

## **New Eden 781**

Chapter 781 Raijū Dead

Kary couldn't believe what she had just heard from Violette's mouth. There was no way in her mind that Alex could have died.

"Where is he?" she asked again, her voice cracking up.

"I don't know..." Violette said between two sobs.

"Last time I saw him, he was at my feet. He was gravely injured, losing a lot of blood... I saw him close his eyes and couldn't hear him breathe anymore. Then the Raijū found me, and I lost consciousness before they reached me. I woke up here."

Kary looked at the ground and saw a trail of disturbed dust which went up the hill next to them. She understood something had thrown Violette away.

If they were lucky, it was Alex after one of his sudden power surges, like he had done more than once before. She refused to believe he was dead.

David's voice came from behind her, trying to sound as empathetic as he could and failing miserably.

"Are you only going to believe it when you see his corpse? What if the Raijū decided to make him their lunch? Will you dig through them to find him in pieces? Kary, you need to accept reality."

She got up, looking at the ground, and walked toward him.

David was about to back away, but a hand landed on his shoulder and clamped down on him. He turned his head to see Jack's impassive face.

"What th—"

\*Whack!\*

David fell to his ass, the force of the punch shaking his brain inside his skull, making him dizzy for a few seconds.

Kary was dancing on her feet, holding her seared hand with the other, grunting in pain. Usually, this punch would have been nothing to her, but David's jaw was hard as stone, and her hand was already wounded.

"Motherfuck—that hurt."

David took a second to get his ideas back in place, then looked at Jack and Kary with bewildered eyes.

"What the ACTUAL fuck?! Are you guys out of your minds? Why did you fucking hit me?! And you, why did you hold me?" David shouted out, disgruntled.

Jack snickered.

"I think you deserved that. Who goes around telling a woman that her mate might be dead and to accept the truth? That was very insensitive of you. A punch was the least you deserved."

"I'm just saying it's more of a possibility than what she wants. She should expect the worst, not the best. God dammit..."

"We should just get back to looking for him. We can deal with the matter of what state we find him in once we actually find him," Jack stated, putting his hand on Kary's shoulder as he stopped next to her.

"But I have faith he'll be alive. He's a tough nut."

Kary nodded her head meekly. Her hope was slowly getting thin.

Everything was pointing to him being dead. Or dog-chow already.

Grabbing Violette and holding her in his arms, Jack proceeded forward. They needed to find him, regardless of his state.

There was no way in hell Jack would let his corpse rot on a mountain in the middle of nowhere. That didn't sit well with him.

'No soldier left behind. As it always was...'

Kary followed behind him, her feet suddenly heavy. She wasn't sure whether it was from the fear of finding Alex dead or the accumulated fatigue wracking her body.

But she would need to rest soon. Be it physically or mentally.

David trudged behind them, caressing his jaw. It wasn't hurting, but it was definitely sore.

'That psycho punches hard for a girl...'

Making it up the hill a hundred or so feet, they found a splash of blood on the ground, still relatively fresh. This worried Kary, but Jack smiled at it.

"Judging by the freshness, he was still alive when this happened. And there isn't enough to be a lethal wound. That means our chances of finding him alive just drastically went up. Keep faith, Ms. Deveille."

Kary nodded her head. Her eyes were having trouble staying open as the adrenaline was leaving her system.

David approached her, grabbed her arm, and propped her up with his shoulder.

"You idiot; you can barely walk. You should have stayed in the valley while we searched for them," David scolded her.

He might not like her much, but she was still an ally, maybe even a friend, if he stopped thinking about it.

"Fuck you. I'm not leaving him alone on this mountain..." Kary mumbled back.

"Tch! Stubborn woman. I see why you two go so well together. But don't fall asleep. I'm not carrying you down this mountain."

Kary chuckled weakly.

She hated his guts for all the shit he had told her. But David still had a heart, even if it hid behind all his snarky comments and insensitive remarks.

It improved from when they confronted the thugs in the service tunnels. Or when he said to abandon them to their fate when he saw the rat queen

Thunder kept rumbling in the sky above them as they approached the storm's center. They could tell the clouds had shrunk since they arrived, but weren't sure if it was good or bad news.

Another shriek shook them to their core, making them grab onto their chests again, that same soul-rending feeling washing over them. Whatever was making this sound was also much closer than before.

"Let's hope this is not a new kind of enemy. We are in no shape to run, let alone fight..." David grumbled.

As they crept forward, they found more blood, this time still very fresh. Whatever had bled like this did so only a few minutes ago.

And the blood was too dark to be human.

"We are getting closer. The storm also seems to be dying out," Jack said, looking up.

"That means that the Raijū are dead," David said, a smile growing on his face.

"The first good news all day. Let's hope whatever killed them isn't a foe," Jack replied, unsure how to feel.

They kept walking forward until they saw it in the distance.

Two large, furry bodies laying on the ground, inert. And something else crouched over them...

Chapter 782 Finding The Killer

Pausing for a moment, the trio realized something was wrong.

From the distance, they could hear a gut-wrenching chewing interspersed with bones cracking and a disgusting slurping sound. Whatever this thing was, it was feeding on the bodies of the Raijū and not in a civilized fashion.

"I think we should turn back," David said, his eyes gloomy.

From this distance, he finally recognized what this thing was.

"That is not human and also not something we can handle. If it sees us as enemies, we will die. And most likely without knowing what struck us."

Kary looked at him and saw a bead of sweat on his forehead.

'He's scared. That's a rare sight...'

"Let me take a better look at it," Jack said, grabbing the rifle on his back.

He lifted the rifle to his face, putting his eye to the scope, and aimed at the thing. His rifle scope was slightly misaligned, probably from getting flung around so much, and he had to adjust his scope.

Grabbing the wheel on top, he started turning it to the right as it did some gentle ticks.

But whatever the creature was, it heard those noises and suddenly snapped its head in Jack's direction.

Another ungodly screech echoed in the valley, this time clear in its origin, and Jack had to clench his teeth and groan to keep the abomination in his sights.

It snarled at the trio, pulling the Raijū away, hopping strangely as it did, like an animal trying to claim its prey.

Jack finally focused on the creature's face, and his jaw went slack.

"I think that is Alex... But something is wrong with his face..."

David put a hand on his shoulder, trying to pull him back.

"I'm telling you that thing is no longer human. And we can't fight it, not in our current state. We need to back away. If it suddenly views us as a threat, we are joining those wolves for lunch. Let's go."

But when Kary heard this was Alex, her heart skipped with joy, and she pushed herself off of David, trying to run toward the winged beast.

"Alex! I knew you were safe!"

"Kary! No!" David yelled, trying to grab her.

But he wasn't quick enough.

Jack hurriedly pulled back the bolt action on his rifle, preferring to be ready to fight and not need to than to be caught with his pants down.

As his hand pulled back the bolt handle and the previous bullet casing left the chamber, the creature screeched again, this time much stronger, as it was no longer warning them, and Jack lost sight of it.

He felt his nap tingle as something shifted in the corner of his eye, and he started turning to his left.

The abomination that used to be Alex was lunging at his left side, its left hand extended, finger pointed like a blade, as it aimed them at Jack's head, more specifically, his eye.

"Alex, stop!" Kary shouted, fearing he might kill the old man.

David was already thrusting his bident at the thing's neck when he saw the other hand, the more human one, raise and grab at its left wrist.

Holding back his attack a centimetre short, David looked with wide eyes as the normal side of Alex's face was crying.

'Is he still in there?' he wondered, ready to finish his thrust at a moment's notice.

Jack was shaking slightly as the hand had stopped an inch short of his eye, and he could barely see anything past it on his left side. He had been that close to instantly dying.

Kary hobbled back toward Alex, trying to touch him, but the creature twitched, and she hesitated.

"What happened to you?" she asked, her voice trembling.

The eye on the human side turned toward her, tears still streaking down its face.

She could see the human hand struggling to hold the demon hand at bay as it started shaking.

And Jack could also tell as the nails were getting closer to his eye.

"Leave. Leave now. I can't hold him back much longer," a voice resembling Alex's spoke in their heads.

But it was strange, like there were three voices in one.

"Alex... What happened?" Kary asked, a tear rolling down her cheek.

"Go! Leave!" the voice shouted.

Then, the half-demonized creature snapped its head toward Kary and screeched at her.

Kary felt her soul tug once more and coughed.

Putting her hand to her mouth, she noticed blood in it.

"We should leave," David said, keeping his eyes on the abomination before him.

He could tell whatever was inside Alex's body wasn't Alex. And it was better not to tempt fate and see if theirs was stronger.

"Whatever you are, if you are evil, I will come back and hunt you," David stated, giving a stern look at the demonized half.

The demon half huffed, licking its lips.

But the voice rang in their heads again.

"We are trying to save us. When we are healed, when he is healed, we will come looking for you. Until then, leave. Before this dark fellow takes control and does all the unspeakable things that he's shouting in our ears."

Jack stepped back, getting away from the shaking hand, and grabbed Kary by the shoulder.

"We should go," he said, keeping his eyes on the thing.

"Alex, if you're in there. I know you are a good man. Come back to us before you do anything stupid you might regret," he added, peering into Alexander's human eye.

Another screech left the abomination's mouth as its legs started moving, trying to step toward Jack.

"Alright, let's go!" David said, walking backward.

Kary didn't want to follow them, but knew they were testing their luck. What if Alex, or whatever was speaking for him, wasn't there?

Would the demon inside him have slaughtered them on sight? Would they have ended like the Raijū?

She turned around, uncaring that she was offering her back to the creature controlling Alex's body, and limped toward the two men.

She couldn't look at Alex's demonized face anymore. It hurt too much.

'Just come back to us. To me. Please.'

Chapter 783 Left Alone

Phoenix looked at a stack of papers on her desk in a private office of the Tree Palace and sighed loudly.

"This is so much work... I wish I weren't alone in doing it... When is he coming back? A month and still no news..." she mumbled, her eyes watering up.

It had been a month since they returned from their hunt in Lac-des-Seizes-Iles, and Alexander was still a no-show. He never called, texted, or even gave a sign that he was alive.

Jack had made an announcement showing satellite imagery to show what they had dealt with. He introduced her, David, and all the others as future assets to protect the regularity of citizens' lives, launching his campaign on this premise: securing a normal life.

He had to answer a barrage of questions, most of which related to the appearance of monsters and the awakened. Some even asked if the last person in the images was Alexander, to which Jack had acquiesced.

But when asked where he was, Jack had to lie, saying Alex had suffered grave injuries and was currently recovering in intensive care.

He then swept all other questions about Alexander under the metaphorical rug and changed the subject adeptly, forcing the news around his coming campaign for mayor.

The reporters quickly changed their center of interest, and the conversation veered away from the missing young man.

Phoenix remembered that day like it was yesterday, as it had caused her great pain, not being able to say her boyfriend was gone, with no knowledge of when he would return.

And ever since, many things had happened as well.

The Inter-Alliance Military Exercises had concluded, with a result that shocked every kingdom in the alliance, aside from Stellar Woodlands. The only force purely composed of Abnormals had won.

It wasn't a landslide win, and they had been pretty darned close to losing. But it nonetheless terrified the rulers of these kingdoms.

To think the Abnormals had only just returned and already grown into a power that could rival armies established for over a century, at the very least.

The sentinels had also done well, reaching the quarter-finals, where they lost to Themiscus' Mana Knight First Regiment.

The disparity in power was just too significant.

The regiment officers had all been vastly more powerful than Commander Alena, which hurt her ego for a while until she grew a drive for betterment from her failure. It had made her realize there were many more big fish in this pond they called the world.

Having been cloistered away from the world all her life had skewed her perspective of power. She was ready to remedy this, though.

Phoenix smiled lightly, thinking about the resolve she had seen in her commander's eyes after the exercises. But her smile quickly disappeared as she thought of the next big thing she had to deal with.

The guild death match that she and Astaroth had agreed to.

Azamus had apparently kept tabs on them and was quick to jump on the occasion when he found out Astaroth was no longer in the game since they had already signed the contract, and put as only limitation for him to wait after the Inter-Alliance Military Exercises.

She could hardly say no and renege on their deal, at the cost of looking weak, but also because there were penalties attached to it. They had wagered big on this on both sides.

Luckily, the ties Leon had made during his decade-long rule came in handy. He was able to pull favours with many influential people, and they had plenty of firepower to bring to bear when the death match came around.

Azamus had hoped that his shady deals and underhanded tactics would be enough to prevail, but he only put himself in even deeper problems because of his loss.

No news had been heard from him since that day, but Phoenix knew he wasn't done yet. They would hear from him again one day.

Azamus was like a roach. A nuke wouldn't take him out.

'But what a mess he left on my plate...' she thought, looking at the pile again.

After Paragon won the death match, her guild effectively swallowed Aces High, making them the second largest guild in New Eden, only a dozen members short of Knights of the Sun.

However, an issue arose as she received the influx of players.

Most of these players were not playing to enjoy the game.

She had received the contracts that bound all of them to Aces High, and her eyes had gone wide. Not a single player in that darned guild had freedom of choice.

Khalor had been more than happy to join the death match because he knew of this, but had only told her after the fact was accomplished.

This had pissed her off, but he was already gone before she could release her rage on him.

Now, she was stuck dealing alone with all these unwilling players. And she couldn't just break the contracts, either.

Both parties concerned in the contract had to come to an agreement, and since Aces High no longer existed, the contract had transferred to Paragon's name. The amount of work this put on her plate was immeasurable.

She had to meet with each player individually and explain that they were free to break the contracts and that she wouldn't force them to stay in Paragon. But issues arose there as well.

Many of these players were bottom of the barrel, and would never find a guild to take them in. And playing alone had become suicide by now.

So, many of them asked if they could stay in Paragon when offered the break of contract. And when Phoenix said they had to pass the test like every other player, most outright refused to break the contract as long as they weren't guaranteed a spot.

She was now stuck with over three hundred players who refused to leave Paragon, accepting that their stay in the guild came at a high cost. To them, it was better than becoming guildless.

"What kind of slavery guild were you running, you sick bastard?" Phoenix mumbled, grabbing a new contract on the pile.

She wasn't even done going through all of them, and already she felt done with the matter.

#### Chapter 784 So Many Incidents

And that was aside from the incident with the Themiscan diplomat's execution.

Things had been going as planned until a group of exfiltrators invaded the palace on the morning of his execution, trying to get him out.

They had teleported almost directly inside the cell block and surprised the few guards around it. The cell was open in a matter of seconds, and they were working on freeing the man.

But before they could finish their job and get out of dodge, a thick blue barrier enveloped the palace, and they couldn't teleport out anymore. The origin of the barrier was still unknown to most, and they assumed it was a palace defence measure.

But Phoenix knew who had put this in place. Only one person in the palace was powerful enough to drop a barrier of this magnitude instantly.

She had tried coming in contact with him, to ask him why and thank him, but Aravelle was nowhere to be found.

In the end, the infiltrators realized they would fail their mission and decided to incinerate themselves, along with the diplomat, with a magic fire that consumed them almost instantly, leaving nothing but ashes behind.

Phoenix had contacted Themiscus, asking for an explanation, but the council swore they were in no way related to the incident. The Head Matriarch even offered to dig into the matter on her end to see if someone had disobeyed her orders.

But Phoenix didn't want this incident to spread out or take up more of their time. She refused the offer, stating that justice had been served, regardless.

Coral had learned that her assailant had been burned alive, and even though it wasn't in a suffering way, she felt a wave of relief wash over her. It was finally over.

She could stop thinking about the what-ifs now that the man was gone.

This had still prompted a wave of improvements to their palace security; Phoenix was highly disappointed that people had just waltzed into their homes as they belonged. Many people were scolded, although none were punished.

The newly formed mage regiment of Stellar Woodlands, or The Magi Mantle, as Commander Dilya Naemenor had named them, did a thorough pass through the entire palace, warding every wall, floor tile, ceiling crevice, potted plant and what not, so that it was impenetrable from outside means.

It took them days, many inspections, and testing runs; Dilya even requested Aberon, who had finally come out of his hidey-hole, to try to teleport in. But they had succeeded.

Aberon even congratulated the young woman, impressed with her astuteness and perseverance. Few mages weren't conceited to the point of trusting their magic immediately.



Most mages who warded their abodes did so and didn't test if the wards worked. They were overly confident in their skills, and it often caused unwanted results or surprise visits.

But even with this, Phoenix had received an unwanted visit the following week from her old 'pal' Blue Peacock, who still moused her way into the palace to question the queen.

Their talk had been short, as Blue was curious if they had caught a glimpse of the infiltrators' clothes. She wanted to conduct her own investigation on the matter.

She had promised Phoenix to make this fast and find the culprit, even though the queen didn't want her to investigate.

"What kind of shadow organization would I run if I let my allies get invaded by another one and did nothing?" she had replied before vanishing.

Just thinking about this made Phoenix's head hurt.

"Trouble just keeps piling up since he's gone. I thought he was the one attracting them, but I'm starting to wonder. Am I the trouble magnet?" she mumbled as she studied the contract in her hands.

"Gabe," Phoenix called out.

The door to her office opened, and a young human walked in, decked in the Royal Guards' full plate armour.

"Yes, Your Highness?"

Phoenix sighed.

"You can call me Phoenix when you are in my office. Don't stay formal all the time."

"I'm sorry, Queen Phoenix. What can I do for you?"

Phoenix grimaced.

'At least he used my name...'

"I would like you to fetch this person for me. Goes by the name Strix. A male Demonoid. Bring him here, please."

The guard slapped his chest with his fist and bowed.

"I will have the guards fetch him, Queen Phoenix. Is that all?"

Phoenix mentally clicked her tongue, remembering that the young man, along with the other three guards that comprised her security detail around the clock, never left her alone.

It was annoying, but Rodney had insisted strongly .

"No. Just this," she answered, waving him away.

The young man backed out of the room before closing the doors.

She could already hear him barking orders at the other nearby guards, making her chuckle.

Since he had been assigned as security detail, he technically outranked the other Royal Guards, and it caused discontent in some of them. Rodney even had to intervene at some point.

The other guards, with a longer record and more experience, hated getting ordered around by a young upstart. But a quick beating later, and respect was established in the ranks.

Gabe and his teammates were put in their position because they were strong but also highly adaptable. They were some of the few Natives that had spent enough time around the Abnormals to start emulating some of their more eccentric battle tactics.

Although it was dangerous for Natives to fight like the Abnormals since they were not immortal like them, Gabe and his two teammates had found ways to emulate some of these tactics without putting their lives at as much risk.

This always put the other Natives in a weird position, and fighting them was almost always a lost cause. Rodney had picked them specifically for this reason.

\*Sigh\*

"I wonder how much longer I need to do all this alone. I kind of understand his disdain for it now. It gets boring real fast..." she muttered.

'When are you coming back, Alex?' he wondered, feeling her heart squeeze.

Chapter 785 Onslaught Of Depression

During the last couple hours of her day, Phoenix interviewed more of the Aces High members. She wanted to get rid of most of them, as they were stuck in a mindset that didn't fit in with Paragon.

But the stupid contracts tied her hands behind her back...

As she left her office, heading toward her room, she stopped by the throne room on the first floor. It was quite a detour, given she had to pass the second floor to get to the first, but she needed to.

Entering the throne room, she found a little girl rolled up in a ball next to Astaroth's throne.

Luna had been like this for a month since they lost contact with Alexander. She would stay near the throne and sometimes even curl into a ball on it, crying herself asleep.

Astaroth's soul companions had been ejected from him the day he went AWOL and were now stuck as physical manifestations, roaming freely. But they were far from enamoured by this.

They felt empty. Like a part of them was missing.

"Luna... Come and sleep in the bed. You can't stay here; you'll catch a cold again. The stone floor is not suited for sleeping. Please, be reasonable."

Phoenix heard the little girl snuffle, and it broke her heart.

"I miss him \*Sniff\* so much..." Luna said between sobs.

Phoenix walked up the dais, dropping to her knees next to Luna, and grabbed her in her arms.

"I know... I miss him, too. But I know he's okay. He'll come back. We just have to trust him. Do you trust him, Luna?"

The little girl shook her head, wiping away some tears with her robe.

"Then come with me. We'll sleep in the bed upstairs, and you can even cuddle some of his clothes to have his scent. I won't judge. I've been doing the same."

Luna nodded her head meekly, grabbing onto Phoenix's shoulders.

It was the first time Phoenix convinced her to leave the throne room, and she was proud of herself. But she understood her.

She also felt like a piece of her was missing.

Phoenix knew she had fallen in love with Astaroth but hadn't known how strong the love was until he disappeared. And it was painful.

Lifting the girl in her arms, Phoenix carried her to the room, laying her on the bed and giving her one of Astaroth's tunics.

Luna rolled up around the clothing like her life depended on it and closed her eyes tight.

Phoenix lay down behind her, embraced her, and hummed a song to help her fall asleep. It was the same song her mother would hum to her as a child, and it had never failed to send her to dreamland.

When Luna's breathing finally settled down, and she fell asleep, Phoenix kissed the top of her little horned head and logged out.

Exiting the pod, Kary looked at the bed, which was still as empty as the night before and the other nights in the last month, and sighed.

"I hope I wake up one day, and you are there, resting. Come back, Alex..."

She walked to the shower, starting the hot water and undressing. In the last month, her routine had gone stale as she stayed alone in the penthouse, hoping Alex would come back here.

She always hoped he would crash into the patio door again one morning, and she would have to help him inside to get cleaned up and rested. But the day hadn't come.

After spending ten minutes in it just thinking under the hot water, Kary finished her shower and went downstairs to eat breakfast.

Looking at the calendar as she walked by it, she saw today was a rest day, so Clark wouldn't be coming by.

He had helped keep her sane in the last few weeks, driving her hard when they spared together. He was the only one who saw her outside New Eden and knew she was close to breaking.

Kary looked at the balcony while eating a bowl of cereal, taking so long her cereal went mushy. She then sat down in front of the television, zapping for an hour without finding anything that caught her attention.

These days, not much caught her attention at all.

She acted strong in New Eden, where her role as queen forced her to. But outside, in the real world, on Earth, she was all but.

The colours seemed to have dulled. The shows she used to enjoy were now boring to her half to death.

The only time she didn't feel like everything was grey was when she spoke to her mother. Even though she had never met this young man, the woman knew that her daughter liked him very much.

So she did as any good mother would and supported her. She even offered many times to go to the hospital where he was being treated and wait by his side with her.

This only caused Kary more pain, as she knew the truth but couldn't tell her mother. Alex wasn't in a hospital.

They had no idea where he was.

She couldn't go to his side and wait for him to get better. She couldn't look at his face and wish he would wake up.

He wasn't in a coma like they had told the news. He was missing.

She thought about calling her mother today, as well, to have someone to talk to. But she dropped the idea.

'If I call her too often, she'll know something is up...' she thought.

Her mother wasn't dumb, after all.

She was about to head up to take a nap, as it was the only time she stopped thinking about Alex when her phone rang in her ear.

She saw the caller ID and frowned.

Picking up the call, she lay her head back on the sofa, feeling annoyed and thinking she would have to go out today.

"Yes, Mr. Gu. What can I do for you today?" she said flatly.

"Ms. Deveille! Come to the compound, quick! It's Alexander! He's here!"

## Chapter 786 Waking Up

Inside Alexander, in the white room that was his soul, only two things were present.

The soul orb that contained all of Psyche, or rather Geminae's power, and Alexander's consciousness.

Both floated peacefully in the room, tethered to each other.

In the last month, the orb had shrunk considerably as it kept Alexander's soul in the mortal realm. This had been an instinctual reaction from the orb, as it felt it was connected to this man.

It had reached out through the gaps of its cage and tethered to the unmoving consciousness to feed it and keep it alive.

Suddenly, his body shook. It was only benign, at first, until it devolved into convulsions.

Alexander's eyes suddenly burst open as he took his first breath in weeks.

His body stopped floating as the tether between him and the orb disconnected, and he dropped to his back on the floor, gasping for air.

Taking a few minutes to settle down his breathing, Alexander looked at the ceiling of the white room, recognizing it and wondering why he was still there.

Last he remembered, he was here, listening to the imp and Geminae argue.

But now, looking around himself, he couldn't see either of them.

Then he remembered the painful memory of being forced to swallow the imp and getting stabbed in the chest by Geminae.

"How am I still alive?" he exclaimed.

He sat up, looking at the considerably smaller orb, and wondered if it had been the reason for his survival.

He rose to his feet, trying to find the imp and Geminae with his eyes, but couldn't see them anywhere.

"Where are you guys?!" he shouted, hoping for an answer.

But instead of seeing them appear before him, he instead heard them in his head.

"He's awake! Alright, you little devil! Time's up; we are going back inside. Let him deal with this."

"Aww. But I'm not done eating! Let me at least taste this flesh one more time be—"

The voice cut out as he felt his vision swim for a second and was now out of the white room.

It took him a moment, as the dizziness of being snapped out like this was assaulting his mind before he could move his head without throwing up.

Looking around, he saw he was in a dark cave, with a bit of light peeking around a corner of stone a bit further. There was no light around him, but somehow, he could see as well as in a lit room, if somewhat devoid of colour.

Before him was an animal whose body was gnawed at several places. Alex looked at it, wondering what had been done to it, before realizing he had the taste of iron in his mouth.

Looking at his hands, he saw they were all bloody, and that's when he saw his body, which was covered in blood as well.

His clothes were all torn up, with barely a part of his pants still holding on to him, covering his privates. The rest of it was gone.

He noticed a small mound a bit further and wondered what it was.

Walking toward it, his stomach churned as the smell of death assaulted his nose.

"Oh, my god! Couldn't they have put the bodies outside or burned them? This is revolting!" he cursed, looking at the mound of corpses from the corner of his eyes.

He had to cover his nose, and breathing through his mouth was barely better, as he could taste it instead.

The mound was composed of a large assortment of animals, from wolves to bears to birds and even some fish.

But looking deeper into it, his heart stopped.

He found something he was almost refusing to acknowledge.

There was a foot. A human foot.

'Please tell me I'm seeing things. Please tell me I'm seeing things,' he thought, pulling at the foot.

He dislodged the foot with a bit of effort, which was sadly still attached to a body—a person.

The face of this person, an older man, judging by the wrinkled skin of his face, was stuck in a mask of terror. Whatever had killed it, he had a chance to see it coming.

Alex looked through the pile some more, hoping this was the only human corpse, but he found two more.

A young man and a young woman dressed like hikers.

He could see teeth marks all over them in some fatty areas, which were evidently not made by an animal. The bite marks were too small, human size, even.

Horror took hold of his heart and mind as he began puking his stomach's contents out.

He already knew.

He knew, deep down inside, that he had done this.

"What have I done..." he whispered, looking at his bloodied hands.

Some of this blood might be the people's blood.

He had killed people... Taken innocent lives...

His mind reeled for a moment before the voice of Geminae rose in his head.

'I'm sorry. I wasn't always able to contain the demon. But rest assured, these were the only ones. You won't find more...'

"Are you fucking kidding me?!" Alexander shouted, anger filling him.

"You let him kill innocent people! How dare you say 'rest assured'?! These people probably died of fright before he even tore into them! This is not okay!"

'I can assure you, they died to him, but it was quick. They didn't suffer,' Geminae said, his voice impassive.

"You... You fucking idiot!" he shouted.

His mind snapped back to the white room as his body went still, his face contorted with rage.

He immediately saw the imp and charged at him.

"You!" he shouted at it, grabbing its throat.

The imp was surprised, as it was whining in a corner, complaining about being unable to eat flesh anymore.

"You killed innocent people! No! Worse than that! You made ME kill innocent people!"

The imp punched at Alexander's forearm, trying to free himself, but in vain.

The air was no longer passing in his throat, as Alex was squeezing the literal life out of him.

Geminae ran next to them and shouted, "Stop! You can't kill him!"

"Tell me why I shouldn't!" Alex shouted back in anger.

"You should, but you can't! Not anymore! Not if you want to live!"

The words hit his mind like a hammer.

"What? Explain yourself," he growled, only slightly releasing the imp throat to allow him to breathe.

"Because you'll be killing yourself..."

Chapter 787 Worrying Revelations

Alex's mind went blank at Geminae's words.

"I would be killing myself? What do you mean?" he asked, confused.

Geminae sighed, rubbing his eyes.

"How long do you think you were out?" he asked Alex.

Alex took a moment to think. He thought about the corpse pile, some of the decomposition of it, and the stench.

"About a week?" he replied, his tone uncertain.

"Ha. If only. The situation would be much better..."

"Stop turning around the pot, Geminae," Alex growled.

"Yeah, get to it so he can release me," the imp added, straining to speak through Alex's grip.

"Shut up, demon," Alex barked at him.

"Alright, alright. You've been out for a month. Thirty-four days, to be precise. Because of this, the connection between your body, soul, and our souls has become airtight. There is no more undoing us. We are forever bound together."

Alex didn't understand what he meant, and Geminae could see it in his lost look.

"You can't kill him or me because that means you are killing yourself. It also protects you from us, because we can't take complete control over your body anymore. Since we can't get rid of you, you can wrench control from us anytime."

In a way, he was relieved that he was no longer at risk of being a meat puppet. But something about this didn't sit right with him.

"Doesn't that also mean I can no longer get rid of him? Isn't having him in here bad for me? Or you, for that matter."

Geminae sighed loudly again.

"Unfortunately, it would seem all of our essences have become accustomed to each other. Which means I get to live with him for all eternity... Yay..."

The imp snickered through Alex's clamped hand.

"I'm not that bad, angel boy. At least, our power levels are the same. He's the weak link."

Alex slapped him across the face, making the imp look at him in shock.

"Whose the weak link? I don't see you getting free. Wanna try that again, bitch?"

The imp's faces became darker as the shame of getting overpowered by a human set in. But he couldn't break free; Alex was right.

"In any case, we are now dependent on each other. We can't just let you die anymore. It was already a risk before. But now, it's a guarantee. If you die, we disappear with you..." Geminae said, his head drooping.

Alex released the imp, which crashed to the ground, gasping for air.

He brought his hand to his chin, trying to understand the repercussions of this. Did this mean he was no longer a human being?

The imp started kicking at his ankle as soon as it caught its breath, cursing him for manhandling him, but Alex ignored it.

When he tired of thinking about this, he kicked the imp away before vanishing from the white room.

His eyes refocused on the surrounding cave, and he grumbled.

He checked his pockets, trying to find his phone, but all he found were pieces of it.

"Of course, it's shattered... When has anything ever gone well for me..." he complained.

He walked out of the cave, trying to see where he was.

He noticed he was in a dense forest, with mountains all around his position. The cave was at the foot of one, and he wondered if he could climb it and catch sight of a town or something.

Looking up the mountain, he saw the peak looked pretty jagged, and it would be a tough climb. But he couldn't care less.

Looking at his bloodied hands, he first decided to find a river, pond, or any water source in which he could clean the blood away. It took him a few minutes, as it seemed like those two twits in his head realized they would need water and had camped not too far from a small lake.

He noticed his body was filthy and decided he might dip in entirely to get some of the gunk off. But as he stepped into the water, chills went up his spine.

"The water is freezing! How far up north did we travel? And with a month gone by, we are now in September..."

Geminae replied to the first question in his mind.

'We ran toward the north, as it seemed in your mind like that was the least populated area. We ran at full speed for approximately a day. Which was why I was surprised when the old man found us, and we found a couple hiking...'

Alex closed his eyes and sighed.



What speed was full speed, he had no idea. And if they never got tired, did a full day mean over twenty-four hours?

He had no way of estimating their location...

'I can't walk back home from here... I have no idea which way to go and how long it'll take... I guess I'll have to use him...'

Washing up as fast as he could, Alex then ran back toward the cave to warm himself up a bit and looked up the mountain again.

He tried melding with White but failed to feel him inside him.

"Why can't I feel any of my soul companions? What did you guys do?"

He asked out loud, feeling his blood boil again.

'We did nothing,' Geminae replied.

'Yeah. You pushed them out when we took control. I thought I would get to eat some soul fragments, but it seems your subconscious knew better,' the imp added.

Alex seethed in anger at the nonchalantness the imp had said he wished he could have eaten them.

"Where are they, then?" he asked, his teeth clenched.

'They are in their world. You'll reconnect with them as soon as you cross into New Eden,' Geminae said.

Alex breathed in, trying to calm down.

How would he climb that mountain if he couldn't use White's claws or Morpheus' wings?

'Just use us,' Geminae replied to his silent question.

"Use you? Why would I do that? Aren't you the reason I'm in this mess?" Alex spat.

'It's irrelevant now. We both have wings, and red-face has claws. Since we are now part of the same being, you might as well use them...'

Alex thought about it, realizing he made a good point.

He was about to meld with Geminae, thinking of the wings, when they sprouted out of his back, this time without tearing through his skin.

'I forgot to tell you. You don't need to meld with us to use our powers. Not anymore. Yay, right?' Geminae said, trying to act cheerful.

But Alex was primarily confused.

'Just how far from a human being have I become...'

Chapter 788 Using Their Aspects

"How do I do it?" he asked.

'You just do. It should have become second nature for your body to undergo the changes. During the month you were out, your body often underwent the same changes as we wrestled for control or balance. It sometimes reverted to your normal self, although very briefly.'

Alexander frowned at the statement.

"So you guys fought for control even though I was still there?"

'Don't get me wrong, it wasn't that we didn't each want to control your body. But we couldn't. Psyche's power held us back. It would seem it no longer sees me as its rightful owner...'

He sounded disappointed at his words, but Alex couldn't care less.

His mind stuck at the fact that Psyche's powers had acknowledged him. He wondered what had caused this.

But he could think about this later. For now, he needed to return to civilization, to his life.

Looking at his hands, he imagined them turning into the hands of the demon he had seen in his nightmares.

The next moment, his skin turned red up to his forearm, and his fingers cracked and popped as the bones in them elongated slightly, the nails growing an inch longer, as well. Alex had to grit his teeth through the slight pain accompanying the change.

Once his hands stopped sounding like popcorn, he opened and closed his fist, asserting that this was his hand, not the imp's, and that he was in complete control.

Feeling no resistance in his thoughts or movements, Alex looked at the cliff before him.

Swiping his hand vertically, Alex sliced through the stone facade easily, like he was slashing through a film of water. His gaze hardened.

"I'm becoming like the monsters we don't want to see..." he murmured.

He changed his hands back to normal, imagining them back as his human hands, and they reverted, the pain much lighter this time.

"Let's hope I get used to this pain. Feeling this every time I change would be tiresome..."

He focused on his back and imagined Geminae's wings growing on it, to the best of his memory.

The sound of wings flapping echoed behind him as two magnificent white feathered wings unfurled at his back. There was no pain this time; his back instead felt slightly warm.

"Huh... Why did this not hurt me? Every time I meld with Morpheus, I feel a slight pain. This was painless..."

Geminae replied to him mentally.

'My powers are from the divine. Ascending shouldn't be painful. It should be relieving, like reaching your true form. Red skin over there strives on that pain. Using his body will always be painful. Using mine shouldn't.'

Alex focused on the wings, trying to will them into moving, but nothing happened.

"How do I use them? Because, right now, they are just a fancy aesthetic..."

A moment of silence later, Geminae replied, his tone confused.

'I... don't know. You just... use them? I never had to think about it.'

Alex clicked his tongue in annoyance.

He closed his eyes, remembering the feeling of flight from his first time melding with Morpheus. He tried focusing on the feeling in his upper back as the wings beat to keep him airborne.

He remembered feeling tension in his shoulder blades, like something was pulling and releasing his muscles. Focusing on this memory, he tried emulating the muscle movement.

It was fruitless at first, as all he did was shrug his shoulders, looking like a clueless idiot.

But with a few minutes passing, he eventually lowered the muscle movement to where the wing base was, and the wings twitched.

He kept practicing for an hour until he could move the wings like he wanted, although he never exerted too much strength in the movements. He wasn't ready to launch himself off the ground yet.

But once he felt like he had mastered the basic movement, he grinned.

'Let's head to the top of this mountain first,' he thought, lowering his posture.

Bending his knees down almost to the ground, he extended his wings up, widening them to the maximum.

He jumped and pushed the wings down with as much strength as he could in one swift movement. But he had miscalculated the power the wings contained.

In that single wing beat, he launched up a hundred meters, the sudden acceleration gripping at his stomach before slowing down mid-air.

"Woah!" he exclaimed, seeing the top of the mountain a few hundred meters above him.

He smiled and beat the wings again, rising to the sky.

Controlling the power behind every movement was more complex than he had imagined, as it required fine-tuning every muscle in the wings as he went, and he wasn't used to them enough yet.

But without too much effort, he reached the jagged peak of the mountain and landed on it.

It wasn't a flat surface, and he had to change his hands back to the demonic hands to grab onto the pointy stone surface. But as he stopped struggling to get a good hold, he beheld the scenery, and his eyes widened.

As far as his eyes could see, there was wilderness. Not a single trail of smoke from a fire or top of a house to see in a distance that he could only imagine was way beyond twenty miles.

Mountains, trees, rivers, lakes. There were so many beautiful scenes, but no sign of civilization.

He wondered how the demon had managed to find and kill three people. He must have hunted much farther than what he could currently see.

Who knew what was behind those mountains in the distance?

Sighing in disappointment, Alex hopped off the ledge of his mountain and headed to the next one south. With a good lock on the sun's position, he could at least determine his directions.

The next mountain over was much flatter on the top, but trees covered its surface, so he had to land on one of the top branches to keep his vantage point.

He didn't dare venture higher in the sky yet, as he had no idea how long he could maintain flight or what kind of flight path he was flying into.

What would happen if he went over the first layer of clouds and came face to face with a small Cessna? How would the pilot react, or worse, what would happen if the plane slammed into him?

It was better to fly low for now.

After repeating this manoeuvre a few times, he finally caught signs of human life ahead of him.

He grinned as he headed toward there.

'I can finally find out where I am. How far did they bring me, I wonder?'

Chapter 789 Something Else

As he flew closer to the plume of smoke he had seen, he thought it unwise to land directly next to the camp or house. So he landed a few hundred meters out in the forest, where his landing was hidden from sight.

He thought about the wings disappearing, and his hands being normal, and they morphed back to normal.

'This is never going to become normal to me...' he thought, looking at his hands.

But he would have to disregard it for the time being.

At least he didn't feel too drained from flying or changing his morphology.

As he walked toward the plume of smoke, he asked Geminae in his head, 'Why don't I feel exhausted from all those changes? Or the time spent flying? Shouldn't this use up a massive amount of mana?'

Geminae took a moment before answering his question.

'Remember how I said we were now part of your body? Well... This is what I meant...'

Alex halted, his brows furrowing.

'What do you mean? Am I not just melding with you two?'

'...'

'Not exactly...'

Alex's frown deepened.

'Then what?'

'You could say you have become a changeling of sorts. Your body now has more than one natural aspect. And you can morph into them with ease and without cost. We are part of you, completely.'

'Excuse me?'

'In technical terms, you have become more than human. You are one-third human, one-third demon, and one-third divinity. You are what we call a Nephilim...'

'So... I'm a monster?'

Before Geminae could reply and try to comfort Alexander, the imp jumped in, grabbing the occasion to torment Alexander.

'Yes! You are the monster you so despise! Doesn't it make you feel despair?! Don't you want to give up on life?! I'll take over your body, don't worry! Rhakhakhakha!'

But instead of feeling a wave of despair from Alexander, he felt a wave of rage and an immense pressure suddenly slamming him into the ground.

'Shut up, you weakened piece of demonic trash. I should have never let you out of your hole. I wish I could slam you back into it and forget about you...'

The imp squirmed in pain and whined, but quickly shut his mouth.

Inside the white room, Geminae looked at it with disdain and pity.

'I guess provoking him now has consequences...' he thought.

'Screw this. I'll deal with it later. I just needed to know what to expect. Thank you for being truthful, Geminae. But don't think I don't remember your intentions...'

Geminae gulped, replying to Alex.

'Of course... Ha ha... I wouldn't dare entertain these thoughts anymore...'

Alex smirked as he resumed walking toward the cabin he had found.

It was a small wooden log cabin with almost nothing around it, aside from a little Chevy truck marked with the Fauna Protection logo and an ATV parked near it. Aside from this, the only other thing of note was the dirt trail that led up to the cabin.

Alex looked at his destitute clothes and imagined he should act like a lost hiker if he didn't want to raise flags.

Walking toward the cabin in a quick gait, trying to look like he was weak and stumbling, he knocked on the door.

"Excuse me?! Is anyone in there?!"

He waited for a moment as he heard movement inside, and the door opened to an elderly man dressed in uniform, holding something behind him.

The old man eyed him up and down before putting a shotgun to his side.

"You look like shit... What happened to you, lad?"

Alex looked at him and tried to fake relief.

"Oh, thank god, a person! I've been wandering the woods for a week now. I went out of food two days ago and thought I was going to die."

The elderly man eyed him up and down again before backing away from the door.

"Come in, lad. Let's get you fed first. You can tell me what happened as you eat," he said, dismissing Alex as a threat.

Alex thanked him profusely, walking inside slowly, trying to act afraid of the gun as the old man led him near the fire.

He had a small pot of something boiling on the fireplace that also acted as a stove, and opened the top to mix it with a wooden spoon.

"I hope you aren't one of those silly vegans because I'm not. I have rabbit stew for breakfast."

Alex shook his head.

"No, meat is fine by me, sir. Thank you so much for sharing with me."

"Think nothing of it, son. My job is to ensure no one dies in these woods. Come to think of it, I did send up two other people not too long ago. A young couple. I hope they aren't lost. Hmm."

Alex heard his words and felt a tinge of guilt.

"I didn't see anyone as I trekked. I'm sure they are fine," he lied, knowing full well they weren't lost but dead.

The old man eventually pulled the pot away from the fireplace and dropped it on a small, round wooden table, where he also put two bowls.

He served himself and Alex and then asked the young man to explain what had happened to him and how come he hadn't seen him go into the woods in the first place.

Everyone hiking up here had to query a licence from him, and he would also give them a rundown of the risks, often even leading them to a safe spot.

Alex had to lie again, disdaining himself for it. He told the old man how he wasn't aware of this and had just hiked from a nearby village and got lost on the way up.

He told him his clothes had gotten so damaged as he ran away from something black chasing him in the woods and was lucky to be alive.

After half an hour of eating and talking, the old man eventually admonished him for his recklessness and offered to lead him back to the nearest village, where he could grab a plane back to the city.

Alex thanked him again, saying he was a lifesaver.

The old man gave him a set of cam

Chapter 790 Far Up North

Alex could have taken a plane, as a small airport in this village served mostly private plane owners with Cessnas and the like. But there was an issue with this.

Along with his smashed phone, his wallet had also disappeared from his pockets.

He had no cash or card, and his only other way to access his accounts was in pieces in the bottom of his torn-up clothes pockets.

Lady luck had not been smiling on him during his time unconscious, and this ticked him off a smidge. But there was nothing to do about it.

'I'll have to get myself new cards, a new phone, and a new wallet when I get home...' he mused, his face slightly grimacing.

The good news was that wherever it was, the chances of someone ever finding it were close to nil.

But it left him with very little options to get back home. And he hadn't wanted to bother the old forest guard more than he already had.

He would have to make do with his own means.

Not to say his options were zero, though.

Since he learned that his body was altered, he had been doing an introspection at every moment he could and discovered something odd about it.

His muscle mass had changed.

Alexander had already begun turning fit, but this was next level.

His muscles were cut and well-defined on every inch of his body, and he could feel every one of them working with each movement he performed.

He also felt much heavier than before, like his body density had changed.

He wasn't sure how to check this, as he didn't feel heavier, but that was also a result of his muscles being more robust.

He only wondered how strong this made him.

'Guess we'll find out soon enough.'

He had decided he would run since he had no way of getting a ride back to Montreal aside from begging and hoping a good samaritan picked him up.

To most, the thought alone of walking the distance between where he was and his home, which he had discovered was more than vast, would be madness. Reaching the village, he had found out just how far he had gone north, and his face had dropped.

Looking at the map in his hand, which the old ranger had given him out of pity, Alex sighed.

\*Kuujjuaq and what to do there!\*

The title on the map annoyed him, but he also slightly despaired.

'This is far. Much farther than I would have expected... I'm glad they thought of getting away from populated areas, but this gives me trouble as well...'

He wasn't a buff in geography, but he knew just about how far it was from his home.

'I estimate around fifteen hundred kilometres, maybe a bit less... That's quite the distance to cover, even in a straight line.'

He wondered just how fast his body had travelled when leaving Lac-des-Seizes-Iles for him to get this far.

There was no way he had run all this in a single day, right?

'Geminae. Tell me this. How long exactly did you run to get away from civilization?' he asked in his mind.

There was silence for a moment before the little angel replied.

'I estimate we ran for about eighteen hours. We didn't need to stop, as our energy and stamina vastly overshadow a human's, and sleep is unnecessary for us. Why?'

Alex stopped walking for a moment, his face becoming white.

'You forced my body to run for eighteen hours straight?! That is insane. Wait! Even worse! That means you were running at—' Alex paused, calculating the distance versus the time.

'You were running at eighty kilometres an hour! That is insane! Simple tripping, and my body would have shattered! Did you even stop to think about the consequences?!'

He couldn't hear Geminae and assumed the angel was thinking about his actions. But would he feel guilty?

That remained to be seen.

He could hear the little demon snickering in his mind again and was half tempted to crush him into the ground again. But he had bigger fish to fry.

Like how to get home.

Even if they managed to make his body move at that speed, he was unsure he could...

This was far beyond inhuman. It was a monstrous speed for an outlandish amount of time.

It did explain how his clothes had become that tattered, though. It was easy to imagine the two beings in his head cared little about dodging minor obstacles, like branches and the such.

And clothes, at that speed, hitting even the most brittle of branches, would tear, assuredly.

And he would have to replicate something of the sort if he wanted to get home in an acceptable time frame. He had already made everyone wait enough.

And that was without counting how some of them must have been worried.

He could already imagine Kary eating her fingernails in angst, waiting for news of him.

Too bad his phone was busted. He doubted anyone in this little piece of northern Quebec would allow him to use their phone.

He was a stranger here.

He resumed his walk toward the village exit, which also happened to be the way to the airport, and he kept track of everyone around him.

As soon as there was no one in a hundred-meter radius, he dipped into the woods, disappearing from the roads.

It was time for him to pick up his pace.

Reaching a kilometre from the roads, he finally stopped moving.

"Alright. Time to see how this new body moves," he said, mostly to himself.

"Geminae, which one of you has the sturdiest body? Which of you two would fare better over a long distance?" he asked, focusing on his cells.

It took a moment for his divine companion to reply, but he had already expected his answer.



'If you were flying, my wings would be much stronger and quicker. But since I assume you don't want to take to the skies, the demon part of you has better physical capabilities.'

He could already feel the imp reeling in fear, knowing Alex would strip it of its power for a bit.

"Very well! Time to test that stupid red skin's strength," Alex said, grinning.

As he tapped into the demonic essence of his new body, he felt the imp's presence grow weak, almost vanishing, as the whimpering disappeared.

'Finally, some peace and quiet,' he thought as his body started contorting and popping, eliciting grunts of pain from him.

When it finally stopped, Alex had utterly changed.