

Zompiewolf 351

Chapter 351 Dire Times, Desperate Measures (2)

"Argh!"

Dozens of panicked guards and civilians yelled the moment they saw an army of undead marching down the streets. Their first thought was, that they were under attack for the second time on the same day.

Forces were immediately mobilised to take care of the problem, but to their surprise, although the undead were behaving aggressively they did not harm anyone. Instead, it felt like they were looking for something or... someone.

Mere moments ago, they had received a report of an explosion in one of the hotel rooms and were on their way there when they came across an army of undead creatures going in and out of every building they could. Everywhere they went, they turned the place upside down.

But the undead weren't alone. Along with them were wolves. However, they weren't anything like any other species they had known. These wolves had a frail-looking appearance along with translucent skin. The mindboggling fact was that these seemingly alive wolves were cooperating with the undead and behaving like search dogs sniffing around to look for something important.

They immediately reported the peculiar sight to the higher-ups, who briefly informed the guards to not do anything. According to them, Lord Shul had informed them about his 'search operation'.

Since the guards were putting their lives at risk and Lord Shul, being the kind man he was, came up with a unique way to patrol the streets. While at the same time, minimising the potential loss of life of the guards.

Although it was a weird thing to do, no one suspected Lord Shul of doing anything that wouldn't be in the interest of Euphoria.

While everyone believed whatever Shul told them... whatever he said was bullshit and a facade. You see, the moment Ashton became aware of what Leon had done, he contacted the only other monarch he was on good terms with for assistance and Shul gladly provided it to him.

"Although I can't help you by sending in personnel to aid you in the search. I will cover up your tracks at my own risk. Think of it as the payment of your good deeds from earlier, go ahead and do whatever you need to do." Ashton remembered what the monarch said.

That was the only thing Ashton needed to hear. A moment later, he summoned everyone he could to help him find Anna. Every single undead and Wraith wolf that was under his authority had joined the search.

It was no wonder everyone was freaking out the moment they saw the horde appear out of nowhere. They thought the explosion was related to the appearance of the undead and immediately fled wherever they could.

While his soldiers were scanning the streets. Ashton decided to fly over to the only place he could find Otiga. Her mansion.

[Ashton, calm down. Don't take any hasty decisions. Anger might seem strong fuel for your power, but it can consume you faster than any other emotion can.]

'...'

[Oh, come on! Say something!]

Astaroth kept trying to get a word out of him but failed over and over again. Ashton had not spoken a word after he gave the soldiers their orders, and it didn't look like he was going to talk anytime soon.

Astaroth was aware of the emotional turmoil Ashton was going through. That's why it was necessary to get him to calm down. His irrational thinking would do him more harm than good. But there was little he could do at this point.

[Damn it...]

Leon might have acted all confident till now. In fact, he was counting his lucky stars when the Second Monarch reached out to him with his plan. If everything went as they had planned, by dawn Leon would be on the fifth seat and Ashton would become a servant to his will.

But whenever he remembered the silent demeanour of Ashton, a chill ran down his spine. It only lasted for a moment, still, that fleeting moment was enough to make him second guess himself.

"Oi Brat, why the hell do you keep fidgeting so much?" Jacklin asked Leon in annoyance, "Don't tell me you're planning of backing out now. If you are, let me tell you what I'll do to you."

Jacklin then pointed at Otiga who had bruises all around her face and body as tattered clothes protected whatever little bit of her dignity that they could. Around her were the corpses of her loyal guards who died one after another in a desperate attempt to protect their patriarch.

"I'll do something so nasty you'll be begging me to turn you into pulp like her." Jacklin finished his statement before pouring some liquor and carefully handing it over to the person shrouded in darkness, "Sir, the drink you requested..."

It was the man behind it all. The mastermind. It was his plan to make the radicals do the dirty work for him. While he only wanted to get rid of the influence Otiga had around Euphoria, his plans ended up failing miserably. All thanks to an unforeseen obstacle and there was nothing he hated more than obstacles in his plans.

Tall and heavily built, this bronze-skinned man had a very ominous feel about him. A particularly notable feature was his missing eye. Apart from that, he also had a small wound on his right foot which resembled a bite mark.

The man, Darjud, was bald just like most of his kind. But his muscular appearance was what made him different from the rest of his Giloran brothers and sisters. After all, Gilorans were known for their frail appearance and aptitude towards mana. Which made most of them have the blue blessing, but not him.

"Thank you..." Darjud took the glass, and took a sip, before pouring the rest of it all over the succubus.

Anna woke up with a start. Her head was killing her and she couldn't concentrate. Although she was awake, she couldn't move a muscle as she lay there while the men gawked at her. However, even in this kind of situation, she did not lose her composure.

"Put the bait out," Darjud instructed them, "The fish would come looking for it, and then... we'll have a feast. But don't forget to make the bait presentable first. A little blood should attract the fish faster- Oh, it looks like the fish found us faster than expected. This would be fun."

Chapter 352 Dire Times, Desperate Measures (3)

This was the second time Ashton had visited the Zhask mansion. Regardless of that, he immediately noticed the change of guards around the place. The mansion was more guarded, which was to be expected because of the radicals. But he had a feeling that wasn't all.

He headed towards the gate where four guards stood with weapons. This was strange since the last time, they did not have any weapons on them. As he got closer, the guards noticed him and immediately perked up as if they were seeing an enemy approaching them.

Their strange reaction solidified his suspicions. Otiga had already informed the guards Ashton could enter the mansion whenever he pleased. Therefore, if everything was fine in the mansion, the guards wouldn't have any reason to stop him.

"Sorry, but you can't enter the mansion." The guards informed Ashton when they saw him approaching them, "A high-level meeting is taking place and no one is allowed to enter. Please leave or we'll be forced to take harsh action against you."

Ashton did not pay any attention to their words and kept walking. Handling a bunch of D grades wasn't a difficult task for him.

"Are you deaf? I said you are not allowed to-" The guard yelled, but made the mistake of putting his hands on an agitated Ashton.

Before the guard could even complete his sentence, the world turned upside down as he fell to the ground. The man's shoulder was dislocated, while the arm that touched Ashton was crushed beyond repair.

"What the..."

As the man flailed in pain, the rest of them stood there... frozen. Only when Ashton tossed the injured guard towards them, did they snap back to reality.

Two of the remaining guards immediately lunged at the intruder, whereas the last one informed the others about Ashton. A moment later sirens were blaring all around the mansion. Every guard employed by the Zhasks rushed outside.

Ashton did not care about the sirens at all. In fact, the guards had only made his job easier. Now he could take them out in one swift move. As for the two brave souls that lunged at him... well, let's just say they'll find peace in the afterlife.

It wasn't Ashton's intention to kill them. He just wanted to render them useless. Instead, his punch blew straight through their torso, killing them instantly.

"Seems like I overestimated their strength." Ashton casually mumbled before wiping off the blood on his hands with the clothes of the fallen.

[More like you underestimated yours...]

The sight left the remaining guards shocked. They were petrified, unable to say a word, let alone fight and avenge their fallen comrades. With one thought rushing through their minds... Did the man in front of them really one-shot two D-grade warriors as if it wasn't anything out of ordinary?

"W-What are you doing? Stop him!"

Someone yelled within the crowd but went silent the moment Ashton turned his gaze towards them. While Ashton was capable of fighting and winning against a handful of low C-grade guards, he did not want to waste his energy or strength on them.

It was wise for him to conserve his strength till the moment he found Anna or Otiga as he was sure Leon wasn't the only one behind the attack. He was too big of a coward to do anything of that sort.

"Tell me where Leon is hiding and I will not touch a single strand of your hair." Ashton tried negotiating some information out of them, "If not... then you already know what will happen to you."

He waited and waited, yet no one opened their mouths. It'd seem, that killing two of them wasn't enough to make the others bark. They needed a little bit more motivation.

"Hold your breath... for as long as you can," Ashton mumbled before giving a couple of cuts to himself.

His action left the guards confused. Why would the intruder hurt himself? Were they needlessly scared of him? They got their answer a moment later as a red mist gushed out of Ashton's wounds, instead of blood as they had expected. The mist shrouded everyone and everything in sight.

Soon the guards began suffocating. At the same time, their skin burned as if their insides were on fire. They were left stupefied... but none of them could think through the continuous pain. A few moments later, their howling could be heard all around the mansion... and yet no one came out to help them.

[You're going to kill them, aren't you?]

'That depends on them.' Ashton coldly replied, 'Either their survival instinct will win, or they'll die while clinging onto their fucked up sense of loyalty.'

Baxtin, the head of the security guards, who was watching everything through cameras, was stunned as well. Out of everything he had seen in his quite long life, he had never come across someone of his calibre. The regular guards did not have a chance against a monster like him.

"Tell everyone to back down, and establish a perimeter around the man now!" He barked orders, "I'll take care of the fucker myself."

His group of elite fighters followed Baxtin as he rushed out of the mansion. he was hoping to save the guards, but by the time he arrived at the scene, the guards were already on the ground. Some had lost their lives, while some were barely clinging to it.

"You! Why are you attacking the Zhask family? Don't you have any concern for your well-being?" Baxtin yelled from a distance while the mist slowly faded away.

"My well-being?" If Ashton's mood was a bit better he would have laughed at his face, "You should care about yours first. I do not want to fight anyone. Leon, he's the one I'm looking for. If you hand him over to me, I'll leave the rest of you untouched."

Ashton even used [Incite] to let the man see the reason behind his words. But he turned out to be too stubborn to listen to anything.

Baxtin charged at Ashton, after all, he was confident in his ability. He wasn't going to lose to just anybody.

"Why do I even waste my time trying to talk to them..." Ashton shook his head before curling up his fist. With all of his genes active, he was far stronger than Baxtin. Something the latter realised the following moment.

Ashton thrust a punch in Baxtin's direction. Baxtin was so full of himself, that he did not even bother to block Ashton's punch and let it land on his chest. Ashton's fist smashed into the ribs but this time he was careful not to thrust it too deep into his opponent's chest.

Blood spurted out from Baxtin's mouth, as he was thrown away by the tremendous blow. His muscular and tanky body hovered in the air as if it had been slammed by a truck. He was thrown toward the five or six companions he had brought along with himself. But even crashing into them didn't stop him as all of them fell to the ground lamenting from the pain of the impact.

To Baxtin's conviction, even with his injuries, he stood up to face Ashton once again. It was annoying, to say the least. Ashton did not want to kill innocents but Baxtin's stubbornness was making him question himself.

But before either of them could do anything, someone began clapping not far away. It seemed their little brawl had a couple of spectators. Ashton looked above and saw five people standing around the entrance of the mansion.

He immediately recognised four of them. Leon, Jacklin, Otiga and Anna. Both the ladies were sitting in a wheelchair but Otiga was not looking in a good shape. Even from a distance, Ashton could see the injuries all over her face. His attention then went to Anna who appeared to be conscious but was motionless.

After seeing her in such a state, every thought of letting them live was thrown out of his head. He didn't care about the consequences, he was going to kill those bastards.

"This will be my final warning... let her go, and maybe I'll do a quick work out of you."

"Wow, this kid sure has some balls!" The muscular unknown man scoffed, "As far as letting her go..."

The man squatted to Anna's level before looking at her lustfully, "I don't think so. It is rare to see a succubus these days. How can I let her go before sampling her first? Maybe I'll let you watch us, how does that sound-"

Darjud stopped abruptly as he was kicked straight to the face and sent flying backwards. Both Leon and Jacklin were way too shocked to even process what happened there. Second Monarch got kicked in the face?

Without wasting any time, Ashton undid both Anna's and Otiga's cuffs before pouring health potions all over them. But the moment he turned to finish the job, Darjud was already standing behind him.

"You... bastard... that was quite a strong kick. For a kid like you." He snarled before grabbing Ashton by the neck and lifting him off the ground with two hands, while the remaining two were wrapped around Ashton's left leg, "Let's see how you fare without you damned leg..."

Ashton did not struggle to free himself from Darjud's grasp. Not even a little. Why would he? Darjud might have abnormal strength, but Ashton could not sense a shred of mana emanating from his body. He was just another brawler like Jacklin, which meant, as long as he had Hydra's armour on him he should be fine.

"Are you sure, you want to be so close to me?" Ashton mumbled with a deadly serious expression, "What will you do if, let's say, your plan backfired?"

To Darjud's surprise, instead of trying to free himself, Ashton wrapped himself around him. The following moment, black-blue flames erupted out of Ashton's body, covering him up entirely.

The little spectacle of fire would not have had any effect on someone like Darjud. He wasn't a B-grade being for nothing. Having high resistance to fire was something that was expected from someone of his calibre.

However, even his high fire resistance was no match for Hellfire. Within moments of getting a hold of Ashton, Darjud was forced to let go as his hands got torched.

Ashton, on the other hand, did not let go of him willfully. But Darjud had to pull him off his body before jumping back. Despite all that, his expression remained unchanged, something that Ashton was stunned to see.

'He is strong... Taking him down even with my abilities would be tough.'

[That my friend, would be a severe understatement.]

Darjud wasn't any B-grader. He was quite the strong one, just looking at his stats made Ashton rethink his choices. Making hasty choices around the man wasn't gonna fly around. He will have to come up with a proper plan if he wanted to make it out of there.

"As I thought, your little tricks are good. I can't believe I got a scar on my body, from someone like you. You have impressed me." Darjud let out a hysterical laugh, but the next moment got eerily silent, "I would have invited you to join me... if you had not soured my plans. Now you three will lose your lives here, all because of your stupid decisions."

Darjud nodded and suddenly Leon and Jacklin threw something in front of Ashton. Before he could react to the sudden attack, the grenades exploded, releasing white smoke.

'Smokescreen? How cheap, even for someone like them.' Ashton shook his head and used wind manipulation to push the smoke away, 'What happened?'

Ashton tried again and again, but he could not do anything. It was the first time he had encountered such a problem. He immediately checked his stats to check whether he was out of mana or something.

But he wasn't. There was plenty of mana for him to use, but for some reason, he wasn't able to use his ability. He tried another ability, but the result remained unchanged. Just like that, he had been robbed of his abilities.

'That smoke!'

What Ashton thought to be smoke, was actually a condensed form of the reagent that was used on him in his hotel room. Back then, he hadn't realised it since the effects weren't so profound. But this time, he could feel the after effect of the smoke.

"Ashton... I don't feel so good..." Anna mumbled before collapsing to the ground.

Otiga was already out cold, so he didn't know whether the smoke affected her or not. But he guessed everyone who breathed the smoke in, had lost their abilities. Whether it was temporary or permanent, remained to be seen.

The smoke slowly cleared out, and when it did, Ashton noticed no one was wearing a mask, except Leon. It wasn't surprising, considering both Darjud and Jacklin did not have to depend on mana to win a fight. Only Leon did, hence he had used the mask to protect him.

"Desperate, are you?" Darjud mocked him, "Being robbed of your abilities, damn, that must have hurt. Don't worry, they'll be back sooner or later, unlike your soul when I rip it out of you."

This time, Ashton did not retort. He was too busy thinking about an escape plan to do anything. As long as he had his abilities, he might have managed to fight both Darjud and Jacklin, but without them, he wasn't all that confident about his victory.

If victory wasn't ensured, there was no point in fighting a battle. That was the only thought in his mind. However, escaping with two injured people wasn't an easy task. Especially when he could easily get overpowered by two brawlers.

"Forget about it kid. There is nowhere for you to escape." Darjud snapped his fingers and dozens of elite guards surrounded the four of them, "This is the place you'll take your last breath."

Ashton took a look around and sure enough, the guards surrounding him weren't as weak as the ones from earlier. Nor did they look similar.

They were dressed in black clothes, that covered their entire body, not leaving a single opening for the smoke to affect them. All of them were about to break through their levels at any moment.

[Ashton... this ain't looking good.]

'I know.' Ashton gritted his teeth in frustration over his weakness.

The problem wasn't that he didn't have experience in fighting without mana. After all, he had spent the better part of the last year fighting without depending on his mana. But this was the first time he was being forced to fight without a single ability under his sleeve.

He really wanted to know how the hell did they manage to do so. Since something that powerful would be of quite some use to him. But right now, he had to focus on getting out of there safely.

'Thankfully I wore the armour before engaging them... since I can't even access the inventory now.'

He still had the Hydra's armour around him, so he was sure it would take them a while to make any progress in 'killing' him. But he was worried about Anna and Otiga. He couldn't fight recklessly while protecting them, especially against so many enemies.

Despite all the odds stacked against him, he still had a way to fight back... for now. There were quite a few... living beings around him. Beings that could be used as fuel for him to level up. Hypothetically speaking... he could get to level 60 and then, evolve. Once that was done, it was unlikely Darjud or Jacklin would be able to finish him off.

"Looks like I'll have to do this the old-fashioned way..." Ashton sighed.

[There are risks-]

'You know of a better way? If you do, then please, tell me. I'll be more than happy to try your method.'

[Stop yelling at me, you shit! Just... be careful.]

'Yes, mom.'

"I didn't expect you to go silent as soon as the party started. Don't tell me you already gave up?" Darjud shrugged, "Come on, it's a fair fight. Between the two of us, no one has any abilities."

Ashton smiled after hearing him. It's true none of them had any abilities they could you. But Darjud's stats, coupled with his proficiency in fighting gave him a favourable position.

"Even hyenas bark when they surround a lone wolf." Ashton sighed, "What's it gonna be then? Are you all gonna jump me at the same time, proving how 'strong' you are? Or are the two of us going to duke it out like men?"

Seeing that Ashton had 'given up', Darjud decided to spice things up. Initially, he wanted to end the fight as soon as possible and then have some fun with the succubus, but things took an interesting turn.

He wasn't planning on ending Ashton so easily, either way, so he did what he thought would be perfect to make Ashton sense what true desperation felt like. Having made up his mind, he nodded and the guards jumped in front of them, forming an even closer circle around Ashton.

"Let's make it even fairer to you, shall we?" Darjud smiled like the sadist he was, "We won't attack you together. Instead, you'll have to defeat the guards in a gauntlet duel."

"Gauntlet duel?"

"The rules are pretty simple. An opponent will attack you, and the fight will begin." Darjud explained, "You kill them, then another challenger will challenge you, then another and another... till you defeat all of them. If you managed to deal with all of them, then you'll fight me. Kill me, and you're free to leave. Sounds fair enough, right?"

Ashton might have a grave expression on his face, but on the inside, he was barely able to contain his happiness. Darjud might have been stronger when it came to physique, but he was nowhere close to him when it came to intelligence.

The fucker was thinking it was his plan, but it had been Ashton's plan all along. He wanted to fight them one on one so that he could kill them in whatever way suited to him and level up.

"Fine by me," Ashton replied as his body began to change.

He might not have his abilities, but he still had a secret weapon under his sleeve... Transformation.

Chapter 354 What A Zompiewolf Looks Like (1)

Unlike popular belief, transformation wasn't an ability. It was merely a change in the structure of genes and cells that allowed the user to unleash the true potential of their body. That's why, even if his mana links were clogged by something, Ashton could still use transformation to gain an upper hand in the fights.

"I don't care about you and your dirty tricks." Ashton coldly mumbled as his body began changing rapidly, "But I will take you down, no matter the price I have to pay."

Ashton grew bigger and wider. Although he wanted to trigger complete transformation straight from the beginning, ultimately he decided against it. A full zompiewolf transformation would alert Darjud and he could come up with plans to defeat him by observing the others fighting.

For now, Ashton decided to start things off with partial werewolf transformation and as the duels would progress and the difficulty would increase, he would increase the mutation accordingly.

Ashton's hair grew longer, till it reached the length of his back. Shiny black claws replaced his pale fingers while his canines grew to be bigger than they ever were. He did not form a snout, but he developed a couple of whiskers on his pallid cheeks. His bones readjusted themselves to make him lighter, faster and stronger.

All of these changes happened in a couple of seconds and surprisingly, Hydra's armour also changed its size to accommodate its user's new physique. Even though the transformation wasn't complete, it was the furthest Ashton had ever changed his form.

"Transformation... hm... The more I get to know about you, the more I admire you." Darjud shook his head, "Damn, I don't really want to kill someone as big of an asset as you. But the radicals have made it clear... if they want them to work for me, you will have to die. Truly a shame..."

As soon as he said that, one of the mysterious guards stepped out of the circle to fight Ashton. The guard did not waste any time and charged at his opponent. Ashton prepared to counter-strike, but the blow never came from the front.

When one of the guards engaged him from the front, another guard standing right behind Ashton had also prepared to attack him. Traditionally, a duel wouldn't start before the competitors came in contact. The guards decided to use this fact to attack Ashton by surprise and end the farce as quickly as possible.

Sadly, what they did not take into their consideration was a Werewolf's extraordinary sense of smell and hearing. The moment the guard behind him took a step, Ashton knew the one in front of him wasn't his opponent.

But instead of confronting the second guard right away, Ashton decided to wait for the last possible moment to deal with him.

The guard swung his sword at Ashton from behind, thinking he had the win in his bag. But a moment later, he was gagging on his own blood.

"How the hell..."

Leon mumbled absentmindedly while the rest of them were shaken. Only Darjud's and Jacklin's expressions remained unchanged. They weren't surprised. They already knew Ashton had some talents, the whole purpose of issuing a gauntlet duel was to unveil his talents so that they could take advantage of his mistakes when it was time for them to fight. All of it at the small cost of their guards' lives.

"Khuk... k..."

Strange translucent blood trickled down Ashton's claws as he pierced the guard's neck with his razor-sharp claws. The guard's body flinched as he desperately tried to breathe in vain. It was clear who had won the first duel... but what Ashton did next shocked everyone... even Darjud.

Using his other hand, Ashton ripped out a chunk of the flesh from his opponent and devoured it without a moment's hesitation. After that, he discarded the barely alive man and stood there, ready to face the next opponent. Only this time, no one dared to approach him.

"Sha, you're up next," Darjud instructed one of the guards who reluctantly stepped out.

Ashton could see, that the guards weren't being cocky as compared before. Sha's use of a shield was proof of that. As for Ashton, he flexed his claws and waited. The guards were strong, even then Ashton's levelling progress was slow. At this rate, he would need to consume all of the guards before even unlocking the next branch of his evolution tree.

Sha bellowed loudly and charged like a mad titan. He was planning to use his small body to overwhelm his opponent with a series of quick attacks and then let him bleed out. A moment later, he swung his energy sword right at Ashton's neck.

Ashton was big but agile. He swiftly jumped back to avoid the attack and the following second, he launched himself right into Sha, with his claws in front of him like a spear. His strong legs gave Ashton enough force to pierce through the little shit's flesh. But Sha managed to get away with just a scratch... a bloody, bottomless scratch.

Ashton was taken a bit by surprise. Sha was quite a capable fighter. Ashton made a mental note of his capability. It would be good to have someone like him on his side.

'It would be a shame to lose someone like him... just because I'll kill him.'

[Why not resurrect all of them?]

'I don't wanna come off as greedy. Three of them are enough.'

[Darjud, Jacklin and this fellow. Quite a weird choice, I'm not gonna lie. But you do you. Just make sure you get out of here alive and well.]

Unlike Ashton, Sha could still access his inventory, which he did to use a potion. The wound was deep enough to not heal completely, but the bleeding had stopped. Once done, Sha once again charged at Ashton, but this time he was careful not to drop his guard.

He might have expected Ashton to fight back, as he had before, but Ashton had other plans. Rather than attacking him, Ashton kept parrying his strikes using his claws. Sha was pushing him back!

Upon watching Ashton back up, the guards began cheering Sha on. He felt a bit more confident and gave his all to break through Ashton's defences. Within mere moments, his efforts were rewarded as Ashton tripped over the corpse of the guard from before and fell over.

Sha took this opportunity and jumped at Ashton, planning to end his life by piercing him through his heart. But before Sha could execute his plan, he felt a sharp pain in his abdomen. He looked down, to see a sword piercing through his stomach.

Ashton did not 'fall over' because of Sha's relentless attacks. He did so of his own volition. So that he could pick the sword of the guard he killed before and use it to kill Sha.

Sha collapsed as his innards fell out of his body, marking the ground with his blood. Ashton stood up, towering over a kneeling Sha. The latter opened his mouth to say something, but before he could Ashton trusted Sha's sword right through his mouth, killing him. Everyone gasped in horror as Ashton licked the blood-stained sword.

"Hm... he doesn't taste half bad." Ashton mumbled as he licked the sword clean, "Next item please!"

[Ayo, mind what you're saying!]

Chapter 355 What A Zompiewolf Looks Like (2)

An hour passed... Ashton kept fighting the guards and killing them when he got the chance. However, he wasn't unscathed from their relentless attacks either. When someone fights so many people one after another, they are bound to lose composure and commit some mistakes.

Ashton wasn't much different in that regard. He made mistakes, and when he did, the guards were there to capitalise on them. Resulting in him being covered in wounds from the head to the toe.

His werewolf genes were doing their work, but the healing he got from them was minimal, even though it was boosted from [Draconic Physique] trait. Sadly, the wounds he received were not minor scratches, that could heal instantly.

Darjud and his guards must have done something to stop his healing from working. It couldn't be poison since he was immune to any type of poison. But whatever it was, it was working.

By this time, Anna had regained consciousness, and so did Otiga. But none of them could do anything either. The numbing drug administered to them by Darjud was still going rampant within their bodies.

They were helpless to do anything but to watch Ashton suffer as one more cut appeared on his blood-drenched figure.

"Next!" Ashton yelled as the last of the guards fell to the ground lifeless.

But the next moment his legs gave out. He ran his sword into the muddy ground to support his weight. The ground wasn't muddy when the duels began, but as the duels progressed, the dusty soil turned into a muddy swamp with the blood of his opponents.

He was in rough shape. Merely using the body of a werewolf wasn't going to be enough. Especially against his next opponent. Well, it wouldn't have if he hadn't secretly activated undead transformation without alerting anyone else.

"Why do you quit and save us some time?" Jacklin mocked Ashton's pathetic state, "But then I guess, killing you would bring me more pleasure than merely seeing you die."

"Looks like you already forgot how our last battle ended?" Ashton smiled weakly before forcing himself back to his feet, "Just because I used an ability back then doesn't mean I can't beat you up without it."

Ashton could see his words had dug deep into Jacklin's mind. Just like he wanted them to.

[Someone should give you an award for being such a great actor.]

'What can I say? Try spending 16 years being pathetically weak, you'll become an expert in acting weak.'

While it was true his wounds weren't healing, the situation wasn't as dire as Ashton had led everyone to believe. [Draconic Physique] coupled with hydra's armour, nearly gave him immunity to physical attacks.

The guards were indeed strong, but they weren't strong enough to put him in such a miserable state. Acting weak and injured was all a part of his plans to make Jacklin drop his guard around him so that Ashton could take care of him as quickly as possible.

As far as his blood was concerned, it was a side-effect of activating undead transformation. The longer he stayed in the form of an undead werewolf, the more blood spots appeared on his body. All he did was to make sure the guards hit him in the place his blood was about to burst through to make it seem the guards were hurting him.

He wasn't sure anyone would fall for his act. But the morons were busy enjoying his misery that they forgot to pay attention to the details. A mistake they would pay dearly for.

"I was thinking about going easy on you... but it doesn't seem like I have to." Jacklin forced a smile on his face, "I will turn you into the miserable piece of shit you are."

"Keep talking and I will..."

Jacklin had had enough of Ashton's cocky remarks. The fucker already had one step in his grave but was still barking as annoyingly as before. Ashton threw the sword aside, expecting Jacklin to fight using his fists, like the last time.

To his surprise, Jacklin took out a dagger from his shoulder belt and pointed it at him, "Let's start by severing that foul tongue of yours."

The following moment, he lunged forward and swung the blade with all of his strength. Ashton used his claws to block the attack, only to receive a kick to his chest. He was staggered, Jacklin decided to keep pressuring his opponent and since Ashton was already in a rough shape, it was unlikely that he would be able to fight back efficiently.

Jacklin attacked again. Ashton jumped back to avoid the strike, but Jacklin was a tad bit faster. The blade ended up drawing some blood from Ashton's shoulder. Watching Ashton bleed filled Jacklin with confidence he kept attacking and hurting Ashton over and over again.

He was so obsessed with the feeling he didn't even notice Ashton's smile. Nor did he notice how his attacks were not even breaking through Ashton's skin anymore. He slashed at Ashton once again, but this time, the blow didn't connect.

"Where the hell is that bastard?"

"Don't you know, you should never turn your back to your opponent?" Ashton whispered in his ears.

Jacklin turned back as quickly as he could, only to see that Ashton had grown massive bat-like wings on his back. Not only that, his face had completely changed into that of a wolf and his blood spots had completely disappeared. It almost looked like he was never hurt in the first place.

Jacklin regained his composure and threw the dagger at Ashton in an attempt to create some place between them. Ashton immediately caught the dagger, before hurling it towards Darjud who blocked the attack with a finger.

"Was that an invitation of some sort?" Darjud asked sternly.

"Maybe." Ashton confidently replied while pointing at Jacklin with his thumb, "He wouldn't accomplish much on his own either way. Not saying that two of you would make any difference."

Darjud smiled, "Your taunts are quite effective. But I'm afraid I can't break the rules. Finish him off and then, we'll have a duel of our own."

Ashton shrugged and turned back, only to meet with Jacklin's fist. The surprise attack should be enough to make Ashton wobble. Unfortunately... not only did Ashton catch his fist, but he also broke Jacklin's finger with ease.

"I told you, didn't I? I can defeat someone like you any time of the day."

Fear flashed in Jacklin's eyes. He had not expected Ashton to get so stronger in just a month. On top of that, they had used every underhanded trick they could to put brawlers in a better place by restricting the use of abilities and still... Ashton was overcoming the difficulties like it was no one's business.

Jacklin wasn't the only one surprised. Darjud was staring at the strange creature with worried looks. His smirk was long gone. Not only did Ashton kill his elite fighters even while he was at a disadvantageous position, but he also rivalled Jacklin? How could someone as strong as him only classify as E-grade?

'The bastard has fooled us all. He is C-grade at the very least!' Darjud sighed and prepared for his turn to come, 'I still have to honour the tradition of my master. Until Jacklin is killed by him, I cannot attack him.'

As for Anna and Otiga, they managed to regain some of their mobility as the drug slowly wore off. They wanted to help Ashton take care of the monarchs, but before they could even stand, a hole was blown through Jacklin's chest.

"Ugh..." That was the last sound Jacklin made as he met his demise.

Just like that, Jacklin had fallen. No drama. No forgiveness. Nothing. Ashton did not give him any chance to blame someone or try and weasel his way out of the mess. Otiga was stunned to see a fellow monarch... one of the strongest on the planet fall like any other mortal being. She had severely underestimated Ashton's strength.

What she did not know was... Ashton could only do so because of his Draconic Physique. Had it not been for that, Jacklin's attacks would have made a mess of his organs. In other words, Ashton was the worst match-up for any brawler until and unless they were strong enough to one-shot him.

Everyone was so busy staring at the dead monarch, that they did not notice Ashton gobble down Jacklin's heart. He did it... he was finally on the verge of another breakthrough. This time... his evolution was going to be world-breaking.

—

Congratulations on taking your second step into becoming a god-like entity.

Please wait while we assess the required information before presenting you with various evolutionary paths.

Current race: Human-based Tribrid (Former), Carbon-based Space Farer (Current).

Genes Possessed: Human, Vampire, Undead, Werewolf, Xyran-human hybrid.

Current resistances: [Pain Resistance lvl 29], [Fire Immunity], [Cold Resistance lvl 19], [Poison Immunity], [Paralysis Resistance lvl 20], [Hemorrhage Resistance lvl 25], [Charm Resistance lvl 22], [Fear Resistance lvl 25], [Pertification Resistance lvl 16], [Stun Resistance lvl 23].

Current Classes: [Necromancer] (Mediocre), [Revenger] (Mediocre), [Blood Mage] (Mediocre), Cinder Soul (Newbie).

Generating evolutionary paths based on the host's existing genes, resistances and classes.

You can now view and select an evolution tree and obtain a new subclass based on your affinity towards classes and genes of your own.

Note: Once you select an evolution path, you won't be allowed to change it. Please make your choice after careful deliberation.

Please select one of the following paths:

Carbon-based Space Farer (Tier: 2)

War God's Disciple (Tier: 3)

Pyro-Flamel (Tier: 2)

Primordial Dragoon (Tier: 2)

Precursor's Aide (Tier: 3)

—

Ashton had to hurriedly make a decision. Jacklin had fallen, now it was Darjud's turn to fight him. He had seen Ashton fight, so it wasn't like Darjud was going to give him time to recuperate. Sadly, that also meant he would have to fight through the pain of evolution while fighting someone as strong as Darjud.

Ashton remembered the pain he had faced during evolving for the first time. Back then, Astaroth had told him every time he evolves, he will suffer through hellish pain. This time wasn't going to be any different either. His body will go through changes, and he'll have to fight through it all... or die.

'It's a battle of time.' Ashton thought to himself, 'Either Darjud will finish me before I can evolve, or I'll end him the moment I'm done evolving.'

[There's no other way.]

Ashton nodded and selected the last option without any hesitation. Anything related to the precursors was a definite choice. Since he was a human, obtaining any precursor class was a blessing.

<All the skill effects have been deactivated till the evolution is completed.>

<All of the resistances have been deactivated till the evolution is completed.>

<This is to avoid any unnecessary complications during the reformation of the host's body.>

<Proceeding with evolution in... 3... 2... 1...>

The following moment he fell to his knees. The evolutionary process had just begun but the pain was already too much for him to handle. Without his pain resistance... the pain consumed his head. If it hadn't been for Astaroth continuously yelling his ass off in his brain, he would have already lost consciousness.

Watching him fall to his knees came as a surprise to Darjud. In his mind, Ashton had abused his transformation for longer than he should have. As a result, his body was finally giving out.

"Huhu... HAHAHA!" Darjud laughed like a maniac, "It's a pity to see you fall now. You tried so hard and got so far. But in the end, it didn't even matter."

Leon too joined in and laughed, while not a single word had escaped his sewer of a mouth when Ashton was slaughtering the guards. He was confident Ashton was going to die by himself. So much so, that he decided to toss a wild idea...

"Sir, why don't you leave him to me? He's going to die, either way, let me do the honours of sending him to the afterlife. In the meantime," Leon pointed at Anna, "Why don't you have some fun with her? After all, a sedated succubus is too delicious of a dish to pass on..."

"Is that how I raised you, bastard!?" Otiga yelled at Leon for even suggesting such a thing, "Is that the kind of legacy left behind by the Zhasks?"

"You want to act righteously now?" Leon laughed sarcastically, "You of all people should know why I did what I did. After all, you're the one who taught me to seize an opportunity when you see one. That's all I did. I saw an opportunity to rule over the family and I took it! If anything, you should be proud of me."

"Enough!" Darjud closed his eyes and thought about Leon's proposal for a moment, "Fine. You can kill the shit, but you'll owe me, boy. Don't ever forget that."

"Of course, sir. I'll put all of the family's resources to do whatever you ask of me." Leon smirked before jumping into the bloody pit, he then proceeded to grasp Ashton's hair before kneeing him in the face, "This is for humiliating me a month ago..."

Ashton's nose shattered with the blow, but the attacks kept coming. Ashton had turned into a defenceless punching bag for Leon. Every blow he received was followed by a few words, informing him why he was getting assaulted.

[Ugh... so cringe... just kill me already.]

Ashton couldn't talk, so Astaroth expressed both of their thoughts like that.

Leon was honestly having the time of his life... until a huge shockwave was sent out of Ashton's body, knocking him over. Darjud who was about to touch Anna was flung away as well. Bewildered he turned around to face Ashton, who happened to be standing back on his feet.

It was at that moment, Darjud realised what had happened. Everything... from the gauntlet duel to his last fight. All of it was what Ashton wanted. He did not fall to his knees because he did not have energy left to fight back, but merely reacted to the pain his body had to go through in order for him to evolve.

Darjud thought he was in control, when in reality, he was getting played by Ashton. Every single thing he did, was exactly as Ashton had planned. Not to mention, when Leon mentioned the succubus, Ashton should have shown some signs of anger, but he didn't.

"That bastard wanted me to leave him alone, so he could evolve without dying!" Darjud gritted his teeth, "How could I fall for such obvious trick?"

He made a rookie mistake by trusting Leon's word... no, he couldn't have possibly been swayed by just his words, could he? He had heard rumours about Leon's ability but never got to test it himself. It could be possible Darjud had been manipulating him all along and he didn't even notice it.

"You bastard! You played me like a fool!" Darjud bellowed and rushed to finish Leon.

But before he could lay a finger on Leon, Ashton quite literally teleported between them, "The duel is still on, right?"

"You cocky bastard. You think a mere evolution gave you enough strength to beat me?" Darjud scoffed, "Step aside, I'll deal with you after I'm done with that bastard."

"Not enough strength you say..." Ashton emotionlessly mumbled before ripping Darjud's hand off, the same one he was about to touch Anna with, "This... would make a nice club to beat you senselessly."

Chapter 357 Precursor's Aide (2)

It took a couple of moments for Darjud to register what had happened. His hand was missing and still, he couldn't feel any pain? What was even more strange was the lack of blood coming out of his 'wound'. His hand was gone and yet not a single drop of blood had spilt anywhere. How was something like that even possible?

"You sure have a funny expression on your face..." Ashton mumbled while swinging Darjud's severed hand like a bat, "Don't worry, I was testing one of my abilities. Unfortunately, I would like to know more about my ability and you happen to be the perfect test subject for it."

"How can you..."

The moment Darjud realised Ashton could use his abilities again, he panicked even more. It would appear, that evolving had caused some changes in his body. Which in turn, caused the drug within Ashton's body to wear off.

'I have to get away from here... from him.'

He was a high-ranking monarch of the Euphoria. Attacking one itself was a crime, and Ashton had already killed one of them. As long as he could get away from Ashton and speak to the first seat, Darjud was sure Ashton would be punished... quite severely.

Someone like Darjud was thinking about fleeing from a fight. That itself spoke volumes about Ashton's strength.

'I'm not fleeing! It's a simple strategic retreat.'

The superiority Darjud had in his voice was long gone. He was now panicking hard as things took a turn for the worst. Not only was he outsmarted by Ashton, but now he was weaker as well. Darjud kept mumbling 'how' over and over, but Ashton did not feel it was of any use to tell a dying man his secrets.

Darjud sensed the danger he was in and decided to hurry out of there before Ashton got rid of him. But it was already too late for him. He was going to die sooner or later. But Ashton had some other plans.

While Darjud ran away, Ashton did not chase after him but calmly walked over to Anna and fed her some of his blood.

As his blood was the primary source of nutrition for Anna, it could give her more than enough energy to get to her feet. However, following his evolution, the blood coursing through his veins had changed... and for the better. Just one drop was enough to get rid of the drugs within her body. She was free again.

"Ashton, I-"

"Shh... we'll talk later," Ashton pressed his bloodied finger on her lips, "For now, take care of Otiga, while I take out the trash."

After saying what was on his mind, Ashton got up took an aim and hurled Darjud's arm at him. The alien tripped over and fell. The next moment, a portal opened behind Ashton and out of it walked the undead Behemoth, Atlas.

"Protect them while I take care of the man." Ashton mumbled in an uncaring tone, "Make sure they don't get a single scratch on themselves, or this would be the last time I summon your ass out of Valhalla."

Atlas mutely bowed to his new master before standing before the ladies as their guardian. Meanwhile, Ashton ran over to Darjud. Every step he took shook the ground, even cracking it in some places.

"Damnit!" Darjud yelled as soon as he learned Ashton was onto him, "I think I can use my martial abilities now... but to think I would have to waste such a precious skill on someone like this bastard!"

The more he thought about it, the more agitated he got, "I'm gonna rip the skin off his bones, turn it into a bedsheet and fuck that succubus of his on top of it every night to make him pay for forcing me to use 'Thunderclap' on him."

Darjud got up and decided to face Ashton by using his one-off ability. It was an ability he learned from his so-called master's textbooks that the master left behind before disappearing. It was a technique, that was tough to grasp and could only be used once.

Darjud was planning on using the technique against the first seat in a duel and taking over his position once he had been defeated. Unfortunately, he was going to have to waste the skill on Ashton in order to live.

[Something is off.]

'I know.' Ashton stated.

Darjud's demeanour had changed once again. Since he wasn't going to run, there had to be something going on in his head.

All of a sudden, ominously black clouds formed over their head and thunder twirled around Darjud's clenched fists. The sight of thunder within a creature's grasp surprised Ashton. But rather than getting worried about it, all Ashton wanted, was to see the ability in action.

"You should have let me leave when you had the chance. Now DIE!"

Ashton wanted to move sideways, but for some reason his body kept him rooted to the spot. The [Thunderclap] skill worked in three phases. What Ashton was going through was the first stage.

A stunning effect to make sure that the enemy wouldn't be able to dodge the second and most important stage. Which was to make the enemy bleed using a single strike from the fist. Once that happened, the thunder revolving around the user's fist would enter the target's body by tracing the blood and fry them from the inside.

[But the skill could just as easily backfire as well. The user doesn't have any control over the thunder once it's released. Thus, if the thunder were to come into contact with the user's blood, it could kill the user instead. It was a dangerous move Xyran footsoldiers used to train with on this planet.]

'Your kind is trying to fuck me over once again...!' Ashton joked.

[Shut it. We stopped using it long before we could ever put the move to use on an actual battlefield. To think this moron not only managed to find out about the skill but also learned it... He is more talented than I thought he was.]

'The skill has a wide range stunning effect, interesting...!' Ashton barely stopped himself from laughing as the effect faded away.

It was to be expected. He had high resistance to being stunned for long durations. In fact, he was surprised he was even affected by the skill in the first place. Thankfully, Ashton knew the perfect way to counterattack.

Thinking Ashton had been stunned, Darjud rushed to attack Ashton with a fist full of thunder. Ashton waited and waited, the minute Darjud got close enough, he sidestepped the attack before severing the rest of Darjud's arms... only this time he did not use his ability, but Balmond.

This caused blood to erupt from his body, forcing the thunder to turn against its summoner.

"ARGHHH!" Darjud shrieked in pain as he was electrocuted on the spot.

Ashton stood there, watching Darjud's expression as it turned from shock to pain to... nothingness. Darjud's muscles twitched as he lay there unable to do anything.

"What a resilient piece of shit you are..." Ashton mumbled when he realised Darjud was still alive, barely but alive, "No worries, I'll end you-"

Ashton had to eat up the rest of his words as he was suddenly kicked away by someone. Following the attack, half of his HP vanished into thin air. Had it not been for Hydra's armour, his body would have been sliced in half from the blow.

Bewildered, he turned around to see a hooded man standing in front of Darjud's charred body. The man was looking at him as if he was seeing a lost puppy. While Darjud's eyes were full of disdain.

Ashton somehow got back to his feet, but as soon as he did, the hooded man pointed his finger at him and said, "Stay down, if you want to leave this planet alive."

Ashton had no idea who the man was, but his strong presence was enough for Ashton to know who the man was.

'The strongest man on the planet... first seat holder.'

Upon witnessing how weak Darjud was, Ashton had assumed the first seat wouldn't be much stronger than him. But now that he had seen the man with his own eyes, he realised how wrong he had been. But the thing that surprised him the most was Astaroth's reaction.

[How can this be...]

'What's wrong?'

[That man... I know him. He is the only outsider the Xyrans accepted into our ranks with respect... or at least he looks awfully similar to him. One of the first ones to be granted the title of Archangels... Michael.]

'But that's not his name- what the hell...?' Ashton used [Detection] on the unknown humanoid alien. Even though his name was indeed not Michael, there was something else that blew Ashton's mind away, 'Level... 189? How can he be stronger than a Xyran General!?'

Without speaking another word, the man lifted Darjud in his arms and turned to leave. At this time, Ashton interrupted him, even though Astaroth told him not to.

"I'm sorry, but I can't let you take him away-"

Ashton pointed Balmond towards the man, but the next moment, the man was in front of him and he was on his knees. Surprisingly, even though he was so close to the man, Ashton still couldn't see the man's face.

"I know what he did to you and he has paid the price for it." The man calmly whispered in Ashton's ears, "On top of that, you already killed one of the monarchs. You should be grateful I'm not severing your head this instant because these morons were wrong. Had they not been, you and your slut would be having an intimate session in your graves."

After saying that, the man got up and turned to leave for real this time, "This is my last warning to you, Mr Fenrir. Don't test the limit of my patience anymore and leave Euphoria for good. The next time I see your face, you'd wish you were never born."

Chapter 358 Gabriel Or Michael?

Nothing was left to say or do. The verdict was clear... Ashton had to leave the planet and the trials behind just because he wasn't strong enough to stand his ground at the moment. The first monarch might not have stated his reasons behind imposing restrictions on him, but Ashton had a clear idea.

'The bastard is scared of me.' He thought, 'I would be too if I was in his shoes. He had seen my growth and likely wants to put a stop to it while he has the chance.'

[I agree... either way, we don't have much choice in the matter.]

Ashton clenched his fists. If only he could have attempted a couple more trials, he could have been strong enough to shut that bastard up for good and not stand there... defeated. That's right, he was defeated. Even though he got rid of his enemies, he still lost the battle.

[Oi, don't think about doing something rash to protect your ego.]

"Don't worry. I'm not that shallow-minded. Not anymore at least." Ashton sighed, "First let's get away from here, then we'll have a lot to talk about. Especially that Michael guy."

[You said his name wasn't Michael though?]

"Yeah... Detection said he was called Gabriel. That's why I want to know more about this Michael guy and try connecting the dots if possible."

"Maybe I can be of some help in that regard..." Otiga replied as Ashton walked back to where they were.

Ashton cancelled his transformation and returned to his more human-like appearance, before asking her what did she mean.

"Follow me into the basement, please. That place might have the answers to your questions." Otiga said, got up and left without even sparing a gaze at Leon who was shaking in fear.

However, Ashton wasn't so merciful. If he was going to be thrown out of the planet, he might as well get rid of some trash on his way out.

"Atlas, you know what to do," Ashton mumbled before lifting Anna in his arms and following Otiga into her mansion.

A moment later, they heard Leon's painful cries. Ashton did not know nor cared what happened to him. He was fine as long as the bastard was dead. Anna looked at his indifferent expression and caressed his face. Even though it wasn't her fault, she still blamed herself for what happened.

Ashton didn't say a word, but smiled and kissed her hand as she pulled away. The incident might have been his worst nightmare, but thanks to it, he got to learn a lot about his limits. Back when he evolved for a second time, he couldn't help but think he was invincible.

But Gabriel or whoever the guy was, quickly put his ass straight in line. In a way, he was thankful to him, even though he swore he would return him the favour when the time came. For now, he had to lay low and gather information. Hopefully, one day he would be back and complete the trials.

Once Leon's cries died down. Otiga finally broke down. She knew Ashton had done something she would have never been able to do. After all, despite what Leon had done, he was still someone close to her. However, that pity party episode ended when she got back inside and saw the mangled corpses of her loyal guards.

Leon's selfishness had taken their lives and that somehow got her to have peace with Leon's rightful execution. Once in the hall, Otiga walked up to an abnormally large portrait of a female alien who resembled Otiga. She then did something to it and a blade appeared in her hands.

She then proceeded to slice the tip of her finger and pressed it on the portrait. A blinding light greeted them as the portrait faded away as if it was a mirage. Behind the portrait was an illuminated path with seemingly no end to it.

"This is the library our family has preserved for centuries. It has the knowledge of everything that ever happened on the planet while we were here." She mumbled as they headed inside.

After a while, she continued, "The hunger for knowledge and intel in the Zhasks is so out of control, most of the heads did not even bother maintaining order and recorded even non-consequential things in here. I think if there's any place you'd find anything about the first monarch, it has to be here."

"Since you're a monarch considered to be quite close to him, I thought you'd know more about him?"

Ashton's question made Otiga laugh. At that moment, he had a feeling she might not be as close to the monarch as he thought her to be. Her words only confirmed his suspicion.

"We're close? I don't even know how he looks. You should take a hint from that fact alone. He values me, or more like valued me, but not to the level he would protect me from his peers. Especially Darjud who happened to be his close friend since they had the same master."

She scoffed and continued, "I don't think anyone, other than Darjud even knows the first monarch's real name. That's the kind of mysterious person he is. To be honest, it's a surprise he let you live after what you did to Darjud."

'Surprise, my ass.' Ashton thought, 'When he kicked me, he had full intention of killing me. He simply changed his mind since I didn't die.'

[Or as I would like to phrase it, he did not want to kill a cockroach.]

'You are a part of the cockroach, so mind your tone.'

[I'm just stating the facts. Also, don't waste time hanging around here, get the information and get out of here. That fucker's mood swing could kick in at any moment and he'd decide to kill you.]

Ashton didn't disagree and they quickly made their way through the corridors. When Otiga said it was a library, Ashton expected it to have long pathways created by bookshelves. But to his surprise, the long hall led to a fairly small room.

The room was surprisingly empty and only had what appeared to be a water basin in the middle. The shiny liquid inside the basin lit up the room with light that came out of it.

"Here we are," Otiga announced while pointing at the basin, "the Well of Knowledge, the place that holds all of the knowledge Zhasks have acquired through generations."

Although it was called a well, it would have made more sense if it was called the circle of knowledge, given its weirdly two-dimensional appearance. There was nothing attached to the thin plate as it floated in the air of its own free will.

[It's a basic technological storage unit. The Xyrans used to have a lot of these floating around. One disc can contain up to ten thousand yottabytes worth of memory... so yeah, the shortage of storage was the reason we stopped using these.]

'I did not understand a single thing that came out of your mouth, but I'll take your word for it.'

Otiga slowly headed towards the well, gesturing for Ashton to follow her. Ashton carefully let Anna down, who was weak but fine otherwise before following Otiga.

"What do I do next?"

"Dip your head in and concentrate on what you want to know. If the well has an answer, it would respond, if it doesn't well, then we'll have to look into finding other ways to get the information." Otiga replied.

[Dip your head into a dish full of suspicious liquid. Yup, that's definitely not suspicious at all.]

Otiga noticed Ashton hesitate for a moment and although she had not expected him to get wary of her, it made sense he was being cautious. After all, it was a member of her family that tried to destroy him and his companion.

"Looks like you do trust me all that much. It's understandable." Otiga smiled and went ahead to demonstrate how it worked.

After that, it was silent for a couple of minutes, before she pulled her head out. However, she was visibly shaken. Whatever she saw inside had scared her... a lot. After taking a few quick breaths, she finally composed herself enough to start talking.

"I can't believe this... The first monarch isn't anything we thought him to be." She panted, "He is mortal, but immortal at the same time. Every single patriarch of the Zhasks has his memory engraved within themselves. All of my ancestors knew him, just like I do. It's almost as if he has been on Euphoria, since the moment it was created."

Otiga kept rambling on and on about how a lot of other things made sense now and whatnot. But Ashton was no longer paying attention to her words. Thanks to [Heartbeat sense], he knew what Otiga said was true and the thing Astaroth told him a moment later only confirmed it was possible.

[Michael was always a master of [Cell Division]. A skill that was considered to be a myth by the galactic species and we thought the xyrans only had the knowledge... that is until Michael showed up with it.]

'Please speak in words that I understand...'

[The gist of it is, as long as the cells among your body keep dividing amongst themselves, and new cells keep emerging, you can basically be immortal. How do you think the Xyrans or the Precursors lived for thousands of years? We keep dividing our cells and generating new ones.]

[But even that has limitations. If we keep dividing the cells, soon enough they'll turn into cancerous cells and the skill that kept us alive would eventually lead to a painful death.]

'Okay, but what does that... oh shit...' Ashton realised what Astaroth had been wanting to say till now, 'Michael is Gabriel?'

[My guess is, that Michael must have managed to get past this limitation and did not want to share the secret with the others. So he staged his death, tricked [Detection] into mentioning him as a new person and has been living on Euphoria in secret ever since. Everything makes sense now... even the fact he is stronger than Beelzebub and even me for that matter.]

Astaroth had a sense of urgency in his voice, but Ashton was only thinking one thing, 'It took that fucker multiple lifetimes to get to level 180+? How pathetic did he have to be to level up so slowly?'

Chapter 359 The Key To Immortality

A day later, the house of Zhasks was in ruins. Not because of Leon's and Darjud's plans, but because Otiga wanted it to be that way. After last night, Otiga did not have a reason to stay on the planet anymore. Especially after Gabriel sided with Darjud and the loss of her trust in her soldiers.

Since Ashton and Anna had to leave the planet as well, they offered Otiga a ride, to which she readily agreed. She might have lost her influence over Euphoria, but she was still an asset. She wasn't a monarch anymore, but she was still the founder and owner of the largest intelligence networks in the Orion arm of the galaxy.

By having her tagalong, Ashton essentially had a walking and trustworthy source of information with him. It was an opportunity only a fool would pass up on. This was a major reason why Ashton decided to help her.

As for the situation in Euphoria, thanks to Otiga's network, they knew exactly what happened after they left. As she had expected, the attack on her and her 'family' as a whole, was classified as an act of terrorism by the radicals. Apparently, she was targeted because of her influence over the Orion arm.

Darjud who was the main propagator of the attack was now being held as the saviour who put his life on the line to protect a fellow monarch. Unfortunately, he failed and was now receiving intense care under the watchful eye of Gabriel or as Ashton knew him... Michael.

Otiga was pronounced dead on the spot, and so were Ashton and Anna. Ashton almost puked blood after hearing this but continued to listen to the rest of the made-up story.

As for the Gryphon dungeon, it was rumoured that Michael had gone inside the dungeon while Darjud was fighting against the 'terrorists'. Michael cleared the dungeon in secret and when he came out, he realised something was wrong and rushed over to the Zhask mansion.

Because why not? He is a god in the eyes of the public living on Euphoria. It was only obvious for him to know what was happening. No one was even going to ask him how he knew exactly where he had to go. Maybe they were scared of asking questions or maybe the people didn't give a shit about anything.

Either way, back to the story. Sadly, by the time Michael reached the crime scene, he was too late to save Otiga, but he managed to save Darjud. That was the story that the public got to know of, and through them, Ashton and the others did as well.

The only good thing that came out of the mess was that he got his [Perception] skill back when he evolved. But Ashton had made up his mind to only use it under certain circumstances.

"Gotta give it to the fucker's PR department. They did a great job spouting out bullshit from their sewer of a brain." Ashton scoffed the moment Otiga delivered the news to him and Anna.

"If I say anything, it'll be hypocritical of me. After all, I have used the service of his PR department myself." Otiga smiled wanly, "All of them are a piece of shit, but they get their job done. They once tried to portray a woman who pooped on her husband's bed as the good guy but failed. I think that was the only failure they got ever handed to them as the woman's image never recovered after that."

"Please tell me you made that up..."

Anna squinted her eyes. Just thinking about a grown-ass adult pooping on a bed made her feel... uncomfortable and disgusted. As for Ashton, who had seen the struggle of people living in an enclosure, Otiga's words didn't matter. Either way, he had seen far worse things than some poop on a bed.

"We will reach the mothership in a day," Ashton switched the topic, "till then, let's try and get some rest."

The ladies nodded and Ashton left the room. He wanted to ask a few things from Astaroth, regarding the so-called key to immortality. Although Ashton had no intention of immortalising himself as it felt quite useless and boring, learning more about it wasn't going to do any harm to him.

If anything, he might be able to incorporate it to make some sort of a new healing ability which wouldn't use mana or wouldn't count as an ability. From his last battle, he had come to realise a lot of things. One of which was that he shouldn't depend on [Regeneration] alone for healing purposes.

[Shall I start? I should warn you, the details of the story will probably bore you... a lot.]

"It doesn't matter. Go ahead."

[Alright... here we go.]

It all began when the Xyrans began planning to overthrow the Precursors. Their scientists were given the task to uncover as many mysteries about the Precursors as they could so the Xyrans would have an edge over them. One of the most important ones was... the key to their immortality.

[Back then, the average lifespan of a Xyrans was between 100-120 earth years. Which wasn't remotely enough to fight and win a battle against the Precursors who had lived on for more than millions of years by that point.]

The scientists theorised about it for decades but ultimately came to the conclusion that their answer had to be on a much smaller scale than they were expecting. The answer had to be hidden inside the fundamental stage of life... the cells present inside everyone's body.

[Every intelligent being knows the importance of cells for a healthy life. These cells have the ability to divide and thus grow. For the sake of it, let's just say one old cell miraculously divides into two or more healthy cells and life goes on.]

Ashton silently listened to the explanation while nodding his head. He did not interrupt Astaroth, even when a few things were going right over his head as the explanation got a bit more complex.

[The problem starts when these cells stop dividing. That's the stage when one's body condition starts deteriorating and we say the person is ageing or is old. In other words, there's a limit to how much a cell can divide. The Precursors, however, overcame this restriction and were able to basically turn themselves into immortal god-like beings.]

"So the Xyrans decided to even out the odds?"

[Mm-hmm... unfortunately for us, the way we divided our cells wasn't nearly as efficient as the precursors. I don't know the reason but it could be because unlike them, we were forcing our bodies to live longer by forcing down a foreign material inside our body.]

[We believed as long as our cells kept dividing, we'll be healthy. Which was true... to a certain extent. For most of us, this process was smooth and the cell division was regulated by itself in our body. But some were unlucky and their growth didn't stop, leading to the formation of cancerous cells and deformities.]

The moment Astaroth mentioned deformities, Ashton immediately thought of the wings behind a high-ranking Xyran's back and Astaroth disagreed. Although the wings behind their backs appeared while they were getting used to [Cell Division], it wasn't a deformity.

Instead, Astaroth was referring to deformities like growing an extra limb or a head or some other part of one's body. It might not seem much, but truly it was a horrendously painful experience... how could growing additional organs even be remotely considered a fun experience either way?

At first, Ashton thought growing an extra limb or two would be quite useful in battle. But his imaginary happiness was immediately shot down when Astaroth mention the extra organs were essentially useless as they were made of useless cancerous cells.

[I can still remember the cries of countless people as their bodies turned into a deformed mess. I don't know how the pain felt, but I can try to describe it in a way you would understand. You remember how painful it was for you during evolution, right?]

Ashton shivered as he remember how helpless he felt. Although it was a part of the plan, if he could evolve without going through the pain, he would do it without any hesitation.

[Yeah... their pain was at least a hundred times worse. Most of them did not survive the ordeal, and those who did, they either turned insane or killed themselves in fear that they would have to go through such pain all their lives.]

Ashton stood there silently. All of a sudden, he thought [Cell Division] might not be a technique he was interested in. Achieving immortality with such high risk, wasn't really worth it. At least in his opinion. However, that did not mean there wasn't a way for him to do something about it.

After all, he was officially on the bloodline of a Precursor. As long as he kept making the right decision while evolving, he might end up obtaining the Precursor's version of [Cell Division]. But for now... there was not much he could do about the lack of strength he had.

Chapter 360 Mercenary Association (1)

"Tell me something... why is that whenever something bad happens, you're always in the middle of it?" Aamon shook his head.

"Believe me, I keep asking that question myself." Ashton shrugged, "But I never get any answers."

It's been a couple of hours since Ashton returned on the mothership of T.I.T pirates and narrated the entire story of what happened and why he returned earlier than expected. At first, Aamon thought Ashton gave up on the trials, but when he saw him he remembered the boy wasn't weak-minded enough to give up everything so easily.

"Either way looks like you people have gone on a shopping spree," Ashton mumbled while looking around the new ship.

"Yeah. We have been busy while you were gone." Frank replied, "Thought we might as well upgrade a few things."

Ashton nodded and kept looking around. This ship was certainly bigger and probably faster than the one they had been using till now. He still had much to learn about different types of spaceships and their classes. But he was immediately acquainted with the ship by Lycaon.

It was a phoenix-class ship known as, the Spirit of Vengeance, aptly named by Lycaon since vengeance was the only thing on their mind. A point Lycaon made sure to iterate over and over was the strength and weakness of the ship.

The Phoenix-class ships were known for being a warmongering battlecruiser packed with high firepower technology while also being agile enough to give a chase to escaping targets should a need arise.

That being said, these ships had a fatal flaw in them. They had to sacrifice heavy armour for speed as it was a light cruiser, not a heavy cruiser. That was why they had to purchase a few more small ships to act as a makeshift shield for the mothership.

"All that aside, it's a shame you couldn't complete your trials." Frank chimed in while installing a new device in his hands, "I wasn't very hopeful, to begin with, since all of us had a tough time there. But after seeing your growth, I would say you could have become the first outsider to ever walk out of the planet with a tag of A-grade being."

Lycaon, working on Frank's arm, eventually let go of his tools and turned his attention to Ashton. The werewolf wordlessly got up and began circling around Ashton. After orbiting him for a while, he nodded as if he was pleased with Ashton's progress. All the while the rest of them were strangely looking at Lycaon to say something.

"I think you are ready for your first mission as a mercenary in space." He finally spoke.

"Are you for real?" Frank raised his eyebrows, "I get that he is strong, but starting off as a mercenary for hire, don't you think it'll be a bit too much."

"For the progenitor of the undead, you sure are full of emotions." Lycaon rolled his eyes, "He's a warrior. In my eyes, he has already proven his worth. Also, unlike us, he would have someone to guide him through the obstacles, so you don't have to worry about him getting lost or something. If you want another reason, I can give you a couple more."

"No... it's fine..."

Frank gave up. Nothing good would ever come out of arguing with someone like Lycaon. Especially when he was all riled up. Lycaon was so adamant about Ashton becoming a mercenary because he wanted the boy to establish himself as soon as possible.

Frank and Dracula might be deaf enough to not hear what their soldiers were talking about them, but Lycaon wasn't. Back when they decided to become pirates, all of the members had to go through rigorous training and trials to prove themselves.

But Ashton? He was simply welcomed in their ranks with open arms. While the progenitors and Aamon knew how valuable Ashton was, the rest of them didn't, nor did they care about his genes or shit.

In their eyes, he was receiving unfair treatment. But unlike their leaders, the only thing rest of them cared about was a person's might. Something they had not seen since, during the fight with Beelzebub, none of them was present there to see just how strong Ashton truly was.

Levelling up wasn't the only reason why they had suggested Ashton complete the Euphorian trials. Clearing the trials would have also acted as a way to demonstrate why everyone valued him so much.

The trials Ashton completed were enough to silence everyone. But the way he had to leave the planet, hampered his reputation. That's why Lycaon wanted Ashton to join the independent mercenary organisation and prove his power there.

Also, becoming a mercenary was the best way to get acquainted with the rules and regulations of living in space. Fortunately, there was only one rule of space: Survival of the fittest.

If you're weak, you're inviting the ones above you to trample you into dust. But if you're strong, you can do whatever you please and no one would be able to do shit about it.

"I'm fine with it." Ashton spoke up, "Being a mercenary should have its perks and with Otiga's help, I should be able to cruise through the missions."

"Ah yes, the woman..." Aamon nodded before getting lost in his thought, "You did a great job bringing her on the ship. An alliance with her would prove to be beneficial to us all."

Ashton nodded, he already knew her value regardless of what Aamon might have said.

"Then it's decided. We'll drop them at the hub, collect some supplies and be on our way." Lycaon said with finality, before going back to work on Frank's arm.

"What do you mean, drop us and be on your way? Where are you going?" Ashton asked.

"Somewhere you're not qualified to." Aamon replied, "Technically, I'm neither. So if you want, I can tag along with you-"

Before Ashton could respond, Lycaon did it for him, "Stop coddling him and leave the kid alone."

He then turned toward Ashton and continued with a serious tone, "You want to make a name for yourself? Then learn to do everything by yourself or forget about making the Xyrans pay for their wrongdoings."

Aamon stared at Ashton to gauge his reaction, and to his surprise, Ashton was completely calm. He was expecting him to show some disappointment or anger as he usually would have, but he did not. In a matter of a month, Ashton had changed a lot. Well, because it was a month for him but for them, it had been a while since the flow of time was quite weird for Euphoria.

,m "Don't worry, even though you're the ones who dragged me to space, I don't expect you to help me out every step of the way." Ashton calmly replied, "It's not like you have been doing it either so, it's fine. Now then, I should get going."

Ashton left the control room without speaking another word. Once he was gone, all of them looked at each other before they broke down laughing.

"You are one twisted bastard." Frank smiled, "While didn't you tell him you already got him registered as a mercenary?"

"Why does it even matter?" Lycaon replied, "His fate is much bigger than ours. One of these days, we'll have to leave him alone, so might as well train him to be a loner while we can."

"By the way, did Dracula contact you? It's been a while since he disappeared along with his granddaughters." Aamon changed the topic of discussion, "To be honest, I don't care about them, but he took Ashton's summons with him. He might get upset because of it."

Lycaon stared at his watch and shrugged, "They should be here any moment now. Also, the twin might not be as strong as Ashton or his succubus, but they are strong enough to be included in our forces. That's why Dracula also registered them as mercs and took them under his wings... quite literally, if I may say."

Ashton did not waste any time and immediately went inside his room. Thankfully, Anna wasn't there, which made things easier. After converting himself into an undead, Ashton slowly took out the Grim reaper's scythe and laid it out flat in front of him.

[Are you sure the ability would work?]

'Honestly, not at all. But there's no harm in trying, is it?' Ashton replied, 'If things begin to go wrong, you know what to do.'

[Don't worry, my pull-out game is quite strong.]

'Of course, it is. To pull it out, first, you have to put it in. Unfortunately, I can only hope you have learned from my experiences.'

[...you wanna die? Just use the damn ability.]

The ability Astaroth was referring to was the same one that Ashton used to sever Darjud's arm. The ability was called [Disassociation] and as the name suggested, it could separate a targetted thing from another.

Since Ashton used it on Darjud and saw the results, he was hoping he would be able to do the same with the scythe and separated the corruption from the source. Therefore, making the scythe usable once again.

'Here we go...'

Ashton raised his arms over the scythe. The only thing in his mind was to make the scythe usable so that Balmond could have a feast. The dark aura of the scythe seemed to react to Ashton's wishes, but the moment everything appeared to be going fine, the power of corruption overwhelmed Ashton.

His fingers slowly began to turn black, from the corrupt aura. It was at that moment Astaroth pulled the plug.

'Damn it! I almost had it!'

[Tough luck boy. Looks like you gotta level up that precursor ability of yours. Also, no need to thank me for saving your life though.]

'I wasn't going to.'