

Zompiewolf 631

Chapter 631 Festival Of Blood (2)

"No volunteers?" Ashton mocked the six guards before him. "And here I thought going against Xyrans was asking for death. But can cowards like you even kill a roach?"

"You... fuck get ready!" one of the xyrans yelled. "We'll end this bastard right here and now!"

Amidst the chaos and flickering lights of the mine, the only thing Xyrans registered was Ashton's emotionless face. The Xyrans underwent extensive training and protocols, unlike the humanoid creature before them.

However, even if all their heightened sense and reflexes, the Xyrans were still hesitant when it came to engaging the intruder. But since Ashton's words had hurt their pride, they couldn't stay idle and do nothing about it.

The air crackled with tension as the remaining Xyrans encircled Ashton, cutting off his escape path. Fear and a determination to prove their worth could be seen in their eyes, but all of it wouldn't account for much against someone like Ashton.

The first Xyran lunged at Ashton with a plasma blade, the crackling energy leaving fiery trails in the air. Ashton sidestepped the strike with fluid grace, his fingers closing around the guard's wrist.

"Too easy."

With a swift twist, Ashton disarmed the Xyran and delivered a crushing blow to his throat. The Xyran gurgled and collapsed to the ground, clutching his injured windpipe, and soon the Xyran choked on his blood... dying of suffocation.

Regardless of the outcome, another guard attacked Ashton, swinging an electric baton with brute force. Ashton deflected the blow with his forearm and retaliated with a powerful kick to the guard's midsection.

The guard stumbled back, wheezing, as Ashton followed up with a series of lightning-fast strikes that left the guard crumpled on the floor, covered in his blood as Ashton's claws tore flesh from the Xyran's bones.

A third Xyran attempted a sneak attack from the side, but Ashton's acute senses detected the danger. He spun around, his elbow connecting with the Xyran's jaw. The force of the impact sent the guard crashing into a nearby wall, his body leaving a dent in the metallic gate.

But Ashton wasn't done with him yet as he materialised before him, tearing his arms before using them as spikes to impale the Xyran and pin him to the door... waiting for him to die from excessive bleeding.

The remaining Xyrans were overcome with fear. They knew they stood no chance against the human or whoever he was.

But they also knew retreating wasn't an option because that would only make the man hunt them down. The Xyrans would rather die as warriors rather than as cowards.

"Fuck! Let's attack him together. It's our only chance!" a Xyran yelled as they all charged against Ashton.

The remaining Xyrans closed in, their movements synchronised as they launched a coordinated assault.

Ashton's movements were a whirlwind of evasion and counterattacks, his fists and feet striking with bone-crushing intensity. He ducked, weaved, and dodged, his body a blur of motion as he expertly parried their strikes and delivered punishing blows.

Blood spattered on the cold, metallic floor as Ashton's fists connected with Xyrans' flesh and bone. Although Ashton's knuckles were raw and bruised, he didn't stop and kept attacking the Xyrans, making quick work of their high-end armours.

Ashton's knuckles soon turned crimson, just like his eyes. But the guards fought back with a ferocity of their own, their plasma weapons and batons flashing through the air, threatening to end Ashton's violent streak.

Surprisingly, the Xyrans soon began pushing Ashton back. Their Synchronised moves were finally showing the effect as Ashton's move slowly grew dull.

Amidst the pushback, Ashton's eyes moved to Irina and Verina; their weakened forms were huddled together, looking up at him. With a fierce growl, he redoubled his efforts, his attacks becoming even more brutal and unrelenting.

A guard managed to graze Ashton's arm with a plasma blade, the searing pain only fueling his rage. With a guttural roar, he launched himself at the guard, his fists striking like hammers. Blow after blow rained down upon the guard until he crumpled to the ground in a motionless heap.

Only two guards remained, their faces filled with desperation and fear. As Ashton advanced, his eyes locked onto his opponents. He deftly sidestepped a lunge from one guard and delivered a swift kick to his knee, causing him to collapse.

The final guard swung his baton wildly, hoping one of the strikes would connect eventually. But Ashton's movements were calculated and precise. He blocked the strikes with his forearms and retaliated with a barrage of strikes that left the guard staggered.

Ashton's final blow sent the last guard crashing into a control panel, sparks flying as the panel short-circuited. The guard slumped to the ground, defeated and broken... but alive, unlike his counterparts.

Breathing heavily, Ashton turned his attention to Irina and Verina. He could see the toll the Xyran imprisonment had taken over them.

Thankfully, Ashton knew exactly how to make the situation better. He seized the barely alive Xyran guard and threw him towards the twins.

"Drink," Ashton's voice was hoarse but commanding. "You'll feel better."

Irina and Verina hesitated momentarily, their eyes locked onto the bloodied and battered guard. They were indeed weak, and the only way for vampires to regain strength was blood. However, they didn't know if Xyran blood would work on them.

But the primal thirst within them overcame their reluctance, and they descended upon the guard like vengeful angels of death. The sound of their ravenous feeding drowned the guard's feeble cries.

As they drank, a surge of energy flowed through Irina and Verina, their bodies visibly rejuvenated.

Ashton watched them, shrouded with relief and satisfaction, knowing he had bought them a moment of respite in their dire circumstances and happy that they were safe.

However, the respite could only last for so long, as a moment later, Ashton was sent flying into the mine's ragged walls. Verina and Irina hissed and attacked the Xyran before them, but they fell to their knees as soon as the Xyran released his powerful aura.

"I'll deal with you two later," Rikk's voice echoed in the empty hall. "The other bastard comes first."

Chapter 632 Curing Superiority Complex (1)

<Skill: Revenge Strike has been activated.>

Rikk's attention was on the twins when suddenly, a blur caught his peripheral vision. However, it was too late. Before he could react, Ashton's lightning-fast strike connected to Rikk's lower jaw, sending him hurtling through the air, much like Ashton had been earlier.

But unlike Ashton, Rikk's impact with the mine's wall didn't halt abruptly; instead, he crashed through it and vanished from sight, crashing through several walls.

Despite the deadliness of his attack, Ashton knew someone like Rikk would have barely been affected by it. The only reason he had pulled a hasty manoeuvre like that was to create some space between him and the colonel so that he could get the twins to safety.

"Sven, Celeste, Atlas!"

As Ashton called their names, the summons immediately appeared out of the darkness, eager to execute his orders.

"Escort the girls safely to Lycaon and Frank," he instructed, his grip tightening around the Reaper's scythe. "Should you encounter Vulcan or Flintmace, inform them that the black protocol is now in effect."

Despite Ashton's command, they refused to move, their attention drawn to the breach in the wall nearby. Rikk's overwhelming aura was leaking through, conveying the imminent threat he posed. The summons sensed their master's peril and couldn't ignore it.

"What are you waiting for?" Atlas asked his fellow summon. "Our dull-headed master isn't weak enough to lose to the kind of those. Just do what he asked us to and get going!"

Saying so, Atlas lifted the twins on his shoulders and made a break for the outside. Sven and Celeste, on the other hand, kept staring at their master as if they knew the danger he was about to face.

"I appreciate your concerns, but now isn't the time," Ashton urged them toward the exit. "Just follow my instructions. Go, now!"

"...as you wish, master," Sven replied as he grabbed Celeste's wrist, still unwilling to leave Ashton and ran towards the exit.

"Even they realise the danger, huh?"

[They did, and probably better than you.]

"...if we're talking on a scale from 1 to 10, how fucked am I in this situation?"

[An 11 seems accurate.]

"An eleven, huh... I can work with that."

As Ashton said, he realised the time for playing as a vampire or a werewolf was over. He needed to get serious, or it would be his final fight. With that in mind, Ashton immediately turned into his zompiewolf form. After all, he would need to put everything he had to win against the Xyran.

Amid his transformation, Rikk emerged from the breach without a scratch on his body.

"That attack of yours was unexpectedly strong," Rikk mumbled, flexing his neck. "It almost broke through my skin. Now then... tell me, who are you?"

"Do I have to tell you that?" Ashton shrugged, trying to act nonchalant.

"I'd be happy if you did," Rikk replied, taking a fighting stance. "But dragging the answer out of your bloodied corpse will be more fun."

With that, Rikk darted towards Ashton, moving around him and throwing punches whenever possible. His strikes were calculated, each aimed to exploit weaknesses in Ashton's defence.

But Ashton's agility surprised Rikk. Ashton lunged forward, his scythe slicing through the air. Rikk effortlessly evaded the swing by jumping over Ashton.

As he landed behind Ashton, delivering a powerful kick to his back. Ashton staggered forward, his fur bristling with the impact.

"Impressive," Rikk said once he was back on his legs. "It feels like you have undergone special training to fight Xyrans... how strange is that? Now you have got all my attention on you."

Growling, Ashton retaliated, his claws swiping at Rikk. But Rikk sidestepped with surprising agility, avoiding the attack yet again.

Rikk then countered Ashton with a rapid flurry of punches and kicks; his attacks found their mark, further pushing Ashton back. Despite his supernatural strength and agility, Ashton struggled to keep up with Rikk's lightning-fast strikes.

Having no other way, Ashton decided to use his scythe's phasing ability. As Rikk lunged with a punch, his fist connected with nothing but air, and he stumbled forward in surprise.

Ashton finally got the opportunity he had been waiting for and delivered a roundhouse kick right into Rikk's face. The kick connected, and blood drizzled from where Ashton's kick had landed.

"You are full of surprises..." Rikk smiled, wiping the blood off his face. "Time to get serious."

Rikk charged once again at Ashton, but this time things were different. The Xyran had changed his approach, aiming to overwhelm Ashton with a relentless barrage of attacks. He closed the distance between them with surprising ease, his strikes coming from all directions.

Ashton phased through a few attacks and countered some, but Rikk's speed and precision made it difficult to predict his movements. A punch grazed Ashton's side, followed by a knee to his abdomen. Ashton grunted in pain, his grip on the scythe faltering.

Rikk saw his advantage and seized it. He launched a powerful spinning kick, catching Ashton off guard. The blow landed squarely on Ashton's chest, sending him crashing. The scythe slipped from his grasp, skidding across the floor.

"Is that it?" Rikk mocked Ashton. "I expected more from you, but then again, someone with as filthy a species as yours will never be able to match the strength of a true Xyran."

"Haha, you're not the first Xyran I have fought and won against who had a superiority complex," Ashton scoffed, blood gushing out of his mouth. "And nor will you be the last."

"You sure have a big mouth for someone licking dust off the ground," Rikk said as his smile faded. "Dogs like you should go around barking at others."

Rikk kicked Ashton without any warning, connecting with Ashton's side. The force of the kick sent Ashton sprawling once again, his body crashing against the ground.

"You're nothing but a pathetic excuse of a living being," Rikk sneered, his eyes shining with sadistic pleasure.

He raised his foot again, ready to deliver another humiliating blow. But this time, Ashton caught it before breaking the leg. It was Rikk's turn to feel some pain.

Chapter 633 Curing Superiority Complex (2)

The unexpected counterattack caught Rikk off guard, and his sneer was quickly replaced by a scowl of pain. Ashton didn't waste a moment and got back to his feet.

Ashton's defiant grin remained, despite the blood oozing from his wounds. He knew he could always recover his lost blood later, but Ashton couldn't the opportunity to smile at the Xyran, knowing his smile was like poison to the member of the 'superior' species.

Quick as lightning, Ashton lunged forward, his fists a blur as he delivered a series of punches aimed at Rikk's midsection. Rikk's defensive manoeuvres were less refined now, his movements hampered by the injury to his leg. But even then, he persevered, trading blow for blow.

"Should I say we are on equal 'footing' now?" Ashton smirked as another one of his punches landed on Rikk's face.

Rikk's face twisted into a snarl as he countered Ashton's assault with a powerful knee strike, catching Ashton off guard as he didn't expect Rikk to lean on his broken leg, but he did and barely flinched.

"You talk too much," Rikk retorted, spitting out a mouthful of blood. "Your cheap tricks can only get you so far against centuries of experience."

The blow landed with a sickening thud, and Ashton grunted in pain as the impact sent shockwaves through his body. But Ashton quickly recovered, using the momentum from the strike to propel himself backwards and regain his footing.

[Centuries worth of experience, my ass! This fucker always slept through the exercises!]

'But he is strong... there's no denying that.'

[I guess it's time to switch strategies.]

'He doesn't like cheap tricks, so we'll use an elegant one. Do you remember anything about him that I can use against him?'

[Let me think... ah, right, he has a short fuse. Like most of the Xyrans.]

'Well, that's something I can work with.'

The two warriors clashed once again, their movements a blur of strikes and dodges. Ashton's instincts guided him as he expertly manoeuvred around Rikk's attacks.

His movements were calculated and precise, exploiting gaps in Rikk's defence and delivering punishing blows whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Rikk, however, was no pushover. He showcased his own mastery of combat skills, his strikes coming from unexpected angles and forcing Ashton to remain on his guard.

Being complacent meant getting his ass handed to him, and Ashton wasn't a fan of anyone but Anna touching his butt.

Regardless of his personal preferences, their dance of combat continued, each exchange growing more intense as they pushed their limits.

Ashton knew he needed an edge, something that would turn the tide in his favour., and it was then a plan formed in his mind.

Flintmace had taught him an important lesson. If one can't win a fight solely on your strength, then one has to use his surroundings to his advantage. And that's precisely what Ashton was planning to do.

Suddenly, while attacking Rikk, Ashton began missing his target. Funnily enough, something similar happened with Rikk as the punches intended for Ashton started hitting the walls behind him.

Ashton carefully manipulated Rikk's movements, subtly steering him towards certain areas of the mine. Moreover, he provoked Rikk, goading him into launching attacks that caused vibrations and stress on the already unstable structures.

"Stop fidgeting, you bastard!" Rikk cursed in anger as his attacks kept missing.

"Tsk tsk tsk, the great Xyran needs his opponent to stand still just to finish him off," Ashton clicked his tongue, mocking Rikk. "How sad can you be?"

"You..."

Rikk's attacks grew more aggressive, his frustration evident as Ashton cunningly guided him into digging his own grave. Soon the mine's walls creaked and groaned under the strain, and Ashton seized the opportunity.

He expertly dodged one of Rikk's powerful strikes, causing Rikk to crash into a weakened support pillar. The pillar cracked under the impact, a crack that spread across the section of the mine where Rikk was standing.

"Watch your step," Ashton taunted, a wicked glint in his eyes. "Wouldn't want the ceiling to crumble over you."

Rikk's eyes narrowed in suspicion, but it was too late. Ashton had already manipulated him into striking another vulnerable point. All it needed was a slight push, and Ashton graciously offered that push with the help of his scythe lying under his feet.

With a loud noise, the mine's walls began to collapse, rocks and dust filling the air as chaos erupted around them.

Rikk tried running out of the danger zone, but Ashton summoned a massive wave of skeletons to keep Rikk rooted to his spot.

Meanwhile, Ashton used the distraction to his advantage, swiftly moving out of the collapsing area and taking cover behind a large rock.

He watched as the mine crumbled, burying Rikk under a mountain of rubble. Ashton's heart raced, his breathing unsteady as he surveyed the destruction he had barely escaped.

The dust began to settle, revealing the aftermath of the collapse. Rikk's muffled shouts could be heard from beneath the debris, his attempts to free himself futile as there were skeletons with him, holding him down.

Ashton's lips curled into a triumphant smile as he realised his plan had succeeded. Rikk was trapped; his superiority and sadistic pleasure were now nothing more than echoes in the darkness.

[Tsk, the bastard didn't die.]

"It wasn't my plan to kill him," Ashton mumbled with a villainous grin. "I just wanted to trap him so that he wouldn't be able to escape from what's about to happen next."

[Eh?]

Ashton didn't bother quelling Astaroth's confusion as he walked up to the debris and slowly began clearing it until just Rikk's face was visible.

"My, my, looks like the tables have turned," Ashton muttered, mocking Rikk again before reverting to his human form. "Guess that's what happens when you underestimate your opponent."

"You... think this will... be the end?" Rikk weakly smiled. "I have seen you... and now I won't rest until I rip you to shreds-"

"Shh... people on the verge of death should bark like this," Ashton smirked as Rikk realised Ashton had no intention of letting him go.

However, the horror on the Xyran's face after Ashton revealed the Seraph's crystal was something else.

"How... how do you have this!?" Rikk yelled, trying his best to free himself.

As a Xyran, Rikk knew all about the fables surrounding Seraph's crystal and the mysteries surrounding its disappearance. But never in his wildest dreams, he'd have thought the crystal would be in possession of a human.

"It's a long story," Ashton replied, staring at the crystal in his hand. "But I'll tell you all about it while searing you, so pay close attention."

Saying so, Ashton placed his hand on Rikk's face. Rikk struggled with all his might but couldn't free himself.

"Goodbye... Colonel." Ashton mumbled before unleashing the crystal's uncontrolled fury on Rikk

Chapter 634 Escape (1)

Vulcan and Flintmace rushed into mine, following Sven to Ashron's location. Their usual tension-free faces were shrouded in worry for Ashton's safety.

Because although they had trained Ashton to become a Xyran killer, there were things that mere skill couldn't overcome and dealing with the Colonel was one such case.

That's why Ashton, along with his masters, had formed a list of codes and protocols to undertake different scenarios. The list contained five protocols that consider various situations and help Ashton have a backup plan for every situation.

These scenarios included: Black protocol, Azure protocol, Shadow protocol, Echo Protocol and finally, the Phoenix protocol.

Black protocol or coordinated combat protocol was to be triggered when Ashton wasn't confident in his victory and might have a risk of his life.

The protocol would be used in situations involving a formidable opponent or unexpected threat. Ashton would signal Flintmace and Vulcan using a predetermined gesture or by simply informing them using his summons.

Upon seeing this signal, Flintmace and Vulcan will immediately join the fight, engaging the enemy as a coordinated team to increase their chances of victory.

However, this protocol was only reserved for fights against Xyrans as Vulcan could only fight the Xyrans and no other species. Under exceptional circumstances, such as with the Behemoth on Orion Prime, the 'only Xyran' rule can be exempted.

Azure protocol was to be used by Ashton only when he would reveal his true form to an enemy, that is, either his Xyran form or the Disassociation/association ability.

In this event, the opponent must be silenced at all costs. If it didn't happen, then the information about Ashton's existence might be leaked to the Xyrans, who would spare no expense at killing him or capturing and experimenting on him for all eternity.

Shadow protocol was a tactical retreat plan. This protocol can only be triggered when neither Black nor Azure protocols have been initiated. As retreating, under those circumstances, wouldn't make sense.

According to the Shadow protocol, Flintmace and Vulcan would provide covering fire or diversion tactics as needed for Ashton, ensuring that he can retreat safely and regroup for a future confrontation.

Similarly, Echo and Phoenix protocols were tactical ambushes and final stand protocols that would be only implemented in situations involving Xyrans or other S-grade or above species.

While details around Echo protocol were clear, that wasn't the case with Phoenix protocol as it involved the use of Ashton's <Resurrection> skill and all three of them hoped there was never a time when they would need to trigger the Phoenix protocol.

"How much further is he!?" Vulcan yelled over the mine's chaos.

"Not much..." Sven replied, his pace not slowing for a single second. "He's right around the corner."

True to Sven's word, they found Ashton standing amid dust and debris as they turned the corner. His clothes were torn, and his body was covered in bruises and dirt, but he was alive.

However, what they saw next to him surprised them even more. It was a charred figure kneeling before Ashton. Without any explanation, Vulcan and Flintmace understood what had happened there.

Ashton had managed to deal with the Colonel and had already turned him into another one of his summons.

They approached cautiously, their experienced eyes assessing the situation. The shadowy figure seemed to be in a state of submission, its posture reflecting his defeat.

"Ashton," Flintmace's deep voice reverberated through the collapsed section of the mine. "Are you alright?"

"I've seen better days, but I'm still kicking," Ashton replied, taking his eyes away from the Colonel's shadowy form. "Unlike a certain someone, that is."

"And here he was worried about you," Vulcan scoffed, pointing at Flintmace. "as for you..."

Vulcan walked up to Ashton before smacking his head with the help of his hammer. "Who allowed you to engage Black protocol and waste our time? Do you not know when you are supposed to use it?"

"Ouch! I was in a really messed up situation, alright!" Ashton replied while rubbing the back of his head. "Can't you see the scene around us?"

"Yeah, yeah... you did good," Vulcan rolled his eyes, clearly trying to cover up his concern for Ashton's safety. "Now, let's go before the rest of the Xyrans get to know what happened here!"

As his masters turned around to leave, Ashton simply stood there. He didn't even need to say a word, and Flintmace understood they were in a lot of trouble.

"He used the beacon, didn't he?" Flintmace asked while pointing at Rikk.

Ashton slowly nodded. "He did as soon as he realised something was off..."

Vulcan was standing between them, confused about what they were discussing. It was then Flintmace decided to fill him in.

Many Xyrans possess a tiny chip implanted within their bodies, which serves as a signal to alert the higher authorities when they come across significant discoveries, such as Precursor artefacts, or in a moment of grave danger.

Once triggered, the assigned administrator would decipher the message and see if it was something the Xyrans needed to make a move. Often times if the beacon was sent by someone insignificant or from an unimportant sector, they would just ignore it.

However, Ombra wasn't unimportant to the Xyrans. It meant the Xyrans were probably on their way to Nefarion with an armada. Therefore, staying there any longer was like waiting for death to show up.

"We need to get out of here," Flintmace mumbled sombrely. "That's the only option we have."

"I agree," Vulcan agreed. "Lycaon and Frank are already waiting for us with the twins-"

"They are already here," Ashton dropped a bombshell on them before nodding towards Rikk's undead form. "They were stationed nearby for security purposes, and every Xyran within the sector is on the way."

"But Otiga's report-"

"This fucker was the only one that knew about the reinforcements," Ashton replied. "and I don't think Otiga got her information from him."

"Damn it! We can't take them on like this..." Flintmace sighed. "We are strong, but not strong enough."

"Don't worry, we won't need to fight," Ashton said with a smile. "Let's gather everyone and go home... without leaving the planet."

Chapter 635 Escape (2)

"Where are the twins?" Flintmace asked as soon as the trio reached the clearing where they had hidden their stealth ship.

"They are inside," Lycaon replied, pointing at the ship. "But what's got you by the balls? Is there any trouble?"

"Trouble would be an understatement," Ashton interjected, narrating everything that happened to the Progenitors. "We don't have much time. The Xyran army is on its way, and we must get out of here before they arrive."

"Are you certain they're coming?" Lycaon's brow furrowed, his eyes reflecting the concern on his face.

"Hm... maybe you should wait and see," Vulcan rolled his eyes. "Does it matter if they are coming or not? We got what we wanted, so time to leave!"

As he said that, Lycaon's gaze shifted towards the two Xyrans they had captured during their operation. These Xyrans had seen their faces, and leaving them behind could spell disaster.

It was the same with taking them with them as they could be used as beacons that'll help the Xyrans locate them, and that would be a whole other issue.

Usually, they would have killed the Xyrans and be done with them. But Flintmace warned them that their beacon could trigger as soon as they killed them. It would give the Xyrans their exact location, which would be the end.

"What do we do about them? Taking them with us could compromise our escape, but leaving them here is equally risky." Lycaon voiced his concerns.

Ashton took one look at the Xyrans, and the others could almost see the gears in his head turn.

"I doubt these low-rankers would have such sophisticated beacons installed in them," Ashton mumbled. "Even Beelzebub didn't have one. However, if that is the case, we could end their misery somewhere the Xyrans would never reach."

"Atlas, Sven," he called out to his shadowy summons, "escort these two to Valhalla. They will serve as a source of sustenance for the undead."

Atlas and Sven, towering and imposing figures, nodded in acknowledgement. They wasted no time grabbing the Xyrans by their necks and approached the portal.

The Xyrans had a glimpse of what awaited them, and the horror in their eyes was unmistakable—a place crawling with undead creatures and skeletons hungrily looking at them, eager to tear the flesh off their bones.

Atlas and Sven took hold of them, their grip unyielding, leading them away towards the darkness surrounding Valhalla. The twins exchanged a glance, a mixture of fascination and apprehension evident in their eyes.

In the shadows of Valhalla, Atlas and Sven carried out their grim task. The captured Xyrans, now bound and helpless, were brought to the undead realm.

The undead all around them were jumping with excitement as they would shortly get to taste something exotic they had never had before.

It was a fate the Xyrans had never anticipated, a cruel twist of destiny. As Ashton had instructed, they would serve as nourishment for the undead. Their life force would slowly be drained... it was a truly horrific way to leave the mortal world.

Irina's voice quivered as she spoke, "What are they going to do?"

"Something much worse than what happened with you two," Ashton replied with a gentle smile before closing the portal.

"That's one scary ability..." Verina mumbled.

"His skill is not something we need to worry or be in awe about right now. Our priority is to leave before the Xyrans arrive." Frank urged, entering the ship. "We need to leave this planet like... right now!"

The ship's ramp lowered with a soft hiss, creating a bridge between the barren ground and the sleek vessel's interior. Irina, Verina, Lycaon, Frankenstein, Flintmace, and Vulcan gathered at the entrance.

The spaceship's interior hummed with energy, the faint glow of controls casting an otherworldly light on their faces. They quickly stepped inside, and as the doors closed, Irina realised Ashton never joined them.

"Is Ashton coming?" Irina whispered to Verina, her voice tinged with concern.

Verina's brows furrowed, mirroring her sister's worry. "I don't know..."

The twins were concerned about Ashton acting as a hero, as he had done a few times in the past.

"Don't worry about him too much," Lycaon, catching wind of their conversation, turned his attention to them. "He has grown a lot and isn't as immature as before..."

"You're trying to convince them, but you don't sound convincing at all," Frank laughed, trying to lighten the situation. "Don't worry; I'm sure Ashton has a plan."

Flintmace waited for everyone to be seated before signalling Ashton the same. Upon getting the approval, Ashton turned away from them and faced the open expanse beyond. His gaze locked onto a point in the distance.

Although he had grown habituated with operating portals, it would be the first time he had opened a massive one. It had to be big enough to fit the entire spaceship, and it was not an easy task to accomplish.

"What's he doing?" Lycaon mused aloud, his gaze fixed on Ashton's preparations.

Before anyone could answer, Ashton's hands began to move in intricate patterns, tracing symbols in the air. A portal began to form, a shimmering gateway to another location. The twins watched with bated breath, their worry giving way to curiosity.

"He's opening a portal," Verina whispered, her voice tinged with awe.

Irina nodded, her eyes never leaving Ashton. "But where is he sending us?"

Ashton's concentration deepened, the portal growing larger and more defined. With a final gesture, the gateway solidified, revealing a scene that seemed both familiar and distant. It was the Eastern Palace on Earth, a place they had often heard Ashton talk about previously.

"This is our quick getaway. The Xyrans won't be able to track us there easily." Ashton said with a confident smile. "Hell, they won't even consider looking for us on Earth."

"Roger," Flintmace replied before pouring life into the engines.

The ship's engines roared to life, vibrations coursing through the vessel as it lifted off the ground. The landscape outside blurred as they ascended into the sky, leaving behind the remnants of their battle.

They entered the portal within a moment, and Ashton followed close behind them. But before he left, he contacted Anna to inform her about the change in plans and for her to head towards Earth to pick them up.

"She's going to be so pissed..." Ashton shook his head before disappearing inside the portal.

Chapter 636 Addition (1)

In the silent courtyard of the Eastern Palace, two werewolf workers named Wally and Wylie were engrossed in a heated debate.

They stood on a platform, gesturing wildly and furiously arguing over the placement of a decorative statue.

"No, no, Wylie! The statue should face the east to catch the morning sunlight!" Wally exclaimed, his paws waving emphatically.

"Wally, my friend, you're mistaken as usual." Wylie shook his furry head. "It should face the west to bask in the golden hues of the sunset!"

Their argument was reaching a fever pitch when, out of nowhere, a swirling portal materialised right in the centre of the courtyard.

Before the bewildered werewolves could react, Ashton's spaceship shot out of the portal with a resounding whoosh, causing a gust of wind, nearly knocking Wally and Wylie off their wobbly platform.

"Whoa!" Wally yelled, flailing his arms to maintain his balance.

"What in the moon's name is happening?" Wylie clung to the platform's edge, his fur ruffled and ears flattened against his head.

Ashton's ship landed with a graceful thud, its engines humming to a halt. The ramp lowered, and soon Ashton emerged on top of the spaceship, closing the portal behind him as his companions stepped out of the vessel.

The werewolves stared in disbelief, their argument forgotten as they gawked at the spectacle before them.

"By Lycaon's grace, is that... Ashton's ship?" Wally whispered, his eyes widening in amazement.

"I think so, Wally! And look, he's brought some strange-looking friends with him!" Wylie replied, equally astonished. "Wait a minute... is that lord Lycaon!?"

The werewolf workers teetered on the platform's edge, struggling to regain balance after the unexpected windstorm.

Just as it seemed they might topple over, they managed to steady themselves, their paws clinging to the decorative statue they had been debating about.

But fate had other plans. With a comical twist of events, Wally and Wylie's combined weight proved too much for the fragile platform. The statue wobbled precariously, and the werewolves exchanged a panicked glance.

"Wylie, I think we might have just-"

"Its all your fault-"

Before either could finish his sentence, the platform gave way with a loud crack. The werewolves plummeted downward, arms flailing as they crashed onto the very decoration they had been arguing over.

The statue, caught in their grasp, toppled over, causing a chain reaction that sent a cascade of smaller decorations tumbling to the ground.

As the dust settled and the courtyard fell into stunned silence, Ashton and his companions turned their attention to the scene of comedic chaos.

Wally and Wylie were sprawled amidst a pile of fallen decorations, the once-imposing statue now comically resting on their backs.

"What the hell is going on here?" Ashton mumbled as soon as he saw the reconstruction happening around.

The Eastern Palace was known for its darkness and eerie nature., but now it appeared as if it was some sort of an amusement park.

The entire place had been redecorated with vibrant flowers and other things, almost making it seem like the guests had teleported elsewhere.

Ashton's brows furrowed as he glanced around, trying to make sense of his surroundings. Before he could utter a word, a familiar voice broke through the air.

"Ashton, my dear, you're finally back!"

Turning towards the sound, Ashton's eyes widened in disbelief. There stood his mother, Ava, her radiant presence filling the space around her. Beside her, a massive pack of wraith wolves trotted, their eerie yet majestic forms creating an awe-inspiring spectacle.

"M-Mother?" Ashton stammered.

Out of everything he had seen, his mother leading a pack of wraith wolves was by far the strangest thing. Even more, he was surprised at how strong the wolves had grown since he last saw them. A single wraith wolf now stood twice as big as a Liger!

Without hesitation, Ava closed the distance between them, her arms enveloping Ashton in a warm and loving embrace.

Her touch was soothing, reassuring, a reminder of the unconditional bond between a mother and her child. Strangely enough, Ashton felt the weight of his recent battles and struggles melt away in her arms.

"I wasn't expecting to see you here!" she said, holding him at arm's length, her eyes scanning his body as if looking for injuries or harm. "You look hurt? What happened?"

"I'm okay, Mother. It's just a few scratches." Ashton somehow managed to smile. As he was seeing his mother after so long, he didn't want her to worry about him anymore.

"Doesn't look like that's the case, but alright, I'll believe you for now."

Saying so, her attention shifted towards the twins. With a warm smile, she extended her arms towards them. "Irina, Verina, come here, my little ones. I have not forgotten about you two."

The twins exchanged a surprised glance before stepping forward, their uncertainty replaced by warmth as they were embraced by Ava.

Ava's eyes lit up as she embraced the twins with the motherly love she had always shown Ashton. However, her smile faded as she took in their shabby and bruised appearance.

"Oh, my lord, what happened to you two?" Ava's concern was evident as she gently touched their faces, her look filled with worry for the twins.

Ashton stepped forward, his protective instincts kicking in. "Mom, we'll explain everything, but we need to get them checked out right now. They've been through a lot."

"Of course, Ashton. Let's get them the care they need." Ava nodded, leading them outside the Palace.

"Your mother is a great woman," Flintmace commented.

"I know," Ashton replied with a smile.

As they moved outside, it seemed like the news of Ashton's arrival had already spread across the area as a vast crowd stood there, waiting for their king.

"Welcome home, your highness!"

Everyone eagerly looked up to Ashton and his allies, from vampires to werewolves to Giholos and various other species from all around the galaxy.

But the moment they saw Flintmace, the aliens went berserk. After all, only a few ever got to see the Tower master in person. No matter how anyone looked at it, it was truly a hero's welcome.

Chapter 637 Addition (2)

Ashton and his companions stood on the outskirts of what had once been a barren and desolate land. The transformation before them was nothing short of astounding.

The landscape had shifted from a wasteland to a bustling construction site, where towering skyscrapers and intricate structures were being raised with incredible speed.

"Welcome to New Livania," Ava announced with a smile, her eyes shining with pride. "This is our most advanced territory on the planet."

Ashton's jaw dropped in amazement as he took in the sight before him. The once empty expanse was now a thriving city, teeming with activity.

Hovering vehicles glided through the air while holographic displays adorned the sides of buildings, showcasing vibrant advertisements and information. The hum of machinery and the chatter of workers filled the air, creating a symphony of progress.

"Wow," Ashton exclaimed, his voice filled with awe. "I can't believe this is the same place."

Ava chuckled, her gaze warm as she observed her son's reaction. "It's amazing what a little trade and fame can achieve, right? And it's all thanks to you."

Flintmace and Vulcan exchanged impressed glances. Although it was Flintmace's first time on Earth, Vulcan had been there before and was surprised by the progress the earthlings had made.

As for the twins, they were equally amazed, their eyes wide with energy reconstruction system in place.

Ava led them through the bustling streets, explaining the various wonder. They'd have never expected to see such advanced technology being used on Earth. Hell, they even had an automated energy reconstruction system in place.

Ava led them through the bustling streets, explaining the various technological advancements implemented in New Livania.

Automated systems managed waste disposal and energy distribution, while advanced materials and sustainable practices were used in construction to build structures that could last any natural or artificial calamity.

"Every inch of this city has been designed to enhance the quality of life for its residents," Ava explained. "We've integrated the latest medical care, education, and entertainment advancements. In the last month alone, we have managed to eradicate several diseases plaguing the planet for god knows how long."

As they walked, Ashton couldn't help but feel a swell of pride for his mother and their people. He knew advancements were being made thanks to the territory management system, but seeing it firsthand was a different experience.

The once barren land had become a thriving metropolis, symbolising resilience and determination. Although Ashton might not show it, Livan, called New Livania now, had always had a close spot in his heart as it was the first territory he ever got to call his own.

"Come, there's a lot to see on our way to the hospital," Ava said, guiding them through the bustling streets.

They entered a bustling marketplace, where holographic displays showcased various products.

Ava stopped at a vendor, engaging in a friendly conversation with the owner. Ashton took a moment to soak in the atmosphere, the city's vibrant energy enveloping him.

"Isn't it incredible?" Ava asked, her gaze fixed on the bustling activity around them.

"It's beyond anything I could have imagined," Ashton replied, clearly surprised by the sudden transformation of the region.

Ava smiled, her eyes sparkling with a mixture of joy and satisfaction. "We've come a long way, my son. And we're just getting started."

As they walked the streets, Ashton saw a lot of familiar faces. From Virgil to Baiter, all of his old comrades were there, and although they looked different now, they were the same in a way.

And then, he came across someone he never wanted to see the face of... the mistress and her equally bitch-looking clone, Nora. But that wasn't all; Ricochet was stuck between them.

"So, y'all are a throuple now?" Ashton rolled his eyes before pointing at Ricochet. "And you, I sent you here to overlook the management and ensure everything goes smoothly, not to create your love story. Why was it my mother who had to travel to welcome us?"

"R-Reaper! What a pleasant surprise!" Ricochet laughed nervously and immediately rushed to greet his 'Captain'. "I had no idea-"

"Yeah, yeah, cut the chase," Ashton held his hand up as he wasn't in the mood to hug anyone, especially a man. "You still need to answer-"

"Cut him some slack, son," Ava mumbled. "He has always been hard at work. You can talk business later; let's get the twins to the hospital first."

"Yeah, I can see that..." Ashton mumbled before signalling to Rico that they'll have a talk later.

Next, Ava led them through the city's central plaza, where holographic sculptures depicted the history and transformation of the region. But the biggest holographic structure was of Ashton, much to his embarrassment.

Citizens went about their business, interacting with holographic interfaces and enjoying the place.

"Really, Ma?" Ashton mumbled while shaking his head.

He could already feel Vulcan's and Flintmace's gaze on him. They were much greater than him, and even then, they didn't have some shit like a holographic statue made for them.

"Hey, don't blame me!" Ava threw her hands as if surrendering. "The people wanted a way to remember their hero and staged a protest once we removed your other statue. Now you tell me, what were we supposed to do?"

Flintmace chuckled, shaking his head. "Well, I guess it's a fitting tribute to the guy who's been shaking up the galaxy."

"This is ridiculous. I mean, come on, it's just me." Ashton rolled his eyes but couldn't help but crack a smile.

"You've become a symbol of hope and change for these people," Vulcan mumbled. "Instead of being embarrassed, you should be proud that your people admire you. Be a source of inspiration for them and a beacon of strength."

Just then, a nearby group of children noticed Ashton and excitedly pointed at the holographic statue. "Look, it's the hero who saved New Livania!"

Ashton's embarrassment was momentarily forgotten as he saw the children's faces light up with excitement. He gave them a small wave, understanding the meaning behind Vulcan's words.

"Well... I guess it's not that bad," he mumbled as they headed towards the final spot... the hospital.

Chapter 638 Frozen Threads Of Destiny

In a dimly lit chamber that resembled a frigid cave, an air of mystery hung heavy. The room exuded an icy chill, making it difficult to see beyond the pale, faintly glowing light.

At its centre sat a human, cross-legged and peaceful, his eyes closed in deep meditation. Despite the coldness that engulfed the area around him, his demeanour remained unaffected, as if he had become one with the cold.

Surrounding him were a few others, creatures from various species, their breath visible as mist in the cold air, their bodies trembling slightly from the cold.

None of them ever understood how their master could resist extreme temperatures. They had tried to follow in his footsteps countless times, but they never lasted more than a minute.

Even now, when they were clad in layer upon layer of warm clothing, the coldness of the room offered them no respite as they felt a chill run over their body whenever they spoke or did the slightest of moments.

Whereas their master sat there with minimal clothing, just a loincloth, to be exact, and always had a smile on his face.

However, no one knew how long their master's smile would last once he heard the news they were about to deliver to him.

Their faces were marked with tension, and a noticeable unease radiated across their body. They exchanged concerned glances, their whispers barely audible against the backdrop of stillness, deciding who would deliver the news to their master.

Finally, one of them mustered the courage to speak, his voice shaky due to cold and fear. "Master, we've lost contact with the Priest and the deacons we placed within the Orion empire."

He continued, "Our connections have gone silent... and they are most likely dead, or the empire has caught on to the cult and is suppressing any news regarding the priest and his followers."

The meditating man's lips curled into a faint smile, his eyes still closed. He seemed undisturbed by the news, his calm demeanour in stark contrast to the unease that gripped his followers.

Slowly, he opened his eyes, revealing his jet-black eyes. Despite being a former human, the 'yogi' had long since transcended the limits humanly possible. Now he had dedicated his entire life to the Precursors, and his devotion towards them had brought him closer to the cult.

"It appears our little venture in the Orion territory has hit an obstacle," he mused, his voice carrying an air of quiet authority and yet was strangely kind. "But fret not, my faithful companions. This is a minor setback, not a cause for chaos like you believe."

His followers exchanged puzzled looks, their anxiety deepening. "But, Master," one of them ventured, "what should we do? The Priest was a crucial link in our plan. And without him, we have lost all the connections he had inside the empire!"

Another one chimed in, "Not to mention, we have the Xyrans breathing down our necks! They believe we attacked one of their mines in the Ombra sector and-"

A sudden gust of wind froze the man in his tracks... like literally froze his chin, and the rest of the followers immediately quieted down. Their gazes fixed on their feet.

The yogi rose gracefully to his feet, his movements filled with grace and kindness. He walked among his followers, the cold air seeming to part before him. Their trembling bodies stilled as he approached, as if his presence alone could calm their fears.

"Let me enlighten you," he said, his tone steady and assured as he approached the man with the frozen jaw. "We are not mere pawns in this game. Our influence extends far beyond the grasp of a single priest."

He continued, "If the death of a mere priest gives rise to such chaos within your heart, then you are not ready to fulfil your role in this endless cosmic universe, my child."

As the yogi said those words, tears could be seen streaming down the face of the man with the frozen jaw. After all, everyone there knew what the yogi meant with his cryptic words.

While the followers had their gazes stuck to the ground, the yogi gently touched the man's face. Their eyes met as the yogi tilted his head and smiled.

"Oh, my brave, brave child..." he mumbled. "Even now, fear has a strong grip on your heart. We don't have any place for fear amongst us, do we?"

The followers softly whispered in one tone, "Fear is an illusion. Only those attached to the falsehood of pleasure believe it's real."

"And what should we do if someone embraces fear?" the yogi continued.

"We guide them to the path of truth," the followers replied as one. "If that fails... then we must guide the corrupt soul to the almighty for purification."

"Lovely... may the almighty guide you on the path of truth."

Saying so, the yogi removed his arm from the man's cheeks, and a moment later, he crumbled into cold ash, leaving nothing behind.

He then turned to face the rest of his followers, his gaze unwavering.

"Inform the Archbishops of our situation. This matter requires their attention, not the concern of a Bishop like myself. We have waited patiently, and now it is time for the true worshippers to design our next step."

His followers nodded, a newfound sense of loyalty running within their hearts. After all, they had placed their faith in this enigmatic figure, and his unwavering confidence was infectious.

The man's smile widened, a glint of something almost feral dancing in his eyes. "This setback is but a test of our resolve. We shall weather this storm, and in doing so, we shall pave the way for a future. A future where our lord awaits us."

With those words, the yogi turned away, returning to his meditation spot. His followers watched him, their anxiety replaced by fearlessness.

As they exited the chilling chamber, a spark of unwavering courage ignited within them. They will fulfil their goal... no matter how many souls they must sacrifice.

Chapter 639 Sparring With An Old Friend (1)

Ava guided the twins through the halls of the hospital. The walls around them were adorned with intricate holographic displays showcasing medical advancements and various treatments that they offered.

Lycaon and Frankenstein followed them closely. After all, in Dracula's absence, they were responsible for taking care of the twins. That is, as long as they were set on travelling through the galaxy.

As they reached a section of the medical facility that specialised in Vampire ailments, Ava scanned her ID, and the door blocking their path disappeared as if it dissolved into air. The moment they stepped through, the door materialised behind them again.

"That's an interesting tech..." Lycaon mumbled. His inventor's brain immediately got distracted by the doors. "I have never seen something like this, even in space."

"That's because it's Tarik's latest creation," Ava smiled. "Although I'm not sure myself, the door utilises light, and in a way, the scanner turns the photons into a solid structure. You can ask Tarik for a better explanation later."

"What an interesting concept!" Lycaon looked baffled and intrigued to meet the man who could cook up something so ingenious.

It wasn't until Frank rolled his eyes that Lycaon realised their place and situation. They were there to get the twins checked, not ask about the new earth's advancements.

After going through a couple more doors, Ava suddenly turned and stopped the men. "Only women are allowed from here as we'll have to do a full-body checkup on the twins."

"Of course," Frank replied with a nod. "We shall wait here then."

Lycaon also nodded, and the two turned to look for something to bid their time. Ultimately, they settled for arm wrestling as they had nothing better to do in the hospital.

Meanwhile, Ava guided the twins inside a room full of intricate instruments they hadn't seen before and half a dozen female vampires waiting for them. All of whom were dressed in lab coats and medical staff uniforms.

"Lady Ava, it's been a while," the green-haired, pale-skinned doctor greeted them. "And these must be the young ladies."

"That's right, Dr Brenna," Ava replied, her gaze shifting towards the twins. "These are Lord Alucard's daughters."

"Alright then, let's get you prepped up for the examination," Dr Brenna replied as a pair of nurses helped each twin.

Then Brenna led the twins to separate examination rooms while Ava waited in the reception area. The minutes ticked by, and finally, they all stepped out of the room.

"Good news. The injuries they sustained have healed quite well." Dr Brenna said, her eyes fixed on the holographic tablet. "Their 'vital' signs are stable, and they're on the path to a full recovery."

Ava smiled at the twins, and they returned the sentiment. Either way, they already knew they weren't in any danger, but since Ava and Ashton were adamant about them getting checked out, the twins had obliged their request.

"They do need some rest, though," Dr Brenna continued. "Their bodies have been through a lot, and a bit of relaxation will go a long way."

"Thanks for your help," Ava replied as the twin joined her. "I'll make sure they get the rest they need."

With that, they headed outside to deliver the news to the Progenitors, who were equally elated.

"We should inform Ashton about it as well," Ava mumbled, remembering that Ashton, Flintmace and Vulcan had headed towards the Arena to check the mutants' strength. "I just hope they don't go overboard..."

Meanwhile, Ashton, Vulcan, and Flintmace traversed the bustling streets of New Livania. The city's vibrant energy was palpable, with holographic billboards advertising everything from entertainment to cutting-edge technology.

"Achoo~" Ashton sneezed, which wasn't expected due to his weird combination of genes. "Who's cursing me now?"

"Ask the Xyrans whom you killed." Vulcan rolled his eyes, as Ashton was the last person he would have expected to believe in such superstitions.

"Xyrans that we killed," Ashton corrected. "Besides, if it's the Xyrans were talking about, then I'd rather sneeze my whole life than let them do as they please."

[You really don't wanna make that trade, believe me.]

'...yeah.'

As they approached the Arena, Ashton could feel the energy coming from the massive building. Even Vulcan, who rarely enjoyed barbaric action, was excitedly tapping his feet.

As for Flintmace, he was a warrior through and through, so obviously, he wanted to see some capable people fight it out. But for Ashton, the purpose was a bit different.

The Arena was a place of potential, a crucible where skilled individuals sought to prove their mettle and a place for Ashton to recruit highly sought mercenaries for the Ghosts.

After all, no matter how strong he was, he needed money to stay operational, and his primary source of income was mercenary gigs.

'Staying a billionaire is not an easy job,' Ashton smirked as they headed inside.

Inside the Arena, the atmosphere buzzed with excitement. Aspiring fighters, warriors, and combatants had gathered, their eyes set on the grand stage where battles of skill and strength took place. Spectators cheered from the stands, their cheers echoing through the Arena.

Ashton's eyes scanned the crowd, seeking out those who displayed exceptional prowess, those who had the potential to join his renowned mercenary faction, the Ghosts.

There, he encountered a familiar face, Virgil, who was the appointed head of the Arena. Since Virgil hadn't seen him yet, Ashton messed around with him by pretending to be an aspirant and walking up to challenge him.

"Hey there, big shot," Ashton drawled, puffing his chest out exaggeratedly. "I've come to challenge you!"

"Go find someone of your stature," Virgil replied without turning around. "I'm not interested in fighting kids."

Virgil, still oblivious to Ashton's presence, remained facing the Arena, his focus on the ongoing match. Ashton couldn't resist the opportunity and gave Virgil a playful smack on the back of his head.

The unexpected smack jolted Virgil, his head snapping to the side. His eyes narrowed in irritation, ready to deliver a sharp retort to the bold challenger who dared disturb him.

But when he turned, and his gaze met Ashton's, his annoyance melted into a broad grin.

"Well, well, well," Virgil chuckled, giving Ashton a friendly shove. "Looks who's back!"

"So what about the match?" Ashton replied with a smile.

"Ready when you are!" Virgil replied, flexing his knuckles.

Chapter 640 Sparring With An Old Friend (2)

Soon enough, Virgil and Ashton stood facing each other in the centre of a Colosseum-like arena. The air hummed with excitement as the spectators eagerly waited for the friendly spar to begin.

After all, it wasn't every day that one witnessed the Arena-master fight it out with a living legend like Ashton.

Virgil gripped his hefty axe, his muscles tense and ready. On the other side, Ashton flexed his arms and shifted into a fighting stance, his aura ready to burst at any moment.

"Ready?" Ashton called out, a grin on his face.

Virgil nodded, his eyes locked on Ashton. "Let's do this."

As the signal sounded, Virgil charged forward; axe raised high. He swung it down with a determined grunt, aiming for Ashton's side. But Ashton moved like shapeless water, sidestepping the attack with ease.

Not only that, he retaliated with a swift kick aimed at Virgil's midsection. Virgil managed to block it with his axe, but the force still forced him to take several steps backwards.

But Ashton wasn't planning to go easy on Virgil. He lunged forward, his fists a blur as he aimed a series of quick jabs at him.

Virgil swung his axe in a wide arc, blocking the strikes with the flat side of the weapon. The impact reverberated through his arms, but he stood his ground.

The crowd cheered, and Virgil gritted his teeth. He swung his axe in a wide arc, aiming for Ashton's legs.

But Ashton leapt gracefully into the air, his body twisting as he avoided the swing. He landed lightly and delivered a series of rapid punches, striking Virgil's chest and forcing him to stumble further back.

To make the battle somewhat fair, Ashton was only using his undead genes, so technically, Virgil would have an advantage over him based on genetic hierarchy. On top of that, Ashton wasn't using his skills or abilities to give Virgil an actual fighting chance against him.

Virgil shook off the hits and lunged forward, his axe aimed at Ashton's head. Ashton ducked and rolled, coming up behind Virgil.

He delivered a swift chop to Virgil's back, making him wince. Virgil's swings were powerful, but Ashton's agility seemed to be one step ahead.

"Nice moves," Virgil panted, sweat dripping down his forehead.

Ashton chuckled. "You're no slouch with that axe either."

"Maybe one of these times, I'll land a hit and you... might lose a limb or two." Virgil laughed, clearly enjoying the spar with Ashton.

"As if. But sure, go ahead! Give it all you got!"

"You don't need to tell me that twice!"

Virgil spun around and swung his axe horizontally, hoping to catch Ashton off guard. But Ashton ducked under the swing and countered with a sweeping low kick, knocking Virgil's legs out from under him. Virgil crashed onto the ground, his axe skidding away.

"Nice try," Ashton smiled, offering Virgil a hand. But since the spar wasn't over yet, Virgil ignored Ashton's friendly gesture, though he did so with a smile.

Virgil rolled and got back on his feet, eyeing his axe a few feet away. Ashton didn't waste a moment, charging in with a barrage of punches and kicks.

If Virgil was serious about the spar, it would be dishonourable for Ashton to treat their little competition casually.

As the attacks rained on him, Virgil deflected some with his arms, but others landed, bruising his arms and torso.

Eventually, Virgil managed to grab his axe and swung it upward, catching Ashton off balance. Ashton stumbled back, giving Virgil a moment to catch his breath.

He could feel the sweat dripping down his forehead as he tried to steady his breathing. On the other hand, Ashton looked almost untouched, his expression calm and focused.

"Fucking tribrid," Virgil shook his head while smiling. "I know you're not even going all-out on me, and yet... never mind, the fight isn't over yet."

"Damn right, it isn't. Now get up. You won't get a break in an actual fight."

"Aye, aye, captain."

Virgil charged at Ashton again with renewed determination, swinging his axe in wide arcs. Ashton danced around the strikes, occasionally blocking or dodging. He darted in and out, landing precise blows that seemed to sap Virgil's strength with each hit.

Ashton then decided to practice with his kicks for a bit. As for Virgil, he sidestepped one kick and deflected another with the axe's shaft.

Ashton spun around; his leg extended in a spinning kick that caught Virgil off guard. The blow landed squarely on Virgil's side, knocking the wind out of him.

Gritting his teeth, Virgil stepped back and lifted his axe overhead. He brought it crashing down with all his might, aiming for Ashton's head. Ashton blocked the attack with his forearms, the impact sending a shockwave throughout the area.

The crowd was shocked as they had never seen someone stop Virgil's signature move with bare hands. Even Virgil was a bit taken aback by Ashton's irresponsible manoeuvre.

However, Virgil didn't have time to spare as Ashton launched his attacks almost immediately.

As the match wore on, Virgil's movements became sluggish. His muscles ached, and his breathing grew heavier. He swung his axe, but it was slow, predictable.

Ashton seized the opportunity, ducking under the swing and delivering a powerful uppercut. Virgil stumbled backwards, his grip on the axe faltering.

In stark contrast, Ashton's movements were fluid, effortless. He moved like a breeze, striking with precision. Virgil's swings grew feeble, his attacks missing their mark.

Ashton sidestepped another attack and delivered a roundhouse kick to Virgil's side. Virgil grunted, dropping to one knee.

The crowd's cheers grew louder, urging Virgil on, but his body was spent. He struggled to rise, his vision blurred. Ashton approached him, his expression serene. He extended a hand toward Virgil.

"Good fight, man," Ashton said with a smile.

Virgil looked up at Ashton, a mix of exhaustion and respect in his eyes. He reached out and clasped Ashton's hand, pulling himself to his feet.

"You're something else," Virgil admitted, a weary grin tugging at his lips. "Well, regardless, I kinda needed someone to kick my ass. At least it was you who did me the service."

"Not going to lie; I thought I'd have to transform for a moment. You have grown a lot stronger than I remember." Ashton chuckled, giving Virgil's shoulder a friendly pat. "You're pretty tough with that axe, Virgil. We should spar again sometime."

Virgil nodded, a newfound admiration for Ashton settling in. "Definitely. But next time, I'll be better prepared."

"You better be-" As he said, Ashton received a call from Ava informing him about completion of the twins' examination. "Oh, I have to leave. Either way, it was fun catching up with you! See you around!"