

# DecrϕηρθD

Written by TwistedSnakes

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## Chapter 1

*Nothing's there. But it wasn't always nothing.*

*There used to be something. But you just can't find it anymore.*

Thick clouds hung in the gloomy sky, casting a dull red with a hint of sickly green. The scent of sulphur was suffocating, adding to the stifling stale, lifeless air that filled this ungodly place. The land would look like a barren desert if not for arced protrusions of rock towering haphazardly over a grey speck, looming menacingly over it.

The speck in question was an arctic wolf. In contrast to the rest of the melancholic landscape, he was white in colour except for grey streaks that ran down his back and arms in irregular splotches, almost as if someone with a paintbrush had clumsily splashed paint over him. A grey dot sat in the middle of the bridge of his nose, just below the sharp stroke of grey running across the top of his head. He was short in stature, probably not any older than a teenager.

He drew in a deep breath of air, slightly choking as his lungs did their best to extract the oxygen from the smell of rotten eggs. He hasn't seen this place before, but he knew he wasn't lost. He could find his way out.

The wolf's three-hour trek brought him to a familiar rocky outcrop. He was close. He picked up the pace, lightly jogging as he turned left past the rocky outcrop, ducking under a fallen column and jumping into a large ditch. The ditch was a flat plain that appeared to be what's left of a river that had long dried up, leaving behind a cracked riverbed. Taking a second to catch his breath, the wolf continued his journey through the winding ditch.

The corpse of the river lead the wolf down a path he was fairly accustomed to. The rule of this realm was easy: find the giant abyss to get back to the real world. This he learnt after months of finding himself here repeatedly, whisked away unceremoniously from reality and into this barren terrain, driven only by a deep instinct that led him again and again to the abyss.

This instinct was leading him again back to his portal home, except the past few months of traversing the rocky lands had now given him a mental map to augment the instinct. He pulled himself out of the ditch as the river reached a sharp horseshoe bend. The spikes of rock formed two rows on either side of him, forming the boundaries of a dusty red path towards his destination.

He trudged along the path until the rocks gave way to a vast land of a flat desert plain, empty except for a huge crack running across the ground. The chalky pathway had led him to the part of the rift where the ground opened up and a gigantic bottomless-crater sat gaping in front of him. He had reached the abyss.

Gingerly, the wolf stepped up to the edge of the abyss, its darkness swallowing up the lower half of his vision. He shivered from an imaginary draft. Despite the stillness and silence that hung in the air, the wolf could hear an ethereal and hollow sound, as if the hole was resonating with the noises of the outside within its bottomless cavity. He must have been here at least a dozen times now, but the abyss never failed to send a shiver running through his spine down to his tail. This sight wasn't something one easily got used to.

He took a deep breath. He just needed to stare into it and the world would fade back to normal. One breath. Two breaths. Three breaths. Nothing was happening today as he peered into the abyss' depths. That was weird. He blinked and gazed into the darkness again. Still nothing. Why wasn't it working any more?

The wolf furrowed his brows, steeling himself as he shuffled cautiously to the edge of the abyss. The claws of his toes curled over the rocky edge of the hole, gripping the ground in a tight and nervous grip. Ignoring the vertigo that bubbled up within his chest, he focused his vision, waiting for a shimmering in the fabric of reality that signalled his way back, but the yawning chasm stared emptily back at him.

His breaths got quick and shallow. It wasn't working. Why? The abyss stood by, not answering the thoughts that echoed within his head, instead threatening only to swallow him whole into an endless fall should he take one wrong step. He quickly backed away from the edge and scrambled as he fell on his rear.

He needed a way out. A means back home. He closed his eyes and massaged his temple. This was the first time the abyss had failed him. Was it running out of power? Were there other rifts he had to find to go back? Was he stuck here? Nothing made sense to him and all his guesses fell flat in the absence of information.

Deep breaths. Don't panic. Everything will be fine. Maybe. The wolf laid back on the ground, getting red soil on the white hoodie and blue jeans he was wearing when he was pulled in. He didn't have the energy for this. He let the fatigue of the journey here wash over him and he felt himself sinking into the ground as the darkness of sleep engulfed him. Before the wolf was aware of it, he was unconscious, lost in a deep slumber.

The wolf had no idea how long he was asleep when a rumble woke him up. Holding his aching head in one hand, he sat up and looked over the edge of the colossal pit. The ground rumbled beneath him again and he looked around the desolate world for any sign of the disturbance.

A deep, guttural roar rose from the pit in a voice that belonged to no animal. It was a ghastly mix of a lion's growl, an elephant's trumpeting, combined with the hissing of a snake and the buzzing of bees. The sound made the wolf tremble and he fell back onto the ground.

The howl sounded through the air again and the ground shuddered, shaking dirt off the rocky outcrops in billows of dusty, orange smoke. Before the wolf could react, a black swirling mass of smoke shot out from the middle of the abyss, forming a pulsing grey cloud with snaking tendrils whipping out from the mass.

A lion's head pushed its way out of the smoke, roaring again as it turned to the wolf ravenously. The head itself was three times the wolf's height, staring at him with sharp eyes that glowed yellow, contrasting the greenish-red hue of the sky. It flashed a vicious grin at him, and draconic wings burst forth from the top of the mist, flapping as the dark mass descended on him. Claws of an eagle emerged from below the monstrous cloud as they reached out their talons for the shocked wolf.

The wolf broke out of his horrified trance. He didn't realize he had been holding his breath, and he gasped for air as he scrambled to his feet, turned and ran away from the pit. His feet carried him away like there was no tomorrow as he flew down the dirt path towards the dry riverbed. The beast was giving chase behind him.

From the back of the smoky form of the beast, a spiked tail grew out and swung at the rocky columns, toppling them over in a crumbling mess of stony debris. With a flap of its menacing wings, the beast overtook the wolf and smashed more rocky pillars with its tail. Boulders came crashing over the scurrying wolf and he dodged them to avoid getting crushed by them. He quickly hurdled over a stack of boulders that was blocking the way and sprinted for the riverbed.

The beast wasn't intending to let him escape. With a shriek, it swooped upon the wolf, reaching out its sharp talons at the white canine. He threw himself at the ground as the claws came close and they flew harmlessly but threateningly over his head. He picked himself up and ran again.

The riverbed was just a bit further, but time was not on his side. The beast was now behind him, flying straight at him with its scaly wings outstretched, knocking over the towering rocks on either side of the path. The wolf turned back to face the front and pumped his feet faster. A thought flashed through his mind: if he died here, would this nightmare end? Or would he die for real? There was no time for such ruminations though, and he focused purely on making his way over to the riverbed as fast as possible.

He stepped on a stray pebble and his ankle twisted with a sickening crunch. He cried in pain but continued his escape, half-hopping as he set his sprained ankle on the ground. Almost there, but the beast was close behind him. The wolf's feet carried him so fast, he was sure he could have taken flight. With a jump, he dived into the riverbed as the beast swooped over him.

His landing rewarded him with a faceful of maroon dirt that stuck to his white fur. He caught his breath for half a second before the beast came into view again. Its talons gripped the riverbank and it lowered its head to snap at the wolf.

The wolf didn't wait around to meet his end, instead opting to continue his limping across the riverbed as the beast gave chase. His exhaustion was catching up to him and he wheezed in pain, trying to take in the little oxygen was in the air. He couldn't keep this up for much longer. Was there no way out?

Large boney branches thrust themselves on the wolf's left and right, making deep scratches along the ground and stirring up a red cloud in front of him. Two large antlers had emerged from the top of the beast's head, which it was now using to bash at the wolf.

The wolf pulled up his hoodie to cover his face from the swirling dust that threatened to both blind and choke him. The smell of his sweat had stained the front of his hoodie but it was still better than the stinging smell of death that hung in the air. He just needed to focus on running.

Another crash sounded as the antlers were dragged along the ground. He jumped over one of the antler's crown tines as it tried to trip him over. The beast was getting closer and there was no foreseeable way he could get out of this place unscathed.

The beast bellowed behind him as it prepared to charge with its antlers down. The wolf whimpered in fear and tried to push himself to run faster. His heart was pumping like the pistons of a car, beating against the inside of his ribcage as his body was pushed to its limits. He was going to die.

As the beast charged at him, the hard bone of the antlers caught him in his back, throwing him forward in the air. Time seemed to slow down as the wind whistled past his ears and the reddish-green clouds came up to meet him. A gasp brought in a breath of putrid air mixed with his sweat, stirring uncomfortably within his lungs.

As he flew through the sky, the world shimmered around him in a rippling wave. Was this what dying felt like? The world shimmered once more in the same familiar way it had always done the past few times he came here. There was a bright flash and the rocky desert dissolved around him.

The wolf flew head-first at a wall covered with photographs and posters, hitting the concrete with a sickening sound of bone against rock. Dazed, he fell onto the bed that was sitting flush against the wall.

The wolf was back home in his bedroom, but this was the first time he ever felt this lost. His body was sore from all the physical exertion and his back hurt from where the antlers were thrust against his spine. He had always thought the other realm he had been phasing into was just the result of his vivid imagination. But these injuries were real, and right now, the other realm was beginning to seem very real too.

And what was that monster? Why was it chasing him? And why didn't the abyss send him back to reality like it always has? Why was this happening to him? A strange mix of confusion and fear welled up within him and tears began to escape his eyes. What was going on? Covered in sweat, dirt, and bruises, he curled up in his bed and sobbed himself to sleep.

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## Chapter 2

*It's not about feeling sad. Or being happy. Or fear. Or anger.*

*It's just nothing.*

A white wolf stepped into a noisy classroom, ignoring the disdainful looks as he trudged reluctantly between desks filled with jostling students. A ball of scrunched-up paper was flung

at him, hitting him on the shoulder before landing on the floor and rolling under the table. The gathering of students that was the source of the paper projectile laughed at him.

"Hey Decro," a fox called out to him in a taunting voice, "You gonna talk again today? Sam says you're gonna speak ten words tops today, but my money's on you keeping your mouth shut." Pretending to ignore the jabs, the wolf lowered his eyes to the ground and sat down at his table. The bullies had already lost interest and moved on to other topics, laughing among themselves as they found another object of scorn to verbally abuse.

Decro noticed his sleeves had slid down towards his elbow and he quickly pulled them up again, tucking them carefully around his wrists. He pulled his books out of the bag and set them unobtrusively on his desk, waiting for class to start.

The entire day could not have passed quickly enough as he ran on autopilot through class after class. This numbing was a bleak way to get through life but it was the only way he knew how. He wanted to conserve his energy should he be whisked away to fight head-on with the Beast again. To exacerbate his situation, the apprehension of impending doom drained his remaining willpower as he went about his daily life.

He sighed as he walked towards the school gates as students streamed past him, excited to go home. The bullies from earlier were standing at the gate, watching him expectantly with malice in their eyes. Decro shrunk back into the hoodie he had pulled over his head and tried to blend in with the crowd. He didn't need this. Not today. Not ever.

He was barely one step out of the school gates when he heard a scathing voice call out to him. "Dick-crow," came a familiar butchering of his name. Decro refused to pay heed to the taunts and continued his way to the pavement, hoping against hope that they would leave him alone.

His silent pleas went unheeded and he found himself shoved back against the school's brick perimeter with two paws. His hoodie fell off as his back hit the red wall, revealing the wolf's face with his ears flattened against his head and his eyes half-closed as he braced himself for physical harm.

"Oyy, Dicky. Didn't you hear me?" Sam, the lioness of the group pressed herself towards the stoic wolf who left her question unanswered. He could smell her breath as her face closed in threateningly. "You think you're so cool right? With your whole 'I cut myself' and 'I don't speak' thing going on," she said mockingly. She roughly pulled the wolf's hoodie sleeve up, revealing an arm marred by sharp scratches running across the skin, slightly covered by a light covering of soft fur.

Seeing Decro's raised eyebrow, the lioness pushed the white wolf onto the ground. "And I know you speak. I've heard you before. Say something now, or I'll give you something to talk about," she threatened. Keeping his mouth shut, Decro closed his eyes and turned his face to the side, exposing his left cheek to the lioness.

"You asked for it, mutt," Sam spat at him. For a split second, Decro felt a rush of wind right before a fist struck his face. Decro grunted under his breath. This was nothing new. Another

punch. Blow after blow rained down on him, pressing the bruises on the right side of his face against the rough pavement.

He wanted to shout out. To yell at them to stop. But his cries would fall upon uncaring ears, deaf to his pain. So he kept his maw shut, and accepted the pain inflicted by self-declared lords who gave themselves the authority to torment him. The unsympathetic ground bit into his face and a warm stream of liquid seeped out, adding a crimson burst that contrasted his white fur.

"Fine, you win today Erik," the lioness' biting voice snapped at a smiling fox. Over the sound of his hushed whimpering, Decro could hear the rustling of dollar bills as money was exchanged. He kept his eyes closed as a last kick in the ribs sent him curling up into a fetal position as his oppressors walked away, leaving him cowering on the ground.

"What's with his arm anyway? How'd he get all the cuts?" the lioness' voice called out above the sound of the other students who had gathered around to watch out of morbid curiosity.

"A few months back, he kept claiming he got them through fighting a monster or something. But he probably just cuts himself or something. That lil' squirt has a crazy imagination," the fox's voice replied.

A snort. "Pssh, what does he do that for? Think he's crazy?"

"Probably. Or just seeking attention."

The voices faded away as the bullies disappeared and the crowd of watchers dispersed. Decro peeked out of the corner of his half-opened eye. Nobody left. Carefully stumbling to his feet, he walked briskly as he headed home. The world was going to shimmer. He could feel it. He picked up the pace, trying to reach home before the "shift" happened.

Warm tears were welling up in his eyes, leaving trailing droplets of saline solution in the air behind him. He lowered his head. If people could not see him cry, perhaps his tears would go away. The world around him took on a wavy quality as though he was looking up at the world from underwater. He didn't have time left. He ran down a dingy alley and crouched behind a dumpster, leaning his backpack against the solid concrete wall.

He had a few seconds left. He let the tears flow out as he caught his breath, staining his hoodie with damp patches in a mixture of salty tears, snot and sweat, spilling over the stains of fresh blood on the pale blue cotton. Another shimmer and the world faded around him.

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### Chapter 3

*That nothingness eats at you. Night and day. Day and night.*

*One year segues into the next and you don't even care.*

*Because nothing matters.*

A dry sound of cracking concrete flooded the white wolf's ear canals as a shower of dust and particles coated his pelt with a powdery sheen. He blinked rapidly as stray particles stung his eyes and clouded his vision, tearing a little to get rid of the offending irritants. With his eyes closed, he dashed through an empty door frame and pressed himself against the wall beside. He had been fighting this beast for over a year now as he honed his survival instincts, which had aided him tremendously in times such as this.

The room he was just in was crushed into oblivion as a giant column stomped through the room like a car in a compactor. He opened his eyes and peered through the doorway that he had come from, only to see a black swirling mass of smoke blotting out the crimson sun in the reddish-green sky. A giant elephant foot protruding from the smoke lifted itself off the remains of the crushed room. With the levels below him crushed, Decro could see the floor of the room three storeys down.

An ursine paw formed out of the dark mist and raised itself in the air, preparing to swipe. The wolf didn't wait around to find out what was coming. He turned and ran out of the apartment building, scrambling down the corridor with a grey sling bag bouncing against his back. The paw burst through the wall behind Decro in a shower of concrete blocks and iron bars, but the wolf didn't turn to look. It retracted through the hole before bursting out in front of Decro.

The wolf skidded to a halt as the bear's paw thrashed around like a snake, bending in ways that were not physically possible as if its joints were merely suggestions as to where the limb was allowed to turn. Decro took a second to catch his breath as he looked for another way out. The stairs to the ground floor were blocked and going into another apartment room was a surefire way to find himself cornered. He furrowed his brow in frustration as he considered his options.

A second paw burst through the wall, this time closer to him. There was no time to think. Decro turned back and ran back to the apartment building from which he came from. As expected, the doorway opened up to thin air in the absence of the room. The dark mist was still hovering over the apartment building, peering into window after window with a gigantic owl's head as it searched for the elusive wolf.

Decro pulled the sling bag to the front, unclasped it, and rummaged through it with his paws. The bag was full of sheathed daggers and pistol magazines, knocking against Decro's white paws until he felt the grip of an automatic pistol.

Just as he whipped out the pistol, the beast turned its owl head and glared at him with two round eyes. Its eerie eyes were two circular disks, purely red except for a perfect black circle in the middle of each one. Its beak opened as it shrieked and charged at Decro.

Panicking, Decro pointed the pistol at the owl's eyes and squeezed the trigger. The trigger didn't move, instead clicking against the safety catch. He grunted and flicked the safety and squeezed again. There was a rattling sound as a burst of five bullets shot out at the beast. The first one hit the owl squarely in its left eye but the recoil of the gun swung the muzzle upwards, sending the other bullets flying harmlessly through the mist. The beast roared and soared up above him.

Decro grunted. He didn't expect the pistol to fire multiple bullets with only one squeeze of the trigger. There was no time to think about that though, as the owl's face came rushing in from behind, threatening to crash through the building to get at him.

The wolf fired at the owl's head, all of his bullets missing the beast. The beast crashed through the corridor, sending dislodged bricks hurtling at the wolf. Flinching a little, Decro turned around and jumped into the open doorway, sailing down three storeys and landing on his right arm on a slab of broken concrete.

"Nghn!" he grunted as the pain shot through his body, sending flashes of white in his vision. Holding his sore arm, he stumbled out of the room and into the corridor. This corridor was relatively intact and free of ursine paws, leaving Decro free to charge to the stairs as his vision cleared.

He was halfway to the stairs when there was a crash behind him. The beast had burst through the walls and floor of the corridor, floating in mid-air as it stared at him with its huge, uncanny eyes. A silver cone poked out through the feathers in the middle of its forehead growing into a huge horn. It thrust the horn into the ground and charged at Decro, tearing through the floor like a knife through melting butter.

The panting wolf could hear the beast approaching. He was half a minute away from the stairs but the luxury of time was not on his side. He needed a different strategy. He slid down the dusty corridor as he turned around to face the beast with his arms wide open. As the horn approached him, he jumped and grabbed the horn in a hug. An unearthly shriek howled as the beast tried to shake the wolf off its face. The horn was wider than he was and he could only grip the sides as the horn was swung into the air, threatening to throw him off the building to his death.

Two feathered wings burst from the smoky figure of the beast as it pushed itself off the building and began its ascent into the air, taking the wolf with it. Below him, Decro could see buildings of various heights laid out in a grid between empty roads that lined the desolate city. He shuddered in fear, closing his eyes as the ground below him got further and further. The air got colder, whipping against his fur as the beast flew him towards a skyscraper in the middle of the city that reached into the heavens, brushing against the red clouds.

The beast tilted its left wing towards the ground and its right wing up into the sky, facing its back towards the glass panes that formed the side of the building. Decro held on to the horn for dear life as gravity pulled him down. There was a crash of breaking glass as the beast flapped its wings, thrusting its horn, along with the wolf, into the skyscraper's glass walls.

Shards of glass flew at Decro, hitting him in the face and back as he was thrust through the inside of the building. Metal work desks and office chairs whizzed past him, scattered haphazardly over the office floor. His pelt prevented the shards from scratching him, although tiny glass specks got caught in his fur.

They were reaching the edge of the building. Beyond that, he would be dangling in mid-air again. This was his chance to escape. He needed to let go. Gathering his shaking nerves, he forced his sore arms to release himself and he rolled over the glass-covered floor. The floor and



ceiling took turns to flash before his eyes as he spun around, coming to a stop as he hit the sharp corner of a metal desk.

There was no time to catch his breath. Quickly spotting an exit sign hanging over a doorway, he dashed towards it, jumping over overturned desks and fallen chairs that got in his way. He pushed open the door as it opened up to a square stairwell. The stairs led down to the ground floor, turning around each of the stairwell's corners in a square spiral. Without hesitation, Decro started running down the stairs.

Suddenly, a section of the stairs above him crumbled as the owl head burst through the stairwell's walls. Its beak had turned into an alligator's jaw, snapping its mouth at the fleeing wolf. Its wings dissipated in a cloud of smoke as lizard limbs grew out through its misty body, crawling its way down the square shaft towards Decro.

Decro whipped out the pistol again, sending more shots at the beast, aiming them at its eyes and mouth. Another burst of multiple bullets combined with the recoil sent his shots ricocheting across the walls. The beast roared in pain as it stumbled a little, and Decro continued his way down the stairs, slowing only to resume his firing at the beast.

His gun gave out as he fired the last of the shots in the magazine. He didn't know how to reload the pistol, and now was the worst time to figure out how to do so. He flung the gun at the beast and searched his bag, pulling out the sheathed daggers. The daggers would be useful in close combat, although Decro wasn't sure he would survive a close combat encounter with the beast.

He unsheathed a dagger and aimed them at the beast. With a sharp movement, he flung the dagger at the beast, hitting it on its scaly maw before bouncing to the side.

Decro ran further down the stairs away from the beast and took aim with a second dagger. This time, the flying dagger struck the beast in its right eye. The beast shrieked in pain and anger as the world shimmered around Decro. The beast threw itself off the wall, sailing through the air as it fell towards Decro. Before he could react, padded toes grabbed him around his chest as both of them fell towards the ground.

The floor rushed to meet them and the beast got ready to smash the wolf into the ground. Decro closed his eyes and braced himself for the impact. Before the concrete hit him, a film of light spread outwards in a wave. The shift was happening. The beast's grip disintegrated around him and the ground burst into dust as he flew through it into the darkness below.

The world reappeared around him. He was standing on the top floor of a tall apartment building. The night sky was clear except for the full moon that bathed the cityscape laid out below him. Decro stumbled his way to the lift lobby and entered a waiting lift. There was a soft chime as the doors closed and the metal box made its gradual descent to the ground.

*Getting out of bed is hard.*

*Washing up is hard.*

*Feeding yourself is hard.*

*How does one find the will to live in a  
life that doesn't seem worth living?*

A street lamp bathed the park in a soft yellow glow, fading into the dark blue sky. In a grassy patch near the lamp laid a wolf and a tiger, both of them side by side as they gazed upwards into the heavenly bodies in the night sky, slowly but surely taking their predestined paths through space, moving in a choreographed dance across the galaxy.

Decro felt the opposite of that. There was no belonging in either world for him, no foreordained path, no destiny. There was just the turmoil of fighting and the preoccupation of fear. Too many times he came close to dying, and too many times he almost accepted his fate.

"So, how do you fight your monster?" the tiger turned to the wolf.

The question echoed emptily through Decro's mind. How does he fight it? He didn't feel like he was fighting it; he just felt like he was just dragging his body through each encounter. He shrugged his shoulders, rubbing his fluffy fur against the soft turf. "I don't know," he replied. "Well, I guess I try to find out its weak points and attack it there," he added.

The tiger nodded. "Yeah, that makes sense," he replied in understanding. "Have you figured out its most vulnerable spot yet?"

"I don't know. There are the eyes. Maybe inside its mouth," the wolf pondered.

"How about trying to stab its heart or something?" the tiger asked helpfully.

"I don't think it has a heart. The entire body is just this...smoke. My weapons fly through it like there's nothing there," Decro furrowed his brow as the grey dot on the bridge of his nose shifted.

"Uhh, maybe it has a weakness or something. Like, kryptonite to Superman?" the tiger suggested.

"I don't think there's anything of that sort in that world," the wolf brushed off the suggestion with a hint of annoyance.

"It's like yellow to the Green Lantern. Or loud noises to Daredevil. Or-"

"Shut up, Chris!" Decro cut him off, sitting up and facing him. "You don't know what it's like to be there! How it's like to be fighting for your life every other day. How it feels to be so empty of emotions from everything. How I hope that one day it just ends it all for me. You don't understand!"

"But I was just-"

"Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!" Decro screamed, getting to his feet and running away, trying to escape the tiger's offensive naivety in his words. Making a beeline home, he ran up a small hill, brushing past the bushes and flowers that formed the park's landscape.

Two paws from the back grabbed him around the waist, and both Chris and Decro stumbled, falling down and rolling down the other side of the hill. "Let go of me!" Decro protested.

"I understand," Chris said to the struggling wolf. "I understand how you feel. I can't say I know how hard the fight must be for you, but I know how you feel," he continued.

"I know how it feels like when you say you don't want to get out of bed. When even simple tasks like brushing your teeth or getting food to eat feels like climbing Mount Everest," the words flowed out from his mouth. "And you just let gravity hold you in place. Because there's nothing left in you to speak out against everything that weighs you down."

The sharp look in Decro's eyes softened and he turned around, coming face to face with a tiger with tears welling up in his eyes. "And you know I'm here for you if you ever feel the same way," Chris finished off.

Decro's eyes fell to the ground. "I'm sorry," he apologized quietly. He pulled Chris close to him in a tight embrace, resting his chin on the tiger's shoulder. A look of surprise crossed Chris' face, and he returned the wolf's embrace.

"It's gonna be okay," he whispered.

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## Chapter 5

*Push it deeper. Bury it.*

*Hide it behind a facade of smiles and happiness.*

*Maybe it will go away.*

Decro could feel the ground beneath his feet moving as it shook and rumbled. The world around him was dark, but he could feel himself hurtling forward at a high speed. Wind was blowing around him, sounding through his ears in a high-pitched whistle. He felt around him for hints as to where he was, and his paws came to rest on cold, metal walls. He appeared to be in a metal room with poles positioned in intervals around the room.

A wave of red light swept through the room as Decro squinted, adjusting to the brightness that assaulted his eyes. As his eyes got used to the familiar red gloom of the world, he looked around and found himself standing in the carriage of a bullet train that had just exited a tunnel and was now tearing across tracks that led through a city. The tracks were raised off the ground, supported by tall concrete columns that stood below the tracks at regular intervals.

A shadow came into view, blocking out the red sun as a familiar shroud of dark mist flew through the air above the train. Decro looked out of the glass windows, peering at his impending adversary. Eight needle-like spikes were sticking out of the black cloud.

Without warning, the mist appeared to gain mass, falling down and crashing onto the carriages at the back of the train. The spikes were the spiny legs of the spider, gripping the cabins as it stabbed their steel hulls. Sounds of piercing metal echoed over the sound of the train's wheels as it made its way across towards Decro.

Decro was ready. He punched a panel in the wall, sending it clattering to the floor, revealing a dark rectangular hole in the wall. The wolf already knew what was in that box. Without looking, he grabbed the handle of the katana in the hole and drew it threateningly in front of his face.

The beast was almost over him. Two barbed legs pierced the ceiling in front of Decro, which he promptly sliced, sending black ooze escaping the wound and spilling over the floor. An angry hiss filled the air, and the wolf swiftly walked over to the source of the sound, stabbing through the roof at where he thought the beast was.

The train lurched to the side as the beast stumbled, sending sparks flying everywhere as the steel chassis met the iron guardrails. Decro grabbed the nearest pole and leaned against the tilting cabin.

Two fangs pierced the shell, leaking green venom that dripped on the floor, dissolving it in a puddle of sizzling bubbles. The fangs tore through the ceiling, shredding the metal apart like a can opener. A snake's head glared at him through the newly-created hole, moving around menacingly before baring its fangs and lunging at the wolf.

Decro jumped back, thrusting his katana with an attack of his own. The blade pierced the snake between the eyes, sending its head hissing in pain as it disintegrated in a billow of smoke. Decro knew that the battle wasn't over yet, but allowed himself half a grin as he pulled the blade back and waited for the beast to make its next move.

His answer came in the form of three bulls' heads emerging from the mist, all lowering their horns at him. The first one charged at him, its smoky neck extending unnaturally long as it reached the ground. Decro did a barrel roll out of the way and jumped back to his feet. Another head was already rushing towards him and he threw himself out of the way onto the ground, skidding away from the plastic shards that used to be the train's seats.

Decro scrambled to his feet and backed away from the beast as the third head exposed the spinning wheels beneath the train. He ran into the next cabin which still had its roof intact. A bull's head rammed through the cabin, crushing the floor and twisting its wheels. Sparks burst forth from the floor as the wheels ground awkwardly against the tracks.

The wolf decided not to run further into the train: he needed visuals on where the beast's next attack would be. He pulled himself up the twisted metal ceiling and clambered through the new opening onto the roof of the train. The humid air battered against his face as the train continued down the tracks and his feet gripped the slippery metal tightly.

Another two heads came raining down upon Decro, who stumbled backwards. He swung his katana at the beast as he attempted to wound the heads, but the third head came crashing over him, forcing him to retreat further back.

He scrambled backwards away from the beast, gasping in shock as he almost tumbled off the edge. He had been pushed to the first cabin of the train and there was nowhere left to run. As the beast sent a bull's head flying towards him, Decro dashed under the approaching head. There was a sickening sound of tearing metal as the front of the train was smashed into bits.

The crushed wheels shrieked as they veered off the tracks. The front of the train derailed, swivelling off the side of the elevated train tracks. The momentum of the rest of the cabins continued to push the train forward, sending the entire train falling off the side of the railroad.

Decro clung to the side of the train as his heart lurched from the freefall. The beast was unfazed by its falling perch as it continued to advance upon the wolf. There were loud splashes as the cabins fell one after another into the canal that ran below the tracks, lying sideways in the rushing waters.

The waterlogged wolf pulled himself up onto the cabin as the rapids carried the train downstream. With his sword drawn in front of him, he looked around, not seeing any sign of the beast. The beast would come back. It always did. Decro took deep breaths in guarded recuperation.

With a splash of water, a black sea serpent burst out of the water and thrust at the wolf. He ducked below the trailing body, stabbing his katana through the scales. The beast was so fast, the sword lodged in its body was pulled out of his hands. There was a gurgling shriek as the beast cried out from under the water.

Its head rose out from the water again, staring at him with bloodshot eyes as the hilt of his katana stuck out from its side. Without his weapon, Decro was now defenceless to the beast's attacks. All he could do now was dodge the beast until time was up.

As he paid attention to the looming head in front of him, he was unaware of the serpent's tail which had silently slithered behind him. There was a smooth swiping motion as Decro was whisked upwards by his ankle and dangled in front of the beast's face. The serpent snorted before sending the wolf hurtling through the air onto the train.

The metal side of the train dented as his body was slammed into it. Decro screamed in pain as the impact sent pain shooting through his body and a blinding light filled his vision. Unable to see, he could feel himself lifted into the air again before the tail swung downwards and threw him against the glass windows of the cabin.

The window pane cracked at the collision of bone against reinforced glass as another scream escaped Decro's lips. He was brought up again, hanging limply in the air as the dirty water dripped off his fur. He couldn't take much more. He prepared himself for the embrace of death as the serpent thrust him against the cracked pane again. The glass gave way to his body weight and he fell into the train cabin into the submerged carriage. The water rapids swirled around him, pulling him deeper into the train.

Decro panicked. He needed air! Weakly paddling with his arms and kicking his legs, he swam upwards to the top of the cabin. The current had carried him further down the train, away from the broken window. Instead, the glass above him was intact, showing no signs of giving as he pounded against the window.

His chest felt like it was going to burst. Before he could stop himself, his body forced him to take a breath, sending water rushing into his lungs. Decro gasped and choked, unable to stop more water from gushing in. His vision grew blurry and a burst of light shot across his eyes.

He sank towards the bottom of the train. Another wave of light filled the cabin and the world dissolved around him in the rapids as the shift happened.

Rain poured around him as Decro coughed out water from his lungs. He turned himself around, getting into a kneeling position as his lungs pumped more water out of his mouth. There was a loud, throaty gasp as he breathed in the cold air around him.

The soil around him had turned into mud, coating him brown. That was the least of his worries though; his entire body was sore and his back was aching from the repeated physical trauma that was dished out to him.

His breathing slowed down, returning to a normal rate as he recovered. His vision blurred as he collapsed into the muddy ground and passed out.

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## Chapter 6

*It's just like frostbite. You feel numbness.*

*But it tears you apart cell by cell, atom by atom.*

*Until everything crumbles apart and there's nothing left.*

A white wolf and a green dragon sat on the edge of a cliff, watching the clouds idly roll by. In front of them was a vast countryside, littered with quaint cottages haphazardly built alongside the winding roads. The dragon kicked his legs against the cliff, scattering bits of soil down the hill. The wolf took no heed of the scenic landscape spread out before him, instead appearing to be lost in thought.

That couldn't have been further from the truth, as the wolf was just staring at the ground with his head devoid of thought. The buzzing of thoughts got too tiring for his fatigued mind and shutting off from the external and internal world was his brief respite.

"You alright?" the dragon asked Decro.

The wolf broke out of his trance and turned to his friend, Kerac. They had known each other for just a little over a year, but in that time Decro had poured out his thoughts and feelings to him in a desperate attempt to feel understood. He reluctantly nodded in response.

Kerac opened his mouth as if to say more, then stopped himself. Decro had the tendency to fly off the handle at the smallest of triggers, and with Decro in a pacified mood like this, he'd prefer not to start any fights.

The silence hung between them in a mixture of comfort and heaviness. Kerac looked sideways at the silent wolf, who seemed oblivious to the world. The silence was too much for Kerac to bear. He pulled the wolf against his chest in a scaly embrace. "What's on your mind?" he cautiously probed.

"Hnng?" the wolf dreamily grunted. "Nothing..." he muttered. His peaceful reverie was now broken and his mind flicked to thoughts of the beast again.

"You sure? I'm always here," Kerac prompted.

"Well... I guess it's about the beast I'm fighting," Decro shrugged.

Kerac sighed under his breath. Here he goes again. Beast, beast, beast; fight, fight, fight. That's all Decro ever thought about. He sighed again. Then again, it's hard to deal with mortal combats against a shapeshifting monster in an alternate realm that one finds oneself repeatedly pulled into.

Words of comfort failed him again, so he instead pulled Decro in closer, holding him tightly. "I could just make things easier for both me and the beast and throw myself down this cliff," the wolf muttered.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Hey," holding on to the Decro, Kerac got up and quickly pulled the wolf away from the edge. "Listen. Fight it, alright?" Kerac ruffled the fur on the wolf's head with his scaly paws.

Decro nodded reluctantly. "I know..." he shut his mouth as he stopped himself from saying more.

"Yeah?" the dragon cocked his head to the side, raising one brow quizzically.

"Well... I've been fighting it for so long now. And the battle never ends. And I'm just so tired," Decro shivered as a tear flowed down his furry cheek. "What am I doing wrong?"

"You're not doing anything wrong. Bad things happen to good people, but you have got to endure," Kerac advised.

"I'm trying my best. I've aimed for weak spots. Tried to attack it from all sides. Set up traps to try to stop it. Nothing," the wolf ignored the dragon and carried on with his lament.

Kerac rolled his eyes in frustration. "Look, if you can't kill it for good, then just aim to hurt it or something. Perhaps you can just shoot it somewhere on its body: it doesn't have to be a huge wound or anything. Maybe a small injury will be enough to hold it back."

Decro got to his feet indignantly, staring angrily at the dragon through the tears in his eyes. "What would you know? I've fought this beast for years. It's not some stupid simple solution

where I imagine it and it all goes away," he spat scathingly in frustration. "You're so naive, you know that?"

Decro stormed down the hill. Kerac didn't understand. Nobody did. Heck, even he didn't understand it himself. His knees buckled under him and he fell kneeling on the ground in hopeless resignation.

"Get on," a firm voice ordered him. Decro turned up to see the dragon's back turned to him as he was invited to climb on. He hesitated for a moment before grudgingly climbing on. With a running jump, Kerac charged off the cliff and took flight with the wolf's arms around his neck.

The ground left them behind with each flap of the dragon's wings. The fields below spread out before them in a patchwork of green, stitched together by the roads and fences running between them. The two of them soared into the clouds as the dragon slowed to a stable glide.

The soft mist blew in Decro's face, slightly wetting his fur with the cool condensation mixed with the sweet air. Curiosity got the better of him and he reached out to the clouds, grasping at the cloudy puffs that sailed by him. He stuck out his tongue to taste the clouds and got a mouthful of pure water wetting the insides of his mouth.

Decro grinned stupidly, amused at his childish actions. He paused for a moment and stuck out his tongue again. Kerac could hear the wolf's soft giggling and he smiled too. His laughter was contagious.

Decro's tears were lost among the drops of condensation as they glided through the sky.

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## Chapter 7

*Maybe it's all futile.*

*Maybe it goes on forever.*

*Maybe you'll never win.*

The world shimmered and swirled around Decro in a whirlwind of grey dust. Decro knew that the shift was happening around him, pulling the fibres of his reality away and stitching a new fabric in its place. Red dust was swept off from the ground, getting caught in the hurricane that whisked around him.

Decro could feel a semi-automatic rifle fade into existence, slung across his back. Across his chest was a leather harness lined with loaded rifle magazines, and a knife hung from a belt around his waist. He pulled the rifle to the front, holding it diagonally down across his midriff with the muzzle pointed to the ground. His finger was tapping on the rifle's safety switch, intentionally fidgeting it the wrong way as he waited impatiently for the hurricane to clear.

The swirling dissipated around him, and he found himself standing atop a guard tower that stood in the middle of a small military camp, towering over trucks and buildings that were laid



out in regular grids. A chain-link fence topped with barbed wire surrounded the camp, demarcating its territory against the barren desert.

There was no sign of the beast anywhere, and Decro paced around the sheltered platform. He pondered for a moment. The corrugated metal shelter over his head was limiting his visibility and he needed to do something about that. He climbed up the narrow railings that bordered the platform, balancing himself carefully on the edge as he reached up and grabbed the roof.

Decro kicked his feet, thrusting himself upwards. His heart skipped a beat as his paws slid down the dusty roof as gravity acted on his body weight. Instinctively, he grabbed the edge of the roof, swinging in the wind as he hung by his two hands. His legs were flailing around as he tried unsuccessfully to gain a foothold.

Giving up on his feet, he instead turned his focus to his arms and struggled to pull himself up. "Hnng!" he gasped as he got his forearms on the roof and held fast. His paws took turns grabbing the ridges of the roof as he inched his way up onto the roof. His head was now level with the roof, and with one last heave, he pushed himself up and tumbled onto the roof, catching his breath as he inhaled the red dust.

He got up into a standing position and brought his rifle back to the front as he surveyed the landscape in front of him. The familiar red desert extended for miles into the flat horizon under the sweltering red sun. Decro looked around him and noticed a growing darkness over his head. A giant circle was pulsing above him, slowly growing outwards. The circle was the deepest of blacks that the wolf had ever seen and dark purple tendrils swirled around its border, pulling the edges of the sky into itself, swallowing it up as it expanded.

The growing black hole cast a shadow over the camp and the ground rumbled. Large, jagged spikes emerged from the ground along the edges of the circular shadow, surrounding the military camp threateningly, as if it could swallow the camp up in its earthly jaws at any time. Pebbles bounced off the shuddering ground as cracks ran from the spiked protrusion towards the middle of the camp, breaking its surface into huge chunks of rock and earth. The metal frame of the guard tower groaned as the rock holding its foundation in place gave way, giving the structure free reign to move about.

The rocky plates that used to make up the ground floated into the air. Below the swirling jumble of levitating rocks, crumbled buildings, and military vehicles, there was just darkness, as if the earth below had forgotten to exist. The tower remained floating in place, tilting to the left and right like a buoy in the sea. Decro crouched, lowering his centre of gravity as he tried to stay balanced on the metal roof.

A much-anticipated shriek sounded from the black hole above Decro and he looked up to see a huge draconic head peering hungrily through the middle of the hole. Its bloodshot eyes were too big for their sockets, bulging out of its skull as they rolled to stare at him. Two mole-like claws probed out on either side of the head, digging against the side of the dark opening in the sky.

Decro didn't flinch. With a stoic expression that betrayed no sign of fear, he cocked the rifle and pointed it into the sky, aiming it at the beast. Flicking the safety off, he gently squeezed the

trigger and sent a shot flying out at the beast's eye. The beast roared in pain as both its upper and lower jaw split down the middle, opening up in four directions in an X-shape. Rows of teeth lined the quarter-maws, making them look like individual chainsaws that formed the petals of a ghoulish flower.

Decro snapped his finger across the trigger repeatedly, sending a spray of bullets into its open mouth. It shrieked again, recoiling for a split second before charging upon the wolf, snapping its jaws. Decro was trapped on the tiny roof with nowhere to run. He looked over the edge, picked a particularly large rock and jumped off the roof towards it.

He landed with a thud on the moving slab, rocking it from side to side as he transferred his momentum to it. There was a sound of tearing metal as the beast's maw pierced the roof of the tower, making the tower bob up and down in the empty sea. The hovering rocks moved up and down as if disturbed by an invisible wave that propagated from the floating guard tower. They smashed against the slab that Decro was on, knocking him back and forth.

Decro remained in a kneeling position and shot repeatedly at the beast as he emptied the magazine. He swiftly popped the magazine out of the receiver and tossed it nonchalantly into the dark void below him as he grabbed another magazine off his harness and slotted it into the lower receiver with a click. He cocked the rifle and resumed his barrage of slugs at the beast.

A ferret's body had materialized behind its grotesque head, clambering down the guard tower with its mole limbs, barely flinching as Decro continued his firing on its hide. Smoky tendrils shot out from the beast's body into the empty depths below and two octopus tentacles emerged in front of him.

Decro fired at the writhing tentacles, sending each of them dissipating in a cloud of black smoke. He swapped out the empty magazine for another one before resuming his firing assault on the beast. More howls of anger filled the air as six more tentacles burst through the gaps between the slabs of hovering rocks, swiping at him.

Decro sprayed his gun at them, sending three of the tentacles into oblivion. Before he could react, one of them lashed out at him and curled around his feet. "What the-" he blurted out as he was hoisted into the air, way above the floating rocks.

The wolf aimed at the tentacle that ensnared him and fired at it, destroying it. Without the support, he fell through the air, grabbing the edge of a floating rock before he could fall into the black pit. He scrambled up onto the rock just before another slab crashed into the rock where he was hanging from.

He swapped out the half-empty magazine for a full one and fired at the last of the tentacles. This was unsustainable. Unless the shift was coming soon, he needed a change of strategy if he were to survive this encounter. He looked around, spying a machine gun mounted on a technical floating just a short distance away from him.

He bit his lower lip and charged over to the vehicle, hopping from slab to rock to rubble as he navigated the spinning landscape. More tentacles had poked through the gaps, reaching out for

him. He was almost there. He jumped onto the vehicle and turned the machine gun on the tentacles, flicking off the safety and firing.

The bullets came out rapidly, whizzing ahead in a straight line. He turned the gun back and forth, making sure to finish off the last of the tentacles before turning back to the guard tower. The beast was using its mole-like claws to crawl up and down the tower, spiralling around the structure with its ferret torso.

The heavy spray of bullets hit the draconic head square in its eyes and it recoiled in pain. It opened its mouth and howled, sending a breath of fire at Decro. He ducked behind the vehicle's cab, letting the fire fly above him. The fire continued on for a few seconds before dissipating in a smell of burning brimstone.

Decro scrambled to his feet and went back to his perch behind the machine gun. He touched the metal trigger of the gun and recoiled. The metal body of the machine gun had been heated up by the beast's fiery breath, burning his fingers during his attempt to touch it

"Gah!" Decro grunted irritably and whipped his rifle forward again, firing more shots at the beast. The beast has had enough. It threw itself off its metal perch and bounded furiously towards Decro, effortlessly hopping from rock to rock as it descended upon the wolf.

Decro panicked. There was nowhere to run. He drew his dagger and waited for an opportunity to stab the beast. The beast, however, didn't give him that luxury. Its clawed paws slammed into Decro, throwing him off the technical and pinning his torso against one of the large rocky protrusions at the side of the pit.

He grunted in pain as he was crushed against the unyielding stone. From his elevated position, he could see the entire pit with rock and military equipment circling the guard tower that floated in the middle. The draconic head loomed in front of him as claws squeezed him tighter against the rock.

Decro yelped in agony as the sharp edges dug into his skin. There was a cracking sound as his bones snapped under the pressure, sending pain shooting through his body. The beast's tongue was licking the sides of its quarter-maws, as it loomed over him, delighted at its satisfying capture of its elusive prey of more than half a decade.

Its free arm was raised into the air, and Decro braced himself for the attack. There was a gust of wind as the claw swiped at him, slicing his skin and creating a deep gash diagonally across his neck. Blood gushed from the wound and air escaped from the sliced windpipe as he struggled to breathe. Decro's arms were closed around his neck as he frantically tried to seal escaping air from the tear in his throat.

He kicked his limbs feebly as he felt his life drain from him. He was going to die. After years of fighting, it would all end here. Decro turned his head away in resignation, his eye catching the silver blade that he was still holding in his hands. Wait. "Maybe a small injury will be enough to hold it back," Kerac's advice came to mind again.

With one hand still clutching his neck tightly, his other arm held the dagger up. He brought the dagger down on the clawed paw that pinned him down. The dragon shrieked in pain as it recoiled slightly. Decro twisted the blade in the black flesh, before pulling it out and stabbing again. One stab. Two. Three. He mutilated the beast's paw, sending it writhing its head in a frenzy.

A wave of light flashed across the world. It was working! He stabbed again, this time disfiguring a different portion of flesh. The beast let go, letting him fall onto a floating slab, splashing his blood across the rocky surface. The beast was clutching its wounded paw in pain, filling the air with shrieks of anguish.

Just a while more. The world was shimmering vividly before his eyes. The beast knew it too, and it glared at the fallen wolf. It had to finish it now. It charged at Decro, prepared to deal his target the final blow. It was too late though, as a wave of light sent the world tumbling away.

Decro found himself in the middle of the street, clutching at the wound in his throat frantically, kneeling down with his head touching the ground as he prevented his flowing blood from entering his windpipe, flowing down his lungs and choking him. He was taking weak, slow breaths as he clung on to dear life.

"Hey!" someone was screaming. "Someone help! He's hurt!"

There were footsteps of people crowding around him.

"Get out of the way!" another voice sounded. "You! Call an ambulance!"

The world swam around him. He could feel himself being carried away. Laid in the back of a bright vehicle. His paws were pried away from his neck as people attended to his wound.

"Kid. Kid. Kid! Stay with me. Are you still conscious?"

Decro nodded feebly.

"Okay, I need you to open your eyes. Look at me, kid. Can you hear me? Come on, stay with me, stay with me, stay wi-"

The bright lights and loud sounds around the wolf faded away as he went into a deep sleep.

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## Epilogue

*But maybe you'll find a reason.*

*Maybe you'll fight the meaning behind the fight.*

*And maybe you'll keep fighting.*

The sky was filled with patches of various shades of blue, punctuated with little clusters of white, fluffy clouds. A soft breeze caressed the surface of a calm lake, sending tiny ripples spreading outwards across its surface, slightly distorting the reflection of the sky above.

A tiny wooden dock extended over the water surface, and on it was a white wolf, dipping his toes in the water, making swirling motions around in the lake as he stared at the expanding circle of ripples. On his neck was a long scar that has healed years ago.

Since then, the shifts had come by less often, and fighting the beast felt easier than before. Was the beast getting weaker? Or was he getting stronger? But if he had beaten the beast before, why didn't this shifting thing end? Why did he still have to fight?

The wolf sighed. All these questions. Still no answers. Rebuilding his life had also been tough. How do you catch up with people after having lagged behind in personal development for years? And each time he felt like he had created something good for himself, everything would crumble down around him again. He had gathered achievements over the years, only having them go obsolete soon after. He had worked hard on his projects, only to have them fail at the last step. He had made friends through time, only to have them drift apart and forget him entirely.

He sighed again as he contemplated the futility of it all.

The world shimmered for a second. It was coming again.

"Yo Decro!" called a voice behind him. The wolf turned around to see a green dragon standing on the meadow behind him. Behind him was a group of the wolf's friends he had made over the years.

"Kerac? What are you doing here?" the wolf asked, tilting his head.

"Here to see you, duh," the dragon grinned back.

Decro got up and walked towards the group.

"So uh," Kerac scratched the back of his head. "We chipped in together to get you this." The dragon pulled out a futuristic cylinder of some sort, with glowing lines running up and down its body, and two handles protruding from one side of it. At the top was a circular opening that exposed strange panels within it.

"What's this?" Decro asked quizzically. He knew that this was a weapon, but its purpose was beyond his knowing.

"A gift. From us," the dragon nodded his head to the rest of the group before turning back to the wolf. "To you," he finished.

Decro looked at the weapon gingerly and took it from Kerac's hands. He turned up to see the group smiling back at him. He saw a glimpse a black jackal, who flashed him a grin. Zep. A white wolf was waving to him too, and Decro waved back. Kaz. Behind him was a smirking black dragon. "Smelly mammal!" he called out. Decro snorted back. "Dumb dragon," he retorted.

Ahh, Tano'rath. A Dutch Angel Dragon was floating in the air beside them with an amused expression. Blue.

Two more dragons were standing side by side. The one on the right was hugging the blue one on the left, who looked annoyed. Space and Teryx. Teryx flashed Decro a wink, and the wolf responded with an amused smirk and a nod of acknowledgement. An eastern dragon was in front of the pair, beaming happily at the Decro. Anakie. A sweater vest-clad lizard was waving at him too, and Decro waved back. Seg. A green wolf was peering at him from behind the crowd too, and the wolf flashed a smile back. Kava.

Decro grinned stupidly, his eyes tearing a little from the gesture of goodwill. "Uhh, I don't know how to thank you guys," he stammered.

"Just keep fighting. That's all you need to do," Kerac beamed.

Decro nodded as he turned back to the docks. The shimmering was filling his vision as a burst of light flooded the world. The faint head of a shark materialized before him, leaving a trail of black smoke behind as it sailed towards him. Snakes were writhing out of the misty body, each one bearing a sharp horn on the top of its head. In front of it were two gorilla arms, reaching out for him

Decro slightly depressed the trigger on the back handle of the weapon and it glowed and hum as it came to life. He aimed it at the beast and squeezed the trigger fully. A beam of blue energy shot out at the beast. There was a shriek of pain as the beast stumbled backwards.

Decro didn't wait. He jumped on one of its outstretched arms and climbed up the beast, tearing across the limb with the energy beam. Yes. It wasn't over yet. He aimed the beam at the mass of snakes coming for him and sliced them apart. Yes. He still had to keep fighting. He pressed the weapon's opening into the beast's dermal denticles and squeezed the trigger, burning a hole through its black flesh. Yes. His friends might not stand by his side forever.

Decro dodged a stray snake that snapped at him, thrusting its horn at him. But he had something. With a swift swing of his dagger, the snake laid in two halves before him. He had friends now. The other arm was coming down on him, and he sliced it off with the energy beam, watching as it disappeared in a cloud of black smoke. He had a future. He vaporized another snake that had tried to grab his ankle. He had hope. Decro pointed the weapon at the remaining arm and destroyed it too. While he had all that, he had a reason to keep fighting.

Until his last breath, he would keep fighting.

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~ End ~