

## **Zompiewolf 501**

### Chapter 501 A Son's Revenge (1)

After a tiring battle against the undead, everyone deserved a break. However, fate had planned something different. It all happened so fast that barely anyone had time to react.

Within moments the jolly mood of the party was soured as hundreds of capsules rained upon them. Massive dust clouds shot up in the air, covering Livan.

Those proficient in magic immediately erected mana shields to minimise the damage. Still, a few unfortunate souls were squashed beneath the drop pods.

"What the hell is going on..." Nora snarled loudly.

Apart from her voice, the hall was filled with groans of pain and coughing sounds. Only a few managed to keep calm, while most were startled and confused.

As the dust began to settle down, the pods opened one after another, revealing an army of undead and outworlders. An invasion army had descended upon them.

Had it been undead, the werewolves might have had a chance against them. But the alien mercenaries were a different story altogether. One look was enough to know what was going on there.

"As I suspected," Jady's voice echoed through the hall, "These dogs organised a party and didn't bother inviting us? Is that any way to treat your soon-to-be ruler?"

A gust of wind swiftly passed through the invaders, slicing Jady's head in half. The smiling undead and their alien counterparts were suddenly stunned into silence.

Jady was the president's right-hand man and thus was leading the operation. For him to be lost in a second dealt quite a blow to their morale.

However, for the aliens, Jady's death didn't matter much. After all, they barely knew the guy to care about his death. It was the way he got killed that surprised them. Unfortunately, they were in for a series of surprises ahead.

"Fucking annoying sack of shit," Ashton mumbled, "Maybe I should thank you for saving me the trouble of travelling to Nirvana. Or should I kill you, morons, for ruining the party? Decisions, decisions..."

As Ashton walked out of the shroud of dust, the eyes of most mercenaries popped out of their sockets. Although he hadn't been in the business for long, any decent mercenary knew who he was. Well, at least they were aware of the kind of mask he wore.

Those who realised they were facing Reaper felt a sense of despair wash over them. How could they not react that way? Reaper was the only one who exchanged blows with Phantom and lived to tell the tale.

In the mercenary business, there was a new sheriff in town, and it was Reaper. Unfortunately, the mercenaries were on the opposite side as him.

Deciding to rectify their mistake immediately, the intelligent ones immediately dropped their weapons and surrendered. Their behaviour both enraged and confused the undead around.

They were paid soldiers who were expected to do their job perfectly, or else they would lose credibility amongst the community. Then why the hell were they behaving like a bunch of scaredy cats?

Till now, the undead had no information on Ashton's background. They only struck Livan to teach them a lesson for taking back Contingency.

Dressed in advanced battle gear and backed up by outworlders, they were confident in their win. Unfortunately, their intel about Livan was outdated.

Not only were they unaware of Ashton's secret identity, but they were also oblivious to Giholos. After the initial reaction shock faded, the undead knew they had messed with the hornet's nest.

"I didn't think you braindead fuckers would fall for the trap so hard." Ashton smiled as the undead stood in their place, frozen in shock.

The undead might have thought they'd catch Ashton by surprise. But it was far from true.

Celebrating his victory wasn't the only reason Ashton agreed to host the party. Otiga had already informed him about Nirvana's job request. So he had one of the intelligence association guys answer their call and reveal all of their plans.

As for the 'people' who died from the initial strike, all of them were undead who had accompanied Ashton from Contingency.

But that wasn't all. There was a special guest among the crowd. Someone Ashton detested from the core of his being. He had no interest in the undead or the mercenaries accompanying them. His bloodshot eyes were scanning the crowd for the man who was more dangerous than anything found on earth.

"Where are you hiding now, bastard?" Ashton snarled, popping out his claws.

"Ho... to think you'll find me so soon. Tsk, you know how to take the fun out of everything, don't you?" A mercenary stepped out of the crowd flexing his shoulders.

"Oi! Nemo! Back down right now- argh..."

The leader of the mercenaries instructed the man to stop. Sadly, the man he was stopping was no longer the man he knew. Before anyone could understand what was going on, the leader fell to his knees, choking on his blood after being stabbed in the neck.

"Not in the mood for talking?" Phantom egged Ashton on, "Come on, is this any way for you to treat a friend? How rude can you be, fucker?"

Without responding to Phantom's provocations, Ashton called out his summons. It was a welcoming sight for Phantom; the more people fought him, the stronger he would get.

Phantom's overpowered passive ability was why he agreed to be part of an army, as he knew he'd be unstoppable.

"Protect the people," Ashton mumbled, grabbing the scythe in his hand, "I'll take care of the rest."

"The kid grew-"

Phantom was in the middle of talking, when Ashton grabbed his face and threw him out of the broken building. No one had ever manhandled him like this since he became 'Phantom'.

Hell, even that Dwarf couldn't have possibly done anything like that to him. Yet this bastard earthling dared to treat him like a ragdoll?

"The precursor you killed, who was he?" Ashton coldly asked Phantom.

"Why? You want to pick up the pieces?" Phantom laughed before throwing a punch at him.

However, his punch phased straight through Ashton. But Balmond's blade did not.

"FUCK!"

Phantom cursed in pain, but Ashton planted his knee to his face before he could get do anything else. This was a different scale of power Phantom hadn't expected from Ashton.

After all, it had only been a few months since their last bout! How did the bastard get so strong in such a short period? It didn't make any sense!

"I'll ask you for the last time," Ashton repeated, "Who was the Precursor you killed?"

#### Chapter 502 A Son's Revenge (2)

While Ashton and Phantom were sorting their business, the undead had to face troublesome opponents on their own. Their invasion had hilariously failed, and now that Phantom had killed a mercenary, the rest turned against the undead.

In a way, the undead brought the mercenaries to strengthen their enemies.

However, not all was lost as they had an ace up their sleeve, a weapon that could instantly turn all odds in their favour.

"Commander, what should we do?" One of the undead soldiers whispered.

"Colonel Jadyne was supposed to take command," The Commander replied softly, "As his second-in-command, I instruct you to arm the bomb. If we cannot defeat them, we'll turn them."

"Affirmative!" The soldier replied and began working on the bomb, protected by the foliage of the troopers.

"Huh, so this is the secret weapon?" Someone whispered into the soldier's ear.

"Yes," The soldier absentmindedly replied, "Now let me do my job-"

The undead turned around to shove the man aside. However, he realised there wasn't anyone standing by him. Besides, it didn't appear as if anyone else heard the voice.

Confused, he resumed his work. But something was off. His hands felt oddly sloppy, and it almost felt like his hands were not listening to the mind.

At that moment, he heard the voice once again. But this time, it almost sounded majestic. Like a god was talking to him.

"Why don't you disarm the bomb instead?" The feminine voice echoed in his mind, "If you do, I'll fulfil any wish you ever had. Everything you ever desired would be under your feet, be it women or power."

? "But the orders-"

"Does a kill need to follow orders from a peasant?" The voice replied, "Maybe I was wrong to believe in you. How unfortunate, but if that's your wish-"

"NO! I'll do as you ask. I'll disarm the bomb for good!"

Without wasting another moment, the man not only disarmed the bomb but completely dissembled it. It was already too late when the commander realised what had happened.

Rushing over to the soldier, the man smacked him hard. But even that blow wasn't enough to bring the soldier out of his trance.

"Bastard! What have you done!?" The commander vigorously shook him, to no avail.

"He won't be waking up any time soon." Alina smirked, "Neither will the rest of your 'bomb squad'."

"You- I know you!" The commander's bloodshot eyes glared at her, "The white witch! To think you were hiding here-"

"She isn't the only one," Jay jumped out of nowhere, slicing undead left and right with his whip-like sword.



"Fucking Inhumans!" The commander snarled before lunging toward Jay.

However, before the undead could do anything, he was slit in half by one of the mercenaries. The undead were backed into a corner with nowhere to run.

Now their only hope was Phantom. As long as they held out till his return, he would surely kill all the bastards. But it didn't seem like he would be coming to their rescue any time soon.

"Shouldn't we help them? I've been itching for a fight, and it'll also help wrap things up faster!" Montagu eagerly popped his claws. The thought of battle brought out the warrior blood in him.

"Dad, let them be." Anna replied, "The Inhumans have suffered enough under the undead's tyranny, and they deserve to get some payback. Besides, the outworlders are also helping them. I don't think we need to involve ourselves for now."

"Then what about helping Ashton-"

"Don't even think about it," Anna sternly warned him, "Phantom isn't someone who can be defeated using numbers."

Anna might have said that, but she was worried to death for Ashton. After all, the last time the two faced each other, Ashton only managed to survive thanks to master Vulcan.

Also, this time around, there was no one to help him. If Ashton lost, all of them would be as good as dead.

"If you want to help," Anna mumbled, "Please take everyone into the underground shelter, and lock it from the inside, so no one breaks in."

"What do you-" Her mother tried to talk, but Anna had none of it.

"It's only a precaution, ma, should things take a turn for the worse." Anna replied, "I'll stay back and come for you once everything is over."

"Very well," Montagu replied and immediately gathered the non-combatants before leaving.

Once the hall had been cleared, Anna decided to join the battle or at least assist them somehow.

"I believe in you, moron." Anna mumbled, "Don't make me eat my words."

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Back on the battlefield, tables had turned against Ashton. Although he had gotten much stronger than before, he wasn't the only one who did.

Phantom wasn't wasting his time after his loss. Travelling through countless worlds, he had absorbed the abilities and power of god knows how many aliens.

"Hm... you are awfully strong. I'll give you that." Phantom panted while resting his hands on his knees, "And here I thought I won't need to go all-out against you."

Ashton used the scythe to support him as blood droplets trickled down his face. Since the scythe's power had been restricted, he couldn't phase through all of Phantom's strikes.

Even though he used the phasing ability to dodge the critical strikes, the strike that connected skillfully reduced him to such a state.

"I was saving the secret strength to go against that dwarf, but I don't think I can afford to go easy on you anymore." Phantom smiled as he rushed in from another attack.

Ashton instantly phased through the attack. However, something weird happened. Even though Phantom's strike turned out to be useless, he didn't stop.

"Shit!"

It took a moment for Ashton to realise that Phantom had never aimed for him. Instead, his target was the ones inside the hall!

"Feel despair, you bastard!" Phantom laughed his heart out.

"Anna!" Ashton yelled at her.

She turned towards them, only to find Phantom racing towards her. He was too quick. From afar, Ashton could see Anna twist in pain as she fell to her knees.

"PHANTOM! I'LL KILL YOU, FUCKING BASTARD!"

### Chapter 503 A Son's Revenge (3)

Rage gripped Ashton through its claws. Phantom's laughing figure was all he could see as his vision narrowed down to him. However, his laughter wasn't all his ears could capture, as Anna's painful cry kept resounding in his mind.

Ashton's human form proved to be inadequate against Phantom's maximum power. But just like Phantom, Ashton wasn't using his full strength either... at least not in the conventional sense.

The power of an A-grade being was nothing to laugh at. Phantom knew it very well. That's why he was so cocky while attacking Eula's planet and now Earth.

No matter how strong Ashton had gotten, as long as he hadn't achieved the realm of an A-grader, Phantom had nothing to be scared about. Unfortunately for him, his overconfidence made him forget about a crucial detail.

Ashton was no ordinary being. Not putting his Zompiewolf capabilities into consideration, he was still half-Precursor. Drunk over his power, Phantom failed to consider any uncertainties before striking Anna.

In his eyes, attacking Anna was a sure-hot method of making Ashton drop his guard and lose himself to his anger. Once a fighter had lost their composure, even a cohega could kill them.

However, the result was much different from what Phantom had planned. Following Ashton's initial outburst, he showed no signs of losing his cool. If anything, he was more focused on exacting his revenge.

'What will be your next move...'

Phantom kept repeating those words when a wave of darkness shot out of Ashton's shadow and surrounded both men. Within moments, they found themselves in a separate domain.

"Silent Kill Zone," Phantom chuckled, "If I had a Yeno for every time someone had tried stopping me using this skill, I would be... 4 Yenos richer-"

Within moments, the cocky smile plastered all over his face faded. Phantom realised that although it was a skill similar to [Silent Kill Zone], it wasn't the same.

"Afterlife, have you ever thought about what it would feel like to be there?" Ashton coldly mumbled, "I did, and this is the result of my imagination. Think of it like an Astral plane. A world that imitates reality but bends over to fulfil its ruler's wishes."

"..."

Phantom kept observing his opponent through spooky eyes. Having no idea what was going on, there wasn't much he could have done either way. But he was sure of one thing... Ashton wasn't lying.

Both of them were in a different world, or something like that. Although the place looked similar to Earth, it had an eerie aura surrounding it—the aura of death.

"How can this be possible!?" Phantom finally snapped.

What kind of power must a man possess to conjure an alternate world on a whim? Phantom had been to countless planets to take countless souls away but never had he seen or heard someone possessing such a frightening ability.

"You should have known this. If partially killing a Precursor gave him the strength you're known for." Ashton growled, "Now imagine what powers a Precursor's offspring would have?"

The mention of 'Precursor' was enough for Phantom to go wide-eyed. His previous life flashed before his eyes. It was a time when his strength in the universe was laughable, to say the least.

In his desperation for money and fame, Phantom turned into an assassin. But as luck would have it, his abilities were not suited for the job.

After one unfortunate incident, he had to run for his life, and that's when he stumbled across Nirvana. That place was heaven for him. For the first time in his life, people admired his strength.

The undead proposed to conduct tests on him to increase his strength further, and Phantom readily agreed. That's where he met a researcher who was different from the rest.

When Phantom saw the man, his body kept screaming for him to run. However, he had grown tired of running away. Thus, instead of running away, he decided to eliminate the cause of his anxiety.

After planning for a while, he 'killed' the researcher named Johnathan. It was the first time Phantom ever felt the rush of murdering. But that wasn't the only thing he felt as a new power awakened within him. The power which he used to terrorise the entire galaxy for a decade!

A moment later, Phantom threw a fit of laughter. Connecting the dots from what Ashton said, he realised why Ashton was so calm. Unlike what Phantom had imagined, Ashton wasn't fighting him to protect his people; he was fighting to avenge his father's death.

"Oh, the joy!" Phantom exclaimed while wrapping his hands around him, "Haha! The rush... the pleasure I felt from killing that bastard. How long have I been chasing that feeling? For a Decade! Thanks to you, I'll get to relive that moment once again! I-"

Suddenly the world began swirling around right before Phantom's eyes. Being clueless, he assumed he was dizzy, but the truth was much worse.

It wasn't until Phantom hit the ground did he realise something was off. He could see the rest of his body standing still. How could he SEE his body from such an angle? Something was wrong!

"You will feel a rush, alright. But it won't be nothing like you had imagined." Ashton whispered while holding Phantom's head through his hair, "I appreciate your truthfulness, and as a way to thank you, I'll ensure you die in the most horrible way possible."

Saying so, Ashton summoned a skeleton, who came digging out of the ground. At the moment, Ashton was inside [Valhalla]. Usually, any living being would die the moment they stepped foot inside. However, it was different when Ashton was in his Grim Reaper form.

"Wait! What are you-"

Phantom couldn't even struggle as he had been freed from his body using [Disassociation]. He could only watch in horror as Ashton replaced the skeleton's head with Phantom's.

"What else? You're going to torture yourself for all eternity!" Ashton nonchalantly replied.

Even without its head, the skeleton was alive and could function normally. That's why when Ashton gave the command, the skeleton walked up to Phantom's body and began slicing him, one centimetre at a time.



Since Phantom's head had been severed using [Disassociation], he could feel the pain of being sliced alive. But he could only watch on in horror as 'his' new bony arms scored him apart.

But Ashton wasn't done yet. Before departing, he summoned another skeleton, gave him a shit-ton of healing potions, and one instruction.

"Make sure that bastard doesn't die."

The skeleton nodded before joining Phantom in the slicing process.

"Y-You can't do this! AAAARGH! PLEASE, ANYTHING BUT THIS! PLEASEEEEE!"

Chapter 504 Mission: Annihilation (1)

"Secure the perimeter and treat the wounded."

Those were Ashton's first words as soon as he was out of [Valhalla]. Constantly using Grim Reaper's powers had taken a toll on him. But it wasn't the time to rest yet.

At some distance, he could see Mera treating Anna's wounds. Thankfully, her wounds weren't severe.

'Letting her borrow [Hydra's Scale Armour] ended up saving her,' Ashton took a deep breath to calm his raging heart, 'Thanks for the idea.'

[Since you now have the scythe, the armour would have been useless for you either way.]

After confirming Anna's status with his eyes, Ashton plopped to the ground. The battle had tired him out, both physically and mentally.

Apart from losing a few undead soldiers, his losses were more or less contained. That said, no money could compensate for the feeling of exacting his revenge.

Facing the night sky, Ashton couldn't help but remember his father. Finally, Johnathan could rest in peace, or so Ashton hoped. The revenge was far from complete and wouldn't be finished as long as Nirvana and its rulers were alive.

[Taking over a continent, eh? How fun!]

"Your excitement is giving away your intentions."

[Can you blame me? After you conquer those smelly bastards, we can engineer my body!]

"...stop drooling."

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While Ashton rested, every outworlder's eyes were on him. Their faces were shrouded with complicated feelings towards him and his [Ghosts].

On the one hand, they were glad Reaper won the battle. But on the other, they couldn't help and felt intimidated by his strength.

Phantom was someone who had fooled the most influential forces present in the galaxy. Yet one man managed to get rid of him? It didn't make any sense!

On top of it all, it hadn't been long since Reaper had established his mercenary group [Ghosts]. Yet they were racking up achievement after achievement.

If things continued progressing as they were, it wouldn't be long before everyone would want to be a [Ghost]. Their influence in the Kernel tower was about to burst through the roof, and the mercenaries wanted a piece of it!

Seeing as neither Reaper nor his second-in-command Anna were available to discuss employment opportunities, they all rushed towards Ricochet. But they stopped once they realised it was the right time to make a good impression on him.

"Let's wait it out," One of the mercs suggested, "in the meantime, let's take care of clean up."

"Right!"

Even though they were 'helping' out the earthlings, their eyes could help but shine, imagining the ripples the news of Phantom's death would send across the Orion sector!

However, the surprises were far from over.

"Another spaceship?" Nora growled, gripping her warhammer tighter.

Nora's personality was somewhat similar to that of Mera, which was given since she was a clone. When it came to admitting defeat or acknowledging the enemy's strength, they both often chose to feign ignorance.

Regardless of how she felt, following the last battle, Nora could feel how pathetically weak she was against the outworlders. That's why seeing another spaceship had her standing on her toes.

But before she could unnecessarily rally the troops, she felt a hand on her shoulder.

"Stand down," Ricochet mumbled, "They're not enemies."

"What do you-"

"Don't put pressure on your pea brain," Ricochet interrupted, putting his finger on Nora's lips, "You can take charge in the bed, but here it'd be better if you follow my lead."

Following a thunderous noise, the ship landed next to Ashton, and over a dozen aliens sprinted out of it, weapons at ready.

Laihud was the first to take notice of Anna's condition and rushed over to help her. Vimur followed suit and walked up to greet their captain.

"Where is that Phantom!? I split his head in half!"

"Oi, rhino! Shut it!" Ashton grumbled in annoyance, "He's dead. But how do you know he was here?"

"That's on me," Otiga sheepishly emerged from the crowd, "Forgive my crude language, but you look like shit."

However, before Ashton could reply, a special guest knocked him over.

"Aegis! You've grown, little bud!"

"Whee~"

Having met his master, the furry beast squealed in excitement. Ashton lifted the evergrowing beast in his arm while scratching his head.

"Don't mind me spoiling your reunion, but did I hear it correctly? Sir, you killed Phantom?" Leon politely inquired.

No one could blame Leon's suspicion, as Phantom was more like an urban legend. Thus it was hard to believe he was gone. Not that anyone wanted him to be alive, but it was difficult to digest the news.

Ashton smiled. Knowing people won't believe his story; he had slipped one of Phantom's fingers into his inventory before leaving [Valhalla]. But that wasn't the only reason for taking the finger. Ashton also wanted to use it to claim the bounty on Phantom's head.

"Here, satisfy your curiosity." Ashton replied, tossing the finger to Otiga, "While you are at it, I was hoping you'll save me the trouble of claiming the bounty myself."

"Of course, you're my boss, and it's my job to aid you in any way you desire." Otiga jokingly bowed before rushing back inside the ship.

At the same time, someone else greeted the crowd with his presence. As soon as Vulcan appeared, everyone walked out of his path. Those who thought Ashton was strong a moment ago openly reverted their decision. Call it intuition, but everyone knew not to mess with the oldie.

"I can sense you have grown a bit since the last time." The dwarf mumbled, "Don't let it get to your head, and maybe you'll achieve a tenth of my strength."

"Thank you, master." Ashton respectfully bowed his head.

It was strange for the Lycanians to see Ashton treat someone with the utmost respect. Out of everyone, Mera was so surprised she gasped loudly.

While she had seen Ashton bow to a handful of people, it was always an obligation more than a show of respect. But this was different, and Ashton genuinely held the dwarf in high regard.

'Who is that man for Ashton to be so respectful towards him?' Mera thought to herself, but no answer popped into her mind, 'Should I try to investigate?'

Chapter 505 Mission: Annihilation (2)

After ensuring Anna was in capable hands, Ashton excused himself to his chamber. As much as he would have liked to stay and chat with his crew, there was a lot he needed to think about, especially about the information Otiga had disclosed before.

"Occuna was destroyed? How could someone destroy an entire planet like that?" He mumbled before entering the bathroom.

The sole reason Otiga accompanied the rest of Ashton's crew was to give him the information. A planet's destruction was a controversial topic, and such destruction is often looked down upon and could damage the reputation of that region's 'Protector' regime.

Hence, the matter was yet to be disclosed to the public. But since the [Ghosts] had returned from the Occuna not too long ago, Otiga hoped they would have some information on the topic.

When they proved to be of little use, Otiga decided to ask Ashton about it. Upon noticing Ashton's condition, she did not push him about it but asked him to keep her request in mind.

"No matter how I see it, this so-called Cult of Cosmos could be the culprit behind this."

[Hm... maybe.]

The automated shower immediately sensed Ashton's presence, along with the dust and blood he was covered in. Instantly warm water rushed out of the triangular shower head to hug his body, momentarily taking his worries away from him.

"Destroying a planet seems like a challenging task. I have seen and heard many peculiar things, but I still can't wrap my head around a planet being destroyed like that."

[Rather than saying a planet was destroyed, it's more suitable to say it was made inhabitable. If that's the case, there are quite a few ways to achieve it.]



"Xyrans might have used them a lot, I suppose."

[I can't deny nor confirm the truthfulness of that statement.]

"Woah, you sound like a dirty politician!"

[All politicians are dirty. But I digress; I meant to say that a strong enough plasma cannon and enough power supply should be enough to sear a planet's surface.]

"If people of Occuna couldn't last against it, the earth has no chance either."

[Exactly.]

After a good time inside the shower, he finally stepped out as the water droplets gently poured through his hair, tracing his well-defined muscles.

At that moment, Ashton had found a new enemy to put in place. However, this time it wasn't an individual like Phantom but a mysterious organisation.

Eula's homeworld and Occuna were the only two places the Ghosts had been to for mission. During both jobs, Ashton had an encounter with the Cult.

While it could be ignored as a coincidence, Ashton didn't think so. They had to be looking for him or someone in his crew. That's the only explanation Ashton could come up with at the moment.

[Sometimes your brain can be so slow.]

"What do you mean?"

[You already know what, or should I say, who they are after.]

At that moment, a faint memory resurfaced. Metal sharks targeted Eula because she was a succubus, but the people from the Cult were also there for her.

But since she was well protected, they shifted their attention to a somewhat easier target--Anna!

"These fuckers are getting too cocky," Ashton mumbled while smiling, "Thankfully, the news of Phantom's demise should make them second guess their intentions."

[One can only hope.]

After getting dressed, Ashton headed outside to check on the relief measures. Although a third of the city had been reduced to a pile of rubble, the residents appeared unaffected by the disaster. Seeing humans, vampires, werewolves and undead smile while helping the relief efforts was heartwarming.

"Congratulations, young lord," Montagu said with a straight face, "You have achieved the impossible. I can finally see why my dearest daughter took a liking to you."

"I'd like to apologise for my incompetence in protecting her-" Ashton muttered but was immediately stopped by Montagu.

"You have nothing to apologise for, son." He said, "Anna got injured because she was weak and couldn't foresee an ambush. That said, I'm glad I got to see her newfound strength. HAHA!"

[A family of masochists, I'm telling you. You'll get married into a family of masochists!]

'Stop thinking out loud, mofo! I ain't getting married yet.'

[Forget about marriage, be a sigma male!]

"Sigma?"

[Sigmaballs.]

'...can't believe I fell for that.'

"Anyways, I'll take my leave." Montagu patted Ashton's back, "Someone needs to watch over Anna, and I believe you have a lot of work to do."

Ashton responded with a curt nod as Montagu disappeared right before his eyes.

"Teleportation, that might come in handy."

[You would consume your father-in-law for a mere ability?]

'Anything that comes out of your dirty mouth becomes dirty.'

[Hey, you're the one wanting to do the sucky-sucky for an ability!]

Jokes aside, the battle reduced his number of undead foot soldiers by around 11%. Thankfully, most of them were the undead under Bismark's command, so his main force was mostly unaffected.

However, not that the limit on commanding more undead had been lifted, Ashton wanted to start resurrecting more shade soldiers.

Unfortunately, Earth wasn't the place to do it, as the residents were feeble compared to the rest of the galaxy. But he then remembered something.

Ashton immediately dipped his hand in his inventory and removed a monster's severed head. It was the lizardman he had confronted on Occuna.

'He wouldn't be of much use without a body.' Ashton shrugged comically, 'That is if I didn't possess [Association].'

A moment later, he called out every single undead from [Valhalla]. The task Ashton was about to give them wasn't something he could accomplish by himself quickly.

"Remember this head," He commented, waving the severed head around like a trophy, "Search far and wide. I don't care if you have to plunge into the swamp, but find a body suited for this individual. The ones who bring a corpse to my liking will be promoted to a higher class!"

The skeletons began clattering their teeth in excitement. Being promoted meant they'd be able to handle more power and have a unit of their own, much like Sven and the others did. Even though they weren't alive, their greed for power lived endlessly.

Chapter 506 Mission: Annihilation (3)

It was a strange night for the citizens of Lycania. Thousands of skeletons poured out of portals and ran rampant throughout the kingdom in search of something unbeknownst to the crowd.

Thanks to Ashton's well-known reputation, everyone stayed calm, knowing the skeletons weren't there to harm them.

While the skeletons were busy, Ashton decided to wrap up some loose plans. One of which was related to Beelzebub's decision. The most effective way to cover military losses was to induct someone or something new into the forces.

The new addition could be anything between a new technology or an unnatural godly being helping them. At the moment, pursuing the tech route was a waste of time.

Ashton had given Nirvana a month before he would return to kick their asses into the afterlife. A better path of the month was over, and it would take the skeletons another week or so to find a suitable torso replacement for the Lizardman.

Since time was running out of hand, Ashton decided to visit Beelzebub sooner than expected. However, it wasn't a desperate move. After all, he finally had his [Ghosts] and the other mercenaries to help him overthrow Nirvana.

Sure, he might take some losses if he proceeded on that route. But with the ship, Lord Testickle provided him, getting rid of their forces would be a piece of cake.

"No, killing them so mercifully won't satisfy me." Ashton immediately threw that plan out of his head, "I need them to feel the desperation their reckless actions caused to my family and me. Giving them a quick death is out of options."

[Look, Ashton, I have told you this before and will give it to you again. Revenge might do you some good, but sadism will not accomplish anything. You are free to do as you please, though remember, Phantom did as he pleased, and now look at him.]

"Karma is a bitch," Ashton smirked, "I'm not deluded enough to think one day she won't come after me. But unlike these bastards, I'll welcome her with open arms and tell her to try her best because I ain't backing down."

In his thousands of years of existence, Astaroth had never taken a lunatic's words seriously. However, Ashton's words and resolve made him feel fear, even though nothing he said was directed at him.

A being who instilled fear in the heart of his enemies with a simple glance was intimidated by a pipsqueak. If a Xyran heard such a ridiculous thing, they'd die laughing.

The great General Astaroth was intimidated by the words of a lowly human? Just the thought made Astaroth cringe.

[Oh, fuck it! I like your resolve more than the universal law of karma. As you said, we'll deal with the witch when she arrives. For now, it's time to wreck those smelly bastards!]

Ashton smiled. But the happy moment was tainted by his father's last words.

'How can I not trust Asta when we have been through so much together?' Ashton thought, 'Maybe, dad was wrong just this once? \*Sigh\* It's not the right time to think about it. I'll cross that bridge when I have to.'

\*\*\*

The subtle clang of shackles could be heard as soon as Ashton entered Raphael's domain. Beelzebub remained there, holding the same position as the last time Ashton entered the domain.

However, Beelzebub no longer had the fiery eyes of a rebel. Instead, it seemed he had finally come to terms with his abnormal defeat by Ashton's hands.

"Huh, I'm not even surprised anymore," Beelzebub mumbled, sporting a sad smile.

"What are you on about?" Ashton replied, squatting down to the Xyran's level.

"Your power levels have risen once again." He replied, "No matter how I see it, such a rapid increase in strength is incomprehensible. I can't recall when I met someone like you."

"He's part Precursor; what else did you expect?" Astaroth appeared next to Ashton, using Raphael's potency.

"You found a great body to leech off of, Astaroth." Beelzebub smiled.



For the first time since Ashton had learned about their relations, he had seen Beelzebub and Astaroth share a moment without hostility. Weirdly enough, he didn't feel excluded from the group either.

At that moment, Ashton could guess the path Beelzebub had chosen to walk on. But for now, he could let the two Xyrans have a moment to themselves.

"Let's skip the bullshit," Astaroth broke the silence, "have you made your decision or not?"

Another bout of silence followed Astaroth's question. With each passing moment, Ashton got fidgety on the inside and Having Beelzebub inside Raphael restricted Ashton from using the Mournblade's full potential.

It also played a part in Ashton ushering Beelzebub towards making the desired decision. After all, without Beelzebub's consent, no one could alter the Xyran's genes and turn him into a puppet.

"It's not like I'm gaining anything by staying inside." Beelzebub shook his head, "However, being trapped here did give me enough time to think about my wrongdoings. As much as I would like you to forgive, I don't see that happening."

He continued, "But being the self-centred bastard I am, I can't help but ask for your forgiveness."

"You know, these earthlings have a saying that piqued my interest." Astaroth calmly replied, "Learn to forgive and forget. While I agree with the first half of the quote, the latter part is complete bullshit."

Ashton said nothing, allowing the two brothers to sort out their differences. But even then, he could see Astaroth's true personality peeking through his words.

"I can forgive you, but I'll never forget what you did to us, to Lucifer. Hell, even now, I want to rip off that cocky smile you gave while you framed me for a crime that I never committed!

"You took everything from me! EVERYTHING! Let's... forget about it. I thought I was ready, but I overestimated myself." Astaroth finished speaking to Beelzebub and turned to Ashton, "Do what you have to. I... need a moment to myself."

With that, he disappeared just like he had appeared before them. However, at that moment, Asta's words profoundly affected Ashton, and the wheels in his head began to turn against Beelzebub.

"What's it going to be?" Ashton mumbled as coldly as he could, "Freedom or prison?"

"Freedom-"

"Good."

Ashton didn't even wait for Beelzebub to finish and dug his teeth into his neck. Within moments Beelzebub was flailing his hands in pain, just like Ashton had planned. But the chains ensured that the Xyran couldn't do a thing as his genes were altered... for the worst.

Chapter 507 Mission: Annihilation (4)

Having done the deed, Ashton left Raphael's domain. But this time, he wasn't alone. A towering being could be seen walking right behind and just seeing the creature strike fear into the hearts of onlookers.

However, it wasn't just the creature's physique that put everyone on edge, but Ashton's cold demeanour raised several questions. Whispers followed wherever Ashton went, but no one dared question him.

Usually, a creature's body would only accept compatible genes that would help boost the host's capabilities. In turn, with each new archetype of a gene introduced to someone's body, their appearance would change positively.

It was one of the reasons why Ashton happened to be more attractive than most males on earth.

However, since He had forcefully spoonfed incompatible genes into Beelzebub's body, his body reacted negatively, turning him into a gruesome creature.

Instead of turning Beelzebub into a werewolf as they had planned, Ashton, in his rage, decided to turn him into something much stronger than intended. Truth be told, Beelzebub was a lot stronger than Ashton.

Not only did the Xyran 'inherited' Precursor genetic mutation, but also a pinch of the vampiric cells. It was these cells that were keeping Beelzebub in check.

—

Name: Un-named (Former: Beelzebub)

Species: Eminent Xyran, Precursor Helper, Vampiric Slave

Status: Beastmon

Class: Glutton (Eminent Xyran class), Ancient Protector (Precursor class), Dependant (Vampire class)

Subclass: [Unforgiving Warrior], [Master Strategist], [Tyrant General] +2 others

Title: [Defiant], [Merciless Commander], [Precursor Slayer], [Unfaltering resolve], [Spirit of Warfare], [Ten Thousand to One], [Mythical Slayer], [Emissary of Negation], [Master of Void]

Age: 1216 years

Gender: Male

Grade: A+ tier (Evolution is possible)

Cumulative Level: 203

Affiliation: Ashton Fenrir

—

In the sense of the word, Beelzebub was still alive, but that was all to it. Having lost his identity, no Xyran would ever be able to recognise him as one of their own.

Not only was the result of his evolution humiliating, but it also served the purpose Ashton wanted.

Being a Vampiric slave, Beelzebub was prohibited from even uttering a word against Ashton. Let alone snitch on him to his alien buddies.

However, not being able to go against his master's orders didn't mean Beelzebub had to fight alongside Ashton. While it was true, a Vampiric slave shared a parasitic relationship with their master.

In other words, the slave's life depended on the life of their master. If something were to happen to the master, the slave would perish alongside.

It was safe to say Beelzebub was fucked, through and through.

At that moment, another notification flashed before Ashton's eyes.

—

One evolution task has been completed!

Vampire evolution task(s):

>> Consume fresh blood of 2 B-grade beings. (1/2)

>> Consume fresh blood of a legendary creature. (0/1)

>> Add a new member to your family. (Turn another creature into your slave) (1/1)

Please bless your servant with a new identity to cement your ownership.

—

"A name, huh..." Ashton mumbled while examining the beast, "I got the perfect one."

---

Are you sure you want to name your servant: \*Guilt\*?

---

Ashton nodded, and the next moment the confirmation screen popped up. The Xyran, once known as Beelzebub, was now gone, replaced by a disgusting lump of mass.

"Who do we have here?" Vimur quizzed, thoroughly analysing the strange creature before him, "Is it some local animal? If that's the case, I can help you with the butchering process-

"He's my attendant," Ashton interrupted, "also, he's most likely the strongest guy on the planet, Ghosts included."

As much as he was enjoying Beelzebub getting thrashed verbally, he did not want him to have a nervous breakdown. Unfortunately, it seemed Vimur wasn't ready to believe Ashton's words.

Truth be told, it wasn't that Vimur did not believe Ashton. However, much like the rest, he was pretty bored doing trivial tasks. A nice would be a great way to get rid of pent-up stress.

The creature might have looked strong from the outside, but Vimur had fought and defeated several creatures like the one before him. Ashton tried again to politely tell Vimur to fuck off, but the rhino-brained bastard didn't back down.

In the end, Ashton relented and allowed Vimur to have his shot against Guilt. After all, it was an excellent way to measure Guilt's strength.

Just like that, a spar was scheduled. Thousands of people surrounded the two, wanting to witness the strength of outworlders, while other space-dwellers joined in to rid the boredom.

"I know what that look means," Ashton warned Guilt before leaving the arena, "I don't care how useful you might be in the future. If you kill Vimur, you'll die next."

Vimur could be seen smiling and waving his battleaxe around at some distance as the crowd cheered him on. Guilt, on the other hand, chose to remain unconcerned.

Without wasting a second, Vimur rushed towards his target. However, just before the two mountains could collide, he dug his axe into the ground throwing huge chunks of dust and boulders towards Guilt.

Ashton was taken aback by Vimur's sudden change in battle tactics. He had always been the one to challenge his opponents head-on. But this time, he chose to proceed with evasive manoeuvres.

Guilt remained unphased by such cheap tricks and refused to dodge. Even Vimur was a bit taken aback by his attack's ineffectiveness.



Seeing this, a human kid cheered on Guilt as he felt terrible for him. However, Guilt's hostile reaction shut the kid up for good, and people around him instantly backed down, not wanting to become minced meat.

Till then, Vimur only wanted to play with Guilt. But after the hostility he displayed, the rhino-brained warrior charged in with all his might.

Unfortunately for him, Guilt had predicted his move and stepped aside. As soon as Vimur went past him, Guilt wrapped his massive arms around his neck, forcing Vimur into a chokehold.

Much to everyone's surprise, after struggling for a few seconds, Vimur inevitably passed out. The spar was over just like that.

But something was off. Guilt wasn't letting go of Vimur and continued flailing him around like a ragdoll. Ghosts immediately rushed over to protect their comrade. But before they could try and save Vimur, Guilt was sent flying following a shockwave.

"I warned you, didn't I?" Ashton growled after kicking the beast away, "Maybe I should teach you a lesson about restraint."

Chapter 508 Mission: Annihilation (5)

Meanwhile, in Nirvana.

No amount of words would've been sufficient to describe the seething look on the President's face. The news of the team's failure reached him; what followed wasn't a pretty sight.

Jadyn's loss didn't affect him much, but the thought of Phantom's defeat made him rethink his decision to engage with the werewolves.

"...what should we do now?" The President mumbled, burying his face into his hands.

Never in his entire life had he sounded as desperate and helpless as he was at that moment.

"We should have taken those runts seriously." Someone replied, "If only we had taken measures to keep them in check like the Vampires, none of this would be happening now!"

"What's done is done," Someone else chimed in, "Given the information we had, coupled with our resources at the time, I believe we made the right decision... even if it came to bite us in the ass later."

Everyone could only nod, as there was nothing left to say. For once, the cabinet members openly criticised themselves for not nipping the bud before it grew into a vicious trap for them.

"Be as it may, how the hell did they manage to defeat someone like Phantom!? Does it make any sense? No, it doesn't!"

"Whether it makes sense or not, reality will remain the same. Phantom was defeated alongside the rest of the squad. Considering those words, it is safe to say this is our loss."

The entire cabinet went silent, and their usual boastfulness was nowhere to be seen. As much as they wanted to offer a solution to the President, no one had answers to his questions.

Phantom was the last weapon they had used. Heck, the cabinet was in a panic and vehemently opposed when the President mentioned using someone as valuable as Phantom to take care of such a trivial matter.

Calling Phantom to help was like using a nuclear bomb to eliminate a colony of ants. But the President persisted, and Phantom was called for help.

While clearly displeased, the cabinet members couldn't help but sigh in relief when Phantom arrived. They could finally put all the troubles behind them and focus on reaping the rewards Phantom was about to serve them on a silver platter. But that did not happen.

Never in a million years would they have thought even Phantom would die facing those werewolves. If someone as strong as Phantom could fail to defeat them, the undead had no chance at victory.

At the moment, they were like a turkey in a slaughterhouse, waiting to be butchered and feasted upon.

Maybe it was karma, finally catching up to them for the heinous things they had done to the humans. That was the only reason they could come up with what was happening to them.

"It's wise to admit our defeat and negotiate with the Lycans. We might have lost, but there's no denying we are much more advanced than them. We could offer them Gen-2 technology for not waging war against us."

Everyone keenly listened to what Jady's replacement had to say. It was mainly because no one else had anything productive to say about their crisis.

"Gen-2 tech might not be useful to us, but for the rest of the planet, it could be considered a gold mine." The man continued, "Bribing with technology might get us enough time to strike them down for good in future-"

"I'm afraid that won't be possible."

Suddenly someone got up to address the gloomy cabinet.

"First off, we are not in any condition to negotiate. Why would someone as strong as them negotiate with us when victory is within their grasp?" The blue-haired child announced.

The man only resembled a kid but was, in fact, older than half of the cabinet members present there. Having been converted at a young age, he couldn't do much about his child-like appearance.

"Let's imagine ourselves in their shoes. If we could take everything the vampires own and have to offer, would we take a little fraction of it?"

Silent whispering sounds filled the cabinet. What the 'kid' articulated made sense. By this point, the Lycans would be oozing with confidence. It wouldn't matter what the undead offered them. As long as it wasn't everything, the werewolves will inevitably attack them.

"That said, we still have a shot at victory. As a precaution, Mr Jadyne had installed a receiver in the science division before leaving for Lycania."

He continued, "The beacon had one purpose- To notify us when the Corpsification bomb went off. As you can guess, the beacon never went off."

Suddenly the gloomy expression on the undead's faces dissipated, replaced by hope as they understood what Kishor was hinting towards.

"To spell it out for those who didn't get it," The child continued, crossing his hands in front of his chest, "Those dogs are still scared of Corpsification gas. Defeating those runts should be easy as long as we can employ the gas into our battle plans."

To date, the undead had always employed corpsification gas offensively. But what Jadyne's assistant suggested made the utmost sense. If they managed to cover the entire nation with the smoke, no mortal being would dare approach them.

However, there was a slight problem.

"I'm afraid you're forgetting something, Kishor." The President sighed, "They already have experience dealing with the gas. If they didn't, then we wouldn't have lost Contingency."

At the President's words, Kishor only smiled. He was well aware of the events that followed in Contingency.

"I agree with your point, Mr President. However, considering both events, it's safe to say they need time to equip before countering the gas. As for the bomb, the Lycans stopped its detonation because they were unprepared."

With gleaming eyes, the President stood up. Finally, a ray of hope had graced them. Even if it wasn't a strategy for triumph, it was enough to ensure their survival for some time. They could devise ways to defeat the enemy if they had time.

"I want every unit to work on the double!" The President roared, "Develop as much Corpsification gas as we can hold. We mustn't leave any table unturned in the battle for our existence!"

Chapter 509 Enemy's Turn

"Control your breathing, close your eyes and visualise your creation," Vulcan's words echoed in Ashton's mind, "It's not your meat to beat randomly. Construct a path, a plan, before executing your will."

With Phantom gone, there was little left to do for Ashton. Nirvana wasn't a threat to him any longer, so instead of dwelling on meagre thoughts of revenge, he decided to focus on honing his other skills.

Although he wasn't the only one interested in the knowledge, Vulcan was so keenly imparting to him. Master Baiter also joined in, although he couldn't do much to keep up with the legendary blacksmith's pace.

Vulcan's way of teaching wasn't conventional by any means. Instead of focusing on practical knowledge, he concentrated on teaching his students from a philosophical point of view.

While others would teach their apprentice how to use a hammer and anvil, Vulcan would instead teach them why they should lift the hammer in the first place.

"Do you have a clear picture in your mind?" Vulcan asked Ashton, who nodded, "Then show me what you got, punk."

Without opening his eyes, Ashton lifted the hammer and waited as it slowly became a part of him. His arm and the hammer were one and the same. It was essential to connect with a tool to create a masterpiece.

Baiter did the same, but he nervously began hammering the metal before him instead of waiting. Suddenly the clanking noise got replaced by a loud thud, followed by a scream.

"ARGH!!!" Baiter screamed, tightly grabbing his crotch.

Ashton wasn't allowed to open his eyes yet, so he could only assume what might have happened to him.

In his hastiness to learn as much as possible, Baiter struck his 'tool' with the hammer instead of the metal sheet. Nora was watching them from a distance and couldn't help but laugh her heart out upon seeing Baiter's twisted face.

Meanwhile, Vulcan couldn't help but shake his head in annoyance. The unexpected visitors were why he wanted to stay on the ship.

But since Ashton insisted on his help rebuilding the city, Vulcan begrudgingly agreed on one condition. Ashton would have to dedicate at least three hours to training with him. The student readily consented since he was eager to learn something new.

Following Baiter's scream, more and more people came charging towards the workshop. Ever since Ashton's alien friends had come to visit, there hadn't been one pale moment in Livan.

"These sniggering bastards..." Vulcan cursed, "Continue your work. I'll be right back."

The dwarf had had enough. Picking up Baiter's hammer, he charged towards the exit. What followed was chaos.

People who had been eagerly watching the drama unfold were now running for their lives. However, some unlucky fellows couldn't retreat in time and were blown away by the gust of wind created by Vulcan's famous [Hammer Swing].

Meanwhile, Ashton had all of his focus on the metal in front. In a way, his mind had stopped registering the happenings around him. He only cared about his swings as he kept beating on the ore.



By the time Vulcan returned, Ashton had finished working on his 'art piece'. However, the look of disappointment was quite evident on his face.

"Hm... Although flawed, it could have been much worse for a kitchen knife." Vulcan replied.

"That's the thing," Ashton replied, "It wasn't supposed to be a kitchen knife."

"Don't tell me," Vulcan mumbled, fearing the worst when Ashton nodded, "A sword like this... maybe you should have struck your balls as well."

Ashton was in no place to give him a cheeky reply as usual and kept his mouth shut while scratching his chin. Having been out of practice for so long, a disaster like this was to be expected.

If truth be told, Vulcan knew something like this was bound to happen. It was the only reason he insisted on training Ashton in exchange for his efforts in rebuilding the city.

'The kid didn't do all that bad,' Vulcan thought, 'Obviously, I'm not going to tell him that. He should be able to recreate a sword in a couple more tries-'

As Vulcan was about to instruct Ashton to start working again, someone interrupted them. Despite wanting to chase her away like the rest, the dwarf knew Otiga wouldn't interrupt them had it not been something important.

"What is it, Lady Otiga?" Ashton asked, clueless about what could have brought her there.

"I did what you told me and dug around for info on Metal sharks and the Cult," She replied in her unusually tense voice, "You might wanna sit down for this."

"Will you tell me what's wrong?"

Ashton's anxiety was about to punch through the limits as he sat on the ground.

"Seven bounties... have been placed on yours and Bella's heads."

"Bounties?" Ashton was even more muddled now, "Why would those fuckers place bounties on us?"

"Well, that's not the worst part. The collective amount is more than seven million Yenos!"

"WHAT!?"

Seven million Yenos? Forget about killing a couple of people; those money-hungry bastards would end an entire solar system for that amount of money.

That said, Otiga still hadn't answered Ashton's question, "Why would they do something like this? I didn't think they'll make a move this quickly!"

"Judging by how often you have messed their plans up, I think they assume you're out for them," Otiga replied.

"What do you mean, how often? As far as I know-"

Suddenly, the reason hit Ashton like a ton of bricks. Ever since stepping foot in space, he had directly or indirectly messed with them.

First, it was on Planet Euphoria where those bastards used the fourth and second seat-holders to try and kidnap Anna. But Ashton foiled their plans.

Then, when the Sharks and Cult turned their attention towards Eula, Ashton also stopped them there.

Finally, not only did Ashton and his crew fend them off on Occuna, but he also killed some Cult members in self-defence.

Time after time, Ashton had interrupted their plans. There was only so much a terrorist organisation like theirs would tolerate his actions.

"Now that I think about it, it's funny they took this long to do something," Ashton laughed nervously, "I guess we need a plan right about now."

#### Chapter 510 Good News All Around

The bounty on Ashton's head went viral like a zombie outbreak in space, but not for the reasons one would have expected.

While some enthusiasts wanted to claim the life-changing bounty, most of the news about the bounty was limited to the time it activated.

It had been a short time since the news of Phantom's defeat was publicised. As such, Reaper's reputation had skyrocketed.

Reaper and his Ghosts were being hailed as heroes like no other before them, and to release a bounty on his head at this time only meant some organisations wanted revenge for Phantom's death.

The citizens across varying civilisations did not take kindly to it. But it wasn't like the Metal Sharks or the Cult gave a fuck about people's opinion of them. They were terrorist organisations, for fuck's sake! Not some privately run security firm.

But people did have influence over various organisations that could foil their plans.

That's why while Ashton gave up on doing anything about the bounty, others came to his rescue. The Kernel Tower had already softened the blow and aided him without his knowledge.

While the Tower had never forbidden anyone from taking jobs from the malignant side of merc jobs, Mazton would not stand for the same this time and let someone harm the hero who took down Phantom.

Within moments of the bounty going live, an announcement was made throughout the Orion sector of the galaxy. Anyone directly or indirectly acting upon the bounty against Reaper would make Mazton and the entire Tower their enemy.

Surprisingly enough, Mazton wasn't the one who made the announcement but the mysterious President of the Kernel Tower. The S-grade humanoid was known not to associate with such matters, but he wouldn't stay neutral this time for some reason.

The Tower wasn't the only organisation that came to Ashton's aid in such a crucial time. Lord Testicles from the Orion empire and the Gold Water leader announced that an attack against Reaper would be considered an attack on them.

Although not sure, everyone knew everyone was jumping to protect Ashton because of Kernel Tower's President. After all, the President had good relations with the Orion Empire and Gold Water Merc organisation.

With not one but three space giants backing Ashton, any organisation would think twice before acting against the Phantom slayer.

The Malignant, or as everyone called it, Dark Guild, was also taken aback by the shocking move of the 'Trinity'.

The Sharks did not even get to take a breather before everything went wrong with them.

The Cult was beyond infuriated by the sudden shift in momentum against them. By offering such a high bounty, they were confident the task would be accomplished sooner than later.

But with the unpredictable involvement of those bastardly organisations, their confidence evaporated. Increasing the bounty reward wouldn't accomplish much, as no sane being would want to make an enemy out of a third of the galaxy.

It didn't seem they'd be able to get rid of the Reaper soon. For now, the sharks and the Cult could only grind their teeth in frustration, As their 'mortal' enemy inevitably escaped from their clutches again.

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On Earth, Otiga, Ashton, Vulcan and the rest of his lieutenants held a meeting to tackle a troublesome issue, except Anna, whom Ashton had forced to take some rest.

Surprisingly, Viper was also included in the meeting. After all, Ashton planned to get him and some humans officially registered as mercenaries under his crew once they got to the Tower.

Although Vimur had no interest in topics that didn't concern violence, even he was in attendance, which alone was sufficient to know the gravity of the situation.

Once Otiga informed them about the bounty placed on their captain and vice-captain, it was time to brainstorm a solution.

"For the Sharks to so blatantly declare war on us," Leon spoke first, "It shows how weak they view us to be!"

"Aren't we weak, though?" Laihud replied, and immediately all attention was on him, "Let's see it from the enemy's point of view. Why did they only declare bounty for Reaper and Bella, no one else?"

The answer was quite obvious. Ashton and Anna were at the centre of every job the Ghosts had accepted.

While the rest of them played an essential role in maintaining the team, there was no denying that their main attack force wasn't all that impressive without Ashton and Anna.

Excluding Ashton's summons, they didn't even have enough soldiers to qualify as a Level-2 faction. Usually, a Level-1 faction had twenty mercs, while Level-2 had about fifty.

At the moment, the Ghosts were a Level-3 faction, which would definitely get to Level-5 once they cashed in the renown for defeating Phantom. Yet, they only had thirty-six people, excluding Viper, humans and Guilt.

"That's not the only reason," Otiga exclaimed, "Since Reaper's home world is a low-grade planet like Earth, people often underestimate his capabilities. I admit, at first, I did too."

Everyone nodded in agreement. If someone narrated Ashton's mercenary career by remarking that he was from a backward planet like Earth, no one would hire him.

"There's a saying on my planet," Vimur mumbled, "Powerful people come from powerful places. While I now know that's complete bullshit, most people we have worked for would agree."

"Be as it may," Ashton replied, "By the time Earth becomes a powerful place, my great-great-great-grandson would be roaming somewhere in a different galaxy, not knowing of a planet called Earth."

Everyone chuckled but soon regained composure.

"Joke aside, that bit has been worrying me as well." Ashton continued, "I cannot leave the planet to fend for itself. Not because of some heroic responsibility but because of the people I care about. Sadly, uplifting Earth isn't something we can do-"

"Who said you can't?" For the first time, Vulcan offered his two cents on 'trivial' matters, "You're a hero for Precursor's sake! Half of the galaxy is grateful to you for what you did. Thus, if you called in some favours, no one would refuse the opportunity to forge a better relationship with you!"

The look on everyone's faces told the entire story. Vulcan was correct. Although it would take years before Earth reached the level of most advanced planets, it was still better than doing nothing.



Reaper's name alone would attract countless organisations and merchants to fund the planet's development. If that happened, the average strength of people on Earth would increase along with their loyalty towards Ashton.

Which, in return, would give Ashton an endless amount of soldiers under his wing. It was a win-win situation for everyone!