

Zompiewolf 31

Chapter 31 - A Final Duel (3)

As the sun rose the next day a lot of people gathered around the courtyard to see Ashton get his ass handed to him in a duel with Donovan. Most if not the entire city had gathered there as if it wasn't a duel but a festival.

Ashton was still in his room preparing a strategy to overcome the challenge in front of him. But no matter what he thought, he could not think of one way where he would come out victorious. Last night for different because for starters it was 'night' and not day.

Thus he was able to use his strength to its fullest. Whereas now, he was supposed to fight Donovan under the bright sky. This would definitely put him in an even more disadvantageous situation as his stats would get reduced thanks to the sun.

Then there was the fact that Donovan was arguably the second strongest werewolf in the city after the mistress herself. He had been groomed to be a knight like no other. Ashton had once even seen him spar against a dozen elite bodyguards on his own and Donovan still came out on top.

With these things in mind, the situation was looking grim for him. However, the thing troubling him the most was that, well, he wasn't even aware of the reason why Donovan wanted to fight with him in the first place?

As far as he could remember, Ashton didn't think he had offended someone of Donovan's calibre recently. Even last night he only acted in self-defence by kicking him. Back then Ashton had thought Donovan was trying to test his awareness like he had done many times before.

But he was wrong, Donovan literally wanted to stab him, and that fact baffled Ashton to no limit. In his eyes, Donovan was acting in his place. After all, if anyone should be attacking the other, it should have been Ashton as a way to take revenge for all the hurt and pain he had been subjected to over a couple of months.

'That dude had way too big of an ego. Maybe be I did something to not physically hurt him but hurt his ego instead?' Ashton thought to himself when he heard a knock on the door.

He opened the door and was surprised to see the mistress standing there. In her hands were weapons and light armour that he was supposed to wear for the duel. She herself was wearing quite extravagant black clothes that tightly hugged her curves.

For the first time, Ashton knew why the heck did the wolves always acted in heat around her. Before he got too lost thinking about her, he shook her head and snapped out of her charm. As the system informed him that he was under her spell.

'Even now... this bitch is trying to seduce me. Why the hell does she have to do this every single day?'

If it wouldn't have been for the undead genes in his body, Ashton would have given up the urge to hold back against the mistress's charm and began acting like a dog in the heat. Just like everyone else.

Little did he know, the more he resisted it, the more she wanted to force him. Which was indirectly the reason for Donovan to despise him and hence was the reason for their duel.

Donovan was least interested in humiliating a kid in front of the entire city. However, at that moment, Ashton was not a kid in his eyes but a competitor who could potentially steal his mate. For someone as possessive as him, it didn't matter what Ashton said, Donovan would not believe him either way.

Thus, by this duel, Donovan was hoping to establish himself as the primary and only mate deserving the Mistress's affection. After all, he was better than Ashton in every way and if he had to do something like a duel to make the mistress love him again then so be it.

Ashton was oblivious to all these things as he had spent his entire life leaving in an enclosure where they did not have the freedom to even process their emotions properly, without being exposed to the disgusting eyes of the guards.

"Thanks." Ashton took the gears and turned around to get changed.

He wanted to close the door as well, but the mistress had already made herself comfortable on his bed. So, there was no point in closing the doors anymore as the servants would only use spread unnecessary rumours about the two of them.

He could feel the mistress's eyes on him but he didn't care. It wasn't the first time that he was changing clothes in front of someone. The guards back at the enclosure always liked to 'watch' them anyways.

"Hm... you scars look nice. Gives you a bit of a rowdy look." The mistress said while googling at him.

"All thanks to you." Ashton gave her a reply and finished dressing up.

"I'll pretend I didn't hear that." Saying so the mistress got up and left the chamber leaving Ashton confused as to why she came there in the first place.

"These people are weird...."

Chapter 32 - A Final Duel (4)

'This is weird...'

Ashton was not used to being the centre of attraction to so many people. One could say he always had the attention of everyone around him. At first as a human whom the mistress had chosen and now for duelling against Donovan.

However, things were different while he was living in the enclosure. The ones who stared at him were the ones who lived him with and thus their gazes didn't feel weird at all. No, their stares did feel weird but not openly hostile like the ones of the werewolves there.

However, the look in the eyes of the werewolves was something different. At first, it felt like he was being treated like a toy by them but soon enough it was clear that it wasn't the case. They weren't looking at him like he was some kind of toy, but they were waiting for Donovan to make a toy out of him.

He walked up to the stage where a referee was standing in the middle. Surprisingly, the referee was someone whom Ashton would have never expected to pick up on something as lowly as that. The mistress was there on the stage.

Her being there was a bit weird, but the more Ashton thought about it more he realised why she was there. After all, she was the one responsible for all this in the first place.

'So that's why these fools are howling like a bunch of horndogs...' Ashton shook his head, clearly disgusted by their behaviour.

He looked at the mistress but did not bow before her, which sent those dogs into another frenzy.

"How dare he disrespect the Mistress like that!"

"He needs to be thought some lessons."

"Haha, don't worry, sir Donovan will surely put that bastard to his place for disrespecting the mistress."

These were just a few of the things Ashton could make out from the howling of the crowd who were seated everywhere they could find a place. It was supposed to be a one on one duel, but to Ashton, it felt like he was fighting against the entire city.

It was at that moment Donovan entered the courtyard through the opposite entrance. Unlike who was carrying two short swords that were given to him by the Mistress, Donovan had decided to go with a sword and a whip.

It was a weird combination of weapons, to say the least, but one that was most effective against Ashton. At least, Donovan thought so as it was the same whip that had been used to punish Ashton for the slightest of his mistakes.

Thus a weapon like that was bound to leave some mental scars behind. Donovan's motive for bringing a whip wasn't that he was actively going to use it. But to play with Ashton's mind.

As soon as Donovan walked onto the stage. The crowd went berserk. There was no question on who was the crowd favourite. The funny thing was, Donovan didn't bow down to the mistress either and yet the crowd kept cheering on for him.

'Fcking double standards...' Ashton thought before facing his opponent of the day, 'Thanks for belonging that whip. Seeing it gave me other reason to try my best to beat your ass with it later Donovan.'

"Looks like it's going to be your grave kiddo," Donovan said with a smug look on his face.

"At least I don't need to fight with a kid to make a show of my masculinity."

Ashton knew he was going to lose the physical battle already, thus he was not going to back out of the verbal fight without humiliating Donovan.

"Say what you want brat today you will regret ever crossing me."

"Is it necessary to fight against a kid?"

"It's a bit too late to back down now, mutt." Donovan had a weird grin that stretched from one side of his face to the other.

"... I was the one living inside an enclosure and yet I'm the one aware of sarcasm?"

"..."

Ashton sighed and readied himself for the battle in front of him. He wasn't foolish enough to think he was actually going to win against Donovan, especially without using his other genes. But Ashton was not going to be defeated easily either.

"Ahem. Let me make the rules clear." The mistress started explaining the rules before the two of them got busy with their verbal battle again, "This isn't a death battle. You are not allowed to strike each other with the intent to kill. The first one who gives up or gets knocked out or is pushed out of the arena loses. Is that clear?"

Both of them nodded.

"Then fight!"

Chapter 33 - A Final Duel (5)

Donovan rushed in on Ashton. He had no intention of making things easy for the kid, nor was he going to go listen to his crap anymore. Ashton, on the other hand, remained in his position. He could see Donovan rushing towards him with his rapier in his hand, and yet he just stood there.

A moment later Ashton threw his hands in the air and proudly proclaimed, "I give up."

All of a sudden the cheering from the crowds stopped. Neither Donovan nor the Mistress could process what had just happened there. All of them knew Ashton would be defeated but none of them had expected it to happen in such a manner.

As soon as Donovan was able to collect his thoughts, he became even more enraged. The entire point of this duel was to beat the crap out of the kid and now that he had willingly surrendered, there was no way he could do that.

Even though he had won, it didn't seem like a victory to him. If anything, it felt even more humiliating because Ashton managed to outsmart all of them.

"The hell you think you are doing!?" Donovan couldn't keep himself in check any longer, "Do you think this is some kind of joke?"

"What did I do wrong?" Ashton mumbled and started walking towards the edge of the stage, "I abided by the rules the mistress informed us about. One could lose by giving up, getting knocked out or being thrown off the stage. Now if you don't mind I have some packing to do."

By this time the crowd started whispering amongst itself. Technically, what they wanted had happened and the kid had not done anything wrong either, he just did as the rules stated. Donovan had won, as they had predicted.

But even then, they felt as they had been cheated on. Most, if not all of them, had been waiting for Donovan to teach the brat a lesson. However, before he could even touch the kid once, the match was already over? How the hell did that work?

Donovan quietly walked up to Ashton, but it was not like he could have touched the kid anymore. The duel and the training were the only two loopholes when Donovan could touch the kid with the intent of harming him.

However, now that Ashton was set to leave for the academy tomorrow, there was no need for him to train. Which meant that Donovan would not be able to teach him a lesson either.

Ashton sensed the werewolf walking up to him and turned around to face him in the eye. Ashton had given up on the duel not because he was afraid of losing or getting hurt. He did so because he did not see a point in fighting with someone while he was at disadvantage.

On top of that, this duel was nothing but a drag in his opinion. He could not give two fcks about Donovan's need to prove his masculinity in front of the entire city. Thus he stared right into Donovan's eyes without any fears.

It was a look that Donovan loathed with a passion. Ashton was someone who was much lower than him in ranks, and someone like him should have that look in their eyes. In other words, Donovan was the predator and Ashton was supposed to be the prey, but Ashton did not share the same thoughts as him.

"I didn't know a staring match also counted as a duel." Ashton chuckled and turned around for the final time to leave.

"You will wait right there!" This time it was the mistress who had an outburst, "You can give up if you wish, but the final decision remains with the referee and I reject your proposal to give up."

Everyone was stunned for the second time in a matter of minutes. Every single one of them had seen duels before and this was the first time they had heard of such a thing. Still, none of them tried to correct her for two reasons.

First, she was the mistress. She could do whatever she pleases to. And lastly, they too wanted to watch the duel. Thus they kept silent on the matter. A few of them did try to protest against the absurdity of the 'new' rule. But their voices were drowned in the sea of cheers and howls.

As for Ashton who was duelling for the first time in his life, he didn't know that the rule was a bogus one made by the mistress right on the spot.

He assumed what the Mistress said was true and let out a heavy sigh before turning towards her, "So the duel is still going on?"

"Yes-" The mistress nodded.

Ashton did not bother waiting for anything else the mistress had to say and grabbed Donovan's hand. A moment later, everything happened as fast as lightning. Ashton stepped in, turned around and rolled

the man over on his shoulders by squatting down while pulling Donovan's hand and slamming him down... out of the arena.

It was a move the mistress had taught him while teaching him about martial arts. However, even she could not believe that not only he had mastered the move already, but also that he was able to execute it so easily.

Ashton had won that too by outsmarting all of them once again!

Chapter 34 - Contingent (1)

Silence. Absolute silence shrouded the arena. No one could believe what had just transpired there. Donovan, the second strongest werewolf in the city was defeated in such a peculiar and embarrassing way.

But it had happened. Ashton had done the unthinkable, that too without breaking any rule. As much as the crowd was opposed to him winning, in their hearts, they had acknowledged the outsider. Just a bit, but it was more than enough for them to take an interest in him.

That was what most of them were feeling at that moment. Some of them, however, were debating about whether the duel was actually over or not. Some argued that the duel was not over as Ashton had attacked his opponent when he was not prepared.

As for the rest of them, they did not see anything wrong with it. In a real battle, the enemy was not going to ask Donovan to prepare himself before striking him down. He was a veteran, thus he should have been prepared for anything and it was his own fault for underestimating the kid. That was all there was to it.

Neither the mistress nor Donovan could believe what Ashton had done either. But both of them were feeling like that for different reasons. Mistress couldn't believe it as she was elated. After all, her disciple had managed to learn a move she had been teaching him for days.

Donovan, on the other hand, could not believe that he was defeated so easily. The humiliation was too much for him to handle. But for some reason, he did not lash out. He simply got back to his feet, shook the dirt off of himself and walked out of the arena.

This was not like him at all. It would be a lie to say that everyone in the arena did not bet that he was going to attack the kid. They were sure of it, however, much to their surprise, he... did not.

"Are we done now?" Ashton asked the mistress once again just to make sure there was not any other hidden rule that he wasn't aware of.

"Ahem. That'll be all. You have won and you're free to leave."

Ashton did not waste any second and left the arena as well. Tomorrow was going to be a big day. it was the day he would leave Maddencreek and hopefully not return there until it was time for his revenge.

Till then, he only had one goal in his mind to get strong enough to get rid of the mistress and destroy everything she had built over the years. She took everything away from him, thus he was planning on doing the same. Even if he had to sell his soul to the devil.

'I should stop thinking about it too much and only bite what I can chew.' Ashton thought to himself and tried to calm the pounding heart in his chest, 'Taking baby steps is better than running with crunches. Revenge will come in time, first I need to get stronger. Much stronger than I am now.'

The day passed without much trouble. No one disturbed Ashton on his last night in Maddencreek. The guards were shooting him nasty looks every now and then. But after the news of his victory over Donovan spread, even the guards did not dare to do anything to him.

However, just as a precaution, Ashton did not eat anything that he was offered. He couldn't trust Donovan or his close aides to not try to harm him by poisoning his food. Instead, he consumed the food bars he had stored in his inventory just to be safe.

Apart from that, nothing of significance happened. The next morning, Ashton had his stuff packed up and ready to move. There were many things he needed to keep outside as his inventory carried most of his important belongings.

After what seemed like hours had passed, someone finally knocked on his door. He opened it up and was greeted by a very fashionably dressed mistress and her bodyguards standing there. Just like the day he was taken away from the enclosure.

"Everything prepared?" She asked him.

Ashton nodded and grabbed his bag and then headed out with the rest of them. All of them got into several cars and headed to the city which was plainly referred to as 'Contingent'.

Ashton had heard a lot about the city from the mistress. And the way she talked about it seemed like it was the last place the Mistress really enjoyed herself. It was probably also the reason why she was accompanying him.

As even though she was quite an influential personality, there were rules that even she could not break. One of the prominent ones was about those who fcked up the rules.

The mistress never told Ashton why she was banned from entering the city, but he had a vague idea about it being somewhat related to attacking her half-sister, the pure-blooded descendant of the king.

"Let's go. We do not have time to leisure around.." The Mistress roared and the drivers raced their cars.

Chapter 35 - Contingent (2)

'Wow.'

That was the first word that came into Ashton's mind as soon as the city of Contingent came into view. Madden creek was nothing in comparison to this city which was to be expected as Contingent was a city that was not only funded by the royalty of Lycania but from other werewolf kingdoms as well.

The kingdom's capital was the only city that was bigger than Contingent. But even then, some said the security of Contingent was much better than that of the capital. Ashton did not know how much truth the claim had to it.

But it must have been true if even the mistress could not enter this city as she pleased when she could freely roam around the capital whether she was invited there or not. Also, the city had multiple gates one could use to enter.

However, all of these gates were heavily guarded by guards who seemed to be on Donovan's level or maybe a couple of levels below. Either way, they weren't people with whom anyone in their right minds would want to mess.

Contingent was a city that defied the odds of architecture and engineering. It was built on top of a mountain range. While the other mountains were covered in snow, the mountain Contingent was made on, was weirdly warm with not the slightest bit of white snow covering it.

In fact, the areas around the mountain were covered with lush green fields. To say that this planet was weird would have been the understatement of a century. Even though they were yet to enter the city, Ashton could see the skyline is riddled with elaborate skyscrapers and each was more impressive than the next.

However, the academy was not the only place of importance there. Since the other kingdoms had funded in its creation, Contingent acted as a trade centre as well. Which would account for all the carts and trucks laden with valuable resources Ashton was seeing around them.

According to the mistress, the trade in the city was at an all-time high and thus, it has attracted a lot of attention from other kingdoms as well. As a result, Vampire had also established an embassy within the city.

Also, the academy also hosted courses for the vampires as well. As weird it was, Contingent was a safe place for them all. At least that was how the others were led to believe. However, only the vegetarian

vampires who survived on animal blood were allowed to attend this place and their admission test and process varied a lot from what Ashton was going to take later that day.

Due to this odd combination of various cultures, it has left its mark not just on education, but also upon the city's identity. What historically was a city of no variation has grown into a large melting pot and it's this that unites a little over one million people to this day.

But more importantly... it was the food and delicacies this place had to offer that made even the stoic mistress drool with excitement. After seeing her reaction, Ashton was seriously thinking whether the mistress only accompanied him because she wanted to try the food once again.

"It's crowded quite a bit today..." The mistress mumbled, "Then again today is the admission test so it's expected to be that way."

"Hm..." Ashton just nodded along.

He still didn't know what the admission test was going to be. He had asked the mistress about it priorly, but she did not know anything either.

"The test changes every year. One year it's about academics and the next it's about duels. Not even the professors and trainers know about it. Only the director of the academy knows what she is going to do for the test."

That's was what the mistress told him. Even the teachers and other faculty members got to know about it mere minutes before the actual test began. It was done so that none of the teachers leaked the news to give any student an unfair advantage over the others.

Ashton thought this to be a wise move. If the teachers knew about it then there was a high probability that the noble families would try to pry the information out of them. Which would have placed the honest teachers in a hard position, while the others would try to sell the information at a price.

"You never told me what your test was?" Ashton asked the mistress as he got bored from sitting in the car for hours.

"We were made into makeshift teams and had to hunt monsters. Each monster had a certain amount of points and to qualify you needed to obtain an unknown amount of points. However, all of us will get individual points for slaying monsters. On top of that, we were allowed to attack the other participants and steal points from them. So you can imagine the chaos that ensued afterwards."

"And how many points did you need to qualify?"

"None. As I said, the director had always been unpredictable. After the test finished we were informed that none of the top ten participants qualified. But the rest of us did."

The mistress had a smile on her face, as she continued, "It wasn't a test to check our strength, but our teamwork and all of the top ten participants had betrayed their teams and stolen their points from them. Thus they were disqualified. So you would need to be extremely careful of what you do within the duration of the test."

Ashton nodded and was lost in his thoughts, 'Looks like this isn't going to be as easy I thought it would.'

Chapter 36 - Entrance Exam (1)

It took a couple of hours for them to enter Contingent. However, another trouble knocked on their car door as soon as they passed through the gates. Their cars were taken aside and all of them were asked to step out. Ashton did not know what was going on, but the mistress did.

So far all of the soldiers or guards as they referred to themselves Ashton had met were either cadets or junior officers like lieutenants. They were stronger than him as he had confirmed the same with the system. It was no wonder the Mistress was doing as she was told to. If he was in her place, he wouldn't have wanted to anger them either.

Soon, they were brought into a building that looked like a police station. Inside, Ashton saw a man standing with one of his feet on top of a man's head. The naked man had a metal collar around his neck and was bleeding profusely from wounds that were all over his body, while the officers around him were laughing and torturing him.

Behind them was a cell. From within the cell, muffled moans of a female could be heard. It didn't take long for Ashton to realise what these bastards were doing inside the cell.

It was a human slave, no, there was an entire family of slaves... a plethora of emotions washed over Ashton as he saw the humans being mistreated. He tried to calm his nerves down, but he was failing, quite miserably. The mistress must have sensed it as well, as she immediately pushed Ashton behind herself.

She was aware of Ashton's raw emotions as a former human and thus acted before he ended up doing something he would have regretted later. The push brought Ashton back to his senses, but he could not get such a terrible sight out of his head.

The only thing he could think of doing was to register the werewolf who was mistreating the humans. Ashton swore he would deal with him when the time was right. But for now, he had to control his emotions as he was weaker than them.

Standing 5' 9" tall, and solidly built with olive skin, the werewolf had an ominous feel about him. Something that Ashton did not like at all. He also had beady brown eyes and his short, straight, brown hair which was in contrast with his jet black moustache and beard.

The man was wearing a uniform just like the rest of the soldiers were, but it was a bit... more ornament than the rest of them. He also had a handful of badges spread across the left side of his chest.

"You bastards thought you could escape from Contingent? How big of a moron did you have to be to come up with something like that?" The man with the moustache barked and his subordinates joined in on the fun and began kicking the slave one after the other.

"Well, it's thanks to that we got ourselves a little treat." Someone else from the crowd said while pointing towards the cell, "These humans might be slaves, but damn, their females know how to make someone feel good."

At that moment Ashton realised that as much as he hated the mistress for what she did to him, she was far less of a monster than these bastards were. The elders living in the enclosure were right, they were indeed treated much better than the rest of humanity.

It didn't mean that Ashton's hate for the mistress had reduced. Far from it, no matter what she said or did, he would never forgive her. But in a weird way, Ashton felt a bit of respect had formed in his dead heart for the mistress.

'It's not a matter of respect...' Ashton thought to himself, 'It's more like comparing two evils and acknowledging the lesser evil between them.'

By this time the moustache man realised there was someone standing near the doorway and told them to stop their chatter. At this moment, the cadet entered the chamber and informed him about the issue.

"Ahem, Ms Mera Bismark. I suspect you had been banned from entering the city without permission from-" The man started speaking but was immediately cut off by the mistress.

"Here you go, Captain." She mumbled and handed the officer a golden envelope.

The man opened the envelope and quickly went through its content. As he did that, Ashton could see the man's expression change quicker than lightning. He was using an arrogant tone a moment ago but now it had disappeared altogether.

He quickly ordered his subordinates to clear the room. Within a matter of seconds, the power dynamic of the room had shifted and it appeared as if the mistress was the in-charge of the facility and not the captain.

"Disha, take Ashton to the academy. The captain and I have some important things to talk about. We'll join you later."

Disha was a blonde werewolf who was her closest aide after Donovan. She was also one of the only females the mistress had allowed to help train Ashton. Unlike the other werewolves, Ashton felt more comfortable with her as well... probably because just like him Disha was not born as a werewolf either.

In fact, she was from the first batch of humans to have been kept in the enclosure. This fact also helped her get close to Ashton. After all, she was once a human just like him.

With the orders being given to them, Disha and Ashton, both headed towards the academy. Which was the main attraction of the city. However, Ashton did not leave before throwing a soul-chilling look at the captain of the station. The captain had made it to his list of people to kill....

Chapter 37 - Entrance Exam (2)

"And here I was thinking the gate was crowded..." Ashton mumbled as the Academy came into his view.

But there wasn't much he could see apart from the tall buildings that watched over the town. The rest of the mansion was covered with people of different ages and physiques. Thousands upon thousands of adults were there with 'kids'.

Some of them were the parents while the others were attendants of the nobles who were there to take the entrance exam. Ashton, on the other hand, had only Disha who was accompanying him. However, he wasn't the only one like that.

There were hundreds of others who had come alone. Most of them were not wearing any extravagant clothes. Thus, it was easier for everyone to differentiate between those from noble lineage and those without one.

"Most of the nobles would have entered the city at least a couple of days ago to get a headstart," Disha said as the two of them made their way towards the crowd.

"Headstart? For what? I thought the mistress said no one knew about what the director had planned for the test until she announced it as the ceremony began?"

"Director might be unbiased, but the professors and trainer are not. By getting a headstart, I meant that the nobles would try to get a favourable expression for their children. Thus when their children qualify to attend the academy, the professors will 'keep an eye on them'."

Ashton shrugged his shoulders in an uncaring way. He had expected stuff like this to happen. But he didn't know it would begin even before they entered the academy.

'I would have expected nothing less from these idiots either way. Well, I will think about it after I qualify to attend the academy. Who knows maybe if I do well, I will get some preferential treatment as well?'

At that moment, several speakers blasted off simultaneously and the giant screen in front of them lit up. The screen was divided into eight sections, with each section having around 200 names written in them.

"Haha, it is my pleasure to see so many young ones trying out to enter our humble institute this year." A strong feminine voice boomed through the speakers, "We can talk later to our heart's content, but for now let's get to what all of you have gathered here for."

Suddenly the names on the screen disappeared and instead were replaced by a map of some sort. The map was divided into nine sections. Each one was coloured differently and marked with numbers from 1 to 8. In the middle of it all was a region that stood out from the rest.

While the other regions were marked with vibrant colours and numbers, the central area was blackened and did not have any numbers on it. As soon as the map flashed in front of the examinees, the crowd started whispering amongst themselves.

The attendants went berserk and were talking into their communicating devices. It would appear as if they were trying to get information about the exam to gain some sort of advantage over the others.

Only the nobles were doing this. The rest of them stood there baffled just like him. What good would doing that will do to them now? The entrance exam would begin in mere moments.

"Typical nobles..." Disha shook her head.

"What's going on?"

"They are trying to form teams and contracting mercenaries to help their 'young lords' win."

"Wait what? I can understand forming teams but mercenaries? How will they do that?"

"Did you think every kid here wants to enter the academy?" Disha scoffed, "Frankly only nobles care about such a thing. Most of the others are here to make some quick money."

It then dawned upon Ashton that the people he thought to be commoners were actually mercenaries. Not all of them but most. As soon as they got a satisfactory wage, the mercenaries started heading towards the person who hired them.

Soon the crowd that had been scattered till then, was reduced to large groups. Some of the commoners were now carrying bags and other stuff while some were busy testing their weapons.

since the groups had been formed, Ashton's hope of surviving against these people was dwindling fast. On top of that, unlike them, he did not come prepared. Hell, he did not even have a weapon on him that he could use there.

'I can not use the twin blades here. Someone might recognise them and then it'll be the end of me. However...'

Ashton might have kept a weapon with him. But he had a lot of other utilities inside his inventory including several medkits. But even then, he could not possibly win a head-on battle with a dozen or so werewolves.

"Huhu looks like you all came prepared this tie around." The feminine voice once again echoed through the speakers, "It would truly be a shame if someone were to ban the use of anything that is not provided by the academy during the test. That's right. I, as the director of this institution, prohibit the examinees from using anything that was not provided to them by us."

'Whoa... she is unpredictable..' Ashton thought with a smile on his face.

In the following moments, they were told about all the rules the examinees needed to know. The map they just saw was a collection of several maps. Each of the areas marked with numbers was the place where a set of examinees would 'spawn'.

The numbers of these locations were there to show which group would spawn in which location. For example, the examinees whose name was on the first list would spawn in the zone marked as 1, and so on.

But that wasn't all. As the director had already confirmed, the examinees would not be allowed to carry any outside material with them. It didn't matter whether they were using their inventories or carrying them in backpacks. This was done in order to maintain some fairness during the exam.

Various items and consumables had been placed throughout the maps. The examinees would have to either locate these resources themselves, defeat the ones who had them, or steal from the fallen ones. It was a battle for survival.

This round would continue till there are only 10 examinees remaining from each zone. The 80 examinees would be the ones to get the opportunity to enter the prestigious academy. While the rest of them would be thrown out of there without any delay.

In this way, out of around 1600 examinees, only 80 would be selected. But the examination wouldn't be over just then. There was another twist, the twist of the black zone, which was in the middle of all the zones.

The 80 'students' would have to face off with each other in the same manner of battle royale one last time. But this time, none of them would be kicked out of the academy. This last round of the exam

would be held solely in a way to rank them into different grades, ranging from S, A, B, C, and D, based on their abilities.

'This isn't going to be easy, is it?'

Ashton thought to himself as volunteers from the academy walked out and handed them some accessories which included a weird watch, a belt, and a chest plate. Before any of them could know what was going on, a new set of rules and instructions flashed in front of them, explaining the uses of the accessories.

"The watch you have been given has been imbued with storage expansion magic." The director spoke, "Each watch will give you 10 storage slots which can be used to store the items you will obtain during the examination."

However, a moment later she was interrupted by a bloodcurdling scream from one of the examinees. He was grabbing onto his hand in which he had equipped the watch, as the rest of his body twisted and turned in pain.

The show went on for about a minute before the screams finally died down and the director started speaking again.

"Quite excited to test the equipment out huh?" She sniggered, while her voice was filled with sarcasm, "Thank you for being the guinea pig for the sake of others. You see, that young man had just gone through what all of you could. That is if you decided to try to place outside equipment into those watches."

Those who were about to try and do that immediately threw their things away. None of them wanted to get themselves electrocuted by the watch.

"As for the belt, it will restrict you from using your own inventory during the exam. And last but not the least, that chest plate is your lifeline. The moment the green blinking light on it, turn red, you will get disqualified. The chest plate is programmed to take a certain amount of damage before breaking down so you need to be careful."

With that, all of the rules and regulations were explained to them. The voice died down and so did the screen in front of them before being replaced by the map once again.

"Good luck, Ashton." Disha mumbled as she stepped back, "I hope you will not disappoint the mistress. Especially after everything she has invested in you."

"Yeah yeah." Ashton waved his hands around, "I know what to do. Thanks for your concern."

Soon a message flashed on their watches showing them the groups they belonged to and how to get to that location. Everyone rushed towards their respective gates as they wanted to get as many pieces of equipment as they could.

Gaining proper equipment would more or less solidify their survival. However, there were quite a few people like Ashton who decided to take things slow. However, these were the examinees who had confidence in their raw strength and abilities. Ashton was one of them.

'Why waste time trying to find equipment when you can easily loot it from others..' He thought while calmly walking towards gate number 5.

Chapter 39 - Zone 5 (1)

Stepping through the door almost felt as if he had walked into a different world altogether. Ashton was in a completely different place. He had experienced it before in training tower, but this place was on a whole another level.

While the room the Mistress had only converted projected the atmosphere of an outside world, Ashton could clearly say that it was all fake. However, what he was feeling now did not appear to be fake at all. He could even feel the warmth of the sun over him.

He was in awe of the size and majesty of the trees. Their knotted branches rose ever upwards, as far as his head could lift, and yet there was no end to the length of the trees. The more he looked at them, the more it felt as if he was in front of a wooden castle.

The orchestra of various animalistic sounds could be heard clearly. A pair of crows were screeching high up in the canopy of the trees. Seeing them made Ashton realise the reality of the situation. Crows much like every other species of the world had either mutated or died from the virus.

Thus the only way one could see these creatures was through projections like the ones he was witnessing. However, his perception skill was telling a different tale altogether. These crows did not fit with their surroundings...

It might sound weird but Ashton could feel something was different about them. Ashton picked up a sharp wood piece off the ground and without a second thought hurled it towards the bunch of crows.

Most of them were successful in flying away, But an unlucky one got hit by the stick which was thrown towards it like a javelin. Ashton jumped at the bird only to realise that his doubts were right on point. They were not birds, but robots with cameras in place of eyes.

'I was wondering how were they planning on keeping an eye on us. Having robots like these to do surveillance is a genius plan.'

With that out of the way, he gave a last look around himself to see if he could gather some hidden equipment or something. The forest which he entered looked oak-brown and primitive. Ashton could see the footprints of the examinees who entered before him on the grass. It didn't look like they were much interested in fighting with one another.

'Maybe they came up with an agreement to find weapons first and fight later.' Ashton thought while analysing his surroundings, 'However, they do not have one thing that I do.'

In such a wide place, Ashton's perception skin was nothing less than a lifesaver. On top of that, since it was a vampire skill, the other participants would not have such a skill, and this gave Ashton an 'unfair' advantage over the others.

'This kid is interesting...!' The director thought while sipping her tea.

For someone who was apparently one of the first werewolves to come into being, the director was fairly beautiful. If she did not hold the position of director of the academy, one would have never been able to guess that she was almost a century old lady.

Standing 5' 7" tall, this fair-skinned woman had an attentive feel about her. Her eyes hold the wisdom of almost a century in them and it was difficult for even the minutest details escape from her vision.

But the most notable part of her was not her eyes, but the burn scar that extended from her left earlobe to the chin. Not many knew how she got the scar, but they know one enough to not talk about it. As she might seem like a friendly and warm person from the outside, but those close to her knew better than to be fooled by her external demeanour.

There were various screens in front of her, thirty-two, to be precise. The director was not alone in the chamber. Most of the teachers in charge of the first year's were there with her. They wanted to check whether there were any extraordinary examinees among the crowd or not.

The Director, on the other hand, was constantly looking at the new examinees and some of them had already caught her eye, including Ashton.

He was the first one to discover the anomaly of the crows there and immediately acted on it. Even though he did not have any weapons on him. This seemed to have some effect on her.

'His decision was foolish. The crows could have turned out to be hostile and then the kid would have been in trouble.' The director shook his head, 'He headed into the unknown without any hesitation. As much as I admire bravery, I hate fools more. However... he might be the first to locate 'that' weapon.'

The examinees had not been made aware of this, but at the entrance of each gate, there was a specific piece of equipment hidden away. However, none of them had been discovered till now.

All of them had been in such a rush to separate themselves from the crowd that they did not even check their surrounding properly.. But the way Ashton was looking around, he might become the first one to find the weapon.

Chapter 40 - Zone 5 (2)

'There is something behind this bush.' Ashton thought and headed deeper into the bushes.

The forest he was in, was filled with bushes all over. But this particular bush was different. It was faint and almost unrecognisable, but there were clear signs that the bush had been interfered with. By interference, Ashton meant that the bush looked more as if someone had slashed it and then tried to cover it up, but did a poor job.

'... Could this be a trap?'

As he was making his way deeper and deeper into the bush, Ashton realise that it might as well be a trap. Since he knew that the examinees could use the 'natural' resources of the zone, there was a high chance that one of them had used the branches and vines to make a trap for the others.

'It is better to check things out rather than jumping headfirst into the unknown.' Ashton quickly backtracked his footsteps to where he had shot down the crow, 'Well, this is one way to confirm my suspicions.'

He threw the broken crow into the bush with all his might and listened. A moment later there was a loud clunking noise. Ashton carefully followed the noise and there it was. A hidden chest right in the middle of the bushes.

The chest looked quite old but was well decorated with ornaments. It almost felt as if the chest was begging him to open it.

'I... really was overthinking things.' Ashton shook his head and opened the chest.

However, as soon as he opened the chest, someone shot an arrow at him. However, thanks to his enhanced perception skill, Ashton easily dodged the arrow. But he could feel something was off. The next moment, there was a blinking notification in front of him.

—

You have been affected by <Luna's Curse>.

Your werewolf stats have been reduced by 30%.

—

"The hell?" Ashton blurted out as he read what the notification had to say, "When did I get- wait a minute!"

It only took him a moment to realise what was going on. Unlike what he believed, he wasn't the first one to discover the chest there. There were three others who had been lurking around there. Those bastards waited for someone like him to show up and open the chest...

'Because there was a curse placed on the chest... damn it! Why didn't my perception skill work on them or the chest?'

[It would seem one of them has learned concealing magic or carrying a tome with them. Which helped them fool you.]

The system's reply only made Ashton madder. Couldn't Lucifer have the system inform him about all this before? But then again, it was his own fault to be blindly dependent on the skills and not his senses.

As for the question of tomes was concerned, until and unless they found it in the zone, there was no way they could use an outside material here. Thus Ashton was pretty sure at least one of them had concealing abilities.

'They found the chest and knew it was cursed. So they used the concealing magic to hide themselves along with the curse on the chest. After that, they waited for someone else to open the chest so they could take the items and kill the one who opened it. Clever bastards...'

"Huhu, looks like we caught one of those nameless dogs." The red-headed kid carrying a bow and arrows smirked. Following his lead, the other two emerged from the flanks and cornered Ashton.

"It's a good thing that he isn't one of the nobles we know. Which means-"

"We can eliminate him without fearing about retaliation from his guardians."

The other two kids were twins and had black hair and were carrying swords. But more importantly, all three of them had the same insignia carved on their clothes.

'So they are from the same family... no wonder they are working together.' Ashton thought before getting into the position to battle it out, 'Thankfully, the curse only applies to my werewolf genes and not the others.'

He looked up the stats of all three of them, and they were all around level 7. Which meant they were a couple of levels below him. However, thanks to the curse, Ashton had more or less the same stats as them. Still, he could use his other genes to overpower them, but before that, he needed to check something.

Ashton then looked up to see whether there was any surveillance in that area or not. It was obvious that there was. After all, the director and the faculty members wanted to know who was the one to find and claim the treasure.

'Things are not going to be easy for me. Are they now?'

There was no chance in hell he was going to risk using his other genes when the others were watching him. Even if the ones in front of him did not notice him using his skills like that, the director and the faculty members would.

However, he wasn't out of any ideas just yet. He jumped over the chest and quickly grabbed whatever was inside it. He had taken the curse, so it only made sense that he took the weapon inside as well. But he had not even remotely expected to get what he did...

'This... I can work with this!'