

made a home halfway out the door

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made a home halfway out the door

by [Felix_J](#)

Summary

He has no exact opinion on clearing out both bases with mock-ups of humans the world's given them — him and Red are just on a different level, and it's not that killing NPCs is so different from killing zombies, it's that. All this Blue team-Red team business is only working as if trying to separate them, and that's stupid.

(Ash gets a potted rosebush from the Red team base.)

roses and smoke week, day 1: **roses** | smoke

Notes

SO s- i mean. roses and smoke week huh.

title from poem by tiredbtw on tumblr

Click. He almost doesn't hear the second part.

Red ducks without being told. He doesn't need to, as caught up as he is his aim is *good*, and the

NPCs aren't as much, at dodging.

That's it. None left.

"And what was the point of all this?" Red straightens up and brushes the dust off his suit, and of *course* he says that. Ash grins — and *he's safe* — and sits down in front of a chest that's... already empty. Raises his head back.

"Are all the chests like that? 'Cause if so, you might be right, there was really no point getting up here."

Red snorts and twists something in his hands, thinking. It shines with metal, a bit. Ash closes the chest and settles on it, and makes a point of looking right at him for a few seconds with his hands open.

Red drops the grenade in, almost carelessly. It's branded, small blue rectangle.

"It's good enough." He adds lightly. "And I mean good. Might make sense to check out the other base, the Red base, right?"

Ash nods, and his eyes slip. It's funny looking at Red now seeing the neon blue shine in his irises, just slightly muted by the sunglasses, a mark of the game he got stuck with Blue team for a while, even if they're just a different shade of it naturally, not so obnoxious. His own are red, annoying they can't rewire it. But they'll live.

He has no exact opinion on clearing out both bases with mock-ups of humans the world's given them — him and Red are just on a different level, and it's not that killing NPCs is so different from killing zombies, it's that. All this Blue team-Red team business is only working as if trying to separate them, and that's stupid.

"Yeah." He nods, and it's too easy to pick. "I'll go."

Red drops a bucket of water, watches it trickle down. "Be careful." He doesn't turn at him. Ash wants to say it's kind of weird of him to say after doing the exact same thing without a hitch. He says *thanks* instead, harshly. Or maybe not harsh, just... tired, a little. He leans down on the wooden railings next to Red.

It's not been two weeks. It feels off already, and he knows it's gonna get worse — the sick thing is he doesn't think he's gonna mind it when it does, being that close to someone for so long doesn't have to make it into dependency but it's gonna. He needs Red. He's more fine with it than he should be.

He just needs him not to die. He needs neither of them to die, and for how many times they did before when it was allowed, the chances aren't great. But he's *not* thinking about that.

"Don't miss me too much." He taps on Red's hand and jumps off into the waterfall. Red picks the water source back up before landing next to him.

He stays true to it and doesn't even try to poke in, after too long a walk, and where the NPCs don't see him they don't target him. Ash taps on the wall of this base, and it's really pretty plain obvious, plastic of just the color.

He's not sure if *talking* to them should make him feel worse about killing their... wait, wasn't Blue team exactly their enemies? They treat him as an equal in that they don't hold him at gunpoint instantly like Red, or like Red team with him — *confusing*. Red should've gone with Red, he

would've offered him if they figured the mechanics beforehand, but that's stress talk.

One of them leans her head up at him like a doll, the animation's all *wrong*, with the hands, the movement, and he thinks now the neon's a conscious choice, and he can respect that. Not the part where his own eyes glow red, but otherwise.

It would be cosy if any of them were actual players.

She thanks him for killing a Blue as a message in chat, and yeah, really they *more* than do not mind. He's... he thinks to ask her on what the problem between the teams is, but he's interested in their loot way more than the lore, and she looks like she *wants* him to ask with all her clipping voxels.

Ash moves up the side methodically, and a few follow him but don't care when he loots the chests, which's a nice change from the way Blue team swarmed him when *all he wanted was to get to his own teammate, really!* Don't mind the gun in his hand shooting in all their faces.

The girl from before is different in that she's the only one that talks, Ash assumes that makes her someone big in the place but he doesn't *fucking ask* until her message is a permanent thing stuck in his chat, and he's cautious it's just not gonna fade away unless he kills her.

Red didn't really tell him if he met something similar at his own, and it looks like a simple task that might end in her leading him to a trap or, alternatively, to the team's main stash. He'll take the gold or arrows from the trap. He goes.

At the top of the tower, last floor before the terrace identical to Blue team's, she stops in front of one of those small windows Ash thought *would* have been good to aim out of, that would've made a temporary base, before an NPC of Blue's jumped him, or maybe he jumped them, and, well, made all those dreams fly out the window.

It's cosy enough here. He pokes outside to check for a splat of red, thankfully like this Red doesn't have any walls to blur in with. Nothing. It's fine, Ash believes in his competence just enough to stay calm.

The quest's silly, really. Putting pieces of a pot back together reminds him of the early shots of the Archaeology update, in that it's clumsy and looks kinda cute, and maybe the NPC isn't a major deal among the Reds, she's just the one who's just a little closer to human, made with a touch of... care.

She offers him the flower pot after he's done, and he's surprised for a second and thinking it's the only thing he's going to get. *Then* she shows him the stash. He's still standing with a potted rosebush in his hands, with just the small cracks in it that feel strongly against his hands, and he's not sorry for having killed Blue team, still.

She wouldn't understand.

It's like watching a good movie, he tells himself. Then he hides the pot in his inventory that doesn't really have many empty slots anymore to fill, and checks the chests.

The grenades have red marks. They're the same otherwise.

Ash thinks the amount of players around him paired with the *knowledge* that's how it's gonna stay, and that he, both of them, may die at any moment, is starting to fuck with him fully.

He thanks her.

The lower floors are already being raided, he realises and has to run back up the stairs after roaming down, and there's a thought about that NPC girl somewhere behind the chant of *where's Reddoons*, and *how's he gonna get down into a swarm of zombies*, and *where would Red go then* again. He doesn't find her. He doesn't really *care* about her.

His teeth clack. He fails the bucket clutch that he didn't really expect to make.

He finds Red at the entrance, and they have all the time; as in, they have none of it but they make do anyway, to shout at each other for taking so long and *trying* to break Ash out of what might as well be a burning house, respectively. They don't attack the zombies while they don't attack them, just run. Ash only there notes there's bits of blood on Red's shirt, and there's probably more on him, soon to despawn now.

They hide in the next closest building, that for once doesn't look like a cheap caricature painted with only one crayon. Red's eyes go back to their usual sea blue.

Ash grips his hand with his back pressed against the inside of a brick wall, in an abandoned school, and it is like there is no divide between them, never was. Nothing at all except him, and himself, and the groans far in the dark.

"We *need* to barricade the rooms." Red breathes, loud and off, like he's still running.

"I can... We can..." Ash throws a look at the entrance, sharp and... he's not scared, he hasn't been since early in the beginning, it's just that knowing, *the* knowing, he'd say it makes him paranoid, except it's the kind of oversaturated vision that's *right*. They *can* die anytime.

"There's a bunch of chairs in here, downstairs too, all throughout the... well, this is a *school*." Chairs glitch zombies.

Red catches it without him saying. "I'll go get some." He gets up quick as he can, and the longest it takes to disentangle their hands, because as much as Ash needs to let him go his fingers feel cramped. Red waits on that one, patiently, silently, even though he could turn the joke so many ways.

Ash takes the pot out carefully when he's gone to redistribute the ammo in his inventory to really *use* it, draws a line against the cracks. They look like they've gotten thicker again. He's probably imagining it.

It takes its place on a windowsill with a few pots with plants absolutely wilted and dead, to the point he wouldn't guess what they used to be if he could.

He shows it to Red. Red finds it nice, hugs the pot with both of his hands and smiles, wide for once, like he wants to light up the room with it. Ash isn't sure if it's got something to do with his deteriorating sanity, but really, in a different world a version of him that's almost-him dated Red before, so. If he figures he likes Red before he has to admit he can't do a fucking thing without him, that won't be worse.

"It belonged to this girl, a Red team NPC." He explains shortly. "Funny small storyline with her. The writers... the mod makers, right, actually tried with that one."

"Oh." Red says softly. They remember the bases, silently, together, and it's just the screeches of chairs that don't let Ash sink into depression freely.

Red doesn't say sorry. He didn't kill her, he *shouldn't*. He knows he kinda means it, though.

Then they're too busy surviving through the night, and many times something crashes and burns in the school, and Ash tries out some of the newer arsenal he's gotten his hands on in the bases, and it *works*. The sound of zombies burning is *almost* music. He keeps cackling, and it's a bit manic, and Red laughs back at it.

The pot breaks. He finds it early morning, when zombies grow quiet enough, and the thorns jab at him when he laughs quietly, just too *high*, and tries to cover the buds with the soil like he's burying it. He thinks he wakes Red up, but *Red's* never gonna admit that.

"Can you help me... get rid of it?" He says, when Red stands next to him, against the windowsill. It goes with a rasp.

Red leans in, careful with his fingers, and extracts a single intact stem, then turns to tuck the rose away in Ash's suit pocket, and it's hard to read what's on his face.

Ash stares silently anyway and thinks it still cuts.

"Okay, Ash." Red says, quiet.

"And... I'm sorry, for killing so many of your Blue team members." He mumbles.

Red raises his head from where he's been staring at the bits of dirt thrown around. "They tried to kill you first, right, it's what matters." His voice's neutral now.

"You don't... fucking understand anything." It's not heated. It's nothing.

"No, I... think I do." Red chews on his lip, just slightly. Ash keeps staring at him.

"Yeah?"

"You're forgiven, then." Red isn't smiling, but his voice's light, half-joking, but it's that he can't really *joke*, so he just doesn't mean it fully. "There's no one to blame you here. We should move to the next base, I think."

Ash takes a deep breath and nods, slowly.

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