

## BIOLOGICAL 341

### Chapter 341: The Chase (14)

The intensity of their fight escalated, with Erik's movements becoming faster and more desperate. Each strike held the weight of their resolve and determination to prevail in this clash of powers.

Simone lunged forward, his dagger aimed at Erik's chest, but the awakener had his defenses up and took no damage.

He quickly sidestepped and raised his weapon; his flyssa sliced through the air in a retaliatory strike.

Simone deftly parried the blow, his dagger clashing against the opponent's blade. The clash of metal echoed through the room as the two combatants engaged in a fierce and deadly dance.

Erik channeled his powers, and soon after, bones emerged from his arms, elongating and hardening into razor-sharp spikes.

With a fluid motion, he unleashed a flurry of bone thrusts toward Simone, who avoided them with quick and calculated movements.

Simone smirked, his eyes filled with confidence. "Impressive tricks, Erik. But can you handle this?" With a swift motion, he activated his own power, turning his dagger into a gleaming ice blade.

The ordinary weapon was transformed into a deadly instrument, glinting with an evil, chilly aura. As Erik observed this, he was left stunned; this man should have belonged to a clan.

"Did you think only the Silverbend could do this?"

The man then charged at Erik, their weapons clashing with a resounding force that was slightly different now due to the ice encasing Simone's dagger, which now resembled a sword rather than a dagger.

The room trembled with their clashes, and the air crackled with mana. The fight was far from over, and both Erik and Simone knew it. Their destinies intertwined in this moment of conflict as Erik pushed his limits, seeking victory in the face of danger.

The onlookers stood in awe, students and thugs alike; their eyes widened with shock and disbelief. The other group members, Amber, Gwen, Jacob, and the rest, gave them occasional glances as the two fought and were left speechless by Erik's prowess.

But there was only one thought in their minds: how the hell could Erik do that? It wasn't only that he was fighting equally against Simone, but they asked themselves how he could use multiple powers.

Their expressions transformed from fear to astonishment, unable to comprehend the magnitude of Erik's ability.

Amber's mouth hung open in disbelief, her eyes wide with astonishment. She had never witnessed such powers before and knew nothing of them.

She could hardly believe that the person she was so intimate with possessed such ability. All of that went beyond human comprehension.

Gwen's brows furrowed, her gaze occasionally moving on the unfolding spectacle. Her mind raced with questions, struggling to grasp the nature of Erik's powers. She had always known him to be strong, but this display surpassed anything she could have imagined.

The rest of the group exchanged bewildered glances, their expressions reflecting a combination of shock, disbelief, and intrigue. The revelation of his powers left them reeling, questioning their own understanding of the world they inhabited.

Though, as they looked at him, his fight progressed; each strike made by Simone was met with a counterstrike by Erik, who used his bone-manipulating brain crystal power to cover his relative lack of speed and prevent Simone from getting too close. The bones even worked as a supplementary defense, as in order to reach his flesh, the sword had to go past the bones first.

The room was filled with the clashing of weapons, the echoes of their grunts reverberating through the air. Erik's spikes thrust once again, Simone made a backspin with acrobatic agility and avoided them once again, and the boney weapons pierced the air.

But the thug was not one to be outdone; his ice sword moved with precision and speed, aiming for Erik's exposed areas.

The man pushed himself and swung the sword at the young man, who could do nothing to defend against that swing and had to resort to using his mana once again. He metalized and used his mana exoskeleton to prevent damage, but that required a lot of Erik's reserves.

<Fuck...> the young man thought.

"What an impressive defense!" Simone said as he retreated.

Sweat glistened on Erik's brow. These many fights against people so strong placed a significant burden on him and his mana reserves. He didn't have that much now, and he was seriously starting to fear he would die that day.

Matthew's hound, Simone, lunged forward again, the ice sword gleaming in his hand and decreasing the room's temperature by several degrees, aiming for Erik's chest once again.

But the awakener, thanks to Nathaniel's power, was able to block the blow. He parried the move with his Flyssa, boosting his strength with the force; Matthew's son was so proud of; the clash of metal ringing through the air.

Undeterred, Simone pivoted, his eyes filled with determination. He swiftly darted to the side, avoiding the bone spikes that erupted from Erik's body, each aiming to impale the thug.

But Simone was no ordinary adversary; his agility was far higher than Erik's, and even if the awakener attacked at almost point-blank range, he was able to avoid the attacks. He twisted and turned, narrowly evading the lethal thrusts.

Erik's eyes glowed with intensity as he channeled his powers further, trying to kill the man, but so did his frustration as the thug kept avoiding each attack he made.

That was the best he could do unless he used Logan's power, but to do that, he needed three conditions: first, he had to use the dart when Simone least expected it.

Secondly, he needed the man to be tired enough to make it impossible for him to avoid the dart, and third, Erik needed enough mana to debilitate him enough to be able to kill him.

With that thought in mind, and with a swift movement, Erik lunged forward, his flyssa aimed at Simone's midsection and hoping the opportunity to use the dart came. The thug, taken aback by the sudden change in Erik's approach, barely managed to dodge the powerful blow.

"You were almost lucky!" Simone shouted.

The force of Erik's strike sent shock waves through the air, causing debris to scatter across the room and dust to arise.

Simone recovered quickly, his expression a mix of amusement and excitement. He knew Erik had very few neural links, and if he was able to do all of this with that meager amount, then he wondered how strong he would be once he got his hands on this power.

The room became a battleground as the two fought. Their movements were a blur of steel and shimmering mana.

Erik's bone spikes shot forth from his body, seeking to impale the thug, but Simone's agility and skill allowed him to dodge, sidestep, and parry each deadly thrust. It was like Simone was dancing as he avoided the bones.

Amidst the chaos, the other group members watched in awe and disbelief while they fought their battles. Their eyes widened as they witnessed Erik's incredible abilities—the manifestation of powers they had never seen before.

Their initial fear and apprehension turned into a mix of hope and astonishment as Erik kept his ground against the man, and they used that hope to fuel their energy during their own fights.

They understood that Erik was the key to their survival. The awakener had become their beacon of hope and their shield against the relentless onslaught of Simone and his thugs.

Amid the battle, Erik's eyes burned with fierce determination, but tiredness could be seen in them. With every strike and every parry, his strength waned, while Simone was still in relatively good shape, although it was becoming challenging even for him.

Though a brief moment of miscalculation led to Erik's defenses faltering, Simone seized the opportunity and swiftly maneuvered his dagger, delivering a deep gash across Erik's chest, adding

to the one he already had—a surge of pain shot through Erik's body, causing him to stagger back momentarily.

The group gasped in collective worry as they witnessed Erik's injury. Amber's eyes widened with concern, and her voice trembled as she called out his name. "Erik!"

Despite the pain coursing through his veins, Erik refused to let it deter him. Blood trickled from his wound, but he pushed forward, refusing to back down. The young man briefly glanced at his companions, acknowledging their concerns and noticing how they were fighting desperately against the thugs.

His friends were now fighting two against one, but they lost the initial advantage they held when they were more, and trying to stay alive and avoid their enemies' attacks was the only thing they could do and think of.

However, their lives also depended on the amount of mana they had available, which was not that much even in their case since they had been fighting for quite some time now.

The battle continued, with Erik's movements becoming more calculated and his focus honed despite the throbbing ache in his wounded chest, shoulder, and arms. Every blow and parry was like a stab wound on his side. He was starting to feel too weak as the blood kept flowing out of his wound.

A twisted grin curled across Simone's face as he witnessed Erik's struggle. His eyes glinted with sadistic pleasure, reveling in the sight of his adversary's pain.

The sight of Erik's weakening defenses and the strain evident on his face fueled his excitement.

He could taste victory within reach, his confidence surging with each blow exchanged. The intensity of the battle had awakened a primal hunger in him, a hunger to dominate and conquer.

His excitement grew, mirroring the growing desperation in Erik's every movement as he relished the prospect of bringing his opponent's secret out.

#### Chapter 342: The Chase (15)

While Erik was fighting against Simone, Floyd, and Gwen stood face-to-face with the thug possessing the power of super acceleration.

The young man's power to negate energy was a natural counter to the man, since he could slow him down, but since he had fewer neural links than the thug, it was clear the effect he had on the man wasn't that strong.

Gwen, clad in her mana armor, braced herself for the oncoming assault, as she was the one who had to actively fight the man while Floyd decreased his speed.

That made it so that the power imbalance between the girl and the thug was reduced.

The thug lunged forward, his speed still high despite Floyd's intervention. His weapon blurred in the air as he aimed to deliver devastating blows.

But Floyd's energy manipulation disrupted the flow of his movements, forcing him to contend with a fraction of his usual swiftness. It was enough for Gwen to react, her armor shielding her from the onslaught.

Gwen countered with a powerful punch, her armored fist meeting the thug's midsection.

The impact reverberated through her arm as the thug staggered back, his accelerated momentum halted by Floyd's power. But the thug quickly regained his footing, his eyes filled with rage.

"Annoying..."

Floyd continued to manipulate the energy emanated by the man, reducing his momentum and the power he generated, his ability acting as a rope, restricting the thug's speed and strength.

Every step the thug took seemed sluggish compared to before as if he were wading through molasses. It gave Gwen the opportunity to launch a series of calculated strikes, her punches landing with precision and force.

The thug retaliated, his movements still faster than an ordinary person's despite Floyd's interference.

His weapon blurred again, aiming to exploit gaps in Gwen's defense. But the young woman's mana armor absorbed the impacts, dissipating the force across its protective surface. She stood her ground, undeterred.

Floyd's eyes narrowed as he intensified his energy manipulation. The air crackled with his power, exerting a stronger influence over the thug's speed.

Each movement from their opponent became a struggle as if he were fighting against an invisible force that threatened to slow him to a standstill.

The thug and Gwen kept exchanging blows, with the armored student seemingly unaffected by the man's attacks thanks to her mana armor and Floyd's intervention.

She seized the opportunities her friend gave her, launching herself forward with a swift kick aimed at the thug's head.

The man avoided the strike but struggled to regain equilibrium since he wasn't used to this low speed.

The fight raged on, and the room filled with the sound of grunts, clashes, and the crackling of energy, which added to the ones made by the others.

Floyd and Gwen pushed themselves to their limits, exploiting every advantage they could find. But the thug's strength was extraordinary compared to theirs, and he still held significant advantages against the two Red Palace students.

As the battle continued and Floyd and Gwen spent their mana, they saw how the man started gaining more and more ground, and they got more and more wounds.

It was at that moment that they started to feel the weight of desperation settle upon them as the situation seemed increasingly dire with each passing moment.

The thug's super acceleration power, despite Floyd's efforts to slow him down, still granted him a dangerous advantage.

Though somewhat diminished, his attacks were delivered with relentless precision and force. The blows landed with bone-jarring impact, leaving both Gwen bruised and battered.

However, the man wasn't stupid; he knew that the main problem was Floyd, and he often attempted to kill him, only for Gwen to protect him while he concentrated on the man as best as he could.

Fatigue weighed heavily on them, their breaths coming in ragged gasps as their bodies strained to keep up with the unyielding assault. Their muscles burned with exertion, and their minds raced to devise new strategies to gain the upper hand.

While resilient, Gwen's mana armor showed signs of wear under the relentless barrage of attacks. Its protective energy flickered and wavered as her mana was coming to an end, threatening to give way under the strain.

Floyd's energy manipulation faltered at times due to his fatigue, and the young man struggled to maintain his grip on the thug's energy.

He even tried to stop the man's heart from beating, something he had never tried, but he didn't succeed due to his inexperience and the difference in the number of neural links.

"We need a plan," Gwen said, her voice tinged with urgency and determination. Her brows furrowed, revealing the unwavering focus and concern across her face.

Nodding, Floyd wiped away a bead of sweat from his forehead, his eyes narrowing with a mix of weariness and resolve.

"You're right," he replied, his voice tinged with a hint of desperation. "We can't keep going like this. We need to find a way to turn the tables on him."

Gwen's lips tightened into a determined line as she scanned their surroundings, searching for any advantage they could exploit, but their options dwindled as the battle raged on.

The realization that defeat was a distinct possibility this time loomed over them, casting a shadow of desperation over their every action. The odds felt stacked against them; their once-steadfast resolve was tested to its limits.

Gwen and the thug continued their intense exchange of blows while Floyd did his work, their movements blending into a symphony of aggression and skill.



The thug unleashed a series of quick strikes to break through Gwen's defenses. She deftly dodged and blocked his attacks, her focus unyielding.

In a swift counterattack, Gwen aimed a powerful kick at the thug's torso, but the man managed to evade the blow and retaliated with a swift slash of his blade. Gwen twisted her body with sonic speed, narrowly avoiding the deadly strike.

Refusing to relent, Gwen pressed forward, launching a flurry of strikes with her fists and feet moving with precision and power.

The thug, undeterred, parried her blows and delivered a sharp elbow strike that caught Gwen off guard. The impact sent her staggering back momentarily, her guard momentarily compromised.

Taking advantage of the opening, the thug swiftly closed the distance between them, his blade slicing through the air.

Gwen attempted to block the attack, but the blade found its mark, leaving a deep gash on her arm as she used it to stop the move. Her mana was too low now and wasn't enough to stop the mighty blow.

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At the same time, another fight was going on as Amber and Martha were facing another thug. Erik's girlfriend's heart pounded in her chest as she faced off against the thug, her eyes darting to Martha, who was clearly almost completely drained of mana and on the brink of being unable to continue fighting.

Concern etched across Amber's face as she realized they were at a disadvantage since Martha would probably stop providing her cover with her ranged attacks.

"Martha, hang in there," Amber said, her voice filled with worry. "Do not lose sight of him."

Martha's breath came in labored gasps as she leaned against a nearby wall, her mana depleted. She nodded weakly, her eyes reflecting a mixture of fatigue and determination.

"I... will...try..."

Amber's mind raced, searching for a solution. She knew they couldn't afford to stay and fight any longer. Not only Martha but even Jacob, Stella, Benedict, and Aaron were in ugly situations. Suddenly, a spark of determination ignited within her. With a quick glance at Martha, she made up her mind.

"I have an idea, I will use my power," Amber declared, her voice filled with determination. "But I'll need all the mana I have left. Tell the other to run away as soon as I do it, and then tell Floyd, and Jacob to use their powers to prevent the thugs from escaping the room. It won't be much but we will gain precious moments."

Martha's eyes widened with surprise mixed with a glimmer of hope. "Do it, Amber. I trust you." She used her remaining mana to keep the thug off Amber and told the others to get ready to run away.

At the same time, drawing on her mana, which had been mostly left intact until now, Amber summoned all her strength and unleashed her brain crystal power.

The densest and most corrosive fog she had ever produced billowed forth from her pores, engulfing the immediate vicinity. The acrid scent filled the air as the fog ate away at anything in its path.

"Run!" Amber shouted, her voice filled with a sense of urgency. Without hesitation, the remaining students, including Martha, turned and sprinted towards the exit while Jacob used his clones to prevent the men to escape, and Floyd did the same slowing them down.

The corrosive fog acted as a shield for the kids, obscuring their escape and disorienting their pursuers. Still, even the students were having problems since Amber could not decide who to target, and they were accumulating wound after wound.

As that happened, the thugs were having the same problems and had the same idea to get out. However, they were slower than the students since the latter positioned themselves close to the doors before Amber used her power and Jacob's and Floyd's powers were nasty ones.

Due to the fog's corrosiveness, the building, mainly made of wood, started going on fire.

Amber kept pace with the others, her heart pounding with a mix of fear and determination. The weight of her decision pressed upon her as she fought to maintain control over the corrosive fog. She knew she had to keep it contained until they were safely away.

Their footsteps echoed through the dilapidated building as they navigated the labyrinthine corridors, the sounds of footsteps and creaking wood resonating through the place. Amber's mind remained focused on her task, her mana diminishing with each passing moment.

Finally, they burst through the exit, gasping for breath as they stumbled into the open air. Amber almost collapsed to her knees; her body was drained, and her vision was blurring.

The corrosive fog was still high, and the thugs were inside the building, but they didn't have that much time. It was at that moment that the building collapsed on itself.

BOOOOM

"We need to go our separate ways," Gwen shouted. Even Erik found that a good idea; however, he was scared that Amber would get caught by the thugs.

They took a moment to catch their breath, their hearts still pounding with the remnants of adrenaline.

"Let's go," she said, her voice unwavering. "Let's do as Gwen said," she added. "Do not get killed," the girl said.

Then they split, each going in a different direction.

#### Chapter 343: The Chase (16)

Erik's heart raced as he got far from the remains of the abandoned building, his breath heavy and his fatigue high. He had a meager amount of mana at that point and was now only using Nathaniel's power to run away from that place, sure that the collapsed building wasn't enough to kill the thugs. He was barely fast enough not to get caught.

His eyes darted around, scanning the streets of the eastern district, searching for a way to get as far away as possible. The moonlight cast eerie shadows that danced on the crumbling walls and broken pavement destroyed by the thaids during the attack on the city, heightening the sense of desperation that gripped him.

Erik got 200 meters from the building, and Simone and the other thugs emerged from its rubble moments later.

Their eyes, especially Simone's, gleamed with determination. From a distance, he observed Erik running away from the place and watched as the others did the same in different directions.

"Fuck," Simone said. Chase the ones you can; we will meet here again once we have done our job. I will take care of the awakener," Simone said. His men nodded, eager to know how Erik could unleash all those powers.

During the fight at the club, it was hard to tell who was using what power, so no one besides Erik's friends found out he had more than two brain crystal powers.

The awakener didn't use them that much in the confrontations they had before they went to the alley where the thugs killed Patricia and Brittney, and he was smart about their usage and made sure no one found out. However, later Simone and the thugs did.

Since, at the abandoned building, Erik had already been discovered and confronted by his friends and decided to leave the country, he didn't hold back, and everyone found out what he could do.

Of course, the thugs' greed soared once they saw the powers in action, but since they were sure their boss would capture the kid, they weren't worried.

"I don't think I have to remind you not to tell anyone what you have seen today, am I right?" Simone said to his men.

"No, sir," they replied with a grin on their faces.

"Good. Now go!" and with that, everyone went their separate ways. Simone's strides were purposeful as he closed the distance between himself and Erik.

The older man quickly jumped over a rooftop and immediately spotted Erik running a few streets away.

"Found ya, little mouse," he said to himself. With that, he jumped down from the building and headed in Erik's direction.

Erik veered to his left, ducking into a narrow alleyway that twisted and turned like a maze. The scent of piss and dampness clung to the air, creating a disorienting atmosphere.

The awakener's mind raced as he navigated the labyrinthine streets, his mind consumed with thoughts of survival.

He darted through alleyways, leaping over discarded debris and broken fences, desperately seeking an escape.

Simone's determination seemed unwavering as he relentlessly pursued Erik, his footsteps growing louder and closer with each passing moment.

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As Erik ran away, he wasn't the only one in that situation. On another side of the district, Amber was running away from one of the thugs. Her beauty attracted the man, who decided to have a taste of her as soon as he caught her. Of course, he would have to kill her later.

Amber's heart pounded in her chest as she sprinted through the dimly lit alley, her breath ragged and desperate.

Fear consumed her, wrapping its icy tendrils around her every thought. She could hear the heavy footfalls of the thug behind her, their echoes growing closer with each passing second.

Her trembling form stood alone on the desolate city street of the abandoned part of the eastern district, cast in the eerie glow of the flickering streetlights.

The darkness that shrouded everything seemed to conspire against her, creating sinister shapes dancing in her vision's corners.

Every sound, from the distant honking of car horns to the faint rustling of leaves, sent shivers down her spine, magnifying her fear.

Her legs burned with exertion, her muscles protesting against the relentless pace. But she couldn't afford to slow down.

Adrenaline surged through her veins, giving her a burst of energy as she pushed herself further, desperate to put distance between herself and her pursuer.

Her eyes darted around, scanning for any possible escape routes she could take, but the narrow alley offered no respite.

The best thing she could do was get to a populated area, but she wasn't even sure the number of people would deter the thug.

As she ran, she tried to reach for her phone, which was inside her pockets, but then it happened—a treacherous pothole hidden in the darkness sent Amber sprawling forward.

Her palms scraped against the rough asphalt as her knees collided with the ground. Pain shot through her body, but the adrenaline numbed it, making her more aware of the impending danger.

Fear intensified within her as she scrambled to her feet, her trembling limbs betraying her. The thug's gruff voice grew louder, his voice like a haunting siren in her ears. She couldn't let him catch her. She couldn't bear the thought of what he might do to her.

As she got back on her feet, the girl managed to reach her phone, and while running, she called her father. The man immediately replied.

"Amber?! Amber?! Is that you?!" Caiden said.

The girl's trembling voice reached her father's ears over the phone, filled with fear and urgency. "Dad! Dad! Please help me! One of the thugs is following me. I need your help!"

Her father's voice cracked with worry on the other end of the line. "Amber, stay calm. Tell me where you are!"

As Amber looked around, the buildings towering over her seemed like foreboding sentinels, their jagged edges reaching toward the heavens like claws ready to snatch her away. Shadows stretched and twisted along the cracked pavement, forming a labyrinth of uncertainty that threatened to consume her.

"I'm in the eastern district; I'm going toward the west," Amber whispered, her voice quivering.

Her father's voice held a mix of concern and desperation. "Amber, listen to me. Go to Ember-field Plaza; the team is on its way, but you need to be fast. Find a place to hide there and stay hidden until the group reaches you. We won't let them get you, I promise."

Amber's voice wavered as she replied, "Okay, Dad. I'll head there," she said amidst sobs.

"I'm doing everything I can, Amber," her father reassured her, his voice filled with determination. "Just hold on; stay strong. We'll be there soon. I love you."

Tears welled up in Amber's eyes as she choked out her response. "I love you too, Dad. Please be quick."

With that, the girl closed the phone and kept running. Her mind raced with horrific scenarios, each one fueling her terror. Her legs moved fast, each step a desperate plea for survival.

The streetlights, their dim glow flickering intermittently, cast haunting shadows that danced on the worn-out facades of the buildings. Each flicker seemed to mimic the beat of her frantic heart, amplifying her sense of vulnerability.

She fought against the urge to look back, fearing that even a glimpse of her pursuer would drain her of whatever courage she had left. She had no more mana or energy and couldn't fight anymore.

Amber's heart leaped as she turned a corner and saw an alley branching to the right.

Without hesitation, she darted into the narrower passageway, hoping to lose the thug in its labyrinthine twists and turns. But the claustrophobic walls closed in on her, amplifying her fear.

The graffiti-covered walls lined the street appeared like cryptic messages, warning her of the lurking danger that seemed to lurk around every corner. Every graffiti tag became a haunting symbol of her vulnerability, a mark reminding her that she was just a kid in this ominous cityscape.

Her breath came in ragged gasps, each inhalation burning her lungs. Her legs ached, and every muscle screamed for her to stop. But she pressed on, her mind consumed by the fear of what would happen if she allowed the thug to catch up.

The man's shouts grew louder as they reverberated through the alleys' walls.

"I'm coming, little bug..." he said with a maniac tone and a lustful grin on his face, but his presence faded into the distance.

Amber dared to steal a quick glance over her shoulder and saw that, luckily, no one was around, as the walls shielded her from sight. But her steps could be heard, and so could the thugs'. He was still chasing her.

The adrenaline coursed through her veins, masking the pain and exhaustion. Her heightened fear transformed the once familiar city street into a menacing labyrinth of death.

Every detail, every shadow, and every sound seemed to conspire against her, amplifying her terror. As she navigated the treacherous night, she longed for the embrace of safety, yearning for the moment when her father would get to help her and when the city would release its vice-like grip on her fragile psyche.

#### Chapter 344: The Chase (17)

As Erik made his way through the deserted part of the eastern district, his heart was thumping violently against his chest.

He was worn out, injured, and in a chaotic state of mind. The secret he had guarded with his life had been exposed to his friends and enemies.

The only thing he could wish for now was that Caiden's soldiers would successfully kill the criminals.

Obviously, his buddies would hide what had taken place, even if he had no idea what Jacob, Enya, or Stella would say about it. Erik took in his surroundings while continuing to run.

The marks of destruction were still visible in the eastern district, serving as a spooky reminder of the Thaid's ruthless assault that had wreaked havoc on the area.

Buildings stood in various states of disrepair, their shattered windows and deteriorating facades bearing witness to the mayhem that had taken place.



The once-bustling streets now lay deserted, their calm only broken by the infrequent gust of wind that mumbled through the desolate landscape.

The tires of the heavy-duty construction equipment stood caked in dust and rubble as they guarded the perimeter in silence.

Cranes stood tall over the skeleton frames of buildings that were in the process of being partially rebuilt, reaching up into the sky with unwavering determination.

The atmosphere was thick with the tangy aroma of steel that had just been freshly placed, and the sound of hammers striking nails resounded in the back of Erik's mind as if people were working at night.

The neighborhood streets were used as makeshift warehouses for all building supplies.

The sidewalks were lined with heaps of lumber, metal beams, and stacks of bricks, all ready to be repurposed as the structural components of a regenerated neighborhood.

The areas that were off-limits or unsafe were marked with tattered caution tape, which fluttered and flapped in the wind.

Erik was so intent on evading Simone, his dogged pursuer, that he searched fruitlessly for a path out of the maze of twisting passageways and dark nooks.

Erik's footfall bounced off the walls as he walked through an alley with only minimal lighting.

The voice of Simone could be heard echoing from behind, full of unrelenting determination. "There is no place to hide, Erik! I'll get to you!"

Erik chose not to give in to hopelessness and instead pushed himself forward, taking advantage of the fact that he was familiar with the neighborhood.

However, his objective was to make it back to the northern area as quickly as possible because it was where there were more people and where he could hide himself better.

However, getting there wasn't going to be simple because he had to steer clear of any roads that would make it easy for the thug to find and attack him.

The good news was that the system was assisting Erik in replenishing his mana, and he was gradually gaining more of it. However, the bad news was that this was taking a while.

Venturing farther into the deserted district, Erik's senses heightened. Every groan and rustle heightened his anxiety, and his nerves were on edge the entire time. Despite that, the awakener was calm enough to think straight.

He stepped backward after being startled by a stray cat that darted across his path, colliding with a stack of crates that fell to the ground. The resultant commotion broke the stillness, a jarring illustration of his precarious situation.

As Erik began to make momentary headway, the increasingly agitated yells that Simone was emitting became less audible. Despite this, he was still able to hear the man screaming.

His comments were oozing with self-assurance and danger as he snarled at Erik, "You can run, but remember this: I'll always be one step behind you!" Erik could not help but feel threatened by his words.

He was urged to move by the man's voice, and he did so by sprinting forward while navigating through abandoned buildings and streets littered with trash. Erik was engulfed in darkness, but he welcomed it as an ally and used it to propel him forward in his frantic search for freedom.

"Erik, you're not doing anything but postponing the inevitable by doing this. No matter how far you go, I'll find you. You can bank on it."

As the young man rounded the corner, a sliver of moonlight revealed the alleyway leading to the district's outskirts. As Erik raced toward his goal, pushing himself beyond his physical capabilities, his hope began to grow.

The steady beat of his footsteps echoed around the room, driving him forward and encouraging him to stay one step ahead of Simone's grip.

Erik observed a gradual change in the surroundings around him as he continued his escape from Simone.

This change occurred when Erik turned another bend and continued his escape. The desolation that had settled over the deserted neighborhood started to dissipate as indications of life and activity appeared in its place.

As he got closer to the northern area, the streets grew larger and were ornamented with various unique shops and boutiques.

Previously, there had been vacant, dilapidated buildings, but now they had been replaced with streets that were crowded with people and lined with colorful storefronts.

The cacophony of voices grew increasingly louder, with each word conveying its own particular narrative and each laugh contributing to the colorful texture of the city's fabric.

"I made it!" Erik exclaimed to himself once he had arrived.

The atmosphere was filled with the enticing smells of exotic foods and cocktails and the sounds of discussion and laughter that filled the area.

Erik did his best to blend in with the thronging crowd in order to find some solace in the sea of unknown faces.

His presence was obscured momentarily inside the urban tapestry due to the cacophony of voices and the symphony of footsteps that created a momentary shroud for him.

He took one step at a time, hoping to blend in with the crowd and appear as a bystander in the lively theater that was the metropolis.

Simone arrived on the scene a few moments later, his eyes analytically darting across the crowd.

His eagerness to find Erik and extract the secret behind his multiple powers from him drove his eyes to dart quickly from one person's face to the next as he scanned the place.

After giving it some quick consideration, he realized that if the Crystal Cross Gang found out what the young man was capable of, he would no longer have the chance to acquire that power. As a result, he decided against asking them for assistance.

Erik went quickly, navigating deftly through the congested area while simultaneously assimilating himself to the undulating motion of the city's rhythm.

But this aroused the curiosity of the onlookers, and they began casting curious glances in his direction, their eyes lingering on the unkempt figure in the middle of them all.

Simone persisted in his search while maintaining an air of resolve and eager anticipation.

His pupils contracted as he narrowly focused his attention on each of the individuals' faces.

He methodically went around the gathering, approaching people unaware of his presence and examining them with an intensity that caused the crowd to feel uneasy.

Erik's attention wandered for a split second during the turmoil, and as a result, he made accidental contact with a large, hulking man who let out a shocked grunt.

The man's features creased into an angry frown, and his brows knitted together in annoyance. He yelled at the person, cutting through the background noise of the crowd with a voice that warned, "Watch where you're going, you idiot!"

He stared into Erik's eyes with blazing intensity, demanding that Erik apologize. Simone swung around to look and quickly started walking toward Erik, but it wasn't easy to make her way through the crowd because there were so many people.

As Erik realized his error, his stomach dropped, but he knew he couldn't afford to linger there any longer. As the seconds passed by like a ticking time bomb, he turned his head to look behind him and saw Simone's face looking at him while he tried to make his way through the crowd of people to get to him.

He didn't utter a word as he abruptly spun around and dashed away, his legs propelling him through the tangled mass of people.

Behind him, the dissatisfied guy yelled in rage, his voice becoming lost in the city's din as it roared.

Erik was sprinting through the crowd, and his mind was racing as he tried to figure out the quickest paths to take and how to avoid any obstructions that could be in his way.

The expression on Simone's face was one of both exasperation and determination.

Every time someone tried to get Erik and failed, it fueled his already-burning desire to solve the mystery surrounding his powers. The unexplained origin of Erik's multiple abilities tore at his very being like an unquenchable thirst that insisted on being sated.

But despite his rage, Simone did not lose his composure. He was an expert hunter in his way, and he carried himself with the utmost professionalism. His training and instincts guided every step he took, and his concentration was unwavering the entire time.

When Erik turned around to take one last look in that direction, he discovered that Simone's outstretched hand was only a few centimeters away from seizing him.

The thug appeared to be on the verge of achieving victory. But just as his fingers were about to make contact with him, a wave of ecstatic excitement raced through the streets.

Football fans swarmed the street from the opposite direction, their voices blending to create a loud roar that could be heard for blocks.

The commotion caused by the large group of people engulfing Erik caused Simone's attention to wander instantly as he became hidden from view.

The awakener vanished into thin air amidst all of the merriment, getting sucked into the sea of happy fans surrounding him.

Simone's anger level rose to an all-time high as he watched his hand limp in stunned astonishment.

He muttered obscenity beneath his breath, his voice obliterated by the thunderous applause and cries filling the space around him.

Erik's protection had come in the form of the celebration, which had become a good shield for him. Simone's eyes flew furiously over the crowd, searching for any sign of his prey, but a wall of joyful faces faced him, each engrossed in the bliss of the moment they found themselves.

He pushed through the crowd of people, pushing past the supporters, in an attempt to catch sight of Erik's unmistakable form amidst the mayhem.

He pushed through the crowd of people, pushing past the fans. However, it seemed as though the crowd was working together to sabotage him, as their combined vitality and size created an impassable barrier between them.

The tension continued to build, and Simone's ire was on the verge of erupting. The man yelled, "ERIK ROMANOOOOOO!" to attract the attention of the people around him.

After waiting five minutes, the man made his way through the mob and exited, only to see Erik dash into an alleyway up ahead.

The man laughed to himself and yelled, "GOTCHA!" This time, he got lucky since if he had waited even a few seconds longer, he would have permanently lost the youngster. After hearing it, Simone resumed his pursuit by beginning to run in the opposite direction.

#### Chapter 345: The Chase (18)

The rapid beating of Erik's heart could be heard in his chest as he ran into the tight alleyway in an effort to hide from Simone. He was worn out, had practically no mana left, and was covered in wounds.

As he moved gingerly along the narrow lane, the sound of his footfall reverberated off the brick walls on either side.

As he turned the corner, however, he was confronted by a group of thugs dressed in the distinctive garb of the Crystal Cross Gang. Erik's eyes widened in alarm as panic spread through his mind.

When he realized who Erik was, a goon with a scarred face twisted into a sneering grin of malice. He nudged his black-haired comrade and nodded in Erik's direction. "Isn't that Erik, the guy the boss wants?"

The black-haired thug's eyes widened with recognition as he studied Erik from afar. "You're right," he confirmed, his voice filled with a mix of surprise and anticipation. "That's him, no doubt about it. The one with the price on his head."

Another one was there, and his tattooed scalp shone brightly beneath the dim neon lights.

He crossed his arms and stood in the middle of the road. He uttered with a drawl, "Well, well," he drawled, a wicked smirk playing on his lips. "It looks like our luck just took a turn for the better. The boss will be pleased when we bring him in."

The scarred thug cracked his knuckles with a sadistic glint in his eyes. "I can't wait to see the fear in his eyes," he boasted, relishing the thought of Erik's impending capture. "He's been giving the boss trouble for far too long."

The thug with black hair kept his eyes fixed on Erik the entire time, and his voice was filled with resolve. Almost immediately, Erik sensed that they recognized him.

"Let's not waste any time," he proclaimed, his eyes increasingly narrowing and intense. "We catch him, we collect the reward, and we have a nice life."

Once they had Erik in their sights, their desire for power and the possibility of a substantial payoff drove them ahead. The hunt was on, and they were determined to fulfill their mission, no matter the cost.

They drew closer, pressuring Erik to slow down and surrounding him with a menacing look in their eyes as they closed the gap between them.

Erik managed to maintain his composure despite realizing he had gotten into a scenario significantly more dire than Simone's. The Crystal Cross gang members went in front of him.

Erik was paying close attention to them. The first thug, a hulking figure with a shaved head and a big scar running across his left cheek, towered over the others and was the most intimidating of the group.

It was evident from his imposing physique and demeanor that he was the one in charge of maintaining order within the group. His muscular neck was covered in a jagged tattoo that snaked along its length, giving the impression that his past was filled with conflict.

The second thug had a slender and wiry build, giving him the appearance of being more agile than he actually was. His eyes were a brilliant shade of green, and they gave off the impression of being intelligent as well as malicious.

In addition to having exceptionally dark black hair. A complex web of tattoos adorned his arms, symbolizing his affiliation with the Crystal Cross Gang. His fast, erratic movements gave the impression that he was a predator about to pounce.

The third thug, who was smaller in size but just as threatening, had his head shaved and elaborate tattoo patterns engraved onto his scalp. He was calmly sizing the situation with a hungry glare as his beady eyes darted around the alley.

Erik's heart was racing as he came to the conclusion that he was cornered with these vicious people, just as the faint light threw frightening shadows on the alley walls.

His dread was exacerbated, and the stakes of his escape were raised as a result of the individual physical qualities of each of the thugs, which served as a continual reminder of the dangerous predicament he found himself in.

The black-haired guy scowled, and his eyes narrowed when he recognized Erik. "Well, well, well, look who we have here," he said. "Look who we have here."

Erik's muscles tensed as he assessed his surroundings, searching for any possible means of escape. "What do you want from me?" he demanded, his voice laced with defiance.

The scarred-faced thug stepped forward, a malicious smirk spreading across his lips. "Oh, we just want a little chat," he taunted, his voice dripping with malice. "What are you doing here all alone so late at night?"

Erik's eyes darted between the three thugs, his mind racing for a way out. "It is not your business. Now, let me pass," he insisted, his voice tinged with rage.

The scalp-tattooed guy gave a low chuckle while his arms crossed over his chest. "This is not the right way to talk to someone older than you, am I right?" he sneered. "Oh! You look awfully familiar," the thug added. "Isn't it?"



"Yeah, yeah," the scarred thug said. "I've seen him before. Isn't he Erik Romano?"

"Yeah! Erik Romano, the awakener!" one of the others replied.

An increased amount of adrenaline coursed through Erik's veins, which caused his jaw to clench. It was obvious that these guys were just messing around with him, but they were also aware of who he was.

He shot back, his tone becoming increasingly agitated as he asked, "If you know who I am, why are you wasting my time this way?" He shot back; his voice tinged with anger. "I am fully aware that your boss, whoever he may be, is looking for me," he said.

The thug with jet-black hair moved closer to the young man, flashing a malicious grin from ear to ear.

"If you know, then just stay put and let us do our job; else, you will feel pain," he snarled. "Besides, it's not like you can get out of here even if you try."

In normal circumstances, Erik would be able to escape, as he analyzed the thugs and found that they were awfully weak compared to Simone's men. However, what they said was true due to his condition, wounds, and lack of energy. He could not escape.

However, Erik kept his hands balled up at his sides, and a flash of resolve could be seen in his eyes. He questioned, "Let's see then," his tone of voice contained an air of defiance.

After hearing the reply, the level of tension in the lane reached its highest point. Erik was getting ready to make his audacious escape while the thugs who were after him were drawing closer, motivated by the desire to get rich.

Erik's motions were propelled by adrenaline and resolve as he threw a flurry of swings in an attempt to free himself as quickly as possible. The goons took direct hits from his attacks, which landed on their arms.

However, tired, with no mana, outnumbered, and outmatched, the thugs quickly regrouped, retaliating with a barrage of forceful blows. They couldn't kill the kid.

The scarred-faced thug blocked Erik's attacks, countering with a swift knee to Erik's midsection, momentarily winding him. Seizing the opportunity, the bald thug with tattoos delivered a powerful punch, sending Erik sprawling to the ground.

Determined to escape, Erik scrambled to his feet, his mind racing for a way out. The young man was, though, forced to stop in his tracks when the thug with the dark hair swept his leg before he could make any kind of move.

The goons surrounded and overpowered him before pinning him to the ground with a hold similar to a vice.

Erik struggled to break free from their grasp. However, his efforts were for naught because the thugs' strength and coordination were simply too much for him to overcome.

The scarred-faced thug sneered, his grip on Erik's arm tightening. "Give it up, boy," he taunted, his voice filled with hostility. "You're no match for us."

The thug with the bald head and the skull tattoo smirked as he took pleasure in Erik's defeat and savored his money prize. "You thought you could outrun the Crystal Cross Gang?" he sneered, his voice laced with sadistic satisfaction. "We always get our targets."

Even though he was exhausted and badly injured, Erik's spirit did not break. "LET ME GO, MOTHER FUCKERS!" he declared, his voice tinged with defiance. "I'LL KILL YOU ALL!"

The thug with the black hair scoffed, his face displaying a look of complete disdain. "Keep dreaming," he jeered, tightening his grasp on Erik's collar. "We own you as of right now."

Even as Erik fought against their grasp, he could not shake the sickening feeling of defeat. After being cornered and encircled, it appeared like he would not be able to make his escape. He thrashed and wriggled, but the Crystal Cross gang members could hold him securely to the ground, rendering his efforts fruitless in the face of their strength.

Panic surged through Erik's body, his mind racing for an escape plan. The gang members laughed, their taunts and jeers echoing off the walls, fueling his fear. He could see the hunger for violence in their eyes; their intentions were clear.

Erik's thoughts were racing as they held him down, and their weight was crushing against him.

One of the thugs joked with the others, "Hahahahaha, what did we tell you?"

Erik took stock of his surroundings while frantically looking for any sign of a possible escape.

The scarred-faced thug smirked triumphantly, his eyes narrowing with sadistic pleasure. "You thought you could escape us, huh?" He taunted, his voice laced with contempt. "Well, look where that got you now."

The bald thug with tattoos sneered, tightening his grip on Erik's arm. "Seems like you're not as tough as you thought," he jeered, relishing in their capture.

"Your little games are over now, and it is time for you to pay, having wasted our time!" The expression of frustration on Erik's face was clearly visible as he searched his mind for an escape route.

At precisely that time, Simone made his way down the alley and into the building.

"Fuck.." was all he could say.

#### Chapter 346: The Chase (19)

Simone, whose eyes narrowed as he caught sight of Erik surrounded by the Crystal Cross gang, knew he had to intervene.

"Fuck," Simone said. He managed to reach Erik but found him pinned down by Crystal Cross Gang members. When he did his research on the Red Palace students Matthew wanted dead, his name was at the top of the list as the reason why the prestigious institution had expelled his son, and he had to be killed at all costs.

The problem was that, as he searched his past, he found out he had no parents, and the Crystal Cross Gang, the criminal organization to which the Mambas were affiliated, or better, which they served, wanted Erik alive for unknown reasons. If these men captured him, they would bring him to their headquarters, and they wouldn't know what happened to him.

That would prevent him from getting Erik's secret out of him. He couldn't allow that. His heart raced with determination, and the instinct to kill arose, realizing that Erik's secret was at stake.

With a cold and commanding presence, Simone stepped forward, weapon in hand, and his gaze fixed on the thugs who had successfully captured Erik. His voice rang out with authority as he addressed them.

"Listen up, you fools," Simone growled, his tone dripping with menace. "If you don't want to die, I suggest you get away from that kid."

The scarred thug looked at Simone, and his face contorted into a sneer. He confronted Simone with a malicious grin. "What's your deal, pal? This doesn't concern you," he spat, his voice filled with arrogance. "Do you want to die, Baldie?"

Simone's gaze hardened; his voice was steady and unwavering. "Oh, it concerns me; he is my target," he replied, his words laced with an undercurrent of suppressed fury. "You won't lay a hand on him while I'm here."

The black-haired thug's eyes narrowed, and his tone was laced with outrage. "Who do you think you are? We're the Crystal Cross gang. You're just asking for trouble."

Erik watched the man confront the thugs. Simone stood tall, his imposing figure casting a long shadow over the alley.

His broad shoulders and chiseled physique commanded attention, exuding an air of power and dominance.

Every movement he made was deliberate, displaying a calm strength that sent shivers down the spines of those who crossed his path. He was a skilled assassin, after all—not as much as the ones who attacked him outside the city, but still skilled nonetheless.

His bald head gleamed under the neon alley lights, devoid of any hair that might have softened his formidable appearance. The smoothness of his scalp accentuated the sharp angles of his face, highlighting a strong jawline and intense, piercing eyes that seemed to hold a dangerous glint.

Simone gripped a dagger in his hand, the metal reflecting a cold, steely sheen. The weapon served as an extension of his lethal prowess and a reminder of the danger he posed.

Matthew's man's lips curled into a defiant smirk. "Maybe I am," he shot back, his voice firm. "So, do you want to die so badly? I will bring you to the gate of hell myself if this is what you want."

The bald thug observed Simone, his tattooed scalp glistening with sweat, as he understood the man in front of him was dangerous.

However, his greed prevented him from backing down. He stepped forward with an air of aggression. "You're making a big mistake, buddy," he growled, his voice dripping with menace. "We outnumber you."

Simone's fists clenched, and his expression hardened. "Quantity means nothing if you lack skill," he retorted, his voice filled with quiet confidence. "And I assure you, I have an eye for this, and you seem rather weak to me."

Without further warning, Simone launched himself at the nearest thug, his movements swift and precise. The alley erupted into chaos as the two sides clashed; of course, Simone used his power and immediately made a sword out of his dagger. It emanated a chilling frost that decreased the surrounding temperature by several degrees.

The bald thug generated a massive hammer, while the scarred-faced thug materialized a sword; it was clear he couldn't use that much, while the black-haired one pinned Erik down and prevented him from running away.

With a fierce battle cry, the bald thug swung his hammer downward, aiming to crush Simone under its weight. But the assassin's reflexes were lightning-fast. He sidestepped the attack, his icy sword slashing through the air as he deflected the blow precisely, causing the ground to shake from the force.

The scarred-faced thug seized the opportunity, unleashing a barrage of swings toward Simone. They whirled through the air with deadly accuracy, but Simone effortlessly weaved and twisted, his movements almost dance-like.

"Even the kid is stronger than you!" Simone remarked.

Each attack narrowly missed its mark as he gracefully evaded, his ice sword blocking each and every attack with ease.

Undeterred, the bald thug lunged forward, his hammer aimed at Simone's midsection. But Matthew's man's agility was higher than theirs, as was his experience.

He somersaulted backward, narrowly evading the bone-crushing blow as the hammer collided with the ground, causing a shockwave that sent debris flying through the air.

Taking advantage of his momentum, the scarred-faced thug lunged from the side, aiming for Simone's side. Below the ribcage was where he intended to hit, hoping to knock the man off balance at least.

But Matthew's hound's instincts were razor-sharp. He twisted his body, the blade going harmlessly past him, and countered with a swift strike from his ice sword.

The clash of steel against skin reverberated through the alley as Simone's blade grazed the thug's arm, leaving a trail of frost in its wake.

The scarred-faced thug recoiled, a mix of surprise and pain etched across his face. Simone's precise movements left little room for error, and his opponents were left questioning their own abilities.

The bald thug, fueled by rage and desperation, lunged at Simone once more, swinging his hammer in a wide arc. But the assassin anticipated the attack, smoothly stepping aside and delivering a powerful kick to the thug's exposed side. The force of the blow sent the man sprawling to the ground, his hammer clattering beside him.

The scarred-faced thug, seeing his comrade incapacitated, hesitated for a moment. Fear flickered in his eyes, but determination pushed him forward.

He attacked Simone, hoping to stop the man from killing his friend. However, Matthew's right-hand man's focus was unyielding. He planted his feet firmly on the ground, using his ice sword to deflect the sword force and maintain his position.

Simone fought with a ferocity born from desperation, as he wanted to prevent the Crystal Cross gang or anyone else from getting their hands on Erik's abilities.

With each attack, Simone effortlessly evaded and countered, his movements fluid and precise. The thugs once filled with confidence, now found themselves outmatched by his skill and mastery.

The man's effortless dominance over the two thugs only served to amplify the aura of invincibility that surrounded him, leaving them with no choice but to reassess their strategy and approach.

As attacks landed and blows were exchanged, the balance of power in the alley shifted. Simone's fighting skills, honed from years of training, allowed him to hold his own against the thugs.

He weaved through their attacks, countering with swift strikes of his own, while Erik watched with a mixture of awe and disbelief.

The Crystal Cross gang members, taken aback by Simone's unexpected resistance, fought back with greater ferocity. The narrow confines of the alley amplified the sounds of grunts and thuds as the battle unfolded.

As the dust settled and the defeated thugs slowly backed away, Simone stood tall, his ice sword gleaming in the dim light. His cold, unwavering gaze was fixed on them, a silent warning of the futility of their resistance.

Erik, a witness to the awe-inspiring display of Simone's prowess, could only wonder what fate awaited him as the relentless pursuer closed in.

In a split-second decision, the black-haired thug recognized his comrades' dire situation against Simone's overwhelming might.

With a determined expression etched upon his face, he swiftly disengaged from Erik, leaving him momentarily forgotten, and joined forces with the scarred-faced thug.

Together, they hoped to turn the tide of the battle. The black-haired thug's loyalty to his companions overpowered any doubts he may have had. He aimed to support his fellow thugs and increase their chances against the man in front of them.

Of course, that was all Erik needed to escape. Seizing the opportunity presented by the distraction of the black-haired thug joining the fight against Simone, Erik, with adrenaline coursing through his veins, sprang into action, his mind focused on one goal: escape.

The awakener stood up and started running away from the four men. He swiftly maneuvered through the chaos of the alley, his movements guided by a combination of instinct and sheer desperation.

He weaved between crates and obstacles, utilizing his agility to his advantage. The sound of clashing weapons and grunts of exertion filled the air behind him as the fight raged on, drawing the attention of the thugs and Simone.

"HE ESCAPED!" one of the thugs shouted.

"KEEP FIGHTING, YOU IDIOT!"

As Erik darted down a narrow passage between two buildings, his heart pounded in his chest, echoing the rhythm of his hurried footsteps. His breath came in short, rapid gasps as he pushed himself to the limit, propelled by the fear of capture or death.

He turned a corner, the distant sound of the ongoing scuffle gradually fading into the background. Erik's muscles ached, his body yearning for respite, but he knew there was no time to rest.

Every shadow seemed to hold the potential threat of discovery, and every rustle of garbage or flicker of light seemed to be a potential trap.

Erik's escape route took him deeper into the heart of the northern district, where the streets were alive with the city's vibrant energy.

Chapter 347: The Chase (20)

As Caiden's team of highly skilled soldiers raced through the city streets in the darkness, the moon was high in the night sky. The urgency in their steps mirrored the gravity of the situation—to save Caiden's daughter and her friends.

"Are there any updates on the location of Amber's friends?" Caiden inquired, his voice filled with concern.

"Not yet, sir," one of his men replied. "But we will find them soon," he added.

Caiden's gaze was fixed ahead, his jaw set with determination. "Remember, our priority is finding Amber. She IS the priority."

"Yes, sir. Do not worry!"



The soldiers nodded in agreement, their eyes scanning the bustling streets as they headed to the place where Caiden told his daughter to go. They knew the danger she was in and the weight of responsibility that rested on their shoulders.

"Sir, what do you want us to do with the men chasing the students?" Another soldier asked, his voice calm and composed as the trained man he was.

Caiden's gaze shifted towards his men. His look shifted from one filled with a mix of paternal love and anxiousness to one cruel and vicious.

"We move in swiftly, neutralizing any threats and ensuring the safety of Amber and the others. I do not want any of the chasers alive," he replied, his voice commanding yet infused with a father's protective instinct.

As they weaved through the city, the soldiers maintained a swift and purposeful pace. Each step brought them closer to their objective, fueled by the urgency of their mission. The city's heartbeat pulsed around them as they pressed on, their focus unwavering.

As the squad pressed forward, their senses tuned to the task at hand, a soldier's radio crackled to life, signaling an incoming call. The soldier swiftly answered, his brows furrowing as he listened intently to the urgent message.

"Sir, we've located one of the kids," the soldier reported, his voice laced with a mixture of relief and concern. "It's a young girl with the power to make thorny vines. According to our information, she should be Martha Elisabeth Cook. She is not far from here, but she is being chased. What do you want us to do?"

Caiden's eyes narrowed, and his mind quickly processed the new information. "Secure her. Kill the one chasing," he commanded, his voice steady and unwavering. "I'm sending Private Reynolds to extract the child. Move quickly, but be cautious," he added.

Private Reynolds, a seasoned soldier with a reputation for swift and effective rescue operations, stepped forward, acknowledging his orders with a nod.

"Reynolds, don't let me wait," Caiden said, his voice carrying a sense of trust in the capable soldier.

The man readied himself, checking his equipment and confirming the location with the soldier who received the call. With a determined nod, he set off toward Martha's location.

As Reynolds neared the building, caution became his ally. He scanned the surroundings, ensuring no hidden dangers lay in wait. With each step, he could feel the weight of responsibility on his shoulders, knowing that a child's safety relied on his swift and calculated actions.

Later, when the man arrived at the place, he quickly spotted the girl as she was running away from a man and using her power to slow him down.

Reynolds moved with deliberate precision. It didn't take much for him to kill the guy chasing her. Martha heard the commotion as she turned to look at what was happening, only to see the thug with his head chopped off, oozing blood from his cut neck.

Reynolds turned to look at Martha, and upon locating her with fear etched across her face, Reynolds approached with a reassuring smile. "Don't worry, kid. We're here to get you to safety. Mister Joyce sent me," he said, his voice gentle yet filled with conviction.

Martha's eyes were wide with a mix of terror and hope, and she cautiously reached out a trembling hand towards Reynolds. "Is everything over?" she whispered, her voice barely above a breath.

Reynolds nodded. His voice was soothing and calming. "Absolutely. I've got you now," he reassured, his words comforting and protecting.

With a swift and practiced motion, Reynolds scooped Martha into his arms, her small frame held securely against his chest. He moved swiftly, maneuvering through the city streets, his senses heightened and his focus unyielding.

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As that went on, the squad continued searching for Amber; they were almost there. The city streets bore witness to their unwavering commitment as they moved forward, guided by the light of hope and the unwavering bond of their unit.

Finally, they arrived at the place of their appointment. Caiden stood in the designated location, his gaze scanning the area as he anxiously awaited Amber's arrival. The minutes felt like an eternity as

he searched for any sign of his daughter, his heart filled with worry, but a murderous glint also shone in his eyes.

Then, as if emerging from the shadows, Amber appeared on the horizon, her figure illuminated by the faint glow of the streetlights. She was running nonstop since her life depended on it.

"Sir, there's a sighting up ahead!" A soldier called out, pointing toward a crowded plaza where a familiar figure stood amidst the crowd.

Caiden's heart skipped a beat, his breath catching in his throat as he caught a glimpse of his daughter's unmistakable silhouette. "Move!" He commanded, his voice filled with anger and apprehension.

The soldiers surged forward, their pace quickening as they closed in on the plaza. With an unwavering focus and calm etched on their faces, they remained vigilant, wary of any potential threats that might arise.

As they reached the plaza, Caiden's eyes locked onto Amber, his heart swelling with relief. "Amber!" he called out, his voice carrying a mix of urgency and fatherly concern.

Caiden's breath caught in his throat as he watched his daughter run, his eyes locking onto her form. Amber turned, her face illuminating with surprise and relief as she recognized her father. "Dad!" she exclaimed.

Caiden rushed toward her, enveloping her in a tight embrace, relief flooding through him. "Thank the heavens you're safe," he murmured, his voice choked with emotion.

Time seemed to stand still as their gazes finally met, a rush of emotions cascading through their being. He saw the weariness etched on her face, the traces of fear and uncertainty lingering in her eyes.

But as Amber's eyes locked with her father's, a flicker of recognition sparked within her. A glimmer of hope replaced the shadows of doubt. The weight of their separation seemed to lift, if only for a brief moment.

Their reunion was a symphony of unspoken emotions. Once filled with exhaustion, Amber's eyes now seemed to shine with renewed strength and determination. A faint smile tugged at the corners of her lips, embodying resilience in the face of adversity.

Caiden couldn't help but feel his own eyes moisten with a mix of relief and pride. His heart swelled with profound joy as he embraced his daughter tightly.

Amber's body relaxed against her father's, finding solace and reassurance in his strong and protective presence. It was a moment of sanctuary amidst the chaos that surrounded them, a brief respite from the challenges she had endured. It was at that moment that the thug following the young woman turned the corner.

"Sir, hostiles are approaching. Do we have permission to kill?"

Caiden looked at the man with unbridled rage. "Dispose of him," he said, and his men moved in unison, and the man died soon after.

Caiden's voice broke the silence between him and his daughter. "Amber, you're safe now," he whispered, his words carrying a sense of unwavering love. "We'll get through this together."

The girl nodded, her mind filled with a renewed sense of hope. "I knew you would come, Dad," she murmured, her voice tinged with gratitude.

As they stood there, father and daughter locked in an embrace, their connection forged stronger than ever before; the world around them seemed to fade away. Some of the soldiers maintained a vigilant perimeter around them, eyes scanning the area for potential threats. The reunion was a brief respite, a moment of solace amidst the chaos of their mission.

"Sir, communication arrived; we found some of the other kids. Four are being followed. There is no trace of Erik Romano."

"Fuck... Rescue everyone; I will take care of my daughter alone."

"Sir, a vehicle is coming here to bring your daughter home," another soldier said, his voice filled with urgency.

Caiden nodded, his grip on Amber tightening for a moment before he released her. "We need to get you to safety," he said, his voice filled with determination. "Our mission is far from over."

With Amber safely in her father's embrace, the soldiers went their separate ways to rescue the other kids. Their pace quickened, and their focus was resolute as they navigated the streets that lay ahead.

"Where is Erik, Dad?" Amber asked. There was concern clearly etched in her voice.

"We will find him; do not worry, honey."

#### Chapter 348: The Chase (21)

The fight between Simone and the Crystal Cross gang members was probably still ongoing. The problem was that the man had always been able to track him down, and the kid bet he would be able to do so again, even this time.

For that reason, he realized he couldn't keep up this relentless escape forever and had to do something.

The narrow alleys and bustling roads were suffocating, closing in on him with each passing second. He needed an exit strategy—a place to find respite from the chaos that pursued him.

With determination etched across his face, Erik made a split-second decision. He would leave the city behind. It was time, and despite not being sure he had enough strength to embark on this journey, he decided to try.

With his friends Jacob, Stella, Enya, and the six thugs knowing his secret, New Alexandria wasn't safe, and he didn't want to risk becoming a lab rat or getting his already small freedom away.

Thanks to the fight among themselves, Erik gained precious time, so the best thing to do would be to head toward Mister Fox's farm and take as many utensils, seeds, water, and survival stuff as possible.

Despite everything, his mind raced with the memories of Mister Fox's farm, a haven tucked away among the fields that had given him plenty of peace in the past.

As he emerged from the bustling city streets, the scenery began to change. The towering buildings and concrete jungle gave way to vast expanses of open space. The gentle rustling of leaves and the distant melody of chirping birds took the place of the cacophony of car horns and hasty footsteps.

Erik's lungs were greedily filled with the crisp, fresh air as he ventured deeper into the rural landscape. The sight before him starkly contrasted with the chaos he had left behind. Endless fields stretched as far as the eye could see, adorned with vibrant patches of green and golden crops swaying in the gentle night breeze.

He navigated through narrow country lanes lined with neatly trimmed hedges and wildflowers. The scent of earth and nature embraced him, offering a brief respite from the tension that had coiled tightly within him. The serenity of the countryside acted as a balm for his weary soul.

He arrived at the usual golden wheat fields, which were now obscured by the darkness of the night and only dimly illuminated by the moonlight.

Mister Fox's farm materialized on the horizon, a sanctuary amidst the rural splendor. The old farmhouse stood with weathered charm, its whitewashed walls and inviting porch exuding warmth and comfort. The outbuildings scattered across the property hinted at a life lived in harmony with the land but were now devoid of the previous look they had when they were cared for and used by their owner.

Mr. Fox's farm, nestled in the embrace of the countryside, exuded a weathered charm that spoke of a bygone era. The aged planks, worn and weathered by the passage of time, held steadfastly as guardians of the land within.

Upon entering the farm, the sprawling fields caught Erik's eyes. However, it was clear that neglect had taken its toll on the property.

Once fertile and abundant, the fields now lay in ruin, the remnants of crops left untended since Mr. Fox's passing. Overgrown weeds and tangled vines intertwined, reclaiming the land that had once been teeming with life.

The farmstead itself, a modest collection of buildings, stood with a sense of stoic resilience. The porch, weathered and worn, offered a vantage point to observe the land and the memories that lingered in the air.

Without human care, nature had begun to reclaim its space. The once-manicured garden now bloomed with wildflowers, their vibrant hues contrasting against the muted landscape. Birds perched on the fences, their songs echoing through the desolate fields.

Despite the signs of neglect, an undeniable sense of tranquility permeated the farm. While the fields bore the scars of abandonment, there was a glimmer of hope. Perhaps with the right touch, the farm could be resurrected, the soil rejuvenated, and new life breathed into the hallowed grounds.

For now, though, it remained a testament to the passage of time, a bittersweet reminder of the cycles of life and the beauty that could be born from the ruins of the past.

Erik quickened his pace, the anticipation of safety propelling him forward. With each step, he felt the weight of the city's turmoil being lifted from his shoulders, replaced by a glimmer of hope and possibility.

As the young man stepped onto Mr. Fox's farm, a rush of memories flooded his mind. The images of that fateful day when he discovered the lifeless body of the old man lying motionless on the ground with stab wounds still haunted his thoughts.

The weight of that tragic moment lingered, tugging at his heartstrings. But Erik knew he couldn't afford to dwell on the past. Survival had to be his utmost priority now.

With determination fueling his every step, the awakener ventured deeper into the farmstead. His eyes scanned the surroundings, searching for any sign of usable supplies. The farm had become a treasure trove of forgotten tools and essentials waiting to be discovered.

His first find was a sleeping tent, whose fabric had faded from years of exposure to the elements. It would provide him shelter from the unforgiving nights that lay ahead. Next, he came across a stash of toilet paper, a small luxury in a world where such comforts were rare. It was a simple but essential finding.

As he searched, he even got some of his mana back, and he was sure he could at least protect himself to a certain extent outside in the forest.

Moving through the abandoned outbuildings, Erik's keen eyes spotted a collection of utensils for cooking and eating. He grabbed them without hesitation, knowing their value in ensuring his sustenance. His hands reached for containers to hold water, pots and pans to prepare meals, and backpacks to carry his belongings.

The young man found a cache of lighters among the scattered remnants of Mr. Fox's life. He pocketed them, grateful for their potential to provide warmth and fire. During his search, Erik immediately thought about something important that would save his life and sustain him in his travels.

He immediately went to a drawer, where he knew Mister Fox held something invaluable to him: seeds. The awakener opened one of the drawers and found what he needed the most.

There were hundreds of packets of seeds. The awakener inspected them and discovered that these bags had seeds ranging from fruit trees to various vegetables and herbs; the seeds held the potential to cultivate a future amidst the desolation or just to sustain him in the long run.

He needed just one seed for each plant, as he could get more seeds from the plants themselves once they sprouted, but since he likely had to use them to fight against the thaids, he decided to bring with him as much as he could. Erik carefully gathered the items, realizing their immense value in ensuring his survival and possibly building a sustainable existence.

With his backpack laden with supplies, the young man glanced back at the farm, a silent tribute to the man who had given him an opportunity in the past. The man wasn't perfect; he was even a bastard to him at times, giving him a meager amount of money, barely enough to survive. Still, he was the only one who helped him in times of need.

It was a weird thing to think, these were weird emotions to have, but it was the undeniable truth he was feeling that way.

As Erik made his way toward the hole in the barrier, he couldn't help but feel anticipation and unease. Every step carried him closer to freedom, yet the shadow of danger loomed in front of him. Once he got out of the barrier, he would be alone in a world of peril. He glanced over his shoulder, ensuring he wasn't being followed, before proceeding.

"Let's go..."

The Red Palace student retraced his path slightly with a determined stride, maneuvering through the overgrown grass and weeds. Though brief, the journey back felt like an eternity as thoughts of what awaited him on the other side raced through his mind.



Despite being the thing that protected the city from the thaid's assault, the barrier stood as a symbol of confinement for him, and he yearned to break free from its grasp.

Finally reaching the edge of the wheat field, Erik paused for a moment, taking in the sight before him. The golden stalks swayed gently in the breeze, whispering secrets of hidden paths and freedom. He plunged into the field with a deep breath, allowing the wheat to envelop him like a protective cloak. He kept walking until he got closer to the breach.

But just as he neared the hole, a sense of fear washed over him. He heard someone approaching, the footsteps crunching softly on the ground. Panic surged through his veins as he instinctively knew who it was. THAT thug had caught up to him once again.

Erik's heart raced, and his mind started racing; he weighed his options. The man was dangerous for many reasons. While he was sure that his friends would say nothing about his powers, there was a chance for the thugs if he escaped. He could prevent that if he fought the man, but it was too dangerous given his condition.

The young awakener had wounds on his arms, chest, shoulder, and side. He was barely able to stop the bleeding and was severely weakened. Fleeing was the best thing to do since he could still become strong enough to protect himself in the future, despite these people knowing his secret.

Gathering his courage, Erik pushed forward, determined to reach the breach before Simone could intercept him. Every step through the wheat field was measured, and each movement was calculated to minimize noise and visibility while increasing his speed. The tension in the air was palpable as he inched closer to his escape route.

But fate had other plans. Just as Erik approached the breach, Simone emerged from the sea of golden wheat, his gaze locking onto the young man like a predator honing in on its prey.

Erik's heart sank as he realized there was no evading the skilled assassin this time. However, the man was not in good shape; he had many nasty wounds on him, much more than Erik did, and his mana was visibly depleted. Erik wondered what had happened to him.

"It looks like they roughed you up!" Erik said while looking at him.

"Shut up, kid; they called for reinforcement!"

Simone's cold eyes narrowed with determination and a twisted sense of satisfaction. "Now, Erik, it is time to tell me your secret finally," he sneered, his voice dripping with malice. "You can't run away from me anymore."

#### Chapter 349: Final Confrontation (1)

Erik's eyes widened as he took in the sight of Simone, his foe now reduced to a battered and bloodied figure.

The fight against the Crystal Cross Gang members had exacted a heavy toll on him, evident from the multiple wounds that adorned his body.

Blood seeped from his injuries, creating a chilling contrast against his pale complexion.

Once marked by a cold and composed expression, Simone's face was now contorted with pain and exhaustion, despite his attempt to be as scary as possible.

His bald head was full of sweat and blood, clinging to his forehead in disarray. Deep gashes crisscrossed his arms and chest, evidence of the relentless assault he had endured.

The crimson stains spread across his torn clothing, a vivid testament to the violence of the encounter. Each labored breath seemed to draw out a wince of agony from the man.

He clutched his side, where a particularly deep wound went through his flesh. The blood flowed freely, staining his hands and the ground beneath him.

Weakness emanated from his trembling limbs, a clear indication of the toll the battle had taken on his once formidable physique.

That must have been the work of at least eight people. When he was in the alley, he was able to battle the three thugs easily. For this reason, what he said about them calling for reinforcements had to be true; otherwise, those wounds had no explanation.

Erik recognized that the man's injuries were severe, and the sight of his life force draining away stirred a sense of hope within him.

The awakener's voice gained a hopeful tinge as he looked at Simone, his adversary now wounded and weak. "Are you sure you want to do this, old man?" he asked, his voice calmer by the second.

"Look at you; you are battered and bleeding. It's time to put an end to this senseless fight."

Simone, his face etched with scorn, scoffed at Erik's words. "You think a few wounds will stop me?" he sneered, his voice strained. "I may be injured, but I can still subdue you easily."

Did going to the Red Palace teach you to underestimate your opponents just because of their upbringing?"

Erik observed the wounds on Simone's body again, then on his. "Look, it is not too late; we can go our separate ways and pretend nothing happened," he tried to convince the older man. Despite the state of his opponent, it was clear that the fight would still be difficult for Erik because of his wounds and low mana.

"Your injuries are far worse than mine. Continuing this battle will only lead to mutual destruction." Simone's eyes narrowed, a glimmer of rage shining through his pain.

"MUTUAL DESTRUCTION?!" he growled.

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA, it really looks like you are becoming mad! I won't let you escape, Erik Romano, not until you tell me how you are able to do what you do, and even after that, you will die for all you caused today!"

Erik shook his head, a mixture of frustration and rage clouding his features. "TSK..." Simone's grip tightened on his weapon, a cold determination in his eyes.

Erik took a step back, pain radiating through his battered body. He left his backpack on the ground, unsheathed his Flyssa, and put his other hand in one of his pockets, where he did hide some seeds from a spare packet he found at Mister Fox's house that he only wanted to use to fight.

He knew that Simone would have probably found him; he was able to do so several times today, and thinking he wouldn't now be just wishful thinking.

Matthew's hunting dog was an expert, and it was clear that, albeit not at the level of the Crystal Cross Gang Assassins, he was good at his job.

As Simone lunged forward, his ice sword gleaming in the moonlight, Erik's weary body strained to respond. His mana reserves were running dangerously low, hampering his ability to channel Nathaniel's power effectively.

Because Erik's mana reserves were dwindling, he struggled to muster enough energy to counter the assault. He focused on evading Simone's strikes, his instincts, experience, and reflexes guiding his every move.

Simone's attacks were swift and calculated, his movements fluid and precise. With each clash of their weapons, Erik could feel the impact reverberate through his arms, threatening to disarm him.

The young man could see the icy determination etched on his opponent's face and the fire of battle burning in his eyes. With lightning speed, Simone performed a diagonal slash at Erik's arms, seeking to incapacitate him.

The young man's instincts kicked in, and he threw himself to the side, narrowly evading the strike.

The blade grazed the fabric of his shirt, leaving a chilling trail in its wake. Adrenaline surged through the awakener's veins as he twisted his body, aiming a retaliatory strike at Simone's exposed flank.

But the thug was quick to parry, his ice sword deflecting Erik's blow easily. The clash of steel and ice echoed through the air, each resounding impact sending shivers down Erik's spine as he could feel the frigid chill of the ice sword as it came dangerously close to his face.

He knew he couldn't match Simone's strength head-on, so he focused on agility and defensive maneuvers.

Erik wanted to use his plant power to throw logs at the thug at the right time, but the man wasn't leaving him with any opportunity.

Besides, he only had one chance to do that. But he was confident that if he could prevent the Crystal Cross Gang assassins from reaching him during the hunting trip with the Red Palace, the thug had no chance against that move.

Simone pressed the advantage, launching a series of rapid thrusts and slashes. Erik's heart raced as he dodged, ducked, and weaved, his body a blur of motion. His senses were heightened, and his mind was fully immersed in the deadly dance, but he was having much more trouble than before.

<Fuck! I can't do shit!> the young man thought in frustration.

Erik's movements were fueled by desperation at that point, with the will to survive pulsating through him. He sidestepped a vertical slash, feeling the gust of wind as the blade whistled past his ear.

With a quick pivot, he countered with a swing of his blade aimed at Simone's leg, hoping to disrupt his balance momentarily.

The thug anticipated the move, expertly shifting his weight and parrying Erik's attack with the flat side of his sword. The impact jarred Erik's arm, sending a jolt of pain up his wounded shoulder. He winced but quickly regained his footing, his focus unyielding.

Attack after attack, Erik found himself constantly on the defensive. Simone unleashed a barrage of strikes, each one calculated and unrelenting.

He was right; under normal circumstances, the thug would have won. But the young man still had some tricks up his sleeves, and due to this, the game was still open. Erik's heart pounded in his chest as he deflected, parried, and narrowly avoided the crippling blows.

A diagonal slash came dangerously close to Erik's face, the tip of the ice sword grazing his cheek, leaving a shallow cut. Blood trickled down his face, mingling with the sweat coming from his brow.

The sting of the wound only fueled his determination to escape. Erik's movements became more fluid as he got accustomed to the man's fighting style, his body responding with instinctive grace.

He sidestepped a thrust aimed at his chest, feeling the rush of air as the blade sailed past him and the chilling frost decreased the temperature. With a deft twist of his wrist, he managed to disarm Simone temporarily, sending the ice sword clattering to the ground.

But Simone took another dagger from his waist and immediately created another sword.

"Nice try, kiddo!" Simone said with a smirk.

He lunged forward, his sword still in hand. Erik's eyes widened as Simone closed the distance, aiming a powerful slash at his leg. The young man backstepped, but Simone gave chase.

Each clash, each near-miss, pushed Erik to his limits. His body ached, wounds burned, and mana dwindled, but his spirit remained unbroken.

Simone kept attacking but started resorting to feints since his wounds prevented him from fighting in top shape, and he had problems moving.

He attacked again, but Erik managed to evade Simone's last strike, creating a split-second opening. Seizing the opportunity, he swiftly grabbed a handful of seeds from his pocket, his hands instinctively finding their grip.

Time seemed to slow as Erik hurled the seeds toward Simone and channeled his mana at max capacity; he couldn't afford to spare even an ounce of it, so he poured everything he had into that attack. At least 200 heavy logs traveled through the air and hurtled toward the unsuspecting thug. Simone, momentarily caught off guard, could not react in time to avoid the incoming barrage.

"WHAT THE F-"

The logs crashed into Simone, and he tried to avoid the heavy projectiles, his eyes widening in surprise. However, soon the logs crashed down on him and buried the man under their weight; the force of the blow left him in a bloody pulp.

[HOSTILE HUMAN 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. 3898 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

[LEVEL UP.]

"Ah...ah...ah... I did it... I did it..."

Erik managed to take Simone by surprise, and the logs killed him. He even gained an additional level from him. However, despite the system telling him the man was dead, Erik wanted to make sure he was really dead, so he approached the logs.

#### Chapter 350: Final Confrontation (2)

Erik's racing heart gradually slowed as he surveyed the aftermath of the intense fight that had unfolded in the midst of the wheat fields.

The once serene landscape now bore the marks of the violent clash between him and Simone.

Broken stalks of wheat lay trampled and scattered, mingling with the scattered logs that had been used as weapons.

The air was heavy with the metallic scent of blood, intermingling with the earthy aroma of the wheat. Erik's gaze fell upon Simone's motionless body, sprawled amidst the wreckage.

A shiver ran down his spine at the sight before him, a grim testament to the scale of his once useless brain crystal power.

Simone's form was barely recognizable, crushed under the weight of the logs that had struck him with merciless force.

The once deadly thug now lay broken and defeated, his body contorted in an unnatural manner. Dark crimson stains marred the ground around him, an eerie contrast against the golden hues of the wheat fields.

Erik's eyes traced the path of destruction, following the trails of blood that painted a macabre tapestry upon the once-vibrant landscape.

Despite the victory he had achieved, Erik couldn't help but feel a pang of rage. That wasn't how his life was supposed to be when he decided to reveal his power to the school.

Would it have been better for him not to say anything? Probably yes, and he hoped that in Etrium, things would be different. There, he could simply claim his main power was Nathaniel's.

That would be sufficient to give him a good life and many opportunities and to avoid him having the stigma of the weak again.

The problem was that he didn't really know that much about Etrium; he only knew that they had mercenaries instead of forced military conscription, but that also meant that he would be freer than here.

The silence of the countryside enveloped Erik as he stood amidst the destruction he had just caused, his gaze locked on Simone's lifeless form.

The wind whispered through the wheat fields, rustling the broken stalks in a mournful cadence. It was a moment of quiet contemplation, a respite from the chaos that had consumed Erik's life in recent months.

A mixture of relief and sorrow washed over him as Erik acknowledged Simone was dead, but the gravity of the situation reminded him he could not go back to Amber and his friends anymore.

Simone's demise marked the end of a chapter, but it also served as a reminder of the fact that he was still weak in this vast world and that there were people much stronger than him that would do everything in their power to get his secret.

He knew that voices of his ability would get to Becker sooner or later and that he would start hunting him down relentlessly not only in Frant but also in the bordering nations.

The path ahead remained uncertain, and Erik knew he had to steel himself for the challenges that lay ahead.

With a heavy sigh, Erik tore his gaze away from the lifeless figure and turned his attention towards the horizon.



It was still dark, but he was able to see the vast expanse of the wheat fields stretched out before him. It was a golden sea as long and far as the eye could see. Each stalk stood tall and proud, swaying gently in the breeze.

The moonlight cast a warm, blue night hue upon the field, illuminating the undulating waves of grain.

The wind that whispered through the rustling wheat carried the earthy scent of the harvest throughout the air.

It was a picturesque scene of abundance and serenity, a symbol of nature's bounty and the toil of countless hands. Erik then turned to look at the body as a thought crossed his mind.

"It would be a waste to leave his brain crystal here..." With that, Erik approached the wreckage and searched for Simone's brain crystal power.

He still didn't absorb Hais's, and he had to find a way to do it safely now that he was going to be in the wild for a while. Erik dipped his finger into Simone's blood and licked it.

[ENEMY'S DNA ACQUIRED. STARTING THE ANALYSIS.]

[ANALYSIS COMPLETE.]

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

[7010 DNA POINTS DETECTED. COMMENCING EXTRACTION?.]

"No. Leave it for later." He then proceeded to pick up his brain crystal power and swallow it without even cleaning it from the brain matter.

[ENEMY'S BRAIN CRYSTAL ACQUIRED. STARTING THE ANALYSIS.]

[ANALYSIS COMPLETE.]

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

[7010 DNA POINTS DETECTED. EXTRACTION IS NOT ADVISED; THE HOST HAS INCOMPATIBLE DNA.]

[EXTRACTION ABORTED]

"Phew..." Erik sighed. < I'm drained. Should I go back to my home and rest before departing? Maybe hire a healer?> the young man thought.

But then he decided to simply get out of the city; the wounds on his body didn't make him suffer that much, and they started closing already, thanks to his new and improved physique. However, he lost a lot of blood and needed rest and food.

Erik decided to pick up Simone's remains and throw them out of the barrier. Thaid's would take care of the body, but at least he would cover the fact that the man missed his brain crystal.

He picked up what he could of the corpse, paying attention to get every bit of the man's skull, and then he retrieved his backpack and took a step forward. Erik ventured deeper into the fields, the golden stalks brushing against his legs as he moved.

Erik's drained steps led him through the vastness of the golden wheat field in the direction of the barrier's concealed opening.

Though darkness enveloped his surroundings, he knew the breach was near. A surge of anticipation mingled with the weariness that weighed on him as he neared his destination.

With each stride, the soft rustle of the wheat stalks accompanied Erik's progress as if bidding him farewell on his journey into the unknown.

And then, as if passing through an unseen threshold, he crossed over into the shroud of the forest after he went past the barrier.

<It has been a while since I have been here,> Erik said to himself.

The night they had transformed the once-familiar surroundings into a mysterious realm cloaked in shadows and dappled moonlight.

The forest stood silent and still, its ancient trees towering above him like silent sentinels. Their gnarled branches reached out, intertwining to form a natural canopy that obscured the moon's gentle glow.

Erik's senses heightened as he delved deeper into the forest's heart. The air was cool and carried the scent of damp earth and decaying leaves.

The forest floor, carpeted with fallen foliage, crunched softly beneath his footsteps. It was a symphony of nature's whispers, a soft chorus of nocturnal creatures hidden from view.

The moonlight, filtered through the thick foliage above, created an ethereal glow that danced upon the forest floor. Shadows stretched and danced with every movement, creating an otherworldly ambiance.

It was a place where reality and dreams intermingled and where the line between the tangible and the intangible blurred. It was the place where Erik would finally be free, but danger lurked at every corner.

As the awakener ventured deeper, he became aware of the subtle sounds that filled the night air.

The hooting of some owl-like thaids echoed through the trees; its haunting call reminded him of the untamed wilderness that enveloped him. The distant rustle of leaves and the occasional twig snap evoked a sense of primal energy that pulsed through the forest.

The forest's inhabitants, unseen yet ever present, added to the tapestry of nocturnal life, but they didn't attack him yet, not even when noticing the body he just threw to the ground without a second thought.

Many thoughts passed through the young man's head as he walked through the forest: how and where he would sleep. How could he protect himself from the thaids at night?

Many questions had to be answered, and solutions had to be found. As he went further, the dense foliage seemed to close in around him, the branches forming an intricate maze that challenged his every step.

Shadows cast by moonlight danced upon his path, beckoning him further into the forest's heart.

Each step was cautious, as if the forest itself held its breath, observing his every move. He actually arrived where he killed Logan, and thoughts about what the kid did to him and what Erik did in return crossed his mind like haunting nightmares. Only they were real.

Erik sighed, and under the watchful gaze of the moon and the ancient trees, he sped toward the innards of the forest, deeper into the place where he could find his death if he didn't pay enough attention.

He carried with him the echoes of his past, the lessons learned, and the hope for a brighter future. Each footfall carried him further away from the gruesome scene behind him, from the pain he had to suffer, and propelled him toward a future yet to be written.