

## Chosen 411

### Chapter 411 Defeated Duelist

Honour stood with Madeline behind the large group, watching their friends setting off on the Trials. The small path that had allowed Lina to the Farewell banner at the forest's edge had long been dissolved.

Seeing so many people openly expressing their affection towards the princess was a sight that brought tears to her eyes. It didn't surprise her... No, it didn't. Lina was the kind of person that was bound to attract this much attention. She cared for others more than she did about herself and it wasn't long before the werewolves of the Sirius pack had figured that out.

Without her peers constantly beating her down, she was shining more than ever. Fortunately, the sudden boost in fame had not gotten to the princess's head. Honour's insecurities were put to rest when the princess started using her family's cottage as an escape from her duties as the princess of Sirius.

A mixture of worry and pride swirled through the young goddess's mind. On one hand, she wanted her friend to win the Trials. On the other hand, she was worried about her. The wilderness was nothing to take lightly, "Do you think they can win?" the grey-eyed girl asked.

'Why not... What's all that hard work been for?' Honour thought to reply, but someone beat her to it.

"They should. With Wyatt on their side now, they should stand better chances of winning, don't you think?" a male voice interrupted them.

"Good morning, Derrick," Madeline greeted the alpha with a bright smile.

"Morning, Derrick. You seem oddly comfortable with this arrangement. Did something happen?" Honour raised a brow at him.

The alpha sighed and slumped his shoulders, "I wanted to ask her for that position, but then, so did Wyatt. I don't know why though. To settle on a decision, we fought for the chance and he won. There was no turning back after that."

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"That was not your choice to make. You should have just asked Lina yourselves. I know Crysta's position by Lina's side is set in stone, but you would have been a more favourable choice than Wyatt," a spark of hope forced her to turn to the Farewell Banner, but the princess and her crew were already gone and the crowd was now starting to dissipate.

The Trials had now begun. Lina and her two escorts were to make their way to the Great Arena. There was nothing they could do to help them now. It was forbidden to interfere with their journey. They weren't even allowed to stop by any of the packs that were littered on the way to the Great Arena.

Tearing her attention away from the crowd, the thrashing sound of heavy wing beats reached her ears, drawing her eyes to the sky above. A great eagle as large as an elephant commanded the sky, spiralling upwards from one of the palace spires.

With smooth rhythmic wing flaps, the enormous creature shot to the sky and gained so much height that it was rendered no more than a speck to her vision in the span of mere seconds.

“What are you looking at?” Madeline noticed her friend’s distracted mind.

Honour thought for a moment before replying, “Nothing, Maddy. It’s nothing. We better get to the royal convoy. They offered to give us a ride. From what I know of the king, he’s not the patient type.”

Before Honour could locate the royal convoy, Bree broke through the crowd and approached them. The girl had her hands in her pockets and her face trained on the ground.

Honour pulled the girl into a hug which she hesitated to return, “I know it was the right thing to do, but...”

“It’s okay, Bree. I know Lina was just as torn to have you switch with Wyatt,” Honour cooed. The right choice was not always the most desirable.

There was a limit to how many a royal could have with them when undergoing a trial and Lina had already hit her limit, “Let’s get ready to cheer them on at the Great Arena, okay?”

“Yeah, that’s what I told her we’d do,” the girl replied. Just then, she lifted her teary eyes and noticed Derrick, “Why wasn’t it you that came to switch with me? I wouldn’t...”

“I lost a duel. If I couldn’t beat Wyatt, there was no way I could prove that I was a better substitute than he was,” the alpha replied and wouldn’t meet her gaze.

“You will do well to remember that feeling of defeat well, pup,” Liam intervened, walking up to them, “Work harder if you want to beat Wyatt. He’s stronger than I am. I can assure you of that and he’ll always be an obstacle to you if you can’t find some way to surpass him.”

“Why are you, of all people, telling me this?” Derrick scoffed at the man’s advice. No one had seen him approach them either. It was like he was suddenly there... materialised from the shadows. His dim red eyes were a sharp reminder of the authority the Lost princess had stripped of him.

“In my experience, Wyatt is trying to find a distraction. Something to play with to pass the time and amuse himself. That has always been his game, long before the two of us stopped seeing eye-to-eye. Hurry up and surpass him, Knight in Shining Armour. Just a piece of advice... from a fallen warrior,” the alpha concluded before walking away from them.

“If you knew that, then why didn’t you fight him then?” Derrick shouted at his retreating form.

“He would have defeated me. And if I’m being honest with you, I don’t want to get caught up in his antics once again,” Liam shrugged, waving at them before vanishing with the dispersing crowd.

Derrick clenched his fist in frustration, “Those two are even more twisted than they were before Katie demoted them.”

“Who knows! Either that... or they are simply more lost than they have ever been before. I know someone else that was once as lost as well before she found her way again,” Honour gave Bree’s hand a light squeeze, “We better get going. See you later, Derrick.”

Chapter 412 Vindictive enemies

Shrouded by deep shadows cast by the tall trees deep within the forest, an amber-eyed man walked at an even pace, his feet barely making a sound. His hands, ever so often, traced the concealed elaborate claw marks that were carved strategically into trees spread throughout the forest.

His hands balled into fists as he followed the winding marked trees through the woods. At first glance, the trees seemed to have been randomly marked and there was no real pattern to where they led.

Yet, in truth, the claw marks were more than mere random slashes. Each tree was distinctly marked differently in a coded directional language that could only be deciphered by those that were taught to.

Even after knowing how to read these marks, the path was meandering and disorienting to anyone that followed it, damaging someone's sense of direction by merely following the directions. It was this same precaution that irked the amber-eyed hooded figure as he followed the markings.

After walking for a while, he came across a cabin that had been built through a thickened part of the trees.

Instead of building in a clearing, the cabin was instead built together with the forest. Carefully building around the large tree trunks and skilfully painting the cabin the colour of bark. For someone that didn't know what they were looking at and hadn't got instructions from the marked trees, this was very easy to miss.

The cabin was also further within trees that were closely packed together which made running into it even harder. The man reached the door and knocked at the door.

His hood helped him blend in with the shadows, so he was able to keep himself hidden on his way to the cabin... not like anyone was going to follow him this far into the woods.

After a moment, a series of clicking sounds could be heard from the other side of the door before it creaked open. The door swung open slowly, adding to the man's already-paranoid suspicions.

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No one greeted him on the other side of the door. Only deep silent and ominous darkness... There wasn't even a sign of a lamp inside the strange cabin in the woods. Sighing, the man entered the cabin and melted into the darkness within. A few steps into the cabin and the door slammed shut, adding to the depth of the shadows inside the cabin.

The man looked about the room, his eyes flashing a bright amber as he searched for any sign of life. His werewolf senses could detect beings with him within the cabin, but his eyes yielded no results. The inhabitants were experts at concealing themselves.

"What brings you here, Victor? Didn't you hear the king's orders?" a deep voice bounced off the sides of the room.

"Yes, I did. Nearly two years ago, I heard the king's orders and I've been reminded of them every time I've tried reaching out to any of you. It's like you've stopped moving... stopped fighting. What are you plotting? I want to help. My revenge, as promised, has not yet been granted," Victor bellowed, turning in the direction he thought was the origin of the voice in an attempt to find its source.

The next voice that came was... much younger, one that he knew all too well, but it came from an entirely different direction, "Your petty revenge is nothing in light of the Rogue king's will." This voice came with a chilling growl that warned him to watch his words.

Victor shivered, feeling a new form of fear towards this voice. The boy sounded a little older than he remembered him, but that didn't change the fact that this voice belonged to Benji, the most agile general of the Rogue king. If it was the boy's intention to kill the werewolf, Victor was better off surrendering, for there was no amount of speed he could muster to escape Benji.

"Ah, yes, the rogue king. How is he? I haven't heard from him for a while," Victor dismissed the obvious warning he'd heard moments prior.

"Watch your tongue, Victor. You're nothing more than an ant in his presence. An ant is all you are. Time has made you cocky," the deep voice came again, but this time from a completely different direction.

"You all hide now... Hiding within the general population. Rumour has it that the rogue killer has completely disappeared and yet the rogues have never been more silent.

New hunters rise and increase their numbers. They are starting to bolster their forces while the rogues have no way of replenishing what they lost. The breeders cannot increase the numbers of the rogues and the Rogue King's bite won't help him increase numbers. Not to mention, the hunters are discovering those facilities with each passing day.

"I'm not a fool. I know the rogues have never faced a darker time. I only want to help," Victor was panting after his speech. He tried once more to survey the room, but his eyes still got nothing. Since this cabin had been built into the very foundation of the nature surrounding it, there were trees growing inside it.

The only thing that greatly separated the inside from the outside was the presence of a roof and man-made items.

After a short silence, the child's voice rang clear, "We'll allow you to speak of your plans for two minutes. If you do not say anything useful, we shall continue with the Rogue king's original orders and end your pitiful life where you stand," Benji's voice had never been more threatening. He'd known the boy to be vicious, but he had never been on the receiving end of his rampages.

"Okay, hear me out. I have a plan... the Trials and the Royal games," the man panicked.

"Those are the most heavily guarded events of the century..."

"No, not the Trials. The Trials allow the royals to prove that they can handle themselves out in the wilderness as they travel to the Great Arena," the man tried explaining.

"Attacking the royals will only draw the hunters to ourselves. Don't you know that the Chase family can sense the bloodlust of rogues that go on a rampage?" Samson's deep voice rumbled.

"Yes, I know that and I do not ask that we attack them. We can merely cause... a few accidents," the man smirked, "I was there when Drake left the palace. He was all on his own. The cocky prince feels he's invincible and chose to carry out the Trials on his own."

“Very well... We’ll give you this time to prove yourself. You can take two rogues on this mission. I’ll be surprised if you can even catch up to the prince. Perhaps this will teach you not to underestimate the royals,” Samson replied.

“What a waste of resources! Samson, are we really going to give him that many rogues to help him?” Benji yelled out, this time directing his voice to the other wolf that was surrounding Victor.

“Ugh, Benji... what part of scary and mysterious don’t you understand?” With the scraping sound of a match, the cabin was alight and bathed in the yellow light of a glorious flame on a match.

Samson lit a lantern and allowed his frightening facade to drop. The frightening aura in the room dropped significantly, causing the amber-eyed wolf to let out a breath he’d been holding in, “For a moment there, I thought the two of you actually planned to kill me.”

“Really! That would be counterproductive,” Benji exclaimed.

“Oh my, I didn’t know you valued my...”

“We’d be giving the location of such a wonderful meeting place out to the hunters. After what we did in that small town last year, we don’t want to be attracting any attention to us. That doesn’t mean we wouldn’t kill you though... we just wouldn’t do it here,” Samson shrugged.

“That’s... uh, good to hear,” Victor chuckled nervously.

“This plan of yours. What do you intend to do with the prince?” Samson asked.

“I thought you didn’t believe in my chances?” Victor smirked.

“Meh! you’re going to die. I can’t shake the feeling that the royal knew what he was doing when he set off,” the wolf replied, “So try not to get yourself killed.”

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#### Chapter 413 Accepting Help

‘Why... why won’t I reach it?’ Lina’s thoughts roared as she tried to reach something out of reach. Striking the ground with as much force as she could muster, the snow-white wolf propelled itself even further through the forest, zipping through the greenery at astonishing speed.

“Lina, wait... please, would you slow down for a second?” Crysta’s voice painfully invaded the princess’s mind interfering with her thoughts. Her paws itched to strike the ground harder and propel her even faster through the trees.

She had only started to feel herself slip into her untapped reserves of speed. The feeling was all too tempting.

It hadn’t been long after Katie’s disappearance that Lina discovered how fast she was really capable of going. When she ran unrestrained, she didn’t know her limits... and yet, her friend was asking her to do the opposite of that.

Groaning in frustration, the princess planted her paws on the soft forest floor and brought herself to an infuriating skidding halt.

The white wolf took a look at her padded paw and was, yet again surprised by how resilient they were.

Given her speed, she had thought her paws would receive blistering bruises when she let loose, but till this moment, her paws still remained undamaged. Her healing was also getting faster which had proved to be very useful to her in the past months.

Lina had been pacing for about ten minutes by the time Crysta and Wyatt made it to her. The green-eyed wolf was panting heavily from having to keep up with the alpha. Wyatt, on the other hand, was only slightly winded.

“Lina, we can’t blow through our energy like that,” Wyatt rushed to speak. Crysta leaned against a tree and dropped to the ground to catch her breath.

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“Why not? My ridiculous brother should already be halfway across the continent by now,” Lina yelled back.

Wyatt took a step back from the furious royal, dangerously reminded of how much Lina had changed. The princess wasn’t frightened by him anymore, ‘She’s grown so much it’s painful,’ the man thought to himself.

Crysta noticed he’d already been overwhelmed and stepped in, “Because Drake isn’t already halfway across the continent. He’s not even that far ahead of us as you might think.”

“He had a headstart. Of course, he is far ahead. This is a race of speed and if he makes it there before me, that will be the end of all this. I’ll lose to him at this rate.”

“But that’s where you’re wrong, Lina. This race is not a test of speed. These are the Trials, Lina. There is more to this than simply speed. This is about survival in the wilderness. It’s about who can handle themselves best in the wilderness and make progress fastest and that can’t be done by speed alone.

We must run at a pace that won’t expend too much energy but keep us making good progress at the same time. On average, it takes about four days to make it to the Great Arena and that’s when we’ve done really well. I know you’re fast, Lina, but you can’t run for four days either... Let’s say you ran faster than the average wolf, it would still take you about two days to make the journey. You’ll get hungry in two days and you’ll need to hunt.

And if you’re running at the pace, you won’t have the energy to...,” Crysta tried explaining.

“I get it, Crysta...” the white wolf stopped her friend there and dropped to the forest floor, “I can’t just run blindly for days...”

Lina wanted to argue with Crysta, but there was no real reason behind her frustration other than impatience. On the other hand, she could tell Crysta wasn’t done with her lecture. Crysta had thought it all through and Lina trusted her judgement, “That was impulsive of me... Sorry.”

“It’s okay. I’m just glad you’re with us again,” the delta got up and looked to a stunning black alpha with an expectant look.

Wyatt looked between the two females, amazed by what he'd just seen. It wasn't every day someone got to witness a delta scolding a royal.

"The map, Wyatt."

"Oh right," the alpha shifted into his human form and an old roll of parchment from one of the bags he was holding. Just as he'd explained, he still had the bags with him when he shifted back into his human form.

Lina lifted her head and watched her two companions. Wyatt brought the map to her and spread out the map, tracing a path with his finger while Crysta explained. Since the delta wouldn't retain her clothes when she shifted back into her human form, she had to explain this way.

"From what we can see on this map, we have to cross the..." she paused at the name that was written on the map, "I'm starting to believe the old kings were either vain or too lazy... We shall have to make our way to the... Sirius mountains... Beyond that is a large marshland that eventually leads us to the Great Valley that holds the Great Arena.

The way there is mainly forest, which will at least provide protection from the sun. The rules of the Trials suggest we don't cross any pack territories which means we'll have to go around every human settlement we find...

Lina shifted back into her human form and studied the map herself. Looking at the sun in the sky and the direction she had been running toward, the girl's shoulders slumped and she placed her head in her hands.

Crysta hadn't dared to say it, but it was clear she was going completely off course and from the looks of her margin of error, she could have continued further south and ended up heading into 'unexplored' territory.

"Why did big brother choose to do this alone?" the girl mumbled to herself, finally realising the error in her misguided frustration at the two of her friends. They had just saved her from ruining the Trials.

"Thank you, Crysta and... I'm sorry I yelled at you, Wyatt."

"It's no problem, Lina. We all have our moments," the alpha smiled in reply.

The white wolf shuddered...

#### Chapter 414 First Hurdle

Honour, Madeline and Bree sat in the back of a stretched limousine that carried the King and Queen of Sirius.

One of Beta alpha Jackson's deltas was driving the car and doing his best to pay no attention to the people seated in the back of the car or at least act like he wasn't interested in hearing what was discussed.

Being in the presence of this family had taught the man that there was always something interesting going on in their lives. Very much so that the beta alphas (mainly Jackson and his deltas) were getting into the habit of gossiping.

Fortunately, they knew when it was time for this foolery and when it wasn't. For example, in this situation, when his role was to drive and not look back or pay any attention to whatever private conversation was going on amongst the royals.

His attention was solely on the road before him, 'Alpha Jackson must have wanted to punish me.' The man grumbled silently. It wasn't like the delta could hear anything. The damned limo was soundproof. He was alone in the front seat.

Inside the car, Honour tried her best to distract her mind from the girl they'd just watched dash into the forest. She could already imagine her friend trying to win the Trials with speed and speed alone... the exact opposite of what she was supposed to be doing.

"Stop worrying, Honour. She has Crysta with her. That delta won't let anything happen to her," Madeline tried.

Honour sighed, "I know, Maddy, but I can't help myself. You know what Lina is like. She rushes into everything she does following instinct... without thinking... usually because she's faster than most and believes she can do it all in time... and without help."

Madeline held her tongue, wondering if the girl was done talking. 'You're definitely hunting for those excuses,' the grey-eyed girl thought to herself.

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"Lina might be quick to make decisions, but what's a Trail if there is nothing to learn from it," the queen pitched in, smiling at the girls before her. The queen was right... The Trials weren't just some competition. They were meant to teach the future monarchs several lessons while they worked to finish them.

The harder the Trials tested them, the more they were bound to learn... but that also meant they were risking their lives as well. It wasn't like hunters had been dispatched to watch over them. Lina was out there with no one watching over her, but those two.

Suddenly the thought of having Wyatt going with them didn't feel too reassuring. "I just hope she doesn't get hurt in order to learn whatever the Trials have to teach her."

This... was partly wishful thinking. What lesson didn't involve a little pain? Lina was bound to witness or experience something that would change her on this journey she'd embarked on. How dire the situation would be... lay solely in the hands of Fate.

"I have a feeling everything will be just fine," the king finally spoke up, "She has good companions with her. Now let's all stop worrying about that. I had a board game packed for times like these. Nothing like a good old game to toss that boredom out the window."

"The king plays board games?" Madeline whispered the question into Honour's ears, completely forgetting the king's keen sense of hearing. From a bag leaning against the closed door, King Davin retrieved a large wooden box akin to the size of a pizza box.



“Yes, I play board games. We do it when there is nothing to take our minds off the people we care about. I remember this helped us a lot back in the day... when Katie had only just disappeared,” the king’s gaze landed on his wife.

Queen Martha paled at the mention of a dark time that had been... partly her fault. The moon goddess had communicated with her and had her send the princess away in the care of the Chase hunters. To distract the king from this loss, she’d introduced him to a variety of board games.

“Times that I pray we never see again in this lifetime, darling,” Queen Martha placed a kiss on her husband’s lips.

“You’re right about that. Now, who wants to take the first turn?” the King turned to the girls.

“I would... after I know the rules,” Bree piped up, her eyes gleaming with excitement.

Honour had remained silent, having been interrupted by the king. Despite his explanation, she was still stunned by this sudden development, “I guess he does,” she said to herself, shifting her gaze to the box he lay on the table at the centre of the spacious cabin.

The king began to open the latches that held it tightly closed, ‘I guess we are all going play,’ Honour continued in her mind.

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After a short meeting with Crysta providing most of the information, the trio of werewolves were finally able to come up with a plan. Lina allowed Crysta to lead the way as she was the one that had memorised the map and learnt the most about long-distance navigation.

Their first part of the journey was mostly forest. The three wolves ran through the woods at a steady pace, cutting a straight line across the land and covering great distances without needing to break momentum for a long time.

Lina was sure her two companions would get tired after about an hour, but three hours went by before they stopped for a break... and three hours more went by before they stopped once again.

The food rations they had packed worked to their advantage and they avoided hunting for their first day of travel. The sun was starting its descent when Crysta stopped in a clearing wide enough and well-shielded from a direct breeze.

The delta shifted into her human form, Lina quickly following suit and covering her friend’s naked body with a robe she’d carried in her bag just in case something like this happened, “Thanks.”

“No problem. We should rest for now,” Lina replied, turning to the alpha that was with them.

Surprisingly, Wyatt, who should have been much stronger than Crysta, was still panting after the running they had done.

Crysta had recovered after a few minutes, but the white-soled black wolf was still panting like crazy. The male shifted into his human form and collapsed on the ground panting heavily, “Three hours back to back without rest or water. What are the two monsters of you thinking?” Wyatt bellowed between heavy breaths.

"I didn't know you would be that winded after only the first day of travel, Wyatt. The distance we still have to cover is quite great. This is not the time to start feeling tired. You've seen nothing yet," Crysta walked up to him and pulled the map from a bag that he was holding along with a full water bottle.

She then sat on the ground and started looking through, "Wyatt does bring up a worrisome point though. We are going to need water pretty soon."

"I hadn't thought much about that though I packed as much as I could carry," Lina replied, going through the bottles that were in her bag with a concerned expression.

"So did I. With how much we packed, we can only go today and half of tomorrow before we're in trouble. We'll need to find somewhere we can replenish our water before continuing the rest of the journey," Crysta said, paying close attention to the map.

Lina paused, observing her friend closely, a pang of shame going through her head, 'Water! That's also something to worry about! I really wasn't thinking... Although...' while the princess hadn't thought of some aspects of their journey, there were others on her mind.

A thought she never thought would ever cross her mind happened to form within it, 'Will Wyatt be okay?'

#### Chapter 415 A Shocking Realisation

Lina watched her friend study the map, wondering a number of things like, 'I wonder if we could make it to the Great Arena a day before my dorky brother? What if I offered to carry them some part of the way so we could really cut down on the time needed to get to the Great Arena...

Yeah, there is no way Crysta would accept that. Although, that would make this all easier. It's not like I'm still the same weak wolf they've come to know. My wolf has gotten a lot stronger.'

The girl let her thoughts wander to the past months and everything she'd done to get where she was now. 'You're starting to look a lot like her. Perhaps you would like to take a break,' Frank's voice filled her mind from random memory.

The most significant memory she had of her training. It wasn't just the beta alpha of the Sirius pack that had chosen to help her get stronger.

Surprisingly, the Mighty Warrior had also offered to help her in the name of sharpening his aim and staying young and fit. The training was brutal, but that's what pushed Lina even more... and now she suffered an even greater obstacle in her development.

...Breaking the wall keeping her from the well of power she felt was unreachable when she ran...

Bringing her mind back to the present, she noticed her friend trailing her finger over the map to a stream that was further off course than she thought they would need to go, "Do we really need to go that far to get the water?" the princess whined.

"Without the water, we probably won't be able to make it to the Great Arena in one piece. However, we cannot simply pick a water source that's far off the path we are trying to follow. Not to mention, we have to look out for wild animals.

Merely wandering about the wild carelessly could get us in the worst situation imaginable,” Crysta explained.

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“Crysta’s right... and with the place we are headed to, we can’t use the Great Sirius river to our advantage. It flows in a totally different direction,” Wyatt called from his spot on the ground. The alpha still didn’t look like he would be getting up just yet.

He wasn’t staring at the map but tried to show that he at least understood Crysta’s point, “You’re right about that,” Crysta mumbled, staring at the map for a little longer.

“There is a stream that comes down from the mountains. It’s a little off our path, but it offers us a natural compass to getting to and... through the mountains. If we could get to it, we could easily find our way to the mountains,” Crysta frowned when as she looked observed the path she’d pointed out.

“Okay, spill it. What’s the downside?” Lina asked.

“We are still quite the distance from making it to the mountains. At the pace we’ve been running, we could make it there tomorrow evening with minimum breaks and stopping to hunt for at most one hour,” the delta explained, “And without diverting for the stream, we won’t have much water left to take us through the rest of the journey.”

Lina struggled with her friend’s words, trying to think of a solution to their problem, “I’m not the best at directions, so if I was separated from the two of you, I would need the pack link to help me guide you back.”

“What are you suggesting? No, that would be too dangerous. We have to stay together at all times,” Crysta argued.

“I know what, Crysta, but I would like it if we actually made it to the mountains by tomorrow evening. If all goes smoothly, I could restock on water and be back to you guys within the span of one hour,” the girl argued.

“No, Lina. I don’t know if you can make that time. Running at your fastest is not the same as jogging. You blow through a lot more energy in a short amount of time and need even more time to recover. The inconsistency could render you slower than someone who was jogging in the end,” Crysta countered.

“You’re not listening to me, Crysta. It’s not the same with me. I can make it,” Lina tried. Logic didn’t seem to agree with her, however.

“I find it hard to believe as well, Lina. I know you’re fast, but you must expend so much energy every time you...”

“Ugh, never mind. How about this then? We can change our course so that we are closer to the stream by tomorrow evening. I’ll zip to the stream and make it back before you know it. Plain and simple,” Lina quickly voiced with a smug smile.

“What’s the difference between that plan and the one you’d come up with earlier?” Wyatt chuckled. Finally having recovered, he took a seat next to Crysta and joined in the discussion as well.

“Ugh, the two of you are impossible. Trust me a little on this. I can make it. I’ve been training for this, you know,” Lina pleaded with Crysta. To her, Wyatt’s decision was a moot point.

“Perhaps we are going about this the wrong way,” Wyatt piped up, “We don’t really know how fast Lina can run or for how long when she goes all out. Perhaps if she can tell us how much she knows she’s capable of, we could work with those numbers and come up with a reasonable plan?”

Crysta narrowed her eyes at the alpha before turning to Lina, “He’s right. How about it, Lina? Can that work?”

“Huh, but I wasn’t planning to go all-out on my way to the stream,” Lina suddenly realised the misconception they were having about her.

“You’re not making any sense, Lina. How can you make the trip in one hour then...” Crysta replied, turning back to the map. The scale on the map suggested the princess would have to travel at an insanely high speed if she was to make both going and return trips in under the span of one hour. Was Lina just assuming numbers?

The royal facepalmed... It all made sense to her now, “I can’t believe you thought I was jogging this whole time.”

There was a period of silence as it took Crysta and Wyatt a moment to make this connection... and when they did, they were so shocked that they inched away from her, “What the...?”

“I’m not even sweating from the three-hour runs we’ve been running... Felt like speed-walking really,” the girl continued.

Crysta’s entire perspective began to change, “Perhaps we were underestimating you a little.”

“That’s an understatement. Although, I would like it if you didn’t overestimate me instead,” the princess chuckled. She took a look at the angle of the sun in the sky and deduced their next course of action, “We can’t spend the whole time talking like this. We can cover more ground, hunt and make camp for the night.”

Wyatt opened his mouth to speak, but Crysta beat him to it.

“Yeah, you’re right. Let’s get going,” Crysta rolled the map and placed it back into the bag meant for Wyatt along with her bottle, “Look away, Wyatt.”

The man threw his hands in the air in disappointment before turning around with his hands on his hips, “We’re werewolves for crying out loud...” ‘And I thought we were stopping here for the night,’ a complaint he did not say out loud.

Ignoring him, the delta shed the robe she was wearing and shifted into her grey wolf. Lina stowed the robe in her bag and shifted as well. The trio was ready to resume the journey.

Without wasting any more time, Crysta led the party. Using the sun’s position as her compass, her knowledge of directions and her memory of the map she’d crammed into her mind, she had them dashing in the right direction at a pace that she dictated.

When they started their journey, the delta felt a pair of eyes on her, sending chills through her body. She could look around, but that didn't get her any information. Instead, she felt like the faster they left this place, the better. So she wasted no time in leaving.

However, through her peripheral vision, right before she breached the treeline and dived back into the forest, she saw something.

Perhaps it was her imagination again or perhaps she'd started to grow paranoid, but the delta could have sworn she'd caught glimpse of a large eagle perching on a tree at the edge of the clearing, watching them with a keen eye.

Chapter 416 [Bonus chapter] Virtues... or Rumours

Three hours later, the sun was setting fast over the horizon and Crysta was starting to hit her limit. Despite all the training they'd been through, none of them had ever run for a whole day with short rests in between.

The first virtue of the Trials was starting to rear its ugly head

...Endurance...

Keeping the plan that Crysta had drawn up was starting to become a test of endurance for the three wolves. This was one of the many rumoured virtues that surrounded the Trials. There were so many rumours surrounding these ancient games. Endurance, Perseverance, Strength, Leadership and many others were all engineered to make these Trials look harrowing and noble.

Some simply said the Trials were just another way to test if the Royals weren't always slacking and could actually back all the training they say they went through while others claimed they were watched over by the Moon Goddess and she was the one that would issue the tests that the Royals and their teams would endure on this harrowing trip.

There was no real way of proving any of these questions since there was no way to watch over the Royals as they went on this journey. What was known by all, however... was the Royals were never the same after the Trials. It was very rare for a Royal to go through the Trials and make it through the same way they'd begun.

And when this happened... the only explanation would be that the Royal had already been through a change harrowing enough to prepare them for this trip. In all the rumours, nothing suggested whether Lina, Wyatt or Crysta had what it took to get through this unscathed.

All Crysta could do... was prepare her best to protect the princess at all costs.

'A clearing... that's what I need now. Somewhere we can make camp for the night.' The grey wolf was just about to stop to announce the end of this run to search for the perfect place to camp when one of the wolves following behind her dropped with a loud thud.

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Crysta turned, panting heavily, only to witness an even more winded alpha lying on the ground, breathing hard. Wyatt had tripped on a large tree root. Having exhausted his reserves of energy, he'd

miscalculated and had not been able to muster enough strength to accurately leap over the frustrating protrusions.

Lina stopped beside him and nudged the black wolf with her nuzzle. The black wolf's side continued rising and falling with a frighteningly erratic rhythm. When Wyatt barely responded, Lina turned to the delta, "We should make camp here. I don't think he'll be able to continue much further."

The black wolf beneath Lina groaned in protest. Wyatt forced himself to roll onto his shaky feet in an attempt to stand. The black wolf slowly rose against his severe exhaustion on shaky legs, "I can keep running. You don't have to..." his words were cut short when he collapsed from the pressure, his legs going completely numb this time, "Ouch... Perhaps I can't."

"No, it's fine. I was about to stop us anyway. I'm pretty spent too," Crysta mentioned, "Shift back into your human form and rest for a while. We'll need to collect firewood and set up camp."

Wyatt complied, shrinking back into his human form. Embarrassment descended upon him, but he blocked out the mind link to keep the others from telling what was going on within his mind.

"How is a delta just as fit as I am?" he mumbled to himself.

"Probably because you don't train and she works her butt off to stay in the best shape her body can manage," Lina replied, "I'm still wondering how you beat Derrick. He trains much more than you do."

"He has weaknesses I can exploit. He's naive. It was not hard to defeat him once I knew that much," Wyatt shrugged.

"That's low, even for you," Crysta spat.

"Is it though? In the real world, someone like that would lose their life to the cunning of his enemies. No matter how much you train, if you can't evade a simple sucker punch, it's all for nothing," Wyatt reasoned.

"No, Derrick wouldn't have gone down because of a mere sucker punch. How did you really win?"

"You're right. He does not go down easy. It took way more than surprise attacks and crafty tricks. He's been practising and polishing his fighting technique.

When it comes down to it, he wasn't strong enough to defeat me just yet. I reckon that he will be able to do so in a few months if he keeps this up," the alpha shrugged.

Crysta sighed and stared at the sad excuse of an alpha lying on the ground. She wanted to argue that Derrick was much stronger than Wyatt, but she had no way of proving it either.

Her training was cruel and she could put the current alphas that were her age down without breaking a sweat, so judging their slight differences in skill was no easy task. In the end, she just had to take Wyatt's word for it. He was the most crafty out of the three alphas after all.

Lina's thoughts were moving in an entirely different direction. Wyatt made her skin crawl and that was enough for her to crave Derrick's company more than his.

Suddenly feeling like she wanted to put some distance between herself and the alpha, "I'm going to do the hunting. It will be much... easier that way," and with that, she was gone.

Crysta stood up, wrapping her robe around her tight before retrieving a bag from the weakened alpha. Rummaging through the rucksack, she found a spare set of clothes that she quickly donned.

"The two of you still hate me, don't you?" Wyatt's lowered voice filled the evening air.

Crysta froze at the bag's zipper. Had she heard the alpha right? Was Wyatt actually feeling bad about the cold shoulder Lina was giving him? 'No... that can't be it. This is Wyatt.' The delta shook the suspicions from her mind, reminding herself of the sneaky devil they had brought along on this trip and all his shifty ways.

"I don't know what you expect me to say to you. You made her life hell and have never made an effort to make it up to her. There isn't much to think about," Crysta sighed, "We better look for a clearing where we can set up the tents."

Wyatt opened his eyes and sat up as quickly as his recovering body could manage.

"Did you say... tents?"

Chapter 417 Tension in the Wild

"Did you say... tents?"

"Yes. We carried one each, so there should be a spare in Bree's backpack. Seeing as you didn't pack anything, you'll have to use that one. Don't touch her clothes though," Crysta replied nonchalantly while she began unpacking.

"Oh, okay," Wyatt hesitated a moment before checking through the bag he was left with.

The alpha was somewhat shocked at the level of preparedness and thought the girls had put into the Trials, "I might have... underestimated you."

Crysta paused, having taken the neatly bundled tent out of her bag, "You know... It's true Bree wouldn't have been able to keep up this pace but you're barely an improvement. I'm supposed to be the slowest and even then, I've tried pushing my limits so that Lina wouldn't feel like we're slowing her down, but..."

"You don't have to tell me. I know what this looks like. I'll make up for it. Just you wait...," the man replied, stretching his shoulders, "I have been meaning to ask. You haven't said anything about the Mountain pass. Why can't we use it? From what I saw on the map, going to the stream would set us farther from it."

"I had to make a tough choice with that one. We won't be able to make it through the mountain pass. I can't find any source of water on the other side of the Sirius Mountain, so the stream is our only hope of restocking our water supply," the delta explained.

"Okay... Well, I hope the Boss Lady agrees with you on that one. Crossing the mountain from that angle alone might wear down the water you're after..."

Crysta's eyebrows twitched with frustration, but she forced down her emotions. One of them had to be their sense of reason in this situation. Losing sight of their goal would only be a recipe for disaster. Then again, Wyatt's infuriating arguments weren't without reason, "We need to get to that stream. We'll solve any other issues when we get to the mountains."

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"Sounds to me like you have more than drinking water in mind," Wyatt chuckled.

"A bath sounds nice right about now," the girl replied, finally finding a place where the trees parted wide enough for them to set up their tents.

"Considering your condition, I'll set up the tents instead. Why don't you try collecting firewood, dry grass or leaves instead? Anything that can catch fire," the delta ordered.

Wyatt froze with his hand on the rubber fabric of the tent he was just about to put up. His blood went cold and his muscles went stiff immediately. Something was wrong with all this.

He racked his brain quickly for a reason why he was reacting to what had just happened... His wolf pointed it out almost immediately. The delta had just ordered him to do something... A delta ordering an alpha.

Normally, he would brush this off and just do as she'd said, but this was different. He didn't have a choice... The gentle throbbing of a headache at any thought of resistance made that dangerously clear.

Crysta's order was binding. She might have not intended it, as her tone suggested, but something was odd about it.

"Very well," the alpha replied before leaving to collect firewood on his own.

Crysta was done with two tents when a white wolf appeared along with the rustle of leaves and a cooling breeze of wind. The wind carried with it the scent of blood... and something else... Lina's scent, which Crysta had only started to recognize recently. It reminded her of lavender.

In the white wolf's bloodied mouth was a petite doe that it dragged with barely an effort. Crysta cast a wide-eyed glance at her friend, "Couldn't you find something like a rabbit or a hare?"

The white wolf dropped the carcass and shifted back into her human form, "I might have... let loose a little while I was in the forest."

The royal rushed to her backpack and retrieved a knife before starting to skin the deer. Crysta couldn't help but notice Lina had not yet shown any signs of exhaustion since their trip had started.

It would be fine to at least make some panting sounds, right? No, the princess hadn't even done that. Each time they'd stopped to rest, Lina had merely sat down and waited for them to catch their breath, sometimes clawing at a tree root drawing signs and exhibiting signs of utter boredom, "Are we slowing you down, Lina?"

The princess was silent for a moment before answering, her knife never slowing in the swift experienced motions between the doe's hide and flesh.



“No, not really. If I was half as good at navigating as you are, maybe... but then there is nighttime. If I was alone, I couldn’t possibly go to sleep comfortably. There are so many dangers the wilderness has to offer.

I’m not as good at coming up with these strategies either. So, I would not be any good at coming up with efficient plans in case I was faced with a problem.

At first, it felt like I could just go through the Trials with speed alone, but the Great Arena is far. I know I’m fast, but I don’t know if I can make that trip. I’ve never been out in the wilderness on my own. There is a lot I don’t know about surviving a journey through the wild. So, to answer your questions... No, you’re not slowing me down.”

Crysta was starting on the third tent when she stared at Lina skinning away with her sharp knife. She made it look so easy, “You’re good with a knife.”

Lina chuckled, “If I didn’t know how to do this, Drake would never let me be. It’s a family tradition to know how to skin a deer as well as field dressing. You know how Royals are with venison...”

“You’re back already?” a male voice interrupted them.

“Yes, I am. Someone’s looking better. How are you doing? You looked like you were on death’s door,” Lina asked. The genuine concern in her voice stunned the alpha.

“I’ll be fine. It’s nothing a werewolf of my calibre can’t handle. Don’t underestimate me,” Wyatt replied.

“Of course, I’m sorry I doubted you,” Lina had just finished skinning the deer and was about to start field dressing when he offered to help. The princess spun the knife in her hand, pointing the handle to the alpha to take, “A hand?”

“Sure,” Wyatt walked over to Lina and took the knife from her, “You can get started on the fire. I’m all over this.”

Lina regarded him for a moment before shrugging, “Very well, you handle that. Don’t push yourself too much though. I wouldn’t want you to be dead weight.”

‘Ah, that’s why she sounded so concerned. Figures,’ he thought to himself, smashing all the delusions that had started to crop up within his mind.

Lina started searching through their bags once more in search of something to light the fire. One minute turned to three and then five... ten, “Crysta, did you pack matches?” Lina asked out loud, slightly irritated. This irritation was not lost on the mind link. The other two wolves both sensed it... clear as day.

Crysta paused with the third tent and thought out loud, “I don’t...”

“Crysta!” Lina squealed, her mouth hanging open in disbelief.

“You were rushing me when I tried double-checking for anything we’d missed. I didn’t have the time to think about it,” Crysta tried reasoning, but could feel her words hitting deaf ears.

Lina stood and began pacing, trying to regain a calm frame of mind. Her previous worries used this moment of weakness to resurface. She could already imagine her brother had made good use of his

headstart and without a delta to hold him back, he was probably much further than they were at the time.

“Lina, don’t blame Crysta for...” Wyatt stepped between the two girls, but Lina was paying no attention to the alpha.

“I’m going for a run. I need to think,” the girl dismissed the man’s suggestion before he was even done speaking. Crysta dropped to her knees, sighing dejectedly.

“Couple’s therapy is a thing these days,” Wyatt broke the silence after several minutes. He was done with field dressing and was starting to set up the fireplace, removing any sticks and grass scattered about the clearing.

“I think that would help you and your buddy more than it would Lina and I,” Crysta retorted.

The alpha grunted in response to the sudden jab, “I lost my friend that day. I’m now convinced there might be no way of fixing that,” Wyatt sighed.

“Why did you choose to come with us, Wyatt? I can’t stand you already. You made a convincing argument back then, but all you’ve done so far is play the part of a useful pack mule,” Crysta barked, getting back to setting the third tent.

Wyatt’s face suddenly contorted in a look of anger, “Okay, that’s it. I get that you need somewhere to direct your frustration, but now you’re crossing a line and...” Crysta turned to face the alpha...

It was true that she was angry. Her frustrations had been gathering ever since she noticed the princess was simply caving to her arguments. Crysta wanted a way into Lina’s mind. No matter what Lina said, Crysta felt if only a little unsure of her true emotions... and it was eating at her...

Their little showdown of anger, however, was interrupted as a loud scream tore through the mind link. It was coming from Lina. The two wolves stopped their argument and shifted, abandoning their camp in pursuit of the royal.

Sensing her distress through the mind link, they could tell her location and quickly made it through the forest heading for the girl’s position. It was a short while before they’d made it to her... and when they did, both of them skidded to a sudden halt, a sense of fear gripping every fibre of their werewolf beings.

It was only the first day of the Trials and they’d faced the obstacle of Endurance. An obstacle that proved harder on the two escorts more than the princess... Now, however, there was something else facing them.

Standing in a defensive position was a white wolf, not daring to move a muscle at the sight before her. Lina wouldn’t take her eyes off the being that had her in this frightening stalemate. Her sapphire orbs were locked in a dangerous tangle with a pair of catlike eyes.

Eyes that belonged to a jaguar.

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Chapter 418 Watching Over Me

The trio stared at the jaguar's catlike eyes, each of them barely moving an inch caught in a stalemate where none of them did a thing. When they arrived, the Jaguar had taken on a defensive position allowing a view of the three wolves.

Even then, however, the cat's claws hadn't drawn its claws yet which struck the wolves as odd. Nevertheless, this was a jaguar. The creature itself was far from its natural habitat, to begin with.

If it hadn't been for the wilderness classes that Lina had taken in preparation for the Trials, she wouldn't have known what kind of animal faced her. But that didn't explain their sudden run-in with the big cat.

As far as she knew, jaguars didn't live in this part of the empire and yet, there it was, clear as day. Blood rushed through her system twice as fast as it normally did, pumping adrenaline into her system and slowing everything around her.

Lina noticed the alpha's brows knit and his muscles tense up suddenly. To her, the man was moving in slow motion, but Lina could tell his intentions from the slight body movements, "Don't challenge him."

The cat itself showed no fear towards the three wolves. Even when outnumbered, the jaguar looked relaxed. Lina wasn't so sure they could take on the creature even with their numbers. The fabled power of the jaguar was almost unimaginable.

From what Lina had learnt from Alpha Jackson, animals rarely attacked without provocation. Any harm that came to the jaguar was bound to be their fault.

Lina had called on her companions through the mind link when she found the jaguar and they'd come to her aid only to find her and the big cat staring each other down.

"What then?" Wyatt asked through the mind link, feeling the ground under his claws as though getting ready for anything to happen.

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"Don't move a muscle. I don't sense any hostility coming from him. Perhaps, he'll just choose to walk away," Lina replied through the mind link.

Being werewolves of significant rank, they weren't smaller than the jaguar, but the jaguar wasn't weak either. Among the creatures of the wild, it stood among the strongest of apex predators. It was agile and stronger than most creatures out there, perhaps the strongest. And it would be foolish for a werewolf to pick a fight with it.

"What do you mean, 'wait'? It's a jaguar, Lina. We should be running or attacking. This thing will..."

"Stay quiet," Lina barked through the mind link. The alpha ground his teeth in frustration but adhered to the princess's orders.

It seemed the jaguar held the gaze of one wolf, in particular, Lina while leaving the rest in peripheral vision. Perhaps it had recognised the alpha of this group or it simply kept its eyes on the first wolf to come across it.

The air was so tense that none of them could think of something other than their survival... which was why Crysta and Wyatt were both shocked when the Royal White wolf standing between them took a step forward and bowed to the black jaguar, completely lowering her guard in the process.

"Lina..." Crysta internally screamed, but the girl completely ignored her. 'Now what? That's reckless...' her thoughts thundered. Her frustrations were soon snuffed out by an unexpected turn of events.

To their surprise, the big cat relaxed and dipped its head, mirroring the princess's gesture before prancing away from them, gone from sight... as though the jaguar had never existed. Lina rose up and stared at the place the jaguar had been in only moments prior.

A strange excitement as well as a tinge of longing filled her. A wave of nostalgia washed over the princess. Savouring the joyous emotion, the girl turned back and started jogging back in the direction of the camp, "Crysta, let's try lighting the bonfire without a match."

Crysta looked between the empty void of black where the jaguar had been and the alpha beside her, trying to understand what had just happened. When it was clear Wyatt was not going to offer her an opinion, she also turned toward their camp.

There was a change in the mind link too. Lina was in high spirits now, compared to the rage that had filled her when she'd left them. 'You'd think facing a jaguar would leave someone terrified,' Crysta thought to herself. When the two wolves reached the camp, they found Lina seated cross-legged by the fire pit blowing a small ember over dry grass.

It was only moments before the small ember erupted into a decent flame. The princess tended to the flame, humming to a familiar tune until it was a decent campfire. "Help me cut up the meat. We could roast it over the fire. I at least remember seeing salt in your bag. We should be able to eat something nice tonight," Lina skipped over the bag that belonged to Crysta and started ruffling through it in search of a pack of salt.

The delta hummed in reply and walked up to the skinned deer. With Wyatt's help, the two got to work preparing their supper. Lina went about setting up the fire for roasting the meat.

She placed two large flat-topped stones on two sides of the fire. Narrow sticks were set on one of the stones and the princess was sharpening each of them with a spare knife she found in Crysta's bag... 'Meat skewers,' Crysta thought when she caught on to the princess's idea.

The process moved rather quickly and before they knew it, Lina, with a little help from Wyatt, had prepared a sumptuous meal of roasted meat. The peaceful smile Lina carried never once faltered, "Someone's in a good mood," Crysta observed when they were done with their meal.

Lina was quiet for a moment before replying, "Yeah... I haven't felt my sister's presence in nearly two years." In her mind, 'At least I know she's watching over me...' the princess unconsciously looked up at the moon high in the sky, 'Just watch me, sister. I've come so far...'

#### Chapter 419 Lina's Campfire Story

"I don't understand," Crysta frowned. The delta had heard something concerning the lost princess and animals, but it didn't relate to what her friend was saying to her. Everyone knew Katie was capable of

communicating with animals and had even used this ability to save hundreds of werewolves in the Lycaon empire right before she disappeared.

But that didn't relate to what Lina was saying. Katie wasn't with them... How then could the princess feel her sister's presence?

"Back when we were in the reserve, I was trying to get back to the hotel," Wyatt ground his teeth at the mention of the reserve, "As you now know, I'm not the best in telling directions, so I got terribly lost.

I got so lost that I entered a cave, seeking shelter. I didn't know where to go and even the mind link failed me. I had gone too far from the hotel that I couldn't call out for help. Running in any direction could have even gotten me further. I was scared," despite the sadness in the story, Lina told it with a smile on her face, "It was only after I had settled into the cave that I realised there was a young bear cub sleeping within it.

I simply needed to walk out before the mother came back and everything would be alright. I knew I was faster than a bear, but when I turned to leave, the beast was already standing there, blocking my way and she was furious. I was done for... With me between the bear and its cub, my situation had moved from bad to downright rotten," Lina chuckled.

"When did that happen?" Wyatt asked. His voice was followed by a clicking sound. The alpha was holding a lighter up to one end of a cigar that no one had noticed him carrying. After lighting the cigar, he blew up a plume of smoke from his mouth and returned his attention to the princess.

Lina stared at him wide-eyed as he stowed the lighter he'd been carrying in his pocket. 'The nerve on this guy...' however, her mood was far too happy to let the outrageous person before her ruin it, "I never did talk about that incident in detail, but that time, someone intervened before mama bear could turn me into a royal dish for the vultures.

Katie came to my rescue. A brilliant white wolf that was even larger than the bear that wanted to kill me. The bear was not shaken by her presence but didn't attack either. Katie bowed to the bear that day, just like I did earlier and the bear allowed her to take me out of the cave.

That was the time I found out that she could talk to animals and also the time I learnt that animals are not mindless either.

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That jaguar we saw didn't seem to fear me when I ran into it. It simply stared at me like I was another creature it had already been aware of. I couldn't help but remember what my sister did back then. I haven't felt this close to Katie since she left," Lina finished her explanation and silence filled the night, only interrupted by the crackling fire they'd made.

Crysta was speechless from hearing the riveting tale of the Rogue Killer. Many stories had started to circle through the palace on the heroic acts of the Rogue Killer, making her more popular now that she was gone.

Crysta still remembered the time she'd managed to royally anger Katie. Perhaps that's why she could never completely feel comfortable with the Lost princess. Katie had downed a tree as a result of missing

her target. If it hadn't been for Cole pulling her out of the way at the last moment, Crysta wasn't sure if she would still be alive to this day.

Katie was impulsive and never cared about what others thought about her. If anything rubbed her the wrong way, the Lost princess approached it directly and in some ways, she acted as though no one was above her... and at the same time acted as though no one was below her either, "She would have made the perfect Luna for the Lycaon empire," the words involuntarily left Crysta's lips while she was thinking.

"Will... Crysta. She 'will' make the perfect Luna," Lina cooed excitedly before launching into another tale of her sister. As it so happened, more than Crysta had ever realised, Lina loved her sister dearly and idolised her so much. So much that the past two years suddenly made all the sense in the world.

A week after Katie had vanished, Lina approached Beta Alpha Jackson and asked him to train her. It wasn't long before the Mighty Warrior Frank Silver started training her as well.

The princess absorbed their lessons incredibly fast, quickly learning different ways of fighting and utilising her abilities. Her incredible agility turned out to be an incredible strength of hers and she was soon assigned another hunter to teach her how to utilise this ability of hers.

As the months blew by, the resemblance between the two princesses began to become clearer. It was almost like Lina was going through a transformation and she was looking more like Katie as the days turned to weeks and weeks turned to months.

Honour, trying to train along with her, was growing more beautiful as well as more powerful. Crysta could only keep up as much as her body allowed her to. She'd learnt a lot from the hunter, but not as much or as fast as her Lina was capable.

The limitations of a delta were soon made clear to her. She didn't have the spark of energy that Lina had from her lineage and was bound to watch her friend grow far stronger than her. 'That's the royal I was looking for back then... Who knew you were this much of a late bloomer?' the thought brought her chuckles.

"I'll take the first watch," Wyatt offered when it started to get late, "Sleep well, ladies."

"No, you need your rest, Wyatt. You were the most exhausted out of all of us. I don't want you to slow us down tomorrow, so sleep soundly. Crysta and I will handle the night watch."

With that order and a scoff from the alpha, Wyatt put out his cigar and retired to his tent, "Aren't you being too harsh on him?" Crysta asked Lina.

Lina sighed and eyed the closed flap of the alpha's tent in thought, "Perhaps you're right, but... he hasn't yet given me a reason not to be either."

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In another part of the woods, a trio of shady wolves dashed through the woods, following a map they'd come to know like the back of their palms. After spending time in the woods, it only stood to reason that they knew the way to the Great Arena and knew all the best places to restock supplies on their way there.

Traversing the wild was nothing but child's play to these three and they travelled several leagues in a short span of time, stopping either to hunt or drink water. Without the power to shift with their bags, they tied their packs to the strongest of them and made sure to use water sources within the forest that were known only to them. Streams that didn't appear on maps, but were known to those that frequented this path.

This reduced the number of times they needed to actually use their own water and they barely veered off course in search of water. They made it to the mountains in a shorter time than was normally possible, finally spotting the creature they were in pursuit of.

The shifty-eyed leader of this trio smirked at the sight of their target, suddenly filled with fiendish malevolence.

Cloaked in a white fur coat with a black patch on his back and three black-soled paws, Drake was running along the steep slopes of the mountain. The largest part of the mountain was stone and very steep that the prince could not find a point to cross over it.

The ranges also stretched far in both directions towering high, challenging the skies and intimidating any and all that approached them, blocking passage to the other side. Drake, however, didn't seem shaken by the possibility of not being able to cross the mountains, 'He must know of the mountain pass,' Victor thought to himself, watching the prince running along the steep mountain slope in search of some way to go through.

The rogues stopped chasing after him and came to a stop when their shifty-eyed leader did. The two that were following him stopped rushing and turned to look at him, "What is the problem?" one asked, having shifted back into his human form.

Victor did the same, disregarding the lack of clothes as was the norm among the rogues, "He's going in the opposite direction of the Mountain Pass. He probably knows of its existence and has started looking for it, but since he doesn't make this trip a lot, he's a little lost.

He doesn't know that yet, however... and we can use that to our advantage. We can make it through the pass before he finds it and be waiting for him on the other side. He'll be exhausted by then."

The rogues were thinking for a bit before allowing evil smirks to grace their faces, "I like the way you think." With that, the scheming began. It wasn't long before they started in the direction opposite to that of the prince.

'Vengeance... I can almost taste it,' Victor mused at his dark fantasies. Delusions of seeing the prince battered and at death's door. It was almost too good to be true.

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## Chapter 420 The Challenge of Calamity

Drake Sirius had made quick progress and made it to the mountains early the next morning. It was faster than the average pace and he'd considered taking it easy on his sister, but something kept him from doing so. He'd seen the princess during her training for the past several months. Lina wasn't the same 'Little Sister' he was used to coddling.

The Great Sirius mountains loomed over him, challenging him to take a step closer. The great slopes were almost too steep to climb and barren with no sign of life.

Shifting back into his human form, Drake retrieved the map he was carrying and began studying it. He was sure the Mountain pass was somewhere among the ranges, but without knowing which part of the mountains he'd escaped the forest from, he couldn't know which direction to find it.

The last time he'd made this trip had been four years ago, during the last Royal games... 'I can't believe that trip alone was not enough for me to learn the layout of these mountains,' he cursed. Taking in a deep breath, the prince relaxed. It was important to keep a levelled head when in a situation as harrowing as the Trials.

Drake felt watchful eyes at his back, but shook off the feeling, 'The creatures of the wild are really active today,' he thought to himself, rolling the map and placing it back in his bag before shifting into his large white and black wolf.

'I'll try my right first and if I go a long way without finding the pass, I'll know it's a dead end. Besides, after running for a bit, I should be able to make out the shape of the ranges and match it with the shapes on the map. That will give me a better idea of which direction the Mountain pass is located,' he thought to himself before dashing along the mountain slope.

While running, thoughts assaulted the prince's mind. Thoughts he kept to himself... thoughts that not even his family knew about. And when they got too heavy, he would shake them off and focus on the positive side to all this... The Trials and the Royal games were a competition that was meant to bring unity and camaraderie between the two empires.

It was an event of peace and celebration... and he was part of the entertainment. 'It would not be princely of me to bore the audience to death, now would it?' he encouraged himself. 'Just imagine I reached the Great Arena first and with no help whatsoever... What spells great King other than... Oh right, I stepped down... Well, I'm still a prince of the Sirius Empire.'

Drake was running for an hour before he had got a decent idea of the traceable shape to look for on the map. The prince stopped running, no longer feeling the eyes that were following him and retrieved his map.

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His eyes hovered over the map for a moment before he found a side of the mountains identical to the side he'd been running on. Staring at the map in disbelief, "Ugh, come on..." the prince yelled in frustration. Drake was now certain he'd been running in the wrong direction this entire time. The sun was rapidly climbing high in the sky and signalling how late the prince really was and sending shivers down his spine.

"Knowing how fast that devil is, she'll be able to make it here and screw up my headstart no problem, but then again, there is the fact that she's awful at telling directions," the man thought to himself before taking a few swigs of water from his tin can.

"I won't be out of water soon, so I should be fine with the trip through the mountains. I have to make it through them fast if I'm to hunt for something. Mountain creatures aren't exactly delectable," he spoke



out loud, shuddering at the thought of having to survive on the creatures that lived within the barren ranges.

'I'm talking to myself again...' a thought crossed his mind.

'Have you ever experienced what it's like to be cut off from the pack link? Do you know the pain a wolf goes through when this happens?' another thought rumbled past his mind.

The prince looked up at the towering ranges, "Yeah, I used to know what that felt like... But now... Well, I'll have my answers soon enough. That's if I can gather enough courage," he spoke to himself once more.

Unlike the rest of the werewolf community, this odd Royal seemed to be operating fine without the pack link, despite his minimal questionable tendencies... 'After all, I'm not alone. I can talk to the wind... and the trees, right?'

Tendencies like that...

When Drake was done refreshing himself, he changed course and started the run to the mountain pass. It was an hour and a half by the time he made it to the large opening that tore through the mountain pass like a knife had sliced through the ranges.

The wind whistled loudly through the mountains notifying everyone close enough to hear of the break in the towering mountain's natural defence. The royal stood at the entrance to the gully that went straight through the mountains. The black hairs atop his white coat stood up on high alert... something was wrong, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it.

His nose picked up nothing and neither did his ears. But he couldn't shake the feeling, 'I wonder if my Lost Warrior Sister used to feel like this every time her enemies were close by,' he thought to himself.

Two steep cliffs shot up on both sides of the path, providing one option only, straight through or not at all. It was like a god had taken a hot knife through the mountain like butter. The prince took a hesitant step through and entered the path only to have his nerves spike.

For some reason, he could feel the eyes that had been watching him before, but this time with more intensity... more ferocity... He turned his eyes to the woods behind him, but there was nothing to confirm.

That large black and white wolf stepped into the pass and started jogging through it, trying to shake the heavy feeling of danger that descended upon him.

If he had simply looked up and paid attention to the top of the mountain, he would have noticed what was indeed watching him, but he had no idea of that either.

Shaking the fears that plagued him, the prince struck the ground with more ferocity, 'The sooner I'm out of these mountains, the sooner I can do away with these jitters,' he thought to himself, shooting through the mountain pass with all the energy that his royal paws could muster.

The hard stone floor of the pass hurt his paws, but that was nothing in comparison to the feeling of danger that kept following him. At some point, he felt as though a colossal bird of prey was trying to scoop him up from the ground, but one look at the sky confirmed that it wasn't the case.

'Come on, Drake. Get a grip. There is nothing watching you. You're probably afraid of how this mountain looks like it could swallow you at any... Drake, that's not helping...'

Tendencies like these indeed...

When he was about to relax, he heard a deafening cracking sound from the top of the cliffs. The prince's eyes darted above him and that's when he saw it, cracks riddling the steep walls of the mountain pass above him. He looked ahead of him... miles of the path stretched out ahead of him with the exit nowhere near and the cracks riddling the cliffs around him were travelling faster than he could run.

The prince skidded to a stop and watched the cracks continue to spread to the entire length of the steep escarpments. Suddenly his fears flashed before him. The cliffs weren't going to hold... 'Why now... why, after centuries of existence would the Mountain pass collapse now?'

The black and white wolf growled at the deafening mountain that shrieked back in challenge, threatening to cave in on him. Then everything went quiet all at once. The prince stood still at the centre of the mountain pass... The cracks had spread along the steep escarpments and rendered the rest of his path... dangerous.

It was almost like his arrival had triggered this reaction... The feeling of eyes watching him returned. Something was definitely watching him... and now that he had stopped moving forward, the mountain had stopped crumbling as well. 'Something very wrong here...' he thought to himself, narrowing his eyes at the sides of the Mountain Pass.

The white wolf took one step back... and in response to that minuscule action, a few pebbles and sand leaked out of the cracks and fell to the ground with clacking sounds.

The mountain groaned loudly... and all hell broke loose.