

New Eden 511

Chapter 511 Winding Down

As Alex and Kary both exited their pods, stretching their weary bodies, Alex made an observation.

"I think our bodies are getting lighter. Is it just me?"

Kary finished stretching herself before jumping out of the pod and doing a few hops in place, trying to see if she felt lighter.

"I'm not sure. It might just be you that's putting on some muscle. I still have some heft to move around. Plus, these two..." she said, pointing at her breasts.

Alexander chuckled, jumping out of his pod, before walking up behind her and grabbing them.

"I can help you carry them around if you need. I'll be like a second bra, hehehe."

Kary elbowed him gently in the ribs, eliciting an 'Oof' from him, before giggling and breaking away from his grasp.

"I'm sure you would love that, wouldn't you? What about you wanting to go slow in our relationship? Has that ship already sailed, mister perv?"

Alex rubbed the back of his head wryly.

"Hey, I blame you for that. You are the one washing off on me."

Kary winked at him, not even answering his blame, and bolted toward the shower.

"Tsk. Little Vixen. Not even going to refute my argument." He grumbled, half mockingly to himself.

He then followed her, undressing on the way to his bathroom. After a long shower, with much-appreciated fun, Alex wanted to take a hot bath as well, to help relax a bit of the stress his body had been through these past few days, be it in or out of New Eden.

Kary pursed her lips in thought before choosing to join him. The bath was large enough to fit three people loosely, so being the two of them in, there wasn't a problem at all.

The water pressure in the penthouse impressed Alex, as he had expected it would take a while to fill up such an enormous bathtub, but it only took three minutes. Once it was full and steaming hot, he let himself slide in, the heat of the water calming his muscles and nerves instantly.

He let out a satisfied sigh as Kary slipped in next to him, echoing his sigh.

"This feels amazing. I haven't had a bath in so long," Alex said, his eyes closed as he enjoyed the moment."

"Same for me. It's like we don't have time for minor pleasures like this anymore."

"We should take the time," Alex argued.

Kary simply nodded.

They stayed there for ten minutes, not saying a peep, as the hot water wrinkled their skin but soothed their soul.

"I was supposed to have a meeting with the chairwoman of EG today. But I got another email from her office, saying that it had to be rescheduled. I still don't know what this is about."

Kary tilted her head toward him.

"Maybe she recognizes your achievements and wants to make you the poster boy for the future ads of New Eden. That would be quite the lucrative offer if you want my opinion."

Alex thought about it. Of course, he wouldn't say no if they offered him.

But something deep inside him told him it wasn't in link with that at all. He almost feared going to this meeting.

He was glad Jack had offered to go with him.

Thinking about the old man, he remembered he should go have himself tested with his new form, to help himself find the limits of what he could do when melded with Morpheus on this side.

"I'll have to call Jack after this. I want to go get my new abilities tested. See what I can do on this side with it."

Kary pondered for a while, before nodding her head once.

"That's not a bad idea. I should use that time to test out a few things myself. I've been wanting to figure out how much of my fire magic I can use. Being in a controlled environment to do so wouldn't be a bad thing."

"Mhm," Alex mumbled in agreement.

"But for now, let's just enjoy the warm water."

Kary giggled, latching onto his arm and closing her eyes again. They let themselves soak in the hot bath for another fifteen minutes until the water started cooling down.

After getting out and drying themselves, they went to sleep a bit, since it was still around four in the morning. A bit of shut-eye wasn't a bad idea.

Alex set his phone alarm to seven and cuddled up to his beautiful redhead before falling asleep.

Meanwhile, inside New Eden, an old power couple was having a blast in the forests around Bastion City. OldGrizzly and ShadowFang were a few miles out of the outer walls, fighting off a group of wildcats, several times stronger than themselves.

OldGrizzly was already up to level thirty-five, and ShadowFang was a smidge higher, at level thirty-eight. But the monsters they were fighting had levels between forty-five and fifty.

But no matter how they pounced on the two players, they could not even land a hit on them. It was like a game of cat and mouse, only with much higher stakes, and the mice were fighting back.

When the last wildcat fell, ShadowFang brushed her hair back, readjusting the bun on the back of her head.

"I see you still have just as much skill as you used to when we first met in Bahrain. I guess age hasn't made you destitute, yet, old fool."

ShadowFang teased her husband often, calling him names that many would perceive as insults. But OldGrizzly was more than used to it and answered in kind.

"If I had been any slower in my reflexes that day, we wouldn't be here, reminiscing about it, you cunning old fox. How many times did you try to take my life after that? Five? Six?"

ShadowFang brought her hand to her mouth, letting out a soft giggle behind it.

"That you know of, my love. Your natural constitution has saved you many more times. But poison just doesn't take on you," she said, her smile charming but venomous.

"Hah! Poison. As if such a weak thing could kill me. I got bit by a rattlesnake once. And after a week of agony, it died," OldGrizzly answered, stowing his weapons.

He then walked over to his wife and embraced her tightly, smacking her ass and kissing her. He would never act so uncouthly, usually.

But here, in New Eden, away from prying eyes, he couldn't care less. And his wife loved it.

After exchanging kisses for a few minutes, ShadowFang broke away from him, reluctantly.

"We are getting closer to our target of level forty. We should keep hunting for the few hours we have left. You still have to meet that witch tomorrow."

OldGrizzly sighed in exasperation.

"I know. I have an idea why she called me for a meeting, but I can already tell she'll annoy me."

ShadowFang winked at him.

"I could make sure she never bothers you again if you wanted."

OldGrizzly laughed heartily.

"I'm sure you could. But for now, she is still useful. Maybe later down the road, if your skills haven't waned by then."

They laughed together as they went back to hunting the local wildlife.

Meanwhile, outside New Eden, Constantine Levesque sneezed.

"Is someone thinking about me?" she wondered, going back to her work.

Chapter 512 Strange News

Waking up to his alarm clock, Alex spun over to shut it off, before grumbling himself awake. He still wasn't much of a morning person and still wished he could stay in bed till noon.

But he at least had the discipline in himself to not fall prey to these thoughts.

Getting up to go take a leak, he shook his head awake, planning his day. He didn't have to go to the gym that day, since he went the day before, but he still would be busy.

After flushing, he left the room without making noise, not wanting to wake up Kary just yet. Alex tiptoed his way downstairs, heading to the kitchen.

He started a pot of coffee, while he made some crepe batter. Looking inside the fridge, he also noticed there were some strawberries left, and some heavy cream.

"Hmm. Might as well go all in."

He pulled out the cream, dumping it in a bowl with some sugar and a bit of vanilla extract, before violently whisking the shit out of it. He didn't want to use the electric mixer, since it made such a ruckus.

After whisking for five minutes, he finally reached the desired consistency, and shoved the bowl into the fridge, to let it set and cool, as he cut the strawberries into slices.

Once the fruit was ready, he tossed it back into the fridge as well, before starting up the stove. It was crepe time.

It didn't take him very long to make a few golden brown crepes, which he garnished with the strawberries and the whipped cream, before walking his way back upstairs. He made his way to the bed, two plates in hand, and leaned in to kiss Kary.

"Good morning, beautiful. Can I interest you in some sweet breakfast? There is coffee downstairs as well, for after, if you'd wish."

Kary yawned herself awake, cracking her eyes open, before smiling widely.

"How were you still single? Any woman would have snatched you right up had they known how affectionate you are."

Alex shrugged in response. He never had been looking for a girlfriend, really.

One just fell on his lap. Or should he say Astaroth's lap?

In any case, he was glad he wasn't already taken when he met her. She might not be perfect, with her mighty bossiness, but she was fine for him.

As Kary sat up in bed, taking one plate, which already had utensils in it, she cut herself a piece of the crepe, forking it up with a nice little strawberry slice, and a bit of whipped cream.

When she put the bite into her mouth, she let out a small moan of pleasure.

"This is heavenly. Did you make the whipped cream yourself? I don't remember you having any."

Alex nodded, as he stuffed a bit inside his mouth as well.

'Mmm. It IS good. I outdid myself.'

They ate their breakfast, being careful not to drop any in the bed, since strawberry juice stained badly and whipped cream would be a mess to clean as well. Once they were done, Alex took the plates and went back downstairs to clean up, while his girlfriend washed her face in the bathroom.

She came back down just as he finished pouring the two cups of coffee, hugging him from behind before grabbing hers and taking a slow sip of the hot beverage.

She let out a content sigh after her sip, her eyes closed in delight.

"I could wake up like this every morning, you know?" she told him.

Alex chuckled. He would love to, but he knew full well his body wouldn't be as lenient every day.

"I could try, but no promises. I never was an early riser."

Kary giggled before heading over to the living room, where she sat in front of the huge TV. She opened up the television, wanting to check the morning news.

As the television opened up, a weird news report was on. As the woman was trying to give the weather predictions of the day, standing on a not-too-busy corner downtown, a homeless-looking man ran up behind her, yelling his lungs out.

"I saw them! Giants rats! Eyes as red as blood, shining in the darkness! They were monsters! Monsters, I'm telling you!"

The camera cut back to the studio as some men were trying to get the homeless-looking man away from the woman.

The anchorman tried playing it off.

"Well, it seems Caroline picked the wrong corner for her weather report this morning. We'll be back to her once the situation has calmed down again. For now, let us go to sports. You're up, Phil!"

As the screen shifted once more to the sports guy, Kary muted the news, turning around to look at Alex. Her face scrunched up in worry.

"Do you think..."

Alex also paled.

"It's not impossible. But I think David would have already called me. There is no way he wouldn't have found out by—"

As he was speaking those words, his phone suddenly rang on the kitchen counter.

Alexander took it in hand, looking at the screen, and his face became grave. On the screen, the caller ID appeared.

It said Private ID, but Alex knew only one person who hid their caller ID. And that was David.

Answering the call, Alex put it on speaker.

"Yes, David?"

From the other side, David's tired voice sounded.

"You saw it too, didn't you? On the news?"

Sighing loudly, Alex responded.

"Yes. We just saw it. Is it a case of hallucination, or is it a case for our attention?"

"Would I be calling you for a hallucination, Alex?"

Alexander sighed again.

"No. I doubt you would. When and where?"

Alex already knew David had called him so they could go take care of it. So there was no use turning around the pot.

"Give me half an hour, and I'll be at your place. This shouldn't be too far from your building. I know a way down there without catching attention, as well."

"Okay. See you in thirty minutes, then."

David hung up, and Alex looked annoyed.

Just when he thought he could enjoy a pleasant morning, with an excellent coffee, a super breakfast, and a calm environment, life threw a wrench into his plans.

"Did you want to come?" he asked, turning around.

But Kary was already up from the sofa, downing her coffee like it was a glass of water. Putting the cup on the counter and drying her lips with a napkin, she smiled at him.

"Of course, love. I wouldn't let you go hunt alone. Drink your coffee and let's get ready."

Alexander nodded his head, copying her earlier move and chugging his coffee.

What a hell of a day would this be.

Chapter 513 Entry Point To The Nest

The half-hour passed by so slowly, as both Kary and Alexander stressed for the battle to come. It wasn't like rats scared them, but the meaning of the battle itself did.

They would need to battle in the middle of a city, where people lived, and make sure the battle didn't overflow into a crowded area. To make matters worse, they would have to remain as unseen as possible.

Even if the world started seeing that things were changing, David insisted it still wasn't time yet to be out in the open about it. He kept saying he was waiting for a specific moment.

Whenever that was, was anyone's guess.

But as the last minutes ticked down, and the couple took the elevator to the lobby, a hooded figure entered the lobby as they exited the elevator.

Alexander recognized the hurried gait of the man and whistled lightly to catch his attention. David stopped his hurried gait toward the counter, hearing the whistle, and turned to face the direction it had come from.

Seeing his quarries coming toward him, he stood in place, waiting for them.

As they both reached him, he turned back toward the entrance doors as they walked next to him.

"Good, I didn't have to wait. Let's go. I know the place and now a shortcut."

Alex waited till they were out of earshot of people, before asking David a question that had been on his mind for the last half hour.

"Did you know?"

David turned his head slightly, eyeing Alex from the corner of his eye.

"Did I know what? You'll have to be a bit more specific. I know a shit-load of things."

"Did you know something would happen this close to us, this soon? Or is this new to you?"

David faced forward again, his face thoughtful.

"I knew it was coming, but I wasn't sure when. This exact breach happened last time, too, but authorities discovered it only later. The rat infestation had become incredible by then, and it took the army to take them down.

"I don't know what happened that we discovered it sooner this time. Could be something drove the homeless underground sooner, like an attack by superhuman people on a bank, in broad daylight."

David side-eyes Alex as he said that, with a snicker, but resumed his talking fast enough.

"Or he could have been looking for something down there, and he escaped the rats, which he might not have the last time. I have no way of knowing the specifics. What I know, though, is that the rat infestation will be much more manageable this time, and we should be fine just the three of us."

Kary looked at him warily.

"When do you intend to tell us more of what you know? I think we have passed the point of trust where you can at least divulge the events to come, and their times. Don't you think it would be better if we could plan for them beforehand?"

David chortled.

"It's not that I don't want to tell you. I would love to tell you more. But what info I have on these events might no longer be relevant. This situation is enough of an example of this. Normally, the rat infestation shouldn't have started for another month or two, by previous estimations.

"I don't know what's causing this, but it seems the veil between the two worlds is thinning faster than last time. Mana is becoming thicker here, at a much faster pace than last time. I can feel its density climb by the day.

"This may help us become stronger much faster, but it also means the events I witnessed last time will happen sooner, and the convergence might also come sooner."

The worry in his voice was genuine, and Kary lay off of him. He might be a taciturn bastard-ish man, but it was clear as day that he still cared about humanity.

They had been walking for a few minutes now, and they reached a part of downtown that was a bit more rundown. David turned right into a dark alleyway, where light barely made it to the ground, with the height of the nearby buildings.

Halfway into the alley, he turned left, into a small dip. In this small depression of the building and alley, a large metal box, with a trap door on top.

The large metallic box of rusted black steel had seen better days. The flaked-away paint on it littered the surrounding ground, as the steel under it had rusted it off.

A large metallic lock sealed the door shut, which also looked like it wouldn't budge, with all the rust on it. But this was barely an issue for anyone present.

Reaching forward, David grabbed the lock in his hand and yanked on it, shattering it like it was plastic.

"This leads to the old maintenance tunnels under the city, from where they accessed the metro tunnels and the major sewer lines. No one has opened it in years, since they mostly send bots down there now.

"My guess is that the homeless dude went in through one of these similar access points in town and wandered into the sewer lines, where they found the rats last time. But we'll be closer to the nest from this side."

Alex tugged on the door, pulling it open, his face over the hole. He got assaulted by a draft of stale air, mixed in with the smell of decay, rust and human dejection.

He immediately gagged as the smell hit his nose and almost keeled over to throw up. To which David laughed, calling him 'weak sauce'.

"What's the matter, tough guy? Can't stand the smell of a bit of shit?"

Kary frowned at him.

"You sound like the smell doesn't bother you. It sure bothers me... Do we have to go down there? Did you bring masks or something to cover our faces?"

David glanced at her.

"I've smelled way worse than this. If you can't stand the smell, you are more than welcome to stay out here. I'm sure I can handle it on my own, even if I would appreciate the backup."

Alex raised his hand, still gagging lightly.

"Nah. Eurgh. I'm fine, I swear. Eurgh. I'll come with you. Just give me a second to adapt."

Kary shook her head.

"If he's going, then I am too. I'll just have to breathe as little as possible."

David grinned widely.

"Alrighty then! Let's go kill some rodents!"

After blurting this, he jumped into the hole, feet first, disappearing into the darkness.

Chapter 514 The Unpleasant Meeting

While this was happening downtown, Jack Boudreau was being driven by Guo to the EG headquarters halfway across town. He was wearing formal attire, and his face showed no emotion, as per usual.

From the front, Guo looked in the mirror at his boss.

"Sir. Should I go in with you? Or do you want to go alone?"

Jack looked back into the mirror.

"I'll be fine on my own. I doubt Constantine Levesque will do anything rash, even if she has the power to do so. And even if she does, I trust you can be in that room in a breath's time."

His assistant smiled at him, his eyes almost closing shut from the action.

"Of course, Mr. Boudreau. There isn't much anyone can do about me going where I want in this world. Well, at least for now."

Jack looked at Guo in the mirror, thinking about how they had met. Guo used to be a special agent in China, where he served in a division of the government that dealt with abnormal phenomena.

They had met in an incident in a rural Chinese village where Jack and his wife had been on vacation. A strange creature had attacked the sauna they were at, and Guo had also been there, relaxing.

Jack had offered the man a job as his assistant, after seeing how well the man fought and doing a quick background check on him.

Guo had just retired back then, and had been looking for something to do to fill his days. Little had he known he was embarking on a job that would require him to use a lot of his past skills and training.

But Jack had put the man to good use over the years he had worked for him, and Guo wasn't bitter about being so active. On the contrary, it made his life have some meaning.

He had known only combat all his life, and now that he could use it for someone's sake, whilst doing other annex tasks, he was content.

The drive ended, as Guo pulled the black sedan into EG's parking lot, going toward the VIP reserved section. He flashed their IDs to the guard, and the man let him through.

Parking in front of the door, Guo disembarked the vehicle, heading to Jack's door, and pulling it open for him. Jack exited the vehicle, straightening his outfit as he rose to his feet, looking up toward the enormous building.

"Stay in the car for now. If I need you, I'll signal you through the watch."

"As you wish, Sir," Guo responded, doing a quick bow.

Jack walked into the building with a resolute visage and a steady gait. He knew why Constantine had called him.

He had caught her techs snooping around his surveillance systems, only blocking her from the secretive projects. But he wondered what prompted her to look into his projects at all.

'It was only around the time I sent extra help to Mr. Magnus, too. Is she interested in the boy as well?' he wondered as they guided him to an elevator.

The two men escorting Mr. Boudreau brought him to a meeting room, this one much smaller than the meeting room they had used for the big meeting last time. But it was also much more luxurious.

He waited there for ten minutes before Constantine finally made her appearance.

He looked at her disapprovingly.

"Ms. Levesque, I am a busy man. I don't quite appreciate being kept waiting when I am on time for a meeting you set up."

Constantine flashed a bright and warm smile at him as she sat down in the chair opposite to Jack.

"I apologize, Mr. Boudreau. Another important call held me up. I trust you know how it is to run a business."

Jack huffed a bit at her response. It was obviously a brush-off.

"Regardless. I would love to know why you wanted to meet me so badly and still show up late."

Constantine faked a pout.

"My dear Jack. Surely you jest. Can I not wish to speak with one of my biggest shareholders for other matters than business? Do I look so rigid as to only think business?"

Jack's gaze hardened.

"Come to the point, Constantine, or I am leaving. I don't have time for a casual chat these days. I am very busy."

His icy tone wiped the smile off Constantine's face as she became serious. The coldness in her gaze didn't come shy to Jack's, and that was saying a lot, considering he had seen some shit in his days.

"Fine. No more turning around the pot then. Yes, I have noticed you have become busier these days. Care to share with me why that is?"

"My business owes no accountability to yours, Constantine. You hold no shares in it and I don't have to answer these questions."

Constantine smirked. She pulled out a tablet from under the table, eliciting a curious frown from Jack, and tapped it a few times.

She then smiled at him, not saying a peep until Jack's phone beeped in his ear.

Jack received an email stating some of his larger shareholders had suddenly sold out to some big tech company, and the shareholder composition had shifted. EG now held thirty percent of his shares, which made them the biggest shareholder behind himself, at fifty-one percent.

"I am now. Are you more willing to share what all the movement in your construction companies is about? She said, a smirk on her lips.

Jack's face darkened as his presence of will flared up. Unlike his usual presence, Jack's aura had a bit of mana laced into it this time, unbeknownst to him.

"You had better have a good reason to do this, Constantine, or I will drive EG into the ground. My enterprises are not yours to meddle with."

Constantine laughed heartily.

"They are now. I simply wanted to know it from you. But I already have a good guess. But I am curious to know why you are helping Mr. Magnus build his apocalypse shelter. What's in it for you?"

Jack shivered. She knew more than she let on, and that was worrisome. But he wouldn't let her boss him around.

"This meeting is over. Since this doesn't concern EG, but my company, if you want to know, you can set up a meeting with my assistant, and we'll talk about it then. Until then, I will be leaving.

Constantine looked angered at how he brushed her off, but she was still the smaller of the two players in this room. And she already knew Jack's assistant wouldn't give her the time of day.

'I'll find out soon enough, Jack. You only wait.'

Chapter 515 Underground Homeless Camp

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Alexander and Kary both climbed down the ladder into the maintenance lines, instead of acting stupid like David and jumping down. Even if the risk of injury to their tougher bodies was minimal, they preferred the cautious route.

When they arrived in the underground tunnel, Alex quickly noticed this wasn't a small sewer line. The maintenance tunnel was as large as a metro tunnel and extended out of sight in three directions.

Kary made her way down soon after, and the lack of light crept her out.

"Want me to make some light for us?" she asked, raising one hand to her face.

David looked at her, smirking.

"Just don't burn yourself and don't drain all your mana before the fight. You would be useless if all you did was to be our torch until there, and then become a burden."

Kary lit two fireballs in her hand, the size of softballs, her face morphing into a mask of anger.

"Or maybe I incinerate you here and deal with this alone with Alex. That sounds like a good plan, doesn't it?"

David backpedaled, his smirk quickly disappearing.

"Whoa! Chill out, woman, before you turn into a human torch."

Alex grabbed Kary's left shoulder while snickering.

"Don't listen to him, Kary. You know he's just a jerk. Yes, I would love some light on our way there. I don't think this idiot brought flashlights."

David frowned at the insult.

"Hey, you live closer. I would have stood out with a backpack full of tunnel-crawling supplies. Couldn't you bring flashlights?"

Kary clicked her tongue at him, extinguishing one fireball in her hands and reducing the other to a smaller flame.

What direction are we heading? Straight, left, or right?"

David pointed to the left, keeping his mouth shut, lest she get angry again and actually try to burn him. Once he had pointed, Kary walked next to him, ignoring him entirely, as she walked down the left tunnel.

Alex started following behind, an enormous grin on his lips. He stopped a moment next to David, turning his head towards him.

"Isn't she hot when she gets mad?"

David just looked at him like he was the biggest dolt in the universe.

"You're a world-class idiot. You know that, right?"

Alex shrugged before resuming his walking behind Kary, catching up with her in a few steps.

David soon caught up to the pair as well, since he was the one that was supposed to guide them.

"How far until we reach the nest, David?" Alex asked, his nerves tensing up in anticipation.

David didn't even turn his head to reply.

"We are quite a ways away. We first need to get down to the second level. On this level, we'll have only the tunnels to the sewers and the surface-level metros. The rats are most definitely at the second layer, where the tunnels are larger and there is less passage. Those are the maintenance tunnels for the metros' electrical systems."

Nodding his head, Alex looked forward again. He wondered how they would go down to the next sub-level.

Was it going to be another ladder? Or would it be a branching tunnel?

The trio came upon a bend in the tunnel, and David raised his arm to stop them.

"Around this corner should be a small underground regrouping of tents and makeshift huts that the homeless use as a haven. Kary. You should stop that flame of yours.

"When we pass through, they might bug us, since we don't look like them, but ignore them and keep going. The tunnel that leads down to the next level is just beyond their camp."

Kary immediately extinguished her flame, sending them back into complete darkness. Their eyes rapidly readjusted, if only faintly, allowing them to see a dozen feet in front of them, where some light came from around the bend.

As they resumed their walk, David in the lead, they went around the corner, coming face-to-face with a small camp. The camp comprised close to a dozen huts and about three times as many tents, in a ramshackle layout, that would make any city planner want to tear their eyes out.

Many homeless people were wandering about, some lazing around large steel drums, in which a weak fire burned, with god knows what material burning in it. Others were sitting in the huts and tents, eating food out of cans that looked barely edible.

Kary's heart pinched, as she looked at all these people in such an unfavourable position. She knew the homeless situation in Montreal was bad, but she had never imagined it was this bad.

As they started wandering across the settlement, many eyes turned in their direction. Some were curious, others scornful, some even envious.

But David and Alexander's menacing glares were enough to keep most of these moochers at bay. But only most of them.

A group of four larger-looking homeless walked up and blocked David's path. Their dirty clothes reeked of alcohol, which who knew how they got hold of it, and their teeth were rotted yellow and black, visibly lacking any form of care.

The one in front, a large-statured man with a fat stomach and puffed-up cheeks, stepped one foot closer to David. Already, Kary could see a lot of the homeless men and women had looked away.

These four meant trouble, and even the locals knew.

"You look lost, little man. Maybe you need me and my buddies to escort you out of this place, at a fee of course," the big man said, snorting in laughter.

David looked at him with his most dreadful stare.

"You better get out of my way, chump. You are way out of your league here."

The three men behind the fat one were eyeing Kary with lustful eyes, their mouths watering at the thought of getting a moment alone with her. Alex was already feeling a mix of disgust and hatred toward them rise as he stepped in front of her, staring them down.

The fat guy, however, didn't look impressed with David's glare and threat.

"What are two scrawny-looking dudes, and one lady, going to do to me and my boys? Call the police maybe? They never come down here. You are in the wrong part of the city, to be making threats, 'chump.'" The fat guy replied, taking another step forward.

The three men behind him started circling around David, trying to bar the path back for Alex and Kary. The situation was rapidly going from bad to worse.

'Do we need to fight them off?' Kary wondered.

She wasn't against teaching the gross men a lesson, but they were still human. And she knew Alex and David wouldn't hesitate to kill them if push came to shove.

'Is there anything else we can do?'

Chapter 516 Too Big, Too Early

David stared the fatso in front of him down, his mind already trying to figure a way out of this without resorting to violence. He couldn't care less if these scum died or not, but he knew this would only bring unwanted attention to him.

But as the three other men wrapped around their little group, David knew there was no more time to think. He either acted now, with the roughness of a hammer, or they would force him into the sharpness of a sword.

Kary was watching two of the men looking at her from much closer now, drool coming out of their mouths.

One of them took a step forward, extending his hand toward her.

"Come here, babe. Don't stay with those two pipsqueaks. I'll show you what a real man tastes like. You'll never want to go back up to the top world."

His hand almost reached Kary, before a clawed hand grabbed it in midair. Attached to that clawed hand was an angry young man, whose face radiated in such hatred that Kary wasn't sure he was in control anymore.

"If you put your filthy hands on her, it'll be the last thing you'll ever do. Understand me, scum?"

Alexander's voice came out so low it was closer to a growl than actual words. That's when Kary knew he was already on the cusp of losing it.

The man snickered toward Alex, before yanking on his arm. But nothing budged.

The small, clawed hand grasping his forearm was like a vice, in which his arm was slowly getting crushed. His face morphed to fear as the pressure upped another degree, and he heard a clear *crack* come from his forearm.

He heard the sound before the pain even registered in his brain. But once it did, he started wailing out in pain, his other hand punching at Alexander's face repeatedly.

But Alex looked unmoved at the strikes. Like they came from a child.

Kary saw him raise his other hand and flatten it out like a blade. She knew he was about to commit the irreparable.

David, on the other side of her, could see this happening from the corner of his eye and knew he needed to act as well before all hell broke loose.

If Alex lost control here, not only would he waste a tremendous amount of mana on human garbage, but there was also no telling if he would stop at these four.

The fat man heard the cracking and the screaming and snapped out of his staring contest.

"What the fuck?! Boys! Kill them!"

But before any of them could take a single step, a bright, blinding light erupted from the middle of this minor scuffle, forcing the homeless thugs to shield their eyes, as David and Alex turned their heads, squinting at Kary.

Standing in the middle of them, Kary reopened her eyes, which flared up like two miniature suns, as her arms and hair glowed a bright yellowish orange, fire rising from them like an inferno.

Her hair fluttered upward, burning like a bonfire, as she extended her arms outward, the fire on it rising almost to the ceiling of the place, twenty feet in the air.

"Enough! Alex, let go of the trash. Don't lose yourself to empty threats and dirty bastards. David, lead us forward," she said, looking at each of the guys.

She then turned her head to each thug, one after the other.

"And if any of you get funny ideas, I swear on god, I will turn you to cinders faster than you can reflect on your actions. Do I make myself clear?!"

The four men, even the one who had been crying out in pain, were in utter shock. The woman before them, which they had considered as nothing more than a plaything, was on fire!

And she didn't even seem to care.

Panic grew in them, before they bolted away from there, Alex releasing his grip on the crybaby's arm. But another problem arose.

Everyone around, who had been turning their eyes away until Alex broke one of the thugs' arms, was now staring in terror at the flaming woman in the middle of their little camp.

General panic spread like wildfire in straw, as every homeless person in the underground camp suddenly started screaming and running. No one wanted to stay close to the burning woman, who looked to them like the incarnation of the devil.

The camp emptied, David watching as almost a hundred homeless people upped and left, running over others, and tents and whatever stood on their way to the direct route out.

The stampede almost resulted in some of them getting trampled over, which would have been terrible, since they mostly looked so fragile that a simple sneeze could kill them. But as they fled, silence came over the camp.

They could hear only the sound of the blazing inferno that was Kary. A sound which rapidly faded away as Kary extinguished her flames.

But Alex smelled a bit of burnt hair odour, wafting off of Kary. When he leaned in to see if she was okay, he could see her wince in pain a bit.

The very tip of her hair was now singed slightly, as if she had passed too close to a campfire, and a few superficial burns speckled her forearms. It was clear as day that she hadn't controlled the flames entirely.

"Are you alright?" he asked her, already knowing the answer.

"I'm fine. I thought I could control the fire, but it was harder than I had imagined. But I wasn't quite ready to go this big, it seems. I'll be fine once we get some ointment on these minor burns."

Alex looked around, searching the tents visually, hoping he could see water bottles or anything that would temporarily soothe her pain. After a bit of looking, he found a tent that had a pack of water bottles and an almost empty bottle of burn ointment.

He was lucky to find those, as whoever had them hid them under some boxes, most likely to hide them from the other squatters. He quickly emptied a water bottle on her arms, trying to cool her down, before applying the ointment.

But David looked impatient, suddenly.

"Make it quick. I have a feeling releasing that much mana might have lit us up like a beacon to our prey. We need to move soon."

Alex frowned, wondering how rats could have felt the mana at all, but didn't question David. He knew more about them than he did, after all.

"I'll go as fast as I can, but I'm not leaving until I at least applied ointment on her burns. She did this for us. It's the least I can do."

David waved his hand at him dismissively.

"Whatever. Just hurry it up."

And so he did.

Chapter 517 Tides Of Fur

After mending her burns superficially, Alexander helped Kary back to her feet. They turned and nodded to David, who sported a look of both impatience and restlessness.

But as they were about to resume their trek, something caught Alex's eye, in a dark corner of the large opening they were in. Something moving.

He raised his hand to signal the other to wait and turned his head toward the movement he had seen. But nothing was there anymore.

"Why are you holding us up? We still have half an hour of walking to do. Let's get to it."

David was getting jittery with anticipation. Even if the goblins were smarter than his current target, they had also been in much smaller numbers. And that was saying a lot, given they had been almost fifty.

The rats would number well over a hundred, in this case. Of that much, he was sure.

"I saw something move fast in the corner. But It's gone now."

David scanned the room with his eyes, and amongst the trash, collapsed tents, and badly built cabins, he couldn't see anything.

Kary reignited a small fireball over her hand, wincing in slight fear of her own power, but maintained the spell for the sake of a light source.

Looking around once more, Alex couldn't see anything.

"There is too much garbage in the way. I can't see everything. Maybe I saw falling trash?"

"All right. Enough paranoia. There's nothing here. Let's move on."

Alexander nodded his head, still unconvinced, but resumed walking. But to take no chances, he half-melded with Morpheus, wanting to try something out.

In the faint fire-lit space, anyone seeing his face shift and move a bit, as his nose flattened and his ears widened, would have had nightmares for weeks to follow. But he did it behind David, and in front of Kary, keeping him half-covered.

Alex opened his mouth and a whistle, so high-pitched it was soundless, shot out of it. As it bounced around the room, it hit something that started moving and screeching in pain from the sound bursting in its sensitive ears.

Suddenly, three hidden creatures lunged at Alex from the hidden trash and tents, where they had been hiding.

"Watch out!" Alex shouted.

He ducked out of the way of two rats and batted another one away, which would have collided with Kary if he had dodged it.

The rats were the size of cats and they screeched as they skittered around the trash-filled floor, going in and out of sight before they came back charging at the one that had hurt their eardrums.

David looked at them, and his face dropped.

"Kill them! Quick!"

He dashed at one of the running rats, and quickly punched down on it, smashing its head into the concrete ground, making a mess of his jacket as the blood and viscera burst out on him.

Alex undid his meld with Morpheus, going for a partial meld with White, this time, and his hands changed to claws, and he tore into another one, while Kary burned the last one to cinders in an instant.

David stood back up, his head spinning all around the room, his eyes looking for something.

"What is it, David?"

"Shut up!" he responded.

As Alex shut his mouth, a bit insulted at the man's brusqueness, he suddenly heard something in the distance. And he wasn't the only one to hear it, as it echoed in the room they were in.

"Fuck! There goes our element of surprise. Get ready to fight, they are coming to us," David said, taking his jacket off for ease of movement.

Alex could feel the concrete under his feet vibrate lightly, as something was stampeding in their direction.

'How many are there if the ground shakes at their approach?'

But there was something he was misunderstanding. He thought all the rats would be the size of the three they had just killed, which were already much larger than any normal rat he had ever seen.

But when the first ones trickled into the large room, he grasped the reason for the trembling ground. The ones that reached them first were the size of large dogs!

Looking at the comparison, he understood he had most likely struck down only a baby of these humongous rodents, and he gulped.

Yes, they were still just rats, and their thinking process was very limited. But a rat this size could most definitely take down a human being, let alone a bunch of them.

David raised his hands, his eyes flashing a dull green, and skeletons poured out of what little shadow he was projecting. One, then two, then four, then seven undead poured out, until one last one did, much better armed than the others, and David slumped a bit after it emerged.

"I can't hold them out for too long! We need to end this quickly!" he shouted out before pulling out a metallic bident from god knows where and lunging into the incoming rats.

Alex hadn't kept the sword David had offered him the last time, and he now had to fight with just his own means. Not that it bothered him.

His hands were lethal enough in their current form, that much he had already proven. Kary also no longer had the wand.

But she had trained many a time, and she had a better grasp on her control over fire. Of course, it wasn't enough to wreath herself in it, but it was enough to turn any enemy to ash promptly.

As David and his undead lunged into a front-line position, Alex decided he was better off dispatching those that slipped past his little barricade of bone, and started darting from side to side, slashing into rats like a rabid werewolf.

Kary stood back, shooting lances of fire at anything that escaped both the guys' purview, and occasionally burned the bodies left behind, as the stench was already making the air hard to breathe.

But their troubles were only starting.

Chapter 518 Rats Everywhere

The more they fought back the rats, the more the darned rodents adapted to their methods. It took only a few minutes before the rats started coursing around David and his skeletal forces.

The development didn't escape him, and he tried repositioning many times, to no avail. The rats seemed to adapt, which shouldn't have been the case.

'Something's different from before. But what?' David thought.

He quickly adjusted his combat posture, going from a barricade mode to a hunting mode, and split up his skeletons in pairs, keeping the odd one out with himself. The death knight, which was slightly stronger than the last time he summoned him, was fine on its own, and he let it be.

But by doing this, the pressure on Alex and Kary went up a few notches, and even if they could kill the rats quickly, it wasn't fast enough. They would get overrun fast.

Over thirty carcasses littered the ground soon enough, burned or torn to shreds, and there was no end in sight to the rat deluge.

Alex wondered if they had bitten off more than they could chew.

"David! How many of these are there?!" he shouted, across the mass of enemies.

"I don't know! There shouldn't be more than a hundred by this time! It depends on how long it's been since they crossed over! But something is off! They shouldn't be this smart!" David replied, impaling a rat at the same time.

Kary chimed in from further back, shooting balls and rays of fire at any incoming rodent, sweat already dripping down her forehead and temples.

"What do you mean, only a hundred?! That is already an insane amount! Couldn't you have told us beforehand?!"

David spun his bident, whacking away a rat midair that had jumped at him, before jumping himself and landing on it, piercing its throat with his weapon. The skeleton with him swung wide with its falcata sword, keeping the other rodents at bay as much as it could.

But the skeleton was already visibly affected, chips of bone gone from its legs and arms, as the rodents often teamed up on it. David knew his pseudo-army wouldn't last much longer.

He could feel his connection to them wane with every passing moment, and time was ticking.

"Listen, I said something's not normal! What are you blaming me for?! Take that anger and direct it to them, instead of me, you screaming sconce!"

A fireball hurtled in the air, barely whizzing past David's face as it slammed into a rat burning its face off. David turned his head toward Kary, and she smirked angrily at him, wording 'oops' with her mouth.

"You fucking madwoman!" he blurted out.

"Hey! Focus, you two! We could seriously die here. Now is not the time to fight amongst each other!" Alex shouted.

As he did, he plunged his hands into a rat's neck, tearing its head off from the rest of its body violently, as blood splattered across his face and chest. He was already a mess, with blood dripping from every part of him, so he had stopped caring.

David looked at him with a wide grin. Alex looked like an incarnation of war, blood dripping off of him as he tore through his enemies.

'As long as he keeps fighting like this, and gets stronger, these demons are in for a nasty surprise,' David thought, focusing back on his own enemies.

"Can't you fuse with a stronger entity, like a demon, and pull that wolf out to help us, Wolfie?!" he shouted out.

Alex kicked away two rats with a roundhouse kick before responding to David.

"I can't! If I do that, I won't be able to fight for much longer! The demons take a shit-load of mana to meld with!" he shouted back.

David looked around, noticing most of the rats pouring out from the tunnel earlier were now surrounding them. But the tunnel was still full of rats, only they had stopped coming into the room.

'What the fuck is going on now?' he wondered.

The three of them slaughtered the remaining rats in the room in a couple of minutes and ended up staring back at the rabid rats which were at the mouth of the tunnel.

Alex and Kary walked over to David, flanking him while keeping their eyes on the rodents.

"What's happening? Why aren't they lunging at us anymore?" Alex asked.

David shook his head slowly.

"I don't know... It's creeping me out as well, to be honest," David replied.

Kary looked at the rats, her flames sputtering over her hands.

"I'm almost out of juice. If we don't end this quickly, you'll end up with a burden instead of an ally."

David wasn't looking great either.

Two of his skeletons were in pieces on the ground, a few feet away, and the five others looking bad. Only he and the death knight were in top shape, if somewhat tired.

As for Alex, blood covered him from head to toe, making him hard to recognize. It was hard to tell if it was all the rats' blood, or if some came from him, as some parts of his clothes looked rough, but he didn't look in pain.

Truth be told, Alex succeeded in using a skill from New Eden, to protect himself from harm, but it didn't encompass his clothes. Looking at him closely, David noticed the small, flickering blue layer floating just above his skin.

'Mana skin. He made it work on this side already. Not bad.'

But the mana layer let pass anything that wasn't considered harmful by its user. That's why the blood had reached his skin.

The two sides of the conflict stayed in a staring contest for another minute, with no apparent change in sight. But change soon came.

It came about as rhythmic shaking ground.

Boom

Boom

Boom

David gulped nervously.

'Please, not that. Anything but that...'

From beyond their visual range, a loud screeching echoed throughout the tunnel, and into the room they were in. It was so loud, the three of them winced in pain, as their eardrums shuddered in their heads.

"Fuck..." David muttered, his grip around his weapon tightening.

Chapter 519 Doubt VS Conscience

David might be one of the current strongest humans on Earth, but he knew full well that only applied to humans. The creature stomping its way toward them by far surpassed what they should fight in terms of power.

"I think we should back off and come back," he declared, sweat pearling off his forehead.

Alex looked at him, confused. He had yet to see David ever back down from a fight.

"Since when do you back away? Weren't you the future of humanity? How can you see all these monsters and think about running away?"

His voice contained a bit of loathing. That day, a small part of the respect Alex had for David's hard-ass attitude disappeared.

"If we die here, how are we going to keep fighting for humanity, huh? Use your empty head a bit, Alex. This foe is far out of our reach. We should retreat and come back when we are stronger. Or get help from well-armed people."

David didn't fear the enemy making its way to them. What he feared was dying, and having wasted the second chance given to him.

There was no way someone brought him back, just so he could throw his life away. He couldn't and he wouldn't.

Taking a step back, ready to bolt away, Alex glared at him.

"David. If we leave, now that we poked the hornet's nest, what do you think will happen? How many people have to die, so you remain alive?"

David knew Alex was right. But the risk was just too great.

The rest of the world didn't know what he knew. He considered his life was worth more than the others.

Hell, he would throw Alex and Kary under the bus, if it guaranteed he survived. But he could already imagine the repercussions of his actions if he left there that day.

As he wrestled with his own thoughts, the enemy he didn't want to confront finally made its way into the barely lit room. Towering over the other rats, an even larger specimen stared them down, with eyes of beady black.

This gigantic rat was dark brown, with streaks of black running from the corner of its eyes, all the way to the base of its tail. Its teeth were dripping with a green liquid, which upon contact with the floor sizzled, revealing its highly caustic nature.

Alexander could feel the slight mana signatures from the dog-sized rats already, but this one. This one was in a dimension of its own, compared to them.

Alex could feel a mana signature almost as strong as his, coming from it, and he started understanding David's reticence to fight. But it also reinforced his fears of the consequences if they just bailed.

Plans on how to defeat this new threat were already rolling in his head. But somehow, he doubted any of them were viable.

He still knew nothing of the capabilities of the enemy, and that made it unpredictable.

Turning his head toward Kary, he could see her scrunched up nose and her furrowed brows, as she was also deep in thought.

David was still half-turned away, his mind and traits troubled between staying and risking himself to ensure the safety of people above or ensure his survival at the cost of strangers.

David just couldn't decide. Whatever conscience he thought he had burned away was currently smashing against his thoughts of leaving.

While he struggled with his thoughts, the humongous rat, which David knew to be a rat queen, just stared at them, her teeth rattling together, while acid dripped out of its mouth.

She stared at the intruders in her domain, waiting to see if they would keep disturbing her kin, or if they would flee. Of course, she wouldn't let either result slide peacefully.

The rat queen was already counting the number of burned and torn corpses on the ground, and her rage was slowly building. Someone would pay for these three humans' affront, this day.

Whether it be them, or their kin, mattered little.

Tension rose, as both sides of the standoff were gauging each other, Kary making plans, and the rat queen imagining how the intruders would taste. Alex was twitching nervously, his body raring to fight.

There was no doubt in his mind this would be an ugly battle. But letting this thing go would make for an uglier result top-side, where the other humans were much weaker than them.

Turning to David, Alex tried reasoning with him one last time.

"Come on, David. You can't seriously be having a hard time choosing to fight or not. We'll have to fight this thing either here or up in the streets, while hundreds, maybe even thousands, of people get become almost nil. It won't matter if you are alive or supremely powerful. You don't know what I do. You don't know what's coming, slaughtered."

David looked back at him, his mind still in turmoil.

"You don't understand, Alex. If I die, humanity's chances at survival become almost nil. It won't matter if you are alive or supremely powerful. You don't know what I do. You don't know what's coming, not really."

Kary ground her teeth together. She understood where David was coming from. But she also knew Alex was right.

There was no way the enormous rat was just going to let them leave. Not after how many of them they had killed.

"Alex's right, David. Could you live with yourself if you caused the death of thousands of people here today?" Kary tried reasoning with him.

But his face stayed in a mask of uncertainty. Which decision was the right one?

Should he leave?

Should he fight?

Maybe he could get some reinforcements here through his connections with the underbelly of the city. But would they get here in time?

Alex looked at him struggle and reached his boiling point. He no longer cared about entertaining this standoff.

"Fuck it! I'm not letting this thing get top-side. You can fuck off if that's what you want, David. But if I get out of here, you better hope I don't see you again!"

Alexander no longer looked back as he bolted forward, toward the sea of brown and grey fur.

Chapter 520 Escalating Risks

Rapidly colliding in the sea of rats, Alex let go of any reservations he had. He completed his meld with White, the wolf in his mind settling in completely as he heard his voice for the first time on this side.

'Master, my words can finally reach you. I revel in the opportunity to fight by your side fully again.'

'We'll see about how long we can survive, White. The situation isn't looking good.'

He felt the wolf's confidence bolster up in his mind.

'But Master, you aren't using every resource at your disposal.'

Alex almost stumbled at the comment. He kept streaking his claws in front of him, in large arcs, tearing his enemies asunder, while he wondered what he wasn't using.

Seeing his master not figuring it out by himself, White just told him.

'Master, you aren't calling on my daughter. Call Genie out.'

Alex's mind went blank.

'I can call her out, on this side? How would that work? You are an energy form, tied to me, and I get how it worked. But Genie is living and has a body. There is no way I can just call her over through the veil, right?'

'It won't be easy, given your level of mana currently, but it is possible,' White responded in his head.

It stumped Alexander. But now wasn't the time to question the how.

'Tell me how, and I'll make it happen. Her help would be more than welcome.'

While he was having this mental discussion, and striking enemies down in throngs, David finally snapped out of his conundrum and made his choice.

He would rather risk it here and keep his alliances with the few powerful people he trusted than ruin it all to assure his survival. But he knew he had damaged his relationship with Alex today, and it wouldn't be easy to mend that damage.

"Argh, fuck this! If I die here, I'll haunt your ass into the afterlife!" David shouted, before dashing into the sea of rats that was trying to bite at Alex relentlessly.

The rats' efforts collided into much more resistance than they expected, as the man was moving lightning fast, and every attack that did land on him glanced off the thick mana layer encasing his body. But at this pace, he would end this fight naked.

Kary was steadily shooting flames into the tide of rodents, trying to keep her mana usage under control as much as she could. She tried using the mana breathing technique she had in New Eden, but there just wasn't enough mana here to absorb.

When she saw David darting back into combat, she was slightly relieved. Even though she was disappointed it took him so long to make his choice.

She already knew Alex's opinion of David had dropped, simply with how he glared at him earlier. But it was none of her business.

The rat queen finally went into action, as David lunged in, almost like she had been waiting to see what he did. She screeched loudly again, sending all the surrounding rats into a frenzy.

She also lunged forward, her large lumbering form moving much faster than one would expect from her size. Just as she reached the first human that had dared charge at her children, a skeletal form appeared before her, smacking her in the head with a long halberd, sending her tumbling to the side.

David couldn't maintain the death knight for much longer, but it could at least serve as a distraction until they cleared out the never-ending rat tsunami. But Alex suddenly jumped out of combat, landing next to Kary.

For a second, David thought they were suddenly betraying him and leaving him alone to deal with the rats because he had hesitated so long. But Alex's words reassured him soon after.

"Buy me half a minute! I can get us some reinforcements!"

Alex didn't wait for their answer before getting to work on his plan. Kary nodded her head at him and looked at David.

He nodded as well, but shouted back, "My death knight won't last that long! After that, the queen will have free rein!"

Kary rapidly made some mental calculations, estimating how much mana she had left until she was exhausted. She reached her results quickly enough, and calculated she could either keep fighting for another few minutes, or hold back the entire tide for about fifteen seconds.

"Holler when he goes down! I will hold them off for a bit! But I'll be out for the count after!" she replied.

David nodded his head, understanding the trade-off. He silently hoped Alex's reinforcement would be strong enough to contend with the rat queen, or their troubles would only grow once more.

In the meantime, Alex was knees on the ground, his hand cut open by his own claws, letting his blood pool on the concrete floor.

'How much is enough, White? I don't have that much blood to begin with, you know?'

'You'll need a puddle of at least one foot in diameter if you hope to bring her over. Her size makes this much more difficult than before, and since you are on different worlds, you can't just call her to appear. A price has to be paid.'

Alex mentally nodded. But a puddle of a foot in diameter, on porous concrete?

That wouldn't be a small amount of blood.

But he had to do it. Focusing on his mana, he pushed it into his veins, hurrying the blood to his cut hand, so it wouldn't be too long.

As the blood poured out of his hand at a faster pace, the puddle soon reached the size White had said.

'Now what?' he asked the wolf.

'Now you focus on her essence and call her to you. The blood connection will form and she should appear before you.'

'Wait, should? I thought this was a guaranteed thing?' Alex panicked.

'There is no such thing as guarantees when calling upon beings across worlds, Master. But I'd say the chances of success are at seventy percent, with the amount of blood paid as tribute.'

'God dammit! I hope you're right, or not only will I have wasted time, I will have lost an ally in trade of none, and will be weak for no reason.'

Focusing on himself, Alex focused on Genie's soul, or at least what he remembered it to feel like. Once he had the feeling locked in his mind, he whispered out her name.

"Genie, answer my call. I need you..."