

## **Zompiewolf 701**

### Chapter 701 Brother To Me (1)

Two weeks had passed since the preparations for the soul-splitting procedure had begun. The moment of separation between Ashton and Astaroth was looming, and the tension in the laboratory was palpable. They had run countless simulations for every possible outcome, and thankfully, everything was in order. It was surprising as they had never seen such positive results, but it was likely due to the Precursor tech they had used. Within days, every detail had been meticulously arranged for the impending event, and the room hummed with anticipation as the day of the operation arrived. As planned, Ashton was summoned to the lab for a final check, and as he stepped into the room, his eyes were immediately drawn to the sight before him. Inside a transparent cylindrical tank, a surreal image met his gaze – his clone, suspended in a peculiar greenish liquid. The eerie fluid surrounded the clone, keeping it in an almost ghostly state. It was an uncanny sight, seeing his likeness suspended in such an unusual manner, and it made him a bit uncomfortable.

Astaroth, as always, couldn't resist commenting as he observed the scene. His voice resonated within Ashton's mind.

[It's strange, isn't it? Seeing yourself like this.]

With a bemused expression, Ashton couldn't help but shake his head, his voice tinged with sarcasm.

"It's not like you get to see your other self outside of a mirror, is it?" he replied. "Also... I'm still not sure if cloning myself was the right choice."

[Well, what's done is done. No point dwelling on it. Oh, also, I don't know why, but this clone does look more handsome, don't you think?]

"It looks better than me?" Ashton raised an eyebrow. "Astaroth, it's supposed to look identical to me. That's the whole point of it being a clone."

[It looks better because soon it will be my body~]

"What good are your looks when you'll still be a virgin, trapped in a new body..."

[This bitch, that joke has gotten old already! Think of something new.]

"Do I have to?"

Their exchange was momentarily halted as Ibis, her demeanour serious, approached Ashton. She was tired from working all day and night, and yet she had a smile on her face as she greeted Ashton. "Are you ready for the procedure, Ashton?"

Ashton's response was a simple nod. Ava and Anna were the only other witnesses in the room, along with the essential Xyrans who were needed to facilitate the process. But it would be a lie if someone were to say there was no tension around them. "Alright then," Ashton smiled while looking at Ava and Anna. "See you in a bit!"

"Of course," Anna replied, briefly kissing him as she whispered in his ears. "Once you're out, you'll have to compensate me for all this tension... and I'm not taking no for an answer."

"Succubus, through and through, aren't you?" Ashton smiled before hugging Ava. After a few heartfelt embraces from his mother and Anna, Ashton stepped into the second cylindrical tank, and moments later, it was filled with the strange greenish liquid. As everyone got to work on the outside, Ashton was having another conversation with Astaroth inside the shared mental space. Astaroth did his best, guiding Ashton through the complexities of the impending procedure.

[This is the last conversation we'd share like this...]

"Good riddance, I say," Ashton's words were tinged with a hint of nostalgia and perhaps a touch of sentimentality. "But to be honest, I'll miss our psychic conversations."

[Likewise... well, I'll proceed with isolating our consciousness. It's more like segregating it into different parts of your brain to ease the process.]

"Right... see you when I wake up."

As Ashton spoke those words, there was a sense of acceptance in his tone. With that, his vision gradually darkened as he slipped into unconsciousness. Within moments, Ibis and the Xyrans, who had been observing closely, began the intricate procedure that would 'separate' Ashton and Astaroth.

However, not everyone was on board with helping the precursor, which became evident as the procedure entered the advanced stages. An unexpected crisis unfolded that sent shockwaves through the laboratory. Ashton, submerged in the liquid inside his chamber, began convulsing violently, his body wracked with spasms. "What's happening!?"

Panic erupted among the observers, and Anna, in a state of distress, cried out, "Ibis, do something!"

Ibis stood there, her expression a mixture of concern and alarm, her mind racing to find a solution. It was the first time something like that had happened in her presence. Besides, Ibis had ensured that everything was in order before beginning the procedure. That's why the current scenario was out of the results she had expected.

The room was tense, and the Xyrans exchanged uneasy glances as they grappled with the rapidly escalating crisis.

Suddenly, one of the chambers burst open, and Ashton's golden-skinned clone, who was none other than Astaroth, emerged from it, cradling the convulsing Ashton in his arms. Anna and Ava, quick to react, rushed to assist, but Astaroth gestured them to stop and placed Ashton on the floor. He then executed a precise manoeuvre, utilising an ancient healing technique in the form of his aura emanating from his hands to stabilise Ashton and end the convulsions.

A collective sigh of relief swept through the room as Astaroth's timely intervention saved Ashton from further harm. Ava and Anna, their expressions filled with gratitude, turned their attention to the now-stabilised Ashton, ensuring he was all right.

"He's fine now. The fluid inside the pods had an adverse reaction with his genetic material, causing his reaction," Astaroth reassured them calmly. "Thankfully, there's no lasting damage. But you should take him to rest somewhere, just in case."

"Thank you..." Ava nodded and called for help before promptly assisting Ashton to the hospital, where he could recover safely.

Once they had departed, the atmosphere in the laboratory shifted dramatically. The smile on Astaroth's face disappeared and contorted with anger. It was a face the Xyrans hadn't seen for ages, but they were frozen in fear when Astaroth turned to face them.

Without wasting any time, Astaroth advanced towards Ibis and grabbed her by the neck, his grip tightening around her throat as he lifted her off the ground. "I trusted you, and you tried to kill him?" he roared over the beeping noise of the machines around. "Give me one damned reason not to kill you this instant!"

Chapter 702 Brother To Me (2)

Ibis struggled desperately within Astaroth's unyielding grasp, her fingers clawing at his vice-like grip as she gasped for breath. Her eyes, wide with fear, darted around the laboratory, searching for any sign of help. The Xyrans, who were present there, sensed the danger of the situation and formed a circle around them, their voices raised in a futile attempt to calm Astaroth.

Astaroth paid no heed to the pleas of his fellow Xyrans, and his grip remained unrelenting. He was determined to get answers, one way or the other.

He leaned in closer to Ibis, his voice laced with a deadly intensity as he demanded again, "Why did you try to kill Ashton?"

Ibis struggled to form words under the relentless pressure on her throat. But she eventually found her voice as a faint, strained mumble. "I don't know what you're talking about." Hearing that answer made Astaroth even angrier. In his twisted mind, he came up with the only possible reason for Ibis to do something so reckless.

"Seraph... you endangered Ashton's life to get back at me for killing Seraph, is that it?" Astaroth scoffed before shaking his head. "I was foolish to believe you'll ever help me without an ulterior motive."

For some reason, hearing those words from Astaroth's mouth pained her like nothing had. Not even the news of Astaroth's presumed death was as painful as the look of hatred in his eyes for her. "Lady Ibis had nothing to do with the incident..."

At that very moment, another Xyran stepped forward, emboldened by the dire situation. His voice was unwavering as he admitted to his dark intent. "I was the one who tried to sabotage the Soul Splitter. I believed Ashton was too great a risk to be left alive," he continued. "I thought crippling or ending his existence would be the best course of action to restore the Xyran dominance over the galaxy."

"Nikai!" Ibis suddenly found her strength and exclaimed the young man's name. She knew Nikai held a candle for her but only viewed him as a friend and had always shot down his advances. However, she hadn't expected him to endanger his life for her sake. The thought that the young man could do something sinister never crossed Ibis's mind. Unfortunately, she didn't know that Nikai had indeed sabotaged the procedure, not in the hopes of killing Ashton but to stop Astaroth's resurrection. He knew with Astaroth in the picture, he would never be able to convince Ibis of his love for her. Hence, saw it as an opportunity to end the roadblock once and for all. With Beelzebub and Astaroth out of his way, no one could 'steal' Ibis away from him... or so Nikai thought. Unfortunately, he hadn't expected Astaroth to segregate Ashton and his conscience before the procedure. Hence, it was too late by the time he sabotaged the operation. Astaroth had already linked with his new body, and Ashton became the target as he was the only 'soul' in the primary body. When Astaroth violently reacted towards Ibis, Nikai realised he had made a mistake. But instead of telling the truth and diminishing his image in what could be his final moments, he decided to make up a story. Nikai wanted to portray himself as a hero who tried to maintain the status quo by eliminating the sole being who could threaten the Xyrans instead of a pathetic loser.

"I did what I thought was right," Nikai boldly proclaimed. "So, let her go and do what you will with me!"

Everyone in the room gasped as Nikai, someone who couldn't even correctly wield a sword, challenged someone like Astaroth. Still holding Ibis aloft, Astaroth regarded the confessor with a steely gaze before taking a deep breath. This wasn't how he had expected to live the first moments of his new life. "Very well then," he remarked. "I shall teach you a lesson in humility."

Astaroth's grip on Ibis's throat slowly loosened, and he released her, allowing her to fall to the ground. But instead of tending to her safety, Ibis launched herself at Astaroth's feet, her desperation noticeable even to the blind. She knew what was coming, and she was determined to prevent it.

"Astaroth! Please! He's a fool who doesn't know what he did!" she shrieked. "I'll teach him a lesson myself! You don't need to dirty your hands!"

"Dirty my hands?" Astaroth stopped before staring into Ibis's eyes. "You may have forgotten how many souls I have destroyed, but I do and adding another one to the pile won't affect anyone."

"Astaroth! Please, I beg you!" Ibis continued pleading for Nikai's life. "Nikai! Apologise to him this instant, and he'll forgive you!"

Unfortunately, it didn't seem Nikai felt the same. If anything, watching the love of his life beg for someone only made him angrier. Sadly, it was that anger that sealed Nikai's fate. "I'm sorry, my lady," Nikai mumbled before retrieving his pistol and aiming for Astaroth's head. "But I won't apologise to a traitor!"

Everyone was shocked and reprimanded Nikai for his words. Whether Astaroth was a traitor or not was debatable, but someone as lowly as Nikai had no right to threaten one of the great generals of their empire. However, Nikai didn't care about what others had to say and fired on Astaroth, who slightly tilted his head to dodge the bullet. Ibis tried to get everyone under control, but it was too late.

Astaroth shrugged her off with casual indifference. His golden eyes shifted to Nikai. In the blink of an eye, an explosion of energy emanated from Astaroth's hand, and the Xyran's head was obliterated in a

grisly spectacle. The room fell into a horrified hush as they witnessed the abrupt and brutal demise of one of their own. The room was filled with a deafening silence, the aftermath of Astaroth's swift and merciless judgment. Nikai's lifeless body crumpled to the ground, blood still spurting from his headless corpse. Ibis sat a few paces away, her eyes wide with shock and her face drained of colour. Her hands trembled as she stared at the ghastly aftermath of misunderstandings and wrong choices. Her lips parted, but no words escaped; she only managed a faint, breathless gasp before turning towards Astaroth. But it didn't seem like he was in the mood to talk to her.

"Let this be a lesson for all of you," he said. "Betrayal to our cause will not be tolerated... now clean up this mess!"

### Chapter 703 Brother To Me (3)

Ashton had been resting in the hospital room after the harrowing incident in the laboratory. His eyes were open now, and his condition had improved significantly since Astaroth's intervention. The guardian had sensed something was off with Ashton and rushed to his side and only allowed visitors once they were confident about Ashton's health. Ava and Anna, his mother and beloved, were by his side, offering comfort and relief. The room was filled with familial warmth, a sanctuary from the chaos that had unfolded moments ago.

"You scared me to death for once, son," Ava smiled, patting Ashton's cheek as he smiled. "Ma, I'm not dying so soon, so stop worrying about me," Ashton said with a smile. "She's your mother, of course, she'll be worried about you no matter how strong you are," Anna retorted, gently slapping his arm. "So you're telling me you weren't?"

As they conversed and shared their relief that Ashton had more or less recovered, a faint but distinct knock resounded at the door. The sudden sound made Ava and Anna startle, their eyes widening with surprise when they saw who it was.

The door creaked open slowly, and there, making his entrance, was Astaroth. Seeing him took Ava and Anna aback; they hadn't gotten a good look at Astaroth before, their attention solely focused on Ashton's condition. Now, standing before them was an exact copy of Ashton himself.



"Oh god, I was shocked for a moment," Ava couldn't help but voice her astonishment, her words tinged with amazement. "It's going to take some getting used to, having two Ashtons around the city."

"Well, it's not a bad thing, is it?" Astaroth flashed a mischievous smile as he replied. "Double the trouble, double the fun."

"No more trouble!" Ava immediately replied. "The city is already in ruins as it is."

"I'll try my best," Astaroth chuckled. "I'm not sure if your son will or not!"

"Oi, fucker, did you come here to talk shit about me?" Ashton said, his words prompted a light slap on his cheek. He had wholly forgotten that others could hear their conversation now that he and Astaroth weren't sharing his mind.

"Ashton, language!" Ava sternly warned him.

"Sorry, ma... my tongue slipped a bit." Ashton apologised before turning towards Anna. "Could you two leave for a moment? I would like to discuss something with Astaroth in private."

"Um... sure."

As Ava and Anna prepared to leave the room to grant Ashton and Astaroth some privacy, Anna paused by Ashton's bedside. She leaned in to give him a tender kiss on the cheek, her eyes brimming with affection. "We'll be right outside, Ashton. If you need anything, just let us know."

"Thank you, Astaroth, for what you did for my son. I am very grateful." Ava echoed Anna's sentiment and offered her own words of gratitude. Astaroth's smile was warm and reassuring. "I was just returning the favour. You can count on me to keep him safe."

Once Ava and Anna had exited the room, closing the door behind them, Ashton and Astaroth were left alone, allowing for a more confidential conversation between the two.

"I guess I have the perfect alibi now," Ashton quipped. "It wasn't me; it was my evil twin. He's the killer! or something like that."

"Just think of the mischief we could get into with this double act," Astaroth chuckled, his golden eyes shimmering with amusement. "Well, if not for our different skin colours."

The jovial atmosphere was soon replaced by a more serious tone as Ashton broached a crucial subject. "Astaroth, I need to know something. Who tried to kill me during the soul-splitting process?" he asked. "I hope you know that I can't ignore an attempt on my life, even if it was from one of your kind."

"You remember out about the attack?"

Astaroth was momentarily surprised that Ashton even recalled the attack as he was supposed to be unconscious during the procedure, but he offered a comforting pat on Ashton's shoulder. "What do you mean? I was awake through the entire process... except the bit at the start," Ashton mumbled. "Whatever they did to me didn't hurt, but it made my body go berserk. So I hope you know I can't just let go of them."

"You don't need to worry about that, Ashton. I've already taken care of the problem." Astaroth replied.

"Taken care of it?" Ashton smirked. "You son of a bitch, you told me not to kill anymore Xyrans and went ahead and did it yourself?"

"Well, they already see me as a traitor, so what worse can they do about it?" Astaroth smiled back. "besides, you're like a brother to me; an attempt on your life is like an attempt on mine."

Ashton smiled upon hearing those words and nodded, knowing their connection was still the same as before. Even if they weren't sharing his body anymore. "I just want you to know that I appreciate it," Ashton replied before getting serious. "Also, I want your opinion on something... what do you think about forming an alliance with the Xyrans?"

Astaroth's expression grew contemplative, his golden eyes taking on a distant quality as he considered the proposition. While it was true that the Xyrans held knowledge that could be invaluable in dealing with Precursors, he had reservations about their ultimate loyalty.

Being a Xyran himself, Astaroth knew his kind would turn on Ashton as soon as they were done dealing with the more significant threat, and he expressed his doubts to him. "Ashton, it's not just about what they can offer. It's also about trust," Astaroth replied. "I'm worried that once the Xyrans achieve their goal of defeating Kro'Han, they may see you as a threat and turn on you as well."

"Well, you're right about that," Ashton nodded, acknowledging Astaroth's concerns. "I know the Xyrans are a complex race, and their motivations might not align with ours. But we do need their help to fight Kro'Han. If they don't help, then it would have to be the two of us against him."

"Well... that is true, but I'm not keen on getting my ass handed to Kro'Han just yet," Astaroth sighed. "So, what do you say? Is it time for us to pay a visit to my homeworld?" "I think it is. Let's see what the Xyrans have to offer and if an alliance is possible," Ashton's crimson eyes sparkled with determination as he nodded. He continued, "If it is, we'll call it a day, and if it isn't... then it'd be better to get rid of them before they intervene in matters where they don't belong."

#### Chapter 704 Council's Dilemma

The grand council chamber of the Xyran civilisation, adorned with intricate designs and grandeur, was a place where decisions that shaped their future were made. On this day, it had transformed into a theatre of shock and tension as council members gathered for an unprecedented emergency session. The reason behind this extraordinary assembly was a revelation that had sent ripples of disbelief through their ranks.

"We have received the reports..." One council member declared, their voice trembling with the weight of the revelation he was about to make. "Astaroth is alive."

The news hung heavily in the air, and whispers of disbelief and gasps filled the chamber. Astaroth, the Xyran they had collectively labelled as a traitor for the death of Seraph, was not dead but alive, and that caused the council to worry.

Adorned in their regal robes, the council members sat in stunned silence. Their expressions reflected a mix of shock, uncertainty, and a touch of unease. A noticeable tension pervaded the chamber as they grappled with the implications of this revelation. After everything they had done to him, it was likely that Astaroth would want revenge.

The name of Astaroth alone was enough to strike fear in the hearts of the council members as they remembered how difficult it had been to expel him. As such, a heated debate erupted as council members voiced their concerns and fears. "He must seek vengeance," argued one, her voice rising. "Our judgment and actions led to his alleged death. He has every reason to want retribution, no matter the cost."

"Let's not jump to conclusions. He might be alive, but does he seek revenge?" yet another one chimed in. "Are you suffering from memory loss? Do you not remember how the council treated him all those years ago?" another member joined the conversation. "We branded him a traitor and cast him aside. Of course, he'd want vengeance!"

The discussions grew more fervent and impassioned, with voices on both sides of the argument stating their cases. Embroiled in a fierce debate, Council members weighed the consequences of Astaroth's return and the potential threats it posed to their civilisation and plans moving forward.

Amid the heated debate, a sense of humiliation pervaded the chamber. Council members were acutely aware of their failure to deal with Ashton and Astaroth, for which they had sent Ibis to Earth. Unfortunately, it led to their defeat, and that sense of failure weighed heavily on them. The desire to reassert their authority over Earth and its inhabitants was noticeable even to the densest person who ever lived.

A faction within the council, driven by anger and wounded pride, fervently advocated for swift and vengeful action. Their voices grew louder, as did their desire to bring the might of the Xyran forces crashing down upon Earth and its defiant allies. They were determined to prove that the Xyran race was not to be trifled with.

However, contrary voices emerged, advocating for a more cautious approach. These council members emphasised that Earth had unforeseen allies in the new tower master, and even the Orion empire was by their side. They cautioned against recklessly pursuing a vengeful war, which could lead to devastating

consequences for the Xyran race. Besides, they had sworn to protect Earth, not to destroy it, and what they did already was enough to be seen as a breach of their contract with the Precursors. "It's not just about revenge," one council member implored. "We must consider the bigger picture. Astaroth may not be the enemy we've perceived him to be."

Everybody's attention was on the Rood, the council elder, when he said that. Rood was once Seraph's trusted follower. Hence, his words were often valued in the council meetings. "What do you mean, Elder? We can't just trust someone who killed lord Seraph!?"

Rood ignored the remark and continued. "I've seen a different side, a possibility for cooperation. Had Astaroth wanted revenge, would he let go of the advantage he had by not killing the Xyrans on Earth to maintain his secret?"

Nobody had the answer to Rood's question. It was known that the warmonger Astaroth wouldn't hesitate to kill anyone and every one as soon as he got his own body. The fact that he had only killed one Xyran since being reborn significantly improved what the council had expected from him. "Also, the Xyran he killed... Nikai was at fault as he tried to kill a Precursor called Ashton in the reports-" Rood continued but was interrupted. "Is that the human with the power signature we detected earlier? The one they claimed to be Earth's inaugural S-grade individual?"

"Indeed," Rood uttered quietly, bracing himself to reveal a startling revelation to the council. "There's a growing belief that he had a Precursor heritage, and I hold strong suspicions that this figure may well be none other than Lord Jo'Han."

The council chamber fell into an abrupt silence as Rood's words hung heavy in the air. The council members sat in their ornate seats had, astonishment and disbelief etched on their faces. It was as if time had momentarily frozen in the grand chamber.

Rood stood before the council, his eyes fixed on their collective expressions. He could sense the shock and confusion that permeated the room.

The council, who had long revered Lord Jo'Han as the benefactor of the Xyrans, had always believed him to be a figure of great significance. To now hear the possibility that he might be connected to Ashton, a human, was nothing short of astonishing.

"How can this be?" A council member muttered. "We've been debating on assassinating the progeny of our lord? In the lust for power, we almost committed an unforgivable sin!"

"Lord Rood," Irobo, a council member and a believer of purist values, demanded, "Even if you're the one claiming that Ashton is Jo'Han's son, we still need concrete evidence. I hope you won't mind presenting it before us?"

"Of course," Rood responded. "I am not one to make baseless claims... unlike some."

Without hesitation, he pulled up a holographic display and projected a series of images, documents, and historical records onto the chamber's walls. The council members watched intently as the evidence began to unfold.

"The evidence I present is based on a comprehensive examination of historical data, familial records, and Precursor lineage," Rood confidently announced. He continued, "But if that's not enough for you, I present Ashton's genetic markers to you. They show a remarkable resemblance to Lord Jo'Han's. This isn't mere chance. The probability of this connection being coincidental is exceedingly low."

Irobo grumbled and resumed his seat as the evidence before the council was more than enough for them to determine that Ashton, if anything, should be among the council and not as their target.

#### Chapter 705 Precursor Artefact (1)

"It's been a while," Astaroth mused, his voice tinged with nostalgia. "Since I've felt the heat from a star on my skin or the gentle touch of the wind on a planet. I used to take those sensations for granted, you know."

Ashton, standing beside Astaroth on the balcony of the Eastern Palace's new mansion. The sun bathed them in a warm, golden glow, and the wind carried the faint scent of exotic flora with it, unlike the stench of the undead from before.

The place also held significance for the two because it was inside the Eastern Palace that Ashton was made aware of Astaroth's existence. It was also where Astaroth saved Ashton when one of his eyes blew up... even though his intention wasn't all that pure.

Other than that, Astaroth's words resonated with Ashton, reminding him of the stark contrast between his existence as a human and his newfound Precursor experience.

In the short span of a few years, he had witnessed the vastness of space, harnessed incredible power, and confronted formidable foes. Still, there was a simplicity to the sensations of being human that he had come to appreciate after facing countless problems.

"You're right, Astaroth. Sometimes, the littlest things mean the most," Ashton smiled, his gaze fixed on the distant horizon. "Feeling the warmth of a sun or the wind, they remind us of the beauty of existence... Look what you did! Turned me all sentimental."



"After living inside your head for all this time, I think I deserve some payback," Astaroth turned his eyes to Ashton, a hint of gratitude in his expression. "Even then... I'm glad to be alive. There's much we can learn from these moments of peace, especially amid chaos like now."

The two stood there, bathed in the sun's warmth, appreciating the simple yet profound pleasures because they knew they were headed towards a storm that would break everyone in one way or another.

But they weren't there to relax as their eyes turned towards the courtyard, which now doubled as a hangar.

The metallic clang of tools and the hum of energy reverberated through the large bay of the Xyran mothership, where Tarik and Ibis toiled tirelessly, along with a plethora of engineers that Ashton had lent from his allies.

Their faces were smudged with grease and sweat, and their clothing was stained from the long hours spent repairing the Xyran ships that would soon carry Ashton and Astaroth to the Xyran homeworld.

While the Orions wanted to accompany Ashton and Astaroth along with Ibis's ships, they politely declined the offer.

The relationships between the empires were strained, and Ashton didn't want to take any chances and hamper their little chance of gaining Xyran's support.

Besides, Ashton and Astaroth were enough to wreak havoc on the Xyran should a need arise. However, Ashton did ask a favour from the Orions, and that was to protect the Earth in his absence, and the Empire readily agreed.

"I hope it won't take long," Ashton mumbled as he noticed Tarik hard at work.

Below them, Tarik expertly welded a fractured hull, and Ibis meticulously calibrated the ship's energy systems. It was a painstaking process, but they knew the importance of their task. The Xyran ships needed to be in optimal condition for the impending negotiations.

"Why do you think that?" Astaroth said, observing their efforts, leaning against a nearby console.

"Kro'Han... oddly, he kept quiet all this time," Ashton replied. "When the Xyran ships appeared, I thought it was Kro'Han, but he's been eerily quiet till now."

"Well, I might have an explanation for it," Astaroth replied, his golden-skinned clone form exuding an air of casual confidence. "What if he didn't attack us yet, just because he couldn't?"

"What do you mean?"

"What if he is trapped on Euphoria and can't leave the planet?" Astaroth suggested. "Then it would make sense why he hasn't attacked us yet."

Ashton got quiet once he heard Astaroth's explanation. While that could be true, it also made Ashton realise something... could it be his masters' sacrifice was for no reason?

If Kro'Han couldn't leave Euphoria, then why did Vulcan and Flintmace sacrifice themselves?

Just the thought filled him with regret and anger that he had been trying to suppress every second since returning to Earth.

"I know what you're thinking," Astaroth mumbled. "And you have gotten it all wrong. Whether you believe it or not, had the Dwarf and Flintface not stayed behind, Kro'Han would have turned your ship into ash before you even got inside it."

He continued, "Had it not been for their sacrifice, both of us would be dead or worse, turned into mindless creatures obeying that fucker's commands."

Ashton sighed and nodded. He knew remembering his masters' sacrifice as a foolish move was an insult to their legacy, and that was the last thing Ashton wanted to do. Thankfully, Astaroth was there to guide him and focus on the positives instead.

However, Astaroth was having doubts of his own. Not related to Kro'Han but to the Xyrans.

"Ibis," he began, his tone laced with scepticism, "Are you certain you wanna trust the Xyrans? Their history is one of selfishness and secrecy. Forming an alliance with them might not be the wisest move."

"I understand your reservations about them. Had I been in your place, I would think the same," Ashton replied, his voice steady. "But we don't have many options. Kro'Han poses a grave threat to everyone.

If we stand divided, he will exploit our weaknesses. Besides, with both of us in individual bodies, the Xyrans wouldn't dare test us."

Astaroth considered his words, his gaze shifting to Ibis, who was assisting another Xyran crewmember with ship repairs nearby.

Suddenly, Ibis's laughter rang out as someone shared a joke, and Astaroth couldn't help but smile at the infectious joy.

He had been at war with himself for centuries, always brooding and stern. So much so that he forgot everything he started fighting for... including Ibis's smile.

"You may have a point," he admitted, "I don't think holding on to past grudges would help anyone."

Just then, Ibis radioed back to them with good news.

"We're almost done here," she said. "Once these ships are ready, we can leave for the Xyran homeworld and start the negotiations with them."

"Yup," Tarik said, wiping his hands on a rag. "The mothership is as good as new. They should carry you safely to the Xyran homeworld or hell, even out of the galaxy."

"Perfect timing," Ashton replied with a grin. "I can't wait to meet the Xyrans."

"Indeed, they won't know what hit them." Astaroth chuckled and patted Ashton's shoulder.

"...why would you hit them?" Ibis inquired, to which Astaroth shrugged his shoulder.

"You know, just in case!"

However, unbeknownst to the group, their enemies were already in motion. In the depths of the cosmos, Kro'Han was plotting moves of his own, using the Cult as his pawns.

Chapter 706 Precursor Artefact (2)

It seemed redecorating Planet Euphoria had become one of Kro'Han's pastimes. The once foresty world was turned into a desert by him, and now it had become a futuristic world unlike any other.

Planet Euphoria was now like a celestial jewel in the vast expanse of the universe, bathed in the ethereal glow of its iridescent landscapes.

Several Towering crystalline formations refracted the sunlight into a myriad of colours, creating a breathtaking vista that seemed almost divine.

It was on these surreal crystalline towers that Kro'Han stood with an air of authority. Before him, cloaked in dark robes, stood the leader of the Cult of Cosmos, the Pope.

Their meeting was held in the heart of Euphoria amidst the natural wonders that defied description. Kro'Han's eyes, as deep and enigmatic as the cosmos itself, were filled with disdain and disgust at what the place had become after the Precursors' departure.

But for the Pope, nothing could compare to Kro'Han's divinity, and there was nothing as wonderful and peaceful as serving him. But they weren't there for sightseeing, after all; Kro'Han had a universe to conquer.

"My Lord, you wanted my presence?" the Pope mumbled politely, his eyes fixated on the floor to not seem rude to the Precursor.

"The artefact I informed you about," Kro'Han began, his voice resonating with a commanding presence, "is hidden on a distant icy planet known as Glaciara. The Glacians, a race my brother created, should be protecting this ancient Precursor relic, so it won't be easy to get it."

The Pope inclined his head in acknowledgement, taking in every word that left his master's lips. He understood the gravity of their mission, the importance of the artefact, and the power it could unleash.

"We shall retrieve it at your command, Lord Kro'Han," the Pope vowed, his voice unwavering, a reflection of the unwavering devotion of his followers. "It won't matter who stands in our way; I'll end them all!"

Hearing those words made Kro'Han sigh. He couldn't believe out of all people that could have come across the planet, it was a fanboy who didn't know anything other than licking his ass.

"Interrupt me again, and I'll have your head as a toy for your beloved cultists," Kro'Han said as he rolled his eyes.

His eyes glinted with a sinister intensity as if the stars themselves danced in his irises.

"Your confidence brings me no joy, mortal. The Glacians are known to be resolute protectors. Even some precursors thought twice before going against them.

They will not yield the artefact willingly. You may need to resort to extreme measures if they refuse to cooperate. Show them no mercy, for our cause is of the utmost importance."

The Pope's gaze remained steady, revealing the deep faith he held in their shared mission of resurrecting the Precursors to their former godhood.

"As you command, Lord Kro'Han. We shall do what must be done." The Pope replied. "No matter the cost..."

"Go ahead," Kro'Han said and waved his hand, signalling the end of their meeting.

With their agreement sealed, the Pope began preparations to depart for Glaciara. The journey ahead was perilous, and he was well aware of the risks.

They would face not only the harsh conditions of an icy planet but also a formidable guardian race determined to safeguard the Precursor relic. But even then, the Pope was confident that his men wouldn't disappoint their master.

However, before they could embark on their dangerous expedition, Kro'Han raised another matter, his voice taking on a chilling edge that sent shivers down the Pope's spine.

"There is one more matter we must address," Kro'Han said, his gaze locked onto the Pope, holding him in a vice-like grip. "I want a test run of the artefact, and what better place for this trial than the Xyran homeworld? I still need to put those bratty children in their place."

The Pope's expression tightened with apprehension, and his mind raced with the implications of Kro'Han's request. As operating within Xyran territory was a daunting prospect itself, not to mention attacking their homeworld was suicide.

"Lord Kro'Han," the Pope began, his voice filled with reverence and fear, "I understand your desire to test the artefact on the Xyran homeworld, but the challenges are immense.

The Xyran homeworld's location is known only to the upper echelon of their civilisation and the members of their council. It is a closely guarded secret, and its location remains a mystery to the rest of the universe."

Kro'Han remained silent, which the Pope interpreted as the Precursors's wish to continue speaking.



"Moreover, the Xyrans have strict security measures in place," the Pope continued. "Any unidentified ship approaching their territory is met with swift and lethal force.

They show no mercy to intruders, and their defences are formidable. We have no way of accessing their homeworld without being identified and destroyed before we even get close."

Kro'Han leaned back in his dark, ornate chair, his expression thoughtful. His expression made it seem like he understood the gravity of the situation and the complexity of the task. Which gave the Pope to continue spouting more excuses.

"As such, to access their homeworld, we would need insider information, someone who knows the location and the security protocols."

"I understand your concerns or what I think of as excuses," Kro'Han continued, his voice laced with mockery. "But rest assured, I will provide you the means to reach their homeworld. You need only focus on that task I bestowed upon you. That's all..."

The Pope's anxiety eased slightly as he realised that Kro'Han would handle the logistics of reaching the Xyran homeworld.

Even the thought of waging war against the Xyrans was daunting, but with Kro'Han's guidance, it became a more feasible endeavour, which made the Pope somewhat confident.

"Thank you, Lord Kro'Han," the Pope replied with gratitude, a sense of relief washing over him. "We shall retrieve the artefact as instructed, and we eagerly await your guidance for the test run on the Xyran homeworld."

"That's all," Kro'Han's smile, as sinister as the abyss of space, held a menacing edge. "You can leave now."

With the pact sealed and plans in motion, the Pope and his cultists prepared to depart from Euphoria, their sights set on Glaciara and the artefact that could reshape the universe's destiny.

Chapter 707 Xenithar, Home Of The Xyrans (1)

The journey to the Xenithar was a voyage filled with both anticipation and worry. It wasn't Ashton or Astaroth who were worried but the Xyrans on board the ship with them.

The Xyrans were extremely careful around them as they didn't want to offend Ashton and Astaroth because they knew it could turn into their final moments.

Thankfully, Ashton and Astaroth were primarily busy with each other, and their interactions with the Xyrans were limited to Ibis. Still, no one tried to stay around Ashton or Astaroth for prolonged periods.

"I wonder why they are so scared of us," Astaroth mumbled while the two of them were on the bay, looking at the stars.

"Let's see... probably because you killed one of them as soon as you woke up?" Ashton scoffed, leaning on the railings. "It's been a month since we left Earth, right?"

"28 days, to be precise," Astaroth replied. "but it is expected to take that much time because Xenithar is around the edge of the galaxy."

"Right... it would have been better if there was a jump engine-"

"We had one that we used to get to earth," Ibis retorted over the radio. "Unfortunately, it was destroyed when the ship crashed."

"Looks like someone wants to blame me for something they caused," Ashton quickly quipped back. "How about next time you start with talking rather than firing weapons when you make contact with a planet?"

"...sure," Ibis replied.

As they travelled through the cosmos, the vastness of the universe stretched out before them, a tapestry of stars and galaxies that seemed to go on forever.

Ashton's eyes were fixed on the celestial wonders outside the ship's windows, but his mind was racing with thoughts about the mission ahead.

The idea of forming an alliance with the Xyrans was a scenario Ashton hadn't thought of before. But the situation turned dire, and they had to let go of the past.

Now, he was on his way to meet them to negotiate an alliance that could potentially save Earth and the entire universe from Kro'Han's destructive plans.

Beside him, Astaroth also observed the starry expanse, his expression contemplative. It had been centuries since he had set foot on the Xenithar, and he knew that things might have changed drastically since then.

The Xyrans were known for their secrecy, and their security measures were mythical. Astaroth expected that the Xyrans had continued to evolve their defences to protect their home from any potential threats. But curiosity got the better of Ashton, and he turned to Astaroth.

"Have you been to the Xenithar before?" he inquired.

"Did you get stupid or something? How could I have not been on the planet I was born on?" Astaroth's eyes remained fixed on the stars as he responded.

"Bitch you said there were two planets there!" Ashton shot back. "How was I supposed to know you have been on both worlds? It is like expecting me to live on Mars or something!"

"That's because you humans were pathetically weak and ill-equipped to even colonise a neighbouring planet, but that's something to be discussed later."

"So you know the way there, right?"

"Nope."

"...what?"

Ashton was surprised. How could someone not know the way to their homeworld?

"I know what you're thinking, and let's just say..." Astaroth smiled. "Xyrans are known for their secrecy."

Ibis, who had been quietly observing their conversation, couldn't help but feel a sense of unease. She had her reservations about bringing outsiders to the Xenithar, especially someone like Ashton, who was a Precursor.

But the council's decision had been clear, and she was bound to follow their orders, even when the risks weighed heavily on her mind.

The journey continued, and they approached the edge of the galaxy. To their surprise, a massive black hole appeared before them, its gravitational pull threatening to engulf their ship.

"What the hell is going on here?"

Ashton was immediately alarmed and wondered if it was Ibis's way of getting rid of them. Astaroth, however, remained unperturbed. He reassured Ashton.

"Calm down, Ashton," he said. "It's merely an illusion to hide the spatial tunnel behind it. The Xyrans excel in creating such deceptions for secrecy, as only an idiot would think of heading straight into a black hole."

As they passed through the illusory black hole, Ashton couldn't help but marvel at the Xyrans' skill in creating such convincing deceptions. It was a testament to their mastery of advanced technology and dedication to safeguarding their homeworld.

Unlike Astaroth's belief, the path had remained unchanged, which made him wonder that the Xyrans had been idling for centuries as they hadn't updated the method.

He then turned to Ibis and asked about the unchanged spatial tunnel system.

"Certain defences are timeless, Astaroth. They remain effective, and there is no need to replace them for the sake of change," Ibis replied to his concerns with a knowing smile.

She continued, "However, while the tunnels themselves may have remained the same, the security enhancements around them have been continually updated."

Astaroth was intrigued by Ibis's explanation. His memory told him of a single spatial tunnel leading to the Xenithar. However, as they exited the first tunnel, they were faced with five tunnels before them.

"What is this? Five more tunnels?"

"Yes... and there are twenty-five such clearings, each having five tunnels. You know what I'm hinting at, right?"

"And here I was thinking the Council has been slacking all this time." Astaroth shook his head as he realised the scale of upgrades the Xyrans had made.

Ibis's smile hinted at the complexity of the Xyran defence. She explained that they were at one of the 25 clearings, each of which had five spatial tunnels.

Only one of these tunnels was the correct path, while the others led to certain doom, guiding stray ships into a star's core or a supermassive black hole or other ways from which they would die before reaching Xenithar.

The sheer complexity of the Xyrans' security measures left Ashton in disbelief. The probability of finding the correct path among the multitude of tunnels was astronomically low.

As Ibis had pointed out, only 1 out of a possible 300 quadrillion ways led to the Xenithar. It was a staggering demonstration of the Xyrans' commitment to safeguarding their secrets and planet.

Ashton couldn't help but be in awe of the Xyrans' ingenious and maddeningly complex defence system that barely required maintenance.

The odds were stacked so heavily against any potential invader that it seemed nearly impossible to breach their defences.

It was no surprise that the Xyrans had managed to maintain their rule over the galaxy for an extended period, and their formidable security measures were proof of their supremacy.

Chapter 708 Xenithar, Home Of The Xyrans (2)

As the ship emerged from the spatial tunnel, a breathtaking sight unfolded before Ashton's eyes. He was greeted by the majestic spectacle of Xenithar, the Xyran homeworld.

It was a planet unlike any other he had ever seen. It was a testament to the Xyrans' advanced technology and scientific prowess, with bustling cities that could be seen even though they were so far from the planet.

Xenithar was massive, nearly seven times the size of Earth, and its sheer scale was awe-inspiring. It dominated the cosmic expanse, a vibrant blue world with sprawling cities and advanced structures that reached toward the heavens.

But that wasn't all. The planet was encircled by a stunning array of eight moons, each radiating with artificial luminosity. These moons were not celestial bodies but artificial constructs created by the Xyrans to accommodate a variety of needs of the Xyran society.

The first moon, Luminara, emitted a soft, soothing glow that bathed the night side of Xenithar in a gentle, ethereal light.



It was relatively smaller in size compared to the others. Still, it held more significance to the traditional populous of the planet as it served as a hub for artistic and cultural activities, as well as hosted its vast libraries that held the collective knowledge of the Xyrans.

The second moon, called Astraforge, was a hub of innovation and technology. It housed laboratories and research facilities where the Xyrans developed cutting-edge technologies and scientific breakthroughs.

It was a moon made of metallic silver and titanium, along with other materials not found on Earth, and radiated a cool, silvery shimmer. It was larger and had a pristine, almost mechanical appearance.

The third moon, Stellacora, was an ivory-coloured moon dedicated to education and served as a learning centre for Xyran scholars and a select few students from across the galaxy who were inducted into Xyran ranks upon graduation. It was moderately sized, around that of Earth's moon and emitted a subtle, warm radiance.

The fourth moon, known as Celestis, was lush green as it was a thriving agricultural haven with lush fields and biodomes that provided sustenance for the Xyran population among Xenithar and its various moons.

It was one of the larger moons and was furthest away from Xenithar. Yet, it was the most well-connected structure on the planet, with ships constantly travelling to and fro from the satellite.

The fifth moon was Novalith, a bustling centre of commerce and trade, which was reflected in its golden glow. It was where merchants from different civilisations and nearby galaxies congregated to exchange goods and ideas.

The sixth moon, Solartis, was a place of recreation and leisure and, hence, was the least advanced among its sister moons.

It was a place where the Xyrans who had retired lived in peace as it offered vast parks, entertainment venues, and stunning relaxing vistas for the rest of their days.

The seventh moon, Nebulos, had a deep sapphire glow and by far the darkest moon. It was because the moon was a massive, intricate network of observatories and astronomical research centres dedicated to unravelling the mysteries of the cosmos.

The eighth moon, Ignara, the largest of the moons, displayed a regal shade of deep crimson, symbolising its role as the political heart of Xenithar. The Xyran Council also convened here to make crucial decisions that shaped their civilisation. It was also where their ship was headed.

Ashton's gaze was drawn to Ignara, the political heart of the Xyrans. Its gleaming structures and sweeping architecture conveyed a sense of grandeur and authority.

"So, what do you think?" Astaroth teased Ashton as he noticed the shocked expression on his face. "Quite a lot to take in, isn't it?"

"I don't know what to say... this place is much bigger and advanced than I thought," Ashton mumbled as Ibis was done explaining about the moons to him. "But where is the security?"

Ibis smiled and pointed at the asteroid belt surrounding their artificial solar system.

"Every asteroid you see, big or small, either hosts the military academy or a proper base to defend Xenithar," she said. "All the Xyrans had been to one such asteroid to complete their combat training, including Astaroth and myself."

"Damn... is there anything that you folks haven't turned into a colony of sorts?" Ashton joked, and Astaroth shrugged.

"I doubt it," he replied. "Everything that enters this space has a Xyran on it. Funny, isn't it?"

Amid their talks, the Xyran ship continued its descent toward the surface of Ignara, and Ashton let go of his excitement and turned his business mode on.

As exciting as the entire place was, he knew better than to get distracted from his goal. Ibis, watching Ashton's reactions with a warm smile, finally broke the silence once they docked.

"Welcome to the apex civilisation of the galaxy," she said, her tone filled with pride and reverence.

The ship touched down on the surface of Ignara, and the doors hissed open, revealing the bustling cityscape that stretched before them. The Xyran metropolis was a fusion of advanced architecture and natural beauty.

Towering crystalline structures coexisted with lush, meticulously maintained gardens, creating a harmonious blend of technology and nature.

The solar system's artificial sun hung in the sky, casting a warm and soothing radiance over the city. The sun, like the moons, was a testament to the Xyrans' mastery over celestial manipulation. It provided the perfect conditions for life, allowing their advanced civilisation to thrive.

"Come on, let's get going." Ibis nodded, and Astaroth and Ashton followed her while the rest of the crew got busy with repairs.

As they disembarked from the ship, Ibis guided them through the city's bustling streets. Citizens of various species moved about, each engaged in their daily activities, which was the opposite of what Ashton was expecting.

The diversity of life on Ignara was evident in the bustling marketplace, where traders from different species bartered goods to the populous that lived on the planet.

"I thought only the officials were allowed here," Ashton commented.

"They are," Ibis replied. "But their attendants, servants, and families live with them, so every moon is like a planet of its own."

The towering structures of the city were adorned with intricate artwork and designs that reflected the Xyrans' appreciation for aesthetics. It was a city that celebrated form and function, where art and science coexisted harmoniously.

Ashton couldn't help but marvel at the level of sophistication and advancement surrounding him. The Xyrans had achieved a civilisation that was both technologically advanced and deeply rooted in culture and knowledge.

As they moved deeper into the city, they approached the grand citadel, the heart of Xyran governance. The citadel's crystalline spires rose toward the sky, symbolising authority and wisdom.

"Didn't think I'd ever see this place again," Astaroth mumbled, lost in his memories.

"Come on," Ibis said, patting him on the shoulder. "Let's forget about the past and think about the future."

"Right."

With that, they headed inside the building. It was here that the Xyran Council convened to make decisions that shaped the fate of their civilisation and, potentially, the future of the galaxy.

The moment was not lost on Ashton. He was acutely aware of the gravity of their mission and the need to negotiate an alliance with the Xyrans. Earth's destiny, as well as that of countless other worlds, rested in their hands. Ibis turned to them, her eyes filled with determination.

"The council awaits," she said, leading him and Astaroth toward the grand entrance of the citadel. It was time to begin the negotiations that could determine the course of the universe.

Chapter 709 Meeting The Council (1)

While Ashton was eager to meet with the council and get down to business, the Xyrans had to fulfil their protocols. Since most of the board consisted of old and fragile elders, they were highly susceptible to diseases.

Hence, everyone who visits the council has to undergo a series of tests and quarantine before they are allowed to meet the council. At first, Ashton thought it was some trap of the Xyrans, but he relaxed once Astaroth informed him about it being authentic.

That being said, Ashton recommended that they conduct the meeting virtually as it would be quicker and wouldn't put anyone's health in danger.

But his proposition was rejected as it was a matter of alliance, hence quite significant, and such issues had been to be discussed face-to-face.

Ashton wasn't pleased with how things were proceeding as he wanted the meeting to be over quickly so that he could return and begin preparation for himself.

Unfortunately, there wasn't much for him to do than provide his blood samples to the Xyrans and for them to conclude the testing.

While the rule about testing extraterrestrial species wasn't a lie, the council's intention differed. They wanted to check whether Ashton was related to Jo'Han and cross-check Lord Rood's reports.

In the meantime, Ashton and Astaroth were guided to their quarters by Xyran generals, who couldn't help but steal glances at Astaroth, who was considered to be one of the empire's most outstanding generals to have ever lived... despite him being branded as a traitor all those years ago.

As they reached the end of the corridor, Ashton noticed three elegantly dressed female Xyrans waiting for them. The one in the lead held out a tray of moistened and scented towels before them.

While Ashton was sceptical, Astaroth immediately picked up one towel and wiped his face and hands before nodding for Ashton to do the same.

Once they were done, the Xyrans handed the tray to her subordinate and bowed before Astaroth, "Welcome, honoured guests. It is my absolute honour to someone as great as General Astaroth in this life."

"It's a pleasure to be here," Astaroth smiled. "Apologies if I'm mistaken, but it feels like I have seen you somewhere before?"

"I go by the name Raphaela..."

"Oh my god," Astaroth smiled before patting her head. "I can't believe it's you!"

As the two of them smiled, Ashton felt out of the loop. But it didn't take long for Ashton to come up with a potential connection between the two. Astaroth's soulblade was called Raphael, so could it be that the lady had something to do with that?

A minute later, Astaroth noticed Ashton's expression and quickly made introductions, and as Ashton had suspected, Raphaela was indeed related to Raphael but not in a way he could even imagine.

"Raphaela here," Astaroth took a moment to consider his word. "Is Raphael's granddaughter."

"Eh? She's the granddaughter of a sword?" Ashton frowned. "Biology... doesn't exist here or?"

"Why do you think the weapons we possess are called soulblades?" Astaroth mumbled. "Because they have a soul, but despite how advanced any civilisation is, they can't create a soul from scratch.

Instead, the soulblades are said to be forged from the souls of excellent warriors who died but refused to leave their legacy behind."

However, despite Astaroth's explanation, Ashton remained untouched and unaffected.

"I'll tell you more about it later," Astaroth shook his head. "Just keep this in mind: Raphael was alive at some point. She is his granddaughter."

"Got it," Ashton smiled and turned towards Raphaella. "My sincere apologies on behalf of this fool accompanying me. He usually slacks off instead of explaining necessary things to me beforehand."

"Oi! Mind your language here!" Astaroth retorted.



"Oh, shut it. It's not like I lied about something."

Everyone was shocked to see Ashton so blatantly talk weirdly about Astaroth, who was akin to a legend in their eyes. But Raphaela couldn't help but smile upon watching the two banter.

"Oh, where are my manners!" Raphaela exclaimed. "Welcome to Ignara, lord Ashton. I hope you didn't have a tough time acclimating to the weather here?"

"None at all," Ashton politely replied. "Strangely enough, this place feels like home."

"I'm glad to hear that," Raphaela mumbled before opening the door to their chamber. "I know you're here on a mission, and while I'm not the voice of the Xyrans, I hope you succeed."

Earth and Xenithar have been bound to each other by ancient bonds, and I hope we can reconnect to our roots without any troubles in these times."

Ashton was confused by Raphaela's words regarding the ancient bond between the two planets. But before he could ask her to elaborate, she, along with other attendants, left the two of them alone to get comfortable in their suite.

The massive suite had two separate bedrooms. As for the room itself, everything was furnished with unimaginable luxuries. The balcony gave them a view of most, if not the entire city, with bustling crowds in the distance.

From the carpets to the ceiling, everything was elegantly designed, which made Ashton feel like the Xyrans were giving him more importance than they deserved.

The things Ashton saw were extravagant even by the standards of the Orion empire, known to be one of the wealthiest empires in the entire galaxy. But even with all that, Ashton's mind was preoccupied by Raphaela's parting words.

"Do you know what she was on about?" Ashton asked Astaroth once they were alone.

"I have my theories, but other than that... nope," Astaroth shrugged. "Besides, my memory about the past is all messed up, so... I don't think it'd be appropriate for me to comment on things that I have no recollection of."

"Says the fucker who kept interfering in my life for years," Ashton rolled his eyes.

"I hate to break the bubble, but I did what I had to do because of your two points worth of intelligence. Unfortunately, it has gone up now, so there's that."

"...you really have a death wish, don't you?" Ashton replied with a menacing smile.

Chapter 710 Meeting The Council (2)

After digging into their dinner, Ashton and Astaroth were relaxing on the balcony of their quarters when they sensed a strange presence nearby.

"Did you call room service or something?" Ashton joked.

"I was hoping you did?" Astaroth replied, and the two knew something was odd.

The two had been informed that no one would disturb them until their reports were out. That's why the situation had grown strange. But there was an even stranger thing.

The figure, though, tried to hide its presence. It didn't seem hostile to the duo. Still, given the history between them and the Xyrans, they were alert as they approached the doors.

Ashton had summoned Balmond out just in case, and Astaroth had followed suit with Raphael by his side. Ashton signalled, counting to three before opening the door.

As soon as he yanked the door open, Astaroth jumped forward with the sword. While he never wanted to kill the intruder, he was sure taking a limb or two was fair game.

But to his surprise, as Astaroth brought Raphael down on the intruder, the sword disappeared from his hands and took its original form of an angel.

"The hell you think you're doing, Raphael?" Astaroth yelled at the top of his lungs as Ashton rushed to join them.

Like Astaroth, Ashton was a bit confused with the scenario until he noticed who the intruder was and understood why Raphael disobeyed Astaroth.

"Raphaela, what are you doing here?" he inquired after helping her back to her feet.

Ashton hadn't gotten a good look at her before since she was wearing traditional Xyran clothing. Still, now that he saw her, she was gorgeous, with radiant golden skin and lustrous black hair.

Her eyes were deep and mysterious, and her facial features were perfectly sculpted. She moved with grace and elegance, carrying herself with regal poise.

While she was good enough to make anyone's heart race, for Ashton, Anna was the only one deserving of his love and vice versa.

"I-I was here on Lord Rood's orders," Raphaela mumbled before respectfully bowing to her ancestor. "It's pleasing to see you in good health, Grandfather!"

"You have grown quite a bit, my dear," Raphael responded before returning to Astaeroth's side and smacking him in the head. "Watch where you swing me!"

"Right, right," Astaroth mumbled while rubbing his head. "I'm sorry, Rapahela, I almost killed you there."

"No worries, your lordship," Raphaela smiled. "Now, please... if you will accompany me to Lord Rood's quarters."

Ashton and Astaroth shot a look at each other before nodding. Astaroth had known Rood for a long time and knew he wasn't someone who would betray him like the rest.

Besides, he doubted Rood would even dare try anything, as he should be well aware of Ashton's strength. If anything, he expected Rood to give them some information ahead of their meeting with the council.

Nevertheless, upon their arrival at Rood's grand mansion, it quickly became apparent that Astaroth's earlier assumption was mistaken.

The moment they stepped into the chamber, Ashton and Astaroth recognized that they were not the sole occupants. Waiting for them were Ibis and another Xyran, standing alongside an elderly gentleman whom Ashton instinctively identified as Lord Rood.

But before Ashton could say anything, Astaroth rushed across the room, stopping before the strange Xyran.

"Fuck, you're the last person I expected to see here!?" he shrieked while Ibis watched with a stray tear in her eyes.

"I've been waiting for you, my friend," the stranger mumbled. "I told you I would go to hell for you, and well... here I am."

Astaroth didn't reply and kept staring at the Xyran before him. He had lost most of his muscles and looked weaker than ever before. But there was no mistaking it... the man before him was his long-lost friend. His comrade through various battles and most importantly... His brother.

"Lucifer! Goddamn, I thought that fucker Beelzebub killed you or something!" Astaroth yelled before hugging Lucifer so tightly Ashton almost heard his bones crack.

"Well, he tried, but thanks to Lord Rood, I managed to make it out of there," Lucifer mumbled before his eyes fell on Ashton. "and there he is... You have grown a lot from that shabby brat you were."

Ashton didn't say anything and just smiled in response. Lucifer... it had been a while since he had thought about him. The Xyran who helped conceal his identity before Astaroth appeared inside his head and took over the admin controls.

Well, Ashton was glad that Lucifer was safe, as he meant a lot to Astaroth. But even then, he couldn't think of a reason for all of them to be in there. Especially him, of all people.

"Thank you, Raphaela, for your assistance," Lord Rood commented. "You have done excellent work. You may leave now as your involvement in these matters would unnecessarily put you at risk."

"I understand, my lord. I'll take my leave now."

Saying so, Raphaela was about to leave when Astaroth summoned Raphael in his proper form.

"Go spend some time with her," he said with a knowing smile.

Raphael didn't say a word; he just smiled and bowed to Astaroth before leaving with his granddaughter. Once they were out, the doors were sealed shut behind them.

"It has been a while, Lord Rood," Astaroth opened the dialogue, bowing before the elder.

Astaroth's actions came to Ashton as a surprise, as he didn't think someone like Astaroth would willingly bow before someone else.

"Don't you be like that, boy," Rood chuckled, waving his hand around. "Someone who sacrificed themselves, allowed others to brand him a traitor for the sake of peace should bow before no one. Especially not a sinner like me."

"I only did what I had to," Astaroth said with a sad smile. "Besides, I would rather be branded as the traitor than allow my teacher's reputation to be tarnished."

"My apologies if I come off as rude, but can someone tell me what is happening here?" Ashton politely asked, confused by everything.