

## **Zompiewolf 621**

### Chapter 621 Deceptive Confrontation (2)

In the distant reaches of the Milky Way galaxy, hidden away from the bustling centre of civilisations, was a desolate sector known as Ombra.

Once a vibrant and lively region, it was home to several star systems teeming with life and diversity. Planets thrived with advanced civilisations, each flourishing with their own unique cultures and technologies.

However, this prosperity would not last forever. The resource-rich sector had always been in the eyes of many intergalactic civilisations, as it was only a matter of time before they all acted to force their will upon the dwellers there.

As the galactic powers expanded and their thirst for resources grew, Ombra became a coveted territory. Fierce battles erupted between rival factions vying for control, leaving destruction and devastation in their wake.

The inhabitants of Ombra's star systems were caught in the crossfire of these relentless conflicts. Planets were scorched, cities were reduced to ruins, and entire populations were wiped out. The once lively worlds turned into barren wastelands, haunted by the ghosts of the past.

Amidst the chaos and destruction, the inhabitants of Ombra were left to struggle for survival. They clung to the remnants of their civilisations, desperately trying to rebuild and defend their homes. But the constant wars and strife had taken a toll, leaving them weary and broken.

As the decades passed, Ombra became a desolate and forgotten sector, shrouded in darkness and despair. The stars themselves seemed to weep for the once-thriving worlds, now reduced to mere shadows of their former glory.

A lone figure wandered the barren landscape on one such desolate planet, a wasteland known as Nefarion. His name was Varian, and he was a Zyrilian, a reptilic-humanoid species that once lived on Nefarion.

The man was searching for answers amidst the ruins of his once-great civilisation under the guise of working for the Xyrans.

Even though Varian was now a part of the Xyran armada, working as a miner extracting the resources Nefarion had to offer, he couldn't help but feel a tinge of hatred towards them as they were the ones who targeted and destroyed many of the sector's planets.

"If only there was someone who could deal with these bastards..." A sudden beeping noise brought him back to his senses. "Fuck! I forgot about to clock out! Eh, whatever; it's not like those dictators would care about a missing miner."

As he walked through the remnants of a once-bustling city, Varian could not help but feel a profound sense of loss.

Memories of a time long gone flooded his mind, of laughter and joy that had once filled the streets. Now, all that remained were crumbling buildings and the echoes of a forgotten past.

Varian was seven when the Xyrans forced them to evacuate the planet, and since the Zyrilians believed the Xyrans to be representatives of the almighty, they readily did so.

Little did they know that the Xyrans were doing nothing more than 'population' control and slaughtered millions of Zyrilians and enslaved those who remained... maybe colonising would be a better-suited term.

After all, Xyrans integrated the Zyrilians into their society as low-ranking individuals who were suitable to become foot soldiers, miner workers, or in most cases, servants.

Varian, like most of his people, hated the conditions that were forced upon them but were too weak to object. Those who did were never seen or heard from again... which was enough to scare the rest of them.

As Varian explored further, he stumbled upon the ruins of a grand library, a treasure trove of knowledge and history. The sight was both heartening and heartbreaking, as he saw countless books and scrolls reduced to dust.

Zyrilians were known for their hunger for knowledge and never really bothered expanding their military strength. By the time they realised the need to defend themselves, it was too late.

Now their knowledge was long gone. Destroyed by the hands of those whom they hailed as the messenger of the almighty.

As Varian picked up what remained of their religious texts, his armband went berserk once again; this time, it was glowing yellow.

All colours got drained from his face as he realised the Xyrans were looking for him and had declared code yellow, which referred to a worker going off the grid.

"Damn it!" Varian cursed, his face losing all colour.

He knew what this meant; the Xyrans were on his trail and closing in fast. He had to act quickly.

Hurriedly, Varian made his way towards the exit, hoping to escape before the Xyrans could apprehend him. But just as he was about to reach the door, a powerful kick sent him sprawling backwards. Before him stood Nishkca, the manager of the mine where Varian worked

The golden-skinned bastards had surrounded him, and Varian knew he was in a world of pain.

"Sightseeing, are we?" Nishkca sneered, pressing his boot against Varian's face. "Trying to relive the past, perhaps? You could have asked for a day off if you were that desperate, you know."

Struggling to catch his breath, Varian glared up at Nishkca, defiance burning in his eyes.

"I wasn't sightseeing," he retorted, his voice laced with anger. "I was trying to save what's left of our history, something you know nothing about."

Nishkca scoffed, his wings fluttering with annoyance. "History is irrelevant," he declared coldly.

"The Xyrans have brought progress and prosperity to Ombra, and the past is nothing more than a hindrance to that progress. Your sentimental attachment to those old relics is what's holding you back."

Laughter echoed around them as Nishkca brandished his plasma knuckles, ready to strike Varian. The Xyrans surrounding them revelled in the sight of impending violence. However, their amusement was short-lived as a slow clap filled the air, drawing their attention away from Varian.

"Man... these Xyrans never cease to amaze me!" The voice came from none other than Ashton, who strolled into the library without any care for the Xyrans around him. "You really do have a talent for concealing your misdeeds."

The Xyrans turned to face the newcomer, and their amusement quickly turned to confusion. Who was this man who dared to mock them in their own territory?

Ashton grinned mischievously, his eyes glinting with amusement and defiance. He took a few steps closer to Varian, unafraid of the hostile gazes directed at him.

"You see, I was passing by and couldn't help but overhear your delightful little discussion. Truly, it's fascinating to witness the lengths you go to maintain your facade of righteousness."

"Who the hell are you?" Nishkca's scowl deepened, and he raised his plasma knuckles menacingly.

"Oh, you don't know me?" Ashton shrugged. His mask was doing its job concealing his identity. "That makes my job a tad bit easier."

### Chapter 622 Deceptive Confrontation (3)

The Xyrans surrounded Ashton, their mistrust and hostility fixed on him as the air around them trembled with tension.

Ashton's presence on Nefarion, which was absolutely off-limits to outsiders, had alarmed the Xyrans. Yet, rather than cower under their scrutiny, Ashton greeted them with a bold and confident smile, his eyes blazing with defiance as if he didn't care he was facing Xyrans.

His stance was that of a warrior undeterred by the odds stacked against him. Although he appeared to be standing there casually, Nishkca could see no openings for them to attack the human.

That was enough to put Nishkca on edge, but his newly recruited underlings didn't have the experience he did. Even then, he was hopeful they'd be able to subdue the stranger before them.

"Should we end both of them?" one soldier asked. "One is a traitor, and the other is infiltrating our planet."

"Nah, let's capture them and feed them to the Holos. Those dogs are always hungry for exotic meat-"

"Man, you guys are funny." Ashton laughed like a maniac, stopping the Xyran midsentence. "What are you people even doing here? Go open a podcast or something. People seem to enjoy those these days."

The Xyrans, used to being feared and obeyed, found themselves unsettled by Ashton's unwavering confidence. It was as if he knew something they didn't, and the uncertainty gnawed at them.

"Who are you, and what business do you have on Nefarion?" one of the Xyrans angrily demanded. "Tell us, or I'll rip your tongue out and do the talking for you!"

"I am but a traveller passing through," Ashton casually replied. "I had heard tales of the Ombra sector's desolate history and was curious to see it for myself. But I seem to have stumbled upon something more intriguing than anticipated."

"Curious travellers don't just stumble upon restricted Xyran property," Nishkca retorted, brandishing his knuckles. "What's your real purpose here?"

Ashton's smile didn't waver, and he continued spouting more bullshit to agitate the Xyrans.

"Perhaps you're right," he conceded. "I am keenly interested in history and preserving the legacy of forgotten places. It's a shame what has become of the Ombra sector. Wouldn't you agree?"

The other Xyrans looked at each other, their suspicion growing. Varian watched in fascination as Ashton seemed to effortlessly navigate the tense situation.

"Enough of your lies!" one of the Xyrans snarled, lunging at Ashton with a plasma spear.

Ashton sidestepped the attack in a blur, his grin widening. "Come now, there's no need for violence. I'm just a man seeking knowledge, nothing more."

Undeterred by Ashton's remarks, the man lunged at him again. Only this time, Ashton decided to go on offence. Ashton seamlessly disarmed him and twisted the Xyran's arm behind his back, rendering him immobile.

The other Xyrans hesitated momentarily, taken aback by the ease with which this seemingly ordinary human had neutralised one of their own.

With a sinister grin, Ashton revealed his fangs; the glint of his vampiric nature confused the Xyrans. They had only encountered one such individual before who was in their custody. At least, that's what the reports mentioned.

"You see, I'm not a human," he said, his voice taking on an eerie tone. "I am something you would have nightmares about... starting now."

Before their eyes, Ashton sank his fangs into the Xyran's neck, drawing blood. The Xyran winced in pain, but he was unable to resist, held firmly in Ashton's grip.

The sight was horrifying yet mesmerising, and Varian could not tear his eyes away. It almost felt like the lord had answered his prayers in the form of the stranger before him.



Ashton drank the Xyran's blood, his eyes glowing with an otherworldly intensity. Time seemed to stand still for a moment as the Xyrans watched in awe and terror.

When Ashton finally released his hold, the Xyran stumbled and fell... lifeless. The chilling silence that followed was broken only by the faint hum of energy in the air. Ashton turned his gaze back to Varian, his fangs retracting as he did so.

"You should leave now," he said calmly, his voice resonating with authority. "I'll deal with these Xyrans."

"B-But-" Varian protested, as Nishkca wasn't the only Xyran there. More of them would arrive at any moment, but Ashton shushed him, pointing towards the exit.

"Rest assured, they won't ever trouble you or this planet again. Now go!"

Gathering his courage, Varian nodded in gratitude and fled from the scene, leaving Ashton to face the remaining Xyrans.

"Now then, shall we begin?" Ashton asked the Xyrans as he bit into his own hands.

Blood trickled down from the bite wounds, but a moment later, red mist filled the room.

"What the hell is this!?" the Xyrans' exclaimed, not knowing what would happen next.

As the mist turned denser, the Xyrans found themselves caught off guard, coughing and sweating profusely, while only Nishkca remained somewhat unaffected.

[Skill: Bloodmist has been activated.]

"Let the hunt begin..." Ashton whispered as he disappeared into the thick red mist.

The mist clung to every corner of the room, obscuring their vision and filling the air with an unsettling presence. Soon Nishkca's underlings began hallucinating and attacking each other.

The once loyal soldiers were driven mad by the poisonous mist. Nishkca watched in horror as his underlings succumbed to the maddening effects of the mist.

What was supposed to be a show of force and control had turned into a nightmarish scene of chaos and self-destruction.

"I need to get rid of this mis- what the hell?"

Nishkca was busy formulating a plan when he felt an excruciating pain in his back. It was as if someone had clawed him. He turned to see the stranger's hand had transformed and was drenched in his blood.

"You bastard!" Nishkca yelled and lunged at Ashton.

Unfortunately, he ended up hitting one of his own men, killing the poor soul instantly. But Nishkca didn't have time to react as he received a swift kick in his face, sending him out of the broken building as Ashton appeared before him... with the severed heads of Nishkca's underlings.

"Huh... I didn't know Xyrans were supposed to be this weak." Ashton yawned before throwing the severed heads towards Nishkca. "You should probably say your farewell to them. After all, you killed most of them."

"What?"

Chapter 623 New Summon! (1)

"Oh, I guess you thought you were trying to hit me..." Ashton acted as if he was lost in his thoughts. "News flash, whenever you thought you were hitting me, you were hitting your soldiers instead."

Nishkca's eyes widened in horror as he connected the dots. The truth unfolded before him, and the weight of his actions pressed heavily on his conscience. His comrades hadn't met their demise by a swift, sharp blade as he had believed; it resulted from his own ruthless and frenzied attacks.

The realisation hit him like a tidal wave, and the guilt washed over him, threatening to drown him in remorse.

The hallucinations that had driven his men to turn on each other were nothing but cruel illusions, a wicked ploy played by Ashton through blood mist. And he had been its unwitting puppet, mindlessly perpetuating the chaos and destruction.

"It can't be..."

Ashton's masqueraded face held a smile, but it was a smile filled with amusement. It was a smile that reflected the gravity of the situation, the severity of the Xyrans' actions. His eyes bore into Nishkca, piercing through the facade of arrogance and revealing the darkness within.

"That's right... they weren't the ones hallucinating. It was you," Ashton's words were laced with a sad truth. "You didn't flinch as they begged for mercy, and here we are now... debating about their deaths."

Ashton's voice trailed off, the weight of the moment hanging heavily in the air. The library, once filled with chaos and violence, was now a haunting memoir of tragedy and despair-filled Xyrans.

The reality of Nishkca's actions hit him with an indescribable force. He had become the instrument of his comrades' demise. Their lives were doused out by his own hands, controlled by the evil mist.

"I knew you, Xyrans, were heartless," Ashton's tone shifted, his words tinged with an air of disappointment, "but this? Killing your comrades... is a whole new level."

The air was tense as Nishkca's eyes burned with anger and frustration. He pointed an accusing finger at Ashton, his voice trembling with emotion.

"This is all your fault! You brought this mist upon us, and now my comrades are dead because of you!"

"Oh, is that so?" he taunted, his masquerade slipping away to reveal his vampire visage. "Blame me all you want, but the truth is, your lack of mental fortitude made you an easy pawn for the mist. Your weaknesses led to the demise of your comrades. Not me."

Enraged by Ashton's dismissive demeanour, Nishkca lunged forward, fists clenched and eyes ablaze. His attack was swift and decisive, fueled by a desire for vengeance and retribution.

"You never learn, do you?" Ashton sighed, flexing his arms. "That's why I love it when people like you struggle."

Ashton sidestepped Nishkca's blow with inhuman speed, and the Xyran's momentum carried him forward, causing him to stumble. Seizing the opportunity, Ashton countered with a well-placed kick to Nishkca's side, sending him sprawling back into the library.

Undeterred, Nishkca rose to his feet, determination burning in his eyes. He charged at Ashton again, fists flying in a relentless barrage of attacks. But Ashton was a master of evasion, his lithe frame twisting and contorting to avoid each strike.

With a wicked grin, Ashton retaliated, delivering a series of lightning-fast strikes to Nishkca's torso and limbs.

His vampire strength allowed him to hit with bone-crushing force, but he held back, not wanting to deliver a fatal blow and enjoyed toying with the Xyran for a while as he had some time to kill.

"Stand still, damn it!"

"Eh? What kind of warrior are you who needs the enemy to stand still so you can land a hit?" Ashton mocked the Xyran yet again.

Nishkca's anger and grief clouded his judgment, making him reckless and easy to predict. Ashton exploited his opponent's emotional vulnerability, baiting him into a wild attack.

With a swift sidestep, Ashton grabbed Nishkca's arm and flipped him over his shoulder, sending him crashing to the ground. A basic manoeuvre, yet an effective one.

Nishkca gritted his teeth, refusing to yield. He pushed himself up, blood trickling from his nose and bruises forming on his skin. With a roar of fury, he lunged at Ashton once more, his fists a blur of motion.

But Ashton was a predator whose claws were honed by two of the most incredible warriors he had had the pleasure of coming across.

Usually, Ashton would have had to turn full zompiewolf mode to deal with a Xyran, but after his training, only one set of genes was enough to bring Nishkca down.

Ashton weaved through Nishkca's strikes using his vampire speed, dancing around him like a ghostly apparition. With each miss, Nishkca grew more desperate, his attacks becoming sloppier and more erratic.

Finally, Ashton saw his chance.

With a swift spin, he delivered a powerful kick to Nishkca's back, sending him sprawling to the floor. Before Nishkca could react, Ashton was on him, pinning him to the ground with inhuman strength.

"You're outmatched, Nishkca," Ashton said, his voice low and menacing. "So much so, you make me wonder if you're even a Xyran at all!"

"I... I won't let you get away with this," Nishkca spat, his voice filled with defiance.

"Oh, really?" Ashton retorted with a mocking smile. "You think you can threaten me when you're completely at my mercy? I could easily end your pathetic existence, but where's the fun in that? No, I'd rather see you suffer first."

With a cruel grin, Ashton tore apart one of Nishkca's hands, causing him to cry out in agony.

"Don't worry," Ashton chuckled darkly. "I won't kill you... not yet, at least. I want you to live long enough to see the downfall of your kind."

"You... you monster!" he gasped.

"Ah, the truth comes out," Ashton sneered. "You see, Nishkca, you're the monster here. You and your kind terrorising innocent beings, wreaking havoc wherever you go. It's time for you to face the consequences of your actions."

Chapter 624 New Summon! (2)

"Like hell, I will!" Nishkca exclaimed, wanting to inform the rest of his contingent about the intruders.

Ashton's crimson eyes followed Nishkca as the Xyran tried to flee the room, his heart pounding with fear and desperation. But the zompiewolf was not one to let his prey escape so easily.

"This fucker... why do they always try to delay the inevitable?"

[Try snapping like the purple guy, he said he was inevitable too.]

"What purple guy?"

[Nothing... focus on catching the bastard!]

"Keep talking shit, and you'll become a lady magnet... to repel them."



[Bitch-]

"Shh... let me focus."

With a swift gesture, he summoned Sven and Atlas, his shadowy summons, to intercept Nishkca.

Sven emerged from the darkness, his tall and imposing figure casting an eerie silhouette against the dim light of the mist-filled room. He moved with inhuman speed, blocking Nishkca's path with his massive form.

At the same time, Atlas emerged from the shadows behind Nishkca, his ethereal presence sending shivers down the Xyran's spine.

"Nowhere to run, Xyran," Ashton's voice echoed through the room.

Hearing those words, Sven and Atlas moved swiftly, surrounding Nishkca and ensuring he had nowhere to run. But he was not about to give up without a fight.

In his fear, he swung his fist at the dark creature, hoping to inflict some damage on the being that had stopped him. But his efforts were in vain.

With effortless ease, Atlas caught Nishkca's fist mid-air, his grip like an unyielding vice. The Xyran's eyes widened in disbelief as he struggled futilely against the strength of the shadowy summon.

"Is this what's become of the proud Xyrans?" Atlas scoffed. "No pureblooded Xyran has the right to be this weak."

Nishkca's face flushed with embarrassment and frustration as he hung helplessly in Atlas's grip. He had always prided himself on being a powerful Xyran, someone to be feared and respected. But in the presence of Ashton's summons, he felt like nothing more than a powerless insect.

With a dismissive flick of his wrist, Atlas flung Nishkca away like a discarded ragdoll. The Xyran crashed onto the floor, the impact knocking the wind out of him. He groaned in pain as he struggled to get back on his feet; his pride shattered.

Ashton watched the scene with an inscrutable expression, his crimson eyes studying Nishkca intently. He had seen many individuals try to challenge his summons before, and most of them had met a similar fate – defeated and humiliated.

"You see," Ashton said calmly, "the power I wield goes far beyond what you can comprehend. My summons reflect that power, and they will not tolerate any form of insolence or weakness... especially from our enemies."

With nothing left to say, Ashton waved his hand, and Sven brought out his blade. Sven stabbed Nishkca in the throat, not sparing even a second, ending his reign. But even in death, the expression on Nishkca's face was that of rage and disbelief.

"What a funny look he has..."

[You're thinking about it, aren't you?]

"Of course I am. I still need two more summons to fulfil the ascension quest."

Ashton stood tall before the defeated Nishkca, his eyes locked onto the once proud Xyran's now lifeless form. With a wave of his hand, Ashton channelled the dark energies of necromancy, and an eerie glow enveloped Nishkca's body.

The very essence of life seemed to drain from him, replaced by an unnatural and malevolent force.

As the transformation progressed, Nishkca's body contorted and twisted, his once golden skin now taking on a sickly, pale hue. Once filled with determination, his eyes were empty and hollow, reflecting only the dark influence of Ashton's magic.

The process was unsettling to witness, the air crackling with energy as Nishkca's life force was bound to Ashton's will. Sven and Atlas watched with impassive eyes, knowing that their new recruit was undergoing a profound change.

Once the transformation was complete, Nishkca stood before them as an undead being, a mere shadow of his former self. His movements were stiff and mechanical, and his eyes lacked any trace of emotion or consciousness.

"W-What is this?" Nishkca mumbled, looking around and touching himself to see whether he was dreaming. "I... You killed me then..."

"From now on, you will serve me," Ashton declared, his voice firm and commanding. "Your life is now bound to mine, and you will obey my every command without question."

"You... you defiled me! I'll kill you!"

Ashton's gaze shifted to Sven and Atlas, and with a simple gesture, he ordered them to teach their new recruit a lesson in obedience. Without hesitation, the shadowy summons lunged at Nishkca's new form, delivering powerful blows that sent him falling to his knees.

Even in his undead state, Nishkca remained defiant, his eyes burning with anger and resentment. But Sven and Atlas were relentless, striking him over and over, each blow draining his strength and breaking his will.

"You will learn to obey, whether you like it or not," Ashton said calmly, his voice carrying a hint of warning. "There is no room for defiance in my ranks."

The beating continued, and slowly, Nishkca's defiance waned away, but not completely. Ashton still didn't appreciate his expression whenever Nishkca glanced at him.

"Looks like this will take some time," Ashton yawned. "Take him to Valhalla and let the rest of the summons teach him the importance of obedience."

"As you wish, master." Sven and Atlas bowed before turning their attention towards Nishkca.

Ashton watched as Sven and Atlas took hold of Nishkca's battered form, dragging him away towards Valhalla. The once defiant Xyran now looked broken and subdued, a stark contrast to his earlier arrogance.

[>> Create and Tame 10 summons. Currently have: 9/10 summons]

"One down, one more to go," Ashton muttered, acknowledging that there was still much to be done.

With a snap, the mist around the library dispersed, and Ashton walked out only to see four hooded figures waiting for him.

"I'm impressed," Lycaon smiled. "I didn't think you could fulfil Master Vulcan's challenge so easily."

"I agree," Frank chimed in.

"What can I say? I got two great Masters to teach me," Ashton replied, nodding towards Vulcan and Flintmace. "Where to next?"

"Where else? To the mines." Vulcan scoffed. "That's where the rest of the Xyrans should be."

"Roger that," Ashton mumbled as a pair of black wings emerged behind him. "I'll see you guys there."

#### Chapter 625 Rash Decision (1)

Since Ashton's group was infiltrating through heavy Xyran borders, it was deemed essential to have a small group, as a large group wouldn't have been able to go deep within Xyran territory without being detected.

As such, only Ashton, Flintmace, Vulcan, Frank and Lycaon were the ones to embark on the mission to find Dracula and the twins. Even though many were willing, Ashton knew it was a mission of utmost importance, and as such, only the strongest warriors should have to take on the quest.

[I can't believe a planet like Nefarion was reduced to this state.]

"What do you mean?" Ashton inquired as he flew in the dark skies of the planet, looking for the mine that was Dracula's final coordinates before his disappearance.

[Nefarion was one of the unique planets in the Ombra sector. It was like a hidden gem, with thriving wildlife, prosperous people, and magnificent infrastructure. Master Seraph used to say it was a heaven located at the heart of hell... just like Earth.]

As he listened to the description, Ashton's heart sank. He was almost able to envision the planet's former magnificence and peace.

[Now... it's become hell.]

"Indeed," Ashton whispered, his gaze focused on the lonely landscape below. The planet's formerly colourful life was now replaced by tragedy and despair. "We're here."

Ashton landed on the ground with a faint thud, taking safety among the debris of a fallen building that overlooked the mining site. The scene before him was unlike anything he had ever seen.

Massive machines, gargantuan in size and strength, rivalling the neighbouring mountains, unleashed a vicious-looking laser, piercing deep into the ground. The force of their drilling shook the ground, sending shockwaves throughout the lonely landscape.

A swarm of aliens of various species laboured tirelessly around the scene, their features carved with despair and desperation.

They toiled under the watchful gaze of the Xyrans, who stood tall and formidable, assuring complete control over their crew. Ensuring nothing went out of control, and there were no rebellions from the overworked labourers.

"Any ideas what they could be mining here?" Ashton asked Astaroth as he should've known the answer to the question.

[Blood Glyphs... At least, I think it's those.]

"Blood Glyphs? What are those?"

[Blood Glyphs are known to be strong and ancient artefacts. They are supposed to be infused with the essence of powerful entities.

The Xyrans think that by collecting these symbols from the planet's deepest depths, they will be able to harness the unimaginable potential and continue increasing their strength unnaturally.]

"Essence of great beings... meaning the precursors?"

Ashton's eyes widened as he pulled together the information. If great beings produced the Glyphs in the distant past, those entities should have been the Precursors. After all, no other species should have been able to store their wills in a planet's heart.

[That's correct. Legend has it that the glyphs contain the Precursors' memory and wisdom. They can potentially cause enormous problems and disasters if they fall into the wrong hands.

The Xyrans' thirst for dominance pushed them to utilise these artefacts, even if it meant enslaving and abusing others].

"Well, there's nothing new there," Ashton mumbled while silently counting the Xyrans around the mine. "It's a known fact; the strong will always abuse the weak."

[That's true.]



"But about these Blood Glyphs, how were they even imprinted around the planet's core? And even if they were, how are these Xyrans extracting those without harming the planet?"

[Who says they are not harming the planet? Did you think wars were solely responsible for turning Nefarion into this excuse of a world?]

Ashton silently contemplated the weight of Astaroth's words. It was confirmed that the Xyrans were the strongest species in their galaxy at the moment and also had access to Precursor technology.

With all things considered, it wasn't a surprise that the Xyrans were hungry for more Precursor-related tech.

[As you know, the Precursors were beings with unimaginable power. They could manipulate energy and matter on a cosmic scale. The imprints of the Blood Glyphs were a testament to their advanced technology and knowledge. Something no other species has achieved to date.]

'The more I hear about the Precursors, the harder time I have believing that my father was one of them...' Ashton thought to himself as he was still hiding that information from Astaroth. "So the Xyrans are using Precursor technology to extract the glyphs?"

[Not entirely. Once defeat was upon the Precursors, the Dwarves took matters into their hands and destroyed most of the tech Precursors had built over time, as they did not want such technology falling into the hands of the wrong people.]

Astaroth continued, [The Xyrans reversed engineered what they could from the scraps and have been looking for more Precursor tech to perfect the tech that they do have.]

"So they turned ruthless and careless in their pursuit of power. They do not care for the consequences of their actions as long as they achieve their goals. The well-being of the planet and its inhabitants be damned."

[That summarises Xyrans to the point.]

"So they are destroying Nefarion as well?" Ashton silently questioned.

[Unfortunately, yes. The Blood Glyphs are deeply connected to the core of Nefarion, and the extraction process inevitably disrupts the planet's equilibrium, causing instability and damage. Soon Nefarion will become so unstable there'll be nothing left of it.]

Ashton clenched his fists as another thought popped into his head. "Does... Earth has those glyphs as well?"

Astaroth was silent for a moment. Since Earth was constructed as an adobe for Precursors and their heirs, the humans, it was obvious they would have placed even more glyphs around the Earth than any other planet. Finally, after a while, Astaroth answered.

[Yes... the glyphs on Earth are undoubtedly the most desired amongst the Xyran populous. However, since Earth had hit rock bottom a while ago, the Xyrans were in no hurry to extract those glyphs as other civilisations were advancing rapidly and took priority over Earth.]

"I see..." Ashton whispered coldly. "I have a final question, then. Do you think Xyrans can be turned into werewolves?"

[Wait... you don't mean-]

"I no longer wish to stall my ascension..."

Chapter 626 Rash Decision (2)

[Have you lost your mind? You have said a lot of stupid shit, but this is by far the worst!]

'...I know it isn't the most rational decision but-' Aston tried to argue but was cut off almost immediately.

[How can there be a 'but' here? Do you think you can take them all just because you killed a few low-ranking Xyrans? Killing someone and taming someone are two completely different things!]

[Do you even know what possible mutation you might cause to the Xyran you want to turn into werewolves? Let's assume you manage to turn them into werewolves; how are you planning to turn them to your side? The last thing we want is a pack of uncontrollable werewolves wreaking havoc.]

Ashton went quiet as Astaroth kept reprimanding him for his rash decisions. Astaroth was glad Ashton spoke his mind before acting, or else they would have been in trouble. Blindly charging into a Xyran mine was nothing short of a suicide attempt.

"You're right... I need to think about this before rushing in mindlessly."

Astaroth sighed in relief after hearing those words. After all, knocking some sense in Ashton was nothing less than an achievement of a lifetime.

Thankfully, before Ashton could pitch any more of his rash ideas, the progenitors and his masters arrived to join him.

"These bastards... they even built an extractor?" Vulcan shrieked, wildly waving his warhammer. "I don't know if I should kill them for stealing the technology or for building it the wrong way!?"

"Try to relax, lord Vulcan," Flintmace mumbled while scratching his cheek.

Although it had been a while since the Xyrans had exiled Flintmace, he still had some attachment to them, and whenever Vulcan threw explicit at the Xyrans, Flintmace felt like one or two of them were directed his way as well.

[Grow up, they don't care about you, and you shouldn't care about them either.]

Astaroth reprimanded Flintmace, who awkwardly bowed towards Ashton, trying to ask for forgiveness from Astaroth. After all, nobody likes being reprimanded by their superiors for minor reasons.

"So what do we do now?" Frankenstein asked, his eyes darting between Ashton, Vulcan and Flintmace.

"We could try storming the mine and then torturing the Xyrans for information regarding Dracula," Lycaon suggested.

Everyone considered Lycaon's plan but ultimately decided against it. According to the reports, a Xyran Colonel inside the mine, who also happened to be the one leading the mining operation.

Since Ashton had fought against some Xyran soldier simulations, he knew first-hand how strong a colonel could be and didn't want to risk a confrontation if possible.

But if they were to capture and torture information out of the Xyrans, a confrontation with the colonel was inevitable.

"Since that colonel is deployed in this region, they could either be too weak and hence were sent to a distant sector like Ombra," Flintmace commented.

"Or they are so strong that the elder council wanted to eliminate him. I hope it's the former case, but who knows, it could be either."

Vulcan nodded in agreement. "You're right. We must proceed with caution. Storming the mine could lead to unnecessary bloodshed, and we need to prioritise finding Dracula and the others."

"But for that, we need more information," Ashton mumbled, but then an idea struck him. "I can do it."

"How?" all four of them asked him simultaneously.

Ashton smiled and brought out one of the Xyran's severed heads. He knew it would be helpful either for frightening the Xyrans or for fooling them, and he was correct.

"What are you planning-" Frankenstien began to say but was interrupted by Flintmace.

"You're planning to transform into a Xyran?" he said.

"That's exactly it," Ashton smiled, and suddenly his appearance changed.

Ashton's skin turned golden and black wings popped behind him, completing his transformation to appear an identical twin to the Xyran he had killed earlier.

The resemblance was uncanny, down to the smallest detail, leaving them in awe of Ashton's shapeshifting ability.

"Well, I must say, that's quite the talent," Frankenstein remarked, breaking the stunned silence.

"I must admit, it does have its advantages," Ashton chuckled, getting a feel for his new appearance. "I can slip past into the mine and gather information regarding Dracula, Irina and Verina."

"As good as you might look, it won't be enough to fool the Xyrans," Flintmace warned. "The Xyrans are cunning beings, and even the slightest inconsistency in your behaviour or appearance could raise suspicions; believe me, they don't take risks when that happens."

"I have already thought that much ahead," Ashton shrugged, pointing towards the severed head. "This will give me all the information I might need inside the mine or, better yet, get the Xyrans to rush out and allow us to look for Dracula ourselves."

Saying so, Ashton bit into the head and activated [Memory Reading]. The next moment, he found himself inside the Xyran's mind. His memories were now Ashton's to claim and use.

In an instant, Ashton found himself immersed in a whirlwind of images and thoughts. The Xyran's memories flooded his senses, revealing secrets, plans, and crucial information about the mine and its operations.

Ashton extracted valuable data from the Xyran's mind with each passing moment. He saw the layout of the mine, the security measures in place, and the roles of crucial Xyran figures within the operation. Every detail became crystal clear, as if he had lived it himself.

When he finally withdrew from the Xyran's mind, Ashton's eyes returned to their usual glow. He was still feeling a bit dizzy, but it was nowhere near the level he had felt before. It meant Ashton was slowly getting used to memory diving.

"Now there's only one thing left," Ashton softly mumbled, knowing he would regret saying what he was about to. "I need to look injured."

"Well, that can be arranged easily," Vulcan had an evil smile as he played with his warhammer. "Don't think I'm doing this out of malice, my dear apprentice~"

"At least try not to smile while saying that!"

Chapter 627 Rash Decision (3)

Two Xyran guards stood vigilant ahead of the entrance of the Xyran mine, their bright eyes scouring the surroundings for any signs of disturbance. While the hum of machines and the distant noises of labourers toiling echoed off the rigid, metal walls.

"Why bother being alert?" a third guard scoffed at the other two. "It's not like we have left anyone alive enough to fight us, haha!"

"Shut it, Strig." Mirku, one of the guards reprimanded him. "Not all of us have a daddy to care for our expenses. Besides, if the colonel learned we were slacking, he would chop our heads off. You know how he is!"

Mirku and the other guard, Jena, exchanged wary glances, well aware of the strict discipline imposed by their superiors.

Strig's careless attitude could lead to dire consequences for them only as Strig's family was well-renowned in the Xyran community. His parents would certainly cover for him in any mishap.



But the Mirku and Jena won't be extended the same courtesy. That's why they couldn't afford any slip-ups. Still, they couldn't deny the truth in Strig's words.

between caution and appearing loyal to their cause. "Did you forget It has been years since they took hold of the Ombra sector and none of them had ever faced any threats. Even if someone showed up there they would either be shot down before they enter Nefarion's atmosphere or they'll be apprehended like that one blood-sucking beast they did a while ago.

"That said, Mirku, what Strig said makes sense," Jena chimed in. "We already took out every single native species here. Those that we didn't are working for us, so where is the harm in relaxing a bit?"

"We may have taken control of this wretched place, but we mustn't underestimate the intruders," Mirku said, trying to strike a balance between caution and appearing loyal to their cause. "Did you forget the chaos those few bloodsuckers caused us?"

"Bloodsuckers, this! Bloodsuckers, that!" Strig rolled his eyes, dismissing his comrades' concerns. "Bah! You worry too much. Those intruders won't be able to get past our defences. We've got enough firepower to blow them to smithereens even before they land!"

"Yeah," Jena mumbled. "Just because they made it through once, doesn't mean they can do it again."

"Exactly! You're a Xyran. So behave like one, damn it!" Strig laughed, sipping on his drink.

Just as Strig continued his careless chatter, a sudden shuffling noise echoed from a pile of rubble nearby. The guards' attention snapped to the source, and they cautiously approached with their energy blasters at the ready.

"What was that?" Mirku whispered, his hand trembling slightly.

Before any of them could react, a figure emerged from the shadows – a Xyran guard, or so they thought. The guard stumbled towards them and fell head first on the ground.

His appearance was bruised and battered, and his armband glowed erratically, indicating that he was injured and had been missing for a few hours.

As Strig, Mirku, and Jena came rushing towards him, Ashton smile inwardly but acted the part well, pretending to be disoriented and weak to even look at them.

"What happened to you?" Strig asked, his suspicion giving way to concern. "What the hell happened to you?"

"Talk about asking the wrong questions," Mirku rolled his eyes and pointed his weapon at Ashton. "Which team do you belong and what's your designation?"

"Private, J. J. Jikem..." Ashton weakly mumbled, showing them the imprint on his forearm that signifies his rank. "Expedition team beta/99..."

"Shit, what happened to you and where's the rest of your team?" Jena asked while reaching for his first-aid kit.

Ashton groaned in pain, clutching his side. "I was ambushed by intruders... dozens of them! They're in the central plaza!"

Mirku and the other guard exchanged alarmed glances, their eyes narrowing with determination.

"Intruders? How did they get in?" Strig inquired while looking around to check if the man was followed by the enemy. "and what about the rest of your squad?"

"I-I don't know," Ashton stammered, acting as if he could barely stand. "They caught us off guard and started attacking. They've already killed everyone in there! I barely escaped during the massacre to inform the colonel about the attack..."

The guards exchanged uneasy glances, unsure of the best course of action. Strig's eyes flashed with fear. His family hadn't pulled so many strings for him to get him an easy deployment, for him to die like that.

He didn't care what happened to the rest, but he knew he had to get to safety first. However, Jena and Mirku had other plans.

"We need to warn the others and take them down!" Jena exclaimed.

"No!" Ashton interjected, trying to sound panicked. "There are too many of them and they're incredibly powerful! We need to get reinforcements first!"

Mirku hesitated, torn between caution and the fear of being branded a coward. Strig's impatience got the better of him, and he made a snap decision.

"I'll stay here and get the injured to safety. You two head out and check if we're safe." Strig feigned being concerned about them when he was only concerned about himself. "Central Plaza is a vital area for... something, I can't remember what, but we cannot let intruders compromise it."

"Fuck... ok!" Mirku took a deep breath. "We'll do that, just make sure to inform the Colonel about this!"

"Right, go now!" Strig yelled, pushing the two soldiers away.

Ashton nodded, pretending to be too weak to argue.

"Be careful," he whispered hoarsely. "They're not like anything we've encountered before."

Jena and Mirku rushed towards the Library, leaving Ashton in Strig's care. As soon as they were out of sight, Strig lifted Ashton up and began dragging him towards the camp around the mines.

His plan was to drop the injured guy there and inform the colonel about the situation before making a break for it. Though he will get reprimanded for his selfish decision, he knew his parents would be able to keep the mess at bay... like they always had.

"Come on, up you go," Strig mumbled before throwing his arm over the shoulder.

"Thanks..." Ashton replied.

"No need, for thanks. We're comrades, it is my duty to help you..."

Strig replied, trying to be overly sweet to the guy so that he could be used as a character witness during his trial for abandoning his duties and fleeing.

'As long as I have a witness for my chivalry, the punishment wouldn't be so harsh...' Strig thought to himself. 'Although helping someone like the bastard isn't what I'd normally do, I have to tolerate it for a while.'

"It seems you misunderstood me," Ashton whispered, suddenly yanking his hand off Strig's shoulder. "I was thanking you for your sacrifice."

Strig was confused, was the man beaten so much that he began hallucinating or something? But before he could put his thoughts into words, he felt a sharp pain in his neck.

In the blink of an eye, Ashton's true form reappeared, and he sank his fangs into Strig's nape. The unsuspecting soldier could only watch in shock as Ashton drained him of his blood, his life fading away.

With Strig's lifeless body now lying on the ground, Ashton wiped the remnants of blood from his mouth and stood there, a cold and emotionless expression on his face.

"Damn, you were one hell of a backstabbing bastard!" Ashton mocked Strig as his lifeless form hit the ground. "To think you were planning on running away first and foremost. Well, at least I don't feel guilty about killing you anymore."

[Get moving fast. You can save your dialogues for some other time.]

"Right..."

Saying so, Ashton transformed once again, but this time he took Strig's form before kicking Strig's corpse into Valhalla for the skeletons to feast on. Once he was done, he headed straight for the mines where his next target, the colonel, was waiting.

"I hope they take the bait," he muttered to himself. "Now, to find Dracula, Irina, and Verina."

Moving swiftly and silently, Ashton ventured deeper into the mine. He relied on his vampiric abilities to evade detection, silently navigating the twisted tunnels and avoiding any Xyrans that crossed his path.

Strig, as Ashton had observed in his memories, was not well-liked among his peers. This worked to Ashton's advantage, allowing him to move through the mine without unnecessary interactions or suspicion.

"Time to give the colonel a taste of betrayal," Ashton murmured, his voice characteristically cold. "But first, gotta infiltrate into the surveillance room. They ought to have information or recording relating to Dracula."

Ashton eventually reached the surveillance room. The door was sealed with an intricate lock, but Ashton's nimble fingers made quick work of it. He slipped inside, the room bathed in the soft glow of the surveillance screens.

The sight before him was overwhelming - countless monitors displayed live feeds from various sections of the mine. Ashton knew he had limited time before the guards could discover his intrusion, so he focused on locating any information related to Dracula, Irina, and Verina.

"There it is..."

Chapter 628 Rash Decision (4)

Ashton's heart pounded in his chest as he scanned the surveillance room, his eyes darting over the screens, searching for any information that could lead him to Dracula and the twins. He had to find them before the Xyrans noticed his presence.

"This is it!"

His eyes caught a glimpse of a file labelled "High-Security Prisoners." He quickly opened it with hope and found detailed profiles of Dracula's granddaughters.

Although there was no mention of Dracula, finding information about Irina and Verina was good enough.

"Where are they... come on, show me..." Ashton mumbled as he quickly went through the pages. "Got it!"

According to the files, their last known location was inside the mine. Ashton quickly took a pic of the mine's map and where Irina and Verina were most likely being held... right across the Colonel's office.

"Looks like I'll have to deal with him either way."

[Try not to. If Stealth is a possibility, you should go for it.]

"Fine... I'll see what I can do."

Just as Ashton was about to move, he heard the faint sound of footsteps approaching the room.

"Fuck!"



He knew he had little time before the guards discovered him. Thinking quickly, he slipped into the shadows behind the stacks of computers and other electronics. Thankfully, since he was in his vampire form, he didn't have to worry about holding his breath.

Moments later, the door creaked open, and two Xyran soldiers entered the room. Ashton's heart raced, and he prayed they wouldn't spot him. The Xyrans were known for their keen sense; any wrong move could blow his cover.

[At least they are low-ranking Grunts. You should be able to take them down if push comes to shove.]

'Thanks for your confidence... But even if they are Grunts, I'd rather not engage them and risk alerting the rest of the Xyrans.'

[You do you.]

"Something doesn't feel right," one of the guards muttered, glancing around the room.

Ashton's eye darted in the Grunt's direction. He knew he had to act fast. With a silent leap, he used his agility to climb onto the ceiling, clinging to the metal beams like a shadow.

But he knew the Grunts very well. They could tell someone was inside the room because of their sense of smell. It also meant that they knew Ashton was still inside the room.

The guards exchanged uneasy glances, sensing that something was amiss. Without wasting any time, one of the guards reached for his radio to alert the Colonel about the intrusion. Ashton knew he couldn't let that happen, no matter what.

If the Colonel arrived there, it might be game over for their 'secret' operation, and they might never learn Dracula's whereabouts.

'Here goes nothing!'

Ashton dropped from the ceiling in a swift and silent move, landing behind the guard with the radio. Before the guard could react, Ashton delivered a decisive blow to the back of his head, knocking him unconscious.

"What was that?" The remaining guard spun around, his eyes wide with shock and fear. "Who are you!? How did you get in?"

"Shut it! Does it look like I'm here to answer your questions?"

"You..."

Ashton met his gaze with an intimidating grin, his fangs glinting in the dim light. The Xyran soldier raised his weapon, but Ashton was quicker and disarmed the guard swiftly.

The guard lunged forward, delivering a swift kick towards Ashton's midsection. But Ashton was ready. With lightning-fast reflexes, he sidestepped the attack and countered with a powerful roundhouse kick of his own.

The guard blocked the strike just in time, but the force behind the impact caused him to stagger backwards.

Ashton wasted no time, pressing his advantage. He unleashed a series of rapid punches and kicks, aiming for the guard's vulnerable spots. But the guard proved himself as a formidable opponent, deftly blocking each blow and countering with his own strikes.

Their movements were like a blur, the sound of fists and feet connecting filling the chamber. Ashton's vampire-enhanced strength and speed gave him an edge, but the Xyran guard was skilled and relentless.

Ashton ducked under a high kick and swept the guard's legs from under him. The guard landed hard on the ground but quickly rolled to his feet.

"You're good; I'll give you that." Ashton smiled before getting into position again.

"I don't desire to be praised by your lowly kind." The Grunt snarled back.

"My lowly kind?" Ashton scoffed. "Bitch, your kind is like cochegas living under the feet of the Xyrans!"  
(Note: Cochegas = Space Cockroaches.)

"You..."

The guard aimed a roundhouse kick at Ashton's head, but Ashton blocked it with his forearm, feeling the impact reverberate through his bones. Had it not been for the stimulated fights he had gone through, he would have been no match for the Grunt.

Regardless, Ashton retaliated with a spinning back kick, catching the guard off guard and sending him sprawling backwards.

But the guard was far from defeated. He sprang back to his feet, his eyes burning with intensity. It appeared the more Ashton fought him, the better his opponent got.

Without wasting time, the Grunt launched a flurry of punches at Ashton, who expertly weaved and dodged each strike.

Ashton saw an opportunity and seized it. He feinted to the left, then quickly changed direction, delivering a powerful knee strike to the guard's abdomen.

The guard gasped in pain, and Ashton followed up with a devastating uppercut that sent him flying backwards.

The guard crashed into a nearby wall, the force of the impact causing the stone to crack. But to Ashton's surprise, the guard rose once more, his determination unshaken.

"Man, I was joking when I called you a cochega, but damn! You're just as resilient as one!"

"Shut up!" the Grunt roared in fury.

With a feral growl, the Grunt charged at Ashton, his movements becoming more aggressive and unpredictable. Ashton knew he had to end the fight quickly before the guard could mount a comeback.

[Skill: Irreverence has been activated. The User will now deal <True Damage> for 30 seconds. User's <Extra HP> will be consumed for the skill's duration.]

"I would've loved to play with you more, but I got to go," Ashton mumbled as he got in position to deliver his final attack.

With a sudden burst of energy, Ashton launched himself at the Grunt, delivering a powerful flying kick that knocked the grunt off his feet. He followed up with rapid strikes, each blow landing with pinpoint accuracy.

The grunt struggled to defend himself, his movements becoming slower and more laboured. Ashton saw his opening and unleashed a devastating spinning back kick, sending the grunt crashing to the ground, unconscious.

"Remind me... not to use this skill... so lightly ever again!"

Ashton stood over his fallen opponent, his chest heaving with exertion. [Irreverence] was a great skill, but the price for using it was pretty high and left the User exhausted.

[You're the one who wanted to finish the fight quickly.]

"Yeah, yeah... I know. I need to make up for the lost blood."

Thankfully, Ashton had a way of restoring his HP as he bit into the grunts and sucked them dry, not leaving a single drop of blood within them. He then proceeded to throw their corpses inside [Valhalla].

Chapter 629 Rash Decision (5)

Ashton ventured slowly through the Xyran mine's dimly lit halls, and his footsteps were silenced by the dust and debris on the floor.

He tried remaining in the shadows, using his skills to blend in with the darkness and his heightened senses to stay undetected. His keen eyes swept every nook and crevice, looking for any trace of Irina and Verina.

A gentle voice crackled through his radio just as he was about to walk inside another tunnel. It was a message from Lycaon.

"Good news, we caught the two Xyrans you sent our way," Lycaon said. His breathing was uneven, probably because of his encounter with the Xyrans.

"Great, keep them restrained. Do not kill them until necessary," Ashton replied. "We can use them as hostages if things go south."

"That's exactly what I was thinking," Frank's voice echoed through the radio. "What about the twins?"

"I have a rough idea where they are," Ashton mumbled while passing through a few miners. "I'm heading there at the moment. That reminds me--"

Ashton was about to ask about Vulcan and Flintmace, as they'd have a crucial role to play if things went south. But his masters beat him to it as another voice joined their conversation.

"Don't worry, Ashton. We're right here," Flintmace informed them while Vulcan's grumble could be heard in the background. "It seems you're doing a great job inside. I don't see any irregular movement among the Xyrans."

"Roger that," Ashton said, immediately disconnecting the call, fearing the Xyrans might detect the radio signals and get alert. "This would have been much easier if only I could use the summons..."

It took him a long time to get to where the twins were being kept, but then he ran into another problem, guards had surrounded the entire area.

While it proved something valuable inside, Ashton wondered if his disguise would work there, as it was highly unlikely that someone like Strig would have clearance to enter such a place.

However, before Ashton had the opportunity to act, he sensed someone approaching him. The thought of fleeing entered his mind, but it was too late as the figure was now standing right behind him.

"Private Strig," the Xyran's voice threw Ashton off as the squeaky voice did not match the silhouette before him. "What are you doing here?"

Ashton cursed under his breath before slowly turning to face the Xyran. Once again, Ashton was glad he wasn't walking around the mine in his zompiewolf form, as his raging heartbeat would have certainly alerted the Xyran before him.

But the surprises weren't over yet, because the Xyran calling him was none other than the 'Colonel' himself. At least, that's what Ashton learned from Strig's memories.

"Yes, Colonel?" Ashton replied, trying his best to mimic Strig's smug and confident tone.

"I need to speak with you in my office. Immediately," Colonel ordered, his piercing eyes locked onto Ashton.

Ashton's mind raced as he followed the Colonel to his office. He knew a colonel calling a private into the office wouldn't be for a good reason. He also knew that one wrong move could expose him, and the consequences could be dire.

[I can't believe this jerk is still alive...]



'Wait, you know him?'

[I don't, but I have heard a lot about him. The guy's name is Rikk, and he was a brat through and through. Just like you.]

'...could we please keep our discussions strictly to the guy?'

[Right, so... what should I say? He was a great soldier. Followed orders to the T. A Xyran of his word... until it came to his private life. The bastard was born to Xyran aristocracy, back when it wasn't abolished, and was spoiled beyond limits-]

'How is he like me then? Either way, could you cut to the chase? I would rather know everything about him before~ I have to enter the office here.'

[...he fell for a succubus and destroyed everything he stood for. Worse of all, the succubus turned out to be a spy planted by an anti-elitist organisation. You see where this is going, right?]

'Rikk got his ass kicked out of the Xyran community?'

[Yup. His family disowned him and everything... that's why seeing him here surprises me even more. After all, once someone is exiled from our community, they happen to be exiled for good.]

'Things do seem suspicious.'

Ashton knew Astaroth wouldn't lie to him about someone like Rikk, but if he were to believe his counterpart, it would be impossible for Rikk to have a post as high as a colonel.

They entered the Colonel's office, a dimly lit room with holographic maps and charts covering the walls. Ashton took a deep breath, trying to steady his nerves.

"What is it, Colonel?" Ashton asked, trying to sound casual.

Rikk studied him briefly before speaking, "I have considered the proposition tossed by your father. Since they have helped me in the past, it is only proper that I repay their favour."

Ashton looked puzzled as he studied Rikk's face. Rikk also saw Strig's expression and decided to elaborate on the situation. Tossing a map in Ashton's direction, Rikk continued.

"You are, at this moment, being promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal, effective immediately," Rikk informed Ashton with a straight face. "Now, before you start celebrating, there's a little mission you'll have to complete."

"I'd do anything, with or without the promotion, sir!" Ashton acted his part, but even he could see Rikk was somewhat surprised by his enthusiasm.

"Ahem, so where was I?" Rikk mumbled, pointing at the holographic map. "Ah, right. Take a look here. We've received intel that some mysterious things have been happening in the nearby sector.

"I want you to gather a team, head there within two hours, and have a report ready by tomorrow. That'll be all."

Without wasn't any time, Ashton took the map and left. Why? Because the area Rikk had pointed to was where Ashton and company had hidden their spaceship. If anyone went looking for anomalies there, they would discover the ship and the ones aboard.

[Forget that you only have a couple of hours to save the twins and run. Or they'll find out about the intruder, aka, you!]

'I know! But first, tell me... how strong is Rikk?'

[He should be somewhere between level 301 and 350... and I don't like what you're thinking!]

"Does it look like I care? But let's save the twins first," Ashton mumbled and rushed towards the cells without a second thought while radioing Flintmace. "My beloved masters, it's time."

The very next moment, there was a massive explosion outside, shaking the mine. It was time to either make it or break it.

Chapter 630 Festival Of Blood (1)

Panic erupted in the mine as a noisy explosion rocked the vicinity outdoors. The ground shook, sending shock waves through the roads. The miners and Xyran guards panicked, their screams and screams heating up into a chaotic chorus of terror.

The once orderly operation descended into chaos as miners and guards scrambled for cover. Tools rattled on the ground, and the air was thick with dirt and dust. The emergency alarm sounded, adding to the noise that stuffed the mine.

Xyrans guards hurriedly assessed the situation, their shouted orders barely audible in the chaos. They called for calm, for patience, trying to repair order to the fearful people. But the blast shattered any semblance of recurring, and panic had unfolded like wildfire.

The abnormal mechanisms in the blast groaned and rumbled as they trembled below the effect of the explosion. Instead of a consistent hum of activity, the blare of alarms created an ominous feeling of urgency in the air.

Faces of surprise and confusion rose as the miner helped the injured in the attack. Most of the injuries they had received were due to the Xyrans trying to beat them into submission. But they would never reveal so in the reports.

But most of all, everyone, from the Xyrans to the overworked miners, had a look of disbelief on their faces. After all, not many species could dare bomb a Xyran establishment, regardless of how small the operation was.

However, one thing was clear. Whoever was behind the attacks knew what they were doing as the blast left a trail of destruction in the form of cracks in partitions and unstable buildings.

As such, everyone from soldiers to non-combatants would be forced to stay outside as the unstable structures could kill anyone who wasn't levelled up enough to survive a building collapse.

It meant... the Xyrans were turned into sitting ducks, waiting to be hunted by the mysterious assailants.

As the dust settled, a moment of severe silence replaced the noise. But it didn't last long, as another explosion went off soon after the first one subsided.

Meanwhile, inside the deepest section of the mines, Ashton rushed towards the sector where Irina and Verina were being held. The chaos around him was the key to getting the twins out.

"Damn it! I told them to keep the use of explosives to a minimum!" Ashton cursed under his breath as he pushed through the dust and gravel.

[Hey, be happy that your plan is actually working for once.]

"And you just had to jinx it, didn't you? I wouldn't be surprised if the Xyrans killed you because you kept jinxing everything around you!"

[Oh, come on! It's not that big of a deal.]

Ignoring Astaroth for the rest of the way, Ashton soon stood before the makeshift prison. The doors were wide open, and it seemed like the guards were removing the prisoners... Irina and Verina.

At first, Ashton was happy to see them, but when he saw their state... rage took over. Their once radiant and assertive forms were now reduced to shadows of their former selves, battered and bruised.

Irina's usually fierce and determined expression was replaced with one of exhaustion and pain. Her white hair was matted with blood, and her body bore the marks of countless beatings. Her once vibrant eyes, which held an air of regal authority, now had a haunting emptiness.

As for Verina, she looked equally ravaged. Chunks of hair were missing from her head, and her ashen skin had turned red and soaked with blood.

Her bony arms were proof they had not been fed properly for days, if not weeks. They were so weak they could barely keep their heads up for more than ten seconds.

Ashton's fists clenched at his sides, his nails digging into his palms as he struggled to contain his anger. He knew he had to maintain his composure for the sake of the mission... but what he saw next made him snap.

One of the Xyrans grabbed Irina by her hair and slammed her onto the ground before ripping off her lousy clothes. The other guards saw it all and kept laughing while a few of them warned the others to keep moving.

[Ashton... don't! This is not the time- ASHTON!]

\*\*\*

"Lucha, this isn't the time to-," one of the guards tried stopping the others but was pushed back.

"Stay out of this, Kio," the guard who had ripped Irina's clothes smiled smugly. "The Colonel wouldn't know what I did, especially in this chaos. Besides, you all can keep yourselves with the other bloodsucker-"

No one knew what happened next, but Lucha's mouth disappeared into thin air as blood spurted out of his face. Before the guards knew what was happening, a hand punched through Lucha's chest, ripping his heart out before crushing it.

"What the-"

The guards turned around to see Strig was the one that attacked Lucha. However, the scene only confused them even more. The guards kept staring at Strig, wondering whether he was always this strong. But even if he was, why would he attack and kill one of their own?

The guards might have been confused, but Ashton wasn't. His crimson eyes were burning with rage as he revealed himself. The Guards were shocked, not knowing what was happening, but they knew there was an intruder whom they needed to deal with.

One of the guards swung his baton, but Ashton expertly dodged the strike and countered with a brutal kick to the guard's abdomen.

His kick turned the guard's insides into a mess, and he crumpled to the ground... before Ashton stomped on his head, turning it into a gooey mix of blood, flesh and bones.

Ignoring the fear-stricken guards, Ashton moved towards Irina. His gaze softened as he approached her, his heart aching at her vulnerability.

Without hesitation, he swiftly removed his shirt, carefully putting it around her to shield her from the prying eyes of the guards.

"I'm sorry I was late..." Ashton said.

Despite his efforts, he couldn't even look her in the eyes. But Irina grasped his face with her bony arms and smiled.

Finally, Irina's tear-filled eyes met his, a mixture of gratitude, exhaustion, and love reflected in her gaze. Her voice was barely a whisper, too weak to form words, but her eyes spoke volumes as Ashton patted her head.

"Could you wait for a moment? I promise this won't take long." Ashton mumbled, and Irina nodded.

The peaceful moment only lasted a second, because as soon as Ashton got back to his feet, his bloodlust returned... far more fierce than before.



"Now then... which one of you bastards wants to die next?"