

CHAPTER ONE

Monday, February 2nd, 2026, at 8:03 AM ...

AS A man of science, Dean Hernandez—assistant to Professor Nathaniel Hernandez, professor of Neogenetics at the University of Fallsville, and a neogenetics student himself—rarely listened to his intuition or emotions.

It wasn't that Dean was some kind of robot. True, as a child, he had been teased by his classmates for his logical, rational approach to the world. His intellectual way of approaching the world had even gotten him in trouble with some of his teachers, especially when he decided to 'correct' them on some scientific fact they got wrong.

That was how Dean learned that people in authority, especially older people, did not always appreciate correction from their students. It was one of the reasons why he and his father clashed as often as they worked together. Father might have been an accomplished scientist and professor in his own right, but that never stopped Dean from disagreeing with or even correcting Father's own mistakes in his scientific work.

On reflection, however, Dean realized he *should* have listened to his intuition when he stepped into the University of Fallsville lab. He should have listened to the prickling feeling on the back of his neck as his hair stood on end, should have listened to the cold, ominous feeling that ran down his spine like a snake curling down a pole.

Yet when Dean looked around, he saw nothing out of the ordinary in the lab. The shelves and cabinets were still full of all of the normal scientific equipment Dean and the other assistants used in their experiments and studies. The temperature on the thermometer was exactly 68 degrees Fahrenheit, exactly as Dean liked it and exactly as the mice needed. The storage closet was full of extra lab coats and masks, but also the loaded tranquilizer gun. Dean found that odd, because the tranquilizer gun was usually kept unloaded in a locked safe near the macaques for emergency use in the event of an escape. He made a mental note to report it to Dr. Wesley later.

And, of course, when Dean walked into the office and turned on the lights, he was greeted by the sounds of dozens of mice excitedly squeaking, a sound which brought a smile to his face despite his exhaustion from staying up late last night chatting with Howard Sycamore, a fellow neogeneticist from the newly-founded country of Superbia who had sounded very interested in Dean's own research regarding animals and superpowers.

In short, everything looked perfectly fine to Dean, who decided that his instinct was simply being wrong.

Of course, as Dean learned later, even if he *had* paid attention to his intuition and left the lab, he might not have been able to prevent the actual tragedy that would follow not even ten minutes later.

But Dean did not know that yet. He simply deposited his work bag onto the big, metal work table in the center of the room before making his way over to the mice.

Over 50 mice, assembled in about a third as many cages, squeaked and ran about excitedly as Dean drew close. In some cages, the mice appeared to be sleeping in, snuggled together in groups as they snored softly. Others ran around, playing or fighting with each other. And still others were, er, mating, which Dean sometimes wished they would not do in front of him, but he supposed that the mice were still animals and still did animal things.

No, Dean's attention was drawn to the cage on the top middle row, which had three fluffy white mice in it. One male and two females, the first female and male wrestling with each other while the other female was sitting a short distance away, apparently napping. Dean was pleased to see that the second female, whom he had mentally named Diana, had triple antibiotic ointment applied to her tail.

Good, Dean thought. That means that Dr. Wesley fixed that tail wound I noticed over the weekend. Although I'm not sure where that scar came from.

A surprised squeak caused Dean to turn his attention to the other two mice. Barbara and Bruce—names he'd mentally assigned to those—were wrestling, but then Barbara suddenly shoved Bruce off her. Bruce practically flew across the cage and slammed into the glass wall on the other side, propelled by Barbara's super strength. Such behavior would have worried Dean, but knowing Bruce, he simply waited a second.

As expected, Bruce hopped back up onto his little feet as if he had not been tossed into a thick glass surface and, giving Barbara a death glare, launched toward Barbara. But Barbara jumped into the air ... and stayed there, flying in circles around the top of the cage, moving so fast she was almost a blur. Bruce skidded to a stop on the paper bedding and glared up at Barbara, but since Bruce had not been bred with flight powers like Barbara, all he could do was make a look that Dean interpreted as something along the lines of *Get down here! I'm not done with you yet.*

Diana, meanwhile, seemed to have finally awakened, but hadn't move. Her eyes did glow briefly, however, as if she was considering whether to use her eye beams to make her rowdy cage mates calm down or not.

Dean chuckled. He was glad that all three of the mice were doing well. He noticed similar activity in the other cages, where mice used their various superpowers. One mouse turned invisible, while another used telekinesis to move some food pellets into its mouth without needing to get up.

All in all, Dean thought that the Supermice Project was going well so far.

That was another reason why Dean dismissed his intuition. If something was wrong, the supermice surely would have been acting differently. Almost all of them behaved exactly the way they always did. Of the few who were not currently active, they were mostly older mice or pregnant females who couldn't be very active for obvious reasons.

I'll have to read Dr. Wesley's emails about them later, Dean thought, rubbing his temple, and thank her for fixing Diana's tail. I was really worried about that.

Satisfied that the supermice were all happy, healthy, and awake, Dean turned around ... and found himself face to face with a huge, growling dog.

Or Dean *thought* it was a dog. The beast which stood before him was bigger than most dogs, equal to him in height, if not a little taller. Its long snout puffed air from its nostrils, while its ears stood on end. Red eyes peered out from a monstrous face that looked more like a parody of a doberman than a real doberman. Massive muscles stood out across its thick legs, while discolored and cracked teeth as sharp and long as kitchen knives poked out from under its lips, which were twisted in a snarl.

The beast—Dean was sure it wasn't a dog at this point—snorted in Dean's face, letting him catch more than a whiff of its death-like breath. Hot air and wet saliva covered Dean's face and glasses, partially obscuring his vision, though not enough to block his vision of the monster entirely, even though he wished it would.

The beast's snort snapped Dean out of his haze. He stepped backward but then he hit into the mouse cages behind him, which rattled upon impact. Startled and confused squeaks emitted from the supermice in the cages he'd walked into, but Dean ignored them, if only because his instincts—the ones he'd done his best to ignore so far—were telling him that if he looked away from the monster for even a moment, it would tear his throat out instantly.

"Ah," said a voice he didn't recognize, which sounded like the voice of a male human but with a distinct buzz of an insect distorting the words slightly. "No need to threaten the scientist, Maul. He's a norm."

The monster dog—apparently named *Maul*, which did not bode well for Dean's survival—snorted in Dean's face again and then stepped aside.

Dean wished it hadn't. Because the figure who stood behind it was even more grotesque than the beast that had been in his face.

The figure *looked* human. Sort of. It was encased in some kind of spacesuit that didn't look like something NASA, or any other Earth space agency, would put their astronauts into. One hand was a three-fingered claw, while the right hand was actually some kind of organic-looking hand cannon, its lip crusted with some kind of dry, unidentifiable blue substance that made Dean's stomach churn.

Its face was possibly the *worst* part, though. It looked human enough, except for the mouth, which had jagged teeth that definitely shouldn't have been in the mouth of a human being. Its insect-like eyes glowed with a disturbingly human-like intelligence, while its thin, paper-like skin had small holes here and there. Its skin was yellow with gray patches in areas, reminding Dean of a zombie. It didn't help that the figure smelled like death, although that may have still been the overpowering stench of Maul overriding pretty much every other smell in the room. Its head was covered in a fishbowl helmet.

"W-Who are you?" said Dean with a gulp, his teeth chattering. "No, *what* are you?"

The figure smiled, a nightmarish expression on an already nightmarish face. "That's a *very* rude question, young man. Didn't your father ever teach you manners?"

Dean gulped again. The blood—or possibly liquid fear—rushing through his veins at this point made it hard for him to think, so he decided to rely on his instincts for now. "M-My father taught me many things. But he didn't teach me about ... about whatever you are."

Maul opened its mouth and thrust its head at Dean, causing Dean to flinch and mentally say his last prayers.

But then Maul abruptly stopped with its teeth less than an inch from Dean's face. Dean didn't dare move or look at anything else. He just stared at Maul's teeth for what felt like an eternity, wondering when he was going to die.

Maul, however, closed its mouth and pulled its head away from Dean, though its monstrous red eyes did not look away from him. That was probably why Dean still felt like Maul's discolored, sharp teeth were still an inch from his face.

The figure, however, clapped Maul on the back like it was a naughty puppy. "Apologies. I genetically designed Maul to be completely and utterly loyal to me. That includes dealing with any, ah, *threats* he senses. Such as backtalk and disrespectful tones of voice. Which I noticed you used, but I can forgive you. Very few people understand how to appreciate true scientific genius when they see it."

Dean, against his better judgment, turned his attention back to the unnamed figure. "So you're a scientist. Like me. And my dad."

The figure chuckled. "Please. Saying that you are a 'scientist' like me is a bit like a first-grader at a science fair saying they are a scientist like Albert Einstein or Stephen Hawking. Neither you nor your hack of a father could ever hope to come close to my scientific understanding of the human body, but it's cute you think you can. Perhaps I won't have Maul rip out your intestines after all."

Dean gulped again. "Y-Yeah. I like my intestines where they are, thanks."

"It would be quite messy, I agree," said the figure. It rubbed its chest. "But it is rather rude of me not to introduce myself, although I'm sure you've heard of me. Care to take a guess?"

Dean said nothing, partly because he had no idea who this person was, partly because he was trying to keep an eye on both Maul and its owner at the same time. Despite having two eyes, that last bit turned out to be harder than you'd think, so Dean settled for focusing on the figure.

The figure spread his arms wide as if he was a researcher presenting his findings at a scientific conference. "I am Hybrid, the world's foremost—and only—expert on xenogenetics, the study of alien life. And I am here for the supermice."

-

Read the rest of *Supermice* [HERE!](#)