

Zompiewolf 741

Chapter 741 Doomsday On Earth (1)

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"Ashton, don't!" Ibis yelled. She was a fool to believe her plan would work, but it was the best she could come up with, given the situation. But Ashton was ruthless and, ignoring her pleas, turned Linas into his summon. "I warned you over and over, yet you keep pulling all these bullshit stunts thinking it would work," Ashton scoffed. "You had enough chances, and you blew them all. Therefore, whatever happens from now is on you and the Xyrans."

Linas's body twitched, a spark of life returning to his vacant eyes as darkness replaced his soul. Linas, they knew, was no more; instead, what stood in his place was one of the strongest creatures under Ashton's command. The malicious aura leaking from Linas's corpse forced countless Xyrans to throw up. It was way too dense than anything they had felt before. Even Ibis was having a difficult time keeping her composure. It was at that moment that she knew she fucked up bad. In the greed of retaining her position in the council, she had doomed everyone to hell. What made it even more ironic was that Ashton had warned them. If the Xyrans pulled any tricks, they would have to pay the price for it dearly. The council had thought he was bluffing, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Ashton's strength was no joke. Even though he hadn't shown them the true extent of his powers, countless Xyrans were already on their knees, wondering what would happen next. In a surprising twist, Ashton turned towards the resurrected Linas and instructed, "Stand down." The Xyrans, still on their knees, exchanged confused glances. Linas, now under Ashton's influence, complied without any complaints, as did the other undead Infiltrator.

A moment later, Ibis looked up to see Ashton standing right in front of her and offering a hand to help. If anything, Ashton's actions confused her even more.

Hesitant but sensing that she had no other choice, Ibis cautiously accepted Ashton's hand. He gently pulled her to her feet, and the rest of the Xyrans, mirroring Ibis, followed suit.

"Not a heartless rick that you thought am I?" Ashton smirked.

Ibis stared into his eyes, expecting to see any indication that it was just another way for Ashton to toy with them. But he seemed sincere in his approach. Even then, Ibis couldn't believe that Ashton would forgive them just like that.

"What are you doing, Ashton?" Ibis asked when she couldn't hold back anymore. "Why are you treating us like... this?"

"Destroying you would be easy, but it won't bring me any joy," Ashton nonchalantly shrugged in response. "Now that you've learned your lesson. If that's not a good enough answer, then let me make it clear. I have no interest in killing ants."

Ashton's reply stung her a bit. After all, they were proud Xyrans, overlords of the galaxy. It wasn't every day that someone compared them to insects. However, Ibis knew Ashton was telling the truth. The way he dispatched two Infiltrators and brought everyone down to their knees without even revealing his true strength was good enough for her to know their place before him. If anything, Ibis was happy they wouldn't likely lose their lives now. The pride and money they lost would eventually recover, but when one's life was gone, it didn't return. That said, Ibis still had questions lingering in her mind. Mainly, why did Ashton kill Infiltrators if he was willing to forgive her? After all, he could have gotten his point through just by beating the crap out of them. "You killed two of my Infiltrators," she asked him as the crowd behind her gasped. "Why did you do that if you were planning to forgive us either way?"

"I thought you already knew," Ashton smiled before shaking his head. "To teach you a lesson and get that false sense of superiority out of your damn head."

He continued, "You challenged me twice, so I killed two of you men. If you challenge me again, you'll lose more of your people until you're the only one left. You get that, don't you?"

Ibis nervously nodded. He was right. The Xyrans had definitely looked down upon him ever since he 'accused' Lord Rood of wronging him. They went as far as ignoring his lineage, thinking they could deal with a Precursor. Their behaviour towards him was the textbook definition of overconfidence and being drunk in power—things they were now paying the price for. "We'll surrender without any conditions," Ibis made the decision for herself and her followers. While the council wouldn't like how she dealt with the situation, Ibis did not care about what they'd have to say. She was doing what was best for her and those who believed in her.

As far as her seat in the council is considered, she could come up with some way inside as long as she lived. Hell, if nothing else worked, she could form a new council with the support of common folks and overthrow the current regime. After all, either of those plans seemed more reasonable than challenging Ashton and dying for no reason. Ibis smiled at her thought process. Overthrowing a regime was easier than dealing with one man... what kind of strange world had she been living in?

"I'll take your word for it, and hopefully, no one will try to jump me now," Ashton, seemingly pleased with her decision, nodded.

With a casual wave of his hand, Ashton cancelled the summon, and the resurrected Linas and the other Infiltrator faded away into Valhalla. As the summons faded, Ashton turned towards Ibis.

"Now, if you'll join me, I would like to talk to you about something."

"Uh... Can't we do this here?" Ibis hesitantly asked him. "Not when there's so many ears on us," Ashton shook his head. "You could either come with me or send the rest of them away. I'm fine with either way."

Ibis looked at those behind her and decided to follow Ashton instead. It wasn't like he couldn't kill her in front of them if he wanted to, so doubting his intentions didn't make much sense to her.

Their meeting barely lasted ten minutes, but when Ibis returned, the Xyrans could see she was lost in her thoughts. Whatever Ashton had told her had taken a toll on her. But as promised, she didn't reveal anything to anyone as both parties went their separate ways.

Chapter 742 Doomsday On Earth (2)

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With the matter with Xyrans having been settled, Ashton turned his focus towards more important things, namely Kro'Han's impending invasion of Earth. Ashton had already asked the Orion empire to be on the lookout for suspicious activities around the solar system. To which they had agreed and set countless ships continuously patrolling around the periphery. However, they were merely stealth ships that would serve as a warning beacon and were not allowed to engage the enemy, as Ashton wanted their main force to be stationed around Earth. But since the Orion empire also had to look after itself, they could only spare a few ships for the cause. That was one of the reasons why Ashton was so hell-bent on getting those Xyran ships. Since the Orions couldn't help in that situation, it only made sense for Ashton to deploy better and bigger ships for the sake of Earth's safety. Technologically advanced Nirvana was also helping them and had partnered with the scientists from the Tower. Together, they had worked hard and deployed thousands of satellites to convey the live feed of most of the solar system. Meanwhile, the Vampires were busy crafting and cultivating more gear and other necessary items for the impending war. Meanwhile, the werewolves were simultaneously. Everything was happening under Ava's watchful eyes, from training the soldiers to ensuring everyone was working harmoniously without messing with the plans of other factions. But even with all that preparation, the desperation in everyone's eyes was palpable. Although when together, none of them expressed their thoughts on the matter, in the lone moments, they couldn't help but wonder if all their efforts were even worth it.

They were worried, and rightfully so. They were gearing up to fight with a being with godlike powers. A being capable of creating planets from dust and destroying them like it was nothing. Yes, the Precursors required machines and technology to make it happen, but they were the only species that'd own such devices. Even though it was unlikely Kro'Han would've been able to get his hands on something like that, he already had a fleet of precursor ships under his command, so who knows if he had obtained the doomsday device as well. That scenario was Ashton's biggest source of worry. He had tried to look for the said device himself but failed. His knowledge of Precursor artefacts and technology was negligible.

As such, obtaining anything useful in his fight against Kro'Han was next to impossible. All he could do was to fight the fucker head-on and hope for the best. "Hope... That's the biggest reason for any army's defeat," Ashton mumbled while lying in bed. "Hope for victory. Hope for survival. Hope this, hope that."

"But hope can also be the glue that binds everyone together," Anna replied, ruffling his hair. "There's no need for you to be so pessimistic."

Ashton sighed, conceding, "Yeah... I keep telling that to my head, but the damn thing is too stubborn." Anna opened her mouth to say something, but before she could, she got up and rushed into the washroom. Worried about her well-being, Ashton followed her, only to discover her puking her guts into the sink. The echo of retching sounds filled the small space as Anna hunched over the sink, her shoulders trembling with each heave. Ashton, unsure how to react, touched her back gently.

"Anna, are you okay?" Ashton asked, worried about her health.

"I don't know... Maybe I ate something bad." Anna, between laboured breaths, managed to mumble. Ashton, not entirely convinced by her explanation, continued to rub her back soothingly. "Either way, let me take you to the hospital. We should get you checked out."

Anna, still leaning over the sink, nodded weakly. Ashton helped her up and, supporting her, led her out of the washroom and towards the exit.

The journey to the hospital didn't take long. Upon arriving at the hospital, Ashton swiftly led Anna to the emergency room. The hospital staff recognised Ashton and cleared the way, allowing them immediate access to medical attention. While they were waiting for Ava to join them, Ashton couldn't shake the feeling that there was more to Anna's condition than a simple case of food poisoning, as Anna suggested. Still, he prayed it wasn't anything serious. Too much was already going on in his life, and if something happened to Anna, then he didn't know what he'd do. "Ashton, what happened?" Ava asked

as she rushed into the room and immediately went to check on Anna. "I'm not sure. We were talking, and then Anna suddenly felt unwell, and she's been vomited," Ashton explained. "She said it might be food poisoning or something, but I thought it was better to get checked either way."

Ava nodded and gestured for Anna to lie down on the examination bed. "Don't worry, I'm sure everything will be fine. Still, let me take a look."

Ashton stood by Anna's side, holding her hand for reassurance. Ava conducted a series of tests, her expression growing increasingly focused. The atmosphere in the room was tense as they awaited the results. boxnovelfull.com

After what felt like an eternity, the reports arrived. Ava thoroughly went through the reports and finally looked up from her clipboard, her eyes wide with astonishment. She took off her glasses, looked directly at Anna, and smiled like Ashton had never seen her do before. "Well, you two just made me the happiest woman on this planet! Congratulations!" Ava said with a warm smile. "You're pregnant!"

"Pregnant?" Anna whispered, her eyes widening.

"Yes, pregnant," Ava nodded, her smile growing even more pronounced as she rushed to hug them both. "You're going to be parents."

Still processing the news, Ashton looked at Anna with a mixture of shock and joy. "You didn't know?"

"No, I didn't," Anna shook her head, her eyes filling with tears. "I had no idea."

"Oh my god!" Ashton, overcome with emotion, pulled Anna into a tight embrace. "We're going to be parents!"

Ava, witnessing the tender moment between the couple, couldn't help but feel an overwhelming sense of joy. "I'm going to run more tests to ensure everything is okay, but it seems you're both in for a new and exciting chapter in your lives," Ava smiled and kissed both of their foreheads. "We might be in the midst of war prep, but this news calls for a celebration!"

Chapter 743 Domsday On Earth (3)

743 Domsday On Earth (3)

Since all the efforts were focused on the war, Ashton couldn't throw a proper party for everyone there. Not that he was a fan of extravagant events. Even though it wasn't anything special, the makeshift party at Ashton and Anna's place buzzed with joy and laughter. Colourful lights adorned the room, and the atmosphere was filled with the clinking of glasses and the sound of cheerful conversations. A rare sight, considering how down everyone had been feeling a few hours ago. It seemed that everyone had forgotten about the source of their problems. Seeing Ashton and Anna beaming with happiness made everyone happy and hopeful that maybe it wasn't the end like they had believed. Even During the celebration, someone had to keep an eye out for irregularities, and Tarik volunteered to do it because he wasn't a party guy himself. Just like that, instead of drinking and laughing like everyone else, Tarik found a quiet corner and got to monitor the satellites that orbited above Earth. He wasn't expecting anything to catch his attention, but he was wrong.

Suddenly, a distress signal cut through the lively ambience, silencing the room. Tarik's expression darkened as he focused on the data streaming in. he couldn't believe his eyes and analysed the readings again, but the feed wasn't lying. "What's going on, Tarik?" Sensing the shift in the room, Ashton approached Tarik with a raised eyebrow. "Everything okay there?"

"I'm afraid not," Tarik's eyes were glued to the data on the screen. "We've got a problem. A big one."

"What is it?" Ashton's jovial expression transformed into a serious one as he rushed to Tarik's side. "One of the stealth ships was destroyed, and this is the last feed they sent," Tarik pointed at the video. "Precursor fleet, heading our way and fast."

Ashton's eyes widened as he hadn't expected Kro'Han to make a move so soon.

"How fast are we talking?"

"Very fast," Tarik hesitated momentarily before replying, "They are already near Mars and at the speed they are moving, they'll be here in a couple of hours."

The gravity of the situation sank in. Ashton had anticipated an attack, but the speed at which the Precursor fleet was approaching caught him off guard.

Ashton had a reason for placing the ships at the far end of the solar universe, as they would notice the ships from far away, which would give them months or even a year to build a plan of action against them.

But since the Precursor ships were already around Mars, his plans got spoiled even before he could do anything. "Near Mars already?" Ashton repeated, trying to wrap his head around the unexpected threat. "How the hell did they cross half the solar system without anyone noticing!?"

"There's something strange. These Precursor ships aren't like anything I've seen before," Tarik nodded solemnly. He continued, "Instead of making a big space jump or using stealth, they're making continuous small space jumps. That's probably why our satellites and stealth ships didn't pick them up earlier."

Ashton thought about the situation. Kro'Han or Astaroth, whoever was in those ships, his decision to make small space jumps was odd and used up a lot of energy. But the more he thought, the more it made sense.

Typically, when a ship makes a big space jump, it creates 'ripples' that can be detected by radar, warning others about the jump. However, The size of these ripples depends on how far the leap is. So, even though making many small jumps would waste energy, the ripples would be too small to be noticed.

As awful as it was to think about it, Ashton couldn't help but thank his stars that the Precursor fleet encountered the stealth ship. While those aboard the vessel met their end, it allowed rest to try and fight back. He turned to the room full of people to give them the bad news. But it seemed everyone already knew or expected what Ashton would reveal. "Everyone, listen up! We've got trouble... The Precursor fleet is here," Ashton calmly informed them. "I know things are moving faster than we had anticipated, but there's nothing we can do to change it, so let's do our best and continue this party after we beat those prehistoric asses!"

The room roared with battle cries as everyone rushed to execute their pre-determined roles. "Tarik, get the Xyran ships ready," Ashton instructed the scientist, leaving the ships' master keys with him. "Blow them into oblivion as soon as those Precursor ships are in range. Got it?"

"Don't worry about me," Tarik nodded, firing up the ships stationed around the planet.

Just like Ashton had predicted, Anna wanted to join the fight with him. While he didn't want to deny her, he was concerned for her safety and for their unborn child. But since he wasn't going to deny her help, he thought it would be best to assign her a safer duty. "Anna, help mom with evac. Once that's done, you can join us." Ashton could see Anna wasn't pleased but realised what he was doing. "Vimur, take some Ghosts and stick with her." "Roger that!" Vimur replied, gesturing to Anna to get going, but she didn't leave Ashton before kissing his lips.

"I'll give you the rest after you win this damn war," she replied before rushing away. Now focused on the impending battle, Ashton discarded his liquor glass. Just then, Mazton approached him clad in armour Ashton had never seen before.

"Mazton, where did you disappear?" Ashton asked with curiosity mingled in his voice. "Also, what's with the new armour?"

"It's the same armour I wore in the last war against the Precursors," Mazton adjusted the armour, a grim expression on his face. "I didn't think I'd survive long enough to wear it again, but here we are..."

"Last war? What was it like?" Ashton asked while equipping his Precursor armour and summoning everything he had in his arsenal.

Mazton's gaze hardened, and he uttered a single word, "Horrible."

Chapter 744 Doomsday On Earth (4)

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As the preparations for the impending battle continued, Anna worked alongside Ava and Vimur to ensure a swift and safe evacuation plan. The atmosphere outside the party disappeared almost instantly.

A signal was sent everywhere, and people worldwide prepared themselves for the attack. Earth had been turned into a living weapon, and the wait began. Inside the control centre, Tarik coordinated the Xyran ships' deployment, ensuring they were strategically positioned for the imminent confrontation

with the approaching Precursor fleet. Obviously, there were gaps in their 'shield', but Tarik was trying his best not to leave too much space for the Precursor fleet to break through their defence without casualties. "How much time do we have now?" Ashton asked, his eyes fixed on the display.

"Not much," Tarik replied, glancing at the data streaming in. "They're making rapid progress and can strike us at any moment."

Given their situation, they were putting up the best defence they could. Even though everyone knew it would most likely be in vain. If even a single precursor ship got through the barrier, it would spell the end for hundreds of thousands of people, at the very least. The tension in the room escalated as the Precursor fleet closed in. Everyone had donned their gear, preparing for the battle that awaited them. Amongst them, Mazton and Ashton were the only ones who had gone toe-to-toe with Precursors. But since Ashton was 99 per cent sure Kro'Han wasn't on the ships, it was a source of relief for them.

Essentially, the ships were the only threat to them. As long as they managed to take those ships down, they'd win. However, it was easier said than done, as the shields around those ships could take quite a beating and keep working. So much so that Ashton was worried if they even had enough explosives on Earth to take their shields down. The control room buzzed with activity as the Xyran ships awaited the command to engage. While Tarik focused on having positive first contact with the Precursor ships, Ashton stood at the centre and confidently addressed the team.

He wasn't feeling all that confident on the inside, but he didn't need to project his insecurities about the battle onto his soldiers. After all, the morale of an army could either make or break their chances of survival.

"Listen up, everyone. We knew this day might come, and even though it's earlier than we expected, it's here," He spoke with seriousness. "But remember, we've faced overwhelming challenges before, and we'll face this one head-on, too and let the universe know how we obliterated its gods tonight!"

A roar of approval erupted from the crowd. Their weapons were raised as a show of their willpower.

"We've got the best minds, the bravest fighters, and the most determined hearts right here in this room," Ashton continued, his words resonating with each person present. "Kro'Han may think he has caught us off guard, but tonight, we let him know the price of underestimating us." Ashton's words filled the room with strength. Thinking about defeat when victory was just as far wasn't the warriors' way. Only the weak believed in the possibility of defeat, and Ashton had grained that thought into their heads. "Back when I spent my days in the enclosure when I was called a 'mutt'... an old man told me something very important," Ashton mumbled, looking at his fists. "Something I had forgotten long ago..."

"Whenever you think you're weak, remember this: It's not the size of the dog in the fight; what matters is the size of the fight in the dog. And GODDAMNIT, WE GOT A LOT OF FIGHT IN US!"

A roar erupted from the crowd, a collective shout of defiance that echoed through the room and worldwide as his words were being live telecasted everywhere. "Tonight, we fight for our future! Tonight, we defy the gods! Tonight, we slay a god! So tell me... WHO ARE YOU!" Ashton roared at the top of his lungs. "Godslayers!"

"I CAN'T HEAR YOU!"

"GOD-FUCKING-SLAYERS!"

Ashton could not help but smile as he stared into countless eyes filled with courage to the brim. "Tarik, light up the skies!" "Roger that!" Tarik nodded, his fingers flying across the console as he fed the instructions to the AI aboard the ships. "Prepare for launch. Engage when ready."

As the Precursor fleet entered the range, the Xyran ships engaged, unleashing a volley of advanced weaponry. The battle unfolded in the vast expanse of space, explosions illuminating the darkness as the two forces clashed.

Meanwhile, Anna, Vimur, and Ava worked tirelessly to oversee the evacuation efforts. The situation's urgency weighed heavily on them as they ensured the safety of as many people as possible.

Even though they were focused on their tasks, their eyes couldn't help but glance at the night sky, which had transitioned from a canvas of twinkling stars to a backdrop of countless explosions.

Anna kept staring above as massive explosions bloomed like fiery blossoms, painting the darkness above. Within seconds, the beauty of the stars was replaced by the harsh reality of war.

"This is it, isn't it?" Ava whispered, "The moment everything changes."

Anna, torn between the duty to evacuate and the instinct to be by Ashton's side, didn't hear what Ava said. "Time is a luxury we can't afford right now! We need a plan, and we need it now," Mazton chimed in. "Maybe I should head there-"

"I've got something," Tarik exclaimed as sweat formed on his brow. "It's not perfect, but it might give us an edge."

Ashton, not wasting a moment, gave the order. "Do it. Whatever it is, just do it! The way things stand, doing anything is better than doing nothing!"

"It's a... suicide mission," Tarik sighed, massaging his temples. "But if we could somehow follow them when they perform a jump, and I get the data from it, I might be able to..." After a brief pause, she gently rested her hand on her stomach, recognising there was more at stake than just her life. Moreover, she trusted Ashton and knew he would take care of everything, even if she wasn't by his side. With that thought in mind, Anna took a deep breath. As the explosions lit up the night, she turned away from the battlefield, focusing on evacuating everyone. ***

"We can't keep this up much longer!" Tarik exclaimed, frustration evident in his voice.

At first, many of the Precursor ships found themselves in close proximity, unable to evade the barrage of missiles unleashed by Tarik. However, just as their shields teetered on the brink of collapse, something strange happened. The Precursor ships began a trend of erratic, uncalculated jumps around the Xyran ships.

Given the situation, the Xyran ships, despite their advanced technology, struggled against the unpredictable movements of the Precursor fleet as the ships were randomly disappearing and reappearing everywhere.

Furiously working on the control console, Tarik analysed the data and devised new strategies to counter the elusive enemy, but his strategies were yet to produce any result.

"We need to find a way to predict their jumps," Ashton sighed as things started looking grim. "We can't afford to play catch-up anymore."

"I'm working on it!" Tarik nodded, determined to find a solution. "Give me some time."

"Time is a luxury we can't afford right now! We need a plan, and we need it now," Ashton, not wasting a moment, gave the order. "Do it. Whatever it is, just do it! The way Mazton chimed in. "Maybe I should head there-"

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somehow follow them when they perform a jump, and I get the data from it, I might be able to map the network they're using for jumps." "It'll be a rough layout. However, it would be better than having nothing," Tarik continued, "But like I said, the ripple will most likely tear apart anyone who does that-"

"I'll do it," Mazton replied with a smirk.

Chapter 745 Doomsday On Earth (5)

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Tarik's eyes widened at Mazton's willingness to undertake such a dangerous task. But Ashton cut in dismissively before Tarik could speak his mind.

"Really? You think I'll allow something like that when I have a better solution?" Mazton was expecting some acknowledgement for his bravado but instead received a scornful look from Ashton. Unfazed, he maintained his smirk, curious to hear what alternative plan Ashton had in mind.

Without any delay, Ashton summoned Lanis, the shadow Infiltrator he had resurrected before and pointed towards the shadowy figure before saying, "He'll do it."

Well, it made more sense to send a summon on a suicide mission because it wasn't like they could 'die'. Even if Lanis was destroyed during the mission, Ashton could summon him again after a cooldown. "Give him one of the Xyran fighters, and he'll follow the plan. We'll get our data and not lose anyone. Win-win for everyone involved." Ashton informed everyone about his plan.

Mazton's smirk faded into an expression of mild embarrassment as Ashton addressed Tarik. He forgot about the summons because Ashton had yet to use them in the battle. "Wait, where's the rest of them?" Mazton quizzed. "Having more helping hands here would be a blessing!"

"Let's just say they are busy somewhere else," Ashton nervously chuckled, "I'll tell you about it later."

Mazton found Ashton's reaction a bit weird. Previously, his summons was his go-to solution to problems, especially when it came to defending an invasion. But then again, Ashton must have had something in mind, so Mazton didn't bother him with his questions and focused on the task instead. "Well, that's certainly a better solution than Mazton dying in vain." Tarik chuckled at Ashton's resourcefulness. Mazton, still slightly embarrassed by the turn of events, laughed nervously. Wanting to shift the focus away from his previous offer, he urged Tarik to get going before they continued losing more ships.

"Oi! Enough with that! We shouldn't waste time like this. Send him away already!" As Tarik busied himself with the preparations, Ashton retrieved a communicator from his inventory and dialled someone. "Otiga set the bait," he instructed. "it's time for the next phase."

The atmosphere in the Xyran Council house was tense as Otiga's voice echoed through the communicator. It wouldn't hurt anyone, so they decided to take her request for a meeting. "As you might already know, Earth is under siege; you won't get a better opportunity than this to take revenge against Ashton and everyone who ridiculed you," she said. While her words were true, suspicion lingered among the council members. Otiga had long been known as Ashton's confidant, so why would she suddenly propose a plan that seemed to go against his interests?

One of the members voiced her concerns over the fact, thinking Otiga's mask would slip away. But instead, Otiga got more confident as she cleared the council's doubts.

"While that may have been the case in the past, Ashton's recent actions have put me in the crossfire with you and Kro'Han," she shrugged. "I'm not willing to die for anyone, and for that, I no longer wish to be part of his plans." She continued, "By dealing with him, you'll be doing me a favour, and that's why I thought I should share some intel with you. After all, it'll work in both of our interests."

Otiga's words resonated with the council. Some were still sceptical about her words, but her voice had a hint of truth. It was an ideal opportunity for the Xyrans to reclaim their lost glory and for Otiga to sever ties with Ashton and lead a peaceful life. What was there for them to lose?

The council members exchanged glances, contemplating the risks and benefits of Otiga's proposition. If they were to fail for any reason, Ashton wouldn't stop hunting them down until they were all wiped out.

But at the same time, if they defeated Ashton or, better yet, imprisoned him, no one would dare mess with the Xyrans then. "We'll think about it," they replied after a brief silence.

"Absolutely," Otiga responded. "Though I would have advised you to take all the time you need, the battle on Earth likely won't continue much longer. So, if you don't hurry, you might miss the opportunity."

Otiga, wearing a confident smile, disconnected the call. The bait that Ashton wanted to set was in place. Knowing the Xyrans, they would be eager to reclaim their respect in the galaxy and seize the opportunity to strike against Ashton without much thought.

Having done her part, Otiga called Ashton to inform him about the progress on her side. "How'd it go?" Ashton's face appeared on the other side. "It's done," she replied. "They should be there in a couple of hours if they make a big space jump like the last time."

"Well done," Ashton acknowledged with a smile. "Thanks for the help. But now, you should go into hiding until I call you."

"Meh, I wanted to see their despair faces, but I guess you're right," Otiga shrugged. "You take care now, and... congratulations on knocking up an innocent succubus."

"Thank you," Ashton laughed. "I'm not even going to question how you knew about it. See you later... once I'm done dealing with this mess."

With the second phase of his plan a success, Ashton had nothing to do but wait for the special guest to show up. He knew Astaroth was in one of those ships, and it was only a matter of time before he showed up. While Ashton didn't know how Kro'Han would show up there, he knew Kro'Han had sent Astaroth to Earth for that reason. Ashton had to stop Astaroth at all costs and knew it wouldn't be easy. "Astaroth... let's see how well you cope with what I'm about to put you through," Ashton mumbled, cracking his knuckles. "You ripped my heart out; I'll do the same... but in a way that'll hurt you more than anyone can imagine."

Just then, his thoughts were interrupted by the news he had been waiting for. Tarik rushed towards him, heaving. "A... A Ship broke through the barrier and is heading straight towards us!" he yelled. "Finally," Ashton smiled. "he's here."

Chapter 746 A Duel Of Life And Death (1)

746 A Duel Of Life And Death (1)

A few moments ago...

Astaroth's restlessness filled the command centre on the lead Precursor ship as he studied the holographic map displaying the ongoing battle. The room was dimly lit for better visibility of the map. So far, the AI on the ships has been making decisions themselves, as Astaroth thought there was no need for him to get involved. However, once he noticed the Xyran vessels, he couldn't help but take control. "Interesting..."

Astaroth tapped his fingers on the arm of his chair, his eyes fixed on the holographic display that showed the scattered movements of the Precursor and Xyran ships. From how Astaroth saw it, it was a game, a chess game where Astaroth and Ashton were the players, their moves determining the fate of Earth. As for the board, it was filled with pawns, but Astaroth's pawns were dripping in super soldier serum.

"Ashton," Astaroth whispered under his breath as another Xyran ship succumbed to the relentless assault of the Precursor fleet. "He was better prepared than I thought. Still, it won't be enough to stop the ships."

"Sir, we have found their command centre, as you requested," Zenos, the Ship's AI, appeared before him. His voice was cold and electronic. "Bringing it on the map."

The holographic display magnified, revealing the Xyran command centre located in Livania. Astaroth's lips curled into a satisfied smile. "Livania, I should have guessed it."

"What will be your next move, sir?" the AI inquired.

"Those Xyran ships are causing more troubles than I thought," Astaroth, with a determined gleam in his eyes, considered his options. "Can we get through their barrier by ourselves?"

"The possibility of success is less than 10% with one ship," the AI informed.

"Great," Astaroth replied, standing from his chair and donning his battle gear. "Disengage a dozen ships from combat and perform a kamikaze attack through the barrier of Xyran ships."

"Kamikaze attack? I'm not sure I-"

"A suicide attack to get rid of the ships blocking our way," Astaroth replied as he secured the arm guard on his hand. Zenos hesitated, taken aback by the seemingly absurd plan. If they waited a bit longer, they'd be able to take down most, if not all, of the Xyran ships. According to the data at hand, that was the best course of action. Zenos informed Astaroth about it and double-checked with him, ensuring he understood the consequences of such a manoeuvre, but the response was different from what he had expected. "You heard me the first time," Astaroth affirmed. "I don't think I need to remind you that Kro'Han gave me complete authority over these ships to use them as I please for the mission's success. So do as I say."

The hologram of the AI nodded, acknowledging Astaroth's authority, and began executing the drastic plan. Despite the Zenos's reservations about the strategy, it complied with Astaroth's directive.

As the dozen Precursor ships formed a tight formation around Astaroth's vessel, they dove towards Livania. The abruptness of the attack caught the attention of Tarik, who attempted to rearrange the Xyran ships in a desperate effort to block Astaroth's advance.

Tarik's face contorted as he manipulated the holographic controls, attempting to form a makeshift barrier of ships to thwart Astaroth's kamikaze assault. The Xyran ships scrambled to respond immediately, but the sheer force and speed of the Precursor attack proved too overwhelming.

"Reposition the ships! Block their path at all cost!" Tension filled the air in the command centre as Tarik barked orders to the AIs aboard the Xyran ships. However, the efforts were in vain.

With Astaroth at the forefront, the Precursor ships pressed forward, unrelenting as they ran through the obstacles. Despite Tarik's efforts, Astaroth's vessel broke through the Xyran defence, piercing through the hurriedly arranged barrier.

Astaroth's ship advanced toward Livania, a looming threat that sent shockwaves through the forces stationed on Earth. Zenos continuously calculated the success of the kamikaze attack while questioning the rationale behind such a bold and unnecessary move as more and more Precursor ships were destroyed.

As Astaroth's vessel closed in on Livania, Tarik, realising the imminent danger, issued urgent commands. "Evacuate the command center! Inform everyone to brace for impact!"

All the personnel rushed to follow Tarik's orders, abandoning the command centre in a frantic attempt to escape the impending collision. The alarms blared, warning of the incoming threat as Astaroth's ship descended like a meteor on them.

The collision was imminent, and the fate of Livania hung in the balance. The Xyran ships, in disarray, struggled to regroup and counter the unexpected assault, hoping to destroy the Precursor ships before they caused any harm, but nothing they did could stop Astaroth. The desperation in Tarik's eyes mirrored the situation's urgency as he watched the impending collision unfold.

In the final moments before impact, Earth's forces could only brace for the inevitable, a collision that would reshape the course of the battle and determine the world's fate. But when all hope seemed lost, Ashton shot out of the command centre with blinding speed and headed straight towards the ship. Everyone's jaw fell open as they couldn't believe their eyes.

As Ashton soared towards the ship, the ethereal glow of the Precursor aura surrounding him gradually became visible to everyone. With each passing moment, the aura expanded, growing in size until it matched the ship's dimensions.

It was then Tarik realised what Ashton was doing. He was going to fight momentum with momentum, opting for a clash that, while causing harm to Livania, would not reach the catastrophic levels of the previous encounter.

At the same time, Zenos warned Astaroth about the incoming attack, but Astaroth ignored the warning and ordered the ship to stay on its route. As usual, Zenos was against such a foolish decision.

But before the AI could do anything, Astaroth overrode the commands using his authority and blocked Zenos from doing anything. Whether they took down the command centre or not was a secondary matter now.

"As long as I land on Earth, nothing else matters."

Chapter 747 A Duel Of Life And Death (2)

747 A Duel Of Life And Death (2)

Mere seconds before impact, Ashton unexpectedly concentrated all his aura into his fist, delivering a powerful blow that shattered the hull of the Precursor ship.

Even the resilient hull of the Precursor vessel proved insufficient to withstand the force of Ashton's concentrated attack, resulting in multiple cracks that marred its surface. The loud crack echoed through the night, but Ashton didn't stop there. Instead of focusing his aura on a single point, he rapidly expanded it, tearing apart the Precursor ship from both the inside and the outside.

The result was a devastating attack that tore the Precursor ship apart from the inside and outside. What followed was an explosion that unleashed a burst of energy, transforming the darkest night sky into one lit by a dozen suns. The brightness was so overwhelming that no one could keep their eyes on it.

Everyone on the ground wondered if that was it? Was Astaroth dead? But as the light faded, a dark figure tore through the explosion. Unaffected by the blast, Astaroth threw a punch at Ashton, who responded in kind.

Their fists met in a fierce collision, creating shockwaves that blew away debris from the Precursor ship everywhere, forcing the residents of Livania to seek shelter.

"Pleased to see your death didn't adversely affect your strength," Astaroth commented as they tumbled through the air.

"No thanks to you," Ashton retorted, blocking Astaroth's fists before delivering a kick to his side.

Astaroth didn't expect the attack to hit that hard and had to unfurl his wings to balance himself in midair. "Look, I know my words won't have any effect on you," he mumbled, "but I didn't have a choice back then. Even if not for Linea, Kro'Han would have killed us if I didn't do what I did."

"Yeah? And now you're invading Earth because you care for us so much, don't you?" Ashton retorted.

"It's not like that-"

Ashton, enraged after seeing Astaroth before him, ignored his explanation and charged at him with renewed vigour. Realising the futility of words, Astaroth shook his head and countered Ashton's attack, delivering a swift kick that sent Ashton crashing to the ground.

The impact created a small crater in the heart of Livania, but to everyone's surprise, Ashton remained unscathed. Upon seeing their leader on the ground, everyone rushed to Ashton's aid. But Ashton raised his fist to stop them. The fight was to remain between him and Astaroth, and as for the rest of them, they were to focus on fighting what remained of the Precursor fleet. Astaroth, hovering above Ashton, took a moment to assess the situation. Though he recognised their will to fight the invasion, he couldn't be disappointed because they were fighting a useless war. "You never did know when to give up," Astaroth muttered while hovering over the crater. "We've got our own battles to fight," Mazton declared, redirecting their attention to the remaining Precursor ships. "Leave Ashton to handle Astaroth."

After Ashton, Mazton was the one in command, so the troops followed his lead and rushed to carry out the orders. In the meantime, Ashton was preparing to engage Astaroth again, but it seemed the former Xyran general had different plans.

"I would love to stay and fight, but I got places to be, so see you around," Astaroth shrugged and flew upwards. Ashton prepared to follow him. Unfortunately, Astaroth had thought of a way to keep him busy. As Ashton took flight, Countless drop pods descended from the atmosphere, hurtling towards him. The ground shook as the drop pods landed and from within emerged Precursor combat robots. While they weren't as strong as the guardians, they still posed a significant threat to the earthlings.

"Fucking bastard pulling cowardly tricks like these!" Ashton cursed as he had to turn away even though he didn't want to. The combat robots, programmed for destruction, immediately engaged the army and Livania's defences. The battlefield erupted into chaos as the robots unleashed devastating firepower. "Consider it a farewell gift from me," Astaroth commented before rushing away. As Astaroth slipped away, Ashton gritted his teeth in frustration. However, before he could resume the pursuit, the combat robots closed in, forming a barrier around him. It was evident the robots wouldn't allow Ashton to follow Astaroth freely. While the robots weren't exceptionally strong, their sheer numbers were staggering and defeating them all quickly seemed nearly impossible. Ashton tried using Hellfire to dispose of them quickly, but the attack had minimal effect on them. "Looks like elemental attacks won't work on them," Ashton mumbled in frustration. "Physical force is necessary to dispose of them, but that will take too long. Fuck!"

Although it was an annoying situation, Ashton had no option other than to fight through the horde of metal. Just as he prepared to launch an attack, a battleaxe soared through the air with incredible precision, slicing through the robots before him. Astonished, Ashton turned to witness Mazton standing amongst a graveyard of robots as the battleaxe returned to his hands. And he wasn't alone; mercenaries from the Towers were beside him, chopping through the robots.

"Go after Astaroth!" Mazton yelled as he sliced through another robot. "We'll deal with these tin cans."

"Thanks!" Ashton nodded with gratitude.

Without wasting a moment, he flew away from the robots, leaving Mazton and a group of mercenaries to confront the 'tin cans'.

However, Livania wasn't the only place struggling with Precursor robots. Nirvana and Vania had their hands full with the rampaging automatons. While Nirvana fought numbers with numbers, the vampires had to use their physical combat skills to subdue the threat. Thankfully, the twins and Viper were there to help them balance the scales.

But there was one thing bugging everyone. When Ashton arrived on Earth after his 'death', he warned them about the cannons used by the precursor ships. Everyone was scared of the powerful attack those cannons could launch. However, even though the Precursor ships were close enough to use their cannons, they didn't do it, which seemed strange. It felt like Astaroth was waiting for something, and the rest of the world had minutes to figure it out before all hell broke loose.

Chapter 748 Kro'Han Unsealed (1)

748 Kro'Han Unsealed (1)

With Mazton's assistance, Ashton finally broke free to pursue Astaroth. Yet, Astaroth's speed far surpassed Ashton's, and with a head start, he could have ventured anywhere. However, Ashton was aware of it and already had a plan in place for such a situation. During their earlier fight, Ashton had intentionally allowed Astaroth's kick to hit him. Why? To discretely apply [Werewolf's Mark] on Astaroth. The mark, once placed on Astaroth, ensured that regardless of the distance, Ashton could locate him. Besides, there was no escape from the mark; once it was on someone, it wouldn't disappear until the prey had been hunted down. But rather than blindly following the direction Astaroth vanished into, Ashton took to the sky, his gaze focused on locating the distinctive mark. That way, he could easily find the mark and take the shortest route to Astaroth.

"Eastern Palace?" Ashton muttered in surprise as he honed in on Astaroth's location. "Why would he suddenly go there, of all places?"

Typically, Ashton might not have given it much thought. However, the peculiar choice of the Eastern Palace intrigued him. Once Palaceing with activity, the Palace now stood empty, thanks to Ashton deploying the Wraith wolves and Griffins in the ongoing war. But if Astaroth intended to cause chaos, why would he visit an empty castle? However, realisation suddenly hit him. All the Precursor technology Ashton took from planet Euphoria was stored there. It could be that Astaroth wasn't aiming for the Eastern Palace itself, but the tech and artefacts stored there. "No point in thinking about it now," Ashton said determinedly, shaking off his bewilderment. He accelerated towards the Palace with relentless speed. "I'll get my answers whether Astaroth lives or dies."

The sky became a blur as Ashton streaked towards the Eastern Palace. The air whistled past him, and the empty expanse of the Palace got closer. The once-grand structure now stood as a silent witness to the conflicts that had unfolded. But the silence was strange. Ashton was expecting more robots there, but there were none. Either Astaroth was confident in his speed, or he simply didn't think Ashton could stop whatever he was planning to do. Either case wasn't like something Astaroth would do. "Being overconfident is my trait, not his." Ashton shrugged as he landed close to the Palace to scan the area for any traps Astaroth might have left for him as gifts on Christmas.

Ashton's eyes were alert, and his senses heightened. He carefully made his way inside while the silence enveloped the Palace, which was disrupted only by the distant echoes of the ongoing battle between the Precursors robots and Ashton's army.

Entering cautiously inside the Palace, Ashton navigated the empty corridors, his footsteps echoing in the emptiness. The eerie stillness put him on edge as he moved deeper into the Palace guided by the [Werewolf's Mark].

Ashton was expecting Astaroth to go for the relics, but strangely enough, he was on the other end of the Palace. "Looks like he hasn't found the stash yet," Ashton mumbled as he rushed towards Astaroth's location. "better hurry and stop him before he gets his hands on whatever he wants."

Alowly reaching the inner chamber that used to be the Lich's abode, Ashton's eyes narrowed as he sensed Astaroth's presence. Astaroth stood at the far end of the room, his back turned to Ashton. It looked like he was busy operating some sort of panel, and he continuously typed away. "What are you doing here?" Ashton questioned, his voice cutting through the silence.

"Ah, Ashton, persistent as always," Astaroth turned around slowly with a smile on his lips. "I knew you'd find me. But it's too late now."

Ignoring Astaroth's taunts, Ashton pressed further. "If you're looking for relics and artefacts, I have long since shifted everything to someplace secure."

"You still don't know, do you?" Astaroth shook his head before turning around, and a portal opened behind him as he did. "The first time I gained consciousness inside these boundaries, I knew there was something different about this place."

Ashton brought out Balmond, ready to strike if necessary. However, Astaroth showed no aggression and calmly circled around the portal.

"Did it never cross your mind? Why was a grade A Lich guarding the Palace when we stumbled upon it?" Astaroth pondered aloud. "Consider this – what's a grade-A creature doing in a realm where the highest grade is C? How did the Lich even attain such a level? Astaroth continued, "It would be impossible to do it even if he killed millions of grade C beings. So, how did he get here? The answer was simple: someone placed the Lich here to guard something."

"What are you getting at?" Ashton interrupted as he got impatient. "Patience, brother... Patience. I'm getting to the point," Astaroth sighed before giving Ashton another hint. "A lich, an entity impervious to conventional death, capable of enduring for countless millennia. Who might have placed such a being here?"

"The Precursors..." Ashton mumbled as the truth dawned upon him.

"Exactly, but to be precise, it was your father, Jo'Han. Now tell me, what could he be guarding here on Earth?"

At that moment, realisation hit Ashton like a truck. The only thing his father cared about was ensuring Kro'Han's demise. Could it be that there's a weapon capable of slaying Kro'Han hidden there?

However, Astaroth shook his head. While the Palace had something to do with Kro'Han, it wasn't to kill him.

"It isn't a weapon; it's a seal. The very same seal that confines Kro'Han to Euphoria. Jo'Han kept the seal hidden on Earth so he could keep an eye on it," Astaroth clarified. He continued, "However, when he

sensed his life nearing its end and recognised you weren't ready for the responsibility, he entrusted a Lich to handle it until you learned about the task on your own."

"How the fuck do you know all this?" Ashton blurted, charging towards Astaroth with Balmond in his hands.

Ashton wished to say that Astaroth was lying, but his [Heartbeat Sense] told him otherwise. For that reason, he lashed out at Astaroth. However, before the two could collide, the portal sent a shockwave that threw Ashton and Astaroth away from the chamber.

"What did you do!?" Ashton yelled at the top of his lungs.

"What I was supposed to..." Astaroth replied. "Unsealed Kro'Han."

Chapter 749 Kro'Han Unsealed (2)

749 Kro'Han Unsealed (2)

"What? Unsealed Kro'Han?" Ashton yelled in horror. As long as Kro'Han was sealed, they had an opportunity to contain him, but Astaroth had just freed the worst precursor in history! The slight possibility that Ashton had of winning the battle against Kro'Han was crushed into nothingness by Astaroth. Ashton, unable to contain his anger any longer, lunged towards the panel to try and stop Kro'Han from getting to Earth. But as he did, Astaroth grabbed Ashton by the shoulder and threw him backwards, placing himself between Ashton and the panel.

"What the hell are you doing!?" Ashton yelled again.

"Stopping you," Astaroth replied, turning his aura into a sword around his arms.

"You fucker! Have you gone insane!?" Ashton barked at Astaroth, who smiled bitterly.

Ashton didn't know why Astaroth had sided with Kro'Han, and Astaroth knew Ashton was too stubborn to hear anything he had to say. It wasn't like it would make any difference, either. Linea was Astaroth's responsibility, not Ashton's. Besides, Astaroth was dooming the entire universe for the sake of one person; how was anyone supposed to understand what he felt, knowing he would be the reason for the death of quadrillions of beings across the galaxy? In the end, Astaroth just shook his head and tried convincing himself that he was doing the right thing, even if it was the wrong way. Either way, when everything was finished, he would be dead. In Astaroth's opinion, it was better to face death alone with all the problems rather than trying to make others understand his inner struggles.

"Love can make you do weird things," Astaroth finally said. "You know it better than anyone else."

"Love and you? Yes, it makes you do illogical things, but not something like this!" Ashton scoffed. "Why am I even bothering with you? You're going down, and once I'm done with you, the only thing you'll feel is endless pain, you backstabbing bastard!"

Upon realising that talking wouldn't solve anything, Ashton steeled his resolve. Besides, trying to convince Astaroth of his folly was a waste of time, time that could be used to try and close the portal. Unfortunately, that meant fighting Astaroth, and it wouldn't be any ordinary fight either. It would be a duel of life and death. If Ashton were to win, the fight would end with just one death, Astaroth's. However, if Astaroth won, it would be the death of the entire universe as they knew it. The stakes had never been higher before. "Just remember, this is what you wanted..." Ashton mumbled, drawing out Balmond as he covered it in his Precursor Aura. The room echoed with the aura of death as Ashton unleashed a wave of attacks. Balmond sliced through the air, each strike aimed at Astaroth's vital points with deadly precision. Astaroth, however, matched Ashton's intensity, parrying each blow with finesse, but never once tried to kill him. It's not like Ashton gave him any openings to consider going offensive. The sound of their clash echoed inside the palace as the two indulged in the dance of life and death. Slowly but surely, the palace became affected by the shockwaves generated by their clash. The walls

around the chamber began to waver. Cracks appeared all around them, yet their intention didn't change. The more Ashton swung Balmond, the more frustrated he got. It wasn't because his attacks weren't hitting the mark, but the sad and apologetic expression on his face angered Ashton even more. Why was he feeling down? Was betraying his friends not as enjoyable as he thought? Or did his knife break while he was busy stabbing it into everyone's back?

If anyone had the right to be apologetic, it was Ashton. His blind trust in Astaroth was why the entire universe was moments away from destruction. If only he had taken his father's words more seriously, their situation would have been different!

Amid the fight, Ashton seized an opening and launched a powerful thrust aimed at Astaroth's chest. Astaroth, however, predicted the attack and sidestepped, narrowly avoiding it. In retaliation, he countered with a sweeping slash of his own, forcing Ashton to parry with Balmond.

But Ashton didn't give up. Instead of backing up, he rushed towards Astaroth and grabbed him by the neck before slamming him on the ground. The force behind Ashton's attack was so strong that the floor beneath them cracked as Astaroth struggled to free himself from Ashton's grasp. "Stop! Fucking! SMILING!" Ashton yelled into Astaroth's face as his face slowly turned red. "Is this a game for you? Huh? Do you have any idea what you've done?"

"Kid..." Astaroth replied as Ashton increased pressure on his neck. "I have lived in this universe much longer than you. What makes you think I'm stupid not to know what I've done?"

"Then why do it?" Ashton sighed, dropping Balmond next to Astaroth's head as his emotions got the better of him. "We were supposed to take that bastard down together! We were supposed to fight him! Not each other!"

"Sometimes... plans change..." Astaroth replied, smiling wanly. "Yeah, I guess you're right," Ashton replied, lifting Balmond again. "Plans change, but oaths don't."

Astaroth understood what Ashton was about to do, and his expression changed. He tried freeing himself from Ashton's grasp, but the latter's hand was firmly pressed against his chest, refusing to budge. "Ashton, you have no idea what you're doing!" Astaroth tried reasoning with him once force didn't work, but Ashton was having none of it. "Guess what? I don't give a fuck anymore."

With that, Ashton threw Balmond towards the panel, hoping to destroy it before Kro'Han's arrival. Astaroth, refusing to accept defeat, summoned every ounce of strength in a final attempt to intervene. Just as Balmond neared the panel, Astaroth's hand desperately attempted to redirect the sword's trajectory.

However, Ashton stopped Astaroth from manipulating his aura. It was too late for Astaroth to do anything. Ashton's victory seemed inevitable.

Suddenly, a hand broke through the portal, grabbing the blade before it could hit the panel. Ashton's eyes widened in disbelief as the hand effortlessly crushed Balmond, the once-mighty sword now reduced to useless shards.

An ominous aura surrounded the chamber as Kro'Han walked out of the portal. As he breathed freedom, an evil grin found its place on Kro'Han's face.

"Finally... your curse has been undone, brother!" Kro'Han roared while Ashton's heart sank as he realised the direness of the situation. The apocalypse has arrived at Earth's doorstep.

Chapter 750 Checkmate (1)

750 Checkmate (1)

As the situation on Earth grew increasingly tense with each passing moment, the space above the blue planet was no stranger to chaos. Ashton's remaining ships fought valiantly against the unrelenting onslaught of Precursor vessels. Eventually, it was evident Precursor ships were superior as only a handful of Ashton's Xyran ships remained, guarding Earth. The odds were against them, and the battle-weary fleet struggled to hold its ground.

Amidst the fierce clash, a new faction silently emerged, ready to join the chaotic dance of war. Xyran ships, controlled by the council, materialised behind the moon with a series of silent booms. Like Otiga had expected, the Xyrans couldn't stay out of action for long and decided to take advantage of Ashton's misery. Within hours, they rushed to capture Earth. But that wasn't all. What started as a dozen ships soon multiplied into hundreds and then thousands, an overwhelming force. However, the size of the current Xyran fleet was much larger than anyone knew, but not because they were secretly making more warships. The Xyrans had mobilised everything at their disposal to bring down Ashton. The council had ordered every single ship in Xyran-controlled space to converge and engage in the fight, regardless of its original purpose. Even cargo and tourist vessels had been hastily repurposed for war as they stormed towards Earth with the singular goal of eliminating Ashton once and for all.

The Xyrans thought Ashton would be in for a surprise. However, as the Xyran fleet approached Earth, a surprise awaited them instead. It didn't take long for Xyran's lead ships to notice the Precursor ships positioned strategically around the planet, a sight that sent shockwaves through the Xyran commanders and council members. It had been a long time since the Xyrans had seen a fleet of Precursor ships, and the mere sight of the vessel brought out the trauma they had hidden away from their final battle with the Precursors.

"Stops the ships!" one of the councilmen roared. "Do not make contact with Precursors ships! Engage camo and wait for our next instructions!" An urgent order to halt their advance was issued as the council convened to discuss the unexpected turn of events. But they were arguing more than discussing anything to help their situation. "Why are there Precursor ships stationed around Earth?" one councilman exclaimed, frustration evident in his voice. "That damned Otiga gave us no information about those!" another one chimed in. "Contact her immediately!"

One of the assistants rushed to do so. Unfortunately, Otiga had long since turned off all devices that could be used to get in touch with her and disappeared. "What concerns me the most isn't that the ships are there," another council member added, his brow furrowed in contemplation. "but why are the ships pointing their cannons towards Earth instead of away from it?"

"That's... true. If the ships belonged to Ashton, it would make more sense for them to point away from Earth!" Amidst their deliberation, an informant abruptly burst into the virtual meeting, delivering crucial information that would shape the course of the conflict. The informant murmured into one councilman's ear, leaving him wide-eyed and visibly shaken. His reaction only garnered more eyes on him as the councilman looked dejected. After regaining his composure, the councilman relayed the news to his peers. Depending on the listener's perspective, the revelation could be interpreted as either a boon or a curse, and he couldn't decide the next course of action on his own. "Just tell us what it is!" a council member demanded as minutes passed.

"Our scans have revealed multiple Precursor life signatures on Earth," the councilman revealed. "It seems Kro'Han has arrived on the planet. And it would explain why the Precursor ships are pointing towards Earth and not away from it."

"Wait... if Kro'Han and Ashton are fighting each other, then it's a golden opportunity for us!"

"I get what you're trying to convey, my brethren. But those two are Precursors! There's no guarantee we'd be able to take either of them down even if they are injured-" Before the council could formulate a proper plan of action, a hostile Precursor ship fired upon the unsuspecting Xyran fleet. "Goddamnit!"

One of their makeshift ships was the target of the Precursor ships. While it was good that a warship wasn't targeted, the Xyrans knew they had run out of time. With their presence now known, the Xyrans had no choice but to retaliate.

"Burn them to the ground!" the council declared, issuing the order for the Xyran fleet to engage in immediate combat. "Ruin their nickel backs!"

The stray shot fired by the Precursor ships was akin to wind to a dying fire. The space above Earth once again became a battleground, illuminated by the fiery exchange between the Xyran and Precursor forces. Laser beams and projectiles streaked across the void as the two factions clashed, each determined to assert dominance in the cosmic arena.

The Precursor ships were already tattered and required repairs following their earlier battle. But now that they were flung into another fight, things were not looking for them. Not to mention the artillery fire from cannons stationed all around Earth. The Precursor ships found themselves stuck between a rock and a hard place. The continuous attack from both sides destroyed many ships in a few minutes. But the surprises weren't over yet.

As the Xyrans fought against the Precursors, a familiar voice echoed in the virtual meeting space. It was Otiga, appearing on the holographic display.

"How's the fight going?" Otiga asked the council while smiling wickedly. "You... You planned all this!" one of the councilmen snarled at her face. "Wait till we get our hands on you-"

"Oh, councilman, I'm not worthy of your praises," Otiga laughed. "As for the plan, that credit belongs to Ashton, not me. Even though I played quite a part in it, won't you agree?"

"Laugh while you can. The Precursor ships will fall and Ashton will follow soon after," the councilman boldly commented. "Who will save you then?"

"Save me?" Otiga raised an eyebrow. "You should worry about yourself first!"

Just then, the Xyran fleet was struck from behind. A couple of their warships were destroyed in seconds. Before the councilman barked orders for someone to check, an attendant came rushing in with bad news.

"The Orion army! Their entire fleet is attacking us!" "What!?"