



AMONG DEMONS

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY SKETCH KOMIK

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LEVEL 4

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“Damn it. I’m a mess. I’ve got sticks in my hair, dirt on my face, and muscles that are probably chronically in pain. Every day I wonder how I’m still alive. Being afraid of the demons is one thing. It doesn’t help that I have to be afraid of other humans, too. Damn bandits always trying to hurt people for their own benefit. Thinking about it, I probably wouldn’t have lasted this long in this demon apocalypse if it weren’t for Dani,” I thought while sitting by the fire.

I looked over to my companion. Danielle Bunker looked like a survivor for sure. Her small body hid her strength, but you could see what she had been through from the scars on her arms. Her light brown hair was cut short for maintenance but was oddly stylish in that rugged sort of way. She had really beautiful hazel eyes. But they looked strange when she used her power. In those moments she looked terrifying. But I trusted her.

Dani looked worn but contemplative. She looked like she was trying to say something.

“We’ve been traveling together a while now. It’s not that I don’t trust you. It’s just...I’ve never told another person...what happened,” Dani said while looking into the fire.



“Hey, don’t worry. I mean, I don’t know what happened, but I can at least sense that it’s been hard,” I said. I did not want to be too pushy.

“I want to share with you. I should. After what I did today...I think I’m going to need your help,” Dani replied, looking into the fire.

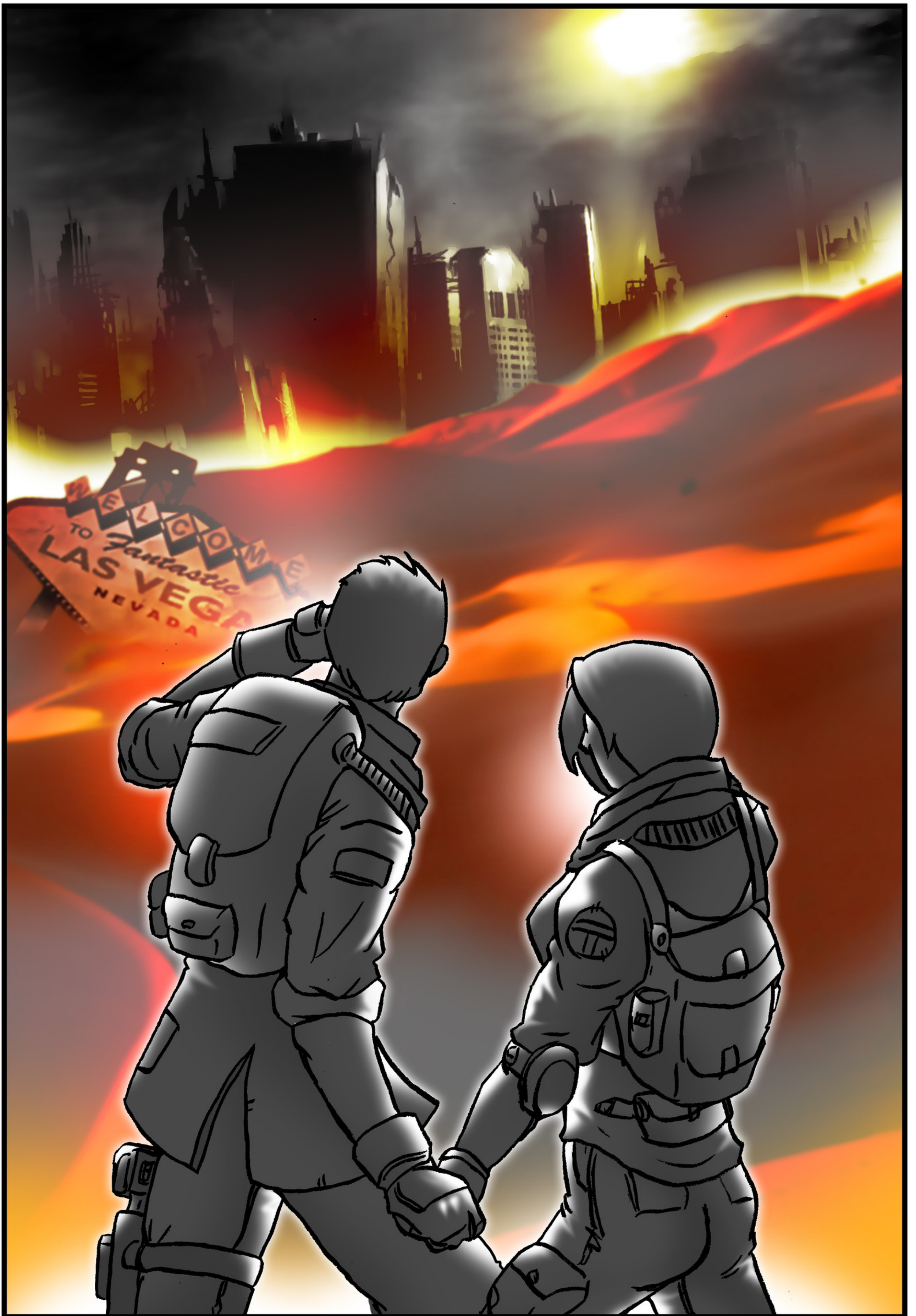
“Help with what?” I asked. I was not sure if I could even help someone as tough as Dani.

“Before I tell you that. Can I tell you everything first?” Dani’s eyes shined in the firelight.

“Yes, of course,” I said, leaning forward.

Dani started telling her story, beginning with her parents and what they found.

“When the demons came the first time, they brought destruction everywhere they went. Las Vegas was no different. The demons’ sandstorms covered its glamour and sank its landmarks. Now there’s barely anything left. However, before I was born, my parents found something there,” Dani said.



"They eventually found an underground bunker on the edge of Vegas," Dani said looking off into the distance.

Dani began to describe the bunker to me. As she talked about her old home, her friends and family, I began to hear a hint of joy in her voice.

“The bunker was big enough to hold a small village. Realizing this, my parents found and brought people back, and eventually it did become a small village. My parents were seen as the leaders. I remember growing up watching them lead kindly; working hard every day ensuring our families were living and thriving in this hostile world, instead of just surviving in it,” she said, smiling.

“More than just surviving. That sounds amazing. But how did you all manage that?” I wanted to hear more.

“We re-designed the bunker, adapted it to our needs, and found ways to go to the surface world safely and unseen. We worked together, sharing shelter, sharing food—sharing our lives. It was home,” her voice said softly.

I imagined what a bunker like that would look like. There would be plenty of water and food. Maybe people would sleep in real beds, or at least they would have good blankets.



“However, when I was 15, we were found, and the bandits came,” she said. She paused to remember.



"They took what they wanted and destroyed everything else. Our mistake was never training our people to fight. There was never a reason to, so only some were capable. We lost those people, too. I was backed into a corner, watching everyone I grew up with getting killed all around me until I was the only one left. Apparently, they were so caught up in the moment, they didn't realize how small our community was and accidentally killed everyone, despite intending to keep some as slaves. They kept me alive, though," She said.

As Dani told this part of the story, her face changed, looking calm on the surface. Still, I could feel the rage from her. Her eyes looked dark...and terrifying.

Dani began, "I was thrown in a quickly-made cage and watched between iron bars as they settled into my once beautiful home. I made eye contact with one of them and he walked over."

"Are you sure it's a good idea to give me those eyes kid?" the bandit said to Dani.

Dani said she felt something stir in the air, and next thing she knew her lips started moving on their own.



“Are you sure it’s safe to work with them? Isn’t a better idea to shoot them all and take everything for yourself?’ I suggested to the bandit,” Dani said to me.

“Soon blood was all around. He killed his friends because of my influence. I was left facing the same bandit,” She said when she recalled the bloody scene.

“The bandit said ‘I can’t take all this stuff out myself. There’s too much,’ and I had an idea,” Dani said.

She continued, “And it happened again. ‘Are you sure it’s too much? Let me out. I can help.’ He let me out and started gathering things up. I grabbed a nearby gun and shot him between the eyes as soon as he turned back at me. He fell to the ground joining the other piles of bodies.”

“Here’s this bunker. It was an oasis of life within a wasteland, then the water became red with human blood and poisoned by human greed. It was the place that I had grown up. The bunker was where all the people I loved had lived,” she said and paused.

"How convenient that everyone was already dead and in one place. I lit it all on fire," she said.





"And I've wandered ever since. Forced to train my ability to survive. I go from one town to the next, helping restore communities, helping keep them alive, and helping to keep other bandit groups away," Dani said monotonously. It looked like she was no longer human.



Dani leaned toward the fire. Her face looked strange in the firelight and said, “I wish I could hunt them all down, but I think my parents and my families wouldn’t approve of that. So, I choose to protect instead.

But then there was a shift in her attitude. That look was back in her eyes. It looked dark, kind of evil and... demonic. The corner of her lips smiled in an evil sort of way, and her voice was deadly as she said, “Well, usually anyway.”



She closed her eyes and took a calming breath. Opening her eyes, she looked briefly at the fire. She sounded ashamed as she continued.

“This world took everything I loved away when all I did was live and love. Some days all I want is blood. And some days it doesn’t matter whose blood.” She looked away from me and away from the fire. I could not see her face.

I could barely see her lips moving as she admitted to me what she needed help with.

“You know about demonic abilities, right?” She said quietly.

“Yeah. A lot of people died from the surge of demonic energy when the demons first came, but some developed abilities. These abilities could be anything,” I said, trying to sound smart.

“Do you know what mine is?” Dani said while turning towards me

“I’m guessing...mind control?” I said, wondering if she was using mind control on me right then.

Dani laughed sadly, “No, not quite. I call it...suggestion. It’s worse than mind control because...I could make you believe it’s your own thought the whole time. You would never realize it. But once I tell someone, you have a chance of fighting my suggestion. So you’re safe from me.”

I was confused, “So why tell me? Why didn't you just suggest that I help you?”

“Because it is a demonic ability. Some people’s abilities are really cool like controlling water or having powerful senses. Those demonic abilities are less evil. Mine is a particularly dark demonic ability, an evil ability that takes choice away from people,” she stated.

“But what does that mean?” I asked. I was still confused.

“The darker the ability, the more demonic energy it has. It means that the more I use it, the more demonic I become,” Dani almost whispered.

“You might become a demon...” I responded.

“I need you to remind me to want to stay human...” She said at last.

THE END



All Eyes and Ears

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