

## **Zompiewolf 421**

### Chapter 421 Creating A Faction (1)

Just hearing 'Precursor' come out of Phantom's mouth shocked everyone there. It was hard to believe Phantom could have killed a member of the ancient species.

Not because he couldn't have, considering a Precursor would never kill a lower species, anyone could try and kill them if they had the means. However, the surprising thing was that he somehow managed to find one in the first place.

After all, the surviving Precursors had gone into hiding or left the galaxy. That said, if he had indeed killed a Precursor, it could explain his arsenal of weird abilities. The question was, what would Vulcan do now?

'He took an oath only to kill those who had laid a hand on his masters.' Ashton thought, 'Since Phantom admitted to killing one, it should be alright to kill him.'

[But you can't let that happen. If Phantom dies, so will the last clue about your father. But I don't think capturing him would do you any good, either. It's not my place to say this, but interrogating him is impossible. Even you must have realised it by now.]

Ashton remained silent. Questioning Phantom would only make him stronger. Although Ashton had just the place in his mind to interrogate him, sadly, it wasn't possible.

Raphael's domain would have been the perfect place for questioning Phantom as it was a place Astaroth had complete control over.

Unfortunately, Beelzebub was still occupying the domain, and Ashton couldn't simply throw him out of there yet. This made it impossible for Ashton even to try and interrogate Phantom.

Meanwhile, on the battlefield...

Vulcan had not spoken a word since the big revelation. But anyone in the field could know how pissed he was. Without warning, Vulcan leapt into the air, and his hammer grew bigger and bigger till it blocked the sky from Phantom's sight.

The hellfire Phantom had used before still revolved around the hammer, giving it a menacing look. Phantom saw the attack coming. However, he wasn't quick enough to dodge the attack just yet.

The moment the hammer touched the ground, it felt like a dormant volcano had erupted. Debris was launched in every direction while the earth itself was on fire. Aegis had to use the [Absolute Shield] to protect Ashton from getting into harm's way.

A second later, Ashton saw a gut-wrenching sight when the dust and debris settled down. There was a massive blazing crater in front of him. Phantom could be seen lying head-first in the hole, with Vulcan standing on top of him.

Ashton did not doubt that Phantom was dead. Although strong, he wasn't strong enough to survive a direct hit from Vulcan. However, Vulcan's mood was far from happy, and a moment later, Ashton realised why.

It was another decoy—a strong one, but a decoy nonetheless.

"This bastard!" Vulcan roared in rage.

Even the ground shook under as he yelled, and Ashton could understand his frustrations. He felt the same when he finally killed Mera on earth, only to realise it was just a clone of hers.

By this time, Aegis had finished healing Ashton, but he still wasn't strong enough to stand by himself for an extended period. Aegis saw this and immediately rushed to support his master.

Ashton stood supported by Aegis' gryphon form as Phantom's decoy disappeared into thin air. There was no point in standing in the hole, so Vulcan walked out to check on Ashton but left without speaking to him.

The dwarf had his old wounds forcefully opened. The scars, which took thousands of years to heal, resurfaced within moments. It wasn't surprising that he wanted to be alone at the moment. Ashton did not bother him either. After all, he didn't have the time or the leisure to do so.

Phantom had turned out to be a lot more complicated than Ashton first assumed. At least he has more information about him, which he could use to his advantage the next time they meet.

[You seem pretty confident that you'll face him again.]

"Because I know we will. Considering that he's no longer infatuated with consuming my body, but killing me instead."

[That's one way of putting it.]

"By the way, do you think he could have done it?"

[Killing a Precursor?]

Ashton nodded.

[It's questionable. Even we had trouble killing the Precursors despite the fact they weren't fighting back. That said, it's always possible that a Precursor willingly gave their life away to a stranger, and the Xyrans had seen it happening quite a few times during the war.]

"I see."

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After Phantom's death, well, after his clone's death, the Metal Sharks took a hasty retreat. Their only goal was to act as a distraction to siphon away some guards and mercenaries while Phantom did his job. Following his death, there was no point in continuing the battle.

But the guards and the mercenaries weren't left unscathed. Two more mercenaries took the journey to the afterlife in the battle while the number of guards had been halved.

Not to mention, the destruction in and around the mansion was unsurmountable. It took days for hundreds of people to clear all the debris, and it would take a whole year to reconstruct the place.

Thankfully, Eula and her mother were unharmed in the incident and were grateful to everyone who helped them evade certain death. Especially to Ashton and Vulcan, who took down the Phantom.

The news of Phantom's first defeat spread across the galaxy like wildfire. Overnight the Mercenary Association regained all of its lost influence. Still, more than that, Ashton and company had become renowned personalities.

Mazton promised that great rewards were waiting for them when they returned.

While Ashton was walking around helping with whatever he could, the people had not seen Vulcan since the battle's conclusion. Ashton had tried countless times to talk to him over the days, but his efforts were met with silence.

The dwarf had closed himself within the workshop, not allowing anyone else to step foot in his 'domain' either. Ashton respected his master's wishes and decided to leave without meeting him.

The night sky was laden with stars. Their ship was ready to leave, and so were the guests of Planet Eva. But Ashton wasn't going just with the surviving mercenaries. He was taking his faction with him.

"Reaper, we got to leave now," Vimur called out to him.

"Coming!" Ashton replied before turning and looking at the workshop for the last time, "Looks like this is it then."

Although faint, Ashton hoped to see Vulcan again before he left. But it appeared his optimism was misplaced. After waiting a minute, Ashton gave up and returned to the ship.

However, to his and everyone's surprise, Vulcan came rushing toward the ship with a massive backpack.

"Oi, brat! What kind of disciple leaves without his master's blessing!?" He yelled.

"Really? He's going to turn this on me?" Ashton mumbled and got off the ship, "What do you want, old man?"

"Ahem! Considering you're pathetically weak, I have generously decided to accompany you till we defeat that Mimic or whatever he is."

"..."

"Hop on. It's rude to make everyone wait like this." Vulcan patted Ashton on the back and hurriedly went inside the ship, "Honestly, I never thought I'd accept such a lazy bum as my disciple."

"This fucker..." Ashton sighed before smiling as he entered the ship.

Chapter 422 Creating A Faction (2)

A vast crowd was waiting for Ashton and the remaining mercenaries at the Kernel Tower. As soon as their spaceship docked at the VIP port, they could hear the loud cheers of everyone waiting for them.

It was a rare occurrence in the mercenary world. After all, there was no space for fans for the mercenaries. Everyone was usually making money for themselves, so much so that they often forgot about the accomplishments of others.

However, defeating the undefeated Phantom wasn't a feat anyone would ignore. It was the first time someone had not only managed to evade 'Silent Death' but also defeat him.

At the same time, people from the Galaxy Times wanted to interview the mercenaries. However, Mazton had made it clear they would not be allowed to do so.

It was because he knew these reporters only wanted one thing from them. The key to defeating Phantom and Mazton wasn't going to let them get their hands on such intel.

Vimur was immediately caught in the storm of attention he got. In contrast, Laihud kept staring at him from a distance.

The healer, too, had a fair share of people cheering for him, but it seemed the one whose cheers mattered the most was busy with someone else.

Ashton saw this and calmly approached Laihud. Since he wanted to use him as bait, he felt it was only suitable for him to try and encourage the man to pursue his heart rather than letting his feelings go unchecked.

"How long do you plan on staring at his back, huh?" Ashton playfully remarked before smacking Laihud's back.

"Ouch- W-What do you mean, Reaper-hael?" Laihud referred to Ashton with the suffix 'hael'.

In Laihud's culture, 'Hael' was used as a suffix towards those who are strong and worthy of one's respect. At the same time, the suffix was also used to acknowledge the superiority of one's skills.

At least, that's how Laihud had explained it to Ashton while they were making their journey back to the tower.

"Dude, please, everyone knows how you feel about him. Well, except for that idiot. But then again, I don't expect his two brain cells to take the obvious signs."



"Huhu-" Laihud chuckled, before turning a little bit serious, "How long have you known for?"

"Pretty much from the moment we left the tower. Well, it's not my place to tell you what to do and what not to. Sometimes, letting your heart go is better. I'm speaking from experience."

[Aww, look at the love guru I raised. I'm proud of you!]

Laihud didn't respond, and Ashton took it as his sign to leave. Just like Astaroth pushed him to confess his feeling for Anna, he wanted to act in that role for Laihud. Hopefully, he'll take his advice, and things will get better. Till then, Ashton had his own business to take care of.

"Asht- I mean Reaper!"

Ashton heard a familiar voice and turned with a broad smile. It had been a little over a month since he had last seen Anna. But much to his surprise, she had changed quite a bit.

Her succubi features had grown more prominent, and she had gained 13 levels from the last time he saw her.

As she came running toward him, Ashton couldn't help but notice everyone's gaze was on her. The men cheering him on just a moment ago now had daggers in their eyes, waiting to kill him.

[Their lust for your blood is much higher than Anna's lust for you, haha!]

'Shut it and try not to ruin the moment, will you?'

[Alright, alright, you have earned that much. See you later.]

Anna forced Ashton into quite an intimate hug, which he was more than happy to reciprocate. Behind her were the twins. They kept their distance but made sure to greet Ashton.

Ashton might not have seen the twins in a romantic light, but they were still friends, so it would have been rude of him not to acknowledge them.

"Woah, you're quite plump." Anna licked her lips.

"I could say the same for you." Ashton laughed, "Also, I know the meaning behind your gaze, but it'll have to wait. I need to take care of some business first."

"Of course," Anna replied before planting a kiss on his lips before letting him go, "That'll be enough to hold me off for a few hours."

"I knew this bastard was a playboy!" Vimur rushed to Ashton and swung his arm over his shoulder, "Look at him! He already had a girlfriend, haha! By the way, I'm Vimur, Reaper's trusty shield. You might have heard of me- Oi, Laihud let me speak!"

Ashton shook his head in disappointment as Laihud dragged Vimur away.

"Tsk, love will cause your brain to rust." Vulcan suddenly appeared behind them, with Aegis, who immediately jumped over to Ashton's shoulder.

"Kyu~"

"Aw, he's so cute!" Anna and the twins simultaneously exclaimed.

Aegis wasn't in his authentic form, but he looked cute regardless. However, the surprises weren't over yet.

Even though Aegis did not like to be touched by anyone, much to Ashton's surprise, he immediately jumped from Ashton's shoulder to Anna's chest and warped his hands around her neck.

"This is new." Ashton looked at Vulcan, who was just as clueless as he was.

In the meantime, Mazton returned after safely escorting Eula to her room. However, Eula let Ashton know she wanted to talk to him in private before leaving.

"Here is the star-" Mazton warmly welcomed Ashton but immediately bowed when he saw Vulcan, "I-I never thought I'd be fortunate enough to stand in the presence of an Elder Dwarf here of all place!"

Vulcan looked annoyed by Mazton's words. However, he read the room and decided it was best to accept his greetings before leaving.

"He... is not a people person." Ashton clarified as he greeted Mazton.

"I see. I'll apologise to him at a later time. But for now, let us proceed to the meeting room. There's a lot to discuss and not much time."

Mazton said after regaining his composure, "The leader couldn't make it here tonight, but he has sent his congratulations to you and wished to meet you some other time."

### Chapter 423 Creating A Faction (3)

As Ashton and Mazton walked into the meeting room, he was surprised to see a lot of unfamiliar faces. It seemed all of them were busy chatting, but the room turned eerily silent as soon as he appeared.

Ashton immediately scanned everyone in the room. Now that he knew how Phantom worked, he wouldn't have been surprised to find him in the room. Thankfully, Phantom wasn't present there. However, there was someone Ashton had known for some time.

"Otiga?"

"I should have known only you would pick a corny name like Reaper." Otiga smiled as the newcomers filled the remaining empty seats, "It has been a while!"

"It seems Lady Shadow already knows you." Mazton raised an eyebrow.

"Yes, Mr Reaper is an old acquaintance from Euphoria." Otiga replied, "We have worked closely on a few occasions."

"I hope you won't let your relationship affect your work, Lady Shadow." Someone from the room's far end remarked, "The same goes for you, Mr Reaper. Try not to let your relationships intervene with your business. That's my advice as a senior."

"Shut it, Balls. We all know how great you are." Otiga retorted.

Ashton saw the person and didn't know how to describe him. His appearance was quite... distinctive, to say the least. His oval-shaped head was overladen with excess skin. Just looking at him reminded Ashton of a man's balls. Just like what Otiga called him.

Although Ashton's assumption was right on point, when Mazton introduced him to the man, Ashton couldn't help but think it was a prank of some sort. It had to be.

"Reaper, meet Lord Testickle. He's one of the seven great generals of the Orion empire." Mazton gracefully introduced him, but Ashton knew Mazton was trying his best to suppress his urge to laugh.

[If I were him, I would have sued the living hell out of my parents.]

'Didn't they throw you on the streets because you were born with a Mournblade? How about you sue them for that instead?'

[Although I didn't, they were in prison the last time I saw them. I'd say karma got the revenge for me.]

'I'm surprised something worked out in your life for once.'

[...me too.]

While Mazton introduced Ashton to everyone, Ashton could not help but notice their gazes. It felt like they were sizing him up as if they couldn't believe someone like him fought and survived against Phantom.

Ashton couldn't blame them. In their eyes, he was a newbie youngster. How could someone like him defeat Phantom when even the brightest minds of the galaxy couldn't devise a plan to accomplish it?

But more than that, he could feel their emotions through [Perception]. Despite what they thought, they were afraid of him. Not scared per se, but they were cautious.

People like Ashton were dangerous. They were only an asset till they were working with them, but the moment such a person turned against them, it would be a catastrophe.

That was probably why some of the galaxy's most influential people had gathered in the room to meet a low-ranking mercenary. By doing so, they would kill two birds with one stone.

Firstly, they'll be able to get first-hand information about Phantom and come up with ways to counter his reign of terror, and finally, they will form crucial connections with someone who was just as dangerous, if not more.

It was no wonder Mazton said Ashton would get his rewards here. Not only would the mercenary association reward him for his feat and the information he would give them, but so would the remaining six people.

[Oi, I can almost see the greed within your eyes. Tone it down a bit.]

'Yeah, yeah.'

"Enough greetings. Shall we get to business now?" Mazton ushered the meeting.

It felt like Otiga was waiting for mazton to say that. As soon as he was done, she jumped to ask a question.

"Did you manage to uncover the identity of Phantom?"

"No. The coward used a decoy to attack us." Ashton replied, "However, I have some information about his class and abilities."

Everyone's ears perked up as soon as Ashton said that. So far, Phantom had been a complete enigma, thanks to his 100% fatality rate. That's why any information regarding his class and abilities was priceless.

Ashton knew the value of the information he held and wouldn't reveal it so quickly. Just like anything in the universe, information, too was tradable for the right amount.

Being a mercenary, Ashton wanted to benefit as much as possible. That's why he intended to monopolise the priceless information under his possession.

[Didn't you say you wanted to share information with them so that they can help you find Phantom faster?]

'I did.' Ashton smugly replied, 'I don't have the time or the means to track the bastard down. But they do since they have literal armies under their command. However, I never said I'll give out the information for free, did I?'

[You sly bastard! I love it, haha!]



People seemed to notice what was happening inside his head and immediately put their offers on the table. Testickle offered the Orion army's support and priority treatment regarding missions associated with them at whatever rate Ashton wanted.

Lord Nix, a prominent figure representing Perseus's arm, offered him one of the fastest spaceships at his disposal for Ashton and his team. Ashton was incredibly thankful to him because he was planning on getting a ship either way.

As for Mazton, well, he lifted any and all restrictions imposed on Ashton as a new Rank 2 mercenary. In other words, Ashton was promoted to the highest ranks of a Mercenary unofficially since it wouldn't be fair to the rest of the mercenaries working under the association.

This meant he would have to progress like the other mercenaries to improve his rank; Ashton would still receive all the benefits a rank 7 mercenary would, despite being at rank 2.

Ashton didn't ask for anything from Otiga. But even then, she offered to join his crew and her intelligence association. In a gist, Ashton would become the new leader of one of the most sought-after intelligence associations.

The gifts didn't stop coming. From money to soldiers and close working relationships offers. Whatever Ashton wanted, he got it within seconds of mentioning it. Honestly, he got a lot more than he wanted, but he wasn't complaining.

By the time Ashton gave them what they wanted, he was one of the most decorated mercenaries in the Kernel Tower. The meeting lasted a little over an hour.

Once the promised money was transferred to Ashton and the delivery of the spaceships scheduled, he left to do what he had wanted to do for a long time. Before someone asks, no, it wasn't Anna but something related to work.

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"Are you sure you want to create your own mercenary faction?" Ena-bot asked Ashton for confirmation.

Joining a mercenary faction was one of the fastest-growing methods. Most of the valuable requestion often requested to be assigned to a faction rather than an unknown group of mercenaries.

However, only some could create a faction. Generally, mercenaries ranked 6 or above are allowed to make a faction. But none of those restrictions applied to Ashton, so he didn't waste time creating his army.

Even Eula's request was one asking to be assigned to a mercenary faction. However, most factions refused to take on the deadly request, and those who did weren't up to the mark. That's why Mazton had to create a group of mercs by himself to help Eula out.

"Yes, please," Ashton replied, and he was handed a ton of documents to go through within moments.

Had it not been for [Detection], he would have gone through the texts for hours. After signing the necessary documents, Ashton was handed a new mercenary card that reflected his new rank and the new faction he had created, known as Ghosts.

So far, it was a fairly small faction. Along with the ten guards he picked up from planet Eva, Vimur and Laihud joined his faction. Anna was a part of it as well, and so was Vulcan. However, he was not listed as a fighter but as a technician. It was to maintain his secret identity as Thori.

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Faction Name: Ghosts

,m Faction Captain: Reaper <Click to view more information>

Faction Rank: 3

Members Information:

- A Grade Members: 0

- B Grade Members: 3 <Click to view more details>

- C Grade Members: 3 <Click to view more details>

- D Grade Members: 5 <Click to view more details>

- E Grade Members: 4 <Click to view more details>

Mission Completed: 0

Reputation: Trusted by the association.

References:

Association VP Mazton.

- Galactical Performer Eula Mendova.

- Lady Shadow, ONI.

- Lord Testickle, General of the Orion Empire.

- <Click to view three more.>

Rating: Will be available upon successful completion of a mission.

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"Not bad," Ashton mumbled to himself.

"You can accept missions from counter 7." Ena-bot remarked, "Have a nice day, Captain."

Ashton nodded and left for the mentioned counter to seek a mission suitable for them.

Usually, a newbie faction would only get a few opportunities to get contracted. That's why there was a need to get some references. The more well-known the referee was, the higher the chances of getting employed.

The reference system was one of the reasons why Ashton wanted to get recommendations from as many influential people as possible.

Recommendations from Mazton, Eula and Otiga were more than enough for him to garner attention. But Ashton decided to go all out and mentioned everyone he had met in the previous hour.

"Let's see if there's any mission- what the fuck?"

Ashton stood dumbfounded in front of the holographic screen. It hadn't been ten minutes since he created the faction, yet he had received over a dozen job requests!

"Maybe I should have toned down my references a bit..."

#### Chapter 424 Joint Operation (1)

The news of Ashton's feat, coupled with his references, had caused quite an uproar in the mercenary world. Still, not every client wanted to hire them as they were a new faction, but the number of requests Ashton had received was unprecedented for a new faction.

Ashton stood there gawking at the screen, overwhelmed with the job requests. After regaining his composure, Ashton rearranged the quests based on the type of job. To his surprise, most of the jobs were Transportation or Escorting. Similar to Eula's escorting job.

Although the pay was quite well, he wasn't too keen on accepting these job offers. Although he didn't say it explicitly during the meeting, his sole focus at the moment was to get strong, that is, levelling up. So that he could face Phantom on his own the next time they crossed paths.

'If I want to catch that bastard alive, I have to get stronger than I am.'

[Getting strong alone wouldn't help you. We need to figure out a way to interrogate him as well.]

'If only we could somehow kill Beelzebub, all the problems would be solved.'

[Go ahead and kill him. That is, if you want the Xyrans to chase our ass to hell.]

Ashton didn't respond, mainly because he had nothing to say. If only Balmond had an ability like Raphael's, then he wouldn't have to worry about handling Phantom.

'Now is not the right time to focus on Phantom.'

Ashton shook his head and went back to reading through the job list. But in the end, he gave up on it as well. His mind was all over the place. However, there were a couple of reasons why he waited to accept any quests.

Firstly, although he was the captain of his faction, it wasn't right for him to select a job request himself. Consulting others like Vimur and Laihud on the matter would also give him the insight to learn about different jobs and further solidify his knowledge of the mercenary world.

Secondly, he didn't want to rush straight into fighting as soon as he finished one job. After all, taking appropriate rest was just as crucial as busting their asses to earn money.

Not to mention, it wasn't like they could leave the station before the promised spaceships were delivered to him, and it was more like they had to stay in the Tower for a week at the very least.

'With hundreds of thousands of Yenos in my account, money will not be a problem for a while. Which means I can take on jobs which give less money but more experience.'

[What happened to the greedy bastard from before?]

'...'

[Then there's Vulcan's training, too.]

'Right. I should have a chat with the master soon. But for now, it's time to rest. I'll conduct a meeting tomorrow.'

[Try to fool someone who doesn't know you. You just want to get laid, don't you?]

'You should be glad at least one of us gets to do that. Why the fuck are you jealous?'

[...]

However, before Ashton got the chance to proceed with his plan, he noticed something. Not so far away from him stood a small group of people.



All it was one look at their uniform for Ashton to get reminded of his first day as a mercenary. The so-called Elite mercenary group: The Gold Water Mercenaries.

"These bastards never learn, do they?"

Like the first time they met, the Gold Water Mercenaries were still busy hogging all the lower-level quests. Even after the humiliation they had to face the last time, it didn't seem they had learned their lesson.

[Why don't you go and get acquainted with them? They are your old buddies, after all.]

'You snatched the words right out of my mouth.' Ashton smiled and casually walked up to them.

"Oi Square face!" Ashton yelled while the mercenaries were busy chasing away other low-ranking mercenaries, "I have wanted to chat with you since our last meeting!"

Kern 'Oma, the Deputy captain of the group, turned around with his eyes blazing in rage. Not only was he having a bad day, but now some idiotic bastard dared to mock him. Forgiving the fool wasn't an option for him.

However, when he saw Ashton's face, all the rage in his eyes evaporated instantly. The way Ashton publically humiliated them was vividly imprinted on his mind.

It was sheer bad luck that out of all people Gold Water mercenaries could have faced, their path was interrupted by someone who had the direct support of the mercenary association. h

"Mr Reaper! It's an honour to meet you." Kern replied with the fakest smile Ashton had ever seen, "What is someone like yourself doing on the lower floors?"

"Ah, nothing much. Just saw your familiar face and thought to meet you." Ashton responded, "What are you doing on the lower floors? Monopolising low-ranking quests as usual?"

"Haha... It's not like that."

Kern had a burning desire to cuss Ashton out, but he knew very well that if they got in a feud now, even the association would support Reaper and not them. Their last encounter had caused Kern some grief from his superiors, so he was more careful with engaging Ashton.

It was peculiar for someone from the Gold Water group to be so polite with another mercenary. But more than that, the low rankers wanted to take a job request and make a break out of there while the Gold Water mercs were busy.

Kern and his subordinates knew what the other mercenaries were doing. Sadly, there was nothing they could have done with Ashton present there as they did not want to have problems with him.

As for Ashton, things were going just the way he wanted. It was a well-known fact that Kern's squad wasn't under direct protection from their S-rank leader.

Hell, it would be surprising if their leader was even aware of their existence. Still, since they wore Gold Water's colours, no regular mercenary wanted to mess with them.

But it was different with Ashton. With Mazton backing him up, the roles of the prey and the predator had reversed. It was Gold Water's turn to know how it felt to have all the job requests forcefully taken away from them.

[I have never seen someone get this petty before.]

'Why? Did the Xyrans not have mirrors?'

[...]

Chapter 425 Joint Operation (2)

"One reason." A faceless calm voice echoed in the dark, "Give me one reason I should not shred you down into minced meat this instant."

Eleanor couldn't speak a word in the Leader's presence, and she couldn't even if she wanted to, as she had her tongue ripped out mere moments ago. That was the price of her failure to capture a direct descendant of the first succubi.

Apart from the monetary and personnel losses, the Metal Sharks had received an irreparable blow to their name, and that was something the Leader wouldn't forgive or forget anytime soon.

However, Eleanor wasn't the only one being punished there. Shing Fuyan, one of the Leader's confidants, faced similar treatment.

He did not get his organs ripped out like Eleanor, considering how much he had accomplished for the Sharks. But Fuyan's soul-haunting cries could be heard every few seconds.

Even though Eleanor knew she was fucked, she couldn't help but think who was facing it worse, she or Fuyan?

While she was lost in her thoughts, someone grabbed her before tossing her around the pitch-black chamber. She had already faced this situation a few times, but it still hurt like hell.

It was thanks to that Eleanor's body was covered in bruises and fractures. Yet the Leader didn't show a shred of mercy to her.

She had no idea capturing Eula was this important, or else she would have escaped from the organisation's clutches when their defeat became a certainty.

It was foolish of her to think she'd manage to get off by getting demoted or a severed arm. Hell, never in a million years would she have known the order to capture Eula came from the Leader himself.

If she did, Eleanor would have given it her all to capture Eula or die trying. For death had become something she now yearned for.

"Fuyan has been a close ally for decades, but that does not matter to me. However, I have decided to spare his life for something he found by himself." The Leader mumbled.

Eleanor did not have the strength to listen to the mysterious electronic voice. However, what the Leader said next immediately caught her attention.

"Fuyan found someone more suited for our needs. An easier target, but more important than that pop star. The only question is, will you or will you not prove your worth to me?"

Eleanor immediately got to her knees, begging for another chance to make things right. Without her tongue, she couldn't form a single proper word, but that did not stop her from trying her best to convey her words.

The voice never spoke again, but the room was lit a moment later. The entire room had been painted with her blood. However, it wasn't senseless scribbling.

Eleanor could read the words that the Leader wrote by smashing her all around the room. Words that made her feel both hope and despair at the same time.

"Do not disappoint me again."

At the same time, Fuyan's shriek was heard one last time before everything went silent again. The Palace of Pain had gone quiet once again.

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"Achoo!" Anna sneezed louder than ever, "Who the fuck is talking about me now?"

"I didn't know you got fans in space?" Ashton playfully remarked while going through the mission catalogue.

While everyone was busy claiming job requests, a few were left as they failed to gain attention from the lower-ranked mercenaries for various reasons.

Ashton wasn't planning on taking on a request, but when he saw Kern's relaxed expression, he took all of them. As soon as he did that, Kern's expression turned grey quickly. The job he wanted to claim now belonged to Ashton.

The only thing was that Ashton needed to know which quest the Gold Water mercenaries were so desperate to steal. Needless to say, Kern wasn't going to let him know, so they left in a huff.

That's why Ashton was going through the list, hoping something would point him in the right direction. However, before he could get far in his search, there was a knock on the door.

Anna went to check it, and a moment later, Ashton heard her gasping in confusion. After rushing outside, he found Eula kneeling in front of Anna.

"What's going on here?" He asked.

"I was hoping you'd have the answer for that..." Anna mumbled.

Before Ashton could ask Eula what the hell she was up to now, she spoke first.

"Please grant blessing over this humble servant of yours, Goddess Lilith!"

"..."

Anna and Ashton both stared at each Other. They couldn't decide whether Eula was off her rockers or had mistaken Anna for someone else. Regardless, Ashton did not find Eula's behaviour acceptable at all.

"Is this want you wanted to talk about?" He firmly asked Eula, to which she nodded.

"I know you are confused by my rambling, but I assure you, I'm here to help you."

[Ah, I see. No wonder your girlfriend felt familiar to me after she became your mate. My stupid ass thought I was getting that feeling because of our bond.]

'What do you mean?'

[Let's just say you might have turned Anna into a primordial being.]

'Speak English, mofo!'

[Translation: Anna might have inherited the genes of the firsts of the succubi when you turned her. Which means other succubi think of her as a goddess. End translation.]

Rather than clearing his confusion, Astaroth's words had the opposite effect on him. How could he turn Anna into something like a goddess of all things? But then again, he was the reincarnation of Seraph to the Giholos, so it wasn't senselessly weird.

However, he still had a question in his head.

'Why the hell were you carrying succubi genes in the first place?' He asked Astaroth, to which he did not get a straight answer.

[Let's just say I had a fun time with them.]



'Weren't you a virgin, though?'

[...we did mental stuff, mostly.]

'No wonder your head is fucked up.'

[...]

Chapter 426 Joint Operation (3)

"So, you want us to recover a magic artefact that no one had heard about?" Ashton asked as soon as Eula was done putting in her request.

"That's the gist of it." She replied, "Only someone from the direct lineage of Lilith can recover the artefact. Since my family is the only pureblood succubi family in the galaxy, the Metal Sharks targeted me to force me to get to Lilith's staff."

It was all news to Ashton. The rumour about Eula offending the metal shark was a hoax she used to hide the real reason behind their relentless attacks.

Even Ashton found it hard to believe that a galaxy-wide criminal organisation was targeting a pop star just because of a stupid remark, and his instincts proved to be correct this time as well.

However, he couldn't blame Eula. If what she said was true, then thousands, even hundreds of thousands of people, wouldn't stop at anything to get their hands on the artefact.

'What do you think, Astaroth?'

[Well, Eula's tale seems too farfetched to me. An artefact that can give immortality to its wielder? It sounds like something from a c-grade action movie.]

'And a walking zompiewolf doesn't?'

[No, because a ton of hybrids were already roaming the galaxy. It was only a matter of time before a tribrid joined in. But then again, the succubi and incubi were known to take their secrets to the grave... so it might be possible, unlikely, but possible.]

While Ashton was busy discussing everything under the stars with Astaroth, Anna asked the most obvious questions that Ashton did not seem to care about.

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but you're not putting in a request with the association as you don't want to spread the information, right?"

Eula nodded.

"Then what makes you think you can trust us?" Anna asked with her arms crossed in front of her mounds, "For all you know, we're mercenaries. The only thing we are loyal to is money, not people."

Eula smiled as if she had expected the question to be hurled at her. She looked Anna straight in the eyes and said, "Neither you nor Mr Reaper is that kind of person."

She continued, "This last month, I have had the pleasure of working with Mr Reaper, and I know someone of his character wouldn't betray a client for money. Also, considering the high regard he holds you in, you're not someone like that. Am I wrong?"

Anna didn't speak at all, knowing Eula had more to say.

"Also, I'm not telling you to recover the staff for me, but yourself."

Anna raised an eyebrow when she heard that. Eula was not only handing them such priceless intel, but she didn't want to artefact either. What kinds of things have this succubus been sucking on?

"Are you serious?" Anna questioned her while trying to get Eula's true intentions out of her.

"Completely." Eula replied, "At first, I wanted the artefact to myself for safekeeping, but now I have realised someone like yourself deserves it more. Not to mention, even if I get the artefact, I wouldn't be able to bring out its true power. But maybe you can."

Anna was surprised, but she still had her suspicions. Devotion could be blinding; she knew about that. However, she refused to believe that Eula's intentions were pure.

'It could be that she wants the Metal Sharks to leave her alone, and by having me take the artefact, she would get rid of the threat looming over her head.' Anna thought.

The two succubi were too involved in their talks that none of them saw Ashton exit the room. He had hoped Astaroth would be able to shed light on Eula's words, but the fact that he couldn't, meant one thing.

The artefact itself predates the Xyrans.

That was the only explanation Ashton could come up with, and if it was true, then only one person could confirm or deny the existence of such an artefact.

"Master! I have a question!" Ashton exclaimed while kicking Vulcan's doors in, "Did the Precursors-ouch!"

"Who the hell do you think I am, your friend?" Vulcan barked back and slapped Ashton in the head.

Watching his master get slapped, Aegis immediately jumped off the bed and loudly barked at Vulcan. Even though Vulcan was his primary caregiver, Aegis still loved Ashton more than anyone else in the entire universe.

"What do you want now?" Vulcan sighed and turned around, allowing Ashton a complete view of his room.

"Damn, old man, did you decide to open an armoury here or something?" Ashton mumbled.

No matter where Ashton looked, weapons or armour were scattered all over the place. Even now, Vulcan was carrying a sword in his hands.

"Damn, did you come here to ask stupid questions?" Vulcan imitated Ashton's voice, "And here I thought maybe you got a useful brain cell in your head for once."

'Useful brain cell while this Xyran cancer lives within me? Impossible!'

[What the fuck did I do now!?!]

'I heard you sniggering a moment ago.'

[Bitch.]

"What are you here for?" Vulcan dropped the sword he had been polishing and got serious.

"I wanted to know if your kind ever created a device that could grant eternal life to someone?"

The look on Vulcan's face was terrifying. Even Ashton couldn't help but subconsciously take a couple of steps back while Aegis ran and hid behind Ashton's legs for the first time in his life.

"Eula told you, didn't she?" Vulcan mumbled while shaking his head, "That girl would get herself into trouble one of these days."

Suddenly, it all clicked in Ashton's head. He always found it weird why Vulcan stuck to Eula's family for centuries when he could have ruled over the galaxy or something.

But now, everything made sense. Despite his claims, Vulcan was there to protect Eula and her family, and by doing so, he would indirectly help preserve the artefact.

"Stay away from the Staff of Eden," Vulcan sternly warned Ashton, "You might be the chosen one or some shit, but even you can't tame the staff. No one can."

Chapter 427 Joint Operation (4)

"What do you mean?" Ashton asked Vulcan.

"There is a reason why that Staff was left untouched by the Xyrans," Vulcan replied, slowly regaining his composure. "Even the strongest amongst them couldn't tame the staff that held the power of creation and destruction."

Ashton felt it was story time, so he picked Aegis up in his arms and sat down. Vulcan did not bother waiting for him and kept narrating what little he remembered about the staff.

"The dwarves were responsible for making and maintaining almost everything the Precursors ever touched. However, not once were we allowed to see, let alone touch the Staff of Eden."

He continued, "Obviously, being restricted only made us more eager to use the staff. But none of us wanted to disrespect our creator's wishes. None, but two morons, and humans at that."

[I'm willing to bet a thousand Yenos, it was a distant relative of yours.]

Ashton did not strike back as the tale was more important to him than Astaroth's barking. Vulcan remembered that a human couple called Adam and Lilith sneaked into the forbidden sector to see why the staff held such significance to the Precursors.

The security wasn't tight because the Precursor believed no human would defy their instructions. But they were mistaken as the seed of curiosity often defied the authority of a higher being.

However, halfway through, Adam had a change of heart and no longer wanted to disobey the Precursors. But Lilith wasn't as docile as her partner. Once she set her mind on something, she would stop at nothing to achieve it.

Adam knew only the Precursors could stop Lilith, so he left her and rushed out to confess to their lords and get their help. However, by the time they returned, it was already too late, and Lilith had got hold of the staff which slowly corrupted her.

Her appearance changed drastically, and she had evolved into something of her own creation.

"That's how the first-ever Succbus came into being." Vulcan sighed, "As a result of her actions, Lilith was immediately banished from Eden, the Precursor's home world. But before she was thrown into the endless space, something weird happened to the staff."

"What could possibly happen to such an overpowered artefact?"

"No one knows, as the Precursors never mentioned the staff ever again," Vulcan replied, "But if I had to guess, I'd say Lilith wasn't the only one who got corrupted that night."

"She corrupted the staff? But how is that even possible?"

"Think of it like this. The staff was a puddle of the purest water in the universe, and Lilith's touch was like sewage. Now you see what happened?"

It was a weird analogy to explain something, but it worked. Since the Precursors were the 'purest beings' in the galaxy, they could use the staff as they pleased and hence did not want anyone else to contaminate the staff. Therefore, they prohibited anyone from even looking at it.

But something felt a bit weird about the story. Ashton couldn't point it out; however, he knew there was more to the tale than what Vulcan told him.



Either Vulcan didn't know the complete truth about the story, or he was purposefully excluding some details to make the Precursors seem like the good guys.

[Victor's version of the story is often popular, but more often than not, it's covered in lies. Unfortunately, there's no one from whom we can get the other side of the story.]

'I wouldn't be so sure of it just yet. As long as I can get some soul fragments, I can reconstruct-'

[Do you know how to?]

'...I'm working on it.' Ashton thought, 'But first, I need to take care of something else.'

Ashton wanted to call out Vulcan on his lies. From the moment Vulcan began narrating the tale, Ashton had used [Heartbeat Sense] on the dwarf. A couple of times, Ashton knew Vulcan was lying, or at least he was omitting the truth.

Rather than calling him out without proof, Ashton decided to get the complete story from somewhere else, hopefully. But there was one thing he wanted to confirm first.

"Master, please, don't answer my next question with a lie." Ashton mumbled as he turned around to leave, "Do you believe Lilith was the one who corrupted the staff?"

Vulcan did not respond, but in his silence was the answer Ashton had been seeking.

"I see," Ashton left the room with Aegis right behind him, "Maybe we should talk about it sometime later when you have made peace with your thoughts."

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Meanwhile, Anna and Eula were busy discussing the specifics of the mission.

Since they couldn't take a request to retrieve the staff, as it would inform people hiding in the shadows about the artefact's whereabouts, Eula suggested Anna take A job request that would land them on a wild planet called Occuna.

Occuna was a planet overrun with wild beasts, which meant many job requests came from there. The quests varied from subjugation to defence to escorting, so the team should be okay with taking on a job from Occuna.

By this time, Ashton returned from Vulcan's chamber and joined in on the plan.

"Once you are done taking care of the job request, you can look for the artefact without any disturbance," Eula eagerly told the couple.

Although she had a point, there was one thing she was missing. A quick search pointed out that Occuna was roughly four times the size of Earth. That said, looking for an artefact no one had ever seen before was too far-fetched.

"I agree," Anna mumbled, "Finding a needle in a haystack would be much easier if he had a magnet. But other than the artefact's existence, we know nothing about it."

Ashton knew Vulcan would be of help in verifying the artefact. However, after witnessing his reaction to the mention of the staff, Ashton decided it was better not to include the dwarf in the planning for now.

[Although it would put us at a disadvantage, it's the right choice.]

In the meantime, since Ashton had already accepted a lot of job requests, he was going through the list to see if there was any request from Occuna. To no one's surprise, there was a chain request on the list.

A chain request was multiple quests marked under a single job request. At the same moment, Ashton had a realisation. The Gold Water mercenaries might have had their eyes on the same job.

"Maybe we don't need to be so clueless after all." Ashton smiled.

"What do you mean?" Anna asked.

"Well, if we don't know about the artefact, we'll just have to team up with those who do." Ashton replied, "Get ready. A joint operation is in order."

Chapter 428 Frenemies (1)

"This request... Are you sure about it?" Mazton asked Ashton, "I thought after all that happened between the two of you, you'd not work with them no matter the reward."

Ashton knew what Mazton's reaction would have been regarding his request. After all, he saved Ashton from trouble when the Gold Water Mercs tried asserting dominance over him.

"I believe people can change. Whether it's for the worst or the best depends on them." Ashton replied, "But I would like to be optimistic for once and put my faith in them once. That's all."

Mazton knew Ashton well enough by now. Although new in the mercenary world, Ashton wasn't someone who would forgive anyone who tried to boss him around.

After witnessing what the Gold Water Mercs had tried doing to him, there was no way Ashton would act all friendly with them. Yet, he was requesting cooperation with the mercs to reconcile their differences. Bullshit!

Mazton wasn't a fool to fall for Ashton's words. There had to be something going on inside his head. That said, if Ashton wanted to extend an olive branch towards the Gold Water, there was nothing Mazton or the association could do to stop him.

As far as acknowledging the proposal for a joint operation was concerned, the mercenary association couldn't intervene in the matter. They were only allowed to serve as a medium for two factions to discuss their partnership, nothing more.

Whether the factions agreed to work with each other or not was none of the association's concerns. But they were free to express their will if they suspected foul play from one or more parties during the operation, which was what Mazton was doing right now.

Ashton's action against the Gold Water Mercs wasn't going to be an issue. The problem will start if the entire Gold Water Faction decides to strike back. If that happened, even the whole Mercenary Association wouldn't be able to stop them.

That's why he needed to make sure Ashton did not do something that could come back to bite him in the ass later.

"I'll forward your request to the Gold Water folks, but I'd suggest that you don't try to fool around with them." Mazton sternly warned Ashton, "Their leader might not give a shit about his soldiers, but he does care a lot about his reputation. If anything goes wrong, he will stop at nothing to avenge his loss of influence."

"Relax, although it might not mean much coming from my mouth, I have no interest in waging war with them either." Ashton replied with a carefree expression, "I just felt bad for taking all the quests from under their nose, so I wanted to do a good thing for once. Who knows, maybe we'll become sworn allies by the end of the job?"

"For your sake, I hope that's what you truly want." Mazton replied before tossing a card to Ashton, "Lord Testickle's promised ship arrived an hour ago. You can use that card to access the special dock. There, you'll meet Kass, and she'll be your pilot for now."

Ashton was happy about getting his spaceship, but he was surprised to find out Mazton gave him a driver as well. Truth be told, he did not want an unknown person on his ship. But more than that, he understood what Mazton was trying to achieve.

"I'm hurt, sir." Ashton smiled faintly, "I thought you would trust me by now."

"Oh, I trust you." Mazton smiled back, "I trust you enough to do something you'll regret. That's why I'm sending a close associate to help protect you from taking stupid decisions regarding the life of your crew."

"Eh, fine. You can do as you please." Ashton waved his hands and got up to leave, "But do you genuinely think anyone can stop me from doing stupid stuff?"

[Trust me, no one can. I have tried and failed countless times.]

Mazton and Ashton soon parted ways. Unlike Mazton's thoughts, Ashton wouldn't do something even remotely stupid while handling the mercenaries. The plan of action was already in place, and now, he needed to follow through with it.

"Revenge? Who the hell would want to take revenge on someone weaker than them?" On his way to the docks, Ashton mumbled, "What I'm about to do is exploit a bunch of fools."

[Sometimes, I find that smile of yours to be quite intimidating. Are you sure you're not a villain instead?]

,m "Villain or hero, who the fuck cares? But if I wanted to pick a role, I would rather be called an Anti-hero. Those folks enjoy the better of both worlds."

[Can't argue with that- wait a minute! That's your ship?]

"I don't know, but I'd like to think so!"

As Ashton stepped foot in the docks, his mouth was left open. Lord Testickle wasn't lying when he said he'll be handing Ashton one of the best ships in his fleet.

Completely covered in black, the destroyer-class starship was a flying wonder. The ship was similar to Lycaon's Ship in size but was much faster and had better defensive and offensive capabilities.

The ship was laden with not one but two EMP Pulse cannons, which Ashton was yet to see in action, and could carry various missiles onboard. On the sides, the ship also boasted ten autocannons that could shoot down any foe who dared to get close to the vessel.

"Other than the offensive armaments, it's a bit lacking in defence. The shielding isn't as efficient as I would prefer, but I can work on it sooner or later, provided I'm given the necessary resources."

A feminine voice stole Ashton's attention. As he turned around, he noticed an ashen-skinned woman dressed in a jumper. Her orange eyes and pointy ears immediately gave away her identity.

[A Dark elf? She's pretty far from her planet.]

"You must be Kass. Mazton told me about you." Ashton extended his greeting to her, "I'm Reaper."

"Yes, Mazton did mention you were a handful," Kass replied, "Now I can say why he thinks that way. I assume you want to tour your vessel, captain?"

Chapter 429 Frenemies (2)

"This thing is quite... Spacious." Ashton said as Kass showed him around the ship.

"All starships have ample space. But this has all the facilities a person would ever require, let it be business or pleasure." Kass replied.

Judging by her voice, it felt like she had a cold personality. However, whenever Ashton asked about the ship, her character immediately did a 180. Kass had no interest in anything but ships, just like he was obsessed with getting strong every waking moment.

Similarly, Ashton realised if he wanted to know more about Kass, it was best to acknowledge her interest in spaceships and go from there. Even Astaroth approved of her, which was rare, especially because he had no interest in getting to know the people around Ashton except Anna.

[She's pretty bubbly for a dark elf.]

'Is that weird?'



[Of course, it is! Dark elves are known for their hostility towards other races. Not to mention, arrogance runs in their veins like viagra in the Xyrans-]

'Woah, Woah, Woah, Woah! What?'

[We'll talk about it some other time. Let's focus on elves for now. So where was I? Right, arrogance. They are arrogant, but they have the skills and the looks to back it up.]

[Amongst the elves, they are supposedly the most attractive subspecies. But what makes them dangerous is that they know how to use their looks as weapons. Countless kingdoms perished in the pursuit of having close relationships with the nobles amongst the Dark elves.]

'Hm, interesting.'

Ashton got to know a lot about the dark elves through Astaroth. The dark elves never viewed anyone as their equals, not even their kin. This mentality slowly pushed them to form relations with 'inferior' species to ensure the survival of their kind, even if the nobles perished.

On top of all that, they were known never to put their trust in anyone's hands, let alone show motions of love and compassion. Because of these reasons, Astaroth was surprised to see Kass working with Mazton.

"Now for the part that would be most interesting for a mercenary, the stimulation chamber." Kass pointed at an empty glass chamber, "I was surprised to find the latest model had been installed in the ship. Someone might have owed you a lot to give this to you as a gift."

"You can say it was something like that," Ashton politely smiled before turning his attention to the chamber, "Why did you think I would be interested in this... Glass room?"

The look on Kass's face was comparable to an adult's when a child asked them a stupid question. But that expression soon disappeared, and she returned to her usual cold demeanour.

"In simple terms, a simulation chamber is an outrageously expensive training room. It's a privilege to own an outdated model of these money mongers, so you can understand what you see in front is nothing short of a treasure."

[Treasures and bitches, two things worth living for!]

'Yet you didn't get any.'

[...]

Kass continued, "When you enter the chamber for the first time, the AI integrated with the simulator will perform a cerebral scan. Once that's complete, you'll be able to recreate a perfect copy of any friend or foe and fight them.

"But that's not all. You can also enhance their talents to fight them when they are at their true potential. For example, you can spar with someone at rank C, upgrade them and get a feel of how they'll fight if they ever evolved into a rank B or higher rank."

"For obvious reasons, since it's a system-based calculation, there's always room for errors. But you'll be able to get the hang of how an already strong person would be like when they become even stronger."

Kass provided an extensive explanation to the point it felt like she was mansplaining things to a man. Despite all that, Ashton understood what a goldmine he had been given by Lord Testickle.

Although fighting virtual enemies wouldn't help him level up, he would get an invaluable fighting understanding that he lacks. But more importantly, he would be able to find and strike the weakness of strong enemies like Phantom without having to face him again.

[Damn! That's quite an incredible invention!]

'Your people didn't have these?'

[You think if we did, we'd have a hard time fighting against our enemies?]

'So much for being a top-tier civilisation.' Ashton smiled, 'That said, this simulation chamber is invaluable like Kass mentioned.'

Kass could see Ashton's interest towards the Simulation chamber and was about to suggest he have a go at it. But before she could, uninvited guests showed up. At least she thought they were uninvited because Ashton was supposed to be there alone.

"Wow, can you guys see the perks of being spoonfed by the Vice President?" Kern, or Square Face as Ashton called him, showed up with his group, "I would kill to have a ship half decent as this one and an exotic pilot. Just look at that!"

As soon as Kass heard Kern's view about her, she bared her fangs. She was used to being treated by men like she was something to pleasure themselves with, but that didn't mean anyone could disrespect her.

Unexpectedly, Ashton decided to show Kern his place again before she did something stupid.

"Oh, you'd have to do more than kill someone to get a beauty like this. As for girls, you'd have to reconstruct your face to get a shot at sleeping with a pig, Square Face." Ashton fired back, "Back to Business; I assume you got my proposal?"

Ashton's words wiped the smirk off Kern's face. In a momentary lapse of judgement, Kern had forgotten about the deal Ashton offered them. It was regarding the job his mercenary group wanted to take, but unfortunately, Ashton bought the right to the request.

Which meant Ashton was indirectly employing Kern and his squad to work for him. Therefore, angering him was the last thing Kern should do, at least till they accomplished their goal.

"Yes, I did," Kern replied, "We are willing to accept the contract terms. But only till the defence part of the job. The subjugation of wild beasts is not something my team has much experience with, so we'd rather not cause unnecessary problems with the group."

"It's fine by me." Ashton shrugged, "We'll leave tomorrow, so be ready, or we'll leave without you."

"...understood."

#### Chapter 430 Beast Horde Of Occuna (1)

A week later, Ghosts and Gold Water Mercenaries landed on Occuna. The planet, much like Earth, was covered in water, with only 34% of the surface being mapped landmass.

The atmosphere was filled with Oxygen and carbon dioxide along with a similar composition as on Earth. If Ashton hadn't been confident about their location, he would have thought they were back on Earth.

However, they weren't alone, and thousands of mercenaries could be seen no matter which direction Ashton looked.

By the sheer number of mercenaries present, Ashton and company realised it was a much bigger deal than they initially thought. After finding and docking at the provided space, Ashton walked out with his team, followed by Kern and his soldiers.

"I'll stay here." Kass remarked, "Someone needs to look after the ship."

"I'll join you as well," Vulcan remarked and immediately walked back inside with Aegis.

It didn't appear Kass was pleased with Vulcan's sudden announcement, but it wasn't like she owned the ship. If a crew member wanted to stay back, it was Ashton's decision to let them stay, not hers.

When Ashton did not stop Vulcan, Kass made peace with the fact and left for her chamber. That said, she would have preferred to be left in solitude. Vulcan also wished the same, so there would have been a little friction between the two.

"He's still upset?" Anna asked Ashton.

"Seems like it." Ashton shrugged, "Sometimes I get confused whether he's the grown-up or I am."

In the meantime, a welcoming party was already waiting for them there. However, Ashton stopped as soon as he saw humans standing before him, and Anna immediately realised why Occuna looked so similar to Earth.

"It's like a second homeworld to them." She whispered in Ashton's ears.

Ashton nodded but didn't speak a word otherwise. He was once a human, too, so he knew what kind of resentment the Humans carried for the mutants who drove them out of the Earth.

The earthlings didn't know they'd get to meet their long-lost relatives on Occuna; otherwise, Ashton would have been more discreet in his approach.

[What's done is done, focus on the task at hand.]

Unlike Ashton's reservations regarding humans, a light-skinned human walked up to him and warmly greeted them.

"Mr Reaper, we have been eagerly awaiting your arrival." The man said, "It's an honour to meet the one who stopped Phantom."

"You're too kind, Mr?"

"Arno Greaves," The man gave him a short and curt nod, "I'll be serving as your guide for the duration of the visit. If you have anything, feel free to ask me."

They were honoured to meet him? Either they had no control over their expressions or were terrible liars. In either case, it certainly did not feel like Arno's words were True. Although he had done a great job of hiding his genuine emotions, it was apparent the rest did not want mutants on their planet.

Sadly, they did not have the privilege of being selective about whose help they needed. The situation was dire, and they required whatever little help they could get.

"Please follow me. I'll escort you to your quarters," Arno said before leading the way, "Meanwhile, Parva, please take the GW mercenaries to their lodgings as well."

"Consider it done, Captain." A man with the physique of a mountain replied, "Please follow me."

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As Ashton made his way into the fortress city of Zanna, he couldn't help but marvel at the technological advancements of the humans. Although the mutants chased them out of the Earth, the Occunians were far more advanced than those on Earth.

Arno took his sweet time showing Ashton and his group around the city. However, the weapon store was the most impressive thing that caught Ashton's eye.

The weapons being sold there were of decent quality. However, they were still better than the weapons the guards Ashton picked up from Eva.

"You can leave the humans to make weapons, no matter their situation." Ashton said, "It's a quality that I adore."

"With unprecedented attacks from friends and foes alike, can anyone blame us?" Arno immediately replied, "We humans have a saying, 'Always hope for the best, but be prepared for the worst'. Considering most of the problems can be solved by swinging weapons, we'd make necessary tools first and foremost."



Initially, Ashton had planned on asking Vulcan about making weapons for the Ghosts. Still, considering how sulky the Dwarf had been recently and that he had a lot of money, Ashton decided to buy some weapons instead.

However, before Ashton could do that, Arno stopped him. This confused everyone. Selling weapons to an outsider would only bring prosperity to his people, so why was Arno stopping him?

"If you want weapons, you can get them from the army barracks instead." Arno suggested, "Those weapons are of much better quality and have been proven useful against the monstrous horde that's headed our way."

"Fair enough," Ashton mumbled, and they continued their tour.

Even though a guillotine known as the monster horde was hanging over their heads, the city was awfully energetic. People were going on and about their business as usual. But whenever they saw Ashton, all that energy immediately turned into hatred.

Ashton was sympathetic towards them, but their gaze slowly changed his mind. They didn't need to be thankful or anything of that sort towards a mercenary, but they should tone their anger a bit more.

"Just ignore them," Arno remarked, "They have a bad habit of dragging skeletons from the past and act like sore losers."

"You... Are unlike any other human I have met." Anna said with a smile, which made Arno blush. After all, it wasn't every day that a guy got complimented by a succubus.

"Well, there's a reason I was chosen to be your guide." Arno sheepishly mumbled, "My mother was a werewolf, and my dad fell in love with her and then had me. Unfortunately, other werewolves caught on to their affair and killed my mother as my dad fled the Earth with me."

It seemed Arno wanted to talk more about his life but stopped when they reached their destination.

"It seems I'll have to cut our conversation short." He said, "Rest well. The Supreme Commander will address the participants tomorrow morning."