

## BIOLOGICAL 1181

### Chapter 1181: Flight and Fight

The Vindicators scaled the building with inhuman speed. Their armored hands and feet easily gripped every tiny edge and windowsill, making them move like spiders on steroids as they crossed multiple stories in mere seconds.

Emily, crouched by the window, was looking at the building where Amber and Mira were taking care of the barrier masters without moving her rifle to make sure she was ready to strike in case something bad happened. It was then that a sound caught her attention-the subtle click of weapons being readied.

<This is not good...>

The world slowed to a crawl as she activated her Time Freeze brain crystal power, the familiar sensation washing over her like honey dripping from a spoon. Colors dimmed slightly, and sounds became muffled, stretching each millisecond into what felt like several seconds.

Two mana bullets hung motionless in the air, like fireflies caught in slow motion, aimed at her head.

However, in front of them was a bird, whose wings spread wide.

<What the hell, June?>

The clone moved to intercept the bullets, intercepting them to prevent the young woman from getting harmed, and was ready to sacrifice himself to save her. He was going to die. She pushed off the ground while her mana was getting drained by the massive amount she was using to slow time that much. It would be easy to just get out of harm's way, but she couldn't just let June die.

Emily grabbed the clone-turned-bird and jumped off the building. The mana drain

intensified, forcing her to release the Time Freeze. Reality snapped back to normal speed. The bullets shattered the concrete where she'd stood moments before.

She clutched June to her chest and leaped from the building. Wind whipped past as they plummeted toward the street.

Her legs absorbed the impact of the landing. Her knees bent to distribute the force across her muscles.

The concrete cracked beneath her feet as she did, and then the woman pushed forward, accelerating into a rapid sprint that left footprints in the pavement.

"What—" June shifted back to human form, running beside her. "How did we get here?" "Saved your life," Emily said between breaths. "Who are those guys?"

June noticed the clear silver insignias on their chests—each showed a simple V with two swords crossing behind it.

"Vindicators. The ones patrolling this sector, at least I think."

Behind them, the vindicators slammed into the street. Their boots punched through the concrete on impact, sending cracks shooting out in all directions. The force of their landing split the pavement like glass.

The concrete gave way under their weight like paper, leaving craters that showed just how much their armor was.

They both wore blackguard combat suits. However, these suits differed from those worn by Terra, Vex, Restro, and Levium.

Their armor was reinforced with plates June recognized as being made with Mernium, the second strongest mana-conductive metal in existence.

The metal plates covered their chest, shoulders, and legs. A single plate of Mernium this size would cost more than most people earned in a lifetime.

That was a pricey material. Even a gram was sold for millions. Yet these guys had thick and large plates on their armor. Either the blackguards found veins of such ore on Mur, which was likely, or they simply didn't care about money anymore.

"Any ideas on how to handle them?" Emily asked. The plan was for the entire group to attack together, but now there were only her and June, and the clone was way too weak for him to be of any utility.

June glanced back.

The Vindicators moved with the same grace of predatory cats, but looked like giant bulls. They were so muscular that their muscles rippled beneath their armor and were clearly visible beneath it. Based on June's estimations, they were nearly seven feet tall.

They were not just graceful, despite the size and the armor plates. They were also fast, and, most importantly, they were gaining ground with each stride.

They were much faster than him. Emily was slowing down to allow June to keep up with her, but that was making things worse. "We need to regroup with the others. You can't take them alone."

"The others won't make it in time before they kill us!"

The Vindicators shot as soon as Amber warped herself and the others inside. They basically just started the fight. There couldn't be worse timing.

Besides, it looked like they had come prepared to capture their target with something less lethal than their brain crystal powers and one that would allow them to do the job without wasting mana.

What Emily and June didn't know was that Amber and the others were almost done with their targets.

The problem was that even if they were, there was no assurance they would be able to get to them on time, but they were going to try their best.

Anyway, there wasn't much the two could do aside from staying alive.

"Three Chimaeric Demons are with them. They'll finish quickly-we just need to buy some time," June said.

Emily's hand instinctively moved to her hip, where her radio should have been. With their situation growing more desperate by the second, she needed to contact the others and let them know she and June were being chased by not one but two Vindicators. A quick message would be enough—just something to alert them they needed immediate backup. However, she found empty air where it should have been. "I lost my radio."

Most likely, it fell on the rooftop where she took position. In the meantime, the Vindicators closed the distance.

June briefly made a face of horror but then quickly composed himself. There was no point in losing his cool.

"We need to get back to the building then," he said. "The others will search there first when they realize we're missing, and the farther we are, the worse it will be."

Emily's speed had already carried them nearly two kilometers away from their starting point. Even at their reduced pace to accommodate June, they covered ground quickly.

This meant they were significantly farther from the building where Emily had initially taken her sniper position, and the road was not a straight line. If they wanted to head back there, they would need to go through the fortress-like city.

<It's not like we have a choice...>

Emily sprinted down the street. Each stride covered more ground than the average human could manage, but she couldn't reach her full speed—not while keeping pace with June. The clone could shapeshift and take the sky, but he refused, especially because he wouldn't make it in time to protect the woman in case something happened.

Besides, the clone was constantly keeping the two Vindicators under his sight, and he often warned Emily of their attacks, allowing her to dodge.

If he was not going to be there, Emily would have to do that alone. Not only would she lose time, but she would also risk being hit.

For both June and Emily, the Vindicators' footsteps thundered behind them like massive steel hammers striking an anvil. It scared them because they knew each step brought the Vindicators closer, and being pursued by heavily armored soldiers wasn't exactly the most pleasant of the situations.

The massive soldiers in their Mernium-plated armor were gaining ground, and the situation didn't even allow June and Emily to do anything about it.

"Be careful!"

Emily moved to the side just in time. A mana bullet sizzled past her shoulder. It was so close to her head that she smelled the ozone. Another scorched the ground near June's feet. The Vindicators weren't trying to kill them--not yet, at least. Perhaps they wanted to capture them to use as leverage against Erik, assuming they knew their connection to him, or simply to extract information about their mission.

It didn't change things. If they got caught, a world of pain was going to come for both of them.

Besides, the Vindicators likely understood what the two wanted to do. Head back, and they were doing their best to prevent them from doing so. Crippling one of the two was going to do the job.

"Left!" June said. He was helping the woman by acting as a navigator.

They went into a narrow alley. The small space gave them some advantage--the Vindicators' larger frames couldn't maneuver as easily between the walls. But it also trapped them on a predictable path and made them easier targets.

Emily's lungs burned. The earlier use of Time Freeze had drained a lot of her mana. She couldn't even understand how Vex was able to use it so often and so well. Of course, Time Freeze must have been the man's birth brain crystal power, and he likely had years to learn

how to use it efficiently.

June ran beside her, his face tight.

"How far to the building?" she asked.

"Six blocks," June said. Another shot sparked off a wall near Emily's shoulder. They burst out of the alley onto a wider

street.

Emily's heart sank.

"This is the wrong place!"

June was right. The Vindicators had strategically herded them with each shot and pursuit

angle, forcing them in the wrong direction. Even June, who rarely made such errors, had been

outmaneuvered.

Chapter 1182: A Flight of Fear

"We must slow them down!"

"What do you suggest?!" Emily asked, ducking to avoid a mana bullet that scorched the air where her head had been moments before.

"Try using your powers to shoot at them! They will be forced to evade, and that gives us precious seconds!"

"What about you?"

"Just pick me up!"

June then shapeshifted into a bird again and spread his wings to be carried. He didn't want to fly away, albeit it would have been good to find help. He was too scared to leave her, and her dying, if he did.

June wouldn't actually be that useful even if he remained, but his worry didn't allow him to leave.

Emily veered to the right, taking a sharp turn down a narrow side street. The Vindicators adjusted their course, their boots scraping against the pavement.

One of the Vindicators raised his arm, the metallic plating of his armor glinting as he took aim. His eyes narrowed behind his visor. He squeezed the trigger, sending a burst of mana bullets streaking through the air.

Emily avoided them all, but one of them whizzed past close to her ear.

<That was close!>

She didn't even know how she avoided that. Maybe luck just played a part in that. There was no doubt, though, that if the bullet hit her, she would have been dead.

<I need to do something...>

The alley had given her an idea. The problem was that she was already out of it, and to do what she had in mind, she needed another alley.

The good thing about it was that even if her plan didn't work, at least she might be able to injure them enough to make them desist from chasing.

Here was the problem, though. These guys were Vindicators, and it didn't matter what Emily did. They would still chase her. Besides, these guys didn't use their brain crystal power yet, and she had no idea what they could do.

She ducked into an alley, the clone following overhead. The narrow passage forced their pursuers to slow down, unable to maintain their speed in the confined space.

Emily activated her Time Freeze brain crystal power. The world crawled around her—dust motes hung in the air, the Vindicators' movements reduced to a glacial pace. She raised her weapon, channeling mana into each shot of her brain crystal rifle.

The barrage erupted—a stream of mana bullets hung in the air for what Emily would have said for many seconds. She watched them slice through the slowed time, then get out of her range and crawl down to the world's speed.

The frontmost Vindicator's hand moved. Somehow, he got enough reaction speed to notice the mana bullets as soon as they left Emily's range. He was still slow in Emily's perception, but faster than any normal human was outside of her power's effects. Light coalesced in his hands, forming a brilliant blade of what the young woman assumed was coalesced and materialized light.

Emily's eyes widened as the Vindicator's sword carved through the first of her mana bullets. The shots split cleanly in two, the halves dissipating into sparkles of energy.

<Light powers,> Emily thought.

These were rare brain crystal powers, and for good reason. Like lightning, light-based attacks moved faster than anyone could perceive. Only Vex had been able to avoid those kinds of attacks when Erik used them, while the others could only create protections.

The difference between her and Vex was that she didn't know how to use her powers well enough to accomplish the same feat.

Emily wasn't sure how Vex had managed during the battle on Maynard Island. Though she had seen him move incredibly fast, her experience with the same power suggested he must have only slowed time down—and even then, light would still move swiftly.

This meant the Vindicator was likely avoiding attacks through expert positioning and careful strategy. His mastery allowed him to use his powers efficiently, perhaps slowing time just enough to dodge incoming attacks.

There was no way to know that, but Emily knew well that bridge had already burned for her, since she had to use a lot of mana just to survive and escape these guys.



There was also another difference between them. Vex was not alone. When fighting against a beast like Erik, he relied on his comrades, something she couldn't currently do.

Besides, while there were ways to stop lightning, there was no known way to stop light. <Things would only get worse if the Vindicator has some kind of ranged attack-energy beams, and something like that.> She couldn't risk finding out.

Time still moved like molasses around her as she grabbed June. The clone's wings folded against her grip, but he was unable to understand what was happening. Everything was simply too fast for the clone.

Emily pumped more mana into her neural links, pushing her Time Freeze more, but also increasing the mana drain on her reserves. She needed every fraction of a second she could get if she wanted to escape.

She sprinted down the alley. The Vindicators followed, but their movements were still much slower than those of the young woman.

The light sword still gleamed in the lead pursuer's hand. Then she left them behind. Sweat beaded on her forehead. Maintaining the Time Freeze brain crystal power was hard, but she couldn't release it yet. Not until they gained enough distance.

The surrounding buildings passed in a blur as Emily raced forward. From her perspective, she moved at her normal running speed while everything else appeared frozen in time.

The world took on an eerie slowness, like a 0.057 video, while to any observers she would appear as nothing more than a lightning-fast streak through the streets. The stark contrast between her fluid movement and the motionless environment reminded her of just how powerful her Time Freeze ability was.

She clutched June closer, protecting him from the whiplash of her acceleration. The clone remained still, unable to even understand what was going on.

The alley opened onto a wider street. Emily knew they were going to be exposed, but the straight shot to their destination might be worth the risk. The alternative meant more turns, meaning more chances for the Vindicators to attack.

<I should be far enough...>

Her Time Freeze shuddered again. The world sped up around her as her power waned. Then it stopped.

June found himself pressed against Emily's chest, disoriented and confused after the sudden burst of speed. His small size made it also difficult to get his bearings, and the world around him seemed to have changed completely in just a few seconds.

"What the... Where are we?"

"I had to improvise a little!"

"Ok, but where are we exactly? I can't recognize any of these buildings after that sudden burst of speed," June said.

"We are closer! That's the important thing!"

Emily maintained a brave face, but fear gripped her chest. Her hands trembled, and her heart pounded against her ribs.

Fighting two Vindicators alone was dangerous-even with her Time Freeze power.

Besides, a storm of thoughts was going on in her mind. What if the others weren't done yet?

What if they already left, searching for her? What if they didn't find her and she ended up killed, or worse, captured, by these two guys?

She paused. "June! Go search for the others!"

"What? I can't leave you alone!"

"June!" She shouted. "Sorry, but you are slowing me down! Besides, the faster we find the others, the faster we can get out of this mess!"

Despite the harsh words, the clone knew she was right. With a nod, June spread his wings and launched himself from her arm. He quickly gained altitude, soaring straight up into the clear sky to search for their companions.

<Almost there,> she thought. <Just a little further.>

Emily could scale the building to find the others, as June did. The problem was that it would give way to her position. She couldn't allow that.

The Vindicators' heavy boots thundered against the pavement behind her, their metallic footsteps growing faster and closer with each passing second. However, now that June wasn't there anymore, she could increase her speed a little.

<Damn! They are already here!>

Emily could practically feel their presence behind her.

The building loomed ahead, its brick walls just fifty meters away. Emily's heart raced-if Amber and the team had completed their mission, if they were searching the area for her right now, she only needed to survive for some other minutes. Just some minutes of running, dodging, and staying ahead of these Vindicators.

She stumbled but kept her footing and kept running. Then she reached the building and

jumped up.

"Ye-"

A beam of light cut through the air where her head had been a moment before. Emily ducked instinctively, rolling in mid-air to maintain her momentum, but lost the chance to grab something. She started falling down. The Vindicator really had a ranged attack ability-

exactly what she'd feared.

### Chapter 1183: Cornered

Emily landed in a crouch, her muscles coiled like springs. She activated Time Freeze again but kept the effect minimal-just enough to give her an edge against the two Vindicators while conserving her remaining mana.

The first Vindicator lunged, his light sword carving a brilliant arc through the air. In her slowed perception, Emily saw the attack coming and rolled beneath it, but it was hard.

She sprang up inside his guard, her fist connecting with his ribs. The armor absorbed most of the impact, though.

The second Vindicator circled around, trying to flank her. Emily ducked a sweeping kick, countering with a leg sweep of her own. Her opponent jumped over it - even in slowed time, their reflexes kept them dangerous.

Light flashed. Emily barely twisted away as an energy beam seared past her shoulder. To avoid it, the young woman had to slow time down a lot, further draining her mana reserves.

<This is not good.>

Emily made many neural links for Vex's brain crystal power, but she didn't know how to use it for melee fighting. Vex most likely used it in short bursts, which was what Emily was trying to do. The problem was the timing.

Her brain needed to process multiple variables at once-the speed and direction of incoming attacks, the position of both opponents, and the drain on her mana reserves.

Using Time Freeze too early would waste precious energy, but activating it too late could mean taking a hit.

Unlike regular combat, where muscle memory could guide her, this power required split- second conscious decisions.

It was like trying to catch raindrops-wait too long and you're already wet; move too early and your hand tires before the rain even falls. The neural links gave her access to the power, but mastering its efficient use was another challenge entirely.

She found herself unable to understand when to use it and when not to.

The first Vindicator pressed his advantage. Emily weaved between strikes, looking for an opening.

In her slowed perception, she watched his movements unfold like a dance. The Vindicator's sword arm traced arcs, each strike precise, and each movement measured.

His footwork shifted, weight transferring from heel to toe as he advanced. Even his armor plates seemed to flow like liquid metal, catching the light as he moved.

Emily saw the subtle tension in his shoulders telegraph his next attack. His blade came down in a diagonal slash that would have been blindingly fast at normal speed. But in her slowed- down time, she could see him move well enough to find the minute adjustments in his grip, the way his elbow locked to guide the strike.

She waited until the last possible moment. Even if she slowed time down, the man was still fast, and dodging the strike was all but easy.

When his commitment to the attack left a fraction of his defense open, she slipped her dagger through the gap in his guard. Her dagger found his shoulder, but the blade wasn't sharp enough to pierce his armor.

Then a punch caught her in the kidney. The second Vindicator had closed in while she focused on the sword from the other dude.

The pain exploded through her side, radiating outward like liquid fire. Emily gritted her teeth, fighting the urge to double over.

She poured more mana into Time Freeze, pushing the power further than before. The world slowed more, giving her precious moments to recover.

Her elbow caught the second attacker in the throat-a lucky strike that gave her the chance to move away.

Using the temporal effect, she staggered backward, despite the throbbing in her kidney. The increased drain on her reserves was substantial, but she needed the breathing room.

The air felt thick, like moving through honey, but it was worth the cost to put distance between herself and her attackers.

<Now I'm certain. They want to capture me.> She thought, panting.

Otherwise, she would have been dead already. If the Vindicator attacked with his brain crystal power or using a weapon, she would have had no way to avoid it.

However, the Vindicators were not going to stop soon. So, they dashed toward the young woman.

Once they were in striking range, the sword came for her once again. Emily dropped low, the blade passing so close it singed her hair.

She grabbed the Vindicator's wrist, trying to disarm him, but that was a mistake, because it was clear the guy was better than her with grips.

He twisted his arm, breaking her grip, and in the same motion, brought his sword down in a devastating overhead strike that would have cleaved her in two. At least that was what she thought.

Without even thinking, Emily avoided the attack, albeit barely, by throwing herself backwards, the blade's energy trail leaving a faint burn mark on her shirt as it passed within inches of her chest.

Emily stumbled but kept her footing. Both Vindicators pressed forward, coordinating their attacks. A punch followed by a sword thrust. A kick synchronized with an energy beam. Each combination forced her to spend more mana maintaining the Time Freeze.

Emily soon found herself gasping for air, and that was with the other Vindicator not having used his power at all.

"Surrender," one of the Vindicators said.

Emily didn't reply. She knew that if she was caught, things would turn ugly for the others.

<C'mon Emily, you knew what you were getting into when you chose to follow him...> Indeed, she knew following Erik was dangerous, but she couldn't help herself. Love was partially the reason. It was a strong one, for sure, but not the only one.

She wanted to get stronger; she wanted to finally be able to manage everything life and people threw at her.

She lived her life in constant fear of being targeted-the threat of kidnapping and sexual assault loomed over her daily life.

Every dark alley made her heart race. Every stranger's lingering gaze sent chills down her spine. Years of watching over her shoulder had worn her down completely, and even all the guards her father gave her didn't reassure the young woman.

If her beauty was going to be a curse, she was determined to transform enough to break that curse. She needed to become strong enough that no one would dare threaten her again.

Taking control of her destiny meant more than just surviving-it meant thriving without fear. Erik offered a path to that strength, and she had to seize it.

Emily caught a sword strike with her dagger. Light made metal screeching against metal. The second Vindicator's fist hammered into her ribs. Emily gasped but countered, her knee driving into his solar plexus.

The sword wielder changed tactics, switching to quick thrusts that forced her to dodge. Each movement drained more energy.

A glancing blow opened a cut on her cheek. Another strike numbed her left arm. The

Vindicators sensed her fatigue, pressing harder.

<Where the hell are the others?> It was taking them too long to arrive. If they had left, they

should have seen her. Unless...

<Unless they left to search for me before I got back here...>

At this point, her only chance of salvation hinged on June finding her comrades.

Emily's back hit a wall. The sword came for her chest-a killing blow. She diverted the last of

her mana into Time Freeze, slowing the world to a crawl. The blade inched closer as she

twisted aside.

Her hand found the sword wielder's arm. Using his momentum, she redirected him into his partner. The Vindicators collided, buying her a moment to breathe.

The problem was that her mana reserves were almost completely spent. Emily raised her fists, knowing she couldn't win this fight, but then, her eyes went weird for a moment.

She felt the ground missing, and then reappearing as if mana was involved. She opened her eyes, confusion on her face. She didn't recognize her surroundings.



"Em!"

Emily turned. Amber was in front of her. Emily had never been more glad to see her in her life.

Her fiery red hair almost burning, her face contorted in worry, yes, but also in anger.

"Took you long enough to find me," Emily said, a smile playing at her lips.

"Sorry for the delay," Mira said, landing. Then June and the other clones came.

"We would have never found you if it wasn't for June."

Emily looked at him and nodded.

"I used almost all of my mana..." She said.

"It doesn't matter; we will take care of these guys..."

"Be careful. One of them can create a light sword, and he has a ranged attack. I'm not sure what the other can do. They seemed to be hell-bent on capturing me, so I don't know what they are really capable of with the intent to kill, but they are strong."

Amber nodded. "We have the Chimaeric Demons," Mira chimed in. "Don't worry; we will kill them and complete the next step of our plan. At this point, messing up the schedule is not important. If the Vindicators found you, it means they knew about the attack."

That was a scary thought.

## Chapter 1184: The Invisible Assault (1)

Erik avoided another barrage of invisible hands. Hundreds of spectral appendages carved through space, each promising destruction.

"You're quite fast," Erik said, observing Bill's rapid movements with a calculating gaze. "But I can't help but wonder about your stamina. How long can you keep up with me? Every movement you

make, every attack you dodge, every invisible hand you create-they all drain your energy reserves. I can see the strain in your movements already."

"Long enough."

Erik's plant tendrils whipped through the ranks of foot soldiers at devastating speed. The reinforced vegetation sliced cleanly through armor and bone, sending crimson sprays across the hangar floor as dozens of soldiers fell. Those caught in the attack had no chance to scream before the metallic tendrils tore through their bodies.

Bill's invisible hands surged upward. Erik sensed the distortion in mana flow roll mid-air. He countered by conjuring wind blades, sending them slicing toward the commander.

Erik's wind blades sliced cleanly through several of the invisible hands, causing them to dissipate into wisps of mana. Bill watched this with a calm expression. Losing a few spectral appendages meant little to him.

<He can likely do more of them.>

"Impressive," Bill said with a hint of admiration. "This is the first time someone has lasted against me for this long. Since I got my abilities upgraded by getting the new brain crystal powers, I've ended most fights in seconds." He stepped through Erik's attacks using Speed Burst; he was fast even for Erik. "Though you seem distracted. Are you sure you can waste your focus on the plane?"

The man grinned.

A cold, almost predatory smile played across Erik's face. A soldier near the aircraft raised his weapon. Erik's tendril pierced his chest before he could fire, lifting the corpse into the air as a warning to others.

"Multitasking," the young man said. The will of the hydra was going into overdrive. "It's something not everyone can learn. I guess you are among those without this gift."

The mana around Bill got sucked, then the air rippled as thousands of new invisible hands formed a dome around Erik. "Let's test the limits of this specialty of yours, then."

Erik couldn't see them, but he knew Bill was going to do something big.

<He is going to make more hands.>

Instability didn't lie.

Erik channeled a surge of mana into Tower Bastion, transforming the energy into layers of protective armor that covered his body from head to toe. The metallic plates materialized quickly, interlocking among themselves.

Though he knew the spectral hands would likely go through his defenses, Erik preferred to maintain multiple layers of protection. The armor would at least shield him from any conventional attacks that might slip through during the fight.

He could do nothing but look at Bill with greed. If he could get his hands on his brain crystal power, he might get a further advantage on the Mur Continent.

"Your power is fascinating. It's made purely to destroy. Killing is just an aftereffect." Erik said, launching a counterattack. Fire and ice projectiles rained down, forcing Bill to divide his attention. "But the mana drain must be immense."

"Are you any different? I bet using all those powers is draining you just as much," Bill retorted, his eyes narrowing.

"The constant manipulation of elements, the creation and control of plants, not to mention maintaining that protective armor-it must be taking a toll on your mana reserves. How much longer can you keep this up before you're completely exhausted?"

Bill was right about the mana consumption, but he failed to account for a crucial detail: Erik was steadily gaining experience points with each soldier he killed.

The constant stream of deaths meant Erik would soon trigger a level up, refreshing his mana reserves and increasing his powers.

This was an advantage Bill had no idea of, and that would turn the tables of any fight in which Erik and his opponent were on equal footing.

More soldiers died as Erik's plants swept through their ranks. The metallic tendrils slashed through armor, limbs, and torsos with brutal efficiency.

Bodies fell in heaps across the hangar floor, their blood pooling beneath broken rifles and shattered helmets. The concrete floor disappeared under a growing layer of corpses, dismembered limbs, and mangled tactical gear.

[LEVEL UP.]

"Are you going to Mur?" Bill's speed burst carried him through Erik's barrage.

"I am."

Erik smiled coldly, his expression betraying no fear. Using his Elemental Lord brain crystal power, he manipulated the remaining pools of water and blood scattered across the concrete floor.

The liquid transformed into thick clouds of steam that rose in dense waves, filling not only the hangar but even the surroundings with a white mist.

This would allow him not only to prevent the enemy from clearly seeing him but would also make it easier for him to spot the spectral tendrils the second division commander created and would also make it harder for the blackguards at the hangar to see the tendrils or target the plane.

"After I'm done with you, I will kill the first division commander," Erik said.

The invisible hands pierced through the mist like ethereal spears, but Erik had anticipated what Bill would do, and seeing the mist move made it easy for him to avoid the attack.

Then he activated his Phantom Veil brain crystal power, creating perfect copies of himself spread across the battleground.

These served their purpose perfectly, drawing Bill's attacks in different directions while the real Erik moved to a better position.

"Your reputation barely scratches the surface," Bill said, dispersing the steam. "But you won't be able to kill her."

"Oh? Why?" Erik's plants erupted beneath Bill, forcing him to dodge. The commander's Matter Disruption turned the vegetation to dust whenever he failed to do so.

Lightning arced from Erik, channeled through the metallic plants still scattered across the battlefield, which acted as rods.

Bill's invisible hands saved him, but several remaining soldiers weren't as fortunate. Their bodies convulsed and fell, adding to the carnage.

"She is strong. Stronger than any of us now, and she will be even stronger by the time you get there, IF you get there. You see," Bill said.

"I'm quite strong myself." Bill's invisible hands formed a protective sphere around him. "But when she got her new powers, she turned even worse than Monica, and she had been the strongest among us for decades."

Erik laughed. "Yet she died by my hands..." He launched some wind blades at his opponent.

"The first division commander won't have her same fate."

Erik's illusions converged. He launched several more attacks. Fire, ice, lightning, earth, and wind crashed against Bill's hands while the real Erik tried to find an opening. Predictable as Bill was in his defense, or his targets, he failed to find even a single one.

The commander's Matter Disruption worked relentlessly, breaking down each elemental attack Erik threw at him into harmless particles.

Bill was a formidable opponent, even more than Monica, especially considering Erik was much stronger than when he fought against the third division commander.

Yet the young man could see the subtle tremors in Bill's fingers and the beads of sweat forming on his forehead.

Each use of Matter Disruption consumed significant amounts of mana, and the repeated defensive maneuvers were clearly draining Bill's energy reserves faster than he had

anticipated.

However, no matter what Erik did, Bill got the right powers to fight against him. These gave him an absolute defense mean, as much as an attacking one, and his third power gave him mobility, which was the main issue of everyone facing the demonic younger man. "Your powers complement each other well," Erik said, launching another wave of attacks. "Speed to compensate for Matter Disruption's range limitation. Invisible hands to extend its

reach. Almost perfect."

"Almost?" Bill's eyes narrowed.

"Almost." Erik's plants transformed, turning from metal to pure water. They exploded

outward, forcing Bill to spend a great amount of mana to protect himself and prevent Erik

from drowning him.

The commander's speed burst carried him through the water explosion.

"The Blackguards prepared you well," Erik said, combining wind and lightning into a storm

of destruction. "But they couldn't prepare you for everything."

[LEVEL UP.] "They did," Bill said, his Matter Disruption turning Erik's latest attack to nothing.

The commander attacked again. Thousands of invisible hands converged from every direction. Bill's speed burst carried him through Erik's defenses, aiming for a killing blow. But Erik had been waiting for this moment. His Phantom Veil shattered, revealing that the Erik that Bill had been fighting was an illusion. The real Erik appeared behind him, Tower

Bastion's armor crackling with power.

"But it wasn't enough."

As Erik kept fighting against Bill, he also focused on protecting the plane. The number of Blackguards trying to destroy the aircraft kept increasing.

Erik had no way to prevent that sea of attacks from reaching the plane, so he created a shield around the aircraft.

Bill's soldiers kept attacking in large groups, but Erik's defenses were too strong. Not only were the plants already resistant on their own, but they also changed to other and more resistant materials.

That wasn't what prevented them from reaching the plane with their attacks, but the fact they still regenerated as if they were plants, meaning that whenever they dented the plant- metallic shield, they regrew, making the soldiers have to restart their efforts.

In the meantime, Erik kept slaughtering whoever got too close and whoever tried to enter the hangar. Many soldiers died as they tried to break through.

Yet despite the high number of deaths, more soldiers kept coming, pouring from the main and side entrances, as if they would die not doing that.

#### Chapter 1185: The Invisible Assault (2)

The battle intensified as Bill's invisible hands protected him.

Erik responded by summoning a devastating lightning storm-bolts of blue-white electricity arced through the sky, striking with thunderous force.

Though Bill's invisible hands created an effective shield around the Second Division commander, deflecting most of the lightning strikes, some bolts found their marks among his troops, and the smell of burned meat and ozone spread across the battlefield.

Erik then threw the blackguards' bodies at him.

"Desecrating the dead now?" Bill's Matter Disruption turned the corpses to particles.

"They're beyond caring."

Erik's plants shifted between states-different kinds of metal, even ice, to keep the plane's area cold.

A soldier breached the perimeter, almost reaching the plane. Erik's tendril caught him mid- stride, transforming into lightning. The man's screams were cut short as electricity coursed through his body.

Bill's invisible hands tried to reach Erik from his blind side, forcing Erik to create force barriers with his Tower Bastion brain crystal power. "You can't keep going on like this forever."

"Watch me." Erik created a dome of pure ice around the aircraft while launching a barrage of elemental attacks at the blackguards through the tendrils.

That forced Bill to act-Erik was systematically eliminating his soldiers one by one. Bodies fell from the sky at a rate of nearly one per second, a pace of casualties that even a hardened commander like Bill found difficult to accept.

But something was weird, because it looked like Erik's mana was never-ending.

<How the fuck can he do this?>

The commander's invisible hands formed a protection, breaking down anything that came close to his soldiers. But Erik noticed his movements slowing, maybe because to do that he had to use much more mana, and his power was already mana-hungry.

"You're slowing down."



"Am I?" Bill suddenly sped up. His invisible hands multiplied exponentially, filling the air. Erik couldn't see them, but it was clear what Bill did, especially because his thoughts told Erik everything he needed to know. Yet it didn't make the situation simpler.

<Shit.>

Erik dodged Bill's invisible attacks. His body twisted and turned in ways that seemed impossible.

Then he used his Instability brain crystal power to understand from where Bill was going to attack next.

Yet the sheer amount of invisible hands was too overwhelming even for him. One of them grazed him.

"Fuck..."

He pumped mana into his Tower Bastion to reduce the effects of Bill's powers. The hands were destroying his armor, but by pumping more mana, he had been able to reform it before the effect reached his flesh.

He also created multiple illusions of himself again. The hands were getting too many. Erik would not be able to avoid them all if things remained like that. By giving more targets to Bill, he might be able to decrease the burden on him.

More soldiers died.

[LEVEL UP.]

[LEVEL UP.]

"Your control is remarkable," Bill said, launching another wave of attacks. "Fighting me while defending the plane must not be simple."

Erik didn't reply.

"I bet we have to thank Levium for this, right?"

He smiled.

"Multitasking is indeed easier with multiple minds." Erik showed that by launching attacks from every direction.

Bill's Matter Disruption worked overtime, breaking down the attacks. But Erik noticed something crucial: the commander couldn't dissolve every type of energy equally well. The number of soldiers decreased further.

"Running out of men?" Erik asked, his illusions multiplying around Bill.

"Don't worry, more are coming."

"They come to die."

"They die for a worthy cause." Bill's invisible hands rushed at him. Erik sensed it thanks to his Instability brain crystal power. "As will you."

"A worthy cause? Like protecting a plane?"

Bill's invisible hands carved Erik's tendrils, but for each one he destroyed, two more took its place. "You know why that plane must be destroyed."

The illusions attacked, forcing Bill to defend from all angles. Meanwhile, the real Erik maintained his aerial position.

"Ah, yes. To stop me from reaching the first division commander, right? Are you scared? Didn't you say she is stronger than any of you now?"

Bill got mad. He tried to attack Erik, but it looked like he was getting too tired to fight.

"Already tired?"

The commander's movements, while still fast, lacked their earlier precision.

"Hardly." Bill's Matter Disruption expanded, creating a sphere of molecular destruction around him made by interlacing multiple hands.

A group of soldiers tried to flank the aircraft again. Their screams joined that of those who died earlier or those who were on their way to the afterlife.

"Your men die for nothing."

"They die ensuring you can't reach Mur."

"Bold of you to assume I need a plane to go there."

"Ah, yes. You can get to Mur in the same way you went to Maynard Island. But let me ask you this: Will your soldiers reach Mur if you go that way?"

Erik got serious.

"If you think the thaid's near Mannard were even remotely comparable to that around Mur, you are mistaken."

Erik clenched his fists.

"I already know that."

He paused.

"But I have faith in my men. We'll pull through this. And make no mistake-that plane will be

mine."

In truth, Erik knew Bill's words were right. He wanted the plane exactly to prevent too many of the Chimaeric Demons from dying.

The remaining soldiers below found themselves trapped in a field of constantly shifting matter and energy.

"Yet here you are, fighting so desperately to protect it."

A soldier got a shot off at the aircraft. The soldier didn't get a second chance as metallic tendrils reduced him to a red mist.

"Perhaps I simply enjoy killing blackguards, and since they're rushing in the plane and making my job easier, why not take advantage of that?"

"Ah! That's all you came up with? Pathetic!"

Bill laughed.

"Your powers are remarkable, Bill, but they have limits. I can sense your mana reaching its end."

"There is still a long way for me to consume all my available mana. I suggest you focus on your fight."

Chapter 1186: The Invisible Assault (3)

Erik launched another devastating barrage, his powers merging fire and lightning into a swirling storm of orange and blue energy.

The combined attack lit up the sky like a second rising sun. Bill's invisible hands moved with practiced precision, carving clean paths through the maelstrom, but Erik could see the telltale trembling in the distorted air where Bill's powers manifested.

Bill repeatedly tried to close the distance between them, using his invisible hands to propel himself through the air.

However, Erik maintained his aerial position with natural flight ability enhanced by telekinesis, moving at speeds that Bill's hand-propelled movement couldn't match.

Despite his power, Bill's method of flight was more mechanical and less fluid, giving Erik a clear advantage in mobility.

"This fight made things more clear, Erik Romano. You are a psychopathic mass murderer who won't stop at nothing to achieve his petty revenge!"

Bill struggled to keep up with Erik's speed.

"Dangerous to the Blackguards, you mean."

"To everyone." Bill's hands multiplied. "People with overwhelming power always are."

Another wave of soldiers charged the aircraft. <Fuck...>

Erik created another Hydra's head. While having two heads instead of one increased his strength, it also made him more susceptible to losing control of himself.

The plants ripped through the enemy ranks while maintaining distance from Bill. The number of soldiers kept oscillating, and so did their rate. Sometimes they increased, and some other times they decreased. The blackguards were likely redirecting their forces from the walls.

"Speaking from experience?"

Bill laughed.

"Funny, but if you think we are the same as you, you are mistaken. We are an organization, not a lone individual who could easily get lost in his own power!"

"What part of my army made you think I'm alone?"

"Them? It's clear they result from your powers. You thought we didn't notice? They all have the same powers..."

"Congratulations on having figured that out."

Bill smiled.

"History has already proven how dangerous someone like you can be, and now we have proof of that."

Bill's attacks intensified, invisible hands reaching from impossible angles. Erik avoided getting killed just because of instability and the new Hydra's head.

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

"Yeah, I knew you would not be aware of this."

Erik sensed the change in Bill's emotions through instability. There was bitterness there, and something deeper.

"What truth?" Erik asked, combining wind and lightning to clear a path through Bill's defenses. Bodies fell below as his plants continued their deadly work.

"Solomon Judd. You are like him."

Erik almost paused mid-attack. "The Savior of Humanity? What about him?"

Bill's laugh carried no humor. "Savior? Yeah, savior... Really." His hands multiplied again, forcing Erik to retreat. "He was a tyrant."

"A tyrant? You are ridiculous."

Erik's plants surged toward the blackguards. More soldiers died trying to breach his defenses around the aircraft.

"I'm not surprised you don't know. Few do." Bill's speed burst carried him through Erik's attacks with practiced ease.

"The first X-ranked soldier after the establishment of the Ferebitz scale. The most powerful human in history. The man who carved out humanity's place in Mannard through sheer force."

Erik launched another attack. "Everyone knows that."

"But do they know how he did it?" Bill's invisible hands formed intricate patterns. "Do they know what happened to those who opposed him? How he controlled everything from the shadows?"

[LEVEL UP]

The level-up notification flashed in Erik's vision, but his focus remained unbroken. Below, his plants continued their brutal killing, their vines and tendrils weaving through enemy ranks and dismembering them.

Erik also kept aerial distance from Bill, knowing that a single touch from those invisible hands could prove fatal.

"He started just like you," Bill said. "A justice's paladin, fighting for what he believed was right. Fighting to save humanity. But power corrupts, Erik. It always does. He died because of greed."

"You're comparing me to Solomon Judd?" Erik's attacks took on a sharper edge. Ice spears merged, forcing Bill to spend more energy defending.

"The parallels are obvious. Overwhelming power. A crusade against perceived injustice. Even your neural link growth mirrors his suspected technique."

Erik's illusions multiplied to keep the hands at bay. "You weren't even alive then. How would you know?"

"The Blackguards keep detailed records. We were there, albeit with different names." Bill's Matter Disruption turned Erik's attacks to nothing. "Every division commander has access to the truth. I've read his complete dossier."

The hangar floor had become a graveyard, yet still they came, and more blackguards were coming.

"And now you're waging war against us," Bill said. "Just like he waged war against those who opposed him."

"You forced this war," Erik said. "You tried to kill me. You led my father to his death. You helped Volkov take Frant and unleash the Heniate!"

"Everything had a reason."

"What reason?" Erik's attacks intensified, his rage feeding into his powers. "Getting the biological supercomputer? For what? Gaining more power? Don't tell bullshit to me by saying all of this was for humanity's sake."

Bill's invisible hands formed a dome around him as Erik's assault reached new heights of destruction. He was struggling to contain him now.

"Do you really think we waged wars, experimented on people, and controlled governments from the shadows just for power?"

"Yes."

Erik's plants grew faster, their vines thickening and multiplying as they spread across the hangar floor. The dense network of vegetation crushed and ensnared everything in its path, moving with lethal efficiency. His emotions made the growth reach a speed it didn't normally



reach.

[LEVEL UP]

"Such a simple view," Bill said. His attacks came faster, driven by something beyond duty now. "You're proving my point. Like Judd, you see only what you want to see."

Erik focused more on the battle. His illusions became more complex. "I see plenty. I see your organization's lust for power, for control."

"Power and control?" Bill's laugh was sharp. "We could have had power centuries ago. We could have ruled openly, controlling everything directly. Instead, we work from the shadows, making the hard choices others won't."

Chapter 1187: The Invisible Assault (4)

"Hard choices?" Erik's attacks intensified. "Like experimenting on children? Like unleashing the Heniate on civilians?"

"You understand nothing. The world isn't as simple as you think."

More soldiers rushed the aircraft in tight formation, moving like a swarm of killer ants having pointed their prey.

Erik's plant cut down the enemy forces. The soldiers dropped in succession as Erik maintained his position above, engaging Bill while defending against incoming attacks. The floor became increasingly hazardous as evidence of the conflict accumulated beneath them.

"Then enlighten me." Erik launched another combination of attacks. While the vines whipped at Bill, shards of ice materialized around him, which were then sent hurtling toward the second division commander.

"What great purpose could justify all this death and suffering? How many lives were worth your precious experiments?"

A brief pause settled between them, though their battle never ceased. Bill's Matter Disruption tore through Erik's vines and elemental attacks as if they were paper dolls in a hurricane.

The clash of their powers filled the area around the hangar with flashes of light that overtook even the light from the rising sun.

"We were those who unleashed the Sinister Cold on the world." Bill's speed burst carried him through the storm of attacks, his invisible hands dissolving everything in their path.

That admission surprised Erik, but not as much as it should have. He had pieced together enough of the puzzle during his investigations. The timing, the patterns, the Blackguards' obsession with control-it all pointed to their involvement.

"You motherfuckers!" Erik's plants erupted with renewed fury, killing blackguards faster than before. The remaining soldiers below died in waves as his rage manifested through his powers.

Yet the most pressing question in Erik's mind was why he candidly admitted to having unleashed the most devastating disease known to mankind on him. What was the purpose?

"Want to know why?" Bill's voice carried an edge of pride mixed with what almost seemed like desperation to be understood.

"You found mana. Once you did, you wanted to control it!" Erik's elements combined violently, creating storms of fire, wind, and lightning that forced Bill to use more energy defending.

"We did," Bill said, while reducing Erik's attacks to nothingness. "The Sinister Cold was necessary to create brain crystals and control mana. As many suspected, it was the direct cause of brain crystals appearing."

Erik laughed maniacally. "Congratulations! You fucked humanity up! Now what, do you want a round of applause?"

"Aren't you curious why I'm telling you this?" A weird spell spread to the area.

Erik got angrier. He clenched his jaw and narrowed his eyes, trying hard not to lose control. His whole body tensed as he fought the urge to attack with abandon.

"Why? So you can justify your atrocities? Tell me how your master plan makes all this death worthwhile?"

"Brain crystal powers gave people power. Yes, unfortunately, Thaid's had been a byproduct of this, but they weren't the goal. That was an accident." Bill's admission came with a subtle shift in his stance.

Then he paused, as if trying to find the words, as if trying to collect the thoughts Erik was already reading.

"There was someone who could use mana before the rest of us could." Bill's invisible hands were basically destroying the surroundings. The ground got dented; everything was turning to nothing where his Matter Disruption touched. The hangar's structure groaned under the assault.

"Exorcists, diviners. They were real. It was just that they controlled mana in some ways we couldn't, and that we still can't. Trust me, we tried. Based on their words, only a person in a billion could use mana, meaning none of us could."

Unfortunately, these people went extinct after the Thaid's appeared.

[LEVEL UP]

The constant influx of experience from killing soldiers kept Erik's mana reserves high, feeding into his increasingly destructive attacks.

"One of them told us about something. A menace, killers trying to reach us, to reach humans, to reach earth."

Erik remained silent.

"She told us, she told the Silver Line Corporation, to find a way to make humans control mana, because that was the only way we would have survived. So we did. We created the Sinister Cold, which was simply something meant to create brain crystals, a way to control mana."

Erik's eyes widened, his jaw clenched. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. The audacity, the sheer absurdity of Bill's claim, left him momentarily speechless.

"You expect me to believe that?" Erik said. "That you unleashed a global catastrophe because some fortune teller scared you with ghost stories?"

He shook his head, a bitter laugh escaping his lips. The idea was so preposterous, so utterly divorced from reality, that Erik found himself questioning Bill's sanity.

Yet something in Bill's voice-the gravity, the unwavering conviction, and the certainty radiating from his thoughts-sent a chill down Erik's spine. He wasn't lying.

Yet Erik's attacks intensified. Below, more soldiers fell as Erik's rage manifested through his powers. Bill saw this with increasing worry.

"Ghost stories? The diviner gave us a time limit! 2000 years. 2000 years, and humanity would be destroyed!" Bill's own emotion fed into his powers.

The commander's emotions rang true-there was fear there, old and deep, mixed with a desperate conviction. Erik felt it. A lot of time passed since brain crystals came into existence, and not much time remained before this catastrophe, or whatever it was, fell on the remnants of the human race.

"So you created brain crystals, only to discover you could control mana in just one way? Brain crystal powers."

[LEVEL UP]

"That's exactly what happened. Brain crystals allowed us to only do one thing. They gave us one brain crystal power, and it even is random!" Bill's speed burst carried him through Erik's assault, but his movements betrayed increasing strain. The constant use of Matter Disruption was taking its toll.

"So you tried to come up with something that would make you get past this limitation. The biological supercomputer."

It was at that moment that two voices echoed around the area.

"Second Division Commander!"

Erik turned. There were two people joining the fight. No, in truth, there were more, thousands. It was just that those on the front were...

"Vindicators..." Erik turned to Bill.

Bill said nothing.

#### Chapter 1188: Waves of Thaid

From their positions, the chimaeric demons directed waves of undead thaid against the Law Gate's defenses.

Yet the barrier was still standing. Not that there was a way for them to bring it down, given their current strength.

Their only hope lay in Erik and his team, eliminating their targets.

The defensive turrets fired concentrated energy beams, cutting down the front ranks of the undead horde. Things weren't going well for the blackguards, but even the Chimaeric Demons were losing many of their puppets. Besides, Erik's army started the battle, but there was nothing they were gaining aside from acting as glorified lures.

"Formation Delta," a clone said to his section. Thousands of bear-like thaid changed positions. When the turrets destroyed one wave, another took its place, maintaining constant pressure on the defenses.

The reason they were so willing to lose so many undead was to keep the enemy's attention on them. However, the clones didn't know the blackguards knew already that Erik was inside the fortress.

Not that it mattered. Keeping more soldiers there was important, and the blackguards couldn't simply leave the enemy there, because if something happened to the barrier, the more undead would still be moving, and the worse the situation would be.

The organization wasn't so stupid as to think they were infallible, not when Erik Romano, who showed them that, was involved.

Though the clones noticed the number of troops at the walls was decreasing at an alarming rate.

The automated defenses became more and more common, and they could see it based on how predictable their firing sequences were. Besides, it was a weakness to exploit.

The quadrupedal units under the Chimaeric Demons' control moved between salvos, timing their advances with the reloading cycles of the brain crystal turrets.

Lightning arcs and ice beams from the fortress's defenses created a deadly web above them. The smaller thaids used the larger ones as shields, advancing under their protection.

The ranged fighters burned through mana rapidly and got forced to shift to brain crystal rifles. They weren't omnipotent, though. There was a limit to what these powerful weapons could achieve, especially when the enemy didn't feel pain and didn't stop, even when crippled.

"The eastern sector has reduced the fire rate," another Chimaeric Demon said through their communication system. "Redirect the wolf-packs. The more troops are going to reach the barrier, the more restless the enemy is bound to become."

The Chimaeric Demons knew their master's team needed more time inside, and there was no better way than to make them agitated. He commanded three massive waves of thaids to strike the eastern section simultaneously.

The automated defenses adjusted, concentrating fire on the enemy's bigger units, but this played into the clone's strategy. The new targets were bigger and massively more resistant than others. Besides, focusing on the bigger thaids created openings for swarms of smaller ones to advance unimpeded, and they were not easy to see because of their dimensions, not for humans, and neither for the automated defensive system.

"Northern section, send more undead," the clone said. The undead moved after the Chimaeric Demons sent the order. Thousands of thaids crashed against the barrier in waves, and many more used their brain crystal powers on it.

Blue light pulsed from the walls as brain crystal artillery weapons discharged. Several turrets fell silent, their brain crystals depleted and in need of being substituted.

The Chimaeric Demon noted the increasing gaps between reloads-the blackguards couldn't maintain this level of defense indefinitely.

"Master's team reports progress at primary target. They found the barrier master. They are going to attack soon," came the update on their radio. "Maintain the current pressure. Drive their reserves down; let them consume mana."

Energy beams and explosions lit up the dark sky. The massive bear-thaids took the hits head-on, shielding smaller units behind them.

The sun was still rising.

"The Western is showing promising weakness," another clone reported. "Redirect some additional forces to exploit the power gap."

"How long do you think this will go on?" a clone asked his brother.

"I don't know. Killing the barrier masters won't be enough, but for sure, we might get a chance to destroy the barrier ourselves if that happens."

Mechanically generated barriers weren't as powerful as those human-made, but the brain crystals inside the machines could be substituted in case they lost power.

The plan was to exploit one of the gaps they were currently creating to then invade. Of course, as soon as the barrier came down. The clone would get easier access to the fortress that way.

Otherwise, sacrificing so many undead made little sense. Well, aside from making the blackguards focus on them, rather than Erik and the others, and for sure, to make them waste

mana.

The barrier would fall-not from their attacks, but from sabotage within. There was no doubt about that. The problem was when. The clones didn't have many undead to spare, and the death ratio was high. Their troops were not infinite.

The real fight would begin only when their master completed his mission, but they still had a role to play.

The Chimaeric Demon ordered the next wave to attack, observing the defense systems having trouble targeting so many enemies at once. Despite the blackguards' powerful weapons, they couldn't stop an army that ignored pain, didn't tire, and would keep pushing until they broke through.

As their forces maintained pressure on the Law Gate's defenses, then the Chimaeric Demon noticed a change. The barrier's surface rippled much more than it did under their assault, its consistent shimmer becoming uneven in sections.

"Energy fluctuation detected in Section Three," a report came.

"Did they do it?"

A clone awaited reports from Amber's team. Based on their communications about targeting the barrier masters, they must have killed them.

The barrier flickered again, the instability lasting longer this time. The blackguards noticed too—their defensive fire intensified, brain crystal weapons discharging attacks faster. They knew what these fluctuations meant.

"The instability is spreading to sectors Four and Five in the southern section," another Chimaeric Demon reported.

"We have confirmation. The barrier masters are dead, but Emily is missing."



"Fuck..."

More turrets fell silent, their brain crystals depleted. Even fewer people were on the walls now. Something big must have been happening.

The defenders raced to reload their weapons while checking the barrier's status. The flickering energy field showed clear signs of weakening.

"All units maintain current formations," the clone said.

The barrier pulsed again, its energy fluctuating wildly in places before stabilizing. Soon, very soon, the Law Gate would lose its primary defense. The real battle would begin only then.

#### Chapter 1189: Under the Weight of Mana (1)

Rain started falling on the Law Gate. The barrier would have left nothing to get in, but the blackguards had to change a little bit of things to make it so it could resist the undead attacks.

Emily placed her rifle on a parapet. Below, Amber and the others were already facing the two Vindicators. Through her scope, Emily tracked the light-wielder, searching for an opening that wasn't coming.

That sword... that brain crystal power was more insidious than anyone might have assumed. It allowed the creation of light constructs but also had ranged attacks that traveled at the speed of light.

These attacks clearly required substantial mana, limiting how often the Vindicator could use them. Whenever he did, Emily slowed time and fired, preventing him from either launching his attack or altering its path.

But that was a tiresome affair. Emily had to constantly stay alert. She couldn't miss even a second of the fight, or one of her comrades would die.

June was by her side, keeping an eye on the surroundings to prevent ambushes.

"Formation Three," one Chimaeric Demon said. The clones moved. They had been created after Erik's attack on Maynard Island, so they were more powerful than he was when that happened. They also had Monica's powers, and, well, they were planning on using it to create two new undead. That was, if they killed those guys.

The first Vindicator's light sword flashed, forcing a clone to dodge. Though physically outmatched, the Vindicators' brain crystal powers demanded respect. Fear. One hit was going to end the fight-or better, a life.

"Mira, left flank!" Amber said.

She warped in rapid succession, creating multiple angles of attack while Mira transformed into a small and agile form and darted between the Vindicators' legs. Mira was strong; that was true, but her powers were more on the normal side.

Instead, the Vindicators wielded brain crystal powers that were exceptionally dangerous- their abilities could manipulate fundamental forces with devastating effect. Most of their powers required immense amounts of mana, but the results were consistently lethal.

The second Vindicator revealed his power at last-waves of gravitational force distorted space around him. A Chimaeric Demon barely avoided being crushed. If he had been just a little too slow, he would be dead.

Gravity control. That was indeed a very nasty brain crystal power. The group started wondering how Erik could fight and win against more of these guys at the same time.

Yet Erik had defeated multiple Vindicators before, proving it was possible. If he succeeded alone, their group of six stood a good chance-Mira with her shapeshifting abilities, Amber with her warping powers, Emily providing long-range support, plus three enhanced Chimaeric Demons with superior physical capabilities.

The problem was that, albeit the clones were strong, fast, and much more than the Vindicators, their brain crystal powers were infinitely worse than their physical might. Not only that, but their opponents had much more mana than them, and mana leveled the field. That was especially true the nastier the power was.

So, it didn't matter how fast they were; what could they do against someone who could use attacks that went at the speed of light? Nothing. At least not alone.

Yet their bodies were still weapons that even the Vindicators couldn't underestimate, and they didn't, especially considering the abyss between them was vast.

Six people. Six were needed to level the field against just two Vindicators.

"Two o'clock," Emily said through their comms. Her position gave her a perfect view of the battlefield.

"The light user is going to attack from a distance!"

The Chimaeric Demons processed this information in a fraction of a second. They knew that, for the dude to use his ranged attack, he had to channel a significant portion of his mana, creating a delay between the attack channeling and the firing.

They tried exploiting the tiny window of vulnerability. One clone engaged the light-wielder while another struck from his blind spot, but they had to avoid the gravity user's attack. He couldn't do a lot, but what he did was scary.

He created zones where gravity was massive. If they ended up in that field, they would be crushed.

Luckily, even he had to use a massive amount of mana, and this had to be moved to the area he was targeting, making it clear where and who the man had under their sight.

The Chimaeric Demons were fast enough, most likely the only ones in the world, able to escape that kind of attack.

Yet it wasn't that simple to avoid that crushing force.

"Careful!" Amber said, warping to avoid a gravity wave.

Indeed, despite being outnumbered, the Vindicators didn't look troubled, at least for now. Their powers didn't exactly complement each other, but the two were still partners. One problem for the Gravity user was that he couldn't attack directly, while it was the opposite for the Light user, who couldn't affect an area.

Their usual tactic was to force opponents into gravity wells, and when that happened, whoever ended up there died.

But the Chimaeric Demons' physical superiority allowed them to pressure the Vindicators despite their caution about their powers.

Mira shifted between forms. Now her arm became a snake head, now got the claws of a Mystlinx. Her adaptability forced the Vindicators to divide their attention, and they were already fighting against many people.

It wasn't the melee fighters that were the real problem, though.

Emily's rifle cracked as she fired. The light-wielder deflected the shot. Sometimes he was forced to leave openings while making his attacks. Each time this happened, Emily disrupted his assault. Though the beam of light still manifested, it struck only a nearby building, leaving everyone unharmed.

Though he consumed a lot of mana.

A Chimaeric Demon capitalized, landing a crushing blow that cracked the Vindicator's armor, but he couldn't do more since his partner created a small area with incredible gravitational force. The Chimaeric Demon had to retreat before he would get killed.

## Chapter 1190: Under the Weight of Mana (2)

"They're strong," one clone said. He was a newborn, but having Erik's memories, he knew how to recognize a strong fighter from a weak one, and these two guys were anything but weak. He dodged another gravity wave.

<The light user is skilled in close combat, but he excels at ranged attacks. His light beams are fast and deadly,> the clone thought. <He's not just using his power randomly either-he times his attacks to cover his partner and create openings.>

<And that gravity user...> The clone's eyes narrowed. <He's more defensive, using his power to control the battlefield. Those gravity fields aren't just for attacking-they're forcing us to move where they want us to.>

The Vindicators observed their opponents with calculating eyes, their masked faces betraying no emotion.

The battle continued, each side trying to get an advantage no one got.

The Vindicators' powers kept them alive, but they couldn't match the Chimaeric Demons' raw physical capabilities, and as time went on, their mana got consumed.

Their mana reserves, while considerable, were depleting. The constant need to maintain their powers against multiple opponents was taking its toll-the light-wielder's beams were becoming less frequent, and the gravity user's fields weren't covering as much area as before. The physical strain was also becoming clear in their movements. Avoiding the Chimaeric Demons' strikes wasn't easy, and one mistake would spell their doom. That, and they also had to avoid the others' attacks, and the repeated dodging of Emily's shots was making everything harder.

Even their coordination showed signs of problems. There were moments when their cover for each other came a fraction of a second too late, forcing them to spend more mana than necessary to compensate.

In truth, they were already searching for a way to leave, knowing that winning against these six people, and alone at that, wasn't possible.

Yet if it was hard for them to gain an advantage, the same could be said for Amber and the others.

...

Rain continued to fall, and the battle intensified. Each drop disappearing when passing through the gravity Vindicator's gravity field.

The raindrops became so heavy under the intense gravitational field that they instantly vaporized upon impact with the ground, releasing small puffs of steam with each collision.

The gravitational force was strong enough to compress the water molecules until they transformed directly from liquid to gas, skipping the usual heating process.

Dense vapor filled the area around the battle, creating a thick haze that significantly reduced visibility.

This was rather problematic for Emily, given her role, because the vapor distorted her view of the targets.

Fortunately, the strong winds of the Law Gate swept through the area in regular gusts, clearing the vapor clouds and providing brief windows of clear vision.

Yet the situation became increasingly dangerous for Amber and the others, because without Emily's support, the light-user vindicator could unleash the light beams and vaporize one of his opponents.

However, if it was hard for Emily to aim, it was even harder for the Vindicators. The Chimaeric Demon were the only ones unaffected, because with Hais's brain crystal power pumping their perception, they saw the subtle signs showing the presence of their opponents within the fog.

They spotted how the water vapor shifted when the Vindicators moved, felt the air vibrate from their steps, and detected changes in the fog from their powers. When raindrops suddenly changed direction or turned to vapor, it showed exactly where their enemies were.

One of them attacked using his starlight fireballs, but no matter what he did, the attacks were blocked by the light user or destroyed by the gravity fields.

Yet he wasn't the only one trying something like that. Another clone launched a devastating combination of strikes powered by Vibration Burst, making the air, the rain, the fog, and the wind dissipate with each one.

The light-wielder parried the attack with a broad shield of pure light energy. Despite his defense, the clone's Vibration Burst attacks hit with such tremendous force that the impact traveled through the Vindicator's body and into the ground.

"That didn't work either!"

The Gravity user tried to kill the Chimaeric Demon by creating a concentrated gravity field that would crush his organs and bones instantly, but another clone leaped between them, positioning himself directly in the gravity user's line of sight.

"Close your eyes!"

He partially turned into a Luminous Leviathan, enough for him to use Bioluminescent Surge. This stopped the enemy from attacking, since he needed to see where the opponents were, and gave time to the Chimaeric Demon to get to a safe spot. Yet it also prevented the others from attacking.

Both sides pulled back. The Chimaeric Demons maintained formation and visual contact while the Vindicators retreated steadily, their masks fixed on their opponents.

"Their mana is never-ending!" Mira said.

"Don't let that fool you. They are keeping their strength as best as they could," a clone said. "But Emily almost exhausted her!"

"She didn't have enough time to learn how to properly use her power yet. These guys have, what, 50 years each? They've been training their entire lives for this. Mana control like that doesn't come naturally. It takes decades of practice. That's the mark of true veterans."

"Less talk, guys!"

Amber warped. The gravity Vindicator created a widespread gravity field, but she had already disappeared, reappearing behind him, but she missed her attack, or better, the Vindicator twisted away and avoided injury.

"Emily, status?" Amber called through their comms.

"I'm here," she said.

The woman was keeping the two Vindicators in her scope all the time, waiting for the perfect shot.

Yet, until now, getting a clear shot proved impossible-the Vindicators kept perfect coordination and constant awareness. They stuck to a tight defensive formation, with one always ready to block any attack aimed at the other, preventing Emily from finding an

opening.

"How is the situation?" Amber asked. Emily was the one with the best picture of the battle. "Not good. If it goes on like this, we would be forced to retreat."

Since a side goal was killing the Vindicators, that meant failing in the tasks Erik gave them. The gravity user tried to crush Mira as she helped the Chimaeric Demons, but she transformed into a bird, darting through the air before the gravitational force could take effect. Emily had to move before the gravitational pull could affect her. Even a partial pull on a body part would

spell her doom.

Though it wasn't easy. Gravity affected everything in the area, making even small movements require extra effort. Birds, insects, and debris all moved slower through the intensified

gravitational field.

"I can't attack from this close too often."

"Maybe you should switch to ranged attacks!" A Chimaeric Demon said.

The Chimaeric Demons circled the two, forcing the Vindicators to protect their flanks.

From above, Emily noticed a subtle shift in the light user's stance and the telltale gathering of

mana around his hands-signs he was going to use his beam again.

"He is charging for another light beam," she said. "Watch out!"



The Vindicator unleashed another attack, but Emily shot, making him miss again. They were starting to curse the sniper they failed to kill earlier. However, the Gravity user didn't stay idle

and targeted Mira.

Amber warped her to safety just in the nick of time. The Chimaeric Demons used this

distraction to press their advantage.

<Their powers are incredible,> Emily thought. <But they are no match for the Chimaeric

Demons without them. The physical gap is too clear.>

When the Vindicators failed to use their powers quickly enough, the Chimaeric Demons' superior speed and strength made them gain an advantage.

But the clones couldn't capitalize on that, because the Vindicators' powers were too

insidious.

The light user could vaporize them in an instant if they got careless, while the gravity user's fields could crush them to paste. One wrong move, one moment of distraction, and it would

be over.

This meant that any kind of attack Amber's team could make had to be carefully planned, and that wasn't easy at all.

With the Chimaeric Demons unable to fully commit to their attacks due to the constant threat

of instant death from light beams or crushing gravity fields, they were unable to defeat the

two blackguards.

Emily had the light-wielder in her scope. Her finger was tensed on the trigger, and she was ready to take advantage of any opportunity the enemy might give her.

<1 second after using his ranged attack,> she thought. <That's when he's most vulnerable.>

She was likely the only one who could take advantage of that second.

The light-wielder fought melee against the Chimaeric Demons. The other Vindicator, instead, didn't let the opponents get too close for them to harm him and mostly played a

support role.

Then another beam came, just as Emily hoped. Amber saved the Chimaeric Demon that was being targeted. Emily slowed time down, then squeezed the trigger.

Her shot whistled through the air, but despite how fast the bullet was for her opponent, the light-user saw it all the same. His light sword turned into a shield to block the bullet. "Persistent," he said, his mask turning toward her position. The Gravity user did the same and created a gravity field under the building on which Emily was.

The building groaned and cracked, concrete and steel splintering under the intense

gravitational pressure.

Chunks of concrete and twisted metal rained down as the structure collapsed, the gravitational forces tearing apart everything and shattering windows into glittering shards that mixed with the falling rain.

Emily, however, slowed time to a crawl-watching dust particles float lazily in the air as she leaped through the suspended raindrops. She landed on the adjacent building's rain-slicked

rooftop.