

## BIOLOGICAL 1161

### Chapter 1161: Planning the Assault (2)

"The battle against them will not be easy," Erik said. "These guys are powerful, and we are not sure about how many of them are at the Law Gate. There are some things to take into account, though."

"What?"

"Your warping ability lets you appear anywhere you can see," Erik said to Amber. "Combined with your corrosive gas..." He showed with the hologram how the gas clouds could be strategically placed. "You can cut off their escape routes and force them into killing zones."

"And I can warp to higher positions for better gas dispersal," Amber said.

"Yes. But that's beside the point. In a battle, you can simply fight them and push them into positions where they can't avoid the corrosive gas. You spread it, kill them, and jump to the next Vindicator."

"But I'll need cover."

"That's my part," Emily said. "With Time Freeze, I can create windows of opportunity. When you warp into position, I can make sure you have the seconds you need to deploy the gas."

Erik smiled. "That somehow was what I had in mind. But Amber can actually escape whenever she needs to by warping. So, I would like for you to focus on killing the other Vindicators. I doubt they might be able to escape you while using Time Freeze. If even Monica had problems with you, there is no way a Vindicator can escape your bullets."

"It makes sense. We will be able to take down their stronger fighters and avoid they end up on the Chimeric Demons."

"So, let me get this straight," Mira said. "Me, you, and Amber will have to fight them melee if we see them and use Amber's powers to kill them."

"Yes," Erik said. "I might be there, so I might be able to kill them without too much of your help, but if you ever find yourself alone, this should be the way to deal with them safely."

He paused.

"Avoid fighting melee against them, because they are likely stronger than you and for sure have more experience."

Then Erik expanded the display to show the entire battlefield. "The Chimaeric Demons have also prepared this..."

Erik continued, manipulating the hologram to show specific points throughout the underground network. "They've been placing charges at structural weak points, creating ammunition caches, and most importantly, storing bodies."

"Bodies?" Emily raised an eyebrow.

"From every battle we've fought. The clones have been transporting fallen soldiers here for months. When we attack, each clone will raise not just any undead but soldiers they've specifically chosen." The hologram displayed markers showing cached remains throughout the tunnel system.

"That's why you had them recover so many bodies after each battle," Amber realized. "You're building an army that's already in position."

"Precisely. But we will first attack with the weaker thaids and use the bodies later. Aside from that, the coordination between us needs to be perfect." Erik zoomed in on the central sectors. "The initial strike will come from outside, but that's just to occupy their regular forces and give us a chance inside. The real battle will be against their elite units, as I said. That will be when the Chimaeric Demons will join the real fight."

He turned to Emily. "You'll set up here." What Erik pointed at was a building at the edge of the Law Gate, but far enough from the walls to prevent them from seeing her.

"Who chose that place?" Emily asked. It wasn't the best place in the surroundings. Emily could actually get much closer to the city center to have a better chance of killing her targets. However, that was undeniably the safest spot around.

"I did, why?"

"It's not good," the woman said. "It's too far from the battle."

There was silence. "Erik, I know you are worried about me. In a melee, I'm not the strongest around here, but I have to remind you I trained all my life, like Amber did. I might be a sniper, that's true, but that doesn't mean I'm useless melee. Besides, I have the Time Freeze Brain crystal power now, so, if I'm in a pinch, I will just slow time down and run."

"She is right," Mira said. "Besides, you failed to address an important point. What about their barrier? Monica's forces had dozens of barrier masters and many barrier generator machines."

"Yes. Until now, I talked about what to do to deal with the Vindicators and where we might be able to find the Division commander, but that was just to address the most dangerous points of the entire ordeal."

"The plan goes like this: We use the tunnels to get into the middle of the city. Then Amber warps us inside so that we are able to get past the barrier. Once there, we must destroy the barrier, which means destroying the generators and killing the barrier masters. That way, the Chimaeric Demons will be able to flood the city. Once that is done, we will go search for the Vindicators and the Division Commander."

"If things are like this, I want to stay as close to you as possible; provide cover. You know... It will make our plan easier to carry."

"We'll do as you want, Emily. Where were you thinking of going?"

Emily then takes command of the holographic display.

"These buildings will do." She pointed at some of them. "They are the highest around and are close to each other. I will be able to change positions often, and being in the middle of the fortress-like city, I will be able to get to something else if those places get destroyed."

"All right," Erik said, "I will let the Chimaeric Demons know."

"About the barrier masters," Mira said. "How were you thinking of taking them down?"

"Well, there are many ways, but I will let you decide on how to move. The only important thing is that you don't get spotted. The best thing would be for Amber to warp alone and use her corrosive gases. Barriers don't block oxygen, so there is no reason to think they block her brain crystal power. If this does not work, the best thing to do would be for Emily to kill a few of them, and then you and Amber kill the rest under Emily's cover. "

"So, let me get this right. We attack with the undead thaids, distract their forces, then we five, the fifth, I guess, being June, sneak in using Amber's powers, take the barrier masters out of the picture, destroy the generators, and let the army invade, and then we head to the Vindicators."

"Indeed," Erik said. "But I want to make this clear. It is unlikely I will be with you while you deal with the Vindicators. Someone has to ensure the planes are not destroyed and that the division commander doesn't kill everyone."

"It's a little bold," Mira said. "I don't know if I can do this... Besides, what use can June give us there? He is not strong enough for such a battlefield."

#### Chapter 1162: Planning the Assault (3)

"I don't think you have to worry, Mira. Your ability to shift between forms makes you unpredictable, at least in battle. Besides, you can use the different forms for various purposes that go outside of the fighting range. You can use a dog's hearing to find people. You would also basically be a moving alarm. You can take the form of a bird for stealth reconnaissance or use that of a bug for stealthy infiltration. You can change form while fighting; you can sneak attack them. You can do a lot of things thanks to replication."

He paused.

"As for June. He insisted on coming with us. I tried to make him desist, but he was hell-bent on coming."

"Is he crazy? June is going to join a fight he should in no way take part in. I get he had been with you the longest and joined your battles the most, but based on how things are, how strong the enemy is, and how fast they are growing, he should understand the best and safest thing to do would be to stay behind."

Mira frowned, clearly worried. She brushed her hair back, a nervous habit.

"I don't get why he's doing this," she said, shaking her head.

"Well," Erik said. "You said it yourself. He was the one who was with me the longest. Besides, if things remained as they had been for centuries, June would have been considered powerful."

Indeed, for centuries, having June's stats would have made anyone into a respected figure. The problem was that with the blackguards creating the technique to get more than one brain crystal power, anyone without one would inevitably be considered weak, with the difference that June couldn't even make neural links, meaning he had essentially no way to escape his situation.

"Anyway, don't worry. I will make sure he has as many brain crystal items as possible."

Everyone nodded. It wasn't just Erik that was worried about the clone; even the others were.

"Anyway, I forgot to mention this: based on the reports, there are at least six Vindicators, possibly more. They should be positioned in pairs throughout these three defensive zones." The display highlighted different sections of the fortress.

"Our priority is preventing them from getting together. During the Maynard Island battle, we saw how dangerous their coordination could be. This time, we keep them split up, especially considering they are six people and not just three. This means finding a pair and eliminating it on the spot." He turned to Amber.

"You and Mira will act melee, while Emily helps you from a distance. You need to keep them occupied. At best, Emily will kill the pairs. At worst, you will be forced to release the gas and teleport away."

"But they'll be expecting an attack on the Vindicators. What if they immediately group up?"

"They can't," Erik said. "A pair should be leading the defenses, another should be guarding the generators, and another should be patrolling around. The only ones who might group up are the two roaming guys. The others can't leave their position unless the division commander says otherwise."

"There might still be more than six, Erik," Mira said.

"In that case, I will act personally, if I can, of course. In case I can't help you, run."

The four remained silent for a bit. What Erik was asking them to do was a lot, and it wasn't simple either. The three women understood they might really lose their lives now.

Of course, if they decided not to join the battle, Erik would simply ask Amber to teleport a small contingent of Chimaeric Demons inside, but at that point, he would be the one tasked to fight against the Vindicators and the division commander, and in a battle of brain crystal power, nothing ensured his victory.

Besides, things would be more complicated. Maybe if he fought with many Chimaeric Demons, he might be able to end the fights quickly, but nothing assured that. Based on how things were, he would do most of the things alone, and that would make them lose time.

"When is the attack going to start?" Amber asked.

"We strike at dawn," Erik pulled up a timeline. "The Chimaeric Demons will begin raising their undead forces an hour before sunrise. By first light, we'll have armies emerging from every tunnel. That's when we move."

Erik manipulated the hologram to show a time-lapse of their planned assault. "At exactly 0500, the first wave begins. The Chimaeric Demons activate their undead forces in the lower tunnels. Each clone has specific targets."

The display showed hundreds of points lighting up beneath the fortress. "When the blackguards respond to the threat, a group of Chimaeric Demons will take flight. They will provide feedback about key targets. Priority is locating their anti-aircraft defenses."

"What if we can't find the barrier masters?" Mira asked. "The plan hinges on our ability to destroy the barrier generators and kill the barrier masters. If we fail, the Chimaeric Demons will never be able to enter the fortress city."

"I'll assist if possible, but it depends on the situation. If I can't help directly, we still have some time before we lose all our undead forces. We can use that window strategically. We might change targets."

"Wouldn't it be better to bring the clones inside?" Emily asked.

"I can't." Amber had a serious look. "Bringing five people in is doable, and it will allow us for a covert operation while there is chaos outside. I can't bring too many people, or I won't be able to fight later."

"Yes, that is why I didn't tell you to do this earlier," Erik said. "The Chimaeric Demons are strong, but have basically no chance against a ranged fighter, especially considering they might have two brain crystal powers."

He paused.

"Anyway, by 0515, if everything goes well, we should have been able to find the barrier masters and deal with them."

Erik sighed and then zoomed in on the central command structure. "If everything goes well, the next target would be the generators. If everything goes well, by 0530, we should have their outer defenses in disarray. That's when the main assault force will flood the place. "

"15 minutes seems tight."

"I know," Erik said. "Our best hope is for Emily and Mira to find them quickly. The clones will help, as I mentioned, but they won't be able to tell us much from outside the barrier." Erik turned to Emily.

"Of course, I don't need to tell you how careful you need to be when you see the barrier masters, right?"

The woman nodded.

"Act based on the situation, and try not to be discovered. Since you insist on not using the places we wanted you to take, I'll give you a list of viable alternative positions you might take aside from those you chose."

The hologram showed Emily's firing positions, selected for maximum coverage. "I'll need to switch positions at least four times," Emily said. "They will for sure send troops into my position, and they might have countersnipers looking for me."

"Try to take them out before they find you."

"Easy for you to say."

Erik sighed. "Anyway, there are multiple backup positions here, here, and here," Erik highlighted several ridges and buildings. "Mira and Amber will provide cover during your relocations. If I'm there, I will help you too."

Amber's face took on a pensive look, and she bit her lower lip. What she thought was simple. In this plan, a lot hinged on Erik's help. He had to help with the vindicators, the barrier masters, the generators.

But it was counterproductive. If Erik decided she, Mira, and Emily would need to get inside, then the best thing to do would be to simply do what he had to. In all of this, there was no mention of the planes; of course, if everything went well, the enemy wouldn't even find out they would enter, and in theory at least, the planes would be safe.

But the battle against the Vindicators was for sure going to stir things. What would happen if the Division Commander appeared?

Erik noticed her expression and paused, giving her a moment to voice any concerns she might have.

"I think you should just focus on finding the division commander," Amber said. "If he appears, we won't be able to do much."

"Are you sure you can do all of this alone? There won't be backup until you kill the barrier masters, destroy the generators, or you warp everyone away."

"Yeah, don't worry."

"Anyway, what do we know about the division commander?" Amber asked, leaning forward with a look of concern.

"Unfortunately, very little," Erik said with a frown. "These blackguards are experts at concealment. They've stayed hidden for years."



"Nothing at all?" Mira asked. "Not even a name or physical description?"

Erik shook his head. "We have some vague reports of their combat abilities, but nothing concrete. They could be a master of deception, a powerful fighter, or both. We need to be prepared for anything."

#### Chapter 1163: Planning the Assault (4)

"When do we move?"

"The Chimaeric Demons need time to prepare," Erik said. "They estimated ten days at minimum. I suggest you use that time to continue your training."

The room fell silent. Ten days were at the same time a lot and not enough. The Law Gate's reputation for impregnability wasn't exaggerated.

It was built to withstand any kind of attack, especially from thaids, given the proximity to the Mur continent.

"This time, we must make sure they don't know about us coming."

"They know," Erik said. "I told you already; they found some of our tunnel. The Chimaeric Demons made them using thaids to sell the idea they were made by them, but they would be stupid to not at least suspect we are involved. For this reason, I prefer to think they know already. What they do not know is when we are going to attack."

"Any news about their forces? How many are they?" Mira asked.

Erik's expression darkened. "We don't actually know how many people are there, but I expect them to be at least a hundred thousand. In truth, they are increasing. Our scouts saw many blackguards reaching the place."

"Which supports the theory they know it was us who made the tunnels," Amber said. "They're expecting us."

"Let them expect us. Their preparations won't matter once we destroy their barriers."

There was silence. The Law Gate affair was important, but it was what was coming soon after that was worrying the three girls.

"I guess we will leave for Mur soon after we secure the gate, right?"

Erik nodded.

"We take their planes and head for Mur immediately, yes."

The three girls' faces darkened.

"Of course, if there are still planes standing. The longer we wait after capturing the gate, the more time we give the blackguards to destroy them."

"That is if they didn't do it already. What are we going to do then?"

"What we did for Maynard Island. We take a lot of Chimaeric Demons and fly there."

"Are you crazy?" Mira said. "Mur isn't somewhere we can simply walk to. Thaid's there might be much stronger than the Chimaeric Demons. What are we going to do if they attack while we fly over the ocean?"

"Do you have any suggestions?" Erik asked. They had no alternatives, unless they wanted to ask Frant for planes, and that would take time. The trade-off here was to wait and go there more prepared, but risking the blackguards would achieve whatever they were trying to achieve, potentially getting too strong for Erik and his troop to beat them, or rush there, but being unprepared, or surely under-prepared.

Erik wanted to make sure things would go smoothly; it was just that he didn't want to lose time. Besides, if he asked Becker for planes, would he be able to give them? Etrium was still on Frant's territory, and the anti-air artillery was there. These things could reach the safe flying zone, and the planes would just be destroyed.

But even if that wouldn't happen, would Becker have spare planes to give? Based on what he knew, he was using them, where he could, of course, for the sharing of supplies among the troops. Most of them also reached Liberty Watch, from which a lot of weapons came.

Jabir and the others basically became Frant's technological pole, thanks to the crafting methods and recipes Erik gave them. The brain-stimulating serums Frant was using to power their troops came from there. If the army didn't get them, the balance would be broken.

Frant's troop were already weak as they were. That was the only way for them to shorten the gaps between the enemy they had.

Sure, brain crystal weapons helped, but there wasn't simply enough manpower to do all of that.

"Ten days isn't much time," Erik said, shutting down the holographic display. "Each of you must focus on making new neural links and mastering your powers."

He turned to Emily first. "Your Time Freeze control needs to be perfect. Time Freeze consumes a lot of mana, so try to focus on hitting impossibly fast targets with shorter windows of time. It'll conserve mana and give you more opportunities during the battle."

Emily nodded. "I'll work on it."

"Good." Then Erik turned to Amber. "You need to learn when to use your warps better. There might be a lot of likely events you have not considered, but that might happen. Besides, the easiest way for you to kill the Vindicators is to use your gas. It needs to be used at the right moment, in the right place, and when we need it."

Amber nodded. She knew Erik was raising a good point.

"I'll keep practicing with the Chimaeric Demons," Amber said. "They pose a greater threat than Vindicators in close quarters. We'll simulate different combat scenarios and develop strategies to handle or avoid them. If I can hold my own against them, I should be fine against anything else."

Erik nodded.

"Mira, do the same," Erik said, turning to the shapeshifter. "Face off against them. Experience firsthand what combat with the Vindicators will be like. And work on your transformations—they need to be faster. That split second between changing from a bug to a combat form could mean the difference between life and death."

"You think I don't know that? I'm already working on it..." She paused. "I've been focusing on partial transformations, too. I still don't get why the Chimaeric Demons do not use them that much. They are very practical."

Erik, as the creator of the Chimaeric Demons, preferred to completely shapeshift. Erik thought complete transformations were more useful and powerful in battle, despite having disadvantages.

This meant the Chimaeric Demons favored complete transformations when shapeshifting—not just for their practical value but because they shared Erik's natural preference for them.

"Now, as I said, I do really think it is time for us to go to Mur, and I think we can." Erik said without preamble. "The question is, do you feel ready? The journey there, the attack on the Law Gate—it might be too much for you."

He paused.

"If you don't feel like joining, I totally understand, but you have to tell me this now, because I would need to change our plans if that is your decision."

For some time, there was silence, but it didn't last for long. The three already made up their minds.

They exchanged glances. Emily was the first to give an answer. "Honestly? No. I don't feel ready at all, but I don't think we'll ever feel ready for that place. This doesn't mean I'm not going."

The other two nodded in agreement.

"Emily's right," Amber said. "We can continue our training and neural link development during the journey. I guess it will take some time before we reach the tunnels, and even more to get to Mur."

Mira's brow furrowed. "Speaking of the journey. I think we all understood we must deal with the Law Gate first, right? That's where the blackguards are still maintaining their presence in Hin."

Erik nodded. "The Law Gate has become their primary hub for reaching Mur. More importantly, it's likely our only chance to secure aircraft capable of making the journey."

"That explains why we are going to attack it, but my point was that I think it is really not the best decision. If the main problem is just to reach Mur, then why don't we steal planes from other places? Based on what I heard, there should be the planes used by Hin's troops to return here, and that is without considering those from the other countries."

Erik shook his head. "The blackguards asked Hin's government, having all aircraft brought to the Law Gate. On the surface, it looks like they're using them to transport more forces to Mur, but I think there's more to it. They're trying to prevent us from reaching Mur altogether or deliberately drawing us to the Law Gate."

"If it's probably a trap, why are we walking into it?" Emily asked.

"Because I don't want to leave a single blackguard alive." Erik's voice was cold. "They are a cancer, and one that must be eradicated. What is funny is that they think they are doing something right for humanity, and that by experimenting on them."

He paused. "You don't know what I've seen in Etrium. It is something I don't wish you to ever see."

"We are used to dead bodies, Erik."

"It is not simply a matter of dead people, Mira. It was their helpless situation. It was how mad they turned because of the torture and the experimentation. It is because of what they did to the kids."

"Since when did you start worrying about the others?" Amber asked. Erik had never been one to play the justice's paladin, so why was he so upset about what the blackguards did to random people?

"I don't; it's just that. I could have been one of them, and I don't like it."

That was true; Erik might've ended up a lab rat before and after getting the biological supercomputer. When he was a kid, he could have been kidnapped by the crystal cross gang, and after he got the system, he might have been used to experiment with the biological supercomputer.

Chapter 1164: Planning the Assault (5)

"As for the other planes," Erik said. "I don't think Becker will give them to us, and the same is likely for the other countries. The clones are almost there to control them, but some may oppose them. Don't forget the blackguards' still have a massive presence there."

"You can do it secretly though," Mira said. Erik remained silent for a while. He considered that, but planning revealed more drawbacks than benefits.

"Moving planes is not something that can be done easily; even less easily, they can be moved in secret," he said. "If they notice something and start asking questions, the troops I sent in the other countries might get jeopardized."

He paused.

"Besides, it's important they don't figure out how things are in Hin. If other countries discover the extent of our influence here, all our plans could go down the toilet. Suspects might arise among them, and they might start searching for the Chimaeric Demons in their own countries. Assume we are able to move the planes; they would end up in Hin, and we would take them. The others might start questioning either why they gave them to us or, if we steal them, why they let the planes disappear, since it will be clear, at that point, it was us who took them."

Mira remained silent. What Erik was saying made sense.

"Plus, here's what would happen next: They discover our influence extends beyond what they suspect. They start investigating all the officials and personnel we've placed in key positions there, here,... everywhere. They find them thanks to the Veritas Lenses..."

He paused. "We've spent months building all of this. One wrong move could destroy everything, and I won't allow that."

Erik leaned against the table, his hands gripping its edge. "We need our enemies to believe we don't have control of the situation—that we are just an army marching from north to south, from east to west. If I told the blackguards to go fuck themselves and took the planes, yes, we might be on Mur in ten days. But the blackguards would still be on Hin, and the fact Salena Turke refused to help them might be a giveaway of our infiltration."

Besides, Erik had no intention of leaving the blackguards on Hin on the loose. The Chimaeric Demons would still be here, but nothing would assure the blackguards wouldn't defeat them. They

would lose their control on Hin, and then getting back on the Mannard continent would be just harder.

No, the blackguards had to die. He had to purge them from Mannard first and then from Mur.

Mira nodded, but it was clear she still wasn't entirely convinced. "T-that makes sense, b-but the Law Gate... Based on what you said, it looks more like hell than a fortified city. Everyone considers it impregnable."

Erik smiled. "It won't be any more difficult than taking Maynard Island. The difference is, this time, the Chimaeric Demons will each control their own forces. We will have much more troops at our disposal; our losses will be minimal."

"But we are not the only ones who grew in power, Erik," Amber said. "Sure, the Chimaeric Demons did. We also did, but after what happened here on Maynard Island, they must have spent a lot of time training." She frowned. "They've had the same time we had."

"They have, but they couldn't get stronger at a pace faster than ours. Their training methods are way inferior to ours. Even if they've gotten stronger, they'll at best match Vex, Terra, and Restro's previous levels, and you are able to fight them now. If not alone, at least as a team."

Erik leaned forward. "Especially considering that you and Emily now have Vex's powers, and they are not simple ones." He paused, tapping his fingers on the table.

"Time and space are simple concepts if you don't try to unravel them," Erik said. "While Vex's powers might look basic, they're actually very powerful. They let you control fundamental parts of reality." He paused. "This makes them incredibly useful, both in combat and utility."

Erik never regretted giving Emily and Amber these two powers. Having more people using them was better than one having all of them. There was a limit to what one person could do.

Someone might have argued that Erik was weakening himself by giving all these powers to the clones or to the three women, but he didn't care, especially because it wasn't true. What was the point of having powers he couldn't use because of the lack of mana?

Not that Erik had few mana points, but the more powers he got, the more increased the mana consumption.

Besides, from a utility point of view, there were things he now started tasking others to do. Infiltration was one of them. Why would he keep something that made him shapeshift into humans if he would never do something like this again?

The Chimaeric Demons had to be used. They were part of his powers. The stronger they were, the stronger he was.

Since many responsibilities had been delegated to the Chimaeric Demons, keeping such a power would be wasteful, requiring him to maintain unnecessary neural links.

As for the powers he gave to the two women, sure, Erik could have given them to the Chimaeric Demons, but given how complicated it was for them to make neural links, he turned down the idea when he had it.

Besides, with Monica's power, even if they didn't get it directly, they could control thaids with many kinds of powers. It would be like getting new ones with him doing nothing.

At that point, giving those to them would have just been pointless. Amber and Mira needed them more than they did. Those were powerful abilities, ones that would keep them safe.

"I think they are among the strongest powers I've ever seen. Maybe they are not completely fight-oriented, but they can still be used for that purpose." He looked at each of them. "They won't be able to counter those effectively."

Turning to Mira, Erik's tone became respectful. "That is, without considering Mira's combat experience. It exceeds all of ours combined. Damn, it is likely more than the Vindicators put together."

The women considered his words. The plan, at least based on what Erik and the Chimaeric Demons thought, made sense. The problem was that issues might arise. It would be naïve to assume that everything would proceed as planned. Would they be able to take care of them if they showed up at their door?

Yet the plan was taking shape in all their minds now.



"We should focus on scenarios where we fight multiple Vindicators at the same time. That's likely what we'll face."

Emily nodded. "I can help with that. My brain crystal power can give us insight."

"That was what I wanted to ask you," Erik agreed. "Use your powers and refer to the Chimaeric Demons. They might be able to come up with countermeasures based on what you see. But don't exhaust yourselves before the actual battle. We'll need you at full strength when we move."

The women stood.

"One last thing," Erik said. "The division commander at the Law Gate—the guy is likely to be as strong as Monica, if not more so. Do not forget this, and if you see him or her, you run."

The others nodded. If the division commander was at least as powerful as Monica, then there would be no way for them to fight him or her.

As the women left, Erik watched them with mixed feelings. He felt proud of how strong they had become in such a short time, but he was also worried about putting them in the middle of the fight.

He shirked from it until now, because of the kind of battlefield they had to join and because of how weak they were. But there was no more reason to do that now. Amber, Mira, and Emily were valuable, especially considering the new powers they got. They were smart and resourceful. He couldn't waste their talents.

Erik chuckled to himself. "Caiden and Richard are going to kill me when they find out I'm bringing their daughters into this. I can already hear them saying, 'You should have kept them safe, not turned them into soldiers!'" He shook his head, his smile fading. "But they're not little girls anymore. They're grown women now, whether their fathers like it."

The next ten days would be crucial for gathering supplies, training with their new powers, running battle simulations, and coordinating with their allies. They needed every minute to ensure their forces were ready for the attack.

Erik looked out the window at the changed landscape of Maynard Island. He sighed. There was much to do and little time to do it.

"I should get in contact with Noah. Since there are not enough supplies here to make brain-stimulating serums, I think the best thing would be to ask them to send us some batches... The Chimaeric Demons will also benefit a lot from them."

They ended their reserves a while ago, and he couldn't ask the Chimaeric Demons on Hin to send them since they were already providing them for the rest of the army. Noah had significantly bigger production facilities.

But there was more.

"Also, I should ask Jabir and the others to send weapons here... I don't think those we got from the blackguards will be enough."

The weapons and supplies they had on Maynard Island weren't enough. Erik's army was way bigger than this place could handle, or better than the blackguards wanted it to handle.

They kept few troops here, mostly the higher-ranked blackguards and their research teams. They had some weapons and tools, but not nearly as many or as varied as the Chimaeric Demons needed for the war.

Chapter 1165: Ten Days Later

Ten days passed in a blur. While Mira, Amber, and Emily spent most of their time training and making neural links, Erik and the Chimaeric Demons organized the movement of resources.

He contacted Jabir, requesting him to produce and transport stimulating serums and equipment to Sleeb Harbor.

Erik and the others reached the place the previous day. It took a whole day flying with the Chimaeric Demons, but there weren't alternatives to that. It was not safe by any means, but at least this was a silent and hard-to-notice transportation mean.

In the end, Erik thought about what Mira said and tried asking for planes. He sent a request to Becker through Caiden, but unfortunately, the man had to decline the request, much to Erik's disappointment.

There was more to Becker's refusal than what Erik had told the girls ten days earlier. He hadn't declined because of reluctance to help Erik reach Mur or defeat the blackguards.

The problem was that enemy artillery was still present inside the nation, and unless they took another route to reach Hin, it wasn't possible to send the planes to Maynard Island.

The problem with these other routes was that some were kept under observation by Miciselen, while others were simply too dangerous to cross.

Besides, the planes would have to stop in Hin to refuel, and since the two nations were still technically at war, that wasn't possible.

Deep in an underground tunnel beneath Sleb Harbor, in his base, Erik met with some of the Chimaeric Demons, those overseeing the operations to attack the Law Gate.

The tunnel stretched ahead, its walls showing signs of recent repairs. The attack on Sleb Harbor of some months ago could still be seen everywhere around the city.

Following the battle against Levium, most tunnels had collapsed and needed repairs. Luckily, Erik's control over Hin's government made the reconstruction process straightforward, but it still was essentially for everyone to not realize where Erik's base in Sleb Harbor was.

"How are the preparations proceeding?"

One of the Chimaeric Demons stepped forward and strode on Erik's left side. "We're transporting the last Thaid corpses to the Law Gate through our tunnel network. The operation is running smoothly, for now at least, though the volume strains our human resources."

Another clone spoke up. "Almost all sixty thousand troops reached their positions. However, the tunnels proved insufficient to house every Chimaeric Demon. Many had to establish camps outside."

That was a problem.

Erik slowed his stride. "Are they keeping distance from the Law Gate? The last thing I want is for them to find out we are going to attack."

"Yes, Master," the clone said. "We let them camp beyond the typical patrol routes. But the blackguards conduct regular sweeps of other areas, so they have been forced to move several times. The risk of detection exists."

"Apart from that, master," another clone said. "If the blackguards were expecting us on Maynard Island, news of the third division commander's defeat must have reached them. They are likely expecting us to attack, and since we had to prepare, we gave them time to do the same."

Erik dismissed the concern. "It matters little now. Perfect timing isn't critical here," he said. "What matters is keeping our movements hidden. The enemy's preparations don't concern me—secrecy is our advantage."

Erik didn't wait for anyone to respond.

"What's important," Erik said, "is not whether they expect us to attack. It's whether they expect us to do it in a week."

He spoke with confidence, showing total faith in their plan.

"They might have fortified their defenses years ago, for all we know and care, but the truth is," he said, "defenses are only as strong as the minds controlling them."

He paused.

"Regardless, our last contingent of troops is going to leave soon, and I'm going, too." He turned to face the group.

"Please arrange transportation for all of us. I want Mira, Amber, and Emily to continue their training without interruption, so make sure they'll have a comfortable journey when we travel."

The Chimaeric Demons nodded.

"What transportation method would be most suitable for this journey, sir?" one clone asked. "We have both aerial and ground options available."

"Ground transport," Erik said. "Flying will draw too much attention. We can't risk detection."

The Chimaeric Demon nodded. "We'll coordinate with our brothers. Some can shapeshift into Thaid's suitable for a comfortable journey."

"I don't want a ride. Prepare something they can pull, a cart, or something like that."

Cars and trucks were going to be more comfortable, but there would be the need to bring fuel with them for the long journey, and, most importantly, they could be detected by the enemy sensors.

Having the Chimaeric Demons pull a cart would be not only silent, but would help them travel lightly.

The group continued through the tunnel system until they reached a large room. Caiden stood inside, examining a series of maps spread across a makeshift table. He looked up as they entered.

"Erik," Caiden greeted, straightening. "I wanted to talk to you before you left."

"Me too," Erik said. "How is the situation in Frant?"

Erik went straight to business.

Caiden's expression turned serious. "Our forces are headed to the coast. We are almost there, actually, but the section had been seized by Miciselen's troops when Hin withdrew."

Caiden paused. There was a smile on his face. "Unfortunately for them, they are not as great as Hin in sea warfare, and for them, keeping supply lines through the sea is not easy. Besides, their fleet is not as good as that of Hin, so we are confident we will be able to take the northern shores soon. Aside from that, we're pressing Etrium's forces into the northeastern quadrant. Progress is coming, but the Eldraith Mountain range complicates our strategy."

He paused.

"The Thaid's—are they causing problems?"

"Not currently," Caiden said. "Though the war disturbs their territories. We've noticed increased movement among their populations. This also prevents Etrium from retreating, and, well, the only way for them to resist is to trench down."

Erik's eyes narrowed. The Eldraith mountain range, and the monsters inhabiting it, were a problem.

"Keep the place under observation. The blackguards have a history of driving Thaid's from their territories, and they might tell Etrium to use this strategy. Mercenaries are not simple dudes; they are fearless and well trained. If they push the wyverns westward..."

He paused. "Frant would struggle to contain that threat. Worse, you will fall. Even I am not strong enough yet to fight head-on against the thaid's there, and wyverns are not the only ones who worry me."

"Yeah..."

Erik talked about the cerulean bird that killed a black wyvern. Erik made it clear it came from Mur, and that the blackguards pushed it out of its habitat.

Besides, Caiden knew about the third division commander and what she did with the black wyvern. The fact that thing was stronger than Erik, even powered down as it was, had been disturbing news. Of course, Caiden told everything to Becker, who was keeping a close look at Erik's campaign.

"Anyway," Erik said. "How's the neural link technique working for your forces?"

Caiden's face brightened, his expression reflecting genuine enthusiasm. "It's incredible," he said, with sparkling eyes.

"Although we've only introduced it to a select handful of our most promising soldiers so far, even these early stages of training have shown potential beyond what we thought was possible."

"Have you tried it yourself? Amber pestered me for making you learn it."

Caiden laughed.

"Oh, yeah!" Caiden grinned. "I've been playing around with it and even made some neural links—got a couple under my belt now. It's honestly mind-blowing how well it works." He scratched his head.

"Where'd you pick up something this cool?"

"I made it," Erik said.

Caiden's jaw dropped. "No wonder you've gotten this strong so fast! This technique is absolutely insane..." He let out a low whistle.

Erik nodded but couldn't help thinking Caiden's enthusiasm was a little weird. It was... out of character, to say the least. After all, Erik was his daughter's boyfriend, and well... He had never been particularly warm with him.

The technique must have made him feel like a kid receiving a Christmas gift, making him drop his usual guarded and stern demeanor.

"Remember, give it only to those you trust completely. The blackguards can't get this technique. Their dual wielders are likely to grow in numbers, and if they get the technique, then we will lose this war. Of this I'm sure."

He paused.

"The only thing that kept the war in balance was the fact they didn't have a good training technique. Imagine what would happen if they got mine. This is not like the one they stole in Etrium."

"Yeah, I get it. Anyway, we are maintaining strict control over its distribution," Caiden said. "We are not giving it to everyone."

"Good. Don't forget—Frant still has many criminals and blackguard sympathizers; keep all of this as much of a secret as you can."

The man nodded.

## Chapter 1166: A Father's Promise

"We already know that," Caiden paused. "We are currently trying to root them out, but it's not straightforward to find them."

There was a brief silence.

"Anyway, how are the preparations for the Law Gate assault going?"

"We've positioned almost all available forces," Erik said. "The last group, including myself, is going to leave soon."

Concern flickered across Caiden's face. "Is Amber coming?"

"She is..."

"Keep her safe, Erik."

Erik nodded but spent some reassuring words on the man. The last thing he needed was for Caiden to make problems.

"Even in large-scale conflicts like this one, she has grown powerful enough to protect herself."

Caiden nodded. "Yeah, I know that. Amber mentioned your latest power." He paused, studying Erik's reaction. "She told me what you did for her."

Erik suppressed a grimace. While he understood Amber sharing such information with her father was natural, this knowledge would spread.

Caiden served as Richard's right hand, who in turn acted as General Becker's closest advisor. The information would reach Becker's ears, inevitably leading to requests—or demands—for Erik to share his power with their forces.

This reinforced Erik's decision to end the Law Gate operation as soon as possible, and once they secured their goal, he could leave for Mur.



There, Becker's influence couldn't reach him. While he changed his overall opinion of him, it was still true that he was a ruthless person, one that would stop at nothing to get what he wanted.

Then it was Erik's turn to ask questions. "Are the others ok?"

Caiden paused, then nodded.

"They joined the war..."

"Ah..."

Erik was referring to Floyd and the others. "We also taught them the technique you provided us. We figured it would have been impossible for them to share the techniques with the blackguards, and we introduced them to the program."

"You did well," Erik said. "They are people you can trust..."

He then sighed.

"Time grows short." He turned to Caiden. "What will you do now? Will you stay in Hin?"

"Until you leave for Mur," Caiden said. "I want a chance to see my daughter before you leave."

Erik understood the father's concern. "Don't worry, Caiden. Amber's safety is a top priority for me."

Caiden's expression tightened. "I appreciate that, Erik. But you have to understand that it's not easy for me and her mother to think she is joining a war and that this war is going to bring her into the most dangerous place in the world."

"I know," Erik said. "But Amber is capable, and groups of clones will always be around her."

Caiden sighed.

"Just... promise me you'll look out for her, Erik. I know I can't ask you to keep her out of the fight, but..."

"I promise," Erik said. "I'll do everything in my power to make sure she comes back safely to Frant."

A smile crossed Caiden's face. "Thank you. That's all I can ask for."

A Chimaeric Demon entered the chamber. "Master, the vehicles are ready. We can leave whenever you give the order."

Erik nodded. "Good. We leave in one hour." He faced Caiden. "This is where we part ways."

"Good hunting," Caiden extended his hand.

Erik clasped it. "Keep pressure on Etrium's forces. The more resources they commit to attacking Frant, the fewer they can send to reinforce the Law Gate if the blackguards ask for troops."

"We'll give them no respite."

"Excellent."

After Caiden's left, Erik addressed the assembled Chimaeric Demons. "Begin the last preparations. I want everything ready for transport within the hour."

The clones dispersed to their tasks, leaving Erik alone with his thoughts. The coming assault would test their capabilities to their limits. The Law Gate's defenses had never fallen to external attack. They would make history—or start the list of failed attempts.

...

...

...

Erik paced around the room, reviewing mental notes of their preparations. The Chimaeric Demons were currently loading equipment and coordinating movements through their tunnel network.

The journey to the Law Gate, on foot, was going to take at least three days due to the forest.

A clone approached. "Master, our forward observers report increased activity around the Law Gate's outer defenses. They're reinforcing their positions."

"Expected," Erik said. "Any sign they've detected our tunnels?"

"None, Master. The underground network remains safe."

Another Chimaeric Demon joined them. "The first transport group is ready, master. Five of our brothers transformed into suitable Thaidis. We gave them harnesses and attached them to some small trailers. That way, you can rest while traveling."

"Good."

The underground shelter was busy with last-minute preparations. The Chimaeric Demons were getting ready for battle.

They checked their weapons, made sure they knew their routes, and planned their timing. The attack on the Law Gate needed everyone to work together perfectly. Different groups had to coordinate their actions to succeed.

"The last supply convoy from Jabir arrived," another clone said. "The stimulating serums have been distributed among the units."

"Excellent. Is everything in position for our departure?"

"Yes, Master. The route is cleared and secured. Our brothers maintain surveillance along the entire path."

Erik then left the room and went outside. There, he saw the assembled force.

"Make some final equipment checks. I want no surprises during the journey."

A clone approached with updated weather reports. "Clear skies predicted, Master. Visibility will be high."

"Ah... shit."

...

...

...

The last hour was very busy. Erik carefully checked all the final preparations. He made sure everything was ready.

He looked over all the equipment again, went through their plans one more time, and made sure all teams were ready to leave.

It wasn't needed, but since this was going to be a crucial moment, an important battle, he wanted to be sure everything was as it should have been.

As time was running out, everyone became more tense. Then Amber, Mira, Emily, and June showed up.

"You are late..."

Mira smirked. "Don't you know you have to give ladies proper time to prepare?"

Erik sighed, then turned to June. "What's your excuse?"

"S-sorry, sir... I,"

"I what?"

"I think I found the best kebab shop in Sleeb Harbour."

June was late because he was gorging himself on food.

"How typical..."

Facepalming, he turned to the three women.

"Time to move," he said. "Are you ready now?"

"We are," Amber said.

Chapter 1167: Ominous Foreboding

"Get in the vehicles," Erik said, pointing at the transformed clones. "We've already lost enough time."

June wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "The kebab was worth it, Master. You should try \_\_\_"

"Not now," Erik cut him off, though a hint of amusement crept into his voice. "We have more pressing matters to attend to."

The group approached the transformed clones. Five of them had taken the forms of large, muscular beasts. Metal harnesses connected them to the small trailers.

Erik had already given a look to them. They weren't the best for traveling through uneven terrains like a forest, but since the journey would take three days, he didn't really want to spend it being uncomfortable. He had already decided it would be best to avoid working vehicles, so this was the basic form of comfort he could get from the situation.

He would make the three girls happy, at least.

Mira inspected the setup with a critical eye. "Well, at least we'll be able to train during the journey."

"That's the idea," Erik said.

"The blackguards watch the skies and most of the forests surrounding the Law Gate, but we won't be spotted once we reach the tunnels. The problem is just getting there."

The others nodded and jumped on the trailer, but Emily paused before boarding. "Hey Erik..."

Erik had tasked her with watching for potential dangers through her brain crystal power. Though he'd waited for her report, she had remained silent—until now.

"I've been monitoring potential futures..." She frowned. Something told Erik the things she saw weren't good.

"Is something wrong?"

"Well... I'm not sure," she hesitantly said. "It's just that I was unable to see what would happen at the Law Gate. Instead, I saw something about Mur..."

"Mur? Why?"

Emily's visions were seldom clear and were mostly random, but never trivial. If she saw something happening in Mur, it must have been significant.

"I would like to know too... My visions, they do not always work like I want; I'm not always able to see what I want. Quite the opposite. Most of the time, I see things completely unrelated."

Erik frowned. "So, what did you see?"

Emily hesitated again. "I saw... bodies, lots of them, but I had been unable to see who they belonged to. Everything was... blurry."

"They might be the Blackguards," Erik said.

"Yeah, I thought about that, but I do not think it was them..."

Those words gave Erik pause. "The Chimaeric Demons?"

Emily nodded, looking worried. Her eyes lost their usual brightness, and she bit her lip. These were clear signs that her vision had made her uneasy.

"I think they were..."

That was a problem. If Emily really saw the death of the Chimaeric Demons, it meant Erik's preparations weren't going to be enough there.

Would he, June, and the three women die there? But why? If the blackguards survived there, why wouldn't he? Besides, he gave strong powers to Emily and Amber, and Mira could certainly flee by shapeshifting.

It was weird.

<Whatever will happen there might be because of the blackguards, but... No... it is most likely going to be something related to the Thaidis. Are they really going to be that strong? Will they really be able to overwhelm the Chimaeric Demons that easily? It wouldn't be surprising, but...>

Erik believed their forces were strong enough to reach their destination. While landing, establishing a foothold, and setting up an operational base would be challenging, these tasks weren't as daunting as the journey to Mur itself.

<At least in theory...>

The sea route presented its own challenges. While sea-dwelling thaidis couldn't reach them, they'd still face threats from both flying thaidis and those waiting on land.

Erik's expression turned serious. "Keep watching. Any warning could prove crucial. In the meantime, I will make sure to make as many clones as possible and to make them as strong as they can be."

"The best thing would be for you to focus on making neural links," Emily said.

The woman knew that the stronger Erik was, the better the newborn Chimaeric Demons would be.

"I know, but I don't have the time."

"Then you better find it. You have the Chimaeric Demons taking care of all matters for you. You should take advantage of that like you said, instead of being the usual control freak you are."

"Ouch! That stings. Was it really necessary?"

"It was," Emily said. "Our survival on Mur depends on your clones..."

Erik paused, his expression thoughtful as he thought about Emily's suggestion, but there was no time for second-guessing now. "Get on the trailer. We're leaving," he said.

Emily nodded and did as Erik said.

He then made a last inspection of their convoy. Fifty Chimaeric Demons would accompany them as guards, while others maintained surveillance along their path. In truth, thousands started leaving the city earlier that morning, establishing patrols, checking the roads, and searching for the best path to take.

A sudden gust of wind interrupted him, carrying the scent of rain. Erik glanced at the sky. The earlier weather report promised clear conditions, but clouds gathered overhead.

"I don't even know how to take this."

The rain was going to make traveling harder but would also help the Chimaeric Demons hide. Hin was a particularly foggy place.



"Let's take this as a positive sign. Sometimes luck favors even me." He signaled the convoy to move out. "Let's not waste this chance."

The group started their journey through the forest. The Chimaeric Demons pulled the trailer and the wagons filled with supplies.

The Chimaeric Demons were strong enough to pull hundreds of carts, so there was no problem.

Erik sat down inside the trailer, thinking about what Emily had told him.

<Maybe I should just focus on making neural links during these three days.> Before he could start, though, June interrupted him.

"I packed some kebab for the road. Anyone hungry?"

Erik paused. "You know what...? Give me one."

June smiled, and then the aroma of seasoned meat filled the trailer.

The convoy disappeared into the deepening shadows of the forest, leaving behind the relative safety of Sleeb Harbor.

Chapter 1168: The tunnels

The next three days passed in focused meditation. Erik dedicated every spare moment to form neural links, following Emily's advice.

The steady movement of the caravan helped Erik focus.

The dense forest gradually thinned as the convoy moved, revealing glimpses of their target in the distance. The Law Gate's silhouette rose above the treeline.

The Law Gate stood massive and heavily fortified ahead. Through the trees, Erik saw automated turrets and watchtowers lining its perimeter. The structure's thick walls also had multiple layers of defenses, clearly built to resist any attack.

<The blackguards really made this place to never be taken. It was hard to see it from the images, but from here, everything takes on a different dimension.>

Looking up, Erik noticed anti-air platforms scanning the skies while still being inside the energy shields' field. Those were already powered on, most likely only by the generators. There was no doubt, though, that once the battle started, the barrier masters wouldn't waste a second before joining in the defense.

This also confirmed what he already knew—attacking head-on would be impossible. Sneaking their way in was their only chance to bring those barriers down.

...

...

...

The caravan slowed to a stop some minutes later, and a clone went to Erik's trailer. "Master, we've arrived at the main entrance point."

He nodded and jumped down from the vehicle, his boots landing on the damp earth. It rained for three whole days.

The heavy rains turned the dirt roads into muddy, slippery paths and reduced visibility, making traveling hard for the convoy. Despite these problems, the vehicles pushed through, reaching the area on schedule.

Erik looked around, and then, not without difficulties but less than he expected, he spotted the entrance through the thick foliage. It was deliberately rough and natural-looking and could be easily mistaken for a natural formation.

Yet for someone who knew there was a tunnel there, it wasn't that natural at all. The blackguards knew Erik was preparing something. They didn't know what, or when, he would strike, but they knew. Many tunnels had been discovered by them. It was just that Erik prepared some to use as a decoy, and only those were found.

"The spot looks good," Erik said as he checked the entrance. "But we could make it harder to see in a couple of places." He pointed out where the tunnel might still be noticeable.

The Chimaeric Demons nodded. They knew that, but given how hectic their days had been, they couldn't do better than this.

"We'll strengthen the camouflage immediately," the Chimaeric Demon said. "The recent rains helped establish native growth, but we can work on it."

"There is no need," Erik said. He then focused his mana and used his powers to make the vegetation around grow. Not that much to look artificial, but enough to cover the entrance better.

Plants quickly grew from the ground, covering the entrance. Green stems pushed through gaps and holes, while ferns and moss spread over the rocks. Young trees sprouted up, reaching for the light above.

Vines grew and wrapped around the existing plants naturally. Local flowers popped up between rocks, perfectly matching the surrounding plants.

The entrance now looked completely natural. You'd have to know it was there to find it, even if you were standing right next to it, and even in that case, it was hard.

The others climbed down from their trailers. Emily stretched, working out the stiffness from days of travel and relentless meditation.

Amber observed their surroundings while Mira went to examine the cave entrance.

"Have we reached the place?" she asked. But it was clear she already knew the answer.

"Yes. This is one of the access points. The network extends for kilometers beneath us, all the way to the Law Gate's foundations."

Mira nodded.

"We shouldn't waste time standing around here."

She strode toward the entrance, and the others followed.

The group entered the tunnel, followed by the Chimaeric Demons pulling their trailers. Darkness enveloped them, broken only by the beams of electric torches.

The Chimaeric Demons chose not to install permanent lights. This made it harder for others to spot the tunnels and saved them time and effort, but it made it harder to see.

A pungent odor hit the group soon after. Emily wrinkled her nose, unable to hide her disgust. "What is that smell?"

The answer was obvious for many reasons. Emily asked that more out of habit, rather than ignorance.

"The Thaid corpses, my lady," a nearby clone said. "We've gathered tens of thousands of them throughout the nation and brought them here. This is an unfortunate side effect."

"Yeah... I guessed," Emily said.

Erik looked around the tunnel. The walls were sturdy, with drains built into the floor and walls reinforced with different kinds of alloys.

His Chimaeric Demons did their job well. This place was enormous enough to hide their army and was built in such a way as to be used as a base.

Erik turned to one of the Chimaeric Demons.

"When can we start?" Erik asked.

"The reanimation process is already underway," the clone said. "Our brothers estimate one hour to raise the entire force."

"Good. I want to launch the attack today. The longer we wait, the worse the fight will be."

Further down the tunnels, the Chimaeric Demons were in a flurry of activity. Thousands of them were raising the dead thaid. Individually, they couldn't yet use many of them, a couple each, at best, but they could make them use their powers.

That didn't matter, though, because there were enough Chimaeric Demons for them to be able to raise the whole undead army without problems.

The atmosphere grew more oppressive as they went deeper into the tunnel complex. Though the earth's musty scent was present from the start, the stench of decay intensified with each step deeper into the tunnel.

The group started getting used to it, at least to the point they didn't feel the need to gag anymore. More Chimaeric Demons came out of side tunnels. Each one stopped to show respect to their creator before going back to work.

"We recently extended the tunnels, master," a clone said as they walked. "The recent downpours actually helped us. They hid the noise from our digging and made the soil soft."

Erik nodded, pleased. "Are they safe?"

"Yes, master."

He paused.

"What about the blackguards—are we sure they haven't heard our digging?"

"Yes. We would have already been attacked, otherwise."

Of that, the Chimaeric Demons were sure.

They entered a room that looked like a command center. Maps were all over the walls, showing the tunnel system and how close it was to the Law Gate. Chimaeric Demons were busy organizing everything.

"Let's get this started," Erik said. He then turned to a Chimaeric Demon. He didn't want to waste even a second.

"Explain the current situation."

The clone nodded and stepped forward. He pointed at the largest map. "Our forces are distributed throughout these sections. The Thaid corpses are stored in these chambers. The main assault groups will come out from here, here, and here." His finger traced the exit points.

June studied the map. "Are you sure this will work? We won't be able to bring the barrier down unless we cut off its energy source. We will only lose troops."

"It will, esteemed elder brother," the clone said. "We planned this deeply, and each group knows its role. The goal is not to destroy the barrier anyway, but just to give our master time to do his part. There is no way he will fail. The barrier will be deactivated."

Erik nodded. "As we said, the undead will be there just to distract the enemy, and, well, after we do our part, to slay their troops."

Erik's expression hardened, his eyes turning cold and the room getting silent. There was only bloodshed in his mind.

Amber went closer to the map and examined the marked positions. "The northern exit puts us dangerously close to their heavy weapon."

"It's intentional," the clone said. "We will make it look like we are trying to enter from that area. We thought the best thing would be to do this with you entering the opposite one. This way, you should have fewer problems while inside the barrier."

"The blackguards will find this weird."

"We can do nothing about that," the clone said.

Erik turned to Emily. "Can you try to see something?"

She nodded and channeled mana through her neural links. It didn't take much before she started seeing something. Vague, of course.

"The initial confusion will help us. I see... chaos in their ranks. But after that..." She frowned. "It becomes unclear again."

"Nothing else?"

"No. You know how this works. I will need to try again to see, but it will take time before I will be able to steer the visions to something we need, and even more to find out something through them..."

More Chimaeric Demons arrived, bringing status reports from throughout the complex. The resurrection process proceeded on schedule. The undead were already heading to the exits.

"Master," a clone approached. "The first wave is ready."

"Let's see..."

Erik followed the clone to the place. Rows of Thaid corpses lay in formation. "You got many flying thaid." "You got many flying thaid."

"Yes," the Chimaeric Demon said. "It was easy to get them, but I do not honestly know if they will be enough. Etrium's technology made flying thaid much less threatening than before."

"At least they will create confusion," June said.

"How many in total?" Mira asked.

"Over 10 thousand in this section alone," the clone said. "The remaining chambers have similar numbers."

Erik nodded.

"Let me know when you are ready," Erik said. "As for you," he turned to Mira, Amber, Emily, and June. "We will go over the plan again."

#### Chapter 1169: The Other Side

Bill stood in his office at the Law Gate, studying the reports scattered across his broad mahogany desk.

The past months hadn't been easy at all. With Monica's death, only he remained behind to ensure all the blackguards from the human continent traversed the ocean and went to Mur.

Many lives were lost.

Maps and displays covered the walls. On them were markers showing troop positions and defensive installations.

The markers also showed the places where the blackguards believed Erik's troops were.

The blackguards even found some of the forest bases, yet they didn't know that most of Erik's troops took the place of Hin's troops months ago.

The latest intelligence updates said nothing about their enemy and his troops.

"Any news about Erik Romano yet?"

Bill's attendant's boots clicked against the floor. The blackguard's uniform bore the Enforcers' insignia.

"No, Commander. Our agents spotted him in Sleeb Harbor three days ago, but after that, there is no more news about him."

Bill's expression hardened. After Monica's defeat, there was only one thing for Erik Romano to do: kill him.

Sure, that was part of the whole blackguards purging, something he himself was helping Erik to do by sending the blackguards on Mur. Yet the two had different reasons. Bill wanted to save his soldiers; Erik to kill them.



As the Law Gate was the blackguards' last major stronghold on Hin, Bill knew Erik would not rest until it fell.

"What about his army?"

"Several of them had been seen reaching the main island and heading to Sleb Harbor."

"Hin's army did nothing?"

"Based on what we know, sir, they didn't even notice them."

Bill slammed his fist on the desk, sending papers flying. His face turned crimson with rage as he paced the room like a caged animal.

"Incompetent fools!" he roared, sweeping a stack of reports off his desk. They scattered across the floor in a chaotic mess. "We've spent years training them, equipping them, and this is the best they can do? FOOLS!"

The veins in his neck bulged as he grabbed a map from the wall and crumpled it in his hands.

"Their enemy is here, on their land, yet they are so useless as to even fail to find them."

The attending blackguard took a cautious step back, having rarely seen his commander lose control like this. After a moment, Bill took several deep breaths.

Bill's attendant tried calming him down. "They don't have our agents, sir. It would be hard for them to do that."

Bill could only sigh at that, because he knew the man was right. Erik's soldiers were strong, and only powerful scouts would be able to find them.

The blackguards themselves were in the same situation the previous year, when their troops didn't have a lot of neural links in their second brain crystal power and when many of their troops didn't even have a second ability.

Bill walked to the window. Below, the Law Gate's massive defenses stretched out like a labyrinth.

Bill chose to remain here at Monica's suggestion, but the guard towers, the anti-air guns, the barrier, and the hundreds of thousands of troops there made him feel safe.

That was because he knew all these things failed for Monica. That was because he knew he might die if he ended up fighting against Erik.

However, despite that scaring him, he knew it was his duty to give the First Division Commander more time for her research team to complete their project, and Bill intended to give it to her, even if it meant facing that monster firsthand.

"Send orders to our agents," Bill said, his fingers drumming against the windowsill. "I want every aircraft destroyed. We have waited enough. If there are more blackguards on Mannard, they will be alone."

The attendant's jaw tightened, and his shoulders tensed. He had served under Bill for years, but the order to destroy their only means of escape felt like signing their own death warrant. His fingers unconsciously curled into fists at his sides as he struggled to maintain his professional composure.

"Sir, if the situation deteriorates, we'll have no escape route."

Bill paused.

"We don't have them regardless," the man said. Then a brief silence ensued.

"I don't want to risk Erik getting his hands on our aircraft," Bill said firmly. "If he captures even one of our ships, he could use it to reach Mur. We can't let that happen. The consequences would be catastrophic."

The blackguard hesitated, his posture stiffening. "We will need to destroy the hangar..."

"Better lost than in his hands," Bill cut him off, turning to face the soldier. "Erik Romano must not reach Mur."

The blackguard's shoulders slumped slightly. He knew the order's implications—destroying their escape route meant committing completely to this fight.

"Sir..." he started, then caught himself. Years of military discipline took over. The second division commander's logic was sound, even if the order was difficult to accept. With a deep breath, he straightened his posture.

"I'll see to it personally, Commander," he said. "The hangar will be destroyed within the hour. What about our defensive preparations?"

Bill moved back to his desk, picking up schematics of the Law Gate's defensive systems. The fortress-like city had been designed to be impregnable, its walls having the latest military technology from Etrium.

These certainly worked against Thaidi. Well, they worked even against humans, but they were not exactly thought to fight against people. There were ways to destroy them, to render them ineffective. If they worked against Erik Romano and his troops, that wasn't something easy to say.

"Put all units on high alert. Double the guard rotations, especially around the outer perimeter. Erik won't wait long to attack, especially not if he had been spotted on Sleeb Harbor."

Then a chilling thought crossed the Enforcer's mind.

"Sir, do you... Do you perhaps think he left Maynard Island because he is going to attack?"

The soldier's question reflected the widespread anxiety that had gripped everyone since Monica's defeat.

"He remained on Maynard Island for months," Bill nodded. "He is a smart fella, and his intelligence is not inferior to ours. I would say it is even better. But he'll come, and if he left Maynard Island, it means he is going to reach this place soon."

...

...

...

The two kept talking for a while.

"What's the status of our forces?" He moved to a tactical display showing troop distributions throughout the Law Gate.

"All units are ready for combat, sir. But..." the soldier paused. "Morale plummeted after news of the third division commander's defeat spread. The soldiers are... restless."

The news of Monica's defeat had spread already among the troops, sowing fear and doubt. There was not a way to prevent that information from reaching the soldiers. However, the result was that even battle-hardened veterans were unnerved by Erik Romano's army.

Bill knew fear could be very dangerous. He had seen how it could weaken discipline, break unity, and make soldiers lose hope.

The soldiers now questioned whether defending the Law Gate was worthwhile or if it was just a way to delay the inevitable. Regardless, everything was going to result in their death.

Bill knew he had to improve his soldiers' spirits. For any army to fight well, the soldiers needed to believe in themselves. Right now, his troops lost that belief.

His troops needed a clear sign of leadership. By maintaining a strong defensive position and staying to face the threat head-on, he would show his soldiers that their commander trusted in their abilities and was committed to their success.

<I need to fight on the first line, contrary to what Monica did. If Erik Romano shows himself, I will have to fight him.>

This didn't mean he couldn't employ some tactics against him.

Despite having multiple opportunities to withdraw his forces, Bill remained at his post.

It helped that the Thaidi on Mur were getting restless, and attacks on the first division were increasing. The first division commander had been forced to hide, creating a hideout in the Lorogia Region.

Since the biological supercomputer had been created in that region, finding a hideout there was a straightforward decision. The first division commander simply repurposed one of the existing laboratories to shelter his troops.

There were many places like that, most already taken by the blackguards, but there were some still hidden in the jungle.

"Monica underestimated him," Bill said, remembering his colleague's last communication. "We won't make the same mistake."

Yet even as he spoke, Bill felt unease growing in his gut. Their retreat from Frant had cost them valuable resources and manpower. The entire war did.

<Damn Volkov.>

Trapped on Hin, they now faced an enemy who had already defeated some of their best fighters. Bill could only hope that the time he gave to the first division would be enough to make them strong enough to at least resist him.

"Send word to all Sentinels," Bill said. "I want hourly status reports. If Erik moves against us, we need to be ready."

The blackguards saluted and left. Bill returned to his maps, studying possible attack vectors. The Law Gate's defenses were strong, but Erik Romano had shown a troubling ability to accomplish the impossible.

"One way or another," Bill said to himself, "this ends here."

#### Chapter 1170: A Dangerous Experiment

Deep in the jungle of Mur, an underground lab was swarming with personnel. Scientists in lab coats worked at their stations, checking instruments, adjusting equipment, and writing notes about the latest experiments.

The lab was heavily guarded, with armed security personnel making regular patrols while carrying high-tech scanning devices.

Their faces were hidden behind protective helmets and masks. Up above, in the treetops, camouflaged scouts kept an eye on the surroundings, working in groups of three to maintain constant surveillance.

The thaids in the area were powerful and very aggressive. In a place like Mur, where fighting for survival was a constant, the monsters developed an aggressiveness that even those on Mannard did not have.

It was a hostile and unforgiving expanse.

The blackguards had learned this lesson through painful experience. In just the past month, three patrol units had been attacked. The first lost two men when a thaid burst from underground. The second unit barely escaped when their barrier master's mana ended. The third never made it back to base.

That was, with the blackguards doing their best not to be seen, even resorting to moving underground. The problem was that thaids were everywhere.

Traditional military tactics proved ineffective here. The thaids showed an uncanny ability to adapt to their strategies, and their attack patterns grew more sophisticated with each encounter.

The blackguards were at a disadvantage here. Their technology, advanced as it was, often proved insufficient against the unpredictable nature of the thaids, while brain crystal powers were not powerful enough to kill such creatures.

Equipment malfunctioned in the oppressive humidity, and the creatures' endless variety made even the most detailed contingency plans ineffective.

The jungle was the monsters' domain, and every step the blackguards took felt like an intrusion into something ancient and malevolent.

For all their discipline and firepower, they knew they were vulnerable here, which made them feel deeply unsettled, given that they were the apex predators on Mannard continent.

Vania, standing amidst the sterile light of the laboratory, understood this all too well. She had seen the reports, read the statistics, and even joined many fights on their way to the Lorogia region.

She had been a salvation many times, but she, the stronger fighter here, was but an ant compared to the thaid.

Vania came here to make sure the work their scientists were working on proceeded smoothly. Yet she didn't know the specifics; she only knew what the goal was. That wasn't her role, and for sure, she didn't care about the process. She wanted results.

As soon as she saw her, Dr. Lena jumped to her feet and greeted her.

"First division commander... To what do we owe the pleasure of your visit?" The woman kept a respectful tone.

"Dr. Lena," Vania said. "I came to know about the current status of the serum."

The lead scientist averted her eyes from her leader. Dark circles under her eyes betrayed long hours of work, and her voice betrayed a hint of anxiousness.

"Commander, we're in the final stages of stabilization," she said. "The initial tests are encouraging, but we had a significant problem."

The first division commander didn't like those words. "The test subjects experienced severe behavioral changes—they became extremely aggressive and lost control of their rational faculties, requiring immediate sedation. We had to suppress them on several occasions."

Vania stepped closer, her boots clicking against the floor.

"What's causing this loss of control?" Vania asked. If that was the result, the serum could not be used.

Dr. Lena hesitated. Then she started explaining the problem. The woman could not tell the first division commander about this. She was the one who was going to make the last decision, and she needed to know everything that was needed to do that.

"The feral behavior seems to result from the serum's interaction with the amygdala and limbic system. We've seen a significant increase in neural activity within these regions, particularly in the basolateral complex. This seems to be triggering an overproduction of norepinephrine and cortisol, essentially putting the subjects into a constant state of fight-or-flight."

She paused, pulling up a holographic model of a brain. "We've also noticed a marked decrease in activity in the prefrontal cortex, specifically in the areas responsible for impulse control and decision-making. When the emotional parts of the brain become too active and the thinking parts become less active, people become more aggressive and have trouble controlling their behavior. The same is for thaids. No, it's worse, because thaids do not have our developed brain."

Vania remained silent.

"We're currently exploring ways to solve this problem," Dr. Lena said. "We identified two main ways to solve this," the woman said.

"First, we're trying to use certain chemicals that can calm down overactive brain cells. Second, we're working on particles that can deliver medication directly to specific parts of the brain. Both of these methods are meant to reduce the aggressive behavior we've seen in our test subjects."

Vania nodded. "Okay. How long will it take to fix this problem?"

"We don't know yet, sir..." The woman paused.

The first division commander sighed. With Erik Romano steadily advancing toward Mur, their window of opportunity was shrinking.

<If only we had caught Lucius before he gave his son that damn thing...>

They would have been not only in possession of the biological supercomputer but even of the crafting procedure, because with the biological supercomputer, there would be someone strong enough to protect them from thaids. They would have found the old Silverline corporation's laboratories much faster, and not at a snail's pace like this.



"How many brain crystal powers could your specimen get with this version of the serum?"

"Nine, Commander," Dr. Lena said. "The serum's current formulation would allow for that many stable integrations. The problem is that our specimen never kept their sanity. It is almost like..."

"It is almost like the sinister cold, right?"

The doctor nodded. "If I may ask, sir, is there a connection to this and...?"

"Them? Indeed."

Vania sighed. "Mind If I ask you, sir?"

The first division commander hesitated. In the end, she didn't reply, and doctor Lena didn't pry further.

Vania's expression tightened. She wasn't sure nine powers were enough to defeat Erik Romano and get the biological supercomputer, but maybe it was enough for them to get strong enough to search the laboratories for the biological supercomputer crafting procedure.

While their research did a lot to make them stronger, in the end, it was just a pale imitation of what Erik Romano had.

The blackguards' main goal had always been to get it from him. The problem was that the kid was getting stronger and stronger, meaning that they had to get stronger too if they wanted to get their hands on it.

"That's not enough," Vania said, running her fingers along the edge of the desk. Her tone made it clear she was not satisfied with the current results.

"But Commander, there's more to the serum than just that," Dr. Lena said eagerly. "Its real strength is in how it improves neural links formation. It acts as a potent catalyst, making the creation process much faster and more reliable than before."

This caught Vania's attention. Their greatest disadvantage against Erik had been his inexplicable ability to form neural links at a fast pace. If they could match that capability...

"Explain further," she said, moving to examine the models floating on the holographic display.

"The serum enhances mana control, creating better conditions for the formation of neural links," Dr. Lena said. "Our projections suggest a five-fold increase in formation speed and success rate compared to brain-stimulating serums, which means 25 times the normal speed."

If that was true, then they might have a chance. "Excellent, Doctor."

Dr. Lena adjusted her glasses, hesitating before speaking again. "Commander, has there been any progress regarding finding... that location?"

They were talking about the lab where the biological supercomputer was made. It was somewhere in the Lorigia region. Years ago, Lucius Romano was seen in that area, and not long after, Erik's Romano got in possession of the biological supercomputer.

As a researcher, she was interested in knowing how Erik's biological supercomputer worked and how it was made. If she got her hands on it, or on the crafting project, she might be able to do much more.

Vania's jaw tightened. The search for that lab had consumed a lot of resources, yet they failed to find it. The jungle concealed its secrets well, and Lucius had covered his tracks masterfully. He was Lucius Romano, after all. A shadow among shadows. The best agent in Frant.

"Nothing concrete yet, but we're narrowing down the search area. Lucius Romano's presence in the region wasn't coincidental, and his son's abilities prove the facility is here."

"The biological supercomputer's creation process..."

There was silence after that.

"Continue your work on the serum, Doctor," the first division commander said.

"I'll assign additional search teams to find the lab."

"Commander," Dr. Lena said before Vania left. "There's one more thing. The serum's testing phase... we'll need volunteers to see if it works the same on humans as it does on Thaidi."

Vania stopped at the door. "Use the prisoners. Their sentences were death anyway—at least this way, they serve a purpose."