

New Eden 961

Chapter 961: Malfunction?

From her perspective, Kary could feel the mana around the airplane shifting through the air like a bubble getting carried through the wind.

But, with the trail trailing behind the airplane, she could tell Jonathan was weaving his mana into the air itself, as if trying to coerce it, instead of ordering it around.

To her senses, right now, the plane looked like the nucleus of a comet, with the wind shifting around it, only grazing the plane gently, instead of pushing it to the side, and leaving a tail of mana particles behind, that got swept back up by the passing wind.

Jonathan's actions were a delicate balance, a high-wire act of precision. His control was such that the airplane was enveloped in a pocket of calm air, defying the turbulence that should have been its natural state.

Kary could only imagine how much of a toll this had on his limited amount of mana. Even if Jonathan was the most developed in mana quantities alone, without having a mana lobe, there was a finite amount of it he could produce.

It was a good thing they were already on the final approach.

In the cockpit, Major Shrute looked at her instruments with a dumbfounded expression. Her wind-speed indicator had suddenly shifted, and she could tell the plane had suddenly stabilized. But it was what came before that astounded her.

The kid called Jonathan had come running into the cockpit, his face covered in a joy-filled grin, before he sat right next to her and strapped in.

With a quick glance at the instruments, Jonathan understood he couldn't just push the air away from the airplane without affecting their descent. So, he had gone for a more subtle but large-scale approach.

Carol looked at him as he closed his eyes and extended his hand forward. And with a perceptible pulse that made the hair on her arms and neck stand on end, she watched as the instruments kept telling her about the turbulent winds to absolute calm.

She could see the landing strip ahead, with its windsock straight as an arrow on a lateral path to her aircraft. Yet, she barely had any adjustment to do with her rudder pedals anymore.

On a parallel landing strip to hers, far in the distance, she could see another plane landing in the opposite direction, with its tail at a forty-five-degree angle from the strip. She knew she should have been in the same situation.

Her mind was telling her this was all but a normal situation.

As she touched the plane down, in the gentlest landing she had done in her career, she looked at the kid, who was sweating bullets, as he opened his eyes and his smile went even wider.

"Yes!" he whisper-shouted, pumping his little fist in the air.

"Did... Did you do this?" Major Schrute asked, barely turning her head toward him.

Jonathan looked at her with a tired grin, tilting his head.

"Did what?" he asked, with the most apparent, high-pitched, lying voice she had ever heard.

Jonathan didn't give her enough time to re-iterate her question, as he bolted out of the cockpit and back into the passenger area, only to find himself in the most strange-looking situation.

When he saw the spiral in the middle of the passenger cabin, with a miniature wind funnel under it, and the powerful air current permeating the cabin, he stopped in his tracks, whispering under his breath, "Woah..."

In the cockpit, Major Schrute was receiving messages from the control tower, where the tower man was genuinely astonished by how straight she landed her aircraft, given the strong winds.

She could hardly explain it herself, so she absent-mindedly accepted the compliments, unsure what else to do. She was directed to a private hangar section, where she was to refuel and wait for her subsequent departure clearance, and she taxied her way there, her mind still floating with uncertainty.

Once she had finally reached her assigned hangar, and stopped her engines, she stared at the instruments for a moment, wondering if they had maybe malfunctioned. But everything seemed fine now.

She sat there, dazed momentarily, recalling how the winds had suddenly mellowed out gently, before becoming almost ideal for landing. It was nothing short of a miracle.

"I knew from what I had been told that I would be hauling around special kids. But I thought the man meant I was lugging some rich douchebags around. Not fucking wizards..." she mumbled.

She had to take a moment to internalize what she could only imagine was her mind playing tricks on her. There was no way that magic was real, and that a six-year-old kid had just moved the fucking sky to his discretion...

"No. I must have been imagining things. It was probably just a pocket of calmer air."

In the meantime, in the passenger area, Jonathan watched as Alex forced the now clear three orbs of water floating above the ground with his overbearing mana, before grinning to everyone onboard.

"Good! Great, even!" Alex exclaimed.

Aapo, Winston and Violette were all in sweat, smiling to themselves. Glad they had managed to keep up with the mounting pressure.

They had succeeded in the test Alex had given them, and even learned from it.

But amongst them, the one that displayed the most emotion, was Aapo. He had gone into this trip thinking they were hunting monsters, and that it would be straightforward, only to be confused the instant they lifted off.

And now, with Alex's forceful guidance, he had discovered a new way to empower himself. He had never thought he would become powerful like in New Eden.

But if he believed the guild leader's words, he could reach a new height, both in and out of the game, at least when it came back online.

Kary looked at everyone and smiled warmly.

'Even if he thinks he is good only at fighting, he has so much more to give,' she mused.

But they had someone to greet here, too. So she rose from her seat, brushing past Alex with a loving smile.

"I'll go get Ri-Chu. Take a second to rest. You look tired, too," she whispered as she brushed past.

Alex nodded slowly at her, feeling the slight fatigue building up. But he intended to rest until they reached Korea, anyway.

"Can you also check for the blood transport?" he asked her.

She nodded before disappearing into the cargo hold, where the ramp to the outside was.

Still so many things to do, and think about. But getting Killian on his feet was the priority.

'Let's hope that's enough to get him up and running before we have to fight the harpies. Every set of hands counts...'

Chapter 962: Swindling Old Man

As Kary disembarked the plane, she quickly found the small medical transport vehicle, which had been waiting for them at the hangar.

Two Chinese men were waiting outside of it, one of them seemingly in his advanced forties, a cigarette in his mouth, while the younger one, who couldn't be older than twenty-five, was glancing to his left with curious looks.

When Kary followed his gaze, she saw what he was looking at and frowned.

"If one of them is Ri-Chu, then who is the other one?" she mumbled to herself.

She hurried towards the medical transport, her steps quick and purposeful, and bowed to them a bit, breaking out her sloppy Chinese greeting.

"Ni hǎo. Does either of you speak English? My Chinese doesn't go much further than a greeting and thank you..." she asked, her face pleading.

The two men looked at her in confusion, clearly not understanding her words.

The younger one stepped forward.

"English, uh, no speak. Chinese, OK. No English," he stammered, his accent heavy.

"Shit..." she muttered in response.

But the pair that had been waiting here as well had already noticed her presence, and one of the boys was already racing toward her.

"Phoenix! I'm so glad to meet you in person finally," the boy said.

"Kary is fine," she replied, recognizing the young Chinese boy as I'die, Rì-Chū of his actual name.

"We were wondering why these two men were waiting here as well. Did you have business with them?" the boy asked, his head tilting a bit.

Kary was astonished at how the kid's English flowed, his accent barely perceptible. If she hadn't known any better, she would have thought he had been raised in America.

"I do, actually," she said, snapping out of her daze.

"We had blood delivered, as we had an emergency on board, and I'm pretty sure they have it. Can you help me out? They don't speak English, and my Chinese is as basic as it gets..."

Rì-Chū giggled and nodded his head, turning to the men.

"Zhè wèi nǚshì wèn ni shìfou you tamen dinggòu de xiěyè."

"A, shì de, women yuànyì. Women bù quèdìng tā shìfou shì gěi tā de rén. Wo hěn gāoxìng yourén néng wéi women fanyì," the younger man replied before the older guy raised his hand to interrupt.

"Women réngrán xuyào fùkuǎn hé qiánmíng," the older one said with a grin.

Rì-Chū frowned at his words, almost certain that wasn't quite right, but he still turned to Kary.

"The elder says you still have to sign some papers and pay them," he told her, his voice uncertain.

It was Kary's turn to frown.

"That's not right. I am certain Alfred would have paid for that already. I want to see the paperwork first."

The boy nodded, turning back to the two men, and started arguing with the old man, until the young one went and pulled the paperwork from their vehicle. He caught a stink eye from the older dude as he handed the paperwork over to the boy.

Rì-Chū read through it, his frown deepening.

"Pho-Kary. I don't see anywhere on here that says you owe them money. It even says pre- paid on the bottom of the form. I think he's trying to swindle you..." he said, his voice quivering.

Kary's face became cold as she stared at the old man.

She released her mana slowly, focusing on the old man, who could only feel it as mental pressure, as she sauntered toward him, stopping a mere foot away from him.

The old guy was already sweating bullets when she opened her mouth to speak.

"I know you don't understand a word I say, so I'll make sure the emotions go through enough for you to get me. Try to swindle me, and I'll burn you alive until nothing is left of you but ashes floating away in the wind," she seethed.

The man truly understood nothing of her words. But the burning gaze, which he later swore he saw a flicker of flames in, and the bone-chilling tone she had used were indications enough of her threat and her willingness to go through with whatever she threatened him with.

He gulped audibly before putting on a cowardly fake smile.

he replied, his voice shaking.

Kary didn't understand what he said, but through Rì-Chū's grin, she understood he was cooperating.

She nodded, stepping back before the man jogged to the back of the transport vehicle.

The kid handed her the papers, which she glanced over, not understanding anything on them, before flipping to the end, where a line was awaiting her John Hancock.

She tapped her pockets, realizing she had no pen, but the boy next to her extended his hand toward her, with a chrome ballpoint pen in hand.

"Look at you, being so prepared," she teased, smiling at him.

The boy giggled, replying, "The man who is prepared has his battle half fought, right?"

Kary quickly scrawled her signature across the line before handing over the papers to the young man, who bowed at her, his face pale. That's when Kary realized she was still releasing her mana.

She quickly retracted it and heard the young man sigh in relief before he bowed again, thanking her.

"Xièxiè."

Kary nodded, seeing the older man rushing toward her with a small cooler. He opened it to show her the two pouches of O negative.

She glanced at it and nodded again, taking the cooler from his extended hands. The old man was in a rush to leave, as he asked a question to the younger one, who nodded, waving the paperwork in his hands.

He bowed swiftly before climbing into his vehicle, backing up a bit, and bolting away from the hangar.

"I think you scarred him for the rest of his life. Although I'm sure he understood nothing of what you said," Ri-Chu chuckled.

"Maybe that'll teach him not to try to swindle people because they don't understand his words," Kary replied with a huff.

"Anyway," she added, "Who is your friend over there? I thought you would be alone."

"Oh! Let me introduce you, then!" he exclaimed, an enormous grin extending on his lips.

"He's been wanting to meet the people of my guild, anyway!"

Chapter 963: Meeting The Storm

This made Kary even more curious.

She walked with Ri-Chu, heading over to the other young man, who had been patiently waiting beside a pile of crates.

When Kary got near him, she started feeling faint traces of mana on him, which led her to believe he was a player. The feeling was too weak for him to be awakened yet.

Hearing footsteps, the young man turned around, meeting Kary's gaze first, in which she could swear she saw a spark of blue. But the mirage was fleeting, and she felt no mana reaction, so she ignored it.

'Must have been my imagination.'

She extended her hand, opening her mouth to speak, but he spoke first, before she could place a word.

"Kary Deveille, also known as the vice-guild leader of Paragons, Phoenix. It is a pleasure to meet you face to face at last," he said, his knowledge about her catching Kary off guard.

His words were filled with confidence, contradicting his supposed enthusiasm for wanting to meet her.

"I see you know about me. I am sorry to say the knowledge is not reciprocated, as I know nothing about you. To whom do I have the honour?" she asked, as the young man, whose identity remained a mystery, grabbed her hand.

"My apologies. I should have introduced myself first. My name is Liu Yan. My friends call me Yan and the online community calls me Stormbringer. I believe you have met Stormbringer before," he said with a confident smile.

That's when Kary clicked on why he was being so confident-because he was not a nobody. No one had ever gotten an interview offline with him since he was so secretive about his true identity. But everyone in the community knew he was a young upstart.

As luck would have it, in ToB, Stormbringer had reached the Heavenly Thousand before even reaching max level, as he had chanced upon an extremely rare monster, and gained looted a piece of legendary equipment in his first week.

And as ToB went about gear, Legendary pieces would stack with the user's level, meaning you didn't need to change them out once you found one.

With this, he had risen at a vertiginous speed through the rankings, stopping in the top ten only once he had reached the max level.

This explained his carefree attitude. He used to be at the top, just like her.

And, although he was lagging a bit behind in New Eden, he was still a top hundred player. Kary was also impressed by his lack of an accent.

"Well, Stormbringer, it is a pleasure to put a face to the name finally," Kary said with a smirk. "I am surprised to find out you are not from North America. Your speech patterns and lack of accent on your online interviews could have fooled anyone," she added.

Liu Yan smiled at her, his eyes almost turning to slits.

"I may be Chinese of descent, but I was born and raised in the States. I'm from New Jersey. But we are veering off from the reason for my being here today," he said, going back to a serious expression.

Kary became serious as well, simply for one reason.

If he was in the ranking where he was, there was no way he was not awakened. Which meant he was suppressing his mana to the point she could barely feel it.

"Yes. That was my next question. What brings you here, and why were you so eager to meet us?"

As they were talking, Ri-Chū stood there, to the side, stunned by who he had been talking to all along. They had never really shared their gamer pseudonyms, and only that they both played New Eden.

The only reason Liu Yan knew he was part of Paragons was that he claimed he had recognized him from the tournament of champions. Yet, Rì-Chū couldn't say the same.

Kary silently texted Alex, telling him he might want to come to the hangar ASAP.

To which he simply responded, *OMW*

"As I'm sure you know, I am still without a guild, since I always preferred to play solo. But I have a nagging feeling that I won't be able to do that for much longer. Something inside the game feels off, and it's the same out here. So I came with an offer," Liu Yan said.

Kary raised her hand up, stopping him before he could continue.

"I mean no disrespect for interrupting you, but this isn't something that I alone will be deciding whatever your offer is. I already told him to come out; just give him a few seconds."

Liu Yan frowned at her words.

"Him? Him who?"

And as the words escaped his mouth, Alex made his entrance.

With a heatwave that almost singed the young man's eyebrows and a momentary blaze of black fire, Alex used a mix of two of his remaining demons' powers, in an attempt to dissuade any would-be assailants, if there were any.

He had immediately assumed it would be someone from the Zhong-Kui, since they were in -China.

But, when he saw the young man looking at him with a mix of surprise and confusion, Alex immediately reverted to his human form.

"Sorry... Kary said to come ASAP. I thought there were enemies..." Alex said, now feeling stupid for making a grand entrance.

"No. Colour me impressed," Liu Yan said, clapping his hands.

"He does have a sense for the theatrics, doesn't he?" the young man added, looking at Kary, who was shaking her head.

"If we were being attacked, I would have alerted you with mana, not a text," she admonished Alex.

Alex's pitiful face, as he apologized again, made Yan bellow out in laughter.

This interrupted Kary's admonishing and made Alex wonder who this guy was all the more, now that he knew it wasn't an enemy.

They waited for the young man to stop laughing before he spoke again.

"I apologize if I seemed rude for laughing, but this scene was just too comical not too. The alleged strongest player in the world, even though he's sunken down on the level leaderboard, and the most renowned guild's guild leader, getting sermon'd like a child. It's not every day one would expect to see that."

"Happens more often than you'd think," Kary grumbled under her breath.

"In any case, could we go somewhere more private to hold a discussion?" Yan added, wiping away a tear sprouting from his eye.

Alex looked at him strangely but figured it was safe to be around him, given Kary didn't seem hostile toward him.

"Sure. Come on board."

Chapter 964: Different Solution

Following them aboard the aircraft, Liu Yan was surprised when he came face to face with a teenager basking another man in golden light, both of them having pale complexions.

"Oh shoot! I forgot to get the blood to the plane when I got it!" Kary exclaimed, dashing to Cory's side.

She was still carrying the cooler bag in bandolier style, while holding her earlier conversation, disregarding that someone on board needed it ASAP.

Looking at Cory, she couldn't help but wonder how much longer he could hold on. But then, an additional problem emerged, threatening to escalate the situation.

"Uh... I don't have the slightest clue how to perform a blood transfusion..." Kary said, looking back at Alex.

Alex defensively raised both his hands.

"Hey, don't look at me. I'm no nurse either," he rebutted.

Liu Yan sighed in exasperation.

"You had blood delivered to you, without someone who can transfuse it? That seems rather unthoughtful, no?" he asked.

Kary grimaced at the words. The thought alone that she had done something without planning ahead was already causing her nausea.

Getting it put in her face like this was making her angry. But she couldn't blame him for it.

She would have done the same if the roles had been reversed.

"We would have figured something out..." she muttered defensively.

Liu Yan looked at her before letting out a chuckle.

"Well, it's a good thing I am here, then. You won't have to figure out anything. My grandparents insisted I take up medical school, even though I loathed attending school."

Kary's face brightened up at his statement.

"You can do the transfusion?" she asked, almost excitedly.

"Yes. Find me something to hang the bags above his body, and I'll start prepping him. In the meantime, I need someone to hold the bags above the patient's body."

Kary almost jumped up, holding the two pouches in her hands.

"I'll do it. Alex can find something to hold them in place while we start."

She was trying to redeem her image by volunteering, ignoring the fact that Liu Yan couldn't care less about her image.

During the time it took the young Chinese man to set up an IV line and a needle, Alex was unable to find something to hang the blood bags on, but quickly resolved to his resourcefulness, and passed a quick clothesline across the cargo hold, from which to hang them.

It wasn't ideal, but it would do.

It took barely a handful of minutes to set everything up and allow Cory to stop his healing as the blood started flowing into Killian's still unconscious body.

But Liu Yan smiled and nodded to himself as the blood flowed.

"This should make him feel better soon enough. In ten to fifteen minutes, his complexion should already start looking better. I won't ask why you are hauling around a half-dead man, or even why that man is Killian Owens. Let us just get seated and discuss what I came to discuss," he said, standing to his feet and brushing off his pants.

As they traversed to the passenger cabin, they found Cory already half asleep in a seat by the door, the quilt from the cargo hold still over him. And the rest of the cabin was also quiet, surprisingly so, as Violette, Jonathan, Aapo, and Winston were relaxing.

They were all still exhausted from their tests that had only ended minutes ago, and they lacked the energy to be excited that they were on foreign soil.

Liu Yan looked at all their tired expressions and frowned.

"I want to ask why they all look so tired, but I'm not sure I want to hear the answer..." he said, turning his head to Alexander.

Alexander chuckled.

"It's nothing convoluted. We were just training our mana control. Something you wouldn't lose out from training as well," Alex remarked.

In his senses, he could see the faint mana emanating from the young man, if he stuck to a surface reading. But Alex's senses were stronger than that.

And in a quick delve deeper into his body, he immediately found the font of mana within his chest, right under his heart, where the soul resided. Which, he had been told long ago, was not a safe place to store mana.

Which is why he wordlessly admonished Liu Yan.

"If you keep storing it there, instead of in a mana lobe, like in New Eden, you'll damage your soul. Unless you find a way to form a dantian," Alex joked, referring to old Chinese folklore.

But Liu Yan only raised an eyebrow at him.

"What do you mean, unless? I already formed a dantian. I'm surprised you could even see past my flesh, given I'm actively concealing my mana presence," he said, his eyes already locking on Alexander.

But Alex frowned.

He scanned the young man again, focusing on where the mana was accumulated, getting his senses closer many times in a few seconds, before he finally saw a thin layer around the mana. He also noticed that the mana within that small shell seemed to rotate slowly.

"Huh..." he said, surprised.

"I guess there is more than one answer to everything mystical," he added.

Liu Yan looked at him semi-confused, but put this questioning line for later.

He picked a seat facing a small table and waited for the other two to sit across from him. And Ri-Chū, unsure what to do, decided to sit next to Liu Yan since he had been following them silently for a moment.

"I'm sorry I've stolen your spotlight, Riri," Liu Yan said, giving him an apologetic look.

"It's ok, Yan. I wasn't expecting a spotlight to begin with. But this feels a bit overwhelming. I'm just now learning that you are a big-shot gamer... I wish you had told me this before..." Liu Yan's apologetic look softened a bit as he put his hand on Rì-Chu's shoulder.

"If it's any consolation, what I wanted to discuss with your guild leaders might mean you and I finally get to play New Eden together."

The sad look across Ri-Chu's face almost instantly vanished, replaced by an excited smile.

"Really?!"

Chapter 965: An Extra Pair Of Hands

"Yes, really," Lu Yan said, nodding his head at Ri-Chu.

He then turned his gaze back to Alexander and Kary, his face becoming stoic once more.

"And as such, I come bearing this offer. Through our many chats, Riri has already told me that you were going on a trip to Korea. And from my understanding, you were to do there something very important.

"Alas, he hasn't told me much more, as he is more tight-lipped than I thought about matters of the guild. But, from what I see here, or more likely what I feel, important is a rather lacklustre word for it."

Alex's gaze hardened as he looked over at Rì-Chū.

But Liu Yan raised his hand to grab his attention again.

"Please don't lash out at him. He said nothing of this. It is information I surmised from our conversations. He only talked about an upcoming trip to Korea. The rest I found out myself."

Kary observed him and found him to be rather difficult to read. Which was surprising, given he looked so young.

Even if he claimed to have taken medical school, he didn't look older than twenty-five, which would mean he wasn't even done with it, under normal circumstances.

How he got to be so informed was a mystery. One she intended to elucidate in due time.

But, right now, it was time to find out what he wanted, more than what he knew.

"We're still waiting for an offer, Stormbringer," Kary said, her tone a bit cold.

"Yes. I was coming to it," the young man said, his face turning to a sharkish grin.

"Since I've already found out about your expedition, I wanted to offer my help. I'm sure one more magic-enabled person would not be too much, and it would allow me to see if we are a good fit."

"A good fit for what?" Alex asked, even though he already assumed the answer.

"A good fit for me to finally settle into a guild."

Kary frowned at him.

"Why would you suddenly want to join a guild, when you've been an established solo player for half a decade?"

Liu Yan looked at her and smiled.

"Because I can tell. As many people can, I'm sure. I wouldn't be the only known solo player to finally put their foot into a guild after New Eden launched.

"People are moving. Pieces of the puzzle are falling into place at a pace that keeps speeding up. And I refuse to be left behind. If I'm right, which I often am, New Eden is more than a game. And it wasn't meant to be played solo."

Kary was about to ask him how he knew about all this, but Alex spoke faster than she could.

"I couldn't care less about everyone's reason for suddenly wanting to be part of a guild. But I do want to know one thing. Why did you pick Paragons?"

Liu Yan stared at him before breaking out into a smirk.

"How about this? Let me come with you guys. Once we are done, and I have decided if you are a good fit for me, I'll tell you why I chose Paragons over any other large guild. Deal?"

Alex looked at him with a stony gaze.

"I'm not sure I can agree to this. I would rather know why you want to join us beforehand."

But Kary was of the opposite opinion.

"Deal. But we will also be looking to see if you are a good fit for us. If either of us thinks the match wasn't made to be, then I hope you can agree to never disclosing our combat abilities to any other guild you would join," she said, extending her hand.

"That goes without saying," Liu Yan agreed, shaking her on it.

Alex was a bit dejected that she had agreed so fast, but he was used to deferring to her judgment on people, so he did so again in this situation.

"Then I hope you are packed already, because we won't be here for much longer," Alex said, looking out the window, where the tanker truck was already retracting its fuel pump.

Liu Yan smiled at him, waving at himself.

"I don't need anything else than what I'm wearing. Anything else I would need, I'll just buy as the need arises," he claimed, a sassy smirk on his lips.

"Born into money. Gotcha," Alex replied, chuckling.

The young man didn't deny or acquiesce about his statement, but it was apparent.

His current clothes all reeked of designer brand, and even his shoes looked expensive.

But Alex couldn't care less.

"Fine. Let's do it that way. But if you put any of my people in danger, you'll have to deal with me personally. And I don't forgive easily," he growled.

Liu Yan responded with a nod, keeping his mouth shut. But he could tell Alex was not kidding. The coldness of his gaze, as he made his threat, was unmistakable. He wouldn't hesitate to deal with him if he willingly threatened his friends.

However, Liu Yan found himself respecting him more for this.

'If he is this protective of his friends, then I understand how their guild has flourished so much, so fast. People feel safe around him. Let's see how that transcribes in a dangerous situation,' he thought.

Major Schrute's voice came over the intercom, interrupting his train of thought.

"The plane is refuelled, and we've been directed to head to the runway to await liftoff. If you are all ready, I'll be closing the doors and starting to taxi toward there. So get yourselves in a seat and buckle up."

Looking around, Alex could see almost all his people, aside from David, who he assumed was somewhere in the cargo hold, and Killian, who was still out cold.

So he got up and pressed the intercom button.

"We are ready, Major. Thanks for the heads up."

There was no reply, but he felt the plane shake a little as the cargo bay door shut, and the plane's engines started whirring to life.

"Alright, you heard her, everyone. Buckle up. I don't want to see anyone moving out of their seat until we are airborne."

But he could tell it wouldn't be an issue, since most of them were almost comatose from mana exhaustion. He simply smiled and went to sit back down across from Rì-Chū and Liu

Yan.

'This will be a much more interesting hunting trip than I thought...'

Chapter 966: Arriving At Destination

The last leg of this flight was eventless, as a general mood of expectation settled across the passengers of the aircraft. Those who were tired tried getting some shut-eye, to calm their nerves, but the anticipation building up wasn't to be brushed off so easily.

Liu Yan, eager to break the silence and form connections, attempted to engage with the others. However, everyone except for Kary and Alexander seemed lost in their own little world.

And talking to them, at this moment, seemed a bit like pushing it.

It wasn't until they had almost landed on Jeju Island that Killian woke up, his body shivering from the cold cargo-hold air.

"Urgh... What happened? Where am I, and why is it so cold?" he grumbled.

David, who wasn't far from him, heard the grumbling and stopped what he was doing to walk over to the waking Brit.

"That took way longer than it should have. I'm glad you're finally back among us. You're still alive, and you are still on board our airplane. We are almost at our destination, so don't take too long to snap back to reality."

Killian turned his head toward the voice, which felt somewhat aggravating to him, and found David walking toward him with a bottle of water.

He grunted in displeasure, grabbing the bottle David almost chucked at him.

"I can't say that waking up to the sound of your voice, and the sight of your face, is pleasant," he grumbled.

"Yeah? That's not what your mom said last time. In any case, try not to get used to it. I doubt it'll happen again, since, you know, I don't swing that way. Tough luck for you, I know," David joked, giving him a wide smirk.

Killian rolled his eyes almost all the way into his head as he sipped water.

"A 'your mom' joke, followed by a homosexual joke? Try not to overexert the pea you call a brain, skeleton fucker. You might hurt yourself," Killian said, trying to get to his feet.

But his legs refused to cooperate, and he felt the weakness settle in.

"Don't try to move just yet," David said, his face returning to a serious expression.

"You just spent almost a quarter of a day unconscious, of which four were spent in hemoglobin deficiency. Give your body time to get its strength back."

The last thing Killian could remember was sitting down in a runic circle to get rid of his soul bind. The rest was darkness.

And now he was being told he'd been out for almost six hours and had been in blood deficiency?

'What the bloody hell happened to me?' he wondered.

But he listened to David's tip, and rested his back upon a crate, letting his body relax and regain strength.

It wasn't long before the intercom flared to life again, with Major Schrute's voice ordering them to sit down and buckle up for landing.

Of course, almost everyone was still in their seat, which meant they were ready for it. But she still did her job and warned them.

As the plane shook slightly on approach and landed smoothly on the slick landing strip, Major Schrute took to the intercom again.

"Welcome to Jeju Island, also known as the Hawaii of Korea. Local time is nine thirty-six in the morning; the weather is warm, and the skies are clear. Thank you for flying with Air Schrute, and I hope your stay will be long enough for me to enjoy some peace and quiet." Across the plane, they heard her bellow out in laughter as her cockpit door opened.

"Alright, I want you all out of my baby. Everyone out!" she hollered, an enormous grin plastered on her face.

Alex looked at her with a raised eyebrow.

"You know this is my plane, right?" he asked.

She shrugged with a grunt.

"Eh. Do I care? Nah. Right now, I brought you here, so you had better go enjoy whatever adventure you rich kids came here to experience and be gone for at least one day. I want some alone time with my baby so I can tweak her a bit before our flight back home. Off you go!" she replied, still grinning.

Her loud voice had woken the few that had managed to fall asleep, and made sure the others were on their feet, as they feared she would start yelling at them.

As they were all funnelled to the back of the plane, where the exit door had already been opened remotely by Major Schrute, they came across Killian, who was awake and finally getting to his feet.

"The younger ones smiled at him, happy to see he was ok, but still kept walking to the stairs that led off. They didn't want to anger the mean-looking woman who was practically herding them forward.

When she came upon the sight of Killian's still-pale face, she stopped for a second.

"What the fuck happened to you? Actually, no. I don't care. Off my plane. No one stays on. Get the grease monkeys in the hangar to pull your stuff out. For now, I want no one on this plane until tomorrow that isn't working for me. Capiisce?"

Killian was confused about why she was in such a hurry to get them away from the aircraft, but didn't have the strength to argue. So, with the help of Cory, who was glad to see him on his feet, he exited the aircraft with the others.

The only one who stood his ground was David. He looked at the fierce woman and crossed his arms.

"Lady, our planning table is in here. We need to use it. You can't just push us off like this is your plane. I'm pretty sure you work for us."

Carol looked at the skinny, pale David and huffed aggressively.

"I don't work for you. I work for the prick with the auburn hair and blue eyes, and he's already off the goddamn airplane. Now, if you don't get off, I'ma kick you off, twig," she threatened, squaring off before him.

But this only made David grin.

"I'd love to see you try."

Chapter 967: Scuffle With The Pale One

Major Schrute couldn't stand the cocky grin on David's face, and instantly lost her cool. With a swift pivot of her hips, her hand flew at David's face, balled up into a fist, and whacked directly into his jaw.

But instead of the usual impact and grunt of pain or straight-up lights out, David's face barely turned from the impact.

And to Carol, it felt like she had just punched a slab of concrete. Her knuckles instantly started bleeding, as the skin on them split from the hardness of the impacted surface, and she had to bite into her cheek not to growl in pain.

This only made David grin even wider.

"That all you got?" he asked, cockily.

"What kind of freakish jaw do you have, twig?" she growled in response.

David didn't answer; instead, he walked up to her face, his grin turning almost devilish.

"It'll take a lot more than that to phase me, lady. I've stared death in the face more times than you could fathom. Either give it your best shot, or go sit in your cockpit and cry yourself to fucking sleep for all I care."

Carol felt a shiver run down her spine as her eyes locked into his. She wasn't sure if he meant figuratively or literally, but his gaze was unwavering.

She had seen men with this look before, in the military.

Men who stared death in the face and laughed. Men that welcomed its icy embrace like a long-lost friend.

Madmen.

But she was no coward.

Her eyes becoming icy, Major Schrute shoved David backward, catching him off guard, before pinning him to a crate and unleashing a flurry of blows worthy of a world-class boxer.

Stomach, ribs, chin, ribs, cheek, nose. She didn't stop for thirty seconds straight, David's body rolling with the punches.

When she went out of breath, she jumped back. She inhaled raggedly, looking at the human punching bag before her, and her eyes wavered.

David stared back at her, his skin lightly bruised and his top lip swollen a bit, much to his surprise.

"I'm impressed. You managed to bruise me. Is it my turn?" he asked, sending shivers down her spine.

But as he stepped forward, his mana starting to seep out menacingly, a voice resounded from the staircase.

"Alright, enough! You've proven your point, you cocky bastard. Leave the woman alone. We still need a pilot to get back home, you dumbass."

Turning to look at the meddler, David gave Alex a sour look.

"Hey, she started it. I'm just getting ready to retaliate," David grumbled.

"I don't care: I'm ending it. We still need her in good shape, and I don't want to have to look for another pilot. Just let her have her plane for the day. You've been at those files for almost a day on the plane alone. I'm sure you can brief us without the table. Get out."

David looked at him with an incredulous face that screamed, 'You're taking her side? She started it!'

But he wasn't about to argue with him over what he considered was just a trivial matter. Stomping his feet a bit like a wronged child, he walked out of the airplane, grumbling to himself.

Alex could clearly hear the whispers under David's breath, mocking his words as he walked past him, but elected to ignore his attitude.

"As for you," Alex said, snapping his head toward Carol.

The woman reflexively raised her guard again, his voice almost jolting her.

'Why am I suddenly feeling so threatened by him? I've never feared a man in my life. What the hell is going on?' she wondered, seeing her hands shake slightly.

Alex looked at her and could tell she was acting like a cornered animal. So he sighed loudly, trying to calm down.

"Listen, Major. Although I do appreciate your professionalism, when you decide to have some. And I like the grit you are showing; you shouldn't go around taunting the people you are carrying," he said, looking at her with annoyance.

She lowered her hands before grunting at him.

"I couldn't stand his cocky attitude. He said he wanted to throw down, so I obliged him," she replied, trying to make it look like no one was at fault.

"Major. I am not joking here. Even the children you carried here could mop the floor with you. I understand that you are strong-headed, most likely due to having to force your place amongst the men in the military. But this isn't your squadron anymore.

"David could kill you in the blink of an eye, and regardless of how fast I am, I couldn't do a thing about it. Is that what you want to have happened?"

He was trying to warn her of the danger, but as the words reached her ears, her brain simply registered them as a threat. One that she couldn't acknowledge.

"As if that pipsqueak could kill me. He looks so sickly that my dead grandma could beat him to a pulp," she tauntingly said.

But somewhere in the back of her mind, her brain was already rebuking her.

'After all those punches, he was barely bruised. One fat lip. That's all I did to him in about twenty punches. Could he really kill me?'

Alex sighed loudly, realizing she wasn't quite apprized of the current state of the world. Her mind was still viewing things through a human lens, when all the ones she carried here could barely be called that anymore.

'I think show will trump tell, here,' he thought to himself.

He scanned the cargo hold, looking for something sturdy, but that wouldn't matter if it were damaged, and his eyes stopped on the pile of crates next to him.

He took a moment, opening the top one, and emptied the contents from it before shutting it again, during which Major Schrute looked at him strangely.

"Come here and strike that crate. Hard as you can," he ordered.

She looked at him, confused.

"I'm not asking. Do it."

She shrugged.

'Not my property,' she told herself.

And with a grunt, she slammed her fist into the top of the crate, denting it a good three inches in. Her knuckles hurt, as they were still bruised and bleeding from pummeling David, but she only winced at the pain.

Alex scoffed.

"Alright, now lift it."

Chapter 968: A Warning, A Choice, An Opportunity

Again, she looked at him with a confused gaze.

"What's the point here, twer-Ahem... Sir?"

Alex's eyelid twitched, as he knew what she was about to call him.

"Just fucking lift it," he growled, getting annoyed.

She did as told, her eyes trailing his reaction cautiously.

The crate was empty, but even then, it was still a chunky piece of metal. And although the weight wasn't much of an issue, the size alone had her using both of her arms to lift.

Resting it on her midsection, she raised it as high as she could with the poor grip she could get on the crate, before slamming it back down.

"There. Happy?" she asked, slightly annoyed at being physically tested.

"Almost. Now it's my turn," Alex said, smiling at her.

'What?' she wondered.

'What's he going to do? Tap it and grunt as he lifts it?' she chuckled in her mind.

Carol was a stocky, brutish almost, and she was confident in her strength. So, when she looked at Alex's tone but still trim physique, in her opinion, she couldn't help but think he was weak.

But her jaw hit the floor the next second.

Alex put one hand on the crate, and with a whining of metal bending, she watched as the crate dented under his fingers. And the next second, he lifted it off the ground with one hand.

"What the..."

And Alex wasn't done.

Tossing the crate up and down a couple of times, like it weighed nothing at all, he finished by catching it in his two hands and grinning at her.

Then, with naught but a fraction of his body's new strength, he crushed the crate between his hands as it sheared and bent into a ball of aluminum and plastic lining.

Just like that, in a matter of seconds, he crushed it like it was nothing but an empty bag of chips.

Alex looked at her incredulous face, as her eyes shifted from him to the crate, and back, her mouth agape.

"Ho... Wha... Tha... What the fuck, kid?!" she blurted, stammering her first few words.

Alex tossed the crate to the side, as it clattered to the ground, and walked over to her, stopping a foot away from her.

"Major Schrute, please do not misunderstand this as a threat. I hold no intention of scaring you. But I do want to make something clear. The people you carry on this plane are far from ordinary. We make look like just your regular Dick and Jane, but we are far more dangerous.

"Even the children wield power that would leave your mind a mumbling mess. If you want to keep working with us, I need you to understand the power dynamics of this group, not as employer and employee. But as human and awakened.

"Yes, we call ourselves the awakened. I know, it's lame. I didn't come up with it. But do keep in mind one thing. The awakened, even the weakest of us, can kill a regular person in a breath. Please be mindful of how you treat us, lest you anger someone, and end up as a pension check to your relatives..."

Her heart dropped as the words reached her brain. Instinctively, her body started shaking, but she wasn't sure why.

She couldn't tell if it was rage or fear.

Alex didn't want to leave her in this state, so he put his hand on her shoulder, pulsing a weak wave of mana into her body, calming it down. He saw her gaze become cloudy for a second, before she blinked and came back to.

"You alright? I think you went into shock for a second, there," Alex tried joking.

She looked down at his hand on her shoulder and stepped back defensively.

"What are you? Are you even human?" she asked, raising her hands again.

Alex sighed again.

'Why do people always fear what they don't understand?'

"I am human, but not human. It's hard to explain. Listen, we don't have time for this. I need you to be ok with this now, not later.

"If not, I'll call Alfred and have you replaced by someone who will be, and we'll arrange for you to get a plane ticket to wherever you want to go. But this is not a decision you can weigh in or think about over a cold one. You're choosing now."

"Even the kids? You made me allow them into the cockpit. They were sitting mere feet away from me..."

"Hey, snap out of it!" Alex barked, getting tired of her confusion and fear.

"Are you in, or are you out? I want an answer now."

The woman looked at him with wide eyes, her mind racing.

Were these people monsters? Were they trustworthy?

Would she be in danger if she flew with them?

So many questions buzzed through her mind.

But Alex was in no mood to wait.

"You got five seconds. Then I'm calling Alfred, he said, crossing his arms.

But the Major's mind was already made up.

"Don't call him. I'll do it. But you gotta promise me you won't eat me," she said, looking serious.

This caught Alex off guard, and he froze.

"Eat you? What kind of fucking monster do you think we are?" he exclaimed before chuckling.

"Hey, don't laugh! I don't fucking know what things you do," she rebutted.

"Fine. I promise no one will eat you. We cool?"

Shaking her head hesitantly, she finally lowered her arms.

In her mind, Carol was trembling in fear. She had no idea what kind of risk she was taking.

But as she looked at the surrounding aircraft, she couldn't let this chance slip by. She had always wanted to pilot this kind of plane in the private sector. Free of worry, free of the high-risk flight zones.

The salary was also nothing she would ever get anywhere else. Even a year of this was more than she'd made her entire career in the Air Force.

Spitting on this would be foolish. Even if it meant flying around monsters...

She bit the bullet and accepted by virtue alone of her greed, with a side of curiosity.

'Let's just hope they keep their promise...'

Chapter 969: Reaching A Peaceful Resolution

While this was happening, David, who had walked off the plane after being ordered by Alex, noticed their last combatant had arrived as well.

She was already all over Ri-Chu, her exuberant side making him all sorts of uncomfortable, but the boy didn't attempt to push her back, accepting things as they were.

"Alright, you two. Calm down or get a room. We have an expedition to plan," David dropped, making a disgusted face.

He couldn't care less if they wanted to be all over each other, but it could wait until after they accomplished what they were here for.

Jin-Sil, who most of them knew as Athena, gave him a stink eye, refusing to let go of Ri-Chu's arm and pulling her tongue at him.

David started gathering his thoughts, getting ready to do his hunting briefing off of memory, when he felt a small surge of mana coming from the aircraft behind him.

With a sigh, he looked at the plane from the corner of his eye, turning his head a bit, and murmured, "How many people are you going to tell our secret to, before it's time for the world to know..."

He knew Alex wasn't doing this to hinder their anonymity, but it could still backfire on them.

If he ever told someone who was so shut off to the unknown, they could end up trying to tell the world about it, and mass panic could very much ensue. Imagine the panic of a new kind of powered humans suddenly being all over the news.

Even if they had done this on a smaller scale in Montreal, it didn't mean the world was ready to hear about it yet.

Proof of this lay in the fact the world governments had yet to make a statement about it; almost like they were waiting for something.

'Last time, they waited until they had some awakened people of their own who could stop the ones wreaking havoc and the monsters with ease. Are they going to wait that long again?'

But as his thoughts stray to this subject, David snapped back to reality when Alex came out of the plane, soon followed by the pilot. Her face was no longer the mask of arrogance and anger it had been a couple of minutes ago.

Clapping his hands to gather attention, Alex quickly became the center of it.

"Alright, everyone. Major Schrute has an announcement to make, and I would like everyone to pay attention, please."

Feeling the gazes of the twelve powered individuals turn on her, all of which Alex had assured her could quickly snuff her out, Carol gulped nervously.

"..."

Carol looked at them, suddenly feeling nervous and slightly nauseous, before Alex's hand rested on her shoulder.

"Come on, now. Out with it," he pressed her, a broad smile on his face.

Carol cleared her throat loudly, gathering her courage.

'Come on, Carol. You were in dog fights against F22s. How is talking to a dozen kids making you this much of a wreck?' she mused to herself, before straightening her back out.

With her posture back to her militaristic attention, her head slightly raised to look over the kids, a not-so-subtle attempt at not looking them in the eye, her face became stern.

"I would like to apologize to all of you who flew with me here. I realize I have been less than agreeable, and have treated most of you like parasites aboard a plane that is basically yours.

"As an employee under Mr. Leduc's employ, I should have treated you with the respect you deserve, and the professionalism that was expected of me," she said, her tone stern but sincere.

"I'm sorry!" she added, straightening up even more, almost saluting them with her body posture alone.

It was bad form to salute a civilian, and thus, she didn't raise her arm. But her body language told all of them present her intention.

Jonathan was the first one to respond, walking up to her with a wide grin.

"Does that mean we'll have more access to the cockpit during flights now?!" he asked, letting his excitement show.

Major Schrute looked down at him before scanning the others with her eyes, noticing all their slight smiles, and her nervousness washed away.

'What was I nervous about? They are just kids. Why did I think they would resent me for this?' she wondered, bending forward toward the child in front of her.

"Although I would prefer peace and quiet during takeoffs and landings, I will keep the cockpit doors open from now on. You are welcome to join me as long as you don't disturb me too much," she replied, much to Jonathan's delight.

He jumped up in joy, his arms extending over his head.

"Yes!"

A light wave of laughter spread across the others as they all silently accepted her apology.

Clap clap

The sound of clapping brought everyone's attention back to Alex again.

"Alright. With this matter aside, I believe we can go back to the cargo hold and do our briefing away from prying eyes now?" Alex asked, looking at the woman.

"Of course. Here, let me open the drop door for you," Carol replied, climbing into the aircraft swiftly.

And not a moment later, a loud rumbling echoed, before a mechanical whine reverberated across the area, the back of the airplane suddenly cracking open.

Alex looked at this with a smile.

Kary walked up to him, grabbing his arm slowly.

"You know, she would have had to open the door anyway, since the people in the hangar were waiting to unload our gear. But the intention behind it is refreshing, to say the least," she said, giggling a bit.

"Yeah, I guess she needed a little push to realize we are not only were her bosses but also not just some rich kids using their money to travel the world on a private jet. Go figure," he chuckled.

Kary rose an eyebrow at him.

"But isn't that what we are doing?" she asked mockingly.

"Hah! I wish."

As the drop door gently rested against the ground, David walked past the couple, smiling.

"Let's get this meeting started, shall we? There is much to discuss."

Chapter 970: Briefing Start

Everyone quickly walked up the ramp, where they headed to the front of the cargo hold, all standing around the table there, and David began tapping away at it.

In seconds, he had already pulled up a file, and the image of Jeju island, which they were on, appeared across the table.

"Jeju-Do, also once known as the Island of the Gods, our current location," David started, before zooming the map on the eastern tip of the island.

"More specifically, the Seongsan Ilchulbong region," he continued, pulling up touristic pamphlet images of the lovely cliffs and rocky overhangs.

Jin-Sil looked at the map and images with a proud smile, nodding at David's accurate pronunciations.

"Regardless of the breath-taking view, and the picturesque images you see here, we are not here on a picnic trip.

"The locals have started spreading rumours of the cliff side being cursed, with many tourists suddenly going missing, and even some locals failing to return from it. And the reason for this is these," David said, pulling a fuzzy photograph of a bird in the sky.

But the image was strange; the bird seemed to be way too elongated from beak to tail. Pulling out satellite imagery, David showed the cliffs, where some large nests were now present, where once there had been almost nothing but small fishing bird nests.

And in those nests, a strange sight for those who were less versed in monsters of mythology. "What are those?" Jonathan asked, too young to be knowledgeable about the creatures. David looked at him and smiled.

"Excellent question. For those of you who are asking themselves the same thing, these are harpies. Although humanoid in height and shape, we should not misjudge them as sentient creatures. They are beasts, through and through."

Zooming the satellite image, he showed the inside of one nest, where a gruesome image appeared.

Instantly, two people suddenly became sick, throwing up in the garbage cans near them in the cargo hold.

Looking at them, Alex was surprised by who they were, having expected them to be tougher than this, given their gaming experience.

Liu Yan and Killian averted their gaze from the table as they stood back up.

Alex was about to ask them if they were alright, but David was quicker to the punch than him, bellowing out in laughter.

"And here I was, expecting both the great Stormbringer and Killi to be toughened veterans. Even the children didn't react as strongly as you two weaklings did. Shameful, really," he mocked.

Killi shot a death glare at him, while Liu Yan kept his gaze averted.

"Can you change the image, please?" the latter asked, keeping his eyes away.

On the table, the bottom of the nest, which had been clearly displayed until now, changed.

And from the rotting cadaver-filled bird's nest, the image changed back to the coast.

David chuckled low to himself, calling them weak under his breath again, before resuming his briefing.

"As I was saying, these are beasts. They may appear semi-human in appearance, but make no mistake. The only thoughts within their minds are to eat and reproduce. They care not to entertain a conversation, and will kill you if given the chance," he said, showing the sea under the cliff side, littered with abandoned single and two-passenger boats.

The dozens of kayaks, paddleboards, and other water-bound touristic transport methods smashing against the cliff side from the waves below painted a gloomy image.

"Now," David said, getting their attention off the picture.

"We won't be coming at them from the water, since it would be suicide. We will have to scale the cliff side from above, walking toward the nests from the caldera above," he said, changing the image.

Showing the raised volcano's caldera, which had lost all semblance of a mountain from erosion, from the millennia of waves crashing into it, everyone present could see the harsh reality of the difficulty of their mission.

Although the nest was on the smallest outcropping of the volcano's south-eastern point, they had no cover on the way there. A small forest covered the foot of the volcano on the northwest side for their approach, but once in the caldera, it was an open grass field.

This would be as dangerous as approaching from the sea, if only in a land-bound fashion.

"Now, I know this seems like a dangerous approach since we'll be leaving ourselves open to aerial assault with nowhere to hide. But I think this is still our safest bet. With nowhere to hide for us, it also means the harpies will have no cover on approach, giving us time to take them down," he pointed out, looking at all their ranged attackers.

"I also don't think we would lose in aerial warfare," Kary chimed in.

"I would rather not resort to that, since we would be exposing ourselves to the eyes of the locals," David pointed out.

"But if push comes to shove, you, Alex, Jonathan, and myself can give them a run for their money. But that would be a last-case scenario, ideally."

Kary agreed it was risky to start flying when there was a civilization center so close by. But they all were ready for the option if the need arose.

Up to now, everyone seemed to follow the gist of his plan. But Jin-Sil raised her hand, gathering attention on herself.

"Yes, Athena," David said, having already forgotten her name.

"It's Jin-Sil," she replied, glaring a bit at him.

David raised his hands apologetically.

"How have you convinced the local authorities to let us up there? It's a national protected area and is only open to public heavy watch. I doubt that would be good for us if we suddenly need to fight in the caldera," she pointed out.

David frowned a bit.

"I... Hadn't thought of that. I assumed we would sneak up there unnoticed," he admitted.

Jin-Sil exhaled loudly.

"Aish... And here I thought you were being so reliable. Fine, I'll arrange an escort as light as I can because there is no way up the mountain without getting spotted by the authorities. Why do you think they keep that first part of the way clear of trees?" she said, pointing at the small piece of grassland before the forest.

"We can figure that out once we reach the area," David said, shrugging his shoulders.

They were still an hour away from there, at the airport, anyway.

Kary looked at Jin-Sil and smiled.

'Good thing we asked her to come. I doubt any of us would have been able to deal with that issue.'