

## **Zompiewolf 641**

### Chapter 641 A Strange Request (1)

The moon cast a gentle glow over Ashton's quarters, its silver light filtering through the curtains. It had been a day of endless meetings and introductions, his mind buzzing with plans and strategies for the future of the Earth and beyond.

"Man... it's a great thing I don't live here anymore," he mumbled as his head hit the pillow. "All this management and work... I'm not cut out for this!"

[I agree! Things involving your brain have never been your strong point. You should primarily focus on fighting and things along those lines.]

"Do you really want me to roast you at this hour?"

[...]

"That's what I thought. Now if you don't mind, I would like to sleep."

With a sigh, he finally allowed himself to sink onto the soft mattress, the day's fatigue weighing heavily on his shoulders.

Just as he was about to drift into a well-deserved slumber, a soft knock echoed through the room. Blinking, Ashton sat up, rubbing his eyes. Who could be visiting at this hour?

With another sigh, he padded over to the door and pulled it open, his brows furrowing in surprise. Before him stood the twins, their expressions a mix of anticipation and something else he couldn't quite decipher.

"Hey, what are you two doing here?" Ashton asked, intrigued by what possibly caused them to visit him so late.

Verina nudged her sister with an elbow, and they exchanged an amused glance before focusing back on Ashton. Irina cleared her throat, her voice gentle yet resolute.

"We know we should be resting, but we wanted to talk to you," she began, her gaze fixed on Ashton.

Ashton arched an eyebrow, leaning against the doorway. "At this hour? What's so urgent?"

Verina bit her lip, her eyes darting to her sister before returning to Ashton. "It's about what you did for us, saving our lives and all."

"Ah, it's nothing. That's what friends are for, right?" Ashton's expression softened, and he waved a hand dismissively. "Besides, I own Dracula for a lot of things; saving you helped me ease that debt."

"It might be part of the job for you, but it means the world to us." Irina's lips twitched into a grateful smile.

Verina nodded in agreement. "Exactly. And we wanted to properly thank you. But first... do you mind if we come inside?"

It was then Ashton noticed the flimsy gowns they were wearing and rolled his eyes. He never understood the need for girls to wear such clothes before sleeping.

[Not everyone can go commando like you, can they?]

'For fuck's sake, just go to sleep or wherever you go!'

[Tsk tsk, the youth these days... have no respect for the elders.]

With that, Ashton returned to the conversation before stepping aside, allowing the twins to enter his room in his 'mansion'.

"You don't have to thank me. I'm just glad you two are safe." Ashton continued once they were inside.

But rather than replying to Ashton, the twins shared another glance, and then, as if mustering their courage, they exchanged a nod and stepped closer to Ashton. Irina cleared her throat once more, her voice a touch shaky.

"Ashton, there's something we want to ask you." She paused, her cheeks tinged with a faint blush.

"Go ahead, ask away." Ashton tilted his head, intrigued.

However, he never expected them to do what they did next. They dropped their gowns, revealing their intentions. Despite the scene before him, he could only shake his head. But even his reaction didn't stop the twins from moving forward.

Verina took a deep breath, her eyes meeting his with determination. "We were wondering... if you'd be willing to... give us your genes."

Suddenly Ashton's eyes widened, and he blinked in surprise. Although he expected something along those lines, he never expected Verina to be so straightforward. A stunned silence hung in the air before he burst into laughter, his deep chuckles filling the room.

"Oh, come on now," he managed to say between laughs, "that's a new one!"

Irina's cheeks turned a deeper shade of red, and Verina playfully elbowed her sister. "I told you he'd react like this!"

Ashton wiped a tear from the corner of his eye, his laughter subsiding. He fixed the twins with an amused grin.

"Look, I appreciate the sentiment, really. But I think we've established that my view on romance is... well, non-existent. Not that you two aren't attractive, but I'm kind of a one-woman man, so... thanks but no thanks."

"Hey, we're not talking about romance here. Just, you know, some DNA-sharing business." Verina shrugged, a mischievous glint in her eyes.

Ashton chuckled, shaking his head. "DNA-sharing business, huh? That's a new way to put it."

Irina joined in the light-hearted banter. "We're just thinking ahead, you know? In case we ever need it."

Ashton's laughter faded, and he regarded the twins with genuine warmth. "I'm touched, I really am. But trust me, you two don't need any of my genes to be strong and capable. You're already remarkable on your own."

Verina grinned, her playful tone returning. "Well, it was worth a shot, right?"

"Definitely worth a shot. But for now, let's get you two back to your own rooms." Ashton laughed. "Also, don't tell Anna about any of this, or else she might not be as understanding as I was."

The twins exchanged a knowing glance before nodding in agreement.

"Alright, Ashton," Irina said, her expression turned serious. "This time, I'm being serious. We would like you to... give you some of your genes, but not in the way you're thinking."

"Yes... we have seen Anna's growth, and after what happened," Verina mumbled, remembering about the Xyrans. "We... would like to get stronger. No matter the cost."

"So... your robes?" Ashton mumbled, confused.

"We didn't want our blood to ruin the clothes... that's why," Irina replied, her cheeks turning a deep shade of red, quite uncharacteristic for a vampire.

[They were talking about converting them... like you did with Anna and Beelzebub! Stop thinking everything with your second head!]

'You're the one saying that? Besides, aren't you, my second head?'

[Ahem... when they dropped their robes, I didn't think they did so because they didn't want their blood all over the silk.]

'Be as it may... do you think-'

[Go ahead if you like. Besides, you still need to complete your ascension tasks. So it'll be like killing a Xyrans fleet with one shot of Blaze Cannon.]

## Chapter 642 A Strange Request (2)

"Are you sure?" Ashton inquired. "There'll be no turning back once it is done."

The twins stared at each other for a moment before nodding. They had already made up their minds. But their reassurances weren't enough for Ashton.

After all, they were Alucard's only daughters, and he knew very well that the Vampires took their genes and purity very seriously. Therefore, Irina and Verina converting into some other species could have lasting consequences not only on their standing but on Alucard's as well.

Their one decision could turn into a cause for disarray amongst the vampires who were Ashton's allies. Even though there were enough forces stationed on Earth that Ricochet could have handled such matters by force, Ashton didn't want things to come to that extent.

But more than that, he wanted to test the resolve of the twins. Anyone would like to get stronger by altering their genes.

That's why Ashton wanted to know if the twins were merely desperate for strength or if they had thought things through and wanted to embrace the changes with open arms.

"You are aware of the uproar it may cause, right?" Ashton continued. "Your people will not be happy with your decisions and might even try to wage war against Alucard. Are you ready to shoulder that burden yourselves?"

"We understand," Irina said. "And believe it or not, we've been thinking about this for a long time."

"After serving as mercenaries, we learned a lot, and along with it came introspection," Verina added. "And it's changed our outlook on things. We don't care about monarchy or lineage anymore. All that matters is strength."

"I see. Well, I can't say I blame you for wanting to get stronger," Ashton nodded, still lost, contemplating whether he should go ahead. "But you must remember that I'm not just changing you. I'm also changing your species. There's no guarantee that everything will go smoothly."

"We're willing to take the risk," Irina said.

"We want to be as strong as Anna," Verina said.

Ashton's eyebrows rose the moment Verina said that. They wanted him to change them because they had seen Anna get remarkably stronger once she became a succubus. There may have been more to them wishing to change than they were letting on.

"Anna is a special case. I only altered her genes because I needed to save her life." Ashton mumbled as he recalled the horrific day. "The fact that she grew exponentially resulted from her hard work, relentless dedication and a bit of luck."

Ashton lied through his teeth because since he transformed Anna into a succubus, he had grown a lot and had a lot of control over his ability. The twins were at no risk of their decision backfiring on them, but Ashton conveniently hid the fact from them.



Ashton continued after a while, "So, if you think I can make someone as strong as Anna upon my will, then you're wrong. So speak your mind now, or we can end this meeting here and pretend it never happened."

"I don't care if it was a coincidence or not," Irina said. "We still want to do it... if you'll help us."

Ashton looked at the twins for a long moment. He could see the determination in their eyes, and at that moment, he knew they were serious about this.

"Okay," he said finally. "I'll do it."

The twins smiled.

"Thank you," Irina said.

"We won't let you down," Verina chimed in.

Ashton stood up and walked over to the window. He looked out at the night sky. He knew it was a risky decision, but he also knew the twins were right.

On the cosmic scale, things like monarchy and lineage didn't matter. All that mattered was strength. After all, Ashton had experienced it firsthand in a lot of scenarios. Having made up his mind, he turned back to the twins.

"I'll need to bite you both," he said. "Once I do, your genes will start to change. It will be a slow process, but eventually, you will become a new and, probably, stronger species."

"We're ready," the twins simultaneously responded.

Verina's hand reached out, her fingers brushing against Ashton's arm, his touch sending a shiver down her spine. Irina stood beside her, her eyes locked onto Ashton's, a silent understanding passing between them.

"You know I can't bite the two of you simultaneously, right?" Ashton joked, trying to ease the situation.

[Actually, you can, and I was about to suggest that.]

'What do you mean?'

[You don't need to bite their necks, do it on their arm or somewhere you can bite both at once.]

'...I'll go for the hands.'

Slowly, Ashton took their arms and leaned in. Ashton's fangs sank into their skin. The sensation like a pin had been pushed through their skin shrouded them, followed by a warm rush of blood.

Verina and Irina held onto him tightly, their fingers digging into his arms as they gasped in surprise. The initial pain quickly gave way to a feeling of exhilaration, a surge of power that flowed through their bodies like a river. They felt stronger, faster, and more alive than ever before.

The twins could feel their senses sharpening, their vision becoming clearer, and their hearing more acute. They felt like they could do anything.

Ashton's eyes were like two radiating moons. As he held the twins in his arms, they could feel his power flowing through them, merging with their own. It was a transformative experience, blending their essences beyond the physical domain.

Their cheeks flushed red, a blush that spread through the points where Ashton had bitten them. Their skin became more vibrant and lively as if it were being infused with new life.

Time seemed to stand still as the connection between them intensified. They felt like they were one being, sharing a single soul. Their thoughts and emotions were intertwined, and they knew they would never be the same again.

And then, as quickly as it had begun, Ashton released his bite. Verina and Irina gasped and pulled back, but they could still feel the power coursing through them. They looked at each other, their eyes wide with wonder.

"Wow," Irina breathed.

"That was... incredible," Verina agreed.

They turned back to Ashton, who was smiling at them. Well, not at them, but their cutesie horns at the side of their heads.

Chapter 643 A Strange Request (3)

The transformation was remarkable, to say the least. Irina's long, pristine white hair grew darker, almost black as night, while Verina's locks took on a deep, blood-red shade, making it easier to differentiate the twins.

The hair wasn't the only thing that changed. Their bodies grew more muscular and powerful, the strength of a werewolf coursing through their veins. Their senses heightened, allowing them to hear even the faintest heartbeat and smell the faintest hint of blood from miles away.

Verina gasped as she felt her body shifting once more. Fur sprouted along her arms, spreading down her back and legs.

She couldn't help but be amazed by the softness and warmth of her new coat, a blend of reds and browns resembling the colours of autumn leaves. Irina's transformation was similar, her fur a sleek, glossy black with a faint silver sheen.

It was then a different set of genes triggered within them. A pair of little horns sprouted from their temples, giving them a cute look. Ashton had no doubt that those genes stemmed from some demonic lineage.

It didn't take any time for the twins to control their new genes, unlike Anna. They immediately turned off their werewolf genes, which... turned out to be a mistake as their clothes had been torn to shreds during their transformation.

Ashton immediately turned his back towards them, not wanting to have any indecent thoughts. Well, it wasn't like he couldn't control himself, but he didn't subject himself to... questionable images being imprinted in his mind.

[Another rare race... how do you keep resurrecting these long-forgotten races over and over?]

'Rare race? They look like normal demons to me?'

[Those are no regular demons, for fucks sake. Those are Yamauba. You can think of them as the Progenitor race to what you call Oni.]

'The hell?'

[That's exactly my reaction. Not only that, you've turned them into tribrids. Yamauba-Vampire-Werewolf tribrids, to be precise.]

'...I just wanted to turn them into regular tribrids.'

[...well, what's done is done. Let's hope there's no cult looking to revive a particular Oni race.]

'Yeah, dealing with one cult is difficult as it is.'

Just then, Ashton's communicator buzzed loudly, startling him. He fumbled to reject the call, but the AI in his phone had a mind of its own and accepted the call anyway.

The holographic screen flickered to life, and there, floating in the air before him was Anna.

"Hey, Ash, I called to tell you that I'm on my way-" Anna spoke before her eyes widened in surprise. "What the hell is going on there!?"

Her expression was a mix of surprise and confusion as she took in the scene before her. Anna had expected Ashton to be alone at this hour, but what she found was far from him being alone.

Irina and Verina were standing right beside him. The only problem was the twins were completely naked.

Ashton's eyes widened in panic, and he quickly tried to shield the twins from view with his body, but it was too late. Anna's eyes grew wider than saucers, and she gasped in shock.

"Oh my gosh, Ashton! What the hell is happening over there? Why are Irina and Verina... uh, well, you know, naked?" Anna stammered, her cheeks turning a deep shade of crimson.

For a succubus, Anna always got flustered at the slightest hit of unexpected nudity.

Ashton's face turned a matching shade of red as he tried to find the right words to explain the awkward situation.

"Anna, it's not what it looks like. You see, we were... um, in the middle of something important when you called." he tried explaining but was cut off by the twins.

Irina and Verina, unfazed by their lack of attire, waved cheerfully at the holographic screen. "Hi, Anna! Long time no see!"

"Hi, girls. Um, are you both okay?" Anna blinked, still trying to process the surreal sight before her. "This horndog didn't do anything to you... did he?"

"Oh, don't worry about us. We're perfectly fine. Just a little wardrobe malfunction, you know." Verina mumbled, flaunting her new muscles.

"Yeah, we're good," Irina chimed in, "However, it's all Ashton's fault. He didn't warn us that our clothes might not survive the transformation."

"I see... but would you two mind covering yourselves..." Anna shook her head before turning her gaze back to Ashton. "Alright, mister, you've got some explaining to do."

Ashton reached over to his inventory and pulled out a couple of oversized t-shirts and sweatpants. He tossed them to the twins, who gratefully put them on, sighing with relief at being covered again. Anna watched the whole scene, a mixture of surprise and concern on her face.

"Okay, now, seriously, what's going on here?" she demanded.

Ashton gestured for the twins to sit down, and they all gathered on the couch. Irina and Verina looked at each other, then at Anna, who was waiting for an explanation.

Ashton cleared his throat and began, "Anna, you know how I turned you into a succubus to enhance your abilities, right?"

"Of course I do. You did what you had to to save me from the mist." Anna nodded, her curiosity growing.

"Well, I did the same with them," Ashton continued. "Only this time because they asked me to, and I thought it was a good decision to make them stronger..."

"Exactly! Ashton's been a huge help." Irina nodded enthusiastically.



Verina chimed in, "Yeah, we're super grateful for his assistance, even if it did result in a little wardrobe malfunction."

Anna couldn't help but chuckle at the absurdity of the situation. "Well, that makes sense, but you should have warned them about the clothes issue, Ashton."

"Yeah, my bad. I didn't think of that," Ashton scratched his head sheepishly.

[Didn't think or you wanted a little show for yourself? \*wink wink, nod nod\*]

'I swear I'll kill you one of these days.'

Once everything had been cleared, Ashton turned to Anna for the reason she called him.

"Right, I wanted to tell you I'm on my way to Earth along with the rest of the crew," Anna replied.  
"Laihud, Vimur and Leon will stay behind and take care of the administrative things in our absence."

"That's great!" Ashton replied enthusiastically. "I can't wait to show you around the new city!"

"I can't wait either," Anna replied with a mischievous glint in her eyes. "try not to have any other malfunctions while I get there."

"O-Of course not!" Ashton nervously scratched his cheek. "Well, I'll see you here. Bye, love you!"

"Love you too," Anna chuckled before disconnecting the call.

[I can't believe you managed to walk out of it alive.]

'Don't even start...'

Chapter 644 Missing Ally (1)

The early morning sun painted the sky with hues of orange and pink as Ashton stood by a small stream, his bare chest glistening with sweat.

Clutched in his hand was Balmond, its blade catching the soft light as he swung it through the air with a precision that would shame even the greatest swordmasters.

As he swung Balmond, droplets of water sprayed around him, creating a misty veil that added an almost mystical quality to the scene.

Ashton's muscles rippled with each powerful movement, his breath syncing with the rhythm of his strikes.

The water at his feet was ankle-deep, cool and refreshing, and it invigorated him as he practised his swordsmanship. The gentle flow of the stream provided a soothing background melody, further enhancing his focus.

Training in water offered unique benefits, and Ashton had come to appreciate them over time, thanks to Flintmace's guidance. The resistance of the water increased the effort required for each swing, making his muscles work harder.

It was like his blade was carving its way through not just air but a tangible force that pushed back against him. This extra resistance built strength and endurance, shaping his body into a formidable weapon.

But it wasn't just about strength. The water's natural buoyancy lessened the impact on Ashton's joints, reducing the risk of injury. The stream also acted as a natural cooling system, preventing him from overheating as he pushed his limits.

Ashton's body was in its prime, but even he knew the importance of taking care of it, and the water provided a gentle environment for him to train without putting unnecessary strain on his muscles and bones.

As Ashton continued his practice, his focus remained unwavering. The smooth arcs of his sword reflected the fluidity of the water around him. His movements were both precise and powerful, each strike a testament to the hours of training he had invested in mastering his craft.

"You have been awkwardly quiet for a while now," Ashton asked Astaroth. "What's wrong?"

[Nothing much... just wondering about what the Xyrans are doing.]

"What do you mean?" Ashton asked while swinging Balmond again.

The sound of the water and the feel of it against his skin became part of his training routine. It wasn't just a physical exercise but a divine experience that engaged his senses.

The serene surroundings cleared his mind, allowing him to fully immerse himself in the present moment. Ashton could feel the energy of the water, the earth beneath his feet, and the cool breeze that rustled the leaves of nearby trees.

[It has been a while since Beelzebub went 'missing', yet no one is bothering to look for him. It is somewhat suspicious, you know.]

Ashton stopped to ponder about what Astaroth had said. Beelzebub was supposed to be one of the few generals in the Xyrans army. His Earth, so the Xyrans should have sent a search party to look for him by now. Something that would eventually bring chaos to their missing should have been noticed by the Xyrans upper echelon.

Moreover, the Xyrans already knew that Beelzebub was headed to Earth, so the Xyrans should have sent a search party to look for him by now. Something that would eventually bring chaos to their planet.

Yet, everything was strangely peaceful, and the Xyrans were more worried about their mines than Beelzebub. At that moment, Ashton had a thought cross his mind.

"Could it be the Xyrans wanted to get rid of him all along?" he said, letting go of Balmond for a moment.

[Though unlikely, it would be the best opportunity to do it, if someone really wanted to get rid of him for whatever reason. But the question is-]

"Who would do such a thing?" Ashton completed Astaroth's thought. "Are they an ally or an enemy?"

[We could ask Flintmace about it and see if he has some clues.]

"Hm... I'll do it after I'm done training," Ashton mumbled, recalling Balmond in his hands. "It's not like we have anything else to do here."

As he resumed training, Ashton's shirtless form glistened with sweat and water as the sun climbed higher in the sky. He welcomed the sensation, feeling every droplet as it rolled down his skin.

His body was a living instrument, attuned to the world around him. His heart beat in sync with the rhythm of his strikes, following a steady and powerful rhythm.

Ashton's breaths were steady, his concentration unbroken. He knew that this training was more than just physical; it was a way to harness his inner strength and tap into the deep reservoir of power within him.

With each swing of Balmond, he felt the connection between his mind, body, and weapon grow stronger. The water amplified his efforts, making him feel more grounded and connected to the earth.

As the morning wore on, the misty veil around Ashton dissipated, carried away by the gentle breeze. His muscles were warm and alive, his body humming with energy.

The stream had become his training partner, pushing him to go beyond his limits while keeping him grounded and focused. He could feel his progress and the subtle improvements in his technique that came from this unique form of practice.

With a final, powerful swing of his sword, Ashton brought his training session to a close. He stood by the stream, his chest rising and falling as he caught his breath. The water lapped at his ankles, soothing and cooling. He wiped the sweat from his brow, a satisfied smile on his lips.

[You felt that?]

'Of course, looks like there's an uninvited guest here.'

However, as he took a moment to catch his breath, he sensed a presence nearby. Instinctively, Ashton flung his sword in the direction he felt someone, his muscles reacting with well-practised precision, allowing Balmond to attain even greater momentum.

Balmond struck a tree with a resounding thud, severing it in half. Splinters flew through the air, and the tree collapsed with a loud crash. From behind the fallen trunk, a figure emerged, unfazed by the display of Ashton's prowess.

It was Mera, clad in workout attire, her expression a mixture of annoyance and amusement. She had been jogging nearby and had apparently stopped to observe Ashton's training.

"What are you doing here?"

Chapter 645 Missing Ally (2)

Ashton's eyes narrowed as he recognised her. Mera was not exactly his favourite person, never had been, and their relationship was far from friendly. He tolerated her presence only because of his mother's insistence.

"Well, well, Ashton, always the dramatic one, I see. Training for some action movie, are we?" Mera raised an eyebrow, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

"...what are you on about?" Ashton let out an exasperated sigh, rolling his eyes. "Mera, what are you doing here? Shouldn't you be somewhere else ruining someone else's day?"

Mera smirked, undeterred by his hostility. "Ah, the sweet sound of your melodious voice. Don't you just love our little chats, darling?"

"Cut the nonsense, Mera. I have better things to do than engage in your banter." Ashton replied, recalling Balmond back to his hands.

Mera sauntered over, her athletic frame exuding confidence. She leaned against another tree, crossing her arms.

"Oh, come on, Ashton. You can't deny the thrill of our encounters. Besides, your mother would be disappointed if we didn't play nice."

"Someone like you does not need to worry about my mom," Ashton rolled his eyes.

"Ah, she didn't tell you?" Mera replied, looking at her fingers. "We have gotten strangely close over time, if you know what I mean."

Ashton clenched his jaw, unaware of what Mera was talking about and what relationship Ava had with Mera. Whatever it might have been, Ashton did not like the feeling, but what was the point of getting angry because of an ant?

"Fine, let's play nice. What do you want?"

"Oh, nothing much, just passing through. I thought I'd jog in this lovely area and stumbled upon your little show." Mera's eyes sparkled with mischief.

Ashton raised an eyebrow, unimpressed by her explanation. "You just happened to be jogging here right at this moment?"

"Well, it's a free world, Ashton. I can jog wherever I please." Mera shrugged nonchalantly.



"Fine, you've had your fun. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have more training to do." Ashton decided it was best to change the subject before he accidentally let go of Balmond and chopped Mera into pieces.

He turned away, thinking he had enough training for a day. But before he could take a step, Mera's voice stopped him.

"You know, Ashton, you're quite impressive with that sword of yours," she remarked, her tone oddly sincere. "Besides, I wanted to talk to you because of a mutual friend... Rose. Do you remember her?"

Rose, of course, he did. She was the one who took care of him while he was in the academy and taught him how to efficiently use his Vampiric lineage properly.

That said, it had been a while since he had last seen her, and in all the chaos of the corpsification gas incident and then the undead, he had forgotten entirely about her.

Ashton paused, glancing back at her with a hint of suspicion. "What are you getting at, Mera?"

"She is in trouble... well, calling it trouble would be an injustice as Rose's life is in danger," She pushed herself away from the tree, her expression serious. "Donovan, that traitorous bastard, joined the Conundrum once my father died and kidnapped Rose."

"But why would he kidnap Rose?" Ashton mumbled, lost in his thoughts.

"Hell, if I know..." The anger finally showed on Mera's face. "All I know is that this is an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone."

Ashton didn't say anything. While he had problems with both Donovan and the Conundrum in the past, he had grown out of it. After all, he had bigger problems to worry about than some useless folks back on Earth.

Even then, if Rose was in danger like Mera said, it was his duty to protect her. After all, without her help, he wouldn't have survived the academy, let alone be a reasonably well-known name in the galaxy.

"Where are they?" he asked Mera, who shot her signature smile towards him. A smile he knew very well.

"Somewhere in Europe," Mera replied. "They are probably hiding in some forest, as it would be difficult for us to locate them there."

who quickly stepped aside, making Mera trip and fall into the stream.

"They should have thought about safety before p[utting their hands on Rose," Ashton said, flexing his hands. "Besides, I have a score to settle with Donovan and the Conundrum... the fuckers managed to escape the last time, but they won't be so lucky this time."

"That's what I wanted to hear!" Mera excitedly ran to hug Ashton, who quickly stepped aside, making Mera trip and fall into the stream.

"Just because I agreed to work with you doesn't mean we're friends," Ashton informed his former mistress as she got up, wet from head to toe.

"...I get that," she said, extending her arm towards Ashton. "At least be a gentleman and help a lady in distress?"

"You're a grown-ass adult," Ashton scoffed. "Feel free to help yourself."

"...Tsk, maybe I should have taught you a thing or two about etiquette before."

"You don't need to worry about that. I know how to treat a woman and a bitch differently," Ashton replied, walking back inside the stream to continue training. "Now, don't bother me again till you have prepared for us to leave and confront those bastards."

"Anything else, your highness?" Mera said mockingly before pointing at herself. "Perhaps you would like to taste this exquisite treat while resting?"

"Sorry, but I'm not into aged food."

"How rude..."

With that, she turned and continued her jog, leaving Ashton standing by the stream as Balmond floated around his head. He watched her disappear into the distance, a perplexed expression on his face.

Ashton couldn't deny that Mera's words had caught him off guard. After all, saving Rose was the last thing on his mind when he returned to Earth.

He sighed, recalling his sword and resuming his training. "Stupid bitch, always causing trouble for me..."

[She can trouble me any time she wants.]

'Of course, you would, fucking simp.'

[I'm a simple creature, Ashton. I see a beauty, and I simp. It's as easy as that.]

'...keep your thoughts to yourself.'

Chapter 646 Long Time, No See (1)

In a dimly lit room, a holographic map of a dense forest floated before them. The room was filled with weapons and tactical gear as Ashton, Mera, and Ricochet prepared to embark on a mission to deal with Donovan and the Conundrum.

Their objective was to rescue Rose, Ashton's former aide and someone Mera had some respect for. Probably because she knew Rose was a hybrid and didn't want to end on her wrong side.

While the other two were busy arranging things they might need for the mission, Ashton studied the holographic map with a stern expression.

"So this is where you believe Donovan and the Conundrum are hiding and where Rose is being held captive," he said, pointing to a marked location deep within the forest. "As strange as it might be, it is the last place I would look for Donovan. You remember about his allergy to fauna?"

"That's what I thought first as well," Mera chuckled before nodding in agreement. "Still, we need to be prepared for anything. My intel suggests they have enhanced their defences and won't give up Rose easily because she serves a somewhat important purpose, and before you ask, I have no idea about it."

Ricochet, his eye glowing faintly, cracked his knuckles in anticipation. "I'm itching for some action. Those creeps won't know what hit 'em."

"Yeah... this is your one and only chance to repent," Ashton joked. "Or else, I'll send someone else over to Earth, and you'll be back at the Tower."

"I assure you, I won't give you any reason to take such a measure, sir!" Ricochet saluted Ashton, who could only shake his head in response.

It was no secret that Ricochet didn't want to leave Earth because of Nora. Ashton even found out that the two were engaged, and their engagement happened in the Arena after Ricochet defeated her.

Ashton wanted to see that moment happen in real-time, but he got decent footage of the event, which he immediately shared with the rest of the Ghosts, and they all had a good time pulling Ricochet's leg.

While Ashton was recalling all that, there was a knock on the door. Since Mera and Ricochet were occupied packing things up, Ashton left to check the doors, only to find the twins standing there.

"Irina, Verina, I know you want to come with us, but you've only recently mastered your new abilities. It's dangerous out there." Ashton repeated once again.

Ever since they found out about the mission through Ava, the twins were eager to join him and try out their new powers. However, Ashton, being the cautious man he was, declined their help and told them to focus on their recovery and training.

But the twins were just as stubborn as him and were not ready to give up. Hence, they had been pestering him nonstop for the last couple of days.

Irina stepped forward, her determination shining in her eyes. "Ashton, we've been training hard and want to help. We can't just sit around and not help you even with the meagre tasks!"

"Yeah, not to mention the natives are quite weak compared to us. No hard feelings," Verina chimed in, staring at Mera, "Besides, Aunt Ava thinks we're ready. She believes in us."

Ashton hesitated, torn between his concern for their safety and the desire to protect Rose. He didn't want them to accompany them because even Astaroth didn't know what sort of abilities the twins possessed, as Yamauba had some unique skills.

And if there was only thing Ashton hated more than his enemies was uncertainties when it came to battles.

Soon, Mera spoke up, and she was surprisingly supportive of the twins. "Ashton, they've come a long way, and Ava wouldn't let them go if she didn't think they were ready. Plus, having them along might just give us an edge."

Ricochet added, "Irina and Verina have a unique blend of powers that could be useful. And, let's face it, they have the spirit for this mission."

"Alright, fine. You can come, but you stick close to Mera and Ricochet. No heroics." Ashton sighed, realising that they had a point.

Irina and Verina beamed with excitement, their gratitude evident as they said in unison. "We promise, Ashton!"

"Yeah, yeah, I'll see how long you hold on to your promise," Ashton rolled his eyes, returning to the map as Mera explained the twins about their plan.

"This path should take us directly to their location." Mera pointed to a specific route that would lead them through the forest to the Conundrum's hideout. "Though, we'll need to be cautious and stay alert for traps or ambushes."

Ricochet cracked his knuckles again, a smirk on his face. "Sounds like a party. Let's do this."

Ashton nodded, his gaze hardening. "We move out at dusk. That should give us some cover as we approach. We can't afford to waste any more time."

The room buzzed with a sense of purpose as they finalised their plans. The mission was dangerous, but they were determined to rescue Rose and settle an old score with Donovan and the Conundrum.

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As the sun began to dip below the horizon, casting long shadows across the forest, Ashton, Mera, Ricochet, Irina, and Verina gathered at the edge of the tree line. Their faces were set with determination, their weapons at the ready.

The holographic map had served its purpose, guiding them to this point. Now, the real challenge lay ahead as they ventured deeper into the heart of the forest, following the path that led to the Conundrum's hideout.

"Well, we're here... what now?" Mera looked at Ashton, who had a smirk on his face.

"Now we'll do what any civilised guest would," Ashton grinned, gripping Balmond tightly. "Knock on their door..."



Without wasting any time, Ashton summoned Atlas, instructing him to rip open the ground. Atlas followed his master's command, returned to the size of a true titan and sunk his fingers into the ground before pulling hard until he ripped open a massive section of the forest.

As Atlas did that, Ashton saw what they were looking for. A massive underground facility, hidden from the view of the outside world.

"Let's greet the hosts, shall we?"

Chapter 647 Long Time, No See (2)

The underground base of the Conundrum was a labyrinth of dark tunnels and hidden chambers, its walls echoing with the quiet, tense murmurs of its masked members.

Donovan, once Mera's right-hand man, now stood among them, his loyalty to her long abandoned. He had betrayed her, joining forces with the Conundrum when Mera began to favour Ashton over him, a boy Donovan thought to be under his feet.

He thought by joining the Conundrum, he would be able to receive the strength he desired to exact his revenge on his former mistress. However, his expectations were too high for his own good.

Even after spending all that time indulging in forbidden arts and questionable methods, he was stuck at C-rank. Previously, it would have been enough for him to challenge King Bismarck for the throne, but now... it wasn't enough.

Earth has changed a lot since extraterrestrial species established themselves on the planet. The grade, which would have been sufficient to shake up entire kingdoms, was barely enough to challenge a city.

However, having abandoned everything in the pursuit of power, there was nothing Donovan could retreat to, and the Conundrum was the only place he was welcomed with open arms.

'Talk about shit luck...'

Donovan paced nervously in the dimly lit command centre, surrounded by Conundrum members wearing zodiac masks. His anxiety was palpable as he awaited orders from the Conundrum's enigmatic leader. The atmosphere was thick with tension and anticipation.

The unnamed leader had called them there for a special announcement, and Donovan assumed it was time for them to leave their seclusion and strike Ashton's new estate... New Lyconia.

Just the thought of getting a bit of revenge on that kid was enough to make Donovan abandon whatever little reasoning he had. As long as he could make the bastard hurt, there wasn't anything Donovan wasn't willing to do.

Especially because Ashton, their biggest threat, was nowhere to be seen. Without him to protect the people, the Conundrum was confident that with a bit of secrecy, they could deal a significant blow to the new world they were creating.

However, their plans were cut short when a low rumbling echoed through the base, causing the masked Conundrum members to exchange anxious glances. The ground shook as if a storm were brewing above their heads.

"The hell's going on!?" one of the members roared at the top of her lungs as the noise of the earth ripping above them got louder and louder.

"Whatever it is, we need to check it out." yet another member chimed in as they all drew their weapons.

Donovan's heart raced as he turned toward the command centre's entrance, his instincts screaming that something was wrong. The rumbling grew louder, and then, with an earth-shattering crash, the reinforced steel doors were torn asunder.

Ashton burst into the command centre, flanked by his summoned allies. Sven, Celeste, and Atlas all entered behind Ashton and the rest, radiating an aura of unstoppable determination.

With their zodiac masks concealing their identities, the Conundrum members scrambled for cover, frustration etched in their eyes. Donovan's heart sank as he realised the dire situation they were in.

"How did they manage to find us!" the lady in a doe mask yelled while the one sporting a bull mask shrugged.

"Could it be?" someone mumbled while they all turned against Donovan.

Since he was the newest recruit, it made sense for him to betray them. Not to mention, he used to be Mera's loyal dog, and it could be possible he was still following her.

Donovan was shocked to see his 'comrades' turning their backs on him so quickly. He was about to retort when their leader's sudden appearance stopped him.

"Now is not the time for us to fight amongst ourselves," the leader wearing a lion mask mumbled. "We have guests, and we should follow etiquette and entertain them."

Donovan nodded and turned to face Ashton. Even though it was unexpected, and he felt unprepared to face off against him, Donovan was glad to at least have an opportunity to bring that bastard down... before he was shocked to see who was by Ashton's side.

But what stunned Donovan was not the powerful summons but the sight of Mera standing beside Ashton. Her presence alone was enough to send a chill down his spine. It took a moment for recognition to dawn on him, and he couldn't help but feel a twinge of shock.

Mera, once Donovan's partner in crime, now stood as a force to be reckoned with; her alliance with Ashton had transformed her into something Donovan had never anticipated. Her loyalty had shifted, leaving Donovan feeling a bitter mixture of resentment and disbelief.

The fucker who destroyed his harmony was standing side by side with Mera? How could it be when they used to hate each other?

"Damn, you look old, Donovan," Ashton smirked. "Looks like your time with these morons hasn't been kind to your face. Not saying you were good-looking, to begin with, but damn, this is a new low!"

"I see your mouth has gotten bigger with time," Donovan replied, his fists clenched. "I'll be more than glad to shut it up for you."

Donovan was about to charge at Ashton when the leader stepped before him, blocking his path.

"He is not your opponent," the leader said, turning to face Ashton and disrobing himself to reveal a muscular body hiding underneath.

However, the surprise came when he removed his mask to reveal a face identical to Rose's. Both Mera and Ashton were shocked, but Ashton was sure the man before him wasn't Rose as he was informed about his identity by Astaroth.

[It isn't like you need me to tell you about it. Apparently, the one you're looking for had impressive assets-]

'This isn't the time for that, you horny fuck!'

[Just saying.]

"Who are you?" Mera asked the leader, who smiled at them.

"It's not a surprise for my twin to not talk about her disgrace of a brother. But as for you, Ashton, I'm sure you're familiar with the cult. What if I told you I'm one of them, and so is my sister? I wonder what will you do about it?"

Chapter 648 As Easy As It Gets (1)

648 As Easy As It Gets (1)

"You? Someone as weak as you is working with the cult?" Ashton rolled his eyes. "Even that changes nothing. I was going to kill before, and I will do it still. Besides, if those fuckers knew about me, they would be rushing to earth with everything at their disposal."

"You should not threaten someone lightly, boy," the leader barked, but Ashton cut him off.

"Oh, believe me, I don't give out threats recklessly like yourself. When I say I'll kill someone, I commit to it."

The tension reached its breaking point in the heart of the Conundrum's hidden forest base. The leader of the Conundrum was fed up with Ashton's intrusion and decided to confront him head-on.

The leader charged at Ashton with a roar, his fists clenched and muscles bulging. He swung a powerful punch, aiming to catch Ashton off guard.

But Ashton, his senses honed through countless training sessions with Flintmace and Vulcan, effortlessly sidestepped the attack.

The leader's fist whistled through the air, striking nothing but empty space. He stumbled forward, off balance, and tried to regain his composure. But Ashton was already on the move, dancing around him like a wisp of smoke.

With each attempt to strike Ashton, the leader found himself grasping at thin air. It was as if he were wrestling with a phantom. No matter how hard he tried, Ashton was always a step ahead.

His movements were elastic like water, his evasion effortless. Every time he dodged an attack, he made a mockery of the Conundrum leader's attempts to land a blow.

Frustration etched itself onto the leader's face. He growled in anger and launched a series of rapid punches and kicks, but Ashton deftly ducked and weaved, slipping through the onslaught unscathed.

It was a humiliating display for the Conundrum leader, who had expected to make quick work of his intruder.

After all, he had heard about Ashton's strengths and weaknesses, but it seemed like he had long since overcome the barriers. The Ashton before them wasn't anything like the leader was informed.

As the leader continued to flail, the Conundrum members, their zodiac masks concealing their identities, watched with shock and uncertainty. Their leader, the one they had looked up to for guidance and strength, was being made to look like a fool.

"What are we waiting for? We have to help him out!" the lady in the rabbit mask urged the rest, but they shook their head.

"Leader doesn't want our help," the man in an ox mask mumbled. "If he did, he would have for us to intervene. But we can do something..."

But their shock soon turned to action. Seeing that Ashton was occupied with their leader, they lunged at Irina, Verina, Ricochet, and Ashton's summons, Sven, Celeste, and Atlas. It was chaos as they clashed with the invaders.

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Ricochet had his cybernetic enhancements whirring with power as three members slowly surrounded him. They were Conundrum members wearing the rat, ox, and tiger masks.

Watching them approach him, Ricochet cracked his knuckles and flashed a confident grin.

"Alright, boys, let's dance!" Ricochet quipped, his voice dripping with a playful swagger.

The Rat-Masked Member lunged forward with incredible speed, a flurry of punches aimed at Ricochet's head and torso. Ricochet's enhanced reflexes allowed him to anticipate each strike.

With a series of well-timed blocks and parries, he deflected the blows easily, his cybernetic limbs moving in perfect synchronisation.



"Is that all you've got?" Ricochet taunted, his grin widening. "I've seen more impressive moves from my grandma!"

Frustration flashed across the rat-masked member's face as he continued his futile assault. Ricochet effortlessly blocked and parried each blow, his movements so fluid that he seemed to be dancing rather than fighting.

Soon, Ricochet had had enough and retaliated with a powerful kick to the Rat-Masked Member's midsection, sending him staggering backwards. It was a precise strike, exploiting a momentary vulnerability, and it left the Rat-Masked Member momentarily winded.

Meanwhile, the Ox-Masked Member attempted to charge at Ricochet with brute force, relying on their strength to overpower him.

But Ricochet was already in motion, darting around the charging opponent gracefully and precisely. He moved like a shadow, his enhanced agility allowing him to avoid the Ox-Masked Member's attempts to grab hold of him.

With a swift spin, Ricochet executed a series of rapid strikes to the Ox-Masked Member's pressure points, causing them to momentarily lose control of their limbs. They stumbled and fell to the ground, disoriented and struggling to regain footing.

"Whoa there, big guy! You might want to cut back on the hay," Ricochet teased as he gracefully evaded the ox-masked member's attempts to retaliate.

Next was the Tiger-Masked Member, known for her ferocity and leapt into the fray with acrobatic kicks and lunges. She aimed to overwhelm Ricochet with sheer aggression.

However, Ricochet's cybernetic eye that Tarik built him, calculated every move, allowing him to anticipate the Tiger-Masked Member's attacks.

Ricochet evaded a high kick with a graceful backflip, narrowly missing his head. He countered with a swift roundhouse kick that struck the Tiger-Masked Member's torso, sending her tumbling backwards.

The Tiger-Masked Member landed with a thud, momentarily winded and struggling to regain breath.

Ricochet dusted off his hands with an exaggerated flourish. "Well, that was fun! Who's next? I've got all day!"

The Conundrum members, hidden behind their animal masks, were increasingly frustrated. Their combined efforts to take down Ricochet had proven ineffective. Ricochet's calculated movements and precise strikes had left them disoriented and vulnerable.

"We need to charge at him simultaneously," Tiger-mask urged the rest.

"You think that'll work?" Rat-mask rolled his eyes. "He is stronger than just three of us to handle!"

"There he comes!" Ox-mask yelled before pushing the other two out of harm's way.

Despite his efforts, it was already too late. Ricochet was on them and delivered heavy attacks on the back of their heads, knocking them out.

They lay sprawled on the ground, unconscious and defeated, their masks turned to the side of their faces.

"Three down, plenty more to go," he said, dusting off his hands as he went looking for new targets.

Chapter 649 As Easy As It Gets (2)

649 As Easy As It Gets (2)

While Ricochet fought against three conundrum members, the twins were busy with their own fight.

Irina and Verina stood against the Conundrum members wearing the Rabbit and Monkey masks, both female adversaries. The place echoed with the anticipation of a fierce showdown.

"Let's see what you fools can do." The Rabbit-mask mumbled.

The Rabbit-masked Conundrum member, quick and agile, darted forward with a barrage of punches aimed at Irina. Irina's werewolf instincts and reflexes in play gracefully sidestepped the strikes, her movements almost akin to dancing.

"You'll have to do better than that!" Irina taunted, her voice dripping with confidence.

The Rabbit-mask took Irina's taunting as a challenge and eventually landed a kick to her in the stomach.

"Do better? Child, I was just playing with you." the Rabbit-mask scoffed.

However, a moment later she realised she hadn't kicked Irina, because the princess had caught her.

"Yes... do better!"

With a fierce growl, Irina countered with a powerful swipe of her claws, leaving a series of shallow cuts on the rabbit-masked member's arm.

Meanwhile, Verina faced the Monkey-masked Conundrum member, who displayed a mischievous grin beneath her mask.

She leapt into the air, attempting a flying kick, but Verina, channelling her newly acquired Yamauba genes, extended her claws with lightning speed, intercepting the attack with a swift block.

"Nice try," Verina remarked, her tone steady.

"You..." Monkey-mask's eyes flared up as she unleashed a barrage of attacks on Verina.

She swung her fists wildly, trying to catch Verina off guard. But Verina's Yamauba heritage granted her a supernatural sense of rhythm and timing. She effortlessly flowed around the monkey-masked member's strikes. But just dodging the strike wasn't any fun.

So Verina decided to embrace offence and immobilised the monkey-masked member's arm, rendering her momentarily defenceless. Verina took advantage of the situation and delivered a powerful kick that sent the monkey-masked member sprawling.

"Tsk... why do you people lose your cool so easily?" Verina shook her head and began toying with her masked foe.

Meanwhile, undeterred by her initial failure, the Rabbit-masked member pressed on against Irina. She lunged again, this time with blinding speed, her punches a blur.

Irina's werewolf senses heightened, parrying the strikes precisely, her Yamauba genes granting her the strength to hold the masked witch back. However, Rabbit-mask eventually landed a strike on Irina, pushing her backwards.

"Impressive," Irina said with a smirk, "but it's not enough."

With a quick twist of her body, Irina delivered a powerful roundhouse kick, catching the Rabbit-masked member off guard. The impact sent her tumbling backwards, landing in a heap on the floor.

Simultaneously, Verina and the Monkey-masked member engaged in a complex dance of strikes and counters. The Monkey-masked member now moved with awkward but effective manoeuvres.

It almost felt like Verina was fighting with a monkey as her agility matched Verina's supernatural speed. It was a battle of wits and reflexes, a testament to their respective abilities.

Verina, determined to gain the upper hand, utilised her Yamauba genes to enhance her speed further. She darted forward with rapid punches, forcing the Monkey-masked member on the defensive. The room echoed with the sound of their clash.

"You're quick," Verina commented, "but I can be faster."

With a sudden burst of speed, Verina delivered a decisive blow, her fist connecting with the Monkey-masked member's midsection. The impact sent her opponent crashing into a nearby pillar, her mask slipping away.

Irina and Verina regrouped, their eyes locked onto the fallen Conundrum members. The Rabbit-masked member struggled to regain her composure while the Monkey-masked member clutched her side in pain.

Amid the clash of fists and claws, the Conundrum members struggled to keep up with the twins' combined prowess.

The rabbit-masked member's breath came in ragged gasps as she tried to match Irina's relentless assault. Blood oozed from the wounds inflicted by Irina's claws as if there was no way to stop the blood.

"Looks like we make a pretty good team," Verina remarked to her sister. "Even after all that genetic mutation."

"Of course we do," Irina nodded, a grin spreading across her face. "Let's finish this."

With renewed determination, Irina unleashed a flurry of strikes that left the rabbit-masked member with no room to counter. She seized an opening and delivered a powerful kick to the midsection that sent the rabbit-masked member crashing to the ground.

Much like Irina, Verina's strikes were calculated and precise. She landed blow after blow, her movements fluid yet deadly. The monkey-masked member's attempts to retaliate were feeble, her strength no match for Verina's unleashed power.

The twins worked together seamlessly, their complementary abilities forming a devastating combination. Irina's werewolf strength and agility, combined with Verina's finesse, overwhelmed and defeated the Conundrum members.

With one final coordinated attack, Irina and Verina struck simultaneously. Irina's claws met the rabbit-masked member's arms with a bone-crunching force.

While Verina's precise strike landed squarely on the monkey-masked member's throat. Both Conundrum members crumpled to the ground, defeated and incapable of continuing the fight.

However, winning the fight wasn't the twins' goal. They were there for Rose and expected the masked foes to have some information on her whereabouts.

As the Rabbit-mask recovered a bit, the twins descended upon her. She immediately raised her hands to cover her face, but when she didn't feel anything, Rabbit-mask slowly opened her eyes.

"Look, as much as fun it is to kick your asses, we're here on some urgent matter," Verina said.

"Yeah," Irina joined in. "Just tell us where Rose is, and we'll leave you in peace."

"She's... in the underground chamber, deep within the base. But you won't get to her so easily," Rabbit replied as her mask fell off her face. "You'll need three keys to unlock her cell, and only the leader knows where the keys are-"

"I see. Thanks for the information." Verina smiled before kicking her on the head.

As they turned to leave, a rustling in the bushes caught their attention. From the shadows emerged Ricochet, his cybernetic eye scanning the area as he assessed the situation.

"Everything under control here?" he asked.



"Yeah, we managed to take care of these two and found Rose's whereabouts," Verina nodded, a hint of a smile on her lips. "Let's wait for the others to clean up before heading down."

### Chapter 650 As Easy As It Gets (3)

Amidst the tumult, Ashton found himself in a showdown with the Conundrum Leader, who had chosen to forgo a mask, revealing his identity as Rose's twin.

The Leader's face was contorted with anger as he charged at Ashton, fists clenched and muscles taut. He charged at Ashton with a roar, fists clenched and eyes blazing with determination to end the zompiewolf. His first punch was swift and powerful, aimed straight for Ashton's face.

But Ashton, being as agile as he was, moved with lightning speed. He leaned back just enough to let the punch whiz past him, his hair ruffling with the wind of the missed blow.

Ashton didn't use his supernatural abilities in this fight. Instead, he wanted to demonstrate the vast difference in their basic combat skills.

After all, it wouldn't be fun if he defeated the so-called Leader in one strike. But that didn't stop Ashton from making fun of Rose's twin.

As Ashton dodged another strike, he taunted the Conundrum Leader with a faint smirk, "Is that all you've got? I expected more from someone who calls themselves a leader."

The Leader's frustration grew evident as he tried to land a hit on Ashton, who continued to dodge with ease. Wooden floors below them creaked and squeaked as the Leader moved over them.

Since the punches weren't connecting, the Conundrum Leader attempted a flurry of punches and kicks, but it was as if Ashton had already predicted every move.

With a calculated sidestep, Ashton avoided a sweeping kick that sent the Leader off balance, exposing his side to Ashton. Ashton knew the Leader had intentionally done that, expecting him to step into the trap.

Leader's intentions were clear as day, but Ashton, being the generous soul he was, decided to take his opponent's offer.

Ashton saw the Leader smile the moment he leaned in to punch him. Clearly, the latter wanted to take the opportunity to deliver a knee strike. However, the Leader had severely underestimated Ashton's speed.

In a swift motion, Ashton delivered a well-placed strike to the Leader's midsection, causing him to stagger backwards. The Leader was wide-eyed as he couldn't see Ashton hitting him, let alone countering him.

"How did you do it?" the Leader gritted his teeth, frustrated with the outcome of their battle.

"I didn't do anything special," Ashton shrugged. "You're simply too weak to do anything."

"You-"

Rage once again blinded the Leader as he lunged at Ashton. However, Ashton's movements were fluid, as he effortlessly dodged everything the Leader threw his way and toyed with the Leader as if they were in a spar rather than a serious battle.

The more Ashton dodged the attacks, the more frustrated Conundrum Leader's got. He lunged forward once more, fists flying, but Ashton deftly ducked and weaved, slipping through the onslaught unscathed.

The Leader's attacks became increasingly desperate and wild, his frustration reaching its peak.

Ashton moved around the Leader with a sly grin, his movements graceful and precise.

He continued to tease, "You really need to work on your form. At this rate, you'll never be able to defeat anyone, let alone me."

The Conundrum Leader growled in anger, his punches becoming more erratic. He was no match for Ashton's combat prowess, and he knew it. Ashton's taunts were like salt in the wound, and his pride was wounded.

In a final act of desperation, the Leader attempted a powerful roundhouse kick. But Ashton, who had been waiting for the perfect moment, seized the opportunity.

With a lightning-quick movement, he caught the Leader's leg mid-kick and twisted it, snapping the leg in half and sending the Leader sprawling to the ground.

Ashton stood over the fallen Conundrum Leader, his expression mixed with amusement and disappointment.

"You're too weak," he said flatly, shaking his head. "I expected more from someone who dared to challenge us."

The Leader, defeated and humiliated, lay on the ground, gasping for breath. He had been utterly outmatched by Ashton, who hadn't broken a sweat throughout the entire fight. The whole place fell silent as the Conundrum Leader struggled to accept his defeat.

Ashton turned away, leaving the Leader on the ground. He had other battles to attend to and other allies who needed his help.

The Conundrum Leader, however, was left to grapple with his wounded pride and the harsh reality of his inadequacy in the face of Ashton's superior combat skills.

"You won't get away with this," Leader called out. "I, too, have a black blessing like yourself!"

"Aah, so that's why you were being so cocky..." Ashton mumbled before breaking down into a fit of laughter. "And here I thought you had a legitimate reason to believe you're stronger than me. Tsk, I never thought someone related to Rose could be so dumb."

With that, Ashton appeared before the man in the blink of an eye and stepped on his broken leg. Upon hearing their leader scream in agony, the Conundrum members didn't know what to do.

If the strongest amongst them was reduced to such a pathetic state, then they could only wonder what would have to them if they stood against Ashton.

Well, most of them did, as Donovan was busy dealing with Mera. He had promised himself that the next time he saw his beloved mistress, it would be the last time they saw each other's face as only one would be left alive.

Mera had always been the strongest amongst her companions, which gave her the illusion that she didn't need to bind them to her and that her strength alone would be enough to keep her people in check.

However, she had seen Donovan break that illusion and was thankful he did. Because if he hadn't, she would have never known that the one she thought of as her dog was a snake waiting for the right moment to strike her down.

"Before we do this... I would like to know something," Mera mumbled as she and Donovan got into a fighting stance. "Why did you do it? Was I that bad of a head for you?"

"Talking was never my strong point, so stop blabbering and get this over with," Donovan replied before lunging at Mera.