



## 473 Static

### Hades 1

Most of the war preparation meetings had shifted to video calls by the end of the first week. Everyone involved had more than enough on their plate. The ambassadors and governors presided over their respective quadrants, while the lesser Alphas managed operations assigned to them within their territories.

Each new development or accomplishment was compiled into memos distributed across all leadership levels. Everyone remained fully informed and aligned.

The quadrants had been notified well in advance that refugees rescued from Silverpine would be integrated into their designated safehouses. Populations would be spread evenly to prevent any single quadrant, ambassador, or Alpha from being overwhelmed.

Construction of an additional safehouse was already underway to further lighten the load.

Despite our limited time, Obsidian and its sectors functioned like a well-oiled machine. I had no doubt we could pull it off—regardless of



what Darius had planned.

Once all hands were on deck, half the battle was already won. <sup>1</sup>

I received a barrage of calls by the minute, each demanding my attention—documents, permits, authorizations requiring either my signature or my seal. Kael had his hands full as well, balancing his usual duties with governance of Morrison's quadrant alongside the Luna who'd been left behind.

Like everyone else, he had his work cut out for him.

An hour ago, I'd received word that the first dome was nearing completion. Once it entered the testing phase, the finish line would be in sight. Each completed dome marked another victory—another task crossed off the long, rapidly shortening list.

Yet anxiety gnawed at me, preventing full focus.

I should be there. With Eve.

I'd saw her off at the laboratory hours ago, watched her shift into her enormous wolf form, and left just as the blood donation commenced. Thea had promised she'd be kept comfortable,



and I appreciated that—but I couldn't fight the instinct to stay by her side.

Elliot had remained there, my boy completely unfazed by the blood being drawn from his mother. He sat at a little table that had been set up for him, absorbed in his own drawings and coloring.

The last update I'd received reported that the other children had joined him to keep Eve company while Lucinda watched over them, ensuring they didn't become a distraction in the lab.

That had lessened my worry somewhat.

At least the children were having fun. And Micah would get to watch his sister work all day—a boost to Thea's morale, which was crucial given the demanding work she'd been assigned.

She was already proving herself quite the asset. I could see a future for her here after this was all over.

Eve would donate blood only twice a week—enough to maintain production of the serum without compromising her strength for her own duties.





Then there was the squad we'd sent into the tunnels.

Every six hours, I received an update in the form of a very concise five-minute video call. The last thing we needed was for the connection to be intercepted within Silverpine and for Darius to discover that a mission was already underway.

The less contact, the lower the chance of discovery within enemy territory where they'd have nowhere to run. And if Silverpine Gammas were to get their hands on the maps and intel concerning the Underspine's location, it would spell an irrevocable catastrophe.

The team knew this. Every update was brief, encrypted, and scheduled at irregular intervals to avoid pattern detection.

So far, they'd reported steady progress.

But "steady" was a fragile word in war.

I leaned back in my chair, feeling the weight of exhaustion settle deep into my bones. Sleep had become a luxury I couldn't afford—a few hours here and there, stolen between crises. My body was protesting, muscles aching in ways they shouldn't, a persistent headache pulsing behind my eyes.



Next week, I'd begin training with Historian Jonathan Blackwell.

According to both Dr. Amelia and Eve, the man knew everything there was to know about the Hybrid Primus—the form I could now shift into. The winged monstrosity that had saved us in Silverpine. I needed to learn to weaponize it properly, to use it against Darius's aerial threats and special forces. Against the full-blooded vampires he'd no doubt unleash.

Dr. Maya had been providing me with vials of concentrated blood to manage the bloodlust that came with my vampire half. I didn't bother asking whose blood it was. Doctors knew best.

Or was it "father knows best?"

I almost smiled at my own dark humor. Anything to distract from the crushing pressure.

The special comm unit on my desk suddenly crackled to life—the encrypted line connected to the tunnel squad. I sat forward immediately, fatigue forgotten. The last update had been six hours ago. They'd implemented Montague's sentinel arrays around their perimeter—devices that emitted detection waves, reporting anything larger than plant life or wildlife.





Designed to catch ambushes and traps before they became fatal.

It had been working brilliantly. The previous communication had reported they'd passed the Cauterium without incident, waiting in hiding while the sentinel arrays detected Cauterium Gammas surveying the woods. The team had stayed hidden until the guards returned inside, avoiding what could have been a disastrous confrontation.

I pressed the connection button. "This is Alpha Stavros. Report."

Static crackled. Then a voice came through, tense and hushed. "Alpha, this is Squad Leader Torren. The situation is... tricky."

My jaw tightened. "Explain."

"We found the cavern entrance. It matches the coordinates from your intelligence and map. But it was a long one. We're preparing to enter the Underspine now, but—"

A loud metallic creak echoed through the speaker, sharp enough to make me wince.

"What was that?" I demanded.

"Sir, we're not—" Panic bled into Torren's voice.



473 Static



"Wait, the sentinel array is—"

Someone shouted in the background. Sharp.  
Urgent.

Then came a sound that made my blood run  
cold: the hissing of gas being released.

"Gas! Everyone—" Torren's voice cut off  
mid-warning.

"Torren! Torren, report!" I was on my feet,  
gripping the comm so hard the casing creaked. 1

More shouting. Chaos. Someone screaming  
orders I couldn't make out.

Then the line went dead.

Complete silence.

Black.

"TORREN!" I roared into the comm. "Squad,  
respond! Anyone, respond!" 1

Nothing.

Static.

Silence.

My heart hammered against my ribs. I stabbed at  
the reconnect button, once, twice, three times.



473 Static



The encrypted line tried to reestablish connection, failing each time with a hollow beep that felt like a death knell.

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