

Chapter 6 – “From the Swampy Depths”

As Kai returned to his normal state of mind, he got to his feet, the headache from his head abruptly meeting with a rocky and very solid wall now much lessened from what it had just been a few minutes ago. While Kai now knew what he wanted to accomplish, he also had to make sure that he didn't die prematurely before could act any of his goals out.

That meant at least surviving these humid swamps, and whatever dangerous creatures that might be lurking them.

Kai had basically no survival experience in scenarios of where nature ruled supreme. For his whole life, he had been living in civilization, whether that be on the concrete streets or in an actual home. But that didn't mean he was completely helpless. If anything, Kai knew how to be a cockroach; almost unkillable and unyielding to anything the world threw at him.

Forged through hardships and misfortune, he wasn't going to let some damp swamp claim his life. While finding some civilization or at least some semblance of it would be optimal, he had to start preparing for if none was in his immediate vicinity. Water and food were priorities, but that's where things got problematic.

Alien world, alien creatures, and alien diseases.

He had no way of properly determining which plants were and weren't going to kill him, or what water would contain some kind of festering alien bacteria and other unpleasant things that would most likely mean the end for him. An excruciatingly cruel and pitiful end.

He had eaten enough bad food and garbage throughout his life on the street that he knew how food poisoning and other damned diseases could put him in critical danger if left unattended.

Slowly moving through the thick undergrowth of the unhospitable swamps, avoiding the more muddy areas, Kai marveled at the lush plant life and unknown insects flittering about the humid air. They were all critters and creatures that he had never seen before, however, surprisingly enough, many of them were oddly similar to other Earth creatures, some even looking downright the same.

Since this was a supposedly alien world, he hadn't been sure what to expect, but the similarity between this world and Earth caused him to wonder why that would be.

But alas, he didn't dwell on it. Having much more important problems to care of than pondering on the mysteries of this world seemed to reveal other priorities. Such as surviving.

Stalking through the lush vegetation, Kai made sure not to expose himself to any potential predators or other dangerous animals. Once he crested a particularly large tree root that broke the ground and blocked his passage, he found himself before a rather clear pond compared to the usually murky swamp water.

He looked around cautiously, knowing the basic knowledge that sources of water were always subject to drawing wild animals to them.

But after not seeing anything in the surroundings, he carefully made his way to the bank. It was a long stretch to think that water was drinkable, but he still checked to see how clear the water was.

It wasn't bad to have a plan-b is worse came to shove. Unfortunately, the water could barely be considered clearer than the murky rivers and muddied soups that riddled the swamps upon further inspection.

The reflection was quite clear though, and the face that peered back at him was his very own all too familiar face. Kai wasn't handsome by any means. His looks could be considered below average, his facial features too rough to be attractive. Though his tousled medium-length brown and wavy hair with his well-defined body build from working, training, and fighting, were the only redeeming qualities really.

The rough life Kai had lived had taken a big toll on his appearance, from his somewhat caucasian-tanned skin from spending most of his life outside, to the veritable tapestry of scars marring his body.

While his looks were subpar, his rough and weathered appearance did attract a certain type of woman. However, it definitely wouldn't be the first time for him to scare a girl away after revealing the true extent of his abuse and years of fighting.

Under the clothes, his body looked like a warzone of lines and streaks. Although these scars stayed to remind him of the abuse he endured as a child and had caused him no small amount of pain for a great deal of his life, that had changed when the new scars he started accumulating weren't that of mistreatment but fighting.

They became a memento of who he was, and what he had gone through. And he damn was proud of them.

Kai was still outfitted in black jogging pants and the grey long-sleeved shirt that he had put on just after returning from a long night of work on the construction site, but they had already been somewhat muddied after his short trek through the swamps.

No small part due to him stumbling and slipping through the dank swamp ground. While he was attempting to dust a few clumps of mud off his pants, he noticed in the corner of his eye a disturbance in the reflection of the water.

The ripple in the water was the only precursor to the sudden attack of a seriously overgrown toad.

With the size of a labrador and the weight accompanied by such mass, Kai had all the air in his lungs knocked out as it rammed directly into his chest. The force of the blow was almost enough to break his ribs as he was flung onto his back. If not for the strong constitution of his bones and muscles, they might've actually done so right then and there.

Laying on the muddy ground, wheezing for air, Kia was trying to overcome his body's instinctual panic for air. However, as adrenaline flooded his veins he quickly regained his bearings.

It definitely wasn't the first time he had been sucker-punched, and over time, you ended up building a natural resilience to shock and surprise. While others might have had been incapacitated by the blow and suddenness of it all, the rush of hormones that entered his veins from his adrenal glands only cleared his mind allowing all his senses to focus almost instantly.

"Umph-!" Getting to his feet, he barely dodged the second lunge from the giant toad as it flew right past him, grazing his shoulder and causing him to stumble backward with a muffled grunt.

"Fuck that hurt," Kai mumbled, clearly pissed off. Although it was only a graze, he knew the force the second attack had was a lot more than the first. It seemed that the ambush attack from underwater had restrained the force the toad could put into its legs as it jumped, but now that it was only relatively solid ground, it could levy its weight much more easily.

Finally now able to observe the damned creature, as Kai wasn't scrambling for his feet, he took in the sight.

It was basically just a giant fucking toad, however, it did have one distinct feature; that being its flattened forehead. It was obvious that the amphibian used blunt force to attack, and it having a hard head made sense. But he was still surprised to see a toad go after such a large creature such as himself.

Why would it even attack me? What could it even do with him if it succeeded?

As he inspected the aggressive creature, to his surprise, a small screen appeared at the periphery of his vision.

[Knucklehead Toad]

"Knucklehead Toad." He said tasting the word. "Simple, but fitting I suppose..."

However, he didn't have more time to wonder about its name as the toad suddenly turned to attack again. But this time Kai was ready. Swiftly bolting to the side, he narrowly dodged the toad's lunge.

At that time, he knew that he had brought himself more than enough time to make a run for it - but deep down, a primal instinct to fight reared its ugly head.

Kai wasn't one to take fights where he didn't believe he had a chance to win, and he was confident in taking down this overgrown toad. So allowing a feral grin to crease his lips, he stalked the toad in a ring. The toad seemed to not actually be without thought as its name and actions otherwise indicated as it now just hesitantly glared back at Kai now when all three of its attacks had failed to do any major harm.

"~Come on now~" He cooed tauntingly. "You green fucker."

But regardless of its hesitance, true to its name, the second Kai stopped stalking, it lunged. But instead of dashing to the side and dodging, Kai simply ducked.

"-Thump!-"

A loud crash resounded out from behind him as the Knucklehead Toad rammed directly into the trunk of a tree. This had been intentional from Kai's side as he discreetly positioned himself in front of one to then succinctly bait out the attack.

Not one to waste an opportunity, he whirled on his feet and mounted the stunned toad. It was just big enough to fit his legs in between its thighs and he quickly used them to pin down the powerful hind legs of the swamp beast and leverage its own weight against it.

The toad was quickly regaining its bearings though and it started to struggle against his hold. It was at that moment, Kai learned rather fast this type of grappling was less effective against creatures that bore no humanoid form - *and* the powerful hindlegs of this amphibian were seriously not to be messed with.

However, a loud thump and a surge of pain caused the toad to spasm and temporarily stop its desperate struggle.

As soon as Kai had restrained the toad's mobility, he quickly reached out for a fist-sized rock in the mud and started hammering it into the temple of the toad.

The scene was gruesome as he continuously hammered the rock into the skull of the toad with ruthless intensity. Over and over again. It croaked and spasmed as the murky-red blood of the creature spurted from the gaping hole of mushy flesh and bone that he was creating in its tough skull. Exhausted and panting heavily, he rolled to the side.

Kai was spent.

It had required a lot more effort than he had imagined to take it down, and he actually got worried as a few times he almost lost control of the damned toad because such a grapple as the one he utilized definitely wasn't meant to be used on an amphibian creature like a toad.

Laying there, and staring up into the lush crowns of the tree canopies covering the sky with sun rays spilling through, Kai suddenly smiled, his visage scary as streaks of blood ran across his face and teeth.

This feeling, fighting for his life and emerging victorious. This was what he strived so desperately after.