

## Werewolf 271

### Chapter 271 - The Meeting (Part 3)

After speaking to Kai and how Ben Clove was involved in all of this, Gary had expected his involvement to be loosely connected. Perhaps in the same way as he was connected to the Rising Dragon gang. The mayor did seem to have a heavy interest in gangs, and it was the first time he had seen one publicly use one for his bodyguards, but there were stranger things that happened in the world.

Now, the fact that he was at this meeting itself meant there was probably more, and at the same time, Gary carefully watched him walk across the room. The large man was confident in his steps, not even caring or worried in front of all these gang leaders. Even if the Rising Dragon gang was on his side, they couldn't stop all the gangs that were there, telling the teenager that something was definitely up.

'Does Xin know anything about this? I doubt it, if I were to guess correctly. I don't even think the Underdogs or the Grey Elephants know about this, either. Otherwise, the red colour gang would have never even tried to target Xin.' Gary thought. 'If it was a meeting between all significant gangs in Slough, then they would certainly be here. It probably means that the mayor is scared of them. That or the reason for this meeting is something that he doesn't want them to know about.'

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm glad that all of you were able to make it." Ben started the meeting off and looked around the room at each of them. While stopping and looking at the Howlers for a few more seconds before continuing. "All of us are busy people, so I won't waste your precious time. There are two agendas for this meeting, so let's get the first one out of the way.

"The last time we met, all five gangs agreed to an alliance. It allowed you to continue your work as you wished without disturbing others, while at the same time serving as a guarantee to protect you all, while also protecting me. I'm glad that you took the time to listen to me. We had a deal that not only benefited me, but benefited you as well.

"If one of you were to get attacked by the Grey Elephants or the Underdogs, then we agreed to help out each other. Which brings up a problem. Unfortunately, the Pincers have been taken over, and replaced in a single day." Ben then looked over to Gary's sofa. "It was too quick for our alliance to even act."

It was then that thoughts started to go through Gary's head. What if all of this was a trap? Have the Howlers been invited over to try to take revenge? Kai did mention that possibility to him, which was another reason they had brought Olivia over. Seeing her should cause them to back off a little, but this wasn't why he was worried.

The masked teenager's heart was beating loudly, not because of his words, but Gary was worried that his mask wouldn't be enough to disguise him. It had stopped others from recognising him so far, but this wasn't one of those dumb superhero comics where people seemed blind and couldn't tell the difference between someone with glasses and without.

"The new gang called the Howlers, if I am not mistaken?" There was a pause as if he was waiting for them to say something, but since Kai stayed silent, Gary did the same. "I see that you have brought along Miss Olivia Pearl. Since she is here, can I take it that what happened was more of an agreement rather than a forceful takeover?"

Once again, the question was met with silence from the trio. Olivia's lack of expression didn't make it any easier for any of the others to figure anything out. They only had the rumours to go by.

"Are the Howlers willing to work with the rest of us? The fact that you guys decided to come here, rather than outright refuse this meeting, must mean you have some interest, no? So what do you say?" The mayor asked with a smile, not letting the silence disturb him.

Seeing the smile on the face of Xin's father and this side of him, made Gary want to run a mile. In a way, gang members were more predictable than this politician who was in front of him. Who knew what he had planned? Who knew what he had done to get to the position he was in now?

The only thing he was hoping for, was that the mayor wasn't as bad as the other gangs, himself. Otherwise, he didn't know how he would face Xin next time. Would he be able to keep his lips sealed if her father would say something that annoyed him again? If he spoke ill of gangs when he was doing this? The man was a hypocrite and a liar!

"You said there were two agendas." Kai mentioned without really answering any of the earlier questions." Not only was his voice a little muffled through the mask he was wearing, but Gary felt like his upperclassman was trying to slightly change it as well. It made the teenager wonder if he should have been doing the same thing all along as well.

"From what we've been told, this meeting had already been planned before we made the Pincers submit to us. So before we decide anything, we would like to know what the real agenda of this meeting is."

"If you want to be part of our meeting, then take your mask off!" Tony stood up and pointed at the masked teenager. "You think hiding your identity is going to save you after this meeting is over? We know your territory, and we will be happy to force you to comply, just like you did with the Pincers."

[Skill activated Controlled Transformation]

"Is that supposed to be a threat?" Gary spoke up for the first time, as he looked towards the gang leader. When speaking, the Werewolf had tried to lower his voice, but to make sure he wouldn't get recognised he had also used Controlled Transformation on the area around his throat.

Since Gary hadn't said anything, now that he had revealed such a deep and menacing voice, the other gang members were really taken aback. The unknown was scaring the other leaders. It was clear by Kai's words earlier that they had beaten the Pincers, just like the rumours had claimed.

The real reason Gary had been unable to hold back his tongue any longer was due to Tony announcing he would come to attack those that worked in Burnham food street. He knew during a gang war that there would be other victims, not just gang members.

"Everyone, may I remind you that we've gathered here simply for a talk?" Ben cleared his throat in an attempt to restore order and cool everyone's head. "Fine, I see no problem with letting you know the details of this meeting as it is something that concerns everyone, no matter if you wish to join us or not. We can decide that afterwards, though it is something that you probably will want to comply with anyway.

"Based on all the information I have gathered, the war between the Grey Elephants and the Underdogs could start any day now. The Grey Elephants look to be making their move, and there is no doubt in my mind that it will be worse than what happened to Chavley during the colour gang war."

Gary knew that the tensions had to be high between the Grey Elephants and the Underdogs after the attack that day, but he thought it would still be awhile before an attack had occurred. Was something pushing one side to act faster than the other?

'This war... it could be my chance to get rid of the Grey Elephants while they are distracted or weak.' Gary thought. He had already planned to get rid of them anyway due to what they had done to his sister, and this might be the perfect opportunity.

"Because of this, they will very likely approach you in the coming days, but if our plan is to succeed, I ask you all to refuse to make an alliance with them. One will take out the other, at which point we will strike together as a group. Then we will be the ones that take over this town!"

"The agenda of this meeting was to remind all of you to not get blinded by greed. No matter what either side might offer you, if we don't use the chance to get rid of both gangs once and for all, it will be just a question of time until the winning side will recover and take over Slough as a whole.

"If we don't have an agreement, then we'll ALL have a problem. And that includes you, Howlers!"

Kai had informed Gary that this was what the other gangs might do, but the blonde teenager had originally predicted there would be a second war after the first. One between the five small gangs, yet he had clearly been unaware that those five were already in some type of secret alliance, seemingly organised by the mayor.

His upperclassman might have an answer, yet since he didn't speak up, Gary chose to do so. Thinking back to what Kai had told him earlier, this was what the Werewolf had to say:

"No! We are going to do what we want and I'm telling you not to get involved."

#### Chapter 272 - The Meeting (Part 4)

The few words that Gary had spoken were once again said in his deep sounding voice. He hadn't cancelled the Controlled Transformation. Since only a small part of his body was changed, it barely consumed any Energy.

However, unlike before where Gary's words sounded quite intimidating, although they continued to sound intimidating in the situation they were in right now, it only caused the tensions to rise within the room.

“You no name piece of sh\*t!” A bald headed man cursed as he jumped from his sofa, and two more bald headed men jumped from the chair next to them. The three looked similar, and it was hard to know whether they were triplets or just looked the same. Regardless, each of them were the heads of the Blood Triangles.

“You come in here, invited when we didn’t have to, and you tell us to not get involved?” The triplet in the centre spoke. “Do you think everyone in here is a weak piece of crap or something? That you can just spew your mouth, and we can listen to you because you took over one of the Pincers! Those damned masks should have been the first sign that you guys were up to no good.”

No one was sticking up for the Howlers, and it was safe to say that most of them were on the side of the Blood Triangles. Feeling the same way towards the new gang.

“Now let’s settle down and give our guests a chance to speak. It’s always best to try to settle things with words first.” Ben stated, looking his way. For some reason, the three seemed to listen and got back in their seats. But it was clear that the Mayor was on their side as well. After all his choice of words, basically said that if they can’t solve it with words then they would take action instead.

Gary thought for a second worrying if it was the right thing to do, perhaps backing down was correct but then what about his sister, and what about the future of slough. The plans and the future of the Howlers had been set, sooner or later they would be doing this anyway.

“As I said.” Gary was adamant. “We will be doing what we want.”

Kai also added to his leader’s decision: “After having listened to your plans, it seems like yours might just mess with ours a little. So take this as our warning- to not get in our way.”

Some gritted their teeth, others clenched their fists, but most of their eyes looked towards Ben, as if he was the deciding one in all of this.

“Fine, I did my best to stop you from getting hurt.” Ben sighed as he shrugged his shoulders and walked to the other side of the room.

It was the signal for everything to start off, as the Blood Triangle trio stood up and the one in front almost dashed across the room, jumping on the table in the centre and leaping towards them. The first one to act as if he was expecting it was Kai.

He quickly got up from his seat and kicked the bald headed man in the centre of the stomach, using his own momentum against him, he fell back and crashed into one of the others.

“That fox masked freak is fast.” The Triplet said, holding onto his stomach.

Everyone had gotten up from their seats now.

“You attacked us, so all is fair game now.”

The one who was closest to the Howlers were the Lock gang.

Immediately, Tony had jumped up from his seat, and it looked like he was ready to tackle Gary to the ground. Gary was ready and unafraid, of course, but there was no need for him to do anything. Stepping in between the two of them was Olivia.

She spun on her back foot, lifting her leg in the air, the heel of her foot landed and met Tony's square nose. A crunching sound resounded. Blood started to pour out of it instantly. Gary knew it was broken, as he had managed to break his nose during their rugby training against Blake not too long ago.

While Tony was busy checking his nose, Olivia took out her whip and swung it, wrapping it around Tony's leg and pulling on it, quickly caused him to fall on his back and hit the ground. Tony was a large man, and even with the whip's extra properties it was something that should have been hard for Olivia to do, yet the Lady Boss made it look easy.

‘She’s more useful than I thought.’ Kai praised her in his mind.

Seeing this, and seeing the whip in her hand, the others were a little hesitant to charge in for a second, yet they were aware that the number’s advantage was on their side. However, Gary wanted to stop this quickly, as he didn't want to go to war with all these small gangs.

These gangs, for the longest time, had never gone against the Underdogs or the Grey Elephants, even with their alliance. In fact, they were still waiting to go after the other one only after they had their war. Which meant as long as they knew there was someone stronger than them, they wouldn't dare to touch them.

A small smirk appeared on Gary's face, peaking just under his mask.

"Stop now, or I'll get rid of you all." Gary growled as he lifted his hand. The teenager had made it transform completely, fur on the outside, and his nails elongated to claws. He had only used the Controlled Transformation on his hand, but it was enough to cause everyone to freeze in place.

Looking at this, the puzzle pieces were starting to come together for the gang leaders.

The Howlers had a frigging Altered as their leader.

That was how they were able to get the Pincers. Why they were confident. It was no wonder, Olivia had quickly submitted to them despite the rumours claiming that theirs had been a small force. Seeing this, they could only think that the gang must have had someone big backing them. Since the Howlers had seemingly out of nowhere and now seeing this, they likely had some large corporation or another gang completely backing them.

"We gave you a warning, yet you chose to ignore it..." Kai scoffed, probing them for a reaction. "This will be your second warning, and I guarantee you, you won't get a third. As you can see with the Pincers, we're not interested in eliminating you and Olivia has been able to see the light and join us. As long as you don't get in our way, we won't get in yours either..."

None of the gang members moved, and even the mayor seemed to be worried now. All the gang leaders were in one place, none of their guards or members were with them. They all knew the power of an Altered and if Gary wished to do so, he could kill all of them. Doing so would outright solve a lot of the Howlers' issues upfront...

It was something none of them had expected.

“We don’t want any trouble, we agree to your terms.” One of the men said standing up and was already leaving. Soon after, other gangs who had yet to make their move had also left. Leaving only the Blood Triangle gang, Lock gang and the Rising Dragon gang.

The others helped pick up their injured brethren, but eventually they left as well, leaving only the Rising dragons, Tony looked back at Olivia for a second before continuing to head out.

“Well it looks like we have finally reached an understanding. Mr Mayor, I want you to remember our name. I’m sure you will hear it a lot more often in the future.” Kai smiled and started to walk ahead as they were getting ready to leave the place as well. However, before going, Gray stopped and looked at Ben Clove.

“Does your family know your involvement in all of this?” Gary asked. “How do you think they would react if they were to learn of this alliance? If you as the Mayor who promised to protect the people were just turning a blind eye to their doings?”

“They know nothing!” Ben replied, for the first time his face changed into something other than that politician’s smile. “Leave them out of this, and if you don’t and you touch them, I assure you that you will regret it as well.”

When Ben spoke, it was a bit of confidence while also shying away. He was frightened, so it sounded like it was the truth, but perhaps his other words were true as well. Especially if they had someone like Jayden Tiger in their family, but the Mayor wouldn’t have to have done all this if he could utilise him like so.

Having heard his answer, Gary had decided to leave, but there was a thought in his head... Was a war really starting soon...and just how would it start.

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At the same time, two adults were leading a group of kids, while Kevin walked in front, and they had eventually arrived outside what looked like a large warehouse. It looked uncomfortable as Kevin looked at the area they were in. It wasn’t in the nicest of places, but then again, it was the same for the Black Rock Orphanage before.



"I assure you the inside has been renovated to meet your needs." The man smiled. "Once you head in there, your lives will change forever."

#### Chapter 273 - Becoming An Altered (Part 1)

Inside a big white house in a certain room, constant banging was heard one after another. In between there would be grunts and yells that could be heard even with the doors closed, and after a while it had stopped.

Inside the office itself, Slough's mayor was standing in the centre huffing and panting, his fists bloody. He was out of breath and the room itself had been turned upside down like there had been a robbery.

Papers were strewn all across the floor, broken chairs, smashed paintings, ripped books and more.

'Those damned Howlers... why did they have to appear NOW?! They could ruin EVERYTHING!!! Everything I've painstakingly built up! I chose this town carefully. I carefully made all my connections... I was so close, and now they're about to ruin it ALL!!!' Ben clenched his fist, and it looked like he was about to attempt to smash his desk as well, until a knock just outside his door was heard.

Putting it down, and now noticing the mess he had caused, Ben straightened out his clothes while heading towards the door, opening it himself. At the door itself was D, leader of the Rising Dragon gang, who seemed to be spending most of his time at the mayor's.

"The NIRV corp representative is here." D explained.

Arriving home after the dreaded meeting he had, Ben had completely forgotten about his appointment today. On top of that, it was quite the important one that he couldn't miss.

"Tell him I will be with him in just a minute, and let's move the meeting to the living room, make sure the doors are locked after me as well." Ben ordered.

After a few minutes, Ben Clove had gone down to the living room, where his daughter and wife were already present. The two of them were sitting down peacefully chatting to the guest that would be there today. The guest himself was an older looking gentleman with grey hair and glasses, on top of that he wore a lab coat.

'These figures from NIRV seem to never leave without their coats.' Ben thought as he put on a smile and went for a handshake. The representative stood up and shook the mayor's hand, while noticing his hands were bandaged up.

"I didn't expect your profession to cause you to use your hands in such ways." The representative sounded surprised, as he pushed glasses back up onto the top of his face. Noticing that both of them were bandaged up, he assumed it had come from hitting something.

Once again, Ben smiled, but it was a forced smile. NIRV was one of the, if not THE biggest corporation in the world. They were the first ones that were able to successfully create an Altered. Ever since they have been leading the way, always coming up with better technologies, making the process safer and on top of that, finding a vast amount of ancient beast fossils to be used as Altered.

Of course, this was why Ben had called them, because they were the best of the best, and his daughter only deserved the best in his eyes. However, as the market leader, NIRV's headquarters was naturally located in a Tier-1 city. This house visit alone had cost the Clove family a small fortune.

Not everyone, but there were people in Tier-1 Cities that tended to look down on those living in lower tiers. Which made Ben have a disliking for most of those in the Tier-1 cities, even though he wished to be one of those people one day.

"I just needed to release some anger, it's a stressful job, after all." Ben explained.

The NIRV employee didn't comment any further. Instead, he turned on the large TV while in the room. What followed was a presentation of sorts, the employee went through all the benefits and the risks that one had to be aware of when undergoing the Altered process.

In the past, there was a high risk of the person dying, but nowadays NIRV had managed to decrease the fatality chance to around one in a million. However, there were some clear points to take away from the presentation.

Once a person selected a specific type of Altered, there was no way to change into another Altered. On top of that, there was also no way for them to reverse the process once it had been completed. Learning to control the Altered form would differ from person to person.

Interestingly, there was the possibility to upgrade one's Altered form though. At times NIRV had managed to find similar beasts. When the procedure was performed on an Altered, it was possible that they could be strengthened if the fossil turned out to be stronger than the original. If this was the case they would be happy to upgrade the Altered free of charge.

"Now, as you have wished, I've brought along a selection for you to choose from. All this Altered DNA has yet to appear on the market and not a single person has had access to. In other words, it will be unique to her... unless of course someone manages to find more of that type of fossil." The representative explained.

There was a reason why Ben had asked for this. It would have been a lot cheaper if they had asked for a more common Altered form. Although some of them could climb the ladder of fame with their strength, if they didn't, they would be left as guards to corporations or amount to very little in the world.

On the other hand, a unique Altered would be able to garner a lot of attention from corporations and more. If Xin didn't make it as an Altered fighter like she wished, then her father still wanted his only daughter to have an easy and good life. Even if it was costly, the mayor was sure that it would be worth every penny.

'I want my family to be safe... even after I leave.' Ben thought.

"Since you don't seem to have any questions, shall we proceed?" The employee lifted a small metal briefcase and placed it out on the table in front of him. "At NIRV, we strive to perfect the Alterification process. Since you've chosen our top option, we've prepared something special for you. It will be announced at our next press conference, but there's no longer even a need to go to a lab."

As the man explained everything, he opened up the metal briefcase and inside there were three syringes with liquid inside. "Now all that is needed is just a simple injection." He smiled.

## Chapter 274 - Becoming An Altered (Part 2)

The syringes in the special metallic suitcase were quite large. The needle itself was a good three inches long, which didn't exactly make Xin jump for joy when she saw them. However, she had heard that the Altered process in the past was quite the painful one.

So perhaps this was an easier alternative compared to before, which she was pleased about. When looking at them closely she could see that the liquid that was filled inside each one of them was a different colour, one green, one blue and finally the last one was a yellow colour.

“Of course, there is only so much data that we can gather based on the fossils of the beast we dig up.” The NIRV employee continued. “Still, I will try to do my best to describe the type of beast that each syringe contains to make your choice easier.”

The TV screen behind the man changed once again, bringing up a 3D render of the beast. The graphics made it look so real and alive, but the man assured them that it was all simulated by computer graphics.

On screen, there was what looked like a giant serpent-like creature. It had long hard green scales with no pattern on its body. However, its tail had two spikes sticking out from the end, making it appear like a hammer. Other than it moving around in an empty room, there was nothing else shown on screen.

“Please bear in mind that we can only help portray the appearance of the beast. We are unsure what traits will be passed on from the beast to the Altered. Perhaps they will be minimal, or there might be even something that we’ve unable to uncover.” The man explained.

Xin knew that based on her brother's experience. In Jayden’s case, his sponsor had believed that he was just consuming a normal beast that looked like a tiger. It came as a shock to everyone and the whole world when it turned out that the fossil had seemingly belonged to a special type, a white tiger. There were even more special things that the public didn’t know much about.

The video screen changed and moved onto the next beast. The scenery changed, and it looked like now there was a body of water. Xin could see a creature swimming through it. It was hard to tell the size of the creature from the scale, but to her, it looked very elegant.

Similar to the creature before, it had one long body. There were two large fins that were flat and wide on the side of its body, as well as a single long fin that allowed it to cut through the water. Aside from that, it also had a sharp horn on the top of its head.

Then there was the final one, though before they could see anything the screen went dark. At first, Xin thought that the video might have been broken, but a few seconds later she could see an outline of something. Glowing light in and out, in the shape of a large bird.

The shape of the bird was not regular, though. Its wings looked to be jagged as if it was made from pointy rocks, and it was the same for its head as well. The longer Xin stared at the beast, the more she could make out what it was, which was sending shivers running through her whole body.

With that, the presentation was over.

“What was with the last one?” Natalia Clove asked.

“Ah, that video? Well, I believe the CGI team must have gotten quite creative with that one. After all, it's quite boring just seeing the beasts in the same room all the time.” The man replied with a nervous chuckle.

It was time for Xin to pick, and she intensely looked at all three syringes, thinking back to the videos. The employee of NIRV thought he had a pretty good idea which one the lady would pick. Young girls like hers usually picked those that would be the most elegant, and he had seen the teenage girl's eyes light up when she looked at the water type beast. After all, the appearance of the Altered forms were important to a lot of people.

“I want to go for the one that made the most impact on me. For some reason, I just can't keep forgetting about it. This one.” Xin said as she picked up the yellow syringe. “I'm serious about doing well in the AFC, so it has to be this one.”

It was safe to say that the man was shocked, but he was also happy with her choice. The man handed her a little pamphlet that explained what they were about to do. How to administer the injection, along with details of whom to contact if she were to experience any side effects.

“Can't you administer the injection now for us?” Natalia asked.

“Sure, I was going to suggest staying a couple of days to see how she was doing anyway. It would be great to gather some data as well. Why don't you head to your room, Young Miss Clove, and get ready? I'll be with you in a second.” The man agreed.

Xin and her mother quickly headed upstairs excited, while waiting for the man. As he packed up his suitcase, though, Ben grabbed the man's hand before it was closed.

"Wait, since you're already here, and you've brought those syringes with you, how about parting with one more?" Ben asked.

After seeing those beasts on screen, and after what had transpired at the meeting, the middle-aged man couldn't resist this change to become an Altered himself. As the mayor, Ben Clove never wanted to go through a similar situation again. He hated having to rely on others like D for the protection of himself and his family, and these syringes could spell the end to that...

"According to your finances, you do have enough money for one syringe, but a second one would bring you close to bankruptcy. NIRV would need some type of collateral if you wish to purchase another one. With all due respect, Mr Clove, are you sure you wish to do that?" The man in a coat questioned him.

Ben Clover was a little scared about when and how that company had looked into his finances, but what he was saying was unfortunately the truth. The Clove family could afford one, but that was only because Jayden had given his father a rather large cheque, so they could afford the best treatment for Xin.

Their own funds would not suffice to pay for a second syringe... unless he used 'other' funds.

"There are always other ways to make money, especially as an Altered in a city like this." Ben said.

"Very well, then. NIRV happens to have a contract for such a situation, which I will need you to sign. But for now, please choose whichever one you would like." The man said with a slight smile, opening up the suitcase once again.

## Chapter 275 - Prime Suspect

Lately, Anton Millstun had been spending more time inside his office rather than out on the field. Not because there weren't many crimes going on in Slough, it was quite the opposite. It was because lately, a certain case of his had become an obsession. In his office he had made a board, with photos of different cases and linking them all together with names written underneath.

“There really haven’t been any more killings done by a crazed Altered ever since Billy has been dealt with.” The Chief of Police talked out loud, as he often did, since it helped him think more clearly.

“All the deaths can be added up to him, but there are still things that don’t make sense. The main one being the blood that was found at the alleyway and the death of Barry. Altered Hunters don't go after anyone other than Altered.

“The theory that an Altered Hunter is also an Altered himself doesn't make sense in the case of Barry’s death, and what reason would Billy have had to go after him? There was zero relation between the two. Yet with all Billy's other victims, we were able to pinpoint them to those underground fights he had.

“I’m sure of it, although maybe not a mass murderer, there is another Altered that is involved in all of this. One that isn’t Billy, but there hasn't been any matches for their blood that was found on the scene. On top of that, the case that started this all. The first kill of Billy would have had to have been his parents. Which means the first case at the building site is unrelated at all.”

Heading over to his desk, Anton grabbed another picture and pinned it up onto his board. It was a school student and a fairly large one as well, with the name Gil written underneath it.

“According to the teachers at Westbridge, Gil was undoubtedly Barry’s closest friend. However, not long after his death, the teenager has dropped out of school and no one has been able to get in contact with him. According to his classmates he did sometimes claim that he would just join the grey colour gang. However, after an attack they have seemingly disbanded, and gotten absorbed by the red colour gang, which means they're no help any more either.

“Could he be the Altered I’m looking for? Regardless, even if he isn't, he might be able to provide me another perspective. Something, that I might not be aware of.”

Finally, heading back to the table once more, the officer picked up another picture and put a pin in the centre. On it, there was a green haired boy which he put next to the picture of a black boy with blonde hair.

“Both of them fought against Billy in those underground matches, and on top of that they go to the same school as Barry and Gil. Somehow, this whole school just seems to be a beacon for trouble. That

green haired kid, in particular... I remember him, he was the one that rebelled against the red colour gang members."

Taking out a big red marker, right by Gary's picture, Anton wrote Altered with a question mark.

'The picture I have of him at the moment, he looks different than when I saw him.'

He had found the next person to interrogate, just then there was a knock on the door. Before Anton could even answer, the door was opened from the other side.

"Now, who's the lucky guy who just volunteered to clean the toilets for the next two weeks?" Anton asked, turning around, but when he saw who it was, he wasn't so surprised any more.

"We just came to inform you that we will be leaving Slough tomorrow." Sadie declared, looking around at the mess inside of the room. If she didn't know any better, the woman would have thought to have stumbled into the lair of a psychopath.

"What about the second Altered Killer and what about the Altered Hunters?" Anton raised his eyebrow.

"You mean the ones who dealt with Billy for us? If there had been any news, I'm sure you would have heard about it. Anyway, our superiors have deemed the case to have been closed." Sadie answered. "Of course, we initially came here because of the three gang members deaths and although Billy's blood wasn't found at the scene, the markings on their bodies do fit the other deaths."

"That's bull crap, and you know it!" Anton slammed his hands on the desk. "Altered or not, an attack with bare hands should leave DNA! And what about the one that attacked the high school student? There is still a lot to do."

Sadie folded her arms like she knew that something like this was going to happen, but she couldn't be bothered to explain. Her partner Frank knew that as well. Slough's Chief of Police wouldn't give up so easily.



“Sorry, Anton, but you know that the power of us White Rose agents is limited. Even if we suspect that another Altered Killer might be out there, for all we know he might have fled somewhere else. If there is another death then we will come back as soon as possible, but for now with no leads, there isn't much we can do.”

“No leads?” Anton then revealed the board he had been working on as he stepped to the side and placed his hand towards the two students. “Here’s your lead!”

Seeing this, Sadie couldn't help but scoff.

“Well, that just proves you have nothing but assumptions at best, and not even good ones. We already went to the school and tested him. Don’t bother reading the report, there was nothing. That kid’s blood was as red as can be. Misguided as he might be, we know for sure that he isn’t an Altered. Anyway, we have said what we needed to say.”

Before Anton could say anything else, Sadie left the room. Frank gave him an apologetic look before closing the door. It was clear Anton was frustrated, but turning around, he grabbed his pen and drew a big red X on Gary’s picture.

‘If they say he’s not an Altered then they must have tested him, I guess he really isn't one.’

Taking the picture off the wall, Anton paused for a second.

“What made them think that he was an Altered in the first place? The two of us came to the same conclusion but... why?”

Maybe there was still some hope in this case after all.

— —

After leaving the police station, the two White Rose agents had hailed down a cab and were heading to their hotel room. Sadie was celery annoyed and Frank was trying to figure out what to say.

"You know, he's a good police officer. He's working hard, you shouldn't give him such a hard time." Frank said. Letting out a big sigh, Sadie finally unfolded her arms. She then paused for a second before proceeding to rub the area around her ankle.

"I know... I'm just frustrated. The wound still hasn't healed from that day, and for some reason it's been starting to itch more and more. On top of that... well... you know the rest already."

Lately, Sadie had been experiencing some side effects and from the sounds of it, they were getting worse.

"Don't worry, that's why we are heading back to the White Rose base. The guy from the lab will take a look at you and find out what's wrong with it. You will be okay in no time, don't worry." Frank patted his partner on her shoulder.

#### Chapter 276 - The Start Of Altered (Part 1)

When school came to an end, Tom picked up his speed to get home, unable to contain his excitement any longer. Today he would be leaving Slough. Not forever, of course, but he would spend the next week or so gaining valuable work experience. The best thing about it, he would be doing so under his parents' supervision.

Honestly, Tom had always been interested in what exactly his parents were doing. When asked about it, they would explain a few details here and there, but they seemed to avoid that particular question, always stating that they would tell him once he was older.

This curiosity drove Tom mad and in the end, it had largely contributed to his desire to want to follow in his parent's footsteps. It seemed like a silly reason, to follow in his parent's footsteps just so he could find out what their work actually was. Nevertheless, it was a goal that allowed him to focus on school and not so much on his other passion, playing video games.

Accepting Tom to now finally go to his parents' workplace, meant he was a step closer to his goal.

Outside his house, he could see his parents already waiting, and it looked like they had already packed his bags for him as well. The Green couple were always the type to be in a rush and were rarely home as well. Another reason why Tom desired to be in the same field as them, just so he could spend more time with them, and not feel so... distant.

“We’ll be out of town for a full week.” James Green said as he was ready to start the car. “You made sure to tell all your friends and teacher, right?”

“Sure did. Mom also had a talk with Headmistress Young, so I’m all good to go.” Tom replied, bouncing up and down in his seat. “Come on, let’s go. No time to waste.”

The car went out of slough and onto the highway, and for the first time, Tom could see the sign to Brocknell. During the drive, Tom couldn’t help but think about his best friend. Were it not for Gary having turned into a Werewolf, he would probably just miss him slightly, but now? Who knew what could happen in the span of a single week?

When entering the Tier-2 city Tom couldn't help but stare out the window, admiring all the sights. Technically this wasn't the first time he had been here, but the last time had been then, he had been a lot younger. His memory of that time was naturally a little fuzzy.

Still, it was just as impressive as he remembered it to be. There were more skyscraper buildings out here. Used for large corporations with offices, or for the rich that like to live at the top and stare out at the city.

Another prominent thing were the advertisements. Digital screens all over the different buildings were advertising for clothes, restaurants and other things, mostly luxury items that might cost more than one month’s paycheck from his parents combined.

The people on the street themselves were walking in nice clothes, and each of them looked clean cut and presentable. The biggest difference of them, however, was the fact that nowhere in the city, not even in the different areas, did there seem to be any sign of poverty.

There was no graffiti, no litter on the street, nor any signs of gangs just walking around at a certain time of day. Tom was witnessing the difference between a single rank in Tiers.

However, seeing all of this just made Tom wonder how great a Tier-1 city would look like. That was something he had never experienced before. Those cities were similar to gated communities, and they didn’t just allow tourism. Those that worked or lived there would be given special passes to enter and leave the city.

It truly was a place that was only for the select few... in other words the rich and mighty.

Eventually, the car came to a stop, and Tom's eyes were lighting up. They hadn't gone to the apartment that his parents would usually use. Instead, they had gone straight to the lab itself.

"Sorry about this Tom, I know you must be tired after school, but there are just a few things that we need to finish up. I hope you don't mind?" His father asked.

"Of course, I don't mind. I wouldn't have been able to sleep today thinking about this anyway. This is much better!" Tom shook his head, quickly getting out of the car, leaving his mother to park it some place else.

The lab was quite large in size, it was placed on its own square of space. There was an open area for employees and the public to walk on. While the road continued in a square on the side. So there were no other buildings next to it.

The shape of the building itself was quite strange. It was like a tear drop on its side. The higher tier cities did tend to have more impractical architectural designs, but still. The lab was large and impressive nonetheless.

Eventually, father and son reached the front of the building, and Tom stopped right outside for a second. He couldn't move any further as he stared at the letters that were placed above the building.

"What is this, Dad?!" Tom asked. "I had no idea they had a building in this city? Why did you keep this a secret from me? How could you and Mom never mention this to me?!"

Scratching the back of his head, Tom's father was a bit nervous at his son's reaction.

"There are quite a few reasons I didn't tell you, and I never knew it was such a big deal, honestly. It's just our job and what we love to do." His dad smiled.

Rushing in after his dad, the two headed into the building, with the letters, NIRV written above.

## Chapter 277 - The Start Of Altered (Part 2)

Even at this late hour, inside the reception hall, Tom could see countless workers in their white lab coats all around the place. It seemed like a building that never went to sleep. Regardless, this was just the reception hall and there was not really anything to see here, the real interesting stuff was inside.

Walking up to the desk, it looked like his father was speaking to the receptionist for a while, and eventually, they handed over a digital tablet to him.

"You need to read this and sign here before we can give you a temporary pass for your internship." His father explained as he handed over the tablet.

"This... it's a contract? An NDA contract? So I can't talk about anything that I see inside with anyone else outside, is that right?" Tom asked after quickly skimming over the pages. There were a lot of technical terms, and Tom felt like he would be here for half an hour if he was to read them all.

"You need to actually read everything written in there, Tom. Don't just click agree like you would on a computer. It's important you understand what you are signing." His father insisted. "I had to really pull some strings to get you in here.

"A temp intern position didn't even exist last week, but hey, your old man knows a few people." James said, cracking his knuckles, which just embarrassed his son.

Sitting down at the few seats at the side, Tom decided to read them all, and his mother soon came to join them. The terms essentially were very strict. It felt like he was about to learn the secrets of the world, and that this legal mumbo jumbo was there for him to prepare for the repercussions.

Now he was starting to understand why his mother and father had only been able to tell him so much. They were just following the rules that had been set out. In the end, Tom signed it. After all, if anything, this level of secrecy only got him more excited about what was hidden inside.

After returning the tablet, Tom was given a pass but no lab coat, which made him feel a little disheartened, but he understood. Walking through, Tom was expecting to see some big secrets, but instead what followed were just... hallways.

There were countless hallways of people walking past heading to where they needed to be.

“You look disappointed.” His father chuckled. “Unfortunately, we are only allowed to see what we are working on. So our projects remains a secret from each other.”

Walking through the hallways, for the first time, Tom also noticed a group of people that weren't wearing lab coats at all. In fact, the way they walked around the place, their clothing and strange hairstyle, they seemed very out of place. They looked more like gangsters he would expect to find in Slough.

‘No, that's impossible, there can't be gangsters in a place like this. Even if they owned the place, they would be in Tier-1 city, not this lab.’ Tom thought as they took a turn away from them.

Eventually, the three of them stopped outside a large oval door. His father used his pass and the door opened, allowing for Tom's eyes to lay on a magnificent, gigantic fossil in front of him. The room opened up and was placed in giant glass containers containing not just one fossil, but countless different fossils all over the place, with numerous workers around each one.

“Remember when you asked me about beasts before? You can't imagine how nervous I got, afraid that someone had leaked some intel or spread rumour.” James explained while walking to the fossil of the beast they were working on.

It was a small one, the bones looked like that of a dog, and his mother was typing away on the computer that was placed just underneath it.

“So, is this where they make the Altered DNA? Form the beast fossils? That's so cool!” Tom commented.

“Actually, it's a little more complicated than that, Tom. You see, what I'm about to tell you is something that the public has no idea about with regard to Altered. Of course, I don't have to tell you that all of this information is completely classified.”

His father waited until Tom nodded, and then continued with his explanation.

“You see, we can’t actually extract much at all from these Fossils. It's impossible to make Altered from the fossils. Now I know you're going to be confused for a second, so I need to hear me out.

“There is a reason why only one fossil can create one Altered, and that's because what we need to do with this fossil is bring it back to life. Now our job is to extract the bones and as much of the original beast as we can from here.

“Then, it goes onto another section of the lab. I’ve never seen it myself, but there they have something they call a ‘Nest Crystal’. From what I gather, it’s quite the special energy generator, though they make it sound like stuff out of fairy tales. I mean, can you imagine a single crystal being able to supply enough energy to run the whole world?

“Anyway, they somehow use their Nest Crystal on the fossil and as long as we have done our job properly. It brings the fossil back to life.”

It took a second for Tom to take everything in there. It sounded like some type of rumour he would have heard from the internet and if anyone else, but his father was saying these things. Were it someone else, he would have called them out for being a liar.

“So are you saying that there are still beats, there are real beasts in this world?” Tom asked.

“Well, not any natural beasts anyway. However, NIRV seems able to bring back the beast to life, though they don’t live for long. After a few tests, they should be sent to a special team. The group we’ve passed on the way here, the ones without the lab coats, are part of that.

“They then have to kill the beast, and once the beast is dead inside they seemingly have their own special crystals. Those crystals from the dead beast is what is used to gather the Altered DNA. That is how the world came to create the Altered we know today.”

Listening to everything, it seemed like Gary was onto something when he had asked his best friend if beasts still existed.

The only question now was what had prompted the green haired teenager to ask that very bizzare question in the first place?

#### Chapter 278 - Underdogs Give Up?

After the trio returned to the Wolf's Pool Club, Tyler was told to go home. He was given the same type of burner phone like all the other Howlers and was instructed to answer it as soon as he got called. The job seemed quite easy for the university student, and he was pleased with what he needed to do.

Of course, he wanted to ask questions after seeing a group of scary people leaving the place, but he remembered the warning from the blonde guy in the fox mask. Surprised that Kai had decided to pay him for the rest of the month up front, he took the hint and left.

'I'll just ask Gary about it when I see him.' Tyler thought, unaware that the high schooler was with him the whole time. In fact, Tyler actually had suspected him to be under the wolf mask, after all, the green hair seemed like a dead giveaway.

However, during the car ride back, he had heard him speak a few times. The voice was far too deep and different from Gary's to be him, so all of his suspicions were cleared. In fact, Tyler now believed that the green haired teenager must have dyed his hair to mimic the gangster boss.

Once again, the masked teenagers chose to enter through the back entrance, as to not disturb anyone. While Kai went inside where he was promptly asked to share the details about what had happened during the meeting, Gary stayed outside for a minute. Olivia intended to return to Burnham food street, so before that, the Alpha Werewolf had a question he hadn't felt comfortable asking her in the car.

"Do you think there will be any problems, because of what happened at today's meeting?"

"It depends on what you would consider a problem." Olivia shrugged. "Whatever they might do, it won't be anything I can't handle on my own. However, after your little display, I would be surprised if any of them tried anything. You just worry about what you need to do next." With that, the Lady Boss went into her own car and drove off.

Joining the others, he came just in time to see how Kai mimicked his earlier speech about the Howlers doing what they wanted and for the other gangs not to get involved. Unfortunately, all he could think about were Olivia's words.



What should he do next? In his head, since the small gangs were no longer going to pose a problem, then it would mean getting rid of the Grey Elephants and the Underdogs was all that was left.

'Before there is a big war to happen, I have to get stronger... and I have to level up this system as much as I can. Maybe this is the break period I need. With a war brewing, the Underdogs might have stopped looking for me for now.' Gary thought.

— —

That same night, a peculiar trio was walking around Slough. Two large men in suits were accompanied by a teenager whose most prominent feature was the large black hoodie over his head. They were all standing outside an apartment room.

"Are you sure this is the right place?" One of the men asked.

"Of course, I'm sure. Heck, it was easy enough to get the information. I didn't have to do much other than a simple phone call, but without a doubt, this should be his home address." The other replied confidently.

They moved their young hooded companion to the side and knocked at the door.

"Who is it?" A woman's voice came from the other side. She looked through the peephole and could see two figures she didn't recognise at all.

"We are from Westbridge, Ma'am. Your son Gary has caused some trouble at school. Do you mind if we come inside to talk about it?" The man asked.

"Gary? I'm sorry, but there is no Gary here, you must have gotten the wrong number." The woman replied, and quickly went away from the door.

The two men sighed, looking at each other, before they lifted their legs and used all their strength to kick in the door. It was a bad neighbourhood and the doors weren't exactly strong, making it easy to break into.

The woman was seen shaking, a phone in her hand. Quickly running up to the woman, they slapped the phone out of her hand while the door was shut behind them. They had quickly gagged her mouth up, and finally, the young hooded man took off his hood, revealing who it was.

Gil looked around the house to see if there were any photos or anything like that, and eventually, he found some of a male student. However, it didn't look like Gary at all.

"You sure this is the right person?" One of the men asked, no longer so sure.

Gil studied at the photo for a while, even though he knew straight away that it wasn't the right person.

"I'm not sure. This photo might have been taken a while ago, and since he dyed his hair, it's hard to tell." Gil replied, looking away but smiling as he did so. "I think it could be him."

Turning around, the dropout ran over and immediately threw his arm out, punching the woman on the right side of the face.

"You know a boy called Gary Dem, don't you?" Gil asked.

"What the f\*ck do you think you're doing, kid? You don't have to hit her!" One of the men complained.

"Damion told us to get the information no matter what. She already lied to us... so now it's time to get her to tell the truth." Gil countered, not once looking at the other two, but only staring at the poor helpless woman in front of him.

— —

A short while later, the lady was a bloody mess, lying barely conscious on the floor. Gil's knuckles were sore after how much he had used them.

"I found a birth certificate. The names of her and her son don't match up with the one we are looking for." The first man stated. "It looks like it must have been a fake address given by the school. Either our transporter is smarter than what we gave him credit for... or somebody is looking out for him."

The other man looked at the woman, thinking about what to do with her. He reached into his coat pocket and placed a thick pile of cash on the floor.

"Don't do anything stupid. If we hear so much as a rumour about you complaining to the police, or telling anyone else that we were here, we'll have to pay you another visit. This is for your troubles. It should cover any medical expenses and then some."

With that, the three left, without getting any closer to their suspect.

"We can't catch them at school or his home address. Damion is going to burst. We have to come up with something else." His partner sighed.

"Don't worry." Gil turned around, a part of the woman's blood still on his face. He looked like a frightening figure in the darkness that startled even the two Underdog members for a second.

"I have a plan..." Gil smiled.

A little while later the two men left, and Gil was free to do as he wished, but he quickly turned around, and headed back. Standing there, the teenager was back at the same apartment they had left only moments ago.

## Chapter 279 - The Worst Night

Not counting the meeting, it was a rather normal day for the Howlers. Since there was school the next day, the teenagers didn't stay too long in the pool club, either. Each of them went back home, continuing their ordinary lives. Right now, the gang was on a reaction basis. They would wait to see the moves of the others first before they themselves acted.

However, what none of them could have known was just how special tonight actually was going to be. It certainly wasn't a night where they could have afforded to relax.

What used to be one of the grey colour gang bases was currently being used by the Grey Elephants. It had been empty for a while and not even grey colour gang members were allowed to return to the place until now. The reason for that had been kept a secret, though.

Outside, next to the warehouse around the back, there were three large delivery trucks. They were stationary, but there were several members inside, all ready to move.

The orphans from the Black Rock Orphanage had just arrived at what was supposed to be their new home. Kevin, as the oldest kid from the orphanage. He was surveying the area, since it didn't exactly look like your typical orphanage.

'I can't look worried in front of everyone. I was the one that convinced Suzan to accept this deal. If this place actually ends up being worse than the orphanage, then it would be my fault, not hers.' Was the thought running through the head of Innu's best friend.

All the other kids turned to look at him for guidance. After Innu he had been with the Black Rock Orphanage the longest, so he knew them all and could see the worried, cute look on their faces.

"It will be okay." Kevin reassured them with a smile on his face. The men slid the door open. As soon as the orphans saw the inside, the faces of all the kids turned into big smiles.

The warehouse had been completely converted. There were now nice warm yellow lights illuminating the inside. There were many coloured matts on the floor, play houses, climbing frames and even charming beds for all of them.

Surprisingly, there were already some other kids present, ones that looked to be around their age.

"Please, make yourself feel welcome." The man gestured with his arms open. "Just like all of you, these kids are from some other orphanages. Given the lack of funding for orphanages in Slough's area, our boss had us gather all of them here in an attempt to create a safe haven for them."

However, the smaller children didn't listen. They were already over the moon, and had run inside to play with the other kids. Unsurprisingly, they were quickly making new friends, all of them enjoying the new shiny toys that would have been a pipe dream in the old orphanage.

From what Kevin could see, including them, there had to be around fifty children or so. Regardless, the place didn't feel cramped at all since it was a large warehouse.

"There are plenty of staff to cater to all your needs. Just go ahead and have fun." The man prompted those hesitating once again.

Looking around, Kevin found a few older looking kids, but just like him, they didn't seem too excited to be here. They seemed to just sit on their beds, being antisocial, while the smaller ones played around.

Truth be told, Kevin wanted to do the same, but he was finding the whole situation weird.

'There are so many people looking after us? Why would a private corporation invest so much money into multiple orphanages? Could it be true that the owner really just used to be an orphan himself?' Kevin started to scratch his head as he thought about it more.

'Ah, am I just overthinking the situation? No, I am the responsible one now. I should try to talk with the others and find out if they noticed anything strange first.'

Walking over to the beds that were stacked on the side, the young teenager greeted the ones on the bed with a hesitant wave. A friendly girl with short cute bangs and short blonde hair actually waved back. Noticing her actions, an afro haired kid gave Kevin a sign to sit next to them. Seeing their reaction, Kevin felt like they were more approachable compared to the rest.

"Hi there, my name's Kevin." The thirteen-year-old introduced himself. "I don't want to bother you, it's just... you know... at my orphanage there isn't really anyone my age. It's kinda nice to see others that kinda understand my situation for a change."

The two smiled and welcomed Kevin, understanding what he meant. Sure, Kevin went to school, but he didn't really associate too much with the others, too afraid of his secret getting out. If anything, he would more likely get bullied for being different compared to the others.

The three of them got talking as Kevin asked them multiple questions, mainly about how long they had been there. Apparently it hadn't been long at all. The girl had been there for two weeks, whereas the kid with an afro had come in one week after her from a different orphanage.

From the sounds of things the people treated them nicely, they were given good food and an allowance when they went out, but there were some strange conditions that Kevin didn't know how to feel about.

For one, all the kids were now being homeschooled. It did explain the school looking equipment towards the back of the warehouse. The schools were informed of the decision that had been made. Honestly, Kevin didn't know if this was a good thing or bad thing for him, since school wasn't the best of places.

'I guess this place might be alright, but I still can't shake that something feels off.' Kevin thought.

"Don't look too worried." The blonde haired girl whose name was Birdie replied. "This place is fun, even though this area kinda sucks. Honestly, they won't let us go out on our own. A group of us have to head somewhere accompanied by one of those adults, which I guess is a good thing with this sketchy area.

"Still, if you're lucky, you might get adopted quite quickly. I don't know how they do it, but they seem to have some list of people wishing to adopt us. Not counting your group, we were down to half the initial number from when I came here. Sometimes even a bulk of us get adopted at once. It's crazy. I've never seen anything like it before."

Birdie seemed like a nice kid who was all smiles, which was why Kevin didn't want to say anything negative, but the last fact that she had just told him was like the final nail in the coffin for him. There was definitely something up with the place, and the young boy needed to find out what it was.

It just wasn't normal. Where were these adopters before? A simple google search would have shown them all the orphanages they could have gone to. Even if they did have a lost mass marketing for so many people to get picked up and so quickly?

'I'm really hoping that I'm wrong about all of this. Otherwise, I might have convinced Suzan to do something terrible and put us all in danger. First... let's make sure my imagination is not running wild and find out what exactly is going on here.'

— —

At the same time, driving in a fancy car was a fairly large man. Next to him was his long time friend, still wearing his sunglasses, despite it already being late.

Up ahead, they could see the warehouse.

"Are you ready?" Brandon asked Raven. "Today is the day this whole city falls and breaks into chaos. We both agreed that there is no better time than now... don't tell me you're starting to feel guilty now?"

"No." Raven shook his head. "The way I see it, it's either the lives of some orphans or ours, and I can't exactly afford to die yet. Not until I find out what happened to my brother."

"Good, then we will get the show on the road. The last orphanage has arrived. The war will begin tonight."

## Chapter 280 - What Would Innu Do?

Although it was late and already dark out, there was one brave woman wrapped up in a coat traversing through the dark streets on her own. The area she was currently in wasn't the safest, and a woman shouldn't be out and about on her own at this late hour. She knew all of this herself when deciding to walk through here. However, she just had to.

'For some reason, I just can't feel happy about my decision? I miss the kids too much.' Suzan thought. 'What's the point of having all of this money... if I don't feel happy?'

The reason she was out and about this late was because she was heading to the location of where the kids had moved to. Suzan had promised herself that she wouldn't. The caretaker knew that it would only make it harder on them and herself. Nevertheless, she decided that there was something that she could do, something that would fill the hole in her heart.

With all the money, it was now possible for her to adopt at least one of the children she had grown to love. It would allow her to have a final goodbye with all the kids. Honestly, if she could and the system allowed it, she would have most likely taken them all home. Suzan hated to play favourites, but it was the last good thing she could do for them.

Hoping to catch them just before they headed to sleep, the woman started to pick up her pace and finally arrived at the address. Surprisingly, the streets were quiet on the way there.

“No one is allowed to enter this area, it has been boarded off to the public, go home.” A man standing outside told her in a gruff voice. There was a metal fence covering the whole area of warehouses, and it looked like this was one of the few entrances.

“I’m sorry that I’ve come here unannounced. My kids... the ones from the Black Rock Orphanage should have arrived here today. I used to work there and just wanted to see them one more time. I was planning on adopting one of them. I’m here for business, I promise.” Suzan spoke, her voice feeling a little shaky. Maybe it was because she had been dealing with kids a lot, but she was finding it hard to talk to the two men in front of her.

With the large bodies and arms folded, it wasn't giving off the impression of a welcoming place.

“That so? Too bad, we’re closed already. Now leave, or we’re going to have to force you to leave. We already said this place is off limits!” The man threatened her.

Thinking that these two men might have not understood, she decided to try to walk past them and would go see someone else, but they immediately stood in her way, and pushed her with such force that she tripped over and fell to the ground.

“We’re not joking around! This is your last warning!” The other man shouted at her.

Understanding that there was next to no chance that she would be able to get out of such a place, Suzan left, but not without looking for another way to get in. At the same time, she attempted to make a call to those business partners of hers to complain about their workers.



[The number you have dialled is no longer in service.] Was all she heard on the other end, though.

“What the- Not in service? That can’t be! I just talked with them yesterday.” She thought.

Worrying that something was seriously wrong, the caretaker did the only thing that could possibly help the situation, and that was to call the police. Whether they would help or not was another thing altogether.

— — —

Ever since the White Rose agents had informed Anton that they would be leaving, he had been working through the night to find some type of lead in the case. Something that would make them stay. If they stayed, the case would be reopened, but without them, not even he could give a good enough reason to his higher ups to keep it under investigation.

“Roo!” Anton shouted, and immediately rushing into the room was the young officer, who gave his superior a salute.

“Yes, Sir!”

“I keep looking through everything and I feel like I’m just one puzzle piece away from solving everything. I’ve looked at all the deaths reported starting from the construction site that day. Seeing if there was anything close to those that would match an Altered killer, but there isn’t one.” Anton ruffled his hair in frustration.

Looking at him, Roo could see the bags under the Chief of Police’s eyes and felt like this case was driving him mad.

“Sir, I hate to say it, but maybe that's because there wasn’t another killing by that Altered? I’m not saying you're wrong about there being another Altered killer, but perhaps your approach is wrong in looking for that Altered’s other victims?”

However, it felt like Roo’s words weren't having any effect on his superior, making him let out a big sigh.

“Have you looked into missing people?” The young officer specified.

“Missing people?”

“Right, I mean, people go missing all the time in general. Trying to run away from crimes or possibly something else. Who is to say that we found whoever that other Altered has killed? How about we look at all the people that have been reported missing, ever since the construction site incident? We can probably limit the search even further to the time Billy was killed.”

Hearing these words, it looked like a light had lit up in Anton. It was something that they should have done, but his mind had been so busy lately with all the things happening around him.

“Sir, there has been a report from a woman.” Another officer said as she rushed in. “The woman sounds panicked on the other end and is in what used to be the grey colour gang area. We need your opinion on how to handle this situation!”

— — —

Inside the warehouse, after learning of the strange events, Kevin had been looking around the place, trying to see if he could find anything else strange. He spoke to a few kids as well, but they had said only similar things as the ones before.

‘There is one thing that I’ve noticed, everything feels temporary and rushed.’ Kevin thought to himself. ‘These coloured matts are great, but they’re really easy to buy and use, and the warehouse itself. They say it’s been renovated, but there was no insulation on the walls. It still has its metal exterior.

‘Instead, they’re using a lot of electricity and have spent a fortune on portable heaters. Even if they have a lot of money at their disposal, it should take time for them to renovate the orphanages... It’s as if they’re certain we won’t be here for too long.

Eventually, Kevin had found something while searching the place. The side of the metal walls looked to be quite damaged, a few dents here and there, and there were temporarily boarded up panels. However, right at the bottom there was a larger panel.

It looked crudely made, merely together by someone with some nails here and there. The young teenager figured that with a few pulls he might be able to get it undone. Before he attempted to do so, though, he made sure that nobody was paying attention to him. Luckily, the adults seemed to completely ignore the playing children.

Pulling on the wood a few times, the nails came undone on one side. He lifted it up, so it slid upwards, at which point he noticed that it was just a large hole that had been made to the outside.

‘Maybe knowing this will come in handy later. Birdie said that they wouldn’t let us out on our own, which is a little strange.’ Kevin thought.

“Alright, everyone!” One of the men shouted. “Orphans from the Black Rock Orphanage, since this is your first day, we’ll need to take a photo of each one of you. These will be your profile photos for our clie-... your future parents. Everyone, make sure to look your best.”

The other kids started following the men outside. Looking at the hole he had just found, Kevin was wondering if he should use this opportunity to leave. Something was telling him that if he did go with the others... there was a big chance that he wouldn’t come back.

In the end, Kevin made his choice... and joined up with the other orphans.

‘Innu would never leave others alone!’