

I LIVED WITH A **RATMAN!**



WYX PRESS



I Lived With A Ratman!

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I Lived With A Ratman! was photographed entirely on virtual location in The Wastelands, which is a part of Second Life®. Consent to use this location specifically and only for this project has been graciously extended by the creator, owner, and game administrator of The Wastelands, NeoBokrug Elytis.

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This episode is dedicated to NickCitrus, rat lover.

When scavengers and Peral children of the wastelands meet around a fire, inevitably the stories begin...

Now that was a pretty good one...



But I've got a story you won't often hear...

And I don't often tell it, but you kids look like you can handle it.

They say that after the end of the old world
some of the animals got a lot smarter.

Maybe it was something in the air or the water,
or maybe it was just their time to rise.



They grew big like men, and savvy.
And they were hated for it.



They had thoughts and feelings,
and had lives just like us.



Well, sort of like us.



However it happened and wherever they came from, animals are real and I can tell you that for a fact.

Because I lived with a rat man!



Now listen up
and you might just learn
a thing or two.



I know that some won't believe my
story and others may want to kill me about it
but I'm not afraid of what people think of me
anymore, or ashamed of what I did.

This is the story and
you can take what you
will from it.

As for me, my
name is Itch.



That's about all
you need to know.

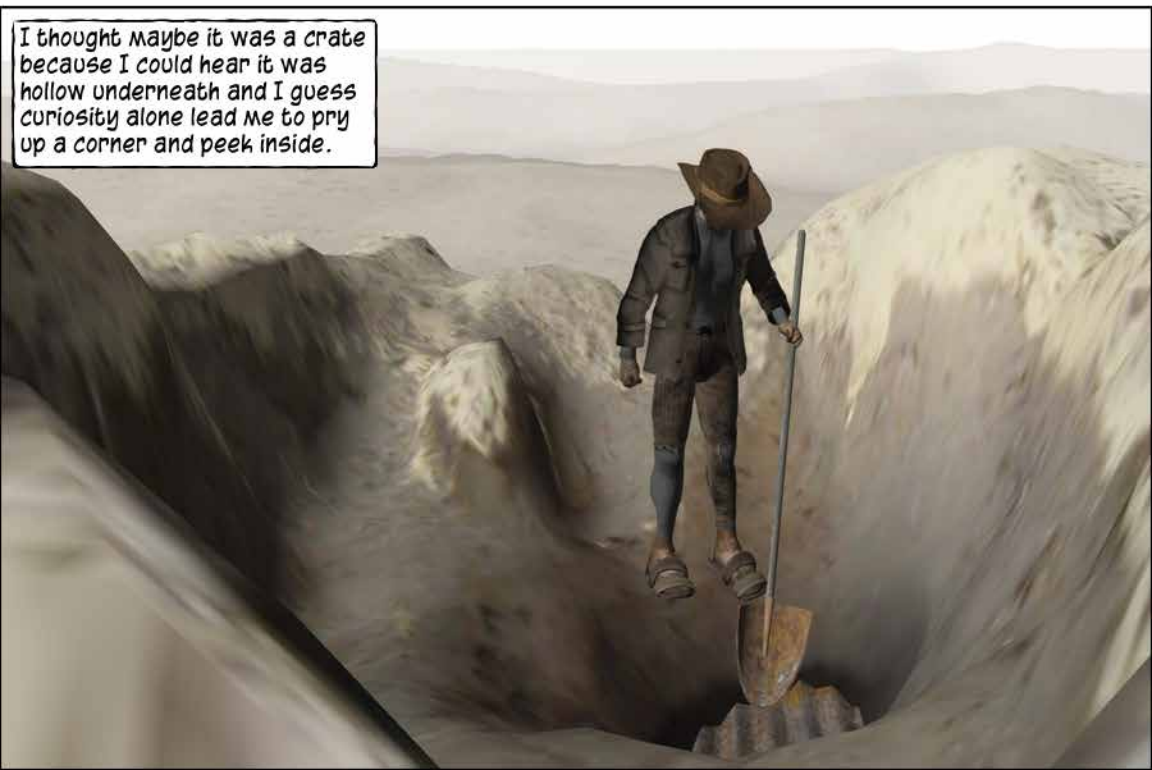
It all started when
I found the house.



I was digging a hole in the sand out in the middle of nowhere, and I don't want to talk about why, when my shovel hit something metal about waist deep.



I thought maybe it was a crate
because I could hear it was
hollow underneath and I guess
curiosity alone lead me to pry
up a corner and peek inside.



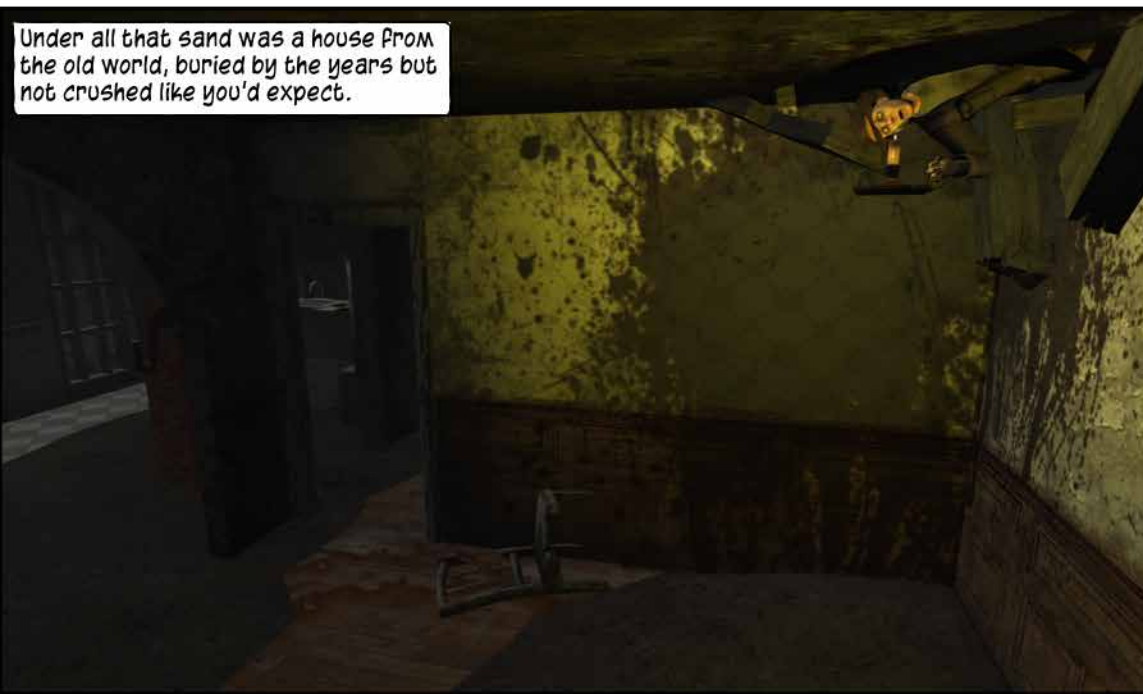
But it wasn't a crate,
it was an attic.



I made an opening in the roof big enough
to crawl through and lit a candle.



Under all that sand was a house from
the old world, buried by the years but
not crushed like you'd expect.





There were regular-sized rats, that was clear, but down there under the sands it was calm and silent, and I liked it right away.



It reminded me of a dream I have sometimes about a place with green plants everywhere and clean water. I'm alone and have no fear, and that paradise is all mine.



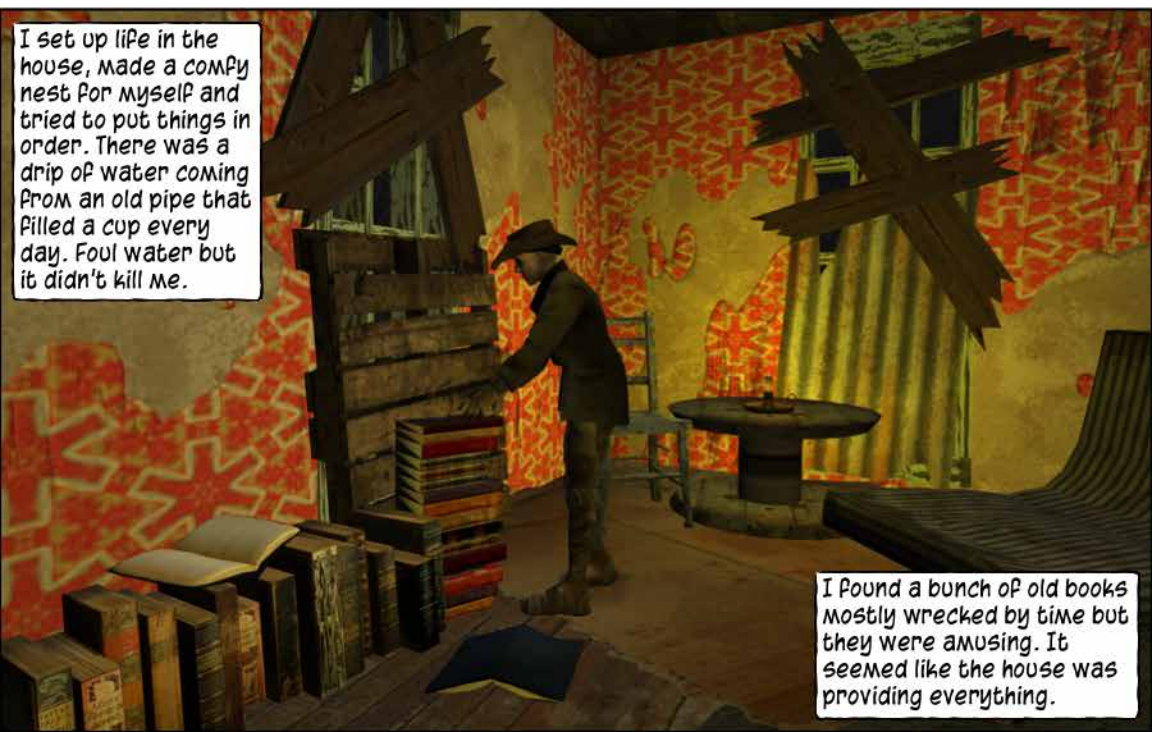
But I haven't seen a green thing growing since I was a kid.



There were three good rooms and another that was sort of caved in so I had enough space to feel like a king.



I set up life in the house, made a comfy nest for myself and tried to put things in order. There was a drip of water coming from an old pipe that filled a cup every day. Foul water but it didn't kill me.



I found a bunch of old books mostly wrecked by time but they were amusing. It seemed like the house was providing everything.

I lived there a full turn of the seasons before he arrived. It was the middle of a hot spell and I was at home sorting salvage when I heard a thud at the door, and then scratching sounds.



I thought someone had found me but when I got up to look through the peek hole I saw him laying there, almost beat to death.





I could also hear voices in the distance getting closer that sounded like they were looking for him.

I don't know what it was that made me do it, I could have left him there to be caught or killed. But I guess I just didn't do that.



I opened the door and pulled him into the hole, I shut the door again and that was that.

The voices roamed around for awhile but eventually went away. And there was a rat man.



Did he smell really bad?

Well, I'm trying to tell the story.

And yes.

I shouldered him down to the house and put him on the floor. He was in pretty bad shape, the worst of it being a bone sticking out from his hind leg.



He was moving but not much so I got him the cup of water for the day and set it down for him careful and backed away.



He hissed some and I don't blame him, but eventually he drank a little. I kept my knife handy but out of sight and wondered if I did the right thing or if I'd just brought about my own end.

I knew the broken bone was going to be a problem unless it was set right so I just started talking to him about it.



This is going to really, really hurt...



He seemed to understand enough to let me get close so I gave him a rope to bite on and pushed that bone back into place with my bare hands.





He spent a long time with his leg wrapped up, me bringing him water and as much food as I could.



He didn't seem too picky about what he ate and didn't even hesitate when I gave him some rats I caught.

That's when I knew what kind of world I lived in.



It was during that time that I got to know him you might say. He never ate all of his food, always left a little bit to give back to me.



One day when I brought his water he out of nowhere says "thank you" in a weird, toothy voice. Turns out a human trader taught him some words that he could just barely form with his snout and teeth.

ZZAANK
YOO!



He told me he would be dead without me, that the men chasing him hated his kind.

He told me his name was **Gnawbert**.

Or maybe it was **Robert**, it was hard to tell.

Gnawbert told me that he came from a big family in a place he called the Dark City.



I never did know how many of his kin there were because he loses count around eight, but I assume there were once a lot of his kind.

He didn't say much about what happened to them, just that they were all gone now.

Maybe it was poisoned cheese, I don't know.



One morning I woke up to find a **deadly ember beetle** on my chest. They are rare but I don't have to tell you how fast a man can die from a single bite.



It started to crawl up to my throat but just then I heard a **whoosh** and then a **pop** sound, which was **Gnawbert** skewering that damn beetle with his claw.



That ol' rat saved my life and had himself a nice little snack, too. Apparently the poison doesn't mean much to a giant rat man.



It was a full three moons before Gnawbert could stand on that leg and much longer before he could walk. I just kept tending to him I guess because I didn't have much else to do. We sort of formed a bond in that time and I also think the house was happy to have folks inside it again.



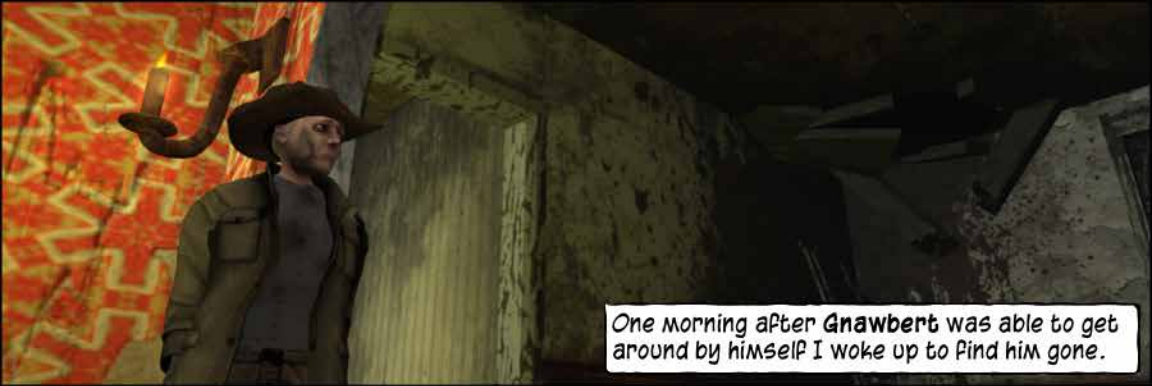
I'd sit with him and flip through the old books and he'd laugh his hissy laugh at the pictures.

We'd talk for hours some days, he'd describe his life in the Dark City...



...and I'd tell him about the amazing green growing place I dream about.





One morning after **Gnawbert** was able to get around by himself I woke up to find him gone.



I didn't know what to think, the house felt so empty suddenly and I wondered if I'd ever see him again. I even missed that weird smell of his.

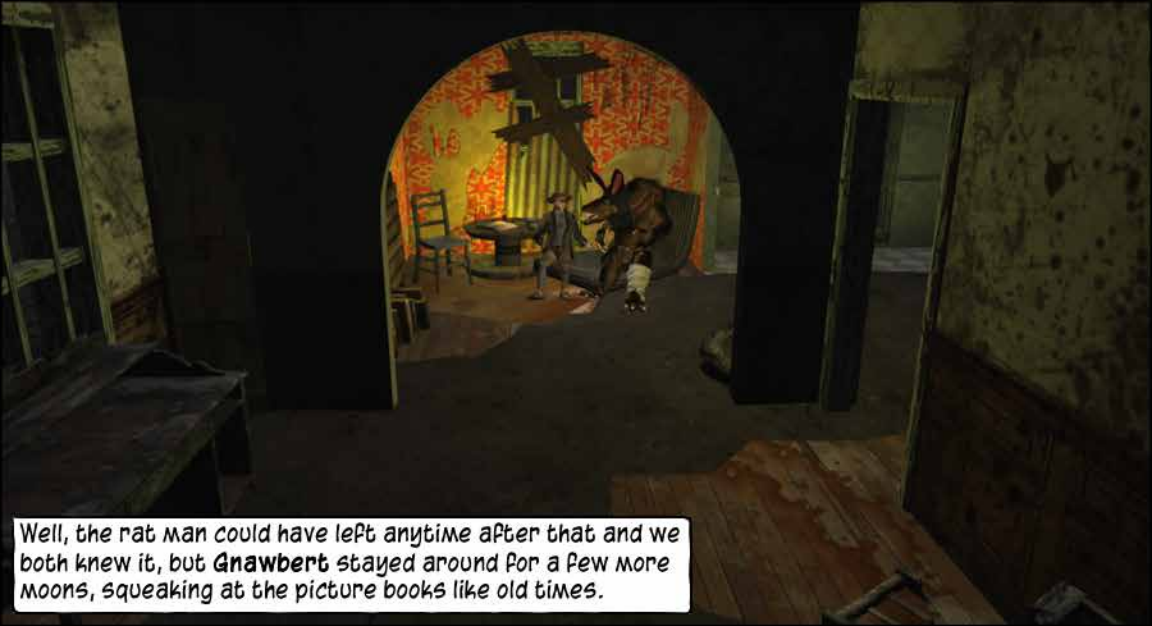


I just kept staring at the front door and hoping he was alright.



Later that afternoon he came back with a terrible limp and some meat. He didn't say where he got it or even what it was but we had a nice meal of it and he seemed pleased with himself.





Well, the rat man could have left anytime after that and we both knew it, but **Gnawbert** stayed around for a few more moons, squeaking at the picture books like old times.



But he would leave the house every so often and the times away got longer and longer. I guess it was then that I figured out it had to end. He wasn't going to stay forever.



It just wasn't his nature, and nature does whatever the hell it wants.



So the day finally came when he said he had to go. I was sad inside but I understood. I gave him my hat because he said he liked it, and it looked smart on him.



He said a hissy thanks and we just stared at each other for a time. Last I saw of Gnawbert he was walking into the wastelands toward who knows what.

Later that afternoon I found a single green leaf that he left on the table, a goodbye present I guess.



I have no idea where he got it.



Were there any
cute baby rats?


Did his broke leg gush
blood really bad?




Hold on now, I'm not done!
There's a lesson here...



You could say I
learned some things from
that big smelly rat, like how two
different creatures can get
along if they have to.

A wide shot of a snowy, mountainous landscape at night. In the distance, a small, rustic hut with a warm fire burning inside is visible. The snow is deep and covers the ground and mountains. The sky is dark.

I know what Friendship is
like now, and good company.

A close-up of a dinosaur, possibly a T-Rex, wearing a brown cowboy hat and a red and white striped shirt. The dinosaur is standing on a grassy field with large trees in the background. It has a friendly expression, showing its teeth.

And I learned that a little kindness can save
a life, and make yours a little bit better, too.



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