

## **BIOLOGICAL 1081**

### Chapter 1081: The President's Daughter (7)

As soon as the man got close enough, one of her guards, those who joined the fight against her, who clearly were not her real guards, gave something to the man to cover himself, with a deferential and servile look in his eyes.

It was at that moment that she became able to give a closer look at the man, and when she did, her heart started beating faster, much faster than it beat in the middle of the earlier fight.

She recognized him; she understood the reason why the guards were so servile towards the man.

Terrifying, that was how Erik Romano appeared to her at that moment. It might have been because of how he carried himself; it could be because of his muscular body or for the look he had in his eyes, but that wasn't the reason. It was because this man exuded power in every move he made.

"You're... you're Erik Romano," she said.

Her blood ran cold, and she felt a chill run down her spine just saying those words, just saying that name.

The color drained from her face, leaving her pale and trembling, and she felt her knees weaken, threatening to give out beneath her as the full realization of who stood before her sank in.

"In person."

"What do you want from me? Why are you doing this?"

Erik smiled, trying to reassure her, but there was no warmth in it, and she felt it.

"What happens next depends entirely on you," he said, not liking his own words a little.

"Cooperate, and you might just walk away from this. Resist, and, well..." He let the implication hang in the air, an implication she fully understood.

Mia drew herself up, a flicker of defiance in her eyes despite the fear.

"You would threaten a helpless woman?" she spat. "The blackguards were right about you. You are as evil and deranged as they say. It's just that I didn't think you were a coward who preys on the weak."

Erik's smile wavered at that point, not because he felt offended by what the woman said or what the blackguards said about him. It was because he knew that the only evil and deranged ones were them.

"Evil and deranged? This is what the blackguards told everyone about me? Easy! Did they tell you because I'm waging a war against them? No, I assume."

But Erik didn't keep talking about this topic. Telling this information to this woman would not bring him any benefit, and besides, what would be the point of changing one person's mind about him? None, aside from the fact he wasn't even interested in that.

Mia Turke, daughter of Salena Turke, was going to disappear from his sight once he was done extracting the information he needed from her.

"Besides, I've fought against plenty of women who were anything but helpless," he said.

"Women who were every bit as deadly, cunning, and ruthless as any man could be, even stronger. I don't discriminate when it comes to my enemies. The Fierce Lioness certainly wouldn't appreciate your implication that women are inherently weaker, and neither do I.

Though you certainly are, that's because instead of focusing on training, you chose to spend time dressing up and partying with your friends. Am I wrong?"

Mia remained silent, as that was indeed the truth.

Besides, hearing about the famous warrior made the president's daughter lose confidence because Erik was right.

Her shoulders dropped. Who didn't know the Fierce Lioness and her legendary feats? Damn, she was said to have killed a Jolmine, a fucking lightning Wyvern. Who else could say the same?

Well, Erik Romano could.

She recalled another piece of information about him, one that really made her back shiver. Erik Romano was said to be able to control thaids and that he had a black Wyvern under his command.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"Information," Erik said, stepping closer. "And you're going to give it to me, one way or another. The easy way, or the hard way."

His hand shot out, gripping the woman's chin and forcing her to meet his gaze. Her eyes were filled with tears, but also with a stubborn resolve.

"I won't betray my country," she said. "I won't betray my mother."

Erik's grip tightened, his fingers digging into her skin. "We'll see about that."

He nodded to one of the Chimaeric Demons, who stepped forward with a syringe filled with a clear liquid. The president's daughter's eyes widened, and she struggled, but Erik's grip was impossible to break.

The needle slid into her neck, and the woman's eyes rolled back in her head. She went limp, and Erik let her fall to the ground.

"How long is this going to last?" Erik asked.

"30 minutes, just as you asked us."

"Good. If things go bad, I will be able to ask the questions I need with her, unable to keep her thoughts. Maybe she will talk with me, not needing to use my powers. Now, load her into the car," he said, turning to his Chimaeric Demons.

"And clean up this mess. We don't want to leave any traces. Take these people's place, including the woman, as soon as you can. No one must find out about this."

As the Chimaeric Demons set to work, Erik allowed himself a moment of satisfaction. Yes, people died, but it wasn't like he hadn't been responsible for death before; it wasn't like he had never killed. In fact, he was sure he was the person with the most kills in the world.

The attack had been messy but successful. They had the president's daughter, and with her, the key to find her mother.

<Just one step, and then...>

Then he would attack Maynard Island.

<I can't wait...>

Erik grinned. This time, it really was a malevolent one. He hated the blackguards, hated what they represented on the surface, and hated how hypocritical they were behind the scenes.

He remembered what they and what Doran did to all the people that got kidnapped in Frant and Etrium.

Children, most of the time. He remembered having lived in fear all his life, thinking he might be just one of the next few people to get kidnapped and disappear.

It was just that there would have been no one to mourn for him, no one trying to find him.

And he could have likely ended up like that easily. If it wasn't for Uncle Benjamin needing information about his father, needing to blackmail him in case he returned by using him as a bargain chip, he would unknowingly be.

Just that thought made his blood boil.

<Given how things turned out, he should have done that... I wonder if dad would have given them the biological supercomputer to save me.>

But he could not ask that anymore, and even if he did, he was sure his father would have said he would have given them what they wanted, just for him to have done the complete opposite.

Lucius... He said he loved him, despite him not having really shown that for a long time, and while Erik didn't really know what to think about him, it was still true that what he was doing was important.

Erik realized long ago that, even if he was the one that had to end up with the short end of the stick, even if it had to be him to live a harsh life, what his father did wasn't something he could simply toss away and forget about.

The blackguards had to be stopped; it was just that. Now it was Erik completing what his father, Becker, Richard, and Caiden Joyce, started.

<Better focus on the next task.>

He mentally communicated with the Chimaeric Demons, who had already disposed of the evidence of a fight and assumed their new identities.

There were a bunch of dead, naked bodies on the ground, all of them belonging to the guards and workers present on the scene. James was also on the ground, stripped bare of his clothes and weapons. The only thing they didn't take was the guards' underwear, for obvious reasons, of course. But for the women in the midst, while they left their pants on, they had to take their bras.

Mia, too, had been stripped of her clothes and was lying naked on the ground. Erik never made distinctions between people, aside from being an enemy or an ally, and he would not start doing that now.

<Is the car ready?>

<It's coming here, master.>

<Good... There is no time to lose. Dress Mia up and load her into the car.>

<Yes, master.>

For now, he had to focus on the next steps. They needed to get off the airport grounds before anyone noticed something was amiss.

#### Chapter 1082: The President's Daughter (8)

They had to act swiftly, since time was a scarce commodity at that point. The anesthetic wouldn't last forever, and they needed to be well away from the airport before she regained consciousness.

Their destination was a safe house, far from prying eyes and potential interference. Erik knew that once they arrived, Erik would interrogate her.

He hoped that in her groggy state, she might be more susceptible to revealing information about her mother's whereabouts.

As they moved, Erik kept a watchful eye on their surroundings, alert for any signs of pursuit or unexpected complications. The success of their mission hinged on their ability to disappear without a trace, leaving no clues for those who would inevitably come looking for the president's daughter.

"Get her into the car," Erik said while wondering what the woman would say, or rather think, once she woke up.

Did she know where her mother was? If yes, would there be defenses?

<Well, that is a simple question, and the answer is even easier. It is clear there will be defenses...>

The Chimaeric Demons lifted the unconscious woman and placed her in the back seat. Erik then climbed in beside her.

"Is the area secure?" he asked, turning to one of his clones.

"Yes, sir," the Chimaeric Demon said. "We've swept the perimeter, and there are no immediate threats. The people in the airport are still unaware of our presence."

"What about the blackguards? Any news about them?" Erik asked.

"They should be in the dark as everybody else."

Erik nodded, a slight sense of relief washing over him. "Good. Let's keep it that way. We can't afford any slip-ups at this stage. We are almost there."

The car pulled away from the terminal while Erik watched as the rest of his team shapeshifted.

Their bodies contorted, their bones melted, and they reformed until they were indistinguishable from the people they had just killed.

Then the Chimaeric Demons, under disguise, moved out of the landing site.

"How long until the anesthetic wears off?" Erik asked his driver, glancing at the unconscious woman beside him.

"Approximately 20 minutes, sir," the Chimaeric Demon said.

"Go faster, then. We'll need to have her secured and ready for questioning by then."

The Chimaeric Demon nodded and sped into the sky.

The journey to the safe house would not be long. The problem was that this time they had to bring an unconscious person with them, and if they didn't pay attention, they would be found out.

For this reason, and to ensure maximum security, Erik decided to bring the woman to a safe house they had occupied in the past months.

This location was chosen for its proximity to the walls, which would allow them to send Chimaeric Demons quickly if the need arose.

Erik wanted to keep her there until the situation stabilized and they could extract the information they needed.

The safe house was equipped with all the essentials for a prolonged stay, including provisions, medical supplies, and communication equipment.

Erik had also made sure that every precaution was taken to maintain the place hidden and prevent any potential rescue attempts.

In truth, Erik hoped this would have been a temporary arrangement. However, as he considered the state of global affairs, he realized the woman's captivity might extend far longer than anticipated.

Given how things were, she might never be released, and that weighed on his mind.

However, Erik didn't like that for many reasons. Yes, it was morally wrong and all of that, but that wasn't Erik's main thought. It was the fact that she was going to become a burden.

To keep the president's daughter prisoner would require resources and attention, but most importantly, guards.

The Chimaeric Demons would need to monitor her day and night, ensure she was fed, and provide for all her basic needs. But, of course, they would also need to prevent her escape or for her to call for help.

This would be a responsibility that could distract from other important tasks and keep the Chimaeric Demons away from other tasks.

Erik kept in mind the long-term implications of her captivity. He wondered what would happen after the war ended.

If they kept her indefinitely, it would require resources and pose risks. The longer she remained a prisoner, the more complicated the situation could become politically and ethically.

If they released her, she could reveal information about Erik and the Chimaeric Demons to the authorities. One of those things might be that he kidnapped her and killed her entourage. Another would be that his agents could shapeshift.

It was an open secret at that point, but there were still some uncertainties around it.

This would make the situation much worse, not just for Erik, but for everyone in the world.

If people found out about the Chimaeric Demons' ability to shapeshift, people might suspect that anyone around them could be a Chimaeric Demon in disguise.

It wasn't that people who could shapeshift didn't exist, but they weren't as powerful as Erik's clones, and hence, their ability to infiltrate the top levels of society was severely hindered.

This wasn't true for the Chimaeric Demons. They were not only powerful, but even smart. Not much was known about them by Erik's enemy—not even they were his clones—but it was clear that his army was strong and that the soldiers had a bunch of useful brain crystal powers.

Damn, all the clones had healing powers; just that made the army insanely resilient and hard to kill.

Fear and suspicion could spread quickly, leading to mistrust between friends, family members, and even strangers on the street.

It might cause panic in communities and make people feel unsafe in their daily lives.

The government and police would likely have to deal with many false reports and accusations, which would waste time and resources.

Overall, it would create a tense and fearful atmosphere that would be hard to calm down, and the result was going to be hate and unrest.

<That would for sure be redirected to me.>

While Erik didn't really care about what the world did or what happened, it was going to create problems in the long run that would have been caused by him, and he didn't like that either, especially considering he might meet resistance from the citizens.

<Maybe I should just kill her.>

Erik paused, thinking about the idea. He wasn't sure if it was the right thing to do, or better, he knew what it was—just a barbarous act that would put him in the same place as the Blackguards—and yet he couldn't stop contemplating it.

The idea of killing the president's daughter wasn't something he took lightly, but he couldn't deny its practicality. It would solve many problems in one fell swoop—no loose ends, no risk of exposure, no long-term complications.

But as he considered it further, Erik felt a heaviness settle in his chest. Erik killed. That was true, but only in two situations.

<When I risked people finding out about my powers, or in self-defense... Basically.> His thoughts went back to when Nathaniel tried to kill him back in Frant.

But this woman's case was different. <Here it's me who attacked her; it's me who killed her entire entourage, all her bodyguards...>

This woman was basically just a pawn in a larger game her mother threw her in, with the older woman being another pawn herself, in the blackguards' hands.

She was an innocent caught in the crossfire between him and the blackguards. Did she deserve to die simply because of who her parents were or because of who they served?

<No. She doesn't.>

Erik closed his eyes, feeling the weight of the decision. He had taken lives before, but this felt different.

<I'm not sure I'm ready to cross this line. I don't even know if I will be able to come back from it.>

Yet, the pragmatic part of his mind kept circling back to the potential consequences of letting her live.

While Erik was lost in his dilemma, time slipped away. The twenty-minute window he had was rapidly closing, and the anesthetic's effects were wearing off.

Without Erik noticing, the president's daughter woke up.

Her eyes fluttered open and closed, and her fingers twitched, showing she was coming back to consciousness.

Her vision cleared a little. At first, everything was blurry, but then she saw someone sitting across from her. Soon, she realized it was Erik Romano, and that she was in a car.

Fear gripped her heart again, but she could not move. The drugs that knocked her out were still affecting her body.

She couldn't talk either, but that was the last of her thoughts. The unfamiliar surroundings made her mind race. She was trying to understand what happened and where she was. In a car, yes, but where?

At that point, Erik noticed she had her eyes open.

"Ah... Hello, you woke up... Good."

But he realized she was unable to talk or move.

"Ah, that's even better... A clouded mind will be easier to pry open."

The woman stared at him, silently asking questions he would not answer.

Chapter 1083: The President's Daughter (9)

Erik cursed under his breath.

"Moving? Why?"

"We don't know it yet, master, but they are creating blockades on all the streets, and a lot of patrolling flying cars belonging to them have been seen flying over Sleeb Harbour."

"FUCK!"

Mia Turke, the president's daughter, was still waking up from the anesthetic. She could hear people talking around her, but her mind was still foggy.

She heard what Erik Romano and his driver said. Yet, despite the serious situation, they didn't seem worried. This confused her.

Mia looked at Erik through half-open eyes. He seemed calm, with only a hint of frustration on his face.

This surprised her, given how dangerous their situation was. The blackguards, the most powerful organization in the world, the strongest people in the world, were closing in on them, but Erik acted like it wasn't a big deal.

The blackguards were very powerful, but Erik seemed unbothered, to the point of making the woman think he was very foolish, extremely confident, or, of course, just crazy.

What Mia didn't know was that Erik's calm appearance hid his racing thoughts. He wasn't worried about fighting the blackguards. Their military prowess was the last of his problems. Instead, he was worried they might know about his kidnapping.

Erik knew that if the blackguards had found out about the kidnapping, it could ruin everything he had planned.

"Deploy our reserves, and make all those at the airport leave right now," Erik said. "I want you to find out why the blackguards are moving. Be prepared for a fight."

"Yes, master."

The Chimaeric Demon started reaching his brothers. However, he closed the window that separated the driving seat from the passenger ones so that Mia wouldn't be able to listen.

As the internal window closed, Erik leaned back, his eyes closed.

<What the fuck is happening?>

Erik suddenly realized something.

<Maybe...>

The blackguards were not stupid, and everything they did couldn't be just random.

<They might know about my plan.>

He thought about it more: they knew he was in Hin, that was for sure. After months of them knowing he reached their shores, it was clear the most likely place for him to be was their capital city.

There was just a problem. If the blackguards were really getting ready for something, it might mean that Mia's travels to different countries were just a trick.

It could have been a trap, planned to make him come out of hiding. This made Erik feel both impressed by their cleverness and angry that he might have fallen for it.

But there was no way to find out the truth. The blackguards might have just reached Sleb Harbour and started a thorough search. That happened when he kidnapped Mia; it could have been a coincidence.

But Erik didn't believe in coincidences. The fact they didn't find information about Salena Turke was proof enough that they knew he was going to do something to find the woman.

Maybe Mia was the only target he could find because the blackguards wanted it to be that way.

In truth, that was a little scary, even for Erik, who prided himself on being highly intelligent. Yet, if his assumption was right, he had just been played by the worst motherfuckers on the planet.

<Fuck... Those ugly bastards are hell bent on getting the biological supercomputer, uh?>

However, Erik wasn't totally convinced of his theory, or better, he didn't want to believe he was actually right, because if he was, it meant there was some scarily intelligent dude out there who, without certain information, devised a ploy to make Erik get out of his hiding.

<They haven't found out we replaced the president's daughter, but they are sure we are plotting something, and that's why they placed so many patrols around.>

The problem was that the driver kept giving information to Erik. Apparently, the number of soldiers within the city was increasing exponentially, to the point that Erik had trouble understanding how that was possible.

<It's like they hid people in Sleeb Harbour a long time ago... But how? When?>

It was simply impossible for this many troops to have reached Sleeb Harbour all in a day, and without the Chimaeric Demons finding out. Based on what the clones said, there were at least 20 thousand soldiers around the city, and their numbers were increasing.

<This was a trap, right?>

Just then, the president's daughter moved beside Erik. She let out a small noise, like a silent moan. Erik's eyes opened and his body tensed.

<She's coming to her senses,> he said.

The Chimaeric Demons nodded.

Erik turned his attention to the groggy woman beside him. He had to act fast before she fully regained her senses. No, most importantly, he had to act fast before the blackguards found him, because he wasn't sure they wouldn't be able to do that.

He needed to find out where Hin's president was, and to do that, he needed to read this woman's mind.

Erik looked at Mia in the eyes and point blank he made a barrage of questions.

"What's your favorite color?"

The woman was left confused. Though her thoughts went to Emerald Green.

<Interesting color.>

"Do you prefer coffee or tea?" Again, the woman was confused by the questions, which Erik kept making despite her not answering at all. She couldn't even if she wanted, and that was the last thing she wished.

However, her mind was still clouded by the anesthetic, and despite struggling to process the bizarre line of questioning Erik made, she always thought of an answer.

Mind it, her thoughts were a jumbled mess, but truthful.

Erik continued asking questions. There was a reason he was asking these seemingly random questions, and it was because he wanted to probe the woman's mind. Sure, he could have also used the Instability brain crystal power to make her more keen to answer, but there was actually no need to do that given the effects of the anesthetic.

Erik asked several more questions, and they became increasingly more specific and on topic.

"When was the last time you spoke to your mother?"

"Fu...ck..." Mia said. Erik felt her mind was becoming stronger by the second.

"Cursing, uh?" Not very ladylike. Yet the woman thought about the answer. Mia saw her mother the last month, when she suddenly came with a request she wasn't used to making in person. She wanted her to leave for a political trip, which was what Mia did.

"What did you discuss that day?" Erik somehow knew what they talked about, but there were some things the woman didn't think about and to which Erik wanted answers.

Erik knew Salena sent her daughter, Mia, to Khunelerp. They went there to ask for help in the war against Frant; it was obvious thinking about it.

The point was that Salena appeared slightly worried in her daughter's memories, a little reluctant.

<Could it be she didn't want to send troops to Frant?> Maybe the war was getting too taxing for Hin.

Though Mia was slightly confused by Erik's question since he asked what they discussed that day, just after he asked when it was the last time she spoke to her mother. It was almost like he could read her mind.

"Where was she when you last saw her?"

The woman's eyes widened, a flicker of defiance struggling to surface through the haze of drugs.

"I... I won't tell you anything," she said, her words slurred. Erik didn't reply, as he didn't need her to talk, only to think, something impossible not to do.

He could see the answers flickering through her mind, the images and memories rising unbidden to the surface.

He saw flashes of conversations, meetings, and phone calls. All happening in one place, a sprawling estate, hidden away in the mountains, heavily guarded and fiercely protected.

President Salena Turke, the woman who held the key to everything. The key to get control over Hin.

She was there, in that mountain stronghold. But Mia didn't know why, nor when she went there.

Mia didn't know if her mother left, but she knew her mother had been put under heavy protection lately and often moved from place to place.

In Erik's opinion, it could be possible that she left already, that she was in a bunker underground, that even the Chimaeric Demons might not be able to find.

Erik leaned back, not knowing if he had to laugh or not. <Is she really there? Did she leave?>

He had no answer to that, but it was the only lead they had to find the woman. He had what he needed. The rest was just a matter of time.

<Send squads to infiltrate this place.> Erik sent the driver the memories he stole from Mia. The Chimaeric Demon immediately picked up his radio and made calls. Five minutes passed, with Erik reading the clone's mind, knowing he just told what he needed to. Yet, he asked.

<Are you done?>

<Yes, master.>

<Goo—>

But then a tremendous rumble echoed around, and then an explosion caught the flying car.

#### Chapter 1084: Levium (1)

Instinctively, he turned to his right, only to be met with a shocking sight. The entire side of the car was gone, ripped away by the force of the blast, and with it, the president's daughter, Mia, had vanished.

For a moment, Erik's mind raced, trying to figure out what fate might have befallen the girl.

Could she have survived such an explosion? No. It wasn't possible. The blast had been too strong, and Mia didn't look like someone who spent time training and making neural links, which meant she was weak, which meant she must have been dead.

Erik clicked his tongue. If the blackguards knew about his plan, then they had to know who his target was, and yet, they had attacked anyway, knowing that the president's daughter would be caught in the crossfire.

That, of course, if they were aware of the plan, because if they weren't, maybe they would have avoided attacking him if they knew he had a hostage.

Erik wasn't so naïve as to think the blackguards didn't know about the kidnapping. They were attacking him minutes after the plan got carried out, and it would be weird if they didn't realize what was happening. The callousness of their actions left a bitter taste in his mouth.

<I wondered to kill her, but I actually didn't, and even decided to keep her safe, yet they didn't think twice, even for a second.>

But Erik didn't know Mia, and despite the implications of her death, he didn't care about her or her mother, who agreed to send troops on Frant and kill his clones.

But there was no time to dwell on this. The car was plummeting from the sky fast.

"Prepare for battle," Erik said at the Chimaeric Demon in the driving seat. "We're going to have company soon."

The clone nodded, his eyes narrowing behind his white demonic mask. Since there wasn't much on the right side of the car preventing them from coming out, they leaped out of it just moments before it crashed into a building.

The two landed with a roll on the roof of a nearby skyscraper. But as they straightened up, they found themselves surrounded by blackguards.

<That was fast!>

They were masked and armed. Erik took in the number of people the blackguards prepared to fight for him.

However, now that he was finally standing, Erik noticed not all of these people were blackguards. There were even several known faces: mercenaries from Etrium and soldiers from the other countries.

Some had blue, green, and brown uniforms. Some didn't even have one and were dressed in casual clothes or very tight bodysuits. Most of them had various pieces of armor donned, and some were clad in full armor and weren't even showing their faces.

Erik counted the people on the rooftop. There were about 500 of them, plus two more, he and the Chimaeric Demon. He wasn't worried about fighting them. Instead, he was worried that the roof might not be able to hold so many people. It could collapse under their weight.

<These fuckers really got to the point of not caring anymore about collateral damage.>

Well, of course. If they did, they wouldn't have left a vehicle explode in midair and let it crash inside a building.

They were all great thaid hunters and at the top of the power ranks in terms of destructive powers. These were guys not to trifle with, and yet, that was exactly what Erik had to do if he wanted to get out of this situation.

As Erik observed those he was going to kill in a moment, a sudden movement in the corner of his eyes grabbed his attention. He turned just to see a single figure flying from the sky and landing in front of Erik and in front of the 500 idiots who decided to have a party on a roof.

He was a blackguard. There was no way for him to be mistaken. However, his uniform marked him as one of their elite, a Vindicator. As the man approached, Erik's heart started skipping beats.

He recognized the man's lean frame, the height, and those jet-black hairs tied back in a ponytail, which he didn't even bother to hide. It was Uncle Benjamin.

The man came to a stop a few meters away, keeping a relaxed posture. Erik felt conflicting emotions rise within him. Anger was the most prominent one.

"I wondered when you'd come for me in person."

There was nothing more he wanted to do than rip Uncle Benjamin to shreds, and yet he stopped himself and just treated him coldly.

"Levium."

The man tilted his head, a flicker of surprise crossing his face. "Why so formal, Erik?"

The man's tone was almost hurt. "What happened to 'Uncle'? You called me that way all your life."

Erik's jaw clenched, his fingers curling into fists at his sides. "Are you seriously asking me that?"

"Yes, of course. After all, it's not like I did anything to you directly." He lied, of course.

"I know it was because of you that my father got imprisoned. Are you aware what you did to him led to his death?"

Levium's shoulders sagged, a sigh escaping his lips behind the mask. "I know," he said. "And I'm sorry, Erik. Truly, I am. But you also have to understand that is not mine, but your father's fault. He chose who to stand with, and he made the wrong choice.

The blackguards wanted to recruit him for years, yet he always refused to join."

But Erik was in no mood for apologies. "You are sorry?"

Erik's word came out dripping with venom. He couldn't believe what Uncle Benjamin had just said.

"My father was wrong for not having joined you, scum? How can you stand there and spout all those bullshit just like that? After everything you've done to us? After everything you've put us through? Everything you have done to the people?"

Levium took a step forward, his hands held out in a calming gesture.

"Erik, please," he said. "You have to understand. The love I had for you, the bond we shared... it was real. I cared for you like a son. I still do, but what your father did is the truth.

Those were actions everyone saw."

"I doubt you took care of me because of affection, Levium," Erik spat again, his eyes blazing with fury. "The only reason you stuck around was because you wanted whatever my father found on Mur. That's all I ever was to you, a means to an end."

To his surprise, Levium didn't deny it. "You're right," he said, his voice heavy with resignation. "But that was just part of it. I won't lie to you. But Erik, my feelings for you were genuine. I loved you like my own flesh and blood.

I paid for your food, for your clothes, for your education."

"Really? Then why was I forced to be used as a slave on a farm?"

There was silence. "The only thing you did was to come home a couple of times a month and bring me out to dinner or lunch, occasionally leaving me some money. But that is beside the point..."

Erik stopped talking for a moment. Then he said, "We both know what you were doing. You were trying to make me feel like I owed you something. But you never gave me enough to really help me change my situation. Then, when my father would inevitably come back, you would have offered me money for whatever he gave me. You wanted me in a situation where I wouldn't have refused.

I'm not dumb. I know you didn't do any of this to be nice."

Erik's lips curled into sneers. He spat on the ground at Levium's feet, the Chimaeric Demon behind him mirroring his disgust with a low growl. Uncle Benjamin didn't reply.

"Why are you here, Levium?" Erik asked, though he already knew the answer. "What do you want from me?"

Levium spread his hands, a rueful smile playing across his lips, behind the mask. "Isn't it obvious? I'm here to bring you to justice, Erik. To make you answer for your crimes."

At that, Erik threw back his head and laughed. It was a harsh sound, tinged with an edge of madness.

"Justice?" he asked, his voice dripping with sarcasm, incredulous at the words Levium just said.

"JUSTICE?! YOU, WHO COORDINATED THE KIDNAPPINGS OF PEOPLE TO USE THEM IN DORAN'S EXPERIMENTS, ARE TALKING ABOUT JUSTICE?!"

Levium flinched as if struck, but he regained his composure. "Those were necessary sacrifices," he said. "To help humanity ascend, to reach its full potential."

Erik's eyes narrowed. "Ascend? Is that the reason for all of this? The experiments, the manipulation, the countless lives destroyed? All so you could play god?"

Levium shook his head. "You don't understand, Erik," he said. "You have these incredible abilities, these powers that set you apart. But that's only because of your father, because of what he brought back from Mur."

Chapter 1085: Levium (2)

"If Lucius hadn't given you that biological supercomputer, wouldn't you have wished for a chance to gain another brain crystal power? With our technology, with the research we could have done if we'd gotten our hands on what your father stole... we could have changed the world. We could have given people like you a choice."

"The biological supercomputer, uh? You even know its name?"

"Of course we do. After all, that was our technology to begin with."

At those words, Erik started laughing. Laughing like he had never laughed before, laughing because of the irony.

"Your technology? So, we were actually right. The blackguards are the remnants of the Silver Line Corporation."

A tense silence fell between them.

"That's a name I didn't expect you to know. How do you know that?" Levium asked. The blackguards did everything they could to hide their relationship with the Silver Line Corporation. Yet Erik knew that name and drew a connection to the blackguards.

"I just stumbled somewhere and found something interesting to read."

But none of them said a word after that. Uncle Benjamin didn't because Erik wasn't supposed to know that, Erik because, despite the revelation, Levium's previous words struck a chord deep within him.

Erik found himself wondering.

What might have happened if he hadn't gotten the biological supercomputer? Would he have been tempted by the blackguards' offers? If the glass case holding the weird AI hadn't broken by accident,

would he have given it to them? These thoughts troubled Erik, making him realize how close he had been to a very different life.

He thought about all the possible futures he could have had.

<The biological supercomputer changed everything. It gave me power but also helped me remain free from manipulation, free from having to obey others.>

Erik wasn't sure if he would have been strong enough to say no to the blackguards without it. It would have been a different history if he knew what the weird creature inside the glass did. But he couldn't see the future.

He knew that, in a different situation, because of the desperation, the hate, and the loneliness, he would have said yes. If nothing else, at least to get out of whatever predicament his father put him in.

At that point, would he have joined the blackguards, seduced by Uncle Benjamin's promises and lies?

Would he have become just another pawn in their twisted games, another soul sacrificed on the altar of their ambition?

The thought made him sick to his stomach. He shook his head, trying to banish the thoughts from his mind.

Luckily, things went differently. The biological supercomputer gave him the chance to stand for his own principles. The AI gave him the chance to make a choice.

"Erik, listen to me," Uncle Benjamin said, taking another step forward. "It's not too late. You can still come back from this and still do the right thing. Help us, work with us, and we can achieve great things together. We can change the world, make it a better place."

Erik looked at Uncle Benjamin. The promises of power and changing the world didn't tempt him at all, but he knew that someone else might have given up on their offer.

His mind was made up, and nothing could change it.

Erik was certain about who he was and what he believed in, and the last thing he wanted to be part of was an organization that wanted to control the world, that killed, kidnapped, tortured, and experimented on people behind the curtains.

An organization that hid the dust under the rug called justice. He had chosen his path already; he had chosen to antagonize the blackguards, and there was no going back.

Any doubts he might have had before were long gone. Instead, he felt sure of the choice he made. Erik gave a small, confident smile to Levium.

"There is no way for me to help anyway, and besides, after all you put me through, even at the cost of destroying the biological supercomputer, I would still say no."

Levium's face fell, a flicker of sadness crossing his features. He had genuinely hoped that Erik would see reason and join their cause. In his mind, he had envisioned a future where Erik's talents could be harnessed for what he believed was the greater good. The problem was, that wasn't possible.

The blackguards wanted to find out what the biological supercomputer exactly was. The organization was what remained of the Silver Line Corporation, but most of the specifics about the biological supercomputer had been lost on Mur.

That was the reason they were scouring the place. The blackguards were searching for their old labs, hoping to find the one where information about the AI was still present.

Since they didn't do that already, they were going to learn they would need to extract the AI from Erik, and that would lead to his death.

Levium didn't know that, and the blackguards didn't know that either. Yet, at least. For sure, though, both of them would stop at nothing to achieve their goal, whatever it was.

However, the rejection stung, not just as a tactical setback but as a personal disappointment.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Erik," he said.

"I had hoped we could find a way to work together, to put the past behind us. But if this is the path you've chosen, then so be it. I won't go easy on you anymore."

"Like you did in Etrium?"

Uncle Benjamin didn't immediately reply.

"You know about that, too?"

Erik laughed. "Did you forget I had some fun time with Momentum? He sang like a bird."

"Momentum? Sing? Talk? I doubt it. You are lying."

"And yet I know about you being behind the ambush in Caelora City."

Erik's mention of the ambush in Caelora City clearly upset Levium. Even with his mask on, Erik could tell the man was reconsidering a lot of things.

This information was supposed to be a secret, known only to a few top blackguards, especially considering that most of those implicated in the matter had been killed.

Besides, if Erik knew about Caelora City, what else did he know? What else did Momentum say to the young man?

"That's because of some weird power you have. I'm sure about this, like I'm sure about the quality of the man you call Momentum."

Uncle Benjamin straightened up, his posture shifting into a combat stance. Around him, the blackguards and their allies tensed.

"I'll give you one last chance, Erik," Levium said, his voice cold and hard. "Surrender now, and I promise you'll be treated fairly. Resist, and we'll take you by force."

Erik laughed, a short, harsh bark of sound. "You know my answer," he said, his own body coiling like a spring. "Besides, what can you do? These are just 500 people, and I killed many more of them alone back in Frant."

The Chimaeric Demon behind him looked at the surrounding soldiers with a look of pure hatred and a will to kill.

"That? Those guys were just some new recruits, and they didn't have multiple brain crystal powers. Here, instead, we have de crème de la crème the world can offer, all equipped with Etrium's technology and Doran's brain crystals."

"It won't still be enough. 500 people are nothing to me."

Levium then laughed. "Ah, is this why you are so confident? Then let me show you how many we really are."

Then, from windows, buildings, doors, cars, blackguards, and soldiers from various countries appeared. Levium smiled behind the mask.

"You see, Erik, I didn't bring just 500 people to deal with you. I'm not so stupid as to make the same mistake again. No, I brought an army."

As if to emphasize his point, Levium raised his hands in a grand gesture. Suddenly, a weird noise spread across the area.

It was weird, as if things snapped or got hit by something bigger. Then they appeared before him. Parked cars around the area rose from the ground, hovering in the air.

It wasn't just that; there were many other things around flying. Stones, chains, even bicycles.

<I almost forgot about that.>

Uncle Benjamin had an incredibly powerful variant of a telekinesis brain crystal power. This explained how he could fly, or better, levitate, and also explained his codename.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you this, Erik," Levium said. "Shade's brother wasn't the only one having a parallel will kind of brain crystal power."

At that, Erik's eyes widened. "How do you know about Martin?"

"That? Once we learned you had all those powers, it wasn't hard to connect the dots about many things. Martin Hais, Nathaniel McConnell, Conal, Orson, and Logan. I remembered you talking about them sometimes. Even if you tried to hide it, a quick research about what was going on in your school, and everything became clear."

"Well, you motherfucker. If you knew, why didn't you help?!"

Chapter 1086: Levium (3)

Erik could sense its murderous thoughts thanks to the Instability brain crystal power. He could understand it because most of his murderous thoughts were directed at Uncle Benjamin.

Both for him and his clones, but even for Levium, there were no more words to spend, no more reasoning to make. The only thing that could be done now was spill blood, and everyone was determined to spill it.

However, as much as Erik wanted to smash his fist into Uncle Benjamin's face, he was in a very precarious situation. There was only a Chimaeric Demon with him, while the enemies he was going to face were too many.

Five hundred were on the roof, but many more were coming towards him from the streets, and there was no doubt they all had multiple brain crystal powers, if not from Doran's research, at least from Etrium's brain crystal equipment.

Levium stood at the head of the blackguard forces, floating in the air like a god, showing his might to all those present to witness his power.

<So cringe...>

Levium's posture was confident, his eyes glinting behind his mask, and his ego reaching the sky.

"Last chance, Erik," he said. "Surrender now, and we can end this peacefully."

But Erik just laughed. "You know that will not happen, Levium. This fight is going to end in one way, and that is with you in a pool of your own blood."

Uncle Benjamin sighed. "Then you leave me no choice. Attack!"

At his command, the blackguards and the fighters from the countries who joined him surged forward.

An initial batch of attacks came to the young man and his clone.

The air was filled with all kinds of attacks; most of them were elemental ones, which was surprising considering how rare and powerful they were.

<The blackguards must have worked really hard to get all those brain crystal powers.>

Fire and water attacks filled the space surrounding Erik. These elements crashed into each other, creating clouds of steam. This made it hard to see the battlefield.

Ice chunks flew, shining because of the lights made by the fire projectiles and the bolt of lightning that flashed in the surroundings.

These were the most complicated powers Erik had to face, but he created ice pillars that attracted them.

These weren't the only ones, though, because the water and ice attacks the enemy made achieved the same result, but it created a more messy situation since the bolts zigzagged through the different attacks, creating lightning cages that crisscrossed the battlefield.

Sharp wind blades whistled by, carrying enormous pieces of stone that could crush anything.

The enemies aimed their attacks at Erik's ice pillars. These pillars were Erik's main defense against the dangerous lightning bolts. The attacks kept hitting the pillars, causing them to crack and break. Erik had to make new ones to replace those that were destroyed.

At the same time, he had to dodge the various attacks that rained on him. The Chimaeric Demon had to do the same, but for him, it wasn't as easy.

The enemy also tried to blind Erik. In truth, that results in the other blackguards ending up unable to see.

They did this by using bright light beams. The result was that all these attacks looked like nature was fighting against Erik, who found himself amid a dangerous storm of deadly projectiles.

Erik dodged the attacks. Fireballs flew past, almost burning his ears. Sharp pieces of ice zoomed by, glinting in the chaotic light.

He bent and twisted his body in amazing ways to avoid getting hit. Thanks to his instability brain crystal power, Erik could sense where the attacks were coming from and dodge them, but it was already taxing his mind.

As he moved, he kept looking around, trying to find weak spots in the constant wave of attacks.

But that wasn't the only thing Erik did. Of course, he also channeled mana through his Force Bastion Neural links.

However, contrary to the usual, he pushed a huge amount of mana into it. This time, he wasn't sure he would be able to avoid all the attacks, so he maximized his defenses.

The Chimaeric Demon didn't have that ability, and that made his creator worry. Not only because it was one of his clones, and he would be sad if he died, but even because he needed him if he wanted to survive this encounter.

Though, since it couldn't really avoid everything, the clone rushed toward the enemy. This way, the blackguards and their allies would have to be careful in what they did, unless they wanted to kill their comrades while trying to kill the Chimaeric Demon.

Once there, the clone started a bloody dance, one that decimated the soldiers barring their way. There was no way these guys could fight against him in melee, and the same was true for Erik.

In fact, the young man did the same while keeping the pillars up and using the Frostwind Fire Tempest brain crystal power to create wind blades.

He cut around 40 blackguards with one single attack, but as soon as they died, 100 more joined the fray.

[LEVEL UP.]

Erik felt a surge of energy within his body.

<Great, let's keep going.>

In the meantime, the building trembled under the weight of the scaling enemy.

The building shook under the weight of so many enemies coming to the roof. Soon the number of people made a weight the building wasn't made to handle.

The concrete floor cracked, with small lines spreading out like a spider's web under the enemy's feet. The metal beams inside the walls bent.

The structure was going to collapse.

As the battle continued, the building became more unstable. The constant movement and the attacks made things worse.

The entire building shook. Erik felt the shaking under his feet. Erik moved through the crowd of enemies. He dodged their weapons, but it was a complicated matter. There were simply too many people on that roof.

A sword came close to his face, but he bent backwards just in time. He spun away from a spear, only to see an enemy with an axe right in front of him swinging it down.

Erik tried his best to dodge the attacks, but he couldn't avoid them all. An enemy's sword got past his defenses and struck his chest. But the blade just bounced off his armor with a loud clang.

<Fuck, this isn't good.>

Erik's armor protected him well. Enemies hit him with maces and daggers — but none could hurt him. The problem was that some might do it sooner or later, and if he was unable to avoid the strike, he might end up with a nasty wound he would be forced to heal with his self-healing brain crystal power, increasing his mana usage.

As his mana quickly depleted, the Force Bastion resistance started decreasing.

<Shit...>

Erik focused on attacking though, because if the enemy was so crazy to use ranged attacks on him, they would kill their own soldiers. By doing that, the number of attacks significantly reduced.

Then a streak of lightning arced from his fingertips, killing another batch of soldiers.

[LEVEL UP.]

But while Erik could get his mana back this way, the Chimaeric Demon couldn't. There were already many wounds on its body, but the carnage he wrought was incredible.

The clone killed at least 100 people alone, and melee at that. The problem was that the number of soldiers was not just 500 anymore.

It was at that point that the building trembled, much more than it did before. The constant barrage of attacks and the weight of thousands of fighters couldn't be sustained anymore.

"It's collapsing!" Erik said under the groaning of stressed metal and concrete.

The roof broke with a loud noise. The building fell apart. Floors crashed down, sending debris and dust everywhere. Erik and the others fell with it, trying to avoid the falling pieces of concrete and metal.

The fall wasn't a problem. That height would not be lethal, and even if he got injured, he still had the self-healing brain crystal power to fix him.

However, he realized he was going to end up on the ground, and he couldn't allow that.

The buildings would act as arenas, and like all of them, there was a limit to combatants they could house.

If the blackguards got on the rooftop with him, they would have to pay attention to how many soldiers went on it and how many attacks they could make before the building collapsed again, or the same result would repeat.

"This way!" Erik said to his clone, gesturing towards the adjacent rooftop. The Chimaeric Demon nodded. Both of them used the falling debris, like stepping stones, and by jumping, they reached the building.

Chapter 1087: Levium (4)

Erik turned to look at Levium, who was flying above the giant cloud of dust created by the building's collapse, his frame visible because of the sun relentlessly beating behind him.

"That bastard!"

Uncle Benjamin behaved as if he were a movie star. <No, that would not even be enough to describe it. He thinks he is a god.>

This feeling of being better than everyone else wasn't just Uncle Benjamin's characteristic. Many of the blackguards usually felt the same sense of superiority, of omnipotence, that came with their special position within society.

It was a big part of who they were. Their great power, plus years of special treatment, made them think they were supreme beings to which the others had to bow.

Erik knew this well, as he used to pose as one of them when Frant was under siege.

He had seen how feeling superior could change good people into bullies who thought they could do no wrong.

Even those who started with good intentions often ended up thinking they were above everyone else and didn't have to follow the rules.

A massive wave of ranged attacks followed, filling the air with a barrage of different kinds of blasts of energy and various projectiles.

The sky darkened even more than it already was, especially from Erik's and the Chimaeric Demon's positions. The sheer volume of incoming fire made it look like it was about to rain. It was just that; it wasn't just water that was going to fall.

"Jump!" Erik said. There was no way they were going to survive that if they tried. The only thing they could do was get the fuck away from there.

Erik and the clone didn't waste a second. They jumped off the roof just in time. A split second later, a storm destroyed where they had been standing.

The building they were in collapsed under the heavy attack. As Erik and the clone fell, an enormous cloud of dust and broken pieces shot up around them, adding to the one that was still there, following the destruction of the first building.

This kept rising, hiding them as they fell and giving them a brief shield from the enemies chasing them.

The Chimaeric Demon didn't even need to get an order, because the first thing he did was shapeshift.

Its body grew longer and sprouted huge, feathered wings, deadly talons, and a huge beak. In just a moment, it turned into a Zephyrwing.

Erik landed on the clone's back. He crouched low, gripping the creature's feathers as they soared away from the devastation behind them.

"Nice save," Erik said, patting the clone's neck.

<Thanks, master!>

The problem was that Uncle Benjamin wasn't staying idle. More and more soldiers soared through the sky, tossed around like dolls by Levium, that really looked like a god now. The display of power he was showing was simply heaven-defying, because the sky was not only obscured by the dust cloud resulting from the collapses, but even by the soldiers the man was using to chase after Erik.

<Damn... I used Hais's brain crystal power wrong...>

Erik didn't have a power like that, though, one that could get some extra benefits by using it with parallel will. Most of Erik's powers, at that time, didn't require a constant concentration or usage of mana to control multiple things at the same time.

It was different for telekinesis.

<That will be a great add to my arsenal.>

Erik had mixed feelings about getting Levium's powers. He knew they would be very useful in fights and even in many other situations. Being able to toss buildings at an enemy was a tantalizing prospect.

But Erik also felt uncomfortable with the idea of taking this power. Levium used to be like family to him, even though they were enemies now.

He would have to kill Uncle Benjamin; that was true, but getting his power would make things more personal than they already were.

<Damn... I almost feel violated now, and I didn't even get that power yet.>

Erik tried to push these thoughts away and focus on the surrounding danger. Now that they weren't anymore amid the enemy, the blackguards unleashed their full might.

Loud explosions echoed between the buildings as the enemy chased Erik and the Chimaeric Demon into the sky.

Fire and smoke filled the air as buildings fell apart. The streets were a mess, covered in broken concrete and twisted metal.

The entire neighborhood was destroyed in seconds. The enemy soldiers were attacking without even trying to avoid casualties.

People were screaming and running away, but their voices were hard to hear over the noise of destruction.

Windows broke, sending glass everywhere. The ground shook with each blast, making more buildings fall down.

"They really care about no one!"

Erik clenched his jaw. He didn't care about those from Hin, of course. Damn, he barely cared about the ones from Frant. The problem was that these fuckers weren't leaving a centimeter of space for him to flee.

<Flee? What the hell am I even thinking? There is no damn way I'm going to leave that bastard alive!>

Nonetheless, he knew he couldn't keep fighting forever. Even with his powers, he would eventually get tired and run out of energy, and the Chimaeric Demon would find the same end.

<How many people did we kill?> Erik asked.

<I didn't count them, master, but around 300.>

Three hundred was not enough. There were tens of thousands of soldiers chasing them, and now that they were in the sky, they didn't even need to hold back.

<We need to get out of here,> he said telepathically to the Chimaeric Demon. <I don't know if I can take them all on my own, but you need to go, find the others, and bring back reinforcements.>

The Chimaeric Demon hesitated. <But Master.> The clone's thoughts were filled with concern.

<I can't leave you here alone. You'll be overwhelmed. Besides, the others should have heard the explosions. They are probably coming here en masse.>

<I don't want to take risks.>

<For you or for me, master?>

<For everyone.>

The Chimaeric Demon remained silent. <Don't tell me you want to reduce the number of casualties among the civilians?>

<Yes... No...> Even Erik didn't clearly know why he was sending the clone away. Surely, part of it was that he didn't want to see him die. The clones were like his children, but were also him, in a sense. Seeing yourself die would not be a pleasant experience. <I'm not like them...>

<Master,> the clone said. <There are too many enemies. If it was a couple of thousands, I might have said there was no problem, but here there is an entire army. You can't take them all alone.>

<I will not do that,> Erik said.

As they talked, the Chimaeric Demon flew. It twisted and turned, barely avoiding the attacks from the chasing army. They weren't that fast, but it was a rain. A deadly rain, at that, one they barely escaped from.

Various kinds of energy blasts flew past them, missing by just a little. Brain crystal rifles' attacks joined them.

The clone suddenly flew down, then changed direction. This made some of the attacks hit each other, causing an enormous explosion.

It flew between buildings, using them as shields against the attacks. The clone was fast, but if it wasn't for Hais's brain crystal power, he wouldn't have been able to do that. There were simply too

many attacks, and only the investigator's brain crystal power allowed him to keep them all under check.

Luckily, the parallel will brain crystal power Erik got from Hais allowed the clone to perceive everything in slow motion. It was able to see and react to the attacks.

<I'm going to shapeshift.>

<If they have the Veritas Lenses, it will not be that useful,> the clone said, avoiding a fireball.

<That's if they will be able to stay close enough for them to see me.>

<Master, I understand your intention, but this is too risky,> the Chimaeric Demon said. <We're stronger together. Splitting up now could be disastrous.>

Erik gritted his teeth. <We don't have time for this debate.>

<This is precisely why I shouldn't leave you,> the clone countered.

Erik's grip on the Zephyrwing's feathers tightened. <I'm ordering you to go. Find help. That's final. We have a chance to kill a bunch of enemy soldiers, among the most powerful of them. We will lose a lot of brothers, but there is nothing we can do.

One thing is sure: without the others, even I can't win. There is no fucking way I'm going to leave that prick alive!>

The Chimaeric Demon's thoughts carried a mix of reluctance and resignation. <As you wish, Master.>

Suddenly, the Zephyrwing and its rider vanished from the sky. The pursuing soldiers stopped their advance.

"Where did they go?"

"They were right there!"

The sky, moments ago filled with the heat of battle, now seemed empty. The soldiers hovered in place, their weapons still raised, their eyes darting in every direction.

"They shapeshifted into something tiny!" Levium said.

"Didn't you see it before? The guy following Erik Romano turned into a flying thaid! Don't be stupid and find them! They couldn't have just disappeared!"

In the meantime, the Chimaeric Demon and Erik went their separate ways.

<This is going to be hard.>

Chapter 1088: Levium (5)

Erik was in a dire situation. He needed to make the blackguards focus on him rather than go searching for the Chimaeric Demon who left. After that, he would need to stall for long enough for his clones to get here.

The battle had stopped. Erik could only hear the loud buzzing of his own wings. He was flying so fast; he sounded like a tiny helicopter.

The blackguards had lost sight of him, but they were still there searching.

Most were on the ground, looking like tiny ants searching for bugs to bring back to their nest.

Searching every place with the Veritas Lenses, hoping to find him. But they were not searching there; they were also searching in the sky, kept afloat through Levium's powers.

Few people could fly by themselves. But Uncle Benjamin used his power to help many search the sky.

<Parallel Wills is much more useful than I assumed. With a power like that of Uncle Benjamin, its usefulness multiplied.>

Erik was regretting a little having given it to the Chimaeric Demons, but at least it was serving its purpose well for them.

The clones were using it like Levium, too, but in a different way. They did it mostly to keep the battle they fought under control, to see attacks coming and avoid them, to think better and faster while not sacrificing their ability to think and focus on something else.

But Uncle Benjamin used it to boost his own brain crystal power.

Telekinesis was a rare power and not always powerful. There were many variants of it, like Mira's power, which was more leaning on the telekinesis side than on the wind one. But there were in between, like Ramon, the Band of Giant's member, who had a lesser version; he used to fight with multiple weapons at the same time. At least, that was what he said.

But Uncle Benjamin had a pure telekinesis power, one that allowed him to make everything fly.

Uncle Benjamin could control many objects at once, using them as weapons. He could create a storm of debris to attack enemies while staying completely safe.

He could throw cars or parts of buildings at his foes. He could also use small items like knives or metal pieces with great accuracy.

For defense, Uncle Benjamin could make shields out of floating debris to protect himself and others. He could also lift himself and others to move around better or escape danger, which was what he was doing. The problem was that those guys all had ranged brain crystal powers, meaning that he basically had flying artillery with him.

Uncle Benjamin was also great at changing the battlefield. He moved things around to make obstacles or clear paths and cleared his surrounding area to make it impossible for Erik to sneak upon him.

The power was already deadly as it was, but now, with the Parallel Will brain crystal power, while one brain focused on talking, breathing, moving, and thinking, the other focused on using just the ability.

That meant that if Uncle Benjamin could have had simultaneously used 10-30 items to attack before, with this new ability, he could use thousands.

<For sure, that's a big power boost. I mean, from 10 to 30 items to thousands...>

But the truth was in front of the young man's eyes. Uncle Benjamin was making thousands of people levitate to search for him while moving objects and keeping weapons close to him at all times.

Erik analyzed the situation.

<To kill Levium, I need the Chimaeric Demons taking care of his pawns. That net of people looks too tight for me to be able to go through it...>

He paused. <Damn...>

Fleeing was not an option for Erik, not now that he had the person responsible for his father's death and the shit that happened to him in Etrium in front of him.

But the blackguards and their allies were too many to make a frontal assault, and they wouldn't stop searching for him even after months.

They would scour every inch of the city until they found him. No, he needed to take the fight to them, to whittle down their numbers and buy time for the Chimaeric Demon to bring reinforcements, before they combed the city and found out his hideout.

There was no other way for him to kill him.

<I will try sneaking on him though... Maybe I will be lucky...>

With that thought in mind, Erik flew low, skimming along the shattered streets and ducking into the shadows of crumbling buildings.

He scanned his surroundings, searching for any sign of the enemy, which wasn't hard to begin with. It was just that what Erik needed to do was find a suitable group of blackguards to kill.

Erik needed to choose his targets carefully. It wasn't just about how many enemies he could fight. He had to think about where they were located, too. He wanted to find a group that was big enough to matter but not too close to other groups that could help them quickly.

Erik knew his hit-and-run plan would only work if he could attack fast and escape before more enemies showed up.

There were many people searching for him, so the distance between groups wasn't bound to be a lot, but the more there was, the better it was going to be.

It didn't take long for Erik to find them. In front of him there was a group of blackguards, perhaps a hundred strong, making their way through the rubble.

Erik could see the glint of the Veritas Lenses built inside their masks—the devices that would strip away his shapeshifting disguise if he went too close.

For a second, Erik thought about using his Phantom Veil brain crystal power and turning himself invisible, but he couldn't do that because he needed them to be in the right place at the right moment.

And that was a partially collapsed overpass.

With that thought in mind, he waited until the blackguards were in position. From his vantage point, close enough for him to see the blackguards well but far enough for them not being able to use the Veritas lenses, he observed them.

<These guys look though.>

Then he mentally grinned and then flew towards them. Mid-flight, he turned human again, startling the blackguards.

By the time they realized what was happening, it was already too late. Erik landed among them, his body once again human, albeit naked. His Force Bastion's armor materialized around him in less than a second, encasing him in a shell of mana-powered metal.

But the blackguards and their allies were not your run-of-the-mill fighters. In fact, despite not having prepared in time, they reacted relatively fast, considering the situation. Their powers flaring to life.

Among the blackguards, there was a guy that looked as big as an ox, and judging by the size of the sword he was wielding, he must have been as fast as that. But despite the enormous size, the guy was quick to absurd levels based on how he got distance from him.

<He probably had a body-strengthening brain crystal power and then got one who increased his speed. That's another good combination, albeit a simple one.>

But he wasn't the only one there. With him, there were people with ranged brain crystal powers of all kinds. The nastiest powers of them all were ranged.

Erik didn't exactly land among them, and even if he did, the blackguards created enough distance between him and them, enough for the ranged fighters to launch an attack.

But Erik was faster than them, his physical strength at least partially offsetting their mana and number advantages.

<They must not have a lot, though.>

In truth, compared to the average Joe, Erik now had much more mana than them. In truth, he could say to also being among the ones with the most mana at all.

<The problem is that I'm just one guy...>

Even if individually everyone had less mana than him, their numbers made it possible for them to barrage Erik with attacks as if he were fighting against a guy with an insane amount of mana. Even more than that, to be honest.

He lashed out with a blast of force coming from his Force Bastion brain crystal power, making at least 20 of the enemy soldiers explode because of the shock, sending a dozen flying backwards, their bodies crashing into the rubble with sickening crunches, and stopping every attack raining on him.

"Too easy..."

But the attacks kept coming. A huge fireball, hot enough to melt metal, flew at Erik very fast. He didn't seem worried at all, though.

With a punch coated in wind and ice, he knocked the fireball away. The fire disappeared when it hit his armor. Without leaving a mark. But Erik didn't like that, not because he couldn't stop the attack, but because he couldn't avoid it.

Then the ox guy arrived.

Chapter 1089: Levium (6)

The man swung his massive sword in a wide arc. Erik bent down and avoided the attack, but the man then unleashed a storm of slashes, giving Erik some trouble.

<This guy is powerful.>

The man was not just strong; after all, that sword had to weigh a ton; he was also fast. Almost as fast as him.

That combination of speed and strength undoubtedly made the guy capable of ripping through Erik's armor as if it were paper.

It was a blackguard, after all, and these guys didn't have lame brain crystal powers, no matter how simple they might appear.

It was very likely that his native brain crystal power vastly increased his strength, and that was why, while the power was relatively simple, the blackguards got him into their organization.

<There is no doubt his native power was that increasing his strength, given how well he manages that sword.>

Erik fought back. He didn't use weapons, simply because he didn't need them anymore. The only thing he needed were his armored fists and the effects of Nathaniel's power. Of course, after the merge, it was something completely new.

Powered up by the shockwaves he produced, he would kill the guy as easily as he could tear through his armor. The problem was that he was able to keep up with Erik in terms of speed.

<I need to kill this fucker...>

Despite being big, the blackguard moved surprisingly well, always getting out of harm's way in the nick of time.

<But it's problematic... Since his brain crystal powers allow him to increase strength and speed at will, the more mana he injects through his neural links, the faster and stronger he becomes.>

However, that also meant the man was probably burning his mana just to keep up with him.

<I'm sick of this...>

Erik channeled mana through his Lightning Lord's neural links.

<I doubt he will be fast enough to compete with the speed of light...>

Erik wanted to conserve his mana, but guys like these were those Erik feared the most because they could render his speed useless or close to it.

<The blackguards must have thought that a guy like him might be able to defeat me.>

Too bad Erik was not the same as he was three years prior. Almost all his brain crystal powers were powerful, and most importantly, they had a lot of neural links.

"Let's see if you can take this on, you motherfucker!"

A lightning bolt shot from Erik's fingers, cutting through the air with a loud crackle. The bright blue-white flash hit the blackguard head-on.

Sparks flew, flesh burned, and a body shivered.

As electricity coursed through him, the man lost control of his bladder and pissed himself. But the man didn't have the time to feel embarrassed because the shock was too much for him. He fell to the ground, dead and smoking from the intense electrical current.

[HUMAN KILLED: MANA ABSORBING PROCESS STARTING.]

[0%...1%... 5%... 30%... 70%... 100%]

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY ABSORBED, STARTING CONVERTING PROCEDURE.]

[3...2...1...0]

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY CONVERTED INTO EXPERIENCE. 18424 EXPERIENCE POINTS AND 184.24 DNA POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

The problem was that the Ox guy wasn't the only one around. While Erik fought against him, the other blackguards joined the fray. For the entire duration of it, around 20 seconds, the two were just blurs, too fast to even understand where they were. The others couldn't get too close or attack Erik.

But when the man died, they swarmed towards him like angry hornets, their attacks coming from every direction.

Erik weaved and ducked, avoiding a barrage of various kinds of energy blasts and flying debris.

There were some that had powers similar to those of Ramon, with them using fluctuating weapons to fight.

Some of them were even at the same level as the old man, but none was at Levium's level. Uncle Benjamin showed how terrifying he was.

If Erik had the time to absorb these brain crystal powers, he would get something really interesting. Unfortunately, he neither had the time nor the will.

His reflexes were pushed to their limits because those guys only multiplied the number of things he had to avoid. Even if he wanted, he couldn't absorb those powers.

His fists flew in a blur, connecting with devastating force, the Force Bastion brain crystal power increasing his destructiveness several folds. When he somehow failed to deal a physical blow, the shockwaves blew up the unfortunate ones on the other side of his fist, even without physical connection.

<These fucking barriers are a real pain in the ass.>

Those guys were another problem. Some of the blackguards and their allies were just playing the support role, protecting their comrades from harm. There were enough people around for them to manage that.

Erik tried to get rid of them as best as he could, but it wasn't easy. These were experts.

<No level up yet...>

If it wasn't for the neural links Erik got in the past months, he would have been in serious trouble. Not only did those increase the potency of brain crystal powers, but they also made them more efficient to use.

"Stupid mother fuckers."

Erik gritted his teeth and focused on those providing defensive support. He unleashed a barrage of wind blades. But they defended themselves, creating multiple barriers.

Erik had a lot of mana, but not enough to contend against that of thousands of people. Whenever he shattered a shield, or any kind of defensive mean, his attacks were stopped by those behind them.

<The barriers themselves are not a problem. It is the fact they are a ton.>

The barriers were like the layers of an onion. They seemed endless and were annoying. As soon as Erik broke through one layer, another one appeared right after it. Then another one showed up.

The blackguards struggled to keep enough barriers up, though, and seizing this moment of vulnerability, Erik tore through the defenders like the blast of an explosion would, using his Force bastion to propel himself at great speed.

He didn't use that often because he was fast already, and without the parallel will brain crystal power, even he had trouble keeping up with the speed. Yet he focused.

His fists and feet became lethal weapons, shattering bones and rupturing organs with each strike.

Blood sprayed as he ripped through flesh, his movements a concentrated of savage efficiency. Erik's attacks were designed to obliterate, and that was what they did. Screams of agony filled the air as he left a trail of mangled bodies in his wake.

In the span of mere seconds, a dozen soldiers crumpled to the ground, dead. The defensive line now lay in disarray, creating a brief window of opportunity for Erik to take care of someone else.

Flames erupted from his hands, scorching those who dared to get too close, leaving a trail of charred bodies.

"STOP THE MONSTER!"

"KILL THE DEMON!"

Despite this, Erik found himself constantly on the defensive. The best he could do was counterattack, or take advantage of those brief moments he gained, to kill those stupid enough to lose sight of him. But they weren't many.

"Shit! There are too many blackguards."

Their attacks became more dangerous as the fight went on, most likely because they were slowly finding a way to use their numbers to fight against him.

Until now, just random attacks landed on his armor because he failed to avoid them due to the numbers. But if he kept fighting against these guys, he was going to start getting seriously injured.

Erik heard the sound of footsteps approaching.

"Fuck! Their reinforcements arrived!"

New batches of enemy soldiers filled the area, turning his kills into a pointless waste of time. Eventually, there were even more new soldiers than there had been at the start of the fight.

<I need to get the fuck out of here.>

Erik channeled more mana, this time into his Frostwind Fire Tempest brain crystal power. He created a dome of ice, and then, using his force bastion, he shattered it. Countless ice shards flew at devastating speed towards those surrounding him.

[LEVEL UP.]

Dead bodies crumpled on the ground, but it was just the tip of the literal iceberg. The young man leaped into the air, and once more he shapeshifted into something hard to see, a bug.

He buzzed away from the carnage, seeking a new place from which to catch his breath and plan his next move.

<I need to rest...>

The system might have refilled his mana reserves, but his stamina and his mental strength were starting to weaken.

The problem wasn't the strength of his enemies. He could mop the floor with them.

<It's just that they are too many!>

He had to avoid too many attacks; he had to use too much of his mana to keep his armor up and repair it when a blow landed on him, and that was very taxing.

The young man flew into a narrow alley, then he came out onto a wide street. Erik looked around with his insect eyes. He saw a place where he could rest for a couple of minutes and darted there.

#### Chapter 1090: Levium (7)

The blackguards were everywhere, searching for Erik and his clone. However, none of them noticed him since he too took the shape of a bug, but that didn't mean he couldn't be seen at all.

Being small was helpful, but it didn't make the clone invisible. That was why, since this was a clone of Erik's latest batches, he actually turned invisible.

The problem was that the mana consumption was too much for him, and sooner or later, he would be forced to at least turn his invisibility off.

All around the clone, the city was getting destroyed. Most of the buildings had been reduced to ashes and rubble, but the sight of the battle between Erik and the blackguards was relatively far.

<Then why are the blackguards destroying everything in sight?>

In truth, in the clone's mind, the answer existed. In his opinion, they were not only searching for him, but were even trying to destroy everything in which Erik could hide.

It was pretty useless, in truth, from this point of view at least, but it prevented Erik's allies from trying to sneak their way toward Levium.

<That bastard...>

But that would not stop the Chimaeric Demons at all, but Levium and his soldiers wouldn't know that.

Smoke billowed from many fires, obscuring the sky and making it hard to breathe. There were also many battle sounds around him, which meant the blackguards weren't actually just targeting his master.

The battle damage around the city didn't seem to be from Erik's fight. There were marks from energy weapons and broken vehicles all over the streets.

<The others are fighting already...>

The blackguards were not only in the area where Erik was, but were also in the rest of the city, after all. The clone's brothers said they were attacking basically everywhere.

Suddenly, a series of explosions rocked the area. The force of the blasts nearly knocked the Chimaeric Demon out of the air.

<Finally!>

The clone had a lead to where his brothers were. He regained his balance and flew towards the source of the commotion.

What was happening was pretty clear. <The blackguards are trying to keep my brothers away from the master.>

The point was, how did they find out about them? How did they know Erik was in Sleeb Harbour?

<One thing is knowing we were in Hin; another was being in Sleeb Harbour...>

But the clone didn't have time to dwell on that. Because as he approached the site of the explosion, he saw a scene of pandemonium.

Its brothers clashed with a squad of blackguards, which hadn't been few.

<Damn...>

The air filled with bright flashes and loud noises as the fighters used their powerful brain crystal powers to kill each other.

Fists flew, swords slashed, spears pierced, and hammers crushed. Blood flew and stained the ground red.

The fight was brutal. For sure, the Chimaeric Demons were winning, but contrary to the usual, much to the clone's horror, he saw several of its brethren dead, their bodies broken on the blood-soaked ground.

<Shit!>

The fight seemed to have reached a climax. The number of blackguards was less than the number of their corpses, but despite having been clearly defeated, it still looked like they had achieved their goal.

<Those fuckers are laughing!>

Of course, it wasn't the blackguards that were doing that, but their allies. They had smug looks on their faces as they died one by one.

The Chimaeric Demons were looking at them with grave looks.

The clone didn't know what exactly made them laugh. Maybe it was just that they had to keep the clones at bay, or maybe it was the fact they found a way to kill them.

They were said to be unkillable, after all, since few did that until now.

<This is not good.>

As the battle reached its last phase, the Chimaeric Demon made a split-second decision.

It darted towards its brothers, its form shifting and growing as it closed the distance, invisibility being turned off. By the time it reached the fray, it had resumed its humanoid shape.

The Chimaeric Demons then killed the last of their enemies. In a matter of minutes, the blackguards' forces were reduced to a puddle of blood and minced meat, their bodies strewn across the battlefield like broken dolls.

"Brothers," Erik's driver said.

"Brothers, we face a grave situation," the clone said with a voice filled with urgency. "Our master has been ambushed by the blackguards. The attack is being coordinated by none other than Uncle Benjamin himself. As we speak, our master is fighting alone against him and his soldiers."

"WHAT?! Why didn't you use the radio to call for help?!"

"The radio broke during the initial attack," the clone said. "I had to come here myself to tell you."

Another Chimaeric Demon said, "We thought something strange was happening. We saw lots of enemies coming and attacking us, but we didn't think they would find the master. Shouldn't he have already arrived at the walls' shelter?"

"We were not there yet once we got attacked. Somehow the blackguards knew what was happening, but the extent of what they know, I'm not aware of."

The Chimaeric Demons became silent. Their shoulders dropped a little, and they bowed their heads slightly. No one spoke for a moment.

"Do you think they might know we replaced the president's daughter?"

The Chimaeric Demon driver stopped to think. Its masked face tilted a bit. He was trying to figure out what the blackguards might know based on the situation, but there were few clues.

"Nothing points to that, but I won't exclude it," the Chimaeric Demon said. "The blackguards blasted the car on which we were traveling. The president's daughter got blown up by it. The blackguards either knew that or didn't care. Regardless, Mia Turke died today."

The clones remained calm. They had seen and done a lot. A situation like this, albeit dangerous, was nothing they couldn't handle.

"Why are you here instead of fighting alongside our master?" A clone asked, its tone accusatory.

The Chimaeric Demon bowed its head. "The master ordered me to ask for help," it explained, its voice tinged with a hint of shame.

"I had no choice but to come in person to ensure the message was delivered."

The gathered Chimaeric Demons exchanged glances.

It was clear the blackguards were searching for Erik, but the reason they attacked them now got an explanation.

"We thought the soldiers were here to drive us out," one of them said. "But it is clear this was all a ploy to keep us away from our master."

It was the logical conclusion.

"Yeah, I was thinking the same thing," one of the Chimaeric Demons said. "It's pretty clear now that they're trying to keep us away from the master."

"Definitely. They must have planned this out pretty well. I wonder how long they've been preparing for this attack."

"It doesn't matter how long they've been planning," a third clone said. "What matters is that we need to help our master right now."

The others nodded in agreement. They all knew that time was of the essence. One of the Chimaeric Demons stepped forward and reached for its radio. The others watched curiously.

"What are you doing?" someone asked.

"Isn't it obvious?" The clone said, turning on the radio. "I'm calling for help. We need to let the others know what's going on."

"Good thinking," another clone said.

Its voice rang out across the airwaves, relaying the dire news to its brothers scattered throughout the city.

"Attention all units," he said. "This is a Code Red. Our master is currently engaged in high-risk combat against enemy forces. Intel confirms the presence of a high-value target, 'Uncle Benjamin', leading the opposition."

"Current status: Our master is isolated and outnumbered. Enemy strength is estimated at battalion level, but we can't rule out the chance of it being a brigade. Our primary aim is to provide immediate tactical support and extract our master from the hostile zone."

"All available units are to converge on these coordinates immediately. Maintain radio silence during approach. Upon arrival, form into fire teams and await further instructions. Failure is not an option. Over and out."

The Chimaeric Demons answered the call for help. The Chimaeric Demons were nervous. They wanted to rush to help Erik right away.

But there was a big problem. The attack had spread the Chimaeric Demons all over the city. Some were fighting in one place, while others were far away, doing different things. Besides, they knew that around the coordinates they got provided; the blackguards mounted incredible defenses.

The Chimaeric Demons tried their best to gather. Those who were close to each other formed small groups. These small groups then tried to join with other groups when they could.

"Hey, let's get moving," one of the clones said. "We can't waste more time than we already did."

"Yeah, you're right. I know where our master is. I'll show you guys the way."

"Great."

The Chimaeric Demons then started preparing.

"Alright, everyone ready?"

"Ready," someone answered.

"Okay, let's do this," the Chimaeric Demon driver said. "We'll turn into small bugs to avoid being seen. Follow me closely."

With that, the clone changed into a tiny insect and took off into the air. The others quickly did the same, transforming into a swarm of bugs. They all flew after the driver, heading towards where Erik was fighting.