

## **Zompiewolf 561**

### Chapter 561 Into The Crucible (1)

The following morning, Ashton walked into the massive simulation room with an even bigger hangover, feeling a mixture of excitement and nervousness.

He was required to be serious about his training, and yet considering his state... well, one could say he wasn't serious at all.

"I should not have challenged Kass to a drinking competition," Ashton mumbled, rubbing this throbbing head. "That bitch can empty the entire bar if we leave her to it."

[It's funnier because you have poison resistance, which is supposed to nullify the effects of any poisonous substance that enters your body. Yet you're the one suffering through a hangover! Haha!]

"Kyu~" Aegis purred, rubbing his head on Ashton's legs.

"I know, bud. No more drinking from now on."

As he pushed open the doors, he saw Flintmace and Vulcan waiting for him in the centre of the room, surrounded by various high-tech equipment and holographic displays.

The atmosphere of the room was quite serious. However, when Ashton saw the polar opposite appearance between the two, he had a tough time holding back his laughter.

Flintmace was an imposing figure standing over seven feet tall with rippling muscles and sharp, angular features. On the other hand, Vulcan was a much smaller dwarf. He was no less intimidating, but that was a different topic.

More importantly, Ashton had never seen Vulcan dressed for battle. He was covered head to toe in heavy armour, wielding a massive hammer that crackled with electricity.

Ashton was familiar with Vulcan's hammer, having been struck with it in their first meeting. Even though he had grown a bit stronger than he was back then, the sight of the cackling hammer sent shivers down his spine.

[Tsk, what a scaredy fucker you are-]

"Oh yeah? Why don't we switch places for a while then?"

[Ahem, I forgot I had something to take care of... I'll see you later.]

"Scaredy fucker."

"Welcome, Ashton," Flintmace said in his deep, rumbling voice. "We're glad you could join us."

Ashton nodded nervously, taking in the sight of the simulation room. The walls were lined with advanced sensors and projectors, and the floor was a seamless grid of high-tech tiles that could change colour and texture at will.

It wasn't the first time Ashton had been into a simulation room, but the tech in that particular was much more advance than anything he had been in yet.

"What are we doing today?" Ashton asked, trying to keep his voice steady.

"You'll be experiencing one of the past wars won by the Xyrans," Vulcan replied bluntly. "It'll be a real war and actual training, not the kind of sparring you're used to."

He continued, "You're going to be pushed to your limits and beyond, and you're either going to come out the other side stronger and more capable than ever before or break trying to achieve the desired results."

Ashton swallowed hard. He knew Vulcan wasn't one to mince words, and the dwarf's reputation as a harsh master was well-deserved. Flintmace was a bit more approachable, but Ashton knew better than to underestimate the wingless Xyran.

"I'm ready," he said, as confident as ever.

Flintmace nodded, gesturing to a nearby console. "We've prepared a series of simulations for you, designed to test your physical and mental limits. You'll face various opponents, from simple drones to full-fledged Xyrans. Don't worry, we won't subject you to all of it today-"

"Talk about yourself." Vulcan scoffed.

Flintmace shook his head, ignoring Vulcan's words. "As I was saying, your goal is to survive as long as you can and learn as much as you can from each encounter."

Ashton stepped up to the console, taking a deep breath to steady his nerves. He had trained hard under Mazton for this moment, but he knew nothing could prepare him for what would come next. After all, Mazton had said so himself. He hesitated for a moment, then reached out and activated the console.

Instantly, the simulation room was transformed into a swirling vortex of light and sound. Ashton was surrounded by a three-dimensional grid of glowing blue lines, and he could feel the energy coursing through his body.

He was aware of Flintmace and Vulcan standing behind him, watching him closely. However, he couldn't see them as everything around him changed into a battlefield.

The battlefield was a chaotic scene of destruction, with the remnants of advanced weaponry scattered across the desolate landscape. Ashton could easily spot the Xyrans fighting an unknown species.

The sky was filled with spaceships of all shapes and sizes, each one bristling with advanced weapons systems. Laser cannons fired beams of deadly energy across the void, seeking out enemy vessels and raining destruction upon them.

Explosions dotted the darkness as ships were torn apart by well-placed volleys of missiles. On the ground below, drones flitted about, their whirring engines and sharp weapons taking out enemy troops and defences.

The advanced technology of each civilisation was on full display, with towering mechs and armoured tanks clashing in a brutal melee.

In the distance, a massive spaceship could be seen, hovering above the battlefield like a dark cloud. Its powerful engines pulsed with energy, and its weapons unleashed a devastating barrage of fire that obliterated anything in its path.

Ashton took a deep breath as he surveyed the battlefield before him. The air was thick with smoke, the acrid stench of burning metal, and the ground trembled beneath his feet with the impact of explosions.

On the horizon, he could see the unmistakable silhouettes of Xyran warships, their sleek and deadly forms slicing through the sky as more Xyran soldiers poured out of the ships.

"Damn... this is all too real!" Ashton whistled.

It didn't feel like he was in a simulated world. Instead, it almost felt like he was fighting against the Xyrans in real time!

"Holy fuck... what is all this?" Ashton mumbled, but he was soon interrupted by his first test.

The first simulation was relatively simple, pitting Ashton against a group of Xyran Grunts armed with laser weapons.

"Here we go," Ashton whispered, calling Balmond to his aid.

Chapter 562 Into The Crucible (2)

Ashton stood on the battlefield, his sword gripped tightly in his hand as he scanned the horizon for any sign of his enemies. He knew that the Xyran grunts were challenging opponents, but they were nothing he couldn't have handled on his own.

In the distance, he saw movement, and he tensed, ready for the fight to come. A group of Xyran grunts emerged from the shadows, their weapons ready. They moved quickly, their movements fluid and graceful as they closed in on Ashton.

Ashton took a deep breath and steadied himself, his eyes locked on the Xyran grunts as they rushed toward him. He waited until they were within striking distance, then lunged forward, his sword flashing in the sunlight as he slashed at his opponents.

"What the hell!?" Ashton cursed under his breath as none of his strikes landed on the insectoid creatures.

The Xyran grunts were fast and agile, dodging Ashton's blows with ease. But things were about to get worse for him.

The grunts moved in unison, attacking from all sides and forcing Ashton to stay defensive. The grunts had been thoroughly trained to abuse their number advantage to drain the enemy's stamina before ending them. They were like hyenas who were on a strict lion-based diet.

But Ashton was no novice with a sword, and he quickly adapted to their fighting style, parrying their strikes and countering with swift, decisive blows. However, he was still stuck in a defensive position.

The battle raged on, each side exchanging blows with deadly precision. Ashton was a skilled fighter, but he was outnumbered, and the Xyran grunts were relentless in their attack.

He felt the weight of their blows as they rained down upon him, and he knew he could not keep this up forever.

"Two can play the numbers game," Ashton mumbled in frustration, intending on summoning his soldiers from [Valhalla].

However, as he was about to use his ability, Vulcan's words echoed in his ears. "You are not allowed to use anything other than that sword of yours."

"What kind of bullshit-"

Getting distracted in the middle of a battle was the worst mistake Ashton could have made as three of the grunts quickly stabbed him in the feet and his back while two of them shot plasma bullets that pierced right through his shoulder.

"Do you want to die, kid?" Vulcan's voice echoed once again, but this time Ashton had had it.

Despite his wounds, Ashton refused to give up. He fought on, his sword ringing out against the Xyran grunts' weapons as he pushed back against their onslaught. He was determined to win this battle, only to wipe that smug smile off Vulcan's face, no matter the cost.

"Enough!"

Ashton's sword glinted in the sunlight as he spun, his blade sweeping out in a wide arc and taking down several grunts at once. They fell to the ground, their weapons clattering beside them as they lay still.

But the battle was far from over. The remaining grunts regrouped, their eyes blazing with fierce determination as they continued their attack. Ashton stood his ground, his sword held high as he prepared for the next wave of attackers.

The grunts moved in, their weapons flashing in the sunlight as they closed in on Ashton once again. He parried their strikes, his sword clanging against their sabres while deflecting the plasma bullets as he pushed back against their attack.

"...fuck."

Ashton fought for what seemed like hours, his sword ringing out against the Xyran grunts' weapons as he held them at bay. But eventually, he began to tire. His arms grew heavy, and his breath came in short gasps as he fought to stay on his feet.



"Need... to... push through..."

But he refused to give up. He knew he had to keep fighting, no matter how tired he became. He focused all his energy on his sword, using every ounce of his strength to keep the grunts at bay.

Ashton took a deep breath and charged forward, his sword glinting in the dim light. He swung his blade with all his might, aiming for the nearest grunt's head. But the alien was too fast, ducking out of the way and firing a blast of energy that singed Ashton's arm.

Ashton gritted his teeth and pressed on, his sword flashing in the air as he parried and thrust. The grunts were fierce opponents, their weapons and tactics, unlike anything Ashton had ever seen. They seemed to move as one, coordinated and relentless.

The grunts swarmed him, their weapons blazing. Ashton fought valiantly, but it was no use. He was overwhelmed, his sword knocked from his hand as he was pinned to the ground.

Dozens of grunts jumped on him, ready to impale him with their weapons. And then, just as suddenly as it had begun, the simulation ended. Flintmace stood there, his face expressionless, while Vulcan was smiling.

Ashton lay there, panting and drenched in sweat. He knew he had lost and could not defeat the horde of Xyran grunts. That feeling was the worst thing he had ever felt in his short life.

Flintmace helped Ashton to his feet, congratulating him on a valiant effort. "You fought well," he said. "But you still have much to learn."

"Much? I'd say too much!" Vulcan sneered. "I expected more from you. You're supposed to be the one who'll end the Xyran's dominance in the galaxy, but you're weaker than a newborn kitten."

Ashton bristled at the insult, his fists clenching at his sides. "If you had allowed me to go all-out, things would have turned out differently!"

Vulcan scoffed. "Going all-out? Against what? A bunch of grunts? Do you think they're the only enemies we'll be facing? What about the higher-ranked warriors who are even stronger and more skilled than I am? How will you survive against them if you can't even handle a bunch of grunts?"

Ashton had no reply for him. He knew that Vulcan was right, to a certain extent and had to keep his strength in reserve for future war fights. If he went all-out on the grunts, he would most definitely lose against the real Xyrans.

He sighed and lowered his head, feeling a sense of defeat wash over him. He knew that he had to find a way to balance his training to push himself to the limit without going too far.

Vulcan seemed to sense his hesitation, and his expression softened slightly. "Look, Ashton," he said. "I'm not trying to be a jerk. I just want you to be the best you can be. We're all counting on you to help us win this war, and we can't afford any weak links."

Ashton nodded, feeling a sense of determination welling up inside him. He knew that he couldn't let his comrades down and that he had to find a way to become stronger and more skilled, no matter the cost.

"I just want to know one thing..." Ashton mumbled. "I defeated Beelzebub before when I was much weaker than I am today. Then why the hell I can't defeat a bunch of footsoldiers?"

"Allow me to explain," Flintmace stepped forward. "First, Beelzebub was the personification of overconfidence when you two fought, and he severely underestimated you and hence lost."

He continued, "Secondly, the Xyrans you fought weren't proper soldiers trained for combat but mere scientists and researchers. You could say you got lucky because if a single battalion of grunts aboard their ship... we would not be having this conversation now."

Ashton nodded, realising his mistake of taking the grunts lightly. But he was ready to fix his error now. "Let's go once more."

Chapter 563 Tarek's Revelation (1)

Ashton lay on the floor of the training room, his breaths coming in ragged gasps as he tried to catch his breath. He was drenched in sweat, his muscles trembling with exhaustion as he stared up at the ceiling, feeling utterly defeated.

He had just completed his sixty-ninth attempt at defeating the simulated Xyran grunts, and once again, he had failed. He had come close a few times, taking down a handful of the grunts before they overwhelmed him, but he just couldn't get the upper hand.

He knew that he was supposed to be one to take down the Xyrans. But these grunts, even with their simple weapons and basic tactics, seemed to have him wholly outmatched.

He couldn't understand why he was having such a hard time defeating the grunts. They were supposed to be a relatively easy opponent, one he could take down without breaking a sweat. But for some reason, he just couldn't seem to get the upper hand.

As he lay there, trying to catch his breath, he heard the sound of footsteps approaching. He looked up to see Flintmace and Vulcan approaching him.

However, unlike before, they weren't brutal with their words. Heck, Vulcan even gave Ashton a pat, something he hadn't ever done before.

"Well?" Flintmace asked before smiling. "How was your experience this time around?"

"As horrible as ever," Ashton replied before getting back up, putting all his weight on Balmond. "No matter what I do, those freaky bastards keep one-upping me."

Ashton felt a sense of despair creeping over him. He had no answer to Flintmace's question or explanation for why he was failing so miserably.

But that moment of desperation was short-lived as he realised he could train for as long and as many times as he wanted. This meant he had endless opportunities to beat the grunts, and all he needed to do was to figure out how.

"It's okay, Ashton," Flintmace nodded, his eyes glinting with understanding. "We all have our weaknesses, our areas where we need to improve. That's why we train, so we can become stronger and better able to face our enemies."

"And you are getting better, Ashton," Vulcan chimed in. "You might not have defeated them yet, but you're improving with every turn. I can bet my beard you'll be able to defeat the grunts by tomorrow!"

Ashton looked up, feeling a glimmer of hope stirring inside him. He had been so focused on his failures, the fact that he couldn't defeat the grunts, and overlooked the progress he had made. But more importantly, he had something else to say.

"You know, I just might keep losing to see you without your beard- ouch!"

Before Ashton could put his thoughts into words, he got smacked in the head by Vulcan's hammer.

"My apologies; the hammer slipped from my hands," Vulcan said while tapping on the hammer.

"It's not a problem because I know one of these days, my hand might slip as well," Ashton replied, frantically rubbing the back of his head.

"I'll wait for that day!" Vulcan replied before all three broke down laughing.

Once done, Ashton took a deep breath, feeling a surge of determination welling up inside him. He knew that he still had a long way to go and that he had to keep pushing himself and training harder than ever before.

But he also knew that he had the support of his comrades, the people who believed in him and were counting on him to help win the impending war against the Xyrans.

Flintmace and Vulcan watched him with approving nods, knowing they had witnessed a pivotal moment in Ashton's training.

They knew that he still had a long way to go and that he still had weaknesses that needed to be addressed, but they also knew that he had the heart and determination of a true warrior.

"Let's go for one last time for today." Ashton got up with some newfound energy, ready to get his ass beaten by the grunts once again.

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Anna walked briskly into the simulation room, her eyes scanning the area for Ashton. She spotted him standing in the middle of the room, sweat glistening on his skin as he fought against a group of simulated warriors.

She hesitated for a moment, not wanting to interrupt his training, but then she reminded herself that this was important.

"Ashton!" she called out, her voice echoing across the room.

Ashton turned to look at her, his expression curious. He had already informed her he would undergo rigorous training from today onwards and wasn't expecting her to interrupt them.

"What is it, Anna?" he asked, lowering his sword as the enemies disappeared.

"It's Tarek," Anna said, her voice urgent. "He's awake, and he wants to talk to us. Now."

Ashton sheathed his sword and turned to Flintmace and Vulcan, who had been observing his training. "Can I stop here for the day?"

"Of course," Flintmace nodded. "This is important. Go see Tarek, and we'll resume training tomorrow."

Ashton nodded gratefully and turned to follow Anna out of the room. They walked quickly down the hallway, their footsteps echoing in the silence.

"What did Tarek say?" Ashton asked, his voice tense with anticipation.

"He didn't say much," Anna replied. "Just that he wanted to see us as soon as possible. He sounded urgent."

Ashton and Anna walked into the sterile hospital room where Tarek sat in bed, his eyes scanning a tablet in his hands. He looked up as they entered, setting the tablet aside with a slight smile.

"Ashton, Anna," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "Thank you for coming."

"Good to see you're up and about," Ashton said, moving closer to the bed. "How are you feeling?"

Tarek shrugged, "Not too bad, considering the circumstances. I've been through worse."

"That's good to hear. We're glad you made it out with us." Ashton nodded.

Tarek's expression became more serious, "Listen, there's something I need to tell you. Something I learned while I was with the Cult. Something I believe your people are mistake about."

Ashton and Anna exchanged a concerned look.

"What is it?" Anna asked.

"Deacon isn't a person, but the lowest-ranking position among the Cult." Tarek hesitated momentarily before speaking. "You people seemed to have defeated one out of the thirty-two Deacons that exist..."



## Chapter 564 Tarek's Revelation (2)

"What do you mean?" Ashton asked, confused.

"It's a position given to those deemed unworthy of any other title or position within the Cult. The Deacons are used as disposable pawns to carry out the will of the higher-ups," Tarek explained.

"Are you sure about that?" Anna asked, unwilling to believe someone like the Deacon they fought could be a low-ranking member of the Cult.

"You have to understand," Tarek said, "the Cult is unlike any other organisation. It's not about money or power but devotion, loyalty, and faith. The higher-ups are revered like gods, and their word is law."

Tarek continued, "Deacon is just a small cog in the Cult's machine. One of them may have been the one to contact me, but he was likely following orders from someone higher up."

"And who would that be?" Ashton furrowed his brow.

Tarek shook his head. "For me to answer that, you first need to understand more about the Cult's hierarchy."

Ashton and Anna sat in front of Tarek's hospital bed, their expressions expectant as Tarek began to speak. He took a deep breath, steeling himself for what he was about to reveal, for no one apart from the Cult members knew it themselves.

Tarek leaned back against the pillows, his hospital gown crumpling beneath him. He took a deep breath and began, "The Cult's hierarchy is structured like a pyramid."

"Why is that?" Anna asked, her brow furrowed in confusion.

"It's designed to ensure absolute loyalty to the Pope," Tarek explained. "Each member is only aware of the members below them in the hierarchy, so they can only ever report to their immediate superiors. This prevents anyone from knowing too much and potentially rebelling."

"At the top is the Pope," Tarek continued, his voice low and serious. "He is the ultimate authority, the one who makes the final decisions. Below him are the Cardinals, who are like the Pope's right-hand men and help him make decisions and carry out his orders."

Ashton nodded. If they were to believe Tarek's words, Astaroth's guess about the Cult being a heretical organisation was accurate. But for now, Ashton decided to focus on Tarek's revelation more than anything.

"Then there are the Archbishops," Tarek said, ticking them off on his fingers. "They are the next level down, followed by the Bishops, then the Priests."

Ashton furrowed his brow. "And what do the Priests do?"

"They're basically the middle management, and they oversee the Deacons to ensure they're carrying out the Pope's orders properly." Tarek sighed.

He continued, "They also propagate the Cult's views and recruit more abled people to their cause. Some say the leader of the metal sharks is either a Priest or a Bishop for the Cult as well."

Ashton massaged his temples. He knew the Cult was working with the Metal Sharks, but he hadn't thought that the Sharks could be an organisation indirectly working under the Cult.

"Hm... in that case, I expect the Deacons to be fighting on the ground?" Anna chimed in.

Tarek nodded, confirming Anna's words. "Like I said before, they are the lowest-ranking members of the Cult. They are the ones who carry out the Pope's dirty work, the ones who do whatever it takes to prove their loyalty to the Pope and climb up the ladder to gain more influence, hoping to meet the Pope someday."

Ashton nodded, confirming every word coming from Tarek's mouth through [Heartbeat Sense]. But there was one thing bugging him with the explanation Tarek gave them.

"Why are they so loyal to the Pope?" Ashton leaned forward, his eyes locked on Tarek's.

"The Cult brainwashes its members from a young age. They are taught that the Pope is infallible and is a direct conduit to the divine. The Deacons, in particular, are trained to believe they are doing God's work by carrying out the Pope's orders."

Tarek's words raised another question in Ashton's mind, but he pushed them aside to be asked later. For now, he wanted to know more about the Cult, so he was more focused on that.

"What about the Pope?" Anna asked, effortlessly reading Ashton's mind as he was about to ask the same thing.

"The Pope is a mysterious man," Tarek said, his voice low. "No one has seen him, apart from the two Cardinals. Even the Archbishops and Bishops have never met him in person."

Ashton raised an eyebrow. "How is that possible? He's the leader of the entire Cult."

"It's all part of their plan. They are able to maintain control by keeping themselves hidden, and no one knows what they look like or where the Pope operates from." Tarek said as he shook his head.

"But someone has to know something. There has to be a way to find whoever the person or thing is!?" Anna sighed and leaned forward, her eyes narrowing.

Tarek sighed. "I wish it were that easy. But the Pope is surrounded by layers of secrecy and deception. Even the Cardinals don't know everything about them."

"But if the Pope is so mysterious, how do you even know he exists?" Anna asked.

Tarek let out a sigh. "No one has ever seen him, apart from the two Cardinals. But trust me, he's real. The way the higher-ups used to talk about him, it's like he's some kind of God."

"So how do we take down someone we can't even find?" Ashton rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

Tarek shrugged. "I don't know. But I know that if anyone can figure it out, it's the two of you."

"Thanks for your confidence in us. We won't let you down." Anna gave Tarek a grateful smile.

"I believe you will. Just be careful. The Pope may be a mystery, but his power is very real." Tarek smiled weakly. "I think that's everything I can recall at the moment-"

"Hold up, there's one thing that's bothering me." Ashton stared Tarek straight in the eyes.

Tarek looked up at him, surprised. "What's wrong?"

"What's wrong is that I'm starting to wonder how someone recruited by a Deacon like you could know so much about the Cult," Ashton stared at Tarek, his eyes staring into the former Cult member's soul. "Please explain that to me."

Chapter 565 Tarek's Revelation (3)

Ashton turned to Anna and said, "Hey, can you give me a moment alone with Tarek?"

Anna gave him a curious look but nodded. "Sure, I'll wait outside."

Ashton watched her leave, then turned back to Tarek, his voice serious. "Alright, let's get down to business."

Tarek gulped down hard, sensing hostility within Ashton's eyes for the first time since they had met. He had only seen the kind and considerate side of his and hence was a bit taken aback by the sudden change in Ashton's demeanour.

"What do you mean?" Tarek looked up at him, his expression guarded.

"Let's talk about what's really going on here," Ashton replied. "I don't believe you're telling us everything you know about the Cult."

Tarek's eyes narrowed. "What are you talking about? I've told you everything I know."

"Really? Because there are some inconsistencies in your story," Ashton said, folding his arms. "For one, you claim to have been recruited by a Deacon, yet you seem to know an awful lot about the Cult's hierarchy and operations. That doesn't add up."

Tarek shifted uncomfortably on the bed. "...I just did my own research and wanted to know more about the people I was working for."

"As a lowly Deacon? Come on, Tarek. You expect me to believe that?" Ashton said, his voice sceptical. "And then there's the fact that you say no one has seen the Pope, yet you seem to know a lot about him too. How is that possible?"

Tarek swallowed nervously, his eyes darting around the room. "...I don't know," he stammered. "I just...heard things, you know? Rumours and whispers, and I pieced it all together."

Ashton's jaw tightened. He knew Tarek was lying through his teeth, thanks to [Heartbeat Sense], and the more he lied, the more Ashton wanted to smack some sense into him.

"That's not good enough, Tarek. You were a Deacon. How did you get this information? And how can we trust that you're not still loyal to the Cult?"

"I swear, I'm not working with them anymore. I saw what they were doing and couldn't be a part of it. That's why I left! You have to believe me!" Tarek shook his head frantically.

Ashton narrowed his eyes, studying Tarek's face. He couldn't detect any signs of deception, but he wasn't convinced. Tarek knew a lot more than he was telling them, but he was smart enough not to lie openly about it.

[Ashton, I think it's enough for the day. Mentally breaking this guy would do us more harm than good.]

'You're right...!' Ashton thought before turning towards Tarek. "I'm sorry, Tarek, but I can't just take your word for it. You're going to have to prove your loyalty to us."

Tarek looked crestfallen, his shoulders slumping. "What do you want me to do?"

"We're going to keep you under surveillance. We need to ensure you're not working with the Cult." Ashton leaned in closer, his voice dropping to a whisper. "Until then, you're not to leave the Tower without an escort. Understood?"

"Yes, sir." Tarek nodded, his eyes downcast.

Ashton stood up from his chair, his expression cold and unreadable. "I hope for your sake that you're telling the truth, Tarek. Because if you're not, there will be consequences."

With that, Ashton strode out of the room, leaving Tarek alone with his thoughts.

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Ashton walked out of the hospital room and took a deep breath, trying to clear his head. He heard Anna's footsteps behind him and turned to face her.

"What happened in there?" Anna asked, her voice laced with concern.



"I'm not sure. But something about Tarek's story doesn't add up. Nah, a lot of it doesn't," Ashton ran a hand through his hair, still processing everything Tarek had told him. "It's like he's been fed certain information to make us believe him."

Anna raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, if the cult has the power to brainwash people, then how do we know Tarek isn't under their control?" Ashton said.

"You think he's been manipulated like the Xylopien leader?" Anna's expression shifted from concern to realisation.

"It's possible. And if that's the case, then we can't trust anything he's said." Ashton nodded. "I could try to remove the influence if that was the case. But doing so might inform the caster about it."

"What are you going to do?" Anna asked.

Ashton hesitated for a moment before making a decision. "I'm going to put him under surveillance until we can clear him of suspicion."

Anna nodded in agreement. "I'll help you with that-"

"No, not you." Ashton immediately shot down her opinions. "You're the one the Cult wants more than anyone. If Tarek is under their control, it'll make sense to keep the two of you as far as possible."

They walked in silence for a few moments before Ashton spoke up again. "I just can't shake the feeling that there's something bigger going on here. Something we haven't even begun to uncover yet."

"Whatever it is, we'll take care of it, like always." Anna playfully punched him on the shoulder.

Ashton smiled at her, punching her back. "Dang, it... I need to get back to training."

"Come on, I'll walk you."

They walked the rest of the way in comfortable silence, lost in their thoughts. When they arrived back at the administrator wing, Ashton arranged for Tarek to be placed under surveillance with Ghosts and the Tower guards and Androids.

Otiga was made in charge of overseeing everything related to Tarek, and the only person allowed to do medical checks on him was Laihud.

It was to ensure that someone else didn't hurt Tarek before he spilt all the beans about the Cult. Vimur would lead the Guards, while Leon would assist Otiga in any way he could.

"Hm.. one more thing," Ashton informed Anna before leaving. "Tell laihud to run a scan on Tarek and make sure he has no implants. You know, the ones Laihud found on creatures from Verdantia."

"Will do," Anna replied while typing something on her pad. "Good luck with your training!"

"Training? It's more like getting assaulted..."

Once the preparations were done, Ashton returned to get his ass kicked by the Xyran Grunts.

Chapter 566 Victory!

Ashton stood in the simulation room, his muscles tense and his sword ready. He had been training for days, honing his skills against the simulated Xyran grunts, and he was determined to defeat them finally.

Flintmace and Vulcan watched as he donned his gear and entered the simulation. The room flickered and shimmered, transforming into a battlefield on a distant planet. The Xyran grunts materialised before him, their sharp claws and gleaming teeth bared.

Flintmace and Vulcan looked on, their expressions unreadable. They had watched Ashton struggle and fail time and time again, and they were starting to wonder if he would ever succeed.

But Ashton was determined not to let them down. He took a deep breath, steadied his nerves, and charged forward.

The grunts were waiting for him, their weapons raised and their faces twisted in snarls of rage. Ashton weaved and dodged, his sword flashing through the air as he tried to find an opening.

The grunts were fast and skilled, and they moved in unison, their attacks coordinated and relentless. Ashton was forced to constantly shift his footing and grip on his sword, trying to keep up with their movements.

At first, it seemed like he was doomed to fail yet again. The grunts were too strong, too fast, too skilled. But Ashton refused to give up. He fought with all his might, channelling his frustration and anger into every strike.

As the battle raged on, Ashton started to feel a glimmer of hope. He was beginning to get a feel for the grunts' movements, and he was finding gaps in their defences that he could exploit.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity of fighting, Ashton saw his opportunity. One of the grunts had overextended himself, leaving his flank open for a split second.

Ashton lunged forward, his sword flashing through the air. It connected with the grunt's side, and the creature stumbled back, stunned.

Ashton didn't waste a moment. He followed up with a flurry of strikes, his sword moving in a blur as he attacked the grunt from all angles. The creature tried to defend itself, but it was too late. Ashton's blows were too powerful, too precise.

With a final, resounding strike, Ashton brought his sword down on the grunt's head, cleaving it in two. The creature fell to the ground, dead.

But the battle was far from over as more grunts appeared to stop him. Ashton drew his sword, ready to fight, but he knew his chances of winning were slim.

The grunts were too fast, too powerful, and too numerous. Ashton had tried every strategy he could think of, but nothing had worked, and he was running out of ideas.

The grunts charged at him, their snarls echoing across the battlefield. Ashton parried their attacks with his sword, his muscles straining with the effort. But he knew that he couldn't keep this up for long.

"First, my summons, and now they banned me from using Seraph's crystal. These mother-"

"We can hear you, you know?" Vulcan called out.

"Why do you think I was cursing you?" Ashton barked back. "Hm... maybe I should try using that..."

With a deep breath, Ashton let go of Balmond, telling it to do its own thing while he went ahead and did something of his own. The Soulblade was all too happy to obey its master and immediately began hacking and slashing the grunts.

Meanwhile, Ashton focused on his inner strength, on the raw power that lay dormant within him. He felt his body changing, growing larger, stronger, more fearsome. His skin darkened, his muscles bulged, and fur sprouted across his body.

Ashton opened his eyes and saw the Xyran grunts recoil in terror. They had never seen anything like this before; they had faced warriors and soldiers but never a Zompiewolf.

Ashton let out a roar and charged at the grunts. They tried to dodge his attacks, but he was too fast, too powerful. Ashton swiped at them with his massive claws, tearing through their thick hides. He bit into them with his sharp fangs, rending flesh and bone.

The grunts swarmed around him, their claws and teeth biting into his flesh. But Ashton was too strong, too fierce. He shook them off with ease, throwing them aside like rag dolls. He was a force of nature, a primal beast unleashed upon the battlefield.

The grunts began to fall back, retreating from Ashton's onslaught. As they realised, they had been outclassed by a single man.

"Oh, now you wanna run?" Ashton roared, relishing the fear in the eyes of the grunts. "I don't think so, you fuckers!"

Ashton chased them down, his eyes blazing with fury. He knew that he had to finish them off, once and for all. He caught up to them and let out another roar, a challenge to their bravery.

He used all his abilities in harmony. The werewolf abilities were used to mark and track them down and unleash powerful blows, while the vampire genes allowed him to fly and mark as many enemies as he could.

As for the zombie genes, they ensured he didn't tire out of exhaustion like the grunts had been hoping.

Having no way out, the grunts tried to fight back, but it was too late. Ashton was too powerful, too unstoppable. He tore through them, one by one, until there was only one left standing.

Ashton approached the last grunt, his massive jaws opened wide. The grunt trembled, realising that he was facing certain death. But Ashton stopped and looked at him with pity and disdain.

"Looks like they finally stopped spawning," Ashton mumbled, looking around the grunt. "Guess you're the last guy-"

Ashton was about to end the grunt when Balmond whizzed past his head, severing the grunt's head.

"...thanks for the help, Balmond." Ashton smiled.

The battlefield fell silent, except for Ashton's heavy breathing. He slowly returned to his human form, his muscles aching, his skin slick with sweat. At the same time, Flintmace and Vulcan rushed to his side, clapping.

Neither of them wanted to tell Ashton that dealing with the grunts in real life was much easier. Nor did they clarify that they had enhanced the difficulty of the simulation past the recommended limit just to test Ashton's ability to accept defeat.

Chapter 567 Know Your Enemy

"Seriously, guys? Do I need to do this?" Ashton sighed before turning his attention towards the massive screen before him. "I have Astaroth inside me. Doesn't he already know all this?"

"Lord Astaroth also knew the quickest way of defeating the Xyran grunts," Flintmace responded. "Til he tell you that?"

[He's got a point, you know. Although I didn't help you because I loved seeing your ass get kicked.]

'Of course you did,' Ashton replied. 'It must have triggered your masochistic tendencies, right?'

[...a bit.]

'What the fuck!?!'

Ashton sat in a large, high-tech classroom with Flintmace and Vulcan at the front. The walls were made of a shimmering metallic material, and the desks and chairs were sleek and futuristic.

It was supposed to be one of the meeting rooms for high-ranking merc groups to convene their meeting. At first, Ashton thought it was going to be a strategic training day.



Little did he know Flintmace would teach him about the Xyran army, its composition, history and the military tactics they usually employed. Although an important topic, it was horrendously straining to learn about them.

"Stop being a kid and focus," Vulcan reprimanded Ashton.

Ashton groaned inwardly. He had never been much of a student, and the idea of sitting through a lecture was almost unbearable. But he knew this was important, and he tried to focus on the 'lesson' for once.

Flintmace noticed Ashton's lack of enthusiasm and placed a hand on his shoulder. "I know this isn't your favourite thing to do, Ashton, but it's important. You can't just charge blindly into battle and expect to win."

"I know, and I'll try my best." Ashton unenthusiastically responded, but it was enough for Flintmace to continue teaching him.

"The Xyran army consists of nine different types of troops," Flintmace reiterated the previous information. "Starting with the grunts, who are the weakest and most easily defeated."

Vulcan nodded. "Grunts are the foot soldiers of the Xyran army. They're numerous but not very skilled. They're often armed with basic weapons like plasma weapons and, in rare cases, explosive weapons. Apart from that, they're easy enough to take down if you know what you're doing."

As Vulcan spoke, images of different Xyran soldiers appeared on the displays. Each was more intimidating than the last, with various weapons, armour, and abilities.

Ashton shifted in his seat, already feeling bored. He had fought against the simulated Xyran grunts so many times that he could take them down with his eyes closed.

"The Xyran army is divided into nine different types of troops, each with unique strengths and weaknesses," Vulcan said. "Starting with the grunts, they get progressively stronger until you reach the final tier, the Xyran Elders."

Vulcan nodded in agreement and added, "The Xyrans are known for their advanced technology and ability to create super soldiers. That's why it's crucial for us to understand their different tiers and strengths."

Ashton listened intently, slowly getting more and more interested in knowing about the Xyrans. Especially the different types of super soldiers they had created to fulfil specific purposes.

Flintmace continued, "So the first tier of soldiers is the Grunts, which we've already discussed. The second tier is called the Shadows.

They are stealthy units and can blend in with their surroundings, making them difficult to detect. They are equipped with advanced cloaking technology and are skilled in close combat."

Vulcan chimed in, "The third tier is called the Tempests. They are highly trained and skilled in using advanced weaponry.

They are also the first class that consists of actual Xyrans and not some experimental creatures. They often lead battalions of Grunts and Shadows into the battlefield."

Following them were the 'Wardens'. They were usually equipped with heavy armour and powerful shields that could deflect almost any type of attack thrown at them.

Vulcan recalled what a pain they were to handle because they kept overpowering the Dwarves using their own attacks. The only way to take them down was to engage them in hand-to-hand combat and kill them.

But since they were usually accompanied by at least two tempests, it was challenging to get through them quickly and kill them before they could deal massive damage to their enemies.

After the Wardens came the 'Infernos'. One could think of them as shock troopers. Their only purpose was to deal a gobsmacking amount of damage to the enemies before they were eventually killed.

Since their rank consisted of outcast Xyrans, not much attention was paid to their defence as they were mostly on death row, and the best of utilising them before they were killed was to use them as expendable troops.

"They are also called the 'Shamed Ones'. Even though they know they are being thrown to die, these motherfuckers do not care about anything and die happily thinking they have proven their loyalty to the Elders."

Flintmace muttered with a sense of disgust towards them. Unlike him, most exiles do not know what the Xyrans have done and perceive the Elders as gods and do whatever they instruct them to do.

Even though Flintmace had never told them about his past in detail, Ashton could guess it must have had something to do with Infernos.

However, sensing the change in the mood, Ashton didn't think it was the correct time to ask Flintmace more about his past. After all, even Ashton didn't like talking about what happened to him when he was a human prisoner.

"Carrying on," Vulcan replaced the holograph with the following type of soldier. "We have what we call the Vindictives, and they are known for their ruthless tactics and willingness to do whatever it takes to win.

They are equipped with advanced exosuits that enhance their physical abilities and allow them to take on multiple opponents simultaneously. One of the Vindictives can take on an entire planet if given proper time and resources. So you can think of the level of strength they possess."

Ashton nodded his mind in overdrive. He was now beginning to understand why no one had ever confronted the Xyrans head-on. With soldiers like the Vindictives in their ranks, one would have to have been screwed up in the head to even think about attacking the Xyrans.

[Well, it's a good thing that you are a bit screwed up on the top floor, eh?]

'Of course,' Ashton smiled, looking at Vulcan and Flintmace. 'And by the looks of it, I'm not the only one with loose screws here.'

"You'll love the name of the seventh tier of super soldiers under the Xyran command," Vulcan and Flintmace smiled broadly as the next soldier model appeared before them. "I present you, the Reapers."

The Reapers were tall and imposing figures, standing almost seven feet tall with broad shoulders and a muscular build. Their skin was a pale shade of grey, almost sickly in appearance, and was stretched tightly over their chiselled features.

They had piercing yellow eyes that seemed to glow in the darkness, and their hair was long, black, and unkempt, unlike most of their Xyran counterparts, who had white hair.

The Reapers wore black armour that covered their entire bodies, giving them a menacing appearance. The armour was sleek and form-fitting, hugging their muscular frames, and was adorned with intricate silver filigree designs.

They carried large, curved swords at their sides, with long, serrated blades that glinted in the light, and their movements were swift and graceful, like those of a dancer.

"Apart from their hair, they look an awful lot like you, don't they?" Vulcan joked.

"The semblance is uncanny!" Flintmace joined in on teasing Ashton.

"Haha, very funny." Ashton retorted. "Now, are you going to tell me what they do, or you'll just keep laughing?"

Vulcan finally continued, "Unlike their appearance, they are the assassins of the Xyran army and are skilled in stealth and infiltration, and they are equipped with advanced weapons and gadgets that make them deadly opponents."

"Usually, no one would notice them until it was too late, and hence they were called Reapers," Flintmace concluded. "I used to be one of them when I was a child, then when white hair replaced my black after evolution, I got disqualified as a Reaper trainee."

"Damn... just because of the hair?" Ashton was weirded out by the Xyran rules of classification.

"Either way, let's continue to the rank I eventually joined." Flintmace continued, "The eighth tier is called the Annihilators. They are the heavy hitters of the Xyran army and are equipped with massive weapons that can cause significant damage to their opponents.

They are also heavily armoured and can withstand almost any attacks thrown at them. However, their numbers are pretty small as most trainees usually died during the training itself."

"And here I thought being trained to death was just a figure of speech." Ashton chuckled. "Seriously speaking, my respect for you had sky-rocketed, sir."

"Hmm... at least we don't need to train you in the art of buttering people." Flintmace laughed before Vulcan got all serious and ruined the fun... as usual.

"We are here to train, not to gossip!" Vulcan yelled at both of them before continuing, "And the final tier is called the Obliterators. They are the most advanced and powerful soldiers in the Xyran army.

They are equipped with advanced exosuits and energy weapons that can cause massive destruction. They are also skilled in all forms of combat, making them formidable opponents on the battlefield. They are often known as the Generals and possess Mournblades."

[As you can guess, I used to be one of them.]

'Damn... I never knew you were so strong!'

[Hehe, now you know-]

'Yeah, at least now I know why you turned out to be a maso. Note to self, too much power can screw your brain.'

[This brat!]

Ashton was impressed by the different tiers of soldiers, and he realised just how challenging it would be to defeat the Xyran army. He knew he had a lot of training to do if he was going to have any chance of succeeding.

Chapter 568 Mythical Hunt (1)

Ashton slumped down onto the bed beside Anna, sighing deeply as he leaned back against the pillows. It had been a long, gruelling day of training, and he was exhausted. But something was still weighing heavily on his mind, something that he needed to discuss with Anna.

Although he wanted to believe Tarek, Ashton knew he couldn't. His stories had too many inconsistencies, and Tarek didn't have proper answers to address them.

There was a way he could ensure that Tarek wasn't lying to him, but the method seemed... unethical. However, it was a sure-shot way to get answers from him.

"Hey," he said, turning to her. "Can we talk about something?"

"Of course," she replied, sitting up and giving him her full attention.

"It's about Tarek," he said hesitantly. "As Mazton said, we don't have much time and waiting for Tarek to tell everything truthfully seems-

"Ashton, stop beating around the bush. You don't have to do that around me, of all people."

Ashton took a deep breath and nodded. He knew the words about to come out of his mouth weren't the most respectful towards Tarek, but in his mind, it was the only way to keep him in line and, at the same time, knock off a task for his evolution.



"I don't know if it's my desperation speaking or what, but I just can't shake the feeling that we need to do something to ensure his loyalty." He blurted out.

Anna frowned. "What do you mean, 'do something'?"

"I mean...turning him," Ashton said, his voice barely above a whisper. "Making him a werewolf, like us. Once he's part of the pack, he can't go against my wishes once I instruct him to tell the complete truth about the Cult."

"Ashton, are you serious?" Anna's eyes widened in surprise. "That's a huge decision, one that shouldn't be made lightly."

"I know," he said, running a hand through his hair. "But think about it. If Tarek were a werewolf, he wouldn't be able to betray us, and he'd be one of us, completely loyal to our cause."

"But what about his free will?" Anna asked. "What about his desires and wishes?"

Ashton sat up, taking her hands into his, "You're a part of my pack. Have I ever abused your trust in me?"

"It is different between you and me." Anna shook her head. "I love you and owe you my life. Even if you wanted to exploit me, I wouldn't mind it because I know I'd be long dead if it hadn't been for you-"

"I know, I know," Ashton said, frustration creeping into his voice. "But we can't afford to take any chances. We need to know that Tarek is with us, that he's on our side. And if turning him is the only way to do that, then maybe it's worth it."

Anna sighed, leaning back against the pillows. "I don't know, Ashton. It just seems like such a drastic solution. And what if it goes wrong? What if he resents us for it?"

"I know," Ashton said, running a hand through his hair. "But I just can't shake the feeling that it's the right thing to do. We can't afford to take any chances. Not when it comes to the Cult."

Ashton looked everywhere but into Anna's eyes, and he knew what she was saying was utterly true.

Tarek might agree to turn at first, but then he might resent them for it, as he might think there was no choice but to obey them to prove his innocence. Cornering him like that would do them more harm than good.

There was a long silence between them as they both pondered the idea. Finally, Anna spoke up.

"If we do this," she said, "we need to be sure. We need to know that it's what Tarek wants, that he's willing to make this sacrifice for us. And we need to be prepared for the consequences, both good and bad."

Ashton nodded slowly, his mind racing with the implications of what they were discussing. It was a huge decision, one that would change Tarek's life forever. But at the same time, it might be the only way to ensure their survival.

"I'll talk to him," he said finally. "I'll explain everything to him and see how he feels about it. And we'll go from there."

Ashton lay back down on the bed, his mind racing with thoughts of what was to come. He knew the risks were high, but he also knew they had no other choice, as they needed Tarek on their side if they were going to survive.

However, before they could ponder further about what to do with Tarek, Ashton received a call from Otiga. He picked it up to see Otiga's face on the screen. She had a playful smile on her lips, and he could tell that she was in a good mood.

"Someone looks happy," Ashton said with a grin, greeting her.

Otiga laughed, "Oh, stop it, you. I was just wondering if you were free right now."

"I'm sorry, Otiga; I know you're a beautiful lady, but I'm happy in a committed relationship and can't do booty calls." Ashton joked as Anna punched him, pushing him away from the camera.

"Ignore this horny fucker," Anna shook her head. "Tell me, what's up?"

"Haha, thanks for keeping him in check," Otiga replied. "Just tell him I might have found something that would interest him."

"What?" Ashton asked as Anna tried to push him down.

"You won't take my booty calls, but what if it was a booty call from the type of monster you've been looking for?"

Ashton was intrigued, "What do you mean?"

"I found you a job request that requires hunting down a mythical grade being," she replied. "And the last time I remember talking with you, you mentioned something about consuming the flesh of a mythical creature."

"Just the thing I wanted to hear!" Ashton immediately perked up. "But have you checked the authenticity of the request? I don't want to fall into yet another one of the Cult's traps."

"Yup, everything checks out." She smiled. "I'm not the one to repeat my mistakes."

"Great! So when do we leave?"

"I have made the arrangements. We can leave sometime in the next week."

Ashton nodded, "Got it. I'll see you then."

As Otiga signed off, Ashton couldn't help but feel a rush of excitement. Hunting down a mythical creature was the biggest obstacle in the path of his evolution.

With that being taken care of, he could move along a lot faster and maybe, just maybe, he would evolve into a Grade-A being before dealing with the Cult.

Chapter 569 Mythical Hunt (2)

Ashton had been training in the simulation room for a week straight, day and night, against various enemies.

Flintmace and Vulcan had been pushing him hard, determined to make him the best fighter he could be, before sending him away to hunt the monster down.

The first day was the same thing all over again as he was pitted against Grunts, but this time their numbers had tripled since he defeated them.

Flintmace and Vulcan had made him fight against hordes of them, pushing him to his limits. Ashton had struggled at first, but he had eventually found his footing, learning to anticipate their moves and take them down efficiently... with a bit of help from Astaroth.

But the Xyran grunts were only the beginning. Flintmace and Vulcan introduced him to the different tiers of Xyran soldiers, each more powerful than the last.

The motive of the training was no longer to defeat targets but to experience their strengths and weaknesses. However, Ashton managed to defeat the Shadows effortlessly, as they were assassins using their stealth to hunt down their prey.

Unfortunately for them, Ashton's werewolf class was almost made to get rid of them, as once he marked them, there was no escape for them. The actual training started from the third day onwards.

He was thrown into an actual battlefield simulation where he had to face multiple enemies simultaneously. From Reapers to Infernos to the Obliterators... everyone had their turn toying with Ashton before he realised why the Xyrans were so formidable.

Even though Ashton was aware of each class's weaknesses, he couldn't even exploit one of them as the rest of the army covered for each other. Even with his summons to aid him in the fight, they barely managed to knock one Obliterator back before being killed.

Ashton's training was not just limited to fighting, however. Flintmace and Vulcan taught him about the different weapons and technologies used by the Xyrans.

He learned how to use advanced energy weapons that only the high-level civilisations used, piloted various types of spacecraft, and even practised hacking into Xyran computer systems.

Although Astaroth often gave him tips during the combat training, he remained completely silent regarding theoretical knowledge, as if he wanted Ashton to learn those through his own experience.

Ashton also spent time honing his skills as a Zompirewolf. He didn't know why, but the Xyrans seemed to have a weakness against his true form. For example, if he could take down ten enemies in his human form, he could take down anywhere between fifty to hundred Xyran if he was in his Zompirewolf form.

It almost felt like his father knew what he was doing before planning everything about Ashton's life. However, till now, he had effortlessly hidden that fact from everyone.

Through it all, Anna was there to support him. She often watched his training sessions, cheering him on as he fought against the simulated enemies. She even helped him relax through meditative techniques and other 'methods' that she knew Ashton liked.

Ashton's progress was slow but steady. He was beginning to feel more confident in his abilities, his reflexes becoming faster, and his endurance improving exponentially. At least that's what Anna said to him.

He knew he still had a long way to go, but he was determined to become stronger and better prepared for the challenges ahead, whether it was the Xyrans or the Cult.

Ashton strode into the hangar bay, his steps echoing across the metal floor. His gaze swept across the room, settling on the three women waiting for him.

Anna leaned against the wall, her arms crossed over her chest. Otiga stood beside her, a smirk playing at the corner of her lips. Kass stood a few feet away, going through the pre-flight checks on the ship they would be taking.

Anna, Otiga, and Kass were dressed in advanced battle suits, each tailored to their unique fighting style and physical abilities. The suits were sleek and form-fitting, made of a durable yet flexible material that allowed for ease of movement.

Anna's suit was primarily black with a deep red trim, giving it a somewhat ominous appearance. The armour also featured a series of pockets and holsters for various weapons and tools, as well as reinforced padding on the chest and shoulders for added protection.

Otiga's suit was metallic silver, with a slim profile and minimalistic design. The suit featured a helmet with a clear visor, allowing her to quickly assess her surroundings and target enemies.

The suit was equipped with several small, hidden weapons, allowing Otiga to take out her foes with precision and speed. Despite knowing her for an extended period, Ashton had never seen her fight before, so it would be quite a fun sight.

As for Kass, even she was wearing a suit which was a rare sight. Her armour was a deep green colour, with a more rugged appearance than the other two.

The suit featured heavier armour plating and little space for weapon slots. Which was to be expected as Kass was the pilot and not a combatant per se.

All three suits were equipped with advanced technology, including built-in communication systems and environmental sensors, giving the women an edge in any battle they faced.

In the meantime, Ashton was wearing the battlesuit Vulcan had prepared for him as a present for defeating Phantom.



Ashton's battle armour was sleek and predominantly black, designed to fit his muscular frame like a second skin. The suit was made of a lightweight yet durable material that was resistant to energy weapons, blunt force trauma, and extreme temperatures and enhanced his performance beyond his limits.

The suit's joints were reinforced with a mythical alloy, Vulcan's most prized possession, allowing Ashton to move quickly and fluidly despite the armour's weight. It had a sleek, minimalist design with no unnecessary bulk, making it easy for Ashton to manoeuvre and dodge attacks.

The best part about it? The armour was just a prototype, and Vulcan was going to continue improving it in the future.

[What a pseudo-harem you have built for yourself!]

'That too when neither I am as good-looking as you nor as strong. Have some shame!'

[What can I say? I am more of a one-woman guy-]

'The same woman that ordered a hit on you?'

[...yeah. But let's not talk about that.]

## Chapter 570 Mythical Hunt (3)

"Good to see you made it, Ash," Anna said, pushing herself away from the wall. "We were starting to think you got lost."

Ashton rolled his eyes, a small smile tugging at the corner of his lips. "Fortunately, I did, Anna, and I had some last-minute training to finish."

Otiga laughed, suggestively shaking her hands in a to-and-fro motion. "Training, huh? Is that what you're calling it these days?"

Ashton shook his head, his eyes narrowing. "You know I'm not interested in that kind of thing, Otiga. I'm here to do a job, nothing more."

"Right, right," Otiga said, still smirking. "Just remember, Ashton, all work and no play makes for a dull life."

Ashton opened his mouth to reply, but Kass called out to them before he could say anything. "The ship is ready to go, guys. We should get moving if we want to make it to our destination in time."

Anna nodded, her expression serious. "Right. Everyone get on board. Let's get this show on the road."

The four of them quickly made their way onto the spacecraft, strapping themselves into their seats as Kass piloted the ship out of the hangar bay. Ashton couldn't help but feel a rush of excitement as the engines roared to life, propelling them into the vast expanse of space.

It wasn't a new occurrence. Whenever he left the Tower to explore the vast space, Ashton always felt how inconsequential their lives were in front of the universe, yet they were there, trying to make a difference.

[No need to get all philosophical on me now! Damn, I miss your stupid self.]

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The sleek ship cruised through the starry void, its occupants gathered in the cockpit as they flew towards their destination. As soon as they were all strapped in, Otiga began the briefing.

"So, the monster we're going after is a Drakonian," she said, her voice grave. "They are one of the most dangerous species in the galaxy and are known for their incredible strength, agility and robustness.

They can literally survive in space for centuries without drinking or eating, just to tell you how pesky those gigantic serpents can be."

Ashton leaned forward in his seat, his attention entirely focused on Otiga. He was always eager to learn more about the monsters and aliens they encountered on their missions. Especially if he was going to inherit their abilities.

"Drakonians are, as you can guess, reptilian in nature, with scales covering their entire body," Otiga continued. "They have long, sharp claws and teeth capable of tearing through even the toughest materials. And their tails are incredibly strong, capable of crushing anything to dust with just one swing."

Anna and Kass exchanged worried glances while Ashton's expression remained stoic. He had faced numerous deadly monsters in the past, and a Drakonian didn't seem anything he wouldn't expect from a mythical monster.

"But that's not all," Otiga said, her voice dropping even lower. "Drakonians also can breathe fire. And not just any fire, mind you. Their flames are said to be hotter than the sun and can incinerate anything in their path."

"It doesn't matter the type, as long as it's 'fire'; I can take care of it," Ashton confidently nodded.

Ashton was confident as Seraph's crystal embedded in his hand granted him complete immunity to fire, no matter if it was regular fire or hellfire.

Although Anna, too, had some resistance to fire, she did not have immunity which meant Ashton would have to face the beast alone. As for the rest... well, it was better if they supported Ashton from a safe distance.

Moreover, Ashton was already looking for creatures he could use to merge with Drakon to strengthen the chimaera, and a Drakonian seemed perfect for the job.

[Heck, considering their names, it almost feels like this was a fated encounter.]

"However," Otiga said, her tone becoming slightly more optimistic. "Drakonians also have a few weaknesses. Their eyes are their most vulnerable spot, and a well-placed shot can blind them temporarily. And their underbellies are also softer than the rest of their scales, making them easier to penetrate."

"It shares the same weaknesses as any other dragon?" Anna pointed out.

"It does. But a Drakonian has a far superior healing ability than any other known draconic species. They can heal their wounds instantaneously, and that is what makes them so formidable."

Ashton nodded, taking in all the information before smiling. It almost felt like he was born to kill a Draconian as he had an answer for all the creature's 'fearsome' abilities.

The Drakonian's Flames couldn't hurt him, and as far as its healing ability was concerned, Ashton had two solutions for it.

First was the werewolf skill [Aggravate] which would literally make the Drakonian endlessly, and no amount of healing factor would be able to save it.

The second and final method was using [Scorch Rain]. The fiery-acidic could negate any type of healing ability.

'Now imagine what would happen if simultaneously used both skills?'

[A quick yet painful death. Although, you'd need to be careful about that tail of it. It wouldn't be surprising if the creature began thrashing around in pain. You know what I mean?]

Ashton nodded. Astaroth was correct. Although he would be fighting off the Drakonian by himself, he wasn't necessarily alone. Otiga, Kass and Anna would be there or at least somewhere nearby and getting them hit wasn't an option.

"Okay, everyone, let's get ready. We're almost there." Kass's voice broke through the radio.

"Got it," Ashton replied as they all strapped themselves to their seats, "I think it'll be better for me to take this Drakonian on by myself."

"What? At least I can help-" Anna immediately shot the idea down, but Ashton cut her off.

"You are strong and have resistance to fire. I know that... we all do. But this isn't ordinary temperatures we're talking about here." Ashton made his point clear. "As such, I'm not letting you anywhere close to that thing, and that's final."