

BIOLOGICAL 1031

Chapter 1031: High Waves, Higher Stakes (4)

The Chimaeric Demon acted. It bit into the monster's flesh, leaving a gaping wound on it and prompting the creature to leave his brother from the vicious grip. The two clones then put some space between them and the thaid.

They exchanged glances, with the unharmed clone asking to his brother if he was ok, to which he replied he was.

Communication wasn't easy without the ability to speak, but the Chimaeric Demons had come up long ago with a series of communication methods based on facial expressions and gazes.

Then the two circled their opponent. Their initial clumsiness in the water was fading as they grew accustomed to their new bodies and the surrounding water, but it still wasn't easy to move, not like they wanted.

The only silver lining to the situation was that they were obviously faster and stronger than the sea thaid, but that didn't mean he couldn't hurt them.

However, this was a creature born and developed in the sea. It was much more experienced than them in underwater movements, and for sure, it was better than them at fighting under water.

The sea thaid eyed them with fury, and a slight tint of madness.

One of the Chimaeric Demons made the first move. He darted forward, his powerful tail propelling him through the water with increasing confidence.

The sea thaid tried to dodge the missile like attack, but his improved control allowed him to adjust his course. His teeth sank into the thaid's flank, tearing away scales and flesh.

The creature let out a loud, high-pitched cry of pain, like a whale's. The clones had never seen a whale because they went extinct centuries ago, eaten by thaids that spread in the water back then, but if they imagined one, it must have been like what they just heard.

The sound was muffled by the water, but was still powerful enough to send vibrations through the Chimaeric Demons' bodies.

After the screech, the creature whipped its tail around, aiming to dislodge the clone still on it, but he held firm and resisted the attacks.

The other Chimaeric Demon, the wounded one, saw his chance. While the thaid was distracted by the first, he charged, ramming the creature from below, on the creature's not-so-soft underbelly.

That made the other clone's wound more grievous.

The sea creature flailed, growing increasingly desperate as it battled against its two attackers. It finally shook off the clone chomping on it, but the other was quick to take his place, latching onto one of the thaid's fins.

The other, now free, circled around for another attack. He noticed that the thaid's movements were slowing down because of the blood loss. In fact, the sea was becoming blood red. It could be seen even from the surface.

The Chimaeric Demons were too smart to leave this chance to go. With a thrust of his tail, the clones shot forward, aiming for the thaid's gills.

He and his brother still needed to understand the proper way to fight underwater, but ripping off the monster's gills, or at least damaging it, would lead to the equivalent of suffocation for any land or flying thaid, at least in theory.

The clone's teeth sank into the flesh of the thaid's gills, and the creature let out another screech, the equivalent of a scream of agony. It bucked and twisted, trying to shake off its attacker, but the clones were stronger than it.

At that point, they started to have a clear picture of how to move underwater.

The clone currently pinning the monster with his mouth, seeing his brother's success, released his hold on the thaid's fin and swam around to its other side.

He, too, targeted the gills, but the thaid used its brain crystal power and blinded both of the clones. However, while the attack from the second clone failed, the first one was still attached to it.

It must have been a truly bizarre and uncomfortable experience for a fishlike thaid to find itself in combat against intelligent species.

Although these enemies appeared, based on its instinctive judgment, to belong to the same race, the situation was foreign and unsettling, because they used tactics it had never seen using. It didn't know what a tactic was, of course, but he could sense the battle was too hard than it should've been.

The sea thaid's struggles became even more desperate. It knew it had only a brief window of opportunity before the clones, currently blinded, would regain their sight and attack again.

It spun and rolled, its body sending currents swirling through the water above. But the Chimaeric Demons matched its movements with ease at that point.

Blood clouded the surrounding water, making visibility difficult. But the Chimaeric Demons didn't need to see clearly at that point. They could feel the thaid's weakening struggles and sense the slowing of its movements by sensing the water movements. The blood loss was too great.

Just as victory seemed within the Chimaeric Demons' grasp, a voice echoed in their minds. It was Erik. He was reading his clones' mind, so he had a rough understanding of what was happening.

"Hold back. I need to analyse the creature before you finish it. I need to find out how strong it is and how it compares to the other thaids we will find. Lure it to the surface. Use its rage against it."

The Chimaeric Demons quickly let go of the sea thaid. They couldn't ignore a command from their creator. Their only job was to fulfill his wishes and keep him safe.

Swimming back, they created some space between themselves and the prey they had wounded. Their sudden retreat left the thaid confused, causing it to stay in the deep, struggling to breathe through its injured gills.

The two clones exchanged a glance, then swam upwards. They moved slowly at first, almost teasingly.

Despite its pain and exhaustion, the sea thaid succumbed to its predatory instincts and took the bait. Driven by a strong and primal rage, the same one that affected all thaids, it surged forward, intent on not allowing its tormentors to escape from it.

Chapter 1032: High Waves, Higher Stakes (5)

Nothing more than a dark shadow against the moonlit surface of the water. The lights were not much, though, and seeing the ship wasn't that easy.

With a last burst of speed, they broke through the waves, their massive bodies launching into the air like torpedoes shot from a submarine. It was just that their bodies were almost as big as a submarine.

Erik and the others saw the two as they arced over the ship. Water cascaded off their bodies as they soared through the air.

It would have been a breath-taking sight for everyone there, and not one of the good type. It was also beautiful.

In a way, it was, but of course, the people seeing it would have witnessed two gigantic monsters jumping over the ship they were on.

Luckily, those on the ship were all Chimaeric Demons, aside from June, Amber, Mira, and Emily, and they weren't easily scared, or taken by surprise by what happened around them.

The sea thaid, caught up in the chase, followed them without hesitation, too taken as it was from its rage. It burst from the water, its body momentarily blocking out the moon as it passed over the ship.

For a moment, time seemed to slow. Erik and the others saw the sea thaid in all its terrifying glory. Its scales absorbed the light from the moon and started shimmering under the few sun rays reflected by the satellite.

There was a difference compared to the earlier jump, though. The creature's body wasn't in pristine state anymore, and was now covered in wounds from its battle with the clones.

In that moment, Erik got the information he told the biological supercomputer to provide to him as soon as the beast was outside of the water again.

A semi-transparent bluish screen appeared before his eyes, filled with data about the sea thaid.

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Name: Luminous Leviathan

Brain Crystal Power: Bioluminescent Surge

Physical Characteristics: Massive whale-like body, iridescent scales, razor-sharp teeth, powerful tail
Ecology: deep-sea predator, territorial, highly aggressive.

[Warning: Not much information about the creature is present on the database.]

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 300

INTELLIGENCE: 7

DEXTERITY: 269

ENERGY: 800

{Others}

Power Level: 467

Estimated Experience per kill: 46678

Neural Links: 57

Erik quickly analyzed the information about the sea creature. It was very strong - stronger than any monster he had fought before, but not as powerful as some others he had seen.

The creature had 57 neural links, which told Erik something about its origin. It wasn't from the Mur continent, but it was likely from a place similar to the Eldraith mountain range, but based within the deep.

Erik was sure about this because the creature was stronger than the Hevadrin, and that wasn't easy to accomplish.

But its intelligence was low, like all the other thaids out there, but slightly higher than usual. The Chimaeric Demons from this batch had around 374 strength points.

They were stronger, yes, but they had also been lucky that the creature had that brain crystal power, and not something else. Otherwise, with those levels of energy, he could have been much harder to fight.

<At this point, the best thing will be to leave the ships' weapons and make the Chimaeric Demons shapeshift into sea thaids.>

However, Erik had a bad feeling. Based on what was known about sea thaids, they were not as strong as the flying thaids; they were in between them and the land ones, but Erik started thinking that might not have been entirely true.

Maybe sea thaids were less than flying ones, which presented a bigger threat than the sea ones; maybe most sea thaids were weaker, but they were many, many more than the flying thaids; or it could just be that the sea thaids didn't simply stay at the ship's level and usually roamed around the deep. This could have meant that the sea thaids on the surface were the weakest ones.

<Well, lucky me, I started getting some information about them... However, until I get more of them, I can't make guesses.>

As the sea thaid descended back towards the water, Erik decided it was time to end this. It was within the Chimaeric Demons' ability to do so. He sent another telepathic message to his clones.

<Take it down. Don't let it escape back to the depths.>

The Chimaeric Demons made the equivalent of a nod in their colossal bodies, and when all three were inside the water, one of the clones reached the thaid.

He slammed into the creature's side, his powerful tail driving them both towards the ship. The sea thaid made a surprised look and one of pain, its tail thrashing wildly, trying to use its strength against the monster. But the clone held firm, and then he sunk his teeth deep into the thaid's flesh.

The other clone joined the fray a moment later. He aimed for the thaid's head, his jaws clamping down on the creature's snout. The sea thaid shook its head, trying to get both clones out of the way, but the Chimaeric Demon's grip was too strong.

The three massive creatures got close to the ship. The force of the fight sent up a towering spray of water that drenched everyone on deck.

Erik gripped the railing, his eyes fixed on the turbulent water. He could sense the fight through his mental link with the Chimaeric Demons.

Suddenly, the sea thaid burst from the water once more. It was a desperate attempt to shake off its attackers, but the Chimaeric Demons chased after it. As the creature reached the apex of its jump, the two clones acted in synchronization.

They released a starlight fireball. Throwing the beast off course. At that point, it took a little before they ended the beast.

[Luminous Leviathan Defeated: Initiating Mana Absorption.]

[Progress: 0%, 1%, 5%, 30%, 70%, 100%]

[Mana Absorption Complete.]

[Beginning Conversion Process.]

[Countdown: 3... 2... 1... 0.]

[Conversion Successful! You have gained 46,678.26 experience points and 466.79 DNA points.]

The Chimaeric Demons had done their job well.

"Get on board, we are leaving!"

Chapter 1033: Thaid Happens

46678.26 experience points. Erik couldn't believe it. The amount was massive, among the biggest he ever got by a single creature.

<I wonder how the situation in Mur will be.>

The Chimaeric Demons, back in human form, jumped back on board. They were wet, and one of them was injured. However, Erik could see they had a lot of things on their minds.

"Great job out there!" Erik said. The least he could do was to compliment the Chimaeric Demons. They didn't get injured often, meaning that if they did, the thaid they fought was strong, at least stronger than anything the Chimaeric Demons fought on the Mannard continent.

"You handled the situation well, despite everything."

"Thanks, master," one of the Chimaeric Demons said. One of them was holding something in its hands. Erik knew what it was.

A vial of the monster's blood and its brain crystal.

<When the hell did they get the vial?>

"I'm not really interested in that... Erik said."

It wasn't a power that would give Erik an advantage. Sure, blinding your opponents was great if used well, but it wouldn't help Erik that much since he could already mess with their feelings and

perceptions. Besides, he was too fast for his enemies to see them. Well, maybe not here in the sea, and maybe not on Mur, but he still thought it would be a waste to get this brain crystal power.

"It's not for you, master; it's for us. We won't be able to use this power, but if you make more of us, the others will. I don't know for how long we will stay in the sea, but if we stumble upon something we can't kill, at least we can blind it and allow you to retreat."

Erik wasn't that keen on wasting DNA points for that. But he still decided to give the Chimaeric Demons what they wanted.

The clones stepped forward and gave the vial of the monster's blood and its brain crystal to Erik.

<Erik, are you sure?> The biological supercomputer said after having read Erik's thoughts.

<What? Why?>

<This power... I've never seen something like this...>

<What's wrong with it?>

<Well... How can I say it? It only works into the Luminous Leviathan's form. It can't be used without those scales.>

<Ah...>

<You won't be able to use it. Only the Chimaeric Demons will, by using the total or partial transformation.>

Silence ensued between the two. <Well, if they want it, I might just give the power to them.>

<If you are so sure about it.>

<I am...>

Erik took the items and uncorked the vial. He downed the blood, feeling a surge of raw energy course through him.

[Luminous Leviathan's DNA gained. Initiating analysis...]

[Analysis complete.]

[100 DNA points required for extraction. 500 points to avoid pain and loss of consciousness.]

<You know what to do,> Erik said to the biological supercomputer.

[500 DNA points used for painless instant absorption. Procedure complete.]

Next, he swallowed the brain crystal.

[Luminous Leviathan brain crystal gained. Initiating analysis...]

[Analysis complete.]

[100 DNA points required for power extraction. 500 points to avoid pain and loss of consciousness.]

[500 DNA points used for painless instant absorption. Procedure complete.]

<Merge it,>

[3000 DNA points required for merging. Confirm to proceed.]

<Yes,> he confirmed.

[Merging procedure initiated...]

[Merging procedure complete.]

"It will be useless if I don't make other Chimaeric Demons, though, and based on the situation, I can't be sure the ship will stay afloat."

Erik turned to look at the Chimaeric Demons. The only way for them to survive, since they weren't part of a fleet, was with them shapeshifting into sea thaid and opening the way for him. Though, what if the monsters here were too strong even for them?

The Chimaeric Demon had been injured. After all, that rarely happened. It was true they could heal themselves, but the quantity of mana they had wasn't a lot. They had to pay attention to how they used the precious resource.

"Prepare a shift rotation. I want those who won't be staying inside the waters to focus on increasing their mana."

"Yes, sir," All the other Chimaeric Demons said in unison.

Suddenly, June came rushing towards Erik with an alarmed look on his face. "Master! We've got problems!"

"What?"

"The ship, it's not in good condition!"

Erik hurried to the helm, taking in the damage to the ship with a sinking feeling. The sea thaid just damaged the hull slightly, but the sea did the rest.

The ship had been breached, and water was pouring in faster than the pumps could handle. The main mast swayed dangerously.

"Can we make it to Hin?" Erik asked, already knowing the answer.

June shook his head. "Not like this. We're barely staying afloat as it is."

Erik nodded. "Alright, listen up!" he called out to the crew. "We've won the battle, but we're not out of danger yet. We need to repair the ship before we sink."

He turned to June. "You check the ship's maps. Find the nearest island or coastline we can reach. We will fix everything properly once there."

"Master, I don't know if we can do this. The ship's repairs will be problematic at sea."

"Do you have another idea?"

"Well, we might tell the Chimaeric Demons to turn into sea thajids and ride them."

"I thought about that. The problem is that we won't know where we are going. Besides, we won't have a way to bring all our provisions with us, and the journey is long. It might even become longer if things don't go as planned."

"Right..."

"Just focus on repairing the ship. Use the thajid's scales if necessary. They look sturdy enough to do the job. On the ship there are repair tools. You won't miss them."

"Yes, Master."

As the crew scrambled to assess the damage and plot a new course, Erik took a moment to catch his breath.

The encounter with the sea thajid had been unlike anything he'd ever faced before. At that point, he had to reevaluate everything he knew about the sea thajids.

<Maybe this is just because of what the blackguards are doing in Mur.>

Mira approached him. "What can we do to help?"

Erik gave her a tired smile. "Help with the repairs where you can. We're going to need everyone to get through this."

Chapter 1034: A Thousand Troops, But Only One Plan (1)

The week following the sea thaid's attack was a flurry of activity aboard the ship. Every member of the crew, from the Chimaeric Demons to Erik himself, worked to repair the damage and keep the vessel afloat.

The main deck, which had endured the thaid's assault, required extensive repairs. However, fixing the ship in that situation and with the damage in that bad place wasn't easy at all. The damage was on the hull, near the deck. It was there that the sea thaid attacked, and where the waters completed the job.

Below deck, the situation was equally dire. The hull breach allowed water to flood in. The damage had been partially repaired by now, but not completely. If the water was high enough, it could rush in. Only the lower part of the damage had been repaired, but in the end, water still entered from above.

However, the initial patch job had prevented them from sinking outright, but a more permanent solution was needed.

Erik oversaw this critical repair personally, using the knowledge he got thanks to the biological supercomputer to tell the Chimaeric Demons what to do.

Mira, Emily, and Amber, though not as physically strong as the Chimaeric Demons, contributed.

Emily's nimble fingers proved adept at doing some finer tunes, while Mira's eye for detail helped in identifying small but potentially dangerous cracks and weaknesses in the ship's structure.

Amber, instead, took charge of organizing supplies and ensuring everyone had the tools they needed. Of course, that meant asking a lot of things to Erik, who was tired.

Erik had even more work to do. He needed to create more Chimaeric Demons' eggs and make more neural links. This took up a lot of his time and energy.

As the days passed, the ship slowly resembled its former self. Though a damage so vast, just the first day of travel was an immense blow to the crew's morale.

On the seventh day after the attack, with most of the critical repairs completed, Erik called a meeting in the captain's quarters. June, Mira, Amber, and Emily gathered around the large holographic map on the table.

Erik looked at each of them in turn, noting the dark circles under their eyes and the calluses forming on their hands.

"First," Erik said, "I want to thank you all of you for your hard work this past week. We've come a long way in a short time, and it's thanks to everyone's efforts."

The others nodded, small smiles of appreciation on their faces.

"Now," Erik said, his tone becoming more serious, "we need to discuss our next move. June, what can you tell us about our current position and the nearest land?"

June stepped forward, his finger tracing a path on the map spread out before them. "Based on our charts and the distance we've covered in the past week, we're approximately here," he said, tapping a spot on the map in the vast expanse of blue that represented the ocean stretching between Hin and Frant.

"Fortunately, there's an island near our current position. We've been making steady progress towards it."

"How far are we from this island?" Erik asked.

June measured the distance with the ship's system's tools. "At our current speed, considering the time we still need to spend for the repairs and the damage to the ship, we should reach the island in about three days."

Erik nodded. "What about enemy presence in the area? Both ships and land-based?"

June's expression grew more serious. "According to our intelligence and the maps on the ship, there should be a small enemy outpost on the island. It's likely used as a coordination point for ship traffic in this area."

"Any idea of the number of troops?" Mira asked. She might not be as smart as Erik and the Chimaeric Demons, but she had plenty of experience.

June shook his head. "Exact numbers are scarce, but given the size of the island and its strategic importance, I'd estimate no more than five hundred to a thousand troops. It's not meant to be a major base, just a waypoint and observation post."

Erik turned to Mira. "What are your thoughts on this? You've had experience with similar outposts before, didn't you?"

During those five months since the war started, Mira, Amber, and Emily helped and fought. Mira often joined attacks on small outposts, where she was tasked with helping with the assassination attempts of various key figures.

She furrowed her brow in concentration. "From what I've seen in the past, these small outposts are usually lightly defended. They rely more on secrecy and their ability to call for reinforcements than on their own strength. If we can approach undetected and strike quickly, we might be able to overwhelm them before they can raise the alarm.

However, the outpost's size also means there might be ships nearby."

"Good insight. Now, what about enemy ships in the area, June? Mira's reasoning makes sense."

June traced a circle around their position on the map. "There are likely to be patrol ships in these waters. However, given the vastness of the ocean and the relatively small number of ships Hin can spare for this area, we shouldn't encounter more than two or three at most. That if we do nothing to avoid them."

"Can we handle that many?" Emily asked, a note of concern in her voice.

Erik smiled. "With the Chimaeric Demons, we can. They've proven their worth against the sea thaid, and enemy ships will be no match for them, especially considering that one of them can sink ships on their own. If the sea thaid could, it's impossible that the clones won't be able. We can definitely handle a few patrol ships. The problem is getting there without being seen.

I don't know if the virus from the biological supercomputer is still working. I think it is since we haven't been attacked by ships yet, but I don't know if the blackguards gave Hin other ways to communicate and share information."

Chapter 1035: Not a Vacation (1)

Amber leaned in, studying the map. "I'm honestly more concerned about the thaids in the area," she said.

During the past week, the attacks had not been many. Some times, there were powerful but lone thaids trying to grab a bite on the ship, which were stopped by the Chimaeric Demons. Erik decided the best thing to do was to lean on them for defence, rather than on the ship's defensive systems.

At other times, large groups of smaller, weaker thaids showed up. These thaids weren't strong enough to damage the ship, and the Chimaeric Demons' new ability to blind them kept the thaids away from the ship. Even so, dealing with these attacks wasn't easy for the crew.

Erik assumed they were in a quadrant where the effects of whatever the blackguards were doing on Mur weren't affecting the thaids.

The opposite was most likely the reason that powerful thaid got to the ship during their first day of travel. Frant must have been on a sort of migratory path.

"Are we likely to encounter more like the one that attacked us?" Amber asked.

June shook his head. "Based on the information we have, the sea thaid we encountered was an anomaly. Most of the thaids in this area are smaller and less dangerous. They might pose a threat to regular ships without a fleet, but with the Chimaeric Demons, they shouldn't be a problem."

Erik nodded.

"That's great. Now, let's talk strategy. Our primary goal is to reach the island, make any necessary repairs we couldn't complete at sea, and gather intelligence about Hin's operations in the area. We need to find out if they learned about the stolen ship and if they know it was us, and not some random hobo."

"Do you think they didn't attack because they know it's you who stole it and want to make a trap?"

"It could be, Mira. Those guys are shrewd, and they likely know, thanks to my dossier, that I do not have sea faring experience. I can kill the blackguards easily, but there is no way I'm going to underestimate them."

"We should send a small team ahead to scout the island then," Mira said. "They could study the defences and possibly even replace some of the guards before we make our approach."

"Excellent suggestion, Mira. We'll put together a scouting team as we get closer to the island. June, I want you to choose the Chimaeric Demons and brief them on what to expect based on our maps and intelligence."

"Yes, Master," June nodded.

"Amber," Erik said, turning to the red-haired woman, "I want you to work on a plan for taking the outpost. Assume we'll have the element of surprise, but plan for the worst-case scenario as well."

"Please don't ask me to pull the same stunt as the last time."

"I won't."

Amber gave a resolute nod. "Then I'm on it. I'll have a few different strategies ready for your review in the next days, but I'll start working on them as soon as I can."

"Good. Emily, I need you to inventory our supplies. Food, water, medical supplies, weapons—everything. We need to know exactly what we have and what we might need to replenish on the island."

Emily nodded, but there was some doubt on her face. "Shouldn't Amber do that? She did this for the past week."

"I need everyone to be aware of everything on the ship." Emily was a sniper. She played at a competitive level, and she was very good at planning. In hindsight, one should have given Emily this role.

However, Amber wasn't stupid either. The Chimaeric Demons might be able to come up with something good, even better than what the three women would.

That was sure, but Erik would not know how the situation in Hin and Mur was going to be, so he needed to make sure the three women were prepared for anything that might happen.

For the past week, Amber was tasked with taking care of the inventory, but now Erik decided to give the task to Emily, so that both of them knew how to do that.

"One last thing," Erik said. "We've faced challenges before, but what we are doing is something new for you. It's okay to be nervous," Erik said, turning to Amber, "but trust in your abilities and in each other, and remember the Chimaeric Demons will help you as soon as you say the word."

Mira, Emily, and Amber exchanged glances.

"Alright," Erik said, straightening up. "Let's get to work. We have three days to complete our plans and preparations. June set a course for the island. Everyone else, you know your tasks. If you need any help or have any concerns, come to me."

As the others filed out of the captain's quarters, Erik remained behind, studying the map. His finger traced the path from their current position to the island and then beyond, towards Hin.

Erik waited for a long time before he could start hitting the blackguards when and where they were the most vulnerable.

As the time to start his move got closer, the anticipation built up inside him. He couldn't wait. He didn't want to.

Finally, it was time for him to get his long-awaited revenge. For what they did to the world, for the suffering they put him through, for the unimaginable pain they caused to his father, it was time to settle the score.

Erik remembered the terrible things the blackguards had done. They had hurt many innocent people in their quest for power.

They had taken people from their homes and families, using them for cruel experiments. The blackguards didn't care about human life; they only wanted more knowledge and control.

Erik felt sick thinking about it. These dark memories made him even more determined to stop the blackguards and make them pay for their crimes.

Erik's feelings about the blackguards had changed completely. Just three years ago, he would have been eager to join them.

Back then, he thought the blackguards were good guys. He even wanted them to take over Frant and hurt the people who had made his life hard.

And yet, over time, he learned everything was a lie. The truths he uncovered shattered the foundations of his beliefs. The blackguards weren't the heroes; they were the villains.

He learned Becker wasn't the bad guy he once thought; in fact, he and his father had been fighting against the blackguards for a long time.

The blackguards were the root cause of every misfortune that had fallen on him. The biological supercomputer, the crystal cross gang, the situation in Etrium, the attack on New Alexandria.

They were behind every assassination attempt that threatened his life.

Chapter 1036: Not a Vacation (2)

Erik stood at the bow, his eyes scanning the distant shoreline.

"This is close enough," Erik said, turning to the group of Chimaeric Demons gathered behind him.

"Remember your mission. Scout the area, gather information, and secure key positions, raising no alarms. The last thing we want is for them to find out we are here."

The Chimaeric Demons nodded. June had chosen thirty of the clones for this task. While the Chimaeric Demons of this batch had the same level of strength, each of them chose what to focus on in terms of brain crystal powers. This meant that some of them were more suited than others for different tasks.

June chose the best with shapeshifting abilities, given Amber's plan. With a couple focusing on healing powers and some on defence.

"Good luck," Erik said.

Without a word, the thirty Chimaeric Demons moved to the ship's railing. Then they vaulted over the side, plunging into the dark waters below.

As they hit the water, their bodies changed. Limbs elongated, skin hardened into scales, and in moments, thirty Luminous Leviathans glided beneath the waves. They quickly dove deeper to avoid being spotted by ships or by the land personnel.

As they got closer to the island underwater, they swam up. They moved towards the surface, watching for any movement on the beach in front of them.

Finding the coast clear, they emerged from the water. But instead of the massive forms of sea creatures, tiny insects now buzzed above the waves of water. The Chimaeric Demons had shapeshifted again, this time into flies.

Funnily enough, this was by far Erik's favourite transformation, and it was the same for the Chimaeric Demons. It was damn too useful for sneaking around; even invisibility was not this great.

The Chimaeric Demons flew towards the center of the island. From high up, they could see the outpost clearly.

It looked like a powerful fortress in the middle of the island. This made sense because the outpost needed to be well-protected. Dangerous sea creatures could attack the shores at any time.

Not all the thaids could reach the land, but there were some gigantic ones that could attack them from the sea without having to put a finger on the sand.

Once at the outpost, the Chimaeric Demons spread out. Some flew high, getting an aerial view of the compound's layout. Others stayed low, going between buildings and through open windows.

Two of the transformed Chimaeric Demons found themselves near the main gate. They landed on a nearby wall. Many guards stood at attention, flashlights parting the darkness like the sea surrounding the island.

"Another silent night," one guard said, stifling a yawn.

"Don't jinx it," the other said. "Remember what happened to our night shift last week?"

The first guard shuddered. "How could I forget? Those damn thaids are getting bolder by the day."

The Chimaeric Demons' antennae twitched with interest.

"Hey, did you hear about the supply ship that was supposed to arrive yesterday?"

"Yeah, word is it got hit by a school of thaids. An officer told me they dragged the whole thing under, crew and all."

"Brutal. At this rate, we'll be cut off from the mainland entirely. But you know what? Anything to make those Frant's bastards pay for what they did to us."

"Yeah. I got mad when I got told the blackguards didn't want us to attack them when Becker got nuked, but luckily, those guys are too stupid to understand what's best for them and killed their new general."

The Chimaeric Demons exchanged a glance.

They took flight again, moving deeper into the compound. As they flew, they overheard more snippets of conversation.

"Captain Roth wants a full inventory by morning. Says we need to start rationing supplies."

"Did you hear? Lieutenant Vega's pushing for more frequent patrols along the eastern shore..."

"Sergeant Kline caught some recruits trying to sneak out last night. They're on latrine duty for a month."

Each name, each piece of information, was filed away in the Chimaeric Demons' perfect memories. But as they listened, one thing became clear: there was no mention of a stolen ship from Frant, no whispers of Erik or his group, just stupid shit or stuff pertaining to the outpost.

The Chimaeric Demons continued their exploration of the base, mapping out guard posts, rotations, identifying key buildings, and locating potential weaknesses in the outpost's defences.

After gathering sufficient intelligence, the Chimaeric Demons regrouped at a predetermined location—a secluded corner of the base near the supply warehouses.

There, they shared the information they had gathered and planned their next move based on the general plan Amber came up with.

Amber came up with a simple but effective plan: Take the place of important people in the outpost. It was something the Chimaeric Demons had done many times before, and that was possible only because of their skills. It always worked well for them, and it would not be different today.

However, Amber left to them the choice of whom to steal the identity off, since they didn't have information about the outpost, and the Chimaeric Demons were well versed in this kind of operation, so they knew better than her what to do.

The only condition was for them to take the highest people's identities, so that they could at least gather control of the base and facilitate Erik's operations.

"Are we ready?" One of the Chimaeric Demons said.

"I am."

"Me too..."

The others followed suit.

The Chimaeric demons split. Each of them had to locate and neutralize a specific individual.

One group, comprising three Chimaeric Demons, made their way to the officers' quarters. There were three targets there, but the most important one was Captain Roth, the apparent leader of the outpost. They slipped under the door of his private room.

Inside, they found the captain asleep at his desk, reports and maps spread out before him. One of the Chimaeric Demons landed on his neck and, in an instant, transformed.

His body grew rapidly, taking in human form.

In moments, it was over. Captain Roth lay dead on the floor. The clone studied him before his own features shifted, changing into a replica of the captain.

Similar scenes played out across the base. Lieutenant Vega was ambushed as she made her nightly rounds. Sergeant Kline was taken as he supervised the night shift in the mess hall, and several other key personnel were neutralized and replaced.

Each time, the Chimaeric Demons were careful to kill their targets without raising alarm. The dead officers were brought to the sea, where the thaids took care of the rest.

Chapter 1037: Not a Vacation (3)

But now, key positions were held by Erik's clones, and not by Hin's soldiers. Not that Erik needed to control the outpost. The only thing he had to do was to find a place where he and the Chimaeric Demons could fix the ship's damage, or at least take another one.

<It would be great if Hin's troops fixed the ship for us.>

But that, of course, required Erik and the others to know what the situation there was. Did they have the tools to make the fix? Did their protocols allow that? What would happen if they arrived on the island? Would they be attacked because of such protocols?

That was why Erik sent the Chimaeric Demons there. He might have done that alone, but what was the point of having the Chimaeric Demons if he ended up doing everything himself?

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The clone impersonating Captain Roth sat at the desk in the command center, looking every inch the part of a tired but dutiful officer.

He picked up the communication device, keying in the secure frequency that would connect him directly to Erik's ship.

"Base to Shadow, everything is ready," he said, using the predetermined codename for Erik's ship.

There was a moment of static before Erik's voice came through. "This is Shadow. Report."

"Infiltration successful," the clone said. "We've secured key positions within the outpost, as requested. No alarm-raising kills made, no suspects raised."

"Excellent," Erik said. "What's the situation there?"

The clone paused for a second. There was much to tell.

"The base layout comprises a central command center, barracks, storage facilities, and docks. We have approximately 150 personnel on-site, including 30 officers and 120 enlisted soldiers. Supplies include enough food and ammunition to last several months. Defenses include automated turrets, a perimeter fence, and several guard towers."

"There are fewer troops than we expected," Erik said. He wasn't obviously sad about this. On the opposite, it was great.

"Yes, sir. This won't be a hard mission."

"Yeah. Is there something else?" Erik asked.

"Yes, sir. There have been multiple sightings of thaid movements in the nearby waters. Their activity seems to be increasing, possibly due to a recent migration."

"Most importantly," he said, "there's been no mention of us or the stolen ship. It seems our stunt hadn't drawn attention to us. For what I found out, they still couldn't send communication to the

working outposts. Most likely, they had to send a squad on foot to tell the situation about the stolen ship to the blackguards. I don't think we have a lot of time before that happens."

There was a pause as Erik contemplated what to do. The fact there had been no news about them to the enemy headquarters was good, but it was also true what the Chimaeric Demon said, and that it was a matter of time before Hin reached their allies and told them about the stolen ship.

"Good work," Erik said. "What's your assessment of the situation? Can we dock the ship there to make our repairs, or do we have to take the base?"

The Chimaeric Demon paused for a second.

"Yes. According to their protocols, ships may dock here for repairs. We would just need the authorization from the officers. Fortunately, we've already replaced them all with our own."

"Proceed with caution," Erik said. "We'll approach under cover of darkness tonight, and as soon as you give us the authorization to proceed."

"Understood, Master," the Chimaeric Demon said. "We will let you know."

As the communication ended, the clone leaned back in his chair, a small smile playing on his lips. Phase one of their plan had been executed without problems.

Now they just had to maintain their cover until Erik and the others arrived. But first, he had some things to make that happen without trouble.

Throughout the day, the Chimaeric Demons played their roles to perfection. They issued orders, oversaw operations, and interacted with the base personnel as if they had been there for years. Their perfect memory and ability to mimic allowed them to not arouse suspicions.

They also subtly altered patrol routes to create blind spots the other could use in case something went badly, and manipulated the supply records to make it so their master could restock without trouble.

The protocols allowed the outpost to restock ships, but there was a limit. However, what the clone did would allow Erik to take more than he should.

As night fell, tension among the Chimaeric Demons grew. Everything had been set already.

The false Captain Roth stood at the window of the command center, looking out over the darkened base. In the distance, he could see the faint outline of the docks where, soon, its master was going to put the ship.

He turned to the Chimaeric Demon, impersonating Lieutenant Vega. "It's time," he said.

From afar, the silhouette of Erik's ship took shape against the dark horizon. Slowly, it approached the dock. The sound of the parting waves reached them.

As the ship arrived at the dock, the Chimaeric Demons acted. They went there and secured it to the docks. They threw thick ropes and tied the ship, ensuring stable mooring.

As night fell, the few soldiers and engineers on duty gathered at the docks, having been briefed earlier about an incoming vessel in need of urgent repairs.

However, everything had been weird. Whispers circulated about Captain Roth's unusual fixation on this particular ship.

Some speculated that it might be carrying sensitive cargo or high-ranking officials, while others wondered if it was part of a classified mission.

A Chimaeric Demon, pretending to be a senior officer, greeted the engineers and soldiers at the dock.

He got straight to the point. "The ship is damaged. We got hit by a thaid swarm. We need it fixed fast." His tone left no room for questions.

The engineers were very interested in this mysterious situation. They listened carefully to the explanation.

Once they understood how serious it was, they got to work. Soon, the dock was busy with activity. Repair vehicles were turned on, their lights shining in the dark. Many people worked around the ship, using advanced tools and materials the Chimaeric demons had never seen to fix it.

After examining the ship, the head engineer came to talk to the disguised Chimaeric Demon. "Sir," he said, sounding both professional and worried, "the damage is bad, but we can fix it. It will take at least two days of non-stop work to repair it properly. But if it's really urgent, we could make it ready to sail in about 36 hours, though we'd have to cut some corners."

The Chimaeric Demon nodded, knowing that even this longer time was fine for Erik. Their plan to sneak in and trick everyone had worked perfectly. Now, they just needed to keep pretending until the ship was fixed and ready to sail again.

Chapter 1038: Not a Vacation (4)

Two days after Erik's ship arrived at the island outpost, it was fully repaired. The Chimaeric Demon pretending to be Captain Roth stood on the pier. He looked at the ship with satisfaction, seeing that all the damage was now gone.

Engineers and technicians still swarmed the ship, though, storing their tools into crates they were going to bring down. Some of them were still making the final adjustments.

The sea thaid attack wasn't the direct cause of the damage. But it started a chain of events that led to the ship needing repairs. The engineers seemed experienced with this kind of problem. They fixed the ship quickly and did a good job. Most likely than not, they had worked on similar issues before.

Captain Roth spotted the lead engineer making his way down the gangplank, a tablet in hand and a satisfied expression on his face.

The Chimaeric Demon straightened his posture, adopting the stern demeanor expected by a high-ranking officer.

"Report," he said as the engineer approached, snapping to attention.

The engineer saluted before launching into his explanation. "Sir, the repairs to the ship's hull have been completed. We've reinforced the damaged sections with our strongest alloys, and I'm confident it will withstand even the most aggressive thaid attacks. Of course, if they are not too strong, sir."

Captain Roth nodded. "Excellent. What about the resupply?"

The engineer glanced at his tablet. "As per your request, we've restocked the ship's provisions. Food, water, medical supplies, ammunition—everything has been replenished to maximum capacity."

What the engineer didn't know, of course, was that the Chimaeric Demons had secretly added much more stuff to these supplies.

While the entire base was resting, they had smuggled additional resources onto the ship, preparing for the long journey ahead and for the many Chimaeric Demons that were going to hatch in the next few months.

"And the weapons systems?" Captain Roth pressed.

"Fully operational, sir. We've even upgraded some of the targeting systems. The ship is now better equipped to deal with the threats it might encounter."

Captain Roth made a small nod of approval. "Well done. Now, the most important question: when can the ship set sail? We can't keep it here for too long."

Those words gave the captain something to think. For the past days, words that this ship was on a secret mission could be heard throughout the base. That was because of the Chimaeric Demon's fault.

He seemed too eager to fix the ship and make it operational in the shortest amount of time possible. The Chimaeric Demon impersonating Captain Roth knew the mistake he made, but there was nothing he could do about it. He didn't know how the captain was, so his antics stood out.

"Sir, the ship is ready to leave now," the engineer said. "Everything works properly, and it's been safe to sail for about an hour."

"Excellent," Captain Roth said, his tone carrying just the right amount of authority and appreciation. "You and your team are to be commended. Dismissed."

The engineer saluted once more before turning and heading back towards the docks, no doubt to share the news with the others that they could finally rest.

Captain Roth, or better, the Chimaeric Demon who was now impersonating him, watched him go, maintaining his stern expression until the engineer was out of sight. Only then did he allow himself a small smile. Everything went according to plan. The only thing that needed to be done now was for the ship to leave.

He made his way to the command center, nodding to the saluting guards as he passed. Once inside, he locked the door and moved to the communication terminal he brought with him.

He inputted the encryption codes and established a connection with Erik's private channel.

After a moment of static, Erik's voice came through. "So?"

"Master," the Chimaeric Demon said, "the repairs are complete. The ship is fully operational and restocked."

"Fantastic," Erik said. "Any complications?"

"None, Master. The outpost personnel is completely unaware of our true identities or intentions. They believe they're simply assisting an allied ship."

There was a pause, and the Chimaeric Demon could almost hear Erik's mind working. "Very good. Set up everything for our departure. We'll leave right now."

The Chimaeric Demon hesitated for a moment before speaking. "Master, what about those of us who have infiltrated the outpost? Should we prepare to leave as well?"

"No," Erik said. "The Chimaeric Demons who have assumed identities here must remain in place."

"Understood, Master. But... are you sure? This will leave you with a significantly reduced force for the journey ahead. And while you can certainly create more of us, crossing the sea with only twenty clones, even for just a small amount of time, could be dangerous given the situation."

There was a soft chuckle from Erik's end of the communication. "I know that, but your concern is not necessary. "

The clone nodded. "Of course, Master. May I ask about the logic behind leaving us here? With control over the enemy's communication systems thanks to our virus, couldn't we gather intelligence remotely?"

"A fair question," Erik said.

"While our control over their systems is total, there's always the possibility of offline communication or information being withheld from digital networks. Your presence there will allow us to monitor the situation directly. Besides, the Chimaeric Demons needed on the ship are just those that must help June control it. The others, the ones who had to man the weapons, will be enough to stop thaid's.

If things go wrong, I will take matters into my own hands. The Chimaeric demons will only need to lure the thaid's where I can hit them."

"I see, Master. I think our team here could also help by warning you early if anything important happens in this area of the sea."

"Yeah, that would be great," Erik said.

The Chimaeric Demon straightened, feeling a renewed sense of purpose now that his master gave him a new mission to complete. "We won't let you down, Master."

"I know you won't," Erik said. The Chimaeric Demons never disappointed him. He knew, no, he was sure, they wouldn't mess up. "Now, I need you to send the official authorization for our departure. Send it right now. I don't want to lose more time than I already did."

"Understood, Master. Is there anything else you need before you leave?"

Chapter 1039: Not a Vacation (5)

There was a brief pause before Erik responded. "No, that will be all. Maintain your guard high and remember to tell me anything that might be of interest."

Erik paused for a second, as if he was trying to remember something. Then it came. "Ah, right, I will leave a crate of Chimaeric Demons' eggs before leaving. Make sure they mature, and once they

are ready, make them take the place of all but the engineers. There will be more Chimaeric Demons than personnel on the ship, so make sure they will end up on enemy ships.

I need you to spread them and to give them a way to communicate with you and from you to me. As many clones spread, as much chaos as we can make."

"Yes, master. Thank you for the trust. Safe travels, and may your journey be swift and hopefully uneventful."

"Ah... Damn, you are jinxing it!"

The communication ended. The Chimaeric Demon took a deep breath, calming himself before resuming his role of Captain Roth again.

He went back to his office, where he moved to the main computer terminal and began inputting the authorization codes for the ship's departure. Everything had to pass through him, so he was the only one who could make the ship leave.

On the surrounding screens, the clone could see the dock systems updating, and once that was done, people started clearing the way for Erik's ship to leave. Once that happened, and his master's ship was far away from the island, all that remained was to maintain their cover and continue gathering intelligence.

The Chimaeric Demon straightened his uniform and prepared to return to his duties as Captain Roth. The soldiers told him they needed him for some other matters not related to Erik, so he prepared to leave.

As he reached for the door, he paused, looking back at the communication terminal. He didn't really want to leave Erik, and he knew the other Chimaeric Demons were thinking the same.

But it wasn't like they would not see each other anymore, so he didn't protest. Not that he would have done it. Erik's orders were absolute, and he would never defy them. Then he took his communication device.

"Guys, there is a crate you have to retrieve."

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Outside, activity on the docks increased. Erik's ship prepared to set sail after the two days it remained under repairs.

June drove the vessel away from the pier. The ship's engines hummed. The powerful throb signaled to those on the ship they were going to leave. Some jumped off the ship. Not everyone got off the ship, and some of the soldiers and engineers were still there.

The others remained in their positions. The engineers found it weird that the ship was controlled by only 20 people, but it wasn't the first time that happened.

It was just that the ships they controlled were usually smaller. However, it might also have been they were on a secret mission or something like that, so they didn't ask questions since the peculiar situation cemented the idea and justified Captain Roth's behavior. The clones, unbeknownst to them, were going to lie anyway.

As they pulled away from the dock, the lights of the outpost grew smaller, twinkling like stars on the disappearing shoreline.

On the bridge, Erik stood watching the island recede into the distance. His face was impassive.

They had infiltrated an enemy outpost, repaired their ship, and left Chimaeric Demons to fully take control of this place.

Soon there would be other clones ready to go to other ships; some might end up in Frant, but others could go on secret missions or even to Hin.

The ship picked up speed as it cleared the harbor; the bow cutting through the waves with renewed strength.

As they entered the open sea, Erik turned to June. "Set a course for the coordinates I gave you earlier. And keep an eye on the long-range sensors. We may have left the outpost undetected, but there might be ships we don't know if that might ask questions."

"If problems arise, the clones on the island will tell us. I told Roth to keep an eye on the enemy ships' position, so if we fail to detect some of them, we will at least know."

June's hands moved deftly over the ship's controls. "Course set, master. At our current speed, we should reach Hin in a month, assuming favorable conditions and no thaid's around."

Mira, Amber, and Emily then reached the control room where Erik and June were.

"Hey, Erik, June!" Emily said. "God, I almost forgot your faces!"

"Yeah, can you believe we were cooped up in our rooms for ages?" Amber said. "Right, you were the ones who told us to stay there to begin with!"

Mira laughed, shaking her head. "Ages? It felt like an eternity! Two days with nothing to do but stare at the walls and avoid being spotted. I'm pretty sure I counted every speck on the ceiling at least twice."

Emily nodded in agreement. "Yeah, and don't even get me started on the boredom. I think I might have invented a few new games just to keep my sanity intact."

Erik turned to them with a faint smile, his eyes showing a hint of amusement. "Sorry about that. We had to be cautious until we were sure we could leave the island. Consider it a small price to pay for our safety."

Mira sighed dramatically, but there was a twinkle in her eye. "Why was it us who had to pay the price?" Of course, she was joking. "Next time, maybe pack some board games or something? Even a deck of cards would be enough! Anything to pass the time."

Erik chuckled. "Noted. We'll make sure to have better entertainment options next time."

Emily leaned against the console, looking out at the open sea. "Well, at least we left the island. So, what happened? I mean, aside from the ship getting repaired? Damn, I can still hear those drills and hammers in my nightmares."

Erik's expression grew serious again. "We left some of the Chimaeric Demons behind; aside from that, we're finally on track to Hin again. It's going to take about a month."

"Ah, right... a mo—" Mira gave a shocked look to Erik.

"Wait. We left who? Erik. What the hell went through your mind? Why did you leave the Chimaeric Demons behind? Are you crazy?"

Chapter 1040: Third Division Commander

There was a man standing. He was not that tall, but he had an impressive muscular build. The man remained immobile, hidden by a mask and with his hands clasped behind his back.

Despite his commanding presence, there was a sense of deference in his posture, and he spoke with careful respect to the person in front of him.

"Third Division Commander," he said, "I've come to report on the situation in Frant, as per your request."

The woman he addressed commanded an aura of absolute authority, her very presence demanding unwavering respect and obedience.

Adorning her uniform was the Justicar insignia, a powerful symbol that showcased her undeniable power and influence within the ranks of the Blackguard.

Unlike her subordinates, the Justicar didn't wear a mask. It wasn't that bold move that made the man uneasy, but the intense gaze with which she was looking at him. A gaze that seemed to see right through him as the sun's rays went through the sky.

She studied him, noticing every detail on his body. She could tell a lot just by looking at his posture, deferential, submissive, like all should have in front of her.

"Proceed, Vindicator," she said.

The man took a deep breath before continuing. "I regret to inform you that the situation has... deteriorated. We're losing ground, and our forces are being pushed back on multiple fronts."

The Justicar's expression remained unchanged, but her posture shifted slightly. "And what of Erik Romano? Have we located him yet?"

It wasn't anymore a secret that the blackguards' top priority was him. At that point, the entire war was just a pretense to find and capture him. The foot soldiers didn't know, but the higher echelons of every organization involved did, and they couldn't wait to get their hands on Erik's powers.

Yes, Frant was an important location since it was close to the Mur continent, not as important as Hin, that was true since it was close to the Mur continent, the closest place with human presence around, actually, but it was still close.

Besides, it was the easiest controlled country, and that was since the country's very foundation. It was a country made by criminals, after all, and still today, many of them were around.

At the mention of Erik's name, the Vindicator's composure faltered for a moment. "I... I'm afraid we've lost track of him, Commander. He seems to have disappeared entirely."

The woman's lips thinned into a hard line this time. "Unacceptable. Erik Romano is not just some random factor in this war, Vindicator. Honestly, losing him is the same as losing the target when playing darts."

"I know, Commander," the man said. "We're doing everything in our power to locate him, but he's proven incredibly good at hiding and too cunning to leave traces behind."

The Third Division Commander paused for a moment. She seemed to be thinking about something. Then she asked, "Tell me, Vindicator, have you heard the latest rumors?"

The man hesitated, confusion clear on his face. "Rumors, Commander? I've heard many. You should be more specific if you want me to understand."

"Right. I apologize. Whispers that the soldiers we're facing aren't just ordinary men, but clones. Clones of Erik Romano himself."

"Clones? My lady? I've heard of that... Yes. They call them the White Demons."

The Justicar turned back to face him; her gaze piercing. "Clones, yes. Demons, maybe." She paused.

"Weren't you in charge of all operations in Frant? If anyone should have known about this, it should have been you. Yet you stand here, not addressing the matter as I expected, despite knowing it. Care to explain?"

The man's posture stiffened, and he bowed his head slightly. "My deepest apologies, Third Division Commander. I... I had heard whispers, but nothing concrete. Erik Romano has displayed so many unexpected powers that it seemed impossible to separate fact from fiction. Without solid proof, I hesitated to report mere rumors."

The woman's eyes flashed with anger. "Your job isn't to decide what information is worthy of reporting, Vindicator. It's relaying everything, no matter how implausible it might seem. Erik Romano has consistently defied our expectations. At this point, we can't afford to dismiss any possibility, no matter how far-fetched it might appear."

"You're right, of course, Commander. It won't happen again."

The Justicar nodded, then turned to a large holographic map that appeared. "There's more," she said. The vindicator at that point was trembling. "Before we started losing ground, there were reports of sudden increases in enemy troop numbers in specific sectors. Each time, it resulted in the fall of our outposts or bases."

The Vindicator stepped closer, studying the map. "Yes. T-that, it was entirely my f-fault, third division commander."

"Indeed," the woman said. "Yet, this is not the gravest mistake you made. Don't you notice anything in the sectors that fell?"

"With all due respect, third division commander," the vindicator said. "Too many sectors fell... I understand you are suggesting a pattern, but I fail to see it."

"Yeah, I see that." The woman sighed. "These spikes and attacks follow our key supply route, Vindicator." Her finger stopped at a particular point on the map. "The sorting center for our supply lines was the last to fall." She traced a line with a finger, and a red line appeared on the map shown by the holographic computer. "Do you notice anything now?"

The man leaned in, his eyes scanning the map. Suddenly, his breath caught in his throat. "The route... it ends at a port."

A grim smile played on the Justicar's lips. "Exactly. I believe we might know where Erik Romano is headed."

The vindicator's eyes widened behind the mask as realization dawned. "Are you suggesting... that Erik Romano is the one responsible for all of this, and that he is..."

"That's precisely what I'm suggesting," the woman said. "Think about it. The sudden increase in enemy forces, the strategic strikes against our supply lines, the direction pointed in coastal areas. It all points to one conclusion."

"Erik Romano is headed to Hin. He is headed here," the man said.

The Justicar nodded. "You finally got it. I don't need to tell you what will happen if he reaches Hin, right? The consequences could be catastrophic. That man... We will need an entire army just to kill him, at least three to apprehend him. If we use the old continent's troop, of course, and we can't call our people from Mur."

The vindicator straightened. "Commander, if I may... I'd like to take charge of this situation personally. Allow me to capture Erik Romano and put an end to this threat."

The woman turned to him, her gaze calculating. "You're volunteering for this mission? You understand the risks, don't you?"

"I do, Commander," the man said. "I feel a personal responsibility in this matter. I should have been more vigilant, more proactive in dealing with Erik's situation from the beginning."

A knowing look crossed the Justicar's face. "Well... You have a personal connection to this mission, right? After all, you took care of the kid for some years, even if that was to find Lucius Romano."

The man hesitated for a moment before nodding. "Yes, Commander."

The woman's expression softened. "I see. Well, Vindicator Levium, or should I say, Benjamin Kaminski. Your request is not only granted; it's expected. Your personal connection to this situation and the skills you possess, as testified by your rank, make you qualified to handle it."