

From all I've read, the word 'entente' is defined as 'a friendly understanding or informal alliance between states or factions.'

I don't think we're what the dictionary had in mind.



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## THE INTRODUCTION

How would you react if you found yourself trapped in a small, dimly lit room with a group of strangers?

Seven people, three men and four women, found themselves facing this question one previously uneventful Thursday evening. A moment earlier, they had each been engaged in their regular routines — work, homework, watching television — and then the world had changed without warning.

In a bright flash of light, they'd been teleported into a room with no doors or windows, unnaturally bright under the light of a half-dozen candles in wall sconces. The walls were brown stone, the floor just as drab, and the air stank of dampness and disuse.

“—extra fries...” one man said, caught mid-sentence, and then trailed off. He craned his neck to gauge the room — his gaze, hidden behind a pair of reflective, round sunglasses, lingered on the wooden

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round table in the middle of the room and the seven chairs set around it — and appeared more confused than alarmed by his situation. “Okay?”

He stood around six foot two, tall by most standards, but four inches shorter than the tallest man present. Broad-shouldered and tanned, with an easy smile, a smooth jaw line, and thick brown hair, he was the sort to stand out in a crowd. In the few moments since the group had appeared in the room, he had already drawn the attention of a heart-stopping woman in a curve-hugging green dress. Her brown eyes flashed gold as she widened her lips in a smile that showed off even white teeth. She had popped into the room mid-stride, but adjusted to the change of scenery with the ease of one accustomed to the extraordinary.

“Not the nicest view,” she said. Her smile faded as her gaze landed on a man in a gray tailored suit standing across from her. The man shared her honey-hued complexion, her thick gold-touched brown hair, and her delicate construction of fine nose and high cheekbones. Although his presence had lured the eye of another woman with short blond hair, who had tumbled to the floor on her entrance, his powers of attraction apparently had the opposite effect on the woman in the green dress. “Or the greatest company.”

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“I couldn’t say,” another woman said, this one hardly more than sixteen years old, her blond curls unruly and tied into two wild pigtails. She wore jeans and a plain black T-shirt with a red-and-white plaid shirt over top. Curved white plastic stretched from behind her ears to transmitters implanted on the sides of her head, and she stared blankly into the shadows through square brown-tinted sunglasses. She’d appeared in the room on her stomach, as though she’d been lying down at her previous location. Cautiously, she crept her fingers along the uneven stone tiles and slowly rose to her feet. Unseeing, she tilted her head toward the sound of a scowling man shifting on his feet beside her, this one wide and hulking, standing at least six foot six with angry red scars down the right side of his face, his hands clenched into fists at his sides.

“I don’t suppose anyone could tell me where I am?” the girl asked. “Or who you are? Or how I got here? Pretty sure I was in my room studying for an exam.”

“You know as much as I do,” said the blond woman who had been attracted to the man in the suit. Her short-cropped hair framed a thin, angular face. Green eyes stared out over a long, bent nose, her thin lips pale. She stood up, crossed her arms over her gray hooded vest, her clenched hands

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stretching her long-sleeved blue T-shirt, and glared around the room.

The fourth woman remained silently poised on the fringes of the group. She was tall and willowy with waist-length red hair, clothed in a simple, belted blue dress. Although she said nothing, she missed nothing. Her cold gray eyes shifted from person to person, evaluating their reactions, assessing the situation.

The man in the suit loped jauntily toward the wide table. He pulled a hand out of his pocket and reached for an envelope sitting in the center of it.

“Maybe this will give us some idea.”

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## THE LETTER

Welcome to you all.

While I would normally hate to start things off with a cliché, I can't resist the temptation to say: If you're reading this note, I'm already dead.

I find even more pleasure in the idea that one of you will soon join me.

I don't know which one of you will — if I did, you wouldn't be in this situation — but I enjoy the thought of you all piecing the puzzle together.

Why me? you might be asking. You should really give yourself more credit. I've crossed a number of people in my lifetime, but only you were special enough to make it on the shortlist for my murder. You have been my greatest competitors and my greatest enemies, the only people smart enough or strong enough to best me. As such, I have no doubt you'll be able to work out this mystery.

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Since I know you so well, I know you're also wondering why I arranged this little meetup. I'm well aware I've always had a knack for getting people to hate me, but that's never stopped me from working for what I wanted. Right up to the end I was focused on becoming the greatest warlock the world has ever seen — I came close, too, I'd like to see you try to deny it — but just as I was reaching the pinnacle, I ran into an old friend of mine. A Seer. Lovely woman that she was, she told me, right before I cut into her brain, that she'd had a vision of me dying before I achieved my goal.

Having known Cass for ages, I didn't waste time not believing her or going out of my way to try to avoid her prophecy. Instead, I opted to set up this counterattack. I decided that if I were going to die, my killer shouldn't be allowed the luxury of living.

So I created this room and tagged each person I encountered who I believed stood a chance of beating me. At the moment of my death, you were transported here.

Don't bother trying to escape. There are wards on every exit and all of your magical abilities have been blocked. There is only one way out: discover who killed me — and return the favor. Seven enter, six leave.

So work it out, take your time, get to know each



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other. It should be quite the discussion — I only wish I could be there to see it. The semi-goddess, the Gorgon-Fae, the incubus, the succubus, the daemelus, the sorceress, and the human — such a unique collection for this invisible entente.

Good luck to you. And to the guilty party: see you soon.

Jermaine