

BIOLOGICAL 1021

Chapter 1021: Amber's Corrosive Cookout

Erik gave Amber a quick glance. She was clearly shaken, because she knew many of the people here died because of her. Mira, instead, was unperturbed. That might have been because of how the two women grew up, or what they did during these years, or it might even be a matter of personalities and beliefs. Erik didn't know that.

Emily was the only one among them who had a neutral expression. She was sorry for those who died, but not as shaken as Amber.

<She got accustomed to these things hastily... Well, not as quickly as I did. Damn, I still remember when I killed that Densoph three years ago...>

Only silence reigned around them. The stench of death permeated everything, and that was because of Amber, since her power just reduced every living creature into a puddle of goo.

As they made their way towards the center of the outpost, the true extent of the carnage that had just unfolded within the outpost became clear.

What remained of the corpses of soldiers and civilians alike littered the ground. They weren't the only ones.

Among them, what remained of the thaids that attacked this place could be found, along with the burnt-out husks of buildings and the skeletal remains of some dead leviathan thaid that had been killed by the blackguards or Amber.

Emily swallowed hard, her rifle hanging at her side. "This," she said. Her voice was strained; she had always known that Amber's powers were ridiculously powerful, but she couldn't fully understand how destructive they were. During battles, she often had to restrain herself because of friendly fire. But now that she had no such constraints, her full might was in view.

At that point, everyone was sure her ability would turn terrifying if she got over the 54 neural links mark.

Emily turned to look at her childhood friend, but Amber said nothing. However, her face was pale and drawn. She stared at the corpses, or better, what remained of them, with haunted eyes, her fists

clenched tight at her sides, because she was the one responsible for what had just happened. Well, at least in part.

Mira glanced at the two women and shook her head. "It had to be done," she said. Mira spent enough time with the woman to understand what she was thinking.

"Those blackguards would have wiped us out given half a chance if they were in our shoes. We're fighting for our survival here. Why should we feel sorry for them?"

"I know that," Amber said, rounding on Mira. "But this... this is..." She trailed off, gesturing helplessly at the gruesome scene. Then, her eyes fell on the puddle of goo having civilian clothes inside.

"They didn't have to die."

"War is ugly," June said. "And Mira is right. We did what was necessary."

It was ironic. To save their people, they had to sacrifice some... a lot of them. Could this still be considered a victory? Could this be considered doing what they needed to achieve this goal?

Amber didn't know. Honestly speaking, no one among them did. What was certain, though, was that Frant's citizen died because of what they did.

An uncomfortable silence fell over the group. Erik cleared his throat. "Alright, enough. June, take Amber, Mira, and the Chimaeric Demons and go check the armory. See if there's anything useful left. Emily and I will look for provisions."

June nodded. "Yes, Master." June motioned for the others to follow him towards the outpost's central compound.

The clone knew that Erik just wanted to know what was here and send people to claim whatever was inside.

Truth be told, Erik was also thinking about placing some Chimaeric Demon eggs here so that he could plant spies, or actually taking control of the place.

But as things were now, he suspected the blackguards were going to abandon this place once they learned they had been attacked.

<I can't help but want to see their faces when they find out it was me and not the thaids who destroyed the outpost.> Of course, what Erik did was siege a city with just 7 people. In truth, attacking this place should have been everything but easy.

The blackguards didn't expect such a situation, since only an army could have taken this place. <For now, they will only think it were the thaids. Amber's fog will leave some traces, but to link this to her and from her to me, it would take time, and I will be in Hin by that time.>

As they picked their way through the rubble-strewn streets, Emily fell into step beside Erik, her brow furrowed. "Erik... do you ever wonder if we're going too far? I mean, I get that this is war, but..." She trailed off, biting her lip.

Erik sighed. "I wonder that all the time," he said. "But we're in too deep to turn back now, and it's not like I have a choice. The blackguards are targeting me, and all I can do is try to end this as quickly as possible, by whatever means necessary. Why do you think we are going to Hin?"

Emily nodded, but said nothing. She didn't like what Erik said, but it wasn't like he was wrong. He really had no choice.

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The group searched the place methodically, taking all the food they could find, but in truth, that was just in case some serious situation arose. The group could hunt, and with Erik bringing seeds with him, they couldn't starve even if they tried.

As they finished their sweep, Erik turned to Emily. "I need to check Vance's office to see if I can find anything useful on his computer. You go help June and the others. I'll catch up with you later."

Emily hesitated a moment, then nodded. "Be careful," she said, before heading off towards the armoury.

Erik watched her go, then turned and made his way towards the command center.

<Hopefully, that guy's computer has a good deal of information. >

If he could somehow tap into the blackguard communications network, even if only for a moment, the intelligence gathered could prove immensely invaluable, potentially even more than he could currently anticipate. The data could offer insights and advantages that might turn the tide of the war in their favor.

No matter the obstacles or risks, he was determined to get the information he needed.

Chapter 1022: Sneaky Computers and Sneakier Tricks

It took little for Erik to head once again into Colonel Vance's office. Now he had more time to give a look around, so he could do things without being in a rush like the last time he was here.

His eyes were drawn to the holographic computer on the desk. He pressed the power button, and the device flickered to life, casting holograms all over the room.

<System, you there?>

<Always ready to serve, boss!> The biological supercomputer said. <What's on the menu today?>

<Stop joking.> Erik sighed. Since he told the system to not behave like it had a pole stuck in its imaginary ass, the computer became very annoying.

That might have been because the brain of someone had been used to make it. Perhaps the biological supercomputer was still that of a fully functioning human being. It might still keep some aspects of human consciousness, and maybe, just maybe, the computer was getting bored. This could explain why it was having such dumb reactions.

<I need you to connect to this computer and dig up as much intel as you can,> Erik said. <We need to know what resources the blackguards, Hin, and Etrium had here—weapons, armor, vehicles, anything useful. And see if you can find any information on their war plans.>

<Roger that! But I need some seconds to work my magic...>

Erik watched as the holographic display flashed data streams across the whole room. The names of mecha models and vehicles rolled quickly, nearly too fast to catch.

Despite the fleeting nature of the information, he caught glimpses of important information, including names of advanced mechas, assault tanks, and armored trucks.

It was a lot for a single location, with so few fighters compared to the front lines, but that was to be expected, considering this was the main crossroads for the enemy's supply line.

Erik grinned as soon as he saw these bits of information, even if it was just a literal glimpse he just had.

<Okay, here's the deal,> the biological supercomputer said. <Looks like they had quite the stockpile here. Advanced firearms, high-tech body armor, even a few experimental combat vehicles. I'm compiling a full inventory for you now.>

<Excellent. What about their plans?> Erik asked. <Did you find something?>

<Ah, well, that's where things get tricky,> the biological supercomputer said. <It seems like they kept most of that juicy information on a separate, heavily secured network. But fear not; I have an idea in mind.>

Erik raised an eyebrow, intrigued. <Tell me.>

<I can whip up a virus that should be able to sneak its way into their main command network.>

Erik stared ahead blankly, but in his mind, he had a sceptical look.

<I should be able to plant it in their systems from this computer. We'll have a backdoor into all sorts of goodies—enemy communications, troop locations, battle plans, and even top-secret crafting recipes!>

Erik's eyes widened at the prospect. <Good, then make it happen.>

<You got it, boss! One super-sneaky cyber-contagion, coming right up. I'll even add a little flair to it—maybe a dancing banana animation just to mess with them in case they find out.>

<Do you want to make me look like an idiot?>

The biological supercomputer ignored Erik and set to work crafting the virus. Erik leaned back in Vance's chair, waiting for the AI to be done. However, it would not take much for the system to do so.

<While you're at it, share the intel we've gathered from here with the Chimaeric Demons, and make sure Jabir and the others get those recipes and schematics.> Erik said. <I want everyone to take advantage of this. When Frant will get out of this situation, I bet people will start learning how to craft all of this and open shops. It will be good for everyone.>

<Consider it done! Oh, and I took the liberty of sending the coordinates of this place to the Chimaeric Demons. I think that stealing all the goodies here will help a lot and will for sure make the blackguards furious.>

<Well done,> Erik said. <But tell them to be fast though—once the blackguards catch wind of this place's destruction, they'll come snooping around like bloodhounds on a fresh trail.>

The biological supercomputer mentally nodded.

<Right now, focus on getting that virus ready. The more we can disrupt their command structure, the better our chances of bringing this war to a swift end.>

<Aye-aye, captain! One incredibly disruptive digital doomsday device, nearly ready to unleash upon our unsuspecting foes!>

After a while, the biological supercomputer mentally turned to Erik. <I'm done. The virus is on, but it will take some time before it will spread through the enemy systems. I made it so it will send information to the Chimaeric Demons autonomously, and I already sent a communication to them saying it was you.>

<All right then.>

<While we're at it, maybe we should leave a little surprise for the blackguards when they come back. Like, I dunno, a whoopee cushion on every chair? Just to lighten the mood, y'know?>

Erik shook his head, a faint smile tugging at his lips. <Let's focus on winning the war and do stupid as shit later. Then we can talk about pranks.>

<Fine, I'll save my comedic genius for another day.>

At that, Erik left the office. He needed to go to the others, but officially, their job there was done. Now they could focus on heading to Hin, but there was something else that had to be done soon.

<I still have to steal a ship.> Erik thought about the Chimaeric Demon's eggs he made before leaving New Alexandria. They should hatch in a couple of days, then it would take some time for the Chimaeric Demons to mature. But it wouldn't take as long as it did in the past.

<Based on my estimations, they should mature right when we arrive at the shores.>

<Let's just hope that when they mature, they won't be like horny teenagers,> the biological supercomputer said.

Chapter 1023: Beach Bums and Battle Plans

A month had passed since Erik and his companions left the blackguards' crossroads outpost. The spoils they gained from the outpost were a lot, and everyone in Frant benefitted from them.

Of course, as soon as the blackguards found out the outpost fell, they sent troops there, but the Chimaeric Demons arrived there faster. Not only did they ransacked the place, but they also sprung a trap, blowing up the outpost as soon as all the enemy troops were in it.

It was clear; the war was becoming hell for the enemy coalition, but they were still much more than Frant's troop, and they showed no sign of wanting to retreat from the country.

As for what Frant got from there, it was a lot. Everything was brought to the front lines, which received a significant boost in their arsenal with an influx of advanced vehicles, weapons, and armor.

Of course, all of them were powered by brain crystals. The Chimaeric Demons left that place bare. Erik and the others didn't stop there, though. The young man planted the Luminara serpentis along the eastern side of Frant, on their side of the front lines.

Most of the monsters from the Eldraith Mountain Range were no longer descending into the lower regions. Theirs, of course. It was another story for the enemy side of the front lines, and without the outpost, it became much harder for Hin, Etrium, and the blackguards to respond to thaids' threats.

The blackguards, in fact, faced constant threats from monster attacks, especially because the Luminara serpentis Erik grew around, funnelled them to their territory. That made their supply lines vulnerable and their operations more difficult to sustain.

Regardless, with those supplies, weapons, vehicles, and armor, Frant got one single important thing: schematics.

These were quickly sent to Jabir and all the relevant people in Frant. However, Erik's base of operation quickly became a central place for Frant's war effort. It was to the point that Liberty Watch City was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of work they had to complete.

The blueprints covered a wide range of technologies; most Frant had, but Jabir didn't.

These ranged from cutting-edge vehicles to innovative weapons. Some schematics were to make some kind of brain crystal powered parts, which Jabir and the others, as much as Erik got told, tried to replicate and even improve.

Erik was happy because this new knowledge could change not just his forces but the whole nation of Frant. The idea of getting back at Etrium, the mercenary guild, and all the fuckers who went against him made him feel good.

It also represented a significant leap forward in their technological capabilities; it was going to open a lot of possibilities for Frant in the future.

However, the process of turning these schematics into tangible assets was not without problems.

Building the advanced equipment required specialized materials, intricate manufacturing processes, and skilled technicians.

The difficulty and scope of the work meant that development would be slow; Erik and the others were doubtful that all the designs could be mass-produced in a not too distant future. But at least everyone got what they stole from the outpost, and that weren't just two or three things.

Regardless, Erik and his group had been trekking over challenging terrain all month long. While his clones made it easier, Erik couldn't help but feel like his butt had been used as a drum in a rock band with all the bumps and jolts.

When he told this to the others, they burst out laughing. It looked like Erik missed the double meaning behind his words.

After some brief stops, they went through traversing deep forests, where most of the sunlight had trouble penetrating the canopy, and where the undergrowth slowed down even the Chimaeric Demons.

<It would have been simpler if we could simply fly to Hin.>

But that would be like calling the blackguards and saying he was headed there, so he couldn't use that convenient way of travelling.

That made them climb little hills. Rocky paths tested the clone's stamina, and narrow, dangerous mountain paths called for every bit of their focus.

Rivers and streams had to be crossed, but the temperatures of the winter made the temperature drop, which caused a fleeting but painful experience, especially for the clones.

At last, the incredible view of the sea yawning out to the horizon greeted them. The group was currently climbing the last mountaintop, separating them from the salty waters.

This was significant for Erik and his friends. Having spent their lives confined within the boundaries of cities, at best traveling through forest landscapes, they had never laid eyes on the ocean.

Whipped against their faces, the salty breeze smelled of adventure and the unknown, but the dangers lurking within were well known to the group, at least in theory.

There was still much they didn't know about the thaids that dwelled into the ancient and deep waters, something they had to take into account if they wanted to traverse the ocean, at least unseen.

However, their initial sense of wonder gave way to unease as they saw what lay in front of the ocean, just below the small hill from which they were spying the shores.

There was a port below, and it was a hive of activity, with heavily armed ships coming and going in a constant stream.

<Damn, there are hundreds of them...> The ships ranged from sleek, fast-attack ones to massive ones meant for troop transports. However, they were all bristling with weaponry and emblazoned with the insignia of the enemy forces, Hin.

Etrium didn't need to take ships to reach Frant, so, here, most of the enemies were from the island country founded by the blackguards.

The group observed as platoons of troops marched in perfect formation, their boots hammering against the worn-out timber docks.

Rumbling along the coast, armored vehicles kicked up dust clouds as they moved into line. The sound of engines and the barking of commands could be heard from that far.

Erik's brow furrowed.

<This won't be simple.>

At the port, the enemy army concentration was shockingly high—far higher than anything they had seen prior. For sure it was bigger than in the outpost.

The ships were fortresses on the sea, armed with a variety of weapons that could readily destroy any resistance, not only delivering troops.

The port was obviously a vital center for the enemy's operations, since it was the place from where they came into Frant from their island country. Of course, this port wasn't the only one.

The group exchanged uneasy glances.

They knew that infiltrating the place would be risky, at least for Amber and the others. But it would be on Erik to find a way to do so, and he had the means. The reason was simple.

Erik turned around. Behind him stood Mira, Emily, June, Amber, and 53 Chimaeric Demons—his clones. These hatched months ago and matured completely just recently.

They were powerful. Right now, they were the most powerful ones Erik had so far, because they were the most recent.

Since they all had the ability to transform into any living creature they wanted, including humans, stealing a ship would not be a hard task for them.

Chapter 1024: Teasing the Architect

"Alright, here's the plan," Erik said. "The Chimaeric Demons and I can shapeshift into insects and get into the ship. We wouldn't need to do anything to get a free ride."

Amber frowned. That was true for him and the Chimaeric Demons. "But what about us?" she asked, gesturing to herself, Mira, and Emily. "We can't exactly shapeshift like you can. How are we supposed to get on board without being noticed?"

Erik ran a hand through his hair. "You're right, that's going to be a problem. Even if we steal a ship, sneaking you three on board won't be as simple as in our case."

June stepped forward. "We should stick to our original plan, master. We take the place of the crew and then hide Amber, Mira, and Emily inside supply crates. That way, we can bring them on board without arousing suspicion."

Erik nodded. "Yeah. I wasn't suggesting a change of plan, just stating the current situation. Anyway, we'll need to be careful. I'm sure controls over what gets up and down the ship will be strict."

Mira cleared her throat. "There's another problem we need to consider," she said. "None of us know how to operate a ship, let alone one of those military vessels. Even if we get on board, we won't know what to do next."

Mira was correct, but he had already found a solution. "The biological supercomputer will help with this process. Since I went inside the enemy's system, I have access to their entire information network. I can get the information we need on how to operate the ship and use their weapons. I just need to access a computer, and the job is done."

The others exchanged glances. "Are you sure?" Emily asked. "The clones won't know how to do it," Emily said.

"You will spend days explaining everything to them. I don't think it will be easy."

Erik shook his head. "I am. The Chimaeric Demons learn fast and remember almost everything that happened to them. I don't think learning how to control the ship will be a problem for them."

"There is also the issue of the other ships allowing us to escape," June said. "I doubt they won't find out what is happening," June said.

"That's why we need to do something about that. I will make another virus. It will help us escape."

Indeed, the virus Erik told the system to spread into the enemy information network months ago was helping a lot with the war effort.

They had to be careful not to let them discover what they had done, or else they could exploit this information for their benefit.

"All we need to do is figure out which ship to target and whose identities to steal. However, we'll need to gather more information before we make our move. We can't afford to choose the wrong ship or crew. I'll have the supercomputer scan their systems and gather intel on the different ships and their crew manifest. Once we have that information, we can choose our target and make our move."

The group fell silent, each of them lost in their own thoughts. "Let's make camp for now," Amber said.

It was her turn with Erik that night. But the only thing the young man could do was sigh, because he knew he had to prepare accommodation for almost 60 people.

Erik rose, scanning the cove where they would camp. His boots crunched as he walked to its center.

He closed his eyes and channeled mana, connecting to the plants and vegetation around them.

Erik took a deep breath and visualized the shelters. He imagined sturdy domes made from the surrounding trees' branches and vines. He imagined soft, moss-covered floors for sleeping and thick, leaf-covered walls to block wind and rain.

His concentration made the surrounding plants respond.

Vines emerged from the undergrowth and twisted. As branches bent and curved, shelter skeletons formed, and leaves and moss grew from the ground, covering floors and walls in a soft, green carpet.

Within minutes, a small village had formed around them.

The village blended with its surroundings. Each building was constructed from intertwined vines and branches to create strong but hidden structures.

Thick with moss and leaves insulated the walls of the shelters and virtually made them invisible to outsiders.

A pleasant spot to relax was the soft, moss-covered flooring. From above, the village appeared to be a thicket, the ideal hideout in a jungle like that.

"Master, your abilities never cease to amaze me," June said.

Erik smiled, appreciating the praise. However, the moment was short-lived as Amber, Emily, and Mira looked at Erik with eyes full of mischief.

"Look who's showing off again. Erik, the outstanding shelter master!"

"I bet you're just trying to impress us with your fancy plant powers." Mira said.

Emily couldn't help but giggle. "I don't know, Mira. Maybe he's just trying to make sure we have a comfortable place to sleep tonight. After all, he wouldn't want to face our wrath if we woke up with sore backs and bug bites."

Erik rolled his eyes, feigning annoyance, but he couldn't suppress the smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"Alright, alright, you've had your fun. I just wanted to make sure everyone had a decent place to rest before we embark. It might be the last time we will sleep eight hours, and I wanted it as comfortable as possible."

"We know, Erik. And we appreciate it, really. I guess we just can't resist teasing you a bit. It's not every day we get to see the great Erik Romano playing architect."

Erik chuckled. "I suppose I should be flattered."

As the group settled into their shelters, the playful banter continued.

Later that night, as he lay in his shelter with Amber curled up beside him, Erik's mind drifted to the challenges they would face in the coming days.

Erik wondered how dangerous the sea journey was, where the blackguards were, their base, and what they were doing on Mur.

The sea was treacherous, with unpredictable weather and the constant threat of enemy ships patrolling the waters and thaids potentially attacking.

Erik needed to find a way to neutralize these threats before they could become a problem for them.

Chapter 1025: Operation Buzz and Boom

Erik, June, and the Chimaeric Demons crouched in the bushes. Their eyes were on the enemy docks below.

The group was ready to spring into action. The plan was to infiltrate the area and steal a warship.

That was their ticket to crossing the sea and reach Hin, where the blackguards had their base.

However, before they could make their move, three critical tasks needed to be completed, of which Erik had to take care of two.

First, they had to gain the information needed to operate the warship and use its advanced defense systems. Without this knowledge, even if they stole the vessel, they would be rendered helpless in the open waters.

Sure, there was always the chance for the Chimaeric Demons shapeshifting into some kind of sea thaid. But that was if their ship didn't get ripped open by one of them before they could do so.

Erik knew nothing about fighting in open water. Damn, he knew nothing about fighting in water at all. This meant the Chimaeric Demons were in the same situation, and that was problematic, almost in the same way of them having to cross the ocean from the sky, where they could be easily spotted by the enemy, and that was if flying thaids didn't spot them first.

There was a limit to what Erik could do against them, especially if they were as strong as the bird that made its nest on the Eldraith mountain range.

Second, and equally crucial, was the need to sabotage the enemy's communication system. By disrupting their communication system, the group could prevent the enemy from alerting other ships at sea and coordinating an attack against them.

That needed to be done with a different virus, and that was because, if they first got found out, they would lose a great advantage.

Besides, Erik planned on planting just a local virus so that the enemy wouldn't suspect there was another one in their general system.

Both of these tasks had to be made by Erik. The first was simple, since the young man just had to inject this information into his brain.

The second was slightly harder, or, to be correct, longer. Erik made the system create a virus that would control these whole docks.

This would prevent the usage of any device and prevent Hinian troops from sending information about the stolen ship to the others.

The last and third task they had to accomplish, the one the Chimaeric Demons were in charge of, was to ensure the ships currently docked at the harbor were destroyed or rendered unusable, preventing immediate chase. All of this was aside from the central task, which was to steal one of the ships.

Everyone was waiting for Erik's orders.

With a nod from Erik, the group closed their eyes and focused their mana, channeling it through their neural links.

In a matter of seconds, their bodies shrank, their shapes morphing into those of small, inconspicuous flies.

Erik and June took to the air, buzzing towards the command center, while the Chimaeric Demons spread out.

<Remember, everyone, team A needs to wait for my signal before destroying the other ships. Also, team B must take control of the target ship as soon as possible. Turn into the enemy, leave the corpses hidden; we will take care of them once we are out in the open sea. Is everything clear?>

<Yes, Master.>

As they flew, Erik and June navigated through the docks' sky, their wings propelling them forward with surprising speed.

They went past guards, unnoticed, also thanks to the bustle of the docks. The command center stood ahead.

Meanwhile, the Chimaeric Demons zipped around, heading towards their targets. Some headed for the fuel barrels that were being loaded onto the ships, while others sought the ships' engines, aiming to disable them from within.

The Chimaeric Demons landed on the ships' decks, scurrying into crevices and vents, searching for something they could exploit.

Once inside, they prepared and waited for Erik's signal.

Erik and June approached the command center. They flew through an open window, and inside, they were greeted by the sight of many officers and soldiers hunched over consoles and screens displaying various data streams.

<It looks like they are busy.>

<Yes, master. I think Becker did something big, based on how they are reacting to the situation.>

<Then that's good. I can't wait for these fuckers to leave Frant. I think I will do something about it once we reach Hin.>

<What were you thinking? If I may ask, of course.>

<Didn't you do it already?>

<Yes. Sorry, Master.>

Erik took the equivalent of a mental sigh. <I was thinking of replacing their leaders with Chimaeric Demons. I'm curious to know what the blackguards will think once they see their allies retreating. >

<If we really are going to do this, shouldn't we do the same with the other countries?>

<Yeah... For sure they work with the blackguards, but since they hadn't sent troops here, which I think is something they will do in the near future, I didn't think it was necessary. However, if we want to reclaim the Mur continent, we can't do this alone... Besides, I want to make sure that Liberty... No, Frant... is protected against these fuckers. >

Erik remained silent for a second.

<I think humanity needs to unite... June. We don't know what will be on the Mur continent... Maybe... Maybe I won't be strong enough for what's coming... >

<We will be ready... Master.>

Navigating through the room, Erik and June arrived at the main computer terminal. Erik could get access from any computer, but most were already occupied. This was the only free one.

They landed on the keyboard, their compact forms dwarfed by the keys.

<Keep your eyes open, June.>

<Yes, master.>

It was at that moment that Erik mentally turned to the biological supercomputer.

<When you want.>

<Yes.>

The AI immediately connected to the device and started sending and receiving the data. Some time passed.

<Are you done yet?>

<Yes, it's just that these guys increased security.>

<Any idea why?>

<Not really; it is not specified anywhere in the data I already have access to. However, I think it might be because they learned you can access their computers, or maybe they simply fear hacking attacks. Regardless, the defense system here is much more sophisticated than usual.>

A couple minutes more passed, and finally, the biological supercomputer got access to the files.

<I'm done.>

As the AI downloaded the data and injected them into Erik's brain, the AI uploaded the virus it had prepared beforehand.

That was going to be controlled by the biological supercomputer until they were within the docks' space.

The malicious code wormed its way through the enemy's systems, latching onto every single device there. Erik wanted the biological supercomputer to be through and leave nothing to chance.

<I'm done. When you want, we can leave.>

<Yes. Just give me a moment to see if the Chimaeric Demons are done with their preparations.>

Erik closed his compound eyes, or at least did something that was equivalent to that, and activated his instability brain crystal power.

Instantly, his mind expanded, reaching out through mana to search for his clones' minds. His consciousness connected with theirs, each clone's thoughts and status becoming clear to him.

<Are you done?>

<Master, we are ready. Everything is set.>

<We are waiting for your signal.>

<What about Amber and the others?>

<The crates with Amber, Mira, and Emily have been brought inside the ship. They are safe and ready for transport.>

<Has the ship been taken?>

<Yes, sir, but not all the crew had been slain. We will act as soon as you order. The ship is ready for departure.>

<Excellent work, everyone.>

Erik and June left the command center and headed for the ship. Soon after, they arrived on top of the deck.

Erik was thinking about the plan. He was still in time to stop everything.

The best thing would have been to steal the ship when it was already crossing the sea; the problem was that this was a tremendous opportunity to destroy the enemy fleet, or at least part of it.

Destroying so many ships was going to create huge trouble for Hin and help Frant's forces. Reinforces would be able to only come from Etrium, and that would not be as fast as with a ship since the mercenaries needed to come here on foot.

In the end, he decided the best thing to do would be to go on with the plan.

<Turn the ship engine on.>

The vessel moved on the water.

<Destroy everything. System, activate the virus.>

Multiple explosions then rang out in the area, shattering the stillness. The blasts echoed through the docks, causing confusion and even panic among the enemy soldiers.

People scrambled for cover, unsure of where the next explosion might occur. The air was thick with smoke and the smell of burning materials, making it difficult to breathe.

Emergency services were quickly dispatched to the scene, but the situation remained tense and dangerous.

Chapter 1026: Chaos at the Docks

As the command to destroy everything echoed through the minds of the Chimaeric Demons, a series of powerful explosions rocked the enemy docks.

The peaceful harbor quickly descended into chaos. The destruction was rampant. Boats were thrown around, and the calm waters became violent.

The soldiers ran in all directions, shouting and trying to understand what was happening. It was clear this was an attack, but from where it came, who was making it? It was all unclear.

The fuel barrels had been blown up by the Chimaeric Demons, who left the area unscathed. That, of course, set off a devastating chain reaction.

Fireballs erupted from the ships, engulfing them in flames and sending thick plumes of black smoke billowing into the sky. The intense heat from the blasts destroyed part of the metal hulls and twisted some other parts into grotesque shapes as the ships sank into the churning waters below.

On the docks, enemy soldiers scrambled in confusion and panic. Alarms blared, adding to the already deafening sounds of the explosions and the shouts of the bewildered troops.

Some soldiers rushed towards the burning ships, desperate to save their comrades trapped on board, while others ran for cover, their instincts for self-preservation taking over.

The virus unleashed by Erik and the biological supercomputer wreaked havoc on the enemy's systems. Communication devices sparked and sputtered, rendering them useless.

The screens in the command center flickered and went dark, leaving the officers unable to restore order amidst the growing chaos.

"What the fuck is happening?"

"We don't know, sir!"

"How the hell do you not know?"

"Sorry, sir!"

The ship Erik chose to steal was now under the control of the Chimaeric Demons disguised as the crew, moved towards the open sea.

The ship had to leave, regardless of what Erik and his clones did. That was why they chose that. However, the protocol asked them to stop and help, which they didn't do. That, of course, alerted the enemy soldiers.

As the Hinian troops noticed what the ship was doing, a few soldiers pointed towards the departing vessel. Confusion was on their face. If they weren't in that condition, they might have understood what was happening.

"Hey, that ship isn't stopping!" one soldier said.

"Something's wrong! That looks like one of our ships, but it's not following protocol!"

"Tell the command center! We must stop them!" a third soldier said.

A commanding officer pushed through the throng, his expression stern and demanding. "What the hell is going on? Why is that ship leaving?"

One of the soldiers turned to him, his face pale. "Sir, we don't know!"

The officer's eyes narrowed as he watched the ship gain speed. "Something isn't right here. Get me a communications link to that ship now!"

However, as they tried to tell the others the situation, and to connect with the leaving ship to understand what was happening, the vessel continued to disappear into the horizon, leaving the bewildered enemy soldiers behind.

The commanding officer's face twisted as he barked out orders to the surrounding soldiers. "Get to the remaining ships! We need to stop those guys from leaving immediately!"

The soldiers snapped into action, rushing towards the docks to board the ships that had not been destroyed in the explosions. Their feet pounded against the wooden planks, adrenaline fuelling their swift movements.

Just as the first group of soldiers reached one of the intact ships, another soldier came running towards the officer, his face drained of colour and smeared with soot. "Sir! The ships that didn't explode... they've been sabotaged!"

The officer's eyes widened. "What do you mean, sabotaged?"

"The engines, sir! They're completely wrecked. Someone tampered with them. We can't give chase—we're sitting ducks!"

A silence followed the soldier's report.

The realization dawned on the officer and the surrounding troops. This was no mere accident; it was a planned and coordinated attack.

A mixture of rage and astonishment twisted the officer's face. The soldiers were in a similar state of mind.

Some of the soldiers stood frozen, their eyes wide as they took in the devastation, and understood it could have been them on those ships right now. It looked like they just escaped death by pure luck.

The acrid smell of smoke and burning fuel filled their nostrils, giving them a feeling of disgust.

The officer's expression hardened as he looked around—the burning ships, the panicked soldiers, and the wrecked engines.

"Everyone, be on high alert!" he said, rallying his troops. "We need to secure the area and figure out how deep this sabotage goes. This isn't over yet."

In the meantime, Erik's ship navigated through the waters, its engines roaring as it gained speed. The flames from the burning ships could be seen from afar, the smoke rising into the sky like some kind of black monster. They could see the enemy soldiers on the docks scrambling to contain the fires and assess the damage.

On the deck of the stolen ship, Erik and June watched. As they put distance between themselves and the ravaged docks, the screams of the enemy soldiers and the sounds of the explosions became fainter. The smell of smoke could be smelled even from there, but it was starting to grow fainter.

The stolen ship continued its steady progress, cutting through the waves as it headed towards the open sea.

Inside the crates, Amber, Mira, and Emily remained hidden.

Erik closed his eyes, his mind reaching out to the biological supercomputer. <Is the virus still active? Are we in control of their systems?>

<Yes,> the AI said. <The virus has successfully infiltrated their networks, and we have complete control over the docks' communication and defence systems. They won't be able to coordinate a pursuit or alert other ships to our presence, nor will they be able to use their cannons to sink us.>

Erik nodded, a sense of satisfaction washing over him. The plan worked. Not that he had any doubts about that.

The glow of the flames faded, replaced by the sight of the open sea. The wind whipped through Erik's hair, carrying with it the scent of salt.

Erik glanced at June, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "We did it," he said. "Tell Amber and the others to get out of the crates. We can't make them stay there until we arrive."

"Yes, Master."

Chapter 1027: Thaid's and Tides

With the enemy harbour engulfed in chaos and flames behind them, Erik and his group found themselves aboard the stolen warship's deck.

For everyone on board, being at sea felt strange. None of them had been on a ship before this week, or seen the wide ocean before, unless it was in a picture, and the experience was clearly different.

The endless horizon and the moving waves were both amazing and confusing, but for sure scary. Not because of how dangerous the waves were, or could be, but because of what lurked deep within them.

Not much was known about the sea and its inhabitants. People said that the thaids living within it were weaker, but that depended on the definition of weak. When comparing the sea thaids, to the flying ones, people generally feared the latter more, but that was because they were fast, and most importantly, they were harder to kill because they were in the sky.

That didn't mean they were weaker. It could be that fighting against them was just simpler.

Erik wasn't keen on trusting other people's words, because every time he did it, he got problems.

The initial euphoria of their successful takeover gave way to the realization that operating the ship would not be simple.

When Erik left the harbor, there wasn't much to do. Since he was on the steering wheel, he did most of the job, aside from the Chimaeric Demons undocking the ship itself. Most of the other stuff was automated, anyway. But now that they were going to travel, he couldn't do so indefinitely.

He needed to rest, like everyone else, and the ship had defensive weapons that had to be manned.

As the ship cut through the waves, Erik gathered his crew in the pilot's cabin. He left the steering wheel to June, after he explained to him how to control the vessel.

However, Erik didn't go on deck, because June never drove a ship, and Erik needed to be there in case problems arose. Hence why he called everyone in the pilot's cabin.

"Alright, everyone," Erik said. "I know this is unfamiliar territory for all of us, but we need to adapt quickly. This warship is equipped with advanced systems and weapons, and each of you will have to learn how to use them. We also need to learn how to move the ship, just in case something bad happens. The best thing would be to be sure there is always a pilot around."

He turned to June. "June, you'll be our navigator. If you want, or don't trust the systems, you can turn into a flying thaid to see how the situation in front of us is. There is something else you also need to do. You must choose some of the Chimaeric Demons to help you with this task. You must chart our course, monitor weather patterns, and ensure we stay on track.

The navigation systems are highly sophisticated, but see things first hand will still be better than relying on systems that might fail us anytime. Regardless, I'll guide you through them. All of you also pay attention."

June nodded. "I won't let you down, Master."

Erik then turned to the Chimaeric Demons. "You'll maintain the ship's various systems—propulsion, weapons, and defensive measures. I'll provide you with the knowledge to keep everything running smoothly."

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Erik spent the next few hours familiarizing the crew with the ship's intricate controls and mechanisms.

He shared his knowledge of the enemy's technology, explaining the functions of each console and instrument. The crew listened, not having trouble remembering everything. Yet Erik might have forgotten to say something.

As the training session concluded, Erik turned to June to plot their course to Hin. They didn't really have to do much; they needed to head north. Though there were many dangerous currents in this part of the sea, and thaids littered it.

The problem was that they couldn't stop the ship since the blackguards might find a way to chase them. Erik was sure the communication devices at the docks were still malfunctioning, but the blackguards, and even Hin, would not let this stop them.

They needed to explain what happened to the others and, since the communication system didn't work, they were likely going to send a team to some outpost to share the news with the rest of the army.

As Erik and June got around the navigation console, studying the holographic charts and maps while considering various routes, they tried to understand how to avoid the thaids the ship had information about.

The sea creatures were a tremendous problem, and they could easily sink the warship if they caught it off guard.

"According to the intelligence I gathered from the enemy systems, Hin's troops have encountered some seriously dangerous thaids in these waters," Erik said, pointing at this part of the map. "They've marked them on their maps as a warning to their own ships."

June leaned in closer. "What kind of thaids are we talking about here, Master?"

Erik swiped his hand across the display, bringing up detailed profiles of the creatures.

"First, there is a weird thaid they didn't know about. It looked like it appeared just recently."

"Meaning after the blackguards went on, Mur."

"Yes. They called it Leviathan Serpent," he said, pointing to an image of a massive, serpentine creature.

"Based on the few encounters Hin's fleets had with the creature, it looks like it wraps itself around ships and crushes them like tin cans. This thing doesn't even need to use its brain crystal power given how big it is.

As much as Hin's troops wrote in the reports, it looks like its scales are as tough as Larnox ore. You can understand how hard those scales are. Hin thinks this comes from the Mur continent's area."

"That's not something we want to tangle with," June said.

Erik nodded and moved on to the next profile. "Then there's the Shadowmaw Behemoth," he said, gesturing to a monstrous cephalopod with tentacles.

"It apparently lurks in the depths, waiting for ships to pass overhead. When it strikes, it wraps its tentacles around the ship and drags it down. It's similar to the Leviathan Serpent in this regard, but the creature isn't as big."

"It clearly has many more ways to grab a ship, given the tentacles."

"Indeed. Hin said the creature is not as dangerous as the Leviathan Serpent, though. Regardless, we'll need to steer well clear of its hunting grounds," Erik said.

For a second, there was silence. The fact that Hin marked two spots as dangerous because of two creatures was bad. The problem was, there weren't only two places with these titanic thaids around. There was one more that Hin was aware of.

"That's not all," Erik said. June's eyes fell.

"There's also the Skylance Harpy." Erik pointed to an image of a sleek, winged creature. "It may not look as imposing as the others, but it's incredibly fast. It's also snatched crew members right off the deck and carried them away. The problem is, that this is a flying thaid.

Based on Hin's intelligence, it should have its nest in an island nearby, but there are several of them in that area, and Hin wasn't keen on getting close enough to learn where the nest was. This makes the monster more problematic for us."

"Master, these thaids... they sound like they are too powerful."

Erik nodded. "That's why Hin's troops have marked them on their maps. Even their own ships aren't equipped to handle these monsters, and as much as how strong they depict them, I'm not even sure the Chimaeric Demons can fight them. We're going to have to navigate around their territories as best we can."

"I wasn't talking about that..."

"Ah... Right, you are saying that you think these monsters come from Mur?"

"Yes, master. Based on what we knew of the sea thaids, they shouldn't be this powerful."

"Don't trust other people's words," Erik said. "The sea thaids people were used to, might just be the tip of the iceberg. What if they were the ones who escaped the depth from the thaids that lurk there?"

"Yeah. It would be we underestimated how dangerous sea thaids are."

"Exactly. That's not something I want to do. For now, we will consider sea thaids more dangerous of the flying ones."

"All right, master."

June studied the map. "It won't be easy to avoid these guys, though. They seem to be scattered across key chokepoints and shipping lanes. We'll have to take a more circuitous route to avoid them."

"It'll add time to our journey," Erik said, acknowledging the problem, "but it's a necessary precaution. We can't risk a direct confrontation, especially not with our limited experience in naval combat."

"But we also can't afford to take too long a detour. If we waste too much time, Hin might tell about the stolen ship to the rest of the army. We might find ourselves not only faring against the thaids, but even against humans," June said.

"I know that."

June gave a look at the map again. It looked like he got an idea.

"What about this route?" the clone pointed to a sort of narrow corridor between two of the thaids' areas. "It's riskier, and the currents are strong, but it would save us a lot of time, while allowing us to avoid the thaids."

Chapter 1028: High Waves, Higher Stakes (1)

The narrow corridor between the two thaids was undoubtedly risky, since the monsters might stray from their areas and end up on their ship, but it could save them a lot of time, especially considering they had to waste some other just to avoid the monsters.

"It's a gamble," Erik said with furrowed brows. "But it might be our best shot. The currents will also make it harder for us, but they should be able to make it through."

June nodded. "I'll make sure we're prepared, Master. We'll have the crew on high alert and ready for anything."

Erik clasped June's shoulder. After the two exchanged determined glances, Erik stifled a yawn, the exhaustion of the day's events catching up with him.

"I need to go rest for a bit. Keep a steady course and notify me immediately if anything changes."

"Yes, Master," June said, turning his attention back to the navigation console. "Get some rest. We'll hold the fort."

Erik left the room. As he stepped out onto the deck, the salty sea breeze whipped through his hair, and the ocean appeared in front of him in all his endlessness.

He spotted Mira, Emily, and Amber leaning against the railing. They were looking at the sea with faces full of awe and fear. Erik approached them.

"Quite a sight, isn't it?" The man leaned on the railing and stood beside them. "I never thought I'd see the ocean."

Mira nodded. "It's both beautiful and terrifying."

She paused, as she was recalling something from her past.

"I've heard stories about the sea thaids. My parents warned me about them. Dad said they weren't as strong as the flying thaids, but they were many more. The ocean is big, after all. Fighting on land is one thing, but out here... it feels like we're at the mercy of whatever creatures call the sea home."

"Wasn't your father a hunter?"

"He was," Mira said. "But he has friends; many of them were or still are mercenaries, so, you know how it is. We talk a lot."

"Listen," he said to the three women, knowing how they felt in a situation where the best thing one could feel was helpless.

He lived with that feeling for most of his life, so he knew how terrifying it might look to the three girls to be somewhere where everything could kill you like that.

"I know this is unfamiliar territory for all of us, but we have the Chimaeric Demons, and I'm here, too."

Erik paused. "Besides, I'm going to make more clones, just in case. We'll have a stronger force, more people who can fight if things take a turn for the worse. Don't worry, because I will make sure we reach Hin without problems."

"You really think that will help?" Emily asked.

"You should know this better than me. Aren't you the one who can see the future?"

That seemingly made Emily calm.

Amber managed a small smile. "Go take a look at the future," she said to her friend. "It will make all of us feel better."

"All right..."

"Do it later, and go get some rest now," Erik said. "It will clear your mind and give you some peace."

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The warship pitched and rolled, its metal hull groaning under the strain of the sea.

Even the Chimaeric Demons struggled to maintain their footing, gripping onto handrails and consoles as the ship was tossed about like a plaything.

"Curse this blasted weather!" The howling wind almost covered the clone's voice.

Another Chimaeric Demon nodded in agreement. "I've never seen waves this high. Well, I've never seen a wave to begin with."

"Stop complaining, guys! We should be able to handle anything this storm throws at us. We are fighting a war. What can the sea do to us?"

"It's not the sea that is making me anxious," the Chimaeric Demon said. The others nodded. Flying thaids, land thaids of all kinds. They killed them all. Sea thaids, though, were something completely new.

There was silence for some time, only broken by the sound of the waves hitting the ship and the winds howling.

"You know, as much as I hate this storm, I have to admit, it's kind of exhilarating," a Chimaeric Demon said.

The Chimaeric Demons kept the ship's weapons ready; the barrels of the cannons and the muzzles of the guns pointed towards the churning waves.

The storm raged on around them; the wind whipping the sea into a frenzy of white-capped swells and crashing waves.

However, one of the Chimaeric Demons spotted something moving in the water. As it drew closer to the ship, its form became clearer.

"There's something out there!" a Chimaeric Demon said. "Something big, and it's heading straight for us!"

Another one of Erik's clones rushed to the rail, his eyes straining to make out the approaching shape.

"Sound the alarm! We've got company, and it doesn't look friendly!"

The piercing wail of the alarm cut through the storm, alerting the rest of the crew to the approaching danger.

Erik came on deck and checked the surroundings. "What did you see?" he asked, his eyes scanning the waters for any sign of the monster.

"I didn't see it well, Master," The Chimaeric demon said. "But I'm confident that something is approaching the ship. It's big, and it's moving fast. The waves and the storm made it hard to get a good look, but I know it's out there."

Erik's face hardened. The sea was full of thaids; it was easy to be attacked in this place. Usually, Hin's ships crossed the sea in a fleet, so being alone here wasn't the best situation.

Though, while Hin had a fleet, they didn't have the Chimaeric Demons.

"Alright, everyone, listen up!" Erik said, his voice cutting through the howling wind.

"Man the weapons! Those who can't must prepare to use their brain crystal powers. We need to be ready for whatever is coming our way. We don't know what we're dealing with yet, but we have to be prepared for the worst."

The Chimaeric Demons sprang into action, rushing to their positions. The barrels of the cannons and the muzzles of the guns were pointed towards the churning sea.

Erik moved to the edge of the deck. "Stay alert," he said.

Chapter 1029: High Waves, Higher Stakes (2)

Water cascaded off its scales as it briefly rose to the surface to attack. But even just that tiny part of the monster's back dwarfed even the tallest masts.

Chaos erupted on deck as the creature's sudden appearance troubled the Chimaeric Demons.

They, Erik, Mira, Amber, and Emily, never fought something like this, so they didn't even know what the best thing to do was.

"Attack!"

The ship's artillery flared, and with it, the attacks sent by the Chimaeric Demons.

However, the starlight fire brain crystal power Erik got from the Luminaclaw bear wasn't enough to kill the monster, even with the stars shining so brightly.

That must have been because the beast was within the water, and fire was useless against the monster within it.

As for the ship's weapons, it looked like the beast was used to them and avoided the attacks relatively easily.

"Fuck!"

Erik stood his ground, eyes locked on the beast before them. However, the creature disappeared again beneath the turbulent waves. For a second at least, because then, a vast chasm appeared in the water.

It wasn't because of the water itself, but for the creature's gaping maw, full of razor-sharp teeth, which opened and tried to bite at the ship.

The thaid's scales under the water shimmered with an array of blues and greens. It would have been beautiful if those lights weren't made by a thaid so big.

"Brace yourselves!" Erik said. "Aim for its eyes and gills! Don't let it get a grip on the ship!"

The sea thaid let out an ear-splitting roar that shook the very air around them. It lunged forward, jaws snapping at the nearest portion of the ship. The ship resisted, but it got a huge indentation on its hull, and where the teeth landed, some holes appeared.

"Fuck! If we go on like this, we won't reach Hin if not by flying."

Erik and the crew would not die, that was for sure, but the ship served its purpose.

For starters, whatever the blackguards were doing in Mur meant they might end up meeting some flying thaids from that accursed place, and at that point, Erik could do nothing.

The second problem was that flying thaids could be easily seen from the shores, and if that was true, it meant Erik and the Chimaeric Demons would be in the same situation.

The third and last problem was that Erik didn't want the enemy to learn he went to Hin, and going there, on top of flying thaids, or better, his clones turned into them, would make that pretty obvious.

While that a ship had been stolen might have been clear to Hin, at least to those who were at the docks, if one of them arrived at Hin's shore, that wouldn't mean that was the ship in question.

So, there would be some moments while the enemy tried to understand where this ship had come from, in which Erik could act. Those precious moments could make the difference in an eventual battle.

Amber and Emily huddled together near the stern, their eyes wide with terror. Mira stood protectively in front of them; she was used to such situations much more than them.

"Didn't they say that sea thaids were weaker than flying ones?" The woman said.

"That's it if they don't come from the waters surrounding the Mur continent!" Erik said.

"Then does this thing come from there?"

"I don't know!"

The Chimaeric Demons kept firing at the monster. Bullets and energy blasts peppered the thaid's scales, but most seemed to glance off them.

Somehow, though, it looked like one of the attacks made it leave its grip on the ship.

"Can any of you copy this creature's form? If the ship sinks, we might need to copy it to traverse the sea."

"We will try, master!"

Erik's mind raced as he assessed the situation. The thaid's size and strength were too much for an average sea thaid, at least based on what people said, but there had to be a weakness.

He noticed the creature flinched when shots came close to its eyes and its gills.

<June!> Erik called out.

<Change course, and try to keep your distance! Push the ship's engines to the max!>

June nodded. The ship turned and tried to get its distance from the creature.

Erik turned to the nearest group of Chimaeric Demons.

"Concentrate your fire on its eyes! If we are lucky enough, we might make it retreat, or even better, blind it!"

The air crackled with energy as the Chimaeric Demons unleashed a barrage of attacks.

Beams of light and fire flashed in the night, converging on the thaid's face.

But the creature was used to such attacks, which weren't even that powerful given the pitiful amount of mana the clones had right now.

The sea thaid dove beneath the waves, its massive body disappearing into the murky depths. An eerie silence fell over the ship, broken only by the howling wind and crashing waves.

"Where did it go?" Mira's voice trembled as she spoke.

Erik scanned the sea, searching for any sign of the monster. "Stay alert! It could surface anywhere! Call me when it does!"

The ship creaked and groaned, the damage to its hull clear in the way it listed to one side. Water sloshed across the deck as waves broke over the railings.

Suddenly, the thaid erupted from the water on the port side, its massive body jumping from the water like a shark hunting a seal.

Droplets of seawater rained down on the crew as the creature blotted out the stormy sky and jumped to the other side of the ship. The beast miscalculated the jump.

"Did you see it?" Many Chimaeric Demons did, and that meant all the others would soon be able to do the same.

However, as the beast reached the waters again, an enormous wave came crashing onto the ship.

"Hold on tight!" Erik yelled, diving to the side.

The crew did, narrowly avoiding the water's crushing weight, bringing them outside the ship. However, the vessel tilted dangerously, threatening to capsize.

Erik rolled to his feet, his clothes soaked and his hair plastered to his forehead.

He saw Amber stumble, falling overboard as the deck shifted beneath her.

Without hesitation, he dashed forward, grabbing her arm and pulling her to safety.

"Thanks," Amber said, her eyes wide with fear.

Chapter 1030: High Waves, Higher Stakes (3)

"Who said they saw the beast?"

"Me sir!"

"Me too!"

"Me, sir!"

That was good. Three Chimaeric demons saw the beast. This meant that they now had the means to fight the monster.

"Two of you must turn into the creature and kill it! The thaid is strong, but I think it isn't as physically strong as you Chimaeric Demons! You shouldn't have problems with two of you."

When the clones shapeshifted into something, they kept their strength and power, and since they had very high statistics, it was clear the monster would be at a tremendous disadvantage.

"All of you," Erik said to the Chimaeric Demons. "Look at your brothers transforming! We will need more of you to shapeshift to kill further threats!"

That, and of course, the attacking monster in case things went badly.

<System!>

<Yes?>

<Analyse the monster as soon as it appears. Is that clear?>

<Yes.>

Erik wanted to do this power more often, but there was no need at that point, because there weren't many enemies able to fight him on equal terms on the Mannard continent, and analysing several

opponents, like the blackguards, who fought against him in droves, would not be simple nor useful, but for sure very stressful, since he would be overloaded by those windows.

However, Erik would go to the Mur continent after being done with Hin, and if here, thaids were already this powerful, he was sure... No; he needed to know against what he was fighting.

"June!" Erik said. "Keep the ship in this direction!"

"Yes, master!"

The Chimaeric Demons then jumped into the water.

"Don't use lights!" Erik said. If the Chimaeric Demons did, the scales of the enemy thaid would simply blind them.

The scales were releasing a lot of light, just by absorbing the faint rains reflected by the moon. Even in the darkness, those rays were enough to make the creature easy to be spotted.

Of course, during the day, it would simply blind anything that saw it, and that was precisely what Erik wanted to avoid.

As they were in the air, before touching the water, their bodies began to transform into a whale-like creature.

The transformation was swift. Each clone's body elongated and expanded, their limbs morphing into powerful flippers.

Their skin became scaly, shining with blues and greens that moved in the light just like the real monster.

Their mouths opened wide, showing many sharp teeth made to cut through tough meat. Erik could only wonder how big the other creatures were for this thing to be so big. Clearly, there must have been small ones. However, the fact he met such a large one so soon could be an indicator of what the ship was going to find often.

But speculating never helped him, because without proof, everything could be said, everything could be thought, and everything, bad and good things, could be true.

The clones hit the water, their scales catching and scattering the light in all directions. However, everyone on board saw the form they assumed, despite the lights making it difficult.

While the two Chimaeric Demons took care of the monster, the other clones on the ship assessed the damages done to the deck hull.

"Damage report!"

One of the Chimaeric Demons approached him. "The last waves breached the part of the hull that was damaged by the monster, Master. We're taking on water, but the pumps are keeping up for now."

Erik nodded. The situation was complicated. Erik didn't expect it to be like this so soon. That spoke volumes about the sea dangers, yet they were still afloat.

Erik turned his attention back to the waters. The Chimaeric Demons must have engaged right now. He was confident the Chimaeric Demons were strong enough to fight the monster, but he couldn't be sure of that if he didn't analyse the monster first.

The fact the clones saw the creature was a lucky event, because until that point, their only means of defence and attack were the ship's artillery, and those could be avoided pretty easily by the beast. But with them being able to morph into the creature now, the situation would change. Not only now, but even in future fights.

The two Chimaeric Demons plunged into the waters. Their new bodies felt alien and unwieldy. The feeling of water pressing against them was simply disorienting after a life spent on land and sometimes in the skies.

One of the Chimaeric demons thrashed his powerful tail, propelling himself through the waters. The motion came instinctively, but fine control was another matter, and he knew he needed it. He overshot in his intended direction, nearly colliding with his brother.

The other one fared a little better. He opened his mouth to communicate and was rewarded with a rush of salty water flooding his mouth.

He couldn't even make a screech. The feeling was strange, but not unpleasant. However, the weirdest thing was the fact that he could breathe while its mouth was filled with the blue liquid, if that could be called breathing to begin with.

The two clones quickly landed their eyes on their target. The sea thaid's scales glimmered as it circled back towards the ship. It hadn't noticed them yet.

The two Chimaeric Demons exchanged a glance. They knew each other very well and knew what they had to do. It couldn't be otherwise since they were Erik's clones, and an unspoken plan formed between them.

They'd flank the creature, attacking from both sides. It was a simple but overly used strategy that yet worked wonders.

The two clones moved, and that caught the sea thaid's attention. It whirled around, its eyes widening in surprise at the sight of two creatures identical to itself rushing towards it. Then, one of the Chimaeric Demons struck.

He rammed into the thaid's right side, his teeth sinking into the monster's scales. The taste of blood filled his mouth, metallic but dulled because of this strange environment.

Though that proved Erik was right, the beast was weaker than the clones. The only problem it posed was that it was within the sea waters. But that disadvantage had been erased by Erik's quick thinking. At least partially, since the clones still needed to get used to this sort of fights.

The thaid thrashed, its tail whipping around and catching at the Chimaeric Demon's side.

The impact sent the clone spinning through the water, his sense of direction all over the place. That proved something else, that the creature wasn't THAT weaker than Erik's clones, and that was a problematic surprise.

The clone flailed, trying to right himself, but his unfamiliarity with this body and the environment made the task complicated.

Meanwhile, the other clone seized the opportunity. He lunged for the thaid's gills, remembering how it had reacted when hit there earlier.

His jaws clamped down, and he felt a surge of triumph as the creature trashed in the water. The beast tried to gather some distance, but it was far from defeated.

It twisted its body and then charged toward the clone with surprising speed. The creature then must have used its brain crystal power because its scales started shimmering despite the moonlight not reaching the depth well, and it blinded the clone.

Panic set in as the Chimaeric Demon felt his newly formed ribs creaking under some sudden pressure. He thrashed, his tail beating against the thaid's body, but he couldn't break free from the beast's maws.

Its brother, having oriented himself, saw his dangerous situation. He charged forward, but in his haste, he misjudged the current. Instead of ramming the thaid, he found himself overshooting again, his momentum carrying him past the grappling pair.

Frustrated, he circled back. This time, he approached with less vigour, fighting against his instinct to rush in to help his brother. He positioned himself above the thaid and then dove, using gravity and the water pressure to add force to his attack.