

BIOLOGICAL 321

Chapter 321: The Red Lotus Lounge (16)

Erik and his team were outnumbered; there was no denying that. The Mambas, a notorious gang in the city, had brought more men than they had expected. Also, half of Erik's force comprised of students that, albeit being better than the average kid their age, had much fewer neural links, meaning less strength, speed, and power.

They were currently holding on because there were some adults with power much stronger than the average thug and were able to keep multiple people at bay.

But Erik's team was not one to back down from a challenge. They may have been outnumbered, but they were not helpless fighters.

They had trained hard in the past months and years, and they were not going to let the Mambas take them down without a fight.

At first, it seemed like a hopeless battle. The Mambas were ruthless fighters, and since the parents were in lower numbers than the thugs, the situation seemed dire.

However, four people—Adam's brother, Anderson's father, Mikey's, and Luisa's mother—had been able to turn the tables.

Mikey, Aaron, and Martha also needed praise because if it weren't for them, most students would have been dead by now. However, the situation was still dire since most of the kids were having severe troubles.

The Red Lotus Lounge was now a battlefield, with bodies scattered across the room and the smell of blood and sweat filling the air.

The Mambas had the numerical advantage and were stronger, but their fighters were not as technically skilled as Erik's team, and slowly the tide was turning.

Amber and Gwen were fighting together against another Mambas since Carl killed their previous opponent. They were using their combined skills to take down their opponents. Erik was holding her own against a female thug, Mia.

Benedict was in a fierce fight with a male Mamba wielding a sword, but he managed to use his weapon's long reach and quick reflexes to dodge his attacks most of the time.

Carl was in a state of rage after his son's death, and he charged into the fray, still fighting against multiple people simultaneously. His eyes were bloodshot, and he was not holding back his strength, delivering powerful blows to his opponents.

Matthew was watching the fights from a distance, his eyes fixed on the students. He was seething with anger that his men had not managed to kill them yet. He knew that the longer the fight went on, the more likely it was that his men would be defeated.

He turned to his men and yelled, "What the hell are you doing? Get in there and take them out!" His men nodded and charged into the fight, hoping to turn the tide in their favor.

Luisa Zamora stood in the center of the Red Lotus Lounge, sweat dripping down her face as she faced off against her opponent, a towering man with bulging muscles and a sneer on his lips. She knew she was at a disadvantage, as the man's strength outweighed hers, but she couldn't back down since the man would kill her regardless.

The man advanced on her, throwing a punch that Luisa managed to dodge, but barely. She tried to land a hit of her own, but her fist barely made a dent in his rock-hard abs. The man laughed, a sound that sent shivers down Luisa's spine.

"You're nothing, little girl," he taunted, lunging at her again.

Luisa moved her hands, creating a wall of flames that the man easily dodged.

She unleashed another burst of flames, but the man was too quick, evading each attack with a graceful ease that made Luisa envious. She tried to attack with more power, but the man slipped past her guard, striking her in the ribs.

Despite the pain, Luisa refused to give up, using her flames to create a fiery aura around her.

Sensing danger, the man tried to back away, but Luisa was too quick, and she launched a fireball at him while at the same time, she kept herself surrounded by a flaming aura. However, the man was still faster and easily dodged her ranged attack.

Luisa realized then that she was at a disadvantage. Her power was formidable, as she could control and create fire, but the man's speed was too high for her dexterity to allow her to aim properly. She needed to think of a way to catch him or at least predict where the man would go.

She focused a lot of mana on the palm of her hand and created a massive fireball, hoping to at least decrease his speed advantage by increasing the radius of her attack. She launched it at the man again, who was distracted by a random attack and hurled at him to see it coming. The fireball hit him squarely, almost engulfing his entire body.

However, despite the mana Luisa poured in, it wasn't enough to kill the man, as he circled his mana as best as he could to offset the flames and avoid going on fire. He still had some injuries, as he got some nasty burns, but those didn't prevent the man from charging toward her, his fists raised, but the young girl quickly reacted.

She sent a wave of flames toward him as he did so, causing him to stop in his tracks and shield his face.

Luisa took advantage of the man's momentary disarray and sent another fireball at him. The man raised his head and saw the ball of fire traveling toward him. He tilted his head and dodged the attack, which ended up hitting a chair nearby and setting it on fire. He then resumed his charge and approached Luisa. The girl panicked, then she felt a sharp pain in her side.

She looked down to see a knife protruding from her stomach.

The man played her, taking his weapon only at the end. She didn't expect it and staggered backward, clutching her wound. She saw the man standing a few feet behind her, a wicked smile on his face. She sprawled on the ground and died.

At the same time, Serena was facing her opponent. She knew that her brain crystal power, which granted her super speed, would give her a way to fight for a bit, but if it weren't for Mikey's, Martha's, and Aaron's help, she would have been dead by now since her opponent had twice her neural links.

The woman was tall and muscular, with long dark hair. She was lean and had a pair of knuckle-dusters on her fists. Her eyes were cold and calculating and fiercely glaring at her, and the young woman knew she was in for a tough fight.

The thug lunged at her, and Serena couldn't help but feel intimidated as the woman took a step closer. The Red Palace student's mind raced as she analyzed her opponent's movements.

Serena was faster than most, thanks to her superspeed brain crystal powers. But it was clear that despite her brain crystal power, she was still slower than the thug; the woman was no slouch either, and Serena had to be careful not to get hit.

She dodged an attack by jumping to the left, and the woman's fist whizzed past her face.

Serena's mind raced as she tried to keep up with the woman's movements, but it was hard. She could feel the adrenaline pumping through her veins as she dodged the thug's attacks, her brain crystal allowing her to react, but just barely. The Red Palace student then felt a pang of fear in her chest as she avoided the move.

The thug's neural links were giving her an edge, and Serena knew that she had to step up her game if she wanted to win this fight. She dodged another attack and tried to retaliate, but it was almost impossible for her.

Despite her speed, however, Serena found herself at an increasing disadvantage. The woman was not only strong but incredibly fast as well. Serena could barely keep up with her movements, let alone land a hit.

"You are not fast enough, girl!" the woman shouted with a smirk on her face.

She charged and landed a powerful blow to Serena's abdomen, sending her flying across the room. The student groaned as she hit the ground, struggling to catch her breath due to the devastating blow that knocked the wind out of her lungs.

The thug was on her in an instant, delivering a barrage of punches and kicks that Serena could barely block. Serena looked toward Martha, Mikey, and Aaron, but she noticed they were having trouble helping three other students and could not help her.

She knew that she had to think fast if she wanted to survive this fight. She concentrated, focusing her mind on her brain crystal. Suddenly, everything around her seemed to slow down, and Serena felt like she had all the time in the world to make her next move.

She saw an opening in the woman's defenses while she kept attacking her and took it, landing a powerful punch to her jaw. The woman stumbled backward, dazed. Serena followed up with a series of rapid strikes, her speed allowing her to land multiple blows before the woman could recover.

"Don't overestimate yourself, kid!" the thug shouted.

She wasn't out of the fight, as those punches were too weak to be a problem for her. She grabbed Serena's arm and twisted it, causing Serena to cry out in pain as the bone snapped under the force. The student struggled to break free, tears in her eyes due to the pain, but the woman's grip was too firm for her to break free.

The thug delivered a final blow, hitting Serena in the head with a powerful punch that sent her crashing to the ground. Serena lay there, gasping for breath, as her head partially caved in and her head spinning. The attack was too strong, and she was barely alive.

As Serena's vision began to fade, she thought about all the things she still wanted to do with her life. She had always been a fighter, but it seemed like she couldn't prove her worth in the end.

As she was on the ground, and blood trickled by her nose and ears, she looked to her left only to see Darragh Montgomery in the same situation. His battle must have been intense but despite his amazing brain crystal power, high-ranked brain crystal, talent, and skills.

They could do nothing against adults with twice their neural links. The difference in physical prowess was too much. Then she closed her eyes, feeling her body begin to go numb. As her consciousness slipped away, she knew that this was the end.

Chapter 322: The Red Lotus Lounge (17)

Erik and Mia stood facing each other, their swords at the ready. The atmosphere was tense, and the sound of their breathing was the only thing they could hear, despite the chaos in their surroundings.

Erik knew that he was almost done, as the thug in front of him was too strong. Mia was quick and agile, and he could not match her strength.

Until now, he resisted, thanks to Nathaniel's power, which gave him enough speed and power to counter her blows, but his meager mana was almost empty and he didn't know how long he could go on like this.

At the same time, Mia was left stunned by Erik's skills. It wasn't an everyday occurrence that a 16-year-old kid could fight for so long against someone her age.

He was indeed on the losing side and had many wounds on his body, but the feat remained.

However, it was apparent to her expert eye that the kid would reach his limit soon.

She had been trained to be ruthless and efficient, and she did not doubt that she would take him down sooner or later.

Without warning, Mia lunged forward, her sword flashing in the room's light. Erik parried her attack with difficulty and backed down slightly to gain some distance. Mia was quick, and he had to be ready for anything.

Erik backed and started circling the woman, who did the same as currently; Erik's defense was tight; their eyes locked in a fierce stare. The awakener noticed Mia's eyes were cold and calculating, and he knew she was trying to anticipate his moves.

He decided to take the initiative and swung his Flyssa towards Mia. She parried the attack with ease and retaliated with a swift thrust.

Erik managed to dodge the attack, but he felt the wind blowing on his skin due to the sheer strength the woman unleashed.

The two fighters continued to trade blows, each trying to gain the upper hand. Erik was a skilled fighter, but Mia was faster, stronger, and more agile. She managed to land a few more hits on Erik, but he could deflect most of them with his sword.

Erik began to feint sometimes, trying to throw Mia off balance. It worked for a while, and he managed to land a few hits on her, too, much to the woman's surprise, but they were shallow at best, and Mia was too skilled to be fooled for long.

However, Erik's fatigue began to set in as the fight continued. He had been fighting for what felt like an eternity and knew he couldn't keep it up much longer.

<Fuck... If it weren't for all those level-ups, I would have already depleted my mana reserves by now...> he thought while observing his opponent.

On the other hand, Mia seemed to be getting stronger as the fight went on. Her movements became more fluid and precise, and she pressed the attack more aggressively.

"I have to admit, kid, you're lasting longer than I expected," Mia said with a grin. "I thought I'd have you on the ground by now."

Erik gritted his teeth, pushing himself harder. "Glad I made a lasting impression on you then," he replied, lunging forward with a swift feint.

Mia easily parried the move and countered with a slash that Erik barely managed to dodge.

"Lasting impression? Hahahahahah," she laughed, circling him with a predatory look in her eyes. "Yeah. It is indeed a lasting impression, but you're still not good enough to survive this encounter."

Erik knew she was right. Mia was a skilled fighter, and he would not have been her match in other circumstances; those level-ups saved his life.

They continued to exchange blows, each move calculated and precise. Erik was getting even more tired, his movements slowing down, and his mana at rock bottom. Mia noticed his weakness and took advantage of it, pushing him back with each attack.

"You're getting sloppy," Mia taunted, landing a solid blow on Erik's shoulder. "Just give up already. It'll save you the embarrassment of losing to a street thug."

Erik growled in frustration, his vision starting to blur. He knew he couldn't keep up much longer. But he refused to give Mia the satisfaction of winning that way.

"Can't you stop talking, please? You didn't stop for even a second since the fight started," he said, gritting his teeth. "Seriously, your bullshit is worse than being stabbed!"

Mia's eyes narrowed, laughing at what Erik just said. "Very well," she said, lunging forward with renewed vigor. "If things are like this, then I have no more reason to keep playing with you," she said, a little bit offended by Erik's comment.

Mia became getting more aggressive, her attacks becoming more ferocious by the second. Still, Erik kept resisting, and they continued to battle, with Erik giving it his all despite his exhaustion.

The awakener could feel his muscles straining and his body protesting with every movement. He knew he was in trouble.

He tried to summon all his strength to fight back, but it was useless. Mia was just too powerful.

With a swift movement, the woman swung her sword toward Erik's head. He managed to dodge the attack, but it left him off balance. Erik stumbled backward, his hand clutching at his Flyssa, and fell to the ground.

He knew he would probably die now, as he couldn't do much in that position, and his opponent was already on him. Mia pointed her weapon at him; she grinned triumphantly, holding her sword at his throat.

"Looks like I win," she said, smiling down at him.

Erik gasped for breath, his heart pounding in his chest. He knew he had lost, but he refused to accept it, and he raised his sword again, ready to fight to the bitter end.

Mia stood over him with a cruel smile on her lips. She raised her sword to deliver the final blow, but Carl joined the fight before she could strike.

Anderson's father stepped forward to face her. The air around her began to stir as she raised her hands, calling forth a gust of wind to knock back her new opponent.

Carl, however, was not deterred. He lifted his hands, generating small explosions from his palms and dissipating the wind the woman generated.

Mia's eyes widened in surprise as Carl closed the distance between them incredibly quickly, landing a powerful blow that sent her tumbling to the ground.

"You think you can just waltz here and ruin our moment?" She snarled, her hands crackling with energy. "Well, think again. I won't allow you to do as you please, old man!"

Carl charged toward Mia with a ferocity that took her by surprise as she said those words, leaving the woman stunned. She had seen his power during his fights against other people but didn't face him head-on.

Mia swung her sword at Carl in a retaliatory attempt, but he was too quick for her, dodging the blow effortlessly.

He retaliated with a swift punch, but Mia managed to dodge it at the last moment, using her power to create a gust of wind that pushed Carl back.

The man stumbled but quickly regained his footing, his eyes locked on Mia.

The two circled each other, each waiting for the other to make a move. The thug lunged forward, her sword glinting in the club's light and a mad glint in her eyes, but Carl was ready for her.

He sidestepped her attack and punched her on the side. However, the woman retreated just in time to avoid the subsequent explosion.

Though Mia grunted in pain and retaliated with a blast of wind that sent Carl flying across the room.

Anderson's father landed hard on the ground, his head ringing from the impact. He struggled to get back to his feet, but the woman was already upon him.

She raised her sword to deliver what she believed was going to be the final blow, but Carl managed to block it with his hand by using his power which generated a small explosion that knocked Mia and her sword back.

The woman stumbled but managed to stay on her feet. It was clear to her that this man was a skilled fighter with a good power of his own, and Mia knew she had to be careful.

Those explosions were nasty, and she saw what they could do to the human body.

However, that didn't deter her, and she charged at Carl again without fear. The two kept trading blows; most ended up hitting the empty air.

The exchange between them was like a dog fight, with Mia trying to sever the man's head several times and Carl using not only his brain crystal power but even Anderson's claymore to kill the woman.

However, it was clear to Carl that he only needed one explosion to end the fight. Anderson's father swung the claymore with a lot of strength behind it, but Mia ducked and avoided the move and retaliated with her brain crystal power, knocking him back.

More often than not, the move worked, but Carl was quick to dodge any subsequent attack, his own power creating small explosions that kept her at bay.

Though it was from here that things changed, Mia charged again at Carl but didn't take Erik into account. The young man rushed behind her and plunged his blade into her side, creating a grievous wound as she kept her focus on Carl.

Of course, this greatly shocked the woman, who turned to look around only to see Erik smirk, and at the same time, Carl took advantage of that and landed a fatal blow, making her entire right arm, including the shoulder, explode.

Mia staggered back, blood pouring from the wound. She looked at Carl with surprise and shock.

"You... you're good," she gasped before collapsing to the ground.

Carl looked down at her, his heart racing from the intensity of the fight, while Erik got a notification.

[HOSTILE INDIVIDUAL KILLED: MANA ABSORBING PROCESS STARTING.]

[0%...1%...5%...30%...70%...100%]

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY ABSORBED, STARTING CONVERTING PROCEDURE.]

[3...2...1...0]

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY CONVERTED INTO EXPERIENCE. 6805 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

[LEVEL UP.]

Chapter 323: The Red Lotus Lounge (18)

Inside the Red Lotus Lounge, chaos reigned supreme. The once-elegant interior was now a battlefield, with bodies scattered across the floor and furniture overturned and shattered.

The students who had come to rescue their parents were outnumbered and outmatched.

Only the fact that some of the parents had been able to keep most of the thugs at bay saved their lives.

However, that wasn't true for anyone, as many people died that day, parents and students alike.

Despite their best efforts, the parents were at a distinct disadvantage.

Most of them did not have particularly strong power, despite their children having it, and they had no weapons.

They were up against a group of people who used to kill people for jobs, and fighting was akin to second nature for them. Their experience in the military wasn't enough for them to make the situation even due to how long ago they stopped training.

The Mambas were taking control of the situation, and it was clear they were in no mood to back down.

They moved with ruthless efficiency, taking down anyone who stood in their way. The parents fought valiantly, but they were fighting a losing battle.

They fell one by one, their bodies added to the growing pile on the ground. Blood stained the once-pristine walls, and the air was thick with the smell of sweat, fear, and violence.

Despite their despair, the parents refused to give up for their children's sake. They fought with every ounce of strength they had, hoping that they could turn the tide against all odds, but seeing their children's dead bodies turned their mood down.

The Mambas were too strong, too well organized, and too ruthless. They seemed to be everywhere at once, striking from the shadows and disappearing just as quickly. It was impossible for the average parent to anticipate their moves or predict their next target.

As the battle raged on, the rescued hostages began to lose hope. They were exhausted, wounded, and demoralized.

Despite everything, Matthew paced back and forth in a dark corner of the club; his fists clenched in anger. He had expected his subordinates to take care of the kids and the parents by now, but they seemed to be struggling with this task. It was clear that overall they were at an advantage, but he did expect his men to have already taken care of these people.

Matthew feared they alerted the authorities or, worse, the clans.

He could hear the sounds of fighting from different corners of the club, but it was not the satisfying sound of victory. Instead, it was the sound of his men getting killed by some of the parents. In particular, four people were basically keeping most of his men at bay and even managed to kill several important members of his gang, like Kevin and Mia.

"Useless pieces of shit!" he muttered to himself, his eyes flashing with fury. He had no patience for incompetence, especially when it influenced his wishes. He had invested a lot in this operation, and he expected results.

He had made sure to hire only the best thugs and criminals available to his finances for this job, but now he was regretting his choices. The crystal cross gang refused to lend him some of his assassins, and he couldn't use more money to hire them since he had to keep his other forces functioning since there was an internal conflict inside the Mambas.

He had to split his forces in order to keep his rule over the gang.

He watched as two of his subordinates stumbled past him, one of them clutching his arm.

They were battered and bruised, their faces covered in sweat and blood. Matthew felt a surge of anger rise in him, and he grabbed the closest one by the collar of his shirt.

"What the hell are you doing?! Why haven't you taken care of the kids yet?" He spat, his voice low and dangerous.

The thug stammered, trying to explain the situation, but Matthew cut him off.

"I don't want to hear your excuses. You know what will happen if you fail! Get back out there and finish the job," he snarled, shoving the thug away from him.

He watched them scurry back into the fray, but he knew it was only a matter of time before they were beaten again.

Then the man noticed the bar, still standing in the club's corner. It was well stocked, and there were several bottles of alcohol within reach. He had a scary face and felt anger oozing out of his pores. He knew what he had to do.

He strode over to the bar, his eyes scanning the bottles. He picked up a large bottle of vodka and a few shot glasses. He poured himself a shot and downed it, feeling the burn of the alcohol in his throat. He poured another, then another, until he felt the buzz of the alcohol in his system.

He turned back to look at the fight, feeling slightly invigorated. He watched as his men fought against the parents and the kids and how they slowly gained an advantage now.

As Carl fought against other thugs in the Red Lotus Lounge, he noticed Mikey's mother, Mary, struggling against four larger men. He quickly made his way over to her, dispatching one of the thugs with a quick explosion from his hands.

"Are you alright?" Carl asked, extending his hand to help Mary up. The woman nodded, but her expression was grim. "I don't know if I can keep fighting," she said. "We've lost so many already. It's time for the kids to get out of here."

The man observed his surroundings as he dodged an incoming attack from an opponent.

The Red Lotus Lounge was in shambles; bodies were strewn across the floor, and broken furniture and shattered glass littered the area. The sound of fighting, clashing weapons, and explosions filled the air as the fight raged on.

Then the man noticed some smoke coming from the doors around the room. The fire they had set finally started devouring the building, but apparently their enemies didn't notice due to the Zamora clan members.

Carl had been fighting for what seemed like an eternity, his hands still crackling with the energy from his last attack.

He took a moment to catch his breath and assess the situation. Despite their efforts, his team was still at a disadvantage. Their opponents had taken out several of their members, leaving only a few left to fight.

As Anderson's father turned his attention back to the fight, he saw Aaron get knocked back by an attack. The kid was exhausted, but he kept firing slime at the thugs to save his fellow students.

He knew they couldn't keep going like this for much longer. They needed to find a way to turn the tide of the battle before it was too late or to let the kids escape.

As what he saw seeped in, Carl immediately understood Mary was right, but letting the kids out of the place was easier said than done, and he knew that once they did, the fight would only become harder for them.

"I understand," Carl said. "What do you suggest?" Mary looked at Carl with a mixture of gratitude and apprehension.

"There is not much we can do; we tell the kids to run away, and we hold the thugs back," she said.

"But we're outnumbered so it won't be easy. Ultimately, it will only be on them if they manage to escape," Mary replied.

Carl thought for a moment before responding. "All right," Carl said. He wanted his son's friends to get out of that situation before it was too late.

Mikey's mother nodded, but her eyes were still full of doubt. "Let's hope they will be able," she said while looking at Mikey, her son.

Carl placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. "We won't lose anyone else," he said firmly. "We'll get through this together."

However, it was at that moment that something happened—a loud noise rang, and they turned to look at the source.

It was then that they saw a chilling scene. Matthew just used his power as he joined the fray and was in a visible frenzy.

Though, what was really chilling was what was at his feet. Charley Hess's and Stefan Strickland's bodies while he was holding Adam's Bond head in his hands.

At the same time, several mournful cries and shrieks sounded through the building.

Frank, Adam's brother, and Stefan's and Charley's parents had blank looks in their eyes. They just saw their precious kids die. If only they weren't kidnapped, all of this wouldn't have happened.

At that moment, a thought crossed their minds: why did the kids come to rescue them? Wasn't it better for them to die instead of the kids? They knew the kids came because the rescue team they called couldn't come in time, and if they had, they would have died, but was it really necessary? In the end, the hostages and the students died regardless.

Wasn't it better for only the older people to die at that point?

Carl and Mary immediately looked at their surroundings, and then they resumed fighting, working in tandem to take down the remaining thugs. Carl's explosions and Mary's flesh-eating bugs proved to be a deadly combination, and they managed to keep some of the thugs at bay.

As they fought, Mary gave instructions to the remaining kids: "GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE! WE WILL KEEP THEM AT BAY," she said. Everyone heard it there, students and thugs alike.

Erik immediately understood that was their best chance at surviving. After the fight against Mia, he accumulated a lot of wounds, and the pain made it difficult for him to fight to the best of his abilities, so the best thing to do would be to run away.

He immediately searched for Amber among the crowd, and once she looked at him, they both nodded. "RETREAT!" Amber shouted. "LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!"

Chapter 324: The Red Lotus Lounge (19)

Erik stood in the middle of the room, searching for all his friends while smoke filled the dancefloor. The club was in flames, and the air was thick with smoke, making it hard to see more than a few feet ahead.

Behind him, he heard the muffled sobs of Martha. She was scared, but Erik couldn't blame her.

They had just been through hell together, and now they had to escape this burning building before it was too late. The young woman saw many people die today, and despite her best efforts, she couldn't help them.

Erik scanned the hallway, his eyes stinging from the thick black smoke. He could barely see a few meters ahead of him, but he knew they had to get out of there fast.

"Amber!" he called out, his voice hoarse from the smoke. "We need to head for the main entrance!"

Amber, who was a few meters away, looked at him with urgency on her face. "I know, but it is hard! Should we wait for Mikey's mother?"

Erik shook his head. "You heard her. We can't stay any longer. The fire is spreading too fast, and these people are too strong for us. They'll catch up if we hesitate. We have to go now."

Amber wavered for a moment but then nodded in agreement. "Okay, let's go."

Erik led the way, weaving through the smokey hallway toward the main entrance. The heat was almost unbearable, and Erik could feel his skin starting to burn. Not only his friends started following them, but also the remaining students, Brittney, Patricia, Jacob, Enya, and Stella.

Erik avoided a sudden attack by one of the thugs, and then one of the parents rushed to his aid, preventing further attacks from reaching him.

"Are you okay?" Amber asked, looking at him with concern. Erik nodded, gritting his teeth. "I'm fine. Just keep moving. Come on, guys," Erik said, trying to sound confident.

They all nodded, and together they stepped forward through the hallway. The air was hot and suffocating, and the flames finally spread inside the dance room, getting closer with every passing second.

Erik led the way, trying to find a path through the wreckage left during the fight and the many bodies littering the ground. The sound of the fight going on in the room they just left was deafening, and it was hard to hear anything else over the sound of clashing weapons and Carl's explosions.

Erik couldn't help but take in the destruction around him as they moved through the club. The once-luxurious décor was now reduced to ruin. The walls started to blacken with soot, and the air smelled of smoke and burning wood.

Aaron and Mikey were behind him, their faces etched with sorrow. Their parents were alive, but Mikey's mother decided to stay back and sacrifice herself in order to make them run away; besides, Anderson died so Erik could understand their current feelings. He, too, was grieving at the moment.

The awakener and the others made their way through the smoky hallway, coughing and wheezing as they struggled to breathe.

But despite the thick smoke and debris, they managed to make it to the entrance without any major obstacles, thanks to the parents fighting behind them.

The problem was that Matthew sent someone to block their way. In fact, as they arrived, they found five figures standing in their way as they approached the exit. Erik tensed up, ready for a fight, but as they got closer, he may be in more trouble than he assumed.

"Fuck!" Erik shouted, his eyes narrowing as he took in their rough appearance.

One of them stepped forward with a sneer on his face. "You're not going anywhere. The boss wants you dead."

Erik's heart sank as he realized they still needed to fight. He knew they were in serious trouble. This whole situation ended badly.

Where the hell were Caiden's men? Why didn't things go his way? Was saving the parents the right thing to do? Would it have been better to wait for Caiden's men to take action?

But what if they didn't arrive in time or Matthew killed the parents as soon as they saw Caiden's men?

Since it was impossible to know what would have happened, Erik didn't linger on that thoughts for long. The only thing that mattered now was to get the hell out of there and to do so, they had to defeat these five guys.

Erik scanned them with his analysis and saw they were mostly at the level the guards at the entrance had, aside from one man at the MI level, so it was definitely possible to kill them. The problem was that they didn't have the advantage of surprise anymore, and killing them would not be simple.

Amber looked at Erik; fear etched on her face. "What do we do?"

The awakener knew the only thing they could do was fight. There were 13 people on his side, while Matthew's men were only five.

Regardless of the chances to beat them, they couldn't just stand there and wait for Matthew's men to attack. They had to make their move.

"Get ready to fight," he said, his voice low and urgent. "Martha, you fight with me; Aaron, you go with Gwen and Amber; I want you to deal with that guy! The others can do as they see fit."

The other group members looked at him in surprise, but they didn't question his reasoning. They knew that Erik was their best chance for survival. The awakener quickly told the others who to target, and like that, they readied themselves.

The young man's goal was to fight against a guy with a bow and mana arrows since he was the most dangerous one and he was the only one who could more or less match his speed, the best thing to do would be to neutralize the only ranged unit so that his friends would be safe.

The problem was that during the previous fights, he was constantly aided by many people, and this time he wasn't sure only Martha's help would be enough. He needed more mana, so he finally decided to use the status points he had collected during the past few months.

That way, he would replenish his mana reserves, be able to fight for longer, and use his powers better.

<System, use all the available status points on Energy>

[UNDERSTOOD, 35 STATUS POINTS SPENT ON ENERGY. CURRENT ENERGY POINTS: 72]

Suddenly, it was as if he was connected to a boundless well of Energy. He felt invigorated, powerful, and more alive than ever before.

He had never felt such a rush of Energy before. His heart was pounding, and his veins were filled with adrenaline. As he waited for the process to complete, he could feel the others looking at him, their eyes wide with surprise and confusion. They must have felt the change, too, but it was like a sort of miracle for them.

Suddenly, it hit him. His mana had increased. He could feel it surging through him at a level he had never felt; it was like a river rushing through a narrow canyon. It was more powerful than anything he had ever experienced before.

[CONGRATULATIONS, HOST. YOUR BRAIN CRYSTAL JUST REACHED THE D LEVEL. HOWEVER, I STRONGLY SUGGEST YOU LEAVE THIS PLACE, AS YOU BASICALLY REVEALED THE BIOLOGICAL SUPERCOMPUTER EXISTENCE.]

That wasn't exactly true. The others didn't know what was happening exactly, so they didn't know what this phenomenon was due to. The problem, though, was that if Amber and the others felt the mana surging, then even the five thugs felt it.

However, at least he was out of the parents' and the other thugs' range. Though the awakener grinned in triumph, feeling the power of mana coursing through him.

"Are you okay? What is happening?" Amber suddenly asked, clearly worried about the situation, her eyes wide with concern.

Erik nodded, but he couldn't hide the exhilaration he felt. "I'm fine," he said, "but I can't tell you more now." He felt like a different person like he was more than just himself. It was a thrilling yet terrifying feeling.

Erik looked down at his hands, still buzzing with Energy. He knew that this was just the beginning. His mana had never felt so potent, and he was eager to explore what he could do with it.

"I don't know what you've just done, but we will find out," one of the five thugs said. "I bet the boss will reward us well if we bring you to him alive."

Erik's heart hardened, though there was nothing he could have done in that situation. Their only chance to escape was for them to fight; if he didn't, they would all die. It was better to reveal he had some secrets than die, and since he couldn't count on Anderson's father or Mikey's mother to save him anymore, contrary to when he was in the dance room, the only thing he could do was this.

Erik, full of Energy, unsheathed his Flyssa and channeled mana through his neural links to use Nathaniel's and the sharpening power.

"Martha, try to apprehend him!" Erik shouted, and then a massive number of thorny vines sprouted from the ground and searched for their target, the archer.

Erik charged at the man, and the other students did the same. Amber couldn't still use her power; hence, she was full of mana, but she planned to use it if the opportunity arose.

The amount of mana Erik pumped into his neural links was twice as strong, so thanks to Nathaniel's power, he gained an insane amount of speed and was able to match the archer's speed. That clearly left the man surprised, as he was at the MI level.

Chapter 325: The Red Lotus Lounge (20)

Erik gripped the handle of his Flyssa tightly, feeling the sword's weight in his hand. The archer thug, Benjamin Chen, stood across from him with his bow and arrows at the ready. The awakener knew he had to be careful; one false move and an arrow could pierce his skin.

The archer stood back, drawing his bow, and sent arrow after arrow toward Erik. The young man blocked them with a swift movement of his sword, deflecting them with precision.

Meanwhile, Martha focused on creating a massive number of thorny vines, which she sent to the archer in the attempt to prevent him from firing again.

The vines writhed and twisted as they closed in on their target, but the archer back stepped, firing another arrow toward Erik.

Erik continued to evade the arrows and close in on the archer, his sword glinting in the room's dim light. The archer continued to back away, his eyes darting around the room as he searched for an escape route.

Martha sent another wave of vines toward the archer, but he slipped past them and fired another arrow at Erik. This time, however, the awakener was ready. He ducked to the side, avoiding the arrow, and swung his Flyssa at the archer.

The thug dodged the attack, but Erik followed up with a quick jab that caught the man off guard.

He stumbled backward, nearly losing his balance, and Erik took his chance to dash toward him, but the man rolled on the ground and quickly regained his balance and gained distance.

As the fight continued, the archer remained relentless. He deftly avoided Erik's attack with a graceful somersault and continued raining arrows on him.

The young man struggled to block and evade the arrows as they came at him in quick succession.

The sound of arrows hitting the ground and walls echoed through the room, mingling with the grunts and shouts of the combatants. Martha tried her best to trap the archer with her thorny vines, but he was too quick for her. He leaped and twisted out of the way, never allowing himself to be trapped.

Erik knew that he needed to close the distance between them if he was going to have a chance to strike. He waited for the archer to take aim, then lunged forward, his flyssa leading the way.

Benjamin, was caught off guard due to how fast Erik was, and how quickly he gained distance, but he managed to dodge Erik's attack with another nimble move. He quickly regained his footing and resumed his barrage of arrows.

Erik was already fatigued from the previous fights, but thanks to his new amount of mana, he was able to push Nathaniel's power to the limit, and thanks to that, he was able to cope with the speed disparity.

However, he had been dodging and blocking arrows for what felt like an eternity, and he wasn't sure how much longer his friends could keep up in their fight; he needed to help them if they wanted to escape.

With renewed determination, the awakener took a deep breath and charged at Benjamin once again.

This time, however, he pumped more mana through his neural links. Erik ducked and rolled as the archer prepared to fire, coming close behind him thanks to a burst of speed.

The archer spun around, and Erik's Flyssa sliced through the air, narrowly missing the archer's neck by a couple of centimeters. The man stumbled backward, a look of shock on his face. That was no 16-year-old power level. Erik pressed his advantage, but the archer was quick to recover.

He drew his bow and fired an arrow, which Erik managed to deflect with his Flyssa. Though Martha took her chance, she finally trapped the man.

She used a lot of mana, so he had trouble getting out of the vines. That was enough for the awakener, who closed the distance between them with a final burst of speed and plunged his blade inside the man's body.

[HOSTILE 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. 3118 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

Erik had just been able to kill an MI-ranked individual. That was no easy feat, as he was still at the RHO level. Nathaniel really had an easy life with his brain crystal.

That was all thanks to the system and his multiple brain crystal powers, but it was now clear to everyone that Erik was too strong for a kid his age, and since the others knew Erik's level, they immediately understood he was hiding something.

However, things didn't end there since he and Martha immediately rushed toward Benedict, Floyd, and Mikey, who were facing a woman who could summon a mana sword.

Erik decided they had to fight against her due to the power she possessed since Floyd would be able to slow down her attacks and reduce their powers severely, while Mikey would keep her at bay with his flesh-eating bugs, and Benedict could attack her.

The awakener chose the opponents carefully and decided that the team combination was the most appropriate one, so he told three people to fight her.

If he and Martha joined the fight, it was just a matter of time for five people to kill her and help the others struggling against the thugs, as not only were they weaker than the thugs, but they were also tired.

Erik quickly charged at the woman, and Martha used her vines to trap her. Though she sensed the mana shift in the air and avoided the attack by gaining distance, but she was followed by Mikey's flesh-eating bugs.

Erik and Martha quickly reached the other three, and Erik, Martha, Mikey, Benedict, and Floyd stood together, facing the woman. They were tired and wounded from their previous battles, but they knew they had to fight on.

The woman charged at them with the sword, and Erik rushed forward to meet her. He swung his flyssa, but she parried the blow with ease. She swung back at him, and Erik managed to deflect the attack by giving himself a strong push, thanks to Nathaniel's power.

Martha summoned thorny vines to ensnare the woman, but she sliced through them with her sword. Benedict tried to attack her from behind, but she spun around and knocked him back with a powerful sword swing.

Mikey used his bugs to keep her at bay and create openings while the creatures chipped at her flesh with their tiny mouths, but she seemed not to care about the attacks.

Meanwhile, Floyd impaired her movements thanks to his power, so fighting her became even more viable. That was their advantage over the average person.

They had very particular and powerful brain crystal powers to keep up with people with average powers, such as sword-conjuring ones.

The battle raged, with the woman moving fluidly between attacks and defenses. She was skilled with the sword and had spent years honing her skills despite ending up with a group of thugs.

The woman, Ava, spun around with blinding speed, launching a flurry of slashes and stabs at the five friends.

Erik was the main fighter; thanks to Nathaniel's power and increased mana, he could keep up with the woman, but he had to resort to using his metallization power to fight her, or she would have wounded him more than he already was. The wounds on his arm were not that painful or deep, but the one on the shoulder was, and he had to pay attention not worsening it.

As he activated the power, Martha, Mikey, Floyd, and Benedict noticed the weird mana traces again, so they knew he was doing something strange again, and it was clear he was using another power.

They were too close not to notice; however, too many powers were currently used inside the club, so the others didn't notice anything. Martha, Mikey, Benedict, and Floyd dodged and parried as best they could, but the sheer speed and power of the woman's attacks were overwhelming.

Erik kept preventing her from attacking the others, but it wasn't simple. He lunged forward with his Flyssa, but the woman easily sidestepped his attack and swung her sword at his exposed back. Martha conjured a wall of thorny vines to shield him, but the woman's sword sliced through them like butter.

Mikey leaped in with his Kukri, trying to distract the woman and give his friends an opening. She dodged his attacks with ease and countered with swift, brutal strikes of her own. Benedict jumped in again and attacked, but the woman parried the blow again.

Martha stayed back, firing her thorned vines again, trying to trap the woman.

"Fuck..." Ava said their teamwork was too good, even for her. The woman deflected most of the attacks with her sword, but a few got through and scored hits on her arms and legs.

However, Erik was the only one who seemed to be holding his own decently. He moved with fluid grace, blocking and dodging the woman's attacks with incredible timing and often saving his friends. But even he couldn't keep up forever. He charged again, this time metalizing his whole body without fearing to be hurt.

The woman attacked him, and despite Erik using much more mana than before, the attack still went through, and a wound appeared on his chest. However, it wasn't as grievous as the one on his shoulder. Martha seized the opportunity and summoned a thorny vine to trap her.

The woman struggled against the vines for a few seconds, but they held long enough for Erik to rush forward and drive his Flyssa into her eye socket. The woman died on the spot.

[HOSTILE 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. 2523 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

The group breathed a collective sigh of relief but knew their battle was far from over; they still had to help the others. Luckily, these fights took place in ten minutes at the most.

The most brutal fight was against the archer. Now that five people could aid the other eight, killing the remaining three thugs wasn't going to be hard. They had to be fast, though, or their friends would die.

Chapter 326: The Red Lotus Lounge (21)

Aaron, Gwen, and Amber were fighting against Ethan, who could summon a mana staff. The battle had already lasted for several minutes but was far from over, as the guy was strong and used to kill.

The only silver lining was that they were three against one and held themselves well against the guy.

They kept dodging and blocking many of Ethan's attacks, but he was a skilled fighter and continued to enlarge, make longer, or make heavier his mana staff to strike them with powerful blows even from a distance.

However, despite constant shifts in size, weight, and length, Ethan's staff was fast and fluid, moving with an almost magical grace that made it hard for the trio to predict his next move.

That was also due to his physical superiority, but thanks to their training and their rare powers, they managed to survive against him until now.

Aaron, trying to gain the upper hand in the fight, summoned a wave of corrosive slime that flew toward Ethan. However, the man quickly responded and used his staff to deflect the attack, sending it harmlessly to the side, which started sizzling due to its corrosiveness.

On the other hand, Gwen was using her mana armor to protect the others as she fought Ethan with her fists. She delivered a series of punches and kicks, but Ethan was able to evade most of them with ease.

While Gwen and Aaron kept the man at bay, Amber, meanwhile, was trying to find an opening to deal a fatal blow to the man, but it was like the thug had eyes behind his neck, and she never landed a hit on him.

Besides, Ethan was a formidable opponent, and his staff made it difficult for Amber to get close enough to land a blow.

Aaron stepped forward, his hands poised to create his corrosive slime. As the ball of slime appeared in his hands, Aaron threw it at the staff-wielding man, but Ethan was quicker, and with a quick move, he avoided the attack.

Amber and Gwen sprang into action as the man moved, with Erik's girlfriend hurling her daggers at Ethan while Gwen charged forward, her fists covered with spiked gauntlets that increased the damage she made.

Ethan deftly dodged the daggers, his staff twirling to deflect Gwen's punches.

Aaron tried again to summon his slime, but Ethan was noticed. He sent enlarged his staff and swung at the young man, forcing him to leap out of the way. The swing hit a nearby column instead, breaking it into multiple pieces that fell to the ground and seriously weakening the club's integrity.

Amber and Gwen continued to press the attack, their moves fluid and coordinated as they sought to keep Ethan off balance. Gwen landed a solid punch to Ethan's chest, but it barely seemed to faze him.

The thug countered with a mighty swing that sent Amber and Gwen flying backward. They hit the ground hard, rolling to their feet as Aaron stepped forward to take his turn.

With a wave of his hand, the young man summoned a tremendous amount of corrosive slime and threw it at Ethan. But the thug was ready, and he swung the staff, which hit the slime and prevented it from reaching him.

Amber and Gwen recovered quickly, leaping back into the fray with renewed determination.

Their attacks came faster now; each move was meant to distract and deceive Ethan.

The battle was intense, and the sound of clashing weapons and grunts of exertion filled the air. Sweat poured down the faces of the combatants as they fought with all their might.

Ethan continued to use his staff, sending it whirling through the air in a deadly dance. Aaron used his corrosive slime to slow the man down, but the staff moved too quickly for him to get a good shot.

The problem was that as the fight progressed, the three students grew increasingly tired. Aaron's slime was becoming less effective on the battlefield as Ethan learned where it landed and avoided it carefully, and he hadn't been able to hit the thug directly.

Gwen's attacks were losing their force, and even Amber was beginning to slow down, her movements becoming more sluggish as the fight continued. The trio fought bravely, but it seemed as though they were losing ground.

Despite their exhaustion, the trio continued to fight, knowing that they had to give it their all if they were to have any chance of surviving.

They dodged and weaved, blocked, and struck, their bodies moving in a frantic combat dance. And yet, despite their efforts, Ethan continued to gain ground, pushing them back with each passing moment.

At that moment, Erik and the others killed the woman, Ava, and right after, he and Martha joined the fray to help the three kill the man.

Since Aaron and Martha had already fought against the thugs for a long time, they already knew what to do while working together, and a plan was brewing in their minds. However, what they wanted to do was only possible thanks to Erik.

Gwen stepped forward, her mana armor glinting in the light. Ethan swung his staff, its mana crackling.

He thrust it at Gwen, but she tilted to the side. As the man's arms were outstretched, Amber dashed forward, her daggers gleaming in the flickering light.

She aimed for Ethan's back, but he spun around just in time, narrowly dodging the woman's attack. Amber didn't expect him to see her, but it was like he had eyes behind his neck or had a tracking device on her.

Erik and Martha jumped into the fray; the woman kept sending multiple thorny vines to the man just so that the thug had to keep moving to avoid being hit and creating more opportunities for her friends.

At the same time, Erik attacked the man with incredible vigor, giving the man a hard time he didn't deem possible for kids this age.

Gwen stepped forward again, taking Ethan's attention away from his assailants. She punched him with a powerful right hook, but the thug parried the blow with his staff.

Seeing an opening, Erik's girlfriend stabbed Ethan's leg with her dagger. He jumped back, avoiding the attack, but the distraction was enough for Aaron's slime to reach him.

The slime started dissolving Ethan's clothes and skin, causing him to scream. He frantically tried to rip off the slime.

As the man was distracted by his slime and Gwen's and Amber's attacks, Aaron, in the meantime, summoned his corrosive slime, which splattered on the ground and started creeping toward Ethan's feet.

There were just a few spots where he could move on.

The man tried to jump away, but the slime-covered his shoes and started dissolving them. He frantically tried to shake off the slippery slime, but it was useless.

He had to get away from the substance, so he jumped back on the only clean spot on the floor.

Martha, watching the action, knew this was the right opportunity. She summoned her thorny vines, which shot out of the ground and wrapped around Ethan's arms and legs, trapping him.

He struggled to break free for a couple of seconds and would have been almost successful if it weren't for Aaron's slimes and Amber's contextual attack, which he parried. Erik, seeing that Ethan was vulnerable, charged forward.

The vines resisted long enough for him to charge, holding his flyssa high.

He struck down at Ethan, aiming for a killing blow. This time he feinted to the left, then spun around and struck at Ethan's neck with a powerful swing of his sword. The thug tried to dodge, but the attack connected, and his head rolled away from his body.

[HOSTILE 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. 7569 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

That was the notification Erik got as the man's head rolled on the ground. That meant that the other two thugs had been killed too.

The awakener turned to look at the situation, and the other groups stood there momentarily, panting heavily and covered in sweat and blood.

However, Erik noticed Adam's brother there; he apparently came to help the students fight against their opponents, but he couldn't understand how he was able to do so.

Erik looked at the other parents, who were still fighting, and saw that the remaining ones were taking care of Adam's brother's opponents too, but the situation wasn't the best.

The man nodded at Erik as he saw him looking at him and then went back to fight against the thugs. His powers, which characterized the Silverbend clan to which both he and Adam belonged, were very powerful.

It didn't take much for him to trap the men and let the students kill them. The fight became especially easy since, thanks to Floyd's power, the thugs' attacks became much less threatening.

At that moment, Erik understood what it meant to be a Red Palace member or what a top 20 student at Thornton High School really signified.

Despite being significantly weaker than their opponents, with a little bit of help from the outside, or the number advantage, they had been able to overcome impossible odds.

In a sense, his friends were even more freaks than he was, despite having the system.

They had succeeded, but the fight had taken a toll on all of them, and they knew they couldn't keep going like this forever.

They were all battered and bruised, and some had sustained severe injuries. As they looked around at each other, they realized they had all changed somehow.

They had faced danger and fought for their lives, and they had come out stronger and more resilient on the other side. Now they only had to get the hell away from that mess.

Like that, Erik pushed open the Red Lotus Lounge door, and they escaped through the city.

"GET THEM!" Matthew shouted from behind, and his thugs didn't let him repeat himself twice.

Chapter 327: The Red Lotus Lounge (22)

Erik and the others burst through the front entrance of the Red Palace and into the cool night air. The adrenaline was pumping through their veins as they knew the gang was pursuing them.

They had just fought in the club; they managed to escape the burning building, but the danger was far from over.

They could hear the sound of footsteps getting closer and closer behind them and the echo of voices shouting for them to stop. They all ran as fast as they could, not daring to look back for fear of slowing down and being caught.

Martha's heart was pounding in her chest as she ran, her mind racing with thoughts of what could happen if they were caught. She glanced over at Erik, who was leading the way with his Flyssa in hand. He looked calm and collected, his eyes fixed on the path ahead.

"I can't believe we're being chased like rats," Mikey grumbled, sweat pouring down his face.

"I know, right? This is insane," Floyd said, taking deep breaths to keep up with the rest.

"Maybe we should split up," Benedict suggested, looking over his shoulder at the approaching group. "We would be able to lose them more easily if we do."

"No way, that's too risky," Erik replied, his eyes scanning the streets for a potential escape route.

"I agree with Erik," Gwen said, her fists clenched in determination. "We will have more chances together."

"We aren't going to fight them, right?" Amber asked but with her daggers at the ready.

"No, we won't," Erik said. "That's if they do not catch them," he added, looking back toward the Red Lotus Lounge, where they saw ten men coming out of the building. The young man then looked at Aaron.

"Aaron, place as much slime as possible between us and the enemy." He then turned to look at his girlfriend. Amber's long red hair was plastered to her forehead, and she wiped the sweat off her brow with the back of her hand.

Her glasses had slid down her nose from the exertion, and she pushed them back up with a finger. Her breaths came in short gasps, and her chest heaved with the effort of running.

Despite her exhaustion, she kept up the pace, knowing that they couldn't afford to slow down with their pursuers on their heels.

Her clothes were soaked with sweat, and she could feel the damp fabric clinging to her skin. Her legs burned with the strain of keeping up, and her arms felt heavy due to the exertion. She glanced over at Erik, who was also breathing heavily, but she could see the determination in his eyes.

She knew they couldn't give up, no matter how tired they were. Amber gritted her teeth and pushed herself harder, ignoring the ache in her muscles.

"Amber," Erik said. "I know you are tired, but you must use your power now."

The girl looked at him with a severe expression. "Here? In the middle of the city? What about the other people?"

"There is no time to worry about the other people, Amber. The situation is already a mess; there is no trace of your father's men, and six of our fellow students died—this without counting the parents. We must make do with what we have in order to survive!" Erik replied.

"We need to be careful, though," Gwen said, breaking the tension. "Her power is strong enough to destroy the block. Many people will really die if she isn't careful enough."

Amber appreciated Gwen's support, but she knew Erik was right, and despite not really wanting to, she made her corrosive gasses and covered their escape.

At the same time, behind them, Simone was with the other nine men and was currently chasing the kids. He was flabbergasted; he knew that the Red Palace students wouldn't be average teenagers, but he never expected that.

They fought like lions; they even killed some of his men and managed to flee from the trap he meticulously laid. Yeah, they got help all the time, but that was still not a normal situation. When he decided on the number of men to place at the club, he decreased the number of people on purpose.

Since the parents had already been drugged, there was no reason for them to take hundreds of men just to kill a bunch of kids. Yet, that same bunch of kids managed to free the hostages, wake them up, and now they even escaped. He underestimated them and paid the price.

With those thoughts in mind, he saw Aaron throw a bunch of slime to the ground. However, the young man was gravely mistaken if he thought that would be enough to slow them down.

After all, they were stronger and faster than the students, so they were bound to catch them sooner or later. However, simultaneously, he saw Amber release her gases, which quickly covered the entire street.

The woman still had most of her mana untouched since she fought with her daggers and could use all her mana to create the most destructive gas cloud possible.

It was also clear that since she had increased her neural links since the attack in the forest, her power was deadlier than ever, and it was a shame she couldn't have used it inside the club since her friends were there. If she had been alone, that would have been another story.

The first thing to go was the asphalt on the street. It started to dissolve, leaving behind a bubbling, black sludge. Then the metal of the nearby cars began to erode, becoming nothing more than rusted shells.

But it wasn't just the man-made objects that were affected. The vegetation on the side of the road started to wither and die as the acidic gas ate away at the leaves and stems. Flames began to ignite on the dry foliage, spreading quickly through the trees and bushes.

As Amber continued to release the gas, the scene became increasingly chaotic. The fire was spreading quickly, and it was clear that the situation was rapidly getting out of control.

Suddenly, there was a loud crack as a nearby power line was dissolved by the gas. Sparks flew everywhere, and the area was plunged into darkness. The flames were the only light source, casting flickering shadows on the surrounding buildings.

Amber opened her eyes and looked back, horrified at the destruction she had wrought. She had meant to use her powers to help people, not to cause this kind of devastation. But now she was faced with the terrible reality of what her powers were capable of. At the same time, Simone looked at the scene; it was scary.

That was the difference between ordinary people and the elite. Their brain crystal powers made them rich, powerful, or whatever, and he could understand why the Red Palace only accepted outstanding students. If this was the power they usually got, then it was obvious they did this.

As Martha saw the thugs keep chasing them despite the fog, she decided to do something. She focused her energy and summoned her thorny vines, which shot out of the ground and wrapped around the legs of the pursuers. They stumbled and fell, caught off guard by the sudden attack.

Simone, the leader of the thugs, was momentarily stunned. But then he barked orders at his men, telling them to free themselves and keep chasing. Martha knew she had to keep them trapped a little longer.

She summoned more vines, which grew thicker and stronger, ensnaring the pursuers even more tightly. They struggled and cursed, but it was difficult to get free. Martha and the others used the

opportunity to keep running, their footsteps pounding on the pavement. They knew they couldn't stop until they were far away from the danger.

Martha watched Simone's face contort in anger and frustration as they gained distance, his eyes flicking back and forth.

She and the others kept running, and a fierce expression appeared on her face; maybe they were going to make it.

"You should have thought twice before messing with us," Floyd suddenly said to the thugs, his voice cold and threatening.

Simone spat on the ground. "We'll get you eventually!" he shouted back, his voice dripping with malice.

Floyd just laughed at that. "Good luck with that," he said, turning on his heel and running away.

Ultimately, the thugs managed to get free from the vines, but the slime and the gas expected them. They had to walk through that hellish gas if they wanted to get the kids. They were hesitant to do so since they would end up wounded, but the problem was that, due to Matthew's personality, they were going to die if they didn't get the kids.

"What do we do now?" Britney asked. She was one of the survivors but wasn't in good shape.

"There isn't much we can do. We run for now," Erik said. "Then we will hide and wait for Caiden's men to arrive, but I don't know where they are now. Amber, can you take care of this?"

"Yes."

Chapter 328: The Chase (1)

The group weaved their way through the city's winding streets, keeping a low profile and trying to avoid any unwanted attention.

Erik, in particular, was on high alert, knowing that the Crystal Cross Gang was still searching for him, but at least they managed to lose the Mambas, at least for now. However, they were clearly still searching for them, and they weren't far, probably. Their advantage was only temporary.

As they approached a large plaza, they could hear the sounds of a bustling crowd growing louder. The group hesitated, unsure of how to proceed since there could be more of the Mambas' men hidden through the crowd.

Besides, it was known that where there were large crowds, shops were present too, and if that was true, it meant the Crystal Cross gang was nearby, as they collected money from them.

Suddenly, they found themselves swept up in the mass of people, each jostling for a spot in the packed square.

The noise was loud, with voices, music, and the clatter of foot traffic all blending into a cacophony of sound that only gave the kids more anxiety. The group tried to stick together, but the press of bodies made it difficult.

Just as they started feeling trapped, they saw a group of Crystal Cross Gang members approaching from the other side of the square. Amber started panicking a bit since she knew they were still searching for his boyfriend.

Erik's eyes scanned the crowd, trying to find a way out of that mess. He noticed a narrow alleyway on the far side of the square and gestured to the rest of the group to follow him. They nodded in agreement and quickly made their way through the throngs of people toward the place.

As they moved, they caught glimpses of the Crystal Cross gang members coming awfully close to them. Erik's hands gripped his flyssa, and so did the others with their respective weapons, and they braced themselves for the possible confrontation.

However, after some tense moments, the gang members went past them, as they didn't notice the Red Palace students.

The group then dashed down the narrow alley, their hearts pounding with adrenaline. Erik paused to catch his breath and glanced around at his companions. They were all panting and sweating, their eyes wide with fear.

He knew they had narrowly escaped danger once again, but he couldn't shake the feeling that the Crystal Cross Gang would be involved somehow, and the next time, they might not be so lucky.

"Why did we suddenly run here?" Patricia asked. She wasn't aware that the Crystal Cross gang was searching for Erik.

"It's a long story," Floyd replied. "It's not the right time to share it."

The group tried to stay hidden, but the anxiety was high, and they were having problems managing it. They had to keep moving to avoid not only the Mambas but also the Crystal Cross Gang members, but the crowd in the adjacent streets would make it difficult.

"I think the best thing to do would be to go to the eastern district. We can go there through the park and reach the eastern district undisturbed," Erik said.

"That's a good idea; the only problem is that we are currently on the opposite side, so to go to the park, we should walk into the crowd again," Gwen said.

"Yeah, I know that," Erik said. "But we do not have any choice."

"Let's catch a breath, shall we?" Jacob said as he observed the exhaustion in his friends' eyes.

"Ok, but we can't waste much time," Erik said. "Just a couple of minutes."

"All right."

Aaron and Mikey then started to look at each other. There was something they hadn't had time to digest yet, and Mikey broke the silence. "So, he died, uh?" He said, his voice barely above a whisper.

Aaron nodded, his eyes downcast. "Yeah... It just feels so unreal."

"I keep thinking about all the times we had together," Mikey said, his voice choked with emotion. "All the memories we made, and now he's just... gone." Aaron placed a comforting hand on his friend's shoulder. "I know, man. It's tough. But we have to stay strong now; we can't let our emotions get the best of us."

Mikey looked up at him, his eyes red-rimmed with tears. "Yeah." He said it; his voice was heavy with emotion. "We remember the good times, the laughs, and the adventures. We hold onto that, and we keep living."

They continued silently waiting for a few moments, lost in their thoughts and memories of their fallen friend. In the meantime, the others' situation wasn't better. They had wasted enough time already, but at least they got some energy back.

Martha's hands shook as she tried to control her breathing, not wanting to draw any attention to herself.

Gwen scanned the adjacent street to find out where the thugs were. She quickly spotted them and told Erik. The problem was that there weren't only Crystal Cross Gang members but also Mambas. Simone and the others finally arrived.

"Let's go," The awakener said, and with that, they headed back to the crowd. However, as they walked through it, battered, bruised, and wounded, they started gathering attention. They had already been lucky enough to avoid it the first time, but they couldn't be lucky twice.

Britney then noticed a group of onlookers approaching and realized they were about to be discovered. "We need to move," she whispered urgently to the others.

But it was too late. One of the onlookers looked in their direction. "This guy has been wounded," he said while pointing at Erik's chest and shoulder wounds.

Immediately, the gang members' attention was drawn to the group, but luckily it was just the Mambas. Simone and the others started pushing through the crowd, determined to reach Erik and the others.

Erik and his friends tried to move faster, but the crowd was dense, and they were pushed and jostled from all sides.

Panic set in as they realized they were trapped. The thugs were closing in, and there seemed to be no way out. Amber's hands glowed with an eerie green light, and she prepared to release her corrosive gas as a last resort.

But then, a loud commotion caught the gang members' attention. Mikey used his power to conjure his flesh-eating bugs, which scared the crowd. The thugs turned to see what was happening.

"Nice job, Mikey!" Floyd said.

It was just the distraction the group needed. They hid better and ran as fast as they could, dodging curious onlookers.

Finally, they found themselves on the adjacent street. Though the Mambas were still on their tail, they could see them going in their direction from afar.

The group kept sprinting through the twisting alleyways of the city, their footsteps pounding on the pavement as they dodged around corners and leaped over obstacles. But suddenly, Britney let out a cry of pain and fell to the ground, clutching her ankle.

"Ow, ow, ow," she moaned, tears streaming down her face. "I think I sprained my ankle."

The others quickly gathered around her, trying to help her up. But Britney winced and pulled away.

"Sorry, it hurts too much," she said. "I can't put any weight on it," fear evident in her eyes.

Aaron knelt next to her and examined her ankle. "It's definitely swollen," he said. "We need to keep moving, but we can't leave Britney behind."

Erik nodded in agreement. "We'll have to carry her," he said. "But we need to do it carefully. We can't afford to slow down too much."

Gwen stepped forward. "I can carry her," she said. Britney looked up at her, gratitude written all over her face. "Thank you," she said.

Gwen crouched down, and carefully Britney jumped on her back in a piggyback ride. The others gathered around them, forming a protective circle as they started moving again.

But carrying Britney proved to be more complicated than they anticipated since they had to take secondary roads in order to avoid the crowds. These alleys were narrow and twisting, and there were obstacles everywhere, making their escape hard.

Gwen had to carefully navigate around piles of rubble, broken glass, and other debris, all while trying to keep Britney as stable as possible as they walked through the alleys.

Meanwhile, the rest of the group was on high alert, scanning their surroundings for any sign of danger. As they rounded a corner, they suddenly heard shouting behind them. "Got you!" Simone shouted. He finally managed to reach the kids.

The group froze, and Erik quickly signaled for them to duck into a nearby alley. But as they hurriedly descended the narrow passageway, they realized it was a dead end.

Panic set in as they heard the sound of approaching footsteps; they knew that they were trapped.

"Fuck!" Floyd shouted.

"We're done for," Aaron whispered, fear written all over his face.

But just then, Martha stepped forward, her eyes blazing with determination. "Not yet," she said.

She raised her arms, and thorny vines shot out of the ground, forming a sort of stairway of vines that allowed them to get past the brick wall that barred their way.

They immediately stepped onto the vines, and by running on them, they went past their obstacle. They continued running, with Britney still on Gwen's back, but they knew they couldn't keep up this pace forever. They were too slow.

As they went out the other side of the alley, passing by the wall. The vines disappeared, and the thugs were left in front of this huge wall they couldn't get past.

"We need to get a roundabout way," Simone said.

At the same time, Erik and the others finally managed to reach the park entrance. The problem was that the Mambas were still on their tail, and they knew where they were headed. The park was the obvious solution to escape, as it was the closest place where they could hide.

Chapter 329: The Chase (2)

Erik looked out at the sprawling park in front of him, taking in the sights and sounds of the bustling attraction. It was a vast expanse of lush greenery dotted with colorful flowers and towering trees that rustled in the gentle summer night breeze.

The park was filled with visitors, young and old, families and couples, all enjoying the many attractions that the place had to offer.

This place was a nature-themed amusement park, a mix of natural and amusement parks.

In fact, in the distance, Erik could see the glittering lights of a roller coaster and could hear the screams of excitement that erupted from the riders.

Nearby, a Ferris wheel slowly turned, offering a bird's-eye view of the park and the city beyond. Erik could hear the music of an outdoor concert, with the lively sounds of a brass band and the singing of a talented performer carrying on the wind.

Several vendors were selling all kinds of snacks and souvenirs, both at the entrance and deep inside the place.

The sweet scent of cotton candy, popcorn, and roasted nuts filled the air, enticing visitors to indulge in a sweet treat. Children ran around with balloons and toys, happy laughter echoing through the park.

However, the part made of concrete didn't span the entirety of the park, and most of it was just untamed nature; in fact, only a specific part of the place was illuminated by the lights; the rest was in complete darkness since the sun had already set.

"Let's go in," Erik said, and with that, he and the others rushed inside at full speed. It didn't take long for them to reach the place's entrance. There was mostly concrete there, and wooden buildings were made to blend in with the environment.

"Will we be able to get out of there?" Amber asked.

"We will," Erik replied, and immediately he ordered the system to keep track of their position and make them go in the right direction.

Erik and his group darted inside, going past the entrance gate, their feet pounding against the concrete path as they ran at full speed. They weaved past benches and trees, their surroundings a blur as they tried to put as much distance as possible between themselves and their pursuers.

The kids saw couples holding hands, walking along the winding paths, and enjoying the serene beauty of the park.

Families picnicked on the soft grass, enjoying a dinner outside. Groups of friends huddled together, planning their next adventure or taking selfies to remember the day.

As they passed a couple who observed them running at full speed, the awakener could do nothing but wonder what they were thinking about them as they sped inside the place.

Floyd looked around in amazement as the group ran through the park, taking in the sights and sounds. "Wow, I've never been here before," he says. "It is magical," the young man added.

Mikey, who was running next to him, looked surprised. "Why not?" he asked.

Floyd shrugged. "I don't know. My father always took me on trips outside the city, and we had everything we needed at home. I guess we just never thought to come here."

Mikey nodded but was a little bit envious of Floyd's wealth. "Yeah, I get that. I haven't been to a lot of places either. Growing up, my family didn't have much money, so we couldn't afford to go on vacations or anything like that."

As they continued to run, Floyd looked around at the attractions in the park. "I have to make a mental note of coming back here as soon as this situation ends," he said.

Erik, who was running ahead of the group, glanced back at Floyd. "Glad you like it," he says. "But let's keep moving. We can't afford to slow down like this and to waste our energy in small talk."

Floyd was like that, always optimistic and joking often. The young man nodded and picked up his pace, running faster to keep up with the others.

As they ran further inside, they came across a pond, its calm waters reflecting the surrounding trees and sky. Ducks swam lazily in the water, and a small paddle boat could be seen drifting along the surface.

However, as they ran deeper inside, the scenery changed. The concrete path and the occasional lawns gave way to a dirt trail surrounded by tall trees that usually filtered the sunlight and cast dappled shadows on the ground, but for them at that time, it meant going inside a world of darkness.

The sound of running water grew louder as they approached a small artificial stream that cut through the park, its surface sparkling in the moonlight, but the kids were having trouble navigating through the forest. They had some torches, but using them was risky since, by doing so, they would basically tell the Mambas their position.

The trail wound its way around the stream, leading them past clusters of bushes and patches of wildflowers. Erik caught a glimpse of a playground in the distance, with a bright yellow slide and swings swaying in the breeze.

They rounded a bend and emerged into a clearing, where a large fountain stood in the center. Water cascaded down from the top tier, splashing into the pool below with a soothing sound.

The system kept giving him directions until he spotted a small bridge that crossed the stream on the other side of the clearing, leading to another trail that wound deeper into the park.

Without a word, he gestured for the others to follow him, and they dashed across the clearing. There weren't people anymore this deep into the park since it was late, but he bet that this place would have been full of people during the daytime, regardless of how remote it was.

As they approached the bridge, Erik could see it was made of wooden planks, weathered from years of use. The stream below was shallow but fast-moving, the water frothing as it tumbled over rocks and logs.

Erik quickened his pace, urging the others to do the same. Britney winced with every step Gwen took, her ankle throbbing with pain every time it moved, but she gritted her teeth and kept moving.

They reached the other side of the bridge, and Erik veered left, following the trail as it wound deeper into the park. At the same time, Simone arrived inside the park and started searching for them; the problem was that it wasn't easy.

The kids could only hear the rustling of leaves underfoot and the occasional hoot of an owl.

As the night grew darker, Martha began to feel uneasy. She couldn't see more than a few meters before her, and the shadows seemed to move with every gust of wind. Every rustle in the bushes made her heart race, and she couldn't help but feel like she was being watched.

The darkness of the natural park seemed to play tricks on her mind, making her imagination run wild. Every sound seemed louder, and every shadow seemed more menacing. Martha tried to calm herself down, recalling that she was in a relatively safe place now, but the fear lingered.

However, the young girl suddenly stopped in her tracks, gasping for breath. Her chest tightened, and she felt like she couldn't get enough air into her lungs. She started to hyperventilate, her whole body shaking with fear.

Benedict noticed immediately and rushed to her side. He placed a calming hand on her shoulder and gently rubbed her back, speaking in a soothing voice.

"Martha, it's okay. Just take slow, deep breaths. You're safe, and we're all here with you," Benedict said.

Martha nodded frantically, tears streaming down her face. She tried to follow Benedict's instructions, inhaling deeply and exhaling slowly. But her panic attack only seems to be getting worse.

"We are going to die. They are going to catch us; we can't do anything about it."

Benedict took a deep breath and tried a different approach. He kneeled in front of her friend and took her hands in his.

"Martha, look at me. You're safe here with us. You're strong, and you can get through this. Just focus on my voice and follow my breathing," Benedict said, taking slow, loud, deliberate breaths.

Martha nodded, her eyes locked on Benedict's. She tried to match his breathing, inhaling when he did and exhaling when he exhaled. Her breathing slowly began to regulate, and the panic attack started to subside.

Benedict held Martha's hands, speaking to her in a soft, reassuring voice. The rest of the group stood nearby, watching with concern but giving the two their space.

"Fuck..." Erik said to himself. That situation wasn't welcomed.

After a few minutes, Martha's breathing returned to normal, and she started to relax a bit. Benedict helped her to her feet, and soon the group resumed their run, with Benedict's hand firmly grasping Martha's.

"Thank you," Martha whispered to Benedict.

"Anytime," he replied with a smile.

Chapter 330: The Chase (3)

Erik and the others kept running through the park, their hearts pounding in their chests. The darkness of the night made it difficult to see where they were going, but they could make out the shapes of trees and bushes around them.

They could hear the sound of their footsteps as they ran and the rustling of leaves as they pushed past the foliage.

They were sweating, panting, and were tired but didn't stop. They knew they had to keep going if they wanted to get away from Matthew's men, who were still pursuing them. Luckily the park was vast, it seemed like it would never end, but it was useful to get away from their pursuers, at least for the time being.

As they kept running, they felt the adrenaline pumping through their veins, giving them the strength to keep going. They didn't know where they were heading exactly; they knew they were trying to go to the eastern district, but it was Erik who was leading the way through the forest, and they wondered how the hell he was able to do so in that darkness.

It was clear that their friend was hiding something. That was especially clear to some of them since they saw Erik having a sudden burst of mana that he shouldn't have been able to have since his

Ferebitz rank should have had an E; however, the mana output he released belonged to a D-ranked individual.

The kids put these thoughts aside since they knew they had to get as far away as possible from the gang members.

That meant they had to keep running with their wounds still open. Erik was the most wounded one between them; he stopped bleeding, but he was debilitated. Moreover, despite her strength, Gwen had already been carrying Brittney for a long time and through a messy environment, and she was tired.

"I need to rest," the young woman said.

"There's a fallen tree there; let's go," Erik ordered, and soon they all moved in that direction. As they arrived, they sat and gave Gwen time to rest enough to resume their escape.

"Benedict, take Brittney; Gwen needs to rest a little bit," Erik said.

"Aye, captain," his friend replied. After five minutes and enough rest, Erik said to the others, "We must keep going. We can't let them catch us."

They nodded in agreement and started running again, this time with renewed vigor.

They went through a large open field, and they could see the city's lights in the distance. It gave them hope that they were getting closer to safety.

Simone turned to one of his men, a burly thug with a scar on his cheek. "Have you found anything yet?" he asked, his voice low and menacing.

They had already entered the park but were searching for traces of the kids. Simone wasn't sure why they ran here; maybe they hoped they could hide from him, but the truth was it was unlikely.

Erik wasn't wrong in his strategy, but the point was that Simone and his men were Matthew's men, and they were highly trained to do that kind of job, and finding people was their specialty.

The man shook his head. "No, boss. There's no sign of them anywhere."

Simone narrowed his eyes. "Keep looking," he ordered. "I'm sure they entered the park, and you know we can't let them get away."

The thug nodded and turned to leave, but Simone grabbed his arm. "And if you find them," he said, his grip tightening, "don't hesitate to take them down. We can't afford to anger Matthew."

The man nodded again, his expression indifferent, and hurried off to join his companions in the search. Simone watched him go, his mind racing, thinking of what he would do if they failed to catch the kids.

He couldn't let them get away—not after what he and his men did; besides, they clearly connected Matthew to the Mambas and saw his subordinates kill many people. He needed to find them, and fast.

One of Simone's men finally found some traces of the kids. Broken branches, footprints, and other signs indicated the group had passed through the area. They immediately recognized the tracks as theirs since blood was mixed with the soil, and they had been injured.

Simone examined the clues, studying the footprints carefully. He could see that the kids had been running, trying to evade them.

"They're heading east," Simone said, looking at the tracks. "We need to move quickly if we want to catch them."

Simone briefly wondered why they were going toward the east, but then he collected the dots. If tracking them inside the park was easier due to the footprints, doing so in the city was harder. However, Erik and the others had only two options, either they could go back to Erik's place, or they would hide in some abandoned or under-construction buildings.

The first one was unlikely, but the second was possible.

The rest of the gang nodded in agreement as he gave his order, and they set off in pursuit, following the tracks as they wound their way through the park.

As they ran, Simone couldn't help but feel a sense of excitement. He loved the chase and the thrill of the hunt, that was the reason why he joined the Mambas, and these kids made it even more interesting by putting up a good fight inside the club and a great chase outside. His hunting instincts were kicking in.

He would have loved to fight Erik since he was unusually strong for his age; unfortunately, he was tied to a fight during most of his time inside the club and barely managed to get out of the club to pursue the Red Palace students.

But he also knew that he couldn't let their guard down, as the Red Palace students proved themselves to be more dangerous than they should have been. Simone didn't want to take any chances.

As they continued to run, the tracks grew fresher and fresher, and Simone could tell they were getting closer. He signaled to his men to speed things up, and they ran forward, scanning the area for any sign of movement.

As they emerged from the park, Erik and the others found themselves on a busy street with people bustling about, completely unaware of their situation.

The street was lined with tall buildings, and the air was filled with the scent of street food and the sound of people going about their daily business. The neon lights flashed and flickered, casting a colorful glow over everything.

The shops were all lit up, with their wares displayed in bright windows. There were clothing stores, jewelry stores, and even a few weapon stores. The place was alive, full of people, meaning they had to navigate through the crowds of pedestrians to keep moving.

"We finally got out of that place," Benedict said.

"Yeah, man, I was starting to have panic attacks, too," Floyd replied. Erik turned to the others and spoke in a hushed tone. "We need to blend in with the crowd. Act normal; don't draw attention to ourselves."

Gwen nodded and followed Erik's lead, trying to appear casual as they walked among the throngs of people; the others did the same. They couldn't help but feel a sense of unease, knowing that they were still being pursued. They quickly went through the city's streets and blended with the crowds.

As they ran, they spotted a group of street performers attracting a large crowd. That could play to their advantage, but they had to stay away from the performers. However, Erik quickly spotted some Crystal Cross gang members.

The awakener quickly pulled his friends aside, hiding them behind a nearby vendor's cart. They watched as the gang members scanned the crowd, searching for any sign of wanted people, drug buyers, or people to kidnap. After a tense few minutes, the gang members moved on, as there was nothing else to do there.

"Let's go," Erik whispered to the group. "We can't stay in one place for too long."

The group nodded in agreement and continued down the street, keeping a low profile and avoiding any attention.

As they walked, they spotted a group of police officers patrolling the area.

"Should we ask for their help?" Martha asked. But Erik quickly dismissed the idea. "If they are here patrolling with Crystal Cross gang members around, it is clear these police officers are on their pay list."

The tension was palpable as they made their way through the bustling streets, each step taking them further away from the park and the other districts and closer to their destination.

However, their luck ended here. Walking through the crowd did severely slow them down, and since Simone and the others were faster than them, they managed to arrive on the same street they were.

"I FOUND THEM!" One of the thugs, shouted; even Erik and the others heard him.

Simone face-palmed, but he and the others quickly rushed to his side and saw the kids in the distance. Without any warning, Matthew's hunting dog and his thugs began to chase them again.

"FUCK! RUN!" Erik said.

The kids tried to run as fast as they could, but it was hard amidst a crowd of people.

The thugs wasted no time attacking as soon as they found Erik and the others. One of them had a bow-summoning power. He called his weapon forth, and began shooting mana arrows, aiming at the group.

Erik and his friends tried to dodge and weave their way through the crowd, but it was difficult with so many people around. The arrows came fast and furious, and it was only thanks to their quick reflexes that they managed to avoid getting hit. However, the passersby were not so lucky.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" A woman shouted, as she saw a nearby person getting hit by an arrow.

Panic quickly spread as she did so. The person getting hit screamed in pain, and people started running in all directions, trying to escape the chaos. The sound of shattering glass could be heard as people accidentally knocked over shop displays or crashed into windows while trying to get away.

More arrows were released, hitting more innocent bystanders.

"WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING? WHO THE FUCK TAUGHT YOU TO USE AN ARROW, YOU IDIOT!" Simone shouted. The man remained silent, as he knew he was messing up.

People started shouting and crying, and the sounds of the arrows hitting the ground and buildings added to the commotion.

Erik and the others tried to move as fast as they could, avoiding the arrows and the people running around them, even using the people as human shields. Gwen called out to Erik, "We need to get out of here! We can't do nothing in the middle of this crowd!"