

Zompiewolf 161

Chapter 161 – Foul Play (1)

The next day Ashton left for the guild as soon as the sun was up. He wanted to claim his rewards as soon as he could. Well, at least that's what anyone who'd see him would think. But in reality, he simply wanted to know who these people were that had been hiding in the shadows trying to get rid of him.

Mera was nowhere to be seen around him, neither did he have an escort like before. He was just a random kid walking through the streets of Deja. Upon entering the guild, he was immediately guided to Markus's office as usual.

"We are sorry to learn about your loss in the dungeon. Seven was a great soldier." Markus shook Ashton's hands before getting down to business, "Your rewards seem to be quite peculiar. We got the gears and weapons as it was mentioned, along with this letter. Obviously, we did not open the letter as it was marked confidential."

Markus then snapped his fingers and the mentioned gears and weapons were immediately laid out in front of Ashton. Who immediately checked whether they were real or counterfeit. To his surprise, the gears were indeed genuine.

Although none of them was eyecatching, it was enough to make Ashton look at them twice.

'Looks like they do not want me to get suspicious about them, therefore they sent actually weapons and not some fake ones.' Ashton thought before storing them all in the inventory, 'Little do they know I'm already on their asses. But for now, I better keep my mouth shut.'

"This should conclude the request that was made. The request has been officially closed now." Markus said, his voice sounding weirdly formal, "Thank you for your hard work."

For a moment Ashton wanted to ask about the change in Markus's tone but ultimately decided against it. The man must have lots of matters to give him tension. Also, it was none of his business to pester around with someone whom he barely talked to.

Once he was out of the guild building, he opened the letter. Inside there were coordinates to a place. Just like the mistress had thought. The enemy was planning to lure him to someplace where no one would be able to hear his cries for help. Sadly for them, it was going to be their doom and not his.

He pocketed the letter and headed to the above-mentioned place. The coordinates led him to a travel portal that was already registered under his name for one-time use. After a quick verification with the guard stationed there, Ashton was able to jump right in.

'An intelligent move to get me to travel through a portal. Since only registered members are allowed to travel through it, they would eliminate the possibility of someone else coming to my aid.'

Although Ashton was heading straight into the lion's den, he could not help but admire the thinking those bastards had put in just to get rid of him. Donovan, for the love of his life, could not have come up with such an elaborate plan nor would he have the resources. Someone had to be helping him from the shadows.

As soon as Ashton stepped out of the portal, he found himself inside some sort of old building. Nature had taken over the structure with moss and wild vines growing from every part. Upon further inspection, Ashton realised that the design and the make of the place was unlike anything he had seen before.

He didn't know why but the building did not seem to be made by the werewolves. After all, the building appeared to be more of a bunker than anything else and what would the werewolves need a bunker for? On top of that, a bunker that was made to keep things out... especially mutated creatures... like the werewolves.

As Ashton kept wandering around the place, he came around some blurred illustrations followed by instructions on what to do when under attack by a werewolf. The half-eroded picture made it clear that this place was made by humans.

"Humans made this bunker? But why would someone invite me over to this place?" Ashton was completely clueless as to what was going on.

He tried to make sense of everything, but couldn't. Yet one thing was clear... he was far away from Deja and it was safe to assume no one was coming to save his butt.

Not that he needed anyone to do it, but it would have been reassuring to know there was someone behind him, should things go south.

"A beautiful place, isn't it?"

Suddenly a voice echoed through the dark corridors. Ashton immediately assumed battle stance, thinking someone was around him.

"Don't worry, none of us will attack you. After all, none of us is there to do so." The voice continued, "But it seems to be a good thing that you're here now. There's a lot you need to understand. But first, let's test you out, shall we?"

"I have nothing to show or tell to a coward." Ashton retorted, "Hiding in the shadows against one kid? You seem to think too highly of me. Or maybe someone overexaggerated my capabilities. Maybe someone named Donovan?"

"Interesting... very interesting..." The electronic voice chuckled, "It seems you are not as foolish as we thought. But it doesn't matter. If you'd like for us to answer any questions, then come find us. Before we find you..."

With that last word out of the speakers, static noise filled the dark hallways. The sound itself was highly irritating and almost too distracting.

"First my vision, and now my hearing... these sly bastards are really pulling all the stops aren't they?" Ashton sighed and took out his blades, "Test my skills eh? Let's see how you'll like it when I rip your hearts out and juggle them with my foot. That's a skill too."

Meanwhile back in Deja...

"Let me know of the coordinates this instant!" Mera screamed her lungs out at the guard stationed next to the portal Ashton had gone into.

The same thing had been going on for a couple of minutes but the guard wasn't ready to budge. Not because he didn't know where the portal led to, but because the life of his family depended on it.

Just yesterday, the guard's family had been taken hostage by some anonymous people. All that was left behind was an envelope with the details of his job written inside. If he wanted to save his family, he had to do as he was told to.

The coordinates of the portal were already set by the time he arrived for duty. The only thing he had to do was wait for someone known as Ashton to get inside the portal and then delete the coordinates so that no one could follow him through.

He couldn't help Mera because he simply didn't know where the kid had gone to. But that was not the answer someone like Mera would entertain. Her temperament was slowly getting the better of her. But she knew, getting angry on the guard wouldn't solve the issue at hand.

"You're not gonna talk, are you?" Mera asked the guard for the last time, to which the guard remained unresponsive just like before.

The moment Mera yanked the guard's neck and kicked him right in the chest, breaking several ribs. The guard screamed before curling up on the ground like a ball, desperately gasping for air as the mistress still had her hands wrapped around his neck.

"So you can talk." Mera whispered into the guard's ears as her own bodyguards stood there like statues, "Then talk before I shatter your spine next. Where did the kid go to? It better an answer I would want to hear or else..."

"I-I don't know! I never got to see the coordinates!" The guard blurted out in a muffled voice, "They kidnapped my wife and kids... I had no choice! If I didn't do as they told me through a note, they would have killed them!"

"hand over the note, NOW!" Mera yelled once again after kicking the man away.

"I-I can't! They'll kill my family if I did-"

"If you don't then I'll kill you, fcking moron! Hand me the note THIS INSTANT!"

The guard was stunned into silence. He didn't know what he was supposed to do. He wanted to see his family one more time, but if he didn't hand the note to the woman, she would most definitely kill him. He was doomed whether he gave the note away or not.

Roughly 10 seconds had passed, when the guard decided to give Mera the note. If he wasn't going to see his family regardless, he could at least do a good deed. He gave up the note and decided to wait for a month. If he couldn't find his family by the end of it, he would... kill himself and hope he'll be reunited with his family in the afterlife.

Mera only took a look at the note and immediately realised who was behind it. Her guess was correct, it was Donovan. At least he was the one who had written the note. She could recognise his handwriting anywhere.

But there was something else... a black rose was printed at the lower edge of the note. The symbol of royalty.

"Get to the castle!"

Chapter 162 – Foul Play (2)

Hu... Hu... Hu...

Ashton slowly calmed his nerves down. It had only been around 10 minutes since the mysterious voice disappeared, and yet those 10 minutes felt like hours to him. He had been relentlessly attacked by night creatures of various types.

Some had blades attached to their hands, while some were heavily armoured. So much so, it took Ashton to give his all just to take two of them down. However, the most dangerous ones amongst them were the cloaked ones.

They were extremely difficult to see in the dark corridors, let alone kill. But the strangest thing was that all of them had a humanoid shape.

Ashton had heard and seen a lot of different night creatures, but they were by far the most peculiar of the bunch. Yet that wasn't all. There seemed to be no end to them as waves after waves kept appearing in front of him, not giving him any rest.

Had it not been for the time he spent inside the dungeon before, he would have died more than five times already. Initially, Ashton had thought he would be able to take care of them all using his [Revenger] class abilities only, but now... that did not seem to be the case anymore.

'Enough is enough, I don't think I should be wondering about keeping my secret anymore.' Ashton thought, 'The way things are proceeding, without the help of Blood Magic and Necromancy, I'd die soon.'

But there was a bit of a problem there... since the man behind the voice could see him, it was safe to assume that the place was filled with cameras. But even with his enhanced vision, he wasn't able to locate any surveillance device. Probably due to the dark.

Ashton was confident enough about killing the creatures, along with the perpetrators who had been hiding carefully in the shadows. There was no way for him to make sure that the surveillance footage wouldn't get sent somewhere else before he was able to kill everyone inside the bunker.

Hell, he wasn't even sure whether the man was in the bunker or not. If Ashton had to take a guess, the man wasn't in the bunker. Judging from the way the creatures inside the bunker were running rampant everywhere, there was no way someone was controlling them.

'Fuck! What should I do? Wait a moment... This could work.'

Ashton immediately opened his status tab and dumped all of the unassigned points to increase his mana by 250 points. The increase might seem meagre, it would be instrumental in what he was planning to do next.

The following moment, he jumped out of his hiding place. After that, it only took a moment for the swarm of creatures to come chasing him. He stood there in his fighting stance and fought as usual, but completely gave up on defending himself.

He was getting recklessly assaulted by the humanoid creatures. His HP was dropping down at an alarming rate, but thanks to the potions he had, it never went down below 80%. However, his blood was still gushing out of the innumerable wounds he had so graciously accepted.

'A little bit more...'

Soon a small pool of blood was formed underneath his feet. At that moment Ashton set his plans in motion and quickly equipped the [Grim Reaper's Earrings]. As soon as those earrings clasped themselves around his earlobes, he felt a surge within him. That 250 points worth of mana had turned into 1000 points, thanks to the earrings' effect.

[Unique Skill: Blood Mist has been activated.]

The next moment, all the blood that had flown out of him, turned into toxic mist. Moreover, he no longer had to worry about the camera recording anything. The mist was so dense, anyone watching the feed would have a tough time even outlining someone's shadow, let alone the person.

"Let's start the killing spree, shall we?"

With that being taken care of, Ashton no longer had to worry about leaking his secret out. Also, he had the perfect opportunity to test his summons.

[Unique Skill: Valhalla has been activated.]

"Come forth!"

A black portal materialised in between Ashton and the night creatures out of thin air. A second later, Sven jumped out of it followed by nine skeletal wolves. Sven immediately swung his broadsword, severing half a dozen heads in a single blow.

The wolves weren't any less fearsome either. Each of them was utilising their agility to their advantage. Although they could not finish the creatures as quickly as Sven, they were at least able to tremendously slow them down.

On top of all that, Ashton's poison was already taking effect on the creatures, as they soon began to suffocate in the mist. Just like that, the tables had been turned. Ashton was no longer on defence. He was going all out instead.

Sven began spinning his sword around himself like a tornado. Anyone who was unlucky enough to get within his reach immediately had their heads chopped down or their body was sliced into half. Then there were those who were even more unlucky and did not die from a single blow.

The like of them were taken care of by the wolves as they tore their flesh away till their hearts stopped beating. The empty bunker was soon covered with corpses all around and the best part about it? Ashton was receiving a tremendous amount of exp.

'You must be tearing the hairs off of your head by now,' Ashton sniggered, 'The mist only blocks your vision and not the sounds. You must be hearing the cries of the creatures as they die, thinking what the hell is going on here. Don't worry, if you're here, you'll find out soon enough.'

Ashton wanted to jump in himself but ultimately decided there was no reason for him to do so. Sven and the wolves were more than sufficient for the task. Also, he kind of needed to conserve his strength, after all, one could never know what could be making its way towards them.

In the meantime, back at the capital, Jonathan was enraged. The black rose might have been the symbol of royalty, but there was yet another group of people who were authorised to use the royal insignia... The Conundrum.

But why would they go after Ashton? They should have known that he was under the protection of the kingdom and the king himself. They did not have the authority to hurt anyone Jonathan had taken under his wings.

Yet those bastards completely disregarded it as if Jonathan's permission did not mean anything to them. Jonathan had always let them run wild, and maybe they had forgotten who he was. If they hadn't, then why would they so blatantly disregard his orders?

"Those bastards... just who do they think they are!" Jonathan yelled and shattered his throne with a single blow, "They dare go against my wishes? THEY DARE!?"

"Your highness, please calm down-" One of the ministers tried to calm the situation believing that the Conundrum must have a reason for doing something this rash, but Jonathan did not care.

"Shut your mouth, maggot!" Jonathan merely pointed his finger at the minister and the latter collapsed on the floor struggling for air, "Summon the royal knights. All of them! We'll arrest all those Conundrum bastards and put them in their places... right beneath my feet!"

The ministers immediately went to work, calling back all of the knights who had been away for different missions. They knew the Conundrum had opened the Pandora's box that would not close unless it gets its fill of flesh and blood.

In the meantime, Mera was standing right in the middle of the throne room along with her guards. She had never seen Jonathan lose his cool this bad before. Hell, the angriest she had seen him was when she nearly killed her half-sister, and even then he wasn't as angry as he was now.

She had not expected him to go bat-shit crazy when she delivered the news of Ashton's disappearance to him. The two of them must be closer than she had expected for him to have such a reaction.

That being said, time was running out. It had already been almost half an hour since Ashton went inside the portal. They simply could not waste any more time in waiting for the knights to arrive at the palace. They needed to move, now.

"Father, with all due respect to your knights, we are running out of time." Mera said as calmly as she could, "If we don't leave immediately, then god knows what would happen to Ashton!"

"We can't just let the king leave without proper security. That too with the likes of you!" Yet another minister opened his mouth, but at the end of the day, he was right.

It wasn't a secret that Jonathan and Mera had a strained relationship. Hell, some would say that the father was at the top of the daughter's hit list. That being said, the ministers simply could not let their king leave with a supposed enemy.

"Fine then... just tell us where we can find him and we'll go and rescue Ashton. You and your knight can come later."

"No. I will come with you.. After all, the boy is just as important to me as he is to you."

Chapter 163 – Foul Play (3)

BAM!

Yet another beast was sent flying away. Ashton's summons had gone on a rampage, especially Sven who had become death itself for all those humanoids. Sven's swings were nothing like before. There was no hesitation in attacking the ones who dared to harm his master.

His technique was perfect. Each of his swings was destined to chop at least one head off of the shoulders of his enemies.

He was easily pushing them back, yet something felt weird. Ashton had searched every room, and every corner of the place they were in and yet he couldn't find a way out. Every room he went inside was either empty or filled with a foul smell. Even worse than that of the dead following him around.

It seemed that the portal was the only way out of there, but it too was inactive. The only good thing that came out of the farce was the exp he got as Sven massacred everyone.

'At least I figured something out. Whoever is behind all this shit isn't here.' Ashton thought before cancelling [Valhalla].

Although he could put more souls in there, he decided not to, because these humanoid creatures weren't anything special. Also, his HP had reduced to 50%, thanks to the excessive use of [Blood Mist]. It was a good idea to wrap everything up and prepare for what was to come next.

Ashton knew the man would have some kind of a backup plan. But rather than waiting for the person to stir some shit up, he decided to take matters into his own hands.

"If there isn't a way out, I'll simply make my own." Ashton flexed his shoulders while clenching his hands into fists and slamming the wall in front of him with all his might.

It took a couple of strikes, but he finally managed to destroy the wall. However, he wasn't expecting to see what was in front of him. It was yet another corridor, an exact replica of the one he had just been inside.

However, the two corridors were not linked with each other through any means. No doors, no windows, nothing. It was almost as if the building was just a huge maze... or a prison to keep something locked inside.

[You have discovered the long lost 'Eastern Palace'.]

[A hidden mission has been triggered.]

—

The secret of the Eastern Palace

[Introduction]: You have stumbled across the ruins of the Eastern Palace. Believed to have been lost long before mutations even existed. Till now, it was believed to be a myth, an abandoned castle with promises of riches to those who could find it. But what if you end up finding more than just riches here?

[Objective]: Uncover the secret of the Eastern Palace.

[Task]:

>> Main quest: Locate the treasury of the Eastern Palace.

>> Side quest: Find more about the mysteries hiding in the shadows.

[Progress]: 0/2 quests completed.

[Reward]:

>> Information regarding the Eastern Palace.

>> Detailed map of the Eastern Palace, with hidden pathways marked.

[Mission Commissioned by]: Unknown

[Priority Level]: 10 (The host cannot ignore the mission, there is no time limit but the host cannot leave the mission grounds before completing the mission. Unless they are willing to embrace death.)

—

"Really? Yeah, it's a great time to give me a mission. It's not like I'm trying to get out of here ASAP. Fcking bullshit!"

Ashton wasn't pleased, to say the least, but it wasn't like he had any options either. The mission had the highest priority. He couldn't ignore it even if he wanted to.

Thankfully, there was no time limit for him so he could, at least in theory, finish the quest. On the other hand, the appearance of the palace had some good news along with itself.

Since the area hadn't been discovered before, the chances of someone watching him were next to nothing. Which in turn meant he could go haywire without fearing any consequences of his secrets being leaked.

"Yeah... wishful thinking ain't gonna help me out here." Ashton shook his head, "There's no way the people who placed cameras and other shit in the corridors before wouldn't know about this place. My guess is... they knew there was something behind the walls but didn't know what."

Ashton continued, "Maybe that was the whole point behind bringing me here. They wanted me to find what was here... and I fell right inside their trap. Welp... no point crying over spoilt shit."

There was one more thing bugging Ashton. Why the hell was a palace designed like a maze? It must have been a defence tactic, but if someone wanted to invade the palace, they could have simply destroyed the walls and made a path right to whatever was in the middle of all this mess.

At least that's what he was going to do. But first, he wanted to look around and see if there was anything of importance there before heading into the next corridor or whatever.

Maybe if his luck was still as good as before, he might even end up finding the lost pieces of the Grim Reaper's set. He looked around for a bit, but couldn't find anything. Just like the previous corridor.

But the eeriness of the situation was slowly getting to him. Not to mention the absence of any kind of night creature. Both the things when coupled together... seemed odd. But since his [perception] couldn't find anything, Ashton felt he was just being paranoid and overthinking things.

When in reality, that was his guts screaming at him. His [Perception] had been fooled before and it could be fooled again. However, his hunch had never failed him... just like this time. As Ashton was about to break the next wall, he realised he had something that could be of some use to him.

It was the thermal scanner that Baiter had given when they visited the outskirts of the swamp. Ashton used the device. According to the machine, he was already surrounded by various heat signals.

"Fuck me..." Ashton mumbled as he barely managed to get away unharmed.

The ground he had been standing on a mere second, was blown into smithereens. As the clouds of dust began settling down, Ashton finally got a view of the 'thing' that attacked him.

"A robot? What the hell?"

Chapter 164 – Foul Play (4)

No, it couldn't be a robot. It had to be something else. A piece of metal shouldn't show up in thermal scans, right? The scanner must be broken. After all, his perception should have alerted him already if anyone was around him.

That's what Ashton would have thought before increasing his intelligence. But now he knew better than that.

"What am I even thinking? Of course, they can show up on the scans. They have to have a power source within themselves and the power source would inevitably release heat." Ashton faintly mumbled as more and more automatons walked into his sights, "Damn... I've started talking like Baiter."

Slowly more and more of them revealed themselves. They kept coming until their number was well over 30. At that point, Ashton stopped counting them and began thinking about countering them instead.

The robots didn't attack him like before but calmly walked towards him. As they did, he realised his go to classes were useless against these metallic bastards. They don't have blood so using [Aggravate] was out of the question and so was [Blood Poison].

Also, the necromancy skills were in cooldown and would remain so for about an hour. So calling out Sven and the wolves was out of the question.

As much as Ashton wanted to use [Revenge] on them, he had to save it for later. According to his assumption, these zones within the maze were more like trials. Trials that one needed to overcome in order to reach the treasury of the palace.

That being said, Ashton was more or less sure of the fact that these robots weren't the last of his enemies. More would come and when they did, he would need his abilities more than ever. He simply couldn't use them as he pleased. Especially the skills with absurdly long cooldown periods like that of Revenger class.

"Well, looks like it's time to go old school."

At that moment, Ashton realised how much he had been depending on his class abilities rather than the strength of his fighting style and techniques.

[Skill: Battle tactics has been activated.]

[Perk: Reflex has been activated.]

It was Ashton's turn to go offensive now. The human-sized robots did not hesitate either. A dozen of them charge into the fight while the rest of them watched the action carefully. Ashton thought it was weird considering their initial attack. But he wasn't complaining.

As long as they attacked him in small groups, he was more than happy to indulge them. On top of that, the automatons had their weakness exposed to him... their glowing chest.

It took Ashton little to no effort to recognise what it could have been. It was their power source, their heart. As long as he was able to destroy that, the automatons wouldn't be able to do shit.

But coming up with a plan and executing it were two different things. Ashton had no difficulty in destroying the first couple of automatons that were within his reach. But things quickly took a turn.

As Ashton went to destroy the next automaton's heart, it got buried deep within its chest. Instead, what he ended up destroying was some sort of an explosive.

"Son of bitch!" Ashton snarled as blood dripped out of his pale white cheeks.

The egg-shaped explosive was filled with poisoned shrapnel, most of which had met their mark. The [Nemean Hide] was able to protect his torso, but not his face. If he hadn't turned his head around at the last possible moment, at least one of his eyes would have been lost right then and there.

On a positive note, neither he was feeling any pain, nor was the poison strong enough to hurt him in any way. Both pain resistance and poison resistance were doing their job well. Also, Ashton was a bit more... attentive now.

'These fckers are full of tricks... I need to be careful.' Ashton carefully took some steps back.

His eyes were scanning the automatons, noticing their slightest movements. Earlier Ashton thought it would be easy to handle these metallic shells. But now he was realising how wrong he had been.

These robots weren't simply boxes of metal. They were more sophisticated than anything Ashton had ever fought. Even the night creatures weren't as unpredictable as them. But just that, Ashton had a light bulb moment.

"If I'm having a hard time against them, there are a lot of people who will feel the same." he smirked while wiping the blood off of his face, "I guess, I should let Baiter have a look at them. With the reproduction skill of his, he just might be able to make some for me."

At that moment, Ashton had made up his mind. Earlier he wanted to get rid of automatons to proceed to the next room. But now, he wanted to store them in his inventory in as perfect condition as possible.

But while he was planning his next move, the automatons had already made their own. Ashton was completely surrounded. Without wasting a single moment, one of the automaton's lashed out. This time, with a short blade that was attached to their forearm.

Thanks to [Battle Tactics] and [Reflex], Ashton was easily able to dodge the attack by sidestepping at the last moment. But as he did, yet another automaton lunged at him.

However, this time Ashton wasn't fazed. He had more or less expected something like this to happen the moment they had surrounded him. He executed a flawless backflip over the automaton, grabbed its head and ripped it off with ease.

"Tsk... so much for keeping them intact." Ashton shook his head before throwing the severed head at the automaton standing next to him, knocking it over as well.

He then proceeded to rip its power source out and stored it inside the inventory.

"Baiter's automatons wouldn't be of any use if he couldn't replicate the power source in some capacity." He turned to face the automatons once again who now had a variety of weapons drawn, "I guess keeping one or two of you intact would do. As for the rest.... well, you'll have to make do with being spare parts."

Defeating those automatons was a bit more... complicated than Ashton would have wanted. Not because they had weapons or armours to challenge him. But because of their exceptional ability to adapt to the fight while it was still going on.

Every time Ashton killed one of them, the others learned from the experience of their fallen comrade and quickly changed their strategy to counter the intruder. For example, as soon as they got aware of Ashton's superior agility, they immediately stopped confronting him head-on.

Instead, they began deploying traps everywhere and no matter how careful Ashton was, he was bound to step foot on one of those, and hellish pain would follow. At least he assumed it would have been hellish pain considering he was still feeling some pain despite [Pain Resistance] was at level 10.

The more the battle was drawn out, the worse it got for Ashton. Soon it came to a point where Ashton decided it was best to ignore the automatons and just stall for some time. At least till [Valhalla] was off the cooldown.

In theory, if new fighters were introduced in the fight, the automatons would have to 'reset' their target and quit focusing on Ashton. Which should confuse the automatons long enough for his summons to destroy them all.

"At least there's enough space for me to run around..." Ashton mumbled before sliding between the legs of the automaton in front of him, "and here I was thinking I'll keep them in pristine condition for Baiter to research. Nothing ever goes as I planned in the accursed world, do they?"

While running around, Ashton was readily pulling out some crucial gear from his inventory to use them against the automatons. The prominent among them was the Mask of Vampirism. If it hadn't been for the mask's [One With The Shadow] skill, he wouldn't be having a good time running around as he was.

The mask's teleportation ability was indeed helpful, but so was the immunity it provided against psychic attacks. Ashton was still wondering how the hell were those metallic bastards able to psychic attacks when they didn't even have a 'human' brain, but he was too busy running around to stop and ask one of the automatons.

Suddenly an automaton sprung out of the ground, swinging his modified blade at him from a low angle. Ashton was not expecting those bastards to be hiding underground. As a result, the attack came to him as a surprise.

However, he quickly recovered from the shock and parried the strike with barbarous force. He then went to chop its head off, but the automaton popped another blade from the left side, in an attempt to slash his abdomen.

Ashton immediately let go of the twin sword he had in his left and grabbed the automaton's blade instead. Before thrusting it backwards, right through its head. The automaton had no chance against Ashton's self-harming move.

The automaton collapsed on the floor, its head dangling backwards like a pendulum. Ashton kicked his body away before taking a breather for the first time.

"This ain't good... ain't good at all," he mumbled while staring at the gaping hole in his left hand.

Although he felt little to no pain and the blood was already striving to dry up slowly, things were not looking good for him. He was realising how stupid he had been to cancel [Valhalla] before checking if there was someone or something behind the walls or not.

However, he couldn't just stand there thinking about his choices. If he wanted to think, he could start thinking about why the hell did he keep getting into situations like these.

The automatons were slowly catching up to him. Not to mention that more of them could be hiding around. Just as he thought so, two more automatons ripped the floor apart as they jumped out of their hiding place.

However, rather than using their blades, they bombarded Ashton with grenades that exploded right before his face.

Ashton tried blocking as much shrapnel as he could from harming his face, but he found little success. The sudden explosion was proved to be too much and... he lost an eye right then and there.

His entire face was covered in his own blood. Blood that got into his only remaining eyes, messing up whatever vision he had left. The automatons attacked once again, stabbing him everywhere, while he weakly tried to fight back.

The following moment, everything turned dark... it felt like he was being dragged into the depth of hell. He felt defeated... no, he WAS defeated. He had lost to some metal scraps. His parents would have been proud.

He fell to the ground... lifeless. At least that's how he appeared to be. There were no signs of movement in his body... at least till the automatons approached to check him.

"Intruder... had been killed." One of the automatons spoke in its electronic voice, "All headhunters are requested to collect the destroyed fighters and proceed to stasis chambers-"

Before the automaton could complete its procedural announcement, a whip wrapped around its neck and ripped its head off in one swift move. The remaining automaton immediately went into action but was tackled down as well.

On top of him was an enraged Ashton who appeared to have lost his at that moment. He quickly picked up the blades and drove them right through the automaton's heart. The automaton was completely unprepared for the sudden attack and fell immediately.

"YOU FUCKING PIECES OF SHIT! YOU DARE DISFIGURE ME?" He roared at the top of his lungs while repeatedly stabbing them, but his voice... it sounded nothing like him, "YOU MOTHERFUCKERS THINK IT'S EASY TO REPLACE AN EYE? Why am I even shouting at you... I shouldn't have trusted this fucker with our body in the first place."

He was sick and tired of their traps and foul plays. It was a war and everything was fair, but Ashton simply couldn't take it anymore or maybe it wasn't him who felt like that... but his alter ego.

"Fuck this... where the hell am I either way? Shit... I need to fix this bastard's eye first. There you go. You should be thankful to me, Astaroth, for fixing your eye. But I guess you can't hear me...." Astaroth sighed before taking a look around, "Where the heck did this bastard fell to eh?"

Chapter 166 – Corridor Three (1)

It had been around six hours since Ashton went missing and Mera and Jonathan formed a temporary alliance. yet even after that, locating Ashton was proving to be a herculean task. Soon, everyone under Jonathan's command was on the case.

It took them some time, but with the help of the brightest minds in Deja, they were somehow able to find the coordinates of the portal Ashton had travelled to. But there was a slight problem... the portal had been deactivated from the other side.

They could have travelled there on foot, however, it wasn't possible. Because... Ashton had been teleported on an island infested with undead creatures... well, not completely undead creatures. Something between undead and night creatures.

A human research facility was supposed to be there. back when the humans and the mutants were fighting each other, the humans in their desperation started doing lots of... unconventional experiments.

All in hopes of finding a way of defeating them mutants. Primarily the werewolves and vampires as they were the primary occupants of the eastern hemisphere. It goes without saying the humans were defeated shortly and as werewolves did not have any interest in the human science project, the vampires took over the island.

They were the only ones who 'valued' humans for more than food. But one day, approximately 80 years ago, the vampires living on the island fled back to their main kingdoms. At least those who could escape did so.

Jonathan had been worried about why the vampires were fleeing the scene. To which the only reply he received was 'Venom'. The humans were prickly bastards and had set up traps all over the island before escaping to space. Almost as if they didn't want anyone to get their hands on whatever that was hidden there.

'I have been thinking of visiting the place, but this...' Jonathan was clearly worried about Ashton.

While he didn't want to believe about 'Venom' spillage, when the vampires informed him about it, he couldn't take the risk either. On top of that, the Conundrum had been oddly insistent about not visiting the island which now made Jonathan wonder if they had some sort of special operation going on there.

"Everyone is scared. They won't say it on the face but it's clear none of them wants to visit the Island of Doom." Mera spoke slowly, "I would usually whip them up till they begged to visit the island. But I don't think even that would work."

"There's no need to force anyone to tag along." Jonathan set his gaze on the horizon, "The two of us will go. If you're afraid of your wellbeing, you can either stay back or force some of your... bodyguards to follow us."

"You'd like that won't you?" Mera scoffed, "What is it that you want? A golden opportunity to prove to the kid that you care more about him or to show the kingdom your strength while staining my reputation?"

"As much as I would like to do both of those things, right now, I don't have any such intentions." Jonathan found himself almost smiling with bickering with his 'daughter', "You do know that even with our abilities, we are just as susceptible to venom as the rest of our kind right?"

"I was afraid of dying, I would never have stood up against you in the first place. Enough talking now, we should head over to the island ASAP." Mera turned her back towards Jonathan, "I just hope that moron is still alive somehow."

While back at the hidden palace...

"Pathetic, pathetic! I was promised a strong body, not some fragile one who couldn't even beat robots created by tier 2 beings?! How the fck am I supposed to fight tier 7 or even tier 5 creatures like this?"

Astaroth was disgusted by how weak his body was. He had been lying dormant for over a decade, in hopes that when he woke up he would have a strong enough body to exact revenge on the ones responsible for his downfall.

At least that was supposed to be the plan when the humans found him inside the meteorite that caused the mutation of the planet itself. Evolving the inhabitants of the planet from tier 1 to tier 2 beings.

The tier of beings was evaluated by the number of times a species had evolved in terms of genetic as well as technology. Right now the planet known as the earth was only at tier 2 out of the 7 tier list. That too was thanks to Astaroth's former species, who were already on tier 6 when he was betrayed by his most loyal subjects.

"To imagine I woke up like this. Without enough intelligence to even comprehend the basic concepts of transcendence. This moron has never even been to space for fuck's sake! What a pathetic excuse of a... never mind. Now that I am in complete control, maybe I could change some things."

Astaroth sighed and traced the battlefield for any surviving robots. But there were none. All he could see was a scrapyard with various robot parts scattered around. All of them had been taken care of by his hands and a few administrative privileges that he still had despite being 'dead' for a while.

Astaroth was confused why he still had those privileges. But if he had to take a guess, he would say it was either the work of 'Lucifer' or 'Beelzebub'. The only two among his kind whom he could still trust.

After all, they were the ones who helped him escape certain death and even influenced the humans to save his 'remains' after the meteor containing him crashed on the planet. All in the hopes of resurrecting him through transplanting his organs into an unsuspecting host.

"There is one way to confirm whether Lucifer was helping this brat or not."

He opened the missions tab, and there it was. A mission had been issued to the boy by Lucifer. Apart from that, the kid had a couple of incomplete quests.

"A priority 10 quest..." Astaroth smacked his head, "I need this bastard to stay alive and for that... I'd have to help him finish the mission. Great... I just got back alive to babysit a kid. Nice.. Very nice."

Chapter 167 – Corridor Three (2)

Meanwhile at an unknown location...

The Conundrum had gathered at one place, to discuss the plan of their failure. Failure that would scar them forever. What failure do you ask? Failure to lure one damned child to his demise.

"Who was responsible to get the fcking kid here?" the man wearing a plain white mask asked the rest of them who had gathered around the table.

Out of the half a dozen people present there, all of them were wearing masks, except one... who happened to be Donovan. He wasn't an official member of the Conundrum yet and never was going to be one.

He was just a pawn in a bigger game, to be used and sacrificed like hundreds before him. And it seemed he knew about it as well. But this time he was completely out of his depth. He betrayed Mera because he knew even she couldn't have found him.

But with the Conundrum, it was an entirely different case. They didn't need to seek him out as they knew his next move even before he could come up with something. They were fearsome indeed, but it seemed there was someone who could outsmart them. However, no one knew who could do something like that to them...

"I believe I asked a question." The man repeated the question once again.

"I was." The one wearing a bull mask raised his hand.

Demon mask got up and gracefully walked up to where the Bull was seated. While the rest of them had their eyes in front of them. All of them knew what was about to happen next and none of them was eager to see what followed.

With a moment as quick as lightning, the man's head was severed. His blood splattered everywhere. As for his head, it rolled over and stopped right in front of Donovan. The man's eyes still fidgeting as if he was alive. But a moment later, he was gone for good.

"Looks like our brother selected his heir right before cruelly leaving us. What a sad, yet auspicious coincidence." The Demon said while wiping his hands on the dead man's shirt, "Mr Donovan, please accept a seat the mask lying in front of you like... an invitation of joining our ranks."

Donovan knew better than to question the leader, so he did as he was told and wore the bloodied mask. The moment he did so, something in him changed. He could feel the mask pouring some sort of energy directly into him.

But that wasn't all, his mind was being filled with new memories. Memories that weren't his own. Donovan wasn't even sure if the memories belonged to one person or two? Maybe even three... it was strange.

At first, it felt weird as if his body was rejecting the unknown power, but soon it embraced the newfound power with open arms. His stats skyrocketed and at the same time, the corpse in front of him withered away.

Only then did he realise the power, the strength, the memories, everything that he had received belonged to the man wearing the mask and a couple of others who wore it before him.

"Now that you are back, let's proceed with the important question." The demon snapped his fingers and the director bound in chains appeared right in front of them, "Who were the people aware of our dealing with the Vampires regarding the Island of Doom?"

"Island of Doom? Why are you bringing it up now?" A feminine voice came out of the one wearing the mask of a lioness, "I thought we were here to discuss the boy?"

"Because that's the place that fucking boy was teleported to!" the demon had lost his calm demeanour, "The king knows about it as well and for all he cares, he thinks we're the ones who threw the bastard there!"

The atmosphere of the room changed all of a sudden. They all knew they were in trouble if Jonathan was on the move. Their king had already made it clear that no one would touch the boy until he had fulfilled his purpose.

Yet they decided not to heed his command and went ahead with the plan and now they were in the middle of some colossal shit!

"Why the hell are you all panicking for?" The man behind the snake mask commented, "The king knows about the boy, boohoo. Haven't we allowed the 'king' to reign for far too long? So much so that he thinks he's over us all. I say it's time to make some changes and the island would be the perfect place for it."

"Huhu... haha!" All of a sudden, the director began laughing at them, "I always thought you conundrum people were so smart. After all, manipulating the kingdom while remaining in the shadows isn't an easy thing to do."

Everyone kept observing her. Waiting for her to say something else and she didn't disappoint them.

"You think you know a lot about the island, don't you? What if I said, the humans... Nah. It'll be more fun to let you fuckers see it for yourselves."

Astaroth was someone who was well acquainted with the 'blessings' as the people around the called. Which was funny considering how it was far from a blessing. Hell, some high tier species didn't have a blessing and yet they were ruling the skies over and below.

But he wasn't on the planet to educate these uncivilized swine. He had to find a way to connect himself with Lucifer or Beelzebub.

But Ashton did not have a two-way link between him and Lucifer because well, his brain wasn't strong enough to comprehend the necessary concepts needed for interstellar communication on its own.

In other words... Ashton was simply stupid. Maybe he wasn't considered stupid based on the average intelligence of the species occupying the planet, but on a mere galactic scale, his lack of intelligence was... concerning.

"I need to override Lucifer's controls and get this host faster, stronger, and more intelligent," Astaroth mumbled to himself before punching a hole into the next corridor, "But in baby steps. I wouldn't want this fool to overthink himself to death, now would I? Now let's see what do we have here.... of course, it had to be fucking undead."

Chapter 168 – Arch Lich (1)

For being someone of much higher civilization, Astaroth always found certain mutations disgusting and troublesome at the same time. One of them being the undead creatures. Disgusting because of the obvious reasons, their rotting smell and awful appearance and troublesome because of their lack of intelligence. They were driven by one thing only... their hunger.

Which made it almost impossible to strike deals with them, unlike the vampires and the werewolves. But the undead creatures that were standing in front of him were different. They were well aware of Astaroth's arrival and yet they did not take a single step towards him.

Instead, they stood frozen. Their eyes locked on the target. Their mouths drool over the possibility of eating something 'fresh' in god knows how long.

"They are being controlled by someone. The question is... are they being controlled by a Revenant, a wraith or a lich?" Astaroth mumbled to himself.

Each of those creatures had its own positives and negatives, not to mention the special characteristic.

If it was a Revenant, then killing these undeads wouldn't matter at all, as they would keep coming back to life again and again unless the soul of the revenant was either pulled out of its body or all of them were killed simultaneously.

But it was easier said than done. If one of them survived for longer than the rest, even by a fraction of a second, all of the efforts of killing them would get wasted. As the surviving undead would inevitably contain the soul of the revenant and bring all of the undead back to 'life' by jumping from one corpse to another. After all, Revenants had the ability to transfer their soul to any undead present around them.

As for Wraiths, they were a bit easier to handle. That is if Astaroth somehow managed to survive their life-draining ability. They also had a ton of immunities and resistance, but thanks to the Ashton brat somehow being able to unlock an admin's [Detection] skill, he would get to know the Wraith's weaknesses by getting to know its strengths.

Finally came the lich... probably the most troublesome of the bunch and a true sorcerer. Not only would Astaroth have to deal with its necromancy skill, but he would also have to be wary of any other magic and traps the lich might possess.

Furthermore, much like a revenant, simply killing the lich wouldn't accomplish anything. The lich would simply find one way or the other to come back to life as they don't have their soul in their body. Instead, one of the undead in their command would usually contain their 'soul'.

The only way to defeat a lich would be by killing the one having the soul and then destroying the Lich. The task might seem simple, but there was nothing more complex than a magician who abandoned its kind in search of immortality.

"No matter what creature it is, this brat was fucked if I didn't take the steering wheel on time." Astaroth sighed and took a step inside.

As soon as he did that, a voice erupted through the darkness, "Who dares to cometh with foul greed for me own treasure?" (Author's note: The creature is speaking in old English. The mistakes are not a typo.)

The words boomed inside the ancient-looking corridor as if dozens of speakers were narrating the same thing simultaneously. The undead heard the voice and immediately went down on their knees, greeting their long-forgotten king.

"Who else? It's your daddy. Open up and be a sweet boy and allow me a passage- Son of a bitch... it just had to be something worse than I expected, didn't it?" Astaroth immediately assumed a defensive stance only to find it meaningless moments later.

Since he was only inside the third corridor, he had assumed the creature would either have to be a Revenant, a Wraith or a Lich. How could he have known that a creature far worse than all of those three combined would be sitting on a gigantic throne in front of him?

—

<Error!>

The Creature's level is too high for the user to view any detail.

The Host is advised to escape with utmost urgency.

—

'Admin Override. Authentication code: 22b3c.' Astaroth mumbled absentmindedly and the details emerged in front of his eyes, 'I already know that creature is well over this bastard's paygrade.'

He already knew what the creature sitting in front of him was but was hoping to be proven wrong. Sadly, that wasn't the case. His worst fears had turned into reality. With Ashton's current state of levels... it was safe to say... Astaroth was about to die for the second time.

—

Name: Forgotten

Species: Zombie (Active), Human (Deceased).

Status: Arch Lich

Class: Necromancer

Title: [Heir Of The Eastern Palace], [Forgotten One], [Infatuated With Death]

Age: Unknown

Gender: None

Grade: D-tier (Evolution is no longer possible to conventional methods)

Affiliation: None

Level: 87 (Extremely Dangerous)

Stats:

HP: 50,000/50,000

Mana: 100,000/100,000

Damage: 167

Armour: 321

Stealth: 109

Stamina: 69

Agility: 98

Intelligence: 420

Nature:

Bored

Knowledgeable

Political smartness

—

"Mortals... as always are foolish." The crown-wearing skeleton smiled as Astaroth began panicking, "Do not be afraid. I take no pleasure in killing anymore. I have had my fill. It's the lastest thing on me own mind. I, however, do find myself taking pleasure in conversing with a creature having a brain for once."

Defeating him? Hell, it would be nothing less than a miracle if Astaroth was even able to scratch the bastard's frail robe. There was a time when creatures like the Arch Lich were nothing more than insects for Astaroth. But now, he was scared to fight one head-on.

Astaroth's gaze turned towards the undead around the Lich, and sure enough... even a single undead was much stronger than any other creature on the planet. At least according to the standard Ashton was aware of. At such a moment there was only one thing Astaroth could do.

"I humbly greet the mighty heir of the Eastern Palace, the great Arch Lich." Astaroth immediately went on his knees, just like the rest of the undead.

He hated every moment of it, but there was nothing much he could have done.. The Lich's spit was enough to turn the brat into jelly. How could he dare offend a being like that?

Chapter 169 – Arch Lich (2)

"Interesting..." The Lich hissed back, for someone who didn't have a face, the lich could oddly express himself better than anyone else, "It's been a long time since a mortal greeted me so kindly. The ones who previously found me made the grave mistake of attacking me on sight. A pity... I wanted them to enjoy the beauty of my palace."

"They probably couldn't see the majestic aura revolving around you, sire." Astaroth felt like puking but sugarcoating his words was the only thing that could ensure his survival, "After all, the beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder."

The only problem was... he needed to get into the treasury to complete the main quest. If he didn't, he would die. But asking about the treasury right from the start would simply result in his death at the rotten hands of the lich either way.

On one side was a canyon and on the other was a minefield, while he was standing on a strip not wider than the width of a strand of his hair. One wrong move and he was done for.

"I find your words... intriguing. You speak as if you know my identity... Are you aware of my identity, mortal?"

"You are the owner of the Eastern Palace, which itself demonstrates your greatness. For someone to become the heir of such a palace, one would have to be extraordinary."

"Haha! I don't think I have met a mortal like you in a long long time." The Lich laughed but the next moment his smile dropped, "What business do you have with me? If I do not like your answer then..."

The lich snapped his bony fingers and the undead surrounded Astaroth, ready to decapitate him on command.

"I think you already know what would happen..." The lich concluded his speech.

Astaroth took a deep breath. As much as he didn't want to, he had to state the reason why he was there in the first place. He could have tried lying, but he was more or less convinced that the lich already had cast some lie detection magic. If he lied, the undead soldiers around him would rip his flesh off the bones.

"To visit your treasury-"

"You are no different than those who came before you. All of you want my riches, yet none of you is worthy enough to step a foot inside. But... I'll give you one chance to prove you're worthy enough. All because you and I are not too different. I can sense the power of death that lies within me, lies within you as well."

The lich's reaction to Astaroth's words was nothing that he expected, he was surprisingly calm and behaving as if he couldn't care about the stuff inside the treasury anymore.

Instead, all the Lich wanted was to find a suitable person to pass down his secrets to and right now, a qualified candidate was standing right in front of him. But every candidate has to pass a test before they are awarded.

[A hidden mission has been triggered in relation to your previous quest.]

—

[Title]: Worth.

[Introduction]: The ruler of the Eastern Palace has taken a liking to you as you are a necromancer as well and believes you could become his successor. If you could pass his test.

[Objective]: Prove that you are worthy of being named the successor of the eastern palace.

[Task]: Answer all of the Arch Lich's riddles correctly

[Progress]: 0/3 riddles answered.

[Reward]:

>> Ownership of the Eastern Palace

>> Access to the treasury

[Punishment]: Failing to answer even one of the riddles correctly would result in instant death. Only for you to get resurrected again to serve the Lich for all eternity.

[Mission Commissioned by]: The Arch Lich

[Priority Level]: 10 (The host cannot ignore the mission, there is no time limit but the host cannot leave the mission grounds before completing the mission. Unless they are willing to embrace death.)

—

'Alright... this is it. The moment to leave this place.' Astaroth thought and accepted the quest, 'On top of that, this place... would be perfect for what I have in mind for later.'

As soon as Astaroth accepted the mission, the lich signalled his undead to move back. The test of life and death was about to commence.

"It brings me happiness to know that you are interested in becoming my successor." The lich smiled wanly, "Here is the first riddle. You measure my life in hours and I serve you by dying. I die quickly when I'm thin and slow when I'm fat. The wind is my enemy but also can be my ally. What am I?"

"Wind is the enemy and also an ally... that has to be fire. But fire can't be the answer, it has to be something that uses fire, a torch? No... a torch never dies, the fire on it does." Astaroth was lost in his thoughts and didn't even notice the undead slowly approaching him, "It has to be... a candle!"

The Lich stared at him with a poker face. Not giving Astaroth the slightest clue whether his answer was correct or not. The moment was nerve-wracking until the Lich smiled and his soldiers stepped back.

"For a moment I thought you wouldn't be able to answer." The lich clapped twice to show his amazement, "Let's make it a bit more difficult, shall we? I have cities, yet no citizens. I have kingdoms, yet I'm no king. I have forests, but no animals. I don't have treasures, yet no treasure hunter can proceed without me. What am I?"

Astaroth was a bit confused. The first three sentences had one thing in common. No citizens, no king, no animals, all pointed out towards one thing... an inanimate object. But the last phrase did not follow that scheme. However, the clues were enough to help Astaroth think of a few things.

'An inanimate object that any treasure hunter would need... there are a lot of things like that. Dynamite, Shovel, pickaxe, excavators... but none of them make sense out of the first three phrases.'

"Remember... the clock is ticking," The lich reminded Astaroth as the undead got closer to him than before.

'Damn it! If only I had a map of this place I could have avoided meeting this fucker... wait that's it!' Astaroth had a light bulb moment, "It's a map!"

"Correct again. Now, for the final riddle... I look flat, but I am deep. I give shelter to those who seek.

I take lives but offer them as well. At times I am beautiful, at times by death's side. I can be calm, angry and turbulent, all at the same time. I have no heart but offer pleasure as well as death.

No man can own me, yet I encompass what all humans need. What am I?"

As soon as the Lich was done with the riddle, Astaroth broke down laughing. The riddle was a tough one to answer... for those who had never heard of it before. As for Astaroth, he couldn't even remember how many times he had heard a riddle like that. That's why he was laughing. He was done.

"An ocean."

Chapter 170 – What The Hell Happened Here? (1)

"Here you go, my treasures are yours to claim." The lich smiled as the wide door opened in front of Astaroth, "But for now, you can only take three things from here."

"I thought I was supposed to be the owner of the palace?" Astaroth did not like the hidden conditions the Lich was now coming up with and didn't waste any time expressing his views either.

"For now, you are just my disciple. Nothing more." The lich reminded Astaroth, "You will need to get much stronger and learn to protect yourself first, before protecting the palace from invaders."

He continued, "Till that time comes, my soldiers and I will protect this place. That also means while I'm here, I am the true owner. Just like two swords cannot fit in one scabbard, two people cannot rule over the same palace."

Astaroth nodded as he knew better than to argue with a stronger entity. At least he was getting a choice and not some random materials. However, the quest wasn't completed yet. But the moment he stepped foot into the room, it did.

—

You have completed the following quest(s):

>> The secret of the Eastern Palace [Main Quest]

>> Worth

Material rewards would be shortly delivered to your inventory.

You have unlocked hidden Lore about the Eastern Palace. You can view the information in the [Hidden Lore] section. A detailed map of the palace has been added to your inventory.

You have received a new title!

[Owner of The Eastern Palace]: Intelligence +10 (will increase by 10 points whenever someone tries to invade the palace.)

—

Astaroth knew more notifications were on their way, so he immediately muted them all and went deeper inside to see what was so special about the treasury in the first place.

Unlike the rest of the palace, the treasury wasn't in a rundown condition. In fact, it appeared the room had been thoroughly cleaned and maintained regularly. Also, the treasury was the only room with active electricity in the entirety of the palace.

"It seems you really love this place, your highness." Astaroth politely remarked.

"This treasury is not just a collection of scrolls, books and artefacts. It also contains the knowledge I have gained over a... my old mind forgot how long I have been in this form for." The lich smiled wanly as he was reminded of the side-effects of immortality, "This place was made to serve as the record for my predecessor."

"Makes sense. I should probably start looking around now."

The lich nodded and silently stood at the entrance while Astaroth roamed around the gigantic room which was a half library and half armoury. There were lots of high-grade weapons, some so rare that they even made Astaroth greed a bit.

But he had to look for some special things. Things that couldn't be found anywhere else. It didn't matter whether it was a weapon, a skill page or an entire skill book. Since he was allowed to take only 3 things, he would make the best out of it.

'I was hoping I would find some high tier knowledge from this place, but I guess, this tier 2 planet would not give me anything par with universal knowledge.' Astaroth thought, 'i guess I'll have to find those when I get into contact with some higher tier civilisations later. For now, let's think about taking some skills that would dominate this planet.'

After wandering aimlessly for about an hour, Astaroth finally took his first item. A skill book with the knowledge about creating automatons and golems. That was the only available skill book Astaroth knew he would need once he made it out of the planet.

Sadly, his host did not have the creationist class with him, but since Ashton was collecting the automatons before he took over his body, Astaroth knew Ashton had some plans for recreating those. That's why he took the book.

'As far as being a creationist is concerned, there are other ways to obtain some useful subclasses. But for that, I would need to contact Lucifer and take the position of an Admin from him. Only for this Ashton guy of course.'

After taking an item for the future, Astaroth needed to secure his present as well. After all, not all strong monsters would turn out to be like the lich. They would be interested in his brains, but for a whole different purpose.

'This idiot won't get strong on his own. I will have to help him out or else he'll be my demise.'

"May I recommend this?"

All of sudden, Astaroth found the lich looming over his shoulder with another skill book. Astaroth was taken by surprise, as he didn't even realise how long the lich had been standing behind him. but he quickly regained his composure and took the book he was offered.

"What's this? Necromancy 101?" Astaroth joked but it didn't seem like the lich enjoyed his joke all that much, "Ahem, please accept my apologies. I make awkward jokes when I'm nervous."

The lich ignored Astaroth's comments and said, "This book here hold all the knowledge I have gathered over the years regarding death and its ownership. It will help you to understand, learn and control the power of death efficiently."

Astaroth took the book and realised it wasn't just an ordinary skill book but a grimoire. Astaroth could not believe his eyes. Even in the high levelled civilisations, it is extremely rare to find a grimoire and yet this... beast was offering him one as if it was the least important thing he could care of.

But more importantly, the lich 'created' a grimoire? Astaroth didn't even know something like that was possible! How could a tier 2 creature create something that only a few select admins could? Yet he had undeniable proof right in front of him.

But what was the difference between a skill book and a grimoire? It was pretty simple actually. While anyone having a suitable class could learn the skills from the skill book or a skill page, it was impossible to do the same with a grimoire.

If anyone wanted to learn a thing or two from a grimoire, they would have to meet certain conditions to do so. Like having a certain amount of certain states, or having finished a certain quest.

This wasn't easy to do for most people as the grimoire never stated what quests or stats one needed to have to obtain the knowledge hidden with them. If someone had met the requirements, the grimoire would open otherwise it won't. That's all there was to it.

That being said, Astaroth had a way of knowing exactly what he needed to learn the secrets hidden in the grimoire. Through the [Detection] skill. But before that, there was something else he needed to take from the treasury. Something he couldn't get before.

"You said I can take whatever I want from here, is that correct?" Astaroth asked with a sincere look on his face.

"I remember my words. It is what I said." The lich replied positively and as he did, a crooked smile formed on Astaroth's face.

"Then how about letting me have that cloak of yours?" He smiled with a greedy look.