

New Eden 381

Chapter 381 The Plan Is Set

Alexander could see what David was trying to warn him about. But he was already aware of the massive drain fusing with the demons gave.

He guessed that anyone who found the ring in David's timeline probably insisted they were strong enough, and Solomon felt urgency enough from the outside situation that he didn't test them properly.

He could tell some demons in the ring didn't entirely respect him, even though he defeated them in combat. Or course, Solomon had leveled the playing field, with the demons never having more mana than him, he still defeated all of them.

He surmised from this that anyone that hadn't shown the demons what they were made of would have little to no respect from the more prideful of them. This could cause them to turn on the user of the legacy.

But it wasn't his case.

"I don't want to sound arrogant while saying this, but it won't be my case. The demons inside the ring are all under control, and they know they shouldn't try any funny business."

David looked at Alex, trying to figure out where he got the confidence to say such a statement. But seeing the absolute confidence in his eyes, he shelved his questions for later.

They still had a Goblin camp to raid, and arguing between them here would only make the risk of a Goblin fleeing higher.

"Whatever you say, man. In that case, Kary, Jack, do you think we can make this work?"

Jack said nothing, his mind still calculating the repercussions if Alexander messed up his claims. But Kary had unwavering confidence in him, and she nodded.

"If Alex says he can do it, then I trust he can. He has never shown overconfidence, yet. If he says he can control the demons in his ring, then I trust his words."

David gave a curt nod before looking at Mr. Boudreau.

Jack still looked in thought, but he eventually gave a silent nod.

"Good. Then it's settled. With this information, Kary, can you make a viable plan? One that guarantees no Goblin flees into the woods, where we couldn't find them?"

"I already have one," she replied.

David gave her the stick he had in his hands.

Kary started explaining her thoughts, drawing some small circles in the dirt that represented them, as she drew lines that enclosed onto the sketch David had drawn of the camp.

Her plan comprised using David's undead, as well as each of them, to form a cordon, and slowly enclose the camp, shrinking the cordon more and more. It was like they were herding sheep.

Only, the sheep would fight back, and were much smarter than usual. She kept her explanations as short as she could, making her points concise and easy to understand.

Once she was done, she looked at Mr. Boudreau to see if he had anything to add. The old man looked at her sketch intermittently, trying to keep his eye glued to his scope as much as possible.

He didn't look like he was going to add anything, and Kary smiled.

"Then let's do it this way," she said, getting up.

David looked at Alex.

"You better not mess up. Even if we can chase the goblins that escape if there aren't too many, the shaman can make this task quasi-impossible. He needs to die."

"Worry about your own job, David. Your attention will be a lot more split up than mine."

David grinned at his response. He was right.

David would have his biggest challenge yet. He would need to split his focus seven ways, to fight and control his undead minions.

A single slip of the mind could cause him to let a Goblin slip through, making their job harder. But he couldn't wait to take on this challenge.

"We grow through adversity, don't we, little butterfly?"

Alex grimaced at being called like that again. But he knew David was only trying to get under his skin, to reduce his own stress of the upcoming battle.

David might be cold and calculating in New Eden when he was Khalor, but Alex knew it was a facade. David seemed a lot more wary outside of the game.

The weight of his knowledge was glaringly pressing on his mind. Combined with that, the very real trauma his mind struggled with every time he thought of the future, it was surprising David wasn't a drooling mess in a psych ward.

Since the plan was set, all of them got ready to move. Since they were splitting up, David covered an entire side with his undead.

It would be easier for him to keep track of them and the Goblins if they were all grouped up on the same side. He had already set his positioning for them while they discussed the plan.

David sent one of his human skeletons to the far end, almost up against the cliff. Next to that, he put his skeletal bear, followed by the eagle undead, before positioning himself in the center of them.

To his right, he positioned the lynx, the grey wolf, followed by his last human skeleton. Next to the last skeleton, they positioned the redneck.

After some convincing, which was a lot easier than David had expected, Godrick had accepted to go back to the camp, to help rescue his sister, or at least help bring back her body.

Putting him next to his skeletons at least assuaged David's paranoia. If the man tried fleeing, he could at least cover his spot by widening his position.

This alone covered two-thirds of the area they had to cordon, leaving the rest to Alex, Kary, Guo, and Jack. Jack had asked to be in the center of the formation, so he could see most of the combat zone, but David refused.

He wanted to keep his eye on the American. Even when Jack offered to keep his eye on him, David still held his end.

Jack was learning over time that he quite disliked David's controlling attitude. To him, the young man was still wet behind the ears, and getting argued at by him time and time again, was making him regret associating with him.

But it was too late to regret the decision now. He would have to use Alexander as an intermediate as much as he could, going forward.

As they split up and walked into position, half a kilometre away from the Goblin colony, David had his eagle squawk the signal to advance.

And the march began.

Chapter 382 Pushing Himself

They started walking forward in unison, slowly closing the gaps between each other as they approached the camp. Godrick was already fidgeting with his grip on his gun nervously.

As they crossed over the ridge where Godrick and his friends had been not even twenty-four hours earlier, his face paled. The bodies of his three friends were not there anymore.

'Where are the bodies? Did the monsters eat them or something?'

But just as he froze in place to wonder, a sharp whistle brought his attention to his left. David was staring at him with daggers in his eyes.

This was enough to make Godrick snap out of his daze and start walking again. He didn't want to test the man's patience.

Even with the rifle in his hands, he had a feeling the man wouldn't go down easy.

Seeing him keep walking, David shook his head slightly.

'I know how you feel, Godrick.'

David already knew this was bound to happen. The moment he grasped the Goblin shaman's presence, he knew the American's friends' bodies wouldn't be there anymore.

Best-case scenario, the Goblins had torched them in vengeance. But he doubted that was the case.

His worst-case scenario, and the one he thought was most likely, was that his three friends were now amongst the enemies they would have to fight.

As they crossed the last trees covering their approach, the Goblin sentries at the edges of the camp started screaming in warning. In mere moments, the entire camp was already getting ready to fight.

And just as David had expected, three human forms started stumbling in their direction, their clothes covered in half-dried blood, stemming from the deep cut in their throats.

Keeping Godrick in the corner of his eye, David could see his expression change to horror. But before he could say anything to make him focus, Alexander beat him to it.

"Godrick, focus! These aren't your friends anymore! If you aren't careful, they will try to tear you to pieces!"

Godrick's head turned to Alex, and the air he had about him made the man understand this was a warning for his safety. When Godrick looked forward again, his eyes were now resolute.

David's lips stretched at the corner, forming a smirk.

'At least he listens to him.'

The Goblins started rushing at them, with the Hob currently staying back, standing in front of the cave's entrance. When the Goblins reached the encirclement, the battle started in full.

The first wave of enemies was quickly felled, the Goblins in the back already stumbling to a stop. It was like the frontline had stepped in front of an execution squadron, and in seconds, they dropped to the ground, dead.

Some of them were cut up, others mangled, and some even had smouldering holes in their heads. But the troubles were not over for the invading party.

As soon as the dead Goblins hit the ground, they were already shaking eerily. When they rose back to their feet, David gave his first instruction.

Jack had given every one of them an inner-ear comms device, so they could stay in touch during combat.

"The shaman will bring them back up every time they die. Use the time they are down to push them back. This way, we can keep closing the net on them."

As the Goblins rose again, the ones in the back regained their lost courage, and the second wave of Goblins was larger than the first.

Claws struck, swords slashed, bidents jabbed, bullets flew, and fire blazed, quickly sending the enemies down again, with a fresh wave of still-alive Goblins.

But the same scene repeated as the first time, as they shook eerily on the ground. But this time, the invading party pushed, kicked, and threw the Goblins back, allowing them to keep advancing.

They didn't know how long they could do this, since they would eventually reach the camp's first structures. But for now, this method allowed them to tighten their cordon around it.

Wave after wave of alive and undead Goblin threw themselves at the humans and skeletons marching into their territory, only getting killed again and again.

When the human invaders reached the first structures, a roar resounded. David grinned.

But something washed his grin away. The Hob, which he wanted Alex to fight, was heading in his direction!

'Fuck!'

With the goliath-sized enemy thundering toward him, David had no time to think about readjusting their positions. But he couldn't fight that enemy with his split focus.

The Hobgoblin swung his gigantic arm upward, a massive wooden club in his hand, and swung back down. But as David was about to dodge sideways, his vision swam for a second.

When his focus came back, he was no longer standing in his position, but was now standing in between Kary and Godrick. Snapping his head to where he should be standing, Alexander was there, his swords crossed over his head, the massive club motionless.

'He teleported me! This is advanced magic. How does he even have enough mana for it?'

Another thing caught his attention. Further, inside the camp, a large white form was blurring around, dodging attacks left and right as it made its way to the hole in the cliff.

"Better clear this camp as fast as possible, because I won't last long with this kind of mana drain!" Alex shouted into the comms.

David grinned from ear to ear.

"You madman! If you fall unconscious here, you'll die!"

"You say that with a huge grin, bastard. Do you want me dead?"

"Hahaha! Not yet. Let's make sure you live to see another day, then."

David felt pressured mentally, to perform at least as well as Alex. So he focused his mind, reaching into the deepest part of his soul.

He knew that was where the power from inside New Eden was stored, since that was what both planes shared in common. Feeling around, he tried his best to unlock a facet of his power he used often in the game.

After a few seconds of rummaging around in his soul, David found what he was looking for. Opening his eyes with a mad grin, he raised his left hand.

"Rise, Ratma, Commander of the western legions of the underworld!"

Chapter 383 Clearing Camp

The ground at David's feet started rumbling slightly, until it cracked open, a hand piercing through the compacted dirt. A purple haze covered the hand, with steel armour covering every finger.

While David was focused on summoning Ratma, his Death Knight, a few live Goblins slipped through the encirclement, because his undead stopped moving.

"David! What the fuck are you doing, dude?!" Alex shouted.

From the corner of his eye, he could see a hand pierce through the ground, but it took him a moment to figure out who this hand belonged to.

David could see what he was doing was causing them problems. But if he summoned Ratma, their troubles would lessen to such a degree they could clear this camp in a jiffy.

As the Death Knight crawled his way out of the ground, a heavy aura of death permeated the surrounding space. The air was almost difficult to breathe for Godrick, who was a normal human.

While this was happening, White Death, who had been zigzagging through the Goblin camp, finally made it into the cave at the back. From that moment onward, it was just a matter of time before this whole thing was resolved.

Four Goblins slipped through the cordon while all this happened, and they needed to be caught fast before they disappeared into the wind.

As soon as Ratma was fully out of the ground, David smiled.

"Alex, go after the Goblins that escaped. I got the Hob."

Alex wanted nothing more than to catch the fleeing Goblins. But he wondered if he could catch all of them.

But an idea popped into his mind. He jumped back from combat, letting David deal with the Hobgoblin.

The latter used the newly emerged Death Knight to deal with the oversized Hob, focusing his mind back on the regular goblins. Ratma had more of a soul, so he needed no conscious control from David, only a command.

Alexander closed his eyes, using his mana sense to the maximum, letting it spread as far as he could, rapidly finding the four escapees. Locking onto their rapidly moving souls wasn't a minor task.

It took Alex almost a minute to manage a lock. As he locked his mind on them, he also locked his mind on four of the undead under David's command.

"You're gonna lose four of your minions, David!"

"What?" the man responded.

But as he asked, four of his skeletons suddenly vanished from their position, rapidly replaced by four extremely confused Goblins. David silently cursed.

This put a dent in their strategy, since a part of their line was now awol. But he rapidly understood the benefits far outweighed the cost.

The four escaping Goblins were now back inside the cordon. The amount of live Goblins was also reduced to these four, as the rest of the goblins had already been picked off as they tried fleeing or fighting.

Taking care of them as fast as possible fixed the possibility of the Goblins reestablishing elsewhere. Now, their only issue left was the shaman.

But Alex's promise came to fruition, as a howl emanated from inside the cavern. Simultaneously, all the undead, be they Goblin, Human, or Hobgoblin, dropped to the ground, inanimate.

Their victory came at a price, though.

David could already feel the last of his mana leaving his body, as he sent Ratma back to the underworld. Feeling his consciousness slip, he laughed.

"Hahaha... Now I get why you were out for so long..."

Dropping to the ground, David still had a smile on his lips. His vision went black, and his mind shut down.

Not far from him, Alexander was having a similar whiplash. As soon as he un-melded from the demon he was fused with, and unsummoned White, his body suddenly felt like it was made of lead.

Dropping to his ass, he was able to mutter a few last words before slipping out of consciousness himself.

"I overdid it again. Sorry, guys. Please take care of the rest..."

Kary watched the two of them, sleeping on the ground, pale as sheets, and chuckled to herself.

"For someone who complained that Alex was an idiot for overdoing it, he sure was quick to copy him..."

Jack walked next to her, chuckling to himself.

"It seems Mr. Magnus did not want to be overshadowed by Mr. Leduc's progress. Competitiveness can lead to great advancements. Even if done only from a shallow intention, it might lead them to become more powerful in the long run."

Kary agreed with his words, nodding her head. But that didn't keep from the fact that both of them were currently out cold, meaning they would need to drag their sleeping bodies back out of the forest.

And since Godrick's rifle didn't have a silencer on it, his gunshots must have alerted half the county's state troopers and police officers by now. They needed to get out of here ASAP.

Jack walked over to Alex, grabbing him under the arm and leg, and flinging him over his shoulder. Guo did the same with David.

Looking at Godrick and Kary, Jack nodded.

"Let's go. We aren't too far from the entrance of the trail. Let's make it to the truck and get out of here before it's swarming with law enforcement."

Kary once again agreed.

Going on a jog, the four of them, carrying the two unconscious allies, made a brisk pace out of the woods. Back at the vehicles, Jack and Guo loaded the two sleepers in the back of it, before sitting in their seats and bolting away with Kary.

Godrick did not want to be left behind, so instead of going home, he followed them. He at first had wanted to find his sister, but the old man was right.

Staying there wasn't the best idea right now. If she was still alive, the police would find her when looking into the gunshots.

So he followed them back out of the woods and drove after them when they left. He followed them all the way to the small town airport, and even to the hangar where they parked.

Seeing the pickup truck parked next to them, Guo clicked his tongue.

He trotted over to the young American, wanting to tell him to leave. But a police SUV suddenly pulled up behind the pickup.

'Damn it,' the assistant silently cursed.

Chapter 384 An Unwilling Contribution

Godrick got out of his truck, only noticing the police vehicle as he did, and stayed next to his door.

As the police truck rolled next to him, they lowered their window.

"You were driving a bit fast there, Godrick. You in a hurry for something?"

Godrick looked into the police truck, recognizing the officer in it.

"Officer Grant. Funny seeing you here. I thought you were looking into my sister's disappearance."

The officer looked at the black SUV parked behind Godrick's truck, as well as the people disembarking it. That included the Asian man he had just seen walking toward Godrick, who was now as still as a statue.

Pointing at them, the officer asked Godrick a question.

"Friends of yours?"

Godrick spun his head, seeing who he was pointing at, and almost froze. Godrick was always a terrible liar, and he despised lying.

But he still didn't want to put in trouble the people who had possibly saved his sister, and that had saved his town from a future mess.

After taking a moment to re-center himself, Godrick spun with the fakest sincere smile he could muster.

"Ahh, yes. Distant relatives from Canada. They came to offer support after hearing about Laura."

Looking at the man behind Godrick's truck, the officer frowned.

"You have Asian relatives? Up in Canada? Why is this the first time I hear of it?"

"Ah, no. You misunderstand. That is... Lee. He's my... Great Uncle's...butler?"

Hearing the hesitation in his tone, the officer became even more suspicious. But Guo saw what the young American was trying to do, and intervened, before the situation became unsalvageable.

"My name is Guo, young master Godrick. I'm sorry officer, I failed to introduce myself earlier."

Turning to the officer, Guo also did a sign to his boss, under the level of the side of the truck, where the officer couldn't see. Jack saw it and understood what was happening.

He started walking toward the police vehicle.

"What seems to be the problem, Godrick? I will be late back home at this rate."

Godrick turned to face Jack, breathing a small sigh of relief.

"I'm sorry, Great Uncle. Officer Grant was warning me I was going fast when I followed you to send you home."

Jack turned to the officer, walking closer.

"Well, Officer Grant, I apologize. It might have been my butler who was speeding. You see, we are quite unfamiliar with the mileage system you Americans use."

Officer Grant stopped his vehicle, stepping out of it.

"Can I please see your IDs, gentlemen?"

"Why certainly, sir. Guo, give the man our IDs"

Guo bowed to Jack, keeping up his facade of butler instead of assistant. He then pulled out two ID cards, his and his boss'.

Walking up to the Officer, he handed the two cards to him.

Officer Grant pulled out a small card reader from his belt, in which he slotted the ID card. After a few seconds, the scanner flashed green, certifying the IDs were authentic.

He also had a bit of their information on the display. When he read it, Officer Grant couldn't help but let out a small gasp of surprise.

He looked at Godrick with wide eyes.

"Boy, I didn't know you had some family with money. This Great Uncle of yours is loaded."

Godrick coughed a bit, not knowing either. Jack had been so silent and precise earlier, he thought the old man was a mercenary.

"I'm sorry for inconveniencing you, sir. I see here you served in the military, and reached the rank of General, no less. Even if you didn't serve in the USA, thank you for your service."

The officer handed the two IDs back to the "butler", before smiling at the old man.

"Surely you would want your great niece to be found as soon as possible."

Jack nodded.

"I would indeed like her to be found as quickly as possible. I can't stand that a family member of mine went missing, even if so distantly related"

The officer grinned.

"Well, in that case, you wouldn't be against helping Valentine's police department, would you? You see, as a small town, our budget is quite thin."

Jack frowned.

"Are you asking me for a bribe, Officer Grant?"

The Officer shook his head a few times, his grin remaining.

"No, sir. Bribes are illegal. I would never. I'm only asking if you would make a citizen contribution to your local police department. The Sheriff elections are starting soon, and a citizen contribution to me would go a long way in helping my position, as well as our town, of course."

Godrick almost wanted to punch the police officer in the face. One second he speaks about helping find his sister, and now he was lobbying for money.

'What a sleazebag!' Godrick thought, gritting his teeth.

Jack could tell what the officer was trying to do. Of course, he would rather not have to part with money to a dirty cop, but the cop in question was holding them here, and it was a matter of time before someone found the Goblin camp, as well as all the shells from the rounds he fired earlier.

It was in his best interest here to give the cop what he wanted.

"How much would the 'Police Department' need in this case, Officer?" Jack asked, emphasizing on police department.

Officer Grant's grin widened. He looked like a shark in a cartoon.

"Hmm. I think a hundred grand would do just fine for our community and our department. With that amount, we would find your great niece in no time."

Jack clicked his tongue, but he still pulled out his chequebook.

Writing a cheque for a hundred thousand dollars, he signed it and handed it to the officer.

"I trust that with this, my family and butler are now free to go?"

The Officer barely heard the man speak, as his eyes laid on the cheque in his hands.

"Yes, yes. You are free to go," Officer Grant replied, waving his hand at the man.

The police officer rapidly embarked in his truck before high-tailing it out of there. He already had something in mind on how to use the bribe... *Ahem* donation he just received.

Godrick couldn't believe this man was even a policeman. When he turned to thank the old man, he noticed he and the Asian man were already walking away.

"Wait! Thank you!"

Jack stopped in his tracks. He barely turned his head to reply.

"Don't thank me yet, kid. I didn't give away that money for free. Now, you owe me. And I never fail to collect my debts."

Godrick felt a shiver run down his spine as the words entered his brain.

'That old man is scary.'

Chapter 385 Silent Ride Back

As everyone boarded the plane, Guo was already instructing the pilot to take off. They had already been delayed enough.

The faster they crossed into Canadian airspace, the smaller the chance their flight would be called back. The pilot was paid either way, so he did as instructed.

In a matter of minutes, the small jet was already on the tarmac, making his last checkups before takeoff. The pilot was used to this kind of hastiness.

Once the tower gave him the green light, he was off the ground in seconds.

The hastiness of takeoff was felt inside the passenger cabin. They were all strapped in, but they still felt the increase in pressure from accelerating so abruptly.

As soon as the jet was high enough in the air, it sped up to full speed, the pilot uncaring of the extra fuel cost. His boss told him to get into Canada fast, and he intended to do just that.

By the time the police and rangers found the area where the Goblin camp was and the battle had taken place, the private jet was already well away from Nebraska.

Calling the plane back would require so much paperwork and jumping through so many metaphorical hoops that they would never do it in time to stop it from crossing into Canada.

So the local authorities covered up the story. The news about the little green men would never even show up in the paper.

Some black suits came in and closed the area faster than you could drop a paperclip to the ground. The conspiracy freaks were already screaming about aliens all over social media.

Back on the plane, the trip back was quiet. Jack had little to talk about with Kary, and the same could be said the other way around.

Since the trip was a few hours long, Jack took a nap. He had slept little in the last two days, and it seemed like as good a time as any.

Guo kept working on his tablet, while Kary stared outside the window. The soft white clouds passing under the plane eventually lulled her to sleep.

Using mana so actively outside of New Eden was a novelty to her. And it had drained her much more than she expected.

She barely noticed as her eyes became heavy and she slept into the land of dreams. The first one to wake up was Alex.

Even though he had drained his mana like crazy in the last few days, it appeared his body was already growing accustomed to using and replenishing it. The abysmal amount of mana around him right now didn't seem to dampen that.

When he woke up, he noticed Kary was asleep in front of him, and opted to leave her that way. Turning his head, he also saw Jack laying back, his chest slowly rising and descending.

When he looked around, he noticed the only one still awake was Guo, trudging away at his tablet.

He rose from his seat, careful not to make too much noise. Alex walked to sit on the seat opposite the aisle from Guo.

"I'm glad to see you are awake so fast, Mr. Leduc. I had hoped you wouldn't be unconscious as long as last time."

"I still feel a bit tired, but nothing unusual. What about you? Do you ever sleep?"

Guo smiled warmly at him.

"Do not worry about me, young man. I rest when I need to. But a lot of work needs to be done. The Goblin camp has already been found, and some American agencies are already snooping into our brief stay near it."

Alex frowned.

"How long have I been out? How did they find out so fast?"

"You haven't been out very long. We are halfway back home, so a few hours. And you would be surprised how quickly the American government catches on to anomalies in their territory."

Nodding in fake understanding, Alex leaned into his seat.

When he glanced toward the back of the plane, he saw David knocked out, strapped into another seat. His skin tone looked pale, like he hadn't seen the sun in a while.

"Is he alright?" he asked, pointing at David.

Guo raised his eyes, looking at where Alex was pointing.

"I'm sure he will be fine. He looks less drained than when you fainted the first time. I'm sure he'll be up on his feet before we reach Montreal. As for the lady, she was fine when we boarded. She only fell asleep when we reached our altitude and cruising speed."

Once again, Alex nodded his head.

Alex tried recalling the last thing he did before backing out. He remembered un-melding with the demon he had chosen, and recalling White Death, and that was all.

Thinking about White Death, he tried communicating with the wolf. When he mentally spoke to it, he received no verbal answer, instead feeling a succession of emotions.

The first one was happiness, followed by confusion, and then came tiredness. Alex understood the non-verbal message.

He could guess he still wasn't strong enough to manifest White's complete soul, meaning the wolf only had basic consciousness. This was why the soul already felt tired.

Just communicating with him, after having been out for a few minutes in the world, was probably the maximum it could exert itself for now.

'It's okay. Rest,' he silently said to his companion.

Immediately after, he stopped feeling White's soul in his mind. It was back to being a subtle presence inside him.

Opening his eyes, there was a calmness to them. Guo could see the difference.

"You seem calmer. Did a nice thought occur to you?"

"Huh? Oh, no. Nothing of the sort. I was just communicating with the wolf's soul inside me. I don't know why, but feeling it closer than before, like this, puts me at ease a bit."

"Is the soul a good friend inside New Eden?" Guo asked.

It piqued his curiosity.

"Nothing of the sort, haha. I could even say White is more of a problem sometimes. I don't know why it appealed me to sense him there. It's almost like... I was missing a part of me before, and now it's back."

Alex didn't know how to put it in words better. But it mattered not.

The sense of calm he felt was enough for him. He didn't need to know the reason.

Alexander got up and walked back to his seat. Guo smiled at him, focusing back on the tablet in his hands.

Moments later, Alex was back asleep, this time dreaming of battlefields filled with enemies and allies. He could see himself, happy, fighting to his heart's content.

Chapter 386 Making Him Walk

As his dream went on, it slowly changed. Amongst the enemies he was fighting, he started seeing faces he recognized.

The dream slowly morphed into a nightmare, as the people he fought with became the ones he fought against. Voices blended together, becoming a cacophony of pained screams and pleas.

Alexander had no way to know how much time had passed, as the sun stayed at its zenith perpetually, only changing in hues. The longer the dream went, the fewer people at his side remained, until he was fighting alone.

The army before grew in size, again and again, with more and more people he knew joining them. On the front lines of this battle, facing him, were more and more of his friends, seemingly talking to him, but he couldn't hear their voices amongst the noise.

He just fought and fought, his body no longer responding to his commands. He screamed and cried, begging his body to stop killing, all in vain.

When he stabbed his clawed hand through a familiar woman, the dream finally became silent. Only the words of the woman he loved came to his ears.

"Why did it come to this? Why did you lose faith in humanity? I forgive you, but you need to die with me today..."

Kary's face teared up before him, Alex unable to do anything, still screaming in pain in his mind. When her body hugged him and caught fire, he felt the flesh on his bones slowly turn to ash.

That was the last thing he saw before everything turned to darkness. Floating inside this nothingness, Alex had finally regained control of his movement.

He wept at the horror he had just seen and committed. A voice floated to his ear, that he recognized.

"What a terrible way to end..."

Alex stopped crying, turning his head left and right, trying to find the provenance of the voice.

"Old man Solomon? What is happening?"

The surrounding emptiness vanished, suddenly replaced by the same white room, with a cloudy floor and two sofas. In one, Solomon was seated, looking at the cup of tea in his hands.

His silence prompted Alex to go sit across from him. Amon was still faithfully standing to the side, his eyes closed.

When Alex sat down, Amon stepped forward, a teacup appearing on the tray that sat on the table. Amon took the teapot and poured Alexander a cup.

Taking the cup, Alex was still reeling from the horrors his eyes had seen.

"How am I here, sir? I thought you were inside New Eden?"

Solomon lifted his eyes from his teacup.

"I do not live anywhere in particular. My domain is inside the ring on your finger, and I follow it, wherever that may be."

Looking at the ring on his left hand, Alex still wondered what kind of psychedelic dream he had just had.

"What was that dream? It felt so... real..."

Solomon nodded his head slowly.

"Because it was. Or at least, it could be. What you experienced is not a dream, young man, but a vision of a possible future. That was Vassago's doing."

Alex was taken aback.

"Why would Vassago show me such a future? I would never betray my friends, let alone kill my loved ones. Surely he is mistaken."

Solomon shook his head.

"Young man, Vassago sees possibilities innumerable, with so many paths that lead to different futures. He may be a demon, but he makes no mistakes. If he saw it, then it could happen. The question is, what leads to this?"

Alexander kept quiet. He did not know what to say.

What the demon had shown him was something that he believed would never come to pass, and if it could, it shouldn't. Looking inside himself, his soul was still clean and white, aside from that small black fragment inside it.

He doubted the corruption could grow, or that he wouldn't see it fast enough to do something about it. There was simply no way he would ever turn on his friends, allies, and humanity itself, like the vision seemed to point out.

But Solomon seemed perplexed by the vision's contents. He kept murmuring to himself, too low for Alex to understand him.

"Young man. I think I know what can cause this. I also know a potential way to prevent it. But it is not something that can be done in a short time. Nor is it risk free."

Alexander took a sip of tea, calming his nerves, which were still all bunched up from the nightmare he saw. He raised his head to ask Solomon what his solution was, but before he could open his mouth, the vision vanished.

He slowly opened his eyes up again, to the inside of the private plane. In front of him, Kary was smiling.

"Wake up, Alex. We are back in Montreal. Jack has offered to drive us home to rest before we return to the facility for a round of testing on you again."

Alex rubbed his tired eyes, trying to push away the sleepiness in them.

'Was that just all a dream? So weird...'

He got up, smiling at Kary.

"Yes. Let's go home. A good shower and an actual bed will do us lots of good."

Leaving the plane, Kary walked by David, who still looked half dead, even though he was awake.

"Wait," David said, raising his hand. "Take the wand with you. Having that will help you in case you ever need it."

David knew Alex wouldn't take the swords, since he had already said he wouldn't. But Kary had said no such thing.

Having her owe him a favour would be a good thing for his future plans, so he cast the bait.

Kary looked at Alex, who looked disappointed at David, and smiled. She turned her head back to David and shook her head.

"No, thank you. I think it's better if I learn to control my power better on my own. I appreciate you offering, but I won't be needing it."

She turned around, not even giving him time to argue, and stepped into the limo that was already waiting for them. David stood there, mouth agape.

He was also about to step into the limo when Guo blocked his path.

"Mr. Boudreau says he has endured your rudeness and pushiness enough for a time. He asks that you find your own way home and trusts you are resourceful enough to do so. Good day, Mr. Magnus."

Guo stepped into the limo, closing the door behind him, and it immediately drove off, leaving David standing there, alone, like a pariah. He couldn't believe what he just heard.

"Well fuck you too, I guess..." David ranted tiredly.

He called a taxi and walked to the front of the airport on his own, trudging like a zombie. He was in disbelief.

Chapter 387 Finally Back Home

As the limousine drove off, Alex looked confused at David outside the window. When he turned to Guo, the man responded before the question was asked.

"Mr. Magnus said he preferred to walk home. Something about needing the fresh air to regain his energy."

Alex somehow doubted that was true, based on the face David was pulling as they drove away. Adding to that Jack's snide grin, Alex could guess it wasn't at David's request that they left him there.

But he was already on his way home, and was not in the mood to suddenly walk, so he did not plead for David.

'I guess being a dick eventually fucks you in the ass, doesn't it?' he thought to himself.

The drive home was not very far, as the airport they took off from was in Dorval, and not Mirabel, so they were still on the island. Night had just fallen and traffic was fluid as they drove into downtown.

As they pulled up in front of the condominium tower Alex lived in, Jack told him to wait a moment.

"I want to confirm something with you before you get out."

"Hmm?" Alex replied.

"In Mr. Magnus' tale, he said regular humans are almost all dead, too weak to survive what comes before the invasion even begins. He insisted everyone should at least reach level thirty, to have a shot at surviving."

"Yes. He's told me that many times already."

Jack looked Alex in the eyes.

"Do you believe him? If you had loved ones you wanted to stay alive, would you do anything in your power to convince them to play?"

Alex thought about the question for a moment. But he remembered he had already asked his trainer to play New Eden, hoping to make sure he would save at least one person if he could.

"Yes. I would convince them by any means I have. If it means I can guarantee their survival to at least then, I wouldn't give up on them."

Jack stared at him for a while before releasing a long sigh.

"Then I will trust you. Guo, order me a pod, top of the line. And order one for my wife, too. I guess I will have to make time in my schedule to play New Eden."

Guo nodded, his hands already blazing across his tablet. Alex smiled at the man's tired expression.

He could guess Jack was a very busy man, and that making time wasn't exactly easy for him. So he offered advice to him.

"What most people are doing is playing at night, instead of sleeping. It might not be the best solution, as it cuts into your rest a bit, since you don't actually sleep, but currently, it's the best solution for people who keep living a life outside the game."

Jack nodded in response, thinking it wasn't such a bad idea. He was used to not having a proper rest from his time in the army, anyway.

Alex opened up the door, looking one last time at the tired old man. He suddenly looked much frailer than he had a few hours earlier, when he toted an automatic rifle, taking out monsters left and right.

"Mr. Boudreau. I don't know if you feel responsible, since you have a hand in releasing the game. But this isn't your fault. I have a feeling even David doesn't know what the real reason for this future is. But I will strive to find out."

Jack flashed a genuine smile at Alex.

"Thank you, son. I hope you do, for all our sakes."

Kary and Alex left the limo, closing the door behind them, and the driver opened up the window separating the two compartments.

"Where to, sir?"

"Home. Margaret will be furious that I didn't come home in two days."

The driver chuckled, familiar with the scene. Even Guo was smiling knowingly.

The limousine pulled away, making its way out of Montreal, entering the well-off suburb of Laval-sur-le-Lac, and pulling into the long driveway of a vast estate. Jack looked at the cherry trees flanking both sides of the road.

He had these planted for his wife when they bought the place, since she loved to see them blossom. The trees were currently in bloom, and the pink and white flowers rained slowly on the pavement.

Jack could smell their aroma through the closed windows of the limousine and smiled warmly. But he was already expecting his wife's fury.

'I'll have to give her a good reason why I was gone for two days. I'll also need to find a way to get her to play the game...'

Jack sighed at the arduous task ahead.

Alex exited the elevator, entering his penthouse, which he hadn't seen in what felt like forever.

"Ahh. Home sweet home."

Looking at his clothes, he could see some blood spatters in purple and green hues on his sleeves, and knew these clothes were ruined. He took them off, getting buck naked right there in the middle of his apartment, and tossed them down the incinerator chute.

Kary whistled as she passed near him.

"I know you are tired, and so am I, so let's wash up, eat a bite, and go to sleep. What do you say, handsome?" she asked him, ogling him as she did.

"I was thinking the same. I'll get the shower running."

Alex climbed the stairs, with Kary looking at his ass as he did, biting her lower lip. Although she was extenuated, regardless of having slept so much on the plane, she could already feel hunger as she watched his naked form climb those steps.

'Who'd have thought I could be this horny...' she thought to herself, walking up to the room.

She rapidly got undressed, joining Alex in the already running shower, where she hugged his well-toned body from behind.

One thing leading to another, Alex and Kary forsook eating and consummate each other before falling asleep in each other's arms after their shower.

Alex's dreams that night were much sweeter than those on the plane.

Chapter 388 Aftermath

Back in Nebraska, Godrick was now constantly being questioned by the local police. Since he had been seen going to the woods with his three friends, and they now had been found dead in the woods, amongst a plethora of weird green creatures, fingers were pointing at him.

He was currently being let loose for the fifth time already, all thanks to a certain cop always taking his side. Even though he hated the situation he was in, he was somewhat happy that Officer Grant was defending him.

As he walked out of the station again, the officer stopped him next to his truck.

"Listen, Godrick. Be honest with me. Did you know about what was found in the woods? I don't care if you were there or not. I just want to know if you knew."

"Max. You found shells to four of my guns in those woods. What do you think? I'm not the one who killed them, but I am the one who brought them out in the woods. We were looking for my sister..."

"How is she, by the way?"

Godrick took a moment before answering.

He had been glad when they found his sister, still alive in the camp, along with half a dozen other women. But Laura wasn't the same since she came back.

She would wake up in the middle of the night, screaming in pain and fear, yelling that they would find her again. When Godrick tried calming her, he would always end up having to restrain her before she hurt herself.

It was painful for him to see his sister, who was a symbol of strength for him growing up, be broken this way.

"She's getting better," he lied.

"Good, good. Tell her hi for me. And Godrick. Stay away from the god-damned woods next time, will ya?"

Godrick nodded weakly. Getting into his truck, he drove back home, where his mother was watching over his sister.

He lived just outside of the main part of town, and the drive there wasn't very long. But he still needed to pass through the main part of it, where everyone was looking at him strangely, as of late.

He had become a pariah in his hometown. He wasn't disconnected enough to not hear the rumours going around.

Some people called him a murderer, blaming him for the death of his friends. Others called him a psycho, claiming he was the one who kidnaped all those women, raping them and psychologically scarring them.

To him, the worst rumour was the one about him doing that to his own sister. His flesh and blood.

But he kept to himself, holding back the anger bubbling inside him, that made him want to do nothing more than fight these idiots. He kept it inside, promising himself to find a better way to channel it.

Reaching his house, Godrick parked the truck in his driveway. As he stopped the engine, he saw his sister bolting out of the front door, like death was on her heels.

He hurriedly jumped out of his truck, jumping to get in her way.

"Stop, Laura! Laura! You're safe now, Laura!"

"Let me go! Let me go! They're gonna find me! They'll kill everyone! We have to run away from here!"

Godrick grabbed her arms, hugging her tight, making sure she couldn't break free from his hold. He blessed the heavens that he had no neighbour to see this happen.

Bringing his sister to the ground, in a semi-seated position, Godrick held on to her as best he could, waiting for her episode to stop. He knew it wouldn't last too long, as it had every time before.

His mother sprinted out of the house, noticing Godrick had already caught Laura. Godrick's mother knew her son wasn't responsible for how Laura was.

But seeing her daughter like this, battered, broken, and unable to think rationally, hurt her very much. She crumbled on the balcony, weeping loudly.

Godrick couldn't stand to see this happen. Had his father still been alive, he could have helped settle everyone, and found a way to make everything go back to normal.

Godrick's father had been this family's rock. Ever since he was dead, Godrick had been trying to fill those shoes, but it was no small task.

He could only try to do his best.

After screaming and trying to wiggle free for about twenty minutes, Laura finally calmed down. She went back to not speaking, her eyes glazed over like she was insanely high.

He picked her up, carrying her inside the house. As he passed his mother, he whispered to her.

"I'm sorry, Ma, I let this happen to her. I'll find a way to make her right again."

His mother kept weeping, not responding.

Godrick felt a pang of pain in his heart. He was sure his mother blamed him for his sister's situation.

Even though the woman did not blame him in the slightest, her pain was too strong for her to put into words, for him to understand. And the misunderstanding remained.

Days went by, with the situation never getting better. Godrick still did not know how to make his sister better.

One morning, he received an email from an anonymous sender. Godrick was paranoid at first, not wanting to open it.

But the subject of the email kept him from deleting it outright.

You can fix your sister.

After staring at the title for several long minutes, Godrick flinched and opened it.

The email contained only a few sentences.

To fix your sister's mental condition, there is a way. Play New Eden. Reach a certain level of power inside New Eden, and you will be capable of helping her. Ideally, play a healing class, or a psychic class. Trust my words. Astaroth

To Godrick, the claims were absolute madness. How could a game ever make him capable of helping his sister?

Worst yet, how could a game change anything in the real world?

Wanting nothing more than to delete this stupid email, Godrick clicked it and dragged it toward his trash icon. But his mind refused to let go, eventually putting the email back inside the inbox.

Godrick opened up the internet, going against all his logic, and purchasing a gaming helmet for New Eden.

'If there is a chance, I should take it. I hope you aren't a liar, Astaroth, whoever you are.'

On the east coast of Canada, in a nice penthouse in downtown Montreal, Alexander closed his email app.

'I hope you find it in you to try anything possible to help your sister, Godrick.'

"Alex! The game is going back online in thirty minutes! What are you doing?"

"Coming!"

Alex got up from his outside table, getting back inside.

It was time to re-enter New Eden.

Chapter 389 The War Begins

Players around the world settled inside their pods, or on their beds and chairs, with helmets on their heads. The last five minutes before the game went back online were counting down.

The hype was a world phenomenon, with even more players getting ready to launch the game than before the update. The forums were exploding with theories about what the update was, with no news about it from Evo-Gaming.

Throughout the seven-day update, posts about New Eden abounded. So much so, that it had drowned a single post out.

One person had seen this post when it went live, and this person was David. But the post had surprised even him, since this was not a repeating thing.

The post came from a disgruntled sister, whose brother had been in a coma ever since the update started, his body now laying in the hospital. But no matter how hard she tried yelling to the world that New Eden was dangerous, no one listened.

But David was worried. This person was none other than Xavier Lagacé, gamer tag Chronos.

Last time, Xavier had convinced him to play New Eden during the update. But this time around, he was apparently in a coma during the update.

It made no sense. Why would his path be altered?

It wasn't like the butterfly effect could affect him, who had had no contact with Alexander or himself since he came back. Why had his future changed?

But David had no time to go investigate. Neither did he have the right to.

Xavier's sister would find it weird if he suddenly walked in like he had known him forever.

Aside from that, he also no longer had the time to do so right now. With the update almost done, and the game reopening in a few minutes, David had to put all his attention on New Eden.

He only wished his friend would get better.

Settling down inside his gaming pod, David closed its lid. As he gazed at the dark inside of the pod, he let his mind wander to memories of better times, with his friend of a different lifetime, and softly sighed.

"I hope you get back on your feet. Humanity will need you."

Alex was walking up his stairs, heading to the main room, where his pod was connected. Next to his, a recent addition was now resting.

Kary had her gaming pod moved to his penthouse, after asking for his permission, of course, to which he gladly said yes. He couldn't let her play on his helmet all the time, after all.

Alexander immediately noticed the different density of mana in his apartment the day after the pod was delivered. With this fact before him, it was easy to infer that the pods were facilitating the entry of mana into their world.

Of course, he knew this wasn't the only entry point. After seeing how dense the mana had been in Nebraska, he knew there were other points of leakage.

But it all didn't matter anymore. From what David had said, the point of change had already been crossed and it was no longer reversible.

All they could do now, was become stronger in and out of New Eden, and hope that when the time came, they could repel the demons.

Reaching his pod, he could see Kary was already in hers, ready to close it and log in. Alex reached inside her pod, pecking her lips with a kiss, upside down like a certain superhero.

Kary giggled, grabbing his head so he couldn't pull away, and giving him a flurry of kisses back.

They had gotten more at ease with each other over the last few days. Living together had burned away a lot of barriers.

Releasing Alex's face, she smiled at him.

"Alright, you flirtatious demon. The game's about to relaunch. We should get ready."

Alex nodded, smiling softly at her.

"Right back at you, my curvy vixen. You ready to kick some demon ass?"

"Of course. Are you?"

Alex chuckled. He was ready, and he would most likely be the first to fight demons, anyway.

When he was logged out, he was still standing directly inside the hall that led to the shield artifact in his starting village. And with the message Aberon had left him, he was certain this would have turned into a hotspot in ten years.

He had already told Kary that he would take some time before coming back to their base. He explained the situation to her, and she even called him lucky.

Logging back in and facing the new threat felt like any gamer's dream come true. But he wasn't sure about her claims.

Yes, he was ecstatic to go back to fighting directly on entry, since he liked combat a lot. But he wasn't sure that facing demons right away was the best for him.

Especially since his soul had already been corrupted once. He feared what would happen if he was so abruptly shoved into a corrupted zone.

But he couldn't change that, so he would have to figure his shit out.

'I can always teleport away if I feel the corruption is too strong.'

Alex went to lie in his gaming pod, Kary closing the lid on hers as he did, followed by him doing the same. Staring at the screen inside the pod, Alex looked at the timer.

0:35

Closing his eyes to center his mind, he put himself into a fighting mindset directly. He was certain he would land in the middle of trouble, so it was his best option.

Counting down the seconds in his mind, he felt gravity pull him down as he reached zero.

Similarly to the first time they logged into the game, the players across the world were brought on a small trip across New Eden's skies.

But the landscape had drastically changed.

Instead of nice green plains, mountains scraping the skies, and cities teeming with activity, what the players were forced to watch was ultimately unpleasant.

Cities burning, plains scorched, bodies strewn about, and mountains seething in black energy. The world of New Eden had been ushered into an era of war.

Astaroth looked at all the devastation and immediately thought back to the memories Khalor had shown him of their world in the same state.

'I guess the true game starts now...'

Chapter 390 Ruins

Launching New Eden

Logging in

Welcome back player Astaroth

As the message appeared in his vision, the landscapes changed, and he appeared in the dark tunnel under Aberon's house. In front of him, where there used to be a conjured wall of stone, shattered stone and scratch marks replaced it.

A thick red mist emanated from the cavern where the artifact should be. In the center, where the artifact once rested on the pedestal, glass-like fragments were strewn about.

Behind the pedestal, a large red circle floated a foot above the ground. The mist flowing through the tunnel all came from the open circle.

It was seeping out of it like fog over a mountain ridge, falling to the ground and washing in every direction.

The thickness of it was much higher than what Astaroth and his friends had seen in the underground of their base. The mana was so saturated with red and black particles that the act of breathing felt like heresy.

Astaroth was on high alert, expecting to be attacked at any moment. But no attack ever came, as he surveyed the room, trying to see what caused the scratch marks and exploded wall.

He could already feel the miasma trying to enter his body, from every pore of his skin, slowly creeping its way toward his face. Astaroth didn't want to risk being corrupted, so he bolted out of the room.

When he climbed the slope leading to Aberon's house, instead of finding a staircase up and the inside of the house, a hole was blown up into the village. The hole was as large as the house used to be, and it was easy to guess which direction it had exploded from.

Jumping out of the underground, Astaroth landed inside the cave. The village he had once started his adventure in was nothing more than ruins now.

The forge was destroyed, the barracks lay in ruins, Aberon's house was no more, and even the small alcoves that the villagers had lived in were mostly crumbled closed.

'What in the heavens happened here? It's like a hurricane hit the interior of the mountain.'

The devastation was reminiscent of the vision he had of Tel'narel and the memories Khalor had shown him through his legacy.

Astaroth scanned the cave for any signs of enemies remaining, but found none. As he left the confines of the mountain, his gaze landed on the forest outside.

His heart dropped.

Around him, nothing but scorched trees and dead animals or monsters. It was like a volcano had erupted from inside the mountain, swallowing everything from there to wherever it ended.

Amongst the remains of animals, many species could be seen.

Astaroth could spot the familiar dire wolves he had hunted time and time again with his fellow warriors in his early stages. He could also see a lot of burnt bat remains, which, by their size and shape, he could tell they were blood bats.

Astaroth also found a few Giant Bears as he walked further away from the village. But something felt odd.

The more he walked away, the more animal bodies he found, that instead of being faced toward the village, were faced in the opposite direction.

He couldn't tell if the monsters had been running away from something, or if they fought against each other, given some bodies were isolated, and others were tangled in heaps.

Once Astaroth had walked far away from the village, where he couldn't feel the taint of demonic mana any longer, he called out to Morpheus and melded with him.

With the wings sprouting out of his back, Astaroth launched into the skies. Once he was hundreds of feet in the air, he stopped.

From there, he closed his eyes and focused.

Feeling a tether attached to his soul, which he had felt many times before, Astaroth opened his eyes and blasted in the direction it went.

'Good. Genie is still alive. Let's hope she hasn't succumbed to the corruption.'

Following the link between him and the wolf, Astaroth flew for as long as the meld allowed him, before landing and switching to White, sprinting in the same direction.

After another five minutes, he swapped over to Luna, feeling he was almost to where the tether connected. Astaroth did not recognize where he was anymore, and the forest in these parts was still burnt to the ground, although it seemed some patches of it were still fuming.

Reaching the edge of a valley, Astaroth came to an abrupt stop. Below him, a few kilometres away, a large tree towered the center of the valley.

Around the base of the tree, a massive row of stones stood tall, forming a perfect circle, acting like a natural barrier.

'This place! It looks exactly like Paragon's base!'

But he had no time to ponder much, since the sounds of battle echoed across the valley, reaching his ears. In the middle of what sounded like thunderclaps and explosions, Astaroth heard a familiar howl.

AAAWWWOOOOOOO!

Astaroth's heart was almost soothed to hear the familiar howl of his companion, Genie. But the low roar of a giant bear followed it, trying to suppress it.

'She's in battle!'

Realizing it wasn't time to dawdle, Astaroth launched forward, making his way to where the noise of a fight was resounding from.

Reaching the place, he came up behind a group of monsters with the same composition as what he had seen around the village.

Hordes of Blood Bats, wings seething in red miasma, making them look even more dangerous than before.

Entire packs of Dire Wolves, with manes flaring up in demonic energy, eyes bright red.

Giant Bears, twice their normal sizes, their fur blood-red instead of its natural black.

These beasts also seemed crazed, acting recklessly, as they fought their counterparts who were losing badly.

At the front of the battle, locked in battle against a massive white wolf, was a Giant red bear. The white wolf was sporting many claw marks across its flanks, bleeding profusely.

The bear wasn't in pristine condition, either, one of its eyes missing, a gaping hole replacing it, as well as many bite marks around its neck, bleeding so much it was a miracle the bear was still standing.

Seeing his companion in such awful shape aroused a sense of fury inside Astaroth, that he hadn't sensed in a while.

"Genie!!"