

MAD RAT REINCARNATED



CONTENTS TABLE

SUMMARY	3
FOREWORD	4
CHAPTER 1: A CAT'S PROMISE.	7
CHAPTER 2: THE RAT WITH THE COURAGE OF A LION.	22
CHAPTER 3: THE CAT WITH A STAR ON HIS HEAD.	41
CHAPTER 4: BACK TO THE BURROW.	60
EPILOGUE	73

SUMMARY

Mad Rat and Heart say goodbye, but the fate of their bodies is a very strange one, as their brain and heart end up inside a very strange character. Years later, they reincarnate again as a rat and cat, living very different lives, but by a chance of fate and a little influence from this strange character, they may just meet again.

Content warnings: Animal abuse (primarily through animal experimentation), animal death, human death, mentions of gore, mentions of surgery, mentions of medical supplies (namely needles), swearing.

FOREWORD

Hey! Do people still read forewords at all? I mean, I assume they do, because people keep putting them in their books. I'll be honest, though, as a kid, I never really read forewords, and now, I barely read stuff that isn't academic! But, ah, that aside...

Hi! I'm Romeo! This is my silly, little, but not-so-little Mad Rat Dead fanfic. I'm gonna admit, I put a lot of effort into this little corner of fan work that I'm not sure many people will even care about, but I have hopes that maybe people will come to see just how much I've dedicated to this silly little what-if scenario that takes place after the events of the game. Ah, the wonders ADHD will do for you when you've got that hyperfixation taking up all the space in your brain. It's like my own personal Rat God! Except, y'know, replace the cheese with finally being able to communicate my thoughts through writing, and the cats with the knowledge that I could be making an effort to work on other projects that are far more original.

So what compelled me to write this? Well, several reasons, as is expected. For one, I was one of the many people (at least I assume I am not alone in this sentiment) that was left wanting more out of Mad Rat and Heart's adventures and relationship by the end of the game's story. Just as they had built up such a compelling, touching, beautiful relationship... we are reminded that this will only last for a day, until they must say goodbye again. But such is life, to be fair. Though we create beautiful, inspiring things together, have meaningful adventures together, we end up having to say goodbye.

That's another reason why I wrote this. You see, my own idea of a good Mad Rat post-game fic is one that does not simply negate the deep message the game has about death and its inevitability. In fact, I think negating it in a way detracts from its deeply touching melancholy, in which we fall in love with the meaningful bond Mad Rat and Heart have created, just to have it taken away from us when we reach the peak of witnessing their love for one another. Mad Rat Dead is a game about learning to let go, learning to say goodbye. To understand that what counts is the beautiful experience you've had, the people you've met and loved and saved. Saving Heart is Mad Rat's most significant decision after all. Through learning to love, so do we learn to let go, even if it hurts.

So, how to create a scenario where Heart and Mad Rat can keep on having their adventures, while simultaneously respecting the idea that their story is very much over with the game? Why, reincarnation of course! This is something that is even hinted in the game itself, courtesy of Mad Rat in a couple of lines. He talks about looking forward to his next life, and reincarnation. Now, the game never gives us an explicit answer as to whether this will actually happen, if there even is an afterlife, but, considering the fact Heart somehow remained conscious and became Mad Rat's heart, I'd like to believe there is some form of spiritual stuff going on, perhaps Heart having his consciousness transferred to his own heart, like possessing your own organs, which is funny and freaky.

Left with these ideas, I set to write a fanfiction that would fulfill my wishes to see Mad Rat and Heart be given a chance to meet again and spend much longer than a day together, with no threats in their way, but also with a fun twist, having them meet in another life. I sprinkled in some fun OCs in the middle, some being more normal than others. Actually, I think you'll be able to tell who's the abnormal one. It's pretty clear. They're also my favorite, I made her special! In fact, he was originally just born out of a "what if Mad Rat and Heart were spliced into this weird unholy fusion that became a funky mad scientist" idea, though it became different in the end. But I need to stop talking about them now, or else I'll spoil the surprise!

I wanted to say something also before we go on. Here, and later in the fanfiction, you'll probably realize I refer to Mad Rat and Heart's relationship as love, but I also don't rush to make a point about them initiating a relationship. So what's my deal? Do I ship them or not? Well, normally I wouldn't be the type to make a fuss about the shipping terms, it's all in the human nature of having fun anyway, but in this specific case, I don't like to say I ship them. I'll explain why.

To me, saying that I "ship" Mad Rat and Heart feels like I am disrespecting their relationship. Their relationship to me is much more than what could ever be described in such simple terms such as shipping, ship names, "boyfriends" or "husbands". They are absolutely gay, don't get me wrong. And they love each other, don't get me wrong on that front either. But if there is one term that I think is most appropriate to them, it is "soulmates". They complete each other, their love is deeper than human terms could contain, and they don't need to announce the start of a relationship because they already are in one.

To live inside someone like that, to be joined to someone like that, to still love them and forgive them because you choose to, to want to save them, to learn love from one another even in your last day to live... Do you think we could ever learn to love in the same way? I think we can get close, if we find the right people, through romantic involvement or otherwise, but it still feels so far.

What Mad Rat and Heart have is special. Truly special, not the kind of slogan special. And when I started this fic, I wasn't even thinking about expanding it this much. At first, I just wanted to have an exploration of their love, and what would it be like for them to say goodbye after realizing how much they care for one another, how much they love one another. But then, y'know, I wanted to add some other stuff, and more and more thoughts came in, and it became a whole thing.

But, I hope I'm making myself understood. I won't get peeved if people call this a shipfic because... c'mon. It's the internet. People will perceive you and think what they will of you. But do know that I did not intend to write this necessarily as a shipfic, more as just a continuation and exploration of a love that I was already seeing in canon.

Something else, you may realize I do dive a lot into the whole "anthropomorphized animals have their own little societies" thing, but allow me to have this little comfort. It's something I grew up with and I treasure to this day.

One more thing, to make the experience more fun, I have scattered many little links with Fun Facts and Character Bios to be found. You could also rush all the way down to the end to see them and spoil the fun, I suppose. But it's cool, I won't get mad.

Either way, thank you for sticking with me through this silly little rant. For your time, have this picture of my cat, Gris:



Gris, the Queen Baby, sitting upon her heater throne (which was later taken away from the room due to it overheating and possibly being about to explode, unrelated to her sitting on top of it).

CHAPTER 1: A CAT'S PROMISE.

Mad Rat held on tight to Heart's fur, his own failing heart felt lesser and lighter in his chest and yet he pressed on tighter to the cat's skin, as if he could still feel that heart that had been within him, had become one with him.

His mind raced with all the things that had happened in just one day, played over and over again, and he couldn't believe it yet, that all of that had just happened, it felt like a dream.

And now he was going to die.

That was perhaps the hardest part to accept. Even if he said he would be alright with it, if he felt ready, it didn't take away from the hazy feeling of it feeling so unreal. What would it actually be like, when it finally happened?

Heart had said he was used to seeing him die, but that was only partially true. He had never actually made the passage. And he worried, he worried about losing this.

Not his life, his pathetic life back at the lab, not over all those years before, his grief was not over that.

It was over that one day. That one, eventful, heart pounding day, that felt as meaningful and important as an entire lifetime, as many lifetimes, and all the clocks ticking and going back and forth and forwards and backwards, over and over again. The fear, the anger, the vengeance, the kindness, the compassion, the determination.

The love.

Oh god, that was the worst part, wasn't it?

Mad Rat had never, ever loved before, no, not like this. Flings, passing looks with lab rats, how could this ever compare? Was this even some kind of romantic love? He could not imagine himself having some actual relationship with Heart, but he wished he could grow old with him, live together, do everything together, hearts pounding as one, like they did before.

Was this that kind of love? The kind that they say doesn't exist in this world? A love that lets you become one, that makes you forget about yourself, forget about the other, it's everything and nothing at once, you're lovers and then you're friends and then you're family. And you are complete strangers who've known each other for years.

He's your heart and your home, the beat that you follow wherever you go, when it gets darkest he's there for you.

And he was losing him.

That's what pained Mad Rat so much. To have been able to feel such blissful, ethereal, transcendental love, that could never be contained or described as a simple relationship, all in one day, and to have done so much with him in one day. He wanted to keep and cherish the memory for years, tell all the young ratlings as he grows older of his feats, and how he met Heart, the most gentle and friendly and courageous cat that had ever existed, who had lended him his heart, who had been his heart, one with him, such an amazing and unthinkable thing!

But, this would never happen. The beauty of this would die then and there with him. Under the moonlight, and they were so close now, Mad Rat hoped he wouldn't go before they could reach the rooftop.

Oh, Heart. Mad Rat worried about him, too. His memory, the memory of their love, would at least go on with him, but would that be preferable still? He knew he would miss him. Hell, Heart came back for him, to stay longer with him.

He didn't want Heart to suffer, the sweet thing. He knew fulfilling their mission would help, and yet, he couldn't help but still feel sad knowing it would never be the same as what they had.

[Hey! You found a character bio! You can look at it here!](#)

"Mad Rat? We're here." He heard Heart's voice call, snapping him out of his racing thoughts.

"Mhm? Oh, right." Mad Rat slowly raised his face up from Heart's fur, and slowly climbed over to the top of the cat's head, now raising his little head, higher, higher.

The moon hung there, just as pretty as it always was. They had made their way to the rooftop again, at the end of that eventful day.

"It's really something, isn't it, Mad Rat?" Heart asked him.

Mad Rat didn't respond. Little drops wet his eyes as he felt the night wind blow over him.

He may have not lived as much as he liked.

But this, this right here, was all he needed in the moment.

The beautiful light of the moon, the fresh air tasting of freedom, the stars dotting and sparkling in the sky.

And Heart, his one and only love, right with him.

Yeah, there were worse ways to die for sure.

He patted on Heart to let him know to get down, and Heart obliged, lowering his head and letting Mad Rat hop down to the ground. Mad Rat then looked back up at him, meeting his bright, yellow eyes.

"Heart."

"Mad Rat? You look like you've still got time. That's good." Heart looked back at him with a kindness in his eye.

"I want you to know that, everything that I'm thankful for, right now, leads back to you." Mad Rat told him.

Heart seemed a bit surprised by that, though he said nothing, his face showed that quite clearly.

"You make me feel something I've never felt before, and it's good. Before this, I never thought a rat like me, where I come from, the way I lived, would ever get to feel this. But you are a blessing to me, Heart. Even with the Rat God messing with me, when I think back to the times we had together, I wouldn't change a thing." He babbled on, and soon was hugging Heart's chest, so close now, rubbing his little face and wetting his fur with tears.

"I... I'm thankful for you too, Mad Rat." Heart put his paws around him, returning the hug.



Heart's voice grew a sad tone now. "I'm going to be honest, Mad Rat. I really haven't had a very good life, either. I've lived on the streets, in a few homes, I've never really had a forever home. And that's fine, I suppose, but I never knew I could stay somewhere for sure."

He gently pulled away, and looked back into the rat's eyes, gently lifting up his chin now with his paw, asking for the attention, for the contact.

"Mad Rat, do you know why I was taken into the lab?" He asked.

Mad Rat shook his head.

Heart sighed. "The scientist just found me out on the street, gave me food, and before I knew it, I was being swooped into that box. I didn't have time to react, no time to think. I was hoping I'd be brought into a new home, at least, but..."

Mad Rat was speechless.

"He was just going to sacrifice you? For me?"

Heart looked away sadly. "Seems so. Ironical that it turned out the other way, isn't it? I guess the Rat God really helped in a way, after all."

Mad Rat folded his arms and looked down angrily. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. A cat like Heart, living without a home, and then used as a sacrifice. Partially, Mad Rat had forgiven the scientist, but this did reignite a flame in him. It didn't feel right.

He looked back up at Heart, who had noticed his upset look.

"Don't feel bad, Mad Rat..." He had said so gently.

"Hey, what's important is you're here now." Mad Rat hugged him again. "And you're going to promise me you're going to live to the fullest, okay?"

Heart hugged him back once again. "Of course! Of course I promise! And I'll never forget you, Mad Rat!"

"You better-" Before he could finish, Mad Rat felt a pang, an emptiness, something consumed him, he felt close to fainting. "Ack!"

"Mad Rat!" Heart rushed to catch him with his paw before he fell down. "Rat, is it happening?"

"Uh, I..." Mad Rat could barely see in front of him. "The moon! Let me see it again!" He was able to mutter out.

Heart hurriedly lifted him up in his paws.

"Ah, that's better..." Mad Rat could still see it. That blurry, beautiful ball shining in the sky.
"Yes, so pretty..."

"Mad Rat." Heart's voice had a clear sadness to it.

"Yeah?" Mad Rat answered.

"I'm going to miss you so much. I've never really had a feeling of home like this- the thought of losing you- I know I said I was prepared but- it hurts!" Heart said hurriedly, breathlessly, trains of thought intertwining.

"It hurts too, Heart. I've never loved like I loved you." Mad Rat was still staring at the moon.
"But be strong for me, okay?"

"Love?" Heart dangled on the word.

"C'mon Heart, don't tell me you didn't feel it too. All giddy and racing and shit when you were with me. You loved me and I love you too. You know the kind of feeling it is. I wouldn't raise kids with you, but you know we'd stay together forever if we could." Mad Rat told him.

"Ah, yes. I know the feeling." Was all Heart could say. Mad Rat was right. What else to call this feeling but love? The purest form?

"You're my home, Mad Rat." Heart told him.

"You're my heart." He simply responded. "And you know, I'll always keep you with me in your soul. I'll be your forever home, and in your memories too."

"Mad Rat." Heart brought his paws close to him so now he could hug Mad Rat. "Thank you."

"Thank you." Was all Mad Rat could say as he nuzzled next to Heart's chest.

He would die here, in pure bliss, knowing what the purest form of love feels like.

And as for Heart, it took him a few seconds to realize Mad Rat wasn't moving anymore, a few more to realize he wasn't breathing, some more to know he wouldn't answer, and a little more even to just sit in front of the body of his now departed love, wondering what to do next.

[Hey! You found a character bio! Click on this link to look at it!](#)

What could he even do with the body? Bury it? But then, could an animal find him and eat him? It's not like it mattered, really, though, the worms and bugs would eat his body anyway. Should he bring him back to the lab? Slip in his cage like nothing happened? Maybe the scientist would know better. But Heart worried about getting caught again.

And then, Heart felt a twitch in his whiskers, a chill up his spine. He wasn't alone. He looked back and saw the cat from before that Mad Rat had saved.

Now, they had had to find him again, to warn him to not eat the diseased rats. It had been quite the adventure, but at least now, they could communicate better, and Mad Rat had lost a bit of his worry towards the cat. He had also introduced himself as his name being Jack, easy to remember.

"I followed your scent here. I remember you said the rat was very ill, and going to die soon..." Jack lowered his ears.

"He is... he's dead, Jack." Heart looked down, avoiding Jack's eyes.

"Oh." Jack looked down as well. "He'll be remembered."

"By us, yes." Heart sighed. "You don't happen to know a good resting place for him, do you, Jack?"

Jack thought about it, tilting his head, putting a paw up to his mouth in thought.

"I... do have something in mind." Jack admitted. "It's my owner, he could... preserve him, I think. Make use of him, even after death."

"Oh! Is your owner a taxidorm- a taxu-" Heart tried to pronounce the word he had in mind.

"Taxidermist? No, no, no." Jack shook his head. "He's a scientist."

"A scientist?" Heart looked at him in disappointment. "Jack, I don't want Mad Rat getting his body messed with again."

Jack bit his lip. "Well... If you want him to be preserved in some way, that's the best I know. He'll be used for the good of other animals, I promise." He tried to convince Heart.

"I'm not sure..." Heart hummed.

"Well, do you know somewhere better for him?" Jack asked. "It's not like he'll be alive in the lab, anyways."

Heart looked into the distance, deep in thought. "I don't. I just... I don't know. I guess I'm still kind of in denial."

"Boy, you really like each other, don't you?" Jack commented.

"I was his heart, Jack!" Heart exclaimed. "When you're part of someone like that, you don't just get over it."

"I still can't believe that part. It feels like a fantasy." Jack grumbled.

"Well, it's very real." Heart spoke in a low voice, giving him a slight glare.

"Alright, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings." Jack stepped closer to him. "But at least trust me. You saw what you and Mad Rat were able to accomplish together. What if there's another animal just like him, and some part of him could save them?"

"Your owner does that?" Heart raised his ears in interest.

"... Yes." Jack said, though there was a lack of confidence in his voice. "Among other things... his methods are different from the average scientist, but I've seen him pull off amazing things."

"Hmm." Heart took another moment to think. "Alright... I guess this is for the best."

"Thank you, Heart." Jack told him. "I'll never forget you."

And with that, he gently grabbed Mad Rat in his mouth, and was off.

Jack had reached it: the promised doorway, an arching pathway with vines growing old over it. It wasn't very far from the regular human lab anyway. He passed through the vines, into the old yard. There seemed to be nothing there, safe, of course, for the wild flowers, and swimming in such a sea of plantlife, a single gnome statue, half sunken in.

Jack made his way to the statue, and carefully so, pulled down the arm.

What came out was a crackle, and a jolly, near mechanical voice, announced:

"Hello hello, I'm the old gnome!"

Before going silent again.

An old trick of an old toy, many would think, and so many people who visited the place thought as well. But Jack knew better, he knew what to do.

He dropped Mad Rat for a minute, and meowed insistently, once, twice, three times.

And waited.

There was something like a chime emitted from the Gnome. And as if by magic, the ground shook, and opened up. Jack picked up Mad Rat, and followed down into the stairs that lead into the underground.

Arriving down there, he would have to scratch at the door, and mind you, the sound of a cat scratching a door is persistently different from a sound a person could produce. As such, it would be unmistakable.

And unmistakable it was, because soon the door opened up, revealing a lively looking middle aged man in a blood stained lab coat, welcoming the cat with open arms.

"Jack! I see you've returned, and with a new addition to my collection."

The man kneeled down and pet Jack, and took a better look at Mad Rat.



"Why, have you just caught me another rat? Jack, I've told you, they're very nice, but I can't keep taking these-" He stopped talking when he noticed something... peculiar about the rat. He snatched it from Jack's mouth, rather quickly.

"Jack! Jack you old rascal! You've done me a great one! This is a lab rat! A rat from that same lab that shunned me years ago! What sweet revenge, what sweet delight!" The man practically danced in play, ecstatic with the find.

He then kneeled down to Jack, who did indeed look quite pleased with himself.

"What did you do to get this rat, you old rascal, you?" He pointed at the cat excitedly. "Look at it! There's not a scratch on it, why, I think it hasn't even been wounded! Ohh, I can't wait to open it all up and find out all the little nooks and crannies that those bastards at the lab put in, all the drugs and surgeries, all mine to study!"

Jack nodded to himself. Hey, his master did preserve every animal he got in their own best interest, organs, skin, fur, eyes, nerves, anything and everything that could be used, would be tested, taken, organized, categorized.

Was that not a proper usage of one's body?

[Hey! You found a character bio! Click here to look at it!](#)

Becoming old is always hard, the same can be said for any human or any animal. Your body slows, your best is never your personal best. Frustration about this inevitability settles in.

Jack was old. An old cat, however, is still a cat, and as such, occupies itself with what it can find. For Jack, he still served his master in finding the best quality in test subjects and samples. He didn't see it as wrong. It was just something he'd seen happen ever since he was a kitten. Besides, it was better if he provided something at the end of its life or already from death, than having his owner sacrifice someone.

Contorting bodies, miracles of science, animals rising from death, what two bodies stitched together can create. What separates mad science from regular science, anyway? Some may say it's just a matter of opinion.

Jack climbed on the rooftop of the lab again, the regular one. He often found himself coming back to that place, it was good to scout things from that height, and it was the highest building in a good mile.

This time, however, he found a familiar scene. Well, familiar, only in the sense of it featuring an old acquaintance.

"Hello." He meowed.

Heart looked back at him, shivering, weak. "It's you."

"It is me. I haven't seen you in so long, old friend." Jack crept closer. "What brings you here again?"

"This is where I said goodbye to him. My-" He shivered and hesitated. "My home."

"Ah, you're talking about Mad Rat." Jack recalled. "Heart, are you...?"

"I am." Heart was not even looking at him anymore, his eyes distant. "I can feel the beat fading."

"Oh." Jack wasn't sure what to say. He had seen many animals die, but this one felt more personal.

He had actually come to care about and know this one.

"Jack, tell me something." Heart said.

"Yes, Heart?" Jack raised his ears.

"Is he still there? The place you took him to?" Heart asked him.

Jack thought back to the last time he had seen Mad Rat, preserved in a jar.

"He is." Was all he could answer.

"Oh, good." Heart sighed. "Will you take me there, when I die? I want to be with him again."

Jack was surprised at that request, but thinking of it, it did make sense. He didn't really know of the circumstances of the secret lab.

"Yes, Heart. I will." Jack nodded.

"What an honor... to be with my Mad Rat again." Heart sighed his last sigh happily.

Jack walked up to Heart's body. Oh dear. Carrying this would be somewhat harder than carrying a rat.

When Jack had the lab door opened for him, the look on his owner's face was one of surprise, of eagerness, as if an angel had just landed by his doorstep.

"Why, it cannot be! Jack, you may have just saved the day!" Was the first thing he said, it was not even a second before he was taking Heart from his back and hurrying the limp creature onto the table.

Jack could then get a good look of what was going on.

Pesto, one of his master's most beloved creations, seemed to be in bad shape.

The twisted creature was a mix of a ferret, a mink and a weasel, the most ambitious experiment the scientist had completed successfully. The creature walked, ate, drank, slept, almost normally, and it was alive. The cross between similar enough species, a discovery the man proudly touted to himself, writing down books that he would later only reveal after his death, so others could find his genius all too late for him to be convicted of anything.

Well, Pesto had been incredible, that is, but not for long, as now the poor thing was writhing in agony on top of the table, strapped down, and about to take another injection of anesthesia from the scientist, put to sleep once again.

"Pesto's brain and heart, both failing. I ran the tests. My treasure may not last forever, after all." He rubbed his gloved hands against each other.

"Or so I thought. You see, the brain I had already fished out, this rat was preserved particularly well, so I'm sure it can work as a sound transplant, and serve as further experimentation!" Jack looked in shock as he could see his owner raise Mad Rat's limp body in the air.

"The only problem is I've looked at my resources and was lacking a heart! I thought I'd have to cut open one of the subjects and waste a perfectly good test subject, but you! You brought me my solution!" His owner continued explaining.

Jack watched as the man poured over the table, but had to turn away soon as things got more graphic. He still was not good at handling such a view. He was thankful, however, for more animals not being harmed. He always reminded himself: he only ever insisted so much in finding dead animals to bring to the lab because he hoped they'd suffice his owner's thirst for more organs and experimentation, without needing to kill more.

Jack went to his corner, his own little bed, with the privilege of it not being behind bars, curled up at it, and rested for the while.

Pesto panted heavily against the warm liquid they lied against, trapped in the feverish, damp nightmare of losing himself. He simply braced himself for what would be the end of his life.

A miserable, disgusting, incomprehensible lab experiment, bits and parts of unwanted creatures, torn from their homes and then cut up and made anew.

A fitting end.

Or so... he thought.

The sound of splashing echoed around, as if there was something else in there with Pesto, running around her mind. As it grew closer, she heard what sounded like music, passing by, until it grew fainter again, as quick to leave as it came.

When she had lifted her head, all she could see was the behind of a rodent.

Without warning, the beat now appeared behind her. She could make out now the ethereal shape of a cat, gently bobbing its head up and down.

That beat... it was growing stronger, it felt like it was inside her, calling her, consuming her. He had never felt something like this before, was it...

Was it his heart?

Oh god, that's right. What a fool he'd be, to think that the scientist would simply let them die mercifully of failing brain and heart. No, of course he'd try to bring him back, no matter what.

But what about their brain?

The beat now came from two places at once. Pesto turned their head to see the animal that had run past before, waiting for them.

It was a rat: a pudgy, average lab rat. It got down on its legs and jumped up, as if beckoning him.

Pesto followed, getting up and running through the mindscape, splashing echoing now with both of the creature's paws hitting the water, as they ran together. When Pesto ran, the music felt louder, and soon, it became easy to move with the beat.

The rat itself seemed to be moving almost as if dancing, those were not the movements of a normal rodent. It hit the ground with precision, using all of its paws to create different poses and moves, yet also having the most efficiency moving forward, reaching formidable speeds.

Pesto copied it, unsure of how exactly they were managing this, though the feel of the beat and the dance was contagious and extremely blissful.

Soon, they had made it into another part of the mindscape, and Pesto's vision blurred with passing memories, all projected around the place.

Those were not Pesto's memories.



Cages. A different lab. Rats, mice. Many of them. Mazes. Tests.

A memory of near-death. A parasite's promise. A delusion that took control. A heart, a loving one at that. The ability to turn back time. The lessons of a lifetime in a single day.

Pesto understood now. These were the rat's memories, and this heart had been the one that was not his original heart, but accompanied him even in death, by a chance of fate.

Pesto felt overpowered by the grandness of this story. It opened up a world of ideas and possibilities they had never thought of before.

With the beat in his heart and these memories close, they felt like they could do anything.

And they would.

When Jack woke up, it was quite the commotion. He had never heard the test subjects this agitated.

"You're not going to actually do it, are you?" Cried one.

Jack lifted his heavy eyes slowly.

A bang against metal bars.

Jack jolted up.

"I can do it."

Another bang.

"I WILL do it."

"Oh goodness, oh my goodness!" Another animal cried from their cage.

"Because I-" Another bang.

Jack ran over to see what was going on now. All the animals in their cages had their looks turned to Pesto, who was slamming fiercely against the bars of their cage.

"Have a mad brain and a beat in my heart!"

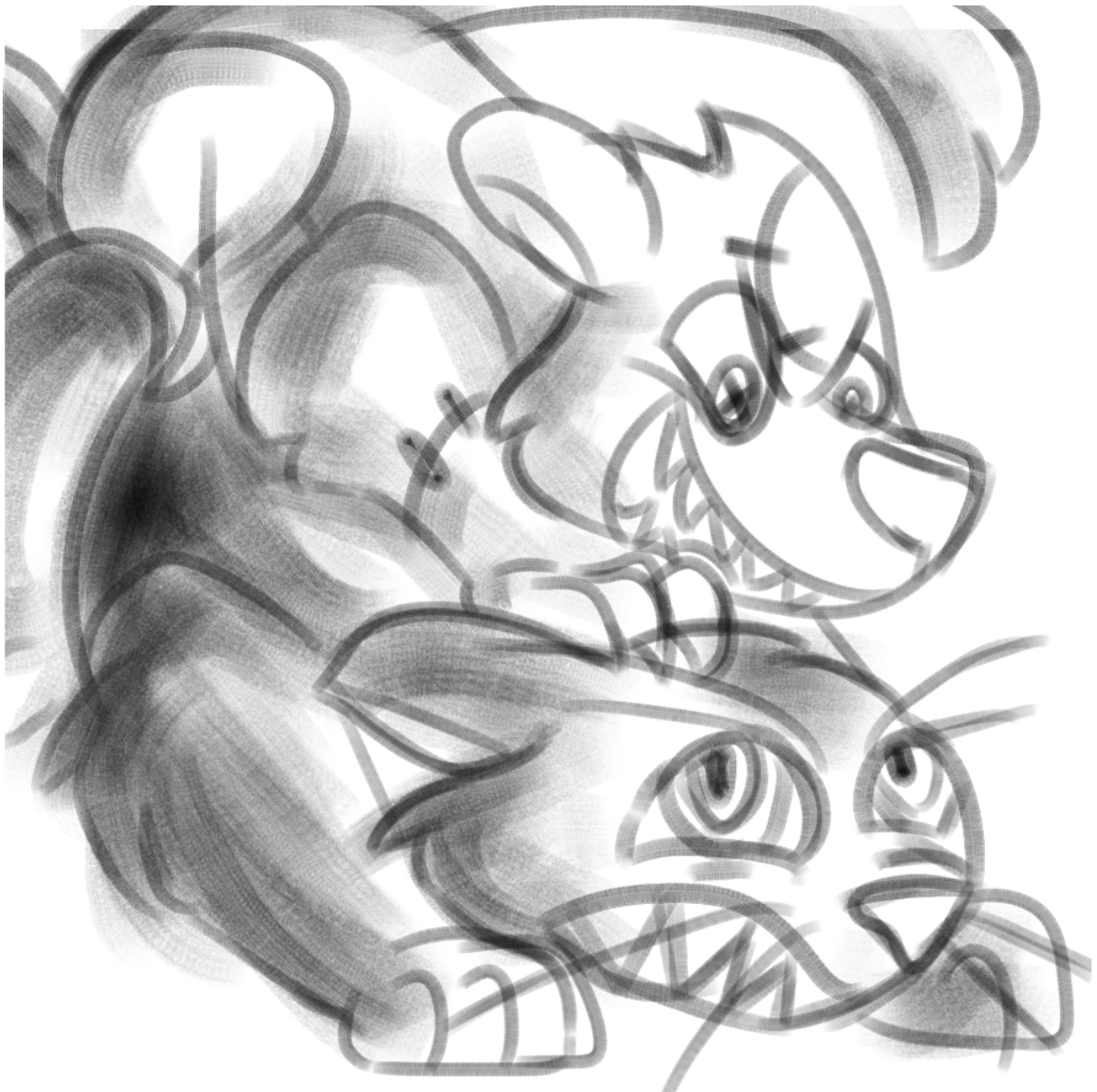
They broke out. Jack was not even sure how they did it, but it was a flash of shattering metal, and it was as if the thing that had come out of the cage had rolled out of it as a fiery ball, filled with energy.

Jack watched in awe, as the creature he had once seen coming undone climbed up the operations table with ease, jumping from side to side almost as if dancing.

"Listen up, you miserable creatures! We've been made test subjects for too long! Tonight, we show that good for nothing human exactly why he should fear us!" They yelled on top of the table.

"They've gone insane." Jack muttered to himself, and ran off to alert his master, who did indeed sleep at a small house right next to the lab, really only a few rooms in that underground location.

It was almost unfair how fast Pesto caught up to Jack. Before he could even leave the lab, the animal had him pinned on his back, growling into his ear. Jack could barely lift his face to see a terrifying grin on the creature's face.



"Going somewhere, Jackie boy? Hm? Remember when you promised my parents you'd keep their bodies safe, hm?" They provoked him.

"You- what parents, you couldn't possibly be talking about-" Jack thought back to Mad Rat and Heart, unaware Pesto had somehow gotten their memories in the procedure.

"Why of course I could, cat brains! And I've got half a mind to return the favor right now, so make a choice: either you survive, or neither your owner nor you do." Pesto's claws dug into Jack's back, to make sure he knew they weren't kidding around.

"I- I-" Jack thought back to Pesto's body squirming in the table, back to that rat and cat who called themselves more than friends, the countless experiments and sacrifices. Maybe, there was a sound choice to make there.

"I'll run off. You'll never see me again. You can do with my master as you wish." Jack conceded.

"Good kitty." Pesto purred, and let Jack go, and sure enough, Jack ran off, without looking back, finding his own, desperate way out of the underground.

He heard the cages open, the screams, the millions of paws running all around, the noises of flesh being torn. He didn't know how to feel. His owner had been an awful man to these animals, but he was his master.

Maybe the limit to science is when it creates something like this.

[Hey! You found a character bio! Click here to look at it!](#)

CHAPTER 2: THE RAT WITH THE COURAGE OF A LION.

Few years passed, as years tend to do. We peak now into a scene taking place below the eyes of any human, in an underground burrow.

Leo raised his head up high, and eyed the crowd. The pack awaited for him to speak eagerly.

"Oh this is so exciting!" One of the rats, Scout, flailed her little paws happily. She then turned to her dear friend, Silver, and grabbed her cheeks: "Are you excited because I'm excited!"

[Hey! You found a character bio! Click here to look at it!](#)

Silver, in turn, simply laughed, eyeing Scout lovingly. "Yes, Scout. I'm excited."

"I mean, I know this is only our second raid at the Annual Foods Festival, but last year was so good and Leo is such a good leader, I just can't imagine this not turning out as amazing!!" Scout continued to gush.

"Ahem." Leo prepared to speak.

"Can you imagine what it's like to be leading the raid? I wonder if he'll take me-" Scout continued rambling, but was shushed by Silver.

"Shhh." Her friend said. "Listen."

[Hey! You found a character bio! Click here to look at it!](#)

"My pack!" Leo began. "We're all looking good, looking strong. I know you've all been training hard to become the best little thieves and terrorizers this side of town has seen. And so, the Annual Food Festival approaches, meaning it's once again time for our biggest raid yet."

The rats cheered in unison, all equally excited for the big event. To keep themselves fed, they all would go out on raids and steal food, which they would later share. A human gathering like the Annual Food Festival marked a period of abundance and living easy for the pack, should they succeed.

[Wow! It's a Rat Fact! Go here!](#)

This was also only their second time attending such an event for a reason. Leo was the first to have the idea to do this, and after ascending to leadership status, he attempted what the leaders of before had considered rash, dangerous and imprudent.

But even if Leo had been known for being a little mad, he had pulled off the heist surprisingly well, leading his pack and showing that he knew when to put himself between the others and danger. Though he had gotten a crushed tail out of it, he did bring back the promised abundance of food, which pleased the pack, showing he was fit to lead after all.



Leo's motto was always to be bold and not let yourself be tied down to expectations, do crazy things if they felt right, and trust in the circumstances around you. That earned him the title of mad rat of the pack, but through showing he had been caring to his peers as well, respect was earned.

"Now, the Food Festival is happening in two weeks. It may seem like we've got a lot of time to prepare, but we still need a plan. They'll probably double security against rats considering what happened last year, so we'll need to surprise them, do something they won't expect." Leo went on to explain his plan.

[Hey! You found a character bio! Click here to look at it!](#)

"Oh! Oh! Is it my turn yet, Leo? Is it my turn?" Scout jumped up on her spot, interrupting.

"Scout!" Leo was angry at first for being interrupted, growling a bit, but then stopped himself. "Well, I guess it is time."

"Yay!" Scout hopped in joy, and went to join Leo on top of the little box they used as a stage.

"To survive, we have to work and think as a pack. Last year was good, but we had no structure. I took some lessons from our old leaders. Flash, Spots, I see you in the crowd." Leo smiled and nodded at two noticeably older rats standing around, no doubt the old leaders who had passed the torch onto Leo. "We're going to set up specific divisions to focus on avoiding humans, identifying and disarming traps, fighting other animals if necessary, and sneaking food out."

"I'm in charge of sniffing out traps! No poison or rat trap is gonna fool us!" Scout shouted enthusiastically. "Everyone who's good at sniffing and being on guard, stay with me!"

"Guess I should say something." Silver nodded. "I'm on disarming duty. If you don't mind getting a few scars from taking out traps, come with me."

"I'll not only be leading the raids, but I'll be protecting us like always, though I could use the help of some good fighters if things get rough. Wild animals or even hostile rat packs can be a handful." Leo said.

"Food's with me." Freeze, an entirely white rat, waved from the crowd. "We'll grab the yummys and leave as quickly as possible."

"Thank you, Freeze." Leo nodded. "Obviously, the groups won't work all at once. It'll be a succession of stages: the sniffers will go from place to place finding traps, alert the disarmers, who will work on the traps while the sniffers move on to more. After everything seems clear, we will go ahead. Freeze should get the collectors out first, and the others group fall back, one by one. My group will leave last, since we will be defending the pack, and that's the most important part."

"Any questions?" Leo looked over at the pack.

A chatter arose, though it seemed they were all denying having any questions, checking in with each other and then shaking their heads up to Leo. It seemed they all understood.

Then, Flash lifted up her head, and raised the small cane she supported herself on.

"Yes. I do have a question." She pointed it up at Leo.

"Oh no." Leo shut his eyes, as he knew what was coming.

"When are you going to get a mate?" The question flew comfortably out of the old rat's mouth, landing like an unpleasant fly on Leo's ear.

[Hey! You found a character bio! Click here to look at it!](#)

"Alright... Meeting's over." Leo simply declared, avoiding giving a response.

The pack, for the most part, seemed satisfied with the answer, Scout also looking at him and giving a nod and a smile before hopping off the stage.

Flash and Spots however, were certainly not fine with this.

"Young man! I do believe my wife asked you a question!" Spots shouted angrily, as the two elders remained in place.

[Hey! You found a character bio! Click here to look at it!](#)

"Look, I'm doing the best I can to keep the pack safe, is that not enough?" Leo asked, as he hopped down and walked to the two rats.

He scratched his back awkwardly. "Besides, the festival's coming up, I don't have time to think of mates with such an important and dangerous event needing attention!"

"You're always finding an excuse." Flash spit unpleasantly at the ground. "Why, in my day, a leader without a mate was unthinkable! The leaders are the family makers of the group! How can you know what it is to care for a pack when you have no children of your own?"

"She's right, you know." Spots nodded. "I think I did a pretty good job with you lot, but I could not do it without Flash supporting me. A leader must see a pack as their family."

"A mate will help, to see them as their children." He put a paw on Leo's shoulder.

Leo instead removed his paw. "But I don't want that! I love the pack, but we're all different, and I don't want to be anybody's dad, I just want us all to prosper, and I don't think I need to see the others as my kids when I'm doing perfectly fine as it is."

"Perfectly fine, you say? What was that about needing our lessons, young man?" Flash provoked.

"If it weren't for us talking to you on this crazy festival raid idea, you would be still charging in without any plans whatsoever! We agreed to do things differently because we trust you have the will to make it work!" Spots added.

Leo dragged a paw over his face and groaned. "Look, alright! I'll get a mate! I'll... find someone who looks nice to me, or something."

"And have children." Spots added.

"And have children?!" Leo jumped.

"Well, yes. That's what all pack leaders should do, where it should always start." Flash nodded along.

"God, alright, okay." Leo huffed. "Anything else?"

"Yes. You must choose your mate and officiate this sharing of power before the festival starts." Flash declared.

"I what?! You can't give me an ultimatum like that!" He growled and crossed his arms. "No way! I won't do it!"

"Fair enough." Flash giggled. "I just wanted to see how you'd react."

"What?! I thought you were serious! It's a good idea!" Spots looked at her.

"No, no. Think about it, dear. I think he does deserve his time." Flash smiled. "But I think it is important to not wait for too long. So at least think of a mate until then, alright?"

Leo rolled his eyes. "Alright, alright. I do have someone in mind."

The elder's eyes lit up. "Really?! You do? Who is it?" They shouted, almost in unison.

"Hey, hey, cool it! I need to think about it, alright? So don't pester me about it, or I won't do it." Leo stomped his little paw on the ground.

"What? You little slug, you should respect your elders-" Spots growled, but Flash instead shushed him, putting her paws on him.

"Now, now, dear, he's young, we should leave him to court his mate!" She then began gently pushing him away. "Bye bye now, thank you for hearing us out, Leo!"

As they were leaving, Leo crossed his arms, tapping his paw, and grumbled. "Yeah, yeah, be a pest and then act soft, why don't you."

[Wow! It's a rat fact! Click here!](#)

Not too far however, careful round ears were spying on the scene, picking up the juicy conversation.

"Oh, Silver, did you hear that? He has someone in mind!" Scout exclaimed happily.

"Yeah?" Silver raised an eyebrow. "And?"

"Silver, I'm someone!" Scout grabbed Silver's face excitedly. "And there's a good chance it's me because me and Leo have been friends since we were pups! And he's been letting me get closer to important stuff like leading a group in the festival raid!"

"Wait a minute." Silver removed her head from Scout's grasp and shook around. "You want to be Leo's mate?"

"You don't think I can do it?" Scout seemed sad.

"No, no, no!" Silver grew agitated. "That's not what I meant! I mean, you're sweet and cute and smart and ambitious, and you'd make a great leader, but..."

"Yeah?" Scout waited.

"I just didn't think you were into Leo." Silver looked down.

"Well, I thought so too, but, everyone says you need a mate sometime, right? And when I think of myself being there up on the stage by his side, leading everyone, when I picture myself as a pack leader, I feel such a rush!" Scout explained.

"It kinda sounds like you just want to lead..." Silver grumbled, lowering her ears.

"Right, hahah." Scout giggled. "Like I could ever lead without Leo."

"You could, you know." Silver assured her.

Scout just kept giggling. "Alright, alright." She seemed to not have taken it seriously, and began walking away. "Welp, I've got a group of sniffers to meet up with, so see ya!"

Silver simply watched her go, with a heaviness in her heart, paws to her chest.

"Bye." She sighed.

Silver paced around, whiskers twitching and tail waving in stress.

Maybe this whole thing was stupid, maybe he wouldn't even show up, why would he even show up? He was so busy! He's the leader, and they barely know each other besides her being an experienced and respected member. Before the groups were organized, they didn't even talk a lot!

Silver had invited Leo to the Rushing Waters, a place in their hideout which gave way to an open channel of the sewer, one pipe came down and spewed water out into a passageway dug into the ground, and not far after, another pipe received this water and connected to the rest of the sewer circuit.

Gross for maybe humans, but it was a nice scene for a bunch of rats. Good to sit and talk at, that's for sure, as the sound of the water running kept the nerves cool.

Still, Silver doubted herself on whether Leo would take her on her cryptic offer of simply having a talk at this place, with no actual indication of what even they would talk about, except that it had to be in secret.

Leo may have a few screws loose, but that didn't mean he wasn't smart.

"Hey, Silver, sorry I'm late. Training my group took a bit longer than I expected." Leo's voice caught Silver off guard, as the fluffy red rat walked into view.

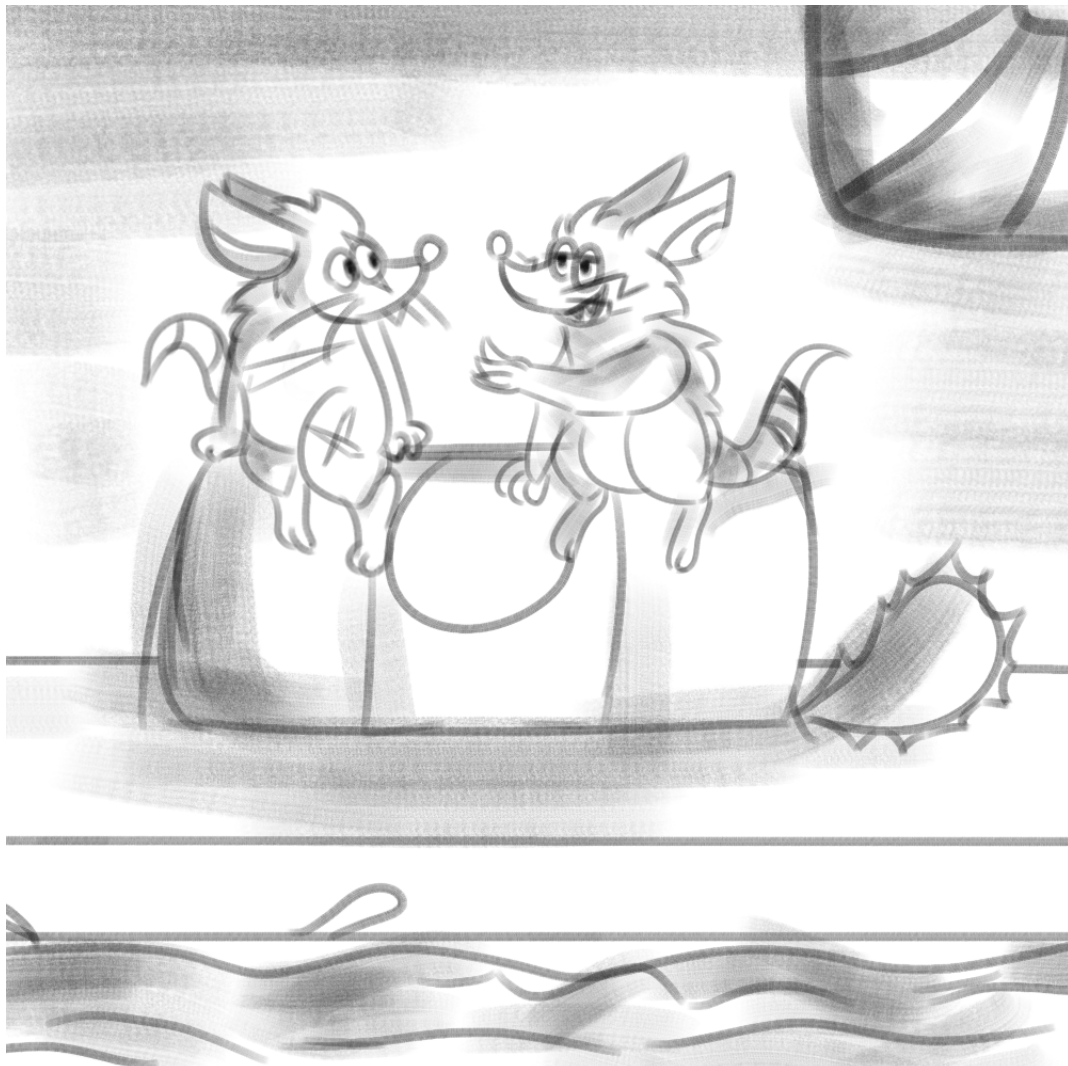
Or... wasn't he?

"Leo!" Silver laughed nervously. "It's okay! How are you doing?"

"I'm fine. You?" Leo walked closer to Silver, and sat on top of the small can the rats often used as a seat.

"I'm doing alright, thank you." Silver sat next to him. "Listen, Leo, I know this is a touchy thing to ask, and you don't like talking about it, but-"

"I know what you're gonna ask." Leo interrupted her.



"Wh, you do?" Silver was shocked.

"Yes." Leo looked into her eyes. "You want to be my mate."

"Wh- huh?!" Silver nearly fell off the can in shock. "You think I-"

Silver couldn't finish that sentence as she had to hold back wild laughter, and it would be funnier if she weren't almost suffocating herself holding it in, hoping she would not be offending Leo too much to the point of making him leave immediately.

"Alright, you don't. I get it." Leo frowned. "That's fine, if you want to know, you're not who I had on my mind."

"Oh thank goodness!" Silver breathed, then realized what she said and put her paws on her mouth. "I mean, uh, who is on your mind then?"

"Didn't you have something you wanted to talk to me about? Something maybe more important than gossip?" Leo swung his legs in the air, facing away from her.

"Well." Silver bit her lip. "It is... about that, though."

"Oh." Leo uttered.

"It's Scout. She's really into you, I mean, she says she is, but I'm not sure-" Silver began explaining.

"Woah, woah, woah." Leo looked at her in awe. "How did you know it was Scout?"

"What?!" Silver exclaimed.

"Yeah, Scout's my pick." Leo told her. "I mean, she seems like the least bad pick of them all, we've known each other since we were pups, she's eager to lead, she's responsible..."

"Excuse me, *least bad*?" Silver put her paws on her hips, not believing what she was hearing.

"Yeah, I mean, no one's really piqued my interest, but Scout's right there, and she's not bad, maybe after a few dates I could like her even more..." Leo said.

Silver couldn't believe her ears. Leo talked about Scout like she was just any rat, he didn't love her, he didn't actually want her to be his mate, he was forcing himself!

She imagined the kind of life Scout would have next to Leo. She imagined Scout, ever so gentle and excited, doing everything to make him happy, gathering the best food and being the greatest sniffer, disarmer, and fighter. But Leo? He would still sit around and say it's just good enough.

Silver would not allow Scout to be the mate of someone who only considered her good enough. She knew Scout deserved better.

That is why she had asked Leo to come to the Rushing Waters after all. In case things took a turn for the worse.

"Well... Thank you for talking to me, Leo. I was really just worried for Scout, you know, I didn't know if you'd reject her feelings or not." Silver got up first.

"Oh, it's no problem, Silver." Leo got up as well. "I don't really like having to pick up a mate, but if Scout likes me, that solves half the problem!"

He had put himself right in front of her, and right in front of the stream as well.

Silver lowered her ears. Perfect.

"I'm glad." Silver pulled him in for a hug.

At least, it seemed like a hug, until Leo realized Silver was attempting to squeeze him, her claws digging onto his back.

"Oww! Silver! What the hell are you doing that for?" Leo pushed her away.

Silver only smiled, and seeing how weakened he was, pushed him into the water.

Leo could barely let out a yell before falling into it, being carried away, letting out choked up sounds as he tried to fight the water getting into his mouth.

He managed to hold onto the exit pipe before it could carry him away.

"Why are you doing this?!" Leo looked up at her in despair.

Silver jumped up and slashed open a pipe that hung from the ceiling, and brought it down, directing all the water out to Leo.

"Nothing personal, chief! It's just time we change things up, I guess!" Was the last thing Leo heard, before the water hit him in a powerful jet, weakening his grip on the pipe, and knocking him further down into the stream, and into the sewers.

The last thing he remembered was flailing wildly, trying to find anything to hold onto, to stop this madness, as the current carried him, hitting his head far too much on the edges of the pipes, and soon enough, having his vision go dark...

As the darkness faded out, Leo slowly opened his heavy eyes, the ringing in his ears still persisting, though he could hear a voice.

"... seems to... life...."

What happened? He remembered the meeting earlier that day. The elders. Silver.

Silver! That's right!

That traitor!

Leo's eyes jolted open, and he tried to jump up, only to realize he seemed to be stuck, strapped down to be precise.

"What the hell?!" He growled.

To his front, he could now see his captor.

And... he wasn't sure what he was looking at.

It was some kind of ferret, maybe a weasel or a mink judging by the ears, but there were patches all over it, of mismatched fur colors, all stitched together. To complete the strange look, the thing wore lab goggles around its neck.

"Oh! Hey! You're up already! Oh, this is gonna make things awkward." The creature held up its paws and gave a sheepish grin.

"Where am I, what are you, let me go." Leo demanded.

"Woah, woah, hey there, little guy!" The animal raised its paws in the air. "First of all, you're in my lab, second I'm a scientist and very good veterinarian who sees exclusively animal clients, and third... hmm, how about no."

"I don't care if you think you're a scientist, or a veterinarian, I don't have time for this and I need to go!" Leo growled, and immediately started munching on the leather straps restraining him, hoping to free himself.

"Woah, woah, hey hey hey!" The animal shouted when seeing Leo gnaw down on the restraints. "Listen, I promise I'll explain everything that's going on, I just need you to be a dear and let me run a small test on you!"

"Oh! Let me think!" Leo tilted his head and gave a fake smile, talking in a mocking voice. "How about no!"

And he was back to eating the restraints.

"Okay, okay!" The creature pulled on its ears in frustration. "Listen, my name is Pesto, I don't blame you if you haven't heard much of me, I'm kind of obscure, but I'm trying really hard to find my parents, so could you please cooperate, just for a little bit? I promise it's not going to take long and I just need to run a first test!"

They had their paws together, pleading.

"Your parents?" Leo scoffed, looking in disbelief at Pesto.

"I'm sorry, but I think that this is not what you're looking for." He used his head to gesture to the rest of himself.

"It's not so simple." Pesto wagged a finger at him. "You see, I'm not talking about biological parents. I'm talking about the rat and cat who gave me my brain and heart!"

Leo stared in silence.

"So... you have the brain of a rat... and the heart of a cat..." Leo repeated.

"Yes!" Pesto nodded, paws to his chest.

"And you call them your parents." Leo continued.

"Yes, yes! Their story inspires me, every day!" Pesto nodded again, emotion showing in his voice.

"And you're still trying to find them." Leo finished.

"Yes, yes! Please, it's just a simple test!" Pesto pleaded.

Leo gave a nervous grin. "Yep! You're insane." And then began gnawing the leather straps with even more force.

"Agh! You don't understand! And you don't believe me!" Pesto groaned in frustration.

She then slammed down some kind of metal cap to Leo's head, perfectly fitting for the head of a rat, which seemed connected to some kind of machine. She ran all the way around, out of Leo's view.

"Hey! What the hell are you trying to do?!" Leo shouted.

But it was far too late. Pesto had run to another chair, and put a second cap on them, designed for them.

With the pull of a lever, Leo kissed goodbye to his attempts to flee.

What happened next was something that would be likely indescribable to anyone not in Leo's place.

Memories flooded his mind, familiar places and faces that were too old to be of this life. Places, feelings, it all mixed up together.

Humans, a laboratory, pills, boxes, cages.

Death, a false god, a parasite, a heart, murder, deceit.

And learning how to love.

It felt so familiar. He had been there before. He had felt these feelings before. He had had these thoughts before.

It dawned on him, as soon as the rush was ending and the experiment came to its conclusion.

This was his past life.

When he snapped back to reality, Pesto was already removing his cap.

"You're speechless..." They noted. "Did it work, then?"

"I... I died.. Heart... You..." Leo could barely make out the words, as he shakingly looked up to Pesto.

"You! You remember!" Pesto's face lit up, grabbing Leo out of his restraints and holding him up. "I'm so excited, I don't know what to do! It's you! You're *the* Mad Rat!"

"I... I guess that's me." Leo looked back at Pesto.

His mind was rushing with the memories still, so many things to take in. This was his past life, but now he had this current one, so very different from before, filled with so many adventures.

Still, one thing from all of that flashback stood out.

"Hey, wait! Pesto!" He said. "What about Heart?"

"I haven't found him yet." Pesto responded, and put Leo down on the chair now, carefully.

"But you have his heart." Leo pointed out. "Do you have his feelings from his last life or something?"

"I do." Pesto smiled down at Leo gently. "If you could only know the happiness I feel seeing you right now... we have to find Heart, the real, reincarnated Heart, immediately!"

"And how do you intend to do that? Do you even know if Heart is even in this country?" Leo pointed out. "For all we know, he could have come back as a totally different animal! And you just found me by dumb luck!"

"Oh, you're so negative, just like before." Pesto gushed. "I would ask all about your life and talk for hours if I hadn't just shared memories with you!"

"Stop being mushy and listen to me! Why did you bring me here and awaken these memories if there's no Heart for me to reunite with?" Leo growled.

"To see you again... To let you know, that wasn't the end, that you made it out and-" Pesto tried to explain.

"Who fucking cares about all that?! Nothing about my past life was good besides Heart! He made it all worthwhile! What am I supposed to do with a bunch of useless memories if the one person who made all the good ones isn't even around?!" Leo jumped in place in anger.

"I..." Pesto lowered his ears and looked away in defeat. "I'm sorry. I just wanted to see you again, to get some confirmation you got a new life, that you were okay. I was selfish in that regard."

"Yeah, well, I'm not okay." Leo hopped off the chair and started on his way out. "And if you'll excuse me, I need to get back to my pack."

Seeing him leave, Pesto chased after him: "Hey, Mad Rat, wait! There's still so much I want to ask you!"

"My name is Leo!" He growled, and began running faster, now looking to fully escape Pesto.

And as he ran, he felt something different. The blood rushing to his veins pumped, his heart accelerated, and as his paws hit the ground each time, they formed a melody.

He was waking up to the beat he had lost so long ago. It came back to him, and it had been dormant in him all along.

"Woah." Pesto ended up stopping midway just to appreciate Leo's movements.

With this newfound strength, he was dashing and moving like never before, jumping off of walls and dancing mid-air.

"Hey, alright! At least with this, I'll get back to my pack in no time, and show that no-good traitor Silver what I'm made of!" Leo told himself, as he could already see the way to the exit, as Pesto had left a second passage open for the animals that would visit the place.

It didn't take long for Pesto to catch up, though.

"Who's Silver?" She asked as she also showed off her rhythmic running and dancing.

"Ahhh! Leave me alone!" Leo simply yelled in shock as he saw the creature catching up to him, and ran faster.

To say that it was a close call was an understatement. Pesto was always just one inch away from simply grabbing Leo, so close in approaching him it seemed unfair to compare the two.

Finally, however, it seemed like Leo was making it out. He opened his mouth in a big toothy grin, ready to taste the freedom...

...And bumped straight into a passing cat.

Leo felt his life flash before his eyes for what seemed like around the third time that day. The cat smiling and opening its mouth, Pesto's screams as they arrived upon the scene, paws and fur flying, distressed meows...

And he blacked out again.

Mad Rat opened his eyes, the world shaking around him. This was his cage, wasn't it?

The water bottle, his little food container with the same old pellets, the metal bars, the fluffy sawdust that covered the bottom of the cage...

He was back, back where it began.

Wait, that wasn't right.

He died, didn't he?

Leo blinked, and he realized he was only having a vision.

The cage he was in, in reality, was much much different.

He was placed inside a soft bed made of a fluffy pillow within the cage, and it itself did not have sawdust, but instead a little carpet was placed inside. To the side, a small tray with sawdust for him to relieve himself, and to his front, a regular water bottle, and a plate filled with...

"Cheese!" Leo could barely contain his excitement as he grabbed the wonderful treats he had been given.

He stopped himself in the middle, though, when he recalled his past life, and the Rat God.

Was this really cheese? Was this safe? Was he really in a cage? Was he going to lose it again?

Where was Heart when he needed him?

But... There was no trick. No cats, either. This really smelled of cheese.

Leo took a bite, and then another, and kept eating.

Oh yeah, this was good stuff.

His ears picked up something now, from outside the cage. It sounded like Pesto, and probably that other cat. He guessed Pesto had simply picked him up and brought him back to their lab.

"Now, now, sit still, I promise this will only take a while!" Pesto tried to sound reassuring. "Normally I would not take unwilling subjects, but I'm so close to this discovery!"

"What are you doing?! What's this stuff you're putting one me?! H-Help!!" The poor golden tabby yelled and writhed against its restraints.

Leo sighed. He couldn't say he didn't entirely understand Pesto's view now. If Pesto had Mad Rat's memories and Heart's feelings, they probably knew what it was like to miss someone like Heart, or Mad Rat for that matter.

Pesto did say their story inspired them, and called them their parents, so it's probable Pesto saw Mad Rat and Heart as admirable for their adventures and for the feeling they shared together. In that sense, it would be in such a mad animal's interests to somehow bring back the two creatures that gave them life and gave them meaning.

Leo could hear the yells of the cat as it was put through the memory sharing process, meowing in unnatural ways. A few seconds, however, and it was over.

Strange, Leo thought. To him, reliving all of that felt like an eternity.

"So, did it work?" Pesto asked the cat. "Do you remember now, Heart?"

"What was all that?! This is insane!" The cat instead screamed out.

"I-is that a no? Do you need more time to process?" Pesto asked.

"I need to get out of here!" The cat thrashed so wildly against the restraints, clawing and biting, it actually managed to get free.

"Help meeeee!" It ran out of the lab screaming.

"Hm." Was all Leo could hear Pesto say. "Guess that was the wrong guy after all."

Leo giggled to himself. He almost felt bad for that cat. Almost.

"Now to break out of this cage..." Leo readied himself, paws on the ground, now curling up into a ball, ready to charge. It would be easy, so easy. The beat flowing through his body, ready for a triumphant climax, to break free.

"Hey Mad Rat!" Pesto instead appeared in front of the cage shouting, surprising him.

"Aggh!" Leo lost his concentration instead and ended up falling backwards. "It's Leo! Get it?! Lee-oh! Not Mad Rat, Leo!"

"Right, right, Leo." Pesto nodded. "Listen, I know you want to get back to wherever you're from *really* badly, but could you please at least answer some questions for me before you go?"

Leo sighed, eyeing the animal as she put up her paws together, pleading and giving an admittedly adorable pleading face, with big eyes and a cute smile.

"What choice do I have?" He groaned. "Fine."

"Hooray!" Pesto exclaimed, and brought out a pen and a notebook. "First of all: Where do you reside currently?"

"Difficult to say, we could be miles away from it. Me and my pack have a burrow north to the heart of town, it's full of underground tunnels we dug, as well as access to the sewer. That's how I got here. One of the rats in my pack pushed me into the current!" Leo told her.

"Woah, wait, north?! Heart of town?!" Pesto was shocked. "But that's so far from here! The lab is miles south from the heart of town! That current took you all over!"

"Ugh! See?! This is why I have to get back to my pack!" Leo pulled on his ears in frustration. "Who knows what that Silver is planning now that I'm gone!"

"Tell me more about this Silver. And your pack." Pesto asked.

"Silver's one nasty rat alright. She's one of the strongest and smartest rats in the pack, fierce like no other, takes no nonsense from anyone. I thought she was loyal to me up until now, but she set me up to get carried away by the sewer current!" Leo vented. "And worst of all, I don't even know what her plan is, why she did that!"

"That sounds intense." Pesto simply commented.

"I'll say." Leo nodded. "Now about my pack... they're alright I guess. Come to think of it, in my last life I had no frame of reference as to what a pack should behave like. I was pretty antisocial to the rats back at the lab. But wild rats are awesome! They're nothing like those losers back at the lab, they're strong, smart, and we help each other and keep each other safe!"

"When I was born, there were already two rats leading the pack, Flash and Spots. But as it is usual for a pack, once I grew up, I got a chance to challenge them and their kids, and prove myself as their new leader. And I got what I wanted: I was known for being bold and fearless and strong!" He flexed his little rat muscles.

"This must be what they talk about when they say reincarnation often gives you a chance to live wildly different lives. This sounds like everything you wished you could have had." Pesto noted.

“Well, kind of.” Leo tapped his foot. “While I like being free and having such a cool pack, things are tough sometimes. We have to always fight to survive, other animals, humans... Everything is trying to get us. And even though everyone puts in work to gather food, it’s never a guarantee there’ll be enough for everyone, or that we’ll all be back in one piece every time.”

“Well, yeah. Every life comes with good things and bad things. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be a learning experience.” Pesto nodded.

He then remembered something. “Actually, Pesto, I’ve been meaning to ask *you* something.”

“Oh! Go ahead.” Pesto accepted.

“Didn’t the Rat God, y’know, bother you? Wasn’t she attached to the heart?” Leo asked.

“Oh, yes, *that* Rat God.” Pesto nodded. “Well, it’s a funny story... She thought I was you so she tried to control me, but couldn’t because I’m not actually a rat or a cat, so I just got up after she tried to mess with me and made a vaccine!”

“What’s a vaccine?” Leo asked her.

“Uh.” Pesto was a bit surprised at the question. “You don’t know what a vaccine is?”

“No?” Leo tilted his head.

“Hm, I guess you never learned about that. It’s like, needles, you know needles?” Pesto described.

“Yes, yes, needles. I remember needles.” Leo nodded.

“Okay, so needles, but they’re filled with anti-sickness juice.” Pesto explained.

“Ohhhh...” Leo’s eyes widened. “So you stick that in the Rat God and then she dies, right?”

“Er, well, no.” Pesto told him. “You stick it in you, and then it goes to the Rat God and then she dies.”

“But that doesn’t make any sense, how can she die if you’re not sticking it on her?” Leo questioned.

“I can’t stick it on her because she’s inside me, so we do the next best thing.” Pesto explained.

“Oh.” Leo seemed to finally understand. “That’s right.”

[Wow! You found a rat fact! Click here!](#)

“Well, that’s about all I had to say or ask, really. I don’t want to tell you every single detail about my life, like I said, I’ve got to get back, and it’s a long way.” Leo moved on.

“I get it.” Pesto nodded. “Do you want help getting back?”

“Nah, I think you’ve been enough ‘help’ already.” Leo crossed his arms.

“Aw, you’re doing that little thing where you act stubborn and mean! Cute.” Pesto giggled.

“Urgh, will you just stop being a pest and let me leave?!” Leo growled. “I can do fine on my own, I just need to get back!”

“Meh, alright, Leo.” Pesto opened the cage. “But I’ll want to see you again! And I won’t stop looking for your Heart either!”

“Yeah, yeah, thanks for that, I guess.” Leo hopped out.

Before he could make his way out, Pesto called out to him one more time:

“Hey, remember that I work as a veterinarian for the animals in need! I’m miles better than any human you can see! If your pack needs medical assistance, I’m your guy!”

“Haha, okay, thanks, Pesto!” Leo laughed awkwardly at them and continued on, before whispering to himself: “I’m never going to trust that weirdo with any medical assistance ever.”

As he kept on running, making it out of the lab and hopping onto the rooftops to get a better view of the city, he thought to himself about all that just happened.

He seemed to have something to do with big events all happening to him over the course of one day. In his past life, and now in this one.

Still, thinking about Heart, he felt strange. He wanted to meet him again so badly, but otherwise, these memories felt completely meaningless to him. Sure, it was nice knowing his life went on, but what about Heart?

Heart had been his one solace throughout all of that, and Pesto could not guarantee Heart would ever be back by his side. As insisting as the animal was about looking to find Heart again, Leo just didn’t think it was all that plausible.

In truth, he did not want to get his hopes up. Being separated from Heart had already been so hard on him, having that love happen and die all in one day, and now realizing what he was missing.

It hurt so bad. Missing Heart hurt a lot.

Wondering where Heart could even be now would do him no good. He had to keep moving forward. The only way to stop this sadness inside him was to forget and move on.

"I understand now." Leo thought to himself. "This is why we forget our past lives."

As much as he wanted to think of Heart, to look for him, he also wanted to live free of that worry. And he decided he was going to do just that.

"In order to live my life, I must forget Heart! I need to leave the past in the past and move forward!" Leo concluded.

CHAPTER 3: THE CAT WITH A STAR ON HIS HEAD.

“Star! Star!”

“Come on, Star! Are you lazing around again?”

Star lifted his head gently from his comfortable nap. Yawning, he stretched his legs and got up, looking through the window.

Ah, it was his friends, Slam, and Coffee.

“Come on out!” He could see Slam, a white cat with black tipped tail and paws, call out.

“Alright, I’m coming!” Star told them.

He tried to pull on the window, hoping to get it open. It was always kind of a pain, getting it open and slipping out, but he managed it.

“Alright, Star’s come to play, and it’s not even night yet.” Slam teased.

“How was your day, Star?” Coffee, a fluffy brown tabby, asked him.

“It was good, more or less like every other one.” Star scratched his ear. “Can’t say I wasn’t dying of boredom though.”

[Hey! You found a character bio! Click here to look at it!](#)

“Well, what are you waiting for, let’s hang out!” Coffee called.

Star smiled and jumped out, joining his friends, feeling the nice soft grass under their paws and some fresh air.

“So what are you guys thinking?” Star asked them.

“Ohhh, I don’t know... just that my yard’s garden has some flowers that just bloomed and some butterflies are going there just to beg to be chased!” Coffee announced. “Maybe we’ll even find ladybugs, or beetles!”

“Ugh, I’m so tired of just batting after little insects all day.” Slam groaned. “When are we gonna hunt some real prey, like rats!”

“Also, technically ladybugs are a type of beetle.” She added at the end.

[Hey! You found a character bio! Click here to look at it!](#)

"Hm, well, I like chasing bugs." Coffee lowered their ears sadly.

"Yeah, yeah, chasing bugs is great!" Star nodded along, giving a nervous smile.

"Star." Slam eyed his nervous expression with contempt, and soon the other cat joined her.

"We know why you really prefer hunting bugs."

"Wh- Oh, c'mon! It's a genuine concern, it's a safety hazard and I won't be eating any diseased rats." Star crossed his paws and turned his face away from them.

"Star. That old story with the hallucinating rats is like, from ages ago." Slam rolled her eyes.

"He has a point. I mean, there's no way all those rats haven't died out, and we haven't heard of any cases since." Coffee added. "Besides, I heard it doesn't even affect cats the same it does for rats."

"When was the last time you ever ate a rat anyway?" Slam questioned him. "For all I know, you just play with them until they run away."

"What? I just get bored, and I have food at home, I don't need any dirty, filthy rats." Star shook his paw in the air, as if rejecting an imaginary rat.

"Hmhm, the food that has a particularly artificial flavor, huh." Slam teased. "That's better than fresh rats, huh?"

"Oh! Oh! With the not-chicken and the almost-beef, huh?" Coffee added in on the joke.

[Hey! You found a character bio! Click here to look at it!](#)

"Alright, alright, guys, it's not that funny." Star grumbled.

"I think I know what's up." Slam came closer to Star, slapping him gently on the shoulder.

"Our Star is scared of rats."

"What?!" Star exclaimed.

"Ohhh, now everything makes sense." Coffee nodded.

"Does not!" Star protested. "I mean, I'm not scared of rats!"

"Maybe all that playing was instead him having trouble with them!" Coffee went on.

"Stop! That doesn't make any sense! I wouldn't chase rats to toy with if I was scared of them!" Star defended himself.

"Well, then why don't we find ourselves some rats to chase now?" Slam offered.

"Ah, that's what you were shooting for. Okay, I get it." Star sighed. "Alright, I'll show you I'm not scared of chasing some rats."

"Alright!" Slam cheered up. "Let's go!"

"So where are we looking?" Star asked, as Slam began to lead.

"We aren't going far, are we?" Coffee asked. "You know, it's nice in a way that we can get out, but going out can be pretty dangerous, especially if we go very far."

"Yeah, I know." Slam told them. "Trust me, it's just my yard. But there the vegetation grows pretty high, so a lot more wild animals end up showing up, even squirrels with the amount of trees we've got."

"Oh, that sounds alright." Coffee nodded.

They didn't have to walk much until they reached Slam's house, and walked into her yard. Indeed, her owner's property had quite a generous share of land, and in it, many trees and vegetation growing all around. It was like a small forest, all growing in someone's backyard.

"Alright, you know the drill." Slam told them as they walked into the heart of the tangling plants and rising trees. "We split up and just do our thing, and call if we need help or find something interesting."

"Except you, Star." She gave him an intimidating look. "You have to tell us if you find a rat."

"Oh, and we'll watch, to make sure we see how you go." Coffee added.

"Seriously? You're treating me like a kitten?" Star lowered his ears. "... Fine."

And so, they all went their separate ways.

[Wow! You found a... cat fact? Go here!](#)

Star decided to simply go further on into the vegetation, nose down on the ground. He better find a rat soon and put an end to this stupid game.

He heard Slam and Coffee meowing enthusiastically and noticed them coordinating a chase to catch a squirrel, and was almost on his way to aid them, but...

"No, no, Star! You stay there and look for rats!" Slam lectured him, and Coffee laughed at his predicament.

Star huffed and went back to sniffing. He later saw Coffee running after a rhinoceros beetle, and almost thought about joining, but soon recalled Slam's words.

He began finding all sorts of animals to chase, but none of them rats sadly.

He almost went up a tree to find a dove, then back on ground ran into an impressive amount of stinkbugs, almost hopped towards a passing toad, saw a hummingbird, as well as a collection of colorful butterflies.

“Ugh! This isn’t working!” Star shouted in frustration.

He tried to turn to the general direction his companions left off to, and shouted: “Hey! I’m finding no rats!”

And unfortunately, only received a faint: “Keep looking!” From Slam, as well as Coffee’s paw coming briefly out of a bush to give a thumbs up.

Star sat and sighed. Why was this day so strange?

Just then, he picked up a scent. It was... yes, it was!

“A rat! A rat!” Star shouted triumphantly.

Except... when Star caught the scent, he was facing away from the trees and vegetation, and towards the open field.

“And it’s... coming this way?!” Star raised his ears in shock, whiskers twitching.

Yes, he could see what seemed like a small fluffy red coated rat, running straight towards him. Not just running, but jumping, dashing, doing all kinds of crazy moves. It almost looked like it was...

“Is it dancing?!” Coffee had already joined his side after they heard Star call, and Slam soon joined them.

“What the hell is it doing?” Slam asked.

“I’ve never seen any animal ever move that way.” Coffee remarked.

“Well, don’t just stand there! Weird rat or not, try to catch it!” Slam yelled at Star.

“Ah, ah, ok!” Star fumbled over himself and almost tripped as he ran to meet the rat midway.

The rat, however, had other plans. He instead hopped up and onto Star’s head, actually homing in on him and slamming his body on him, giving him a bit of a headache.

“Ouch!” Star yelled. “What the hell?”

The rat continued on dashing and dancing, like nothing had happened.

“Well?! After it!” Slam insisted.

The rat, soon as it reached the two cats, jumped up and onto each of their heads, doing the same homing attack, eliciting cries of pain from each of them in succession, their meows almost forming a musical scale, and then continued on, making its way now up to jump the fence.

“Did I just see that little shit *smirk* when it jumped up from our heads?!” Slam turned to face where the rat had gone, growling.

Star now was moved by a different kind of feeling to go after the rat. There was something obviously special about this rat, the way it was moving being so unnatural yet so unrestricted and free and efficient.

He had to find out more about this rat. He needed to. He felt attracted to it, even, something about it was just mesmerizing.

As he ran after the rat, he tried to copy the movements it was making, clumsily, yet still trying. The slam of its paws on whatever it could find formed a beat, and if only Star could tap into it-

Star felt as if something slowed down in his mind. A song? Where was this beat coming from?

As he tried to follow it, he could feel his heartbeat changing, as if syncing up to the rhythm, he was now stepping differently, he could hear it now, every movement, every single pull of his muscles was conditioned to the song.

And he was catching up.

Before, he could barely see where the rat was going, the thing was moving so fast, but now, Star was right on its tail, if only a few steps back.

“Star! Wait up!” He could hear his companions calling to him behind him, running after him, though, clearly not with the same ability, struggling to keep up.

But he had no time to slow down, as he felt himself get closer and closer, his movements now almost entirely copying the rat’s own. The rat gave a quick glance to him, to see how close he was, and tried to lose him by taking a different route, but Star followed close.

Star chased it up onto a rooftop, and by a chance of fate, Star’s legs stretched higher, over the rat, and...

He did it.

He managed to fall right on top of the animal, holding it with his front paws.

The rodent simply stared up at him, saying not a word.

Star, feeling confident, let go of it with both his paws.

“Ah, hm, hello, Mr. Rat!” Star began nervously. “Now, I know this is a little weird, but I just wanted to say I’ve never seen an animal move like you before, and I think- I think you’ve made me do it too! How do you do it-”



Before Star could continue on, the rat delivered a powerful kick to his jaws. In the moment, the rat took the opportunity to flee, leaving Star in shock.

“Wow. That was something.” Coffee was the first to speak. “Well you technically caught it... that’s gotta count, right?”

Slam was also silent, gasping without making any sound, before she finally spoke, pointing wildly at the direction the rat fled: “What the absolute ever loving hell was that?! Did you even see that?! That rat was moving like some kind of- like those human break dancers! The thing fucking slammed into our heads mid-air! What the hell!”

"It didn't want to talk to me." Star rubbed his chin where the rat had kicked.

"Well, yeah, it's a rat." Coffee pointed out. "What's it gonna say- 'don't eat me'?"

"But I told it I just wanted to talk!" Star shouted.

An awkward silence fell onto the group.

"Woah, calm down, man. It's just a rat." Coffee said.

"Okay, no, I'm kind of with Star here. It's not just any rat. That thing was moving fast and weird." Slam pointed out, then walked up to Star. "And you were acting weird too! How did you even manage to copy it?"

"What, like you guys couldn't?" Star asked.

"No?!" They both shouted at him in unison.

"Why would we, what the hell do you think we are?!" Slam yelled.

"I get dizzy just thinking about having to outrun a dog!" Coffee gave an example.

Star lowered his ears and sighed, clearly frustrated with the situation.

"Alright, alright." Coffee decided to be kind, walking up to him. "I know we just experienced some high emotions, and you guys are right. It isn't just any rat. But it's gone now, and, remember, we aren't supposed to go too far out. We should just go home with this cool memory in mind."

"Eh, Coffee's right. What can we even do?" Slam shrugged.

Star said nothing, but stared back at the way he'd seen the rat last run to. The wind blew in his direction, as if beckoning him.

"I kinda..." Star began, but stopped himself.

"Star? You're seriously not thinking of going after that thing, are you?" Slam asked him.

Star looked back at them and then down at the ground, lowering his ears. "No, no. Yeah, it is stupid to want to go after a rat like this. It was cool but... it happened. And now we can just go home and laugh about it, right guys? I mean, I don't even know why I wanted to talk to that rat so badly anyway, what would we even talk about..."

"Hm... Okay." Coffee mumbled. "Well, let's go then."

And so, they all began turning back, to leave the rooftops and go back to their homes.

However, as Star was following them, when they were already back in Slam's yard, he heard a voice calling:

"Hey, psst. Star. Star."

It was a voice he'd never heard before. Yet, he did end up checking it out. There, hidden in the bushes, was an animal that was around the size of a cat, stalking him.

Star couldn't help but stop and go to it. "Me? You're talking to me?"

Soon, a strange animal with mismatched fur colors and stitches all over burst from the bush, looking into his eyes.

"Indeed I am."

And before he could do or say anything, it had slammed a syringe onto his neck, and his world went dark.

"... And when it saw Slam on the other side, I thought its heart was gonna jump right off its chest!" Coffee was telling a story. "If only your rat had been more of a scaredy-rat, right, Star?"

The cats came to a halt once they realized something: Star was missing.

"Star?" They began calling. "Staaaar?"

"He's not here." Slam said.

"Do you think he went after that rat again?" Coffee asked.

"Wait a minute." Slam, started sniffing out his trail, and then raised up her paw to point. "Look!"

The duo watched in horror as they saw, in the distance, a strange creature running on the rooftops, carrying Star on its back, the cat's body all limp.

"What the hell is going on?" Slam had her ears low and her body contorted and shivered in stress. "Why is today so weird?"

"Well, we're going after him, right?" Coffee proposed.

"We have to. It's dangerous out there, but Star's in far more danger now!" Slam nodded.

And they took off.

"... awake for this."

Star opened his eyes slowly, his head spinning. Just what had happened?

As his vision adjusted and he was able to see better, a frightening sight jolted him right into a state of alert.

"Hello, Heart!" The thing he had seen before jumped into view, right in front of him, its face too close for comfort.

"Aaaaaaaaahhhhh!" Star's first instinct was to scream.

"Oh, sh, sh, sh, it's okay!" Pesto tried to calm him down, paws in the air, but to no avail.

Star just continued to scream, and began thrashing against the restraints. "Get me out of here! Help! Somebody please help!"

"Stop moving!" Pesto ended up giving out a big roar in his face, teeth showing and spit flying everywhere, eyes glowing mad. That got him to shut up, if only because it terrified him so much, it made him freeze entirely.

"Will you animals *please* stop thrashing and ruining the restraints? Do you know how hard it is to fix these each time, *and* get material that's good quality as well?!" Pesto began to rant. "I'm a weasel-ferret-mink thing! I'm a scientific abomination! I can't just- go to the human store and get a regular leather belt or something, they're going to throw stuff at me! Oh, and don't tell me to disguise myself as a human, I've tried!"

Star was rendered speechless: "I... I'm sorry?" Was all he could say.

"Oh, you better be, because if these break again, I swear, I'm going to. Lose. It! And I've already lost it years ago! I'll get lost even more!" Pesto yelled.

"What do you want with me?!" Star had tears in his eyes now, exasperated.

Why him, he thought. Why was he being put through this?!

"I want to awaken your memories, Heart!" Pesto told him. "I just know it's you! The way you chased after Leo, there's no way you aren't him!"

"L-listen, I don't know what you're talking about, I don't want any trouble." Star shook in his seat. "Uh, wait, who's Leo?"

"Oh, right!" Pesto gently slapped their own head. "Leo's the rat you were chasing, though you probably know him better as Mad Rat."

"Wh- Mad Rat, Heart, you keep saying these weird names and I have no idea what they mean!" Star was starting to lose it. "You keep acting like you know me too, do I have some severe case of amnesia? Has my entire life been a lie? Am I real?"

"Woah, woah, woah! Slow down there!" Pesto gently placed a paw on him. "It's not that extreme. You're just... going to remember another life."

"What?" Star asked, still unable to understand or believe what was going on. "Am I part of your weird pseudo science experiment?"

"Okay, I know it's hard to believe, but think of it this way: you wanna find out what's up with that rat you saw, right? And why you were able to run and dance like him, right?" Pesto offered.

"And you think the answer is some kind of past life mumbo jumbo?" Star asked them.

"Hey! I've got proof this works, alright?" Pesto huffed. "Now get ready."

And so she put the cap on him, and he was powerless to really do anything or protest.

Pesto ran all the way to the other chair and strapped in as well, ready to begin.

"Not feeling anything, but-" Star began grumbling, but before he could finish, he found himself having his mind blown.

His heart started to accelerate, and the beat he had heard before seemed to return. Feelings rushed to him that all seemed connected.

The feeling of melancholy, living all alone. Wandering the streets. Homes that didn't stay. Sadness, abandonment. Abuse. So much hurt. Occasional happiness, occasional allies. Friendship. Heartbreak. Loss. Hope. Betrayal.

But things converged at some point, into something a little easier to understand. A double vision, sharing his body with someone.

A false god. A parasite. Cages. Rats. One, then many. Then only one again. A familiar black cat. A friendly human. Back and forth, back in time, so many adventures in a single day.

A feeling began to stand out. Love.

Love for this creature he shared his body with. So much love. To be one with someone. To know a love that transcends what most will ever come to know about the feeling. And to finally have a home, in his chest, as his heart.

And then, the loss. Sadness and melancholy again. But hope. A warm feeling, at the end of his life. Kindness, from a friendly human girl perhaps. And then, knowing when to die.

Star snapped back to reality, breathing heavily.

"Oh gosh. Oh no. Mad Rat- Leo is Mad Rat?!" Star exclaimed.

"Oh! Oh you remember!" Pesto was ready to jump into view. "It is you!"

"I-it's me, I guess, but, Mad Rat, or Leo, where is he? Do you know where he went?" Star asked her.

Pesto bit her lip. "Okay, so yes and no. You see, he's going back to see his pack, and I kind of sort of maybe know where that is. But I also don't really know where it is as in a specific address."

"That's got to be good enough." Star told her.

Pesto, seeing his compliance, loosened up the restraints and let him free. "He said his pack is located north to the heart of town, and I don't want to discourage you, but that's pretty far from here."

"But you said you found out he was Mad Rat. Did you do the same thing to him? Did he ask about me?" Star asked.

"He did." Pesto affirmed. "But he was also very sad about me not having met you before, he kept going on about how you could be any cat anywhere, any animal, really. He didn't really believe you'd meet again."

"Hey, wait a minute, how did you even know about us? How do you know us?" It dawned on Star how strange this all was.

"I have your heart." Pesto pointed to her chest with her paw, and then brought her other paw to her head. "And his brain- well, partly. I wouldn't have kept my memories otherwise."

"Oh." Star lowered his ears. "Guess we weren't well preserved after all. No offense, you just, look uh..."

"I know I look bad. The scientist that made me didn't really care about animals, just results." Pesto looked down and hugged himself.

"I'm sorry." Star eyed him gently. "But, at least I'm glad you were able to bring us together again. You aren't as bad as I thought."

"Sorry for almost breaking your equipment by the way." Star glanced back at the restraints. "But you can be scary!"

"It's okay." Pesto scratched their back and grinned sheepishly. "I do get kind of angry. And that gentle honesty is what I've always admired about you!"

"Feels weird hearing you say you know me, but I guess that makes sense. You must have his memories, and my feelings too. That's how you were able to remind me, right?" Star concluded.

Pesto nodded. "I'm glad you get it." Then they tilted their head and asked: "Are you going to go after Leo?"

"I have to." Star jumped off the chair. "He may have not recognized me, and may have not been looking for me, but I know he wants to see me again, and I do too."

He walked towards the door. "Last time we saw each other, we could barely stay together after learning to truly appreciate each other. I'm glad fate gave us another chance, and I'm not going to waste it."

"Then go. Follow his scent, and follow the beat! I believe in you, Star." Pesto told him.

And so Star took off, feeling the rhythm as he ran out.

Pesto sighed happily and went to tidy things up. He unplugged the machine, arranged the chairs back in position, used his tail to sweep the floor a bit...

He thought to himself of this exciting, eventful day. Meeting both of his parents! Helping them reunite! Well, maybe. He did worry about how their meeting was going to go, and there was also the problem of that rat Silver causing trouble for Leo... And also Star's friends, and what about Star's owners?

As he tidied up, he thought more and more and grew slightly anxious. He couldn't help it. He still felt connected to them. He couldn't let them go.

He had to go see how they were doing.

Before he could even think of heading to the door, however, he was surprised by two cats jumping out from the other side, giving fierce battle cries.

Slam and Coffee had come to save their friend.

They said nothing but lowered their ears, growling and hissing, advancing slowly towards Pesto, and beginning to circle her.

"Hey, hey, guys, I know what it looks like... I mean, what it looked like, given that I've- hehe- let your friend go... as you can clearly see..." Pesto had a nervous grin plastered on her face as she coiled around herself, the cats closing in on her and blocking her escape routes.

"Liar! What did you do with him?!" Slam hissed.

"We should trap them and interrogate them." Coffee growled.

"Did you even listen to me?!" Pesto cried out. "He isn't here. He's fine. You just missed him in fact."

"Shut up!" Slam yelled and jumped up at her without warning.

Instincts kicking into action, Pesto activated her hidden beat, and dodged Slam's attack by a hair. She made her escape, running towards one of the office tables littered with lab supplies.

As the cats ran after her, she jumped up onto it, landing on a tray that was conveniently full of needles filled with anesthetic. The tray shot up as Pesto pressed on its side, and the needles were sent flying- straight onto each of the cats.

Pesto watched as each of the poor felines fell down on the ground in a potent sleep, biting her lip.

"I guess that works. That was really lucky for me." She said to herself.

He looked over them, thinking of what to do next.

"Well... I do wanna go soon but... I can't just leave them here to run around and cause more trouble..."

Star felt like he'd been running for a while, catching Leo's scent and following the beat as it seemed to grow louder. His mind was a mix of simply easing into the beat, thinking of nothing but his movement and rhythm, but also constantly thinking of Leo, of Mad Rat.

Would he recognize him, if he saw the way he could move? If he called him by his past name, if he reminded him of all they've been through? Told him he'd also seen Pesto?

The thought of being rejected by him hurt very much. It's not like he hadn't been stubborn and hard to please before, but this was different. He had already learned to love him. Would it matter to him if he wasn't really the Heart he remembered?

He still thought about that powerful kick delivered to his jaw, it still ached. He wondered if Leo really hadn't noticed how he was moving just like him, how they must have been in sync, and hadn't he connected the dots already?

Was he really going to have to take another beating just to convince Leo of who he was?

As the beat became thundering and the scent thicker, Star could see Leo moving from a distance. Still very far away, but he could clearly tell that small dot was Leo, just from the smell, color, and movement.

He picked up the pace, giving it all he had to make that sprint. However, Leo's ear twitched, and he turned his head to see Star approaching.

"Damn it, you again?!" He mouthed, more to himself than anything, and picked up the pace as well.

Star felt his breath fall short once he noticed just how far ahead Leo advanced once he saw him. He realized catching up to him would not be easy.

He'd been running for so long, and pushing himself so much, he felt his legs would give out, the only thing keeping him steady being that beat.

If he was ever going to reach Leo, he'd have to try something else.

"Mad Rat! It's me, Heart!"

And he knew just the thing.

As expected, Leo stopped right in his tracks, skidding and stopping himself before he flung himself off a rooftop with the momentum.

He turned around, breathless, looking back at Star.

"What did you just say?"

"Mad Rat, I said it's me, Heart." He repeated, as he finally managed to get closer to the rodent. "Or at least, that's what my name used to be. And you've got a new name too, right, *Leo*?"

"Who told you all these things? Pesto?" Leo still took a step back, hesitant.

"I did meet Pesto, but I promise they awakened my memories, I'm not lying, Leo!" Star stepped towards him carefully.

"F-for all I know she could've just told you this stuff and passed the memories onto the wrong guy, and now you're using that to get close to me!" Leo continued doubting him, shaking his head.

"Leo... it's ok to be scared." Star gave him a gentle smile. "But you and I have the same beat. You saw the way I ran after you. No other animal could've done that if it wasn't synced up to that same rhythm!"

"... I want proof." Leo lowered his head, avoiding Star's loving gaze.

"*More* proof?" Star groaned. "What more can I show you? Should I retell our adventures to you or something?"

"No, idiot. If you really can feel the same beat as me, then I want you to prove it in a race. All I've seen so far is you chasing me, but you haven't run by my side." Leo told him.

"Alright, Leo." Star sighed, closing his eyes. "If you really want a race, so be it. I'll impress you with all my moves!"

"Heh, you better do so, Star." Leo ended up conceding a little grin at him.

They approached each other, side by side, and readied themselves.

“Ready?” Leo crouched down.

Star copied his movement, concentrating on his heartbeat, awaiting for the “go”.

Instead, Leo simply laughed to himself and dashed forward, without giving any warning.

“Hey! That’s not fair!” Star fumbled over himself to start running as well, surprised by the fake out Leo had given him. “You didn’t say go!”

“If you are who you say you are, then you should know how I play!” Leo told him.

Still, it didn’t take long for Star to ease back into the beat, catching up to Leo. He had to admit, this was not what he was hoping for when he dreamed so often before of reuniting with his Mad Rat in another life, yet, it was incredibly on brand for the little rat.

It didn’t take long for Leo to realize how close they were together, and as he took a turn, dashing down through a pipe, so did Star dash down, landing with precision on his feet. Leo took a sharp turn, Star copied it. Leo would get on his head and spin around, and Star was doing the same.

“Damn, he’s really keeping up.” Leo thought to himself. “Can this really be him?”

“Hey!” As they were still running, Star called his attention. “What’s the goal?”

“The goal?” Leo repeated.

“Yeah, races have to have an end goal!” Star pointed out.

Leo realized he hadn’t really thought of an end goal, just an excuse to somehow lose this random cat. He didn’t really want to confront the fact Heart could possibly have found him again because... why would he?

Their lives were different now, and he didn’t want to put Heart through any more trouble. What if they came to part again soon? What if something happened? He couldn’t handle doing it again. He had just managed to convince himself he’d be able to live a different life without Heart in it.

Why’d he have to come back now and make everything so difficult?

Without warning, Leo simply turned on his feet and put himself in front of Star, making the cat have to put all his strength into braking so as to not hit him.

“Leo?!” Star called, not understanding what was happening.

"Tell me something, *Heart*." Leo put emphasis on the name. "Why'd you come back to see me? Aren't you scared?"

"Scared, Leo?" Star lingered on the word. What could he possibly mean? "Why would I be scared? I'm just happy to meet you again."

"You don't get it." Leo shook his head. "Aren't you scared of losing me? Of being left alone? What if something happens again? Something we can't control?"

"Leo." Star came closer to him. "I don't care about any of that. If I have to keep finding you again and again, in every life we have, it'll still be worth it. Because it's not about what happens later. It's all about you. It's the time we spend together."

Leo simply stared at him. Oh, no. He was going to cry now, wasn't he?

"It's really you, isn't it?" He asked, looking into Star's eyes.

"Of course it's me." Star confirmed, giving him a loving glance, now also feeling emotional.

Leo suddenly ran up to him and hugged him, nuzzling his face in his fur. "I missed you so much!"

Star simply put his paw around him and smiled, hugging him warmly. "I missed you too."

"It's so good to see you again, I don't know what to say." Leo just kept nuzzling his face furiously.

"It's okay." Star laid down to get better on eye level with Leo. "I'm also not sure what to say either."

"Heh. Sorry for kicking you in the chin earlier." Leo gently rubbed the spot he'd hit, hoping to make up for it.

Star just laughed gently. "It's okay, I deserve it for slapping you so much."

"But that was a lifetime ago! Literally!" Leo protested.

Then they simply looked at each other, and laughed.

"It really is good to see you again." Star admired Leo carefully now.

Every bit of him now, so different from the Mad Rat he knew, but he wanted to have that new form imprinted in his memory. His fluffy rugged fur, chipped ear, scars on his side... The life of a wild rat must be tough.

"It's good to see you too." Leo also admired him, how different he looked from the cat he knew.

Fluffy grey fur with a white underbelly, and that cute little star mark on his forehead... He seemed well cared for. Leo remembered the cats he saw with Star, were those his friends? Family, perhaps? So he got the home he always wanted... Would he even have time for him now?

"We're going to be seeing each other a lot more now, right?" Leo asked him, gently holding Star's nose and petting him.



"Of course!" Star purred. "I can't wait to learn all about you, I want to visit where you live, too."

"So do I... You seem like you've got a good home now, at least." Leo avoided his gaze for a bit, still thinking whether that might become a problem and come between them.

Noticing this, Star lifted up his chin to make him look back at him. "Hey, you're welcome there too, ok? I'll tell my friends to leave you alone. They were really impressed by your dancing, by the way!"

Leo still removed his chin from Star's paw, blushing as he looked away. "Thanks, heart of mine."

"You still want to call me that?" Star rubbed his cheeks over him affectionately.

"Y-yeah? I mean if you don't like it we can think of something else..." Leo seemed to get embarrassed.

"No, it's okay. I just think it's funny I never thought of a nickname for you either, aside from just calling you Mad Rat." Star observed. "What if I called you Maddy?"

"Call me that again and you'll be getting a second kick in the jaw." Leo told him, though judging by his smile he was probably still joking.

"Okay, okay!" Star laughed. "I'll just call you Leo."

"Yeah, that's okay." Leo caressed Star's paw gently.

"Oh my gosh, just look at you..." A familiar voice entered the scene.

They turned their heads, and sure enough, Pesto was watching from a few rooftops away, wiping a tear off his eye.

Once noticed, he just waved: "Oh, oh, pretend I'm not here." And he turned away and put his arms over his head, as if hiding.

"Ah, yeah... them." Star said.

"Yeah... guess we've both met them." Leo scratched the back of his head.

"What do you think of them?" Star asked.

"They're weird." Leo was honest. "But... They did help us reunite. And they gave me my cool powers back!"

"Yeah, I agree. They're not so bad, even if their methods are... questionable. How did you meet them, anyway? Did they kidnap you too?" Star wondered if that method was common for Pesto to take.

"Nah, I kinda ended up at their lab by accident. I-" In the middle of his explanation, Leo's eyes widened as he remembered the events that occurred earlier that day.

He then grabbed Star's face and exclaimed: "I need to get back to my pack!"

“Oh! What happened?” Star, shocked at the sudden grab, recoiled and shook his head.

“I got thrown out! They’re trying to get rid of me!” Leo shouted.

He then grabbed Star’s paw and looked up at him, pleading: “Help me, Star. If you come with me, that traitor won’t think of messing with me when I come back! Who knows what lies she’s told the pack by now?”

“Woah, Leo, slow down!” Star’s eyes widened with concern. “Of course I’ll help you, I’m just... I’m not sure what you’re talking about!”

“I’ll explain on the way back!” Leo jumped up, ready to run again. “Are you on my side?!”

Star hopped to his feet as well, ready to run as well. “Always. Wherever you go, I’ll be with you.”

“Thank you, my heart.” Leo gave him a smile. “Let’s go!”

Star smiled back at him as they both began to run back together.

CHAPTER 4: BACK TO THE BURROW.

“Ugh, my head...” Slam meowed as she slowly lifted her head up and began to stand up.

She looked around better now, and realized she had been put in a cage. It was actually somewhat spacious, having the ceiling be high enough for her to not hit her head, and there was a water bowl and a bowl with food in it. As she looked through the bars, she could tell they were still at the lab.

And right in front of the cages, Pesto had positioned a big whiteboard and written a message on it:

“Hey kitties! Sorry I can’t stay, I need to go watch Star and Leo reunite! I promise to come back and even free you later, just promise not to kill me, okay?”

-Love, Pesto”

“That fucker!” Slam growled.

“Hey, Slam! You’re awake!” The familiar voice of Coffee came from somewhere else, presumably a few cages off to the side.

“Coffee!” Slam called. “Are you ok?”

“I’m fine. Did you see they left us some delicious chicken in the food bowls? Real chicken too!” Coffee purred happily.

“How can you think about eating at a time like this?!” Slam hissed. “That weirdo’s locked us in cages and our friend is missing, and you’re eating chicken!”

“I’m regaining strength.” Coffee explained. “I’m gonna break out soon!”

“Oh, really.” Slam rolled her eyes.

“Really.” Coffee could be heard taking steps inside the cage, as if backing up, and then running, a loud clang against the bars rang out.

“Well, they don’t call me Slam for nothing.” Slam got up, and tried Coffee’s method as well, ramming against the bars.

Coffee was the first one to break out, slamming full face on the ground as they fell out, along with the bars.

“Woo! I did it!” They cheered, before immediately falling over again in exhaustion.

“Alright, I’m coming!” Slam announced, trying to break out still.

However, Coffee was already exploring the lab, and ended up pushing a button that opened up all the cages, and as Slam was charging once again, she fell out with a yell.

“Yeowch! Hey, watch it! I was going to get out by myself!” She hissed, picking herself up from the floor.

“Sure you were.” Coffee smirked.

“Hey! I mean it!” She growled at them.

“Alright, let’s not fight, we still gotta find Star.” Coffee recalled.

“Right.” She nodded, and they all spread around the lab, sniffing.

After a good few minutes scouring every single place a cat could be hidden at, of checking for Star’s scent anywhere, they had to admit only one possibility:

“He’s not here. He really did leave.” Coffee twitched their nose as they caught the scent that clearly led outside.

“Do you think that... *thing*, whatever it was, was telling the truth?” Slam asked.

“Maybe. But who knows what they did to him! We have to find him!” Coffee meowed agitatedly, tail swinging wildly.

“Alright, let’s get back on his trail!” Slam agreed.

They began their pursuit again, now catching Star’s other trail, the one leading towards his chase after Leo.

As they were running out the lab, they barely noticed as they passed Pesto who was making her way back, and was very confused seeing them run past.

“It’s been hours, and there’s still no sign of Leo!”

“Who will lead us now? The festival is so close!”

“What if he didn’t survive? What if he never makes it back?!”

“We need a leader! What will we do?”

The cries rang out around the burrow, rats running around desperately as Silver, who had climbed up on the stage, tried to calm them down.

She had told them before that a pipe had burst when Leo went to meet her, and that he had heroically sacrificed himself to get her out of the way of the water jet, but had fallen in the water as a result and gotten carried away by the current.

"Everyone calm down! I'll explain my plan if you'll just listen!" Silver shouted, trying to be heard over the crowd.

"How are you going to make a plan if our leader is missing?" Flash shouted from the crowd.

"We don't have to have a leader!" Silver retorted, leaving the entire pack now speechless.

"We are smart and strong together already, with or without a leader. Leadership positions may seem nice because you think they make you strong, but your strength comes from you! You don't have to make big life decisions just because you want that confidence!" She kept on talking, delivering the speech she had been building up carefully inside.

As she finished, her eyes locked with Scout's, which seemed to have an enigmatic glimmer to them.

"Nonsense!" Spots cried out in the crowd, jumping up in fury. "Packs always need leaders, to know who to turn to!"

"You can turn to your neighbor!" Silver exclaimed. "We can already count on each other, that's what makes a pack's strength! Trusting one another, knowing that we'll have each other's backs! That's why we had the teams for the raid in the first place! It's sad that Leo is missing, but that doesn't mean we can't still keep the original plan!"

"She does have a point, you guys." Scout spoke up, even if shy at the crowd's eyes pinned on her.

"So what, you just suggest we go on without Leo? As if one of ours didn't go missing?" Spots questioned her.

"Yes. Even if Leo is important and we wish he were here, that doesn't mean we can't go on." Silver was firm on her answer.

"But will we ever find another leader?" Freeze now spoke up.

"If anyone really wants to lead in Leo's absence... maybe." Silver crossed her arms and once again looked down to meet Scout's glance.

Scout, however, avoided her gaze, looking down.

"I said." Silver repeated louder: "If anyone really wants to lead in Leo's absence."

Scout had now crossed her arms too and was tapping her little foot rapidly, twitching in a nervous manner.

“Scout? Is there anything you want to share?” Silver gave her a little smile and rolled her eyes.

Scout finally let herself burst into an excited yell: “I wanna be the leader, I wanna be leader so bad!”

And she was already racing towards Silver, jumping onto the stage. “Can I really be the leader, Silver? Really really?!”

“Of course you can be the leader.” Silver held Scout’s paws and smiled warmly. “You can be whatever you put your mind to. I’ve always known you had it in you.”

Scout said nothing in response, but smiled at her and then turned confidently to the other rats:

“Hear me, my pack! We are strong together! I promise to keep you all safe! We’ll double down on learning how to take care of each other, I have some ideas to make the raid even safer! Everyone can learn how to sniff out traps and help each other to avoid them! No one will get left behind!”



“Hm, well that is an impressive adaptation.” Spots nodded.

The rats, although hesitant at first, began cheering her on:

“Hey! Alright!”

“Thanks for taking the lead, Scout!”

“You can do it, Scout!”

“We believe in you!”

Scout smiled to herself, then turned to Silver, speaking low between them:

“I hope Leo is okay and that he comes back soon but... thank you, Silver.” She put her paw on her shoulder. “I don’t know if I would have ever gotten the courage if you hadn’t told me I could do this.”

Silver just smiled at her.

Their moment of peace and ease was interrupted, when one of the rats began sniffing the air, standing alert:

“Wait, is that a- I think I may be smelling a-”

The others began sniffing the air too, Silver and Scout did so as well.

And as they all caught the scent, horror dawned on them, bodies tensing up and ears dropping.

“That’s a cat!” Scout cried out.

Panic took over the pack as the rats all began screaming out in terror.

Silver picked up another scent, one that worried her, specifically.

“Leo.” She simply muttered.

“Leo?! Leo’s here?” Scout immediately picked up the word, however, and sniffed the air, hoping for more clarity.

Her little eyes were enormous, as she declared: “It’s a cat *and* Leo!”

That made the pack even more exasperated, now eliciting cries of confusion:

“What?! How can Leo be coming in with a cat?”

“Do you think it killed him?”

“Maybe it made him show it the way to our burrow!”

Silver looked at Scout, who seemed to have just stopped in time, watching the pack go into a frenzy.

“Scout?” She called for her.

“Right!” Scout seemed to snap out of it, and jumped up, calling out to the others: “Listen up everyone! I need all of the fighters to join me, and anyone who’s also willing to stay! The others will evacuate through the emergency tunnel! We’ll meet back after this is dealt with!”

“Spoken like a true leader!” Flash nodded, and immediately turned to take the escape route. “Now, now, elders first, dears!”

Silver and Scout remained side by side, tense and ready to fight. They were joined by a fair amount of brave rats who wanted to help fight.

They waited, as they heard the steps getting closer. Ears ready to listen for anything.

“We’re almost there!” Surprisingly, Leo’s voice was heard first.

“Leo?!” Scout leaped forward, ready to run to him, but Silver jumped over her.

“Cat, remember? Be careful.” She held her in place.

The rats watched, as Leo dashed in through the entrance, sliding across the floor in one stylish move, surprising them. However, they also watched in shock as a cat came right in after him, sliding in the almost exact manner he did.

“Leo, you’re...” Silver couldn’t believe her eyes.

“You’re alive!” Scout celebrated, managing to throw Silver off her back as she jumped up in happiness.

“Hey there, Scout!” Leo smiled at her, then gave a darker glance at Silver. “Silver. Good to see you.”

“Ah, i-it’s good to see you too, chief.” Silver backed off a bit, holding her tail.

“So this is your pack? They’re all so... adorable!” The cat stepped closer to the rats, smiling brightly.

In response, they all immediately jumped back, frightened.

“Leo, did you bring this cat here?” Scout asked.

"Oh! It's a long story." Leo simply gave a sheepish grin. "But he's an old friend, and much more than that too. He promised to help me get back safely."

"Woah, Leo, since when were you friends with cats?" Scout asked him.

"Since... Well, it was a long time ago. If I told you, you wouldn't believe me." Leo and the cat looked at each other giving a knowing smile.

"Aw, no fair! I wanna know!" Scout pouted. She then looked up at the cat. "What's your name, kitty?"

"My name is Star!" The cat responded. "It's very nice to meet you, uhh..."

"Scout!" Scout smiled up at him, now losing her fear for good. She then turned to where Silver would be: "And this is- Huh?! Where'd she go??"

Sure enough, as Scout had turned around, she noticed Silver had sneaked off and was trying to run away.

"What? Silver! The cat won't hurt us, what's gotten into you?" She called to her, though it was no use.

"I have a sneaking suspicion she's not just scared of me." Star commented to Leo, who nodded in agreement.

"Wait a minute." Scout sniffed the air again, and then ran past Leo and Star, closer to the entrance, catching the wind coming in. "Did you bring more cats?"

"Oh, no we didn't." Leo lowered his ears, fearing what this could mean.

"That's got to be a mistake right? Must be just my scent!" Star tried to remain optimistic.

But Leo shook his head: "You don't know Scout. She sniffs like no other. She's never wrong."

"That smells like more than one cat..." Scout stepped back and away from the entrance, and soon ran back to the others. "We may have a problem."

"You don't think some cats may have followed us without us noticing... Do you?" Star looked at Leo.

"Whatever it is, we've got to be prepared." Scout gestured with her paw, calling the other rats to stay in a fighting position.

"I'll protect you too!" Star put himself in front of all of them. "If they really want you guys so badly, they'll have to get through me!"

They waited, as they could hear the steps of the cats running inside, but Star sniffed the air and realized something:

"Hey, wait a minute, I know those guys!"

"They're your friends?" Leo asked.

"From back in the yard, remember? You jumped on top of their heads?" Star pointed out.

"Oh, yeah, haha. Good times." Leo laughed.

"They may have been easy for you to mess with before, but we gotta focus right now on explaining to them they can't eat any of you!" Star turned his gaze back to the entrance, expecting his friends to come bursting through any minute.

And soon they did: Slam and Coffee popped into the burrow. Yes, popped, as they both had tried to squeeze in at the same time, causing them to clumsily tumble in forward.

"Guys!" Star ran to meet with them. "I'm okay, but please don't touch-"

Before he could finish his sentence, he heard something like a fierce rat squeak. A war cry coming from a rat, even.

He turned to see Silver, yelling and running past all the other rats, who were very confused, as the little rat threw herself at the cats, jumping on them and trying to kick and bite them, going from one to the other.

"What is she even doing?" Leo just watched in disbelief.

As a result, however, the cats got up, angry at the attack, and began trying to hit back, paws flying everywhere as they tried to catch the grey rat that attacked them.

"Wait, wait, stop!" Star tried to put himself between them, only to get caught in the fight, receiving an accidental scratch and a kick from Silver who'd been trying to move around them.

"Silver, stop!" Leo rushed to the fight as well. "What's gotten into you?!"

"Listen, chief!" Silver yelled as she dug her claws on the back of Slam and held tight as she tried to kick her off, as if she was a bull rider. "You can do whatever you want to punish me after this, but right now, I don't want Scout to have the last memory of me being a coward! I want to fight to show how much I care!"

"That's your reasoning?" Leo asked. "To look cool?!"

"It's not that!" Silver growled as she dodged a hit from Coffee's paw and used it instead to run up and jump onto the cat's back. "I don't want her to be entirely disappointed in me! I was just trying to help her!"

“Leo, what’s going on?!” Scout grew worried and decided to approach the scene. “What are you two talking about? Why are they still fighting?”

“Scout, I’m sorry.” Silver told her, still trying to keep balance and not be smashed by the cats. “I just wanted you to see how you could be a great leader if you tried. I didn’t want you to be in an unhappy relationship just for the sake of tradition.”



“What? What’s that got to do with anything?” Scout looked from Silver to Leo, still not being able to piece together what had happened.

“You’ll see.” Silver finally hopped off Coffee’s back and then looked back at the cats, and yelled at them: “Hey! I don’t want to fight anymore! Your friend is friends with one of ours!”

“Let me get ‘em-” Slam tried to still jump at the rats, but Star tackled her again, holding her down.

"That's what I've been trying to say!" Star tried to explain. "The rat we met before is actually an old friend, and this is his pack! We can't hurt them!"

"What the hell?! You're going soft on random rats now, Star? An entire pack now, even?!" Slam pushed him off.

"I don't really get what's going on." Coffee was standing up. "Earlier today, that rat kicked you in the jaw, and now he's an old friend of yours?"

"If this is some kind of weird prank-" Coffee was rubbing a spot which Silver had bit. "It's not funny."

"It's not a prank! Why would I go through all this trouble for a-" Star rubbed his paw on his head in frustration. "Ok, y'know what, you don't have to believe me, that's fine! But we're not hurting these guys, and that's final!"

"Hey. Excuse me." Leo called for attention, hopping forward to greet the cats. "I just wanted to say your friend here is a very good cat, the best I've ever met. The truth is our story is a lot more complicated than you think. But if you leave us alone, we leave you alone."

"You better apologize for hitting us like that, squirt." Slam hissed as she looked down at him.

"Slam." Star hummed at her through gritted teeth.

"What? It fucking hurt, man. And that other rat was shockingly strong too!" She pointed at Silver.

"It won't happen again! Right, Leo?" Star gently nudged Leo with his paw.

"Yeah, yeah, sure." Leo crossed his arms. "Just don't scare us like that again."

"And?" Star kept looking at him.

"Alright, alright. I'm sorry." Leo rolled his eyes.

"Well, I guess all's well that ends well." Coffee said to Star. "We were really just looking for you, but what was all that with that weird... *creature*?"

"Oh, Pesto? It's... part of that long, long story. Maybe back home I can tell you, but like I said before, you may not believe me." Star just smiled at them.

"Oh home! Finally somebody said the magic word!" Coffee was ready to go. "Our owners must be worried sick, we gotta go."

"You're leaving?" Star looked down to see Leo tugging gently on his tail, giving him a sad look.

Star laughed gently and leaned down to nuzzle him. "I am. But this won't be the last time we see each other, I promise."

"Ok." Leo hugged his muzzle affectionately. "See you until then, my heart."

"My heart?" Coffee repeated it, and the cats looked between themselves, confused.

"Come on, let's go." Star didn't elaborate on that, instead making his way to the exit.

As the cats left one by one, making their way out of the tunnels, the rats waved goodbye at them.

After they had all left, the pack went all to circle around Leo, happy to see him again and to be able to talk after all that commotion.

"We're so glad you're ok!" Cried one of them.

"Now we have our leader back, and possibly some cats who will fight for us!" Another exclaimed.

Scout lowered her ears and looked down. She should have been happy, but instead, she knew this would mean the end of her short moment as leader.

Silver also sighed to herself and scratched her arm, nervous for what was to come.

Noticing she wasn't alone in not being quite ecstatic over Leo's return, Scout approached her.

"Hey, Silver." She greeted her.

"Hey, Scout." Silver responded, and sighed.

"Guess I won't be the leader anymore." Scout traced little circles with her paw on the ground.

"I'm really sorry, Scout. I really wanted you to get that chance." Silver kept avoiding her gaze, a pained expression in her face. She had to tell her.

"You keep talking like this was all your plan somehow." Scout still searched for her eyes however, trying to look at her, find her gaze and talk sincerely. "Did you push him into the water, Silver?"

"I did." Silver admitted, hugging herself. "I was stupid and not thinking right, at that time I just wanted to see him get out of my sight."

"Why?!" Scout now jumped to her front, glaring at her. "Why would you want that?"

“Because he was saying things I didn’t like, Scout.” Silver shut her eyes, trying to avoid Scout’s piercing eyes. “And I don’t want you to be with someone who only thinks you’re good enough, or the least bad in the pack.”

“He said all that?” Scout tried to process what Leo saying this meant.

“He did. I know he didn’t mean anything bad by it, but I also know you wouldn’t have been happy together as mates.” Silver put her paw over her head, turning away from Scout once again. “But I still shouldn’t have done that, I realize that now. I don’t expect forgiveness. I just want you to be aware now that you can make a better choice.”

“You know, I hate how sweet you are, even when you do really bad things.” Scout seemed to have gotten a bit touched by that, as Silver could see her wiping a little tear from her eye.

“I know.” Silver once again averted her eyes, not wanting to see Scout cry.

“Silver.” She turned around to see Leo had called her, and was waiting for her, the rats now giving her glares. She imagined he’d already told them the truth.

“Scout.” Silver turned to the only one who stood beside her. “Before my fate is decided, I need to tell you something.”

“What is it?” Scout was ready to listen.

“I love you. I’ve always loved you. I’m sorry my selfishness let me make this into a big, horrible mess. I hope you’ll find happiness in your life.” She confessed, looking into her eyes.

Scout simply gasped, a note in her throat that wouldn’t come out, paw over her chest, taking the moment in.

“Silver?” Leo called her attention. “It’s ok.”

“What do you mean ‘it’s ok’?” Silver turned to him.

“I’ve made my decision. Your fate isn’t in my paws anymore.” Leo shook his head, which actually seemed to surprise the other rats, who gasped in shock.

“I’m afraid I don’t understand, chief.” Silver told him.

“I’m stepping down from my leadership position.” Leo informed her. “From now on, Scout can lead.”

“What?!” Scout ran to him. “I can’t just accept that!”

“Too bad, you gotta.” Leo shrugged at her and then put his paws on her shoulders, giving her a more serious look. “Listen, Scout, I know you. You’ve wanted this since we were pups, you just never acted on it because you didn’t think you could. But Scout, you love this pack and

doing things for us maybe even more than I ever could. And you have something that they're looking for as well, now."

"What is that?" Scout asked.

"An eligible mate." Leo smiled as he nodded towards Silver.

"What?!" Silver, Scout, and all the other rats shouted in unison, totally confused.

"Well, you decide whether to stay with her or not, Scout, I'm just saying... She'd do a lot for you." Leo elbowed Scout.

"I guess she would." Scout gave a shy smile.

Her smile grew bigger, as she became more confident, and she turned towards the other rats: "Alright! New orders: get the rest of the pack back in here and give them the news! Leo is back, I'm staying as leader, and I've chosen a mate!"

Silver gasped and blushed, unable to believe what she was hearing. "Scout, I don't deserve this."

"Hush your mouth! Your leader is speaking!" Scout spoke firmly to her, though she was giving a warm smile. "You're still going to have to make up for what you've done, that's for sure, but you also don't have to doubt yourself. A pretty grey rat taught me that self doubt just leads to being unfulfilled."

Silver simply nodded, her cheeks red, smiling brightly back at Scout: "Ah, alright!"

EPILOGUE

"Are the gatherers moving out?" Leo had approached Scout, who was hiding under the very last table, away from the eyes of people, as the pack did their best to go unnoticed.

"They sure are." Scout nodded, smiling. "Think we might be okay after all! But stick to the plan and escort them, will you?"

"You heard her, everyone find a gatherer to pair up with and protect them with your life!" Leo repeated to his group of fighters and defenders.

He made his way to escort Freeze, as the rest of the rats paired up as well.

"I'll go on ahead with my own group." Scout informed. "I still want to double check for traps. A shame we made Silver stay behind fixing the pipe she broke though, she was always good at disarming them."

"Eh, she has to learn her lesson." Leo shook his head.

"Yeah, guess you're right." Scout said before she went on with the rest of the group.

Leo and Freeze's groups waited for hers to disappear completely as they moved from out of the table's safety, before following on ahead.

Scout's group had already made it under the next table, when Leo heard her speak out, a tremble in her voice:

"U-uh, I think- I think I smell a-"

Leo could smell it too, and he did not wait to bolt towards where she was, paws carrying him with precision and speed, flying through the air as he was already homing in on the cat that had found his companions and was standing between them and their freedom.

He spun in the air and slammed on the cat's head, making the feline yell in pain and stumble back.

"That's not one of ours, is it?" Scout asked Leo as he landed in front of her.

"No." He growled, staring down the creature which had just gotten angrier.

The cat lifted up its paw, ready to strike back in anger, claws popping out of its paw.

"Get ready to dodge!" Leo shouted.

But before they even knew what had happened, a grey blur had hit the cat, slamming it into the ground.

“That’s-!” Scout’s face lit up.

“Star!” Leo jumped up happily.

“Stay away from my friends!” Star hissed at the other cat, putting himself between the cat and the rats.

The cat recoiled away, the fur on its back raised high in distress: “Crazy rats... crazy cat... I’m outta here!”

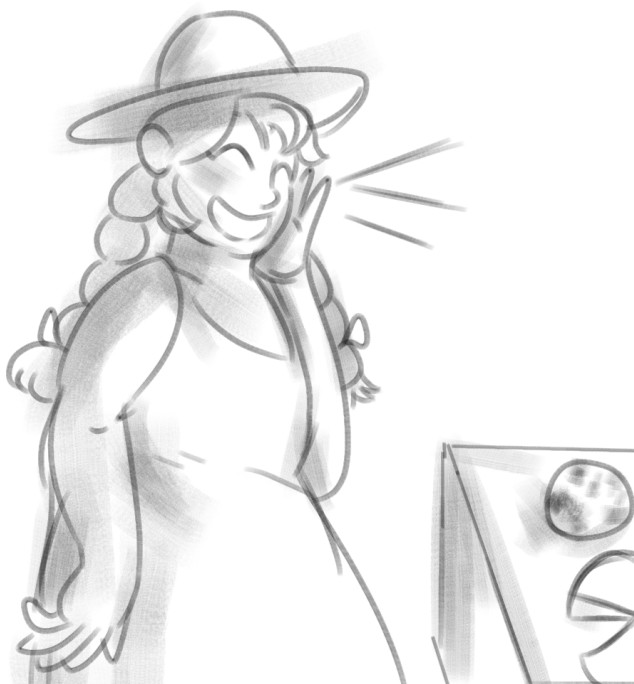
And with that, it ran off.

“Star! It’s so good to see you!” Leo ran up to Star and jumped in for a hug. “What are you even doing here?”

Star laughed a bit at the sudden hug, gently petting Leo with his paw. “My owner likes going to the festival. Maybe you’ll recognize her?”

He pointed to a human that was at a stand nearby. It was a brown haired young woman, wearing a simple red dress and a stylish wide brimmed hat. She seemed to be looking at a selection of cheese products and talking excitedly about each of them.

“You don’t think she’s...” Leo couldn’t help but take a few steps out into the street, just to get a better look.



"I also only realized after my memories were awakened. But it's her, Leo. No doubt about it. She took me in at the end of my life last time, and now, she adopted me as a kitten." Star kept smiling as he admired her throw away talk about how she loved cheese so much, she considered herself a little rat.

"What are they talking about?!" The rats talked between themselves, unable to decipher the meaning behind Leo's and Star's shared human friend and their memory of her.

"Leo, quit exposing yourself to the humans and come back here!" Scout called.

"I guess I can't say no to my leader." Leo shrugged, but then turned back to Star: "I'm really glad to see you here, my heart."

He hugged Star again. "Please come visit us soon. Scout and Silver are going to officially become mates soon, and I'd like you to be there for the celebration."

"That sounds lovely." Star purred. "I want to dance with you."

"Star, you'll make me blush." Leo was already blushing however, as he smiled and looked away from Star, all flustered.

Star laughed and gently nudged him with his paw towards the rats.

"Save it for the dance, will you? Your pack's waiting for you, my home."

It was no use, the usage of a pet name like that coming from Star just made him blush more. He obliged, however, running back to the others.

"Star? Where are you?" They could hear the woman call, and Star meowing and returning to her.

Leo sighed happily: "Everything's as it should be."

Hey there! It looks like you reached the end. Don't worry, I'm sure you've got the bonus content I've added to help keep you company. It really means a lot to me you've made it this far and read my silly and ambitious little fanfic. I want to say, from the bottom of my heart...



(Psst, don't leave yet! We've got some concept art down at the next page!)

CONCEPT ART



First tentative art of Pesto, before this fic was even imagined

Leo and Star, in the original .mdp file I sketched all the original concepts. Star lost his collar for the sake of simplicity. And yes, they ARE supposed to be looking at each other and close together <3





Pesto's original concept character portrait. Like this a bit better, but I didn't think it'd fit inside the bios space.

Scout and Silver in their first ever sketches.





Star's friends, featuring the now deleted Song.

MAD RAT



Pronouns: He/Him

Born a lab rat, Mad Rat's life was never glamorous, but he was able to find happiness when a failed heart transplant led him to meet an extremely loving cat named Heart. He is at the end of his life now, and they must say goodbye.

Congratulations! You found Mad Rat's bio page! Keep collecting them, also don't scroll down aaaah aaaah you'll spoil the surprise aaaaaa ([Back](#))

HEART



Pronouns: He/him

Heart was picked off the street to be used as an organ donor to save Mad Rat, however, fate had other plans. After a big adventure, Mad Rat resolved to go back in time and stop the transplant from ever happening.

Congrats! Looks like you found Heart's bio page! Hope you're having fun with these! Please don't scroll up or down aaaaa please please aaaaa ([Back](#))

JACK



Pronouns: He/him

Jack is a cat that tried to catch Mad Rat, only to instead be spared and saved by him. They became friends, and Jack believes that he can be of further help. He may be keeping a darker secret, though.

Hey there! You found Jack's bio! Looks like you're getting a lot of these! Who knows how many you'll collect by the end! ([Back](#))

PESTO



Pronouns: They/She/He

An offputting creation of mad science, to see if three animals similar enough combined into one could be successful. After receiving Mad Rat's brain and Heart's heart, they awoken to their true potential.

Woah! This little freak is Pesto! And I love them! She's really weird but that's part of his charm. Hope you can enjoy her like I do! ([Back](#))

SCOUT



Pronouns: She/her

A sweet and determined little rat, she has a heart big enough for everybody and the smarts and strength to match it! She second guesses herself a lot, though. Dreams of being the leader of the pack.

Woah a cute funny little rat! This is Scout. Hi Scout! ([Back](#))

SILVER



Pronouns: She/her

A bit of a loner, Silver is a very pragmatic rat.

She is known to be reliable when it comes to handling threats and caring for the pack.

Frequently sticks around her best friend Scout, whom she has a crush on.

Silver is a character I'm actually pretty proud of in writing because of her dualistic nature.

[\(Back\)](#)

LEO



Pronouns: He/him

Mad Rat's reincarnation, Leo is the fierce and bold leader of the rat pack. He was considered too harsh and danger seeking before, but proved himself to be a good leader. He got his name from a torn newspaper horoscope.

Woah! Looks like Mad Rat became a pretty cool looking rat in this next life! ([Back](#))

FLASH



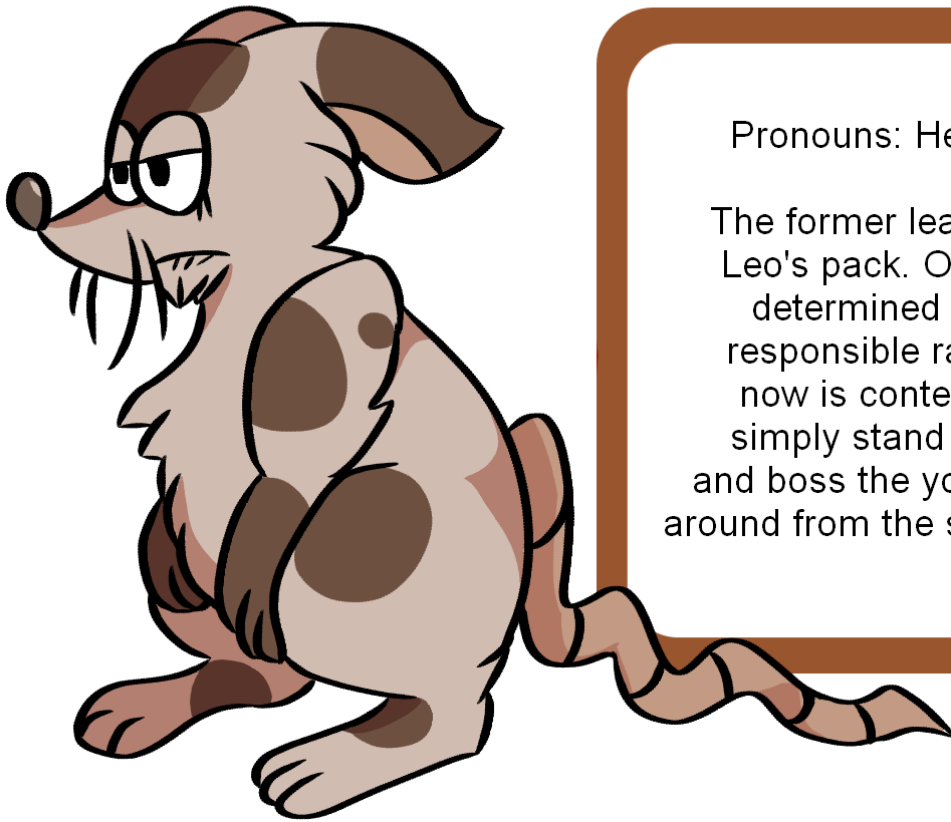
Pronouns: She/her

The mate of the previous leader of the pack, now at an old age. She still cares a lot about the pack and will act as a mentor to Leo alongside her mate, Spots.

(side note: she's not even that big of a character idk why I did a bio for her)

I told myself I wouldn't do unnecessary added bios for characters who are important but just move the plot along yet I did Flash (and another one which you totally shouldn't look for next page and instead find organically). Huh. ([Back](#))

SPOTS



Pronouns: He/him

The former leader of Leo's pack. Once a determined and responsible rat, he now is content to simply stand back and boss the youngins around from the sidelines.

You got me! Spots is another less important character I somehow made a bio for. ([Back](#))

STAR

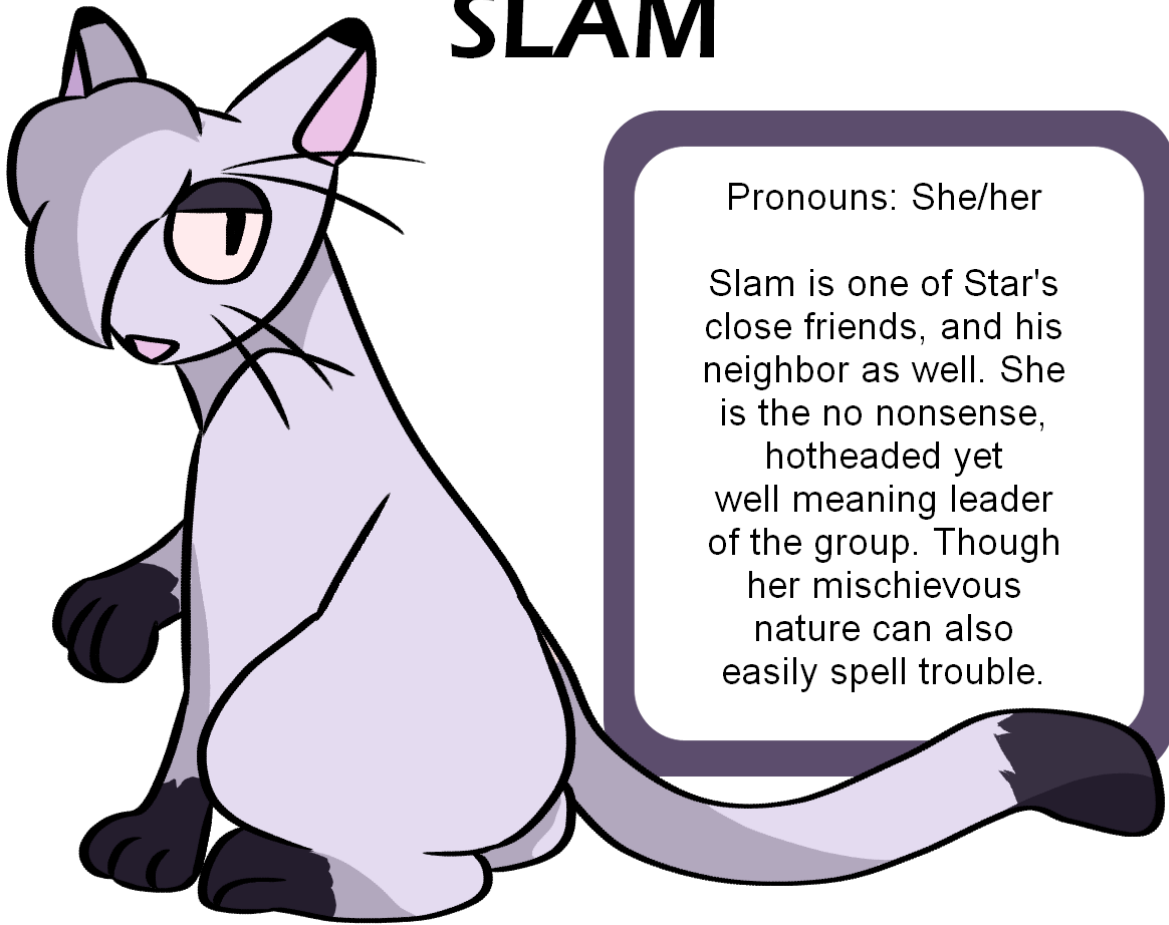


Pronouns: He/him

Heart's reincarnation, Star is a very sweet and fun loving house cat, although often lazy and timid at times. He leads a simple life, either at home with his loving owner, or going out with his friends.

Oh, this is what Heart looks like now! Nice! ([Back](#))

SLAM



Pronouns: She/her

Slam is one of Star's close friends, and his neighbor as well. She is the no nonsense, hotheaded yet well meaning leader of the group. Though her mischievous nature can also easily spell trouble.

Star's hot headed yet cool friend, it's Slam! ([Back](#))

COFFEE



Pronouns: They/them

Coffee is one of Star's close friends, and his neighbor as well. A sweet and mild cat, Coffee is content to simply have fun and be the voice of reason in the group, however being a bit airheaded hinders them.

Hey, I have very sad news about this. This is the last of the bios. I know it's sad, but there's more stuff to find, like the fun facts you've probably been finding! ([Back](#))

RAT FACT #1



The proper name for a group of rats is a "mischief", or sometimes, a plague.

I wanted to look this up so I could have Leo refer to his pack by a "proper" name, however, that quickly became troublesome when I realized just using the word "mischief" to talk about his pack might confuse people who don't have that knowledge.

Apparently, they're called that because rats in a group are "mischievous" in nature, which is true! Plague feels more self explanatory, but I didn't want the connotation. I read "pack" was also used and went with that. Still, please imagine Leo's pack also being referred to as a "little mischief".

[\(Back\)](#)

RAT FACTS #2



Rats usually only live up to 2 years.

Sadly, yes, rats have a very short lifespan. In fact, wild rats are expected to die in 1 year! I want to have you know that- to make things less sad for our beloved rat and cat who love each other across different lives- in this little universe I've tweaked things so rats are expected to live way longer, even in the wild. Maybe not as much as a cat, but let's say, around 7-10 years is a good range (though I'm open to changing it).

[\(Back\)](#)

RAT FACT #3



You (probably) know Rat God is based on Toxoplasma Gondii. What you don't know is how that contributed to me getting into this game.

So, I wanted to tell this story, because the domino effect that led me to getting into this is frankly pretty bonkers. I want to say that I had seen a trailer before all this came along, but I ended up forgetting the game existed for a good while. Until... This happened:

I did fan art for a very small pokétuber called PrimaDiva and ended up becoming one of her primary channel artists with her regularly commissioning me. Due to this we became friends and I ended up joining her Discord group.

One day, Prima posted a video discussing how we could make the fairy type real, and how the way that rats become attracted to cats due to the influence of Toxoplasma Gondii is similar to how fairy types use their charms to lower their opponent's guard and attack. Immediately after, someone in the group chat posted "haha, nice Mad Rat Dead reference", and upon her confusion, proceeded to spoil the game's connection to Toxoplasma Gondii.

This immediately piqued my interest, and I was already considering just watching the game already due to Chongoshow's pretty awesome mashup catching my attention, so it was

really the final push I needed to watch a gameplay video playlist (I sadly do not own a Switch nor do I own a PS4).

And... long story short, I'm here. But who knew me drawing fan art for a small youtuber who does videos on pokémon biology would get me over here! Thanks, Prima, for giving me a hyperfixation so strong I work tirelessly on this fanfiction project!

(Also, can Rat God be considered a Fairy type? And if so, would she have a secondary typing or not? Fairy Psychic maybe? Fairy Poison? Fairy Dark???)

([Back](#))

~~RAT~~ CAT FACT #4



Originally, Star had a third friend: A black cat named Song.

If you haven't seen Song in the concept art, you can see them here. Song used to be Star's more quiet, practical, and level headed friend, serving as a balance between Coffee and Slam.

However, I started to wonder if maybe I was having too many extra characters, and realized Star didn't really need three friends to move the plot along, especially when all they did was bounce off of each other in dialogue. So, Song was deleted, and part of their personality and role in the story went to Coffee. Coffee also stole Song's gender, as Coffee used to just be a guy in the original script.

[\(Back\)](#)

This is also the end of what I can offer for now. I don't really plan to add much, maybe some playlists later on, but this is more or less complete. Thank you again for reading this. It means so much to me.