

((**Note:** This section takes place during [chapter 8](#).)

Nick pushed his way through the edges of the thicket and made his way back to the city. After his walk, he came back to the outskirts of the city. It looked even closer to being rebuilt than before he left, but there were still some ways to go. He looked around for a while, but couldn't find Fayt for the life of him. Placing his hand on the back of his own neck and rubbing, he stopped walking and turning in a full circle, wondering where the kindhearted hybrid could be. Nick looked around the rubble, hopelessly lost; and he would have been for much longer. But thankfully, he heard Fayt's voice calling him over, "Nick!"

((**Note:** This section takes place during [chapter 9](#).)

Nick followed Fayt along apprehensively, a knot growing in his stomach. As they walked through the forest, Nick followed along in the back until they reached Chi's house. They stopped at the clearing, looking at the tree house and then following it up to where the female hybrid was leaning on the terrace railing. "Good to see you, Chi," Albel said, his voice more threatening than welcoming.

Chi looked at everyone from the black hybrid to Rika and asked, "What can I do for you all today?"

"I hear there's a cure for the hunter's state."

"This is true," the female hybrid confirmed.

Albel smirked and asked, "So how did you manage to make it without getting a hold of the DNA sequences?"

Chi paused for a bit before answering, "Well... there were some old papers of-"

The black hybrid interrupted, "I destroyed all the documents." Nick cringed; he glared at Chi for a moment before looking away. A deeply furrowed frown took place on his face. She couldn't have known what he had told the others; it wasn't her fault, but still. It didn't help the mage feel any better about the situation.

"I had help," said the female hybrid.

"From who?" Nick shifted around uncomfortably as Albel shredded Chi's explanation to pieces.

Chi frowned slightly and answered, "Akuma, he hangs around the lab a lot. Perhaps you missed something."

Albel sneered up at her, "So Akuma came up with it?"

"Just the papers."

Nick started to slink away, but felt Albel placed an arm firmly around his shoulder. The black hybrid asked with an odd smile, "So this welp didn't come up with it?"

Chi tapped her fingers on the rail and said, "Not exactly, he helped make it, it's all."

"Where are the papers?"

"I destroyed them for our safety."

"Fine then, where is the rat?"

Chi went quiet for a brief moment. "How should I know? I'm not his mother," she said, looking off to the side. Rika's arms folded across her chest as they listened to the arguing back and forth. Fayt seemed to be growing more uneasy.

A low groan rumbled in Nick's throat as the events unfolded to favor his story less and less, "Nnnnnngggggghhhhhh." He could only hope that they wouldn't find Akuma. Deciding it was time to leave, the mage tried to slip away from Albel's grip. "Well, Akuma obviously isn't here, so we should just get back to the city. Wouldn't want to Aquarians to show up without us, heh?"

But the black hybrid curved his claws inward at the mage's arm as he tried to escape. "I believe I just said I hate liars. Already caught one. We'll just have to see how far that lie goes. All the way to the source, hmm?... I'll deal with you next," he said simply, shoving Nick away. "So your little scapegoat, Akuma. You must know where he is, because he's the only one to confirm or deny your claims. So let's see," he sniffed audibly. This put the mage boy on edge. Nick watched, terrified for Akuma's safety as things escalated very quickly. Then the black hybrid snorted with laughter, "Oh yes, you certainly don't know where he is." Then Albel jumped up onto the terrace. The black hybrid seemed obsessed with finding the horned boy, and through him the source of the information.

Fayt shuffled closer to Nick. "Albel..." he trailed off, seemingly not sure what to say. Albel located Akuma's scent, making Nick cringe. This wasn't going to be fun.

The angry hybrid forced his way into the house, being followed by a squabbling Chi. There was the noises of bumping furniture, yelping, and scolding. The female hybrid cried, "Albel! No! He has nothing to say!"

What happened next bothered Nick to no end, and sent him over the edge; he wasn't going to let this

happen. Akuma came scrambling out of a window, climbing onto the roof. Albel followed shortly after, swiping his claws after the horned hybrid. Akuma jumped to a branch on a neighboring tree and then another lower one. Albel zipped closer, obviously quite faster. The hybrid boy landed on the ground and leaned forward in a run. He was stopped short as the black hybrid landed on him, forcing him into the ground roughly and knocking the wind from his lungs. Akuma gasped for air at the impact, seemingly focused on that instead of squirming. He had only briefly caught his breath before Albel pushed a foot heavily between his shoulder blades and drawing a katana. He placed it next to the boy's neck. "So let's go over this again. Where did we get the DNA sequence from?" he asked, looking around at everyone.

Chi was now hanging out the window fretfully and Fayt took a few steps forward. "Brother, please-" the white hybrid begged.

"Not another step," the dark hybrid growled, pressing the steel closer to Akuma's neck.

Nick decided it was time to step in. This was too far for him to let go. You can knock a kid around a bit, but not to this extent, and never putting their life in danger. In a flash, he appeared on ground about 20 or so paces from Albel and his prisoner. The mage wasn't going to let him hurt Akuma, especially knowing the kid's past now. Balling his hands into fist, he called out, "Hey shit for brains, leave the kid alone. I have the information you want, not him. I'm the one who created the cure after all, not him. He was just the tester." His rage was obvious in his speech.

The dark hybrid glanced up at the mage. His horned hostage grunted from his spot on the ground as the boy's face heated up in a light blush. Albel looked at Nick with interest. "Is that so?" he asked, looking down at Akuma. The dark hybrid took on a mischievous smirk and said, "Let's see how much you know." Nick glared daggers at him as the hybrid removed his foot and used it to roll Akuma over onto his back. He put his sword tip on the boy's throat to keep him from moving. Albel looked at Nick once more and told him, "So here's how it works. You answer my questions. If I think you're lying..." He pressed the tip of the sword closer to Akuma, "He gets an injury." He raised his head slightly and made a quiet bark of laughter. "You make one move and my sword goes through his throat," he added. The horned boy stiffened up in response. The mage didn't know what to do, but he wouldn't let Albel hurt Akuma; he had decided that much. Fayt clicked his teeth, appearing to want to help, but afraid that Akuma would get hurt if he did. Rika seemed relatively entertained by the situation, though she remained silent. The dark hybrid demanded to know, "So where did you learn how the hybrid DNA works?"

Nick stared down Albel for a while, not moving, not saying a word. Dion himself said he couldn't stay hidden from Albel forever, but Nick was still hesitant. *'I guess he's going to be found out sooner than later,'* he thought. Taking a deep breath and looking the dark hybrid straight in the eyes he said, "Dion gave me the information I needed to make the cure. Now let Akuma go." His voice was monotone, never wavering, never giving Albel any reason to mistake what he said as a lie. Nick hated what the hybrid was doing right now. *'Leave it to Albel to take something good and use it as an excuse to hurt people,'* he thought to himself bitterly.

The dark hybrid narrowed his eyes at the mage. Then he looked back down at Akuma and growled, "So it's true. And did you know about this all along? That he was alive?" The horned boy looked fretfully at his attacker before tilting his face to the side and looking off somewhere else. Albel snorted and looked at Nick. The mage watched Albel closely as he sheathed his katana. But the hybrid still stood straddled over Akuma, who remained stone still.

Nick was waiting for Albel to step off the horned boy. "Yes, Dion is alive," he said with his eyes still narrowed.

"And just where would I find him?" the dark hybrid asked with a sneer.

Fayt finally moved forward, reaching out and touching Albel's shoulder. He asked in uncertain tone, "Brother... perhaps you could use this opportunity to see what happened?... Instead of a murdering spree? He can cure your hunter state after all. Maybe just even for the sake of closure?" He gently pulled his brother off of Akuma as the dark hybrid was pondering.

The dark hybrid growled, "We'll just see about that." Once he was a few feet to the side, Fayt glanced over his shoulder. Akuma still seemed frozen to his spot on the ground, perhaps afraid he might elicit hostile reactions from moving.

Nick took no time in putting himself between Akuma and Albel. In a flash, he was next to the horned hybrid, blocking the path between him and the darker hybrid. The mage answered, "He lives in a thicket, that's all I know. I wasn't paying attention to how I got there." Turning his attention to Akuma, but never letting Albel leave his vision, the mage squatted down next to the hybrid boy. "Are you alright?" he asked, concern seeping into his voice. It didn't look like the boy was injured, but Nick just wanted to be sure.

Albel turned and looked around. "Let's go then, Fayt," he said simply, raising his nose and walking off.

The white brother looked over at Nick and apologized, "Sorry about that... I'll see what I can do." Then he followed after his brother.

Nick watched as the brothers left. "Don't worry about it, Fayt. Please don't let him kill Dion though," the mage called after them before they vanished from view.

Rika put her hands on her hips and muttered, "Guess that means I'm stuck here a while." She wandered towards the ladder of Chi's house. The female hybrid seemed to have relaxed in her spot at the window after the terrible event that unfolded.

Akuma shifted his eyes up at Nick as he knelt down. There weren't words to describe his embarrassment. The male hybrid looked back to the side, staring at the grass beside him. "I thought you weren't going to help me," he said, recalling Nick's words earlier.

"Well, I lied," the mage admitted to him as he offered the other boy a hand. The hybrid tensed up in embarrassment again. "Here, stand up," he said, looking down at Akuma. "I couldn't let him hurt you. I would feel responsible, one way or another." Truthfully, Nick didn't know why he felt so attached to him, but he couldn't bear to let anything happen to the kid. It was strange.

The hybrid boy looked at Nick's hand and looked away again. Then he furrowed his brows and asked, "Why do you always help?"

Nick had to think about it for a moment before he replied unsure, "I just like to help people, it's all." Akuma finally took the hand, letting the mage help him up. The hybrid looked at the ground with a guilty look on his face. Akuma edged forward and lightly pressed his forehead to Nick's chest, making the mage's eyes widened in surprise. It seemed so uncharacteristic for Akuma, and he didn't expect it. '*Poor kid,*' Nick thought to himself as he pulled the young hybrid into a comforting embrace, returning the gesture. "The whole world's not against you; you know that, right? There are people out there who care. The trick is finding them. After that, everything gets easier." The hybrid sighed quietly in response. The mage let the hug last for a few more seconds before breaking it. Pulling away, he looked down at the hybrid. "Listen, I don't hold anything against you; Dion told me a bit about your past. Just know that if you ever need anything, you can count on me, okay?" he assured Akuma in a gentle tone. "You going to be alright?" Nick prodded.

The hybrid stirred slightly at Nick's address. "Mmm," he hummed in agreement, nodding. Akuma looked over at Chi's house, then he pulled away and half-waddled to the ladder. Rika had already climbed up the ladder and was inside.

Nick watched as Akuma climbed up the ladder. That boy was something else alright. One day, he is punching you in the face; the next, giving you a hug. Nick just shrugged; it seemed like he was getting better about people now, or at least about Nick. Looks like the hybrid just needed someone to care was all. He looked around and decided to follow up after Akuma and climb the ladder. He was so tired after working all day on the city, along with his scuffles with Akuma, and creating the cure. '*Maybe it would be a good idea to ask Chi if I can bunk here for the night,*' he thought to himself as he hoisted himself up the ladder and into Chi's small house. His eyes ran over the interior of the house as he looked for the female hybrid. He noticed the wooden floors and walls, the kitchen and the pantry off to one side with an assortment of herbs and potions in glass bottles along shelves. There was a sitting area in the middle and a bed off to the other side. Another door led to a small bathroom. An area rug decorated the sitting area. Then the mage's eyes locked onto Chi. Waving, he walked over to her asking, "Mind if I stay at your house for the night, Chi? I've nowhere else to go really."

The woman looked up from her spot and laughed quietly, "Quite popular tonight, aren't I?"

"Oh yes, very popular," Nick agreed, nodding his head. "Albel made sure to drag everyone down here," he added in as he walked over to the window, looking out and the landscape before him. He

always liked the way the forest looked at night, it was very peaceful.

Rika seemed quite content to explore the place, curiously glancing into glass jars. Chi looked over at the mage, smiling and nodded, "Well of course you can. Help yourself to the couch then. And what about you two?" She looked to Rika and Akuma.

The silver-haired woman paused in her examination of a jar, glancing out the window. "Oh... no I'm good. I'll go home now actually." She waved her hand and left the house.

Nick turned and called out to her, "Goodbye Rika, don't get eaten on your way home. You'd miss out on the Aquarians if you did!" His voice carried out in a teasing tone.

Akuma muttered something that nobody could make out and laid on the other couch. He rolled over so he was facing the back of it and snuggled in. "Oh well, goodnight then," Chi chirped, walking to her bed and slipping into it. Nick was left as the only one awake. He let out a sigh and glanced out the window one last time before plopping down on the couch opposite of Akuma. A lot had happened that day, and even though he was exhausted, he still couldn't find sleep. Instead, he just stared up at the ceiling, thinking about what had transpired that day.

((**Note:** The following sections take place during [chapter 10](#).)

Nick shifted in his sleep, rolling over on the couch as he heard Akuma's hiss. As the light hit his eyes, he lightly brought a hand to his face to reduce its intensity. A yawn found its way to his lips and he rolled onto his stomach, pressing his face into the soft couch below him. He laid there, just enjoying the feeling of laying on a soft warm surface before the smell of fish reached his nose. Feeling his stomach grumble, Nick eventually pushed himself up and made his way to the kitchen where he saw Chi preparing breakfast. "Good morning," Nick said cheerily as he took a seat, looking over the food in front of him. There sat three plates of seasoned, cooked fish with butter and a slice of lemon. Each dish also had a side of salted green beans. Picking up his fork and beginning to eat the fish before him, he made a "mmm" sound. "This taste great!" the mage commented in between bites.

Chi smiled and set the dishes in soapy water in the sink. "Glad you like it," she said as she grabbed a plate and joined them at the table. Akuma nibbled at the fish, but remained silently apprehensive to the green beans. The woman smiled again as she bit into a piece of fish. There was a loud woosh outside the window that caught her attention. "What the..." Chi stood and moved the window. Nick took a few more bites before cramming the rest of the fish into his mouth and swallowing as a few dragons flew by outside. He picked up his own plate and placed it in the sink before washing his hands. He then walked over to the window, peering outside to try and see the dragons that had just passed by. A large golden dragon was flying towards the city, accompanied by an armored magi and hellfire dragon. Chi blinked

curiously, "How strange... I wonder if those are the Aquarians." Then she looked back at the others. Akuma finished the last of his fish and muttered under his breath as he stood up. He grabbed his plate and set it in the sink. The woman clasped her hands together and asked, "Want to go see then?"

"Yes, we would probably go now," Nick said before adding in, "We wouldn't want to miss all the fun after all, right?" He made his way to the ladder and hopped down, landing nimbly on his feet on the ground below. While he waited for the other two to come down, he arched his back and stretch letting out a groan as he did so. "Ah, much better," he muttered to himself.

Chi walked out the door next and jumped down to the ground, fluttering her wings to soften the landing. She noticed a sickly-looking magi dragoness approaching in the distance and grinned. "Oh you guys go on ahead then. I'll catch up," she waved at them before skipping off to see the dragoness.

Akuma came down the ladder next. "Hmph," he frowned and turned on his heel, heading for the town. Nick followed the boy, waving back to Chi as she was left behind.

As they drew closer, the mage could see the rubble had been cleared. The big golden dragon seemed to be talking to a human of the rebuilding effort. The gold said to the human, "Ah wonderful then, we can start building immediately." Then he asked the magi dragon, "Bring in our friends, will you?" The orange dragon warped away and returned shortly with a group of stone and earth dragons.

Rika saw the mage and hybrid approaching and crossed over to them with her arms folded across her neck. She told them, "The big guy says he's the leader of Aquios and wants to help us in return for peace between dragons and humans. At least here anyway." She laughed quietly before continuing, "That'll be interesting in the least." She looked at the dragons that had warped in. The blue hellfire dragon directed the stone and earth dragons, pointing them where to go and build. Within minutes, stone and earth dragons had stone buildings raising from the ground. A cobblestone path started to formulate between them as a road. A few vine dragons came around and started to plant trees and flowers along buildings and medians.

Nick rose an eyebrow and said, "Peace between the dragons and humans, huh?" He had given up on that idea a long time ago. There was too much hatred between the races now a days it seemed. He admitted earnestly, "I didn't believe that could happen." He turned to watch as the dragons started to reconstruct the city. Now with the added help it was sure to be done within the day, especially with all the previous day's progress. It was weird seeing the process when he wasn't the one doing it himself. He thought about helping, but decided for now he was content with where he was.

More dragons were warped in and people started to arrive to help as well. The city quickly grew thanks to the quick efforts of the mages and dragons. The city started to take shape at last. Akuma and Rika sat on a median and watched as people worked. The hybrid rubbed his arms as the woman looked around with a bit of a frown, muttering, "I guess this puts a dampener on my hunting..." She stopped a passing pygmy and asked, "Ey, what's the plans for the city anyway? The setup?"

The pygmy paused before explaining, "Oh quite simple. It's a big circle that has multiple roads all leading back to a center plaza. There will be different districts, like a pie chart really. Home districts and then shopping ones of the sorts." Then he went fluttering off.

Nick looked at the dragons with interest; they seemed so organized. It made him wonder where they came from. They couldn't be former slaves; they wouldn't have had enough time to organize like this had they been. That meant that they had to have been free before the Spell took effect and freed all the dragons. He scratched his head as he thought it over before finally voicing his thoughts out loud, "I wonder where they all came from; they seem too organized to be former slaves, so they must have been free before the Spell." The mage had never thought that free dragons could exist before the spell; but then again, he had never been off the continent. Couldn't they have led a revolution before the Spell though? The number of dragons here could have easily over ran the city within a day, even if they humans still had their weapons to fight back with. Confused on the subject, he just shook his head in an attempt to clear his mind. Another long while passed and the city finally was completed. People around the city started to fill the streets and enter buildings. Some took up homes, while others claimed shops. Nick watched as people claimed places as their own and chuckled. *'Just handing out buildings for free, are they?'* he thought to himself.

The dragons seemed to be conversing with some of them while the big gold one called Woltar was talking with who appeared to be their new mayor. Rika stuffed her hands in her pockets and muttered, "Well let's see what they did." They strolled along the road down towards the town square. They arrived, seeing the big empty area that was decorated with a dragon fountain in the center. "Cozy," the woman uttered quietly. "And what about you, kid? You pickin' a place out? Better hurry. People are grabbing them up like crazy," she asked Nick, looking out to the crowds heading towards the houses.

The mage shrugged and looked around. "I guess I should find somewhere huh?" he said, scratching his chin. "I guess I'll get right on that," he said heading off in a random direction in the city.

After 10 minutes of walking, it seemed like all the good places were taken and he was about to give up when he noticed a rather large house off from the rest near the outskirts of the town. It was a big wooden structure, about three stories high, with an old timey feel to it. It had a nice balcony on the third floor and lots of windows for good views of the forest and city alike, but that was all he could tell from the outside. Moving forward, he went to open the door to take a look inside. After thoroughly exploring his new home and placing down what little things he owned within it, Nick made his way back into the city, but not before taking a key off of the table next to the door and locking the house up. For a while he wandered, not quite sure of what he should do now. He felt restless after the past few days of adventure; it left a pleasant taste and he wanted more, but he didn't know where to start. Sighing, he shook his head and decided he could figure it out later. What he did know though was that he should

get something to eat, or at least that's what his growling stomach told him. He made his way over to a nearby bakery, following his nose, and saw Akuma standing outside the window. A small grin found its way to Nick's face as he walked up behind the hybrid and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Why don't we get you something to eat? You look as hungry as I do," he offered with a warm smile.

Akuma flinched roughly, before flashing his claws, stopping just short of raking them across Nick's face. The mage flinched at having his face nearly torn off, but otherwise he didn't move. He took his hand off of the hybrid's shoulder and chuckled. "No need to be so uptight, Akuma. I doubt anyone here wasn't to hurt you, so you don't need to go around swiping people's faces off," he said grinning before adding in, "People don't generally like it when you do that."

The hybrid calmed himself, looking blankly at Nick for a moment before breaking it with a blink. "Mmmm... yeah..." he mumbled, humming out the first part. Akuma looked back at the window before he moved almost robot-like into the bakery. Once inside, the boy looked unsure of what to do here.

Shaking his head, Nick moved ahead of Akuma and pulled a small pouch from his belt under his robe and gave it a little shake. Akuma's head snapped to him as metallic clinking came from within and the mage explained, "Gold, silver and copper are generally used as a global currency. You can trade them for different goods and services. I'll pay for you, so don't worry about it. I have enough gold to buy everything in the bakery anyways."

The hybrid furrowed his brow and asked, "Why do they trade shiny pebbles for food? What use are they?"

With a shrug, Nick said, "Because it's rare I guess." He admitted nonchalantly, "I don't really know the science behind it." Then he walked up to the counter and motioned for the hybrid boy to follow. The mage said cheerily, "Just come to the counter and pick anything you want from the display. I'll take care of the rest." Akuma snorted, turning and looking in the case. His eyes settled on a sandwich and he pointed to it. Nick ordered two of them, one for Akuma and one for himself. The hybrid let out a quiet huff, appearing to think that this trade was ridiculous. The clerk nodded and went to the back of the shop for a moment before coming back out with two freshly made sandwiches wrapped neatly in wax paper. Taking them both in one hand, the mage paid the clerk in the other and headed off, motioning for the hybrid to follow him again. "I saw a good place to eat on the way over here," he explained as they walked with Akuma eyeing the sandwiches. It wasn't long before they reached a huge fountain. Nick sat down on the edge and handed the boy one of the sandwiches. Mumbling, the hybrid took a seat next to the mage and grabbed the sandwich. He sniffed it briefly before taking a little nibble. He seemed to be satisfied as he continued to eat his lunch. "So, what are you going to do now?" Nick questioned as he unwrapped his own sandwich.

Akuma paused as he looked down at his sandwich, answering, "Same as always. Just roam around, I guess. Nothing here has changed for hybrids. I... don't really have a place to go." He bit his sandwich

again.

The boys finished off their sandwiches. The mage wiped his mouth before crumbling up the leftover wax paper into a ball and holding it out in his palm. It burst into flames and completely disintegrated into ashes before scattering into the wind. He looked up at the sky thinking something over. He ran a hand over his smooth face, a side effect of never aging, and turned his attention back to the hybrid. Nick said warmly, "If you need a place to stay, you're always welcome at mine." He had only known Akuma for a short time, but still he felt like he had to watch out for the kid. It seemed like he has had a hard enough life already and Nick just wanted to make it easier.

"Stay with..." the hybrid trailed off. He snorted, looking to the side, "Dion's offered before..." His breath caught. "Dion," he said as if remembering something. He gripped the paper in his hand and said softly, "I wonder if he's okay..." The boy looked at the ground in thought.

Nick looked up thinking. He had forgotten about Dion until Akuma mentioned him. He couldn't help wondering himself what had happened to the scientist. He didn't really know him personally, but it seemed like he was all the hybrid really had, and he didn't want anything to happen to him for Akuma's sake. "I'm sure that Dion will be fine. He has had to deal with Albel before, hasn't he? He's a smart guy, so don't worry about it," Nick tried to reassure Akuma and set his mind to rest. When he looked back at the hybrid, he noticed that he didn't quite know what to do with his trash, so the mage took it from his hand and crumpled it up in his own. "Here, you just throw it away in any trash bin, they're all over town," the boy explained as he chucked the wad of paper towards a trash can, summoning a gust of wind to carry it the extra distance. Nick explained, "It's better to throw everything away rather than just chucking it into the environment. It all piles up after a while if you do that."

Akuma looked away with a snort and quickly sputtered, "Sure, whatever. Not like I care. He just feeds me is all."

"Akuma..." Nick began as the hybrid had his little outburst. He could sense the hybrid's distress. "You know it's kind of obvious when you blurt out like that." He let out a sigh and began to say something else, but a strange figure walked up, touching Akuma's horn.

The hybrid was taken back by the sudden action, sneering at this person. The blonde person in black punk-style clothes muttered, "Oh how curious."