

## **New Eden 371**

### Chapter 371 Drive To The Airport

Recounting the entire fight, leaving no detail out, Guo took his time. He even included his personal thoughts about their opponent, painting a vivid picture of how the demon's second form was dreadfully powerful.

David listened with as much attention as Jack, especially hearing the details of the demon's second form. He knew from those details that the demon had fully released.

But when they reached the part where the demon cut off Jonathan's arm, Jack's anger could be felt in the limousine. His silence was heavy and filled with coldness.

But as Guo kept talking, the transformation of Alex also became somewhat of a mystery.

"Wait," David interrupted. "You are telling me Alex defeated a fully released demon? With no holy power? That's impossible."

Guo nodded once.

"Even with what I was taught growing up, only two things can harm a demon. Specialized weapons, or holy energy. I have never heard of a third one before."

David raised a hand.

"There is a third one. But I doubt Alex could have pulled it off."

Jack asked the question on everyone's mind.

"What is the third way?"

"He would have to demonize. Demons do a lot of infighting, and throughout their invasion, we saw many cases of demons killing other demons for their share of the humans they killed."

Guo frowned.

"I have never heard of a human being possessed and going back to normal. I assumed he was using part of his power from before."

"Unless he found a soul with holy essence, it wouldn't have done much. You say he beheaded him by choking him with his hand. Only another demon could do that and make it permanent."

Thinking back, Guo remembered something the demon said that made no sense then.

"The demon did call him a king of hell. But I thought it was only a transformation of his."

David paused for a second. In his previous run of New Eden, a few players had contracted demons to fight for them against the invaders. But the cases where that didn't backfire were rare.

"You said he summoned another creature, right?" David asked.

Guo nodded.

"Yes. He called it Zepar. It was a small demonic-looking creature, but it didn't give off the same energy as demons. So I discarded it as a monster from New Eden."

David rapidly brought out his phone. He went onto the net, trying to find references to a creature named Zepar.

It didn't take him much time to find a page that described Zepar as a demon of old. The legends he found tied the demon to another seventy-one demons, all under the control of a single man.

King Solomon.

But David couldn't believe it was the same Zepar.

"Everything I find about Zepar points to him being a demon. But something doesn't add up. They say here that Zepar has long since been under the control of King Solomon, the Great Sage."

"And what doesn't add up?" Jack asked, becoming impatient.

The old man was still waiting to hear about the condition of his grandson.

"Well, Solomon's legacy is cursed. Last time, the player who found it, died mysteriously. And any other player that took the legacy item followed in his footsteps not long after equipping it."

"Guo," Jack interrupted. "Finish your report before this goes any further. You can resume this discussion after."

Guo bowed his head.

"I'm sorry, sir. After Mr. Leduc had changed form, he killed the demon in seconds, severing its head from its body with his hand. But Jonathan was still bleeding out and would have lasted only a few seconds. But the other creature he summoned, Zepar, said he could maybe fix him."

"Just maybe? You gambled with my grandson's safety?"

"Sir. Mr. Leduc saved your grandson's life. No one was gambling. If not for his intervention, we would have all died. And we did not force Jonathan to fight the demon. He did so by choice."

The other occupants of the limousine could hear Jack's teeth grinding on each other.

"We shall come back to this another time, when we are alone. For now, finish your report."

Nodding, Guo kept talking.

"Mr. Leduc did something, and he merged with the creature Zepar, before using some kind of magic to reattach Jonathan's arm to his body, seemingly reversing time on it, making it as if the demon had never severed it in the first place."

"Alexander never showed such a power before this. We tested his powers before, in the facility. Did he gain new abilities?"

David was the one to answer.

"As time goes by, the abilities we have inside New Eden will start showing more and more here. But I've never seen him use those abilities either in New Eden. Have you, Kary?"

Kary shook her head.

"It was new to me, too," she answered.

"Then it's something he recently acquired. But that hardly makes sense. The newer the power, the longer it should take to show on this side."

Jack looked pensively at Alexander.

"I guess we will have to ask him when he wakes up. And new tests will need to be performed. Speaking of which, Mr. Magnus. I would like for you to go through these same tests, if possible. We are trying to determine how your bodies are adapting to this new energy form"

David waved his hand dismissively.

"Only if you can make the tests before the update is done. Because I will be almost always inside New Eden after that."

"I shall arrange it so."

Through all their talking, the limousine had finally reached the airport from which the private plane would be taking off. Stopping the car directly at the hangar bay of the jet, the driver spoke through the limo's intercom.

"We have arrived at the airport, sir."

Jack looked at the other occupants.

"Seems like we will finish this discussion on the plane."

As everyone got off, two men were loading the luggage inside the plane already, and they were the ones to carry Alexander inside the plane, strapping him in a seat, so he wouldn't fall when the plane took off.

Kary and David gawked at the plane they were about to board.

It was a nice, streamlined Learjet, with the dark blue company logo painted on the side. This was a rich man's transportation method.

Jack chuckled at their reaction.

"Wait till you see inside."

Kary and David swallowed audibly, walking up to the small staircase that led inside the airplane.

'Wow,' was their only thought as they boarded it.

Chapter 372 The Cursed Legacy

The luxuriousness of the private plane wasn't something they could see every day. Walking down the center aisle, they felt like they were walking into a chic hotel.

The seats of the airplane were all well-spaced and covered in white leather. Every one of them had its personal little table, on which they could write, eat, or do anything they so wished.

But even better yet, was something they saw when Jack sat down. He pivoted his seat, to get it facing another seat behind, with the table now between the two.

The man pointed to the seat in front of him, looking at David.

"Sit."

There was no question. Only an order.

Since this plane was Jack's, and it was the only way he and Alex could get to where they needed to be in time, David sighed but obeyed. Sitting down across from Jack, he crossed one leg over the other, sinking into the seat.

"Do you always travel in this? This thing is cozy as hell."

Kary took another seat, the one in front of where Alex was already buckled in, and copied Jack's action of turning her seat. With her now facing her boyfriend, she looked at his face.

It had regained a bit of its colour, even though it was still paler than usual. She sighed in relief.

Guo got in the plane last, closing the hatch behind himself. He then went into the pilot's cabin tapping him on the shoulder.

Coming back out of the cabin, Guo sat in the seat nearest to it and the hatch that led outside. He opened up a tablet, getting on with other business, while Jack spoke to David.

"Now that Guo's reporting is done, you can keep talking about that legacy or whatever you called it, and the item that gives it. How are they cursed?"

David dug out from his memory what he knew about Solomon's legacy.

"All that was ever shared on the net, and through the chatter, was that the users of the legacy always died when they tried using it. Something about them losing their mind and committing suicide."

Kary interjected at this point.

"Alex didn't look or sound out of his mind when he used his melding ability. With either of the two forms. Could it be something else?"

David looked unsure.

"There is only one way to know. But that requires sleeping beauty over there to wake up. Did the nurses or doctors say why he was still unconscious?"

"Something about him being physically and mentally drained. They said his body was severely lacking in energy, whichever one they tried looking for in his body. I think he overused his power, and it took a toll on him."

"Ahh. That would make sense. But Alex isn't the kind to be stupid enough to drain himself completely. At least he doesn't give me that feeling."

Kary chuckled.

"You misjudge him grossly. Alex is the type to go all in, if he thinks it can guarantee a good outcome. I'm surprised he doesn't pass out after every combat, honestly."

Hearing this assessment from the young woman, Jack chuckled. It resembled the image he had in mind when thinking of Alexander.

Jack didn't know Alexander as much as Kary did, but he had met more than his fair share of firecrackers in the military. Men and women that were fully off, or fully on.

So he easily tagged him as one of those.

"You talked about the legacy being cursed, but you still have said nothing about the item. What is it?" Jack asked.

The conversation kept veering, and he was still waiting for all the information to have a wider view of the full picture.

David brought his attention back to Jack.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Boudreau. I'm trying to understand the situation better. Back to our sheep. The item tied to the legacy is a ring. Images were once posted on the web. It's a black ring, with golden etchings and a green gem inlaid on the top."

Kary looked at Alex's hand, and her face shifted to worry.

"You mean like the ring Alex has on his hand right now?" she asked.

David snapped his head to Alex's hand, glancing at his fingers and turned his head back to face Jack.

"Yeah, exactly like that one. Wait... Yes! Like that one!"

David sprung up, as the plane lifted, and he went face-first into the floor.

Jack looked at him face-plant and held back a peal of laughter. In the meantime, Kary was too worried to care if he had fallen or not.

She was looking at Alexander, examining his every facial trait, to see if he seemed in pain. But Alex looked serene, almost like he was having a dreamless sleep.

David fought gravity and got back on his feet, walking the last two steps to be next to Alexander. Grabbing his hand, he scrutinized the ring.

Every detail matched the one he had seen online. This ring was Solomon's Seal.

"How did he get it here without losing his mind?" he whispered to himself.

David waited for the plane to stabilize before going back to his seat. In the meantime, he stayed crouched near Alex, trying to figure out if he needed to change his plans regarding the man, or if everything would turn out better.

Once the plane stopped shaking and ascending, he returned to his seat, still pensive.

"So, are you able to say with certainty it is the same ring?" Jack asked him.

David nodded, staying silent. Kary, Jack, and Guo could practically see the gears turning in his head.

"Should we assume Alex might already be cursed? Or is there a possibility that he will be fine?" Kary asked.

"I don't know... I don't have prior knowledge about how the alleged curse works. I only read posts and articles on forums."

David didn't like this uncertainty. Ever since he came back, his life had been a succession of predictions and safe calculations.

He hated the messiness and uncertainty that his life was before this. And now, he was back to having a big question mark in front of him.

Jack was the one to break the tenseness of the moment.

"I think we should wait for him to wake up before we decide for him, or make wrong assumptions. For now, we can focus on how to get rid of the problem we are going to face."

David nodded. He preferred it that way, too.

"Yeah. Let's shelve this issue for now."

### Chapter 373 Describing The Enemy

Setting aside the curse Alex was possibly under, David sat pensively for a moment, trying to recall everything he knew about goblins.

In his timeline, they were the first things to cross over from New Eden, too, and that meant there were enough encounters later on to have a detailed plan of attack.

The only difference was that last time, the first few encounters had been a tad later, and they had been kept under wraps for a lot longer. He wondered what sped up the change this time around.

"We are going up against goblins, I'm almost certain. The easy way to win against goblins is to kill as many of the small ones before going up against the Hob."

Jack looked at him with attention. He was quite used to battle briefs, but he was usually giving them.

"What is a Hob?" the old man asked.

"A hob is their leader. We call them Hobs in the gaming community. Their full name is Hobgoblin. They are bigger, stronger, and more violent prone Goblins."

"What about taking him first? Killing the leader first is always a viable strategy in war."

David shook his head.

"This isn't your typical enemy. You aren't fighting humans here, so you can't assume they will act the same. Killing the Hob first would be terrible in this case."

Jack frowned.

"And why is that?"

"Because Hobs inspire fear in the goblins. Which means the goblins obey their every command. But Hobs are stupid. They have no sense of tactics. Letting them control the goblins is better in most cases."

"If they inspire fear in the small ones, wouldn't killing it make us the big bad, effectively killing enemy morale?"

Jack's reasoning was sound. If he were fighting a human troop.

But these weren't human.

"No, old man. You are looking at this wrong. These aren't insurgents, or soldiers of medieval times. Killing the Hob first will only give us more trouble."

"You keep saying this. Explain your reasoning."

David locked his gaze on him.

"Because the goblins are much smarter than the Hob. If the Hob goes down first, it goes from a battle of brawn, to a battle of brains."

Kary interrupted him there.

"I understand your reasoning. But wouldn't we win in a battle of wits against goblins? I mean, they are rarely depicted as smart creatures in any game."

David sighed loudly.

"That's because, in games, the goblins are meant as introductory monsters. Trust me, woman, they aren't. I've seen what goblins without a Hob do. It is not something we want to see."

"In that case, what should we do?" Jack asked.

He would much rather be taking point in any battle he went, then letting a young and reckless young man like Mr. Magnus. But he didn't know what they were going against, contrary to David.

"Like I said. We kill as many of the goblins as we can while staying safe. Then we take on the Hob. The goblins are weak, and even firearms can kill them. Even a well-placed shot from a good rifle might kill a Hob."

Jack squinted at his insinuation.

"What do you mean by this? You make it sound like the monsters, later on, won't be killable with guns."

David nodded his head once.

"That is exactly what I am saying. But that is an issue for later. For now, let us focus on the goblins. Killing the little ones won't be too hard, given that they will huddle around the Hob until he orders them to fight."

David looked at the table before him, which had a switch. He recognized the instrument, as the table in his hideout had the same function.

"May I?" he asked Jack, pointing at the switch"

The old man simply waved at the switch.

Taking it as an acknowledgment, David flipped the switch. The table's surface receded, revealing the digital display under it.

He rapidly opened up a sketch program, placing pins on a blank surface. One pin was larger than the others.

"As I show here, The Hob will stay in the back, safely, for as long as he can, trying to have his underlings kill the enemy. Hobs may be violence-prone, but they are also lazy. As long as he stays there, we can safely pick off the goblins."

He moved around the smaller pins on the canvas, keeping them bunched up in a circle or pointed formation.

"Goblins will try to keep huddled while under the leadership of the Hob. They will act in unison, which makes them dangerous foes to take down alone, but as a small group, we should be fine."

Jack raised a hand to interrupt him.

"What weapons will they be using, and what surprise might we encounter?"

David pulled out a generic image of a goblin from the net.

"As you can see in this image, goblins tend to use very short swords, or daggers. Fighting them is like fighting a child wielding a kitchen knife. Their movements will be crude, but dangerous nonetheless."

The mental image almost made Guo laugh. But Jack took this seriously.

After all, if the threat level was as benign as a child with a knife, any adult with a semblance of survival instinct wouldn't get caught or killed by them.

David continued his explanation.

"As far as tactics, as long as the Hob is alive, the most we have to concern ourselves about is watching our six. Goblins like to mob their enemies and hit them from all angles simultaneously."

"Up to now, you have painted a picture of fighting them while the big one is alive. What happens on the off chance that there is none, or that he is dead already?" Jack asked.

David looked gloomy for a second.

"If we get there, and something has killed the Hob, our problems will be many. Goblins are incredibly shrewd, and their small bodies allow them for very furtive movements in a forested environment. Fighting a goblin camp under those conditions is like walking into Viet Cong territory."

Kary gulped. Given how they had just used that exact tactic in New Eden, a few days prior, to take down enemies in a hundred-to-one fight, she knew how dangerous that could be.

"We will want to avoid that at all costs," David said, with a grave tone.

#### Chapter 374 Hiding In The Mud

Small flashbacks of live feeds from goblin eradication raids popped into David's mind. He had watched these with rapture, being too weak at the time to take part in them.

He had seen what happened when the Hob was killed first. Humans thought they were the hunters, but quickly realized they were the hunted.

Teams of ten men, wiped out by small camps, with no more than twenty goblins. Grown men, fleeing in the woods, like death itself was after them, crying and pissing themselves.

He snapped back to his little sketch. Erasing the bigger pin temporarily, he scattered the small pins to the wind.

"If the Hob is dead, the goblins will flee into the woods if they feel threatened. But don't be fooled. They aren't escaping in fear. They want to split up their assailants. Goblins will absolutely have the upper hand in their environment."

David added pins of a different colour to his sketch.

"These blue pins are us. If the goblins scatter, under no circumstance should we split up to find them. The moment we do, they will start hunting us down like dogs."

Jack looked at the sketch with a critical eye.

"And what happens if we cannot kill all of them?"

The way he saw it, once the goblins scattered, it would be almost impossible to catch all of them. He was curious about what these small creatures would do once they fled.

"We cannot let that happen, either. Goblins have strange bodies, and their metabolism can swap from reproducing as a pair to self-reproduction. And their gestation time is far from being as slow as ours. Letting even a single Goblin escape can mean having to deal with an even bigger camp down the line."

Jack nodded his head gravely. That would be less than ideal.

"Then how do we keep them from escaping?" he asked.

David pointed at himself.

"I can track them. I'm sure Kary and Alex can, too. As long as we focus enough, we will sense their mana signature at a long distance. But that requires intense focus. Which is why we can't be alone to hunt them."

Glancing at Alex for a second, David chuckled.

"Well. Maybe he and I could, since we always have allies with us. But Kary would need to be accompanied."

The woman nodded her head, definitely preferring to not be left alone with goblins. If these were anything like how they were depicted in any fantasy setting, she would be a primary target for them.

A shiver went down her spine, thinking about what would happen if she got caught.

David ignored her paling face, focusing on his little presentation. He was confident in letting no Goblin escape, as long as everyone followed his plan.

'Why would the Hob be dead already, anyway? It's not like someone would be stupid enough to attack a camp of creatures unknown to them, right?' he thought.

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The morning was rising in the forest, and Godrick was still hiding in his hole. For the last few hours, he had seen many little green men walk past his hiding spot.

Luckily for him, his many hunting trips had taught him how to hide very well, in wait for prey. And his over-appreciation for old war movies had led him to memorize a lot of hiding techniques.

Godrick had covered his clothes in mud, masking his scent as much as possible, as well as hiding the colours on it and covering the smell of blood he was surely wafting.

He had found a small outcropping of stone under an overgrown pine tree, and he had hidden there, putting up some branches at the entrance, intertwined with the hanging roots.

This covered the entrance enough to hide him, for now. But every time a little green man passed over him, or in front of his hiding hole, his breath would stop, fear overcoming him.

Godrick was no coward. But after seeing his three friends, their throats slit, with panic in their eyes, courage had left him.

And even though he still had his gun at first, using it to shoot at his pursuers, the little buggers were moving so fast, he didn't even manage to wound one. And now, he was unarmed, tired, and fearing for his life.

The little green men seemed to be bad trackers and had yet to find him. But how long would that last, with the sun rising?

Godrick rolled into a ball. He suddenly wished he had been more reasonable, or that his friends had pounded some sense into him.

'I don't want to die here. Not like this. Please, God, save me. I swear I will go to church more often. I'll pray daily too, if you want me to. But, please, just save me.'

Hours would pass, with Godrick's nerves tense at every moment. Little green men would pass his little hole many more times, and they would shoot glances in its direction more than once.

A few times, Godrick thought they had found him. But every time, the little green men growled, turned around and left.

Godrick wanted nothing more than to leave this hole. His body was aching from sitting motionless for so long.

Bugs, snakes, and many other small animals were crawling all over him. It was hell.

'Why are you still looking for me? Just go away.'

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Aboard the plane, Jack and David went over many plans and contingencies while they were flying to their destination. The intercom interrupted them.

"Sir. We will land in ten minutes. Please get ready."

Pressing a button on his seat's arm, Jack responded.

"Thank you, Grant. Once we are on the ground, have the plane refuelled and ready to leave as soon as possible. We don't know how long we will be here, but I don't want to stay once the business is over."

"Aye aye, sir."

Looking at Guo, Jack opened his mouth again.

"I trust you brought all my equipment?"

"Yes, sir. Everything is in your suitcase."

Jack nodded, locking his eyes on David once more.

"Once we find the goblins, we will make noise. So we better clean this up fast and get out of dodge. I don't want to explain to the American authorities why I'm shooting military-grade rifles in their forests."

David nodded.

"Then you better follow my plan, and hope nothing has happened to the Hob. Because if he's dead, this will be a lot more complicated."

Jack nodded, strapping into his seat for the descent.

'It's been a while since I have hunted. I guess this will be good for removing the rust on my skills.'

Jack's face turned into a small smile.

#### Chapter 375 Arriving At The Destination

After landing the plane effortlessly, the pilot taxied it to the hangar bays, already calling in the refuelling service and inspection department. Guo went up to the pilot, giving him a last set of commands in private, before he walked out of the plane.

Guo had already reserved a rental SUV, and it was waiting next to their assigned hangar, so he headed over to inspect it. After doing his thorough sweep of the vehicle, he instructed the airport crew to unload the luggage inside the back of the vehicle.

The crew did as ordered, but while moving the bags and suitcases, they found some of them were strangely heavier than others. Two bags, in particular, were much heavier than the others.

Guo recognized the bag he had packed with his boss' gear inside. The other one, he had seen Mr. Magnus shove into the limousine at the facility.

Grabbing it, he lightly palpated it, trying to figure out what was inside. He could hear metal clanking inside before David got next to him.

"Curious aren't you? You aren't the only one who brought some gear. Now knock it off. It's rude to grab someone else's things."

Guo bowed his head slightly as an apology, letting go of the black bag.

As all of them started boarding the SUV, the two airport employees helped bring Alexander to the vehicle.

Looking at him, Kary thought he had a much better skin tone than earlier. He was probably about to wake up.

Once everyone was in, Jack being in the front, Guo got behind the wheel. He had already planned out an itinerary for the trail where the person was reported disappeared.

The less they talked to the locals, the better it was.

He drove off, heading to their destination. But reaching the trail entrance, he noticed they wouldn't be alone.

A lone pickup was parked directly in front of the trail entrance, almost blocking it.

Guo parked further, getting off first to check the truck. Once he got to the side of it, he saw the boxes of ammo in the back, as well as a few unfinished beer cans in the front.

Walking back to the rented SUV, Guo reported.

"It seems some rednecks might be in the woods. We'll have to be careful. I found some ammo, so they might be armed."

Jack chuckled.

"Given this part of the country, and the remoteness of the town, they will be armed, guaranteed. Doesn't matter, though. I doubt they would notice us, with how expansive the woods are."

David turned to the second row of back seats, where Alex had been laid down.

\*Slap!\*

"Wake up, sleeping beauty!"

Alexander's eyes snapped open, startled at the sudden impact on his face. He could feel the skin still pinching, and by David's face, he knew who had struck him.

"Was that necessary?" Alexander grumbled, wiping away the fatigue from his eyes.

"You've been sleeping long enough. We're here, so get ready."

Alex looked outside, not recognizing the area. Looking back at David, his face was a mask of confusion.

With a long sigh, David refreshed his memory.

"Valentine, Nebraska. Remember? We're here. Get your game face on."

Given that Alex had been out cold for all the duration of the flight, and even before, his mind was still hazy a bit. But he eventually remembered the favour David had asked of him.

But seeing Kary outside the SUV, as well as Jack, brought more questions to his mind.

"Why are they here? I understand Guo, but why would you bring Kary?"

"Hey, don't ask me. I didn't invite her. She invited herself."

Alex grew slightly worried. He knew she could take care of herself, but given they were going after goblins, and knowing the reputation the monsters had, he was scared she would get captured.

Sighing in defeat, Alexander figured it was too late now, anyway.

"I'm not letting her out of my sight. I don't care if it makes things difficult for your plan. Understood?"

Hearing the sternness in his words, David knew it was useless to argue.

"Don't worry. My plan already considered that. Unless shit goes awry, we won't need to split up at all."

Alex nodded his head, regaining all his senses. Then something started feeling strange.

He focused his mind, blinking, as he activated his mana senses.

His eyes went wide in realization.

"David. This area is chock full of mana. It's not as dense as in New Eden, but it's the largest concentration I have ever seen outside."

David nodded silently.

"I know, I can feel it. I'm impressed you can see it. You must have a high affinity for sensing mana. But this is normal, and it's the reason there are monsters here. Wait until you see a dungeon entrance."

The words took Alex aback a bit. But he shelved the questions popping in his mind for later.

'No use in thinking about this now,' he figured.

Seeing everyone was getting ready, he jumped out of the SUV. Kary, seeing him hop out awake, hugged him strongly.

"You made us worry. Next time, don't act so recklessly."

"I'm sorry. All I cared about was saving Jonathan, and I didn't know it would drain me so much. I'll be careful in the future."

Kary nodded before smacking his lips with a kiss.

"Alright, you two lovebirds. Come get your gifts. Santa Claus is early this year, but they come with strings attached."

David pulled out his bag, dropping it on the ground behind the SUV.

Both Alex and Kary wondered what he was talking about, and even Guo and Jack stepped closer, curious about what he had brought.

Unzipping his bag, David started by pulling three small vests.

"Put these on. They might save your bacon."

Taking the vests, Alex recognized the design.

"Bullet-proof vests? Do Goblins have guns?"

Jack replied before David could.

"These aren't just any bulletproof vests. I don't know where you got your hands on these, young man, but I'm impressed. These are military grade."

David grinned.

"I have my ways. Although you probably wouldn't like to know them."

"I see," Jack answered, frowning.

He could guess the people he bought those from were not very legitimate.

"But still. These vests aren't only good for bullets. They should block any blow coming at you and are still extremely light. There are no plates in there. Its titanium threaded pockets, with shock absorbing Elasto-Gel inside. These bad boys can withstand a heavy-calibre rifle's round, and make you feel like you only received a punch."

Alex was very impressed, as he put the vest on. It was indeed very light, and it didn't encumber his movements at all. Kary followed suit.

"Next comes the real fun. Behold, what you will be fighting with."

Chapter 376 Unloading The Arsenal

David pulled from his bag first, a small metallic rod, about a foot long, with a deep red gem embedded on the tip. The small rod looked like a maestro's baton, with an ornamental gem on it.

He handed it to Kary, pointing the gem toward himself.

"I know you like casting with your hands in New Eden. But I figured, since the mana is a lot thinner and rarer here, a wand might help you channel your spells better, and boost your current strength."

Kary took the wand from his hands, already feeling the fiery energy in the gem. The gem seemed too dark to be a ruby, and its cut also seemed different.

Kary could feel a connection already establishing between her mana and the little gem on the wand. As she waved the wand around, small spurts of flame spurted out of it.

"This is effortless. It's like I was trying to light a fire underwater until now. Thank you, David."

He waved her off like it was nothing.

"Like I said, strings attached. If you want to keep it, You will owe me a favour later."

Kary understood the transactional side of this gesture and nodded her head. What was a little favour in exchange for strengthening her right now?

Seeing she didn't complain about the trade, David went on to the next item. Or items, in this case.

Pulling out two short swords from the bag, he threw them to Alexander.

"I assume you know which end goes where?" he said jokingly, as Alex stumbled to catch the swords without cutting himself.

"Did your parents never tell you not to throw swords?!" Alex growled at him, finally catching the weapons by their hilts.

"I can't say that they have. Now, your swords are nothing special, since having swords made in such a small amount of time isn't easy. Best I could get you is lighter and more durable blades."

Alexander waved the swords around. They indeed felt lighter than one would expect a sword to weigh.

As for the durability, he would know only when he was fighting.

"They'll do nicely. Thank you."

"Don't thank me yet. Remember, strings attached."

Alex chuckled.

"I won't be keeping the swords after. I figure that paying back this favour is already enough. From now on, we can work as equals."

David frowned at his words.

"You'll need weapons for the next time we need to fight off something. Keeping the swords is the better option."

Alex shook his head.

"I feel I'm getting close to using more of my power from New Eden. And that includes my weapon."

"Only artifacts and legendary weapons can transfer to this side. The rest will simply turn to dust. Keep the swords."

"Don't worry about me. I'll have my weapon soon enough."

Not wanting to waste any more time on this, David huffed and shrugged.

"Suit yourself."

He looked into his bag again, pulling out three pieces of wooden shaft, about a foot and a half long, as well as a metallic U, with very pointy ends.

David started screwing the pieces together, with what looked like a titanium screwable center rod going through the wooden shaft. He then screwed on the U part, fixing it in place with a sharp-looking nob.

Alexander finally recognized the bident weapon David was putting together. But something made him curious.

"Why the wood? Wouldn't a weapon made of metal entirely be better?"

David's lips pulled into a grin.

"This isn't just any wood. It's Yew wood. I chose it for a reason."

Alexander seemed even more confused.

"The wood of death and resurrection. Quite a symbolic choice, Mr. Magnus," Guo said, squinting his eyes.

"You are correct on what it symbolizes. But that is not why I chose it."

David closed his eyes, putting his hand parallel to the ground. Sending his mana into the ground, he felt the echo of some skeletons under the surface, buried deep.

"Come," he whispered.

At first, the two undead that resided in his shadow came out. But he kept his eyes closed, pouring more mana into the ground.

Alex could see the dark mana going into the ground, but not where it went. That was until it connected to what it was looking for.

The mana wrapped around the bones of some dead animals, bringing them back to the surface slowly, as it pushed out of the way dirt and stone, as well as roots, to pierce the surface.

Kary yelled in surprise when the large skeleton paw of a bear breached the ground, before pulling the rest of its boney body out. Soon following it, three more animal skeletons.

One was of a feline and looked like it could be a lynx; the second was a canine, and by its size, most likely a grey wolf; and last, the third, was an enormous bird, which could only be an eagle.

The eagle immediately went to perch on the top of the bident, nesting itself between its two prongs.

As for the three other skeletons, they walked in front of David and bowed their heads.

"Impressive, Mr. Magnus," Guo said.

"I remember last time, you had only these two human skeletons with you. Did you get stronger?" he added.

"Not exactly. Although they can be considered part of my strength, they aren't direct results of my power. I am using the essence of the Yew to reach out to them and temporarily bind them to me with the weapon."

Jack was observing the three skeletons just standing there, their heads strung low. Even the eagle seemed to look at David with deference.

As for the two human skeletons behind David, they seemed like they could have been warriors when they were alive. The way they were holding themselves seemed military-like.

But he preferred if they entered the woods soon. What would people think if they drove in here, with six skeletons standing in the parking of a hiking park?

"If we are all ready, let's get going."

\*Shik-Clack\*

Jack pulled the loading bolt on his rifle, which would have put Godrick's weapons to shame. The military-grade, semi-automatic rifle in Jack's hands was much more recent, and way better constructed than his hunting rifles.

And with how he handled it, David, Alexander, and Kary quickly understood it wasn't his first time using one.

"Let's go!" David said, taking the lead.

Chapter 377 First Altercation

David had already seen goblins in his first life, although from very far away, and he could recognize their mana signature. So once he walked into the woods, he focused his mind, quickly locking on some not too far from them.

But something troubled him. There were only three or four there.

And they seemed to circle the same zone repeatedly. As they started walking toward that area, David whispered to the others.

"There are four of them up ahead. Three of them seem to be looking for something, and the last one is in a tree, acting as a lookout. We will need to take them out rapidly, lest they cry out and call back up. This will allow us to thin their numbers before we reach their camp."

Jack pulled out a cylindrical object from a pocket on his tactical vest. When he started screwing it on the tip of his rifle, David understood what it was.

"Point me where the lookout is. I will take him out when you go for the others."

David nodded, pointing in the approximate direction of the goblin lookout. His mana sense wasn't very refined, as he had a very low affinity for it, so it wasn't as precise as he wanted.

But when Jack propped the underside of his rifle on a nearby tree stump, he rapidly scanned the tree line and found his target.

"Found him. When you go after the others, just whistle sharply. I'll hear you and he'll be out before he can open his mouth."

David agreed with this move. A Goblin in trees would be hard to pin down, but a marksman might not have that problem.

Turning to face Kary and Alex, he motioned to each one to go in different directions.

"Take a slow approach. They don't have the best eyesight in the daylight, but their hearing is very keen. Make sure you don't step on branches. And Kary, once we are all in position, I want you to walk out where they can see you. Act scared. That will allow me and Alex to have the drop on the others."

Alex gritted his teeth. In an angry whisper, he responded to David.

"No! She will not act as bait. Are you out of your mind?"

David rolled his eyes at Alex.

"Oh stop it, Lancelot. Your girlfriend isn't a defenceless damsel. She could probably scorch this forest to the ground. She is the best bait we have, so suck it up."

Alex wanted to take the swords David had given him, and cut him to pieces. But seeing Kary nod in agreement, he restrained himself.

Turning to her, he frowned.

"Why are you accepting? This could put you in incredible danger."

Kary put her hand on his shoulder.

"I really like that you want to protect me, but I'll be ok. I will not let goblins capture me, I promise. In the worst case, I'll do what he said, and burn this forest to the ground."

Guo was worried about all this pyromaniac talk.

"Please, let's not do that. Starting a fire of this size would not only pin down the airplane but also be hard to explain to local authorities."

Jack was still locked on to his target, so he ignored their talking, but some movement in leaves not too far made him turn his scope.

When he spotted the movement, he found another little green creature moving around in the trees. And this one was coming straight in their direction.

"I don't think we have time to discuss this plan anymore," Jack said.

Seeing him flip his safety off, David was about to ask him what he was doing. But before he could, Jack had already pressed the trigger.

\*Ftu\*

A silent air-depression noise echoed around them in the forest's silence. It was soon followed by something thumping on the ground further away, and strident screams echoing in the forest.

But David didn't get to complain, because the screams soon started coming from multiple directions around them. They sounded further than the three goblins they had been targeting.

But as the screams kept happening, he could judge they were coming closer. Alex hadn't waited for David's assessment, and was already spreading his mana senses in every direction, trying to assess the trouble they were in.

As his senses spread out from him, reaching almost a kilometre away, his face paled.

"Oh boy. There aren't just three goblins left."

"Why do you think I fired, young man?" Jack replied, already focusing his scope on the next target, opening fire again.

The three goblins that had been closest were already almost upon them, and David cursed his luck.

"Fuck! Well, no more overt plans. We just kill everything that comes at us!"

Alexander had reopened his eyes, confident he had caught everything coming their way in his senses.

"I counted another twenty coming for us. But further away, I detected another mass of them clustered together. There should be another fifty to the west."

David cursed in his mind.

"This isn't just a Goblin camp. It's the start of a colony. We need to clean these up fast, and run there. If any of them escape, we're fucked."

"Then get to killing, Mr. Magnus!" Jack said, pulling his trigger again.

As he said that, the three goblins that had been prowling around a spot ahead of them jumped at Kary, who was turned around, looking at Alex. Her instincts alerted her to the danger, but it was too late for her to react.

But nothing happened to her, as an eagle skeleton dropped from the sky, pinning one to the ground, already pecking at its eyes, and a bear and wolf skeleton jumped on the two others.

Turning her head to David, to thank him, his response made her swallow her gratitude.

"What are you doing? Do you want to die? Stay focused!"

She grit her teeth, mentally speaking a mantra to herself that she had recently been thinking a lot, every time she talked to him.

'Don't incinerate him. Don't incinerate him. Breathe in, breathe out.'

Centering herself again, and pushing the urge to light David on fire, she pivoted toward where she heard screaming the closest. Lifting the wand he had given her, she instead purged her anger on the poor Goblin rushing at her with a mad grin.

As a ball of fire the size of its head blazed in his direction, the Goblin didn't even have time to register the pain, as his body turned to ashes.

'Whew. That was therapeutic,' Kary thought, smiling lightly.

## Chapter 378 The Hiding Man

A battle quickly broke out all around them as Alex dashed left and right, slashing the swords at anything that ran at it that wasn't human. Kary was being careful with her shots, making the firebolts she was slinging smaller and faster, so she wouldn't miss her targets.

But doing so also slowed down her attacks, as she needed to aim carefully, and manipulate her mana much more. She still wasn't as adept as in New Eden yet.

David was controlling his undead with more minutia than in the game. He had quickly realized the undead on this side had a particularity that wasn't as present in New Eden.

The souls he dredged out and tied to himself were a lot weaker and therefore were not as conscious as in New Eden. This meant he had to consciously control their actions.

This didn't allow him to fight as freely as he would in New Eden, but it was good practice. He had already noticed after some practice out here that his control in New Eden was getting better, too.

But having to control six undead was a bigger challenge than he expected, disappointing himself a bit.

'I still need to get stronger. Six undead will never be enough to protect anyone later on.'

Guo stayed close to Jack, making sure his boss wasn't struck from behind, while he gunned down any enemy coming at them from his direction. Jack was quite the marksman, taking out Goblins left and right, not wasting a single bullet.

Although their enemies numbered four times their group, the battle was over in less than a minute. The sight was quite gory, and contrary to New Eden, the bodies were not disappearing.

Taking a moment to wind down from that high-pitched minute of the battle, the stench finally caught up to them. Kary's stomach turned, almost making her keel over and throw up.

Alex was a little better off, only gagging a bit, but the odour still repulsed him.

"Why the heck does it smell so bad?" he asked, covering his mouth and nose with his arm.

Guo and Jack seemed unfazed by the smell, and David wasn't even paying attention to it already. His eyes were set to the west, already thinking about why so many Goblins would stray out of their colony during the day.

"It's not normal for them to be out here with these numbers during the day. Something is wrong. We should hurry to their colony."

Kary seemed more than happy to move away, ignoring the fact that they would have to do the same further to the West. Anything that got them away from this smell.

Alexander was ticked off that his question wasn't answered, but before they left, something caught his eye. In the grass near Jack's feet, something glinted in the sunlight.

Seeing his eyes squint near his feet, Jack shifted his gaze, following Alex's. When he saw the glinting object, he crouched to brush away the leaves and branches covering it.

"Hmm? This is a hunting rifle. What is it doing out here? It hasn't been abandoned here too long ago, either."

David heard the talking behind him and turned around to say they were losing time. But as he reached the ledge next to him, turning his body, something grabbed his foot and yanked on it.

In a swift movement, he dropped to the ground, below the little ledge, his lungs emptying of air as he hit the ground, and someone was crouching over him with a knife drawn, panic apparent in their eyes.

David reflexively lifted his bident, the prongs poking the man in the chest just enough to stop his movements.

"Who the fuck are you, and why are you attacking me?!" David shouted, his eyes filled with wariness.

He was ready to run his bident through this guy's chest, if he ever so much as moved the knife toward him.

"I can ask you the same! I've never seen you around!"

In a matter of seconds, skeletons surrounded the young man, two human ones, and four animals he had hunted in the past, all staring at him with their empty eye sockets.

His mind went into shock. For a moment, he was sure he was hallucinating, prompting him to rub his eyes.

As soon as he brought his hand to his face, David overturned the situation. With a swift turn, he whacked the shaft of his weapon on the man's arm, making him drop his knife, and shoved him off himself.

Rolling over him, David brought his bident on the man's throat, his eyes merciless.

The young man's eyes widened.

"Give me one good reason not to kill you right now for assaulting me."

David's tone contained no trace of hesitation, and it was easy to guess he was willing to go through with his threat.

"Listen, man, I thought you were one of the green monsters when I attacked you. I'm sorry! Please let me go!"

At the time this happened, Alex, Kary, Guo, and Jack were now standing around them, between the skeletons controlled by David. Seeing he was surrounded, the young man understood he wasn't in a good position.

But someone talked for him.

"Come on David. Let him go. He's human, not a Goblin. And it's not like he hurt you or anything. He must have been hiding from the Goblins and was scared out of his mind."

Looking at the man that spoke, the young man saw him holding two swords, still dripping with green blood. Although the man looked like some sort of warrior of old, with his blades wet in his enemies' blood, he was still sort of attractive.

"My name is Godrick. Listen, I just came here to look for my missing sister. Me and my friends found their camp almost a mile off to the west, but we weren't expecting these things."

David looked at the man in the eye.

"Is that gun we found yours? Were you expecting to shoot something when you found your sister? Your story doesn't make much sense."

"I swear I'm telling the truth! These parts are filled with bears and cougars, man. The gun was for my protection. Please, let me go. I just want to find my sister."

David was still having a hard time believing his story.

"You said you came with friends. Where are they? Cuz I see only you here."

Godrick swallowed with difficulty, his eyes flashing back to his three friends, choking on their own blood, their throat slit next to him.

"They're... they're dead. The little green monsters killed them. I was running away from them after I killed a bigger one, and that's why I hid."

David's face paled.

"You did WHAT?!"

Chapter 379 Aggressive Reaction

The sudden outburst startled Godrick. David's bident was still close to Godrick's throat, and he was now pressing it against it.

"Repeat what you said."

David was seething with anger.

"I... I said I shot a bigger one of them before running away. They killed my friends next to me without me noticing, so I bailed."

David stood back up, starting some rapid pacing.

"Fuck!" he barked, stabbing his weapon into the ground.

The undead under David's command still surrounded Godrick, so he didn't dare get up. But seeing the man's reaction, he could guess he had messed up something.

Alexander, who had been asleep when David had explained what would happen if the Hob was dead, also failed to understand David's anger. But the three others had complicated faces.

"Fuck!" David shouted again.

"Did I do something wrong?" Godrick asked, scared and confused.

"Did you—Are you serious? I can't believe the stupidity of you. You just made our objective a hundred times harder to attain. All because you wanted to be a hero!"

Something snapped in David's mind, and he grabbed his bident, suddenly thrusting it at the young man in front of him. But before it pierced through Godrick's stomach, two swords crossed in front of the weapon, blocking it with a loud clang.

Alex looked over the crossed swords, his eyes sharper than daggers as he stared at David.

"Your anger doesn't give you the right to kill a person. Especially one who was only trying to save his sister."

Kary's wand was suddenly near David's face, too, with the gem on the tip shining brightly. David could feel the heat coming off it.

To his back, a rifle was also pressed, Jack not impressed by the lack of self-control David was showing.

"I'm not letting you kill a man. We are not here to commit murder."

Jack's voice was stern and cold. There wasn't room to debate in it.

David looked at everyone, his anger simmering down a bit.

"Tch! Fine, I won't kill him. But I want you to understand he just made our job a lot harder, almost impossible. You'll want to murder him too, later, after we have to run down the Goblins through the woods on a chase in every direction."

He brought his weapon down, stabbing it into the ground again.

"We have to adjust the entire plan now. Because this redneck idiot and his friends thought they could be heroes."

David sat on a nearby fallen tree, grabbing his head with his hands. His mind was already trying to calculate how the Goblins would react to their approach, now that their Hob was dead.

From the corner of his eyes, David saw Alex, still standing in front of the redneck, his swords pointed down, but his eyes scanning the surrounding undead.

"I will not attack him again. Stop worrying."

Alex snapped his head toward him.

"I don't think I will trust your word on it. I just saw you lunge at an innocent man with the intent to kill, because he made your plans harder. Pull your undead away, and then I might believe you."

David stared at Alex like he was an idiot.

"Are you going to take responsibility if he runs and we can't catch him? I'm only trying to keep him from fleeing."

Jack intervened, stepping between the two young men.

"Enough. Both of you stand down. Mr. Magnus, trust me, if the young American tried fleeing, he wouldn't make it far. Either he catches a bullet in the legs from me, Mr. Leduc catches him, or your undead do. Cut him some slack."

Locking eyes with Mr. Boudreau, David knew what the old man said made sense. But he would much rather have an intimidation factor in place, as a safety.

But seeing the old man remain unbudging, David sighed and brought his undead back to his side. Alexander stood down too, walking back next to Kary.

Godrick, who had been holding his breath in fear for a while, dropped to his ass, panting.

Alex glanced at him, shaking his head in pity. Then he turned his head to Kary, smiling warmly at her.

"Thank you for having my back on this. You didn't have to, but you still helped me, without hesitation."

Kary slid her hand on his forearm.

"I would never hesitate to help you. I believe you are a good person, and your decisions are on the good side. So helping you only makes sense."

Feeling her trust in him, Alex felt warm inside. He kissed her lips tenderly and hugged her tight.

Jack went back to scanning their surroundings, with his eyes and through his scope alternately. Even though he couldn't sense the enemies like the three young adults could, he was confident in the senses he developed in the military.

David stopped squeezing his head, looking at the couple.

"Alright, you two lovebirds. Enough foreplay. I need the brainiac's mind to help me here. We need to find a way to cage in the colony before they try scattering to the four winds."

The stupid nickname he gave Kary slightly angered her, but the urgency of his tone pushed aside her will to punch his face. She walked away from Alex, stopping next to the sitting David.

He had already grabbed a dead branch on the ground, trying to map their strategies.

"I'll send the eagle in reconnaissance, to get us a layout of the place. Our strike needs to be precise and lightning-fast. If we take too much time mowing down the Goblins, we will never catch all of them."

Kary understood his worries.

"Once you have the layout, I will come up with something. Maybe Mr. Boudreau can help me, since he has some experience with tactics. He might think of something I can't."

The old man nodded once, not stopping his watch.

David sent the eagle skeleton away toward the Goblin Colony, connecting to its senses through their link. It took only a short while for the eagle to be high enough to spot the clearing the Goblins were in.

He still waited for the bird to be directly over the zone, so he could have a better view of the camp itself and its configuration. The eagle's excellent eyesight made it easier to gather intel from high in the sky.

"Alright, I have the layout. Let me draw it."

#### Chapter 380 A New Problem

Tracing his stick on the ground, David drew a basic layout of the colony they would attack. Luckily for them, a part of it was back up to a cliff-side, making one direction entirely impossible to flee from.

The West part of the camp was the one with the cliff, and it extended a good distance, meaning that as long as they cordoned off the rest of the escape routes, they should be able to contain the Goblins inside their little village.

But David knew Goblins were shrewd. They would probably have a hidden escape route somewhere.

David drew up the small cabins and huts the Goblins most likely slept in, or kept their prisoners. There were around a dozen of them, and all of them seemed to have guards at their entrance.

He was drawing all this with one eye, as the other was still linked to the eagle's senses, circling the sky to make sure he missed nothing. Once he had everything from an overhead view, he commanded the bird to land in the forest facing the camp.

From there, he could see something that made him frown. He turned his head toward Godrick.

"You, Garrick. You said you killed a large green monster, right?"

"It's Godrick. And yes. I blew a hole through his head with my rifle. Why?"

"Tsk. Then we have an even bigger problem than I thought."

David was focusing on something in the goblin colony. Something that shouldn't be there if what the American said was true.

At the back, near a hole in the cliff, was the Hobgoblin of the colony, standing still in the sun. The fact he wasn't moving was uncharacteristic of the monster, and David quickly understood why.

In the Hob's left eye socket, instead of an eye, was a crudely painted eye, on what seemed to be a pebble, or something of the sort. The Hob wasn't moving, his gaze completely unfocused, as it just looked forward.

Looking at Godrick again, David asked a question to confirm his fears.

"Did you shoot him in his left eye?"

It confused the American how he knew, but he nodded his head.

"How do you know?"

"I'm looking at him right now. Our problems just went from bad to worse."

Godrick pivoted around, trying to see the enormous monster, but couldn't see him. He wondered how he was looking at something that wasn't there.

Alex stepped next to David.

"How much worse are we talking about?"

David looked up before drawing something on the ground.

"There seems to be a cave in the back of the camp, inside the cliff-side. From what I see, if I am to believe the redneck over there really blew up the Hob's head, and that the Hob is standing outside the cave, we have an additional issue."

"And what is that?" Alex asked.

David finished his drawing, taking a step back.

On the ground, he had drawn a Goblin with a kind of feathered headdress, holding a long cane in his hand.

"I think they have a shaman with necromantic powers."

Alexander frowned, not understanding the gravity of his revelation.

Seeing his confused face, David clicked his tongue.

"This means killing the Goblins, which should have been easy, as long as we could cage them inside their camp, just became next to impossible."

Still frowning, Alex opened his mouth.

"You mean the shaman can raise them from the dead? But then, shouldn't we just kill him first?"

David looked at him like he was an idiot.

"Do you see how many we are? Keeping them from fleeing is already going to be hard as it is. If we send even one person to go after the shaman, we will have a gap in our encirclement."

Kary looked at his drawing while they argued. Her mind was already cooking up different strategies to siege the camp, limiting the flight of enemies as much as possible.

But no matter the plan she cooked up in her head, she couldn't compensate for a missing person. Sending someone to kill the shaman wasn't a workable option, even if they took Godrick with them as extra firepower.

Jack was busy eyeing around, and couldn't look at the map David drew, but his mind was still working on solutions for their short-handedness.

He factored in giving the American his rifle back, and forcing him to accompany them, but even then, he couldn't figure out a way to send a person further into the camp without breaking their siege.

Alex had an idea, but he wasn't sure it was a good one. But he spoke up anyway.

"I think I have a solution. I touched on a deeper facet of my power last time I fought, and I think I can send in White Death to fight the shaman."

David shook his head.

"That would be good if I didn't need you at full power to fight the Hob. But with it being undead now, it won't die as easily. I will need you fused and primed to fight it back."

Alex nodded, but wasn't done.

"I still think I can do it. I'll just have to meld with another one of my soul companions. Or better yet, with one of the lesser demons in Solomon's seal."

David looked at him deadpan.

They hadn't asked him about the ring yet, and Alex just revealed it to them like it was nothing.

"What do you know of the legacy you found?" he asked Alex.

Alex pondered for a moment before responding.

"I know it contains seventy-two demons, ranging from lesser demons to kings of hell. Why?"

David didn't even know how to react to his nonchalantness. It was like Alexander was clueless about the potential threat he posed to himself, and the others, by melding with those demons.

"Did you know this legacy was found last time, too?"

"You never told me, so no. But I'm surprised such a powerful legacy didn't help more than that."

"Care to know why I never brought it up? Or better yet, why I didn't go for that one? Regardless of its potential power?"

Alex looked at him with a frown.

"You prefer skeletons?"

With a deep sigh, David answered his own question.

"Because every user of that legacy died after using it. Not a single one survived long enough to know it was killing them."

"Oh," Alex replied, getting the point David was driving at him.