

BIOLOGICAL 281

Chapter 281: A friendly match (3)

Anderson launched a flurry of kicks, aiming for Erik's midsection with precision. Erik defended with all his might, blocking and evading as best as possible. He countered with powerful punches, aiming for Anderson's head and torso. But his opponent's evasiveness was unmatched, and he slipped through Erik's defenses, landing a swift strike to Erik's ribs.

The awakener winced, feeling the sting of the blow, but he refused to back down. He retaliated with a fierce kick of his own, aiming for Anderson's legs. His opponent responded with a swift dodge without wasting a second, but Erik followed up with a spinning back fist that grazed Anderson's cheek.

"Whoa, that was dangerous," Anderson said as he had just evaded the move.

"More are coming!" Erik said with a smirk on his face. However, he started to get a little bit frustrated. He knew that his friend was not an easy opponent, but the problems he was having while fighting him despite his physical superiority were too great.

<Damn, I now understand how he was able to keep up with Nathaniel despite never using his brain's crystal power...> The awakener thought. Then he realized he would be dead by now if Nathaniel had been as good as him in martial arts. Not even his multiple powers could have saved him in that case.

The fight continued at a breakneck speed, with neither Erik nor Anderson surrendering. They were both battered and bruised, with Anderson having fewer wounds on his body than Erik, but their determination was high, and the fact they were having a ton of fun prevented them from doing so.

That was very surprising, as Erik thought that his friend would be the one on the receiving end despite everything. At that moment, he truly realized how essential the basics were and how martial arts skills mattered. Yeah, that was a confrontation purely based on physical prowess and skills, but that didn't mean Anderson was less strong just because he couldn't use his power.

Erik was amazed by his opponent and friend's ability to fight.

With these thoughts in mind, Erik pressed forward, determined to prove himself. He lunged at Anderson with a series of rapid punches, but Anderson skillfully dodged and weaved, avoiding most of the strikes.

<Damn, he is a damn eel!>

Erik's friend retaliated with a spinning kick, catching Erik off-guard and sending him sprawling to the ground again.

"You are starting to piss me off now," Erik said.

"You are pissed off? What about me, then? I am the one who must deal with your ridiculous speed!" Anderson replied.

"Well, you did it well until now! It's already the third time my face has met the ground."

Anderson sighed. A slight pause ensued as both fighters breathed heavily, their bodies covered in sweat and the bruises multiplying. They locked eyes again, acknowledging their respect for each other's skills. However, Anderson was aware he was starting to reach his limits. Erik's physical conditions were simply too much for him to cope with.

This slowly became a battle of attrition that he was losing, but that was expected, knowing Erik.

They circled each other cautiously, assessing their next moves. Erik's mind raced as he searched for an opening in Anderson's defense, but there were none. He feinted left and then quickly changed direction, relaunching a powerful kick. Anderson blocked it, but Erik followed up with a lightning-fast punch to Anderson's gut.

Anderson grunted but retaliated with a quick knee strike to Erik's chest, sending him staggering.

Erik gained some distance and started observing Anderson once again, something his opponent reciprocated. Then both dashed toward each other, and the fight continued, each fighter giving their all. They traded punches, kicks, and grapples, showcasing their entire arsenal of techniques.

The training room was filled with the sounds of their exertion, the impact of their blows, and their heavy breathing.

The healer kept watching the fight go on; it was now reaching a climax, and he could see it from the fighters' moves. He knew that one wrong move could mean the end for either of them. Martin couldn't help but feel a sense of admiration for both fighters, who had trained tirelessly for this moment. As he watched, he couldn't help but wonder who would emerge victorious in this intense battle.

Erik and Anderson were locked in a grueling clinch, each trying to gain the upper hand. They pushed and strained against each other, their muscles bulging with effort. Sweat dripped from their foreheads as they fought for supremacy.

"It's been a hell of a fight," Anderson said, his voice hoarse.

Erik nodded, a smirk forming on his face. "Indeed. But I'm not done yet."

The two continued their intense battle, but Anderson's experience and fighting genius made it so that the slight advantage he earned until now gave Erik a lot of ache and pain that was preventing him from winning once and for all.

Years of training in martial arts gave Anderson a keen sense of anticipation, allowing him to read Erik's intentions and respond with lightning-fast reflexes. He seemed to predict all of Erik's moves before they even happened, leaving Erik frustrated.

He wasn't always successful; he was not a god, but the bruises on Erik's body were a testament to that skill's superiority, and besides, they were much more than his own.

Every time Erik attempted a punch or kick, Anderson would swiftly counter with a precise strike, exploiting the awakener's patterns and weaknesses. This was the only way he could fight head-on against his friend, and he was aware of that.

In his mind, he already recognized Erik's strength. The awakener's frustration grew, and he realized he had to step up the game to defeat Anderson. He needed to adapt and find a way to outsmart his opponent.

<Let me try this,> the young man said to himself.

From that moment on, the young man changed his approach, feinting and using deceptive footwork to throw off Anderson's predictions. He aimed for Anderson's legs, hoping to impair his mobility

and throw him off balance. His opponent's movements became more defensive, and his focus shifted to protecting his lower body.

"C'mon..."

Erik's frustration turned into determination. He focused his mind and tapped into his reserves of speed and agility, unleashing a flurry of lightning-fast strikes. Anderson was caught off guard by Erik's sudden burst of speed.

"Were you holding back?" Anderson asked.

"A bit; I hope you won't get offended," Erik said while circling around him. The fighting genius sighed but didn't let this get the best of him.

However, he struggled to keep up with Erik's rapid movements, barely blocking or evading Erik's attacks. The awakener's punches and kicks came from all angles, testing Anderson's defense to its limits.

Erik's relentless assault forced Anderson to back down, trying to create distance to regain his composure. But Erik was relentless, closing the gap with astonishing speed. He dodged Anderson's attempted counter and delivered a strong uppercut before spinning a kick that knocked Anderson off balance.

Thornton's top student's experience and fighting genius were being challenged like never before. He realized that he couldn't solely rely on his tactical approach anymore. What he didn't know was that Erik was pushing himself to the limit this time.

Anderson shifted his strategy, relying on his instincts and reflexes honed through years of martial arts training, as he started having problems keeping up with his opponent. He was able to evade Erik's attacks and hit him with a sharp jab and a quick, low kick that threw Erik off balance.

"Shit... That was heavy..." Erik said.

"You are not the only one with surprises," Anderson replied with a smile on his face; he was genuinely enjoying the fight despite everything.

Erik didn't let up. He recovered quickly and pressed on, his determination driving him forward. He weaved through Anderson's defenses, landing strikes that kept him on his toes.

The fight became a blur of movement again, but things were much faster than before. The two exchanged blows, both fighters showcasing their skills and pushing each other to their limits, and that was especially true for Anderson.

As the fight continued, his fatigue started reaching very high levels. Sweat soaked his clothes, much more than in Erik's case, and his breathing grew heavier.

"Are you tired?" Erik asked with a smirk.

Anderson ignored his taunt and kept trading blows with his friend, each refusing to yield.

Erik's increased speed and determination had put Anderson in serious difficulty. He struggled to predict Erik's moves now as Erik varied his attacks, mixing up his punches and kicks with feints and combos. Anderson's movements became more reactive, but his defense became less impenetrable.

"Shit!" Anderson swore for the first time during the fight.

Sensing an opportunity, Erik seized the moment. He unleashed a powerful punch, aiming for Anderson's head. But Anderson's fighting genius kicked in, and he managed to evade the full force of the blow, only taking a glancing hit.

Anderson retaliated with a quick jab to Erik's ribs, causing Erik to wince in pain.

"You are a monster!" Erik said with an astonished look.

"So you are!"

Erik pushed forward once again, utilizing his speed and strength to their maximum potential. He launched a barrage of attacks, each strike coming faster and harder than before.

Anderson struggled to keep up with Erik's relentless assault. He tried to counter, but Erik's speed and strength were too much. His strikes were getting through now, landing with precision and impact.

Then both punched, and their fists met, making a loud impact noise. The two fighters stood facing each other; they were both exhausted.

"You are good..." Erik spoke between breaths, his admiration for Anderson evident in his tone.

Anderson nodded with a slight smile on his face. "So are you," he replied, acknowledging Erik's skills once again.

Chapter 282: A friendly match (4)

The two then dashed again, but the fight was going to end soon, given how it was progressing. Anderson was now having too many problems keeping up with Erik, not only because the awakener had stepped up his game but also because he was tired.

The fight went differently from how he imagined: despite knowing that Erik had won against Nathaniel, he still thought himself to be able to win.

After all, when they were still at school, he and Nathaniel were on the same level, and he didn't even need to use his brain's crystal power to achieve that same level of power.

It was true he lost against him during the tournament, but that was only a single defeat. He had won against him other times, and that loss didn't mean much.

Now, however, after so much time passed, he even surpassed Nathaniel regarding neural link numbers, and his physical prowess was greater than his. Of course, Matthew's son clearly had an advantage since he could use his power without blowing up buildings, and that gave him an advantage.

But if all of that was true, how was it possible that Erik was still winning? He suddenly remembered one time when he saw Logan, Conal, and Orson beating him senseless, with him literally begging for mercy as the trio gave him pain.

Now, he was facing the same kid, but he was too different. It was like he wasn't the same person at all; how was it possible that he had grown so much in such a short amount of time? How could he

have surpassed him after all the effort and time he poured into his training? He cursed his own brain crystal power in his mind because if he had another one, he would be much more powerful.

With these thoughts in mind, Anderson started going on the offensive. He threw a fast punch at Erik, who tilted his head and counterattacked with one of his own.

However, Anderson knew what he was going to do, and for this reason, he raised his leg and parried the attack. It was painful, but not as painful as taking a hit on his face or abdomen.

Knowing what Erik was going to do meant that Anderson was aware of what he had to do to take advantage of the situation; for this reason, he jumped, poured all his strength onto his leg, and threw a kick at Erik. However, the awakener performed another inhuman feat and jumped backward in a fraction of a second.

It was like Erik could see what he was going to do in slow motion and was able to react accordingly. He wasn't far from the truth, to be honest. No, he was spot on. That was due to his high dexterity; he was basically a cheat in such kinds of confrontations.

In the meantime, Erik analyzed Anderson's movements, looking for patterns and weaknesses. He learned to do this thanks to master Nieminen but was still far from using this technique perfectly as Anderson did.

Despite the intensity of the fight, Erik remained calm and focused, keeping his composure as he observed Anderson's defenses. He noticed a slight hesitation in Anderson's left side after a feint—a small opening that could potentially be exploited.

The awakener reflected on whether Anderson had intentionally left that opening as bait to lure him into a trap. But Erik knew he had to take the risk. This was his chance to turn the tide of the fight. With lightning speed, Erik feinted a high kick toward Anderson's right side, drawing his attention away from his left side.

Anderson was having trouble keeping up with Erik again but noticed the move; he didn't know it was a feint. Erik never made such moves; it wasn't in his style, at least from what he saw up to that point. So this time, he genuinely thought he was going to attack, and he went into stance to block the move.

In that split second, Erik seized the opportunity and launched a powerful right hook, aiming for Anderson's exposed ribs.

The punch connected with devastating impact, sending Anderson staggering back, gasping for breath. Erik's calculated strike had found its mark, and Anderson's defenses had been breached. The awakener didn't hesitate, not even in front of a friend.

He followed up with a rapid combination of strikes, targeting Anderson's vulnerable spots with precision. Anderson could do nothing to defend himself, as he was out of stance, and Erik was too fast. As Erik unleashed a barrage of punches and kicks, he overwhelmed his friend's weakened defenses.

The young man, caught off guard by Erik's sudden burst of offense, tried to counter at a certain point, but his movements were slower and less coordinated after those heavy punches and kicks. He struggled to regain his footing and defend himself against Erik's assault. The awakener's determination and strategic thinking had paid off.

He continued to capitalize on the openings he had observed in Anderson's defenses, landing powerful blows with each strike. He moved with fluidity and precision, exploiting Anderson's too many induced weaknesses and keeping him on the defensive.

Despite Anderson's resilience, he could not fully recover from Erik's previous devastating blows, and his defenses faltered. Erik's attacks continued to land, and wounds and bruises gradually accumulated on his body. If they were less than Erik's, now they were more than his.

There was basically nothing he could do anymore but wait for the inevitable. With one final, powerful strike, Erik delivered a decisive blow to Anderson's midsection, sending him crashing to the ground. "I surrender," Anderson said as he realized he could do nothing more. He had lost.

The awakener stood victorious; once again, it was thanks to the system, as he was much weaker than Anderson if it weren't for his pumped stats. He had been able to turn the tide of the battle in his favor. He extended a hand to help Anderson to his feet, showing respect for his friend and opponent's skills and resilience.

Anderson grabbed Erik's hand and stood back on his feet. "You made it," Anderson said. "Yeah. Thank you for having given me this opportunity," Erik said. As the two fighters stood in the center of the room, Erik's mind was filled with a mix of triumph and admiration for Anderson's formidable skills.

He wondered how strong he would become if he managed to reach Anderson's skill level just a bit. With a nod of mutual respect, Erik and Anderson exchanged a firm handshake, acknowledging each other's abilities. At that moment, both fighters knew that they had given their all and that they were splendid fighters regardless of the outcome.

Anderson's chest heaved as he caught his breath, his eyes fixed on Erik with a mix of admiration and respect but also showing a tint of sadness for having lost. He couldn't see the kid who feared everyone anymore.

"You've come a long way, Erik," he said, his voice tinged with genuine appreciation.

"You're not the same weak kid I used to see daily at school." Erik nodded, a faint smile playing on his lips.

"Thanks, Anderson, it means a lot," he replied, his breathing still heavy from the intense fight.

"You didn't give me an easy time, uh?" Erik said, laughing.

"Hahahaha, well, I tried." Just as they were catching their breath and sharing a laugh, Martin Middleton, the healer, emerged from the control room.

"Congratulations, Erik," Martin said with a smile as he approached the two fighters. "That was an incredible display of skill, I must say."

Martin then turned to look at Anderson and said, "As for you, Mister Worthington, I bet that... No, I'm sure you will grow to be a splendid fighter. Your future will be boundless.

I've seen many fighters in my years at the Red Palace, and I've never seen someone with a technique so perfect." Erik and Anderson both nodded, acknowledging Martin's kind words, but wondered when he would start healing them as he kept talking.

The wounds they accumulated were not one or two. "But enough wasting time; let me heal you quickly," the healer said.

Martin's skilled hands glowed with warm healing mana as he examined Erik and Anderson. He mended their bruises and strained muscles, relieving the soreness from their bodies. Erik and Anderson exchanged grateful glances, appreciating Martin's power.

After a few moments of silence, Martin straightened up and declared, "You're both in good shape now. Now, since this was an official fight, it is now time to declare the winner. Congratulations, Erik, you advanced to rank 190."

Erik's heart swelled with pride, and he extended his hand to Anderson once again. "Thank you, Anderson," he said sincerely. Anderson clasped Erik's hand firmly, a genuine smile on his face.

"You've earned it, Erik," he said. With the fight behind them and their injuries healed, Erik and Anderson exchanged a few more words and decided to go have a shower and then head to the cafeteria to put something in their stomach.

They knew that their bond as friends had only grown stronger through the intense competition. As both the contestants left the room, Erik got another notification on his smartphone.

The Red Palace was asking again if he was willing to meet Hais again. Apparently, the man was here and asked for him once again.

At this point, it was clear that the man suspected him of the murders. However, once again, he decided to meet the man.

Chapter 283: Demise

Karl raced through the narrow alleys of New Alexandria's eastern district. This was a once-thriving part of the city that had fallen on hard times now, as this was the poorest block of the whole eastern part.

The dilapidated buildings loomed overhead, with broken windows and walls covered in graffiti. Trash littered the streets, and the flickering streetlights cast eerie shadows as Karl weaved through the labyrinthine paths.

"Fuck!" The young man was scared. He had been followed by someone he didn't know for several blocks now, and his heart pounded in his chest.

"Ah, ah, ah..." He was having difficulty breathing.

As he tried to shake off his pursuer, his footsteps echoed through the deserted alleys. He glanced back and caught a glimpse of some figures, their shadowy forms drawing closer as time went on. His fear mounted, and he pushed himself harder, desperate to find a way out.

"HELP! HELP ME!" The young man shouted, but there was no one who could lend him a helping hand. Such was the cruelty of his situation; the desolate alleys were a stark reminder of his situation.

As he turned another corner, Karl's heart sank as he realized he had reached a dead end. He looked around frantically for an escape route, but the high walls and boarded-up buildings offered no way out. He was trapped.

Karl's breathing grew heavy, and his legs felt heavy. He had no choice but to confront his pursuers. The figures emerged from the shadows, revealing menacing silhouettes. Karl couldn't distinguish their features, but their intent was clear—they were after him.

"You can't run forever, Karl." One of the figure's voice echoed through the alley, sending a chill down Karl's spine. "It's time to face the consequences of your actions."

"What the fuck are you talking about? What actions? Why are you coming after me?!" he shouted.

"Because you went against him, you went against the young master," the shadows said.

"To whom? I did nothing!" Karl shouted.

"Are you really sure? This is not what we know," one of the men said.

At that moment, Karl understood what was happening and why. "Is it because of Nathaniel? Isn't it?!"

"Hahahaha, see? It wasn't that hard..."

Karl's mind raced as he tried to understand what was happening and come up with a plan to get out. He knew he couldn't take on his pursuers in a physical confrontation. Fighting one was maybe possible, but even in that case, winning would be hard due to the difference in physical prowess.

He could have won if he had the number advantage, but instead, he was in the opposite situation; he was alone against many. He needed to think fast.

In a moment of desperation, Karl spotted a narrow gap between two buildings. It was a tight squeeze, but his only chance to escape. The young man quickly turned into smoke, squeezed through the gap, and emerged into a narrow alley on the other side of the building.

He quickly materialized and continued to sprint through the dark alleys, his heart pounding in his ears. He could hear his pursuer's footsteps growing fainter, and a glimmer of hope ignited in his chest. Maybe he could still escape.

"Ah, ah, ah..."

Karl's lungs burned, and his legs ached, but he pushed himself to his limits. He knew he had to make it out of this part of the city, where the streets were deserted, and he had to ask for someone's help. Finally, the young man emerged into a slightly more well-maintained part of the city.

The streets were wider, and the buildings were in better condition. He could see a few people on the streets and the distant lights of bustling shops and cafes.

As he sprinted through the relatively intact streets, Karl's fear began to subside, replaced by a glimmer of hope. He could feel a surge of adrenaline as he realized he might actually make it out of this predicament.

Just as Karl thought he had lost his pursuer, he heard a voice behind him. It was one of the figures, his assailants' footsteps closing in once again and clearly audible from a distance. Karl's heart sank, but he refused to give up. He pushed himself even harder, his legs burning with fatigue.

Some more men quickly obstructed his path, forcing the young man to dive into an alleyway again. However, aside from some staircases, there was nowhere he could escape anymore, not even with his power.

Without hesitation, he raced up the narrow staircase, his pursuer hot on his heels. He could hear their footsteps growing closer and their breathing heavy with determination.

Reaching the top of the stairs, Karl found himself on a rooftop with nowhere left to run. He turned to confront his assailant, ready to defend himself. He was a Red Palace student and had some pride to defend.

The figures emerged from the darkness, revealing a group of armed individuals with malicious intent in their eyes. Karl's pulse quickened as he realized he was outnumbered.

The assailants lunged at the Red Palace student, wielding knives and swords. Karl fought back with all his strength, using his agility and speed to dodge their attacks.

He managed to knock down a couple of the weaker attackers thanks to his brain crystal power, but the others closed in, overpowering him. In a desperate attempt to escape, Karl tapped into his ability. He transformed into a wispy cloud of smoke once again, slipping through the grasp of his assailants and dissipating into the night sky.

The assassins were momentarily taken aback but quickly regrouped, determined to kill Karl at any cost. They scanned the rooftop, searching for any trace of him. Karl knew he couldn't maintain his smoke form for long and needed to find a way to escape.

He spotted a nearby ledge and transformed back into his human form, intending to make a daring leap to the next building. But just as he was about to jump, a sharp pain pierced his side. One of the assailants had managed to land a lucky strike, slicing through his flesh with a flying knife.

Karl gasped, clutching his wounded side as blood oozed from the gash. He stumbled, his vision blurring, but he forced himself to keep moving. He leaped across the gap between the two buildings, barely reaching the other side.

He continued to run, his movements growing sluggish as blood seeped from his wound. His pursuers were relentless, closing in on him with renewed vigor.

Karl's strength was fading fast, and he knew he couldn't keep this up much longer. He noticed that the blade, still etched into his shoulder, was covered in some green substance, probably poison. Karl's surroundings blurred with every step, and his head grew heavy.

He stumbled some minutes later into a dark alleyway, collapsing against the wall, his breaths coming in ragged gasps. He knew he was done for. The assailants caught up to him, surrounding him with menacing grins. The young man looked up at them, his vision fading, and realized he had no way out. His heart sank as he faced the inevitable.

One of the assailants delivered the final blow, and Karl slumped to the ground, his life slipping away. He looked up at the dark, deteriorated skyline of New Alexandria, realizing he would never see the city again.

As his vision faded to black, Karl's last thought was of his mother, whom he couldn't see anymore now.

"Professor Derr, I hope you have good news for me," Major Fischer said, his voice tinged with urgency.

Professor Derr looked up from his notes; his eyes were bright with a mixture of relief and excitement. "Major Fischer, I'm pleased to report that our vaccine trials have been successful. The first batch of vaccines will be ready in two days."

Major Fischer's shoulders visibly relaxed, and a sense of relief washed over him. "That's wonderful news, Professor. How effective is the vaccine?"

Professor Xilion smiled, a rare expression on his usually serious face. "From the initial samples we've tested, the results have been promising. The vaccine has shown a high efficacy rate in preventing the parasite from spreading and erasing the symptoms in those already infected."

Major Fischer nodded, his confidence in Professor Xilion's expertise reaffirmed. "That's excellent. We can finally start treating the infected people and prevent an outbreak."

Professor Xilion nodded in agreement. "Yes, Major. We will continue to monitor its effectiveness as we produce more batches and work on a stronger variant."

Major Fischer expressed his gratitude to Professor Xilion for his tireless efforts and the progress he had made. But he was more grateful for the fact that they didn't have to execute more people to keep the mutations at bay.

With renewed hope, Major Fischer and Professor Xilion discussed the logistics of distributing the vaccine to those in need once the first batch was ready. They strategized on prioritizing the highest-ranked populations and areas with high numbers of infected people. After all, everyone joined the war effort, so treating the soldiers or the citizens didn't make that difference.

"Major, how about the teams? How is their establishment going?" Xilion asked.

"They will depart in two days too. They received some special training to handle the situation better and received extensive information regarding the monsters in the east. Preparing them wasn't easy."

"Good. I expect you to send me some data, maybe some tissue samples if you can," Xilion said.

"I will see what I can do. For now, keep working on the vaccine," Fischer replied.

After a thorough discussion, Major Fischer left the laboratory. He felt a glimmer of hope for the first time in a long while, knowing that the vaccine was a significant step towards eradicating the Heniate's influence from the city once and for all.

Chapter 284: The Stranger

The moonless night hung heavily over the mountains that guarded the capital city of Etrium. The air was thick with an eerie silence, broken only by the distant shouts of drunken mercenaries having drinks at the city's many bars.

In the heart of the city, a man cloaked in shadows moved with purpose. As he reached the city's outskirts, he approached a hidden garage where a mercenary flying car awaited him.

The vehicle gleamed in the dim light, its blackened metal body reflecting the starless sky. The man approached the car with a sense of familiarity, as though he had done this many times before.

With a flick of the mercenary's wrist, the car's hatch opened, revealing the luxurious interiors bathed in soft blue and white lights. The man climbed in, and the mercenary did the same; the car lifted off the ground and steered towards the mountain that would lead him out of the city.

As he ascended into the night sky, the man felt a sense of foreboding. The mountains loomed ahead, their jagged peaks reaching up like the teeth of a hungry beast. The wind whistled through the narrow pass, the man's eyes scanning the shadows for any sign of danger.

He wasn't a warrior, just an artisan. This kind of departure wasn't safe, but he had no choice but to leave hidden by the night, as he couldn't afford to be found out. As he flew higher, the air grew colder, and the mist swirled around the car like ghostly apparitions.

After hours of nerve-wracking flight, the man finally cleared the mountain range and descended toward the city of Fasard. The place sprawled below him, its brightness contrasting the night sky above. The streets of Fasard were bustling with activity, but a thick fog hung over the city, obscuring the buildings and casting an eerie glow.

He was now almost in the city, but there was much he had to do. The man arrived at the gates, but there he was quickly let go undisturbed, and like that, he entered without problems. Soon after, another flying car came to pick him up, and he went in.

The man was quickly brought to Fasard's cathedral in the city's heart. Its imposing structure loomed before him, its stained glass windows reflecting the moonlight and its grand facade transmitting a sense of peace and grandeur.

As the heavy wooden doors creaked open, revealing the grand cathedral's interior, the man was immediately struck by the opulence that awaited within. The vast space seemed to glow with warm, golden light, casting a radiant aura over the ornate details that adorned every surface.

The grand arches soared to dizzying heights, supported by marble columns intricately carved with elaborate designs. The ceilings were a masterpiece of frescoes, depicting scenes from the stories in rich blue, red, and gold hues.

The moonlight filtered through the stained glass windows, casting a kaleidoscope of colors across the polished marble floors. The walls were adorned with gilded frames, showcasing exquisite oil paintings depicting religious history scenes.

Saints and angels seemed to come alive on the canvas, their ethereal beauty rendered with meticulous detail. The flickering candles added a soft, warm glow to the already awe-inspiring ambiance, creating a sense of reverence and holiness.

The altar stood at the far end of the cathedral, a masterpiece of craftsmanship. It was adorned with intricately carved gold leaf designs, reflecting the light in a dazzling display. Precious gemstones, set into the ornate sculptures, sparkled with a brilliance that captivated the eye.

On it, a hooded man was waiting. "You finally arrived, sir; we were waiting for you," the hooded man said.

"Yeah, it was a rough journey. It wasn't easy going past Etrium's security," the artisan said.

"I'm sorry to hear that, sir. If you want to follow me, I will bring you to my master, and then to your room to rest."

The artisan nodded, and the hooded figure led the man through a hidden passage that snaked beneath the cathedral, the walls lined with ancient runes that gave the place an eerie light. They moved swiftly and silently as though the shadows themselves were guiding their way.

After a while, they emerged in the courtyard of a grand mansion, and the artisan had a vague idea who it belonged to. The mansion loomed before them, its windows dark and its walls adorned with intricate carvings. The figure led the man through the ornate doors, and they were immediately enveloped in an atmosphere of luxury and power. After a while, they reached a giant room.

Sinisa Volkov stood before them, a tall and imposing figure with piercing eyes that seemed to see through the man's very soul.

"Welcome to my humble abode, Julius" Volkov said.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mister Volkov. I often hear rumors about you and your prowess," Julius said.

"Likewise," Volkov said. "Can I offer you a glass of wine?" Volkov said to appease his guest's needs.

"There is no need; I'm exhausted and would like to settle our matters before going to bed."

"Good then, I wanted to talk to you in person as soon as I could..."

Fasard's lord wasted no time and delved straight into business. He spoke commandingly, outlining his proposal to the man from Etrium.

His voice echoed in the room as he explained once again that he needed someone to teach his chosen apprentice Etrium's latest technology, the one that would allow using the brain crystals powers of dead thaids, a craft that was unique to Etrium, and that was quickly making the nation earn military advantages over the other nations.

In return, the man would receive the protection and riches he sought. The man listened intently, his mind calculating the risks and benefits of such an agreement. He was wary of Volkov's intentions, but the lure of wealth and safety was tempting.

He had spent years honing his craft in Etrium, and his skills were highly evaluated, but there were many people like him, and he struggled to make a name for himself. This could be the opportunity he had been waiting for. "If it is as you say, then I have no reason to refuse," the artisan said.

"Good, then." The man and Volkov came to an agreement. Terms were discussed, promises were made, and a pact was sealed.

The man would share his knowledge and expertise in exchange for the resources and protection he needed to continue his work aside for an astronomical amount of money. Julius inquired about the apprentice he would teach as the business matters were settled.

"Who is he?" the man asked, referring to the kid he was going to teach. Volkov then explained the kid and how he found him roaming Fasard's streets.

Soon, he told him about the kid's genius. "But someone will bring you to him. I think seeing him in person will be better than learning about him through my words," Volkov said. "Indeed, then lead the way," Julius said.

After reaching an agreement, the man from Etrium left the room, escorted by a woman. The air outside was thick with tension, and the man couldn't shake off the feeling of foreboding.

He knew he had entered a dangerous alliance, and the mystery surrounding the figure who had brought him to Volkov only added to his unease. Julius was escorted into a crafting room full of tools and machinery he was well familiar with.

He stepped into the sleek, high-tech room, illuminated by holographic displays that floated in mid-air, projecting intricate blueprints and schematics. The walls were adorned with glowing panels, and the table at the center of the room emitted a soft blue glow.

The air was heavy with a sense of foreboding as Julius, a skilled artisan from Etrium, was led into the room by a cloaked woman. Her face obscured by the shadows of her hood, she moved with an air of mystery and intrigue.

In the corner of the room stood a young child, no older than 10, who seemed to shrink back as Julius approached. The child's eyes darted nervously, and their small frame trembled with fear. Julius studied the child, noting his petite figure and the way he seemed to shrink into himself as Julius approached.

He could sense the child's trepidation and hesitancy, which only fueled his curiosity. The woman who had brought him in spoke in a hushed tone, her voice barely above a whisper. "This is the one," she said cryptically, her eyes fixed on the child.

"The kid you will be teaching is a prodigy," the woman said, and Julius nodded, his keen eyes taking in the child's demeanor. He could see the glimmers of talent and potential in the way he saw him handling the custom-made hammer Volkov prepared for him, but he could also sense the overwhelming fear that seemed to hold the child back.

Approaching the child slowly, Julius knelt to his level, the man's presence looming over him.

"I am Julius," he said in a deep, calming voice. "And I am here to teach you." The child's eyes widened, and he looked up at Julius with a mix of curiosity and unease.

Julius could see the child's struggle to trust and open up to a stranger in this mysterious setting. The woman who had brought him in remained silent. Julius sensed that she held secrets, but he pushed the thought aside for now, focusing on the task at hand.

Chapter 285: Meeting again (1)

As Private Investigator Hais pulled up to the grand entrance of the Red Palace, he looked at the ornate structure that loomed before him once again. Still, the effect the place had on him wasn't so big anymore, and despite the beauty of the place, the investigator could only feel disgust and rage toward the institution.

The Red Palace was a renowned place where individuals trained to enhance their physical and mental abilities.

It was also the place where Hais was going to meet Erik Romano, a young man he had previously met during an investigation and who he strongly believed had something to do with the disappearance of three boys.

But this time, Hais wasn't here to investigate Conal, Orson, and Logan's disappearance; instead, the investigator had the inkling that Erik was also involved in Nathaniel McConnel's death, and he came here again to inquire and to see if the young man showed signs of guilt or nervousness.

The imposing sight of the palace's crimson walls, which appeared to exude an air of power, greeted Hais as he got out of his car. He quickly passed through the gate and arrived at the entrance, where two bulky security officers were now watching him warily.

"I'm Private Investigator Hais," he announced, showing them his identification. "I have an appointment."

The guards exchanged a glance before one of them nodded and led Hais inside. The interior of the Red Palace was just as awe-inspiring as its exterior, but again, the man only became angrier once he saw it. The walls were adorned with intricate murals depicting warriors in action, and the halls were lined with statues of martial artists frozen in dynamic poses.

Amanda Smith, the receptionist, sat behind the front desk. Her dark skin contrasted beautifully with her bright smile, making her a striking figure.

As the receptionist, she was used to dealing with all sorts of people, but when the tall, lanky private investigator in a worn-out trench coat he wore despite being summer entered the building, she greeted him with a cold and assessing stare.

"Welcome again, Mr. Hais," the woman said.

"There is no need for you to force yourself to be polite to me. I don't like you as much as you don't like me," the man said.

"Oh, but I do like you, sir," Amanda replied.

"Yeah, yeah, just bring me to the room," Hais replied.

"All right. Then, if you are gentle enough to follow me, we will go to the same one we used last time." She was used to keeping a professional stance in front of everyone who entered the institution, especially outsiders like Hais.

"Mr. Hais, please follow me," Amanda said, her voice relaxed and professional. She started walking toward a door leading to a corridor, her pencil skirt hugging her curves, and led the way down the hallway.

Hais followed, taking in the grandeur of the Red Palace once again with its opulent decor and solemn and luxurious atmosphere but remaining wary of everything and everyone.

Amanda led Hais to a small, windowless room. The walls were painted in a muted shade of gray, and the only furnishings in the room were a plain wooden table and two chairs. She gestured for Hais to have a seat, and he complied, settling into one of the chairs with a sense of urgency.

"I will inform Erik that you're here," Amanda said curtly before turning on her heel and leaving the room. As Hais waited, he took the opportunity to scan the room for anything suspicious.

He noticed the faint smell of cleaning chemicals, suggesting that the room had been recently sanitized, and saw multiple cameras pointing at him from every corner of the room.

Erik's heart pounded in his chest as he stepped out of his apartment and into the hallway of his high-rise building. He had just received a call from Amanda, the receptionist at the Red Palace, informing him that the private investigator, Hais, had returned to ask him more questions.

<I need to stay calm...> the young man thought.

However, Erik couldn't shake off the nagging feeling of unease that had settled in his gut ever since Hais first showed up at the Red Palace. He likely knew he had killed Conal, Logan, and Orson.

As Erik made his way to the elevator, and couldn't help but feel a sense of foreboding. He knew that Hais was determined and persistent, and the thought of facing him again filled him with anxiety.

<System, if you see I'm not calm enough, do your job.>

[UNDERSTOOD.]

As the elevator doors closed and the lift started its descent, Erik's palms grew sweaty, and he tapped his foot nervously. He couldn't shake off the feeling that things were going to take an ugly turn. He couldn't afford to slip up and reveal something he shouldn't know, and the pressure was mounting with each passing moment.

<This is not good.> The young man took some deep breaths to calm himself down, and slowly he managed to gain composure.

But the elevator ride felt like an eternity, and Erik's mind raced with thoughts and scenarios of what Hais might ask him. He tried to prepare himself by mentally rehearsing his answers, but there was much Hais could ask, and he needed to be consistent with his answers.

When the elevator doors finally opened, Erik stepped out into the lobby, his steps quick and purposeful. He tried to appear composed, but he was nervous as he approached the front desk, where Amanda was waiting.

The woman looked up from her desk as Erik approached; her expression was unreadable. She was as stunning as ever, with her flawless skin and commanding presence.

He cleared his throat nervously, his words coming out in a slightly shaky voice.

"I'm here to see Hais," Erik said, trying to sound confident despite the jittery feeling in his stomach.

Amanda nodded, her calm demeanor unchanged. She gestured to go to the usual room, which he got told about through the message she sent him, indicating that Hais was waiting there.

Erik took a deep breath, steeling himself for the upcoming encounter, and walked toward the room. After a short while, especially as the thought he didn't have to mess up sank in, Erik calmed down enough to have a decent conversation with Hais.

<System, I want you to connect to the Red Palace's system. Find out if they are recording my and Hais's meeting, and if this is true, erase all evidence without leaving a trace. Find out if someone is also listening to the conversation.>

[UNDERSTOOD. CONNECTING TO THE RED PALACE'S NETWORK. CONNECTION COMPLETE. A RECORDING IS CURRENTLY GOING ON. DO YOU WANT ME TO PROCEED WITH STOPPING THE RECORDING AND ERASING THE FOOTAGE?]

<Yes, Erik replied. But make it so that whoever is listening doesn't notice.>

[UNDERSTOOD. STARTING PROCEDURE. 3...2...1... PROCEDURE COMPLETE. RECORDING STOPPED, FOOTAGE ERASED.]

After a short while, he entered; Hais was already there, sitting at the wooden table, his keen eyes locking onto Erik's as soon as he walked in. Erik couldn't help but feel a surge of anxiety as he met Hais' gaze, but he didn't show it.

<I can do this...>

The investigator gave him the feeling of having a sharp intuition, and the relentless questions he asked the last time, gave the young man enough reason to understand what kind of character he was. Erik knew he had to be careful with his words.

"Good morning, Mister Romano. I hope you had a nice time since we last saw each other," Hais said.

"Good morning, Mr. Hais. Everything has been good; thank you for your concern," the words came out much more calmly than Erik expected.

"Good morning, investigator Hais. How can I help you?" Erik said with a huge smile.

"I came here to ask you about something different from Logan's, Conal's, and Orson's disappearance. I would like to know something more about what you did at the Red Palace during the attack. Is there a problem with it?"

"There is no problem; what exactly do you need to know?"

"I would like for you to recap exactly what happened during that day," Hais said.

As they exchanged some pleasantries, Erik visibly calmed down. "Well, I was training with Master Nieminen, and then she had to leave the Red Palace to join the city's defenses. From there, I went to the Yellow Palace's shelter, and there I waited for the attack to end," Erik said.

"Is there someone who can testify about this?" Hais asked.

"Of course, besides Master Nieminen, there were multiple people there," Erik replied.

"Ok, then? What happened?"

"Then I waited until the Blirdoth attacked the Red Palace, we were all forced to leave the shelter, and we fought against some thaids," Erik said.

Hais already knew all this; he just wanted to see what Erik said. However, there was something else that he wanted to know; Nathaniel McConnel died somewhere around the shelter, where Erik was told to have been found later. So, what Hais wanted to know was what happened to the awakener after he left the Red Palace.

"Then?"

"Then the Principal came and helped us fend off the Blirdoth, we students had to escape, and from there, I went to the shelter."

"Just this? You didn't find any thaid along the way?" Hais asked.

"I did find some thaid, but I killed them." That was what Hais wanted to know, but unfortunately, Erik didn't lie. Hais knew already that there were many dead thaid bodies in those areas, and it was likely that it had been him who killed them.

If Erik had; lied, trying to make it seem like the amount of time he had been outside and that he would have had available to kill Nathaniel was less, then Hais' suspicions would have been higher.

Chapter 286: Meeting again (2)

"What monsters did you kill?"

"Some Eganesus and a Ferele," Erik said.

"That's really impressive for someone your age," Hais replied.

Erik didn't lie once again; talking about the Ferele was a risk since it was a beast he shouldn't have been able to kill at the level he did show to the others, but if he said Eganesus, the only one that died around those parts, it would have been clear that he was also the one who killed the Ferele.

"Yeah, it wasn't an easy fight. I almost died," Erik replied.

Hais nodded, jotting down notes in his notebook. "So, did you take Parkside Street and go into Bloomfield Way?" Hais asked.

Erik's heart skipped a beat. That was the street where Nathaniel's body was found, but he knew he couldn't reveal the truth about his presence there. "No, why?" Erik replied carefully.

Hais raised an eyebrow, scrutinizing Erik's response. "Interesting..." Hais said. "There is also something weird that happened around those parts; the cameras in that area were suddenly turned off, making it impossible to find out what happened that day."

Erik wavered, knowing that he had disabled the cameras through the system to avoid being caught on tape. His mind raced, trying to come up with a good reply, and in the end, he played it dumb. "Really? It's indeed interesting. Maybe it was a malfunction or a power outage," he replied, trying to sound confident.

Hais leaned in, his eyes fixed on Erik's face. His reasoning was that Nathaniel was found dead in the same area Erik fled; the two had problems, and Nathaniel's phone got destroyed.

This linked the young man to five other people whose phones got destroyed, contrary to what happened to others who died in the same area.

Plus, the cameras around there were all deactivated, further hinting at human presence. Erik was the only living person around those parts. Besides, he was the only one who could have killed Nathaniel, so everything pointed at him.

The problem was that there was no proof. The phones could have been easily destroyed by the thaidis too, but there was no explanation about the cameras.

Hais didn't know what Nathaniel and those five people he linked to him were doing there or how they were precisely connected. Still, in his opinion, Nathaniel went there to get his revenge against Erik for being the reason why he got kicked out of the Red Palace and Erik killed him. So, he tried to push the awakener to say something wrong or betray himself.

It was at that moment that Erik understood what Hais was trying to do.

<FUCK! SYSTEM TURNS OFF THE POWER FROM THE RED PALACE! MAKE IT SO THAT WHOEVER IS LISTENING TO THIS CONVERSATION CAN'T HEAR ANYTHING!>

[UNDERSTOOD. TURNING OFF THE POWER.]

The lights went immediately off at that moment. That was Erik's best strategy for stopping whoever was listening from learning more of what Hais was going to say. The recording had already been deleted; there was basically no proof he even went inside that room.

The investigator observed as the lights went off, conveniently when he was going to say something important. He immediately looked at Erik.

Hais leaned back in his chair, his gaze still fixed on Erik. "Mr. Romano, it is clear that there are too many coincidences that heavily imply you are involved in Nathaniel McConnel's death.

Mister McConnel's body was found in close proximity to where you fled; the cameras were turned off in the same area; and the phones were destroyed in a manner that suggests human intervention." Erik was right; Hais did suspect him even in Nathaniel's death. Luckily, he managed to prevent someone from the Red Palace clearly hearing Hais stating he believed he was the culprit.

"I don't know how you did it, but I'm sure it was you who killed Nathaniel and probably Logan, Conal, and Orson. It was probably you who also turned off the cameras, exactly like you are doing now."

Erik swallowed hard, feeling the weight of the situation pressing down on him.

"Are you crazy? How could I turn off the power system in the Red Palace? Besides, I understand that the evidence regarding Nathaniel's matter may point toward me. Still, I assure you, I had nothing to do with Nathaniel's death," Erik said, trying to sound as convincing as possible.

Hais leaned forward again, his gaze unrelenting. "You are lying, Erik Romano, but I will soon discover what happened. Besides, can anyone vouch for your whereabouts at the time of Nathaniel's death? Can you provide an alibi?"

Erik hesitated, knowing that he had been alone during that time. "I... I was alone," he admitted, feeling a wave of terror wash over him.

"But how the hell could I have been with others after everything that happened at the Red Palace? It is clear I was running away from there, and due to the thaids, I had to escape from."

Hais raised an eyebrow; his skepticism was evident. "Alone? That's convenient, isn't it? Besides, you were plenty able to kill the thaids around there. If you took Vermilion Lane, you should have been able to avoid any monster you couldn't have faced with your current power. The only monsters you shouldn't have been able to kill were around the street where Nathaniel got killed.

This means that you are lying; if you genuinely tried to escape the thaids, you would have taken another road, where you should have been plenty capable of facing the monsters arriving at the shelter much earlier than when you did. You arrived very late to the place, meaning you should have had enough time to kill Nathaniel, escape the monsters, and reach the shelter."

Erik clenched his fists, feeling the frustration and rage building up inside him. "That's not what happened! What do you know about the thaids in that area?" he exclaimed, his voice rising with emotion. "They could have moved from one place to another!"

"I know plenty; the police released a report of the monsters they found and killed in the area. If you managed to slaughter the Eganesus and the Ferele, then the monsters that got killed by the police and militaries are the ones who devoured all the other victims inside the area.

Some you were able to kill, some others not; the point is that they had all been found around the park, close to your position, close to where Nathaniel died. If you really tried only to escape the monsters, you should have taken much less time than you did, meaning that you went around the part where Nathaniel died."

"This is just a conjecture," Erik said. "You don't know how many thaidi I did avoid. Besides, the creatures could have simply moved from my position to where Nathaniel died. You have no proof of what you are saying!"

"We will see," Hais replied. At this point, Erik was seething with anger. Basically, the man understood everything that happened that day. At the same time, there was no point for Hais to stay there since it was evident to him what had happened.

"You can expect me to come again," the private investigator told Erik after an hour of questioning. At that moment, the lights came on again.

<Analysis,> Erik said. The young man wanted to see who this man really was and how strong he was.

- Name: Martin Hais.

- Brain crystal power: Unknown.

-Physical characteristics: Approximately a meter and seventy centimeters tall. Very skinny. Approximately seventy-four kilograms. He has an unkempt appearance and always wears a long coat. He belongs to the human race.

-Personality and traits: He is the investigator charged with discovering what happened to Conal, Logan, and Orson. He appears to be very smart and driven by something. There are too little data to assess the man's personality correctly.

-Power Level: 205

-Approximate Strength: 45

-Approximate Intelligence: 100

-Approximate Dexterity: 44

-Approximate Energy: 320

...

...

...

As Private Investigator Hais left the room, Erik's nervousness weighed heavily on his shoulders. He had indeed killed Nathaniel, but he never expected to come under suspicion for the crime since he thought he had covered his tracks well.

He had acted in self-defense when Nathaniel attacked him, so he knew he wasn't in the wrong; however, now it seemed that some evidence was pointing towards him as the perpetrator of his murder.

Erik's mind raced as he waited inside the room. He was almost panicking, and the fear of getting caught was really high. Investigator Hais was scary; he had been able to understand precisely what happened and even gave plausible reasons why Erik should have been the perpetrator of the murder.

The awakener was aware that he had to do something to fix the situation and avoid being arrested, and as soon as he thought that, he regained his cool without the system intervention.

Erik paced back and forth, trying to come up with a plan. He couldn't believe how his life had taken such a dark turn.

The awakener acknowledged Hais' worth, as he had been able to find out what happened that day without a single proof, despite not having touched Nathaniel's body directly and having turned off the CCTV. Hais was a skilled investigator who would leave no stone unturned in his pursuit of the truth.

Erik was now in a pinch; the best thing would be to kill Hais, but it would be weird for him to die after he came here to investigate Erik.

<What to do?> Erik asked himself, but it was at that moment that he took a decision.

<Even if it is weird for him to die now, I must kill him. If he shares the story with someone else, it would be much more problematic than having him die in this weird situation. Besides, I must understand what proof he has, what he has on me, and I must prevent him from finding out more.> Murder was quickly becoming his favorite way to get rid of problems.

Erik's quick thinking basically saved him, as he cut off the Red Palace's power at the right moment so that there was no proof of what Hais was telling him. The recording had even been stopped before he came inside the room, so there was no problem. The only problem would be if someone listened to the conversation and, for some reason, understood what the private investigator was implying.

<Yes, I can't allow the guy to find proof of what happened, and he already discovered what transpired that day without anything tangible to show it. I must take action soon. He is too dangerous,> Erik said to himself.

As soon as that thought came to his mind, a notification appeared before Erik.

< Quest: Kill the investigator.>

-Rewards for completion: 2000 experience points, 400 DNA points, and 2 points in intelligence and dexterity for killing the target.

-Failure Penalty: Jail or Death.

-Description: Hais has probably found out you killed Nathaniel, Conal, Orson, and Logan. Kill him before he can gather enough evidence to cause trouble for you.

Chapter 287: What Does It Take to Kill? (1)

Erik quickly left the room where the meeting between him and Hais took place and moved swiftly through the corridors of the Red Palace, his heart pounding in his chest for what he was going to do.

<System, send a loop video to all the cameras I will walk into.>

[UNDERSTOOD. CONNECTING TO THE CAMERAS. SENDING LOOP VIDEO.
PROCEDURE COMPLETE.]

He carefully avoided the people walking through the halls, ducking into shadows and staying out of sight. He knew that being caught by someone would foil his plans, and he couldn't risk it. If The investigator was going to be left alone, he would, for sure, find evidence about him killing Nathaniel and the others.

As he reached the main entrance, he saw Hais leave the palace and exit the main door. Erik's managed to analyze him before he got out of the building and was overjoyed at the sight of the men's estimated stats. Killing him wouldn't be impossible.

The young man knew he had to follow him without being seen, and time was of the essence. The young man quickly searched for Amanda Smith, the receptionist, but apparently, she was nowhere to be seen. Probably trying to understand why there was a power outage earlier.

Erik waited for Hais to walk ahead and followed suit; however, he knew that there were two guards at the door, so he had to take action now.

<System, connect to the guards' smartphones and send a notification through the Red Palace's system. Tell them to go to the first floor. Then I want you to make the security system show Hais leaving the Red Palace and send the loop again after he leaves.>

[UNDERSTOOD. NOTIFICATION SENT. CAMERA DOOR WORKING NORMALLY FOR 30 SECONDS.]

Like that, Erik observed the guards entering the building with their smartphones in hand, and the two quickly went toward the elevator with a puzzled look. Hais noticed them walking in and was immediately startled, but he didn't give it much thought. After the loop video was sent again, he got out of the main door undetected.

Erik saw Hais ahead, walking briskly out the door and towards the city's bustling streets. Then the awakener quickly walked through the Red Palace's garden until he was out of the gates. He kept a safe distance from his target, trailing behind him and making sure to stay out of the private investigator's line of sight.

He had to be careful not to attract any attention from Hais and anyone else who might recognize him.

The older man then waited for a cab to arrive, Erik overheard him calling for one, and he did the same through one of the two guards' phones.

<System, shut down any camera from now on.> He had to do that since the cabs had cameras inside. They could expose him following the older man.

Hais jumped onto the vehicle as soon as it arrived, and Erik had to do the same once he arrived shortly after. Erik hailed a cab and quickly jumped in, his mind racing with determination.

<System, connect to Hais's cab, and find out where he is going.>

[UNDERSTOOD. TASK COMPLETE. HAI'S CAB'S DESTINATION IS MILL STREET.>

Erik then instructed the driver to go to Mill Street, and the driver sped. The car immediately started floating in the sky and began its march.

As the vehicle weaved through the bustling city streets, Erik closely watched Hais's cab ahead. He could see Hais's silhouette through the window, talking animatedly on the phone. After a short while, both the vehicles arrived at their destination, and the two men jumped off the car.

Mill Street was abuzz with activity as Erik and Hais arrived. The street was lined with various shops, cafes, and vendors, each vying for the attention of passersby. The air was filled with the tantalizing scents of freshly brewed coffee, sizzling street food, and the chatter of people going about their daily routines.

There were also pedestrians at every corner, ranging from businesspeople in sharp suits to tourists with cameras slung over their shoulders, capturing the sights and sounds of the bustling city. There were street performers, musicians, and artists, adding to the lively atmosphere with their performances and creations.

The buildings on Mill Street were a mix of old and new, with their facades displaying a blend of architectural styles. Some were adorned with colorful murals, while others boasted ornate detailing and intricate designs. The street was lined with tall trees that provided welcome shade, their leaves rustling gently in the summer breeze.

Erik observed Hais disappear into the crowd of people. Without hesitation, he sprinted after him, weaving through the throngs of people on the bustling city streets, determination in his eyes.

Hais was a seasoned investigator who moved with purpose, expertly maneuvering through the crowd. Erik struggled to keep up, dodging past pedestrians and avoiding collisions as he pursued the man.

<I just hope the Crystal Cross Gang doesn't find out I'm not at the Red Palace anymore...>

Erik's mind raced as he tried to anticipate Hais's next move and pay attention to gang members. He knew he couldn't afford to lose him; his life and his freedom depended on it. Erik squeezed through narrow gaps in the crowd, observing the investigator from a distance.

Hais glanced over his shoulder, and Erik caught a glimpse of his expression. The awakener's adrenaline surged as the man almost caught him, but he luckily dove in time to not be seen. For now, it seemed like he didn't find out he was being followed. Then, the young man saw some Crystal Cross gang members ahead, so he quickly lowered his gaze and hid from them. At the same time, Hais hastened his pace.

At a certain point, the crowd seemed to thicken, and Erik took his chance to go undetected by the gang members; he pushed through, his eyes locked on Hais's back. But as Erik went ahead, he was met with an unexpected obstacle. A group of street performers had set up their act, blocking the way.

Erik's heart sank as he saw Hais disappear into the distance, taking advantage of the distraction. Without hesitation, the young man went past the performers, lowering his gaze and blending with the crowd.

Then, he saw the investigator going inside an alley and Crystal Cross gang members looking at the crowd, probably looking for people to rob or watching the street performers act.

Erik's mind raced, calculating Hais's and the gang member's movements, until finally, he got the opportunity to follow Hais into the alley. Erik was trying to anticipate where he might be headed, but no place aside from Hais's home came to his mind.

The chase continued through the alley, with Erik closely following the man, who apparently noticed nothing; his eyes were fixed on Hais's figure in the distance until the man went back into the busy streets.

Erik quickly arrived at the end of the alley, but he could hear the sounds of the city, the shouts of merchants, the laughter of children, and the clatter of hooves on cobblestones from a distance. The awakener immediately spotted the man from a distance as soon as he got out of there and saw him walking toward a crowd.

Hais seemed to be in a hurry, constantly looking over his shoulder as if he suspected someone was following him. Erik's heart pounded in his chest; did he find out he was following him? However, he didn't desist and remained focused, keeping his distance and hidden from the investigator's eyes.

They reached a narrow alleyway again, and Erik watched as Hais disappeared around the corner. Erik followed cautiously but quickly arrived there. He could hear Hais's footsteps echoing in the alley, and he kept his eyes on him, ready to react to any unexpected turn of events.

As they reached the end of the alley, Hais turned abruptly, and Erik had to quickly hide behind a stack of abandoned crates to avoid being seen. He held his breath, praying that he hadn't been discovered.

Hais glanced around, seemingly satisfied that he was alone, and then he disappeared into the building he had in front of him. Erik waited a few moments, ensuring the coast was clear, before cautiously emerging from his hiding spot.

He quickly scanned the area, making sure no one had spotted him. Satisfied that he was still unnoticed, he approached the building Hais had entered, carefully avoiding stepping onto something that could make too much noise.

In the middle of the alley stood a single metallic black door covered in graffiti paintings. The door was a canvas for all sorts of strange symbols, most of which were associated with occultism. Erik couldn't make out their meaning, but the mysterious aura they exuded intrigued him more. He then heard the sound of a door closing; it was probably Hais arriving at his place.

Erik hesitated, his gaze darting around to ensure he was still unnoticed. Still, despite his apprehension, the awakener knew he had no choice and had to get rid of the private investigator quickly, so he cautiously followed Hais up the stairs, careful not to make any sound.

<System, did you turn off all the cameras?> Erik asked.

[ANSWER: YES. THROUGH ALL YOUR JOURNEY HERE.]

<Well done.> With that settled, there was no chance someone would link him to this place.

Erik arrived at the top of the stairs and stood in front of a black wooden door with a small metallic door plate that read "Martin Hais, Private Investigator." Now the young man had to decide: attack Hais now or leave knowing where he could find him?

However, after a couple of moments of thinking about it, the awakener decided now was the time to take action; after all, he was already outside, undetected by the Crystal Cross Gang, undetected by Hais, and unnoticed by the Red Palace. It was the best opportunity he could get.

Chapter 288: What Does It Take to Kill? (2)

Erik stood in front of the black wooden door. He then reached out to twist the doorknob, but it wouldn't budge.

The door was clearly locked. Frowning, Erik gave it another push, but it remained firmly shut. He glanced around, making sure no one was watching, before he leaned in closer to examine the door.

As he observed it, Erik noticed a small electronic panel nestled discreetly beside the doorknob. It had a sleek design, with buttons and a digital display. Intrigued, Erik's curiosity got the better of him, and he pressed a button on the panel.

To his surprise, the digital display lit up, revealing a keypad. Erik's mind raced as he quickly assessed the situation. He didn't have the access code but had something better: the biological supercomputer.

<System, unlock the door,> the young man told the biological supercomputer.

[UNDERSTOOD. ACCESSING THE DEVICES. DOOR UNLOCKED.]

Immediately after, Erik heard a click, and after a slow push, the young man opened the door enough to peek inside. Investigator Hais's apartment was a chaotic scene of disarray, and as the awakener peeked inside, he was immediately struck by the mess that greeted him.

Trash was littered everywhere, scattered across the floor in crumpled paper, empty food containers, and discarded items. The stench of stale food and unwashed dishes hung heavy in the air, making Erik wrinkle his nose in disgust.

The furniture in the apartment was in a sorry state. A broken chair lay overturned, its wooden frame splintered, while a cracked coffee table was piled high with clutter. Books and papers were strewn haphazardly, some torn and crumpled, as if they had been thrown in frustration. The walls were lined with notes and scribbled diagrams, evidence of Hais's obsessive research.

It looked like no one was in sight, so the young man stepped in, but not before putting his mask on.

<System, are you still turning off all the cameras right?>

[ANSWER: YES. THE HOST'S SAFETY IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE.]

<Good.> Like that, the young man stepped inside, carefully walking in order to avoid being seen or making too much noise. As the young man moved deeper into the apartment, he noticed some cracked windows, allowing a chilly draft to seep in.

The curtains were drawn, casting the room in a gloomy light. The entire area felt abandoned, as if Hais had become so preoccupied with his work that he had forgotten about his well-being.

Erik cautiously moved through the cluttered apartment, keeping an eye out for any signs of Investigator Hais. He had managed to slip in undetected, but he knew he had to pay attention or be discovered.

When he analyzed the older man, he found out that, purely based on his stats, he would be able to kill him since the investigator was strangely weak for his level, which should have been around the MI level, but had abnormally high intelligence, which was around the 100 points, a scary amount considering Hais was only average in terms of rank.

So, if Erik wanted to win, he had to play his cards well. The most concerning matter was Hais's brain crystal power, which was still unknown by now.

However, since statistics usually depended on one's brain crystal power, it was clear that Hais's power was related to intelligence. It was probably why he was able to find out he was the one who killed the four young men and did not have those high physical statistics.

Aside from that and his military training, thanks to his multiple powers, there was no reason why he shouldn't be able to win against him; besides, with Nathaniel's power, he would be able to gain an advantage if things went wrong.

Erik had tested that power a couple of times; it wasn't easy to use it, at least not at Nathaniel's level, but at least he would be able to increase his speed and power a little bit. However, that wasn't how Erik wanted to fight; he planned to use Logan's power to weaken the old man and kill him easily by producing a poison that would reduce his strength.

That was his usual strategy, and since it worked well despite his low amount of mana, he didn't want to try another one against this kind of opponent.

As he scanned the messy apartment, Erik couldn't help but feel a sense of unease. Trash was littered everywhere, broken furniture lay in disarray, and papers were strewn across every surface. It was clear that Hais was not a tidy person, and the state of his home seemed to reflect the turmoil that must have been going on in his mind. It was the investigator's mental state that made him uneasy.

Erik crept, trying to remain unseen and unheard, and started looking at the papers around him. As he searched through Hais's belongings, Erik couldn't help but be impressed but also scared by the amount of information and evidence that Hais had collected about him, Conal, Logan, Orson, and Nathaniel.

The investigator had created an organized chaos of notes, photographs, and newspaper clippings, all meticulously arranged on a large corkboard on one wall. Erik could see that Hais had been tirelessly piecing together a puzzle, connecting dots and unraveling the mystery of the four guys' deaths, and everything was linked to him.

Erik's curiosity was piqued as he studied the evidence before him. He could see that Hais had been diligently tracking the movements and activities of the missing individuals, trying to make sense of their connections and the circumstances surrounding their disappearances. There was a huge section dedicated to what he did.

Erik couldn't help but wonder why Hais was so invested in this case and what had led him to become so obsessed with it.

As the young man continued his search, he stumbled upon an old newspaper tucked away in a corner. His curiosity was piqued, and he picked it up and read a faded article. It was about the death of a child named Norman, who had died 45 years ago.

The article mentioned that the child's surname was Hais and that he had tragically passed away at a young age. The article said that he had been beaten to death by bullies at school and that the police did nothing to them, who kept living as if nothing had happened.

<Is this the reason why he is so invested in the case?> Erik asked himself.

As Erik pieced together the clues, he couldn't help but feel a mixture of pity and admiration for Hais. It was evident that a deep sense of purpose had driven him, but it had come at a great personal cost. The disorganized apartment, the compulsive research, and the newspaper article all painted a picture of a man whose search for answers had consumed him.

As Erik continued his search, he suddenly heard the bathroom door creak open. He froze in place, listening intently. He could hear the sound of someone moving inside.

It was Hais, who had just taken a long shit, apparently, since the toilet flush could be heard from the room Erik was in. The awakener's heart raced as he searched for a place to hide. And after spotting it, he quickly went behind the couch before catching a glimpse of Hais emerging from the bathroom. The investigator looked haggard and worn, his eyes bloodshot and his face pale.

The old man quickly went to his desk and sat on a chair. The man quickly started to work and began reading some papers he had in front of himself while his PC turned on.

Erik crouched in the shadows, hidden from view, as he watched Investigator Hais deeply engrossed in his work, pouring over stacks of papers and scribbling notes furiously. Erik started channeling mana through his neural links so slowly that Hais couldn't notice the accumulation of mana in Erik's hand behind the couch; his eyes were fixed on Hais, waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

The man was too absorbed in his work to notice him peeking.

Hais was a formidable adversary, and Erik needed to catch him off guard if he wanted to have any chance of killing him.

As he waited for the dart to be formed, Erik couldn't help but feel a surge of adrenaline coursing through his veins. This was a risky situation, but he had come too far to turn back now. He had to take the chance.

From his vantage point, Erik could see Hais's face up close. The lines of concentration furrowed his brow, and the intensity in his eyes was palpable. It was clear that the investigator was deeply absorbed in his research, pouring over the details with keen interest.

The awakener also noticed a hint of frustration in his expression, as if he were missing a crucial piece of the puzzle. The furrow in his brow deepened, and he tapped his pen impatiently on the desk, lost in thought.

Finally, the moment his dart was ready and filled with enough mana arrived. Hais leaned back in his chair, taking a deep breath and stretching his arms. Erik's heart pounded in his chest as he saw the opportunity he had been waiting for.

He quickly jolted out of his hiding place, and with a quick and precise motion, the young man threw the dart toward Hais, watching it sail through the air and hit its mark.

Hais's eyes widened in surprise as the dart entered his flesh, and he was even more surprised as soon as he recognized the mask the guy in front of him was wearing.

"YOU!" Hais shouted. However, he quickly observed what the man was wearing; it was the Red Palace's uniform.

"So, I was right..." Hais said while trying to understand what Erik did. He just threw something at him, and he started feeling a foreign poisonous mana inside of him, trying to take over. That left the investigator deeply confused. Didn't Erik have a sharpening power? What the hell was happening? Could he have been wrong the whole time?

"You were, but that doesn't matter anymore now. The poison already seeped in," Erik replied.

"I am?!" the investigator asked in confusion.

Chapter 289: What Does It Takes To Kill? (3)

Erik managed to catch the private investigator off guard with his dart. As the old man was still confused by the sudden aggression, before the private investigator could even react, Erik's Flyssa was already drawn and aimed at Hais's throat.

The old man barely managed to unsheathe his sword in time to parry Erik's lethal strike, sparks flying as the steel clashed.

"So, is this how you handle things? You have a problem with someone, and you kill them?" Hais remarked.

"You know nothing," Erik said while swinging his sword horizontally at his opponent, who deflected the move with his sword.

"You really think that killing is the solution to everything? That once you get rid of your opponents, everything will improve?" Hais asked.

"It proved to be the right solution until now..." Erik replied, swinging his sword again. He had an advantage, as usually, he didn't go in a fight without being sure to win.

However, Hais was clearly a monster on his own. He had many years of experience in the military, and his abnormally high intelligence made it so that he could essentially predict Erik's moves. However, the awakener noticed how his opponent's already abnormally low strength had already started to wane due to the poison.

"You are sick in the head..." Hais said, feeling his strength leaving him, and the weight behind Erik's attacks became bigger and heavier.

"Sick?" The two clashed again, creating sparks that flew in the air once again. "Was I really the sick one? The three pricks made my life hell for years, and Nathaniel wanted to kill me just because he couldn't accept I had become stronger than him. AM I REALLY SICK?" Erik said, shouting.

His rage was palpable as he unleashed a flurry of vicious attacks, his sword cutting through the air with deadly precision. Hais, struggling to defend himself, pushed back with all his skill and experience.

"You won't get away with this!" Hais spat, his voice filled with venom as he tried to defend himself. He gritted his teeth, his mind racing as he fought to stay upright.

He knew he was not that strong already, as his brain crystal power severely limited his physical prowess, but now, he was forced to face a 16-year-old kid who had more strength than him, but his life depended on this encounter, and he couldn't mess up.

His sword met Erik's strikes with calculated defense, parrying each blow with skillful precision. Still, as time passed, he could feel how fighting was becoming increasingly harder due to whatever Erik did to him.

The room quickly turned into a battlefield, with furniture getting knocked over and papers flying in the chaos of the fight.

Erik's ambush had caught Hais off guard, but he was determined to turn the tide. The awakener's intense desire to kill this man, who threatened his already precarious peace—the peace he had long desired and finally attained after years of suffering—fueled his attacks.

His sword sliced through the air with a lethal edge. The clash of their swords was intense, and their movements were fast and fluid.

Sweat trickled down Hais's brow, his breath coming in ragged gasps. His muscles strained with the effort of parrying Erik's relentless assault. The tension between them was almost tangible.

Their swords clashed and danced, the steel ringing with each strike. The fight was a battle of wills, with Erik's determination to kill Hais matched by Hais's resolve to survive and defend himself. They circled each other, their eyes and bodies locked in a fierce duel.

"So, what did you exactly do before? I saw you threw something at me, and now this fucking mana is weakening me..." Hais asked. He was too curious to know.

"That? It was Logan's parting gift for me..." Erik replied.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing in particular. You should focus on the fight now." Erik then dashed against the old man, increasing the intensity of his attacks. However, Hais was in deep thought. What did Erik mean by parting gift?

Hais's mind raced as he parried Erik's fierce attacks, his thoughts a whirlwind of confusion. The Red Palace student's words echoed in his mind, and the investigator couldn't stop thinking about them despite being in a dangerous situation.

Then, the memories flooded back, images from his research piecing together like a puzzle.

He remembered reading from a document what Logan's brain crystal power was; the young man had a rare ability that allowed him to create poisonous mana darts.

As Hais recalled the details of that document, he made the connection. Erik had stolen Logan's power, and now he wielded it with deadly intent. It all made sense.

"YOU!" Hais said.

"You figured it out, uh? This is another reason to get rid of you, then," Erik said.

"How can you do this? It should be impossible!" Hais said.

"But it is not..."

Hais's heart clenched with a mixture of anger and determination. He couldn't let Erik get away with this. If what he thought was really true, Erik had a very dangerous ability; the ability to steal other people's power. Hais knew he had to stop him, now more than ever.

With renewed resolve, Hais fought back, but he started channeling mana now, and immediately his brain crystal power started going in over gear. It was at that moment that Hais activated his parallel wills brain crystal power. And the fight started taking another turn.

Erik's blade whistled through the air, aimed for Hais's shoulder, but the seasoned investigator deftly dodged the attack with a swift sidestep, his sword slicing toward Erik's midsection. That was the result of Hais's power; it allowed him to give his parallel will the task of predicting Erik's attack, which he wasn't having trouble foreseeing, thanks to his intelligence.

The awakener countered with a spun parry, narrowly avoiding being lethally stricken.

Their swords clashed repeatedly, the metallic clangs echoing through the room as they circled each other, each seeking an opening. Hais's mind was sharp, his focus unwavering, as he sought to outmaneuver Erik and land a decisive blow.

"You can't delay the inevitable forever, Hais," Erik spat, his voice laced with determination. "You are going to die..." Erik smirked, his eyes having a weird light inside. That, Hais thought, was the look of a predator before killing its prey.

"Take this!" He shouted, his sword flashing in a deadly arc toward Hais's chest.

The investigator blocked the attack with a swift parry, pushing Erik back. "DON'T BE ARROGANT, AS I WILL TAKE YOU DOWN!" Hais growled, his muscles tensed as he prepared for the following exchange, but his strength kept waning.

Erik's laughter filled the air as he lunged forward, his blade aiming for Hais's throat. "We'll see about that," he taunted, his movements fluid and calculated.

Hais again met Erik's attack head-on, their swords clashing with a shower of sparks. The intensity of the fight was palpable, the air crackling with tension as they attacked each other with deadly strikes.

The exchange of sword blows continued, each man showcasing their skill and determination. It was a deadly dance, a battle of wills as they fought for their respective goals. Sweat dripped down their brows, their breathing heavy, but neither showed any sign of relenting.

The fight raged on, the room filled with the clang of steel against steel. Hais's mind raced, analyzing Erik's moves, searching for an opening and the best way to block Erik's attacks. He knew he had to end this, to stop Erik before he could kill someone else.

With a fierce roar, Hais launched a swift and calculated attack, his sword slicing through the air toward Erik's side. The young man countered with equal ferocity, but Hais's strike was the real deal, and the blade cut through Erik's defenses, leaving a gash on his arm.

The awakener hissed in pain, his grip on his sword faltering for a split second. It was all Hais needed. With a final powerful swing, the investigator's sword connected with Erik's, sending his blade flying across the room, leaving him disarmed and vulnerable.

"See? What did I tell you?" Hais asked.

"Oh? You think you have won?" Erik remarked. His bloodlust was soaring, and the need to kill the investigator quickly became a primal need.

"Stop playing the villain!"

"I'm not playing..."

At that moment, Erik dashed toward Hais. "Fool," the old man said. However, Erik was far from being done. At that moment, he channeled mana again, sharpening his arms, making them deadly weapons. The fighting style shifted from sword combat to hand-to-hand.

At the same time, Hais, still wielding his sword, advanced towards Erik with purpose, his eyes fixed on his opponent. He swung his blade in a swift arc, aiming for Erik's chest. The awakener evaded the strike with a nimble backstep, narrowly avoiding the deadly edge.

With a surge of power, Erik lunged forward, aiming to pierce his opponent's chest with his bare hand, but Hais predicted the move and blocked Erik's attempts with precision, keeping him at bay with calculated strikes. However, fatigue started to set in more than ever.

Erik's movements were now more fluid and primordial as they engaged in combat. Hais's experience as a soldier gave him a slight advantage in close-quarters combat, and he used his skills to block Erik's attempts to land a mortal blow, but the young man was a Red Palace student; he was everything but weak.

Erik fought with reckless abandon, throwing punches and slashing at Hais, trying to find an opening. But Hais's power and years of training and experience kept him one step ahead as he countered Erik's every move.

However, after many tries, the awakener landed a hit on the old man, and blood started pouring down the wound. It was now clear that the time had come, the poison had made its effect, and Hais had its strength severely reduced. Now not even his brain crystal power could help him anymore.

Chapter 290: What Does It Takes to Kill? (4)

Despite his fatigue, the private investigator knew he could not allow Erik to hit him again, or he would die. However, he could also feel much weaker than before, probably due to Erik's dart, which he knew was Logan's power that somehow Erik stole.

<Damn...> Hais thought. <I'm in serious trouble here...>

The investigator then lunged forward, his sword slicing through the air with deadly precision. At the same time, Erik moved with fluid grace, his mana-coated arms cutting through the air like a hot knife through butter.

He parried Hais's attacks; the young man metalized his skin, and thanks to the sharpening power, it was like two swords clashing and echoing in the small space of the office. As the duel continued, both of the contestants' mana releases caused the air to crackle, and Erik's excitement and bloodlust increased along with his advantage.

"You can't do this anymore, old man," Erik said after another exchange of attacks.

"Don't underestimate me!" he said while observing Erik's arm's weird consistency. He knew that was probably due to another power he stole, but he didn't let that fact affect him.

Hais was skilled, and his swordsmanship was honed through years of experience despite not being at the same level as someone studying at the Red Palace. He tried pushing Erik back with a flurry of strikes, aiming for his exposed sides. But the young man now had the situation under control, and if it weren't for the bloodlust, he would have already killed Hais. He was now toying with him.

"So, what did you plan to do if you managed to find proof it was me who killed them?" Erik asked.

"Did you have to ask?" Hais replied. "I would have given all the proof to the police so that not even someone like you could have avoided execution, or at least jail time..."

"It's a shame you'll die before revealing everything, huh?" Erik said.

"Tsk... I wouldn't be so bold if I were you!" Hais replied.

"Ok, ok..." Erik observed Hais for a couple of seconds, still ecstatic. "You know, I think I've had enough of this..." Erik said with a murderous glint in his eyes.

With a sharp intake of breath, Erik started channeling mana through his brain crystal. The fight was still going on, but the awakener's next move was going to settle the fight once and for all.

Soon after, a giant, transparent-blue wolf head materialized into thin air, its jaws gaping wide with razor-sharp teeth dripping a poisonous liquid on the ground.

The astral wolf lunged forward in a fraction of a second, its jaws snapping shut on Hais's sword arm. The wolf then ripped the limb off as if it were just munching on a succulent piece of meat. Hais cried out in surprise and pain, looking at the arm in the wolf's mouth as blood trickled from it.

Erik seized the opportunity, unleashing fierce attacks with his mana-coated arms, piercing Hais's abdomen and his sharpened arm coming out of the investigator's back.

The old man fought back with all his might, but the combination of Erik's brain crystal powers, his weakened state, and the very same nature of his brain crystal power was overwhelming.

The man staggered, blood oozing from the multiple wounds on his body. His face was a mask of horror, and Erik could see the fear in his eyes. Hais further stumbled backward, gasping for breath, unable to stand anymore, and soon after, he fell to the ground while he lost an increasing amount of blood.

Erik lowered his arms, the mana-coating dissipating and the astral wolf bite vanishing into thin air. He stood victorious, but as the bloodlust started to wear off, what he had done started to set in. He looked at Hais with a mixture of respect and pity, acknowledging his skill, power, and will.

"You won in the end, uh?" Hais said, his voice strained and coughing blood.

"I won," Erik replied. "Maybe it is too late to say this, but killing you was the last thing I wanted to do."

"You can keep your sorry excuses for yourself. You are nothing more than a monster, Erik Romano, and one day you will pay for what you did," Hais replied.

"Really? Despite knowing I was bullied and beaten every day by the three pricks after I told you Nathaniel tried to kill me, do you still think I was the one in the wrong? How dare you?!" Erik said in outrage.

"I don't care; you could have handled things differently," Hais said. "If you really were better than them, you would have spared them or asked for help..."

"It's easy for you to say that, but tell me, would the police have done something if I told them what they did? Would Nathaniel have stopped trying to kill me if I did? What I told you the last time, that his father was Mambas' leader, was all true. I even have proof! Are you really so naive as to think that everything would have stopped and that I would have finally had peace? No.

The truth is that only the strong survive in this nation, no, in this world, and I did what I had to ensure my safety."

"You are no better than... them... Erik Ro...ma...no..." At that moment, Hais lost his life due to the blood loss. Erik felt a sense of relief washing over him.

[HOSTILE INDIVIDUAL 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. 4315 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

[QUEST COMPLETE. REWARDS ISSUED.]

"Fantastic..." Erik said to himself.

He now only had to find Hais's files and delete them, and then get rid of all the physical notes the man wrote, but not before doing something more important.

Erik leaned forward, dipped his finger into Hais's wound, and then licked the blood off his fingers.

[MARTIN HAIS'S BLOOD ACQUIRED. STARTING THE ANALYSIS.]

[ANALYSIS COMPLETE.]

[50 DNA POINTS ARE REQUIRED TO EXTRACT THE DNA.]

[4780 DNA POINTS DETECTED. COMMENCING EXTRACTION?]

"No." Erik then grabbed his Flyssa from the ground and walked toward Hais. With a quick motion, he severed the old man's head, and a small translucent bead fell out of his brain. Erik picked it up, and after having cleaned it inside the bathroom, he swallowed it.

[MARTIN HAIS'S BRAIN CRYSTAL ACQUIRED. STARTING THE ANALYSIS.]

[ANALYSIS COMPLETE.]

[50 DNA POINTS ARE REQUIRED TO EXTRACT THE POWER.]

[4780 DNA POINTS DETECTED. EXTRACTION IS NOT ADVISED; THE HOST HAS INCOMPATIBLE DNA.]

[EXTRACTION ABORTED]

Erik knew he had to move quickly and efficiently to find any evidence that could implicate him in the murders Hais had been investigating. Erik kept his cool as he rummaged through drawers and cabinets, searching for anything that could connect him to the crimes.

A few moments later, Erik found a file tucked away in a hidden compartment. He pulled it out and quickly scanned its contents. It contained information on the victims, their backgrounds, and the details of the murders. Erik's suspicions were confirmed - Hais was awfully close to finding the evidence he needed to show he was the culprit.

However, he also realized he had been lucky; Hais was awfully weak for his age, and that was the only thing that allowed him to kill him. If he were stronger, the awakener would have just fled the country.

Erik grabbed a lighter from his pocket and set the file ablaze without hesitation. He watched as the flames consumed the evidence, leaving no trace behind.

He repeated the process with any other documents he found inside the house, basically clearing the place for all the papers; however, the amount of garbage was too much, and soon, a fire started inside the apartment.

"Shit..." The young man said. He tried to stop the fire from spreading, but it was futile, and soon the furniture caught fire.

Erik knew he had no more time to lose now. He needed to erase any digital trail that could connect him to the murders.

<System, connect to all the devices inside the building and find every file related to Hais's investigation and delete it. Even if they are on other servers far from here. I want everything deleted.> Erik commanded the biological supercomputer in his mind.

[UNDERSTOOD. INITIATING SEARCH AND DELETION PROTOCOLS.]

Erik waited anxiously as the biological supercomputer began its task and as the fire spread. The smoke was starting to be seen easily, so he had to get the hell out of that building. He paced back and forth, his mind filled with anticipation and worry. He knew that if any trace of his involvement was found, it could be disastrous for him.

[ACTION COMPLETED. ALL FILES RELATED TO HAIS'S INVESTIGATION HAVE BEEN DELETED. NO TRACE OF YOUR INVOLVEMENT REMAINS.]

Erik sighed in relief, grateful for the biological supercomputer's efficiency. He knew he could trust the advanced AI to carry out his instructions without fail.

"Thank you," Erik said to the biological supercomputer, feeling a sense of gratitude towards the machine.

[YOU'RE WELCOME. IT'S MY PLEASURE TO ASSIST YOU, HOST.]

Erik nodded, acknowledging the computer's response. He knew that his relationship with the biological supercomputer was unique, as it was not just a machine but a sentient being with its own consciousness.

As Erik prepared to leave Hais's apartment, he turned to the biological supercomputer one last time.

"Are you sure there is no proof of me being here?" he asked.

[ALL DEVICES HAD BEEN PREVIOUSLY TURNED OFF. YOU ARE SAFE.]

With that, Erik left Hais's apartment, knowing he had thoroughly covered his tracks. He felt a mix of relief and apprehension, knowing that he had successfully removed any evidence that could incriminate him, but also aware that his killing habit was getting out of hand.

After that, Erik pressed the fire emergency button, and soon, the alarm started ringing inside the building, alerting all the people present that they had to evacuate. With that done, Erik quickly left the building and returned to the Red Palace.