

BIOLOGICAL 311

Chapter 311: The Red Lotus Lounge (6)

"So, is my son going to fight?" Anderson's father asked.

"Indeed, so there is no time to lose," Erik replied.

Before coming to the Red Lotus Lounge, he had the idea of asking the parents to fight to save the others; of course, he mostly cared about Anderson and Mikey.

The problem was that, of the 21 people who got kidnapped, only fifteen were able to fight since four were kids and two were elderly people.

Erik approached Anderson's father and Mikey's mother, who had been sitting in the corner of the room together since they knew each other. They looked worried, but there was a slight tint of determination in their eyes, which was a positive sign.

"Mikey is there too," Erik suddenly said.

Anderson's father and Mikey's mother exchanged a look of concern, but then Mikey's mother spoke up.

"We can't just sit here and wait," she said to Anderson's father, her voice firm. "If there's a chance to save our children, we must take it."

<Bingo!> Erik thought that was precisely what they needed; the problem was that they needed more than two people to solve this situation. He quickly looked at the others but saw the two parents' same determined look.

Anderson's father nodded in agreement. "I may have left the army years ago, but I'll do whatever it takes to save my son," he said. Erik smiled.

"That's the spirit," he said.

"But we have to be careful. We can't just charge in there and hope for the best. There are 41 people in the other room, including Matthew. It's going to be a difficult fight, but we have to try to save them."

Mikey's mother looked at the man intently. "What do you suggest we do?" she asked Anderson's father, Carl.

The man leaned in closer. "I think we should try to mess up this place so that regardless of the situation, we will all be forced to get out of the building sooner or later. Mambas included," he said. "That way, we can also catch them off guard and attack them by surprise."

Erik looked thoughtful. "I have an idea," he said. "There's a storage room nearby that's full of flammable materials. If we can ignite it, it should create a diversion that will give us the opportunity we need."

Mikey's mother nodded in agreement. "That's a good plan, young man," she said. She then looked at the awakener with a suspicious look.

"How come you look so calm despite the situation?" she asked.

"I didn't have a simple life," the young man replied. That didn't really convince the woman, who turned to look at Carl.

"Whatever," the older man said, "the idea is a good one so that we could try."

"Erik!" Gwen said. "Are you sure about this? Setting the building on fire could create more problems. Besides, we can't do much with only two people helping."

"Agreed," Floyd said. "We need the other people's help."

Then they all turned to look at the other hostages. There were a couple of people from influential clans and families, such as the Silverbend clan, in the figure of Adam's older brother.

There was a member of the Zamora Clan, Luisa's mother, and many others.

Erik and Anderson's father approached the group of hostages, who were all former military members or were part of powerful families. They stood up straight at the sight of the two men, ready to take on any challenge.

Carl took charge, saying, "We need your expertise to help us rescue our children. There are 41 of them in the other room, including the leader, Matthew, as the kid just said.

We need to take them by surprise and overpower them. We can't do this alone, but with your help, we can make this happen."

Erik added, "Our friends, your sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters need us. Will you join us?"

Their speech was convincing, but it wasn't like the parents needed much persuasion to agree to help their kids.

Without hesitation, Luisa's mother stepped forward and said, "I'm in. We know how to work together as a team thanks to our training and won't let these criminals get the best of us."

Adam's brother said, "I'll join too. We were trained to handle high-pressure situations. Let's get our family out of there."

One by one, more and more of the hostages offered their help, each exuding confidence and determination.

"All right, I guess you all heard the plan," Erik said.

The others nodded in agreement, ready to put their skills to use. They knew that the situation was dangerous, but they also knew they had the experience and training to handle it.

Amber and Martha thanked them all for their willingness to help. They felt more assured and ready to rescue their friends, knowing they had a team of skilled individuals backing them up.

"But there are some kids and elderly people here. It is clear they can't fight with us," Mikey's mother said.

"Indeed," Carl added. "Let the elderly take care of the children and call the police," he said.

"Yes, Floyd will escort them out and come back here. Will you, Floyd?" Erik asked.

"You can count on me, bro!" the young man replied. He didn't waste time and immediately led the six people out of the building.

There were no more guards around, so the place was relatively safe, but he still kept his guard up since the men in the other room could always hear them.

He also gave his phone to them, and as soon as they were out, an elderly woman called the police. Floyd came back inside.

In the meantime, Erik stood up and gestured for the others to follow him. "I know the way," he said. "I'll lead you to the warehouse and keep watch while you two set the fire," he said to Carl and Mikey's mother.

As they made their way through the corridors, Carl and Mikey's mother kept a lookout for any guards or obstacles in their way. When they reached the storage room, they quickly set to work, piling up boxes and dousing them with other flammables they had taken from the kitchen.

Erik stood watch at the door as they worked, scanning the hallway for any sign of danger. He heard footsteps approaching and tensed, ready for a fight. But it was only Amber and Gwen who had come to see if they were all right.

"We have to hurry," Erik said, gesturing to the boxes. "We're about to ignite the boxes. This will give us the chance we need and will create enough chaos."

Carl and Mikey's mother finished setting the fire, and they all rushed back towards the other room, where the other hostages were held.

As the fire started to spread inside the small room, the air filled with smoke and heat. The flames licked the walls and ceiling, devouring everything in their path.

The sound of crackling wood and burning furniture echoed off the walls as the fire grew stronger and more intense.

The room was quickly engulfed in flames, and the heat became unbearable. The air was thick with smoke, making it hard to breathe. The flames licked at the curtains, which soon burst into flames, sending sparks flying across the room.

The fire quickly spread to the couch and chairs, and they were soon engulfed in flames, sending embers flying everywhere. The red carpet got on fire, the wooden floorboard beneath creaked and groaned under the intense heat, and the flames seemed to be getting closer and closer to the door.

"All right, everything has been done," Erik said. "Are you ready?"

"We are as ready as we can be." Mikey's mother said, and that was true.

The problem was that, aside from the students, no one in the room had weapons, meaning that they only had to fight with their brain crystal powers and fists.

That wasn't a problem for people from the Montgomery, Zamora, or Silverbend clans, but it wasn't true for the others, who had varied powers that weren't all that effective in battle.

The hostages' faces were a picture of determination as they exited the room to help rescue their family. Their eyes were focused, their jaws set, and their shoulders squared, displaying an unwavering resolve.

Their facial expressions were intense as if they were mentally preparing themselves for the battle ahead. There was a sense of urgency in their actions as they quickly began to gather any tools or weapons they could find.

Their body language showed they were ready to take on anything that stood in their way with a fierce determination that seemed to radiate from within. It was their primal instinct to protect their kin from danger.

Some of them tightened their grip on some knives they had taken from the kitchen, while others checked their surroundings to ensure no one would take them by surprise.

They were ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead with a determination that was fueled by a deep love for their children, brothers, and sisters and a fierce sense of duty and that would not be extinguished until their family was safe in their arms again.

Chapter 312: The Red Lotus Lounge (7)

Caiden was currently sitting in his office. He had just received a call from Amber, stating that she needed his help to rescue some people who had been kidnapped.

His daughter hadn't explained the situation exactly, but he suspected this was related to the attack he had received earlier.

His men told him they were probably Mambas' members, and he wondered how the hell they got so bold as actually to try to kidnap him.

The problem was that knowing his daughter, he was sure she was probably going to the Red Lotus Lounge to try and save those people, but that would be an idiotic move.

The best thing would be to wait for help. Still, her strength, her inexperience, and probably Erik Romano would definitely push her to do something stupid, like actually trying to rescue the hostages.

The problem was that Caiden was not aware that the thugs gave the students a time limit and that if they didn't go to the Red Lotus Lounge, they would kill all the students' parents.

Caiden picked up his phone and dialed a number. His voice was low and dangerous as he spoke.

"Bob, Listen carefully," he said. "I need you to gather a squad of our best men and prepare them to move out. We're going to the Red Lotus Lounge."

There was a pause on the other end of the line, and Caiden could almost hear the gears turning in the other person's head. He knew what he was thinking.

The Red Lotus Lounge was not a place you went into lightly.

A ruthless gang ran it and didn't take kindly to outsiders interfering with their business.

"Sir, are you sure about this? Isn't this a blatant war declaration to Matthew McConnel?"

Caiden gritted his teeth. "My daughter is probably in there, and I'll be damned if I let her be held captive or killed by those bastards. I want her out of there, and I want her out now."

He could hear the man on the other end of the line sighing, but he knew that his words were absolute for this man. Caiden then explained the situation based on what Amber had told him.

"I'm putting you in charge of this operation," Caiden said firmly.

"I want you to be ready as soon as you can. We don't have much time."

"Do you want me to call the clans?" the man asked his employer.

"Yes, they won't stay idle if their kin gets kidnapped," Caiden added.

"Sir, regarding the time needed, most of our men are outside the city, and it will take them at least an hour to be here."

"Can't you do it faster?" Caiden asked.

"No, sir, unfortunately, this is the situation."

"Nevermind, just be sure you gather them as fast as possible. Let me know when you are ready."

"Yes, sir."

With that, Caiden hung up the phone and leaned back in his chair, letting out a long breath.

He knew that his daughter's survival depended on how fast the squad arrived, and knowing it would have taken them an hour was scary. The problem was that there was nothing he could do.

His mind was already thinking about what he would do once his daughter was safely home.

His daughter had to expect consequences for her actions, but at this moment, he didn't care what she did. All he wanted was for her to be safe and out of harm's way, and he was hoping she did nothing stupid.

As he waited for news from his men, Caiden paced the length of his office. He couldn't shake the feeling of helplessness that had been gnawing at him since he had tried to contact his daughter, only for her not to have answered his phone calls.

In the meantime, at the Red Lotus Lounge, Anderson was still trying to stall for time. However, he didn't have anything to say to Matthew anymore.

From what he saw, the man was on the verge of having a mental breakdown. It was understandable since his son died; however, it was clear that they had nothing to do with it, and wanting to kill them all was just stupid.

Matthew's eyes flickered with anger, and his fists were clenched so tightly that his knuckles were white.

Anderson stood across from Matthew, his heart pounding in his chest. The man's face was cold and emotionless, and Anderson knew he was in deep trouble.

Matthew had made it clear that he wanted to kill Anderson and the other students, and he was just wasting time to get a better taste of the sweet revenge he was going to get in a couple of moments.

"So, Anderson," Matthew said, his voice dripping with contempt.

"I will give you one chance, only one, to get out of this mess. I want you to tell me who killed Nathaniel."

Anderson swallowed hard and, keeping his voice steady, said, "No one of us killed Nathaniel. Thaidis killed him! We know nothing about it aside from this!"

The young man could see the tension in Matthew's body as he leaned forward, his voice low and menacing. He seemed almost like a crazy psycho, ready to lash out at any moment.

Matthew sneered. "Do you really expect me to believe that? My son wasn't perfect, but thaid's? Come on. I already told you once that he would never have gotten killed by such mindless beasts. It's clear that your little group targeted him."

Anderson shook his head, feeling his anger rise. "What group are you even talking about? I will tell you this one more time. We had nothing to do with Nathaniel's death!" he said.

The more Anderson spoke, the more Matthew could feel his anger rising up. It was as if the young man was trying to provoke him at this point. He found it idiotic since he was only making the situation worse.

Matthew's eyes narrowed. "ENOUGH WITH YOUR LIES!" he spat. "DO YOU REALLY THINK I WILL BELIEVE THAT? You and your little group of friends were the last ones to see him alive. I don't know why you did that, but you will pay!" Then Matthew placed a hand on his face and laughed bitterly.

"HAHAHAHHA. You and your little friends are all the same. You think you can do whatever you want, without any consequences, just because of your parents, and you are so talented as to be admitted to the Red Palace."

Anderson felt a surge of frustration. He knew that Matthew was looking for any excuse to justify his bloodlust, and Nathaniel's death was all the excuse he needed.

But Anderson and the other students had done nothing wrong. He would be furious right now if he knew that Matthew was accurate and that Erik had indeed killed Nathaniel.

"So, are you really willing to go against our families just because of your petty little revenge?"

Anderson tried to keep his cool and stay calm in the face of Matthew's aggression. But it was difficult, especially when the man started playing with the blade on his side.

Matthew laughed bitterly. "Your families are not much stronger than my organization. I have many people around the city; the ones you see here are just a fraction of them. I have the power to do whatever I want, and I will not let your little group of misfits go without punishment."

Anderson felt his jaw clench. Matthew was beyond reasoning at that point.

The only thing that kept them alive was his insanity; he could see it in the eyes of his men, who were starting to have enough of this chat and only wanted to kill them all and go home.

"We will not be intimidated," Anderson said firmly.

Matthew stood up; his face contorted with rage. "You are a fool, Mr. Worthington. Nothing will remain of you after I am done with you!"

Anderson stood up as well, feeling his muscles tense. "Let me see that then," he said, his voice rising.

At that moment, everyone placed their hands on their weapons, students included. The air inside the Red Lotus Lounge was thick with tension.

Anderson and his fellow Red Palace students stood shoulder to shoulder, facing off against Matthew and his men.

The two groups had been talking for what felt like an eternity, despite only five minutes having gone by.

Anderson could feel his heart pounding in his chest as he looked around at the scene before him. The men unsheathed their weapons and were ready to engage.

Matthew had a wild look in his eyes. Anderson could tell that the man was going to give the order, which made him nervous.

He didn't know what Matthew was capable of, but he knew he would do anything to get what he wanted.

On Anderson's right side, Mikey was standing with his arms crossed and a determined expression on his face. However, Anderson knew he was just as scared as he was but was doing his best to hide it.

The other students weren't in the same situation, though; to save their parents, they were willing to fight.

Matthew glared at Anderson for a moment longer. "Ah! The words of a dead man bear no weight. Kill 'em all!" Matthew ordered.

However, at that moment, the door behind Matthew burst open, with his father and Erik at the forefront.

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Erik and the others moved with precision and speed, their footsteps barely making a sound as they crept toward the door behind Matthew and his men.

They did what they could to prepare for the rescue, but not much could have been done due to the situation.

Erik nodded to Anderson's father as they reached the door, who kicked it open with a loud bang. The sudden noise startled Matthew and his men, causing them to turn around in surprise.

The Red Palace students, who were standing in front of the crowds of men and women employed by Matthew, were equally surprised to see Erik and the others burst into the room.

Their eyes widened in shock as they realized that the awakener had managed to save their family and was now here to rescue them as promised, and with reinforcements too.

Erik and the others flooded into the room, weapons at the ready. They moved well-coordinatedly, attacking Matthew and his men from all sides. It wasn't easy for the students, and they mostly had some support roles, but they held up well.

The room erupted into chaos as the two sides clashed, with the sound of blades clashing and screams echoing throughout the space.

Anderson and Mikey knew Erik was brewing something, but since he and the others had been away for a lengthy time, in their opinion, they thought the mission failed and resigned to their fate.

However, suddenly they found themselves caught up in a fight as their rescuers battled fiercely to save them.

Despite being weaker than their opponents, Erik and his team fought with a ferocity that left Matthew and his men reeling.

The hostages, who he was sure were still sleeping in the adjacent room, suddenly attacked them from behind and even managed to kill some of their men. That was not good.

"Call for reinforcements!" Matthew shouted. He thought the people he had would be enough to handle a bunch of students, despite them going to the Red Palace, but he didn't expect to face fully-trained adults.

The room was now a blur of bodies, with punches and kicks flying in every direction, powers being unleashed, and weapons being handled.

Anderson quickly approached Erik, saying, "I've never been more glad to see you than I am now!"

"Less talk, more fight!" Erik said he was avoiding a thug's attack.

The other students quickly joined the fray, fighting fiercely to defend themselves and their friends.

Erik swung his Flyssa with scary precision and speed, leaving the students who didn't know him amazed, but even that wasn't enough to kill his opponent.

However, the real fighter was Carl, who was battling against five people at once while Erik and the others supported him.

At the same time, Amber moved quickly and smoothly, inflicting minor wounds on their opponents as they got distracted by the adults. Benedict did the same, but due to his weapon, amana halberd, he only managed to keep some thugs at bay, preventing them from killing fellow students.

Anderson's father and Mikey's mother fought side by side, facing ten people at once.

Carl had a power similar to Anderson's but much weaker; he could generate small explosions from his hands, which were strong enough to blow a person's head off.

Mikey's mother, instead, could also generate bugs, and she unleashed them along the battlefield, together with her son's, and they wreaked havoc.

Mikey's were not strong enough to seriously damage their opponents, but they were a lot annoying and chipped at the thugs by constantly biting them. Instead, his mother was a beast, and the only ones comparable to her were those from the Zamora, Silverbend, and Montgomery clans.

However, Erik's attention was suddenly diverted from the group of thugs attacking Carl to a woman wielding a sword capable of creating small gusts of wind, charging toward him with a murderous look on her face.

Erik quickly drew his sword and braced himself for the attack. He quickly analyzed the woman and discovered that she had at least twenty more strength points than him. So she was faster and stronger, but Nathaniel's cheat-like power was going to even the field a lot.

Of course, he didn't have enough mana to use the power to attack or defend as Nathaniel did, but only to increase his speed and to help him generate more strength. If he had more mana, he could even win.

The problem was that he had to be subtle in its usage, and he hoped that, thanks to the chaos, the others wouldn't notice he was using another power.

For sure, due to the massive amount of mana fluctuating in the air due to the fight, it was impossible to discern his mana from the others, but the risk remained.

The young man quickly channeled mana into his neural links. The woman, Mia, approached, swinging her sword with great force, but Erik increased the strength of his sword by generating a forced blow, which helped him resist the attack, and he managed to parry it with his own blade.

The clash of steel echoed throughout the room, leaving the woman greatly surprised.

Mia was fast and agile, but Erik held his ground thanks to Nathaniel's power. He blocked her attacks with precise movements, countered with his own strikes, as his teacher taught him, and pushed her back toward the wall.

Mia created a small gust of wind, trying to knock Erik off balance, but he held firm and continued to press forward.

As they continued to exchange blows, it became clear to the young man that this would be a hard battle, one he couldn't win. His job was to simply stall for time so that someone could kill her.

Erik saw an opening and lunged forward with his sword, but Mia quickly reacted, sidestepping his attack and almost slashing at his back. However, as the awakener understood her intention, he used Nathaniel's power to get a momentaneous burst of speed, but it was too much, and he ended up stumbling forward. However, he regained his footing and turned around to face her again.

"You are not bad," the woman said, clearly seeing that her opponent's technique and skills were far superior to hers. Erik didn't reply, and he ignored the woman.

Engaging in conversation during a life-or-death situation was useless, and he was not as invested as when he killed Nathaniel or Logan. However, as the awakener engaged in combat with the woman, Mia, he quickly realized that her power to create small gusts of wind was very annoying.

She used her power to knock him off balance several times, and if it wasn't for Nathaniel's power, he would have been dead by now. He quickly understood that thanks to that power and the system, he was able to face an average NI-ranked fighter without problems.

He was still at RHO rank officially, but his power greatly exceeded that of his rank.

However, Erik had been in enough fights to know that overestimating his own abilities was dangerous. Meanwhile, Anderson was facing a man named Kevin, who had summoned a spear made of mana.

The weapon glowed with otherworldly energy and seemed to have a life of its own.

Anderson was clearly at a disadvantage despite this being a rather common brain crystal power. He was stronger than his peers but not enough to fight against such people. However, he didn't let himself be intimidated by the man's power and used his flawless technique to resist his opponent.

It wasn't simple, and his concentration spiked, but he managed to avoid being fatally hit by receiving his friends' help here and there. There wasn't much else he could do, though.

At a certain point, Anderson was lucky enough to disarm Kevin with a well-placed maneuver, but that was hardly effective since the man used his power again to summon the spear.

"Whoa, I can totally see why you were able to enter the Red Palace. You are basically only running away, but being able to face me at your current level is very impressive!" Kevin, the thug, said, and then he charged toward Anderson.

The young man braced himself and prepared for the impact. Just as Kevin was about to strike, Aaron used his slime power, forcing the thug to stop his attack.

"Hahahahaha, you are as annoying as a fly!" he said, looking at Aaron.

Anderson's father, Carl, had always been a man of few words. He was a former military officer and had been trained to handle challenging situations.

When he learned his son was going to be killed because he had been taken captive by these thugs, he knew he had to act quickly.

As soon as they all entered the room, without hesitation, Carl charged at one of the thugs. The man, caught off guard, tried to defend himself, but Carl's military training kicked in with an acrobatic move and swift punch to his abdomen; using his power, he made his torso explode.

BOOOOM

The thug fell to the ground, lifeless. He didn't even have the chance to look Carl in the eyes as he died immediately. Soon after, Anderson's father quickly grabbed the thug's weapon, a rusty old machete, and looked around to find his next target.

Another thug rushed at him, brandishing a baton. Carl expertly parried the attack and delivered a powerful blow to the thug's head with the butt of his newly acquired weapon.

The man could feel the adrenaline coursing through his veins as he fought his way through the thugs.

He could see his son, Anderson, and the other students fighting alongside him. He felt proud of their bravery and determination but was scared since he saw that his son was having trouble against the man with the spear.

Carl knew then that he had done the right thing by coming to rescue his son, as the situation was more complicated than expected.

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As Mikey's mother fought, Amber and Gwen gave her support; however, the number of people was too high to hope they didn't have to fight one on one against some of the thugs.

In fact, the two girls were suddenly attacked by a man wielding daggers who aimed at Gwen's throat in the midst of chaos.

"Be careful!" Amber shouted, and Gwen created her armor just in time to block the attack.

"Fufufufu, it looks like we have some tough cookies here, uh?" the man said while licking his daggers.

Amber and Gwen immediately went into stance. Unfortunately, Erik's girlfriend couldn't use her corrosive gas, as she would kill her allies if she did so.

That was the downside of her brain crystal power and why she trained so much with daggers. Gwen didn't have this disadvantage, but her power wasn't as destructive as his best friend's.

The two young women stood their ground against the man, Justin, who was wielding his sharp, shimmering mana daggers as if they were his kids. Amber held her weapons, one in each hand, and observed the man.

"The two kittens want to play! Fufufufu, let's go then!"

Gwen took a step forward to engage Justin in combat. "I'll tank; you take care of him!" Gwen shouted.

However, as the fight began, the two girls quickly realized that Justin was faster than both of them, as he dodged an attack made by Amber with ease.

He countered with a quick jab of his own, but Gwen chimed in and protected her friend with her mana armor, parrying the blow.

Amber attempted another strike by circling behind the thug, but he quickly got out of range, his mana dagger flashing dangerously close to Amber's throat during the process.

Gwen chased the man and swung her arm, unleashing a flurry of punches that the dagger-wielding thug avoided easily. However, Amber seized the opportunity and lunged at Justin with her daggers and aimed at his side.

The man sidestepped her attack and delivered a swift kick to her midsection, sending her tumbling to the ground.

"Amber!" Gwen shouted again and rushed forward to defend her fallen friend, her mana armor glowing brighter as she braced herself for the thug's next move.

The man was relentless, his mana dagger flashing as he darted around the two women, playing with his two daggers.

All around them, the room was filled with the sound of clashing blades and the occasional roar of someone exerting him or herself.

The air was thick with the metallic scent of blood and the acrid smell of sweat. The combatants moved quickly and gracefully, their weapons flashing in the club's light.

Amidst the chaos, people fought fiercely with their abilities, conjuring up gusts of wind, throwing balls of fire, and creating mana shields to protect themselves. The walls shook with the impact of blows, and furniture was smashed to pieces; at the same time, the fire Erik and his friend started began affecting the other rooms.

In another part of the room, Mikey's mother, Mary, was fighting against five people.

She stood with her back against the wall, ready to defend herself against the five attackers who had cornered her.

She raised her hands, summoning her flesh-eating mana bugs, and prepared for the fight.

As the thugs approached, Mary kept her eyes on them, ready to dodge any attacks.

The first man lunged at her, swinging his sword, but the woman was quick on her feet, sidestepping his attack and kicking him in the stomach. As he stumbled back, she sent a swarm of bugs at him. The bugs crawled out of her palms, swarming over him and the other men and trying to bite them with their razor-sharp mandibles.

The men swatted at the bugs, trying to brush them off, but they kept coming, devouring flesh and drawing blood.

The one on the ground was instead relentlessly attacked by the creatures, who were devouring his flesh and causing him to cry out in pain.

Mary's agility and strength took aback the other four men, and the brutality of her brain crystal power deeply terrified them, but they quickly regained their composure and charged at her.

She dodged their swings, punches, and kicks, weaving in and out of their attacks with precision. The woman countered with mighty blows, using her fists and feet to strike at their weak points.

"Is this everything you can do?" She asked with arrogance to the five men.

"I wouldn't be so cocky if I were you, bitch. We managed to kidnap you once; we will be able to kill you now!" One of them replied.

"There were more people then!" Mary replied with a smirk.

The five men attacked again, but Mary was determined to protect herself and her son, so she fought with all her strength. She conjured more bugs, sending them flying at the men and forcing them to back away.

She could hear Mikey's grunts in the distance and knew she had to keep fighting. Her son was aiding the battlefield with Aaron and a girl she didn't know a lot since they managed to create distractions and problems for Matthew's men.

The thugs were getting frustrated, and they started coordinating their attacks, trying to trap the woman against the wall.

But Mikey's mother was too quick for them; she conjured a massive swarm of bugs, sending them flying at the men incredibly fast. They became so focused on defending themselves against the bugs that they didn't notice that the woman briefly helped Amber and Gwen with their fights.

However, they quickly got a hold of themselves and charged at the woman.

The men advanced, weapons in hand, ready to pounce. One of the attackers swung his blade at the woman from her side; she deflected the weapon with a kick, leaving the thugs to wonder how the hell she was able to do that; however, the woman was almost reached by an attack from behind. Fighting 5v1 was not simple.

She used her bugs to protect herself from the attack, and at the same time, she punched another one of the assailants and kept the others at bay with the bugs.

Another attack quickly came, which Mary deftly dodged. Then a myriad of other ones, but she weaved and darted out of the way.

Though she saw an opening again, she struck out with a quick jab, landing a blow to the face of the closest attacker.

The remaining ones attacked from all sides, but their wounds and the blood loss they incurred severely impaired them, and she managed to evade their attacks again.

Unfortunately for them, they all had weapon-conjuring powers, so they were at a disadvantage against the woman, as she was not only skilled melee but could also attack from a distance.

However, they chased her, coming at her with renewed aggression; their attacks became sluggish, but the rage behind them increased with each attempt.

Mary quickly found herself under a barrage of attacks. She deflected as many as she could, but some landed, leaving her with cuts and bruises.

As she fought, the woman kept a watchful eye out for her son. But with so many people in close quarters, she knew that she had to be careful and focus on the fight.

She continued to defend herself, using a combination of blocking and evading to minimize the damage while chipping away at her enemy's flesh with her bugs.

Martha, Mikey, and Aaron stood side by side, ready to defend the others from the thugs closing in.

They could use their power in that confined place, but it wasn't easy, and since they were physically the weakest of the bunch, they could only support their friends.

However, together, they were the real deal. Martha summoned her thorned mana vines, which coiled around some of the attackers, trapping them in place.

The thugs didn't particularly struggle against the vines, but those brief seconds the woman gained gave the parents and the other students time to land some hits.

At the same time, Mikey, who was standing next to Martha, summoned his flesh-eating bugs. The creatures swarmed around the thugs, biting and chewing on their flesh.

This saved Anderson a couple of times and even helped his father with his current fight, as the man kept five people at bay.

The thugs tried to swat the bugs away, but the creatures were quick and elusive. The bugs severely impaired their vision and constantly chipped away at their faces with their bites.

That was the best Mikey could do since the thugs were too strong for him at the moment. Standing next to Mikey, Aaron used his corrosive slime to impair the thugs' movements. He hurled globs of slime at their feet, sometimes causing them to slip and burning their flesh.

The thugs struggled to keep their footing, giving the hostages time to fight back. This also led to some severe injuries.

The problem was that the slime corrosion could be offset by using mana, as the thugs were able to use the same technique the Crystal Cross Gang's assassins and the others used when walking through Amber's fog.

It was similar to having the same mana armor every thaid had, but it was much weaker.

However, that was enough to contrast most of Aaron's slime's corrosive properties.

Chapter 315: The Red Lotus Lounge (10)

Amber held her daggers tightly, ready to strike at any moment. Gwen was clad in her mana armor, which was covering her body in a protective shell.

But Justin was unfazed. He moved quickly, his daggers slicing through the air with frightening speed.

The three of them clashed, with Amber and Gwen working together, coordinating their attacks, and trying to catch Justin off guard to gain an advantage, possibly killing him.

But the thug had many neural links compared to them, and his stats allowed him to see what they were trying to do with ease; however, it wasn't as easy to fight against both of the two young women as they were skilled Red Palace students and knew how to move during a fight.

Gwen rushed forward, her mana armor crackling as Justin swung his daggers at her.

She parried his blows by bringing her armored arms in front of her, but each hit pushed her back a little further and threatened her armor's integrity. The girl gritted her teeth, determined not to let the thug gain any advantage he didn't already have.

Suddenly, Amber appeared behind Justin, daggers poised to strike. But he was too quick, dodging to the side and turning with a spin to face her.

The red-haired girl cursed under her breath but kept lunging forward, though Justin was already on the move, slicing his daggers through the air. Amber narrowly deflected the first strike using her sturdy daggers, but the second attack caught her arm, drawing some blood.

However, as the girl made her move, her friend, Gwen, saw an opening and charged forward, her fist high in a stance, aiming for Justin's head. But that wasn't enough to damage the thug since, at the last second, he sidestepped and swung his leg in a vicious arc, catching Gwen in the chest.

Gwen gritted her teeth against the pain, knowing she couldn't let it distract her. With a hand on it, she backed away, circling Justin warily as he turned to face her.

Meanwhile, Amber was still trying to find an opening, but now she had trouble exerting her strength due to the wound. She darted in and out, jabbing with her daggers, but Justin was always one step ahead; he was facing both the girls contemporaneously and toyed with them like a psycho. He countered Amber's attacks effortlessly, leaving her frustrated and off-balance.

Amber's friend saw that Caiden's daughter was having trouble finding an opening, and she knew that she needed to act fast before the thug could land another hit on her.

She feinted left, then right, then lunged forward again, her arms raised in a fighting pose and aiming at Justin's head again.

But once again, he was too quick. He spun around, delivered a devastating kick to her side, and sent her flying with his powerful attack.

"Gwen!" Amber shouted. She was aware that she just saved her life since the thug was going to attack her while she was in a vulnerable state.

"Don't worry about me; be careful!"

Gwen recovered just in time to alert Amber as Justin launched himself against her friend. She deeply realized how messed up the situation was and understood they couldn't keep this up forever; Justin would kill both of them sooner or later.

Amber turned just in time to see the thug move; she instinctively moved her daggers in front of her neck and managed to block Justin's lightning-fast attack at the last moment.

She gritted her teeth and prepared to back down, but the man was relentless, and for a brief moment, he attacked repeatedly Amber, who barely managed to parry the attacks. The young woman was forced to flee from the man, but he gave chase.

Gwen cried out in alarm, but she was having trouble reaching them. Justin was chasing the fleeing girl, continuously attacking him, each blow harder than the last. She blocked as best she could but was starting to feel the strain, and the wound on her arm didn't help her.

Amber, meanwhile, was running away from Justin by backstepping, looking for a way to escape his assault. She feinted left, then right, trying to throw him off balance and stop his assault. But he was too experienced for that, and he kept his guard up, waiting for her to make a mistake.

Despite the urgency of the situation, and the sheer focus she had to put on defending herself from the man's attacks, Caiden's daughter had the intuition to run back to Gwen, and it was there that the fierce woman engaged the man again. At that point, Gwen started receiving the brunt of Justin's attacks. Her mana armor was holding up, but barely.

Every time Justin struck, she felt the force of the blow reverberates through her body. She gritted her teeth, determined to hold on. Amber saw Gwen struggling and knew she had to help. She leaped forward, her daggers flashing in the light.

Justin parried her attack easily, but Amber persisted, hoping to distract him long enough for Gwen to recover.

The red-haired woman darted in and out with her daggers, trying to find an opening to strike. On the other hand, Gwen focused on defending herself with her mana armor, which took the brunt of Justin's attacks now that he started targeting her since she defended Amber.

Despite their best efforts, Justin seemed to be one step ahead of them. He easily countered their attacks and delivered powerful blows that left Gwen struggling to remain standing.

Amber tried to distract Justin once again by throwing objects at him, but he deftly dodged them and used the opportunity to strike Gwen again.

The woman felt the strain of the fight, her mana armor flickering and almost giving out under Justin's relentless assault.

Taken by sheer desperation, Amber threw another item, this time aiming for Justin's face.

He managed to block it with his mana daggers, but it allowed Gwen to strike him from behind since she threw it at a very delicate moment. She struck him with a heavy punch, sending him stumbling forward and falling to the ground. She was weaker than her opponent, but that didn't mean she wasn't strong.

Amber saw her chance and leaped forward with her remaining dagger, aiming for Justin's heart as he was on the ground. But he turned at the last moment and blocked the strike with his mana daggers from the ground.

"Fuck!" Gwen shouted; even she lost her composure as the situation was dire. They needed to find a way to defeat Justin before he wore them down completely.

The fight continued, with Amber and Gwen fighting with all their might against the powerful thug. They exchanged blows, evading, and counterattacking, but they were still struggling to gain the upper hand.

However, at that moment, another swarm of flesh-eating bugs descended upon Justin, attacking him from all sides. He swatted at them with his daggers, but they kept coming, biting and gnawing at his flesh.

"Get the hell off me!" the thug shouted as the bugs chewed at his flesh.

Despite the distraction, Justin managed to land a glancing blow on Amber, but before he could follow up, Martha's thorned vines snaked out of the ground, wrapping around his legs and holding him in place.

He briefly struggled against them, but they held fast enough to give Amber time to back away to safety behind Gwen. The woman took advantage of the distraction to lunge forward, her armored fists aimed at Justin's exposed side.

But despite the others' intervention, Gwen was too slow, and the thug twisted out of the way, his daggers flashing in the club's light. Nevertheless, a slime projectile coming out of nowhere landed on his right arm and started corroding his flesh.

The man had to quickly circulate his mana to protect himself from the slime's effects, and he quickly tried to get rid of that substance.

That made Gwen and Amber gain precious moments, and the two charged at Justin as he struggled to rid his arm of Aaron's corrosive slime.

Justin quickly turned around, his mana daggers at the ready, but the girls were already on him. With her twin daggers, Amber launched an attack aimed at his jugular while Gwen, encased in her mana armor, aimed at his heart.

Their strikes were quick and precise, but Justin was no easy target. He managed to deflect Amber's attack with his daggers, but Gwen's attack found its mark and landed on his chest, giving him trouble breathing for a couple of seconds and making him feel a very high chest pain located under his heart.

"You fuckin' bitches! I will kill you!" the man shouted as soon as he got his breath again. Justin lunged at the girls fiercely, forcing them to back away quickly.

As they retreated, Mikey's swarm of flesh-eating bugs suddenly descended upon Justin, biting and tearing at his flesh and preventing him from advancing further, but that was futile.

Since that didn't work, Martha's quick thinking made her conjure a thorny vine, which snaked out and wrapped around Justin's arm, immobilizing him. This time, it worked.

Amber charged again, taking advantage of the opening, hoping to land a critical blow. However, Justin quickly recovered and deflected her attack, sending her tumbling to the ground again despite being partially immobilized.

Gwen, seeing her friend in danger, lunged forward to defend her as the thug freed himself and charged at her with a maddened look. With a powerful blow, she managed to hit Justin's chest again, exactly over the heart she previously attacked, and made him stagger backward due to the pain.

"You are done, bitches! You are done for!"

All of that wasn't enough to make Justin out of combat, and he quickly regained his composure to continue the fight, which continued this way with the group working together to keep Justin off balance and prevent him from gaining the upper hand.

The bugs and vines continued to harass him, giving Gwen and Amber just enough time to land a few blows before he could recover and retaliate. Despite their best efforts, however, Justin was still a formidable opponent, and the fight dragged on, with each of them taking their share of hits and bruises.

However, Martha and the others could not keep that up forever, as they were also helping the others not get killed.

They managed to be that useful only because Mikey's mother's flesh-eating bugs were also helping the overall battlefield and because there were people as strong as her and Anderson's father in the figures of the Zamora, Silverbend, and Montgomery clan members.

Though that wasn't enough to prevent deaths, two parents quickly lost their lives during that confrontation, leaving their children in tears.

Chapter 316: The Red Lotus Lounge (11)

While all that was happening, Erik was still locked in a fight with the woman, Mia. However, something was happening at the same time.

Since he was in the radius, as each person died, Erik gained experience since the system absorbed their mana. Until now, four people died between parents and thugs, and he gained another level.

As he and the woman named Mia traded blows, Erik observed her trying to find any weakness he could exploit. She was a tall and athletic woman with short, curly brown hair.

She had piercing blue eyes that seemed to gleam with a competitive fire and a strong jawline that suggested she was not one to shy away from training.

Her muscular arms and toned legs hinted at the hours she must have spent training and working out, and she had several tattoos covering her arms.

The woman was currently wearing a tight black tank top and matching pants, and she used a very aggressive and unpredictable fighting style with quick slashes and bizarre footwork.

She seemed to favor a style that relied on brute strength and endurance rather than finesse or technique.

Despite her intimidating appearance, there was a certain grace to her movements, as if she had honed her skills over many years of training, and there was a hint of a sinister smile playing at the corners of her lips as if she was enjoying the challenge of facing Erik in deadly combat.

"You are good, kiddo! You are very good!" she said, swinging her sword at the young man with reckless abandon.

With her weapon held in a reverse grip, Mia lunged at Erik again, aiming for his midsection. The awakener quickly stepped to the side and countered with a swift cut aimed at Mia's exposed back.

She easily blocked it with a parry after she violently twisted on herself, a wicked smile playing across her face. However, she was internally surprised by the move the awakener had just performed; that was no easy feat. How could this greenhorn be strong enough to face her at only 16 years old?

"Hahahahah! More More, LET ME SEE MORE!" Mia said, her voice laced with a hint of insanity. "Can you entertain this young lady?" Erik's eyes widened as he realized just how crazy Mia was.

The two continued their dance, clanging swords in a flurry of strikes and parries. Erik could feel the adrenaline coursing through his veins, knowing he was in for a tough fight.

The woman was stronger than him, and there was a limit to what he could do even with Nathaniel's power due to the low amount of mana and neural links he had.

"You know," Mia said, her eyes gleaming with madness. "I love the feeling of a sharp blade slicing through flesh. It's like music to my ears!"

Erik felt a shiver run down his spine at her words. The young man could increase his physical stats to face the woman, but that would make him unable to improve his mana later, and he already did this several times. The alternative would be to increase his energy stats immediately to gain more mana and use Nathaniel's power more extensively.

However, before doing that, he wanted to see how the situation turned out. One thing was clear since he could receive help from his friends at any moment.

He took a deep breath and charged at Mia, aiming for a swift strike to her chest. But the woman was too quick for him. She dodged his attack and lunged at him with her sword, aiming for his neck.

"Nice move, kiddo!" Mia said, laughing. "Too bad you are too slow!"

Erik managed to dodge the next blow, but barely. He knew he couldn't let his guard down even a moment.

Mia was too dangerous to underestimate; it was already a miracle in itself that he was able to fight against her without having the same trouble his friends were having against their opponents.

Then Mia attacked. Erik raised his guard, preparing to defend himself as the woman lunged forward with a lightning-fast strike.

The two blades clashed, and the sound of metal rang through the air. They traded blows repeatedly, each trying to gain the upper hand.

The woman laughed maniacally as they fought, her eyes gleaming with a crazed fervor.

"You'll never beat me!" she shouted as she pressed her attack.

Erik couldn't help but feel annoyed by the woman's antics. She was clearly crazy, and he started having enough of her constant mocking.

The awakener channeled mana and used Nathaniel's power under his feet to increase his speed. With a sudden burst, he darted forward and managed to land a glancing blow on her shoulder.

But the woman was not deterred. She only laughed harder, her sword flashing as she continued her onslaught.

Erik realized that he was in serious trouble; this was no ordinary opponent, and he might be forced to reveal his powers, as he didn't know if he would be able to go on like that since his mana was already half full despite him having leveled up just a couple of minutes ago.

He needed to find a way to turn the tables on her quickly. It was at that moment that Erik received another notification.

[THREE HOSTILE INDIVIDUALS 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. 4863 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

Luisa Zamora's mother, Ana, stood tall as she surveyed the room. Three men, each wielding a mana weapon, were currently confronting her. They had no idea what they were up against. Ana had the power to control flames, as all of the Zamora clan's members did, and she was not afraid to use it.

Ana summoned a small flame in her palm with a flick of her wrist. The men hesitated for a moment, unsure of what to do, as they knew the Zamora clan was powerful, but then they lunged forward with their weapons.

The woman leaped back, narrowly avoiding their attacks, and sent a burst of flame at the closest man. He screamed as his clothing caught fire, and he frantically tried to put it out. The other two men hesitated, clearly realizing they were dealing with a dangerous opponent.

"Come on then!" Ana yelled, her eyes blazing with anger. "I'll take you all on!"

One of the men lunged forward with a knife, but Ana dodged to the side and sent a wave of flames in his direction. He stumbled back, his clothing smoldering, but he was not out of the fight yet.

The other man took advantage of Ana's distraction to charge at her with a spear. She managed to dodge most of his blows, but he caught her on the arm, sending a jolt of pain through her.

"You're going to pay for that," Ana snarled, and she sent a jet of flames at the man's face.

He screamed as his skin blistered and peeled away, and he collapsed to the floor, writhing in agony.

The last man hesitated for a moment, clearly realizing he was outmatched. But then he lunged forward with his weapon, determined to take Ana down with him.

Ana calmly stepped back; he didn't even let the man approach her as she sent a wall of flames shooting up in front of him. He screamed as he was engulfed in the fire and fell to the ground, his body consumed by the flames.

However, she wasn't done yet. She turned to look to her left and immediately saw Erik Romano, the kid who saved her, having trouble fighting against his opponent.

However, it was clear he was an awakener, as he was able to face the woman despite her being clearly stronger than him.

The kid was too strong for his age, and she couldn't explain how that was possible. The only thing was for him to have an insane number of neural links despite his age, but she didn't know the number. However, it was clear she had to intervene.

Ana watched with bated breath as Mia and Erik clashed their swords. The woman's moves were precise and fluid, and she seemed to be getting the upper hand. Erik was having trouble defending himself, and his attacks were getting weaker as the fight continued.

Ana knew she had to act quickly and summoned a fireball to hurl at Mia. The fireball missed its mark, and Mia dodged it easily, but it took Erik some time to regain his composure.

Mia's eyes glinted with a crazed fervor, and she let out a manic laugh. "HEY! STOP INTERFERING!" she said as she lunged forward with her sword. Erik managed to block the attack, but his arms shook from the impact.

Mia continued to press forward, and Erik was barely able to keep up with her speed and strength. Ana sent another fireball, which distracted Mia enough for Erik to land a blow on her arm.

The woman gritted her teeth in pain but quickly regained her focus. She swung her sword with even more ferocity, and Erik struggled to defend himself.

Ana continued to send fireballs, hoping to create an opening for Erik, but Mia seemed impervious to the flames.

Chapter 317: The Red Lotus Lounge (12)

Erik lunged forward, sword raised high, as he charged toward Mia. The woman replied with a gust of wind strong enough to knock him off balance, but he managed to recover quickly and retaliate with a swift attack.

The sound of clashing swords echoed throughout the room as they exchanged blow after blow. Around them was chaos, and they even had to pay attention to flying attacks.

Mia, especially, was receiving fireballs from Ana from time to time when she came too close to killing Erik.

Despite his best efforts, Erik struggled to keep up with Mia's agility and the strength of her wind bursts. He knew that he had to be careful and precise with his movements, or else he would be quickly defeated, but doing so was easier said than done.

Now Erik felt what it was like to be against someone with significantly more neural links; it was like he was one of his past opponents while fighting against him. He understood the struggle the others had when they fought against in the inner ranking fights.

Mia grinned as she watched Erik struggle. "Is this all you've got?" she taunted, sending another gust of wind his way. This time, he managed to sidestep and avoid the move, but the force still got his leg, and he stumbled backward.

Erik gritted his teeth, determination filling him. He quickly regained his footing and charged forward, this time with a fierce attack that forced Mia to back down a little.

"Oh? Where did this come from?"

"There is more to come..."

The fight continued like this, with Erik landing a few hits but ultimately being on the defensive most of the time.

Mia seemed to be toying with him, enjoying the thrill of the fight. She was like a cat playing with a mouse.

Erik tried with all his might, dodging and blocking Mia's attacks as best he could. Sweat dripped down his forehead, and his muscles ached, but he knew that if he relaxed even for a single moment, he would die.

The awakener's sword clashed with Mia's once again, the sound ringing in his ears as they traded blows, and he felt his arms shaking with the force of her strikes whenever she swung her weapon. He had managed to block her attack, but her follow-up was too fast, and he felt her sword slice into his shoulder.

Erik gritted his teeth, feeling a surge of pain shoots through his body. He stumbled backward, trying to put some distance between himself and Mia, but she pursued him relentlessly.

Then the woman used her wind-burst attack to knock him off balance. The kid tripped but pivoted on himself by using his arms and made a somersault that had been made just in time to avoid a strike on his jugular. These attacks were making it difficult for Erik to fight and keep his footing steady.

Erik tried to focus on the woman's movements, hoping to predict her next attack, but the pain in his shoulder made it hard to concentrate.

The awakener then saw Mia lunge at him; he tried to raise his sword to block her strike, but he was too slow, and the woman's sword came close to his chest. However, an untimely fireball hurled toward the woman prevented her from capitalizing on the moment, and Erik was saved just in time.

However, he could hear Mia's laughter ringing in his ears, mocking him as he struggled to stay on his feet.

"Do you need Mama to fight? Can't you stand up for yourself?" The woman taunted again. Erik gritted his teeth.

The awakener knew there was no way to reason with this psycho, as she was fighting only to have fun.

He had to keep fighting until the situation got good enough to receive more help or make a run for it, but his injury was bad, and he didn't know how to move from there on out without using his other powers.

They all had visible effects, and he couldn't use them, or he would be found out. He planned on using it only if the situation got terrible, and since he was now facing the woman with Ana's help, there was no need to do so despite the difficulty.

As he thought this, he felt the blood trickling down his shoulder, and his chest throbbed with the pain radiating from it.

He took a deep breath and steadied himself, determined to get out of this situation. He raised his sword as he saw Mia lunging at him again. Erik parried the strike, but the woman suddenly released a powerful burst of wind that knocked him off balance again.

"Fucking bitch!"

As he stumbled, she quickly followed up with a swift strike, causing a deep cut on his arm which added to the one he already got on the shoulder. His situation was quickly worsening, but Erik gritted his teeth, trying to ignore the pain while knowing he was in a difficult situation.

As the awakener stumbled back, clutching his wounded arm, Mia chuckled wickedly. "What happened to your previous bravery?" She taunted, her eyes gleaming with malice. "You are disappointing me; I thought you were better than this..."

Erik gritted his teeth, ignoring her words as he tightened his grip on his sword. "I may not be the best fighter out there, but I have something you don't," he replied through gritted teeth.

"What?" The woman asked.

"A fucking functioning brain!"

The woman burst out laughing and charged at Erik again. The awakener tried to step back, but Mia kept pressing forward with her attacks, her eyes gleaming feverishly.

"Come play, little boy; don't be coy. It's time to show your fighting joy!" Mia said, twirling her sword with ease and giving Erik the creeps. The awakener barely avoided another attack.

"HAHAHAHAHHAHA! You're just a pathetic little insect trying to play with the grown-ups!"

Erik clenched his fists, trying to stay focused, but he was feeling tired with every passing moment. The situation wasn't good; the woman was too strong, and without his multiple powers and the surprise effect of his astral wolf, it would be hard to win.

He tried to keep his distance, hoping to find an opening and wait for help to come, but Mia was too quick and too skilled.

"You should give up now, boy," Mia said with a smirk. "I could make this quick for you. Or I could make it slow and painful. It's up to you."

"The only thing you could really do for me would be to shut up. Woman, each word you say is worse than being stabbed!" Erik replied.

Erik avoided another life-threatening attack, but as the fight progressed, his breathing became labored. Blood dripped from the gash on his arm and shoulder and stained his shirt.

He gritted his teeth, refusing to give up, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to keep up with Mia's relentless assault.

Erik grunted as he narrowly dodged another attack, this time retaliating with a strike of his own. He managed to land another glancing blow on Mia's arm, but it wasn't enough to slow her down. She laughed maniacally as if enjoying the pain she was inflicting on Erik.

"How do you feel, young man? How does your arm feel?" Mia taunted.

"It's never been better; thanks for your concern," Erik replied. The awakener didn't respond further, focusing instead on avoiding Mia's sequence of attacks until he was forced to block one. The attack was swift and fast; Erik was barely able to see it, and if it wasn't for Nathaniel's power speeding his arm, he wouldn't have been able to prevent being killed.

He gritted his teeth as he struggled to intercept Mia's attack.

<If only she didn't use this fucking wind continuously!> The young man thought.

The situation was dire because the woman used her brain crystal power to knock him back. The wind it created wasn't that strong or wide, but it was concentrated, and she used it to make him lose his balance; besides and it was hard to predict when she would use it.

Moreover, he had already received a deep cut on his arm and shoulder; he would be in trouble if he got more wounds. He knew he couldn't keep this up much longer.

"Is that all you've got, weakling?" Mia sneered, her eyes glinting with crazed glee. "I thought you would be more of a challenge."

Erik knew he had to do something drastic if he wanted to win this fight. For this reason, he decided to channel a little more power into Nathaniel's power. However, that was a risky move since he would end his mana earlier and expose himself to a greater risk later. Becoming useless during this fight wasn't what he wanted.

Again, he found himself in need of increasing his strength; if he survived this fight, he would start massively using the technique the Biological supercomputer developed to increase his neural links.

The awakener focused on his mana, feeling the familiar energy coursing through his body from the brain crystal. He felt a rush of strength and confidence as the power surged through him. He lifted his sword and charged at Mia with renewed vigor, using the force to propel himself toward his opponent.

Mia's eyes widened as she saw Erik approaching her with that speed; it was abnormal compared to what he showcased until now.

She raised her sword to block his attack, but Erik's strength was aided by a "force blow" that severely increased his strength; it was a lot even for her to handle. He forced her back, his sword clanging against hers with a metallic ring.

Mia stumbled backward, her hair whipping around her face in the sudden gust of wind the clash created. She narrowed her eyes. Erik capitalized on the moment and lunged at her again, his sword flashing in the light.

"DIE BITCH!"

However, as Erik swung his sword, things went differently than he had hoped. The woman blocked his attack and counterattacked, almost cutting his throat.

"You're not good enough to pull stuff like that off," she spat, a mad glint in her eyes.

"Fuck," Erik said.

Mia charged at him again, her sword flashing in the air horizontally. Erik bent backward and avoided the strike but was exposed to great danger as he did that. He quickly regained his footing, but despite having done so, he found Mia in front of him, and he barely had the time to parry the following strike.

"SHIT! THAT WAS CLOSE!"

But just as parried that attack and was going to get space from the woman, he noticed something coming at him at top speed and a sudden jolt of pain in his side.

He looked down and saw a small dagger inside his flesh. Someone had thrown it at him when he was distracted.

Erik gasped in pain but couldn't remove the weapon, or his wound would worsen.

Chapter 318: The Red Lotus Lounge (13)

Benedict stumbled back, his mana halberd clashing against his opponent's hammer.

He was sweating profusely, his muscles aching from the constant barrage of blows. He had been fighting this thug for what felt like hours, and he was no closer to defeating him.

"Come on, kid, show me what you've got," Daniel sneered, swinging his hammer at him once again.

"I thought you were supposed to be some kind of hero. Didn't you come here to rescue your friends?"

Benedict gritted his teeth, channeling more mana into his halberd. He swung it around in a wide arc, trying to catch Daniel with his range advantage. But the thug was too quick for him, dodging out of the way and bringing his hammer down on Benedict's arm.

The kid cried out in pain, feeling the bones in his arm snap under the force of the blow. He stumbled back, clutching his injured arm.

"Is that all you've got?" Daniel laughed, extending his rope and wrapping it around Benedict's neck.

"Pathetic, and you even go to the Red Palace. Is this everything you guys amount to? Weren't you all mighty?"

Then Daniel, Benedict's opponent, used his power against the kid.

He could summon a rope that could infinitely extend, clearly depending on Daniel's mana reserves, and that could contract at will. The rope quickly coiled around the Red Palace student, and he gasped for air, struggling to break free from the rope.

He could feel the air being squeezed out of his lungs, and his vision was starting to go dark.

Suddenly, withering, snake-thorned vines came out from the ground and descended on Daniel, causing him to release Benedict from his constraint. Martha emerged from behind, her hands outstretched.

"Are you okay?" she asked, helping Benedict to stand on his feet.

He nodded, gritting his teeth against the pain. "Thanks. I owe you one."

"You owe us all one," Aaron said, stepping forward. "Did you really think we wouldn't have come here to help you?"

Mikey nodded, his flesh-eating bugs buzzing around his head. "Yeah, man. We're a team, remember?"

Benedict smiled weakly, gripping his halberd tightly. He then looked at his friends; he knew they would die if they stopped assisting the others. "Go help the others!"

His friends looked at him with admiration, but there was also anxiousness in their eyes. However, they did as he said and went, supporting the other students and parents in any way they could.

With renewed determination, Benedict charged at Daniel again. He swung his halberd with all his might, but it wasn't easy to catch him. Since the two had heavy weapons, the fight was not that fast, but a wrong hit meant death.

However, the real problem was not this guy's hammer but his brain crystal power. If he got hit by the rope, it would start coiling around him automatically, and at that point, he would be a sitting duck.

"Why did you become a thug with a power like that?" Benedict asked, standing in front of him.

"Mind your business, kid; you know nothing about life."

Daniel glared up at him but said nothing else. Benedict took a deep breath, feeling the adrenaline coursing through his veins.

He tightened his grip on his halberd as Daniel's rope transformed into a whip. With a flick of his wrist, the thug lashed out at the kid, the tip of the rope crackling with energy.

Benedict dodged to the side, narrowly avoiding the strike, but Daniel was quick to follow up. The whip lashed out again, and Benedict wasn't so lucky this time.

The rope's end caught him across the chest, and he felt a sharp pain as the weapon got him.

He gritted his teeth, trying to shake off the pain as Daniel closed in, this time with his hammer raised high. Benedict knew he did not have enough strength to defend against this attack, and he had to evade the move.

Daniel cackled triumphantly as he swung the hammer down, but Benedict rolled to the side, narrowly avoiding the crushing blow.

Daniel hit the ground, creating a small crater where Benedict previously stood.

As the young man's eyes scanned the room, he saw the result of Daniel's attack, and a shiver went down his spine. If he got hit, he would have been dead by now.

"Damn..."

As he retreated, Benedict spotted a metal pole on the ground nearby and made a mad dash for it, dodging and weaving as Daniel's whip cracked around him.

He tore the pole from the ground with a desperate heave and threw it at Daniel. It was like a giant arrow aiming to kill the man.

The thug managed to deflect the blow with his hammer, and he did so with ease, as Benedict wasn't anywhere strong enough to be a threat to him.

However, the young man pressed his slight advantage, lunging forward with his halberd as Daniel was distracted, but the thug was quick to counter, wrapping the whip around it and tugging it from Benedict's hands.

During this whole ordeal, things weren't as straightforward for the others. If it weren't for Adam's older brother, Mikey's and Luisa's mothers, and Anderson's father, who could face 5–6 people at once, the kids would have already been dead by now.

Most of the thugs focused on the adults, but not all of them, as was shown by Erik's, Amber's, Gwen's, Benedict's, and Anderson's fights.

If Erik managed to fight against Mia thanks to his prowess, Amber and Gwen could fend off their attacker thanks to their joint effort. Thanks to Martha and the others, Benedict could do the same, but Anderson was in a different situation.

His was the hardest fight of the lot. It was true that the young man was strong, but he wasn't faster nor stronger; he simply had the technique and an insanely strong brain crystal power, which he couldn't use since he would end up killing everyone aside from himself if he did.

One of Erik's plans was for him to save the hostages with a rescue team, and then Anderson had to use his power to blow off the Red Lotus Lounge.

It was unclear if his mana was enough to surpass Matthew's and his men's mana defenses, but at least the chaos he would have created would have allowed him and the others to run away.

The problem, though, lay in what Matthew would have done if they had seen only Anderson going to him.

Would he have killed the hostages and, consequently, Erik and the others due to rage? Would he have killed him on the spot? Since there were too many unknown variables, Erik decided to use the "gain valuable time" approach. However, the fight was too hard.

The young man was using his claymore, but he didn't really like fighting with weapons since they hindered his movements, and he wasn't as skilled with them as without the weapon. However, his opponent was using a spear that had a long reach, which was hard to counter with his body alone.

Anderson gripped his claymore tightly as he faced off against his opponent, who had summoned a spear made of mana.

He knew he was at a disadvantage but had to keep fighting to get out of the club with the others.

He tried to attack Kevin, but the man expertly parried his strikes and countered with a thrust of his spear. Anderson managed to dodge it narrowly, but he could feel the wind of the attack on his cheek.

"You're a tough one," Kevin said with a smirk. "But you can't beat me with that big sword of yours."

Anderson gritted his teeth and lunged at Kevin again. But the man was too fast, and he dodged the attack easily.

Kevin then struck with his spear, hitting Anderson in the shoulder. Anderson let out a grunt of pain as he stumbled back.

"You can't win," Kevin taunted him. "You're fighting for a lost cause. Give up now, and maybe I'll kill you painlessly."

Anderson shook his head and raised his claymore again, but his movements were slower now. His wound was slowing him down, and he was losing strength.

Kevin noticed this and smiled cruelly. As the fight continued, the kid found himself pushed back further and further by Kevin's relentless attacks.

He had managed to block or dodge most of them, but his movements were becoming slower, and his breathing was labored due to the blood loss.

He knew he was in trouble. Kevin seemed to be getting stronger with every strike of his mana spear. Anderson had to think of a new strategy quickly, or he would surely fall.

After an assault by Kevin, Anderson backed away to try and regain some breath, but in doing so, he exposed himself. Sensing the opportunity, Kevin rushed forward, thrusting his spear toward Anderson's chest.

But Anderson was ready. He swung his claymore in a wide arc, knocking the spear aside and creating an opening in his opponent's defense in turn. He stepped forward and swung his claymore with all his might, aiming for Kevin's head.

The thug managed to dodge, but the sword cut a deep gash in his shoulder. He winced in pain but didn't back down.

"Two centimeters above, and I would be dead," Kevin said. "You are indeed a Red Palace student," he added.

The man thrust his spear repeatedly, forcing Anderson to keep his guard up and preventing him from going on the offensive.

The two continued to exchange blows, their weapons clashing loudly in the closed-off club. Anderson was growing weaker by the minute, his movements becoming more sluggish and his strikes less powerful.

He knew it was only a matter of time before his opponent landed a fatal blow.

"Fuck!Fuck!Fuck!"

"The fight is over, kid!" Kevin said. It was clear Anderson could do nothing anymore. He didn't have the power nor the strength to do so.

Kevin shot forward with great speed. Anderson saw him arrive and raised his claymore to kill the man. He angled it perfectly, and the swing came down beautifully. It looked like the god of death was going to harvest lives with its scythe. However, Kevin jumped, and while in mid-air, he spun on himself and avoided the swing. That was the opportunity he was searching for.

He took advantage of Anderson's opening and thrust his spear straight at his heart as if on cue.

The young man tried to dodge, but this time he was too slow, and there was no one who could help him. The spear pierced his heart, and he watched the spear's tip go through his chest.

Chapter 319: The Red Lotus Lounge (14)

Anderson's knees buckled as the fatal blow struck him in the heart. The claymore fell from his hand with a dull thud.

His eyes locked on his friends; his expression was one of both pain and acceptance. He fought with all he had; he tried and tried, but in the end, he wasn't strong enough. However, he could not blame

anyone since the idea to come here had been his; Erik warned them of the dangers, but he pressed his friends to do something nonetheless.

Well, at least he managed to save his father and the other people; however, as he looked at his surroundings, he saw a couple of them dead.

<Did I really make a difference?> the young man asked himself.

That was not comforting to see before dying trying to rescue people, but since reality could not be changed, he at least hoped that Mikey, Aaron, and the others would survive.

His breath came in short, ragged gasps as blood bubbled from his throat, staining his lips blood-red.

His friends, still fighting against their opponents, could only look on in horror from a distance as he fell to the ground.

They knew there was nothing they could do to save him. Martha felt tears streaming down her face as she watched helplessly.

Anderson's breathing became shallow and ragged, and he struggled to stay conscious. He looked up at his friends, his eyes filled with pain and regret.

"I'm sorry," he managed to whisper before turning his head to the right as his hand tried to reach the hilt of his sword already on the ground.

His friends would have been frozen in place if they weren't fighting for their lives; however, they looked at him with wide eyes, unable to believe what they were currently seeing.

Benedict tried to rush forward, but his opponent stopped him; he couldn't get distracted for long, and if he did, it would have been him to die next.

However, he saw Anderson's eyes grow dim, and his body slacken.

"Anderson!" Aaron shouted, his voice choked with emotion. "Hang on; we'll get you help."

However, as Anderson lay dying on the ground, his friends were still locked in their own battles and couldn't do much.

Carl, Mikey, and Erik were fighting fiercely, unable to aid their fallen comrade.

They could see the life slipping away from Anderson's body from a distance, and knowing they could do nothing to stop it tore their hearts; Anderson couldn't be helped. Everyone knew that much. Tears streamed down his friends' faces.

"ANDERSON!" Carl shouted. "ANDERSON!" he shouted again, shock evident on his face at his son's situation.

The young man smiled, but his chest heaved with one final breath, then went still.

His eyes were fixed and unseeing, staring up at the ceiling as if searching for something that would never come. Anderson died like that.

Mikey was the first to notice Anderson's stillness. His heart sank as he realized that his friend had died.

Carl and Erik quickly caught on, their eyes darting toward Anderson's motionless body and their opponents.

But they had to stay focused on the battle at hand. Each of them knew they couldn't afford to let their guard down, not even for a second.

They fought fiercely, even as they felt the weight of Anderson's death bearing down on them.

"MOTHER FUCKER, I WILL KILL YOU!" Erik shouted to Kevin.

"HAHAHAHAHHAHAHA, WHAT WILL YOU DO?! EH, TELL ME?! YOU WILL BE DEAD BEFORE THE NIGHT COMES!" Kevin shouted at Erik, taunting him for what he said.

[ALLY 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. 3827 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

Erik looked at his notification, and a tear escaped from his eyes. The system absorbed the mana from the surroundings and got Anderson's once he died.

For a moment, it was like there was only silence around them, broken only by the sound of Carl's quiet sobs.

Amber and Gwen stood a few feet away from Anderson, watching the brutal fight between Anderson and Kevin unfold.

As Anderson's body slumped to the ground and his claymore clattered out of his grip, the two women gasped in shock and horror, becoming despair as their friend died.

Amber's face became red as tears streamed down her cheeks. She couldn't believe what she had just witnessed.

She had known Anderson for years, trained with him, and fought by his side, and now he was gone. She felt a deep sense of loss and sorrow welling up inside her.

Gwen, too, was stunned by what had happened. The sight of Anderson's lifeless body on the ground made her feel sick to her stomach. She couldn't imagine what his father was feeling right now.

Erik's heart raced as he saw his friend's life slip away. He wanted to stop fighting and help him, but he knew he had to keep going. The thought of losing a brother was too much to bear, but those thoughts fueled his rage and resolve, and he started fighting with even more ferocity.

Mikey felt a surge of anger and sadness as he watched Anderson's life slip away. He couldn't believe this was happening, and he started unleashing bugs with all his might, determined to make a difference and help his friends survive.

Despite their fears and grief, the three continued to fight, each strike fueled by the hope that they could somehow turn the tide of the battle and save the others' lives.

"Let them pay," Mikey snarled, his eyes flashing with fury. "Let's kill them!" he shouted again. Even Martha nodded. However, they were bound to finish the fight on their own without their friend by their side.

Carl's heart sank as he watched Anderson die, and a pool of blood formed around him. He was in shock and couldn't help but feel helpless. Anderson lay motionless on the ground, his body sprawled in a pool of crimson. His vacant eyes stared blankly into the void, mirroring the unimaginable pain that had probably consumed him moments ago.

The metallic scent of blood hung heavy in the air, a grim reminder of the brutality that had unfolded.

Every inch of his being seemed to bear witness to the violence inflicted upon him, his broken form serving as a haunting testament to the fragility of human existence. He was fighting as if he was in auto mode.

Carl wanted to rush to Anderson's side but knew it was impossible due to the many thugs preventing him from going. Tears welled up in his eyes as he watched his son die.

However, things didn't end there. As Anderson was getting killed, multiple fights were going on. In particular, Frank, Adam's brother, was doing a lot of damage as he could create and control ice.

Frank faced a woman named Maya, a thug who could summon gloves that enhanced her strength.

It was a weird power, but it was powerful since her strength increased a lot. But Frank had an advantage since his brain crystal power allowed him to attack from a distance.

Maya rushed towards him with her gloves on and a sword in hand, aiming for a quick slash at Frank's throat, but the man quickly created a wall of ice to block her attack.

She tried to break through it with her enhanced strength, but the ice remained unbreakable, and then he launched a barrage of icicles at her.

Maya moved quickly, evading the icicles and closing the distance between them.

She swung her sword in a wide arc, but Frank was ready. He created a small ice shield, blocking the blow easily and preventing any kind of damage to his body.

However, the woman wasn't done, and she charged at the man again, bearing her sword to him.

Frank didn't waste time; he created an ice spear and hurled it at Maya.

She avoided it, but as she did so, Frank got closer. He unleashed a flurry of punches and kicks, and each strike imbued with his ice power, which pervaded the girl, causing pain and severely slowing her down.

Maya was quick, but Frank's control of the ice gave him an advantage in the fight.

Frank then created a sharp ice spear again and thrust it toward Maya, piercing through her body. This time she had been unable to avoid the attack since the previous attack had slowed her. She fell to the ground, defeated, with a gaping wound on her chest. She died like that.

Frank looked around and saw that a woman, one of the hostages, had been hit by a stray attack. He quickly went to check on her, but it was too late.

The person had already died from the wound. He didn't know her, but she was definitely someone's parent.

Since things went like that, Frank turned around to see who he could fight against, and he quickly spotted his prey, a thug fighting against a woman.

He quickly joined the fight and attacked him by helping the woman, this time using his ice as a sword, and after a short 2v1 fight with the said thug, they killed him in conjunction.

The battlefield quickly turned into a cemetery, with blood, corpses, and guts exposed to the ground, leaving behind a scene of gore and carnage.

At the same time, Erik received a notification.

[MULTIPLE INDIVIDUALS 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. 7764 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

[LEVEL UP.]

Chapter 320: The Red Lotus Lounge (15)

Carl's heart felt like it had been ripped apart as he watched his son, Anderson, lay on the ground.

He couldn't believe what he had just witnessed and couldn't accept that his son, his pride and joy, was gone forever. Anger and sorrow mixed in his chest like a boiling cauldron, each emotion fueling the other.

He had raised Anderson since birth, held him when he was just a little bundle and had watched him grow up and become a strong and capable young man. Now, just like that, he was gone, his future ripped apart. Carl felt like he was in a nightmare he couldn't wake up from.

Carl couldn't help but think of all the things he would never get to do with Anderson—all the conversations they would never have and the memories they would never create. The thought was unbearable.

His pain was indescribable, his heart aching with deep, all-consuming grief that threatened to swallow him whole. He had lost everything that mattered to him at that moment, all because of a single man.

As he watched the other people fight fiercely against the other thugs, Carl felt a wave of anger wash over him.

These people had taken his son from him; they had destroyed his life and the lives of everyone who knew Anderson.

He wanted to make them pay for what they had done and make them feel the same pain his son had felt.

A red haze descended over Carl's vision, and he felt a surge of adrenaline coursing through his veins. He wanted to lash out, to hurt someone, anyone, to make them feel even a fraction of the pain that he was experiencing.

But it was Kevin who was responsible for all of this, and Carl's fury was directed solely at him. Carl had failed to protect his son, and now he would make the man who killed him pay for it.

He took a step forward, his fists clenched so tightly that his knuckles turned white, and he evaded his current opponents' attacks and immediately headed to Kevin while taking Anderson's claymore from the ground.

Anderson's killer found this man in front of him, his eyes full of scorn as he stared back at him, who towered over him. There was silence for a moment as both men sized each other up.

And then, in a sudden burst of motion, Carl launched himself at Kevin, his rage fueling his every move. He swung a mighty swing, aiming for Kevin's face, but the other man dodged it, albeit barely.

"What the...?" Kevin shouted. Only now did he understand that if this man had been able to fight against five people at once, there must have been a reason.

Kevin tried to back away, but Carl was relentless, pushing forward with a ferocity that was terrifying to behold.

He landed several blows, the claymore connecting with Kevin's body with sickening sounds. The other man grunted with each slash but had pride that refused to go down.

At a certain moment, the two men circled each other, each looking for an opening and waiting for the other to make a mistake, but Kevin was in an ugly shape.

The other fighters and hostages occasionally glanced at the fight only to remain shocked by the situation unfolding as Carl unleashed his fury on Kevin. The two's weapons clashed, with Carl's strikes fueled by a fit of intense anger and determination to avenge his son.

The man's eyes burned with a fierce intensity as he landed blow after blow on Kevin's defense once more, his grief and fury pushing him beyond his limits.

Kevin, caught off guard by a sudden barrage of attacks, struggled to keep up with the older man's relentless assault.

The sound of their weapons clashing echoed through the Red Lotus Lounge as Carl continued his onslaught, fueled by his rage and sorrow.

Anderson's father didn't care if he lived or died in this fight at that point; he only cared about making Kevin pay for what he had done.

Their swords locked together momentarily, and Carl used the opportunity to get in close and deliver a powerful punch to Kevin's stomach.

Kevin doubled over in pain, and Carl brought his sword down toward him with all his might. But Kevin quickly reacted and managed to block the strike at the last second.

"WAIT! WAIT! WE CAN TALK ABOUT THIS!" Kevin said in a vain attempt to save himself.

The two men separated, panting heavily and covered in sweat. Carl's eyes never left Kevin's as he readied himself for another attack. The two circled each other again, their weapons at the ready.

Carl's rage had not diminished in the slightest, and he was determined to take Kevin down no matter what.

As they clashed once again, Carl's thoughts turned to his son. He could see Anderson's face in his mind's eye, and his heart swelled with grief and anger. He would make sure that Kevin never hurt anyone else again.

"C'MON, MAN! I WAS JUST LISTENING TO ORDERS!" Kevin said again.

At that moment, everything around Carl's vision seemed to fade away. The sounds of fighting and chaos in the club became muted, the flashing lights dimmed, and the people around him were nothing but distant figures.

All he could see was Kevin, the man who had taken away his son.

With a roar, Carl charged at Kevin; his eyes locked on his target. Kevin tried to defend himself with his mana spear, but Carl was fueled by a fierce determination and burning anger that made him unstoppable.

He dodged and weaved through Kevin's thrusts, his movements fueled by pure adrenaline.

Carl closed the distance between them. He swung his claymore with all his might, striking Kevin's spear and knocking it out of his hand. Kevin stumbled backward, momentarily defenseless.

In a sudden burst of motion, Carl lunged forward, aiming a kick at Kevin's midsection.

It connected with a sickening thud, and Kevin flew backward, landing hard on the ground.

For a moment, Carl hesitated. Was this what his son would have wanted? But then, the memory of Anderson's lifeless body flashed through his mind, and his fury returned in full force. Carl stopped hesitating.

He raised his sword high and brought it down with a savage force, slicing through Kevin's shoulder and burying the blade deep into his chest. Kevin let out a guttural scream as he fell to the ground, his life slipping away.

Anderson's father stood over the killer, his chest heaving and his eyes ablaze with fury. For a moment, he was satisfied. He had avenged his son's death, but he wasn't feeling better.

The man stood over him, breathing heavily, his chest heaving with exertion. He looked down at his son's killer, who lay there, gasping for breath, blood oozing from his nose.

However, as he stood over Kevin's lifeless body, his chest heaving with rage and sorrow, he knew he was not finished. He turned to face the ongoing battle between his son's friends and the remaining thugs.

He saw Gwen and Amber fighting a man who had a wicked grin on his face as he dodged their attacks.

Without hesitation, Carl charged toward Justin; his claymore raised high. The man's grin faltered as he turned to face the enraged parent.

He held his daggers high, but Carl was too quick, and he knocked the weapon out of his hand with a swift strike of his son's claymore.

Justin stumbled backward, tripping over a chair as he tried to regain his balance. Carl seized the opportunity and lunged forward, his blade piercing Justin's side.

The thug let out a scream of pain as blood gushed from the wound. Carl twisted the blade, making the wound deeper and more fatal.

Gwen and Amber stopped for a second as they saw Carl finish off Justin. They couldn't help but feel a mix of shock and awe at the ferocity with which he attacked. Everything happened in a couple of seconds.

Carl turned to face them, his eyes burning with fiery intensity. "I won't let anyone else die," he said, his voice low and menacing. "I won't let any more innocent people suffer because of these thugs and their twisted morality."

Now that Carl had just taken Justin down, he turned his attention to Daniel, who was still locked in combat with Benedict. Carl knew he had to act fast before the man could use his power to restrain Benedict and kill him or any of the others.

He charged toward the man, his anger and grief fueling his movements. Daniel turned towards Carl, his face contorting in surprise and fear.

Without hesitation, Carl swung his claymore at Daniel, who barely managed to dodge in time. The tip of the sword grazed his arm, drawing blood.

Daniel summoned his rope, hoping to trap Carl, but Anderson's father was too quick. He sidestepped the rope and swung his son's claymore again, this time landing a blow on Daniel's side.

The thug stumbled back, clutching his side in pain. Carl didn't give him a moment to recover.

He charged forward; his sword raised high. Daniel tried to summon his rope again, but this time he was too slow. Anderson's father was already on him and brought his sword down with all his might, cleaving Daniel in two.

As the thug's body fell to the ground, Carl let out a roar of triumph mixed with grief.

He had avenged his son's death and saved some of his friends, but that didn't make him feel better again, mainly because he saw two more hostages die. He felt a sense of emptiness inside as if his soul had been ripped apart along with his son's life.