

New Eden 731

Chapter 731 Next Round Of Testing

The rest of the morning was boring for Alex, except when Clark was jolted awake with smelling salts. He had made a fuss about suddenly being surrounded by strange people in a strange place.

Alex had to help calm him down and explain where and why they were where they were. In the end, Clark accepted, although reluctantly, to get tested on by the strange scientists.

In the meantime, they had already brought Phoenix to another room, where she was also getting tested. Surprisingly, she had made decent progress in mana pool size and the intensity of her controlled flames.

This made her happy, as she always felt she was holding Alexander back on this side of the veil. Hearing that she had advanced by leaps and bounds made her feel she could finally be helpful to him if another situation arose.

Every time they had an incident, up to now, she had been assigned almost a supportive role. She was tired of being at the back.

That wasn't her style. Kary was a fighter, not a helper.

As for Alexander, he had to stay by Clark's side during his testing, as the man had asked this. He didn't trust the weird men, and Alex couldn't fault him.

Once Clark was tested, and they had hard data for his capabilities, Alex was disappointed. He had expected more.

Jack and his scientists had found a way to quantify mana, which was beyond Alexander's comprehension. And with it, they had established the start of a power scale.

Alex currently stood at the top of that scale; his mana levels only equalled by the young gale, but its purity was much higher. But Clark was barely above a human in terms of power.

It didn't make sense, though. They had just fought, and Alex knew that the last hit would have dealt massive damage to him had it connected.

The power level shown for him made no sense.

'Maybe his power is only observable in actual combat?' Alex mused.

It was now his turn to go through the works, and Alex had to focus. He did the same as usual, condensing as much mana as possible through the measuring device, showing his mana levels.

Then, he did a panoply of physical tests to determine how much he could boost his body with it. He excelled in those parts.

Then came the next part of his tests. These were specially tailored for him.

Since he was a summoner type, the tests consisted of summoning each of his soul companions one by one and having them run some tests. Then, he was to summon them simultaneously and hold them out for as long as possible to see how long he could fight at maximum summon capacity.

They also tested him on the time he could stay melded with each soul companion, with and without the other companion summoned.

Sadly, Alex still could not get Luna out. He wasn't even able to communicate with her yet.

He had, though, managed to sense her around his soul. This meant he could eventually reach out to her.

But he wasn't there yet.

His tests were the longest ones, given the range of them. But they eventually ended.

And just in time, as well.

Mr. Gu entered the facility, looked at the three people there, and smiled.

"I see I am right on time. Good. I will be taking Mr. Roberts back to his home before the three of us go to Mr. Boudreau," he said, pointing them at the door behind him.

Clark looked at him with weary eyes before glancing at Alex. Alex smiled at him and gave a brief nod, signalling he was okay, before walking away.

Only then did Clark start moving, and he kept his eyes on the strange Chinese man all along, alert if he tried anything funny.

They were guided to the same lift they had come from, which led to the parking lot, and took it wordlessly. It was only once in the limousine that Clark opened his mouth.

"So, this Boudreau guy. Big shot, I take it? When do I meet him?"

The question surprised Alex and made him wonder why he wanted to meet the guy. But Mr. Gu was ready for such a question.

"Ideally, never. But if you wish to meet him, I can ask him if he wants to meet you, although I doubt it. We only brought here you because you showed the traits and are linked to Mr. Leduc. In any other circumstance, you would have never seen this compound. At least not until you gave us a reason to take you here for a more unpleasant stay."

Everyone in the limo felt the hidden threat and the lingering awkwardness it left in the air.

They quickly reached Clark's small apartment building, where Mr. Gu politely asked him to stay quiet about the facility and gave him a card with a number to call if he ever felt like his newfound power was running wild.

Then, he was almost thrown out of the limousine, and the vehicle darted away, heading toward the downtown area.

'What kind of people has the kid gotten himself linked to? If I didn't know better, I would think he was held against his will...'

But Clark couldn't muster the energy to care about this any longer. He was spent and couldn't wait to get in a hot bath and catch some Zs.

This wasn't his problem. He already had a few of those and didn't need the problems of others as well.

Alex saw him stay on the sidewalk momentarily as the limo pulled away, wondering what was happening in his trainer's head. He could only imagine the confusion likely in the man's head.

'I guess I'll have to explain in more detail the next time we have a moment. I hope he doesn't suddenly refuse to train me...'

Alex looked at the buildings go by in the window, and his thoughts wandered back to New Eden, where a war had been dodged, only for them to prepare for a bigger one.

His life had gotten so complicated in just a few months...

Chapter 732 Late Arrival

The drive from the residential outskirts of downtown into the more commercial part was short. Soon enough, the limo stopped before a tall blackish tower with a conical shape.

Alex could barely distinguish the name on the building's highest levels from the ground. But vanity was a trait of the rich, and right before the building, a giant sculpture of its name was also present.

The name 'Levitus Group' screamed for attention, with its large cobalt blue lettering on a black stone backdrop.

'I wonder how he came up with this name...'

Mr. Gu saw his gaze go to the enormous sculpture and smiled.

"I wondered the same thing at first," he said, walking beside Alex.

"Huh?" Alex asked, confused.

"The name. You are wondering what meaning lies behind it, aren't you? Many do. I was the same in the beginning. It took me years to figure out why he named it this way. Mr. Boudreau never shares his vision on it. He prefers to let the people come up with their own conclusion."

Alex eyed the Chinese man curiously, waiting for him to tell him his thoughts. But Mr. Gu softly chuckled and walked away.

Next to Alexander, Kary was more absorbed in the building's architecture. The building may look like a plain conical shape to the masses, but she wasn't fooled.

She had seen this shape in a picture before, hanging behind Jack Boudreau's underground office—an image from Jack's earlier years in the military.

'Why emulate an old ruin's shape for something modern?' she wondered.

"Hurry up, young ones. Let us not keep Mr. Boudreau waiting," Mr. Gu called out.

Clicking his tongue in disappointment, Alex followed behind him, glancing one last time at the sculpture, his mind already coming up with different reasons for the name. Kary followed suit.

Reaching the lobby inside the tower, Alex saw someone he recognized.

Standing at the reception counter, David Magnus had a furious face.

"What do you mean, Jack can't receive me because he has a meeting? I know that! I'm part of that meeting, for crying out loud!"

He was losing patience with the man behind the counter, who smiled in response.

"Sir. I understand your frustrations. But I don't see your name on the authorized guest list, and I can't let you walk into the building without authorization. I will also ask that you calm down, or I will be forced to call security."

David seethed angrily at the man, about to offer him a reason to call security, when a familiar voice echoed behind him.

"Cut the man some slack, you zombie. He's just doing his job. Besides, I wouldn't let your dead-looking ass in either, he he."

David spun around abruptly, his face red with anger, a vivid contrast to his deathly pale skin.

"About time you fuckwits got here," David cursed.

"Can't you tell this idiot I'm with you?" he asked Mr. Gu.

Mr. Gu shook his head patronizingly.

"You need to learn patience, Mr. Magnus. This behaviour won't get you what you want from people. But the angry man is right, Leonard. He is with us," Mr. Gu replied, saying the last part while looking at the receptionist.

The man behind the counter smiled warmly at Mr. Gu before looking back at David, who was looking back at him.

"Why didn't you say so sooner, sir? Here is a guest pass. Have a nice day."

The stretched smile on his lips elicited a sharp response from David, who only wanted to jump over the counter and punch his face. But he contained his emotions.

He yanked the lanyard from the man's grasp, spitting out a forced "Thank you."

Stomping away from the counter, he followed Mr. Gu, Alex, and Kary, who were already walking toward the glass barriers that separated the lobby from the elevators.

Kary giggled at his temper tantrum, making him almost growl at her.

"You told me to be here fifteen minutes ago. Why are you guys late?" David spat as they stopped before the glass barriers, scanning their passes.

Mr. Gu let Alex and Kary in through his own pass while David had to take a checkpoint.

"We had an unexpected detour to make, Mr. Magnus. My apologies. But it would be best if you learned to contain your emotions better. This type of uncouth behaviour does not benefit a future saviour of humanity, does it?" the Chinese man mocked.

David grumbled to himself something along the lines of 'fuck humanity...' and entered the opening elevator, keeping quiet as he recentered himself.

Soon enough, his calm and cold demeanour returned, making Mr. Gu nod in satisfaction.

The elevator ride was long, given they went from the ground floor to the hundredth floor.

It slightly disappointed Alex that the elevator shaft was in the center of the building. He would have wished to see the city get smaller from inside the elevator.

But he would be served when he got to the top floor.

Reaching the hundredth floor, the elevator lurched to a stop, a *Ding* resounding inside as the doors opened. And the sight that greeted them floored them.

In a straight line with the elevator doors, there was nothing. But that nothingness led to a large windowed wall that overlooked Montreal's eastern side in its entirety.

Levitus Tower was the tallest building on Montreal Island, making it the most incredible vantage point to look at it. The unobstructed view went on for miles and miles, the St-Laurence River clear, all the way to the island's tip.

Alex and Kary walked over to the window, almost afraid of leaning on it, fearful they would taint the view with their handprints.

"Woah... Jack looks at this every day? What a lucky bastard..."

His penthouse may be at a considerable height, but it was far from the tallest building in his neighbourhood. Of course, this didn't mean he had peepers looking inside his penthouse, but the view wasn't as unobstructed as here.

Even Kary took a moment to look on in awe. This wasn't a sight anyone could see any day.

Well... Aside from Jack Boudreau.

"Come along now, young people. Mr. Boudreau is waiting," Mr. Gu called to them, walking toward the left of the elevator.

Alex and Kary were almost reluctant to pull away from this view. But they weren't here for sightseeing.

Jack had told them he had something important to discuss. And with all going on lately, it couldn't be a trivial matter.

Chapter 733 Cozy Office

Guiding the three young adults toward the office part of the floor, Mr. Gu brought them around the inside of the building, on the opposite side that they pulled out of the elevator.

This purposefully designed floor would cause any would-be infiltrator to be seen by a dozen cameras and countermeasures if the situation ever arose. Jack didn't have many enemies, given his friendly business temper.

But one was never too cautious, especially when you had led troops into battle and gotten men killed by the hundreds. He was sure he had his fair share of hidden threats.

Jack heard the footsteps long before the four people arrived at his door. Which was why he had already put away the paper files he had been looking at.

"Ahh, there you are. A bit late, but it gave me time to sort out other minor matters. Please. Have a seat," Jack said, pointing to the side, where two large sofas were nested before a coffee table.

On the table, a few freshly baked cakes were waiting under a glass canopy, and a pot of steaming coffee was waiting under what looked like a pour-over pot.

He rose from his desk, headed toward the couch closest to him, and sat in the middle, leaving some room for Mr. Gu. Jack waited for all three of them to be seated before pouring himself some coffee.

Mr. Gu followed suit, pouring himself and the guests a cup before raising the cake bell and pushing some dessert plates forward.

"Please help yourselves to some. These aren't your everyday fresh cakes. Mrs. Boudreau made them herself," Mr. Gu said, smiling.

Jack was puffing his chest out, with a smile the width of his face, as he looked at the cakes with pride. It wasn't often Margaret made sweets, but they were on a level of their own.

He, of course, knew she had learned this skill for one of her many past infiltrations and undercover missions. But that was irrelevant to their taste.

Kary did not need to be told twice, as she was already grabbing a plate and some tongs to grab a colourful cupcake. She almost drooled through her enormous grin as the smell hit her nostrils.

David leaned back on the sofa, uninterested in such offerings, and stared at Jack, waiting for the meeting to truly begin.

Alex had heard snippets of how Margaret operated in New Eden. Considering with whom she was married, he had already assumed Jack's wife might be an assassin.

So he eyed the cupcakes with a measure of distrust.

Jack saw this and bellowed with laughter.

"Boahahahaha! Don't worry, Mr. Leduc. If Margaret wanted you dead, you wouldn't wake up from your gaming pod one morning. Poisoning food is not her MO."

Alex looked at him, eking out a forced smile, which turned into more of a weird grimace than a smile. Meanwhile, Kary was already stuffing her face with the colourful little cupcake and moaning in pleasure.

"Ell your wi'e 'ese 'up'a'es are 'eli'ious!" Kary blurted through her mouthful of sweets, careful not to spill a single crumb.

Jack grinned at her, raising a thumb, before looking at Alex and motioning at the table.

Alex shook his head no, saying, "Thanks. But I'll pass if you don't mind."

A slight disappointment flashed on Jack's face, but it was gone as fast as it got there when he noticed Kary smiling wider.

"More for me, then!" she exclaimed, having just swallowed the last of her cupcake.

Instead, Alex sipped his coffee, letting out a light sigh of appreciation. This was some excellent coffee.

Once he judged everyone was comfortable enough, Jack smiled and leaned forward.

"Alright. Let's get to the reason I called you all here today. I can already feel the curious stares from one of you, so let's get this over with."

David lightly scoffed, knowing the comment had been about him. But he nonetheless kept his mouth shut.

"As most of you know, the next municipal elections are coming up in a few months. I know you probably don't care much about those, given your age and centers of interest, but I am different.

"Unfortunately, I will also need help from you three in the coming elections, as I am presenting myself as a candidate. And you will be part of my campaign."

David grinned. He had expected this to be the case.

Otherwise, it made no sense for Jack to suddenly start making moves so openly about promising safety to the citizens through protection from the rogue players. The pieces were now slowly falling into place.

Kary stopped shoving sweets into her face, her eyes locking on Jack. Her attention was now entirely on him.

She was aware that Jack had ulterior motives for every action he took, as most sly old men did. But this went beyond owing people favours.

She pushed the sweets back on the table, taking a wet napkin and cleaning her mouth before becoming serious.

"So this is why you were pushing Alex as a hero to the public. Marking him as under your wing means you are the symbol of safety. Not a bad idea," she commented.

"But what about us? How do you plan on tying us to you?"

Jack smiled at her.

'Smart woman. Exactly as I had expected,' Jack thought.

"You are understanding this in the wrong way, Ms. Deveille. I don't want to bind you all to me. What I want us to work together for a safer future. I'm sure Mr. Magnus here knows that this is a safe bet. The world is changing, and we should change with it."

David nodded his head. The old man wasn't wrong.

He also had his reasons for accepting to be present today. There was something he wanted to share with the people in this room, and having them already meet up saved him time and effort.

"I'm more curious about how you intend to present me to the public. What's your angle? I'm not exactly PR-friendly," David remarked with a snicker.

But Jack was well prepared.

"Then let's put all the cards on the table, shall we?" Jack said, taking a remote from his pocket and pressing a button.

The room went dark the following moment before a hologram appeared over the table they were seated around.

Chapter 734 Learning His Plans

A video montage played on the holographic projection, showing pieces and bits of their combat against the goblins back in the States. David frowned, as he didn't remember seeing cameras on any of them.

But he never once saw Jack in the image, or Mr. Gu, for that matter, and he quickly connected the dots.

'He was wearing a hidden body cam. Smart.'

"With this video, and many more to come, I'm sure, I planned to portray you three as enforcers of sorts. You would be called in to deal with monster appearances and people going rogue with their newly discovered powers.

"If we pull it off properly, it would give you young folks, as well as me, a good push in public opinion. And that is exactly what I need for the upcoming campaign. What do you think?"

Alex looked dazed at the prospect of taking an active role in the public eye.

It was silly to suddenly feel self-conscious about this, given he had always wanted to become a recognized professional e-sports player. But it suddenly became an all-too-real possibility.

He felt his stomach churn a bit from the nervousity.

"I don't want to be a part of this big public stunt. I'll help you do the work, sure. But I want no camera pointed at me while I do. I don't want to be seen as a hero. Or a saviour, for that matter," David said, looking at Jack sternly.

Jack frowned a bit at his statement.

"Tell me, Mr. Magnus. If you don't want to be portrayed as a hero or saviour, why are you bending over backwards to build a shelter to save people? Doesn't your statement go against your actions?"

David snorted at the words.

"You misunderstand my intentions, Jack. I don't want to save people out of the goodness of my heart. I say fuck humanity. But not everyone deserves to die. I'm giving them the option of survival on the condition they help fight.

"My shelter won't be a place to hide, but a place from which we fight back."

Jack's teeth clenched at hearing these words.

"Why even build a shelter, then? Are you trying to have a place filled with slaves?" he asked, his face gloomy.

"Not slaves. But I won't take in people who want to cower in fear. Humanity will soon be at stake, and only the ones willing to fight for it deserve to live. You can take in those freeloaders in your shelter, if you want, but mine will be a war camp."

Jack clenched his fists. He understood what David was saying, but it sounded too selfish.

Jack was a military man, so he understood the meaning of self-sacrifice. But he had joined to serve and protect his country and people.

Not let them out to die.

If David weren't one of the most powerful people in the world right now, he would have shoved him into a hole to be forgotten. His mentality went radically against Jack's.

"Don't get me wrong, Jack. I don't want humanity to end. But I also don't want to protect people who can't defend themselves or have no will to. In two years from now, when the rifts start opening, the world will become survival of the fittest.

"We will need every man, woman, and child who can fight to beat back the tides of demons. There is no use in saving people who refuse to fight and cower behind doors and walls. And that is if the timing is still the same..." David said, his face looking grave.

"I'll do the dirty work. I'll help you keep the troubling ones in check. It also benefits me, since they could kill important figures if left unchecked. But don't portray me as a hero. I'm not a hero. I'm the devil that lurks in the shadows and does the work no one wants to do."

Alex felt like it was the first time David expressed his true thoughts, and funnily enough, he agreed with him on some points. Why save people who don't want to help save others?

But Alex also knew that regardless of how cowardly a person was, he wouldn't hesitate if he could save a life. He just wasn't the type to leave a person to die if they didn't deserve it.

"I think David has a good point, even if his methods and philosophies are a smidge barbaric. We won't be able to save everyone. That much is certain. If I have to choose to save a person who will fight back or a person who will cower, I would choose the fighter," Kary said.

Hearing her say this, Alex realized they were almost all on the same page. Their ways of treating people might differ, but they all wanted to keep humanity alive.

"I'll do it. But I want to be sure you aren't tying locks on us. My freedom is important to me. I don't want to be restrained under someone suddenly," Alex said, looking at the montage rolling on a loop.

Jack smiled at Alex.

As long as he had him, his plan could proceed. Having all three cooperate would be a boon, for sure.

But his primary target had always been Alex. He felt he could sell him as a hero with much more ease than the other two.

Even though Kary had more public exposure already, she didn't fit his intended mould. Alex could, with a bit of work.

"In this case, let us iron out the specifics and write all this down. Not in a contract, of course. But only in a way to have everything black on white, for good measure."

Mr. Gu pulled out a tablet and set himself up on a corner of the table. He was ready to get everything in writing as needed.

Alex agreed to this, followed by Kary. Only David seemed reluctant at first.

"Come on, man. It's not like he's forcing you into anything. Just discuss your intentions and let's all set our own boundaries. This way, we can keep working together without issue. Don't you want that?" Alex said.

That was the last push he needed to agree. The rest of the meeting proceeded in a more roundtable fashion, everyone talking in turn and setting up their expectations.

Chapter 735 The Next Crisis

The hours flashed by, all five of them absorbed in their discussion; the small document became thicker by the minute until everyone had said his piece.

Mr. Gu finalized the document and sent it to the office's printer to make copies for everyone.

No signature was required of anyone, but having copies ensured they all kept track of each other's goals and expectations.

Once everything was in order, and Jack was about to have them escorted out, David interrupted him.

"I have something else I wanted to discuss with all of you. And I think it's the perfect opportunity to set your plan in motion," David claimed, pulling out a data stick.

Handing it over to Jack, David leaned back into the sofa and waited for the data stick to get plugged in and booted. Everything he needed was already on it.

Jack didn't waste time, handing the stick to Mr. Gu, who walked to the desk and plugged it into a slot to this effect.

In a matter of seconds, the hologram switched from the looping montage to a static screen with a map open on it.

The map displayed an area a bit northwest of Montreal, about fifty miles away, where a small municipality called Lac-des-Seize-?les could be found. It was a remote area, surrounded by forests and lakes, with no sign of any other civilization around.

"I present you our next pain in the ass. Lac-des-Seize-?les," David said, pointing at the display.

Jack wasn't sure where he was going with this, so he stared at him until he continued talking.

"In this remote place, located in the middle of nowhere, is the ideal scenario for your plan to work, Jack."

Jack's eyelid twitched.

"Stop talking in riddles, son. Spit it out."

David chortled lightly.

"So impatient. I guess showing is better than telling, though. Here, give me that remote," David said, grabbing the remote off the table.

He clicked the button on its center, making the image switch out for a news article. It looked like a local newspaper, dated a few days ago.

'Hunter found mauled to death and half eaten. Are bears back in the region?'

The title was innocuous, mostly, as bears were not uncommon in the forests of Quebec. But there was no way David brought this up if it wasn't a special case.

"A bear did not kill this hunter. Although the size of what attacked him matches a black bear, that was not the culprit. The culprit is an animal that Alex appreciates a lot, a wolf.

"But not just any wolf. A mana-mutated one."

David clicked the button again as the image swapped out for a sketch. And the drawing was not something that was normal for the human world.

The image showed two wolves, one of which reached the size of a big black bear. But the other wolf...

It was immense. The size of a ten-wheeler dump truck,

"The first wolf, the smaller one, is what attacked this hunter. It was probably a stray from a local pack who went off to hunt because their usual food source has drastically lessened.

"The increased size of the wolves made them eat more. Therefore, their food source has either all perished or fled the area. This means they will begin to starve and become bolder towards human settlements. I don't need to tell you what that means."

Jack's face paled.

"Are you saying we are about to have a mass grave this close to home?" he asked.

"Well, that depends," David replied.

"On what?" Alex asked.

"On how fast we prepare and get there. I estimate the wolves will start walking into town before nightfall tomorrow."

"Why did you wait this long to tell us?" Kary asked, frowning.

"Yeah. That sounds like you are stalling. Is there a reason?" Alex chimed.

David smirked.

"I am stalling. Because if we all go right now, we'll die," he stated.

Jack's face became stern.

"That bad? What would it take for us to win without casualties?" he asked.

David clicked the button again, the image changing to a chart.

"I estimate the wolf pack to be close to thirty units. Wolves are a protected species in that area, so they left them to thrive. The downside is that now that they have mutated, their numbers will play against us.

"Those are no longer regular wolves. Unironically, they will make the rats in the service tunnels look like vermin."

Alex looked at the chart and couldn't understand what the numbers meant.

"What's with the chart and the percentages?" he asked, confused.

David smiled at him.

"Good question. Each distinct line has a number to it. That is the number of powered people we bring. The percentage numbers are the chances of success without casualty."

Looking at the chart, Jack noticed no 100% category.

"How much do we need for a guaranteed victory without the loss of men?" he asked, locking eyes with David.

"We could be a hundred. It won't matter. You see, the second wolf I showed before, I am almost certain there will be at least one. It's a boss-level creature, just like the rat queen. And god forbid there are two; one would already be a difficult fight, since it will lead the others in combat."

It was a well-known fact that wolves were excellent pack hunters. If a smart one led them in battle, it could spell catastrophe for their prey.

"If there are two of them, I recommend we flee immediately. But if there is only one, then our chances are much better. But there is no guarantee. Death is something that comes in without knocking. A single second of inattention from anyone could spell their end."

Jack understood that all too well. He had experienced war.

"In that case, we better pick our fighters well. Anyone who isn't on top of their game will be a liability," Jack said, crossing his hands.

He was already trying to think about whom to bring. The problem was that this wasn't New Eden.

Their choices were much more limited, and in the few people with powers that he knew, a few of them he didn't want to throw into danger just yet. Like his grandson and Violette Bellemare.

'This will be a tough call...'

Chapter 736 Difficult Choices

Their options regarding awakened people and who they could allow to join them were incredibly limited. If they brought someone they couldn't trust, it would be catastrophic.

They could not afford to have a loose cannon on their group or, even worse, a loose-lipped person.

A loose cannon would bring them unnecessary risk in battle, and loose lips would get people who should remain in the dark to light.

This wasn't a desirable outcome in either case.

"From my standpoint, I think the only people we can bring are already in this room. Maybe one or two more, but I'm not sure I want to bring them along..." Jack said, scratching his chin pensively.

"If you are referring to Gale, sorry, I mean Jonathan and Violette, then I would prefer not to bring them either. But I don't think we will have much of a choice," Alex said, looking at the chart.

Jack grimaced at the thought of putting kids in harm's way.

"Look, Jack," David said.

"I know your grandson is still very young, and I also know he is a bit mentally indisposed right now. I met him in New Eden and could tell he wasn't on top of his game. But I think this can help him.

"As for Violette, we all know her strength in New Eden. If even a fraction of that has started transpiring over here, she is a great asset to have with us."

Jack growled at David.

"They are children. Don't talk about them like pawns to be used. Asset my ass," he warned.

David raised his hands to calm him down.

"Hey, I don't like this any more than you do. But do you want to survive? Or would you prefer we go with the possibility of returning with half the people here? Be reasonable, old man."

Jack hated that David made sense. But there was no refuting his claim.

"I won't be the one asking her parents if she can come. You want her there; you deal with them," Jack stated, turning his head away from David.

Alex looked at them and shook his head.

'Like fire and ice...'

"I'll deal with Richard and Katherine. If I promise them to bring her back safely, then I'm certain they'll let her come," he said, thinking about who else to bring.

"How many people do we want present at a minimum?" Kary asked, glancing at the chart and doing mental calculations.

David pointed to the last column.

"Our best chances are at ten fighters. But a minimum of eight. With Jonathan and Violette, we would have seven."

Mr. Gu raised his hand, bringing their attention to him.

"My apologies, but I will not be joining this endeavour. I might be experienced in fighting creatures of the supernatural variety, but this is outside my realm of competence. I am no superhuman, after all."

David frowned at the words.

"There is no way you are a regular human. No one could enter and leave my hideout without getting detected, like you did."

Mr. Gu smiled at him.

"Merely concealment techniques and sensorial obfuscating. Old ninja tricks, no more. I didn't magically appear or disappear, if that is what you think."

David seemed to disagree, but couldn't force the man to come if he didn't feel powerful enough to join. It would only put a burden on them.

"Then we would be six. We would need a minimum of two more fighters to stay on the safe side and four more to be on our safest option. Do any of you know more awakened people that could help?"

Alex's mind went to a young mercenary, but he wasn't sure he could ask something like this of the man. He didn't know him after all.

'What if I approach this as a business deal?' he wondered.

This would be a thought for later, though. They had to come to a solid core right now.

"So let's recap, then. I, Alex, David, Jack, Violette, and Jonathan are there. Who else?" Kary asked.

"I can ask my wife to come. She's more than capable of taking care of herself. That would bring us to seven once more. If need be, I can get a team of armed mercenaries to come, just for cover."

David raised his hand and shook his head.

"That would be unwise. Alex knows this, but human weapons are ineffective against mutated beasts. The Goblins were weak, so it worked, but these aren't Goblins. Bullets will sting them, at most.

"I'm already uncertain about bringing you along, Jack," David commented.

"You take care of yourself, boy. I can take care of myself," Jack spat.

"Whatever..." David said, rolling his eyes.

"I might have one person available. But I'm not sure they can get here in time..." Kary pointed out.

"Where are they coming from?" Jack asked.

If there was something money could fix, then his wallet was wide open.

"He's from Illinois, but he's already closer than this. He should be up in New York State already. Somewhere around Syracuse. He was visiting Alex and me, so a part of the road is already done."

Alex cocked an eyebrow. This was the first he was hearing of this.

"Someone was visiting us? Who?" he asked, confused.

"Silent Light. He asked me if he could visit us since he would like to get to know the real us. I said yes. I was planning on telling you, but things got hectic, and it slipped my mind. Oopsy," Kary giggled.

Alex smacked his forehead. But if Silent Light was coming, what would it change?

"Is this person awakened?" Jack asked.

"If I believe what he tells me, then yes. And I doubt the kid would lie to me. He practically idolizes me, even if he would never admit it," Kary responded.

"Then I can make sure he gets here in time. If he stops at the airport, I can have an airplane to him in three hours. He would then be here in six or seven hours."

Kary giggled.

"I think there is a faster way if we can get a pass to break a few laws," she stated with a mischievous smile.

"Pray tell, Ms. Deveille," Jack asked, intrigued.

Chapter 737 A Possible Ally

"The one coming here is doing so on a vehicle that can cover great distances in a short amount of time. He could be here in three hours if we can get him some escort vehicle to ensure a clear path."

Jack frowned slightly.

"Do you know how fast he would have to drive for that? That is beyond breaking laws. That is endangering himself and others."

Kary nodded her head.

"That's why I said he should have some escort vehicle. Something that ensures cars move out of the way, and he doesn't get in trouble."

Alex looked at her, making mental calculations. He wasn't very well versed in geography, but he was sure Syracuse was at least two hundred and fifty miles away.

Anything that could cover that in three hours would have to stop and refuel at least once on the way. This could only mean one type of vehicle.

"What kind of speed bike did he get his hands on? That's some serious speed."

Kary shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know the specifics. He just said he had a new Honda bike and wanted to show it off. That's why he was coming."

Jack sighed in annoyance. He didn't like enabling people to break laws.

But the situation obliged.

"I'll contact some friends in New York State and Ontario. I should be able to get him a helicopter escort. But if he kills himself on the way here, I will not be held responsible for this. You can take the full blame."

Kary giggled at the statement.

"I'm sure it'll be fine."

Jack shook his head in exasperation.

"I'll go make some calls. You should focus on finding more people to bring," he said, looking at David.

"Sure. I'll try my best. But there is no guarantee. I'm not exactly a social bug."

Jack went to sit behind his desk, dismissively waving his hand. That was Mr. Gu's cue to get them back downstairs.

He ushered them out of the office as Jack reached someone on the phone. His cheerful and boisterous greeting told them he had already activated 'Businessman' mode, and it was better not to bother him.

The ride back down was silent as the three young adults were thinking about who else they could contact, and Mr. Gu observed silently.

"Do you think we could reach anyone else from the guild?" Kary asked, holding her chin between her thumb and index.

"I doubt any of them have the time for this. And that is if they even awakened. It's not as common as you'd expect. If you two hadn't noticed the mana and actively circulated it, you wouldn't have awakened yet either," David dismissed.

"Yeah, well, that's no thanks to you," Alex replied sneeringly.

"Hey, back off. You don't seem to understand the weight of one's actions on the flow of time—everything you do differently than before affects us all. I can't just change everyone's future without eventually facing the consequences," David defended himself.

But Alex disagreed. Wasn't time already altered beyond repair, anyway?

What would changing it more do now?

"Regardless, I think you should have told more people. Just so we have better chances in the future," Alex replied flatly.

To which David only shook his head, annoyed at the rebuke.

"Think what you want. There is a time and place for everything. And that time hasn't yet come. Soon, though," David confided.

"Eh, whatever. In any case, I think I can get one more person with us. But it'll most likely require me to hire a mercenary. I hope I get a friends-and-family discount. Otherwise, I'm not sure I can afford him."

Kary tilted her head in curiosity.

"Who would you hire? Alfred?"

"Dear god, no. I'm sure Alfred wouldn't let me hire him even if I paid top dollars. No. I was thinking about one mercenary that work for Bellemare's company, Bellemare & Delphis Security.

"I saw him when I went there after a job I did for them, and he oozed mana. It was uncontrolled, but we could have another ally if he can control it now."

This made Kary think of another person who lacked control over his tiny amount of mana.

"What about Clark? Can't we bring him?"

Alex huffed at the question.

"Will he even want to come? After the forced testing this morning, I doubt he wants to see my face for a few days."

David chuckled.

"Look at you, making friends. I'm so proud of you," he mocked, making a patronizing grimace.

"Oh, fuck off, you zombie! It wasn't my fault. He attacked me; I only defended myself. It's not like I was trying to get him embroiled in all of this..." Alex complained.

He hoped Clark wouldn't ask him to find a new trainer. He liked the guy.

"Then you better go and apologize. If he's a chance at another fighter, we might need him," David said, shaking his head.

"Yeah, yeah. Fine. I'll call him when I get home. I'll see from there."

Kary giggled lightly.

The elevator dinged, signalling they had reached the ground floor, and Mr. Gu escorted them to the lobby.

"Alright. Then I suggest you all make calls from your side as well. MS. Deveille, When Mr Boudreau is done with his calls, I will contact you to tell you the arrangements. I trust you will relay the info to your friend."

Kary nodded her head.

"Good. In this case, I wish you all a pleasant ride home, as I will not be driving you home this time. I need to get busy as well. I have, however, prepared cars for you lads and lady. They will be waiting at the entrance. Have a good day."

Mr. Gu said his piece before pivoting on his heels and heading back to the elevators. His step was rushed, like he had an urgent matter to attend to.

Alex, Kary, and David headed outside, where two black sedans were parked. A driver was waiting in front of each one with a sign in hand.

One had Mr. Magnus on it, and the other had Mr. Leduc and Ms. Deveille written. They split up into their different cars and headed back home.

They had much to do and plan before leaving the following day. This was going to be another life-threatening experience; they knew it.

Chapter 738 Arrangements Made

In Syracuse, the seventeen y/o teen had stopped at a gas station to refuel his motorcycle. He carefully pumped the gas into the tank, making sure he didn't scratch the bike or over-draft the gas.

He didn't want to damage or dirty his baby, after all. He heard a whistle from behind him and smiled.

But when he turned, instead of meeting eyes with a chick, it was a man in a plaid shirt and jeans ogling at his bike.

"Nice ride, kid. That's a classic, too. How much did you get that for?"

Cory was disappointed yet again by the attention he was getting for his motorcycle. He had expected to catch all the women with his new ride, but it was primarily men looking at his bike with envy.

His face turned slightly sour inside his helmet, but since only his eyes were visible behind his lifted visor, the man couldn't tell.

"My uncle got me this from a guy who'd been storing it in Canada. I'm unsure how much he paid for it, but he said it was almost a steal. The man said they rebuilt it to original specs, so it's basically an original."

The man walked closer, leaning in next to the engine.

"Yeah, I can see that. He did a great job, too. Say, would you sell it to me? I'm willing to pay top dollar for this baby. You see, I'm a collector, and the Hornet is the one bike I couldn't find in a mint condition that hadn't been modified. I would be glad to offer you fifty Gs for it."

Although the offer was enticing for a seventeen-year-old boy, Cory had more money now than he cared to think about. Fifty was practically pocket change.

"No, thank you. It was a gift for my birthday, and it would be rude of me to sell it."

The man made a disappointed face but backed off.

"Aww, shucks. I get it. Well, if you ever change your mind, here is my info. I'll gladly offer the same amount if it's still in this condition."

Cory took the card, thinking nothing of it, and watched the man step away. When he saw him walk to a vintage, bright yellow, seventy-eight Camaro, he was at least convinced the man wasn't lying.

The rev of the 5.7L V8 sent shivers down his spine on ignition. This was a true macho man's car.

As the man tore away, waving his hand at the kid, Cory waved back distractingly.

"Don't worry, baby. I'm not selling you to anyone," Cory whispered, running his gloved hand on the gas tank.

He went inside to pay for his gas and grab a quick drink when his phone rang in his ear.

The caller ID showed Phoenix in his eye, making him wonder why she called him. She already knew he was on his way, and he had texted her this morning, telling her he would get there by the end of the day if everything went well.

'Is she impatient to see me? Nah, that can't be it,' he told himself.

Not wanting to make her wait too long, Cory picked up the call.

"Hello?"

"Hey Silent. Are you in Syracuse yet?"

Cory frowned at the question.

"Yeah, what's up?"

"Can you head to the closest heliport and wait there for me? I have someone who will meet you there. The why is a bit long to explain, but they will tell you more once you meet. Alright?"

"Uh... Sure? Did something happen? You sound rushed."

"Nothing to concern yourself with for now. Just get to the heliport as fast as you can. Thank you, kiddo!" she chimed before the call cut off.

'Well, that was weird... I guess I'll know more when I get to the heliport then,' he guessed, shrugging his shoulders.

With a thought, his phone was already pulling up the GPS to the nearest and only heliport in Syracuse. Finishing his slush in two quick sips, Cory walked back to his bike, holding his helmeted head in his hands.

"Argh! Brain freeze. Dumb move, Cory. Real dumb move," he cursed himself as he sat on his motorcycle and turned the ignition key.

The engine revved to life in an aggressive hum before quieting to a rumbling whisper. Cory smiled.

'I'll never get tired of this.'

Checking his backpack straps and lowering his visor, Cory pulled away from the gas station and followed the directions in his head to the heliport.

It wasn't too far away but did require him to take two highway interchanges, and he had to weave through some of the early lunch-hour traffic to save time.

A few cars honked at him, yelling insults as he weaved through the traffic or passed by the highway's shoulder.

Honk!

"Hey! Careful, you maniac!" a man yelled at him, lifting his middle finger up high.

"Yeah! Well, fuck you too, asshole! Maybe I wouldn't have been that close if you weren't cutting lanes!" Cory screamed back through his closed helmet, responding in kind with his middle finger.

It took him twenty minutes to reach the heliport, and when he got there, a woman was waiting in the parking lot with a sign in her hands.

His name was on the placard.

Cory was almost stunned by the woman's looks.

She was wearing thigh-high shorts and an incredibly form-fitting shirt that left little to nothing to his imagination, given her apparent lack of a bra. When she noticed the motorbike approaching her, she smiled, the lollipop in her mouth tucking into her cheek.

"You Silent Light?" she asked before he was even completely stopped.

"Uh, yes, Ma'am! A pleasure to meet you," Cory said, fumbling with his words as he raised his visor.

"Adorable. Well, I hope that bike is as fast as I was told it could be. We got a hell of a distance to cover, in not too long of a time. You ready?"

"Excuse me, what?" Cory asked, instantly confused.

"Oh, right! I have to explain. My bad. Well, let's make this short then; we're on the clock," she said, recounting her boss's instructions over the phone.

Cory listened, his eyes going wider and wider.

"This is madness! They expect me to do what?!"

Chapter 739 Changing Training Place

While this happened over two hundred miles away, Alex was already busy talking with Clark. He had texted him first, testing the waters, and Clark seemed the same as usual.

**

'Can we talk?'

...

'Sure. But no more visits to that sketchy underground place... That creeped me out.'

...

'Fine by me. Let's meet back at the gym, if you don't mind. But no sparring this time. :)'

...

'The thought didn't cross my mind. (:'

**

After the quick back and forth, Alex had told Kary he was going out for a bit, to which she nodded, yelling 'I love you!' from the kitchen as the elevator doors closed on Alex's smiling face.

Alex took his time to reach the gym, knowing Clark lived further from it than he did.

He received mixed gazes as he walked into the place, as some people from earlier, mostly employees, were still present. They looked at him like he was some freak, but nothing else happened.

He had half expected someone to approach him and revoke his membership. But apparently, he was worrying for nothing.

About five minutes after he got there, Clark passed the front door. He was stopped briefly at the reception desk, exchanging a few words with a tall guy in a dry-fit gym uniform before walking to the locker room.

Alex caught this from afar, worried he might have caused trouble for the man, but waited for him to come to him.

Clark didn't make himself wanted for long, as he popped out of the locker rooms barely thirty seconds after entering, walking directly to Alexander.

"Alright. I'm here. Let's talk."

Clark sounded a bit colder than his usual self. He also seemed angry.

"Did I get you in trouble with the gym?" Alex asked, feeling guilty already.

"Don't worry about it. I heard you have a big ass penthouse. I'll train you there. Just make sure you buy some good equipment."

"Wait. What? Did they revoke your license? Aww, man. I'm so sorry."

Alex grabbed his head in his hands. This was his fault.

Had he been more open with Clark, or if he had contained himself more and not taunted the man.

All of this wouldn't have happened...

"Listen, kid. I don't want a pity party. I'll bounce back. Just tell me what you want to tell me. They want me and my things out of here pronto."

Alex sprung up.

"Let me go talk to him."

"No!" Clark barked.

"Listen, Alex. I'll gladly keep training you. I'm not angry about what happened earlier. Okay... Maybe a little. But with a bit of time, it'll pass. But don't go shoving your nose where it doesn't belong. This is my issue to deal with. Focus on yourself."

Alex stopped in his tracks, gritting his teeth.

"Fine. Then grab your stuff, and we can go talk somewhere else."

Clark nodded.

"Fine by me. Give me a few minutes."

As Clark said, it only took him a few minutes to grab his things, and they left the gym. But not before Alex stopped at the counter.

"You can go ahead and cancel my membership; I won't be coming back here. Also, I'll make sure everyone I know knows that your gym treats its employees like shit."

He didn't let the woman manning the reception reply and stormed out the front door.

Clark wasn't sure how to feel about Alex's reaction, but he was happy the kid was more loyal to him than the gym.

"Alright, where do you want to go chat?" Clark asked, a big gym bag on his shoulder.

Alex looked at the sizeable bag and decided what to do next.

"You said you'll train me at home. How much is a personal home trainer, usually?"

Clark pondered for a moment.

"Well, someone of my experience usually goes for about four hundred dollars a week. Why?"

Alex smiled.

"I'll pay you a grand per week. Drop that shit at my place, and I'll have an access card made for you. That way, I'll never be late again. What d'ya say?"

Clark took a moment to internalize what he had just said.

"A grand a week is a bit much. I don't want to feel like I'm ripping you off..."

"Just take the money, Clark. I put you in trouble, and you lost your spot at the gym. Let me make it up to you. Please?"

The man glanced at Alex's guilty plea and sighed loudly.

"Fine. But you better expect me to work your ass for that amount of dough. If you pay for a thousand-dollar trainer, you'll get a thousand-dollar trainer. Prepare yourself for a hell untold."

Alex's smile disappeared as quickly as it appeared as he realized what he had done to himself.

'Shit...'

The two men reached the building Alex lived in and stopped at the reception desk.

"Hi. I would like to have a keycard made for this gentleman. It would have to have limited access on specific days of the week and times. Can you do that?" Alex asked the receptionist.

"Sure thing, Mr. Leduc. Could I have your information, please, sir?" she said, looking at Clark with a wide smile.

Alex turned away from the desk, giving Clark a bit of privacy, while he gave his personal info and scanned his fingers and eyes.

This took only a few minutes, and the woman left for a moment to fetch the card from the security office.

Once she returned, she gave the card to Clark, who smiled warmly at the woman before following Alex to the elevators.

"Alright. Let's see what all that money of yours got you. The building looks snazzy, so I expect a posh penthouse," Clark said almost mockingly.

Alex chuckled, pressing his card against the scanner and his other hand on the scanner. He scanned his eyes and said his name before the elevator started moving.

"That is one complicated sequence. How paranoid are you?" Clark asked, eyeing Alex weirdly.

"Hey, don't judge. You try having people break into your apartment and try killing you. You'll get paranoid as well. I'd rather waste a minute in security checks and sleep safe."

Clark shrugged, as he couldn't begin to imagine the situation Alex had gotten into.

When the elevator reached the penthouse on the fifty-second floor, and the doors opened, Clark's jaw went slack.

"Holy mother of cash..."

Chapter 740 Unexpected Flight

Strolling into the penthouse, Clark saw the gigantic open space that led into the living room and went slack-jawed. His entire apartment could fit in that space alone.

And that wasn't the end of it.

He could see the stairs that led to a second floor, and the bend left that went into the kitchen. He slowly spun on himself, looking around the place.

"This house is amazing... But do you even use all this space?" he asked, wide-eyed.

"A large part of it, yes. But there is one room that has yet to get used. And that is where I will set up the gym. Come with me," Alex said, heading toward the stairs.

Kary heard them come in, and from the kitchen, she peaked around the corner. When she saw Clark in the penthouse, she wondered what was happening.

"I'll ask him later," she mumbled to herself.

She returned to being on her phone, looking at Silent Light's wild texts, giggling.

'Poor kid. He must be terrified,' she thought, finding the situation amusing.

Most men would kill to be in his shoes right now. But instead, the boy was in a sense of heightened panic.

Alex entered the room on the left and landed in what was supposed to be an office. But the room was practically barren.

Aside from a hide-a-bed in the corner, which Kary had only used sparingly when they started seeing each other, there was nothing else.

"This is it. I'll buy the equipment you want, make me a list. I'll get everything as fast as I can."

Clark looked at the room, his mind already positioning the equipment he imagined he would need. He started making a mental list of every machine or equipment he would need to train Alex and Kary, assuming she would still join.

"This place is perfect. There is just enough space to get the machines and a sparring area. But the equipment will be costly. You sure you are good to cover it all?" Clark asked.

"I'm not strapped for cash, Clark. I'll be fine. Just give me a list, and come back on Monday."

Clark nodded his head, already writing everything down in a text message.

Once Alex received it, Clark dropped his bag in the corner of the room and glanced around one last time.

"Alright then, see you on Monday."

Alex followed him back to the elevator, double-checking the list with him, and sent him on his way. He could already tell a part of Clark's bad mood had washed away.

As he left, Kary walked up to Alex.

"So? What did he say about joining us tomorrow?"

Alex looked at her with a blank expression for a moment.

"Huh?"

Kary's face changed to confusion as well.

"Weren't you going there to ask him if he could join us for tomorrow's raid? What's his answer?"

With a resounding smack, Alex facepalmed himself on the forehead hard.

"Fuck! I totally forgot to ask him! So many things were happening simultaneously, and it slipped my mind..."

Kary giggled.

"Then go ask him now, you dolt. Unless you think it's better to leave him out."

"But I'll never catch up to him now... He's probably already on the ground floor. Even with the elevator, he'll be blocks away by the time I reach the ground. I'll look stupid if I suddenly chase after him to ask him a favour..."

Kary laughed again.

"Don't worry, love. You already look stupid for forgetting. But you really shouldn't care about those things too much. If you think we need him, then catch up to him."

Alex thought about it for a few seconds.

Clark's help could mean the difference between someone dying or only having some injuries. Was he ready to take that gamble?

Looking at Kary's slightly mocking face, Alex looked past her at the open patio door.

"Fuck it. I'll catch up to him."

He started walking toward the balcony, making Kary frown.

"Uh... The elevator is the other way? What are you—"

Before she could finish, though, Alex had started running and shot himself over the balcony railing.

"Be right back up!" he yelled as he disappeared from her sight.

She ran to the railing, watching him plummet to the ground as wings started emerging from his back.

"And then you wonder why people think you're crazy... Just don't miss your landing," she mumbled while shaking her head.

Alex felt the wind sting his face as he picked up speed downward, and he melded with Morpheus partially to get the wings on his back. He didn't need the power, so a partial meld was enough.

He winced in pain as the wings tore through his back and then in disappointment as they ripped through his shirt next.

'I need to find something that'll follow the changes in my body. This is starting to get expensive...' he thought.

Could the scientists at Jack's underground compound think of something for him? But now was not the time for stray thoughts.

The ground was coming up on him blazingly fast, and he had to stop his flight.

Spotting Clark only a few meters away from the building door, Alex corrected his course and flapped his wings with all the power he could muster.

On the ground, Clark, who had just passed the spinning doors to the condo building, suddenly felt a powerful gust of wind coming from above and lifted his head.

When he saw Alexander's form come at him like an arrow of a bow, he reflexively raised his arms in a cross-guard position.

But instead of feeling an impact, he heard a loud thump on the concrete in front of him and a groan of pain.

Looking before him, he saw Alex skipping on one foot, cursing under his breath.

"Fuck, I think I sprained my ankle... I need to learn how to land; this is getting troublesome..."

Clark looked at him with a mix of confusion and astonishment.

Looking up the side of the building and then back at Alex, he asked the first thing that came to mind.

"Did you just jump off the fifty-second floor? Are you insane?"

Around them, a few people were still startled at seeing a human land on the ground, not knowing where he had come from.

The wings on Alex's back were already gone, as he didn't want to attract too much attention.

Alex looked at Clark, glad he had caught him but still in pain from his sprained ankle.

"Yes, to the first question. And, maybe, to the second?" Alex replied, still unsure if he qualified as insane.

One thing was sure: it was rare for a sane man to throw himself off a building this high without a parachute.

