



430 The Game Plan

Victoriana's gaze returned to me, sharp but open, waiting. ¹

I leaned forward, sliding a folder across the board. Letters, pictures—everything that had arrived from Silverpine in the last few weeks. The ink of their threats still felt heavy in my hands.

"You've seen these," I said, steady but firm. "The threats. The letters. The photographs. They were not simply intimidation—they were a map of intent. A test. And they were sent here deliberately to unsettle us."

Victoriana inclined her head once. "I read them," she confirmed, her voice clipped. "And your dissection of them as well. Every annotation. Every mark."

I nodded, breathing easier at that acknowledgment. "Then you know what I see. They are pacing. Waiting. Something has gone wrong on their side of the line, and they are stalling for time. While they wait, they want to reap chaos here. Fracture us before they strike. And when that fails—as it will—they will turn



their claws toward the citizens. Fear spreads fastest among those with no shield."

The chamber was still, the Ambassadors and Governors listening intently, the lesser Alphas watching like wolves scenting blood.

"They will use that fear," I continued. "They will make make impossible not want the Alpha's. By any means necessary. They will press obedience into our throats." 1

My fingers pressed lightly to the board. "So we must move first. We ensure the civilians are protected. We call for lockdown. Give them the chance to restock, prepare—but then no one leaves their homes. Not until we have the upper hand. We contain the panic before it can be weaponized against us."

The weight of my words hung over the chamber, met by silence thick as stone.

Victoriana's gaze did not falter. Her eyes swept the others once, then settled back on me. "A harsh measure," she said at last, her voice low, deliberate. "But perhaps the only one that makes sense."

Her approval was not spoken outright, but the shift in the air—subtle, heavy—told me I had her



ear.

I drew in a breath, steadying myself before continuing.

"But we cannot be blind to the repercussions. The citizens were already made aware of classified information—Governor Morrison saw to that. His defection cracked something vital, and though we attempted to mend it by revealing the full truth, the bombs at the press conference undid everything. Whatever fragile trust we had clawed back... it collapsed in fire and blood."

A ripple went through the chamber, small but sharp—everyone knew it was true.

"Now," I pressed, voice firmer, "to add a lockdown on top of that? It will not be seen as protection. It will be seen as a leash. And in the shadow of the Bloodmoon, with doubts already festering about the Alpha's leadership, it could turn dangerous. Instead of forging unity, it could split us further. And if that happens, we will not have a united front when Darius brings the war we all know he intends to wage."

Victoriana's gaze deepened, unreadable.

I let my words settle, then added quietly, "So we



give the people what they fear losing most—sight. We allow the media to continue its work."

The silence that followed was not the silence of dismissal but of shock. Heads turned, whispers hissed like sparks catching dry tinder.

The Governors stiffened, the Ambassadors exchanged quick looks, the lesser Alphas leaned forward in disbelief. Everyone here knew the truth: the press would twist whatever they were given. They always had.

Still, I held my ground, my tone calm but unwavering. "Yes, they will twist it. But if we silence them, the people will decide their own truth—and that will be worse than anything the press could conjure."

The chamber erupted in low murmurs. Voices overlapped—sharp, skeptical, some outright hostile.

A Governor rose first, her jeweled cuff clinking as she set her hand on the board. "Luna Eve, with all due respect, the press thrives on blood. They will not soothe panic. They will sharpen it. They will twist every measure we take into proof of weakness."

Another voice, a Lesser Alpha this time, barked



from the tiers. "And what happens when the citizens start rioting, hm? When every whisper becomes a headline? You think soldiers will waste their blades keeping them calm instead of preparing for Darius's war?"

An Ambassador leaned forward, his tone measured but biting. "We cannot afford another blow to public confidence. The press feeds chaos. That chaos will be laid at the Alpha's feet, and if he cannot answer it—" he cut himself off, but the implication was clear.

The Alpha was not around, which only made it worse.

The voices swelled, each pouring their concerns into the air, until the chamber pulsed with restless tension. Fear, frustration, doubt—all of it given words.

I raised a hand. Slowly, deliberately.

The sound dulled. Not gone, but muted enough that when I spoke, my voice carried.

"I hear you," I said firmly. "Every concern. Every doubt. They are valid. The press will twist. The citizens will panic. Order will falter. But listen to me—" I swept my gaze across the chamber, locking eyes with each cluster. "If we silence



them, the story writes itself. And it will be written by Darius."

I leaned in slightly, pressing the words harder. "We cannot win a war on only one front. The battlefield is here as much as it is in Silverpine. If we deny the people their voice, we will hand them to him without a fight."

I steadied myself, letting the heat of their objections burn out before I spoke again.

"The riots are already bad," I said, my tone low but unyielding. "And they will get worse. Familiarity begets contempt—the citizens are used to seeing Gammas in the streets, holding the lines. They know their faces. They know their patterns. And familiarity no longer frightens them."

The room quieted a fraction. I pressed on.

"So we change the pattern. We give them a different presence. A more formidable one. The Military Gammas."

A stir ran through the chamber. Several Ambassadors exchanged uneasy looks, the Governors leaned forward, and the Lesser Alphas muttered under their breath.



I didn't give them time to spiral.

"They are not accustomed to seeing this force outside of wartime. To see them deployed openly will do more than suppress riots—it will remind the citizens of the weight of our defense. Of the seriousness of this moment. Not as a leash, but as a shield. Protection carried out by the highest authority beneath the Alpha himself."

Victoriana's expression remained carved from stone, but her silence told me she was listening.

I leaned forward, my palms flat against the board. "They will not see soldiers taking their freedom. They will see soldiers standing between them and something so worrisome that the military had to step in."

"But that is just the best case scenario, first and mostly there will be confusion." I continued

I straightened, letting the silence stretch just long enough to anchor my next words.

"The Military Gammas are not only for the people's eyes—they are for what I know will come. We need a force ready not just for open battle, but for the dirtiest tricks in the book. And those are the ones Darius will pull."



A murmur rippled through the chamber.

I pressed on, my voice steady, deliberate.

"Silverpine has caught us off guard too many times to count. Conspiracies, double agents, bombings, the massacre of royalty itself. They have honed chaos into a weapon. If we do not prepare for it now, then when the Bloodmoon rises, it will not be soldiers or strategy that fall first—it will be the heart and soul of Obsidian. The civilians. And even as they scatter, running with every rumor and conspiracy the press feeds them, they are still ours to defend."

From the end of the board, Silas leaned forward, his voice cutting through. "Then shift the press in our favor. Encourage them. A little payment here, a little push there—they will soften the civilians to us."

I inclined my head slightly, a gesture of acknowledgment. "I thank you for the thought, Silas. But no. That would be worse than silence. All it would take is one article—one leak of proof that we manipulated their voice—and whatever faith remains would shatter completely. They would see us as liars, no better than the enemy we name."

The words settled like iron. Heads lowered,



some in reluctant agreement, some in frustration.

Then I allowed the silence to sharpen, to prime the chamber for the strike.

"But afterwards," I said, voice steady as a blade, "we shock them."

Every gaze lifted toward me again.

"The reason the media will remain on air, even under lockdown, is because of what comes after their spin. After they twist the tale as they always do—we take it from them. We strip them of the narrative by giving the people something they cannot ignore. A live broadcast. One with evidence."

I slid the folder closer, my hand resting on its edge. "The letter—yes. The threats. But not the images. Those are too volatile. We show just enough to reveal the truth, to prove that Silverpine's hand is behind all of this. Their words, their intent, their proof—not rumors, not council decrees, not manipulation. The people will see it for themselves."

I let my gaze sweep the chamber, holding the silence that followed. "And once they do, the press loses its grip. The civilians will know who



the real enemy is. Not this council. Not Obsidian. Silverpine. With that we will be a united front before Silverpine and not the chaos filled territory vulnerable to attacks and threats."

There was silence.

"Any questions?" Victoriana asked. 1

Numerous hands snapped up.

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