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about 3,600 words

Final Fight

By Eric M Hunter

Based on the video game

By Capcom, Japan

Metro City Slums.

Not a place you want to be these days or any place in Metro for that matter, Dug thought. Never used to be called the Slums before. Then again, he couldn't remember what this part of town was called before the Mad Gear took it over. Shadylane? Hillvalley? Now it was just the Slums.

Dug turned the next corner beside a pile of forgotten tires and came face to face with Holly Wood.

"Where you headin', Duggie boy?" Holly Wood twisted a small dagger into his fingernail then brought it up closer for inspection. He blew hard through his lips to clear the grim then went to task on the next finger. Dug rubbed his bald head reminding himself that he needed a shave while he caught a glimpse of the row of daggers strapped flat against Holly Wood's left thigh.

Dug shifted his weight a bit to one side and looked headlong down the alley. There were a few others of Mad Gear just standing around. He thought they were supposed to be patrolling this side of town, not just standing around. He looked back at Holly Wood.

"I was told to meet up with Bred. He's down in the basement, right?" Dug hoped this would be enough for Holly Wood to let him pass. He knew that not everyone was informed on what the Boss's plan was. He'd send a group of people here or there or up to the Westside or down to the Bay Area. Dug bit hard on his bottom lip. Holly Wood took the tip of his dagger and thrust it up under Dug's chin. He flicked his head back quickly.

"I wouldn't be playing games, Duggie boy. Word on the street is there's something big coming. Boss is about to take this whole city to its knees and there's nothing ol' Mayor Mike can do about it." Dug swallowed hard. Just have to keep quiet, he thought.

A long few moments went by. Holly Wood flashed a wicked smile and returned the dagger to his thigh along with the others. He squared Dug up then stepped to the side. Dug exhaled quietly through his nose, nodded his thanks, and started down the alley.

On either side of him was trash, broken down cars beginning to rust over, and Mad Gear. Some he knew, others he didn't want to. They talked in hushed tones as Dug walked by. Two women, who he knew as Roxy and Poison, watched as he walked past. They were done upright with high heel boots, stolen police caps, and shredded tank tops. One had a coiled whip beside her. Dug did his best to contain any excitement he might have had, but they laughed at his direction, killing any sort of dream he could conjure up. Dug hung his head and continued down the alley towards the back door.

Protecting the backdoor was Simons who nodded approval at his arrival. Simons was a long-time Gear. Saw a lot of action on

the frontlines at the beginning when no one knew what Mad Gear was and his face was battle-hardened from it. His sunglasses hid a nasty scar over his right eye. He was the one who recruited Dug when he was laid off due to the riots. I think he said he sold furniture, Dug thought. What a strange profession before becoming one of the most active members in a gang. Dug smiled and walked down the short steps to the backdoor.

The handle was a bit rusted but felt well worn in his hand. He tried to remember what this place used to be before it was converted into a local Gear hangout. A second-hand shop, Dug wondered. He remembered walking past it a few times on his way to somewhere, he wasn't sure where, but he hadn't looked through the window.

The backdoor opened up into a large basement. The four walls were once covered in lead-based paint that was slowly peeling off. There were these ancient-looking lanterns bolted to the walls, but someone had put in overhead lights. Occasionally they'd flicker on and off.

It looked like at the moment the basement was being used for storage. Large wooden boxes and barrels were scattered around the floor. When Dug stepped down the steps, he saw Bred

sitting on the floor in the middle of the room. He looked up at Dug who gave a small wave to him.

"Hey."

"Hey." Dug sat down on the floor opposite him. Dug looked about the room while Bred stared at the floor.

"Did you take the subway?" Bred asked, looking up from the floor. Dug shook his head.

"No, I was just over the cut off by the Westside before Damnd called me to swing by here. How long have you been here?" Bred looked up to the ceiling. The lights flicked on and off.

"I used to take the subway all the time. To the grocery, my grandma's house, that guy I was hanging with for a minute. You could get anywhere." He looked back down at the floor. Dug knew what he meant. He also noticed that Bred didn't answer the question.

"Now, if you aren't Gear, you know better than to take the subway," Dug said. Bred nodded. "I remember one of the first times I took the subway. It was my brother James and me before he died. I couldn't have been older than five or six. We were heading to Coney Island. I was so nervous, being on the train like I was afraid that he was just going to leave me there then I'd have to find a way to get a hold of my mom. I was a mess.

But then we got there and had fun. Weird, I remember more about the ride over than I do about that day at Coney." There was a crash of something from outside behind Bred's back. Something being thrown around, maybe.

"Lots changed just over the past few months, you know?" Dug nodded. "I mean, Metro hasn't always been a nice place to live, you know? I mean, my whole family is from here and the worst we ever really had to deal with was just petty thieves. Man... Gear came through, almost had to join, you know?" Bred exhaled deeply.

"Yup." More silence. One of the lanterns on the back wall gave way to darkness. Dug flexed his knee up and rested his arm on it. He laughed. "I was hanging with Two P yesterday and we were patrolling the yard. And we ran into some people, I don't remember, a couple of kids. So we step up, asking them what they're doing, tell them to get going, you know, and this dude comes out of nowhere, right? And he steps up between the kids and us and acts all shitty with us. Acting tough. He's gritting his teeth and sticking his chest out. And then it hits me," Bred looks up at Dug confused. "I went to school with this guy. We had science class or something. And then, he recognizes me. 'Duggie?' he says. I'm like, oh shit, and I look over at Two P

who just shrugs his shoulders then straight kicks his guy in his nuts." Dug starts laughing and Bred just shakes his head.

"Why? Why would he do that?" Dug struggles to talk between each laugh.

"I don't know. I don't know. Like, he just panicked and kicks his guy. Greg, I think his name was. And he drops, man. Just drops like a sack of potatoes." Dug slaps the concrete floor and Bred starts to join in smiling widely. "Like, bam! And the kids scattered in all directions. I look at Two P and was like 'What the fuck, dude?' and he just shrugs and takes off running." Their laughter echoes off the walls drowning out the rush voices outside.

"Man, what the hell?" Bred asked, wiping the tears from his eyes. Dug shook his head. It felt good to connect again, he thought. It's been so slow being pushed from one corner of the city to another just to shake someone down for some protection money or push drugs onto someone on the subway who's trying to get home. Dug couldn't remember the last time he'd gone to the movies or had a quiet afternoon nap. It always seemed like he was in three different places at once. His back ached. There was dirt under his fingernails.

Then, the backdoor burst open casting light from the outside down on them. A tall, brawny shadow walked in its frame covering the entire door. Dug started to stand, but Bred grabbed his wrist pulling him back. Out of the overcasting light, Dug caught the thick, chiseled jawline of Axl. His chest ripped out from underneath his sleeveless jacket. He stepped forward towards them and tightened his red hairband.

"What the hell are you two doing?" he asked looking up as the lights overhead blinked. He cleared his throat. Bred stood and stepped forward trying not to look so small in front of this towering rock.

"We were told to stand guard here."

"By who?"

"Damnd," Dug answered. Axl shook his head.

"Idiot. He's going to get us all killed." Dug looked back and forward between the two completely lost in the conversation.

"Killed? Who, us? I didn't do nothing." Bred grabbed Dug's bicep and held him in place.

"Hey, relax. Nothing's going to happen. We're going to be fine. No one wants anything to do with low-level guys like us. Just keep your mouth shut and you'll do fine." Dug looked back to Axl who looked down and shook his head.

"Alright, what's going on here? What did I miss?" Bred exhaled.

"Damnd thought it would be a good idea to play a little game with Mayor Mike."

"Kidnapped his daughter," Axl finished.

"Paraded her through town a bit too."

"What? Why on earth would he do that?" Dug asked. Bred shrugged.

"Show dominance. It was an easy pick up too. Just waited outside her school until class was over. Only took a few minutes."

"You were there?" Dug asked moving closer to Axl's side of the room as if he were picking sides.

"I got the call so I showed. That's how the Gear works, man. But it was fine. He didn't do anything to her or nothing."

"At least not when you were there," Axl added. Bred shot him a grizzly look. Dug shook his head in amazement.

"Jesus. Does he know? Does the Mayor know?" Dug asked. Axl laughed.

"Does he know? Of course, he knows. Damnd called some fucking news crew to show up."

"Channel 3, I think," Bred said, sitting back down on the concrete.

"Put the whole thing on the five o'clock news. Live! Telling him that 'he needs his cooperation or something might happen to her.' Called him on the phone and everything, made sure he tuned in."

"Jesus." Dug sat down next to Bred on the floor. Axl followed them.

"Psycho."

"Yeah, no kidding. And that laugh." Bred shook his head then placed it in his hands.

"Oh, god, that laugh. Like nails on a chalkboard. And those stupid jokes he tells." Bred looked at Dug and they recited the joke in unison.

"What did the fish say when it ran into the wall? Dam!" Together they mimicked a cackle laugh at the top of their lungs that forced Axl to cover his ears with his hands. Their fake laugh fell to their normal chuckles.

"Oh, I hate that laugh," Axl said, shaking the ringing out of his ears. Bred's laugh stopped short and he looked towards the opposite door.

"Did you guys hear something?" he asked. Dug and Axl shrugged.

"What do you think he'll do?" Dug asked, looking back and forth between Axl and Bred.

"Who? Mayor Mike? Pssh, nothing. He'll probably call in a state of emergency. The National Guard might show up. Honestly, I'm surprised that hasn't happened already. But he won't do anything. He'll buckle like they all do," Bred explained.

"I wouldn't be so sure," Axl added looking down at the floor catching the attention of both of the others.

"What do you mean? He's just a governor. That's it," Bred said.

"Yeah, he is now. Didn't used to be." Axl took a deep breath thinking back to something, Dug thought. "I fought him once, you know."

"Mayor Mike?" Bred asked suspiciously. Axl nodded.

"Yup. Was trying out for Slam Masters. Made it through the second or third round, I can't remember. There were a lot of good wrestlers there from all over the state. But I had been training for a while and I really wanted it. So one day I get a call, said the higher-ups had taken a liking to me. Thought my character was good, unique. Really want to see what I'm made of.

So I said, shit, whatever you got, I can handle it. So I show up bright and early, get a quick workout in and then the promoter comes into the gym and says 'Axl, you're up. Get your boots on!' So I lace up, thinking I'm hot shit and walk out of the back and into the arena ready to go. And there he is standing in the center of the ring: Mike 'Macho' Haggar. He's as big as a damn house. Ripped. Wearing these giant brown boots and these green pants with one suspender over his shoulder. I damn near shit myself right there. I'd seen him fight on TV since I was a kid. Would even have his daughter come out after a win, but never had I thought in a million years that I'd have to come face to face with Macho Mike." Axl readjusts on the floor and Bred looks back to the door again shaking his head. Just imagining things, maybe.

"So I think to myself, this is it. I'm either going to get my ass kicked or I'm going to be the next heavyweight champion of Saturday Night Slam Masters. So I hop in the ring and Macho Mike starts asking questions. His voice is deep and gravely. 'Where you from originally?' and 'How long you've been wrestling?' but I don't say shit. He's just sizing me up. Trying to get into my head. I know that game. Played it before. So I just start circling him. Keeping my eye on where he is and how

far I am from the ropes. I go in for a grapple. He wraps his arms around me and I swear to god I can't breathe. I try hitting him in the head with my elbows but every inch of him feels like concrete. I'm not getting anywhere. So I'm kicking, headbuttin', nothing works. Right as I'm about to pass out, he slams me hard in the center of the mat. My head is swimming, but I'm aware enough to know that this may be my only shot. He thinks I'm out. Hell, I think I'm out, but I find my feet and get them underneath me. He's got his back towards me so I run and put my knee right in the center of his spine. He falls into the ropes but he's on me so quick I'm not ready. He grabs my head and pushes it down between his legs, grabs my waist, and in an instant, we are up in the air. All I see are the overhead lights spinning as he drives me back into the canvas. Got a concussion that day. Never stepped foot in the ring again. So yeah, there's a lot he can do." Axl picked up a stone and tossed it to a dark corner of the room. Bred and Dug sat quietly.

Dug took a moment to really get a good look at Axl. He was a big guy, fit, not someone you would want to find in a dark alley. He'd seen the Mayor on TV when he came back into town. Said that he was going to rid Metro City of the Mad Gear. Said that he'd take every precaution necessary to 'get the filth off

the streets'. Dug laughed. Thought he was doing it for votes. Won in a landslide, even, but now this stuff with his daughter. Dug didn't know what to think.

Suddenly, the back door swung open and Simons and Two P came rushing down the short steps and into the basement where they were sitting. Axl stood up quickly to face them. Holly Wood and J followed up behind them. Dug and Bred looked on.

Right when Axl was about to ask what all the commotion was about, the door behind came crashing in Bred and Dug. Once the dust cleared, Mayor Mike Haggar stood in the door frame arms out from his sides, fists clenched, teeth gritted. He looked back and forth between all the eyes that now looked on in disbelief. From the side, he sort of looked like Tom Selleck.

Bred, the only one to realize where he was and what he was doing, stepped forward and took the first punch right to Macho Mike's jaw. When it landed, he didn't flinch, only looked more agitated. Bred pulled back, rubbing his fist. Mike took the opportunity and threw a punch right into Bred's gut. Then another dropping Bred to his knees. Dug found his confidence and stepped forward only to have Macho Mike grab him by the throat and throw him to the side. Dug curled up and put his hands to his neck straining to catch his breath.

Mike stepped up to the next few in the room with Axl at the front. For a moment, Mike took Axl in, confused, his eyes squinted up, his mustache stretched across his mouth. For a second, Axl and Mayor Mike were in a world not like our own. An old world, one filled with sweat, leather, and specialized entrance music. Mike's mouth twitched into a confused smile. Axl took the pause and launched his fist to his throat. Mike tried to grab his arm before it landed but was a moment too late.

Mike fell back right into one of the giant crates that littered the basement. Wood splintered everywhere. Dug did his best to cover his face and his ears were filled with the groans of Mike's pain. Axl, feeling a bit more confident, juggled his fists back and forth waiting for the next round. Then Axl felt a bit of hot pain in his stomach. Looking down, he saw a small dagger protruding right above his belt. Looking up, Axl took the left fist of Mayor Mike Haggar to the right temple. Axl lost his sense of the world and fell to the ground. Mike gave him a final look, one of disappointment, and readied himself for the others.

Holly Wood flipped the dagger in his right hand and tapped his thigh with his left. He was weaker than him, Holly Wood knew, but he was faster and deadly with that dagger. He was ready. Mike brought his hands up in front of him, elbows to his

sides, machine guns like a boxer from the '20s. Holly Wood faked left, then right, and brought his dagger down hard. Mike flexed up and blocked crossing his wrists up. Holly Wood pulled back and tried to strike again, but Mayor Mike grabbed him by the waist and suplexed him to the ground, crumbling into Dug and Bred who were still trying to find themselves on the concrete floor.

J ran back outside leaving Two P the only one left standing. Blood was seeping from the wounds Mike had accrued and took a step towards him. Two P thought better of his situation and turned running out the back door flapping his red jacket behind him. Mike tried to grab it but Two P was too quick. He took a few steps up and out of the basement.

Dug's vision began to clear up. He was able to catch his breath after a few short hard bursts. He pulled himself up from the floor onto his hands and knees and looked around him. Holly Wood laid flat on his back neck in a position that it shouldn't be. Axl was lying face up, one knee up, rubbing his temple, and feeling an old pain he thought he'd gotten over. Dug looked over to Bred, he wasn't breathing.

Dug remembered the time when he was first in the Mad Gear gang. It was almost like a Boy Scout meeting. He was given a

time and a place to meet on a piece of scrap paper. At first, he sort of thought it was a joke. Who runs a gang like this, right? Like it was an after school program. They huddled around tables sitting on folded chairs. Damnd was there conducting the meeting. Saying if you aren't in it, then get out. Dug wasn't paying attention. His attention was caught up with the window that was just to his right. There was an old woman who was trying to cross the street but the traffic was too busy. She kept inching out bit by bit, but the light never changed. Finally, she decided she would just go for it. A car clipped her, bringing her to the ground. The contents of the bag scattered on the road. No one stopped to help her.

Dug shook the nonsense out of his head. He had to get up. He had to get out. In the distance, he heard a whistle. A whistle he'd recognized. It was Damnd. He was calling for reinforcements. Mayor Mike "Macho" Haggar was about to get his revenge.