

## **BIOLOGICAL 421**

### Chapter 421: The Humanoid Thaid (4)

However, the humanoid thaid suddenly shifted its attention back to Erik, which caused a dramatic change in the tide of the battle. It let out a low-pitched rumble as it charged toward him, its monstrous form tearing through the gap that had been left between them.

The creature moved frighteningly rapidly, its form becoming a blur of muscle and malevolence as it went.

Erik's heart pounded in his chest as he vaulted away, narrowly avoiding another swipe from the clawed hand of the thaid.

He could feel the rush of wind as the attack missed him by a hair's breadth, the force of it almost knocking him off balance.

Erik channeled his mana without missing a beat, feeling the energy surge through him as he pushed off the ground. He catapulted into the air, landing deftly on the side of a tall cabinet.

He started running along the wall at breakneck speed, his feet clattering against the metal surface as he did so. His body, infused with mana, seemed to defy gravity, and his movements were fluid and quick, like those of a bird in flight.

The thaid let out a raging roar as it followed Erik with its eyes, and it became increasingly frustrated. Again, it attempted to attack, but the fake awakener's unpredictability and agility allowed him to stay one step ahead of it, but that was no easy feat. To fight head-on against the monster, Erik was using a ton of mana, meaning he couldn't be helpful forever.

He launched himself off of the wall, performed a somersault over the thaid's head, and landed deftly on his feet behind it.

As Erik scrambled to his feet, he locked his gaze on the hulking back of the beast. His heart pounded in his chest, adrenaline coursing through his veins as he gathered his mana again as the beast twisted on itself to attack the young man, who was too close to avoid the blow. Erik aimed his supercharged force fist at the beast's broad back, hoping to block the attack as he did before.

A chill ran down Erik's spine as he realized he was within striking distance of the creature's lethal claws.

Just as the beast was about to swing its massive arms at him, a powerful attack blasted it from the side again. Samuel, armed with his stone gauntlets, had delivered a blow to the creature's head that was highly damaging.

The force of the impact was so great that it launched the beast into the air, sending it careening across the room and crashing into the opposite wall. As a result of the force of the impact, the laboratory began to shake, and debris and dust began to fly in all directions.

As Erik watched the creature being sent flying across the room due to Samuel's blow, he took several deep breaths, and his chest began to heave. His expression changed to gratitude as he turned his attention to the older man.

Samuel's voice was strained but steady as he asked Erik, "Are you okay, lad?"

Erik, panting heavily, nodded back at him. His heart still pounded like a war drum, but he was unharmed. For the moment, at least.

But Samuel wasn't finished. His weathered face was a mask of stern concern as he continued, "You're too aggressive, Erik. You're drawing its attention too much. That thing... it's stronger than the average thaid, and you are too weak compared to it."

"I know that..."

The reprimand caused Erik to show a hint of discomfort, but Erik knew that Samuel was right. Because of his eagerness to fight and demonstrate his worth, he came dangerously close to losing his life. If not for Samuel's timely intervention, it might not have worked out...

He swallowed hard, forcing himself to meet Samuel's gaze. "You're right," he said, his voice shaky but determined. "I'll... I'll try to be more careful."

The more experienced man gave a satisfied nod, and one could see a glimmer of relief in his eyes. However, there was not enough time for a more in-depth discussion.

The thaid was pulling itself together and slowly pushing itself up from the debris-strewn floor as it attempted to recover. Samuel refocused on the monster while preparing his body for the subsequent round of combat.

The only thing that broke the tension of the exchange was the sound of the monstrous thaid scraping debris as it pulled itself from the wreckage of its crash.

The harsh, metallic sound clashed with the relatively peaceful atmosphere of the laboratory, which caused chills to run down the spines of the two men fighting it.

A small cloud of dust and detritus swirled around the creature as it lumbered upright, its hulking figure casting a grotesque shadow on the eerily lit room.

The glow of the torches cast an eerie illumination over the scene, which caught on the beast's sickly-purple skin and made it shine like wet ink. Its knotted muscles contracted and strained under the weight of its bulk, adding to the horrifying spectacle of its recovery from the blow.

The menacing yellow glow from its eyes flickered erratically, indicating that the beast displayed signs of disorientation. Its massive and cumbersome form swayed in an unstable manner as it could not keep its equilibrium.

Erik and Samuel kept their distance, their eyes widening in awe and horror as they observed the scene from a safe distance.

Their attention was immediately drawn to the monstrous head of the beast, which had sustained a severe wound. A hideous wound was exposed right in the middle of the sea of sickly purple.

The flesh around it was torn and ragged, and a darker, almost black substance could have been the beast's blood. The substance's color was purple, mixed with the flesh around it.

The devastating blow delivered by Samuel was the direct cause of the wound. It had caved in a portion of the beast's skull, leaving behind a deep and ugly indentation that was impossible to ignore.

It was a horrific scene, and it served as evidence of Samuel's unbridled power in the form of his stone-encased fists. The older man's face remained expressionless, but as he looked at the damage he had caused, there was a trace of gleeful satisfaction visible in his eyes.

The surrounding lab had not been spared from the chaos of the battle. Several tables had been tipped over, and the yellow liquid contained in the tanks around them had spilled out onto the floor.

Additionally, the floor was littered with shards of glass. There was significant damage, if not complete destruction, to the instruments and equipment.

The room bore the scars of a fierce battle, a fight for survival in the most hopeless circumstances. The room was covered in blood and debris.

Even though the beast was in a fragile state, it exuded an aura of malice. The thaid did sustain some wounds, but it was by no means defeated. Its grotesque mouth contorted into a snarl, letting out a guttural growl that reverberated throughout the room, adding to the oppressive vibe. It was a resounding message that the conflict was far from being resolved.

A brief glance was exchanged between Erik and Samuel, and both of them nodded their heads in unison. They needed to wrap up this task as soon as possible. The beast was injured and disoriented; this was the perfect time to launch an attack.

As the thaid steadied itself, shaking off its disorientation, the two men readied themselves for the next bout, their resolve hardened by the sight of their enemy's injury.

#### Chapter 422: The Humanoid Thaid (5)

Erik inhaled deeply before fixing his gaze on Samuel and taking another deep breath. His voice reverberated throughout the laboratory's wreckage as he yelled, "We need to finish this now." He caught a glimpse of the beast out of the corner of his eye as it was momentarily off balance but eventually got back on its feet. "Before it completely regains its strength."

Samuel gave a terse nod, his eyes never leaving the beast. "Agreed. But there's one change in our plan," he replied, facing Erik fully. His stern gaze made Erik straighten up. "It's my turn to tank this thing. You've been too aggressive, despite me having asked you to stop."

You did attract too much attention and almost died. For this reason, your task now is to distract it occasionally or when you see it preparing to strike me without any chance of evasion on my part."

His statements were unwavering, and they left no room for debate. Indeed, he was correct. Erik's behavior had been reckless, as he'd charged headfirst into the conflict.

Erik nodded after taking a breath to calm his jittery nerves. Even though adrenaline was surging through his veins, he kept his voice calm as he responded, "Alright, I understand."

The two men exchanged one last nod before turning again to the beast. It was time to put an end to this fight.

After regaining consciousness, the Thaid didn't waste any time. Samuel was in the path of its oncoming charge as it let out a roar. The older man braced himself, his stone gauntlets gleaming in the eerie glow of the Aclaitrium.

The Thaid's charge was like a hurricane, but Samuel stood his ground, every muscle in his body tensed and ready for the impact.

A sonic boom could be heard throughout the area due to their collision, which was heard around the ruins of the laboratory.

The Thaid swiped at Samuel with a clawed hand, a horrifying, brutal swing that would have surely crushed the older man, despite his armor being on, had it connected.

But Samuel was prepared for the assault, so he ducked low and drove a gauntlet-encased fist straight into the Thaid's midsection.

The point of impact was followed by the propagation of a shockwave, which caused dust and debris to become dispersed all around them.

The Thaid staggered backward, a groan of agony resonating in its throat as it did so. However, it quickly regained its composure and launched another attack, aiming for Samuel's head.

Samuel only managed to raise his gauntlet in time, but the Thaid's blow was so powerful that it pushed him back several steps and caused his boots to scrape against the metallic floor.

"Didn't you have to help me when I couldn't dodge?!" Samuel asked Erik.

"Sorry!" The young man replied with an apologetic look.

Samuel, however, responded by countering with a powerful uppercut delivered with his other fist. His stone gauntlet made contact with the Thaid's jaw, and the force of the impact audibly cracked the twisted and gnarled features of the creature.

For a moment, it seemed the Thaid faltered, stumbling back under the force of Samuel's blow.

But the beast was far from defeated and retaliated with a vicious backhand, catching Samuel off guard. The older man grunted in pain as he was thrown to the side, crashing into a pile of rubble.

As the older man was being thrown to the side, he screamed in pain as he collided with a pile of debris.

Erik rushed forward while letting out a rumbling scream, which diverted the beast's attention away from Samuel.

The monstrous eyes of the Thaid, devoid of feelings other than rage, swiveled toward him, and its body followed suit. Erik did not retreat, his energy pulsating inside of him, fueling his brain crystal power.

After noticing Erik's move, Samuel quickly regained his footing and exploited the distraction to gain an advantage.

Erik's intervention was successful, and Thaid's focus shifted entirely toward him. He darted around the lab, trying to keep out of reach of the Thaid's claws.

Even though he was not as strong or fast as he needed to be for this, the urgent nature of the situation required him to fight. As he moved, the pounding of his heart could be felt in his chest, and the adrenaline rush heightened his senses.

Meanwhile, Samuel, having momentarily slipped from the beast's immediate focus, reentered the fray. He used the beast's distraction to sneak behind it and attack from behind.

As Samuel brought his stone-encased fist down in a sweeping arc toward the back of the Thaid, a heavy thud echoed through the lab.

The stone gauntlet connected with the creature's thick, gnarled hide. It was like striking at a wall, a chilling testament to the Thaid's monstrous strength and fortitude. Yet, despite Thaid's resilience, it was apparent that Samuel's blow had its intended effect.

A low grunt issued from Thaid's throat, a guttural sound reverberating off the lab's rusted metal walls.

The massive frame of the Thaid wobbled ever-so-slightly due to the impact, its enormous legs bracing themselves against the uneven ground beneath it to keep its equilibrium.

Even though the blow did not prove to be the decisive one they had hoped for, it was nonetheless a resounding demonstration that the monster was not invulnerable.

Even though it had mutated and became more resistant to damage, the Thaid's skin was not entirely impervious to Samuel's blows.

A small patch of its dark, purplish hide seemed to have darkened further, a blossoming bruise visible even amidst the dim, Aclaitrium light. It was a small victory, but every advantage was precious in dire circumstances.

Samuel took a few steps backward, ready to avoid any attack that might be launched in retaliation, but the Thaid did not immediately turn around and strike at him. The target of its attention remained Erik, and it appeared to be intent on first eliminating the more youthful and possibly less dangerous of the two opponents.

Even after hearing the Thaid roar, which caused the laboratory walls to shake, neither of the two men retreated from their position.

The exchange of blows between Samuel and the thaid continued like a brutal ballet of power and agility. A cacophony of roars and grunts filled the air; their struggle could be heard resonating in the ruins of the old laboratory.

The Thaid was unrelenting, and its monstrous strength was a force to be reckoned with that was extremely frightening.

But Samuel, despite his advanced years, Samuel fought back with equal ferocity, landing powerful blows with his stone gauntlets at every opportunity.

On the other hand, despite Samuel's best efforts in terms of preparation and agility, there were times when the opponent's unrestrained, raw power was simply too much for him to overcome.

One of these moments came crashing down on him as the Thaid, seizing an opportune moment, landed a vicious blow on the older man. He was caught off guard. The massive arm of the Thaid swung around with a speed that seemed impossible for its massive form, and the impact resounded with a bone-jarring crunch as it connected with its target.

Chapter 423: A tough decision

"AAAAH!"

Samuel was knocked to the ground as Erik watched in increasing alarm as the older man's stone armor, which had taken the brunt of the attack, visibly cracked after the blow. The Thaid's monstrous strength was a terrifying spectacle.

Erik reacted quickly and channeled his mana through his neural links, focusing on his duty to divert the attention of the Thaid away from Samuel, who was lying on the ground.

He thrust himself forward, the air around him crackling with the accumulated force energy, and aimed his attack squarely at the Thaid.

The problem was that Erik felt his energy reserves dwindle. He'd pushed his powers to their limits, flooding his very being with the ethereal substance to keep pace with the humanoid thaid. That was the advantage of brain crystal powers as they allowed to make up the difference in strength if all the available mana was used, but clearly, that also meant the mana reserves would deplete faster.

Each quick dodging maneuver, each swift darting movement, and each punch thrown with supercharged strength drained more of his reserves than the previous one.

He was beginning to sense the weariness starting to overtake him—a bone-deep fatigue threatening to drag him down. Erik knew that, even though he had done everything in his power, it would not be enough.

The Thaid was a natural phenomenon—a ruthless predator propelled by unquenchable rage and ravenous hunger.



Erik was exhausted and couldn't keep up the fight for much longer. Yet, amidst the grim realization, Erik spotted something. A glimmer of hope. A faint possibility of success.

The Thaid, despite its seemingly unstoppable power, was not unscathed. The wounds he and Samuel managed to inflict on it were taking their toll.

Samuel's stone armor amplified the power of his blows, which caused deep gashes to appear on the beast's body. In particular, the head wound appeared in much worse shape than before.

Purplish blood seeped from the savage wound, dripping into the Thaid's ghastly eyes, blurring its gaze.

The beast was staggering slightly, its balance thrown off by the nasty head injury. Its movements were slower; its reactions were delayed. The monster that had once seemed invincible was starting to falter.

Considering their circumstances, this was a ray of light in the darkness. Erik's heart pounded fiercely in his chest, fuelled by the sight. He needed to make his last contribution count.

As he charged at the humanoid monster, the young man yelled, his voice echoing through the metallic corridors, serving its purpose of distraction.

"COME HERE, YOU STUPID BEAST!"

The Thaid's yellow eyes flickered in his direction as it turned to confront the young man once more, its hideous face contorting into an angry grimace. A short scuffle ensued, with Erik again diverting the monster's attention by weakly attacking and keeping as much distance as possible from the monster.

It bought Samuel enough time to recharge and get his bearings together, a time during which he could reassemble his mana armor and gather his strength for the upcoming battle.

Erik looked over at the older man, silently hoping he had noticed their opponent's deteriorating condition too. Samuel needed to strike now while the beast was weakened.

"Samuel!"

The cavernous metallic room reverberated with Erik's voice, each syllable ricocheting off the tall tanks and the ancient, rusty walls.

Because of the adrenaline and fear, his breathing was erratic, his body was trembling, and his eyes were wide open.

He was pushed to his breaking point, and his mana was close to running out. His words came out as a desperate plea, choked with the bitter reality of his helplessness.

"I can't help you anymore! I have no mana left!" he shouted, his voice ricocheting off the hollow remnants of the underground lab. "You have to kill it now!"

His words were delivered with a desperation that was even more unsettling than any monstrous roars the beast had let out. It was the natural, human cry of a young man driven to the edge and clinging to hope no bigger than a thread.

It was a plea for victory against the odds, and its eerie reverberation could be heard all across the scene of the chaotic destruction. Even though he was having a hard time, Samuel turned to look at Erik.

Samuel, amid his struggle, turned to look at Erik. His face was a mask of concentration and determination, but the weight of the young man's words was not lost on him. With a grim nod, he turned back to face the monstrous humanoid Thaid, his resolve hardened by the urgency in Erik's voice.

It seemed as though the air in the room became denser as if to give tacit recognition to the seriousness of the situation. The rate at which Samuel breathed slowed down, and the intensity of his focus increased.

Every thud and every collision that resulted from the monster's frantic movements seemed to reverberate in time with the beating of his own heart—the moment had come for the decisive push in the race.

The older man was aware of the responsibility that was bestowed upon him. He was aware of the actions that were required of him. He took a long, steady breath before preparing himself for the fight that was about to begin.

Samuel's breathing slowed, and his focus sharpened. Each crash and clash of the monster's frenzied movements seemed to resonate in time with the pounding of his heart.

Now was the time for the final push. He knew the burden that lay upon him. He understood what he had to do. With a deep, steadying breath, he prepared himself for the battle that lay ahead, aware of the monumental task he had to achieve - to kill the beast. And so, with one last glance at Erik, Samuel charged towards the Thaid, his stone-armored fists ready for the decisive strike.

"Get out!" Samuel commanded Erik, his voice resounding through the cacophony of the Thaid's monstrous roars.

The sound of his stone-armored fists pounding against the thick, grotesque flesh of the Thaid served as a fitting accompaniment to his words.

Samuel stood like a bulwark between the horrifying creature and Erik, a final line of defense shielding the younger man from the relentless assault.

The awakener hesitated briefly; his eyes darted between the never-ending battle and the exit to the broken lab.

He was torn between the need to stay and help Samuel and the realization that his mana was almost completely depleted, making him more of a liability than an aid in this fight.

After swallowing his pride, Erik looked Samuel in the eyes, gave him a single, affirmative nod, and promptly turned on his heel and ran out of the building.

The echoes of the gruesome battle grew fainter with each step he took, yet the harrowing scene remained seared into his mind, a haunting reminder of the reality they faced.

Samuel's defiant grunts and the Thaid's thunderous roars resonated in his ears long after he had crossed the threshold and plunged into the dimly lit corridors of the military building.

As he fled, Erik was aware that he would abandon Samuel in the fight's thickness.

As he ran, Erik knew he was leaving Samuel in the heart of the battle. But he also knew that Samuel wanted this, that the older man's chances of defeating the Thaid increased if Erik was safe and out of the way now that the young man's mana had ended. Still, the guilt and fear gnawed at him, and he could only pray that Samuel could hold his own.

#### Chapter 424: The ballet of Violence and Survival

As Erik exited the lab, Samuel discovered himself standing alone in the very core of the monster's lair.

The sheer magnitude of his mission burdened him deeply. This was the village's last chance to find a new home. He had a mission to rid the ancient city of the terrifying monster's grip. Taking a calming breath, he refocused on the enormous creature before him.

The Thaid growled, its massive, wounded form creating eerie, monstrous shadows that flickered in the dim torchlight Erik and the others had abandoned. The beast, wounded but undeterred, stared at Samuel with fiery yellow eyes, ready to strike.

The creature's skin, a deep shade of purple, was marked by fresh wounds that oozed purple blood. As it slithered, the skin appeared to contort and swell disturbingly while its sharp teeth sparkled with an eerie glow.

Samuel's entire being throbbed with pain, burdened by the weight of his stone armor, which grew heavier by the second due to his waning strength.

His fists, encased in mana-stone, felt heavy and slow from the countless strikes he had delivered. He struggled to catch his breath, the metallic taste of blood filling his mouth.

The weight of the relentless battle pressed upon him, his strength waning as his energy dwindled. Yet he could not yield, for the village's safety rested on his shoulders. Failure was not an alternative.

Samuel's eyes darted toward the Thaid, his mind racing as he prepared for the imminent attack. The monster, exhausted from the clash, also displayed visible signs of fatigue. Samuel had to admit that, without Erik's contribution, he would have never been able to fight against this thing.

The young man's damage was negligible, but the time he made Samuel earn and the opportunities he produced were invaluable.

The injury on the creature's head seemed to worsen, with thick, dark purplish blood slowly trickling down its horrifying face. However, the creature remained far from defeated, and its anger only grew stronger.

The laboratory surrounding them resembled a battlefield, marked by the remnants of their fierce confrontation. Glass shards, remnants of the ancient Thaid specimens, crunched underfoot.

The walls and floor gleamed with battle scars, etched and marred in countless spots. The room was heavy with the smell of blood and intense hostility—a suffocating fog that hung in the air.

The Thaid pounced on Samuel, its sharp claws slicing through the air with deadly purpose. Unyielding in his armor of stone, the man bravely faced the oncoming assault.

The beast's attack hit him hard, but he stood firm, protected by the mana-stone armor that absorbed most of the impact.

The creature's sharp claws scraped and clawed against the tough stone, creating sparks of energy that danced in the darkness.

Each blow reverberated with an earth-shattering sound as if the clash between the beast's might and Samuel's unwavering defenses could reshape the very fabric of reality.

But Samuel was no ordinary farmer. He was a fierce warrior, skilled in harnessing his weight and momentum to gain the upper hand. As the Thaid closed in, he fought back fiercely, landing powerful strikes.

With fists as big and weighty as sledgehammers, he punched the Thaid's monstrous figure. He focused his aim on the creature's wounds; each punch meant to inflict maximum harm.

Samuel gave a low grunt as he unleashed a powerful punch, his fist connecting with the Thaid's stomach. The force of the impact sent a strong tremor up his arm. The creature staggered back, its horrifying mouth stretching open in a howl of agony.

Samuel swiftly struck its head with a sharp punch as it stumbled, targeting the bleeding injury. His knuckles, encased in stone, collided with the squishy resistance of wounded flesh and bone. The punch was so powerful that it made the Thaid lose its balance.

Samuel gritted his teeth, determined to push through the throbbing pain in his fists. With lightning reflexes, he dodged a fierce swipe of the stumbling creature's claw and swiftly struck back, delivering a powerful punch to its jaw.

The sound of impact reverberated throughout the room. As the Thaid regained equilibrium, Samuel unleashed a flurry of punches on its midsection, each strike echoing with a powerful impact.

However, with each powerful blow he delivered, the Thaid responded with an equal display of strength and aggression.

The creature's claws scraped against his armor, each strike a chilling reminder of the deadly force he faced. Samuel's stone armor stood firm, yet he sensed the mounting pressure, the unyielding attack gradually eroding his defense.

The human-like Thaid unleashed strikes that echoed like thunder, slamming into Samuel's sturdy armor with incredible strength.

The monster's sharp claws glided over the surface, carving deep marks on the armor and quickly wearing down the stone.

The broken armor pieces tumbled down, making a loud noise as they hit the floor in the lab. It was like watching a statue being methodically destroyed under the relentless pressure of a kid with a hammer, but in this case, the kid was the savage human-like Thaid.

But Samuel pressed on, undeterred by the constant loss of his protective shell. His face grew stern, reflecting his armor's unyielding nature and character as he tapped into his well of mana.

In a blink, the energy obeyed, transforming the air into a protective armor of solid stone. The new creation grew firmer, tighter, and perfectly conformed to his body, filling whatever the monster destroyed. However, the older man's mana dwindled. Samuel had to tap into a considerable amount to bridge the gap in strength, resilience, and swiftness that separated the monster and him.

But the Thaid was relentless. Samuel found himself under a relentless assault as the enemy's attacks relentlessly pummeled his recently forged armor with overwhelming strength.

The stone struggled, creaking and cracking as it tried to hold its ground against the relentless force.

Whenever Samuel summoned his mana, the stone would reform, enveloping him in its protective embrace as he prepared to face the Thaid's brutal onslaught with unwavering resolve. It was a never-ending dance of making and breaking.

And thus, he battled, his fists soaring through the air in a storm of unyielding blows, his stone armor shielding him from the lethal assault.

It was a brutal ballet of violence and survival, a testament to the desperate struggle between man and beast.

Chapter 425: The situation outside

In the blink of an eye, the beast's sinewy, purple arm shot out, snagging Samuel by the waist.

The old warrior didn't have a moment to react, the sudden grip of the monstrous creature freezing him in his tracks. In a bone-chilling silence, the monster's grasp grew tighter, and then, with a thunderous roar, it hurled him away.

Samuel's body soared through the air, tossed like a discarded toy by an angry kid.

The air around him was thick with an unsettling stillness as he soared through the dark room. Every gaze followed his path as he collided with the icy, metallic walls of the laboratory. The sound reverberated through the chamber, shaking the very air within.

The moment his stone armor met its match, it shattered into pieces, revealing his vulnerable form as he slid down the wall and collapsed onto the floor.

The broken pieces of his protective shell lay scattered, reflecting the dangerous nature of the situation. The setting was like a dark and twisted artwork. A brave warrior lay on the ground, his broken defenses scattered around him. The only light came from faraway torches, casting an eerie glow.

Samuel lay there, struggling to catch his breath as the dust slowly descended. His chest heaved, each breath growing more difficult than the one before.

Crimson liquid oozed from the edge of his lips as the creature cast an eerie gaze upon him, its steps unsteady as it approached the elderly farmer. Samuel's eyes, filled with pain, still burned with unwavering determination, a resolve that refused to fade away.

That was quite the burden... Samuel grumbled, his words escaping his blood-stained lips as he struggled to rise.

His voice reverberated, filling the quiet room with a powerful resonance that hinted at his unwavering strength. He couldn't tear his eyes away from the creature slowly stumbling towards him.

Samuel's knees gave way, burdened by the heaviness of his body and the wounds he bore. With a strained groan, he hoisted himself up from the ground, his muscles trembling. His body teetered on the edge, a moment of instability as the room whirled into a hazy whirlwind. Yet he found his footing after much effort.

Raising his head, he locked eyes with the fearsome creature, his gaze burning with unwavering resolve. His hands, covered in blood and bruises, were raised in a fierce fighting stance. The thaid let out a wild scream in response.

KYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH

The room trembled as a bone-chilling roar reverberated within its walls. The creature's eyes burned with a fierce, primal rage.

Samuel remained steadfast and unwavering in his resolve. He stood firm, his gaze fixed on the fearsome creature. The room grew tense as if an electric charge filled the air. And in an instant, Samuel sprang into action, his every movement shrouded in silence.

The seasoned warrior courageously lunged, fearlessly sprinting toward the towering creature. The monstrous creature let out a thunderous roar, confronting him with an overwhelming fury that rattled the very walls.

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Erik staggered ahead, his heart racing in his chest, weaving through the twisting halls of the military base.



The place was so quiet it felt like something was lurking in the shadows. All the kid could hear was his heavy breathing and boots echoing on the old, rusty floor. His weary legs throbbed, and his chest constricted with effort.

His entire being ached for rest, yet he pressed on, compelled to continue. His mana was depleted, yet the notion of Samuel battling the creature alone made him feel worse.

He couldn't resist joining the battle, whether to weaken the beast or improve their odds of victory by slaying the creature.

As the young man escaped the military base, running through its walls ravaged by time and speeding through the corridors littered with abandoned equipment and the remains of soldiers who had long passed, he thought about what the others were doing. Were they fighting? Probably yes, since the human-like Thaid screamed a lot and probably attracted the Acidspitter Arthropods.

The young man moved through the dark with the aid of a biological supercomputer. It had memorized the layout of the military base under Erik's command. The awakener made the right choice, leaving the torch behind to aid Samuel in battling the beast.

As he approached the entrance of the military base, his footsteps boomed, their echoes filling the empty corridors with an eerie presence.

When Erik stepped out of the abandoned military base, a wild and crazy scene overwhelmed his senses. He was right in his earlier conjecture.

Outside the base, a swarm of Acidspitters Arthropods descended upon the area. The piercing cries echoed through the empty streets, bouncing off the abandoned structures and sending a shiver down his spine.

His eyes darted to his comrades in arms, a courageous group of eight locked in a fierce battle against the swarm of creepy crawlies. In the midst of them, he spotted Ethan's slender figure, his youthful countenance twisted with a mix of fright and resolve.

A protective human barrier encircled the base, undoubtedly erected to thwart the monster's advance toward Samuel.

Ethan's voice reverberated through the ancient underground city, a desperate cry bouncing off the metallic walls enclosing them.

"Erik!" he cried out, his eyes filled with terror and resolve as he locked eyes with his fellow villager.

"We need some help here, Erik!" Ethan's voice trembled, breaking through the tumultuous noise of the battlefield, as he cried out once more, his desperation palpable. His muscles trembled, struggling to bear the burden of his mighty weapon.

His footing faltered as the Acidspitters advanced, their sheer numbers appearing never-ending. However, as Erik gazed into his eyes, he detected a glimmer of unwavering determination that could not be snuffed out.

Erik's heart pounded in his chest. He sensed his mana had depleted, rendering him unable to engage in battle as he had in the lab. Yet his comrades called upon him. Samuel yearned for his presence. Luckily, his stats would allow him to fight against the horde of monsters. After all, if he couldn't fight when his mana ended, what was the point in all the training the Red Palace forced him to undergo?

The villagers were in dire need of his assistance. He had no choice but to take action, even if it meant putting his life on the line.

The Acidspitters glided with an eerie, otherworldly elegance, their slender legs making a rhythmic clatter on the rugged terrain as they moved forward. The villagers skillfully dodged the acidic spits, watching as they sizzled upon impact with the ground.

The substance cracked and devoured the ancient flooring. The Acidspitter Arthropods' sole purpose was to eliminate the intruders and feast upon their flesh, lured by the fierce conflict within the military compound.

#### Chapter 426: Strenuous Defense

Erik gazed upon the terrified villagers, their faces marked with fear. Yet a stubborn fire burned in their eyes, filling him with hope.

They stood firm, holding their weapons with unwavering determination, refusing to back down.

His breath hitched as a rush of adrenaline coursed through his veins. He felt a pang of helplessness; his mana reserves were dangerously low. Yet, he had been trained and didn't stop training during these months in the art of the sword. However, all that training was meant for moments like this; he received basic combat training to face situations where mana was insufficient.

Tired yet resolute, Erik leaped into battle's midst, clutching the Flyssa firmly in his hand.

The world seemed to shrink as he stood there, leaving only the beasts closing in, their hisses filling the air and the villagers' faces etched with worry.

Erik possessed great strength, nearly matching the villagers, who were quite skilled in combat. However, he was still a bit weaker than them, without a doubt.

The young man had enough physical strength to fight against the creatures almost on par with the villagers, who were all around the v (NI) level, yet, he was weaker than them.

However, Erik made up for his relative lack of strength and speed thanks to Nathaniel's brain crystal power, which he used to increase his speed to higher levels, matching the villagers'.

He couldn't use other powers now since he would end his mana amid the fight, putting him in a dangerous situation. Still, his Flyssa was sharp enough to kill the Acidspitter Arthropods, who were dangerous only because of their numbers. Erik swiftly weaved through the swarm of hissing creatures.

His gaze locked onto Ethan, who stood back-to-back with a fellow villager, bravely defending against a horde of Acidspitter creatures. Erik's heart froze with apprehension as he saw a creature's claw inch dangerously close to Ethan.

He couldn't bear to see his friend harmed. Erik's heart raced within him; his breath was steady as he dashed forward. With a single, graceful swing, he brandished his Flyssa, a blade of gleaming steel that cut through the air with a haunting sound.

The Acidspitter was caught off guard as a razor-sharp blade sliced through its tough outer shell, causing a shower of blood to stain the broken ground below.

The beast emitted a piercing screech, its limbs convulsing, before it crumbled to the ground, devoid of life.

[MULTIPLE ACIDSPITTER ARTHROPODS KILLED IN THE SURROUNDINGS: 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. 400 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

Ethan's head snapped towards the piercing cries of the dying beast, his eyes widening in astonishment as he laid eyes upon Erik.

"Erik!" He yelled, relief evident in his voice. "Get on Jordan's side; he needs help!"

The awakener nodded, his gaze sweeping across the battlefield. His heart sank as he beheld the monstrous horde.

As he arrived, his presence breathed new life into the others, despite the overwhelming enemy forces. They appeared to grow in stature and wielded their weapons with greater ferocity, their cries resounding through the war-torn land.

Erik's eyes scanned the fierce battleground, finally fixing upon Jordan. The seasoned man found himself right in the middle of the action; his expression hardened with resolve as he fought against the Acidspitters.

With deadly precision, Erik moved through the horde of creatures. Their sheer numbers, however, proved too much for him to handle. With unwavering determination, the kid dashed ahead, his Flyssa shining menacingly in the faint glow of the Aclaitrium.

He dived headfirst into the horde of creatures, his blade cutting through the air with swift and precise movements. Each strike he made was a fierce declaration of his unwavering resolve to destroy the looming threat of these abominations, to kill all of them, leaving none alive.

His sword clashed against the hard exoskeletons, creating a satisfying crunch with every defeated creature. Each fallen beast brought a small taste of victory; moreover, with every Acidspitter Erik defeated, the burden on his friends lightened a little. He felt a sharp awareness of his diminishing mana.

He wielded his force manipulation cautiously, using it only when necessary—a gentle push, a swift slice—preserving his dwindling energy. But the situation was dire. The horde grew more numerous as more Acidspitter Arthropods joined the fight, their high-pitched screams echoing through the battlefield.

The eerie sound of their sharp claws scraping on the old floor reverberated through the thick atmosphere, forming a chilling melody that foretold imminent danger. Erik's heart plummeted as he witnessed the monstrous creatures charging toward him and his comrades in arms.

The Acidspitters' eyes shimmered with a chilling wickedness that tingled his spine. They moved together like a well-oiled machine. Their clever positioning and coordinated advance showed a chilling level of intelligence.

Their reinforcements had arrived, and they were showing no signs of retreat. The initial lull was over; the storm was about to unleash its wrath.

Erik could almost taste the renewed vigor of the beasts, their onslaught promising a battle more fierce than before. The air around him seemed to grow denser with the impending menace and the scent of blood, the hope of victory growing dimmer with each passing second.

Erik gritted his teeth as he felled yet another batch of creatures, his energy reserves depleting with each swing of his blade. However, he was constantly gaining experience as the biological supercomputer absorbed the mana from the creatures the young man and the others killed.

However, that was just a tiny victory. The truth was, staying put without reinforcements or Samuel's help meant certain death. He could only pray that the older man was doing well within the military building.

Erik's ears were filled with the din of battle, but his focus shifted to the imposing entrance of the military base. He could see a hazy silhouette, its details obscured by the shadowy interior of the base.

With a chill running down his spine, he realized that Samuel must have fallen if it was the humanoid Thaid stepping out into the dying light.

His heart raced within him, its thumping reverberating through the passing moments that seemed to stretch forever, all while he observed the mysterious figure drawing near.

His hands tightened into fists, the strain causing his knuckles to pale. He realized he was holding his breath.

His entire being trembled with an insatiable desire for it to be Samuel, alive and triumphant, emerging from the depths.

As the figure came into view, his heart skipped a beat. It was Samuel. The man was alive, and apparently, he was victorious!

Chapter 427: The stone titan

Staggering out, he emerged from the base. He was bruised, bloodied, and visibly worn, yet he stood tall with a triumphant look.

His stone armor lay shattered around him, pieces strewn across the ground, a testament to the fierce battle he had just fought.

He had emerged from his fight with the humanoid Thaid. That could only mean one thing. He had won. He had slain the beast that had been their worst fear for so long. But there was no time to celebrate just yet. The Acidspitter Arthropods were still closing in, their eerie gaze now fixed on Samuel.

The fight was far from over.

Amid the chaos, Erik raised his voice, straining it above the din of clashing weapons and monstrous shrieks.

"Samuel!" he called, catching sight of the older man's bruised and battered form limping out of the base.

Relief intermingled with concern for the old farmer's visible injuries, but there was no time to dwell on them; every second was vital.

Samuel's tired, bloodshot eyes found Erik amidst the crowd of battling villagers.

He gave a weary, reassuring nod. The seasoned warrior was in no condition for a prolonged battle, his body echoing with pain from his brutal fight against the humanoid Thaid.

Yet there was a grim determination in his eyes. Without hesitation, he gritted his teeth, drawing on his mana reserves, and plunged headfirst into the fray.

Erik watched as Samuel, despite his injuries, began to cut a swath through the monsters with precision and deadly efficiency. He was a masterclass in combat, even in such dire conditions. Samuel's presence seemed to reinvigorate the villagers. With renewed enthusiasm, they fought on, their efforts now focused and coordinated.

Samuel moved like a force of nature, his battered body a whirlwind of lethality amidst the swarm of Acidspitter Arthropods. The older man weaved through the onslaught with uncanny grace, striking out with devastating precision, every blow a death sentence for the horrific beasts.

Even in his exhausted state, he danced a deadly ballet of carnage, dispatching monster after monster with a lethal grace that defied his years.

In a few breathless moments, Samuel laid waste to hundreds of creatures. The sheer magnitude of his prowess held the villagers in stunned awe, their mouths agape as they watched the older warrior fight with a ferocity and tenacity that seemed more than human. The monstrous horde was being decimated, cut down like wheat before a scythe.

[MULTIPLE ACIDSPITTER ARTHROPODS KILLED IN THE SURROUNDINGS: MANA ABSORBING PROCESS STARTING]

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

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY ABSORBED, STARTING CONVERTING PROCEDURE.]

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

Erik watched in astonishment as every swing of Samuel's fists carved a path through the mass of monstrous forms. The sight was breathtaking in its raw intensity, with Samuel's expertise and ferocity reminding him again of the gap in their abilities. His resolve hardened, and Erik was spurred into action, charging back into the fight with newfound vigor. They would survive this. They had to.

They had Samuel.

However, Samuel's gaze swept over the battlefield, settling on Ethan. Even amidst the chaos, his voice rang out clearly and authoritatively: "I can't keep this up for long. I'll carve a path through these creatures. We must take that opportunity to escape and leave this city immediately."

There was no room for argument in Samuel's tone. His words cut through the noise of battle, the certainty in his voice grounding them amidst the chaos. Ethan met Samuel's gaze and nodded, understanding flashing in his eyes. Erik and the others echoed the response, their expressions set with grim determination.

"All right," Ethan shouted back, rallying the others with a swift gesture, "You heard him! We leave as soon as Samuel makes an opening. Be ready!"

With a final nod to Samuel, Ethan turned back to look at the fray, his weapon ready. Erik, following his lead, braced himself for the arduous task ahead.

The villagers took their positions, their eyes focused on the relentless horde, waiting for Samuel to create their path to survival. As for the man himself, he turned his back to them, facing the oncoming sea of Acidspitter Arthropods, ready to part it with the sheer force of his fists.

At that moment, Samuel's form seemed to expand; his body was enveloped in a shell of solidified mana that took on a colossal scale. It was as though he had taken refuge in a gargantuan armor suit, turning himself into a behemoth of stone.

His previously human form was now a towering figure, his silhouette monstrous and awe-inspiring amidst the horde of Acidspitter Arthropods.



Samuel charged forward with a thunderous roar that echoed through the underground city, his stone-encased fists swinging and his feet stomping with unrelenting fury.

Each step was a cataclysmic event, the ground trembling under his immense weight, and his movements instantly obliterated numerous Acidspitter Arthropods.

It was as though he had become a force of nature, an unstoppable tsunami of power and wrath that effortlessly carved a path through the sea of creatures.

His armored form moved with terrifying speed and precision, and his attacks were calculated and efficient.

The Acidspitter Arthropods were swept aside like mere insects in his path, their bodies crushed under his heavy footfalls or smashed aside by his mighty swings. His figure was an ever-advancing beacon of death and destruction but a beacon of hope for the villagers.

As Samuel tore through the horde, a path was opened—a clear swath cut through the endless tide of creatures. The villagers, seizing this golden opportunity, followed in his wake, their hearts filled with renewed hope and determination as they dashed toward their escape.

"Follow me!" Samuel's booming voice reverberated through the chaotic battlefield. Encased within his towering stone armor, he was an indomitable force, his voice holding an undeniable command that cut through the clamor of the skirmish.

Hearing the command, Erik and the other villagers sprung into action. They surged forward, their feet pounding against the cold metal floor, rushing into the precise path that Samuel had paved through the sea of Acidspitter Arthropods.

Chapter 428: Corrosive spit

The battle raged all around them as if the very fabric of reality had been torn asunder. The Acidspitters lunged and thrashed, but they were quickly pushed away or crushed by Samuel, a massive stone armor. The villagers also fought back and took down the Acidspitters.

Despite their anxiety and fear, the villagers didn't dare slow their pace or look back. Their full attention was fixated on the secure trail stretching ahead, with the imposing figure of Samuel guiding their journey.

The scene was horrifyingly gruesome. The Acidspitter Arthropods' exoskeletons, once bursting with vibrant green and yellow colors, now appeared dull and lifeless.

They mirrored the faint glow of the Aclaitrium ore embedded in the nearby buildings. With his fierce strength, the man reduced the once-mighty bodies to mere corpses.

Erik and the others picked their way carefully over the shattered bodies. The jagged claws, once mighty enough to tear through flesh and bone, now lay shattered and blunt.

Countless legs, once swift and nimble as they scurried across the metallic streets of the underground city, now lay twisted in unnatural positions or severed from their owners' bodies.

The Acidspitter Arthropods' multifaceted compound eyes stared blankly up at them, the once vibrant glow extinguished. These once terrifying eyes could detect movement with pinpoint accuracy and were now clouded and lifeless.

Most disturbing, perhaps, were the creatures' elongated mandibles. These fearsome tools, capable of launching highly corrosive acid, were stilled forever.

Some were clenched tightly shut in a macabre semblance of the beasts' final moments, while others lay wide open, their specialized glands void of their deadly payload.

Erik sprinted, his veins coursing with a thrilling blend of fear and excitement. Amid the grave circumstances, he couldn't help but feel a sense of awe at Samuel's display of power.

The image of the elderly man bravely fending off a swarm of Acidspitters all by himself would forever be etched in his memory.

However, those feelings were short-lived, as suddenly, an ominous hissing sound filled the air as more Acidspitter Arthropods emerged from the crevices in the cave's walls.

A horrifying sight met the humans' eyes as these monsters reared back, their elongated mandibles quivering.

Suddenly, without prior notice, they unleashed their lethal acidic payload into the sky, resulting in a downpour of spit-based projectiles that possessed corrosive properties and targeted the humans below.

The acid, a potent concoction of corrosive chemicals, was created by the creature's brain crystal, harnessing mana to transform into a potent force that could effortlessly dissolve almost anything.

The sky unleashed a torrent of lethal orbs, crackling and swirling with a sickening sound. Every tiny wad of spit transformed into a deadly missile capable of inflicting excruciating pain upon any hapless soul it touched.

Erik and his companions swiftly moved, skillfully evading the perilous downpour. They danced with death, playing a dangerous game, dodging the acid rain with intense focus and fear etched on their faces.

Their hearts thumped loudly, the rush of adrenaline coursing through their veins. Every breath they took felt stolen, caught between the fragile balance of life and death.

However, one of the villagers was not as fortunate. A scream echoed through the chaos as one of the Acidspitter Arthropods' deadly projectiles found its mark.

The dreadful wail tore through the night as a villager was struck by the Acidspitter Arthropods' deadly projectile. His leg was hit first; the acid immediately ate through his protective clothing and flesh.

The gruesome sight was surreal as the potent acid quickly melted through the ligaments and bone, reducing the man's leg to a grotesque mess of charred flesh and liquefied bone in mere moments.

He tried desperately to escape the terrifying attack, but his leg was disintegrating, leaving him unable to move. His eyes bulged with fear as he tumbled to the ground, his body landing with a wet thump on the icy floor, the sound reverberating eerily through the battlefield.

The air filled with a collective gasp as his companions looked on in horror. Their hearts raced in their chests, overwhelmed by the sheer brutality of the scene. But the relentless acid rain was far from over, and they couldn't stop to help him.

The Acidspitter Arthropods pressed on, unleashing a barrage of their corrosive spit, sending it soaring through the sky before descending upon their human prey. The air was pierced by the villager's anguished cries, echoing through the night as a barrage of acid projectiles descended upon him.

They unleashed a relentless assault on his body, striking with brutal speed. Each blow landed with a horrifying hiss as the corrosive liquid gnawed at his flesh. He was unable to evade the onslaught any longer.

His screams escalated into a bone-chilling shriek that echoed around the large area, a chilling soundtrack to the horrifying spectacle unfolding. The acid was ruthless, showing no mercy as it rapidly ate through his clothes, skin, and muscles.

Within moments, the villager was reduced to a writhing, screaming mess on the floor, his cries becoming more desperate and agonized with each passing second.

The others watched in terror as their friend perished, writhing in unbearable agony. Yet mourning was a luxury they couldn't afford.

The relentless horde drew nearer, their hunger for destruction growing with each passing moment. In this dire situation, the sole focus became survival, for nothing else was significant. The persistent hiss of acid drowned out the cries of their fallen comrade.

Ethan's voice soared, pure and brimming with intense desperation. His eyes, wide with terror, were focused on the horrifying spectacle unfolding before him, the brutal death of one of their own.

"We need to get out of here! NOW!" He shouted, his voice echoing off the walls of the underground city.

Ethan's voice trembled with fear; his face drained of color yet determined. He understood that remaining rooted in terror would only invite further demise.

They were compelled to continue their journey. Escaping was imperative. And they had to act quickly before the Acidspitter Arthropods killed someone else.

Chapter 429: Escaping the cave

Amid the nightmarish landscape, the sight of Samuel at the vanguard, encased within his colossal stone armor, was a beacon of hope. His hulking form blotted out the glow of the Aclaitrium ore adorning the cavern's walls, casting a moving shadow before him.

The older man moved with defying urgency, his every step crushing Acidspitter Arthropods beneath his weight. The crunch of the Thaid's vibrant exoskeletons beneath his steps echoed through the caverns, a grim chorus to their frantic retreat.

Samuel carved a path with each thunderous stride, his stone fists swinging like wrecking balls, sending Acidspitter Arthropods flying into the air, their broken bodies raining down.

Green and yellow bodily fluids splattered across the stony ground, a grotesque reminder of the impending massacre. Samuel didn't flinch or hesitate; his attention was solely on the path ahead. The ground beneath them was littered with the skeletons of countless Acidspitter Arthropods, their compound eyes reflecting their final moments on the planet.

The smell of crushed bodies and acid was nauseating, but they all forced it down, their survival instincts taking precedence over their discomfort.

The villagers raced behind him, their faces pale and their eyes wide. The metallic odor of blood and the acidic stench of the slain Arthropods created an eerie fragrance that lingered in the damp cavern. They avoided looking at the mangled bodies, focusing solely on Samuel's path.

Erik had to rely on his physical strength and the sporadic bursts of speed he could use with Nathaniel's brain crystal power to survive, with his mana reserves almost to 0. He tried to be as conservative as possible and only used the power whenever he really needed it.

The young man twisted and turned, weaving his lean body through the acidic spitballs that whizzed past him like deadly projectiles. Each near-miss reminded him of the potentially fatal consequences of a direct hit.

Four Acidspitter Arthropods were directly ahead of him, their insectoid bodies moving quickly toward him. Their serrated claws clicked menacingly against him, and their multifaceted eyes were fixed on his figure. Each of them, a vibrant mix of greens and yellows, raised their elongated mandibles, ready to launch another acid volley.

Erik responded by brandishing his Flyssa. The metallic ring of the blade echoed around him, briefly drowning out the harrowing sounds of battle. His grip on the hilt tightened, his knuckles whitening from the pressure.

He pushed off the ground, his body cutting through the cavern's stale, damp air as he closed the distance between himself and the approaching Arthropods.

Erik's blade flashed in the dim light, his movements a blur of lethal precision. He killed the Arthropods in his path one by one.

Each successful strike fueled him, even as his lungs burned and his muscles screamed in protest. He would live.

[MULTIPLE ACIDSPITTER ARTHROPODS KILLED IN THE SURROUNDINGS: 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. 400 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

Despite the fear and despair in the air, Ethan proved to be a formidable opponent throughout the ordeal. He would have been considered a genius if he had been born in New Alexandria.

However, it was clear that he and the villagers lacked fighting techniques; they were strong, that was for sure, but that was probably due to the secret technique the village developed, which allowed a young man only a year older than Erik to reach the v (NI) level.

Though much smaller than Samuel's, his silhouette cut through the chaos with its own deadly grace.

Ethan moved with the grace of a seasoned warrior. Strong and toned by years of hard farming, his arms swung a spear with lethality. His agility and strength, products of life under the harsh conditions of their village, were evident in each powerful blow he landed.

Ethan charged at an incoming Acidspitter Arthropod, sidestepping an acidic spitball and swinging his makeshift weapon with a loud yell.

The force of the impact flung the creature into the air, crushing its vibrant exoskeleton. Ethan spun around and slashed another Arthropod creeping up behind him, its body crumpling under his ferocious strike.

His actions were not as flashy or acrobatic as Samuel's or Erik's, but they were just as effective.

Erik's gaze settled on their destination—the cave exit—amid the chaos and acid. As he registered the sight, his heart pounded in his chest, a glimmer of hope amidst the violent whirlwind of bodies and acid.

It was the only way out, but a sea of vibrant green and yellow monstrosities besieged it.

Samuel's voice rang out through the loud cacophony of shrieks, roars, and clashes of bodies, a steady beacon in the midst of the chaos.

"COME ON!" he yelled, his raw energy and determination fueling their exhausted bodies and propelling them toward the cave exit.

Samuel, in his colossal stone form, charged forward, a ruthless destroyer.

The ground trembled with each step, and the sea of Acidspitter Arthropods parted, their bodies crushed beneath his stone-clad feet.

Erik's ears throbbed, his gaze fixed on the cave exit as he sprinted, avoiding the acid spitballs and slashing at the monsters who dared to stand in his way. The stench of death and acid burned his nostrils, causing a wave of nausea to assault him.

As they dashed towards the cave entrance, a horrifying, gut-wrenching scream clawed its way up from the back of the group. Erik's heart stopped beating as he swiveled his head toward the noise source. Time seemed to stretch, the world shrinking to the spectacle unfolding beside him.

A villager with whom he'd shared laughter and stories during these months was falling to the ground; his face contorted in agony.

As one of the Acidspitter Arthropod's lethal spits seared through his back, eating away at his flesh, a sickening hiss pierced the air, providing the soundtrack to the man's misery.

His knees collapsed, his hands clawing at the ground as if he could somehow pull away from the searing pain in his back. As his body began to convulse, a terrible gurgling noise echoed from his throat, the corrosive poison quickly working its horrific magic.

Ethan's voice pierced the din of the battle, a raw, guttural sound carrying a mix of disbelief and heart-wrenching despair. "GEORGE!" he yelled, his voice echoing off the cave walls, providing a chilling soundtrack to the unfolding horror.

The scene was a grotesque depiction of carnage and suffering. George was on the ground, writhing in pain as the Acidspitter Arthropods swooped down on him, their vibrant colors contrasting eerily against the dull gray of the cavern floor.

The sharp and nauseating odor of singed flesh filled the air as the acid ate away at his flesh, opening gruesome wounds that oozed blood.

The beasts didn't waste any time. They lunged at him, their sharp, serrated claws ripping and tearing at his flesh, adding to George's agony. Their multifaceted eyes gleamed with predatory satisfaction as they ravaged him, feasting on his dying body.

Every claw, tear, and bite from their elongated mandibles elicited a new scream from George, the sound hauntingly human amid the monstrous spectacle. Under the relentless assault, his body convulsed violently, a macabre dance of death.

George's agony was seared into their minds, his screams echoing in their ears, spurring them on, and the desperation to flee growing with each passing second.



During the monstrous frenzy, Samuel began to stop mana from flowing through his neural links, and his mana-stone armor began to fall off his body. The structure crumbled into a jumble of stone fragments that fell to the ground, the remaining mana that held it together dissipating into nothingness.

Samuel appeared smaller and more vulnerable without the protection of his armor, but there was nothing he could do because he couldn't fit through the exit door with that massive thing on.

The group rushed forward, eventually passing through the exit door. Into the tunnel ahead, their footsteps echoing off the narrow passageway as they made their way toward what they hoped would be their salvation.

The tunnel was dark, with a shroud of pitch-black obscurity enveloping them. The only light was a faint, distant glow at the end of the tunnel.

The screeching of the Acidspitter Arthropods and the sickening sounds of destruction faded behind them, replaced by the survivors' heavy breathing and the echoing silence of the tunnel.

Erik's scream echoed off the narrow tunnel walls, creating a haunting melody of desperation.

"RUN! FASTER!" he yelled, his voice rough and jagged. Each word pierced the air, breaking the oppressive silence within the tunnel.

#### Chapter 430: The dark tunnel

The group ran desperately in the dark, echoing tunnel, their footsteps pounding; their torches flickered in their tight grips, creating an eerie play of darkness and illumination on the chilly, stone-laden walls surrounding them. Each flicker of light revealed gruesome visions of the Acidspitter Arthropods they had narrowly evaded, pushing them to sprint with even greater urgency.

The air was thick with the scent of fear, with a bitter taste lingering on their tongues. With every stride, their unease swelled, the relentless fear of the unfamiliar devouring their every notion. The wind whispered—a cold breeze in an unseen abyss—as if it carried a foreboding message: they were still in danger.

Ethan's voice echoed in the tunnel, rough from the tension and effort. "Keep going!" he roared, his voice echoing through the suffocating shadows.

"Don't stop; push through! Run, damn it, run!" His voice carried an urgent tone that pierced through the darkness, stirring up adrenaline among the villagers as they ran for their lives.

The tunnel filled with a chilling hiss as the Acidspitter Arthropods charged forward, their bodies clattering against the rocky walls with a bone-chilling sound.

Their eyes glowed scarily under the dim light of the torch, making the dark space look strange. With every swift scuttle, they closed in on the fleeing group, a relentless wave of predatory determination.

The tunnel echoed with the eerie scrape of sharp claws against stone, overpowering the terrified gasps of the humans running away.

The Acidspitter Arthropods moved swiftly and with precision, their bodies twisting and turning in a strange, eerie rhythm as they made their way along the rugged trail. The air was heavy with the scent of their acidic presence, a powerful and sickening reminder of their deadly brain crystals.

The villagers listened to their tired and scared breaths as they echoed through the air, creating a haunting melody.

The sound from their and the thaid's footsteps reverberating through the tunnel seemed monstrous. Yet, they ran with all their strength, the torchlights their only beacon in the suffocating darkness.

Despite the chaotic situation, Erik's voice was calming and comforting. His words flowed forth in soothing ripples to quell the mounting fear.

"Stay calm, all of you," he urged, his voice unwavering despite the rapid beating of his own heart.

"Fear is our enemy here, not the Arthropods. Breathe, think, and keep moving. We will make it out!"

Erik spun around, his heart pounding, as a mysterious clicking echoed through the narrow tunnel. The flame of his torch danced, revealing a haunting glow at the mysterious sight. His breath caught in his throat as his eyes beheld a truly extraordinary sight.

The Acidspitter Arthropods had broken their ground-based pursuit. Instead, they had taken to the rough walls of the cave, their serrated claws gripping into the cracks and crevices with uncanny ease.

Their vibrant bodies crawled over the hard surface like grotesque spiders, the green and yellow of their exoskeletons reflecting eerily off the torchlight.

They moved with grotesque agility, their bodies flowing in a terrifying dance. The creatures climbed the walls.

Samuel's voice reverberated through the tunnel, firm and commanding. "Eyes forward, focus on the path ahead!" he ordered, his tone leaving no room for disobedience. "Don't let your mind wander. Our survival depends on our ability to stay focused. Don't give in to the fear!"

The tunnel's darkness pressed upon them like a slithering serpent, amplifying their fears and intensifying their need to flee. Their brows glistened with sweat, and their muscles throbbed from the ceaseless sprint, yet the hope of escape from their fear urged them forward.

Ethan's eyes fixated on a flicker of hope far away—a tiny beam of light fighting against the overwhelming darkness, the exit. His heart raced, matching the quick steps they took. The sound of their urgent getaway reverberated through the dark tunnel.

"THE EXIT!" Ethan's voice rang out, loud and clear, above the cacophony of hisses and clicks that filled the tunnel behind them. His words, a beacon of hope, cut through the heavy tension hanging in the air, bringing a renewed surge of adrenaline to the group.

The light grew steadily, the exit appearing tantalizingly close yet still a dangerous distance away. But at least there was a direction, a goal, a lifeline.

The light at the end of the tunnel was not a mere metaphor for them - it was their survival, their freedom from the nightmare that was rapidly closing in on them from behind.

Emerging from the dark tunnel, the group burst into the sunlight without pausing to relish their freedom. They were well aware that safety still eluded them. Instantly, their gaze shifted to the imposing metal door they had come out from.

The screams of the Acidspitter Arthropods echoed through the tunnel, growing louder as the creatures neared the exit.

Panic bubbled in their chests, but they had to remain focused. Samuel was the first to reach the handle, his hands slipping over the worn surface as he began to turn it with all his might.

Ethan and Erik swiftly joined him, their hands gripping the wheel handle and their muscles flexing with determination. The door groaned and scraped against the stone, its movement accompanied by a piercing noise that blended with the approaching creatures' clamor.

The villagers, driven by their unyielding will to survive, lent a hand. As one, they grasped the wheel handle; their combined might gradually shift the colossal door.

Their brows glistened with sweat, and their breaths were ragged and labored. Each passing moment held immeasurable value, for with it came the relentless approach of the Acidspitter Arthropods.

With one last heave, the door slammed shut, silencing the thundering footsteps of the approaching creatures. They joined forces to fortify the entrance, their combined strength making the hefty wheel handle come to a halt. The door was tightly shut, trapping the fearsome creatures of the hidden city inside.

However, several loud sounds started coming from within as they closed the door. They were the Acidspitter Arthropods. The thaids were apparently walking on the door, maybe trying to open it, but were too stupid to understand that if they used their acid, they would open the door in a matter of moments.

That realization haunted the surviving group, but luckily, since, in their tiny brains, they couldn't come out of there, nor could they understand how to do it, they ceased their struggle and headed back.