

## Chapter 76

### The Council

The atmosphere around Alliance Tower crackled with tension so thick, the everyday passerby of New York City subconsciously crossed to the other side of the street well before setting foot on the sidewalk outside of the impressive chrome and glass skyscraper.

And that wasn't an exaggeration. Just as he had countless times before, Xavier stood outside of the Tower and watched the uncanny effect the presence of dozens of Wolven Elite had on the bustling city. There would be traffic jams reported on the morning news today as a hundred thousand humans all chose the same alternate routes - typically efficient workers would be calling in late, and sedentary office workers would finally get hit their daily step goals. All because the Council was in town.

It was for this reason - among a multitude of others, but this one specifically - that when the Alliance met, they usually refrained from committing to an all-hands-on-deck situation. When the entire Council

convened, it was reserved for the most important of Alliance matters that were typically planned well in advance and rarely moved.

The annual public relations talks that had occurred a few months ago was one such occurrence, and the Samhain Revival that would take place in another few months was the other. Therefore, the meeting that was taking place today was unplanned, unappreciated, and undeniably necessary.

Xavier made his way up to the enormous meeting room located on the Tower's penthouse floor. The circular room was more than large enough to comfortably fit thirty fully grown Wolven males, physically, at least. There was no amount of enclosed space that could effectively aerate the wafting cloud of testosterone of over two dozen males who were no longer - or never were, to begin with - fit for Alphadom.

As usual, it helped that not a single representative from Grave Crown was in attendance. In less than three day's time, however, it was almost guaranteed that each Pack would receive a sealed letter containing the Grave Crown Alpha's determination on the matter at hand. It happened without fail, every time a major decision was made, even though no one knew how they got their information.

And, that was what the next few hours would be - former Alpha's, relatives of Alpha's who had the blood, but not the parentage, and even more Betas and Gammas all posturing and throwing their weight around in an attempt to make the sitting Alpha's feel somehow inferior.

His father had always told him to observe and notate but never engage in the pretense of lesser males. Looking back on his youth, there were a lot of things his father had said that should have sounded off alarm bells but made so much sense at the time.

Of course, it would make sense if Xavier had any interest in continuing to play the Alliance's game, much less his father's. But, if he ever wanted to become the male his mother wanted him to be - the male he should have been for Ava, and the kind of male he'd aspired to be in his youth, then he'd have to change a lot about the way he approached these males around him.

Ironically enough, his father's advice still applied well enough. Xavier would watch, but he wouldn't engage in the Alliance's usual song and dance. He needed to conduct it.

Climbing to his feet, Xavier turned to address the room of Weres, each backlit by the morning sun shining in through the room's tinted panoramic windows. The faces staring back at him were the very people who were as responsible for perpetuating their broken system as they were for keeping it afloat.

They were raised on power and self-importance, just the same as he was. Where Xavier and the other Alpha's wielded their titles with authority inside of their own territories, here they were seen as hardly more than placeholders. "Males," He said, making sure to look each male in the eye. When he came to his father's steely gaze staring back at him from the

crowd, he couldn't help but linger. But when he noticed the diminished form of Red Moon's sitting Beta, Regis Davis, Xavier found he had to look away.

The male looked downtrodden as usual, simpering and preening to August's every whim in order to keep his position. It was a perceived act of kindness, Xavier's decision to allow the Davises to maintain their positions. In reality, it was just further proof of his father's manipulations.

"Your Alphas have gathered you here today concerning a matter of great import."

Off on one side, he heard a low grunt-just loud enough to let Xavier know that Wyatt Miller, Dylan's father and the sitting Alpha of Dark Moon, was on board with the context of this meeting, but only just. Dylan had insisted on filling his father in on their plan, and gruff but fair as he was known to be, the Dark Moon Alpha begrudgingly agreed.

Much like his son, the weathered old male had little patience for the Alliance, but even he couldn't deny the need for intervention the existence of even a single active portal to Axis called for.

Liam stepped up next to Xavier to face the Council, "After investigating numerous concerning reports, we have found evidence of rogue activity within the bounds Alliance, as well as without."

No one in this room would dare show more than the most minimal signs of surprise or concern on their faces, but the tension in the meeting room immediately increased tenfold as accusations that were thinly veiled as questions rang out. "How long have you known about this threat?"

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"You've allowed rogues to infiltrate our territories?"

Suddenly, Rhys Bennett rose to his feet, both hands raised in a placating gesture that would never work on these males. "Hold your tongues, hold your tongues! Now, I've reviewed these claims and found them lacking. Let it be known once and for all that Eclipse will not cow to unsubstantiated fear-mongering."

Xavier was careful not to let the contempt he felt for the Eclipse Alpha show on his face. "The reports we came to you with were hardly unsubstantiated," Xavier turned back to the Council. "Eclipse needed more evidence, so we found it." Xavier turned around, where a large screen filled a sizable portion of the wall behind him. On it, a presentation of the evidence they'd found in the bunkers began to play.

"We've found indisputable evidence of a rogue presence," Liam said, pointing at the screen when the map of rogue sites came up. "As you can

see, there's enough evidence to presume that there are operating rogue sites in every territory. This is an Alliance issue, not a Pack issue."

The Council grew increasingly discontent at the news - and with this crowd, discontentment presented as flagrant anger. Xavier saw Rhys Bennett pale as each of his five Council representatives glowered at him menacingly. "So, you've failed us, Alphas," spat a Gamma representative from Dark Moon. "How could a threat this expansive go unnoticed for so long?"

"Because, at this point, they haven't done anything," Xavier said firmly. "Until now, there was no sign of their movements at all. There was no reason to expect anything untoward was taking place, much less in our own back yards." "And as soon as they slipped up," Liam spoke up. "Most of your Alphas acted."

He didn't need to sidle a gaze over to Eclipse's side of the room to sense the gathering storm of repressed embarrassment and anger hovering over Bennett and his goons.

"What are the rogues after?" August's voice cut through the frustrated din, hitting at the heart of the matter and why they'd gathered today. Calm and collected, just as any leader from Red Moon was expected to be. Xavier met his father's gaze, knowing the male would expect nothing less than full-on engagement from him. "At this point, their goals are unclear. But we've found proof that the rogues are smuggling pixie dust from Axis."

With that, the slide changed again, showing the photos they'd taken of the pouch of refined powder they'd located, as well as the wall covered in glowing portal runes. Never before had Xavier seen a Council chamber go quiet, but the rising undercurrent of fear wafting throughout the room couldn't be denied, now.

"That doesn't look unclear to me," said a Silver Moon representative. "That looks like a call for war!"

Shouts of both agreement and dismissal rang throughout the room as the situation official escalated. Bitter accusations were being flung around like projectiles, and the overall call for war was growing louder with each traded barb. And it didn't sound as if the rogues were the exclusive targets up for debate.

"ENOUGH," Xavier rose his voice against the assembly for the first time in his life, commanding the attention of every male in the room, if only for a stunned moment. "This isn't the time to turn against one another. It's the time to be proactive."

He turned to point at the photo of the portal, the energy emanating from the glimmering runes almost palpable through the two-dimensional image.

"Whatever failure we're facing isn't ours alone. If the fae are allowing their world to bleed into our own, then they'll damn well come help us fix it."

Xavier steadied himself internally as he turned his full attention back onto the Allied Council. "That's why we, the Alphas of the Red, Silver, and Dark Moons, put forward the motion to invite the Seelie Court to the Material Realm for the first time in a thousand years."