



## 460 Beta On Duty

Kael 1

The east quadrant's stadium had a few hiccups compared to the other three. From the looks of things—the rusty water pipes, the roof with the tear that let in a shaft of afternoon light, and an almost extensive crack running along the foundation's eastern wall—"hiccups" was being generous.

"Christ," I muttered, running my hand along the fissure. It went deeper than I'd hoped—wide enough to fit three fingers into at certain points. "How long has this been like this?"

The site manager, a nervous deputy of Morrison named Torres, shifted his weight from foot to foot. "The crack appeared about two months ago, Beta. We've been monitoring it, but with the other projects taking priority..."

"Monitoring it." I turned to face him, keeping my voice level despite the frustration building in my chest. "Torres, this stadium is supposed to transform into a shelter that can withstand sustained assault. This crack compromises the entire structural integrity of the eastern wall."



"I know, Beta, but the resources—"

"—Were allocated elsewhere. I understand." I did understand. We'd been spreading ourselves thin across all four quadrants, trying to prepare for a war we thought was still a year away. Now we had six weeks, and the east quadrant—the most populated of the four—had a shelter that might collapse under its own weight, let alone enemy fire.

I pulled out my tablet and began documenting everything. The corroded pipes that would fail the moment we tried to pressurize the water system. The ventilation ducts that showed signs of mold—which would spread like wildfire once we sealed the dome and packed in fifty thousand people. The retractable dome mechanism itself, covered in a fine layer of rust that suggested it hadn't been tested in months.

"When was the last time you ran a full systems test?" I asked.

Torres went pale. "Six months ago, Beta."

"Six—" I bit off the curse that wanted to follow. Losing my temper wouldn't fix the stadium.

"Show me the transformation sequence. I want to see it deploy."



"Beta, we'd need authorization from—"

"I'm giving you authorization. Deploy it. Now."

Torres fumbled with his radio, calling down to the control room. Within minutes, warning klaxons began to sound throughout the stadium. The few workers present cleared the field, and I watched as Torres initiated the sequence from his handheld controller.

The stadium groaned like a living thing in pain. Sections of the upper stands began to retract, revealing the hidden dome panels beneath. Except three of the panels on the eastern side stuck halfway, their hydraulics screaming in protest. The ventilation system activated with a sound like a dying animal, and one of the main water pipes burst spectacularly, spraying rusty water across the field.

"Shut it down," I said quietly.

"Beta, I—"

"Shut it down, Torres."

The transformation sequence reversed, panels grinding back into place with the tortured sound of metal on metal. When the stadium finally fell silent, water still dripping from the ruptured pipe, I turned to face the site manager.



"This is what we're working with. How many engineers do we have assigned to this quadrant?"

"Fifteen, Deputy. But they're also handling—"

"Get me fifty. Pull them from the other quadrants if you have to. The west and north quadrants are ahead of schedule—they can spare the manpower."

"The Luna will have questions about reallocating her resources—"

"She is not here now, and is managing the pack which means I'm making the decisions for quadrants concerning the safe house." I pulled up the schedule on my tablet, already calculating timelines. "We have four weeks to get this operational. Week five is for testing and redundancy checks. Week six is for evacuation drills."

Torres was taking notes frantically. "What about materials? The pipes alone will require—"

"Put in the emergency requisition. Mark it priority alpha—that goes straight to the Alpha and Luna for approval. We'll have materials by tomorrow." I hoped. With Hades still recovering and the council scrambling to prepare for war,



supply chains were stretched thin. But this wasn't negotiable.

I walked the perimeter of the stadium, my tablet documenting every flaw, every potential failure point. The dome panels that stuck. The hydraulic systems that wheezed. The emergency generators that looked like they'd been installed during Alpha Leon's reign and never maintained since.

This was supposed to be a safe house—a refuge where civilians could survive seventy-two hours of hell while we fought off ferals and whatever else Darius threw at us. Instead, it was a death trap waiting to happen.

"Torres," I called out, "who was supposed to be overseeing maintenance on this facility?"

The deputy hesitated. "Ambassador Morrison elected Reeves Gallow but with the ambassador himself going missing..."

I sighed deeply. The Reeves Gallow must have nothing to do with the ambassador after his treason and subsequent disappearance."

I pulled out my phone and called Dr. Eloise. She answered on the second ring.



"Kael, I'm in the middle of—"

"I need your medical team to inspect the east quadrant stadium. Mold in the ventilation system, water contamination, structural issues that could create crush hazards."

She was quiet for a moment. "How bad?"

"Bad enough that I'm not putting civilians in here until we've gutted half the infrastructure and rebuilt it from scratch."

"Christ. Okay, I'll send a team tomorrow morning. But Kael, we're already stretched thin with—"

"I know. Everyone's stretched thin. But if this dome fails during the Blood Moon, we're looking at thousands of civilian casualties in the most populated quadrant." I stared up at the torn roof, sunlight streaming through. "I need this fixed, Eloise. Whatever it takes."

"I'll make it happen," she said, and disconnected.

I spent another two hours documenting every issue, creating work orders, calculating material needs and labor hours. By the time I left the stadium, the sun was setting, painting the damaged structure in shades of orange and red that looked too much like fire.



Six weeks. We had six weeks to turn this wreck into a fortress.

I pulled out my phone again and started making calls—to the supply depot, to the engineering corps, to Silas about redirecting food storage to the other three quadrants until we got this one operational.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I thought about Thea. 1

I stopped for a moment, that familiar tug returning.

I dragged a hand through my hair.

That earthy musk and soft jasmine wafted past me. Blue eyes flickered behind my eyelids.

Ajax growled low; he felt it too. 5

I shook it off quickly, going back to the issue at hand.

The composite material she and Dr. Maya were developing—if they could create immunity-bearing metal, maybe—just maybe—we could reinforce these failing structures with something that would actually hold.

Watching her build up the idea of the dome,



**never disheartened by logistical setbacks, always adapting—creating a theory that might save the civilians.**

**Meeting her, even in such a precarious situation, had to have been nothing but... fate. 1**

**And now, there was a hope for tomorrow. Tonight, I had a stadium to rebuild—and not nearly enough time to do it.**

**I climbed into my vehicle and headed back to the Tower, already composing the report I'd need to present to Hades and Eve. Another problem. Another crisis. Another impossible deadline.**

**Just another day preparing for the end of the world.**