

Chapter 69

Hidden Agenda

The coordinates brought them to the base of a mountain ridge about five miles out from the campsite. At first glance, there was nothing out of the ordinary about the area. The woods were as dense here as they were throughout the rest of the forest, the lack of a clear trail leading to their theory that the rogues operated in small groups. Fewer people gathered at one time meant that there was a smaller chance for their activity to be detected.

Upon reaching the coordinate's origin point, Xavier and the other Alpha's spent an hour surveying the area, sticking to the shadows, and waiting for further signs that the area was occupied. So far, they'd detected nothing but a couple of cameras hidden in the branches of a few trees pointing at the base of the mountain.

Dylan picked up a rock and tossed it past one of the camera's line of vision. When it didn't move to track the motion, he did it again, only this time

leaning forward, allowing the camera to catch sight of his hand throwing the rock. They waited with bated breaths for someone to charge out of the hideout's hidden entrance, but several more minutes went by without any reaction whatsoever.

Dylan got up from his spot, crouched behind a nearby tree, and walked directly underneath the camera so that his entire body was in full view of whoever might be monitoring the feed.

"The fuck are you doing, Miller?" Liam cursed under his breath.

Dylan waved his arms back and forth, jumping up and down in place. Nothing happened.

"The lights are on, boys, but it looks like no one's home," Dylan said.

Xavier dropped down from where he'd been perched in a tree, poised for an aerial strike. "Dammit, Dylan. There are about a dozen different ways you could've just gotten yourself killed, pulling that nonsense. How did you manage to pass basic training again?"

"It's not like he ever showed up, to begin with," Liam muttered.

Dylan crossed his arms, his cocksure smile practically glowing in the dark, "I had great friends who let me copy their homework."

Xavier snorted, "I never let you copy shit."

"Lady friends, you asshats. The fairer and kinder of the sexes. It beat hanging out with you two any day."

Xavier shook his head. "Right, well, we're here," he said, gesturing to the blinking cameras. "Now, where is it?"

It was more difficult in the dark, but eventually, they could pick out the small discrepancies in the natural fall of the foliage coating the forest floor. In a few spots, the underbrush was just a little too linear to be anything but artificially manipulated.

Liam kicked a patch of seemingly loose vegetation, only for it to stay in place. He reached into the brush and pulled up netting, used to create a camouflaged tarp that covered and concealed a reinforced bunker hatch that had been built directly into the forest floor.

"Well, damn. Just how long have they been out here?" Liam cursed.

Using both hands, Liam followed the netting around until he located the door's latch. He tugged, bringing the hatch swinging open, before darting back a safe distance. They waited at the ready just in case the rogues had been banking on them not finding the bunker at all.

When, again, nothing immediately happened, Xavier took a glow stick from his pocket, cracked it, and dropped it down the bunker shaft. It illuminated a ten-foot drop and triggered a motion-activated light, but by the time it had reached the bottom, it was clear that the corridor was empty.

"Told you," Dylan whispered. "The lights are on, but no one's home."

"This is fucking weird," Xavier said, already making his way down the ladder.

The end of the ladder led to a short tunnel that ended in a reinforced steel door that was sealed with a digital lock that required a code to enter.

"Think you can handle that, Miller?" Xavier asked, "You're good with tech, right?"

Dylan stepped up, holding the yellow transponder in his hand, "Enough to crack vault doors? Hardly, but I don't think it'll come to that."

He pressed a series of buttons on the transponder, bringing up a screen that held a long sequence of numbers. "I saw this earlier, but it didn't look like coordinates or anything else I recognized. I bet the entry code changes regularly, so they have it sent to these radios automatically."

Dylan typed the series of numbers into the keypad, and sure enough, the lock's backlight turned green, and the sound of shifting gears releasing filled the tunnel. Dylan lifted up the little yellow box, "These things are sick. We should really think about getting some."

Liam's eye twitched as he moved to pry the door open, "Let's hope that our situation doesn't get so dire that advanced tactical gear becomes a necessary commodity."

Together, they stepped into the underground bunker and paused, rooted in place by what lay inside.

"Maybe find out where we can place an order, Dylan." Xavier sighed, "Just in case."

The bunker was absolutely massive, compared to what they'd been expecting to find. A half-dozen rooms and passageways branched out from a central entrance chamber. Liam wandered through the closest door and scoffed. When Xavier and Dylan joined him, they saw just what was worth the disbelief.

A good hundred bunkbeds laid out in neat little rows, filling up a massive, cavernous space that had been converted into sleeping quarters. Only about a dozen men and Wolves had attacked them back at the campsite.

Xavier had assumed they'd called in the cavalry to try to take them out. Little did he realize; they were basically just cannon fodder.

"Goddess," Dylan breathed. "There are hundreds of them."

"In this site," Xavier muttered, turning away from the discomfiting scene.

Sure enough, the rest of the bunker was big enough to support a couple hundred soldiers efficiently, if not comfortably. It had everything from a mess hall and fully stocked gym to fucking vending machines. And the strangest part was that it was completely empty.

Built directly into the base of the mountain, it stretched deep and far enough underground to most means of detection. Given that was the case, it was no wonder that the rogues had needed to set up some sort of communications camp miles away from their base of operations.

The breadth of the operation in this single bunker led Xavier to believe that the rogues weren't simply communicating with their higher-ups on the outside. There had to be more factions, more bunkers just like this, somewhere out there. Who knew how many of these sites were out there, housing possible enemies of the Alliance? Who was bankrolling this operation, and what did they want?

"Miller, mind looking through the sleeping quarters and seeing what you can find?" Liam asked, "Hopefully if we find out who these people are, we'll be able to determine what brought them together."

"Sure thing," Dylan said before disappearing back into the room with the bunk beds, the sound of rifling following him.

Xavier moved to another reinforced door. Unlike the others leading to the recreational areas they'd already searched, this one was firmly sealed shut. As soon as he pried it open, the smell of smoke filled his nostrils.

He looked to Liam, who'd followed him, "You smell that?"

Liam nodded, and they both took off down the corridor, following the scent of burning paper to the only room left accessible in the tunnel. The passageway continued further, but someone had caved the tunnel in, a massive pile of rubble filling the hall from floor to ceiling.

‘That explains where everyone went’, Xavier thought.

As they stormed into the room, it was clear that this was what they'd been searching for. Papers were scattered across a large table, while a litany of maps and bulletins were posted up on walls and cork boards.

"Fucking hell," Liam spat, dousing the raging trashcan fire that had been the source of the smoke. When it was out, Liam reached into the can and pulled out a badly charred chunk of paper. He held it up to the light, inspecting what was left. It held the remnants of a diagram, but it was impossible to tell what it belonged to. "Any idea if any of this is the least bit usable? Or did they burn all of the important shit?"

Xavier looked in the can and found a cylindrical tube that was nearly completely black or burned away. If he squinted, he could see the faint outlines of random letters and numbers.

"I'd go with the latter," he said, looking around at the heaps of papers lying untouched around the room. Xavier held up the cylinder. "At the very least, they burned whatever we could read. I'm pretty sure this is an encoder."

They began sorting through papers, and sure enough, save for a few receipts and random memos, each was unintelligible.

"Damn," Liam growled. "Everything we need to know could be right here, and we can't fucking read it."

Xavier felt his frustration. If they'd had any idea that campsite would lead to **this**, they would have taken a stealthier approach, to begin with. Scanning the room, he spotted a map on the wall that was different than

the others. Where most of the maps showed areas around the Northeastern Regions, this one had several spots circled in red.

"I think they forgot something," he called to Liam. "Look familiar?"

Examining the map, alarm bells began going off in Xavier's mind. Each location marked was remote, densely forested, and there was at least one in every territory.

"Fuck," Liam sounded more excited than Xavier could remember the male being in ages. "We got 'em."

Before they could celebrate further, Dylan stormed in, apprehension shrouding his expression.

"What happened?" Xavier asked, immediately on high alert.

"I found this shit, is what happened," Dylan tossed a few items onto the table in front of them. As soon as Xavier and Liam realized what it was they were looking at, they both recoiled.

"Fuck," Xavier growled at the spell tome that sat on the table like the evil omen it was. "Witches."

Dylan pointed at the small leather pouch he'd tossed alongside the grimoire, a fine substance spilling out of the opening, shimmery and eerie like an oil slick. "See that shit? Pretty sure that's pixie dust."

"The fae are in on this?" Liam took an involuntary step away from the table.

Dylan's chest heaved as he looked between the two other males.

"What the fuck did we just stumble onto?"