

Zompiewolf 591

Chapter 591 Emperor's Decision

The grand hall fell into a hushed silence as Emperor Galen, ruler of the Orion Empire, made his way to the centre of the court.

His imposing figure exuded an air of authority that commanded respect. His gaze settled upon the shattered remnants of the plasma sword and Keron, who stood with shame on his face.

"Enough," Emperor Galen spoke with a voice that echoed through the hall. "This duel was meant to settle grievances with honour and integrity. Keron, you defiled the sanctity of the spar by resorting to a weapon. Explain yourself before I kill you myself."

Keron's eyes darted between Emperor Galen and Reaper, his lips trembling with fear as he immediately went to his knees. He knew the Emperor's legendary rage well and did not want to face it, even if it meant betraying his so-called lord.

"Emperor, I felt the need to avenge my master's honour and, in doing so, allowed my emotions to cloud my judgment. I take full responsibility for my actions and will bear whatever punishment you see fit."

Emperor Galen's expression hardened as disappointment clouded his features.

"You have disgraced yourself and the noble house you serve. The rules of the spar were clear, and you chose to ignore them. Such actions cannot be tolerated within the Orion Empire. As such, I sentence you to-"

Before the Emperor could pronounce his judgment, Ashton stepped forward, his voice calm but firm.

"Emperor Galen, if I may interject. Keron's actions were driven by loyalty and a misguided sense of duty towards his master. While he has erred, it is his master who bears the responsibility for instigating this conflict."

Lord Callan went pale once he heard Ashton's words. He hoped the Emperor would forget about him after punishing Keron, but now all attention was on him.

"Hm... Reaper, your words reflect that there's more you want to say," The Emperor regarded Reaper with a raised eyebrow, curious about the mercenary's interruption. "Speak your mind. What do you suggest as an appropriate course of action?"

Ashton bowed respectfully before addressing the Emperor. "Emperor Galen, I humbly request leniency for Keron. His loyalty, though misplaced, is an admirable trait. Instead, let the blame fall upon his master, Lord Callan, for his disrespectful actions towards Bella and the court."

"You would allow Keron to live, knowing he defied the rules of the spar?" Emperor Galen's gaze shifted from Reaper to Keron, considering the proposal.

"Yes, your highness. Keron's punishment should come in the form of learning from his mistake, not through a loss of life." Ashton met the Emperor's gaze unflinchingly. "Besides, I believe he has the potential to grow and become a better warrior under the guidance of the Empire."

Emperor's gazer shifted to Keron. It was true that Keron and the give Keron another chance, and since Reaper was asking that of him, he had no reason to deny the request.

family he was adopted into had served the Empire well over the years.

If he wanted, the Emperor could cite their loyalty as a reason to give Keron another chance, and since Reaper was asking that of him, he had no reason to deny the request.

"Very well then," Emperor Galen nodded, acknowledging Reaper's words. "Keron, you shall be stripped of your position as a noble's guard and will serve the Empire as a soldier in the ranks.

You will undergo rigorous training to discipline your emotions and learn honour's true meaning before returning to your previous position."

"Thank you, Emperor Galen. I will not disappoint you. I will dedicate myself to the Empire and seek redemption for my actions." Keron's eyes widened in both relief and gratitude.

He bowed deeply to the Emperor, his voice filled with determination. However, he didn't show any respectful gesture towards Ashton, which the latter didn't mind. After all, a lion couldn't care for an ant to salute him, could he?

"Lord Callan, your lack of control and disrespect have disgraced your noble house and the Empire itself. Your actions will not go unpunished."

Emperor Galen then turned his attention to Lord Callan, who had remained silent throughout the proceedings. "However, Reaper would be the one to decide your fate as it is the Ghosts whom you have offended."

Lord Callan shot a dirty look at Ashton and Anna, blaming them for his current situation despite knowing his lust was the reason he was stuck in such a position.

"Emperor Galen, I believe Lord Callan's punishment should reflect the severity of his transgressions." Ashton stepped forward once more, his voice commanding everyone's attention.

He continued, "He is drunk on power and thinks his nobility and financial strength would dominate anyone and could take anything he wished for."

"Hence, I propose that he be stripped of his noble title and privileges, banished from the court, and barred from holding any position of authority within the Empire."

The entire room gasped as those words left Ashton's mouth. But he knew very well that the Emperor would side with him, mainly because Anna did not want violence and only kicked Callan once he crossed the line.

"Your words carry weight, Reaper, and I find them just." Emperor Galen considered Reaper's words, his expression unyielding. After a moment of contemplation, he nodded. "Lord Callan, you shall face the consequences of your arrogance. Leave this court and never return."

"But, my lord-"

"LEAVE!"

Lord Callan, his face pale and filled with rage, glared at Reaper and Bella before storming out of the grand hall, his once-exalted status reduced to nothing.

Once he was gone, the Emperor turned towards Ashton. His eyes showed that he was planning something.

"You have shown wisdom and integrity in this matter, Reaper. You have demonstrated that despite being mercenaries, the Ghosts hold honour in high regard."

Emperor Galen, having made his judgments, addressed Reaper directly. "As a token of my appreciation, I grant you and Bella a place of distinction within the Orion Empire, and as it happens, I got a vacancy in my court."

Ashton bowed deeply, his gratitude evident in his voice. "Thank you, Emperor Galen. We shall continue to serve the Empire with unwavering loyalty and honour."

Ashton's and Anna's faces showed sincerity, but both smiled inwardly as their plan was a success.

They didn't notice how Anna had worked her charm of a succubus to force Callan to do what he did. Nor did they see how Ashton used [Incite] on Keron to use his sword to fight him.

Since everyone in the court knew of Callan's lust for women, none thought he was manipulated. Having Otiga research the royal family proved to be a great move by Ashton.

'Now, with the court invaded, it's time to look for the traces of the Cult.' Ashton thought as the Emperor bestowed the title of royalty upon him and Anna.

Chapter 592 Hidden In Shadows (1)

A holographic projection flickered to life in the dimly lit chamber, revealing a group of shadowy figures.

The room was shrouded in darkness, their identities concealed by the cloak of secrecy. The atmosphere was heavy with anticipation as they gathered for their clandestine meeting.

At the head of the table sat the enigmatic figure known as the Priest. Their silhouette was cloaked in a dark robe, concealing their face and form from prying eyes. The Priest exuded an aura of authority, commanding the attention of the gathered Deacons.

The holographic projections of the Deacons materialised around the table, their identities masked by distorted images. Their voices were electronically modulated to conceal their true identities further. The atmosphere crackled with tension as the discussion began.

"We are facing a grave threat, my brethren," the Priest began, his tone filled with urgency. "Reaper, Bella, and their Ghosts have entered the Empire, and their presence has not gone unnoticed.

"They have gained the favour of the Emperor, a position we cannot allow them to hold. If left unchecked, those infidels would disrupt our lord's work!"

The deacons, their holographic projections arranged in a semicircle around the Priest, nodded in agreement. Their voices whispered through the room, a chorus of shadowy figures.

"We must devise a plan to rid ourselves of this thorn in our side, to eliminate the Ghosts and ensure our power remains unchallenged."

The Priest leaned forward, his eyes glinting with malice. "The Ghosts are renowned for their combat prowess, but we must exploit their weaknesses. We need to strike when they are vulnerable, when they least expect it."

One of the deacons interjected. "What of the Emperor? His favour towards the Ghosts cannot be ignored. We must find a way to turn his attention away from them and continue exploiting the Empire's resources for our cause."

"Indeed. We must exploit the Emperor's trust in the Ghosts. Once we sow the seeds of doubt and suspicion in his mind, we'll manipulate his perception until he views them as a threat." Yet another Deacon chimed in.

The Priest nodded, a sinister smile curling upon his lips. "Once the Emperor's favour wanes, the Ghosts will be left vulnerable and isolated."

"But how shall we execute our plan, O wise priest? The Ghosts are a formidable bunch," Another deacon, their voice tinged with a sense of malevolence, spoke up.

She continued, "They have quite a few supporters in the Emperor's council. It would be tough for us to sway the Emperor away from them when the majority is in their favour."

"We wouldn't manipulate the Emperor; the Emperor would get rid of them himself."

The Priest's comment left everyone confused. Weren't they talking about manipulating the Emperor since the beginning? Also, since they have been doing it for a while, it should be the safer option.

"I know what my dear disciples are thinking. So allow me to explain," The Priest's holographic projection leaned back, his fingers intertwining in contemplation. "We'd do what we have done till Seeing the confused look in their voice, the Priest continued.

"We will infiltrate their ranks, exploit their weaknesses from within. now."

Seeing the confused look in their voice, the Priest continued.

"We will infiltrate their ranks, exploit their weaknesses from within. We shall sow discord and manipulation, turning allies against one another until they crumble under their own mistrust."

"We already have, wise one," One of the Deacons interjected. "one of our followers is already within their ranks, though it's uncertain what level of authority they hold at the moment."

The Priest's eyes widened with surprise, his initial composure faltering. His voice trembled as he spoke, a mixture of shock and excitement permeating his words.

"What? One of our own has breached their ranks? This... this is beyond our expectations."

A low chuckle escaped the Priest's lips, gradually evolving into a burst of full-blown laughter that reverberated through the chamber. The other deacons, taken aback by the Priest's unexpected reaction, exchanged bewildered glances.

The Priest's laughter subsided, replaced by a sly grin. "Oh, the irony! The Ghosts believed they were the ones weaving a web of manipulation, yet they unknowingly allowed our presence to infiltrate their very core."

However, his amusement quickly faded as suspicion crept into his mind. His gaze hardened as he addressed the deacon.

"Who authorised this infiltration, and who is our agent among the Ghosts?"

"I... I apologise, esteemed Priest. The decision to infiltrate the Ghosts was made by me alone. I believed it was necessary for the success of our mission." The deacon's holographic projection stammered, their voice laced with nervousness.

The Priest's eyes narrowed, his voice dripping with disappointment.

"You acted without consulting the council, without my knowledge. Your actions could have jeopardised the safety of all of us, the entire Cult. Do you not understand the risks?"

"I-I... I thought it was for the greater good, esteemed Priest. I apologise for acting without your guidance." The deacon's projection trembled, their voice barely above a whisper.

The Priest leaned forward, his voice filled with a stern warning. "You have overstepped your boundaries, deacon. Your impulsive actions could have endangered our entire operation.

"Remember, we are shadows in the dark, working together to achieve our goals. Such recklessness will not be tolerated again."

The deacon's holographic projection nodded fervently, a tinge of fear evident in their voice. "I understand, esteemed Priest. I assure you, I have learned my lesson. I will not act without your explicit approval in the future."

The Priest's gaze bore into the deacon, his voice cold and unforgiving. "See that you do. We cannot afford more missteps, especially when dealing with the Ghosts."

He continued, "They are formidable opponents, and we must be calculated in our actions. Remember, the Cult's survival depends on our unity and adherence to our plans."

With a final warning delivered, the Priest settled back into his seat, his features composed once more. The deacon, chastened and filled with a sense of humility, retreated into the shadows of their holographic projection, their voice barely audible.

"Give me the details of the infiltrator privately... they shall be coordinating with me from now on." The Priest instructed before disconnecting the call. "One day, these morons will get me killed!"

Chapter 593 Hidden In Shadows (2)

In the secluded confines of the royal chambers assigned to them, Ashton and Anna found themselves alone, their masks of composure slipping away to reveal the true intentions behind their actions.

They had orchestrated the events of the court, including the confrontation with Lord Callan and Keron, as part of a larger plan to expose the hidden Cult members lurking within the Emperor's court.

"Everything is going according to plan," Ashton whispered, his voice tinged with anticipation.

Anna nodded as a mischievous smile played on her lips. "Well, since we did the one thing the Cult couldn't have anticipated, I bet they are pissed."

The cult's relentless pursuit of Anna had initially perplexed and concerned Ashton. He knew they desired Anna for reasons related to her succubus heritage, but their repeated failures to apprehend or eliminate him had fueled his suspicions.

That's why he decided it was time for a preemptive strike on the cult to remind them they weren't the only ones who could plan ahead of time. It was time to turn the tables on the cult and expose its dangerous influence within the court of the Orion Empire.

However, Ashton knew he had to be extremely careful. One wrong move and the entire empire might turn against him and the Ghosts.

Moreover, he was sure someone close to the Emperor was a cult member, or else they wouldn't easily manipulate the empire without being noticed.

Therefore, it was crucial that they never reveal their plan to anyone, even though they were doing the empire a favour by taking out their trash for them.

As they discussed their strategy, a faint noise caught their attention from outside the chambers. The sound of muffled footsteps and whispered voices drifted through the air.

Without a moment's hesitation, Ashton and Anna exchanged a knowing glance, both aware that the cult had finally made their move.

In a swift and synchronised motion, they positioned themselves strategically within the room, their senses heightened and ready to face the onslaught.

Moments later, the chamber doors burst open, and a horde of masked figures stormed in, their intentions clear. Ashton's instincts kicked in, and he engaged the attackers head-on.

Ashton's reflexes were honed to perfection as he swiftly sidestepped a swinging blade, countering with a lightning-fast strike. His movements were fluid and precise, every punch and kick a testament to his years of training.

His fists blurred in the air, landing with bone-crushing force, while his legs delivered devastating kicks that sent his opponents sprawling to the ground.

With succubus agility and deadly grace, Anna danced through the chaos. Her lithe frame twisted and turned, evading attacks with near-supernatural swiftness.

She struck with pinpoint accuracy, her strikes imbued with a seductive allure that incapacitated her foes with lethal efficiency. Her movements were a deadly dance, as her hands and feet moved in perfect harmony, leaving a trail of fallen attackers in her wake.

Ashton and Anna stood back-to-back, their bodies tense and ready for the next onslaught of masked assailants that flooded the royal chambers. The room was chaotic as the attackers lunged forward, their weapons raised.

The masked assailants lunged at Ashton and Anna from all directions, their desperation fueling their attacks. But the mercenaries were a well-oiled machine, their synergy evident as they seamlessly supported each other.

Ashton's brute strength and calculated strikes were complemented by Anna's agility and precise blows, forming an unstoppable force against their enemies.

Ashton expertly parried a series of knife strikes, each clash of metal resonating through the room. With a mighty thrust, he disarmed one attacker and swiftly followed up with a devastating elbow strike, rendering the assailant unconscious.

Meanwhile, Anna gracefully sidestepped a lunging opponent, her movements almost ethereal. With a fluid motion, she spun, her leg extending in a high kick that caught her assailant square in the jaw, sending him crashing to the floor.

As the battle raged on, Ashton and Anna's movements became more synchronised, their teamwork reaching a level of perfection that left their enemies in awe.

incapacitated and defeated.

Ashton, his eyes gleaming with a fierce determination, faced a final wave of attackers. Ashton would deliver a powerful punch, leaving an opening for Anna to capitalise on, her strikes hitting with surgical precision. They moved in a dance of destruction, a seamless fusion of strength and finesse.

During the chaos, a group of attackers closed in on Anna, attempting to overwhelm her with sheer numbers. But she met their assault head-on, her lithe form darting between them with astonishing speed.

Her strikes were like whispers in the air, barely detectable until they connected with bone-shattering impact. Her adversaries crumpled to the ground one by one, incapacitated and defeated.

Ashton, his eyes gleaming with a fierce determination, faced a final wave of attackers. He effortlessly blocked and dodged their strikes, his movements calculated and economical.

With every strike, he seemed to channel an almost superhuman strength, his fists leaving a trail of devastation in their wake.

As the number of masked attackers dwindled, it became evident that this assault had been meticulously planned.

These were not mere foot soldiers but skilled operatives of the cult, driven by fanatical devotion. Despite their resilience, they were no match for the combined might of Ashton and Anna.

As the last masked assailant fell, the room fell silent, save for the laboured breaths of Ashton and Anna. The once-opulent chambers now bore the scars of the fierce battle, strewn with fallen bodies and shattered remnants of furniture.

Ashton stepped forward, his voice filled with triumph. "You are the last of them, the ones who dared to challenge us. I don't usually do this, but wanna say anything before we had your ass over to the empire?"

The captured cult member sneered, his voice laced with defiance. "You may have defeated us today, but the cult's influence reaches far and wide. You cannot stop what is already in motion."

"Ah yes, I almost forgot about the cringe you fools spew. I guess I should follow suit and say something a hero would," Ashton laughed before shaking his head.

"We will hunt down every last member of the cult, expose their corruption, and eradicate their influence, even if it is the last thing I do."

Kindle!

Chapter 594 Breach

Minister Theron, deep in thought in his private quarters, was jolted from his reverie by the distant sounds of commotion echoing through the palace corridors.

His brow furrowed with concern as he listened intently, trying to discern the source of the disturbance. The peace and quiet of the palace had been shattered, and he knew it was his duty to investigate and ensure the safety of the Empire.

Without hesitation, he reached for the communications device on his desk and activated it. The device crackled to life as he relayed his urgent message to the royal guard stationed throughout the palace.

"This is Minister Theron. What's going down there?" The Minister commanded to know. "What? Intruders in the palace?... There is an unusual disturbance, I see. I need a squad of guards to join me immediately. Proceed with caution."

Within moments, a group of elite guards assembled outside the Minister's quarters, ready to follow his lead.

Their expressions were resolute, the weight of their responsibility etched upon their faces. Together, they embarked on a brisk march, their boots echoing in the empty corridors as they headed towards the source of the chaos.

As they neared Ashton's room, the noise grew louder and more chaotic, confirming the Minister's suspicions that something significant was occurring.

The guards fanned out, forming a protective formation around the Minister as they approached the door. With a nod from their General, one of the guards gently pushed open the door, revealing a scene of disarray and conflict.

The Minister's eyes widened in shock as he took in the sight before him. Broken furniture, scattered debris, and fallen bodies filled the room.

His heart raced, and he feared the worst, but his relief was palpable as he spotted Ashton and Anna amidst the chaos, standing tall and seemingly unharmed.

"Reaper! Bella!" the Minister called out, his voice filled with concern and relief. "What has happened here?"

Ashton's gaze met the Minister's, his expression calm yet determined. "Minister, we were attacked. But fear not, we have dealt with the assailants."

Anna's voice joined Reaper's, her tone steady. "They caught us off guard, but we could defend ourselves. Unfortunately, all but one of them died in the process."

The Minister's relief turned to simmering anger as he surveyed the wreckage. He clenched his fists, his voice laced with frustration.

"This should never have happened within the walls of the Orion palace. Our security measures have failed us."

He turned to the General in charge of palace security, his tone stern. "General, I measures have failed us."

He turned to the General in charge of palace security, his tone stern. "General, I entrusted you with the safety of this palace, and you have allowed this breach to occur. Explain yourself."

The General, his face pale and filled with remorse, bowed his head. "Minister, I... I apologise for this grave lapse in security. We will investigate how these assailants managed to infiltrate and take immediate measures to prevent such incidents in the future."

The Minister's gaze hardened, his disappointment evident. "Investigate thoroughly, General. We cannot afford any more oversights. Our Emperor's safety must be paramount."

He turned his attention to the royal guards accompanying him. "I want a complete sweep of the palace, from top to bottom. Check every nook and cranny for any remaining assailants. We cannot risk any further breaches."

The guards nodded, their expressions determined. They dispersed swiftly and orderly, fanning out to carry out the Minister's orders.

The Minister then focused his attention back on Ashton and Anna. "Reaper, Bella, I apologise for this security breach. Rest assured, we will get to the bottom of this. These attackers must have had a motive. Were you able to identify any of them?"

Ashton exchanged a glance with Anna, their expressions guarded. "No, Minister," he replied evenly. "They wore masks, concealing their identities. We were unable to discern their motives. However, I hope something will be revealed once you interrogate this person."

Ashton replied, throwing the surviving assailant towards the guards.

The Minister's frustration grew, but he masked it well. "Very well. We will interrogate the captured assailant and uncover the truth behind this attack. No stone will be left unturned."

Ashton and Anna nodded in understanding, their determination evident. They knew that exposing the truth behind the attack meant unravelling the web of intrigue that had plagued them for far too long.

But for now, they had to be cautious in revealing their suspicions, for they did not yet know who among the palace inhabitants could be associated with the cult.

The Minister, satisfied with their response, nodded in acknowledgement. "Thank you, Reaper, Bella. Your bravery and skill in defending yourselves are commendable. The Orion Empire owes you a debt of gratitude. I'll make sure you are compensated fairly for what happened tonight."

After the Minister and the guards left them alone in their chamber, Ashton and Anna exchanged a cautious glance. The night's events had heightened their suspicions, and they knew they couldn't afford to trust anyone blindly, not even someone as high-ranking as the Minister.

Ashton leaned against a wall, his arms crossed over his chest. "Anna, what are your thoughts on the Minister? Do you believe he can truly be trusted?"

Anna sighed, her eyes scanning the room for any signs of surveillance. "I don't know, Ashton. He seemed genuinely concerned about our well-being, but it's hard to trust anyone completely in a place filled with secrets and hidden agendas."

Ashton nodded, his expression grim. "Agreed. We've seen too much deception, too many attempts on our lives. The cult's reach could extend further than we can imagine."

Anna stepped closer to him, her voice low. "We need to be careful, Ashton. We cannot afford to reveal our suspicions prematurely. We must gather more information, find the ones pulling the strings behind the cult."

A flicker of determination sparked in Ashton's eyes. "That's why we joined the Orion Empire in the first place, Anna. We knew that by being here, we could smoke out the hidden members of the cult. And if the Minister is truly working against us, we'll find out soon enough."

Anna nodded, her gaze unwavering. "We have to tread carefully. Let's keep our cards close to our chests for now. We don't want to tip off anyone who might be watching."

Ashton ran a hand through his hair, frustration evident in his voice. "I just hope we can trust the people we'll be working with, who'll aid us in uncovering the truth."

Anna's eyes met his, a glimmer of determination shining through. "We have to trust ourselves, Ashton. Our instincts have guided us this far, and they won't lead us astray now."

Ashton's lips curved into a faint smile. "You're right, Anna. Let's continue with the plan and hope for the best..."

Chapter 595 A Battle of Deception (1)

The next day...

The Minister, Theron, paced anxiously in his office, awaiting updates from the guards. He had been restless ever since the masked assailants had attacked Reaper and Bella.

Thankfully, no harm came to the mercenaries, and they even managed to keep one of the assailants alive. The man could provide valuable information about the culprits and offered a glimmer of hope for the Orions to redeem themselves.

Unbeknownst to Theron, the glimmer of hope had long since been erased from existence right under their noses.

The heavy wooden door creaked open, and two guards stepped inside, their expressions grave.

Theron's eyes narrowed as he met their gaze. "Report," he demanded, his voice laced with urgency.

"The prisoner... we found him dead in the morning, sir."

"What?"

The guards who had been tasked with keeping watch over the prisoner stood before Theron, their heads bowed in remorse. One of them, a seasoned veteran named Captain Alden, spoke up with a heavy heart.

"Minister Theron, we did everything in our power to keep the prisoner secure. But someone managed to slip past our defences and poison him."

Theron froze, his heart sinking. The weight of the situation bore down on him, threatening to crush his resolve.

The prisoner had been their only lead, their only chance to catch those responsible for the attack on Reaper and Bella. And now, that opportunity had slipped through their fingers, shattered by an unknown hand.

Fury surged within Theron, burning through his veins. His fists clenched at his sides, and his voice boomed with rage and frustration.

"How could this happen, Alden? I put you in charge of this damned operation for a reason!"

The guards exchanged uneasy glances, staring at Alden. Their voices were barely above a whisper, but they immediately quieted down as the captain began speaking.

"Minister, I had assigned my most trusted men to guard the prisoner. They reported no signs of foul play until it was too late. The poison was swift and undetectable-

Theron slammed his hand against his desk, his eyes blazing with intensity. "This is an utter failure of our security measures! We cannot allow such negligence to happen within the walls of the Orion Empire over and over!"

Captain Alden lowered his gaze, his voice filled with regret. "I can assure you, Minister, that we will thoroughly investigate this matter. We will find out who was responsible for the prisoner's death and bring them to justice."

Theron took a deep breath, attempting to calm the raging storm within him. He knew that now was not the time for anger alone. He had to channel his fury into action to ensure the Empire remained safe from those who sought to destabilise it.

"Carry out your investigation swiftly," he commanded, his voice steady. "Leave no stone unturned. We must find the ones responsible for this act of sabotage and make them pay for their crimes."

"Yes, sir!" Alden saluted as he left the chamber by himself.

Theron sank into his chair, his mind racing. The prisoner's loss severely affected their investigation, but he couldn't afford to dwell on it. He had to keep moving forward, adapt and find alternative paths to uncover the truth.

"There's more to it than I had initially assumed..." he whispered while the guards kept staring at him.

Theron then got up and paced back and forth, his mind racing. He was a man of action, not one to be deterred by setbacks. He knew that time was of the essence, that the culprits responsible for the attack on Reaper and Bella were growing bolder with each passing day.

"It seems I have underestimated our adversaries," Theron muttered, his voice tinged with disappointment. "We must redouble our efforts to uncover the truth. The Emperor trusted us with the safety of Reaper and Bella, and we cannot fail him."

"May I add something, sir?" One of the guards hesitated before speaking, his voice tentative. "Minister, could it be possible that the families are behind this?"

They might see Reaper and Bella's newfound status as a threat to their positions and think eliminating them like this was the best choice?"

Theron paused, considering the guard's words. The thought had crossed his mind before, the notion that the noble families might have orchestrated these attacks.

The rise of a mercenary duo to the ranks of royalty was a bitter pill to swallow for many, and the allure of power could drive some to desperate measures.

As Theron pondered over the guard's words, he realised something. The attack on Reaper and Bella and the poisoning of the prisoner could all be a part of a larger plan, one that threatened the foundations of the Orion Empire.

"You may be onto something," Theron said, his tone thoughtful. "The families might indeed have a motive to rid themselves of Reaper and Bella. They could be using their influence to manipulate events from behind the scenes."

The guards nodded in agreement, relieved that the Minister had acknowledged their theory. Theron continued, his voice filled with determination.

"We cannot afford to let these attacks go unanswered. I want every lead pursued, every stone unturned.

Increase the security measures around Reaper and Bella, and gather a team to thoroughly investigate the noble families. We need to uncover any potential connections or motives they may have."

The guards nodded, their resolve renewed. They had failed in their duty to protect the prisoner, but they were determined to rectify their mistakes. With a final salute, they turned and exited the office, leaving Theron to grapple with the weight of his responsibilities.

Theron took a deep breath, steeling himself for the challenges ahead. He knew that their task would be challenging and that the road to uncovering the truth would be filled with obstacles and deception.

But Theron was resolute. He would not rest until those responsible for the attacks on Reaper and Bella were brought to justice. Whether it was the noble families or a deeper conspiracy at play, he was determined to unearth the truth and protect the Empire from the looming threat.

Chapter 596 A Battle Of Deception (2)

The Ghosts, their loyal allies and comrades stood together in the hangar bay of their spaceship, preparing for their departure to the Tower. Kass was going through the final checks while the rest of the team gathered around Reaper and Bella.

The atmosphere was tinged with anticipation and sadness as they bid each other farewell for a month.

Leon approached Reaper and Bella, a small smile playing on his lips. "Well, Reaper, Bella, it's time for us to head out. The Tower won't wait, you know. Also, who knows how much chaos the trainees have caused in our absence."

Ashton nodded, his eyes meeting Leon's. "I know, Leon. You all have important work to do. We'll hold down the fort here and continue our mission within the Orion Empire."

Anna added, her voice tinged with mischief, "While we do our thing, don't forget to send updates regarding what we discussed with lord Mazton."

"Don't worry, I got it." Laihud softly replied.

Vimur clapped on Ashton's back, only to be tossed into the ground. Even then, he didn't stutter or forget about what he wanted to say.

"Don't worry, you guys. We'll keep things running smoothly while you and Bella handle business here."

"Otiga, do me a favour and keep him out of the room while you make important decisions." Ashton clapped back with a smile on his face.

"That goes without saying," Otiga replied, returning Ashton's smile.

"Now, before you go, there's something I'd like to say to you," Ashton glanced at his teammates, gratitude shining in his eyes. "Thank you, all of you. We couldn't have come this far without your unwavering support."

"Don't get all emotional on us now," Otiga stepped forward, her gaze turning serious. "Reaper, Bella, remember to stay cautious. The cult is dangerous, and we've seen what they're capable of."

Trust your instincts and watch each other's backs, even if it means taking decisions you usually won't."

"Don't worry, we got this," Ashton nodded. "We won't let our guard down. We know the risks and won't rest until we're done doing what we set out to do."

As the conversation ended, the Ghosts exchanged heartfelt farewells, their camaraderie evident in their actions. They clasped hands, shared encouraging words, and gave each other reassuring nods. It was a testament to their bond forged through countless missions and battles.

Finally, it was time for the Ghosts to board their spaceship. Kass, the last to join them, called out, "All aboard, folks! Time to head to the Tower."

The Ghosts turned, their eyes lingering on Ashton and Anna for a moment longer. They knew the weight of the mission that lay ahead for their friends.

Ashton and Anna had chosen to stay within the Orion Empire to delve into the shadows and expose the hidden cult members, risking their own safety in the process. But they also knew they were doing what needed to be done.

As the spaceship's engines roared to life, the Ghosts saluted their friends, a mix of admiration and concern etched on their faces. Reaper and Bella stood tall, their resolve unwavering.

"Take care, Reaper. Bella," Otiga called out, his voice carrying through the hangar. "We'll be back in a month. Keep yourselves safe."

Reaper nodded, a half-smile on his face. "You too, Otiga. Safe travels to the Tower, everyone."

With that, the spaceship slowly lifted off the ground, soaring towards the starry expanse beyond. The Ghosts were on their way to continue their operations, leaving Ashton and Anna to face the challenges that awaited them within the Orion Empire.

As the ship disappeared from view, Ashton and Anna turned their attention back to their surroundings. The hangar was now quiet and empty... eerily so. The bustling activity that had filled the space minutes ago had vanished, leaving an unsettling stillness in its wake.

Ashton's instincts kicked in, and he felt a tinge of unease prickling at the back of his neck. Anna, too, sensed the sudden shift in the atmosphere and tightened her grip on her weapon, ready for any potential threat.

Just then, the heavy doors of the hangar swung open, and Minister Theron strode in, flanked by his entourage of guards. Ashton's tension eased slightly at the sight of the Minister's familiar face, but he couldn't shake off a sense of apprehension.

Something told him that Theron's presence in the hangar held more significance than a mere chance encounter.

"Minister Theron," Ashton greeted, swiftly saluting the man before continuing. "You should have just called us to meet you. Is there something you need?"

Theron waved off Ashton's formalities with a disarming smile. "No need for such pleasantries, Reaper. We have a more pressing matter to address, and I believe it is best discussed in person."

Ashton exchanged a brief glance with Anna, their unspoken understanding clear. They both knew that this encounter with Theron carried serious implications, potentially leading them deeper into the labyrinthine plots of the Orion Empire.

"What is it, Minister?" Ashton asked, his voice steady, betraying none of the underlying anticipation coursing through his veins.

Theron's expression grew sombre as he motioned for the guards to keep a vigilant watch.

Ashton's brows furrowed, a sense of foreboding creeping into his thoughts. "What is it, Minister? Is there something we need to know?"

Theron's expression turned grave as he nodded. "There are certain factions within the Empire who are opposed to your close association with the Emperor. They see you and Bella as a threat and won't hesitate to eliminate you."

"So they are the ones who attacked us?" Anna quizzed the Minister. "But even then, shouldn't the assailant we captured be enough to-"

"That should have been the case..." Theron's face fell slightly, his voice filled with regret. "Unfortunately, the prisoner died in custody under mysterious circumstances. We were left clueless as to who could be behind these attacks."

Ashton sighed when he heard about the prisoner's death, but he had expected it would happen. After all, it was the cult they were up against. Pulling off shit like that was their forte.

"No worries, sir," Ashton replied. "Feel free to use us as bait to catch them, or better yet, let me set a trap for them as a gift for their generosity."

Chapter 597 Evolving Planet

As Ashton and Anna focused on unravelling the mysteries of the Cult, Earth itself was undergoing a remarkable transformation.

The arrival of visitors from space ushered in a new era, as merchant associations extended their support to assist with the planet's development. The bustling activity of these interstellar traders brought hope and progress to the people of Earth.

One of the most formidable challenges lay in the vast swamps that dotted the planet's surface. These marshy lands had long been a hindrance to progress.

But with the combined efforts of advanced technology and skilled outworlders, the wetlands were being transformed into a new part of New Lycania, the flagship country leading the charge towards a brighter future.

However, amidst the excitement of progress, Ricochet couldn't help but feel a tinge of concern. He understood that with the increasing influx of intergalactic visitors, Earth would become a prime target for potential threats from outer space.

With his small team of loyal comrades, Ricochet had been shouldering the responsibility of defending Earth, but the task was becoming overwhelming.

Merchant associations had indeed hired a considerable number of mercenaries to bolster Earth's defences. Still, Ricochet knew that the sheer cost of maintaining such a force would soon surpass their resources.

With more than ten thousand mercenaries stationed across the planet, the financial strain was mounting, threatening to impede progress and put Earth at risk.

However, Ricochet's worries were soon alleviated when Ashton, the ever-vigilant leader, anticipated their needs without even being asked.

Recognising the importance of a robust fighting force, Ashton dispatched thousands of low-level recruits to Earth, ensuring that the lack of manpower would be adequately addressed for the time being.

Little did Ricochet know that Ashton had complete access to whatever was happening on Earth through the 'Base Management' perk.

But it wasn't just bodies on the battlefield that Ashton provided. He also understood the significance of knowledge and technology in levelling the playing field.

Ashton sent a group of seasoned teachers and advanced technology to Earth, empowering the planet's inhabitants with the tools and skills necessary to catch up to the interstellar standards.

The arrival of the recruits injected a renewed sense of hope among the people of Earth. The new fighters, though inexperienced, were eager to learn and contribute to the defence of their home planet.

Under the guidance of the seasoned teachers, they began their training, honing their skills and developing a sense of unity and purpose. But some would say they were working hard to join Ashton's private crew one day.

Ricochet himself took on the mentor role, guiding the recruits with his wealth of experience. He shared stories of their previous battles, emphasising the importance of discipline, teamwork, and unwavering determination.

The Earthlings listened attentively to their teachers, their eyes filled with admiration and respect for the seasoned warriors from space.

Tarek was one of the people Ashton had sent to Earth to safeguard himself from the watchful eyes of the cult and the empire and to share his knowledge and expertise with the people of Earth.

Having spent years honing his scientific acumen, Tarek possessed a wealth of knowledge that could propel Earth's technological advancements to new heights.

Ashton recognised the value of Tarek's expertise and saw an opportunity for him to make a meaningful impact on the planet.

Arriving on Earth, Tarek quickly immersed himself in his mission. He sought out eager learners who had a thirst for knowledge and a passion for scientific discovery.

Through his teachings, Tarek introduced them to advanced scientific concepts, unveiling the universe's wonders and providing them with a deeper understanding of the laws governing the cosmos. So that none of them felt out of space once they were recruited by the ghosts.

Tarek's lessons were not confined to mere theory; he believed in the practical application of knowledge. He led his students through a series of hands-on experiments and encouraged them to think critically, fostering a spirit of innovation and problem-solving.

The Earthlings embraced this opportunity with open minds and hearts, eager to absorb Tarek's wisdom. As Tarek guided his students, he also found solace in the journey. Earth's beauty and diversity fascinated him.

The knowledge exchange became a two-way street as Tarek learned from the Earthlings' unique perspectives and incorporated their insights into his teachings.

In turn, Tarek found comfort in his newfound role as a mentor and protector. He watched as his students blossomed into brilliant scientists, their minds ignited with a passion for discovery.

Together, they pushed the boundaries of what was thought possible, embarking on groundbreaking research projects that held the potential to shape the future of Earth.

However, Tarek's presence on Earth was not solely focused on scientific endeavours. He also remained vigilant, constantly aware of the lingering threat posed by the cult and the empire.

He knew that he had to keep a low profile, ensuring his safety and those around him. Though he had evaded their grasp thus far, Tarek understood the importance of remaining vigilant and cautious.

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With each passing day, the Earthlings grew stronger, their progress evident in how they handled their weapons and executed combat manoeuvres.

The technology provided by Ashton augmented their abilities, enabling them to compete on a level playing field with their interstellar counterparts.

But it wasn't just the recruits who benefited from Ashton's assistance. The Earthlings, as a whole, saw remarkable advancements in various fields. The influx of advanced technology accelerated the planet's development, propelling it forward in leaps and bounds.

Scientific breakthroughs, efficient energy sources, and sustainable practices became the norm, shaping Earth into a beacon of progress and innovation.

Ricochet, standing amidst the bustling city, looked around with a sense of pride and fulfilment. Once on the brink of destruction, Earth was now on the path to becoming a force to be reckoned with.

The unity among its people, fueled by their shared purpose and the guidance of Ashton and his allies, was an unstoppable force.

With a renewed commitment to protect their newfound prosperity, the Earthlings stood ready to face any challenges. Their journey had only just begun, and they were determined to forge their own destiny in the vast expanse of the cosmos.

And so, with their ranks bolstered, their knowledge expanded, and their spirits aflame, the people of Earth embarked on a path of progress, determined to prove themselves to the galaxy and secure their place among the stars.

Unaware that their leader had already found a spot for them in the Orion Empire. A spot that countless worlds would destroy each other to become a part of the Orion Empire.

#### Chapter 598 A Place Called Home

The laboratory hummed with activity as Tarek, engrossed in his work, meticulously measured and mixed various compounds. The air was heavy with the scent of chemicals, a testament to the scientific experiments within the confines of the lab.

Beakers and test tubes lined the shelves, emitting a soft glow as Tarek carefully manoeuvred through the cluttered space. His eyes were fixed on the microscope before him, studying the intricate composition of a serum.

Tarek's focus was unyielding as he strove to solve the pressing problem: the uncontrollable berserking of werewolves during the Blood Moon. However, with a sudden thought, Tarek dropped what he was doing and sat down.

"Misha," Tarek called out to his AI companion to help him archive the information he knew about the Blood Moon. "The Blood Moon is a rare celestial event that occurs when planet Earth casts a reddish hue on the moon during a lunar eclipse.

"The Blood Moon is a catalyst for werewolves, amplifying their natural abilities and driving them into an uncontrollable frenzy." Tarek continued dropping all the information he had obtained from the natives regarding their problems."

During the period when the moon was at its fullest and veiled in crimson splendour, werewolves experienced a profound physical and psychological transformation. Their senses become razor-sharp, enabling them to detect the faintest scents and sounds."

It is important to note that not all werewolves are affected equally by the Blood Moon. The severity of the berserking state can vary based on an individual's age, experience, and control over their werewolf nature.

Older and more seasoned werewolves may exhibit greater control, channelling their enhanced abilities to maintain a semblance of rationality amidst the frenzy.

However, younger or newly-transformed werewolves may struggle to contain their instincts, succumbing entirely to the primal urges that drive them.

Tarek continued, "The exact cause of the werewolves' berserking during the Blood Moon remains a topic of speculation and debate.

Some theories suggest that the celestial alignment triggers a surge of lunar energy that resonates with the werewolves' inherent abilities, heightening their powers beyond normal limits. I don't know the truth behind those statements-"

But before he could continue, an unwanted guest entered his makeshift lab. The door to the lab swung open, and Ricochet stormed in.

Tarek, deeply engrossed in his work, barely glanced up as Ricochet entered. He didn't want to acknowledge him because the two had been engaged in constant disagreements.

Ricochet observed Tarek's meticulous actions, his eyes scanning the lab's cluttered surroundings. He took a deep breath, preparing to address Tarek about a pressing matter.

"Hey, Tarek," Ricochet called out, trying to break through the scientist's intense focus. "I need to talk to you about something important."

Tarek finally tore his gaze away from his work, turning to face Ricochet with a raised eyebrow. "What is it, Ricochet? I'm in the middle of a critical experiment here."

"I appreciate the importance of what you're doing. But I need your help with a different matter." Ricochet nodded, understanding the significance of Tarek's work, before continuing.

"We're facing a significant threat—a forest teeming with monsters threatening our people. I need a solution, something that can neutralise them effectively."

Tarek's expression softened, and he listened intently to Ricochet's concerns. Ricochet's words resonated with him, but he knew the weight of the decision ahead. After a moment of contemplation, he spoke with conviction.

"I understand your need to protect the people, Ricochet, but I cannot create a deadly poison to subdue the creatures," Tarek stated firmly. "Such an action would have severe environmental consequences, harming not just the monsters but also the delicate ecosystem surrounding them."

"Are you for real?" Ricochet's brows furrowed in frustration. "Tarek, we're facing an imminent threat. Our resources are stretched thin, and we need a solution that will guarantee the safety of our people. Can't you see that?"

Tarek met Ricochet's gaze, unwavering in his stance. "I see the urgency, but I also see the bigger picture. Poisoning an entire group of islands, even for a noble cause, is ethically and environmentally unsound. It would do more harm than good in the long run."

Ricochet's frustration boiled over, his voice tinged with exasperation. "You're being idealistic, Tarek! Sometimes sacrifices must be made for the greater good. We can't afford to be held back by ethical concerns when lives are at stake."

Tarek's eyes blazed with passion, his voice firm as he stood his ground. "No, Ricochet. Sacrifices should never come at the expense of our values and the world we inhabit. It is our responsibility to find a solution that does not harm the very planet we seek to protect."

The room fell into a heavy silence as both men locked eyes, their differing perspectives hanging in the air. Ricochet realised the depth of Tarek's convictions and his unwavering dedication to preserving the Earth.

Despite his frustration, he couldn't help but respect the scientist's unwavering integrity.

With a sigh, Ricochet broke the silence. "Fine, Tarek. If you don't help me with this, I'll have to find another way to deal with the monsters. But mark my words; if it comes down to choosing between the lives of our people and the preservation of the planet, I will always choose the former."

Tarek nodded solemnly, his voice filled with resolve. "I understand Ricochet. We all have our roles, and sometimes we must make difficult choices.

Remember, the path we choose should always align with our core values... and this time, your request was something I couldn't be a part of."

Ricochet turned on his heel, frustration etched on his face as he made his way to the exit. "I hope you're right, Tarek. For all our sakes."

As the door closed behind Ricochet, Tarek returned to his work, his mind buzzing with ideas and possibilities. He knew the road ahead would be challenging, fraught with decisions and moral dilemmas.

But he remained steadfast in his belief that there was always a better way—to protect the people and the planet their leader called home.

Chapter 599 Exiled Cousin (1)

Ashton and Anna walked into the grandeur of the Emperor's courtroom, their masks finally removed, revealing their true faces to the public for the first time.

The atmosphere in the room instantly shifted as the courtiers and members of the noble families turned their attention towards the entrance, their gazes drawn to the charismatic pair.



Anna, her radiant beauty and allure heightened by her succubus nature, emanated an ethereal charm that captivated the entire room. Heads turned, and whispers of admiration and intrigue rippled through the crowd.

The men, in particular, found themselves entranced by her presence, unable to tear their eyes away.

One nobleman leaned towards his companion, his eyes fixed on Anna, and whispered, "Is that the famed Bella? By the stars, she is even more mesmerising in person. No wonder Reaper is so smitten with her."

His companion nodded, unable to take her eyes off Anna's graceful movements. "Indeed, she possesses an otherworldly beauty. It's as if she holds an enchantment that bewitches all who behold her."

As the courtiers marvelled at Anna's charm, the few female members of the court couldn't help but steal glances at Ashton, the enigmatic Reaper.

His rugged features, chiselled jawline, and piercing eyes exuded a magnetic allure that left them weak-kneed. The air in the room seemed to grow warmer as a collective sigh of admiration escaped their lips.

One noblewoman, her eyes lingering on Ashton, whispered to her companion, "Have you ever seen a man so captivating? It's as if he stepped out of a tale of knights and heroes."

"Indeed, he possesses a raw masculinity that is utterly irresistible. No wonder Bella is drawn to him. I would give anything to have his attention." Her companion nodded, a dreamy expression on her face.

"You're married to Lord Batten! Compose yourself!"

"Hmph, I'm only his fifth wife. It'd be a miracle if he even remembers my first name."

"Alright, but please, take hold of your emotions!"

Ashton and Anna, aware of the attention they commanded, remained composed and focused. They navigated through the sea of admiring gazes, their eyes scanning the room, searching for any signs of hidden cult members among the courtiers.

They knew that lurking beneath the surface of the opulent court, there were those who wished to see them fail or disappear.

"I think we went overboard~" Anna smiled, tightly hugging Ashton's arm.

"That was the entire point, wasn't it?" Ashton smiled back. "To show off your charm and let the cultists go haywire. Having the one they want to capture so close to them would blue ball them so badly."

"You and your words..." Anna shook her head before the two went quiet again.

Their gaze met briefly, a silent exchange of determination and understanding passing between them. They had infiltrated the Emperor's court not only to gain support but also to expose the cult members who sought to harm them.

They remained vigilant with each step they took, their senses attuned to any suspicious behaviour or subtle hints of deception.

As they reached the Emperor's throne, they turned to face the noble assembly, their eyes scanning the room one last time. Anna's enchanting smile graced her lips, captivating the courtiers even further, while Ashton's stoic demeanour commanded respect and attention.

The Emperor, seated upon his throne, regarded them with curiosity and approval. His voice resonated through the chamber as he addressed the gathered courtiers, his words echoing with authority.

"Welcome, Reaper and Bella, to the heart of the Orion Empire. Your presence here is an honour, and I trust you will bring your unique skills and strengths to our cause."

Ashton's voice, deep and commanding, cut through the hushed silence. "We are grateful for the opportunity, Your Majesty. We stand ready to serve and protect, to ensure the prosperity and safety of the Empire."

The courtiers listened intently, their eyes shifting between the Emperor and the formidable duo standing before them. They recognised the significance of this moment, the arrival of two legendary figures who could shape the Empire's future.

Just as the Emperor was about to commence the court's daily proceedings, a sudden commotion erupted outside the courtroom.

The sound of hurried footsteps and strained voices filled the air, drawing the attention of the entire assembly. The grand doors swung open, revealing a chaotic scene unfolding before their eyes.

Several guards, clad in the Emperor's regal armour, rushed into the courtroom, their faces etched with frustration. They were in hot pursuit of a brawny figure, a man whose imposing presence seemed to overshadow the guards themselves.

Evidently, this man possessed formidable strength, overpowering the guards' attempts to subdue him.

The courtiers murmured amongst themselves, their curiosity piqued by the unexpected interruption. Whispers and hushed conversations filled the room as they exchanged speculations about the man as they knew what would happen next.

The man struggling against the guards was none other than the Emperor's exiled cousin, known for his volatile temper and thirst for revenge. His eyes burned with fury, his face contorted with anger and indignation.

He had come with a singular purpose—to seek retribution against Ashton for what he perceived as a grave humiliation inflicted upon one of his family members during the ball.

Sensing the gravity of the situation, the Emperor rose from his throne, his voice resonating with authority and concern. "Hold, everyone! Cease this struggle at once!"

The court fell into an uneasy silence, their eyes shifting between the enraged cousin and their sovereign ruler. The tension in the air was palpable as the Emperor's gaze bore into his cousin, a flicker of disappointment and weariness evident in his eyes.

"Adri... what's the meaning of this!?" The Emperor clenched his fists as he held back the desire to punch the exiled moron. "Do you not understand the meaning of being exiled?"

"Well, well, little brother. It seems you have grown quite a bit... at least your ego did." Adri greeted the Emperor with a half-smile before pointing at Ashton. "But don't worry, I'm not here for you... but for that bastard. To punish him for his deeds!"

[A wild moron appears! What will you do now?]

'Could you shut it...!' Ashton shook his head. He did not know who the man was, let alone what deeds he was talking about. 'Let's see how things pan out first.'

Chapter 600 Exiled Cousin (2)

Ashton's curiosity burned within him as he watched the tense exchange between Adri and the Emperor. Unable to contain his intrigue any longer, he turned to Minister Theron.

"Who is that, talking to the Emperor so casually?" Ashton asked, trying to hide his annoyance.

Theron glanced at Ashton, a flicker of sadness passing through his eyes. "That 'lunatic,' as you so aptly put it, is Adri. He was once a candidate for the throne, but he fell out of favour with the former Emperor."

"Wait, what?" Anna interjected.

"That is true," Theron shook his head, his eyes growing sadder by the passing moment. "He was... exiled a while back. Those were the former Emperor's final orders as he passed away."

Ashton's eyebrows furrowed, his mind racing to piece together the puzzle. "Why was he exiled? What did he do to warrant such punishment?"

Theron sighed, his gaze fixed on the ongoing confrontation. "Adri's ambitions were great, but his methods were ruthless. He sought power at any cost, even if it meant sacrificing the kingdom's and its people's well-being. His exile became inevitable when he disobeyed a direct order from the former Emperor."

Theron continued, "In contrast to his nature, Adri wanted to protect a planet from an unknown enemy, but the former Emperor, his father, was against it. You could say the one time he showed compassion towards others, he got exiled."

Anna's eyes widened in realisation. "So, the current Emperor was chosen as the rightful successor?"

Theron nodded, his voice tinged with regret. "Yes, after Adri's fall from grace, the former Emperor recognised the current Emperor's fairness, compassion, and strong leadership qualities. It was a difficult decision, but the empire's well-being took precedence."

"So, his exile was his punishment for defying the Emperor's command?" Anna interjected, her voice laced with pity for Adri.

Theron nodded. "Precisely. The former Emperor saw his actions as a threat to the empire's stability, and thus, Adri was cast out."

Ashton's mind raced with possibilities. "If Adri was once a contender for the throne, could it be that he seeks to reclaim his position by framing me as the Emperor made me a court member?"

"If that were his intention, he could have made a move long ago. The court holds a significant number of sympathisers for Adri, and he knows it." Theron shook his head, dismissing the notion. "There must be another reason driving his relentless pursuit."

"But if he had sympathisers within the court, why didn't he attempt to seize the throne?" Anna pointed out the apparent mystery.

"That is a valid question and one that has puzzled many." Theron sighed, his expression thoughtful. "If Adri truly desired the throne, he could have made his move at any time with the support he had. But he never did, which suggests that his motivations may lie elsewhere."

Ashton's mind raced with possibilities. "So, if his exile wasn't a power play, what could be driving him to cause such a disturbance now?"

Theron's voice held a tinge of concern. "That question troubles me as well. Adri's actions are unpredictable, and he seems driven by a sense of purpose. If he truly wanted to protect the planet, why is he causing chaos in the Emperor's court now?"

As they spoke, the confrontation between Adri and the Emperor continued unabated. Nursing their bruised bodies, the guards exchanged glances of frustration and bewilderment. Adri's voice reverberated through the room, filled with intensity and conviction.

"Gabe, step aside. My problem is with Reaper, not you or this empire."

The Emperor, known as Gabe to his loved ones, stood tall and unwavering, his gaze meeting Adri's with a steadfast resolve.

"Cousin, you have caused enough chaos and turmoil already. I cannot simply step aside and let you have your way."

The room fell into a tense silence as the courtiers and guards watched the confrontation unfold. The air crackled with anticipation as if the very fabric of the space held its breath, awaiting the outcome.

Ashton, known as Reaper, exchanged a knowing glance with Anna. The situation escalated further, and the conflict seemed centred solely on him. He braced himself for whatever Adri had in store, his senses sharpened, ready for the challenge ahead.

Gabe's voice held a mix of caution and authority as he addressed Adri. "You know that I cannot allow a duel to occur within the palace grounds. The consequences of such an act would be dire for our empire. We must find a more civilised resolution."



Adri's eyes burned with intensity as he retorted, his voice tinged with bitterness. "Civilised resolution? Reaper deserves nothing less than a battle to the death. He humiliated my family, and I will not rest until justice is served."

While the eyes were focused on the relatives, Ashton thought it was the right time to step up and take care of the mess. However, he couldn't help but feel like the cult was behind in orchestrating the situation before him.

"Allow me to make something very clear to you, sir," Ashton called out to Adri. "I did what I needed to do to preserve my partner's honour. If your so-called family member wasn't a horn dog, I wouldn't have had to take such action."

He continued, "But let me clarify one thing, I will not back down from defending those I care about."

Adri's fists clenched, his body trembling with rage. "You think you can challenge me? I am a master martial artist, yet to be defeated--"

"Good, there's a first time for everything." Ashton's expression hardened, his eyes locking with Adri's.

Adri's nostrils flared, his pride wounded by Ashton's confident stance. The courtiers and guards held their breath, the tension in the room palpable. It seemed as though a confrontation between the two skilled fighters was inevitable.

But before the situation could escalate further, The Emperor's voice rang out, commanding attention.

"That is enough, both of you. We will not resort to violence within these walls. This court is a place of law and order. You both will stand down or live the rest of your days in prison!"