

## **BIOLOGICAL 1191**

### Chapter 1191: Under the Weight of Mana (3)

"The sniper's becoming annoying," the gravity vindicator said. He raised his hand, and Emily felt space distort around her again. The new rooftop cracked. Emily couldn't keep her powers up for long, so she had been forced to stop providing mana to her power.

"Emily!"

Amber tried to warp to Emily's position, but the gravity user's power made spatial

transportation dangerous. One wrong move and Amber would appear inside the field, dying a horrible death.

From below, she didn't have a clear picture of where the field was.

"I need you to keep them busy!"

A Chimaeric Demon launched himself at the gravity user, forcing him to redirect his attention.

"Come and show me what you've got!"

The man did.

Emily used this moment to change positions again. Her mana reserves were still low, but she had enough for a couple more time freezes if needed.

"I've got her," the light-wielder said, but the other two Chimaeric Demons started attacking him.

Emily kept moving. Her friends were doing well but were struggling to keep the Vindicators' attention on them.

Whenever they had the chance, they tried to attack her.

Then she found a new place to hide.

She positioned herself behind a large air conditioning unit on a five-story office building, two hundred meters from the action. The unit's metal shell blocked her from view while its noise covered her movements. She could see the street clearly through building gaps while staying hidden.

The solid concrete building let her shoot steadily, and she faced away from the sun to avoid glare. Several stairwells gave her escape options.

Looking through her scope, she observed the intense battle: the Chimaeric Demons darted around at high speed without landing effective hits. Mira kept changing forms to attempt surprise attacks, and Amber repeatedly warped to strike from different angles. Despite their efforts, none of these tactics worked.

<I just need one clean shot,> Emily thought.

Then the opportunity finally came. It looked like targeting Emily had somehow woken the others up.

In truth, the Chimaeric Demons had increased their attack rate, launching strikes from multiple angles with complete disregard for their safety.

They left themselves open to enemy attacks with each strike, but thanks to their enhanced recovery powers and endurance, they kept up this risky strategy even as injuries piled up.

She shot, and her rifle found its mark just as the light-wielder turned to defend against an attack. It only worked partially, though.

The man heard the shot and materialized a light shield around him over the one he already had. It wasn't enough to block the bullet completely, but at least it prevented his arm from being maimed.

The impact, though, sent him spinning halfway around.

"Move!" a Chimaeric Demon saw the man charging another light beam as he was spinning. "Son of a--"

Emily managed to slow down time and escape before the Vindicator fired. The guy was still targeting her.

The light beam erupted from his hand. The Chimaeric Demons scattered, each one diving in a different direction to avoid being reduced to ashes.

Amber and Mira were not under the man's sight, so they had no problems avoiding the attack, which was still aimed at the sniper.

The beam struck the building Emily had occupied moments before, vaporizing the air conditioning unit and incinerating concrete and steel alike.

A circular hole remained where Emily had been, its edges still glowing orange from the heat. A crack then made everyone turn. The top three floors of the structure collapsed in on themselves, sending a cloud of pulverized debris outward.

Yet the two vindicators didn't stop targeting the young woman. The light user used his ranged attacks every time he had the chance, while the gravity user created a gravity field around them to prevent the enemy from attacking. At the same time, whenever his partner aimed at Emily, he tried to prevent them from escaping the attack by making another gravity field around her.

If it weren't for Emily's keen sight and experience, she would have been dead already. Besides, she had been able to notice when the light user attacked, so whenever he did, she either tried to stop him or moved to safety before the gravity user could trap her.

But even they couldn't maintain this pattern for long. Mana was a limited resource for them, too.

"Amber! Get Emily!" A Chimaeric demon said, blood flowing from a slash that carved through his shoulder.

His healing power activated, knitting flesh back together, but the mana cost forced him to be conservative with the healing, and he kept the lighter wounds.

Amber warped beside Emily just as another gravity distortion tore through her cover. "Hold on!"

Space twisted around them as Amber's brain crystal power activated. They materialized some buildings away, hidden from enemy sight. Amber couldn't stay too far away from the battlefield, though, or the Vindicators would get an advantage.

"Stay here," Amber said. "Better angle, safer distance."

Emily nodded, already setting up her rifle. Below, the battle intensified.

A Chimaeric Demon took a direct hit from the light sword, the energy blade slicing through his chest. He staggered back, healing the worst of the damage but leaving smaller wounds untreated.

The clones were starting to get reckless.

"They're getting slower," a Chimaeric Demon said.

A gravity wave caught one clone, crushing his left arm. He grunted, he started healing himself, and the others helped. If that wound wasn't treated, the clone would die, and fighting without an arm was dangerous. So they grew another one back.

"Don't be so aggressive," Mira said.

"We can endure superficial damage."

"That is not superficial damage!"

The light-wielder unleashed another beam barrage, this time aiming at a Chimaeric Demon, since Emily was nowhere to be seen, and neither was Amber.

However, their speed made them difficult targets. He was having trouble setting them under

sight.

The clones tried to turn invisible. The problem was that with someone using light powers, invisibility didn't work. Invisibility hinged on the ability to bend the light to disappear, but someone who could control it was immune to this trick.

"Formation switch," a clone said. They change positions, presenting different threats to each

Vindicator.

Emily set the Vindicators under her scope again.

They were visibly tiring, their powers requiring enormous mana expenditure, and their

bodies having less stamina than the Chimaeric Demons.

But the clones were risking a lot.

Each attack put them at risk of getting hit back. Though they could heal, constantly fixing

injuries ate up their mana. Even with their high endurance, the serious wounds forced them to burn through mana fast-they couldn't afford many more direct hits.

Amber prepared to join the fight again.

"Wait," Emily said, grabbing Amber's arm before she could warp away. "Remember Erik's strategy? About cornering the Vindicators?"

Amber immediately understood what Emily wanted to do, but it wasn't going to be that easy.

"I forgot."

Despite having been on many battlefields already, this was the first time she didn't follow

orders. Besides, usually, she would have many more Chimaeric Demons with her, and she would be fighting much weaker opponents.

This time, her team was made up only of six individuals, her included, and she was facing two powerful vindicators. She was so focused on keeping everyone alive that she forgot. "The gas trap. Yes." She squeezed Emily's shoulder before disappearing.

Back in the battle, Amber coordinated their movements through quick hand signals. The Chimaeric Demons understood what she had in mind.

The Vindicators were sufficiently fatigued to succumb to the trap, but if that worked, it depended on what the group did and how well they did it. The clones' attacks became more purposeful, much more studied, but also much more reckless than they already were. They got injured often, but none of them died yet. They began herding the Vindicators toward

a narrow intersection between two buildings, one without an exit.

Mira turned into a monkey and started using the debris of the building the gravity user created to do ranged attacks.

The muscle power she gained from that transformation helped a lot, but it was still not enough for her to injure the two bastards, despite these attacks being strong and fast enough to shatter steel.

Emily's shots appeared more often, but she always made sure to move before the gravity or the light user could target her.

However, this time she wasn't trying to prevent the Vindicators from using their power or to kill them. Instead, her goal was to help the others trap them, to move the Vindicators exactly where they needed them, and to prevent the light user from using that damned beam again.

"Now!" a Chimaeric Demon shouted.

Amber then warped, appearing above them, her birth brain crystal power activated. Green- yellow gas poured from her body, enveloping both the Vindicators and the surroundings. She warped away as the corrosive fog did its work.

The gas consumed everything in its path. It wasn't hard to see that, given how fast everything dissolved. Amber wanted to be sure she would kill the two Vindicators and pumped mana as much as she could into her neural links.

The Vindicators' screams lasted only seconds. When the gas dissipated, only goo remained on the ground. The corrosive gas ate through everything else.

"Well," Mira said, returning to human form. "Erik's plans sure never disappoint. They are a little bit too brutal for my taste, though."

"Brutal but effective," a Chimaeric Demon said.

#### Chapter 1192: Under the Weight of Mana (4)

Heavy rain poured down on the Law Gate, droplets drumming against the metal and stone surfaces. The cold water flowed in rivulets down the fortification's walls.

The group gathered around the melted remains of the Vindicators. Metal and flesh had fused together into dark, viscous pools that steamed in the rain. Pieces of armor and weaponry lay scattered among the puddles of liquefied bio-matter. Somehow, they survived the corrosive fog. It was a grim scene.

Blood, burned metal, and chemical residue created an unpleasant atmosphere that persisted despite the rainfall.

Amber's corrosive gas lingered around, but the rain was making everything disappear. Even the rest of the Vindicators were being washed away by the rain.

Mira shifted back to her human form, rolling her shoulders to work out the tension. "Is everyone ok?"

The Chimaeric Demons checked their injuries. The battle had been tough, and they had been forced to be aggressive in order to pressure the Vindicators enough to prevent them from killing their comrades. Though they had already healed their wounds, the memory of the pain lingered.

"Minimal damage to report," a clone said, examining the scorch marks and healed gashes on his arm. "Our healing powers closed the worst injuries. We still have some surface wounds, but nothing critical."

Emily lowered her rifle, her hands trembling. She was utterly exhausted.

To survive this ordeal, she had to use a lot of mana, and now not much of it remained, while the mission was still at the beginning. There were at least four other Vindicators to kill and the barrier generators to destroy.

Emily had been on a rollercoaster of emotions-fear during the initial attack, panic when she realized she lost her radio, relief when June found the others, and now exhaustion as the adrenaline faded.

She had never been this close to death before, and it was an experience she didn't want to experience again. The memory of those bullets suspended in time, meters from her face, would haunt her for a long time. She shuddered, pulling her jacket tighter against the cold rain.

"We burned through a lot of mana, though," she said. "At least I did."

Emily looked terrible-her face was white, her hands shook, and exhaustion showed in her hunched shoulders and the bags under her eyes.

"What happened exactly?" Amber asked. "We tried reaching you on the radio, but you didn't answer."



"I lost it during the first attack," Emily said. "I was keeping an eye on you when I heard shots. I immediately slowed time down, only to find two mana bullets aimed at my head, and June was on his way to intercept them."

Everyone turned to look at the clone, unsure whether to feel proud or angry about June's stupid stunt. It was a reckless move that could have gotten him killed, but also an incredibly brave act that would have saved Emily's life if she hadn't realized what was happening.

"If June didn't find you, I would be dead by now." The clone shrugged, as if that was the most natural thing to do.

"Thanks," Emily said. June simply nodded and then went back to monitoring the surroundings.

"We need to move," one of the Chimaeric Demons said.

"But security knows we're here now. The whole fortress will be on alert. Moving around will be much harder than before."

Everyone nodded in agreement. However, everyone knew that the Vindicators finding them out was inevitable.

The Vindicators were elite soldiers whose expertise matched their powers. While Emily and the others could hold their own in a fight, they lacked formal training and experience. The same went for the Chimaeric Demons-their infiltrations owed more to their brain crystal powers than skills. Without these, they would have struggled far more than any trained operative on such a mission.

"Erik's not going to like this complication," Mira said.

"We'll deal with that later. Right now, we need to disappear," Amber said. The group moved toward the building's far side, away from where the battle had happened.

Emily glanced at June as they walked. "Next time you want to take a bullet for me, give me some warning."

June smiled. "Where's the fun in that?"

Moving through the shadows, Emily couldn't shake the memory of those suspended bullets and June's willingness to sacrifice himself for her.

"We need to be more careful moving forward," Mira said, turning to the Chimaeric Demons.

"How are your mana reserves holding up?"

She knew the three clones were their best shield.

One of the clones flexed his hand, green energy crackling between his fingers. "Better than expected. Since each power draws from a different astral brain crystal, we still have several brain crystal powers at full mana capacity. Our healing powers had been almost depleted, but our offensive ones are still good."

"That's something at least," Amber said.

She moved to the building's edge and looked down at the massive fortress below them.

The fortress was huge, spanning several kilometers. It was filled with blocky buildings and strong walls that formed a confusing maze.

Below, black-armored soldiers rushed through the rain-slicked streets, splashing through puddles with urgent eyes.

"Where are they going?" Emily asked.

"I bet Erik showed himself."

"Or they are searching for us," a clone said. There was no way to know.

"This is a serious problem," Amber said, looking at the increased troop movements below. "With so many soldiers patrolling, we'll need to slow down our search. One wrong step and we'll have the entire garrison coming down on us. We can't afford that kind of attention right

now."

At that point, Amber would be forced to warp everyone away.

"I think we should discuss what to do now..."

"The generators are our main target. The other Vindicators are a secondary problem." She

paused.

Emily chambered a fresh round in her rifle. "The generators will have their own Vindicator protection. Don't forget that."

Amber nodded. This meant that fighting those bastards would be inevitable. She sighed, then thought back to the puddle of liquefied remains of the two Vindicators they killed.

Her corrosive gas had been thorough-too thorough. Even their brain crystals hadn't been spared, eliminating any chance of using their bodies to fight.

Each Chimaeric Demon could bring forth two undead, with them using their brain crystal powers, and maybe they could use the two. If they did, they would be much safer.

She sighed again, pushing away thoughts aside. Unfortunately, her powers were too

destructive.

"What's the problem?" a clone asked.

"I was thinking we could have used the Vindicators' bodies," Amber said. "Your powers could have turned them into undead, giving us powerful allies. But my corrosive gas..." She gestured toward the melted remains being washed away by the rain. "It destroyed everything, including their brain crystals. There's nothing left we can use."

The Chimaeric Demons nodded in understanding.

Using their power to raise and control the dead would have given them an advantage, especially with such powerful corpses. However, the complete destruction of the bodies had eliminated this possibility.

One of the clones perked up. "What about the barrier masters we killed earlier? Their bodies should still be intact."

"They weren't as powerful as Vindicators," another clone added, "but their defensive abilities will be helpful. We could use them to protect us during the generator assault."

"That's actually a great idea," Amber said. "Get the barrier masters' bodies. There were six of them."

Emily frowned. "Are you sure the barrier masters are our best option? There might be more valuable candidates out there."

Amber nodded.

"After we destroy the generators, we could send them to reinforce the main battlefield. The army needs protection from the artillery units."

She paused. "I don't know how the situation outside the walls is, but I bet we lost a lot of troops."

Nods of agreement rippled through the group.

"Go take the bodies, then we are going to create teams again," Amber said. "One Chimaeric Demon scouts with Mira. Another stays with Emily and June, another with me."

The Chimaeric Demons headed back to where they had killed the barrier masters. The area was chaotic-the earlier assassination had already drawn attention, and Erik's ongoing fight had only made things worse. Though soldiers swarmed the location, the Chimaeric Demons were confident they could handle the situation.

Emily slumped against a wall. She needed to rest. "Did you expect all of this when we started?"

Amber shrugged. While she had anticipated hardships, she hadn't known exactly what to expect. Mira, on the other hand, did.

"In my mercenary days, we faced worse. Thaidis make these Vindicators look tame by comparison. There's a reason mercenaries hunt in groups."

While the Vindicators were more powerful than the Thaidis Mira had faced with her mercenary group, the tactical approach needed was similar, especially considering the power disparity was almost the same.

"Hunting needs perfect strategy," she said. "And even better escape plans when things go wrong."

Emily and Amber exchanged tired sighs. The rain intensified, washing away blood and debris from their earlier battle.

Minutes later, the Chimaeric Demons returned, each carrying two barrier masters' bodies.

Amber examined their recovered bodies, then motioned toward the fortress's center. "Let's

move. The generators won't destroy themselves."

The clones resurrected the six.

The group moved out, hugging the shadows of buildings while using the rain as natural cover.

One Chimaeric Demon led alongside Mira.

Then the two shapeshifted and went scouting ahead.

"Protect Emily and June," Amber said.

The Chimaeric Demons formed a protective circle around them.

#### Chapter 1193: The Generators

The group reached the compound. Emily monitored their surroundings through her scope, noting the locations of patrols and security cameras.

Thanks to her help, the group avoided them, but sometimes Emily was forced to take care of the patrols, and then the group had to hide the bodies.

They couldn't avoid dealing with the bodies-leaving them exposed would create an obvious trail leading straight to their position.

They were forced to hide the corpses in drainage ditches and alleys, making sure no blood trails would give them away. The process was time-consuming but essential for maintaining their stealth approach.

"Three squads approaching from the left street," she said through their comms. "Standard equipment, no Vindicators in sight."

Amber listened. "We will avoid engaging for now. Let's hide behind those dumpsters."

Getting to the building housing the generators had been frustratingly slow, despite Emily telling them where the patrols were.

The Blackguards swarmed everywhere in groups of three to five as they rushed toward two main locations: the hangar where the planes were kept and the outer walls where waves of undead tried to breach the barrier.

The group heard the blackguards talk. From the blackguards' conversations, they learned that the situation at the hangar was dire.

Two Vindicators were on their way to the place, and the second division commander was already battling Erik, who was described as more like a demon than a human.

Erik was killing many blackguards, but unfortunately, he was in a thought fight himself. The group couldn't determine if the second division commander's tough demeanor was genuine, or if they were merely trying to boost their own spirits, but that's what they said.

The group then scaled a building. The Chimaeric Demons took position at the edges, near the parapet, from which they could see the streets below and act as if someone noticed them. Mira and June went scouting near the building.

"Two minutes and we act," Amber said.

The sun was already up at that point, yet lightning flashed above them, illuminating the target building.

Security around the building was unusually light, with only a handful of guards patrolling the perimeter and minimal surveillance equipment visible.

Two cameras covered the main entrance, and only one guard stood at each corner of the building.

This last defense immediately raised red flags-it could mean either a cleverly concealed trap or that the real security lay inside.

"Something's wrong," a Chimaeric Demon said. "Where are the Vindicators?"

The absence of Vindicators was obvious from several missing signs. Normally, with Vindicators present, there would have been much tighter security—at least 24 well-armed and very powerful guards at each entrance. The guards would also act more professionally, unlike the relaxed behavior they were showing now. The group would have also seen more frequent patrol rounds and special security equipment around the building.

"The blackguards said two Vindicators were going to Erik. Could they be them?"

"There is no alternative," Amber said.

"I don't think those on the walls could leave. If they are there, it means they're commanding the defense there—if they abandoned their position, the entire chain of command would fall apart."

Mira nodded, but was still confused.

"Strange," Mira said, frowning. "News of two dead Vindicators should have reached command by now. They should realize Erik isn't working alone and that we're after the barrier's power sources."

It meant that sending the two Vindicators protecting the generator was stupid.

"Unless they don't care about us..." Amber said.

"Worse," a clone added. "They might think their defenses are enough to deal with us. After all, the master is the real oddity here; even us Chimaeric Demons are nothing compared to him. Besides, I think they believe no sane person would sneak their way here."

"We must not be sane then," Emily said with a grim smile, adjusting her rifle against her shoulder. The rain trickled down her scope lens as she continued scanning the perimeter. "By the way, there are no signs of movement on the upper levels. There are no snipers or heavy weapons."

Amber wasn't liking the situation one bit. "Whatever they prepared, it will be inside." She paused to think. "Should I warp you in?"



"No," One of the Chimaeric Demons said. "Better keep your mana. We will sneak our way in and destroy the generators. In the meantime, you cover our asses. I'm talking to you, Emily."

The woman nodded. Mira kept observing the building, taking in every detail—the placement of the guards, the worn paths in the mud where patrols had repeatedly walked.

With each moment, her sense of unease grew stronger. The security setup felt too sparse, almost staged.

"I was thinking," Mira said. "In my experience, this level of security for such critical infrastructure means one of two things: a trap or..."

"Or they've already moved everything important," Emily said.

"Yeah."

The group exchanged looks. They had come too far to retreat, but the situation urged them to be cautious in their approach.

"It's not like we have alternatives," Amber said. "But we double our precautions. Mira, take point. Emily, keep doing what you are doing. June, stay with her. The rest of us will..."

"No," a Chimaeric Demon said. "The best thing is still for us clones to go there alone."

"They have the Veritas Lenses. If you are not careful, they might spot you," Amber said. "True, but having you with us would make it harder to stay undetected."

"True, but I can warp you out in case all of this is a trap." She paused. "Remember, you are currently controlling the barrier masters. We need you alive."

The clones sighed. That was extremely similar to Erik's sighs. Almost the same. It was true; they were his clones, but each one of them got slightly different personalities from him and the others. This gap widened as time passed.

A distant explosion interrupted the group, the sound carrying clearly despite the rain. Then another, closer.

"That's from the hangar," a Chimaeric Demon said.

Emily swung her rifle toward the disturbance. Through her scope, she saw flames rising

despite the rain. However, she couldn't see much. She was too far, and the vapor and smoke

there limited the visibility.

"Multiple explosions," she said, as more of them appeared.

"Maybe it is the planes..."

"No," Mira said. "They should have destroyed them already. This is their battle."

Amber's expression hardened. "We need to move now. Let's go..."

Mira remained behind with June, Emily, and the barrier masters. She would provide the first defense line, June would act as a lookout, and if things went bad, the barrier masters would

create one.

More explosions rocked the area where Erik was fighting-three sharp blasts followed by a deeper boom that shook the ground beneath their feet.

Amber and the three Chimaeric Demons went inside. They moved through the service

corridors. Water dripped from overhead pipes. As they crossed the metal grating, Amber

followed the Chimaeric Demons' steps.

Steam leaked from valves where maintenance passages connected to main corridors. If she did not pay attention, they might all die.

A patrol walked past the other side of the wall. Amber and the clones pressed themselves against the pipes until the footsteps disappeared. Amber kept her breathing steady despite her racing heart. For the clones, it was just another Tuesday.

At some point, one clone signaled to stop.

"What?"

"There is someone..."

Then they heard some voices.

They heard two blackguards walking past, their boots echoing on the metal floor. "The generators are struggling," one said. "They weren't meant to maintain the barrier alone for

this long."

"Yeah, what happened to the barrier masters anyway?" the other said. "Their barrier just vanished."

"Must be dead. Good thing we still have the generators, or we'd be overrun by now."

Their voices faded as they continued down the corridor.

Another clone pointed to a vent above them. Once there, Amber sighed in relief. "Well, at least we know the generators are still here."

"Which doesn't mean this is a trap," a clone said.

They climbed further inside the ventilation system; the clones helping Amber through the tight space, but then they turned into rats. Her clothes got dusty as they crawled, while Amber was smaller than them and had fewer problems moving. Guards passed below, not noticing

them.

Red emergency lights shone through the vents. Amber ignored all thoughts and focused on

staying alert.

A clone stopped suddenly. He signed that there was a large room with multiple people below

them.

They then reached a wider section. "Based on the map I took at the entrance, the generator room must be nearby."

They entered a storage room through the vents, which the clone closed behind them. The room only had spare parts and tools.

On the other side, there was the generator room entrance, guarded by security cameras and

dozens of people. The clones watched the devices and moved when they weren't pointing at

them.

They went past them and stopped.

The generator room was massive, filled with the enormous machines. Walkways crossed

above, and power lines ran along the walls.

But the machines weren't what made them stop.

Hundreds of armed guards stood around the generators. Teams with heavy weapons and even deadlier brain crystal powers lined the walkways. More guards blocked the other exits. The clone was right. This was, in fact, a trap. There weren't few guards outside because the generators had been brought away, but because they were all inside the generator room. That also explained why the Vindicators left. There were hundreds of people here. Only Erik, or a powerful team of at least hundreds of fighters, would have been able to come here and have the strength to fight. "Well. We were wondering where the hell they ended up," Amber said.

#### Chapter 1194: A Clash of Titans (1)

Lightning crackled through the hangar area as Erik now had to fight against two new threats.  
<Lucky me...>

The two Vindicators rushed to Bill's side, the barrier master quickly taking position on his left while the elementalist darted to his right.

"Getting tired?" Bill asked, his invisible hands multiplying across the space and raining down on Erik like a swarm of angry wasps. "Your movements are slowing."

"Oh, well, I mean... It's a couple thousand against one."

Erik's sarcasm was lost on Bill, but his words rang true—he was fighting an impossible battle that no sane person would have chosen to face.

Yet he was there, and not only was he trying to come out on top in a situation in which everyone else would have fled with their tails between their legs, but he was actually holding his own well.

The hydra's heads were also helping a lot. They allowed Erik to use the plants to create a protective dome around the aircraft while he kept fighting against the blackguards below, and now Bill and two Vindicators.

As for the plane, Erik turned everything around it into metal to make it harder for the enemy to destroy it. This didn't mean metal was actually enough—many powers could easily tear through such defenses, but at least it provided another layer of protection, and that wasn't something to discard.

At the same time, the Hydra's heads were managing different aspects of the battle and were the main reason Erik had not been defeated or the plane destroyed. It was thanks to them he kept piling up kills and experience points.

Erik didn't get that many levels, three to be precise, in the last ten minutes. It was a great rate, but not as great as others he got when farming thaids.

Yet all that mana replenished his reserves.

One of the Vindicators remained on the ground and focused on defending the soldiers that were rushing at the plane.

Her power was suitable for the task since it allowed her to enhance the stamina and mana regen of those around her. Her birth brain crystal power, though, was that of a barrier master. It was a troublesome combination, because she could protect her comrades while, at the same time, powering them up.

A Vindicator barrier master was a first, though. Yet not a less annoying combination.

The other Vindicator was an elementalist. He called him as such, since he had two brain crystal powers that allowed him to control wind and fire.

It was hard to miss, given how soon he started bombarding Erik with combinations of wind blades and fireballs, but he was mostly supporting Bill.

However, aside from trying to kill Erik, he was also protecting the barrier master Vindicator, and while Bill remained in the air to face Erik directly.

"Anyway, you don't look better than me. Am I wrong, or are you the one who can barely stand?"

Erik taunted, unleashing a barrage of ice shards and crackling lightning bolts at the oncoming Vindicators, only to watch their attacks dissipate against the barrier master's shields.

<That fucker... I need to get rid of her somehow.>

The woman was skilled and showed a remarkable ability to do multiple things at the same time. Though Erik didn't know if powering up those around her was a sort of passive ability or required focus. In the first case, then he was unlucky; in the second, it would only mean the woman was even better than he assumed.

Besides, based on how well she was protecting the soldiers below while also protecting Bill and the Elementalist, she must have been a very good fighter.

<Well, she is a Vindicator. It wouldn't make sense for her to not know when to make a barrier...

>

Yet it wasn't easy to block Erik's attacks, especially those of his plants, since he made the vines spread underground to reach their target, meaning it was impossible to see them before the attack.

The elementalist started controlling the winds, creating a sort of bent wind barrier that redirected Erik's attack back at him.

At the same time, the man created a small hole in the wind barrier through which he sent wind-powered fireballs.

<Fuck... This guy has a lot of mana...>

It didn't help that the Barrier Master Vindicator was also helping his mana regeneration, which meant he could make such kinds of attacks much more often.

The temperature around Erik surged dramatically as waves of heat rolled through the area, the elementalist's fiery assault turning the air itself into a weapon, and the wind he was generating didn't help.

However, that wasn't enough to kill Erik. With all the defenses he had, what should have burned to cinders, everyone else was nothing more than a mild annoyance. Besides, he also evaded most of his attacks, and with the strength he had, he didn't even break a sweat. Though the man's attacks were fast enough to give him a hard time.

"Why are you struggling this much?" Bill asked. The man knew Erik was likely to win.

His mana reserves seemed endless, and despite having so many reinforcements on his side, it was only a matter of time before the blackguards would deplete theirs.

<No, there is still a chance for us to win before that happens.> The man tried to reassure himself.

That Erik apparently had massive mana reserves was clear to the blackguards now, despite them not knowing how much or why. In truth, it was just because Erik got mana from each

level up.

That was why they called the barrier master vindicator here. She could increase mana regen, which at least partially offset Erik's endless pool.

The problem was that no matter how valuable this information was, without someone able to make him deplete that mana, they would not win.

<It doesn't mean we must not try...>

"Why should I not?" Erik asked.

Erik's plants transformed, shifting from things as hard and static as metal to others more evanescent like fire, sometimes even going on between the two.

The sudden change caught the elementalist off guard, and he stumbled but didn't fall; his shields provided cover while he recovered but could not stop the attack for long.

The man got forced to increase the strength of the wind he created just to keep up with Erik's attacks, and that reshaped the environment.

The winds pushed away the remnants of rain, creating clear patches in the previously overcast sky. It parted the clouds and swept the debris that the battle created.

Sunlight pierced through these openings, casting beams that revealed the state of the



battlefield below.

They also fell on Erik, making him look akin to a deity, albeit a god of death.

The winds, however, failed to disperse the heat generated by the fighters' attacks.

The temperature rose noticeably because of the beaming ball of fire that both Erik and the elemental Vindicator generated.

It didn't matter how it could have been because of winter. The area was as hot as if they were in the middle of summer and was constantly rising.

"I could ask you the same question," Erik said. "Why are you struggling so much? Shouldn't you know death is the only thing that awaits you?" Erik launched another assault.

"Because I have a goal, Erik, a wish, to be more precise."

"Is this the goal that made you guys unleash the Heniate on New Alexandria?"

"Are you still mad about that?" Bill avoided some metal tendrils sprouting from the ground, then destroyed some massive concrete chunks Erik threw at him with telekinesis.

Meanwhile, despite the Barrier Master Vindicator's protective efforts, Erik's attacks

continued to cut through the blackguards' ranks.

Yet still they came, their numbers endlessly increasing, empowered by the barrier master's brain crystal power, and protected by the same person.

"I'm tired of talking to you. For someone so young, you think small," Bill said. His invisible hands formed a cage around Erik, trying to limit his movement.

"Better narrow-minded than a monster like you guys."

The elementalist unleashed a flaming tornado and hurled it towards Erik.

The young man's third Hydra's head struggled to track all the threats. His plants created

barriers while he dodged, but the assault forced him closer to the ground, which was a problem since there was basically no free space for him below, and the elementalist was

waiting for him there.

<Fuck.>

Erik felt a massive surge of mana come from the elementalist, who then summoned a massive firestorm, its power magnified by his companion, constantly replenishing his mana. Bill's invisible hands struck from multiple angles, each aimed to disable or kill. Erik dodged them all, but just barely-the soldiers who couldn't target the hangar had turned their attacks on him instead, making his situation direr by the second.

Many had melee powers and could do nothing, but a lot had ranged ones.

<If I go too far from the battlefield, I can't control the plants.>

There was a limit to his powers, after all, and he couldn't leave.

Erik destroyed another wave of soldiers while preventing the plane's destruction.

[LEVEL UP.]

## Chapter 1195: A Clash of Titans (2)

The Vindicators pressed their advantage, trying to restrict Erik's movement but failing spectacularly. Yet it didn't mean they stopped trying, especially because, if they did, they would be killed.

Erik already had to constantly move to avoid the invisible hands released by Bill, but at the same time also had to resist the elemental powers. He was using wind to make it harder for Erik to move.

That meant Erik had to spend significantly more stamina than usual, forcing his wings to beat with greater force and frequency to overcome the opposing wind currents.

Erik had two alternatives here, two that would drain his mana faster. Either he could make flying easier by using telekinesis or create wind of his own to contrast that of the Elementalist.

He chose the second. The higher number of neural links made mana consumption lower, despite not being as effective as the first was.

Besides, Erik had to prevent the flames from spreading toward the plane.

<Maybe I need another Hydra head.>

But Erik was reluctant to make a new one. The power was not a simple one, and having multiple versions of himself inside of his mind was not something without repercussions. The system said that clearly, he could lose himself in all those minds.

<This isn't working,> one of his consciousness said. <We need more power. More heads.>

<Are you insane? We're already having problems in not killing each other. One more split might create even more problems!>

<Better fractured than dead,> the first said. <Look at their coordination. Three Vindicators, and we can barely keep up with all the things we need to do.>

<I might start focusing on the Vindicators instead of the planes. Even if we lose it, it won't be a great loss.>

<It won't be a great loss? We would be forced to bring thousands of Chimaeric Demons with us just to use them as baits! Do you have a vague idea of how many of them we will lose?> <Of course I know!>

<No,> Erik's main consciousness said.

<Then what's your brilliant plan? Because right now, we're losing.>

<I'm going to make a new head,> Erik said.

<This will make things less stable...>

<It doesn't matter. We need that plane, and we are smart enough to avoid tearing at each other and keep the space balanced.>

<If you say so...>

<Yeah.>

<Then let's do this.>

The internal dialogue took only seconds, but in those moments, Erik made a decision. A new Hydra's head was born.

With the new Hydra's head, Erik's defenses solidified. The consciousness devoted itself entirely to protection, making Erik's main consciousness deal with moving and attacking. The other heads were going to take care of other different tasks, as they were already doing.

"Something changed," Bill said, his invisible hands probing Erik's defenses, who looked more solid and reactive.

The elemental's wind still howled, but Erik's counter-currents neutralized the worst of it. His own gusts created pockets of calm air where he could move easily.

<I think they noticed.>

Erik's plants surged upward. The barrier master's shields held against the assault, but Erik saw her strain increasing. She had to defend many people, making a lot of barriers, since a single large one wasn't currently working to stop Erik's tendrils.

The blackguards, though, kept pressing and attacking the hangar. Erik created physical defenses, but it wasn't easy to keep them standing with so many people attacking.

The barrier master's enhancement made their attacks particularly potent, given how much mana they could now imbue.

Even his defenses were having trouble against that much power unleashed by so many people.

"Your mana will run out eventually," Bill said, launching another wave of invisible hands. "The barrier master's enhancement affects regeneration, too."

Erik already noticed that. Bill was keeping his attacks at a minimum, and his complexion improved. At the same time, the other blackguards increased their attacks, as if mana was of no issue at all.

Bill was clearly pacing himself, using the minimum amount of power needed while letting his mana regenerate.

The elementalist kept attacking Erik to keep Erik under pressure and to give Bill enough time to get his mana back.

"You keep saying that," Erik said, attacking again.

The elementalist combined wind and fire into a spiral of destruction, but Erik's new Hydra's head anticipated the attack. Plants erupted from below to absorb or redirect the assault.

[LEVEL UP]

Fresh mana surged through Erik. The barrier master noticed something was wrong.

"His reserves should be depleted by now!"

Then Bill's attacks went back to their original intensity. He realized some time ago there was something weird about Erik, but he couldn't understand what it was.

Yet the shift in momentum, even if he didn't understand its cause, was visible. Bill's invisible hands tried striking from every angle, trying to overwhelm the younger man.

The fourth consciousness handled the defense, and his attacks always failed.

"You know what amazes me?" Erik asked, his elements combining in increasingly complex combinations and sneakier attacks.

"Even though I can kill you as easily as flies, you still don't stop..."

The elementalist unleashed another firestorm, its power magnified by the barrier master's enhancement.

"Then why don't you try, prick?" Bill was starting to get annoyed now.

Erik's plants caught several soldiers, and more experience rushed to him.

The barrier master's face contorted with effort as she struggled to maintain her protective shields, sweat beading on her forehead as Erik's attacks increased in both frequency and power. Her mana reserves were draining rapidly, and small cracks began appearing in her barriers whenever Erik's strikes landed.

Since she was the only Barrier Master there, even with her vast mana reserves, she struggled against Erik's assault amid battle. Unlike defending the walls-where maintaining a single powerful barrier sufficed here, she had to create multiple smaller ones to protect troops scattered throughout the battlefield.

This meant she had to spend a lot more mana and much more focus if she wanted to succeed, yet Erik wasn't making that easy for her.

No matter how much she tried to protect them, Erik's power seemed to be unstoppable, not because of their might, but because of how insidious they were.

Erik's plants were especially dangerous because they could sprout from any patch of ground, making them nearly impossible to predict. While his tendrils attacked from one direction, roots would suddenly burst through the concrete floor in another spot, catching soldiers off

guard.

The barrier master couldn't see underground, nor could she predict the future; protecting everyone just because of this was getting hard.

Besides, Erik compounded this threat by layering illusions over his actual attacks. The barrier master would see a surge of vegetation coming from the left, reinforcing her shields there, only to have the real assault emerge from below or behind. These deceptions forced her to spread her barriers thin, trying to cover all possible angles of attack, and that made the barriers fragile and weak.

Yet something unexpected and alarming rattled Erik to his core—a sight that made him freeze in place and momentarily lose focus on the surrounding battle.

A massive explosion rocked the hangar, sending shockwaves through the entire structure. Flames erupted simultaneously from multiple points across the building—near support beams, fuel lines, and critical junctions.

The fire moved fast and burned hotter than normal fire, showing that someone had used brain crystal powers to make it worse.

As this was happening, Bill's face changed—he stopped looking frustrated and instead smiled like someone whose plan had worked perfectly.

"SHIT! What did you do?" Erik asked. It was clear the plane had been destroyed; the plants

protecting it had been crushed. That was simply too much weight, and the fact that the blackguards kept destroying them didn't allow Erik to fortify the section well enough.

Bill's grin widened. "You are not the only one good at sneaking his way around!" The hangar's structure groaned as support beams warped under the intense heat. The barrier master's shields

protected the remaining soldiers from the worst of it, while the elemental used his wind to keep the flames at bay, and at the same time making them worse.

The plane was totally destroyed. Its body was broken in half, its wings were completely

ruined, and its engines had melted down. All that was left was a pile of burned, smoking metal pieces spread across the hangar floor, surrounded by metallic plants.

The flames were so hot that they started melting the metal beams holding up the hangar. The steel turned red hot and began to bend and twist.

The extreme heat melted everything in sight-both the metal parts of the destroyed plane and Erik's metal-transformed plants turned into rivers of molten metal flowing on the floor. Bill's grin said everything. Now two things were going to change. The first was that Erik could completely focus on the enemy rather than protecting the plane. The second was that the troops below were going to do the same with him.

#### Chapter 1196: Chaos in the Generator Room

"That's a lot of guards," one of the Chimaeric Demons said, glancing inside the generator room.

"Maybe Mira was right, and this is a trap."

"Don't jump to conclusions," one of the other clones said. "Maybe they simply amassed security here, thinking it would provide better protection for such a critical facility."

Amber nodded. "They had probably been scared by the death of the barrier masters and placed as many defenses as they could here to protect the barrier generator."

"This is stupid," one of the clones said. "Putting all these guards in one place is risky. They've left other important areas with less protection. It would make more sense to spread out their forces evenly."



"I partially disagree," another clone said. "Think about it-these generators are their most important asset. If we destroy them, their whole defense system fails. By putting all their forces here, they've created a strong defensive position. Anyone trying to attack would face too many enemies in this small space. It's like walking into a trap."

The third Chimaeric Demon studied the room.

"What do we do?"

"We could create a diversion," one of the Chimaeric Demons said. "Draw their attention to one side while we destroy the generators from another."

"Too risky with these numbers, and the room is too small," Amber said. "They will surely overwhelm us before we make any real progress."

"What about your warping powers?" the second clone asked. "Could you teleport us inside? We can strike and flee."

"I don't think we will be able to go far even if we teleport," Amber said. "They'd spot you as soon as you appear."

"A frontal assault?" the first clone considered. "We should be able to do it..."

"It would just cause our deaths," another clone cut in.

"Yeah," Amber said. "It's too dangerous, and we need all of you alive for the remaining Vindicators."

A clone looked above. "The ventilation system might work."

"What were you thinking about?"

"Something they can't defend against." Amber understood as soon as the word 'ventilation,' was pronounced. "My birth brain crystal power."

"Indeed. It's our best option," the clone said. "Quick, lethal, and it will destroy the generators, too."

"But the gas will fill the entire room," Amber said. "They will try to get out. Those generators look sturdy. They might resist a couple of minutes, and when they see the gas is killing them, the guards will try to get out."

The third clone smiled-Erik's smile, but with a harder edge.

Amber's heart skipped a beat as she watched him smile. It was exactly like Erik's smile-the same slight curve of the lips, the same sharp look in his eyes. She had seen this expression many times before when Erik was planning something during their missions.

Seeing it on his clone's face stirred complicated emotions. This wasn't Erik, not really, and yet... the mannerisms, the tactical thinking, even the slightly predatory edge were all over him.

"We will block them."

There was a pause. "If we stay at the doors, we will be able to prevent them from surrounding us, and the number of people will stop them from directly attacking us. More than that, the corrosive gas will push them to attack each other to get out."

"Yes, but that poses exactly the same problems as all the other plans. There are still too many enemies."

"That's true," another clone said, "with the difference that Amber's clone will actually take care of them."

Amber considered their plan. Her gas had proven devastating against the Vindicators, leaving nothing but liquefied remains. Against hundreds of soldiers, in an enclosed space, her power was bound to make a slaughter.

The strategy relied on the guards' panic to work against them-as they tried to escape, they would fight and trample each other, accelerating casualties beyond what Amber's power alone could achieve. With the Chimaeric Demons blocking all exits, only the soldiers directly facing them could mount an attack, while those trapped in the room's center would succumb to the corrosive fog.

"It will be a massacre," she said.

"We need those generators destroyed."

The clone was right. The more those things kept the barrier up, the worse it was for the troops outside the walls.

Based on the plan, no Chimaeric Demon should have joined the battlefield yet, but the undead were not infinite, and the blackguard's defenses were massive. Sooner or later, they would completely destroy the undead, and then the Chimaeric Demons would be forced to join the attack in first person.

The sooner that barrier was brought down, the fewer casualties among the clones there would be later.

The third clone pointed to the upper walkways. "There's a maintenance alcove up there, hidden from view. It's the perfect spot for you to release the corrosive gas."

Her gas would flow downward, filling the room in seconds.

"You'll have to hold every exit," she said.

"Can you really hold back this many people?" Amber asked. "If even one group breaks through..."

"We won't let them escape."

Amber took a deep breath. "On my signal then."

The Chimaeric Demons went near the exits, close enough to be able to act as soon as Amber released the corrosive gas but far enough to not be seen by the guards inside. As soon as Amber warped and released her power, it was going to be on them to prevent the blackguards

from escaping.

Amber waited for the clones to be ready, then gave her own signal and warped inside.

She materialized in the maintenance alcove above the generator, crouching in the narrow metal space.

The large room below her was packed with equipment. Rows of machines hummed loudly, while hundreds of guards in black armor stood watch.

They were placed around the important machinery, weapons in hand. Not one of them thought to look up to where she was hiding, not knowing they were about to face death

coming from above.

She activated her birth brain crystal power.

The deadly gas poured from her body like a waterfall, flowing down into the room. The cloud spread quickly across the floor in all directions.

The guards didn't notice until it was too late-by the time they saw the gas touching their boots; it had already surrounded the closest group of soldiers, giving them no chance to warn

the others.

Screams erupted as the corrosive fog spread. Soldiers rushed for the exits, only to find the Chimaeric Demons waiting there already.

The first clone engaged a squad, trying to break through the main door. He released many starlight fireballs, which also set the fog on fire, creating a double-destroying effect.

But Amber released more, which made the area even deadlier. The lucky ones that reached the exit got kicked back. Bodies flew backward, crashing into their comrades and creating a mess.

"Keep them inside!"

The second clone faced a similar group, who were trying to escape through a side exit. They attacked with various powers-fire, lightning, projections of various types.

Most of the attacks ended up on their own comrades, and the few ones that went past them

were not fast enough to hit the Chimaeric Demon, albeit it wasn't easy even for them to avoid them in such a cramped space.

The third clone guarded the emergency exit, where the most dangerous wave formed. Elite troops charged at him while the fire and the corrosive gas burned and liquefied their bodies. The clone shifted between forms, mostly small, and avoided the attacks he could. Screams turned to gurgles as it ate through armor, flesh, and bone. The generators sparked

and sizzled as their components dissolved.

"The gas-ARGH!"

"Don't let anyone through!" A clone shouted.

More soldiers died trying to break past the Chimaeric Demons, but despite their numbers and brain crystal powers, they couldn't match the clones' raw power.

The battle was far from easy for the clones. Despite their powers and combat experience, they

got hit many times.

Energy blasts burned them, swords cut them, and powerful blows broke their bones. What saved them was their healing power-they recovered from wounds that would have killed anyone else. Of course, at the cost of their mana. Fighting so many enemies at once in narrow corridors pushed the clones to their limits.

They were fast, but not fast enough to avoid every attack. They were strong, but there were many strong people among their enemies. In the absence of Amber's powers, they would also

have been dead.

Then emergency lights flashed as critical systems began shutting down. The generators couldn't resist anymore.

The gas ate through everything-organic and inorganic alike.

The generators collapsed one by one, their metal unable to withstand the mana-powered corrosive gas. Power conduits exploded as systems failed.

Finally, the screams stopped. The last escape attempts ceased. Only the hiss of dissolving material remained.

The Chimaeric Demons held their positions until Amber gave the signal. When she warped down to join them, the generator room had become a scene from hell-dissolved bodies,

melted equipment, destruction absolute and complete.

"It's done," she said.

The clones nodded, their expressions grim.

In the distance, more explosions sounded from the hangar. Whatever was happening where

Erik was, they had done their part.

The generators that powered the Law Gate's defenses were destroyed. The Chimaeric Demons were going to take care of the rest, but the Vindicators were still around.

Chapter 1197: The Tide of Death

Waves of undead crashed against the Law Gate's barrier as the sun climbed higher in the sky. The Chimaeric Demons directed thousands of undead thaids against specific defense sections.

"Sector Eight is showing increased resistance," one clone said. "Redirecting the troops to support the primary thrust."

The larger bear-like thaids absorbed devastating hits from the defensive turrets shielding the smaller units advancing behind them. Even when torn apart, they continued forward, driven by the clones' inexorable will.

"The enemy ammunition expenditure is exceeding sustainable levels," another Chimaeric Demon said. "They will not be able to keep this up for long."

The blackguards' weapons fired with decreasing frequency, their brain crystal weapons needing more frequent reloading.

"The heat must have ruined the weapons."

"There are still many around. Don't lose focus."

Flying creatures attacked from above, dodging the enemy's attacks as they flew across the battlefield.

While they attacked the barrier, they also served as decoys, forcing the defenders on the ground to shoot at them instead of other targets, since flying thaids were much more dangerous than land ones.

Thousands of smaller thaids surged forward, exploiting gaps in the defensive fire. The automated targeting systems struggled to track so many targets at the same time.

A massive bear-thaid, nearly three times larger than its companions, tanked a direct hit from a brain-crystal artillery piece. Its flesh vaporized, but its momentum carried the rest forward, crashing into the barrier with bone-crushing force.

Yet the barrier stood firm, its surface absorbing and dispersing the impact in rippling energy waves. The crystalline matrix hummed with strain but maintained its integrity.

"Maintain pressure on Sections Three through Seven," the lead clone said. "Force them to spread their remaining defenders thin. This way, when the barrier falls, we are going to have an easier time."

Energy beams lanced through the morning air, cutting swathes through the undead ranks. But for every thaid that fell, two more took its place. The defenders couldn't maintain this pace indefinitely.

Then, without warning, the barrier flickered.

"Energy fluctuation detected across all sectors," a clone said. "The shield is destabilizing."

"Did they do it?"

The clones were just waiting for Erik and his team to take care of the generators. The barrier masters had been killed already, and only the devices were keeping the barrier up.

The barrier's surface rippled like disturbed water, its shimmer becoming more and more erratic, more and more frequent.

The blackguards noticed that too—their defensive fire reached a frenzied pace as they tried to kill as many undead as possible before the barrier came undone.

The shield pulsed. The Chimaeric Demons didn't know what was happening exactly, if the generators had been destroyed, or if their attack was working, yet the barrier was having problems.

Entire sections, some spanning hundreds of meters, faded before snapping back into place with a crackling surge of energy.

The Chimaeric Demons redirected their forces. Thousands of undead pressed against all the weakened points that started appearing.

"All units, prepare to engage against the enemy. The moment that barrier falls, the blackguards will rush into a melee fight."



Of course, the blackguards would try to kill as many undead as possible first. The fewer the enemy troops were, the better it would be for them.

The Chimaeric Demon never finished the sentence. With a sound like shattering glass amplified a thousandfold, the Law Gate's barrier collapsed.

The plan had worked perfectly. Erik and his team destroyed the power generators inside the fortress while the undead army kept the defenders busy at the barrier. This was exactly what they needed to break through.

"FORWARD!"

The undead army surged, no longer held back by the energy field. The thaids charged the walls while flying units soared over them, diving at defensive positions. The remaining turrets fired desperately, but without the barrier's protection, they couldn't stop the tide of reanimated monsters.

Energy crackled through the air as the blackguards unleashed devastating ranged attacks. Beams of power tore through ranks of undead, vaporizing flesh and shattering bone. Those gifted with long-range abilities maintained their barrage.

The melee-specialized blackguards took their positions as the undead closed in. They summoned their brain crystal powers, creating glowing energy weapons and defensive shields.

"First defensive line breached," a clone said.

There was nothing better than to kill blackguards in the morning, and there were many that needed to be killed before they could reach the inside of the fortress.

They maintained the pace.

"They're falling back," another Chimaeric Demon said.

"Be careful. They might have more traps inside."

There were still many turrets along the walls, so, unless they got destroyed, the blackguards would keep killing the undead.

It didn't take long before the clones found out there were more of those inside, which provided covering fire for the ones retreating.

Yet nothing had been enough to stop the undead.

"Western wall secured," a clone said. "Moving units to flank the western enemy troops' retreat."

The blackguards tried to establish new defensive lines, but the undead's advance gave them no time to properly fortify positions.

Those with enhancement powers tried boosting their companions' abilities, but even enhanced soldiers eventually tired.

"Section Seven on the northern walls is showing signs of heavy resistance," another update came.

"Redirect the tank units there."

The blackguards' command structures were failing one after another as their communication systems went dark, destroyed by the combat.

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The Chimaeric Demons directed their forces through the fortress. Larger units smashed through barricades while swarms of smaller thaids flooded through side passages and maintenance tunnels.

"Western sector cleared," came another update.

Emergency sirens wailed as the fortress's remaining defenders retreated deeper into the fortress-like city.

"Kill them all."

The battle transformed from a siege into a hunt. The undead spread through the fortress like a flood, overwhelming any resistance.

The blackguards' superior weapons meant little against enemies that ignored pain and fought with inhuman coordination.

"We have confirmed the Master's position," a clone said. "He is fighting with high-value targets near the hangar."

"Let's give him a hand, then," the lead clone said.

Chapter 1198: The Army of the dead

Erik's plants erupted from the ground, powered by the fury he was feeling for having lost the plane. With nothing to protect, his attacks focused on the enemy in front of him. The

metallic-plant tendrils whipped through the air, forcing Bill to dodge while his invisible hands destroyed them.

"Feeling better now that you destroyed the plane?" Erik asked in cold anger.

The elementalist launched another massive fireball, but Erik protected himself by making thousands of tendrils of metallic plants sprout in front of him.

The metal liquefied and fell to the ground, making the rain sizzle, evaporate, and scorch the surroundings.

"Oh, you have no idea," Bill grinned. "Now we can focus on what matters."

The barrier master strengthened her companions' powers, but Erik noticed her breathing growing heavier. Maintaining so many enhancements drained her mana rapidly, despite her ability to increase its regeneration.

Now able to focus fully on the battle, Erik's changed the plants' shape much faster than before.

He exploited his advantage, overwhelming his three enemies with a combined assault of ice spears, lightning, fire, and wind.

The elemental's wind barriers faltered under attack, yet the barrier master quickly intervened.

Even if Erik tried, he didn't have enough mana to destroy her barriers, or better, he could, but The would end up without mana.

"I had more plans than just the plane," Erik said as he attacked, making the three back away.

His plants spread wider, covering more ground, forcing the blackguards to divide their attention. "If you think I failed my mission just because of this minor setback, you are mistaken. Did you forget about my army?"

Erik's counter-winds prevented the elemental from creating another firestorm. The wind- powered fire dispersed before it could fully form, making the elemental waste precious

mana.

Bill attacked with his invisible hands from all directions, trying to trap Erik. Even though the young man was protected by thousands of plant tendrils, Bill's hands could break through them easily. However, each attack drained his mana.

There was a limit to what the barrier master could do with her powers, and despite her help, Bill didn't have enough time to recuperate that much mana.

Erik's fourth Hydra's head used the tendrils and the Instability brain crystal power to stop all the hands they could. While they could destroy matter, it was still true they were hands, and as such, they could be injured and severed from their source.

He exploited his advantage, overwhelming his three enemies with a combined assault of ice spears, lightning, fire, and wind.

"Now, since there is no plane to protect anymore, your only advantage against me is gone," Erik said.

His attacks grew more aggressive, forcing the barrier master to strengthen her defenses further. He looked at her.

<How much longer can she keep up with those enhancements?> That was what really worried him.

The blackguards were still there, surrounding Erik, but they had been unable to do anything meaningful. Erik kept a wall of vines behind him, so every attack they used got blocked. However, that pushed Erik's mana consumption further.

However, he didn't stop killing the other blackguards, and experience was rapidly increasing. It was then Erik saw something that made him grin.

As if answering his question, inhuman screams rang from beyond the hangar's ruins. Bill's expression trembled for the first time.

"The barrier..." He saw it flickering and then disappear. Bill knew there was someone targeting the barrier masters and the generators.

Erik wouldn't have been so stupid as to come here alone.

Bill sent people to protect both the barriers and the generators. However, he didn't think someone aside from him could do the job, yet those he sent failed.

Massive bear-like shapes entered the city. Undead thaids poured into the battlefield, their rotting flesh absorbing attacks that would have killed living creatures. The barrier master's enhanced troops found themselves having to repel their advance. They could not focus on Erik anymore.

"Impossible," the elemental said.

Erik's plants caught more soldiers as chaos erupted below.

"Protect the army," Bill said to the barrier master.

"But, sir..."

"GO!"

She obeyed, and that was what she focused on. She created a barrier, but her mana had been spent a lot now, and she was also in the middle of a battle. She couldn't focus on creating and repairing something big enough to block the advancing undead in that situation.

"Your army will die like all the others," Erik said. Bill's invisible hands betrayed his concern. He knew Erik was right. Whatever happened to Maynard Island made Erik much stronger than he was before that battle.

For a moment, Bill thought about fleeing. However, he knew that if he did, his troops would just die. Erik would be able to rampage. It wasn't just that, though; Erik would for sure hunt

him down.

Right now, Bill had many troops on his side and two vindicators. He might be able to do something if he stayed.

He turned to the elemental. "Contact the walls; make the others come." If two Vindicators weren't enough, he was going to call them all.

"Yes, sir."

The elemental took the radio. Erik tried to stop him, but Bill prevented him from killing his underling.

"I'm your opponent."

"All of you are," Erik said.

Wolf-like Thaid's darted between the larger undead, their attacks forcing the blackguards into tighter formations.

The barrier master tried to cover as many angles as she could, but it wasn't easy, not in that situation. The ranged fighters were behind the barrier so that she could cover a smaller area, but the melee fighters were in a gruesome battle with the Chimaeric Demons' undead.

Erik's fourth Hydra's head kept focusing on defending, while the others pressed the attack. Ice and lightning rained down.

Bill was doing everything he could to defend and, at the same time, attack. However, the death rate spiked. Each death fed more mana into his body. Experience points. He would eventually level up again soon.

The elemental was done at that point. The surviving Vindicators were going to come here.

Then flying thaid's flew above the area but headed further deep into the fortress-like city. There were more soldiers coming to the hangar, and they went to intercept them. Humans died, but undead got destroyed. It was just that the Chimaeric Demons hadn't joined

the battlefield yet.

Also, because they didn't actually need. With Monica's powers, they could simply resurrect the blackguards and use them to fight. That was exactly what they did.

## Chapter 1199: Friend or Foe No More (1)

The dead blackguards rose, mana making their bodies move. Their limbs snapped into place before they became able again to stand and to stare with their creepy, glowing eyes.

They picked up what remained of their weapons and moved; they marched in creepy, synchronized movements, though their motions were stiff and unnatural. Then, with no sign of recognition, they attacked their former allies.

The blackguards backed away as they saw their fallen comrades rise from their metaphorical grave. Their shouts went unanswered as the undead marched toward them with a single purpose.

The blackguards were a tight-knit group that rarely formed connections outside their own ranks.

They lived together in the barracks, trained together, and shared meals in their own mess halls. Now, these close bonds made the battle even more horrific, as soldiers were forced to fight against their bunkmates, training partners, and closest companions who had been turned into undead.

Besides, each death dealt a double blow to the blackguards' ranks—not only did they lose a trained soldier and trusted companion from their side, but that same fallen comrade would immediately rise to join the growing forces opposing them.

The psychological impact was crushing, as the blackguards watched their numbers dwindle while the enemy's strength multiplied with each dead warrior.

"Do you like my trick?" Erik asked, laughing at his opponent.

"The trick of a thief, which I guess you are..." Bill said.

"I guess you are not wrong." Erik looked at the man with contempt. "You're not wrong. But this thief will be the one to kill you!"

Bill's invisible hands lashed out with increasing desperation, trying to maintain a semblance of control over the deteriorating situation, yet aside from trying to kill Erik, there wasn't much he could do.

Even the Vindicators struggled to contain the ever-growing army of undead, and the other two were nowhere to be seen.

The elementalist tried to intervene as best as he could, burning the bodies and the undead alike. Completely disregarding Erik, but that increased the pressure on the second division commander.



This proved to be a fatal error as Erik seized the opportunity. Tendrils burst from the ground, ensnaring the man, swiftly impaling him through the heart before he could mount any kind of resistance.

[Human enemy killed: mana-absorbing process starting.]

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

[Mana successfully absorbed, starting converting procedure.]

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

[Mana successfully converted into experience. 15,576,349.13 experience points and 155,763.5 DNA points awarded to the host.]

[LEVEL UP.]

Bill grimaced because he understood the battle was truly lost.

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Explosions rocked the Law Gate's concrete walls as Amber and the others ran to the hangar. "This looks like it's out of an apocalypse movie!"

The battle grew direr with each step they took-powers crashed together, wounded soldiers screamed in terror, and undead thaids let out inhuman howls all around them.

"What the hell is happening there?"

Another explosion rang. The battle wasn't on the same scale as the one Erik had with Levium, but that was just because the madman used entire buildings to attack their lover. However, the undead, the inhuman screams, they made it look much creepier than the one against Levium.

"That doesn't sound like a normal fight," Mira said.

Given the situation, the group never strayed too far from the six undead barrier masters who moved behind them.

The Chimaeric Demons flanked the group, particularly protecting Emily. Amber was in front of her, while Mira and June were slightly ahead, scouting.

"Erik must have engaged the second division commander," Emily said. Through her scope, she caught glimpses of the battle through breaks in the buildings. "The situation there is ugly."

They rounded a corner to find a squad of blackguards locked in combat with undead thaids. The soldiers' tore through rotting flesh, but for each thaid they destroyed, two more took its place under the Chimaeric Demons' control.

The thaids got killed, but they also brought down many opponents. The smaller and weaker thaids were used as a diversion, while the strongest and biggest one tore down at their

opponents.

It was a simple tactic: tear the blackguards down with sheer numbers, and when the undead got destroyed, raise a new one from their dead opponents.

This way, the Chimaeric Demons were not only limiting their losses, but they were even getting more powerful fighters.

"The other Vindicators must be there too," Amber said as they went past the fight. "That's why the battle is lasting this long."

"How many do you think there are?" June asked.

"Two died by our hands," a clone said. "This means there could be four remaining, unless we've overlooked someone."

Another explosion shook the ground. This time, it was bigger than the others, and many buildings collapsed because of it.

Through gaps in the buildings, they saw Erik's plants clash with something, but soon after, the same plants withered, died, and turned to ashes, as if that something destroyed them. At the same time, the many elemental forces Erik could use swirled around. There was fire, wind,

and water.

The group couldn't understand what was happening, but the elemental forces kept flickering, as if something was suppressing them, only for Erik to recreate them from scratch.

"Is that a barrier?" a Chimaeric Demon asked. "Damn, there is another barrier, master!"

Mira nodded. She quickly realized they needed to find Erik and assess the situation. If possible, they had to help him.

"The undead are keeping most of the blackguards' forces occupied. We can use that chaos to sneak our way in."

Then the fires flickered and died. The group didn't know what was happening. Erik could use them, but either stopped because he didn't need them anymore or because he died. Since the plants were still there, it was unlikely Erik died, meaning Erik must have thought they were

not useful anymore.

In truth, the flames died because the elementalist Vindicator died, impaled by Erik's tendrils. "Two more Vindicators are coming from the walls," June said. "They're moving fast."

"How do you know that?"

"I see them!"

The clone was currently flying overhead, partially shapeshifted, so that he could fly and talk at

the same time.

"I need to get a shapeshifting brain crystal power too," Emily said.

The other two Vindicators were currently engaged with the undead, but were currently making their way toward the hangar.

However, the group could only concentrate on the surrounding battle. In particular, Amber's expression hardened as she saw what was really happening and how big and deadly the battle was.

This time, the group was not in a building, sheltered by the fight. They were in the middle of it, where people died in droves.

Thousands of blackguards fought against waves of undead while Erik duelled with Bill high above. The hangar's remains smoldered behind them.

The stench of rotten bodies, piss, blood, and feces could be smelled even from their peripheral position.

The battlefield had transformed into distinct layers of combat-air and ground, living and dead.

High in the air, Erik and Bill fought against each other. While no one could see Bill's invisible hands attacking, they could watch as Erik's plant-like tendrils were being destroyed when they got too close.

"Whatever that power is, the second division commander has a nasty ability. We need to stay

hidden, or we're dead meat."

Neither of the two seemed to gain a clear advantage, not because that wasn't happening, but because Amber and the others didn't have enough dexterity to be able to see the two fight. They were missing a lot, simply because they couldn't see it. However, Erik looked confident.

Of course, they knew Erik well enough to understand when he was lying or when he was at least worried.

Below them, a barrier master Vindicator coordinated the ground defense. Her shields protected clusters of soldiers, but they also looked somehow empowered.

"Do you think it is because of one of her brain crystal powers?" Mira asked a Chimaeric Demon.

"It can be," the clone said. "These guys are full of surprises."

However, the woman's face showed strain.

"Maybe we should focus on taking care of her. She is clearly keeping most of the undead out of the battle."

"We can," a Chimaeric Demon said. "The problem is, who should do it, and how?"

"What do you mean, who?" Amber asked.

"Who among us?" The clone paused. "Based on what I'm seeing, the undead need protection.

It would be better to rush to their side."

"We have six barrier masters," Mira said. "We can use them to protect the undead while we take down the barrier master Vindicator."

"Or," Mira said. "We first kill the barrier master, then we protect the undead."

The dead soldiers kept coming back to life during the battle, attacking their former friends.

When soldiers saw the faces of their old teammates among the undead, many couldn't bring themselves to fight back. This proved deadly, since these walking corpses had no problem

attacking their former allies.

Through the smoke and chaos, Amber spotted movement at the edge of the battle. The Vindicators were almost there. Their arrival would complicate things.

"And now we have to consider the other two guys," June said.

Amber paused to think. She understood the battle had been in a stalemate until now, with Erik

facing the barrier master and the second division commander, but if two more Vindicators arrived, she didn't know how things could change.

"We fight the barrier master," she said. "The woman is only focused on protecting the other blackguards. We should target the approaching Vindicators instead, before they could create too many problems for Erik—we've already proven we can handle them." "Then the barrier masters will be used for our protection?" A Chimaeric demon said.

"It's the best option if we want to prevent the scale of the battle from tilting in the blackguards' favor. I don't know what powers they have," Amber said. "But with the undead barrier masters, I doubt they can do much to us."

Mira nodded. "Yeah, and if they join the fight now, they might target Erik. We must prevent that."

The Chimaeric Demons nodded.

"All right."

"Everyone knows their roles?" Amber asked, preparing to warp. The others nodded, weapons ready and powers activated.

They would only get one chance to turn this fight's tide.

#### Chapter 1200: Friend or Foe No More (2)

The undead barrier masters moved around Amber's group and prepared to fight. Behind her, Mira shapeshifted into some kind of Chimaera, with legs that gave her speed, arms that gave her strength, and claws that would get past any non-mana-powered defense.

The Chimaeric Demons used the Xeridon Anteris' powers to get stronger and activated Hais' brain crystal power to get a better understanding of the battle and spot any weakness or opportunity they got to kill the woman.

"Remember," a Chimaeric Demon said, "one mistake and the Vindicator will tear us apart."

Emily inspected her rifle's bolt action and scope mount. Her mana reserves were low, leaving her with just enough power for one or two Time Freeze uses. She didn't get enough time to recuperate, and most of what she was going to use of her mana was going to be used to power up the rifle itself. After all, it shot mana bullets.

With her mana reserves this low, Emily knew she had to make every shot count. A missed shot wasn't just wasted ammunition-it was precious mana she couldn't afford to lose.

Every shot would cost her precious mana, and emptying her tank early meant certain death. She had to pick her shots carefully, striking only when success was guaranteed.

"I'll go take position," she said. June followed her.

"Be careful, Emily."

"I've got her, don't worry," June said, moving closer to the sniper.

The Chimaeric Demons spread out, positioning themselves to guard from different angles. "Are you ready?" Amber asked Mira.

"As I'll ever be."

However, before they could do anything, something weird happened. There was a change in the undead's behavior.

The reanimated soldiers moved with increasing frenzy, their attacks becoming more aggressive, more chaotic. The blackguards found themselves pushed back by the sudden shift in intensity, but the barrier protecting them was still active, and until that was up, they were not going to lose.

The barrier master, Vindicator, strengthened her shields because something felt wrong. She knew that whatever was making the undead stir; it meant something big was going to happen.

Then the earth beneath their feet trembled violently. The vibration started as a subtle rumble, like distant thunder, but quickly intensified into powerful shockwaves that made stones bounce and dirt crack. With each passing second, the tremors grew stronger, threatening to split the ground itself.

"What's happening?"

Terrifying screams echoed through the air as the ground cracked open like a broken window. Then, with a deafening crash, the ground collapsed, forming an enormous hole that pulled everything down into it.

Thousands of blackguards plummeted into the darkness. The undead did the same; it was just that, this time, below ground, there was not going to be any barrier protecting them, and the fall would not kill the undead either.

As the dust cleared, they found themselves in a vast underground tunnel that stretched over 50 meters wide and disappeared into darkness in both directions.



Water dripped from the rough stone walls while earthy smells filled the stale air. Looking up through the hole above, they saw thousands of Chimaeric Demons positioned in the darkness. "Welcome," a clone said. "To your graveyard." A grin then spread across his face.

Above ground, the barrier master Vindicator stared in horror as thousands of soldiers plummeted into the dark chasm below.

She stood rigid, watching the scene unfold. Without her protective barriers, the soldiers below would face the undead in close quarters and without her protection.

Then agonized cries drifted up from the chasm, becoming quieter as the troops fell deeper into darkness.

Bill saw everything, his expression darkening as he watched his soldiers disappear into the chasm. His jaw clenched, and his fists tightened at his sides while he cursed the trap that had just been sprung and the man he knew was responsible for it.

"You planned this."

"Eyes on me," Erik said, his plants striking with renewed vigor. "Getting distracted now would be bad for you, wouldn't it?"

The dust from the collapse created a thick cloud around the battlefield. Through the cover, fifty clones emerged, but no one noticed them, because their shapes were so small and inconspicuous that it was impossible to see them. The clones took the shape of small bugs.

Turning into humans again, they materialized behind the barrier master and the two newly arrived Vindicators before anyone could react.

"What the...?"

No one expected such a master move, not even her, and she had seen her fair share of tactics and traps.

The barrier master managed half a turn before multiple powers struck her simultaneously. They were all starlight fireballs that rained from every direction. The attack left her with no chance to react.

If she had been fast enough to deploy her shield, she might have been alive, but unfortunately, the Chimaeric Demons were too sneaky, too hard to spot, and too fast to act. The barrier master didn't survive, and so died the chances of the blackguards below to resist both undead and Chimaeric Demons.

The other two Vindicators fared no better, caught between dozens of attackers wielding the powers Erik gave them.

"Well," Mira said, watching the ambush unfold. "I guess you could say they really brought down the house-and the Vindicators with it."

Since the Chimaeric Demons had taken care of the Vindicators, there was no reason for them to act.

The three clones with Amber's group faced their companions. "The Vindicators have been dealt with. Our brothers will eliminate the remaining blackguards. Since things are like this, we should focus on the real threat."

With the Vindicators eliminated, only one real threat remained besides the blackguards' main army: the second division commander.

The group looked up at Bill, still locked in combat with Erik. They didn't understand what was happening, but they saw how Erik took that fight seriously, and in the pinch he was in.

In truth, it looked like Erik was fighting with the air; it was just that the air itself transformed everything he threw at the second division commander into nothing, meaning the man either had an invisible power or could do something weird to the space that would destroy everything in the man's path.

Erik himself was struggling, but the second division commander was not in a better situation. It was incredible how these people could get such devastating powers despite not being half

as strong as Erik.

However, it was clear that experience was also playing a huge role. These guys didn't have

many brain crystal powers, meaning they were fighting with what they had since birth, while Erik had so many powers that he didn't even learn how to use one well.

That was why Erik usually fought with his elemental powers, because they were his best ones and even the most straightforward to use.

The problem was that they amounted to nothing compared to telekinesis, which, while simple, had been able to turn Levium into a monster.

Of course, telekinesis wouldn't help much against the second division commander, since whatever Erik threw at him could simply be disintegrated.

Amber listened to what the Chimaeric demon said. He was giving more and more reason for

them to join the fight.

"That won't be easy," she said, watching Bill's invisible attacks tear through Erik's vines like they weren't even there. "How do you fight what you can't see? His powers seem to destroy

everything."

Mira studied the battle. "We don't need to see his attacks. We just need to trap him. If we can contain him in a small enough space, even invisible powers won't help him escape six barrier

masters' powers. At least in theory."

"The barrier masters. Yes, that's a great idea," one clone said. Amber nodded. "Their barriers held against the entire army-they should work against one man, no matter how powerful." Emily kept the man in her sight. "What if he can? We don't know what his powers can do

exactly."

"We can still try. If he targets us, we simply leave."

"The barrier masters' barrier only works one way," another Chimaeric Demon interrupted. "Attacks can go out, but nothing comes in. In this case, it will be the opposite, but still, you

get it. If we can trap him..."

"I can fill the space with my corrosive gas," Amber said, understanding the plan. Below ground, screams echoed as the Chimaeric Demons eliminated the trapped blackguards.

Above, Erik maintained pressure on Bill, keeping him focused upward rather than on the threats gathering below.

"Are we sure the gas works?" June asked.

"We don't know either," the clone said, "but I doubt his power can stop something like that."

"We'll help the undead," another one of them said. "You focus on the kill."

Mira picked her bow. While she couldn't fight in melee against such a monster, she could still do something from a distance. "We'll only get one chance at this."

The other nodded.

Everyone took their positions. The undead barrier masters moved too, readying themselves to

create Bill's grave. The second division commander, instead, continued his fight above, unaware of what was going to happen.