

Zompiewolf 171

Chapter 171 – What The Hell Happened Here? (2)

The lich stood there in silence. One has ever asked him for something with a smug look before, but rather than being angry, he was... pleased. For the first time in a long time, someone had outsmarted him. Or maybe it was his arrogance that brought him to his 'fall'.

"Very well then." The lich mumbled, "I told you, you could take anything from the inventory, and since I'm standing here along with the cloak, it also becomes a part of the deal. You are surprisingly cunning for a human..."

After a couple of moments, the lich smiled at Astaroth and took off his majestic cloak. The second the cloak was off of him, his intelligence and mana dropped by 20% as they had been boosted by the effects of the cloak.

[You have obtained: The Grim Reaper's cloak. 2/10 items have been collected.]

[Intelligence and Mana would be increased by 250% and 350% respectively upon equipping both the pieces of equipment.]

With the shiny black cloak in his hands, Astaroth was done picking whatever he could from the treasury. There were a couple of more things he wanted to get his hands on, but for now, it was enough. Too much greed would lead to his grave.

'Just woke up and already got a secret base of operations along with a security guard no one on the planet would mess with. Maybe this kid's luck ain't all that bad, eh?'

Astaroth smiled, however, as he did that, a strong explosion shook the ceiling. Something was going on there. He turned his gaze towards the lich who appeared to be just as clueless as him.

None of them knew what was going on. But that wasn't it. Astaroth slowly began to realise his control over Ashton's body was slipping away. Just like it did in the arena all those weeks ago. If the kid woke up while the lich was around, who knows what the idiot would do.

"I have to leave. Please do me a favour and seal this place up again as soon as I leave." Astaroth requested the Lich.

"As you please." The lich nodded in agreement.

He didn't bother to know why his successor was in such a hurry or what was that explosion. The action showed him the confidence he had in his strength. No matter who the foe was, the lich and his army were more than enough to take care of them all.

Sadly, it wasn't the same case with Astaroth. For all he was worth in his previous life, he was still pretty weak. It would take him years to even get himself back to a tenth of his previous strength. But for now, he had to run away before Ashton woke up.

'I'm not going to let a moron's foolishness take my life away. Not again!'

Astaroth thought and rushed out of the Palace with all his might. Hell, he even activated [Stride] skill to make sure by the time Ashton woke up, he would be far away from the Lich and the Palace altogether.

Slowly but surely his control over the body began fading away. Thankfully he was able to make it out of the third corridor before he completely lost control of his limbs.

"I hoped that fucker Lucifer would at least contact me before this brat took his body back. I guess I'll have to wait for him to either lose his control or get grievously injured to do anything else."

Astaroth mumbled as his legs gave out and he collapsed right where he had taken over Ashton's body, "It was a fun run... I hope you get stronger when I've awoken the next time brat."

As darkness covered his vision, Ashton woke up once again. Not knowing what had inspired there in a couple of hours he was knocked out. His vision slowly cleared up, but his memory was still hazy. But not for long.

A moment later he sat right up, breathing heavily as the memories flooded his head. He remembered facing against the automatons that proved to be a bit too much for him.

Then he remembered the grenade exploding right in front of his face. How the shards punctured his eyes and chest. He instinctively touched the parts he knew for sure were injured. Yet surprisingly, he wasn't injured at all.

He felt a bit tired as if he had been running a marathon, but apart from that, everything was just fine.

"Was it an illusion of some sorts?" Ashton mumbled in a sleepy voice, "No... there's no way it was an illusion."

he immediately opened his inventory and there they were. The broken pieces of all the automatons he had slain. But something was odd. There were a lot more automatons than he had defeated. But that wasn't all...

"When the hell did I get these things?"

The grimoire, the automaton skill book and especially the cloak. He could have mistaken getting the number of automatons wrong but he sure as heck would remember getting his hand on stuff like this.

As seconds turned into minutes, his confusion only grew bigger and bigger. There were a lot of things unaccounted for, even if he ignored the things within his inventory. As far as he remembered, there were quite a few automatons remaining when he was 'defeated'.

But now, there were none. Not having the answers was killing him on the inside. He was scared, confused and bewildered at the same time. Then as he looked around himself, he could see that someone else must have fought there. Someone, not him.

"What the hell happened here?"

But before he could ponder about it any further, he heard footsteps rushing towards him. Although he was fatigued, the sudden boost of adrenaline was enough to put him back to his feet and ready to fight. But there was no need to fight anyone as the people who entered the corridor were his well-wishers.

"Your highness and mistress? The two of them here.... no, why the heck are they here together?"

Chapter 172 – No Memories (1)

The two of them rushed towards Ashton, who didn't know how to respond to the concerned look on their faces. Not because he was surprised or anything, but because he knew, all they saw in him was a tool. An expensive one, but just a tool.

They were worried for his safety alright, but for their own greed. Well, who was Ashton to make a comment on it, after all, he saw the same thing in them.

Mera stopped to take a look at him. At the same time, Jonathan stood on the lookout for the inevitable trouble coming their way. Well, trouble that they would rather have not dealt with if they had a choice.

Getting inside the base wasn't as easy as they thought. Their blood-stained attire and swords were the proof of that.

Unlike Ashton who was directly teleported within the former human base, they had to fight their way through countless monsters and undead beings to get there. They were hopeful that the doors leading inside the base would still be functioning or at least they prayed for that.

But their prayers were not answered. The doors didn't budge even with the two of them trying their best. Instead, they had to blow it up, which in turn gathered a lot of creatures who were gradually making their way towards them.

"You good kid?" Jonathan asked Ashton.

"I've been better... but I'm good."

Ashton politely replied all the while Mera was intently looking at him for any injuries. Ashton's armour had blood on it as well, but surprisingly there wasn't a single wound on his body.

"Good. Can you still use weapons?"

Ashton nodded, but Mera butted in, "He must have been through hell here alone, and you're still planning on making him fight?"

"Yeah. He's a soldier and a soldier should never back down from a fight until and unless his limbs and head were severed off. Now, get ready for trouble." Jonathan retorted and turned his gaze towards the hole Ashton had made in the wall, "Here they come..."

The atmosphere suddenly got tensed. Ashton looked at the people who were there to 'save' him, and both of them were frowning hard. Since they were much stronger than him, he could only wonder what could make them worried.

The gravel scattered all over the floors started jumping on their place as the ground began to shake. The noise of over a hundred footsteps slowly got louder and louder and the ground began to shake more vigorously. The creatures were rapidly getting closer to them.

"You brought a horde in here, didn't you?" Ashton sighed but prepared himself for the fight ahead of him.

"You indeed have developed a sharp tongue," Mera growled and a moment later, both she and Jonathan transformed into full-fledged werewolves, "I just hope someday your brain gets sharp as well."

The scene in front of Ashton's eyes was breath-taking. Not one, but two werewolves changed forms right in front of his eyes.

But he knew what was to follow next so he jumped back. Mera had a weird transformation-related ability, an ability that could drive any human or werewolf in her vicinity to become a slave to her will. It was the same skill she used during the ceremony of turning Ashton into one of her kind.

Even with the distance between them, Ashton felt a strange attraction towards her, which he quickly broke away from by not looking at her. Her silvery fur was not getting close to him or his general who was alert like never before. Not in a hundred years.

But what about Jonathan? He should get affected by Mera's innate skill, right?

Ashton turned to look towards Jonathan who was right next to Mera but for some unknown reason, he was seemingly unaffected by her skill. Also, his transformation looked more fierce and strong than Mera's.

His burgundy fur wasn't anything especial unlike Mera's, but he had sharp bones popped out of his shoulders and fists, which gave him a menacing look. Not to mention his weirdly curved foot-claws that could easily rip off any form of flesh with minimal effort.

'Maybe I should try to transform as much as I can as well?'

But before he could do so, Mera stopped him and threw hers and Jonathan's daggers towards him.

"We'll sever their limbs, at least of as many as we can." She instructed without turning towards him, "You just deal the finishing blows, alright?"

"That's... not a lot of work."

"If I was in your place, I wouldn't complain. After all, you're being offered a ton of free exp." Jonathan chimed in with a smile, "Just think of it as our way of making it up to you for failing to protect you before."

Little did they know, getting absurd amounts of exp was poison for Ashton. At least eight dozen monsters were approaching them. Killing all of them would have usually made Ashton happy. But getting the exp could also upset the genetic balance within him which he couldn't afford.

'Three levels... that's the highest I can level up to without losing my shit.' He thought to himself as the horde of enemies got closer and closer to them.

The next moment, countless monsters burst through the small hole. At the same time, Mera and Jonathan jumped into the horde, hacking and slashing them relentlessly. It was almost impossible to be accurate 100% of the time.

They ended up killing more monsters than their limbs. Upon witnessing it, Ashton had a look of relief on his face. He jumped in as well, killing his first target among the horde of monsters. As he did, his relief got solidified further.

'Looks like I was getting worried for nothing!'

The exp those monsters were giving him were not even enough to level him up twice, let alone cause any imbalance in his genes.. That was the only thing Ashton had to know before he joined Jonathan and Mera in hacking those beasts for real.

Chapter 173 – No Memories (2)

Sometime later...

"About time you woke up." A familiar voice echoed in Ashton's ears.

Ashton was greeted with Mera's scarred face the moment he woke up. At first, he was startled, not knowing what she was doing in his room, but the memories of the previous day soon flooded his head.

A lot had happened back on the island and Ashton didn't realise how fatigued he was until Jonathan, Mera and him, were already on their way back to Deja. Fighting all those creatures didn't help him either. In the end, his body had been stretched long past his limits and he fell unconscious on the way back.

That's all he remembered. Still, he couldn't get past the uncertainties of the circumstance he found himself in. However, now wasn't the time to dwell on such minute details. For a bigger problem was probably waiting for him in the form of Mera and Jonathan.

"Let the boy breathe a bit, Mera. The questions can wait." Jonathan's voice echoed from the opposite corner.

He and Mera were the only ones in the room beside Ashton, inside his bungalow. Ashton turned to greet Jonathan, after all, he was the king and had to be treated with respect. But before he could put his thoughts into action, Mera jumped off the bed, staring at Jonathan like she was going to rip his eyes out.

"You're the one saying that when you forced him to fight those creatures back on the island?" She lashed out.

"The situation is different from then and now. That was a battlefield. This," Jonathan pointed around the room, "is his home. A place to rest and collect his thoughts."

"You might have a way with words father, but please, try feeding your bullshit to someone else who would believe you." Mera scoffed, "Why don't you just say that you want to ask him about everything there, in my absence?"

"If you know it that well, then why don't you do me a favour and get going?" Jonathan smiled before heading towards Ashton, "As much as I want you to be correct, I am genuinely concerned about him. If I wasn't, I wouldn't have personally made the journey to rescue him."

Mera opened her mouth to say something but quickly shut it back. She knew no matter what she said, Jonathan would easily turn her words against her.

After all, he wasn't only the king of the Lycania, but also a great politician and strategist who had a talent for using others' words against them. Much like Marc Antony, who in the tales of Julius Caesar, had once turned the roman crowd against Brutus by saying mere 30 lines. No more, no less.

That was one of the many reasons the other kingdoms did not want to interfere in his business. At least, till he did something he shouldn't and try to step into their territories.

"Also, how do you plan on questioning him with the culprits being absent?" Jonathan continued with a smile.

"The Conundrum? I thought they-"

"Oh, they must be tough to find for someone like you. But you don't think I'm foolish enough to let them operate without a leash around their neck, do you?"

"..."

Once again it was Mera's turn to remain silent. She didn't know for sure whether what Jonathan said was an intentional jab regarding Donovan or not. But it sure felt like it.

It hurt more because she knew she messed up by allowing Donovan to live as what happened with Ashton could also lead to Donovan one way or the other. After all, they more or less knew Donovan was working for the conundrum and not the king.

"Either way, those bastards would be in front of the court and will be trialled for heresy. Ashton, you will have to be there as well, as a witness." Jonathan stated what he had to and left the two of them there alone.

Mera stayed there for a couple of minutes before leaving as well. Finally, Ashton had some time to collect his thoughts for once. The answers he was seeking weren't going to appear in from of him out of thin air.

But he had a good way of finding a way to get a rough idea of what must have conspired at the eastern palace while he was 'unconscious'.

'Open mission logs.'

A tab with a complete list of the missions he had been assigned and those he had completed opened up in front of him. And sure enough, just as he had expected, someone or something must have helped him out while he was knocked out.

Not only the mission related to uncovering the secret of the palace had been completed, but he also had another mission that he didn't remember ever accepting in the first place. A mission to prove his worth to become a successor or some shit.

'The priority of the mission was set at 10. I would not have been able to get out of there without completing the quest.' Ashton slowly began piecing the puzzle together, 'Considering that I am out of there and alive, it means I completed the quest...'

He shook his head. How could he complete a quest if, for the life of him, he was knocked out? But if he somehow managed to do it, it would also explain the unknown rewards he had in his inventory. The skill books and... the cloak.

"Wait for a second! The Grim Reaper's Cloak? What the hell? I sure as hell did not find anything like this. I can forget about breathing but not about finding such a piece of equipment!"

Now he was sure as heck someone was controlling his body while he was unconscious. Someone must have used his body to take care of the automatons as well as the quest. That was the only possible explanation Ashton could come up with.

But without his memories, jumping to a conclusion just yet wasn't the right thing to do. Thankfully, he knew of a way to find for sure whether someone else was using his body and if what he was thinking was correct, then who was it?

"Lucifer needs to answer some questions. If he can control my blessing, then it wouldn't surprise me if he could also control me. I need to meet Rose. She is the only one who can help me get into contact with Lucifer."

He continued, "But before that, I need to sort the mess here first. As weird as it must sound.... I'm looking forward to meeting those who almost got me killed."

Chapter 174 – Escape Plan

Tensions were running high in the courtroom the next day. After a day full of rest, Ashton had recovered completely. But as usual, his heart was seeking vengeance on those who dared to put their hands on him. Albeit, indirectly.

More than that, he was looking forward to meeting Donovan. After all, Ashton wanted to return all the favours he had done to him while they were both living under the same roof. All those fights and shit he did to him under the guise of 'training'... all of it was going to haunt that bastard Donovan now.

Unlike Ashton's trial, the courtroom wasn't packed. Only a dozen or so people were present there, including him, Jonathan and Mera. Even the ministers were not allowed to attend the trial as it was something Jonathan wanted to take care of by himself.

'Just bring them out already...!' Ashton was busy fidgeting in his seat next to Mera.

Mera looked at him but didn't say a word. She simply placed her hand on his shoulder... quite awkwardly. Ashton didn't know what the fuck she was doing there, and his expression must have given his thoughts away as the next moment she took her hand off of his shoulder.

"Bring them in." Jonathan finally ordered and low and behold, six people were escorted inside the room, in handcuffs.

All of them had animal masks on their faces, except one who had a demon mask which looked... weird to say the least. Why the hell were they even wearing masks in the first place? They were supposed to get trialled here, it wasn't some sort of a fashion show.

"As I call your names, take your masks off. If you don't, then I'll take your heads off instead. Are we clear?"

"You cannot do this to us." The man with the demon mask bellowed, "We have saved and protected this kingdom before it even existed! We aided you during the war with the humans, we aided you every single step of the way, and this is how you decided to pay us back?"

"Mike Maquinn, be really careful with your words." Jonathan blasted the room with his cold aura, sending chills down the spine of everyone present there, "I am already itching to rip your filthy tongue out and feeding it to dire wolves. It would be wise if you don't infuriate anymore."

The man in the demon mask got silent all of a sudden. He was pretty sure he had done everything to hide his identity from everyone. Even his own family didn't know his true identity, and yet Jonathan had uncovered it as if it was a child's play.

"I remember instructing you to take your damn mask off. Or should I invite your family in to witness your true colours?" Jonathan reminded the man.

At this point, not only did Mike drop his mask, but the others also followed. Everyone except the guy with a bull carved on his mask was now standing there as they had been stripped out of their clothes.

The man called Mike looked almost identical to someone Ashton had been in contact with for a while... He looked the same as Rose. Except, Rose had a certain warmth in her eyes, but this man was... cold. As if he was hungry for someone's blood.

The next moment, all of them went on their knees. Whether it was due to shame, guilt or disappointment, no one knew.

"We have served this kingdom for longer than anyone." Mike mumbled, "We have protected it from countless dangers for years. Sacrificing more than just our lives for the sake of loyalty to this cursed kingdom. But now... we see the fault in our ways... we should not have ever aided you! You will drag this profane kingdom to ruins! All because of a fucking child?"

He spat in Ashton's direction but it was just as weak as the man's appeal of 'loyalty'.

"That fucking kid is someone under my protection, did you forget that?" Jonathan took a deep breath in an attempt to calm his raging blood, "Also, this trial is not about that fucking kid. It's about your heresy of not obeying my command! I told you... to stay away from him. Didn't I?"

Jonathan's temper got progressively worse to the point the walls around him began shaking. None had ever seen him get that angry, but for some reason, Ashton did not feel threatened by Jonathan's aura like before.

It almost felt as if he had experienced something more intimidating not too long ago, thus his body wasn't reacting to Jonathan's forceful aura. Also, something else had caught Ashton's attention. The man with the Bull mask...

While the rest of the 'Conundrum' was acting synonymously, that guy had neither taken his mask off nor was he kneeling down. It was like he had a different mind of his own and didn't care about dying or living.

Mera was looking at the same man as well, and just then something clicked inside Ashton's head. He recognised the smell coming from the man. Although he wasn't as built as Ashton remembered him, there was no mistaking it... the man behind the mask was Donovan.

Ashton's blood started boiling, but he forced himself to remain calm. Acting out in front of Jonathan and those conundrum bastards would only give the latter a chance to rebuke him. It would also make their point more valid which wouldn't look good either for Jonathan or him.

Till Jonathan was done handling his job, the only thing Ashton could do was dig his nails into his palms while waiting.

"You might see the boy in favourable light now, but you don't know what he was made for-" Mike started talking again but Jonathan cut him off.

"To kill our kind because he's the 'weapon'? I hate to disappoint you, but I have known that for a while now." Jonathan stated with a gleeful look on his face, "You people are really out of your depth here, aren't you? The great Conundrum, protector of Lycania, shadow rulers of this kingdom... but do you really know what's been happening here?"

"..."

"You have lost your touch long ago. If I wanted I could have gotten rid of you the moment you expressed your wishes to execute one of my offspring. But I didn't because you had been of immense help during the war with humanity."

He continued, "You ask what have I done for you? I have forgiven you for your past discretion. You have done things, I would have killed anyone had they had done it. But now you senile fools have crossed the last line by disobeying a direct order and this time you will pay!"

Suddenly, Mike broke down laughing. But the rest of them hold on to their silence. Everyone in the room thought the bastard had lost his mind or something.

But the next moment, he got back to his feet and looked Jonathan right in the eyes and said something that left everyone else baffled.

"If you already know so much, then I assume you also know your court might not be as loyal to you as you had thought?" Mike dropped his hands into his inventory and took out several vials from it.

"How the hell-" Mera was shocked, the cuffs around their wrists should have denied them from accessing their inventory... unless someone from the staff sabotaged them.

"EVERYONE GET DOWN!" Ashton roared at the top of his lungs as soon as he used [Detection] to figure out the contents of the vials.

The guards rushed to stop Mike, while Ashton aimed his crossbow at him. But in the following moment, everyone was blown away as the vials exploded. The guards around them were instantly incinerated, but those conundrum bastards were safe.

A huge part of the room collapsed following the explosion, which gave the conundrum folks an ideal chance to escape while also killing anyone who got in their way.

"Remember Jonathan! This day marks your downfall along with this kingdom! Long live the King.... of Vania!" Mike roared before leaping out of the window.

Chapter 175 – Return (1)

As the dust settled down, everyone slowly began gathering themselves from the scare of the explosion. The fancy and extravagant courtroom no longer existed. Just a few vials were enough to tarnish its beauty.

As for the guards standing around them while the explosion took place... only their bones were left behind... the rest had been turned into ashes. Out of the dozen people who were there excluding those conundrum bastards, only three survived.

Ashton, Mera and Jonathan, had been the furthest away from the explosion, thus got off scot-free, with minor injuries. 3 royal guards and 6 palace security personnel lost their lives in the blink of an eye. Had the courtroom been full... who knows how many more would have died.

Blood dripped down his forehead as Ashton got back to his feet. Next to him Mera was already up and was looking towards Jonathan who was still sitting on his throne. It would appear even he was having a tough time accepting what had happened there.

Even though Jonathan had not suffered any physical injuries, it was clear that Mike's bold move had forced his... anger issues to resurface. A moment later, countless people, from healers to warriors, rushed inside the obliterated hall and got to work.

However, no one dared approach Jonathan, afraid of what he might do to them in anger. But then something weird happened. As soon as the healers were done looking at Mera, she took some water and headed towards Jonathan.

'The hell is she doing?' Ashton thought to himself as a nurse wrapped a bandage around his head, 'Offering him some water? That's strange... but then I guess strange things have been happening a lot lately.'

But Ashton couldn't have been more wrong in his assumption. Mera was bringing the water to Jonathan alright, but it wasn't for him to drink. Instead, she threw water right on his face... stunning everyone there into silence.

"We're doomed..." the nurse mumbled through her breath and began shaking in fear.

The rest of them were in a similar state. Jonathan was already enraged like never before and this strange bitch just made the situation even worse. Much worse than it should have been.

"This is not the time to remain shocked!" Mera yelled at the top of her lungs and the next moment Jonathan was back on his feet, looking around as if he didn't know what he was doing.

"Was he really just shocked? I swear I thought he would rip someone to pieces in a couple of moments." One of the doctors mumbled.

"Shush it... just pray to Lycaon we can walk out of here safely." Another doctor hushed the former.

'Pathetic...' Ashton shook his head, 'It is your job to know whether a patient is in shock or not but all of you were scared to even take a look at the man.'

Despite Ashton thinking so, he knew if he would have been in their shoes, he would have done the same. The sense of fear can often overwhelm the sense of duty. Especially when it came to someone as scary as Jonathan was.

Once Jonathan had stabilised himself, Mera walked back to Ashton's side, taking a look at his injuries as if nothing happened.

"That was oddly kind of you, ouch!" Ashton smirked and was promptly hit in the head by Mera.

"Keep your thoughts to yourself." Mera sternly replied, "We may have our differences, but I don't want him to lose his sanity because of someone else. If he is ever going to lose, it has to be by my hands."

'You couldn't have been more right.' Ashton smiled while keeping his thoughts to himself, 'Just like what I had in mind for you.'

Apart from that... Ashton was wondering about the things Mike had said about him being some kind of 'weapon'. Since Jonathan knew about it, Mera should have been aware of it as well. If she did know

about it, then it would mean... her marking him back in the enclosure wasn't as random as he had thought.

A couple of hours later...

While the courtroom was still being taken care of, everyone shifted to the smaller throne room. The air within the room was quite heavy. Unlike before, Jonathan had once again called in all of his ministers and royal guards to address the situation.

Mainly they were there to discuss three things. One, to hunt down the conundrum. Two, to take care of their families and lastly... to figure out who the fuck was it that betrayed the kingdom and helped the conundrum escape.

They could easily give up on the first thing as those bastards must have already escaped Lycania through portals. Or at least they must be hiding away somewhere.

As for the second topic... there was nothing to discuss. They were already aware of the identities of the members and therefore had already made their move to take care of their families. All that remained was to punish them instead.

However, at the moment, Jonathan's undivided attention was on the third reason he had called all of them in. To find out who was the bold and brave person who betrayed him.

"You can either surrender yourself, and I won't kill your family off. Or I'll kill everyone here along with their families." Jonathan said in an uncaring tone, "I don't think I'll have a tough time hiring new people. make your choice while I count till ten. After that... all of you are dead."

Pin drop silence... not a single man spoke a word but all of them were looking at each other. Tears welled up in most of their eyes while the rest were staring around praying that someone would step out of the crowd and accept the blame.

The countdown kept going... but no one came out.

"Tsk, I gave you a chance to surrender yourself. But you didn't... I expected more out of you... Devon."

The crowd gasped as Jonathan called out the name of his 'most loyal minister'. But that wasn't all, the following moment, three figures jumped out of the shadows and sliced the man's limbs in one swift move before dragging him back to Jonathan.

"Everyone.... get out," Jonathan whispered while sipping on his wine, "I dislike being disturbed while eating."

Chapter 176 – Return (2)

A couple of weeks later...

Things had started to calm down a bit... but at the cost of numerous public executions. In just two weeks, more than a hundred people related to those conundrum fools were executed, despite the protests from the citizens.

Jonathan's answer to the protests was similar to that of a dictator and not a monarch. The protesters were beaten up like mad dogs till they 'willing' went into 'correction centres', where they were tortured endlessly by the royal guards till then either died or swore allegiance to Jonathan's tyrannical rule.

Even the nobles who dared stood up against Jonathan were silenced either through wealth or... mysterious accidents in which their family members ended up dead or paralysed. The public's view of the king drastically changed, yet none of them dared to open their mouths anymore.

Things were stable... immoral, but stable. As for the conundrum folks, they were still missing and Jonathan had ordered to drop the search. It was pretty clear they had already escaped the kingdom to head to some other place and Jonathan had the idea exactly where... The kingdom of Aryania.

It was the nearest vampire kingdom and also the kingdom that was once in charge of the Island of Doom. The conundrum's unwillingness to allow Jonathan to enter the island and their escape to Aryania signalled at one thing.

The conundrum was already working for the vampires longer than Jonathan could have anticipated. Mike had successfully blindsided and outsmarted Jonathan. There was no denying that and he seemed to be taking out that bitterness on the people of his kingdom.

Although no one knew how Jonathan knew who had betrayed him, there was one thing they were sure of... not to ask him any questions. Since Devon was gone, no one had enough balls to stand up against Jonathan, therefore, his tyrannical rule over Lycania went ahead without any problems.

As for the mistress... even she seemed to have taken a back seat when it came to royal affairs and was simply keeping an eye on the situation. But that wasn't all. Since the director was still missing, Mera had occupied herself in finding clues to locate her.

She had been pretty sure the conundrum had captured her, but with them gone... who knows what they could have done if the director was indeed kidnapped by them.

Meanwhile, Ashton was having a hard time forgetting about Mike. His face resembled Rose's, meaning they could be related... which would then also crack the reason behind Mike's closeness to vampires. Considering Rose was half vampire and was even a part of royalty.

But Ashton wanted to confirm the facts and for that, he needed to get back into the Academy. But he couldn't let Jonathan know the reason behind his visit, or else he might even try to capture Rose and have her executed. Just like every other relative of Mike's.

Also, Ashton wanted to have a chat with Lucifer, so he would kill two birds with one stone. Also, he had the perfect guise to go back to the academy without raising suspicion on himself.

Still, it was better he actually informed Jonathan of his decision before leaving and that's exactly where he was headed.

But before that, he went ahead to the guild and look if there were any quests available around Contingent so that he could progress towards getting that gold rank. And as he thought, there was... a quest available.

In the absence of the Director, the professors must have advanced the schedule for the field trip Ashton would have been a part of had he been a student there. They were looking for a few silver and bronze rank adventurers to aid them and Ashton just happened to meet the qualifications.

'Yet another reason to visit Contingent. I don't think Jonathan would deny me. Considering he wants me to reach Gold rank as soon as possible.'

With that in mind, Ashton took the quest and informed his team about it. Since it was a subjugation quest in one of the weakest dungeons, and the pay was good, none of them had any complaints either. With the quest in hand, Ashton finally headed back to the palace.

After a brief security check, Ashton was led to the throne where Jonathan was having a meeting with his ministers. Despite appearing to be busy, he acknowledged Ashton's presence with a nod and signalled him to wait. The meeting was wrapped up in a couple of minutes then, it was Ashton's turn.

"What is it?" Jonathan asked Ashton nonchalantly.

"Nothing much, your highness. Just wanted to inform you that my team and I, would be heading to Contingent for a quest." Ashton politely replied.

"Contingent huh... why there? I believe there are lots of other quests you can take part in."

"The pay is good and the task is easy. Also, I was hoping to investigate more about the director's disappearance while I am there."

"Hm... that makes sense. You must want to know about your parents from her. Am I correct?"

While that was one of the reasons, the main reason was to know more about his own existence... About him being a weapon. Ashton had already tried asking Mera about it but she refused to give him a concrete answer. The only thing she did was to confirm his suspicions.

She knew about him being a weapon and that's the reason she decided to mark him to be taken away once he got to the 'age'. Since neither Jonathan nor Mera was interested in giving him an answer, Ashton decided to find the only person he knew who could.

"While it is one of the reasons, I was hoping she would know where those conundrum bastards are hiding." Ashton replied calmly, "They tried to kill me, for that reason I want to help you to get back at them. Then there's Donovan... I have some personal grudge to settle with him as well."

"Fine... you have my permission to leave. But before you go, answer this." Jonathan got up from the throne and walked up to Ashton, "Do you think the Conundrum would have left such a valuable witness alive?"

"Whether she is alive or not, it's worth a try." Confidence was brimming from Ashton's words.

Ashton was confident likely because he knew that even if she was dead, he could raise her as an undead soldier later when he had high enough intelligence and then ask her something.. That is if she actually retained her memories.

A few days later...

Back at the academy, the sudden execution of a few nobles had led to a power struggle between the students of higher lineage. While the first years were somewhat peaceful among each other, the second years were causing unnecessary trouble for themselves as well as the juniors.

Their targets were members of those families which had disappeared overnight or died in some sort of an 'accident'. Why? Simply because they were weak and trampling over the weak ones was their duty... and also a bit of fun.

If the higher class wasn't bullying those of lower status, they would often force them into submission and turn them into their personal lackeys. They would then band together to take on some higher ranking nobility members to take away their influence as well.

Since most of the first years were comparatively weaker than their seniors, they couldn't put much of a fight on. Also, the target was not to abolish the weaker families but to have them assimilate with a bigger and stronger family.

Some willingly joined the seniors to avoid crossing them, while ganging upon those who didn't. The Gruntas were the first to jump ships when things started to change and now were one of the strongest... 'cults' inside the campus.

They even managed to poach a few disciplinary committee members on their side with the promise of influence and whatnot. Though the rest of the smaller groups, weren't hostile with them, it was certain that if the Gruntas were not taken care of somehow, soon everyone enrolled in the academy would have to seek their approval and be under their thumb forever.

As for the professors, they intervened whenever they could, but the staff was widely outnumbered. Therefore they couldn't be everywhere at all times to protect the students.

They were a bit dependent on the disciplinary committee to help them out with crucial information when the shit show first started. But they soon realised the committee was up to no good.

So they decided to take matters into their own hands and punish the ringleaders and put an end to the madness.

However, it was easier said than done. Whenever they would corner the Gruntas for a violation, one of the other students would take the blame instead. Allowing the Gruntas to walk away freely.

At the end of their wits, they decided to ask Jonathan for some help, who assured them the problem would be dealt with as a Baronet was already on his way with his team to handle it. But the baronet... whoever, he was, was taking their sweet time to get there.

This gave the unknowing Gruntas a few more days to cause havoc in the academy. And their new target was... Anna Swan.

Although they did not have any beef with the quiet and neutral Swan family, the Grunta twins had some personal score to settle with her. They had been eyeing for an opportunity to take care of her for a while now... especially ever since she took the side of that filthy mutt Ashton.

And now, after trying for days, they finally had her cornered. She was standing alone, while around 50 students both from the first and second year had surrounded her. But for now... the twins had something else in their minds or more like the adults of their family wanted them to do something else.

"This is your last chance Anna," Nicole smirked, "Join our family. I'm sure the Swans wouldn't mind if you decided to marry Nick. After all, my twin is just as beautiful as I am."

"Do you really think it's the time and place to discuss marriage proposals?" Anna retorted without wasting a moment, "Also, I'm not interested in marrying someone who did not even have the guts to come forth with the proposal himself."

"Unlike myself, my brother has family duties he has to take care of in the capital. But he did give me this letter to give you as an informal proposal." Nicole took out a black envelope from her inventory and tossed it towards Anna.

"You think bringing your pets along would be enough to force me into agreeing with you or something? If it was your brightest plans, then I apologize, you failed hilariously." Anna turned the letter into ash without opening it, "Now if you don't mind, I have places to be."

"Tsk, I was really hoping you would accept the proposal. We could have been best friends and sisters-in-law." Nicole shook her head as if she was actually disappointed.

But everyone around Nicole knew she was hoping Anna would reject the proposal. After all, that would give her the reason to unleash her dogs upon her. Nicole snapped her fingers and everyone prepared themselves to lunge at the beauty standing in front of them.

Anna was well aware she wasn't getting out of there without injuries. Even her life might be in danger, but she wasn't going down without a fight.

Even if she might not be as strong as the second-year students, she was confident in her abilities. After all, she had been fighting in the underground arena to get stronger than the rest of them.

She surrounded her fists in flames, while at the same time prepared to release the toxins from her hairs to charm as many people as she could there. However, before either one of them could do anything, something landed in front of them with a loud bang.

"I should have known it was you fuckers causing trouble." A familiar voice pierced through all the dust and smoke, "You Gruntas never learn, do you?"

As the dust began to settle down, all of them got their first look at the one who dared to interrupt them. The man was wearing lavish black armour with the royal insignia engraved on the chest plate, immediately putting his status above everyone there. But the surprise wasn't over yet...

A look of shock enveloped both Nicole's and Anna's faces as they recognised the man standing in front of them. But their reactions afterwards varied widely, while the former had clenched her teeth in a mixture of fear and anger, the latter felt... somewhat happy.

"It's been a while, Anna." Ashton smiled at her before turning his attention towards the students surrounding her, "Alright, I assume you wanted a fight, and now you got it.. Don't back away now."

Nicole stood frozen at her place... She thought she would never see the horrifying face of Ashton ever again. At least while she was still attending the academy. But she was wrong... and so were the other noble-tards, who thought with Ashton removed from the campus, they could do whatever they wanted.

On top of that, none of them could still believe what they were seeing. Both the first years and second years had seen what the man standing in front of them was capable of and didn't want to upset him. Let alone fight against him.

"Are you going to keep standing there like a bunch of fools or attack me?" Ashton asked the crowd while flexing his shoulders, "You outnumber me 50 to 1, it's already a handicap, isn't it? Just come at me together, what's the worse I could do to you?"

All of them nervously looked at Nicole to tell them what to do, after all, she was their 'leader'. But she was as flabbergasted as the rest of them. However, the look on her face changed the following moment.

"What the hell are you fools waiting for? Get him!!!" Nicole roared at the top of her lungs and her followers charged towards Ashton... albeit hesitantly.

However, Ashton wasn't gonna hold back just because they were hesitant. He had been craving for an opportunity like this to beat those bastards senseless, and now with Jonathan's backing, he could do it without sparing a second thought to it.

A fight broke out immediately.

As the students rushed towards him, Ashton immediately activated his less-lethal skills. As much as he wanted to kill them all, there already had been too much blood-shed in the last couple of weeks and for the first time, Ashton thought about fighting defensively against the students.

With the sharp edge of his whip, he slashed their weapons in half. While also knocking over those who were a bit too close for comfort. Seeing that the fight had already broken out, Anna decided to join in with her flames.

"Don't! Just stay back and relax. Their asses are mine for the taking."

Not only did Ashton's whip slice their weapons in half, but also their morale. Most of them backed off after that, but some didn't. Five second-year students simultaneously lunged at him. Since all of them were brawlers, thus they preferred close-quarter combat.

It seemed they either didn't know or had forgotten that Ashton preferred close combat as well. With whatever little bit of mana they could control, began swirling around their fists as they came crashing down on Ashton.

Bang!

With a loud noise, the already shattered courtyard got destroyed even further with debris flying around and hitting everyone. Everyone but the person the attack was supposed to hit. Ashton had dodged their half-assed attack by simply leaping over them.

"I guess you people can't even manage to execute [Rock Pound] properly, so much for being seniors..."
Ashton shook his head.

"How do you know what skill we used?" One of the seniors was baffled a first-year dropout knew about a skill they had to buy at a hefty price.

"Why don't I show you instead?" Ashton smirked and slammed his fists on the ground.

Since his opponents did not have immunity to physical attacks like the Wraith wolves Ashton had previously used the skill on, he had to tone the skill's effect down quite a bit. But it was still effective... much to the seniors' dismay.

In an instant, countless bones in their bodies got shattered. Their legs had become useless as they had been gobbled up by the earth. After fighting with night creatures for more than a couple of months, handling the students was a piece of cake for Ashton. Still, he tried not to get too much in the flow and end up killing a couple of them.

"This should be enough," Ashton mumbled but was interrupted as an arrow whizzed past his head, "I guess not."

'What is going on here...' Anna couldn't help but wonder, 'Fifty against one and they are still losing? What's up with that brutish strength of Ashton's? He was strong before but now... it seems he's in an entirely different league.'

Anna had the front row seat to watch the drama unfold as Ashton destroyed Nicole's gang. Hell, it couldn't even be called a fight anymore, it had turned into a one-sided massacre.

Not only Ashton's strength, his battle prowess and his presence of mind had also evolved. Since there were people who were unwilling to fight him, he purposefully made a mistake every now and then to lure them into attacking him.

And since all of the students were so desperately wanted Nicole's approval, they immediately jumped ahead at the first opportunity. Only to get knocked out a moment later. One would think the cult members would stop falling for the same trick again and again, but nope, they didn't.

In just a couple of minutes, their number was reduced from 50 to 30, then to 20. As their numbers went down, it also became harder for them to fight him and unlike them, Ashton did not have a single wound on his body.

Within moments the few people who were still standing surrendered themselves in hopes of mercy. At the same time, the professors finally arrived to check what was the ruckus all about. They were pretty sure that yet another student would have to spend some time in the infirmary.

One could only imagine the look of shock on their face when they realised that not one but over forty students would have to receive medical attention there. But their shocked eyes only got wider when they realised who did this to them.

"What are you doing here? You are not allowed to-"

The familiar voice of Amaira was heard. But Ashton immediately brought a finger to his lips, gesturing her to shut up, before heading towards Nicole.

"If I wanted, I could have killed you all and no one would be able to do shit about it." Ashton's voice was calm yet the cold fury in his eyes made Nicole drop on her knees, "But don't worry about dying yet. I'm going to make your life so miserable, you'll beg for me to kill you."

At this time the final guest arrived at the destroyed courtyard. Michelle Bismark, Jonathan's beloved daughter.

"I see you already made a mess upon arrival." she stated in an uncaring tone, "Father had told you you were coming here to take care of this... issue, but I guess you arrived sooner than I expected."

"What can I say? Someone had to keep their raging hormones under control, princess." He then turned towards the professors, "Judging by their late response... it's no wonder situation got out of hand."

While the two of them conversed, the professors were confused. Since when did the two of them were on such good terms and what did the princess mean when she said 'The king' has sent him To the academy? Amaira immediately voiced those questions and Michelle's response surprised them all.

"I think you already know why he was sent here.. He's the baronet father had mentioned dispatching to establish order here once again," Michelle stood in front of Ashton before formally introducing him, "I would like to introduce to you, Baronet Ashton Bismark, the youngest person to have ever been given a title above Knights."

For a moment everyone thought Michelle was pulling some sort of prank on them. But upon noticing the seriousness on her face, their thoughts were a bit... all over the place.

It hadn't been too long from when Ashton was just a student at the academy, and now he had been sent back to monitor everyone and help establish some sort of peaceful situation inside the academy.

"I-I didn't know-" Amaira immediately jumped to crisis control.

She and Ashton did not share the best of relationships as student and teacher. Also, she had openly supported the Gruntas whenever she could. This gave Ashton two quick reasons to have her suspended or worse... fired from the Academy.

"Of course, you didn't." Ashton scoffed, "When have you ever known anything apart from licking the shoes of the nobles?"

It would be an understatement to say Ashton was having fun berating her. Was he abusing his power over them? Pretty much yeah. But was he wrong? Maybe not.

The authority he had been granted by the king was more than enough to question even the professors and if found guilty, he could indirectly punish them as well, by having them get fired or something. As long as they were a resident of Lycania and not some other kingdom.

In other words... He could take care of Granta's if he wanted to and no one would be able to touch a single strand of his hair. And if they still tried to, well, then they'll have a bloodthirsty king chase them to the depths of hell.

Although, Ashton would preferably take care of his messes by himself rather than depend on people whom he hated. By this time, the rest of Ashton's team arrived there along with the local police, who were also under Ashton's command until the situation at the academy was solved.

It went without saying people were not too keen to serve under a mutt. Especially someone who was barely an adult. Thus the chances of the police department refusing to cooperate was quite high.

Jonathan had already foreseen this issue and had come up with a solution as well and sent one of the high ranking royal knights with Ashton to make sure all of Ashton's orders were fulfilled without any problem.

But before punishing Nicole and the rest of them, Ashton had some other thing to take care of.

"Where is professor Rose?" He asked the professors as she wasn't present along with the rest of them.

"She must be in her chamber. Ever since the king went on a rampage-" Professor Tanaka, another one of the purists answered Ashton, but immediately backtracked his words under the presence of the royal knights.

"I meant ever since the king decided to punish those who were a threat to the kingdom." Tanaka mumbled with an awkward smile on his face, "I guess someone close to her was punished as well."

"If what you're saying is true, then we should question her as well." One of the knights suggested while looking at Ashton.

"Don't bother with unnecessary things." Ashton advised the knights with certain finality in his voice, "You people take care of these... troublemakers while I talk to her. Also, while I'm gone, Virgil is in command."

"As you wish, sir." The knights bowed and got to work.

"Y-You don't have the authority-" Nicole began rambling as a knight picked placed handcuffs on her.

"Oh, I have all the authority I need to make your life hell. Now take her away." Ashton sent her off to jail with a smile, "Also, Baiter, if anyone asks for your name-"

"I'll tell them it's not their concern..."

Ashton did not want the students there to think that his companions were weird, and keeping Baiter's name in check was one of the important things for that.

A moment later, Ashton headed inside Rose's room and knocked on the door. There was no reply. he knocked again and still no reply.

Fearing the worst, he broke the door and rushed in. Which turned out to be a mistake...? or maybe it was a blessing... for a boy his age at least.

In front of him, Rose stood with only a towel wrapped around her. It wasn't huge enough to contain her... assets completely. As water dripped down her wet hair, carefully caressing her body. It would appear she had just walked out of the shower it took Ashton a lot of effort to take his eyes away from her.

"You know, it's polite to wait outside if someone isn't answering the door." Rose replied with a luscious smile, "Or were you hoping to catch me in a situation like this? Loads of students have fantasies about their teachers but you took it to the next level."

"M-My bad... I acted on impulse. A lot of people have been disappearing these days so I thought. Never mind, I'll wait outside." Rose's talking was enough for Ashton to force himself to turn around and leave. But he was stopped by Rose.

"No need for that. We can talk while I get dressed. Just keep your back turned against me." Rose chuckled mischievously, "I hope it would be a 'hard' task for you."

Ashton shook his head in dismay but kept his word. A minute passed before either of them spoke a word.

"I suppose you are here to find out beloved director?" Rose Asked.

"That is one of the reasons I'm here for. But right now we have some other things to discuss." Ashton replied.

"About what?"

"Lucifer and... Mike."

Something dropped out of Rose's hands the moment she heard about Mike. That was enough for Ashton to confirm his suspicions. Rose and Mike were related... maybe she even knew about him being a part of the conundrum.

If that was the case then... Ashton would never be able to trust Rose as he did before. It would simply be impossible. But then again he would need her to get in contact with Lucifer. Depending on her answer... things could get unnecessarily complex.

"Did you know....?"

Chapter 180 Lucifer's Confession (1)

Ashton waited and waited for Rose to answer him. He was hoping she would somehow give him a satisfactory answer... but she couldn't.

"It's alright." Ashton dismissed his question, "Your silence is loud enough to answer for you. Just tell Lucifer to contact me when he gets the time. Inform him it's... something potentially life-threatening. That should get him interested enough to contact me."

Saying so, Ashton took a step out of the room while Rose silently nodded. For someone having a bubbly and cocky personality like her, she was weirdly silent.

"Oh and the moment I meet Mike, I'm gonna kill him. No matter who gets in my way." Ashton insinuated with a calm yet freakish voice, "Since you care about him so much, you should tell him that. Also, I hope this... situation would not get in the way of our mutual friendship with Lucifer."

He continued, "Or else, I think his highness would be quite interested in finding one of Mike's relatives. If you know what I mean."

Rose had helped him immensely, that was the sole reason he wasn't planning on abusing the powers bestowed upon him by Jonathan.

But if she tried to do anything against him, he wouldn't have any trouble getting back at her. Hybrid or not, even she would not be able to bear Jonathan's wrath.

However, Ashton was hoping it never came down to it. But if it did... well, too bad for her.

The next day...

The news of Ashton's return spread like wildfire inside the campus. While those who had been tormented since Ashton's 'expulsion' could finally breathe out freely, those who had been abusing their family name were a bit worried and even began thinking about disbanding their groups.

Then there was a group that was planning to still carry on as usual. These were the seniors who had very little to lose and much to gain. Most of them did not belong to a noble family, yet their valour and strength were enough to make their own cult of followers.

The only thing they were afraid of was the fact they might get sold out by one of their own, sooner or later. Also, with Nicole, the leader of the strongest faction, detained, the rest of the nobles were forced to bite their nails while they waited for Ashton to make his next move.

Little did they know, Ashton had kinda put their case on the back burner. His team and the knights would still actively seek out the miscreants and deal with them, but Ashton was busy focusing himself on something else... namely finding the director's whereabouts.

Even before beginning the search, Ashton knew it was going to be on hell of a task. Especially since he would have to do it by himself and that literally, no one had any information about her.

He was spending most of his time looking for clues. Potentially anything that would guide him to her. But even after putting all of his brain cells to think of something, he was having little to no success.

That was until he received an anonymous request.

When he woke up the next morning, he found a letter addressed to him. The send did not disclose their identity, but according to the letter they had some information regarding 'the one he was seeking'!

Along with a request to meet up with the sender at the Black market. Ashton wasn't one to trust anyone so easily, let alone people who wouldn't even show their faces to him. But this case was different.

He was desperate for any information... anything literally. Also, he wasn't as weak as he used to be before. So if it turned out to be a trap, he could make his way out of the mess. Even if it meant getting some blood on his hands.

The only thing was... the meeting wouldn't be held for a week. It was disappointing and frustrating at the same time.

"It's best to wait and see what my options are. I can't blindly trust anyone who comes dangling a carrot in front of me." Ashton threw the letter in his pocket and got ready to interrogate the professors.

Despite what anyone said, the students would not have gotten so rowdy without some of the faculty members supporting them. While in the director's, all this nonsense was kept somewhat under control, her disappearance must have sparked these fools to do as they pleased.

Amaira and Tanaka were definitely in on the scheme, considering their blatant favouritism towards the nobles. Therefore, their interrogation was just a formality and nothing more.

As for Profesor Bancroft and Professor Kakaroff, they were too busy with their own shit, they wouldn't have had the time to indulge in such childish games. But Ashton was still going to have them interrogated.

But before he could even interrogate a single person, he ran into trouble. In front of the administrative building, quite a crowd had gathered. It didn't take long for Ashton to recognise who they were as he had seen most of them during his trial back at the capital.

"I really wanna kill these fuckers..." Ashton sighed and walked closer to see the nobles threatening Virgil and the rest of his team for locking their 'Precious' kids up in cells like criminals.

"All they did was have some fun with the other students! You can't have them arrested for that!" One of the parents yelled at the top of their lungs.

"You will have to answer for this folly you goons have committed!" Yet another one chimed in.

In the distance, Amaira and several other professors could be seen laughing. Well, Ashton took note of all of their faces before deciding to teach the 'parents' a lesson as well.

Suddenly Ashton rushed in and grabbed one of them before slamming him down hard on the ground. The man's nose was broken and his face got covered in blood.

But that wasn't all... Ashton grabbed his hands and snapped all of his fingers one after another while the rest of them watched him in horror.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Ashton scoffed, "You already said your children were 'playing' with the other students. So I thought I would play with some of you just like your children played with others."

