

Chapter 72

Alpha Killer

"This is some insidious shit, right?"

Dylan's question lingered in the air between them, calling into stark attention the weighty apprehension that pervaded the Green Light Club's small meeting room. As they stared down at the pile of useless paper trail littering the table, the small leather pouch of pixie dusk seemed to taunt them with everything they didn't know.

At this point, Xavier had to agree. Forces that had been carefully kept apart for hundreds of years were suddenly bleeding into one another, and not in a "Hi, neighbor!" kind of way, either. No, what lay before them was clear and indisputable evidence of cloak and dagger bullshit of interdimensional proportions.

"What stakes do the fae have in any of this? The rogues must be offering them something that they want, but their realm has everything they could possibly need." Liam said from where he sat, doggedly parsing through each sheet of paper they carted back from the bunker, searching for any discernable bits of information.

From what Xavier could tell from where he sat doing the same, it was a futile effort. They'd been at this for days, running through every code cipher and descriptor they could think of, the entire process made damn near unbearable since everything had to be done by hand.

He didn't remember the last time he'd set foot in a library after the age of twelve, but he and the others had gone and cleared out their section on classic code-breaking methods book-by-book, strictly adhering to the local public library's three-book per guest limit. It had taken them ages to get absolutely nowhere.

"Maybe it's the Unseelie making waves?" Dylan posed, "Historically, that's what they're known for. Perhaps the Dark Court is looking to profit off of a little mortal greed. Wouldn't be the first time."

Xavier grunted, tossing the latest cryptic sheet of letters, numbers - and random arcane symbols, they'd come to discover - onto the table, "Even if we had anything they wanted, it would have to be pretty damn important for them to go to the trouble of getting powder into the material plane. It's not like they can send it FedEx."

By cosmic design, interdimensional travel wasn't easy. In fact, historians were pretty sure that the first rift between realms had been opened completely by mistake about a thousand years ago when some errant young spellcaster on the other side fucked around and found out that they weren't alone in the universe.

Where most humans were fixated on finding life *out there*, most of them no longer cared about the proven and well-documented existence of the entire realm of magical beings that existed in tandem to their own dimension. But there were reasons for that. Reasons that made four fully grown Alpha Wolves sweat at the sight of a tiny leather satchel.

Shortly after the existence of the fae realm, Axis, it had come to be called on Earth, had been revealed, both worlds plunged into hundreds of years of chaos as the forces that had never meant to coexist began to mix.

The universal elements governing Axis and the Material Realm were like oil and water - existentially incompatible and constantly working against one another. Where Lycans and shifters, and even witches, were all manifestations of the Material Realm's affinity for magic, the Earth's magic was rooted in the natural matter that existed within the universe - energy could be manipulated and transformed, but never destroyed, and only passed on through those who were born from natural manipulation.

Axis operated on an entirely different metaphysical frequency. The laws of their realm were fluid to the point where time and space were hardly more than suggestions, and anyone who lived there could freely

manipulate the world around them by the sheer force of their will alone. It was only a matter of learning how.

When the two worlds collided, humans became jealous of the immeasurable possibility Axis had access to, while the fae became obsessed with the Material Realm's predilection for innovation. Both sides grew contemptuous and covetous of the other's realms and resources, all the while knowing that materials from each realm were toxic to the other.

From what they knew, pixie dust was the street name for a powerful magical resource. In Axis, the component was used to reinforce and boost magical capabilities, but on Earth, it was a highly volatile substance that was especially incompatible with the Earth's magic. Its natural ability to amplify energy made it more dangerous the more of Earth's energy it was exposed to.

Where it would sicken an Omega, enough pixie dust could outright kill an Alpha. So, the fact that one of the most dangerous substances known to their kind was sitting just inches away was nothing if not unsettling.

"The borders between the realms were sealed ages ago for a reason," Liam muttered. "What are the chances that the Courts even know about this? I doubt they're any more eager to destroy the realms than we are."

Xavier sighed heavily, sharing a heavy look between his two comrades, "I bet we're going to find out. Sooner rather than later if we want to head this

off before it goes too far. We need answers." Liam's jaw tensed, "You're talking about bringing them here? The fae rulers?"

"Just the Seelie, and just long enough to ask them what the fuck is up with Axis that's leading to the biggest dimensional bleed in seven hundred years. It has the Unseelie written all over it."

"We're never going to get away with doing that without the Council finding out," Dylan said. "Shit. We're not going to be able to contain this."

Xavier shook his head, "The plan was never to hide this from the Council in the first place. We're strictly gathering information to take back to the Alliance."

Dylan's brow furrowed, "After what happened the last time someone tried to tell them something was up? My father's still dragging his feet, Rhys Bennett is a selfish coward, and Grave Crown might as well not even exist for the fuck-all they give about the Alliance."

Liam leaned forward, "Trust us, Miller, we get it. But the Council does not take well to Packs that don't disclose critical information. There's no making any big moves without their say-so."

Dylan bared his teeth, "And the Council is a bunch of has-beens who get off on throwing their collective weight around to prove they've still got it." He got up from his seat and began to pace.

"The Alliance is bogged down in bureaucratic crock just to appease a bunch of old males who need something to feel superior about. Are we really going to sit here and let them tell us that this threat isn't real when we know that as soon as shit hits the fan, they're going to blame us anyway?"

"Not just us, Dylan." Xavier's tone was cold and firm enough to give the fuming Dark Moon Prince pause.

"What?"

"Once slighted, the Council doesn't stop at Alphas. They punish the entire Pack," Xavier had only ever seen his father anxious once in his life, and it hadn't been when his sister had died. But that night, he'd come home and informed Xavier that it was his time to step up to the plate; August Michaels had been shaking. "No matter what we agree or don't on the politics, that's something that will never change."

Dylan's hands tightened into fists at his sides, "Not if we don't do anything about it."

"Careful, Miller," Liam placed a steadying hand on the other male's shoulder. "Too much talk like that might give the wrong person the right ammunition. We all learn to play the game eventually, and for now, that means not ruffling feathers on what could very well be the eve of war with the rogues."

He patted Dylan on the back, "One battle at a time, brother."

Despite his continued ire, Dylan couldn't argue against that stark truth. They already had enough to deal with at the moment. What bothered Xavier was the fact that he agreed with Dylan, and he knew Liam did, as well. The Council had too much power and dubious motivations at best.

For generations, the Alliance's Elite class had been little more than a figurehead title meant to groom future Councilmen who'd go on to perpetuate the vacuous cycle. Xavier was ashamed he'd only begun to see just how deeply the Alliance's faults went. As his father had taught him, Xavier had always operated under the impression that the Pack came first.

He should have known when his father was urged to sweep his own daughter's murder investigation under the rug that the Alliance didn't share those same values. Or perhaps they did, but they sure as hell never protected Xavier or anyone he cared about.

"What's our next step?" He finally said. "A single bag of pixie dust might've been enough to call for an investigation, but it won't justify opening a rift."

Liam pulled out the map they'd found with locations circled in red.

"That's simple enough," he said. "We follow the ley lines."