

## 511 Third Wave

32:40:09 1

*Frostfang*

They returned approximately two hours later, making it the fastest time they ever attempted an attack after one wave. Maera had a bitter taste in her mouth as she read the radar to see them return before the Deltas could get through half of the injured.

And judging by the way that Silas grew slightly pale, she knew he shared her dread.

Maera took a deep breath as they took formation and her stomach dropped when she noticed that the newer ferals, the ones that Hades coined the term "prime ferals," were no longer the same two that had ripped through their ranks mere hours ago.

They were now four, snarling even from a distance.

Silas saw them too because he exchanged loaded glances with her. If the last wave had rendered eight dead and almost fifty critically injured, this wave would be harder won—if won at all.

Maera did not even pay her snickering son any mind. She was calculating risks and probable casualties.

After they had relayed the info about the new addition to Darius's army, Hades had analysed the footage and had said confidently that the ferals were copies of Eve—just slightly smaller with slower healing compared to her.

But from what he saw, he deduced that they were not simply ferals. They were gammas that still had their consciousness, but Darius had found a way to create duplicates of Eve. There seemed to be a downside to them, though.

They tired easily. It was in the way they grew less ferocious and active during battle. Unlike the usual ferals that had no concept of exhaustion, the prime ferals, as Hades had put it, had their limit and required recharge. For how long? He had not been sure.

But now it seemed they had just figured it out.

Two hours of downtime.

Maera wondered just how much more they had in their arsenal.

The gammas came in first this time, racing

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forward toward their forces—sixty, maybe more.  
A wave of bodies charging through the snow.

The prime ferals stayed back.

Flanking James. 1

Watching.

Waiting.

James stood at the rear, arms crossed, that same  
lopsided smile on his face. He wasn't moving,  
Wasn't fighting.

Just observing.

Like this was a test.

"Hold!" Silas barked. "Wait for effective range!"

Frostfang's line held—rifles raised, fingers on  
triggers, breaths held.

The enemy closed the distance.

Two hundred meters.

One-fifty.

One hundred.

"FIRE!"

The air erupted.

Gunfire shredded the silence—a thunderous wall of sound. Muzzle flashes lit up the snow like lightning.

The charging enemy line buckled.

Five gammas dropped. Ten. Fifteen.

But they kept coming.

And then—

They fired back.

Silverpine's gammas raised their weapons mid-charge, still running, and opened fire.

Bullets screamed through the air.

A Frostfang gamma beside Maera jerked, blood spraying from his shoulder. He went down.

Another took a round to the chest. Fell.

"KEEP FIRING!" Silas roared. "DON'T LET THEM CLOSE!"

Both sides unleashed hell.

It was chaos—pure, brutal chaos. Bullets tearing through flesh. Snow stained red. Bodies dropping on both sides. 1

Maera squeezed her trigger—three-round burst.

An enemy gamma stumbled, clutching his leg, then went down as another round caught him in the chest.

Reload.

Fire again.

The enemy was close now. Fifty meters. Forty.

"SHIFT!" Silas bellowed. "PREPARE FOR CLOSE QUARTERS!"

Maera dropped her rifle, felt the change begin—bones cracking, muscles expanding—

But the enemy was faster.

They hit Frostfang's line like a freight train.

Wolves crashed into wolves. Claws met claws. The gunfire didn't stop—gammas who couldn't shift fast enough still firing point-blank into the melee.

Maera's wolf form tore into an enemy gamma, jaws snapping. She caught his throat, bit down, felt bone crunch.

He collapsed.

She spun—

Another enemy was already there, claws raking

across her ribs. She snarled, twisted, drove her shoulder into his chest. He staggered back.

Gunfire cracked—the enemy jerked, a bullet through his skull. He dropped.

Silas was beside her, rifle still raised, firing into the chaos with brutal precision.

"LEFT!" he barked.

Maera turned—

Two enemy gammas charging her position. She shifted her weight, braced—

Silas fired twice. Both dropped.

"Stay close!" he shouted, ejecting an empty magazine, slamming in a fresh one.

Maera nodded, her wolf form moving in tandem with him—him covering with gunfire, her engaging anything that got too close.

It was working.

Barely.

Around them, Frostfang was holding—but bleeding. Bodies littered the snow. Screams cut through the air. The Deltas were already being overwhelmed trying to stabilize the wounded.

And through it all—

James stood at the edge of the battlefield.

Watching.

The four prime ferals flanking him, snarling,  
muscles coiled, ready.

But not moving.

Not yet.

Maera's wolf locked eyes with him across the  
carnage.

James smiled.

And raised one hand.

No.

The prime ferals exploded forward.

"PRIMES INCOMING!" Silas roared.

"CONCENTRATE FIRE!"

Every available rifle swung toward the charging  
monstrosities.

Gunfire erupted—focused, desperate.

One prime feral took three rounds to the chest.  
It stumbled—but didn't fall.

Just kept coming.

Another took a headshot. Its skull snapped back. It howled—and kept running.

"They're not going down!" someone screamed.

"AIM FOR THE LEGS!" Maera shifted back to human, grabbed her rifle, fired. "SLOW THEM DOWN!"

The gammas adjusted—targeting joints, limbs, anything to stop the advance.

One prime feral's leg shattered under concentrated fire. It collapsed, snarling, dragging itself forward with its front claws.

But the other three reached the line.

Carnage.

The first prime feral tore through two Frostfang gammas in seconds—claws ripping, jaws snapping. Blood sprayed across the snow.

The second slammed into a defensive cluster, scattering them like toys.

The third—

Came straight for Maera.

She fired. Hit it in the shoulder. It didn't even slow.

She fired again. Chest shot. It roared.

Still coming.

"MAERA, MOVE!" Silas tackled her sideways—

The prime feral's claws tore through the space where she'd been standing, gouging the snow.

Maera hit the ground hard, rolled, came up firing.

Silas was already on his feet, rifle blazing. "WE NEED TO FALL BACK!"

"WE CAN'T!" Maera screamed. "IF WE BREAK, THEY'LL OVERRUN US!"

The prime feral charged again.

Silas stepped forward, rifle raised—

Click.

Empty.

The feral was five feet away.

Silas dropped the rifle, shifted mid-stride, his wolf form colliding with the prime feral in a brutal clash of fur and fury.

They went down in a tangle of claws and teeth.

Maera shifted, lunged forward to help—

A massive weight slammed into her from the side.

She hit the snow, the wind knocked out of her.

Looked up.

James.

In wolf form. Massive. Dark.

Standing over her.

"Hello, Mother," he growled.

Then he attacked, his jaw snapping at her face. In an instant, the world stopped as she dodged and failed. It was too late before she realized his target was not her face but her now exposed throat.

All she felt was his scalding breath at her pulse and in the quarter of that second she knew it was over.

The obscene wet crunch of crushing bone and flesh was deafening, echoing in Maera's head like a bell. She gritted her teeth against the wave of agony that cleaved into her.

Only to feel nothing.

Her eyes found their focus and James was still

there, his jaws still clamped down. But not on her neck--- on an appendage.

She turned to find Silas's wolf, just as she was pulled back and away from the situation as even James' eyes flared to saucers. Then his eyes narrowed to slits as he bit down harder, blood pouring. Silas bit back a howl, unwilling to give him the sick satisfaction.

"Fire!" Maera ordered, "Save the general," Isolated with teeth still buried in Silas' leg, bullets rained on James, making their mark as he let out an earth-shattering howl. His men ceased engaging and came to his rescue, his jaw releasing Silas with a snarl.

Some bullets found their mark in Silas but being platinum rounds allowed him to remain largely uninjured from the gunfire.

"Fall back!" James commanded, just as he mounted one of the primes and retreated with his gammas shielding him from the gunfire that refused to stop.

Maera raced back to Silas, with other bleeding gammas. Before anyone can pick up the general, Maera swung into action, lifting him onto her back, fired up by adrenaline, she carried him

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back to the camp.

Wave two had finally passed but from the dead  
that littered the ground, they had suffered a  
heavier loss.

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