

Zompiewolf 391

Chapter 391 One Day, I'll Come Up With A Title (1)

Eula's two-week stay in her home began the same day. None of the mercenaries had any opportunity to relax due to their reduced numbers. But also since they had to remove the stain of betrayal that become the source of their anguish.

It wasn't strange that people's trust in the mercenaries had gone much below than anyone had thought. Qamno's and Avvo's betrayal completely overshadowed Ashton's achievements. So much so, that the local security and residents did not hesitate for a moment before getting hostile towards them.

The hate Eula's consorts had towards Ashton only added fuel to the fire. The locals had known the consorts for some time, thus their words were widely believed and soon became facts in the eyes of those who loved Eula.

The scaredy consorts even managed to make everyone believe that had they been alongside Eula, she would not have to suffer through the mental scarring of being completely overwhelmed by the terrorists.

When in reality, they were glad they weren't on the ship with Eula or they might have ended up like her headless bodyguards.

Vimur, Laihud and the rest of them were completely ostracized and were only contacted when they were needed. The rest of the time, they were left unattended.

None of the mercenaries were even offered breakfast and instead when they went to ask for some, they were told there was nothing left and they should have asked for it earlier. At the same time, some untouched food was given to the stray animals right in front of them.

This behaviour made them angry, however, Laihud calmed everyone down and went to buy something from the outside. Vimur could have fought as well, but he did not. The moment he got to know what Qamnol and Avvo had done, he was ready to take some shit. One could say, the mercenaries were repenting for the sin of the others.

Ashton, on the other hand, could not bother about the way everyone behaved around him. For a being like him, food and sleep weren't as important as the rest of them. After all, he could go months without either and be hardly affected by it.

"Hm... Would you believe me if I said it's the first time I have seen the sea?" He mumbled.

[Are you for real?]

Ashton smiled.

Although he had been around large water bodies before, he had never gotten the opportunity to witness the sea in all its glory. He had been a bit too busy living his life like a captive and then fighting with every Tom, Dick and Harry who came in his way.

As an added security measure, Eula's mansion was constructed on a far-off island. Although ships could be seen at some distance, none of them was allowed to get within a 10-kilometre radius of the island. If they did, they would be immediately shot down without any questions.

The island was connected to the mainland with the help of a drawbridge which was controlled by the mansion itself. Hundreds of guards were stationed all over the island, making it impossible for anyone to even lift a finger and go unnoticed.

With all that in mind, it should have been impossible for anyone to sneak behind them. But in the last hour, Ashton had managed to sneak in and out of the island a handful of times with different entry and exit points.

If someone like him could do it and go unnoticed, it was obvious the guards were incompetent. Every time he sneaked in and out, Ashton made sure to make a mental note of the place. In some cases, he even made sure to obstruct the path permanently. Right now, he was taking a break after getting rid of one such path.

[Rather than doing all this work yourself, don't you think you should alert the security?]

'What's the point? Even you have noticed how they are acting around us, haven't you?' Ashton scoffed, 'If I even report these things to them, they'll not listen to me.'

[Be honest with me... you wanna rub it in their faces, don't you?]

'...maybe.'

[Why am I not surprised?]

Ashton smiled and went back inside the mansion, only to be stopped at the front gate.

"Are you planning to stop me every time I want to enter the mansion?" Ashton sighed and brought up his mercenary card.

"If you have so much trouble, then why don't you walk away and leave the protection to us?" The guard scoffed, "It's not like you lot can do shit either way."

Ashton kept his calm. He had met a few too many people like the minotaur in front of him. Acting arrogant and prideful when things are calm and then running away as soon as things turn to shit.

Ashton was cool till those fuckers were bashing the team in its entirety. But this guard took it a bit too personal, so Ashton did what was the most suitable thing and lashed back at the cow... in a polite way.

"I was wondering about the same thing." Ashton mumbled with a sincere expression on his face, "Lady Eula has so many competent people to protect her, then why did she ask for mercenaries to escort her instead of asking a mighty doorman like you to do so."

The minotaur's face flared up as soon as Ashton talked back. After bashing the rest of the team, it seemed the locals had gotten a bit too loose with their tongues. The rest of them might take the heat but Ashton was no one's verbal punchbag, except Astaroth's.

"I'll tell you what, the next time I see her, I'll ask her to promote you, so you could at least stand inside the gate and bark at people like a good pet," Ashton said and walked inside, leaving a very angry minotaur behind.

However, he did not make it far enough before he was greeted by one of Eula's consorts. It seemed he had overheard the conversation between the guard and Ashton and wasn't pleased with him. Not that Ashton gave a shit about someone as useless as him.

'Talking to him gives me brain damage,' Ashton thought, 'let's just ignore him and leave.'

Sadly, it seemed the consort had other things in his mind as three guards promptly stepped in to block Ashton from leaving.

"What is it?" Ashton annoyingly asked the consort.

"I overheard what you said to him and I would like you to apologise to him for your harsh words." The consort blatantly ordered Ashton.

To say it did not go well with Ashton would be an understatement. Especially when a moment later, the consort found himself on the floor grabbing his bleeding cheek.

"Let me make one thing clear for you worms. I am not your servant, nor do I work for you. I'm not like the rest of the guys who will take shit from morons like you." Ashton brought his face awkwardly close to the consort's.

"I'm a mercenary who is contracted to protect Lady Eula. That's the only thing I care about. So if you care about yourself, then throw away any notion you might have in your mind about me working for you. This is the last time I'll warn you to be careful with your words around me."

Chapter 392 One Day, I'll Come Up With A Title (2)

While going through the mansion, Ashton decided to check the defence mechanisms that had been installed in place by the locals. The first thing that caught his attention was several watch towers that stood erected in the courtyard. Each tower had at least 2 snipers on the lookout for potential trouble.

On top of that, the walls around the mansion had been reinforced using technology as well as magic. No one should be able to make it past the walls without making an absurd amount of noise.

Even if they managed to do so, hundreds of remotely activated traps were also spread across the courtyard along with various tips of sensors, including heat and motion sensors. All this security should be able to hold off a small group of assassins.

Sadly, Ashton knew most of these measures would prove useless against a full-frontal assault. The snipers, the reinforced walls and the traps might manage to slow them down. But judging from the ones he had to fight till now, these measures wouldn't hold for long against them.

Especially with all the escape paths, he had found earlier, stopping an army would be damn near impossible.

'Even after hearing what happened, the efforts are a bit too lax around here.'

Ashton knew one thing for sure, if he ever found himself in the need of security, he would never ask anyone from Eva for help. Having these idiots around would do more harm than good. While he was busy looking around and nit-picking at everything, he heard a voice.

"Oi, you! Can you tell me where the armoury is? I gotta store these weapons there before getting back to work." A hoarse voice echoed in the courtyard.

Ashton turned around and looked all over the place but couldn't see anyone. For a moment, he wondered whether he was going mad or something. It was only when he received a kick on his leg he realised the owner of the voice was standing in front all this time.

The man wasn't invisible or anything, he was just... a tad bit short. So short that Ashton couldn't even register his presence until the person hit him. With a bulky figure and hammer attached to his waist, a dwarf was staring at him through his bushy eyebrows.

The dwarf had very long, wavy, dyed red hair which happened to be shaved on the left side and mysterious blue eyes. His dirty clothes and soot-filled skin gave off the hint that the creature had been hard at work until recently.

"Uh... how can I help you?"

"Getting out of the way would be a good start." The dwarf growled.

'They are as feisty as I have heard. Short height but a big mouth that makes up for it.' Ashton thought while stepping aside.

[Now you know why quite a few species hate them.]

"Now tell me where is the armoury?" The Dwarf barked yet again.

When Ashton first arrived at the mansion, he did the same thing that he did with Eula's entourage back at Kernel Tower. He asked for a list of everyone working in the mansion and obviously, the Dwarf was mentioned there.

Apparently, the Dwarf who was known as Thori Smeltmaster had served the family for more than one and a half centuries. The forge was his home and everything. Thori never frequented the outside world.

According to what Ashton had been told, Thori would only come out of his forge once in three decades with a shit ton of weapons, armours and other equipment. Also, most of the relics possessed by the family had been created by him.

Ashton wasn't really sure about the so-called 'relic' the old man had made. If they were of any use, should Eula be carrying at least one of such items with her to help her survive against the terrorists? Either way, there was something about the dwarf that Ashton couldn't stomach.

"Since you have worked here for most of your life, shouldn't you know where the armoury is?"

It was strange. As someone working under Eula's family, the dwarf should have known everything about the place. Therefore, the Dwarf should not have asked such a thing from a stranger like Ashton.

That being said, someone like the dwarf would have been the perfect target for the phantom to turn into. After all, Thori had the most influence over the family since he had pretty much seen them all grow and become the people they were now.

Without wasting any time Ashton used [Detection] at the old dwarf. What he saw made him rub his eyes over and over and he wasn't the only one surprised by it either.

[S rank... how come I have never heard about the name Thori Smeltmaster before?]

'That isn't his name... look carefully.'

Next to the Dwarf's name, there was a caution symbol. It had been a while since Ashton last saw this symbol as it denoted that the user did not have high enough authority to view that detail of the person or thing.

The Dwarf had his identity hidden. Which made Ashton even more suspicious about him. Neither he nor Astaroth had any idea how [Detection] would react after seeing the Phantom. But this discrepancy was enough for Ashton to strike.

The S rank was bothering him as well, but he couldn't let that hesitation get in his way. If the Dwarf was indeed the Phantom, then this was the golden opportunity Ashton had been waiting for.

Without any delay, Ashton drew Balmond and prepared to strike. But at the same moment, something strange happened.

The hammer Thori possessed became bigger and bigger. Until it was as big as Ashton himself. Despite the hammer's size, Thori wielded it as if it was as heavy as a bird's feather. Thori swung the hammer but Ashton dodged the strike.

However, he still ended up being blown away by the winds generated by the hammer. He wasn't the only one who got thrown away either. Most of the watchtowers were knocked down along with him.

'Damn it!'

Ashton cursed and tried to get back to his feet. Sadly Thori was already standing on top of him. Ashton swung Balmond at the dwarf, but Thori stopped the attack by simply placing his foot on his arm. No matter how much strength Ashton used, he could not free his arm.

"That blade... where did you find it?" Thori calmly asked while examining Balmond, "It's similar to the ones wielded by the Xyrans and yet... it's different. It's not a Mournblade... but something else."

"How do you know about Mournblades?" Ashton was shocked and so was Astaroth.

"Human child... a dwarf never forgets his creations. Now tell me... what is your blade?"

Chapter 393 One Day, I'll Come Up With A Title (3)

The commotion outside attracted the attention of everyone inside and outside the mansion. Within moments, about a hundred people had assembled in the destroyed courtyard. All of them were carrying weapons assuming the worst but when the dust settled down all of them lowered their weapons except the mercenaries.

They saw Ashton flat on his back and couldn't believe what they were seeing. After all, no one had been able to take him down till now, at least, not that they know of. In their eyes, Ashton was being attacked by the dwarf, but none of them rushed to help Ashton.

Firstly, because they were wondering if interfering would even do anything good or not. And secondly, because they worried about upsetting their client anymore.

"What is going on here?" A loud feminine voice echoed through the courtyard.

Natalie, Eula's mother was the first to voice everyone's thoughts. Her voice was filled with authority and arrogance. However, as soon as she saw Thori, she immediately knelt down, followed by her family and servants. Her red hair flailed behind her as she bowed before Thori.

Just like Eula, Natalie was a beauty queen in her own right. It was hard to believe she was roughly a century old when she looked like someone who had just crossed her 30s.

"Elder Thori, my apologies for not noticing you before," Natalie mumbled, her eyes staring at Thori's feet, "Please tell me who is responsible for your anger and I'll deal with them myself!"

"Relax kiddo, this human had quite a unique weapon. So I asked him to have a short friendly spar with me. Nothing more." Thori smiled, "Also get up, it doesn't suit the matriarch of the family to kneel before a lowly servant like myself. As for you..."

Thori stepped off of Ashton's hand before offering him a hand to get up. Ashton barely touched the hand and was immediately pulled back to his feet. Thori had to have an enormous amount of strength to pull Ashton like a twig. It was a shame Ashton couldn't view Thori's stats either.

"Please, elder, do not refer to yourself as a servant." Natalie mumbled, her eyes still on the ground, "My family is protected, thanks to your blessings and creations. If anything, we should be the ones to serve you."

Thori shook his head accepting his defeat. Even though he had served the family for years, none of the matriarchs ever treated him like a servant. He was always treated with an unnecessary amount of respect. something he didn't like at all. The respect he was shown was more than someone like him deserved.

"Is something wrong? I can see an awful amount of useless people carrying weapons around."

Thori's comment made the guards grind their teeth. His words were harsh, but Ashton knew everyone single one of it was the truth. Their numbers might be sufficient to stop low-grade invaders, but in the eyes of an A or a B-grade being, they were nothing more than insects. Therefore, in the eyes of someone like Thori, they were more like unicellular organisms.

"My daughter... was threatened by some terrorists, elder." Natalie sounded as if she was ashamed to admit it, "To ensure her protection, we had to-"

"Someone threatened the family? That's the first time I have heard of something this absurd." Thori scoffed, "Instead of finding those bastards and killing them, you decided it was best to hide like rodents?"

"..."

Thori looked around and kept shaking his head. The disappointment on his face was as clear as the sky above. Unlike the last time he had been out of the forge, a lot of things had changed. The family he had been serving could not stand the test of time and had gotten considerably weaker.

Had it not been for the relics he bestowed upon them, the family would have lost its influence a long time ago. But even now, they were only hanging on to it by a thread. No one explained this to Thori, he was intelligent enough to deduce it by himself.

"These defences wouldn't hold off a threat." Thori mumbled while playing with his hammer, "It's a good thing I came out of the forge when I did or else the family would end up getting wiped out."

Once he finished looking around, Thori ordered everyone, "Gather all the materials you can and put them outside the forge. I'll show you lousy asses how to construct instruments of maximum defence."

All of the servants and guards bowed and rushed to do as they were told. In the meantime, Ashton realised that Thori couldn't possibly be the Phantom. There had to be another reason for his name to be hidden.

It was a harsh and hasty move to ask the man directly about it since the name was obviously hidden for a reason. But neither Ashton had the time or the patience to beat around the bush. In order to quell his suspicion, he had to take care of the elephant in the room as soon as possible.

However, before Ashton could say anything, Thori gestured for him to keep silent and follow him. A moment later, they were headed towards the forge. Natalie's and Eula's mouths were left hanging as they saw a stranger enter the forge.

Even the family members were not allowed to step a foot inside the thing because Thori did not like it. That was also the reason why Thori told them to put the materials outside the forge and not inside. Yet he allowed a complete stranger to accompany him inside? Something was off.

"Eula, you said there was something special about the man, didn't you?" Natalie quietly asked her daughter.

"Yes mother, he had 'her' scent all over him. She has likely accepted him as her mate." Eula coldly responded.

"I see... if your senses are correct, then he is an important asset for us." Natalie smiled, "His connection with 'her' might be the thing we have been waiting for. As soon as you are off the planet, get close to the man and locate the Clan-Diety. You must not fail this task no matter what."

"As you wish, mother..."

The forge was much bigger on the inside than on the outside. Hundreds of broken and half-finished instruments, weapons and materials were scattered all over the blackened floor. The moment Ashton stepped a foot inside, he thought the room got struck by lightning and a cyclone at the same time.

What surprised him, even more, was the quality of the products forged. Although most of them were far from finished, nothing was marked lower than the Epic grade when Ashton checked them.

,m 'Just who is this man...'

Once Thori and Ashton were inside the forge, the dwarf did not ask him anything. Instead, he began hammering a metal sheet. Ashton waited and waited, but Thori didn't speak a word. Astaroth was just as confused as Ashton.

"You are an interesting fella, human." Thori emotionlessly mumbled, "Not only do you possess a legendary sword, but you also managed to pass the test."

"A test?"

Ashton was confused. However, instead of answering him, Thori asked him another question.

"Do you know why I never allow anyone inside the forge?"

"Um... I think I have an idea."

"People think I don't want to share my smithy skills with anyone, that's why I don't allow them to enter the forge. It's quite hilarious, honestly." Thori kept going on without lifting his head from the metal sheet he was hammering.

"The true reason is... I do it to protect those delicate flower-like beings. The heat let out by the forge is sufficient to kill any mortal being who isn't a dwarf or has near immunity to fire and heat. Even the great Xyrans are no exception to this. Well... only some were, like the one called Seraph."

At that moment, both Ashton and Astaorth realised why Thori said Ashton passed the test. He was testing Ashton to see if he was an ordinary being or not. A normal being of space couldn't possibly survive the heat of the forge.

[This old bastard knows a lot more about the Xyrans than I thought...]

'You sound pissed.'

[How can I not be when I don't even remember this hammering fool, yet he knows everything about my people?]

Suddenly, Thori stopped hammering and threw the product at Ashton. It all happened so fast, that Ashton barely managed to catch the gauntlet in time.

"Go ahead, pick it up." Thori pointed at the armour, "Consider it my apology for attacking you earlier. It should also serve as the proof of my identity."

Ashton was a bit taken aback but looked at the metal gauntlet. Much to his surprise, the gauntlet didn't feel like it was made of metal at all. It was soft and... silky. But that wasn't all, the moment Ashton used [Detection] on the gauntlet he was dumbstruck.

—

Item: Dwarven Might

Type: Gauntlet

> Ignore 1000 HP worth of damage once every 2 hours.

> Increases HP by 1500 points.

Stats bonus:

>> Armour: +100 while equipped for use.

>> Mana consumption reduced by 50% for all skills.

>> Strength: +50 while equipped for use.

Rarity: Epic grade item

Description:

An Epic piece of equipment made by a blacksmith whose name has been long forgotten by society. Although this gauntlet is a rushed product, it's still one of the most valuable pieces of equipment that can serve as both a sword and a shield as and when required.

Effect(s):

> The effect of all resistances is increased by 5 levels when the gauntlet is in use.

> The Last Stand: Instantly heals 50% of lost HP over a duration of 5 seconds when the user is on the verge of death. The user can not use any skills during these 5 seconds. This ability can only be triggered 5 times.

> Dwarven Blessing: While equipping the gauntlet, the user can use the following abilities:

---> [Enhancement]: The user can randomly enhance a weapon possessed by them. The efficiency of this skill is based on the user's [Intelligence] Stat.

---> [Refinement]: The user can refine a completely upgraded weapon to further increase its quality.

---> [Armament]: The ability to make weapons out of thin air... although the user needs to have the required materials within their inventory.

—

"Close your mouth, or you'll end up inhaling the soot." Thori smirked while crossing his arms in front of his hardened chest, "If you like the gauntlet, I'll have it imbued with concealing magic. After all, the Seraph's crystal isn't something a mere piece of cloth can hide."

"How did you-"

"I'm a forge-master. Someone who has spent his entire life around fire and flames. I can recognise both rare materials and heat sources from a distance. That crystal of yours is no exception to that."

"I see..." Ashton mumbled while staring at the crystal embedded in his arm, "The gauntlet is good. Thank you. But do you mind me asking something else?"

"It's not like you're gonna stop either way, so bark." Thori mumbled and turned away to continue his work.

"How do you know so much about the Xyrans?"

Thori carefully put his hammer down on the anvil but did not turn to face Ashton. It was painfully obvious that Thori did not want to talk about it or more like, he was being forcefully stopped from doing so.

[Something is a bit off about this dwarf. Not only he is hiding his name, but he is also hiding his connection with the Xyrans. Try to get as much information out of him as you can... it's absolutely necessary to figure out whether he is a foe or an ally.]

'That's easier said than done.'

Thori's reaction was enough for Ashton to keep digging deeper into the matter. But before he could say another word, Thori grabbed him by the neck and pulled him down to his eye level.

"Xyran sword and Seraph's crystal. Since you possess both, it's obvious you're being guided by someone. Probably a Xyran. Fine, sit wherever you like because it's going to be a long tale. A tale for which one day I'll come up with a title. But for now, you'll have to make do with a titleless story."

Chapter 395 The Dwarven Tale Of A Battle

Dwarves were one of the many creatures created by the Precursors. They were probably amongst the first few races that had the opportunity to work closely with their creator. All of their knowledge of creation was given to them by the Precursors as a present for being loyal to them.

Astaroth was already aware of this much. But what Thori revealed next made the Xyran doubt the history of his race as he knew it. Ever since he was a kid, he was told that some selective Xyrans were born with Mournblades. But what Thori stated was much different than the tale he had heard and accepted as truth.

While it was true that the Mournblades chose their owner, no Xyran was born with a Mournblade. They bonded with one later on and the Dwarves created these Mournblades under the instruction and guidance of the Precursors.

The Mournblades were supposed to be a present for the entire race of Xyrans. Just like the Dwarves were given the knowledge of creation as a present.

At the same time, it also symbolised that the Xyrans were chosen as successors by the precursors. However, once the precursors saw how quickly the newfound powers had corrupted the entire race, they were deemed unworthy of such a high position.

Therefore, the Precursors decided to make a new race to succeed them. The race that would be known as Humans.

By this time the Xyrans had no idea, they were once considered to be the prime candidates to become the protector of the galaxy. Had they known about it, they would have certainly behaved themselves.

But not explicitly informing them about it, the precursors were testing how the Xyrans would react if they were given unimaginable powers. To say the Xyrans spectacularly failed the test would be an understatement.

"This was the reason why the humans were not given any extraordinary powers from the beginning." Thori continued, "The precursors did not want to repeat the same mistakes again. That's why they decided to educate the humans first and then give them the powers they would need to rule over the galaxy."

While Thori explained all that, Ashton kept listening to him without interrupting him even once. This newfound knowledge was increasing his [Intelligence] stat like never before. But more importantly, he was being given information that we would not be able to access another way.

That being said, the more Thori talked about the past, the more Ashton realised why the humans were so powerless. The Precursors had already created a lot of 'demons' or failed successors, and they did not want to mess it up again by giving humans reality-altering powers as soon as they were created.

So they withheld the powers from the humans until they were sure that the humans won't stray like countless species before them.

"We, the Dwarves, were supposed to aid the humans using our knowledge to maintain the galaxy, once the Precursors were gone." Thori continued with sadness on his face, however, that sadness soon turned into anger, "Sadly before any of that could happen, the Xyrans and their allies attacked Eden, the planet the Precursors lived on."

"Those bastards destroyed everything... Humans and Precursors weren't the only ones they killed that day. Countless Dwarves lost their lives to them as well. The blades we created to be used for the good, were what slaughtered my people. Everything... was taken away from us."

Thori had kept a stone face throughout narrating the tale, but he couldn't hold his tears back anymore. He looked at Ashton with a tear-drenched face and tried to say something. But his throat felt too heavy to say anything more.

Ashton got up and gently patted the dwarf's shoulder. He might not have suffered through such a cruel fate, but he could understand a little bit of Thori's pain. After somewhat calming down and composing himself, Thori continued the tale.

"The Dwarves wanted to fight back, but the Precursors locked away our means to do so. Just because they did not want to fight back, they locked away our means to do so as well. That left us with no other choice but to flee and live a secluded life."

"That's why an S grade being like yourself, is on this planet," Ashton mumbled.

Thori nodded, "As much as I would love to say I have forgotten about the war over the years, the moment I saw your blade, I could not hold myself back and attacked you. As for my real name... it's Vulcan. Had to hide it because of the 'living in seclusion' part of my tale. So what's your tale?"

Rather than telling Vulcan about the tale, Ashton decided it was better to show him the truth. Using Astaroth's authority, Ashton summoned both Raphael and Balmond at the same time. To say Vulcan was shocked would be an understatement.

Even though Vulcan's true age surpassed a measly number of a thousand, he had never met someone who possessed not one, but two Mournblades.

Since these blades were linked to one's soul and everyone only had one soul within them, it was impossible for someone to possess two Mournblades. Even the Precursors were not an exception to this rule.

Yet, Vulcan's eyes were not cheating him. He was sure he wasn't hallucinating or something. But at the same time, trusting his eyes was... turning out to be quite difficult for him.

"The blade I use," Ashton mumbled while swinging Balmond, "is called a Soulblade and is linked to my soul... in a way-"

"How is this even possible..." Vulcan cut him off, "Even if it's not the same blade, you should not be able to possess two blades of similar properties. The dwarves made sure of it that one user can only have one blade."

"What if I told you there are two souls within my body?" Ashton softly mumbled, "The one talking to you now is a human, and now-"

"It's a Xyran." Astaroth completed the sentence.

Chapter 396 Mentor (1)

"A Xyran and a human in the same body..." Vulcan absentmindedly mumbled, "I have seen a lot of strange things in my life but this is by far the most absurd thing I have ever heard."

Those were the first words that came out of the Dwarf's mouth. Astaroth had just finished recounting his own tale, while in control of Ashton's body. However, narrating the tale wasn't easy.

The moment Astaroth revealed he was a Xyran, Vulcan almost lost it. The slightest swing of his hammer should have been enough to end both Ashton's and Astaroth's life right then and there.

Thankfully, Vulcan wasn't a complete hothead like the rest of the dwarves and composed himself enough to evade any unfortunate tragedy. At first, Vulcan was a bit apprehensive. But the more Astaroth talked, the quicker Vulcan realised that the person he was talking to was indeed a Xyran.

There were a few things that no one except a Xyran and a Dwarf would know about, and Astaroth made sure to use those truths to his advantage. Things like the great orgy were one of the most important 'truths' that he revealed.

By the time Astaroth finished narrating his monologue, Vulcan could see him in a somewhat favourable light. For some twisted reason, the story of Xyrans betraying each other made the dwarf smile. Although it was a bit weird, Ashton completely understood Vulcan's sentiments.

Back when he had lost everything to the werewolves, if someone would have told him the mistress got killed by one of her people, even he would have been happy. Hell, he would be jumping around like a rabbited rabbit...

'I'm pretty sure I'll be happy even now...' Ashton thought as Astaroth handed him control over his body, 'Hm... it's weird thinking about it now. Especially because now I can squash someone like her with just a finger.'

"Hm... it can't be just fate that we met here, Ashton. I wasn't so sure about it before, but after meeting you, I think those old farts were correct." Vulcan gently stroked his beard, "Are you a believer?"

"I'm not interested in joining a cult if that's what you're getting at," Ashton replied.

Vulcan shook his head as if he was annoyed, "Respect your elder and let me fucking complete my statement!"

"Have heard about a thing called prophecies?" Vulcan continued, "It was very popular back when the Precursors were in control of everything. They had quite a few unique abilities, one of which was the ability to peek into the future."

"Wait... so they knew what was going to happen to them?" Ashton questioned, "Like if they could see into the future, they should have known about the Xyrans attacking them."

"One can only wonder. Those geezers were way too mysterious for someone like ourselves to ponder what was going inside their heads." Vulcan shrugged before continuing, "What I do know, is they once told us about a human who would need the help of every creature they ever created to fend off some evil. Something even they were scared of."

"We never got to know what it was and why would a human need to fight against them. Throughout these years, I always thought, that maybe they were wrong. But after meeting you... I'm not so sure anymore."

"Woah, Woah, Woah! Hold your horses, old man." Ashton backed up while shouting, "You have the wrong guy, I have no interest in becoming the galaxy's saviour or some shit."

Vulcan smiled but did not argue. Unlike Ashton, he already knew there was no one who could throw away a prophecy once it was made. The little human might think the prophecy would simply disappear because he wanted it to, but fate wasn't something that could be controlled by mortal beings like themselves.

"You can do whatever you like." Vulcan mumbled, "But for now let's focus on the things here, shall we? Since I'm in a good mood and you want to take down the Xyrans just as much as I do, I'll help you."

"What do you mean? The Gauntlet you gave me is already more than enough-"

"You think you can unleash the Gauntlet's true potential?" Vulcan scoffed, "You can't do shit with it because you don't know how to use those skills. The skills of a true creationist."

Vulcan's words made Ashton ponder about some things. It was true he could not use the skills to their maximum potential. Why? Because he simply had no idea how to make weapons appear out of thin air. Guidance was what he needed the most to even use those skills.

"Thank you for the help..." Ashton agreed to Vulcan's proposal.

"Looks like you have a few brain cells in your head." Vulcan smirked, "Your training will start tomorrow. For now, leave me alone. I have to repair the damage our little farce caused."

Ashton nodded and left the forge. While he was glad he got to meet someone like Vulcan on this job, protecting Eula was still his primary objective. But what he didn't know was a parade of people was waiting for him outside the forge.

People who had given up more than half of their lifetimes trying to catch a glimpse of the forge were jealous of him. While some of them were simply curious and wanted to know what Ashton saw inside.

Much to their disappointment, Ashton wasn't interested in talking anymore. His anti-social ass was drained of energy after chatting with Vulcan for more than three hours straight.

'What a bunch of hypocrites,' Ashton thought as he walked away from the crowd, 'Associating with the mercenaries was the last thing on their mind. But look at them now, bloody assholes queueing up for a chat.'

[You can't blame them though. If someone who did not bother interacting with most of the household suddenly got friendly with a stranger, I would have been curious as well.]

'Whatever, I just need to get away before they get too excited.'

Chapter 397 Mentor (2)

It was nearly midnight. Planet Eva's three natural satellites were providing more than sufficient light to the ground. The sky was so clear, that Ashton could almost count the number of craters all across the three moons.

But rather than focusing on the sky above, Ashton was busy staring at the ocean as he sat on the edge of the terrace. The royal blue ocean waves lapped lazily at the shore. For a moment the scenic beauty of the place stole his attention. It was a perfect place to spend some time with Anna.

'What even am I thinking right now?' Ashton shook his head, 'I should concentrate on the job.'

[Yeah, just like those guards are... fuckers have been snoring like that for hours already!]

Ashton glanced around the courtyard and saw a few guards sleeping while standing. If someone saw them, they would think the guards had worked hard the entire day, that's why they were a bit tired.

The sound of their loud snoring pierced the silent night like a bullet through unprotected flesh. Judging from their calm demeanour, no one would have been able to guess they were under attack.

That being said, Ashton thought the guards were as vigilant as they have been during the day. After all, they were useless during the day so he couldn't expect anything else from them during the night.

Apart from their snoring, everything was quiet. However, just like everything, the peace and the quiet of the night came to an end.

"They are here."

Ashton mumbled and the next moment a loud roaring of multiple engines was heard. The sleepy guards hastily woke up and rushed towards their posts. The mercenaries did the same. But the cars coming from the front were just the beginning of their problems.

While the guards rushed towards the gate, Ashton realised that a few enemies were approaching them from the ocean as well. The island had been surrounded and so was everyone on it.

The next moment, the guards open fired at the incoming vehicles. However, the bullets simply bounced off of the armoured vehicles. The guards were slowly beginning to panic. But the mercenaries did not move a single step.

Since the mercenaries were not allowed to operate turrets spread across the mansion, there simply wasn't much for them to do. They couldn't just rush in front of armoured vehicles either.

"I should have taken a gun or something," Ashton mumbled before jumping down from the building, "Looks like I have to get my hands dirty. If only removing bloodstains wasn't such a pain in the butt..."

While the guards were unable to do anything to the assailants, it was the same for the assailants. Although they were equipped with heavy weaponry, their attempts to break through the walls were unsuccessful.

Both parties would have been in a stalemate situation if it hadn't been for the boats charging at them from behind. Their plan was a simple one. They were going to distract the guards with the cars. In the meantime, the main infiltration force would arrive through the ocean.

Since the guards would already be preoccupied with the frontal assault, the main infiltration force would launch a surprise attack on them from behind and trample everyone in their way.

Once the guards were taken care of, they'll capture the Eula bitch, hand her over to the Metal Sharks and be done with the job.

In hindsight, the plan wasn't a bad one... but a terrible one. Why? Because it was obvious what they were trying to accomplish.

"Come on, let's get going." One of the assailants softly mumbled as soon as their boats hit the beach sand, "The guys in front won't be able to hold them off indefinitely."

The attackers began assembling their weapons and explosives. Even though a couple of them were on the lookout for potential trouble, they had failed to notice the man who had entered their numbers.

While they were doing this, their leader, a metahuman known as Dobrich, left them behind to take a look ahead and make sure everything would go according to the plan.

"Get the explosives ready. Those bastards have improved their defences." Dobrich commented, but he received no reply, "Oi, you lazy bastards, have you all gone deaf- what the hell happened here?"

Dobrich turned back to see he was the only one standing on the beach. The rest of the crew was gone, and their equipment was scattered all over the place. Assuming the worst, he retraced his steps back to the boats, when he noticed countless bloody patches on the white sand of the beach.

There was even a trail of blood that led up to one of the boats they had used to get there. The man instantly knew what was happening and immediately ran away.

At that moment, he didn't care where he was going, all he knew was that he needed to get away from there and inform the rest to abort the mission as well.

After running for what seemed like an eternity, Dobrich stopped. He looked around while panting to make sure no one was following him. Upon making sure he was alone and safe, he began fiddling through the pouches tied around his waist.

But before he could find what he was looking for, he heard a voice.

"What are you doing here? You should have stayed there, I was about to head down to meet you. Well, you only made my job a bit easier, so thanks."

Dobrich did not notice the person sitting right in front of him. Not until the man spoke first. The person's face was covered in a black mask. However, under the collective moonlight, Dobrich could see the person's bloodied hands as he tried to wipe them off.

The man's weapon, a bloodied broadsword was next to him... alongside a pile of severed heads.

"Bloodstains... I absolutely hate them." Ashton shrugged as if it was no big deal, "Cleaning it is always tiring, especially when it gets on the clothes. By the way, do you know a dry cleaner who can get rid of the stains?"

Chapter 398 Mentor (3)

Meanwhile, the assailants in front were getting anxious. It didn't take one to be a genius to figure out something was wrong. Had everything gone smoothly, they should have received the signal to hold off their attack.

Not only they did not receive any signal, but they also weren't able to get in contact with the infiltration team either. This became the source of their worry.

"Sir, the sun will be up in about 47 minutes. We have to retreat before th-"

"No need to tell me what I already know!" The leader of the operation, Eleanor, snapped, "Tell me what happened to the alpha team!?"

"We're still trying to contact-"

Bang!

Before the terrorist even managed to get a word in, a hole was made in his skull. Eleanor was just that kind of a woman. She hated failures and more than that, she hated those who become the reason for her failure.

Although she wasn't part of the upper hierarchy of the Metal Sharks, she was still influential enough to make her own decisions without facing any backlash from the bosses. One of the reasons why she wasn't recognised yet was her race. Being human was worse than being livestock in space.

The loss of their home world was the biggest scar on their image. Even after evolving over and over, they were still more or less useless in the eyes of the rest of the races. Metal Sharks, an organisation that supposedly boasted equality for all races, was no different either.

Eleanor was well aware of it. However, if she managed to capture Eula, no one would be able to deny her a place in the upper echelon. That's why she gave it her all to capture Eula. But it didn't look like her plan would be successful after all.

"A mysterious object is approaching us!" Someone yelled over the radio.

Eleanor peeked out of the window to catch a glimpse of a... bag? Someone had thrown it from inside the mansion.

"What is it?" She asked but no one replied, "Fucking morons! Do I have to do everything by myself-"

A moment later Eleanor got to know why everyone had been stunned into silence. In front of her was a bag filled with severed heads of the infiltration team. A note was attached to the blood-soaked bag.

"Your people got my clothes dirty. Send a dry cleaner to clean them. P.S. I'm sorry for not sending their bodies back as well. My pets were a bit hungry." Eleanor finished reading the note with a cold expression on her face, "The plan failed... Retreat for now..."

The soldiers followed her instructions without protesting. After all, none of them wanted to become dog food like the infiltration team.

At some distance, Ashton was busy creating some skeleton soldiers. After seeing the guards fight back, he realised they were useless as they valued their lives more than anything. His skeleton soldiers, on the other hand, were not afraid of dying and can fight much better than the guards.

"If I managed to control the Gauntlet to the best of my abilities, I would be able to give them guns or something to aid in the battle." Ashton mumbled while patting a skeleton's head, "For now, stay underground and don't come out until I say so. Is that understood?"

The skeletons nodded and vanished into the sand. Had Sven been there, Ashton would not have had to create new soldiers. That's how Ashton had been operating till now.

"If he was here, I would have to worry about anything..."

Just then a shadowy figure appeared next to him, "Master, just like you instructed, I delivered the severed heads back to the enemy camp. The enemy seems to have retreated for now."

"Good job, Raven. Now stay here and take care of the skeletons for me. I'll leave the defence of this section of the beach to you."

"Thank you, master. You will not be disappointed."

Ashton nodded and headed inside the mansion. The battle was over... for now. But Ashton knew the enemies will return sooner or later. Although he did not fight Dobrich for long, his HP dropped by 12%. Which was alarming. Someone on his level should not have lost more than 5% HP in a one-sided fight.

[Your actions are getting a bit rusty.]

'I know. Too much sitting around is making things troublesome for me.'

The courtyard was in mess. Although the terrorists had not broken through the walls, they still managed to kill quite a few guards. a couple of watch towers had been destroyed as well. Almost a third of the people had been injured and were receiving proper treatment now that the enemies had retreated.

The first attack might not have left a physical mark on the defence force, but there was a significant mental impact on the guards. Till now they were thinking defending a fortress was an easy task. But now they knew it was anything but easy.

It situation would have been far worse if the terrorists managed to infiltrate the walls. But in Ashton's eyes, the attack had served as an eye opener for them to get off their high horses and do some real work.

"It looks much better than I thought it would." Vulcan sat beside Ashton.

"Where were you?"

"Ah, I can't fight against these fools. There's no fun in that." Vulcan shrugged, "Besides, I'm reserving my strength to fight the Xyrans. By the way, you got some blood on your lips. What were you doing?"

"Dinner."

"Alright then. I think it's time to start your training. Get your ass up, we don't have much time before I need to get to work."

"...sure, I'll make a report and then meet you in the forge, is that okay?"

"Don't make me regret taking you in as an apprentice." Vulcan scoffed and left, leaving Ashton alone with his thoughts.

[What are you waiting for?]

"It's... nothing much." Ashton sighed, "I was hoping the Phantom would appear during the assault... Looks like I was expecting too much."

[Cheer up! There are still 13 days left. He'll appear soon enough. Now get your ass inside the forge.]

"Aye aye captain."

Chapter 399 First Lesson: Learn To Create Fire (1)

As Ashton entered the forge he noticed the forge was much cleaner than the last time.

"Someone has been busy." Ashton smiled while looking around.

"Stop smiling like an idiot and go start a fire," Vulcan ordered while vaguely pointing in the hearth's direction, "Do that and then we'll get down to the basics."

"A fire? It's no biggie." Ashton shrugged and raise his hand.

Since he could generate and manipulate fire on will, Ashton thought the best way to do it was to use the crystal. However, the second Vulcan realised what Ashton was doing, he threw a couple of wooden rods at him.

"Oi! What do you think you're doing, you dumbass of a disciple!" Vulcan barked, "Your habit of taking shortcuts would one day cut your life short!"

Astaroth sniggered. The old man's attitude was much like his teacher, Seraph's. Even he had forced Astaroth, Lucifer and Beelzebub to do things the primitive way rather than use their abilities or the available technology as a way to value the things they had.

Although he wasn't sure what was going inside Vulcan's head, he was positive whatever Vulcan had planned would only help Ashton in the long run. That being said, he was enjoying every second of Vulcan yelling at Ashton. After all, it was a rare sight to witness something like that.

"You told me to light a fire! So I was about to do that!" Ashton shouted back which ended up in him getting smacked in the head.

"I'm your mentor now! You will treat me with the respect that I may or may not deserve." Vulcan spat before handing him a few sticks, "Pick those up and start a fire from the scratch."

"Wooden sticks... you really want me to light a fire like cavemen used to?"

Ashton was confused about whether Vulcan was being serious or not. Not using abilities was fine, but he should at least allow him to use a lighter or some sort of flint. But the look on Vulcan's face said it all... he was dead serious.

'Aw fuck it! Even if I have to do it with wood, my strength and stamina should be enough to-'

"Oh, and before I forget about it," Vulcan said with a sadistic smile, "Those sticks have been imbued with a special kind of Dwarven magic. Even an A-grader will have a tough time using them as ordinary sticks."

"What-"

"You have six hours to make fire. If you fail, I'll throw you out of the forge myself. Your time starts now."

Ashton wanted to curse the old bastard out loud. But he didn't. Had he done that, the sadist would have added another weird stipulation to turn the difficult task into an impossible one. Like lighting the fire while standing on the head or something.

After picking up the sticks Ashton got to work. Despite being a slave for sixteen years of his life, he did not have to do something like this. Lighting fire using sticks was already difficult, but having no knowledge about it made it even worse for him.

'Hm... wait a minute. I don't need to light a fire by rubbing sticks together... I just have to pretend as if I did it.'

[... Just do some hard work for once in your life.]

'That's a waste of time-'

"Don't even think about using your crystal to light the fire and fool me." Vulcan reminded Ashton while working on something else, "The magic on the sticks would repel flames from any eternal source. It might even cause an explosion."

"Are you a mind reader or something?" The annoyance in Ashton's voice was pretty obvious.

"I don't need to be a mind reader to know what's going inside that thick head of yours. Just do as you are told and then maybe after a couple of centuries you can do as you please in my forge."

"How long do you think humans live for?"

"You're no human. So shut it and get to work if you don't want this to be your last time in this forge." Vulcan reminded Ashton for the last time.

Without wasting any time, Ashton got to work. But the task proved to be more troublesome than he had expected. Handling the sticks was proving to be quite tough for him.

Since both the sticks were cylindrical in shape, he was having trouble rubbing them together. No matter what he did, one of the sticks always ended up slipping, making all his efforts go to waste. An hour passed like that and he had not made any progress.

"Damn it!" Ashton blurted out in frustration and threw the sticks, "Why can't you just be at one place- Wait... this could work!"

His throw had managed to break one of the sticks vertically, revealing a flat surface. Forgetting about his frustrations and disappointment, he once again picked up the sticks and got to work. After firmly grabbing the second stick with both hands, he furiously began rubbing the flat surface of the stick with all his might.

The constant to and fro motion of Ashton's hands, made it seem as if he was rubbing some different kind of wood. But Ashton wasn't thinking about any such thing. Right now, his only focus was on creating a fire.

After ten minutes or so, Ashton realised another mistake of his. Even if he managed to make some ember out of the wood, he would still need something soft and fibrous to turn the ember into a small fire, before lighting up the fireplace. Simply throwing the ember into the fireplace would let all his efforts go down the drain.

"Um... do you have something soft and inflammable here, that I can use to sustain the fire?" Ashton asked Vulcan.

Vulcan smiled as soon as he heard that question, 'Looks like the kid isn't a complete fool after all...'

He acknowledged Ashton's efforts, but he had no intention of letting Ashton know about it. After all, he would fail as a dwarf if he didn't give his student a hard time.

"Everything you need is in that cabinet," Vulcan replied, "Take what you want from there."

"Got it, thanks!"

Without wasting any time, Ashton ran toward the cabinet and found a handful of cotton just lying around. After grabbing some of it, he immediately got back to rubbing wood-

'Stick! It's a stick!'

Chapter 400 First Lesson: Learn To Create Fire (2)

A couple of hours passed. Ashton's hands were screaming for relief. But he did not stop. Not even when his hands got full of blisters and cuts.

Usually, these small 'injuries' would have healed themselves, but it seemed the sticks were imbued with magic to prevent it from happening. It almost felt as if Vulcan wanted to give him a taste of misery. Unfortunately for him, the great weaponsmith did not know how stubborn Ashton can be.

In these two hours, Ashton managed to create a small chunk of ember quite a few times. But his hastiness and impatience to get the fire up and running, ruined everything.

He either ended up blowing air with an unnecessary force that killed the ember, or he blew it too softly, which again resulted in the ember dying out. It almost felt the pain incurred from rubbing the sticks was nothing in comparison to watching the ember slowly running out of flickering light.

Thankfully, his pain resistance made it possible for Ashton to continue again and again, no matter how many times he failed.

Vulcan had been quietly watching Ashton. The process of making fire from nothing might seem useless and a waste of time. But in reality, it was filled with morals and lessons that one required to become a great blacksmith.

'He's a lot tougher than he looks. If it was anyone else, they'd have already given up on it.' Vulcan nodded while closely watching Ashton's struggle, 'This brat might turn out to be the child of the prophecy after all.'

"I DID IT!" Ashton let out a wild battle cry, loud enough to shake the forge itself, "EAT THAT SUCKER!"

The wide smile on his face was proof of his efforts. The moment the fire took over the hearth, all of Ashton's fatigue miraculously disappeared and so did the blisters on his hands. Who would have thought starting a fire could give someone a sense of great accomplishment?

"I did it..." Ashton turned toward Vulcan with a big smile.

"Good job,"

Vulcan smiled as he walked up to the hearth, used some elemental magic and... poured water all over it. Just like that, the fire Ashton had spent hours on was gone.

"What the hell? What are you doing!? I spent hours working on it-"

"You got a couple of hours left, so just do it again." Vulcan shrugged and waited for Ashton's next move.

60 per cent. That's the probability Vulcan came up with that Ashton would lash out at him. That was also the probability of his failure to become his 'disciple'.

From the first time he met Ashton, Vulcan knew the kid was too arrogant for his own good. Sure he was strong, but one should refrain from showing a shred of arrogance until and unless they become the strongest. After all, arrogance was a trait not suited for the weak.

The first lesson of starting a fire was to let Ashton feel helpless and weak. In other words, it was the first step to breaking his arrogance. The second and final step was to make him feel despair by destroying something he had grown attached to, like the fire he had created.

If he was able to push through it all, only then would Vulcan give him the knowledge of forging that had been kept as a secret till now. But Vulcan wasn't too optimistic about it.

Ashton wasn't the first one to try and become his 'disciple'. Thousands have tried over the years and failed miserably at the same test. Eventually, Vulcan made peace with the fact that no one was capable of qualifying his simple test.

That was the actual reason why he spent years in solitude. So that no one would waste his time by attempting to become his disciple. Although Ashton had the characteristics Vulcan desired in a student, he was pretty confident that Ashton's arrogance would blind his vision. Which in turn would make him lash out.

However, much to his surprise, Ashton did not argue. Instead, he picked up the sticks and got to work again.

"What are you doing?" Vulcan asked.

"There's no point crying over spilt milk... or in this case spilt water, now is there?" Ashton shrugged it off and got back to clashing wood until Vulcan stopped him, "Since I have two hours, it should be enough to light up another forge."

"It's enough, you've passed."

"What?"

"It was a test and you passed. Barely so... but you did."

"... I see." Ashton nodded, then kept rubbing the sticks, "Either way, we'll need some fire to carry on the lesson so I might as well keep going."

"I appreciate the sentiment, but as I said.." Vulcan snapped his fingers and the next moment the hearth was back on fire, "It's enough. Now before we continue, tell me what problems did you face during your... test. That'll be your first and only lesson for the day."

Ashton was a bit confused. He faced a lot of difficulties, but he couldn't see a way for those difficulties to turn into lessons. But since he knew it was better than to question Vulcan, he did as he was told.

"The slipping of wood as I put it," Vulcan continued after Ashton finished listing the difficulties, "symbolises the need to think out of the box and is the first law of this palace of creation. Simply doing as you are told to, won't make you a proper weaponsmith, let alone a decent one."

Similarly, Vulcan listed down every lesson that could be drawn from the process of creating fire. For example, the blisters in one's hand could be seen as the driving force of success.

The embers dying out, teach the importance of patience in the art of forging. Even him pouring water all over the hearth was a lesson in itself.

A lesson that taught them, that even if a person did everything correctly, it won't ensure success. One has to be willing to repeat the painful process over and over again. All the while accepting failures with open arms and learning from them.

The disappearance of the blisters was also a symbol. A symbol that teaches how success can make someone forget about all the pain they had to endure to get there.

"So you see, everything you did today will act as the foundation for you to become a good weaponsmith. Although it might seem useless." Vulcan concluded his speech, "Now, get out and rest up. because you wont get any once your training starts."