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Hades 1

The countdown had begun — thirty minutes until the Bloodmoon's rise. Our forces were already in position, each quadrant led by its ambassador or governor and reinforced by two lesser Alphas. 1

Thanks to Eve's donation, they would hold when the red haze fell upon the world.

We were stationed in an underground command center a mile from the border. The main hall buzzed with activity — banks of monitors streaming live feeds from every sector, comm lines flickering beneath them, each tagged with the code names of the divisions:

Dawnstrike, Gallinti's line.

Frontfang, Silas'.

Shadowhunt, Montegue's.

And Ironwall, commanded by Kael — in charge of both aerial units and the defense of civilian safehouses.

The command station itself was armed — racks of wolfsbane grenades lined the reinforced walls,

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in case the moon drove our own soldiers feral.

I leaned over the console and activated one of the comms, pressing the receiver to my lips.

> "Dawnstrike," I called. "Do you copy?"

Gallinti's voice came through, steady and sure.

> Copy that."

I moved to the next channel. "Frontfang, do you copy?"

Silas's voice was clipped, efficient. "Frontfang ready. All units in position."

"Shadowhunt?"

Montague's dry tone came through. "We're not going anywhere, Hades. Shadowhunt holding."

I switched to another channel, my hand tightening on the receiver. "Ironwall, status report."

There was a pause and then Kael's voice cracked through, steady

"Ironwall secure."

The final station was next, "Aegis, do you report?"



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"All in position, commander," Cain replied. "We are ready for it."

I dropped it.

My eyes shift from one screen to another, watching the scene that would soon be clouded red, and erupt into chaos.

Shadowhunt was the western flank, the very dense woods that bordered Obsidian. It was perfect for an ambush with the more stealthy gamma being led by Montegue.

My gaze moved to the barren location of the Dawnstrike, the no man's land was clear, for now. This had been where the conscripted had been battling until recently. After Eve had been given to me all those months ago in exchange for the longest treaty of almost six months that had held until now.

It was still littered with items of clothing, bones and large patches of discolouring in the soil that had once been blood.

Then off to Frostfang in the highlands—the northern ridge where the wind howled and visibility dropped to near zero in minutes. It was the hardest position to hold, but also the hardest to attack. The terrain alone would slow Darius's



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forces to a crawl.

If they came from the north at all.

I studied the thermal imaging on that screen. Nothing yet. Just light snow and rock and the faint heat signatures of our own soldiers hunkered down in defensive positions.

My jaw tightened.

Four fronts. Four commanders. Obsidian and Silverpine civilians are depending on us to hold the line.

The door to the command centre hissed open.

I turned, and Eve strode in—black tactical gear hugging her frame, twin blades strapped to her thighs, a personal comm clipped to her ear. Her hair was braided back tightly, her turquoise eyes sharp and focused.

Behind her came High Gamma Victoriana.

The woman was a force of nature—tall, broad-shouldered, her silver hair cropped short, a wicked scar cutting across her left cheek. She was dressed for war: reinforced tactical suit with emblems over her chest and shoulders, a rifle slung across her back, grenades clipped to her belt. Her amber eyes swept the command center

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like she was cataloging every weakness, every asset.

"Alpha," Victoriana said, her voice gravelly. "High Gamma reporting. My units are synchronized with all divisions. We're acting as rapid response —any sector that gets hit hard, we deploy."

I nodded. "Good. Stay on standby. The moment Darius moves—"

"We move," she finished. "Understood."

Eve stepped up beside me, her gaze locking onto the monitors. "Status?"

"All quadrants report ready. Aegis is in position. Ellen—" I hesitated, hating the words even as I said them, "—is secured at Lunar Heights."

Eve's expression didn't change, but I felt the tension radiating off her. "She'll hold."

"She will," I agreed. Because she had to.

Another hiss—the side door opening. Thea stumbled in, slightly breathless, her lab coat discarded in favor of tactical gear that looked too big on her small frame. Her golden hair was tied back in a messy ponytail, her azure eyes wide.

20:03

5/15



"Alpha," she gasped, crossing to the main console. "Luna. I just got the final readings from the observatory."

She pulled up a holographic display—a projection of the moon's current position, its trajectory marked in glowing red lines.

"T-minus fifteen minutes until the Bloodmoon rises," she said, her voice tight. "Once it's up, it'll be at full strength within sixty seconds. Ellen needs to activate the shield the moment it crests the horizon, or the radiation will hit before she can compensate."

"Cain knows," I said. "He's got eyes on the eastern skyline. The second it is in our hemisphere —"

"She will know, she will feel it," Thea finished. She exhaled shakily, then tapped a few commands into the console. "I'm uploading a countdown timer to your system. It'll track the full seventy-two hours—down to the second. When it hits zero..." She trailed off.

"We'll have survived," Eve said firmly.

Thea met her gaze, then nodded. "I'm heading back to the safehouse. Kael's orders—no non-combatants in the command center once

the moon rises."

"Smart," I said. "Stay safe, Thea."

She gave a tight smile. "You too. All of you." Her eyes lingered on the screen showing Ironwall—Kael's division. Then she turned and headed for the door.

"Thea," Eve called.

The scientist paused, glancing back.

"Thank you," Eve said quietly. "For everything."

Thea's smile softened. "Take them down, Luna."

Then she was gone.

The countdown timer flared to life on the main screen:

72:00:00

But beneath it, another timer ticked down:

00:14:47

Fourteen minutes, forty-seven seconds until the Bloodmoon.

Victoriana cracked her knuckles. "So we wait."

"We wait," I confirmed.



Eve's hand found mine for just a moment—
squeezing once, hard.

I squeezed back.

The command center fell into tense silence,
broken only by the hum of electronics and the
occasional crackle of distant comm chatter.

On the monitors, nothing moved.

The woods of Shadowhunt were still.

The no-man's-land of Dawnstrike was empty.

Frostfang's highlands were quiet.

Frontfang's forward line held position.

Even the aerial feeds from Ironwall showed
nothing—just the distant lights of civilian
safehouses.

00:13:12

My hand tightened on the edge of the console.

Come on, Darius, I thought. Show yourself.

00:12:00

A crackle on the comms—Montague's voice, low
and tense.

"Shadowhunt to Command. Movement detected.



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Western perimeter, grid seven-two. Heat signatures—multiple. Can't get a clean count through the trees, but... it's a lot."

My blood went cold.

"Dawnstrike," I barked into the comm. "Gallinti, do you have eyes on the western tree line?"

A pause. Then: "Affirmative. I see them. They're holding position just inside the woods. Not advancing yet."

"Frontfang?"

Silas's voice came through, sharp as he responded. "Highlands quiet. Nothing on thermals."

So Darius was concentrating his forces on the west. 3

Shadowhunt and Dawnstrike.

The woods and the no-man's-land.

"Victoriana," I said. "Get your units ready to reinforce Shadowhunt if they push."

"On it." She was already moving, barking orders into her personal comm.

Eve leaned closer to the monitor showing



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Shadowhunt. "How many?"

"Can't tell yet," I muttered. "But if he's massing there—"

"He's going for a breakthrough," she finished.

"Punch through the western line, flank the others,"

I nodded grimly. "That's what I'd do."

00:10:33

The heat signatures in the woods multiplied.

Twenty. Fifty. A hundred.

More.

"Fenrir's foot," someone muttered behind me.

Eve's jaw tightened. "He's throwing everything at us."

"Not everything," I said. "Not yet. He's waiting."

"For what?"

I looked at the countdown timer.

00:09:58

"For the Bloodmoon."

Because once it rose, once the red light bathed the battlefield, all hell would break loose.



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Even with the vaccine, even with our preparation—there would be chaos. Confusion. The primal pull of the moon.

And Darius would use that.

00:08:45

"All units," I said into the open comm channel. "Stand by. Enemy forces are massing on western front. Do not engage until they cross into no-man's-land. Repeat: hold your fire until they advance."

A chorus of acknowledgements crackled back, Montague and Gallinti affirming.

00:07:12

Eve's hand found mine again.

I didn't let go this time.

00:06:00

The woods were crawling with heat signatures now.

Hundreds.

Maybe thousands.

"Hades," Montague's voice came through, tight. "They're not just soldiers. I'm seeing... shapes."



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Big ones. They are not the usual shifters. 3

My stomach dropped. Ferals.

He was deploying Ferals first.

00:05:00

"All units, this is Command," I said, forcing my voice to stay level. "Enemy contact is imminent. Remember your training. Trust your commanders. Hold the line."

00:04:00

Eve turned to face the room, her voice ringing out.

"In four minutes, the Bloodmoon rises. We are keeping the civilians safe. Darius wants to break us. He wants to prove we're weak. He's wrong."

She paused, her turquoise eyes blazing.

"We are Obsidian. And we do not break." 1

A low growl of agreement rumbled through the comms

00:03:00

I pulled up the feed from Lunar Heights.

The platform was visible now—a skeletal tower

20:05

12/15

Close



jutting into the sky, and at its peak, barely visible, a small figure.

Ellen.

Strapped in. Cain armed beside her.

Waiting.

00:02:00

"Aegis to Command."

Cain's voice.

"Go ahead."

"She's ready. Countdown synced. The moment the moon breaks the horizon—"

"She activates," I finished. "Good. Stay by her, Cain."

"Always." 1

00:01:00 1

The command center held its breath.

On the screens, nothing moved.

The enemy forces in the woods were still.

Our soldiers were still.

The world was still.



00:00:30

Eve's hand tightened in mine.

00:00:15

I could hear my heartbeat in my ears.

00:00:10

Someone was praying quietly in the corner.

00:00:05

00:00:04

00:00:03

00:00:02

00:00:01

00:00:00

On every screen, the world turned red.

The Bloodmoon had risen.

And the war began. 3