks of transit buses and former businesses. The units simultaneously launched a huge spread of missiles that tore through the streets and buildings like a lightning bolt. The nearby courthouse erupted, with office supplies and burnt clothing littering the sky like a ticker-tape parade.

Most of her remaining squad was destroyed by this barrage; the rest were separated by the tidal wave of toxic debris. Sojourn's eyes danced over the burning carnage surrounding her, the pit of her stomach rippling with anguish—she pulled words from the back of her scorched throat, yelling into the orange-black cloud of fire that stung her eyes.

"All survivors, keep heading south to the ferry terminal. Use the cover of darkness as a refuge until sunrise. If you find any civilians, keep them safe! If you're able to regroup, converge on the sound of my voice."

Sojourn waited for a few moments but was met by nothing save the relentless *clank* of Null Sector units in the distance.

Sojourn silently paid her respects to the fallen before jumping down the exposed entrance of a subway tunnel.

### *Spadina Avenue at Lake Shore Boulevard West*

*9:48 AM EST*

As the sunrise illuminated the devastated landscape, thin ribbons of yellow sunlight cast murky spotlights through the tunnel. Sojourn crawled out of an access hatch onto the Harbourfront Centre—a sprawling seaside resort complete with everything a well-heeled tourist could ever want. Gorgeous views of Lake Ontario, the CN Tower, a seaport complex connecting the expansive ferry system with the best cuisine in the province. Her tired eyes scanned the immediate area for hostiles, but she could only see black smoke.

Her usual reserve of self-confidence and awareness was nearly gone. She'd done the best she could under the circumstances. She was cut off from Tremblay. She'd led a doomed excursion under the pretense of saving lives. Now she was standing at the edge of her beloved city, watching it burn under the momentary safety of isolation. More Null Sector drop pods rained from the sky like molten lead, tearing through buildings and punching massive craters into the landscape.

Even the most battle-hardened soldier would gasp at the implications for the unprepared civilian populace.

Thanks to her enhancements, she could likely fight for several more hours if need be, but would there be anything left to defend? There was no one else coming to save Toronto—she'd seen fighter planes shot out of the sky, watched the Canadian military and police forces being overrun. And it was only a matter of time before those who remained succumbed to the endless hordes of Null Sector invaders.

“Help me! Someone! Please! Help!”

The fog of indecision and regret vanished from Sojourn's mind. She spun on her heel, raising her rifle with pinpoint precision. Down the block was an omniscient

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dressed in a fast-food uniform, being chased by a Nulltrooper toward a narrow alleyway. The Nulltrooper was just outside her rifle's range, but she fired a few warning shots in their direction to get the Nulltrooper to ignore the innocent omnic.

Strangely, the Nulltrooper fired lazily over its shoulder as if Sojourn's attack was a mere afterthought and remained deadlocked on its target. Sojourn raced toward the pair, firing more shots, hoping she closed the gap fast enough for her rifle's bolts to drop the attacker. The Nulltrooper grabbed the omnic around the neck and pulled him kicking and screaming into the alleyway, where the terrified cries stopped instantly.

When Sojourn arrived at the alley, she cautiously peered around the side of the building, not wanting to give the Nulltrooper a clear shot. Sojourn's eyes went wide as she stepped into the alley—ready to blast the Nulltrooper to dust—but it was empty. She had never known of a Null Sector unit to kidnap an everyday omnic. There was no logic to a move like that, unless Null Sector had suddenly decided to take hostages.

She slowly examined the alley, but there was nothing except an open sewer main entrance and the smell of a thousand horrible things.

The *snap-hiss* of Sojourn's comm system sent a jolt through her consciousness. "Hello? This is Sojourn. Please respond."

“Chase! It’s Tremblay . . . good to hear your voice. We’ve been trying to raise you on the comms since we got cut off. There was deliberate interference on all our military frequencies, but we’ve been modulating the signal until we found a clear channel.”

“Damage report? Is your team okay?” Sojourn asked, the relief in her voice impossible to disguise.

“*Okay* is a relative term, but the command center is in one piece. Where are you? Some surviving troops have managed to make it to the Harbourfront. The ferries are loading up and leaving soon, but we ordered every available boat there to continue to evacuate any citizens caught in the downtown area.”

The evacuation alert rang out again now, on a loop from the thousands of hidden speakers across the metropolitan area.

Sojourn sighed inwardly. Despite the incredible losses on the streets of Toronto, her ragtag band of warriors had cut a pathway south toward the waterfront and given the government time to evacuate civilians.

*BING! BING!*

Sojourn recognized the sound of wood against metal, specifically baseball bats against Null Sector armor. She turned to see an omnic and a human woman fighting against Nulltroopers and an advancing gunner unit. She reasoned that these two knew they had little chance of survival against these odds, but they still fought until the inevitable occurred.

The duo was now surrounded as Nulltroopers pulled other nearby omnic away to an unknown fate. Sojourn recalled her days fighting alongside Jack as a recruit in Overwatch. She had seen how quickly people became victims; but right now, Sojourn didn’t see any *victims*. She saw people willing to fight for their freedom and safety. Despite the flames and mounting casualties and the sheer exhaustion, the soldiers, police officers, and emergency workers who followed her had never stopped.

Sojourn thought of the two little girls who’d undoubtedly lost their parents in that coffee shop. Behind the fear in their eyes, she could detect something else in their joined hands. An intangible thing that only warriors recognize—*courage*.

She’d seen people give up under lesser circumstances in the first Omnic Crisis. People ran, surrendered, died huddled in fear.

Right now, she saw humans and omnic fighting side by side in defense of their city. Their home. *Her* home. Toronto.

Sojourn fired a surgical volley of blasts from her rifle at the Null Sector invaders. She felt a deep satisfaction as her shots took down the enemy and gave the human and omnic a chance to escape. A chance to fight another day.

*FOOOOOOOOM!* Sojourn recognized the sound of a departing ferry horn and turned to see the first batch of civilians being evacuated to the safety of Lake Ontario. The image of the overpacked decks with throngs of humanity leaning against the rails reminded her of a cruise embarking for some sunnier shore. Except there were no sandy beaches or mixed cocktails on the other side of the bay—only survival.

The weariness and fatigue that had plagued Sojourn upon her escape from the subway tunnel was long gone. In its place were confidence and pride, and a simmering anger urging her forward. It was enough to keep her going.

She would fight to the end, even if it meant she was the last one standing.

*DON'T MISS THE EXCLUSIVE STORY OF SOJOURN'S  
FIRST MISSION WITH OVERWATCH, AS TOLD BY  
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