

Zompiewolf 711

Chapter 711 Meeting The Council (3)

"I sincerely apologise," Lord Rood promptly responded. "Given the magnitude of our impending discussions and revelations, I regrettably overlooked your presence here."

"... it's alright," Ashton replied, wondering how he should deal with Lord Rood 'ignoring' him.

"Lord Rood, you mustn't!" Astaroth urged, but his desperation only made the rest of them even more eager to hear the 'revelation'. "We all swore absolute secrecy-"

Hearing Astaroth made Rood chuckle. "Look at me, boy, I have one foot in my grave. You think I'm afraid of the consequences?"

As Rood brought it to Ashton's attention, he couldn't help but notice the frailty of the Xyran. He refrained from passing judgment on Rood's appearance; the overall state of Rood's physique gave the impression that something unseen was slowly sapping his vitality from the inside.

"My years are beginning to weigh on me, and I fear this may be my final opportunity to unveil the truth," Rood remarked before settling into his seat. "About Astaroth and also about you, young man."

"Me?" Ashton asked, wondering what possibly could the old man know about a stranger like him?

Rood nodded before returning his gaze to Astaroth. "You have done well taking everyone's hate on your head for all these years and ridding the council of the burden..."

Speaking those words, Rood motioned for Ibis and Astaroth to approach. Once they had drawn near, he gently guided their hands and brought them together, their palms touching each other.

Ibis was confused about what was happening, but Astaroth couldn't even try to look anyone in the eyes and kept his head low.

"Ibis, my dear," Rood commenced. "Everything the council conveyed to you regarding the night your father's passing... has been a distortion of the truth.

Although it is a fact that Astaroth was responsible for Seraph's demise... the genuine motives have been concealed from you and the entirety of the Xyran civilisation."

As Lord Rood's revelation unfurled, Ibis stood there, her golden wings slightly quivering in shock. Her eyes widened as she stared at Astaroth and then back at lord Rood, but it seemed the only one surprised by the revelation was Ibis.

Ashton wasn't surprised. Astaroth had already informed Ashton about the incident, and it seemed Lucifer also knew about it. But no one other than Astaroth and Rood knew what the latter would reveal next.

"Your father... Seraph turned into a corruptor-"

"YOU'RE LYING!" Ibis shrieked and let go of Astaroth's hand. "My father is the only one who could handle Precursor artefacts!"

Recognising the inner conflict raging within Ibis, Lord Rood allowed her the space to vent her frustrations, to unleash her anger and lay blame upon them.

While he understood the necessity of this situation, he was also aware that he had to persist in his efforts. Only by doing so could he hope to ultimately exonerate Astaroth and set things right.

"We shared your belief, but the artefact's power surpassed even his strength," Rood elaborated, seeking to ease the tension. "Seraph excelled in concealing the corruption, but gradually, the artefact's influence became insurmountable, eventually leading to his demise before we could react."

He went on, "In our eyes, Seraph endured, when in reality he had perished long ago. It was the Crystal that held sway over his body, deceiving us all... until the day it could no longer maintain the facade and was caught killing those belonging to other races."

Ashton stood there in shock, realising the reason Seraph's Crystal was called as such. It was because the Crystal had assimilated the Xyran with itself! But if the Crystal was a deadly weapon, then it didn't make sense how he was still alive?

'Is it because I am a Precursor?' Ashton wondered, but a sudden crashing sound brought him out of his thoughts.

Ibis's anger flared, and she seized the table, shattering it into pieces as the unsettling revelations about Seraph continued to surface. Lucifer moved swiftly to subdue her, but a gesture from Rood halted him in his tracks.

"You... You're not telling the truth... My father wouldn't attack innocents!" Ibis screamed, her voice filled with denial.

"He didn't... but the Crystal made him do such acts," Rood sighed. "It was then Astaroth caught wind of the situation and tried to reason with him. But eventually, he had to end Seraph to stop him."

Then, suddenly overwhelmed by emotion, she crumpled to the floor, her tears flowing freely, while Astaroth embraced her in an attempt to offer solace.

A heavy silence hung in the room as Ibis wept, her heart heavy with the weight of the truth she had just learned. Rood, though visibly saddened by the painful revelation, maintained a stoic composure.

"Beelzebub exploited the circumstances, weaving a distorted narrative that briefly led us astray. We were on the verge of believing it, but Astaroth swiftly unveiled the truth, supported by concrete evidence," Rood admitted in a subdued tone.

"Nevertheless, we could not disclose the truth to the public for fear of sparking rebellion and causing division among the Xyrans," Lucifer interjected.

He continued, "That's when Astaroth made a selfless decision to safeguard our master's reputation. He willingly bore the label of a traitor to our civilisation and faced exile."

"Astaroth ended Seraph's life, but he did it in the name of safeguarding all of us, and above all, his deepest desire was to ensure your safety, Ibis," Rood commented, gently touching Ibis's head.

"He went as far as to compel everyone present to pledge an unbreakable oath, a vow of secrecy that we would take to our graves. But tonight, I have chosen to shatter that oath, for I believed it was crucial for you, above all others, to know the truth."

Ibis, upon hearing this revelation, felt as though the world around her was crumbling. Tears welled in her eyes as she processed the implications of what she had just learned.

Strangely enough, Astaroth's presence provided solace, his strong arms offering a sense of security amid the emotional storm. Ibis clung to him, her emotions a tumultuous mix of gratitude and sorrow.

"I'm sorry..." Astaroth mumbled. "I never wanted you to know any part of this..."

"No, it's my fault for letting you bear this burden all this while," Ibis responded with a warm smile, her fingers brushing against Astaroth's cheek. "I'm sorry..."

Lord Rood beamed, satisfied that all was well, and shifted his focus to Ashton. "Shall we turn our attention to you now?"

"Eh?"

Chapter 712 The One Above All (1)

3178 years ago...

"Are you sure about it, my lord?" Lord Rood asked the Precursors before him.

Ignoring Rood's question, Jo'Han gazed down upon Earth, his eyes filled with a mixture of awe and sadness. Humans had been progressing faster than he had anticipated, yet he knew their progress would mean nothing if they failed to stop what was said to be inevitable.

Jo'Han continued to observe Earth, a planet teeming with life and beauty. His voice, resonant and powerful, carried a joy as he said, "Look at it, Rood. Is it not wonderful? A canvas painted with the vibrant hues of life.

Yet it saddens me to see the looming threat cast by my own brother upon this creation."

"Be as it may, my Lord, we'll stop him as soon as you say the word."

Jo'Han allowed himself the rare pleasure to smile and painfully tore his gaze away from the blue planet. As the sun shone upon him, Rood saw countless deep scars on his body, but the cause of the scar remained unknown.

As far as Rood knew, Precursors were the only ones to exist in the universe until they turned to creating all the known life forms. Also, the Precursors had never fought amongst themselves.

Due to all these reasons, Rood had always wondered how lord Jo'Han's body got covered in scars. But whenever he had tried asking him about it, Jo'Han would either dodge the question or change the topic.

After spending more than five centuries trying to pry an answer out of him, Rood had given up and made his peace that he would never get to know about the scars or the Precursor's past life.

"I don't doubt you will," Jo'Han smiled, staring into the endless space. "But I hope it doesn't come to that..."

Even though Kro'Han was Jo'Han, he still hoped that Kro'Han would see the light of day and return to the right path. But it didn't seem like his wish would come true.

"The One Above All has never been wrong before... It is unlikely he'll be wrong this time either."

Jo'Han mumbled, remembering the self-proclaimed overlord of their universe and also the one who saved his life from the injuries that scarred his body.

He remembered that day millions of years ago when a battle of cosmic proportions unfolded. Jo'Han, surrounded by his fellow Precursors, faced an entity that defied the very nature of their understanding—a force that threatened not just their existence but the entirety of the universe.

The creature, a dark and malevolent force, proved impervious to the advanced technology and formidable weapons wielded by the Precursors. It slaughtered them with merciless efficiency, leaving devastation in its wake.

Even Kro'Han, the strongest Precursor to have ever lived, was consumed by grief as his beloved sacrificed herself to protect her beloved and fell before the overwhelming power of the dark force.

Jo'Han tried his best to rally the troops for a final confrontation, but in front of the mysterious creature, once a towering figure of celestial might, found themselves on the brink of defeat.

In the face of the dark cosmic horror, all hope seemed lost. The creature stood tall, poised to snuff out the remnants of the once-mighty Precursors.

"Another universe will fall, and I'll become one of the twelve guardians," the creature snarled before setting his gaze on the bruised and broken Jo'Han, struggling to get back on his feet.

The creature laughed before gently tapping its finger on Jo'Han's head. It was supposed to be a gentle tap, but for Jo'Han, it felt like his entire body was being torn apart from the inside.

Watching their leader scream in agony shattered what little courage the Precursors had, and they realised it was time to meet their maker.

However, in the eleventh hour, a glimmer of salvation emerged. A portal opened behind Jo'Han, and from it shot a golden Trident, guided by an unseen hand.

Jo'Han saw a glimpse of the weapon but knew there was nothing anyone could do that would hurt the creature. But to his surprise, when the trident collided with the creature, it severed its arm—a feat none of the Precursors' weapons had achieved.

"Fucking cockroaches, wasting my time," a voice came from the other side of the portal. "I swear Nina would divorce me one of these days."

Amidst the pandemonium, a figure emerged from the portal—a being of radiant energy and cosmic authority, dressed in an all-black outfit, not even armour.

As his eyes met Jo'Han, his saviour was suddenly taken aback before acknowledging the Precursor's presence with a soothing smile.

"You did well. Now let me deal with this weakling."

That was Jo'Han's first encounter with the being who called himself [The One Above All].

"No..." the creature shrieked. "You are not supposed to be here!"

"Ah,?I should have asked for your permission, right?" the man rolled his eyes. "Now, stay still, and it'll be over before you know it."

"NO!!!"

The creature, sensing a force beyond its comprehension, attempted to flee. However, [The One Above All] shrugged his shoulder before sighing.

The man extended an ethereal hand, capturing the fleeing entity with an invisible force. The creature struggled against the grip, its dark essence churning in defiance, but the struggles were in vain.

"Really? Running? That's your escape plan?" he mumbled. "Let me show you what happens when you waste my time."

In a spectacular display of power, The One Above All toyed with the creature. With a mere gesture, he dragged it back, tossing the malevolent force around like a ragdoll.

The creature, realising the futility of resistance, attempted to warp away. Yet, The One Above All's power was absolute, and he yanked the creature back into their realm.

What ensued was a spectacle beyond the comprehension of the Precursors. The One Above All singlehandedly dismantled the creature, tearing it out of existence.

"Well, that was anticlimactic," he said.

Even though a lot of time had passed, Jo'Han, the memories of that ancient battle still vivid in his mind, smiled with gratitude and humility.

Rood stood there, watching Jo'Han as he got lost in his thoughts. While he had been part of countless meetings with Jo'Han, the lord seemed lost this time, making Rood wonder why he was even called to a desolate moon of a shielded planet.

"There is something I need you to do for me," After what felt like an eternity, Jo'Han snapped back into reality. "There'll be a time when you will meet my child. You must tell him what I'm about to reveal..."

Chapter 713 The One Above All (2)

The silence that followed Rood's words was palpable, so much so that it felt like they could hear each other's heartbeat echoing as the after-effect of the information disclosed. All eyes were fixed on either Ashton or on Rood.

On the other hand, Ashton remained unaffected by the revelation, at least on the surface. But a lot was going on inside his mind. [The One Above All], he had heard that name countless times by now, and every time he did, it seemed that man's power had grown even more.

Before his encounter with Kro'Han, Ashton had assumed that [The One Above All] was another Precursor as, in his eyes, they were the strongest creatures to have ever existed.

But after hearing what Rood had to say, he was even more fascinated with such a being. Someone who was stronger than the Precursors... someone who could defeat kro'Han in the blink of an eye.

"So you're telling me... Ashton is the son of the leader of the Precursors?" Astaroth mumbled, wondering if Ashton knew about it beforehand because he didn't look surprised.

Ashton heard Astaroth but refrained from either confirming or denying anything. Instead, he turned towards Rood and asked the most obvious question.

"[The One Above All], where can I find him?"

Lord Rood shrugged before replying, "I'm honoured that you think someone as insignificant as me would know that information, but no, I don't."

Ashton nodded and went silent again. He was hoping he could somehow persuade this [The One Above All] character to help them subdue Kro'Han or something, but it seemed like it would be impossible.

Why would Jo'Han urge Rood to tell him about something from the past? Could it be that Kro'Han was somehow related to the mysterious creature? Or was it his father's way of warning him about more precarious threats?

Ashton was hoping the meeting would give him an answer to deal with Kro'Han, but it did everything but that. And then it hit him... that creature was the only one to have ever defeated the Precursors and, by extension, Kro'Han.

'Do I need to get as strong as that creature or something?'

The more Ashton thought about it, the more precise the picture got. Jo'Han was also the first Grim Reaper and had informed Ashton that it would be his biggest strength.

'Could it be... He wants me to resurrect that creature!?'

Ashton's eyes widened as he considered resurrecting the beast. While it would ensure their victory, it was too reckless to even consider. There was no way Jo'Han would want his son to risk the safety of the entire universe just to defeat Kro'Han.

'No. I'm not resurrecting whatever that thing was... No, until I have tried every other means of victory,'

Ashton sighed, pushing such a dangerous thought out of his head. But there was something he needed to confirm from Lord Rood.

"The war my father talked about," he mumbled. "Do you know where it took place?"

Rood nodded, "Celestria's Verge."

"The edge of the galaxy?" Astaroth commented.

"Precisely," Rood commented before turning his attention towards Ashton. "Why do you ask?"

"To visit it, of course."

Rood had expected Ashton to request something along those lines, but he hadn't thought he would be so straightforward. Even then, Rood knew he had to make some things clear first.

"Ashton," Rood began cautiously, "you do realise that the place where the Precursors fought that creature has been forbidden for anyone to enter? Furthermore, the Precursors themselves placed defences to prevent unauthorised access."

"I'm aware of that. But I'm a Precursor, too, and I have the right to go there," Ashton replied, his eyes filled with confidence. "No defence can keep me out of there; anyone who tries will regret it."

Rood sighed, realising that challenging Ashton's resolve would be futile. Still, he had to try.

"It's a dangerous place, Ashton. Even the Precursors chose not to tread there after that battle."

Ashton, undeterred, replied, "I can handle danger. Besides, I need to understand more about Kro'Han, and if there's information on how to defeat that fucker, I want it."

"If that's what you want, then... I'll accompany you to the forbidden zone," Astaroth, observing the exchange, finally stepped forward. "We'll leave after the council meeting."

"Very well," Rood sighed in defeat. "If that's what you want, then you have my blessings."

Ibis, always eager to participate in risky endeavours, expressed her desire to join the expedition. However, Astaroth, with a protective concern, declined her offer.

"Celestria's Verge is harsh and unforgiving. I cannot risk your well-being, Ibis," he commented. "Besides, someone needs to monitor Kro'Han, and I can't think of anyone more suitable than you."

"...I know you just want to get rid of me, but fine. I'll do it." Ibis scoffed before smiling.

Astaroth's golden eyes softened a rare display of emotion. "I promise, Ibis. We'll be back before you know it."

"Also, I'd need to contact Earth and tell them it might take a while longer to get back," Ashton mumbled. "They will not be happy about it, but it is what it is."

"Ibis can help you with that as well," Rood said. "I hope that's everything you need as of now."

"Yes, you have been more than helpful, Lord Rood," Ashton respectfully commented.

Rood nodded before retiring to his room, leaving them alone. Ashton then turned his attention towards Lucifer, who smiled as he greeted the former.

"How have you been?" Ashton asked. "I can't believe such a scrawny man was behind such aggressive system notifications."

"Try dealing with someone with two intelligence points and see what happens to you," Lucifer chuckled.

"You're still on about that?" Ashton joined in and laughed. "Sometimes, even I have a difficult time believing how pathetic I used to be."

"Used to be?" Astaroth commented. "You mean you aren't anymore?"

"I'm not anymore since you now have a body of your own," Ashton retorted.

Meanwhile, Ibis silently watched the trio banter like old friends. She couldn't help but wonder how things would have been if Astaroth had never died to begin with.

'We'll probably be married, right?'

Chapter 714 The Weight Of Trust (1)

The council room was bathed in a soothing hue of blue lights and exuded an air of futuristic elegance. The floor felt like a seamless expanse of polished silver, melded with the walls, creating an illusion of continuity. The room's architecture was a testament to the advanced technology of the Xyrans as if the very essence of the galaxy had been woven into its design.

The seats, arranged in a circular formation, were elevated on platforms hovering above the ground. Each seat was a sleek, ergonomic masterpiece crafted with a reflective chrome-like finish. The arrangement allowed everyone seated to have an unobstructed view of the holographic displays floating at the centre of the room.

Speaking of the holographic displays, they projected intricate galactic maps, celestial bodies, and real-time data feeds. The room felt like a living representation of the galaxy, a cosmic dance of lights and information. Blue lights cascaded gently from the ceiling, adding a tranquil glow to the immersive ambience.

The ceiling, a seamless canopy of crystalline material, displayed a dynamic simulation of the galaxy's movements. Stars twinkled, and galaxies rotated, creating a mesmerising display that transported the onlookers to the heart of the cosmos. The room's designed to emphasise the Xyrans' dominance over the galaxy, a subtle declaration of their prowess in navigating the vast expanse of space, unlike no other species.

The control panel at the centre of the circular arrangement was a sophisticated console with holographic interfaces. The council members could manipulate the visual representations, enabling them to discuss and strategise with a cosmic backdrop.

"I have been there countless times before, but the design always surprises me," Astaroth commented as he prepared to enter the council chamber alone. It was lord Rood's idea to let Astaroth enter the chambers alone at first. Why? Simply because he wanted Ashton and Astaroth to dominate the rest of the Council, and a reincarnated Astaroth was more than enough to shake the Council. Besides, there were other matters that Astaroth needed answers to and allowing him to have an audience first was more than enough to push the Council on the backfoot. But if he couldn't subdue the Council alone, Ibis would join him and criticise how the Council had handled things since her father's death. With all that force, they could blackmail the Council into parting with the only known weapon capable of killing Kro'Han. "Remember," Ashton reminded Astaroth. "Soul killer, we need that at all costs, as it is the only weapon that could kill Kro'Han."

"Relax, my brother," Astaroth rolled his eyes. "This isn't my first rodeo with those ancient fuckers, and as for the soul killer, taking it is your job. Not mine."

"Fine by me." Ashton rolled his eyes as Astaroth was invited into the chamber to present his case.

A gruelling hour passed before the door parted again, and the guards called out Ashton's name. As he entered the massive chamber, he couldn't help but notice the room's atmosphere. Astaroth was smiling as usual, but everyone else looked like they had been caught stealing candy. Ibis and Rood were the only ones who seemed to be in a good mood. "What a delight it is to see our lord's heir in flesh finally!" Rood excitedly announced, and the rest gently tapped on their armrest to convey their 'joy'. Like he had been taught, Ashton ignored the praise and executed the traditional Xyran salute, and it changed something within the council members as their gaze suddenly felt warmer. It was then Ashton discovered something even stranger. Usually, the people he met couldn't move their eyes away from his unusual hair. But the Council seemed more interested in his eyes than anything else. The following second, everyone began to whisper amongst themselves until Lord Rood cleared his throat, and everyone's attention returned to the topic. "It is said a Precursor's identity is revealed by their eyes," Lord Rood continued. "Just one look is enough for us to know your true identity, son of Jo'Han."

Ashton remained silent, carefully watching the changing expressions of everyone around him. He had expected the revelation of his lineage to cause some reaction from the Council, but they were as still as the statues watching them from the entrance. Lord Rood continued, "While we know you have your fair share of questions, answering those is not on the agenda for today." The council members nodded in response. It was clear they were more concerned about Kro'Han than anything else.

"As we now know, an ancient evil has woken up again. An evil who can doom us for all eternity with a mere snap of his fingers," Lord Rood commented. "Nevertheless, we have the weapon to deal with the threat, once and for all: The Soul Killer!"

Ashton listened intently, hoping that Rood would advocate for the acquisition of the Soul Killer in front of the Council. But what he said differed from what they had planned the previous night.

"However," Rood continued, his gaze shifting towards Astaroth, "we must exercise caution in wielding such power. As such, the Soul Killer will be entrusted to Astaroth, someone we know and have worked with for centuries."

'What the-'

Ashton's expression shifted from anticipation to disbelief. Rood's change of stance left Ashton grappling with the realisation that the weapon capable of neutralising a Precursor's immortality would not be under his control. Which meant he was in as much danger as Kro'Han. A murmur swept through the Council, with some members nodding in agreement while others exchanged uneasy glances. As Ashton turned to look at Astaroth, he seemed unfazed, maintained a composed demeanour, and was aware that the decision had strategic implications for Rood's words.

Rood sensed Ashton's gaze and immediately rushed to diffuse the situation.

"T-The council acknowledges Ashton's unique position as a Precursor; since he is a Precursor, the Council has decided to ensure the safety of our people first and foremost," he mumbled. "I hope this decision will be welcomed by all the

parties involved."

With that, the Council members hurriedly left the chamber, leaving Ashton and Astaroth alone to solve their issues.

Chapter 715 The Weight Of Trust (2)

As everyone left, the council room was shrouded in an uneasy silence, the blue lights casting an ethereal glow on the raised seats. Ashton's gaze was fixed on Astaroth, anger simmering beneath the surface. The air crackled with tension as the accusation he had hurled at Astaroth hung heavy in the room.

"Ashton, I assure you, I had no part in changing the plans," Astaroth declared, his tone firm.

Ashton narrowed his eyes, the echo of Jo'Han's words haunting his thoughts. 'Do not trust anyone, not even the one within you.'

"You expect me to believe that?" Ashton blurted out. "Rood was going to give me the Soul Killer, and suddenly, the plan shifts, and it's for you?" Ashton's frustration was evident in his words as Astaroth stood before him calmly and collectedly. Even though he had no role in Rood's plan, he had been aware of the change and didn't object to it. In Astaroth's eyes, he had used the Soul Killer once, so handing him the weapon capable of killing the Precursors was an obvious choice. Astaroth had expected Ashton to understand, but it didn't seem likely that this would happen soon. Moreover, the reason Ashton had hidden the truth about his lineage from him meant that he could have hidden more things from Astaroth, and in that case, it was better for him to have control over the Soul Killer. "I have no reason to betray you," Astaroth said, his expression hardening. "I've been by your side since the beginning and helped you as promised. Why would I betray you when we're close to achieving our goal?"

Jo'Han's warning once again echoed in Ashton's mind. This time, louder than ever before. He took a step closer, his voice laced with suspicion. "Yes, you've been by my side, but whose agenda are you really following, Astaroth? Is this some ploy to seize power for yourself? Or something even worse?" "Power? Do you think I crave power? You never understood me, did you?" Astaroth's eyes flared with offense. "I have no desire for power. My only goal is to help you achieve yours."

The room felt charged, the weight of their conflicting emotions pressing against the futuristic walls. Ashton's hand clenched into a fist. "You can't blame me for doubting you," Ashton commented. "You

have been behaving strangely ever since we got separated, and now this? How do you expect me to trust you?"

Astaroth's resolve hardened. "I won't stand here and be accused of treachery. If you don't trust me, then so be it."

Ashton's frustration boiled over, and he lunged at Astaroth. The two clashed in a furious scuffle of anger and mistrust. The room became an arena of swirling shadows and bursts of energy. Ashton's fists blazed with aetheric power as he aimed relentless strikes at Astaroth. Astaroth, in turn, showcased his skill, effortlessly dodging and parrying Ashton's attacks. Ashton was enraged beyond the limit as if someone else was controlling him.

As they brought out their swords, the metallic echoes of their confrontation reverberated through the chamber. Blue lights flickered and dimmed with the intensity of the blow they exchanged. Ashton, almost possessed, pressed on, each strike infused with the weight of his distrust and unadulterated rage. Astaroth, however, matched Ashton's aggression with controlled precision.

His movements were like a beautiful dance, a symphony of calculated defence and counterattacks. Astaroth's experience slowly began overwhelming Ashton's rage. He avoided the full force of Ashton's blows, responding with measured strikes that tested Ashton's resilience. Fueled by frustration, Ashton unleashed his Precursor powers, creating shockwaves that rippled through the room. Astaroth, not one to be outdone, summoned his strength, a golden aura enveloping him as he countered Ashton's assault.

Since Astaroth's body was cloned from Ashton's, it had retained some Precursor properties, and as such, Astaroth had some residual Precursor powers to counter Ashton's. Their powers clashed like cosmic storms, shaking the very foundation of the council room. The struggle between trust and doubt manifested in every movement, every collision of force.

The battle reached its zenith when Ashton, his aetheric energy blazing, attempted a final, overwhelming strike. Astaroth, anticipating the move, deftly redirected the force, leaving Ashton off balance. In a swift motion, Astaroth seized the opportunity, disarming Ashton and pinning him against the walls. Ashton tried to fight, but Astaroth's grip was firm, and the golden-skinned Xyran held Ashton in place with unyielding strength.

The room, previously filled with the crackling energy of their battle, now hung in an uneasy silence. Blue lights flickered erratically, casting intermittent shadows that danced across Ashton's strained features.

Astaroth, his golden eyes unwavering, stared into Ashton's eyes with concern. The aftermath of their struggle seemed to linger in the air; a visible tension mirrored their rift.

"This distrust will be our undoing, Ashton," Astaroth grunted as he held Ashton in place. "I am not your enemy."

Ashton, breathing heavily, glared up at Astaroth. "Prove it."

With that, Astaroth released his hold on Ashton, stepping back to create a measured distance between them. Though no longer physically restrained, Ashton felt the weight of mistrust and doubt settling in the room.

"I need to claim the Soul Killer," Astaroth mumbled, his gaze piercing through the tension between them. "Whether you believe me or not, it stays in Xyran hands. If you think I'm your enemy, deal with it when the time comes."

"Believe me, I will."

The words hung in the air, and the weight of trust felt heavier than ever. Ashton, still seething with rage, turned his gaze away from his 'brother'. Astaroth wanted to clear the mistrust between them. But it was getting late for the ritual to claim the Soul Killer, and he had to turn away, leaving Ashton alone in the council room.

Once alone in the dimly lit chamber, Ashton wrestled with his conflicted emotions. On one side, he wanted to trust Astaroth, but on the other, his father's warning echoed louder, and the uncertainty of their alliance gnawed at him.

Chapter 716 Land Of The Precursors (1)

In the days that followed, Ashton and Astaroth couldn't agree, partially because of guilt and partly because of anger. The atmosphere around them was tense so much that the Xyrans worried about a potential fight that could destroy their moons or something.

As such, the Black Division, a company of the greatest Xyran soldiers, were stationed around Ignara to ensure everyone's safety. The Black Division had never tasted defeat; they were always successful no matter how difficult their mission was.

But despite their past glory, they weren't taking on Astaroth and Ashton lightly. They were well aware of Astaroth's strength and had no intention of working against him. As such, they settled for religiously surveilling Ashton, the more unpredictable of the two.

While Ashton was being kept within a specific area of the moon, Astaroth was given free rein as the Council trusted Astaroth more than a stranger, even though their shared past spoke otherwise.

This arrangement continued until Astaroth was handed the Soul Killer device, and Ashton and Astaroth were set to depart for Celestria's Verge. But before that, the Council suggested that they should wait and try to resolve their misunderstandings, given the circumstances.

However, Ashton and Astaroth were set on leaving the Xyran-ruled space as soon as possible. Though their relationship was tense, defeating Kro'Han seemed to be the only thing they agreed on, and they wanted to waste no time on their bickering.

Ultimately, the Council agreed and arranged for a ship for them. While the Xyrans were worried about the downfall between the two, most of them were glad to see the guests depart... but they weren't alone.

Despite his declining health, Rood accompanied them for two reasons. First, to see the place Jo'Han talked so much about and second, to try and apologise to Ashton for not giving him the Soul Killer as promised.

The spaceship hurtled through the cosmic expanse, the hum of its engines a constant backdrop to the silence within.

Astaroth sat in the cockpit, fingers dancing over the holographic controls, navigating through the sea of stars. Rood joined him, taking a seat in the co-pilot's chair, and a heavy atmosphere settled between them.

"We need to talk," Rood finally broke the silence, his gaze fixed on the vastness beyond the viewport.

Astaroth glanced at him, his golden eyes reflecting an unreadable emotion. "Talk away."

"I need to know your intentions, Astaroth," Rood pressed, the weight of uncertainty evident in his voice. "With Ashton, with the mission... everything."

"Why is that?"

"Because I have a duty to protect him," Rood responded. "Even above you."

Astaroth leaned back, his posture casual, almost indifferent to Rood's status on Xenithar.

"My intentions haven't changed," he responded. "I'm here to fight Kro'Han and end him. As for Ashton, he's not my concern. Whether he chooses to join me, that's his choice."

Rood studied Astaroth's stoic expression, searching for any cracks that might reveal the truth because the Astaroth he knew wouldn't give up on someone he called his Brother.

"You don't seem too concerned about him," Rood commented.

"He is a grown-ass man who has been through a lot," Astaroth chuckled. "He'll find his way. If he chooses to isolate himself, it's because he needs time to process. It's not my place to intrude on his peace."

"Is that so? You two were inseparable once," Rood frowned, the lines on his forehead deepening. "Now it feels like you're drifting apart, and I find it weird."

Astaroth's eyes narrowed, and he turned his attention back to the controls. "People change, Sir. Circumstances change. It's a part of life."

A moment of silence hung in the air before Rood decided to address the issue at the core of their unease.

"We can't ignore what happened during the meeting either-"

"Rood, I'm here to protect Ashton," Astaroth mumbled, his jaw tensing, a sign of inner turmoil. "But I can't control his perception of events. If he thinks I betrayed him, that's his choice. In time, everything will clear up."

"The question is, are you?" Rood's eyes narrowed, suspicion lingering.

Astaroth's gaze remained fixed on the starry expanse. "No. I've never betrayed him, and I never will. But trust is a delicate thing. Once broken, it's hard to mend."

Their conversation reached an impasse, and tension thickened between them. Astaroth remained focused on the navigation controls, and Rood sighed, realising that he wouldn't open up about having a secret meeting with the Council and changed their decision to get the Soul Killer for himself.

Rood was aware of the meeting because one of the Councilmen had informed him about it. But even he was too scared to reveal everything to Rood. That's why Rood wanted to know Astaroth's answer, but it didn't seem like he would talk.

"I'm going to check on Ashton," Rood finally declared, rising from his seat.

Astaroth nodded without looking back, his demeanour unwavering. "Feel free."

As Rood left the cockpit, the door sliding shut behind him, Astaroth was left alone with his thoughts.

The hum of the spaceship's engines reverberated through the narrow corridor as Rood approached Ashton's room. The metallic walls seemed to close in, amplifying the weight of unspoken tension in the air.

Rood knew the trials set by the Precursors would require all of their attention, and a broken crew like theirs wouldn't survive for long. As such, he wanted to mend the bridges while there was time.

"I didn't have any success with Astaroth... let's hope it won't be the same with Ashton," Rood mumbled before opening the door leading to Ashton's room.

Inside, Ashton sat cross-legged on the floor, eyes closed, immersed in meditation. Rood hesitated for a moment before clearing his throat, "Ashton, do you have a moment to spare?"

No response.

"I understand your anger. I should have fought harder for the Soul Killer," Rood admitted, his tone carrying the burden of regret. "I tried to change their decision, but the council—"

Ashton's eyes remained shut, and he continued his meditation, seemingly impervious to Rood's words.

"I wanted to apologise," Rood persisted, "I never meant for things to unfold this way. I tried to reverse the decision, but they wouldn't listen."

Silence hung in the room like an unspoken truth. Ashton's meditation was a shield, a barrier to prevent his temper from boiling over. Rood's regret-filled words seemed to bounce off that shield, leaving Ashton unmoved.

"I really wish it didn't come to this," Rood sighed, running a hand through his silver hair. "I wish we could have found a better way, you know."

Still, no acknowledgement from Ashton.

Rood took a step back, realising that his attempts at reconciliation were falling on deaf ears. "Ashton, I—"

"You did what you had to," Ashton's voice cut through the air, low and controlled. "If you think I'll become a danger to you, then you're wrong. What happened, happened, you can leave now."

He nodded silently, acknowledging the chasm that had widened between them. As he turned to leave, the door slid shut behind him, sealing the divide.

In the corridor, Rood found himself alone with his thoughts. The spaceship hurtled through the vastness of space, carrying them and the weight of decisions and consequences. The flickering lights overhead cast a muted glow on Rood's troubled expression.

He walked the corridor in solitude until he came upon Astaroth, leaning against the wall with a contemplative gaze. Rood hesitated before speaking, "Ashton might turn into a liability for our mission—"

Astaroth's eyes met Rood's, and he raised an eyebrow as he didn't expect Rood to be so forward and straight with his words.

"I know," Rood admitted, "I shouldn't have said that. It's just... the Council's decision has complicated things."

"I already told you," Astaroth shrugged. "Leave him be. I know him; he is disturbed right now, but he'll recover. Now let's head back."

As Astaroth returned to the ship's controls and steered them through the cosmos, Rood lingered in the corridor, feeling uneasy for some reason.

Chapter 717 Land Of The Precursors (2)

The spaceship descended through the desolate atmosphere, a reddish hue casting an eerie glow on the ruins below. Ashton peered out of the viewport, his eyes widening at the sight of Celestria's Verge—the once majestic land of the Precursors, now reduced to a wasteland of run-down structures and barren lands.

The planet's surface bore scars of battles long forgotten. Craters pocked the terrain, evidence of conflicts that had unfolded millennia ago. It was as if Celestria's Verge had witnessed an apocalypse, the remnants of once-majestic buildings standing like mournful sentinels over the aftermath.

Though now dilapidated, the architecture still bore traces of intricate designs and advanced engineering. Symbols etched into the corroded walls told stories of a race that sought to explore the cosmos, leaving an unforgettable mark on the fabric of the universe.

Overhead, the sky was shrouded in perpetual gloom. A reddish tint, possibly due to atmospheric decay, cast an eerie hue on the landscape. The sun, if it still existed in the conventional sense, remained obscured, leaving Celestria's Verge bathed in an otherworldly twilight.

In the distance, Ashton could make out the remnants of what seemed to be a central hub—an ancient Precursor city that once teemed with life. Now, it lay silent, a ghostly reminder of the bustling metropolis it had once been. Tangled, dry vines and metallic debris intertwined, weaving a tapestry of nature, reclaiming the remnants of a technological marvel.

Celestria's Verge, once a beacon of the Precursors' might, had succumbed to the relentless march of time. The very essence of a once-thriving civilisation now echoed through the empty corridors of decay, and the wind carried whispers of a legacy that refused to be forgotten.

"Is this... Celestria's Verge?" Ashton asked, disbelief lacing his words as their ship descended on the barren world.

Lord Rood, seated beside him, nodded solemnly. "Yes, Ashton. This is what remains of your homeland, if you want to call it that."

Ashton glanced about the crumbling remnants of Precursor civilisation. "But... how could one creature be capable of this?"

"The creature of the dark wasn't the only thing working against the precursors," Rood sighed a heavy weight of sorrow in his voice. "Time, Ashton. Time happened. The Precursors were a mighty race, but even we were not immune to the ravages of time. While the creature was the primary reason for their decline, it wasn't the reason why their civilisation crumbled, as against time, they too faced extinction."

"You're not making any sense, old man," Astaroth retorted. "Is that so..." Rood chuckled weakly. "Looks like my old age is catching up to me."

Maybe it was Ashton's imagination, but it felt like Rood was nervous, as if he was hiding something from them. However, rather than comment on it, Ashton decided to keep an eye on Rood for behavioural changes. As the ship touched down on a cracked landing pad, the metallic clank of the doors opening reverberated through the desolation. Ashton stepped onto the crumbling surface, his footsteps echoing in the silent expanse. Rood followed suit, looking around with nostalgia and sorrow.

"We need to find the remnants of Precursor technology that might aid us in defeating Kro'Han," Astaroth explained, his gaze scanning the ruins. "Though it doesn't look like that would be possible..."

Before Ashton could respond, a low mechanical hum resonated through the air, accompanied by an unsettling buzz. The ground trembled as massive robotic insects emerged from the shadows of the ruined structures. Ashton's eyes widened as he observed the unnatural creatures, their metallic exoskeletons glinting in the dim light.

"Fucking hell, what are those?" Astaroth yelled, calling out Raphael in his hands.

"Stay close, Lord Rood," Ashton warned, unsheathing a sleek energy Balmond from his inventory as he charged at the robots together with Astaroth.

However, the robotic insects ignored them, focusing squarely on Rood. Astaroth, unfazed by the robots' ignorance, lunged at them.

"Why are they only attacking Rood?" Ashton questioned, bewildered.

"These are remnants of our automated defence system, designed to protect Precursor technology. You can say they are one of the trials!" Rood exclaimed, raising his blade and attacking the metallic onslaught head-on. "It seems they can't distinguish friend from foe anymore."

Ashton wasn't convinced by Rood's explanation, as the insects seemed aware of his and Astaroth's presence. Strangely enough, both of them had Precursor genetics, which could be why the insects were

strictly attacking Rood, a Xyran. Meanwhile, Astaroth engaged the robotic insects, displaying remarkable prowess in combat. His hands crackled with energy as he unleashed powerful strikes against the relentless assailants. Rood's precision with the energy blade complemented Astaroth's raw strength, creating a formidable defence against the robotic onslaught.

Ashton stood a distance away and watched the skirmish unfold. The sight of Astaroth and Rood battling the robots perplexed him, and his thoughts became weirder with each passing moment.

Earlier, he only suspected foul play from Astaroth, but now it felt like both of them could be involved in some notorious scheme, and he was stuck on an unknown planet with people who could betray him. "Something isn't right here..."

In the meantime, the Xyrans were busy dispatching the robots. The robotic insects, however, were persistent. Astaroth destroyed several with precise strikes, but their numbers seemed inexhaustible. Rood, too, fought valiantly, but the mechanical creatures pressed on.

Feeling a surge of frustration, Ashton clenched his fists. He was a Precursor; if they weren't attacking him, there was a chance they might listen to him.

Stepping forward, he approached one of the robotic insects, its sensors locking onto him. Astonishingly, it halted its attack, following Ashton's thought.

If he could control the robots, it would be advantageous for him. After all, he would again have allies whom he could blindly trust. "I think I can communicate with them," Ashton announced, his voice carrying, hiding his true intentions.

Rood shot him a wary glance mid-battle. "Communicate? Ashton, be careful. We don't know how—"

Before Rood could finish, Ashton extended his hand towards the robotic insect, focusing his thoughts on a connection. Surprisingly, the insect responded, its movements less hostile, as if acknowledging Ashton's presence.

"What are you doing, Ashton?" Astaroth called out, momentarily halting his assault.

"Just shut it and put your sword down!" Ashton roared. "They won't harm anyone... for now."

Chapter 718 Betrayal (1)

The desolate landscape of Celestria's Verge lay still, and the metallic insects seemed pacified by Ashton's presence. Astaroth and Rood exchanged glances of astonishment. They watched as the once-aggressive guardians moved in a synchronised pattern around Ashton, their metallic bodies reflecting the dim light.

"By the stars," Rood muttered, his eyes narrowing in disbelief. "He's controlling them."

Astaroth nodded, unsurprised by the gods of plot armour protecting Ashton. "He's a Precursor. Only god knows what else he is capable of."

While the two chatted, Ashton stood amidst the robotic creatures and maintained a focused connection. His thoughts seemed to guide the creatures, and the once-chaotic assembly moved in a harmonious and orderly way under his command.

A more significant part of the group slowly moved towards him, revolving around Ashton like a dog would to its long-lost owner. Once they confirmed whatever they wanted to, the creatures began happily chirping around. "I didn't expect this," Rood admitted, still observing the surreal scene. "I guess Ashton is in more touch with his Precursor side."

Astaroth, though intrigued, remained puzzled. Having been cloned after Ashton, he was, in theory, just as much a Precursor as Ashton was. Yet he couldn't control the creature even if he tried. Little did Astaroth know that the robotic creatures didn't recognise Ashton due to his Precursor lineage but because of a program written in them by Jo'Han. Like Ava had said, Jo'Han had mapped every event of Ashton's life even before they had planned to create him. As such, it wasn't odd that Jo'Han knew Ashton would get to the Verge and left the creature to guard the place till he did. But how could Jo'Han ensure that the creatures would only serve Ashton and his master and not an impostor? It was a bit of a gamble, but instead of trusting his son, Jo'Han decided it would be better for him to imprint that information on the Precursor Armour Ashton was sporting, as only Ashton could wear it. "Incredible... the trials would be easy to clear if Ashton can keep this up," Rood commented, but Astaroth was too busy inside his head to register Rood. Ashton, sensing their conversation, turned towards them. Following his gaze, the robotic insects seemed to acknowledge the presence of Astaroth and Rood and didn't attack them anymore, even without Ashton's input. Before approaching the two, Ashton waved the creatures away, and they dispersed without a fuss, returning to their dormant state but ready to help in case Ashton needed them. "He controls them like they're an extension of himself," Astaroth remarked, a hint of wariness in his voice. "Is it only me, or is he getting stronger by the day?"

Ashton approached, meeting their gaze. "They're not a threat. They're like guardians to this place and probably mistook strangers as adversaries."

"How can you control other Precursor technology as well?" Rood asked. "Were you taught all this?"

Ashton shrugged. "I don't know. This is the first time I've tried, and it just... happened."

"That has to be the case! I expected no less from Lord Jo'Han... it's a shame he isn't with us."

"..." Ashton and Astaroth were both silent after seeing a respectable elder fanboying so hard for someone. It was like a century-old man on the Verge of death, supporting the nth generation of his favourite K-pop idol. Ignoring the fanboy, Astaroth crossed his arms, studying Ashton intently. "Well, this changes things. With this newfound ability, we might have an edge against Kro'Han."

Ashton, however, remained contemplative. Like him, Kro'Han was a Precursor- a more knowledgeable one, no less. However, bringing him anywhere near Precursor tech could spell disaster for them. "Yeah... I don't think that's a good idea," Ashton commented. "If anything, keeping Kro'Han away from all this tech should be our priority."

"Hm... he is correct," Rood nodded in agreement. "For now, let's proceed cautiously and gather whatever information or resources we can from this place."

As the trio ventured deeper into Celestria's Verge, the remnants of Precursor technology loomed like silent sentinels. Ashton's connection with the ancient defences facilitated their exploration, guiding them through the ruins of the old empire.

"Oi! Burden, I mean Ashton, come check this out!"

Suddenly, Ashton heard Astaroth call out to him. He and Rood hurried to Astaroth's location only to find him standing in front of a rundown building. "What is it, Ass-taroth?" Ashton replied, mocking the Xyran like old times. Astaroth scoffed playfully before nodding towards the building. "It looks like some kind of foundry. At least that's what I remember from the time I went excavating for Precursor tech."

"At least you remember something useful from the past, old man," Ashton took a jab before getting close to the sealed doors. "Let's see what I can here..."

As usual, Ashton's touch activated the long-dead entrance. As they entered the dimly lit interior, holographic displays flickered to life, revealing ancient texts, images, and records suspended mid-air.

"Looks like you were right, Astaroth," Rood commented, staring at the holographs. "This is written in Precursor language..."

Ashton, drawn to the holographic displays, witnessed images of a flourishing civilisation, advancements in science, and the cosmic wonders they had once explored.

"Yeah, well, I don't know Precursor language, so you better start translating all this shit and see if we get anything useful from this place," Astaroth said before pinching his nose as the place had a very distinctive smell. "You don't need to tell me about it," Rood said as he spurted his wings and flew upwards, wanting to decipher the words in an orderly manner. Ashton, engrossed in the holographic projections, traced the timeline of events. The records unfolded the tale of the Precursors' cosmic endeavours, encounters with diverse species, and the intricate web of alliances and conflicts that defined their era.

"Wait a minute..." Ashton mumbled as he saw something strange. "The war that Precursors lost happened long before they created the humans, right?"

"That's what the old man said," Astaroth replied, looking strangely at Ashton. "Why? Is something wrong?"

Ashton hastily pointed at a panel and replied, "If the Verge was left isolated after the war, then how the heck is there a record of humanity's creation here?"

Astaroth leaned in to double-check Ashton. But as he did. A thunderous sound echoed above them, and before they knew it, Rood had attacked Astaroth, pinning him to the ground with a lightning trident.

"What the hell?" Ashton yelled and brought out Balmond, but he was kicked away before he could do anything. "Finally... centuries of patience paid off..." Rood sniggered. Unlike before, he didn't look old and frail. Instead, he appeared to have buffed up considerably more than Ashton or Astaroth.

"The fuck is wrong with you!" Astaroth yelled, but Rood ignored him, saying something that made everything clear. "You rats won't put any hurdles on Lord Kro'Han's path... I'll make sure of it!"

Chapter 719 Betrayal (2)

"Colour me surprised. Kro'Han got to you, didn't he? You damned puppet!" Ashton's expression changed from anger to disbelief as he raised Balmond again, ready to confront the unexpected adversary.

"Puppets are easily discarded. I made a choice, and it's the winning side," Rood scoffed, flexing his newly created muscles as if eager to test his regained youth.

"You think siding with Kro'Han makes you a winner?" Astaroth said with a defiant smirk despite being pinned under the trident. "You're just digging your own grave, Rood."

The response to Astaroth's smile was a surge of electricity from the trident coursing through Astaroth's form. The Xyran lord gritted his teeth against the pain but refused to scream. Astaroth was well aware of Rood's sadistic tendencies and refused to let the fucker get the pleasure he wanted to get by torturing him. But it seemed the pain coursing through Astaroth got transferred to Ashton because he was seething in rage. He called upon the insectoids from before, but to his surprise, not a single such creature appeared to aid him. Ashton found it weird, and Rood's smile confirmed he must have done something to corner Ashton and Astaroth there. 'What can he possibly gain from this?' Ashton

wondered. After all, their stalemate of a situation was temporary, and even Rood must know that. Sooner or later, Astaroth would be freed from Rood's grip, and someone like Rood wouldn't dare go up against the duo alone. Which meant Rood must have a plan in his head. A plan that would topple the scales in his favour. But what could overpower both him and Astaroth? That's what Ashton wanted to know. Unfortunately, he had no time to stand there and do nothing. Even though Astaroth was putting on a brave face, Ashton knew his condition wasn't good. Ashton, realising the dire predicament, lunged at Rood with Balmond. "You're not getting away with this!"

But Rood, empowered by Kro'Han's blessings, effortlessly deflected Ashton's attack and countered with a swift blow that sent Ashton crashing. The transformed Xyran lord displayed a level of strength and agility that surpassed their expectations.

"You were never meant to survive this encounter," Rood declared, his voice resonating with a newfound conviction. "Lord Kro'Han's power flows through me now, and you two are nothing more than obstacles to be eradicated."

""You're playing a dangerous game, Rood," Still pinned to the ground, Astaroth managed to utter. "Kro'Han won't keep his promises. You're just a pawn in his game."

"If I'm a pawn, then so be it. At least I'll be on the winning side," Rood chuckled menacingly. "As long as the Xyrans are safe, I don't care about anything else. Enjoy your demise... once again-"

With that, Rood raised the trident, ready to deliver a potentially fatal strike. But Ashton emerged from the rubble before he could land the blow, kicking the proud Xyran with his aura-enforced body. With a powerful kick, Ashton dislodged Rood, sending him sprawling backwards. The trident clattered to the ground as Rood tumbled out of the library, momentarily defeated. "Need a hand, big guy?" Ashton grinned.

Astaroth, despite the chaotic situation, smirked in response. "Young guys should away help the elder."

"Well, we might have to do the opposite of it," Ashton replied. With the trident off him, Ashton helped Astaroth back to his feet, a nod of gratitude exchanged between him and Ashton.

"Thanks for the assist," he said, rubbing his neck to remove the numbness around it. The banter between them served as a brief respite. However, their moment of levity was interrupted as Rood reappeared, not a scratch on his body from Ashton's kick. Strangely enough, as Rood reappeared, Astaroth couldn't help but interject with a touch of humour amid the tense atmosphere. "Well, well, look who's back for another round! Don't tell me you got so desperate that you started consuming performance enhancers, Rood?" Astaroth quipped, a mischievous glint in his golden eyes. "You seem a bit too eager to pick fights today!"

Ashton shot Astaroth a puzzled look, to which Astaroth shrugged playfully. "Just saying, maybe the old Rood needed a boost. A little something to put his rotting dong to use."

"Really, dude? You wanna do this now?" Ashton whispered to Astaroth. "Just watch. I know how to get him riled up," Astaroth whispered back. "His first and fourth wives left him because of his ED."

"..."

Looks like Astaroth's plan worked because Rood was brooding hard. Now wielding his trident with an ominous aura, Rood glared at Astaroth. "Jokes won't save you from Lord Kro'Han's wrath."

"Bitch, please," Astaroth, unfazed, continued his banter. "Maybe you should've asked for the secret recipe from your Lord and Saviour. It might have given you a fair chance against us. You know, a little performance enhancer to keep up with the big leagues."

The Foundry's silence shattered as Rood, seething with anger, charged at Astaroth. Astaroth gracefully sidestepped, avoiding Rood's initial attack. However, Rood's fury didn't wane, and he swiftly redirected his assault toward Astaroth again.

Amidst the skirmish, Ashton rushed to intervene. With a swift motion, he swung Balmond at Rood, aiming to thwart his relentless assault. But Rood deftly intercepted Ashton's strike with his trident, the clash resonating through the building.

Astaroth seized the opportunity, swiftly moving to Rood's side with fluid grace. He aimed a precise strike, and his fist connected with Rood's ribs, eliciting a pained grunt.

Rood, recovering from the unexpected blow, retaliated by summoning a surge of energy through his trident. The weapon crackled with lightning as he unleashed a sweeping strike towards Astaroth, who skillfully dodged the attack with a nimble sidestep.

"You're getting slow, Rood," Astaroth teased his tone a stark contrast to the intensity of the battle. "Last I checked, a hit like this wouldn't have done shit to you. Let alone cause you to scream in pain." "...unlike your mouth, that's as crude as I recall," Rood scoffed, ignoring the blaring pain to his side. "Fret not, I'll shortly fix that."

Chapter 720 I'm A Zompiewolf (1)

The moon hung low in the midnight sky, casting an ethereal glow over the desolate battlefield. Ashton and Astaroth stood side by side, their swords gleaming in the pale light. Before them, Rood twirled his thundering Trident with an ominous grin as if swinging the Trident would save his ass.

The air crackled with tension as the trio sized each other up. Ashton locked eyes with Rood, while Astaroth was itching to mimic Rood even more, but Ashton stopped him.

Suddenly, without a word, Rood lunged forward, his Trident slashing through the air like a bolt of lightning. Ashton parried the attack skillfully, the metal clash ringing across the battlefield.

"He never learns, does he?" Astaroth sighed and went back to action.

Astaroth swiftly closed the distance, delivering a series of lightning-quick kicks to Rood's midsection, where he had hit the Xyran before. The relentless attacks made Rood stagger back, but he soon retaliated with a powerful swing of his Trident.

Ashton and Astaroth moved in perfect harmony, which wasn't a surprise as the two had spent years in the same body and knew what each other was going to do next before either had thought about it.

Their movements synchronised as they dodged and counterattacked. Sparks flew as the clash intensified, each strike leaving a mark on the barren cityscape.

"Is that all you've got, Rood?" Astaroth taunted, his eyes gleaming with confidence.

Rood's laughter reverberated through the air, a sinister sound that made them uncomfortable. "You underestimate the power bestowed upon me, fools."

With a sudden burst of energy, Rood unleashed a torrent of lightning from the Trident, sending Ashton and Astaroth flying backwards. The duo rolled to their feet, gritting their teeth against the searing pain that coursed through their bodies.

He didn't know about Astaroth, but Ashton was sure he had dodged the strike. Yet he was hit by the thundering wave. It confused him, and Astaroth shared the emotions with him.

"You too, huh?" Ashton said, his voice firm as the jolting pain subsided. "I was hoping you had a plan this time..."

"Me? Nah," Astaroth scoffed. "But we definitely need to get that trident from him."

Ashton nodded in agreement, as they regained their footing. Without wasting a moment, they closed in on Rood and threw a barrage of attacks on him.

The trio engaged in a fierce exchange of blows, the air pulsating with the clash of steel and the dead sky above them cackled. It felt like the long, desolate planet was responding to their conflict... either that or Rood was on to something.

Meanwhile, Astaroth's movements were a blur as he seamlessly transitioned between punches and kicks. Ashton's sword, with precision, deflected Rood's Trident strikes and protected Astaroth simultaneously.

However, despite being pushed back, Rood seemed to revel in the chaos, his laughter echoing through the night. Ashton thought of summoning his soldiers for a moment but decided against it for two reasons.

Firstly, his summons were back on earth, protecting his family, which was more important than ever because if Rood could betray them, the remaining Xyrans were no exception.

Secondly, calling the summons would be useless as they likely would serve as distractions, and one hit from the Trident would be enough to eliminate them.

"Oi, Ashton! Stop dreaming, will you?" Astaroth yelled after protecting him from Rood's attack.

"You're persistent. I'll give you that," Rood sneered with a glint of madness in his eyes. "But it's useless... No matter how hard you try, you're not winning this fight."

"Yeah? We'll see about that!"

The battle raged on, each side pushing the limits of their abilities. Astaroth's fists met the electrified surface of the Trident, sending shockwaves through his body. Despite his agility, Ashton struggled to evade the relentless onslaught of lightning-infused attacks.

"We can't keep this up," Ashton grunted, frustration etching his features.

Astaroth nodded, his gaze unwavering. "We need to find a weakness, exploit it."

As if hearing their conversation, Rood's laughter grew louder, a cacophony of madness that fueled his strength.

"My weakness? There's no such thing!"

Suddenly, Rood's form changed, his body morphing into a grotesque, monstrous version of himself. The ground beneath him cracked as he grew in size, the Trident now a massive, thundering weapon that seemed to channel the very essence of the storm.

Ashton and Astaroth exchanged uneasy glances, realising the tables had rolled twice before turning against them. The once confident expressions on their faces now masked a growing concern.

"What in the heavens is happening?" Ashton muttered, his grip on the sword tightening.

"I was hoping you would have an answer to that, being a Precursor and all..." Astaroth said while scratching his head. "When should we start running?"

Ashton's voice echoed from a distance, "Who the fuck are you talking to there? Get a move on, you chicken legs!"

Now a hulking monstrosity, Rood swung the colossal Trident with devastating force. Thankfully, Ashton used his aura to push back against Rood, but even then, he could feel his aura wasn't as strong as before.

"That motherfucker did something!" Ashton yelled to inform Astaroth. "I can use my aura properly!"

"Well... fuck me-"

"Not the time or place!"

"Shut it, you dim bulb!" Astaroth yelled while raising his fist as they rushed towards the ship.

"You thought you could challenge me?" Rood's monstrous voice boomed, laughter echoing through the battlefield.

"No disrespect, but... we were thinking of killing you!" Astaroth yelled back. "Just so you know, we still are!"

"Jester... till the end... huh," Rood rolled his eyes as he chased behind the duo.

"Rood knows more about Precursors than I do! Facing him like this is useless," Ashton mumbled. "I need to do something. Something Rood wouldn't expect a Precursor to do..."

While Astaroth distracted Rood, Ashton came up with a plan worth testing. But for it to work, he needed to catch Rood off-guard.

"Before all that, I need to know how he messed with my aura," Ashton mumbled. "I bet it's that Trident... Wait a minute... that's it!"