

506 Detonation

60:29:15 1

Dawnstrike

Soldiers worked frantically, clustering the four Verdantin canisters together in a tight formation. Gallinti knelt beside them, hands steady as he attached explosive charges, wiring them to a remote detonator.

Victoriana stood beside Eve, her expression unreadable.

"If you die doing this," Victoriana said quietly, "Hades will destroy me." 2

Eve managed a tired smile. "Then I'd better not die."

Victoriana's jaw tightened. "You're exhausted. You've been fighting for hours. If something goes wrong—"

"It won't." Eve's voice was firm. "I'll get clear. I promise."

Victoriana stared at her for a long moment, then pulled her into a brief, fierce embrace.

"Come back," Victoriana whispered.



"Always."

Gallinti approached, holding the detonator.

"Ready."

Eve shifted into her wolf form.

Nodded once.

"May the moon guide you," Victoriana whispered.

Eve charged.

60:09:00

Eve hit Morrison's vine wall like a battering ram.

Tendrils lashed at her. She tore through them, jaws snapping, claws ripping. Sap sprayed across her fur, burning where it touched skin, but she didn't stop.

Morrison emerged from his dome, massive and terrible, vines writhing around him like a living crown.

"You should have run, little wolf," Morrison said.

"You should have taken your pack and fled."

Eve didn't answer.

Just attacked.

She was everywhere—a black blur of fur and



fury, tearing at vines, forcing Morrison to spread his defences, to extend his reach.

Open up. Come on. OPEN UP.

Morrison laughed, a sound like splintering wood, and his vines spread wide—trying to encircle her, to trap her.

His centre was exposed.

Now.

Eve threw her head back and howled—long, piercing, so sharp her ears fluttered against her skull to protect her own eardrums.

The signal.

She sprang for a retreat, muscles coiling, leaping---

A vine wrapped around her hind leg.

Another around her torso.

No.

She was caught. She had left herself open for too long. Morrison coiled around her, she snapped her jaw trying to disarm him only for more and more to wrap around her. All his vines came together around, as everyone watched on in horror.



"You fucking bitch," Morrison growled, guttural, his emotions and clear disdain letting him make the mistake of leaving himself completely open.

He stood there vulnerable while he focused on Eve, trapping her with every vine he had, the ones yet to be destroyed.

Gallinti's voice crackled over the comm, still in her ear: "Luna, you're not clear—"

Eve shifted back partway—enough to scream: "SHOOT NOW! HE'S OPEN!"

"You're too close—"

"DO IT!"

Gallinti didn't move.

Couldn't move. He shoved the detonator into his clothes.

And started running.

Toward her.

"GALLINTI, NO!" Victoriana's voice was raw with horror. 1

"STAY BACK!" Eve screamed.

He didn't listen.



He dodged left, ducked under a vine, rolled beneath another—moving with desperate speed toward her.

He reached her, dropped to his knees, and slashed at the vines holding her with his combat knife.

"You fucking idiot—" Eve gasped, as he pulled out the detonator.

"Not leaving you," Gallintí said, sawing through the last vine. It snapped, and Eve stumbled free—
BOOM.

The explosion was massive—four canisters of concentrated Verdantin mixed with military-grade explosives detonating simultaneously.

Green liquid sprayed outward in a wave, with it a cloud of green and deadly grey engulfing everything.

Morrison screamed—a sound that was agony and rage and disbelief all at once.

The Verdantin hit him like acid, eating through vines, through his green-tinged skin, through everything. His body began to shrivel, blacken, and collapse inward.



"NO!" Morrison's voice was failing, cracking.
"The new dawn—the pack—I was supposed to
rule—Darius promised—"

His words dissolved into a gurgling shriek.

He fell to his knees, vines withering around him,
turning to ash.

Then he collapsed.

Dead.

Victoriana had no time to celebrate, she ran
forward towards them, the blast had caught Eve
and Gallinti too. The cloud of chemicals made it
impossible to see and access the damage to
those caught in the explosion. She waved her
hand around, trying to dispel the smoke,
blocking her vision.

Then she slipped, not on sap, Victoriana knew
that metallic smell, blood.

She reached out blindly trying to catch herself,
only to find them as she grabbed a hind leg.

Victoriana felt around, desperation clawing at
her throat as she left for them. The smoke
cleared as more gammas surrounded her and
what remained.



There was no sound, only a silence that seemed too resounding. It was more deafening than any other sound.

Eve's massive wolf form lay motionless on the ground, covering something.

Her back—

Victoriana's breath caught.

A gaping wound stretched across Eve's shoulders and spine—so deep that bone was visible. Ribs. The edge of a lung, expanding and contracting with shallow breaths. 1

But she was breathing.

"Eve," Victoriana whispered, hands hovering, afraid to touch, afraid to make it worse.

Beneath Eve's body, Gallinti stirred.

He was covered in blood—most of it not his—but alive.

"Is she—" Gallinti's voice was hoarse.

"Alive." Victoriana's voice cracked. "Both of you are alive."

She stood, turned, and screamed at the top of her lungs: "MEDIC! DELTAS, NOW!"



Soldiers came running.

Carefully—so carefully—they shifted Eve's wolf form off Gallinti. She whimpered, unconscious, and the movement made the wound in her back worse, flesh tearing.

"Get her to the Delta tent!" Victoriana ordered. "Gallinti too! Move!"

They lifted Eve—still in wolf form, too injured to shift back—and carried her toward the medical area.

Gallinti tried to stand, stumbled, and two soldiers caught him.

"I'm fine—"

"You're not," Victoriana said flatly. "You're going to the Deltas. That's an order."

Gallinti nodded, too exhausted to argue.

Victoriana stood alone for a moment, staring at Morrison's remains.

Nothing but ash and withered vines.

"He's dead," she said to no one in particular.

Then she turned and followed her soldiers to the Delta tent.



69:45:09

Delta Tent

Chaos.

Deltas swarmed around Eve, hands glowing with healing light, voices sharp with urgency.

"Blood loss is critical—"

"She's not responding to standard healing—"

"The wound's too deep, we need to—"

"Wait." One of the Deltas—an older woman named Kerra—leaned closer, frowning. "There's something..."

She placed a hand on Eve's abdomen. 1

Her eyes widened.

"What?" Victoriana demanded. "What is it?"

Kerra looked up, her expression stunned as she pointed at the gaping hole through Eve's back.

Victoriana moved in, leaning forward as a lump clogged her throat. Her eyes widened, her blood stopping cold. 6

