

The Monsters Within

Chapter Two

Jenna-Bear

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Infinite Worlds

Jenna-bear

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The wind found the gaps in her gown and filled it as it flowed across her body. It was a light wind, only slightly more than a breeze, given the height of the balcony. It complemented the mild temperatures of the mid-spring morning. Jenna closed her eyes as the wind caressed her skin under her gown. It felt good for a change.

She had arrived in the city the previous evening. For months she had been in the south undergoing extensive training in the Carolina Wildlands. She had been on missions before, but she was preparing for an important mission that took her to Atlanta Metro. It was a challenging mission but rewarding both for her and for the Grey Roses. They acquired a lot of supplies, particularly weaponry and technology, which would be put to great use. Then she got a short reprieve back in Old Winchester in the mountains to the west, where she got to spend some time with Amanda. It was too brief, however.

Now, she was back in Capital Metro, where her life had begun. At least she was with the other love of her life, though of a different type. Her sister, Kara, was inside the apartment, preparing for a mission of her own. Jenna did not know the details. That fact alone told her it was dangerous. She looked out over the city. The view wasn't much. A forest of apartment buildings stretched out before her. This was one of the older apartment buildings from before the Plague. Other than the fresh air she could get from standing on it, the balcony was otherwise useless.

She heard the balcony door slide open behind her but did not move. A soft but stern voice she grew up with, only now more mature, broke her thoughts. "You've been standing out here a while."

Jenna turned to regard her sister. Her golden hair, which she inherited from their mother, was tied back in a ponytail, and she wore the standard civilian clothes of UGC citizens: khaki pants and a white shirt with a tan jacket with a flap that stretched across her chest. Whatever her mission, she was going incognito.

“It feels good out here.”

Kara raised a brow. “Standing out here with nothing but that shirt on, you will probably get sick.”

“It’s a nightgown. And it covers me...enough.”

“Now Jenna, I know you would stand out here naked if you could get away with it, but if one of the security bots spots you in their scans, it may consider that shirt indecent enough to come investigate.”

Jenna gave a sly smile. “They shouldn’t make those robots so *pervy!*”

Kara stared back, her expression stern. She couldn’t hold it, though, and finally broke out laughing. Jenna laughed, too, and followed her sister into the apartment. It wasn’t an enormous apartment, but it was obscure enough that Rachel was able to secure it for them when they were in the city.

Jenna looked at her sister. “It seems that you are about ready to go!”

“I am!” came the blunt response.

Jenna looked away, back toward the balcony. “I wish...I wish I could go with you.”

“No, Jenna! You have your tasks and I have mine. You know that. Since we started, Rachel thought it was a good idea that we work separately. I agree with her.”

“I know! It’s just...” She paused as she felt a tear forming in her eye. “We hardly ever see each other anymore. There is always a job to be done. I barely get to see you...to see Amanda. We are constantly moving. Up and down this forsaken land. And for what?”

“You know the fight! You know why we do this. Remember our father? Remember what he saw? What he died for?”

Jenna slumped at those words. “I do!” Jenna was too young when they died. But she had learned what happened. Their father was a prominent figure in the UGC. He confessed to their mother that he had seen horrible things. He was aligning away from the organization altogether. She understood. She saw how it was wrecking him. Then, one day, their mother took Jenna to pick up Kara

from her school. They stopped at the ration depot, and when they returned to their home, their father was hanging in the bedroom.

Jenna vaguely remembered the scene. She was the one who walked in and saw him. When her sister followed, the scream she gave was blood curdling. The cleaners wrote it up as a suicide. But their mother knew otherwise. Eventually, they ended up living in the under city, in some abandoned old ruin of a house. Then, their mother disappeared. Something had happened to her. The two girls were left to survive on their own.

Jenna looked back at Kara. "I miss those days...when you took care of me and told me everything was going to be alright."

Kara looked confused. "What happened? You are not like this. You are one of the toughest girls I know. What is going on?"

"Everything has happened! From Dad's death to our days in the Undercity, to the time that Rachel discovered us, took us in, and started training us for what we have become today. All of it has made me hard. You as well. But don't you ever wish you could just be fragile for a change? That we could just wrap ourselves in the arms of a lover and let all our worries go?"

Kara's face softened. "Jenna, sweetie! I do dream of that moment. When we can be carefree and just live our lives. That day will come. But we do what we must to achieve that dream." She grabbed Jenna's arms and pulled her to face to face with her. Her deep green eyes peered directly into Jenna's. "I promise you that one day, we will be free. That is what we are fighting for." Then, Kara pulled Jenna close and squeezed her in a big hug.

Jenna just accepted the embrace. She melted in her sister's arms. "You, me, and Amanda should just leave...go out west. Out to the wide-open stretches far from the UGC's reach."

Kara squeezed her tighter. "You know they will only catch up to us sooner or later. No! We must fight. We must tear down this awful structure that is the UGC. Only then can we be truly free."

Finally, Jenna pulled back from the hug and looked her sister in the eyes. Even though her own hair was a medium brown, in sharp contrast to Kara's golden hair, staring at Kara's face was almost like looking into a mirror. "I love you, Kara! You have always been there for me. Like you said, I am a hard person. I know that I must be. Even around Amanda and especially around Rachel. But I am glad that I have you where I can be vulnerable for a change."

“Always!” Kara smiled and then released her grasp on Jenna’s arms. She turned to grab her bag and started for the door.

“Kara!” She stopped and turned back. “When this is all done, when we finally have a break, promise me that you will tell me a story like you did when we were little.”

Kara cracked a wide smile at that, her eyes glistening. She shook her head. “I promise, Jenna-bear!” Jenna almost broke at the sound of the name that she hadn’t heard since she was a child. The name her father used to call her, and Kara picked up after they were left alone. Kara turned and walked out the door.

Jenna stood there for a time after Kara left. She turned back to the balcony, tempted to go back out and watch her sister leave the building below.

Finally, she went to the bedroom where her bag was. She moved her bag onto the bed then looked into the nearby mirror. She wiped her face. Her sister was right. They couldn’t run. They had to fight. Things were ramping up, and it seemed like this movement was going to explode into something more very soon. She had to be a part of it. Jenna closed her eyes and focused. She could feel the weakness leaving her, her strength filling up the void inside like liquid fire.

She grappled with her emotions, wrestled them down, and pushed them away. When she opened her eyes again, they were like brown flames in her reflection. Gone was that weak child she once was, that she had allowed to return that morning. Now, she was the hardened warrior that her life had forged her to be. She pulled off the gown. She had to meet Rachel at the celebration.

She retrieved her own civilian clothes from her bag. How she hated wearing those things. They were like a uniform of indignity. But she would do what she had to do. For Amanda, for Kara, and for herself. She looked back at the mirror as she pulled the slacks on. Oh yes! Those flames were back in her eyes. She was ready to give the UGC hell.

About Author



S. J. Serio was born in Baltimore, MD where he currently lives with his family. He has served in the U.S. Navy and worked in many jobs of different fields including information technology, transportation services, and hospital services. He decided to pursue his love of writing and creativity and is the founder of Infinite Worlds, LLC.