

BIOLOGICAL 1091

Chapter 1091: Levium (8)

Surrounded by hundreds of enemy soldiers, Erik was starting to feel fatigued.

He kept fighting for no longer than 40 minutes, but the sheer number of enemies was too overwhelming.

Between the energy blasts and hurtling debris, he was sure he avoided tens of thousands of attacks, but not all of them.

The blackguards seemed to have called for the elite of the world to catch him. These guys had insane levels of mana, and their attacks were devastating.

Erik was fast, strong, and powerful, but he wasn't omnipotent. He couldn't move so fast as to avoid droplets of rain, and that was exactly how dense the attacks on him were.

Two, three, four attacks landed, then hundreds. If it wasn't for his Force Bastion, and his Self-healing brain crystal powers, he would have never lasted that long.

The system gave him mana when he leveled up, but at this point, it wasn't easy to get levels. In fact, the young man only got eight of them. Years ago, he would have said he gained a ton, but in such a situation, it wasn't enough.

Erik had to kill 1,000 people to get these eight levels. In truth, Erik had killed more than simply a thousand individuals, but even if he did, it was just a tiny drop into the ocean of soldiers that were trying to kill him.

Fleeing wasn't even possible because the blackguards had not only Veritas Lenses on their side but even other kinds of brain crystal powers that allowed them to pinpoint his location.

But in truth, Erik was too fast for them to get him. The real reason he didn't leave, and that was actually forcing him to do so, was that he didn't want to. It was his choice.

He had no intention of letting Uncle Benjamin leave. In fact, Erik mostly kept to the areas where the older man was and often tried to ambush him.

<The problem is that I always failed.>

Erik never landed a single scratch on him because the bastard did everything in his power to make his defense absolute.

First, he kept people with the Veritas lenses in a kilometer radius around him. Surrounding uncle Benjamin were from one to two thousand soldiers, which he was keeping flying with his telekinesis. Uncle Benjamin created an unpenetrable dome made of people, and these all had utility and ranged brain crystal powers.

Detecting him was the first thing they did, and the second was to unleash hell on him. A wild swing of a sword arrived at Erik.

<I need to stay focused.>

He was fighting against another group of enemy soldiers, and they weren't weak either. But no one really was on this battlefield.

<How can I kill that motherfucker?!>

Erik avoided the slash and struck back with devastating force, his fists, feet, and powers lashing out as if they were made by a titan.

Bones shattered and bodies crumpled beneath his onslaught, the blackguards falling before him like wheat before a scythe.

But he achieved nothing concrete.

[LEVEL UP.]

<Another batch of a hundred blackguards is almost dead. What great news...>

Erik knew he had to keep moving. He delivered one last powerful attack, knocking six soldiers into the air and ending them with some wind blades. Then he jumped up, changing his shape as he did so.

He turned into a tiny insect once again and flew away from the battle. He was looking for a safe spot where he could plan his next move. But he knew he couldn't stay there for long, because the blackguards would find him.

Erik flew into a narrow alley. He doubted they would find him there for the time being, provided he kept well hidden.

The surrounding buildings had many holes and burn marks from the fierce fighting. Erik had already been there. In fact, there were charred bodies and body parts scattered everywhere.

<This is madness,> Erik thought to himself. <They really are hell bent on catching me, aren't they? Well, if that happens, I will simply kill myself. The biological supercomputer said it would find a new host and that I would turn into another biological supercomputer myself. There is no fucking way I'm going to leave the system to them.>

But that was easier said than done. Erik knew well that even if he killed himself, with the many people here, the system was bound to take a new host among the blackguards, but that wasn't all.

The system said he would be turned into a biological supercomputer, yes, but how much of his free will would remain?

Yes, the system acted like a person a lot of times since he told it to speak like one, but did the biological supercomputer follow directions and orders? Could it decide for itself what to do?

Could it decide the host? Was there something else it could do but serve someone?

<Maybe I'm approaching this all wrong.>

He thought about Uncle Benjamin. <Brute force isn't working. I need to be smarter and more strategic. What would the fucker do in this situation? No, scratch that. What would he least expect me to do?>

But the answer was simple. There were two choices for him. One was to attack; uncle Benjamin expected Erik to be overtaken by emotions, which he was, in truth, and that was shown by the fact he kept around the older man, just to try to kill him.

However, Erik was sure Uncle Benjamin wasn't just going to rely on that to kill Erik. He had to have something else prepared to get him.

The other thing Erik could do was to call for reinforcements. The problem was, did Levium think he was alone here? Of course not. If the Chimaeric Demons were not here yet, it meant Levium sent someone to stall them.

Uncle Benjamin didn't know the Chimaeric Demons were the result of his powers, and even if he did, he wouldn't know how fast the clones could be made.

The problem was that if he expected Erik to ask for reinforcements, it really meant he had something else in mind to deal with this.

<I refuse to think he hadn't thought about this.>

Erik thought again at his approach. Until now, he fought in the first line while waiting for the Chimaeric Demons. But what if he didn't?

<I need to use their numbers against them. Create chaos and confusion. Maybe I can trick them into fighting each other?> He paused.

<Hey! This is actually a great idea. The only problem is...>

It was that if Erik used instability to turn as mad as possible at those around him, unless he kept the battle close to himself, which would give away his position, he wouldn't be able to level up, and that meant being unable to refill his mana.

Erik moved onto a wider street and scanned the area for enemies. He spotted another group of blackguards ahead with more soldiers from the various countries they asked for help from.

There were hundreds of enemy fighters around, searching everywhere—looking up at the sky and down at the streets—trying to find Erik.

Chapter 1092: Levium (9)

There was a subtle tension in the air. Maybe it was the smell of smoke, the dust covering the sky, or maybe it was because of who they were searching for, but even the blackguards were on edge.

There was a group, their faces grim and their postures rigid, hands at the hilts of their weapons, fingers on strings and triggers, that had been searching for Erik Romano for hours.

But no matter how much they combed through the rubble and the destruction, they couldn't find him.

"The fact this fucker can shapeshift is a fucking bother," said a man. On his chest, there was a strap depicting Miciselen's flag.

"Damn, I wish you guys gave me shapeshifting brain crystal power, too." He said while looking at the blackguards.

They didn't show emotions at the man's remark, but not because they felt nothing, but because their masks prevented anyone from seeing them.

In truth, they were deeply unsettled. The man who just talked was Nikolai Vostok, a powerful man from Miciselen. He, like all those accompanying them on this mission to capture Erik Romano, received a brain crystal power from them.

That was the reward for them accepting to come to this mission—a reward that no one, aside from the blackguards, could grant, which they gave them beforehand to maximize the chances of the mission being successful.

This reward surpassed any material possession of value, as the blackguards' ability to give brain crystal powers didn't rely on tools—unlike Etrium's technology.

The blackguards didn't like the man's words; he was acting like an ungrateful brat. Highly trained as they were, the blackguards would have ignored remarks from people they barely considered as such, but the situation with Erik Romano put them so much at the edge that everything happening disturbed them.

As the soldiers searched for the young man, words spread through their ranks like wildfire.

Tales of Erik's devastating power and the trail of destruction he left behind were shared. Not because the higher-ups wanted to scare their soldiers, but to warn them about the risks they were facing.

"Did you hear about the squad they sent to the eastern sector?" one soldier asked. "Not a single remained alive. They say Romano tore through them like they were made of paper."

"Yeah... He is said to have at least four elemental powers. That lucky bastard. I just got one single brain crystal power that makes my weapons sharper."

"It suits you well with your ability to imbue your weapons with energy. You basically can do not only devastating ranged attacks, but even in melee, there is no way your slashes will be stopped by armors and other kinds of powers."

"It might be," the man said. "But against this dude, it looks like we are just mincemeat," he paused. "If I got something that would make me faster or increase my defense, I would have been happier."

One of the blackguards spoke at that point. There was a cold tint in his voice. "You got a power that was suited to your existing abilities. We strive for efficiency and compatibility when assigning people their second ability. Our choice wasn't baseless, so accept it without saying other stupid shit."

"Yeah, yeah..."

The talk about Erik resumed. The stories grew more horrific. Soldiers spoke of powerful warriors from other countries reduced to broken husks, their abilities rendered useless against Romano's overwhelming speed.

"It makes little sense," a veteran from Prare said. "We came here with thousands of people. All of us with powers that could level mountains. We also got another fucking brain crystal power, and yet, every time, it's the same story. No survivors."

The soldiers felt scared after hearing these battle stories. Even those who didn't believe the rumors at first and considered Erik's power to have been inflated started to worry.

They kept looking around nervously, afraid they might be the next ones to die fighting the younger man.

The problem was that Erik seemed to have vanished like a ghost, and like a specter, he could materialize anywhere at any moment.

It wasn't that long ago that the group received reports of his last sighting, which, of course, ended up in a bloodbath.

Despite the short time since his last sighting, they couldn't find him.

"For sure, the guy knows how to hide."

"Yeah. With all that power, I would have slaughtered everyone and turned the survivors into my slaves," a man from Reraiph said. "He must be a coward."

At that point, one of the blackguards snapped again. "Erik Romano is no coward. We have been fighting against him for a while. There is nothing he does that has no reason behind it. He is not a coward; he is a strategist, and those under him are more, if not as cunning as him. Pray, just pray that you do not fall under one of his schemes, because that would be the last thing you will see."

"Cunning?" the soldier said. "That's a coward's way to fight."

"A lethal one, though."

Those discussions did nothing but increase the sense of unease that hung in the air.

They had all heard the stories of Erik Romano, and all of them were impressed and scared by that.

But for the blackguards, Erik was more than just a fearsome opponent. He was a threat to everything they had worked for, a wild card that could upset the balance of power they had sought to maintain, and that was already doing so.

As the soldiers talked, a strange feeling crept over them. It started as a faint unease, a prickling at the back of their necks that they couldn't quite shake.

Some shifted uncomfortably, their eyes darting from place to place as if searching for some unseen threat.

As the minutes ticked by, the feeling grew stronger, morphing into something deeper and primal.

The slight apprehension they felt at the beginning turned into fear. Then, it started shifting into something else—a cold and clammy dread that seeped into their bones and set their hearts racing.

Their discussion only made things worse. Some even began muttering under their breath, their words jumbled and incoherent.

Chapter 1093: Levium (10)

Erik observed the group searching for him. He was hiding in the small crevice of a building, shielded by concrete fragments—mere pebbles for a human, but colossal boulders for an insect like himself.

That prevented the soldiers from seeing him, and thanks to that, for the Veritas Lenses to unmask his shapeshifting, but it wasn't a place where he could hide forever.

<There are around one to two thousand soldiers in the area...>

Unbeknownst to the enemy, Erik was using his Instability brain crystal power to manipulate their emotions. It was the fastest and best way to deal with these guys without having to risk his life.

If he succeeded, he might be able not only to create chaos among the ranks and kill a good number of soldiers, but also get a huge amount of mana, or better experience.

This would for sure make him level up, replenishing his reserves once more.

But Influencing thousands of people at the same time required him to use all of his mana reserves.

Besides, the process was far from straightforward. It required him to, in a sense, fragment his consciousness into countless pieces, each targeting an individual, even if only slightly, and that was why that much mana was required. On a single individual, it would have been much less.

Splitting his mind in this way made it difficult for Erik to focus on his surroundings, putting him at risk. He wouldn't be able to react swiftly if someone discovered his hiding spot. Yet, it remained his best option to ensure his safety.

<I can fight melee, but that is almost as demanding as using the instability brain crystal power is, with the difference being that I also risk getting killed.>

He reached out with his mind, his consciousness brushing against theirs like tendrils of mist seeping into cracks.

With each passing moment, he pushed them further and further towards the brink of various emotions. He was stoking the fires of their fear and their rage to the point they would consume the targets entirely.

The soldiers' conversations grew increasingly tense. They tried to laugh and feigned bravery, but their efforts rang hollow—unconvincing, even to themselves.

Many talked about their families at home and the people they missed. Some remembered better times from before the war started, mostly those from Etrium and Hin, who were those, aside from those coming from Frant, who had been affected the most by this war against him, against Erik Romano.

Even though they tried to stay calm, everyone could feel that something wasn't right. Maybe it was the fact they were in foreign lands, albeit not all of them, or maybe it was the fact they knew they were going to die in this foreign land, but the unease persisted, gnawing at their resolve.

The soldiers felt jittery. Every dark spot seemed dangerous. Their training helped them fight, but it couldn't prepare them for someone like Erik Romano. This guy proved himself to be a monster, to be a devil, and maybe, at least as much as the stories depicted him, he was even more devious than the devil himself.

It became harder to choose between following orders and staying safe. Erik's power made these feelings worse. What started as a search for a dangerous person turned into a fight against their own fears.

Their fear kept growing. It changed how they thought, making it hard for them to think.

Some paced back and forth while the group moved. Erratic thoughts raced as they struggled to keep their composure.

Suddenly, panic spread through the group as if a spark had been ignited. It began with one person screaming in fear for no reason.

"I CAN'T TAKE THIS ANYMORE! I DON'T WANT TO DIE!"

Soon, other people started screaming too. Various voices created a symphony.

"I WANT TO GO HOME!"

"FUCK ERIK ROMANO! I'M OUT OF HERE!"

"I WANT TO SEE MY MOM!"

It was a completely irrational reaction.

"Shut up!" a soldier said. "We have a job to do! We can't let that monster alive!"

However, the rising tide of panic drowned out the soldier's words even as he was speaking. More and more voices joined the chorus.

Even the blackguards, as stoic and unflappable as they were, felt the effects of Erik's power, albeit not knowing he was the one responsible for this clusterfuck.

They shifted uneasily, their hands tightening on their weapons. Though, contrary to most of the others, they felt something was amiss.

It was true that their allies were scared, but not this much, not like this.

What was most puzzling, though, was not the fearful reaction some had, but those of rage that some of the soldiers were exhibiting.

Yes, they didn't like such powerful fellas reacting like little kids. Even they found it bothersome, but the rage—or, better yet, that much rage—was unjustified.

"I don't like this," a blackguard said.

"Me neither."

Earlier, as if a spark ignited fear, this time, it was as if something ignited a powder keg. The tension exploded into violence for no apparent reason.

Surprisingly, it started because of one of the many blackguards who lashed out at a panicking soldier, his sword connecting with the man's chest and going through the heart.

"What the?!"

The other blackguards couldn't see the man's face because of the mask he was wearing, but if they could, they would see a visage contorted with unbridled rage, one that bordered on madness.

His eyes were wide open and red. The veins on his forehead were swollen and pulsing as he breathed heavily.

He was baring his teeth like an angry animal. His lips were pulled back in a grimace.

He looked... No; he was completely out of control, as if all his normal thoughts were gone.

In a matter of moments, the situation turned into chaos. A massive fight broke out among the soldiers and blackguards.

The problem was that at least a thousand people took part in it. They started attacking each other, using their brain crystal powers or those coming from their weapons to rip into their comrades' throats. Everyone had lost control of themselves.

One soldier's body stretched like rubber and choked her friend. Another soldier shot fire from his hands, burning everything in their way.

A blackguard moved through the attacks as if he were a ghost. He passed through solid objects and appeared behind the people attacking him.

Using this power, he mercilessly took down his opponents.

Another soldier's skin turned rock-hard, making him impossible to hurt for those on a similar level of power.

He ran through the fight, knocking down his comrades like they were toy soldiers. Which they were. In truth, it was just that; they were Erik's toy soldiers.

The battle kept going, getting worse and worse. Soldiers and blackguards fought each other wildly, not holding back.

Blood ended up everywhere—on the ground, on the walls. The air smelled of iron, mixed with dust, broken things, and scary powers.

Erik watched from a distance, still controlling the soldiers' emotions. He could sense their fear and anger, enjoying the feeling of toying with those trying to kill him.

Erik mentally smiled, but his face was that of an insect, so no physical change came.

Chapter 1094: Levium (11)

[LEVEL UP.]

As the chaos and carnage unfolded, Erik remained hidden.

However, he didn't stay idle, because as time passed, he pushed more mana and focused on affecting the minds of those around him more and more, pushing their emotions to the brink of madness and watching as they tore into each other with reckless abandon.

[LEVEL UP.]

More and more energy was being absorbed by Erik from the enemy soldiers.

[LEVEL UP.]

[LEVEL UP.]

[LEVEL UP.]

[LEVEL UP.]

<Around a thousand people died... It is not enough...>

However, a thousand people dead in the span of 10 minutes wasn't by any means a small amount.

<Three years ago, just one of these guys was enough to make me level up tens of times...>

Erik got lost in his thoughts. <The time in which I was hiding was the safest I had ever been. How ironic.>

But then his thoughts went back to his situation.

Erik realized that by manipulating the soldiers' minds and creating the chaos, he had put a target in this area, drawing Levium closer to his hiding spot.

But it wasn't like he could stop now, because as the soldiers killed each other in a frenzy of fear and rage, their deaths were feeding him with mana, and he knew how much he needed it.

Erik felt the ethereal substance coursing through his veins, replenishing his reserves and giving him the strength to continue the fight.

<I won't stay for long...>

Erik knew he couldn't rely on this tactic forever. The soldiers that came to hunt him were tens of thousands, and while he killed a huge chunk of them, there were still many more searching for him.

And then there was Levium, Uncle Benjamin.

<The situation is unusual. Trained soldiers on the same side were fighting each other. It is clear this isn't a normal fight or something resulting from bad leadership. The chaos is too big and happened too fast to be explained by conventional means. Levium will figure out something is happening to his troops. He'll realize that something is messing with his soldiers' minds. That someone powerful is behind it all... and that it is me.>

But to what extent Levium would piece things together was a huge unknown. He might realize Erik had powers to mind-control people, but this might be partial or total, or even something completely different from mind control that could still make people behave like Erik wanted.

Erik's power wasn't exactly mind controlling, and maybe he could use that to his advantage.

<But if Uncle Benjamin thinks I can, then this will play to my advantage... At least in theory.>

Erik needed time to use his instability brain crystal power, and he could affect people only up to a certain area.

<But it's not that different from fighting by myself from that point of view.>

Depending on what Uncle Benjamin understood from the situation, and what would be his response, though, would tell Erik a great deal of things about the man.

With that knowledge, Levium would adapt his strategy. He would no longer send his men in close to engage Erik directly, knowing that they would be vulnerable to his influence. Instead, he would opt for a more brutal, more destructive approach.

<There is only one thing he will do at that point. Stay at a distance.>

Levium would probably try to destroy everything in the area. This way, the man could get rid of all hiding places, and at that point, it might be possible for him to catch Erik.

This would fit with how the blackguards usually dealt with hard-to-find enemies.

With that figured out, Erik felt the need to leave and find a safe spot to think about what to do next. He still hadn't found a way to approach Uncle Benjamin without the clones.

Erik flew away but remained close to the ground, using broken buildings and scattered objects to for cover. It worked, and Erik came to a stop nearly a kilometer away from his original position, but still in range for him to see Levium and his men from a distance.

Erik's eyes fixed on the sky where the man hovered. Levium was still in the air, surrounded by a swarm of soldiers who darted back and forth, searching for him.

The man was using his powers to create a giant dome of people who were using the skies to better see the streets below.

<Well... What remains of them.>

Then he saw someone flying towards Levium, heading straight for the commander. Both Uncle Benjamin and the man wore masks, so Erik couldn't see their lips. He was also too far from them for him to listen to what they said, and there was too much noise anyway.

He could only watch how they moved, trying to guess what they were talking about.

But even if he couldn't hear what the man was saying to him, it was clear the man was reporting to Levium the situation he just caused.

Erik observed. At some point, he saw Uncle Benjamin nod and his body stiffening.

<He didn't probably like what he heard.>

Then the mask moved, as if Uncle Benjamin was talking, probably giving orders.

The messenger bowed deeply, showing deference. He then soared away from his commander. Erik's gaze followed the messenger as he navigated the crowded sky.

The messenger descended to a group of soldiers on the ground. From his belt, he retrieved a small device.

<That's most likely a radio...>

The messenger's hands moved rapidly as he spoke into the device, his fingers adjusting dials and pressing buttons as he relayed the commander's orders through the crackling radio waves.

<And that's it; he gave the order. But what order is it?>

Erik saw the soldiers pull back from the area en masse.

<This is not good.>

He realized what was happening.

<I was right. Uncle Benjamin is going to destroy this place.>

Seeing the soldiers leave the area, Erik knew his guess was right. Uncle Benjamin would not take any chances.

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

Chapter 1095: Levium (12)

"What the fuck?!"

A soldier tattered and in blood-soaked clothes stumbled on the scene of a carnage. Eyes wide in horror, he observed.

He trembled, his entire body wracked with violent shivers.

An overwhelming sense of dread consumed him, leaving his mouth parched and his legs unsteady.

His heart pounded in his chest like a war drum, threatening to burst through his ribcage.

The gruesome scene before him seemed like something out of a nightmare, too horrific to exist in reality.

Everywhere he looked, he saw men and women tearing into each other with a savagery that defied comprehension, but it looked like many people had been killed already.

Those fighting in this frenzy wielded their weapons with a fury that bordered on madness, their faces contorted in masks of rage and fear. Some were even smiling as if they had just received a Christmas present.

But the ones fighting weren't just the soldiers coming from Khunelerp, Etrium, or Hin. Even the blackguards were joining in the fun.

"What the fuck is going on here?" The man's voice trembled because the last thing he wanted to do was to attract some of these psychos and have to fight them.

He watched as a man drove his sword through the chest of another soldier, his eyes blazing with a feral light. The wounded soldier screamed in agony while his blood splattered the ground.

The watching man felt bile rising in his throat and an unsettling fear bubbling up. He had to get out of there; he had to find someone to report this matter to.

Turning on his heel, the soldier ran, his feet pounding against the ground as he fled the scene behind him, never looking back.

<What the fuck is happening? This is not normal!>

However, as he tried to give an explanation to the situation, only one crossed his mind. Erik Romano, their target, had to have something to do with that carnage. He could be the only one wanting and having the power to do that.

Of course, this was just a thought. He didn't have proof, but he wasn't so crazy as to not consider Erik Romano being implicated.

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In another part of the city, an officer was looking at a holographic map, checking the battlefield situation.

There was a huge cluster of soldiers in some area in the south, but as more time passed and the more the dots connected to their vitals vanished.

<What the hell is happening there?>

He was the one who sent scouts there to see how the situation was. Erik Romano might have been there, but better be certain. The problem was that none of the soldiers there reported anything.

Just then, a soldier came in.

"Sir!"

The officer looked up from his map, his brow furrowing. "Report, soldier. What's the situation?"

The soldier, panting and visibly shaken, struggled to catch his breath. "Sir, it's chaos out there. Our troops... they've turned on each other. It's a bloodbath."

"What?"

The officer's face grew serious as he heard the news. His forehead wrinkled with worry.

<Our own troops turning on each other? It has to be some kind of mind control. But who could have that kind of power? Unless... unless it's Erik Romano.>

"They're attacking each other as we speak, sir." The man struggled to talk because of his exhaustion.

"Give me more details, soldier..."

"It's like they've gone mad, literally. They have crazy looks. Some even smiled as they teared into their comrades. Some kind of mind control must be at work here..."

The officer remained calm.

"Yeah... I was thinking the same."

The officer's mind pieced together the situation. This could only be the work of someone incredibly powerful. And who fit that description better than their target, Erik Romano?

The man possessed multiple brain crystal powers, many more compared to their own soldiers, making him the most likely perpetrator of this.

The officer's jaw clenched. The problem was that if Erik could manipulate the soldiers, the situation would become rather problematic. Besides, it would mean Erik Romano was much more dangerous than they assumed.

"Come with me," he said, turning to the soldier. "We need to report this to Commander Levium. He'll know what to do."

The two men set off on a run.

In the sky above the city, Levium hovered.

<Where is he?>

He was scanning the streets below like a hawk since he arrived on the battlefield, and yet he didn't find Erik. He vanished.

It was frustrating how a kid who had been powerless just three years ago now was not only as powerful as him but even as an entire organization.

The amount of preparation he had to put in to capture the same kid that almost cried whenever he left was baffling.

<Erik, though, is really powerful only on the ground. In a power of pure brain crystal powers, he is no stronger than the others...>

Levium had that extremely clear. The problem was that Erik showed weird things in the various battles he partake in the past. It was like he had a ton of mana in his brain crystal, as if it were never-ending. The weird thing, though, was that he couldn't go much far from certain power levels.

<It's almost like he has a normal amount of mana, but that he can recharge it almost at will.>

In truth, Levium wasn't wrong. Erik had high levels of mana, but nothing out of scale, like his physical stats were. In fact, the only reason he survived until now was because he fought on the ground, where he could take advantage of his powerful body, and by doing that, leveling up and recharging his mana.

For months, Levium had to find suitable people for this hunt. Mostly people with powerful ranged brain crystal powers.

But humanity seemed to have a knack for elemental powers. Those weird, unexpected, and truly powerful brain crystal powers like his were almost nonexistent.

For months, the blackguards had to arm them and give them new and selected brain crystal powers. The amount of resources they had to spend was astronomical.

Chapter 1096: Levium (13)

But that was what the current head wanted. She wanted Erik; she wanted his ability to get multiple brain crystal powers, and as the servant he was, he obeyed.

However, Levium often wondered if it wasn't just better to go forward with Doran's research and forget about Erik.

But the allure of power was strong for everyone. Besides, why spent decades to achieve what Erik could give them in five minutes?

The problem was that Erik was powerful enough to bring ruin to their organization. <That's what he thinks, at least... He might be powerful, but if he is having this much trouble fighting me, then against the others, he might lose...>

Levium was a Vindicator, among the most powerful members of the organization, but Vindicators weren't the most powerful in absolute terms. Besides, he wasn't even the most powerful one among them.

Those truly scary people were still out there.

<If he could have killed me as easily as he did with the others, he would have already; this means we still have a chance to catch him. But this won't last for long... Given enough time, he will become the strongest person in the world.>

In truth, many considered Erik as such, but only the average people. There were fighters that were hidden, but that could rid the Mannard continent of humanity if just they wanted, but no one knew about them.

Of course, this wasn't the case in the past. What made such people this powerful was Doran's research.

Levium's gaze swept over the scene below. Amidst the sea of people, a lone figure caught his attention—a soldier waving his arms, trying to grab his attention. The commander's eyes narrowed, focusing on the man.

<What now?>

Levium channeled mana into his neural links, and using telekinesis, he made the man levitate. The soldier felt like an invisible force enveloped him, lifting him from the ground.

His feet left the earth, his body rising, guided by Levium's control, heading toward the commander. The soldier hovered directly before him in the sky, but close enough for them to talk.

"Report," Levium said.

The soldier swallowed hard. "Sir, something's wrong with some of our troops. They've gone mad. They're attacking each other!"

Levium's eyes narrowed behind his mask.

<Fuck... This is not good...>

"It's a bloodbath down there, sir. Our soldiers, those from Khunelerp, Etrium, Hin... even our own blackguards. They're tearing into each other like animals. It's like they've lost all reason."

Levium was silent for a moment. <This is Erik's doing for sure...> He sighed.

"Did you see any sign of Romano?"

The soldier shook his head. "No, sir. But... who else could be behind this? What other explanation is there?"

Levium's jaw clenched beneath his mask. The man was right. This had Erik's fingerprints all over it.

He thought hard about what was happening. Erik could have done that thanks to a myriad of strategies or powers.

However, he was inclined to think he had some kind of mind-controlling brain crystal power.

<That's exactly what we needed.>

Erik had shown to be powerful, but somehow he still struggled to fight against thousands of people.

In truth, very few didn't. Of course, Erik was basically the only one known who could do this, but in truth, the blackguards had some who could do the same.

But if he could also control people's minds, then he would really be unstoppable. What he only needed was for him to control some particularly powerful blackguards, and he could kill everyone while being safe.

Levium didn't know everything Erik could do, but he knew Erik had shown powers they hadn't expected before.

But this strange event happened right when and where they were chasing Erik. This was too coincidental to be just by chance.

<What really worries me is why he decided to use this power just now... He could have kept it hidden and used it in a better situation where he would not have been found out.>

In truth, Levium was just overthinking. Erik was strong, that was true, but again, he was limited with his brain crystal powers. He couldn't do something that thousands of people did, exactly as he did when he fought with his body alone.

That meant there was a limit to how many people he could kill with Frostwind Fire Tempest, for example, and that was because stronger people had stronger defenses against other people's powers. Regardless of what these defenses were.

<Maybe he is just trying to escape?> Uncle Benjamin paused to think. <No... As much as it saddens me to say this, he could have already escaped if he wanted. The only reason he didn't is most likely because he wants to get revenge against me. >

But that was good for Levium, because it meant he would have time to kill or catch Erik.

<I need to neutralize him now...>

"Sir, what are your orders?"

Levium had already taken his decision.

"Pull our forces back from the area," he said. "And prepare for a full-scale bombardment. We're going to wipe this sector off the map. If Erik is the one behind this, we might be able to make him come out."

The soldier didn't really like those orders.

"But sir, our troops... they're still there. We can't just abandon them!"

"Those soldiers are already lost," Levium said. "If Erik has them now, regardless of how he did that, they might attack the other soldiers. We have to cut our losses and eliminate the threat. Do you understand?"

The soldier could only nod. The last thing he wanted was to make his commander mad.

"Relay the orders," he said. "And prepare for the strike."

The soldier saluted. "Yes, sir."

Levium brought the man down to the ground. Then, the soldier relayed the commander's orders to the other officers.

And then they gave the order. The bombardment began, and a rain of destruction poured down from the sky like the wrath of an angry god.

Chapter 1097: Levium (14)

<Their firepower is bigger than I anticipated.>

The sky got tinted black as the explosions rang. Black, because the multiple brain crystal powers unleashed brought a myriad of colors in the sky that muddled together to create something that inevitably turned dark as the situation was.

Though the most predominant tone came because of the ash and dust that got raised up above, which not only gave the sky the dark tint of the apocalypse but also reduced visibility to nothing.

Erik watched, clenching his jaw tight.

<That would have killed even me...>

The soldiers under his hex continued their frenzied battle, oblivious to the destruction raining down upon them.

But soon they found out. They screamed, but after some time, these were cut short because their heads got blasted off and their lives snuffed out of their bodies.

Soon after, a rain of flesh and blood fell. But it didn't stay in the air for long, since it got soon blasted away by the new explosions rocking the area.

The place where Erik had just been turned into an even bigger maelstrom of violence and confusion, bodies falling as readily from friendly fire as from the bombardment itself.

Yet Erik didn't look at the scene for long because his target was just one, Levium. The commander's darted through the sky, weaving between the airborne soldiers that surrounded him like a protective swarm.

Erik could do nothing but clench his fist in frustration. There was no clear shot, no opening to strike. Every time he thought he saw an opportunity, a soldier would move into position, blocking his view.

<I can't figure out if he sees me...>

But that happened just because there were many soldiers around, not because Levium saw him.

Erik couldn't find a way to attack the man from a closer position, so an attack from his current one would only be stopped before it could even enter the area where Uncle Benjamin was.

He kept staring at the man. <There has to be a way.>

Then the bombardment intensified. The entire city block vanished in balls made up of various kinds of energies that reached hungrily toward the sky and fell like tsunamis on the ground.

Everything shook with each impact, something that could only be achieved by someone as powerful as the men and women the blackguards asked for help from.

Erik could feel the vibrations, even from his position. He watched as structures there crumbled into dust and rubble.

Through the haze, the young man caught glimpses of the soldiers still locked in their maddened combat. They fought on, heedless of the surrounding destruction, their minds warped by his power.

Part of him marveled at how devastating he had been by using his instability brain crystal power, while another part recoiled at the carnage it had wrought and what would have happened if someone with similar powers appeared.

<It would be a mess.>

Then a movement caught Erik's eye. In the distance, he saw one of the Chimaeric Demons creeping closer to Levium's position, using the chaos as cover.

<That idiot...>

Erik reached out with his instability power, establishing a mental link.

<What the fuck are you doing?>

<Master?>

<Yes. It's me. So?>

<We were searching for you, master.>

Erik paused. <You are not alone?>

<No. My brothers are scattered around the area.>

There was silence for a couple of seconds. If the Chimaeric Demons were here, it meant the clone he sent to ask for help did his job.

<Did you come because of the message I sent through one of your brothers?>

<Yes, Master. We received word on the radio and came to investigate. I got told that one of my brothers relayed your orders about the situation to the rest of us.>

Another volley of explosions rocked the area. Buildings crumbled, and flames licked the sky. The ground beneath their feet trembled, and Erik had to hover through the air to avoid debris crashing on him.

<Master, why are the blackguards doing this?> The clone didn't know what was happening in this part of the city.

Erik's expression hardened. <I used my Instability brain crystal power to turn their own forces against each other. This bombardment is their try to regain control and to bring me out of hiding.>

He paused, watching as another section of the area disappeared. <They're willing to sacrifice their own troops to catch me.>

<Did they fear you were going to use them to attack?>

<I guess, but it's not like this little move will do anything to prevent that happening again.>

Though, since the blackguards now knew Erik could do that, they were for sure going to implement new strategies and countermeasures.

The Chimaeric Demon observed the destruction in silence for a moment. <If they keep doing this, there won't be a single hiding place anymore.>

Erik nodded. <Yeah, Uncle Benjamin was never one for half measures...> But there was something else on Erik's mind.

<Are the others coming?> His eyes never left Levium's frame.

The Chimaeric Demon nodded. <They are, Master, but it will take time. Right now, there are just a few hundred Chimaeric Demons around searching for you. The others are outside the district. The

number of troops we had to send doesn't allow for a covert approach, meaning we'll need to break through enemy lines to reach you.>

The clone hesitated. <Master, perhaps it would be wise for you to flee. The situation is becoming too dangerous even for you.>

<I have no intention of letting Uncle Benjamin leave this place alive.>

The bombardment continued unabated. The city, at least this part of it, was being reduced to ruins before their eyes. Fires raged unchecked, consuming everything in their path.

At that point, the Chimaeric Demon reached Erik's position.

<We need to create an opportunity. I just need a single attack, which I doubt Uncle Ben will be able to stop. To do that, we need to get rid of the soldiers protecting him.>

Chapter 1098: Levium (15)

<I don't know if that will be possible, master... Uncle Be—Levium is smart, and based on what I'm seeing right now, he is also powerful.>

Erik blinked twice. <I know exactly what he's capable of. He also got another brain crystal power, maybe even more than that. However, he took things a step up with his birth one, thanks to the other power he said he got, a parallel will brain crystal power.>

Erik looked at the man and the myriad of soldiers hovering around him. <That allows him to control many things at the same time. That's why I can't let this opportunity slip away. If Uncle Benjamin comes to Mur, where most the blackguards are, he would be a nightmare to deal with, and he already is now with those guys from the other countries.>

It was the first time Erik found himself in front of a human he couldn't kill without tactics or brute force alone, since he surpassed the two hundred strength point mark.

Levium showed him how really scary the blackguards were for everyone else. When Erik started his war against them, he was too strong already.

They never really posed a problem to him, and the only thing they did was just to show off how rich and resourceful they were.

But now, with all these technologies and the almost infinite funds they had, the blackguards had been able to level up the playing field with him. At least up to a certain point.

Battles became much harder for Erik, especially because these guys employed huge numbers of troops to fight against him.

Erik was still stronger than each one of them, taken alone, even a hundred at a time, but he couldn't fight against a thousand people alone.

<This is the same tactic these guys used against the thaids in Mur. I wonder how many blackguards are on that continent for them to be able to stay there for years.>

Erik felt anxious as he thought about it. But luckily, before he could delve more into these upsetting thoughts, a loud explosion went off very close to him. The ground shook under his feet.

Suddenly, the building Erik was hiding behind started to fall apart. Enormous pieces of concrete and metal fell on him. The Chimaeric Demon acted. It moved fast to protect Erik, using its body as a shield.

<Master, we must move. This place is becoming too exposed.>

Erik nodded, allowing the Chimaeric Demon to guide him to a more sheltered place.

He and the Chimaeric Demon moved through the area. The two decided to go into a section not touched by the blasts yet, albeit knowing it would for sure be touched by them sooner or later.

The only problem was that some of the blackguards and their allies were still around searching for him.

In truth, the blackguards didn't order everyone to retreat. Erik could control people, but if just one or two were, they wouldn't be a problem they couldn't handle. Some of the blackguards were still searching for him.

However, the number of troops was pitiful, for sure not enough to pose a problem for him and the clone.

But even if he wanted, they couldn't kill those guys because a missing report would be a giveaway of his position.

<We need to find an elevated spot,> Erik said. <A place where we can see what's happening without being seen. I need to think...>

The Chimaeric Demon nodded. At some point, they reached a suitable place.

It was a broken-down office building. The place must have been empty for a while, most likely because of the huge mobilization of troops Hin needed to fight the war against Frant.

Erik observed the place. It was ironic how a single organization had brought the population of two countries to the brink of nonexistence. If it wasn't for Erik and the Chimaeric Demons, Frant would have fallen already. Entering the building, they took the stairs and reached the last floor.

They entered a big corner office with a wide view of the damaged city. Erik hid behind a desk to look outside.

From up high, they saw the city in chaos. Smoke rose from many places. Explosions flashed in the distance. It was clear the battle was not only taking place here but in the whole Sleeb harbor.

<How is the situation outside of this area?> He asked the Chimaeric Demon.

<The blackguards attacked everywhere, sir. That was why we didn't rush here earlier. We didn't even know where you exactly were, sir. We knew you were on your way to the base, but given the scale of the attack and how much time passed since we completed our mission at the airport, you might have been everywhere.>

<You don't need to justify yourself.>

The clone paused. <Yes... Master. Thanks... Anyway, we assumed the blackguards main goal was to find you, but their behavior suggested otherwise because it looked like they were specifically targeting us.>

<I see...>

<As for how the situation is, sir. We are not having that much trouble fighting and pushing the soldiers themselves. But they still are a real pain in the ass. They have multiple brain crystal powers, and it looks like they got neural links to a decent number...>

<Yes... I saw that... What else?>

<Well, we are currently trying to push them far from the walls, trying to keep our hidden shelters out of the fight, but the blackguards are pushing hard. I don't know if they found out where our bases are, but everything points to it being true. The problem is that we failed to create a cohesive front line, especially because the fuckers are using secret tunnels and entrances to move across the city.>

There was a brief pause. <Anything else?>

<No, sir... Aside from the fact that half our troops are headed here...>

At that point, there was another silence. Only this time, it lasted for long. Erik started thinking hard about what to do next.

<Master?> the clone said.

<What?> Erik asked.

<What do you want us to do?>

A grim smile played across Erik's face. In truth, he knew what he needed to do to kill Levium.

He needed to distract the soldiers surrounding him because they were the only obstacle between him and the older man.

This was not all. The Chimaeric Demons had to distract the enemy main forces too, because if he managed to attack him, even if he killed the other soldiers, Levium would still get reinforcements. The battle would just turn never-ending.

<I need you to relay some orders to the others. >

The Chimaeric Demon tilted its head. <What orders, Master?>

Erik's grin widened.

Chapter 1099: Levium (16)

Emily, Amber, June, and Mira hurried through the city streets, flanked by their Chimaeric Demon escorting them.

Debris from shattered buildings and scattered refuse littered the streets. In the distance, explosions echoed, and smoke filled the air, obscuring their vision.

However, while the city itself was certainly in ruins, it was the people who had suffered the most devastating impact. Bodies littered the streets, some lying in pools of blood, others reduced to unrecognizable masses of flesh.

The scale of destruction was higher than anything they had ever seen before, aside from June, of course, who had seen his fair share of gruesome things since he was born.

The problem, though, was that the four knew Erik was in the middle of all of that death. They were all anxious about Erik.

The group walked, hearing the crackle of electricity from damaged power lines and the creaking of unstable buildings.

Sometimes, these turned into deafening noises and clouds of dust. That happened when the buildings couldn't sustain their own weight anymore.

The Chimaeric Demons remained close to the group to protect them. Their eyes were those of hawks searching for prey. It was just that they were searching for danger rather than something to eat.

The last thing they wanted to happen was for the blackguards to target the four. Erik's closest four. They just needed one of them as prisoner to make Erik do something stupid.

The Chimaeric Demons tried to dissuade them from venturing into the city, but they were determined to help.

It wasn't like they were defenseless, but against people with two brain crystal powers, they were at a severe disadvantage.

June was in a more unstable situation. That made the Chimaeric Demons focus on protecting him rather than the three girls, much to his anger.

It was obvious. June was now the weakest of them all, as he had been created by Erik a long time ago, when he was still in Etrium, when he was still weak compared to now.

"I don't understand," Emily said. "Why would the blackguards make it seem like the Chimaeric Demons were their primary target?"

"It is a diversionary tactic," Mira said. "By focusing their attacks on them, they hoped to draw attention away from their true aim—Erik."

"You are right as always," a Chimaeric Demon said. "Their strategy involves creating multiple fronts to divide our attention," the Chimaeric Demon said. "They've deployed decoy units to simulate major offensives, while their actual strike teams move through less defended areas. It's a classic feint and strike maneuver."

"Additionally, they're using a tactic we call 'pulse attacks'—rapid, concentrated assaults, followed by quick retreats. This keeps us off balance and makes it difficult to mount an effective counteroffensive. It also makes it harder for us to understand what they are trying to do."

"It looks like even the blackguards have smart people on their side," Amber said.

"They have..." the clone paused. "In truth, it wasn't like these months ago... They were not as smart... It's like they became smarter all of a sudden."

"Can it be because of their multiple powers?" Emily asked. Everyone understood what she meant. Erik said he got smarter as he got more powerful, so if the neural links they made for their new powers had the same effects as Erik's system, increasing their stats, or whatever they were, maybe they got smarter because of this.

"That's what we believe," the clone said. "For now, we've adapted by implementing a flexible defense grid and using our shapeshifting abilities for rapid response. Our scout units are constantly feeding us real-time intelligence to help us anticipate their next move, but it's not as simple as we believed."

"Anyway," Mira said. "I think this tactic's clever only up to a certain point. I don't think they really thought we would have bought the fact we were their main target," she said. "Not with Erik in the city."

"That's true, assuming they knew about him here, but we can't be certain of this. From their point of view, Erik might not have been here at all."

"How can you say this?" Amber asked. "They are targeting him even now; just this should have been proof they knew about him."

"It's not like you are wrong," Mira said. "The point is that they might have found Erik by pure luck." She paused.

"Think about it. Erik might have sent the Chimaeric Demons here to conquer the city while he was somewhere else, which, if you ask me, is what Erik should do instead of going from battlefield to battlefield. This means they might have come here just to kill the Chimaeric Demons and ended up finding Erik by chance."

"But if that was true, why did they specifically target his car once he left the airport?" Emily said.

"She is right," one of the Chimaeric Demons said. "If what you say is true, Mira, they wouldn't have attacked his car."

In truth, everything made sense. What Mira said didn't actually mean what Emily, or the clones, said was false, and vice versa.

"I understand you've adapted your strategy, but can you give us more specifics about the current battlefield situation?" Mira asked, addressing the Chimaeric Demons. "How exactly are we responding to their tactics on the ground, aside from the flexible grid?"

"We've taken a multi-layered approach, blending defensive maneuvers with our adaptable strategies. Our primary forces hold strategic points throughout the city, reinforcing bases and shelters with the flexible grid in place."

The Chimaeric Demon paused. "At the same time, smaller units execute swift, hit-and-run strikes on blackguard detachments scattered around the city. These units use shapeshift to reach the places faster and silently. Thanks to our scouts' real-time intelligence, we can also pivot rapidly, but their movements are still trickier than we anticipated."

"We've also established a series of fortified positions along the city's main arteries," another Demon added. "We are trying to funnel the rest of our forces toward the city center, but the fortified positions are there mostly to act as targets."

"We need to breach their defensive line. We're concentrating our efforts on their south-western flank. Once we punch through, we'll have a direct route to their main base of operation."

Mira listened. "Can't you rush in by shapeshifting into flying thaids?"

The demon shook his head. "Its impossible. The blackguards concentrated a lot of ranged troops in that area. I would even say they are all ranged troops; they are preventing us from approaching. The only reason they are not already doing this against our infantry is because they would kill their own soldiers, and they can't allow that."

Then one of the Chimaeric Demons halted, its head tilted as if listening to something.

"What is he doing?" Emily asked.

But it didn't take long for the clone to say it himself.

"We've just received new orders from the Master himself," the Demon said, turning to face Emily, Amber, June, and Mira. "He's told us to concentrate our attacks on a specific area and disregard the rest of the battlefield as much as we can."

"Where exactly?" June asked, his brow furrowing.

The demon's eyes almost glowed. "The Financial District, specifically the area around the trade center."

"Do we have an idea why?" Mira asked.

"The master is there. We just confirmed his location. A group of Chimaeric Demons is already there, and they relayed this information to us. The master's orders are clear," the demon said. "We are to use all our ranged attacks and destroy that area."

"Why? If Erik wants to get out of there, we should go help him, right? What does he want to achieve by attacking it this way? Besides," Amber said. "Isn't Starlight Fire's brain crystal power weaker during the day? How effective will that be against the blackguards?"

The demon nodded. "You're correct. However, the sheer volume of our attacks will compensate for the reduced power, and the master knows that. It should be enough to achieve his goal."

Mira shook her head. "What the fuck does that idiot have in mind?"

However, June knew the clones were not telling them something because they ran their hands through their hair, which was something Erik did when lying or contemplating. The Chimaeric Demons, being Erik's clones, had the same quirk, which even he had.

June looked at the Chimaeric Demon's masked face.

"What aren't you telling us?"

The clone, unable to lie to June, told the truth.

"Esteemed elder brother... He... he is here."

"Who?"

Emily furrowed her brow. She glanced at her friends, trying to find out what was happening, yet Mira and Amber had the same confused faces as her. However, June had a serious look on his face.

"Is there a key player we're not aware of?" Mira asked.

"Indeed, there is... Erik's main target for his revenge..." June said.

"Erik's main target for his revenge?" Then Amber understood.

"Uncle Benjamin?"

Amber was the only one, among the three women, that knew about him. She even met the man in question on one occasion.

Erik didn't talk about him a lot, almost never, and he stopped talking about him completely once he learned he was a blackguard and the one responsible for his father's imprisonment.

"Who is Uncle Benjamin?" Mira asked.

Amber sighed. "Uncle Benjamin is Erik's father's best friend and the one who took care of Erik when Lucius left for Mur. That's why Erik calls him Uncle. He was a respected figure in Frant, always taking part in galas and important meetings... Even my father respected him..." She paused.

But it was clear there was more to the man than everyone assumed.

Chapter 1100: Levium (17)

"We've discovered he's a high-ranking blackguard. Even worse, he was directly responsible for the capture and imprisonment of Erik's father, which we know well led to Lucius' death. Erik often spoke about him during our time in Frant, especially in high school. However, Erik only learned about his uncle's involvement with the blackguards while in Etrium. He is basically Erik's main target. Even the blackguards as a whole are not as important as him."

Emily and Mira exchanged shocked glances.

"So Erik's targeting his own uncle?" Emily asked.

Amber nodded. "He is not really his uncle, mind that. It's just how Erik called him, an honorific of the sort. This explains why he wants to stay there and fight. He's not just fighting the blackguards; he's going after the man who betrayed his family."

The group fell silent for a moment. "This doesn't change the fact he wants us to bombard the same area in which he is."

Amber broke the silence. "We have to trust him. Erik's strength has gotten us this far. He must see something we don't, or..."

"Or he doesn't care what happens to him." June said.

"Yeah."

The Chimaeric Demon tilted its head while receiving more information. "The other units are already mobilizing towards the target area."

Mira sighed. "We have little choice, then. We need to go there quickly if we're going to have any say in how this plays out."

"What do you want to do?" June asked Mira.

"We go help Erik, of course. If the man responsible for his father's death is there, then I want to at least give him a punch..."

"Yeah..." Emily had a determined face. "Besides, I think this is not the only reason he wants to kill him so badly. There must be more. Erik is not that easily swayed by his emotions. It happens some time, but not that frequently."

"No! " I don't like this idea at all," said a Chimaeric Demon.

"While you surely are not weak and have your own set of competences, shapeshifting isn't one of the things you can do. We clones can reach the master by changing our form, but you can't.

Proceeding with this plan would be far too dangerous for both us and you. Moreover, it might complicate matters for the master."

"There is a bunch of Chimaeric Demons there already," Amber said. "What can four more people do?"

"It's not about what four more people can do," the clone said.

"I'm pretty sure you will be useful. I'm not doubting that. It's just that the people we are fighting have multiple brain crystal powers. Not only that, but they are also very strong and have trained and fought for years. Just taking this into account, there is a huge level difference between them and you."

"Did you forget I was one of the Red Palace's best students?" Amber said.

"It doesn't matter. Having two brain crystal powers makes it possible for them to have double, triple, and higher neural links. Can you understand how strong these guys are?"

"No, actually," Amber said. "Erik never explained how the number of neural links influences this."

The Chimaeric Demon took his mask off. Erik's face appeared at that point. They were identical.

"The biological supercomputer gives Erik three stat points for each neural link made. In truth, he should get three in each stat: strength, intelligence, and dexterity, for a total of nine excluding energy, which is innate and depends on one's brain crystal."

The clone looked at the three women. There was a serious expression on his face. "Stats influence how fast, strong, or smart someone is, including master Erik. The system does not give all these stats to Erik because too many changes to the DNA might lead to mutations, especially for someone with multiple brain crystal powers like him, but this is not true for the blackguards."

He paused.

"They get energy and DNA changes equivalent to 9 for each neural link, meaning that a guy with two powers, one at 40 neural links and one at 30, might even reach 300 strength points in certain circumstances."

The Chimaeric Demon paused, but it was June that resumed the talking.

"Master Erik has 542 strength points right now, meaning that they are at least half as strong and fast as him. Do I have to explain what that means to you?"

"Yeah," Mira said. "That if they find us, we are dead meat."

"No, it's worse," June said. "It means you will be captured and used as bargain chips to make Erik surrender, and you know he will..."

As they turned the corner, the group found themselves in the middle of a bloody battle.

The street before them was a sea of bodies in motion, a tsunami of people wielding swords and different kinds of weapons and wielding many types of brain crystal powers. Blackguard soldiers clashed with Chimaeric Demons in a furious fight. Approaching the area wasn't possible for Mira, Amber, Emily, and June.

Emily gasped at the sight.

Mira's eyes darted across the battlefield. "What do we do, guys?"

"We need to go through them," Amber said. "We can keep a certain distance, though, and I can use my brain crystal power to keep the enemy forces away from us."

"No! You can't," the Chimaeric Demon said.

"We can't stay here, regardless!" the woman rebutted.

June's jaw clenched. "Let's do as they say." He turned to look at the Chimaeric Demon.

"Elder brother?!"

The clone couldn't understand, or better, he could, but didn't want to accept that.

"They might really help the master. Our group is made of twenty-four fighters. Twenty Chimaeric Demons and four of us. I think we can pull this off."

June's words were just second to Noah's, and his were second to Erik's.

The Chimaeric Demon sighed. "We'll clear a path through the fighting, then stay close and be ready for anything."

With that, the Demons surged forward, carving a swath through the chaos. Emily, Amber, June, and Mira followed.

They pushed deeper into the fray. The intensity of the fighting increased. The four risked their lives at any time, but the Chimaeric Demons did their best to protect them.

They even had to heal them a couple of times.

"We will open a path there!"

The clones used their Starlight Fire brain crystal power to destroy the troops in front of them.

A series of explosions rocked the area.

Flashes lit up the battlefield, along with explosions that made the ground shake.

Smoke and debris flew up, blocking the view for a moment. The clones knew that those hit directly by their attacks were killed instantly, while others nearby were badly hurt by the heat and flying debris.

"It's our chance!"