

A New King in the City

Shay opened the front door and walked into the dark living room.

He flipped the switch on the wall and a warm light revealed a comfortable couch in front of a clean fireplace and a big TV. Rows of books and DVDs covered the walls, except for one where heavy curtains concealed a big window overlooking the front yard.

He threw his damp coat, too large on his skinny frame, on an armchair and the keys on the small table by the door. His cellphone and wallet followed soon as he fell on the couch with a sigh. Grunting, Shay removed his shoes and tried to wipe the mud he left on the couch, with little success.

“What a shitty day” he thought to himself. The bandage on his right arm was uncomfortable and he was exhausted.

It was not the first time he undergone the treatment, of course, but he hated it every time. It always seemed to suck out all of his energy.

He ran his hand through his blond hair and looked at his watch. Half past eight. “Damn it” the curse escaped his lips “Might as well cook something for dinner”.

He walked across the room and into the kitchen. The floor was cold under his bare feet, and even colder as he opened the fridge and reached for some chicken breasts and lettuce.

His body moved almost mechanically as he placed a pan on the stove and then prepared the meat. As it usually happened when he had nothing better to do, his mind went back to the day he was diagnosed with...with... “Damn, why do they have to give diseases such weird names” a rare disease, slow to progress but untreatable. Or so he thought. That doctor said they could try some kind of experimental treatment. Shay agreed. Not that he had much of a choice.

Shark cells, injected into his bloodstream. Obviously it was not this simple but he was not interested in the details. Each week, for three months now he has visited that private clinic where a nurse has pumped a bag of white stuff into his arm. The doctor said that the test results showed slight improvements, but he wasn't feeling any different.

He snapped back to the present to flip the chicken. The lettuce was ready and he had basically nothing left to do but wait.

He grabbed the remote and turned on the small TV on the counter. Central City News. A journalist was speaking of some grand upcoming event at S.T.A.R. Labs. “Right, the particle accelerator startup. So it was today” Shay turned up the volume and got back to cooking his dinner as the TV rambled about neutrons, speed of light and other science stuff.

As he sat down to eat, the journalist was counting down.

17

He grabbed a bite of meat and lettuce.

10

He drank some water.

4

The power went out.

“Oh, REALLY?” he cried out.

He dropped his fork and made his way through the dark room to a drawer where he kept a flashlight. With it, he made his way back into the living room, resolved to get to the fuse box in the basement.

Instead he stopped in front of the window. No light was coming in from the street lamps.

He pulled the curtains and was surprised to see that the whole block, the whole city was dark. No, wait, there was a faint yellowish light in the distance. Though it seemed to get closer quickly. Shay got no time for thinking as a bright yellow flash blinded him. He tried to shield his eyes but the light seemed to travel over and through his body.

With a yelp he fell on the floor. The light was gone and the power had come back.

As he opened his eyes, little bright stars danced around his vision.

"That's it! I've had enough for today" he declared.

He stood up and angrily walked back towards the kitchen. He threw what was left of the dinner into the fridge, turned off the lights and climbed the stairs to his bedroom.

After a quick stop to the bathroom he removed his clothing and grabbed a clean night shirt, a pair of shorts and jumped into his bed, hoping for a good night of sleep.

Shay woke up to the sound of his rumbling stomach and found his bed sheet soaked in sweat. The digital clock blinked 3:41AM.

He groaned as he shifted uncomfortably, his stomach twisting noisily.

"That's what I get for not eating properly" he thought to himself. Throwing away the sheets he sat up on the edge of the bed rubbing his face, trying to wake up enough to walk.

Another spasm made him reach down to his belly and forced air out of his lungs.

"OK, OK. I got it..." still half asleep, he stumbled out of his bedroom and down the stairs.

As he approached the kitchen his mouth began to water, stomach growling with anticipation. He blamed this terrible hunger on the lack of sleep and the stressful day, but it started to get very unnerving and very painful.

He reached to the fridge door "Just a glass of milk, maybe some cookies...then I'll go back to sleep".

As he thought that, his eyes found the leftover chicken from dinner, and his hands picked it up. He put one piece of meat into his mouth and started chewing.

"I guess this will do..." he thought as he swallowed piece after piece of cold meat. In no time the plate was empty and he opened the fridge again to grab something to drink.

Instead he took a package of ham and bit into it. Then a piece of cheese. Then another.

He gulped down food almost without chewing, throwing the empty packages and remaining pieces of food on the floor. Drooling, he started to tore away the meat from a steak, slamming his teeth furiously on the food as he bit hard on the bone.

So hard a piece of his molar broke off.

The pain made Shay yelp as he snapped back to reality.

It took him a few seconds to put the pieces together: the floor littered with dirty packages and food remains, his shirt stained with blood, sauce and saliva...

"Oh my God..." he whispered.

He was still holding the tattered steak in his bloody hands.

"OH GOD!" he threw it away and held his head, running his hands through his hair "What the FUCK WAS THAT?"

He had no answer to that question but...he felt...his hunger was gone...for a few seconds at least.

"AAAH!" he hunched forward, holding his stomach. He clenched his teeth and the pain from the broken tooth made him scream again.

Blood flowed in in his mouth and the metallic taste engulfed his tongue.

And for another moment his stomach relaxed.

"Help..I need to call for help..."

Shay grabbed the counter to try and steady himself, the other arm wrapped around his contorting stomach.

He took a few wobbling steps, trying to avoid stepping on the mess he made, and started to move towards the living room, and his cellphone.

Each step sent waves of pain through his body, making him groan as he approached the small table by the front door. With a trembling hand he reached for his phone and started scrolling through his contact, smearing the screen with blood, until he found it. With a small cry, he pressed "Dial".

"GH! Come on...answer...the...damn phone!" Shay pressed his forehead on the cool wall as another wave of pain hit him, the hunger growing still.

The rumbling noises of his stomach almost covered the faint and sleepy "Hello?" that came from

the phone.

“Doctor! It's Lamden! Shay Lamden! AAAH! I need help, please help me!”

“Wha...Mr. Lamden? Calm down, what's wrong?”

“I don't know! I woke up and my stomach...everything hurts! And the hunger! I'm so hungry...you need to help me!”

“Alright Mr. Lamden...Shay! Listen to me! You have to calm down, you may have some sort of allerg...”

“IT'S NOT AN ALLERGY!”

“OK, calm down now. I'm calling 911, you just wait for help. Everything is going to be...”

The call ended with a loud “crunch” as a sudden muscle spasm made him clench his fists. He screamed in pain and dropped to his knees and hands, his body shaking and twitching. He felt something biting into his right palm and forced his hand to rotate, revealing the shattered phone.

Pieces of hard plastic and glass were etched into his flesh, small droplets of blood forming around the wounds. He looked at the bent metal frame and then back at his hand.

“What is happening to me?”

Another spasm shook his frame and he screamed again as the pain numbed his arms.

Then it began.

His hands and arms started to pulsate, veins standing up painfully.

Shay watched in shock, mouth agape, as he felt his fingers stretch out. It was like someone dug into his hand with hot iron nails.

The bones stretched with cracking noises, tensing the flesh. His fingers slowly snapped around, slithering on the wooden floor. His palms inflated and stretched, his right hand pushing out the fragments of his destroyed phone. The tendons in his hands thickened as they covered the swelling knuckles. As muscles and skin started to fill the lengthening bones a thick membrane worked his way in between his fingers, connecting them all together.

His fingers stopped growing but the bones didn't. They kept stretching and poking at the flesh. With a tearing sound and a gush of blood, a thick piece of bone erupted from underneath his nails.

This time, Shay screamed.

The bones grew out and flattened, becoming pointed and pushing the flesh aside as he grew...claws?

His arms spasmed one more time and he screamed again as his hands clenched, his still growing claws sinking deep into the floor. He even felt the membrane tense as he moved his fingers.

He almost lost his balance as his wrists snapped, the bones moving around as they swelled.

His muscles started to twitch, then pulse. Faster and faster. He whimpered as he felt and saw his veins swell and throb painfully. His arms began to inflate. Muscles tearing and relaxing with a burning pain as they grew. His biceps and triceps started to fill the short sleeves of his shirt until he could see the muscles trembling through the fabric.

The pain continued as he got even bigger.

The sleeves resisted, biting into the flesh, but that wasn't enough to stop his swelling mass. Small tears appeared in the fabric before it gave in with ripping sound.

Shay moaned as his arms surged again, going rapidly from bodybuilder size to tree trunk size.

Then suddenly, the spasms stopped.

Shay gasped for air as his arms stopped trembling. He felt his veins deflate and his hands slowly relax.

He looked down and his eyes widened. He was huge! Muscles rippled all over his arms, twitching at even the smallest movement, the veins slightly pressing out of his flesh.

But his hands...

He made a shocked noise as he took a better look at his hands. They were bigger than before. And more muscular. And he had bony claws that sunk into the wood. And a fleshy membrane...like...

“...a shark...” he muttered “Am I turning into a shark? A monster?”

Just as he thought that, the hunger came back.

“FUUUUCK! Not again!” Shay flexed his right arm, freeing his claws from the wood, and pressed his hand on his stomach. This time he could feel his insides moving.

“AH! Need to stop this...need to...” as he tried desperately to find some sort of solution, his mind went back to a few minutes earlier, to the improvised feast he had in the kitchen. While he was eating he was alright. No pain, no hunger. Maybe he just needed to...

“...eat...” the thought made him drool. Shay licked his lips, tasting blood again.

“The garage. Freezer...there's meat in there...” he pushed himself up with his other arm and grabbed the small table, leaving big dents on it “I can eat that...until help...comes...yes...” he turned towards the closed door at the end of the hallway “...meat...just until...eat meat...” his big arms fell to his sides as started to slowly walk towards the garage, and his food. His eyes were fixed on the distant doorknob and small drops of saliva stained his shirt, his body was working mechanically, one foot in front on the other.

The pain and the hunger were almost forgotten until a loud crack, and a jolt of agony in his ankles caused him to lose his balance.

He didn't have the time to catch his fall and landed flat on the floor. The impact forced the air out of his lungs and cleared a bit the fog that engulfed his mind.

He closed his eyes as waves of burning pain washed over his legs. Somewhere, deep inside him, he knew they were going to change. Just like his arms.

All he could do was lay still and moan helplessly as he felt his lower extremities shake, tears forming around his eyes.

Just like before, a web of pulsing veins engulfed his flesh.

He felt it starting at his feet. More precisely at his toes.

With cracking sounds they splayed more and more. Meanwhile the bones started lengthening.

Shay cried as he felt tension as a membrane connected the changing toes, stretching as his joints popped and moved around.

Then the whole foot grew. Bones popped and the flesh of his soles pulsated. His arches grew longer and larger. Muscles and tendons were being pumped inside his swelling soles and toes, and he felt too much flesh in his feet as each spasm made the extremities curl.

Blood dripped on the floor as his toes exploded, painfully giving way to the growing and sharpening bone.

Cries and whimpering sounds came from Shay as his ankles popped and swelled to match the inflated heels. He felt the bones grind and the change slowly traveling upwards.

His shins burned as his tibiae elongated. His femurs followed suit, growing bigger, and his knees popped, becoming bigger and sturdier.

Then the muscles came in.

Shay gasped and panted as his legs spasmed, shaking his whole body.

His lower legs ballooned out freely, with his feet hitting painfully the floor as they too pulsated bigger. His thighs trembled with anticipation and then exploded. Huge chunks of muscles expanded randomly, before shifting into position. The knees sunk into the flesh and suddenly his shorts and underwear gave up. Pieces of fabric dropped on the floor as his glutes contracted and hardened into solid muscles.

The legs kept growing for what it seemed an eternity, adding pounds of muscles, throbbing veins and steel tendons to his frame. The shifting femurs and growing mass pushed painfully at his still human pelvis, threatening to pop the joints, when it stopped.

Shay kept sobbing. He dared not to look down his body, for the fear of what he could find. He could still feel it though. He felt his sweat-soaked mass pressing on the floor. The immense feet twitch and curl, the claws scratching the wood. The veins slowly retracting, even though not completely, into his pulsating flesh.

He pressed his forehead on the floor, breathing heavily.

Slowly, he stretched one arm in front of him. Then the other. He sunk his claws into the wood and

flexed his muscles, dragging himself forward. He tried to work his strange feet and after a few tries he managed to shift his toes and get some grip on the floor. The long soles and the membranes made flapping noises as he crawled down the hallway. He needed to get to the food. He needed it.

He let out a long moan as he felt his body rising from the floor. But his arms were still stretched outwards, dragging his mass along the floor.

Crackling sounds came from his chest as it began to burn.

His ribs were pushing outwards, sliding across the floor as his tattered shirt stretched. Slowly, his chest barreled out and his head lost the contact with the ground. He felt the buttons of his shirt snap, one by one, as his chest grew bigger and bigger. His strained flesh slid across the cool floor as the veins started to pop up.

A sharp pain and a loud crunch made his scream.

He lost control over his left arm as his shoulder pushed out painfully. His bones pressed hard into the flesh as they cracked and moved. Tendons snapped, dragging his growing shoulder blades around a much bigger joint and into place. Another scream accompanied the shift of his other shoulder.

Shay tried again to scream. But he couldn't breathe.

His muscles pulsed and shook his body as they grew.

His pecs quickly filled the vast ribcage, pushing his body even higher. He could feel the fibers stretch and slide against the floor with wet sounds.

The shoulders rippled and ballooned out with muscles, tugging at his already huge arms.

His back muscles throbbed and swelled, granting him a frighteningly hulking upper body. Lines of hard muscles snaked around his chest and back, straining at his already exhausted frame.

As the transformations slowed down, Shay gasped and took a deep breath. Far deeper than before. His heartbeat thundered in his ears, alternating rhythmically with the sound of his huge inflating lungs.

He resumed his crawl, this time faster as the new muscles aided him in his quest.

Even as he felt a sharp pain in his spine, he didn't stop dragging himself. He couldn't. He needed food.

As he kept crawling his skin started to shift. It hardened and toughened, becoming leathery and thick. His palms and soles puffed up and got covered in hard calloused skin. Meanwhile his whole body began to lose color. His skin slowly greyed out, except for his chest, belly and the inside of his arms and legs, which turned a bright white.

Screaming, he felt his spine crunch and press out. His vertebrae inflated, one by one, painfully making his body stretch longer. He cried as he felt his abs seize, hurting his already agonizing stomach. The muscles pushed out, hard and trembling, giving him a six...an eight pack. His abs pushed out into the floor, sliding and stretching. His back followed suit, hugging his frame in huge, steel muscles.

He lost the control of his legs for a few agonizing moments, as his pelvis exploded into a more suitable configuration. Muscles swelled and tendons popped as his legs trashed around.

Shay stopped as he felt his neck seize and his head snap up as his muscles tensed.

The vertebrae popped and elongated as the veins throbbed painfully. The muscles tugged at his head and grew bigger and bigger, engulfing his throat.

Tears flowed from his eyes as he screamed. But it felt wrong. His mouth was opening too much.

His lower jaw snapped as it hinged down almost perpendicular to his skull. Saliva and blood dripped on the floor as he screamed again and again. Small clicking sounds accompanied his teeth, as they fell to the ground.

Shay couldn't take it anymore. The hunger, the pain...

He cried, trying to curl his mind onto itself, trying to forget what was happening. Maybe if he just let go...

His head kept changing. Hairs fell on the floor as his skin toughened and turned a dull grey.

More blood pooled on the floor as sharp points pushed out of his gums. His upper and lower jaw cracked and enlarged, as more and more teeth grew in his enlarging mouth. His lips stretched and cracked, pulling back, becoming tough and hard. The tongue swelled and discolored.

His nose twitched and started to sink into his face, just like his ears. They were absorbed into his skull, leaving only dark holes behind.

Then his face pushed out. Pain engulfed his mind as his skull crunched and elongated, a pointy snout forming. His hole-nostrils shifted to the side of his face, and his forehead flattened, squeezing his brain. His eyes hurt as they moved slowly on the side of his new head.

Muscles stretched and tugged at his changing skull, covering the cracking bone. His bloody jaws snapped together as big tendons connected the joints.

Shay opened a pair of pitch black eyes. His mind swam into a dense fog.

The colors were wrong. The smell of blood, his blood, was intoxicating. His jaws twitched.

He gasped in pain and felt something flap on his neck.

He gasped again and felt it again. Something was moving with each breath he took.

A shaking hand rose to investigate. Pressing his palm on one side of his huge neck, he felt something move and twitch. Cuts? He carefully slid a finger into one of them. And he felt it touch the inside of his throat.

He quickly pulled the finger back out, and his claw sliced his gill.

Shay's mind did not want this pain. It was too much. He sunk down, deeper and deeper into nothingness. He let go.

The creature roared.

Its fists slammed into the floor, splintering the wood as it roared again.

Blood flowed from its injured gill into his throat. It felt its taste. It smelled it. And it fueled its hunger.

Planting its arms into the ground, it pushed itself up. The muscles pulsed as it rose to its feet.

Its head almost touched the ceiling and its shoulders slid on the walls. Its massive, naked frame stood for a moment in the hallway. The huge chest heaving with each rumbling breath. The muscles twitching all over its body. The toes curling, sinking the claws into the floor.

It moved towards the door, each heavy step sending deep vibrations into the walls. It was closed.

With a grunt, it slammed its hands into it, ripping it from the hinges and throwing it into the dark garage.

The door was still small for the creature. It lowered the big head and squeezed inside sideways, its body pressing into the walls.

As it was inside, it stood again. Its ebony gaze scanned the room, shifting from the tool cabinets, to the boxes, to the bicycles. It finally found what it was looking for. The freezer.

A faint smell of meat teased its nostrils. It snarled as it approached the food it needed.

Its hands gripped the heavy metal door and the metal bent under its claws. With a sharp tug, it ripped the door and threw it aside.

It growled as it saw the meat. Taking one big chunk into its claws it smelled it. Frozen. Dead.

The creature roared in anger. It wanted fresh meat. Hot. Bloody.

But it was hungry.

With a crunch, it ripped a piece out of the frozen package, chewing and gulping pieces of hard meat.

It pushed food into its mouth, its teeth working their way into the frozen chunks.

With food inside its stomach, the creature was ready to complete its transformation.

It roared, but kept stuffing meat inside his mouth with one hand.

The other gripped the edge of the freezer and clenched.

It hunched forward as it felt the muscles in its back ripple. A tugging feeling accompanied the sounds of stretching skin as a small mound appeared on his spine. It kept growing and inflating, rising out of its back. A point formed as the dorsal fin emerged from its flesh.

It was almost at the end of the meat supply, but it needed more.
As the last piece of food bulged its way into its throat, the creature punched the walls in rage.
The house shook and the concrete shattered under his blows.
Then pain forced it to its hands and knees.
It was growing again.

It roared as its body shook.
Its bones stretched more and more, this time much faster. Muscles exploded outwards, throbbing and pulsing.
It moved the hands and knees as its body enlarged beyond belief. Its dorsal fin brushed the ceiling.
Its spine started to grow again, but this time it surpassed the boundaries of its body.
A nub appeared between its glutes and it growled.
Its rumbling noise increased, alongside with the pressure in its buttocks.
It roared angrily, wanting this to end. It slammed its hands into the floor, pushing muscles and bone out of its body.
Its hips snapped larger as the spine gained one more foot in length. It grew quickly, putting on meat and bone. The tip of it started to flatten into vertical structures. Fins.
The creature panted as its body shook. The tube of meat extending from its lower back was making it groan. As it felt the nerves connect, it swayed the heavy tail around. It kept growing as it trashed the furniture in the now small garage. It hit the walls and curled as there was not enough room for it. After nearly doubling the length of its body, the new limb stopped growing.

A loud rumbling came from the creature as it stood still in the middle of the ruined garage.
Even on all fours, it was massive.
The dorsal fin pushed against the roof. The thick muscular tail was curled to its side. Its webbed feet and legs twitched. Its belly moved and spasmed. Its huge chest heaved. Its arms were planted into the floor, veins throbbing. Its gills flapped with each breath. Its head rose up.
Pitch black eyes snapped open and thick lips pulled back, revealing rows of sharp, blood stained teeth.
It spoke.

“HUUUUNGRRRRRY!”