

Zompiewolf 441

Chapter 441 Archive (1)

Ashton had the beasts pinned under the thick foliage of the forest for cover. Sadly, there was only so much the trees could have done, and their safe space was rapidly shrinking. The raining poison was too potent for the trees to withstand the relentless barrage.

Whenever the beasts tried to fall back, Ashton pushed the cloud further in their direction using [Wind Manipulation], causing more devastation over and over. But when all seemed lost, many flying creatures appeared on the horizon and rapidly flew in his direction.

"What are they, kamikaze birds or something?"

[No, they are something that'll ruin your day.]

"What?"

[Have patience and learn something yourself.]

Although a bit taken aback by such suicidal manoeuvre, Ashton wasn't all that worried about them. No matter how large and robust those flying creatures were, they won't stand a chance against [Scorching Rain].

Therefore, it surprised him when they didn't die even after spending minutes under the bloody rain. The birds covered the clouds, giving the beasts a fighting chance without worrying about the rain.

"How the hell are these birds not dying yet?" Ashton cursed out in frustration.

[They have some special coating on themselves which they use to adapt to the harsh environment of Occuna. It seems their coat is resistant to your little concoction. Simply put, no matter how deadly your skill is, it's useless if it can't enter the target's body.]

While he was focused on the birds, the beasts on the ground charged at him. Despite trying to move the clouds away from the birds, Ashton had little success stopping the beasts as the raven-like birds quickly covered any gaps he created.

Ashton was caught in a dilemma. If he focused on the birds, the beasts on the ground would eventually break through the walls. But if focused on the beasts, more and more of them would keep charging in and swarm him. In a flash, all the progress he made was ruined.

'I need to stall them till I get rid of those pesky birds.'

Summoning the Bone goliath had consumed most of the skeletons available, and the Goliath himself wouldn't have been nearly enough to stop the horde for an extended time.

'Time to fight like a necromancer.'

[Translation: you want to fight like a bitch?]

'You're a part of this bitch, so shut the fuck up.'

Although Ashton wasn't particularly fond of summoning an army to fight in his stead, he didn't have a choice in the matter. The support from a few zombies he could call from Valhalla will have to be enough.

But then it clicked him; there was someone who specialised in disrupting a cluster of monsters. Someone he had long since forgotten about.

Almost instantaneously, a portal opened behind him. It wasn't the one leading to [Valhalla] but to the Eastern Palace on Earth. As soon as the portal opened, someone popped their head through it.

"You... Want something?" A surprisingly calm and soothing voice asked him.

"It's nice to meet you too, Ursa." Ashton casually greeted the siren, "I see you found some clothes."

"I thought you didn't like seeing me naked, so I thought I'd wear something." Ursa smiled, "I can take them off if you like?"

"Not now, first get here. I'm in need of your help." Ashton mumbled while cancelling [Heaven's Downfall] skill so he didn't accidentally kill her.

Ursa did as told and immediately realised what was going on, "The horde; you want me to distract them, right?"

Ashton nodded, "But don't worry, you won't be alone."

Saying so, he opened yet another portal, which led to [Valhalla]. However, instead of something coming out, a portion of the undead world itself fell out of the portal, becoming one with the ground below.

Within moments, something weird happened. Countless hands reached out of the portion of [Valhalla], ripping it apart to reveal forty zombies climbing out of there.

Unlike the skeletons, these Zombies weren't as mindless as some other creatures but carried specialised weaponry. Some of them carried swords and battleaxes, while some had a shield twice as large as their bodies. A few even took bows and arrows, and the rest were mages.

All of them bowed before Ashton, eagerly waiting for his command.

"Ensure her safety, that's all. I don't care about anything else." Ashton commanded before flying towards the birds above.

The zombies nodded and assumed a defensive formation with Ursa at the centre. At the same time, Goliath stood in front of them like an impregnable wall.

[Skill: Aggravate has been activated.]

The aerial beasts saw Ashton coming and immediately attacked him. As he neared them, Ashton realised why Scorching Rain did not affect them. Their wings were made of some metal that protected them.

However, their metal wings weren't strictly used for defence, as Ashton realised a moment later.

Hundreds of birds threw themselves at him like javelins. The control they had over themselves was impressive. Even with [Wind Manipulation], Ashton would have struggled to pull off manoeuvres like them.

Sadly for the birds, just because Ashton couldn't match them, it didn't mean he couldn't disrupt them. Instead of using [Wind Manipulation] to move away from them, he used it to pull the birds towards him.

Ashton struck as many of them as he could using [Aggravate], making them bleed uncontrollably.

At the same time, Ursa let out [Siren's Cry], attracting the beasts towards herself. Ashton and Ursa attacked the beasts on two fronts simultaneously, causing an uproar among the beasts.

This sudden attack was Ashton's makeshift plan, and he decided to render it useless when he caught on someone kind of centralised intelligence controlling the beasts.

After all, counter-attacking two different fronts at once would be difficult regardless of how intelligent the one controlling the beasts was.

'It's just the beginning.' Ashton thought, and dove towards the monsters headed towards Ursa.

Enraged birds followed him since he had angered them. Everything happened so quickly that the beasts had no chance of survival.

As they neared the beasts, Ashton retracted his wings and fell to the ground. However, the birds couldn't abruptly stop their momentum. As a result, the birds hit the beasts like bullets from a high-calibre machine gun.

Each bird hit around a dozen of beasts. As a result, thousands of beasts were dead and more were injured. Still, thousands of creatures were alive, and it would have taken hours to kill them all by himself.

Thankfully, Ashton wasn't by himself. After all, no one could have done a better job scavenging than the Wraith wolves.

Another portal opened up, and this time, hundreds of wraith wolves climbed to hunt down the survivors.

[Hm, they have been breeding a lot more than I thought they would. Well, it's a good thing. Now you don't have to worry about them dying often.]

'I'm no Xyran. I care about them as I care about my summons.'

[...you make me regret being a Xyran more than anyone in the universe.]

"What's going on here?" Vimur questioned as soon as Kass landed the ship, "I'm not hallucinating, am I? Beasts are attacking each other, and Reaper is chilling amongst them?"

"They are his pets," Anna replied while patting the nearest Wraith wolf's head, "Don't worry, they won't harm anyone unless Reaper instructs them. Either way, let's make ourselves useful, shall we? Call everyone else for clean up."

"On it!" Ricochet exclaimed and contacted the rest of the mercenaries.

The horde had been dealt with; however, their job was far from over.

Chapter 442 Archive (2)

Within moments, everyone from the mercenaries to Occunians was hard at work. Ashton couldn't kill all of the beasts, but he took care of the majority. Those who survived were too afraid to show up again for a long time. At least, that's what everyone was hoping.

Even in victory, their task was far from over. Just because the beasts had been dealt with didn't mean everything was fine. After all, the one controlling them was still somewhere out there.

As for the beasts that ran away, they didn't flee from fear alone. They were running away in confusion, as if they weren't aware of what had happened moments ago.

As if that wasn't enough, Ashton couldn't brush off the feeling of someone watching them, hidden deep within the foliage of the endless forest. The alarming thing was even with his heightened perception; he couldn't feel anyone's presence in the woods. Whoever it was, they had to be master in becoming one with their surroundings.

[It wouldn't be wise to chase after them just yet.]

'I know. I'm not going to face an unknown enemy unprepared.'

[It's not like your plans live to fruition either way. Just look at what you planned and what happened today.]

'Technically, that was your plan. Feel free to bitch about your failure now.'

[...I liked you better when you had 2 two intelligence points.]

'I liked you more when I didn't know you existed.'

[The burning pain of humiliation aside, that was a good one.]

'Thank you! Been learning it all from you.'

"Reaper, you good?"

Laihud rushed to check him for wounds, only to be left with his mouth hanging wide open. As absurd as it was, there wasn't a single wound anywhere on Ashton's body.

"Yeah, I'm fine, Laihud. Thanks for asking." Ashton replied absentmindedly, finally turning away from the forest, "Tell the others to collect some corpses and leave. I don't think those beasts would appear here anytime soon."

"Wait, you're just gonna let them have it?" Vimur expressed his displeasure over Ashton's decision, "They didn't even do anything!"

"Be that as it may, it won't be fair to withhold them from getting what was agreed on just because I made a decision." Ashton replied, "Everyone would have gotten a chance to fight if I didn't charge at the horde like a war-crazed maniac."

"Still, it's not like they'd have been a lot of help." Anna chimed in, "But it's your decision at the end of the day, and what's next?"

"We need to fulfil Eula's request. But I don't think it'll be that easy." Ashton scratched his chin.

Ashton didn't mention why it would be challenging, but Anna instantly knew what he meant. Since no one had found the artefact till then, it only meant it had been hidden in a remote location or someplace none of them would ever find it.

Blindly going around the planet looking for the artefact would take them decades, if not centuries. Even then, there was no guarantee they'd ever find the staff on their own. They desperately needed clues, and the only ones who could provide some were the humans at Ashton's mercy.

"Vimur, keep a portion of the corpses separate from the rest." Ashton instructed him, "Be sure to throw some rare ones in it as well."

"Oh, you're amassing some for your exclusive use?" Vimur asked, hinting at Ashton's necromancy.

"Nope, you can say... It's for donation purposes."

"Donation? To who?"

"Some grumblers."

"What do we do now?"

Nico's former teammates were busy having a deep discussion amongst themselves. They had hoped the beasts would be able to complete what they failed to do; sadly, that wasn't the case.

Not only did Ashton survive, but the mercenaries also did not suffer enough loss for the army to overwhelm them into submission. As if that wasn't enough, the number of beasts he soloed was more than they had ever killed, even if outside help.

Those corpses were worth an astronomical amount of money. Even having a hundred or so of them should be enough for the city to last for a decade.

"With the cult representatives dead, we can't even contact the cult!" Someone let out in frustration.

"Even if you could contact them, how would you explain their people died?" Yet another blue-haired individual spoke up, "I heard one of the branch leaders has the ability to interrogate the dead. A single fallen cultist is all they'd need to know how we stab them in the back!"

"Enough!" Qalea slammed her fists on the table.

As she gazed around the room, all she saw were a bunch of defeated people struggling to keep their heads in the right place. More importantly, she couldn't believe they still wanted to kill Ashton, even after what they had witnessed.

"A bunch of dancing monkeys! That's what you all look like right now!" She yelled again, "Instead of thinking of ways to ensure our people's survival, you are busy cooking up ways to get revenge? How dull-headed can you possibly be!?"

Qalea's words seem to bring some sense of duty within the people. They were well aware of what was essential and what wasn't.

Still, they were in denial. Denial that their strongest warrior was dead. Denial that a mutant defeated them once again. Denial that they had no leg to stand on anymore.

Without speaking another word, Qalea got up and turned to leave when her subordinates stopped her.

"Don't tell me; you lectured us only to leave?"

"Leave? I would have left this forsaken planet long ago had it not been for my loyalty towards these people," Qalea sternly replied, "Even now, I will do anything to ensure their survival while you wallow in self-pity."

As soon as she said that, Ashton appeared before them like a shadow. The humans immediately jumped back in surprise. Large beads of sweat trickled down their heads from anxiety.

At that moment, they knew Ashton could have shortened their lifeline based on how much of their conversation he had heard.

"I heard you were willing to do anything?" Ashton asked Qalea with a smile, "If that's the case, then I might have a proposal for you."

"What proposal?"

"I assure you, you'll love it."

Chapter 443 Archive (3)

Despite protests from others, Qalea knew better than to argue with Ashton. The reinforcements they had called from the capital would take a couple of days to arrive there, as Kass had shut down the teleportation network a while back.

Those reinforcements were the only chance they had to reestablish order in the city. But till then, they'd have to entertain whatever Ashton deemed fit for them.

"Don't worry. Unlike what you know about mutants, we too, have hearts." Ashton played a sympathy card on her, "I'll ensure the safety of your people till you get back on your feet."

"How very generous of you," Qalea sarcastically replied.

"Sarcasm is not going to help your case in the slightest." Ashton sighed before stopping at the main square, "These are for you."

Qalea looked up and couldn't believe her eyes. Hundreds of relatively intact monster corpses had been neatly arranged in stacks. A few human scientists were already fawning over them like flies. Their excited squeaky voice was all she needed to know the value of the corpses.

She stared at the mound, then at Ashton and then back at the scientists. Dozens of thoughts rushed into Qalea's head at once. Why was Ashton showing her this?

Well, the answer to that was quite obvious. Ashton was dangling a bone in front of the dogs to get something from them. The question was, what could he possibly want from them?

After all, Ashton had already taken control of the city. Anything he wanted from them, he could have taken without any resistance from their side. Apart from that, there was no reason for him to be 'kind' to them all of a sudden.

"Keep at it, and you'll overthink yourself to death." Ashton scoffed, "Sometimes the reason can be much simpler than the absurd theories the brain comes up with."

"You can't expect me to believe you suddenly became our benefactor, can you?" Qalea replied once she got her head back in place, "Especially after what we planned to do to you..."

Ashton sensed a bit of regret in Qalea's voice. Unlike the rest of them, she was genuinely worried about the people and wanted to do anything to help them. Her sensitivity and loyalty were why he chose to strike a deal with her instead of anyone else.

"It is as you said. I shouldn't be generous to you or anyone who decided to mess with us," Ashton calmly said, "that said, I'm not petty enough to punish innocent civilians for the mistakes of a few. Especially since I once was a human too."

"Bullshit." Qalea called him out, "You're no human. Anyone with half a brain cell can determine that much."

"And anyone with a quarter of a brain cell would know the difference between past and present tense. Well, it doesn't matter. I want to enter the archives, and in exchange, you can have these corpses your scientists have been drooling over."

Qalea was taken aback. The existence of the Archive was a well-guarded secret even amongst the Occunians. As the name suggested, the Archive was a record of everything the humans had ever encountered on the strange planet. They started centuries ago and have been maintaining the record ever since.

What worried her the most wasn't how Ashton got to know about the Archive but why he wanted to access it. An outsider like him had no reason to enter a sacred place important to humans.

"I'm afraid no such thing or place exists. I don't know how you got that information, but--"

"Vimur, has everyone received their share?" Ashton unhesitatingly interrupted Qalea.

"Yup. All of it locked and loaded." Vimur replied with a thumbs-up.

"A shame... But I guess there's nothing else to do." Ashton shook his head as he pointed at the corpses in front, "Get someone to burn them all. Since we can't take them with us, we might as well get rid of excess luggage."

"Alright, I'm going to call Bella for help," Vimur mumbled and was about to leave when Qalea jumped to stop him.

The corpses were vital for their survival, and she couldn't allow them to be taken away or, worse, destroyed.

"So much for doing a humane thing!" She blurted out, her eyes red and flaring up from a mixture of emotions.

"That's the problem of showing pity to fools like you," Ashton said while gesturing for Vimur to stop, "you see kindness as weakness and strictness as tyranny. You should be well aware of the situation you are in right now."

Ashton got awkwardly close to Qalea's face before continuing, "This city of yours is nothing more than a warehouse for the mercenaries. The only reason they have been holding back is me.

"The moment I let go of those sickening bastards, the things they'll do to you people... Even satan would have a hard time keeping a straight face. Your compliance is the only thing that can save your people now.

"So either you do as I say, or this city of yours will be left in dust before the reinforcements you are so depended on ever get a chance to fire a bullet at us."

Ashton's warning rang inside Qalea's head for a long time. She didn't know how, but she could tell Ashton wasn't joking. If she failed to appease him, everything Nico had worked for would be useless.

There was hope before. Just a tiny flicker against the wind. But not anymore. If Ashton was already aware of the reinforcements coming, there were of no use anymore.

A surprise attack was the only thing that could have stopped Ashton, but with the element of surprise lost, there was nothing they could do to defeat the mercenaries.

"I can't decide by myself." Qalea's hostile tone was nowhere to be heard now, "The rest of the council has to agree to it as well."

"Then I believe you'll do a great job convincing them." Ashton smiled reassuringly, "Off you go now, and remember, time is ticking."

Chapter 444 A Quest Like No Other

The next day...

Rain on Occuna wasn't anything like on earth. The winds were less violent, but the icy-cold raindrops felt like miniature daggers, ready to skin a person alive.

To make things worse, the raindrops were known to move horizontally instead of vertically, making it more difficult to trace the path ahead. The way through the forest was muddied, forcing everyone to move at a snail's speed.

Thankfully, since Ashton and Anna both shared an affinity towards the fire, the coldness of the weather had little to no effect on them. As for the sharp raindrops, they had borrowed special armour from Qalea to protect themselves.

Ashton and Anna were the only ones who entered the forest to look for the artefact. He had a plethora of reasons for not allowing the rest to follow them.

The most important one was to fulfil Eula's request and add a new weapon to his arsenal. Since Eula was adamant about not letting anyone else know about the artefact, Ashton decided it would be best to travel in a pair.

Also, travelling in a large group under those weather conditions would have further slowed their speed, and time was something Ashton couldn't afford to lose.

As for the rest, Vimur and Laihud were watching the city in Ashton's absence. Their main job was to stop reinforcements from breaching the city until they returned with the artefact.

Gold Water mercenaries were also helping them, but Ashton knew it was only a front for them. It only took an hour before a handful of them left the city, and they have been on their trail ever since.

Ashton paid no heed to their presence because if he wanted, he could have erased his presence in a moment. If worse came to worse, there were other ways of handling them as well.

Killing them wasn't off the book either. After all, framing the beasts for attacking them wouldn't take much convincing to make everyone believe him.

Also, since Ashton had instructed them to stay in the city, they were neglecting his orders by following him, so their death was none of his concern and wouldn't cause any immediate problems for him.

That said, Ashton had ulterior motives for allowing them to follow him. Half a dozen rank C mercenaries were more exceptional meatshields. In a twisted way, the mercenaries could be thought of as alarms to notify them of an attack. Obviously, Anna knew all about it.

"Not to doubt you or anything, but how can you be so sure this is the place where the staff is hidden?" Anna questioned Ashton as they took refuge in a small cave to catch her breath.

"I'm not sure, but I feel this has to be the place. The archive clearly stated that whatever's in the cave is the reason the beasts act weirdly." Ashton mumbled while staring at Seraph's crystal in his hand.

--While Ashton went through the archive earlier, Astaroth shared some interesting information. Apparently, Seraph's crystal was something of a Precursor artefact itself, given to him by the Precursors themselves.

If it was true, then it was clear these artefacts were doing something to make these creatures go wild.

Ashton's deductions were based on the Gorillan cave where he found the crystal, as it was a likely example of the case. The creatures living in that forest back on earth were also behaving strangely until Ashton took control of the crystal. Just like the creatures of Occuna were behaving strangely.

However, at the end of the day, it was just a theory. A likely one, but a theory nonetheless. But it was the only hint Ashton could find about the Staff's existence in the archives.

"Well, there's nothing to lose at this point," Anna said as she stepped out of her rain protective armour, "But I can't say i'm not surprised at their sudden obedience. It almost feels like the humans were happy to send us off."

"Of course, they were." Ashton shrugged, "There's a reason why not much is known about the cave despite the humans living on the planet for centuries."

Within the archives, the black cave was referred to as the Cave of Death. The reason being no human being to went inside the cave ever returned, and out of the 99 expeditions sent to uncover the truth about the cave, all ended in disaster.

Moreover, since no technology seems to work within the cave, they couldn't even send a robot to do the work without sacrificing manpower. In the end, humans decided to give up on the cave altogether and focus on more important things.

That was the reason why Qalea and the council were so eager for them to leave. In their eyes, they were getting rid of Ashton for free, and in his absence, it would be easy to handle the rest of his faction.

Little did they know Ashton had left Sven and Dolos to protect his people while he was gone. If they foolishly attacked anyone they shouldn't have, his summons would ruin the entire city.

After a couple of minutes, they were ready to explore the cave. The inside of the cave resembled the boundary between day and night. Despite the outside being fairly lit, the insides were completely dark.

Other than the periodic sound of dripping water, the entire place was shrouded in eerie silence. It wasn't the first time either Anna or Ashton had encountered a place right out of a horror movie. But even then, it was quite an unnerving experience.

With a snap of his fingers, Ashton created a small orb of fire to light their way as their flashlights weren't working. Even the glowsticks they brought were proving to be useless against the endless darkness of the cave.

"It's quiet, too quiet even." Anna mentioned, "Didn't the humans mention howling sounds and whatnot? But this place is as quiet as the queen's funeral march."

Ashton had noticed something similar, but before he could reply, the entire cave was filled with a putrid smell. A smell both of them were oddly familiar with.

"Undead!" They simultaneously exclaimed and got ready to fight.

Flames began circling both their fists. Anna's hair turned red as if lava was flowing through them. Without wasting another moment, she hurled a fireball ahead of them, hoping to hit something. But what they saw next left both of them shocked.

Everything ahead of them, from the floor to the ceiling, was made up of rotten flesh. The yellowish-black mass in front would make even the strongest men empty their bowels right then and there.

"I guess now we know why it was so quiet inside the cave all of a sudden," Ashton mumbled, "as much as I don't want to say it, it seems the cave is a sentient being."

"What makes you say that?"

"Honestly, it's just a hunch."

"Of course, it is." Anna sighed, "You know, as much as I love you, I hate it when you voice your so-called hunches."

[I know that feeling.]

'What, you love me too?'

[...I agreed with the latter half of Anna's statement. I have no interest in you, of all people.]

'Apart from your bullshit, do you know anything about this?'

[Can't say I do. As far as I'm aware, even the Xyrans have no records of encountering anything like this.]

That wasn't what Ashton was expecting to receive as an answer. But seeing as he didn't have any other way, he decided to summon a bunch of skeletons and have them lead the way to see what would happen.

But it seemed it wasn't going to be so easy as a notification appeared as soon as Ashton tried using [Valhalla].

—

A Domain of the dead already exists in the vicinity. Unless the field is deactivated or the caster is killed, the skill [Valhalla] can't be used.

Upon defeating the owner of the domain, the user can integrate [Valhalla] with the existing domain to establish control over the dungeon.

An emergency mission has been issued!

[Objective]: Clear the dungeon.

[Task]:

Phase one: Hunt down all undead beings inside the dungeon to weaken the boss.

Phase two: Once the creatures have been dealt with, the boss would reveal itself. Get rid of the boss.

(Undead creatures receive a 20% stat bonus inside the dungeon.)

[Progress]:

Phase one:

> Undead Critters killed: 0/400. (Killing each undead weakens the boss by 0.1%)

> Undead Wraiths killed: 0/20 (Killing each undead weakens the boss by 1%)

> Undead Generals killed: 0/4. (Killing each undead weakens the boss by 10%)

Phase two: Boss killed: 0/1.

[Reward]: Random increase in stats (Total points: 100), Grim Reaper's gauntlets, Special summoning skill scroll, Evolution of Necromancer class.

[Mission Commissioned by]: The System.

[Priority Level]: 1 (The host cannot ignore the mission. The dungeon's exit will remain sealed until and unless the mission is completed.)

—

Anna received the same notification as well. Like any normal person in her shoes, she was a bit worried. However, Ashton's confident smile quelled her tension away.

"It's annoying that I can't summon friendlies here, but a 20% stat increase doesn't seem bad at all."

Chapter 445 The Art Of Necromancy (1)

Unaware of the danger Ashton had thrown himself into, Vulcan was busy mending and crafting weapons on the ship while playing with Aegis. Staying true to his words, he wasn't going to aid Ashton in any way.

After all, the staff was a dangerous artefact that should remain hidden, especially now when corrupted minds were abundant in the galaxy.

Vulcan wasn't judging Ashton, but there was the risk of him losing the staff of Eden to someone whose goal could be destruction on a scale unforeseen by anyone.

Not to mention, the trial to obtain the staff would take a lot of work. The precursors would have made sure of it. But then again, it wasn't the first time Ashton had defied the odds and overcome trial, which no one would dare to attempt, let alone survive.

"Am I in the wrong?"

That single thought shook his resolve. Not helping Ashton was one thing, and letting him die was another. Vulcan couldn't let Ashton die as he was the only one who could end Xyran's tyrannical rule over the galaxy.

Suddenly, Vulcan was reminded of a conversation he and Ashton shared as they made their way back to Kernel tower after defeating Phantom.

They had been discussing Xyrans and their society to understand them better. After all, outsmarting someone was impossible unless someone knew about them like the back of their hand.

"And you think you have a solution?" When Ashton mentioned defeating the Xyran council, Vulcan smirked, "You, who couldn't even take care of this Phantom person, want to take on the Xyrans by himself? Kid, defeating a battle-hardened Xyran would be much more difficult than you think."

"I did defeat one of them, though." Ashton confidently replied.

"A general, even then you almost got killed in the process." Vulcan slapped Ashton on the back of his head, "You don't plan on having near-death experiences with every Xyran you encounter, do you?"

Ashton remained quiet as Vulcan continued, "In case you're unaware, let me enlighten you. Beelzebub, the Xyran you are so proud of defeating, is the weakest member of the council.

"Under normal circumstances, someone like him wouldn't even qualify to join the council as an attendant, let alone a member. However, he did so through marriage. Apart from him, the rest of the council consists of S-grade beings, whom even I would not want to face in a fair fight."

Ashton's silence grew louder when Vulcan finished spewing facts at him. Defeating Beelzebub knocked the winds out of his lungs. Even then, Beelzebub's carelessness and arrogance were the only reason he managed to take him down.

That's why, even though Ashton had gotten a lot stronger than before, in the end, his current strength wasn't nearly enough to handle the Xyrans. His fight with Phantom only solidified his weakness.

"I admit our current situation is bad," Ashton finally replied, "But it's not like we're heading out to fight them tomorrow. The way I see it, they're the ones at a disadvantage. We know who our enemy is, but they don't, and they won't.

"We strike them first and strike them hard. So hard they'd have a hard time standing up, let alone fight back. It won't be easy, but in time we'll emerge victorious. For now, there's only one thing to do, gather resources and ensure not to arouse any unwarranted suspicion."

Ashton's words were full of confidence; even Vulcan couldn't help but imagine what it would feel like to defeat the undefeatable. However, at that moment, that's all it was... A thought, nothing more.

"Even decades' worth of preparation won't be enough to fight them."

Vulcan maintained his defeatist attitude, which was not surprising after everything he had witnessed during the Precursor-Xyran war. If the Xyrans could defeat a godlike species, then what could a band of baboons possibly do to them?

"Thanks to their superiority complex, Xyrans have wronged way too many people and civilisations. Potential allies lay in every corner of the galaxy. Once the war breaks out, we'll have an army waiting to join us." Ashton shrugged before laughing, "But if you're going to keep bitching like a baby, then it would be best for you to stay behind."

Back to the present...

Vulcan sighed as Aegis' squeaky voice pulled him out of memory lane. The little creature seemed worried about something as he snarled and ran around the room like he was intoxicated.

The next moment, there was a series of distant explosions. The shockwaves formed by the blast were enough to shake the ground violently. Something weird was happening somewhere in the forest.

"What is that brat up to now!?"

—

You have slain multiple enemies.

[Progress]:

Phase one:

> Undead Critters killed: 231/400. (Killing each undead weakens the boss by 0.1%)

> Undead Wraiths killed: 3/20 (Killing each undead weakens the boss by 1%)

> Undead Generals killed: 0/4. (Killing each undead weakens the boss by 10%)

Phase two: Boss killed: 0/1.

—

"This is going to take a while," Anna mumbled, her fists still ablaze from the explosion she had caused.

An undead dungeon was the best place for a pyromancer like her to show the extent of her abilities, as the undead were weak to fire. In fact, it was the only element that could fatally injure them.

Even then, she was barely able to keep the undead in check. The insect-like critters were incredibly annoying as they kept on resurrecting the undead. The only way to ensure they couldn't raise the dead again was to thoroughly burn every corpse Anna and Ashton came across. Hence, the explosion.

It had been a while since Ashton disappeared, saying he had something to take care of. While he was yet to return, it was Anna's job to ensure no critter made it past her. She didn't know why, but Ashton mentioned it was vital.

"If he doesn't return soon, I'm gonna suck a lot more than just blood from him!" Anna yelled and continued blasting the critters.

Just then, she heard footsteps behind her, the same place Ashton had disappeared. The only issue was that hundreds of them proceeded in her direction instead of one.

She turned around, only to be greeted by hundreds of skeletons who promptly rushed past her and attacked the undead.

"What is going on here?" She mumbled.

"Just one of the many tricks I have up my sleeve," Ashton replied, "A trick called [Corpse Parade] to be precise."

"I thought you couldn't summon skeletons in here?"

"I didn't. I just greeted new ones from scratch."

Anna didn't fully understand him, but as long as they had allies to depend on, she wasn't complaining.

"Let's clean this sewer of a dungeon," Ashton winked at her before jumping into battle.

Chapter 446 The Art Of Necromancy (2)

Causing explosions left and right might have been the obvious method for killing the critters, but it wasn't the wisest. Anna's actions had given their location away to everyone following them.

Kern's men were one of them. Ashton had disappeared into the dungeon before they had a chance to know the cave's location.

But thanks to the explosion, the Gold Water mercs found their way to the cave. After that, it was only a matter of time before they got the same notification as Ashton and Anna.

"We can't exit the cave now?" Luno, Kern's newest recruit, panicked hard.

"There are more important things to worry about than that," Grimm, the team leader, calmly explained, "See whether we can contact the commander from here or not. If a connection establishes, request immediate backup. If we fail, I can't have that werewolf and succubus running out of here."

"On it," Another soldier replied before fiddling with the radio.

The radio packed quite a punch. So much so that one could easily have interplanetary contact with someone stationed on a nearby planet or satellite. That's why it came as a surprise to everyone when the radio malfunctioned inside the dungeon.

Deep furrows on Grimm's forehead were a clear sign of his annoyance. Just like Luno, the entire team consisted of newly recruited members. That's why they wanted to take this opportunity to prove their loyalty and worthiness to the Gold Water. But it didn't appear their task would be a smooth sailing one.

Belonging to the Tardigrodes species, they were nomads who lost their homeworld to natural causes and have lived as refugees on other worlds and as integrated members of various alien societies ever since.

However, most of them were treated as outsiders, and that's why they had people-pleasing tendencies ingrained in their behaviour. Tardigrodian mercenaries were no exception. Their will to force themselves to go to extraordinary lengths to accomplish their task was one reason Kern hired them.

"Listen up," Grimm exclaimed while grabbing the rest of the team with an arm each, "The situation seems dire. Handling the undead should be easy as Reaper and his girl would take care of them."

"I-isn't it wrong to let others do our work-" Tosti, the youngest in the group, interjected.

Tardigrodes were hard workers and didn't appreciate anyone taking their work away. That's why they were surprised when Grimm mentioned letting their enemies do the work for them.

Slap!

"Don't open your mouth until I say so!" Grimm retorted, "As I was saying, we'll let them do the heavy lifting for us. Fighting against the undead should tire them out enough. Once that happens, we'll sweep in to claim the staff for ourselves. Anyone has any doubts?"

Luno was the first to nod. Although confused like the rest about 'skipping work', he knew better than to voice his thoughts.

"Jenko, you stay here. As soon as the barriers lift, you will contact Commander Kern and inform him about the situation." Grimm handed everyone their orders, "The rest of us will head deeper into the dungeon and try to steal the staff. We anyone is scared, they can stay back."

As he said so, he waited for anyone to say something, but no one did. His men were braver than Grimm thought. Either that or they were fools who would believe anything he said.

To them, it would appear Grimm trusts them, and that's why he was taking them deeper into the cave with him. But their thinking was flawed and far from reality. Instead of trusting them, Grimm was planning on using them as meatshields when the time arrived.

'Without proper equipment, these idiots are the only ones who can save me from the undead.' Grimm thought as they headed inside the cave.

Amongst the team, Grimm was the only one who had some experience fighting against the undead. The rest were teenagers who wanted to make a name for themselves.

That said, they would do anything Grimm told him to without blinking twice. In other words, Grimm was planning on taking advantage of their blind trust in him.

"Let's go!"

In the meantime, Ashton and Anna were slowly progressing through the dungeon. Handling the wraiths wasn't challenging; in Anna's words, they were weaker than the critters.

Ashton knew it wasn't true. Critters were weak creatures, there was no denying that, but the only reason it seemed the wraiths were easier to deal with was that it wasn't their first time fighting against them.

Earth was abundant with wraiths and similar creatures, and hence both had enough experience dealing with them.

However, Ashton could no longer control the undead as the duration of [Corpse Parade] skill was up. Now they will have to face the Undead generals and the dungeon boss without help.

"Should we head inside?" Anna asked.

Ashton stared at the rusty doors in front of them. Behind one door stood the generals, the second last hurdle to obtaining the staff. Dealing with the generals would weaken the boss to the max.

The only issue was there were two doors in front of them. One led to the generals while the other to the boss, and they didn't know which was which.

Ashton tried to cheat his way using his [Perception], but that was a bust as the material of doors stopped him. In other words, they were blind. Opening the wrong door could be catastrophic, but it was a risk they had to take.

"I have a plan," Ashton mumbled as he walked up to the adjacent door, "it'd either mess everything up or save us some trouble."

"You're not planning to do what I think you're planning to do, are you?"

"I'm going to open this door. If the boss comes out of here, open your door." Ashton explained his master plan, "Either the generals would attack the boss or vice-versa, or the five of them would give us the gangbang no one asked for."

"That's the most ridiculous plan I have ever heard of!"

"It is what it is." Ashton shrugged, "As a wise man once said, if you lose, blame it on the RNG."

"... Sometimes, I hate that I love you." Anna smiled and took her position, "I'm ready."

Both of them took a deep breath as Ashton pushed his door open, "I should have known my luck. Anna... open the door!"

Chapter 447 The Art Of Necromancy (3)

Ashton stared at the boss across the opening in front of the room. Soon enough, the Undead Generals also began pulling out of the next room.

The boss resembled a humanoid like Goliath, but the human part of the humanoid was long ago. Instead, what Ashton saw was a walking chunk of flesh and bone consisting of hundreds of individuals who were sent to explore the cave before them.

As for the generals, they were pretty simpler to the shadow soldiers Ashton raised from death now and then. The resemblance between the two was too much to be a coincidence.

Someone had left these soldiers behind to protect the treasure from getting into the wrong hands. It was probably a Precursor's curse that took such a horrifying face.

All five were at least ten feet tall giants, looking down on their prey until their eyes met. Ashton thought he was seeing things for a moment, but the dungeon boss smiled at the generals as if he was reuniting with long-lost friends.

At that moment, Anna realised they fucked up big time, and Ashton's expression told a similar story. The entire point of simultaneously opening the doors was to allow the generals and the boss to wear each other out, and then the two of them would take down whoever was left standing.

However, if the monsters were going to act all buddy-buddy, then their plan was pretty much busted. The best they could do now was for one to stall the boss till the other got rid of the generals. Once the boss was weaker, they'd strike him down together.

The only question was, who would become the bait?

Ashton was faster, had [Perception] and [Battle Tactics]. Ideally, he could predict and dodge the boss' attacks. But on the other hand, Anna was suffering from mana exhaustion after causing so many explosions and couldn't kill the generals by herself.

Since mana exhaustion also affects physical abilities, letting Anna stall the boss wasn't a viable option either. Not that Anna would make any excuse to back out of facing the boss if Ashton asked her.

Just like that, the couple was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

[There is one thing you could do.]

'I'm not gonna use a skill if I'm not certain about its effects.'

Ashton immediately understood what Astaroth was suggesting to him. Hell summon was a skill he earned along with Seraph's crystal but had never used because the skill itself was an unpredictable one.

The skill description was very vague, and all it mentioned was that it could call a creature from the depths of hell to the world of the living if the user wished it so.

However, if the summoned beast were at a higher level than the user, they would gain their freedom and cause havoc everywhere. Using [Hell Summoning], he could effectively worsen their lousy situation.

Going all out against the beast wave didn't seem a good decision anymore. Thanks to that battle, most of Ashton's deadly skills were currently on cooldown.

With a quick movement, the boss jumped behind the generals. Simultaneously, the four undead generals drew their swords, pointing towards Ashton.

"Oh, the successor of the Grim reaper," They simultaneously spoke, "Prove your worth or let your blood be the sheath to our blades!"

"What kind of drama have they been wasting their time on?" Even in the face of danger, Ashton's sarcasm was on point.

Even though having the generals focused on him was bad news, Ashton was relieved that Anna wasn't on their radar.

Instead of idling around and wasting time, Ashton immediately drew Balmond and got ready to take them on as the generals lunged at him.

In one fluid motion, Ashton crouched, and their attacks whizzed past his head. Ages of inaction had slowed their movement, which was perfect for Ashton.

Enraged, the generals struck again. Their lifeless eyes turned red inside the helm. Despite increasing the power, the result remained the same. But they didn't stop.

Slowly but surely, their attacks were becoming more coordinated and fast. It was progressively turning difficult for Ashton to keep up with their ever-changing attack patterns.

Even Anna could see with every attack, Ashton was being pushed back. It was almost as if the undead were adapting to his moves and simultaneously coming up with plans to counter him.

'I need to help him!' She cursed her uselessness at such a crucial time.

But alas, there was nothing she could do. Without mana, she was no different than a powerless human. Just then, she turned towards the dungeon boss; surprisingly, his eyes were glowing like the generals.

Suddenly, it all made sense. The reason the undead generals were getting better with every passing moment wasn't their strength or abilities. Instead, they were simply puppets being controlled by the puppeteer, the dungeon boss.

'I must take him down or sever the connection between him and the generals.' Anna thought to herself and slowly walked to the boss' blind spot.

She might not have any mana, but she had years of training as a werewolf. That should be enough to rip out the bastard's eye, at the very least.

However, the boss waved her into silence before she had the chance to do anything.

"This is a trial for the successor. No interference shall be tolerated henceforward, and refusing to cooperate would lead to instant execution of the troublemakers." The boss spoke as the ground froze her into place, "Insignificant beings like yourself are only allowed to spectate from a distance. Nothing more."

"W-Who are you?"

Anna could help but blurt out. However, the boss ignored her existence and continued guiding the generals in their fight.

The generals once again struck Ashton. But this time, he didn't back down or try to dodge. Balmond slipped out of his hands as Ashton leapt to deliver a debilitating blow to one of the general's necks, nearly severing it apart.

"Blows like those wouldn't be sufficient to pass the trial-" The boss spoke up again but was interrupted by Ashton.

"Watch and learn," Ashton smirked.

Almost instantly, Balmond flew over to the general Ashton had hit and finished the job in one strike.

The general's head flew over to the boss' feet as the glow in its eyes disappeared. Once done, Balmond immediately took his place beside Ashton, floating in mid-air.

"A Soul Blade... It's been long since I have seen one." The boss mumbled, "You have me impressed. Take pride in astonishing the arch lich who served under the first necromancer, the great Grim Reaper!"

The room's appearance changed into that of an arena in an instant. Anna was nowhere to be seen in that stony arena. Ashton and the generals were the only ones facing each other.

'Teleportation magic?'

[I don't think so. Look up.]

Ashton did that, and the Arch lich stood looking over them, with Anna frozen on his side.

"Let the trial begin!"

Chapter 448 The Art Of Necromancy (4)

The empty stalls of the mausoleum were filled with skeletons cheering on for a fight. Had it not been for the innumerable lanterns hanging around, it would have been impossible to see in the pitch-black darkness, let alone fight in it.

[I assume you are not getting paid for this performance.]

Ashton didn't bother replying. At the moment, he was solely concerned about Anna's well-being.

"Fret not, mortal," The Lich exclaimed as he noticed Ashton's lingering gaze, "Your companion is safe and sound within the shell of ice. I have, but only immobilised her. She remains conscious; however, her life is in your hands."

He continued, "Defeat my loyal subjects to complete the trial, and she shall live, fail, and she shall perish. The outcome is in your hands, not mine. I urge you to tread carefully, or else be prepared to taste pain that no resistance can protect you from."

"You better keep your word," Ashton replied before turning to face the generals.

In a surprising turn of events, two generals stepped back, leaving Ashton to face their leader. Whether it was for the sake of fairness or out of foolishness was up for debate. But one thing was as clear as the skies above, Ashton did not care about their righteous behaviour.

—

You have begun a new chain quest!

[Objective]: Complete the second phase of the trial.

[Task]: Take down Arch Lich's summoned undead soldiers.

[Progress]: 1/11 Lich's soldiers killed.

[Reward]: None.

[Punishment For Failure]: User Anna's death

[Mission Commissioned by]: System

[Priority Level]: 1 (The host cannot ignore the mission, nor delayed)

—

Variables were one thing Ashton had come to hate with all his being. Earlier, he only had to take care of the generals and the Lich, that's all. But thanks to the moronic system, he would not have to kill not four but ten more soldiers.

'Getting upset over it isn't gonna save Anna,' Ashton thought while curling up his fingers to fight.

The general, wanting to match his opponent, also gave up on his weapon. However, it was a fatal mistake on the General's part. Just because Ashton was using his fists, it didn't mean he won't use his sword.

Being the owner of the soul blade, Ashton wasn't required to physically hold Balmond in order to use it. His thoughts were more than enough to control the blade.

Massive claws popped out as Ashton rushed towards his undead opponent. The General's fist met him halfway, but a moment before they could collide, Balmond jumped out of Ashton's inventory and slashed the General's hand in half.

Ashton immediately changed his stance and buried his claws deep within the General's helm. Rotten blood gushed out of the dark helm, covering Ashton's hand.

However, the soldier was unaffected by the cheapshot and struck Ashton with his remaining arm. Balmond once again tried to interfere but was knocked away.

Ashton was flung away, leaving a trail of dust behind him. Although he had managed to block the strike, he wasn't unscathed, as his left forearm was cracked.

The General charged again, and Ashton barely dodged his massive fist. Or so he made it seem. The moment the undead thought he had the match in his bag, Ashton kicked his knee, shattering it.

As soon as that was done, he leapt onto the bastard's back and slid his arm around the undead's neck. The undead flailed his arm's around but couldn't get Ashton off his back.

The vice grip slowly got tighter and tighter around the General's neck. Until the moment Ashton ripped his head off with his brute strength.

An instant later, the undead fell to his knees and momentarily stared at Ashton before turning to dust.

The skeletal spectators loudly booed. The General wanted a fair fight, but Ashton used a weapon instead. In their eyes, Ashton had cheated in a fair fight.

[Progress]: 2/11 Lich's soldiers killed.

On the other hand, Ashton paid no attention to them and prepared for the next challenger. However, none of the remaining two generals stepped forward. At the same time, the crowd stopped booing.

Surprised by the sudden change in the environment, Ashton turned his attention towards the Lich, who had raised a hand, signalling everyone to stop. Once everyone was quiet, the Lich turned his focus toward Ashton.

"Explain."

"What?" Ashton replied.

"The involvement of your weapon against an unarmed opponent was immoral," The Lich clarified his question, "Explain your stance and based on that, I will decide your punishment."

"This is a war. Everything is a fair game-"

"This is a trial, not a war, for you to show off your deplorable underhanded tactics." The Lich interrupted, "Were you in control of your blade, yes or no?"

"I wasn't." Ashton replied, thinking if he said so, the Lich wouldn't be able to 'punish' him as the blade had a mind of its own.

"Very well then, hand it over." The Lich smiled, "I'll keep the blade with me since you can't control it."

Checkmate.

Neither Ashton nor Astaroth had not expected the Lich's next move. Having said that Balmond had a will of his own, Ashton could no longer command him to leave his side.

If he did, it would show that Balmond was under his command all along, hence prompting the punishment. However, before Ashton could do anything, the Lich began giggling.

"How a fool like you became a necromancer is a mystery worth solving," The Lich smiled, "I already know what a soul blade is, mortal. Hence, i'm well aware you were controlling the blade all along.

"Had you been honest with me, I would have let you off easily, but now your punishment would be considerably severe."

The Lich snapped his fingers, and a part of Anna's Icy coffin melted instantly.

"What do you think you're doing!?" Ashton yelled at the top of his lungs.

"Executing justice," Lich replied, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth and an arm for an arm."

The Lich summoned a skeleton to hold Anna's arm as he prepared to sever it. However, at the last moment, someone kicked the skeleton away while, at the same time, a dagger was lodged into his chest.

"What sorcery is this?" Lich yelled, baffled by what he saw in front of him.

Surrounding Anna's coffin were Ashton's undead. Raven was the one who had struck the Lich, while Dolos, Celeste and Sven were protecting Anna.

But that wasn't all. Atlas and Gokung had taken care of the undead generals.

"Sorcery? It's the art of necromancy. You should know it, right?" Ashton smiled.

Chapter 449 Lich No More (1)

"Sorcery? It's the art of necromancy. You should know it, right?" Ashton smiled.

As soon as he said that, the Lich realised his mistake. By teleporting Ashton to the arena, he had essentially lifted the constraints according to which Ashton couldn't use [Valhalla], as the restriction was only valid within the cave and not the arena.

"How long had you planned this!?" The Lich screamed, utterly baffled at the turn of events.

"Pretty much since we got here." Ashton replied before flying over to the Lich, "Could you remind me what you said a few moments ago? Something about an arm for an arm."

The Lich threw Raven's dagger away and retreated towards the stony arena where Atlas and Gokung had killed his remaining generals.

[Progress]: 4/11 Lich's soldiers killed.

A notification soon verified the result of their efforts. However, the Lich wasn't fazed anymore.

"Keep him busy," Ashton instructed his summons before turning to help Anna out of her icy coffin.

"As you wish," Sven spoke on their behalf, and within moments, the undead had surrounded the Lich.

"Don't waste your efforts, mortal." The Lich laughed maniacally, "The ice won't melt, nor would your beloved awaken till you complete the trial."

The situation unfolded, as the Lich said. No amount of hellfire could melt the smallest piece of ice on Anna's body. Ashton had been calm and collected since the trial began, but now he had started showing signs of frustration and anger.

"Hold on a little while longer," He mumbled with a smile before heading back down to the arena.

"You confuse me, mortal." The Lich spoke as soon as Ashton appeared before him, "You have no grasp on the power asleep within you. Your fate was written before you even existed, yet you desperately cling to your weakness."

The Lich pointed at Anna before continuing, "Involving yourself with those creatures will do you no good. You must let go of any feelings you may have towards other mortals before you gain immortality-"

"Great, another incel." Ashton cracked his neck, "Why don't you bring out the rest of your pipsqueak army so I can burn some steam instead?"

The Lich didn't bother replying, but it was clear Ashton's words had some effect on him. Suddenly, a black staff materialised in Lich's hands. At the same time, the skeleton's around the arena transformed into a variety of soldiers.

From spearmen to mages, every unit ever used in a battle was present there. But that wasn't all; seven portals simultaneously opened behind him. What happened next surprised Ashton even more.

"Why am I not surprised?"

Out of the first five portals, doppelgangers of his summons appeared, while the last portal remained sealed.

"What will you do now?" Lich snarled.

In Lich's experience, people always struggled to win against doppelgangers of themselves or their allies. Not only was the task excruciating physically, but it could also deal massive mental trauma.

Lich expected Ashton to be baffled and admit defeat. However, he had not expected what would happen next.

"That's the best move you got to test me?" Ashton laughed, as did his summons, "You're kidding, right?"

Unbeknownst to Lich, Ashton's summons had spent countless hours fighting in [Valhalla]. That said, they were well aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses and could exploit them at any moment.

Making them face each other was the stupidest decision the Lich could have made, and Ashton waited no time before getting his point through to the Lich.

"No wonder your so-called Grim Reaper is nowhere to be found. With idiots like you as his subordinates, the man must have suffered serious brain damage and died!"

The Lich had had enough of Ashton's nonsense. The mortal was one of the succession candidates. That's why he wasn't planning on killing him, as his master had mandated him only to test the candidate, not to kill them.

However, by insulting the Grim Reaper, the boy had crossed a line he shouldn't have. Even death wasn't suitable punishment for him.

The Reaper's eyes began to glow wildly, and the remaining portal was opened. Out of which walked an undead dragon, Lich's most prized possession.

"Your death won't be a pleasant one, you arrogant bastard!"

The Lich roared at the top of his lungs. A moment later, the army of undead charged at Ashton and his summons.

Ashton and his summons quickly managed to dispatch their doppelgangers and the skeletons. However, the dragon was a different deal altogether.

No matter how much Ashton or his summons tried, they couldn't put a single dent in the dragon's bodies. Not only that, Lich was continuously casting curses at them. The longer they fought, the slimmer Ashton's chances of winning got until they became non-existent.

First Gokung, then Sven and Raven, followed by Celeste and Dolos and finally Atlas. All of his summons were granted eternal sleep. Ashton wasn't in great shape, either.

Ashton summoned whatever strength was left in his body and lunged to deal with the dragon. But with a flick of its bony tail, the dragon snapped Balmond in half.

"Defeat... what does it taste like, m-o-r-t-a-l?" The Lich laughed while standing on the dragon's back, "Where has all your confidence disappeared? Do you have no more cocky comebacks?"

Ashton pursed his lips as he punched the ground. He had been defeated. With his sword and summons gone, he could do nothing to defeat the dragon or even a random undead soldier, for that matter. This was it. Death had arrived for him... at last.

The Lich kept barking at him, but in his last moments, he averted his gaze to take a last look at his beloved. Unlike him, Anna's face was calm in her slumber.

Anna's calmness had a strange effect on him. Suddenly, all the urge to fight back was gone. He didn't want to struggle in his last moments, as peace was the only thing on his mind.

"Die!" Lich roared as the dragon ripped Ashton's head off his body, "I won! No one is more capable of being master's successor than me!"

It was rare for a Lich to feel anything positive. But he was oddly happy. Moments later, the realisation dawned upon him.

"Finally caught up to it, eh?"

Lich looked up to see Ashton's smiling face. They were still in the arena, but the dragon or the undead were nowhere to be found. It almost felt like the Lich had woken up from a slumber.

"How-"

"You think you're the only one who can use magic?" Anna interrupted him.

Unlike before, Anna was sporting her succubi armour. One look at her armour was enough for the Lich to know what had happened.

"A Succubi's illusion. How did you know it was an undead's weakness?" The Lich asked to which Anna shrugged.

"It was a weakness? Good to know." She replied.

However, the Lich was still confused. After trapping Anna, she shouldn't have been able to move, let alone cast magic. Then it hit him.

"You used your spell as soon as I released your arm from the coffin..." Lich mumbled while shaking his head, "Years of inaction clouded my judgement. Very well, you have bested me, succubus. I admit defeat."

You have cleared the Dungeon.

The system will now be randomising suitable rewards due to the involvement of a second party.

Chapter 450 Lich No More (2)

Before Ashton could ponder more about the 'second party', Anna collapsed. Casting [Illusion] on the Lich was more problematic than she thought, and what little bit of mana she had regenerated was pulled away from her, making her unable to do anything more.

At the same time, they returned to the cave right in front of the boss room. The doors were wide open, and a Staff could be seen floating in the middle of the empty chamber.

As much as Ashton wanted to take the staff, he couldn't. If anyone but a succubus so much as touched the staff, they would be gone forever. However, the prize inside the other room was all his.

But before that, there was something else he had to check.

Name: Ashton Fenrir

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

Status: Zompiewolf

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

Subclass: [Cinder Soul]

Title: [Defiant], [Novice Brewer], [Monklin Slayer], [Researcher], [Owner Of the Eastern Palace], [First Modern Space Farer of Earth], [Hydra Slayer]

Age: 16 years

Gender: Male

Grade: C-tier (Evolution is possible) [You can begin the third stage of the evolutionary process.]

Cumulative Level: 180

Affiliation: Self.

Level:

> Werewolf Level: 90 (0%)

> Vampire Level: 90 (0%)

> Zombie Level: 90 (0%)

Stats:

HP: 21500/21500

Mana: 18000/18000

Dark Aura: 12370

Damage: 314

Armour: 269

Stealth: 299

Stamina: 285

Agility: 239

Intelligence: 389

[UNUSED STAT POINTS]: 0

Nature:

Calculative

Unforgiving

—

"Already maxed out C-grade, huh..." Ashton mumbled.

As part of personal rewards, he was supposed to get 100 stats points. However, during randomising the rewards, those points were taken away. Usually, that would have made Ashton go batshit crazy, but there was something else he was concerned with, namely his evolution.

Unlike one common task, he was assigned three missions for all his primary genes. It was a bit weird, but considering specialised his genes were, it was bound to happen sooner or later.

[Just so you know, from now onwards, you will have to evolve all your genes before you can turn into a Zompiewolf again. Otherwise, the imbalance within your gene could lead to unforeseen problems.]

"So basically, you're saying I should evolve all of the genes simultaneously?"

[Yup, and good luck with that. It's not an easy feat; if it were, we would have hundreds if not thousands of S-grade beings in the galaxy.]

Ashton scoffed, ready to prove Astaroth wrong again, and continued checking on Anna, who was sound asleep. Although Ashton always thought he was the one protecting Anna, had it not been for her, the Lich would have screwed him up for good.

"Wait, where did that bastard disappear to?"

Ashton frantically got up, scanning everywhere. Although the Lich had admitted defeat and the dungeon had been effectively cleared, Ashton was not planning on leaving the Lich alive. After all, he was too dangerous to be left alone.

"Master, he's there!" Sven yelled, pointing towards the boss room.

Ashton headed straight into the room with Atlas closely behind him while the rest protected Anna. Lich was headed towards the Staff of Eden. Fearing the worst, Ashton leapt to push the Lich away.

However, the Lich stopped him in mid-air with a snap. Atlas rushed to help his master but got stuck in an invisible forcefield. A moment later, Lich walked past the staff, opened a concealed ancient-looking chest, and pulled out a piece of paper and a pair of black gloves.

Once done, he returned to Ashton and snapped his fingers again to free Ashton and Atlas from their invisible prison.

"Just because you deceived me once doesn't mean you are superior to me." Lich sighed before handing Ashton the paper and the gloves, "These were the possessions of Lord Reaper. Since you're deemed a worthy successor, these now belong to you."

Ashton used [Detection] on the gloves without wasting any moment and was surprised by what he saw.

Item: Grim Reaper's Gauntlet

Type: Armour / Stat Enhancement gear

> Magical Defence: 500-600 HP per strike

Stats bonus:

>> Armour: +10% while equipped for use

>> Mana: +300% while equipped for use (up to a maximum of 30,000. Can be increased when more equipment of the same set is found)

>> Intelligence: +20% while equipped for use (up to a maximum of 200. Can be increased when more equipment of the same set is found.)

Rarity: Legendary item

Description:

A legendary piece of equipment of unknown origins. However, more about the equipment might be found once more parts of the set are united. It can be only equipped by a high levelled undead or a necromancer.

The weapon had been enchanted and imbued with unique abilities and effects.

Effect(s):

> Drastically decreases the intelligence and mana required to cast spells related to the Necromancer class.

> Reduces the intelligence required to resurrect or create undead soldiers by 70%.

> The skeletal soldiers created no longer suffer through weakening resulting from resurrection. Instead, being turned into skeleton soldiers increase their stats and levels.

> Set items gathered: 5/10 (Partial Set effect can now be triggered)

--> Grim Reaper Transformation:

The user can turn into a being of absolute death for five minutes. During this time, the user turns immortal. Furthermore, undead under the user's command would be buffed permanently.

The user would also ignore all restrictions on the Necromancer or related class and would be able to regenerate undead soldiers infinitely (While the transformation is active).

Item: Grim Reaper's scythe can only be used during the transformation.

Other effects would be revealed as more set items are gathered.

—

"To think you challenged me before you had at least seven set pieces," Lich scratched his head, "I wonder how you were able to survive till now with that recklessness of yours."

[Eh, I just got used to it by now. This fucker won't listen to reason either way-]

Ashton ignored Astaroth as a sloth would ignore danger and instead turned his attention towards Lich.

"So what now?"

"I don't understand-" Lich was still talking when someone entered the room, "Don't touch that!"

Lich yelled at the person behind, but it was too late. A blood-soaked Grimm was standing next to the staff.

"This artefact better be worth the sacrifice of my brothers-" Grimm smiled as blood dripped from his hair and onto the staff, "W-What's going on! ARGHHH! SOMEONE STOP IT!!!"

The curse of the staff forced Grimm to transform, just like it forcefully changed Lilith into a succubus thousands of years ago. However, Grimm's transformation was not as pretty as Lilith's, as he became one with the darkness.

"I hope you are ready to battle again," Lich mumbled, "I'm afraid I'll be needing some help this time around."

"So I have a choice?" Ashton shrugged and drew Balmond, "There's no rest for the Reaper."