

BIOLOGICAL 201

Chapter 201: Before the fight

It was now the fourth of August, the year 3040. Many things happened in the past few days, some good, some bad. The bad one was related to some news shared by the military.

Apparently, a vast horde was headed toward New Alexandria, and the city was setting up defenses all around and inside the barrier to avoid a breach in the eastern gate. The horde was so strong that General Becker had been forced to ask all the citizens under 60 years old and over 16 to join the defenses; they called every person available, and that received some training.

Despite the effort to prepare for the horde, rumors about the military's inability to effectively protect the city only added to the anxiety and uncertainty among the citizens. The military's announcement about the impending horde invasion of New Alexandria was disturbing, especially as they had already called in every available person for defense, leaving no room for additional reinforcements.

Luckily, Erik and his friends were underage and did not have enough experience to join the city's defenses, regardless. On the one hand, he was happy he didn't have to risk his life against the horde. On the other hand, he was sad due to the large amount of experience he would lose.

To be honest, Erik did expect a situation like this to happen, as it was all coherent with what was happening around the city and that he had the opportunity to see when he went hunting for thaids.

He didn't know the reason for this phenomenon, but it was clear that the military would release this information as soon as things calmed down. Erik thought about hacking into some military device to find this out, but he did nothing since he didn't care about it.

Instead, he tried to focus on the positive aspect, which was that he had gained a lot of knowledge and skills during his time at the Red Palace that he could use in the future. He reflected on the fact that he had come a long way and was now capable of handling himself in situations that he would have found overwhelming before.

He hoped this confident attitude would lead him to even greater success in the future, regardless of the challenges that may come his way.

The positive news, instead, was about Nathaniel. It had to be said that during these weeks, Erik had extensively used the power to connect to any device to make the young man's life hell. Erik

discovered that his father, Matthew, was the leader of the Mambas, a local gang under the influence of the Crystal Cross gang since the little prick kept information regarding the matter on his phone.

He actually wondered how idiotic Nathaniel could be to do something like that, but he guessed that he wasn't too bright after all.

Actually, he found out that Nathaniel had a pretty intense life, as his father owned several establishments inside the city, even clubs where prostitution and drugs were freely available. Nathaniel spent the past few days having casual sex with many women and indulging in alcohol, and Erik felt disgusted by the lifestyle he had been living.

This had all been seen through text messages that Nathaniel sent to some people Erik didn't know. Still, obviously, the young man took his opportunity and sent these conversations to Natasha, further destroying the two's previous relationship.

The only thing Erik needed now was to beat the prick, and at that point, he planned to share the information about Nathaniel's father with all the Red Palace students, the police, and the military. If he managed to get Nathaniel kicked out, that would be surplus. Erik was aware that, to do so, he needed more proof than just texts.

Time flew like that, and Erik managed to go high enough in the inner ranks to challenge Nathaniel. There was only one problem. The prick had gained another neural link, making him jump to PI1 on the Idor scale. He was the only one able to do this during the first year, even setting a record.

This meant that his stats increased, and if they did so evenly, then he would have Erik's exact level of strength, implying that Nathaniel was, without using his power, as strong and fast as him. However, Nathaniel's sudden surge in strength and speed didn't necessarily make him invincible, as other factors could still affect the outcome of a battle.

It was up to Erik to find a way to bypass this problem.

The awakener initially thought that the strength disparity would help him even in the field, despite Nathaniel's crystal brain power, but that was not true anymore. Besides, Nathaniel's comrades during the hunt told how he had been able to kill a Wiangrine alone.

That alone spoke volumes about Nathaniel's BCP since Wiangrines were powerful for RHO-ranked students. If he could do that while still having six neural links, he didn't want to imagine what he could do with seven.

For this reason, it became clear to Erik that he needed to improve his strength again by using his spare attribute points, something he didn't want to do. He had originally intended to use them the following month to boost his energy after the military school had tested him, but it appears that he could not do so.

Luckily, the system told him that there was no level cap, so he could still increase his energy in the future, but during the fight he had against the thaids inside the forest, he understood how meager his amount of mana was. Compared to his comrades and friends, he could battle for much shorter periods, and he had to rest a lot between the fights, or he would have dragged his teammates down.

He needed mana ASAP.

As soon as he realized what was happening, he put all his unassigned stat points into strength, bringing his total to 51. Needless to say, this made him insanely powerful for his rank; he was actually so strong as to be comparable to an OMICRON-1 ranked fighter, and that was too much for his current number of neural links, even considering that people knew he had double the amount.

This meant that he had to be careful when he fought against Nathaniel and when he did things in the future.

<Fuck... This will significantly slow me down,> Erik thought. Increasing his physical stats was easy with all the neural links he could establish, but that wasn't true for energy. The only way to increase it was through the system.

"Remember me why you are doing all this..." Floyd asked Erik. Previously, Erik's friend thought he only wanted to climb the ranks, but now that he has openly challenged Nathaniel, it was clear why he was doing all that.

"I'm simply tired of that prick," Erik lied. "He's always belittling people, and I want to teach him a lesson," he added. However, he knew he was doing it only to make him suffer.

"I'm not buying it, Erik," his friend replied.

"I don't know what you expect to hear, Floyd. The truth is that I'm sick of that psycho. Besides, haven't you heard of what he does outside the Red Palace? Don't you know how he treats and what

he thinks about other people? If it weren't me trying to put him in his place, someone else would." Floyd sighed deeply.

"It's just that I don't think doing this was necessary at all. Your level of obsession is too much. This is not sane..." he added. "But you're right; someone would have taught him a lesson before, sooner or later."

Erik shook his head. "I don't think I'm taking this too far. I only want to teach him a lesson, Floyd." The young man continued, giving several reasons for wanting to do this.

He actually used as an excuse the fact that Nathaniel was mean to the others and that he didn't want other people to suffer as he did in the past, but it was clear Erik didn't really care about the others; he was only using them to convince Floyd nothing was really happening.

"If you say so..." Floyd added. Erik looked at his phone and noticed it was almost time to head to the Blue Palace to fight against Nathaniel.

His mind returned to the day he had been defeated and humiliated in front of everyone at the school's tournament. How Nathaniel insulted him and what he did during the Red Palace's hunt. With those thoughts in mind and a need for vengeance, the young man set for the Blue Palace.

Chapter 202: Retribution (1)

Erik quickly arrived at the Blue Palace and got his usual notification, specifying the healer, the room, and the ranks.

ERIK ROMANO (RANK 571, FIRST YEAR) VERSUS NATHANIEL MC CONEL (RANK 370, FIRST YEAR)

ROOM 883, EIGHTH FLOOR.

HEALER: MARTIN MIDDLETON

Erik's concentration was razor-sharp, but he was extremely anxious about this match against Nathaniel. The guy was an absolute monster in the ring—a true beast who'd been on top of their rankings from the first day they joined the Red Palace.

He hadn't lost once yet, not even when matched against some of the best fighters the peasant rank could offer; the hall's quietness worsened things severely. Erik took a deep breath and reminded himself of his strengths, trying to stay focused on the fight ahead. He knew he had trained hard for this moment and was determined to give Nathaniel a run for his money.

Erik needed to win today for his vengeance and pride. He knew there was a difference as big as an abyss between Nathaniel's and his powers, but he hoped that with his improved strength, he would be at least equal to his opponent in terms of speed.

The problem was that Nathaniel's power was difficult to deal with since it increased his attack range. It also had a significant width, allowing him to hit his opponent easily enough if done correctly; the awakener's opponent had shotguns in his hands.

Soon after Erik arrived, Nathaniel did the same. Both students wore the Red Palace's uniform and had their weapons hanging by the waist or the back. Erik took a deep breath and prepared himself for the upcoming battle, knowing he had to be careful and strategic in his moves to stand a chance against Nathaniel's powerful abilities.

His eyes interlocked with Erik's, the challenger's, and then narrowed dangerously. They both took positions in front of each other, ready for battle. Tension was palpable, and Nathaniel's rage could also be felt. The plant hugger's challenge was not unexpected, but Nathaniel was not one to back down from a fight.

He had been waiting for this moment since the hunt, as he wanted to prove his strength and dominance over the other students, especially Erik.

However, the young man was also curious. He was sure Erik saw him lure the thaids during the hunt outside the city but was there something else?

"Do you really think you can win against me?" Nathaniel said.

"I'm sure of it..." Erik replied.

"You are just RHO1; what gives you the gall to challenge me?" he said, staring defiantly at Erik while keeping his arms folded across his chest.

Nathaniel wasn't used to losing. He hated defeat more than anything, so that any loss would leave traces of hatred within him. For him, it all came down to one thing: dominating everyone around him. His competitive nature was evident in how he held himself as if daring anyone to challenge him.

This attitude had made him successful in many areas of his life, but it also made it almost impossible for him to form relationships with others who didn't share his intense drive for dominance. Nathaniel often found himself alone, unable to connect with those around him on a deeper level. However, he was a force to be reckoned with and ensured everyone knew it.

No one was allowed to defy him in any way. Ever.

"Did you forget I'm an awakener?" Erik replied.

"So what? You have two trashy powers. There is literally nothing you can do against me..."

Erik smiled slightly, "I wouldn't be so sure of myself if I were you, Nathaniel..."

McConel smiled like a psycho. "I must say that you played well against me during those days," he added.

"I don't know what you are talking about," Erik replied.

"Oh, come on... Don't take me for a fool. I know you were the one who spread those messages, and I know that you saw me that day..." Nathaniel said.

"What day are you talking about? Are you sure you don't need to be seen by some specialists?" Erik replied.

"Feigning ignorance, uh?"

"Whatever..." Erik shrugged. There was no way he would admit it was him who shared those chats and images or that he saw him luring the thaids. His vengeance wasn't going to end after this duel.

Nathaniel looked at Erik with anger and contempt and said, "All right, all right. It doesn't really matter since I'm going to crush you..."

They both stared into each other's eyes intensely. Then a notification rang on both the students' phones to remind them about the match. They had to go to the eighth floor and report to the healer to start the match.

The two then went to the elevators; they took two different ones and quickly reached the eighth floor. Then they headed to the room where they were going to fight.

Once they arrived, they entered the room, which was identical to all the others they went to when having other fights. It was entirely metallic, and there was a retractable door barring the entrance to the room that the healer would later use to observe the match without getting injured.

There were countless cameras and speakers all over the place, and once they stepped inside the room, the barrier covered every angle of the place.

The healer was already inside the room. Martin, the designated healer, was a tall man with brown hair, blue eyes, and a very strong body. He seemed pretty old, though Erik couldn't tell exactly how old he was. He wore the same clothes as the rest of the staff members, but unlike them, he didn't seem to care much about looking presentable. In fact, his hair was disheveled.

However, despite his unkempt appearance, Martin had a kind, gentle demeanor that put the students at ease. His healing abilities were highly sought after, and many believed that his unconventional appearance was a testament to his dedication to his craft rather than a lack of professionalism.

He greeted both competitors with a smile. "Hello, guys! How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Are you joking? I won't even sweat against this weakling!" Nathaniel responded immediately.

"Hahahahaha It looks like there is bad blood between you two, am I right?" The healer asked.

"Nah..." Erik answered.

The healer then observed the awakened. "I suppose you, too, aren't nervous..."

"No..." Erik replied.

Martin nodded and turned towards the camera system, "Okay, we will begin shortly." Good luck, gentlemen," he said while looking at the two students. "Ah, before we start. It is my duty to remind you that fatal moves are not allowed."

He then went on to explain what they could and couldn't do. Both men understood what their limits were, but Erik was sure Nathaniel wasn't going to follow the rules. After hearing everything from the healer, the two started preparing themselves. First, Erik checked his flyssa, ensuring it was still sharp and ready for combat.

Nathaniel did nothing, as he didn't really like using the trident compared to his brain crystal power.

"Good. Well, let's get started. You may begin whenever you want," Martin said. Both of them nodded, and then Erik turned towards the entrance, taking a position in front of Nathaniel.

Martin went inside the other room and closed the retractable door, locking it from the inside, making sure neither of the fighters could get out until one of the two surrendered or was sent K.O. Then, he sat comfortably near the wall and observed everything happening.

Erik broke up Nathaniel's friendships, made him and his girlfriend look bad in front of the whole Red Palace, and planned to humiliate Nathaniel by publicly defeating him. However, that wasn't the last step; there was much more he wanted to do, and he had multiple roads ahead. He had only to choose what to do.

Nathaniel was still looking at Erik in anger. How did he dare oppose him? How could he think he could win against him? What kind of stupid idiot thought he was good enough to beat him? These questions filled Nathaniel's head, but none of the answers mattered now. All that existed was winning the battle, putting his opponent in place, and showing him his superiority.

"Don't come crying at me once I beat your ass..." Nathaniel said.

"Do you ever stop being an asshole?" Erik replied. Nathaniel looked at him with rage, but there was only silence inside the room. Neither of them moved.

Then Erik readied himself. Waiting for the match to start felt like an eternity, and yet, once it did, it went on fast. One moment, Erik stood in front of Nathaniel, and the next, he was right behind him. Obviously, the awakener's opponent was left shocked; when did the motherfucker become so fast?

However, his reflexes were good enough to block the attack by turning on himself incredibly quickly and raising his weapon in the air.

Erik's sword got caught in Nathaniel's trident and stopped moving. The trident user was confident in his power; he could not only attack but also deploy a defensive energy shield, so he knew he could quickly stop Erik's most devastating attacks. However, that required a lot of energy, which was why he used the trident to block the attack.

Nathaniel channeled mana through his neural links as he saw Erik's Flyssa get stuck in his weapon and prepared himself to punch the awakener.

Chapter 203: Retribution (2)

Nathaniel was unsure if his attack would land on his opponent, but that did not stop him from trying. Confidence oozed from him. As soon as the mana circled his arm and his brain crystal pumped the mana, his arm started supercharging and converting mana into this mysterious force. He felt the energy flowing through his veins and knew he had to make the most of it.

He lunged forward with fierce determination and unbridled rage, aiming to strike his opponent with all his might.

Nathaniel then punched; his fist shot out in a blur as soon as his mind registered he was ready to strike. The area around his fist, which was in the center, was about 30 centimeters wide, and it almost hit the Awakener hard enough to push it against a wall. However, Erik dodged the blow by moving one meter to Nathaniel's side, greatly surprising the young man.

Nathaniel quickly got himself together and got ready for Erik to attack. His heart was pumping adrenaline all over his body as he prepared for his opponent's next move. He knew he couldn't afford to let his guard down, not even for a second if he wanted to emerge victorious from this intense battle.

Nathaniel was too proud to see Erik's fights, as he didn't believe he would be able to even remotely catch up to him, and yet, despite all odds, here they were. It was clear to Nathaniel that Erik had

gained an incredible amount of strength and was at a complete loss for words, yet he refused to think of him as an equal like he did with Anderson or Amber.

Nathaniel couldn't help but feel a twinge of jealousy towards Erik's progress, as he had always considered himself the better fighter. However, as he watched Erik's movements with a mix of awe and envy, Nathaniel realized that the fight wouldn't be as simple as he had initially assumed.

Erik had been practicing for months, honing his skills at every opportunity. He was confident in himself, much more than when he took his entrance test or fought against Zak. The increase in strength was helpful, but it would make it hard for him to increase his mana reserves since, to get more points, he needed to level up and kill creatures.

However, thanks to his increased speed and agility, his body moved like water, entirely under his command, fluidly shifting in position whenever the young man willed. That didn't sit well with Nathaniel; that increased the amount of mana channeled through his neural links, and he tried to punch Erik again.

BOOM BOOM

Nathaniel unleashed two punches at him, and the radius of his power significantly increased. The young man was also increasing his speed by using his power to make his attacks gain momentum. That way, Nathaniel was still much slower than Erik. Soon after, the fight started getting heated, with Nathaniel trying to attack him relentlessly while keeping his mana output relatively low.

Five minutes went on, with Erik swiftly dodging Nathaniel's attacks and landing a few counterattacks of his own. Their punches echoed through the room, creating deafening sounds that seemed to shake the walls.

Nathaniel yelled, "STOP RUNNING, YOU COWARD PIECE OF CRAP!" as frustration rose within him. Erik disregarded the taunt; he did not allow Nathaniel's teasing to affect him. This further enraged the Mambas' scion, who decided to increase his mana output and step up the game.

"FIGHT ME! YOU LITTLE BITCH!" Nathaniel shouted again.

The rage inside him made him lose control. His fists flew forward faster than ever, each swing causing a loud sound due to the mana hitting the empty air but making him look like an angry god throwing boulders at his enemies. Each hit came closer to hitting its target, becoming dangerous for the Awakener's safety.

Nathaniel's fists became so supercharged with mana that they could easily injure Erik, only thanks to the shockwaves. But the Awakener could avoid the attacks because he could move several meters in a matter of seconds from where he was and without notice.

As he felt another blow coming towards him, Erik found himself avoiding Nathaniel's attack again; he had been playing it passive most of the time until now.

Erik's blows would be dangerous to Nathaniel, too, since he could easily break a bone with the amount of strength he possessed. The fight became increasingly dangerous and intense in the following minutes, something the healer quickly noticed. The amount of mana in the room was off the charts, but what was scary was that almost all of it came from Nathaniel.

The healer was, however, astounded by Erik's mana management. At the moment, he wasn't even using mana to sharpen his flyssa, instead focusing solely on avoiding Nathaniel's fast attacks. The Awakener's opponent punched again; some minutes earlier, he had thrown the trident away and focused solely on using his power.

However, Erik collected enough "data" about Nathaniel's fighting style during the fight, and he started understanding how to land hits on him. That was all Erik did until that moment: collect data.

The problem was that Nathaniel was much better than him technique-wise, and he left no opening for Erik to exploit. It wasn't like he didn't have any, as he still had a lot to learn, but Erik couldn't see them easily since he wasn't as skilled as him, who had trained since an early age.

However, all his battles, training, and stats he pumped into intelligence and dexterity made it so that it was only a matter of time before he saw one. The young man didn't have to wait long as Nathaniel's fighting style became more unruly and unrefined; Erik immediately saw an opening and smirked. Nathaniel noticed the smile.

"WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU LAUGHING FOR?!" he asked, clearly enraged by Erik's lack of fear or respect for him.

"It's just that I find it funny," Erik replied, avoiding another one of Nathaniel's seemingly unavoidable and fast attacks.

"WHAT?!"

SWOOOOSH

BOOM

"The fact that, up until two months ago, I saw you as an insurmountable obstacle, and yet, here I am, fighting against you on equal ground," the Awakener said while smiling. That wasn't the only reason, though, as most of Erik's happiness came from seeing Nathaniel's openings now.

"HA." Nathaniel burst out in a maniacal laugh; he looked like a madman.

"YOU THINK YOU ARE MY EQUAL?! SERIOUSLY?!" Nathaniel paused and attacked the young man again, but he could not surprise his opponent sufficiently to land a blow.

"I WILL ACKNOWLEDGE THAT YOUR SKILLS HAVE IMPROVED OVER THE LAST TWO MONTHS AND THAT YOU ARE NO LONGER THE WEAKLING YOU WERE, BUT THERE IS STILL A MOUNTAIN BETWEEN MINE AND YOUR POWER! "DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE YOU CAN BEAT ME?" Nathaniel barked at Erik.

"I do not think so; I'm certain..." answered Erik, dodging another attack. "You see, this match started twenty minutes ago, and you couldn't land a single blow on me!" Erik said.

That statement caused Nathaniel to stop laughing suddenly. His face darkened, then slowly turned red because of the boiling rage he was currently feeling. He started breathing heavily and clenching his fist, and that was the moment he snapped. He didn't care anymore about the consequences, and he unrestrained himself.

The amount of mana inside Nathaniel's body bubbled to the point that it started manifesting around his skin. It appeared like a blue glow that glistened when he moved. His speed suddenly increased several folds. Nathaniel was hell-bent on killing Erik at that point.

Nathaniel unleashed every ounce of mana he had. Every tiny spark of energy he could muster was used, and he let loose in full fury.

<How the fuck can this guy have this much mana?!> thought Erik in shock, clearly able to feel the substance swirling around him.

The healer, Martin Middleton, immediately noticed the sudden shift in Nathaniel's mood and the amount of mana he unleashed; it was like a tsunami. However, he didn't think that Nathaniel would do something so stupid and risk being expelled by the Red Palace. He didn't anticipate that his rage would drive him so far as actually to try to kill him though he warned him.

"Nathaniel McConel, I'm warning you. The mana levels you are unleashing are too high above the threshold. If you do not calm down, I will declare you the loser and kick you out." Martin, the healer, said.

However, the young man didn't care what he said. He wanted Erik to pay; he would never accept these words from anyone. Not even his father. So, instead of calming down, his rage only increased.

<This is bad,> thought Martin with worry. <If he keeps attacking like this, he might hurt or even kill Erik.>

Martin knew that Nathaniel was capable of doing precisely that. Since Martin noticed how Nathaniel was unfazed by the healer's threat, he immediately pressed a button and called the security.

"There is a problem in room 883. Immediate assistance is required! I repeat immediate assistance is required!"

Chapter 204: Retribution (3)

[WARNING: HOSTILE DETECTED]

Description: Nathaniel lost his mind; he wants to kill you. Defeat the opponent without killing him to earn experience (stored mana will be converted into experience).

-Rewards for completion: A thousand experience points for defeating Nathaniel; five hundred D.N.A. in either case; and two dexterity points.

-Failure Penalty: Death by killing or defeat in the inner rankings.

As Nathaniel's rage increased, the biological supercomputer detected the young man's hostility and issued a quest Erik didn't expect.

He had to defeat Nathaniel, and if he managed to do so, the system would turn some of the mana it stored into experience points.

Erik looked at the young man standing before them with an expression between shock and hatred on his face. He couldn't believe that Nathaniel was really trying to kill him again.

This wasn't the first time, and he wondered how he could trigger so easily. Erik actually killed someone in the past, but that happened because he couldn't bear any more of Conal's, Logan's, and Orson's attacks.

He thought about killing people and stealing their power but didn't cross the line; they were mere thoughts.

However, Nathaniel was really aiming to kill him. Now that his bloodlust was directly headed for him, Erik was pissed. He didn't want to allow Nathaniel to treat him like this. So, he quickly gathered his strength and prepared for the impending confrontation.

Then Erik realized something; previously, when he saw Nathaniel or heard him talk about him, he had only viewed him as a spoiled brat, but it was now evident that Nathaniel was a sociopath.

"Let me tell you something," said Nathaniel, looking at Erik. "After this, they will need to pick you up with a spoon."

"You're going to regret what you said," Erik replied. "I'm sick of you!"

His voice echoed through the room. The words made Nathaniel just angrier as, in his distorted mind, Erik had to be scared.

At that moment, Nathaniel darted toward Erik; his speed was significantly higher than before, and he finally managed to reach Erik's speed.

That was impressive since it meant that Nathaniel was able to reach the speed and power of an OMICRON-1-ranked fighter despite only being at the PI level. Erik was annoyed by life's unfairness.

If only he had been born with such a mighty brain crystal power, he wouldn't have had a life so hard. As soon as Nathaniel reached Erik, the awakened avoided the strike again. Still, things weren't so simple this time for him since, with the increase in mana output, Nathaniel pumped up the radius of his attacks, making it harder for his opponent to avoid the strikes.

Erik couldn't help but feel envious of Nathaniel's brain crystal power, but he knew that he had to focus on his fight if he wanted to survive. In fact, the young man quickly understood that if the prick managed to land even a hit on him, he would get seriously injured. Nathaniel punched, releasing an incredible amount of mana and moving the surrounding air easily.

He basically created air cannons that made it hard for Erik to keep his balance. Erik tilted to the side and avoided the blast; he could see Nathaniel's opening and raised his Flyssa to cut him.

However, Nathaniel used the second function of his rare brain crystal power and created a small barrier that decreased his mana by a lot. He blocked the move, channeled mana, and raised his arm to punch again.

Erik moved at an astonishing speed and went directly behind Nathaniel, who heard the man and quickly jumped, twisting his body and raising his mana-charged leg to unleash a kick on Erik's head.

Erik anticipated Nathaniel's move and bent back, avoiding the lightning-fast kick and the shockwave it created; then, from that position, he counterattacked, swinging his sword again and aiming right above Nathaniel's shoulder, which caused the young man to release another barrier, through which he parried the attack.

The blow landed on it, stopping the attack. Erik felt like he had just struck a metal bar, but no sound was produced. It was weird.

However, Nathaniel stumbled back as a result of the sword's impact, but he quickly regained his balance and charged at Erik, who was astounded by Nathaniel's fortitude. The two clashed in a flurry of blows, their weapons ringing in the air as they fought with all their might.

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHAH" Nathaniel started maniacally laughing since the more the fight progressed and the more his bloodlust increased.

However, it was totally different than Erik's, as it made Nathaniel rapidly descend into madness, while the awakener was much more composed when his need to kill arose. Erik's eyes glinted with fierce determination as he parried Nathaniel's attacks, his movements calculated and precise. Despite Nathaniel's increasing frenzy, Erik remained calm and collected, waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

His opponent, instead, seemed to have lost his mind. "I WILL KILL YOU! YES! I'M GOING TO SEND YOU TO YOUR DEAR MOTHER!" Nathaniel yelled at Erik.

The young man stepped up his game and released a barrage of punches aimed straight at Erik's chest. The awakener had trouble avoiding the deadly strikes, but at least Nathaniel started caring less and less about his stance, multiplying his openings severalfold.

Erik started slowly counter-attacking. A slash here, another there, but every strike was parried or avoided by Nathaniel, who, after one minute, looked more like a beast than a human. "NATHANIEL MCCONEL! STOP, NOW!" The healer shouted.

It was now clear that this duel went just beyond the inner-ranking climbing. Not even two minutes had passed since he called for reinforcements, and the guards had yet to arrive. He started growing more worried since it was clear that Nathaniel was fighting to kill.

He pressed the button again and contacted security. "Where the fuck is the security?!" he shouted on the phone. "They are on their way; what is happening, Martin?!" the person on the other side asked, but the healer slammed the phone on the desk and stopped paying attention to it.

Martin's heart was racing as he tried to remain calm, but the thought of one of the two students dying made him feel uneasy.

He could not intervene to stop the fight, as the two students showed a prowess much higher than their levels, and he was a healer and not specialized at fighting at all. For the peasant rank, the Red

Palace usually only sent the healers to check up on the fights since they were usually sufficiently strong to stop the kids in case something like this happened.

For the higher ranks, more people got actually sent.

Still, the two students were well beyond the peasant rank in terms of strength, as they were essentially at the knight level. For those ranks, there were usually guards stationed in every room. Nathaniel's mana seemed endless, while Erik's was meager in comparison.

Yet, the awakener, thanks to a masterful management of the spare resource, could keep his flyssa sharp. However, it was clear that he wasn't winning anymore, and his initial confidence disappeared.

But over time, the urge to kill gradually took its place. Erik was trying to keep his bloodlust under control, but it wasn't easy with Nathaniel's full-on psycho mode. The need to kill him or at least make him suffer arose.

The fight continued; 3...4...5 seconds elapsed, during which the two exchanged blow after blow. Erik started becoming increasingly able to capitalize on Nathaniel's now numerous openings, and the young man started accumulating wound after wound, further enraging the kid.

"YOU ARE DEAD! I PROMISE YOU WILL NOT SEE THE SUN AGAIN TOMORROW!"
Nathaniel punched again, and Erik avoided the strike.

However, he didn't go beside Nathaniel this time but simply dove. His hair fluttered into the wind due to the shockwaves Nathaniel sent, and this time he punched; his opponent was too lost in his rage and delusions to notice that Erik didn't use his main hand.

Nathaniel used his barrier again to stop the blow, but the awakener actually used the momentum he gained to spin in the air and attack Nathaniel from the side. Erik exhausted all his mana in this strike, making his Flyssa able to cut steel easily.

In that split second, Nathaniel tried to block the attack with his barrier again, but since he exhausted a lot of mana to keep up with Erik's speed and to conjure the barriers, his mana was dangerously low. He didn't have enough of the ethereal substance to create a new barrier, and Erik ended up cutting Nathaniel's hands off his arms.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" Nathaniel shouted in pain, and immediately, the mana he channeled got disrupted. It was at that moment that the guards finally arrived.

They quickly jumped into the middle of the room and pulled Erik away from Nathaniel. The healer emerged from the room and yelled, "NO, IT'S THE ONE ON THE GROUND!" The guards then rushed at Nathaniel, who was losing a lot of blood and was looking at his stump.

However, the healer immediately rushed at him and started reattaching his limbs.

"YOU WON THE MATCH, ERIK! NOW, GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE!"

Chapter 205: Post fight

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" Nathaniel was screaming on the floor while the healer reattached his hands. At the same time, the guards were keeping the young man on the ground since he was in a dangerous mental state.

"I WILL KILL YOU! ERIK ROMANO, I SWEAR, I WILL FUCKING KILL YOU!
AAAAAAAAAAAAAH"

Erik didn't say anything, watching Nathaniel lie on the ground in pain, knowing that he had just taken his rank was already enough for him. There was a smile on his face, which not only Nathaniel noticed but even the healer and the guards who entered.

"I WON'T REPEAT MYSELF, ERIK ROMANO; GET OUT!" The healer barked.

"Yes, sir!" The awakener replied. With that, he left the fighting room and headed to the elevator. Once on the ground floor, he saw Floyd standing up from the couch he was sitting on and still waiting for him.

He had a happy smile on his face. Erik turned to his left and saw a huge electronic board that reported the match winners and their new ranks. Under ten more match results were Erik's. Floyd saw his friend win from the board, and he was smiling because of it.

"Congratulations!" Floyd shouted from the other side of the room. The two walked toward each other and hugged; that was a great day. Nathaniel was basically hated by everyone, as he was mean to everyone, and Erik's friends had known his personality since school.

"Thank you, Floyd," Erik said, smiling.

"You must tell me everything!" Erik's friend said.

"Sure, but let's get back to the Red Palace first..."

"Yes. Oh, I told the others that you just won; they said to meet at the cafeteria!"

"All right..."

With that, the two left the building, took the bus, and headed to the Red Palace. After entering through the main door and taking the elevator, the two went to the cafeteria on the first floor. There they found their friends waiting and waving from afar.

The cafeteria was filled with people talking loudly about this and that, some eating, others drinking coffee or tea, and most of them laughing and joking around after a hard day of training. All of them were wearing the usual Red Palace uniform. Most of those present also carried weapons such as swords, axes, hammers, etc.; the list could go on forever.

When the group came closer to their friends, Erik greeted everyone with a nod and a wave of his hand.

"Let's grab some food and catch up," said one of the friends. The group then proceeded to order their meals and sat at a nearby table to chat.

Everyone congratulated Erik for his victory. All his friends, especially those from Thorthon High School, knew how hard it was to beat an opponent like Nathaniel, and they were glad he did. Erik thanked his friends and said he couldn't have done it without their support.

That was not only because of Nathaniel's personality but also because they were happy for Erik's growth. Not even two months prior, the young man was a nobody, had no power, and didn't know how to fight. Erik's friends had seen him train tirelessly daily, and they were proud of his progress. They knew he had worked hard to get to where he was and deserved the victory.

In this short period, he had been able to pull off a feat that no one else would have been able to do. It wasn't only because he learned hand-to-hand combat, the sword, or even made four neural links, which usually take years to make, in a few months, but also because he grew as a person.

They knew how pitiful Erik was sometime before, and despite still having some childish or cowardly traits or the inability to look people in the eyes, the young man was slowly coming out of his shell.

However, the eight friends didn't waste time and started torturing Erik with questions about the fight.

"So, how did it go?" Floyd asked. "You said you would have told me once we got here!" he added, looking directly into his eyes.

"I will tell you it ended with me chopping his hands," Erik answered with an evil grin. "But don't worry, the healer has already reattached them."

However, the mood suddenly changed when he said those dark words without a hint of emotion in his voice and a slightly satisfied look on his face.

"You chopped his hands off?" Aaron asked.

"Yeah," Erik replied. "But the fight was tough..."

The young man then explained what had happened; he also said how Nathaniel lost his reason mid-fight, tried to kill him, and how the guards intervened a couple of seconds after he won and explained that they had to apprehend him to let him calm down. Although Erik won, the match would have ended in his favor regardless since it was clear that Nathaniel tried to kill him.

"If what you say is true, then I think Nathaniel will be expelled," Amber said.

"Really?" Erik asked.

"Yeah. This is a serious matter," his friend replied. However, Erik couldn't help but smile. That was an unexpected bonus, as he messed up Nathaniel's life with his taunts. The young man knew that was a pretty messed-up thought, but that was the bare minimum after what Nathaniel had done.

Erik's friend looked at him with concern, wondering if he truly understood the gravity of the situation.

Despite his smile, Erik knew that he had to face the consequences of his actions, especially considering Nathaniel's background.

He didn't feel sorry for him; instead, he had other plans in mind. Erik swore that he wouldn't allow anyone to mess with him anymore. If someone wanted to hurt him, he'd make them pay the price for it.

However, Amber was a little bit worried, and this was reflected on her face. Nathaniel came from a complicated family that many knew was related to the Crystal Cross Gang. His father, who was apparently the leader of the Mambas, a gang notorious throughout the whole country, was an extraordinarily shrewd but violent man.

As far as she remembered, there was a rumor saying that he killed several police and military officers during his career as a criminal, and that was without talking about ordinary people, merchants, and the like.

Even though any official source didn't confirm these rumors, they were pretty common among the city's gangs, and despite not having the proof, people close to the higher-ups knew about this too. Once school began, Amber's father warned her to stay away from Nathaniel, who initially had a crush on her. That was the reason for the animosity between Nathaniel and her.

"Erik, be careful. Nasty rumors roam around Nathaniel's family. We all know how he is, but there is still a lot most people don't know..." She then turned to look around to see if anyone was listening to their conversation. After she ensured that the other people inside the cafeteria were minding their own business, she resumed.

"I assume you are aware of the rumors regarding Nathaniel's father's line of work, am I right?" she asked.

Erik wasn't just sure; he actually read a message on Nathaniel's phone, which he promptly deleted, in which he talked about this with some people. Of course, he couldn't say so.

"Yes, I heard this..." he said.

"Well, let me tell you something. My father basically confirmed this to me once before high school began. Knowing Nathaniel's personality, I bet things won't end here. After all, YOU, among all the people, just beat him, and if he is really going to be expelled from the Red Palace, things will become complicated," Amber said.

However, Erik had done everything he did, knowing this well. The point was that he simply didn't care; the Crystal Cross Gang, a far scarier organization than the Mambas, was already on his tail. Even the gang, the greatest stain on New Alexandria's history, could do nothing to him inside the Red Palace. Why should he be scared about Nathaniel's father?

"At this point, it doesn't make any difference," Erik said. "I already have a huge target on my back," he added.

"That is true; however, don't think they won't find a way to reach you. You are safe here since the Red Palace is a private institution with ties to the government. But this is also true because not many people can join it. The military school will be different since everyone must join it, and there are ways to send people after you there."

Again, Erik was aware of this, yet he did what he did without thinking twice. Someone could have thought he had been stupid for messing with Nathaniel, but he didn't care.

"I'm already strong enough to beat him, and it only took me two months to reach this level; what will I become in another two?" Erik asked.

"Don't be too cocky," Gwen interjected. You somehow managed to win against him, but that's only because you have double the amount of neural links. If you didn't, you would have lost badly and wouldn't surely be here Erik," she added.

"Gwen!" Amber said.

"What? Isn't this the truth?" she asked.

Erik then looked his friend in the eyes, which was weird since he usually avoided doing so, and then said, "This is true, but I promise you, Gwen, that in a month, I will be much stronger than I am today..."

Chapter 206: Rage

"I WILL KILL HIM! I SWEAR I WILL KILL HIM!" Nathaniel shouted while the guards brought him outside of the fighting room. His face was red with anger, and his fists were clenched tightly. The guards tried to calm him down, but Nathaniel kept struggling and screaming. It was clear that he had lost control of his emotions and needed to be restrained for everyone's safety.

Martin, the healer, sighed; he had never seen something like this happen inside the Red Palace. Nathaniel had just been healed, and his arms reattached to him with no problem; however, his psychological state was a mess and needed medical attention as soon as possible.

"AAAAAAH, BRING HIM TO ME! BRING HIM TO MEEEE!" Nathaniel kept shouting.

"Bring this kid to the infirmary, and make sure to chain him properly. We do not want him to do worse than he is currently doing; also, tell the healer there to give him a sedative," Martin said, and the guards did as instructed. Martin's quick thinking helped prevent any further harm from being done.

As Nathaniel got dragged out of the room, the healer returned to the small operating room, where he watched the fights and took the phone. After a couple of moments, someone answered.

"Hello, this is Martin Middleton, the healer assigned to the eighth floor. I need to urgently report about the psychological state of one of our students..."

The healer informed the person on the phone that Nathaniel was in stable condition but needed a sedative to calm down.

Once Nathaniel arrived at the infirmary, he was quickly bridled and sedated. It took him a couple of minutes to calm down enough so that they could put him on an IV drip to keep him under control until the psychologist came.

The healer at the infirmary had been told soon after they brought the young man there that he was highly unstable and that they needed to evaluate his psychological state as he tried to kill a fellow student.

Nathaniel was still furious but much calmer than before. However, he kept muttering how he wanted to kill Erik and how he was going to make him pay.

Soon after, the psychologist came to check on him under the supervision of two guards and started asking him some questions.

"What is your name?" the psychologist asked. She knew that, but she needed to understand whether Nathaniel's mental state would allow her to get anything useful from him.

Starting with a simple question was the best way to understand if what Nathaniel was or wasn't going to say could be helpful or not. However, once Nathaniel heard that question, and despite the sedative, he had been injected with, he said, "SHUT UP, YOU BITCH!"

The woman started scribbling down notes on her tablet and then resumed asking Nathaniel questions. Clearly, the young man showed hostility toward the woman and the guards. He was out of his mind, probably because of his defeat. The guards had to intervene and restrain Nathaniel, who was still struggling and shouting.

It was clear that he required additional medical attention, which did not bode well for his psychological evaluation.

The psychologist stayed many hours with Nathaniel and performed five comprehensive tests to determine whether the young man had ASPD, including the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R), the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-5 (SCID-5), and some others.

In the end, the psychologist's evaluation showed that Nathaniel had ASPD. This made him a possible threat to others, so it was decided that he couldn't stay in the Red Palace.

When the woman was done, the guards actually brought Nathaniel to the Red Palace's principal, Tom Van Dyke. He had been seated in front of him, still bridled, with the guards right behind him.

"Do you know why you have been brought here?" the principal asked.

At that point, Nathaniel was calm enough to reply to the man without going fully psycho.

"No..." he said.

The principal looked at him with a severe look and then said. "You are here because, from what I've seen and what has been reported, you tried to kill one of your fellow students during an inner-ranking match.

Now, it is useless to lie since there is plenty of footage, and the mana dosimeters show high and concentrated levels of mana inside the room where you two fought." The principal kept looking at Nathaniel seriously and continued speaking. "This behavior is unacceptable..." the principal said somberly.

"Sir... I..." Nathaniel spoke with a lump in his throat. However, he was cut off by the principal. Nathaniel had been diagnosed with ASPD, so he was keen on trying to deceive and manipulate others. The principal didn't want to give the young man the opportunity.

"Enough; there is nothing you can say that will change what happened..." The man said. "Now, you have recently been the subject of several tests, and unfortunately, these results came up positive."

"What kind of tests? What was the result?" Nathaniel asked. He was in disarray at that moment.

"You tested positive for ASPD," the principal said. Nathaniel knew what this meant and was aware of the fact that it was a problem.

"Now," the principal added, "This wouldn't usually pose a problem itself, as we had a couple of people with this disorder stay in the Red Palace; however, due to the recent incident, a clear violent episode far outside the boundaries admitted by this institution, me, the doctors, and the board of directors have decided that we can no longer allow you to train in this institution."

A bomb suddenly dropped on Nathaniel; he would be kicked out of the Red Palace.

"Wait, Sir! This was a mistake. It won't happen, ag-"

"Enough!" The principal said. "I'm sorry, young man, but you are dangerous. You showed it by trying to kill the student Erik Romano, but you further solidified this decision by verbally abusing the psychologist. Hell, with your behavior, I don't even know if the military school will take you in!"

Nathaniel thought about it and said, "Sir, with all due respect, if I really have ASPD, then this means I have a disability. Isn't this discrimination?"

Principal Van Dyke then said, "You don't understand. The problem is not that you have this disorder but that you tried to kill a fellow student. The diagnosis only further worsened your situation, but it is not the main reason you will be expelled. This would have happened to any student, not just you!" the principal said, while Nathaniel looked at him with disbelief.

Nathaniel couldn't believe what he was hearing. He had always diligently trained and done as he was instructed, but one mistake would ruin his entire academic career.

"To be honest, I should have reported this to the police, and you should have spent some time in jail, but since you are still a kid, I decided to give you one more opportunity.

However, when you are done here, the guards will escort you back to your room to pick up your personal effects, and then you will be escorted out of the building. Is everything clear?"

"SIR, PLEASE! DON'T DO THIS TO ME!"

"Gentlemen," the principal said while looking at the guards, "Please escort him out."

"Yes, sir." With that, Nathaniel left the room and went to pick up his stuff.

"What a pity, the kid had a great future before him."

If Erik had been there to watch the scene, he would have been disgusted for many reasons. One of them was that attempting to kill people was something out of line, and that was true. However, he wouldn't be able to understand how bullying people and frequently making them end up in the hospital was accepted.

After a few minutes, Nathaniel left the building, completely confused and frustrated. Before escorting him out, he had his personal effects in a plastic box that the Red Palace had given him.

If the young man initially felt sad and frustrated, that emotion suddenly turned into anger and hatred, and he began to walk toward the city center. Alone, in the middle of the night. Nathaniel's mind was racing with thoughts of revenge. As he walked, his determination grew stronger with each step.

"Erik Romano... This is all his fault..." the young man said as he walked down the street. His mind was filled with thoughts like 'how dare they?' and 'they're all assholes!' As a result, Nathaniel's body moved faster than usual, and he started running through the streets, even using his power to go faster.

Soon enough, he reached an old abandoned warehouse, where he stopped after entering it. After sitting on its floor, he leaned against the wall, closed his eyes, and took deep breaths until the feeling of calmness overcame him.

He remained silent for a long period of time. Finally, when he opened his eyes again, he put his hand inside his pocket and grabbed his smartphone. He dialed a number, and the other person answered after a couple of moments.

"Hello?"

"Achim, I need your help with something..."

Chapter 207: It begins

The following day, news about Nathaniel getting kicked out started circulating among the Red Palace students. This made it so that many of them started searching for why this happened to one of the most promising students of this generation, as he not only started inside the Red Palace at inner rank 500 but was even able to reach the 370th in less than a month.

Obviously, this meant that the attention immediately shifted from Nathaniel to Erik. The young awakener wasn't new rumors about him: when he was in high school, people talked about him as a loser and a talentless waste of air; once he awakened, he clearly became a hot topic again, not only among Thorthon high school students but in the whole nation, since he was the only alive awakener there.

This meant that once he joined the Red Palace, words about it spread quickly throughout every student there. Of course, the higher-level students didn't care much, despite being slightly curious about him. They were disappointed once they learned he wasn't that strong, despite learning that he had started training and sparring just a month prior.

But now, he was basically a celebrity among the peasant-ranked students. First, because he was the fastest rank climber in the whole institution's history, and second, because he was the cause of Nathaniel McConel's expulsion.

The young son of the Mambas' leader was infamous among the peasant-ranked students not only because of what Erik did to him in the past few days but also because of the rumors about him being a psycho. The students that joined his team during the Red Palace's hunting event spoke a lot about him.

Learning that not only had Erik accomplished all he did in less than a month but that he was even the reason why someone as crazy as Nathaniel had been kicked out made his popularity soar among the students.

They admired him for his strength and bravery, and some even hoped to become friends with him one day. After all, the Red Palace was known to give opportunities to their students to make connections with future influential people.

However, some people were also afraid of him and avoided crossing his path, especially considering what happened to Nathaniel. News of how he chopped off his hands and how he managed to make him almost lose his sanity circulated too.

Even though he was the center of attention and rumors, Erik kept his mind on training and improving. He knew he still had a long way to go before he could compete with the higher-ranked students in the Red Palace, despite being much stronger than his peers at the same rank, and he didn't want anything to distract him from his goal.

In his spare time, he also kept spending time with his friends, getting to know them better and building a stronger bond with them. Clearly, his exploits pushed the others to train more and climb the ranks; in fact, all his friends started challenging people. They were all scheduled to fight after classes ended, as they wanted to match Erik's feat.

Overall, Erik's time in the Red Palace had been eventful so far, and he knew that there would be many more challenges and obstacles to overcome in the future. But he was determined to succeed and prove to everyone that he was worthy of his place in the institution—no, in the world.

The young man was currently training with Master Nieminen, practicing sword combat against her. Her movements were precise, smooth, and fluid, while his movements were still largely wild, sometimes uncoordinated, and clumsy most of the time.

It was apparent he was trying hard to land a hit on her, but she basically toyed with him to teach him better. Still, he never gave up, pushing forward relentlessly until finally, he managed to hit her on the shoulder once.

"Well done, Erik! It looks like you are finally getting the hang of it!" Master Nieminen happily said.

"Thanks, Master," the young man replied.

He then looked at his mentor, hoping she might have something else for him to teach, but he noticed that she seemed somewhat distracted, staring into space and mumbling to herself occasionally.

"Master?" Erik said.

She snapped back to reality and smiled at him. She placed her hand over his head and patted him gently. "You're doing great, boy."

Erik nodded, happy to hear those words, but then he asked. "Is something bothering you?"

"Yes, to be honest. I, along with most of the teachers at the Red Palace, will be required to join the military starting this evening. But to tell you the truth, Erik, I'm slightly worried."

"What could possibly worry you, master?" Erik asked. She was a strong warrior, a fine soldier, and he found it difficult for her to be worried about something fight-related.

"Don't tell anyone what I'm going to say, but bad rumors about the incoming monster invasion are going around. Some friends of mine in the army say this is the biggest horde to attack the nation since its founding. Apparently, the army had been able to kill some of the most powerful thaids, but some still remain, including several Yevyagìts."

Since Erik downloaded the information about the regional thaids, he knew what kind of monsters they were.

The pictures depicting the Yevyagìts showed towering monsters, standing at more than 10 meters tall and resembling giant apes that towered over most buildings and structures. Their massive size dwarfed most thaids, making them look like mere pups in comparison.

The creatures' bodies were covered in thick, shaggy fur, similar to a wolf's, which provided a layer of natural armor and protection against attacks. Most of the time, the fur was a dark shade of black that almost absorbed all light. This made them look scary in the dark.

The Yevyagì's face was, however, their most striking feature. It resembled that of a serpent with elongated, slanted eyes, each as black as coal, providing an unnerving and piercing stare. The creatures' snake-like features extend to their pointed and angular noses.

Their mouths were filled with razor-sharp fangs that jutted out menacingly, and their jaws could even unhinge to reveal a mouth that seemed far too large for its face, allowing them to swallow large prey in one gulp. However, due to their massive size, the Yevyagìs were rather slow, but their strength was immense, and they could easily topple buildings and walls easily.

Though, the creatures' inextinguishable hunger, and driving force, was what really made them scary, as it caused them to attack anything that moved, even if it posed no threat to them. If one of those beasts managed to enter the city, the weaker people were bound to be devoured alive.

"Is the situation that bad?" Erik asked.

"Yes," the teacher replied. She then explained to the young man what was really happening outside the city.

The Blirdoth emitted a roar that reverberated through the whole west side of the mountain range surrounding New Alexandria. It could be heard for kilometers.

Trees could be seen withering to the naked eye; it was a frightening scene. The creature came out of the dense forest, spreading its poisonous and deadly miasma, making every living liquefying without hope of survival.

The creature stood on a clear hump of dirt placed on a small hill facing, from a distance, New Alexandria's massive barrier. The creature looked at the human race with contempt while enshrouded by a poison mist that gave it a sort of regal but deadly aura.

It started moving toward the eastern gate while keeping off its deadly gas. The only thing it could think of was to kill and eat.

Once the beastly horror arrived in a secluded place inside the forest, it started looking fiercely at the countless thaids standing in line, roaring, shrieking, and growling while waiting for orders. The Heniate was behind the beast and controlled all the others through it.

Not only was the view scary beyond measure, but the noise generated by the creatures also contributed to the chilling atmosphere.

The soldiers keeping an eye on the horde were looking at the myriad of beasts with a look of dread; most of the people went back to the city, and only a handful of soldiers were still out to check on them.

The Blirdoth started roaring again, and soon, countless beasts started marching. The thaids standing in line started striding forward in a fearsome march of death; their destination was the human settlement in front of them, where countless creatures were hiding in fear, ready to be eaten.

The beast was looking forward to eating their soft juices, especially the ones belonging to the young ones, which it had not tasted yet. Its mind trembled at the thought of all the mana that it was going to absorb from such a buffet.

One of the soldiers immediately took his communication device and said, "It's starting..."

Chapter 208: Yellow Palace's shelter

After their short conversation, Master Nieminen and Erik resumed their training. The young man moved agilely around the room, trying to exploit the few openings that his master was showing him, but he wasn't able to capitalize on them at all. However, the older woman was very pleased with her student, who learned a lot about the Flyssa in such a short time frame.

She complimented Erik on his progress and encouraged him to keep practicing, emphasizing the importance of patience and perseverance in mastering any skill.

But Erik knew that most of his progress was due to his high dexterity. High dexterity made people more coordinated with their hands and eyes, among other things, and Erik's greatly improved intelligence helped his training a lot.

However, what really surprised Master Nieminen was how strong and fast Erik had become. She noticed his improvement, and it became clear how strong this boy really was despite his natural

restraint to avoid raising too much suspicion. Despite his natural abilities, Erik remained humble and continued to put in the hard work necessary to improve his skills.

He was grateful for Master Nieminen's guidance and knew that with her help, he could reach even greater heights.

At that moment, Erik stopped moving around and tried to hit his teacher. She made a simple movement, which was characteristic of her own sword style, and with a precise but fast movement, she deflected the attack.

Obviously, Erik knew that if he didn't move, he would end up getting kicked in the face, so he quickly backed away from her with a somersault, and as he did, he saw his teacher kick, barely missing his nose.

"Well done, but this won't be enough to defeat your opponents. Always assume they are stronger than you during a fight and play it safe. Capitalize on their openings and exploit their weaknesses," the master said.

"Yes, sir!"

Erik then attacked again; he slashed right, but her master parried; she didn't attack; he then went right behind her, but Master Nieminen obviously saw him. She didn't even need to move that much; she raised her arm and moved the sword behind her back, rotating on herself while parrying the blow. Erik moved back again and observed his sparring opponent.

A few seconds passed before Erik finally decided to retake action. He started with an offensive maneuver aimed at Master Nieminen's head. He charged straight forward, using his charge's momentum to ensure he got his full weight onto his strike. But when he reached the woman, she merely turned slightly and used one leg to push against his chest, forcing him backward.

Erik failed again but didn't let this small failure affect him again. He tried again to confuse his master by jumping around the room, trying to use his agility to get past her defenses, but his efforts were futile once more.

His movements weren't sharp enough, and Master Nieminen clearly saw past them. Erik then started probing the woman; his attacks looked like nothing but feints or attempts to distract his master. And every single attempt ended with Master Nieminen deflecting or easily parrying. Erik was impressed by Master Nieminen's skills and knew he had a lot to learn from her.

However, since he couldn't land a single attack, he grew frustrated and angry at his lack of skills, which led to a mistake: he suddenly switched tactics and tried to increase his speed. However, Erik didn't increase his dexterity, and the two stats showed a vast disparity.

The young man could go even faster than he was currently doing, but being unable to control his body, he ended up stumbling and falling to the ground with a painful thud.

"Don't overdo it, Erik; you'll only hurt yourself. I'm proud of how far we've come but don't expect miracles. You still have a long way to go."

The young man slowly stood back up, breathing heavily and sweating profusely. "Sorry, ma'am," he apologized.

Master Nieminen smiled gently, patting her student on the shoulder. "You're alright; don't worry. Let's stop here for a couple of moments; you still have a lot of things to do today, so it would be better not to tire yourself out," she said. The student looked relieved and grateful for the understanding.

"Thank you, Master Nieminen," he said with a slight bow before taking a deep breath and composing himself.

The two started chatting in order to give Erik time to catch his breath and recover some energy. Obviously, he hadn't been expecting such a strenuous session, but despite this minor setback, Erik was impressed by how much he had improved, thanks to Master Nieminen.

A couple of months ago, he never thought he would be able to wield a sword like he was doing now. Besides, Master Nieminen seemed to know exactly what he needed to improve on because each time she countered his strikes, she always said something to him, explaining what he was lacking and what he did wrong.

While still talking about this and that, a siren echoed inside the city, and giant red lights started blinking inside the training room. It was a red alarm, something that meant huge trouble.

"Erik, take your sword and go hide inside the building's underground bunker," his teacher said with an alarmed look.

The young man understood clearly what the alarm meant. It signified they were under attack; the horde finally managed to reach the city. For this reason, he complied.

As the siren rang, Erik sheathed his sword, but before heading out of the room, he asked his master: "What are you going to do now, Master?"

The woman looked at Erik, and with a solemn look, she said: "I was instructed to join the army at the eastern gate. I will also take a look at what is happening. Remember, do not leave the bunker for any reason; is it clear?"

"Yes, Master," the boy replied, and despite the attack on the city, he wasn't that worried. If someone like Master Nieminen joined the city's defenses, there was no way something terrible could happen to him.

Besides, he didn't really care about the city in itself. If, for some reason, the eastern gate ended up being breached; he could simply run away. He didn't know if he had enough strength to survive such a harsh situation, but he had a clear destination in mind in case something like that happened: Etrium.

However, it was clear that the situation had to be grave for the red siren to start ringing suddenly.

Erik knew that he had to stay safe, but he was subject to the disease of curiosity and was dying to know what the situation outside was.

The boy then thought about his friends. Amber was surely heading toward the Red Palace's shelter with all the other people. However, he knew that Aaron was in the middle of the city with his father. His friend said that he needed to buy some stuff, but Erik didn't know much. He was a little bit worried about him.

Erik's heart raced as he grabbed his sword and ran towards the bunker, wondering what could be happening outside. He stopped being idle and quickly headed out of the room, taking the stairs for safety reasons. He was having a little bit of difficulty walking since he was sore all over, but there was nothing that he could do about that.

As he descended the stairs, he could hear the muffled sounds of chaos and panic above him, making him even more nervous. After three minutes, he and many other students arrived in front of the reinforced door protecting the Yellow Palace's shelter.

On the door's side was a red button with a speaker just above it. The boy pressed it, and a ringing buzz sound echoed.

As soon as the noise ceased, the shelter's door opened, and the boy and all the others entered the room. Beside him, at least a hundred people were there; they were all first-year students who hadn't joined military school yet and were simply too young to join the defensive effort.

There was not a single adult or sixteen-year-old present in the room, as they were called by the army to fight, or they had to help set up the complex defenses surrounding the university.

<This is the safest place I could be,> Erik thought. <I only hope the others are okay.>

"Hello, everyone!" The voice of a soldier greeted them from the speakers inside the room. "We've received word from the main command center that we are currently under attack."

Everyone turned around and listened intensively to the voice, but nobody spoke. They couldn't believe that the thaids had really reached the city, even though it shouldn't surprise anyone as the army had already announced this was a possibility during the past week.

Chapter 209: The alarm

[FIVE MINUTES EARLIER]

Tension was high at the eastern gate. Scouts reported that the horde was minutes away from reaching the clearance surrounding the barrier. The army had been told to prepare for an attack, and they were doing just that, but with the usual uneasiness that characterized each period before a battle.

However, this wouldn't be a simple bout; a million-strong horde of thaids was marching over the city, and if things went sour, New Alexandria could even end up being wiped out.

The generals were strategizing their plan of action, knowing that the city's fate rested on their shoulders. Since they all received military training, the adult citizens were on the walls with all the other soldiers, and only the kids and the old people who couldn't fight anymore were waiting inside the city. They were not few by any means but were still less than the adults.

"The wait is killing me," Tim said.

"Me too," Frank replied.

Tim looked around nervously as he saw more scouts returning to the city with news about the enemy's advance. He didn't like how close the thaids had gotten.

"Do you really think we can make it?"

Frank put a hand on Tim's shoulder and said, "We have to trust our leaders and their plan. We'll get through this together."

Frank nodded energetically. "I'm sure of it."

The two observed the battlefield, noticing how many people were stationed behind a three-meter tall wall to shield the soldiers from thaids, give them a tactical advantage, and protect the artillery.

Many people were stationed on it, along with hundreds of thousands of other soldiers at the base of the wall.

Tim and Frank were there as sentinels, and their role was to keep an eye on the surroundings and sound the alarm whenever the horde appeared from behind the distant trees. Tim and Frank kept looking around the battlefield and saw the enemy coming from many different directions, making it hard for their army to defend itself.

They knew they had to act quickly to warn their fellow soldiers and prepare for the attack.

As soon as the alarm sounded, all men and women had to operate the artillery weapons and activate the mechas. Every soldier available had instead to make as much destruction as they could; killing as many thaid as possible was the first goal the higher-ups gave to the soldier.

The alarm echoed through the battlefield, and Tim and Frank sprang into action, rushing to their posts and preparing for the fight ahead. They knew this battle would be one of the toughest they had ever faced, but they were determined to do whatever it took to protect their homeland.

However, as they kept scanning their surroundings, the two soldiers noticed the figure of a lone scout running toward the walls. Thanks to their superhuman senses, they could clearly see his eyes. They showed clear signs of terror.

Suddenly the earth started trembling, a deep rumble echoed from the east, countless trees started falling to the ground, and a massive cloud of dust spread on the horizon.

"Uh?"

Tim was the first to notice the commotion, but all the soldiers soon saw it. Inhuman screams and shrieks filled the air, making everyone's blood cold. Some of them clutched their weapons tighter, ready for whatever was coming, while others looked around frantically, trying to locate their team members. Tim's heart pounded in his chest as he realized this would be much worse than he had anticipated.

Everyone turned to look at the forest but was horrified to see the scene developing—monsters were racing toward the city at top speed.

The creatures were in all shapes and sizes, from small and slimy to large and hairy. Some resembled mammals, others insects, and others even had tentacles.

It was a veritable menagerie of life; the soldiers who never met the horde on the battlefield were left terrified but controlled their urge to flee and not abandon their post for the sake of their families behind the barrier.

Their hissing and growling echoed through the air, sending shivers down the spines of those who heard them.

Some creatures were so massive that they could flatten a house with a single stomp of their foot.

However, they were still far from the city walls, giving the soldiers time to prepare their weapons and defenses.

"Hurry up!" a soldier shouted with urgency in his voice. "We are under attack!" he added. The alarm started ringing with a grave tone, and the soldiers rushed to their positions, ready to face the enemy.

The thaids' horde was approaching the walls in alarming numbers. The artillery started shooting at the horde.

BOOM

BOOM

BOOM

There was a look of horror on the soldiers' faces once they saw what was among the beasts. The intelligence department had already briefed them, but seeing them was completely different. The Yevyagìt were there.

The artillery kept blasting them, but most of the creatures were resistant to conventional weapons, so the result of the attack was not that good.

"Sir, the Yevyagìt are running toward the gate," a young soldier told Colonel Tiwana.

"They are twenty, sir." The soldier added.

"This..." the Colonel replied. One is already problematic to handle, but twenty was a nightmare. Tiwana knew these beasts were among the horde, and he prepared an elite group of ranged soldiers to take them down.

"Tell the 42nd corp to attack the beasts; they must stop them at all costs." This corp comprised three hundred thousand soldiers and had the sole role of killing the Yevyagìts before turning their attention to the horde.

"Isn't it our responsibility to kill them if they want to die so badly?" he asked the soldier.

After a few seconds, the Colonel asked, "Is the 42nd corp ready?"

"They are, sir," he replied.

The Colonel nodded and gave the order to proceed with the mission. "Good; tell them to focus all their fire on killing the Yegyavìts." Solemnity was plastered on Colonel Tiwana's face; he knew that the upcoming battle and the task he gave to the 42nd Corp were hard, but if someone could pull this feat off, this would have been them.

The soldier knew what was happening and went quickly to tell all the troops what to do. Anyone was called to defend the walls; there was not a single soldier or able-bodied civilian inside the city aside from those placed there for safety reasons or those protecting particular places.

A minimal number of police officers were also present, but it was clear they were enough only to stop minor skirmishes and the occasional thief.

Guns and bombs were enough to deal with weak creatures, but during an invasion of such caliber, it was impossible to say what would happen or if the soldiers would have been able to stop the horde.

"Did they ask for our help yet?" said a big and burly woman. She was exuding a threatening aura by simply being. She was the Fierce Lioness, whose real name was Amanda Ravithier.

The woman was a seasoned mercenary. She was the leader of Etrium's strongest mercenary guild, the Band of Giants, and she had so much power that she was essentially deemed a one-woman army.

"No, ma'am, they did not ask for our services; they probably think they can face the horde alone," replied Adina, her chief relationship officer, and the right-hand woman. Despite being much shorter than her boss, she was not less threatening.

However, we can still contact them and offer assistance if they change their minds. Adina is always ready to go the extra mile with her excellent relationship management skills and determination to provide the best service possible to their clients.

"This will end up in a huge mess. Have you contacted my daughter yet?" Amanda asked Adina.

The woman replied confidently, "Yes, ma'am, she is currently inside one of the city's fortified shelters alongside a couple of our most skilled men."

Amanda asked her daughter, whom she was training to be a mercenary. To come with her to Frant and learn how to manage such situations. The fierce Lioness was very strict with her daughter, wanting her to take the Band of Giants reins once she retired.

"Good; tell her that she must open the monitor in the room and observe what is going on inside the city; this is her only opportunity to see what a real battle is and get accustomed to gore..." Amanda said.

Martha's mother was not a pleasant person; she was ruthless, and most of the time, she showed a black heart. She was uncaring about other people's thoughts; she didn't care if others died. What she only cared about were two things: power and money.

This side of her made the relationship with her daughter, Rebecca, difficult. The young woman wanted her mother's love, so she trained like crazy to please her. However, Amanda never acted like a mother to her, more like an instructor.

"Yes, ma'am," Adina said to her boss.

She then dialed a number on the phone and gave a couple of orders to whoever was listening on the other side.

"Everything is done, ma'am," she said once the conversation ended.

"Good." Amanda replied, "Adina, I want you to keep the whole squad ready for action; be quick about that."

"Yes, ma'am," she replied.

Chapter 210: Skirmish (1)

"Everyone, please go toward the bunkers in an orderly manner. I repeat, go toward the bunkers in an orderly manner." Allan's father, Luca Grimes, was helping the people inside the city to safely reach the shelters, as he was the chief of New Alexandria's police department.

He was armed with a handgun, handcuffs, and a sword, all of which were in his belt. The last one was his personal weapon, the one he got in military school, who accompanied him throughout his

military service. With him, multiple agents dressed in uniform were controlling the crowd of people and redirecting them toward the shelters.

Several police cars roamed the streets, giving orders to the citizens and controlling the situation.

Not even five minutes had passed since the siren rang, and Allan's father was already tired. Managing people was a hellish task since they usually didn't listen or started fights that the police had to sedate.

This wasn't common among the older people, as they had been trained by the military and knew what discipline was, but it was different for the many fifteen-year-olds heading to safety. From a distance, a car could be seen approaching Luca's position. "Unit 254; reporting for duty, sir," a police officer resolutely said to Luca.

"Welcome, we need help controlling the crowd here; multiple fights broke out, and we had problems controlling the situation," Mr. Grimes said. After explaining what to do, Allan's father dismissed the agents surrounding him.

"Get in position, now."

"Yes, sir," the man replied.

"Sir, the 42nd corp is ready."

"Good," Colonel Tiwana replied.

"Let's give the thaids a taste of their own blood." Countless people used their powers to shoot down the thaids, especially the 42nd Corp, who aimed at the Yevyagits.

It looked like the colossal creatures aimed to destroy the city's eastern gate as they were heading there. They clearly had to pass the wall and the artillery, but it wasn't that hard since they were ten meters tall and could simply walk past the three-meter-tall wall easily. Explosions echoed in the distance.

Heatwaves hit back the soldiers; gunshots reverberated through the battlefield, and the sound of the laser rifles echoed through the field. The sound of various brain crystal power attacks splitting the air, generating explosions, or killing thaids, rang continuously.

The artillery shot, creating a sort of strange cacophonous melody not too pleasant to hear, which, though, gave the people on the wall a weird sense of safety.

BOOM

BOOM

BOOM

The soldiers channeled mana through their neural links. They were ready to shoot down any thaid that approached the wall. The thaids were infamous for their brutal attacks, and the soldiers knew they needed to stay alert. With mana coursing through their veins, they felt invincible and prepared to defend their city at all costs.

As the thaid got closer, the soldiers gripped their weapons tighter and got ready to use their power. The air crackled with energy for a moment as the two sides faced off, each determined to emerge victorious.

Bolts of fire, earth projectiles, and strange mists moved toward the charging beasts, setting an uncountable number of them on fire, corroding others, and killing the rest in strange ways. The soldiers were amazed at the destruction they were causing but they knew they couldn't let their guard down until the thaids were completely defeated. However, with each enemy they killed, their morale grew.

Looking at their blazing fur was a pleasure to the soldiers' eyes, and their pained shrieks and shrills were music to their ears. The soldiers fought with all their might, determined to eradicate the thaids and protect their land. They knew that this battle was crucial for the survival of their people, and they were willing to do whatever it took to emerge victorious.

As the soldiers watched the enemy beasts in agony, they felt a rush of power and dominance over the creatures. Hearing their cries of pain only reinforced their perception of victory and superiority.

Although the sight of the scorching fur gave the soldiers a thrill, the haunting wails of the animals stirred a sense of uneasiness within them.

Witnessing the pain of their adversaries reminded them that the ones who were likely going to suffer were going to be them. The creatures kept advancing, and a sense of urgency arose inside the Colonel Tiwana, but he could do nothing to stop the other monsters as he chose to concentrate the 42nd Corps' firepower on the twenty giant Yevyagìt charging the wall.

If they did not stop them first, the city would fall with certainty.

"Keep concentrating your firepower on the huge beasts," said the Colonel Tiwana. He felt dread in his stomach as he watched the smaller creatures swarm towards the wall.

He wasn't the only officer on the wall, but he was the one coordinating the corps' efforts. Clearly, their success in repelling the beasts would depend on their ability to remain focused and coordinated.

They couldn't afford to let anything distract them from the task at hand. "Yes, sir." The soldiers fired continuously at the thaids, while the artillery killed the weaker ones. The brain crystal powers falling in the elementalism category were among the least common, but the range advantage allowed them to be lethal.

Using fire, wind, earth, or water attacks to create different and powerful effects. Though they were not the only ones on the walls, conjurers were amidst the soldiers. These were able to summon creatures to halt the thaids' advance and proved to be a valuable asset in the battle, as their summoned creatures could make a temporary defense against the thaids.

Who significantly slowed down their otherwise rapid advancement, giving the soldiers more time to strategize, attack, and regroup. The conjurers' ability to use elemental attacks also added to the soldiers' arsenal, creating a diverse range of tactics to combat the thaids. Their presence on the battlefield proved to be crucial in defending the city.

Without the presence of the conjurers, the thaids would have easily overwhelmed the soldiers on the walls. The creatures they summoned came in different shapes and forms, but there was something they had in common: they were deadly.

Some had razor-sharp fangs, others had venomous spines, and a few could even wreak havoc with powerful ranged attacks.

No matter their appearance, these creatures were all bound to their creators' will. Most of the people had weapon conjuring brain crystal powers, which made them particularly suited to fight in melee. But these weren't sitting ducks, and while the monsters were far away, most soldiers attacked them with guns, laser rifles, and bombs.

They had been trained to be snipers, gunners, and archers. The ranged soldiers were making bullets, laser rays, and arrows rain down on the mutants like a downpour; the rain was of death, and the creatures were completely soaked by it.

It wasn't enough since the number of thaids made it impossible for New Alexandria's defense force to halt their advance or kill them all.

Slowly but surely, the beasts were getting closer. It was not only the human side that was attacking, though, as many monsters started throwing objects on top of the walls, destroying cannon after cannon, and killing soldiers and citizens alike.

There were even thaids spitting acidic juices that liquefied people on the spot and damaged the wall, compromising their integrity. However, luckily, the barrier was behind the wall. Among the creatures, one surveyed the situation with the thaid's equivalent of a grotesque grin.

The beast emanated a putrid scent and released a toxic gas, which made it impossible for other creatures to approach it since it liquefied them on the spot. It looked like the beast was giving orders to the other creatures, which did not go unnoticed by the human side.

"Sir, urgent report, the Blirdoth has been spotted," a soldier urgently said after seeing the horrifying creature.

"Give me its position," Colonel Tiwana said. The Blirdoth's presence could mean trouble for their mission, and Colonel Tiwana knew they had to act fast before it could cause any harm.

He took a pair of binoculars, and by following the soldier's directions, he spotted the creature. What he saw left him disgusted; the creature had a huge bear-like body and the face of a rotting dog.

It was emitting a putrid fog, which withered everything away. He knew he had to act fast before the creature caused any harm to anyone else.