

## **New Eden 871**

### Chapter 871 The Difference Between Winning And Losing

Far away from Stellar Woodlands, in a dark region of space, a golden being calmly flew across the cosmos.

It was one of the rare moments when he was calm. Being surrounded by nothing made him feel at peace.

It was a strange thing for the God of Creation to feel at peace with himself most when he was surrounded by nothing. Like his own domain had shunned him.

Gaius had his eyes closed as his senses tracked a certain Ash Elf. But his mood didn't stay good for long when he suddenly vanished from his purview.

The maggot from Earth that called himself Astaroth, he couldn't locate anymore.

He had been looking at him closely ever since he had met him, feeling like it was strange that a mortal carried the essence of a long-since-gone goddess. He didn't believe the words of the mortal.

"Coincidences happen, yes. But not so many of them in a row," Gaius said, opening his eyes.

First, something had freed Psyche from her eternal prison, then her presence had disappeared, and now someone with her essence appeared?

This was too much to be a coincidence.

And now, the mortal he was tracking was hidden from his eyes. Very few beings in the mortal realm could hide anything from him.

"Why are these meddlesome Progenitors of Magic shoving their noses into my business again? I may not be able to kill them since the laws of the world forbid me, but I can still punish them. Do they not fear punishment, insolent monkeys?"

But as he scrutinized the barrier that separated the Paragon's domain from the rest of the mortal realm, he found something else which shouldn't have been there.

It took him a moment to lock on to it, but his eyes went wide when he did.

"This essence! This thread! I knew he was lying!"

Gaius' consciousness grabbed onto the thread that stopped at the barrier and pulled on it, following the essence thread to its source. He grinned when he arrived at the other end of the continent.

"Got you!"

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While this happened, inside the mage tower that now housed Nalafein and his troops, as well as the Knights of the Sun guild, the prince was meeting up with his generals when he felt a crushing presence smash into his shoulders.

He wasn't the only one who felt this, as everyone near the gigantic tree and many miles around suddenly felt like a mountain had crashed onto their shoulders.

Many fainted immediately, while the others struggled to maintain consciousness.

"Psyche!" they heard in their heads, the ears of many starting to bleed, while some of the weaker players died outright.

The laws of the world protected the Natives from the psychic assault, but the players weren't as lucky. The stronger ones watched as their health bars dwindled, more and more players exploding into pixels.

Only four being in the mage tower weren't affected by this attack.

Gellumvire, who was strong enough to have been trained, if only briefly, by a Progenitor of Magic.

Nalafein, who was under the protection of the former.

The Progenitor of Magic, Edith of the Words, who instantly grew wary. She teleported to the last person unaffected, whose face was grave.

"Lady Nemus. He found you. You should leave before he starts killing people until you come out," Edith said, looking at the goddess severely.

But Nemus only returned her gaze with an icy stare.

"He can't. The laws of the world are already limiting his influence on the people. The only ones in danger are the Abnormals. And they can take a few deaths without too much problem."

Edith looked at her with a frown.

'Is she saying she'll let them die only to protect herself?'

"I can't hold this barrier long, Nemus. This is a god. Once he starts forcing his way through, it will only be a matter of time. And I don't intend on landing on his shit list for you," Edith warned her.

Nemus sighed.

"I didn't mean it that way. I won't cower from him. But delaying him also allows me to amass power. Can you at least distract him for me?"

Edith clicked her tongue.

"I'm not a pawn you can use whenever you feel like it, Lady Nemus. Nor am I your champion. Why would I do that for you?"

"Because it may very well be the difference between winning and losing this war. Gaius has no intention of letting you and your friends close the rift like last time. I am well aware of what happened the previous time he sicced the demons on you.

"This will be different. I can assure you that he will take on a more proactive role. It is why he brought the Abnormals to this world. Please. For the sake of everyone. Help me. Delay him, if only for a minute."

Edith swore in her mind. Edith had dug into why the Abnormals had suddenly appeared this time around. Every time they appeared, a terrible event occurred, and the world almost died.

Yet, there had been no Abnormals present during the last demon war. If they were here now, it was a sign.

"Fine," she spat.

"But the moment he becomes aggressive toward me, you are on your own, and the barrier goes down."

Nemus nodded, smiling at the Progenitor.

"Thank you. And when you see a young man called Astaroth next time, tell him I'm sorry. This is the most I can do for him now."

Nemus pushed Edith out of the room, making the latter swear at how easily she was forced out of her home.

But she had accepted to help. And she wasn't one to go back on her words.

Edith teleported again, appearing before the very twitchy Gaius, God of Creation, floating over the start of a new settlement, as he glared at the tree.

"She sent you to deal with me? Had Psyche lost her mind? If you attack me, the laws of the world will no longer apply to you."

"I wasn't sent here. I came of my own volition. And I don't know this Psyche you speak of. The only other celestial being here is called Nemus, and she is a new god."

Gaius crackled with energy as he released a beam of golden light right next to Edith, searing a part of her hair.

"DO NOT LIE TO ME, YOU INSULT OF HALF GOD! LOWER THE BARRIER!"

Edith's face went dark a little.

"I loved that strand of hair. But I can't let you through, Gaius. You are already hurting the mortals by simply being here. Go home."

"RRAARRGGHH!!!" Gaius howled in rage.

Before Edith could react, Gaius exploded with power, and the barrier that kept Nemus safe shattered.

The next instant, Gaius was before her, grabbing her throat and disappearing again.

Far away from there, Astaroth heard her voice in his head, for the last time.

'Take care of my creation, Astaroth. Take care of the souls of the innocent.'

## Chapter 872 Getting Kicked Out

Aravelle was about to start explaining how he would help Astaroth with this when he suddenly heard her voice.

He frowned, mentally asking her what she meant, but no answer came back.

Seeing he wasn't paying attention, Aravelle was about to smack the back of his head, but as he swung, Astaroth suddenly vanished.

And he wasn't the only one.

Across the world of New Eden, every single player present, whether they were busy or just enjoying some food in a cozy restaurant, vanished simultaneously.

Opening his eyes in his pod, taking a deep breath from the abrupt disconnect, Alexander pushed open the top of his pod.

He heard Kary in her pod awaken similarly raggedly and called out to her.

"You alright?"

Kary pushed open the top of her pod, feeling like she had woken up from a nightmare.

"I'm fine. What the hell just happened? I was going to talk to Alena when I suddenly got booted out of the game..."

Alex looked at her with narrowing eyes.

"Yeah, same for me. There was no warning or anything. What the fuck is happening?"

"I don't know either. Did David tell you this would be happening?" Kary asked.

"No. He w—"

\*Dvvt Dvvt\*

Alex paused his phrase, looking into the air, as his new neuro-phone opened a screen only he could see. And on it, David's name and face, with the words \*Incoming call\*.

"He's calling me. Maybe he forgot to tell me. I'll answer."

Kary nodded, waiting for him to put the call on speaker. And Alex did just that as he answered it.

"Hey, David. You call to tell me something you forgot, man?"

"What the fuck did you do this time?!" David's voice came, sounding angry.

"Huh? What the hell do you mean? I was kicked out, just like everyone."

"Then tell me what you did, Alex. I looked online, and EG is saying their servers crashed. What did you do? Every time something happens, you are at the center of it," David replied.

"Hey, listen, man. I was hoping you could tell me what was happening. Isn't this supposed to happen?" Alex asked, confused.

"No! This has never happened before! Something caused this, Alex. We need to figure out what. Every moment we spend outside of New Eden this close to the scheduled update is that much more chance that my plan goes down the drain!"

Alex could hear the panic in his voice, and he could tell David wasn't lying.

"I doubt it will be too long before we can head back inside, David. Let's not devolve into panic just yet," Alex tried calming him.

"Alex, you don't understand! I can't feel the rifts anymore! If mana doesn't keep leaking into our world, we'll never be ready when the demons invade!"

Hearing him say this, Alex quickly activated his mana vision, looking around him. And his face paled.

David was right.

Even the leak that was in his room was gone. Only residual mana floated around in the air.

"What could cause this?" he asked David.

"How the fuck would I know?! I told you this never happened before!" David shouted into the phone.

"Let's calm down a notch," Kary intervened.

Her face was now stoic, with her eyes narrowed and calculative.

"There has to be a reason. If EG was hacked, then it's only a matter of time before they regain control, no?" she asked, hoping David would know more.

"EG wasn't hacked. That; I've seen before. We would still be inside. Hell, we would be stuck there until they regain control. This isn't the same," David answered, returning to a more normal tone.

"Then maybe a glitch in the pods and helmets? Something that made all of them lose connection at once?" Alex asked.

"No. That's impossible. The pods are practically individual nodes in EG's system. You can't disable a group of them at once. Way too much trouble," David answered.

"Then what the heck could have kicked us out?" Alex asked.

But before David could reply, Alex's phone rang again.

He frowned, seeing the number appear.

"It's Killi. Why is he calling me?"

"Doesn't matter. Put him in a conference. Maybe he knows something," David replied.

"Alright."

Swiping the accept button mentally, Alex slid Killi's call into a conference with David and himself.

"Hey, Killi. Listen, man, I put you on speaker and conference; Khalor and Phoenix are there, too."

"Killi, did something happen near you before you got disconnected?" David immediately asked, not letting him say hi.

"Hello to you too, Khalor. Are you guys disconnected over there, too?"

"Yes," Kary replied.

"Hmm. Strange. I don't believe EG is telling the truth about their hacking thing. It wouldn't have kicked everyone out. After all, we aren't all on the same servers," Killi said, sounding intrigued.

"That doesn't matter right now!" David interrupted.

"Tell me if something happened near your location before you got kicked out!"

They heard Killi sigh, and Alex and Kary wanted to do the same.

"There was something. But I doubt it changes anything to our situation. Also, I didn't get to see everything, as I died before we got logged out."

"Tell me what happened!" David rushed him.

"Pipe down, man. You are blowing out my ear."

"Just tell me already!"

\*Sigh\*

"Some dude just popped up in the sky, screaming a name, and we all started to lose health. Some of my players just outright blew up. Whoever he was, he wasn't some weak trash mob."

Alex frowned.

"That sounds like something that happened to me earlier today. It was a god, though. I doubt he could come back down that fast. What's the name he called out?" Alex asked, wondering why the gods were suddenly so proactive in the mortal realm.

"I barely caught it before collapsing," Killi replied.

"Something that starts with Psy. I fell unconscious before I could hear the rest of the name."

"Psy? I don't know any monsters or beings whose name starts with Psy. Also, I doubt a god would land in New Eden just seeking someone. There are limitations in place. Only one god has free rein on where he goes, and he wouldn't go to the mortal realm.

"He hates the place. Considers the inhabitants' maggots and would rather step in shit than step on the same ground as us," David scoffed.

But Alex's face had already whitened to deathly hues, the blood raining out of it.

"That was Gaius..." he mumbled.

"Wait, how do you know about Gaius?" David asked.

"Because he's the one who came at me earlier today... And I know the name he called out. Now her message makes sense..."

"The hell are you talking about, man? Gaius wouldn't give two squirts of piss about any of us. Not yet, at least. And whose message?" David asked, his tone confused.

"Psyche... Gaius was after Psyche... And I think she might be dead..."

### Chapter 873 An Early Break

David had never heard the name Psyche before. He had no idea who that was or why Gaius would hate her enough to chase her down into the mortal plane.

What he did know, though, was that Gaius had only ever stepped into the mortal realm twice in his last timeline.

The first time was when he opened the first demon rift into their world, Earth. That was when all hell broke loose, literally, and humanity started dying like flies in an inferno.

David knew Gaius was the root of this problem, which was why he was trying to become powerful enough to force him to stop. His plan had been this all along.

Get strong and either force Hades to act or take over his domain and act against Gaius himself.

But it was a plan that required a lot of time—and every second lost outside New Eden reduced his chances of success.

The second time Gaius stepped foot into the mortal realm was when one of the strongest players in New Eden reached the Legendary grade, and he challenged Gaius to a duel with humanity's safety in the betting pool.

The man had wagered humanity's safety, hoping to battle Gaius at least to a standstill and make him acknowledge that humans were strong enough and didn't warrant extermination.

Gaius wouldn't have accepted the duel at all hadn't the man already crushed his champion. The challenge was like adding insult to injury, and Gaius replied with all his might.

This led to humanity's greatest player dying before he even had a chance to try to save them. Gaius showed up, and the next second, the man exploded in a rain of crimson, leaving nothing behind aside from his blood.

Now, Alexander was telling him that Gaius had stepped foot into the mortal realm twice in the same day, once for him and another time for a being called Psyche? A being he had never heard of before?

It made no sense.

"Who is this Psyche, Alex? And why would Gaius, the ficklest of gods, the one who only cares about seeing the things he created implode, so he can start over, care about her?" he asked.

Alexander took a moment to think about this. Did he really know why Gaius hated Psyche's guts that much?

Not particularly. But he did know where the issue stemmed from.

Nemus had told him when he had helped her free herself, although inadvertently.

"Psyche is the goddess of souls. She's the one who created life—the one who made Gaius' creations not feel empty. As for why he hates her, I'm not entirely sure.

"All I know is that they had a disagreement at one point when she told him he shouldn't try to imitate her work. And that led to Gaius imprisoning her. Aside from that, I know nothing."

David took a moment to take in the info while Kary looked at Alex strangely.

'But why does he look devastated about this? Did he know her personally?' she wondered.

"Umm. Excuse my rudeness, here, but... What the hell are you two going on about?" Killi asked, reminding the other three he was still there.

Killi had been told about the game being more than a game. But that was it. He was never told any more details because they weren't sure he would keep it to himself if they did.

Of course, the man wasn't totally ignorant, either. After all, the news of people awakening the powers they had in the game was all over the world.

Even he had recently found out that his strength had grown by leaps and bounds. Enough to assume it wasn't his gym time paying out.

But now, the cat was out of the bag.

"Killi, can I call you back?" Alex asked, trying to brush away the matter.

"Like hell, you can. You better not hang up, Astaroth. I will call again until your brain hurts if you do. Tell me what's going on."

But David interrupted them.

"It's irrelevant for now. Killi. Get all your players, at least the ones who have awakened, and get them ready. Find anomalies, get stronger, make yourselves gear. If you can't make it, I know someone who can. I'm sure he'll help you for the right amount," David said.

"Hold up," Killi said, his voice sounding confused.

"What anomalies. What gear? Khalor, what are you talking about?"

They all heard David sigh loudly.

"Killi, I'm sure there have already been anomalies in the UK as well. Your government must have hidden them better. We were hunting them here since I knew where they would pop. So we have an advantage.

"But people everywhere need to start doing the same. There is no more time to take it easy."

Alex became confused. David had been rambling about how they should keep this as low-key as possible only a few months ago.

And now he wanted the world to fall into hunting mode?

"Why the sudden rush?" Alex asked David.

"Because if I know that bastard Gaius as well as I think I do, this will tip him off. He may do something much sooner that makes all our lives harder. And if we aren't ready for what comes next, then a lot of people will die."

Alex frowned, and the two others did the same.

"What comes next, David?" Kary asked.

David took in a big breath, exhaling it slowly.

"If what I think happens, it'll be months early. Hell, the next step wasn't supposed to happen before the next tournament ended in January. But I doubt he'll wait that long. Not now that he's pissed."

"What will happen, David?" Kary asked again.

"I think Gaius might break the veil early. And if he does, the world will have no more time to grow. Dungeons will start appearing, and with no one to clear them, they'll break open and disgorge monsters into the world that standard weapons won't be able to deal with.

"Last time, the world's government had already established a force to deal with monsters, as the anomalies had ramped up to a noticeable point where they couldn't hide them anymore.

"But I don't think Gaius will wait for that to happen. If he shatters the veil and we aren't prepared, we'll lose so many players early that the future will be doomed. It won't matter how much stronger I am or Alex is. We'll be out-manned, over-powered, and under-prepared.

"I think Gaius will push his plan forward, and we will all die way before we can reach the power to fight back..."



Killi was as confused as ever, his lack of previous intel making him not understand what David meant by his statement.

'Break the veil? Dungeons breaking? What the hell are they talking about?' he wondered.

"Have you all lost your mind?" he asked, his voice clearly judgmental.

David clicked his tongue in annoyance.

"Alex, just hang up on this buffoon. If he can't simply listen, then he's useless to us. I guess we lost the UK."

"Who are you calling a buffoon, you half-dead muppet? If I wanted to talk to you, you little wanker, I would have called you. Why don't you hang up, huh?" Killi replied, his anger leaking through his words.

"Whatcha say to me, you fucking Brit?! Want me to fly over that ocean and make you swallow your fucking monarchy in bits and pieces?! What about that, you fucking high-class prick?!"

Alex listened to them fall into a verbal pissing contest, and he pulled his face down with his hand, already mentally tired of their bullshit.

"Alright, enough! You two better shut the hell up, or I'll find both of you and cremate you alive! We don't have time for your crap!" Kary shouted, having enough.

Alex could hear David's teeth grinding as he closed his mouth, not wanting to anger the crazy woman.

"How dare you?" Killi replied, astounded that she would threaten him.

"Shut up, Killi. Kary is right. Biting at each other is a waste of time. We need to figure out a way to counter-act the events before it's too late," Alex interjected.

"Killi, I will take some time to explain everything to you, but not over the phone. I'll come over to you. I should be there around tomorrow. But, until then, do as David asked. It's important that you follow those directions. Lives are at stake."

It was Killi's turn to click his tongue. But the promise of info quelled his annoyance.

"Fine. But if I do all this, and it's for nothing, there will be hell to pay. Understand? I'm putting my reputation on the line here..."

Alex could easily understand why he was worried. If Killi suddenly outed himself, saying the world was in danger and that they needed to arm themselves, any logical person would think he had gone insane.

But it stayed the truth.

"Start the work. I'll come up with a way to make it all credible. Don't worry about your reputation. I'll make sure it stays clean. You are more valuable with it."

Alex heard David snicker in the back, and he snapped.

"You better fucking cooperate too, you idiot. Instead of antagonizing someone who can help, you should be trying to make more friends like him," Alex growled.

David sighed and grumbled into his phone, "Fine. I'm sorry I said I would make you eat your monarchy..."

Alex could hear the reluctance in his voice, but he was still glad about his apology.

"What about the rest of your insults?" Killi asked.

"Don't push it, Brit-boy. Get to work."

Killi scoffed and hung up. But he wouldn't let his grievances tarnish his duty.

He didn't believe Khalor's words, but Astaroth had proved himself trustworthy.

'Maybe I should start calling them by their names, at least when we talk on this side...' Killi thought as he dialled another number.

The line picked up almost instantly.

"What can I do for you, sir?" a young but calm voice said.

"Gather up all our players. Tell them a guild event will happen at the headquarters, but keep our sponsors in the dark for now. Tell everyone that each of them that shows us will make a thousand dollars just for coming, regardless of whether they stay after."

There was a pause before the voice spoke up again.

"What should I tell them if they ask about the event?"

Killi smiled from his side of the call.

"Tell it's something unlike what they've ever seen or done. And that the rewards will be plentiful."

"Yes, sir. Anything else?"

"One last thing," Killi said, opening up his television on the EG scandal.

"Call my press manager. Tell him I have an announcement and that every news outlet needs to be present. Tell him the government might try to shut us down and to have contingencies in place if they try."

"I will get to it, sir. If I may ask, should I warn the family as well?"

Killi thought about it for a moment. His family had been hounding him to accept their sponsorship for a while now.

Given how big it had become, they wanted to have their name out there when people talked about Knights of the Sun. Maybe now was the time to give in to their requests.

Killi thought about it momentarily, the girl on the other end of the call remaining quiet.

But his thoughts always brought him back to how his father dealt with anything that wasn't exactly as he wanted.

With a deep sigh, Killi replied, "Not yet. They can hear it at the same time as the rest of the UK."

There was another pause before the girl asked, "Are you sure, sir?" in a worried tone.

"Positive. Father would find a way to keep me from going public with what I'm trying to say as long as he hasn't redacted the speech himself. I don't need his control. This is not his problem to deal with."

"Very well, sir. I will get to work," the girl replied, resigned, before hanging up.

Killi sat there for a moment, thinking about his complicated family matters.

'If he weren't such a control freak, the family would have long since lost everything. But I don't need absolute control right now. I need flexibility. If anything they said is true, the future will require adaptability. And Father is all but adaptable...'

His father was cold, calculating, and a genius planner. He could determine everyone's actions for days, weeks, and sometimes even months in advance.

His plans rarely broke down. He always had plans over plans over plans, with contingencies for all of them.

But that only worked in bureaucracy and business, where he excelled.

If the world became a battlefield, he would be as useless as any Tom, Dick, and Harry out there.

'Especially since he's a coward...'

875 Revelations, Omen Of Death

In the meantime, David was back to coming up with solutions for the incoming problems. He was well aware of how bad the situation would become once the veil shattered.

He'd been there the first time. He'd seen what a dungeon break could do.

In fact, the first dungeon break had been rats that they had already defeated. And if that was any unit of measurement, it could only get worse from there.

"We'll have it the worse around the world, aside from South America. I'm not sure why that is, since it also happened last time, but I know it will be like that again. In total, three spots will get it bad, and, out of the three, two we have to protect at all costs."

Alex looked at Kary with a questioning face.

"Why on two? Can't we protect all three? I'm sure it's feasible, and more people staying alive means better odds, no?"

David scoffed in his telephone.

"You are naïve. Protecting all three would be ideal, yes, but I doubt it's a good use of our limited resources. Plus, one of them won't need as much help as you think. The three hot spots for dungeon breaks will be here, in North America, down in South America, and over in mainland China.

"The spot in China; we figured out why after some time. With how many people are over there, the number of pods they got was phenomenal. And with them, the amount of breaches in the veil was enormous.

"As for here, we never found out why we were hit so hard. Yes, we had a lot of pods in service when the veil broke. But it wasn't remotely close to what China had. Luckily, it meant we had more awakened players, as well.

"As for the last place, in South America, we think Gaius did something there, away from any watching eye, and that's why it was hit so hard. The issue lies with what came after."

Kary was taking every detail in, trying to guess the next step.

"So you want to defend China and here more?" she asked, interrupting him.

David sighed, but he didn't insult her like he had Killi.

"No. China is actually the only one of the three spots that will handle itself without issue. I don't know if it's because they always expected to get targeted, but their response time was insane the last time.

"No. My primary fear is about South America. From what we gathered after raiding EG headquarters last time, South America has received no pods. They shouldn't have gotten awakened players any time soon.

"But when the dungeon breaks occurred, a guild rose from the ashes of destruction, and that's where the problems stemmed."

"Why would a guild cause problems? Aren't they a welcome addition to our side?"

But Kary already understood why they were a problem.

"Not if they are a dark guild," she said with a grave tone.

Alex's face paled.

"That is exactly why," David said.

"The guild that grows out of the South American chaos is called Mercadores Da Morte. The merchants of death. And they live up to their name..."

Kary could almost hear Alexander's thoughts as she looked at him.

"The merchants of death? Why would anyone call themselves that? What is the point?"

David sighed again.

"They never made a statement to explain it, sadly. But there were rumours from people who managed to escape their clutches during the early start of the end. Something about them wanting to get back at the world for letting South America rot.

"They claim that the world abandoned them when South America burned. Since the Amazonian Forests, their home, burned, they took it upon themselves to cull the world to balance the scales. I imagine the name stems from that."

Alex was horrified at what he heard.

'Deciding the world has to die because they didn't get help? Isn't that like playing god?' he wondered, horrified.

He wasn't hypocritical enough to say he would hesitate to take a life to save his own or that of his friends and family. But to go out of his way to hunt down people in revenge?

That was a line he vowed never to cross. Of course, as he thought that, images of him killing Kary and a mountain of bodies under his feet flashed in his eyes.

He shook the thought away, a cold sweat dripping down his temple.

"Then why do you want to defend that place? Wouldn't it be better to let them all die if they eventually strike out against humanity?" he asked, angry that humans would resort to killing their own, in a conflict that was so much bigger.

David chuckled.

"And leave the possibility that they rise again this time? I don't think you realize how much damage dark guilds will do to us once the demons spill into the world. Whose side do you think they'll take when they see hordes of demons doing exactly what they are trying to do?"

Alex realized the naivety of his words.

"Then why defend them?"

David took a moment to answer.

Alex heard him sigh again.

"I never said anything about defending them. I said we should defend South America from the dungeon breaks. But that isn't the main reason we should go there. And we should go there ourselves."

Alex frowned, already catching on.

"We should go there to defend, and if we catch wind of their guild, then we should find their headquarters and exterminate every last one of them. If that guild sees the light of day, thousands will die within the first month of the end alone. We can't allow them to exist."

Once again, Kary felt a shiver down her spine.

"Why is it that we talk about this? How are we talking about killing people with such ease?"

"Now, listen," David's voice pulled her out of thought.

"I know this is asking a lot. And the burden it'll put on your mind is enormous. But I want you to think about one thing. Especially you, Kary. If Mercadores Da Morte sees the light of day, your life will be as good as forfeit..."

"Mercadores Da Morte's guild leader will come for you, and he won't come alone. Many people will die, and ultimately, however strong you are, he will be the one to come out victorious, with your life snuffed out. He will kill you..."

876 Hashing Out A Plan

Kary frowned at his words.

'Why would anyone come after my life? I don't remember pissing anyone off aside from Damien. And I haven't heard of him in too long for it to matter.'

Alex interrupted her thoughts, his killing intent suddenly washing over her, even though it wasn't directed at her.

"Then I'll kill him before he can do anything to her. He'll wish he had never been born."

Even David felt a chill run down his spine at the words.

"Chill out, dude. There is a reason I want to go there first. The dungeon break they get is the worst one the world experienced in my timeline. They had a dragon's lair open up. But Mercadores Da Morte beat the boss, closed the dungeon, and saved their country.

"That alone came with its load of powerful items. But it isn't the real problem. They make gear with the dragon's remains and more than one piece. Their guild leader then becomes one of the world's largest threats because of this gear."

"His entire guild wound up being one of the best-equipped guilds in the world, and they are using it for nefarious deeds. In my timeline, Kary joins the alliance sent to stop them from creeping up into North America, where they want to send everyone to their graves.

"But she would be no match against a fully dragon-gearred monk. He counters her in every aspect. Immune to fire damage; Close-range expert; Super resistant to magical damage. And the worst part is that he never fights alone."

Alex's mood grew worse by the second, hearing how much of a dirtbag this guy was.

"What are we waiting for to end his pathetic life?" Alex asked, his nails digging into his palms.

"Seriously, calm down, Alex. We can't head in there willy-nilly, either. This man was never heard of before the veil broke. It's not like we know who he is. We can't just go to Brazil and start roaming until we find them..."

Alex clicked his tongue.

"I assume you have a plan?" he asked through clenched teeth.

Both Alex and Kary almost heard the smirk form on his face.

"Of course I do. I'm pissed that I have to push it forward by months, but it's still feasible. But it'll take a lot of funds to pull off. And a group of people who are willing to be away from home for a while."

"If we know your plan, it'll be easier to convince the people we know, David. Spit it out," Kary spat.

"Jeez. You are both so on edge... It's just a threat to your life; get over it. It's not like it'll happen, now that you know. Anyway, let's get back to our main issue. I'm not sure Jack will agree to fund us or lend us what we need.

"And aside from him, the only other person I can think of that could have us the material we need, well, Alex, I'm not sure you can convince either. Especially since you will most likely be bringing his daughter with us..."

"Richard? What does he have that we would need that Jack wouldn't be willing to help us with? I'm pretty sure Jack has more money than Richard."

"Money isn't the issue, is it?" Kary interrupted.

"Bingo," David replied.

"Our issue lies not only in hardware that is near-impossible to get without connections but also a free pass to anywhere. And, Although Jack is loaded, I doubt he can get all of that so easily. He would need to pull in favours, which costs more than money."

Alex was starting to get a bad feeling about the direction the conversation was taking.

"What is your plan, David?" he asked.

"My plan is simple. Since we are locked out of New Eden, then our only option is to power up on this side of the veil. That will require us to go around the world and hunt down any anomaly on which we can get our hands.

"This will allow us to get gear, train our people to fight with the genuine risk of death, and get mana crystals. I can't stress enough how those are important for our future development. The more we get before the demons breach into our world, the higher our chances of survival."

"And why would we need hardware that isn't easily accessible? Buying a plane and hiring a pilot are hardly out of our capabilities. Why can't we do most of this ourselves?" Kary asked, unsure why they would bother Jack or Richard with their plan.

"We need something fast, big enough to carry us and our gear, and something that doesn't catch too much attention with authorities.

"Plus, the pilot we would have to hire would need to be confident enough to land that enormous aircraft anywhere, including places without dedicated airports. Do you know how much something like that costs?"

Kary started doing mental math while Alex frowned deeper and deeper.

"Wait, you want us to travel the world without going through customs and legal avenues? Wouldn't that land us in trouble?" Alex asked.

"Why do you think Richard's pass to anywhere would be beneficial to us, dumbass?" David replied tauntingly.

"This isn't something we can pull off with our own means. Even if we had all the funds to get our shit together, we wouldn't have the logistical pull we need to do it. This wouldn't be just a onetime thing. It would be an operation.

"Something that would have us gone for weeks, possibly months, depending on how things turn out."

Kary finished her mental math and looked troubled.

"By my calculations, this would be a multi-million dollar endeavour. Close to reaching the nine digits... The plane that we would need alone would cost us all our earnings. And I'm not even sure we can access our guild funds anymore, given the servers are disconnected..."

David scoffed again.

"You can forget anything from New Eden until they reconnect our worlds. Nothing is coming through. It's staying in there unless you can pull it directly through the veil."

Alex sighed in relief upon hearing this. It meant he still had access to his companions, even Genie. But the problem was still a big one.

They never kept that much gold on them. And since they hadn't traded it in before getting booted out, it was still all over there.

They were practically broke...

"What caused this?" he wondered.

## Chapter 877 Broken Covenant

Inside New Eden, many things happened at once, as all the players in the world disappeared in the blink of an eye.

The first one of these things was widespread panic, as protectors, employers, patrons, and friends suddenly disappeared, leaving some in better positions than others.

Many Natives died that day, with no more protection, as the adventurers they hired suddenly vanished, and a few villages burned to the ground, as monsters that were being pushed back by militia and adventurers suddenly lost half their manpower.

But that wasn't the only thing that disappeared from the world that day.

Seven beings were having a heated argument in a cage made of golden light, deep in an empty part of the cosmos.

"How could you pick a side in an argument between gods?! Look at where that has landed us! Could you not think before you acted, Edith?!" Aravelle shouted.

"I told you I didn't pick a side! I just tried protecting the mortals that were below us! It's not my fault if Gaius is a pretentious prick who thinks that anyone who doesn't bow to him deserves to be imprisoned or die!" Edith replied, raising her hands in the air.

"Can we not argue, right now?" Necen, the Fey progenitor, asked, her face wincing whenever someone raised their voice.

"That's right. We should be looking for a way out. This isn't the time to fight amongst us. If Gaius returns and we aren't back in the mortal realm, there is no telling what he'll do to us. You can fight all you want once we are back on our home turf," Beseag, the Dwarven progenitor, agreed.

In the meantime, the Gnomish progenitor, Hispos, was studying the cage's bars, seeing way past the energy they radiated.

"This is not a common Aether cage. It's covered in runes. Has Gaius been studying our work? The complexity of the commands is not unlike the ones I scribe into my golems, but the runes are entirely foreign to me. Edith, could you come look at this?"

Edith turned to help him, but Aravelle stepped before her.

"Don't fucking ignore me, Edith! As the junior of this group, you owe me at least that respect," Aravelle spat, his ear tips red with fury.

"Step aside, you old codger. You should be getting us out of here as the oldest of the group. Instead, you are more focused on admonishing me. I don't intend to die here today. Instead of punishing me now, help me. You'll get your chance at the former later."

Necen hated conflict and was busier covering her delicate ears than listening to their words.

As for the other two, Egbert, the Vampire, and Sensez, the Orc, they were in a corner, talking in hushed tones.

"I always knew the light side of this group would drag us into a conflict, eventually. It's in their nature. They can't stand by and let bad things happen," Egbert said, voice heavy with disdain.

Sensez huffed, looking at the other five with contempt.



"I should have cursed every one of them when they talked us out of ascending to godhood. Now, we are stuck behind bars at the mercy of the God of Creation. Freaking goody two shoes..."

Beseag looked at the two of them and shook his head in disappointment.

"I can hear you, you know? I can feel every vibration in a fifty-mile radius; perks of living underground. Stop moaning and pissing, and help us. We won't be able to leave this wretched prison without all our power."

Both of them clicked their tongues disdainfully, but approached the bars as well.

They didn't want to stay here any more than the others. If they could help, they would.

But then, they wouldn't speak to them ever again.

"I can't understand the runes. But if you give me an hour, I should be able to come up with a cypher. As for the construction of the cage itself, it'd be better if Hispos dismantled it. I'm a terrible builder, and pulling at this thing recklessly might lead to unknown results," Edith said, focusing on the lettering of the runes.

Hispos nodded. He started looking at every bar encapsulating them, etching a blueprint in his mind, both to know how to dismantle it and to understand how to reconstruct it later.

What kind of builder would he be if he held no interest in trying to construct such a complex structure, right?

In the meantime, Aravelle walked over to Necen.

"I'm sorry for screaming earlier. It's just..." Aravelle started saying, trailing off.

"I know," Necen said.

"This puts all our efforts back to zero. All the Aether we pushed into the world's veins was sucked right out when Gaius blew up Edith's tower. But you should stop and think about how she feels. She put centuries into growing that tower. And now, it's gone."

Aravelle sighed, realizing his blunder. Necen was right.

Those mage towers were like their homes. It was the place they could always return to and be safe. And now, Edith's tower had been vaporized.

"It will take a while before Gaius can return to our realm with what he just did. All those mortals he killed..."

"All those trees and animals he killed," Necen added, a tear rolling down her cheek.

Aravelle put his hand on her shoulder.

"Help us get out, and we can replant as many trees as he burned. We may not be able to bring back the lives he snuffed out, but at least we can make sure the planet recovers from his actions."

"Mm," Necen responded with a nod.

While they discussed and examined, a battle of untold proportions was taking place in another part of the cosmos.

Gaius and Nemus were at each other's throats, each spell, strike, and word aimed to end the other.

There was no compassion in Nemus' eyes, regardless of her attachment to all life. Gaius had crossed a line that no god should ever cross.

He had taken mortal lives.

"If I don't kill you here, Gaius, someone else will! The gods will no longer obey your every command! You broke the covenant!" Nemus howled in anger.

"Shut up, you half-assed copy! You couldn't lay a scratch on me back then, and you have only weakened! Like you could ever defeat me!" Gaius shouted back, his black eyes crackling with gold electricity.

Both of them shot a beam of pure Aether at each other, tinted with their domain's power, and they collided in the center, exploding.

Anything that would get caught in a blast like this would cease to exist.

Such was the power of a battle between gods.

Chapter 878 Thinking Bigger Picture

Outside New Eden, Alex, David, and Kary had finally finished planning their next few steps.

Kary would have loved to plan further ahead, but David insisted that it was useless.

"There are too many moving pieces at play here. Planning too far ahead could be just as bad as not planning ahead at all in this situation. We've done enough for now and can add a few more steps once the plan is in full swing."

Even though she hated that David was acting as the voice of reason, she couldn't fault his argument. She wasn't entirely confident in planning so far ahead, anyway.

'This isn't a game of chess anymore. It's turned into a MOBA. And the arena is too big, with too many players to calculate every outcome,' she imagined, calming her reticence down.

"In this case, I will bid you a good night, David. It's still three am, and I'm tired," Alex said, yawning.

"Yeah, I agree. We'll make our other calls in the morning. Until then, resting doesn't sound too bad."

Alex hung up, taking the earpiece out. He looked at his bed, figuring a shower would be a good idea, before heading in it, but Kary flumped herself on top of it.

"We can clean the sheets tomorrow. I'm way too tired to stand under hot water. I'll fall asleep in the shower. All that thinking and stress drained me."

Alex chuckled, looking at her lovingly.

"You're right. Let's get a few hours of sleep in first. We can care about our sweaty bodies when we wake up."

"Hey, speak for yourself. I'm not sweaty, and I smell like roses," Kary mocked, whipping her hair to the side.

Alex laughed as he jumped into the bed next to her and grabbed her in a tight embrace.

They fell asleep almost instantly once they were comfortably wrapped under the covers, and if it weren't for a hastily set alarm, they would have slept in until late in the morning.

Alex was the first to wake up, shutting off the alarm as Kary groaned beside him.

"Mmm... Just a few more minutes..."

Chuckling silently, Alex got out of bed and headed downstairs to start a pot of coffee. He knew she wouldn't be in bed for long, as she was usually the early riser.

The least he could do was have coffee ready for her, right?

And lo-and-behold, once the smell of coffee started infusing the air of the penthouse, he heard a moan from upstairs.

"That smells amazing. Pour me a cup, please," Alex heard, muffled and distant.

He grabbed two cups from the cupboard and slowly filled them, before dropping a bit of sugar and milk into them.

Kary liked her coffee sweeter more than he did, so he added a second sugar cube, grimacing at the thought of the sweet coffee.

"Hey! I saw that," Kary grunted as she came down the stairs.

"Huh? Saw what?" Alex asked, acting innocent, as he grabbed his cup and brought her hers.

She clicked her tongue lightly, giving a slight glare, before grabbing the hot cup.

As she took her first sip, a moan of satisfaction escaped her lips, her eyes closing in delight.

"Ahhh. That first sip really touches your soul, doesn't it?"

Alex took a sip, closing his eyes as well as he enjoyed the beverage, but didn't respond.

'As a matter of fact, it doesn't. That would be weird for all my companions, now wouldn't it?' he mused, laughing internally.

But Alex was preoccupied with something else.

He opened up his TV, zapping to a news channel that treated the gaming world, and quickly found what he was looking for.

"Coming live from the EG headquarters this morning, where the CEO, Ms. Constatine Levesque, has convened a press conference. She refused to tell us what it was about until now, but there can only be one reason for her to talk to the press today.

"With the scandal of their servers going offline last night, in the middle of the highest traffic time of the day, because of a hack, we hope she sheds light on their solutions. We haven't yet caught wind of her or her assistant, but the time for the conference is nearing.

"Stay tuned for more news on New Eden's crash!" the reporter said in her microphone, sounding way too excited.

Alex wanted to know more, and it seemed he tuned in just in time. He had expected the shrewd woman wouldn't hold off on talking to the press for too long.

Would she have answers to everyone's questions? That much he doubted.

But she would at least talk enough to give everyone a clear picture to deal with.

Alex was only hoping she would have a timeline before they could return to New Eden.

Getting stronger on this side of the veil wasn't that easy. The minimal amount of mana their world now contained wouldn't be enough for everyone to get strong.

Luckily for him, he had a mana lobe, now. This saved him from a lot of trouble.

But he couldn't say the same for Kary, David, or any of his friends.

'I don't even know if I can help them form one. It took so much out of me to form mine. Would it be dangerous for them in the state we are now?' he wondered.

But there would need to be a change, eventually. Because without a mana lobe, there was a hard limit to how much they could grow in power right now.

And it would stay that way until mana started leaking back into their world.

"You seem lost in thought," Kary said, bringing him out of his head.

"Hmm? Ah, yeah. I was thinking about the situation on a bigger scale. With the mana wells gone, getting stronger is going to be tough. I was trying to figure out a way around it. Gear can only make us so much more powerful."

Kary smiled at him.

"Look at you, using all that brain power. I'm proud of you," she mocked with a sly smile.

Alex growled at her playfully.

"We'll see how long you keep up that attitude when I start whipping that ass of yours," he playfully threatened.

"Oooh. Whipping. I like the sound of that," she replied, making her eyebrows wiggle suggestively.

Alex wanted to wrestle her, but a shout on the TV cut him short.

"She's here! Ms. Levesque! Ms. Levesque! What do you plan to do about your servers?!"

The conference was starting.

## Chapter 879 Interrupting Your Broadcast

Walking to the stand with a dozen different microphones, Constantine looked weary. She'd been up ever since the servers crashed, trying to understand what had happened.

Even when she tried reaching out to Gaius, there was no response from him. So, she was just as much in the dark as everyone.

But she needed to reassure the players and the rest of the community, lest her investors start pulling out of the company before it crashed financially.

She cleared her throat, getting bombarded with questions, before greeting everyone.

"Good morning to everyone, be you here, at home, or watching from your devices at work or on your daily commute. Let me start by saying that Evo-Gaming is terribly sorry for the interruption in service and that we are working our best to fix the issue ASAP.

"The hackers have yet to make themselves known or make any request, but rest assured that we are ready to accede to any reasonable demands they might make. Our top priority is getting all the players back online and reconnecting the servers.

"EG is aware that the gold transfer servers were also targeted, and our guess is that is what the hackers were after. Unfortunately, our system is all in one code, and taking one down takes all of it down.

"We realize now that this might have been a mistake. It was a security measure in hopes hackers wouldn't try to tackle it at all. We assume this must be a powerful hacker group, as taking down our entire server is not a one-man job.

"As soon as they reach out, we will do our utmost to get everything back up and running as fast as possible. If you are out there, listening in to me, we await your demands. The sooner you make them, the quicker this is resolved, and the more likely we will consent to anything you ask."

She paused, looking at the central camera on her, making sure it recorded her resolute face before looking down at something.

"On another note, we were already calling a press conference today, initially, to make a big announcement. Sadly, this incident will shadow this happy announcement, but I will make it, nonetheless.

"With the end of the year quickly approaching and more than half a year already passed since the first tournament, EG wants to congratulate every player in the world for reaching heights that would have seemed impossible months ago.

"And it is my pleasure to announce that, starting on New Year's Eve, the next tournament preliminaries will start. That is, of course, if our servers are back online, ha ha," she laughed, trying to smooth over the crowd of reporters.

Her calm demeanour about the hack had already calmed the torrent of questions, and the reporters were already more malleable.

"I can't give more details about it just yet, but do expect this to be a grand event. As for the tournament itself, the format this time will be wildly different. Since guilds have been established and play such an integral part of the game, the tournament will have two facets.

"One that will pit guilds against each other, with many enticing rewards for the winning guilds. Even the losing guilds will get something out of this. The recognition of being part of the largest and most powerful guilds of New Eden!" she exclaimed.

There was not much of an uproar, dampening her mood a bit, but the light clapping still made her smile.

"The second facet of the tournament will be the individual part. Not unlike in March this year, players will have to fight against their peers and win, either through points or elimination phases, to reach the top and prove they are the number one in New Eden.

"Last year, our number one was a little unexpected and very unpredictable, which made for less of a show than intended. But we do hope this year's participants will show us a grand spectacle and wow viewers worldwide with their prowess and guile!

"The two phases will happen in succession, with the guild facet first, giving a chance to the losers of the guild phase to reclaim glory in the individual phase. This will give everyone a chance to prove they deserve all the glory and clout to be called the strongest players!"

The reporters frantically wrote down every nugget of information she was giving them, hungry for more, and Constantine grinned.

'Now, time for the show.'

She tapped a button on her phone, sending a message to someone, and waited a few seconds before opening her mouth to speak.

With the reporters busy writing, they failed to notice her little movement, and weren't the wiser, when the giant screen behind Constantine suddenly switched from her face to a black screen.

A symbol appeared on the screen, catching Alex by surprise. He knew this symbol!

"I've seen this somewhere before," he exclaimed, jumping from his sofa at home.

"What? Where?" Kary asked, confused.

On the screen, Constantine suddenly started arguing with a scrambled voice, which was broadcasting over the venue's speakers. The voice was calling itself the oracle, and saying that they were responsible for the server's hack, and started making a plethora of unreasonable demands.

Alex thought about where he'd seen the logo, and it suddenly clicked.

"I saw it at Violette's home. Her mother was wearing a brooch with it on it! I'm certain."

He immediately tried calling Violette, trying to reach her and ask where her mother was. But his phone rang before he could finish dialling her.

It was an unknown number.

Alex frowned before answering and putting it on speaker.

"Who is this?"

"You know who it is. You were about to call me. Are you the one who gave her that logo, Alexander?" Katherine's voice echoed, anger very heavy in her tone.

"I am not. I was about to call you and ask if you had..."

Alex heard something crash and break in the background, along with Violette's voice asking her to calm down.

Alex and Kary heard Katherine take a deep breath.

"Fine. Then I guess I have some work to get to. Don't get too far from your phone. I'll call back soon enough," Katherine ordered, before the line hung up.

"What was that about?" Kary asked.

Alex grinned. He pointed at the TV and raised the volume.

"We are about to find out."

Chapter 880 Taking Control From Her

With the raised volume, Alex sat back on the sofa, excited to see what Katherine would do. He knew she hadn't been wearing that broach for nothing.

And by the tone she had over the phone, he could tell she was pissed.

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"Oracle! You are making unreasonable demands! How could we even amass fifty trillion dollars in twenty-four hours?! EG isn't even worth that much!" Constantine argued.

But the person on the screen seemed hell-bent on taking everything she owned.

Of course, this was all a script. There was no hacker on their servers; therefore, there couldn't be a ransom request.

This was an elaborate ploy her assistant had devised to try to make the public see that they were fighting back.

With her back to the cameras, Constantine was grinning from ear to ear. She could hear the reporters behind her chanting at the screen to be reasonable.

'They are all on our side already. This is great. I should give her a raise. '

But her attention was brought back to reality quickly as the screen buzzed out of focus.

It returned to a black screen, where only writing was showing up.

\*You have dirtied the name of the Oracle. You must now pay the price of your insolence.\*

The screen shut down.

But this wasn't over.

The news drones started glitching slightly before they rammed each other out of the sky, exploding mid-air and raining on the reporters. Panic took hold of the people present, and they ran, screaming in fear.

The smart cars around the venue suddenly locked themselves from inside, locking the reporters out, as pieces of metal and plastic fell on them.

Every screen present displayed a different message before shutting down or getting taken out by a rogue drone.

\*Never mock the Oracle.\*

\*Never pass yourself for the Oracle.\*

\*The Oracle sees all.\*

\*The Oracle controls all\*

\*If they wanted your servers down, the Oracle would have burned them from inside.\*

\*The Oracle had nothing to do with your failure.\*

\*But you taunted fate, and the Oracle shall straighten it.\*

Once all the screens in the area had been busted or fried out, the neuro-phones in everyone's ears were the next target. And every reporter heard the next message loud and clear.

\*The Oracle urges you to ignore the fallacy of this liar's words. EG was never hacked by the Oracle, and shows no traces of hacking at all. Dig through her lies. Uncover the truth. Bring it to light. For the truth is what the Oracle seeks. Truth and justice.\*

After that message, every electronic device in a mile-wide radius stopped functioning. This would cost millions in damages, and the bill would naturally fall on EG's lap, as they were responsible for this incident.

Constantine Levesque looked around her, seeing the damage caused by a single hacker, and her breath was cut short.

'This is insane. We just wanted to use a name that came up a lot in the hacking community... Why would they retaliate like this?'

"Liar!" a reporter shouted, holding her forehead, where a minor cut was bleeding onto her cheek.

"Liar!" another one screamed, a cut on his arm, most likely from a piece of shrapnel.

"You lied to us! You lied to everyone!" another one chanted.

"No... This is—" Constantine tried rebuking.

"Liar!" someone cut her.

In seconds, the crowd of reporters were back on their feet, pointing fingers and yelling, calling the woman a liar, a cheater, a fraud.

Constantine's personal security suddenly jumped up on the stage, grabbing her and taking her back inside the headquarters before locking the doors behind them.

The reporters banged on the reinforced glass, their muffled voices still audible through it, as they chanted almost in unison, "Liar! Liar! Fraud! Cheater!"

Constantine was in shock as her guards ushered her to an elevator and back to her office suite.

"Ma'am. Please stay here while we disperse the crowd. It isn't safe for you outside your office. Some employees might feel that the reporters are right, and you could be assaulted by them as well. We'll take care of it."

The woman nodded, her eyes still wide and empty.

'How could this happen? Why did it happen? Who the hell is this Oracle...'

As the guards left, a single person was allowed past their cordon, and it was Constantine's personal assistant.

"Ma'am! Are you alright?! I'm so sorry this happened. This is all my fault. I will accept any punishment you deem fitting of my failures!"

The woman bowed at ninety degrees, her face filled with shame.

But Constantine was too far lost in her own mind even to hear the assistant's plight. She was lost in her nightmares.

This could mean the end of EG if the word spread too far that there was no hack—that she tried to pin the blame for her servers crashing on someone else.



Her credibility would tank, and her investors would pull out in droves. The company's stock would crash, and all her efforts would be in vain.

She couldn't take this lying down. She wouldn't.

She snapped out of her thoughts, finally noticing her assistant's presence, and cleared her throat.

"This isn't your fault. You couldn't have known this Oracle person was so good they could railroad our efforts so easily. Plus, there was no way to know they would find out so fast."

"No, Ma'am. This could have been avoided if I had done more research on them, or picked a less-known name. This is entirely on me. Please, punish me!"

Constantine sighed loudly.

"You want punishment, then go down in the server rooms and drive those idiots on maintenance forward until my servers are back online. Being with the sweats might make you uncomfortable enough to consider it a punishment."

"Yes, Ma'am!" the assistant said before rushing out of the office.

This was hardly a punishment in Constantine's eyes. But her assistant hated those nerds enough that she might consider it so.

On her end, she needed to get ahold of Gaius. He could fix this, she was sure.

So she kept sending messages to him through her special device. But they all remained unanswered.

'What the hell is he doing?'