

BIOLOGICAL 151

Chapter 151: First Merging (2)

A surge of pain shot through his head as the two neural links came off, making him gasp in pain. That was the worst feeling Erik had ever felt in his life. His vision swam, and he almost fell from the bed, but he caught himself just before collapsing into the floor.

That pain lasted for at least an hour before starting to subside. However, he still had to merge the powers before the whole procedure would be deemed complete.

[LEYLARHAD'S DNA AND BUSH HEDGOHG'S DNAs SUCCESSFULLY MERGED.]

[1740 DNA POINTS DETECTED. 200 DNA POINTS USED. BRAIN CRYSTAL POWER MERGING PROCEDURE INITIATED. THE USER IS RECOMMENDED TO LAY ON A BED.]

From there, things were relatively easy. Erik didn't feel pain at all and remained seated on his bed, waiting for the merging to end. The process took two more hours with no problems along the way. Once finished, a notification rang inside his head.

[PROCESS COMPLETE. NEW POWER UNLOCKED: POISONOUS ASTRAL WOLF BITE.]

"Ah, fuck..."

The system just said poisonous astral wolf bite. Erik clearly couldn't be certain what the power would do, but he could easily infer that it was just a version of the astral wolf bite with a poisonous element.

This was for sure a powerful brain crystal power, but Erik didn't particularly like it. It would have been cooler if he gained the ability to conjure an astral wolf or something like that.

Still, unfortunately, that was not the result. However, the young man thought that if he kept merging powers, he would get something like that sooner or later.

Maybe if he merged a conjuring type of power and the poisonous astral wolf bite, he would be able to achieve this result.

Now, Erik just had to test this new power of his: However, he couldn't do it inside the Red Palace, so he decided to leave it for later and just check his status. As he willed it, the usual bluish-white window appeared.

[Host Information]

{Attributes}

[Powers]

{Biological Super Computer Powers}

{Host's Powers}

-Rapid Growth [Plants] (ESIGMA2E-Ranked)

(Allows the host to make Plants Grow Faster)

-Sharpening (ESIGMA1D-Ranked)

(Makes Everything sharper according to the quantity of mana imbued into the item or body part)

-Poisonous Mana Darts(ESIGMA1D-Ranked)

(Conjure poisonous mana darts whose lethality depends on the mana injected)

-Bone Manipulation(ESIGMA1E-Ranked)

(Manipulate, enlarge, and increase the density, shape, and sharpness of the user's bones)

-Animal Shapeshifting (ESIGMA1E-Ranked)

(Shapeshift the body into that of an animal. Animals must be absorbed to unlock their shapeshifting.)

-Mana Exoskeleton (ESIGMA1E-Ranked)

(Create a bone-hardened exoskeleton whose strength depends on the mana used to create it)

-Poisonous Astral Wolf Bite (ESIGMA1D-Ranked)

(Conjure an astral but solid projection of a Leylarhad's head whose only aim is to bite at whatever target the host is aiming. Its teeth have a poisonous element whose Toxicity depends on the mana used. Notice: the target must be close to the projection)

-Metallization (ESIGMA1D-Ranked)

(Transform into metal body parts and items through mana. The strength of the material depends on the quantity of mana imbued.)

{Skills}

Erik observed his status and quickly went to his power section, where he found two notable things. The first was that Astral wolf bite and poisonous mana spikes disappeared, and that clearly the number of neural links decreased. The second one was that a new voice was there; it was the poisonous astral wolf bite.

"Well... is better than nothing, really..." Erik said to himself. "I guess I will simply have to find a way to use it efficiently as soon as I'm able to go thaid hunting again..."

With that, Erik tried to get some sleep since he would have another busy day the following day. However, his thoughts trailed to Mr. Fox's dead body.

To be honest, the emotions he felt were already subsiding. Erik had been taken advantage of for two years, but at the same time, he wasn't really that angry with his employer since he was the only one who gave him a job when no one did.

This made it so that the young man's mood quickly returned to normal. It wasn't worth thinking about such people, neither alive nor dead.

Private investigator Hais was currently looking at some documents. After receiving his payment in the past weeks, the man started studying the case two women brought to his attention. It was the one related to the disappearance of three young men, Conal Price, Orson Smyth, and Logan Reid.

What the investigator found out was a pretty dark situation, but it was nothing out of the ordinary, to be honest.

He knew how much this country was rotten, how they pushed young people to be elitists and base everything on power.

The situation was slightly better when he went to school many years ago, but these things had already happened there.

He was even subject to discrimination because of his power: parallel will. It was useless for combat, and he even had many problems during his military service.

The only thing this power did was allow him to have like two thinking brains at once, making him able to analyze things much better and have like two minds he could dedicate to different tasks at the same time.

That was also why he decided to do the private investigator.

Investigator Hais found a lot of evidence that the three boys bullied their fellow students. They beat them, robbed them, and probably sent them to the hospital multiple times. He wondered how society might have allowed things like that to happen, but then he recalled how rotten it really was.

Mr. Hais interviewed many of these young boys and girls during the past weeks, and they all had some things in common.

The first one was that they hated the three bullies' guts. They were openly happy about their disappearance and didn't even try to hide it.

The second one, though, was that no one of the students he interviewed was strong enough to kill the three; after all, that was the whole point of them being discriminated against.

However, the man didn't interview everyone; he still missed a couple of students, among which was the rumored awakener.

Hais quickly found out that he was subject to bullying before his awakening, and something weird happened a couple of days before the three young men's disappearance.

This student, the awakener Erik Romano, ended up in the hospital as thugs apparently assaulted him. Heis found this fact extremely suspicious, and he couldn't understand how the police could think it wasn't a matter worth investigating. It was too coincidental.

There was also another incident regarding the four as they had a fight at school in front of the whole student body.

If he found all these things, there had to be something more about this matter since it was unlikely that the police didn't know all of this. Was it possible they knew, but they covered up the case to protect him due to his awakener status? Were the militaries so desperate to obtain his powers as to cover a murder?

He didn't have any tangible evidence yet, but something inside of him told the investigator that Erik Romano was deeply involved in this matter; he may even be the culprit. That was possible since he became strong enough to join the Red Palace, and killing people like Logan, Conal, and Orson wouldn't be that hard.

"But I can't understand how..." The investigator told himself.

"If he really is the culprit, where did he hide the bodies? How come no one found them?"

He thought about it. Judging by the temperature around here, and the fact that they were in the middle of the summer, it was highly likely that the bodies had already become skeletons. However, the bones had to be present somewhere, and if he did find them, he could understand what had happened.

"Well, I can't be too sure he really was the killer... I still have many people to interview. Besides, I really have no proof that it was a student..."

The investigator continued searching through his computer files. But after a while, he received an email. It was an anonymous sender, and this immediately piqued the investigator's attention.

YOU MAY FIND THIS INTERESTING.

-1GB FILE ATTACHED

The message didn't say anything else, but it had an attachment. Hais immediately downloaded the file and quickly found out that it was a video.

The man opened the file. It was footage taken at the western train station. In the pictures, he could see three individuals,

"Are that Conal, Orson, and Logan?" the investigator asked himself.

The trio was chasing a masked student with a slightly chubby appearance and not particularly tall.

"Well, that's interesting," the investigator said while watching the footage. He saw they smashed several stands and damaged some shop properties, enraging the owners. After a short chase, the four ended up inside a train. The investigator zoomed in on the train and found out it was number 113.

The man quickly went to the train station website and searched where train number 113 was headed that day.

"Northern district?"

Then everything started to click inside the Investigator's mind. That was an excellent place to hide a body, as most of the places were farms and fields. However, it was also true that there were a lot of farmers there, and by now, someone should have found the bodies already.

"Wait a minute..."

The man went again to his files and opened the one regarding Erik. It was then that a grin appeared on his face.

"He does work on a farm!"

It was now clear. Erik Romano did kill the three students. He didn't have proof yet, but it was just a matter of time acquiring it if he found the place where he killed them.

"Well... now I'm sure it wasn't a gang that killed the three boys..."

Still, if he found all of this in two weeks, it was impossible the police didn't. The young man's homicides had probably been covered. This meant he had to be careful about his next moves, as the government was involved.

Chapter 152: Disturbingly high number of monsters (1)

"Lower your arms!"

"Ugh..."

"No, no! Not like that!" Master Nieminen was training Erik in the Crypt of the desert weapon style.

The young man was quickly improving by leaps and bounds, and he knew it was due to his high dexterity. This fact was partially known even by the teacher. However, the woman thought it was primarily due to his talent.

The method of measuring physical characteristics was not widely used, mainly because it was an uncertain method. Basically, just the Red Palace and a few other institutions used it. What exactly

did dexterity influence? What about strength? It was relative to the power one could muster but then? Did It also influence other unknown factors?

Scientists had a general consensus about the stats measuring. However, there was no certainty in it. Only Erik knew what these really did since he had the system fully integrated with his body. He knew he had no talent, well, at least compared to monsters like Nathaniel, Anderson, and Amber.

However, he had the system and a strong will to improve, and as long as he practiced hard, he thought he would be able to reach whatever goal he had.

Erik was trying to learn the various stances that Master Nieminen's style required. After that, he had to learn footwork to keep his balance and stances while moving.

"Good, now try slashing!"

SWOOOOSH

What Erik executed was a perfect strike which left Master Nieminen pleasantly surprised.

"Well done!" she said.

"Thank you, master..."

Two hours passed, and it was time for Erik to train with the others inside the gym to improve his physical condition. However, before going, Master Nieminen stopped the young man.

"I heard you won against your opponent yesterday; congratulation on your first victory," the woman said.

"Thank you very much, master. I trained hard..."

"I Know. However, do not stop here. This is just but a small victory. You will have to fight countless times in the following years." She said, giving him her usual stern look. "Now get out of here. I don't want you to be late..."

Erik bowed politely. He grabbed his bag from the nearby locker and reached the main entrance, where he met up with the rest of the group waiting for the bus. He greeted them with a friendly smile. They returned the greeting with smiles of their own.

"Hey, Erik!" Amber said. "I heard about your employer. How are you?"

"Why? What happened," Floyd asked.

"He died," Gwen said. "Apparently, he was murdered, and Erik was the one who found the body. It was on every newspaper being related to the awakener..."

"Really? I'm sorry to hear this, man..."

"It's not a problem... I'm fine, by the way," Erik said.

"Are you sure? You can talk to me if you need it..." Amber said.

Erik didn't pay attention to this, but Floyd and Gwen looked at each other.

Since a week ago, Amber started behaving weirdly around Erik, and she frequently asked about him when he wasn't around; It was weird behavior for the young woman. Unbeknownst to them, this started when she, Emily, and Erik trained at her house. Something sparked inside of her.

The two started to think that Amber could have fallen in love with the young man, which would explain many things.

Knowing Amber, initially, they believed that she did what she did because of her kind personality, but as more time passed and the more she grew attached to the young man.

However, the young woman didn't say anything to them, so they said nothing about it. If that was true, they wondered what the students who fell in love with her at school would have thought.

"Thank you, Amber..."

"How was the old man? The one who died," Floyd asked.

"Hmmm, well, he was a difficult man and was quite harsh," Erik said while looking down. "To be completely honest with you, he wasn't even that good of a person. He paid me misery despite making him earn a huge fortune with my power. He was always stern before I awakened, only for him to bootlick me a little bit when I awakened, and my power grew stronger," Erik said with a slight tint of anger.

"Besides, he constantly remembered me how no one would have employed a dud like me..."

"That's horrible," Amber said.

"Yeah, he was that kind of guy. Greedy to the bone and mean to other people. It was just a matter of time before someone would have killed him."

"Do you have any hint about who could have done something like that?" Erik was confident it was the Crystal Cross gang who did it. He was sure it was due to a missing payment or something like that, not knowing it was because of him.

However, he couldn't say it was a gang since Erik was there every time the man paid the gang. He could be considered an accomplice to whatever the old man did.

"No, I have no idea. And to be honest, I don't want to know..."

As they waited for the bus, Benedict, Anderson, and the others arrived.

"Yo, guys!" Benedict said with a happy look.

"Hey, man!" Floyd energetically replied.

"What are we going to train today?" Benedict asked.

"Shoulders," Gwen said.

"Good, I can't wait!"

They then boarded the bus and quickly arrived at the Red Palace, and after reaching the gym, they split as usual. With Aaron, Mikey, Erik, and Anderson training the same muscle groups.

Anderson went straight to the dumbbells to work on his arms while Gwen went to a machine. Today she decided to focus only on the weight training machines and work with heavy loads. Her arms were already pretty big, but she wanted to make them bigger.

"Quick! Quick! Burn that fuckers!" a soldier shouted.

"There are too many of them! We must retreat!" another said.

Countless horde's thaids were attacking them from many sides. The team they belonged to was sent, with countless others, to kill as many horde's thaid as possible since they were headed to the city.

However, the situation was dire. Each day more and more monsters joined the rank of this vast army, and fighting with so many beasts was becoming increasingly difficult.

They needed more soldiers to do their job, knowing full well that the most they could do was to slow down the horde and prepare better defenses.

However, the number of soldiers was insufficient since most were fighting in the war against Hin. Despite this, the soldiers were fighting valiantly. This group was led by a veteran warrior named Lain; she tried her best to kill all the thaids who got too close to the ranged fighters with her mana sword.

The woman cut off the head of a Leylarhad with a single motion as it was attempting to bite the head off of a squad member. However, she couldn't be everywhere, so, here and there, soldiers died.

"Shit... This can't go on..."

Lain looked around and saw a lot of dead bodies lying on the ground. She sighed deeply, seeing their comrades dying left and right. Even though she had been leading this group for years now, she never thought things would end up like this.

But if they didn't thin the monster's population soon, a huge disaster would befall the city. There were supposed to be more thaids joining the horde soon, as they were spotted several kilometers from here.

She took a deep breath and focused herself; she needed to stay calm, control her emotions and fight at best as she could.

She slashed another thaid, chopping an arm this time, crippling the beast. However, the sheer number of creatures was too high for her to make a difference.

Chapter 153: Disturbingly high number of monsters (2)

"To the cars, FAST!" Captain Lain shouted, inciting her team members to go to the car.

In the meantime, Captain Lain kept slashing beast after beast, but she was slowly getting overwhelmed. As soon as all the team members jumped in the car, they started suppressing fire to allow their captain to save herself.

The woman started running nonstop toward the SUV; they still couldn't take floating cars, lest they be killed by flying thaids, especially wyverns. Once she arrived, she boarded the car with a jump, and the driver gave the vehicle gas.

WROOOOOOOOOOOM

However, the beasts didn't stop, and they started chasing them. Lain wasn't the only one who made their team retreat, as countless vehicles could be seen speeding beside them. Each ranged soldier shot from the top of the car at the monsters, but now the number of monsters they killed was significantly reduced.

"Emma, for how long can you keep firing at them?" Lain asked. Emma was a 25 years-old-ranger; she had the power to control water, which was very strong. She fired highly pressurized water jets at the creatures, which basically killed them on the spot, but her mana reserves were dangerously depleting since she was basically the only one with ranged powers inside her team.

"I'm not sure..." Emma answered. "Fifteen minutes at best..."

Lain was not sure they would be able to escape the monsters, especially if Emma wasn't able to kill the ones who got too close to the car and tried ramming it. The problem was also that they couldn't go that fast since they were in a forest, and if they didn't drive safely, they could risk destroying the car, spelling their doom.

Luckily, they weren't the only ones fleeing the horde; many people kept shooting at the thaids. One thing was sure: no matter what happened, every team member's life depended on her. However, Lain didn't stay idle; she picked up the radio and called for help using the dedicated channel.

"Here is Captain Mary Lain of team Bravo. We are fleeing from the horde thaid and need immediate assistance. Over!" the woman said.

The other side didn't let her wait a lot.

"This is New Alexandria Defense Force Command Center; this is Commander Black speaking." A tall, blond-haired man spoke into the microphone. "We prepared multiple squadrons to take your place; you just need to reach the river five kilometers from your position. Over."

<Shit...>

Five kilometers were not much on a car typically, but in the forest, surrounded by thaids and with an uneven road, it wasn't a short distance either.

"Roger, we will do what we can..."

With that, the conversation ended.

"You heard him, right?" Lain asked her team members.

"Yes, sir!" they replied in unison. The group kept traveling for five more minutes when an explosion rang on their right side.

BOOOOOOM

Flames engulfed a car close to them in a raging inferno, burning everything within its radius. The soldiers inside the vehicle died as soon as it exploded.

"WHAT THE FUCK DID JUST HAPPEN?" The driver asked.

"A CAR EXPLODED!" Emma replied. "They got rammed by an Erendu!"

This was a bull-like thaid with two short horns above its eyes and a bottlenose dolphin-like snout. It had a thick neck, four long and heavy legs, a slim waist, and powerful muscles.

Its body was brown colored, and it ended in a long tail with fur on the tip. The Erendu's head, neck, and front shoulders were also covered in bone armor plating.

This beast had a brain crystal power that increased their strength several folds, and coupled with their massive size; since they were no shorter than two meters, they were basically killing machines.

"Do you think you can kill them if they get closer?" Captain Lain asked.

"I have never fought one before!" Emma exclaimed. "But don't worry; my mana reserves aren't empty yet..."

As if on cue, the Erendu started aiming at their car. It channeled mana through its brain crystal, and his strength and speed suddenly increased.

"FUCK. EMMA, DO SOMETHING!" One of the team members said as he saw the beast chasing them, and all the others started shooting at the beast.

Quickly, the young woman started concentrating and moving massive amounts of mana. She began firing her concentrated water jets, which hit the creature with full force. Unfortunately, despite being powerful, the attack was enough to kill the creature, but only to steer it away from the car, sending it crashing to a nearby tree which got destroyed instantly.

"Fuck! That was dangerous!" Another member said.

Emma didn't stop; instead, she focused even harder and shot again and then another time. This time, she used much more mana and finally killed the creature.

However, after doing so, she could be visibly seen panting. That attack required a lot of mana, and she was basically left without.

"Are you ok?" Captain Lain asked the girl.

"Yes, somehow..." Emma replied. "I still have some mana remaining..." she said with tired eyes.

"There is no need; if you collapse now, it will be a problem," We will take care of the thaids with our rifles. We also have a couple of grenades, so we should be able to kill the few still chasing us.

Luckily, the group was close enough to the river, the thaids were still pursuing them, but the team gained a fair bit of distance from the monsters. They made it to the river bank shortly after, where they saw a column of people waiting for them.

"Reinforcements!" the driver shouted.

From one side of the river, multiple cars went at full speed toward the bank, leaving a huge dust cloud behind. On the other side, countless soldiers, vehicles, and weapons were waiting for the right moment to use their powers and weapons to kill the thaids.

"Sir, the horde has been spotted."

"Good, just wait thirty seconds. After that, start attacking them with all we have..." Commander Black said.

The army could bring a couple of cannons and laser cannons by mounting them on the cars. They were able to kill more thaids compared to the standard rifles. However, they could do nothing to stop the strongest ones, so they were not effective overall.

It was just a matter of moments now. The reinforcements just had to wait for the fleeing soldiers to get to the river and abandon the cars.

Lain and her team were almost there with the horde behind them.

"We will swim through the river, ok?" the captain said with a worried look. "Emma, can you do it?"

"Yes, sir..." the woman replied. She had regained a little bit of strength, but her lack of mana debilitated her.

As soon as they arrived at the river, Lain's team and all the others fleeing the horde jumped out of the cars and started swimming through the water.

The canal wasn't that big, just 50 or 60 meters wide, but it was very deep. Legends said it had been created by a slash of Solomon Judd's word when battling a powerful thaid.

"SWIM!"

The soldiers immediately jumped into the water, and the ones waiting from the other side of the river started shooting at the horde. Most used their brain crystal powers, but soldiers were also dedicated to manning the cannons.

BOOM

BOOM

BOOM

Explosions rang throughout the forest, fire attacks, ice attacks, and many others. One by one, the thaids met an untimely demise. Limbs were blown off, heads exploded, bodies burned, and blood sprayed everywhere. However, that wasn't nearly enough to stop the creatures. Despite this, the commanding officer had a smug look on his face.

"Well done, everyone!" the officer said.

At that moment, the soldiers arrived on the other side of the river, including captain Lain and her team. "Are you all ok?" she said once she reached the shore.

"Yes."

"Yes, sir..."

"I'm alive..."

"I'm fine too, sir!"

Chapter 154: Disturbingly high number of monsters (3)

However, the situation didn't improve. All the military could do was slow down the thaids from reaching the escaping soldiers.

Lain turned back as she got out of the water and saw the thaids still marching toward the humans.

"This is not going to end well..." the woman said to her comrades. They looked at her, knowing that they could trust her judgment.

"What do we do, sir?" one of the teammates asked.

"We must follow the commanding officer's orders, so we will probably have to fight..." Captain Lain then turned to look at Emma, who was still out of mana. "You go take a car and go to the driver seat; take the engine on. Be ready to flee at any moment," she added while looking at her subordinate.

"Yes, sir," Emma replied.

"Sir, do you really think they will make us fight?" one asked.

"Indeed... they will want to take advantage of the river."

"But this is crazy! It's impossible to kill those beasts. They are too many!" another one said.

Then, as if on cue, a voice resonated from the radio.

"To all squads, this is the commanding officer. We will use the river advantage to kill as many thaids as possible. If you are injured or out of mana, please take a gun and try to kill as many thaid as possible from a safe distance," the man on the radio said.

"For fuck sake!" one of the members shouted.

"Emma, go!" Lain said. The girl started immediately running toward one of the nearby cars, and once she was on, she turned the engine on.

Captain Lain knew that by ordering Emma to take the car, she was defying orders. However, she was not so foolish to forfeit her life because of a lost cause. However, Emma took a laser rifle from the car and aimed at the incoming thaids.

At the same time, Captain Lain and three other team members remained at the riverbank and turned to face the thaids. They were all melee fighters, so they had to take the first line while the ranged one remained some meters behind to rain.

BOOM

BOOM

BOOM

Powers rained onto the thaids, detaching limbs off their bodies, making heads fly in every direction. Explosive bullets pierced through the weakest of them, killing several.

At least a thousand thaids fell dead in less than a second, but more kept coming. There weren't enough people to stop them. Soon, it became clear that there would be no way to stop the tide of monsters. However, they could kill some more once they passed through the river.

"They're getting closer, captain," one of Lain's team members yelled. He pointed his finger to the side where the thaids approached.

The first monster finally arrived at the river and started crossing it; more did the same. The soldiers kept shooting at them, killing thousand more during these short minutes. However, Lain and the others couldn't move from the riverbank.

"PREPARE TO FIGHT!" Lain shouted.

She then focused her mind and summoned mana into her hands, immediately making a sword appear out of thin air.

As soon as the first thaid crossed the river, she ran toward the beast with her comrades, and a short fight ensued. Her three team members went in front and on its back and cut its ligaments, making the beast fall to the ground. Lain chopped its head off as soon as it did, killing the beast right there.

Then multiple thaids crossed the river, and Emma kept shooting at their eyes, hoping to give precious moments to her comrades who kept killing the bigger thaids with the previous strategy.

Each and every one of the squad members killed many smaller and weaker thaids with one or two slashes. However, the militaries were starting to get overwhelmed since the bulk of the thaid's horde was approaching the river.

"We can't possibly stay any longer," Lain shouted. However, the commanding officer didn't give the retreating order yet. He wanted to maximize the number of kills.

A group of seventy Leylarhads crossed the river and engaged in battle; they were much weaker than the average soldier, but when in massive numbers, they were a problem.

The wolf-like thaids charged at Lain's squad, but they were faster and stronger than them, so they started getting them down, one by one.

AWOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO

The Leylarhads howled and focused on captain Lain. She was indeed stronger, but it would be hard to kill more than fifty Leylarhads who were trying to kill her simultaneously. Besides, the woman tried to understand why these beasts were so bent on killing the humans at the cost of their lives.

It wasn't normal. The truth was that these monsters weren't themselves anymore, they got infected by the Heniate's parasites, and the only thing they could think of was to let the parasite spread.

"CAPTAIN!" Emma shouted and started firing nonstop at the creatures. The laser rifles were partially effective against the Leylarhads but not that much to kill them. However, the shots injured some of them, significantly reducing Lain's burden.

The woman jumped, ducked, and rolled away from the charging wolves' attacks, constantly evading their claws, and fangs and counterattacking when needed.

She was like a war machine, a weapon of mass murder, moving fast and precisely. Her actions were inhumanly smooth as if someone else controlled her body instead of herself, and she felt no weight from gravity.

Her comrades jumped into the fray, trying to help her, and as soon as they did, the pressure on her decreased. However, John, one of her team members, got bitten by one of the wolves.

"JOHN!" Lain shouted, and she immediately ran in his direction, chopping the wolf in two.

"AH! FUCK!" Lain helped the man stand, but the burden on the other three team members increased.

"It's ok. I can still fight!" John shouted. With a bleeding shoulder, he started hacking again at the monsters, and Lain did the same. Though, as time passed, more and more beasts came.

The battlefield was more or less the same everywhere, countless soldiers had been injured, but most of them kept fighting. The human side was taking advantage of the river, which significantly slowed down the thaid's advance and gave time to the melee to kill the monsters.

The ranged fighters, however, didn't stay idle. They kept sending attacks to the monsters. There was a multitude of powers at play right at that moment.

People used fire attacks, and some others used earth attacks that they used to help the soldiers who were in trouble. Some even created a slime substance that slowed down the approaching thaids and many more.

At the same time, the artillery kept firing on the monsters; most of these shot explosive bullets of large caliber, which were as big as a tank's ones.

This barrage of firepower made the enemy slow down temporarily but in no way could stop them. The thaids continued to approach the river, and the humans could only focus on defending.

"How many thaids did we kill?" the commanding officer asked.

"Around twenty thousand," another officer replied.

"Good, give the retreat order," the man said.

The man immediately sent a communication to all squads, and slowly the melee fighters started retreating to the cars while the ranged ones used suppressive fire.

Lain had just received the communication when she shouted her order.

"RETREAT! RUN TO THE CAR."

Emma kept firing at the monsters, giving her comrades time to come to the car. John, in the meantime, was bleeding profusely.

Once they reached the vehicle, they jumped on, and Emma quickly gave gas, speeding away from the battlefield.

"Are you ok, John?" a team member asked.

"I'm fine... but my head is starting to spin."

"Hold on, soldier," Lain said. "We will take you to a doctor."

At least ten thousand vehicles from every dimension started speeding through the forest while firing at the monsters. Less and less thaids started chasing the vehicles until they stopped altogether.

The massacre survivors retreated to the city, where they would regroup with their allies before attacking the monsters again.

"Damn..." Lain said.

"What?" Emma asked.

Lain hesitated a little bit, but then she spoke. "At the speed, the thaids are going toward the city, even considering that we are battling against them throughout the way. I think that in more or less two weeks, they will reach the city."

Grim looks appeared on the team member's faces. Judging by the sheer amount of thaids still alive inside that million-strong horde, Lain had doubts that the barrier would be able to defend the city.

Chapter 155: The Principal's announcement

Two days quickly went by, with the usual routine going on. That morning, however, things were going to take a different turn. Erik woke up at the usual hour and went to wash and wake up Benedict. This became routine, as it looked like the young man had trouble waking up alone.

"Ugh... good morning," Benedict said when Erik entered his room.

"C'mon, we are going to be late..." Erik said.

BIIIP BIIIP BIIIP

Erik received a notification on his phone, which he could see directly from his eyes, thanks to his biological supercomputer.

SENDER: RED PALACE J.S.C

TITLE: IMPORTANT

-ATTACHMENT: 2 GB VIDEO

"What could this be? Hey Benedict, did you receive this too?" Erik asked while faking, having just checked his phone. Immediately, Benedict grabbed his device and controlled whether the message was there.

"Yes, what is this?"

"How could I know? I just saw the notification..."

Erik opened the message and downloaded the file; it took a couple of seconds to do this. Once he clicked on the video, the image of a man appeared.

"Greetings, students. I'm Tom Van Dyke, the current Red Palace principal. The reason why I'm sending you this message is very simple. The school board and I have decided to issue a special event for you to participate in, and there is something you must do," the man said while looking at the camera.

"The event is mandatory, and it will probably be one of the most, if not the most, important day of your lives for some of you!" the man said excitedly. In the meantime, Benedict approached Erik, who was watching the video on his phone. He was listening to it with rapt attention.

"Listen..." the man said, getting closer to the camera and starting to whisper, "Today, we are going to send you to kill Thaidis!" He smiled.

"WHAT?!" Benedict shouted, ignoring that all the other students who didn't join the military yet were exclaiming the same thing, 'is this guy crazy?'

"Yeah, yeah... I know what you are thinking. I'm crazy, you are all going to die, and bla bla bla... but listen to me. Thaidis near the city are not that strong, the likes of you can easily kill them, and since this would be a good learning experience, I decided to have you make a trip around the city," the man said.

"Oh, but don't worry, you can be rewarded since we will host a small competition."

In the following five minutes, under Benedict's astonished look, the principal explained the rules and how everything would work. First of all, the students would be divided into groups of five randomly selected people.

There were currently 4000 peasant-rank students inside the Red Palace, meaning that there would be 800 groups.

They were going to get a device that would count how many thaids each they killed, and a master would be nearby in case something happened.

They just needed to press a button on such a device, and the closest master would be alerted and run to help the students.

Each thaid they killed would earn the squad one point, and the squad with more kills would get a prize. The first three squads were going to win the possibility to make a weapon with the items available to the higher-ranked students, in Erik's case, the Squire rank.

The first-ranked team, though, would win a brain-stimulating or body-stimulating serum each, depending on the individual's preferences.

After that, the principals went on trying to convince the students how that would be a good experience and how they would come out with more confidence than ever before; after a short while, the video ended.

The principal gave the students two hours to prepare themselves, eat, exercise, and the like; after that, they had to go to the main entrance, where a bus would bring them to the barrier.

As Erik closed the phone, a notification arrived both to him and Benedict.

TEAM 765 MEMBERS:

1) Anderson Worthington

2) Judith Wang

3) Erik Romano

4) Elena Francis

5) Robyn Farley

"Anderson is my teammate; how many chances were there?" Erik said. He then turned to look at Benedict, who was still reading who his comrades were.

"Were you lucky?" Erik asked.

"No, man, I don't know any of them. They are all probably second-year students," the young man replied. "What do we do now?" he asked.

"Well, it's not like we have a choice in the matter; we must participate," the young man paused a little bit to think and then said, "You know what? For now, let's just go have breakfast. I will send a text to the others telling them to meet us at the cafeteria..."

"Good idea, I'm quite hungry..." Benedict replied.

Later, Anderson, Aaron, Mikey, Floyd, Gwen, Amber, Martha, Benedict, and Erik met at the place and ordered something to eat. All of them were freaking out because of the principal's small competition, addressing him like a psycho. Of course, Erik was pretty calm, something that Mikey quickly noticed.

"How come you are so calm, Erik?" the young man asked.

Erik was munching on a pear, not particularly stressed by the situation. As soon as Mikey addressed him, he raised his eyes only to see the other eight students staring at him.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" he asked.

"Well, we will fight fucking thaids, yet you did not bat an eye at this..." Mikey said.

Erik looked him in the eyes. He knew what the principal said was true, well... mostly. Up to a week ago, killing thaids around here was easy; Erik didn't know how the current situation was out there, but it couldn't be good. However, the fact that the masters would be around there, ensuring the student's safety, greatly reassured him, so he thought nothing about it.

"Well, I mean... The principal said we can kill them already, the masters will be around... and... we can't do nothing about it, so stressing about this matter is only counterproductive..." The young man said, leaving the others flabbergasted.

Erik was often emotional, mostly gloomy and sad. They did expect him to freak out about the prospect of killing thaids, and yet he wasn't. However, he was right; they could do nothing about it.

"Look, I don't know if this will be able to calm you down, but despite being true that we can't choose our partners, we can still regroup and hunt together. I bet your teammates won't contest this decision since safety can be ensured by being close to other groups."

"That's a good idea," Aaron said. "As the groups currently are, we have eight teams, meaning that forty people are available. We can create a defensive perimeter ensuring that each group takes care of each other's blind spot areas," he added.

"Yeah, totally..." Erik said.

"Ok, but what if the others do not accept?" Benedict remarked. Raising concern among the group. Then Erik chimed in.

"I don't think they will and the reasons are two. First, the idea is a viable one, and despite maybe losing a few points, they will generally be safer. Second, most of them are low-ranked students, so many will at least listen to what the higher-ranked says. Since, besides me, you are all basically high-ranked I think they will do as you say.

Moreover, we have Amber and Anderson, and just knowing that such powerful students will be watching their back is additional insurance. I doubt they will disagree, and even if they do, this doesn't mean you are forced to go with them hunting where they say you can simply meet with one of our groups and join us," Erik said.

"Yeah, but what if the other team members oppose this because they do not want to lose points?" Gwen added.

"Then we can simply leave them and make a group of our own. We will gather fewer points, but we will still be safe. I think that with the nine of us, we will hardly have problems..."

Everyone nodded. Despite often being a crybaby, Erik showed he could be particularly insightful sometimes.

Chapter 156: First official hunt (1)

After a satisfying breakfast and an hour of training, the group waited an additional hour and then reached the main entrance. However, going there was more complicated than expected since all the students, from the lowest to the highest ranks, were going down to take the buses that would bring them to the barrier.

However, when Erik observed these people, he noticed that most of them were very calm. It was easy to understand why: most of these students were in their second or higher year, meaning they were already part of the military.

It was well known that this kind of outing was frequently done at the military school since it was not only a way to make the young men and women win their fear of the thaids. However, it was also a way to keep the thaid's population in check and decrease the soldier's burden.

The only ones outraged by this situation were the first-year students who didn't join the military yet, such as Erik and the others. In fact, the young man's friends all had frightened looks. Erik knew that fear was useless.

The problem with being afraid was that it made people quickly lose their focus in crucial situations, resulting in injuries or, worse, fatalities.

Erik and his friends contacted the other squad members during the hour they had to wait for the buses to be prepared.

Most of them agreed to participate in their joint hunting; however, Martha's and Floyd's group decided they wanted a shot at the competition and didn't want to join them.

However, the two friends decided to split from their groups and join the others. Floyd went to Gwen's group, while Martha went to Benedict's, who was the highest ranked among the people

inside the group. They didn't meet any resistance; besides, having another person covering their backs was a considerable assurance.

"Ok, can I have your attention?!" a woman shouted.

"I'm Master Donovan, and I have the task of managing all the students. Soon you will receive a notification on your phone asking you to mark your presence during this outing. The same notification will appear before going away. This is to ensure that no student goes missing."

Immediately, the notification that the woman was talking about appeared, and Erik pressed the huge green button that appeared on his screen. Once Master Donovan checked every student's presence, she proceeded with her speech.

"Ok, guys, things are like these; the city's surroundings are safe. However, I suggest that the peasant-ranked students not go farther than five kilometers from the barrier. We can, more or less, allow the other ranks to move farther but don't go over the hundred kilometers mark, since the thaids you will find will be significantly stronger.

Don't wander alone through the woods, and don't attack other students or harm them in any way. Failure to comply may result in expulsion from the Red Palace."

She proceeded to list all the safety measures they had to take, and after that, she allowed the students to board the buses.

"Let's go," Erik said. Basically, all the 32 students who decided to join the awakener and his friends went on the same bus, on which they decided how to move.

"Ok, guys, we will stay around a hundred meters from each other, meaning we will be spread across more than half a kilometer. If you see something dangerous, contact the other groups immediately. If you feel in danger, let others know, and we will rush to help you. Do not hesitate! We cannot afford any mistakes!"

Erik made sure everyone understood him; he needed to be sure they realized the seriousness of their situation. He had a lot of experience with thaids and knew that if they messed up, they could risk dying. He tried to make his words as easy to understand as possible so that nobody felt confused when they were in the middle of a fight. After some seconds, all the students nodded.

"Good, now, let's get out there and hunt those bastards," Erik said.

Mid-journey, the bus passed through New Alexandria's tall skyscrapers. As usual, many people walked along the streets, and the atmosphere seemed very lively. People talked loudly and laughed amongst themselves. Some of them were walking in pairs or trios, and some of the buildings' windows were open, allowing the sounds of laughter to reach the street.

They were currently flying over the eastern district, meaning that most buildings were civilian ones. However, after a short while, the buildings stopped appearing, and it was there that Erik saw the barrier and, in the middle of it, a massive fortification. The eastern entrance.

The place was heavily fortified, with metal buildings immediately behind the main entrance, which in itself was another building. It was like an airport or a train station. Everyone had to get past it to get out of the city. All around the massive metal building, a seemingly transparent thin wall stretched all around the city.

It was not simple to see it, but some ripples sometimes allowed the students to notice it.

Many Red Palace members had already been outside the walls, so they were used to this view. However, people like Amber or Benedict didn't, and they marveled at its size.

As they flew, from a distance, the students noticed a broad river that flowed between two mountains, surrounded by lush vegetation.

It was a majestic sight that could only be described as coming out of a fantasy book.

They even spotted some gigantic flying thaids here and there and got goosebumps all over. "We are almost there," Master Donovan said. As soon as she said this, the buses started traveling downward toward what they called the door.

After five minutes, they were already down the bus. The various masters that went with them started showing the way to the students. They knew the procedure they had to follow, so they brought everyone to a section where they were going to be briefed by the militaries about what they could expect around the city.

They listed a enormous variety of thaid species they could find. Also, they warned the students that the thaid population suddenly spiked and told everyone to pay attention and not to engage vast groups of monsters.

When the briefing ended, they were brought into a giant hall with a massive door.

"Are you ready?" a soldier asked one of the masters, who nodded in confirmation.

"Good..." the soldier then turned to look at one of his comrades and shouted, "OPEN THE DOORS!"

The man pressed a button, and the huge hall door opened. A siren rang, signaling that the passage was now free; as soon as the teachers got permission, the students started to get out of the building.

The first ones to go out were the Emperor students, all clad in fancy attires and high-level weapons. They were also surrounded by an aura of superiority and looked at the others with disdain. Then came the King ones, who were in a similar situation, and all the others followed suit.

Finally was the turn of the peasant-ranked students, who went out of the building with frightened looks. However, the fear momentarily dissipated once they saw the forest and smelled the air.

It was something they could never do inside the city. Everything had a different aura compared to the city. The sound of birds chirping loudly, the smell of flowers and plants... Even the sky seemed different. It was truly magnificent.

"Let's go, guys; we need to find the best hunting spots before the others..." Erik said, and led his group off to the left side of the road, heading straight towards the forest.

Chapter 157: First official hunt (2)

"Ok, guys, remember this, don't go farther than a hundred meters each," Erik said.

"Yeah, yeah..." a girl from another team said. "However, I can't understand why we must follow your orders," she added.

Erik knew something like that was bound to happen. The reason was simple, Erik was the lowest ranked of the 32 people present at that moment. However, he wasn't shy to reply.

"First of all, the idea of hunting in a bigger group was mine. Secondly, I'm the most knowledgeable guy out there regarding thaids. Besides, it's not like any of you stepped up to take the role. Since things are like this, just shut up and listen to what I have to say."

The girl didn't reply but kept staring angrily into his eyes as if challenging him. He decided it would be best to ignore her for the time being. Luckily, she wasn't a member of his team, so the hot potato didn't end with him in the end.

"Now, if there are no other interruptions, here are some things you must keep in mind: the most common beast around here is the Lomalin; they are bug-like thaids, not particularly powerful, but that usually travel in numbers. If you are lucky, you can meet groups of 4-5 individuals. However, the most common thing for them is to roam in groups of a hundred.

Suppose you are unlucky enough to stumble onto such numerous groups. In that case, I suggest you fall back and not play the hero, at least before you understand how to hunt them; once you do, it is not that hard. Aside from that, you should also start hunting this kind of beast since they are pretty weak."

The others nodded, wondering how Erik was so knowledgeable about thaids.

"Also, keep in mind that, around Lomalins, you could happen to find Crombos. These are bipedal thaids with long tails they use to stand. However, the most dangerous thing about them is their claws; they can rip you apart with a single swing, so stay away from them. They are reptilian monsters, so you should recognize them immediately, and you can't miss them since they are massive.

In that case, the only thing you can do is either run away or hide," the young man said.

"How do you know all that?" a guy asked. Erik thought about what to say for a bit before answering. In the end, he came up with a lie that they clearly couldn't verify.

"I've been researching thaids in my free time; I find them fascinating. This was also in preparation for the military school since they will teach us what species there are and how to fight them. I simply decided to get early knowledge. I know most of the species inhabiting the region, so if you find yourself in front of monsters you don't know you can fight, ask me," the young man replied.

"Ok..."

Erik spent the rest of the time explaining, what to do, and what to avoid. To be honest, he wasn't that expert, but having fought many thaids, he had a general knowledge of what to do. Of course, he couldn't say this, but it was clear that Erik knew he could manage his own against these monsters.

As soon as the briefing ended, everyone split off into teams and looked for prey. This small competition's goal was to hunt as many thaids as possible, so it was clear they had to start searching for them.

Currently, Erik is in a team with Anderson and three other people. Since they were outside, Anderson could use his power and also said he was willing to do so. Erik was eager to see how strong it was, like the other three members who had heard about the young man from the people attending the entry test.

Before reaching the east entrance, Erik made all the people explain what power they did have. Judith Wang had a brain crystal power that allowed her to summon two mana hounds; she could make them larger, stronger, and faster by supplying them with more mana. Her power was good for scouting ahead and was a fine addition to the team's fighting prowess.

Besides, the young woman knew how to fight with daggers, so she wasn't dead weight. Elena Francis was another team member, she had a sword-conjuring power, so her position was pretty standard. Robyn Farley was the last team member; he had the power to elongate his arms, making it so that he could also attack from a distance. He was also a spear user and a very gifted one, according to his master.

"All right, me, Anderson, and Elena will stay on the frontline and fight the bulk of the enemies. Judith will have to send her two mana hounds to search for thaids. This will be the most efficient way to kill as many of them as possible. Aside from that, I think her role should be to stay free and deal critically hits to thaids we are having trouble dealing with.

Robyn will have to fight from a distance." He then turned to look at the two people in question.

"However, you and Judith will have to focus on the enemies we are not fighting with. Kill the ones who are trying to creep on our backs or the ones that are going to attack us with us unable to defend," he said.

"Remember, despite our being the toughest role, yours will be the most important one since you will have to ensure our safety. Don't stray from the plan, and everything will be ok. Ah, and... Judith, whenever you find a thaid, call back your hounds; we don't want you to waste all your mana," the young man concluded.

"Lastly, I know I shouldn't say such a thing since I've never done it in my entire life," Erik said, "However, this will be the first time we will claim some lives. Despite being thaids' ones, the fact that we will kill will remain. Do you think you can handle this?"

The others hesitatingly looked at each other. However, there was little they could do. If they didn't try, they would lose the competition. Since they would be forced to kill thaids in the future, especially when they entered the militaries, gaining the courage to do so now wasn't a bad idea. Anderson was the first one to speak.

"I'm not sure I will be able to do so, but killing thaids can't be that bad, right? I mean, they eat humans, and fewer thaids there are and the better it is..."

"Yeah... he is right," Elena said. "I will try to stay calm."

"Ok," Erik replied.

After that, Judith summoned her hounds, which immediately started searching for nearby creatures. Of course, it didn't take much time before she could do so. One of the hounds went to the left, while the other went to the right. Both of them found creatures; two Lomalins groups. One was at least 47 strong, while the others had at most fifteen members.

Once the girl saw the creatures, she conveyed her search results.

Erik knew that the most appropriate thing to do would be to hunt the smaller group of thaids and allow his team members to get accustomed to fighting and killing. However, Erik still asked his team members what they wanted to do.

"We should hunt the smaller group," Judith said, and the others promptly agreed. In the end, the team decided to hunt them.

As they walked, Erik told the others to go into fighting positions, and so they did. Robyn stayed behind Judith between him and the front liners. Erik ended on the left, Anderson in the middle, and Elena on the right.

"Ok, guys, remember, they can harden their exterior, so the best thing to do would be to kill them with one move. Be careful of their mandibles; they are very powerful," the young man waited for a little bit.

"On the count of three, we will attack. Remember, we have to each focus on a different thaid."

Chapter 158: First official hunt (3)

Before doing anything, Erik checked the Lomalins' statistics. They were all at power level 13 but were the usual weak creatures. However, Erik knew these monsters were at least level 11, not even a month ago, meaning they were slowly increasing their power. Erik didn't know how, but for sure, there was one clear thing: something bad was happening around New Alexandria.

Since the monsters were weak enough, he started counting down to attack.

"3...2...1...GO!"

Erik, Elena, and Anderson charged at the Lomalins, with Robyn and Judith following them. Erik's four team members were nervous. It was the first time they fought thaid or killed another creature, and they were scared of what could happen if one of their attacks missed its mark.

Elena was the most scared of them all, as she was on the frontlines, but contrary to Anderson, she didn't have mighty powers. And for sure, she wasn't as calm as Erik. Anderson was more or less calm; he was nervous but not as much as to suddenly miss easy attacks or freezing because of fear.

Judith and Robyn were tense, but not as much as the front liners. They played a critical role but didn't have to face the thaid directly.

Erik didn't waste time, and the first thing he did, was slash at a Lomalin with his sword. He didn't even need to use his power since his blade was sharp from the start.

However, Elena and Anderson hesitated and lost some precious time. Though, seeing Erik quickly killing the thaid, they both gathered courage and charged at a Lomalin each. They used their swords just like him, ending the life of the two creatures in a matter of moments. Only 12 thaid were still alive.

The beasts charged at the five students. Erik didn't waste time and felled another beast, with Anderson and Elena doing the same. At the same time, Robyn and Judith attacked. The young woman went on Elena's side since she saw that she was still scared by the beasts.

The dagger user plunged her blades inside the Lomalin's head, killing it on the spot. While Robyn used his power to attack a Lomalin approaching Anderson, ending its life.

Like that, five more thaids died, leaving only seven thaids alive. However, these were now very close to the front liners, gnashing their mandibles and growling.

Moreover, the Lomalins started channeling mana, creating a mana exoskeleton around themselves, making it harder for the five students to kill them.

There wasn't a problem for Erik since he could change the sharpness of his weapons and quickly pierce the Lomalins' defenses, but for the others, it wasn't like that.

Anderson could kill one more creature since his claymore was pretty heavy and he was physically strong, but Robyn and Judith were having trouble. Elena was in between the two situations; she could also sharpen her sword. However, her wasn't a power specific to that task like Erik's, so it required much more mana.

"Ok, if a situation like this occurs, take your time to retreat and slowly damage the opponent," Erik said. The others listened to his advice since it looked like he was a thaid expert. Erik didn't need to do as he had just said, but giving his comrades enough fighting experience was necessary.

They were used to fight against humans, but these were never life-or-death fights. This time, they risked big, so they tried to play safe.

"In the meantime, Judith, I want you to go behind the Lomalins and pressure them! If we are lucky, they will be distracted enough to not pay attention to us frontliners..." Erik added.

"Ok!"

So, as they retreated, Elena and Anderson slashed their swords. However, after their hesitation and fear went away, they started putting more strength into their attacks, and their training started kicking in.

Initially, they had trouble damaging the Lomalins, but after a couple of minutes, they started killing them again. At the same time, Judith circled the Lomalins, even with a bit of fear. However, she quickly discovered that the beasts were much slower than her, so she started kiting them with great efficiency.

After five more minutes, all the thaids died, and a sudden notification appeared in Erik's vision.

[MULTIPLE HOSTILE LOMALINS 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. 105 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

<I don't get that much experience anymore since I'm now level 15...> Erik thought. However, he quickly noticed that he got the experience even from the creatures he didn't directly kill. This meant that the system did absorb mana from nearby dead creatures. If he could take advantage of this feature on a battlefield, he would become immeasurably strong in a short time.

[NOTICE: THE ACTIVE ABSORPTION RANGE IS TEN METERS. DNA POINTS ARE REQUIRED TO INCREASE THE RANGE. WARNING: IF TOO MUCH MANA IS ABSORBED, THE SYSTEM WILL CEASE THE ABSORPTION PROCESS TO AVOID UNWANTED MUTATIONS INSIDE THE HOST.]

<Ah, right. If I change the DNA too much, I can become a monster,> Erik thought.

The fight was not that hard. There wasn't a single person panting or out of breath.

"As I've said, it was not that hard..." the awakener said.

"Yeah..." Anderson replied. "But how could you be so calm?" he then added. "I almost thought it wasn't the first time you did something like that."

Erik decided to bullshit him. After all, he couldn't say that he was actually right.

"You know what happened between me, Logan, Conal, and Orson, right? You think all of that didn't make me mentally stronger?" In truth, all of that would have made anyone weaker, if not crazy. However, Anderson didn't know it since he was never abused in all his life. So, he simply agreed.

Elena then asked Erik a question. "Where did you learn all of these thaids strengths and weaknesses?"

"From multiple sources, but there is a book I recommend to you. It is called 'Thaid Science,' and Jucas Finch has written it."

Elena looked at Erik with a look of determination. She decided to read that book.

"We should probably leave soon," Erik suggested, and everyone nodded.

"Now... I have to ask a much more important question: do you think you can handle another Lomalin group? Specifically, a bigger one?"

Since the students got a little bit used to killing the thaids, they had a slightly less conflicted look on their faces.

It was clear that killing something was not easy. However, they knew that here or in the militaries, they were bound to kill thaids and that, regardless, these were humanity's natural enemies. They didn't have to feel bad or guilty about their deaths. They had to kill more than fifteen beasts if they wanted to have a shot at the competition.

"It's ok for me..." Anderson said.

"Yeah, the same here."

"Yes."

"Yeah, let's go."

"Good. However, this will be a slightly different fight. Since the thaids will be in higher numbers, we must adopt a kiting strategy. Hit and retreat. It won't be difficult; Judith, you have seen how easy it is to run away from them. What do you think?" Erik asked.

"It should be feasible... I think..."

Elena nodded at this, but Robyn was unconvinced.

"I don't know, jumping from 15 to 50 is a lot..." he said. However, he turned to look at Anderson. He was the highest-ranked student on the team and was among the best of the whole peasant rank. So, his opinion mattered to him.

Both Erik and Anderson noticed Robyn's look. The young man thought about it for a bit and then said.

"Until now, Erik gave us good advice. He is even the most knowledgeable about thaids in the entire group. If he thinks we can do this, I have no reason to believe otherwise," Anderson said.

Erik nodded at his friend and resumed his speech. "Good, since we all agree. Please, Judith, send your hounds to them. I want to be sure there is no nearby threat. Large Lomalin groups usually attract Crombos..."

"Understood, let me summon them."

Chapter 159: First official hunt (4)

Some hours later, deep into the forest, Benedict and his team searched for thaids. It wasn't simple to make their first kill, but after having thought about it for a while, he and his team members gathered the courage, and soon later, they killed a couple of thaids.

After that, things became easier. It still wasn't simple to kill the beasts, but they did it nonetheless. Unlike Erik, the students decided to fight freely to kill as many thaids as possible. However, they would immediately notice they were rookies if someone saw them.

Currently, the group was fighting a medium big thaid. The beast had a reptilian body, a feline head, and a mouth filled with small, sharp teeth. Its body was covered in thick yellowish-brown fur. Its paws were large claws, which could be used for digging or ripping apart its prey. On top of all this, it also sported two long horns protruding from either side of its skull.

These horns helped it defend itself against predators by stabbing them with great force when necessary. They were usually found living alone, although groups of three to six might occasionally live together.

The creature turned its face towards Benedict when an arrow was shot at the creature's eyes. However, the beast moved its head, avoiding the attack at the last moment.

Martha tried to ensnare the beast with her thorned vines, but the beast retreated several meters back before jumping out of Martha's reach.

While it did so, Rex aimed another arrow, aiming straight at the thaid's front paw. This time he hit his target perfectly; however, no blood was coming out.

At that moment, Benedict's team members learned this thaid's brain crystal power. It could generate simple illusions that generally helped it, ambushing its prey. The beast was, in truth, in another place, taking cover between the trees. That way, it wouldn't be seen until it wanted to appear again.

"I told you," said Rex, "this thing is tough."

The team quickly lost sight of the beast and started searching for it while staying alert for any sudden movements around them. As expected, the thaid reappeared shortly afterward, only this time, it came from behind them.

Rex immediately fired arrows, hitting what he later discovered was one of the thaid's illusions.

Benedict and Beatrice, both with a weapon conjuring power, went in front of Rex, Martha, and the rest of the squad to shield them from attacks. While the others tried to take cover behind one of the trees surrounding them.

The beast charged at benedict and Beatrice, trying to grab them. At that point, Benedict wrestled with the beast, stopping it from harming his comrades. However, the monster was powerful and kept trying to bite him in the neck with its scary-looking jaws.

Soon enough, it slashed down on Benedict's arm with its paws, causing him severe pain. He yelled in agony as the beast bit harder.

As Benedict fought hard to control his opponent, his teammates attacked. Rex released a couple of mana arrows toward the beast, hitting it on the flank.

The projectile arrived before Beatrice arrived, and the beast, feeling the sharp pain on his side, tried to escape his attackers. However, Martha immediately used her thorned vines to restrict the beast's movements, giving Beatrice and the other two teammates time to arrive at the beast's side and whack it with their weapons.

The thaid roared in pain as the six students continued attacking it relentlessly. But despite everything, the thaid was too strong and resilient and refused to die.

A brawl broke out later. With the beast, trying to slash, bite, swipe, and kick anyone who got near it.

After a few minutes of struggling and many wounds accumulated, the thaid finally collapsed onto the ground and succumbed to death.

After that, everyone looked at each other. The students knew they had won their battle, though that was only a beast. Despite being harder to fight, they weren't going to get more points from it. This was because the Red Palace and the military wanted to encourage the students to kill as many thaids as possible.

The reason was that they wanted to reduce the number of monsters before the horde reached the city's gates.

"Are you ok, guys?" Benedict asked his teammates.

"Yeah..." Rex replied. Despite not having exerted himself that much, he was pretty tired. "My arms are sore..." he lamented.

"I'm ok," Martha said. "how are you? You had a close call..." she said.

"I'm good. I just got a scratch," Benedict replied.

Beatrice looked at her team with a cold look in her eyes. "Let's go," She said. "We need to hunt more thaids if we want to have an opportunity to win this competition..."

They all agreed and followed after Beatrice, leaving the dead thaid behind. The group searched for more beasts while remaining vigilant against anything else that might come their way.

During the following hours, the group hunted hundreds of thaids, but unfortunately, none of them were very skilled at hunting. The beasts often escaped or ran away from them before they could approach, resulting in fewer points than they should've gotten.

"Ah... I can't take this anymore..." Rex said. He was the weakest one in terms of physical strength, and keeping up with the pace was getting difficult for him.

Martha nodded. "Me neither," she added.

"I still don't get why the Red Palace issued this quest. I mean, it looks like it's too much for students like us..." benedict said.

"I don't know," Rex said. "Take a look at the scores; there are teams that killed hundred of thaids already," he said while looking at his phone.

"Damn, Erik's team is even first, with 2500 kills!" That was a remarkable result considering that Erik was the lowest-ranked one among them. "How is a score like that possible?" Rex added.

"Well... Anderson is on his team. Besides, Erik himself has a ton of knowledge about thaids. He probably knows where to find them and how to kill them..." Benedict replied. To be honest, he was happy that Erik could get this kind of score; he was that kind of guy.

Rex sighed. "It's frustrating knowing we'll never beat those guys."

"Don't worry, bro," benedict said. "We are doing great. We just need to keep searching a little bit more," he said.

"Are you done talking?" Beatrice said. Her tone of voice suggested that she wasn't tired of his and Rex's constant talking. That was probably one of the reasons why they were unable to find thaids.

"Yes, ma'am," Benedict replied.

"Good, let's continue our hunt then," Beatrice said. "If you see any thaid, make sure to alert the others ASAP! Remember, if things go bad, call the other teams..." she reminded her team members.

"Sure thing, boss lady!" Rex shouted sarcastically.

After searching for a bit more, the group found a rather large Ner group. Erik had never met these creatures since the breach was in the Lomalin's territory.

However, they were present around here, and Erik knew it. He told the other groups what kind of creatures they could fight roaming around here so they knew how to kill them.

These beasts were invertebrates thaids with ant-like heads and stubby antennae. Their faces had pincer-like mandibles, and their long bodies had multiple legs. They had a relatively powerful poison-like brain crystal power that allowed them to kill bigger thaids, and their body was covered in thick chitin. They were around thirty centimeters long, but they were in huge numbers.

"It looks like we are finally lucky," one of the other team members said.

Chapter 160: First official hunt (5)

In the meantime, Floyd, Gwen, and the other team members were a hundred meters from Benedict's group. Their team was slightly more powerful than Benedict's, and they scored higher than him.

At the moment, they were near a river that led to an old cave entrance where several boulders lay. Near it was a small cliff which seemed like it would be perfect for helping them find more thaids. Gwen thought it wasn't too big for them having problems climbing but not so small as to prevent them from seeing what was happening around them.

"I will go take a look over there," Gwen said since she got to lead the other five students. "You guys stay here." She pointed at her teammates before going towards the cliff with her gauntlets in hand.

As soon as she reached the stone walls, she climbed up the cliff's rugged surface until reaching the top.

Thanks to that, she was at least a couple of meters above the tree level and could see the city nearby. It looked much smaller than it really was, making her understand how really fragile human life was despite the built skyscrapers and giant domes.

However, a thunderous screech quickly took the young woman's attention. She and the other got immediately alerted. However, her team members couldn't see what was happening, but she could.

A large shadow appeared above the canopy, flying majestically over the trees like a bird of prey and swooping down on unsuspecting thaid. The creature made no noise whatsoever during its flight, but it emitted an ear-shattering sound when it screeched.

Gwen never saw thaids before this day, and she had only heard about the flying ones. They were the most dangerous thaids out there, but there were many variants.

The deadliest ones were the flying wyverns. Luckily, these creatures were scarce on this continent. However, bird-like ones weren't.

These creatures were the ones reigning over this continent, being both the apex predator and the kings of all birds.

The sound of wings beating against the air brought Gwen back to reality, and she kept observing the thaid more.

It was a majestic bird whose beastly feathers were yellowish-greenish and had a tall crest that decorated the top of its head, much as a cockatiel would. The similarities ended there, however, since the monster was at least thrice as large as a condor and had two bloodshot eyes in addition to rows of jagged fangs sprouting along the side of its enormous beak.

Simply taking into account its size, Gwen deduced that it could seize her without any effort and transport her in the sky without any difficulty.

The creature continued its search for food and eventually came upon something resembling a hedgehog but was at least a couple of times larger. The face of this creature was shaped like a cat, and its spikes were green with some black tints at the margins.

Its spikes were unmistakably those of a hedgehog, despite his legs being a little longer than usual. Its stocky form didn't allow it to move very quickly, but the spikes on its back were extremely dangerous. It was quickly evident to Gwen that the bird had brought its victim, which apparently was a bush hedgehog.

Well, at least judging by what Erik explained to her and the others before going to hunt.

The bird reached the bush hedgehog in a matter of seconds, diving down with the speed of a torpedo. The battle was everything but easy. When the bird was on top of the land creature, its fur became very thorny and spiked in appearance.

The feathers prevented the Kreeth from poking it with its beak, but it had exceptionally keen talons, which it used to produce a big gash across the bush hedgehog's flesh at the price of some minor damage.

Following several failed efforts, the bird-like thaid was eventually successful in putting an end to the creature's life. It started slowly removing the spikes as soon as it brought the carcass atop a nearby tree. As it removed all of the spikes, the beast was rewarded with a delicious lunch and began to devour its kill greedily.

Gwen knew the beast was dangerous, yet she was mesmerized by its beauty and gracefulness.

After eating half of its meal, the bird-like thaid stopped moving and perched on a tree branch, allowing itself to digest the rest of the meat inside its body. Then it opened its beak wide, letting its stomach expand until it could fit another piece of meat.

Gwen knew that a flying thaid so close to the city was weird since usually they got shot down by the military.

<Why is this thing so close to the city?> The young woman asked herself. Gwen kept observing until she saw a group of soldiers silently jumping from tree to tree with mana weapons. One of them noticed her and signaled for her to stay as far away as possible. This beast was dangerous, and she would die soon if she did not pay attention.

She obeyed instantly, knowing full well that if she tried to attack the thaid for a meager point, she'd probably get killed anyway. So, instead, she walked down the cliff and gestured for her teammates to avoid making too loud noises.

"What happened?" Floyd asked. He looked scared when he saw Gwen's ashen face.

"Is everything alright, Gwen?" another asked.

Gwen looked at the two, telling them not to raise their voices. The young woman whispered, "There is a flying thaid nearby, the militaries are taking care of it, but we must pay attention..."

"A flying thaid?" Floyd said. "Were you able to find out what species it was?" he then asked.

"No." She then described the beast to her team members, telling them every detail of the creature. As she described the thaid, the others realized how powerful it really was. A single scratch from its talons was enough to kill a human. Then it told them about the bush hedgehog and how it died under the creature's clutches.

"Where you able to find thaids we could kill around here?" a teammate asked.

"I'm sorry," Gwen replied, shaking her head. "But I saw a clearance nearby. We can try our luck there," the young woman said.

At that moment, they heard the dying screech of the bird-like thaid. It had probably been killed by the soldiers. They decided to leave before anything more unfortunate occurred.

They went through the forest, keeping a low profile, making sure nothing could see them, especially now that they were aware that flying thaids were nearby. They moved along the edge of the trees, looking carefully for a spot where they might have seen a thaid. After ten minutes or so, Gwen pointed out a clearing ahead of them.

After a brief discussion, her companions agreed and decided to go further deep into the forest before entering the clearing.

After a little bit of walking, they arrived at the clearing after passing by several thickets and small bushes. However, from a distance, the students noticed a very large group of Lomalins. There was

no doubt that these creatures were hostile; however, as much as Erik told them, they were also easy to kill.

"Do you feel confident enough to handle them?" Gwen asked.

"I don't know," one of her teammates replied. "We haven't trained together, and I am unfamiliar with your abilities," he added.

"Yeah... me too..." Another said.

"I get it, but we can't miss this opportunity. The group is large enough for us to get enough points to end up in the upper part of the rank. I think we shouldn't miss this opportunity."

They thought about it for a little bit, then nodded, deciding to kill the creatures.

The five members approached the clearing cautiously. Their first thought was to take advantage of their hiding places, but they quickly changed their minds upon seeing the size of the crowd. It would have been useless. These guys were a lot!