

Zompiewolf 581

Chapter 581 Back Into Simulation

Ashton stood alone on the holographic platform, surrounded by the whirring and buzzing of the simulation chamber. The familiar scene of a futuristic battlefield unfolded before him, with towering structures and debris strewn across the landscape.

Above, sleek spaceships zoomed through the sky, engaged in a deadly dance of aerial combat. Strange alien creatures lurked on the ground, their menacing forms ready to attack.

"Here we go again..."

With a deep breath, Ashton drew his sword, the blade glinting in the artificial light. The hum of energy surged through him as he prepared to face the simulated Xyran adversaries. He knew this was a training simulation, but his determination burned like a real battle.

"Dunno about the real battle, but my pain is definitely real."

The first wave of enemies appeared, a group of wiry, insectoid creatures with sharp, serrated limbs. They hurried toward Ashton, their chittering cries filling the air. With a swift motion, he launched himself into the fray, his sword cutting through the air with deadly precision.

Ashton had begun training from scratch to judge the abilities he received from the Drakonian. Right off the start, he felt the changes in his body. As the Grunts struck him, their blows didn't have much effect on him as they had before.

Not to mention his healing had been boosted several times, which meant even if some Grunt somehow managed to hurt him, the effect of their blows did not last for long.

Ashton's movements were fluid and calculated, his body a blur of agility as he parried and struck. His training honed his reflexes, allowing him to anticipate and swiftly counter the creatures' attacks.

The clash of metal and the hiss of energy filled the battlefield as Ashton pushed back the first wave of foes with ease.

But the simulated Xyrans were relentless. As Ashton dispatched one group, another emerged from the smoke-filled horizon. This time, hulking robotic automatons stomped forward, their heavy metal frames emitting ominous whirrs and clanks.

"That's something new..." Ashton smiled and lunged at the automatons.

Meanwhile, two old folks were busy judging him in real time.

"He's doing better than I expected," Flintmace mumbled, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. "What do you think, sir?"

"Stop with the sir," Vulcan replied, scratching his long-ass beard. "As for the brat... I don't think what he's doing is something praiseworthy. But at least he's still alive, so that's something."

Flintmace kept smiling. He knew deep down that Vulcan was just as impressed with Ashton's progress as he was. But the old man being the old man, refused to acknowledge it, thinking his words might affect Ashton's performance.

"Let's see what else he has planned for us today," he mumbled.

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"Hm, these guys are tough," Ashton mumbled, scratching his head. "Maybe I should try and use 'that'?"

[You've been prohibited from using <Scorching Rain>, but I don't think anyone would mind if you used something else.]

With a quick assessment of the situation, Ashton adapted his strategy. He leapt into the air, his vampiric wings spreading wide as he soared above the battlefield, evading the automatons' lumbering attacks.

From above, he took a deep breath before unleashing a barrage of fire blasts from his mouth, each finding its mark and causing the automatons to stagger.

It was the [Draconic Breath] Ashton had been trying to employ in various situations. So far, he had been pleased with the skill effects and thoroughly enjoyed them. But the only thing he disliked about the skill was the aftereffect.

"Cough~ cough~ cough~ why does it have to burn my insides!?" Ashton complained, his chest heaving as he coughed violently while remnants of smoke escaped his mouth.

[Just think of it as a Drakonian-sized sneeze. That may help.

"If only the Cult were as smart as you, I wouldn't have had to worry about them." Ashton sighed, regaining balance mid-air. "What's next?"

The battle continued to escalate, with each wave of enemies becoming more formidable than the last. Ashton's heart pounded in his chest, his body pushed to its limits. Yet, he refused to yield. He knew that only by making himself further could he grow stronger.

As the final wave approached, Ashton faced a daunting sight—a massive alien creature, five times his size, emerged from the shadows.

Its scaly hide shimmered with an otherworldly sheen, and sharp spines adorned its back. It roared, a booming sound that shook the air around Ashton.

"You never told me the Xyran had Drakonian pets?"

[If I were to be honest, I never realised they were Drakonians.]

"Bitch, were you thinking about women while on the battlefield or what?" Ashton smacked his forehead before continuing. "Who the hell made you a General? I really wanna have a nice and long chat with them."

[Here he comes~]

"Who, Seraph?"

[...the Drakonian.]

Undeterred, Ashton squared his shoulders and charged at the colossal beast. He ducked and weaved, dodging its powerful swipes and countering with calculated strikes.

The clash of their powers sent shockwaves rippling through the battlefield, causing the surrounding structures to tremble.

With every strike, Ashton could feel the weight of the battle, the desperation and determination fueling his resolve. He knew this was not just a test of physical prowess but also a test of his mental fortitude.

Why else would Flintmace and Vulcan force him to fight Drakonian after Drakonian?

As the battle raged on, Ashton's efforts began to pay off. With a final, mighty swing of his sword, he severed the creature's appendage, causing it to howl in agony. It stumbled backwards, its strength waning.

At that moment, Ashton sensed an opening—an opportunity to strike a decisive blow. With a surge of power, he channelled his energy into his sword and unleashed a devastating final attack. The blade cleaved through the creature's flesh, making it vanish in a burst of energy.

As the simulated battlefield faded away, Ashton stood amidst the dissipating holograms, his chest heaving with exertion. Sweat trickled down his brow, mixing with the residue of the battle. He had emerged victorious once again, proving his strength and resilience.

A wave of satisfaction washed over Ashton, knowing he had pushed his limits and become stronger. With each simulation, he grew more skilled and prepared for the challenges ahead. He knew the battles would be even more demanding, but he was ready to face them head-on.

Chapter 582 Deception At Its Finest

Ashton and Anna walked through the dimly lit corridors of Kernel Tower, their footsteps echoing in the silence. Tarek's room was just ahead, and Anna couldn't help but feel uncomfortable.

"Do you think he'll agree to your proposal?" She asked.

"It'll be a lot easier for both of us if he did," Ashton shrugged. "If he doesn't, then... we'll think about it later."

They reached Tarek's door, and Ashton hesitated momentarily before knocking. The door swung open, revealing Tarek sitting on his bed, his eyes filled with weariness and determination.

"Tarek," Ashton greeted, his voice filled with concern and resolve. "How are you doing these days?"

Tarek nodded, gesturing for them to come in. Ashton and Anna entered the room, taking a seat opposite Tarek. The air was tense as they prepared to discuss the delicate matter. But Tarek tried his best not to show his wariness to his saviours.

"Been worse before," Tarek smiled, closing the book he had been reading. "I suppose you want to talk about something?"

Ashton took a deep breath, his gaze locked with Tarek's. "I know you think you've told us everything that you could, but as I said before, it could be false information-"

Tarek's eyes hardened, his voice laced with frustration. "I've already told you, Ashton. I'm not lying. I'm no longer part of the Cult, and I would never betray you."

"First thing, don't cut me off," Ashton closed his eyes, his fist clenched tightly to restrain his frustration. "Secondly, since I've witnessed what the Cult is capable of, I won't believe a word you say till I know for sure."

Ashton studied Tarek's expression, searching for any signs of deception. He knew Tarek well from the little time they had spent together, and something in his gut told him that there was more to the story. But he also knew that accusations without proof would lead them nowhere.

"I want to believe you, Tarek," Ashton admitted, his voice tinged with regret. "But doubts still linger. And I can't afford to take any risks, not with the safety of the people I care for."

Tarek's eyes widened in realisation, understanding the gravity of Ashton's concerns. "So, what are you suggesting, Ashton?"

Ashton leaned forward, his voice filled with determination and empathy. "I have a proposition for you, Tarek, and I want you to consider becoming a werewolf."

Tarek's lips curled into a mischievous smile as Ashton proposed the idea of him becoming a werewolf. He couldn't help but chuckle, thinking it was some sort of prank or jest.

"A werewolf? What does that have to do with anything?" Tarek's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Besides, who in their right mind would agree to something like that? I mean, the whole hairy, smelly, full moon thing? Sounds rather primitive, don't you think?"

Ashton exchanged a knowing look with Anna, a smirk on his lips.

"Well, Tarek, funny you should mention that," he said, his voice laced with amusement. "Because Anna and I happen to be werewolves ourselves. Do we look primitive to you?"

Tarek's laughter abruptly ceased, and his eyes widened in disbelief. He searched their faces, looking for any sign of deception. But the unwavering expressions on Ashton and Anna's faces left him speechless.



"You're... you're joking, right?" Tarek stammered, his voice laced with uncertainty.

"No, Tarek. We're not joking." Ashton shook his head. "But good to know how you view us."

Tarek's gaze flickered between them, surprise, realisation, and a tinge of regret following his sight. His teasing words had unintentionally struck a nerve, and he now understood the weight of his jest.

"I... I didn't mean to offend," Tarek murmured, his voice tinged with remorse. "I was just... I didn't know."

"And to answer your first question," Anna mumbled while looking at Ashton. "Wanna do the honours?"

Ashton took a deep breath, carefully choosing his words. "Becoming a werewolf will give me complete authority over you, Tarek.

If the Cult has manipulated your mind, being turned into a werewolf will break their control. I'll be able to see the truth, to know if you've been honest with us."

Tarek's face contorted with uncertainty and contemplation. He looked down for a moment, his thoughts racing. The weight of the decision hung heavily in the air, and Ashton could sense Tarek's internal struggle.

Finally, Tarek lifted his gaze, determination burning in his eyes. "Alright, Ashton. I'll do it. If becoming a werewolf is the only way to prove my innocence, I'm willing to take that risk."

Ashton nodded a mixture of relief and concern washing over him. He knew the gravity of Tarek's decision and the potential consequences. But he also understood that they needed to uncover the truth, whatever it may be.

"Thank you, Tarek," Ashton said, his voice filled with gratitude and determination. "I promise we'll get to the bottom of this and find the truth together."

Anna placed a reassuring hand on Tarek's shoulder, her voice filled with support. "You're not alone, Tarek. We're here for you every step of the way."

Tarek looked between Ashton and Anna, a glimmer of hope in his eyes. At that moment, he knew that he had made the right decision. Together, they would uncover the truth, expose the Cult's manipulation, and free Tarek from suspicion.

"Well, that wraps up everything," Ashton stood up, his voice steady and resolute. "I will contact you about when and how we'll do it later. For now, take a break and do as you please."

"Got it." Tarek nodded, a smile forming on his lips.

With the problem being resolved, Ashton and Anna left the room. Ashton headed for training with Flintmace and Vulcan as usual, while Anna made her way to managing the Ghosts in his absence.

[You're a sick bastard, you know that?]

'Of course, I do.' Ashton smiled.

[Don't you feel bad about using <Incite> to manipulate the poor guy into agreeing with you?]

'Desperate times call for desperate measures. I knew Anna would have fought me tooth and nail if Tarek declined my request, and I didn't want that, so I did what I deemed fit.'

[You're becoming more and more like me~]

'You wish.'

#### Chapter 583 A Familiar Ceremony (1)

The training hall was filled with clanging metal as Ashton sparred with Dolos, his summoned swordsman. Their blades clashed and sparks flew, filling the air with a palpable energy. Ashton's movements were swift and precise, his training honing his skills to a razor's edge.

As Dolos lunged forward, Ashton's attention was diverted by the entrance of Vimur and Leon, who were escorting Tarek into the training hall. Tarek's hands were bound by plasma cuffs, emitting a faint blue glow. Ashton's brows furrowed in concern as he halted his training and approached them.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Ashton demanded, his voice laced with confusion and disapproval.  
"What's the meaning of this?"

"Otiga said we should be careful so-" Vimur mumbled, but Ashton immediately cut him off after sending Dolos back to Valhalla.

"Vimur, Leon, remove those cuffs," Ashton commanded, his voice firm but tinged with a hint of reprimand. "Tarek is not a prisoner here."

Vimur and Leon exchanged a quick glance, recognising their mistake. Without hesitation, they swiftly moved to unlock and remove the plasma cuffs, releasing Tarek's hands. Tarek flexed his fingers, rubbing his wrists to ease blood flow, a slight smile tugging at the corners of his lips.

Ashton approached Tarek, his expression softening with remorse. "I apologise for the inconvenience, Tarek. I should have ensured my instructions were clear, and it was a mistake on my part."

[Such a sly bastard you've turned into.]

Although Ashton couldn't see Astaroth's physical form, he knew he was shaking his head. But not in disappointment.

Ashton had intentionally instructed Otiga to bring Tarek into the hall with cuffs on. He intended to give Tarek a dose of what would happen if he changed his mood about being turned into a werewolf.

Was it a crappy thing to do? Absolutely. Did Ashton give a shit about it? Absolutely not.

He wasn't an idealist to think Tarek would give him the whole truth just because Ashton asked him nicely. Nor was he the statue of morality to not apply underhanded tactics whenever and wherever he needed.

Tarek waved off Ashton's apology with a dismissive gesture. "No need to apologise, Ashton. I understand the precautions. I'm here because I want to be and prove my loyalty and join this team."

"That's good to know," Ashton nodded, appreciating Tarek's understanding. "I know you already gave your permission for what's going to happen next, but I'm obligated to ask you again."

He stepped closer to Tarek, looking straight at him. "Turning into a werewolf is a significant commitment, Tarek. It will grant me control over your actions, ensuring your loyalty. Are you certain this is the path you want to take?"

"I am certain, Ashton. I trust you and believe in the cause we're fighting for. I'm ready if this is what it takes to prove myself." Tarek met Ashton's gaze, his determination unwavering.

"Alright, let's do it then," Ashton mumbled before taking a deep breath.

His muscles twitched and quivered as an electric surge coursed through his veins. Slowly, his body began to change, morphing into something otherworldly, a creature of primal instinct and untamed fury.

Bones shifted and cracked, elongating and reshaping. His fingers curled into sharp, clawed appendages while his teeth sharpened into fangs capable of quickly rending flesh. Dark fur sprouted across his body, spreading like wildfire, until he was enveloped in a magnificent coat of pure white.

Ashton's senses heightened, his world transforming into a symphony of scents, sounds, and colours. His hearing became acute, allowing him to pick up even the faintest rustle of leaves. His eyes glowed with an otherworldly luminescence piercing through Tarek's soul.

With his transformation complete, Ashton let out a mighty howl. It was a natural instinct that was hard to deny, even for him. The sheer freedom and exhilaration coursing through his veins were intoxicating and empowering. He felt more alive than ever before.

[Of course, you feel alive. After all, you last switched your genes a long time ago.]

Tarek watched in awe and apprehension, his heart pounding in his chest. He knew his own transformation was imminent and braced himself for the unknown.

Tarek closed his eyes, knowing what was to come next, and sure enough, Ashton grabbed him and bit him in the next. Tarek howled in pain as blood drizzled out of his wound.

He would've thrashed his limb around if he could, but Ashton held on to him tightly, not allowing Tarek any room to move. Tarek felt a surge of energy coursing through his veins, and his skin prickled with anticipation.

The transformation had begun.

Tarek's body convulsed as bones cracked and reformed, muscles expanded, and a thick coat of blue fur sprouted. His senses heightened, and he could feel the primal instincts taking hold.

Ashton, towering above Tarek in his own werewolf form, carefully watched the transformation unfold. Tarek's eyes once filled with clarity, now reflected a wild and untamed spirit.

The scent of power and ferocity hung in the air as Tarek's howl pierced the silence, reverberating through the room.

With a surge of adrenaline, Tarek lunged forward, his newfound strength propelling him towards Ashton. Instincts fueled by the wolf's nature took over, causing Tarek to temporarily lose control. His claws swiped through the air, aiming for Ashton's defences.

"Ah, so you became one of those..." Ashton shook his head before dodging Tarek's strikes.

A scenario like this unfolding during the ceremony wasn't uncommon. The unfamiliarity with one's new powers could make someone lash out and try to take away the position of an Alpha.

Ashton, experienced in dealing with the turbulence of transformation, swiftly dodged Tarek's attacks. His instinct as an Alpha kicked in, guiding him to subdue Tarek without causing harm. He moved with grace and precision, his movements a dance of dominance and restraint.

As for the ones watching from the sidelines, they didn't know what they should do. Vimur was more than eager to join the fight as usual, but Leon was wise enough to recognise the significance of the battle between the two werewolves and help Vimur back from causing any trouble.

#### Chapter 584 A Familiar Ceremony (2)

The training hall was dimly lit, its metallic walls gleaming under the artificial lights. The air crackled with tension as two werewolves faced each other, their feral eyes locked in a battle for dominance.

Ashton stood tall, his muscles rippling beneath his fur, ready to prove his worth. Tarek, his figure imposing itself, bared his sharp fangs, growling with a ferocity that echoed through the hall.

Ashton's golden eyes locked onto Tarek's, the wildness within them a reflection of the newfound power coursing through his veins. He could sense Tarek's inner turmoil, the battle between reason and instinct.

Ashton knew that in order to bring Tarek back to his senses, he would have to confront him as an Alpha and not a human.

With a mighty leap, Ashton lunged forward, his werewolf body agile and swift. Fueled by the raw energy of his transformation, Tarek met the challenge head-on, his snarls echoing through the air. The clash of fangs and claws reverberated in the chamber as their battle for control began.

Ashton moved with finesse and strength, every movement calculated to subdue rather than harm. His instinctual knowledge of the wolf's nature guided him, ensuring that each strike was delivered precisely and purposefully. He aimed to overwhelm Tarek, not forcefully, but by demonstrating dominance and authority.



Tarek fought back fiercely, his attacks fueled by raw power. His movements were wild and untamed, lacking the finesse that Ashton displayed. Claws clashed, teeth gnashed, and snarls reverberated as the two werewolves grappled intensely.

Ashton's voice, filled with determination, cut through the chaos as the battle raged on. "Tarek, remember who you are! You have control over your actions!"

Tarek's blue-furred form momentarily faltered, his eyes flickering with a glimmer of recognition. Sensing the opportunity, Ashton seized the moment, redirecting his attacks to non-lethal manoeuvres.

His goal was to defeat Tarek in combat, not to kill him. However, Ashton knew for the battle to end, he had to make Tarek regain his reasoning, and the best way of doing so was to beat him into submission.

With each calculated move, Ashton aimed to disrupt Tarek's frenzy and chip away at the primal instincts clouding his judgment. He strategically used his superior agility and knowledge of Tarek's rough-edged fighting style to create openings for communication.

"Tarek, remember your goal!" Ashton's voice echoed with authority. "Find your centre; regain control! Or by the time I'm done with you, there'll be nothing left to regain control over."

Tarek's attacks gradually became less ferocious, his movements faltering as fragments of his human consciousness fought to resurface. But it only lasted for a moment.

With a thunderous roar, Tarek lunged at Ashton, his claws extended, aiming to rip through the white-furred werewolf. Ashton sidestepped the attack with agility, swiftly countering with lightning-fast strikes.

Their claws clashed, sparks flying as their strength met head-on. The impact reverberated through the hall, eliciting gasps from the crowd of Ghosts that had now gathered to see their captain in action.

Tarek immediately turned tactics and pulled Ashton into a bear hug, trying to break his back.

"...this is what you came up with?" Ashton shook his head before taking a deep breath.

With a sudden surge of power, Ashton broke free from Tarek's hold, delivering a decisive blow to his opponent's side.

Tarek yelped in pain, stumbling backwards. The white-furred werewolf seized the moment, launching a swift barrage of attacks, each strike calculated and precise.

As Ashton's blows landed, Tarek's blue fur was soon stained with blood, driving him further into a defensive stance. But Tarek refused to yield, pushing past the pain, his wild nature fueling his resilience.

Seeing there wasn't any way around it, Ashton took a more rigid approach and charged again, his movements fluid and graceful.

He feigned a strike to Tarek's left, then swiftly shifted to his right, delivering a powerful blow to Tarek's jaw. The impact sent the blue-furred werewolf crashing to the ground, dazed and disoriented.

Ashton seized this opportunity, redirecting Tarek's momentum, using his strength to guide rather than overpower. His grip tightened around Tarek's neck but with gentleness, as he did not want to accidentally paralyse him.

Amid their struggle, Ashton's eyes locked with Tarek's, commanding him to return from the depths of his wild nature. And at that moment, Tarek's eyes, once consumed by feral instinct, flickered with a glimmer of lucidity.

A growl of frustration mingled with a hint of recognition escaped Tarek's throat. His wild movements began to slow, his snarls transforming into gasps for air. The battle within his own being waged on, but the light of reason had begun to pierce through the darkness.

With one final surge of strength, Ashton manoeuvred Tarek into a position of submission, not as a sign of dominance but as a display of trust and camaraderie. Ashton's voice, filled with unwavering belief, reached Tarek's ears.

"Tarek, I know you're in there. I trust you, and you have the strength to overcome this. Embrace your humanity and reclaim your control before I do something we'll both regret."

Tarek's form trembled, his growls gradually subsiding. His once-wild eyes softened, the glimmer of recognition shining through. Slowly, he shifted back to his human form, his breath heavy and laboured.

"Finally..." Ashton sighed in relief before transforming back to his human form.

Now in his human form, Ashton extended a hand to Tarek, offering support and solace. Tarek's features, lined with exhaustion and confusion, reached out, grasping Ashton's hand firmly.

"You good?" Ashton asked once he saw Tarek massaging his head.

"Just a bit of a headache..." Tarek replied, shrugging off the pain.

"That's a good sign, and it means your body is slowly adapting to your new genes." Ashton smiled, patting him on the back. "Go and rest now. We'll talk when you feel better."

Just then, a notification popped up before Ashton's eyes. Notifying him about the completion of the task and the addition of a new member to the pack.

"Only three tasks remain... can't wait to get this over with."

Chapter 585 [Bonus ] A Trailblazing Arrival! (1)

Three pivotal tasks lay ahead, marking the next crucial step in Ashton's journey of evolution. While the prospect seemed promising, the reality was that achieving this goal would require an extensive amount of time.

Mainly because specific tasks were beyond Ashton's control. Specifically, there was one task that fell into this category.

The endeavour to locate a legendary creature proved to be no easy feat, as Ashton had yet to encounter one since the time they had freed Tarek from prison. That beast was an incredibly formidable adversary, and Ashton knew better than to underestimate such creatures.

Despite the challenges, Otiga had established a specialised division within ONI (Outer-Nova for Intelligence Commission) dedicated to searching and tracking legendary creatures. Unfortunately, their efforts have yielded little success thus far.

Ashton spared no expense in his pursuit, squandering Yenos in his quest. Fortunately, the demand for Ghosts and their supernatural abilities ensured a steady flow of income.

Additionally, they had also been selling Drakonian materials in the market, further bolstering their financial resources.

Each piece of Drakonian scale fetched exorbitant prices, amounting to hundreds of thousands of Yenos after factoring in the commission rate. In terms of value, a single Drakonian scale surpassed the combined worth of a hundred solar systems, including Earth-like planets.

On the topic of Earth-like planets, Earth had begun to witness an influx of various space merchants, as reported by the vampire twins, Irina and Verina, during their visit. The opportunities surrounding Earth's burgeoning trade piqued Ashton's interest.

The remaining two tasks on Ashton's list required considerable time and meticulousness. As Ashton was particularly selective when it came to choosing associates and resurrecting summons.

Ashton still needed to recruit four more members into his werewolf pack to accomplish the first task. Simultaneously, he aimed to add two more summons to his ranks in Valhalla.

These prerequisites marked the final steps before Ashton could venture into the realm of super-grade beings, among them the formidable Mazton.

"I cannot rely solely on my Cumulative levels to consider myself an A-ranked being," Ashton muttered, shaking his head in frustration.

His cumulative levels, which denoted his strength in his zompiewolf form, had already reached level 300, placing him within the mid-tier A-grade classification.

Despite his achievements, Ashton's perfectionism prevented him from feeling content with his progress. At times, he entertained thoughts of impulsively speeding through the tasks, but he possessed enough wisdom to resist such reckless behaviour.

He knew that hasty completion might provide temporary advantages, but he would undoubtedly regret it in the long run. After all, what good would a pack of mediocre werewolves and subpar undead summons serve?

Ashton faced similar contemplation when it came to Tarek. However, he recognised the immense value of investing in Tarek's conversion. Tarek possessed invaluable knowledge about the cult and had the potential to create various scientific equipment tailored to the Ghosts' specific needs. The benefits of having Tarek as an ally outweighed any doubts Ashton may have had.

In the interim, Ashton and his trusted lieutenants focused their efforts on preparing for the highly anticipated Orion Ball.

Vulcan, on the other hand, chose to abstain from engaging with an immature emperor and empire. Instead, he resolved to honour his promise and engage in a friendly sparring session with Flintmace.

Upon learning of Vulcan's decision, even Ashton began to reconsider attending the event. After all, it was a rare occasion when one got to witness two S-grade beings facing off against each other.

Despite his reservations about witnessing the intense battle between Vulcan and Flintmace, Ashton understood the importance of maintaining diplomatic relations with the Orion Empire.

The Orion Ball served as a significant opportunity to solidify alliances and forge new connections. With this in mind, Ashton resolved to attend the event, fully aware of the spectacle that awaited him.

The Orion Ball was not merely a social gathering or a display of extravagance but a conjunction of power, ambition, and destiny. Ashton's presence as the guest of honour marked the culmination of his efforts and his rise as a significant figure within the supernatural realm.

In the days leading up to the ball, Ashton also took the time to reflect on his journey thus far. He pondered the challenges he had overcome, the losses they had suffered as a team, and the sacrifices they had made along the way.

As the preparations for the Orion Ball continued, Ashton and his team found themselves engrossed in the intricate details of the upcoming affair.

They worked closely with the tailors, discussing design elements and colour schemes and ensuring that each costume reflected their personalities and roles within the group.

While the men grumbled about the discomfort of their attire, the women revelled in the excitement of dressing up for such a grand occasion. Even Kass, usually more inclined towards practical matters, embraced the chance to indulge in something "girly" alongside her female companions.

As the days passed and the Orion Ball drew nearer, tension mounted within Ashton's team. The prospect of encountering influential figures, both human and supernatural, filled them with a mix of excitement and apprehension.

They knew their actions and interactions at the ball could have far-reaching consequences, shaping their future endeavours and alliances.

Meanwhile, Tarek continued to prove his worth to the Ghosts. His vast knowledge of the cult and scientific expertise became indispensable assets as he worked closely with Otiga.

Tarek worked tirelessly to adapt existing technology and develop new equipment tailored to the Ghosts' unique abilities and needs. His contributions elevated the team's efficiency and effectiveness, earning him the respect and admiration of his newfound comrades.

Ashton recognised the symbiotic relationship between Tarek and the Ghosts. The more they invested in Tarek's development and integration within the group, the greater their collective strength became.



But that wasn't all. As the Ghosts progressed, they made many enemies as well. Some of them were the other mercenary groups that weren't too pleased with the Ghost's sudden rise to power and chose the Orion ball to 'teach' them a lesson.

Unfortunately for them, Ashton had already learned about their childish venture, thanks to ONI and was planning a surprise of his own.

#### Chapter 586 A Trailblazing Arrival! (2)

The grand hall of the Orion Palace shimmered with extravagance and splendour as beings from various corners of the galaxy gathered for the royal party.

The room buzzed with an energy transcending boundaries as humanoid and non-humanoid aliens mingled, their exotic forms and vibrant colours adding to the spectacle.

The guests conversed in a multitude of languages, their translation devices seamlessly bridging the communication gaps. A delicate dance of diplomacy and curiosity unfolded as species exchanged knowledge and shared tales from their respective corners of the galaxy.

At the centre of attention were the guests of honour—the renowned mercenary organisation, the Ghosts. Whispers of their accomplishments echoed through the crowd, accompanied by both awe and scepticism.

A while ago, the Ghosts had achieved the impossible by taking down one of the most notorious criminals in the Milky Way galaxy, The Phantom, a feat that had earned them praise and admiration from countless worlds.

In one corner of the room, a group of Andromedans gathered in animated conversation with their luminescent blue skin and multiple appendages. They marvelled at the Ghosts' audacity and skill, their voices blending harmoniously as they discussed the intricacies of the operation.

"I heard the Ghosts recently took down the Vortak Syndicate single-handedly," one Andromedan said, her voice reverberating with excitement. "They're like shadows, striking swiftly and disappearing without a trace."

A nearby cluster of reptilian Rylorians observed the Andromedans with a hint of scepticism. Their scales glistened in hues of green and gold, their slit-like eyes narrowing as they exchanged theories.

"It's nothing more than luck," a Rylorian murmured, his sharp teeth glinting. "A mere mercenary group shouldn't be celebrated so grandly. They lack the finesse and experience of established organisations."

While the Rylorians felt that way, there were plenty of others who both backed them as well as criticised them as they were known for their 'purist' beliefs.

A group of elegantly dressed Caelrians, their iridescent wings gently fluttering, gathered near a holographic projection of the masked Reaper and his soldiers in action. Their ethereal voices carried a sense of curiosity and intrigue.

"Have you seen Reaper in action?" one Caelrian asked, her eyes gleaming with anticipation.

Another Caelrian nodded, her voice filled with awe. "Yes, I watched one of their missions firsthand. If I'm not mistaken, it was a rescue operation for the President's daughter. Their precision and skill are unmatched, and it's no wonder they could defeat such a formidable adversary."

Nearby, a cluster of yet another reptilian species, the Zetharians, engaged in a spirited conversation. Their scaly bodies shimmered under the soft illumination as they exchanged their opinions.

"I've heard the Ghosts operate with incredible efficiency," remarked a Zetharian with flickering bioluminescent patterns across his skin. "Their tactics are as cunning as a predator stalking its prey. Not to mention, they are yet to fail a single of their mission which gives them an edge over the other organisations."

A neighbouring group of sleek and agile Xyloids joined the discussion, their metallic exoskeletons reflecting the vibrant hues of the room. Their synthesised voices conveyed an air of curiosity.

"I wonder how the Ghosts managed to gain such fame in such a short period," one Xyloid pondered, their eyes glowing with a faint luminescence.

The Xyloid were known as hibernating creatures that hibernate for tens of years every time and therefore are usually unaware of what's happening around them.

A jovial gathering of Gleeplorians, known for their social nature and vibrant plumed feathers, chuckled among themselves. Their melodic laughter filled the room as they shared anecdotes.

"They say Reaper has nerves of steel," one Gleeplorian chirped. "It takes a certain kind of bravery to face danger head-on and emerge victorious."

At a nearby refreshment station, a group of human ambassadors engaged in a lively discussion with an imposing species of armoured Atraxians. The humans spoke with admiration, while the Atraxians maintained a stoic presence.

"I shouldn't say this because of the history between the humans and mutants, but there's no denying that Reaper is a legend in the making," one human stated, a gleam of excitement in their eyes.

"Their tactical genius and combat skills are unmatched, and the Ghosts have become a force to be reckoned with. Therefore, we should take this time to forge a relationship with them."

As the conversations continued, beings from the Avian race, with their feathery wings and elegant postures, added their opinions to the mix. They shared stories of encounters with the Ghosts and expressed their admiration for the mercenaries' audacity.

Amid the diverse crowd, a cluster of telepathic beings known as the Alerians stood apart, their luminescent tendrils pulsating with vibrant colours as they communicated silently.

Their serene expressions betrayed a profound curiosity, their minds delving into the mysteries surrounding the Ghosts and their enigmatic leader, Reaper.

But not all the species in attendance held the Ghosts in high regard. An enigmatic race of energy beings called the Xalites observed the festivities from their ethereal forms. They remained distant and aloof, their whispers of disappointment carrying across the room.

"They are mercenaries, after all," one Xalite said, its voice resonating in echoes. "The attention bestowed upon them is unwarranted. True heroes should come from noble origins, not a band of paid, honourless, and opportunistic warriors."

"Did you Xalites used to work as labourers in Crimson mines not too long ago?" An Avian smirked as the Xalite left for some other location.

Amidst the diverse opinions and perspectives, the grand hall atmosphere remained charged with anticipation. The arrival of the Ghosts and their enigmatic leader, Reaper, was eagerly awaited by all.

The galaxy held its breath, ready to witness the collision of worlds and the convergence of power and intrigue.

The conversations ebbed and flowed like currents in the cosmic ocean as the royal party continued. Species from all walks of life and galaxies intertwined, sharing tales, exchanging knowledge, and weaving a tapestry of interstellar unity.

Amid the cacophony, the Ghosts remained a beacon of curiosity and intrigue, their reputation preceding them. Whether hailed as heroes or questioned as upstarts, their presence ignited a spark of excitement that permeated the air.

And as the hours ticked by, the anticipation grew, reaching its zenith as the doors at the far end of the hall swung open, followed by the announcement of the arrival of the honoured guest.

Still, no one was expecting Reaper to make a grandiose entrance as their mouths were left open after what they saw.

### Chapter 587 A Trailblazing Arrival! (3)

As the commotion filled the grand hall of the Orion Palace, a sudden hush fell over the guests as they witnessed a sight that sent chills down their spines. The magnificent hall emptied in a frenzy as beings from all corners of the galaxy hurriedly made their way outside.

Outside the hall, the atmosphere was charged with panic and confusion. The guests, still in a state of shock, looked around anxiously, searching for safety. Their eyes widened as they saw a colossal approaching them—a Drakonian.

Whispers of alarm and trepidation spread like wildfire as news of the approaching Drakonian reached the ears of the attendees. Panic gripped the hearts of many while others braced themselves for the impending danger.

"I've heard stories about Drakonians. They are fearsome creatures," a trembling voice exclaimed, its owner scanning the surroundings anxiously. "We need to find shelter!"

"I can't believe this is happening. How did a Drakonian breach our defences?" another voice questioned, a mix of fear and confusion evident in their tone. "Where are the Orions? Why aren't they doing anything?"

Amidst the rising fear, a ripple of excitement cut through the tension like a ray of hope. Some brave and adrenaline-fueled individuals saw the imminent threat as an opportunity to prove their mettle.

"This is our chance to show our strength! Let's rally together and face the Drakonian head-on!" a determined voice shouted, its words emboldening those nearby. "We won't let it wreak havoc without a fight!"

Just when despair seemed to settle upon the crowd, a figure dressed in elegant black formal attire, adorned with a mysterious black mask, leapt down from the Drakonian's back. His movements were swift and graceful, commanding attention as he landed on the ground with an air of confidence around him.

And then, to their astonishment, the Drakonian landed gracefully beside him, its massive form dwarfing the surrounding guests. The creature's eyes gleamed with familiarity and affection as it wiggled its tail, causing awe and fear among the attendees.

But there was something more. A stunning woman emerged from atop its mighty back, her flowing red dress billowing like flames. She wore a matching red mask, lending an air of mystery to her striking presence.

The masked man gracefully offered his hand, assisting the lady in red as she descended from the Drakonian's back. They stood side by side, emanating an aura of power and authority that held the crowd captive.

Whispers spread like wildfire among the onlookers, connecting the dots and realizing the truth. Gasps and murmurs of realization filled the air.

"Wait, isn't that... Reaper and Bella?"

"They are the guests of honour?"

"The renowned Ghost mercenary leader and his co-leader?"

The revelation sent shockwaves through the crowd, and a mixture of awe, admiration, and curiosity replaced the initial fear. All eyes remained fixed on the couple, captivated by their presence and the unexpected turn of events.

As the guests' gaze shifted, they noticed a luxurious spaceship descending from the heavens, its sleek design and impeccable craftsmanship a testament to its owner's prestige.

The rest of the man's and woman's allies emerged from the vessel, donning garments that mirrored their leaders' elegance, yet each in shades of red and black that signified their unity.

The atmosphere shifted from panic to a mixture of excitement and curiosity. Though still in awe of the Drakonian's imposing presence, the attendees now greatly appreciated the power couple and their entourage.

The room fell into a hushed silence as the guests awaited the next turn of events, their eyes fixed on Reaper and Bella, the Ghosts who had captured their attention and imagination.

Any complaints they might have had about the Ghosts disappeared instantly. Moreover, those planning to embarrass them now hid their faces.



If Reaper could tame a beast like a Drakonian, did they even have a chance to mess with him? If they tried anything funny, the Drakonian would burn them to a crisp, and even if it did not, the masked people surrounding the couple certainly would.

The royal party had taken an unexpected twist, transforming into a spectacle none could have anticipated, and the guests held their breath in anticipation of what would unfold next.

As the crowd stood in awe of Reaper and Bella, their attention shifted to a figure approaching from the distance. It was the Emperor's most trusted minister, known for his unwavering loyalty and sharp wit.

He clapped his hands enthusiastically as he made his way towards the couple, his charismatic presence commanding the attention of all.

"Bravo! Bravo!" the minister exclaimed, his voice resonating with genuine admiration. "What a grand entrance, our esteemed Ghosts! The galaxy has been abuzz with your legendary exploits, and today, you have surpassed all expectations!"

The attendees watched in fascination as the minister continued his approach, clapping and applauding the Ghosts' arrival. His words carried a weight of authority and genuine appreciation, adding to the spectacle that had unfolded before them.

Reaper and Bella stood tall and composed, their eyes fixed on the minister as he neared them. And then, in perfect unison, the Ghosts executed a formal Orion salute, their movements precise and in sync.

A display of discipline and respect left the crowd in awe, as it took years to learn the correct way to do the salute and even more to master it. But the Ghosts made it seem like child's play.

The minister beamed with pride, his clapping momentarily ceasing to address the Ghosts.

"Ah, Reaper, Bella, I must say, your skills and dedication are a testament to your remarkable prowess. The Empire is honoured to have you as allies."

Reaper's masked face turned towards the minister, his eyes reflecting gratitude.

"Thank you, Minister," he said, his voice commanding yet filled with appreciation. "We are truly grateful for the Empire's support and the opportunities it has provided us. Our challenges would have been unconquerable without the Empire's assistance and the Emperor's watchful eye."

"You have brought honour to our Empire, Reaper. Your accomplishments have inspired us all. Today's festivities are a small token of our gratitude for your service and valour." The minister nodded, his expression filled with admiration and pride. "Please, come inside. The Emperor's waiting for your arrival."

Chapter 588 Royal Spar (1)

With a warm smile and an air of authority, the Minister led Reaper and Bella through the vast and prosperous halls of the Orion Palace. As they walked, the crowd's murmurings followed in their wake, whispers of intrigue and awe filling the air.

Amidst the palace's grandeur, the trio moved with class, drawing attention from the guests who watched in curiosity and admiration. Conversations hushed as eyes followed the Ghosts and their entourage, their grand entrance still fresh in everyone's minds.

"Reaper and Bella, what a sight to behold!" murmured one attendee, their voice tinged with envy and fascination. "They certainly know how to make an entrance. Don't you think so?"

Another guest leaned in closer to their companion, their voices hushed as they shared their thoughts. "I wonder if I could join them... I should get in their good graces and form a good relationship with them."

As the Minister guided the Ghosts through the labyrinthine corridors, the whispers grew louder, speculations and theories intertwining like a delicate dance. Some marvelled at the display of power and elegance, while others questioned the reasoning behind such a flamboyant arrival.

"Such extravagance," commented a dignitary, their voice laced with a hint of envy. "They have certainly made their mark. But is it necessary? I mean, the Drakonian could have accidentally killed someone, and would the Ghosts take responsibility for that?"

A group of Orion nobles observed the scene with curiosity and scepticism.

"I wonder what the Emperor thinks of their arrival," one noble pondered, their voice carrying a note of intrigue. "Such boldness surely demands his attention."

A few steps behind, a group of scholars engaged in a hushed discussion, their voices filled with scholarly curiosity.

"Do you think the Ghosts' arrival signifies a shift in power dynamics?" one scholar mused. "Their actions and reputation have certainly set the galaxy abuzz."

"Well, it certainly has not gone unnoticed, has it?"

The murmurs grew in volume and intensity as the trio passed through each corridor, echoing off the intricately adorned walls. The whispers followed them like a subtle symphony of intrigue and fascination.

Amidst the curiosity and speculation, some marvelled at the Ghosts' audacity and admired their commanding presence. The Ghosts had become a topic of conversation, their every move scrutinised and analysed by the attendees.

"Have you laid eyes on their pet Drakonian? It's unlike anything I've ever witnessed before. The Ghosts truly live up to their renowned reputation," one guest whispered in awe.

"Reputation? They are nothing more than a group of arrogant show-offs," another guest retorted dismissively.

Ashton couldn't help but smile upon hearing the man's critical remark. It was as expected, considering the man's affiliation with a certain evolved race of humans known for their blunt opinions.

Nevertheless, Ashton knew that confronting the man would serve no purpose and would be beneath his own character.

He resisted the urge to retort and instead focused on maintaining his composure, reminding himself of the importance of diplomacy and restraint in his position as the leader of the Ghosts.

"We're here!" the Minister cheerfully exclaimed.

The grand doors swung open, revealing the opulent interior of the inner chamber. A hushed silence fell over the room as the esteemed guests took in the sight before them.

The palace guards directed the rest of the Ghosts to remain outside while Ashton and Anna, the esteemed guests of honour, were granted access to the inner chamber.

The outer chamber, where most attendees were gathered, was an impressive sight. Lavish decorations adorned the walls, and laughter and conversation filled the air. The atmosphere was lively, with beings from various corners of the galaxy mingling and exchanging pleasantries.

However, the inner chamber held an air of exclusivity and intrigue. It was reserved for guests who had achieved a certain level of accomplishment, a select few who had earned the respect and admiration of the Orion Empire.

As Reaper and Bella stepped through the ornate doors, all eyes turned towards them. The tension in the air inside was palpable. Whispers circulated among the guests as they studied the couple, assessing their presence and judging their worth.

The Ghosts had garnered a reputation as formidable warriors and skilled operatives. Still, now they stood amidst the elite of the Orion Empire, where accomplishments were scrutinised, and respect had to be earned.

However, a moment later, everyone went silent. All conversations quieted, and all eyes turned toward the imposing figure of the Emperor sitting on the throne at the centre of the room.

He was a tall and regal being, his form draped in elegant robes of shimmering gold and crimson. His presence commanded attention, and his aura exuded authority.

The Minister stepped forward, addressing the Emperor with the utmost respect. "Your Majesty, may I present to you the esteemed guests of honour, Reaper and Bella, leaders of the renowned mercenary organisation, the Ghosts."

As the Minister concluded his introduction, a hush fell over the chamber. All eyes turned towards the Emperor, awaiting their response to the presence of the Ghosts' leaders.

The Emperor's piercing gaze shifted from the Minister to Reaper and Bella, studying them intently. His dark, piercing eyes filled with curiosity and wisdom.

His skin was a deep, obsidian black, contrasting sharply with the vibrant colours of his attire. His features were sharp and defined, displaying a regal countenance befitting his position.

"Your Majesty," Ashton began, his voice steady and respectful. "We are deeply honoured to be in your presence. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Empire for extending this invitation and the support you have provided us throughout our endeavours."

With a nod of acknowledgement, the Emperor spoke, his voice resonating through the chamber.

"Reaper and Bella, I have heard tales of your valour and accomplishments, the legends that precede you. Your exploits have reached even the farthest corners of our Empire, and I am honoured to finally meet you in person."

Reaper and Bella inclined their heads respectfully, acknowledging the Emperor's words with a deep sense of honour. They understood the significance of this moment, as they were being recognised by the highest authority in the Orion Empire.

The Emperor continued, "Let the festivities begin!"

Chapter 589 Royal Spar (2)

The grand hall of the Orion Empire's royal palace was ablaze with vibrant colours and lively music as the royal festivities reached their peak.

Nobles from across the galaxy had gathered, each vying for attention and influence in the illustrious court. Thus it was the perfect opportunity for Ashton and Anna to forge connections to ensure they had allies when the tides of battle grew treacherous.

Ashton stood tall, his dark cloak billowing behind him, engaged in conversation with an influential military general. While Anna, her enchanting form concealed beneath a mask, mingled with the courtiers, her eyes gleaming with curiosity and caution.

She wasn't afraid to use her charms when and where necessary, so it wasn't a surprise she had garnered a lot of attention. More so because she was a succubus, everyone wanted to know more about their origins.

Across the hall, Lord Callan, a noble from the Orion Empire, observed the festivities with a haughty gaze. He was a man of wealth and privilege, one who had never been denied anything in his life.

His eyes fell upon Anna, her graceful movements captivating him instantly. The succubus exuded an aura of mystery and allure, and Lord Callan, 123rd in line for the throne, was smitten.

However, his guard, surprisingly a human, sensed what was happening inside his master's head and warned him about the complications.

"Your Lordship, I would suggest you not antagonise-"

Reaper and Bella were talented combatants and the Emperor's special guests, which meant upsetting them, was akin to upsetting the Emperor.

"Shut it, Keron. I'd ask for your opinion when I need it!" Callan retorted, fixing his grand suit.

Unfortunately, Callan didn't care about it since he wanted to have a taste of Bella and add her to his 'exotic collection'.

Unable to resist the pull, Lord Callan approached Anna, a smile playing upon his lips. He believed no woman could resist his charms, and his position in the Orion Empire only added to his arrogance. Anna, sensing his intentions, tensed under her cloak but remained polite.



"Ah, fair lady," Lord Callan began, his voice dripping with false charm. "I could not help but notice your radiant beauty. Pray, allow me to accompany you for the evening and show you the wonders of the cosmos in... private."

Anna's eyes narrowed, and she looked towards Ashton, hoping for his support, but he was engrossed in conversation, unaware of the unfolding situation.

She knew she had to handle it herself. She responded calmly but firmly, "Thank you for your kind words, my lord, but I am already betrothed to another, and I must decline your offer."

Saying so, she returned to the conversation she was having with a countess in the empire, not caring about a lowly man's temper. However, her actions led to Lord Callan's face flushing with anger, his entitlement shattered by Bella's rejection.

His voice dripped with venom as he hissed, "Betrothed to a lowly mercenary? A woman of your beauty deserves better, my dear. Reaper is a mere speck in the grand tapestry of the Orion Empire."

Anna's patience wore thin, and her proper form began to emerge, her succubus wings and horns becoming visible. She held her head high, meeting Lord Callan's gaze with unyielding strength.

"Reaper is more of a man than you could ever hope to be, my lord. His honour and loyalty outweigh the wealth and titles that define you." Anna Replied with a smile. "Now, if you don't mind, you should seek another woman in the crowd. I assure you there are plenty of beautiful ones for you."

Lord Callan's face twisted into a mask of fury, his entitlement fueling his rage. Without warning, he reached out and grabbed Anna's hand, his grip tight and possessive.

"You will learn your place, succubus! I will not be denied!"

"You man-child..."

Anna's eyes blazed with a dangerous fire, and her patience was finally extinguished. In a swift motion, she broke free from Lord Callan's grip and unleashed a powerful kick, sending him hurtling backwards.

The force of her blow was so great that Lord Callan crashed through the grand hall's ornate wall, leaving a gaping hole in his wake.

Silence fell over the hall as courtiers and nobles alike turned to witness the spectacle. Lord Callan lay sprawled amidst the rubble; his arrogance shattered along with the wall. Anna, her form returning to its deceptive guise, stood tall, her voice commanding and resolute.

"No man, noble or otherwise, has the right to lay a hand on me without my consent. I am not a possession to be claimed but a person who chooses her own path. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have more deserving company to keep."

With a final glance towards Ashton, who turned his attention towards the commotion, Anna walked away, leaving Lord Callan and the shattered remnants of his entitlement behind.

The courtiers whispered among themselves, their admiration for the succubus growing with each passing moment. Most of them viewed Lord Callan as a nuisance and were glad someone taught the pervert a lesson.

Ashton, his eyes filled with concern and pride, approached Anna. He wrapped his arm around her, offering silent support as her rage slowly simmered.

"That was one hell of a kick, Anna." He slowly whispered into her ears.

"Of course it was. The moron couldn't take any hints-"

Just as they were about to head towards the Emperor to sort the mess out, Keron stopped them. His plasma blade was merely inches away from Anna's throat.

"Although I'm aware my master was at fault for the situation, as his knight, I must avenge his honour-"

Before the man could finish, Ashton appeared behind the man in a blur, calmly placing a hand on the man's shoulder.

"I'm intrigued as to what honour such a man possesses?" Ashton whispered before walking past Keron. "Do yourself a favour and stand down while you still have legs to stand on. This will be your first and final warning."

Chapter 590 Royal Spar (3)

The courtiers and nobles watched as Keron stood before Reaper, mere moments away from tragedy. In this tense moment, Minister Theron, the wisest and most respected figure in the Orion Empire's court, stepped forward.

Minister Theron's voice resonated through the hall, commanding attention. "Enough! We cannot allow chaos to disrupt the festivities. Let us settle this dispute in the way of our ancestors, through a spar, as the Orions have always done... if his majesty allows so."

The Emperor, seated upon his ornate throne, considered the proposal momentarily. His gaze swept across the hall, taking in the anticipation and the desire for spectacle.

With a regal nod, he granted his approval. "I see no reason to object. These proceedings have indeed grown stale, and this event shall bring a welcome breath of excitement."

His suggestion brought a murmur of agreement from the gathered crowd, intrigued by the prospect of witnessing a clash of strength and skill. Minister Theron's eyes moved to Keron and then to Reaper.

"Keron, as the noble's guard, do you accept this challenge to settle your grievances with Reaper?" Minister Theron asked, his tone just and uncaring.

Keron, his face filled with determination and a hint of anger, stepped forward. "I accept, Minister Theron. I will avenge my master's dignity and punish this insolent woman for her misdeed."

Before Keron could continue, Reaper interjected, his voice firm and filled with warning. "Choose your next words carefully, Keron. Bella acted in self-defence. I suggest you stand down before the consequences become dire."

Keron's eyes narrowed, his hand instinctively moving towards the hilt of his plasma sword. "I care not for your warnings, Reaper. I will not let this insult go unanswered."

Minister Theron raised his hand, silencing the room once again before speaking.

"Very well. The spar shall commence, but I must remind you that this is an honourable duel fought with martial arts. No weapons shall be allowed."

Reaper and Keron nodded in agreement, preparing themselves mentally for the strike delivered with the intent to overwhelm his opponent.

But Reaper, with his uncanny reflexes, swiftly evaded the onslaught, ducking, upcoming clash.

As the courtiers cleared a space in the grand hall, creating a makeshift ring, Keron and Ashton faced each other, their eyes locked in a silent battle of determination. The air crackled with tension as they prepared to engage in combat.

Fueled by his desire for vengeance, Keron launched himself forward with lightning-fast punches aimed at Ashton's torso. His movements were precise, each strike delivered with the intent to overwhelm his opponent.

But Reaper, with his uncanny reflexes, swiftly evaded the onslaught, ducking, weaving, and parrying with calculated grace.

"Is that all?" Ashton taunted his opponent as he played with him.

He knew Keron was no match for him and wasn't taking the fight seriously. Otherwise, he would have ended the spar along with Keron's life in one blow. Keron, oblivious to their difference in strength, kept attacking Ashton.

Ashton's agility and combat prowess allowed him to seamlessly transition from defence to offence. With a sudden burst of speed, he closed the distance between them, launching a series of powerful kicks towards Keron. Each strike carried the weight of Reaper's immense strength, threatening to knock Keron off balance.

Keron, determined not to be overwhelmed, countered with swift footwork, dodging Reaper's kicks and retaliating with fast jabs and hooks.

However, despite his best efforts, he struggled to penetrate Reaper's defences. The Ghosts' leader seemed to have an almost instinctive sense of his opponent's movements, effortlessly blocking, parrying, and countering with precision.

As the battle raged on, the intensity grew. His frustration mounting, Keron summoned his inner strength, channelling it into a powerful roundhouse kick aimed at Reaper's head.

The force behind the strike was formidable, but Reaper, always one step ahead, deflected the attack, redirecting Keron's momentum and leaving him momentarily vulnerable.

Seizing the opportunity, Reaper swiftly closed his fists in a blur as he unleashed a barrage of devastating blows upon Keron. Each strike landed with a bone-crushing impact, causing Keron to stagger backwards, his defences crumbling under the sheer force of Reaper's assault.

Bloodied and battered, Keron's resolve faltered for a brief moment. But the fire in his eyes refused to die out. Gathering the remnants of his strength, he pushed through the pain, mustering a final surge of energy.

He launched himself at Reaper with a primal roar, attempting a desperate takedown. But Reaper, unyielding and unrelenting, sidestepped the attack with a fluid motion, swiftly countering with a sweeping leg kick.

Unable to regain his balance, Keron crashed to the ground, his body momentarily paralysed with pain.

Seeing defeat looming, desperation flickered in Keron's eyes. Ignoring the agreement to fight without weapons, he reached for his plasma sword, hoping to turn the tide with its deadly power. The blade glinted in the dim light as he swung it towards Reaper with all his might.

"Die, you mutant bastard!"

"...really?" Ashton shook his head as the plasma sword arced towards his neck.

After fighting against simulated Xyrans, Keron's pathetic manoeuvre wasn't enough to put a scratch on Ashton's skin. He intercepted Keron's strike with lightning-fast reflexes, catching the blade between his hands and the next moment, the sword shattered.

When Ashton's bare palms intercepted Keron's Plasma sword, a collective gasp escaped from the onlookers in the grand hall. The courtiers, nobles, and even the seasoned military personnel were astounded by the audacious display of strength and defiance against the deadly weapon.

Noblewomen clutched their chests, their delicate fingers pressing against the expensive fabrics of their dresses, their hearts pounding with fear and exhilaration. It was an unusual sight, a testament to Reaper's otherworldly power.

Military generals exchanged incredulous glances, their disciplined demeanour momentarily shattered.

They were well aware of the reputation of the plasma sword, its ability to effortlessly slice through the strongest hulls of spaceships. Yet here was Reaper, a mere mortal, breaking it apart as if it were made of glass.

Minister Theron, usually composed and measured, had a look of awe. His lips parted as if he wanted to speak, but he found himself speechless, simply observing the aftermath of Reaper's feat.

The Emperor's usual composed demeanour faltered briefly, replaced by a flicker of intrigue and curiosity. He leaned forward, his gaze fixed intently on Ashton. The courtiers around him shifted, sensing the rare display of surprise from their sovereign.



Minister Theron stepped forward once more, his voice resonating with authority. "Let it be known that Reaper has proven himself in strength and mercy today. The matter is settled, and the court festivities may continue."

"Not so fast," The Emperor interjected. "Keron... must face the consequences of his actions."

Kindle!