



368 Through The Maze

Hades 1

We stepped through.

And the world shifted again.

Gone were the blood-streaked halls and the writhing chaos of monsters. This was... organized.

Buzzing with activity.

Structured like a hive—but colder.

Clinical.

Rows of bright overhead panels cast sterile light down long corridors lined with reinforced glass. Behind each glass wall, I saw labs—some filled with machines I couldn't name, others housing tanks of glowing liquid, and others still... worse. Containment units. Cryo-pods. Silver-plated restraints bolted into walls.

But what truly caught my eye were the people.

Dozens of them.



Some walked briskly in pressed uniforms, marked with a strange, curved M-crest embroidered above their heart. Others—armed guards—stood posted at intersections, holding advanced rifles unlike anything Obsidian had issued. Then there were the scientists: lab coats, goggles, datapads glowing blue in their palms. They moved in choreographed indifference. Focused. Efficient.

Not a single one of them looked panicked.

They knew.

They knew what was above. They knew what we fought through. And they stayed here anyway.

"This isn't a vault," Cain muttered beside me. "It's a fortress."

"Or a bunker," I said grimly, "for monsters in human skin."

We ducked behind a wide support beam as two guards passed. Their boots thudded in perfect sync. Neither spoke.

Cain scowled. "We need to blend in or we're dead before we find Kael."



I glanced down at myself—still half-shifted, bloodstained, glowing faintly at the edges with silver energy. Not exactly subtle.

Cain grinned, pulling something from a compartment on his belt. "Lucky for you... I plan ahead."

He held up a small, matte-black canister etched with rogue code.

"Pulse-gas?" I asked, recognizing the design.

"Modified version," he said. "Short-range neuro-disruptor. Drops anyone with a heartbeat. They'll wake up with migraines, but no memory."

He didn't wait for approval.

Cain yanked the pin, then rolled the canister forward.

It clicked once.

Twice.

Then hissed.

A cloud of translucent vapor surged out, crawling low across the floor like a living mist. Within seconds, the effect was visible—guards



slumped mid-stride, scientists fell against their terminals, one by one collapsing like dominoes. No screams. No alarms. Just silence.

Cain motioned. "Quick. Uniforms."

We moved.

I tore a coat from one of the taller men, ignoring the weight of the body as I rolled it aside. Cain did the same, tossing me a rifle and slipping into his own stolen gear like second skin. The rogue in him was always prepared for subterfuge. It was in his blood.

I fastened the coat, adjusted the collar to hide my throat, and let the silver light in my skin die down.

The world felt wrong in here.

Tighter.

Sharper.

Like the air itself had expectations.

Cain crouched beside a fallen soldier and rifled through his pockets, pulling out a sleek identification card with a glowing circuit at its



core. "These guys don't use keypads," he muttered. "Biometric-encoded cards. Smart. Fast. Makes brute-forcing a bitch."

He tossed one to me.

I caught it and held it up to the wall scanner near the corridor intersection.

It pulsed red.

"ACCESS DENIED," the panel snapped in a sterile, synthetic voice.

Cain frowned. "Wrong rank."

I growled and moved to another body—this one wore a captain's badge stitched in matte thread across his chestplate. I yanked his ID and tried again.

This time the scanner blinked green.

"ACCESS GRANTED. AUTHORIZED LEVEL: BETA-VAULT OPERATIVE."

A soft hiss signaled the corridor doors unlocking ahead.

Cain whistled low. "That's more like it."



We gathered five cards total—two captain-level, three technician class. It was enough for a recon unit. Barely. But our numbers had thinned. Of the dozen that made it in, only seven stood now, counting Cain and me.

Too many for stealth.

Too few for war.

I scanned the others. Bloodied. Breathing heavy. Still standing—but not invincible.

"We split," I said.

They all turned toward me, instantly attentive. Warriors trained to follow. Even the rogues, now.

"We can't move as one unit—not in a place this monitored. The more of us there are, the more attention we draw. This—" I held up the ID card, "—gets you through doors. Not all of them. But enough. If you hit a redlock, double back and regroup. Don't get fancy."

Cain folded his arms. "You got a plan or just winging it?"

"I always have a plan," I said. "Even if it's chaos."



I pointed at two of the younger Lycans, both from Cain's side. "You—stay here. Strip the bodies. Keep watch. Loop the cameras if you can find a control port. If they wake up early, gas them again or kill them quietly."

The taller one nodded, already moving to a nearby console.

I turned to the rest. "Cain and I are heading deeper. The corridor with the bio-seal—Kael's trail leads that way. If we're not back in twenty, assume fallback protocol."

"And the fallback is?" one rogue asked, squinting.

"Blow the entrance," Cain said with a grin. "Seal this place like a tomb."

I didn't smile.

I just checked my stolen rifle, then stepped forward.

Because the ease of the first part had been a lie. An illusion of control.

This place—the deeper we went, the more I could feel it—it wasn't just a lab or a vault.



It was alive.

And it was waiting.

Waiting for something to test me.

Or break me.

And I wasn't sure yet which it preferred.

Cain clapped one of his men on the shoulder.

"Watch your backs. No heroics. If the vault starts closing behind us—cut the lights and run." 1

Run where was the question but there was no answer.

"Yes, sir."

Cain stepped in beside me, both of us blending in like shadows wrapped in the skins of our enemies.

We stepped into the next level of the maze—
—and became ghosts in borrowed skin.

The corridor was denser here. Busier. Guards crossed paths with med-techs, scientists with black badges muttered to sleek-voiced AIs, and armored carts rolled by, carrying sealed crates





marked with biological hazard symbols and serial codes I didn't recognize.

We moved through them like current through water. No one looked too hard. No one questioned.

That was the danger.

Because they weren't afraid.

Because they believed we belonged.

Cain drifted beside me, eyes scanning everything while his body stayed loose, confident. A true rogue's stride. I mirrored him—stern, silent, calculating.

We split the team.

The others peeled away without a word, each moving into parallel wings of the compound under the guise of assigned patrols or maintenance. No one dared look twice. I spoke low under my breath, using the comm device looped into my collar.

"Six minutes. You see anything off-grid—mark it. We regroup after the next vault bend."

Crackling affirmations came through. I didn't wait to reply.

Cain motioned to a hall branching eastward. "I'll take this wing. You follow the blood."

I nodded, then turned—

—only to be intercepted by a uniformed man who stopped short in front of me.

He looked about thirty. Tired. Sweating beneath his helmet. The veins around his eyes twitched.

"Shit—sorry, didn't see you," he muttered, stepping closer. "Are you my relief?"

I gave a stiff nod, adjusting the rifle on my shoulder.

His entire body sagged with relief.

"Thank the Void. I've been standing post for two cycles. My head's spinning. And with what they're about to do to that thing down in Chamber Theta..." He shook his head. "I'd rather be halfway to nowhere before they start gouging the hybrid's eyes out."

He gave a tired chuckle, meant to be a joke.



It landed like lead.

"Anyway," he added, taking a step back, "you didn't hear it from me—but it's gonna get ugly."

My skin prickled, eye twitching but I said nothing.

Just nodded again.

And walked past him.

Cain slid into step beside me a beat later, whispering, "Gouging whose eyes out?"

"Kael's," I said, jaw tight. 1

Cain's face hardened, his hand twitching toward the knife at his thigh.

"We don't have time," I murmured. "They're preparing him for extraction. They think he has data—memories, codes. They're going to torture it out."

"And they're too calm for this to be a first time."

We passed another checkpoint. A scanner blinked green at my card. The door slid open without hesitation.



More halls.

More glass.

And somewhere deeper...

A scream was going to break loose.

I could feel it pulsing in my chest—

That fury.

That heat.

That need to move, to strike, to rip the door off its hinges and drag Kael out before they even touched him.

I took one step toward the hall marked
CHAMBER THETA when—

"Hey!"

The voice cracked like a whip across the corridor.

Cain and I froze.

A woman in a sleek grey uniform approached, tablet in hand, her eyes narrowed behind biometric lenses. She wasn't armed, but her



presence alone had weight—too confident to be a low-level tech. She must've been in charge of this section.

"What are you doing here?" she snapped, scanning our uniforms. "That card doesn't authorize live extraction sectors—Theta's under direct bioethics lockdown. Who gave you clearance?"

My jaw tightened. I didn't speak.

Cain stepped forward with smooth irritation, his expression instantly morphing into bureaucratic disdain, the kind that spoke fluently in rank and red tape.

"Captain Rynn, Sector Three," he said sharply, gesturing to his ID without actually letting her read it. "Our clearance was processed under Directive V-12 for cross-unit extraction synchronization. Theta holds a flagged hybrid with embedded Cortex fragments—we're here to verify if the data signature matches the breach from Vault Echo."

She blinked. "There's no mention of V-12 in this morning's queue."



Cain scoffed. "Because it wasn't scheduled. It was triggered—retroactively—after the AI sweep caught anomaly markers in the fragment residue. It's above your level. We're not here to argue with local routing. We're here to prevent another containment breach."

The woman hesitated, uncertainty blooming like a bruise across her face.

Cain pressed harder. "If you'd like to delay the scan and risk liability when the biohazard protocol fails, I'll happily mark your name in the incident log. But if you want to stay clear of a Class-5 tribunal, you'll let us pass."

The silence that followed stretched—

Then snapped.

She stepped aside, muttering, "Fine. Just don't touch anything without scanning first."

Cain gave her a curt nod and strode forward like he owned the compound.

I followed, blood still burning beneath my stolen uniform.

Once we were past the bend, I exhaled sharply.

"That was reckless."

Cain didn't look at me. "That wasn't reckless. That was routine. You think these people have loyalty? No. They have paperwork. Threaten to complicate it, and they fold."

"I could've handled it."

"You could've eaten her," Cain muttered. "I saw your hands. They were already shifting."

I didn't deny it.

Because he was right.

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