

Zompiewolf 451

Chapter 451 Lich No More (3)

Grimm's transformation progressively got more bizarre with every passing moment. Red metallic scales replaced the skin as a thick tail grew out of his back. His face was deformed as well to resemble that of a crocodile.

"Out of all things he could have transformed into..." Lich mumbled.

"His appearance is quite intimidating; I agree with that." Ashton replied, "His appearance aside, it doesn't look like he'll be much trouble to handle."

"The appearance does not do justice to his capabilities." Lich remarked, "A Draconian should not be taken lightly. Not even by you."

Draconian, an ancient species that were thought to be the descendants of the dragons based on their resemblance. Ashton had heard about them before, but only in tales. That said, the one in front of them was essentially a dragon's successor.

It was no surprise Lich was acting cautiously. Any descendant of a dragon was dangerous, especially the one created by the staff.

"Well, there's no point chatting, is it?" Ashton said as he hurled Balmond towards Grimm.

It was best to take someone down while they were in the middle of transformation than let them become their most powerful self. However, Balmond couldn't even graze the Draconian.

The staff of Eden was protecting its holder by casting a barrier to prevent anyone from interrupting the transformation. Ashton and Lich both were powerless and could do nothing but watch.

[So that's why the Precursors didn't kill Lilith before she transformed. Interesting.]

"Now is not the time to admire the staff," Ashton reminded Astaroth, "If you have an idea to interrupt the transformation, bark. Otherwise, shut it."

[You moron, do you think you can do something even the Precursors couldn't?]

"..."

[That's what I thought. Instead of trying to do the impossible, think of ways to end him as soon as the transformation is complete.]

Astaroth's words got Ashton thinking. Since Dragons were immune to poison and fire, using [Heaven's Downfall] or [Scorching Rain] were out of the question. Even if the abilities were practical, both of them were under cooldown.

"Atlas, try to hold him back for as long as you can."

Atlas nodded and stood before his Master and Lich. Then Ashton turned towards Lich for advice. Since Lich knew about the Draconians so well, he should also know about their weaknesses. At least, that's what Ashton was hoping for.

Sadly, his hopes were shattered a moment later when Lich shook his head, "Master had faced a few Draconians in his lifetime, but defeating them was an arduous task. Apart from the Master, no one ever came close to defeating one, not even yours truly."

Lich then proceeded to raise numerous skeletons to overwhelm Grimm when his transformation was complete. Ashton did the same, but he knew it was a meaningless tactic, nothing more.

They stood in silence, waiting for the inevitable. A sudden roar broke the silence. Grimm's transformation was complete, and as such, the staff was of no use to him. The Draconian did not hesitate before discarding the staff and charging straight at the skeletons.

Skeletal soldiers bearing shields immediately jumped ahead to slow the crazed beast. However, they did not last long. Draconian's momentum was a force to reckon with as he pushed through hordes of skeletons like twigs and headed straight towards Ashton.

It was then Ashton got a clear look at his enemy. Brandishing red scales and black engravings all over his body, Grimm stood a few metres away from him. His swollen, pale green eyes were solely focused on Ashton.

An aura of unquenchable bloodlust surrounded the Draconian.

"Why is the fucker so fixated on me?" Ashton raised an eyebrow, "As far as I know, I haven't fucked anyone's wife, have I?"

[Hm, maybe you fucked him instead?]

"What did I tell you about not protecting your feelings on others?" pan(da-n0vel.c)om

[... fuck you!]

"See, that's what I was trying to say."

Before Astaroth could continue firing his shots, Draconian fired something else. He released his fiery breath, and the skeletons between him and Ashton were turned to ash.

Grimm walked up to Ashton; his face was inches away from the mutant's. None of them backed down from the challenge until...

"Boo!"

Ashton said, and the next moment, Atlas grabbed the Draconian by his tail and flung him across the room. However, wings erupted out of the creature's back as he stabilised himself in mid-air.

Draconian stared at his new target and flew towards Atlas alarmingly fast. However, this time, he was met with Ashton's fist as the latter slammed the former's head on the ground.

At the same time, Lich cast a series of curses on the creature, slowing him down considerably while at the same time reducing his defence stat. Curses were the only way for the Lich to give Ashton a fighting chance.

Without any hesitation, both Atlas and Ashton jumped on the Draconian. Their punches and kicks soon began overwhelming the creature. Draconian was confused, he couldn't see what was going on, let alone fight back.

A giant meatball in front of two lions, that was the state Draconian found himself in. Frustrated by the situation, Draconian flapped his wings in an attempt to knock his assailants back.

However, when he revealed his wings, Ashton and Atlas grabbed them and pulled with all their might. Their intent was clear; they wanted to take away Draconian's manoeuvrability. But the task was challenging.

In hindsight, Ashton had committed a grave mistake. Since both of them were holding onto Draconian's wings, there was no one to stop the creature from using his breath again, which he promptly aimed at Lich.

A massive wave of fire enveloped Lich, who was too occupied with casting curses. In an instant, Lich was turned to ashes, and so were the curses he had used on Draconian.

As soon as he regained his speed and defence, shrugging off his Ashton and Atlas wasn't tricky.

Draconian aimed towards Atlas and blasted him away with another Fiery breath. Ashton realised it and rushed to protect Atlas. However, he was too late. Atlas was gone.

Now the fight was between him and the creature.

But before Ashton could make a move, the Draconian knocked him away with his muscular tail. Blood oozed out of Ashton's mouth as he broke through the doors leading into Anna's recovery area.

Draconian calmly walked out of the room, surprised to find more enemies for fighting. Without waiting for Ashton's instructions, Celeste took Anna and rushed to heal her Master while the rest tried their best to stall for time.

Sadly, none of them lasted against Draconian's breath.

"Fuck!" Celeste cursed as she prepared a final stand against the descendant of dragons.

But something weird happened. Destroyed summons that would have taken hours to regenerate were healed instantly. Not only that, they all had gotten considerably stronger than ever before.

"What is going on-" Celeste wondered but was interrupted.

"Cast a barrier spell around Anna, now." Ashton's voice felt oddly insentient.

Celeste turned to find Ashton floating in the air. But that wasn't all; his face was half rotten, resembling an undead. A hood of darkness surrounded him as he tightly held onto a scythe.

The Reaper had evolved into the Grim Reaper.

Chapter 452 Grim Reaper (1)

A few moments ago.

Ashton's vision was blurry. It felt as if a massive dark cloud had wrapped around him, leaving only a small window for him to gaze through.

'I feel like shit...'

There wasn't an ounce of strength in his body. His body was still under control, but he couldn't feel a thing: no emotions, no pain, nothing. Strangely enough, Ashton couldn't even hear Astaroth's voice, even though he knew the bastard was speaking something.

'Is this how death feels like?' Ashton thought, 'I never thought it would feel so... empty.'

At that moment, Ashton had no recollection of what was happening. It wasn't until he saw Celeste that he remembered the fight and how the Draconian destroyed all of them.

Even all of his summons together weren't enough to stop him. In the end, only Celeste was left standing. But Ashton knew it was only a moment of time before she joined the rest.

As Ashton turned his gaze sideways, he saw Anna peacefully sleeping.

'I have to... do something...'

At the same time, something presented itself before him. At some distance, a scythe was waiting for him.

"So you fear death?" A voice echoed in the darkness.

"Couldn't think of a cringier question, could you?"

"..."

"I don't," Ashton replied, "death can have me when I want it to, when it earns the right to claim me. Not before that. Not. Yet."

Even in his pitiful state, his voice was quite bold.

"You are an amusing one," The voice replied, "death shall be by your side, one with your shadow. However, do not mistake it as your ally, for it shall have you when you least expect it."

With those words, the darkness in front of Ashton was absorbed within him. The surge was the power he felt was unforgettable. It was addicting. It was enticing. He had never tasted death like this before, and he wanted more. A lot... more.

Back in the present.

The moment Ashton appeared before him, Draconian knew the circumstances had changed. He was no longer the predator but the prey. The only thing on his head was to run away while he still had the chance. Unfortunately, the undead had already surrounded him.

Seeing no way out, Draconian once again unleashed a fire attack on them. Ashton didn't move; the flames passed through him and hit his summons.

The summons were destroyed again; however, they regenerated as soon as they fell. Draconian tried retreating into the chamber, only to be confronted by an overwhelming amount of skeleton soldiers.

The more skeletons Draconian destroyed, the fiercer the rest of them got. Moreover, using his fiery breath continuously was not an option. Whenever the breath was used, it needed some time to recover completely.

If abused frequently, the flame within the Draconian would eventually die down, and so will he, as a Draconian's flame was like a human's heart. In simple words, whenever the Draconian used his flames, he essentially used his life force as fuel.

Leading the charge, Ashton tapped the scythe on the ground, and black smoke enveloped everyone in the chamber.

[Grim Reaper Exclusive skill: Death's Domain has been activated.] pan(da-n0vel.c)om

[All allied undead will receive a 150% increase in their stats, and the effectiveness of their skill is increased by 100%]

[Enemies within Death's Domain will lose 1% of their HP every second, and their stats will be drastically reduced.]

Draconian became enraged and began smashing everyone. But whether he broke the skeleton, burned them, or ate them, like the summons, the skeletons kept regenerating over and over.

Within moments, Draconian found himself pinned to the ground as the skeletons kept attacking his joints and parts that were not entirely covered by the scales.

The Draconian was being devoured alive, and there was nothing he could do to stop it. In his final act of desperation, Draconian tried blasting everyone away as they swallowed him.

The fire began accumulating in his mouth as the Draconian aimed for the cave's ceiling. If he wasn't going to make it out of the cave, no one was either. A powerful blast would have been sufficient to take down the entire cave, turning it into a grave for him and his enemies.

However, seconds before he could unleash the deadly attack, Ashton's gaunt face appeared in front, and he forcefully shut his mouth.

No matter how hard the Draconian struggled to free himself, he couldn't do a thing. The skeletons and the undead had weakened him beyond limits. There was nothing Draconian could do but stare at Ashton with his fearful eyes.

"You have caused quite a ruckus," Ashton whispered in his ears, "now be a good lad and die before I hunt you down in hell and kill you all over again."

Draconian tried to hold his breath back, but it was too late. With no way out, the fire he had amassed rebounded towards his torso. Ashton could see a massive ball of fire making its way down to Draconian's stomach before exploding.

Following a loud bang, Draconian's innards were splattered across the room. Ashton, his summons and the skeletons were all drenched in blood and tiny bits of Draconian's flesh.

Only the bastard's head remained intact as Ashton kept holding on to it till the explosion to ensure the fire had no other way out of Draconian's body.

"And so... it ends," Ashton mumbled as he fell to his knees.

Grim Reaper's time was up, and Ashton was back to being his original self; the scythe mysteriously returned to his inventory, waiting to be called by the Grim Reaper again in his time of need.

The resurrected skeletons simultaneously turned to dust as Ashton didn't own most of them. As for his summons, they stayed back, greedily staring at the Draconian's head.

Anyone who ate it would receive a tremendous amount of power. But Ashton wouldn't let such a precious thing go to waste and immediately placed the head inside his inventory.

Someday, Ashton would resurrect the Draconian to do his bidding, but for now, the Draconian's place was inside his inventory.

[Where the hell have you been!?!]

"Have you gone blind or what?" Ashton yelled, "I was here the entire time."

[No, you weren't. Your heartbeat, your breathing, everything stopped! But I couldn't take control of your body for some reason!]

"We'll... talk about it later," Ashton mumbled as he noticed something on his information tab.

—

One of the User's classes has been forcefully changed.

[Undead] --> [Grim Reaper (Partial)]

Chapter 453 Grim Reaper (2)

Grim Reaper might have sounded like an overpowered class, and people would die to obtain such power. After all, the ability to rule over death wasn't to be taken lightly.

Ashton thought the same while he was the Grim Reaper. The surge of power he felt was nothing like he had ever felt before. With power like it, forget about Xyrans; even ruling the Precursors wasn't an unrealistic dream.

However, as soon as that power dissipated, Ashton knew he would never want to turn into a Grim Reaper if he could evade it. Being a Grim Reaper came at a cost, an unimaginable cost.

There was no guarantee Ashton would be able to turn back into being his usual self if he ever transformed into Grim Reaper again. The words he heard before accepting the scythe were eerily accurate.

"I could become one with death..." He mumbled.

The phrase was confusing at first, but not anymore. Becoming one with death meant Ashton would forever be trapped in the body of the Grim Reaper.

Moreover, he never knew when the transformation would end up being permanent. The conversion itself was like a ticking time bomb, and that was a risk Ashton wasn't willing to take.

That said, Ashton did not willingly turn into Grim Reaper. In a way, the scythe had coerced him into doing so, and there was no guarantee it won't happen again.

In his desperation, Ashton could again end up giving in to his desire for power, and everything he had worked for would be in vain.

"Astaroth, do me a favour." He requested, "Seal the scythe away inside the inventory. No matter how much I beg, cry, or yell, do not give it to me."

[Are you sure-]

"Please, do this one thing for me. You're the only one I can trust."

[It's done. Don't worry; I got you.]

Ashton sighed in relief. Despite the powers given to him, he never wanted to go through it ever again. However, he needed to get stronger to ensure a scenario like now never arose again.

"Let's focus on the evolution tasks for now."

[Well, there's a lot to do. Let me show you.]

As Astaroth said that, a list of tasks appeared in front of Ashton. One look was enough for Ashton to realise the road ahead wasn't going to be easy.

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Werewolf evolution task(s):

>> Fight and defeat 10 B-grade beings

>> Turn 2 creatures into Werewolves.

>> Add new members to your pack of werewolves. (Currently have: 2/7 werewolves in the pack.)

Vampire evolution task(s):

>> Consume fresh blood of 2 B-grade beings.

>> Consume fresh blood of a legendary creature.

>> Add a new member to your family. (Turn another creature into your slave)

Grim Reaper evolution task(s):

>> Raise a Lich.

>> Create and Tame 10 summons. (Currently have: 6/10 summons) pan(da-n0vel.c)om

>> Consume the flesh of a mythical creature.

"Completing these tasks would take a while." Ashton frowned.

Despite having cumulative levels on par with an A-grade being, completing a few of the tasks was a bit problematic.

Fighting and consuming the blood of B-grade beings was pretty easy. But finding suitable candidates and convincing them to turn into werewolves was an annoying task.

As if that wasn't enough, forming a pack was easier said than done. While serving the Mistress, Ashton had seen first-hand how troublesome managing a pack can be.

"I should be able to manage them somehow." Ashton mumbled while going through the list, "How the hell am I supposed to consume the fresh blood of a legendary creature?"

If the task were: Consume the blood of a legendary creature, all Ashton would have to do was buy some blood. Money was an issue, but it wasn't like Ashton didn't know how to make more money.

However, the word 'fresh' turned things troublesome. The system indirectly told him to hunt down a legendary creature. Hydra was one such creature, but Ashton highly doubted he would ever get to face her again.

The third vampire evolution task was problematic as well. Converting someone into a vampire wasn't difficult, but training them to control their thirst and to behave around the werewolves Ashton would enlist, was an entirely different story.

"I had wanted to raise a Lich already, so despite being a lengthy process, I don't have to go out of my way to achieve it. The same goes for increasing my summons." Ashton scratched his chin, "It'll take time, but I'll get there soon enough. The final task, though..."

[Consume the flesh of a mythical creature.]

"It's easier to find a legendary creature than a mythical creature." He sighed, "Just my rotten luck."

[You know, you already have a mythical creature with you, just saying.]

Ashton was perplexed. Since when did he have a mythical creature-

"You monster! How dare you suggest such a thing!?"

[Oi, oi, oi, no need to get all angry! I was simply pointing towards the obvious route-]

"Take your route and shove it up your ass!" Ashton yelled as his parental instincts kicked in, "If you so much as dared to look at Aegis with ill intent, I'll mentally kick your ass!"

[Alright, point noted. No eating the doggo. Also, good luck finding a mythical creature!]

"Otiga might be able to help us. Now that I think about it, I have to collect my share of earnings from her."

Since Ashton was the owner of Otiga's intelligence network, according to their deal, he was entitled to get 20% of their collective income. That, too, without doing any work. Passive income had never felt so good.

"But first," Ashton stared at the staff.

Touching the artefact was out of the question, and after what he had seen, he wasn't going to let Anna touch it either. Not till he was sure the staff would cause no harm to her.

"Sven, take that staff and secure it in [Valhalla]," Ashton instructed, "Make sure no one plays with it, especially Celeste."

"Yes, master." Sven bowed and left with the staff, followed by the rest.

"Now then, let's deliver the good news to Occunians, shall we?"

[Since you're alive and kicking, I'm sure it won't be good news for them.]

Chapter 454 Third Werewolf (1)

Anna had regained consciousness by the time Ashton reached the exit. Ashton filled her in on everything that happened while she was out. Except for the part where 'death' had become one with him.

Ashton was already tensed about it; there was no reason to make Anna worry about it.

"What about the staff? Where is it?" Anna's voice was still a bit weaker than before.

"Since you were busy snoring, I asked Sven to take it with him." Ashton playfully replied, "Once I get it checked out by Vulcan and he gives his clearance, then you can have it."

"Bummer, I was pretty excited about a new weapon-"

Their conversation was interrupted by a stray gunshot. The weapon was so poorly aimed neither of the two had to try to dodge it. However, a bullet was still a bullet.

As Ashton looked up, he realised Kern was standing there along with a handful of Gold Water mercs. They didn't speak a word, but it was clear they had no good intentions after ambushing Ashton.

"I was wondering when you would show up." Kern mocked them, "Since you are here now, why don't you hand the artefact over to us and get it over with?"

Ashton could help but laugh at Kern's suggestion. Even then, he thought it would be funny to let the fool think he was in control of the situation.

"Why the hell are you here?"

"It doesn't matter, does it?" Kern laughed, as did the rest of his troops, "What matters is how much pain you and your lover want to endure before handing over the artefact to me."

Well, Ashton was already aware of what had happened.

On their way out, Ashton noticed the corpses of a few people dressed in Gold Water colours. Since it hadn't been long since their death, it was easy to determine those people were the comrades of the one who transformed into Draconian.

Most likely, these people entered the cave after him and got trapped inside. Some of them decided to try and clear the dungeon, while a couple stayed back.

The barrier covering the exit was destroyed the moment Anna defeated the lich. Using this opportunity, those who stayed around the portal might have rushed to contact Kern for help.

[Well, I would assume the lad wants to die badly. Maybe it's time you grant him his final wish.]

'Maybe I will.'

That said, one thing had been bothering Ashton for a while now. Kern was acting oddly confident for someone with his tail between his legs till now. It was almost as if he knew something Ashton did not.

'Ah, I see.'

The contract the two parties had signed required them to cooperate until the beasts were repelled by Ashton. Since the beasts were no longer attacking the city, their contract was void.

Still, attacking a former employer was questionable, and no matter what explanation they gave to the association, they will be viewed in a negative light. Kern could even have his mercenary license revoked.

All things considered, there could be only one reason why Kern was willing to risk it all: The Staff of Eden.

However, that contractual flaw works in both ways. Meaning Ashton was free to kill Kern just as much as the other way around. Moreover, since he had already built quite a reputation, Ashton didn't fear being ostracised by the association. pan(da-n0vel.c)om

"Let me see," Ashton mumbled while counting Kern and his soldiers, "Twenty-seven against two; that's not fair."

"Hmph, at least you know your place-"

"Not fair for you," Ashton said before launching himself at Kern and his men.

One roundhouse kick later, Kern was sent flying into his men. Before anyone of them could balance themselves, Ashton punched the ground, causing tremors and knocking them on their backs.

"Like I said, not fair for you," Ashton said while cracking his knuckles, "This will be your only warning. Stand down. Your numbers mean nothing to me."

While the rest of the soldiers looked defeated and did not want to die, Kern was unwilling to give up. In his eyes, getting his hand on the artefact was more important than death.

Back to his feet, Kern charged at Ashton. He threw a roundhouse punch at the latter, but Ashton effortlessly grabbed his hand before throwing Kern back amongst his comrades.

Frustration was at an all-time high in Kern's mind. He was so close to his goal and yet so far away. If only he could get the staff, all of his troubles would vanish. After all, the Metal Sharks were quite generous regarding such things.

Regardless, Ashton was standing before him like an impregnable wall.

"How can you be so strong!?" Kern yelled in frustration, "You're merely a C-grader! You shouldn't be able to last against an A-grader like me!"

"An A-grader, you say?"

Suddenly a thought entered Ashton's mind. Having an A-grade servant felt like a good idea. Moreover, it would also solve the feud between him and the Gold Water mercenaries with minimal violence.

"To be honest, I don't know what artefact you are talking about." Ashton mumbled, "Since you attacked me, I thought I'd play with you for a bit. But seeing you all serious and shit, I'd rather not."

"What scheme are you cooking up now?"

Kern was rightfully being cautious of Ashton's words. After all, everyone had seen what he did to Nico after luring him in with sweet talk.

"Not a scheme, but an exchange." Ashton shrugged, "I'm willing to give you the dungeon reward since I don't have any use for it, but not for free."

"Reaper, what are you-" Anna tried interrupting, but Ashton winked at her, gesturing her to go with the plan, "Even if we don't know what it can do, it should be pretty expensive considering how difficult it was to clear the dungeon."

"You heard the lady," Ashton shrugged, "What do you say? If you, all of you, give me all of your money and a piece of equipment, I'll be willing to part from the reward. Of course, this is the only way you'll ever get this so-called artefact from me."

While the rest stared at each other in confusion, Kern did not waste any time and transferred all of his money into Ashton's account.

"The fuck are you fools waiting for!?" He barked at the troops, "Give him your money and equipment now!"

'Cha-ching!'

Chapter 455 Third Werewolf (2)

1.32 Million Yenos.

A wide smile appeared on Ashton's face when he saw that number. Since the Gold Water mercenary group was quite famous in the galaxy, he had expected them to have a decent amount on them, but this was more than he had assumed.

'Not to mention their gears. They should fetch me a fairly good price as well.'

[Avarice hoards itself poor; charity gives itself rich.]

'That's hilarious coming from a member of the genocidal species who eliminated species for their greed for power.'

[That's... never mind.]

Kern was getting impatient and made no effort to hide it. Having held his part of the deal, he wanted Ashton to honour his word. Parting with his money stung him a bit; however, in the long run, the artefact would prove to be more helpful.

A few hundred thousand Yenos were nothing compared to a mythical artefact. Anyone aware of the artefact's existence would pay him anywhere from a few million to hundreds of millions of Yenos.

The way Kern saw it, getting the staff from Ashton for cheap, was a final 'fuck you' message to the latter. Little did he know, Ashton was playing them like a bunch of fools.

Forget about millions of Yenos; Kern would be lucky if some fool paid him more than a couple of Yenos for the staff Ashton would give him.

"I hope everything is to your liking?" Kern sternly remarked once Ashton returned, "If it is, why don't you give up the artefact, and all of us call it a day?"

"Oh, come on, I thought we were becoming friends?" Ashton teased the poor guy, "Well, if you are in a hurry, I guess there's nothing I can do but part ways here."

Kern didn't bother replying and extended his arm towards Ashton, gesturing him to hand over the staff. Ashton shrugged, grabbed an old staff from the inventory and gave it to Kern.

The information Kern had on the staff was limited since only a handful of people knew about it. But he knew the Staff of Eden wasn't supposed to be touched directly. When he noticed that the staff had been carefully wrapped with a protective cloth, he knew the staff was legit.

However, a question did pop up in Kern's mind for a moment. Judging from how Ashton was behaving until now, it didn't seem he knew much about the staff. But the way he evaded touching the staff meant he had to know quite a bit about it.

"I know it's none of my business, but I'd suggest that you don't make direct contact with the staff," Ashton mumbled, "Someone from your team did so, and he got turned into a monster of sorts. Unfortunately, I had to kill him."

Ashton took a final jab at Kern, "Since we are great friends, I wouldn't want your face to get uglier than it already is. So, better keep the cloth around it till you figure out how to disable that curse."

"Thank you for your 'friendly' advice," Kern mumbled through gritted teeth before leaving, "We're done here. To the ship, now!"

By the time they disappeared, Anna had walked up to Ashton, judging him with her fiery eyes.

"What?" He asked.

"I'm wondering whether I am just another victim of your effortless lying or not." Anna shrugged, "If I hadn't known in advance, I'd have thought you gave him the authentic staff instead of a counterfeit."

Ashton smiled, but before he could say anything, Astaroth interrupted him.

[Aren't you forgetting something?]

'I'm not turning Kern into a werewolf if that's what you were talking about.'

An A-grade werewolf, people back on earth, would go crazy if they heard of it. However, in hindsight, hastily turning Kern at the moment wasn't wise.

The galaxy was filled with talented people, and the evolution tasks were time-consuming. That said, Ashton thought it was better to turn a talented individual and cultivate them than convert a high-ranking person with mediocre talent.

[Hm... I assumed in the rush of completing the quests, you would make some mistakes. It looks like I was wrong.]

'Yet again.'

[...]

"Let's head back," Ashton said, "We have fulfilled the contract's obligations. There's no point wasting any more time here."

Anna nodded, and the two of them left the forest for Zanna. Their time on Occuna had come to an end, and it was time to collect their rewards and set sail towards a new adventure.

In some unmapped part of the galaxy, not very far from planet Occuna, a fleet of seven spaceships was making its way towards the wild planet.

It had been a while since the Cult of Cosmos had received updates from Cyclops or Nico. Capturing the succubus was of the utmost importance, and the sudden silence from their subjects was oddly suspicious.

Truthfully, the cult couldn't care less if either Cyclops or Nico were dead. They were more worried about whether their plan of capturing the succubus was revealed to Reaper and his team.

If the succubus went into hiding, it would become difficult to find another one of their kind, which would put their plans on halt again.

"How much further do we have to travel?" A man draped in black armour barked.

"It would take up another week, sir." A robotic voice replied, "At the current speed, that is."

"Hmph!" The man angrily grumbled.

Every precious moment they wasted while travelling ensured the succubi's escape from the planet. Although their partnership with the Metal sharks wasn't threatened at the time, the leader will surely notice a continuous chain of failure.

Angering the leader was the last thing anyone working in the underworld would want, and it was even more dangerous for the ones working closely with the leader. It was fair enough to say getting close to the leader was more hazardous than diving into a black hole.

"Order the cruisers to go ahead and take control of the city while we're on the way," The man said, "I'm not letting her escape this time. No matter what."

Chapter 456 Distress Call (1)

By the time Ashton and Anna reached the city, the gold water mercenaries had already disappeared. Kern had to be in a hurry to deliver the staff to whoever was paying him. Ashton felt nothing while selling the artefact to Kern, but now he felt a bit bad for him.

After all, based on the person he was dealing with, trying to pass off a counterfeit might cost Kern dearly. He might even have to give up on his life altogether.

'There's no point thinking about things that are out of my control.'

[According to that logic, you should stop thinking altogether.]

'Nah, who will keep roasting you if I did that?'

[I'm more than capable of doing it myself.]

'Self-burn, those are rare nowadays.'

[Yeah, yeah, just get off this planet now. I don't like this place one bit.]

Except for the Gold Water mercenaries, everyone else was stationed as Ashton had instructed them. The humans were shocked to see Ashton return as they had already begun preparing for a feast in his 'honour'.

Out of the hundreds that entered the cave, no one had ever returned alive. That said, the residents believed Ashton would be no exception. But much to their horror and surprise, the mutant returned from the cave, alive and kicking as always.

As much as Ashton enjoyed seeing their colourless faces, he was more intrigued to see Vulcan waiting for him.

"Woah, easy there, little guy!" Ashton said as Aegis ran up to him.

"The runt was getting desperate after not seeing you for a while," Vulcan nonchalantly mumbled.

"So you didn't miss me, then?" Ashton replied, imitating Aegis' baby face.

"This brat..."

Vulcan shook his head, but Ashton knew Aegis was just an excuse. The Mastersmith was as much worried about him as Aegis was. However, the stubborn dwarf genes would never allow Vulcan to show his caring side to anyone.

"Well, I have a few things I'd like to discuss once we are off the planet, about you know what."

"Alright," Vulcan mumbled and went back inside the ship.

By now, Vimur and Laihud had arrived with their reports. The beast corpses have been divided as per Ashton's instructions. Staying true to his words, Ashton had left a fraction of the corpses for the humans.

Had Ashton wanted, he could have been petty and asked for compensation for clearing the cave dungeon. However, clearing the cave was more of a personal project for him than anything else.

Moreover, Ashton had tormented the humans enough. Any more of his tricks, and they might actually kill themselves just to be free from him. As much as it would help him create a lich, he wasn't eager to witness such a sight.

"Great work. Load up the corpses on the ship, and we'll leave."

"There's something else," Laihud said, "The humans have asked to have a conversation with you if you don't mind."

"We both have fulfilled the terms of our deal. There's nothing more to discuss," Ashton replied before heading inside the ship, "and if they want a share of the reward from the dungeon, tell them to pound sand."

Laihud nodded and left to make final preparations. Within the next hour, Ashton and the Ghosts were ready to leave. Humans were never great at hiding their emotions, especially positive ones. The lot began dancing as soon as the mercenary ships exited the atmosphere.

Unbeknownst to them, death was slowly heading towards them and allowing Anna to leave would be the cause of their doom.

Once aboard the ship, a few things needed to be dealt with regarding the faction. In his haste to make a mercenary faction, Ashton had pushed essential matters such as a hierarchy on the side.

At the moment, the Ghosts had no official hierarchy, and the order they had amongst themselves was based on mutual respect. But on Vulcan's and Laihud's suggestions, Ashton thought it was wise to put a hierarchy in place with their respective salaries.

Ashton was made the captain with unanimous votes. Anna was named the second in command, while Vulcan, Laihud, Vimur, Leon and Kass were made lieutenants with their own jurisdictions.

Ashton wanted Vulcan to take up the position of the Second in command, but he declined. So Anna ended up accepting the job.

Instead, Vulcan was tasked with procuring and creating weapons for the Ghosts. Laihud was tasked with handling external affairs, mainly using his diplomatic prowess to deal with the mercenary association and other mercenary groups.

As for Leon, he was in charge of internal affairs, and his job was to maintain peace between the Ghosts and resolve any incidents amongst the troops.

Vimur's job remained the same as he was in charge of training the troops. Kass was given the command of logistics and tasks related to the ship, whether it was the maintenance of the ship or purchasing dropships and gunships for dogfights.

Apart from them, there was another lieutenant, Ricochet, the metahuman from Occuna, who supported Ashton in his fight against the beasts. In Ricochet's words, he had turned his people into enemies by siding with an outsider.

As a result, Ricochet had to leave the planet. So when Ashton asked him to join the Ghosts, Ricochet immediately agreed. However, Ricochet wasn't alone; his twenty soldiers joined the ghosts with him.

With Ricochet's team joining the faction, their total numbers were 36, out of which 20 were E-graders.

Vulcan saw the newbies joining as a sign to get rid of his old equipment and immediately armed the new members. That said, even his old equipment was comparable to high-grade weapons sold in Kernel Tower.

Ashton left Leon and Laihud to discuss everybody's salaries and returned to his room. An important call needed to be made.

"Hello, Otiga. I happened to come across a few rare beast corpses, and I was wondering if you could-"

"I was about to call you myself," Otiga interrupted him, "We have received a distress call, so I thought you'd like to know about it."

"Why would I-"

"It's from Earth."

Chapter 457 Distress Call (2)

"Earth!?"

"Yes. It seems the undead disaster had gone out of hand, and earthlings can no longer sustain themselves." Otiga continued, "Moreover, since they are a lower civilisation, they can't even contract any mercenaries for help."

"So they resorted to broadcasting on open channels," Ashton completed the sentence, "I should have resolved the problem before stepping into space."

Ashton punched a hole through the gate in anger. The Giholos should be enough to handle the undead; that's what he thought before leaving Earth. But now his hasty decision had bitten him in the ass.

Handling the undead wasn't that big of a threat on a galactic scale since most advanced weapons were proficient in those tasks. But for the people of the Earth, an undead outbreak was nothing less than a catastrophe. Ashton had seen the carnage it could cause with his own eyes.

However, the undead wasn't Ashton's only concern.

'Asking for help on an open channel could lead to unforeseen troubles.' Ashton thought, 'Not everyone roaming in space will have good intentions.'

[Not to mention, asking for help to deal with the undead is like announcing, "Hey! We are pathetically weak. Come rule over us! Thanks!"]

Otiga was still on the line, waiting for Ashton to decide. Although, she already knew what he was going to say next.

"It will take us months to reach Earth." Ashton mumbled, "Damn it- wait a minute! Yes! This could work!"

Astaroth knew what had gotten Ashton so excited. Months? Hell no, it would take mere seconds for Ashton to arrive on Earth. However, it would be a one-way trip, as he won't be able to reach the ship by himself.

"Otiga, I'll send you the coordinates of my ship. Collect the beast corpses from here and sell them at a reasonable price."

"And what about Earth?" She asked.

"I'll take care of it," Ashton replied and rushed out of the room.

The portal to the Eastern Palace was his way of reaching Earth. As Ashton could summon the portal to Eastern Palace from anywhere. However, it was a one-way route, and he could not use the same trick to get back on the ship.

"That's why I'll meet you on Earth," Ashton explained to his lieutenants, "After delivering the corpses to Otiga, make your way to Earth."

"Dimensional travel sounds fun," Leon mumbled.

"Not to mention, we'll get to see our Captain's beloved homeworld." Vimur chimed in, "I wonder what the girls look like there."

"This horndog..." Liahud shook his head, "I assume you are leaving straight away?"

Ashton nodded, "It's already been a few weeks since they sent the signal for help. The longer I wait, the longer it will take to clean the mess."

"Don't worry; I'll take care of Aegis in your absence." Vulcan grumpily muttered, "Go, handle your business and then we can talk about more important stuff."

"That takes care of everything," Ashton got up, "Ricochet, gather half of your men; you'll leave with Anna and me."

It was obvious that most of them wanted to come with him, but Ashton decided against it.

Earthlings may have seen a lot of weird things, but exposing them to a plethora of weirdos would be a bit too much, even for them. That's why Ashton decided it was better to take the humans first.

The remaining Ghosts will eventually get the chance to see Earth when they come to pick up Ashton. That said, saving his people wasn't the only reason Ashton wanted to visit Earth.

An entire country filled with undead should be more than enough to create a lich. So, visiting Earth was like hitting two birds with a stone.

Everyone got ready and gathered in the hangar in around ten minutes. Once everyone had been accounted for, Ashton opened the portal and jumped inside.

The journey only took seconds, yet it felt like hours had passed. Anna and Ashton had experienced dimensional travel quite a few times and thus did not feel lasting effects. Ricochet and his men, on the other hand, were occupied puking their guts out.

It had been a little over a year since Ashton had left Earth in search of power. His search was far from over, but he was happy to be back. No matter how short he was visiting.

"Let's get going."

At the same time, in the independent state of Livan. A fight was raging on. Despite having the blessing of advanced technology on her side, Avalina barely managed to push back the undead horde.

Countless independent states had already fallen before the mighty undead. The undead now ruled over 65% of Lycania, and asking for help from the other werewolf empires proved useless.

It almost felt as if the other empires were in on the conspiracy from the beginning.

"How's it looking?" Avalina asked Virgil, who silently shook his head, "That bad, huh..."

"There's too many of those bastards." Virgil had never sounded so defeated, "We are outnumbered thousand to one, to paint a picture. We'd have lost long ago if it had not been for the walls the Giholo constructed. But it seems this is as far as we can go."

Avalina's expression changed. Being a vampire, she could not go head-to-head with the undead. Werewolves and Giholos were the only ones who could stand the effects of [Corpsification Gas] to some extent and were leading on the battlefield.

"In the end, I couldn't fulfil my promise to you, Ashton." Avalina mumbled, "Prepare everyone, even vampires. This will be our last stance. If we're going to die, let's take those bastards with us."

Avalina's words filled everyone with anger towards the undead. No one was delusional enough to think they'll make it out of there. However, a moment later came a roaring sound from the city hall, stopping Avalina in her tracks.

"Who is using the portal?" She asked, but Virgil was as clueless as she was.

Fearing the worst, all of them rushed towards the city hall. Avalina thought the undead had somehow gained access to their portal system and were about to invade.

One after another, people riding wraith wolves appeared out of the portal. Judging from their weapons and armour, these people were most likely not from Earth.

Avalina stared at Shin'uk, the leader of the Giholo. But she didn't know the strangers either.

"Who are you? Reveal your identity!" Avalina yelled while maintaining a safe distance from the 'intruders'.

"I can't believe this," The leader of the men spoke before revealing his face, "Seriously, you call yourself my mother?"

Avalina's lips trembled with happiness at the sight of her son. Virgil was beyond shocked, and so were the rest of them. Their lord was back! Ashton was home!

Chapter 458 The Tyrant's Power

Avalina rushed and tightly wrapped her arms around her son. It had only been a year, but it felt like centuries had passed since she had last seen him.

"You have grown so much!" Avalina exclaimed while caressing Ashton's cheek.

Ashton smiled, enjoying the motherly embrace. The others were equally surprised and happy. However, the Giholos immediately went to their knees when they saw their 'god'.

Despite feeling awkward, Ashton acknowledged them with a curt nod. Even such a small gesture was enough to send the Giholos into a frenzy. For being their last day in the world of the living, it was sure as hell a lucky one.

"It's good to have you back, my lord." Virgil smiled, "And you too, my lady."

"Virgil, how's the married life been treating you?" Ashton asked while fist-bumping him.

"I don't wanna spoil the surprise for you." Virgil shrugged before pointing at Ricochet and his men, "If you don't mind me asking, who are the people accompanying you?"

"Right, it almost slipped my mind. These are metahumans, some allies that I made during my travels."

When Ashton said the people were humans, everyone was slightly surprised, but not much. Since a fair share of humans had made it off the planet, they would have survived in one way or another.

Moreover, Ashton had made Livan a neutral city where mutants, aliens and humans, everyone could live together in harmony.

That said, if Ashton had dropped in some other mutant-controlled region, his reception might have been quite explosive.

"I'll answer your questions later," Ashton interrupted as soon as someone was about to ask something, "We have to take care of something, don't we?"

"Right."

Avalina's mind was full of questions and doubts, but at the moment, she could only push those thoughts aside and focus on the task at hand.

Ashton and his forces, along with Avalina and everybody else, made their way to the walls. It seemed like a prophecy that Ashton arrived in Livan when he did. If he had waited a day longer, there might not have been a home to return to.

A sea of undead was continuously clashing with the massive walls built around the city. Things would have taken a nasty turn if it wasn't for the wall.

"Call the men back," Ashton mumbled.

"Call them back?" Virgil stared at Ashton as if he had seen a ghost; the rest did the same.

Other than the wall, the werewolves and the Giholos were the ones dealing with the undead. Without them, the wall would not last long.

"If they stay down there, I'll end up killing them." Ashton continued when Virgil hesitated, "As the lord of this estate, I command you to call the troops back."

"Yes, my lord."

Within a minute, the soldiers were back in the city. Now it was time for the space people to show the mutants how to deal with generic undead like these.

Wings sputtered out of Ashton's and Anna's backs while Ricochet and his men entered the battlefield riding wraith wolves. If he and his men could handle the beast wave on Occuna, taking care of some mindless undead wasn't much of a task.

[According to my calculations, a hundred thousand undead should be enough to raise a lich.]

'Perfect.' Ashton mumbled, and the gates of Valhalla opened behind him.

Within moments, hundreds of skeletons and zombies rushed out to attack the undead.

(Author's note: For now, I'd refer to the enemies as undead while allied undeads as zombies to avoid confusion.)

As soon as Ashton's forces appeared on the battlefield, it became why he wanted everyone to fall back. If the soldiers had stayed, they would have been hit by a rogue spell or squashed by gigantic creatures like Atlas and Gokung.

Anna was blindly shooting fireballs at the horde. Each of her spells burned away dozens of undead who couldn't do a thing to stop her. Mini explosions lit up the field like stars in the night sky.

Sven and the skeletons under his authority were making quick work of the undead. Countless of those rotting bastards were cleaved in half within moments. But the carnage had only begun.

As for Raven, the undead were lucky to catch his shadow before ending up in pieces for the skeletons to stomp on.

Similar to Anna, Celeste was having the time of her life. There were abundant shadows for her to utilise as weapons, and she did not shy away from doing so. Hundreds of shadowy spikes would erupt from the ground every now and then, killing hundreds of undead.

The massive bodies of Atlas and Gokung were more than enough for them to kill thousands of undead at any given moment. However, it was funny to see the two of them coordinating their attacks and failing miserably.

But the one who surprised Ashton the most was Dolos. It was the first time the Shadow Tyrant was in action with free rein to do as he pleased, and boy, was it a surprise.

What Dolos lacked in agility, he made up for it in his ability to dish out disgustingly powerful AOE attacks. His attacks usually started with a [Howl], which put his enemies in a daze while weakening their defence.

Once the undead became vulnerable, he would jump several meters in the air and slam his arms on the ground. The resulting force would crack the earth while also generating shockwaves to knock down his enemies.

However, this was only the beginning of his abilities. After all, he wasn't an A-grade summon for nothing.

Out of the cracks, some goblin-like creature appeared. Their only difference was their horns, red skin and massive wings.

"What are those things?"

[I believe the humans call them Imps, a type of lesser demons. Those pesky little bastards are known for having more power than they can control. Us, Xyrans, used to have them as pets, and they were pretty annoying, to be honest.]

"Annoying creatures with horns and wings that have more power than they should. Huh, so they're like your cousins, interesting."

Chapter 459 Complications

The battlefield was eerily silent. No more explosions were going off, and no more snarls of the undead could be heard either, for the battlefield had turned into a graveyard for the undead.

The corpses lay on the ground, one with the bodies of a few unlucky people who had not been evacuated in time. The charred corpses were giving off a thick black smoke.

The area was declared unfit for anyone but Ashton to enter. In their final attempt to spread the virus, the undead released a massive cloud of corpsification gas even as they died.

Thankfully Ashton was hovering above and absorbed the gas before people behind the walls could come in contact with it.

A couple of hours later, the battle was over, and Ashton did not even have to raise a finger against the undead. That said, he had met the starting requirements to raise a lich. Now all that remained was to look for a suitable person to be turned into a lich.

[Good luck finding someone who will willingly embrace lich-hood.]

Turning oneself into a lich was much easier than having someone else do it. For this reason, every lich in existence had turned themselves into a lich and not someone else.

After all, random Tom, Dick and Harry wouldn't have the resolve to embrace death and immortality simultaneously. Only someone with nothing to live for and yet everything to experience would be willing to turn themselves into a lich.

"Master, we have gathered the blood of the fallen as you wished," Sven returned with a small vial filled with a viscous black fluid.

p-A- n-d-A-n-0-v-e-1、 (c)om Although Sven said the vial contained the blood of the fallen, in reality, the vial only had a drop of blood from everyone who got killed. Anyone who drank the vial's content would turn into an undead being. But not necessarily into a lich.

A final ingredient needed to be added to the vial. It was the blood of a beloved one. The candidate would have to kill the person closest to them as a sign of complete devotion to the task and add their blood into the mix before drinking.

As if things were not complicated enough, the target must be killed using a specific poison. The poison from the Vrucificus flower only blooms twice a year on the night of the blood moon.

This act was supposed to sever any semblance of soul and attachment the candidate might have to the world of the living. According to the grimoire, even after completing these gruelling tasks, one would only turn into a partial lich or a Demilich.

The road to Lich-hood was long and tiring, where a simple mistake could ruin everything. Sacrificing countless souls, killing the people closest to one, and repeating it over and over wasn't something weak-minded individuals could deal with.

Hence the number of liches throughout the galaxy could be counted on fingers.

"Burn the corpses," Ashton waved his hand, and his summons got to work.

Six months; that's how long Ashton had to find a suitable candidate, or else the blood he had gathered would become useless, forcing him to start the process from scratch.

'For now, let's head back and reconnect with everyone.'

[Maybe you'll end up finding some pathetic guy who would be willing to help you.]

'If only you had a body, I wouldn't have to look for a pathetic guy in the first place.' boxnovelfull.com

[Or, you could try looking into a mirror. I assure you, there'll be a pathetic guy in front of you within moments.]

'Of course, there will be. After all, you live inside me.'

[... ceasefire!]

"How cheeky can you people be?" Ashton asked Virgil, "Really? A statue? And here I thought you would be too occupied even to remember my face!"

Now that the danger had been averted, Avalina and Virgil decided to give Ashton a tour of Livan. It was then they came across a statue of himself.

By seeing the statue, Ashton could see what the sculptor had tried to do. In an attempt to show Ashton's Zompiewolf side, the sculptor decided to give him furry wolf-like arms while vampiric wings were coming out of his back.

The statue was holding 'Balmond' in one of his hands while half of the face looked oddly misshapen to pay homage to his 'undead' genes. While the genes within Ashton's body lived in harmony, his depiction in the statue did not.

The statue was supposed to symbolise hope for everyone in the hard times. However, judging by how menacing it appears, it's safe to say the statue could only work as a scarecrow, if nothing else.

[They might as well add a Scythe in your other hand.]

"Uh... let's keep moving, shall we?" Virgil awkwardly mumbled and practically pushed Ashton away from the statue.

"I think I have had enough for the day," Ashton replied, "The immediate danger might have been averted, but the source of the problem remains."

The outbreak started in Contingency and spread like wildfire throughout the empire. That said, little to nothing had been done to take care of the root cause of the problem.

"I was afraid you'd say that," Avalina sighed, "the horde you fought today wasn't even 10% of the undead armada."

Ashton nodded as he understood what Avalina was hinting towards. If they were struggling so desperately against 10% of an army, then it was obvious why nothing had been done to take back Contingency.

Everyone was too occupied while ensuring their survival; the thought of fighting back had never crossed their mind. But now things were about to change.

However, jumping to confront the enemy without strategies and understanding of the situation was plainly stupid. Despite being the strongest person on the planet, Ashton wasn't arrogant enough to underestimate an opponent.

Thankfully, he knew the person who would have plenty of intel for him. He might also be useful in raising a lich. After all, who would know how to create a lich than a lich himself?

"Where is 'Forgotten'?"

Chapter 460 Unexpected Encounter

Before departing from Earth, Ashton had requested the lich of the Eastern Palace to find a way to cure 'corpsification' disease. Since Ashton owned the Eastern Palace, the lich couldn't disobey him.

However, Ashton hadn't seen him since returning. The look on Avalina's face told Ashton all he needed to know.

"So he's missing," Ashton mumbled, "Why am I not surprised?"

"The last we heard, he was working around Contingency, gathering samples to test the fruits of his 'labour'." Avalina responded, "But then the undead population grew explosively, and we lost all contact."

"What about Nirvana? Heard from the undead authorities there?"

"Let me read their reply straight from the mail," Avalina cleared her throat, "The Attack on Contingency was an act of terrorism, and we strongly condemn it. Our best wishes are with you and your people. May Thanatos's blessing shine brightly upon you."

Ashton frowned. He more or less knew the undead empire would try to brush off the responsibility.

No sane head of state would ever admit their mistake publicly. That said, Ashton was expecting them to provide some help, you know, to clear up their image a bit.

Besides the undead, it seemed Alucard was having a tough time ruling over Vania. The noble vampires were not so happy about his 'positive stance' towards the werewolves.

After all, the animosity between the two groups was no secret. In the eyes of the nobles, the disaster was helping them to get rid of the werewolves.

Lycania was no more. Its citizens were disoriented, and the army disorganised. It was the perfect time to strike their mortal enemies down once and for all. Instead, Alucard was sending in resources and soldiers to help them.

Three mutants who allied against humans were now at each other's throats.

Their behaviour proved the theory that no matter how much brotherhood people share amongst themselves, as soon as the threat of the common enemy disappears, these so-called 'allies' would not hesitate before stabbing each other's backs.

pAn,da-n0v e1,c Ricochet and the metahumans were finding delight in watching the mutants have a tough time. Even after chasing away humans off the planet, the mutants were still as useless as ever.

However, Ricochet kept his men in check. They might find the situation to be funny, but regardless they were now part of Reaper's crew, and as a lieutenant, the captain's problems were his own.

Not to mention, they were on a planet ruled by mutants. Making fun of them would certainly not be good for their health.

"Three continents, three problems." Ashton sighed.

First was the undead situation in Contingency, which they could have handled easily if Ashton had his ship with him. The cannons and the plasma turrets should have been more than enough to clean Contingency of undead filth.

The second was trouble in Alucard's paradise. Arguably, this would be the easiest to handle since there were two things the vampires respected: Bloodline and power.

Ashton had both after being bitten by Dracula and having unparalleled strength on earth. Which meant the so-called rebellion would be suppressed as soon as he smacked some sense into a couple of 'nobles'.

Finally, arguably the worst problem of them all was confronting the culprits. Invading Nirvana would be easy; however, since only a little was known about the undead or the country of Nirvana itself, doing so would be quite bothersome. boxnovelfull.com

Knowing that things would worsen if either of the three problems were not solved, Ashton had to get busy immediately. The first step was taking control of Vania. However, Avalina thought otherwise.

"Alucard can handle himself better than you think," She said, "Our primary focus should be on taking back lost territories for resources they have to offer... and I have someone you should meet."

"Who?"

"Just come with me for a bit. Anna could come as well as you might need her," Avalina awkwardly mumbled as the two followed her, "To be frank, I think we'll need Anna's help more than you. Please don't hate me for this."

"Why would I-" Ashton smiled; however that smile disappeared as soon as he saw the person Avalina wanted him to meet.

Ashton's rage-filled eyes locked on the woman waiting for him, and he wanted nothing more than to rip her to shreds.

"This is the big surprise you wanted to show me?" Ashton coldly asked Avalina, his voice smoldered with resentment.

Avalina could not look her son in the eyes anymore. Despite knowing Ashton would not approve of her or her methods, she went through with it.

"The fuck do you want?" Ashton ignored Avalina before turning his attention to the culprit.

"That's quite a cold greeting, even for you." The Mistress smiled, "It's good to see you too!"

That was all it took to set Ashton off. With a flash, he grabbed the Mistress by her throat and was ready to end her right then and there.

"ASHTON, DON'T!" Anna yelled in time to stop him, "It's not worth it."

In their intimate moments, Ashton revealed his past to Anna. That's how she came to know about the things the 'mistress' had done to him. For her, torture was a form of training, and it was a miracle Ashton came out of it with his mind intact.

Even then, killing her wasn't worth it. Unfortunately, Ashton did not care. Even now, when he had the Mistress in his clutches, the bitch was still smiling. There wasn't a shred of remorse on her face.

"Oi, sis. I think you broke your toy well before I got to play with him." The Mistress mumbled while struggling to free herself.

"Does he look like a toy to you?"

To Ashton's surprise, another Mistress walked inside the room. Confusion took over anger. Why the hell were two of them there?

"Tsk, I should have known," Ashton smacked his lips before easing the grip on the clone's neck, "A coward like you would never face me herself."

"You can say whatever helps you sleep, kid," Mistress shrugged, "Now then, shall we get down to business?"