

373 The Layout

Hades 1

Cain moved behind the Gamma, slipping a gloved hand around his neck like a leash of iron.

"No tricks," he warned. "Or I start plucking teeth."

The Gamma gave a stiff nod, sweat glistening beneath his helmet, and began walking—slow, halting steps that echoed off the steel floor. I stayed close, sidearm pressed to his back. Every operative in the room parted like shadow before fire, no one daring to block our path.

"Secure the chamber," I ordered flatly to Cain's team. "All data ports. All exits. No alerts, no witnesses."

They moved instantly.

One sealed the room's command console with a field clamp, wrenching a pulse disruptor into place. Another dragged the unconscious scientist into a containment pod and hard-locked it. The last pulled a canister from her belt and cracked the seal—releasing a faint

vapor that curled along the vents.

EMP neutralizer.

The entire lab's surveillance would short before the next camera sweep.

"Seventy seconds before they notice," Cain muttered beside me. "We move now, or we go loud."

"No," I growled. "We finish this clean."

As we entered the corridor, I grabbed the Gamma by the back of his armor and slammed him face-first into the scanner pad beside the door. The machine chirped—a whirl of unlocking hydraulics—and the reinforced gate hissed open.

I didn't let him catch his breath.

Cain hauled him upright again, and we pushed deeper into the north sublevel. The air turned colder, damper. Lights flickered overhead, and the hum of machinery grew louder with each step. My body itched to shed the last remnants of control. My wolf was close—so close I could feel his breath at the back of my spine, begging to be loosed.

Not yet.

I forced myself to breathe. Slow. Measured.
Deadly.

Cain spoke low at my side. "We're close. I smell
sedatives. And metal."

I did too.

The corridor opened into a chamber lined with
glass walls and retractable gates. Inside one of
them—Extraction Room Four—Kael hung limp in
suspension cuffs, his body sagging between
steel restraints. Tubes ran from his veins into a
containment unit pulsing with crimson light. 4

My stomach turned to iron.

His shirt was shredded. Bloodied. His torso a
patchwork of bruises, sensors, and healing
incisions. But he was alive. 1

Barely.

"Open it," I snarled at the Gamma.

The Gamma's hand trembled as he keyed in the
override. "I-It's locked to Darius's internal
authorization. I-I can't—"

Cain grabbed him by the jaw and shoved two fingers into the Gamma's mouth, yanking his head back until the man gagged. "Try again."

This time, it worked.

The gate slid open with a hiss.

Cain went for the tubes while I went for Kael. His eyes fluttered open at my touch—just for a moment. Enough to recognize me. Enough to let out a breath.

"Alpha..." he rasped.

"Don't speak," I said, lowering him into my arms. "I've got you."

Cain yanked the last IV out with a grunt. "Sedative levels high. But manageable."

He turned to the Gamma. "Now. The fallsafes. Where are they?"

"T-There's a manual lockout on the upper sub-core," the Gamma stammered. "You pull Kael from this room without disabling it and it'll send a trip signal to Central Command—"

I grabbed him by the collar again and slammed

him into the console beside the door.

"Then disable it," I hissed, eyes glowing faintly.

"Now."

With shaking hands, the Gamma entered the shutdown code. Lights dimmed. The hum of the containment field dropped.

"No alerts triggered," Cain confirmed after a beat, checking his reader. "We're still dark."

I looked down at Kael. He was breathing. That was all I needed.

For now.

I turned back to the Gamma, my voice sharpened to a blade.

"Broadcast to your men," I ordered. "Now."

He blinked. "W-What—?"

Cain moved before I could. He gripped the man's arm, twisted it back until a bone popped.

The Gamma screamed.

Cain didn't flinch. "He said now."

The Gamma fumbled for the comm unit clipped to his belt. His fingers trembled as he tuned the frequency to the facility's internal channel. A faint beep echoed as the line opened.

"This is Gamma Reyes," he croaked. "We... we have a breach in Extraction Room Four. Hostiles are inside."

Cain's hand tensed, and the man whimpered.

"Correction," I said flatly. "Let me help."

I stepped forward, plucked the comm from his hand, and pressed the transmit key.

"This is Hades Stavros," I said calmly—so calmly it echoed like prophecy. "King of Obsidian. Alpha of the Black Moon Line."

A silence followed. Then static.

I continued, voice unwavering.

"Extraction Room Four is now under my control. The Beta of Obsidian has been retrieved. He is alive. Injured—but alive."

I let that hang for a second before tightening the screw.



"My men—Obsidian operatives—have already taken position at every key junction in this facility. Vent shafts. Cryo storage. Upper decks. Maintenance chutes. We're not alone. You're not safe." A mix of lies and truths but just enough to instill the right amount of fear.

I let a touch of menace color my next words.

"You will clear all exits. You will deactivate all kill switches. You will give us safe passage."

Another long pause. Then, I leaned in for the kill.

"If you don't... I will bring this place down to its roots. I will burn your names into what's left of your kin and carve your screams into Darius's throne."

Static crackled again—then voices, hushed, panicked, some barking for confirmation.

Cain smirked, tapping the side of his comm.

"Intercepting chatter from east entrance. Three of ours just flayed your Gamma Prime and took his clearance badge."

I looked back at the broadcast mic.

"Test me," I whispered. "See how far I will go."

Then I dropped the comm on the floor and crushed it beneath my boot.

The Gamma fell to his knees, arms shaking.

Cain knelt beside him and whispered with a cold smile, "That was the nice version."

I turned to the others still trembling in the room—the remaining scientists, the lower-ranked guards watching from the hall. Eyes wide. Souls buckling beneath the weight of what they'd just heard.

"You open the north gate," I said to one of the scientists. How did I know there was a north gate, the command had just slipped out.

But she didn't hesitate. She sprinted to the panel, keyed in her pass, and the massive reinforced gates began to part.

Beyond them, floodlights flickered on.

And revealed my Gammas, still alert and ready.

Cain's best with them side by side.

Dressed in stolen armor, visors lit, claws flexing.

Dozens of them.



The scientist let out a choked breath and backed away from the console. Another man collapsed entirely, sinking to the floor like his spine had been cut.

Cain chuckled under his breath. "Guess they got the message."

I looked down at Kael again.

"Let's bring him home," I said.

Cain nodded once.

And we stepped into the light.

We moved in formation.

Some strange silent exodus.

Kael was secured between us, his weight shared as we carried him across the sterile corridor. The air was still. Not peaceful—hushed. As if the building itself was holding its breath.

Our operatives closed in behind, covering all angles. No one dared fire. No one dared move. The facility, for now, obeyed.

Cain glanced at the path ahead. Then at me.

Then at the corridor we shouldn't have known to take.

His voice was low, like a growl wrapped in suspicion. "You've never been in this facility."

I didn't look at him. "No."

"Then how," he asked, sharp now, "did you know where the North Gate was?"

I didn't respond. I couldn't.

Cain slowed his steps just slightly, watching me from the corner of his eye.

"Even I had to improvise a few turns," he murmured, just for me. "These compounds—they're never identical. They're modular. And yet you moved like you knew. Every command. Every corner. The timing. The gate."

I didn't answer.

Because I didn't have one.

The words had come out of me as if pulled from muscle memory. Instinct. A command I never learned—but somehow remembered.

A memory I shouldn't have.



Cain narrowed his gaze. "You didn't just guess, did you?"

"No," I admitted quietly, my voice distant. "It was like... a map lit up in my mind. Like I saw it. Not in pieces. All at once."

Cain fell silent for a beat.

Then he exhaled through his nose. "That's not normal." 1

"No," I said again. "It's not."

We kept moving, our men behind us.

But our alertness never dropped.

I scanned every shadow, every vent, every breath that wasn't ours.

Cain stayed close, his body angled slightly toward me.

He was still watching me.

Still chewing on the impossibility of what he'd just witnessed.

He didn't speak again until we reached the far access wing—a low-lit tunnel leading to the

extraction deck, where the cloaked transport awaited.

Kael's pulse was steady. Weak. But stable.

Then Cain finally asked, voice hushed and sharp.

"What else aren't you telling me?"

I looked forward. The lights above us pulsed softly, unnaturally synchronized with my heartbeat.

"I didn't have time to explain before," I said. "And it's not something I could've made you understand in there."

Cain raised a brow. "Try me."

I nodded once. Slowly. Then said it.

"There's a fragment of the horn," I said, voice low. "Vassir's horn. It's here. In this facility."

Cain stopped walking.

"What?"

I turned slightly, my tone flat but heavy. "A piece of it. Just a shard. Embedded probably into a core that bleeds power into this place."

He stared at me.

No words. Just dawning horror and comprehension twisting in his expression like a storm forming behind the eyes.

"That's why I heard no generators," he murmured. "No humming. No vibration under the floors. The air didn't breathe like a machine—it felt..." He shook his head once, jaw clenched. "It felt still. Alive. Watching."

Cain looked at me harder now. "That's how you knew the layout."

I didn't speak.

"You were synced," he said, voice lowering into awe. "Weren't you? Through the Flux in the horn... and the Flux inside you."

A pulse throbbed behind my eyes.

But the connection hadn't entirely faded.

Cain kept going, piecing it together aloud.

"That's why the scanners didn't flag you. Why your roar activated doors. Why the retina scans let us through without a blip."

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He looked at me like he was seeing something ancient wrapped in familiar skin.

"They recognized you." 3

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