

Zompiewolf 611

Chapter 611 A Battle To Remember For Centuries! (2)

The Priest's arrogant laughter echoed through the courtroom as he gloated about the power of the unleashed Behemoth, Krathos.

"Behold, fools! This mighty creature will be the end of you! There is no escaping its wrath!"

But as the Priest boasted, a rumble resonated through the room, causing the ground to shake. The Behemoth began to tremble, sensing the chaos and the immense power of its own existence. The Priest's triumphant expression faltered as he realised something was amiss.

A low growl escaped Krathos, and its once-controlled movements turned erratic. The Behemoth's eyes glowed with an ominous light, and its massive limbs flailed uncontrollably, smashing against the walls and pillars of the courtroom.

"What's happening?" The Priest's voice trembled with uncertainty. "Krathos, listen to me! Obey your master!"

But his words fell on deaf ears as Krathos, now consumed by rage, paid no heed to its former master's commands. The creature unleashed a primal roar, a symphony of fury that shook the very foundations of the room.

"No, no, NO!" The Priest panicked, but it was only the beginning of his troubles.

Without wasting any time, Ashton sent Balmond over to the Priest to keep him busy while they figured out how to deal with Krathos.

"This is going to be fun..." Ashton shrugged, but his words seemed to betray his expressions.

Ashton, Vulcan, and Flintmace exchanged glances, their expressions filled with determination. Despite the chaos around them, they knew that protecting the empire meant taking down the rampaging Behemoth.

"We have to stop it," Flintmace declared, his voice cutting through the turmoil. "If we don't, it'll bring devastation upon the empire and as much as I don't wanna admit to it, we need the Orions to fight against the Xyrans."

"Not to disappoint you, but I wanted to kill the creature from the moment it appeared," Ashton shrugged. "I kinda need it for my ascension."

"Stop blabbering and prepare yourselves!" Vulcan reprimanded the two as his axe transformed into his trusty warhammer.

The air was tense as they faced the towering creature and the corrupted Priest, who had lost control over his creation.

Krathos let out a bone-rattling roar, its massive form dwarfing everything around it. Its scales shimmered with dark, menacing energy, and its eyes glowed with an otherworldly fire. The ground quaked beneath its tremendous weight as it prepared to unleash its devastating power.

Ashton's scythe gleamed with a cold, ethereal light as he took a defensive stance. His eyes locked onto the Behemoth, studying its movements, seeking any weakness he could exploit.

Flintmace hefted his massive sword, its blade gleaming with a dangerous brilliance. His stoic expression belied the anticipation brewing within him.

While Vulcan cracked his knuckles, his hammer pulsating with elemental energy. He was ready to unleash the fury of the forge upon their formidable foe.

With a thunderous stomp, Krathos lunged forward, its claws slashing through the air with deadly precision. Ashton reacted swiftly, his scythe deflecting the first blow, but the sheer force behind the attack sent him skidding backwards.

"Hm... I thought the attack would squash you," Flintmace laughed. "You have gotten better than I thought!"

"Save your praises for later..." Ashton shrugged his shoulders. Had he been a second late in phasing, the creature's attack would undoubtedly have squashed him.

Flintmace charged in, his sword swinging in a wide arc, but the Behemoth deftly evaded the strike, retaliating with a swift tail swipe that knocked Flintmace off his feet.

Vulcan unleashed a torrent of fire towards Krathos, the flames licking at its scaly hide. But the Behemoth shrugged off the fiery assault, its resilience proving far more significant than anticipated.

With a sweep of its massive hands, Krathos sent Vulcan hurtling through the air, crashing into the remnants of the courtroom.

"We need to figure out its weakness," Flintmace mumbled, uninjured by the Behemoth's attack.

"Really? We need a strategy?" Vulcan let out a sarcastic remark. "I never knew the Xyrans could come up with things like that!"

"Of course, you wouldn't know about it," Flintmace retorted. "The last time the Xyrans used their brains, we wiped out an entire civilisation, including yours."

"Enough!" Ashton intervened in between. "You people are supposed to be my mentors, so stop behaving like a bunch of brats and focus on the task at hand!"

Being lectured by their apprentice broke them out of their fog, and they realised they were fighting amongst themselves, not because of their past. But because of the Behemoth's passive skill.

Since Ashton had turned into his half-Reaper form, he was immune to it, but Flintmace and Vulcan were not, and hence they got into an argument that was about to break into a fight had Ashton not stepped in.

Flintmace's brow furrowed, his anger subsiding as he realised the truth in Ashton's words.

He shook his head, a sheepish smile forming on his face. "Wait... what's going on here again? Why were the two of us fighting amongst ourselves?"

"I can't believe we fell for such a trick. We're supposed to be S-rankers." Vulcan's shoulders slumped, his fists unclenching as he sighed heavily. "Had it not been for Ashton... we'd have died fighting each other."

"Yeah, yeah, feel free to thank me later." Ashton tightened his grasp around his scythe as he said that.

Flintmace and Vulcan exchanged a brief, begrudging glance before nodding as if apologising for what they had said to each other.

Meanwhile, Ashton turned his attention back to the Behemoth. He studied its movements, searching for patterns or any hints of vulnerability. He had faced formidable opponents before, but this creature pushed the limits of their abilities.

"I'll keep the Behemoth distracted. Ashton, look for an opening!" Flintmace raised his sword, his eyes narrowing with perseverance.

Vulcan cracked his knuckles, sparks of elemental energy dancing around his fingertips. "And I'll provide support to Flintmace."

With their roles defined, the trio sprang into action. Flintmace charged forward, engaging the Behemoth in a relentless assault. His strikes were calculated to keep the creature occupied and divert its attention from Ashton.

"Scorching rain might not work on those scales..." Ashton mumbled as his attention fell on the Priest who was busy duelling with Balmond. "However... I do have that bastard with me."

Chapter 612 A Battle To Remember For Centuries! (3)

Ashton's attention shifted to the Priest as the clash between Flintmace, Vulcan, and the monstrous Krathos raged on. Balmond had done an excellent job of torturing the Priest.

However, there were some things that even Balmond couldn't do... like make his target cower in fear. As Ashton approached them, the battered and bloodied Priest glared defiantly at Ashton, refusing to yield.

"You think defeating me will make a difference? You know nothing of the true power that resides within Krathos," the Priest sneered, his voice laced with defiance.

Ashton's eyes narrowed, determination burning within them. He knew that uncovering Krathos' weakness was crucial to defeating the Behemoth and ending its threat to the empire. He stepped forward, closing the distance between him and the battered Priest.

"I may not know everything about Krathos, but I do know that no creature is invincible. Now, tell me its weakness," Ashton demanded, his voice resolute.

"You are a fool if you think I will divulge such information willingly." The Priest chuckled, a low, deranged sound. "My allegiance lies with the Cult of Cosmos, and I will protect its secrets until my dying breath."

With a swift motion, Ashton lashed out, delivering a powerful kick to the Priest's jaw. The force of the impact sent the Priest sprawling to the ground, and his words were cut short.

"You underestimate my determination," Ashton said, his voice filled with a steely resolve. "I will make you talk, one way or another. Even if it means killing and resurrecting you over and over."

Ashton circled the fallen Priest, his eyes scanning the surroundings. He let go of the scythe and took hold of Balmond before squatting down to meet the Priest's level.

Kneeling beside the Priest, Ashton gripped the soulblade tightly, its sharp edge glinting in the dim light. He pressed it against the Priest's throat, the threat of its cutting edge clear.

"Krathos is strong, but you are weak," Ashton spoke with a quiet intensity. "You cannot protect its secret if you're dead. Now, tell me its weakness while I'm being gentle."

The Priest laughed, but his laugh became a bloodcurdling scream a moment later as Ashton took hold of the Priest's ace, burning off his skin using the crystal in his arm.

The Priest thrashed his arms around, trying to get the crystal away from his skin while Balmond inched closer to his neck.

"Hm... since you can open your mouth to scream, try talking next." Ashton glared at the Priest, who now sported a burned face and a useless eye.

The Priest's remaining eye widened with fear as Ashton took hold of the other side of his face, the weight of his impending demise settling upon him. He struggled against Ashton's grip, desperate to escape his fate.

"Fine!" the Priest gasped, his voice filled with defeat. "Krathos... is vulnerable... to sonic frequencies. Its heightened senses make it susceptible to high-frequency sound waves. It will disorient the creature, giving you an opportunity to strike."

Ashton's grip on the Priest's face loosened slightly, his gaze unwavering. "And how do we generate those frequencies?"

The Priest sneered, a twisted smile playing upon his battered lips. "You will need a powerful sonic emitter, one that can produce sound waves at a level that will incapacitate Krathos. But good luck finding one in time."

"I always find a way." Ashton smiled as he opened a portal to Valhalla.

A few skeleton soldiers appeared before him, paying their respects to the Grim Reaper.

"Take special care of this esteemed guest of mine," Ashton instructed the skeletons. "Make sure not to kill him."

With that, he released the Priest, who crumpled to the ground, gasping for breath. Ashton rose to his feet, Balmond slipping from his hand and, without wasting any time, rushed inside Ashton's inventory on his own. As if saying he was done playing for the day.

He knew he had obtained the vital information he needed, but time was of the essence. After the Priest was dragged inside the realm of the dead, Ashton opened yet another portal leading to the Eastern palace on Earth.

If all he needed was someone who specialised in generating high-frequency screeches, then Ashton had the best woman for the job.

A moment later, a beautiful lady walked out of the portal. Although she had changed a lot since the last time Ashton had seen her, the change had been for the better.

"It's been a while, Ursa." Ashton greeted her as the portal closed behind her.

"I greet the master," Ursa returned his smile, a glimmer of excitement in her eyes. She gracefully bowed before Ashton, acknowledging his presence with respect. "How can I be of any service, my lord?"

Ashton pointed at Krathos as Flintmace and Vulcan tried their best to get past the creature's quick reflexes.

"As you can see, I'm in quite a pickle here," he said. "apparently, that creature's only weakness is high-pitched screams. And since you're part banshee and I have seen your abilities on planet Euphoria, I thought you were the best candidate to help me out here."

Ursa's eyes sparkled with excitement, her voice filled with confidence. "Consider it done, my lord. I will unleash a scream that will shatter the very foundation of this beast."

With unwavering determination, Ursa stepped forward, her ethereal form emanating a captivating aura. As she did that, Ashton informed his masters to get out of the way if they didn't want to use hearing aids for the rest of their lives.

Once they were out of harm's way, Ursa raised her delicate hands to her lips, a hush falling over the battlefield as everyone watched in anticipation.

Taking a deep breath, she unleashed a spine-chilling scream, her voice piercing the air with its sheer intensity. The high-pitched sound reverberated throughout the place, cutting through the chaos and commanding attention.

Krathos, caught off guard by the unexpected assault, staggered momentarily, its monstrous form faltering.

The respite provided Ashton, Flintmace and Vulcan with a brief window of opportunity, enabling them to deliver powerful blows against the Behemoth.

"Cover your ears and charge!" Vulcan yelled at the top of his voice while providing everyone with earmuffs. Being a true creationist, Vulcan had something for every situation.

For the first time, their attacks did damage Krathos as it was too busy covering its ears and couldn't defend itself.

Chapter 613 The Next Step (1)

The atmosphere crackled with tension as Ashton, Flintmace, and Vulcan stood together, their eyes locked on the weakened form of Krathos. The behemoth, once an unstoppable force, now bore the scars of their relentless assault.

Krathos' ears were bleeding from the relentless verbal assault from Ursa. The pain had grown to the point where Krathos did not even care about protecting its ears because they were gone for good.

Flintmace hefted his colossal sword with ease. The massive weapon glinted in the dim light, reflecting the determination in his eyes.

Vulcan gripped his warhammer, flames dancing along its surface, ready to unleash the elemental fury it contained.

It was a mystery for Ashton to know how his masters wielded weapons that were easily twice or thrice their size with such ease.

"That thing can sure take a hell of a beating," Flintmace mumbled while wiping the sweat off his forehead.

"Its hide is quite sturdy," Vulcan continued as he planned things he could make from Krathos' hide after they defeated it. "Whatever you do, Ashton. Give me some of that hide."

"...let's defeat it first-"

The ground trembled beneath their feet as Krathos let out a defiant roar. Despite its weakened state, the beast still posed a formidable threat. Its eyes, once filled with malevolence, now smouldered with fury. The creature's massive form twitched, muscles rippling with raw power.

"Looks like the fucker has had enough of our shenanigans," Ashton smiled, swinging his scythe over his shoulder.

Flintmace grinned, his battle-hardened spirit igniting. "With pleasure!"

"Handover your hide to me, beast!" Vulcan's eyes narrowed, his fiery gaze meeting Krathos'.

In a synchronised movement, the trio launched their assault. Flintmace charged forward, his sword swinging with incredible force. The blade struck Krathos' side, leaving a deep gash in its armoured hide. The behemoth roared in pain, lashing out with its massive claws.

Vulcan followed, summoning the power of fire to engulf his warhammer. The flames roared to life, enhancing the weapon's potency. He swung the hammer with precision, aiming for Krathos' head. The creature managed to evade the full impact, but the searing heat burnt its skin.

At the same time, Ashton moved with eerie grace, his scythe cutting through the air like a spectre's touch. He targeted Krathos' legs, aiming to weaken the beast's mobility. With each strike, he carved deep wounds into the behemoth's flesh.

Krathos retaliated, swiping its tail in a sweeping arc. Ashton deftly dodged, but the tail struck Vulcan's side, sending the dwarf tumbling backwards. Unfazed, Vulcan rose to his feet, his determination unwavering.

Flintmace lunged again, his sword striking Krathos' other flank. The behemoth staggered under the onslaught, but it retaliated with a ferocious bite. Flintmace managed to evade the deadly jaws, but the beast's fangs grazed his armour, leaving behind deep gouges.

"This nasty bastard!" Flintmace yelled as he stepped back for a bit.

Ashton took advantage of the distraction, sweeping his scythe upward in an arc. The blade connected with Krathos' underside, leaving a large gash. The creature howled in pain, thrashing wildly.

Vulcan circled around, his eyes locked on Krathos' eyes. He unleashed a torrent of fire, the flames engulfing the beast's head. Krathos roared in agony, blinded by the intense blaze.

Flintmace seized the opportunity, driving his sword into Krathos' exposed side. The blade sunk deep into the creature's flesh, eliciting another anguished cry.

Ashton's eyes narrowed, a plan forming in his mind. He focused his power, summoning the energy of death to do his bidding. With a swift motion, he channelled the energy into his scythe, enhancing its potency.

He launched himself at Krathos, his scythe slashing through the air with deadly precision. Each strike left behind trails of black energy, slicing into the behemoth's body.

Flintmace and Vulcan joined the onslaught, attacking from different angles. Their combined assault was relentless, and Krathos was overwhelmed by the trio's coordinated attacks.

Despite their advantage, Krathos fought back with determination. It swung its massive claws, creating shockwaves that threatened to knock them off their feet. The creature's tail whipped around a deadly weapon that needed to be evaded at all costs.

Nevertheless, Ashton, Flintmace, and Vulcan were undeterred. They moved with practised precision, their teamwork seamless. Their weapons struck with unyielding force, leaving Krathos reeling under the onslaught.

With each strike, Krathos weakened. Its once fearsome roars turned to pained cries. However, even in its weakened state, the behemoth refused to surrender.

Ashton took a step back, his scythe glowing with ominous power. He gathered the energy of death once more, ready to deliver a final blow. Flintmace and Vulcan positioned themselves, preparing to strike in unison.

In a synchronised movement, the trio attacked with all their might. Ashton's scythe cleaved into Krathos' chest, its blade sinking deep into the creature's heart. Flintmace's sword pierced its side while Vulcan's flaming warhammer struck its head.

Krathos let out a final, resounding roar, its massive form trembling. With a shuddering breath, it collapsed to the ground, defeated.

Ashton, Flintmace, and Vulcan stood over the fallen behemoth, their breaths heavy with exhaustion.

They had emerged victorious, but the battle had taken its toll on Ashton as he collapsed on his feet. The constant use of 'death' had left him drained.

Without wasting time, Ashton reverted to his humanoid form and drank a bunch of potions. The revitalising liquid surged through his body, providing a much-needed energy boost. Ashton could feel the effects almost instantly, the weariness beginning to ebb away.

Without hesitation, he moved on to the next potion, then the next, and the next. Each one served a different purpose, replenishing his stamina, restoring his mana, and healing any minor wounds he had sustained during the battle.

"Investing in Laihud's potions was a great choice," Ashton sighed in relief as he drank the final potion. "So you guys want some?"

Flintmace and Vulcan stared at Ashton and then at one another before they broke down laughing.

"There is much you need to learn about S-grade beings," Flintmace finally managed to say. "We have special abilities called Moulding abilities that care for things those potions do. Maybe you will get to know about it soon."

"Yeah..." Ashton scratched the back of his head as he walked up to Krathos. "Its blood is all I need for now."

With the most challenging tasks in the way of his ascension cleared, all Ashton needed to do was to raise two more summons and find four more candidates to be turned into werewolves.

Chapter 614 The Next Step (2)

Ashton's fangs sank deep into the behemoth's flesh, and he could feel the rush of power surging through his veins as he drank greedily from Krathos' life force. The exhilaration of consuming the blood of an S-grade being sent a thrill down his spine, and he relished the surge of strength that accompanied it.

Typically, the taste of monster blood left a bitter aftertaste, but as the crimson liquid flowed into his mouth, Ashton was taken aback by the unexpected sweetness. It was unlike anything he had ever experienced before, a delectable sensation that seemed to transcend mortal flavours.

At that moment, he realised it wasn't just the rarity of feasting upon a behemoth that made the blood exceptional. There was something inherently unique about Krathos' essence that set it apart from any other creature he had encountered.

Whatever the reason, Ashton couldn't deny the intoxicating allure of the blood flowing through his veins.

As he drank, Ashton could feel his powers surging, as if the essence of Krathos was infusing him with newfound abilities. The rush of energy was exhilarating, and he revelled in the sensation of being invincible, even for just a fleeting moment.

As Ashton's fangs pierced deeper into Krathos' flesh, an unexpected sensation washed over him. The blood that had tasted sweet moments ago now felt like an elixir, transporting him to a realm beyond the physical.

His vision blurred momentarily, and he felt as if he was floating between dimensions, untethered from time and space constraints. In that fleeting moment, he caught glimpses of a distant world, a place that resembled Earth but felt so foreign and distant.

The images flickered like fragments of a dream, revealing a scene of epic proportions. A battlefield stretched before him, filled with warriors from different races and species united in a common purpose. Ashton immediately recognised Krathos as one of the beings standing alongside the army.

Among them stood a figure with ashen skin and what appeared to be a snake around his neck, wielding a radiant trident with an air of command that demanded reverence.

Besides the warrior stood another figure, one with a metallic left arm that glinted in the dim light. The sight sent a jolt of recognition through Ashton, for the man bore an uncanny resemblance to himself. They were not mirror images, but the shared features were undeniable.

Ashton's mind raced with questions as he tried to comprehend the significance of the vision.

Who were these warriors, and what was the meaning behind their presence in his mind? It felt like he was witnessing a moment from a forgotten era, a memory buried deep within his subconscious.

Ashton's head pounded with excruciating pain as if an unseen force had torn his mind apart. He desperately tried to grasp the unfolding reality, but the images that bombarded him were too overwhelming to comprehend.

"What's happening to me?" he groaned, feeling like his existence was being ripped apart at the seams. He clutched his head with both hands, hoping to find some relief from the torment.

But as quickly as the visions had appeared, they began to slip away like sand through his fingers. His mind rebelled against the influx of unfamiliar memories and experiences, and he could feel himself losing control.

A strange scene played out before him just before he succumbed to the darkness. A minotaur-like creature, its pristine white fur contrasting with its powerful form, charged fearlessly towards a figure with ashen skin.

"Lord Shiva, Lord Deathless... I don't think it's safe for ungodly beings to be outside the World Tree's protection," the white minotaur, Nandi, spoke with reverence, addressing the enigmatic figures before him.

"Arnold," Shiva responded, his voice gentle as he turned his attention to the man with the metallic arm, Arnold.

"Don't worry. I'll instruct Talos to get everyone to safety." the man called Arnold nodded, and within a second, a humanoid robot appeared before him.

It was then everything disappeared from his eyes as someone grabbed him by his hand and tossed him aside.

"Not yet... you are too weak." the voice said before throwing him away.

'Too... weak...?'

The words echoed in Ashton's mind, the voices of these otherworldly beings resonating like distant memories. Their presence felt ancient, tied to forces far beyond his comprehension. The vision only offered a fleeting glimpse into their world, leaving him with more questions than answers.

Ashton wanted to know more about what was happening around him and what he witnessed. But it seemed that was all his mind could take as his vision got blank.

Ashton's grip on reality faltered, and he succumbed to unconsciousness again, only to awaken back in the present, his fangs buried in Krathos' flesh. The taste of the behemoth's blood still lingered, but now it was mingled with the lingering impressions of the vision.

"What just happened..."

Ashton's mind whirled with thoughts as he tried to make sense of the visions. Were they memories from a forgotten past or glimpses of an alternate reality? And most importantly, what role did he play in the grand tapestry of events? Who was the man who called him weak?

There were way too many questions inside his head and no answer.

But the immediate reality demanded Ashton's attention. The battle had left its mark on him and his companions, and they needed to regroup and recover. Flintmace and Vulcan stood by his side, their concern evident in their eyes.

"Ashton, are you alright?" Flintmace asked, his gruff voice filled with genuine concern.

Ashton shook his head, trying to steady himself. "I... I'm not sure. I saw something, a vision, but it was all too fleeting. It felt like another world, and there were beings, powerful beings. Shiva and Arnold..."

Vulcan chuckled, unable to resist making a joke. "Krathos' blood must have had some hidden surprises, eh? Or did you hit your head on that giant beast somewhere?"

Ashton glared at Vulcan, not amused by his attempt at humour. "This is serious, Vulcan. I saw something, and I don't know what it means. Shiva and Arnold seemed important, and a whole army behind them! Much bigger and stronger-"

"Did you hallucinate or something?" Vulcan chuckled. "Maybe we should try tasting Krathos' blood for ourselves and see what happens."

Flintmace shook his head and continued, "Let's go, Ashton. We need to interrogate that Priest too."

Chapter 615 The Next Step (3)

Vampire Skill: [Skill Absorption] activated. Attempting to absorb the skill [Past-sight] from the prey.

Required gene to learn the skill: Precursor gene.

Genes present in the host's body. Proceeding with absorption.

Due to the inefficiency of [Skill Absorption], only partial absorption could happen. As a result, the active skill [Past-sight (lvl 30)] has been turned into an active skill [Memory Reading (lvl 20)].

(Note: The user is recommended to upgrade [Skill Absorption] as soon as possible.)

"Huh... it's been a while since I saw this notification," Ashton rubbed his eyes as soon as he woke up. "Couple with that... it took over 20 hours to absorb this skill... that's a first."

As Ashton lay there, the visions of Shiva and Arnold still lingering in his mind, he couldn't shake off the sense of awe they invoked.

Vulcan and Flintmace had always been the pinnacle of strength in his eyes, but after witnessing the might of those beings, Ashton couldn't help but doubt whether even his mentors would stand a chance against them.

"Shiva and Arnold... I shouldn't dwell on them," Ashton said, standing up. "If they are as strong as I suspect, they could defeat any of us effortlessly, that is, if we are on different sides."

Just as Ashton was about to push the rogue thoughts out of his head, he remembered something else. "Wait... could they be Precursors? They are said to be the strongest beings in the universe, so it would make sense. Why I'm wasting my time on this..."

Shaking his head, Ashton decided that dwelling on their power was futile. His primary concern was the safety and well-being of those he held dear, nothing more.

Ashton heard a soft but urgent knock on his door. Curious, he opened it to find Anna standing there, her eyes red and filled with worry. Before he could react, she slapped him across the face, the sound echoing through the room.

"You fool!" she exclaimed, her voice filled with anger and concern. "Why are you so hell-bent on facing every danger by yourself?"

Ashton rubbed his stinging cheek but didn't protest. He understood her frustration and knew he had worried her more times than he could count. He sighed, knowing that both of them were correct from their standpoint.

"I'm sorry, Anna," he said gently as she wrapped her arms around him. "I don't want to put you through this, but sometimes, there are things that only I can handle. I don't want anyone else to get hurt because of me."

"I know," Anna's grip on him tightened, and she buried her face in his chest. "But I can't bear the thought of losing you... ever."

Ashton held her close, his heart aching at her words. He felt the same, and that's why his first instinct was to save her first. Even if it meant taking harsh steps to do so.

"You're a moron, you know that?" Anna looked up at him, her tearful eyes searching his.

"I fell in love with you, so yes. I do." Ashton mumbled softly.

"Want me to slap you again?"

"No thanks," Ashton chuckled. "The last one was enough."

"Then shut up and just hold me a little longer," Anna said, a hint of a smile on her lips.

"As you wish, your highness."

Ashton and Anna were lost in each other's embrace when suddenly, there was a knock on the door. They reluctantly pulled away from each other, and Ashton went to answer it. A messenger stood there, looking slightly nervous.

"Reaper and Bella, Minister Theron requests your immediate presence before the Emperor," the messenger announced, trying to sound as official as possible.

Anna exchanged a concerned glance with Ashton. They both knew that a council meeting after their battle with Krathos could mean only one thing - they wanted Ashton to release the Priest he had kept inside [Valhalla].

"Tell Minister Theron we'll be there shortly," Ashton said calmly, dismissing the messenger with a nod.

As soon as the messenger left, Anna turned to Ashton, her expression serious.

"What do you think this is about?" she asked, her mind racing with possible scenarios.

"What do I think? I think this is gonna be fun," Ashton smiled confidently before wearing his all-black attire. "Let's get going."

They made their way to the council chambers, the anticipation building with each step. When they entered, the ministers and the Emperor were assembled, their eyes fixed on Ashton.

But they weren't the only ones there. Vulcan, Flintmace and several other figures who held importance in the Orion empire were present there. The room was adorned with banners and decorations, and the atmosphere was filled with a sense of triumph and gratitude.

As soon as Ashton and Anna entered the chambers, everyone moved as fast as they could and before Ashton knew it, he was flanked by Flintmace and Vulcan while the mercenaries stood in formation behind them.

The Emperor, along with his ministers, stood on an elevated platform, preparing to address the heroes and the gathered crowd.

"Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed guests and brave warriors," the Emperor's voice boomed across the hall, "Today, we gather to honour those who have shown unwavering courage and selflessness in the face of danger."

He continued, "Lord Flintmace, Sir Thori, and Sir Reaper, you have all proven your mettle and dedication to our empire. We are eternally grateful for your service."

The crowd erupted into applause, and the mercenaries raised their weapons in acknowledgement.

"Reaper, Flintmace, and Thori," the Emperor had a lot more to say, his expression serious, "I must ask you for one more favour. The Priest who summoned the behemoth, he has committed heinous crimes against our empire and its people."

"As such, he must face justice for his actions... by our laws," Minister Theron concluded, his tone firm and resolute.

Another minister said, "We would like to ask you to hand him over to us so we can bring him to trial and deliver the appropriate punishment for his crimes. The people of our empire need to see that justice will be served and that no one is above the law."

Chapter 616 Have It Your Way

The tension in the room was palpable as Ashton, Flintmace, and Vulcan objected to the Emperor's request. The Emperor, who had been praising them moments ago, now found himself facing the resistance of his most trusted allies.

"Reaper, Flintmace, Thori," the Emperor spoke, his tone measured but firm, "I understand your concerns, but we must consider the greater good."

He continued, "The people demand justice for the crimes committed by the Priest, and we cannot ignore their cries. Public pressure is mounting, and as the Emperor, I must answer to the will of my people."

Flintmace stepped forward, his eyes locked with the Emperor's. "Your Majesty, we are not saying justice should not be served. But the Priest possesses vital information about the Cult of Cosmos. We need that information to protect our empire and the entire galaxy!"

"We have fought too hard and sacrificed too much to let this opportunity slip through our fingers. The information the Priest holds could save countless lives." Vulcan chimed in, his voice resolute.

The Emperor looked torn, torn between his duty to his people and the advice of his most trusted allies. He knew the information about the Cult of Cosmos was crucial, but he also understood the need to maintain order and uphold the law.

"I hear your pleas," the Emperor finally spoke, "but I must put the welfare of the empire first. The Priest's crimes cannot be ignored, and the people demand justice. I cannot issue an execution order without proper trial, but I cannot ignore the will of the people either."

Ashton sighed, realising the difficult position the Emperor was in. However, he knew of a way where the Priest would be helpful to them, even in death.

"Your Majesty, we understand your predicament," he said, "but I must also consider the galaxy's safety. The Cult of Cosmos could strike us even harder if the Priest isn't handled properly. We need time to extract that information and ensure it is used for the benefit of the entire galaxy."

Flintmace nodded in agreement. "We have dealt with the Cult long enough to know their methods and strategies. We are best equipped to handle the Priest and get the necessary information."

"I will not issue an immediate execution order," The Emperor considered their words, his expression troubled. "but I cannot allow him to remain in your custody indefinitely. As such, it would be wise for you to hand him over peacefully."

"Fine, we'll do it your way," Ashton said, his voice firm and resolute.

In an instant, a portal crackled to life, emanating an ominous dark aura. From within its depths emerged a chilling sight that sent shivers down everyone's spines.

A horde of skeletal beings, animated by some unknown force, stepped out, marching forward in eerie unison. Their hollow eye sockets stared vacantly ahead, and their bony forms creaked with every step.

The court gasped in horror and disbelief at the ghastly spectacle before them. The Priest, now looking more like a condemned soul from the bottomless pits of the underworld, was bound in heavy chains, his lifeless eyes devoid of any trace of defiance.

Ashton, in control of the macabre horde, moved forward, taking measured steps toward the Priest's prone form. The court remained paralysed by the surreal scene before them, their voices caught in their throats, unable to comprehend the dark power at play.

With a flick of his fingers, Ashton released the chains that bound the Priest, and the skeletal beings receded slightly, their duty fulfilled.

The emotionless horde turned, retreating back into the portal from where they came as if they were mere spectres of an ominous dream.

The court watched in awe as the portal closed, leaving no trace of the eerie visitors, but their terror lingered in the air. All eyes were on Ashton as he stood before the once powerful and now defeated Priest.

"You wanted him, Your Majesty," Ashton spoke, his voice low but commanding, addressing the Emperor.
"Here he is, at your mercy."

The Emperor, taken aback by the spectacle he had just witnessed, could only nod in response. The gravity of the situation had not escaped him, and he understood that Ashton had used a power far beyond their realm of comprehension.

The Priest remained motionless, a broken man, his spirit shattered by the display of dark power he had just witnessed. He dared not look anyone in the eye, haunted by the terror he had seen in the depths of that chilling portal.

However, Ashton wasn't done yet as he turned to address the Emperor's court. "Let me ask all of you, what punishment do you deem fit for this sorry excuse of a cultist?"

Everyone was silent, not knowing what Ashton was planning to do. Hearing no voices, Ashton decided to taunt them for a bit.

"The Emperor said he had to listen to the voice of his people and execute the priest," Ashton scoffed. "But the people here seem mute to me? Do you not have a voice, or are you too scared to speak your desire?"

Everyone was shocked as Ashton's words could be misinterpreted, as if he wasn't mocking the crowd but the crown. As such, it could be his head rolling down his shoulders than that of the Priest's.

However, Ashton's intention was not to provoke the court or challenge the Emperor's authority. He understood the delicate political situation and wanted them to participate actively in the decision-making process.

In other words, Ashton just wanted to hear the people speak their minds and bear the responsibility for their choices.

"Yes! We want the Priest to be executed right before our eyes for betraying us all!" Someone yelled.

"Off with his head!" yet another one chimed in.

"Fine," Ashton sighed, retrieving Balmond from his inventory. "Have it your way."

Before anyone could react or even know what Ashton was planning to do, Ashton swung Balmond in a great arc. The next moment there was a loud thud as the Priest's head rolled onto the ground, smearing Ashton with his blood.

Chapter 617 Fool's Gold

"There you have it," Ashton's voice echoed through the hushed courtroom, his tone void of emotion. "The traitorous Priest is dead."

Ashton's eyes swept across the stunned faces of the courtiers and the assembled crowd. The once wild chants for the Priest's execution had turned into an eerie silence. The weight of their decision hung heavily in the air as if time had momentarily frozen.

The people who had called for the Priest's death now stood in disbelief, their words snatched away by the reality of the situation.

They had been driven by anger and thirst for vengeance, but they had not expected Ashton to carry out the execution before their eyes, unfazed by their demands.

Even the courtiers, who had witnessed countless trials, were taken aback by the grim resolution with which Ashton had acted. The courtroom had seen its share of emotions, but this moment was unparalleled.

Ashton's gaze returned to the lifeless body of the Priest, still lying where he had fallen. It was not a moment of pride or satisfaction for Ashton but a solemn act of 'pleasing' the crowd.

He did exactly what the people wanted, but when they should have been cheering, everyone was quiet and scared.

A murmur started to ripple through the crowd as people slowly began to process the gravity of what had transpired. Some were bewildered, others frightened, while others questioned the limits of power displayed by Ashton.

"What's wrong, people?" Ashton yelled. "Isn't this what you wanted while chanting remarks such as, 'Off with his head'?"

Ashton took a step back, allowing the reality to sink in. The crowd's silence starkly contrasted with the vibrant energy that had filled the courtroom just moments ago.

The magnitude of the consequences was dawning on them as they realised that their demands had led to the death of a man. But that wasn't enough. Ashton wanted to make them realise what they had to sacrifice for a few moments of peace and pleasure.

His voice breaking through the quiet, Ashton addressed the crowd again, his tone steady but tinged with emotion.

"This was never an act of vengeance or personal vendetta from me," he explained. "I did what I did solely because you, the people, demanded so. However, allow me to tell you something."

Ashton's voice echoed through the courtroom, cutting through the thick tension in the air. His words were filled with anger, frustration, and a sense of urgency and truth.

"Do you think this Priest and his collaborators were the only cultists here? NO!" Ashton's voice rose with conviction. "There are countless more of them, lurking in the shadows, plotting against us, and who knows, some of them might even be present in this very court, pretending to be loyal subjects!"

He paused for a moment, allowing his words to sink in. The silence that followed was heavy with realisation and apprehension. The courtiers exchanged wary glances, unsure who among them could harbour such dark secrets.

"If only we had been allowed to interrogate him," Ashton continued, his tone filled with regret, "we might have been able to uncover the identities of many more cultists hidden throughout the galaxy!"

But because of your selfish desire for swift justice, we'll never know the full extent of this insidious network!"

Ashton's words struck a nerve, and some courtiers looked visibly uncomfortable. They had demanded immediate retribution, and in doing so, they might have jeopardised the empire's safety and allowed the cultists to escape scrutiny.

"So remember this," Ashton's voice grew stern, "when the cult strikes the empire again, and they will, it was your desire for vengeance and your impatience that paved the way for their resurgence!"

He let the weight of his words linger in the room before he turned away from the crowd. His gaze fell on the lifeless body of the Priest, a tragic reminder of what had transpired.

Ashton took a deep breath, trying to steady himself amidst his wild emotions. He had not wanted to resort to such harsh words, but the gravity of the situation demanded it.

The empire's safety was at stake, and the people needed to understand the consequences of their actions.

The Emperor, standing nearby, acknowledged Ashton's words with a solemn nod. He recognised the truth in what the Reaper had spoken, and the burden of his own decision weighed heavily on his shoulders.

Without saying another word, Ashton summoned the skeletons once again, and they carried the Priest's corpse back inside [Valhalla]; no one objected to him as the empire had received what they wanted and no longer had any use for the Priest's corpse.

The courtiers watched silently, their earlier desire for vengeance replaced by a sense of sobriety.

With the grim task completed, Ashton turned to the Emperor and bowed respectfully. The ruler acknowledged him with a nod but not saying a word otherwise.

Ashton's companions joined him as they made their way out of the courtroom. Anna walked by his side. Like everyone else, she, too, was confused about why Ashton did what he did. But she knew waiting for Ashton to reveal his reason was better.

Flintmace and Vulcan followed closely, their presence a reassuring show of support. The mercenaries, too, made their exit, their steps echoing through the halls.

There was a sense of closure among them, knowing that their dangerous mission had come to an end.

Ashton's lips curled into a smile as they left the court behind. His plan succeeded as he easily made a fool out of the empire. With his newly acquired [Memory Reading] ability, Ashton could extract crucial information from the dead Priest's mind.

If [Mind Reading] were to fail, he could always resurrect the Priest as, unlike the Deacon, the Priest's body hadn't disintegrated into dust. With the help of his [Association] ability, Ashton could easily turn the Priest into his summon.

But Ashton was against it, as the Priest was relatively weak, and he wouldn't want to raise a weak summon just to obtain some information from him.

'First, let's get to the Tower and then think about what I'd do...'

Chapter 618 The Priest's Tale

As soon as their ship docked in the Tower, Ashton and Anna headed towards Otiga as they were in need of her network and knowledge. As they approached her, Ashton couldn't help but notice her playful demeanour, but this time, there was no room for banter.

As they approached Otiga, she greeted them with a playful smile, but her keen eyes quickly noticed the seriousness etched on their faces.

"Why the long faces?" she quipped, trying to lighten the mood. "Did the cultist escape, or did he turn to dust like the one you found before?"

"Oh, he's here alright..." Anna mumbled, looking at Ashton.

Ashton was yet to explain his plan to her, so Anna kept making random remarks at him. Hoping Ashton would say something, but so far, he was as tight-lipped about it as ever.

Ashton hesitated momentarily before answering, "The cultist is here but dead. I killed him."

"Dead? How did that happen?" Otiga's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "I'm pretty sure you wanted to capture him alive."

Ashton and Anna proceeded to tell her about the events at the Emperor's court, the battle against Krathos, and finally, how Ashton had dealt the fatal blow to the Priest.

"Alright, let's see him then..." Otiga mumbled, handing everyone a pair of gloves.

Ashton gently placed the lifeless body of the Priest before Otiga. The once powerful cultist now lay defeated, his secrets waiting to be unveiled.

Otiga's eyes glinted with curiosity as she looked at the body before her. Her expertise lay in gathering information and uncovering hidden truths; this task was right up her alley.

"What do you need me to do, Ashton?" Otiga asked, her fingers itching to delve into her work.

"I need you to find out everything you can about this Priest. His species, his planet of origin, and any information about his identity before he joined the cult. We need to know as much as possible," Ashton said, his eyes locked on hers.

Otiga nodded, understanding the gravity of the task at hand. She reached for her tools, including some vials to store the Priest's blood for testing purposes.

"I'll start with analysing the DNA," she said, her voice focused and determined.

Ashton nodded appreciatively, knowing that Otiga was best at what she did. He stepped aside as she approached the lifeless body of the Priest, floating in the air thanks to the ridiculous technology Flintmace had given them access to.

As she hurried off to begin her work, Ashton turned his attention back to the lifeless body of the Priest. He knew he had a powerful tool at his disposal - his newly acquired [Memory Reading] ability. He knew that he could extract vital information from the Priest's memories.

"This is the part where I tell you about my plan," Ashton told Anna before activating his vampire and precursor genes.

to do. He knelt beside the Priest's body and closed his eyes, focusing his mind.

With a deep breath, Ashton steeled himself for what he was about to do. He knelt beside the Priest's body and closed his eyes, focusing his mind.

The [Memory Reading] ability was still relatively new to him, and he hoped he could handle the influx of memories that awaited him and not black out like the last time.

Sinking his fangs into the Priest's body, Ashton activated the ability. The world around him faded, and he was transported into the vast sea of the Priest's memories. He was now an observer in the Priest's life, experiencing it as if he were physically there.

In his earliest memories, Ashton saw the Priest as a young boy living in poverty on a desolate planet. He struggled to survive, scavenging for food and shelter. It was a harsh world where kindness was scarce, and the weak were often preyed upon.

Ashton felt a pang of empathy for the young boy, seeing himself reflected in those desolate eyes. He understood the pain of a difficult childhood all too well.

The memories continued, showing how the Priest's life took a turn when the cult swept into his village.

They offered him a chance to escape the hardship, promising power and prosperity beyond his wildest dreams. It was a seductive offer for a boy who had known nothing but suffering.

Ashton watched as the Priest was initiated into the cult, becoming a devoted follower. The cult's teachings filled the void in his heart, giving him a sense of purpose and belonging. But with every step he took deeper into the cult's embrace, the darkness consumed him.

The memories revealed how the Priest was tasked with spreading chaos and discord among neighbouring planets, using his manipulation abilities to instigate conflicts and fuel hatred.

Ashton's heart sank as he witnessed the Priest's involvement in countless atrocities, knowing that his hands were stained with the blood of innocent lives.

"It's funny how we had a similar start to our lives, but then we turned to be on the opposite ends of the spectrum of morality," Ashton smiled wanly as he continued watching the Priest's life.

"I can't excuse the horrors you committed, but I can understand the desperation that led you down this path."

The memories continued, showing how the Priest rose through the cult's ranks, gaining power and influence. But with each step, he became more entangled in a web of deceit and darkness.

He was no longer the young boy Ashton had seen initially - he had become a cold and ruthless fanatic.

"Hm... there wasn't much to go by, but I at least found a couple of names that could be useful."

Ashton opened his eyes, finding Otiga standing beside him, holding a data pad with a thoughtful expression. While his head rested on Anna's lap. It seemed he blacked out after witnessing the Priest's memories.

"I've completed the DNA analysis," she said. "The Priest's species is known as Zelians, a race known for their manipulation abilities. They were thought to have been wiped out centuries ago, but it seems the cult has kept their existence hidden all this time."

Ashton nodded, the pieces fitting together perfectly. "And what about his planet of origin?"

Otiga tapped a few buttons on the data pad. "It's a remote planet in the outer regions of the galaxy, far from the reach of the empire's influence. It's a barren world."

"Then it's a perfect place for Cultists to operate from," Ashton concluded what was going inside Otiga's head. "Do we have any missions I need to take care of?"

"At the moment, there are a couple of them," Otiga replied, going through the list of jobs the Ghosts have been getting since Ashton's reputation shot through the roof and the faction gathered more fame for themselves.

"Fine, I'll deal with those, and then we can head for the planet..." Ashton scratched his head. "What was the planet's name again?"

"Zeom."

"Got it..." Ashton replied, finally getting up. "Thanks for everything."

"Any time," Otiga replied with a smile as the couple left her to her devices and a corpse to dispose of.

Chapter 619 Progenitors Arrive

"I don't like it when you faint," Anna said while showering.

"Says the bitch who keeps drinking my blood," Ashton laughed, looking at the mirror as water dripped from his hair, tracing his muscles.

Anna and Ashton were used to taking baths together and also made it Anna's feeding time as it was easier to wash off the blood in the shower.

"I'm not joking, Ash!" Anna ripped apart the holographic curtain as Ashton said those words. "You need to take your health more seriously!"

"I'm sorry... but to read someone's memory, my conscious needs to leave my body, and hence I collapse," Ashton mumbled, enjoying the sight before him for the thousandth time. "Believe me, it's nothing serious!"

"I know, but it still worries me," Anna sighed, wrapping a towel around her body before stepping closer to Ashton. "You've been pushing yourself so hard lately, using god knows how many abilities without a worry about the toll it takes on your body."

Ashton turned off the shower, his expression serious as he looked into Anna's eyes.

"I can't stand idly by when there's so much at stake, especially when it involves you. As long as the cult tries to capture you, I'll do anything to stop them," Ashton mumbled, pulling Anna closer. "Even if it meant selling my soul to the demons."

"I understand why you're doing whatever you are, but you need to take care of yourself, too," Anna urged, placing a hand on his cheek. "You can't help anyone if you're not well."

"I know," Ashton admitted, leaning into her touch. "I promise to be more careful."

Anna gave him a small smile, her hands hovering above his nether region. "Good. Now how about we continue where we left off?"

"Seriously? You were the one saying I should take my health seriously-"

Before Ashton could complete what he was saying, Anna placed her finger on his lips before pulling him close and whispering in his ears.

"This is an activity I can overlook," Anna's luscious voice was enough for junior Ashton to get roaring.
"Besides... you need to look after your creation... M-A-S-T-E-R..."

Ashton couldn't resist the allure of Anna's playful advances, his body responding eagerly to her touch. He chuckled at her teasing words, feeling his heartbeat quicken with desire.

"We have to... go..."

But Anna was relentless, her mischievous smile widening as she leaned closer.

"You know you want this, Master," she purred, her fingers tracing tempting patterns on his skin.

"Fuck..." the words escaped Ashton's mouth as Anna began getting handsy with him. "Fine, this 'master' would gladly put you in your place!"

With a mischievous glint in his eyes, Ashton pulled Anna closer, his lips finding hers in a heated kiss. Their bodies pressed together, igniting a passionate fire between them.

Their shared desire filled the air as they explored each other's bodies, each touch igniting sparks of pleasure. Time seemed to slip away as they lost themselves in each other, indulging in the intimacy they both craved.

Their love-making session was becoming a sort of ritual as they couldn't keep their hands off of themselves as soon as they were done with a mission. Especially missions that involved a high risk of fatality.

"Ah... go slow, damn it..." Anna squealed as Ashton lifted her up, her legs around his naked waist as he penetrated her. "We have time! We can take it slow!"

"Uh huh, that ain't happening," Ashton mumbled before kissing her neck. "As a responsible master, I must deal with a rowdy succubus."

Ashton and Anna's intimate moment was abruptly interrupted by a knock on the door. They quickly pulled away from each other, trying to compose themselves as they exchanged knowing glances as they got dressed.

"Come in," Ashton called out, trying to mask the lingering desire in his voice.

The door creaked open, revealing Flintmace standing in the doorway with a mischievous grin.

"Am I interrupting something?" he asked, his eyes darting between Ashton and Anna.

Ashton rolled his eyes, though a small smile tugged at the corners of his lips.

"Yes, you are," he replied, trying to sound annoyed but failing miserably. "But does it even matter?"

Flintmace chuckled and walked into the room, closing the door behind him.

"Sorry, couldn't help myself," he said, giving Ashton a playful pat on the back. "But we've got business to attend to."

"What's the matter, Xyran? Jealous you're not getting any action?" Vulcan's voice echoed from the outside.

"Oh please, you know I've got plenty of admirers," Flintmace raised an eyebrow, his grin widening. "Being a tower's owner has its perks, unlike you, you red-haired buffoon."

"Enough of this banter," Ashton said, returning to why his masters were there in the first place. "What's the matter?"

"We have some guests who want to meet you," Vulcan said, his voice low and intense.

Ashton raised an eyebrow, intrigued by the sudden appearance of unexpected visitors. "Guests? Who are they?"

"You'll know when you see them," Flintmace replied. "You better come with us to the meeting room. Both of you."

Curiosity piqued, Ashton and Anna followed Flintmace and Vulcan to the meeting room. As they entered, they saw two figures waiting for them—Lycaon and Frankenstein, two of the three Progenitors of mutants.

"Damn... it's been a while, guys," Ashton greeted them with a smile while Anna, true to her royal lineage, gave them a courteous bow.

"Indeed, it has," Lycaon replied with a smile. "You're looking well."

"And doing well!" Frank intervened. "We have heard a lot about your mercenary group. As a fellow earthling, I'm proud of you."

"And you two look as intimidating as ever," Ashton complimented them. "But where's the third wheel hiding? Don't tell me he's out there flirting with my people... I swear he never learns!"

As soon as they heard Ashton asking about Dracula, their faces fell. They looked at each other before Lycaon delivered the bad news.

"We have some troubling news," he said. "Dracula has been kidnapped."

Chapter 620 Deceptive Confrontation (1)

"Dracula has been kidnapped, I see- Wait, what?" Ashton exclaimed. "You're kidding. He was kidnapped? By whom?"

Ashton was hoping the seriousness on Lycaon's and Frank's faces would slip away, but he was wrong. They weren't lying.

"How did it happen?" Anna inquired, wanting to know how someone at the peak of an A-grade was kidnapped.

"We suspect the Xyrans are behind this," Lycaon stated angrily. "They've been trying for a while now to get their hands on us, and it appears they've finally made their move."

"They also took Irina and Verina," Frankenstein explained, his face bleak. "They must have viewed them as a means of forcing Dracula to cooperate."

Ashton's mind raced, trying to process the information. Irina and Verina were his ex-fiancées, and even if he wasn't interested in them in that way, they were still his friends.

Ashton's fists clenched, rage pouring through him. "These Xyrans. Always getting in our way!"

Anna caressed his shoulder. "We will get them back," she vowed fiercely. "However, we must proceed with caution and strategy. We can't afford to make any blunders because the Xyrans are incredibly powerful and crafty."

Flintmace and Vulcan took a step forward, their faces resolute. "We're right here with you, Ashton," Flintmace added. "Whatever it takes, we'll get them back."

Ashton nodded gratefully, knowing he could rely on his trustworthy companions and friends.

"Thank you. But before we make a decision, we'll need to gather as much information as possible," Ashton then turned towards the Progenitors. "Can you tell me anything else you've discovered about the Xyrans' activities?"

"We've been tracking their movements for a while," Lycaon said, nodding as he explained. "It appears that the Xyrans have been conducting secretive experiments and collecting rare artefacts from various planets. We suspect they are plotting something significant."

He went on to say, "Dracula was investigating them and their sudden interest in artefacts when he went off the grid. I believe this was when the Xyrans informed him about Irina's and Verina's abduction."

"We also suspect they have a hidden base on an uninhabited planet in the Ombra sector," continued Frankenstein. "It could be where they're keeping Dracula, Irina, and Verina."

Ashton's fingers swiftly danced across the communicator's holographic interface as he relayed his urgent message to Otiga.

"Gather all the intelligence personnel," he commanded. "Drop everything else they're working on and focus solely on the Ombra sector and its exoplanets. I need a comprehensive report on potential hidden bases or any unusual activities within three hours. This is a top priority."

Dozens of questions popped up in Otiga's mind upon hearing Ashton's weird request. However, once he said it was an urgent matter, Otiga decided her questions would have to wait.

Otiga nodded solemnly, her eyes mirroring Ashton's determination. "Understood, Reaper," she replied. "I'll mobilise the team immediately. Though, I'd suggest we leave a team to focus on finding more about the Cult-"

"Fine. You can do as you deem fit," Ashton interrupted her. "I don't care how many people are working on it, as long as I can get a proper report ASAP."

With that, the communication ended, and Ashton turned to his companions.

"While Otiga and her team gather the information, we need to prepare for our journey to the Ombra sector," he said.

Flintmace and Vulcan exchanged knowing glances. Since the matter concerned the Xyrans, they were obviously going with Ashton to help him out. No matter how much Ashton had grown, there was no way he would be able to face an entire Xyran armada on his own.

"We'll ensure our ship is fully equipped and ready to go," Flintmace said.

Anna nodded. "And I'll gather all the necessary supplies and equipment. Lord Vulcan, I would need your assistance with it."

"That much is obvious," Vulcan patted Ashton on his back. "We'll need everything we can get our hands on. Be prepared, brat."

Ashton smiled gratefully at his friends. "Thank you. We need to move fast if we want to have any chance of finding Dracula, Irina, and Verina before it's too late."

As the team sprang into action, each member focused on their assigned tasks with unwavering resolve and perseverance. Time was of the essence, and they knew they couldn't afford any delays.

Within three hours, the intelligence report was compiled and delivered to Ashton. As he absorbed the precise facts regarding the Ombra sector and its exoplanets, each word and piece of data became seared in his consciousness.

The report revealed a web of prospective locations where the Xyrans could be carrying out their dark plots. Ashton's brows furrowed when he identified places notorious for their covert and unregulated activities, ideal breeding grounds for the Xyrans' evil schemes.

The Xyrans were so drunk on their power they thought they could do whatever they wanted without anyone challenging their authority. But Ashton had had enough of those bastards.

Also, since he was on the verge of becoming an S-grade being, based on his cumulative levels, he thought it was the perfect time for him to make his presence known to the Xyrans.

The time for subtle actions and covert operations was over. It was time for a direct confrontation, a challenge to the authority the Xyrans held so dear.

[Are you sure about this? Once you reveal yourself, they'll know exactly what you've been up to all this time.]

"Do I even have another choice, Astaroth?" Ashton sighed. "Their attack hit a bit too close for comfort. It's only proper that I return the favour."

[I get it. But I am suggesting that... do not confront the Xyrans as Ashton, but as Reaper, as a mercenary who was hired to deal with them.]

Ashton leaned against the wall, considering Astaroth's advice. Astaroth was right; revealing himself as Ashton could risk everything he had worked for.

However, if he confronted the Xyrans as Reaper, they would have difficulty messing with him as he had a few S-grade beings backing him up, and no soul, Xyran or not, would want to fight with someone like him.

"Fine, let's do this your way."