

New Eden 911

Chapter 911 The Monster That Evil Fears

David turned and looked at the drone above him as the horror died out. He smiled and pointed at it, motioning it to get closer.

After a second, the drone slowly descended, stopping a few feet away from David, and pointing its camera at his face.

"To whomever may be watching this right now, and thinking that I am a monster, I would like to say a few words," David said.

He then raised a hand, making a pulling motion, as he chanted, "Rise."

The bodies of the fifty gang members suddenly seized and shook, as if in the middle of an epileptic episode, before more horror happened.

The bodies started getting back up to their feet, flesh rotting away quickly, either completely falling off the bone to reveal skeletons underneath or decomposing until a rotting zombie stood in their place.

Some bodies shook wildly until they dropped back to the ground. Then, spectres pulled out of them, exhaling condensed air, the air from their bodies freezing the one around their breath.

"I am a monster. The monster that evil fears when it goes around infecting everything it touches. The monster that will keep evil at bay when the time comes for humanity to make its stand. Don't stray from the right path, and we will never meet.

"But if you wander off that path, and dredge into the dark marshes of evil, well..." David said, grinning.

He waved at the bodies around him and looked back at the camera.

"I shall add you to my collection, and make sure your body atones for your crimes, until it crumbles to the sands of time," he added, before melting into his shadow.

Alex had just turned on his phone to catch the broadcast right before the killing ended, and he scoffed.

"He can call me many things, but I'm no drama queen like him..." he muttered as Elise and Kary looked over his shoulder at the bodies that melted into the shadows as well before they vanished.

"Is that guy a friend of yours?" Elise asked, looking at Kary.

"Unfortunately, yes..." Kary grumbled.

Alex was about to defend him when his phone beeped in his ear as a text message made its way into his mind. It was from David.

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'I cleaned up for you. I hope you don't forget this favour you owe me in the future. :)'

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Alex grumbled to himself as he saw the message.

"Favour, my ass. You just made the whole world see the worst waking nightmare they could imagine. Now, I'm going to have to explain so many things when the press comes to me, asking why you called me 'the hero.' You fucking asshole..." he mumbled.

Kary heard him mumble but didn't understand the words, as she wasn't focusing her mana on enhancing her body right now.

But Elise heard everything crystal clear.

"Based on your relationship, I take it you are quite good friends, yeah?" she asked Alex mockingly.

He glared at her, but didn't reply.

This only made Elise chuckle as Kary passed her hand in her hair, thinking about what came next.

"We should leave before someone recognizes you from the crowd and comes asking questions," Kary said, turning to leave.

But she ended up face to face with a father and son duo, whose mouths stood agape.

Alex turned as well, and realized he hadn't brought them away, but with him here.

"Uh... Hi guys..." he said, grimacing stupidly.

Elise looked at the two of them and sighed.

"You guys leave. I'll catch them up and answer whatever questions they have. I'll call you later and keep you posted on how it went," she said, walking toward the father and son duo, grabbing them by the shoulders and trying to bring them away.

They offered little resistance, staring at Alex with wide eyes and dropped jaws.

"Oh, and Alex!" Elise shouted out over her shoulder.

"Hmm?"

"Thank you. Even if you weren't the one to deal with the thugs, you still saved these two. I owe you. You can count on me whenever you need me. Call, and I'll answer."

After saying this, she pulled on the two boys, dragging them along, away from this scene that could be called nothing short of a horror show.

Alex smiled, as he figured this was mission accomplished.

As he turned to leave again, he saw a journalist, and they made eye contact. The man's eyes widened as he raised his hand, trying to grab Alex's attention.

"Sir! Sir, wait up! I have some questions!"

"Shit. Kary, we're leaving," Alex said, grabbing her in a princess hold, not letting her time to react, as he blasted into the sky.

Of course, he wouldn't leave the man hanging to dry. As the journalist reached where the pair had been, he raised his head in awe and noticed something fluttering down toward him.

He raised his hand, catching it, and saw a business card.

On it, the name 'Gu Fang,' along with a number to reach him.

The journalist grinned widely, as he thought he was on to the biggest scoop of his life. He spun around, ensuring none of his peers saw him and what he had caught, before fleeing the scene like he had stolen something.

In the meantime, as Alex flew away with Kary in his arms, only one thought crossed his mind.

'Sorry, Mr. Gu. Sorry, Jack. I couldn't think of anything else to do...'

In his office, Jack suddenly sneezed, frowning after he did, while Mr. Gu brought him a tissue.

"Are you catching something, sir?" the assistant asked, frowning.

Jack scoffed.

"When was the last time you saw me sick, Gu Fang? I don't fall sick. Someone must be talking about me behind my back."

The assistant chuckled.

He had never seen his boss sick. Not in almost twenty years of service.

"Come to think of it, has he contacted you again since the other incident?" Jack asked his assistant.

"No, sir. It has been radio silence since. But I doubt he stayed put. We should expect a call from him sooner than later. I'll keep teams ready at all times, in case we need to intervene with force."

Jack nodded at the answer.

"What about your digging? Did you find out who ordered that man to be taken and his family killed?"

Gu Fang nodded as he sat down in front of his boss.

"I have. But there is something strange about the matter, sir. The kid said he saw two other people leaving the scene, and after digging around some CCTV, I was able to find footage of them."

Jack frowned.

"What is strange about that? There are so many cameras everywhere nowadays; you can't throw a stone without getting caught on tape."

Gu Fang nodded.

"I know. But you would expect professionals not to make such rookie mistakes, or at least cover their tracks. It almost feels like the person who ordered the man to be abducted wants us to find them."

Jack's eyebrows furrowed as he leaned back in his chair.

"And who is it that ordered the hit, and where are those two men now?" Jack asked.

"That's where it gets strange, sir."

Jack looked at him with a frown.

"Why so?"

"Because the two men that left the scene were found dead only hours after we retrieved the kid and the family. Bullet through the head, and pushed into a river to float away."

"I don't think they followed their orders correctly. And whoever ordered the man taken was not happy about it. As for who they work for, well, that's another beast as well..."

Jack wasn't in the mood for riddles, and he glared at his assistant for answers.

"My apologies for the suspense, sir," Gu Fang apologized, realizing Jack was turning sour.

"I found clear ties to the Italian mob, but I couldn't recognize the family crest on their vests. Given their presence here, right after the Bianchi family was taken out, it's either a small-time family or a rising one."

Jack nodded, the results being not too far from his expectations.

"I had expected a big player, so this isn't that much of a surprise. But for them to take out their own men, they must have fucked up big time. Has the kid Alex brought in woken up yet?"

Gu Fang shook his head no.

"He's pretty banged up. I don't know if he'll ever wake up. But if he does, you will be the first to know, sir," Gu Fang promised.

"Good. As for the mob family, find out where they are holed up, and send a letter with a photo of their kid in it. I want them to know he is still alive. The less they get pissed, the less likely they are to retaliate."

Gu Fang nodded, getting up to start on this, before Jack raised his hand to make him pause.

"Yes, sir?"

"Tell our mercenaries that I'll double their pay if they can find a way to get stronger. I can't feel the mana around my pod anymore, and I haven't gotten stronger since the game shut down. We need a new way to power up. If they find one, I'll double everyone's pay, and get a bonus for the finder."

Gu Fang smiled.

"How much of a bonus, sir?"

"Hmm... Offer ten. That should rile them up."

"I will get right to it, sir."

Chapter 912 Discussing Their Next Step

Alex reached the penthouse again in a few minutes, carrying Kary in his arms like it was nothing, and landed on the balcony, this time not falling prey to an opportunist demon.

As he put Kary down, she slid her hands on her shirt, brushing the wrinkles of flying at high speed away, before turning around and giving Alex a light punch in the stomach.

"You could have warned me, you know?" she complained, pouting.

Alex chuckled at her childish reaction before embracing her tightly.

"The journalist was running toward us, and I didn't want to deal with them. I'll leave that to Mr. Gu and Jack. So, I reacted with little thought. I'm sorry," he pleaded, kissing her on the neck.

Kary shivered a bit, in pleasure, before grabbing his ass with both hands.

"For that ass? I'd forgive murder," she joked.

Alex nervously laughed, as, technically, he had already committed murder... But that wasn't a subject he wanted to discuss.

Walking into their home, Alex walked over to the fridge, his stomach growling in hunger.

"Are you still hungry? You just ate that massive sandwich I made you..." Kary asked, frowning.

"I don't know what to tell you... I'm guessing using all that mana has made me hungry again. Probably since barely any mana is left in the air, and my body has to generate its own. It's siphoning the energy from somewhere."

Kary looked thoughtful for a moment before she figured he was probably right. And then, her mind snapped back to a memory, and she smiled at him.

"Come to think of it, I still can't do that as fast as you. Don't you have a solution for me?" she asked, eyeing him with a blatant stare.

He looked at her with a moment of confusion before realizing what she meant.

"Uh... Can we do that tomorrow? I feel exhausted, and I still have one last stop to do for the day. We can rest a little before it, as it has to be night, anyway."

Kary frowned at his words.

"What do you mean, one more stop? And why are you saying we? Do you need me there?"

Alex smirked at her.

"First, you say I shouldn't leave you alone anymore, and now you want me to go alone to a dangerous place? Make up your mind, love, he he."

Kary pouted again, not happy about his mocking. But she returned to smiling quickly, as she was glad he at least hadn't thought about ditching her in the middle of the night.

"Then, could you tell me where we are going and what we have to do there?" she asked, smiling warmly at him as she sat at the kitchen island.

Alex nodded, grabbing a bag of baby carrots to snack on, while he explained to her what he intended to do, and where they were headed.

But Kary's expression rapidly changed from a smile to a worried one.

"Are you sure it's a good idea to kick the hornet's nest like that? What if they start shooting at us? Do you intend to kill them all before they realize we are there? Or are we going just to talk to their boss?"

"Woah, calm down. One question at a time," Alex chuckled.

Kary glared at him lightly.

"How can you ask me to stay calm when you are saying we are walking into the den of someone who ordered a man's family to be killed and that man to be captured? Even if we are awakened, that doesn't mean we can't die, Alex," Kary said, reality-checking him.

But Alex shrugged.

"We are flying in, but that's irrelevant," he said, chomping down on his carrot.

Kary's glare intensified.

"Listen. Of course, I would love for this to be resolved peacefully. And, yes, I expect them to be prepared. They tried kidnapping an awakened and sent one of their own to kill his family if he refused to cooperate.

"But we aren't just any awakened players, Kary. Even if they have one or two of them, I can probably handle them alone, let alone with you by my side. There is nothing to worry about."

Kary had no idea where he got his confidence from, and she knew he was strong enough to take on many of them at once. But this wasn't a game.

He may be able to block bullets with his wings, or toughen up his skin enough to limit the damage they did to him, but she wasn't that resistant.

Even if she focused most of her mana on forming a mana shell around herself, she wasn't sure it would deflect bullets. This was extremely risky for her.

And she was too stubborn to let him go alone after making him swear to take her along.

"I can hear the gears grinding in your mind," Alex said, walking up to her side as he hugged her.

"Don't worry too much. Stick close to me, and I'll make sure not even a hair on your head gets touched. Like I said, I don't want to go there to fight. I want to know what these people want. That's it. If shit starts hitting the fan, I'll get us out. I promise."

This promise reassured her enough to stop worrying, but she wasn't satisfied with Alex's lack of a plan.

"If we are going to do this, I want a plan of entry, as well as a plan of action, and a plan of escape if anything goes awry. If you can't figure out a plan for this without my input, then we aren't going, either of us. Understood?" she asked him, looking at him sternly.

Alex nodded at her, his smile still stretched wide.

"I do hope you don't expect a you-level plan, though. A rudimentary plan is still a plan," he joked.

Kary rolled her eyes at him before grabbing a baby carrot from the bag in his hands and shoving it into her mouth.

"Get to it, darling. We aren't leaving if you don't have a plan for me," she said, walking away from the kitchen into the living room.

Plopping onto the sofa, Kary took the remote and started one of her shows on the TV, leaving him alone with his thoughts. Alex wasn't like her.

He would need to concentrate if he wanted to devise a plan that would withstand more than one complication. She could do that in the middle of battle, but he couldn't.

Alex may have all the battle instincts in the world and be the most reactive person she ever met; he was not much of a thinker.

'To each their strength,' she thought, delving into her TV show.

On the northern shore of Montreal, David had just returned home and was getting ready to rest.

He had used up most of his mana earlier just to summon his small army of undead, and his little subterfuge, disappearing into the shadows, had only brought him about one block further before he needed to walk home.

"If I had a mana lobe, this would be a drop of water in the sea... I wonder when that idiot will start taking his job seriously and get the right people into their needed strength. With New Eden offline, we need another way to get stronger, and that requires mana lobes..." he mumbled to himself.

As he laid down on his bed, staring at the ceiling, he felt his shadow move, and looked to his right.

"How rare of you to come out on your own. What do you need, Kenelm?" David asked the death knight, who was now standing beside him.

"I came with news, master."

The death knight's voice sounded windy and ethereal, like a ghost, even though he had a body and vocal cords. But it didn't bother David.

David sat up on his bed, wondering what news was important enough for the death knight to come out of his shadow on his own to deliver them. Usually, he would either wait to be summoned or send a message into his mind directly.

Seeing he had his master's attention, the death knight lowered his head before speaking.

"Remember when I said I couldn't feel our connection to Hades anymore?"

David nodded.

"Yes, I recall. I also recall telling you that you wouldn't feel it until the connection between our worlds was re-established, which would require the worlds to reconcile, or a dungeon to open in this world. What about it?"

The death knight raised his head, locking eyes with his master.

"Then I think this might happen sooner than we anticipated. I felt the connection with the god of death, earlier. It was flitting, like a mirage in a desert, but it was still there, for a fraction of a second."

David's eyes became serious.

This could only mean one thing. And it wasn't that the worlds had reconciled.

"Can you tell me from where you felt it?" he asked, standing up and walking to his desk, where he picked up his neuro-phone.

"It came from the southwest, master. It felt very distant, most likely on another continent, but I felt it nonetheless."

David nodded, putting the earpiece in his ear. He had a call to make.

Chapter 913 Imposing Entrance

The rest of the day flew by as people across the globe wondered what they would do with their nights. The game was still offline for mysterious reasons.

Even though most of them ended up getting to sleep early, it was weird for them to be in bed after spending most of their nights in their pods, fighting monsters in another world.

It was as if the game had transformed their nights, replacing sleep with a restless state. They tossed and turned in their beds, their eyes refusing to close, their minds still imagining the game's world.

The gaming pod had been forcefully sending them into a sleep-like state for months, and now that they had to sleep on their own, without being completely exhausted, they were having trouble finding peace.

But many people decided to forego sleep that night, and a couple in particular was ten thousand feet in the air, flying above the southern shore of Montreal's metropolitan area.

"I'm surprised you managed to plan this out. Even if your plan is extremely rudimentary, it's acceptable," Kary said to Alex as he carried her in his arms.

Alex snort-laughed.

"Hey, you know me by now. I don't plan. I act. I'm decisive."

Kary turned her head to look at him with a noticeable glare.

"Yes. You do. Remind me where that has gotten us, time and time again?" she mocked.

Alex's face went dark at the reminder of his multiple mishaps.

"Fine. But I swear this one will go well. We are only here to talk with them. No fighting if possible."

Kary shook her head with a smirk.

"You keep saying that. Maybe it'll come true. In the meantime, how about we land? We've been hovering over this part of town for a while now. Haven't you found them already?"

Alex nodded once.

"I have, but something is off. The car I marked is not parked with the other vehicles. It's lying on the front lawn, like a display..."

Kary looked down, injecting some mana into her eyes to improve her vision. It took her a while of searching, but she eventually found a manor-like house with a car parked on the front lawn.

Alex felt her mana senses explode out, as they reached the ground in seconds, and he smiled.

He had known for a while that she had developed a great range for her mana detection, but seeing it even on this side was impressive. He doubted many could emulate this feat.

Well, aside from him, of course.

"I can only sense three people in that manor with mana," she declared, returning her mana senses.

"Yes. There are also about twenty other people, some with bigger builds than others. I can only assume that the big dudes are the goons, and the others are servants or something," Alex added to her statement.

She looked at him with wide eyes.

"You can sense people that don't have mana? Since when?"

Alex chuckled.

"Since I started using Geminae's powers. He can sense souls. And with a bit of fine-tuning of my mana senses, I can make it detect the natural aura of people, even if they don't have mana."

Kary was impressed. This was a useful power to have.

"So I guess it wasn't just me who found it weird that the three with mana are in the backyard, while the others are either inside the manor, or guarding the front yard?" Kary asked, a grin on her face.

Alex replied with a smirk of his own.

"I think she knew I was coming, and the car was only a distraction for her men. I guess there is no point in trying to be stealthy if she knows we are coming. Let's go say hi," Alex said, folding his wings on his back as gravity reasserted itself over them.

Kary felt her heart hit her throat as the feeling of weightlessness took hold of her. She almost screamed in fright instinctively, the move taking her by surprise, but she managed to hold it in, with only a tiny, "Eep!" escaping her lips.

Alex chuckled at her yelp, his eyes focused on their destination.

He wouldn't bother walking up the front door since they were waiting for them in the backyard.

The ten thousand feet free fall took longer than Alex had expected, and he asked Kary, "Do you want to land on your own? Make an entrance?"

Kary nodded her head, pushing off Alex's chest as she looked at the ground, smirking.

The backyard was getting closer at a breakneck pace, and Alex reopened his wings at the last second, breaking his fall as they caught air. He landed with a resounding crash as the pavement under his feet cracked.

As for Kary, when she reached about fifty feet from the ground, she blasted fire out of her hands, slowing down her descent, and landed in a three-point landing, before igniting her body and standing to her feet.

Alex started glowing a golden hue, his eyes lit up like two gold torches, and Kary blazed in hot orange-yellow flames beside him.

"Knock knock," Alex said, looking at the three women sitting under a pergola with flowers dangling from it.

The flowers were rustling in the wind that Kary's heat waves were causing, and the three women looked unfazed.

The one in the middle interrupted the seconds of silence after Alex's words with a slow clap, as the other two stayed stone cold beside her.

Clap

Clap

Clap

"What an imposing entrance, Astaroth. I must say, I am surprised to see you brought Phoenix along with you. Well, surprise might be the wrong word. Delighted, maybe? Anywho. How about you both cut the theatrics and come sit with us?" she asked calmly.

Alex was a bit disappointed that he did not get a reaction from their resounding entrance. But he should have expected as much from people who had awakened their own powers.

Alex folded the wings into his back, keeping the glow on him and his golden eyes, to make them understand he was still powered up, and Kary lowered the intensity of her flames before they walked under the pergola.

Alex watched as the mana particles around the three women reacted to the one on the left. She split apart the flower curtain for them and covered the pergola with magic, seemingly protecting it from the aggressive nature of Kary's flames.

Under the pergola, there was a small rectangular table on which lay a kettle and some teacups, three on one side and two on the other.

'She knew exactly how many we'd be...' Alex understood.

The woman in the middle, who was already seated at the table, motioned them to sit across from her, while the other two remained standing.

Once Alex and Kary sat down, the other women sat down as well.

'Her bodyguards, I take it,' Alex surmised, taking in every detail.

And he wasn't the only one. Kary was already analyzing everything she saw, making plan after plan in her mind, if anything were to happen.

"Please, lady Phoenix. No need for such caution," the woman in the middle said, looking at Kary.

"You'll have to excuse my caution. I don't know you, and you have already left a poor impression on me with how you handled Mr. West's family," Kary spat, looking her in the eyes with the pitch-black eyes on her flaming face.

The woman sighed, taking the cup on the table before her, and taking a sip.

She grimaced, pulling the cup away from her mouth.

"It's gone cold while we waited for you to arrive. Could you heat it up for me, since you don't want to get rid of these aggressive flames of yours?" the woman asked Kary, smiling warmly.

"Why certainly," Kary said, her featureless face unmoving.

She reached a finger on the teacup, instantly boiling the content, as the cup became incredibly hot.

The woman groaned as she put the cup on the table, waving her hand to disperse the heat. The woman on her left jumped up, her face showing evident rage.

Alex instantly felt her killing intent.

A wing popped from his back, stopping a millimetre from her throat, as she halted her movement forward.

"Sit the fuck down, woman. Unless you want to paint your mistress' dress red with your blood," Alex threatened.

The woman glared at him before disappearing and reappeared next to Kary, a dagger in her hand. But she stopped her movement again, realizing another white wing was waiting for her there, too. And this one was already digging into her throat, blood trickling on the feathers.

"Don't make me repeat myself," Alex growled without looking at her.

'He followed my instant-movement skill? That's impossible!' she thought, the dagger in her hands an inch away from Kary's back as the tip reddened with heat.

A crisp clap brought attention to the woman on the other side of the table again as she clapped her hands.

"Now, now. Let's not be savages. I'm sure Lady Phoenix didn't intend to burn me, Maria. Let's not pursue this matter any further. Sit. Let us talk," she ordered, as the woman's face became neutral again.

"Yes, Ma'am."

She disappeared from behind Kary, reappearing in front of her seat, the wing still threatening her, and she glared at Alex.

Alex glared back, but retracted his wing, letting her sit down.

"Good! Now that this is out of the way, how about we discuss why you came, shall we?" the woman said, smiling at her guests.

Chapter 914 Hostile Introductions

"Yes, let's," Alex groaned.

"Here, let me start the conversation. Why did you have someone try to kill Randall West's family? And why have him kidnapped?" Alex asked, sounding angry.

The woman's smile wavered a bit at his rudeness, but it didn't last.

"How about we start with introductions?" she asked, trying to keep civilized.

Alex scoffed.

"Why? You seem so hellbent on getting rid of us. I'm considering getting rid of you as well, especially after the threat your muscle just did to my woman," he glared.

The woman raised her hands in a gauge of peace.

"Please. I wish not the death of anyone present. You have to excuse Maria. She is quite protective of me and goes from zero to a hundred in seconds. You know how that is, I'm sure. Can't we start on a neutral foot here?"

Kary looked her in the eye, trying to see if she was deceiving them, but the woman looked sincere.

Alex wasn't inclined to believe her, given his already established impression of her, but when he saw Kary extinguish her flames, he sighed loudly.

"Fine... Introductions it is. You start."

The woman smiled wider, nodding her head.

"Why, of course! It would be quite rude of me to ask your names without telling you mine, now, wouldn't it?" she said, as the woman to her left, Maria, groaned.

"My name is Amara, Amara Rossi, head of the Rossi family. To my left is my second in command, Maria Lombardi, and to my right is our current strongest awakened, Carla Pesci."

She looked almost proud of announcing that her underlings were her strongest assets, and Alex wondered why that was.

'Is she not scared that I'll take out her entire family right here, right now?'

Alex and Kary stared at the three women before them, as the latter looked at them, expecting them to introduce themselves as well.

"Seems you don't trust us enough to tell us your names. Well, it doesn't matter. I already know them," Amara said, smiling at them.

"Alexander Leduc, known inside the game as Astaroth, king of Stellar Woodlands, powerful fighter, as well as caster. Your class is Soulmaner, and you were seen with at least four different summons and multiple more forms of fusing.

"As for you, my fiery friend, I also know a lot about you. Kary Deveille, a top-rated Esports player, as well as a Pyromancer in almost all the games you've played in the past. A tendency for fire, I assume? But I digress.

"Queen of Stellar Woodlands, as you stand by the side of your lover, and mark yourselves as the most prominent power-couple in New Eden, and meet every challenge with gusto, and wipe out your would be enemies ruthlessly.

"Although you established your kingdom just before the game went into its first update, and the timeline within New Eden jumped a decade, you came back, and it was still standing, having experienced meteoric growth.

"Your kingdom is now part of the most popular and wealthy cities in New Eden, winning you a spot in the alliance, and cementing your place as the most powerful guild in one fell swoop. Am I missing something? Stop me when I'm wrong," the woman smirked, as she aired their progression like it was public knowledge.

Alex looked at her with increased wariness as he cracked a joke.

"What are you? Are you a fan or something? You've been following our steps since the start of the game."

Amara looked at him, her smile returning.

"You could say I'm a fan of sorts—a fan of what you will do for humanity. But that is beside the point, and we can get to it later. For now, I'm more curious as to why you came here alone with Ms. Deveille instead of coming with your current backer, Jack Boudreau."

Alex's blood froze for an instant when she mentioned what he did for humanity.

'Does she know? No. That's not possible.'

"Since I exposed your classes, let me tell you ours. It's only a fair trade, right?" Amara said, waving her hand at Maria.

"Maria, if you could start with yours?"

The woman low growled at Alex and Kary, but nodded her head.

"Assassin," she bluntly replied.

Amara turned her head to her right, and the other woman smiled, looking at Kary.

"I'm a mage specializing in defensive magic."

This left only Amara's class for them to find out.

Looking at the woman in the middle, Alex read the essence of her mana, but couldn't figure out what it was. It was the first time he had seen mana that felt like this to him.

"I guess that leaves just mine. Well, it's not relevant to the conversation right now, so let's shelve it for later. First, we can talk about your accusations; what do you think, Mr. Leduc?" she asked, smiling at him.

Alex wasn't happy about being left to dry like this and almost popped a fuse. But Kary's hand dropped on his thigh, as she shook her head no.

"I don't need to wait. I figured out what class you are already," Kary declared, locking eyes with Amara.

"Oh?" Amara said, looking surprised.

"You're some kind of Seer, aren't you?"

The woman's eyes narrowed slightly, before she went back to her warm smile.

"What makes you think this, Ms. Deveille?"

Kary scoffed.

"Many things point to it, actually. I don't know if you thought you were hiding your game well, but you've been giving pointers all this time. The first one being the car up front."

Amara suddenly became serious.

"Would you care to elaborate on what pointers you think I left, Ms. Deveille?" she asked, her tone cold.

"Sure," Kary said, smirking.

"The first was the car. How could you know Alex would come for you if you hadn't seen it happen already? I don't believe you could know he marked the car. You're not a mage powerful enough. Maybe she, but not you," Kary said, pointing at Carla.

Amara's eye twitched at being called a weak mage. It wasn't a wrong statement, per se, but it still pissed her off to be downplayed like this.

"The second one was the fact you knew we would figure out your invitation before getting here. You set up all your men to guard up front, but you waited for us in the back. Who else than a seer would know where we would choose to land?"

Amara smiled again.

"Maybe I'm just good at predicting what goes on in your mind," she said, in an almost mocking tone.

Kary smirked before firing a firebolt at the woman, which shattered on a shield, the embers disappearing before they hit the ground.

Amara twitched when the firebolt landed, fear flashing in her eyes ever so briefly.

"See? I predicted you would do that. I was already shielded."

Kary scoffed again.

"Please. Don't kid yourself, woman. You've been shielded since before we got here. You didn't know I would attack you, because you haven't seen the entirety of this meeting. I'm guessing you get visions, bits and pieces. You were scared that this would go south, and you've had her protect you all this time.

"This brings me to my third pointer. You said you are a fan of what he does for humanity. Although Alex wants to do what he can, he hasn't done anything for humanity yet, which means you knew he would become someone who helps us in the future.

"You've either seen what happens and know he changes things, or you've seen what he becomes way ahead of time. Did I get anything wrong?" Kary mocked.

Amara looked at her warily. She'd rarely been laid bare like this in her life.

"So you really don't think I could have predicted your actions?" she asked, slightly annoyed at how Kary downplayed her intelligence.

"I highly doubt it. You seem smart; I won't deny it. But you seem less of a planer, like me, and more of an impulsive person, like him. Am I wrong?" Kary asked, narrowing her eyes.

Amara sighed loudly.

"Very impressive. I would expect nothing less from the one who helps keep humanity a step ahead, Ms. Deveille. You were almost right on the class name. As for the rest of your statements, they are mostly correct.

"Aside from the one where you said I feared you, that is wrong. I don't fear either of you. I've seen when I die, and it's not here—not now. My class, Oracle, has allowed me to peer in time enough times to know what's changed and what hasn't.

"And you put a wrench in my plans when you kept me from getting my hands on Mr. West. But we can get to that in a moment. For now, I have a question for both of you."

Alex looked at her, feeling her animosity rise inside her.

"Will you drop the idea of fighting? Or will I have to watch this garden burn, as you battle with my lieutenants?" she asked, her eyes ice cold.

'So she's seen multiple instances of this meeting...' Alex thought.

Alex looked at her with intensity.

"Depends. Did you order to have a family murdered?" he asked, his gaze steady and devoid of fear.

Amara locked eyes with him, before sighing as she rubbed her eyes tiredly.

"I did not. That was a mistake in communications, and the ears of a young, violent man, hearing what he wanted to hear. I fail to see how murdering the family of a man would get him to work for me, don't you?"

Chapter 915 Beating Around The Bush

Alex looked at her, his face steady, but his mind wavering.

"How does one misconstrue any words into, 'Murder this family for me.' Do you have any idea how ridiculous your claim sounds?" he asked her.

But Amara looked at him with a stoic face.

"And yet, that is what happened. My exact words to him were, 'Bring me Randall West, and make him understand we are his only good option.' Why he thought that meant, 'Murder his entire family,' well, you tell me. I'm just as lost as you.

"But I wouldn't have ordered the death of the family of someone I was trying to recruit. That would be stupid. You may think I am not smart enough to predict your moves and minds, but I am smart enough to know how people think.

"I built this family from nothing, after all. Did you think I inherited the Rossi family?" she asked, looking at Kary intently.

But Kary kept quiet.

"Too small," Alex commented.

Amara wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry at his comment, but she couldn't do either. If she showed disrespect, she had a feeling one of her sinister visions would come true.

She was already walking on eggshells because of Maria's actions. It wasn't the time to add fuel to the barely extinguished fire.

"In any case, I didn't ask him to kill anyone. But the kid has been trying to upstage Maria for a while, now. I have no idea why, or why he thought killing more people than her made him look better.

"But what I do know, is that I still can't allow him to die. He's too useful to me now, and to us in the future, for me to let him die. So. How about we start the conversation on how you intend to return my man to me?"

Alex smirked.

"I'm sorry. That just isn't going to happen. He tried killing innocents and then tried killing me. Do you think I'll just turn a blind eye to that fact?" Alex asked, his face slightly mocking.

"But no one died, no? Why can't you just turn a blind eye to his failed attempts and call it a kid's mistake? I'm sure you did plenty of those yourself as a young man. Can't you extend the same mercy you were shown to him?" she asked him again.

"I never tried murdering people, Ms. Rossi. There is a difference between trying to steal something and attempted murder. There is only so much mercy inside me, and it has already been running short lately.

"The world is already going to shit, and you would expect me to turn a blind eye to someone trying to make it worse? You can't be that naïve, to think I would let this slide."

"Just let the stupid kid die, Amara. He's been nothing but trouble for us. I'd call this karma for all his dumb decisions," Maria said, looking at her boss with a bit of disdain flashing in her eyes as she mentioned the young man.

Amara looked at her, her face softening a bit.

"You know I can't do that, Maria. It would make me just as bad as the things we are trying to keep from killing us all. I refuse to lower my standards for this. Killing an evil person and letting a misguided one die are two different things."

Maria smiled softly at her, before looking back forward at their guests, her face ice cold once more.

"Is there nothing we can do to convince you to return him to us?" Amara asked, her tone pleading.

But Alex remained stern on the matter.

"Unfortunately for you, I can't take your word for his good side. I'll let the people I have him with judge if he's redeemable. In the meantime, he stays locked up. But you can rest easy knowing he won't die in the foreseeable future," he promised her.

Amara could barely consider this a compromise, but she took what she could get.

"Thank you for your leniency. Then, let's move on to the next matter. What did you hope to accomplish by coming here? I know it can't be just about meeting us and deciding if we are worth keeping alive. What's your plan?"

Alex looked at her with a smirk.

"And what tells you I'm not just here to get rid of a rival who's been trying to steal awakened players from under my nose? Do your visions portray me like enough of a pushover that I would let you take all the awakened from under our control and say nothing?"

Amara grinned.

"Of course not, Mr. Leduc. But that wasn't the sole reason we came to Montreal. The awakened here are stronger than most, because of a certain necromancer tugging at the strings of fate, yes.

"But our reason for coming wasn't to build our roster. We could have done that in Italy, where no one is amassing them yet. No. I came here for you. I came here, hoping you would join under me," she declared.

"Then you wasted your time," Kary scoffed at her.

Maria growled at Kary's continued rudeness.

Even Kary didn't know why she was feeling so hostile. Ever since she laid eyes on the three women, she had been feeling like they were the enemy.

And she knew better than not to trust her gut feeling.

"Your attitude toward the boss of the Rossi family would get you killed in Italy. If you don't want to find out how that feels, change your tone, woman," Maria growled.

Kary locked eyes with her, flames flickering in her eyes. She was about to retort a snarky comment, but Alex put his hand on her thigh.

"Ms. Lombardi, have you ever felt the stare of an apex predator? The stare of a creature so powerful that you know you will die under its jaws? Because I have. I even slew two of them, right in this world—enemies that would have taken any of you and charred them to coals.

"Do you care to find out how that feels? Being charred to coals? Because Kary can teach you that. With her eyes closed, her hands behind her back, and a smile on her face. Is that what you want?" Alex asked, his face icy, but his tone bleeding with enmity.

Maria felt a shiver run down her spine, something that hadn't happened in a while.

'What is with this man... Every time he speaks, it's like he's compelling my mind to listen to his words...' she thought, glaring at him.

Amara cleared her throat.

"Ahem. I thought we had gone past the stage of threatening each other. Mr. Leduc. Can we get past this hostility and really talk? Or is this pissing contest going to continue wasting my time?"

"You're right," Alex said, sighing.

"I thought you'd unde—" Amara started saying before she felt a surge of mana and fear grip her.

Hovering over her and her two lieutenants' heads was now a wolf's head with a lightning bolt on its forehead. And it was growling.

Kary had to contain the laughter rising within her, as she saw the face of all three women change from confidence to terror almost instantly.

"Meet White Death, one of my many soul companions. And one who doesn't have much patience. He's a bit like me, but worse. Now, things will go like this. I'll talk. You will answer when asked a question and keep your mouth shut if not spoken to.

"Any break of this rule will result in White biting down on the offender. If you keep your waggy tongue to yourself, this will go well. If you yammer about, or act the least threatening, then you can kiss your shoulders goodbye, as they disappear in the darkness of his stomach.

"Deal?" Alex asked, his face clearly annoyed.

Amara raised her head, staring into the wolf's eyes above her.

"Well, I must say. I hadn't seen this outcome..."

White growled at her, his maw slowly opening.

"That is not the answer that should be coming out of your mouth at this moment. You were saying?" Alex asked, as White's head slowly lowered above Amara's, his jaws open.

Maria wanted to jump in and save her lover, but she could tell she wouldn't be fast enough, let alone strong enough, to take down this monster before Amara lost her head.

She glared at Alexander, nodding her head twice.

"Fine," she growled.

Amara sighed, seeing as her lieutenant had already given up.

'So much for her offering to fight Astaroth earlier,' she thought.

"Very well. We can do this your way. But you must know this will not put us on good terms, right?" Amara asked.

Alex scoffed.

"Woman, I don't give a shit about being on good terms with you, and I'm tired of pretending I do. Even if you brought to bear the entirety of your country's forces upon me, I'm pretty sure I could wipe them out. Why should I care about being on good terms with a gangster?"

Amara's traits stretched thin, as she realized he'd been pushed too far. Maria's constant threats had pissed him off, and now he would never accept working with her, let alone for her.

'This is why I hate her hard-headedness. She was bound to strike that head of hers on someone who was just as bad eventually...'

Chapter 916 Dealing In Concessions

Alex was seething with frustration, his meticulously crafted plan now a mere casualty of the incessant posturing. It was as if his efforts had been flushed down the drain.

Since these women couldn't be talked with, without having to throw out threat after threat, to keep them in line, he no longer had the desire to speak with them. He would rather wipe them out and be done with the problem altogether.

Surprisingly, or rather, unsurprisingly, Kary was the one to cut away his anger.

"Send White back, Alex. This isn't the way to handle them," she urged, her hand on his forearm, a stark contrast to his boiling anger.

Alex looked at her, and saw her serious gaze, as her eyes were locked on Amara, and he sighed loudly.

"I guess it's your lucky day, ladies. My partner here thinks you don't need to die right now. But choose your words carefully as we move forward, because there won't be a warning next time you threaten her or me. I'll just rip your heads off myself."

With a wave of his hand, the enormous wolf hovering above them vanished, and the threat factor that came with it disappeared along with the animal. But Amara could tell the one sitting across from them was hundreds of times more dangerous.

Maria was still reeling from the feeling of dread the wolf had caused her. She'd fought monsters in New Eden, hundreds, nay, thousands of them.

But the feeling of staring down the gullet of one, from such proximity, on this side of reality... It was way more intense than she had expected.

She was always safe inside New Eden. If she died, there would always be a respawn, making death a trivial matter for players.

But staring at death here, in the real world, where respawns were not something she could rely on? It was quite an abrupt wake-up call.

She realized, rethinking on the man's words, why her words didn't threaten him.

He'd faced death already. And came out on top...

Her attitude quickly changed, as she realized her thoughts until now had been wrong.

Maria had thought that with Amara's abilities, the pair before them had been dancing in their palm all along, and that there was no way they could lose. Amara would have seen their loss already.

But she was wrong. As soon as they landed in their backyard, the board had already switched to theirs.

For all of Amara's already envisioned scenarios, and all of her own confidence and strength, they had already flipped the board in their favour.

Alex couldn't read thoughts, but he was good at reading faces, and he could read theirs like open books.

Even though he still wanted to tear them apart, Kary had seen this before him. They were finally in the mood to listen and cooperate.

His tense shoulders relaxed as he exhaled annoyingly.

"Can we get this conversation back on track without veiled or blatant threats? Or are we all wasting our time here?" he asked, looking at the three women in turn.

"Mr. Leduc. I never wanted there to be any threats. I wouldn't have prepared to receive you here if I wanted to threaten you; I would have come to your home. I think the boiling blood of your temperament and Maria's have gotten us off track.

"I'm sure she's sorry for her actions, and will keep her mouth shut, from now on, yes?" she said, glaring at her second in command.

Maria felt her anger rise again, but promptly shoved it down her throat, knowing this was not the time. She could vent later on her punching bag.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Leduc. I let my emotions get the better of me. It won't happen again," she growled, reluctantly.

Alex was about to taunt her by saying that it felt fake, but Kary's hand dug into his arm, and she glared at him intently.

He quickly swallowed back his cutting words and simply nodded.

With this out of the way, Kary decided she would take the lead on this, since Alex was too easily angered, and with another person like him across the table, it was better for the two rational people to do the talking.

And their conversation lasted the entirety of the night, only ending as the sun rose above the horizon to the east. Kary had navigated the interests of both parties, setting boundaries for both parties, so that no massive conflict would ensue.

She could hardly ask the Rossi family to back out of Montreal entirely, as she held no legitimate claim to the area. Jack could have possibly waved his weight around on them, but he wasn't there, and she couldn't speak in his stead.

But, at least, she got the three women to back off from the awakened people in the region, allowing them to grab the ones farther north, in Quebec City, so they wouldn't have come for nothing.

Alex grumbled at that part, saying they shouldn't be taking any of the awakened people at all, since they weren't from here, but a quick elbow to the ribs from Kary clammed him up.

In return, Amara swore she would help in any way she could to help the city if a crisis arose since they were already here. This promise alone made Alex view her in a different light.

He had thought the woman was self-centred and that she wouldn't help unless it affected her. But it seemed he was wrong.

Other concessions were made, and side deals agreed upon, with Amara promising help in entering Italy if they ever needed to enter the country. Her connections there would make a lot of their movement easier if they needed to jump into Europe.

As the sun started its ascent into the skies, Kary looked at it and felt the exhaustion setting in.

"Alright. I think we've discussed enough for one night. How about we stop here, and if there is more to discuss, we can do it in a more neutral environment next time, like a pleasant restaurant or a rented office?"

"I think it's safe to say we are all tired, and the tension has taken a toll on our energy. Let's table the rest of the discussion for another time, and part ways civilly for now. Agreed?" she asked, looking at the four others at the table, one after another.

Everyone nodded tiredly, before Alex was the first to rise from his chair.

"Well, I'd say it was a pleasure meeting you, but the start of this night made sure it wasn't. I guess we'll see how it goes next time," Alex said, his tone snarky.

Alex leaned over the table, extending his hands from right to left, shaking the women's hands.

Carla reluctantly shook it, still terrified of the man, while Amara shook his hand firmly, smiling at him.

"I'll make you like me, Mr. Leduc. I can be a very persuasive woman, and a precious ally, if you can learn to trust me."

"Sure, whatever you say, lady," Alex replied dismissively.

As he extended his hand to Maria, she slapped it away.

"Fuck off already, you eyesore. I've tolerated your face enough for a lifetime," she spat.

Alex grinned at her.

"Yeah, well, the feeling is mutual, you bull-headed bitch. I just hope next time we meet, you don't cower in fear, so I have a reason to beat the ever-living crap out of you," he replied, his eyes narrowing.

Maria turned away from him, a smirk adorning her face, as Alex walked away from the pergola.

Kary looked at Maria, before gazing at Amara, who shook her head tiredly.

"Men, am I right?" Kary joked.

Amara side-eyed Maria before giggling.

"You most certainly are right. I look forward to our next meeting, Ms. Deveille. I think our cooperation can lead to great things."

Kary nodded, turning away from the table.

"Let's hope you don't play with my trust, Ms. Rossi. Those who do, tend to get burned—in this case, literally," Kary said as she walked away.

"I'll be sure to keep that in mind. Farewell," Amara replied.

She watched as Alex unfolded wings on his back again, appearing almost like an angel from afar. Then, he blasted into the sky, disappearing in a single instant.

Kary quickly followed behind him, as she lit up like a human torch and blasted flames under her feet and arms, lifting off like a rocket.

She left behind a spot of melted stone and soot, which slightly angered Amara, but she sighed dejectedly.

"Those two are way past the point I thought they would be. It's like my visions couldn't follow the speed of their progression," she muttered, as she started making her way back inside.

"Carla, have the men fix the garden and call our house in Italy. We need to warn them to stay away from Montreal, and make sure the other families heed the warning as well. If we cross these two, it will not end well..."

Carla nodded tiredly, branching off from her as she left to complete her task before a well-earned sleep.

"What about me?" Maria asked.

"You? You're coming with me. I'm tired, and I feel like snuggling," Amara said, winking at her.

"It would be my greatest pleasure, my lady," Maria replied, grinning like a child on Christmas Eve.

The night had been long, and the rest was most welcome for all parties concerned.

Chapter 917 Walking In Like He Owns The Place

Alex and Kary practically crashed into their bed, forgoing the shower before bed, as they were burnt out. Their bodies refused to go on for a single moment, given their consumption of mana, and the extended day they had gone through.

But instead of a restful sleep and well-deserved rest, the loud penthouse intercom, ringing nonstop, abruptly woke them up.

Alex groaned, realizing someone was ringing them from the front desk, and that they had been sleeping for less than two hours.

Kary was unresponsive as he turned to look at her, and he figured there was no point in waking her up. So he rolled out of bed, dragging his tired feet to the intercom screen in the guest bedroom.

He could have taken it in the master bedroom, but then he would have almost assuredly woken up Kary, and that was a big no-no.

"Yes?" he yawned, pressing the answer button.

"Mr. Leduc, I am terribly sorry for disturbing you at this early hour. Someone is here for you, and they are asking us to let them up. They insist it's urgent," the young woman said.

Alex looked at the time, and saw that it was barely nine, and he sighed in annoyance.

"Did they say who they were?" Alex asked, rubbing his tired eyes.

"Kid, stop making me wait," Alex heard a grumpy voice over the speaker.

And he recognized this voice.

"Let him up," he sighed, knowing that making that person wait would only make them even angrier at him.

The young receptionist nodded, hanging up the line, and Alex sighed.

"What the heck does he want, this early in the morning, that a call wasn't enough?" he groaned, walking to the spare bedroom's bathroom to wash his face.

He was still sleepy and smelled of sweat, but at least the cold water he splashed on his face helped him wake up a tiny bit.

As he walked down the stairs to his living room, the elevator doors dinged open and Alex turned to greet his visitor.

"Good morning, Richard. What can I do for you this early in the morning?" he asked, his voice heavy with annoyance.

Richard looked at his dishevelled appearance, and his wrinkled clothes, which were clearly remnants of yesterday.

"Long night, I suppose?" Richard asked, his anger slightly reducing.

"Very. Which is why I don't appreciate getting a call before you show up..." Alex grumbled.

Richard scoffed.

"Check your phone before accusing me of showing up unannounced, you little shit," Richard spat, walking to the kitchen.

Alex watched him walk into his home like he owned it and became stumped.

'What is it with people barging in here like they own the place?' he groaned in his mind.

He grabbed the neuro-phone in his pocket, looking at the call history, and saw that Richard had indeed called him three times, leaving a message each time.

This, at least, made his arrival less surprising. But it still didn't make it less confusing.

"How do you take your coffee, Alexander?" Richard asked from the kitchen, opening the cabinets to pull out two cups.

His movements seemed almost practiced, like he knew where everything was.

"Uh... two sugars, two creams... But how did you know where the cups were?" he asked.

Richard looked at him like he was stupid.

"Kid, I work in a job that requires me to know a lot about human mannerisms and typical behavioural patterns. Your coffee maker is on the right of your counter, so the cups were either in the cupboard directly over it or the one on the left, for ease of access," Richard replied, as if it were common knowledge.

Alex was confused.

"You're saying you can guess things with just a broad knowledge of human patterns? Please. Do you think I'm that predictable?" he replied, trying to sound offended.

"You are. Don't kid yourself," Richard replied, pushing a coffee across the kitchen island and taking a sip of his.

"Eurgh... Cheap coffee brand. For someone who lives in a rich home, and likes to splurge on dumb shit, you still eat and drink like a commoner..." Richard complained, making a grimace.

Alex frowned.

Richard slid him a card over the countertop and emptied his cup into the sink.

"Call this number. He'll hook you up with a decent coffee ground instead of this garbage... At least have some taste, young man."

Alex took the card, confused as fuck about what was happening. Then he took a sip of his coffee and frowned.

"I said two sugars, two creams. Why is this so damned bitter?"

Richard looked at him and scoffed.

"I put one sugar instead of two. Don't you know that the more sugar you put in your coffee, the milder the caffeine effect? You are tired, so I figured less sugar would wake you up faster. You're lucky I put anything at all. Now, stop complaining. We have stuff to discuss."

Alex's mind was getting pushed left and right, from one confusing information to another, and he still had no idea why Richard would have come to his home this early in the morning.

He didn't see Alfred anywhere, either, which meant he'd come alone, making it even stranger.

"What could be so important that you came here yourself, without your butler, at nine in the freaking morning?" Alex asked.

Richard looked at him with annoyance.

"Nine isn't early, young man. Your long night doesn't concern the normal life rhythm of society. And, if you'd picked up my calls, I would have scheduled you at a convenient time. But since I wasn't getting a response, I decided it was now."

Alex's tired mind was hardly following his supposed logic, making him unable to guess why he was here.

"In any case, I'm not here to tell you how to live your life. I couldn't give a shit less what time you wake up or go to bed. As long as you don't keep me waiting when I need to talk to you, you can do whatever you fucking like.

"That is not why I am here. I believe you know why I am here, so I'll give you a minute to drink that brown piss you call a coffee, and think hard," Richard said, walking out on the balcony as he left the patio door wide open.

Alex followed him outside, watching the older man lean on the railing, looking at the surrounding city.

"Quite the view you got yourself. A pity it won't stay this nice forever, if I am to believe what my wife told me..." Richard mumbled.

That's when Alex's mind finally connected the dots.

"Is that why you are here? You have something to add to my deal with her, I suppose?" he asked, suddenly wary.

"Not quite. I don't tend to meddle in my wife's deals, just as she doesn't meddle in mine. We trust each other enough to stay out of each other's business unless it's a deal we made together," Richard said, turning toward him.

"No. Even though I can't entirely agree that she let our daughter go with you without asking me, I hardly get a say after how I treated her in the last year. I'm here for a different reason."

Alex sighed loudly, walking to the patio table and sitting down. He felt a chill on his back, as the cold metal chair reminded him of the time of year.

He waved at Richard to sit across from him so they could talk more comfortably. Richard nodded, satisfied with his try at hospitality.

"Then please, tell me what brings you here, Richard. Is there something wrong with the deal we made? Or are you just worried about your daughter?"

Richard shook his head no.

"Neither of those. The deal is pretty solid, and if my wife thought our daughter would be okay, then I'll let the matter rest. No. I came to talk about the situation on a global scale. I want to know what this is all about."

Alex frowned.

"Didn't your wife tell you about it? She's had my place under surveillance... Shouldn't you know as well?"

Richard shook his head no again.

"I just said I don't meddle in her business. I deal in mercenaries and para-military operations, Alexander. I don't poke into her side of the business. It's better this way. I only know the broad strokes. Something about the world about to enter crisis mode, and needing you on the move to react."

Alex didn't know whether to laugh or cry at his lack of information.

'I would have expected his wife to tell him, given his daughter is going with us...' he mused.

"Well, Richard, it's a little more complicated than that. But if you want to know, I'll tell you. I think I owe you that much, given that Violette is coming with me..."

Richard nodded.

"There is no easy way to say this... The world is not about to enter crisis mode. It's a little more serious than that," Alex said, grabbing his mug in both hands to warm himself.

"How much more serious?" Richard asked, his brows furrowing.

Alex looked at him, conflicted. But he'd resolved himself long ago to tell people when the time would come.

And it was knocking at their doors, now.

"The world is ending."

Chapter 918 Convincing Richard

Richard looked at Alex, wondering if he had lost his mind. After all, what kind of madman would spout that the world is ending, while keeping his cool like this?

"What do you mean, the world is ending? Is an asteroid about to slam into Earth? Are we on the verge of a global catastrophe? Are aliens coming to invade our world? If you want to speak madness, at least be clear," Richard admonished him, trying to take him seriously.

Alex sighed at his words, knowing this would be the reaction he would get.

"You could say it's a combination of the things you said, in some way."

Then Richard sighed, rubbing his eyes annoyedly.

"Kid. I didn't come here to hear mad talk or joke around. Are you going to be serious about this, or did I waste my time?" Richard's voice was laced with frustration, his patience wearing thin.

Alex scoffed.

"Hey, no one asked you to come. You did that on your own. But I am being serious, Richard. It may not be now, or in the coming months, but the world is slowly about to devolve into madness itself.

"Things will happen that make no logical sense. Catastrophes will erupt around the world, killing people in droves and leaving cities and landscapes in complete destruction. Monsters will appear, straight out of our worst nightmares, and kill humans with abandon.

"The end is coming, and it's coming with a vengeance," Alex said, locking eyes with Richard.

Richard looked at him, his brain screaming that the young man had lost it. But he knew that wasn't right.

Richard had seen the drone footage from a little over a month ago. He'd seen the wolves the size of city busses, and how they took down their drones with lightning.

If that was any indication of what was to come, then humankind was about to face its biggest hurdle in history.

"How can you be so sure it's coming, and when it'll hit? Are you some kind of prophet?" Richard asked.

Alex chuckled at the words.

"Nothing like that. But I know someone you could say is some kind of prophet. He's seen what happens—experienced it firsthand. And with how it scarred his mind, I readily believe him. Especially since he's been right on everything he claimed up to now."

Richard thought about who Alexander had been hanging around lately, and one name came to mind.

"That man. Does he have concrete proof of his claims? Or just prophecies that happen to come to pass?" he asked, still doubting the claims.

"Oh, he has proof. Although it is hard to believe, or at least it was for me, when he showed me, it's concrete evidence," Alex replied.

"And can I see that evidence?" Richard asked.

Alex shrugged.

"I doubt he can show you on this side of the veil. Sadly, his power here is much weaker than on the other side."

Richard frowned.

"What other side?"

"Inside the game, Richard. Inside New Eden. It's more than a game. You should know by now. How do you think I became who I am? Or your daughter, or anyone that has suddenly developed supernatural abilities?

"Did you think we suddenly evolved into the next stage of humanity? Did you think this was a natural occurrence? What point do we all hold in common, Richard?"

Richard took a moment to think, and the answer became obvious.

"How does that even make sense?" he asked, confusion crawling into his mind.

"Honestly, it doesn't," Alex replied.

"But it's the hand we were dealt and the one we have to play. The problem isn't what is going to happen. The problem is when. David thinks the decks have been shuffled with all our meddling, and he has no idea what comes next, or rather, when it comes."

Richard leaned back into the chair, taking in the information. His rational mind was having difficulty processing the words he heard.

How could he believe that a video game had suddenly given people abilities, and that the world was changing to mimic the game? No one in their right mind would believe this.

"You came here, I assume, to ask if our plan was just a waste of money and why we were wasting everyone's time. Am I right?" Alex asked.

"Well, not quite in those words, but something like that. How would you have reacted if your wife came to you, saying she was taking a part of the company's assets and spending them on a project like yours? It made no sense."

Alex couldn't argue with his words. For someone who was missing a crucial part of the information, it truly wouldn't have made any sense.

"We aren't trying to screw you out of your money, Richard. Or your assets. We need to be mobile enough to react to what will happen in the coming months. If monsters appear halfway across the world, we need to be able to respond fast.

"Any wasted time results in lost lives. As a man who deals in mercenaries, I'm sure you understand the value of time, when lives are at stake," Alex said, looking at the city below him.

And he was right. Richard did understand this.

He had been hired many times by the armies of different countries, who had soldiers in places they couldn't step without causing political unrest. His mercenaries would be sent in for rescue, and time was always of the essence.

Having the resources to move people around the globe swiftly was a significant advantage in a time-sensitive issue.

And if he believed Alex's words, then time would be a luxury they wouldn't have enough of if monsters started appearing in cities. He couldn't start imagining what would have happened if the wolves he saw in that footage had reached Montreal.

What would the police do to monsters who were capable of becoming lightning to move around? Or had the size of small trucks and buses.

To make matters worse, he had read the reports from Alfred, who commanded the mercenaries.

The man they sent in with them had claimed that standard weapons would have never worked on the monsters. Their pelts were apparently extremely thick and would have caught bullets like a kevlar vest.

If a group of fifty of those dropped in a city, how long would it take for the army to send jets or tanks? And would that even be enough?

How much carnage would monsters like those cause in the hours it took for the government to react? And how much carnage would they cause after the army failed to stop them?

Alex gave him time to think and process the information he'd given him. He understood how hard it was to swallow that pill.

Getting people with means on his side, people like Jack, Richard, and Katherine, was an excellent way to ensure they stayed on top of this.

After a few minutes of silent staring into the city below, Alex heard Richard clear his throat next to him. So he turned his head to look at him.

"Alright. I won't say a word about your plan. I'll let it happen. But, tell me. Does humanity have a chance against these monsters?" Richard asked.

Alex grinned.

"Against them? With people like me on humanity's side, we aren't at risk of losing. But they are only the beginning. The real threat comes after the monsters and the natural catastrophes."

Richard frowned.

"What could be worse than monsters appearing across the globe?"

Alex looked at him, trying to gauge how ready he was to hear the rest of the story.

"Richard, let me ask you something. Do you believe in heaven and hell? In the existence of good and evil?"

Richard frowned at the left-field question.

"I'm not much of a believer in any religion, Alexander. I do believe good and evil exist. But I firmly believe they are a construct of our society, guidelines to follow for the standards of morality we should abide by."

Alex nodded at his response.

"Very logical. I would have expected nothing less from you. But what if I told you gods were real? And that their opposites were as well? What then?"

Richard looked at him, his brows almost connecting above his eyes.

"With everything that you just told me, you want to add that gods are real, and the devil exists? How far are you trying to drag my mind into unease?"

Alex chuckled.

"Not the devil. That is most definitely a construct of humanity. No. Demons. Also, I don't believe that gods represent good in this story. They have their own agenda. If it aligns with good, it is only a coincidence."

Richard scoffed at the words.

"Now you're making even less sense. Do you have proof of this? Or are you just trying to scare me into believing your story? Because I already said I wouldn't interfere."

Alex snickered.

Then he snapped his fingers.

A gout of black fire erupted beside the table, startling Richard, before his eyes went wide in fear.

"What in the hell is that thing?!" he exclaimed.

Alex smiled at him.

"Your proof."

Chapter 919 A Fucked Up Future

Standing next to the table, Alex summoned Bael, the demon he assumed would be the most convincing in support of his claim. His appearance, lean and rippling with muscles under his vivid red skin and the two curved horns pushing out of his forehead, was as close as humans depicted demons.

So, it was a safe bet.

"Bael, meet Richard Bellemare. Richard, meet Bael, King of the Second hell, Dis. Well, ex-king, by modern times," Alex corrected himself.

Bael scoffed at him, a gout of smoke pushing out his nostrils.

"What? It's true," Alex replied, looking at Bael and shrugging.

Richard was in shock.

"Are... are you consorting with demons, Alexander?" Richard asked, mustering his courage in front of this manifestation of evil.

Alex looked at Richard, and could see the slight shivering on his shoulders.

He snapped his fingers again, sending Bael back into his soul space, and sighed.

"Technically, no. I don't consort with them. But I do have a few working for me, in a technical sense. I used to have a lot more than I do now. But... Circumstances changed..." Alex said, thinking back on Solomon.

"Doesn't that make you evil by definition?" Richard asked, still guarded.

"You aren't listening, Richard. These demons are part of my power. They aren't part of the problem. They will help when the time comes to defend humanity. The same can't be said about the ones we'll see barging into our world in a year or two, if we believe David's calculations and memories."

Richard heard the timeframe, and his mind narrowed back into serious mode.

"Wait. A year or two? We don't have longer than that?" he asked, the shivering of his shoulders stopping.

"And that is only if the numbers are still the same," Alex added.

With all their actions since they knew about what was coming, he somehow doubted the timeframe was still the same, mainly since Gaius had acted radically differently from the last time, killing Psyche and forcing the worlds to separate.

If he were to take a gander at how long they had, he wouldn't bet anything past a year.

But that was irrelevant to the current conversation. He didn't want to make Richard panic, either, so he kept his thoughts to himself.

But he could see the wheels turning in the man's head.

"You were saying they are the real threat? If nothing changes from now on, how much of a threat are we talking about?"

Alex smiled at him.

"Now you are asking the right questions."

"Just answer the question, and stop smiling. You are making this creepy," Richard replied in an annoyed tone.

"Alright, calm down. The threat they pose is unlike anything we've ever faced before. I'm talking about extinction level. If we don't get strong enough to drive them back, the demons will consume our world, with all its inhabitants, and leave Earth a barren wasteland."

Richard gasped at the gravity of the situation.

"Why is no one talking about this on the news, Alexander? If you know this, and I assume you aren't alone, why is no one else aware? Aren't you making the situation impossible to change?"

Alex looked at him, raising an eyebrow.

"Let me ask you this, Richard. If I had told you this, without our prior relationship, as a complete stranger, and without the proof I showed. Would you have believed me? Or would you have marked me as crazy and tried to lock me away?"

Richard realized the reality of his words.

Hell, even though he knew him and saw proof, he still had trouble believing they were having this conversation.

"And to think I only came to ask you if you were trying to scam my wife into getting you a plane to fly to vacations for free..." Richard joked, rubbing his eyes.

Alex almost choked on his coffee sip as he heard the words.

cough cough

"Seriously?!" he asked, looking at Richard with wide eyes.

"Well, that was my original intent. I've seen a lot of people try to screw their way into free shit before. And we don't exactly have the best relationship. I thought you were trying to spite me by wasting away my resources," Richard admitted.

Alex looked at him incredulously.

"Do you not trust your wife to make prudent choices? How would I even begin to scam her like that? Your wife terrifies me," Alex said, looking at him with confusion.

"Ha, me too, kid. Me too. But that was my thought, anyway. Now... I don't even know if I'm going to wake up, this conversation just a nightmare, or if I'm going to head home and try to drink myself out of this memory..."

Alex's wide eyes turned to a disappointed frown.

"Please think of your daughter, and don't do something so stupid..." he asked Richard.

Richard looked at him with a smirk.

"It was just conjecture. I've gone sober ever since our last... altercation. I may not like you very much, but I do love my family. And getting punched in the face by a stranger, because I was hurting them? Well, let's just say it is quite the wake-up call..."

Alex smugly smiled at him.

"You're welcome."

"Ahh, fuck off," Richard replied, glaring at him.

They both chuckled a bit before they turned to look at the city.

"It really is a pleasant view, isn't it?" Alex said, thinking of what was to come.

Richard simply nodded.

He'd seen this city from a high viewpoint many times before, which was no novelty to him. But the thought of looking at this same landscape, destroyed and burning, sent shivers down his spine.

It put some appreciation of what they were seeing into the both of them.

"How certain are you that you can stop this from blowing out of proportion?" Richard asked, keeping his gaze on the city.

Alex took a moment to reply, thinking of his odds as things stood.

Even on this side of the veil, he was almost sure he was stronger than when they had travelled through time with that dungeon run, so he estimated his chances were a lot higher.

But even with that, he hadn't fought any of the demon army's high commanding officers, and that was for something that had happened thousands of years prior.

How much stronger had they gotten since? There was just no way to tell.

And that was doubly true now, knowing who the demon lord was. There was no way a reborn Solomon or Zagan hadn't used all their knowledge to raise the demon army's strength to the next level.

Even now, the only demons that the players had seen were from the lowest rungs of their army: frontline fighters and scouts, at best.

Alex was the only one who'd seen a higher-tiered demon in the Ash Elf kingdom, and that one was on a different level.

If he were to guess, his power level was as high as that of the Captain he had fought in the dungeon and almost lost to—and he wasn't even an officer.

Just an infiltrator...

"As things stand now, I'd say with everyone's help, maybe a fifty percent chance of victory. I can't promise anything higher..." Alex admitted.

Richard sucked in a breath of cold September air.

"That is lower than I expected a cocky person like you to respond, but higher than I was expecting, based on the things I've heard today," Richard admitted.

"I know it's not much, and I say this with all honesty. This is a positive estimate. So many things can go awry until then, and screw our chances over. Fifty percent is the best-case scenario, as things currently stand."

Richard nodded, expecting as much.

"It's wise that you know that things can still fuck up. I thought you were dumber than this. But you can still see the truth from your confidence," Richard praised him.

"I'm not sure if I should feel honoured or insulted by your words. But, in any case, it would be stupid of me to think everything will go as planned. Plans seldom go as planned. That's why we make contingencies, right?" Alex said, quoting something Kary had once told him during the siege of Bastion City.

Richard looked at him, an eyebrow cocked, almost certain these words weren't his own.

"That is right. In this case, what is your contingency? Do you have a Plan B or a Plan C if anything goes wrong with your plan?"

Alex huffed.

"Do I look like the planning sort, Richard? I thought you knew me better. Kary and David are the planners. I'm just the muscle. I will lift mountains and split oceans if they say that's what we need. But I sure as hell ain't gonna be thinking, he he," Alex laughed.

Richard shook his head, a smile on his lips.

"I figured as much. If you don't mind, I would like to hear those plans."

"Then I guess there would be no better way to hear them than directly from the horse's mouth, right?" Kary's voice echoed from the open patio door.

"Good morning, Ms. Deveille," Richard said, smiling at her.

"Yeah, not a good morning to you. I'm tired. But let's get this done so I can go back to sleep," Kary tiredly said.

Chapter 920 Parting Ways

She spent the next hour or so discussing their plans with Richard. Most of these were contingencies for specific situations.

There was no solid plan for the foreseeable future since they didn't know when they would start travelling. They were still waiting on news from Katherine.

Richard smiled at this bit of information.

"Well, then, I guess I'm the bearer of good news. The plane is ready. A client of ours was looking to get rid of a stealth-repurposed XB-1 SST. It's being flown in from the States as we speak.

"You are lucky we are so connected. In the mid-thirties, this plane was supposed to be repurposed as a presidential plane before they took a contract with a different company. Since then, it's been in storage in Florida.

"We would have never found out about it if it wasn't for a particular friend we have at the Pentagon, who oversees unused military hardware. He managed to get us a sale at quite the bargain. But I digress.

"The plane is on its way and should be accredited to fly internationally within the week. We have you a pilot, co-pilot, and supply crew that'll follow you everywhere. How does that sound?" Richard boasted.

But Kary was too tired to care.

"Great. Can I get back to explaining my plans now? I still have a few to go over, since you want to know everything..."

Richard's smile dropped, his boasting falling on deaf ears.

"Fine," he grumbled.

Kary finished her explanation, going over another half dozen plans, making sure Richard was aware of all their pre-planned moves. She also made sure to tell him that she had already promised to tell Katherine about any other plan she came up with.

Once she was done, she didn't even wait for him to tell her his thoughts, and simply went back inside, heading to bed again.

Richard watched her leave, confused.

"Is she always this blunt?" he asked.

"Nah. You got her fresh out of bed, tired as hell, and pissed at being woken up, I assume. She's usually a lot nicer to guests. But, don't worry about it. She means no disrespect," Alex defended her.

Richard looked at the open patio door again before shrugging.

"In any case, I take it she has a good grasp on the possible situations you'll face, given all her contingencies. So I won't bother you about this any longer. I wanted to be sure I wasn't letting my daughter leave with dolts who don't plan anything.

"People who go with the flow are the worst allies to have when shit hits the fan. Most of them panic and die," Richard said, glancing at Alex.

Alexander looked at him, unimpressed at his half-baked hidden stab.

"Cmon. You can do better than that, you old foggy," Alex told him, smirking.

Richard raised him a middle finger before standing to his feet.

"I've taken up enough of your time. I'll take my leave now. But keep something in mind, Alexander. Even if my wife accepted that you take my daughter into dangerous situations, which I don't know how you got her to accept, by the way, doesn't mean I do.

"If you ever come back without her, or if she comes back with even a single fingernail missing, you'll have hell to pay. I may not be the best of fathers, but I am her father. And I will make sure the ones who put her in harm's way pay the price. Understood?"

Alex smiled at him.

"You know, for someone I punched in the face for being a massive douchewad, you sure sound like an upstanding dad, suddenly. Your wife already gave me the same threat, Richard. I'll make sure I keep her as safe as I can. You have my word."

Richard nodded, not saying another word as he walked his ass back toward the elevator.

"Call us when the plane is ready, Richard!" Alex shouted from the balcony.

Richard waved his hand at him as he climbed into the elevator, and Alex turned his head back to the cityscape.

"At least we'll be able to move around pretty quickly," he mumbled as he took the last sip of his now cold coffee.

He shivered in disgust as the cold coffee slid down his throat.

"Urgh... Cold coffee is the worst."

He walked back inside, setting his cup in the sink and rinsing it, before he walked up to his room, where Kary was already fast asleep again.

He smiled as he brushed some hair off her cheek.

"You could have stayed in bed. I was handling him," he murmured, knowing she could hear him, even half asleep like this.

She grumbled as she turned in bed, and he chuckled.

Climbing into bed as well, Alex snuggled up to her back and fell asleep once more. Their rest was uninterrupted for the remainder of the day.

Meanwhile, halfway across the globe, in South Korea, even though it was already the middle of the night, someone was having trouble finding sleep.

Standing in the middle of her family home's backyard on a cool autumn night, Jin-Sil, also known by most of her friends as Athena, was shooting her bow at a target hundreds of feet away.

And although this target was static, the sheer distance from it, and lack of lighting in the darkness of the night, would have made any archer worth his salt reconsider this nightly training session.

But Jin-Sil wasn't just any archer.

Ever since she started playing New Eden, she had noticed her eyesight getting better. She could see farther and clearer than most people, and even in the dimmest of settings, she still saw her target perfectly fine.

Even a hundred yards away, her round sandbag, which hung from a solid oak branch, looked like it was mere meters away from her, and as bright as in a sunset lighting. Every shot she took flew into the distance, whistling in the wind before thudding dully into the sandbag.

She pulled her bowstring, time after time, ignoring the numbing sensation growing in her fingers from the repetitive movement, and shot arrow after arrow. She had been standing there for over an hour, and the sandbag was already looking like the most awkward porcupine in existence.

"Jin-Sil. You'll catch a cold like this. Please come back inside..." a faint voice echoed behind her.

The young woman lowered her bow, not even turning to look at her mother.

"Is father going to apologize for his words?" she asked, her tone cold.

There was a moment of silence, and Jin-Sil knew what the answer was, even without a word being exchanged.

"Then I will keep practising until my fingers bleed. I don't want to see him if he can't step over his pride and apologize."

"Jin-Sil... Your father is a very traditionalist man... You have to understand him... Even I was surprised when you said you had started dating someone. You are still so young..."

Jin-Sil turned to face her mother.

"Mother, I am eighteen, soon to be nineteen. How is that too young to date someone? Did you and father not meet at the age of sixteen? How can you judge me on this?" she asked, her voice quivering in anger.

"That's not the problem, daughter..."

"It's because he is Chinese? How backward of you two. I thought the only thing that mattered between two people was love. How can you hear he is Chinese and suddenly be so against me finding someone I fell in love with?!" she almost shouted.

"My daughter... You can't just drop this on us and expect us to understand... This is a lot to take in..." her mother said, her eyes sad.

"If you think that is a lot, wait till you hear this, then. Since I am no longer welcome in my own home, as father said, I will leave. I made enough money from New Eden; I no longer need to tolerate his poor treatment of me.

"Come next week, I will have packed my bags, and will move out of the house. Is that what you both want? Since I brought shame to your name? That is fine. I'll take on another surname. I won't bring any more shame to yours!" Jin-Sil growled, her eyes filling up with tears.

"My daughter... Please... Why don't you go to sleep on this? I'm sure you will reconsider in the morning. You might even realize you don't like this boy as much as you think you do..." her mother pleaded.

But that was the drop that made the levy break.

"How dare you assume you know how I feel?! You and Father haven't cared one bit about me ever since I dropped out of archery competitions! All you ever cared about was how I reflected on you. Since I am such a disappointment, wouldn't you be glad that I left?!"

Her voice wavered through her knotted throat, and Jin-Sil held back her tears. She was angry beyond what words could describe.

"I'm done with his poor treatment. If you don't love me, then I have no reason to stay. Goodnight, Mother."

Leaving the courtyard, Jin-Sil didn't hear the sobbing as her mother collapsed.