

Zompiewolf 341

Chapter 341 All Eyes On You (2)

Ashton did not lie when he said that, there was nothing left to do in the trial zone anymore. Atlas, who happened to be the secret boss was already dead and as for Ursa, she had been freed as well. The two objectives of the trial were over and done.

As for the undead, well, they died along with Atlas. Therefore, the trial zone did not have any 'trials' remaining. These were the only challenges the zone had to offer. But now that neither Ursa nor Atlas exist in the trial zone, there was nothing left to do.

There were a couple of more things that Ashton did there, after completing the trial. But they were none of Otiga's concern. Things like Ashton had a new summon as well as a certain new ally. Such things were better left hidden.

Otiga nodded along while Ashton recounted the tale of his trial to her. The more she listened, the more she realised how different his trial was from hers. She was only given the objective to escape the trial zone while the Siren tried to hunt her down.

But Ashton's trial was entirely different. Even though he came across the siren, defeating her or escaping from her clutches wasn't the objective of his trial. She did not know there could be such a sporadic trial hidden amongst the others.

Leon kept making odd noises all the while Ashton narrated the happenings. Almost as if he was telling Otiga that Ashton was lying. Otiga would have thought the same thing had she been unaware of the countless tales left behind by her predecessors. One such tale indeed had mentions of a demonic tree in it.

The way Ashton described the tree, was the same as the one mentioned in the story. Therefore, Otiga knew Ashton wasn't making things up.

'I always thought the scriptures weren't true. But I guess, I wasn't capable of learning the truth about the trial in the first place.' Otiga thought to herself.

The tales left behind by the initial challengers were treated as holy scriptures by the Zhasks and thus were kept in a protected location. A location that only the Patriarch of the family knew, and no one else. By default, not even the other monarchs had any idea about their existence... only Otiga knew what was written in them, just like her father did before her.

Considering the secrecy surrounding the vault, it was unlikely Ashton would be aware of the tale. Which meant he was speaking the truth, even though it was a bit too much to swallow.

"Who would have thought such trials would still exist after all this time?" Otiga smiled, "I genuinely thought all of the sporadic trials would be over."

"What do you mean?" Ashton asked.

"Initially, there were more than 12 trials spread across Euphoria. But as time progressed and challengers kept completing them, the number of trials reduced to what it is now." Otiga explained, "After so many years, we thought these twelve trials were periodic trials since they did not disappear after completion. Looks like Ursa's trial wasn't one of them after all."

This information was a bit... intriguing. But in hindsight, it made sense. If the trial was to kill a being, then once it was done, how would someone else be able to clear it? In this case, there would be no trial anymore.

A few minutes later, Ashton was dropped off at his hotel.

[Basically, if you had killed the Hydra before you were teleported out of there, that trial would have seized existing as well.]

"I guess, there will be more sporadic trials as well," Ashton mumbled, "Getting rid of them would give me better rewards, I guess. Just like Ursa's trial."

[By the way, was it really okay to send Ursa to earth?]

"She helped me get out of the cave. So, I'll trust her this once. If she screws up, I'll have her taken care of as well."

Thanks to Astaroth's comment, Ashton was reminded of what went down after he defeated Atlas.

Back in the cave, as soon as Ashton closed the notification, the underwater cave began collapsing. There wasn't enough time for him to walk out of the cave the same way he came in, as water flooded the cave.

Ashton quickly threw Atlas' corpse inside [Valhalla] before sending the wolves back to earth. The situation was dire, but not hopeless... until it became hopeless. Ashton fought the wave and almost managed to get out of there on his own.

However, his fight with Atlas and the way he continually switched his genes had exhausted him. Fighting the high-pressure water, wasn't something his body could tolerate. At that moment, Ursa arrived to help him safely get back to land.

Surprisingly, the countdown only mattered while he was inside the cave as he wasn't teleported outside yet. Before Ashton could wrap his head around what was happening, Ursa hugged him tightly, knocking the winds out of his lungs.

"Thank you! Thank you for saving me!" She exclaimed happily, "Finally I am free!"

Ashton gently pushed her away after a couple of minutes, "I should be the one thanking you. After all, you saved me as well. But how did you know?"

"When I saw the undead disappear, I knew something was going on inside the cave. So I rushed in to check, only to see that the ave was falling apart and you were struggling in the current."

Ashton smiled awkwardly, realising that deep down Ursa was still the caring woman she once was. Only this time, no one was going to take advantage of her kindness.

"What's your plan now?" Ashton casually asked her.

Someone like her who had been thinking about escaping the 'prison' for thousands of years, should have a plan regarding what they wanted to do next. That's why it came as a surprise to him when Ursa said she had no idea.

She had longed for her freedom for so long, that she had given up on making it out of there. But now that her freedom was no longer a pipe dream, she did not know what she wanted to do. That's when Ashton suggested she moved to earth.

No one would be able to enslave her there, and she would be able to live as she pleased. Ursa was a bit sceptical, but once Ashton opened the portal back to the domain of wolves, and she saw how good of a life the wolves were living, she agreed with his idea.

Just like that, Ashton gained a new ally. But that wasn't enough for his greedy ass. Despite Astaroth's protests, Ashton resurrected Atlas. Surprisingly, the only memories he had were of the time when he used to look up to the Precursors. Therefore, when Atlas saw Ashton, he readily accepted him as his master.

It was a bit... uneventful that someone as strong as Atlas immediately accepted Ashton as his new master. But it was fine since Ashton wasn't in the position he could have fought against the behemoth once again.

That was all that happened in the trial zone before he was eventually teleported out of there. Up to this point, nothing had surprised him. However, the real shocker was when Otiga told him how long he had been inside the trial zone...

"I still can't believe it's been an entire week since I went missing and not just a day as I believed." Ashton chuckled as he opened the door to his room.

[The flow of time is surely messed up here.]

"Since it's you fuckers who created the planet, I wouldn't expect it to work properly in the first place. Now shut up and give me some privacy, will ya? I got a-

Slap!

As soon as he entered the room, he was greeted by a hard slap across the face, instead of the smiling face, that he was expecting. But before he could even ask why Anna slapped him, she planted her lips on his.

[Damn... those mood swings are quite dangerous. Whatever, I'm outta here gotta find a way to tame that Scythe as well. Good night to you, lucky bastard.]

Ashton paid no heed to whatever Astaroth mumbled. The only thing he could think about was the little succubus wrapped around his arms. He was hoping he would get some rest once he got back to his room, but that seemed unlikely now.

Chapter 342 All Eyes On You (3)

The twin stars were up early in the sky. Since Ashton was given a mandatory two-day quarantine, he decided it was the best time to use his rewards and get stronger by using unallocated stat points. After

all, it had been a while since he last opened the stats page. As a result, a lot of unallocated stat points had been accumulated.

As for the girls, they were already on their way to clear their remaining trials. Both the twins had one trial remaining while Anna had to complete three more. As for him... well, his trials were either too difficult or unnecessarily time-consuming. He knew in future, he might have to focus on clearing the trials as soon as he could.

"For now, let's see what fruits my two labours have generated." Ashton excitedly rubbed his hands together.

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Name: Ashton Fenrir

Species: Human-based Tribid (Active), Carbon-based Space Farer (Active).

Status: Zompiewolf

Class: Revenger (werewolf class), Blood Mage (vampire class), Necromancer (zombie class)

Subclass: [Cinder Soul]

Title: [Defiant], [Novice Brewer], [Monklin Slayer], [Researcher], [Owner Of the Eastern Palace], [First Modern Space Farer of Earth], [Hydra's Adversary], [Atlas' Slayer] <NEW!>

Age: 17 years

Gender: Male

Grade: E-tier (Evolution is possible) [Get to level 60 with all your Genes to begin the second stage of the evolutionary process.]

Cumulative Level: 113

Affiliation: Self.

Level:

> Werewolf Level: 58 (27%)

> Vampire Level: 57 (0%)

> Zombie Level: 55 (0%)

Stats:

HP: 14500/14500

Mana: 9950/9950

Dark Aura: 11270

Damage: 176

Armour: 149

Stealth: 141

Stamina: 165

Agility: 162

Intelligence: 209

[UNUSED STAT POINTS]: 43

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[So close and yet so far... I guess you'll be evolving again sooner than I expected. Your stats are not half bad for someone of your grade. Congratulations, you have officially graduated from being a moron to being a Dimwit.]

"Wanna know what you have graduated into?" Ashton sternly replied.

[No thanks.]

Ashton ignored Astaroth and focused on the good news. No matter how long he stared at his stats page, he could not figure out anything that he needed to correct. His levels and stats were all just as they should have been.

'No, they have exceeded my expectations. I never thought just clearing two trials will get me to this level already.'

He could only imagine how strong he would be once he finishes all of the trials. But for now, he had to focus on efficiently using his points. His previous battles were tough, but they weren't enough to push him to the limit.

That being said, since he had one more summon under his control, it was necessary for him to increase his intelligence. No necromancer would want to lose control over their summons because of a lack of intelligence.

'Here goes 20 points down in the drain.'

[So you admit your mind is as good as drainage?]

'Of course. You live in it so it has to be filled with sewage.'

[Technically, both of those things are different-]

'Shut it.'

—

Unallocated points used: 43

Intelligence: 209 --> 230

Damage: 176 --> 190

Agility: 162 --> 170

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After taking care of the stats, Ashton decided to look into his new title: [Atlas' Slayer]. The title was pretty useless... until the time to face another Xyran would arise. The effect was similar to that of [Hydra's Adversary].

He would take less damage from Xyrans, but deal more damage to them. But the title effect would activate only when he would face another Xyran or a Xyran subspecies. Since the title could only be used for a specific use, Ashton realised right now, that the title was a bit useless to him.

However, the other rewards he got for killing Atlas were not as shabby. After all, the reward for defeating Atlas was to get one of his abilities. Since all of the abilities Atlas had been good, it didn't matter which ability he was awarded. It would be a win-win situation for him.

The only thing was, that the ability he'll get would be adjusted according to his grade and not his level. Therefore, no matter what ability he ended up with, they wouldn't be as strong as they were when Atlas was using them. Also, he wasn't allowed to select the ability, he would be randomly allotted one of them.

"Let's see what we get..."

—

The reward is being randomised...

Randomisation completed.

>> Divinity: Additionally absorbed stamina can be used to dish out increased damage based on the user's HP. Deals 10 (+3% of user's maximum hp) as true damage to the surrounding enemies every 2 seconds.

<Divinity> skill is being adjusted to suit the user.

Congratulations! New Vampire skill: <Irreverence> has been created.

>> Irreverence: Drinking others' blood will heal the user. However, absorbing blood from others while having full HP would be stored as 'extra HP'. The user can also convert their HP into 'extra HP'. This

'extra HP' could be used to deal damage to the targets in a small area. Deals 20% of the user's physical attack (+2% of the user's extra hp) as true damage to the surrounding enemies every 3 seconds.

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[...]

'...'

[Ahem... do I need to explain-]

"Nah, I'm good."

[Good, good... just wanted to say the skill causes continuous true damage. So you must know how important the skill is. Just... try not to use it too often or else all of the high-grade beings will have their eyes on you.]

Ashton nodded. He was hoping to get this skill, but since Divinity depended on another skill which was used for stamina absorption, he wasn't so excited about getting the skill. Thankfully, the skill was altered to suit him. Otherwise, getting this skill would have been quite a disaster.

With the rewards on his end sorted out, Ashton decided to focus on the last reward: The Grim Reaper's Scythe. However, not everything could go the way he wanted them to and the Scythe only proved that point.

"Any progress?"

[Unfortunately, no. The corruption rate of the scythe far exceeds anything I have seen till now. Forget about using it, even touching it now would do you more harm than good. And before you ask, feeding it to Balmond might not work the way you want it to.]

"The scythe might end up corrupting Balmond?"

[I'm not sure, but I would not recommend doing anything we are not sure about. I'm sure you wouldn't be so keen on losing Balmond to your greed.]

Ashton remained quiet. The scythe was supposed to make Balmond stronger than ever before. But now, it was impossible.

"Dwelling about it ain't gonna help us." Ashton jumped off the bed and began stretching, "Rather than that, I should focus on obtaining information about the remaining trials."

Chapter 343 Gotta Catch 'Em All? (1)

A month later...

True to his words, Ashton decided to speed through the trials. In a month, he completed five more trials. But in truth, the trials had nothing to do with difficulty since all of them were the lower six trials. On top of that, Otiga already helped him gather all the information he would have needed to clear the trials as efficiently as possible.

All of these five trials were much easier compared to the trials he had attempted before. For starters, none of them was combat oriented. As a result, Ashton did not gain any levels in the past month. The trials he had completed till now were to test their willpower. Which was done by toying with their senses.

Well, it wasn't that they were deprived of their senses. But the planet messed them up pretty bad. At the completion of each trial, one of their senses was compromised. For example, after completing the trial of Cetus, instead of getting blind, the participants would lose the ability to sleep.

If they tried, they would get the most horrible nightmares someone could think about. Handling this wasn't difficult for Ashton or for any of the girls as they had spent a month on the Progenitor's spaceship trying to evade sleeping in zero gravity.

Ashton wasn't sure what the twins did when they could not sleep, but he had a lot of fun with Anna. For once, they were glad they did not have to sleep. But the curse wasn't permanent as it switched the moment another one of the lower six trials was cleared.

Following a similar pattern, the participants had their sense of touch compromised. Where whenever they would touch something, it would feel as if they were touching something unbearably hot and gooey. Ashton had no trouble with this either as he was literally immune to fire.

He had the most problem when his hearing was messed up. In his opinion, it was the cruellest mess up, the planet could have sprung on them. To hear the desperate cries for help, while being unable to do anything, for an entire week was torturous.

But according to Anna, the trial involving the sense of taste was the worst. This time whatever they ate or drank, would turn into disgusting things once inside their mouths. For Ashton, it was no biggie as zombies could eat literally anything and not worry about it at all.

Similarly, all of their five prominent senses were tested one after another. The experience wasn't an easy one. As a result, out of the thousands of participants that had arrived to complete the trials, a little over two hundred participants were left. The rest of them quit the trials and left the planet long ago.

As for Ashton and co, throughout the weeks, they finally managed to conquer the lesser trials together. Only Ashton and Anna of the group were left on Euphoria while the twins headed back to their grandfather.

There was a rule on Euphoria to avoid overcrowding... at least it was supposed to do so. Once a participant had no more trials to complete, they had to leave the planet. Until and unless they were the guests of one of the monarchs. In which case the monarchs were responsible for their lodging etc.

"Maybe they should have taken up Lady Otiga on her offer. She wanted the twins to stay till you complete all of your trials." Anna playfully nudged him while they were waiting in queue to be transported to the Pegasus trial zone, which happened to be Anna's final trial.

"In my opinion, they made the right choice." Ashton mumbled as he wrapped his hands around her, "Rather than staying here and wasting their time, it was better for them to head back and focus on their training instead."

"Hm... I think I'll take Lady Otiga's offer to stay behind. After all, you will have to feed me regularly so..."

"Yeah. That's definitely the only reason you would like to stay back." Ashton laughed and so did Anna, "Let's get this trial over with, then I can feed you loads upon loads."

"Can't wait."

Ashton might have said he would complete the trial as soon as possible. But it wasn't going to be so easy. After all, it was the final trial among the lower six trials, and arguably the worst one amongst them as well.

It was time to attempt the most time-consuming trial, which was the Pegasus' trial. According to the information they got from Otiga, in this trial, the participant had to capture one of many flying horse-like creatures called Pegasus and tame it.

,m Sounds simple enough, right? Well, it wasn't. Catching a Pegasus was difficult already but the participants did not have to catch 'any' pegasus. Upon entering the trial zone, they would randomly be assigned one of the many pegasuses. They would then have to find and capture this particular pegasus.

If Sven was there, Ashton would have tamed all of the pegasuses and the trial would have been a piece of cake, all thanks to his binding skill. Sadly, that wasn't the case as Ashton had to do it all alone... technically, he wasn't alone as Anna would help him and vice-versa.

Even though they had all the information they would need to catch a Pegasus, wasn't going to be an easy job which he got to know as soon as he arrived in the trial zone.

Also, the hundreds of participants in the area did not help. Most of them were slackers. Ashton could just feel it and according to the reports that Otiga shared with them, most of the remaining participants were part of an extremist group.

None of them was going to put in the required hard work, and rather than capturing Pegasus on their own, they would simply steal them from the ones who do the work. This strategy was much easier and less draining.

But it was unlikely those fuckers would try to mess with him. After all, Ashton had become quite a famous personality on Euphoria. Not only was he stronger than all of them combined, but he had also gained a strong backer in Otiga, and no one wanted to mess with her.

Anna wanted to clear the trial, the legit way if it was possible. Since Ashton wanted to teach the extremists a lesson, she decided to tag along. Well, Ashton wasn't some self-righteous prick. He had another reason for doing so, and that reason was Otiga's request.

She was the one who wanted to teach the extremists a lesson. From what Ashton could gather, she had, had her fair share of troubles with them. Nothing big, but still annoying kind of problems. Therefore, she decided to mess with them, now that she had the chance.

"It's gonna be a lot of fun." Ashton smiled while cracking his knuckles.

Chapter 344 Gotta Catch 'Em All? (2)

The zone they went to, was in complete contrast to the others. While the environment of the other trial zones was gloomy and often got on the nerves of the participants, this time around, the twin suns of Euphoria were shiny over a luscious green forest laden with hundreds of different trees.

The forest was gigantic, radiant, and diverse. Its canopy was contested by trees Ashton had never seen before, that permitted ample, shimmering lights to descend for scattered shrubs to control the nut and seed-covered grounds below.

Curling vines drooped from every tree. Below them was a range of flowers most of them had never seen before. These flowers were most likely unique to this region of the planet. In hindsight, the place was a perfect spot to have a romantic date or something. Especially due to its brightened-up and uniform scenery.

At the same time, the beauty of the place was contaminated by the discord of beastly sounds, predominantly those of foraging beasts that reverberated through the air and were in harmony with the splashing of fish in a nearby lake.

"This place is-" Ashton mumbled but Anna cut him off.

"Beautiful..." She said as her wide crimson eyes absorbed everything into her memories, "isn't it?"

"Y-Yeah, beautiful. That's exactly what I was about to say..." Ashton instantly agreed, before muttering his true thoughts within himself, 'I did not think it was disgusting or anything.'

[Sucker.]

'You want me to suffer one of these nights? My bad, I forgot you were a masochist.'

[Sorry to disappoint, but I don't have either voyeuristic or masochistic tendencies. Not that it's weird or anything, everyone has their own... kinks. But watching others sure as hell ain't mine.]

'Right... killing is more like your thing.'

[As is yours.]

Ashton couldn't disagree even if he wanted to. As he knew what Astaroth said was true. A year and a half ago, he wouldn't have even thought about killing someone, other than Mera for obvious reasons.

But now, he never hesitated before killing someone or something if they bared their fangs at him or someone he cared about. Honestly... it was a bit scary, now that Ashton thought about it. But Anna's voice derailed his train of thoughts as she had found something eye-catching there.

"Aren't these dogwood trees?" She asked while pointing towards a section of forest.

"They are... and not just one but an entire section of forest is covered by them." Ashton replied, "But then again, Otiga's report stated the forest arguably had floral species from various planets spread across the galaxy."

Some of these trees were familiar to the earthlings, letting them know this forest of a collective index of flora present throughout the galaxy. Just as the reports stated. Even though, Ashton and Anna already were aware of it, seeing it with their own eyes still came as a surprise to them.

However, there was one thing none of them knew but was shortly made aware of by Astaroth. This forest wasn't supposed to be a forest initially. At least it was not intended to become one.

[Back when the Xyran made Euphoria, we simply wanted to test out the variety of flora samples left behind by the Precursors.]

Astaroth explained the forest's origin story in much detail. The gist of it was, that the Xyran did not do it as some form of recreational activity. It wasn't a place they would bring their partners and have some lovey-dovey time with them.

They created this place because they wanted to know if there was a way to militarise these lifeforms. In their twisted way of thinking, the Xyrans thought everything the Precursors created had a secondary devastating purpose.

They weren't all that wrong about it. After all, unlike they were led to believe, the Precursors did create weapons. They simply never used them due to their 'morality'. But xyrans did not have that moral obligation... which resulted in quite a few disasters.

Those failures were probably the reason why a secret prison was created to force valuable information out of the Precursor's mouths. As without their guidance, the Xyrans would have probably destroyed the galaxy in mere days.

[Either way, back to the story... even after years and years of studies and experiments, nothing came out of it so we decided to give up on it. The trees were simply... just trees and nothing more. Since then, we decided to conduct different kinds of experiments and studies. The kind that involved studying different beings and even humans.]

'... your kind's obsession with humans gives me Yandere vibes, not gonna lie.'

[Can you blame us? After all, Humans were supposed to be better Precursors. It made sense for the Precursors to give you lot some kind of gift that made them a genetic wonder capable of ruling over the galaxy.]

[However, the humans were stopped from achieving their true potential as the precursors did not get to nurture them as they did with us Xyrans. If they had, we would probably be in your shoes and vice-versa.]

Astaroth carried on narrating the tale. The Xyrans hoped that the humans would be able to obtain some sort of powers and be trained into foot soldiers for their kind.

[The ones destined to rule the universe would help the ones who stole the spotlight from them... it was quite ironic.]

'Just carry on with the Xyran's tale of stupidity.'

[...]

However, upon realising that humanity did not even have access to the thing called 'Blessing' they were deemed useless and the project known as 'Garden of Eden' was abandoned. It was this abandoned Garden of Eden, that turned into a forest once the Xyrans left Euphoria for good.

[It's safe to say, the Xyrans never thought an unkempt garden would turn into a fully grown forest with its own ecosystem.]

'How would they? It's not like they ever thought about something before doing executing their half-assed plans.'

[Hm... that way of thinking sounds quite familiar. Wait! You do it too!]

'Of course, I do. You're my body-mate. What do you expect?'

[... Why do I always end up getting trolled by you, nowadays?]

'Anyways... could you tell me one tale about Xyrans that does not involve sick experiments or massacres?'

[Let me think... Oh, I can tell you about the time when the Council came up with the solution to excessive inter-breeding between Xyran families and decided to have orgies on a nearly unprecedented level involving various other species?]

'... what?'

[Yeah! A galaxy-wide orgy. One could say the Xyrans literally fucked the galaxy. Not the humans though, you know due to the superiority complex and shit. Apart from that, the fun did cause a lot of problems later... but who cares? Everyone was having fun. The ladies even had some tentacle stuff-]

'... let's stick to the tales of mass murders from now on.'

Ashton decided he was scarred enough and decided to focus on the trial. At the same time, everyone got their missions through the wristbands. Anna gave him a look and nodded. It was time to put their plan into action.

"Let's split and look for those who possess flight skills." Ashton reminded Anna, "They are the ones those radical assholes will go for first."

Anna nodded and departed on her own. While Ashton decided to hang back and observe others for a moment or two. Despite knowing that radicals were present in the trial zone, he did not have any idea who they were and targeting every single participant wasn't a good choice either.

'It's better to not accidentally piss off someone with a strong background.' Ashton thought to himself, 'Maybe I shouldn't say that, considering I'm going against a radical group.'

Since they could not randomly attack people, Ashton came up with a plan to think as those radicals would. Thus, they came up with a plan to look for people capable of flying.

The Pegasuses were flying creatures that only ever stepped foot on the ground to eat. One could argue they also came down to sleep, but that only ever happened once a month during a new moon, because that's the only time they slept.

A moonless sky was the only time when they could sleep peacefully without being noticed by their natural predators. It was also the preferred time to capture them. Sadly, the next new moon wasn't going to happen any time soon. Therefore there were only two ways to capture the pegasuses.

One was to lay a trap using their favourite fruits as bait. This method rarely ever worked since the pegasus were highly intelligent beings.

"The only one who will ever fall for such obvious traps as the young ones." Ashton mumbled before shifting his gaze towards the sky, "But that doesn't mean it easier to capture them because the mothers of the babies almost never let their young out of their sight. Which leaves the participants with one choice..."

Suddenly, a pair of wings appeared out of Ashton's back. The wings of a demonic Xyran. But no one would suspect that, because Ashton had changed the shape and colours of the wings using his [Alteration]* skill.

"We would need to catch them in their domain... the sky."

Chapter 345 Glaring Nightmare

Glaring Nightmare was the name of one of the rowdiest radical groups present in the Orion belt of the Milkyway galaxy. They were nowhere near the strongest, but their ability to cause a mess was unmatched. Even Xyrans would have a hard time beating them when it came to making messy situations even messier.

Unlike other groups in their clique, they openly did things that would have deemed them as psychos. Including but not limited to throwing each other out in the space without so much as a space suit just because they got bored. Yeah... not such a great way of curing boredom.

They were more like a sorority group being high as fuck and their pranks going out of hand than a terrorist group. Their only motive was to spread as much death and destruction as they could... that too in as sadistic of a way as possible.

Being called as radicals, one would expect these people to be the messiah of the lower civilisations and help them get justice or whatnot. But the members of Glaring Nightmare did not give a fuck about anyone but themselves... sometimes not even themselves.

In fact, they often plundered the weak and took their children and women to increase their numbers. Sometimes when they couldn't find anything to mess around with, they'll mess with each other... and not in a good way.

Their idiotic ways were the reason why they were on a constant lookout for more people to join them. Thankfully for them, as long as they had booze, women and narcotic substance, plenty of youth came looking for them like moths to a flame.

"The more I read the report about them, the more I want to know what happened between them and Otiga." Ashton mumbled as he flew across the sky while reading the report, "By the way, do Xyrans have anything to do with them?"

[Haha, it was hilarious. Do you think anyone who has a loose screw or two belongs to the Xyrans?]

"Judging by the thing I have seen so far, the Xyrans having a bunch of junkies on payroll wouldn't surprise me in the least. Just look at the way they make money to stay operational. How come these fuckers get to live a better life than those on earth?"

[Do I really need to tell you that?]

"Nah... I already know you Xyrans have some 'daddy' issues that you love to take out on you siblings, that is, humans. Either way, let's continue with the report..."

Their main source of income depended on slave trading along with trading rare creatures found throughout space. Sometimes they also served as mercenaries, but since their erratic behaviour and poor background, they did not get many clients. Because... there had been cases where the radicals have killed their employers just for fun.

'This could be the reason why Otiga is so pissed with them.' Ashton thought to himself, 'She could have given them a contract which they blew up and since she was the one to employ them, she had to suffer because of their action. Makes sense now.'

Despite all this, they weren't viewed as a threat by most of the higher civilisations. Their self-centred behaviour was the reason for it. Since the group did not have a common goal, their factions often end up fighting amongst themselves. This meant it was easier to divide them and let them fight each other to death. The Xyrans wouldn't even have to lift a weapon to end them.

As for what they were doing on Euphoria, the answer was simple. Euphoria was a hub that was managed by an organisation that did not discriminate between criminals and ideal citizens of the galaxy.

Anyone could enter the place and do what they wanted to as long as they did not give the monarch a reason to hunt them down. Also, the planet was filled with rare beasts. Therefore, the radicals from the Glaring Nightmare group would often come there to capture these creatures for a minimum price and then sell them to their customers to make absurd profits.

"Looks like they aren't that dangerous after all. Sure, no one would want to cross them because of the amount of nuisance they can throw in someone's face. But they quite are weak. Just like a bunch of bullies who can't do anything against someone who stands up to them."

One of the reasons why the group was so weak was a crucial lack of a clear hierarchy amongst them. Without a proper chain of command, it was easier to defeat them. Which meant there was quite a high chance that they lose every battle they fought.

Those Nightmare fools seemed to be aware of it as well. Thus, they rarely ever fought with someone on the same or higher level than themselves and always targetted the ones weaker than them.

"That's why I know they wouldn't dare to target me," Ashton mumbled while he casually flew around.

He was on the lookout for something to happen, all the while looking for the Pegasus he had to capture. Right now, Ashton was only looking for the pegasus and had no intentions of capturing it. Because once he did that, he would be teleported out of the trial zone since the trial would be complete, something he couldn't afford to do.

Also, he was a bit preoccupied with other things... including learning how to fly. For starters, it was really weird to fly around like this. After all, humans were not supposed to fly like this. Usually, he would have used the Wind manipulation ability to move around.

But with the wings, it was a lot easier... well, maybe not as easy as he had expected. There were a lot of things Ashton had to keep in his mind before flying. He tried and tried, but in the end, Astaroth was left in charge of handling the wings for now.

"Well, that concludes everything that we know about the radicals."

[Are you sure you can't kill any of them? You just need a little nudge to get to level 60. Hit it and you'll be able to evolve again.]

The plan was enticing, but Ashton shook his head before he could get carried away. Killing them might allow him to get to level 60 and evolve again, but he would not be able to compete in the following trials.

A rule of no killing was in place during Pegasus's trial. Anyone who broke the rule would be exported out of Euphoria and banned from entering it ever again. Ashton had no idea why such an absurd rule even existed.

But according to rumours, it was said the Monarch of the Seventh seat hated his experience while attempting the trial. Therefore, once he became a monarch he placed such a rule to ensure no one got greedy and killed the participants.

"Whoever he was, only made things worse." Ashton shrugged his shoulders, "If you make rules, people will always find a way to get around those rules and keep doing what they wanted in the first place. These Nightmare folk were the prime example of such a case."

While Ashton was chatting with Astaroth, he noticed something weird. Even though he was flying in a place where the Pegasus were supposed to flock around, in the last hour he had not seen a single flying horse.

It was just a hunch, but Ashton could feel something problematic was about to go down. No sooner than he thought this, a crimson portal appeared midair. It wasn't very big, but it was big enough for the other participants to fall back. However, a few unfortunate ones got sucked inside... to god knows where.

'An instance dungeon? Why here of all the places?'

[I'm as clueless as you are and I don't like this feeling...]

According to what Ashton knew about instance dungeons from Astaroth, these only popped open under two circumstances. The first and most common reason, a Xyran administrator wanted to have some fun messing around. Or the second... when some sort of predefined conditions were met, prompting the dungeon to appear.

[It's unlikely that this is an Admin's doing. If they had, then there would have been some sort of notification about it.]

"Well, that doesn't matter. Now does it?" Ashton readied himself, "Once the dungeon opens-"

Ashton was cut off by someone's loud voice. He looked below to see at least a hundred people celebrating. All of them had a robe made out of Pegasus hide. There was no doubt in Ashton's mind that these assholes were the reason the dungeon had appeared.

[Looks like my guess was right on point.]

Ashton did not reply as he was joined by Anna, who looked just as baffled as the rest of them.

"What the hell is going on here?" She asked.

"Those Glaring nightmare folks are behind this. They did something to cause this mess." Ashton calmly replied, "My guess is... they have never been able to kill anyone in this place. So they decided to cause a dungeon to appear and do the killings for them. The only thing I don't understand is... how the hell did they summon a dungeon here in the first place?"

Ashton wanted to head down and bash their heads till he got the answer he was looking for. But he knew that wasn't possible. If he accidentally killed one of them, he might end up getting banished. Well, it wasn't like he had the opportunity to do so in the first place... the dungeon had opened.

Chapter 346 Only I Can Kill It... Isn't That Weird? (1)

The situation was immediately reported to the guards as well as the mercenaries. The presence of an un-named creature in a trial zone wasn't a matter mere participants could handle by themselves.

Everyone moved out to subjugate the monster, but there was a problem. Someone had messed around with the portal that led to the trial zone. The technicians were already on it, but for the life of God, they could not figure out why the portals were behaving weirdly.

Since the portals were the main way of travelling between the commanding zones, a broken portal meant that they could not even ask other commanders and monarchs for help. They were on their own in this fight.

"Time is of the essence. Portal or not, we have to get there right now." Sigreid, the four-armed commander of the trial zone instructed his soldiers, "Board the ships, we'll go there the old-fashioned way. Nifa, you stay here. As soon as the portal is up and running, I want you to get the other commanders and bring in reinforcements. We'll try to hold the creature back till then."

"Aye, sir!" Nifa, who was comparatively the size of a dwarf saluted Sigreid and got to work.

The portals might not be functioning, but the communication channels were. Nifa immediately contacted commanders of the nearest zones to aide them. However, merely contacting them wasn't going to do anything.

It would take Sigreid and his men more than a couple of hours to reach the trial zone. As for the reinforcements... they could take anywhere from 6 hours to an entire day just to get there. This meant... all of the participants might end up dead before the guards could even fire a bullet at the monster.

"Bring me the list of participants now!"

Nifa yelled at the nearest management representative. The lady rushed to get the list and handed it over to him. There were more than two hundred participants currently inside the zone. Nifa went through the list and the more he did so, the more hopeless he felt.

"Tsk... most of them are E-grade or below. They don't stand a chance against a D-grade monster."

Nifa turned to face the representative and decided to take his frustration out on her. He cared about Sigreid's reputation more than anything else, and thanks to the management's incompetence, now it would be tarnished beyond repair.

"Who the fuck is in charge of maintaining the portals!?" He yelled at her so loudly everyone around them turned towards them.

The situation was dire, but him losing his crap wasn't helping anyone. No matter how angry he was, it wasn't time for everyone to work together and get out of the mess as wholly as possible.

Yes, people were going to die, but that did not mean they should stop hoping that none of them would survive. If they were quick enough, that is.

"H-He's missing-"

"Missing? MISSING!?" Nifa took a deep breath to calm his raging nerve before continuing the conversation, "How long?"

"Wha-"

"He's been missing for how-fucking-long!?"

"We don't k-know sir." The lady stuttered through, "The portals don't break down often... so we don't really need him all the time. But when we realised what was going on and sent some men to look for him... we found he hasn't been in his room for a while-"

"Great. Just great. If I find you fuckers had any involvement in the attack, I swear I'll give you such horrifying deaths, no one would ever dare to stab us in the backs." Nifa's voice was calm but full of silent rage, "Do you have any idea how many lives would be lost-"

"I wouldn't be so sure of it, Lieutenant Commander Nifa Bolrock."

Without turning around to face the owner of the voice, Nifa kneeled down. Everyone else around him did the same. A monarch, no matter the seat, required at least this much respect from the ones serving under him.

"I greet the monarch." Nifa politely mumbled.

"At ease, everyone." The man in a wheelchair responded, "As for you, Nifa, I did not expect such an immature reaction from you in a time of crisis. Everyone is worried, but that does not give you the right to go unhinged on someone who works just as hard as you to maintain peace on Euphoria."

He continued, "As my son and the future heir to the seat, you need to maintain your composure in the direst of situations. If you can't even do the minimum, how do you expect others to follow you? Apologise to the young lady and stand back."

"Yes, sir." Nifa replied before mumbling an apology.

Short and slender, this orange-skinned man had an aura of calmness around him. He also had a strange bruise on his left foot that stretched from the knee to the heel, which was probably the reason for his disability.

As soon as he appeared there, all the panic and tension seized to exist. With his appearance, everyone knew things would be taken care of without their need. That was the power of the disabled man, who was also known as Lord Shul D'ma Bolrock.

"Good job everyone." Shul commended all of them, "Your quick and swift action might seem useless to you, but I'm sure the ones inside the trial zone would be thankful to you regardless. Our soldier might not be able to save them, but someone else will. So all of you can rest easy."

Nifa knew his father had a way with words. That was the reason no one was able to overthrow him from his seat, even though he had been bound to a wheelchair thanks to the 'friendly' duel he had with the first seat holder.

But now wasn't the time to sway the crowd with empty words. The soldiers were going to reach the trial zone in time to save the participants, that much was true. What Nifa couldn't understand was the reason why his father would lie to everyone about a mysterious someone saving everyone's life? Did his father finally lose his mind or something?

"Forgive me arrogance, your lordship, but who could possibly save them?" One of the soldiers asked him, but it felt more like he was asked to ask him the question.

"How about someone who defeated the fourth monarch?" Shul replied with a smile, "Someone like him isn't going to lose to a creature from an instance dungeon, now would he?"

Chapter 347 Only I Can Kill It... Isn't That Weird? (2)

"Atchoo!"

[The hell are you sneezing for? Are you allergic to gryphons.]

"It's not like I'd have known even if I had, now would I?" Ashton barked back while dodging the gryphon's attack, "Be honest with me, this is supposed to be another one of the Xyrans' sick experiments, right?"

The gryphon... it was the first time Ashton had come across one. To be honest, Ashton liked the way they looked. The head of an eagle and the body of a lion, both being the apex predator of their own domain. But their appearance was quite a bizarre one. As far as Ashton was aware, only the Xyrans could pull something like this off.

[Uh... remember how I told you the Xyrans was militarising everything in sight? Yeah... the gryphons might be one of the things created by us for that reason. Or so you'd have thought but in reality, it was the precursors... we just failed to tame them as the precursors did.]

"I fucking knew it."

How could he not be? Something like a gryphon couldn't possibly exist on its own... at least that's what Ashton thought but then he remembered something like a Zompirowof shouldn't have existed either.

'Does that makes us relatives?' Ashton chuckled before stabbing the creature again, however, the plan still didn't work, "Damn it! The bastard keeps healing himself..."

However, they weren't healing. Much like the wraith wolves, the gryphons too had resistance to physical and magical attacks. Not to mention, their hides were just as strong as that of a Nemean lion's. The same one that took the lives of more than a thousand adventurers back on earth.

Ashton was quite familiar with their toughness as the armour made out of Nemean hide had protected him quite often back when he was in his early stages of development. Feeling helpless, Ashton looked down. No matter in which direction his eyes went, all he could see was the golden wings of the gryphons.

Around a hundred of them had appeared out of the dungeon and began hunting as if they had been starved for aeons. Thankfully, anyone flying in the air was immediately targeted by them. Ashton tried his best to keep them under control but in the end, they were a bit too much even him to handle.

As a result, at least half a dozen people lost their lives. The creatures weren't done after that and attacked everything they could... which only consisted of Ashton. Anna wanted to help him but Ashton sent her away, claiming she should protect the innocent first.

It was a bullshit reason. Ashton couldn't care less about the rest, he just wanted Anna to be safe. She was strong, he had no doubts about it, but if he was having trouble dealing with them, then surely Anna would have a worse time than him in dealing with them.

"If my sword or magic won't work then I guess we'll have to take a more intimate approach," Ashton mumbled as he placed Balmond back in his inventory.

[Dude, I know you think you're a casanova after what you have been doing for the last month, but believe me, bestiality is not the answer here.]

"What the fuck?"

Ashton had the most grossed-out expression he ever had on his face. Even watching two zombies fuck each other wouldn't have been less gross than him hammering them with his hammer.

"Intergalactic orgy... you fuckers..."

[It wasn't anything like that! Trust me!]

"Sure... I totally believe you."

Moments later, Another gryphon came charging at him. But this time, instead of dodging, Ashton wrapped his hands around its neck and before the gryphon could realise what was happening to it, he sunk his teeth into the beast's neck.

Ashton had two reasons for it. One, if possible he wanted to get high resistance to physical and magical attacks as well. And second, to test out his new [Irreverence] skill. Since the creatures were immune to the common types of damage, then the answer was simple. He would have to use other methods.

<The use of Irreverence has blocked the user from using skill absorption. Please deactivate Irreverence before trying again.>

<User's current Extra HP: 1200>

"I knew the skill would have some hidden complications." Ashton sighed before slamming his fists on the gryphon's head.

The next moment, he was covered in the creature's blood as its head exploded like a watermelon. Ashton had not expected something like that to happen... but he wasn't complaining. If he could one-shot a gryphon every three seconds, he was more than happy to swim in a pool of their blood.

"I really should hide this skill... it's too strong."

[Was I speaking in some other language when I told you that? Well, there's nothing we can do about it. The gryphons would not die without using this skill.]

Ashton agreed and flew over to his next target. Unbeknownst to him, something peculiar was going on the ground while he fought the flying lions.

"Damn it! That bastard ruined our plans."

A greasy, slow and downright squeaky voice pinched in everyone's ears. It was the voice of Shiok, the self-proclaimed leader of one of the Glaring Nightmare's independent branches.

"Yeah... I'm pretty disappointed too. But what can you do? You win some, you lose some- ow!" one of the party members shrugged his shoulders, only to start caressing his butt a moment later.

"And sometimes you get your ass kicked for interrupting me!" Shiok exclaimed and continued kicking the one who interrupted him until his butt was brighter than the twin stars above "So where was I? Right, our plan failed. What should we do next?"

Another member proudly raised his hands. Shiok was pleased with the respect he was being shown and asked the man if he had any idea.

"I wanna pee. Can I leave?"

"... someone, shoot him in the head."

No sooner than Shiok uttered those words, a dozen shots were fired at the man's head. Proceeded by another... and another... and another... until only one of the twelve gun holders was alive. All because they were arguing about whose bullet killed the man first.

By looking at them, one would wonder how the hell did they even manage to successfully execute an elaborate plan like summoning the gryphons. The answer was... they didn't. They only did what they were told to by a person they didn't even know.

Hell, they had no idea what would happen once they completed the 'ritual' as they called it. They simply did it because it seemed a funny thing to do. But now their lives were in danger because of it.

"Boss, I have a genuine idea. Let the man fight them, he'll get tired and then we'll kill him!"

"Nice. I like this idea. Let's go with it- why am I... feeling sleepy... all of a... sudden?" Shiok collapsed, followed by the rest of them.

As they did, Anna appeared out of the shadows, wondering if she should kill them or hand them over to the authorities once they arrive.

"Ants want to hunt a T-rex these days?" She shook her head, "You should be glad I found you, morons, before Ashton. Or else, god knows what he'd have done to you."

Chapter 348 Only I Can Kill It... Isn't That Weird? (3)

Meanwhile, on the ground, the battle raged on and on, with no one able to come out on top. At the beginning of this war, this land was lush and green. But not anymore. Since the land was now littered with corpses. The greenery of the forest had been long since replaced by a mixture of distinct coloured blood types.

No one would have expected a loving and peaceful place to turn into the twisted image of its former glory. The garden of Eden had been turned into an avenue straight out of hell.

In certain places, the land had been scorched with fire, in others the many battles have turned the grass to a dark brown with mud being sloshed about in some places, creating a sticky mud in others, along with gruesome sludge from the blood of the fallen.

But that wasn't all. In some areas, the mud has been scorched from the large numbers of soldiers who have been hit by fire spells of the gryphons. Over time, the trees got destroyed, with branches filled with arrows or long spears or just hacked down by plasma swords.

Numerous trees simply broke under the weight of the fighting and fell over, crushing the participants along the way. The death toll was at an all-time high.

The air had become thick with smoke rising from the ground and up into the skies, while also ascending from the burning corpses. The sky was grey and dark with smoke, and at times the wind will change and the smoke will blow over the fighting, causing the eyes of the survivors to burn and tear up as they tried to flee from the danger, with some even passing out from the overwhelming smell of smoke.

The fields were filled with cries of pain. It was pandemonium. A dozen or so people calling out in pain, people shouting back and forth to check on their comrades and whatnot. Yet none of them could find solace as things rapidly went from bad to worse.

But the gryphons did not stop. They decimated anything and everything that caught their eyes. The participants were helpless against the monsters.

"Damn it! None of our attacks even work on them!" A Cynthilan* warrior yelled at the top of his lungs, "No matter how much we stab and shoot them, nothing can stop these bastards!"

The group of young wannabe mercenaries, entered the trial thinking it would be a piece of cake for them. After all, one of them had the Tamer class. They could easily tame four pegasuses and be done with the trials.

Once they received the proof of clearing the trials, no one would be able to take them lightly in their field. Sadly, their dreams came to a halt, because instead of finding young and docile pegasuses, they end up discovering deathly Gryphons.

But where everyone saw a disaster, the four of them saw an opportunity like no other. If they could somehow conquer the dungeon, they would gain recognition from the Monarchs and would most likely earn a place amongst the guards.

Their plans, however, crumbled when they were put in their place by a single gryphon. Out of the four friends, one had to sacrifice himself to give the others a chance to escape. The incident had a profound impact on their confidence.

"Keep it low, Chakas! We survive thanks to Lurrew giving up his life! Do you want to throw that chance away so recklessly!?"

The remaining Cynthilans held on to their breaths as if the moment they breathed out, they would be killed. For people who wanted to become famous mercenaries, they did not have any talent or the composure expected from them. Especially during times like these.

"Don't you think I know that?" Chakas growled in a low voice, "We belong to a race of prideful warriors and yet we are hiding like cowards! If only I could get close to one of them... I just might be able to tame them-"

The man was mid-sentence when something huge fell out of the sky right in front of him. He and his friends immediately pulled their weapons out. Their worst fears had come true. A gryphon was right in front of them.

"Damn you Chakas! they found us thanks to your whining... Fuck! Run!"

Their fight or flight instinct kicked in and they decided to flee from the spot. But before they could take another step away from the fallen Gryphon, another one fell out of the sky not far away from them... only this one was covered in blood.

"Wait... is it dead?" Chakas mumbled as he slowly kicked the gryphon to get some reaction out of him. But there wasn't any, the creature was indeed dead, "Is that a bite mark around his chest?"

Chakas, looked up only to see a lone man fighting against the gryphons. No... it wasn't a fight, but a one-sided massacre. Through his sharp sight, Chakas could see a flying humanoid creature jumping from one gryphon to another, killing them like it was some child's play.

"What is going on up there..."

"Who gives a fuck? Since the Gryphons are focused on him, let's get the hell out of here!"

"Y-Yeah..." Chakas ran away but not before taking a last look at their flying messiah.

[Alright, that's numero 57. Good job so far.]

Ashton did not reply as he was preoccupied with trying to catch his breath. He had managed to kill a little over half of the gryphons and he was already out of breath. Continuous use of [Irrelevance] skill was slowly tiring him out.

He only realised it now, why Atlas' [Divinity] skill consumed absorbed stamina from the enemies in place of HP. Rapidly gaining and losing HP can cause a lot of strain on one's body, Ashton was learning that through firsthand experience. Thankfully, the gryphons seemed to have learned their lesson and did not dare to attack him anymore.

"They seem to be communicating amongst themselves..." Ashton said followed by an awkward pause.

[What? You expect me to know their language?]

Ashton shrugged his shoulders in reply.

[You racist bastard! Just because I'm an alien, it doesn't mean I can understand every random creature's language.]

"So you don't know?"

[... I never said that.]

"..."

[They are discussing whether they should retreat and bid some time or go all-out and die.]

Ashton did not have to wait for a second more as the Gryphons had made their decision. All of the remaining creatures headed back inside the portal, leaving Ashton confused but at the same time relieved.

"We'll get them next time..." Ashton mumbled and began casually descending, "In the meantime, let's see what Anna found about those radical shits."

Chapter 349 Only I Can Kill It... Isn't That Weird? (4)

The Gryphons might have disappeared, but the dungeon had not. It was still looming over the now destroyed garden of Eden, like a bomb waiting to explode. It took a few hours, but the reinforcements arrived there to take care of the mess. The only thing was... there was nothing they could do but wait.

The littered gryphon corpses did surprise the guards. But when they got to know who was responsible for defending countless souls, all of them let out a sigh of relief. Had Ashton not been a part of the trial, then things would have been in a much worse state than it was now.

Sigreid was the first one off the carrierships and immediately took control of the situation. The injured were sent to hospitals while a squad took care of gathering the remains of the dead. This terrorist attack was undoubtedly going to leave a huge mark on the confidence of people over Euphoria.

The Euphorian security force had never faced an attack of such a scale. In fact, they had always managed to quash any attempt at destroying their harmony. But this time, they failed miserably.

The only solace for the people was in the fact the perpetrators that had been caught by Anna. At least they would be able to get some form of justice by punishing them.

The aftermath of the attack was immediately noticed as hundreds of people left the planet and didn't even bother completing or registering themselves for the trials. But since a kind of curfew had been imposed around the planet, getting out of there was much more difficult than getting in.

The guards had a reason to believe more terrorists were involved in the planning and the execution of the attack. Also, the quick confession from the captured goons only solidified their decision to do so.

As for Ashton, well, he was more interested in what he had obtained from killing the gryphons. His werewolf and vampire genes finally managed to reach the maximum limit. This meant, that now he only had to focus on his undead genes and he would be on the way to his second evolution.

But before that, Ashton found himself surrounded by a couple of 'guests'.

"Looks like I was right after all," Otiga sighed, "if only the others took my word a bit more seriously. Which they did not, simply because it involved a club of goofy radical idiots."

As soon as Otiga arrived at the trial grounds, she immediately sought Ashton, because she knew he was the one who took care of the gryphons. She was followed by Shul in his wheelchair. After exchanging greetings, all of them decided to have a chat together, mainly to discuss their next plan of action.

"I can understand," Ashton replied, "When Anna brought them over, I was like, 'These morons caused all this mess?'. They might not look the part, but they were certainly the ones who executed the plan."

"Even though quite a few lives were lost, thanks to your efforts, it wasn't a complete obliteration like we had thought." Shul gave Ashton one of his charismatic smiles, "But young lad, would you mind telling me something?"

"That... should depend on the question. Don't you think?"

"I told you, his tongue moves faster than a bullet." Otiga laughed.

Ashton more or less knew what Shul wanted to know. The same thing as the rest of them... while none of their attacks was working against the gryphons, how did he manage to kill so many of them? That too, all by himself?

he couldn't remember how many times he was asked the same thing over and over. First by the survivors, then by Sigreid and his soldiers, and the list went on and on. Every time he gave them the same answer...

"It seems only I can kill them. Isn't that weird?"

But he had a feeling, that such a generic answer wasn't going to work against the monarchs. For all he knew, Otiga might already know more than she was letting others believe. Considering she was one of the galaxy's most valued information dealers.

It was the same reason that baffled Ashton a bit more. Her reputation always preceded her, but still, no one believed her when she alerted them about a potential terrorist attack? Something was odd, it almost felt like someone wanted the attack to happen and undermined the authenticity of her information.

'The matter doesn't involve me. Whatever happens on Euphoria is none of my concern.'

[What if the motive behind the attack was to get rid of you?]

'What do you mean?'

[Think about it. You have made quite a few powerful enemies here. They wouldn't want anything more than getting rid of you. But since they can't go against you openly, they decided to pull this shit off in hopes you'll wound up dead. While the rest of the deaths could be chalked up to collateral damage.]

'Hm... I don't think anyone would go to such an extent, but I can't ignore the possibility either. I'll keep it in mind for now.'

Suddenly Ashton felt Anna nudge him, pulling him out of his thoughts.

"My apologies, I got lost in my thoughts. What did you want to know, Lord Shul?" Ashton asked with a smile, "Was it related to the Gryphons?"

Shul nodded while the rest looked at him. Seeing no way out of it, Ashton decided to come up with an elaborate and believable lie.

"Honestly, I don't have a definite answer for that." Ashton shrugged, "But I think it had something to do with my vampire genes. It's only a guess, but I believe they might be weak to vampire saliva or something. I could be wrong though."

Ashton checked their expression to see whether they believed him or not. But that did not help him in any way, since their expressionless faces were unreadable. So much so, that he ended up yawning right in front of their faces.

"Haha, young man, you should rest more. Especially if you're planning on participating in the upcoming raid." Shul smiled.

"Raid?" Ashton asked, "What raid?"

"You don't think we'll leave that dungeon hanging over us, do you?" Otiga replied, "Shul and I are in agreement. We will try to convince the other monarchs but even if they disagreed, we'll send our personal forces inside to take care of the issue at its root. Also, I was hoping you'll be willing to join us."

Otiga must have hoped Ashton would immediately agree to her request, because after hearing Ashton's reply, she got a bit disappointed.

"Hm... it's quite a big decision to make. I'd like to think over it for a day or two before giving you my answer."

Chapter 350 Dire Times, Desperate Measures (1)

After Ashton was done chatting with the monarchs, they went their separate ways. The trial wasn't over, but most of the participants left Euphoria in fear of another terrorist attack. While it wasn't good for the planet's economy, Ashton was a bit pleased with this outcome.

It was times like these where the courageous people got their chance to shine. In his eyes, anyone who left the planet just because of a mishap was weak and did not deserve to attempt the trials in the first place.

'No wonder those people only got to attempt the basic trials.' Ashton shook his head as soon as he noticed a hint of arrogance in his thoughts, 'I got carried away... I'm not that strong to start calling out the rest. Not yet anyways.'

[It is important to keep oneself in check. You're growing up quite nicely. I'm proud of you.]

'Thanks for the compliment.' Ashton had a sarcastic smile as he thought, 'In order to express my gratitude for your words, I will not troll you for an entire minute.'

[...]

'Ignore all that, just tell me you found a way to purify that scythe... If only I could use it, taking care of the gryphons would be a piece of cake.'

For the last month, while Ashton solely focused on clearing as many trials as he could, Astaroth had a task of his own. Firstly, he had to come up with a way to make the monster egg they had to grow out of its shell as soon as possible and secondly, find a way to get rid of the scythe's corruption.

While the Xyran had some idea about taking care of the mysterious egg, he had no idea how to make the scythe usable. This was primarily because the Scythe wasn't a weapon created by the Xyrans. Had it been, Astaroth would have certainly taken care of the issue by now.

But the weapon was something that predated them. Although, he did not know it for sure, but his guess was... the scythe was one of the rare weapons created by the precursors. After all, as far as he knew, the precursors were the only ones capable of making weapons that could predate the Xyrans entirely.

A few days back, on Astaroth's request, Ashton bathed the scythe with hellfire. The logic behind such a request was a simple one. Since scythe was corrupted with death, and hellfire could burn anything, including undead, they were hoping it would be able to get rid of the corruption as well.

Unfortunately, even hellfire wasn't enough to make the scythe usable. Since then, the weapon had been gathering dust in Ashton's inventory along with the rest of his unused weapons.

[Ever since we tried using hellfire and failed, I could not come up with anything else. Well, not anything we can get our hands on for now.]

Ashton was a bit taken aback but nodded his head. Hellfire was one of the Xyran's most renowned treasures because it once belonged to Seraph. If even those flames couldn't do a thing to the scythe, then it was obvious anything else in Ashton's present arsenal wouldn't be effective.

'Then I guess I'll have to depend on the <Irreverance> skill for now.'

At that moment there was a knock on the door. Anna got up to check, but Ashton gestured for her to stop. Although Anna didn't know why Ashton told her to stop, she obeyed him. Seconds turned into minutes but no one knocked on the door again.

Something was off... very off.

'Where are the guards?' Ashton thought.

Ever since Ashton expressed his worries that someone on the inside might have helped the radicals in planning and executing the attack, Otiga decided to send some of her guards to protect him. If someone from the inside was involved in the attack, then they were surely going to target him next as he was the reason they failed in achieving their goal, whatever it was.

The reason was pretty simple. He was the only one who forced the gryphons to retreat while others desperately clung on to their lives. Thus, by taking him out, they would manage to make sure he won't be a hurdle to their plans again.

However, since the guards were not responding and the door wasn't knocked on again, Ashton was more or less sure something strange was going on.

Suddenly the night sky turned white as the door was blown apart. Ashton was standing right behind the door, therefore when the door blew away, he got hurled backwards. The explosion wasn't a normal one either.

For a moment, all of Ashton's heightened senses were compromised. He could feel a handful of men enter the room and moments later marched out. It took them merely thirty seconds to get in and out of the hotel room.

It took a couple more seconds for Ashton to regain his senses back and as soon as he did, he realised... Anna was missing.

"Anna? ANNA?" Ashton yelled while looking all over the room, but she was nowhere to be found.

By now, people had begun gathering around the room. Only to see the corridor littered with unconscious guards. Ashton immediately rushed out of the room to give the bastards a chase. But the assailants were nowhere to be found.

Ashton had never cursed the lack of [Perception] more than he was now. If only [Perception] was active, he would have sensed the incoming attack and prevented all of this from happening. If not that, at least he would have been able to look for Anna using it.

But why would someone attack Anna? Was he the reason she got caught in this mess, or could it be something else entirely? Hundreds of questions were running rampant inside his head. But in the end, there was only one answer to it all... it didn't matter.

It didn't matter who or why they did what they did. The only thing that mattered was they had signed their death certificate the moment those bastards laid their hands on her.

"Otiga!" Ashton immediately called her, "Someone-"

"Unfortunately... Lady Otiga isn't here anymore. You can leave a message if you want." A male voice giddily replied.

"Leon, is that you?"

"It's commander Leon to you, fucking brat." Leon boldly replied before smiling, "By the way, how's that little succubus of yours? I hope everything is alright there."

Ashton remained silent... too silent for Leon's comfort. The latter immediately disconnected the call, before sitting right next to an unconscious Otiga. They were in some kind of a mansion, but Leon wasn't alone... Jacklin was there with him along with someone else... someone much stronger than anyone present in the room... The Monarch of the Second Seat.