

New Eden 351

Chapter 351 Empty Village

Feeling his body connect to the space in front of the starting village he had originated from, Astaroth focused his mind and mana, taking a step forward. His body lurched forward, passing through an invisible film, giving him a bit of the same feeling as when he used the teleporter.

Appearing in front of the village, his stomach churned a little. Keeling over a bush to the side, Astaroth threw up.

'Hah. Weak mortal. That's what you get for using my powers without paying the just price.'

Astaroth answered out loud, not even bothering to waste the mental message.

"Shut up. You were trying to rip me off. And since you belong to me, now, I can do as I please."

'Tsk.'

Hearing the tongue click, Astaroth knew he had won that bout.

But, standing up, Astaroth found it strange that no one had yet intercepted him. There was usually a patrol out and around the village. Normally, they would have seen him appear and at least asked who he was before letting him pass.

He looked at his timer. Only four minutes remained.

He walked into the cave, and the eerie silence troubled him. There was no shout of kids playing, or the sound of hoes tilling the soil, or even the sound of wooden weapons clashing coming from the barracks usually.

The forge's chimney was not spouting smoke, like it usually did, and Astaroth finally noticed it, but there was no longer a barrier in place.

'What the hell is going on?'

Using his melded strength to the maximum, Astaroth toured the village in seconds, checking out every spot where there should normally be people at this time of day. Everything was empty.

'Why did you want to come here, Master Astaroth?' Asmodeus asked.

The demon could feel the angst in his master, and forsook his snippy attitude, thinking it better to stay neutral for now. Astaroth could lock him away, after all.

"No one is here... The village is empty. This isn't normal."

Walking toward the last place he had to go, Aberon's house, Astaroth felt his angst levels rising. When he got to the house, the door was slightly ajar.

"Master Aberon? Are you in here?"

The silence was his only answer.

Pushing the door inward slowly, Astaroth walked in. But where there used to be a mess of books and magic tools, nothing remained.

The house had been cleaned out. This worried Astaroth even more.

His mind was already racing, thinking about the worst-case scenarios. Racing to the bookcase that hid the passage under the house, he found this open, too.

He practically vaulted inside the tunnel, running on the wall on his way down, making it to the artifact room in record time. Where the cave usually lit up with the brightness of the artifact, and overflowed with mana, he only found a stone wall.

On the stone surface, a sigil was carved, and it leaked slight mana traces. Slapping his hand on the sigil, a mental message instantly assaulted Astaroth's mind.

'Do not open this, Young Man! Only trouble lies beyond this point. Something weird opened up in the artifact room, and to protect everyone, I sealed it away with the artifact's barrier. If you want to find us, Call on Terraria and Arborea. They escorted us to a haven further in the forest, hidden from everything. Farewell, Astaroth. And may you someday find us and rejoin your family. Aberon.'

As the message ended, the sigil erased itself from the wall, leaving only the flat stone surface. Astaroth had a bad feeling about what could have opened up on the other side of the wall, so he visualized the space on the other side.

The area was pitch black in his senses, and since it was past the barrier, his mana senses couldn't pick up on anything. Foregoing prudence, he teleported inside.

As soon as his body reappeared in the once brightly lit room, the mana inside rushed to him, its demonic essence trying to rest control of his body.

'Get back out, right now!' Asmodeus screamed in his mind.

Astaroth was already feeling his head buzzing because of the miasma's thickness, but he managed to teleport back outside to the main village. In his haste, he miscalculated his arrival point, and teleported ten feet in the air.

Feeling his body fall prey to gravity, Astaroth fell to the ground, smacking it hard.

"Oof"

He stayed sprawled on the ground for a moment, regaining his bearings, and letting his head stop thrumming. But Asmodeus cared little for his health and was quite agitated.

'By Lucifer! Why was there hell miasma in there, and why was it so thick?!'

"You don't need to shout, you horned idiot. I know why there was some miasma there. A tear must have opened. Aberon must have had no way to close it, so he sealed it. But I don't know how long that will hold."

'A tear? Is that what Vassago was rambling about? Wasn't that supposed to happen in your world, not this one?'

"It all starts in this one. It only spills into mine. The problem lies in that my world doesn't have powerful people like this one in it to defend it."

Astaroth looked at his timer again. Two minutes left.

He didn't have time to do anything about the problem. Calling Terraria and Arborea would take him longer than what time he had left.

But if what he glimpsed in the miasma was accurate, the seal from the shield wouldn't last the ten-year time skip. He had to warn the guardians of the forest.

Summoning Genie to his side, he looked at her in the eyes.

"Genie. I will be gone for a long time, soon. I will need you to deliver a message to the guardians of the forest for me. Can you do that?"

The wolf nodded her head once, signalling yes.

"Good. You will need to find them as fast as you can, and tell them that the barrier is holding back a great danger, but it won't hold out for as long as it needs to. They will need to fortify it."

He grabbed hold of Genie's head, sending the mental image he had seen inside to her.

"Show them this. It is of the utmost importance."

Looking at his timer again, his time was ticking away. One minute left.

Scanning Genie's level, Astaroth was reassured. She was strong enough to resist almost anything that this region could throw at her, so he wouldn't have to worry about her death during the time skip.

"I hope you will stay safe while I'm gone. You stay alive, you hear me? Don't make me mourn you."

Hugging her big and soft body, Astaroth made the wolf feel his love as much as he could. As the last seconds ticked away, he received a notification.

Chapter 352 Waking Up Injured

Alexander slowly opened his eyes, immediately seeing the grey screen of a helmet over them. But when he tried lifting his arms to take the helmet off, two things happened in quick succession.

The first thing that happened was him noticing that his arms felt like they weighed a ton and were sore.

'It figures. I've been lying on here unmoving for a few days.'

But immediately following these thoughts, a violent burning sensation coming from his back assaulted his mind.

"Argh! What the fuck!"

The nurse at the entrance of the room, stationed there for when he woke up, heard the scream and rushed into the room.

"Mister Leduc, please don't move. You need to stay as still as possible. I will inject some pain meds so the burning sensation goes away."

She expertly grabbed a syringe from the cabinet near the bed, taking the plastic cap off in a swift motion. She then pricked the needle into the designated insert spot on the IV tubes.

As she emptied the contents of the syringe inside the tubes, Alexandre kept gritting his teeth as the burning sensation on his back slowly faded away. He could also feel his mind become foggy, but he maintained enough conscious thought to be functional.

"What happened? Why am I bandaged everywhere?" he asked, his mouth feeling like it was full of cotton balls.

The nurse went to the hallway, signalling someone further down the hall, before coming back into the room.

"Mr. Leduc, I have called over Mr Boudreau. He has some things to discuss with you. He asked me not to discuss your injuries without him present. So, if you don't mind, I will wait for him."

Alex turned his head toward the ceiling. The pain medication had taken away the burning sensation, but he could still feel a prickling going up and down his back.

It felt like some bugs were crawling under his skin, taking small bites at his muscles under it. It was very unpleasant.

A few minutes went by, as Alex stared at the ceiling while the nurse checked a few electronic charts on the side of his bed. She took a few notes, tapping around on her electronic tablet.

Heavy footsteps started echoing in the hall, with the sound of high-end shoes hitting the tiles resonating. Not a moment later, Jack Boudreau entered the room.

"Good afternoon, Alexander. I hope you enjoyed the last few days inside the game. And I hope your mind isn't too affected by the pain medication, because we have a lot to discuss."

"I'm fine. The siege went well, if that is what you were asking. As for me, I'm more worried about the state of my body than that of my mind. What happened?"

"Ahh, yes. I was hoping you could enlighten me on the matter, actually."

"What do you mean? How could I tell you about the burns on my body? I was unconscious and inside New Eden. Surely you would know more about it than me."

Mr. Boudreau's eyebrows furrowed together.

"Alexander. Your body temperature suddenly spiked and your back and Ms. Deveille's suddenly started burning up peculiarly. We do not know what happened."

Alexander panicked at the mention of Kary being injured too. His body jerked upward, sending a pang of intense pain to his brain.

But he growled and endured it.

"Where is Kary? How is she? Why didn't you tell me she was injured before this?"

The nurse stepped forward, trying to push him down on the bed. But, albeit his drugged state, and his injuries, the nurse could not even budge him.

It was like trying to push down a brick wall.

"Mr. Leduc, please lie back down! You are going to worsen your injuries!"

Jack chuckled at the nurse's vain attempts.

"Calm down, Romeo. Listen to the nurse and lie down before you change your injuries from burns to open wounds. Ms. Deveille is fine."

Hearing the old man say that Kary was fine, Alex calmed down, dropping his back down on the bed.

The nurse lifted his sides gently, trying to find out if he had torn up the heavily burned skin of his back. Seeing no blood through the bandages, she sighed in relief, giving Alexander a stern look.

"You need to be more careful, young man. Your burns would have sent anyone to the intensive care unit. It is a miracle your body is healing up so fast already. Don't make me sedate you!"

Mr. Boudreau chuckled again.

"Nurse Jane, threats have little effect on this young man. And I doubt we have anything strong enough to sedate him if he doesn't want to go down. Can you leave us alone for a moment?"

The nurse looked at Alexander with wide eyes for a second, before nodding her head to her boss. She left the room, closing the door behind her.

Jack pulled a chair closer to the bed before unbuttoning his vest and sitting down.

"I didn't want her to hear what we were going to discuss next. Now that we are alone, please tell me what happened in New Eden while you were there."

Understanding the question, Alex became serious instantly. The fewer people heard what he was about to say, the better, for now.

Astaroth took a deep breath before recounting the entire ordeal. He didn't have to talk much about the siege itself, since Jack's grandson had talked about it at length ever since he had logged out.

Explaining the situation about the markings in the game, it became clear what had caused the burns on his body on this side too. Jack assured him that Kary was fine.

"Ms. Deveille is healing faster than you are. It is astounding."

Astaroth could guess why. Her fire element affinity probably was already taking away the burning sensation and the residual heat from the wounds, allowing her body to heal faster.

But his mind lingered on the effects it could have on his body here. These markings weren't just burns, after all.

Finishing his tale to the old man, Jack frowned again.

"You say you met Solomon? The great sage Solomon? I thought he was a legend from this side. Why would he be in New Eden?"

Alex shrugged his shoulders, having no answer to that question. Jack brought his hand to his chin, looking at Alexander pensively for a moment.

"Hmm. Well, I will leave you to rest and heal, for now. When your wounds aren't at risk of worsening, you can go see your sweetheart. But first, heal up. We have more to discuss later."

Getting up to leave, he looked at Alexander one last time, and the latter nodded at him.

Being left alone, Alexander felt sleepy suddenly. So he closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 353 Causing An Unwanted Scene

Sleeping for a few hours, a dreamless sleep, Alexander woke back up with his back still sore. The tingling under his skin had lessened, to some extent, but he could still feel like a colony of ants was crawling under his skin.

The pain was at a manageable level right now, and he could tell the pain meds had worn off. Feeling like his body was a statue made of lead, he decided to try to get up.

He didn't want to lie down forever, and he had things to do. But right now, in his mind, only one thing was preoccupying him.

Seeing Kary.

Sitting up on the bed, Alex spun his body to his right, sending his feet on the cold tile floor. Feeling the bite of the cold tiles, he tried looking around the room for something to put on his feet.

Searching a closet near the foot of the bed, he found some hospital grey hospital slippers, and slipped into them. The warmth immediately made him feel better.

Alexander drug his feet out to the corridor, crossing paths with the nurse assigned to watch him. She looked at him incredulously.

"Mr. Leduc. You should stay in bed. Your wounds, they are going to open up. Please listen to me."

"I want to see Kary. Where is she?" Alex asked, ignoring the nurse's request.

The middle-aged woman stood up from her seat, putting herself in front of Alexander.

"Mr. Leduc, I won't ask again. Please return to your bed. I don't want to sedate you."

Alexander locked his eyes into hers. The ferocity of his stare sent her tumbling to her ass, as his blue irises turned silver, and his hair started changing to white.

"Threaten me again, and I will give you a reason to want to sedate me. Tell me where Kary is."

Words couldn't escape the terrified nurse's throat, as she clicked a panic button on her belt. Mr. Boudreau had insisted everyone have one, since they might get some rowdy patients in the near future.

Seeing that she wasn't answering him, Alexander turned his head to the nearby desk, where the nurses were already taking shelter behind. He took the few steps that separated him and the counter.

Seeing them all cower behind the big wooden furniture, even the bigger male nurses, Alexander realized he might be overreacting. So he tried putting on a smile.

But that was a stupid attempt at false politeness, as the prominent canines in his mouth only made him look like a hungry predator.

"Can one of you tell me where Kary Deveille's room is? I just want to see her."

Two security guards rushed to the room entrance. Seeing the man at the counter, in a hospital gown and slippers, with his hair white and eyes silver, they halted.

One of them, new to his job, and trying to prove something to his peers still, pulled out a telescopic baton. Whipping it to the side, it opened up.

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"Okay, man. Time to get back in your room, as the nurse asked. Don't make me make you."

Turning his head slowly to look at the man, Alexander kept his smile up. The toothy smile sent shivers down the man's spine.

"Just tell me where Kary Deveille's room is, and no one had to get hurt."

Alexander took a step toward the man.

In the meantime, the second guard, more conscious about what his job entailed, was on the radio, trying to get exact orders from his supervisor on how to deal with this man.

The supervisor being on break when the alarm popped, meant that for the moment, the chain of command was interrupted. This meant he was not getting a response.

Seeing as there was no answer to his query, the guard pulled out his baton, too.

Astaroth was still slowly walking to them.

"Hey! Step back! That's an order!"

Alexander continued his slow approach.

"If you come one step closer, I'll hurt you!"

Seeing as the young man before him was ignoring him, the guard struck forward with his baton. But he wasn't quick enough.

Alexander grabbed his arm, as it was lashing toward him, with his left hand, as his right hand grabbed the man's collar.

Feeling the tight grip around his neck, the man became paler than a ghost. But Alexander was still in control of his actions and knew the poor sap was only trying to do his job.

So he opted for the non-violent route and simply shoved him backwards. Of course, the simple shove was much more powerful than he intended, and he sent the first guard flying into the second one.

As they tumbled down the corridor, a third man, this one armed with a machine gun strapped to his back, came around the corner. This man was the one that had driven Alexander and Kary here.

Seeing two people tumbling away next to him, he reflexively pulled on his gun. But when he pointed it in the direction the two guards came from, nothing was there.

"What the..."

"Behind you," Alexander's voice came, next to his ear.

Instinctively jumping forward into a roll, the mercenary turned around in a swift motion, his gun now aimed at Alexander.

"Lower the weapon. I just want to see the woman I came here with. Why is everyone suddenly so hostile?"

Locking his eyes on the mercenary, Alexander controlled himself, and turned back to normal. His breathing was ragged, since he had very little mana inside him at the moment.

The mercenary got up, strapping the gun behind his back again. He looked at the nurse and asked where the woman was.

"Where is she and why didn't you tell him right away? Are you trying to make Mr. Boudreau mad? This is a VIP guest."

The nurses behind the counter struggled to get up and find out the room number the mercenary asked for. The mention of the big boss so casually put them on an immediate edge.

"R-r-room number 2-1-6, sir!"

The male nurse who responded to him with a stutter, looked at the now-normal again Alexander.

Alexander looked at the mercenary.

After a moment of silence, the mercenary understood the stare. With a sigh, he beckoned Alex.

"Fine. I'll lead the way. But I need to get back to my actual job after this."

Alexander nodded to the man, as he led the way to Kary's room. Reaching a room not too far from his, Alex entered the room as calmly as he could.

Kary was sleeping on the bed, unaware of what had transpired. So he sat in a chair nearby, watching over her protectively.

The mercenary left the two alone, going back to his proper duty. Surveilling the captive.

Chapter 354 Beating A Teen

Elsewhere in the facility, Mr. Boudreau was standing in front of a glass cell. Inside that cell, a teenager was seething and spitting at the glass wall.

"Let me out of here! This is kidnapping! You can't hold me here!"

"You are right. I can't legally hold you here. But I don't follow the law here. Here, I am the law."

The teenager started punching at the glass pane again, as he had many times since he was locked up. He had tried tapping into his game avatar's strength many times, but could never muster it.

He had already surmised that his cell had something to do with it. But he couldn't figure out which part, and how to cancel it.

When he first woke up, he could partially transform, and thought he could break loose. But after a few seconds of being transformed, sleep gas flooded the cell, knocking him out.

The next time he woke up, he couldn't transform at all, like his power had been all sapped away.

"This isn't a joke, old man. If the police ever find out you kept me here, you will go to jail!"

Jack chuckled at his threat.

"No one will find you here, for as long as I say so. And you aren't imprisoned here. When We judge you can behave in society again, and won't go trying to kill people and rob banks, we will set you free."

"Tch! I was only taking what is mine by right!"

"And what right is that, child?"

"The right of power! The strong will always dictate the fate of the weak! Step in here and I will show you!"

An eyebrow raised on Jack's face. He signalled a man to his right, who nodded before pressing a button.

Stepping forward, a small door slid open, long enough for Jack to step inside the cell, before closing behind him.

The teenager immediately yelled and tried running at Jack. He lifted his hand, in a stop motion.

"Wait a moment, please."

Stopping in his tracks, the teen had a bewildered look on his face.

Jack started unbuttoning his vest, taking it off, and throwing it on the bed in the cell.

The teen was going to run at him again, but Jack raised his hand again. This frustrated the teen.

"What now?! Are you scared of me?!"

"Nothing of the sort. I don't want blood on my clothes. This is a ten thousand dollar suit. Let me take off the shirt before I beat you to a pulp."

The teenager couldn't believe his ears. Did the old man think he was going to win?

But when Mr. Boudreau finished unbuttoning his shirt, taking it off and depositing it next to his vest on the bed, the kid's jaw dropped.

Albeit his stretched face, and tanned skin, giving him the look of an older fellow, Jack was still very well-maintained, for a man in his late fifties. His time in the military drilled a strict training regimen into his very bones.

He never skipped a day, and his body was still as fit as when he was a mere soldier. This, accompanied by his many battle scars, tamed the teenager's hot temper rather quickly.

Seeing the bodybuilder of a man, with cuts and bullet scars all over his torso, the teenager took a step back. Jack chuckled at his move.

"What's wrong, kid. I thought you were going to show me. Come on. Do your worst."

The taunting words, coupled with Jack not even raising his guard, quickly reignited the young man's rage. Screaming like a madman, he lunged at Jack.

As soon as he stepped inside the old man's reach, a punch impacted the kid's face, with enough strength to almost knock him out instantly. But it knocked something out.

Spitting two of his teeth on the white floor, the teenager was now astonished.

'I didn't even see his hand move! What kind of monster is this man? Is he a player, too?'

Seeing him stare at him, Jack took a step forward.

"I know what you are thinking, boy. No, I am not a player of New Eden. This strength, I worked my blood sweat and tears to get. Not like you, spoiled child."

Feeling his rage climb again, the teenager jumped to his feet. Dashing at the old man again, a repeat of the previous scene happened.

This time, instead of punching him in the jaw, Jack punched him directly in the nose. The kid's nose stood no chance, instantly breaking, as blood gushed out of it.

Jack walked up to the teenager, who was now crawling back in fear. He kneeled next to him and grabbed his collar.

Looking him deep in the eye, Jack said to him these words.

"You are decades too young to think of beating me. Even with your unearned power from the game, I would still always win."

After saying that, Mr. Boudreau wiped his bloody hand on the kid's shirt, cleaning the blood off of them. He then got back up, walked to the bed, and collected his clothes.

The teenager stayed in the cell's corner, realizing he had pissed himself when the man had been up in his face. Shame was overwhelming his mind, as tears formed in the corner of his eyes.

Nodding to a camera, the door re-opened for Jack, who walked out of the cell without looking back. As he walked away, heading to his office, Jack dressed back up, keeping only his tie in his pocket.

An assistant walked over to him from the shadows.

"Sir. Mr. Leduc has woken up again. He is currently in Ms. Deveille's room. Should I have him called to your office immediately?"

Not even looking at him, Jack replied.

"Hmm. No. Let them have a bit of time together. You can have him come to me in a few hours. In the meantime, I have someone else I want you to go meet with."

"Yes, Sir. Who will that be?"

"I've had chatter amongst the workers for one of my building companies, something about an off-the-grid bunker. An anonymous client paying in cash. I want him brought here. I have a feeling he knows something that I want to know."

"Yes, Sir. Do you have his name?"

"Yes. His name is David Magnus. You should find him close to the building site."

"On it, Sir."

The man practically vanished from his spot behind Jack, making it look like he was never there.

"Who are you, David Magnus" And what secrets do you hold?"

Chapter 355 An Unexpected Visit

Somewhere deep in the woods, near Montreal, and close to the construction site of his future shelter, David was surfing the internet, for news of the changes to happen on this side.

He found many minor incidents, where people were described performing miracles. It went from lifting cars to save people, all the way to healing from terminal illnesses.

The crime was also on the rise, with the thieves being described as performing unnatural actions. People claiming to use real magic abounded around the world.

These were all precursors to the actual changes to come. David had withheld some information from his guild when he told them about the update.

He had told them almost everything to know about New Eden's changes. But those weren't the only changes to come.

Diving deeper into the web, he searched for any news, big or small, about strange sightings or phenomena. It took him a while before getting any credible hit, other than alien sightings, or yeti encounters.

But he eventually found one that entailed more of what he was looking for.

Berserk children in the woods, kidnapping young women and killing kids. New Drug on the rise?

He quickly tapped on that news article, reading it through and through.

In it, the news reporter transcribed the words of a woman who claimed to have escaped these, 'children', as her friend was grabbed on their hike through the woods.

Her friend was still missing, but the police thought she might have just lost herself, discarding the woman's words as ravings of grief. But David knew better.

"Goblins. So it has begun."

He rapidly looked at the city name and country where this had happened and wrote them down. This had happened in a small town in the states, called Valentine, in Nebraska.

He rapidly opened another tab on his browser, booking a flight to the USA, with two seats in first class, for the next day.

"It's time to call in this favour from the butterfly. It's hunting season."

A wide grin spread on his lips, at the thought of killing his first creatures on this side.

Closing all his tabs, he grabbed his phone and speed-dialled one of the few contacts on the list.

But his phone never rang. Frowning, he took it away from his ear.

When he looked at his service indicator, his bars were crossed off with a red X. His face turned to a scowl.

David had a signal booster installed, so he would never lack signal, since all his phone service and internet came in wirelessly. To have suddenly no service, after he had just been on the net, was strange.

It could only mean one thing. Someone was jamming the signal.

His spine suddenly tingled, as he felt the gaze of someone on him.

Not bothering to turn around, he immediately started applying mental pressure with his mana.

"You have to be either dumb, or suicidal, to come into my home without being invited."

A voice came from the shadows to his left.

"Mr. Magnus. Your tricks won't work on me, I have seen worse in my life. Qi practitioners in Tibet give off stronger pressure than yours."

Turning his head, David saw the man walk out of the shadows. He was a white man, with some Asian traits, like his jet-black hair, and slightly stretched eyes.

"Who are you, and what do you want with me? More importantly, how did you reach here without tripping a single alarm or trap?"

The man waved his hand to the side dismissively.

"Unimportant details. My employer wishes to talk with you, and would like you to come as soon as possible. Meaning now, preferably."

David glared at the man. He took a step toward him, raising his hands to the side.

Two skeletons sprang from the ground, flanking David on each side.

"Do you think you can come here, ask me to follow you, and leave unscathed? I have more important things to do than to talk to rich pricks. Now leave!"

Seeing the man stare at him, unbudging, David sneered.

"Fine, have it your way. Attack!"

As he commanded, the two skeletons dashed forward, armed with nothing but their boney hands, aiming them at the man's throat. But as they reached him, the man vanished.

David felt a surge in energy from behind him, but was too slow to react. Feeling the tip of a knife pressed against his nape, David stopped moving.

'How?! He doesn't look like a player, and his mana signature was off too!'

"Mr. Magnus. You 'Players' are not the first ones to touch on energy surpassing human understanding. Many people before you committed feats of the supernatural. Please do not underestimate everyone you meet, for your sake."

David remained unmoving, his mind still assessing the threat level of his intruder. He felt little to no malice or bad intentions from the man, but those could easily be hidden, with practice.

But feeling the knife edge away from his nape, David jumped forward, repositioning himself between his skeletons and turning around.

But, search as he may, the man was no longer here. A beep on his phone stopped his search.

The network was back.

"Tch! He's gone."

Looking at his desk, they had placed a nicely folded card there. On it was an address and time to meet with the man's boss.

David vaguely recognized the address, but not enough to place a face and name on the mystery rich man that wanted to discuss with him.

Seeing as the time of the meeting was this same day, he figured it was better to get rid of this before leaving for the States. Which reminded him to call Alexander again.

The phone rang twice, before the annoyed voice of Alexander answered.

"What do you want?"

"Hello to you too, butterfly. Remember that favour you owe me? It's time to cash that in. You will come with me tomorrow. I hope your passport is in order."

And before Alexander could refute him, or refuse to come, David hung up. He chuckled as he could imagine the angry face of Alexander on the other side of the line.

"Serves you right. I don't get bossed around without retaliating."

Stretching his body, and sending the undead back to rest, David walked out of his little hideout. He walked his way to the city and hailed a cab.

The cab arrived in record time, and David was almost flabbergasted. The cab driver, a buff man with a scruffy beard, understood his gaze and responded with a smile.

"Calm day, today. Where to, sir?"

David gave the address, ignoring the happenstance. The cab driver nodded and drove off to the destination.

'Who the hell is this rich prick, and how did he find me? Even Evo-Gaming couldn't.'

Chapter 356 Outside New Eden, Life Sucks

Inside an office, on the top floor of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, in Birmingham, a doctor was looking at test results for a full check-up. On the tests, a name was written at the top.

Patient name: Winston Owen Jr.

Bloodworks: Normal

CT Scan: Normal

Genetic Markers: Standard

Bone Marrow: Normal

"This makes no sense."

The doctor had an incredulous look on his face. In general, he would be happy that all these results came back normal.

But the patient in question was suffering from an incurable genetic disease. But now, even the genetic markers of it were gone.

It was like his body had reset to a normal state, after being ravaged by the illness for all his life. He should be happy about this, for his patient.

But instead, he was stumped. The doctor had never treated Winston intending to rid him of the illness.

There was an experimental cure in the works, but that was still in the lab testing phase. All he ever did for the kid was make sure he stayed healthy and alive, at least until treatments could be invented.

"There has to be a reason. A genetic disorder doesn't just vanish!"

He was wracking his brain with this. If he could find what had changed, and what made Winston suddenly heal from this, he could replicate it, and possibly become world famous.

He grabbed his phone rapidly, tapping the direct-line button to his secretary.

"Yes, Doctor Jones?"

"Call the Owens and set an appointment with them as soon as possible. I need to run a new set of tests on their son."

"Alright, doc. You have a busy week this week. Should I set them for next week?"

"Cancel any appointment at the time that best suits them as soon as possible. I don't care about the other patients right now. The Owen child is my new immediate priority."

"On it, sir."

The call was made within seconds of her talking to the doctor, and within minutes, she had cancelled another appointment to set them in. If her boss told her to spit in the prime minister's child's face, she would.

Finding an easy-going job like hers, with pay and benefits like she had, was like finding a pearl in the ocean.

'I wonder what has made him so high-strung. Did he make a breakthrough in his research?'

In Korea, a young woman by the name of Jin-Sil, was currently in her backyard, bow in hand. She was in a state of hyper-focus, her eyes closed, the bowstring taut, almost as if the world around her had stopped.

She was listening to the sound of the wind, blowing through the grass, and the birds, chirping in the trees. Every little sound was like an echo in her mind.

This girl, was currently one of the strongest archers in New Eden, gamer tag Athena Woodland.

Summer break was just around the corner for her, and the plum tree in her yard was filled with ripe fruit, about to fall at any moment.

Jin-sil kept her attention on sound only, shutting out any other sensory input. Because of this, she didn't see her father come into the yard, although she heard his footsteps.

But as the man was about to talk to her, Jin-sil suddenly snapped her bow to the opposite side of him, toward the plum tree. Releasing the bowstring, an arrow left it with great speed.

The father was slightly stunned at her swift movements. He hadn't seen his daughter with a bow in hand for so long; he had almost forgotten she used to wield them.

Hearing a thunk in the plum tree, her father turned his head to look. Embedded in the trunk, the arrow she had fired, with a plum fruit on the shaft, dead center.

Looking back at his daughter, he noticed her eyes were closed. He couldn't believe she had shot with her eyes closed, as that was impossible.

So he stood there, waiting for her to shoot another arrow. Jin-sil pulled another arrow from the quiver on her back, which her father found weird.

He had seen her in competitions, and her quiver was always at her side, not on her back. But he said nothing and watched.

As she nocked her arrow, and pulled the string, she heard a small snap, toward the plum tree again, and her bow moved fast as lightning. Releasing the arrow, it flew true, and another arrow with a plum fruit on its shaft, this time embedded itself in their yard's wooden fence.

A smile found its way on her lips, and unbeknownst to her, on her father's lips too. But the man wanted to see more.

He grabbed a pebble on the ground and threw it at his daughter, aiming for her midsection. He was expecting it to hit, breaking her concentration.

But that wasn't what happened. Jin-sil, heard the whistle of the stone coming at her, and where it came from, and didn't hesitate. She backflipped away from her position, drawing another arrow from her quiver.

As she landed, she released the now-nocked arrow, and it flew straight at the pebble. The semi-blunt arrowhead shattered the small stone, before thinking in the wooden pillar, barely a few inches away from her father.

The man's face paled.

"How dare you fire at me! You could have injured me, you unfilial daughter of mine!"

The man's face was contorted in a mix of rage and fear. But just as he stepped forward to teach his daughter a lesson, she nocked another arrow.

"Don't, Father. You attacked me, and I defended myself. Let's end it like this."

The arrow pointed at the older man instantly killed his rage, replacing it with fear and hurt pride.

"You dare speak back to me?! Go to your room and don't come out for a few days!"

Jin-sil didn't make him ask twice. She grabbed her stuff and headed to her room.

She would rather be locked there, than have to listen to her mother's lecture about talking back to her father. Or worse, have her father 'Discipline' her.

She thought her father would be proud that she took up the bow again, but it seemed his pride was of more importance than her happiness, as always.

'I can't wait to be back inside New Eden.'

Chapter 357 Meeting In The Strangest Of Places

In China, a young teenager was currently at school, laughing with a few of his friends. But his mind was somewhere else.

He was thinking about New Eden, and all the new friends he had made there. He couldn't help but feel excited about his return to them, and the adventures they would have together.

His parents had cut him some slack ever since he brought some money home from New Eden, and his gaming schedule had been unrestrained ever since, as long as his school scores didn't drop.

But Ri-Chu was a very smart kid, and he barely had to study to keep up his scores. This allowed him much more time to enjoy New Eden with his new best friend Athena.

Thinking about her, his face flushed uncontrollably. All his nearby friends saw the change and immediately started teasing him.

"Who were you thinking of, this time, Xiao Ri-chu? Was it perhaps the stunning beauty, Jia Yang? Or maybe that foreign transfer student, Astrid Johansson, from Sweden?" one friend asked, making an obnoxious face.

"It had to be Astrid, the transfer student. Her forms are much more prominent, and her beautiful blonde hair is stunning!" another added.

"Stop it, you idiots!" Ri-Chu defended himself.

But some girls in the class had already heard the banter. Some of them frowned at the boys, calling them perverts from afar.

But one girl reacted differently. Astrid Johansson.

Her Chinese might not be the best, with her heavy Swedish accent, but her understanding of the language was top-notch. So, hearing her name, instantly piqued her attention.

She got up and walked over to the boys. In the most broken Chinese the world had ever heard, she knelt next to Ri-Chu and asked, "Wouldn't you love to learn to know me more?"

Ri-Chu was quite an attractive young Chinese male. He was taller than most of his peers, and his traits were more defined than most.

His mother ranted often that her great-great-grandmother had been impregnated by a white devil, and that luckily, the sanctity of their bloodline erased the traits from the child.

But she also thanked the blood of that white devil for remaining in the family, allowing them to have stronger physics and more defined traits than most Chinese, making them quite attractive.

So it wasn't much of a surprise to him that a girl would ask him out. But it still always made him nervous.

Ri-Chu was a very shy boy, and had never talked to girls much. And now, this stunning blonde girl, with eyes of deep blue, with curves in all the right places, so brazenly asked him such a question.

He immediately flustered, stuttering out his response.

"I-I-I'm s-s-sorry. I'm already interested in someone else!"

He bowed his head as he said that, almost smacking his forehead on his desk. But Astrid wasn't insulted.

She smiled, and turned away, swaying her hips as she left, trying to leave an impression on his mind.

Ri-Chu's friends were glued on the swaying buttocks of the girl, almost like cats following a laser pointer. He had to smack one of them behind his head to make them snap out of it.

But another problem arose. He had responded without thinking.

And now, all his friends wanted to know who the 'Someone else' was. They pestered him until the classes restarted and kept giving him the most stupidly suggestive looks even during class.

'Kill me now, oh Budha!' Ri-Chu begged in his mind.

Even he didn't know why he answered that.

'Who else do I have? I'm not particularly attracted to anyone...'

But as he thought that, his mind flashed with the image of a tall, slim, Elven archer. He blushed red again, mentally whooshing that image away.

His friends chuckled, seeing his beet-red face, and they were almost all sent out of class for being disruptive. But that didn't save them from having to clean the classroom once classes were done.

'I can't wait to be back inside New Eden. Is it because I want to see her?' he wondered, as he swept the floors of the classroom, once school had ended.

Back in Canada, in the private hospital Alexander was in, seated at Kary's side, he was thinking differently.

He had received the call from David, and was in a foul mood since. He had thought he could get a few days of rest, and be able to plan out their next moves in New Eden.

But now, this maniac wanted him to go along with him on a trip to go-knows-where. He only hoped Kary wouldn't be too mad about being left alone at his place for a while.

As he was lost in thought, a grunt snapped him back to reality.

"Hrm. God. I'm still here."

Kary had opened her eyes, and the white ceiling reminded her of her whereabouts. She couldn't wait to be out of this place.

Turning her head to the side, she found Alex, looking at her with worried eyes.

He walked up to her, taking her hand.

"Are you alright? Do the burns hurt?"

She smiled at him lovingly.

"I'm fine. I'm only groggy because I couldn't sleep well, so they dosed me. But the burns barely hurt anymore. What about you?"

"Fit as a fiddle," Alexander lied.

Kary had a feeling he was being untruthful, but let it slide anyway. She had more pressing questions.

"How come this happened to us out here? I looked in the mirror. These markings are identical to the ones on our bodies in New Eden."

Alexander had told her all he knew already, since David was withholding information, too. But he could surmise from these events.

"I think our bodies are being affected much more by New Eden than I originally thought. David is holding out on the total picture, but this is beyond a coincidence."

"You don't say," Kary responded.

But she laughed it off.

"I guess we'll know when we know. No use in fretting over it too much for now."

Alexander nodded his head. He would still worry, but at least, he didn't want her to worry too much.

Squeezing her hand tightly, Alex leaned in for a kiss. His back was screaming murder at him, from the burnt skin stretching, but he put up a tough front, for Kary.

But as he embraced her, some footsteps echoed into the room. Turning his head over to the door, the familiar assistant to Jack Boudreau stepped into the room.

"Mr. Leduc. If you don't mind following me, Mr. Boudreau wishes to speak with you."

Alex didn't want to go, but a tug on his hand made him look at Kary. She nodded yes, before letting go of his hand.

He sighed deeply, before looking back at the assistant.

"Lead the way."

Chapter 358 Hidden Underground

Following the man out of the room, Alexander fell face to face with someone he didn't want to see at the moment, and who he wasn't expecting to see there at all.

"David? What the hell are you doing here?"

Turning his head to his interlocutor, David raised an eyebrow in surprise.

"Butterfly. The same goes for you. What are you doing here? I thought this was a special hidden place, but it seems they even let dogs in, hahaha."

The insult flung by David was a playful one. But that didn't keep Alexander from wanting to punch him in the face.

But as he took a step forward, a hand landed on his shoulder.

"Gentlemen. Please refrain from any more violence on the premises. Especially you, Mr. Leduc. The nurse you scared is still in shock at seeing you throw a man like a rag doll."

Alexander felt bad for doing that to the woman, even though it felt like the right thing to do at that moment. But before he could apologize, a snippy remark from David put him in a foul mood again.

"Look at you, always resorting to violence. You are such a savage, wolfy."

The snide grin on his face drove the point further, making the urge to punch him stronger in Alex's mind.

"Shut up, bag of bones. Like you're any better."

"Gentlemen!"

Both of them shut up at the assistant's snap. Seeing they would not talk any further, the man started walking away.

"This way, if you please."

The pair followed behind him, jabbing at each other silently. From afar, it would look like a sibling rivalry to anyone looking.

The assistant ignored their little punching game, as he led them to an elevator. Once inside, he scanned his retina and thumbprint, before voice activating the elevator.

"Basement office."

The elevator dinged, as it started descending smoothly. The steel walls all around them didn't allow them to know how fast they descended, or how far, but with the time it took, it could have been anywhere between a few floors, to a few hundred metres.

As the elevator dinged again, the doors opened. As the assistant and the two men entered, they walked into a superbly decorated office, with lavish furniture, and expensive art on the walls.

Jack Boudreau was looking outside an enormous bay window, into a well-lit cave down below. His arms were crossed behind his back, the latter ramrod straight, with his shoulders squared up.

It was easy to tell from this posture that this man had been in the military.

The assistant led the two young men to chairs in front of the desk, and pointed at them to sit.

David did so immediately, getting comfortable in the chair, while Alexander ignored the demand. He walked over to the window, standing beside Jack, in awe of the sight before him.

In the cave below, workers were busy like bees in a hive, transporting building materials and crates of unknown contents. There seemed to be many tunnels leaving from this gigantic cave, some natural, others man-made.

"What the heck is this? Are you building a fallout shelter under the city?" Alexander asked.

"Impressed? I built only a little of this. I found this cave when I was having the land for the hospital inspected for stability, before building it. The inspector found a strange blip on his sonar test, and he had diggers investigate."

"And you found this massive cave? How was it never found before?"

"Cave system, to be exact. And it was never found because there is no surface entrance or exit. It's all an enclosed system. The air inside it is purer than the one at the surface, meaning it has been closed up for a long time."

"How long are we talking?"

"Very long. Possibly predating humankind. Which is why there is no gas machinery down there. It's all electric. And the hole was closed once we had a shaft installed to go down there. The only access is through the hospital now."

"Ahem!" David loudly interrupted.

"I would love to know more about your pet project, old man. But you had your butler or whatever invade my home to ask me here. So I would rather we get to business so I can go home."

Although Mr. Boudreau didn't like the arrogant tone David had used, he wouldn't mind discussing business and sending his rude ass home. He looked at Alexander and waved at the other seat across his desk.

"Sit. I have questions for both of you."

As the two of them sat down, Alexander next to David, and Jack at his side of the desk, the latter locked his gaze on David.

"Let's start with you, Mr. Magnus. My little birds tell me you are up to something. I want to know why."

David frowned at the old man's words. He was curious about how the old man knew about his project, but he was more curious about why he wanted to know why he was doing it.

"What's it to you? Can't I build whatever I want on land I purchased legally?"

"Young man. I care not what you do on the land that you own. I care why. Why are you building an underground shelter? I have seen the plans, so I know what you are building."

Alexander was aware of the shelter, since David had told him. But he was curious how Mr. Boudreau had found out.

Looking at the assistant almost fading into the darkness of a corner, he surmised he had something to do with it.

David looked at the old man. Judging by his air of authority, and the massive secret cave behind him, he understood the man could at least keep secrets.

He also doubted the old man would let him leave if he said nothing.

"Fine. I'll tell you. But it needs to stay within the confines of this room, for now. The world isn't ready for this information."

Jack nodded, before looking at his assistant for a second. The assistant nodded at him, flicking a switch next to him on the small table.

And weird buzzing assaulted their ears, before subsiding quickly.

"No signals in or out of this room until that switch is flicked again. You can speak freely."

David smirked.

"Military jammer. Powerful stuff, too. Neat. In that case, let us get to business."

Chapter 359 Sly Old Man

Mr. Boudreau leaned in on his desk, putting all his attention on the rude young man in front of him.

"The reason I'm building a shelter is quite simple. We will need it soon. Things are changing on Earth, and soon, the changes will start happening faster and faster."

"What kind of changes?" Jack asked him.

Even if the man had suspicions, given the events of the last month, with his grandson suddenly being able to use magic, and Alexander being able to transform into half a monster, he preferred having a better overview of the situation.

"World destroying changes. It will start small. Like humans being able to suddenly perform feats unimaginable before. But it will worsen. Mana, the energy that is leaking into our world, will do more than change humans."

Alexander listened with rapt attention, too. Although David had told him most of this already, he wanted to be sure to get any new piece of information he could get out of the guy who knew most.

"Animals will start changing too. They will become more ferocious. Beasts that usually steer clear of humans will start actively hunting them. At first, it will be innocuous, people will brush it off. But it will escalate when predators change, too."

From the corner of the room, the assistant interjected.

"There have indeed been more animal attack reports in the last month than the entire last year. It has been attributed to climate warming and habitat destruction, for now."

"It'll start that way," David said, looking at the man.

"But it won't stop at that. The first sightings have already occurred. I was going there with Wolfy here tomorrow, to fix it."

Jack raised an eyebrow.

"The first sightings? Sightings of what?"

David's face became sombre.

"Monsters. Not just larger, more dangerous animals, but actual monsters. There have been sightings of what I believe to be goblins, somewhere in Nebraska. Valentine, I believe the town was called."

Without even needing to ask, Jack's assistant started researching this report David talked about. It took the man a few seconds only, to find it and send it on Jack's computer.

David was curious how the assistant could access the net, with the signal jammer in place. But Jack answered his silent question.

"Internal network. It's verified and only comes in, no outward signal, I promise."

Nodding his head in approval, David waited for The old man to read the article that was now displayed on a big screen in front of him. The high-tech screen allowed for a double-sided display, that way, Alex could read it too.

Reading the article, which was misleading if you didn't know what you were looking for, the three men frowned.

"Are you sure this is a monster sighting?" Jack asked.

To him, this could be the ravings of an aggrieved friend, for losing her friend in the woods. Survivors' guilt was a thing, after all.

But it could also be a murder cover-up.

"Little green men? Could she have been high on something?" Alexander asked.

It wasn't uncommon for hikers to eat trail-side mushrooms when hiking, if they were hungry. One mistake and you were on a trip with puppies and flying elephants.

But the assistant interjected from the corner.

"There is too much detail for a hallucination. The way she describes the attack is too vivid. She also has all the markers of fear and panic in the article's picture, like what she saw was traumatic. And she wouldn't give as much detail if she was lying for whatever reason."

David snapped his head toward him.

"What are you even? Some sort of ninja/detective/butler? How would you know so much about the markers of emotion or what is a plausible lie or not?"

The assistant only smiled in response, letting the mystery thicken.

"The matter of my assistant's skills is not a priority. You only need to know he is skilled in what he says he is. I believe and trust his words completely."

David frowned at the circumventing answer, unsatisfied. But he shelved his curiosity for later.

Bigger fish to fry, and all that

"I'm certain this is legit information. Since I already know what to look for, it makes my job easier when I look for these incidents. So you can also trust me when I say it is what I say it is. Goblins."

Without a photo of the actual creatures, and just descriptions of an eyewitness, it was hard to assert like David did. But Alexander believed he wasn't wrong.

He hardly believed the man to be a fool. A conceited prick, and an aggressive fuck-muffin, maybe.

But not a fool.

"So that's what you wanted me to go with you for? You're lucky my passport is in order. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to go."

David brushed Alexander's words aside, like he was a fly on the wall. Jack was still staring at him.

"I'm sure that isn't all you know, young man. Care to tell us the rest?"

"Tch. I hoped this would be enough to take your attention off me for a while."

"Son, I've seen stranger things in my life than little green men in a forest. It'll take more than that to make me take my eyes off the prize."

"You've seen weirder?!" Alexander exclaimed.

'Just what kind of man is Jack Boudreau?' he wondered.

"If you want information, pay up. You are useless to me, so I won't be giving you info for free."

Jack smiled a wide toothy grin. Turning his head to his assistant, He opened his mouth to speak.

"Have all the workers from our companies pull back from his worksite."

"Wait, what?!" David jumped up.

"You can't do that! I paid them already!"

"Young man, whatever do you mean? You paid cash and have no receipts. I have no proof you paid my workers. I won't make honest men work for free."

The shark grin on Jack's face rapidly told the two younger men how he became a business tycoon. This man didn't beat around the bush.

"Fine! I'll tell you what I know! But you'll owe me one!"

Jack lifted his hand to the assistant, who had a wired phone in his hand. The assistant put the phone back down, with a chuckle.

'Fuck me,' David thought, growling mentally against the sneaky old man.

Chapter 360 Frightening Truths

"Now keep talking," Jack asked, his face still stretched in a grin.

"Tch! The next part is a lot more critical. People changing will have good sides and bad sides. I'm sure you can guess it, but some players have nefarious minds, and getting power suddenly will turn them into criminals."

"Yes, we have an example of that here already. Alexander took a teenager in, who was robbing a bank only a few days ago, before he logged in for your pissing contest with the other guilds of New Eden."

"Hmm. I read about that incident on the news websites after the game logged us out. They said there were two robbers, though."

Hearing Alex growl to his left, David chuckled.

"I assume it was a misunderstanding from the news and the people present. What were you even doing there? You're hunting criminals now?"

"I was just passing by, I never intended to run into that situation. But the kid threw a vault door at me. I reacted, that's all. And now the police think I'm a bank robber."

Jack waved his hand dismissively.

"Don't worry about that, Alexander. My lawyers and private eyes are already working on it. Let us get back on track. So I understand that this will not be an isolated incident?"

"Far from it. The issue will only become bigger until the real threat comes along. But by then, half the world will die, anyway. Between the crimes, the monsters, the natural catastrophes, and reconnection day, the death toll will be enormous."

"Wait, half the world?!" Alex exclaimed.

"At least, by the calculations made while it was happening."

"If you know all this, why aren't you trying to make sure it doesn't happen? Is there nothing you can do?"

Alex's outburst slightly annoyed Jack, who wanted information, but he understood the young man's questions. But David was more than annoyed at being interrupted.

"I've been waiting for it to start, so I can finally do something, you idiot. Did you think I could just go out to the world and say, 'Hey half of you are going to die. So play New Eden, won't you?' Do you think I'm that stupid?"

"Is there nothing you could do before the bad things started happening? You know what's going to happen. Be proactive!"

"It's not that simple, you imbecile!"

"Alright enough, both of you!"

Slamming his hand on his desk, Jack intervened.

"You two bicker like an old couple, and I know what I'm talking about. You can do so later, when you are alone. For now, Alexander, stop interrupting, and David, stop taunting him."

"Yes, Dad," David spat out, rolling his eyes.

"Young man, if you were my son, you would know what respect is. Now keep talking."

The sternness in his eye reminded David that Jack still had his workers in his hands. That meant he held him by the balls.

Swallowing his pride a bit, he leaned back and kept talking.

"To answer Alexander's question, I couldn't do anything until it started. I could only plan and prepare. People would call me a loony if I suddenly came out and said the world was ending."

"You would be locked up in a facility faster than you could finish your tale," Jack said, nodding his head.

"Yes. That is why I had to wait. But now, with the goblins in Nebraska, I can give some proof. I can start pulling more people into New Eden."

The assistant leaned forward, interrupting him.

"And what makes you think people won't instead ask to cancel the game entirely, if that is where the problem stems from?"

David looked at him with a smirk.

"That is a good question. The answer is simple. It won't work. We did that in my timeline, and it changed nothing. After a few months, when people saw the attacks weren't lessening, they played the game to at least gain the strength to fight back. But it was too late. The death toll was already in the millions."

Jack scratched his chin.

"So you mean to say we need to make this convincing? Enough so that people believe you and play the game so they don't die?"

Looking at him, David nodded once.

"It's the only way. Constantine will try the slow way. She will try to market the game as much as she can, to make people play naturally. But it won't be enough. We can control the monster issue with her method, but not what comes next."

Alexander answered this time.

"The demon invasion. Does she even know it's going to happen?"

"I doubt it. From what information we gathered last time, Constantine's avatar, Paladina, is a champion of the one who started all this. But I don't think she knew the complete picture."

Jack chuckled.

"That sounds a lot like Constantine Levesque. She is a good company chairwoman but cannot see the bigger picture. She was already like that in her previous career."

David looked at Jack with squinted eyes.

"You seem to know her well. What are your ties to her?"

"I'm an investor in Evo-Gaming. A major shareholder. I did my homework on her before investing in her raising company years ago. She wouldn't listen to the truth in front of her if she saw a way to make money off the lies."

"Hah! Sounds exactly like her. In that case, that makes my job easier. If you can try to steer the future company decisions a bit, we might get more people to join New Eden."

Jack frowned.

"I don't much like what you are asking me. What kind of steering are you implying?"

"Nothing too drastic. But if you are willing to sink money in, you could force her to make more aggressive marketing campaigns. Her approach is too slow, and will not be enough."

Jack wasn't sure he wanted to dunk his money into an endeavour that was going to bring about the end of the world, if he believed David's words. It was poor business.

"And why would I do that?"

"Because I have something better for you in the meantime. A way to make sure your money isn't wasted."

Jack's grin came back.

"Pray tell. How can you make this worthwhile for me?"

"Same way I did for Alexander. I can make you even richer."