

Zompiewolf 361

Chapter 361 Mercenary Association (2)

"I greet the master..." Sven bowed before Ashton, "I hope your journey has been fruitful."

"Can't say it wasn't." Ashton smiled seeing his trusty summons after so long, "I can see you have been training as well."

Before leaving for Euphoria, Ashton had to leave Sven, Celeste and Gokung behind as Dracula wanted Ashton to focus on his development, rather than his summons. Ashton was a bit sceptical at the start, but now that he had seen their growth, he knew he made the right decision. All three of them were strong... stronger than before.

Celeste appeared to be more docile as well. The fact she didn't race up to Ashton the moment she saw him spoke volumes. Maybe he should take tips from Dracula on how to keep her that way.

As for Gokung, she still gave into her animalistic nature once in a while, that's why she still had her collar around her neck.

And Sven, he was just as courteous as before, despite he had grown the most out of the lot. But his strength had gone way above what Ashton had imagined. Sven had officially reached grade E and would breakthrough that limit soon.

However, there was a stronger summon they were yet to meet. Without wasting any moment, Ashton called forth Atlas. The moment he stepped foot into the training room, Ashton noticed the visible change in Sven's expression.

He was no longer the strongest in the group and it wasn't a pleasant feeling at all. For a long time, he had been the closest to his master, but now his position was in danger thanks to a being who was much superior to him.

"Boys, beasts and hoe, I would like you to meet, Atlas." Ashton said while pointing at the behemoth standing behind, "Formerly he was a Xyran, now an undead monstrosity. I hope you will get along with each other and not give me unnecessary troubles."

Before Ashton could say or do anything, Atlas and Sven lunged toward each other and a fight erupted out of nowhere. Sven used his shadow blade to relentlessly attack a weaponless Atlas. But even then, he wasn't having any success.

No matter how hard he tried, Sven could not land a single effective blow on the behemoth. After a couple of seconds, Atlas completely gave up on defending himself as Sven's attacks were not having much effect on him either way.

In fact, Atlas was basically playing with Sven, while the latter tried his best to deal some damage to the behemoth. The fight was slowly getting serious and as a result, the training area was suffering minor damage after every blow they exchanged.

"Reinforcing the room to accommodate the duelists." The ship's nameless AI announced.

The next moment, the room had changed considerably. The ceramic floor was instantly replaced by metal. The same went for the walls and the ceiling as well.

Ashton allowed the duel to go on. It was a good opportunity to see how much Sven had grown from the last time he saw him. It took a while, but Sven finally realised he wouldn't win the fight if he kept charging headfirst at Atlas.

Atlas simply had too much HP and defence. Taking him down wasn't going to be an easy job to do. Watching him struggle, Celeste and Gokung decided to join in, but Ashton raised his hand to stop them. There was no need for anyone to interfere in their matter.

"Let them duke it out."

That's all he said as he kept observing them from the sidelines. Ashton knew who was going to win, and in some capacity, Sven did as well. So far, Atlas hadn't even been fighting back. He was simply toying with Sven.

"Oi fatass, fight seriously or I'll be the one kicking your ass next." Ashton yelled at him, "I don't have time to sit around here forever."

Ashton's words almost made Atlas jump out of his skin. Offending Ashton was the last thing on his mind, so he got serious. The next time Sven swung his sword at him, Atlas did not block the strike and instead snatched it away and plunged it into Sven's chest.

It didn't destroy the latter, but that move was enough for Atlas to show his supremacy. Sven accepted his defeat gracefully and that was it. A new hierarchy had been established amongst his summons. The duel ended at the correct time, because a moment later, an announcement was made.

"We are about to arrive at the destination. Please report to the command centre at once." The AI emotionlessly mumbled.

"Finally..." Ashton stretched his muscles before heading out of the room, "All of you, get inside."

Half an hour later...

"The place is quite lively..." Ashton mumbled.

He was gazing out of the cupola of the ship as they closed in on a space station. It was safe to say Ashton was amazed as it was his first time seeing anything like that. The space station was shaped like a tower with hundreds of ships flying around it.

The size of the tower made even the largest of ships feel like insects flying around a watermelon, which awed him even more. It looked both intimidating and mysterious at the same time. For the first time, Ashton was excited about something, even though he hid it really well.

[Seriously? The Xyrans created a literal planet out of nothing and this rustbucket is the thing that excites you the most?]

'Yeah, because the planet was created by Xyrans. If this wonder was created by them, then I wouldn't be as excited as I am now.'

[You're shameless.]

'Yeah, and you're the epitome of greatness aren't you? You're so great you don't even need a body to ruin someone's day.'

The moment their ships were cleared for access, Ashton could hear voices of all languages and accents mixed with the robotic voices of the AIs. It was a weird symphony of some sort that made Ashton feel as if he was in some kind of a market.

Well, his guess wasn't too off of the mark. The space station, simply known as 'The Kernel', offered more services than Euphoria or any other mid-level civilization had to offer.

"The kernel is a place where everything and anything was possible as long as you have the money and clearance to access them." Lycaon informed Ashton, "Since you lack both, you won't have access to a lot of things. But that's why we're here. To make sure you know what you need to."

"First of all, let me tell you... your level, skills or anything about you doesn't matter here." Frank chimed in, "The only thing they care about is your Mercenary rank. The higher your rank, the higher level jobs you can get from the association. As you progress, more perks will unlock and you'll be able to access other floors of the Kernel Tower."

"Got it." Ashton nodded, "If you don't mind me asking, what ranks are you three?"

"We... kind of got our licences revoked the moment he turned into pirates." Frank scratched his chin in embarrassment, "I believe the saying, 'you can't have your cake and eat it too', is true."

"That being said," Dracula finally broke the silence, "Since none of us can accompany you and Anna down there, I asked Verina and Irina to guide you. Don't worry, they won't stick around you for long, they have their own missions to handle."

Ashton stared at them for a couple of seconds before the doors opened up and they stepped out of the ship. Once outside, Anna and Ashton were accompanied by the twins who had already ventured inside the Kernel, while they were busy on Euphoria.

In his absence, the twins had already got themselves registered as mercs and did a couple of missions. They weren't the ones who told Ashton about it, but his summons who had accompanied the ladies to these missions while Dracula trained them.

Although he had gotten entry to the tower, they still needed to go through a mandatory security check. The check itself was not a problem but the queue was too darn big. While they were waiting for their turns, Ashton noticed a few aliens heading into the tower without waiting for any security checks.

Verina noticed his gaze and whispered in his ear, "They are high-ranking mercenaries. As such, they don't need to go through security checks like us. Also, they have a dedicated port for themselves where they can park their ships anytime they want without clearance."

"I see... These are the perks Lycaon was talking about?"

"Some of them." Verina nodded before handing him a weird-looking black card, "By the way, this is a sort of transaction card. It has 10,000 yenos in it. As for yenos, they are one of the three universally accepted forms of currency. Granddad told me to give it to you."

"Looks like I'll have to thank your old man for this," Ashton graciously accepted the money and after security check headed inside the tower.

Ashton knew the place was supposed to be big, but it was downright gargantuan from the inside. It was easily the biggest artificial structure he had ever seen in his life.

"Wow..." Anna mumbled.

"I know right?" Irina replied, "Either way, important things first. Follow me please."

They took an elevator and dropped to the lowest floor they could. That was where the mercenary association was located. Ashton was surprised to see the lack of living beings around the place. Only robots could be seen everywhere.

One such robot immediately rushed towards Verina the moment she whistled. It was a tiny ball-shaped robot that appeared to have not received regular maintenance. One of his hands didn't function at all, while his eyes were flickering like a broken lamp.

"How can I be of your service-"

No sooner did he spoke than another robot appeared chasing away the one from before.

"My apologies for such... weird reception." The robot sighed, "My name is Ena-117, how may I be of assistance tonight?"

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Unlike the robot from earlier, Ena-117 had a humanoid body. In fact, if she had not introduced herself as a robot Ashton would have believed she was an alien. That's how realistic she looked. Not to mention, her persona and the way she behaved, everything about her resembled a living being. She was more of a clone than a robot.

Before Ashton had a chance to respond, Irina jumped in, "They are here to complete their registration for the mercenary licence."

"Oh, wonderful!" Ena excitedly clapped, "Could you tell me your name and affiliation? It's required in order to look up your registration request."

"It's under Ashton Fenrir and Anna Swan, affiliation: Neutral." Irina continued.

Ashton had no idea what the hell was going on there. Irina was talking about him, but he had no idea what she was on about. After looking up something on a handheld device, Ena looked up at Ashton and Anna.

Unbeknownst to them, she had clicked an image of them to be stored in the Association's database. While she was doing her work, Verina couldn't take it anymore and asked Ena a serious question.

"I don't mean to offend you or anything, but isn't the job of registering new mercenaries left to the lower-end AI models, like the robot from earlier?"

"Yes, you are correct." Ena replied without looking up from the screen, "Usually, I only handle clients that are Rank-5 or above. But since I was in the area and you had an uncomfortable experience because of the Roller-bot earlier, I thought it was only fair I assisted you in any way possible."

A moment later, she handed over the device to Ashton and continued, "Please pick a mercenary name for yourselves. Your real identity would remain undisclosed to the clients to maintain fairness for the other mercenaries as well as to protect your privacy. You will have the option to make your information public once you reach Rank-3."

"I see..."

Ashton was happy about the arrangement. After the events of Euphoria, he wasn't sure using his name so freely would be beneficial to him. Michael might not chase after him, but he had picked up a fight with the radicals.

Although they seemed weak and aloof at times, it wasn't a good idea to boast his name around space. They might not be able to do anything to him, but they could attack Anna, and he sure as hell wasn't going to let her go through what she did on Euphoria. Never again.

"How about... Reaper?" Ashton mumbled after thinking about it for a while.

"Sounds... ominous, but acceptable." Ena quickly typed something into the device and turned towards Anna, "And what about you, ma'am?"

"Bella."

"Wonderful! That takes care of the administrative part of the things... now, please deposit the collateral amount of 4000 yenos each."

Ashton turned towards Verina who had a mischievous smile on her face. When she gave him the card with money on it, he thought the progenitors were giving him a start-up fund. But to his surprise, it was actually to complete the registration process.

'I don't think I have any right to complain. After all, they did give me the money. Who knows how long it would have taken me to get the money by myself?'

[That's right! Be grateful for their kindness, you ungrateful overpowered freak.]

'That's rich coming from you. When was the last time you thanked me for letting you rot my brain?'

[How about you thank me for saving your ass time and time again?]

'Why should I? After all, I am an ungrateful overpowered freak.'

[...touche.]

Ashton handed over the card to Ena, who promptly gave it back to him after deducting the said amount.

"That's all. It'll take a couple of minutes to generate your mercenary cards." Ena reported as she placed the device in her pocket, "In the meantime, would you like to know more about the rules and regulations of the Mercenary association?"

"It would be great if you would do that for us," Anna responded.

Ena wasted no time after that. The first thing she explained was how the hiring procedure worked. In basic terms, a client will offer a job to the association and the rewards associated with the job. Based on the terms of the job, the Association would decide whether they would hand it over to a mercenary or a mercenary group or will it be open for any mercenary to take that offer.

Generally, the jobs with higher rewards were often assigned to the high-ranking mercenaries as they were often sought after. As for the open contracts, they were assigned based on the reputation system.

"Your reputation will affect how the association will treat you. You can gain reputation by completing missions and by achieving recognisable feats." Ena explained, "Your reputation will also contribute to the ranking system that ranges from Rank 1 to Rank 10. The treatment you'll receive in Kernel tower will grow based on your ranks."

By this time, another roller-bot arrived, with Ashton's and Anna's Mercenary licence. The black card with golden borders had almost no information about them. That was until they pressed in the middle of it.

A moment later, an electronic screen appeared on the card with all the necessary information about them shown. Their mercenary name, rank, bank balance as well as current reputation... which happened to be 0 out of 200. In other words, they would not receive any special treatment within the tower.

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Mercenary Name: Reaper

Reputation: 0/200 (Newbie)

Rank: 1

Class: Undisclosed

Level: C-Grade (Mid)

Feats or Achievements: None

Affiliation: None

Missions completed: None

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Around the bottom of the screen were two tabs, [Missions completed] and [Feats or Achievements]. So far, both of these pages were blank, which was obvious since they had no reputation either.

"As you keep completing missions and achieve feats, they'll be automatically added to the respective column." Ena explained, "Also, the fee for completing a job would be transferred to you as soon as you complete it, after deducting 25% as commission. Don't worry, as you climb ranks the commission rate would go down."

She continued, "Please keep in mind, just like succeeding in a mission would raise your reputation, failing to do so would also reduce it. That's why it is suggested you only pick up missions suitable to your rank and not get overambitious. The ranking system is created for your own safety more than anything else."

Anna listened to her very carefully, but Ashton did not. He had his own questions to ask.

"How did you determine my grade? I don't remember you ever asking about it either."

"As a robot for the Ena series, we have inbuilt scanners capable of determining that. Well, the scan only has about a 70% success rate so we often make mistakes as the scan itself depends on the stats of the user and nothing else. If there's any discrepancy, please inform me and I'll correct it instantly."

"I see." Ashton breathed a sigh of relief, "The grade is incorrect. I'm actually D-grade, not C-grade."

"Please show me your card."

After tweaking for a bit, Ena handed the card back to Ashton and it now displayed that he was a D-grade being. Not C.

[That was a close one. I didn't think other civilisations would develop such technology so soon.]

'Yeah, I almost thought she knew my cumulative level...'

"Thank you for joining the Mercenary association. I hope you will achieve great success in the coming years." Ena wished them well as she left, "You can accept job requests on the floor right above. If you have any other questions, you can revisit this floor and someone will help you out for a small fee of 20 yenos per question."

The group nodded and left for the upper floor. Ashton pocketed his card and was about to leave the elevator when he accidentally activated it and clicked on the achievement section. The screen lit up but this time, it had another icon. A '+' had been created there.

Out of curiosity, Ashton clicked on it and a new window opened up in front of him. On the screen his 'feats' were visible. At least the feats he achieved on Euphoria.

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Please select the achievements you want to add.

>> [Hydra's Adversary] ---> 100 Reputation Points (Maximum value reached!)

>> [Gryphon Crisis Manager] ---> 40 Reputation Points

>> [Behemoth Slayer] ---> 100 Reputation Points (Maximum value reached!)

>> [The one who completed 7 Euphorian Trials] ---> 70 Reputation Points

>> [Fourth Euphorian Trial Seat Holder] ---> 60 Reputation Points

Please note that once the achievements have been added to your resume, they can't be removed.

'Seat holder? Wait... is it because I killed Jacklin?'

[That would make sense.]

"I see, you already have so many reputation points to claim," Verina mumbled as she skimmed through the information window, "Both Irina and I only got like 60 points from our accomplishments on Euphoria. What about you Anna? How many points did you get?"

"Let me check," Anna mumbled and did the same thing as Ashton, "102, not bad right?"

"It's way better than ours." Irina shrugged, "Considering our score reached 120 after completing two jobs."

"I have a question though," Ashton got back inside the elevator, "You guys go ahead, I'll be back in a moment."

"You know you can ask us first, right?" Verina smiled, "Why are you so eager to waste your money by asking them questions?"

Ashton had a light bulb moment but got a bit embarrassed as he walked out of the elevator, "I suppose I could do that. Once I add these achievements do they become visible for the others to see?"

While he was happy he could get his hands on some reputation points and gain access to better job requests, it also became a source of concern for him.

Even though he hid his real name and could also alter his appearance, it wouldn't take long for someone to link the dots to his real identity if they saw those achievements. After all, he was the only one who accomplished such feats in recent times.

Especially [Gryphon Crisis Manager] and [Fourth Euphorian Trial Seat Holder]. These two achievements could easily out him to the radicals and he did not want it. That being said, if the achievements were visible for everyone to see, then he would most likely not add them to his resume. At least not till he was strong enough to take on the Radicals as a whole.

"Nope. No one can see the achievements except you and the association once you have assigned them." Verina replied, "However, there are some jobs that would make you release that information as a clause for being employed."

"Most of the high-ranking jobs often ask the mercenaries to release that information to them under a confidentiality contract." Irina chimed in, "They can not release that information to anyone else, or the association itself would hunt them down."

"I see..." Ashton scratched his chin, "It'll take a while for me to receive those kinds of quests. Even then, I can just ignore the job requests that require me to reveal the information. Fine, let's add them for now."

Your rank has risen!

Current Rank: 2

Current Reputation: 370/1000 (Not-so-new Newbie)

Chapter 363 Elite Mercenary Group (1)

Ashton headed over to get his first job as a mercenary. However, at his rank, not many were available in the first place. Those that were available to him, were not available to Anna as she was still stuck at rank 1.

She wanted Ashton to leave on a mission suitable for him, while she would hang back with the twins as their rank was the same. However, ever since the incident with Darjud, he had grown kind of overprotective of her and did not want to leave her alone, but he was not being given a choice.

In the end, he agreed it was for the best to leave her with the twins. But not alone. Sven was to stay within her shadow and protect them if the need arose. This was his compromise. Initially, he wanted to leave Atlas with her, but considering he wasn't fully tamed yet and was unpredictable, Ashton decided to leave Sven instead.

Also, since Sven had already been on two missions with twins, it was best to leave him with them. After that, the twins took a prearranged escorting job and left along with Anna and Sven.

'Hm... I should look for a high-paying job, I guess.'

[You bet. Being a mercenary isn't cheap. Thankfully you have some leftover money from earlier. It will come in handy. Especially when you have to pay for your travelling, food, and lodging.]

Ashton nodded and began analysing the bulletin board for the latest job requests. The ones he could apply for were useless searching and retrieving missions or some sort of plant collection thing.

These kinds of missions did not give enough money or combat experience. Those were the two criteria Ashton refused to let go of. After all, the only reason he became a merc was to get stronger and level up faster.

[There was a Xyrans saying relating to money, I don't remember it well, but it went something like: A person can never have enough money.]

'I wouldn't expect anything else from you greedy bastards, to be honest.' Ashton smirked, 'But this time, I can agree with your ways. I do need money for a lot of things, especially information about the Xyrans and that'll be pricey. They have been quiet for far too long, considering one of their generals just went missing out of nowhere.'

[I don't know about it now, but back when I was alive, Beelzebub wasn't held in high regard by the council. I doubt they have changed their views on him even after a millennium. That being said, they will look for him eventually, but not so soon.]

Ashton just nodded and didn't respond. Ever since he got his [Perception] skill back, it had been hyperactive. Ashton could feel, see and hear things he normally wouldn't be able to. It was the same with his other senses as well. The trip to Euphoria had proved to be more fruitful than he thought.

That being said, his [perception] was the reason he immediately noticed the commotion that was slowly heading his way. From what he could hear and understand, some 'elite' mercenaries were heading his way and causing a ruckus.

For some reason, they wanted to call dibs on the lower-ranking jobs instead of claiming jobs that suited their ranks. This was the reason why players ranking at level 1 or 2 were so adamant about not letting them do so. But it's not like they had a choice in the matter.

Although anyone was eligible to take any job request as they pleased as long as they qualified for it, it was an unspoken rule to not take jobs that were lower than the mercenary's rank. It was for that reason Ashton did not accompany Anna and the twins in their escort quest. But now it looked like he should have done so.

'I understand why they are losing their shit over such a matter.' Ashton thought to himself, 'If an employer could get better-ranked mercenary to do their work for a cheap price, it's obvious they'll go for them instead of the usual low-rankers. These fuckers are basically taking their jobs away from them.'

[You know you're one of them, right? You might be strong, but you're still a low ranker so...]

Ashton shook his head and sighed like never before. Troubles... just the thing he wasn't looking for. He turned around and saw around twenty or so people walking in his direction. The mercenary group consisted of various different types of aliens. Some Ashton had seen before, and some he had not.

The one thing all of them had in common was their golden armour and the logo of a black hexagram engraved on their upper limb. It was probably the symbol of their mercenary group.

Ashton averted his gaze from the hexagram tattoo and analysed their gears. Just one glance was enough for him to know that the mercenary group had to have a powerful backer. The reason behind his logic was that all of them had rare gear on them.

He was still grasping the concept of the new monetary system of the Yenos. Even then, he could say just one set of armour would probably cost him around fifteen to twenty-five thousand Yenos. Which was enough to buy a third-hand travel-oriented or non-combat spaceship... something that Ashton did not possess.

[Don't get jealous. You possess something their backer can never dream of having.]

'I'll trade you for a battlecruiser without a moment's hesitation.'

[...fuck you!]

'Yeah yeah, but the F-word reminded me of something.' Ashton could barely contain his laugh just imagining what Astaroth's reaction would be, 'You said there was an intergalactic orgy right? Then how come are you still a virgin?'

[I'm done talking to you regarding that matter. It was a mistake to bring it up in the first place.]

Before Ashton could reply, someone grabbed his shoulder and tried to shove him aside. Unluckily, they weren't able to. Ashton turned around to see one of the people from the mercenary group was still holding on to him.

He was a muscular, pasty-skinned man with thin eyebrows, a large nose and a funny squared face. The person was one of the aliens Ashton did not know about. However, apart from the muscles, it didn't seem there was anything he had to worry about from the man. Especially when he was just a C-grade being.

"Do you need some help?" Ashton politely asked knowing the man had gotten flustered.

"Just move it. We'll be the first ones to accept certain job requests."

Ashton thought nothing could possibly be funnier than the alien's perfectly squared face, but he was wrong. The alien's squeaky voice was even funnier. Ashton almost thought he was conversing with a squish toy.

"Um... sure, go ahead."

Ashton stepped aside as he had no reason to get into a fight with unknown people. In his eyes, all of them were mercenaries trying to earn a living. However, if they gave him a reason to engage them, high-ranking or not, he was going to kick their ass. But he would like to keep the situation as peaceful as we could.

[Bruh... why are you getting so level-headed!!!]

'I have no idea.'

Chapter 364 Elite Mercenary Group (2)

The mercenaries kept looking at the bulletin board for hours. By this time, the administrative robots from the floor below, came up to assist them in finding a quest suitable for them. But they vehemently declined the offer.

By this time, the low rankers were getting frustrated beyond any measure. Still, it wasn't like they could have done something about them. Especially since they knew who was backing them up. As for Ashton, he was cluelessly staring at them.

While the other low-ranking mercenaries left, he stayed there. Why would he leave? He was there to take up a job and wasn't going to leave before he got one. However, the longer he stayed there, the more interested he got in the mercenary group.

'Looks like they are looking for a specific quest.' Ashton thought, 'But why? Do they know something and don't want anyone else to know about it?'

[Maybe you should try looking into them. Try asking one of the bots to fetch you their details. I bet you could get your hands on their service record at the very least.]

As a way to cure his boredom, Ashton decided to take Astaroth's advice and asked a roller-bot for the mercenary group's service records. After paying a small fee of 10 Yenos, he got the digital file and began

skimming through it. To say he found a lot of strange things within the file would have been an understatement.

'Damn... those aren't mercs. They are a fucking army of supes.'

Ashton got wide-eyed as he read through their description. These mercenaries were part of a larger group known as the Gold Water Clan and were one of the most active presence in the galaxy. They were surprisingly a large group with over fifteen thousand active members.

The group was apparently created by one of the seven beings who happen to have transcended the limits placed on them. Which meant, they weren't A-grade beings but something more... something much stronger than anything else.

'Is this even possible?'

[Yes, it is. Master Seraph was the first one in our kind who ascended the limits placed on us by the Precursors. Why do you think we A-graders blindly followed him? We wanted to know the secret of how he was able to achieve the feat of being an S-ranker.]

'You're such a sucker...'

[But he never told any of us anything about it. I even suspected he forgot about it all... or someone made him forget about it. It had to be one of those things.]

'I guess that's the reason no one wanted to upset them. If someone were to fight against them and the word of it got out, their leader would wreck the galaxy to mend their hurt ego.'

[But to think there are seven more of them, that too independent of Xyrans... Maybe the galaxy has changed a lot more than I initially thought. Is there anything else about the mysterious S-grader?]

Ashton shook his head. Since it was a service record, it only contained basic information about the mercenary group and the rest of it was filled with the list of jobs the group had completed.

And they have completed a lot of those... like more than five hundred of them were listed in the data Ashton was given. It finally made sense why they were receiving such VIP treatment from the association.

Watching them get special treatment reminded Ashton of how he got a similar treatment from the Guild back on earth. There was something even more interesting. He was much stronger than he had been before, but on the galactic scale, he was just another common fish in the sea. Nothing more.

[Wow, you're turning poetic too. How about you leave fighting behind and start writing?]

'Don't joke around.'

[Good. Had you agreed to my request, I'd have taken over your body.]

'Why? Are you so desperate to leave your V-card behind, that you want to take over my body of all things? Shame on you.'

At this moment, Ashton's and Astaoth's chatter was interrupted by the square-faced captain of the mercenary group. Ashton only saw him from the corner of his eyes as he yelled in frustration. It would appear they finally found the quest they had been looking for, but there was some kind of restriction to it.

"Out of all the job requests, why does this one have to be restricted!?" Square-Face yelled at the Ena bot.

"Our apologies sir, but it appears the one behind the Job request has strictly forbidden anyone who is rank-3 or above from even accepting the request," A different Ena-bot responded in an attempt to cool the alien's raging nerve, "If you give me some time, I can look up a far better job request than this lousy one-"

"Hm... so we need a Rank-3 or below person to accept the request right?"

"Yes sir. As long as it's a low ranker who accepts the request, you can take the job." Ena replied, "However, the person accepting the request has to be an independent mercenary with neutral affiliation. That is, the person must not belong to any mercenary group."

"Yeah, I figured out that much. It shouldn't be hard though, after all, insects are pretty common in-"

Square-face turned behind to look for someone who fit the criteria. Only to see that the low rankers had already left the tower or retired to their rooms.

"What the hell? Where did all of them go? The room was packed with them a couple of moments ago!"

"Sir, there's one left. Should we try recruiting him?" One of the mercs pointed toward Ashton who acted as if he was lost in his own world.

Square-Face looked in the direction the deputy was pointing to find the man he had encountered beforehand. He wasn't so keen on selecting Ashton as he gave him quite some weird feelings. The man was around rank 2 and yet he was so strong.

Had it been possible, Square-Face wouldn't have even thought about looking in Ashton's direction. But since he was the only one in the hall that could help him, Square-Face decided to ask for Ashton's help.

Chapter 365 Introductions (1)

"I'll consider it for 2000 Yenos. Upfront. This condition is non-negotiable."

Ashton could barely hold his poker face as he blatantly asked for money in exchange for helping the Gold Water mercenaries.

The look on the mercenary's face said it all. They were probably expecting Ashton to start jumping at the thought of helping a renowned group like theirs. After all, it wasn't every day when Gold water mercenaries would need help from a nobody like him.

If there were any other low-rankers present there, they would have jumped at the opportunity to just go on a job with them and have it on their resume. Hell, they might even start beating the crap out of each other to get the spot. But no, this man was built differently. He did not share the same mindset as the rest of them.

As soon as Ashton placed his demand on the table, the merc was left baffled. Ashton knew it very well that the mercenaries were in a hurry and since he was the only one that could help them, he decided to monopolise the opportunity for him.

'It's the least they can do for me. After all, it was thanks to them I couldn't take the job earlier than them.'

[You greedy bastard... I like it. Milk them dry, I say.]

'You say a lot of things.'

"Please wait while I discuss the matter with the captain." The mercenary excused himself and went to talk with Square face.

There was a reason why Ashton asked for 2000 Yenos and not more. Because the reward for completing the job was 2000 yenos. Rather than completing the job and then getting his reward, Ashton wanted the money upfront.

Not to mention, since he was going to be accepting the job, the moment it was complete the reward would be credited to his account. So basically, he would be making 4000 Yenos from 2000 Yenos worth of a job.

'As a wise man once said: This is business.'

[Damn, your negotiation skills are definitely better than mine, you cold-blooded opportunist!]

'You learn these things with time.' Ashton smiled.

After deliberating for a couple of minutes, some who appeared to be quite close to Square-face himself came up to negotiate with Ashton. The man appeared to be a Giholo, the same species that attacked earth before Xyrans crashed the party. Although he had an aura of superiority around him, Ashton knew he wasn't much stronger than him.

Even his partial transformation should have been enough to teach the alien brat a lesson. The only reason Ashton did not lift a finger on him was because of their unknown S-grade backer.

"I am Kern 'Oma, the Deputy captain of the 1892nd squad serving under the Gold water mercenary group." Kern 'Oma offered his hand for a handshake.

Ashton used [Detection] and realised there was a suspicious powder spread across the palm. Had it not been for the training he went through on Euphoria, Ashton might not even noticed the thing on Kern's hand.

Ashton looked at the information he received through [Detection] and as it turns out, it was some sort of a sleep-inducing drug in powdered form. Kern was probably planning to make him sleep and then take advantage of him.

'These fuckers...'

[Looks like he wants to sleep with you. Go for it, tiger, get him!]

'Keep your fetishes to yourself, fucking wanker.'

Ashton was a bit heated now. He simply wanted to do business, but these fuckers wanted to put him to sleep and then forcefully make him accept the job request? Obviously, the robots would try to stop them from doing something like that.

But then again, the way they have been letting the mercenaries do whatever they pleased, they might not do anything more than urge them not to do something like that. In that case, as a responsible asshole, it was his duty to teach the fucker a lesson.

Ashton shook Kern's hand without any delay. As soon as he did that, a smile flashed across Kern's face, thinking their plan was a success. But before he could do anything else, Ashton shoved his hand right into Kern's face.

It only took a couple of seconds for the drug to take effect, but the next moment, Kern was on the ground, sleeping like a child. Ashton grabbed him by the neck and threw him straight towards the mercenaries.

Surprisingly, Ashton did not raise his voice or anything at the mercenaries. Instead, he approached the Ena-bot and stared her down menacingly.

"If I am correct, there's a law that prohibits mercenaries from attacking each other while they are inside the tower, right?" Ashton asked with a forced smile before pointing at the mercenaries, "One of them attacked me, so what kind of punishment is it going to be for them?"

"Sir, I'm not sure what you're saying?" the strange Ena-bot replied, "If anything, you're the one who attacked them. All they did was to show a friendly gesture when you knocked the man out for no reason whatsoever."

Square-face then scoffed, while the rest of them started laughing loudly. Ashton was in a pickle. While it was true they tried using the drug on him, it wasn't visible to the naked eye. Also, since Ena-bots were programmed to aide the high-ranking mercenaries in any way they could, she wasn't going to accept anything that would put a blame on her clients.

It was for that same reason, that she was assisting them by claiming Ashton was in the wrong. Although he had expected Ena-bot to do something to sweep the mess under the rug, he did not expect her to so blatantly side with the wrongdoers.

'These corrupt pieces of shit!'

[Ashton you have to control your anger. It is not the right time to react in a hostile manner. We'll deal with them later. For now, just get yourself out of this mess.]

'I swear these bastards are going to regret pulling shit like this on me...' Ashton took a deep breath, 'But you're right, I need to defuse the situation first.'

Chapter 366 Introductions (2)

"Sir, I suggest you do whatever they want you to and defuse the situation." The new Ena-bot suggested, "or else if the higher-ups get involved, you'll be in a troublesome situation and considering your information in our database, you won't be able to get away with minor punishment either. That's the only piece of advice I can give to you at this moment."

Ashton remained silent trying his best to not let his explosive temper get in his way. After thinking about it for a couple of seconds, he got calm enough to not rip the fucking robot's head off.

"Good job setting me up. Now I know why the others were avoiding you like plague." Ashton complimented Square-face on his success, "I'll take the job without any money. That should be enough for you right?"

After saying his piece, Ashton headed towards the bulletin board to register take the job for them and be done with it. However, he was soon stopped by the mercenaries who quickly surrounded him. It did not look like they were going to accept Ashton's offer.

"You should have done it in the first place." The Square-face laughed, "But since you knocked out my deputy captain, you should offer a bit more than what you suggested. It's only fair."

Ashton forced a smile on his face, but in his head, he had already killed these bastards a dozen times by now. Every time he heard their voice, he got a step closer to slashing their necks. But Astaroth's voice helped him hold his bloodthirsty back.

"It's my first day here, so I'm not sure how I can give you anything," Ashton said, still smiling politely but his patience was rapidly draining, "If you have anything on your mind, then I'll try my best to accommodate your wishes."

"Tch, to think it was your first day and you still messed with us. You got a shit ton of bad luck, don't you?" Square-face gave Ashton a pitiful look, "Hm... let me think about it for a moment. Since you can't offer us money, it will make things a bit difficult for you."

He continued after a few seconds, "You know what? I'll let you off easily since this is your first offence. How about we all introduce ourselves to you the way the Gold Water mercs do?"

"I don't know what you mean-"

"You'll know soon enough," Square-face barely contained his laugh before turning back to face his group, "Everybody line up in front of the gentleman. Let's introduce ourselves to him."

Ashton had no idea what was going on, but he decided to go along with it for now. While the morons formed a queue in front of him, Ashton was thinking of only one thing... how he will kill that fucking robot the moment he gained enough authority to do so.

[Relax a bit. Just keep your head down and we'll take care of them later.]

'I've been hearing that same line every two-three days now. Can't fight Michael? Get strong, and come back later. Can't take care of some mercenaries? Get strong and come back later.'

[I know how you feel, but this is the best way to handle things.]

Ashton sighed. A moment later the queue had been formed. He looked at them and saw a few of them flexing their fists... as someone would do before punching something. At that moment it was clear why the mercs were so eager to introduce themselves. Little did they know their eager faces were about to turn sour.

[Looks like you wouldn't need to wait for long to get your revenge.]

'Revenge? No, this is karma. Revenge will come later.'

Ashton held on to his serious expression on the outside, he was laughing like a maniac inside his head. With his Draconic physique and armour stat points, these bastards would end up hurting themselves more than him.

[Oi, wipe that smirk off your face.]

'Right, right.'

Ashton stood there and soon enough the first candidate introduce himself. Upon a glance, Ashton had quite literally not seen an uglier alien than him. Although he was solidly built, this one-eyed cream-skinned alien looked weird. His monobrow and extensive ears didn't add to his beauty either. Nor did his bucktooth.

'I wonder what kind of expression would you have when you start tearing up.'

"Private Wallace Jennk. It's a pleasure to mee-OUCH!"

Wallace hit Ashton's face with all his might. So much so, that the rest of his squad could hear a loud crunch and began laughing, thinking Wallace broke the poor man's face. Only when they heard Wallace's cry as he fell to his knees, did the mercenaries realise the crunch did not come from Ashton's face. It was the sound of Wallace's broken bones.

"What the hell?" Square-face looked at Ashton with bewilderment in his eyes, "What did you do to him?"

"I did nothing..." Ashton said with an innocent expression on his face as he turned toward the robot from earlier, "I had my arms behind me at all times, you saw that right, Ms Ena-bot?"

"I... yes. You did not move do anything..." The robot replied.

There was a limit to how much she could 'assist' her clients. While she could excuse the drug matter as an oversight, she could not possibly say that Ashton hit their client back when it was clearly the other way around.

"See!" Ashton turned back towards the mercenaries, "You can continue introducing yourselves to me. But I must say... it is a weird way of introducing yourself to a stranger. Something like this wouldn't fly in my world as they'll think you are attacking them."

Saying so, Ashton squatted down next to Wallace, who was still clinging to his broken hand, "It'll be rude of me if I didn't introduce myself to you, right?"

A look of horror flashed in Wallace's eyes. His gaze instantly turned towards the captain. His eyes begged for help. But Ashton grabbed his chin, forcing Wallace to look at him.

"It's rude not to look at someone when they are introducing themselves," Ashton smiled innocently, "My name is Reaper. It's a pleasure to meet you!"

SMACK!

Chapter 367 Introductions (3)

Ashton hit something, but it wasn't Wallace's face. He looked up to see Square-face had stopped his punch. Even though Ashton had not put all of his strength behind the punch, he still managed to dislocate a couple of Square-face's bones. Other than that, no one was harmed.

"Oh, you know you could have waited for your turn..." Ashton cluelessly mumbled, "I'm not running away from here. After all, this is the least I can do after causing your squad unnecessary inconvenience."

"Cut the crap!" Square-face yelled, "You think I don't know what you're doing?"

"Did I do anything wrong though? I only did what I thought was polite." Ashton smirked, "After all, it wouldn't be much of an introduction if both parties did not introduce themselves."

"Then allow me to introduce myself!" Square-face clenched his good fist and lashed out at Ashton, "I'm the captain of 1892nd Squad and the one who'll beat your ass red, Captain Ka'erd Bonk."

"What the hell is going on here?"

Before Ka'erd's punch could land on Ashton's face, someone walked out of the elevator. It must have been someone important because the moment Ka'erd and the bitchy robot saw him, they immediately lowered their heads. Since Ashton was already squatting down, there wasn't much need for him to do anything else.

However, he still lifted his gaze a bit to get a good look at the man. The short yet solidly-built, bronze-skinned man had a controlling feel about him. A particularly notable feature is his long nails, along with a large bruise on the left side of his face.

The wound looked old, judging from the scar left behind it had to be a plasma weapon that left its mark on him. Due to the burn mark, a part of his goatee was missing, but rather than looking ugly, the scar made the bronze-skinned alien look even badass.

[I never thought I would see a Crisik so soon.]

'Crisik?'

[These were one of the first species that sided with us during the Xyran-Precursor war. Considering how you view the Xyrans, your views about the Crisik would be more or less the same. You can say they were like distant brothers to us.]

'Oh shit... I should expect trouble then. Since they were so close to the Xyrans, it's obvious they'll hate humans as well.'

[That's where you are wrong. The Crisik weren't as heartless as the Xyrans. In fact, when the Xyrans were planning on killing the humans, they were the ones who dissuaded us. Unlike our greedy asses, they only hated the Precursors because of how they had treated them in the past and not because they wanted to rule over the galaxy.]

'What do you mean?'

[It's a long story, but I'll tell you about it as quickly as I can. As you know, the Precursors had a habit of making new species and then forgetting about the older ones. The Crisik were one of the first races they created around the same time as the Xyrans.]

[However, since the Crisik were not as involved in technological advancements as us and tend to live a minimalist life, the Precursors lost interest in them. Which meant they were as good as dead to the precursors.]

'This is the short version?'

[Hold your horses, I'm getting there. Even though they were abandoned, they were living a carefree life. That's when they were hit by a weird phenomenon... the thing that was nowadays referred to as a Dungeon. At first, they thought it was a natural calamity, and even though they tried to fight back, they lost about two-thirds of their population due to dungeon breaks.]

[You can only imagine how surprised they were when they got to know the truth. The precursors were testing their new creation and thought the Crisik were the perfect lab rats for the experiments. That's why when the Xyrans declared war over the Precursors, the Crisik joined our side and killed many precursors to avenge their fallen kin.]

Ashton was too stunned to speak. It was rare for Astaroth to paint the precursors in a bad light. After all, they were supposed to be gods, the good guys. Yet the more Ashton learned about them, the more he realised that maybe... the precursors weren't all that different from the rest of them. The humans, the Xyrans, the precursors... at the end of the day, all of them were one and the same.

While Ashton and Astaroth were busy chatting amongst themselves, the Crisik walked up to the Ena-bot and forced the truth out of her since Ka'erd nor Ashton answered his question. After listening to her report, the Crisik shook his head in disappointment.

"I expected more from you machines... maybe I shouldn't have." the Crisik mumbled to himself before turning his attention towards Ka'erd, "As for you, aren't you ashamed of bullying newbies by abusing your master's name?"

"With all due respect Admiral Mazton, I was only trying to protect my master's and my team's honour," Ka'erd replied, his voice reeked of respect towards the Crisik, "And if I have to, I'll do it 100 times over."

"Your master's honour isn't so small that it got hurt by a newbie. Stop using your master as an excuse and earn up to your mistake." Admiral Mazton berated the captain, "The Lord knows your master very well, that's the only reason you rodents are allowed to do whatever you please. But there's a distinction between what you can and cannot do."

Mazton wasn't done yet, "Believe me when I say this, you are but an insect in front of the Lord's and your master's eyes. Your master wouldn't miss a squad like yours that ceaselessly causes troubles. This is your final warning. If I ever see you abusing your privileges, you won't live long enough to say 'sorry'. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Admiral Mazton. It wouldn't happen again." Ka'erd apologised but his tone clearly wasn't apologetic, "Let's go. We'll accept the job quest tomorrow."

Just like that, Ka'erd and his squad retired to their rooms, leaving Ashton and Mazton alone. Ashton was still kneeling on the ground as he did not know what he was supposed to do. He did not want to disrespect Mazton after he had helped him. But what happened next confused him even more...

Mazton instructed the Ena-bot to go away and close the association for the day. Once she was gone, he walked up to Ashton and bowed.

"My apologies for not assisting you earlier, Slayer of Hydra."

Chapter 368 First Job (1)

"Um... I-"

Ashton was about to clarify that he had not killed the Hydra, but merely injured him. However, Astaroth stopped him in his tracks. A Crisik was bowing to him, Ashton might not recognise it, since he did not know much about them, but Astaroth saw an opportunity and wanted to seize it.

The Crisik were honour-bound creatures. Some of them even went so far as to kill themselves to protect the sanctity of their pride. They were creatures who honoured their word and deeds no matter how hard things got.

To have such a creature bowing before an 'insignificant' creature like Ashton was an unprecedented event. Back when Astaroth was still 'alive' in the sense of the word, he barely saw a Crisik offering respect to the Xyrans like this. That's why Astaroth wasn't going to let Ashton's stupid mouth lose out on a potential backer.

[Whatever you do, do not accept you have killed Hydra. But don't deny it either. Let him think whatever he wants to, that's it. Even if he discovers you did not kill hydra, you'll have an excuse to say that you never said you killed him. Win his favour from now on and who knows? Maybe your time as a mercenary would be a good one.]

Ashton pondered upon Astaroth's plan and ultimately agreed with him. In the mercenary world, having a strong backer was as essential as being good at the job. Just the situation from before was a great example.

Even though Ashton was stronger than the mercenary group, he still had to think before messing with them. If he had a strong backer as well, he wouldn't have to take shit from them and get rid of their sorry asses without wasting a minute.

'After seeing the way they behaved around Mazton, it'll do me good to be on his good side... which I already am.' Ashton thought and immediately jumped into action.

"Please sir, you don't need to behave so respectfully towards me." Ashton said in the politest of voice, "If anyone should be bowing, it should be me. Seeing as you helped me out of the mess I created."

"Strong and humble, that's a rare combination these days." Mazton smiled and extended his hand, "My name is Admiral Mazton, you might not know of us, but I belong to the ancient and honourable race of the Crisik. Humans and us... used to have a good relationship for some time."

"I see... it's a pleasure meeting you, Admiral. But I'm not a human anymore. I used to be, but then I was forced to change for a ritual."

"Mutation or not, you're still a human at heart. Unlike those space humans that we encounter every so often, you actually behave like the humans I remember about. Oh, where are my manners? We should chat in a more comfortable place. Please join me, I would like to discuss some things with you."

Ashton agreed and they entered the elevator. So far, even with his rank 2 privileges, he only had access to two underground floors where most of the mercenary association was located and a couple of upper floors which happened to be a basic shopping area.

With enough money and reputation, he would be able to buy weapons, gear and other materials from these floors. But that was it. On the other hand, Mazton had access to the entire tower since he was working directly under the owner of the tower who also was one of the seven S-grade beings.

Mazton led Ashton to his suite located on the top floor of the tower. The security of the floor was surprisingly tight and to Ashton's surprise, only those who were above level 150 were working there. In other words, all of the guards there were A-grade.

Upon seeing them, Ashton realised why no one wanted to mess with the association, not even those Gold Water Mercenaries. Going up against an organisation like that was... well, suicidal would be the light way of putting it, but you get the gist.

After a quick security check, Ashton was allowed to follow Mazton into the meeting room. Even then, the guards never left Mazton's side.

"Just ignore them. It took a while, but I got used to them. So much so, I often forget that I'm not alone." Mazton joked, "You can imagine the kind of awkward positions that has led me to."

"I can imagine," Ashton anxiously smiled, "If you don't mind me asking, what am I doing here, Admiral?"

"Straight down to business... Alright. Firstly, I would like to apologise for the behaviour of our staff. My team has already reviewed the security footage where the Gold Water Mercenaries tried to drug you." Mazton informed him with all seriousness, "I have already sent a strongly worded letter about their behaviour to their superior, so you don't have to worry about them in the future."

"Secondly, I saw you were wanting to take up a job, and I think for someone of your calibre, I have just the kind of job. Obviously, whether to accept it or not strictly depends on you. Finally, on behalf of the mercenary association, I'll be funding your trip in case you accept to do the job."

"I heard a lot of things about the Association, but no one told me you can be this generous..." Ashton replied while taking the tablet containing job details from Mazton.

"Whatever you have heard is correct." Mazton chuckled, "The association does not give a shit about low-ranking mercs. It's the same in your case. However, I have a personal interest in you because of the achievements registered to your ID as Reaper."

The atmosphere around the room dropped tremendously the next moment. Ashton thought he might have said something to upset Mazton, which was far from true. Mazton mood had nose-dived but Ashton wasn't the reason for it.

"You might not know this, but the Hydra killed a lot of my kin back when he was living freely. I have been wanting to get rid of that bastard myself for a while now." Mazton mumbled while massaging his temple, "That's why when I got to know about your achievement [Hydra's Adversary] I was ecstatic. Finally, someone had gotten rid of that ugly multi-headed freak."

He continued, "I was on the way to meet you and thank you when I saw what those Gold Water Mercenaries were up to. I shouldn't say this but I wanted to make sure I had the right person, so I waited for a while for you to do something."

"And when you saw their punch did not hurt me in the slightest, you decided to intervene." Ashton completed Mazton's thoughts, "Thank you for it. Otherwise, I would have ended in quite a pickle, to be honest."

"Haha, as they say, all's well that ends well." Mazton got up, "That being said, I'm afraid I have other things to deal with. I'll have to end our meeting here."

He handed Ashton a golden badge with a sword and a gun engraved on it, "You can read the file and take as much time as you want. If you decide to accept the quest, just show the badge to a robot and

they'll provide you with the necessary equipment. Lastly, it was nice meeting you, Mr Reaper. Have a good day."

Chapter 369 First Job (2)

True to his word, Mazton provided Ashton with a room to stay in while he was in the tower. While it wasn't as luxurious as the other rooms, it was still located on the upper floors where usually someone of his rank wouldn't even dream about stepping a foot in.

Not to mention, there were guards located right outside the rooms as an added security measure. Mazton was worried the Gold water mercs might hire someone to kill Ashton as they wouldn't dare to do something to him. Not after the warning, Mazton had given them.

Ashton tried not to think about them and focused on the task at hand... whether he should accept the job request or not.

Right now he was sitting on the bed reading the information Mazton had given him about the job. It was an escort job where he had to accompany a high-value target from one planet to another where the target would be staying for a couple of weeks. Then return to the tower with her. All the while, they had to make sure nothing happened to the target.

The job was issued to the association and they were responsible for selecting a 10-man team to get the job completed. It finally made sense why Mazton was personally handing out invitations to mercenaries of his choice and why the job wasn't listed as regular jobs.

Accepting the job meant Ashton would have to accompany nine other mercenaries, who were most likely going to be of higher rank than him. It was a drag, but the rewards for completing the job were quite a sum. Not to mention the reputation he would receive would be enough to make him jump straight to rank 4.

On top of that, there were a few other miscellaneous rewards that would be provided to them by the association itself. It was a job anyone would love to have on their resume and Ashton was no different. But there was something else going on in his mind.

"I can't help but think this is going to be some sort of test."

[I agree. Mazton is probably using this mission to test your strength whether you're really strong enough to fight and defeat Hydra or not. Honestly, I don't blame him. If I didn't know you and you said that you slew Hydra, I would be sceptical as well.]

Ashton nodded and kept reading whatever he could about the job. The gist of it was the target he had to protect happened to be a well-renowned personality in the galaxy. As such, a terrorist group had issued a hit on her. The reason behind issuing the hit wasn't disclosed.

Instead, an image of the woman was issued. She was the target they had to protect. While the lower half of her face was covered up, her yellow eyes, were majestic and so were her horns. Well just one eye, since the other one was covered by an eye patch. Other than that, no additional information about her was present on the device.

"Interesting... she looks like a succubus to me." Ashton commented, "Not as beautiful as Anna, but definitely good-looking. I wonder why the terrorists want to kill someone like her though?"

[You'll most likely get to know about it when you accept the job. Turn the page, will you? There could be more important information hidden away.]

Ashton looked at the couple more tabs that were left. In these tabs were the images and descriptions of potential hitmen who could be paid to do the dirty work. Surprisingly Ashton could only read about two of them, while the information about the other two was hidden.

The information of those he could read... left him frustrated. He saw reports about two identical-looking aliens, but at the same time, they were different. At least in terms of physique, since one of them had a missing arm.

Chak 'Mandai and Olk Yoga, were the names of these blood-thirsty hounds. The more he read about them and their bloody rampage, the more he realised how twisted their minds were.

"They look horrifying... what even are they?"

[Those are Siiglinas. A race that craves war and battles. So much so, that they often even kill their parents, offspring and partners, just for the sake of it. No wonder they are working as Assassins.]

Both of them were extraordinarily tall, towering at an absurd height of 7'7" and 7'10" respectively. Still, they seemed short because of their hunched back. Their face was unlike anything Ashton had seen till now. While their lower jaw was just like anyone else's, their upper jaw was divided into two independent jaws that were filled with razor-sharp teeth.

The file even included pictures of their fallen prey, and Ashton had to clench his teeth tightly, just so he didn't throw up. Ashton, a zombie who was used to eating flesh, wanted to throw up just by looking at the horrifying remains of the unfortunate souls these two fuckers assassinated. One could only imagine what bizarre things he saw in those tabs.

The rest of the information was hidden and would be released if Ashton accepted the request. After reading about the rewards and such, Ashton wanted to accept the job without any hesitation.

But one thing was troubling him... he wasn't suited to work in a team. Especially when they were necessarily a bunch of strangers. As if that wasn't enough, he was probably going to be looked down upon since he was going to be the 'weakest' amongst the rest based on their ranks.

This meant, he was presumably going to be treated like shit. On the other hand, it was an excellent opportunity to make some connections with the mercenaries as well as other strong personalities. In the end, the pros of the job vehemently overshadowed the cons.

As a result, Ashton decided to take the job and see how it went. He wasn't a fool to give up on 5000 Yenos and more than a thousand reputation points. But more than that, he wasn't giving up on the opportunity to gain Mazton's favour.

That being said, he still needed more information. Thankfully, he knew just the person who could give it to him as he called her.

"Hey, Otiga? I kinda need some information. Do you think you could help me out?"

Chapter 370 Spar (1)

The next day...

"Welcome. How may I help you?" A roller-bot eagerly asked Ashton as he stepped out of the elevator.

"I was told to hand this to one of you..."

"Wonderful, please wait here while I ask a superior for help on this matter." The Bot said as Ashton handed the badge to it, the next moment the bot immediately scurried away into the overcrowded floor.

A couple of moments later, the roller-bot returned with an Ena-bot, the same one who blatantly supported the Gold water mercenaries yesterday. Ashton wasn't pleased to see her there, but he wasn't petty enough to hold a grudge against a robot of all things.

'It isn't like a robot would feel remorse for its actions.'

However, it would seem even robots had expressive emotional intelligence. At least to some extent, as the robot sincerely apologised to Ashton for her past mistake. He was a bit taken aback but accepted her apology and asked her to not waste time on unnecessary things.

The bot nodded and confirmed Ashton's mercenary information before asking him to follow her. they took a different elevator and this time descended far below the lower level.

A few minutes later, Ashton walked into a room filled with a variety of people. Well, technically there were only ten people inside the meeting room apart from him and the robot. All of them had some sort of a battle scar on their body.

The moment Ashton entered the room, all eyes were instantly on him. All of them were looking at him as if they were trying to figure him out. It was probably because he had altered his appearance before getting there.

Whether they were working on the same side or not, he knew the rule of the mercenaries too well. Money was the only thing that mattered to them. Some of them would even sell their loved ones if paid the right price.

That being said, there were mercenaries who did not care much about money, but loyalty and other values. Mazton was an example of this type of mercs.

However, Ashton did not want to take a risk by showing his real face to them. He did not trust anyone in the room, as they could sell his information to the Radicals and that would open a can of worms that Ashton is not yet ready to handle by himself.

"Good to have you here," Mazton happily welcomed Ashton, "I almost thought you wouldn't show up."

"The opportunity was too good to pass up," Ashton replied with equal enthusiasm.

"You made the right decision. Come, let me introduce you to everyone." Mazton pointed at the mercenaries one at a time and gave a brief description of them and their specialised talents.

Out of the nine of them, two of them were assigned the roles of a tanker. Apart from them, there were two brawlers and two supporters or as they referred to themselves, strategists. Then there were two battlemages and a healer.

As for Ashton, he was the only swordsman in the group. Well, he was only introduced as one, but little did they know he was the most versatile mercenary in the group and could technically fill any role according to the need and demand of the situation.

Also, all of them were ranked 5 or above, making Ashton the least experienced mercenary in the room. As he introduced himself to the group, he couldn't help but notice their disappointed faces. It was similar to that of a teenager who was asked to babysit a toddler while hanging out with their friends.

In short, they weren't pleased with his lack of experience. Ashton could almost read their thoughts at this point.

'I bet they are wondering I'm a product of nepotism, right about now.'

[Haha, I can't wait to see their reaction when they realise who is their daddy.]

'You're not alone.'

"Alright people, look alive." Mazton interrupted the introductions, "Now that everything is taken care of, we can discuss the job details. But before that, I would once again remind you that you are not just representing yourself during this job, but the association itself."

He continued, "That being said, mistakes will not be tolerated at all. The punishment for failing the job would be severe. Don't let it scare you, rather take it as motivation to perform better than you ever have. Yes, Vimur, you have a question?"

Vimur was one of the two tanks and belonged to the warrior race of Azon. Their appearance was similar to that of a minotaur, but instead of having the facial qualities of a bull, they looked more like a rhinoceros.

"Apologies in advance, but Admiral, don't you think you're being kind of... Hypocritical?" Vimur then pointed at Ashton before continuing, "Considering it is an important mission then why do you want us to babysit the kid? Wouldn't it better to have a proper mercenary, someone who knows their shit, take his place instead?"

Everyone agreed with his point of view. It almost seemed they were waiting for someone to say something before forming a clique against Ashton.

"I understand your concerns, but if you knew what I know about him, you wouldn't even think of doubting him." Mazton calmly explained, "Although I can vouch for his skills, I guess, you would like to see it yourself?"

The mercenaries looked at each other and nodded. Just like that, the decision was made. Ashton would have to prove his worth to the rest of the team and what easier way to do that was there than by sparring against each other?

"What do you say?" Mazton asked Ashton.

"I have no problems." Ashton nonchalantly replied, "In fact, I would love to see their skills as well. After all, they are superior to me, so they should have at least something that would amaze me."

He knew the mercenaries weren't the only ones who wanted to see him in action. Mazton intended to confirm whether he was making the right choice or not. That was the whole reason behind him suggesting a spar in the first place.

The mercenaries unanimously decided that since Vimur was the one who spoke up, he should be the one to go against the kid. Ashton had no problems with it, no matter who his opponent was, they were going to lose. That fact was certain.