

BIOLOGICAL 1141

Chapter 1141: The battle for Maynard Island (18)

Monica's lips curled into a malicious grin as she looked at the burning hilltop. There was a twisted and cruel satisfaction in the woman's eyes, making Erik want to kill her more.

"Oh, poor Erik," she said. "Look at you, the valiant protector, who failed to do his job. Where are your precious friends now? It seems your efforts to keep them safe have failed."

She grinned again.

Flame tendrils spread, creeping across the hilltop like living shadows. The fire consumed the grass and vegetation in its path, leaving behind a trail of ash and scorched earth.

Monica then circled around Erik, her wyvern's massive form casting an ominous shadow on the ground below, obscuring the moon for those fighting on the ground.

Her laughter echoed across the hillside. "Face it, Erik. You've failed them. And now, as we speak, my forces will destroy yours."

Erik's gaze swept over the battlefield below. The blackguards under Monica's command had been reduced to a mere handful. They had been decimated by the Chimaeric Demons.

The advanced turrets and mechas had been destroyed. There wasn't a single piece of machinery standing, scattered across the blood-soaked earth like discarded toys. Only the lights illuminating the area had been spared.

The problem, though, was the huge undead horde below. For every fallen soldier, both from the Chimaeric Demons and the Blackguards, another rose to join Monica's undead army, making the difference in strength between Erik's Chimaeric Demons and Monica's forces disappear.

It didn't help that less than ten thousand of his clones were still alive, and resisting against a horde of monsters more than tripled their numbers, and some of them were as powerful as the clones themselves.

Erik clenched his fists; the odds tilted in Monica's favor, and he was unable to do anything. However, there was a reason for him to still be relatively calm. Emily and the others were alive, just further down the hill, to which Monica was awfully close. She failed to see them because they were hiding.

<I need to sell this well.>

Erik had to make Monica believe the sniper had been killed, because otherwise she would pay attention to the shots.

The younger man did his best to make a convincing face, which contorted with anguish, his eyes welling up with tears. His hands trembled as he clenched them into fists. A ploy to show Monica the barely contained rage and despair that should have threatened to overwhelm him.

"No!" he said, his voice cracking with emotion. "You monster!" Tears streamed down his face.

Monica's laughter rose.

Erik raised his head, eyes red and puffy, glaring at the woman with a mixture of hatred and defeat. "You'll pay for this," he said between sobs.

But in truth, as he said that, he was thinking about something else.

<System, show me the status.>

—Status—

[Host Information]

NAME: Erik Romano

AGE: 18

POWER LEVEL: 1,462

SYSTEM LEVEL: 352

EXPERIENCE: 330,528,972

DNA POINTS: 77,409,823

HEALTH: 47,860

MANA: 47,790

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 542

INTELLIGENCE: 474

DEXTERITY: 522

ENERGY: 1592

Available attributes points: 105

{Powers}

[Biological Super Computer Powers]

-Brain Crystal Manipulation

Brain Crystal Power Extraction

Brain Crystal Power Merging

Brain Crystal Power Analysis

Brain Crystal Power Editing

Brain Crystal Power Strengthening

Brain Crystal Power Sharing

-DNA Manipulation

DNA Extraction

DNA Merging

DNA Analysis

DNA Editing

DNA Strengthening

DNA Sharing

-Analysis

-Brain Information Injector

-Device Manipulation

[Host's Powers]

Plant Master: A13B-RANKED

Chimaeric Demon: Aα3X-RANKED

Self Healing: Aι2A-RANKED

Instability: Aλ2B-RANKED

Phantom Veil: Aθ2A-RANKED

Frostwind Fire tempest: Aη3A-RANKED

Force Bastion: Av1B-RANKED

Lightning Lord: Aη3A-RANKED

Beastwalker: Aθ1B-RANKED

Telekinesis: Aσ1A-RANKED

Will of the Hydra: Aσ1X-RANKED

Earth's Will: Aσ1A-RANKED

Rising tide: Aσ1B-RANKED

Time Freeze: Aσ1A-RANKED

Warp: Aσ1A-RANKED

Molecular Restructuring: Aσ1A-RANKED

Aegis Morph: Aσ1A-RANKED

{Skills}

Kyokar hand-to-hand style (MASTER)

Etrium's sword style (ADVANCED)

Crypt of the Desert Style (MASTER)

Alchemy (Intermediate)

Architecture (Beginner)

Thaid Expertise Proficiency (Advanced)

Flora Expertise (Master)

Tactical Expertise (Advanced)

Management Proficiency (Intermediate)

Stealth Proficiency (Intermediate)

—END—

Erik gained 20 levels during the battle against Monica, all thanks to the Chimaeric Demons.

Despite the level gains, though, Erik's mana reserves were low, depleted by the combat. It was incredible how much mana he had to use just to injure the beast.

The constant barrage of attacks had drained his mana faster than the level-ups could replenish it, and that was especially true when he used those powered-up wind blades.

If not for the biological supercomputer absorbing mana from those who died below, Erik would have been defeated long ago. The wyvern's mana was too much, and its body too resilient. It didn't help that Monica often healed it.

<For how long can she go on? Healing the Wyvern must have taken some mana away, but I wonder how much she is using just to keep that thing in its undead state.>

The problem was also that there were just Chimaeric Demons giving him experience at that point. As their mana left their bodies, upon death, the biological supercomputer was going to absorb it. But the Chimaeric Demons didn't have that much mana yet.

Yes, they could increase it as Erik did, but it was still a slow affair, and the clones didn't have that much time to make their astral brain crystals more powerful, meaning there was only a certain amount of mana he could get from them.

The wyvern spread its wings, preparing to resume the battle against Erik once again. Monica wanted to take advantage of Erik's supposedly bad mental state.

<How are you?>

<We are fine,> Mira said.

<Can you place a shot?> Emily heard what Erik said. She immediately sent a mental message to Erik.

<If you stay close to the hill, I might be able to do it, but you must also prevent her from moving too much...>

<I don't know if I can do that,> Erik said.

<You try. If you can do it, I think I might be able to kill her...> Emily said.

Then Erik turned to Amber mentally.

<How are your mana reserves?>

<Not bad, but I'm not even halfway to getting them full...>

Erik paused.

<I need a favor,> he then said.

<I think I already know what you want to ask me.> She glanced down below at the battlefield. The Chimaeric Demons were on the verge of being overwhelmed.

<I will do what I can,> the woman said, <But even if I am able to flood the area with my corrosive gas, I don't know how many undead I will be able to bring down.>

<It doesn't matter,> Erik said. <Unless fully destroyed, the undead will keep fighting, but this doesn't mean we can't at least affect them. Focus on making the clone's life easier.>

Chapter 1142: The battle for Maynard Island (19)

A Chimaeric Demon's blade flashed. The sparks created by the blade colliding with those of one of his undead brethren.

The clone almost felt physical pain in his chest, but for sure, albeit there was no physical wound on him, his heart was bleeding, and that was just because of who he was fighting against.

Even though his brother was now under the third division commander's control, the clone could still see traces of how he had been before.

It felt wrong to be trying to kill him, even if he was under Monica's control, and every time their swords clashed, it felt like he was betraying their master's trust, as if he were going against him.

But he knew he had no choice. His brother wasn't really there anymore. In front of him was just a puppet, reanimated by whatever power the blackguards' third division commander had. An empty body, a shell, and nothing more.

As he blocked another attack, the Chimaeric Demon promised himself he would end his brother's suffering.

Steel met steel as the two exchanged blows. The clone dove under a wild swing, retaliating with a thrust that would have been fatal to any other opponent.

The blade pierced flesh, but the undead showed no sign of slowing down. It was as if the blade didn't even touch him. Then the clone realized what he had to do.

"I need to cut the head."

As grim as even thinking about doing something like that to his brother was, he didn't have many choices. He could either do that or burn the opponent down.

It was just that fire would take some time before it would incapacitate the undead, or the puppet; severing his head was fast, clean, even merciful, in a sense.

The Chimaeric Demons were, though, not easily swayed by emotions. They were like Erik, and even if he had bursts from time to time, this didn't mean they, as his clones, had them often.

While the clone thought of a way to take care of the undead, he observed him and those around. There was something he noticed. The undead on the ground, contrary to what the Wyvern did, weren't using brain crystal powers.

This meant they couldn't, because if the Wyvern did, there were no reasons for the undead Chimaeric Demons not doing the same.

Either Monica could only make some creatures keep their powers, either they could use them under Monica's direct control, or there were some other limits taking place.

Regardless, that played to Erik's and the Chimaeric Demons' advantage. If the undead could use their brain crystal power, they would be able to heal themselves, and that was, for sure, something that would swerve the outcome to one, and one alone.

The battle would not be unceasing because there were too many opponents for the Chimaeric Demons to fight, and while they could heal themselves too, they would clearly empty their reserves of mana before their opponents did.

<I need to tell this to the others.>

So he did.

...

Around them, similar battles raged. A group of clones fought back-to-back against a wave of undead. They created a defensive circle, which helped to offset the overwhelming number of undead they were facing.

There were no living blackguards anymore, luckily, as it meant the Chimaeric Demons only had to fight melee and could fully exploit their ranged powers.

There would be no barrier masters preventing them from attacking this way. For more than a few moments, the clone also thought about shapeshifting.

This way, they would be outside the undead clones' range. The problem was that the battle above, between Erik and Monica, was reaching levels where just being in the sky was dangerous.

The Wyvern released flames so massive as to encompass huge chunks of the battlefield below, and that was just with one attack. Erik wasn't doing something less dangerous, sending wind blades and water jets, hurtling massive boulders at the enemy, and discharging lightning at every turn.

Every kind of elemental power Erik possessed was being used. The sheer amount was so overwhelming that the sky almost looked like a blender.

Besides, the clones were sure that, if they took the sky, Monica would simply get down enough for her to target both the clones and Erik. Staying among the undead was the only way for them to avoid being incinerated by the undead wyvern's flames.

This didn't make their situation better.

The battlefield was a nightmare of familiar faces twisted by death. The clones faced opponents who moved with their same fighting style and who knew their tactics and strategies.

Yet the undead versions fought with reckless abandon, unconcerned with self-preservation, and unable to do too many complicated things.

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A clone cleaved through three undead blackguards with a single swing. Three heads fell, but it was merely a drop into the bucket. The endless tide was slowly but surely overwhelming them.

It didn't matter how heavy the rain of fire that descended on the undead was.

Blood soaked the ground. The clones' tactics and brain crystal powers kept them alive, but fatigue was beginning to take its toll; their mana was ending. They reached a point where the only powers they were using were just healing ones.

Not even that often, as to conserve their strength, but enough to reduce the number of deaths. Though their movements, though still deadly, became less precise, their reactions a fraction slower, and the death toll only increased.

Amber crouched low in the shadows, her heart pounding as she observed a patrol of undead shuffle past.

June and the ten Chimaeric Demons flanked her, but they were not enough to keep her safe. At best, they could grab her and free her if things turned ugly. The undead couldn't shapeshift, which was the clone's only advantage, in case they chose to flee. Of course, they quickly understood that would be as dangerous as staying on the ground because of the black wyvern.

The problem was that shapeshifting required time, and taking flight required some too, meaning that if they didn't play it smart, they could be killed during the process. The undead were certainly able to do that.

They had descended the hill's eastern slope, using the scattered trees and undergrowth as cover, but Monica sent undead searching for the bodies of Erik's friends. She believed she had killed them, based on Erik's reaction, but she was not as stupid as not to send someone to search.

She knew it could be a ploy, so some of the undead had been sent around the hill to search for them.

The last thing Monica needed was for the sniper to attack her again.

The battlefield's chaos provided some concealment, but reaching their target position needed absolute stealth. They would die, otherwise flooded by the undead.

<We need to move now,> June said. A gap had opened in the undeads' lines, offering a window to get close enough for Amber to use her brain crystal power and maximize its effects.

Amber nodded, leading her group forward in a low crawl. The more they progressed toward the battlefield and the more the ground got slick with blood and other fluids, she preferred not to identify. Every few meters, they froze as undeads passed nearby.

They were heading for a small dip in the ground. This spot would help keep Amber's poisonous gas in one place and guide it where she wanted. But to get there, they had to cross an open area where they could be easily seen.

Amber's mana reserves were not that low now. She rested enough after her initial usage to recuperate, but she didn't have much either. She was far from being at full capacity, but she had to do what she could.

Her goal was not to defeat the undead, but to reduce their numbers or to make it harder for them to fight.

She only got one chance at this—what she was going to do had to count. The Chimaeric Demons spread out around her, forming a protective circle as they moved.

They ran across the open area. The battlefield in front of them was an ugly sight, filled with death and bodies as it was. Amber was the one who liked to kill less, even more than Emily, who wasn't used to her fighting, and seeing all of that, especially when the face of the one she loved was cold and still all around, wasn't easy.

Finally, they reached the depression. Amber went in the middle of the dip, the others staying as far away as possible to avoid getting killed themselves by the corrosive fog, and taking up defensive positions.

"Somehow they didn't notice us."

"It won't last long," June said.

Amber channeled all the mana she had available and then released her corrosive fog. The gas seeped from her body, pooling in the depression.

"June!"

"I'm on it!"

Then the clone turned into a black wyvern. That surely attracted everyone's attention, but luckily it didn't attract Monica, who was as focused as she was in fighting Erik.

June spread his wings and then pushed the corrosive fog forward, toward the already burning undead.

Those caught in its path dissolved, their dead flesh sloughing off in chunks. The gas wouldn't stop all of them completely, but it would slow down those it couldn't kill.

"Let's get out of here," a Chimaeric Demon said. He went to fetch the exhausted Amber and jumped on top of June with the other clones.

Chapter 1143: The battle for Maynard Island (20)

Mira and Emily crouched behind a partially burned tree trunk, watching the battle between Erik and the blackguards' leader unfold above them.

The smoke from the black wyvern's flames still burned the vegetation on top of the small hill, making their eyes water, but they didn't dare move from their position.

Eight Chimaeric Demons surrounded them, while two were being used as mounts.

Mira suggested they did that so that, in case they got spotted, they could run away quickly from their position. But it wasn't like there were other places they could go. Emily could either use the small hill to try to kill Monica or nothing.

"The forest is becoming a death trap," a clone said. More trees were catching fire by the minute.

"We're running out of cover."

The flames were consuming their remaining hiding spots, and she knew better than anyone there how important a hiding place for a sniper was.

The young woman adjusted her rifle scope, tracking Monica's movements based on the lights produced by Erik and the wyvern.

Erik darted around the undead thaid, his attacks apparently wild.

<He is playing it well,> Mira said.

Erik was trying to make it look like he was filled with rage and desperation for their supposed death because he needed Monica to think the sniper was dead. He maneuvered closer to the hill, aiming to give Emily an easier shot. However, Monica was a cautious woman, and she kept her distance from the area.

Yet, it didn't mean she wasn't keeping the hill monitored. In fact, she sent her undead searching for any survivor, so it was clear she didn't fully believe the sniper was dead.

"He is good at acting," Emily said, "but she's not taking the bait."

Erik's attacks grew more frenzied, and the openings he left more common, yet Monica kept her distance, forcing him to chase her across the sky.

<Emily, are you in position?> Erik's voice echoed in her mind.

<We found a spot,> she said, <but she's too far. Even if I predict where she'll be, at this distance, I can't guarantee a killing shot.>

Emily looked through her rifle scope. She saw Erik avoiding another burst of fire. Erik moved carefully, despite making it look like he was fighting with reckless abandon. Monica, though, seemed happy to stay far away and tire Erik out.

She still had a lot of mana despite her having raised an undead army and controlling a wyvern.

<I'll try something,> Erik's said. <Be ready to act.>

<What are you going to do?> Emily asked. She knew that if Erik's usual tactics didn't work; he was prone to taking unnecessary danger. What he was going to do now, though, was unknown.

<I'm going to give you a chance. Do not waste it.>

Emily then started seriously worrying. Mira went to her. "Did you talk to him?"

"Yes."

"So?"

"He is planning something," the woman said. "But he didn't tell me what—"

"Whatever he's planning, it better work soon. This smoke is getting worse."

Emily nodded, keeping her rifle trained on Monica's distant form.

.-.

Erik weaved through the air, trying to understand the wyvern's attack patterns. Monica didn't make it easy. She was controlling the wyvern in a way that even he had trouble understanding what the purpose of it was.

Monica proved to be a very nasty opponent, and that especially in the smartness compartment. Yet Erik never fell into the woman's ploys.

The only thing he understood at some point was when the woman was going to order the wyvern to shoot its flames. There were too many things he didn't figure out yet.

This made every attack he received dangerous. He wasn't invincible, after all, especially not against something so powerful as a wyvern, albeit an undead one.

Regardless, these attacks also gave Erik a chance to act. Though one thing was obvious. The blackguards had chosen their leader well.

The woman, Monica, was not only powerful but also smart, at least based on what she showed during this battle.

Throughout the battle, Monica showed she was a smart and skilled fighter. She kept her distance from Erik when she had, while she got close when he just received a blast from the wyvern's flames.

Monica was also careful not to use too much of her energy and never wasted mana on healing the black wyvern when the wound was insignificant.

Many did that kind of error.

Monica used the burning forest to her advantage. The smoke and flames made it difficult for Erik to see and move around, and it was also night already.

She kept changing her fighting tactics, and for some time, she even attacked with a gun from the black wyvern's back.

All of this made it tough for Erik to guess what she would do next, and she was too fast; Erik couldn't even lock her on with his Instability brain crystal power.

What surely made her reach the level of power she had today, though, was her brain crystal power. When the blackguards didn't have multiple abilities, one allowing the user to create undead, as powerful as when they were alive, or at least as close to it as possible, meant that she was a one-woman army.

There was no thaid she couldn't kill, no place she couldn't conquer, and the more she killed, the more powerful she grew. She could take advantage of the brain crystal powers from creatures or people she killed, effectively giving her the ability to wield multiple brain crystal powers well before everyone else could.

Yet, for some reason, she didn't do it with the Chimaeric Demons or the blackguards below. Erik often glanced below, and it was clear that the only side using brain crystal power was that of the Chimaeric Demons.

<There must be a reason for that...>

Erik suspected it was because of the black wyvern. Monica was powerful, but her brain crystal was still limited, like everyone's else. Most likely, she had to use a huge chunk of her mana to allow the creature to use its brain crystal.

Despite how convincing his theory was, it remained just that—a theory.

The woman was cunning, meaning she might be doing this to deceive Erik. She didn't leave many signs of her real intentions, and even those she left were usually deceptions.

Erik had no other alternative other than to bait the woman to the hill.

<I need to make this look good,> he thought, slowing down his speed.

Monica noticed his apparent fatigue. "Tired already?" she said, moving her undead mount closer.

Erik waited for the right moment. The wyvern reared back, flames building in its throat. This time, instead of dodging, Erik shifted just enough to ensure the blast wouldn't kill him instantly and pumped as much mana as he could into his Force Bastion Brain Crystal power. He couldn't teleport nor avoid the attack because he needed to make Monica believe she had won.

He glanced below from time to time. The battle was still bad, but Erik saw Amber's fog spreading through the undead.

It wasn't killing all of them, and the pressure on the Chimaeric Demons' front line didn't decrease, but at least the fight had been shortened, and the number of targets the Chimaeric Demons had to kill decreased.

If his plan didn't work, he might be able to do something about Monica by sacrificing some of the Chimaeric Demons, albeit he didn't like that solution.

However, his army had been decimated already. A couple more deaths would not make a difference at that point. Erik had no intention of dying here.

If the whole attack on Maynard Island failed, he was going to teleport where Monica couldn't see him and flee, of course, after having given time for his clones and friends to escape.

Though all the blackguards died, meaning that, even if he failed to kill Monica, he would have still won the general battle.

He also thought about making the Chimaeric Demons shapeshift to help him, but if he did, Monica would either flee or kill the clones.

Erik was barely holding on against the black wyvern. The difference in stats wasn't that much, but the amount of mana it had was astronomical.

He couldn't win in terms of both pure power and resistance. The number of enemies who could give him mana had also been reduced to zero. Only the Chimaeric Demons' deaths would help him from this point of view, but they were few now.

The flames engulfed him. Pain seared through his body as he plummeted toward the hill because of the blast. He used his self-healing power sparingly, just enough to prevent death but leaving visible wounds.

Erik crashed into the hillside, his impact sending up a cloud of dust and ash. He lay there, seemingly struggling to stand up, while monitoring Monica's approach through his Hydra's head.

"Look how far the mighty have fallen," Monica said, guiding her mount lower. "First your friends, and now you."

The wyvern hovered nearby. Monica's voice dripped with satisfaction as she approached.

"Any last words?" she stood over him.

Erik's lips curled into a subtle grin, hidden from Monica's view by his bowed head. At that moment, a sharp crack split the air.

Chapter 1144: The battle for Maynard Island (21)

[MONICA VELAZQUEZ 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. 9484806.79 EXPERIENCE POINTS AND 94848.07 DNA POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

The crack of Emily's rifle echoed across the battlefield, and for a moment, everything fell silent.

During those small seconds going between Erik raising his head and looking at the woman, he felt nervous. If there was something the battle today showed him, it was that the blackguards were as resourceful as everyone said.

The fight between Erik and the blackguard leader was tough and intense, even though it didn't last long. Erik had to use all his skills and power to keep up with her.

The problem wasn't Monica's own strength, but the black wyvern. This beast was much stronger than Erik expected, and it could match everything he did by simply resisting it.

What should have been a quick win turned into a long, hard battle, but it wasn't like Erik expected less.

Monica had a really terrifying power, and Erik wondered what would have happened if, instead of the black Wyvern, she got the Leviathan Serpent.

Another surprise was the black wyvern's strength. It was close yet lower than that of the sea thaid. Sure, the undead beast was severely weakened compared to when it was alive, for yet unclear reasons, but it was still powerful.

Of course, Erik didn't analyze the Leviathan Serpent. He didn't have the time to even think about it, but he felt how strong it was just based on the effects it had created when moving. Of course, it might have simply been because of its size, as it was many, many times bigger than the black wyvern.

In truth, the idea there were beings stronger than wyverns was a scary thought, but, of course, the black wyvern Monica used as a puppet might have been a juvenile one, meaning it didn't reach its full potential.

Regardless, either intentionally or not, Monica made the creature just strong enough for the beast to be a problem Erik couldn't take care of with his body alone.

<Not that all those brain crystal powers worked... Damn, I really need to make more neural links, especially for the new brain crystal powers.>

That was the only way Erik could fight against an enemy that found a way to power up faster than he currently was.

Mana was another problem. Erik didn't know what battles he was going to fight in the future, but on Mur, they were going to be hard.

He had to pump it up fast. Sure, he needs to hunt, but the creatures on Mannard, humans included, didn't give him a lot of mana unless he killed thousands of them.

Killing thousands of Thaid's wasn't a bad idea, but they didn't group up like humans did unless Erik made them do.

Erik finally raised his head; a grim smile played across his lips as he saw Monica. She was dead.

The woman's body was upright on the wyvern's back, but where her head had been was now a display of destruction.

The high-caliber mana-powered round from Emily's brain crystal sniper rifle had torn through her skull, leaving a spray of bone fragments, brain matter, and blood painting the wyvern's scales.

What remained of her head hung by threads of flesh and sinew, her once-cold and cruel eyes reduced to pulp tissue scattered among a twisted jaw hanging from the neck.

Her body swayed, still held in place by her death grip on the wyvern's reins. Blood continued to pour from her neck, falling down her pitch black uniform in crimson rivulets.

<Perfect shot, Emily,> Erik thought.

Emily's shot ended the battle. Her perfect aim took out the enemy leader, saving lives on Erik's side. Without the young woman's intervention, the battle would have been a long affair.

For a moment, the young man wondered why the undead wyvern hadn't collapsed with its master's death. It was twisting and jerking, but it was still reanimated, or whatever it was.

<Maybe there is still Monica's mana within it.>

The creature remained hovering for some seconds, then, as if someone had snuffed out a candle, the light shining in its eyes flickered and died.

<Phew...>

For a second, Erik thought that thing wouldn't die. With Monica's death, there was no one left to channel mana into her undead creations. The wyvern's wings ceased their beating, and gravity reclaimed it.

Erik's gaze shifted to the battlefield below. Like in a domino, all the undead started jerking and twitching, and then their bodies dropped like puppets with cut strings, returning to the true death they had been denied by Monica's sinister powers.

The undead army fell apart. All the dead bodies Monica had brought back to life stopped moving and collapsed.

The battlefield went silent, and for a moment, only confusion remained. Then, when they realized what happened, the surviving Chimaeric Demons let out an enormous cheer. Their victory cry was so loud it echoed across the whole area. This marked the end of Monica's control over the dead.

"WE DID IT!"

"OOOOOOOH!"

"DEATH TO THE BLACKGUARDS!"

The Chimaeric Demons raised their weapons and started shooting in the air, as if celebrating a grand festival. The sky lit up with mana-infused attacks aimed at the stars, most of them starlight fireballs illuminating the sky and exploding like fireworks.

<That was an absolutely incredible shot, Emily!> Everyone heard that, as Erik established a mental link among the survivors.

He couldn't see her, but she was blushing. <Uh... Thanks...>

<We're not done yet,> Mira said. <There might still be blackguards hiding around the island.>

Erik nodded. <You're right.>

<Search every corner of this island. Kill any resistance, but keep a few alive for questioning. We need information,> he said to all his remaining Chimaeric Demons.

Despite their exhaustion, the clones spread around. There wasn't a second to lose.

Erik flew down to where Monica's body had fallen. The wyvern's corpse lay nearby, already beginning to decompose at a sped-up rate without the third division commander's mana sustaining it.

"Now," he said to himself, "time to collect your brain crystal power."

He glanced at the mess her lover made. "Though Emily certainly didn't make it easy to find the crystal. It might take a while to sort through... all this."

He began the grim task of searching through the remains, knowing that somewhere in the bloody debris lay the source of Monica's abilities.

Her brain crystal would be an invaluable addition to his powers; with it, he could understand how she had managed to create and control such a massive undead army.

However, Erik wasn't sure if he was going to keep it. There were things he could do with it, but other things the Chimaeric Demons could do better than him.

He had 1600 energy points, but the clones, even if, for example, each had 500 energy points, were tens of thousands of times more than Erik. An army of 100 thousand Chimaeric demons, with 500 energy points each, would make it possible for them to raise an army Erik would never be able to raise alone.

<I need to think this through...>

As Erik searched for the brain crystal, he heard his army secure the area. There were still some fights happening nearby, and the hill where they fought was still smoking from the black wyvern's fire.

Many bodies covered the ground below. Enemies, yes, but even Erik's own troops were among the dead, and they were not just two or three.

They had won, but at a high cost, as less than a third of his army remained. Still, they had achieved their main goal: they had killed Monica, the Third Division Commander.

Now what Erik needed to do was find information. He had to search the blackguards' database to see what they knew and to find out if there was someone else worth killing. He also needed to know where exactly the blackguards were on Mur if he wanted to destroy them.

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...

...

<Master,> a clone's voice reached him, <we've secured several prisoners. They're ready for interrogation whenever you are.>

<Good job,> Erik said. He then spotted Monica's brain crystal among the remains of her skull.
<Keep them under guard. I'll deal with them once I'm done here.>

He held up the crystal, still slick with blood and other matter. This small object had given Monica the ability to raise and control the dead, to create an army that had nearly overwhelmed his forces.

Erik cleaned the brain crystal pocketed it, and smiled.

Then he surveyed the battlefield once more, his gaze settling on the smoldering ruins of the blackguards' main building.

The blackguards' main building lay in ruins. Its walls had crumbled, and the collapsed roof left gaping holes, exposing the devastated interior.

Smoke billowed from various parts of the wreckage, spiraling into the sky and creating fingers of smoke, reaching for the stars like the hand of a dead giant.

<Work never ends, uh?>

Chapter 1145: Powers Unlocked (1)

Erik soared through the smoky night sky, riding one of his Chimaeric Demons.

The massive wings beat steadily as they approached the ruins of the blackguards' headquarters. Below them, the aftermath of battle stretched out—bodies strewn across scorched earth, the remnants of Monica's undead army now truly lifeless.

"Ah... right... I unlocked the last two system's powers..." Erik had to check them out.

—STATUS—

[Host Information]

Name: Erik Romano

Age: 18

Power Level: 1,462

System Level: 352

Experience: 340,013,778 / 378,468,305

DNA Points: 105,469,671

Health: 47,860 / 47,860

Mana: 47,790 / 47,790

{Attributes}

Strength: 542

Intelligence: 474

Dexterity: 522

Energy: 1,592

Available attribute points: 105

{Powers}

[Biological Super Computer Powers]

Brain Crystal Manipulation

Brain Crystal Power Extraction

Brain Crystal Power Merging

Brain Crystal Power Analysis

Brain Crystal Power Editing

Brain Crystal Power Strengthening

Brain Crystal Power Sharing

DNA Manipulation

DNA Extraction

DNA Merging

DNA Analysis

DNA Editing

DNA Strengthening

DNA Sharing

Analysis

Brain Information Injector

Device Manipulation

[Host's Powers]

Plant Master (A₁3B-Ranked)

Chimaeric Demon (A α 3X-Ranked)

Self Healing (A₁2A-Ranked)

Instability (A λ 2B-Ranked)

Phantom Veil (A θ 2A-Ranked)

Frostwind Fire Tempest (A η 3A-Ranked)

Force Bastion (A ν 1B-Ranked)

Lightning Lord (A η 3A-Ranked)

Beastwalker (A θ 1B-Ranked)

Telekinesis (A σ 1A-Ranked)

Will of the Hydra (A σ 1X-Ranked)

Earth's Will (A σ 1A-Ranked)

Rising Tide (Aσ1B-Ranked)

Time Freeze (Aσ1A-Ranked)

Warp (Aσ1A-Ranked)

Molecular Restructuring (Aσ1A-Ranked)

Aegis Morph (Aσ1A-Ranked)

{Skills}

Kyokar Hand-to-Hand Style (Master)

Etrium's Sword Style (Advanced)

Crypt of the Desert Style (Master)

Alchemy (Intermediate)

Architecture (Beginner)

Thaid Expertise Proficiency (Advanced)

Flora Expertise (Master)

Tactical Expertise (Advanced)

Management Proficiency (Intermediate)

Stealth Proficiency (Intermediate)

—END STATUS—

His eyes widened as he read through the powers on the status's list.

"DNA Sharing and Brain Crystal Power Sharing?" Erik said. "Is this real?" he asked the biological supercomputer.

[Indeed. These are my most powerful functions, unlocked only at the highest levels due to their extreme mana requirements.]

That was weird. <But why? Why would the Silverline Corporation create something like this? It makes little sense!>

[Based on the available data and observed patterns, the logical conclusion is the creation of power hierarchies,] the AI said. [By giving an individual the ability to share powers, they create a godlike figure—one who can elevate or deny others at will. This is a way to create gods among mortals.]

The AI paused. This strategy is likely intended to instill dependence. The biological supercomputer's host would force those seeking power, and even those who do not, to rely on him. They would serve and even worship the biological supercomputer's host. This way, the user would also be able to make others do what he or she wants. From analyzing blackguard operations, since they are the remnants of what the corporation was, this appears to align with their methods and goals.]

<That... actually makes sense,> Erik said, thinking of the blackguards' rigid hierarchy and their obsession with power accumulation. <It's about control, then. However, they would never stop being at the top of the hierarchy. Even in the event of their death, a new host would appear, then two, then four, and so on. Besides, the user might give others just powers he or she discarded.>

[Yeah. Exactly what I had in mind.]

There was a problem, though.

<How exactly does the power work?> Erik asked, leaning forward as the clone banked around a column of rising smoke.

[The process takes place in two steps,] the AI said. [First, you must possess the power yourself. Then, through DNA sharing and Brain Crystal Power Sharing, you can permanently transfer it to another individual who possesses a brain crystal. However, once the transfer is complete, you lose the power in the process.]

Erik nodded. <That's not necessarily a negative thing. Having too many powers can be counterproductive if you don't have time to make neural links for all of them.>

The clone began its descent toward the ruined headquarters. <We will talk about this later.>

[All right,] the system said. There was something else he needed to do. Erik reached into his pocket, pulling out Monica's brain crystal and blood vial. The crystal still held traces of gore, while the vial gleamed darkly in the morning light.

"Time to see what kind of power you had, Third Division Commander Monica Velasquez." He swallowed both the crystal and the blood.

[Will of the Puppet Master's and Healing Touch's DNA Brain Crystal gained. Starting analysis.]

<Will of the puppet master? Not necromancy or something like that?>

[Analysis complete.]

[10,000 DNA points are required to extract the DNAs and Brain Crystal Powers. 25,000 required for painless extraction. 35,000 required for instant absorption.]

"Instant absorption," Erik said. He didn't want to wait to absorb them, nor did he want to feel pain like he did four years earlier.

[105,469,671 DNA points detected.]

[Blood absorbed. DNA-storing procedure initiated.]

[Procedure complete.]

[Brain Crystal Power absorption process initiated.]

[Processing... Processing... Complete.]

Instinctive knowledge flooded Erik's mind—the way Monica's brain crystal power worked unfolded before him. He understood now how she had raised and controlled her undead army, how she had maintained the wyvern's power while commanding countless other corpses.

—PARTIAL STATUS—

[Host's Powers]

Healing Touch: Aσ1A-RANKED

(Powerful healing ability. It allows to regrow limbs.)

Will of the Puppet Master: Aσ1X-RANKED

(Imbue the Will of the user into something non-living. They might be corpses or items. These can be controlled by the user. The more mana is used, the more powerful the puppet is. If enough mana is used, the brain crystal can be restarted, if any are present, and the puppet can use its brain crystal power. The amount of mana needed to unlock the brain crystal depends on the puppet.)

—END—

<This is not a power related to necromancy. Well, the name said it itself.>

The power allowed the user to connect his will to items and non-living things, making him or her able to control whatever it was.

"That also explains why the Wyvern had its brain crystal power while the other undead didn't. Monica didn't have enough mana, because she used it all on the wyvern."

But then he started thinking.

<System, what were Monica's energy points at?> Erik got a lot of experience from her, so she was bound to have had a lot of them.

Chapter 1146: Powers Unlocked (2)

Erik got a lot of experience from her, so she was bound to have had a lot of them.

<1848, she was 52 points away from having an X-ranked brain crystal power.>

"WHAT?!"

<Yeah, she was also almost as powerful as you in terms of physical strength, as she had two brain crystal powers at 54 neural links.>

Erik couldn't believe that.

<How did she do that?>

<Well, consider she had not to join missions, and with your technique, after a year and a half, it is possible to reach such levels. You didn't simply because your training time is low, and for the other blackguards, it was the same. But I guess she had nothing to do.>

<So, if I fought on the ground, I would have lost.>

<Yeah,> it was clear. <She would have been swift enough to resist you, not always, mind you, and for sure she would not be strong enough to free herself if you caught her like you did on the black wyvern. Although she would still face a disadvantage, the wyvern's presence would have leveled the odds. Fighting in the sky not only reduced her own risk of death, but also made it more difficult for her to murder you. I guess her life was more important than killing you.>

<She trusted the black wyvern too much,> Erik said.

...

The Galewing touched the ground. Broken walls and shattered columns surrounded them. The building's interior was exposed to the sky, and glass shards turned, walking into a dangerous affair.

Papers and debris were scattered across the floor, carried by hot winds still flowing from the lingering fires.

But there were pieces of weapons, armor, and various electronics.

Erik dismounted, and the Chimaeric Demon turned human.

"Search the area," he said. "Look for any surviving data storage, anything that might tell us more about their operations on Mur and what they know about the biological supercomputer."

The clone nodded.

"But I think they might have destroyed everything already, master. Defeat was possible, even in their opinion. I don't think they would have kept anything worthy here."

"Maybe," Erik said. "But that's from an organization's point of view. You are not considering people's ones. Someone might have kept something."

As his clone moved to relay the orders, Erik thought.

The ability to share powers changed everything, especially because he could give something to Mira, Amber, and Emily. Unfortunately, June, Noah, and the other clones would not be able to join in the fun since they didn't have brain crystal, but his lovers might turn more powerful.

<This is really a god-sent gift.> For many nights Erik wondered how he could ensure the three's safety, yet nothing came aside from them breaching the 54 neural links limit.

But that wasn't going to be fast. Like him, they didn't train as much as they should've. Yes, they made a lot of neural links when they were on the sea, but that was not going to be enough on Mur.

However, if making neural links worked as for the blackguards, which he had to check, they could become as powerful as him with just two brain crystal powers.

<There is something the blackguards do not know now, though, but were lucky enough not to chance upon it for now.>

That was not a matter to discard. <The system said that too many DNA changes at once might lead to mutation. That was why it tuned down my ability to get attribute points from neural links. With all my powers granting me 9 of them at each neural link, I would have turned into a monster long ago. That is most likely why the system has infinite levels. It is a way to get back all those attribute points I missed.>

At least in theory. It was a shame, though, that the system didn't have other abilities to unlock.

<Anyway, with this knowledge, I might even give Amber, Mira, and Emily more than two powers. If they do things carefully, they might be able to get stronger than me even faster.>

But then a darker thought spread.

<I might do something similar to the others... I wonder what Becker would do once he learns about this. People would flock to me just to get better powers.>

That might be a way for him to keep other people in check. In truth, what the Silver Line Corporation had in mind wasn't actually a bad idea.

It meant he could keep the other countries under control.

<No... No... No tyrant thoughts here, Erik... You are not like them. Unlike the Silverline Corporation, I'm not going to do this for control.>

He sighed.

<Anyway, System. How many powers can I share with a single individual?>

[There is no theoretical limit, but practical constraints exist. Each transfer requires DNA points to be spent. They are not much, but that would force you to constantly hunt to keep them up or wait for me to accumulate them. I might even establish a quest system again.]

<No, thanks. Those daily quests were infernally annoying.>

Erik looked around at the destroyed building. There were broken walls and pieces of debris everywhere. Even though this place might have useful information about his enemies, Erik was thinking about something more valuable.

<The best thing I got today isn't in the ruins.>

Erik's new ability to share his powers was a big deal. He could strengthen his friends too, not only Amber, Mira, and Emily. He could change how his team worked together, employing specific tactics he couldn't use earlier but that he would have available now, thanks to this power.

He could do the same with the Chimaeric Demons, but since he already got a way to give them power, and given how slow it was to make neural links for them since their brain crystal was made of pure mana, he wouldn't be able to do it in the same way.

He would need to wait. Sure, they were physically strong, but that had limits, and those limits were getting closer and closer since his enemies were turning as powerful as him in that aspect.

Erik looked at the rubble again.

<Damn, the amount of things to do keeps increasing.>

Chapter 1147: Glints in the Rubble

The landscape was bathed in the amber glow of the setting sun, its shadows lengthening across the rubble strewn about.

A symphony of sounds filled the air—clanging metal, shifting debris, and urgent voices.

As night fell, jagged silhouettes stood against the dimming sky, obscured by dust clouds and stretching shadows.

Someone moved through the area; the sound of shifting debris echoed.

Hands sifted through the rubble. Each piece of wreckage was examined before being set aside, as if that wasn't what the person was searching for.

Despite the apparent futility of the task, there was urgency in the searcher's actions. Something of tremendous importance lay hidden beneath the ruins.

Suddenly, a glint caught the man's eye.

Eager, the man cleared away the rubble. His hands became faster, but more careful. Then he stopped, his body going stiff. He had found what he was looking for.

<Master.> The clone said.

<Yes? Did you find anything?>

<I did.>

<Great job, June. Wait for me there; I'm on my way.>

Eight days passed since the battle on Maynard Island, which passed in an instant for Erik and all those on Maynard Island, simply because there were many things to do, and given the little time they had available, they could only search without pause.

After the battle, Erik focused on searching for any information he could use—something about the blackguards, something about their plans, their leaders, their bases, their members.

This proved rather problematic. The battle between Erik and the three Vindicators reshaped the island landscape, and when Monica took her wyvern out, she destroyed the main building, which presumably was the place where such information was held.

How something so big could be destroyed by a single creature's simple movement was beyond Erik, but unfortunately, those kinds of things were very much possible in his world.

Regardless, that meant that if Erik wanted to find a kind of database, he would have needed to clear the rubble and fix the area. That required time and, more especially, people.

Erik had his clones, but the Chimaeric Demons were no longer that much. Around 10 thousand, but not enough to clear everything in less than a week.

That was a problem, and that their search for surviving blackguards brought to nothing didn't help either.

<Finally some kind of lead...>

Most of the rubble had been cleared, all the surrounding area had been leveled, and everything had been brought to walking levels, but the research was not complete.

Erik arrived where June was.

"Where is it?"

"Down here, Master."

Below Erik were the remnants of what looked like servers. This was where the blackguards kept their information.

"We did it, Master." June said, genuine happiness blooming on his face.

"Yeah, that's if the blackguards didn't erase everything when we came."

If that was the case, Erik would need something to fix this equipment, do it fast, and then he would need to search it with the biological supercomputer.

"Bring this to the camp, then call Caiden. Send him to my tent."

"Yes, Master."

With that, Erik reached the place. Caiden got to Maynard Island two days earlier. As soon as Becker received words of Erik's victory. He sent Caiden to coordinate with Erik, but something told Erik the reason he was there was because of Amber.

Soon after Erik got there, Amber's father arrived.

"Were you searching for me?" The red-haired man said, entering the tent.

"Yes. I need you to contact Becker," Erik said.

"Is this about the servers you found?"

"You already know about this? Damn, it hasn't even been ten minutes."

"Well," Caiden said, "your clones were shouting with joy, as if they'd just received Christmas gifts. It was impossible not to notice."

"Stupid idiots..." Erik sighed. "Anyway, we don't have techs able to fix them, and I cannot do it myself."

He was going to take care of that sooner or later.

"I need to fix them and find out what information is there."

"Wouldn't it be better to send them to Frant?"

"No," Erik said. "The carriers might get attacked, and we might lose the information forever. Besides, it will take a lot of time for you to crack open that thing, while it won't take me much."

"Ah, right," Caiden looked at Erik with dawning realization. "I forgot you are a skilled hacker. Yet you can't fix a computer. Shouldn't this be like some sort of basic information for you guys?"

Erik didn't reply. "Besides, the war in Frant is not over yet. The blackguards are still in the territory, aided by Etrium, and Miciselen joined in the war. It doesn't matter if Hin is outside of the picture right now."

Erik sent many of his clones around the world because that was exactly what he wanted to prevent—for more countries to join the war. They took control of Khunelerp, Reraiph, and Prare, but hadn't been able to yet take over Miciselen since it was the closest to Maynard Island, after Hin.

Miciselen was another insular country, in the extreme northeast. Its southern side was close to Hin's northern, and on its east was the Mannard continent.

The ocean separating Maynard Island from Miciselen was larger than the one between Hin and the tiny island that had housed the blackguards for centuries. However, it was still much closer than Frant, and especially Khunelerp, which lay on the far east.

As for Etrium, the blackguards' influence there was too strong. The Chimaeric Demons did their best to take control of the country, but it looked like the fake paladins of justice, once Etrium found a way to make brain crystal weapons, set their goal to completely dominate the country, as much as they did in Hin.

There were only two things that could stop Etrium at that point: complete defeat or, if the Chimaeric Demons got enough time, a tactic similar to that Erik used on Hin: substituting their leader.

"Richard says the blackguards are retreating. No one knows where they are going, but it looks like they are being escorted by Hin's retreating troops somewhere. They might even be coming here. I still don't get why—"

"Why am I allowing Hin's troops to come back to their countries?"

Chapter 1148: Bonds of War

"I told you already," Erik said. "If I do that, Hin's troops will start suspecting something weird is going on with Salena Turke. I can't allow that."

"But we will be able to get rid of millions of soldiers in a heartbeat. If they have nowhere to run to, their only choice would be to go to Mur."

"Or to Etrium," Erik said, "where they would join their forces to attack Frant again, or worse, Hin. I can't allow that. Not that, not before I leave for Mur."

"Are you still set on going there?"

Erik's jaw clenched. "The blackguards are there, Caiden," he said.

"They are everywhere, Erik. Look, I want to destroy these bastards as much as you want." Erik looked at Amber's father's face. There was a look of pure hatred in his eyes.

For sure, the man must have seen and known many of the things the blackguards did before Erik found everything out.

It was clear; after all, Caiden, Richard, Becker, and his father, Lucius, were actively trying to decrease their presence in Frant for years, to the point of waging a fake war with Hin just for the sake of them sending Lucius there.

Erik didn't doubt the hatred the man had for these people, but that hatred wasn't as deep as his, who suffered under the blackguards firsthand.

Caiden had been rich all his life, and on top of that, he was powerful. He couldn't be bullied, neither in Frant, nor outside of the country.

He lived a pampered life, and while this didn't turn him into a complete moron, he had still been exempted from living in a world where the effects of what the blackguards did, through the Crystal Cross Gang, for example, could be felt on one's skin.

But Erik lived through that. He remembered the drug addicts at every corner. He remembered fearing to be kidnapped every day, after work, while the sun was setting. He remembered fearing being robbed of the few money he earned after having been exploited by Mister Fox.

Erik hadn't been lucky. Those things didn't happen to him just because he was the son of Lucius Romano. The blackguards needed him alive because they... Uncle Benjamin knew that if Lucius ever came back, he would go to see him. Which he did.

Erik was the key to finding the man; he was the key to getting the biological supercomputer before Erik got into its possession.

Luckily, the young man had been smart enough to hide properly from them, but even then, given his immaturity, given his hatred for a country that, albeit not without sins, was suffering as much as he was, he risked a lot showing off at school; he risked a lot entering the Red Palace or killing Nathaniel.

And he had been forced to leave a country wholly unprepared, severely weak compared to the average adult, which had no way of surviving alone in a thaid infested world.

Yet he did. Not because of skills, not because of the biological supercomputer. At that point, it became just dumb luck.

Erik never faced something he couldn't really kill, and when he did, he had at least been able to flee.

The young man recalled his near-death encounter with a wyvern on his journey to Etrium. Even his battle against the Leviathan Serpent hadn't brought him as close to death as that harrowing moment. Well, in either case, Erik couldn't really talk about fights.

Other people, in the same situation, might have just died. But luck, albeit part of all the famous people's skill set, was something unreliable.

"That is exactly the point, Caiden. The only way to get rid of the blackguards is to kill their leaders."

"Leaders?" The man asked.

"Exactly. Here, I fought against a woman who called herself Monica Velasquez, the third division commander. If there was a third division commander, there are going to be for sure a first and a second division, and maybe there are even a fourth and fifth, and even more."

Erik paused, his eyes narrowing with steely resolve. The tent seemed to grow colder as he continued, "If this is true, there might be much more people to kill. As more time passes, the more the blackguards will be able to power up their troops. In four years, they had been able to give people two and three brain crystal powers. Those having three did not get powerful enough, having to focus on too many neural links, but with the technique they stole from me, they might be able to get much stronger than the troops we've faced until now, given the time. Things will get harder if we wait too much."

Caiden sighed. What Erik was saying made sense. The problem was that they needed his help to save Frant; they needed more Chimaeric Demons, or the battle would not end.

"I don't know if we will be able to hold on with the remaining troops, Erik."

"Don't worry about that," the younger man said. "I've sent thousands of clones across the continent. As I've said, I prevented four of the remaining countries from joining the war. Given enough time, I might be able to do the same with Etrium and Miciselen."

"What if we don't have enough time?"

Erik paused for a second. In truth, with the Chimaeric Demons having to kill blackguards across an entire continent, having to take over governments, with the little time he had available to make them, there were very few troops for him to help Frant. This meant that he really had to give them something to allow them to take care of themselves.

"I will make the Chimaeric Demons teach an improved Neural Link training technique. One that would make you strong enough to resist against the blackguards."

"A new technique? There is another one?"

"There are many," Erik said, making Caiden look rather surprised. "It might allow you to cross the 54 neural links mark. It is very powerful. It should also allow you to train multiple brain crystal powers at the same time, but, well, you don't have them. Regardless, it should give you the ability to resist on your own, at least until I get rid of the blackguards once and for all. You just have to make sure that people whom we can trust get their hands on them. Call Becker, tell him to send the technicians here, and I will give you the technique."

There was a moment of silence. Caiden couldn't possibly refuse this. A technique that might allow humans to get past the 54 neural links threshold? Frant had to get it. Damn, even he wanted it. "All right then, I will make my call."

Chapter 1149: Merging Powers (1)

Caiden left, and Erik sat alone in his work tent. While there were still many things to do regarding the blackguards, his mind shifted to something unrelated, a crucial task for him to get stronger.

The servers they'd found in the blackguards' headquarters would have to wait—he needed to optimize his powers first, and to do that, he needed to merge them.

"System, show me the status."

—STATUS—

[Host Information]

NAME: Erik Romano

AGE: 18

POWER LEVEL: 1,462

SYSTEM LEVEL: 352

EXPERIENCE: 340,013,778

DNA POINTS: 77,469,671

HEALTH: 47,860

MANA: 47,790

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 542

INTELLIGENCE: 474

DEXTERITY: 522

ENERGY: 1592

Available attribute points: 105

{Powers}

[Biological Super Computer Powers]

-Brain Crystal Manipulation

(...)

-DNA Manipulation

(...)

-Analysis

-Brain Information Injector

-Device Manipulation

[Host's Powers]

PLANT MASTER: A13B-RANKED

CHIMAERIC DEMON: Aα3X-RANKED

SELF HEALING: A12A-RANKED

INSTABILITY: Aλ2B-RANKED

Phantom Veil: A02A-RANKED

Frostwind Fire tempest: Aη3A-RANKED

Force Bastion: Av1B-RANKED

Lightning Lord: Aη3A-RANKED

Beastwalker: Aθ1B-RANKED

Telekinesis: Aσ1A-RANKED

Will of the Hydra: Aσ1X-RANKED

Earth's Will: Aσ1A-RANKED

Rising tide: Aσ1B-RANKED

Time Freeze: Aσ1A-RANKED

Warp: Aσ1A-RANKED

Molecular Restructuring: Aσ1A-RANKED

Aegis Morph: Aσ1A-RANKED

Healing Touch: Aσ1A-RANKED

Will of the Puppet Master: Aσ1X-RANKED

{Skills}

(...)

—END STATUS—

He studied the list of abilities he'd accumulated in these four years.

His eyes went on the elemental powers. Frostwind Fire Tempest and Lightning Lord were both powerful on their own, but combined, they could create something truly strong and hopefully more efficient. Adding Earth's Will and Rising Tide would complete the set, giving him control over all basic elements. Of course, there were more he could take, and for sure he was going to, when he found them.

Yet despite knowing there were other elements out there, Erik never found them.

<This is the first thing I'm going to merge. A single power controlling all elements would be more efficient than juggling multiple ones,> he thought. <Hopefully, the merging will also reduce the mana drain.>

The defensive powers, Force Bastion and Aegis Morph, also caught his attention. Force Bastion's exoskeleton and Aegis Morph's adaptive armor complemented each other perfectly. Merging them could create an ultimate defense system—one that combined Force Bastion's force shielding and strengthening with Aegis Morph's material adaptation capabilities.

<System, remember to keep the Force Bastion as the main power. I don't really want to lose Nathaniel's brain crystal power; it is too useful. Just focus on giving Force Bastion the things that make Aegis Morph superior. Can you do it?>

[Well, I mean. I always did the mergings, considering what would have been best for you. From your point of view, they were random, but in truth, there were thoughts behind. Of course, depending on the powers' compatibility and the limitations the two powers offer, we might not be able to get what you want.]

The system paused.

[But I don't think we would have many problems here. These two are pretty similar brain crystal powers, so I guess we could do it. The only problem is that we will lose something from Aegis Morph. While I can give its attributes to Force Bastion, it will never reach the defensive abilities Aegis Morph has. That is a purely defensive power, after all. It doesn't have Nathaniel's ability to

make force shields or create concussive blasts of energy, and there is a limit to what the DNA can store.]

<It doesn't matter,> Erik said. <I can still increase its defense by increasing the mana I pump into it.>

[True, but with Aegis Morph, you might have been able to get 3 times that defensive power at the same mana cost. But if that is what you have decided on, I won't argue.]

Erik nodded. There was something else Erik was thinking about merging.

"The healing powers are obvious candidates, too," Erik said to himself.

Self-healing's passive regeneration was useful, but its blood consumption could be dangerous in prolonged battles.

<What can we do about this?> Erik asked the system.

[In this case, I would suggest making healing touch the main power. It can already heal yourself and other people, but it is not as powerful as self-healing, which is much faster at doing its job than healing touch. So, I would implement the fast regenerative powers of self-healing. The result should be something slightly less powerful than self-healing, but that can be used on other targets too. Clearly, it will be better than Healing Touch.]

<Is there a way to make it less mana reliant?>

[Yes but that would involve using blood as a complementary source, and that might be a problem sometimes.]

<Ok,> Erik said, then stick with the original plan.

But then came the harder decisions. Erik studied the remaining powers. Will of the Hydra and Instability both dealt with mental capabilities—could their merger create something that enhanced both cognitive abilities and emotional manipulation? Or would it dilute their individual strengths?

<I don't want to risk it. Both powers are too useful, and Will of the Hydra will become more once I make more heads... Instability is too valuable for its ability to read people's minds, so no, I will leave them as they are.>

Phantom Veil and Beastwalker both involved transformation and deception. A merger might create an ultimate stealth ability, but it could also result in something less focused than either original power. Erik often had to find new shapeshifting powers, so he decided to leave Beastwalker as it was.

Phantom Veil was good at creating distractions, and unless he got something to power it up, he didn't want to risk making a mess. The same was for Invisibility. The power was useful as it was, so there was no need to merge it with something else, and he didn't even have something suitable for the task.

He stopped to think.

"System, what factors should I consider when merging powers?"

[Multiple factors affect the outcomes,] the AI said. [Power compatibility, intended use, potential synergies, DNA storage limits, powers' characteristics that go against each other.]

Erik nodded. The risk of unwanted outcomes was still present, and while he could use Brain Crystal Power Editing to adjust the results, that would consume too many DNA points he might need later.

Chapter 1150: Merging Powers (2)

Author's Note: This chapter is part of a larger one split to manage word count and make the chapter less costly. Most of it are power descriptions, for which I apologize. Feel free to skip if you wish, but be aware it includes part of the previous scene.

There were some other powers he was thinking about merging.

The Molecular Restructuring power he got from Restro particularly interested him. Its ability to alter matter could combine well with several other powers, but which combination would yield the most useful result?

<I could merge it with the elemental powers to get something I could use like Restro and Terra did, using the free flowing state of water with stones, the ethereal constitution of fire with ice... But I could also merge it with Plant Master.>

Erik paused again.

<I might be able to make the plants more resistant and deadlier. I might be able to create shelters made of solid metal instead of just plants. The problem is that I might also get something totally unrelated.>

But if the system made the merging considering Plant Master as the main power, then it should work like with Self-Healing and Healing touch.

<This is a really good idea. Let's put it on the list of things to merge.>

The last thing Erik wanted to merge was Monica's power, Will of the Puppet Master. It was just that Erik was thinking of giving it to the clones.

If he did, they could actually create their own personal armies, but he would lose the ability to make them himself. Not that he needed it; he already got the Chimaeric Demons. It was just that it required time to get them, while Monica's power seemed to be much faster at doing that.

However, the benefits of giving this to the clones were much more than him having it personally, because he was one, but the clones were many, and if they all got the ability, he might be able to create vast armies with far less mana since the consumption would be redistributed among the clones.

They would be able to make teams even when they were on solo missions, and by getting the right puppets, they might be able to use powerful brain crystal powers without him having to actually give them.

<That's settled then...>

He took his decision.

"The elemental merger is clear enough."

There was a short pause.

"Same for the defensive and healing combinations, Plant Master, and Monica's power. But the rest..." He trailed off, considering the possibilities he had available.

After some time considering what to do, Erik decided to keep the rest of his powers as they were. These abilities were the basis for his current combat might, and changing them might cause catastrophic results.

<System, can you analyze potential merger outcomes?>

[I can calculate probabilities based on power similarities and known patterns, as I've said, but exact outcomes cannot be predicted with complete accuracy. Though I'm pretty sure we will be able to get what you want.]

Erik leaned back, weighing his options some more. Every decision needed to be calculated, every risk assessed. The merging was no exception.

<Then let's do this...>

[100000 DNA points required for merging. Confirm to proceed.]

<Confirm.>

[Instant merging procedure initiated.]

[Merging procedure complete.]

[New Powers obtained.]

<Show me the list of powers.>

—Partial Status—

[Host's Powers]

CHIMAERIC DEMON: Aα3X-RANKED

(Allow to create the user's clones. These have the user's same stats as when they were created. They also possess many brain crystals and as many powers as they have. Each brain crystal has a size that depends on the amount of neural links the clones develop for each brain crystal power. The starting rank is E. The amount of Neural links for each brain crystal power is infinite, but their complexity is a hundred times greater than that of humans, meaning the time and effort spent to make a neural link is a hundred times greater than that required by a human. The clones are permanent, but to make them, mana is necessary. The clones are born from eggs, which take two weeks to hatch. After that, a month and a half are needed for the clones to reach maturity. Keep in mind the hatching and maturity times depend on the amount of neural links. The clones have the user's same memories up until he created them.)

INSTABILITY: Aλ2B-RANKED (Allows to mess with the emotions of the surrounding target and to read their minds.)

Phantom Veil: Aθ2A-RANKED

(Illusory Invisibility: The user can turn invisible while simultaneously projecting an illusion of themselves or another object in a different location. Holo-Cloak: The user can create up to 20 realistic illusions that include environmental mimicry, making it hard to distinguish between reality and illusion. Dynamic Camouflage: The user's invisibility adapts dynamically to the surroundings, making them hard to detect while also being able to project misleading visual and auditory cues. Enhanced Stealth: The user and their illusions can move without creating visual ripples, ensuring seamless blending with the environment.)

Beastwalker: Aθ1B-RANKED (The user can shapeshift into animals.)

Telekinesis: Aσ1A-RANKED

(The user can lift objects into the air, using them for both attack and defense purposes. The mana consumption increases with the object's weight and the speed at which it's moved.)

Will of the Hydra: Aσ1X-RANKED

(The hydra gets a new head every time one is cut, and its mind splits, becoming more powerful. As you focus your will, you can split your consciousness, creating new cognitive centers that function in parallel. With each division, your mental prowess grows, improving your ability to perceive, analyze, and manipulate the world around you. Be careful, because too many heads might lead to the loss of oneself. Each mind thinks independently, as if they are multiple personalities. The power increases the ability to think. The more brains the user has, the greater that ability is.)

Time Freeze: Aσ1A-RANKED

(Allows the user to slow down or freeze time. The amount of mana used affects how much the time gets slowed down and for how long. Stopping time requires astronomical amounts of mana.)

Warp: Aσ1A-RANKED (Enables the user to alter distances, warp objects, or shift locations within a range that depends on the mana used. The shorter the distance, the smaller the object, and the lesser is the mana consumption.)

Verdant Architect: Aσ1X-RANKED

(Verdant Architect enhances Plant Master's control over flora. Aside from allowing to control plants and make them grow, it also has the ability to add capability to reinforce botanical creations with various properties, such as metal-like strength or flexible resilience. It can turn plants into fire or water. The limit depends on the user. This power allows for the construction of plant-based defenses and weapons that are highly durable, adaptable, and capable of withstanding forces. It provides versatile applications and can be used for various purposes. The plants can change the molecular structure of what they touch, based on the user's will.)

Rejuvenating Touch: Aσ1A-RANKED

(Improved Version of Healing Touch, powered up to reach the same abilities of Self-Healing. It doesn't depend on blood, but its mana consumption is less than Self-Healing. It allows to regrow limbs and can heal most wounds. The target can also be healed passively using fixed amounts of mana, but the healing done depends on the mana used. Direct healing is suggested.)

Tower Bastion: Aσ1A-RANKED

(Enables the user to generate and manipulate an adaptive armor directly on his body. The armor can change form and material to respond to different threats, providing both offensive and defensive capabilities. The armor doesn't have to be conjured in its entirety, and force energy can be used.

Defensive abilities are greater than Force Bastion, but weaker than Aegis morph with the same amount of mana used. Existing Abilities: Integrated Force Armor: The user gains an exoskeleton that provides both physical protection and the ability to generate powerful force fields. Shockwave Armor: The armor can emit force shockwaves to repel attackers or deal blows. Dynamic Shielding: The force shields can adapt to various threats and provide layered defense. Enhanced Strength and Agility: The armor boosts the user's physical capabilities.)

Elemental Lord: A♾1X-RANKED

(Elemental Mastery: The user can control fire, wind, earth, water, and lightning elements, either separately or in combination, and generate them. Constructs: The user can create solid constructs and weapons from a blend of the elements (i.e., wind blades, ice lances, fire swords.). Temperature Control: The user can manipulate the temperature to create areas of intense heat or cold, making it possible to create ice or lava.)

—End Status—

<Jeez...>