

BIOLOGICAL 1041

Chapter 1041: A traitor's resolve

Uncle Benjamin bowed deeply. He needed to show his respects to the woman in front of him, since she had absolute control over the blackguards.

The woman's main job was being the third division commander. But there were three of such divisions in total. The first division dealt with thaids. It was the largest of the three, and most of its members, including the commander, were now on the Mur continent.

The second division dealt with criminals. It was a sort of international police, at least it was at the beginning.

Currently, they were spread out across the Mannard continent, and a lot of them were searching for Erik.

However, they were currently working with the third division, the most powerful of them all, but also the one with fewer members.

This division, led by Third Division commander Monica Velasquez, dealt with internal affairs.

That meant the division killed traitors, made spies, observed their members, searched for promising candidates, but most importantly, was searching for lost technology.

Since Erik was thought to have such technology, the two divisions were coordinating to capture him, since he fit both bills for the two divisions to act

This year, Commander Velasquez had an important job. The Blackguards organization had three leaders, one for each division. Every year, they took turns being in charge of the organization. This year, it was Velasquez's turn to make the final decisions for the entire group.

That was why she currently was the Head Justicar.

"Thank you, Third Division Commander. I won't let you down. With your permission, I'd like to leave for Hin immediately. "

The woman nodded. "Permission granted. Assemble whatever resources and personnel you need. This mission is now your top priority. Do whatever it takes to capture Erik Romano and bring him in. Alive, if possible, but do not hesitate to use lethal force if necessary.

It's better to bring back a dead Erik Romano than to come back empty-handed."

"Understood, Commander," Uncle Benjamin said, not completely calm after what the woman had said. "I'll prepare to leave at once."

As he turned to go, the woman stopped him. "Levium," she said, her tone colder than before. "Do not fail this time. Erik Romano isn't the boy you once knew. He's become something... more.

Don't let your past cloud your judgment."

Uncle Benjamin paused at the door, his hand on the handle. "I understand, Commander. Rest assured, I'll do what needs to be done. For the good of our cause."

With a final bow, Uncle Benjamin left the room. His shoulders felt heavy. Until now, he tried to avoid Erik as much as possible. Of course, he was still forced from time to time to take the helm of some operations, like the one in Etrium.

Even though Uncle Benjamin had an ulterior motive for taking care of Erik as a child, he still grew fond of him. He was supposed to find Erik's father, but he went beyond his duty by taking him out for meals and buying him gifts. This wasn't part of his job, but it helped create a real connection between them.

The relationship the man had with Lucius was also a genuine one. The two grew up together. It was just that; he ended up within the blackguards, while Lucius worked for Frant's government.

When he got told he had to spy on Lucius, his heart sank, but there was no way he wouldn't fulfill his duty, and despite the two having taken contrasting paths, he still loved the man, and for this reason, his son.

With a heavy heart, Uncle Benjamin strode towards the command center.

"Erik..." He paused. "You put yourself into a colossal mess."

Uncle Benjamin felt conflicted. He remembered how unhappy Erik used to be, so he wasn't too upset about Erik's current situation. Erik had become powerful and made a name for himself. Still, Erik was now on the opposite side. He was considered an enemy.

If Erik knew what Uncle Benjamin really thought, he would be furious. Uncle Benjamin was the main reason for all of Erik's problems, even more than the Blackguards as a group. Most importantly, he was responsible for his father's death.

Uncle Benjamin caused all of Erik's troubles and betrayed him. Yet he still dared to think he cared about Erik? It was simply outrageous.

As Uncle Benjamin walked, old memories came back to him. He thought about Erik as a young boy, innocent and full of promise.

He remembered how proud his friend Lucius was watching his son grow up. But then he remembered the day everything changed.

It was when they found out Erik's brain crystal power was defective. That night, Lucius got very drunk to cope with the situation, because he knew how hard his son's life would be.

He remembered when Lucius told him he was leaving for a mission. At that time, no one knew Benjamin was a blackguard. He belonged to the third division, after all, and they were secretive even among the organization's members.

That day set in motion a chain of events that had led to this moment.

Uncle Benjamin clenched his fists, pushing the memories aside. Now wasn't the time for sentimentalism.

Erik had chosen his path, and it was a path that threatened everything the Blackguards stood for. Personal feelings had no place in this mission.

He entered the command center, calling for attention. "Prepare a strategy focused team," he said.

"We're heading to Hin. Top priority mission, target: Erik Romano. I want our fastest ship ready within the hour, fill them with the best of the best, and ask for reinforcement from all the countries — in secret, of course. This mission has the highest priority. We will be directly under the third division commander, the head Justicar. This should let you understand how serious it is.

The mission is classified. Do not talk about it with others, even the other division commanders."

"Sir, yes, sir!"

As the room burst into activity around him, Uncle Benjamin silently apologized to the memory of his friend for what he might have to do to Erik.

With a deep breath, he pushed all doubts aside and focused on the task at hand. Erik Romano might have escaped from them so far, but that was about to change.

Chapter 1042: Between two seas

Erik and his team had been sailing for two weeks since leaving the island base. The journey had been relatively uneventful so far. That didn't mean they fought no thaids, but they were weak.

The Chimaeric Demons took care of them, but Erik could see now why they said they were weaker than flying thaids. They were not weaker in terms of strength, but they could be fought easily compared to them.

The ship's systems were able to find them under water, and with the new brain-crystal-powered weapons, it was possible to kill them. In the past, Hin's fleet must have had many ranged users, and since the sea thaids attacked the ships, it wasn't hard for them to hit.

Flying thaids, instead, stayed in the sky, which was much harder to reach them.

Fighting sea thaids should have been easier if the ship was in a fleet. Thaids could avoid a single ship's attacks, but not if a fleet rained down attacks on them. It was impossible.

On the fifteenth day of their journey from the island, the ship neared a dangerous area. It was a stretch of water between two zones where huge sea monsters lived.

The very thought of these creatures sent shivers down the spines of even the bravest sailors. For sure, it did on Hin's, who avoided this place like a plague.

Looking at what Erik was doing from an outsider's perspective, it was pretty stupid to go in the middle of two of such zones, but it was exactly because everyone avoided this place that it was so good to take it.

Of course, only those who were brave enough, or stupid enough, to do it dared.

Erik was in the pilot's cabin. June stood beside him, his hands resting on the ship's controls.

"Master," June said, breaking the tense silence and making Erik lose focus on the waters in front of them.

"Are you absolutely sure about this? Going through the corridor, I mean. We could still change course and go around the thaid territories."

Erik turned to June and looked at the clone. "I'm sure, June. I know it's dangerous, but we wasted enough time already, and I'm pretty sure Hin is on our tracks right now."

June nodded, respecting his master's decision but still feeling uneasy. "All right, master."

Erik sighed, running a hand through his hair. He knew what the clone was thinking. "Look, June, going through the corridor is risky; no doubt about it. We might face one or both of those massive sea thaids, or if we're lucky, neither of them will notice us. But here's the thing—we know what to expect here."

He took a moment before continuing. "Going around the dangerous areas might seem safer, but it's not. We'd be in unfamiliar waters where we could meet even scarier sea monsters we don't know about. Plus, the longer we're out at sea, the more likely Hin's ships are to find us. At least in the corridor, we know what we're up against."

"And you think we're less likely to run into Hin's ships in the corridor? What if they think we do that and prepare an ambush?"

"It's very unlikely any smart ship captain would choose to sail between two dangerous sea monster areas unless they had no other choice. That's why the corridor is probably the safest place to avoid

enemy ships. We're only taking this risk because we have the Chimaeric Demons to protect us. For Hin to come here safely, they'd need to send at least two entire fleets of ships."

"I see," June said, his unease lessening somewhat. "When you put it that way, it makes sense."

Erik placed a hand on June's shoulder. "I know it's not a simple decision, June. But I believe in our abilities, in this ship, and in the plan we've made. We can do this."

June straightened, bolstered by Erik's confidence. "Of course, Master. I trust your judgment."

Erik smiled, then his expression grew serious again. "Now, speaking of plans, did we receive any news from the Chimaeric Demon we left at the island outpost?"

June nodded, reaching for a nearby console. He pulled up a message and presented it to Erik.

"Yes, Master. The clone reported some interesting developments. There's been significant movement along Frant's shores. Many ships are heading back to Hin."

Erik's brow furrowed. "Many ships? Did the message say how many?"

June shook his head. "Not an exact number, but the clone described it as a 'substantial fleet.' Apparently, the island outpost received orders to prepare to restock these returning ships."

Erik paced the small cabin. "This is problematic. It could mean Hin has figured out we stole one of their ships."

"Do you think they know it was us specifically, Master?"

Erik was silent for a moment, considering. "No," he said. "I don't think so. If they knew it was us—if they knew I was involved—they would send back a lot more than just a 'substantial fleet.' They'd be mobilizing everything they could spare from the war effort in Frant, at least in theory."

"That's assuming you are that important to them."

"Didn't they already prove it?"

"Yes and no, Master," June said. "The blackguards know how valuable the secret behind your powers is, yet they never sent entire armies against you. The trap at the prison doesn't even count."

"They didn't know what I could do, back then..."

"You might be right," the clone said after thinking for a moment. "But we can be sure of one thing. They're being careful. They're sending people after us, but not so many that it hurts their fight in Frant. It's a clever move. But it also shows us they don't know everything about what's going on.

They are uncertain about who stole the ship, at least based on the blackguards' actions. We need to find out how many ships are heading back."

"Indeed."

What Erik and June didn't know, however, was that the situation was more complex than they realized.

While the blackguards didn't have concrete proof, they strongly suspected Erik was heading to Hin. The number of troops being sent back was indeed smaller than Erik expected, but not as underwhelming as he might have thought if they were certain of his involvement.

The truth was, the blackguards were in a precarious position. They couldn't afford to weaken their forces in Frant too much, as the war there was still raging, and it wasn't going well for them.

Losing Frant wasn't a problem in itself. They never had complete control over it, after all, but it would undermine their leadership across the globe.

The number of troops from Frant wasn't large, especially considering who they were after. However, the blackguards were secretly asking for help from other countries. They reached out to their allies, their servants from the other countries, in Prare, Reraiaph, Khunelerp, and Miciselen for more soldiers. They were doing all of this quietly, without drawing attention.

Back on the ship, Erik made his decision. "June, it's time. Take us into the corridor."

The clone nodded, his hands gliding over the controls. The ship's engines hummed louder as it picked up speed, cutting through the waves like a lance.

As they entered the body of water, the atmosphere in the cabin changed. Erik and June were nervous.

The sea here was different. The waves were untamed and crashed on the ship's hull as if they were burning with rage. But it wasn't just the roughness of the water that was unsettling.

The water was also much warmer here. It felt very different from the cooler waters they had been sailing through for the last two weeks, and the reason might be more important than someone might have assumed.

Chapter 1043: Hotter Than a Summer BBQ (1)

Erik stood at the front of the bridge. He left the pilot's cabin, since he wanted to be on the deck in case something arrived.

Fifteen of the 20 Chimaeric Demons were inside the water already. Circling the ship and preventing the weaker thaids from approaching the vessel.

On either side of the ship, in the far distance, he could make out their faint silhouettes moving beneath the water's surface.

The Chimaeric Demons looked like they were fighting something—at least some of them.

This was problematic, because it meant that the waters were filled with thaids. Even though they had only entered the area a short time ago, the situation was already more dangerous than they wanted.

<Master,> June's voice broke through Erik's thoughts. <We're fully in the corridor now. Our sensors aren't picking up any immediate threats the Chimaeric Demons can't take care of, but...>

<But that doesn't mean they're not there,> Erik finished for him. <I know, June. Keep us on course, but be ready to make evasive maneuvers at a moment's notice.>

June nodded, not that Erik could see it, his hands never leaving the controls. <Yes, Master. I hope those two titanic sea thaids don't notice us. Or if they do, that they're not in the mood for a ship-sized snack.>

Erik laughed. <Yeah. I share that hope.>

As they sailed deeper into the corridor, the water's heat seemed to increase.

Erik couldn't shake the feeling of unease as the temperature kept rising. Why was it so much warmer here than in other areas?

He went through multiple hypotheses, finally landing on one thought: underwater volcanoes.

"It makes sense."

The heat, the violent waves—both could be explained by volcanic activity below.

"Damn it," Erik wanted to curse. "There was no mention of it on Hin's documents."

But of course, the enemy avoided these two areas, which was, in truth, a single one shared by the two thaids, so it was likely it hadn't been fully charted, and even if they crossed this part of the sea, it wasn't like they could send someone to chart the depth below.

It wasn't possible because of the pressure, but even because of the thaids. However, if Erik had known, he might really have chosen a different route to take, or at least he would have prepared better.

<Do you see something weird?> Erik asked the Chimaeric Demons under water.

<Nothing, sir. Just some thaids trying to approach the ship, but nothing we can't take care of.>

<Right... Keep your eyes open, and be ready to use that blinding brain crystal power of yours. At the slightest problem, we get the fuck out of here.>

<Yes, master,> The Chimaeric Demons said in unison.

...

...

...

Hours went by, then a week. Nothing happened, aside from the waters becoming hotter and more raging.

The heat had become unbearable, turning the ship into a floating oven. Even the Chimaeric Demons couldn't withstand the scorching temperatures in the water and had to retreat into the air, transforming into flying thaid's to continue their scout.

Erik did his best to lower the temperature by making large ice blocks everywhere to keep the ship cool enough, but the ice melted quickly, and he was forced to replace it often.

Luckily, though, it looked like even the other thaid's couldn't withstand these temperatures.

On the deck, Mira, Emily, and Amber lay sprawled out in swimsuits, trying to find relief from the heat. They didn't touch the water, but their swimming suits were drenched from sweat. They looked thoroughly miserable.

As Erik arrived at the deck, he was immediately hit by a wall of heat. He glanced around, taking in the scene.

The few Chimaeric Demons still on board were at their posts, but they took off all their clothing to stay cool. Even they were struggling, despite Erik having made ice close to their positions.

However, Erik's gaze fell on the three women. <Holy...> He had seen them naked many times, but there was a different allure to them with the swimsuit.

Emily was basically clutching a block of ice. Amber was lying on a towel, while Mira was reading something. Emily and Amber were younger than Mira, and they still had some childish behavior. The latter, though, was very ladylike. Even the way she kept reading added to her allure.

<Keep yourself composed, Erik.> His thoughts then went to the Chimaeric Demons, his clones.

<I don't want to be in their shoes.> He caught them stealing glances at the three women from time to time. Well, they had his memories, even they knew how their naked bodies were.

<Ahhhh...> Erik sighed. <Let's not think about it.>

Erik approached the three women. They were sweating and in obvious discomfort. He couldn't help but feel sorry. He was not in a different situation than theirs, but he was faring much better.

"Ladies," he said, "How are you holding up?"

Mira lifted her head. Her eyes were full of annoyance. "Oh, you know, just peachy. I always dreamed of being slow-roasted on a ship deck."

Emily managed a weak chuckle. "Yeah, Erik. This is great. Really loving the whole 'sailing through the fires of hell' experience."

"What about you?"

Amber simply groaned and threw an arm over her eyes. "I think I'm melting. Is this what it feels like to be a popsicle in the desert?"

Erik sighed, running a hand through his sweat-soaked hair. "Kind of. Even in the white desert, the heat wasn't this bad." Mira knew Erik went there, but Emily and Amber didn't.

"You went to the White Desert?" Emily asked. "I did; I made a giant tree there to kill some flying thaids. I didn't have the powers I had today, so I was at a disadvantage as much as you would be."

"No kidding," Mira said, pushing herself up into a sitting position. "I remember those months. At some point, we thought you were dead. The tree was basically a giant giveaway of your situation."

"You knew about the tree?" Erik asked.

"I did, but I didn't know you made the tree for that reason. Honestly, it's appearance scared the shit out of many people. They were going to send someone to see what made it. Luckily, they didn't have a death wish, unlike you, and just ignored the matter."

"Happy to hear my home caught everyone's attention."

"Don't change the topic," Emily said. "I thought we were trying to get to Hin, not the sun's surface."

Erik laughed. "Trust me, the sun wouldn't be as dangerous as this place."

Emily sat up too, fanning herself with her hand. "So, what's the plan? Because I'm not sure how much more of this we can take."

Erik looked out over the roiling sea. "There's not much we can do, honestly. We can only push forward. We are two weeks away from the end of this sea corridor."

"Two weeks? What? I will be dead by then!" Amber said.

"Don't be dramatic! We're making progress. The corridor isn't endless. We just need to hold out a bit longer."

"Hold out? Erik, we're not just uncomfortable here. This heat is dangerous. We're risking heat stroke, dehydration... How much water have we left?" Amber asked.

"Plenty, don't worry. We're also taking precautions. The Chimaeric Demons are distributing water constantly, and we've set up more cooling stations below deck."

Mira snorted. "Cooling stations? You mean those pathetic fans blowing hot air around? We might as well try to cool ourselves by breathing on each other."

Erik couldn't argue with that. The ship's cooling systems were working overtime, but they were never designed for this kind of extreme heat. The block of ice helped, but since it was hot, they

quickly turned into hot steam. Even the one Emily was clinging to was almost halved in size in less than 15 minutes. "Look, I understand your frustration. This isn't ideal for any of us."

"Understatement of the year," Mira said.

"But," Erik said, "We're safer here than we would try to go around. The heat is brutal, yes, but it's also keeping away any Hin ships that might look for us, and for sure, it's keeping the thaidis away. Did you forget we didn't encounter a single one since the third day?"

Mira nodded reluctantly. "I see your point. Still doesn't make this any easier to bear."

Chapter 1044: Hotter Than a Summer BBQ (2)

"I promise you, as soon as we're clear of this corridor, we'll cool down properly. Maybe even take a detour to a nice, cold island if we can find one."

Mira perked up slightly at that. "A cold island? Now you're talking. Got any of those in your back pocket?"

Erik chuckled. "I'll see what I can find. In the meantime, why don't you three head below deck? It's not much, but it's cooler than out here."

The women exchanged glances, then slowly got to their feet. As they passed Erik, Amber paused and gave him a worried look.

Erik turned his attention back to the sea. The water churned and steamed, heat radiating from below. He couldn't shake the feeling that there was more to this corridor than just the heat. Something about it felt... off.

But for now, his main concern was getting his team through this ordeal. Erik took a deep breath of the scorching air.

<Maybe I should make some more ice blocks.>

With a last glance at the horizon, Erik turned and headed back to the bridge. They had a long way to go, and every moment counted.

But just as that thought of rest crossed his mind, June called out, his voice tight with alarm.
<Master! I'm picking up something on the long-range sensors. It's big, and it's moving fast!>

<Any idea what it is?>

<No, master... But unless there are thaids strong enough to resist the heat here, I don't think there are many alternatives...>

<Fuck... It's one of the two thaids, the Behemoth or the Leviathan.>

<What do you think it could be, Master?>

<Honestly? I have no idea, but I'm inclined to think it's the serpent... I'm coming there, June. You swerve into the octopus area!>

<I have to do what?>

<You heard me!>

<But what if the monster comes? Or what if it is this thaid that is coming here?>

<We have to risk it. If it is the serpent, we might be able to make the two fight; otherwise, it would be on us.>

Erik then mentally turned to the Chimaeric Demons flying above.

<Do you see anything?>

<Nothing, master! Whatever is coming is deep into the sea or too far!>

<Keep your eyes open. June, I'm coming to you.>

Erik was at the clone's side in an instant, peering at the readout. A large blip was indeed moving across the screen, heading for their position.

"How long until it reaches us?" he asked. June's fingers flew over the controls. "At its current speed... ten minutes, maybe less."

Erik nodded. "Then we have ten minutes to find the other thaid."

<Alright, listen up everyone!> he called out to the other clones.

<We've got company coming. I want you to spread! Go lure the octopus or the enormous serpent and bring it here! Is that clear?>

<Yes, Master!>

<As for you! He said to the Chimaeric Demons on the ship.

<Go pick the girls and your brother's eggs; take also some crates of provisions. If things go bad, I want you to leave the ship before that thing arrives. I'm not sure how the situation will unfold from here on, so I want to be prepared.>

<Yes, Master!>

The crew sprang into action. The weapon systems were going to be useless. If the creature coming was as powerful as those two thaid, or if it was one of them, even the brain crystal technology on the ship wouldn't work.

June, in the meantime, entered the octopus area. The Chimaeric Demons were already searching around, hoping to find the creature. But the sea was vast and deep. They might cross it but could fail to see it or to be spotted. The clones doing the same with the Leviathan Serpent were in a similar situation.

Not knowing what creature was coming, based on how large it was, it could be one of the two. Erik didn't know if he was strong enough to fight it. If he was, then good, but if he wasn't, it was better to have a contingency plan, and that was why he sent the Chimaeric Demons to search for them.

If they saw each other, there would be great chances they would forget about the ship's existence.

<Well, I hope...>

As the minutes ticked by, the tension in the pilot cabin grew. On the deck, the Chimaeric Demons were ready to leave.

They took on the form of Zephyrwings, so they were big enough to carry a couple of people while transporting the goods. June was also there, turned into a black Wyvern, carrying the Chimaeric Demons' eggs and most of their provisions, but not everything.

They still had to leave most of the food behind, but that wasn't a problem. By flying, they would reach Hin's shores quickly. The problem was that there were much higher chances to be spotted.

When the clone transformed, the ship swayed dangerously. The weight was a lot, but when June got a firm hold over the ship, it stopped moving.

Erik stood at the center of it all, at the pilot's cabin. Outwardly calm, but inwardly ready to fight, if necessary.

<Five minutes to intercept,> Erik said to the others. There was no sight of the Chimaeric Demons searching for the two creatures.

Erik went through their options. Fight or flee? Stand their ground or try to outrun the creature?

The computer estimated three minutes at that point.

<June.>

<Yes, Master?>

<Bring the others up above; I'm going to fight this thing and see if I can save the ship.>

<What? Master, we don't even know what stats this thing has! It's too dangerous!>

<Maybe. But I can't risk Amber, Mira, and Emily dying. Bring them to safety.>

<What does this have to do with you risking your life like this? We can simply leave the ship!>

<You know we can't, June.>

One minute to intercept.

On the horizon, a huge vapor cloud formed, its size increasing with each passing second.

The billowing mass rose, stretching higher into the sky and expanding outward, drawing closer to the ship.

Erik realized at that point that it wasn't a volcano that was making the waters so unbearably hot; it was the thaid approaching the ship.

<Fuck... It's too hot!>

"Do it now, June!"

The clone spread his wings and took to the sky. The Chimaeric Demons followed. Erik watched them ascend.

June circled back, his gaze fixed on the ship. The temperature lowered a lot up in the sky, but it was still high. Heat tended to go up, after all.

Then, with a last beat of his wings, he led the Chimaeric Demons further up the skies, ensuring the safety of Amber, Mira, and Emily, as well as the cargo they carried.

Erik remained on the ship, standing ready. He set the ship's controls to keep heading toward the center of the octopus' s area, and he went on deck.

Thirty seconds. The vapor cloud was almost on the ship. June and the others could see it; it was massive, long, and terrifying.

Chapter 1045: Hotter Than a Summer BBQ (3)

As the thirty-second countdown ticked away, Erik knew he had to act fast or risk being cooked alive. The approaching creature's heat was already unbearable, as it was at this distance. If he didn't do something drastic now, he would die in thirty seconds.

Without wasting another second, Erik sent mana into his Frostwind Fire Tempest's neural links, channeling an enormous amount of mana into them.

The wind howled, and the sound cut through the air while the temperature dropped. Erik felt the chill seep into his bones, which at least helped him fight the scorching heat he was feeling since the creature had appeared minutes ago.

The water condensed in front of the ship, transforming into an enormous glacier right before his eyes.

The gigantic ice formation hung suspended in the air for a moment before gravity took hold of it. The glacier fell from the sky with terrifying speed and when it crashed into the ocean; the impact made a deafening noise.

A monstrous wave, born from the glacier's violent entry, spread and surged towards the ship. Erik gripped the railing, his knuckles white as the vehicle lurched violently. Then they sizzled, because they made them almost incandescent.

For a moment, it seemed the ship would capsize, tipping to one side.

<Maybe I exaggerated a bit.>

Erik felt dizzy as the ship rocked violently. He struggled to stand upright on the tilting deck. Everything around him spun, making it hard to tell where the sea ended and the sky began.

However, that wasn't the only result coming from the glacier, because as soon as the extreme cold surface of the gigantic ice boulder hit the boiling waters, a geyser of steam and water erupted.

The area around the ship cooled down. This gave Erik some brief relief from the extreme heat, but not that much.

But Erik's victory was short-lived. The intense heat radiating from the still-hidden creature melted the glacier at an alarming rate.

Clouds of steam kept billowed up, creating a thick fog that enveloped the entire area, and not just that around the ship.

Though, while this prevented Erik from seeing the thaid, it also hid the ship from the creature's sight.

The temperature then started rising again. Thinking quickly, Erik used his Frostwind Fire Tempest power once more, this time creating several large blocks of ice on the ship's deck.

These would help the young man fight the heat that was slowly coming back in full force. No, it was even worse, because the creature traversed several nautical miles in just seconds, and as it got closer, the temperature increased at a much faster pace.

Erik realized his mana wasn't enough to match the creature's. The change in temperature was too much, despite Erik pouring a ton of mana into making the glacier. This could only mean one thing: the sea thaid had much more of the ethereal substance than him.

<But I am at the fucking A rank!>

It was scary to think there was something that could make him feel like having an E-ranked brain crystal again, but here it was. It was a dreadful thought, one that made his insecurities surge again.

At that point, Erik, hidden by the cloud, could only wait. Five tense minutes passed with Erik standing on the deck. If the ship wasn't hidden by the fog, the creature would have already attacked it.

<Well, at least I got five more minutes.>

But Erik could see and feel the water shifting and rippling around the ship. Something massive was moving beneath the surface, and judging by the increasing intensity of the disturbances, and of the rising heat, of course, it was getting closer.

"Damn it."

Even though he hid the ship, whatever was approaching seemed to have some other way of tracking him.

<I need to do something. But what?>

In desperation, Erik willed his biological supercomputer to display his status, hoping there might be some ability or power he had overlooked and that might help him get out of this situation.

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[Host Information]

NAME: Erik Romano.

AGE: 18

POWER LEVEL: 279

SYSTEM LEVEL: 236

EXPERIENCE: 1,034,762 /1,278,611

DNA POINTS: 318,342

HEALTH: 22,440/22,440

MANA: 22,370/22,370

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 394

INTELLIGENCE: 326

DEXTERITY: 374

ENERGY: 1117

Available attributes points: 0

{Powers}

[Biological Super Computer Powers]

-Brain Crystal Manipulation

Brain Crystal Power Extraction

Brain Crystal Power Merging

Brain Crystal Power Analysis

Brain Crystal Power Editing

Brain Crystal Power Strengthening

(LOCKED)

-DNA Manipulation

DNA Extraction

DNA Merging

DNA Analysis

DNA Editing

DNA Strengthening

(LOCKED)

-Analysis

-Brain Information Injector

-Device Manipulation

[Host's Powers]

PLANT MASTER: A₁3B-RANKED

CHIMAERIC DEMON: A_ε2X-RANKED

SELF HEALING: A_μ1A-RANKED

INSTABILITY: A_λ2B-RANKED

PHANTOM VEIL: A_o3A-RANKED

FROSTWIND FIRE TEMPEST: A_o2A-RANKED

FORCE BASTION: Aσ1B-RANKED

LIGHTNING LORD: Aσ1A-RANKED

BEASTWALKER: Aσ1B-RANKED

{Skills}

Kyokar hand-to-hand style (MASTER)

Etrium's sword style (ADVANCED)

Crypt of the Desert Style (MASTER)

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As the interface appeared before him, he gave it a quick look. Unfortunately, there was nothing he could use among them that could help him in that situation, at least not apparently.

The reason Erik remained on the ship was to protect it. He made the others leave so that they could be safe. But he was in the middle of the danger.

The problem was he did not know what to do, unable as he was to think clearly.

<Think, Erik. Think!>

His mind went into over gear. Trying to come up with a solution. There were only two things he could actually use, and that came to his mind: the Instability, and the Phantom Veil brain crystal powers.

The first option was to manipulate the creature's mental state, disorienting or confusing it, or at best pacifying it. The second was to create an illusory copy of the ship, which might divert the creature's attention and lead it away from the ship.

However, this plan came with significant problems. Creating an illusory copy of the entire ship would demand an enormous amount of mana, and he didn't have much to begin with, at least not compared to the sea thaid.

Besides, there was no guarantee that this would work against the thaid, at least based on how powerful it looked to be just from the distance. The same could be said for the Instability brain crystal power. What if the creature realized he was trying to mess with it? With how much more mana it seemed to have compared to Erik, it would break the mental attack easily.

Besides, while the surrounding steam might help to conceal the illusion's nature, Erik doubted it would last for long. Given the creature's apparent strength, Erik was sure he would need to use his Instability brain crystal power to further muddle its perceptions.

<The creature is going to see through the trick...>

The young man was starting to lose hope.

Chapter 1046: Hotter Than a Summer BBQ (4)

<Well. There is not much I can do at this point. Better try everything I can.>

Erik focused on his Instability brain crystal power, injecting an astronomical amount of mana into its neural links, but enough to create a big ass illusion.

He then probed around with his mind, searching for the creature hidden in the steam and swimming in the waves.

As Erik's consciousness expanded, he searched for a minute, then two. This went on until he found the beast, and oh... He found it.

If Erik wasn't already in a state of panic given what he saw, at that moment, for the first time in years, that feeling came back. Fear, simply pure and unbridled fear, rushed through Erik like a tidal wave crashing through a paper fortress.

The sheer enormity of the beast's presence almost overwhelmed his senses, making him feel as insignificant as a minnow facing a megalodon.

The depth and complexity of the emotions emanating from the creature were beyond anything Erik had ever experienced.

These weren't the chaotic, instinct-driven thoughts he usually found when reading a Thaid's mind. No, these were strangely coherent, almost... human-like in their structure.

Yet the sheer power radiating from the unseen monster, the immense cloud of vapor it generated, most likely thanks to the immense amount of mana it had, all pointed to something far beyond humans.

It had capabilities, even Erik didn't have. The young man dug deeper into the creature's mind. He found the creature didn't think in words like humans did, but it was very similar. However, its feelings and thoughts were clear, coherent, ordered, and terrifying.

The monster felt as if there was some kind of territorial intrusion. That much was clear.

<Shit... This must be the Leviathan Serpent.>

There was no other alternative. The ship went through the corridor within the two monstrous thaids. Hin was wary of.

So, since the monster wasn't using tentacles, by exclusion, only the serpent could be the one before Erik, and it looked like it perceived the ship's presence as a violation of its domain.

But something didn't add up. Erik knew they weren't and had never been within the Leviathan's territory. Not before, and not now. This was especially true in the current situation, since Erik told June to bring the ship into the area controlled by the Shadowmaw Behemoth to escape the Serpent.

Erik thought hard. Harder than he had ever made, and suddenly realized something important, or rather, it got scared by something else other than the Leviathan Serpent.

<If this guy is so upset about us having somehow ended up within its territory, even though we didn't, how will the Behemoth react when the Serpent enters its area?>

It became clear that these sea monsters were much smarter than Erik had thought, but their territorial nature was still there, like for any other Thaid. That led to another scarier thought.

<What if all the thaids on the Mur continent are this clever? It can't be, right?>

Erik thought about how Hin, the country nearest to Mur, handled these clever sea monsters. He wasn't sure if his ideas about the creatures were right, but he couldn't ignore the possibility, and that humans, enemies at that, could somehow keep the monster at bay concerned him.

<The blackguards are there, after all... So, if this is true and Hin resisted, it's most likely because of them.>

Pushing these concerns aside for the moment, Erik focused on the task at hand. He channeled mana into the Leviathan Serpent's mind, trying to introduce calming thoughts and instill the idea that the ship was in another place. But the amount of mana Erik was using was a lot, and his reserves were draining quickly.

It was like the Leviathan Serpent's mind was a chasm, a gorge which not even the sea could fill.

"Fuck..."

The effort felt to Erik like he was trying to redirect a river with his bare hands. The Serpent's mind was vast, seemingly ancient, and incredibly powerful, contrary to everything Erik knew about Thaids.

His influence felt like a mere droplet in an ocean of consciousness. But he endured, pouring more and more mana into it. A droplet might do nothing, but many could do something, even if not that much.

Slowly, Erik sensed a shift in the creature's thoughts. The intense feeling of territorial aggression waned a little, replaced by curiosity.

Erik seized on this change, projecting images of peace and non-aggression. Minutes stretched into what felt like hours as Erik kept pouring mana.

<It's almost time.> Sweat poured down his face, not just from the intense heat, but because of how much mana he was using. Besides, the ice had already melted at that point, and Erik's skin was becoming red.

With his mana reserves already strained, Erik understood it was time to act.

<Let's go...>

Summoning his last reserves of mana, Erik focused on his Phantom Veil brain crystal power's neural links.

He pushed mana through them, and he concentrated on making a large-scale illusion. Slowly, the image of a ship materialized in the fog-shrouded waters.

The illusion wasn't perfect. Erik had to be crude with the details, given the size of the illusion and his dwindling mana reserves.

Even though the fake ship didn't look perfect. He didn't make it with the idea it had to be in mind, but the fog and his mind attack might be enough to fool the giant sea creature.

As the ship took form, Erik guided it closer to where he thought the Leviathan Serpent was. The connection with the creature was still there, and after some moments, Erik felt a shift. The thaid detected the silhouette of the false ship in the mist.

<Great... Now, bite the bait, you motherfucker!>

The monster's attention turned towards the illusion. The waves around the real ship calmed, and the oppressive heat lessened, but not that much.

<It's working>

The Leviathan serpent was moving away, chasing the phantom ship.

A sigh of relief escaped Erik's lips, but he knew he wasn't out of danger yet. The real ship continued its course towards the Shadowmaw Behemoth's territory, and that was as dangerous as heading toward the Leviathan Serpent.

But the area was vast, so it wasn't like he was going toward certain death, especially considering there was no sign of the other massive thaid or the Chimaeric Demons sent to find it.

"Damn it."

Chapter 1047: Hotter Than a Summer BBQ (5)

Erik couldn't lose his mind to fear. He needed to act rationally, because while the situation wasn't simple, it might still be possible for Erik to save the ship.

The young man started searching around with his instability brain crystal power. He couldn't see past the fog, but he still had a way to see how the situation within it was thanks to Instability.

For starters, the waves were high, and hitting strong the ship, but they were less violent than before, secondly, the temperature dropped a little, meaning the Leviathan serpent got relatively far from his position. Third, his Instability brain crystal power told him the monster was reaching for the illusion.

Now, the only problem was to find the Chimaeric Demons. he could only use mana to do that.

However, doing that while maintaining the illusion, influencing the Leviathan Serpent's thoughts, wasn't easy.

<Damn, guys! Where are you?>

Just as Erik felt he might collapse from the strain, a familiar voice cut through his mind. It was his voice, or better, one of his clones.

<Which one are you?>

<Those sent to find the Shadowmaw Behemoth.>

That was simply great.

<Did you find it?> Erik asked without losing time.

<We did, master!> The news was great, but Erik was still in the middle of the fog and not out of danger yet.

<The creature moving towards you is indeed the Leviathan Serpent.>

<I know that...>

The Chimaeric Demons didn't reply.

<Master, we can't see the ship. Where are you?> Another clone said.

Erik gathered his remaining strength to send a reply.

<The ship is hidden in a vapor cloud I made, taking advantage of the frostwind fire tempest brain crystal power. But I can't keep myself hidden, and the creature at bay for much longer. My mana is almost down to 0.>

Erik felt the growing apprehension within the Chimaeric Demons. There were many questions on their minds.

For starters, why was their master in that situation? Why hadn't he already killed the monster?

If he didn't, it meant he couldn't, and if he couldn't, it meant the monster was out of their league, too.

Erik didn't know how much the monster was stronger than them or if they would have found the behemoth.

But Erik's plan to bring the creature here turned out to be a great idea, because now he could use this situation to his advantage. As if sensing Erik's thoughts, the Chimaeric Demons said something.

<Don't worry, Master. The Behemoth is following us. We're heading towards the vapor cloud now.>

That was great. If the Chimaeric Demons could see the vapor cloud from their position, it meant the Shadowmaw Behemoth could, too.

And if that was the case, the massive creature must have realized its territory had been invaded by the Leviathan Serpent.

A battle between these two titanic sea thajids was inevitable.

<The problem is that I'm going to be caught in the middle of the clash,> Erik thought without sharing with the Chimaeric Demons.

<Hurry!> he then said. <I might need to abandon the ship if I can't bring it away from here. Be ready to fetch me, but be careful, the vapor can cook you alive!>

The Chimaeric Demons rushed towards the ship's location. It wasn't easy to miss it, anyway.

Erik turned his attention back to maintaining the illusion and keeping the Leviathan Serpent away from the vessel, but the strain got increasingly bigger.

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

Erik's vision started blurring, and he felt his knees weakening. But he forced himself to stay upright, to keep channeling mana through his neural links.

Through his mental link, Erik could sense the Leviathan Serpent's growing frustration. The illusion was beginning to fade as Erik's mana waned.

<It found out...>

Then the creature realized it had been tricked. At the same time, he felt a new presence approaching—the Shadowmaw Behemoth. The beast was mad because of the intrusion.

It obviously knew the Leviathan Serpent was within its territory.

At that point, even the Leviathan Serpent realized there was something big and powerful coming toward it.

The ship rocked violently as the sea churned, stirred by the movement of the two colossal creatures.

"Come on, come on," Erik said through gritted teeth. At that point, he stopped channeling mana altogether. He couldn't do that anymore. But it didn't matter, because the Leviathan Serpent got focused on the Behemoth at that point.

Soon, he ran toward the ship's steering wheel and changed its course, turning it toward the corridor once again.

The Leviathan serpent ended up on Erik's left at that point. The cloud of vapor he made through the glacier he conjured up had dissipated. The ship was out in the open, and only the cloud created by the boiling water was still there.

Suddenly, a deafening roar split the air. Not metaphorically, the Leviathan Serpent was challenging the Behemoth.

The roar released a shockwave so powerful that the fog dispersed.

At that point, Erik saw the beast in all its ungodly magnificence.

The Leviathan Serpent was an incredible sight. Its immense body rose from the ocean like a chain of mountains on the horizon. It was so long that Erik couldn't see where it ended.

Each part of its body was as wide as a city street.

But it was impossible to miss the head. It was bigger than the ship, with a mouth that could easily swallow it whole.

The creature's skin looked like rough, old stone. Its back had a line of sharp bumps, making it look even scarier than it was.

Huge fins stuck out from its sides, despite obviously being a snake-like creature, and each one was taller than a building.

The Leviathan Serpent moved slowly but smoothly. It mustn't have been easy to move that colossal body, and that was why it developed fins.

While it swam, it pushed so much water that it created giant waves.

<Holy fuck!>

Erik looked farther. The Shadowmaw Behemoth was almost there, but Erik was able to find that out because of the huge tsunami that the moving creature generated. It was scary, a scene out of a movie.

<I need to go through the fog.>

There was no other way to get far from the monsters. But Erik knew it would be dangerous. The fog was directly made by the Leviathan Serpent, which meant it was hotter than the clouds he made through his brain crystal powers.

<System, how much mana do I have?>

<500 points.>

"Shit..."

Chapter 1048: Hotter Than a Summer BBQ (6)

As the vessel plunged into the scorching fog, Erik's world exploded into agony. The heat slammed into him with merciless intensity.

He couldn't hold back the scream that was keeping in his throat anymore. What came out was a sound of pure anguish.

"AAAAARGH!" But it was barely audible over the hissing steam and churning waves. His skin felt like it was melting off his bones, each second bringing a fresh wave of pain.

Erik channeled mana however he could. The Self-healing brain crystal power helped him survive and keep up through the fog, but he had to use it sparingly.

Blisters formed and popped in rapid succession across his exposed flesh. The smell of burning hair filled his nostrils as wisps of smoke rose from his scalp.

Erik's eyes watered, then his legs gave way to fatigue, and he collapsed to the deck, his body convulsing as the heat continued its assault.

Through the haze of agony, a small part of Erik's mind kept pushing what remained of his mana to heal his wounds. The ship kept moving.

The Shadowmaw Behemoth at that point had arrived, and it was challenging the Leviathan Serpent. It had to get out of its territory or it would face its wrath. But the Leviathan Serpent must have been a prideful creature, because it didn't care about the Behemoth's threat.

Through the thinning fog, Erik caught glimpses of two colossal shapes. The Leviathan Serpent's long body rose from the waves.

The Shadowmaw Behemoth did the same. The behemoth wasn't much different from the Leviathan Serpent in terms of size.

Like its contender, it was a mountain of flesh with tentacles that stretched out like trains in the sky. Despite the difference in shape, the beast was not by any means weaker than the Leviathan Serpent.

The two titanic creatures looked at each other for a moment. Then, with another earth-shattering roar, they charged, or rather swam, at full speed against the other.

The impact of their collision sent a shockwave through the water. The resulting waves nearly toppled the ship.

Erik didn't have enough strength to grab a handrail or something like that and got tossed around, nearly falling from the ship.

At that point, Erik was outside in the fog, but he was still having trouble standing on his feet.

His mana had by far ended at that point, and he hadn't been able to heal all his wounds.

The Chimaeric Demons would have to finish the job.

Erik tried to stand. Even though he was exhausted and hurting, he knew they had little time left to bring the ship away before the two creatures' really clashed, or worse, they started using their brain crystal powers.

"Guys!" Erik shouted, but only a raspy voice came out of his cooked throat.

The Chimaeric Demons, though, had flown on the other side of the fog. They saw the ship getting out of it and were horrified at seeing their master in such a state.

They quickly dove toward the ship, and as they got closer to the boiling waters below, the temperature rose. The ship was hot, the metal almost melting and bent at different places and angles.

The vessel hadn't stayed within the fog for long, but the temperature had been enough to damage the ship.

The engine was still going, but if they didn't lower the temperature soon, it might explode.

Erik heard wings cutting through the air. The Chimaeric Demons were there, their bodies becoming visible as they came down from the sky.

However, they couldn't land. The heat was too intense, and they couldn't understand how Erik was resisting it.

Though they moved their wings, trying to dissipate the heat and to give Erik a moment of respite.

However, the two clones fought against their self-preservation instincts when they saw it wasn't working and landed on the deck, burning their feet.

The moment they did, ignoring the pain, they sprang into action. One immediately began channeling mana through his neural links and started healing their master.

At the same time, the other scooped him up in its talons. The metal beneath their feet was so hot it sizzled.

With a powerful beat of its wings, the Chimaeric Demon carrying Erik lifted off from the ship.

The sudden movement sent a jolt of pain through Erik's body, but he couldn't even muster the strength to cry out.

His consciousness flickered in and out as the cool and hot air rushed past him.

They watched from the sky as the ship continued its course, its automated systems keeping it on track even without a helmsman.

The vessel's hull glowed an angry red from the intense heat it had endured, steam rising in thick plumes where seawater met the super-heated metal.

But even the waters were hot because the Leviathan Serpent had been through there.

As the Chimaeric Demons focused on healing their master, a roar split the air.

The battle between the Leviathan Serpent and the Shadowmaw Behemoth was now in full swing.

The Leviathan Serpent struck first, its body surging forward. Its jaws clamped down on one of the Behemoth's writhing tentacles.

The surrounding water boiled from the heat of their bodies and churned because of their weight and size.

The Shadowmaw Behemoth didn't wait before retaliating. Its tentacles lashed out, wrapping around the Serpent's body. The two titans thrashed in the water, creating whirlpools that could have swallowed entire ships even from that distance.

The Chimaeric Demons observed in horror, because only now they understood how much they risked, and how scary the two creatures really were.

As the battle went on, waves formed. They grew larger by the second, fed by the chaos made by the warring monsters.

Soon, they towered over the fleeing ship, like mountains of water that threatened to crush the ship under their weight.

The first of these colossal waves crashed onto the vessel.

It looked like it would be swallowed whole by the deluge. But as the water touched the metal of the hull, an explosion of steam erupted.

The ship emerged from the wall of vapor, listing dangerously but still on track.

Chapter 1049: Hotter Than a Summer BBQ (7)

More waves followed. Yet, with each impact, the temperature of the hull decreased, and since the engine was still going, the ship was getting farther and farther from the waves. The red glow faded, replaced by a more normal, albeit scorched, appearance.

The Chimaeric Demons continued their work on Erik. His face returned to a healthy color as their mana knit his wounds and healed his skin.

Erik's eyes fluttered open, unfocused at first but sharpening as awareness returned.

"W-what..." Erik tried to speak, but his voice was a hoarse whisper.

The Chimaeric Demons couldn't talk in their current form, but judging by the look in their eyes, they wanted Erik to rest.

Their master managed a weak nod before closing his eyes again. He could feel his strength returning, but fatigue was still there.

Below them, the titanic battle continued. The Leviathan Serpent had coiled its body around the Shadowmaw Behemoth, squeezing with enough force to crush a fleet of ships.

But the Behemoth wasn't having trouble resisting it. Its tentacles continued to lash out, leaving deep gouges in the Serpent's scales.

Both creatures dove beneath the waves, then burst back to the surface, sending geysers of water hundreds of meters into the air. The sky darkened as the vapor clouds obscured the sun.

Where the Serpent was sleek and sinuous, the Behemoth was a mountain of flesh and fury. Its mouth opened and closed in a horrifying rhythm.

The creature had a beak, but nothing stopped it from developing razor-sharp fangs along the entire inner length of the beak. It looked terrifying to look at that beak, and the unfathomable depth of that mouth.

As for how the creature truly appeared, It looked like a mix between a squid and an octopus. Of course, Erik had never seen one of them in his life, both because he didn't live close to the sea and because they were extinct. However, he remembered them from some historical biology classes he took at school.

They were hard to forget creatures, even if there were far more unsettling and weird creatures around.

To see the Behemoth, though, wasn't easy. The creature kept most of its body underwater and kept its tentacles out for most of the time. However, when the Leviathan Serpent coiled around it, sometime he brought it outside the water, and that was the reason they all saw it.

The ship moved further away from the fighting monsters. The waves, although still large, started getting smaller. The ship kept rocking in the rough sea, but the risk of it flipping over was gone.

Erik became more aware of his surroundings as time passed. And when he was in stable enough condition, he watched the battle move further away. However, given the monsters' size, it took a while before they finally disappeared on the horizon.

Though the effects of their battle were present even after many nautical miles were put between them.

<Shit... Shit... Shit... SHIT!>

There were many things Erik wanted to say.

"Guys..."

The Chimaeric Demons turned to Erik, but since their master had no mana anymore, he couldn't use his instability brain crystal power to read their minds, and their current form didn't allow them to speak.

"Maybe I messed up."

It was weird and unsettling for the two Chimaeric Demons to hear their master, who fought and won against unbeatable foes for three years, say those words.

They knew everything; they had Erik's memories; they knew how strong their creator was, and yet he was here, saying those words.

"I... I knew thaids from the Mur continent were strong, but... not like this... not this much. I think that... I think that the average monster there is more powerful than a Wyvern... It wouldn't make sense otherwise."

If the clones could respond, they would have said that might not be true. After all, these were just two thaids, and they were sea ones, of which humanity knew little.

Besides, Hin marked these two creatures as very powerful. The most logical thing was that these thaids were as powerful as a Wyvern, not more.

The problem was that there was no way to know the truth before they set foot on Mur.

The only sure thing was that the sea was dangerous. At that point, it was clear it was much more dangerous than the sky, at least on average.

So, a question surged within the Chimaeric Demons' mind. How the fuck did Frant send his troops on Hin?

Even that might have had many answers. Maybe the situation changed. The blackguards were on Mur doing who knew what, after all, and whatever they were doing on Mur was pushing not only land and flying thaids to move, but even sea ones.

The how, though, was an enormous question, because it meant the blackguards were powerful enough to force these titans to leave their original territories.

What his father said about the blackguards on Mur started to have less sense. A beast like this could destroy hundreds of thousands of people in a heartbeat. Even 10 armies wouldn't be enough to kill it.

The group had to rethink their strategy; they had to rethink what to do and how much time they spent on Hin before going to Mur, because if they went unprepared, they might lose their lives, or worse, they might lose Erik.

Luckily, the Chimaeric Demons were different from Erik's past clones in that having not one but multiple brain crystals, courtesy of Erik's efforts in improving his brain crystal power, allowed them to become stronger by making more neural links.

The problem was that there was a much more complex brain crystal. It wasn't better, but it was something that was purely made by mana, which meant it was also harder to develop connections to the body, neural links.

"We need to get back to the ship," Erik said, his voice stronger now. "There's much to discuss, and we need to assess the damage."

The Chimaeric Demons nodded in agreement. They began their descent, carefully watching the ship's movement to time their landing. From their position, and much to their relief, the Chimaeric Demons noticed that the ship's temperature decreased to bearable levels, thanks to all that water crashing on it.

However, they also saw the extent of the damage to it. The hull was warped and blackened in many places, and several of the smaller parts had broken off entirely.

With a gentle thud, they landed on the deck. The metal was still warm to the touch, but no longer dangerously hot.

Erik stood on shaky legs, leaning on one of the Chimaeric Demons for support. His wounds had been largely healed, but not all of them, because the clones didn't have that much mana to begin with.

"Find the others," he said. "I can't contact them until I get my mana again... Make sure everyone is safe. Then gather in the main cabin. We need to plan our next move."

As the Chimaeric Demons dispersed to carry out his orders, Erik made his way to the ship's wheel. Barely, of course, but he still got there.

He placed his hands on the warm wood, feeling the vibrations of the engine below. From the vibrations, it was clear the engine sustained a lot of damage because of the heat, but there was nothing Erik could do to lower the temperature right now.

Chapter 1050: Hotter Than a Summer BBQ (8)

June must have thought that the best thing to do would have been to get as far as possible from the fighting area, and indeed, that had been the right choice given how big the two creatures fighting affected their surroundings.

They basically created tsunamis. Not just 10, or 20 meters high, but even 60, 80.

If they weren't so far from the coast, they might have destroyed cities and harbours.

The Chimaeric Demons couldn't exclude that it was really going to happen as an indirect effect.

The waves were turbulent even in this part of the sea, far from the battle scene, and they could get to the coastlines easily.

The clones approached the rest of the group, their wings cutting through the air.

One of the two Chimaeric Demons shapeshifted his face into that of a human.

"Master Erik needs us back at the ship immediately," he said as they drew near.

June nodded. Something big must have happened, that much was clear from the clone's worried look.

"Lead the way," he said, adjusting his grip on the supplies he carried.

It took a little before the group arrived on the ship. The state in which the vessel was became clear to everyone, but at least the ship didn't sink.

However, what really horrified them was the state in which Erik was.

The man stood on the deck now, his body a map of burns and wounds.

His skin was raw and blistered in places, and not a single hair remained on his head or body.

He leaned heavily against the railing, his strength at rock bottom.

"Erik!" Amber cried out. Her voice was more that of a mother who had just witnessed her child's last breath, a primal sound of anguish that echoed across the sky.

As soon as the Chimaeric Demons landed, she, Mira, and Emily rushed towards him.

The Chimaeric Demons didn't hesitate, either. After having left all their precious cargo on the deck's ground, they transformed into their human forms and surrounded Erik after having pushed the three women away.

They channeled their mana into his battered body, mana that was affected by their healing brain crystal power.

Again, they had few mana points, and the number of neural links for that particular brain crystal power was low. But there were many of them, so they could completely heal Erik if they worked together.

The effort bore its fruits because Erik's wounds closed, and his burns faded, as if they had never been there. Even his hair regrew, though it remained short.

Mira, Emily, and Amber hurried to Erik's side. They looked worried but relieved as they watched him heal.

Their eyes moved over his naked body, checking how he was. Once Erik seemed out of danger, they all started asking questions.

"What happened to you?" Mira asked. "How did you end up like this?"

Emily reached out to touch Erik's arm, as if to reassure herself that he was really there and that he was ok.

Erik took a deep breath, wincing as his skin stretched because of the movement. "I had to go through the Leviathan Serpent's fog," he said, his voice hoarse.

"The heat... it was like being stuck in a giant microwave with a burrito. Even the ship looked like it had just come out of a tanning salon gone wrong."

Amber's eyes widened. "The Leviathan Serpent? Was that really what was coming toward us?"

Erik nodded. "That, and the Shadowmaw Behemoth. But the latter came because we lured it here to divert the Serpent's attention away from us. Luckily, it worked, but I'm not sure we will be able to pull this stunt again. We need to get out of this area. I messed up, thinking we would be lucky enough to avoid them.

However, the Leviathan Serpent thought we were invading its territory, and that was why it came to attack us."

"You are talking as if that thing has human-like intelligence."

"Because it has, Mira. That thing didn't use a language, but its thoughts were very much human-like. They were clear and focused. It didn't act because of pure instinct. That thing is sentient."

A hush fell over the group as they processed this information.

"Did you analyze them, master?"

"I Couldn't. After the Behemoth arrived, I barely had the time to steer the ship away. To avoid getting caught in the middle of the fight, I had to go through the fog. Honestly, seeing how strong they were that was the last of my thoughts, but..."

"But what?" Amber asked.

"The biological supercomputer," Erik said. "Has a way to quantify how strong something is. In my case, I have around 400 strength points. This means I'm around four times as strong as someone with a hundred strength points. For example, Amber," Erik said.

The Chimaeric Demons knew well what Erik was saying. They had his memories, so they knew how the system sounded or appeared, what it was capable of, or how useful it was in a battle.

"You have around 160 strength points. This means I'm 2.5 times faster and stronger than you. If you can reach 100 kilometers of speed while running, it means I can reach 250. You get it. But that thing... I think it might have reached the 1000-strength point mark."

The Chimaeric Demons remained silent. It was a silence that the three women couldn't understand.

These numbers were abstract and new to them, but to the Chimaeric Demons, who knew how accurate they were in representing the enemy's strength, they weren't.

If Erik, their master, said the monster felt like it had that many points, it meant it was powerful. No, it meant it was a living catastrophe, and the Behemoth wasn't any less of a natural disaster than the Leviathan Serpent was.

"Mur might still not be in our capabilities right now..."