

New Eden 521

Chapter 521 Traversing Worlds

Inside New Eden, Genie was tracking through the forests around Bastion City, acclimating to her new domain. Astaroth had left her to herself after arriving in town, and she understood his responsibilities.

She was slowly finding where the breeding grounds of monsters were, and where the zone bosses roamed. She was mapping out the zone in her mind when she heard a whisper echo in her head.

The whisper was so faint, almost imperceptible, as it slipped through her mind. But she recognized the voice of her master.

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

Focusing on his mana signature, she tried finding where he was, to bound out through their blood pact, but couldn't lock in on him. It was like he wasn't on the same plane of existence.

Genie focused harder, infusing mana into their bond, trying to compensate for the intangible resistance between them. She poured almost half her mana inside this Aetheric tether before she felt the familiar sensation of being pulled through the void between them.

On the other side of this, Alexander was focusing intently on the connection on his side and poured as much mana as he could muster, without collapsing, into the little blood puddle.

When it suddenly started boiling and expanding, he took a step back, wondering what was happening. But as he did, he felt the link between him and Genie strengthen rapidly.

White's voice resounded in his head.

'You have succeeded, Master. I can feel Genie crossing through the planes. She is coming!'

As he finished saying that, the blood puddle exploded upward, scattering droplets many feet off the ground before they went still. The droplets floated there, above the floor, at eye level, before suddenly shaking again.

As they shuddered, Alex felt them supercharge with mana, before agglomerating together, to form an orb of blood the size of a volleyball.

After balling up, the blood suddenly flattened out in the air, forming a large oval sheet, resembling very much the portals of demonic energy in New Eden. And from this flat surface, a large white wolf emerged, the blood not clinging to its fur as crossed through, before landing on the concrete floor.

Genie looked around at these unfamiliar sights, taking in the stone-like walls and floors before her eyes landed on a familiar man before her. This man smelled like her master, and his mana was the same, but his face was different.

He was human.

Kary, from the side, was stunned. Inside New Eden, a wolf the size of Genie was already something of a rare occurrence.

But on Earth, it was just not something that happened.

Genie reached into her bond with her master, asking where he was.

"I'm right in front of you, goofball! Is a different skin colour and shorter ears all it takes to confuse you?" he answered out loud.

Genie tilted her head a bit, recognizing even her master's voice coming from the man, although he looked different. But she brushed the confusion aside.

She already knew her master came from a different world. It wasn't so strange that his appearance differed in this other world.

Leaning her head before this human, Genie closed her eyes and reached out to her master's soul, pinging it with mana. She felt the mana echo in the human in front of her, and it confirmed her thoughts.

'Master Astaroth,' she called out in her mind.

"We can better acquaint ourselves later, Genie. I need your help first."

The wolf straightened up, already scanning the surrounding room, quickly finding the reason he needed help.

Behind a blazing wall of flames that Kary was holding up, at the cost of feeling herself rapidly weaken, a small army of dog-sized rats, and one humongous, angry queen rat were staring, ready to pounce back into the fray.

Genie already lowered her posture, growling menacingly at the rat queen.

From the other side of the flame wall, the queen could already sense the enormous threat that had just appeared. A flash of uncertainty passed through her eyes, but reminding herself of the bodies of her children, strewn around the room, burnt and shredded to pieces, her rage brushed the feeling away.

She screeched loudly, threateningly, at the gigantic wolf on the other side.

Genie answered the threat with a threatening howl of her own, which reverberated across the underground tunnels, even making its way faintly to the surface. Some people walking near manholes and metro airways heard the faint howl, wondering if they had hallucinated, before going back about their day.

Kary exhausted the last of her mana, causing the flame wall to sputter out of existence, as the ground where it was coming up from was still white hot, with flames flickering from it. As she collapsed to her ass, Alex caught her, before gently seating her next to a ramshackle cabin's wall.

"You did great. Thank you. When this is all over, how about we go get ourselves treated to a relaxing day at the spa? You deserved it," Alex said, smiling.

Kary smiled back, her eyes already shutting from exhaustion.

"That sounds great. I'll hold you up on that..." she muttered, as she fell unconscious.

Seeing her fall sound asleep, Alex made sure she wouldn't fall to the side and got back up. Already, a skeleton was walking over to stand guard next to the vulnerable woman.

Alexander walked over to Genie and David. To his surprise, the rat queen had not charged back in, yet, probably still gauging her new opponent, Genie.

Alex nodded in thanks to David, who returned the nod.

Walking slightly in front of them, Alex stretched his tired body. He could still go for a few more minutes of intense fighting, but he knew that tomorrow would be a bitch.

"Alright, you fucking hamster. How about we end this, here and now?"

The rat queen heard his words and seemed to understand them, as she screeched in rage once more.

SCREEEEE!

And once again, all hell broke loose.

Chapter 522 Cured, At Last

While Alex and David were battling the army of rats in the underground passages of Montreal, somewhere across the Atlantic Ocean, a young boy was in a special hospital room for the fourth time in a single month.

Winston Jr. Was having another plethora of tests done on him again, this time about things a little more serious than just dust or pollutants. His doctor was introducing a very light strain of the cold into his system, to see how his regrowing immune system would react.

Of course, during the tests and for a few days after, he would stay right there, under perpetual observation. But if everything went well, Winston's doctor had promised him some serious changes to his lifestyle.

After inoculating Winston with the light cold, the nurses waited an hour before getting some blood samples to see how the virus was reacting and how his system was reacting to it. It took a while before the blood results came back, and in the meantime, Winston was getting slightly dizzy.

But these were normal symptoms of the cold, for now, and the doctor paid it no heed. As the results came back, he studied them ravenously, his eyes wide in excitement and anticipation.

He went through the results twice to make sure he missed nothing, and a smile beamed on his face.

"Mr. And Mrs. Owens, I have great news," he declared, turning to the parents.

The man and woman clutched each other, their hopes at a peak point in their lives. Winston Senior hadn't been this hopeful since he asked his father-in-law for his wife's hand.

"Is he..." the man started asking.

He couldn't finish the question, his throat already constricting with emotion.

"Yes. I believe your son is cured of his CEDS. Your son is finally healthy again."

Winston Jr.'s mother started sobbing in joy, hugging her husband tightly, as a single tear dribbled down the man's face. The joy these simple words elicited from them was unquantifiable.

Winston Jr. Who was on the other side of a glass pane, could see his parents crying, but couldn't hear what was being said. But from the smile on the doctor's face, he knew it had to have been good news.

He smiled to himself, sitting on the bed, still feeling slightly woozy and now getting a light fever, but he felt great. He pinched himself on the arm, making sure he wasn't dreaming.

'Am I really cured? Will I finally be able to go outside?'

A small tear rolled off his cheek as the realization settled in.

His life would finally go back to a normal one. No more staying locked inside the house.

No more talking to friends through a screen, or being stuck in a quasi-spacesuit when going outside.

He would be truly free for the first time in his life. Winston had been living with this condition ever since birth and had never experienced what it was like to go for a run outside and fall in the grass.

Or to breathe the air after a heavy downpour. He had never felt the sunlight directly on his skin, not filtered through a window.

All these things that most people considered mundane, Winston had never experienced in his life. What was it like to go down a street with food stalls, and have the smells waft up your nose?

Winston did not know.

To walk to the sea, feel the salty breeze on your skin, and taste the ocean's bounty in the air. Winston had never experienced this joy.

And that was saying a lot, considering he lived in England, which was an island.

He let his imagination run wild, seeing himself on a boat in the middle of the ocean, enjoying the warm sea breeze, feeling the water splash into his face as they crashed into waves.

He only snapped out of his reverie when he heard the door to the room open up. The doctor came into the room, only wearing a mask, instead of his big quarantine suit.

"I'm sure you have guessed it with the lack of precautions, Winston, but I have great news for you. You are cured, kiddo."

Winston's emotions finally reached a threshold where he could no longer hold them, and he burst into tears. His parents came into the room, also only wearing masks, and they hurried to his side, embracing him tightly.

The doctor let them indulge for a few moments before clearing his throat.

"Ahem! I know I said you are cured, but unfortunately, we still have to keep you here for a few days until your body fights off the cold. This will allow us to re-confirm our verdict and also make sure you stay safe all along. Once that is through, you can go back home; without your suit this time."

"Thank you so much, doctor!" Winston Jr.'s mother exclaimed.

The doctor chuckled.

"Don't thank me, Ma'am. I did nothing. Your son recovered on his own, and you could call him a miracle. I would love to get more samples of his blood, so I can study the change in depth, if you don't mind."

The mother nodded her head, still having a hard time talking, as she choked on her tears.

"I would also recommend you keep the filters in your home running for the meantime until we have our follow-up appointment. But all the other measures in place in the boy's room, you can remove safely."

The father nodded his head, glad to hear this. It meant his boy could finally live a normal life.

"Thank you, doctor. I will never forget the dedication you put towards our son's illness."

The doctor nodded his head, glad to hear those words. The Owens family had been big contributors to his hospital and research over the last decade or so, and he was happy to hear it wouldn't stop now that their son was healthy.

"I will leave you together now. If there is anything, you have my personal number. Do not hesitate. Call me."

And with that, the doctor left the room to go to his office. He still had much energy to dedicate to this miracle case.

Chapter 523 Forlorn Hornet

Next Chapter

In a small town in Illinois, named Shelbyville, a teenager was currently walking home from a day with his friends. He passed in front of the high school he was going back to in a few weeks, and he sighed loudly.

All his friends had gotten cars for their birthdays in the last few months, and he was still stuck going to school on his bicycle. It had sparked a few rounds of mocking from the people who liked to bully him, towards the end of the year, and he was tired of this.

But he was broke, and couldn't even afford a crappy car, let alone one that had some panache. His parents had told him to hold off on buying anything since he was short on money to get a car that had any value.

He walked in silence, enjoying the music playing in his head from his phone, and soon enough, reached his house.

He lived in a small townhouse, nothing too fancy, but quite cozy. But something was unusual.

Usually around this time of day, his father was in the garage, door wide open, playing around in his workshop. But right now, the garage door was closed, and his father was sitting on the porch, drinking a beer.

When his old man saw him walk up the alley to the house, he hurriedly bolted inside, a wide smile on his face.

"The hell is wrong with him?"

Walking up the porch steps, the teen looked into the mailbox, which had Hitchcock ostentatiously written on it. He expected to get some mail soon about his school loan applications, but there was nothing.

"Cory! Come inside! Your mom and I need to talk to you!"

"I'm coming!"

Cory Hitchcock, or as many of his friends knew him, Silent Light, was impatient to receive news from the bank. He had applied for a student loan a year in advance for when he would apply to college.

Cory was entering his junior year at Shelbyville high school, and he couldn't wait for high school to be over. He was already planning for college, which he knew he would get into since his grades were close to perfect.

His addiction to gaming and anime never detracted him from his studies, and he scored almost perfectly on any exam he took. His parents had given him free rein on his sleep schedule and gaming hours, in virtue of his performance in school.

Life had blessed them with two smart kids, and they couldn't be happier in life, even if they weren't very wealthy. Megan, Cory's older sister, had been just as studious, and that was how she got into a prestigious college and went on, becoming a psychiatrist.

Cory entered the house, taking his shoes off on the entrance carpet, lest his mother murder him, and proceeded to the kitchen, which was where his parents usually had their talks with him.

As he got to the kitchen, he hugged his mother, who was standing near the kitchen island, smiling at him.

"What's for dinner? Did you need me to get something from the store?" he asked, sitting down at the table, across from his father, who was still grinning dumbly.

"Son, I have good news," his father said, breaking the silence that was setting in.

Cory suddenly perked up.

"Did you receive news from the bank about my student loans?!" he asked, excitement overcoming him.

"No. Better than that."

Cory wondered what could be better than that. That's what he wanted most lately, and anything else was only a back-burner thought.

Seeing his father wasn't speaking, Cory urged him.

"Well, come on. Spit it out!"

His father kept his dumb grin as he rose from the table.

"Follow me, son."

It stumped Cory. Why even have him sit down in the kitchen if he was going to take the conversation somewhere else?

But he was curious what the good news could be, for his father to want to show him, instead of saying it.

As he rose to follow behind his father, his mother closing the march, they walked over to the door that connected the house to the garage.

Cory's excitement peaked, as he immediately thought his father had bought him a car. But he was curious what kind of problem wagon he had gotten, given their slimmer means.

His father stopped in front of the door, turning to face his son.

"I know we said that you should hold on buying a vehicle since we are tight on money, but I got this at such a cheap price, it was practically a steal. It might not be what you wanted, but I'm sure you will love it."

The tone his father used doused his enthusiasm a bit, Cory suddenly half expecting the worst rust bucket he had ever seen.

But as his father opened the garage door, letting him in first, Cory's heart stopped. He turned to his father, mouth agape, wondering if this was a prank.

"You can't be serious. This is a joke, isn't it?"

His father burst out laughing, pulling out a set of keys from his back pocket, before slapping them into his son's hands.

"Not at all. And it's all yours."

Cory turned back to the garage, and tears of joy filled his eyes. It indeed wasn't what he had wanted.

But it was a hundred times better.

Sitting in the garage, alone in the middle of it, making it look so much bigger than it was, was a gorgeous yellow motorcycle, a bit on the older side of time, but the style would never go out for it.

The large white Honda logo painted on the gas tank garnered attention, even through the bright hornet yellow paint of the bike. The aggressive-looking light called out a lust for driving it from inside his guts.

"Your uncle bought it off a shop across the border. The kid whom it belonged to had been keeping it in storage for so long after they rebuilt it, that the shop owner was given the green light to sell it. He got it two days ago, and after re-polishing it a bit, offered to sell it to us cheap as a gift for your seventeenth birthday coming up soon."

Cory was at a loss for words as he walked over to the bike, brushing his hand across the handlebar, eyeing the engine with awe.

Of course, Cory had his motorcycle permit. He had gotten it at the same time as his driver's licence when he hit sixteen, since it wasn't much more work for him.

Spinning around, Cory slammed into his father and mother, hugging them tighter than ever, thanking them profusely.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you! And tell Uncle Mathew I love him for me! Can I go take it for a ride?!"

"Be my guest, kiddo, hahaha!"

Cory didn't need to be told twice, as he grabbed a helmet he had from when he did some off-road four-wheeler with his friends and jumped on the motorcycle.

Putting the key in the ignition, and turning it, the engine started as smooth as butter, and the roar of it sent shivers down his spine.

Over the engine's roar, he heard his mother say, "Be safe! And don't speed!"

"Yes, Mom!" he yelled back over the roar of his new bike, before taking off out of the now-open garage door.

Cory experienced unadulterated happiness, as he hit the highway with his new ride, cranking the throttle a bit, to see what it had in store for him. For an hour, he almost forgot he had a home to go back to, as he dreamt of crossing the country on this monster of his.

"Now, no one is going to make fun of me anymore! I'll be the top dog for a while, hahaha!"

Chapter 524 Reasons Revealed

[Prev Chapter](#)

[Next Chapter](#)

In Chicago, a few hours from Shelbyville, Megan Hitchcock, also known as Morticia, famous psychiatrist, and pro gamer, also Cory's sister, was ending her day of consultation with a cold glass of whisky.

She had a long day and already knew her night wouldn't be any more restful. Her duties in New Eden, which Phoenix had unceremoniously slapped onto her lap, took up much of her time.

At least until they finished setting up the office, and she could get a few hires to work for her. But until then, her plate was often full.

She didn't mind the added work, for now, given it helped her social studies into the player mentality. Her paper on this was advancing by leaps and bounds, and she was glad about it.

That was the whole reason she picked up gaming, to begin with. She only found herself a talent at it once she played Tower of Babel and became a top ranker.

Her ability to read a person's intention from their body language had allowed her to shine in the PVP format of the game and made her into some kind of big shot.

Thinking on her workload for later, Megan downed her glass before pouring herself another one.

"I hope I get to go back to levelling soon. I'm getting bored with being clustered in an office day in and day out..."

When she thought about how her kid brother had been going on adventures lately, she felt a pang of jealousy. But it quickly subsided when she thought of how he was going back to school soon.

She tilted her chair back, enjoying her drink a bit, before she needed to head back home through the traffic of Chicago.

'I should take a few weeks of vacation. Focus on my research paper from home, in a more relaxed manner...' she thought, taking another sip of her whisky, as the ice clinked against the glass.

Far to the east of there, in New York City, Damien Grimm was currently ending his day of fooling around in country clubs and drinking his ass off, before going back to his penthouse downtown.

He had his assistant drive him around all day since he knew he would be drunk by the end of the day, and wouldn't be apt to drive. His assistant, much used to seeing his boss completely sloshed, simply made sure he got home safe and sound, without making stops on the way there.

After parking in the underground car lot, he brought Damien to the elevator, slapping the penthouse's code into the command box, and held his boss until they were inside the condo.

"You know, Louis, hic, if you weren't so darn useful, I would probably have fired you already, hic."

"I thank your eternal generosity, Master Damien. Shall I run you a cold bath before you log into New Eden?" Louis responded, his tone as neutral as he could.

"Yesh. A bath sounds good. But make it hot, hic. I don't like cold water."

"As you wish, Master Damien."

Louis brought the young man to the large, luxurious sofa before setting him down. As Damien practically instantly passed out, Louis left to go run a bath for him.

As soon as he was far enough, his face darkened to a hate-filled mask.

Louis couldn't stand working for Damien. His days were a rinse and repeat of this all the time.

Drag his ass around until he was too drunk to think straight, and bring him back home, suffering a slew of insults along the way. When he wasn't piss drunk, he was calling on whores in the penthouse and terrorizing them.

When he wasn't outright beating them.

But his situation forced him there. He couldn't leave Damien unless he wanted to end up in jail.

Many times Louis had thought about leaving, or even worsening his sentence by shoving Damien off his balcony. But the fear of going to prison held him at bay.

'If only you hadn't stumbled into me that night... I would be free of all this nonsense...'

Thinking back to the fateful night when Damien bound him to his service, Louis shuddered. He could still feel the cold air of November brush against his face, and the warm blood on his hands.

It had all happened so fast, and Damien was passing by when it did. The young man, back then barely an adult, had been so helpful in helping him hide the body, swearing he would keep his mouth shut, so long as Louis worked for him.

If he had known what working for Damien meant, back then, he would have delivered himself to the authorities. He hadn't wanted to kill that poor man, but he had rushed him with a knife.

'It was all in self-defence,' Louis had kept telling himself, at night, when his dreams filled with visions of blood.

But the act of hiding the body, instead of calling the authorities, had transformed his manslaughter charge into a murder charge, making his case worse than it already was.

'If only I had called the police. I would be out of prison already...' he thought, as his breath became ragged.

He had to pull himself out of his stupor as the bath was full already, but his skin had gone deathly pale and he was sweating profusely.

Louis washed his face briefly, drying out his clammy hands, before getting Damien up for his bath. Reaching the living room, he saw Damien completely tapped out, and his mind fluttered to dark urges, before going back to empty.

He walked over to Damien, shaking him lightly awake.

"Master Damien."

"Huh? What?!" Damien half-shouted, waking up in a jump.

"Your bath is ready, Master Damien."

"Huh? Yes, my bath. About time, you good for nothing. How long is it to run a bath? I had time to fall asleep."

Louis clenched his jaw for a second before bowing a bit.

"I'm sorry, Master. I will make sure it takes less time in the future."

"Good. Now help me up. My legs feel like jello."

Louis helped the man up before bringing him to the bathroom, where he helped undress him and lowered him into the bath.

Damien passed out once more in the bath, and Louis had to resist another urge to just shove his head under the water.

'I hate him. I hate him so much! He ruined my life!' he thought, waiting to the side.

Chapter 525 Scars To Bear And Overcome

Back in Montreal's urban region, in the underground facility under Jack Boudreau's control, Jonathan was using his free time training his wind magic out of New Eden.

The boy had been having a rough time using his wind swords with his right arm, ever since it had been severed and reattached. It was like the mana flow between his body and the limb wasn't quite right, and his blade refused to form correctly.

It either formed haphazardly, or the wind couldn't solidify correctly, because he had to focus on the shape. Jonathan wasn't sure whether it was a physical blockage or a mental one.

He couldn't discard the second possibility, since he still had nightmares about the event.

In the very few hours he did indeed sleep, every day, he sometimes woke up in sweat, tearing up from sheer fear, his dreams fluttering with images of the demon holding him by the throat as he slashed his arm off. His mind even sometimes delved deeper into those, making him see and feel as if the demon cut up the rest of his body, as well.

For a six-year-old child, images like these were more than enough to cause permanent trauma. Yet, Jonathan was fighting them back as best he could.

He knew he should seek help to overcome this fear, but he refused to. The maturity he sometimes showed was terrifying to his grandfather, who wanted nothing more than his grandson to live a normal life.

But that ship had sailed long ago, when he was the only survivor of a car crash that took his mother and father from the boy, at the tender age of two. Ever since that day, Jonathan had been growing up so fast that Jack sometimes feared he would think like an old man before reaching the age of majority.

Jonathan rose from his butt, taking a last sip of water from his bottle, before going back to his mana training. Usually, around this time of day, he switched to target practice in another room of the facility.

But he refused to train on that until he could get his wind swords working correctly in his right hand again. So he stubbornly resumed his focus, and conjured his mana into a wind blade, focusing on shape and strength.

Jonathan got the shape to hold, using most of his focus there, before trying to thicken the mana in the wind element. But just as he started infusing more mana into it, the blade started wobbling uncontrollably, until it burst into a sharp gust of wind, blowing Jonathan to his back.

"God dammit!" Jonathan screamed, his back to the cold floor.

Tears started forming in the corner of his eyes, as desperation was slowly creeping in. Even if he knew he could still use his full power in New Eden, he wanted it to show on Earth as well.

What was the use of becoming stronger on one side, if it didn't show here, too?

"I don't want to become useless... I don't want more people that I care about to die... Not again..." he cried.

Doctors had said after the crash that he was too young to remember any of it, but they had been wrong. Blurry images flashed in his mind of his mother, crawling to the back seat after the crash, making sure he was ok.

She had a large piece of something shining embedded in her stomach, and was visibly in pain as she checked up on him. She had smiled when she confirmed he was okay, before dropping to the top of the overturned car, unmoving.

That was the only thing Jonathan remembered about it, but it was already much for him to bear. He refused to watch another of his loved one's die.

Brushing away the tears from his eyes, the little boy got back to his feet, a look of resolve in his eyes.

'I'm going to make this work again! I have to!' he thought, channelling his mana into his hands once more.

Back on the island of Montreal, in a rich part of town, Violette was currently in a pool, floating on her back, with an instructor positioned behind her, holding her head above the water.

"Good, Violette. You're doing great! That's it. Keep your body relaxed."

Violette was learning to make herself float in case she ever fell into the water again. It was one of the first things the instructors were teaching her, to save her from possibly drowning again.

Her mother, Katherine, was on the side of the pool, angst clear on her face. But regardless, she was proud of her daughter's progress.

The instructor slowly let go of the little girl's head, letting her float on her own. Violette didn't even notice as he ever so gently took his hand away.

It wasn't until he called out to her mother that she realized she was managing on her own.

"Look, mom! I'm floating!"

Katherine nervously looked at the instructor, who smiled back at her, making a thumbs up with his hand.

"You're doing great, my little flower. Stay focused, though," she replied.

As Violette noticed the instructor was a few feet away, she tensed up a bit, and her body started sinking a bit. The instructor rapidly swam back to her, maintaining her head above the water again.

"Whoa, breathe in, breathe out. Stay calm and keep your muscles relaxed. I'm still right here."

Violette calmed down, feeling his hand back under her head, and her body floated back to the surface.

"You're doing great, Violette. At this pace, you can start learning how to swim by the start of next week. But before that, you'll have a little test to pass. Is that okay with you?"

Violette nodded her little head, nervous at what the test entailed. But she wanted to learn, no matter the difficulty of it.

She thought of all the possibilities of her knowing how to swim, given she was a water mage inside New Eden, and her imagination went wild with ideas.

'I need to learn this! It'll make me stronger!'

Chapter 526 Escalating Problems

As everyone was having regular days, whether training, learning new things, or even getting piss drunk, three people were having a terrible day.

Alexander, Kary, passed out on the ground, and David, were fighting a battle of life and death. Be it theirs, or the ones of the people above them, in the streets of Montreal, lives were at stake.

The fight had been going full throttle ever since Genie joined the fray, and they seemed in a good posture to win. But both Alex and David had a bad feeling about this.

Up to now, whether inside New Eden or outside of it, not much had gone their way or according to plan. And both of them had a feeling this was about to turn into the same thing.

Genie held the rat queen at bay, sometimes getting bit at the heels by stray rats that Alexander and David dropped their attention from. But the poor rodents quickly understood that biting the heels of such a massive and powerful canine was risky business.

After getting bit a few times, Genie decided she had enough of them, and anything that got near her hind legs would get kicked into orbit. The rodents suddenly flew off, splattering into a nearby wall and whimpering on the ground until they died.

In a matter of two minutes, the two men started seeing the end of the tide of rats coming at them.

David spun his head toward Alex after batting away a rat with the butt of his bident.

"Here comes the real challenge! How much do you want to bet that this fat stinky bitch enters rage mode when we kill the last of her offspring?!"

"A grand that she suddenly gets extra abilities and becomes bigger!" Alex responded, grinning.

"A grand?! Chump change! Make it ten, and I'll add that the acid she keeps drooling will come flying at us first thing when she rages!"

Alex almost coughed blood when David said a grand was chump change. Of course, given their current wealth, he wasn't far from the truth, but it still hurt to hear, for someone who grew up in a frugal home.

"Alright, ten K! But I don't think she'll spit that acid! I think it'll coat her claws and make her attacks even more dangerous!"

David chuckled.

"Alright, deal! Let's see who can kill the most enemies until then!"

Saying this, he suddenly redoubled efforts to fell the rats coming at him and his three remaining undead fighters. Another two had turned to piles of bone since they started fighting again, and David was straining to keep even them up and standing.

Alex, on his side, was sweating buckets. Enough to wash away a part of the blood on his face, even though he kept getting splashed by more.

He could feel his mana reserves running dangerously low, but he wasn't falling yet.

He fed on Genie's mana reserves through their bond, since she was fresh as a fiddle, and this kept him going, if only temporarily. But he knew the crash after would be terrible.

Alex wondered who would bring them back to the surface after they cleared this if they didn't die. Kary was unconscious, for who knows how much longer, and he could already guess that he and David would soon join her in the arms of Morpheus.

But he couldn't think of this just yet. They had to slay the queen first.

Slashing left and right, adding kicks and punches into the mix, Alex was like a tornado of blood, as he flashed through the rats, tearing through them with ease. He might not last much longer, but his efficiency in killing them was unrivalled.

David was having a tougher time killing the rats before him since he couldn't infuse himself with much mana, given he was using a large part of it to keep his undead in fighting form. He watched from the corner of his eye as Alex acted like a combine harvester, leaving only bits of corpses and blood spatters in his wake.

'As long as he's on my side, the future looks a little less bleak. I can't afford to ostracize him further.'

David resolved himself to pick Alexander's side in any conflict in the future, even if he had to step on his pride. It was hard to find a reliable ally, one that he hoped one day would call him a friend.

He knew his hesitation earlier had cost him a great deal of respect from Alex, and he would need to work hard to fix that.

But he pushed aside the thoughts and focused on fighting. He still wanted to at least try to contend with Alex in their little slaying contest.

A few more minutes passed before the last rat fell, leaving only the queen alive.

The rat queen, seeing the last of her offspring die at the hands of this furry humanoid man, suddenly kicked backward, jumping out of Genie's reach.

As she landed, she screeched once more, this time even louder, making Genie whimper in pain as the strident noise assaulted her sensitive ears. Even Alex and David had to cover their ears, the reverberation on the concrete walls making the decibels rise.

As she screeched, her fur started shedding, falling to the ground in clumps, as her skin under it became visible. Her sickly grey skin, which was covered in green veins that outstretched from her head to her feet.

Her claws suddenly started oozing the same green acid as her mouth did, melting the ground under her paws progressively.

Her eyes went from black beads to shining green orbs, as her veins pulsed rhythmically, her body expanding. When her screech ended, David, Alex, and Genie stood in front of the rat queen, which had doubled in size, suddenly seeming almost too large for the tunnel behind her.

Her acidic saliva dripped to the floor faster than before, making little sizzling sounds as the concrete melted and fumes rose.

Different from before, though, the fumes weren't dissipating. The green fumes were instead rising to the ceiling, where they slowly accumulated.

'This is bad...' both men thought simultaneously.

They were now on a timer to end this. Who knew what those fumes would do to their lungs if they breathed it in, let alone their skin for just coming into contact with them.

The rat queen stared at them, her gaze even more vicious than before.

"Time for round two, I guess. It's just you vs us, now, you fugly squirrel," David taunted.

SCREEEEEE!

Chapter 527 Fleeing Squaters

The homeless people from before had all exited the tunnels by now, and were running top side, screaming, "Monsters! There are monsters in the tunnels!"

Most people just bolted across the streets, avoiding the crazy-talking homeless people with all their might. But the wandering cops on the streets couldn't do the same.

Stopping some of them as they ran by, with their hands raised in a sign of peace, they got him to talk.

"Please, sir, calm down. Explain what you mean by monsters. And where exactly in the tunnels?"

The bewildered person they stopped was an old man, who the simple action of running top side had already exhausted. The old man stopped for a moment, taking in a few gulps of air, before explaining in between gasps.

"In the tunnels... Three monsters! They transformed... right before our eyes! One of them even caught fire!"

The pair of police officers looked at the old homeless man with a strange look.

"Sir. Do you need help? Should we call an ambulance for you?"

The homeless man frowned at their question.

"I don't need your help! Do your jobs and go kill those monsters!" he shouted, taking a step back from them.

The police officers raised their hands in peace again.

"Alright, sir. No need to get agitated. Just show us where the monsters are."

The old man's eyes widened in fear again.

"I'm not going back there! They're in the maintenance tunnels that used to service the metro lines! You can go there yourselves!"

After shouting this, the old man bolted in a different direction, getting away from the law enforcers, as they looked at each other, bewildered.

"The heck did that man consume?" one officer asked, relaxing again.

The other looked at him with a wry smile.

"Right? But... Shouldn't we at least... go... check?"

His partner looked at him weirdly.

"Did you knock your head this morning? Why would we go into the tunnels on the word of a sloshed old man? He could have been high on any kind of substance, and hallucinated all this."

"I get that..." the other police officer said.

"But what if he wasn't under influence? You saw the others running as well. They can't possibly all be off their rockers, right?" he added.

This caused the first one to doubt his words as well. They could attribute a single mad old man to many factors.

But a dozen homeless people running away, with apparent fear in their eyes? It could hardly be a coincidence.

Sighing loudly, he started walking toward where the homeless had come. He knew a service entrance not too far from there, anyway.

"Alright... Let's go have a look. But if there's nothing weird, we're getting right out, and we don't say a word to anyone about this ever again. I don't want to be called the loony cop for the rest of my service..."

Walking a few blocks from their current position, the two police officers made their way into a dirty alley. The alley they walked into was the same one David, Alex, and Kary had walked in previously.

When the cops got to the service entrance, the older one immediately noticed something strange. Aside from the open trapdoor, which should be closed and pad-locked, he also noticed the smashed lock on the ground.

But it showed no signs of being cut or smashed open. No.

It looked like something had pulled on it with enough strength to tear it to pieces.

As the cop picked it up, the shape of the lock strangely rested in his hand. The lock was bent on itself, with clear dents on it.

Grabbing the lock, sliding his fingers on the dents, he frowned.

"Whatcha got there, partner? The other one asked him."

"The lock. But something's weird about the way it's broken..."

"What do you mean? It's not cut?"

The older cop shook his head.

"No. It looks like something ripped it off. As if they pulled on it extremely hard until it stretched and snapped. But something is weird about the shape."

"Hmm. What is?"

The older cop closed his hand on the lock, his fingers resting perfectly on the dents on the lock.

"It fits perfectly in my hand. But it's impossible to tear a lock open with your bare hands. That would require an ungodly amount of grip strength."

The other shook his hand dismissively.

"That's highly unlikely. Maybe the chains they wrapped around it to pull caused those dents. They probably had it hooked up to the back of their car, or something, to rip it open."

"Hmm. You're probably right... But where is the car now? Isn't it strange that they tore the lock open and just left?"

Even though it was the young cop that had insisted they come to check, his idea of it was to verify the entrance, and then leave. He hadn't wanted to be more thorough, just pretend to be.

But now that his old-timer partner found something weird, he got the feeling he would want to investigate further. That meant going down into the service tunnels, almost assuredly.

He sighed heavily, already knowing where this was going.

"Alright... I wanted to come check. Let's go check."

As he said this, a resounding screech echoed from the entrance to the service tunnel. Both men felt a feral sense of fear assaulting them, like whatever made that noise was their death coming for them.

"Holy fuck! What the hell was that?! Are you sure you want to go down there?!" the young one asked, his hand back on his gun.

The older man was clutching his heart, as it was skipping beats in his chest.

"Do we even have a choice now? We have to find out what caused that sound. There could be people in danger..."

Clenching his teeth, the young one did what his job entailed, and that was ensuring the public's safety. He climbed down the ladder that led into the dark underbelly of the city.

Reaching down there, his partner followed behind him, both of them pulling out their flashlights and guns, raising them at the ready.

"Let's go," the older one said, taking the lead.

Chapter 528 Last-Ditch Effort

Further down the tunnels, Alex and David were fighting for their lives, as even a single wrong move could cost them.

The rat queen, whose size was now too large to slip away down the tunnel behind it, went on the full offensive and wanted them dead.

Already, the concrete floors and walls showed plenty of paw prints and scratch marks, sizzling and fuming in green, as the queen chased Alex around the room, the latter being too quick for her to catch.

But aside from Genie, he was the one dealing out the most damage to it, and she wanted him gone. She also already understood that Genie had only spawned because of him, and her rat brain worked out that without him there, the wolf might disappear as well.

Of course, she was wrong. Since Genie was a living being, she wouldn't just disappear from Alexander's death.

But she would still take an immense piece off the chessboard if she caught him.

While she chased him around, like the buzzing and annoying fly that he was, Genie raked her claws on the rat's side and bit at her flanks at every given chance, making sure she inflicted the most pain on it as possible.

But the rat queen's skin had toughened up considerably after she transformed, almost becoming leather-like in texture, and Genie wasn't as effective as before. But that didn't stop her from contributing.

The very few times the queen closed in on Alex's position, a quick tackle to her flank made her miss her attacks, and Alex was back to buzzing around, keeping her distracted.

David was, of course, doing his best as well, aiming for weaker spots on the rat, like its tail or its paws, even going for places where open wounds were already present, but it wasn't easy.

Exhaustion was creeping up on him, his last skeletons already crushed by the rat queen in her first charge, and he was barely keeping himself standing. That meant that his body had much difficulty keeping up with the massive monster, and could only strike at her when she passed near him.

The fight lasted a few minutes, with no apparent progress being made, aside from a few bleeding cuts to its side. Alex knew he could cut into the rat's hide if he could attack her, but making offensive moves on her, currently, was a risky endeavour.

'If only she could go after Genie for a bit, or some other distraction. Only then could I make any significant attacks,' he thought.

He kept zooming around the room until he noticed two beams of light flash on him and the rat queen from the tunnel he and his friends had come from. Barely turning his head in that direction, his blood froze.

At the mouth of this tunnel, two police officers were standing, flashlights lit, pointed at him and the ginormous rat in the room, with guns at the ready.

'Shit!'

"What the fuck is that?!" he heard one officer, the younger one, ask.

The older one was already mouth agape, fear readable on his face, as his gun and flashlight were shaking ever so slightly.

Alex bounced off the wall over the tunnel entrance so they could hear him over the pounding of the rat's paws on the concrete floor.

"You need to get the fuck away before she goes after you!"

But the older officer looked at him, his gun raising in his direction, almost blinding him.

Alex and David had been fighting in absolute darkness for a while, and their eyes had gotten used to it. So, being flashed by a beam of bright light in the eyes was excruciatingly painful, making Alex cry out in anger.

"Get that shit out of my eyes! You're blinding me!"

But before he could do anything more, he heard the younger cop cry out in fear as he noticed the gigantic rat stampeding in their direction.

Bang! *Bang!* *Bang!*

The man fired three shots in rapid succession; the bullets going cleanly into the rat queen's body; her hide too thin to block supersonic projectiles. However, this had an unfortunate effect for the man.

The rat queen's eyes suddenly lowered from Alex, still bouncing off the ceiling, to the cop on the ground, who had just wounded it. In a strident screech, not too dissimilar then the one they had heard from above ground, in the open service trap, the rat queen pounced forward at the two cops, mouth wide open.

The one that had fired was instantly bit into two pieces, his face forever frozen in a rictus of fear and pain, as life faded away from his eyes.

His older partner, seeing this happen a mere two feet away from him, suddenly yelled out in rage. But before the rat queen could eat him, Genie's maw clamped down on the rat's tail, pulling her away from the human, attempting to save his life.

"Keep pulling, Genie! You! Officer! Either run now, or keep shooting it in the face, but start doing something! If you freeze now, you're dead!"

Alex had landed a few feet away to the side. He wanted to attack the rat queen, but he knew the moment he struck her, she would turn toward him.

He needed to make the attack count for something.

Alex lowered his posture, making resemble a sprinter on a starting line, as wind started whistling in the surrounding cave. In the very low light of the dead cop's flashlight, David saw the swirl of wind accumulating behind Alex's foot and knew what he was trying to do.

The cop started firing his gun at the gigantic rat in front of him, who was still clawing at the ground to reach him, emptying his charger into the beast's face, making her infinitely more angry.

The rat queen screeched louder and louder, green blood streaking down its ugly, fur-less face, while Genie pulled with all her might to keep her from reaching the human. But the rat queen dug in with her claws, suddenly gaining grip, the ground under melting even faster.

Genie's paws started sliding on the concrete, which was slick with blood from the previous opponents, and she knew she wouldn't be able to hold her foe in place much longer.

'I'm slipping, Master,' she called out in Alex's mind.

'Hold her as much as you can. I'll take her down in one hit, but I need to charge as much wind as I can.'

Genie acknowledged the command, but she could only do so much.

The cop, who had already emptied his charger, looked on in horror, his legs refusing to budge from under him, as the rat queen stepped closer.

One step.

Two steps.

Three steps.

Her horrific form was already looming right in front of him, the caustic saliva almost dripping on him, as she eyed him with hunger and hatred.

David collapsed as his mana ran out. He had aided Alex's wind spell as much as he could, but his tank was empty.

'You're our last hope,' he thought, his consciousness slipping.

Alex, feeling he had reached his maximum capacity, his eyes already threatening to close, opted to gamble on this one attack.

"Fucking die, will you?!" he shouted, as his body blurred out of existence, his speed reaching an inhuman velocity, as it instantly crashed into the rat's side.

Boom!

Schlurk

Bang

Thump

The service tunnel suddenly fell into a deathly silence.

Chapter 529 White Walls And Ceiling, Again

Alexander woke up feeling dizzy, his head pounding rhythmically at the sound of his heartbeat. He slowly opened his eyes, expecting complete darkness, but the sight of neon lights greeted him instead.

The beeping of a heart monitor, steady next to him, caught his attention.

Turning his head, he saw the monitor, along with tubes running from his arm to an IV pouch. He understood he was in a hospital.

But when he tried moving, a sharp pain traversed his entire body, making him groan loudly. That's when Kary's voice next to him spoke up.

"You're awake! The doctors didn't know when you would wake up."

"Which hospital are we at? And how did we get here?" Alex asked, confused.

Last he remembered, he was charging at the rat queen, at the speed mach fuck you, and then everything went black.

David, on the other side of the bed, was the one to answer.

"The cop that you saved called in backup. It's a good thing he did since you were half buried under a concrete cave-in. But it also means they brought everything to light, monsters included."

Alex frowned at the news. And as he did, the door to his room opened, drowning the quiet room in the buzz of voices.

Alex couldn't see very well, with the position he was in, but he caught sight of many reporters behind a large familiar back separating them from the room. Then Mr. Guo entered the room.

"Mr. Magnus, Ms. Deveille, you're up. Oh? Mr. Leduc, you're awake. What great news."

Alex looked at Jack's assistant, wondering why they were there.

"In any case," Guo said, "Let's not tell the press he is awake. I think rest is better for him, right now, than being swarmed by those vultures."

David nodded his head in approval, while Kary smiled at his consideration.

"But you are awaited outside, the two of you. Keep things short, and concise, and try not to make any alarming revelations," he added.

Guo said those last words while eyeing David, the words distinctly aimed at him. David only chuckled.

"Do we even have a choice at this point? The entire SPVM is down in the service tunnels, checking everything with a fine-toothed comb. In a few hours, they'll know a good part of what happened, and swarm us with questions of why."

Guo nodded once in understanding.

"Mr. Boudreau already acknowledges this. He only wants us to hold on to the revelations until we have the home-ground advantage. We can't push the reporters away in this hospital. But we certainly can at the private facility."

David's eyes squinted. He caught on quickly to what Guo meant.

If the public and the reporters didn't like what he had to say, they couldn't cause a scene over there. It was a whole other case, here.

"Alright. I'll keep it as vague as possible for now. But the public needs to know. Things are moving at a much faster pace than in my last life, and I don't know how much time we have anymore. Everyone needs to prepare."

David stood up, followed by Kary, who leaned in to kiss Alex's cheek.

"I'll be right back. You should sleep as much as you can, for now," she whispered to him, caressing his face.

Alex nodded, agreeing with her. He had just woken up, but already, he could feel the exhaustion creeping up on him again.

But as the trio left the room, to go fight their own battle against the press, a doctor squeezed into the room. Alex recognized the man since it was the same doctor who had treated him the last time he was here.

"Ahh! Mr. Leduc. How glad I am to see you awake. How are you feeling, aside from the pain and tiredness?"

Alex eyed him with a frown.

"Why is it that every time I'm here, it's you that treats me?"

The doctor chuckled.

"Why, that is a simple answer to give. I work for Mr. Boudreau. When interesting cases come through, it's usually my job to send them to his private care center. But enough about me. Answer my question, please."

Alex sighed.

'Jack has a hand in every pie in this damned city, doesn't he?' he thought.

"I feel fine, pain and sleepiness aside."

He used this time to contact Genie through their mental bond.

'Genie, are you ok? Are you still in the tunnels?'

'I am ok, Master. I traversed your body to go back to Bastion City's outskirts when you passed out.'

'Good. Great call. I'm not sure an eight-foot-tall wolf is what the citizens here need to see right now. I'll come to find you when I cross over.'

'Very well,' Genie responded.

"Mr. Leduc?" the doctor called out, snapping Alex's attention back to him.

"Hmm? What? Sorry, I got lost in thought."

"I asked you how much pain you are in, on a scale of one to ten."

"Ah. When I stay immobile, I'd say a two. But if I try moving, it shoots up to a nine."

The doctor whistled, looking impressed.

"Just a two? You are one resilient kid. Anyone in your situation normally cries out in pain, even if with light sedation. I see your morphine has run out, and yet you still seem fine. Interesting."

Alex looked at him with a curious look.

"And what condition is that, doctor?"

"Ahh, right! No one has told you yet. Then let me ask you a question, Mr. Leduc."

Alex nodded his head.

"Do you remember in the early two-thousands, when a woman's parachute failed to open, and she crashed into the planet and survived?"

Alex frowned.

"Yes, vaguely. But what does this have to do with me?"

The doctor pulled out a sheet of paper with a copy of an X-ray on it.

"This was her skeleton when she entered the ER. I had to make many calls to get a photocopy of this."

"That still doesn't tell me anything, doctor," Alex said, his frown deepening.

"Yes, I'm getting there. An impatient one, aren't you, Mr. Leduc?"

Alex groaned in response. Who wouldn't be impatient with a person beating around the bush like this?"

Seeing the doctor pull out another sheet, this time black, and putting it on a lighted screen, Alex could barely see a chest on it. But then the doctor pulled out another one, this one of legs.

The doctor pulled out sheet after sheet, forming a full skeleton on his screen. A skeleton, albeit in terrible shape, from what Alex could garner from this distance. But then the doctor pulled the screen closer.

"This, Mr. Leduc, is your skeleton when you arrived in the ER."

Chapter 530 Verbal Battlefield

Alex's eyes widened in realization. His eyes went from the photocopy in his hands to the many X-rays on the screen, and his jaw dropped.

The amount of fractured bones in these images was insane. It was to the point Alex wondered how he hadn't turned into a paste in whatever caused this.

The doctor laughed at his reaction.

"Impressive, I know. You shattered about one hundred and fifty bones in your body, of the two-hundred and six it contains. Not a record, but very close. And I assume the actual impact shattered more than that."

Alex couldn't believe how many broken bones were in his body. How wasn't he feeling like shit right now?

But then he got stuck on the last sentence the doctor said.

"What do you mean, more than this? Wouldn't every fracture show up on these?"

The doctor grinned at him.

"Usually, yes. But something amazing is happening inside your body that many doctors would kill to examine. Let me show you something."

The doctor pulled out another series of X-rays from his little folder, putting them side by side with the ones already on the screen. On those, a lot fewer fractures were apparent.

"This is you, an hour ago. You were asleep for about four hours, and we X-rayed you twice since you got here. This is the second one. On this pass, we counted a hundred and thirty-six fractures. You are already healing."

Alex's eyes widened. This rate of healing was far from normal, and usually, this many fractures would take months to heal, if not years.

The doctor kept talking, forcing Alex out of his stupor.

"And I believe if I were to X-ray you again, a lot of the ones on here would also be gone. That is why I said I think the first impact broke many more bones, that we didn't get to see, since they had already healed. The rescue team found you half-buried in a three-foot thick concrete wall, with rubble all around you."

Alex no longer wondered why everything had gone black after he charged the rat queen. Most likely, he had passed through her and bashed himself into the wall behind, causing himself all these injuries.

Of course, he would never tell a soul this resulted from his own actions. He wanted to keep a bit of his pride intact, after all.

But at least he was certain that his attack did its job.

"Doctor. I have a question."

The doctor nodded his head excitedly.

"Yes, pray tell."

"How many people have seen these X-rays?"

The doctor frowned at the question.

"Me and the nurse that was helping. Why ask?"

Alex looked at him deadpan.

"Burn them. No one should ever see them again. No one should ever hear about this, either. Soon enough, it won't matter, anyway."

The doctor looked at him with a sense of dread, anger slowly creeping up inside him.

"Why would I do that? Your case is a miracle. Anyone studying this and finds out how you are healing so fast could try to emulate it in other patients."

Alex's stare intensified. He pulled into the very little mana pool his body had re-accumulated and applied mental pressure on the doctor.

"You are going to burn them. Am I making myself clear?"

Alex understood what the doctor wanted to do, and he agreed it would be great for scientific advancements. But he also had a feeling if this got out, which it would, assuredly, he would become a target for people with much worse intentions.

There was no way he would put other people in danger, just for something that would be a common occurrence soon. If he believed David's claims, everyone playing New Eden would soon become much tougher and heal faster than ever before, in simple virtue of the mana that would lace their system.

There was no use putting himself and his loved ones at risk, for something which would soon be benign and common.

The doctor was feeling like someone had put a back of rocks on his shoulders, as the simple act of looking at Alexander made him sweat in angst. He nodded his head nervously.

"I will burn them. They are yours and the decision stays with you in the end."

Alex nodded his head, releasing the pressure he was exerting on the poor man, as he watched him gather all the X-rays, and bolting out of the room.

Alex suddenly felt even more tired from using the very little mana he had left, and closed his eyes to rest.

'Hopefully, when I wake up, I will be ready to leave this place,' he thought, as he drifted asleep.

Outside of the room, Jack, David, and Kary tried to fight their way out of a debate with the journalists, who were hungry to get more details about the service tunnel incident.

Already, many of them were receiving details of the investigation, which normally shouldn't have leaked from the police yet. But this was a common occurrence with news outlets and big scoops.

"Mr. Boudreau! Mr. Boudreau! How did you come to know these young people, and what is your attachment to them?!" one woman asked, her microphone shoved over the others.

"These young people are associates of mine, and in what manner of business that is, is of no concern of yours. Next question," Jack replied, keeping a stoic face.

Questions suffused through the ruckus, making them barely understandable. But one journalist asked his question louder than the others.

"Mr. Boudreau! What do you know of the events in the service tunnels? Is this something that has occurred before? Will it happen again?"

Jack looked at the man who asked this, a young and strapping fellow, his large stature making it easy for him to push to the front of the other; scrawny journalists.

"I know little about the incident, other than what the police have already shared. As for the question about priors, I don't believe there has been. If this will happen again in the future, only time itself knows."

The answer elicited many frowns from the crowd of journalists. Jack was used to interviews like these, and his ability to deflect was on par with many politicians.

When Jack saw the doctor rush out of the room, quickly being escorted by Jack's guards before the reporters could swarm him, his voice boomed over the crowd.

"Alright! This was enough for today. You can reconvene this interview in front of my private health center in four days, and we will have more answers by then. Gentlemen, please escort these people out of the hospital."

A row of suit-wearing gorillas stepped forward, arms outstretched, as they pushed away the journalists with relative ease. Soon enough, peace and quiet came back into the corridor.

But this was only the beginning of it.