

BIOLOGICAL 1051

Chapter 1051: The group's resolve (1)

Erik turned to June. There wasn't much more he could tell them since he didn't have information to give.

There was a slight pause because of that, one that was interrupted by Erik. Only, this time, he looked even more serious than he had previously been.

"The engine might be damaged because of the very high temperatures. We need to check it and fix any problems quickly."

June frowned, looking at Erik's still-weakened state. "Master, you're in no condition to be worrying about repairs right now. You need rest."

"But I'm the only one with the knowledge to fix it. Let's go down and give it a quick look."

"No," Emily said, stepping forward. "June is right. You've been through enough. We can handle this."

Mira nodded in agreement. "If worse comes to worst, we can have the Chimaeric Demons pull the ship. But you need to recover your strength."

Erik opened his mouth to argue, but June cut him off. "Master," the clone said.

"The temperature on deck has decreased, but we don't know about below. We might need you to create ice to cool things down further, but for that, you need to replenish your mana. So, just rest, please. We aren't out of these damned waters yet, and the temperature is still high—not to the point of boiling, but we are close to it."

Erik looked around at the faces surrounding him and realized he was fighting a losing battle. With a sigh, he relented. "Fine. But keep me informed of any developments."

The Chimaeric Demons then carried their master in the pilot's cabin, where he could rest without the sea waters splashing on him, and brought a bed there.

Then they secured the cargo they left on the deck. The Chimaeric Demons egg might have problems hatching if the temperature was too high, and the food might spoil, so they left some of the stuff above deck in order for it to keep a relatively good temperature.

"Rest now, Master," June said. Erik didn't have the strength to argue anymore and lied on the bed. It took little for him to fall asleep as the exhaustion of the day's event overtook him.

However, as he fell asleep, Mira, Emily, and Amber gathered on the deck. There was much on their minds.

Amber paced back and forth. She wasn't in an excellent state of mind. "We can't go on like this."

Mira nodded, her eyes distant. "Erik could have died. For real this time. When he did incredibly dangerous things back in Etrium, I often feared for his life, but as I got to know him more, it became clear that fear wasn't needed. He was already stronger than anything he faced back then. But here...

and on Mur... It's different."

Emily hugged herself. "We were useless," she said. It was a very sobering thought. "While Erik was fighting for his life, for all our lives, we were just... waiting."

The three women became silent, each thinking about their situation. They had left Mannard, where they knew how to handle dangers like thaids and other people, and where they were strong enough to be elite, strong enough to be considered at the top of the food chain.

But now they were in a new world, Mur, the sea. They were places where threats were much bigger and harder to understand, to predict, to avoid, and to fight head on.

"You shouldn't be too hard on yourselves," June said. "None of us was prepared for this. For sure, I am not and can't be. I do not have brain crystals, and I can't get stronger. But you and the Chimaeric Demons can. You may not have fully understood how powerful Erik's neural link technique is.

It's something he got from the system, after all, and you should really use it more."

Amber turned to him. "You may be right about this, but it doesn't change the fact that we should have been ready for these situations. We've relied on Erik for too long. It's time we step up."

Mira nodded. "The neural link training technique Erik taught us... we haven't been pushing ourselves hard enough with it. About that, you are right."

"Yeah," Emily said. "We were strong on Mannard, but here, we're almost useless. Maybe we even are. I think getting so much power quickly made us lazy."

June listened to them, a small smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "So? You have the means. You just need to do it."

The three women exchanged glances, a silent agreement passing between them.

"We will start training in earnest," Amber said. "This time, harder than we ever have before. We must push past the 54 neural link mark, girls. As for where we are headed, that's the bare minimum to survive. More neural links mean stronger brain crystal powers, better mana circulation."

"And stronger, faster, more resilient bodies," Mira said.

June's smile widened. "I'm glad to hear you say that. I think the master will be happy about knowing you will be stronger, because that will mean you will also be safer. You know," he added. "The master has your well-being at the top of his priorities..."

As the women discussed their plans for intensified training, the Chimaeric Demons busied themselves by assessing the ship's damage.

They went through the lower decks to see if there were holes of any kind.

Like Erik said, the engine room was a particular concern because it indeed sustained damages.

The intense heat had warped some of the metal components, and there was a worrying smell of burned oil in the air.

The Clones didn't even know how the engine was still working, but because of some stroke of luck, it was still going. However, it might not last for long.

The Chimaeric Demons then started working. They did what they could, using their strength to straighten bent parts and their limited knowledge to make temporary repairs, but without Erik, they couldn't fix it.

Maybe they would really be forced to drag the ship themselves. If Erik didn't leave the other Chimaeric Demons behind, they might have had an easier time.

Chapter 1052: The group's resolve (2)

During this time, the ship sailed towards Hin, and its occupants focused on their training and preparation for whatever they would find on the island under human control, but especially on the Mur continent.

Every member of the crew, from Erik and his lovers to the Chimaeric Demons, did their utmost to create more neural links.

For the Chimaeric Demons, though, it was harder because they had their duties to uphold. After all, they had to protect the ship and maintain its systems, and they had less time available to train compared to the others. Besides, it was also harder for them to make neural links.

But Mira, Amber, Emily, and Erik were the ones who really focused on the task. The three women pushed themselves hard because facing the situation with Leviathan Serpent made them feel like they weren't strong enough. Which was true.

Each day, they spent hours in the deep concentration that making neural links required them, and slowly, they built new ones.

Erik, too, chose to concentrate on two of his powers that had fewer neural links. Over the month, he created 15 new neural links for the force bastion and the Lightning Lord brain crystal powers.

It was a great achievement, but nothing compared to making neural links at higher levels, which were harder to make compared to those two powers, who only have their native one.

Erik learned something important from all his experiences. He realized that to get stronger; he had to focus on fewer powers instead of trying to improve all of them at once.

This was especially true because he learned that 54 neural links weren't the maximum limit after all.

People used to think that 54 was the most neural links anyone could have. But after all he saw, Erik realized this limit was likely due to the old training methods not being very effective.

Making more neural links became harder as the number grew, especially for more advanced powers. So, if Erik wanted to go beyond 54 neural links, he had no choice but to focus on a few, especially because, in Mur, he wouldn't have time to train a lot of them, and to gain stats by doing that. The best thing he could do was to increase his power's efficiency.

As for Mira, Amber, and Emily, since they had around 40 neural links each, they were only able to make 5 new ones over the month.

Even though Mira, Amber, and Emily made fewer neural links than Erik, they still did great.

After all, for them, making new ones was harder than Erik, who was focusing on powers who had very few. So, even though they only made 5 new ones each, their achievement might have been considered better than Erik's.

Even though everyone improved at different speeds, they all felt good about their progress. The entire crew had become stronger and tougher, and this would undoubtedly help.

The crew didn't just spend the month training. They also had to deal with many attacks from sea thaids. These weren't as terrifying as the Leviathan Serpent or Luminous Leviathan they encountered earlier in their journey, and the Chimaeric Demons were able to manage these attacks easily.

They were annoying, though.

Erik had to do nothing on the ship since the Chimaeric Demons took care of everything. But they kept close enough to the ship so that Erik could absorb the creatures' mana. He even gained two levels thanks to that.

After a month at sea, everyone on the ship felt hopeful but careful. Now, they could almost see the shores of Hin in the distance, and tension started mounting. They were almost finished with their sea trip, but were about to start an even riskier part of their journey on land.

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Erik, Mira, Amber, and Emily were on the ship's deck, focusing on their training. They sat still with their eyes closed, not moving or uttering a word. Some of the Chimaeric Demons were doing the same, most of them, actually, since this part of the sea wasn't that dangerous thanks to Hin's fleet.

"Master." June's voice cut through the silence. Erik opened his eyes and looked at his clone.

"What?"

"We've reached it."

Erik's eyes opened. Everyone else opened them too, looking at June with mixed feelings.

"We've entered Hin's territorial waters," June said. "If all goes well, we should reach the shores by tomorrow."

Everyone went silent. They knew this day would come and had gotten ready for it. But now that it was actually happening, they felt apprehensive. Even Erik felt that way. The Leviathan Serpent encounter truly shocked him to the core.

The man stood up. "Good work, June. Let's head to the pilot's cabin. We need to plan our approach carefully."

Once everyone was at the pilot's cabin, they waited for Erik to speak. He did by turning to June. "What's the situation with enemy ships? Have you detected any on our current route?"

The clone shook his head. "Based on our ship's systems, I have detected no immediate threats on our path. However, we should expect heavy patrols closer to the shore. Hin is likely to have significant defenses against potential attacks."

Erik nodded. "We need to find a gap in their defenses. Look for a section of the coast that's less heavily guarded. We'll need to approach under cover of darkness and leave the ship offshore."

"And then?" Mira asked.

Erik turned to the group. "We'll cover the remaining distance underwater. It's risky, but it's our best chance of reaching the shore undetected. When we reach the shores, it won't matter if they find the ship. We will be far at that point."

Amber and Emily exchanged glances, then nodded in agreement. They had come too far to turn back now.

"June, set a course for the least guarded area you can find. We'll need to time our approach carefully. Tell me if you need anything."

The clone nodded and went to the ship's controls. He moved his hands over the instruments to change their course and look for a good place to land.

While he worked, Erik looked out the cabin window at the ocean in front of them. He knew that somewhere out there was Hin.

He was hoping he would finally find answers to the many questions he had, and hoped he would finally get rid of the pest known as the blackguards.

Chapter 1053: Reaching the Shores (1)

Etrium's technology was spreading a lot at that point. It was making it possible for humanity to reclaim the land and was getting better and better now that more and more scientists worked on it. But even despite this massive technological and human presence, it wasn't that simple to fight on equal ground with the thaids.

To do that, many ships were needed. To guard the various small islands spread around and around their outposts, and to patrol the sea.

This part of the sea, since it was heavily guarded by the humans, had been subject to a cleaning. This left the area without many thaidi around, and those who were still here tried to stay away from the ships.

However, powerful monsters still lived in the area. The ones that Hin and the Blackguards couldn't defeat were carefully tracked. These monsters were marked on all of Hin's maps and watched closely. This helped ships avoid dangerous areas while traveling through the waters.

This whole situation made everyone mad on the ship. Some were jealous because the blackguards' presence made everything much easier for Hin.

The island on which the country was located was not that different from Frant in terms of size, but the human-controlled land was much bigger, and that was because of the criminal organization hiding behind the shield of justice. A false one, of course.

That became even more clear since the blackguards funded the nation and gave them a ton of Etrium's technology.

Everything was testified by the many ships that were now roaming around the island. They weren't just hundreds, but thousands.

To cross the sea, a fleet was needed because a single ship couldn't face the horrors of the deep. But a fleet could. That meant that to understand the scope of Hin's new military might, one had to consider the fleets, not the ships.

On the open sea, it wasn't absurd to say that Hin was the undisputed winner.

Erik and his group had many close calls while trying to avoid being spotted. They almost got caught several times, but thanks to some good luck, they remained unseen.

After many days of travel, they finally approached the shores. However, to maintain their secrecy, they couldn't bring the ship too close to land.

Based on what they knew, there shouldn't have been humans's presence in the area, but Erik wanted to be safe rather than sorry. For that reason, they had to cross the remaining distance from the ship to the beach by using the Chimaeric Demons.

The clones transformed into various sea thoids. Some took on forms resembling large, streamlined fish, while others mimicked the appearance of gentle, massive creatures like whales.

These not only had to carry Erik, Mira, Emily, and Amber, but also transport their provisions and equipment, and later, bring the ship back to the sea, as far away from their position as they could.

<That if it is possible...>

Luckily or not, their long journey had depleted much of their food stores, lightening their load considerably.

There was something else the group had to bring on land: the Chimaeric Demons' eggs.

During the journey, Erik worked hard every day. He spent his time training and making Chimaeric Demons' eggs. By the time they arrived, he had created almost 20,000. The eggs filled up all the empty spaces on the ship, and took the place of the crates that previously held the provisions they consumed.

Erik looked at the crates full of eggs. He thought about what would happen when they hatched. They would give him a small army in the enemy's heart nation.

If used wisely, he could make it harder for them to send soldiers to Frant, even outright impossible. However, this wouldn't stop Etrium, but at least Hin and the blackguards would worsen their positions in Frant.

"Are we ready?" Erik asked.

June nodded. "Yes, Master. The first group of Chimaeric Demons has already started unloading crates on the beach. Another team has been dispatched to secure the landing area. However, it will take some time before they can comb the entire area."

"Let's just hope there is no one around. I don't want to start a full scale war without the Chimaeric Demons, at this point. As soon as we set a foothold here, we will wait for the eggs to hatch before making our move."

"Can't we simply go to the blackguards' base?" June's question was reasonable.

"I'm not in a hurry, at this point, June... If I was alone, I would have simply gone to their capital, made a base there, and created the eggs. But since I'm not alone, I used the time available to do something that would guarantee Amber's, Emily's, and Mira's safety, and increase our chances of success.

Even if we do not bring our entire army inside their capital city, we will at least have a firmer foothold on the island. Sabotage operations are great tools. Besides, If the blackguards protected Hin despite monsters like the Leviathan Serpent, I really think we should take things in a more careful manner."

There was a brief silence at that point, then Erik then turned to Mira, Amber, and Emily. "It's time," he said.

The three women nodded. They went to the edge of the ship, where a Chimaeric Demon in the form of a large, flat-backed sea thaid waited for them to bring the group on the shores. They jumped down. After some time, the Chimaeric Demon reached for the land.

As they got closer to the beach, Erik saw that the first group of Chimaeric Demons were busy unloading boxes and setting up a safe area. There was no sight of the other group, but Erik assumed they were far inland to see how the situation was.

When their ride reached the shallow water near the sand, Mira, Amber, and Emily quickly jumped off. They were so happy to be on land again that they almost fell over.

"Oh... god. I missed the land so much..." Mira said.

"Happy to have been of service," Erik said.

"The situation is your fault, to begin with." Mira smirked.

"It was you who wanted to come!"

Erik, though, watched with amusement as the three women knelt and ran their hands through the sand, savoring the feel that having ground under their feet, after so long at sea, gave them.

"Come on now," he said. "We need to help unload the crates."

The women stopped enjoying the sand and got back to work. They helped Erik and the Chimaeric Demons unload their supplies from the ship. While they worked, Erik looked around, not lowering his concentration on it for a second.

Since Erik had picked a quiet beach far from any cities or military bases, there was silence. It was exactly as it was in Frant. Outside the cities, the monsters reigned supreme, while in cities they were absent. Here on Hin it wasn't any different, since most of the territory was controlled by the thaids and the area was clear of human traces.

But they couldn't stay on the open beach for long. Patrol ship might come around, and thaids could stumble upon them.

There was a forest in front of him. It was not close, but not even that far, and that was a melting pot of horrific creatures that could easily see them on the beach.

"We need to move into the forest," he said. "I'll use my Plant Master power to create some shelters once we're under cover. No one will be able to find us unless they stumble on our camp."

The others nodded in agreement. Of course, they still had to wait for the other group of Chimaeric Demons before they could leave, since they could tell them where the best place to go was based on their scouting.

After some time of unloading, a Chimaeric Demon approached Erik.

"Master, should we proceed with moving the ship back out to sea?"

"Are you done with the crates?"

"Yes, sir. Everything has been brought to the shore." Erik looked around. Aside from the Chimaeric Demons' crates, there weren't many filled with food around. The journey had been hard.

"There is nothing else on the ship."

"Then yes," Erik said.

"Take it as far away as possible from our position and then return here. We're going to establish a base of operations on the hills around, somewhere we can retreat to if things go wrong in the enemy capital. It might take more than a couple of days to set it up properly. So you will find us here again when you return."

"Understood, Master."

"Have safe travel," Erik said.

The clone nodded, then turned and signaled to four others. They transformed into small, sea thaids and slipped into the water.

Now, Erik was left with Amber, Mira, Emily, June and two Chimaeric Demons, while three others were scouting around.

Erik watched as they swam to the ship, becoming smaller and smaller until they disappeared beneath the waves. The ship, though, was still visible.

Chapter 1054: Reaching the Shores (2)

Soon, the ship's engines rumbled to life, and it moved away from the aera. Erik felt a twinge of unease as he watched it go.

That wasn't their only mean to go back to Frant unnoticed. But for sure, it was the most comfortable. He could fly or swim with the Chimaeric Demons, but even flying didn't make the trip that shorter.

However, it wasn't like he had another choice. The ship was basically a giveaway to his position, and it couldn't stay there.

That wasn't even the most pressing concern. The ship would also attract thaids, so used as they were about the human presence on it, and if they spotted them on land, it might create trouble.

Since he knew that was a necessary step to take, he told the clones to go. June was beside Erik. He knew what was going on in his master's mind.

"It was the right choice, master," June said.

Erik nodded. "You're right."

He paused for a second. "Now, let's wait for the scouting team. "

Over the next few hours, they waited. It didn't take that much before the Chimaeric Demons came back. They found a good place where to set camp, one that would make them virtually invisible if Erik used his Plant Master brain crystal power.

Then, the six clones, and the four human moved their supplies into the jungle.

Erik could use the Chimaeric Demons to do the job, but since there were not enough of them to move everything in a short time, he decided to help them.

Erik wanted to stay close to the shore for some time. He didn't really know what to expect from the blackguards here, and even less on Mur. So, he planned to do several things.

The first was to collect information. He clearly had to learn what the Blackguards knew, and to do that, he needed to reach an enemy base. Of course, he also needed to fully scout the surrounding area. The last thing he wanted was for a horde of thaids roaming around and stumbling on his camp.

The second was to train. Everyone needed this, including the Chimaeric demons. They could grow, and not taking advantage of that fact was pretty stupid if they all went to Mur.

Third, he needed a way to make neural links faster. That meant he needed the biological supercomputer to work on a new technique or improving the one he already had.

Most likely, it would just increase the number of brain crystals he could make neural links for at the same time, but Erik also needed for something that would make training faster.

He also needed to craft brain stimulating serums. That would clearly make training much faster. He would also need to find some weapons for Mira, Amber, and Emily.

While Amber didn't have that many problems fighting with it, Emily and Mira had. Emily's power was powerful, but unsuited to fight, while Mira's, albeit being a good one for fighting and assassination, wasn't powerful at all.

That would last at least until the eggs started hatching. At that point, he could delegate to his clones, and he could go establish a foothold in Hin's capital, and find a way to reach the Blackguards' main base. Erik was cautious, but it was this cautiousness that kept him alive for so long.

While in the forest, the Chimaeric Demons led the group to a small hill overseeing the adjacent valley. It was the perfect spot to set a base because they would be able to see the enemy approaching, where they wouldn't be easily spotted, and where they could build fortifications easily.

<Damn, I should really think of going into construction work...>

Without wasting time, Erik got to work. He used his Plant Master brain crystal power to create dense barriers of vegetation along the way, leading to their new base and providing cover from any aerial patrols.

It worked also as a sort of road, but only those who knew it would be able to see that the vegetation was leading them somewhere. That partially ended when they reached the spot, but Erik wanted to make the surrounding vegetation denser, so that seeing through it would be hard, or outright impossible. Then he shaped the plants into shelters.

Using trees as the main materials, making their branches grow, expand, and enlarge, and using their leaves to create living insulation.

These were going to play an important role in the future months, so Erik wanted them to be as sturdy and comfortable as possible.

Massive leaves formed roofs, while thick vines and branches wove themselves into walls. It wasn't luxurious, but it would keep them dry and hidden, and there was everything they needed in terms of furniture.

Makeshift crates, beds, and bathrooms. The others even helped to create the kitchen, but that required stones, because wood was obviously flammable.

Erik created separate structures for their living quarters, storage for the crates, and a larger central area that could serve as a meeting space and command center.

But there was much more to do. 20000 Chimaeric Demons was a military division, and they needed a lot of space, so before they hatched, he had to create the buildings and the defenses.

That wasn't the only problem, because while he had 20000 Chimaeric Demons' eggs, he was going to stay here for a while, and he would make more.

<I will go to Mur with at least 100000 Chimaeric Demons... that's for sure.>

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As night fell, they allowed themselves to rest. Sitting around a concealed fire, Erik looked at his companions.

<Luckily we brought everything here in a day...> The others took care of that while Erik made accommodations for everyone.

<Damn... I'm spent.>

Of course, he created stuff all day long. He basically had no mana anymore to spend.

Everyone was tired, even the Chimaeric Demons, but there was a sense of accomplishment in their eyes. They had made it to Hin, against all odds, and they established a foothold in a day. It was pretty impressive.

"We did it," Emily said. "We actually made it to Hin."

Amber nodded. She was smiling brightly. "It still doesn't feel quite real. After everything we went through at sea."

"Don't forget that Hin is just the beginning. Mur will be a much more dreadful challenge," Mira said.

"You're right."

Even Erik was smiling. He was happy, because finally, this whole situation, the blackguards' charade, it was going to end, and the war with it.

"We've accomplished something incredible considering our numbers and preparation. But as Mira said, it's clear we need to prepare for the Mur continent."

"We will keep training," Amber said. Erik paused.

"This must be true for you, too," Erik said to the Chimaeric Demons.

"Yes, Master."

"Good. Once everything will be settled around these parts, I will start working on a few things that will benefit all of us, but I need your cooperation."

Erik and the others started feeling apprehension. They were in enemy territory now, surrounded by unknown dangers. But they were also closer than ever to the blackguards' most important base.

"What were you thinking?" Mira asked.

"Well... A new Neural Link training technique, Brain and body stimulating serums for all of us..."

"Ah... right. We left that task to Jabir, but since we arrived in Frant, I basically had no way to use them," Mira said.

"Right... The problem is that I need you to help me find what I need to do this. The second goal is impossible if we don't find a way to make the serums. The Chimaeric Demons know how to do them too, so they will also help with the production. We need to make enough for the new batches of Chimaeric Demons. We will stay here for a while, at least until I feel we got a sizable army on our side."

"Isn't this going to be a little overkill?" One of the Chimaeric Demons said.

"Overkill?" There was a brief pause. "No. Not at all. You know why."

The conversation went on, with Erik explaining what he had in mind in details. Then everyone went to bed. That night, while everyone else was asleep, Erik stood at the edge of their camp, looking at the dark jungle sprawling below the hill where the group made camp.

He knew that somewhere far beyond the jungle, after having crossed another sea, he would finally find the place he couldn't wait to go to. Maynard Island, where the Blackguards had their base.

<Will I finally have answers about the biological supercomputer? About how the blackguards knew about it? About the reason they are going to Mur?>

The questions got suffocated by the heavy feeling of responsibility on his shoulders. He thought about the nearly 20,000 Chimaeric Demon eggs, about Mira, Amber, and Emily sleeping nearby, and about June and the other Chimaeric Demons keeping watch. All of them were depending on him. So were many people back in Frant.

Erik sighed and walked back to his shelter. As he went inside, he smelled the fresh plants around him. He also made flowers sprout, which Emily, Amber, and Mira appreciated, so the air was pleasant and flowery. The three women were sleeping together on the flower and leaves bed he made.

<Tomorrow will be a tough day.>

He then laid on one of the beds, the three women left empty. He was too tired and fell asleep soon after he got his clothes off.

Chapter 1055: Planting seeds and dodging monsters (1)

The newly hatched Chimaeric Demons required care and supervision, which meant he could no longer rely on the already matured clones for other tasks.

There were currently 19 people in the outpost, aside from the Chimaeric Demons who just hatched.

The place was starting to get filled. Erik did what he could to expand and put the outpost to safety, but things like that, to be thoroughly made, required time.

However, now that most of the facilities and basic needs were met, it was time for Erik to go check what was beyond their outpost area and gather information about their new environment.

While much of the world had been abandoned to the thaids, and Hin hadn't been spared from this, the past war between Frant and the island country meant there could be military outposts and fortifications in the area, and Erik had to find out.

Also, since Hin was close to the Mur continent, Erik thought there might be strong thaids coming from there in the area. Thaids that Hin's army didn't know about. These could have wandered in with no one noticing, and might be too close to the outpost for Erik's comfort.

"June," Erik said. "I need you to come with me to scout the area."

The clone was currently talking to Mira, but Emily and Amber were around, so they heard what he had just said.

June nodded. "Of course, Master. When do you want to leave?"

Before Erik could respond, he noticed a weird look on the three women, then he heard the sound of footsteps getting closer. They were Amber's and Emily's.

"We're coming with you," Mira said.

Erik shook his head. "No, not this time. It's too dangerous, and we need to be fast. June can shapeshift, which will make the entire journey fast and comfortable, but we can't bring more Chimaeric Demons with us, so you will slow us down."

The three didn't like Erik's words. After all, they were pretty fast, even on foot, and anyway, they reached June's level of strength from a long time.

They weren't as useless as they had been five months ago.

The problem was that while that might have been true, Hin was not Frant, and Mur's thaids weren't Mannard's and the blackguards weren't Hin's troop.

The situation was too different. Despite having considered the wilderness a foreign world for a long time, it was still true that Frant, Hin and every other country exerted some form of control over the surroundings, which wasn't true here.

"But Erik, we've been training hard. We can help!" Emily said.

"I know you can," Erik said, placing a hand on her shoulder.

"But right now, I need you here more than with me. The Chimaeric Demons are few and busy with the new hatchlings. I need you three to protect the camp in case something goes wrong. Help where and when you can."

Emily opened her mouth to protest, but Erik continued, "Please understand. It would give me peace of mind knowing you're here, keeping everyone safe. Can you do that for me?"

The three women looked at each other. They seemed both sad and understanding. After a moment, Mira spoke up. "Okay, Erik. We'll stay here and keep training. But please be careful while you're gone."

Erik smiled. For once, they were listening to him. "I promise. We'll be back before you know it."

With the matter settled, Erik turned back to June. "We need to go now. Can you do it now?"

June nodded and changed shape right away. His body shifted and got bigger, turning into a large, four-legged thaid, an Erendu. It was the most suited for forest landscapes among the transformations June had available, and well, among his favourite.

Sure, it was cool to turn into the Black wyvern, but that didn't exactly allow for stealth.

Flying would be faster, but they needed to stay out of sight, and taking the shape of a large flying thaid wasn't the best way to stay hidden.

With the war going on, it was too dangerous to be up in the sky, because even if the war wasn't on Hin's shores, it was unlikely they didn't make outposts and defenses through the jungle. It was possible now, thanks to Etrium's technology.

Before leaving, Erik looked at their outpost one last time. It fit in well with the jungle, making everything hard to spot. Exactly what Erik wanted.

Erik got on June's back and they went into the thick jungle.

The surrounding plants were a mix of familiar and new to Erik and June.

He already saw it back at the outpost, but now he was seeing species he didn't find there.

Some were the same there were on Frant, but others he had only read about before.

He saw huge leaves in bright purple and blue colors above him. There were also strange vines shaped with spiral patterns wrapped around some of the tree trunks.

<Master, should we plant it?>

<Yes.>

Erik stopped there to plant the Luminara Serpensis.

He had to place it on the ground, make it sprout, grow, and then collect seeds and flowers again so that he could repeat the process.

He already did it back at the outpost, but he wanted to expand the thaid free zone as best as he could.

As Erik did the job, he started thinking of his original power.

The plant master brain crystal power was nothing like his birth one, who could only grow plants and vegetation. The Plant Master brain crystal power, instead, allowed him to control them, making them suitable for many purposes.

It hit him like a ton of bricks. He had not understood how useful the ability could be in the past, but he started to see its real value.

It wasn't just a power to make shelters or hiding places, or even to grow the Luminara Serpents.

This ability could be used for fighting, getting food, and the like, and he needed to take advantage of that.

Depending on the plants, he could make medicines; he could use them for making potions and the like. He just needed a little bit of creativity.

Making potions was something he hasn't been doing for a long time, but god knew how much he needed to make some good old potions.

Brain and body-stimulating serums might help him in making the group stronger, so that was something else he added to the list of things to do.

Chapter 1056: Planting seeds and dodging monsters (2)

For so long, Erik focused on enhancing the Chimaeric Demon brain crystal power that he basically forgot to power up everything else. It had been a good choice, yes, but at the same time, it created some setbacks he now had to address.

Making more neural links for it improved the hatching speed and strength of his clones.

While this had been necessary, after the encounter with the Leviathan Serpent, Erik realized he had neglected his own personal growth, which would make the Chimaeric Demons stronger in turn.

Growing stronger was a win win situation for everyone.

The experience that Erik had with the Leviathan Serpent was truly enlightening and opened his eyes to a whole new perspective. If there were many thaids strong like it on the Mur continent, he wouldn't stand a chance in a direct fight.

<Not even in an indirect one.>

Just getting stronger and improving his physical stats wouldn't be enough to beat enemies that had thousands of strength points.

Even if he reached level 1000, nothing assured he would be able to reach those astronomical amounts of stats.

"Leveling up isn't the answer. I need to focus on creating more neural links." That would not only make his brain crystal powers stronger and more efficient, but he would also gain stats, killing two birds with one stone.

June tilted his head to listen as Erik started talking to himself. It was clear to the clone, his creator had many things going on in his mind.

"I wonder," Erik said, "if it would be worthwhile to ask the biological supercomputer to make a new neural link training technique. Or perhaps there's a way to improve the existing one. The system said it was possible when I first asked it to create it, but I'm pretty sure the DNA point cost for such upgrades would be astronomical."

Before the system stopped storing the energy, Erik did not know how much it used to do what it did, but now that he had direct access to the resource, he knew it wasn't a measly amount, instead; it was the opposite.

Costs were relatively low for merging and absorbing, but editing powers was much more pricey, and creating the training technique had to be around that same level.

June slowed his pace, turning his head up to look at Erik, currently seated on his back. <Master, what's on your mind? You seem deep in thought.>

<Nothing... June. It's just that Mur's Thaids are worse than we assumed.>

<Yeah... I didn't expect such a powerful creature to exist. It's no wonder that Solomon Judd died in Mur. But...>

Erik knew what the clone was thinking about.

<Yeah, you are wondering how the Blackguards are surviving there, right?>

<Yes, I mean. Ou—ehm... Your father couldn't look at other people's stats, so what if the Blackguards on the Mur continent are stronger than those on Mannard? I mean, yes, they might be flooding the continent in order to resist the much stronger thaids, but is this really all? Is the strength the Blackguards showed on Frant everything they have to offer?>

<I'm inclined to say no,> Erik told the clone. <They are pretty sure they can capture me, despite me having shown them the opposite for a while. It's weird... I think they are sure they can really deal with me somehow, and that makes me think.>

<The situation is for sure worse now that even they can use multiple brain crystal powers. Be it thanks to Etrium's technology or because of Doran's research. It's just weird that they are focusing on the first rather than the second. During the attack on New Alexandria, there weren't many of them around.

They increased in numbers, in recent times,> June said, <But not as much as one would expect from someone having that kind of technology.>

<Maybe it's just costly...> That was a logical explanation, but one that didn't sit well with the clone.

<Maybe... Master. Regardless, I believe investing in improved neural link-making techniques would be wise. We don't know what awaits us on the Mur continent, and even here in Hin, we might encounter threats as bad as the Leviathan Serpent. Being prepared for such possibilities could make all the difference.>

Erik nodded. "You're right. We can't afford to be caught off guard again. When we return to the outpost, I'll consult with the biological supercomputer about potential upgrades to our training methods."

As Erik and June walked through the jungle, Erik's mind went to all the things they might face. The jungle was full of life, and thaids could be hidden anywhere.

He took care of the few weak ones in the area quickly, using his Plant Master brain crystal powers to make vines and strangle the fuckers. It was efficient, silent, and hard to see.

Aside from getting their mana absorbed, he didn't waste time collecting their blood and brain crystal.

Erik had already decided to focus on a few powerful brain crystal powers and to increase his neural links rather than getting more powers. So he went past the prize and left the bodies behind.

At some point, the two came to a small open area where the trees weren't so thick. From there, they could see far away.

In the distance, they saw mountains with misty tops.

<If I'm not wrong,> Erik said to June, <Sleb Harbour should be at the base of that mountain.>

The mountain range was indeed quite large, although it did not quite match the immense size of the Eldraith mountain range.

Despite being located deep within the giant island and far away from the sea, Sleb Harbour was ironically the name given to Hin's capital city.

But everyone guessed they gave it that name because the entire country was a harbor, or at least the people from Hin considered it as such. A harbor, a ship, a fortress,.

Erik patted June. <Let's go search around. I see some places we could climb that might help us locate enemy bases.>

<Yes, Master.>

Chapter 1057: Not Alone (1)

Erik and June looked at the surroundings. The jungle was thick, stretching as far as they could see. Tall rocks poked out above the trees and small streams flowed through the forest like thin silver lines.

Thaids had kept humans from living outside the few human cities for a long time. But now, thanks to Etrium's technology, humans had built small settlements, albeit military ones.

As Erik and June kept looking around for any signs of life or danger, the clone spotted something unusual in the distance.

"Master," he said, "I've spotted something in the northwest."

Erik looked in the same direction as June, narrowing his eyes because of the sun. Far from their position, he saw something that looked like a fortification.

<It must be big since we could see it from this distance.>

"Good eye," Erik said to the clone. "Any suggestion on how to proceed?"

June thought for a moment. "We could attack it, Master. Take them by surprise and wipe them out."

Erik shook his head. "That's too risky. A direct assault would alert Hin to our presence, and we don't have enough Chimaeric Demons yet for a full-scale takeover."

June's idea wasn't inherently bad. They did this kind of thing many times, after all. But they needed to keep the outpost hidden and his presence in Hin a secret.

"What if we lure some thaids to the outpost?" June said. "It would keep them occupied and reduce the chance of them stumbling upon our camp."

Erik pondered this idea but saw its flaws not long after. "That would likely have the same result as attacking the base ourselves. If they can't handle the thaids, they'll call for reinforcements. Plus, any significant change in thaid behavior might alert them to an outside influence."

Erik wasn't so naïve as to think the blackguards didn't understand it was he who stole the ship back in Frant. Sure, it was still possible all the chaos he created resulted from Frant's troop, but how many chances there were after months spent in stalemate?

While Frant showed them they weren't so weak as to be bullied, it was also true they weren't powerful enough to pull that off, at least until Erik gave them a way to access their information network.

Thanks to the backdoor Erik left for Frant's army, who could now access the Blackguards communication system, the war was bound to be won by Frant unless the Blackguards asked for the other country's help, which was likely to happen if things went too bad.

The two fell into a thoughtful silence. After a few moments, Erik spoke again.

"Before we decide on any course of action, we need more information. Let's scout the outpost and see what we're dealing with. That will give us a better idea of our options and might add new ones."

June nodded. "A wise choice, Master. Shall we proceed?"

Erik nodded. June then changed his shape. He grew larger and turned into an Erendu once again. Erik got on the clone's back, and they started moving through the forest, headed towards the outpost.

The journey was laborious. Even with June's strength and stamina, the undergrowth and uneven terrain made progress slow.

Hours passed.

At some point, the two started hearing noises.

<Did you hear it, Master?>

<No, I'm not in a thaid form, remember? I don't have your hearing. What was that?>

<I heard...>

Voices.

There were voices up ahead, coming from another clearing. The two went toward the area.

<Human presence is weird here. They are too far from the outpost, and only soldiers and military personnel would be here to begin with. >

In the end, they got there. Ahead, they spotted a group of soldiers moving in formation.

Erik told June to stop. They hid behind some bushes and watched the soldiers. The group looked well-prepared, with full armor Erik was sure came from Etrium, and that gave them multiple brain crystal powers.

They moved like they were searching for something. <Or someone.>

<Master,> June said, <Why are there guards so far from the outpost?>

Erik furrowed his brow. <That was what I was trying to understand. They shouldn't have a reason.>

<Could they be here for some kind of thaid?>

The soldiers had really good equipment, which made it easy for them to move around in this area full of thaids.

But Erik and June were confused about why these well-armed soldiers were so far from their base. It didn't make sense unless they had a specific reason to be there.

Erik thought about it more. Being in such a risky place without a good reason seemed like a waste of people and equipment. The chance of running into thaids made it even stranger that the soldiers were here.

As Erik kept thinking, he realized this wasn't a normal patrol. The soldiers seemed to look for something important or expecting something big to happen. Whatever brought them here, it wasn't just a routine check.

The more Erik thought, the more things became suspicious.

His thoughts went back to the attack on the dock, which resulted in him stealing the ship. Erik knew there were infinite potential reasons for the patrols to be here, but he wanted to think about the worst options there were.

<Hin must have alerted the blackguards by now.> They would know someone from Frant was headed their way. What could be the reason to steal a ship, after all?

But why station patrols in this specific area? When Erik decided to come to Hin through the corridor between the two sea thaids' territories, he assumed Hin and the blackguards would consider that route too dangerous for any sane person to attempt.

<Unless...>

Suddenly, Erik understood why the guards were in this remote jungle. Everything made sense.

The guards weren't here by chance - they were probably searching for someone. Be it Frant's soldiers, or someone else. However, as he thought it became clear, they were not searching for anyone, and for a simple reason, at that.

<No ordinary person would have traveled through that dangerous sea route. Only someone very confident in their abilities would try such a risky journey. How many people could actually survive such a trip?>

There was just one answer based on what Erik knew. Just one. Him.

Erik turned to his clone. <June, I think I know why these patrols are here. The blackguards know we are here. They are searching for us.>

Chapter 1058: Not Alone (2)

<Is it possible? Is it really possible they've figured out it was us who stole the ship?>

Erik nodded. <Why not? Think about it. The stolen ship itself, the impossible route through the sea thaid territory. That is, without considering all the stuff we did in Frant, sabotage, base destroying, cargo stealing, horde channeling.>

He paused. <Besides, we have followed their main supply route. I didn't actually plan of us to do all the stuff we did, but for sure we attracted attention, and since we had to be fast to get the ship, it's

not like we want to a dock that far from the end of the supply line. For months they have been in a stalemate, and then, all of a sudden, Frant starts gaining ground?.

<Yeah,> June said, <Who else would attempt something like that but you?>

<Exactly.>

June paused for a moment. <It's a logical deduction, Master. But are you certain about this? After all, they do not have proof.>

Erik shook his head. <No, I'm not, of course. But there's a simple way to find out: we need to enter that outpost. If they're expecting me, their defenses and protocols will be different from a standard frontier outpost. Some of them might also know something.>

The voices of the approaching patrol grew. Erik and June hid better.

"Just another day of pointless patrol," one soldier said, his boots squelching on the ground.

"Tell me about it. We've been out here for weeks, and for what? The war's going to hell no matter what we do."

"Come on, guys," another soldier said. "It can't be that bad, right? I mean, we're still holding the line, aren't we?"

The first soldier let out a bitter laugh. "Holding the line? Kid, have you been paying attention? We've lost three major outposts in the last month alone. Frant's pushing us back faster than we can dig new trenches."

"But... but what about the blackguards?" the young soldier asked. "Aren't they supposed to be unbeatable?"

One of them spat on the ground. "Unbeatable? Ha! Fat lot of good they've done us lately. Something's changed on Frant's side. I don't know what it is, but it isn't good, and even the blackguards fear it.

It makes little sense though. Frant is winning with all the technological shit we got from Etrium, and yet, here we are. "

"You don't know how much I would pay to go on their shores and let them taste hell."

Erik observed the approaching patrol through the foliage. The veteran soldiers' faces showed clear signs of fatigue and weariness.

The remaining one, the younger soldier, instead moved his eyes from tree to tree. Even he was nervousness in the unfamiliar jungle. Thaid's could be everywhere, after all.

"I heard a rumor," the young soldier said. "They say Frant's got some kind of super-soldier. A guy who can take out entire platoons single-handedly."

He was talking about Erik.

The older soldiers exchanged glances. "Don't go spreading that nonsense," the first one growled. "We've got enough to worry about without ghost stories."

"It's true, I swear! Words said the blackguards are waging war against Frant to find this guy, and that he can control Wyverns!"

The others grumbled. "Wyverns? Now I heard them all!"

As the patrol passed by their hiding spot, their voices faded.

Erik focused on the retreating soldiers. He reached out with his Instability brain crystal power, probing their thoughts.

Erik used his mind-reading power to look into the soldiers' thoughts. He found their emotions simple. They felt scared, frustrated, apprehensive, and hopeless. Erik could tell they were tired from fighting for so long.

Even though Erik couldn't control their thoughts, he could see a lot of information in their minds. He saw quick flashes of their past missions, which showed how hard their job was, and how bad the general situation for Hin was.

But that wasn't all. Among their memories, he saw soldiers joking with each other about their worries. He also saw the many orders they had been given.

But one thought, one directive, one memory stood out above all others. A mission, repeated in each soldier's mind like a mantra: Their target was human, and they had to find it.

The higher ups looked certain there were enemies here in Frant, based on what they told to these guys.

Erik frowned. The soldiers were indeed looking for a human, but they didn't know who exactly, at least the soldiers, and the higher ups didn't share this information. They only knew this person had somehow gotten past Hin's defenses and made it deep into their land.

However, the soldiers were told the target was extremely dangerous. That was why they got armed that well, but there was no name, no face to put to this intruder.

Erik stopped reading their minds. He felt frustrated; he wasn't so stupid to think it wasn't him who they were searching for, albeit the possibility was there.

<Becker shouldn't have sent no one else here...>

Erik thought about what he learned. <The soldiers are looking for a human intruder. They likely increased security. There are rumors about a 'super-soldier'.>

He was their target. There was no other alternative. Though Erik wanted to be sure, he wanted to know what Hin knew, and if the blackguards were doing something secret about it.

<Fuck...> The enemy being aware of him would make things harder. But it also showed that his actions were making a difference and, despite everything, he felt proud. After all, it was not common for one person to cause so many problems for an entire army.

Erik turned to June. <They're definitely searching for me,> he said. <The soldiers don't know who exactly. Just that it's a human who's infiltrated their territory.>

June nodded. <So they suspect, but they don't know for sure. That gives us an advantage, doesn't it?>

<It does,> Erik agreed. <But that is if they really do not know it is me, and I'm keen to think this isn't the case at all. Besides, it also means we need to be even more careful. They're on alert. Even if they don't know exactly what they're looking for, there will be many guards around. Maybe someone who can counter some of my powers.>

Chapter 1059: Not Alone (3)

Erik and June approached the outpost. It was much bigger and better defended than they thought.

That wasn't the only surprising thing, though, because the outpost looked ancient but had modern technology mounted in various parts.

<Well... That is something I never expected to find.>

The place was basically a castle, and it had tall and old stone walls, with watchtowers all around. A barrier and many alloy parts covered the whole place and closed the breaches that had been made by the passage of time, or by the thaids that had used this place as home.

<The problem is, to understand whether the barrier is kept up by people or by Etrium's technology,> Erik said to himself, forgetting that he and June were connected.

<The place is small enough for just a couple of barrier masters to shield the entire area, master.>

<Ah... ehm... Yes, I know that; it's just that if it results from technology, I can do something with the biological supercomputer about it.>

The two kept walking through the forest, circling the fortress and studying it at the same time. The problem was that the area was not small by any means, was swarmed with people.

Erik had two main concerns about the people guarding the place. First, he noticed that the patrol guards were much stronger than the average soldier. The system was never wrong about that.

The second was that they were loaded with brain crystal tools, weapons, and armor and, thanks to them, they had many brain crystal powers available for use.

They already had, on average, around 150 strength points, and some of them, albeit few, almost reached the 200 strength point mark.

It was something new. Humanity hardly reached this kind of power in the past. That could only mean one thing, and Erik was sure of it. The technique he taught to his men and women back in Etrium, when his guild was still standing, had been leaked to his enemies.

It was new, but not surprising; many people abandoned his guild when Erik got chased by the blackguards, and it was only logical for these people to sell the secret to them, or whoever paid the most.

Hin, and most likely the blackguards, must have had the technique for a while, and they used this time to power up their troops. The only question was, why didn't they employ these soldiers on Frant's battlefield? Or maybe they did, but Erik never stumbled upon them.

<Who knows?>

There was something else, though, something pertaining to the multiple brain crystal tools they had. By reading the patrols' minds, he learned that each patrol had someone with a device that could spot lies and see through any disguise. They called it Veritas Lenses.

It was a brain crystal tool, a ring, which allowed the wearer to see through shapeshifters. Erik and June heavily relied on that kind of power, but with the brain crystal ring in the enemy's possession, neither he nor June would be able to sneak their way into the outpost by taking someone's place.

That meant not being able to ask questions, which would hinder his ability to get information out of his targets' thoughts.

There were a lot of people with these special rings. Erik and June had seen hundreds of patrols, and each patrol had someone wearing one of these rings. If all the other outposts were like this, it made Erik wonder if Hin, Etrium, and the blackguards had hunted down all the thaids with this brain crystal power.

Erik's mind-reading powers allowed him to find out this tool's presence, but the Instability brain crystal power wasn't perfect, nor that easy to use.

He couldn't simply browse through the soldiers' minds at will. It was more like listening to a radio broadcast, and he had to listen to it, regardless of what song he wanted to hear. The only way to get information was to talk to the target, if it was possible.

<System> Erik thought, <Do you have any solution for this?>

The reply didn't come late. <Well, they for sure are bent on capturing you, uh? These tools are a problem, yes, but they are not without limitations. Based on what we have seen, they allow to only detect what the user can perceive.>

Erik's brow furrowed. <Are you saying...?>

<The devices allow them to see through deception, but they cannot see what isn't there at all, or better, what they do not see. Shapeshifters can be seen through since the user can actually see them, but what if they can't see them at all? The ring wouldn't work.> the system said. <Invisibility should be undetectable to these devices, at least theoretically.>

A spark of hope ignited in Erik's mind. <My Phantom Veil brain crystal power... it should work?>

<Correct,> the system said. <The Phantom Veil brain crystal power would render you completely undetectable to both normal vision and these truth-discerning devices. Not because the device itself doesn't work on it, but because it is based on the user's sight.>

That was a problem for June. <So I have to go in alone...>

<That is the most prudent course of action based on our current capabilities,> the system said.

<However, this approach is not without risks. While you would be invisible, you would still be physically present. Any physical interaction with the environment might alert the guards.>

Erik nodded.

<Be aware that while the devices cannot detect you directly, they may still be able to sense anomalies or disturbances in the environment caused by your presence. >

Erik took a deep breath, processing all this information. <Thank you, system.>

<No worries,> the system said. <Do you need any further analysis or strategic planning help?>

Erik paused. <Not at the moment. I need to discuss this with June first. I don't think he will be happy about me having to go in alone.>

<All right. I will remain on standby for further consultation.>

Erik finished talking with the system and opened his eyes. He turned to look at June. Erik knew he had to do something difficult now—he needed to convince the clone to let him go into the outpost alone.

Chapter 1060: Not Alone (4)

"June," Erik said, "I've talked to the system about our infiltration options. There's a way to get past the guys that can see through our transformations, but... it will not be easy."

"What did the system say, Master?"

Erik explained everything, telling June about the device limitations and how his Phantom Veil brain crystal power could get around them.

"So, you're saying you need to go in alone?"

"Yes. The Phantom Veil can only cover me."

June's face showed many feelings at once—he was disappointed, worried, and a bit frustrated. He said nothing for a while, but it was clear he was feeling his limitations again. He couldn't get stronger, he didn't have a brain crystal, and he had no mana. He was stuck in a limbo, where the most he could do was to shapeshift and act as Erik's mount.

This wasn't the first time he thought about it, but he felt well how Noah and the first batch of clones felt. It wasn't pleasant.

"I understand, Master. I don't like it, but I understand."

Erik placed a hand on June's shoulder, feeling the tension in his clone's muscles. "I know it's not ideal. Believe me, I'd much rather have you by my side in there. But we have to play to our strengths."

June nodded. "You're right, of course. As much as I hate to admit it, I'm... I'm not as useful to you as I once was."

The admission seemed to hurt June, and saying out loud must have not been pleasant for an existence that had as its only goal that to serve him. Erik felt a pang of sympathy.

He knew how much June prided himself on being helpful, on being an extension of Erik himself. He was not the first clone, that was Noah, but he was the one who had remained on Erik's side the longest. It was a position that all of them wished, but only June could pride himself on it.

Noah and the other clones went through something similar. There was no way for him to give June a way to become stronger. He didn't have a brain crystal, and his powers came from his body.

In a sense, he was better than the other people since he didn't depend on mana, but that also prevented him from getting more powerful, because mana didn't restructure his body.

"Don't say that," Erik said. "Your role might be different now than it was in the past, but it's no less important. I need you out here. If I get inside, keeping watch will help me a lot."

June managed a rueful smile. "A glorified lookout and getaway driver, eh?"

Erik chuckled.. "Hey, every great infiltrator needs a reliable getaway driver. And there's no one I trust more to have my back out here."

The clone straightened, a hint of his usual confidence returning. "You can count on me, Master. I'll keep an eye on things out here, monitor the patrols, and be ready to create a distraction if needed."

Erik nodded, relieved that June was accepting the plan, even if reluctantly. "Good. Now, let's go see if we can enter inside."

Avoiding patrols, the two got closer to the fortress. But after many hours of searching, going around the fortress, and avoiding the soldiers, they only found one entrance, the main one, which was heavily guarded.

However, the two found out the barrier protecting the ancient fortress was kept up by technology, so Erik had a way to sneak his way in. At least in theory.

The problem was that even if Erik did that, as soon as he got inside, he would find face to face with the guards, and while they couldn't see him, they would still be alerted because the door was going to open.

Stuck, Erik, and June hid behind a tree to think of a plan.

"What do we do?"

"Should we create a distraction?" Erik said.

"I don't know, master. It looks dangerous. Besides, how would you get out?"

"Yeah, you are right... Maybe I can use the Plant Master brain crystal power to make a tunnel under the walls."

"That's if the barrier doesn't cover the ground, which I doubt, master."

As it got dark, Erik and June didn't find a solution.

"It's becoming late. The others will be worried," the clone said.

"It would take too much to head back."

June sighed. "Let's camp around here for the night. We might be able to gather information; maybe get something out of the patrols."

Erik agreed. They had too little information to act now, and since there was apparently no way for them to get inside, the best thing was to wait and get more information. A rushed move could ruin everything.

They started looking for a good place to set up their shelter. Erik used his powers to make one, not far from the fortress but close enough for him and June to spot and read the minds of the patrols around the base.

As night fell, the fortress lights disappeared. They would attract thaid's, and there was no way Hin wanted that to happen.

"I think..." June said.

"What?"

"Maybe there is a solution."

"What were you thinking about?"

"Well, it's simple, master. You can enter when the patrols return to the fortress. But that would work only until you have your invisibility up, and I don't think you can stay invisible during the entire time, no?"

"Yes, but not being able to take other people's place will need us to stay here for a while."

"It's not like we have a choice. We need to find out who these guys are searching for, although it is pretty obvious they are searching for you. Well... that, and what they know... How the situation in Frant is..."

"Right..." Erik sighed. He didn't really like to wait for so long just to enter a building. Yet, it wasn't like he had a choice.

"Let's try to make this quick, all right? I have a revenge to carry on."

"Yes, master."