

The city of Lincoln rose above the plains like an undeniable mountain, a conglomeration of palisades polished with white, rounded spires rising from a massive base. Like any massif, one needed to be a great distance away to see the peaks of this hulking network of human dwelling. Always visible from any angle was the single, slender tower rising into the heavens, to the very edges of Earth's atmosphere; this was the Lincoln Space Bridge, a transportation elevator moving goods and human cargo to and from the space stations orbiting about the planet.

Millions of people resided within the confines of what was once the capital of Nebraska, just one of thousands of such cities now built to accommodate Earth's human inhabitants. The rapid onset of climate change devastated global markets. Increased risk of violent weather events resulting in episodes of geologic mass wasting, surges in global pandemics, changes to local environments, and a plethora of other alterations to the planet's surface overwhelmed the ability of human communities to continue as they were.

In turn, the economic engines of global society suffered persistent financial losses. Insurance companies were forced to payout for perpetual damages caused by flooding, landslides, tornadoes, hurricanes, and wildfires. The Earth was changing, but humanity took too long to change with it. Insurance premiums increased to the point people couldn't afford it anymore; they dropped their coverage so they could afford food.

The shift in the planet's conditions disrupted the agricultural productivity of growers. Weather patterns altered what crops could be grown and where. Evolving ecosystems drastically altered the biodiversity of the planet. Familiar symbiotic relationships disappeared in favor of new partnerships between organisms, some including improved mutations of preexisting species. The world's water supply could not keep up with the needs of daily, household and industrial consumption let alone nurture the food needed to nourish humanity. To resolve this issue, large "agri-corporations" converted their vast land holdings into tall, translucent towers to better control conditions and manage production. Shaped like giant beehives, the average greenhouse peaked at about 200 meters above their massive bases. Many buried their foundations deep into the Earth. Each floor of these massive structures were designated for

specific agricultural crops based on requirements for maximum growth. These indoor vertical farms allowed for better resource management while sheltering the plants from the grave weather conditions outside. Meat-like protein products were often cultured in the labs found at the bottom of the structure. Usually constructed in desert regions, thousands of agri-hives, though effective, struggled to keep up with the demands of the human population. As a result, food prices swelled.

Centuries ago, the world's governments fell into a series of oligarchs controlled by large corporations whose decisions were driven by the risk management assessments of large insurance companies. It was determined humanity could not defeat the powers of nature. Governments began to promote more sustainable cities, built away from the coasts where sea levels had risen and landslides became more prominent. Wildfires increased with the rise in global temperatures. Regions of the globe not used to horrendous tornadoes were left abandoned. Governments no longer subsidized the rebuilding of communities repeatedly destroyed by the changing Earth's transgressions and people around the world did not resist.

Globally, urban areas were deserted for more stable environments. In what was considered the United States, the *right people* were moved inland to the Midwest and the Four Corners regions. The Mississippi and Colorado River basins with all their tributaries had been manipulated such they no longer reached their respective oceans. What was once the Gulf States had been all but abandoned. Weather patterns had changed rendering the region a perpetual disaster zone. No organization wanted to continue redeveloping the area any longer. Much of Florida was underwater, and the areas not submerged were prone to massive flooding through its calcareous soils. Such was the case for many places in the world.

Eventually the insurance companies convinced governments to stop funding the continual repair of these perpetually endangered regions and encourage people to move into corporate funded cities in more environmentally secure parts of the continents, where immense castles could be constructed to more easily withstand the dangers of the changing climate. Of course, only a specific class of people were afforded the privilege of inhabiting the new urban lifestyle. Those who obeyed the banks, obeyed the laws

of taxation, those who posed no threat to the general population were allowed to find salvation within these white pillared fortresses. Those who could not were left in the wilderness.

Two young girls sat upon a tuft of grass on a small knoll above the trash, mud, and dilapidated shelters. Covered in rags, clothes that were dispensed by the city folk living in the towers rising above them, the two huddled together to stay warm while keeping an eye on the group of disheveled men gathered about a fire in a tall, metal drum.

She didn't know how old she was. All Emma knew was she was young, yet burnishing the features of an adult woman, a desirable age ripe for males to apply their dominance. Her mother had been raped and killed by that group of men now warming themselves around the fire. She kept pushing her tangled, mud clumped hair from her face to maintain a watchful eye on those petulant heathens. She remembered that night. Her mother was high on the happy rocks, a homemade concoction distilled and crystallized from the chemicals exuded out the sewer pipes from the city. Most everyone who lived here in the borderlands around Lincoln was addicted to the malevolent substance; every city had their own version of it. Emma had smoked it just once; she recalls a sense of false calm in her mind, a dazed sensation relieving all worry. Life was inevitably manageable under its influence. But she also remembered the lack of self-control, the sexual avarice, and the peevish disposition that came with it. One moment she would be bringing another person to arousal, the next she would be chastising them for taking advantage of her. The interchange resulted in a strange mixture of laughter, pleasure, and boisterous expressions of hatred. Emma remembered feeling so sinister and in control, yet, she wasn't. It didn't take her long to realize the futility of being under the influence of whatever chemical was being passed around.

Emma gazed upward at the massive fortress of Lincoln; the base bathed in blue light fading to the nearly pure white tops of the towers against the layered colors of the evening sky. Emma dreamed of being on the other side of the wall, to live within those pristine spires reaching into the atmosphere. She could spot the space bridge rising into the heavens, the top of which she could not even imagine seeing.

Her visions of life on the other side of the wall were pieced together by what came through the waste chutes, the discarded materialism no longer considered recyclable. After the water was reclaimed, bricks of raw sewage were dropped onto massive dung piles semi submerged into the earth. Any sort of grimy livelihood would be better than living on this side of the wall, living off the scraps of the privileged urbanites living within the city of Lincoln. Emma imagined stable families living in clean apartments, not worried about the weather, the cold, the rain. Out here, she was left to wander the borderlands between the walled off privileged population and the wilderness that laid behind her. Out in the borderlands there are preachers who attempt to divert the attention of the many living their lives under the influence. Emma had discovered enlightenment thanks to a priestess known as The Omni. The Omni would wander the areas just outside the city walls trying to save those who were lost. Who was she kidding, all of those outside the wall were lost. They were born of greed, addiction, and narcissistic false hopes. But The Omni maintained faith and optimism even in such dire, discriminatory conditions. They were the children of the outcast, not deemed worthy to live within the city. Their genetic code and genealogy suggested recklessness and aggravations upon society. Their offspring were judged before they were born. However, The Omni preached of light amongst the darkness, to see the flowers blooming amongst the filth. Truth, honest, real hope was still attainable by those who chose to see through unadulterated eyes.

Through The Omni's teachings Emma quickly realized the fruitless habits of the population around her. She needed to escape. She needed to be on the other side of the wall, within the confines of utopian conditions of the massive urban complex towering above her. Anything less was not tolerated. Behind her was the wilderness. Emma had heard stories of people living in the woods, living off the land, a savage population living without the comforts of technology - no computers, warm beds, or security from nature. At times she wondered if venturing into the wilderness was better than what laid out before her now. But why settle for more poverty when one could aim to live within the city.

Emma sat staring at the group of men huddled around a fire as the sun provided its final gasps upon the day. The men kept inhaling their happy rocks and staring at Emma and her sister through the rising fog. The sister really was of no blood relation. She was just a companion Emma maintained. She

didn't have a name, just The Sister. The Sister's mother was also raped and killed by the same group of men who now glared at them, in a sort of maniacal haze. Emma could read their intentions for the evening; they had followed the two girls along the wall for the past two days. The time was coming when a confrontation would be had; plans for survival were running thin. Emma continued to gaze at the collection of tall towers of Lincoln as The Sister simply sat next to her mumbling some nonsense; she possessed little knowledge outside of her own surreal existence, still withdrawing from her own happy rocks addiction. Emma was increasingly feeling the draw of the woods behind her. This would be her last resort for survival. She could not imagine having to rebuild her life in such a land of lawless heathenry outside the city walls or in the wild. Yet, she maintained hope.

The Sister rose her head and began to yell out obscenities, "SHIT! SHIT! SHIT!" She shook Emma's arm and subsequently her whole body.

Emma tried to calm her companion down, "What is it? What do you see?" She glanced in the same direction as The Sister.

Through the evening fog Emma could see a lean figure nonchalantly making their way through the muck. Though the figure stumbled from time to time, there was an assertive grace as the individual approached. Emma didn't know if she should panic. She had never seen a person of this stature on this side of the wall before. The sleek looking visitor bore an unbuttoned three-quarter length jacket revealing a sweater zipped to the lower jaw and some kind of utility pants tucked into knee-high leather boots. Clearly he had connections within the confines of Lincoln. When freed from the foggy air, Emma could see the very lean, tall man with a very chiseled face shaded by a rugged wide-brimmed hat. She imagined people from the city to possess more weight than he did. There wasn't an ounce of fat on his tall frame; she figured he was twice as tall as she was. His eyes were judgmental, constantly assessing his surroundings, yet exhibited no fear of anything around him. Every aspect of this gent was a library of wit and experience unknown to most anyone, certainly more than any resident outside the wall.

The stranger stood several feet from the two young girls, tipped his rustic, black hat towards them. "Good evening ladies."

Both Emma and Sister were taken aback by his demeanor. They were unsure of how to respond to such formalities. They continued to sit and stare at what was becoming an increasingly intimidating fellow. “You have nothing to fear from me. May I get your names?”

The girls continued to stare, weary of continuing any sort of conversation with such a figure. For all they knew this was another man looking to take advantage of them.

The stranger observed his targets a bit, waiting for any kind of an answer. He seemed unsurprised by their awkward silence. “Well I’m Feron. Most people call me by my last name, Kietch. I’m here to lend some help to one of you.” Emma heard the word help. She felt somewhat encouraged by the sound of it, but not totally convinced of his intentions. She kept wondering why he was here. “I have been watching the two of you for a while. I might be able to offer you an opportunity to escape this way of life.” Emma continued to dwell on his use of the word help and the comforting tone of his dialogue. She didn’t fully understand what he was offering, but any form of help would be greatly appreciated. Kietch furrowed his brow trying to interpret the facial expressions of his counterparts. Then he turned towards the group of rough looking men gathered about the fire. He investigated the entirety of the situation; the grizzly group returned his glances with glares of ire. Who was this fancy dressed man consulting with their prey? An ancient sense of territoriality was being trespassed upon. If they didn’t do anything about this strange figure in their unholy land, what would they have left? The delusional group of barbarians seemed to huddle closer together to consult on the situation. They then motioned towards the girls and this intruder upon their turf. Feron watched their motions, then anticipating a confrontation turned his head back to the wide-eyed young girls. “Allow me to render these malcontents into an incapacitated state. Maybe then you’ll better understand my intention.” Feron then returned his attention to the predatory trio slopping their way towards him.

The greasy one to Feron’s right yelled out, “Who are you? Where you from?”

”Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Kietch. I work for some very powerful people. I am here to conduct some business with these two young women, none of which concerns any of you.” he politely replied. Feron stood, feet slightly spread apart, hands hanging by their thumbs from the front of

his black belt. The morbidly obese figure on Feron's left began hobbling through the mud in an attempt to out-flank Feron. Kietch then noticed the one on the right also motioning himself opposite his comrade. Feron simply followed them with his eyes, shifting his attention from one to the other, a tight smirk on his face, amused at what these three monstrous men were about to do. "May I ask who you are?"

The one in the middle who just stood his ground, answered "I'm Tuff."

Feron's smile widened, "Is that so? You huffin' shit from the sewer, or is that your real name?"

The brute bent his brow trying to interpret what the stranger had said. He then violently beat his chest and shouted, "Yeah, I'm Tuff!" He then turned his head watching his team attempt to surround Feron. Tuff was clearly anxious, getting ready to make some kind of move.

Feron stood confidently in place, "I would be very careful about the decision you boys are about to make."

The thug to Feron's right yelled out, "We're not boys! We're men!"

The massive one on Feron's left had to get his two cents in, with a deep, guttural shout, "Yeah. We're men."

"You three have a plan at least, I'll give you that." Feron explained, "But I don't think you really know what you are getting yourselves into."

The one in the middle again exclaimed, "Those women are ours! You go now!"

Feron gave a snide grin, turned to Emma and Sister and rhetorically asked, "Do these gentlemen own you?" The girls, their faces mixed with fear and curiosity, weren't sure what this well manicured fellow was asking, or even implying. Emma just shrugged her shoulders and shook her head as though she were confused. Feron tipped his hat as a friendly gesture toward them, "I didn't think so."

The trio of oafs did not care for Kietch' mocking tone towards them. This strangely attired, skinny intruder needed to be put in his place. In their mind, death was a fine consequence. The young girls behind them also needed to be dealt with. The three men had needs, to show how masculine they were. This was their territory. Not the preacher. Not some fancy pantsed skinny man from the wealthy

side of the wall. An instinctive notion to show all they were the alpha males of this land needed to be fulfilled.

Feron simply watched for one of them to signal their next move. Or he could simply force the issue by playing with their lack of intelligence. He turned to the large one on his left, growing more antagonistic, “Hey fatass, how much shit do you devour from the sewer every day?” The recipient of the insult appeared confused at first, then openly gritted his teeth. He didn’t know what this gangly stranger said, but he knew enough it was an insult. Feron began to slowly walk toward the monstrous man, “I am intrigued by your size. I just want to poke you but I’m scared my hand would get caught in that bottomless hole you call a belly button.” twisting his finger as though he were about to poke a cute teddy bear. “Besides, I’d be scared to find what you have hidden underneath them folds of yours.” Again, without knowing exactly what was being said, the large man continued to get riled by the insults being spewed at him. “I imagine you would like to take advantage of those girls back there. But tell me, how do you know you have cock? I’m sure you haven’t seen it in quite some time.”

That last comment sent the obese man over the edge; he became outraged at the idea of his anatomy being questioned. The giant goon charged Feron, arms reaching outward while attempting an intimidating roar. Noting the events taking place, the other members of the trio unwillingly also ran towards Feron. Feron walked into the large man’s charge and sidestepped him at the last second, tripping him into the deep muck beneath his feet. Feron then immediately turned around while unsheathing two thick batons, one for each hand, that telescoped outward and clicked as they locked into extended positions from each side of his body. In the following instant Kietch grimaced and flung his right hand backwards first ramming the metal rod into the gut of another attacker coming from behind, then slamming the baton in his left across the back of the skull of his opponent. The greasy grunt fell to all fours in the mud before Feron violently kicked the man in the side; the sound of cracking ribs could be heard. The wounded oaf laid on his side, rolling in the mud and groaning in pain. Feron stretched his neck from side to side, fixed his hat, then promptly turned and stoically marched toward the third of the hostiles.



As his two partners fell, Tuff had acquired a piece of lumber. He gave a loud yell and ran toward Feron while swinging his newfound club. Kietch's face tightened as he simultaneously flipped the batons in his hands so he was holding the narrow ends allowing the thick, metal handles to become the points of impact. He then planted his legs, bent slightly at the knee, readying himself for the charge. Once he was in range, Tuff swung his club with reckless abandon. Feron gracefully danced about the beastly addict avoid every blow, until a window of opportunity arose. In a quick and massive swipe, Feron crushed the man's lower jaw with the baton in his right hand, then immediately followed with a blow from his left. Tuff fell for a moment, his lower jaw misshapen and out of place. Realizing his altered appearance, he screamed trying to push his mandible back in place.

As Feron resheathed the batons, he noticed the fat man continuing to struggle his way back to his feet with little success; the mud was deep and allowed little traction to assist a man of his size. The second nestled on his knees, one arm still bracing his torso in pain. Tuff tried gurgling some kind of insult, but decided to just let his jaw hang. Again he picked up a club and carefully meandered towards Feron. Feron simply marched into the attack, raising his left hand to catch the thick wooden weapon and with a fluid motion shoved a knee into the mid-section of his attacker. He then stepped aside to allow the muddy grunt fall to the ground. Feron quickly pulled a knife and thrust it into the back of his attacker precisely severing the spinal cord. Tuff laid motionless in the mud.

The massive man who initiated the attack continued to wallow in the mud. Feron tromped over him while sheathing his knife, stepping on the oversized lummo's head and approached his greasy opponent holding his rib cage, kneeling in the filth. Feron gave him a powerful kick to the head, shoving the wounded man on his back. He then stomped on the man's chest. A distinct cracking of more ribs could be heard. Feron then pressed his right foot on the neck of his victim, watching him squirm until dead, Feron's face firmly grimacing with despicement for the scum that attacked him. He then turned his attention to the obese man who finally got to his knees. Feron walked towards him, mud sucking the soles of his boots. He gazed at the two young girls who appeared shocked by what had just transpired. Feron gave them a diabolical smile as he approached his final kill. He slid his right hand along his belt and

pulled out a pistol. Stopping just a couple of meters in front of the fat man, Feron tilted his head as his prey still struggled to get to his feet. Feron shoved the side of the man's head with his foot causing the large gent to fall face first in the mud. It was then Feron held his firearm to the back of the man's head and fired a couple of shots. All three of the perpetrators laid motionless. He could hear a slight moan coming from the man with the severed spine. Feron walked over to him and squatted on the balls of feet. He could hear Tuff trying to mumble something. "I warned you to think about your actions." Feron said placing the barrel of his gun against the back of the man's skull. "I could leave your paralyzed body to suffer in this god forsaken shit hole. But I will do your dumbass a favor and let you die quickly." And pulled the trigger to silence him.

The girls continued to sit on the knoll, eyes wide, mouths gaping with astonishment. Sister stared at the unholstered gun as Feron began to stumble through the mud toward them. Neither of the girls felt compelled to run, but caution was thick about them. Feron stopped in front of the young ladies and gave an exasperated sigh, "Well, that's done." He then paused with an inquisitive look directed toward Emma, then Sister. Raising his eyebrows Feron explained, "You two have to make a choice. I wish to take one of you with me to live on the other side of that wall." He had pointed his thumb over his shoulder as he started his proposal. The girls squinted their eyes, Emma's mouth now closed and suspicious. Sister held a blank stare on the firearm. Feron felt like he wasn't being understood and provided hand signals to aid in his slower description of his terms. "Here's the deal. I am allowed to take only one of you," he raised an index finger to emphasize the number he was taking with him, then pointed at each girl attempting to signify it would be one of them, "to live on the other side of the wall." The assassin in the wide brimmed hat turned and pointed at the skyscrapers of Lincoln. Feron returned to gaze upon the young girls, his shoulders slumping, mouth curling downward to one side in frustration. Could these girls speak? The language out here was simple and often incoherent. He had been watching them and was under the impression they could communicate to some degree, at least with the rabble that resided out here in this shithole. Emma, more literate than the average person living on this side of the wall, seemed to

understand living in the city. This was her opportunity to realize her desires. Feron asked, “Do either of you understand what I am offering here?”

Emma quickly shook her head. “Yes. I want to live in the city.”

Feron began to grin. “Good. But I can only take one of you. You need to decide.” He scanned the ground around him and spotted a large flat stone. Picking it up with his free hand, Feron laid the stone at the girls’ feet, then stood tall. “I need either one of you to use this and decide who is going with me, if you get my meaning.” Emma briefly looked at the gun, then at Feron, his eyes studying every move of his audience. Sister, more anxious than Emma, seemed tense as she kept eyeing the piece. “Let’s make sure we have this clear. One of you needs to pick up that gun and kill the other. I know that might be a lot to ask. I doubt either of you killed anyone before, but this is the application required to come under my employ.” Emma understood the nature of his request, but pondered the consequences of what she must do.

Sister moved slowly toward the pistol. She was now looking up at Feron as she did so, wondering if this is what she was supposed to do. Emma grew curious about her friend’s intentions. Still watching Feron, Sister got closer to the gun. Her feet were now in the mud, she was bent over, her hand now hanging over the stone. Feron returned her gaze, his smile growing reveling in the motion of his plan. Sister swiped the gun and clambered up the knoll. Emma slid away frightened by Sister’s actions. Sister fingered the pistol, first gliding her fingers over the grip of the handle. She then held it like Feron had done, the handle in the palm, her finger on the trigger. With her other hand she lightly glided her fingers down the barrel, then turned the piece to stare down the barrel. Emma scrunched her face anticipating disaster; common sense told her such a decision was risky. Sister then embraced the weight of this prize; it was heavier than it appeared. She turned the barrel away from herself, first pointing at the ground, then paused. She looked at Emma, then back at Feron, who was continuing to examine her every move. Sister then stood up and raised the gun pointing at Feron. Feron didn’t flinch, standing his ground. “I wouldn’t do that if I were you.” then took a couple of steps forward. Sister kept the gun on him, shaking with anticipation of what would happen next. She let him take a few more steps then tried to pull the trigger.

Nothing happened. It seemed so simple when the stranger did it. Feron took a few more steps and swiped the gun from her hands. Pursing his lips, Feron shook his head and gave a disappointed “tsk, tsk, tsk.” He held the pistol up showing Sister the profile, pointing to the little button just above the handle. “I don’t usually have a safety on my firearms. Waste of space and time, really. But when working with a couple of newbies, it’s best to keep things somewhat predictable.” He smiled as he clicked the safety off. Then holding the gun by the barrel, reached out to hand the gun to Emma. Emma’s eyes grew initially backing away. Feron encouraged her, “Go ahead, take it.” Emma slightly turned her head to the left, eyes still looking at what Feron was offering her. “I think you know what I am asking of you.”

Emma slowly relaxed and turned towards Feron’s outstretched arm. Sister’s brow bent downward trying to comprehend what was happening. Emma slowly grabbed the gun from Feron’s hand and looked it over. Feron reminded her, “If you know what I am offering you, you’ll know what I am asking of you.”

Emma glanced at Sister who suddenly realized what was to be done. Her eyes grew large as she leaned away from her lifelong friend. Emma, weighing the outcomes of her choice, turned her head once again towards Feron, “You promise?”

Feron released a most devilish grin, “You will owe me one day. If you accept that, yes, you have my word.”

Emma pointed the gun at Sister and pulled the trigger. The muzzled release of the bullet pushed Emma backward a few steps. Sister fell backwards off the knoll and on her back in the mud below. Emma could hear her moaning, crying, a desire to scream but too taken aback by the events to do so.

Feron sauntered over to Emma’s target and analyzed the wound in her left shoulder. “We’ll work on your aim. I don’t usually like to let my victims suffer for too long.” He then looked at Emma, “You’ll need to come over and finish her.” He waved his hand motioning Emma to come closer. Emma slowly stumbled through the mud to stand next to her new mentor. She gazed down at Sister. The Omni had given Emma the opportunity to make decisions for herself, to realize her own destiny. But this was a whole different sense of empowerment. Emma gazed at Sister, the girl she protected during the past week. *What if I don’t kill her? What would this dangerous man do to me? Will he really take me to live in the*

*city?* Her emotions were overwhelmed with contradicting guilt and opportunity. This is what The Omni called a conscience. We are responsible for our actions. And everything we do has a consequence.

Feron gently grabbed Emma's right arm, the one holding the gun, and positioned it to aim at Sister's head. "Finish it." Emma paused as Sister began to squirm away from the sight of the barrel. Feron clamped his foot upon her wounded shoulder, holding her in place; Sister screamed. Emma adjusted her aim and pulled the trigger. Silence. She did it. She took a life. Emma shed a tear. Sister had only been with her for a few days, but was it her right to dispose of a person this way? She then recalled how easy Feron had made it look. Maybe this is how we must survive, to direct and protect our fate, she thought. Emma had no choice but to trust this man who just recently made his acquaintance. She was going to hand the gun back to its owner as he did to her, but the barrel was quite hot.

Feron gave a light giggle. "Let me grab it this way." Using both hands, he carefully took the gun from her hand and holstered it. He noticed Emma looking back at Sister. "It'll get easier. At least now Sister will no longer suffer in this shit pile." He then nonchalantly offered his hand. "C'mon."

Emma looked at it, then gave a smile. "To the city?"

"Yup." And Feron began leading back to the wall. "You need to know up front, I wasn't going to take Sister into the city. She wasn't worthy." Emma just stared at Feron, analyzing his intentions as they tramped through the mud. "You were the one I wanted to come with me. I just needed you to prove yourself worthy. I have big plans for you." He then looked forward, deciphering their path back to the city, "It is okay to mourn the death of your victims, sometimes." Emma continued to try interpreting her emotions. "What is life without survival of the fittest? I often ask myself, 'What is life without death?' The point is, all people die. In the meantime, while waiting for our own ends, we must make the most of the time we have ourselves. Sometimes that means being selfish. Sometimes that means we have to do things we don't necessarily want to do." Feron then looked around as they walked, giving a bit of a sigh through his pondering gaze, "Out here, in this slimy god forsaken realm, you don't have much of a choice. It's either kill or be killed. That's lesson one." He then looked down at his new protege, "You did what you had to do today. You did good."

The Omni had made her feel valued. And now this man praised her. Realizing the opportunity that had been granted, the guilt slowly faded from Emma's mind. The limits to what laid before her were endless. As long as she was on the other side of the wall, to live in the city, all would be well. Emma looked up at her new friend and smiled. Continuing to guide her through the muck, Feron returned the gesture with an even wider smile, "I promise you, things are going to start looking up for you, Emma."