

BIOLOGICAL 1011

Chapter 1011: The enemy's plans for an attack it won't ever happen

"Once we finish unloading the shipments, we'll be ready to launch an attack on the enemy base," one of the blackguards, a male, said.

"What about the mechas? When are they scheduled to arrive?"

"They'll be the last to come," the male blackguard said. "We're expecting them within a week. With their firepower, those fuckers won't stand a chance."

<Ah... That's all this is about, uh?>

The enemy was gearing up for a big offensive and was organizing their forces to complete it. The mechas could really mess things up for his clones in this area.

<Well, they can heal themselves, so I doubt many of them might die. But the blackguards can still destroy the base.>

This meant the Chimaeric Demons had to rethink their plans and come up with some countermeasures to make sure they could handle the attack. That was, of course, if they made such an attack, which Erik had no intention of letting happen.

If the Mechas were not here yet, then there was still time.

<Damn, I really need to steal the schematics for the brain crystal technology.>

The female blackguard studied the map spread out on the table. "What about our supply lines? We'll need a steady flow of resources to keep the mechas and our troops operational during the assault."

"We've secured multiple transport routes through the forest. Our convoys will be heavily guarded, and we've set up checkpoints along the way to ensure the safety of our supplies."

"Good," the female blackguard said. "And the terrain? Have we accounted for any potential obstacles or choke points?"

The male blackguard pointed to several marked locations on the map. "Our scouts have identified the key areas of concern. We'll be deploying specialized units to clear any obstructions and secure strategic positions before the primary force arrives."

The female blackguard nodded, a smile tugging at the corners of her mouth. "Excellent. It looks like we've covered all our bases. These fuckers won't know what hit them."

"Indeed," the male blackguard agreed.

"Make sure everything is ready and operational. Is this clear?"

"Yes, sir. We'll double-check every detail and make sure our troops have what they need."

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The conversation between the two continued, and Erik, having heard enough, decided it was time to leave. The base was a slight disappointment, because it was clear these guys knew little aside from this sector's operation.

<That should be the blackguards way to prevent me from getting information that might mess up the entire war.>

The problem, for them at least, was that they sided with Hin and Etrium, and they... Well, they didn't have the resources the blackguards had, so Erik was bound to pierce their information network. It was just wouldn't happen in a blackguard controlled base.

Erik went his way back through the cave's tunnels and past the barrier, eventually reaching the cave entrance.

Once outside, Erik reached for his lovers and transformed back into his human form. His naked body materialized.

June handed him the clothes, and he dressed. The girls already saw him naked several times, and the Chimaeric Demons—well, they were his clones. They basically saw him naked each time they went to the toilet, so no one was surprised.

Though Emily was new to all of this, her relationship with Erik didn't start for a long time, and she was slightly embarrassed.

"They're planning to attack the Chimaeric Demons' base as soon as they finish unloading the shipments," Erik said, without wasting time.

"And they have mechas coming in a week to bolster their forces."

The group exchanged worried glances. "This is a problem. Technology is already becoming better and better at killing thaid and people. Rifles were already a big concern, but with Mechas, now."

"Well, it's not like it will be different from what happened in New Alexandria," Amber said.

"Yes, but the Chimaeric Demons won't have buildings protecting them now, and besides, there are many more troops compared to the situation back then." Mira said.

"We need to warn the others. The Chimaeric Demons must be prepared for what's coming. Even better if they can get advantage of the situation, and I already have a couple of ideas on how to do it, so they will be able to do the same."

One of the clones accompanying them stepped forward. "Master, allow us to deliver the warning and tell them about the place. We can reach the base quickly by flying and ensure they have time to prepare and move."

Erik nodded. "Yes, but only one of you should go. We need the others here."

"Why aren't we going back with them? Shouldn't we all regroup and face this threat together?" Emily asked.

Erik shook his head, a small smile playing on his lips. "The information we've gathered is everything the clones need to take over this base and use it to their advantage. They have the strength and numbers to handle it, while the blackguards don't until they get the new troops and equipment."

He paused, his gaze sweeping over the group. "Besides, we don't have time to lose, and I have another plan to help them. I'm going to create some new Chimaeric Demon eggs to bolster our forces here. It won't be much, but they will be stronger than the clones stationed here."

Erik turned to look at the Chimaeric Demons. "Tell them where the eggs will be," Erik pointed east.

"There is a clearing around these parts. I saw it on the blackguards' maps. Tell them they will be there, hidden in a wooden building I will make. They will know what to search for."

The Chimaeric Demons nodded.

"Yes, sir."

The Chimaeric Demons, after a quick chat, figured out who had to do the job. Erik, who was watching the whole thing, went up to the guy right after the decision.

"Be safe," Erik said. "We will wait for you at the designated spot."

"Yes, master. Just give me an hour and I will be back," the Chimaeric Demon said.

He then nodded. With a final salute, it transformed into a flying thaid and took to the skies.

Erik turned to the others. "We have work to do. Let's not waste more time. We also have to disrupt the supply line, so we will waste more time, and we already wasted enough here," he said.

"Yes."

"Ok."

The remaining clones transformed into their thaid forms, their bodies shifting and changing. As they got a suitable form to act as mounts, Mira, Amber, and Emily wasted no time jumping onto the backs of the transformed clones.

Erik, opting to travel on foot, led the way as they all headed towards the designated spot.

Chapter 1012: The Strategic Hub

After creating the Chimaeric Demon eggs, Erik and his group had left the area, but their impact brought waves. It had set in motion a chain reaction that reshaped the battlefield largely.

The group didn't see the impact first hand, since they were far from the battlefields, but as they traveled from base to base, reports trickled in of the Chimaeric Demons' advance.

Essentially, the clones had infiltrated the enemy underground base, replacing soldiers and stealing strategic intelligence.

This stolen information helped Frant's forces a lot, because armed with insider knowledge, they dismantled the blackguards' carefully laid plans in that sector.

However, that helped other parts of the front lines too, and it made it so the various groups of fighters could push the front lines further north.

That wasn't all. The information the group got was about supply lines, which got severed. It was about ambushes that were thwarted.

This resulted in strategic positions being reclaimed, but most importantly, technology got stolen technology.

The results were amazing. In just a month, Frant had pushed the front lines north, reclaiming dozens of kilometers of lost territory.

The tide was turning, but the war was not done yet. The enemy wasn't easy to beat, and the Chimaeric Demons were nearly not enough to win the war, just like that.

<I can't take this anymore...>

The group was ascending a slope, their mounts' strides muffled by the grass beneath their feet.

<This damn hill doesn't want to end.>

Erik led the way, keeping an eye on the horizon as they climbed. The hill wasn't particularly steep or challenging, which explained its lack of strategic value to either side of the conflict, but it provided a perfect view of the surroundings.

As they crested the peak, a panoramic scene unfolded before them. The lush valley below stretched out.

There were fields and forests, but it was the silhouette of something man made that got the group's attention.

"There," Erik said, pointing towards the outline of a city, albeit a small one.

The others pulled up beside him; the clones came to a halt. Mira shaded her eyes with her hand, squinting because of the sun in her eyes.

"Is that our target?" she asked. "Well, it must be, since you are pointing toward it."

"Yeah, that and the fact it is the only place for hundreds of kilometers, which might be suitable to be used as the main sorting center for the supply lines," Emily said.

Erik nodded. The city's walls and watchtowers were just visible, a gray smudge against the sky.

Even from this distance, the importance of the position was clear—nestled at the confluence of several major ancient roads. It was an ideal distribution point for supplies and troops.

Frant did its best to prevent flying vehicles from crossing the skies. It was still the nation's territory, so the air defenses were many.

This made bringing supplies through the air be difficult. The only alternatives were the land and the sea.

However, the problem was that humans didn't usually build roads outside of cities; the reason was as simple as it was obvious: Thaid's.

This didn't mean the old roads built by ancient humans weren't there, and these were the ones that Etrium, Hin, and the blackguards were using to fight this war.

Even Frant was taking advantage of them, since even the enemy troops and artillery made it hard, if not outright impossible, to cross the skies.

The difference was that thanks to Erik's help, Luminara Serpentis littered these ancient roads, making it so that they, at least those controlled by Frant, were free of thaid's.

"It's perfect," Erik said, more to himself than the others. "Hidden in plain sight, yet controlling everything that moves through this region. The blackguards had been smart in choosing this place."

"So, the supplies come from here, right?" Emily asked.

"No, the supplies come from the sea. But this city?" He gestured towards it. "It's basically the point from which most of it get sorted to other places. Bases, outposts, cities. Everything passes through here before heading to the front lines."

"How can we be so sure that they choose this city among the many ones they captured?" Amber asked.

"It wouldn't make sense otherwise. This is the best place, within the area we assumed was their major supply line."

The group fell silent as the breeze carried the scent of wild flowers.

Emily's voice broke the silence. "So if we want to cripple their operations..."

"We liberate the city," Mira said. "Or something similar, at least. I don't honestly think there are still civilians there... Not after learning what the blackguards are really capable of."

Erik nodded. He had done this many times already, so it wasn't a problem. Besides, this city wasn't even a large one, like New Alexandria was. Erik could even solo it if needed.

The others exchanged glances.

"It won't be easy, master. Its strategic value means it will be protected very well. The blackguards won't give it up without a fight."

"What's our plan, then? We can't just charge in blindly if things are as you say," Emily asked.

Erik's gaze swept over the group. "First, we gather intelligence. We need to know their defenses, weak points, and most importantly, where they're keeping any civilians, if they are still alive, of course."

Mira nodded. "And then?"

A predatory grin spread across Erik's face. "Then we remind the blackguards why they should fear me."

As Twilight painted the sky in hues of orange and purple, Erik looked around.

"We'll set up camp here," he said. "Tomorrow, we scout. Then me and June will enter the city and see what's the situation is."

"All right."

The Chimaeric Demons transformed, their bodies shifting back to human form.

They then established a perimeter. In the meantime, Erik created a camp. The usual one, but he had to be careful now, because if they could see the valley below, then whoever was there could see them.

"Are we just going to rest now, or do we want to do something productive?"

"The Chimaeric Demons will study the surroundings a little," Erik said, his eyes fixed on the distant city lights.

"How do you plan on entering the city? I bet there will be people that can find out shapeshifters. After they learned the Chimaeric Demons could do that, these guys appeared like fungi."

June joined them, his expression thoughtful. "The sewers, maybe? Every city has them."

Erik nodded. "Good thinking. It will make it hard for them to find us. They are more prepared for shapeshifters who can turn into humans or large creatures, not into insects."

Chapter 1013: Patrols, Plans, and a Whole Lot of Guessing

In the end, a week had passed since the group first laid eyes on the city from atop the hill. Each day, they observed the comings and goings, piecing together a clearer picture of their target and the situation.

Erik, in the end, preferred not entering the city before he didn't have a clearer picture of the situation, especially considering how many people were coming and going to and from the city.

It turned out that his hunch about the situation was spot on—this place was a key link in the enemy's supply chain, through which they sent resources and troops to the front lines. It wasn't like he didn't know that already. Everything led to that conclusion. The problem was that he didn't have proof.

However, there was something he failed to predict, the scale of the operation, which exceeded his initial estimates. The city teemed with blackguards. Their numbers were far greater than anticipated.

Heavily armed patrols circled the perimeter, while watchtowers observed the surroundings, their searchlights cutting through the night, and warning about thaid attacks.

It became clear the enemy valued this place a lot and was going to defend it fiercely.

As dusk settled over their makeshift camp, the group gathered around a small and carefully concealed fire.

Mira spread out a crudely drawn map on the ground.

"After a week of observation," the woman said, "we've identified three primary entry points to the city." Her finger traced invisible lines across the map, connecting key locations.

"The main gate to the east, heavily guarded but with the most traffic. The western approach is less fortified but surrounded by open ground that offers little cover. And last, the southern wall, which backs up against the river."

The others leaned in, looking at the map. Emily was the first to speak.

"Which one looks most promising, in your opinion?" She asked the others, her gaze shifting between the map and their face.

Erik, who had been silently watching from the side, came forward. The firelight made his eyes look intense.

"That's precisely what me and June are going to find out," he said. "We need more specific information on each of these entry points, and I think it is now time to enter this place and see how the situation inside is."

"Are you sure the plan will work?"

"Everything depends on what the thaids do."

"It should work."

What Erik and the others thought about was to lead the thaids to the city and use it as a diversion. Erik would then sabotage the entrance, the defenses, and kill high priority targets, with Mira, Amber and Emily helping on the sides.

"As we agreed, we need to lure the thaids here. The Chimaeric Demons will take care of this. The problem is we need to coordinate the attack to the moment at which I blow up one of the entrances."

"Wouldn't it be simpler for you to kill the chain of command? It shouldn't be hard for you."

"Well," Erik said. "Yes, and no. I bet they will all be dual wielders, and I don't know if I will be able to fight so many people at the same time, considering they also are dual wielders. The situation depends on how sneaky I can be, and with the current situation, I can't be certain of that. Besides, the point was to make it so the enemy doesn't find out we are traveling north.

I might end up with my hands tied."

"You will still need to kill their higher-ups. They will replace them quickly. They had been trained to do this, after all, but at least this will create enough chaos and give us enough time to break those entrances," Mira said.

"Exactly." Erik paused a little. "Tomorrow, we split into teams. June and I will investigate the sewers and enter the city. There's bound to be an underground network we can exploit." June nodded.

"Mira, you and Amber will scout the eastern gate," Erik said. "It's the busiest entry point, which means it's also our best chance to gather information on troop movements and supply schedules." The two women exchanged a look.

"Emily, you'll take two of the Demons and search around the western approach. It might be less guarded, but that open ground is not a problem for you and your rifle, right?"

"No."

"Good. Then see if you can find any blind spots or patterns in their patrol routes."

Emily straightened, her chin. "Leave it to us."

Erik nodded before addressing the last Chimaeric Demon, the one which was tasked to lure the thaids here. "You, it should be obvious what you have to do, right?"

"Yes, Master. Don't worry, it will be a piece of cake."

"I can't stress this enough, guys," Erik said.

"This is strictly a reconnaissance mission for you. We're here to gather information, not engage the enemy. No matter what you see or hear, maintain your cover. We can't afford to alert them to our presence, and besides, it's not like you can do something. As soon as you are done, get back to the camp.

Two of the Chimaeric Demons will stay with you while me and June get inside the city, and the third clone will start herding the thaids."

The group murmured in agreement.

"Get some rest," Erik said. "Tomorrow will test all of us. We need to be at our sharpest."

Erik couldn't sleep as the others settled in. He left the dying fire and found a silent spot at the camp's edge.

He stared into the darkness, thinking about the plan. This city's destruction would aid the war effort a lot. The blackguards' supply chain would be crippled, at least temporarily, limiting their troop support. Frant's forces would gain an advantage since the front lines would be weakened.

That, of course, would even be better if the enemy focused on hunting local thaids. They risked injury, death, and, for sure, they would be tired.

It went beyond just disrupting supplies, though. They would gain intelligence and schematics, aside from the usual equipment they were already getting from their enemies.

Maps, troop movements, and communication logs—everything they needed was bound to be taken. Their troops would also benefit from the supplies.

Breathing deeply, he prepared for the challenges they would face the following day.

<I hope the girls will be okay.>

Erik fell asleep after thinking about these things. He needed rest, as he told others.

Chapter 1014: A Sinister Discovery

The sewer entrance was shrouded by vines and foliage, and loomed ahead like a portal to hell. Though, that was just from the perspective of a fly. For a human, it was not bigger than a floor tile. The darkness to which the entrance led to, though, wasn't the major problem there. It was the smell.

The smell hit them right away. It was a disgusting smell that made their throats gag and eyes water.

It smelled like a thousand dead bodies left to rot in a nasty pit with sewage. The air was so thick; it felt gross to breathe. The breeze that sometimes passed through the leaves seemed powerless, only swirling the stench around as if it were a cruel prank.

It was the kind of smell that made you wish you could stop breathing altogether.

<Well, it's not like I could expect something else.>

Erik looked around to make sure they hadn't been spotted, and once he saw that wasn't the case, he nudged June forward. Then he tapped at his communicator.

"Mira, Amber, status update on the eastern gate?"

Mira's voice crackled through. "Erik, it's busier than we expected. A lot of troops and vehicles have been entering since before we arrived. They must have come here during the night."

"How many?" Erik asked, ducking behind a fallen log.

"Too many. It's impossible to count them, but I'm talking about at least 8000 troops and at least a thousand vehicles in the last hour alone."

"Most of the vehicles are transport trucks," Amber then added. "But we've spotted a few armored personnel carriers, too."

Erik gave a concerned glance to June. "That's a lot more activity than we anticipated. Any idea why?"

"Not sure," Mira said. "But the soldiers seem on edge. Their posture is tense. They all have their weapons in hand. Something's got them spooked."

"Or they're preparing for something big," Amber said. "Erik, I don't like this. The number of troops pouring in... it feels like they're fortifying for an attack."

That was a problem. Erik wanted to lure the thaid's here and take advantage of the enemy's unpreparedness, striking them when they least expected it. But if they were preparing for an attack, what Erik wanted to do would not be effective.

With this many enemy troops, Erik would have to gather thaid's for at least a week just to make the attack useful enough for him.

"But there have been no orders about an attack on this place from our people."

"That's the problem," Amber said. "I think it is a Thaid's attack, and for so many people to have these looks, I think it won't be something weak."

That, instead, was a good occurrence. However, to know if that was really the case, Erik had to enter.

"Understood. If this is the situation, then let's take advantage of it."

"Are you sure? You might end up trapped there. Besides, we don't know if this is true."

"Yeah. We need to get inside regardless to see what is going on. Aside from that, I doubt someone will pay attention to a fly. Not that they can do something against me, anyway. They'll be dead before they even hear the buzz of my wings."

June leaned closer to Erik's communicator. "Have you overheard anything useful?" he asked to the three women.

"Bits and pieces," Mira said. "Mentions of 'increased thaid activity' and 'safety protocols'. But nothing concrete on why. The increase in thaid activity might well be because of us."

"Erik, I'm worried about you two going in there. If they're this on alert, the risk of discovery is much higher. Can't we do it after this mess ends?"

"No, Amber. We lost too much time already; we need to stick to the plan. "

Mira gave Amber a reassuring look, then turned to the communicator again.

"Just... be careful," Mira said. "We'll keep monitoring the situation out here. "

Erik nodded. "Keep in touch with the Chimaeric Demons and find out if the reason for this increased activity is because of us. Maybe someone spotted our guy and thinks we are attacking. If that's the case, then we might really have problems, since they might expect us. Otherwise, I don't think there will be problems."

Erik ended the transmission, turning to June. "Ready?" he asked.

June nodded. "Let's do this."

Erik and June exchanged a glance, then began their transformation. Erik's form shrank rapidly, his body contorting as wings sprouted from his back. In seconds, he became a tiny fly. June followed suit, his body twisting and shrinking until he, too, had taken on the insect form.

It had taken June considerable effort to swallow a fly in the past to gain the ability to turn into one, but it wasn't like he didn't understand the advantages of being a tiny flying menace.

<Ready?> Erik's thoughts reached June.

<As I'll ever be,> June said. <I Still can't believe I had to swallow a fly to do this.>

The two insects zipped into the sewer entrance, immediately assaulted by the overwhelming stench.

<This smell is worse than I imagined,> June said.

<It's not worse than things we went through in the past.>

<Yeah, but there is something weird...>

<Stay focused, for now,> Erik said. <There might be someone guarding this area too.>

<Sorry, Master.>

They flew deeper into the tunnel, their compound eyes adjusting to the darkness.

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As they progressed, they noticed an odd undertone to the typical smell they would expect from the sewer.

<Master, the smell is too strong. There is something weird about it. > June said. <Can't you smell that?>

<I noticed it too. It's not just sewage.>

As they approached the manhole cover leading into the city, the peculiar smell intensified. The two flies rounded a bend in the tunnel and suddenly halted in mid-air.

Before them stretched a sea of bodies, floating in the murky water as far as their insect eyes could see. Men, women, and children—all in civilian clothes—bobbed lifelessly in the feces-infested water.

<What the...? What happened here?>

<A massacre,> Erik said. <I think they are the citizens.>

<Do you think they killed them all?>

<I doubt it,> Erik said. <This city had hundreds of thousands of people living here. I don't think the sewers were big enough to house them all. There are many corpses, but they might just be the ones belonging to those who fought when the blackguards conquered the city.>

They hovered silently, observing the lifeless bodies laying intertwined, their swollen faces gazing at the skyless ceiling without expression.

<We need to find out if there are more people alive,> Erik said. <And quickly. Because if the blackguards aren't coming here just to deliver supplies and they are truly running from something. We must get the people out, if we can.>

June agreed. <Do you think this is connected to the increased Thaid activity Mira and Amber mentioned?>

<It's possible,> Erik said. <They might have thrown the bodies here to cover their stench as best as possible. But they could have also burned them. The choice is peculiar.>

They went through the grotesque obstacle course of corpses, heading towards the ladder leading up to the streets above. They didn't need to use the ladder, though.

<Be prepared for anything when we emerge,> Erik said.

<Understood.>

Chapter 1015: When Fortifications Meet Flying Pests

<This place is different from New Alexandria,> June said.

The city stretched out in front of them, combining old-world charm with military fortifications. Unlike the magnificent skyscrapers of New Alexandria, the city's skyline was humble. There was nothing that could compare to something like the Red Palace, but honestly, the tallest building here couldn't compare to the smallest in Frant's capital.

Most buildings were no taller than four or five stories, constructed of concrete and bricks. Narrow cobblestone streets wound between them, occasionally opening into small squares or marketplaces.

There were some public buildings there, whose architecture hinted at a rich history. It couldn't be otherwise, since this was an ancient city. It wouldn't find itself at a crossroads, otherwise.

The buildings had ornate facades and intricate stonework adorning them. There was even a clock tower, followed by many but smaller churches, whose spires punctuated the skyline.

Despite its smaller size, the city still covered a considerable area. But not so much as to trouble Erik.

<Yeah, but I wouldn't live here even if I got paid to do so. This place is too far from anything worthy of attention. I bet you can't even find a decent market here.>

<Well... maybe. But the blackguards chose to come here for its strategic importance.>

<That's because our artillery makes it impossible for them to ship the goods by air. These ancient roads are the only things worthwhile about this place.>

Indeed, ancient highways, relics from the pre-Thaid era, stretched out from the city like spokes on a wheel.

Modern military additions contrasted with the city's historical charm. Sandbag fortifications and gun emplacements dotted rooftops and intersections, while hastily erected barricades blocked streets.

Erik and June noticed that the city's layout seemed to thicken in one area, likely the one having the command center. The streets were also filled with civilian and military traffic, with people moving with urgency.

<Well, at least they didn't kill people for no reason.> There wouldn't be citizens in the city if it had been otherwise. Though it was clear, there weren't many around.

The two intruders kept flying around. At that point, the scope of this strategic location became clear.

<The blackguards chose well,> Erik said.

As if to underscore his point, a convoy of trucks rumbled into view, their cargo holds laden with supplies. Soldiers swarmed around them, efficiently unloading crates and redirecting them to various parts of the city.

As Erik and June hovered, observing the city's bustling activity, they noticed an unusual pattern emerging. While convoys of trucks continued to pour in, unloading their cargo. The people seemed tense; Mira and Amber were right. There was something big going on.

Soldiers scurried along the city walls, their eyes scanning the horizon for some unseen threat. On rooftops, teams assembled anti-aircraft guns, their barrels pointed at the sky. They were going to be repurposed to kill thaids.

That became clear at that point given the fact the blackguards were worried about 'increased thaid activity'.

It was just that Erik expected it was because of his and the Chimaeric Demons' actions instead. It looked like one or more flying thaids were coming this way. Otherwise, it wouldn't make sense for the anti-aircraft guns to be pointed at the sky.

Even civilian buildings weren't exempt from the preparation, as people climbed onto them, with binoculars able to make the wielder see at kilometers, nestled on their noses.

<Do you think it is some kind of flying thaid that is coming here?> June asked, his tiny form darting between two agitated soldiers.

<My guess? Yes. Probably something bigger and nastier than the usual Zephyrwings or Galewings.>

<But why here? Why now?>

<Not sure,> Erik said. <But for the blackguards to be this agitated, the situation must be serious.>

They watched as a commander barked orders, directing more troops to reinforce the city's perimeter.

<Whatever's coming,> Erik continued, <it's got them scared. And that worries me. We've seen blackguards face down some terrifying Thaid's before, but this... this is different.>

<Should we abort the mission?>

<No,> Erik said. <If anything, this makes our job more easy, because if the thaid's are really attacking this place, we must capitalize on the situation. Jerry went to lure more thaid's. If we make a double attack, we might be able to destroy this place, instead of just sabotaging it.>

Erik and June flew closer to a group of military officers huddled near a makeshift command post. The two insects perched on a nearby crate, their tiny bodies unnoticed.

"Sir, reports confirm the flock is heading here," one officer said. "Estimated time of arrival is two hours."

The commander cursed under his breath. "What is the situation with the anti-air defenses? We can't let them breach the city walls."

"We placed everything we have, sir, plus, we are on our way to deploy mechas."

<A flock of flying Thaid's?> June's thoughts reached Erik. <We were right then...>

<It couldn't be otherwise. It looks like destiny really wants the blackguards to be wiped out by this planet.>

The two officers kept talking.

<Should we split up? I could scout the city; look for weak points we could exploit when the attack comes.>

Erik considered for a moment. <Great idea. You go ahead and search around. I'll stay here and try to gather more intel. I want to find out who's in charge of this place.>

<Understood. Be careful, Master.>

With that, June zipped away, his tiny form soon lost in the bustling crowd. Erik remained, his compound eyes fixed on the officers as they pored over maps and barked orders.

As Erik listened, he learned more about the city's defenses and the growing panic among the ranks. The name "Colonel Vance" was mentioned several times.

<This Colonel Vance must be the one running things here,> Erik thought to himself. <If we can take him out during the chaos of the Thaid attack... Of course, after having taken all the information we need from him...>

Chapter 1016: Panic at the Outpost

The atmosphere within the enemy outpost grew increasingly tense as news of the approaching Thaid flock spread.

The fact was that this wasn't just any group of flying monsters, but it was a massive swarm of Thunderwings, creatures native to the Eldraith mountain range, or at least living nearby that terrifying place.

Of course, the reason these creatures ventured so far west was due to the blackguards' activities in Mur. These activities drove the thaids from Mur to Mannard, which in turn pushed the local thaids away from one of the deadliest places on the Mannard continent.

Erik observed the mounting panic with a sense of grim satisfaction.

<God, I fucking hate the blackguards...>

However, he was also sorry for the few citizens that were still alive, but he couldn't help but be happy for the enemy troops having to bear this clusterfuck of a situation.

The risk of such creatures ending up in the rest of Frant was clear, but at least the Luminara Serpentis Erik circulated should have worked to keep them at bay and around from their territories. When all of this ended, Erik was going to spread this plant everywhere in Frant so that all the monsters would be pushed elsewhere. Hopefully, in Etrium.

<You deserve this, you motherfuckers.> The blackguards' actions had finally caught up with them, and nature itself seemed to exact revenge on his behalf.

Now, since Erik found out enough information from the panicked foot soldiers' conversations around him, he decided to find where the outpost's leader was.

As he did, he took note of the anti-air artillery units being assembled across the city. The weapons were clearly enhanced by brain crystals.

However, despite the advanced weaponry, the soldiers' anxiety told Erik that even these defences might not be enough against the incoming Thunderwing attack.

Erik had never encountered these creatures personally, but from what he knew, they were powerful.

<They should have around 200 strength points...> But that wasn't the only problem. Thunderwings had a deadly brain crystal power, which allowed them to control and make lightning. Like Volkov could.

That made it clear how dangerous such power was because these attacks were... well... fast as lightning, and capable of frying anyone in seconds. Coupled with the speed these creatures had and the sheer number with which they were going to attack, no one knew if they could survive this encounter.

<Well... Whatever, this plays to my advantage. For once, at least, I don't have to do everything by myself.>

Though Erik still wanted a group of land thaids to attack the place. That would serve as a useful distraction for the enemy troops, who will have not only to focus on the sky but even on the ground.

After some time searching, Erik found what he believed was the command center. It was a sturdy building at the heart of the city.

Its windows were reinforced, and its entrance was heavily guarded. Using his tiny size to his advantage, Erik went through a small crack in one of the upper windows, entering a spacious office on the top floor.

From there, he navigated the building, but no one seemed to be the leader of this place. However, in the end, Erik found him.

The man was in another office room, pretty far from the entrance, and that was why Erik had trouble finding him. Within the room was a stern-faced man in an elaborate uniform standing behind a large desk. In front of him were two blackguards.

Maps and reports were strewn across the desk, and a holographic display flickered with real-time updates of the approaching threat.

<This guy is from Hin.> Erik thought that because of the man's accent and, of course, the uniform he wore.

"Give me a full report," the man said.

One of the blackguards stepped forward. "Sir, the Thunderwing flock is massive. Our latest estimates put their numbers at over a thousand. They're moving faster than we anticipated. ETA is now less than two hours."

"And our defences?"

"We've positioned all available anti-air artillery as you ordered, sir. The brain crystal enhancements should give us an edge, but against so many Thunderwings." He trailed off, the implication clear.

"What about the civilians?" the leader asked.

The first blackguard shifted uncomfortably. "Evacuation is... problematic, sir. There isn't enough time to move everyone to safety. We've begun arming those who can fight, but..."

The leader cut him off with a sharp gesture. "They do not want to fight for those they think of as invaders. Right, but they'll have to do their part if they don't want to die. "

Erik noticed the subtle tension between the leader and the blackguards. It was pretty wild how those blackguards, who are usually so full of themselves, actually listened to that guy from Hin.

<Weird...>

It was an unusual dynamic, given the blackguards' typical disdain for others.

<Maybe these are low-ranking members.> Erik didn't have the time, nor did he care about them to see if he was right.

"There's more, sir," the second blackguard said. "We've lost contact with the last supply convoy from the north. Given the increased Thaid activity in the sector, we fear they may have been attacked."

The leader's expression darkened. "Damn it all. Those supplies were meant for sector 34."

The man sighed. That was a setback, it was true, but it held no real importance to the current situation.

"How about the Mecha units?"

"We have ten fully operational, sir. Five more are undergoing last checks. They should be ready within the hour."

"It'll have to do. Position them along the eastern wall. That's likely to be the Thunderwings' primary approach vector."

After some talk, the leader dismissed the blackguards with a series of rapid-fire orders, his tone leaving no room for question or hesitation. The blackguards didn't like the tone, nor the orders, based on what Erik could read from their mind, but their masks made it impossible for the man to see it.

As the door closed behind them, he slumped into his chair.

"Fuck... Things are not going well. These Frantians bastards proved to be stronger than we assumed. I still don't understand why they didn't send those troops to Hin when they attacked us."

Of course, the man hadn't been informed about Erik and his abilities, so he didn't know that most of the current enemy forces were Erik's Chimaeric Demons.

Well... not that the blackguards were sure about it. They had inklings that these were troops he brought and not that they were his clones.

Chapter 1017: Sacrifice or Save?

Erik watched as the man reached for a communication device on his desk.

The colonel was frankly worried about the situation. It had never been easy to defend the outpost, but now it just turned into a monumental task.

Frant's troop were already powerful and easy to deal with, but flying thaids were worse. That was, of course, because he hadn't seen the Chimaeric Demons fight in person. There was something he could say with certainty about their commanders, though they were vicious and shrewd, always ready with a counterplan for the counter plan.

The colonel was concerned. He didn't think he had enough men and weapons to stop the creatures and save the outpost and felt a heavy weight on his shoulders, knowing he needed to protect his men and the outpost.

He also had many questions, but no answers to them, since the ones who could give him answers didn't give a damn about him being in the dark. For starters, how did Frant get these strong troops and generals? Why were the thaids here in Mannard so strong? Why were they acting this crazy and out of the ordinary?

It was abnormal and driving him insane because it rendered the operations he needed to check over impossible.

But he wasn't stupid. He knew something was happening, but he didn't know what, where, or why.

The man studied maps and reports, trying to solve a puzzle that seemed to get harder every day. His mind was filled with theories, but without solid evidence, he felt like he was guessing in the dark.

Even in his own country, Hin, things were not as they used to be. Thaids from the Mur continent were increasing their attacks on the shores, yet the blackguards were still maintaining control over everything.

However, this unexpected surge in thaid activity in Frant was a troubling anomaly that hinted at deeper, more complex issues at play. That wasn't all. It was too big, too drastic, and too dangerous because it was at much greater levels than in Hin.

"This is Colonel Vance. Get me a secure line to High Command. Priority Alpha."

Erik became curious when Vance turned on a secure communication device. He moved closer so he wouldn't miss anything.

After a brief static, a voice crackled through. "This is Central Command, General Hawthorne speaking. Sitrep, Colonel."

Vance's voice was tense. "Sir, we have a critical situation. Thunderwing flock estimated at 1000-plus, approaching vector 030. ETA 90 minutes."

"What's your defensive capability, Colonel?"

"We've got 15 M-290 Skybreaker batteries operational, sir. Ten Sentinel-class mech deployed five more at 80% readiness. The problem is our anti-Thaid shield generators are only at 68% capacity and we also lost a convoy from Sector 7, aside from those destined for sector 34."

General Hawthorne's voice hardened. "That convoy," the man said, referring to the one from sector 7, "Carried the new XR-5 power cells from Etrium. Without them, how long can your shields hold?"

"Best estimate? 30 minutes of sustained assault, sir, especially because of these numbers. After that, we're relying solely on ground-based defences and air support from the 103rd Wing and the few soldiers with defensive brain crystal powers."

"Unacceptable. That outpost is the center of our entire eastern supply network. If it falls, we lose our foothold in three sectors in the next 3 days. I don't need to explain how many we would lose in the next few weeks, right?"

Vance hesitated. "I don't have a solution, sir. Only evacuation protocols—"

"Denied, Colonel. That outpost does not fall. Initiate Protocol Omega-7. Arm all civilians and integrate them into your defence grid."

"We already started that, sir, but sir, these civilians are from—"

"Even better," General Hawthorne said, interrupting Vance. "We came here to kill them all, regardless, Colonel. Use them as meat shields if you need. I don't care, just Hold. That. Outpost."

Central Command out."

The communication ended. Erik watched as Vance input a series of commands into his holo-computer's display before marching out.

As the door closed behind Vance, Erik allowed himself a moment to think.

<These fuckers...>

Erik wanted to save the citizens, but there was nothing he could actually do to make it so. Even if he managed to make them escape, they would be caught by other thaids out there. Erik doubted they had the strength to survive in the wilderness, since those who were not in the army were kids and old people, in general, those who couldn't fight.

The only possible way for him to achieve this was to attack the outpost before the thaids came, which wasn't possible, especially because he needed a place to bring them, people to coordinate them, and there were simply too many people here to save, and far too many for Erik to fight alone.

<Maybe the sewers?>

However, Erik quickly realized there wasn't even a chance to bring the citizens to the sewers, where they might have been safe, at least for the time being.

The attack was going to happen early in the morning, and the sun was going to be high in the sky. There wouldn't be shadows around to help them. Sneaking them there under such conditions was simply not possible, with Hin wanting to mobilize them to fight. Any attempt to move the citizens would have been too noticeable.

<FUCK! FUUUUUUCK!>

The only thing Erik could do was to take advantage of the impending Thunderwing attack and...

<I have to sacrifice them...>

However, there was something specific he had to do to take advantage of that attack.

It was simple in theory, but complex in execution. If the anti-thaid shields, the barrier, had no energy, either he could destroy the supply line that powered them or he could somehow make that energy run out. Both options had their own sets of challenges and risks.

The best thing was to destroy the energy generator, and that had to be done at the right moment. Timing was crucial; a premature attack could alert the blackguards, while a delayed one could mean missing the opportunity altogether.

Making the energy decrease gradually would have made the blackguards replenish it as best as they could, but it would also have made it harder for him to destroy the barrier, since it would be a slow and painstaking process.

What if the blackguards killed the thaids before he could end the energy? But the first option, destroying the energy generator, would work.

Erik only had to find the right moment to carry out his plan. He had to be precise and act when the blackguards were least expecting it, ensuring his actions would have the maximum effect.

<I'm going to kill you all... I swear,> Erik said, referring to Hin, Etrium, and most importantly, the blackguards.

With a last look around the office, committing every detail to memory, Erik zipped out through the same crack he had entered.

Chapter 1018: Electric Siege (1)

"Sir, long-range sensors have picked the thaids up. ETA 10 minutes."

Vance's jaw clenched. "Sound the alarm. All units to battle stations."

Sirens wailed across the outpost, jolting soldiers and civilians alike into frenzied action.

Vance watched as the M-290 Skybreaker batteries swiveled into position, their brain-crystal-power enhanced systems humming to life.

"Shield status?" Vance barked into his comm.

"68% and holding, sir. But without those XR-5 cells... too many attacks might make the barrier crumble."

Vance cut him off. "I know. We'll have to make do."

The horizon darkened as the Thunderwing flock approached ten minutes later.

At first, they looked like distant storm clouds, but as they drew closer, individual shapes became visible.

Each Thunderwing was big... No, massive was the right word to describe a wingspan easily reaching 60 feet.

But the most terrifying aspect was the electricity surrounding them like the tongues of a demon.

"All batteries, prepare to fire on my mark," Vance said, his voice carrying over the comm to every gunnery position across the outpost.

The flock got closer, to the point Vance could see the gleam in the thaid's eyes.

There was a fierce, primal intelligence within them, and that sent a chill down his spine.

He raised his hand; the gunners waited with fingers hovering over triggers. He waited a second, then brought it down.

"Fire!"

The Skybreakers roared to life, their massive barrels glowing with a blue light as they unleashed their ammo.

They let loose energy bolts that made the outpost shake.

The air crackled with energy as dozens of bolts streaked towards the Thunderwing flock.

The sky lit up like in a deadly fireworks display, flashes of blue from the Skybreakers mixing with the lightning made by the Thunderwings illuminated it.

As the first volley approached, the lead Thunderwings reacted. Their bodies glowed; electrical energy powered by mana surrounded them. With ear-splitting shrieks, they released massive bolts of lightning from their mouths.

These natural lightning strikes collided with the incoming energy bolts in mid-air.

The resulting explosions were blinding, making it hard for everyone to look at the sky for more than a second, and even in such a short amount of time, everyone risked being blinded.

Some of the Skybreaker shots made it through this mana-powered defense, slamming into Thunderwings with devastating effect. Some of the creatures fell from the sky, their bodies smoking and twitching.

The attack didn't kill them all, but killed some. It wasn't enough, but at least they started chipping down at the monsters' numbers.

But for every Thaid that fell, three more were still there. The flock seemed endless, a rolling storm of wings and lightning that stretched to the horizon.

Thaids were driven by instinct rather than tactical thinking. In a similar situation, any other thaid would have continued their advance, and that was exactly what they did.

They didn't strategize or plan; they simply reacted to external stimuli and inner urges.

The air filled with the acrid smell of ozone and burnt flesh as the battle raged on.

The Skybreakers continued to fire, their operators working to maintain the barrage.

Thunderwings kept releasing their lightning strikes, sometimes shorting out a battery, sometimes missing wildly and striking the ground.

Vance watched as the sky became a weird dance of lights.

"Sir, they're approaching the shield perimeter!" a lieutenant said.

The colonel watched in contemplation as a Thunderwing slammed into the energy barrier.

Electricity arced across the shield's surface, the competing energies creating a light show that would have been beautiful if it weren't a prelude to death.

"Shield capacity down to 68%... 67%... 66%!"

"Deploy the mechs!" Vance said. "And get those civilians on the ground defenses now!" In the meantime, the Skybreakers started decimating more and more thaid.

Then, the massive humanoid machines stomped into view. They raised their arm-mounted cannons, adding their firepower to the fray.

But the Thunderwings were relentless. It looked like they were attracted by something, and that something must have been human meat.

They bombed the shield using their mana-powered discharges, weakening it with each attack they made.

Vance could only watch as sections of the barrier flickered as their energy waned.

The Skybreakers and mechs' firepower wore down the Thunderwings'.

Airborne energy bolts hit their targets, and brain crystal powers made many more fall down from the sky.

But it wasn't easy to kill them. These were powerful beasts, with very strong natural mana barriers.

Yet the Thunderwings were not invincible, and the added fire power made more of them fall from the sky, their bodies crashing with earth-shaking thuds.

Three years earlier, such an event would have been the signal for doom, and yet, Vance was managing the situation with very low casualties.

What Etrium did, by creating brain crystal weapons, had indeed been great for humanity. The problem was, that being colluded with the blackguards, they had a monopoly.

Sure, there were some crafters that left the country and sold the technology to others, but it wasn't enough to level the field. For years, Etrium would earn a ton of money, at least until the foreign nations didn't start mass producing them.

Two Skybreakers' attacks collided with a large Thunderwing, whose wingspan was easily over 70 feet.

They pierced its feathers and later its hide, making the beast convulse in midair.

In its last moments, a massive electricity surge arced and struck several of its brethren. Half a dozen Thunderwings crashed due to the chain reaction.

Mechs worked well too. Advanced targeting systems guided their arm-mounted cannons' rapid fire.

A skilled mech pilot killed three Thunderwings with a single burst, sending the energy blast through each beast in a gruesome daisy chain.

As the battle continued, Thunderwing corpses burned on the ground.

Some of the dead creatures still twitched in their death throes.

"We can do this!"

Despite mounting casualties, the Thunderwings continued due to an instinct beyond human comprehension.

They attacked the barriers, trying to break them. The shield weakened as their attacks exploded on impact.

The Skybreakers targeted the Thunderwings closest to the shield. Energy bolts stopped the creatures before they hit.

"We can do this!" People said again.

Chapter 1019: Electric Siege (2)

While chaos happened outside, Erik and June moved through the outpost. They went quickly through halls and air vents, their small bodies unnoticed.

<There,> Erik said to his clone as they approached a heavily guarded room. <That must be the energy system for the barrier.>

The two insects slipped through a small gap in the door, entering a room where the hum of machinery could be heard 24/7.

Massive generators lined the walls. These advanced machines relied on the latest technology and were crucial for the facility's operations. Brain crystal-enhanced capacitors stored the immense amount of energy produced by the brain crystals.

This energy was then distributed to the shield grid, ensuring a continuous stream of energy into the barriers around the entire complex.

<It's impressive,> June said. <I wonder if we will be able to get this technology.>

Erik nodded.

<I'll make sure we will be able to.>

<Should we destroy it?>

<Not now. We need to time this perfectly. Too soon, and we risk the blackguards to find a solution to the situation. Too late, and we might lose our chance entirely.>

They perched on a control panel, watching as technicians scrambled to maintain power levels. They were pumping mana into the device, helping to supply the precious resource. It was the best thing they came up with to make up for losing those batteries.

Through a nearby window, they could see flashes of the battle raging outside.

<The Thunderwings are getting closer,> June said. <But the defences are still holding...>

<Not for long,> Erik said.

Minutes passed, feeling like hours. The room shook with each impact on the shield, alarms blaring as power levels fluctuated wildly.

Suddenly, Erik sensed a shift in the battle's momentum. Of course, he sensed that since he was keeping an eye on the thoughts of the enemy soldiers. The blackguards were making things go under control. <Now!>

In an instant, Erik transformed back into his human form, startling the technicians. Before they could react, he made wind blades and decapitated the enemy.

Soon after, another devastating attack on the generators was unleashed. Electricity worked wonders here because it fried everything without the need for Erik to do something specific. Energy arced wildly as systems overloaded and exploded.

Alarms shrieked as the barrier's power plummeted. Erik turned to June, who had also resumed his human form. "It's done," Erik said. "Now we need to complete the plan."

His words were cut off by a deafening screech as the first Thunderwing breached the failing shield. The real battle was about to begin.

"Shield capacity down! Shield capacity down! It went to 55%... 50%... 43%!"

There had been a massive explosion somewhere within the city. "What was that?"

No one knew, but for sure, it did something. "Send the technicians to check!"

But then Vance watched in horror as a Thunderwing slammed into the waning energy barrier. Electricity arced across the shield's surface.

Relentless attacks kept hitting the barrier, causing it to shake and crack. The shield, which had been endured for a long time, now weakened as its energy faded away. With each hit, the barrier's glow dimmed, showing how much pressure it was under to withstand the attacks.

"Sir, we have multiple breaches!"

Vance's heart sank. This was what he had feared. "All units, prepare for close-quarters combat. Activate all ground-based defences! Someone go check the batteries!"

The streets below erupted into chaos as Thunderwings poured through the gaps in the shield. Soldiers and hastily armed civilians used their brain crystal weapons to attack the approaching monsters. However, their skills were pitifully inadequate against the creatures. These were flying thaids, after all.

A Thunderwing swooped low, its talons raking across a squad of soldiers. Their screams were cut short as electricity coursed through their bodies.

Nearby, a Sentinel mech grappled with another Thaid.

Vance's comm cracked again. "Colonel! The eastern sector almost collapsed. We can't hold them!"

He gritted his teeth. "Fall back to secondary positions. We cannot lose the supply depot!"

"Ye—" The barrier finally came down. There was nothing to protect them anymore.

"Damn! These are just a thousand thaids! We are many more!"

As he issued orders, trying to stem the tide of the assault, Vance couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong.

That was further proved by the many reports that came in. The shield had failed faster than it should have, even with the power issues. And now, reports were coming in of unexplained equipment failures across the outpost.

A terrible suspicion formed in his mind. Could there be saboteurs within the city? But who? The citizens? And how? There were guards stationed everywhere.

Besides, they wouldn't want to commit suicide by helping the thaids, right? There was no reason for them to help the monsters breach the city, unless they wanted to die.

Erik and June moved through the chaos-filled streets amidst the panicked soldiers and civilians.

"Should we proceed with the next phase?" June asked.

"Not yet. Just go on with the power grids for now."

They made their way to the nearest energy substation, dodging falling debris and stray lightning bolts from the rampaging monsters. Erik short-circuited the main control panel while June overloaded the backup generators.

They continued their sabotage, methodically disabling power grids across the city. With each successful strike, more of the outpost's defences failed.

Anti-aircraft guns fell silent, mechs powered down, and communication networks crackled into static.

The sky darkened as more Thunderwings entered the city. After destroying their fifth power grid, Erik paused, surveying the surrounding destruction.

"I think it's time," Erik said.

June nodded in agreement.

"Alright. Let's move to the last phase," June said. "Signal the others. It's time to take control of this outpost."

June took his communication device and reached out to Amber, who was still waiting outside.

"Are we ready?" she asked.

"Yes, we're ready," June said. "I'm going to tell the Chimaeric Demons to move into position. They've been waiting for our signal."

"Good. Make sure you, Mira, and Emily are in sync," June said. "We can't afford any mistakes at this stage."

"All right."

Chapter 1020: Electric Siege (3)

The forest trembled. Erik entered not only the city to sabotage the outpost's defences, but he prepared an attack of his own.

Originally, that had to be the attack itself, which Erik would have used to take advantage of the situation and kill this outpost's leader. However, because of the Thunderwings attacks, there was no need for that to be the major attack anymore.

The footfalls of a horde of Thaidis echoed around the forest. Massive *Ursus Glacialis* came out from the trees, lumbering alongside Shadowclaws.

Packs of Leylarhads, muscular bodies, darted through the thick underbrush while they looked at their quarry, Erik's Chimaeric Demon.

These were just some of the thaidis that pursued the clone back here.

The Chimaeric Demon was, in fact, at the head of this monstrous stampede, sprinting with speed and agility very few people in the world could reach. For sure not these thaidis.

The Chimaeric Demon vaulted over fallen logs, weaved through dense thickets, and glanced back at its pursuers.

<They are still chasing, good.>

Erik found not only plants that repelled the thaids. He had been unlucky enough to find some that did the opposite. Of course, it wasn't hard for Erik to make them grow and to use them to lure the thaids.

If the Thunderwings didn't attack, he might have used these tactics to lure even more creatures to the outpost. The only problem would have been that it was going to take some time.

Using these plants, the clone was leading the Thaid horde exactly where it wanted them to go, or better, where its master told him to bring it.

The treeline broke, revealing the outpost in the near distance. The Chimaeric Demon smirked, its mission almost complete. Erik's plan was unfolding perfectly—lure the land Thaids to join their airborne brethren.

On the outpost's walls, a soldier's shout pierced the air. "Thaids approaching from the west! Massive horde!"

If things weren't already hard for them, now for sure they were in an even more precarious situation. The mounting pressure started to make things almost unbearable.

The already chaotic defences, which had been struggling to maintain any semblance of order, scrambled to redirect their attention to the new threat.

Colonel Vance gave the orders as soon as he was informed about what was happening.

"Send someone to stop them! I don't care who!" The man then re-joined the fight.

A group of the outpost's elite fighters took up positions along the western wall. It was clear they couldn't do much, but at least they would kill as many thaids as possible and lessen the burden on the other soldiers. However, doing that in the middle of an air attack by flying thaids wasn't easy.

Energy bolts and blasts rained down on the forest's edge, felling trees and sending explosions of earth skyward. But before they could thin the Thaid numbers, sharp cracks echoed from the forest.

One by one, the elite fighters fell.

"A SNIPER! THIS IS AN ATTACK! I REPEAT THIS IS A HUMAN ATTACK!"

Well, that could be. Erik Romano could control Wyverns, basically everyone in the world knew that at that point, who said there wasn't someone in Frant who could control other thaids.

Hidden deep in the woods, Emily steadied her sniper rifle. She picked off the outpost's strongest defenders with efficiency, clearing the way for the horde.

The Chimaeric Demon could have taken care of them, but it was better not to expose him, and most importantly, Emily didn't want to be left out from the action.

As even the land-based Thaids breached the city walls, the outpost descended into utter chaos. Land thaids used their strength to batter down buildings, ambushing panicked defenders and devouring soldiers and civilians alike while they were distracted by the Thunderwings and their deadly lightnings.

Erik saw his opportunity. He stealthily made his way towards Colonel Vance's last known position. The colonel was barking orders, trying to salvage what remained of the city's crumbling defences.

Erik struck quickly. Before Vance could even register the threat, one of Erik's wind blades sliced through his neck, ending the colonel's life in an instant.

The outpost's leadership had fallen, and with it, any semblance of organized resistance.

With their major goal complete, Erik nodded to June. It was time to leave.

They maneuvered through the chaos, evading random assaults from Thaid's and desperate soldiers. He gave a quick look behind.

There were civilians there, but there was nothing Erik could do for them. However, now came the hardest part. As they reached the outskirts of the city, Erik activated his communication device.

"Amber, it's done. The colonel is dead. It's your turn now," Erik said. Amber... She made it clear she didn't like Erik's plan, and she didn't especially like the fact she had to take part in it. However, there was nothing she could do about it.

If she didn't act, these people, but most importantly, the civilians, would be devoured by the thaid's. Maybe without their intervention, the city defences might have stopped the flying thaid's. But they would have lost their chance to destroy this place.

Even if it pained her, she wasn't stupid enough to stop something that would save thousands of lives, just to save a couple.

"Understood," Amber's voice crackled through the device. Erik heard some quivering within it. "Erik... Are you sure you want to do this?" The woman asked.

"I have literally no way to help them," Erik said, referring to the civilians.

Amber sighed.

Then, a thick, unnatural fog rolled in from the forest, pushed by some winds, and guided the mist over the outpost.

That was Amber's fog. Erik was planning on not leaving anyone alive.

The fog finally enveloped the city, obscuring the ongoing battle. If the thaid's would not kill the enemy, the fog was going to do that. With them, the civilians would die too.

However, Amber didn't really like the situation.

The fog also served another purpose—it would make it impossible for any surviving blackguards to track Erik and his team's movements or identify them as the orchestrators of this attack.

As the sounds of battle faded behind them, Erik allowed himself a grim smile. He was happy because he had been able to do what he wanted to. The mission had been a success, but it came at a terrible cost in terms of human lives.

The vital supply hub of the blackguards had fallen, and with it, a significant blow had been struck against their operations in the region.

Erik and June disappeared into the forest, leaving behind a city in ruins. "We will go check the situation inside once everything settles."

"Yes, Master."