

## BIOLOGICAL 291

### Chapter 291: Fischer's Investigative teams

The sun was beginning to rise over New Alexandria as three teams of soldiers gathered at the eastern gate, preparing for their mission into the wild. The air was crisp with a hint of anticipation as they organized themselves, laser rifles gleaming in the faint light.

Captain Mary Lain of Team Bravo stood at the forefront, her commanding presence evident as she oversaw the preparations. She checked her own equipment, making sure her weapons were fully operational and her tactical gear was secured.

Her team consisted of Private Emma Morin, Private Larry Carter, Private Dylan Cunningham, and their newest member, Private Lucas Anderson, who had recently joined Team Bravo to substitute for Private John Murray. They worked swiftly and efficiently, each soldier grabbing their gear with practiced efficiency.

The other team was Team Delta, led by the newly appointed Captain Nico Montgomery, who moved with purpose as they readied themselves for the mission.

The other team members diligently followed Captain Montgomery's orders, grabbing their laser rifles and checking their explosives. However, the team's cohesion and camaraderie were not great since this was a newly established team, as most of the members died during the attack on the city.

The last team was Team Tiger, comprised of Captain Bisk, Private Miranda Morin, and three other members who had substituted Andrea, Jacob, and Azelia. They were not less powerful than their predecessors, but it was clear that it was not the same for Bisk and Miranda. Bisk and Miranda had formed a strong bond with their previous team members, and adjusting to the new dynamic was difficult.

Despite this, they were doing what they were tasked with without complaining.

Captain Lain raised her hand as the teams finished their preparations, signaling for them to gather around her. The soldiers quickly formed a tight circle, their laser rifles and white weapons slung over their shoulders, and listened attentively to their respective team leaders.

"Alright, ladies and gentlemen," Captain Lain began, her voice carrying authority. "We have a mission ahead of us, and we cannot afford any mistakes. We are Frant's best of the best, and we had

been tasked with finding the Heniate. So, stay vigilant, watch out for each other, and remember your training. We leave as soon as the gate is open. Move out!"

With a chorus of "Yes, ma'am." and nods of determination, the soldiers moved towards the gate, the anticipation palpable in the air.

The teams made their way toward the parking lot where their land SUVs were parked, moving swiftly and silently. The morning light was slowly brightening the sky as they approached the vehicles, their laser rifles held at the ready in case of any unforeseen threats.

Captain Lain led Team Bravo and the other teams toward their designated SUV, with her team following closely behind. They quickly loaded their gear into the vehicle, ensuring everything was securely stowed. Emma took the wheel, ready to drive. The others did the same, and quickly every team was ready to depart.

Then the eastern gate doors slowly opened, revealing the vast wilderness beyond. Captains Lain, Montgomery, and Bisk exchanged nods, a silent signal to move out. The SUVs roared to life, speeding towards the gate with their laser rifles and equipment secured in the back.

With a burst of excitement, the teams raced through the gate, their vehicles kicking up dust as they accelerated into the wild. The inside of the gate slowly disappeared behind them as the door closed, and they were now fully immersed in the untamed wilderness.

The drivers navigated through rugged terrain, the boulders, and the artillery embedded in the ground, and which was still under repair as they raced toward the outer wall. As they raced through, the soldiers couldn't help but take notice of the destruction that the Thaid's had wrought.

Captain Lain's sharp eyes caught sight of the holes in the ground between the barrier and the city wall. It was clear from the deep craters and scars left in their wake by the monsters' repeated attempts to breach the city's defenses that they had failed, as well as from the ones made by the army's attempts to defend the city.

Emma and Lain exchanged solemn glances, realizing the magnitude of the threat that almost destroyed their capital city.

As Team Bravo drove further, Emma, who was at the wheel, carefully observed the upturned trees at the forest's edge. Bombs, brain crystal powers, and thaid's had clearly plowed through the once-thriving forest, leaving a path of destruction in their wake.

The broken trunks and branches littered the ground and were currently on their way to be removed by the soldiers.

The army soldiers were also in the process of gathering some of the massive Thaid's remains. The sight was chilling and sobering. Lain, Bisk, and Montgomery knew that they were probably going to fight these kinds of monsters in the near future; it was scary to think about it.

It was even possible to spot claw marks on rocks and deep gouges on the ground, signs of the recent battle that took place outside the city.

"It's heartbreaking to see what could have happened to the city if we didn't manage to stop the invasion," remarked Emma.

"Yeah, the scale of their rampage is unbelievable," added Captain Montgomery, his voice filled with emotion.

"Hey, sis, where were you when the battle started?" Miranda asked Emma.

"North side, with Captain Lain. We even faced the Blirdoth," the woman replied, with a slight tint of pride in it.

"We know it was in all the newspapers," Dylan replied. He could not join her team members in that fight, and he missed the glory of battling the Blirdoth.

"What, are you jealous?" Captain Lain said. They kept bickering with each other, but quickly the conversation turned to each team member expressing their anger and frustration over the destruction caused by the Thaid's. The memories of the battle were still fresh in their minds, and the images of chaos haunted them.

As they drove past the outer wall, their resolve increased. They knew their mission's stakes were high, and they were determined to make the Heniate pay for its actions.

They quickly entered the forest, following the trail from which the Thaid's horde came. The rugged wilderness and the remnants of the Thaid attack only fueled their resolve to protect their city and complete their mission.

The teams moved in a tight convoy, keeping a keen eye out for any potential threats. The landscape around them was rugged and unforgiving, but they were prepared.

"All right, just a brief recap of the situation," Lain said. "The Blirldoth was first spotted 4000 kilometers east from our current position, so the higher-ups assumed the Heniate must be there. We are not certain about this, so the first thing we will do is search a 20-kilometer-wide area for the monster."

"Indeed," Bis added, "Keep in mind that there could be monsters at levels higher than the KAPPA one. In that case, we should avoid them. Report to me if you spot them."

"Yes, sir," Bisk's team members replied.

The trip proceeded calmly for some hours. The journey to their destination was long, so Lain observed her team members and quickly noticed Emma and Miranda talking. They were sisters, and it was even weirder that they had been assigned to the same mission but on different teams. Lain was curious about her subordinate, as she didn't talk that much about her youth.

"So, how was Emma when she was a child?" Lain asked Miranda with genuine curiosity.

Emma exchanged a glance with her sister before the woman replied, "She was a sweetheart, but our family's demands quickly ruined that. They had high expectations for us, being born with our powerful abilities. We were trained from a young age to control them and join the military soon after the military academy."

Miranda nodded in agreement. Lain nodded, impressed. "That must have been quite an experience. Your family certainly had a prestigious reputation in New Alexandria."

Emma smiled faintly. "Yes, they do. But it also came with its own set of challenges and expectations. We were constantly under scrutiny and had to work hard to meet those expectations."

Lain nodded understandingly, then asked, "So, why did you both decide to join the military in the end? Was it your family's wish?"

Miranda sighed softly before replying, "In a way, yes. Our family wanted us to use our powers for the greater good, and serving in the military seemed like a way to do that. It was expected of us, and we obeyed."

Emma nodded in agreement. "Yeah, basically everyone in our family is in the military."

Lain could sense a hint of sadness in their voices. She realized the Morin sisters had joined the military out of duty rather than personal choice. She decided to change the topic, wanting to avoid pressing them further.

"Well, regardless of your reasons for joining, I'm glad to have had your sister on my team. Her skills and abilities are invaluable to us," Lain said with a smile, trying to lift their spirits.

Emma and Miranda exchanged grateful glances, their expressions softening. "Thank you, Captain Lain," Emma replied sincerely.

Chapter 292: Matthew's vengeance

"AH, AH, AH..."

Natasha stumbled through the dark, damp alleyways, her breath coming in ragged gasps. Blood seeped from numerous wounds on her body, leaving a trail of crimson behind her. Her vision blurred, and her steps unsteady, but she had to keep moving and find help before it was too late or find a way to escape her pursuers since she couldn't keep running for long.

She quickly turned around to see if whoever was chasing her was still there, and unfortunately, they were.

These people wore all-black attire that blended seamlessly into the shadows, making them difficult to spot in the dimly lit alleyway. Their clothing was form-fitting, allowing for ease of movement, and they moved with calculated precision, exuding a sense of deadly purpose.

Each assassin wore a mask that concealed their identity, adding an air of mystery to their menacing presence. The masks were featureless and were designed to make the wearer look as anonymous as possible. It was impossible to determine their expressions or emotions through them. They were devoid of any humanity, cold, and detached in their pursuit of the young Red Palace student.

"AH, AH, AH..." Natasha ran, but her breath was ragged. With every step, pain shot through her body, reminding her of the injuries she had sustained earlier.

This pursuit has been on for at least five minutes, with her trying to escape these people with everything she could. She tried to ask for help, but as soon as she did, the assassins arrived and attacked her, leaving the young woman with multiple wounds. After a short while, she stopped trying to ask for help, as that would reveal her position.

Her clothes were torn so much that her breast was exposed, and part of her pants had been completely ripped. She was drained of any energy but refused to give up. The young woman had her poisonous whip firmly grasped in her hands, but they were shaky. She knew she was in a desperate situation.

As Natasha turned a corner, she heard the footsteps of her pursuer getting closer, their heavy steps echoing in her ears. She tried to quicken her pace, but her body protested, and she stumbled, nearly falling to the ground.

One of her attackers, a tall and menacing figure, closed in on her, his eyes gleaming with malice. He swung his blade at her, and Natasha used her whip to deflect the attack. Desperation fueled her as she lashed out at the assailants with her whip, the poison dripping from its tendrils.

Her movements were slow and uncoordinated, and she could feel her strength fading, but she managed to hit the man in the eye and pierce his brain, killing him on the spot. The effort was exhausting, but at least it worked.

Despite her injuries, Natasha stood up again after killing the man. She swung her whip with all the determination she could muster, using it to keep the rest of the pursuers at bay. The poison worked its magic, weakening some, but they continued to press forward.

"WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU?!" The woman shouted, but she didn't receive any reply. Natasha bolted away again, and the chase continued through the narrow alleyways; She. was stumbling and gasping for air.

"AH, AH, AH... FUCK! FUUUCK!"

With a burst of speed, Natasha made a daring move, propelling herself onto a rooftop with her whip. She stumbled as she landed, the pain in her wounds intensifying. Her vision temporarily blurred, and the grip on her weapon wavered.

Her pursuers followed, closing in on her, their blades slicing through the air as they aimed at her. Natasha's movements were slow and labored, and she could feel her grip on consciousness slipping, but she was a Red Palace student, and she was not weak.

With a steely determination, Natasha straightened up, using her whip again despite her weakened state. She turned to face her pursuers, who had caught up to her and were surrounding her on the rooftop.

"Surrender, young woman," one of the men said.

"Why? So that you can kill me?!" The girl asked, desperation clear in her voice.

"You already know this is your destiny and can't escape from us. You may be strong, but not as strong as us."

"WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?!" The woman asked, crying. "I did nothing to you or anyone else for that matter!" she added. "Please! Let me go!" The sobs between her words were useless; these men didn't care at all about her. They received an order and intended to complete their task without fail.

"You know we can't do this. Now, stay put, and everything will end painlessly."

Natasha's heart pounded in her chest, but she stood her ground, her eyes blazing with defiance. She knew she couldn't take them all on, but she refused to go down without a fight. She swung her whip, the poison dripping from its tendrils, and lashed out at the nearest assailant.

Despite her strikes lacking their usual precision, Natasha fought with all the strength she could muster. She used her whip to keep her attackers at bay, striking out at them with every ounce of her remaining energy. Her injuries slowed her down, and she stumbled several times, but she managed to hit some of the men.

Her once beautiful face was now full of wounds. She had a broken finger that was swollen and crooked, causing her intense pain whenever she tried to move it, and on the same arm, she had a nasty cut that was deep and jagged, oozing blood and surrounded by a halo of swollen, red skin.

The assailants, however, closed in on her, their weapons slashing through the air. Natasha ducked and dodged, using her whip to block their attacks and retaliate with her own strikes. She gritted her

teeth against the pain, her body protesting with every movement, but she fought on, her eyes fixed on her enemies.

During the fight, Natasha's long ponytail had come loose from its tie and now hung freely around her shoulders. The once-neat strands were tangled and disheveled, matted with sweat, and streaked with dirt. Some sections had been pulled out entirely, leaving uneven tufts of hair sticking out at odd angles.

Despite its messy state, however, Natasha's hair still seemed to frame her face in a way that was both striking and wild, giving her an air of fierce determination even as she struggled to defend herself.

However, despite her best efforts, Natasha was having trouble handling the sheer amount of people. Her movements grew weaker, and the grip on her whip faltered. She cried out in pain after one of them managed to land another blow, this time on her shoulder, but she persisted in fighting out of sheer desperation and survival instinct.

"AH, AH, AH..." Her breathing became more and more ragged.

As Natasha struggled to stay on her feet, her vision blurred, and darkness threatened to envelop her. She knew she was reaching her limits but refused to give up.

Natasha swung her poisonous whip, lashing out at her attackers with all her remaining might. The venomous barbs sliced through the air, delivering their deadly payload to anyone they struck. One of the assassins lunged at the young woman from the side, evading her whip.

He swung a dagger toward her, and despite her efforts to dodge, the blade found its mark. Pain exploded in Natasha's side as the dagger pierced her flesh again, sending waves of agony through her body and blood gushing out like a fountain.

She cried out, staggering backward, clutching her side where blood seeped from the wound. Two more assassins closed in, blades glinting in the dim light. Natasha's vision blurred, and her head spun. She knew she couldn't keep up the fight much longer, and desperation surged through her.

The young woman stood a little and staggered back; she swung her whip in a wide arc, hoping to catch some of the assassins. She failed to injure most of them as they avoided the move by jumping back, but she landed a hit on a woman, and the poison seeped through the wound.



"FUCKIN BITCH!" The woman then kicked Natasha in the face, and she fell to the ground.

Natasha's wounds pulsed with pain, and blood oozed from multiple gashes, staining her clothes and pooling on the ground beneath her. The assassins pressed their advantage, closing in on her from all sides.

Natasha tried to evade the attack from the ground, but the pain and the blood loss prevented her from doing so, and the blades found their mark once again, this time piercing her in multiple parts.

"It's really commendable how you managed to keep up until now despite your wounds. You really lived up to the expectations I had on you, but you are done now..."

"Go...to...hell..." Natasha managed to mutter.

Natasha's face was a mask of desperation and exhaustion, her features drawn and haggard from the ordeal she had been through. Her skin was pale and clammy, with sweat beading on her forehead and upper lip. Deep circles ringed her eyes, which were half-closed and bloodshot from lack of sleep and the strain of the fight.

Every breath came in ragged gasps, and she could feel her strength ebbing away by the second. The young woman was now on the ground, and her body was wracked with pain, with blood pouring from her wounds.

"Sayonara..."

The assassins' leader closed in, his blade raised for a final strike. Natasha's vision faded; she had fought bravely, but her injuries were too severe. The last thing the Red Palace's student heard was the sound of the assassins' laughter as their leader closed in for the kill. Her world faded into darkness, and she died like any common rodent on the street.

#### Chapter 293: Silent Takeout (1)

As Erik lay on his bed, he stretched out his tired muscles and let out a contented sigh. He had just returned from a grueling training day, and his body ached, but the sense of accomplishment and progress filled him with satisfaction. Amber was with him since Benedict had something to do with Martha, so they were currently alone in Erik's room.

The young woman has now "officially" become Erik's girlfriend. Of course, they didn't tell the others about their relationship, but some of them had suspicions, especially Gwen and her keen eyes.

The young woman curled beside him as she saw him slumping on the bed, resting her head on his chest. Her presence brought the young man comfort like nothing else. Her soft touch and gentle embrace melted away the tension from his body. These past three days, since he killed Hais, have been harsh.

The fire Erik had started consumed the private investigator's body and the whole building, and nothing remained of it. The other owners and the police thought the fire started because of a cigarette Hais left somewhere after he fell asleep. Since the whole building collapsed, the injuries Erik left on the man's body were covered, and no one suspected him, at least for the moment.

"Today was intense," Erik said, running his fingers through Amber's silky hair. "Master Nieminen pushed me a lot; the training is becoming more gruesome as time passes. I feel like my muscles are going to rebel against me tomorrow."

Amber chuckled softly, tracing circles on Erik's chest with her fingertip. "I know what you mean. My training session was tough too, but there is nothing much I can do except endure. Though, I'm getting better with each day." Erik smiled at Amber's words, feeling a surge of pride.

His girlfriend was powerful, beautiful, and intelligent. Despite still having feelings for Emily, he quickly understood that getting something solid with Amber was his best choice and knew that what he felt for Emily was irrational since he didn't even know her well.

Besides, Amber was giving him something he had never had in the past. The feeling of being loved.

"I couldn't have done it without you," Erik said sincerely, pressing a kiss to Amber's forehead. "Thank you for all you did for me..."

Amber's eyes sparkled with affection as she gazed up at Erik. They lay in silence for a while, basking in each other's warmth and comfort. Erik traced patterns on Amber's back, feeling the rise and fall of her breath against his chest.

After a while, Amber stood up from the bed, put on her shoes, and said, "I must go. It's getting late."

"Can't you stay five minutes more?" he said, pouting. Amber chuckled, and she kissed Erik on his forehead. "No, no," she said, smiling. "I have to call my father as soon as possible. Lately, he has been working a lot, and to be honest, I'm a little bit worried. I must make sure he is okay."

"All right then, I think I will start training then. Remember that I won't come to eat with you guys; I'm planning on going to bed early," Erik said.

"Ok." The woman then went to the door. Since they were alone, she didn't bother sneaking away. Erik brought her to the door, where they shared one more lingering kiss, their lips conveying their feelings and longing for each other. Then Amber slipped out of Erik's apartment, leaving him standing in the doorway, watching her disappear down the hallway.

Erik closed the door with a sigh, feeling a sense of emptiness in the apartment without Amber's presence. He missed her already, but he knew she had her responsibilities to attend to. He decided to occupy himself with some training to keep his mind off her absence. Besides, today was a crucial day.

Achim was going out with his girlfriend, so this was probably his only chance to get rid of him—the only one who could link him to Nathaniel's death.

Then Erik went back to his room and sat cross-legged on the bed, his eyes closed, and his mind focused. In the past few days, he has learned the biological supercomputer's new training technique and was already making a lot of progress. If things went well tonight, he would be able to increase his neural links.

The technique consisted of weaving the mana from his brain crystal in a particular way. What did change compared to the previous method was how the neural links were made, despite the process still resembling the building of a bridge between his brain and the brain crystal. If before it was like building a bridge with logs, now it was akin to making them with metal and concrete.

Taking a deep breath, Erik began the training. He visualized his brain crystal as a complex network of pathways, with each brain crystal power represented as a beacon of light in the distance.

With focused intent, he started placing the concrete and the metal down, two at a time, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Erik felt that with a little bit more effort, he could actually make three neural links at the same time, but something was preventing him from doing so.

Since he learned the technique, Erik also became able to see the neural links better. Before, they just looked like tiny strands of light connecting the brain to the crystal, but now they were something more.

They were unique, reflecting the individual characteristics of the brain crystal power they connected to. Some were sturdy and stable, made of solid materials like steel, representing grounded and practical powers. Others were delicate and intricate, constructed with fine silk threads, representing subtle and nuanced powers.

Erik could feel the feeling of building each bridge as if he were physically constructing a tangible structure in his mind.

The process was not without challenges, as manipulating the mana was easier said than done. Erik encountered obstacles along the way, but with determination, he persevered, using his sheer will to overcome any barriers that arose.

<That's it! I'm almost there!>

Steadily and quickly, these two bridges started forming; Erik felt a surge of energy coursing through his mind and body as the links got established. Soon they grew stronger and more efficient with each strand of mana weaved and manipulated. He could sense the powers becoming more accessible and their energy merging with him.

What amazed Erik the most was that the ability to train two brain crystal powers simultaneously. It was like constructing two bridges simultaneously, each leading to a different power. He had to balance his focus and concentration, carefully building and strengthening the connections to both powers in harmony.

After a short while, he made it. The young man's mana started traveling from the brain crystal to the brain and then spreading through the rest of the body. The flow became less obstructed, and he could easily tap into his mana reserves. He just made two neural links in the span of four days. That was an impressive feat.

Erik didn't want to increase his main powers immediately, so he concentrated on building the neural links for the metallization and the mana exoskeleton power. For too long, these two powers lagged behind the others, and he didn't have many neural links with them to begin with, as establishing these connections was hard.

As he opened his eyes, Erik realized that he had reached a new level of understanding and control over the two brain crystal powers. The neural links he had built were now solid and functional, allowing him to access and utilize his powers more efficiently.

The young man decided to metalize his arm. There was not much he could do with only two neural links for that power, but it was clear that metalizing objects became easier. He then built the mana exoskeleton and noticed that the mana expenditure decreased slightly.

Overall, two neural links were nothing compared to the 54 that each brain crystal power could have, but it was still better than just having one. After that, the young man watched the clock; it was now 19:00, so he had to prepare and leave the Red Palace.

He knew that he couldn't afford to be seen or recognized by anyone, as he was going to commit another murder, which required utmost secrecy. To ensure his anonymity, Erik had chosen to dress in all black, a color that would help him blend into the shadows and avoid drawing attention.

He put on a black hoodie, which covered most of his face, and pulled up the hood to further conceal his features. He wore black pants that fit snugly, allowing him to move stealthily and silently. He strapped on a pair of black boots that were sturdy yet lightweight, perfect for navigating through various terrains.

In addition to his dark attire, Erik had prepared a backpack with all the essentials he needed for his mission. He packed a small first aid kit, a water bottle, some energy bars, and a few tools that might come in handy. He also carried his mask in his backpack, which he would wear to obscure his identity further if necessary, and had some spare clothes in case he needed to change quickly.

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<Quest: Assassination.>

-Description: Sneak into the Red Lotus Lounge and kill Achim.

-Rewards for completion: A 1000 experience points and 150 DNA for completing the quest.

-Failure Penalty: Death or Imprisonment.

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<A quest, fantastic.>

Erik checked himself in the mirror; he was satisfied with his appearance. He looked like a shadow, blending seamlessly into the darkness.

He was ready to slip out of the palace without a trace. Now he only had to get out.

#### Chapter 294: The Red Lotus Lounge (1)

Erik moved stealthily through the corridors of the Red Palace, his senses heightened and his heart pounding in his chest. If he were caught trying to leave, people would start asking questions. Why was he going outside this late in the night?

With his hood pulled low over his face and his footsteps muffled by soft-soled shoes, Erik left his apartment, closing the door behind him, and moved silently, trying not to attract attention through the brightly illuminated corridors of the Red Palace.

<System, send loop videos to all the cameras I will encounter. I've already deactivated them too many times, and I can't risk them finding patterns. Make it so they can't see I'm leaving the Red Palace.>

[UNDERSTOOD. CONNECTING TO ALL NEARBY DEVICES. SENDING LOOP VIDEOS.]

As Erik moved stealthily through the corridors of the Red Palace, he heard the approaching footsteps of a group of students. He quickly hid behind a corner, weirdly calm despite the situation. Peering out from his hiding spot, he observed the students passing by.

They were two male and female students, all dressed in the standard Red Palace uniforms: red pants with golden stripes on the sides and a jacket embroidered with the golden Red Palace Dojo logo on the back. They chatted animatedly, their voices echoing in the corridor as they walked side by side.

The first student was a tall, athletic-looking male with short, dark hair and a confident stride. The second student was a petite female with brown hair that matched her eyes. She walked with a determined gait; her eyes focused ahead as if she had a goal in mind.

"So, I told her to mind her business, and she got angry despite being the one who put her nose into my business," the girl said.

"Leave her be; it doesn't bring you anything to get angry because of her..."

"Yes, but-"

After the two went past him, Erik started going ahead again. He quickly turned right, moving with cat-like grace, minimizing any noise or sudden movements that might alert the other people to his presence.

He quickly arrived in front of the elevator, went in, and pressed the button for the ground floor. Soon, the doors closed, and the machine started its descent. The first thing had been done; now, he needed to get to the main entrance.

The elevator quickly arrived, and Erik stepped out of it and hid behind one of the many couches the ground floor had. From his position, Erik could observe that the reception was empty. Apparently, Miss Smith ended her shift, and the place was left unattended.

However, many guards were around, and Erik had to go undetected by them if he wanted to sneak out of the institution. However he could see the exit from his position, but he knew there were two guards outside, and he needed to get rid of them.

<System, I need you to send a message to the outside guards. Tell them to head to the first floor immediately. Hopefully, they will be questioned by the other guards, and I will have enough time to sneak out.>

[UNDERSTOOD. CONNECTING TO THE DEVICES. MESSAGE SENT.>

Shortly after, the two guards received the messages and went inside, heading for the elevator. As Erik predicted, the other guards were puzzled.

"Hey! Where are you going?" one of them asked.

"We got told to head upstairs."

"Uh? Why?"

As the guards kept talking, Erik sneaked his way past them unnoticed; however, at one point, he found himself trapped between two guards walking toward him from opposite directions.

He quickly ducked into a nearby janitor's closet and held his breath, listening to their footsteps as they passed by. Once they were out of earshot, he slipped out of the closet and continued his stealthy journey.

Finally, after what felt like hours of nerve-wracking evasion, Erik left the building and reached the garden, where he could see the night sky peeking through the trees.

He knew the most challenging part was over, but he couldn't let his guard down just yet as he had to get out of the Red Palace's property.

With a final glance back at the building, Erik took a deep breath and prepared himself for the next phase of his mission—finding Achim and his girlfriend at the club. He knew the real challenge was still ahead but was determined to see it through.

And so, Erik slipped into the shadows of the night, hiding behind trees and bushes, and finally went past the gate. However, he wasn't done; he quickly called a cab and told them to meet on a nearby street. So he quickly ran there and waited for it to arrive.

<System, like last time, deactivate all cameras and make it so that I can't be traced. Before leaving the cab, erase all evidence of my presence from their servers.>

The cab arrived shortly after, and Erik sat inside. "Bring me to the Red Lotus Lounge," he said. That was the name of Nathaniel's father's club; there were numerous and varied rumors about the place.

Some said it was a front for illegal gambling, where high-stakes poker games were held behind closed doors, and fortunes were won and lost in a single night.

Others claimed it was a hub for illegal drug trafficking, where exotic substances from around the world were bought and sold under the cover of darkness.



There were also whispers of clandestine meetings between McConnel and other powerful crime lords, where shady deals were struck, and alliances were formed.

The Red Lotus Lounge was said to be a haven for the criminal underworld. In this place, the rich and powerful rubbed shoulders with the seedy underbelly of society, where secrets were exchanged in hushed tones over glasses of expensive whiskey.

Of course, prostitution went rampant there, and it was said that people didn't have problems having sex in front of everyone else, even on the dance floor. Of course, Erik never went there, so he didn't know if all of that was true.

However, since he was aware of Matthew's connection to the underworld, it was clear that there must have been some truth to those rumors.

The police had never been able to prove these claims since they never found anything, probably because Matthew received some intel beforehand that the police would check on them, giving him the time to clean everything.

He was clearly going to find out since Achim and his girlfriend were going there tonight. After a short trip across New Alexandria's night sky, Erik asked the driver to leave him a few blocks away from the club while the system erased every trace of his presence inside the cab.

Like that, he walked toward the building, and as Erik approached the Red Lotus Lounge, he couldn't help but feel a sense of awe mixed with trepidation.

The club was housed in an old, refurbished warehouse that stood imposingly amidst the city's bustling nightlife. Its soft red brick exterior was adorned with a prominent, glowing red lotus flower symbol, serving as a beacon for those seeking excitement and intrigue.

As he approached, the awakener noticed a line of people waiting outside the club. There were men and women of various ages, dressed in a mix of casual and formal attire, all eagerly anticipating entry into the mysterious establishment. Some were chatting animatedly with friends, while others were checking their phones or scanning their surroundings curiously.

There were well-dressed businesspeople, young partygoers, and even some rough-looking individuals who seemed to exude an air of danger.

It was clear that this was a place where people from all walks of life converged, drawn by the allure of the club's reputation and the promise of a thrilling night ahead.

Two hefty bouncers in all-black suits with earpieces and stern expressions stood watch at the club's entrance.

They carefully scrutinized each person in line, occasionally turning someone away with a shake of their heads. Erik could tell that security was tight and that getting past the bouncers unnoticed would be challenging.

The young man took in the atmosphere around him as he waited in line. The air was filled with a palpable sense of anticipation and excitement, punctuated by the distant thump of music that seeped out from inside the club. Neon lights illuminated the dimly lit street, giving the surroundings an otherworldly glow.

A long line of people snaked around the block, all waiting eagerly for their turn to enter the club and join in on the fun. The scent of alcohol and perfume hung heavy in the air, adding to the overall sensory experience.

Erik tried to keep a low profile as he waited, blending in with the crowd and avoiding drawing attention to himself. He knew he couldn't afford to be recognized, as it could jeopardize his mission to find Achim.

He kept his hood pulled up, concealing his features, and carefully observed the bouncers' movements, looking for an opportunity to slip past them unnoticed.

The tension in the air was palpable, and Erik's heart pounded in his chest as he approached the front of the line. He knew that once he crossed the threshold of the Red Lotus Lounge, he would be entering a world of danger and uncertainty.

#### Chapter 295: The Red Lotus Lounge (2)

Erik stood on the sidewalk across from the Red Lotus Lounge, scanning the area with keen eyes. He kept a safe distance, blending into the crowd of pedestrians passing by on the busy street while keeping a vigilant lookout for any sign of Achim.

The imposing bouncers, who diligently checked IDs, guarded the club's entrance and allowed only those on the guest list or with the right connections to enter. Erik knew that trying to get in through the front entrance would be risky, as he was not on the guest list and wanted to avoid drawing attention to himself.

There was a backdoor behind the building, but that was even more guarded, and to enter, he had to fight his way in without the possibility of winning.

He observed the people coming in and out of the club, hoping to catch a glimpse of Achim or his girlfriend. He scanned the faces, looking for familiar features, and listened attentively to any conversations or mentions of names that might give him a clue.

The Red Lotus Lounge was as vibrant and bustling as he had heard. The music pulsed through the walls, and colorful lights illuminated the club's exterior, creating an alluring ambiance.

Erik noticed a mix of people entering the club: young partygoers, well-dressed businesspeople, and even some shady-looking characters that fit the rumors he had heard about the club's association with the criminal underworld.

<Last time, Achim said he would come around 21:00, so he should be here in a couple of minutes.> Erik thought, but there was another pressing matter he needed to solve.

<System, connect to the club's surveillance system, and scan for Achim's face. Based on what he said, Achim should not have been here yet, but better safe than sorry. Besides, give me a map of the place, tell me the number of guards there, and find me an easy escape route.>

[UNDERSTOOD. CONNECTING TO THE SECURITY SYSTEM OF THE RED LOTUS LOUNGE. SCANNING THE BUILDING. NO TRACE OF ACHIM INSIDE. SENDING THE BUILDING'S PLANIMETRY TO THE USER THROUGH THE BRAIN INFORMATION INJECTOR.]

Immediately, a surge of information spread through Erik's mind. It was like he was a computer and had just downloaded some data. Like that, Erik learned every nook and cranny of the building, especially since the biological supercomputer complemented that information thanks to the surveillance system.

He could anticipate the people's movements in the building and knew exactly where to go and what to do in an emergency.

Like that, Erik obtained the number of guards inside the building; there were 15 of them, all armed and in top shape.

<Entering will be relatively easy compared to what I will have to do later, but killing Achim won't be that simple with all those guards. I have an idea, though...> Erik thought.

As he continued to wait, Erik's senses were heightened. He noticed the subtle nuances of the club's patrons: the nervous glances, the hurried whispers, and the occasional exchange of envelopes or small packages. It was clear that there was more to the Red Lotus Lounge than met the eye and that the rumors were probably true.

Time seemed to drag on as Erik patiently observed the club from the outside. He was careful to avoid drawing attention to himself, keeping his movements discreet and blending into the surroundings. He checked his watch, realizing that the time had come, and a couple of minutes later, a limousine landed in front of the club. Memories of her naked figure briefly flashed inside Erik's mind.

The vehicle exuded an air of luxury with its tinted windows and polished exterior. Erik's trained eye noted its manufacturer and model, identifying it as a high-end car preferred by the powerful and wealthy. He watched as the rear door of the limousine opened, and Achim stepped out, followed by his girlfriend.

She was a striking woman, elegantly dressed and carrying herself with poise. She had a demeanor that matched Achim's, exuding confidence and sophistication.

Her boyfriend was dressed in a sharp suit, and his demeanor was confident and commanding and matched the girl's demeanor. He exchanged a few words with the driver, and Erik strained to catch snippets of their conversation.

It seemed like they were discussing some kind of arrangement or plan, but Erik couldn't make out the details. As Achim and his girlfriend entered the building, the awakener knew it was the right time to strike.

<System, keep an eye on Achim through the cameras and always tell me where he is. Keep also the guards under observation.>

The system didn't reply, but the order had been given. Erik surveyed the crowd outside the Red Lotus Lounge, waiting for an opportunity to create a diversion. His keen eyes spotted a group of unruly individuals near the entrance, engaging in boisterous behavior and causing a commotion.

He decided to take advantage of them, pushing a nearby man toward them. The guy ended up making one of the unruly individuals fall to the ground, and it was clear he was pissed.

"Uh? You pushed me?" The man on the ground said.

"No, I-" A sudden, sharp pain in his chest cut off the man on the ground's attempts to speak. Then the man received another punch, but in doing so, he ended up making another person fall since he staggered back.

"Uh? Do you have a death wish, motherfucker?!" this guy said, thinking that it was another guy who pushed him. He quickly punched that man and his friends rushed in to help him.

All of this ignited a brawl that quickly spiraled out of control. Fists flew, and chaos ensued as the scuffle spread, involving more people and drawing the attention of the club's bodyguards.

As the situation grew increasingly chaotic, the bodyguards rushed in to break up the fight, trying to restore order. Erik used the distraction to his advantage, slipping past the flailing bodies and darting into the club, undetected in the confusion.

Inside the Red Lotus Lounge, the atmosphere was electric. The sound of dancing feet interspersed with the music's resounding bass and filled the room. Multi-colored lights danced across the dance floor, casting an otherworldly glow on the revelers as they moved to the beat. The club was packed with people, gyrating to the pulsating music and lost in the rhythm of the night.

The air was thick with the scent of sweat and alcohol, and the energy was powerful.

It was a scene straight out of a movie, and everyone there knew they were experiencing something special. But Erik couldn't care less about the atmosphere. He was on a mission to find his target, and he knew he had to move fast before someone found him.

The dance floor was a sea of bodies, moving in unison or lost in their own individual grooves. Sparkling outfits, dazzling accessories, and extravagant hairstyles adorned the clubgoers, creating a sensory overload of sights and sounds.

The bodyguards, dressed in dark suits and with stern expressions, were strategically positioned throughout the club. They scanned the crowd with sharp eyes, on high alert for any signs of trouble.

Their presence was a constant reminder of the club's association with the criminal organization known as the Mambas, adding an undercurrent of tension to the otherwise vibrant atmosphere.

Bartenders were busy mixing colorful cocktails behind the bar and serving them to eager patrons. The air was heavy with the scent of alcohol and sweat, and the temperature inside the club had risen several degrees from the sheer number of people packed into the space.

Erik moved cautiously through the throng of dancers, mindful of the watchful eyes of the bodyguards. He kept his head down, blending in with the crowd as he discreetly observed the scene behind his mask, searching for Achim and his girlfriend.

<System, give me Achim's position.>

[UNDERSTOOD. THE YOUNG MAN IS IN A VIP ROOM ON YOUR RIGHT. THERE ARE SOME GUARDS OUTSIDE THE ROOM, SO BE MINDFUL.]

<Understood.>

Despite the sensory overload and the loud music, Erik's senses were heightened, and his focus was laser-sharp as he navigated the club. He scanned the different areas, checking the corners and nooks, trying to spot the room where Achim was.

As he moved through the club, Erik couldn't help but feel a sense of unease. The Red Lotus Lounge was a place of revelry and indulgence on the surface. Still, the dark rumors he had heard about its ties to the criminal underworld and the Mambas added a more black undertone to the proceedings.

The fact that many people were having sexual encounters on the various sofas scattered throughout the space and that people of all ages and genders were abusing drugs left and right emphasized that even more.

<What a shitty place,> Erik thought. <No wonder Nathaniel was a prick if he grew up in such places.>

The music continued to blast, the dancing continued unabated, and the bodyguards remained vigilant, casting wary glances around the club. He tried to move toward the VIP room where Achim was, but the bodyguards barred his way. He needed to do something to get rid of or get past them.

### Chapter 296: The Red Lotus Lounge (3)

As Erik stood on a corner, observing the VIP room, he noticed how the two intimidating guards blocking his way were armed and alert. Erik knew that trying to force his way in would be futile and would likely result in Achim and his girlfriend being whisked away to safety.

The young man quickly assessed the situation and ruled out the option of creating a dangerous diversion, as he did to enter the club, knowing that the guards would likely rush inside the room to protect Achim and his girlfriend if he caused a commotion elsewhere in the club. It was clear that the guards were highly trained and wouldn't be easily fooled.

Erik knew that he needed a more subtle approach to gain entry to the VIP room and confront Achim.

He took a step back, his mind racing as he considered his options. He observed the guards closely, noting their movements and patterns.

He noticed that they were vigilant and focused on the entrance of the VIP room, but occasionally, they would glance towards the bar as if checking for any trouble.

This made him think about something: the building's blueprints clearly showed that behind the counter, there was a passage to the kitchen, and from there, there was a corridor leading to many rooms, among which the VIP room where Achim and his girlfriend were located.

This meant that Erik only needed to enter the kitchen, and from there, he should head to the VIP room. The problem was that Erik could clearly see from the cameras that at least two people were in the kitchen, plus at least four other servers were bringing food and drinks to the many rooms.

However, thanks to the system, he should be able to get past them unnoticed.

The only problem was that he needed a plan to sneak inside the kitchen from the bar.

Quickly, he had an idea: Since many people were using their weird brain crystal powers there, using his wasn't a problem at all. Given that a band was currently playing music, the best thing would be to take advantage of the situation.

He quickly headed toward the bar and placed himself near the entrance while channeling his mana into Logan's power. As soon as the dart was ready, he hid behind a barrel and soon threw the dart at the singer. The man on stage was in the midst of his performance.

But as he belted out the chorus of the song, he suddenly faltered. His voice cracked, and he clutched his neck, a look of confusion crossing his face. The stinging pain in his neck intensified, and he tried to shake it off, but it only grew stronger.

The man was confused; he felt the pain in his neck, but there wasn't anything on his skin. Suddenly, he started feeling the foreign mana spread and tried to fight it. However, the man was not that powerful; he probably joined the army for some time, but since he was not that strong and was more interested in music than fighting, he wasn't skilled enough to get rid of it.

The singer's movements became sluggish as the foreign mana spread through his body, and his voice trailed off. He stumbled, lost his balance, and fell to the ground, his limbs going limp. He lost the battle against Erik's mana and started getting paralyzed. The audience gasped, their attention immediately drawn to the singer's plight.

At first, some of the clubgoers assumed it was part of the performance, but soon it became clear that something was wrong. The music came to a sudden halt as the singer's band members rushed to his side, trying to revive him. The crowd murmured with concern, and whispers of confusion rippled through the room, and all the gazes focused on the man.

Amidst the commotion, Erik discreetly slipped away from the scene, blending into the crowd, his presence unnoticed. He knew that the diversion he had created using his mana had effectively drawn the attention of everyone in the club, allowing him to move without raising suspicion.

He quickly went behind the counter while the bartender looked at the singer, unaware that the young man had just entered the door and gone inside the kitchen. He did this at the right moment since he was looking at the kitchen through the cameras, but he had to pay attention now since someone was surely looking at them in the control room.

<System, send a loop video to the control room while I'm here, behind the main room, and after I'm out of the club, delete everything they may have recorded until now.>

[UNDERSTOOD. SENDING LOOP VIDEO.]



With that, Erik was sure he wouldn't be found out quickly. The problem was that the guards could find out about the loops. The best thing to do would be to stop them once he left the room, so things would seem normal. That was what the system was going to do anyway.

Erik found himself in the bustling kitchen of the Red Lotus Lounge, where there was a flurry of activity as chefs and kitchen staff hurriedly prepared meals for the club's patrons. The aroma of exotic spices and sizzling ingredients filled the air, but Erik had no time to be distracted by the culinary delights.

He glanced around the room, quickly spotting the two chefs who stood between him and the corridor that led to the VIP room. The chefs were engrossed in their tasks, chopping vegetables and stirring pots, and their attention was focused on the food in front of them.

Erik knew he had to be careful, as any wrong move could alert the chefs to his presence and jeopardize his mission. He assessed the situation by observing their movement patterns and the kitchen layout. He noticed a narrow gap between the counters that led towards the corridor, but it was a tight squeeze.

Taking a deep breath, Erik stealthily made his way toward the gap, carefully avoiding the bustling staff and hot cooking surfaces. He moved with cat-like agility, keeping his footsteps light and his body low to avoid drawing attention.

As he approached the gap, Erik's heart raced. He knew he had to time his movements perfectly to slip through without being noticed. He waited for a moment when the chefs were preoccupied with their tasks, and the gap was momentarily clear.

With a swift and fluid motion, he slipped through the narrow space as soon as the opportunity came, his body brushing against the counters as he moved. He held his breath, praying that he wouldn't make any noise or bump into anything that would give him away.

The chefs continued their work, seemingly oblivious to Erik's presence as he emerged on the other side of the gap. He had made it through, but his heart was still pounding in his chest. Erik now found himself in the corridor that led toward the VIP room.

The place exuded an air of opulence with its rich golden and red color palette, which evoked a sense of elegance and extravagance. The walls were adorned with ornate wallpaper in deep shades of red, embellished with gilded accents that caught the flickering light from the dim sconces lining the corridor.

The corridor was wide, allowing for a smooth traffic flow, as the staff members needed it to move with haste. The plush carpeting underfoot was a deep crimson red, muffling footsteps and adding to the lavish ambiance of the club.

Along the corridor's length, several doors led to various VIP rooms and offices. These doors were intricately designed with gold trimmings and handles, adding to the overall regal aesthetic of the corridor. Each door had a small, discreet nameplate indicating the room's purpose, but the details of what lay beyond remained a tantalizing mystery for even the workers.

Only Erik knew what lay ahead since he could see inside the room through the biological supercomputer.

The lighting in the corridor was deliberately subdued, with strategically placed golden lamps casting a warm, inviting glow. The walls were adorned with framed artwork featuring abstract and contemporary pieces that added a touch of modernity to the otherwise classic decor.

As one walked down the corridor, they would catch glimpses of the club's inner workings through open doors or partially drawn curtains. The faint hum of conversation, the clinking of glasses, and the distant music melody created a symphony of sounds that added to the club's atmosphere.

Despite the allure of the VIP rooms and offices, the corridor itself was a destination of its own.

Its lavish design, with its golden and red hues, evoked a sense of exclusivity and sophistication, making it a focal point of the club's ambiance despite being accessed only by a few selected people and the workers. It was a place where secrets were whispered, deals were made, and intrigue lurked in every corner, adding to the allure and mystique of the Red Lotus Lounge.

Erik knew he was getting closer to his target but couldn't afford to let his guard down. Through the cameras, he noticed a waiter walking toward the kitchen, so he had to get the hell out of sight soon.

He moved silently, trying not to make any sound that could alert any staff members or security personnel that might be in the adjacent rooms. Quickly, Erik reached a bathroom, which he knew was empty, so he entered and observed the waiter from the security system getting past the door and entering the kitchen with an empty tray.

As soon as the man was out of range, the awakener sneaked his way to the end of the corridor, where he knew the VIP room, in which Achim and his girlfriend were located, was.

As he approached the VIP room door, Erik heard muffled voices coming from inside. He knew that Achim and his girlfriend were in there, and time was of the essence. He needed to act quickly and decisively.

Erik carefully tried to open the door without alerting the two people inside. He slowly pushed the door open, peering into the VIP room. He saw Achim and his girlfriend sitting on a sofa, seemingly unaware of his presence, and sipping champagne. He knew that he had to act quickly before they could react.

#### Chapter 297: The Red Lotus Lounge (4)

As Erik entered the VIP room, his senses heightened, and his focus sharpened. He could hear the faint murmurs of conversation and the tinkling of glasses, but all that mattered to him was his target: Achim.

With his usual mask on, Erik moved swiftly and silently; his flyssa gripped tightly in his hand.

Achim was still sitting with his girlfriend on the sofa in the middle of the room, engrossed in what was clearly more than a conversation. The awakener's heart pounded in his chest as he closed the distance between them, his eyes fixed on his prey.

Erik's grip tightened on his flyssa, and he lunged towards his target, determined to end the man's life once and for all.

But Achim's girlfriend, who was sitting beside him, spotted Erik out of the corner of her eye. Reacting instinctively, she pushed Achim out of the way and shielded him with her body, taking the brunt of Erik's attack. The sword sliced through the air, missing Achim by centimeters but striking the woman instead.

The wound on the woman's body was a deep gash that sliced across her side, just below her ribcage. The crimson blood oozed from the laceration, staining her clothes and pooling on the floor beneath her.

The cut was clean and precise, stretching several centimeters in length, and it was clear that it had struck deep into her flesh, causing significant damage. The blood poured out from it steadily, coloring her once-elegant attire with a dark, sticky stain, and it was evidence of the force behind Erik's attack with the flyssa.

Her breathing was labored, and her complexion had turned pale as shock set in. It was a severe wound, and the woman's face contorted in pain as she clutched at it, trying to stem the bleeding with her hand.

A sense of guilt weighed heavily on Erik as he caught a glimpse of the woman's injuries.

He had never intended to harm her, and the sight of her in pain tugged at his conscience.

Achim stared in horror as his girlfriend collapsed, blood pooling around her.

"ANGELICA!" he shouted, but the sound of his voice was muffled by the music being blasted by the club's speakers.

Erik's eyes widened in surprise, momentarily caught off guard by the unexpected turn of events. He hesitated for a split second, his emotions conflicting with the ruthless mission he had set out to complete.

[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. 76 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

In that momentary pause, Achim seized the opportunity to grab a nearby bottle and swung it at Erik with all his strength while looking at him with a gaze full of hatred. The glass shattered upon impact, sending shards flying toward Erik, who instinctively raised his arm to protect his face.

Blinded by rage, Achim's grief turned into a fiery determination to avenge his girlfriend's death. He grabbed his sword with a white-knuckled grip, his movements wild and uncoordinated as he

launched himself at Erik. The situation slightly took Erik aback, but he quickly regained his composure, knowing that it was his or Achim's life.

"WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU, MOTHERFUCKER?!"

Achim swung his sword wildly, driven by a primal need for retribution. But his strikes were reckless, lacking in precision and finesse. Erik was now a skilled fighter, and he easily parried Achim's blows, countering with calculated strikes of his own.

"WHY DID YOU DO THAT?! WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?!"

The man swung his sword again, but Erik avoided the attacks easily.

"You know damn well who I am, Achim..." Erik replied, and then everything was clear to the young man.

"Ha... haha...hahahahahahahahah. So, you have come, uh? You are the guy Nathaniel wanted dead!"

"Bingo!" Erik replied.

Erik and Achim faced each other in the VIP room; swords were drawn and ready for battle. Erik exuded confidence and skill as he squared off against the older man, just by his assumed stance.

Achim was skilled too, but he was nothing before the training the Red Palace provided to Erik; despite being in the military, he didn't have enough time to hone his skills and wasn't even that interested.

From the first clash of steel, it was clear to Achim that his attacker and his girlfriend's killer had the upper hand. His movements were fluid, and his strikes were precise and calculated. He deftly parried Achim's attacks, easily anticipating his every move. On the other hand, he was clearly struggling to keep up, his swordsmanship lacking finesse and strategy.

Erik's blade danced effortlessly, weaving a deadly dance as he pressed the attack. He struck with precision, aiming for Achim's weaknesses and exploiting them with ruthless efficiency. Achim's

defense crumbled under Erik's onslaught; his sword was constantly forced into defensive positions as he tried desperately to keep him at bay.

Erik's higher experience and skill were evident in every move he made. He sidestepped Achim's swings, countered with swift and calculated strikes, and seamlessly transitioned from defense to offense in an instant. His footwork was flawless, allowing him to control the pace of the battle.

"So, you came here to kill me? Just because I helped Nathaniel find those guys? DAMN, I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO YOU ARE; NATHANIEL DIDN'T SAY IT!" Achim shouted, but the bass from the main room was still pumping and covering his voice.

"It doesn't matter at this point. I can't leave loose ends that could create problems in the long run," Erik replied.

"MOTHER FUCKER!" Achim replied.

He was becoming increasingly frustrated and desperate, and he lunged forward with a reckless attack, leaving himself vulnerable. Erik capitalized on the opening, swiftly disarming his opponent with a well-timed strike. Achim's sword clattered to the ground, and he stumbled backward, gasping for air, sweat pouring down his face.

Achim, realizing his defeat, dropped to his knees, his shoulders slumping in defeat. He looked up at Erik, a mix of frustration and fear in his eyes. "You're too good," he admitted, his voice hoarse with defeat. "I can understand why that psycho, Nathaniel, wanted to kill you so badly..." His eyes were now devoid of any hope.

Erik nodded solemnly, sheathing his sword. "I can't understand it either," he said quietly, raising his sword to deal the finishing blow.

"WAIT! I CAN GIVE YOU MONEY! I'M RICH; I CAN GIVE YOU INFORMATION! WHATEVER YOU WANT, BUT DO NOT KILL ME!"

Erik sighed. "Unfortunately, I can't. You see, I saw the conversations between you and Nathaniel and knew he talked to you about me. Leaving you alive had never been an option."

"How can you be so ruthless?! If what Nathaniel said is true, you should be 15! How can you be so ruthless?!"

"It doesn't matter. I'm just doing what I can to survive. No hard feelings," Erik said with a cold tone. He, too, was accustomed to murder; his past problems and everything he had suffered were what pushed him to become like this. In a sense, it was the whole city's fault.

Erik wasn't an evil person; like everyone, he wanted peace, he wanted love, and he wanted happiness. But due to his situation, to him, it looked like there was always someone trying to get those things away from him, and he was sick and tired of this.

Who told Achim to help Nathaniel? Who told him to be okay with what his and Nathaniel's father did? They brought pain, shame, and fear to many people, which was another reason to get rid of him.

Achim looked at his surroundings and spotted the many cameras.

"Hahahahahahaha, if you kill me, even with that mask, my father's men will find you and will make your life miserable! YOU WILL SUFFER A FATE MUCH WORSE THAN DEATH!" Achim shouted with a slight grin on his face.

"Don't worry, I already took care of the cameras," Erik replied, noticing he was looking at them. Immediately, Achim's smile disappeared from his face.

"NO! PLEASE, NO!"

"Goodbye." At that moment, Erik swung his sword.

Achim winced as he looked down at the slash across his chest, a crimson gash that oozed blood. The wound was deep, the edges precise and elegant, evidence of Erik's swordsmanship. Blood trickled down Achim's tuxedo, staining it a dark shade of red.

The cut started just below his jawline and extended diagonally across his chest. The skin split open, revealing the underlying muscle tissue. However, Erik's strength was so great that he cut Achim's bones like butter, and there was a giant gap that allowed the awakener to see his opponent's innards.

Achim didn't immediately die. The wound throbbed with pain, radiating waves of agony with each breath he took. He pressed a hand to the wound, trying to staunch the bleeding, only to find the hole; the blood seeped through his fingers, warm and sticky.

Achim's breath came in ragged gasps, and he could feel his strength waning. He knew he had been no match for this man's skill and experience in battle, but he was still having problems accepting the situation.

The pain was overwhelming, and he struggled to keep his balance, his vision blurring. As he fell backward, Achim could feel the cold grip of fear creeping up his spine once more.

Blood continued to pour from the wound, staining his hands and the ground beneath him. Achim's eyes met Erik's, and he could see the expressionless eyes behind the mask.

Achim mustered all his left strength and tried to crawl away from Erik. He knew he needed to find help quickly if he wanted to survive. His vision faded, and his arms gave out. All the blood in his body quickly ended, and Achim, unable to scream, talk, curse, or move, lost his life at that moment after his vision was obscured and his heart was full of fear and dread.

[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. 105 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

[QUEST COMPLETE.]

Chapter 298: The Red Lotus Lounge (5)

The VIP room of the Red Lotus Lounge was quiet, except for the faint hum of music coming from the main floor. Erik stood there, his sword in hand, his breath heavy with exertion. His eyes were fixed on Achim's lifeless body lying on the ground, blood staining the plush carpet beneath him.



"Finally, this matter has been settled." Erik sighed. "Now things should go back to norm-"

Just as Erik was about to turn and leave the room, the door creaked open, and a waitress entered with a tray of drinks. Her eyes widened in shock as she took in the scene before her. She uttered a piercing scream and dropped the tray, the drinks spilling onto the floor as she turned to run.

<Fuck...>

Erik's masked face revealed nothing as he watched the woman flee from the room in terror. He knew he had to leave quickly before the authorities arrived.

He had two choices: go to the main door or go back to the kitchen. It didn't take much for him to decide.

If he did the first, he might be forced to fight the guards, but it was also the fastest way to get out of the club; if he did the latter, he would temporarily avoid the guards, but they would be alerted by the staff, and he could also find himself in a situation in which he had to fight the chefs and other people and then the guards too.

"TSK..."

Since that was the situation, he decided to go out of the main room. He quickly rushed toward the door but sheathed his Flyssa; he couldn't risk anyone recognizing the weapon. Then he opened the door and went outside the room.

Erik's heart pounded in his chest as he passed by the guards, his eyes scanning the crowded dancefloor. The guards outside were caught off guard, their eyes widening in surprise as they saw this unknown man rush out of the room.

For a brief moment, the guards hesitated, startled by Erik's sudden appearance. But then their eyes turned to the room, and they saw Achim's and his girlfriend's lifeless bodies sprawled on the floor. Shock and confusion flickered across their faces as they realized what had transpired.

"Stop him!" one of the guards yelled, pointing at Erik, and then talked to someone through his radio. They quickly recovered from their initial surprise and gave chase, pushing through the

dancing throng of people. But Erik was already lost in the sea of bodies, his figure disappearing into the chaotic rhythm of the nightclub.

The dancefloor was a pulsing, writhing mass of bodies, moving in sync with the thumping beats of the music that reverberated through the air. The DJ's energetic mix pumped up the volume, creating an electrifying atmosphere that seemed to vibrate with power.

The multicolored lights cast a kaleidoscope of hues, illuminating the dancefloor and reflecting off the disco ball overhead. The air was filled with the scent of sweat, perfume, and alcohol as the crowd gyrated and grooved to the rhythm, lost in the euphoria of the moment.

It was a spectacle of hedonism, with men and women of various shapes, sizes, and ethnicities wearing revealing outfits that left little to the imagination. Some danced provocatively, their bodies moving sensuously to the music, while others jumped and bounced with wild abandon, their laughter and shouts mingling with the beats.

Bare skin glistened with sweat as bodies moved in close proximity, grinding against each other in a sea of ecstatic movement. Some dancers twirled and spun, their limbs flailing in choreographed chaos, while others engaged in sensual embraces, lost in the moment's passion.

Erik moved through the throng of dancers, his heart pounding with adrenaline as he weaved and dodged, blending into the chaotic rhythm of the dancefloor. He knew he had to leave the building, and this crowd played an essential role in making that happen, as the pulsing energy of the dancefloor and its people provided the perfect cover for the young man.

It was a surreal sight, the music and the dance captivating him for a moment, even in the midst of his mission. But he couldn't afford to stay for long, and with a determined gaze, he pushed on, disappearing from the guards' sight.

The guards pushed past party-goers, trying to catch up to Erik, but he moved with agility, dodging and weaving through the crowd. He used his knowledge of the club's layout to his advantage, always staying a step ahead of his pursuers.

"STOP HIM!" one of the guards shouted. At that moment, someone noticed the VIP room where Achim's lifeless body lay and saw the corpse.

A woman gasped and covered her mouth, her eyes widening in shock. A man let out a startled shout, and others in the group gasped and muttered in disbelief. Panic spread like wildfire, and the once boisterous atmosphere in the room turned into chaos in an instant.

People stumbled back, trying to put distance between themselves and the grim scene before them.

"CALL AN AMBULANCE!" someone shouted, alerting the people close to them. Immediately, rumors started circulating, and soon everyone noticed the body.

Some frantically checked their phones, dialing for emergency services, while others stumbled out of the room, seeking safety in the club's main area. There were even people who recorded the scene or took photos, sure that they would gain notoriety by sharing those pictures on social media.

Some patrons had tears in their eyes; others were trembling with fear, and many were in a state of disbelief. Whispers and murmurs spread throughout the club as people exchanged worried glances and tried to make sense of the situation.

Sensing the change in mood, the DJ lowered the music, and the once-thumping beats now seemed eerily muted. The dancefloor, which had been alive with energy just moments ago, now seemed subdued as people huddled together, sharing their concerns and anxieties.

As Erik made his way through the pulsing dance floor, he could hear the guards' shouts behind him, growing fainter with each step. He knew he had to get out of the club and disappear before they caught up to him. With his heart pounding in his ears, he pushed through the throng of people until he was finally at the entrance door. However, two guards were already there.

"Fuck!" Erik used both his metallization and the mana exoskeleton's powers to defend himself against the attacks he knew he couldn't avoid. He then channeled mana through the neural links connected to Nathaniel's power and generated a surge of power at his feet that gave him a tremendous speed boost.

He was fast, but the guards had good reflexes, and they struck at Erik, meeting the defenses he had just put up but cutting his clothes. However, the guards were at least three levels higher than Erik, so he definitely felt the blow on his body.

"Shit..." he said due to the pain.

However, he was able to get out of the door; the night did not end yet, but he had achieved his goal and was almost done with this whole ordeal.

He finally slipped out into the night air. He glanced back briefly to see some of the guards still searching the club, their expressions filled with confusion and urgency. Unfortunately, the two bouncers were still chasing him, and they were fast.

Erik now only had just a little bit of mana, but he had to do with what he had. He channeled the ethereal substance again, creating energy beneath his feet.

He didn't reach Nathaniel's expertise yet, nor did he have the same amount of mana, so the improvement he was able to get wasn't the same, but even with the meager amount he had, the speed he gained increased several times, giving him the chance to escape. Thanks to that, he managed to lose the bouncers.

Despite having a few more ranks than him, they could not reach him. With a sigh of relief, Erik melted into the shadows, disappearing into the city's darkness, leaving behind the chaos he had caused.

Realizing that their target had slipped through their grasp, the guards turned back to the VIP room to assess the situation.

The music had stopped already; their eyes fell upon Achim's lifeless body, and shock and horror washed over them. What happened was terrible; someone died under their watch—a VIP, nonetheless, one that was linked to important members of their organization. Their heads were probably going to roll.

They quickly called for backup and medical assistance, realizing that the situation had taken a grim turn.

The shock and panic lingered in the air as the reality of the situation sank in. It was a night that would be etched in the memories of those present, forever changing the atmosphere of the Red Lotus Lounge. The incident would leave an indelible mark, and the questions of what happened and why would linger long after the night had ended.

Meanwhile, Erik vanished into the night, knowing he had to head back to the Red Palace as soon as possible, at least for now. He had achieved his mission, but the consequences were far from over.

He was unaware that the night's events had set off a chain reaction that would reverberate through the city.

Erik's attack had been too flashy, and many people had seen his mask. However, the system deleted all the footage of his stay at the nightclub, so at least finding him through some recordings wouldn't be simple.

#### Chapter 299: An unsettling news

Erik, clad in his training gear, made his way through the corridors of the Red Palace. Benedict was with him, and they were both headed toward the cafeteria to have breakfast before the training started. The others were on their way, so they were probably bound to meet them there.

As he arrived at the first-floor cafeteria, Benedict's and Erik's stomachs rumbled with hunger. They quickly sat at a table, and soon a waiter arrived to take their order. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee and the sounds of sizzling pans filled the air, creating an inviting atmosphere. The menu had a wide variety of options, from classic breakfast dishes to more unique creations.

As they perused the menu, their stomachs growled in anticipation of the delicious meal to come.

Erik and Benedict made their choice and requested a hearty breakfast to replenish their energy, and the attendant swiftly prepared their meal with expert precision.

As they savored each bite, they had some small chats. The bustling ambiance of the cafeteria provided a refreshing contrast to the rigorous training halls, and Erik appreciated the opportunity to relax and refuel before the next training session.

However, they couldn't help but overhear a conversation from a group of students sitting at the table next to them as they ate.

"It looks like another dead body has been found," one of the students exclaimed, looking visibly shaken. "It was Natasha's this time. She adds to Karl's one, whom the police found dead a few days ago. It's all over the news."

Erik and Benedict exchanged a glance, recognizing the names as members of the Red Palace as well as former Thornton High School students.

"What happened? Did they say how they died?" another student asked, looking equally shocked.

"I heard they had been killed," another student replied, her voice tinged with anxiousness.

"Karl had been found in an alley while Natasha was on a rooftop; the authorities are investigating, but they have nothing solid on their hands. Though the news of their deaths didn't shock everyone, and some students are already speculating about the possible motives behind the killings. The principal had called for an emergency meeting to address the situation."

Erik and Benedict listened intently, their breakfast momentarily forgotten as they absorbed the news. Natasha and Karl were well-known members of the Red Palace, and their sudden deaths were unexpected and shocking.

"Weren't Natasha and Karl Nathaniel's friends?" Benedict asked. Erik looked at him and then replied, "Indeed, since high school."

He couldn't help but wonder what could have happened to them and why they had met such a tragic fate that didn't make sense.

Why should someone have targeted two Red Palace students? The students at the neighboring table continued to speculate and discuss the news, with various theories and rumors swirling around.

Erik and Benedict exchanged solemn glances, both realizing that the Red Palace would be deeply affected by this event, as two Red Palace students' deaths were no simple matters.

Benedict looked at his friend, his expression mirroring the concern that was etched across his face. "What do you think, Erik? Could this be related to the Crystal Cross gang?" he asked, his voice filled with worry.

Erik furrowed his brows, deep in thought. He had no concrete answers, but a gnawing suspicion began to form in his mind. "I don't know, Benedict," he replied slowly, his voice tinged with uncertainty.

"I doubt they would target them. There was no reason to do so and they even where Nathaniel's friends..." Erik said.

"So?"

"So, Nathaniel was the son of the Mambas' leader, and they are an organization under the Crystal Cross Gang..." Erik replied.

"I didn't know that..." Benedict replied, "Then it could have been something related to Nathaniel?" the man casually asked.

"That would be plausible," Erik said. "I mean, they fought during the last period and stopped being friends, but I doubt someone would kill them for this reason."

<Unless...> Erik thought. <Yeah, unless this is retribution for Nathaniel's death, and they targeted them because they thought they had something to do with his death.> Immediately, the situation became much more serious.

If revenge for his death was the reason, then he was in grave danger once again. <But they do not have proof against me; something must have made these guys think they were responsible.>

Benedict nodded, understanding the gravity of the situation. "Do you think someone may be targeting us too?" he asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

Erik sighed, feeling a weight of responsibility on his shoulders. "I don't think you and Martha should have problems since you rarely involved yourself with them. But the others may be targets. This is all a conjecture, though," he admitted, his mind racing with possibilities. "It's hard to ignore the pattern. It's too weird and coincidental."

As Erik spoke, he couldn't help but recall the recent events and incidents that had been happening around the city. The deaths, the increasing tension inside New Alexandria, and the rumors swirling about. It was all too unsettling to ignore.

<I need to find out the truth,> Erik thought, his resolve hardening. <I can't let this go unanswered. Especially if this will be dangerous to Amber and the others.>

"Let's go ask them some questions," Erik said, pointing at the talking students. Benedict nodded in agreement, showing his support.

The awakener couldn't shake off the feeling that, somehow, he was connected to it all, and he was determined to find out why.

The two students approached the group, which was discussing the recent deaths of Natasha and Karl. They looked up at them with a mix of curiosity and apprehension, knowing that Erik and Benedict were known for their skills in martial arts and that their rank was very high, especially Erik's.

"Hey, have you guys heard anything more about what happened to Natasha and Karl?" Erik asked, trying to keep his voice steady despite the growing unease inside him.

One of the students, a young man named Mark, nodded solemnly. "Yeah, we were talking about it, and it's been all over the news," he said, his tone somber. He didn't know what Erik had heard about their conversation, so he told him again what he knew. "They were both found dead, probably assassinated. The police are investigating, but people are already blaming the underworld.

It is not that uncommon after all."

Benedict furrowed his brows, and his jaw clenched. "Do you know if they had any enemies inside the Red Palace or if there was any indication of who might have done this?" he asked, his voice filled with concern.

The students shook their heads, exchanging worried glances. "No, nothing like that," replied one of the girls, Sarah. The girl was average-looking, with a simple charm that drew people to her. The girl's complexion had a warm, medium-brown tone that complemented her features. Her eyes were kind and expressive, with a gentle sparkle that reflected her inner warmth.

While her nose was unassuming, and her lips were of moderate fullness, they often curved into a sweet, friendly smile. She had dark, wavy hair reaching down to her shoulders. It had a natural bounce and volume, which she often left down in a casual style.

"Natasha and Karl tended to be on their own and didn't interact with people often; they didn't seem to have had any enemies despite mingling with Nathaniel. It's all so sudden and shocking."

Erik's mind raced with possibilities, but he kept his thoughts to himself. However, this indicated that someone from the outside had killed them, which was far more problematic than someone from the Red Palace itself doing it.



If Erik had to deal with some first-year Red Palace student, he might be able to do it, but if they were trained adults, or some assassin part of one of the many gangs around the city, then things would be much more complicated. The more he pondered about this matter, the more he thought he was connected to it.

"How were they killed?" Erik asked firmly. The girl, Sarah, was taken aback by the question; it was too direct, and since the scene was gruesome, she didn't really want to talk about it that much.

"Whoever killed them used a blade, apparently the same kind of blade, further suggesting that this has been the work of some organized groups. The problem is, who would target some Red Palace students?" Sarah asked.

"Yeah, I agree, and I would like to know exactly that. It doesn't make sense to target someone here, as the students here are usually the sons and daughters of important people," Erik replied.

Sarah, who was apparently the most knowledgeable of the bunch, looked at Erik with a contemplative look. "Yeah. I must also add that there weren't any other bodies on the crime scenes, but multiple blood traces were around, especially in Natasha's case. This made the police believe that, at least in her case, she was assaulted by multiple people," Sarah added.

At that moment, Amber, Martha, Aaron, Mikey, Anderson, Gwen, Floyd, and the others arrived at the cafeteria. They scanned the room, searching for their friends, and immediately noticed them talking to some guys with serious expressions on their faces. They wasted no time and immediately walked toward them. Amber was the first to speak up.

"Hey, what's going on?" she asked, her usually confident smile faltering as she looked at Erik and Benedict.

Erik and Benedict exchanged a nervous glance before Erik finally spoke up, "We have some bad news to share." Erik replied, "Karl and Natasha died."

Chapter 300: It was because of that...?

Erik's footsteps echoed through the corridors of the Red Palace. As he walked, he couldn't shake off the unease that had settled in his gut since he learned about Karl's and Natasha's deaths; there was something weird about the matter.

The post-training journey to his room seemed longer than usual as his mind raced with thoughts of the possible assassins who could have been responsible for Nathaniel's demise.

He considered the Crystal Cross Gang, the Mambas, some random thug on the street, or someone specifically targeting them. The list of potential suspects was long, to be honest, but what was more mysterious was the reason why this happened, and Erik's mind spun with theories and suspicions.

Finally, Erik reached his room, a modest yet comfortable space that served as his sanctuary within the Red Palace. He entered and closed the door behind him, taking a deep breath as he let his guard down, at least momentarily.

He approached the large window that overlooked the city, and his eyes were drawn to the sprawling skyline of New Alexandria, with its shimmering lights and towering skyscrapers.

As he gazed out at the city, Erik couldn't help but feel a sense of discomfort and anxiety; despite the heavy weight on his shoulders having been recently lifted with Hais's and Achim's deaths, what was happening now gave him many things to think about.

With a sigh, Erik went to his room, sat at his desk, and powered up his smartphone, connecting to the internet to search for news about Nathaniel's two friends' deaths. His fingers flew across the virtual keyboard, scouring the latest reports and articles, trying to piece together the puzzle of what had happened.

Apparently, what Sarah and the other students told him was a lot. Natasha had indeed been found on top of a rooftop, while Karl had been found in an alley, but apparently, even in that case, the young man tried to escape by climbing some buildings, as there were many traces over some of them. Karl probably took advantage of his brain crystal power and climbed the buildings easily.

However, if the assassins killed him, that meant that they were skilled enough to reach Karl despite him having a natural advantage.

In Natasha's case, some poison had been found around in small pools, which meant that she tried to fight back. She had many wounds, meaning that she put up a strenuous defense that was, though, futile.

Erik's mind raced with possibilities as he delved deeper into his search. Was it a personal vendetta? He sifted through the information, analyzing every detail and cross-referencing it with his own knowledge of the city's power dynamics.

The more he dug, the more he realized that the situation was harder than he had initially thought. Clues and leads seemed to point in different directions, and nothing was certain. However, four things stood out in his mind. The first was that the two victims were both Nathaniel's friends.

Secondly, they had a disagreement with him; third and fourth, they were members of the Red Palace and top students at Thornton High School.

Erik kept scanning the internet, searching for information about their deaths. His heart was heavy with a sense of foreboding, and his mind was filled with questions. Why were they killed? Were they targeted because of their association with the Red Palace? Was it a random act of violence?

<I don't get it...> Erik thought. This situation was confusing.

The awakener quickly scanned through the articles. He didn't really like Karl and Natasha and wasn't sorry for their deaths, but he had seen them around the Red Palace and at school.

<System, can you enter the police's servers and download all the data you have about their deaths?> Erik asked.

[OF COURSE. CONNECTING TO THE INTERNET. SEARCHING FOR THE DATA. DATA FOUND. DOWNLOADING RESOURCES.]

After a few moments, Erik gained access to the police servers. He quickly located the files related to Karl and Natasha's deaths, thanks to the system's help, and downloaded the reports, statements, and photos of the crime scenes to his smartphone in an untraceable way. His heart raced as he opened the files, eager to uncover any additional information that might shed light on the mystery.

The reports were detailed, documenting the circumstances of Karl and Natasha's deaths. They were found in different alleys, both with fatal injuries consistent with a brutal assault. The crime scenes were gruesome, with bloodstains and signs of struggle evident in the photos.

He delved further into the reports, scanning through the statements from the investigators. Some details were redacted, likely due to the sensitive nature of the case. However, Erik pieced together that the police were puzzled by the lack of evidence or clear motives behind the killings. Though, it was clear to them that this was a gang-related crime.

Erik leaned back in his chair. A thought crossed his mind. <What if...>

<System, exactly as you did with the police server, can you do it with security systems? I mean, working remotely.>

[I'M ABLE, BUT THE LINK DEPENDS ON THEIR CONNECTION TO INTERNET SERVICES.]

<Good, then find me Nathaniel McConnel's house and find where his father is. If he is not home, connect to Achim's house and find his father.>

[UNDERSTOOD. CONNECTING TO THE INTERNET. SEARCHING FOR INFORMATION ABOUT NATHANIEL MCCONNEL. RED PALACE'S DATABASE HACKED. INFORMATION RETRIEVED. CONNECTING TO NATHANIEL MCCONNEL'S HOUSE SECURITY SYSTEM.

10 PEOPLE PRESENT IN THE HOUSE. MATTHEW MCCONNEL FOUND. SENDING AUDIO-VIDEO SIGNAL TO THE BRAIN.]

The awakener hoped that what he thought wasn't true and that it was all in his imagination. However, he couldn't ignore this thought. Everything was too coincidental. The crime scenes, the targets, and their connections—their relationships with Nathaniel were the most unsettling aspects. What if they died because of what he had done?

Erik quickly got an image of a man he assumed was Nathaniel's father. Matthew was a burly man, standing 185 centimeters tall and weighing over 100 kilograms. His imposing frame was built with bulging muscles that strained against his clothing.

He had a shaved head, revealing a rugged face with a chiseled jawline and a prominent brow ridge. His thick, dark eyebrows, which continuously furrowed in intensity, framed his piercing brown eyes.

His skin was tanned and marred with a few scars, evidence of past battles and confrontations. Matthew's large hands were calloused from years of physical exertion, and his broad shoulders were often squared with an air of authority. His overall appearance exuded a menacing aura, as if he were always on the brink of unleashing his inner rage.

At that moment, a man cautiously entered his study.

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Simone entered Matthew's study, and the lush carpet muffled his footsteps. Matthew was seated at his massive oak desk, his hands gripping the edges tightly. His face was flushed with anger, and his eyes wild and restless. Simone, a loyal underling of Matthew's, knew better than to approach him without caution.

"I'm here, boss," Simone said, keeping his tone respectful but also wary of Matthew's volatile state.

Matthew's gaze snapped up to meet Simone's, his eyes burning with intensity.

"Is there any news about the task I gave you?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, we killed two targets already. Karl Moran and Natasha Pope. We found out they were Nathaniel's friends in the past, but they went their separate ways after some furious fights."

Matthew looked Simone in the eyes. He knew Karl and Natasha, but he didn't know if they were the ones who killed his son; for sure, they had the reasons.

"Good, and for the others?"

"Well, things are a little bit more complicated now since we killed the previous two targets. Now we are using an alternative way to deal with the rest of them," Simone replied.

"I want this done as soon as possible. If they go to military school, things will get a lot more complicated. I don't think you are aware of this, but usually, the students are forced to stay at the military base for the whole year without leaving. Of course, wealthy people have ways to avoid that, but the commoners don't."

"Don't worry, sir; we already took things into our hands," Simone replied.

"How so?" the man asked with curiosity.

"We are currently kidnapping parents and family members of the students in question," he replied cautiously.

Matthew raised an eyebrow, pleasantly surprised by Simone's idea. "That's a wonderful idea. How are you going to proceed then?"

"We will tell them to go to a specific place without alerting anyone. If they do, their family will die."

"Did problems arise until now?" Matthew asked.

"Yes, some of the students are the children of rich or important people. As much as we tried, we couldn't kidnap Amber Joyce's family members, nor Gwen Lindsay's or Floyd Valdez's. However, we kidnapped some family members from the Montgomery and the Zamora clans. I must ask you, though: are you sure you want to proceed? These people must not be trifled with," Simone asked.

"Yes," Matthew said. We are as powerful as they are, and we have nothing to fear. He said this, slamming his fist on the desk.

Simone nodded, understanding the depth of Matthew's rage. "Understood, sir."

Matthew's eyes blazed with a maniacal glint. "It's necessary to make them suffer, to show them that they're not immune to pain and suffering. They need to learn that their actions have consequences and that trifling with me is like trifling with death."

Simone swallowed, trying to keep his composure in the face of Matthew's explosive fury. "Very well, sir. Things will end shortly; you will have news from me soon."

Matthew nodded, his expression still twisted in anger. "Good. Make sure it's done discreetly. I want those students to feel the fear and anguish I felt when I was in their shoes."

Simone bowed his head, acknowledging Matthew's orders. "Yes, sir."

With that, Simone turned to leave the room, leaving Matthew alone with his dark thoughts. As the door closed behind Simone, Matthew's maniacal grin spread across his face, a chilling sight that

sent shivers down Simone's spine. The man knew he had to carry out Matthew's orders, but he couldn't help but feel a sense of unease.

His boss's rage had taken on a disturbingly unhinged quality, and he wondered just how far the man was willing to go to exact his revenge on those he perceived as his enemies.

At the same time, Erik observed the scene horrified.

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<New quest: Stop Matthew>

-Rewards for completion: 5000 experience points for rescuing the hostages; 2000 DNA points if the mission gets completed.

-Failure Penalty: Unknown.

-Description: Matthew is planning to kill the students. Foil his plan by rescuing the hostages.