

Chronicles of Eden – Act XI Preview Chapter

10/31/17

Chapter 1

Dangerous Decision

In the world of Eden every action had a consequence. For every choice made there would be an outcome that was either favored or lamented. Sometimes the end result could easily be seen beforehand, other times it was unexpected or not quite what was sought out. It was always important to consider the possibilities of one's own actions before moving forward with them, both for themselves and for those who could be affected by their decision. Even if it seemed like the right choice to make or there was no other options to take that didn't mean it was the right path to follow.

Of course this didn't always stop those from following that path.

Under the night sky all was quiet in what was once the centaur kingdom, Ruhelia. An ominous scar stretched across the land where the centaur homeland used to be, no lingering traces of the monsters who lived there remaining after disaster had befallen them. The only ones that were still among the living were a group of travelers who had made camp atop a knoll at the outskirts of the now barren landscape.

"This is not what I expected to find," Daniel lamented, standing on the hilltop next to a few of his mates who were also gazing upon the depressing sight.

"How the fuck did monsters do that?" Clover asked waving ahead at the large crevice that was dug through Eden. "Even with those bomb things the ant girls were using they couldn't have done all this."

"It's all gone," Luna sadly said with drooping wings. "Everything. Kroanette's going to be heartbroken when she sees this."

"She should be here soon," Falla guessed looking up at sky. "I'm willing to bet even if she doesn't come from the path behind us we'll know she got here by her screaming. I'm sure we'll hear it loud and clear from here."

"I don't understand how it got this bad," Cindy said tilting her head in confusion. In her arms Snapper was quietly sleeping while remaining still as stone, the youngling being gently rocked in Cindy's arms as the wraith looked over the scarred landscape with a troubled grimace.

"There were at least buildings standing when you were here last, yes?" Specca asked.

"Yeah, there were. Now there's nothing. Where did everything go?"

Daniel looked around at the bleak sight then up as something caught his eye. The girls also took notice of Kitten and Alyssa flying down towards them, the demon flapping her wings to slow her decent while Alyssa rode on her staff alongside her.

"Did you find anything?" Daniel asked.

"Nothing," Alyssa answered shaking her head in disbelief. "There isn't anyone or anything out there. It's just... gone. Everything is gone."

"There is something," Kitten remarked glancing back to the crevice. "I can see a large disruption in the magical ether over that scar. Whatever did this was caused by a tremendous force of power."

"Magic did that?" Clover said pointing ahead.

"Something with a great deal of magical power," Kitten replied. "I can see the ethereal trails of the magical currents that flow through this world very clearly, and right over there is a *big* distortion of energy."

"How big?" Daniel worried.

"I couldn't even cause that much of a ripple in the ether if I tried," Kitten told him. "Master, whatever did that, the amount of power it exuded... nothing could have survived it. Not even me."

"What the hell did that then?" Clover asked shaking her head.

"Whatever it was it's gone now," Alyssa answered with a shrug. "We flew all over, couldn't find a single survivor or even a remnant of the kingdom that once stood here. Ruhelia was completely wiped off the face of Eden."

"Can you see where that energy source went?" Daniel asked Kitten.

"No," she said looking down in thought. "Aside from the big surge of ether lingering about out there I couldn't make out any noticeable trails of monster energy traveling away from it. Whatever caused this is able to move around without standing out."

"So whatever did this is still out there?" Falla worried. "It could even be around here still?"

"I'm afraid so," Alyssa replied. "Though I don't think it's around here. Kitten and I couldn't find anything near here that looked suspicious. Whatever did this is likely long gone now."

"But Kroanette's out there somewhere," Luna feared. "Oh no, what if she runs right into whatever did this? Or those monsters that attacked her home? Or other monsters that didn't do this and didn't attack her home but aren't nice either? Or what if-"

"Stop, Luna," Falla ordered grabbing hold of her sister. "Stop talking about stuff like that, it's making me more worried about her."

"Pip's with her though, right?" Clover reasoned. "Kroanette's got a fairy by her side, if anything were to try to mess with her Pip would blast it to dust without a sweat."

"I'm not sure Pip would be much protection against whatever did that," Kitten said pointing to the massive crevice carved into the land. "She's strong for a fairy, but not that strong. This thing would probably use her as a toothpick before snapping her like one."

"No," Cindy whined with a frown. "I don't want Pip being broken. I like her."

"You're not helping here," Clover barked at Kitten.

"Kitten," Specca scolded. "We don't need to be thinking about something so grim at a time like this."

"I'm just telling the truth," Kitten defended holding her hands up. "Though Kroanette does have her refraction bracelets on, right? She can't be harmed by magical attacks. That's something positive to think about."

"That's right," Alyssa agreed with a smile. "If anything tries to attack her with magic they won't be able to hurt her."

"Unless of course the magic annihilated the entire land around her," Kitten mused looking back to the crevice. "The spell itself wouldn't touch her, but everything around her blowing up and being turned into a fiery hellstorm could easily kill her all the same."

Luna cried out and clung to Falla while sobbing, with Cindy watching them worriedly before she started whimpering and coddling Snapper closer to her. Daniel and the others watched them with concern then turned to Kitten with dull stares as she was smiling nervously at Daniel now.

"You suck at comforting others, you know that?" Clover dryly asked.

"You could have left it at she was safe with her bracelets on," Specca scoffed. "At least for our peace of mind."

"Um... sorry?" Kitten slowly said with a shrug.

"Are you?" Alyssa derided with a raised eyebrow.

Daniel shook his head at the cambion then looked around at the ruined landscape while growing more concerned over what caused such a distressing sight.

"She has her refraction bracelets, she's very fast, and she has Pip with her. She should be safe until she reaches us."

"Um, Master?" Kitten said pointing behind him. The group turned to see a blue streak of light zigzagging around the approaching valley and several trees, a small wail being heard from it as it drew closer before it finally raced over and shot down into Kitten's shirt.

"Boobies!" Pip cheered as her legs kicked about above the girl's bosom.

"Pip?" Daniel wondered.

"Wait, what's she doing here alone?" Specca nervously asked as she quickly searched for any sign of a centaur that had yet to arrive. Kitten reached into her chest and pulled the fairy out, the little monster gasping for air before smiling brightly at her.

"Hello! I found your boobies!"

"What are you doing here?" Kitten asked. "My master told you to find Kroanette and stay with her, didn't he?"

"I couldn't find her," Pip said shaking her head.

"What?" Daniel worried.

"I couldn't find her," Pip repeated as Kitten let her flutter up into the air. "I went this way and that way and every way around the trail that led here, but I couldn't find her. I don't know where she is."

"You're kidding me," Alyssa feared grabbing her hat. "Again? Kroanette got lost *again*? And at a time like this?"

"She really has no sense of direction, does she?" Clover flatly asked.

"But this was her home!" Specca cried out. "Surely she had to have known how to get here of all places, wouldn't she?"

The group looked to each other then down in silence as they all realized that Kroanette getting lost even when heading towards her homeland was a very believable scenario.

"We need to pin a map to her belt," Falla suggested.

"She can't be lost now though," Luna fretted. "There are bad monsters around here. She's in danger being all alone."

"We need to find her," Alyssa said looking down in frustration. "And she could literally be anywhere out there. She could have even gotten turned around and ran straight back to Trixton Pass where those monsters hunters live."

"I'm sorry," Pip frowned. "I tried to find her. I really did."

"It's okay," Cindy reassured her. "You tried. And you're not broken, that's a good thing."

"Kroanette," Specca feared. "Oh dear, where could she have gone?"

“Should we go looking for her?” Clover asked.

“Any idea where to start?” Kitten dryly replied. “She could have run off in any direction. She has no sense of navigation at all, and that can’t be any better during the night. She might have even charged right off a cliff by now.”

“Kitten!” Specca shouted at her. “Stop saying such things about her! You’re not helping at all!”

“Sorry,” Kitten said with a weak smile.

“I really doubt you are,” Alyssa flatly retorted.

“Daniel?” Luna whimpered looking over to him. “What should we do? Kroanette’s lost and she’s in danger out there.”

Daniel thought for a while on what to do, knowing his centaur could be running blindly into trouble at any moment while also being anywhere out in The Outerlands at this point. After thinking carefully on what to do he turned to the girls as they waited for his answer.

“Kitten, I want you to go back out there with Pip. Check further down the path and see if Kroanette is just a little behind with getting here. This is her home, I’m going to have faith she knows how to get back here, she could just be a little lost at the moment. Find her and guide her back.”

“We’ll try,” Kitten said with an uncertain look towards the valley. “Though knowing her she’s likely more than ‘a little lost’.”

“We’ll find her and her boobies this time,” Pip promised with a salute.

The cambion flapped her wings and took off into the air with Pip zipping alongside her, the two flying off into the distance together before vanishing from sight. Daniel watched them leave with eyes that conveyed his own doubt of finding the wayward centaur before turning to the girls who had troubled looks on their faces still.

“Nobody else is to leave the campsite,” he ordered. “I want all of you staying close until the others return. This isn’t friendly territory anymore, we need to watch our backs out here.”

“I don’t really feel like flying around here anyway,” Falla mentioned as she and Luna were sticking close to each other.

“Daniel,” Specca said quickly moving closer to him. “What if Kitten and Pip can’t find her? What-”

“Right now all we can do is believe they can,” Daniel reasoned while taking her into his arms. “Maybe Kroanette is almost here, maybe Kitten and Pip will find her near the path, that’s all we can hope for right now. We know Kroanette is racing to get here, this is the best place we can be to find her. We’ll wait until she arrives, we know she’s coming here.”

Specca nodded while snuggling closer to him in his arms, the nixie and all the other girls trying to hold onto hope that Kroanette would be there soon. Daniel gently rubbed the girl’s back while her tail wrapped around his leg then glanced over to the carriage nearby.

“You girls go on inside. Doku and the others should have dinner just about ready. I’m going to wait out here a little longer. Go on ahead and try to keep calm about this, I’m sure Kroanette is fine and will be here any minute now.”

The girls nodded before Specca gave Daniel a quick kiss, the nixie and the others then making their way towards their home while Clover remained behind. The girls stopped at the carriage door and looked back to see the elf watching Daniel with her twintails swaying in the breeze.

“I’ll stay too,” Clover offered. “I’m not leaving my man out here alone in a place like this.”

“I’ll be fine, Clover,” Daniel reassured. “I’m not going anywhere, I’m staying right here next to our home.”

"And so am I," Clover stated crossing her arms.

"Clover-

"I'm not taking my eyes off you!" Clover shouted, catching everyone by surprise. "This is clearly not a safe place to be and like fucking hell I'm leaving you alone! I don't care if you're three feet from the fucking door, I'm not leaving your side when there could be who knows what watching you from the shadows."

Daniel smiled a little and shook his head then walked up to the elf, gently running his fingers around the girl's bangs before nodding at her.

"Alright, if you're so insistent."

"I am," Clover agreed taking hold of his hand. "I just got you. I'm not taking any chances with losing you."

"You're not going to lose me, Clover."

"I'm not taking any chances," she firmly repeated, then looked down with worried eyes while tightly holding his hand. "I'm not letting anything take you away from me. I already lost someone I loved before because I walked away when I shouldn't have. I'm not going to let that happen again. Never..."

Daniel watched the elf falling silent while closing her eyes, her hand gripping his firmly while taking hold of it with the other. He smirked and then saw the other girls watching with slight smiles on their faces.

"She really is opening up more with us," Specca marveled.

"She's definitely changed a lot since we first met her," Luna mentioned.

"Daniel really can bring out the best of anyone he meets," Falla agreed with a warm smile.

"I really like him," Cindy giggled before looking down to Snapper while coddling her.

"I think we should stay out here with Daniel too," Alyssa reasoned with a nod. "We'll all keep watch for Kroanette together and-

"I can watch over Dan just fine on my own!" Clover shouted at them. "He told you girls to get the fuck inside and stay safe so do it! What are you waiting for? Get going! Can't you see we're having a fucking moment over here? Goddammit!"

Cindy stared at Clover in surprise while everyone else watched the elf with blank expressions, seeing the girl growling with frustration before quickly stepping closer to Daniel's side and holding onto his arm.

"Then again," Falla dryly commented. "She hasn't changed *that much* since we first met her."

Alyssa held in her scoff then looked to Daniel, the boy shaking his head a little with a weak smile at them before Clover tugged his arm to pull him closer.

"Why don't you girls go inside and see how dinner is coming?" Daniel suggested. "We'll keep watch for Kroanette a little longer then join you."

"You heard our man," Clover snapped. "Get going. We've got this."

"I can already think of one dinner conversation we're going to have tonight," Alyssa flatly mentioned before heading towards the ride.

"Clover, honestly," Specca sighed before following the witch.

"Why was she being so loud?" Cindy asked as Falla and Luna guided her away.

"That's just how she is," Falla answered with a shrug.

"At least she didn't wake Snapper," Luna said as she watched the swarm sleeping peacefully with a small twitch of her antennae.

Daniel watched the girls enter their home then turned to Clover as she was glancing up to him with a small blush and a nervous smile.

"You didn't need to yell at them like that," he said shaking his head.

"I'm sorry. I just wanted a little time with just you and me. Is that so wrong?"

Daniel smirked slightly then gave her a kiss, the elf clutching his arm closer as she eagerly kissed back. Breaking from the gesture Daniel then looked around at the ruined countryside before them with a quiet sigh.

"I would like to spend quality time with you too, Clover. I'm just sorry it had to be at a time like this."

"I'll take any time I can get with you," Clover assured, resting her head on his shoulder while her fingers laced with his. "And I mean it, I'm not taking my eyes off you. Especially if there's even the remote chance I could lose you."

"You're not going to lose me, Clover. You're not going to lose any of us."

Clover nodded as she breathed out slowly, her eyes gazing ahead at the fallen centaur homeland with a remorseful frown coming across her face.

"I know exactly how she's going to feel," she softly said, with Daniel looking to her curiously. "I know how it is to lose one's home. She's going to be so torn up when she sees this."

"We'll be here for her," Daniel assured, giving the elf's hand a light squeeze. "She won't be alone in her hour of need. Whatever happens to her in life, her family will be right there by her side the entire time to help her through."

"NO!" Kroanette screamed as loud as she could. All around the dark woodland monsters of The Sisterhood laughed as they watched the centaur being bound in sticky webbing by two arachne. The shrieking princess thrashed about in a futile attempt to get away as the arachne rolled her around while covering her body with their netting, her legs being pinned in place beneath her while her arms were held down at her sides.

"LET ME GO!" Kroanette cried out as she was turned around again and again, the arachne only responding with more laughter as they used their legs and hands to quickly wrap the centaur in a thick covering of sticky silk.

"She's a real screamer," a troll laughed.

"She's big and fat," a mite droned while drooling. "Lots of meat to eat."

"Our leaders like that in their prey, don't they?" a gremlin chuckled.

"Well they certainly liked the centaur empress who screamed like this," an arachne replied with a shrug. "Perhaps they'll fancy this one as well."

"Wait, what?" Kroanette screamed as she turned her head to try to look at the spider. "What did you just say about the empress? What did you say?"

The monsters stopped spinning the centaur in their web and snickered while Kroanette struggled to budge.

"You don't know?" one of the arachne asked. "You mean you haven't heard?"

"Heard what? Explain yourself this instant!"

An arachne grabbed her hair and forced Kroanette to look up at her, the monster leaning closer with a sly grin while gently holding the centaur's head with her other hand.

"Oh my, are you just now returning to Ruhelia from one of your little deliveries? You poor girl, you haven't heard the news yet, have you?"

“What are you talking about?” Kroanette strained out as her head was being held at a painful angle.

“The centaur empress... is dead,” the arachne hissed in her face. Kroanette stared at her in shock as her heart skipped a beat. “Our glorious leaders devoured her on her throne room floor of her palace. Last I saw of her the old hag’s corpse was strung up in front of her bastion for all to see.”

“You see we were in Ruhelia a few days ago,” the other spider mentioned. “It was a lovely visit. So much to do and eat there. I had the time of my life eating a few of your precious children.”

“No...” Kroanette breathed out in horror. “You lie. You’re lying... you’re lying! You can’t... you didn’t... NO!”

“Heavens, no,” the arachne holding her gently replied. “I’m not lying at all. I was there when it happened. I saw it with my own eyes. The centaur empress had her innards ripped out until there was nothing left in her carcass. She’s dead, little horsie. She’s *very* dead.”

“NO!” Kroanette screamed as she thrashed around in her binds, her cries escalating further as tears started coming from her eyes. “It can’t be true! My home! My mother! No! You fucking demons!”

“Mother?” the arachne wondered. “Did you just say the empress was your *mother*?”

“Yes! She’s my mother! I swear to the heavens if you touched a hair on her head I’ll-”

Her head was yanked back by the spider, the centaur wailing in pain from her neck being bent sharply before seeing the spider chuckling at her.

“I never laid a hand on her. Our leaders however touched her *all over*. And inside as well. But if you don’t believe me you can ask them yourself, we’re taking you straight to them as a prized catch.”

“So sorry for your loss,” the other arachne laughed before they began spinning Kroanette around in their webbing again. “And I’m even sorrier you didn’t witness your mother’s cries of agony as our leaders ate her alive!”

“NO!” Kroanette shrieked. “MOTHER! NO!”

The monsters around laughed as they watched the centaur being wrapped up in the spiders’ netting, the girl screaming as loud as she could not out of fright now but rather sorrow. Kroanette screamed and cried as she was spun around before the arachne pulled the webbing across her mouth, muffling the centaur’s shrieks as she was nearly covered from head to tail in the sticky coating.

“I do have a bit of good news for you though,” the spider said holding the crying girl’s face towards hers. “I heard from some of my friends that there was another centaur who called the empress her mother. Did you by chance have a sister?”

Kroanette screamed into her gag while nodding, her eyes wide in terror as the arachne chuckled and leaned in closer to her.

“Well, you’ll be happy to hear that she was not eaten alive by our leaders, or any others in our little circle of friends.”

Kroanette whimpered and breathed sharply through her nose as the arachne showed a wicked smile while caressing the girl’s cheek.

“No, she wasn’t eaten. Instead she jumped out of the palace tower to her death,” she laughed, with Kroanette screaming loudly into her gag again. “Dropped like a rock into the river! So there’s something to be thankful for, right? She probably died instantly from the impact... unless of course she survived the fall and drowned instead. Oh well, at least she wasn’t eaten, right?”

Kroanette’s muffled shrieks only brought about more laughter from the dark fiends, all of them watching as the centaur wailed in agony as she was wrapped tightly in the webbing. The arachne chuckled and pinched the girl’s cheek playfully before waving the ogre over towards them. The

lumbering giant stepped closer and picked up the bound centaur in one hand, the screaming girl then staring in fright at the groaning brute that watched her with a vicious scowl.

“Don’t crush that one,” the arachne ordered. “We don’t want her bruised or dead before our leaders get their hands on her. They want her alive so that she can scream while they eat her up after all.”

The ogre groaned and nodded then looked at her hand with a disgusted grimace as she shook the bound centaur about who was also stuck to her palm now. The monster leaned in to chomp down on Kroanette who continued to scream into her gag before a rock struck the face of the ogre, causing the brute to pause for a moment before looking down to see a troll shaking her head at her.

“What did we just say? Our leaders want that centaur *alive*. Don’t kill her.”

The ogre growled and nodded before shaking the sticky prisoner around a few times in annoyance.

“Alright, let’s collect the others we have nearby and return to camp,” another troll said waving them forward. “I’m starving. I could go for a bite and a good fuck from one of the men we have.”

“Me too,” a gremlin hissed. “All this scouting has worked up an appetite.”

The ogre groaned and started walking along with the other fiends, holding the screaming centaur in its hand while a few of the monsters continued laughing as they watched her crying. Kroanette shook her head and struggled to move, her body held firmly in place not only by the strong webbing of the arachne but also the muscular hand of the ogre. As she was carried off with her captors her heart broke apart further and further by the second as she dreaded what the dark monsters had taunted her with being true.

‘Mother! Hollia! Maria! Ruhelia! This can’t be happening! Please, somebody wake me from this nightmare! DANIEL!’

Hollia watched the sight of a few lanterns passing by quickly on the tunnel walls as she and her companions rode the rails with the ant girls in their underground conveyer. Glancing to those near her she saw Sasha examining the velarite she had procured from Mika’s home along with the sword that was once wielded by another reptile girl. Beside her Mika was looking down at the floor with one leg propped up and her arm resting on it, the hunter keeping her eye downward while she remained silent just as she had been during the entire ride back to the ant girls’ nest.

“How are you holding up, Mika?” Hollia asked, only getting a fleeting glance from the hunter in response. “When I lost my family and home I was a wreck for days afterward. But you appear to be focused still on the same day that you’ve lost so much. How do you do it?”

“I don’t have a choice,” Mika replied shaking her head. “It’s not like I’m holding up well on the inside at all. My home is destroyed. My sisters are dead. And my little brother could be as well if not worse. Inside I’m screaming in pain. My entire life has been taken from me all in one day.”

“You seem to be keeping your resolve rather well considering all that,” Hollia mentioned.

“That’s because crying won’t solve anything!” Mika shouted at her, catching the ant girls and centaur by surprise. “The only thing I can do is track down The Sisterhood, find out what happened to Max, and kill them all for what they’ve taken from me! I can curse my life and this world until the sun goes down afterwards, but until then I don’t have the luxury of giving up and going home. I don’t have a home to go to anymore, I don’t have any family left beside me. All I have is my revenge to seek out, and I *will* have it.”

“Heard that before,” Sasha said looking to Hollia. The centaur slowly nodded as she watched Mika lowering her head again, the hunter clutching her sword tightly while her other hand formed a fist.

“For our fallen family and homes,” Hollia proposed. Mika turned her eye up to see the centaur smiling a little at her. “Seeking revenge is something we share in common. It’s nice to know a sorceress like you shares the same path as I do.”

“Why’s that?”

“It will be a big help to have your magic fighting on our side.”

Mika watched the centaur in silence then looked back down while her hair fluttered in the wind, not saying a word as she thought about the path she was on now very carefully.

The clacking of the wheels rolling beneath the group of monsters and lone human echoed through the tunnel as the ant girls driving the convoy squeaked repeatedly with each heave and ho of the teetering beams they worked. Hours passed while the returning scavenging party of the fallen home of the monster hunter rode the rails, not a word being spoken or squeaked among those riding with the salvaged goods. After traveling through the dimly lit passageway the ant girls driving the convoy started to apply the brakes to slow down the ride, the screeching of the wheels sounding off in the tunnel as everyone took notice of a light coming closer further ahead. The cars rolled along the rails before slowing down as the transport arrived back at the underground station where other ant girls were waiting. As the wheels screeched and the convey slowed to a stop Mika and her party noticed every ant girl in the cavern was now a lot less lively, with most of them seeming downright depressed while a few were huddled in groups as they appeared to be crying.

“What’s going on?” Hollia wondered.

“I believe news of their queen has finally reached them,” Sasha speculated.

“Hey,” Tabitha called out. The group saw the neko along with Scay standing near the ride while ant girls were pushing ramps over next to it. “What’s the hunter doing back here with you? Wasn’t she returning home?”

“There was nothing out there for me to return to,” Mika replied standing up.

“Her home had already fallen under siege,” Hollia explained standing next to her. “Her brother wasn’t there, in fact half of her house wasn’t there either.”

Ant girls quickly ran up the ramps and started taking supplies from the cars while Sasha got to her feet carrying her salvaged ore, the reptile girl seeing the scurrying monsters hastily unloading the first car of what supplies it had before she trotted down the ramp along with Mika and Hollia.

“Her home was attacked by The Sisterhood,” Sasha said glancing to the human. “However it wasn’t just The Sisterhood who were there. A number of their grunts were already dispatched when we arrived.”

“Her brother killed them?” Tabitha wondered. “Not bad for a kid.”

“We don’t believe so,” Hollia said shaking her head. “The way the fiends were slain was too precise and powerful for a young boy to have done. Someone else killed them, though who that was we’re unsure of.”

“So what happened to him?” Scay asked tugging on her hair. “Where is he?”

“The only ones who can answer that for me are The Sisterhood,” Mika scorned. “I’m going with you to Green Haven to find some answers, and also to pay them back for taking everything from me.”

“You’re coming with us?” Tabitha dryly asked. “Didn’t we already go over how this is something you’re not-”

Mika grabbed the neko by the neck and lifted her up, the choking cat grabbing her arm in surprise while ant girls around them stopped to watch.

"They killed my sisters! They destroyed my home! And my brother is either in their clutches or dead! I'm going with you to find out what happened there, and I'm going to annihilate every one of those accursed monsters who ruined my life! You got that?"

"Okay!" Tabitha coughed out kicking feet. "Okay! You can come with us!"

Mika shoved Tabitha over into Scay's arms, the naga quickly holding onto her friend while wrapping her tail around her, then slowly looked around at seeing ant girls watching her with troubled expressions. She took a slow breath then looked to her hand that she flexed slightly, creating a flickering crimson casting ring over her palm briefly.

"Hunting monsters is what I do," she announced. "Count yourselves lucky to have a hunter like me helping you exterminate those vile demons out there."

Holding her hands to her head she tried to calm herself, the lingering echo of Aeon's voice sounding off in her ears again as she held in her furious growl in contempt of the Dark Queen.

"I'm going to go for a walk to cool off," she said before turning to Hollia. "I'll meet up with you all later. I just... need to clear my head."

"Take your time," Hollia replied with a nod. "We won't be leaving for Green Haven until tomorrow. We'll be with my knight when you're ready to return."

Mika started walking away before stopping, her eye looking down as she thought about something before glancing back to the girls. They were watching her in silence along with the ant girls nearby while others had resumed unloading supplies from the convoy.

"Something else?" Sasha asked raising an eyebrow.

Mika shook her head then walked off with her cape fluttering behind her, the ant girls in her way stepping aside as the hunter made her way out of the cavern with a focused expression on her face.

"Great to have her on the team," Tabitha grunted rubbing her neck.

"She could be useful," Hollia mused. "With her magic aiding us fighting against The Sisterhood should be easier."

"Where's she going?" Scay wondered. "She's all alone. What if the ant girls give her trouble for being down here?"

"I pity the ant girl who tries picking a fight with that sorceress," Sasha commented looking down at her supplies. "Let her go, she'll be fine on her own. Let's go inform my master what we found and then I can get to work fixing my sword."

"Where is my knight anyway?" Hollia asked holding her spear up at her side.

"He and the others went back to the cave with the drinks and brawling ant girls," Tabitha said pointing to a tunnel to the side, her eyes remaining locked onto the one Mika ventured into.

"We were waiting for you to come back," Scay happily said. "And not just because Forrus scared Tabitha earlier by snapping at her."

"She did not scare me!" Tabitha shouted at her. "The only reason I'm here is because you dragged me away before I could skin that mutt for trying to bite me!"

Hollia and Sasha glanced to each other with smirks then started walking off while Tabitha was being held back by Scay and waving her fist around in the air.

"What was with those looks?" she shouted at them. "Like fucking hell a filthy lycan would intimidate me! Hey! Are you listening to me?"

"Never do," Sasha plainly called out.

“See you later, you two,” Hollia replied with a wave of the hand.

Tabitha growled in frustration then pushed Scay off her with a grunt. The naga smiled nervously and giggled with a twitching eye as Tabitha slowly calmed down before looking back to where Mika left.

“Tabitha?” Scay asked. “Is something wrong?”

“That look she had in her eye,” Tabitha cautioned. “Something else is going through her head right now.”

Mika made her way down the tunnels of the ant girl nest, her gaze remaining forward while ant girls were scurrying about all around her in their daily routines. Many looked at the hunter curiously while passing by, some slowing down and stopping to watch the woman walking through the corridor without giving any of them a second glance. After rounding a corner an ant girl stepped up before her along with a few others, the monsters squeaking at the human while having pickaxes held over their shoulders as they stood in her way. Mika slowly eyed each of them before stepping aside to move around them, the monsters then quickly getting in her way again and squeaking at her with stern expressions.

“Stand aside,” Mika ordered, the ant girls shaking their heads at her while more were gathering nearby. “I’m not your enemy, you’d do well to keep it that way.”

One of the ant girls stepped forward and grabbed Mika by her chest armor, the hunter then immediately holding up her hand towards the monster’s face while summoning her magic. A crimson and black casting ring formed before her palm while crackling with magical energy, the bright glow illuminating the stunned monster’s face as Mika slowly shook her head.

“If you want to fight me then you should know I will *not* hold back,” Mika scorned. “My enemy is The Sisterhood, they are the ones I wish to slay with my power, however if you’re so insistent on getting in my way then I’ll use you as target practice! Do you hear me?”

The ant girl let go of the human and backed away with hands held up, herself and all the underground monsters staring in surprise at the human as she glanced around at them while keeping her magic up.

“I’m in no mood to play with any of you. You want my help in getting rid of The Sisterhood? You want me to aim my magic at them and not you? Then get out of my way or else I’ll *make you* get out of my way. Move it!”

The ant girls quickly scrambled away in a hurry while squeaking, leaving Mika behind as she slowly lowered her hand and recalled her magic. She started walking forward again down the empty tunnel, venturing further into the darkened nest where only a few torches were set up on the walls here and there along the way.

After making her way deeper into the nest through the winding tunnels she finally came up to the cavern she had been searching for. Entering the cave she looked around at seeing the ancient cenotaph from earlier resting in the middle of the chamber while ant girls were patrolling in groups of three all around it. Some had pickaxes and shovels, others had satchels filled with bombs, and a few were holding large sledgehammers over their shoulders as they marched about with focused expressions. Mika began walking towards the centerpiece, her eye set forward while noticing all the ant girls stopping and taking immediate notice of her. She stopped at the edge of the cenotaph’s steel base and looked down at the glowing writing lining the platform’s edge, silence filling the cavern while she glanced around to see all the ant girls watching her carefully. Taking one step onto the base all the ant girls squeaked and tensed up. Another step was met with them drawing their tools in a threatening manner. And one more step had Mika bumping into something that wasn’t seen.

“Mika?” a girl’s voice exclaimed. After a quick squeal of excitement Mika was lifted up into the air and shook around, something all the ant girls watched in bewilderment while the human had a blank expression on her face.

“It’s so good to see you again!”

“Is that Mika?”

“Yay, she came to see us again!”

“She came to see me! Not you two!”

“Nuh uh, she wanted to see me! Nobody wants to see you!”

“She wanted to see me, she just couldn’t tell you weren’t me since you’re invisible!”

“No way, she wanted to see me the most! I’m her best friend!”

“No, I’m her best friend! Let me hug her!”

“I want to hug her, she came to see me after all!”

Three girls argued in circles as Mika was shook around in the air, the human sighing quietly while being hugged by one of the invisible girls before being taken into another’s arms as each of the three hidden monsters fought to take turns hugging her. After floating about in the air for a while Mika cleared her throat and spoke up.

“Hey! Mind putting me down now?”

After a pause she was then set down while three shimmering veils of light flashed around her, the rippling distortions then fading away as the trio of desuwraiths became visible.

“Hello again, Sara, Lara, Tara,” Mika plainly spoke.

“What are you doing back here, friend?” one of them asked with a curious smile.

“Thanks again for showing us how that lift thingy worked,” another mentioned while looking to two of her hands in amazement.

“We were able to see Nuci again thanks to you,” the third praised with a hop. “Thank you so much.”

“Sure,” Mika replied as she started walking past them towards the central alter. Before she could get closer two hands quickly grabbed her shoulders, the human glancing back to see one of the desuwraiths holding her with a worried smile.

“Wait, where are you going?”

“Um, you’re not supposed to get near that thingy,” another added shaking her head.

“Nobody is supposed to go near it,” the third agreed with a nod. “Why are you going near it?”

The ant girls around the area watched the human closely as she lowered her head in silence. After a moment she shook her head and looked back to the desuwraiths.

“I need to go down there for something. Stand aside.”

“What? Go down there?” one repeated as the three turned to each other in concern.

“But you can’t go down there,” another insisted shaking her head.

“Nobody is supposed to go down there,” the third agreed as the sisters faced Mika while remaining on guard. “Only we can. Nobody else.”

“Why do you want to go down there?”

“You shouldn’t want to go down there.”

“You’re not allowed to go down there.”

Mika eyed each of the desuwraiths then smiled curiously and shrugged.

"I wanted to meet the guardian of the City of Eden," she politely said. "Nuci, right? She's the one guarding the Dark Queen and her city, isn't she? Would it be alright if I go down there to say hello to her?"

"You want to meet Nuci?"

"Is that all?"

"That's all you want to do?"

"Yeah, that's all. Please?" Mika sweetly asked.

The desuwraiths looked to one another in silence then smiled at the human while stepping back.

"If that's all you want, then I guess that's alright."

"Yeah, go ahead and meet her. She's really nice, you'll like her a lot."

"We were afraid you were going to do something bad like steal the key from her and use that to unleash the Dark Queen from her prison and thus ending all life on Eden as we know it. But if you just want to say hi to Nuci then you can go down there."

"Thank you," Mika replied with a nod. She walked over to the alter and took off her glove, pausing for a second as she noticed the desuwraiths smiling and waving at her while the ant girls around the chamber were watching her curiously. Mika smiled weakly and waved back then held her hand on the alter, in doing so causing it to glow brightly while green triangular outlines lit up in the air between the three statues surrounding her. The lines shifted to blue then purple before turning yellow and spinning around, the sight keeping the attention of everyone in the cave as the triangles finally stopped while pointing downward and turning back to green. The emblems turned into circles that began to stretch out overhead and overlap one another, the searing light of the rings crossing through each other before lowering down onto the floor in a wide loop around the monuments.

Mika watched the dais with its glowing white emblems lighting up around her fingers along with a downward arrow appearing below her palm, something she questioned if humans really did create somehow. The hunter then paused for a moment as an echoing chuckle sounded off in her ears, her expression turning serious as she knew the Dark Queen was watching her. With a grunt she pushed down on the alter, the top lighting up with a warm glow while the ground shook a little. The circular platform began lowering where the bright rings were set in the floor, a rush of air shooting up around the edges as the cenotaph began dropping down into the shaft below.

"Hey!" Tabitha shouted from the cavern entrance. Everyone turned to see the neko and Scay running into the chamber towards the centerpiece. "What do you think you're doing? Mika! Stop!"

"It's okay," one of the desuwraiths said as the sisters held out their hands to stop the girls before them. "She's just going down there to say hello to the guardian."

"Yeah, she wants to be friends with her like she is with us."

"She's more my friend than she is either of yours," the third sneered.

"Nuh uh, she's my friend the most!"

"No way, she likes me way more than either of you!"

"You're both so stupid, why would she like either of you more than me?"

"We're not the stupid ones, you are!"

"Yeah, you, not us!"

"I know you are but what am I?"

"Stupid!"

"So stupid!"

"I know you are but what am I?"

“Stupid!”

“So so stupid!”

“You idiots!” Tabitha shouted as she pointed to Mika. “Nobody is supposed to go down there, Daemon even said so!”

“But she just wanted to be friends with Nuci,” one of the desuwraiths curiously said.

“Yeah, that’s all she’s doing.”

“She even said so.”

Tabitha saw Mika glancing to her with a stern expression, the hunter then looking down before the platform lowered out of sight. The steel doors began closing over the shaft as Tabitha growled in anger.

“No, that’s not what she’s doing at all!” she argued before ducking under the desuwraiths’ arms and dashing towards the shaft along with Scay.

“Wait, you can’t go down there!” one of the desuwraiths called out after the girls.

“Nobody is supposed to go down there!”

“Daemon even said so!”

Tabitha and Scay jumped down into the shaft before the steel doors slammed shut behind them. The desuwraiths scrambled over to it along with the ant girls, all of them looking around at the sealed platform before the sisters began hopping about in a panic.

“Oh no, not good! Not good!”

“So not good! This is bad! Very bad!”

“This is so bad it can’t possibly be good!”

The desuwraiths whined and trotted about anxiously before turning to all the ant girls who were watching them.

“This is so not good!” they all cried out together.

Tabitha and Scay dropped down onto the lift as it continued descending down the darkened tunnel. Scay looked around in wonder at all the glowing lines and etchings in the statues and surrounding walls while Tabitha focused her sights solely on Mika who watched them from the center of the platform.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Tabitha sharply asked, hands grabbing hold of her swords as she tensed up. “Nobody is supposed to go down here for any reason, Daemon made that crystal clear to us.”

“He never told me that,” Mika retorted. “Then again I was gone while finding my home ruined and my little brother missing. I guess that bit of news slipped by me.”

“Why are you going down here?” Tabitha demanded.

“To see the guardian, Nuci. Didn’t the desuwraiths explain that to you?”

“I don’t believe that for a second,” Tabitha snapped. “We watched you blow up on those ant girls while threatening to blow them up with your magic, we followed you as you made your way straight to this place after leaving the station, and by the look on your face making friends with the guardian is the last thing on your mind right now. The tense look you’re trying to hide in your eye, I can see it clearly. Something’s gotten you rattled, mind sharing what that is?”

“What’s wrong, Mika?” Scay asked tilting her head. “Are you feeling tense? Do you want a hug? Or to be stabbed?”

“No, thank you,” Mika calmly replied. “The desuwraiths already gave me plenty of hugs, and I’ll pass on the stabbing. I just need to speak with the guardian down below, that’s all.”

“Speak to her about what?” Tabitha carefully said while slowly approaching her.

Mika watched the two monsters carefully getting closer, the naga slithering around a statue before stopping behind the human while the neko kept a sharp eye on her with hands gripping the handles of her swords.

“The Dark Queen needs to die,” Mika replied while narrowing her eye.

“She’s sealed away forever,” Tabitha said shaking her head. “She’s not going to hurt anyone where she is.”

“You’re wrong. She can still harm others even from down here.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because she’s spoken to me,” Mika answered, with Tabitha and Scay jumping with a startle. “And the words she uses can hurt just as badly as any blade.”

“What did you just say?” Tabitha slowly questioned.

“That monster needs to die,” Mika sternly said grabbing her sword. “So I’m going to do my job.”

“You’re going to let her out?” Tabitha gasped.

“No, I’m going to kill her. No matter the cost.”

In a flash Tabitha drew out her swords just as Mika did with hers, the two clashing with a fierce strike of their blades before the hunter spun and cast out a blast of blue light towards the advancing naga. Scay was thrown back into the wall before tumbling up against it into the air then dropping down with a thud, her whine being overpowered by a strong clash of swords between Mika and Tabitha. The neko swiped at the human’s sides with her swords, each strike being blocked by the hunter as she knocked the monster’s attacks aside before following through with a downward slash. Tabitha darted to the side and struck around with her sword, the strike being knocked back by Mika’s sword before she swung with her other katana towards the woman’s head. Mika ducked under the attack, swung back with her blade to parry Scay’s dagger that the naga stabbed at her with, turned to block one of Tabitha’s blades followed by the other, then spun around to avoid Scay’s attack again before punching her in the head. The naga was thrown to the side before she quickly slithered around the platform with a strained grunt, the monster circling the lift rapidly while Tabitha locked swords with Mika in the center. The two pushed against each other with fierce growls before Scay raced over and tackled Mika to the ground. She swiftly wrapped herself around the woman while grabbing her head, wrestling her down in a roll on the floor before Mika shouted with a bright red flash coming from her hand under the naga’s body.

“AHHH!” Scay screamed as streaks of flame and light shot out between her coils, the naga crying out as Mika pulled her hand free and held it to the monster’s chest. A blast of blue energy shot Scay back with a wail, the monster’s tail quickly unraveling as she held her arms around herself with her tail twitching below her.

“That hurt! *Waaah!* Why are you so mean? I was just going to stab you!”

Mika grabbed her sword and quickly parried a downward slash of Tabitha’s blade, the neko striking again and again with both her swords to keep the hunter pinned down.

“Have you lost your mind?” Tabitha shouted as she kept attacking the hunter. “You’re trying to release a harbinger of death and you don’t even realize how fucking stupid that is?”

“She has to die!” Mika yelled before kicking up with her foot, knocking the neko back into a stumble while scrambling onto her feet again. “She has to die, there’s no other way!”

“She’s sealed away, you fucking bitch!” Tabitha argued. “And that’s the way she needs to stay!”

“That’s not good enough!” Mika shot back. She swung her blade to the side, parrying Scay’s dagger before the naga ducked under her second swing and whipped her tail around into the woman’s

gut. Mika grunted hard as she was thrown back into a statue before Scay struck down at her shoulder, her dagger striking against her shoulder plate with a few sparks before Mika grabbed her hand and stopped it from piercing her chest next. The naga kept her body pressed against Mika while trying to drive her dagger into the woman, her other hand holding Mika's with her sword held against the statue down to the side.

"You can't let that bad monster out, Mika!" Scay pleaded with a twisted smile. "If she gets out we'll all- *nnrrghmmm* DIE! HAHA! I really want to stab you now, I'm not even kidding! I'm going to do it! I AM!"

Tabitha ran over and held one of her blades towards Mika's face while having the other poised to slash at the human, both monsters keeping her detained while Mika struggled to hold back Scay's dagger.

"You've lost your mind, Mika," Tabitha scorned. "How do you even know the Dark Queen was somehow talking to you from way down here underground? How could she? You're obviously hearing voices in your head, a sure sign you're going crazy!"

"HAHAHAHA!" Scay laughed while going cross-eyed. "I want to wear your skin! You'll be my friend then, won't you? PRETTY PLEASE?"

"Like I was saying," Tabitha said while keeping her eyes focused on Mika. "A sure sign. See her? That's you in a week at most."

"I know she talked to me," Mika grunted. "I know what she's capable of. I know what she's going to do if left alive. I have to kill her, I have to before it's too late."

"And just what is she going to do if you don't kill her?"

"She's going to take away what I have left to live for," Mika whimpered shutting her eye. She started breathing heavily before screaming as a golden casting ring lit up below her, a wave of energy rolling away and crashing into the walls as the lift rumbled with its downward decent. Scay and Tabitha braced from the force of power pushing against them before Mika yelled out with furious look on her face.

"I WON'T LOSE MAX, I WON'T!" she roared as a crackling eruption of red and golden light exploded around her. Scay screamed from being thrown back before she slammed into a statue, the girl dropping down with a whimper while Tabitha tumbled away on the floor before stopping herself from slamming into the moving wall. Getting back onto her feet she quickly held up both of her swords to block Mika's that struck at her with a heavy clang, the two locking into a struggle with Mika slowly pushing Tabitha back. The hunter's armor and clothing was singed along her hand however she didn't appear to notice or even care her own attack harmed her.

"She won't take him from me, she won't!" Mika yelled while Tabitha slid towards the moving wall. "I won't let anyone take my brother from me!"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Tabitha shouted as she wobbled in her defense. "You really have gone crazy, haven't you?"

"Nobody is taking Max from me," Mika growled, the ground under them lighting up with a crimson casting ring that bled upward against the moving wall. The air started to waver with streaks of golden light rippling up from the casting base while Tabitha's tail and bells hit against the shaft from being pushed closer.

"Scay, a little help here!" Tabitha called out.

"HELPING!" Scay shouted as she grabbed onto Mika from behind. She wrestled Mika around before the hunter screamed with an eruption of light blasting from beneath them, throwing Scay back

into a tumble before she slammed into the central alter and wrapped around it. Tabitha was thrown into the wall behind her, smacking against it while being knocked up along it before she halted in midair above Mika from a magical force catching her. Mika held her hand up towards the neko, having three spinning casting rings along her arm and before her palm as she growled furiously at the monster.

“Mika, stop!” Tabitha cried out.

“Stop hurting us,” Scay whined as she slowly sat up.

Mika let out a long yell while energy crackled along her arm, the force being exuded pushing back Tabitha’s fur as the neko stared in shock at the growing red light blooming in Mika’s hand.

“I will put an end to the Dark Queen,” Mika scorned. “And I’ll do whatever it takes to make sure she never speaks to anyone ever again! Nobody will stop me, nobody will keep my brother away from me!”

“What are you talking about?” Tabitha shouted. “Didn’t you say your brother is either dead or with The Sisterhood? What does he have to do with letting the Dark Queen out to kill us all?”

“She knows where he is, she knows where he is!”

“Then why do you want to kill her? You’re not making sense!”

“You don’t understand!”

“You’re right, I have no fucking clue what you’re talking about!”

“She needs to die, that’s all you need to know! And I will kill her along with any that get in my way! I’m not after you or your friend’s life, I’m not hunting you, but if you try to stop me from doing this I’ll have no choice but to put you down as well!”

“Stop!” Scay cried as she grabbed Mika from behind. “Please don’t hurt my friend! I really like her!”

Wrapping her tail around the human she pulled the woman’s arm aside, with Mika shouting as she stumbled about before releasing the magical blast of energy. The bolt of crimson light struck one of the statues nearby, exploding into a powerful blast that threw Tabitha and Scay over into the wall while Mika stumbled aside with them, the girls hitting against the moving shaft before tumbling upward with it and dropping to the ground with heavy thuds. Tabitha and Scay groaned as they slowly sat up before Mika grabbed the naga’s head and slammed it down onto the ground, knocking the monster out instantly as she did so again with a furious cry.

“You bitch!” Tabitha yelled as she tried tackling the human down. Instead she was grabbed and thrown down onto the ground before Mika took hold of her sword and held it across the neko’s throat.

“She needs to die,” Mika growled furiously. “She cannot be allowed to live, she cannot be allowed to speak, she needs to die!”

“Could you at least try making a little more sense here?” Tabitha snapped. “Dammit, if you’re going to kill us over this then at least explain yourself properly!”

“I’m not going to kill you,” Mika argued shaking her head. “You’re not the one who crossed the line with me.”

She then slammed Tabitha’s head onto the ground hard, knocking the neko out cold with her legs kicking once below her. Standing up Mika looked down at the unconscious girls before sheathing her sword at her hip, her fierce gaze then aiming downward as her anger was only aimed at another.

“She’s the only one I’m going to slay down here.”

The lift traveled down the long tunnel deeper into Eden, the quiet rustling of the air passing by all that was heard as Mika focused on her task. After lowering down further than Mika thought possible into the world the lift slowly came to a stop at its base inside the underground grotto. The hunter

glanced around at seeing the flourishing vegetation within the cave while hearing the tranquil splashing of the waterfalls that fed its many pools scattered about. Seeing nobody else within the cavern Mika walked off the steel platform and down the knoll towards the water that had light coming up from under it.

"Where are you?" she called out. "Show yourself!"

Looking around carefully she saw only a few flowers swaying gently in the grotto while the trickling of the waterfalls remained constant. After a moment she heard a rustling which she quickly turned towards, watching with a sharp eye and hand held firmly on the handle of her sword as a large flower bud near the falling water slowly unraveled its lightly colored purple petals. From within the flower a woman slowly rose up with her vibrant violet colored hair flowing down behind her, the floral monster opening her eyes and taking notice of Mika staring at her while tensed up.

"Hello there," Nuci softly greeted. "Who may ask are you?"

"Are you Aeon's guardian?" Mika demanded.

"Aeon?" Nuci breathed out in surprise. "How... how do you know that name?"

"*Because she's my dear friend,*" Aeon spoke in their heads. Nuci jumped with a startle and quickly looked down while Mika watched her carefully. Slowly she turned her gaze down to the wavering pool before her, seeing a soft light blooming under it while a wavering silhouette appeared below.

"Aeon!" Mika shouted drawing out her sword.

"Aeon," Nuci gasped. "Wait, what's going on here? Who is this human and why is she down here?"

"*Why, she's come to let me out of course,*" Aeon chuckled. Nuci looked to Mika in surprise as the hunter kept her furious glare fixated on the unseen monster's shadow. "*She came all this way just to see me in person. Such a nice friend to have.*"

"What is she talking about?" Nuci worried. "My dear child, who are-"

"Enough with your callous tongue, Aeon!" Mika yelled. "I've come to rip it out along with your heart!"

"*Spoken like a true monster hunter,*" Aeon complimented. "*Mika Harollson, you're a credit to your profession. By all means, come slay me. I encourage you to with all your might.*"

"Please lower your sword and calm yourself," Nuci requested holding out her hand. "Mika, is it? I don't know what Aeon has said to lure you here or why, but you mustn't-"

"I won't calm down until I've driven my sword through her accursed heart!" Mika roared before holding her hand down towards the pool, a spinning casting ring of crimson and golden light forming before her with crackling snaps of energy arching out from it. She quickly fired a blast of magical energy into the water, creating a powerful explosion against the barrier underneath with a heavy tremor. Water splashed high and away from the impact, allowing Mika to steal a glimpse of Aeon fluttering beneath her magical seal. As the pool began refilling again the chronofly chuckled in their minds while tapping the barrier with her finger.

"*Remove this seal around my city and then you and I may settle our little dispute once and for all right here.*"

"That's not happening!" Nuci argued shaking her head. "Mika, please listen to me, you cannot-"

"Enough!" Mika yelled at her. "She needs to die! You may have her body trapped here in that prison but her voice is able to travel to those living above, and her words are just as dangerous as she herself is!"

"I assure you that she herself is far more dangerous than anything she may have spoken to you," Nuci insisted.

"You're wrong," Mika cursed looking back down. "She needs to die, right now. Tell me how to remove the seal, Aeon, so that I may then claim your head!"

"With pleasure," Aeon laughed. "The key fragments to my seal are hidden right above you—"

"Aeon!" Nuci cried out at her as Mika looked up at the tangled roots and vines that clung to the ceiling.

"She has them hidden over your head. Recover the key fragments from her, put them together, and place it against my seal. That will dissolve the barrier and allow me to greet you face to face."

"You mustn't!" Nuci shouted shaking her head. "Mika, don't listen to any lies she's telling you! Please, you can't—"

She then stopped and stared in shock at seeing Mika holding her hand out towards her, her destructive spell base hovering before her palm as she glared at the alurane.

"No... Mika, please don't do this..."

"I don't want to hurt you," Mika told her. "I really don't. I may be a monster hunter, but I have no desire on harming you. She's the only one I want to kill tonight. I know damn well how dangerous she is, but keeping her locked away isn't good enough. She needs to die. Give me the key fragments to her seal and I'll spare you. However if you try to stop me then I'll be forced to go through you."

"Mika," Nuci lamented with a frown. She looked down to the water with a pout as Aeon giggled in their minds. After a pause she sighed and turned to Mika with a gentle shake of her head.

"You will not yield with this? You will not listen to my words?"

"Her words overshadow any that you could make," Mika said shaking her head. "I'm going to open that seal and kill her, with or without your consent."

"I'm sorry Aeon has done this to you," Nuci sadly spoke. "I really am. Whatever she has said to cause such anger and pain within you, I'm truly sorry for."

"Just give me the key fragments," Mika ordered.

"I'm afraid I can't do that," Nuci said with a remorseful smile. "You see I wouldn't be much of a guardian if I just handed them over to anyone who asked without putting up even the smallest fight."

"You're going to try to fight me?"

"Heavens, no," Nuci replied with a small smile. The ground rumbled a bit before large roots ripped up from the ground and rocks all over the grotto, swinging about through the air while splashing water about. Vines and tendrils overhead began constricting as they started overlapping one another to guard what was safely hidden above them. And the alurane who stood before Mika gently waved her hand before her, trailing a shimmering radiance that outlined a large segmented shield floating before the woman while her hair fluttered behind in a small breeze. Nuci lightly toiled her fingers together at her side, summoning wisps of green and blue light up along her arm towards her hand as she demonstrated that she too was capable of using magic.

"I am going to fight you," Nuci corrected before showing a weak smile. "But don't worry, I can see you're not a bad person at heart. I'll try to be gentle with beating you down. Sorry in advance if I'm a little... rough."