

BIOLOGICAL 371

Chapter 371: Primal Showdown

Erik's breaths came out in ragged gasps as he entered a small pocket of forest further ahead of his previous position, a narrow expanse that provided a brief reprieve from the Ursolith's pursuit. It was a tiny refuge, only ten meters wide, but it was enough for him to gather his wits and prepare for the impending confrontation. The beast had been weakened enough for him to fight one-on-one.

Erik's heart pounded in his chest, and time seemed to slow down. The air around him was tense, with a palpable sense of danger and anticipation. He braced himself, his mind racing with calculations and strategies, looking for any advantage he could gain.

The twenty seconds he had left before the Ursolith reached him felt like an eternity, each second stretching and contorting under the strain of anxiety. Erik's gaze was fixed on the small clearing's entrance, his eyes darting back and forth, his senses heightened to detect any sign of the approaching beast.

The Ursolith then burst into view with a bone-shaking roar that shattered the silence. The ground trembled beneath its massive weight as it charged forward, its eyes fixed on its prey, its enemy, Erik, with unwavering determination. Its massive form took up a lot of space from the clearing, casting a shadow that seemed to engulf everything in its path and leaving tiny room to move to the young man.

Erik's mind snapped into action, his calm demeanor giving way to a determined resolve. His muscles coiled with tension as he planted his feet firmly on the ground.

The Ursolith charged at him, its thunderous footsteps closing the gap with terrifying speed, yet not on par with what it had been able to do until five minutes ago.

Erik unsheathed his Flyssa with a lightning-fast reflex, the gleaming blade catching the dappled sunlight. His movements were fluid, almost choreographed, as he prepared for the impending clash.

The Ursolith arrived ahead of Erik, casting a dark, imposing shadow. The creature came to a halt, its piercing gaze fixed on its prey. A hush hung in the air, pregnant with anticipation and raw power.

The Ursolith then unleashed a roar that shattered the tranquility of the surroundings with a thunderous eruption. The sound broke the silence, reverberating through the trees and echoing into the distance. Its roar seemed to consume the entire forest, drowning out all other sounds in its wake.

But as the deafening roar died away, the once-vibrant forest fell silent. It was a heavy silence, pregnant with fear and awe. The silence encircled the trees, the leaves barely rustling in the aftermath of the Ursolith's primal display of dominance.

[DANGER: A FEAR STATUS HAS AFFECTED THE HOST. RELEASE OF CALMING SUBSTANCES INTO THE BRAIN IN 3...2...1]

The silence engulfed everything as if the air had stopped breathing in response to the beast's proclamation. It was a tense moment in which the forest seemed to hold its collective breath, awaiting the next move in the deadly dance that was about to begin.

"Shut the fuck up," Erik said with a challenging look. The beast couldn't understand what the young man said but noticed he was unaffected by its brain crystal power, but it then resumed its attack undeterred.

The massive Ursolith lunged forward, jaws snapping with bone-crushing force aimed at Erik. The young man twisted and contorted his body in a breathtaking display of agility, narrowly avoiding the beast's lethal bite. His movements were quick and fluid, displaying his acrobatic abilities as he danced around the Ursolith, always one step ahead.

Erik launched a quick counterattack, seizing the opportunity. His Flyssa glinted in the sunlight as it sliced through the air, finding its mark on the Ursolith's flank with a deft flick of his wrist. The blade met resistance as it bit into the tough hide of the monster, leaving a deep gash filled with dark crimson.

The Ursolith's roar shook the forest to its core—a primal howl of pain and fury. Undaunted by its wound, the creature retaliated with a devastating swing of its right paw, aiming to crush Erik beneath its enormous strength and weight.

As he evaded the powerful strike, the young man's reflexes went into overdrive, and his body contorted with preternatural grace. His instincts guided him, and he narrowly avoided the Ursolith's fatal blow. The wind from the beast's swing brushed against his cheek, a chilling reminder of the danger the creature posed to his safety.

Following his escape, the awakener took advantage of the opportunity to strike once more. He lunged forward with calculated precision, his Flyssa gleaming as it sought a vulnerable spot on the

Ursolith's massive body. The blade found new life, sinking deep into the creature's flesh and eliciting another earth-shattering roar, but it wasn't enough to kill the beast.

The Ursolith, bloodied and enraged, turned its full attention to Erik. Its eyes burned with a feral zeal, its primal instinct urging it to eliminate the threat before it.

Erik scanned the Ursolith for flaws that he could exploit. He noticed that, despite the numerous wounds on its body, the thaid wasn't going to die soon, and because the awakener only had a limited amount of mana to play with, he needed to end the fight quickly, or he'd be the one dying.

It was then that he noticed the severe wound on the beast's neck, a reminder of his earlier assault; it was nasty enough for the young man to use it to kill the creature.

<How can this fucker still be alive with that wound on its neck?> The young man wondered.

He needed to target that weak spot if he was going to have a chance of defeating this tenacious foe.

With his decision made, the awakener shifted his stance with calculated precision, his Flyssa firmly in his grasp. He had to time his killing of the creature perfectly.

The Ursolith, wounded but unafraid, decided, for some strange primitive reason, to stand on its two feet and kill the pest named Erik with its massive front paws.

It swung the lethal weapon multiple times, each strike exuding raw, unyielding power and causing the wind to shift. The beast's goal became clear: keep its vulnerable neck out of Erik's reach, forcing him to defend himself.

"You are smarter than I thought!" Erik shouted.

The awakener's instincts took over, his body moving with a fluid grace honed over months of practice. He ducked and weaved to avoid the crushing blows that were about to pulverize him.

Despite the beast's relentless assault, Erik remained unharmed. He evaded the Ursolith's attacks by sidestepping and rolling with otherworldly grace. His thoughts raced, looking for an opening, a chance to land a crushing blow on his formidable opponent, but he had to force the beast to lower its neck.

The Ursolith's snarls echoed through the forest, filling it with its ferocious presence. Its eyes blazed with rage and determination, refusing to yield to Erik's deft evasion.

The young man's concentration was high. He studied the Ursolith's movements, looking for an opening amid the chaos of the fight. Then, in a split-second decision, he took advantage of a brief window of vulnerability.

Erik took advantage of the Ursolith's mighty paw strike and used his Plant Master brain crystal power to bridle the Thaid and prevent it from moving; then, he darted forward, narrowly avoiding the beast's attempt to bite him with its massive jaws.

He then went toward the beast's hindquarters, his Flyssa poised to strike with the speed of a striking serpent, evading the deadly claws of the beast. Erik didn't have enough mana to completely restrain the Thaid.

The blade sliced through the air, aiming to sever the tendons in his right hind paw and limit the Ursolith's mobility further. He was successful, and the beast fell to the ground with a resounding thud.

As he saw the neck within his grasp, every muscle in his body coiled like a tightly wound spring, ready to unleash a final, decisive strike.

The beast attempted to stand on its own, using his ferocious jaws and jagged teeth to keep Erik at bay. On the other hand, Erik still had numerous wounds from when he was at the Red Lotus Lounge and had limited mobility.

However, he didn't miss that chance and took advantage of the situation; he evaded the monster's paws once more, deftly maneuvering to position himself on the beast's side, close to the neck. He closed the gap between himself and the beast in a swift and fluid motion, his blade poised to strike.

Erik launched his attack with a primal yell.

"DIE!"

The blade descended with unyielding force on the Ursolith's exposed neck. The sound of steel colliding with flesh and bones echoed through the forest.

As the awakener's blade found its mark, the Ursolith roared in agony, but its roar was cut short when the young man severed its head, leaving a bloodied stump on the beast's body. Blood poured from the wound like a fountain, staining the ground.

[URSOLITH 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. 1371 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

[QUEST COMPLETE. REWARDS ISSUED.]

"Yes!" Erik shouted. He managed to kill another strong beast, and its power would help him fight against monsters he couldn't survive against. The ability to instill primal fear in his opponents was bound to be very useful.

Erik then approached the thaid's body and licked the red substance from the bloody stump.

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

[ANALYSIS COMPLETE.]

[URSOLITH'S DNA HAS BEEN FOUND COMPATIBLE WITH THE BRAIN CRYSTAL POWER "ANIMAL SHAPE SHIFTING" TO STRENGTHEN THE POWER, THE HOST IS REQUIRED TO DRINK AT LEAST 20 CC OF BLOOD.]

[100 DNA POINTS ARE REQUIRED TO EXTRACT THE DNA. 500 TO GET IT WITHOUT INCURRING PAIN AND LOSS OF CONSCIOUSNESS.]

[1690 DNA POINTS DETECTED. COMMENCING EXTRACTION?.]

"Not now, but I will power up the animal shape-shifting power," Erik said. With that, he cupped his hand and drank the blood until a new notification appeared in front of him.

[BLOOD ABSORBED. DNA STORING PROCEDURE STARTED. PLEASE WAIT.]

[PROCEDURE COMPLETE.]

"Good." He then extracted the brain crystal from the thaid's severed head and swallowed it.

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

[ANALYSIS COMPLETE.]

[100 DNA POINTS ARE REQUIRED TO EXTRACT THE POWER. 500 TO GET IT WITHOUT INCURRING PAIN AND LOSS OF CONSCIOUSNESS.]

[1690 DNA POINTS DETECTED. EXTRACTION IS NOT ADVISED; THE HOST HAS INCOMPATIBLE DNA.]

[EXTRACTION ABORTED]

Chapter 372: Whispering Ruins

Erik tried to rest as much as he could during the next four days. Since he left the city, he only had difficult times. The lack of sleep, the continual travel, and the incessant fights sapped his energy, and he found himself in need of rest.

During these last four days, he continued to train and make neural links with the new technique developed by the Biological supercomputer and Hais' brain crystal power. He also absorbed the power of the Ursolith and used the five status points he gained from leveling up to gain extra mana.

After some recovery, the young man decided to resume his journey. However, he knew that if he did so, thaid's attacks would intensify. He had built several traps and protections around his temporary base in the previous days, allowing him to relax more after his training sessions. Still, he knew that as he resumed his march, everything would change.

After many hours of walking, Erik went farther into the forest and farther from new Alexandria, his steps muffled by a thick mat of fallen leaves covering the woodland floor.

The rustle of leaves in the mild breeze, the distant song of a bird hiding amid the branches, and the faint murmur of a nearby stream filled the air with a symphony of nature's whispers. It was a world unspoiled by man, where the raw beauty of the forest reigned supreme.

The sun that day shone through the canopy above, creating ethereal lights that danced amid the swinging trees. Shafts of golden-lit moss-covered rock sections produced a tapestry of mottled shadows and gentle hues. Erik was wrapped in nature's arms as the perfume of damp earth and the delicate fragrance of wildflowers filled the air.

The young man's eyes were drawn to his surroundings as he traveled. Towering ancient trees reached towards the heavens, their gnarled trunks acting as timekeepers. The forest was a haven for life, overflowing with colorful plants and creatures. Wildflowers sprayed vivid hues against the green backdrop of the undergrowth while delicate ferns unfurled their fronds in graceful arcs.

The awakener's strides were measured, his senses tuned to the forest's mysteries. His footfall left a delicate trace on the mossy ground, briefly interrupting nature's perfect cadence. He felt a connection to the wilderness, a comprehension that went beyond words and that only intensified as he got his Plant master Brain crystal power.

That was maybe due to the fact that the merged power was the off-product of his birth brain crystal power, and there was a sort of connection to nature that only intensified as his power became stronger.

The jungle hugged him, protecting him from the city's chaos. He proceeded with purpose, his steps guided by an internal compass that directed him to the answers he sought. However, despite this connection to the natural world, the forest was also lurking with dangers. He had to be careful.

Erik's gaze lingered on the rich elements of the natural tapestry surrounding him as the trek through the woodland proceeded. Every tree, every leaf, and every gentle breeze told a narrative, and he was merely a bystander in this magnificent story of existence.

Then, as if by magic, His's eyes caught sight of something unusual among the natural splendor as he explored the forest. A patch of moss sprouted in an unusual vertical arrangement, unlike anything he'd seen previously. Curiosity piqued his interest, leading him to the enigmatic sight.

"What on earth is that?" Erik stated as he approached the weird sight.

Erik closed the gap with deliberate strides; he grabbed his sword. He gently stretched his hand, his fingertips touching the delicate surface of the moss. Its texture was strange to him—chilly and somewhat moist. He carefully scraped away the verdant vegetation with his blade, revealing an unexpected sight buried beneath.

To his surprise, the moss hid a row of old bricks. Their dismal colors stood out against the brilliant greens of the woodland, implying a long-forgotten purpose.

"Where the hell am I?"

Erik's hold on his Flyssa intensified, his determination driving him to discover the truth. With each methodical stroke, he removed more moss, revealing an ancient brick building.

"This is the work of human hands," the awakener said, marveling at the structure. He paid closer attention to the structure. The bricks were worn and engraved with fading symbols and aged patterns. He could also see some scraped-off paint as if the building was littered with graffiti.

The world seemed to pause its breath as if it was holding the answers in its calm embrace. Erik continued to follow the moss' trail over the brick walls. He followed the vertical growth step by step, developing a sense of eagerness and interest.

"This seems to be a rectangular structure. Was this a house?"

As he emerged from the trees, he had a better view of the structure, aged by time and caressed by nature, which had revealed itself to him.

The bricks served as the foundation for what was once clearly a house, which the expanding wilderness has since reclaimed but protected from the eroding effects of time.

Erik's eyes widened in astonishment as he examined the rotting ruins of the building. Ivy clung to the crumbling walls, creating a green tapestry against the weathered brick stones.

The roof, which had long since fallen, let the sunshine in, throwing an ethereal glow on the ruins of what had once been a simple dwelling.

Nature had not forgotten this location as moss and ferns sprang through the crevices, bringing life back to the abandoned building. It was as if the forest had embraced the house, weaving its magic to create a balance of man-made and natural elements.

However, the young man noticed something disturbing as he stood on the border of the abandoned house. Nature's customary symphony, the smooth rustling of leaves, and the beautiful chirping of birds were conspicuously absent. The air was thick with an unsettling silence as if time itself had stopped in this barren place.

His senses were on high alert as he studied his surroundings. There was no thaid scurrying over the woodland floor, and no vivid presence of wildlife graced his presence. The void left by their disappearance was unsettling, throwing a cloud of solitude over the place.

The forest was deafeningly quiet, its ancient trees stretching toward the heavens like silent sentinels. The gap produced by the absence of animal noises and the hushed murmurs of the wind reverberated strongly throughout Erik's being.

"This is weird..." Erik said out loud. Then, he noticed something weird, a feeling that spread throughout his guts. It was his Plant Master's brain crystal power that gave him that feeling. "I can sense something." He could usually feel the plants' presence. Their lives, their needs. However, there was something much stronger ahead; something was inside.

<I wonder what it is...>

Erik approached slowly, his steps fueled by reverence and curiosity. His fingertips brushed the disintegrating bricks as he looked for a way in. What he was feeling was totally different from the usual.

Erik took cautious steps around the perimeter of the abandoned house, his eyes checking for signs of intrusion. His pulse raced when he noticed a weathered window with its glass in a coating of neglect. He approached the window with determination on his face; his mind focused on uncovering the secrets that lay within and finding out what that weird feeling was.

The young man summoned his bravery and raised his Flyssa, its gleaming blade poised to sever the barrier between him and the truths hidden within. As the glass cracked, a tremendous crash resonated through the still air, shards dispersing like fragments of forgotten memories.

He moved deliberately and methodically through the smashed window. The house's interior greeted him with a sense of despair. The musty aroma of antiquity mingled with the dust, which danced in the faint rays of sunlight filtering through the crevices.

Erik's gaze wandered over the aged wooden furniture, silently guarding the weight of lost stories. The once-grand dining table was in disarray, its surface worn by time. Tattered drapes dangled limply, their faded patterns evoking a bygone period.

Erik's attention was drawn to pieces of obsolete technology that appeared to be locked in time as he delved deeper. Ancient computers stood as antiques from another era, their keys worn from typing innumerable phrases.

The house was abandoned a long time before he was even born. Its cavernous walls seemed to scream echoes of a bygone era as if trying to recapture the vibrancy they once possessed. Erik was filled with wonder as he had just discovered a portal into history.

The weight of the past pressed against him, each cracking floorboard a reminder of the lives previously occupying this space. It was a location where memories had been inscribed into the walls' very fabric, ready to be discovered by anyone prepared to listen.

Erik's fingertips brushed over the aged surfaces, sensing the texture of the past. He imagined the laughter and conversations that had filled these rooms and the lives that had unfolded behind these walls.

His eyes were drawn to an ancient, worn sofa as it traveled through the gloomy interior of the abandoned house. A neglected journal, made of some weird material, rested on the fading cushions, its cover tarnished by the passage of time. He reached out and carefully took this artifact from its resting place, intrigued by it.

Erik gently wiped away the filth, revealing faded ink on the first page. The words became clear, showing an article about when the unrelenting attack of thaids began a long time ago.

Chapter 373: Whispers of Time

Title: Sinister Cold: Reflecting on a Year of Devastation.

Author: Benjamin Hawthorne

Date: 15/04/2568.

It's been a year since a mysterious virus spread in our world, irrevocably altering the course of history. In retrospect, because of its sinister character and the chilling repercussions it unleashed on our civilization, I have come to refer to this terrible plague as the "Sinister Cold."

This disease, the Sinister Cold, first appeared in the year 2567, signaling the beginning of a wave of devastation that swept over our cities and towns with relentless fury.

It exacted an enormous toll, claiming the lives of millions of people and causing an ecological disaster that drove countless animal species to extinction. We were, and still are, on the verge of catastrophe, with our lives hanging in the balance.

This insidious illness caused two major symptoms: death or a terrifying decline into a permanent state of coma. With hindsight, I see the terrible impact of these symptoms as they tore through our civilizations, leaving a path of heartbreak and shattered lives in their wake.

Sinister Cold, so named because of its chilling effect, inflicts two primary symptoms on its unfortunate victims: death, in which the victims die as a result of rapid and irreversible organ failure, their bodies are weakened beyond the point of recovery, and with nothing that can be done to save them; or a terrifying decline into an unresponsive coma, buried within the depths of their subconscious, seemingly permanently lost to the world.

Because of the virus's unpredictability, scientists and medical professionals are at a loss for solutions, and their efforts to combat it are fraught with frustration.

The symptoms of those infected, before reaching one of the two likely outcomes, are frighteningly diverse, attesting to the virus's ruthlessness. There is not much to say. The Sinister Cold preys on the human body, attacking with ferocity. It causes a violent fever that consumes its victims from within, turning their skin pallid and clammy as their life force dwindles.

Delirium sets in, accompanied by nightmare experiences that sever their tenuous hold on reality. Some victims have uncontrollable seizures, their bodies shaking as their minds sink into darkness.

Fear and uncertainty abound as this sickness tightens its icy grasp on our globe. Every day brings new hurdles and heartbreaking losses while the search for a remedy remains elusive.

Our scientists and medical professionals work tirelessly, motivated by a flicker of optimism that we will defeat this wicked opponent one day, against all odds.

However, as we navigate the dangerous waters of Sinister Cold, we are presented with a sobering reality: the hunt for treatment remains complex and elusive. Despite our scientists' and doctors' earnest efforts, development appears excruciatingly slow. The weight of hopelessness falls on us, putting doubt on our chances of recovery.

(...)

As he carefully read through the worn pages of the journal, Erik absorbed the Article's horrible tale of the Sinister Cold, the disease that had ravaged the earth many years ago.

"I didn't think I would find this information here..."

Like everyone else, Erik was aware of the disease that threatened the annihilation of the human species. Of course, he had no idea what had transpired in the past, but things weren't all that different from now, probably.

The young man kept reading, finding out the author's dissatisfaction with the seeming lack of progress in finding a cure for the virus. He also thought about the writer's feelings about the government's response, experiencing a sense of sadness for the government's inaction.

Furthermore, Erik couldn't help but make a mental comment on the journal's date. It occurred to him that this document was now regarded as ancient, a relic from a time of sorrow and uncertainty.

He closed the journal with a heavy sigh, its brittle pages whispering stories of a world forever changed. While the events mentioned in the essay may have occurred many years ago, the echoes of their impact continued to reverberate throughout time.

It was also weird to know what followed those events, with the apparition of the brain crystal and the birth of the Thaidis.

<I bet that when the Sinister Cold appeared, people didn't think it would have led people to develop superpowers...> The young man thought.

The awakener stepped away from the journal and placed it back on the sofa. Nothing was exciting about it because it was mainly about scientists and the government's inability to discover a solution.

His attention was drawn away from the journal by a pair of old wooden stairs lying in the corner of the chamber.

Their presence silently invited him to explore the depths of this forgotten house. Intriguing by the prospect of more discoveries, he took a step closer, his gaze tracing the exquisite carvings that ornamented the staircase.

The worn-out stairs bore the imprints of numerous footsteps that had traveled their length. The once colorful and polished wood has faded to a dull tint and was covered by thick and heavy dust, blending with the ancient surroundings' state of decay.

Erik's heartbeat increased with excitement as he began his descent. With each step, a gentle groan rang through the vacant house.

<The stairs are not very stable...> The young man noticed.

As he moved farther into the unknown, the air became cooler, with faint light streaming through the crevices in the walls and forming elongated shadows on the floor.

The staircase seemed to go on forever, carrying Erik further into the heart of the house. His fingers brushed against the old banister, feeling the smoothness eroded by the hands of time.

As he descended, the air grew heavier; there was much dust there, which was making his breath hard.

He finally made it to the bottom step, his eyes adjusting to the dimness of the lower floor. The scene that met him was one frozen in time—an abandoned area filled with whispers of a life once lived. Erik's gaze moved around the room, taking in the fading wallpaper, rotting furniture, and relics from a bygone era.

However, his gaze was immediately pulled to a plant that pulsated with an ethereal glow in the center of the room amidst the creeping soil that poured inside the brick structure. Its mana-pulsing existence appeared out of place among the decaying and human remnants.

The plant was tall and slender, reaching about a meter and a half in height. Its bright green stems twisted and coiled like serpents in a complex dance. Each stem was adorned with beautiful, luminescent leaves that glowed softly and enchantingly, sending an iridescent color over the room.

Clusters of small, translucent orbs draped from the branches, generating a steady pulsing of mana that echoed with a pleasant hum. The orbs had a hypnotic quality to them, moving from deep blue to shimmering silver as though responding to unknown cosmic forces.

A gorgeous flower bloomed at the plant's heart, its petals unfurling like the wings of a celestial creature. The petals were a stunning combination of iridescent blues and purples, suggestive of a starry night sky. They released a delicate smell that filled the air with a gentle sweetness, adding to the plant's charm.

"Is it this that is repelling the thaids? Maybe the scent does it."

Erik marveled at the plant, its presence defying logical explanation. Its light seemed to throb with its life force as if it were a portal to worlds beyond human knowledge. This was neither a plant nor a Thaid; it was something different from the two, yet having aspects belonging to both.

Erik could sense the gentle thrum of mana resonating inside his very own being as he approached the plant, which seemed to recognize him, to perceive his link to the natural world and the invisible powers that regulated it.

<Is this due to my new brain crystal power?> The young man wondered. It was true that, since he got it, he started feeling something weird whenever he got closer to plants. It was like he could communicate with them, and it was hard to get accustomed to it while in a forest.

At that moment, the young man channeled mana through his Plant Master brain crystal power's neural links and infused it into the plant, which began growing.

"What the...? Why does it take so much time to grow?" the young man said out loud after five minutes passed.

Erik studied the plant as he pumped mana into it, and it appeared that although his power allowed him to grow plants faster and control them, naturally, the problem was that it was taking a lot of time for this single plant to grow.

At the same time, Erik usually made things grow even meters taller in a matter of moments. The plant acted like a sponge and seemed insatiable, hence why it grew slower than normal plants.

However, as the plant grew, so did the feeling. He was drawn to the living organism, but there was something about it that disgusted him, and the feeling grew stronger as the plant grew larger.

"Yep, this must be why the thaids are far from here," the young man said. There was something in the scent that was disgusting, even him, which found it pleasant to the nose.

"Better to take this with me. With my power, I won't have problems growing it in other places, and hopefully, I should be able to sleep better with this around."

Erik carefully plucked the brilliant plant's flower with gentle hands, taking a few of its roots with him. He cradled the delicate plant in his palms, admiring its ethereal beauty as he delicately put it into an empty water bottle he had on hand.

The bottle provided a temporary sanctuary for the mystical plant, protecting it from harm while allowing its vibrant glow to shine through the transparent walls. Erik secured the cap tightly, ensuring a safe and stable environment for the flower to thrive.

He could feel a gentle buzz of energy flowing from within the bottle as he held it in his hands as if the plant itself was grateful for the newfound refuge.

The young man realized he had discovered something extraordinary. He felt safer now that he had the plant in his grasp and was determined to protect and nurture this miracle, knowing its importance to his existence. It was at that point that the building began to shake.

Chapter 374: Getting out

As soon as the plant was secured, Erik noted that the roots had spread beyond the soil and lodged themselves into the building's rotting walls. It seemed as though the plant had discovered an odd source of nourishment in the ancient bricks in its search for sustenance.

The thin and delicate roots intermingled with the wall's fissures and crevices, clinging tenaciously as they gathered nourishment from the surrounding environment and grew along the walls, hugging them in a tight embrace.

The plant appeared to have exceptional tenacity and adaptability, allowing it to grow even in the worst conditions.

He discovered something strange as he inspected the roots more attentively. They radiated a faint, bluish glow, their energy pulsing in time with the plant's ethereal radiance. However, the energy within decreased rapidly, and the glow dimmed.

Soon a transformation began to take place right in front of his eyes. The once vivid and supple tendrils that had threaded their way through the crumbling walls began to wilt. The once vibrant colors had faded, replaced by a grey pallor that stretched like a blanket down the length of each root.

The roots became brittle and frail as the plant's vigor evaporated. Thin cracks emerged on their surface, simulating dry dirt needing water. The breaks grew deeper over time, separating the roots into shards that decomposed into small particles. The roots crumbled into fine flakes like ashes as the metamorphosis accelerated.

<This is not good...>

The remnants started falling to the ground by the air coming from the hole in the roof, which allowed air to spread inside the building, dispersing the plant's ashes like ghostly dust within the abandoned room. The ashes shimmered briefly before being carried away by an unseen stream, a last fleeting glimpse of the plant's former vitality.

A strong tremor shook through the building's foundation at that exact instant.

"Shit... The plant kept the building in place."

The building groaned and creaked in protest, its aged timbers and weathered bricks reacting to the disruption with a cacophony of unpleasant noises.

The tremors became more intense as if the removal of the mystical plant had awoken the structure itself. The walls shook, sending cascades of dust and debris down from above.

As the structure convulsed, Erik's surroundings seemed to dance in chaos, as if the very fabric of reality had been disrupted.

Objects fell from shelves, smashing to the ground in a flurry of shattered glass and splintered wood; parts of the ceiling started to collapse from the floor above, destroying the flooring and falling to the room Erik was currently standing in. The formerly peaceful and tranquil atmosphere had been overwhelmed by turmoil.

"I'd better get out of here."

Erik's heart pounded with adrenaline-fueled urgency with each thunderous shake and tremor that resonated through the structure. His feet pounded against the shaky ground beneath him as he dashed towards the stairs going back to the first floor.

However, as he ran upstairs, a portion of it gave way beneath Erik's weight. His heart skipped a beat as the wood cracked and disintegrated, threatening to throw him back to the bottom floor and lock him below. His hands went out instinctively, reaching for something to grab onto, desperate for an anchor to keep him from falling.

Erik's fingers found traction on a solid handrail; the wood was weathered but amazingly unbroken. He held on to it with all his might, his heart thumping in his chest as he dangled perilously over the dark gulf that opened beneath him. Sweat ran down his brow as he battled to regain his footing.

With sheer determination, the young man gathered his strength and hauled himself up, centimeter by centimeter. The railing cracked and moaned under strain, but it stayed fast even as the building shook, giving him the lifeline he needed. The world appeared to hold its breath as he struggled against gravity, his muscles straining.

Erik lifted himself onto the solid earth of the first floor with a sigh of relief. He took a deep breath and paused momentarily to take in the sights around him.

The awakener's veins were filled with a mixture of thankfulness and adrenaline. He silently thanked the gods for saving him from a potentially fatal fall. At that moment, though, he turned to face the building's entrance, the window he had destroyed to get inside. He began rushing away from the exit without looking back.

The building creaked and complained, threatening to collapse at any moment, but Erik persisted, motivated by an intuitive desire to flee the collapsing structure.

His hammering footsteps eventually reached the window, and he burst through it to escape. The air felt significantly more stable there; Erik took a huge breath to savor the fresh air.

As the kid stepped out of the rotting mansion, the building's foundations groaned beneath the weight of its own age. The young man turned to look back in time to see a scene of devastation.

The structure, weakened by the lack of roots, could no longer support the weight it had supported for so long. The walls collapsed with a tremendous sound, releasing clouds of dust and debris into the air.

To him, the collapse appeared to happen in slow motion, with debris hanging in mid-air before succumbing to gravity's grip. Dust clouds billowed, hiding the structure's ruins and engulfing the memories trapped within its walls.

Erik stood there, fascinated by the sight, his emotions racing. Witnessing the demolition of a place with so much history and value was a moving experience. The once-standing structure disintegrated, tumbling in a violent avalanche of rubble.

Erik exhaled a sigh of relief as he stood a safe distance from the collapsing building, his heart racing from the adrenaline-fueled escape.

"Wow, that was a close call," he muttered to himself, his voice filled with shock and gratitude. "I can't believe I made it out in one piece. Talk about luck."

The kid took a step back as the dust fell to the ground, and silence returned to the scene, allowing himself to digest the enormity of what he had witnessed.

"I wonder what archaeologists would have thought about this place. It's a little bit sad that the building collapsed. But why did no one find this place during all this time?"

To be honest, that was weird, as it wasn't like it was hard to find the building. The vines growing on it were too weird not to notice, mainly due to how they grew vertically.

Erik then looked at his side; the plant holding the water bottle was there. Erik gingerly cradled the plant's water bottle in his hands, his attention fixed on the ethereal glow within. The flower, nestled within the container, seemed to throb with an otherworldly force as if it carried a secret waiting to be revealed.

He rotated the bottle gently, watching the slender green stems twist and coil like serpents in an elaborate dance. Each stem was adorned with glowing leaves that emitted a delicate, captivating glow that coated his hands with iridescent color. The beautiful colors of the petals, which blended iridescent blues and purples like a starry night sky, captivated his imagination and enslaved him.

Suspended from the branches, clusters of translucent spheres radiated a gentle pulsing of mana that resonated with a beautiful murmur. The spheres, whose hue changed from deep blue to shimmering silver, appeared to respond to invisible cosmic forces, adding to the plant's mystique.

Erik was amazed at the flower in the bottle's beauty and unfathomable power as he examined it. The delicate aroma of the plant, a gentle sweetness that permeated the air, added to the enchantment surrounding it.

<Luckily I didn't drop this, or I would have risked my life for nothing...> the young man thought.

Erik's gaze was riveted on the plant inside the bottle. He couldn't help but wonder about its capabilities and if the capacity to fend off the thaids was real. For now, it was just a hunch, fueled by the slightly repulsing feeling he felt from the plant scent despite its alluring perfume.

"It's wonderful," Erik murmured as he observed the flower inside the bottle, his voice laced with admiration and hope. "But can this beautiful flower truly protect me from the thaids?"

Erik tightened his grip on the bottle, determination shining in his eyes. "I may not know for certain, but I won't let doubt stop me from trying, at least. It may work or not, but I need to try if I want an answer."

The young man then stood on his feet again. He removed the dust, the earth, and the dried leaves from his clothes.

Leaving the remnants of the destroyed house behind, Erik resumed his march with a renewed determination. His boots crunched against the gravelly path as he set his sights on the road ahead. The weight of the past lingered in his mind, but he knew he had to keep moving, pushing forward toward his destination.

Chapter 375: In the meantime...

The scenery unfurled before the young man like a tapestry, with mountains in the background and fields that went on forever. The air was fresh and brisk, carrying with it the aroma of the earth and the hope for new starts. With each step he took, he inched his way closer to Etrium, where his mission awaited him.

As Erik made his way along the winding road, he paid attention to the sights and sounds of the environment around him. Birds were flying around the treetops, and their cheerful chirps could be heard floating through the air.

The sound of his footsteps was accompanied by the rustling of leaves as if the forest itself were urging him on with words of support and motivation.

The road in front seemed to go on forever, like a never-ending serpent road that faded away into the horizon. But Erik kept marching.

He was well aware that difficulties lay ahead of him, but he now possessed a newly found strength that was the product of the challenges he had already conquered. He felt strong enough for the journey.

The landscape subtly shifted in colors and shapes with each kilometer walked. The meadows were covered in vivid splashes of color provided by the wildflowers, which gently swayed in response to the wind. The music of nature continued, creating a tapestry of peace and harmony around him as it did so.

<Traveling after the Heniate's attack has been a good idea, there are not many thaids around these parts... Most of them probably died.>

The sun's radiance illuminated the landscape, which cast a hazy, ethereal glow as it descended below the horizon. The land was shrouded in a mysterious haze as the length of the shadows increased. The once bustling meadows and fields appeared quiet in reverence as if paying homage to the approaching twilight.

As the last rays of sunlight lingered on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the landscape, Erik concluded that the most prudent course of action, after all the walking he had made, would be to eat something and then go to sleep.

"Better start making a shelter..." The young man said to himself. He decided to use his powers to create a wooden shelter to protect him from the eventual rain and a little bit from thaid's.

After he found the place he was searching for, Erik activated the Plant Master's brain crystal power. He concentrated his willpower and directed his mana to flow through his neural links.

He could feel the surge of mana coursing through his veins. It pulsed and danced, a shimmering current of mystical power that connected him to the world around him. The mana flowed like a river, fueling his senses and enhancing his abilities.

With each inhale, he drew the ethereal essence from his brain crystal to the rest of his body, and he could feel its resonant vibrations coursing through every part of his being. The awakener released the mana from his body and channeled it towards the vegetation around him.

The plants woke up in response to his mana's touch, and their development sped up due to his influence. The ground was quickly colonized by thick and pliable vines that began to entwine with one another and ascend toward the canopy.

As if in response to Erik's wishes, the leaves unfurled in a kaleidoscope of verdant green tones that were lustrous and full.

The plants started to change when he exerted his will over them, bending and interweaving themselves to form a protective shelter. The leaves grew thick and numerous, intertwining and overlapping one another to create an artificial canopy. Meanwhile, the vines extended and arched, forming a sturdy framework.

The plants continued to expand in size under Erik's guidance, and their combined frames eventually formed a dome-shaped structure. The shelter's framework was strengthened as the vines became denser and more intertwined with one another.

The leaves became more elongated and expanded, and they grew to overlap one another to form a barrier that was impervious to the rain that was forecast to fall.

The result was a tall and imposing wooden structure, and the form it took fit in perfectly with the forest that was all around it. The domed structure offered protection from the outside elements, and the organic walls provided a sense of security and tranquility.

As Erik entered the shelter, a pleasant breeze and an aroma reminiscent of the earth greeted him. It was a safe haven, a sanctuary, and a place where he could relax and regain his strength. The plants buzzed with energy.

"All right, now it's time to check whether my logic is correct," the young man said to himself.

Erik carefully removed the plant from the bottle and then cradled it in his hands as he did so. He located an appropriate location out in the open ground, where the earth appeared more eager to take in the plant's roots.

Placing the plant down, he pressed his palms against the earth, channeling his Plant Master power and redirecting his mana into the ground.

He could feel the mana responding, intertwining with the plant's essence. The surrounding area gave off the impression of coming to life with a spectral glow, which reflected the pulsating radiance that had once emanated from within the deteriorating house.

The thin stems of the plant reached upward, directed by Erik's will, winding and coiling like serpents in a complex dance around the dome he just created.

New leaves emerged from the plant's stems, and each one had a delicate surface that glistened with the same entrancing glow. The iridescent tones illuminate the open area with ethereal light, creating a dreamlike atmosphere throughout the surrounding area.

On the branches, clumps of tiny orbs with a translucent appearance started to form. These orbs began to emit a soft pulsation of mana, and they resonated with a harmonious hum.

The cosmic force that permeated the air, the mana, caused the orbs. At the very center of the plant, a multitude of magnificent flowers started to unfurl, and their petals began to spread outward in a manner that resembled the wings of an ethereal being. There was a blooming of a mesmerizing combination of iridescent blues and purples hues that looked like a starry night sky.

The air was filled with a light fragrance, which carried a hint of sweetness and added to the plant's allure.

"All right, it looks like I'm good to go with this..."

The young man was uncertain as to whether or not the plant would effectively keep thais away. There were no threats in the immediate area of the house where he found the plant, and that was the only piece of information that he had regarding the matter.

The awakener had no choice but to wait and watch what would happen. In the meantime, Erik planted an apple and made several trees grow from its seeds. He then ate the sprouted fruits and placed some traps around his temporary camp to make the place safer.

"I'm curious as to what Amber is up to..."

Amber was sobbing quietly inside her room as her fiery red hair fell in a cascade around her tear-streaked face. The bedside lamp gave off a warm glow that created an inviting atmosphere and illuminated the books and trinkets strewn about on her shelves.

She buried her face in trembling hands as her sobs reverberated throughout the tranquil environment. Her glasses perched atop her nose as she sobbed.

However, the room also seemed to reflect her anguish, with shadows moving across the walls and reflecting the turmoil that was going on inside her heart.

Amber's eyes, now filled with tears, looked into the void as if searching for answers that were just out of reach. Her despair and yearning were only exacerbated by the eerie stillness surrounding her. The space, formerly a haven of tranquility and inspiration, was now merely a receptacle for her sobs, soaking up all of her anguish.

Amber's tears continued to fall as the room remained still, its atmosphere tinged with sadness.

Caiden, Amber's father, entered her room and stood there in silence, his presence a reassuring anchor amid her tears. He watched her with concern, and his eyes showed compassion and love. In the hushed space, their connection conveyed a great deal, providing her with some consolation in the face of her suffering.

Amber's room was filled with heaviness as Caiden approached her, his face etched with an ashen sorrow.

Amber's red hair was disheveled, and her glasses were slightly crooked as she cried, reflecting a mixture of hope and despair on her tear-streaked face. Caiden inhaled deeply before starting to speak, but it was clear his voice would be shaky as he spoke.

"I'm sorry. We searched everywhere but didn't find him; there was no trace of him inside the city. I'm so sorry, my dear," Caiden said.

When Amber's father said those words, Amber's heart sank, and she began crying even more freely. She sobbed uncontrollably while clutching her chest and stumbling over her words.

"No... No, Dad, you must be wrong! He can't be... he can't be gone!" Amber shouted amidst sobs.

As Caiden reached out to console his heartbroken daughter, tears welled up in his eyes, but he held them back.

"I know, Amber, I know. It's devastating. But we searched tirelessly, and there was no sign of him. My men have done everything they could. Even Becker's men searched, and we also asked for help from the clans. It's possible...

it's possible that he's... that he's no longer with us," her father replied with the most reassuring tone he could muster.

Amber's cries grew louder, her heartache echoing through the room. She struggled to comprehend the enormity of the loss, clinging to the last threads of hope.

"But... but how can we be sure, Dad? What if he's out there, hurt or lost? What if the Crystal Cross Gang got him? We can't give up on him!"

Caiden's voice cracked with anguish as he gently held Amber's quaking hands. Amber's hands were trembling.

Amber's father's voice quivered with anguish as he gently held Amber's trembling hands. "I understand your pain, my dear, but we must face the reality. It's been weeks, and no one has seen or heard from him since that day. We can't keep holding onto false hope."

Amber's sobs did not stop, and her grief weighed heavily on her heart. She desperately sought comfort in Caiden's embrace as the pressure of the unknown continued to mount on them. She clung to him tightly.

Chapter 376: Grasslands

A week went by after Erik found the plant inside the ancient house. The living thing kept the thaids away from his camp by acting as a repellent against them. That was a tremendous heaven-sent gift since Erik managed to sleep well for a whole week, during which he planted a flower every night.

As the plant increased in numbers due to Erik's intervention, the flower spread through the forest, giving Erik many safe places to go if he was in danger. However, he did more than just spread the plant.

Erik worked on his trap-making skills every day. He wasn't good enough to say he was a master, but at least his traps were effective. Most of them were made by making the plants around him grow in specific ways. He worked hard to make complex webs of clever traps to fool and stop even the smartest thaid hiding in the shadows.

With each failed try, he took apart the complicated parts of his creations, figuring out how to improve them and making careful changes to the designs. Through these challenges, he got more accustomed to the process and learned more ways to protect himself passively.

At the same time, Erik looked deep into himself and trained to increase the number of neural links. He didn't get one in the past days because he had much to do and couldn't totally concentrate on training, but each session got him closer to making two more neural links for Hais's and Nathaniel's powers.

"Ah, I've had enough of this for today..."

Erik was tired. He had fought and killed a lot of thaids that day, so his body felt tired and heavy. Each fight had worn him down and left him sweaty and tired. He struggled to catch his breath as he stood over the dead thaid. The sword felt too heavy in his hand and wasn't as sharp as it used to be.

Erik slowly put his sword away and took a moment to look around. The ground was full of dead thaids, a good source of protein for his travel. The air smelled like victory and the end of the battle. He felt happy and tired at the same time.

He knew he needed to rest so that he could get over the fight of the day. But even though he was tired, he didn't stop walking. Every thaid he killed brought him closer to his goal and strengthened him.

"I will walk a few kilometers more and search for a spot where I could put the thaid-repelling plant."

The plant needed to be inside the ground to work. It released a small amount of energy or spores, or whatever affected the other creatures, that discouraged thaids from attacking when it wasn't drawing its nutrients from the ground, but the bottle in which Erik had to keep it blocked everything.

The problem was that he was approaching more and more the Eldraith mountain range, and that meant that the thaids were becoming stronger.

So, he couldn't always use the plant due to the fact that he had to keep moving and there were limitations to its usage, but if he did so, that would also hurt his growth. What would happen if the plant didn't work on some thaids or in some places? What if he had to fight some way or another but wasn't strong enough to defend himself?

The best thing for Erik to do was to use the plant to make sure he could rest enough to then have energy the following day when he could spend the rest of the day moving through the forest and killing thaids to get more experience. Moreover, with the new neural link developing technique and Hais's brain crystal power, he didn't need to spend points on other stats, so he focused on energy.

As Erik walked through the thick underbrush of the forest, his steps got heavier as he noticed a significant change in the scenery. As the bushes got less dense, more light could get through. His heart started to feel uneasy, which cast a shadow over his spirit.

At a certain point, what was left was just a vast open space. He felt a lot of different emotions when he saw what was in front of him, but none of them were happy. It was a vast grassland bathed in the harsh light of the sun. The wide-open space felt tight and suffocating. He was distraught by the lack of trees and places to hide.

Erik's heart dropped when he saw that he was in this kind of terrain, a place he hated. He was stunned by how big it was, and a feeling of helplessness came over him like a cold breeze.

The trouble with this kind of terrain was that flying thaids could see down to the ground. There were no trees to cover them, and only a few monsters were able to make it through the empty and dangerous expanse.

A clearing may be easily managed due to its often small size, in contrast to the expansiveness of grasslands, but here, on these lands, in the event that flying thaids attacked him, Erik was unsure of his chances of survival.

He felt exposed without the usual plants around him as if eyes were watching his every move. Once comforting, the forest's canopy had been replaced by an endless sky that didn't give him the peace he was looking for.

"Fuck..."

Erik stopped walking. Uncertainty suddenly made his body feel heavy. His once confident walk was now weighed down by doubt and fear. He could put the plant on the ground to keep thaid away, but it would only work as long as he didn't go anywhere. He could sleep; he knew that much, but proceeding through the journey was a problem.

Erik stood still at the entrance to the grassland, his eyes fixed on the far horizon. As soon as his eyes landed ahead, he saw the majesty of the Eldraith mountain range. Even from 600 kilometers away, it was clear that the mountains were huge and beautiful.

The tall peaks of the Eldraith range poked through the sky like dark sentries. The rough shape of the mountains cast a strong shadow on the land, and their sharp edges showed that forces shaped them a long time ago. Erik's mind went crazy as he tried to picture what was hidden in those dark places.

The peaks of the Eldraith range vanished into the clouds, and the tops of the mountains were always covered in fog. Erik imagined icy cliffs, tumbling rivers, and secret places where elusive animals

lived. The darkened hills gave off a sense of weight, as if the mountains themselves were filled with a sense of dread.

The place was a barrier between Frant and Etrium. It was a natural border, so Erik had to go through it to get to Etrium. Its dangerous peaks and steep cliffs scared away people who tried to cross into an unknown country.

But what made the Eldraith range even scarier were the wyverns that lived in the sky above it and in the area. These dangerous sub-races of flying thaids were known for being cruel, wild, and intelligent. Because they had wings like bats, bodies like lizards, and razor-sharp claws, so they roamed the mountain range, making it dangerous for anyone who wanted to get into Etrium.

Not only was that a problem, but this kind of thaids often had strange and powerful brain crystal powers that were as unique and different as the ones humans had. The difference was that these beings' bodies were in a league that the human ones could never hope to reach.

The wyverns were also known for being very territorial and fighting furiously against anyone who tried to get into their territory. Their skill in the air and deadly strikes made it hard to cross the mountains. Erik understood that to venture past the Eldraith range meant confronting these flying predators, and the stakes were high.

The trip ahead held both the hope of getting to Etrium and the risk of running into the wyverns. He would have to be careful as he moved through the dangerous mountain range, using his wits, agility, and the skills he had developed through months of training to get past that place.

Erik was in a terrible situation. On the one hand, he had to get past the Eldraith mountain range to get into Etrium, and on the other, he also had to go through the grassland to approach the foot of the mountain, a place where there was nowhere to hide, and flying thaids could attack him.

"Well, it's not like I have a choice. This damn grassland is very vast, and there is no way to avoid walking through it."

With a heavy sigh, he braced himself for the challenges that lay ahead and cautiously ventured into the vast grassland, his senses heightened and his spirit guarded.

Chapter 377: Packstalkers

As Erik walked into the grassland beyond the end of the forest, his heart was filled with an unsettling worry. The tall grass, which reached up to his shoulders, made it feel like everything was closing in on him.

Every rustle and sway of the grass sent shivers down his spine, and he couldn't help but think that the powerful thaidi who roamed these lands were hiding nearby.

Even though the meadow was vast and beautiful, it had a spooky feeling that made him think twice about every step he took, and there was even a huge precipice several kilometers on the right side of the place.

He felt even worse when he thought about the flying thaidi wandering around these kinds of places. The trouble was that these monsters weren't the only ones here.

Every step through the tall grass was scary because every moving blade seemed to hide a danger that couldn't be seen.

So, Erik put his senses on high alert. His ears were straining to pick up any strange sounds, and his eyes were moving from shadow to shadow, looking for signs of movement.

"I hope I won't find anything too dangerous..." Erik said out loud to vent his frustration.

He walked through the grass, and his thoughts briefly wandered to his friends and girlfriend, Amber, whom he loved dearly.

A bittersweet ache filled his heart as he yearned for their presence by his side. The distance between them seemed immeasurable now that he was outside New Alexandria.

They were the only ones who cared about him. For a long time, he thought Uncle Ben loved him the most, but it was clear that wasn't the case, as he didn't think twice about using him. At least, that was what Erik thought.

He kept thinking about Amber's bright smile and the warmth of her embrace, which comforted him in a time of doubt.

He wanted to know that she was safe; he thought about her face, with her red hair blowing in the wind and her glasses set on her delicate features.

He thought about her strength and resilience and hoped she would be fine without him, but he still felt a twinge of remorse for having abandoned her without saying anything.

He also thought about his friends, who had become like family to him. He wondered how they were coping in his absence, if they were staying true to their training and finding comfort in each other's company. Erik couldn't help but miss Floyd's stupid comments and Benedict's sometimes dumb antics, as well as their laughs, friendship, and the way they always looked out for each other.

However, the awakener quickly snapped out of those thoughts, as it was dangerous to focus on something else in those places. After a couple of hours of walking through the tall grass, he noticed a sudden noise in the surroundings.

He stopped, his senses grew sharper, and his eyes moved quickly over the moving blades of grass. The only thing that broke the eerie silence was the faint rustle of plants.

He narrowed his eyes and looked around for any sign of movement. Something didn't feel right to him, and his heart beat faster in anticipation. It was then that he noticed it—the grass, in certain areas, was not just swaying with the wind. It moved in unnatural patterns as if something was slithering beneath its surface.

Erik felt a chill run down his spine as a feeling of dread came over him, the fear of the unknown high. He was used to danger, but the threat he couldn't see in the field gave him the chills. Every part of him told him to be careful and get ready for what was coming.

"Oh, c'mon!"

His eyes jumped from one moving patch of grass to the next as his mind raced to figure out what was hidden below. Were they thajids getting ready to attack? Or is it something else? Uncertainty gnawed at him, but he toughened up and got ready to fight whoever showed up.

"I really hope they aren't—" The rustling of leaves and grass stopped Erik's words.

With quick speed, he shot his hand to his side and pulled out his Flyssa. The shining blade showed how determined he was.

He tightened his grip and looked around the moving field with his eyes. Every muscle in his body tensed up, getting ready for the danger that was right around the corner.

Then, out of nowhere, a thaid took off from the grass. As soon as Erik's eyes fell on the jumping thing, time seemed to slow down. The monster had scales that sparkled in the sun, and its claws were out, ready to strike.

Its smooth body was a mottled shade of green that went well with the greenery around it. Its growling mouth was full of sharp teeth, and its eyes burned with a fierce, hungry look.

The thaid's quick body twisted and turned in the air as it tried to hit Erik with a blow that aimed at his jugular, a move that would kill him.

The young man could see every detail of the creature's muscular body and poisonous dripping claws, which shows how dangerous it was. In that fleeting moment, Erik could sense the raw power and ferocity that fueled the thaid's existence.

With his sword ready, Erik got ready for the fight that was about to happen. He knew that every move he made would determine the end of this life-or-death fight, so he turned on his heel and rotated his body in a smooth motion.

His flyssa cut through the air with a quick, practiced swing, crossing the path of the thaid. When the blade hit its target, it cut the creature in half while it was in the air.

The fatal blow split the creature into two pieces, and as the creature's two dead halves fell to the ground, blood and pieces of scales and meat flew into the air.

[HOSTILE CREATURE 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. 131 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

"Fuck! It's a Venomstrike Packstalker!" the young man shouted.

These monsters had power from a brain crystal that allowed them to produce poison, a rather common brain crystal power, to be honest, yet deadly.

But that wasn't their main advantage; people knew these monsters were very smart and hunted in groups, which was where their real power lay.

They didn't have a really powerful brain crystal, but their stats were relatively high, around Erik's level, without using the Xeridon Anteris's brain crystal power or Nathaniel's power.

That meant they weren't very challenging for the young man taken individually, but they hunted in packs and were relentless predators.

Erik knew that if one of these things was here, there had to be more and that this attack was just the beginning.

"Shit!"

Erik's heart pounded in his chest as adrenaline surged through his veins. With resolve, he broke into a sprint, his legs propelling him forward with swift strides. The grassland blurred around him as he weaved through the dense foliage, his senses heightened.

The quick and nimble Venomstrike Packstalkers were chasing Erik. Their smooth bodies dashed in and out of the tall grass, almost without making a sound.

They moved toward Erik like ghosts in the wind, taking advantage of the fact that they were almost aerodynamic and the grass didn't slow them down as much as it did the young man.

"Shit! Shit! Shit!"

Erik worked himself so hard that his muscles were burning. The grass rustled and shook as the Packstalkers charged forward at the same speed as Erik.

Erik's agility was put to the test with every step he took through the field. The Packstalkers copied his every move, matching his speed and dexterity, and kept their eyes on their target the whole time.

As the pack stalkers closed the gap, the grass hid them from view. They blended in with their surroundings and used it to their advantage, making their slim bodies disappear and resurface with uncanny accuracy. Erik's eyes darted left and right as he tried to find any movement in the sea of grass in front of him.

In a split second, another Venomstrike Packstalker leaped out of the grass, its gleaming talons ready to strike. The young man quickly and instinctively swung his sword, sending the Flyssa through the air in an arc.

The move was quick and brutal. When Erik's weapon hit the Packstalker's body, it made a loud slicing sound as it cut through the air. The creature's speed pushed it forward, and Erik's blade cut its body as it the beast jumped to kill the young man.

[HOSTILE CREATURE 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. 139 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

As the two dead halves of the thaid fell to the ground, time seemed to stop momentarily. The young man kept running and didn't stop to look at the monster. But those seconds were long enough for the other monsters to catch up.

With renewed vigor, he pushed forward, his movements fueled by a mix of adrenaline and resolve. Each step carried him farther away from the fallen creatures, closer to the promise of safety that lay beyond the grassland.

His senses remained heightened, ever vigilant to any sign of movement or danger lurking in the shadows of the swaying grass.

Erik knew that the chase was far from over. The thaids, driven by instinct and hunger, would not relent until their prey was killed.

Chapter 378: Troubles

Erik looked across the sun-baked grassland, a never-ending sea of green waves fluttering in the wind. The hissing of the Venomstrike Packstalkers rang menacingly behind him, accented by the loud rustle of grass as the monsters chased their human prey.

Erik sprinted through the tall grass, his pulse beating in his ears and adrenaline driving his limbs. He took a quick look behind him and saw at least forty of the terrible, green-scaled animals.

Their sleek bodies blended in with the greenery, giving the impression that they were fatal apparitions. Their sharp, predatory eyes betrayed a lethal will to kill.

A shriek from his right immediately sent him alert. A Packstalker lunged at him, his talons dripping with venom.

Erik unsheathed his Flyssa and faced the beast, driving his blade into its exposed belly as it was mid-air. It fell, writhing in the grass, with a sad cry. The young man was temporarily safe, but he was well aware that one down didn't mean there weren't others coming.

As he began his desperate flight, his heart raced. The landscape ahead rose rapidly, heading to a rocky outcrop surrounded by tall grass. Erik pushed harder, intending to take advantage of the high ground.

However, another Packstalker appeared from the left, a jumble of mottled green scales and lethal talons. The beast became silent as Erik's Flyssa arced into the air once more, killing it.

"Shit! Shit!"

Erik resumed his run, but the dangerous situation did not end there, with that Venomstrike Packstalker's death.

Three more thaids jumped out of the swaying grass that stretched before him, baring their teeth and pointing their claws, preventing Erik from reaching the outcrop.

Since their scaled shapes, honed for stealth and agility, blended in with the surrounding grassland, the young man had no idea when or where the next monster might appear, making it difficult for him to react to these beasts.

Erik's senses heightened as the predators drew in, their eyes gleaming with predatory intent, but he was forced to come to a halt to combat the beasts. He could quickly murder one, but killing three was going to be more difficult.

Erik reacted with lightning-fast reflexes, his prowess set to outmaneuver the onslaught. He dodged the first Packstalker's lunging assault, skilfully sidestepping the venomous claws that nearly caught him. His quick shape pivoted to avoid the second Packstalker's vicious attack, its talons tearing through the air where Erik's body had been just a couple of seconds before.

"You are not smart enough to kill me!" Erik exclaimed. He was using the Xeridon Anteris power to kill them quickly, thanks to the speed and strength he gained as a result, but he wasn't consuming much mana or even taking advantage of Nathaniel's brain crystal power. That wasn't necessary.

Erik somersaulted over the third Packstalker's snapping jaws, the predator's powerful bite meeting only air, undaunted by the menacing presence closing in around him. As he danced amid the attacks, Erik's body seemed to defy gravity, moving with supernatural grace.

The awakener turned the tables on his opponents, transforming his evasive moves into a lethal onslaught. He killed the first Packstalker with a fast and lethal blade swipe, executing a smooth aerial spin. He shifted his weight to confront the second predator, his blades shining with lethal intent.

Erik launched himself into a series of agile twists and somersaults before unleashing a barrage of attacks on his remaining opponents. Each slice and thrust was delivered with accuracy and power. The kid was too fast and swift for the Packstalkers, so they didn't even have time to fight back. His blade found its mark and instantly killed the remaining two beasts.

[MULTIPLE HOSTILE CREATURES 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. 393 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

Now that the surroundings were clear, he had to start running again. He took a quick look around. The metallic scent of blood mingled with the earthy sense of grass in the air.

The once-vibrant green blades had become scarlet, their tips encrusted in viscera and fragments of the dead beasts. Guts and entrails littered the ground, evidence of the brutal confrontation that had just occurred.

He just had seconds until the rest of the pack surrounded him, and he wasn't sure he could battle that many thaids at once, especially when they were this powerful.

Even if Erik was effortlessly dispatching them, this did not imply they were helpless.

He would have died if he didn't have the Xeridon Anteris' brain crystal power, as the creatures had the same level of strength without the ant's power. Moreover, the problem was that strength and speed could save him from numbers only to a certain point.

However, something horrific occurred before he could resume his movement: a haunting wail resonated through the air, resonating with the chill of impending doom. The problem was that the source of the noise was not around him but above.

Erik's gaze was drawn upward, and what he saw took his breath away. A swarm of flying thaids dressed in brilliant feathers that glistened against the cerulean sky soared far above on the hunt. The young man recognized the beasts right away; they were Galewings.

"FOR FUCK SAKE!"

Erik had a shudder up his spine. These monsters were powerful enough to prey over most creatures, as most flying thajids could. However, because they were too large to move through the foliage generated by the trees, they frequently searched around these free areas. The awakener saw a slight shift in the wind as the Galewings' penetrating gaze fastened on the hunting party.

The Galewings produced a powerful gust of wind using their brain crystal powers. The grass shook furiously as the Packstalkers and Erik were exposed by the wind, which lowered the grass around them and removed their cover, their hunger screams drowned out by the Galewings' shrieking calls.

The avian giants descended lower, their massive wings fanning the air and scattering the Packstalkers.

The Galewings slashed violently through the air, releasing cutting wind blades. Packstalkers were caught in their tracks and killed by the elemental power. The hunter had become the prey at this point.

Predatory ballet dancers, the Galewings, whirled in the skies, their dazzling talons preparing to attack. Each swoop and shriek was precisely timed and performed.

Under this intense aerial bombardment, the Packstalkers were in disarray, their numbers falling. Each dive by the flying thajids resulted in a Packstalker being seized and lifted into the sky.

Others were stuck to the ground and slowly slaughtered by the beasts, who ripped their bellies open or plucked their arms and legs out of their bodies with their talons. Some Galewings even began from the Stalkers' heads, making them erupt into pouring fountains of warm blood that drenched the earth.

Several Packstalkers reassembled in an attempt to defend themselves from the flying predators. They tried to protect themselves by channeling mana via their brain crystal and injecting potent venom into their talons, but their efforts were futile.

The Galewings, lords of the skies in this place, just struck from afar with their wind blades, killing some of the lizards in a matter of seconds as they flew through the skies; their gigantic wings cutting through the air as they danced around.

The Venomstrike Packstalkers, on the other hand, were simply too many to be chased down all at once. Because this type of flying creature frequented their hunting grounds, it was part of their survival strategy.

Because they knew they would be hunted if spotted, they could only increase their reproductive cycle and hunt in large groups to ensure the pack's survival. They would sometimes go into the forest to hunt, but their camouflaging advantage would be nullified if they did so.

However, their venom was potent enough to kill the majority of the thaidis, and they were quick enough to kill practically anything in their path, so there were ways around that problem.

As the commotion unfolded, Erik saw it as an opportunity to flee. The trouble was that he had no place to hide in the surroundings. If he made trees or plants grow, they would stand out because there was nothing else in the area save grass, and even if he did create massive grass blades, they would be plainly seen.

However, that wasn't the most pressing matter. The Galewings were not stupid, and it was obvious they noticed him among the lizards.

The young man was desperate, and he truly believed he was going to die. That emotion was heightened when Erik observed a Galewing flying toward him as he darted through the landscape.

With its massive wings stretching the sky, the gorgeous monster fastened its eyes on Erik, its goal apparent. The Galewing released a wind blade with a rapid and purposeful motion.

"FUCK!"

Erik focused all his available mana on Nathaniel's and the Xeridon Anteris' brain crystal powers. He was drastically increasing his strength and speed. Still, even with all that raw power, he was having a hard time looking around because his dexterity was less than half of what he was currently exerting in speed.

Brain crystal powers depended on the mana used, and if one used all his or her available mana at the same time, they could create very powerful attacks. In this case, Erik was using the mana he had without caring about how much remained of it. This was to avoid the incoming attacks.

Chapter 379: Escaping death

The air crackled with energy as razor-sharp gusts cut through it, away from Erik by just a couple of millimeters. Wind blades flew past his ears, their intangible energy brushing his skin and delivering an alarming reminder of the beast that pursued him.

Erik's muscles ached with exertion as he pushed his body to its limits, especially since a torrent of wind blades swooped down on him. If he allowed one of those attacks to hit him, there would be nothing to do; he wouldn't survive. The kid was anxious to dodge the Galewing's bombardment.

The wind blades slashed through the air with precision, their power seen in the devastation they left in their path as the grass blades in his immediate vicinity were chopped in half. Each close call made the young man's heart skip a beat, his body reacting with cold sweat dripping from his forehead, back, and legs.

"Fuck! FUUUUCK!" he cursed under his breath, his mind racing for a way out of this situation. He couldn't keep dodging forever, and he knew it. His eyes darted around, searching for any possible escape route, but the space in front of him stretched for kilometers, and he was already pretty far into the grassland to go back to the forest; he had to go forward.

Fear had Erik's heart in its grip and was threatening to upset his composure. Despite this grave situation, he summoned the strength inside himself to remain focused and steadfast. He was aware that panic would be his undoing, so he relied on his determination and survival instinct while running.

He threaded through the maelstrom with each stride, his mind a beacon of concentration amid the raging storm. Each wind blade he somewhat dodged heightened his concerns, urging him to push harder to evade the impending danger.

The lightness of his resolution countered the weight of his anxiety, allowing him to maintain a delicate balance between panic and control.

However, Erik's dread was heightened even more as the Galewing fired a second wave of wind blades. He dodged, weaved, and sidestepped with hair-breadth accuracy, the wind blades brushing his flesh but never finding their mark.

The beast shrieked because its attacks were missing their target, which was unusual. The creature hadn't used all of his power until now, but it was evident that it needed to pick up its game to eat tender meat that day.

Erik was in the midst of a chaotic scene of carnage. The air was filled with tension and the deafening sounds of chaos. The Galewings' beaks and talons struck with merciless efficiency, unleashing devastation upon the unfortunate Venomstrike Packstalkers. The Packstalkers around the kid were dying in droves.

Feathers scattered through the air as the Galewings swooped down, attacking their targets with swift, calculated movements. The grassland floor was stained with crimson blood, evidence of the brutal encounters between predator and prey.

The cries of the Packstalkers filled the air, a chorus of pain and desperation as they fought for their lives. Their attempts to defend themselves were met with ruthless aggression from the Galewings, who seemed to possess an instinctual drive to dominate and conquer.

All of this sent shivers down Erik's spine. If he didn't do something, he was going to end up like them.

The young man made a mistake by looking around, something he didn't dare to do again, instead concentrating exclusively on the road ahead. The Galewing screeched above, launching another salvo of wind blades. They seemed to flood the air around him this time, as they were more numerous than before.

Erik felt the ground beneath his feet vibrate with each gust, and the bitter tang of chopped grass filled his nostrils. With each stride, he darted right, then left, dodging and turning. The deadly blades slashed millimeters from his skin, but each one missed, making the Galewing's displeasure audible in its ear-splitting screeches.

The adrenaline rush had enhanced Erik's senses. His heartbeat became a drumbeat, syncing with the Galewing's screeches and the wind blades' whispering whoosh. Each stride felt like an eternity as he pushed himself forward, one hard breath at a time.

Suddenly, the ground beneath him /gave way. As he dropped, a sharp scream ripped from his lungs as he was swallowed by a massive hole hidden beneath the long grass. His fearful scream resonated into the abyss as he fell into nothingness.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

He landed hard on the tunnel-like slope, knocking the air out of his lungs. Erik found himself speeding down a massive black slide in an instant. The smooth, cool stone on his back and the momentum dragged him farther into the darkness, making his head spin.

His heart hammered in his chest, adrenaline coursing through his veins like a scorching ichor. In a hopeless attempt to slow his descent, his hands clutched at the tunnel's slippery walls, but he only managed to spark tiny showers of light as his Flyssa scraped against the rocks.

Erik's world had been limited to the dizzying sensation of freefall and the rush of chilly air past his ears due to the darkness and his inability to see anything.

As he continued his perilous descent into the abyss, the young man felt as if each second stretched into a minute. Despite his anxiety, he clung to the bleak hope that this unforeseen diversion had saved him from a terrible fate above, and he tried his best to slow his descent.

The young man waited thirty excruciating seconds before realizing the slope was diminishing—a faint light at the end of the dark tunnel. As the slide leveled out, relief swept over him as he braced for the expected harsh landing.

With a thunderous thump, he landed on flat ground, rolling head over heels before coming to a stop.

"Ah... fuck...shit..." The young man could do nothing but swear due to the situation.

Erik lay on the ground, bruised and out of breath, staring at the blackness before him until he became accustomed to it.

His heart pounded, but it wasn't from fear; for the first time in what felt like hours, it pounded due to relief. He was alive, safe from the Galewing and Packstalkers, and although battered and exhausted, he had survived for the time being.

He didn't have time to waste, though. Erik reached inside his rucksack and took out an apple he kept for emergencies. He tossed it to the ground and used the little mana he had to make the plant grow in that hostile environment. It worked, but because of his poor mana pool, it didn't grow very big.

Erik was still near the hole from whence he had emerged; therefore, there was enough air to make a torch starting from the tree's branches without depleting all of the oxygen, at least according to his assessment. So he cut some branches and twigs from the tree and set them on fire in one of the buckets he had taken with him by using a lighter.

When his surroundings brightened, at least a bit, he took a couple of apples from the tree and began eating to refuel his energy.

The air was chilly and damp, with the sole source of heat coming from the crackling fire he had managed to start within the metal bucket. The shimmering shadows of the flames revealed the shapes of the tunnel that encompassed him.

Erik sat on the ground for a few minutes, eating a few apples he had gathered from the small tree. They were small but sweet. Their crisp and refreshing flavor provided a little reprieve from his exhausting journey.

The interior of the tunnel was breathtaking. Its smooth, curved walls made it appear that some colossal beast had fashioned them. Specifically, the tunnel's evenly rounded shape reminded Erik of a giant worm's burrow, inspiring both awe and wonder as well as terror and apprehension. Of course, he didn't allow those feelings to overpower him because that would just be harmful.

The awakener relaxed with each bite of the apple, allowing him to fully immerse himself in the quiet seclusion of the tunnel and replenish his energy and mana.

The young man expended basically all of his mana to evade the Galewings wind blades; he had only 50 points left, making him a sitting duck in this dangerous environment. He would not have survived in the wilderness without his other abilities, and he clearly saw the irony of the situation. He would have been dead by now if he didn't fall here.

He could hear his breath blending with the crackling of the fire, producing a relaxing symphony of sound.

"I hope there are no thaids around here..." That was his hope, but it was clear that monsters were bound to be present in a place so big.

Erik took a moment after finishing his dinner to appreciate the silence of the tunnel. The quiet gave him a rare time to contemplate, organize his thoughts, and rest.

The kid took a little break, allowing his body and mind to rest. He closed his eyes and leaned against the tunnel wall, concentrating on breathing. He felt the mana in his body increase and stream through his neural linkages with each breath, replenishing his energy reserves. After a few hours of rest, he felt his mana reserves were sufficient and ready to be used again.

Chapter 380: Exploring the tunnel

Erik resumed his journey with the metal bucket in hand, its flaming glow casting swirling shadows on the tunnel walls.

The flickering flames illuminated the road ahead of him and dispelled the approaching darkness that threatened to devour the tunnel, but they couldn't show everything. The area was mostly dark, and the young man had to be aware of his surroundings because thaids might attack him anytime.

<System, scan the surroundings for thaids; I don't want to be a sitting duck. If something approaches, tell me immediately,> Erik said to the biological supercomputer.

[UNDERSTOOD,] the System replied with its usual robotic voice.

Erik's senses intensified as he went further in, alert to the slightest changes in his surroundings. The tunnel seemed to stretch into the depths indefinitely, its walls a tapestry of texture, and bugs scurried on its surface.

The rhythmic sound of his footfall echoed across the vast space, threatening to draw thaids to him. The warmth flowing from the bucket provided comfort and illumination in the bleak underground but could also attract creatures.

Erik's gaze strayed, taking in the architectural details of the tunnel.

The smooth curves and mild undulations of the walls suggested that this was not a naturally formed cavern but that these tunnels were created by some type of enormous worms, which terrified him, as there were only a couple of thaid races that could have done something like that, and as much as he knew, they shouldn't even be on this continent.

The occasional rough area hinted at the presence of minerals and rock formations, but he hadn't seen anything useful or uncommon until now.

Erik took each step farther into the unknown, guided by the flickering light that accompanied him. His thoughts were filled with dread and vigilance, and he was desperate to discover a way out of this cave. If things went wrong, he had to return to his starting point and ascend the hole from which he had fallen.

He didn't have to worry about getting lost because the biological supercomputer had mapped the cave, but that wasn't enough to put him in a good mood.

On the other hand, the young man's head swirled with thoughts, each spilling over the other in a never-ending waterfall of questions, possibilities, and worries. His steady and repetitive breath bounced off the tunnel walls, a continual reminder of his isolation in this deep maze. His fingers tightened on the metal bucket's handle, the heat throbbing repeatedly in tune with his heartbeat.

The prospect of fighting thaids here wasn't good; he was aware that usually, bug-like thaids were not particularly powerful, but there were many of them, and in a place like this, with no apparent way out, fighting that many thaids was dangerous.

Moreover, he'd already had a taste of a similar predicament on the grassland, where everywhere he went could be a Venomstrike Packstalker hiding location, and the situation only worsened when the Galewings arrived.

Generally speaking, Erik could hold his own against most enemies in the open, thanks to his multiple brain crystal powers, and he was slowly accumulating more and more brain crystal powers and increasing his mana. Furthermore, he had an advantage over his colleagues because people at his level would never be as strong as him.

He was still nominally a RHO ranked individual but had far more neural links than most people at his age or level. The problem was that he was at a disadvantage down here in the earth's depths.

Here, thaids not only could be a lot, but with their heightened senses and familiarity with the dark, they held the advantage. The bucket's narrow beam of light looked absurdly inadequate to help him fight, but he could do nothing about it.

He could only look at the fire-generating long, frightening shadows that danced and twisted around him and reflected onto the rocky walls around him.

He thought about his sword, the comforting weight resting against his hip. But the narrow confines of the tunnel and the lack of light would make a sword fight tricky. He would have to rely more on his agility, his ability to dodge, to listen, to anticipate, and to the system.

He wished he had more information, a stronger weapon, and a chance to level the playing field. He could maybe stop and place on the ground the thaid repelling plant, but that didn't make sense in this cave. However, if he wasn't able to find a way out, he would be forced to do so, at least to sleep.

But hoping was not a viable tactic. Erik shook his head, wishing the anxiety away. He resolved to face whatever came his way. He'd escaped Galewing, Packstalkers, and even human attacks. He'd find a way to get through this as well.

For the time being, he had to keep going, be aware, and prepare for whatever lay in the guts of this subterranean beast.

He added more wood to the bucket as he went deeper, and the flaming glow brightened, chasing away the engulfing blackness. It was as if the flames shared his will, opposing the abyss and refusing to go out. The tunnel was the realm of the thaids, but Erik was not going down without a fight.

As he walked further, the young man's steps slowed as his eyes caught sight of an ethereal glow emanating from deeper within the tunnel. The light was pulsating softly, casting long, dancing shadows on the tunnel walls illuminating everything with white-blue hues. The sight piqued his curiosity, offering a welcome distraction from the dread of potential dangers lurking in the shadows.

Erik moved cautiously closer to the source of the light. The radiance grew stronger over time, showing clusters of sharp rocks lodged in the tunnel walls. Their surfaces glistened with an inner light, lighting the surroundings with enticing splendor.

"WHOA!"

Erik was overcome with awe as he recognized the source of the light—chunks of Aclaitrium ore. These were not ordinary stones but veins of one of the most powerful mana-conductive materials ever discovered. Aclaitrium had the unusual characteristic of absorbing and retaining mana inside their crystalline structures, making the ore glow with an ethereal light.

If words about the Aclaitrium being here spread to New Alexandria, the young man was sure the government would rush here to mine it all.

After all, this was a precious material, good for making fine weapons, and that was sold at a high price on the market.

Erik extended his hand, his fingers brushing against the gleaming ore. The stones hummed as he touched them, sending a pleasant tingle up his arm. He could feel the intense mana energy pulsing rapidly through the rock, like a heartbeat.

He felt as if he could reach out and touch the very essence of the ethereal material, the fundamental force that powered the world around him.

He stood there for a few moments, transfixed by the ore's beauty and power. This underground passage was more than just a dark, wet labyrinth; it held one of the world's most valuable ores.

Erik resumed his journey, guided by the luminous Aclaitrium veins that spread across the cave walls and fueled by newfound curiosity and interest. His heart beat with excitement and expectation as he headed toward the growing lights.

The magical stones' appeal and latent potential seemed to have supplanted the terror of the thaids.

Erik couldn't help but marvel at the mesmerizing sight as he proceeded farther into the tunnel. The Aclaitrium's gentle glow lit his route, putting a comforting light on the rough cave walls and making the young man relax a little.

As he walked, Erik's calmness increased thanks to the pulsating glow and the whispers of mana energy. With its mysteries and perils, the underground world also had a strange beauty, which Erik had the rare opportunity to observe.

However, the young man had no idea where the ore led to. He had no alternative to follow the glowing trail for now, but that didn't necessarily mean he was going in a safe place. In the end, Erik emerged into a large cavern, the blazing Aclaitrium veins throwing an ethereal light across the vast space. The young man's eyes were taken aback by the scene in front of him.

"Seriously?"

The vestiges of structures appeared from the shadows as his eyes acclimated to the shimmering illumination, portraying a picture of a period long past.

Rusted metal beams, crumbling stone wall fragments, and the skeletal remains of timber supports suggested a once-bustling human community under the ground. It was now in ruins, reclaimed by nature and time, a ghostly echo of humanity's fight against the thaids.

He was certain of this since there was a towering metal structure in the middle of what Erik could only describe as a subterranean city, and painted on it, albeit worn and ruined, there was a symbol the young man knew well. The one he saw frequently in the history books that counted the tails of the world before mana and superpowers. It was the symbol of the united earth.