

BIOLOGICAL 431

Chapter 431: Back to the village

For a moment, they stood there, panting heavily, their relief palpable. They were safe, at least for now. They had made it. They had survived.

As they pressed their backs against the chilling metal of the ancient door, the adrenaline rush from their escape slowly faded.

Their breaths came in gasps, their chests heaving with each inhale and exhale. Their hearts hammered against their ribs as if yearning to escape their bony prison.

The villagers stared in disbelief, their eyes wide with the terror of their daring escape. Sweat, dirt, and sheer fear were visible on their pale faces. Their knees trembled, and some collapsed, their bodies quivering with exhaustion and fear from the relentless pursuit. Their hands shook, still clutching the torches that had been their only light source in the tunnel's darkness.

"We clearly need more people to kill all of these monsters," one of the villagers said.

"You are right," Samuel said, "We clearly underestimated how many were there..."

He was undoubtedly tired, his breaths coming in slightly heavier and his muscles aching from the sprint, but there was tranquility about him that set him apart, probably thanks to the system. Though filled with the echoes of danger, his eyes were more measured, analyzing their surroundings and assessing their situation rather than being consumed by fear.

While his body showed the physical signs of their sprint from danger - the sweat clinging to his brow, the heaviness of his limbs - his composure remained largely undisturbed. That honestly freaked the others a little bit.

He stood a little apart from the villagers, giving them room to recover while he surveyed the surrounding landscape, his mind already moving on to the next step of their journey.

As their breaths steadied, Samuel glanced at Erik. His eyes, weathered and tired from the fight, blended with admiration and worry. He inhaled deeply, savoring the crisp air of the outside world, a stark difference from the stuffy and damp air inside the old city they had narrowly fled.

"We need to tell Amos about this since it is clear more than just a handful of us are needed to kill them all," Samuel said, his voice a gravelly whisper, weary yet determined. "Those thaids in there... they are too many, and with their ability..."

He cast a quick look over his shoulder; his mind filled with the terrors lurking on the other side of the door they had just closed tightly. "There's a sea of them in there, Erik."

"Yeah, that was what I kind of told you. We've probably seen but a fraction of their numbers, and already we've lost two good men," Erik said.

Samuel's eyes locked onto Erik's, a wordless connection passing between them. "That is an underestimation, lad. Even with your explanation, I couldn't have imagined they were that many. I thought they were a lot based on what you said, but I thought they amounted to a couple thousand at max." he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "This is a well-prepared, well-equipped army.

We can't take on a swarm like that with just a few of us. We'd be picked off, one by one."

His eyes fell upon his weathered hands, twisted and aged from years of toiling on the farm and fighting off Thaids. His fists tightened the sting of old scars awakening within him.

"We need to rally the other villagers, gather every able-bodied man and woman willing to fight. Because when we open that door again..." He paused, looking back up at Erik, a fire kindling in his eyes, "We need to be ready to wipe those abominations off the face of this earth."

Due to the weight of Samuel's words, the air became still. He spoke the truth: they lacked the power to accomplish this task with ten people. The problem was that keeping people away from defending the village was going to be problematic with the threat of Frant's soldiers looming over the village.

Ethan glanced over at Erik. His eyes had a spark of humor, contrasting with the dire situation they found themselves in, but his face was sad. "Nice birthday, eh?" he joked, his tone lighthearted yet tinged with exhaustion.

"Yeah, a perfect one..." Erik replied, his voice dripping with irony and a touch of irritation. He took a quick look around, taking in the reality of his surroundings. The ordeal had ended, but he knew they would move into a different kind of turmoil.

The weary group made their way toward the village; their tired bodies weighed down by the hardships they had faced and the sorrow of losing two friends.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a cloak of darkness over the land, the band of eight adventurers departed from the ancient city.

With each step, they ventured closer to the village, their path concealed by twilight's fading light. As the final rays of sunlight vanished, the world was bathed in a warm, orange glow.

Beneath the dusky sky, their path was cloaked in a calm stillness, interrupted solely by the gentle whisper of foliage beneath their steps and the sound of their heavy breathing.

They walked along the natural trail, a path their feet knew well. The torchlight flickered, making the shadows dance on the ground. The wavering silhouettes stretched out against the vegetation that bordered their path.

They were all tired but determined, their eyes fixed on the path and their minds filled with anticipation for what awaited them.

Despite their weariness, the villagers pressed on, driven by a surge of energy and the longing to reach their homes. In the midst of them all, Erik glided with an air of tranquility, his face composed and peaceful as the sun dipped below the horizon.

Finally, the majestic shapes of their village in the treetops appeared, with the glowing lights from the houses already shining brightly. It was a comforting sight.

As they drew closer to their destination, their eyes fell upon their beloved home, filling their hearts with a comforting sense of peace. Relieving, they continued their journey, leaving the dangerous Acidspitter Arthropods behind.

They had made it back home, but they were aware that another, more human, threat awaited them.

Chapter 432: Reaching Home

The people of the village hurried about, their steps filled with determination. Quiet, intense discussions replaced the usual friendly chatter. The Frantian soldiers, once a distant concern, now posed a clear threat.

As they ventured deeper into the village, familiar faces crossed their path, each wearing a resolute expression. Even the little ones, oblivious to the gravity of the matter, could feel the pressing need and were lending a hand in their own ways.

Erik's gaze lifted to the majestic tree houses, reaching toward the sky. Under their calm grace, a hidden tension simmered.

Since he came here, Erik has always found the village comfortable. There was no fear, no anxiety. But this day, his Birthday, was not a joyous occasion. Instead, it became a fierce struggle to stay alive, and the fight was nowhere near its end.

Samuel turned towards Erik and the others, his weathered face etched with concern. "Erik," he said, his voice steady but carrying a hint of fatigue. "I need to speak with Amos about the situation."

The young man nodded, preparing to accompany him. "I'll go with you," he said, his voice firm.

But Samuel raised a hand, stopping him in his tracks. "There is no need," he said, shaking his head. "You've done enough today. It's your Birthday, after all. You need to rest."

Erik's eyes met Samuel's, ready to voice his objection, but the older man's stare made him think twice. Reluctantly, he nodded, acknowledging Samuel's wish.

The day had been full of challenges, and the days ahead held even greater trials. As he came to understand, rest was precisely what he required.

"Very well..."

He let out a weary breath, his eyes fixed on Samuel's retreating figure, making his way toward Amos's abode. A weighty feeling descended upon him, a blend of weariness and unease for what lay ahead.

But for now, he would rest. He knew that soon enough, he would be needed again.

Erik shifted his gaze to Ethan, his eyes mirroring his exhaustion. "Ethan," he started, his voice heavy with exhaustion, a reminder of the harrowing experience they had just endured.

"I think I will head home, eat something, and rest. This day has been...eventful, to say the least."

Ethan clapped Erik on the shoulder, his face lighting up with a slight grin. "Yeah, don't worry. Happy Birthday again, Erik."

With a tired smile, Erik nodded. "Thanks, Ethan," he said before walking away, his steps heavy with exhaustion but resolute.

"Take care!" Ethan called after him, waving him off. And so the two went their separate ways.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a golden glow across the land, it marked the end of a tough day. Yet, it also signaled the start of a fresh beginning—a battle that would involve the whole village.

Erik reached his home, a charming wooden cottage perched atop a towering tree. The strong tree trunk bore a mesmerizing pattern of twisting knots and deep grooves. He carefully set down his sword, its metallic sound resonating gently in the quiet that had enveloped his dwelling.

The place was a stunning mix of practicality and old-world allure. Made of weathered, gleaming wood, it blended seamlessly with the forest like a towering tree that had grown above the ground.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, its glow seeped through the windows, painting the wooden floor with enchanting patterns of light and shadow.

A sturdy stone stove stood tall and strong off the side, like a loyal guardian. It was a necessary friend, always there to keep him cozy and cook his meals.

The room was sparsely furnished, with only a few pieces of rugged furniture. There was a rough table, a couple of wooden chairs, and a bed covered in fur to keep warm during the winter.

Though unassuming, the abode possessed all that was necessary. Erik's surroundings exuded a tribal vibe, reflecting the village's tree-dwelling culture.

The room's emptiness gave it a calm and straightforward vibe, like a peaceful sanctuary hidden from the chaos beyond its walls. In its humble beauty, it was a haven for Erik to unwind and recharge.

Erik, now settled in the solitude of his home, found himself wrapped in a blanket of thought. His mind kept circling back to the humanoid thaid.

Since he didn't have enough mana to fight against it, he had to leave the lab, and this meant that he hadn't been close enough to absorb its mana when it died, a detail that gnawed at him now.

The implications were clear - he'd missed out on valuable experience points, and by how strong the beast was, it was clear the experience would be massive.

Frustration washed over him, evident in his expression, as he dwelled on the opportunity he had let slip away. Every ounce of experience held immense importance; it could determine whether one lived or perished. As he gained more experience, his strength grew, increasing his odds of survival.

However, he wasn't one to dwell on the negative for long. His mind wandered to the swarm of Acidspitter Arthropods that Samuel and his companions had killed. Each death gave him just one experience points since the Acidspitter Arthropods alone were weak, but it was still something.

Erik heaved a weary sigh, his fingers combing through his tousled hair. It was a strange world they lived in, where one's life revolved around hunting, killing, and training.

It was draining, dangerous, and sometimes it seemed as if the whole world was against him. But it was the reality of his situation. All he could do was continue to get stronger, continue to survive.

Erik's focus shifted towards more mundane matters: food and rest. He walked over to his small pantry, the wooden boards creaking under his weight.

The pantry, though modest, held a variety of vegetables from his recent foraging trip in the forest. They were all in different stages of freshness, and he deftly picked out those on the brink of spoiling.

Chapter 433: Meeting Vanessa

He returned to the stove with a basket full of vegetables. A large iron pot sat atop the stone structure, ready for use. He retrieved a wooden bucket of water from the corner of his cottage. Pouring the clear, cold liquid into the pot, he settled the bucket with a satisfied sigh.

It was now time for the fire. Erik reached into a pile of gathered, dry twigs and logs. These were meticulously placed inside the stove, their brittle forms ready to be consumed.

He struck the flint against the steel, and the resulting spark danced its way to the dry fuel. A hungry flame leaped up, eager to consume the offerings, and soon a warm, crackling fire was burning brightly, casting flickering shadows that danced on the walls of his treetop home.

The flame's heat gradually warmed the water in the pot. He added the vegetables as the bubbles began to rise. Under the flame's watchful eye, the pot's contents began to transform. The vegetables' colors softened, and their nutrients leaked into the water, transforming it into a rich, hearty broth.

Erik moved his small kitchen in an organized rhythm, a dance honed by repetition and necessity. He adjusted the flame as needed, stirring the pot occasionally with a large wooden spoon. The aroma of cooking food quickly filled the cottage, a simple yet comforting scent that spoke of home and safety.

Erik took the time to clean up while his meal was cooking. He tidied his kitchen and put away the remaining vegetables. He ensured the fire was burning at the proper intensity—not too low that it died out, but not too high that it became a hazard.

His meal was finally ready as the stars began to twinkle in the darkening sky. He poured the hot broth into a wooden bowl and sat by the window. A wave of contentment washed over him as he took his first sip of the hot soup.

Despite the arduous journey and missed opportunities, he was alive, safe, and celebrating his birthday with a hot meal. It wasn't a perfect day, but it was his, and that was enough.

The forest outside was a dark tapestry flecked with the glow of the distant torches. Erik gazed into the night, knowing the next day would bring new challenges.

But for the time being, he relished the peaceful silence, solitude, and simple joy of a well-prepared meal. His eyes became heavy, and as he finished his dinner, he drifted off to sleep, ready to face another day in this strange and dangerous world.

Erik awoke from his peaceful slumber as the first rays of dawn pierced the veil of night. The early morning light filtered through the wooden slats in the windows, casting golden stripes across the room.

He felt the usual stiffness in his muscles, a reminder of the previous day's exertions. However, he felt a sense of freshness; resting did wonders for his stiff body.

He got out of bed, and a glance outside confirmed the start of a new day. The sounds of the forest were beginning to stir, the chirping of birds mingling with the distant rustle of leaves, a chorus signaling the beginning of another day in the treetop village.

Erik knew better, despite the apparent calm of the morning. The peace was deceptive, a mask for the threat that loomed over the village.

The situation, however, did not allow them to waste time; the villagers were beginning to stir as well, creating a flurry of activity as they began their day. Erik could hear distant voices, clattering tools, and the soft hum of everyday life beginning to pick up.

His thoughts then turned to the activities of the day. Since arriving in the village, he has been responsible for assisting on the farm due to his knowledge and powers. It was an essential component of the village's means of subsistence.

Life continued even amid the hazards and perils of the forest, and growing food was just as crucial to surviving as protecting oneself from the hazards.

Erik splashed his face with cold water from a basin, a refreshing jolt to fully wake him. He was out the door in a flash, dressed in the unremarkable clothes he wore to work.

The villagers had given him a tunic made of rough-spun yarn, a pair of sturdy pants, and some worn boots. These items constituted his working attire. Before he dashed out the door, he snatched a piece of bread left over from the previous meal and quickly chewed it.

Erik stepped out into the bright morning light, making a final check to ensure his sword was secure by his side. The forest loomed ahead, shrouded in morning mist, its mysteries, and dangers hidden among the foliage.

Erik set off down the worn path that led to the farm, ready to face another day in this scary world, taking a deep breath of the crisp morning air.

The young man was halfway through the wooden bridges when he noticed Vanessa approaching him. Her blond hair glowed like the sun in the morning light, allowing her to be easily identified. She was a fierce fighter whose abilities were admired by everyone in the village.

Amos had entrusted the woman with a monumental task: protecting their home from the looming threat of Frantian soldiers. This was no easy task, but Vanessa had repeatedly demonstrated her determination and tenacity, qualities that earned her the Scout Leader position.

The scout team had become a more cohesive unit under her leadership, with their communication and tactics sharpening with each passing day. Everyone in the village had noticed a ripple of positive change caused by her influence.

However, the brutality of the situation left its mark on even the strongest warriors. Vanessa and her team had engaged with a group of Frantian soldiers two days prior. The battle was fierce, and the villagers were defeated. Only she survived the encounter, raising the level of alertness throughout the city to all-time highs.

Chapter 434: Discussion (1)

However, the woman was not unharmed by the confrontation. Many cruel gashes crisscrossed her body, and the red and angry wounds forced her to remain within the village's boundaries.

Nonetheless, the woman refused to be idle in such a dire situation, and she was relegated, at least for the time being, to duties within the village borders, ensuring the safety of their home from within.

Her eyes betrayed her heart's longing to return to the woods, but she was supposed to rest and get better first. Her typically robust and resilient figure was noticeably hunched over as she moved around due to the pain.

Vanessa called out, "Erik," huffing slightly as she approached him. "Amos needs to talk to you." His heart gave a slight jump. The name of the village leader carried weight, and if he wanted to discuss something, it was rarely trivial, especially if it was about the situation at the cave.

"Did he mention what it's about?" Erik inquired, his brow furrowed in concern. Vanessa shook her head, her hair swaying with the motion. "He didn't say much other than that it was about

yesterday's... events at the cave. Samuel had explained everything to him, but there are some things that only you can help with." Erik nodded, his eyes narrowing as he processed the news.

He had a hazy idea of what this was about. "Alright, I'll go now. Please, tell the others at the fields I will come later." Erik turned on his heel and walked towards the village's hall, his journey to the farm temporarily postponed.

His mind raced with possibilities, but he maintained a steady stride, ready to face whatever lay ahead.

After all, the battle from yesterday may have been over, but its echoes continued to be heard today. Erik inhaled deeply as he made his way lightly along the winding network of wooden walkways that connected the treetop homes. The aroma of fresh dew and moss filled his lungs simultaneously.

The distant hammering of the local blacksmith or the sharp clang of pots from the open-air kitchen occasionally reached his ears, providing a symphony of the beginning of a new day's activities.

The village had a long-standing relationship with the surrounding forest, as evidenced by the massive tree trunks that towered all around them, with their gnarled roots reaching down into the ground below and their great arms reaching up into the heavens.

The homes, tethered to the trees like watchful offspring, exuded a calm allure thanks to their weathered but sturdy wooden facades and the windows, which provided a glimpse into the residents' day-to-day activities.

Erik admired the vibrant murals splashed across various walls as he navigated the labyrinthine paths of the village. The intricate details of the murals told stories of bravery, love, and survival. Erik admired the murals. He could hear his stomach rumbling in anticipation as the delicious scent of freshly baked bread drifted from a nearby house.

At last, the imposing silhouette of the great hall emerged on the ground in the middle of the village. They used the hall, which was an architectural triumph, as a representation of their cohesion and their power. Erik descended quickly from the treetops via a ladder he had brought to enter the building.

He found himself walking into a heated debate as the meeting hall's tall, sturdy wooden doors creaked open. Amos was conversing with a group of people Erik didn't know.

They gathered around the grand table in the hall's center, carved from one of the massive trees that supported their village.

Maps, scrolls, and various strategy tools were scattered across its surface, each marking a section of their village or the surrounding areas. Their expressions were solemn, and their voices were low but purposeful.

Amos' hardened gaze swept across the parchment in front of him, his fingers tracing the familiar lines of their territory. His graying hair fell across his brow, and his lips moved slightly, muttering to himself as he considered the task.

When he noticed Erik's arrival, his face softened slightly, and he motioned for the young man to approach. Despite the circumstances, the meeting hall retained its imposing grandeur. Light poured through the tall windows, highlighting the intricately carved pillars supporting the roof.

The scent of ancient wood mingled with the fresh ink on the scrolls, creating a heady combination that hinted at the importance of the discussions taking place.

Erik, a little intimidated by the intense atmosphere, had no idea what Amos would ask him, but he knew the significance of this meeting.

With the previous day's events still fresh in his mind, he braced himself for the upcoming conversation. Amos turned his gaze toward Erik as he approached. The young man was put at ease by his eyes, which were as clear and sharp as they had been in his youth.

He walked the remaining distance, his footsteps softly echoing against the wooden floor until he came to a halt in front of the elder. Erik saluted Amos with a respectful dip of his head.

"Good morning, Amos," he said, his voice steady but deferential. When the older man's gaze met his, the conversation with the others stopped.

Erik straightened his back, mentally preparing himself for the upcoming discussion. "Erik, I called you here because I talked to Samuel," Amos began, his voice resonating with a deep, grave undertone that demanded respect.

The hall became even quieter as all eyes were drawn to them. "He told me about the situation in the ancient city. He killed the humanoid thaid."

"He did..." Erik responded.

"That is good to hear, but it is not because of the thaids that I called you here," Amos explained.

"Samuel already mentioned that we can easily manage the Acidspitter Arthropods with more people, but he also hinted at some form of technology left behind. Especially a greenhouse, Is that correct?" Erik nodded in response to the elder's inquiry.

"Yes. We saw a giant glass dome inside the underground city, but honestly, I don't know if it will work again. Too much time has passed since they were made and used."

"I see." As he considered the information, the elder looked thoughtful and distant. "So, what do you think we should do?" Amos inquired.

Chapter 435: Discussion (2)

"I believe we could try to read and comprehend the books found there," Erik responded, mirroring Amos' thoughtful expression.

"But that won't be an easy task. I mean, the texts are old and complex, and the knowledge contained in them far surpasses anything you know or understand."

As Amos pondered Erik's words, the hall fell silent once more. After a long pause, the village chief inquired, "Could you study those texts, Erik? You have been educated in the city, after all."

Erik shook his head slightly, his gaze falling to the floor, before responding. "I'm afraid my education wouldn't be much help, Amos. I was trained in basic fighting skills and general knowledge, but nothing as advanced as the technology in the ancient city. Despite its age, it's far more sophisticated than anything we were taught at school."

Disappointment spread as a murmur ran through the room. Erik's words carried weight, carrying the heavy reality that their situation was more dire than they had thought.

The ancient city held the promise of solutions, but they were tantalizingly out of reach, hidden behind the barrier of knowledge they lacked.

"However..." Erik began, his voice trailing off, causing a sea of curious faces to turn toward him.

"What is it, Erik?" Amos asked, his gaze narrowing.

The young man paused, unsure of how to express himself. The idea seemed far-fetched and uncertain, but it was a possibility. He took a deep breath and looked Amos in the eyes before saying,

"There might be a... solution. It's a long shot, but it's worth considering."

"Care to enlighten us?" Amos inquired, his voice echoing throughout the grand hall.

Erik nodded, his gaze fixed on the elder.

"In the city, as part of our education, we were taught extensively about Frant's country - its landscapes, plant life, fauna. You see, the future of every child in the city was to be enlisted in the army at some point, so it was considered essential knowledge."

Erik took a brief pause to gather his thoughts before continuing. The room was silent; all eyes were on him, faces filled with curiosity and anticipation.

Amos' brow furrowed, his gaze inquisitive, as he asked, "I see. And what exactly is the point of all this, Erik?" The question hung in the air, a silent invitation for Erik to elaborate.

"Yeah..." Erik responded, his tone slightly irritated by Amos' apparent impatience. Despite this, he continued, clearing his throat before diving into his explanation.

"In Frant's territory, a certain tree has been heavily influenced by mana, enabling it to produce energy akin to what the sun emits. The Frantians use this to boost their agricultural production sustainably and in a less energy-reliant way. After all, there are few territories where humans can farm, so Frant's biggest production is made underground, where these trees play a role."

He paused to let his words sink in, his gaze scanning the audience in the grand hall. The room fell silent as everyone focused on the young man.

Erik took a deep breath before continuing. "I think we can take some of those trees and bring back one of those. We can plant it within the ancient city's greenhouse. If it works, we can harness its energy to grow our crops underground. Otherwise, I think you have to give up on moving there."

The hall was filled with a mixture of surprise and cautious optimism. Erik's proposal provided a ray of hope in these difficult times. It was a potential solution they were unaware of.

That was normal. With the thaids roaming around, moving an entire village wouldn't be easy.

"These trees grow in the Lumisgrove, southwest of here," Erik replied, a serious expression on his face at the mention of the foreboding location.

The Lumisgrove was known for its dangerous terrains and the creatures that lived there. It was nestled at the foot of the raging Lumifalls, a place where the air was thick with mana.

This intense concentration of energy transformed the local wildlife into fearsome beasts and affected even the vegetation. At school, Erik frequently saw pictures of the place. It was as dangerous as it was mysterious. Most of the plants there started producing a weird glow with different effects. Some attracted thaids, some produced light to attract insects; some others were deadly.

"It's not a journey to be taken lightly," Erik began, his tone becoming grave. "The Lumisgrove is saturated with mana, so dense it's almost tangible. This overabundance of energy has affected the local fauna so much that thaids further mutated there. They've evolved into monstrous versions of themselves, far more dangerous than their counterparts elsewhere."

Erik paused, allowing the grim reality of the situation to sink in. "Many creatures there are bigger, stronger, and faster, with deadly brain crystals."

"Moreover," Erik continued, "the Lumifalls that tower over the grove isn't just a natural spectacle. Due to its mana-rich environment, the waterfall can produce volatile elemental anomalies. Torrents of water can turn into razor-sharp ice shards or searing steam without warning. Besides, all that mana turned stone into Aclatrium, meaning Frantian presence will be massive.

I know for certain that it is."

Erik looked around, noticing the people's worried expressions. "To go there, we'll need your strongest warriors and most cunning minds. People trained in stealth, hunting, fighting, and survival in general. All of these are not skills you can find in the average villager. However, assuming you have them, even then, it will be a dangerous journey. But if you succeed, the payoff could be your salvation."

Even seasoned soldiers in New Alexandria found the prospect of venturing into the Lumisgrove daunting. Erik was aware of the dangers but knew the villagers had no choice if they wanted to move.

One of the villagers, a strong man named Gian, who had been quietly listening from the corner of the hall, stood up. His leather suit creaked as he pushed himself off the wall. As all eyes turned to him, the room fell silent.

"Should we form a small team to undertake this task?" he asked, his voice full of conviction. The crowd murmured. He raised his hand to silence them before proceeding.

Chapter 436: Discussion (3)

"Before you reject the idea, consider this," he said, making sure to make eye contact with everyone in the room, "I want you to take a moment and consider this important point. We have already made plans to send some men into the ancient city to clear out the Arthropods that reside there. No matter where we go, we are bound to find danger," He paused for a second.

"If things are already like this, sending more people on this quest wouldn't make a huge difference in our fighting strength against Frant, so why don't we simply send them there?"

The proposition made by Gian appeared to have a significant effect on the villagers. He had a point. They were already in danger. If they could achieve something substantial in the process, wouldn't it be worth the risk?

The villagers looked at each other, silently communicating and considering the different choices they had before them.

His suggestion was met with a soft sound of agreement from the people present, and then there was a moment of quiet hesitation from Amos.

The heaviness of the reality they were facing was palpable in the room. Every person in the village knew that if they divided their human resources even more, it would make the village more susceptible to an imminent attack from Frant.

"But we can't afford to spread our forces thin," Amos argued, "Sending a group to the ancient city to deal with the Acidspitter Arthropods is already a major strain on our human resources. If Frant decides to attack during their absence, we'd be sitting ducks." His statement seemed to echo the concerns of others in the room.

Most people agreed that this critical mission carried a notable amount of risk to their ability to defend themselves.

Given their limited human resources, the prospect of losing more individuals was simply not doable for them, especially considering the imminent danger posed by the looming Frantian attack.

Despite the intense debate, one fact was clear: they had to act. The village's survival hung in the balance, and they needed every advantage.

"If we don't act," another person said, "we won't have any chance of moving into the underground city. Yes, it's a gamble, but we might need to take it. To increase our chances of success, it is crucial that we carefully plan and execute our operation with efficiency and speed. This approach could be our sole opportunity to achieve our desired outcome."

Deep in thought, Amos pondered over the weight and significance of those uttered words, allowing their meaning to sink in and resonate within him.

As he looked around, his eyes carefully shifted from one face to another, taking in the emotions written all over them. He could see the traces of fear and worry, but he also noticed something else shining through a solid determination to keep going, no matter what.

Even in the face of dire circumstances, the flame of hope continued to burn brightly, refusing to be extinguished.

Everyone's attention shifted to Erik. Their faces showed hope and anticipation. Amos shifted his attention towards Erik, his gaze becoming even more severe and intense than it had been previously.

"Erik," he started, his voice echoing in the hushed hall. "Would you be able to recognize this tree if you saw it?"

Erik paused briefly, feeling his heart race as he processed the question. He looked into the eyes of the villagers. It was evident that they were desperately seeking a solution to their problems.

As he reminisced, his mind wandered back to the days spent in Frant during high school. The memories flooded like an endless stream of knowledge pouring into his eager mind. He couldn't help but recall the countless lessons he had attended. The memories were there, clear as day.

"Yes," he finally replied, his voice filled with a solid and unwavering determination that caught him off guard, leaving him pleasantly surprised. "I can recognize it."

Amos nodded in happiness, feeling a slight relief that washed over his tired facial expressions.

As the room fell into a moment of calm, it appeared as if everyone had let out a collective breath, causing the tension present before to dissipate gradually. However, Erik couldn't help but feel a distinct chill travel down his spine, causing a sudden and unexplainable sense of foreboding to wash over him.

As soon as he spoke up and revealed his ability to identify the plant, he instantly realized that he had unintentionally offered himself up for this dangerous mission.

As Amos started to talk about how the team would be formed, Erik's mind was filled with thoughts and ideas, moving quickly from one to another. He carefully considered the various risks that lay ahead, weighing them against the potential outcomes that could arise.

As Erik stood in the room, surrounded by ongoing discussions, his mind wandered back to the vivid memories of his lessons in New Alexandria.

The Lumisgrove has always been a great interest for him and has been extensively discussed in various lessons.

Its importance in the agricultural sector of Frantia is widely recognized and unquestionable. However, due to its significant importance, numerous warnings were issued regarding the dangers of that particular location.

The loud sound of the cascading water nearby, the Lumisfalls, was just the beginning; the abnormally strong Thaidi, the treacherous terrain, and the unpredictable weather added layers to the threats.

However, the specific type of tree they were searching for, the Auburn Pine, could only be found in that location.

However, he would find more than just that at the location. It was evident that engaging in combat with those Thaidi would provide the young man with significant experience.

Monsters there typically possessed considerably larger amounts of mana than the other creatures in other areas. Although it was risky to go there, it was not a completely useless endeavor.

Amos shifted his attention back to Erik, his face showing signs of wear and tear, and a hint of hesitation caused his features to appear less harsh.

The atmosphere in the room became very quiet, almost as if the room itself was pausing and waiting. The question asked felt very important, and everyone could feel its significance in the air.

"Erik," Amos began, his voice cutting through the bustling conversations that filled the air, causing a calm and respectful silence to settle over the room. "Would you be willing to lead a team to the Lumisgrove?"

The words he spoke reverberated through the air, resonating in the space that separated them and serving as a powerful reminder of the urgent and challenging circumstances they were currently facing.

Amos carefully considered this decision before taking any action. The villagers were placing a great deal of expectation on a young man who had recently come to their village.

At first, they were doubtful about him. However, due to the prevailing circumstances that were in play, they were left with no choice but to pursue the path ahead of them, and at this very moment, Erik emerged as their most favorable and promising option.

The young man felt his heart pounding rapidly in his chest, filled with emotions, as he carefully contemplated the immense magnitude of the request that had been presented to him. As he contemplated the perils ahead, his mind whirled with many thoughts.

He couldn't help but ponder the uncertainties that awaited him on this daring expedition and the weighty burden of responsibility that would be placed squarely upon his shoulders.

Feeling mixed emotions, he inhaled deeply, gathering his thoughts and calming his nerves, before directing his gaze towards the wise and experienced village elder.

After a brief moment of silence, he replied calmly and unwavering, expressing his willingness to proceed.

"I am willing," he responded after a pause, his voice steady. "But there's a condition. You have to teach me this village's neural links developing technique." The request stirred a wave of surprised murmurs around the room.

A hushed silence followed Erik's proposition, quickly shattered by the rising voices of dissent that rippled across the room.

His request, which was straightforward but important, caused a strong reaction of anger and disbelief among the people who had gathered together.

"That's absolutely preposterous!" exclaimed a large and muscular man, his forehead creased with anger, as he shouted from the rear of the room.

His words resonated with the other present individuals who expressed their disbelief and anger. The villagers were very cautious about sharing their secrets, especially when it came to the technique of developing neural links.

This unique knowledge was highly valued and only passed on to individuals who had shown unwavering loyalty and dedication to the community.

Chapter 437: Discussion (4)

"He's nothing more than an outsider!" A second voice rang out, strengthening the wave of disapproval that washed over Erik. The room became cold and hostile, their earlier acceptance of him as a village member a distant memory.

Many viewed Erik's request as an overreach, a blatant assumption that he was now one of them. The young man remained still amidst the commotion, his gaze firmly meeting their accusatory glares.

He knew their concerns and fears but knew it was the ideal time to acquire the technique. Perhaps he could find something to enhance the existing one.

If he could do so, he might gain power more quickly. Suddenly, a booming voice cut through the chaos, instantly silencing the room. "Enough!" Amos issued a command, his voice echoing off the hall's wooden walls.

The authority emanating from the elder's eyes compelled the room to remain silent. The commanding presence of the village chief temporarily quenched the anger in the room as all eyes shifted to him.

"Every one of you has a right to your opinion," Amos continued as he swept his stern gaze across the faces before him.

"However, let's not forget why we're here and even having this conversation. This pertains to the survival of our village, of our people."

His gaze finally landed on Erik, "And this kid; no, this man, despite being an outsider, as you just said, is willing to risk his life for that cause; to help us."

The elder's words echoed throughout the hall, serving as a potent reminder of their dire circumstances. Based on what Erik said, the Lumisgrove posed a great deal of danger. Every aspect of the mission was fraught with peril.

Amos understood that Erik would need more than his current skills and knowledge to overcome such obstacles. He would need to be more powerful, agile, and capable.

The village's technique for developing neural links presented a potential solution to enhance his capabilities for the upcoming task. Amos regarded Erik with a contemplative expression on his face.

The young man's request was unexpected but not unreasonable. He recognized the resolve and determination in Erik's eyes.

Fear was also present, but it was moderated by a sense of responsibility and a willingness to do whatever was required to ensure the survival of their village.

At least, that was how the older man saw it. During his brief stay, Erik became an integral part of their community, willing to risk his life for them, and he greatly assisted them. He had come a long way from the stranger they had once mistrusted.

Amos returned his steady gaze to Erik; a moment of silence passed between them before the elder finally nodded in agreement.

"All right, Erik," he said with a measured and confident tone. "You will learn the neural links developing technique. Vanessa will be your teacher." The rest of the Villagers voiced their objections vehemently, causing the room to erupt in discord.

They had not anticipated that Amos would agree to such an absurd request. Amos raised his hand, again silencing the room with his authority. "Quiet!" he ordered. The older man's gaze swept over the villagers, meeting their objections with a determined stare and a wave of mana.

"But," Amos turned his attention back to Erik. "You must never disclose this technique to anyone outside our village. Can you make this promise?"

Erik didn't hesitate. He was aware of the significance and sensitivity of the information he would receive, and he had no intention of sharing it with anyone, especially not with Frant.

"I swear," he declared, his voice echoing throughout the room. The villagers' eyes were filled with suspicion and doubt as they observed him. If a promise were all that was needed to solve a conflict, the world would have none.

Amos said, with a sense of finality in his voice, "Very well."

"You are dismissed for now. I will have someone inform you when it is time to leave. Be ready; it won't be more than a week." Erik could not resist glancing over his shoulder as he exited the conference room.

The village council erupted into animated discussion behind him as he left. Their voices reverberated through the open door with disbelief, frustration, and resignation. He observed Amos' stern back standing tall among them, his authority and resolve unwavering. He had anticipated opposition, even outrage.

He was, after all, an outsider and a stranger. They had no reason to trust or reveal their secrets to him. However, they had now, against all odds, accepted his proposal. The decision made by Amos was final, and Erik could not help but feel a small surge of satisfaction.

The sun cast long shadows on the wooden structures of the village as he turned away and walked. The crunching of the fallen leaves provided a soothing background for his thoughts.

The path back to the farm was familiar, but the spectacle unfolding before Erik as he rounded the bend was anything but ordinary. A disparate group of villagers had gathered.

Each was heavily armed and covered with winter clothes, their weapons gleaming menacingly in the few sun rays that went past the clouds above and their faces etched with grim resolve.

There were axes, pitchforks, spears, and homemade swords, and each villager held their chosen weapon with a firm and determined grip. This was not a typical hunting trip or a simple foraging excursion.

Erik's suspicions were confirmed by their gloomy facial expressions and hushed conversations. This mission was borne out of necessity—survival. Among this assortment of individuals, a few stood out.

Samuel's broad frame towered over the others as he yelled orders, and his weather-beaten face was stern. Erik could recognize several of the other villagers who were standing on either side of him from their trip to the ancient underground city.

Their familiar faces were exhausted, yet their eyes appeared energized and unwavering in their resolve. Concern crept into Erik's mind as he observed Samuel and the villagers bracing for conflict.

Chapter 438: Samuel's Departure

Erik's expression became more serious as he took in the sight of Samuel's bandaged body. The remnants of the fight that had taken place in the ancient city were clearly visible on the body of the elderly man, and the events of the previous day were still very fresh in his mind.

The usually upbeat and robust man was now decked out in a combination of freshly woven bandages and armor that had been worn in combat. His recent struggles were evident on his skin by the cuts and bruises. His facial lines became more defined due to the pain and exhaustion he was experiencing.

Even though it had only been a day since they had last been to the ancient city together, Erik believed Samuel was already on his way back there. On the other hand, he became aware that this was only feasible as a result of Samuel's strength, which was noticeably superior to that of everyone else in the village, with the exception of Amos.

When Erik looked around at the other villagers, he noticed that one of them was conspicuously absent, Ethan. The Awakener was left with a sense of apprehension due to the absence of his steadfast friend, which further emphasized the gravity of the villagers' predicament.

While maintaining his focus on Samuel, Erik made his way through the crowd. Even the intermittent hushing of voices and the clanging of weapons were not enough to distract his attention from the older man. As Erik got closer to Samuel, the man's conversation with another villager stopped, and both of their eyes turned to look at Erik instead. Samuel was the one who initiated the shift in focus.

"Samuel!"

"Ah... Hello lad," Samuel acknowledged him with a nod, breaking the younger man from his thoughts. The older man's expression was one of calm determination, unwavering, although he was clearly in pain. "What brings you here?" the older man asked.

"I saw you leaving, and I'm curious as to why you're so heavily armed," the young man inquired. However, he already suspected they were returning to the ancient city, this time with enough men to kill the Acidspitter Arthropods.

Samuel's stoic gaze met Erik's questioning one. His face, which typically exuded contagious optimism, now bore an unusual severity.

"We're heading back to the ancient city," he replied, the words heavy with unspoken tension, confirming Erik's suspicions. The older man paused as if he wanted to say more, then added, "We need to clear out the rest of the Acidspitter Arthropods."

The mission they had started working on the day before continued with a heightened sense of urgency, despite the absence of Erik and Ethan. When Samuel spoke to the young man, his face did not show any of the humor it usually does; instead, it was a mask of determination and solemnity, reflecting the disposition of the group leaving.

Erik glanced at the others, all prepared to embark on their journey with similarly determined expressions. Nevertheless, it was Samuel's condition that bothered him most. "Samuel," Erik began in a low, solemn tone, "it's been only a day. Look at yourself; you're still full of wounds."

Concerned, he shifted his gaze from the older man's bandaged arm to the limp he desperately attempted to conceal. "Are you sure about this? Going there in this condition...is it okay?"

Samuel responded to Erik's concern with a wry smile and a light pat on his body as if to dismiss it. "I may not be as young as I used to be, but I'm more resilient than you think," he responded with a chuckle, attempting to lighten the mood.

"Besides, the villagers need me, and sitting around isn't my style. I heal faster when I'm doing something worthwhile."

"If you say so..." Erik's voice faded as he fixed his gaze on the elder figure. As the young man fell silent, an unspoken worry lingered in the air, dense and palpable.

The tension in his body was evident, and his stance was guarded as he took in the sight of the courageous villager, who was wounded but prepared to face the perils that awaited him in the ancient city.

Samuel merely smiled in acknowledgment of Erik's obvious concern. It was a gentle expression that communicated comprehension and assurance.

"Don't worry, lad, this will be a walk in the park," he promised, his tone echoing the determination he exhibited in his eyes.

The two engaged in a brief conversation, their words low and solemn against the background of villagers preparing for their expedition.

Erik imparted his knowledge of Acidspitter Arthropods with the hope that it would provide Samuel and his team with an additional layer of protection.

Samuel nodded as he listened attentively to Erik's words, his experience as a warrior evident in his attention to detail.

The young man's last words were a simple and heartfelt plea to the man he had worked with every day for months and who was the first to accept him as a village member.

"Be careful, Samuel." His eyes met the elder's, and a silent promise passed between them. The simple gesture of Samuel's nod conveyed a great deal of comprehension.

Thus, their dialogue came to a close. Samuel turned away and joined the villagers already on the move; as Erik observed, his heart was stirred by the sight of them advancing, especially Samuel, with all his injuries and exhaustion.

With a final glance toward the departing villagers, Erik turned his steps toward the farm.

The desolate appearance that the place had when he first arrived was in stark contrast to what he was seeing now. Even though winter had already begun, the once barren ground produced green shoots that reached for the sun's warmth.

The farmland was adorned with numerous rows of crops, and their vivid hues created a beautiful canvas against the backdrop of the natural winter landscape. It was very strange.

A calmness descended upon the land, a pleasant change of pace from the daily struggles they were forced to go through.

Chapter 439: An unexpected visit (1)

Ethan was right in the middle of this scene, toiling away alongside the other villagers. His hands moved with fluidity from years of practice, and he tended to the plants with expertise earned through countless hours of toiling in the heat.

Despite the beads of sweat dotting his brow, the look on his face was complete happiness. His concentration was unwavering as he worked methodically to tend to the crops, the cadence of his actions falling in lockstep with those of his colleagues.

Erik walked up to Ethan, and as he did so, a grin tugged at the corner of his mouth as he observed his friend hard at work. Ethan, noticing Erik's arrival, paused in his work to give a nod of acknowledgment.

His hands were stained with earth, symbolizing his commitment and contribution to the land they were reclaiming. His eyes now shone with a determination that had been honed over time. They had been filled with fear and uncertainty in the past, but now it was different, thanks to Erik and their collective effort.

The Awakener was impressed by the progress made on the farm. The once desolate land had been transformed into a shining example of what was possible thanks to the tenacity of the villagers.

They had transformed an area that had been devoid of life into one that was teeming with vegetation and had become a source of food abundance. The farm was doing very well.

He observed Ethan as he returned to his work, his movements smooth and deliberate.

Erik knew it was time for him to depart from the farm as the sun started to set in the sky, turning the world various shades of gold and orange, intermingled with the blue and white clouds.

He and Ethan had been toiling in the soil side by side for the better part of the day, planting, watering, and tending to the crops. Their hands had been working diligently.

He only had to work the soil, collect the vegetables that needed to be collected, and nurture the plants because he was not required to sell the products; however, everything was required to support the village's population.

In this case, he did not have to make any effort to make the plants collectible and marketable. To tell the truth, it was invigorating.

"Ethan!" Erik yelled out as he wiped the sweat off his brow with the back of his hand. His hard work throughout the day had left his muscles sore, and he could feel the fatigue working its way into his bones.

Ethan raised his head from his assumed position, crouching with his hands covered in dirt. When his eyes met Erik's, an instant mutual comprehension passed between them, they had been working on the farm for several hours; now it was time to head back home.

Erik continued, "I'm going, I'm too tired..." his voice carried over the rustling of the few leaves still on the trees and the far-off sounds of the village. As he stretched, his hair was ruffled by the light breeze, and he could feel his back popping from the movement.

Ethan acknowledged his wish with a nod and a teasing grin. "Rest well, Erik," he replied with a friendly "See you tomorrow." As he waited for Erik to finish gathering his belongings, he observed the setting sun casting long shadows across the farmland.

Erik gave the farm one last wave before setting off, leaving it in his wake. As he made his way through the village, the sights and sounds that were already familiar to him wrapped themselves around him like a warm blanket.

His footsteps were soft as they brushed up against the worn path. Warm light emanated from within the houses built on top of the towering trees. He could hear the distant laughter of the villagers, the hum of conversations, the familiar sounds of life winding down after a long day.

This light cast a warm glow that danced on the path before him. The world around Erik was covered in a gentle cloak of twilight by the time he made it to his home in the branches of a tree, just as the last rays of the sun disappeared beyond the horizon.

As he made his way up the ladder to his house, his muscles groaned in protest at the movement because they were already sore and tired from the day's labor.

But once he reached the peak, he found himself overcome with a sense of calm as he looked out over the sleepy village and the dimly lit farmland below him.

He was tired, but it was a good kind of tired. The kind that came from a day of hard work shared labor and shared stories. With a final glance at the twinkling lights of the village below, Erik turned, pushed open the door of his house, and stepped inside.

The young man gave in and collapsed onto his wooden bed, a wave of exhaustion washing over him like a tide. The reassuring backdrop of the pleasant aroma of freshly cut wood and the gentle buzzing of insects outside put his worn-out thoughts to rest.

As his mind was clouded with the day's events, a persistent thought made its way to the surface, like a buoy in a turbulent sea - he needed to increase the number of his neural links.

His days were spent engaging in strenuous physical labor, and his nights focused on activities that would increase his neural links. Erik had been utilizing Hais's brain crystal power to help facilitate the process, guiding the mana through the links to practice the technique.

But due to work, he often had to pause and focus entirely on the task at hand, making it so that the time he had available for making new neural links was far from enough.

Unwilling to waste any more time, Erik sat up, rolling his shoulders. With a deep, cleansing breath, he began the training process. He focused on the brain crystal, tuning out everything else. His room, the chirping of the insects outside, and the soft rustling of the few winter leaves all faded away, leaving only the crystal and its intricate workings.

He could feel the subtle flow of energy in his brain, the neural links lighting up one after the other in a stunning display of interconnectedness. He could feel the mana affecting the links, trying to create more. The process was slow, painstaking, but every bit of progress was a step towards becoming stronger.

But after five minutes, Erik's eyes fluttered open as a sharp knock on his door shattered the tranquility of his house.

The loud and insistent knocking echoed throughout the cramped space that he occupied. When he finally managed to rouse his sleep-deprived body, there was a brief period of disorientation.

A grumble slipped past his lips, a soft protest against the disruption. He'd been close to making a new neural link, and that distraction suddenly interrupted the achievement.

"Oh, my god..."

Erik forced himself off the bed he was seated on, even though his muscles resisted the abrupt movement. His irises were knitted together in a frown, and his eyelids were drawn together due to tiredness.

He moved towards the entrance with more muscle memory than conscious thought as he approached the door. His annoyance was palpable, a simmering undercurrent that colored his movements.

Chapter 440: A night Visit (1)

A completely unexpected sight greeted Erik when he pulled open the door. Vanessa was visible there, standing in the dappled light from outside.

She stood with her back against the door frame, the moonlight shining on her face. Her golden hair fell over her shoulders and beautifully framed her face.

Erik was taken aback and stood there, dumbfounded, briefly. Then the dawning of comprehension occurred: Vanessa would not have shown up at his house at such an ungodly hour without having a compelling reason to do so.

His annoyance faded, and an increasing sense of dread gradually replaced it. His eyes met hers in a silent question, and then he moved aside to make room for her to enter, his weariness forgotten for the time being.

After all, it appeared the night would continue for a while longer. "Vanessa, what are you doing here at this hour? Is everything okay?"

"Hello, Erik," Vanessa said in a steady voice. Her usual fiery demeanor was replaced with a subtle calmness, starkly contrasting Erik's exhausted but curious look.

"Amos sent me," she added, her gaze fixed on Erik. "He said it's time for you to learn our village's secret technique." Erik stared at her, momentarily taken aback by her unexpected revelation. He knew Amos would send her during these days, but he didn't expect at this ungodly hour.

The secret technique of the village, the one that had been so closely guarded and was a matter of pride for them all, was now to be taught to him.

He was aware of the gravity of the situation, but he didn't care. He could barely suppress a smile once he learned the woman's purpose.

Leaning against the door frame, Erik folded his arms and raised an eyebrow in a surprised but non-confrontational manner.

He asked, with a voice that betrayed the lingering traces of sleep and fatigue, "Did Amos really send you at this hour?"

Vanessa nodded, her eyes reflecting the seriousness of her task. The soft moonlight highlighted the grim set of her mouth and the determined glint in her gaze.

"Right now?" Erik asked as he rubbed the nape of his neck, his tired eyes trying to determine whether or not the circumstance was absolutely necessary.

Vanessa met his gaze with one of her own, which she held steady the entire time. She affirmed, "Yes, right now. Amos wants you to learn our neural links-establishing technique as soon as possible." Erik grew silent as his mind raced with various ideas, questions, and concerns. Despite everything, there was one thing that was crystal clear.

This was a defining moment for him, as the technique could be used to improve his current one. The two of them shared a look of understanding before he nodded.

Erik heaved a sigh. Even though it was an odd hour, the impending dangerous mission he would face justified taking such extreme actions. It took him a few moments to take in all of the information.

His brain, foggy from lack of sleep, was doing its best to keep up with the unexpected events.

A revitalized sense of determination washed over him as he nodded in acknowledgment. Even though he was far away from the cozy confines of his bed, he was determined to complete the task at hand because of how important it was.

Erik gave Vanessa a definite nod and motioned for her to come inside.

He uttered, "Alright, let's get started," with an air of newly discovered resolve in his voice.

As Vanessa stepped inside, the door closed behind them, shutting out the soft glow of the moonlight.

Even though it was a late hour, it was evident that the night had not yet ended. The real work had just begun.

"Sorry about the mess," Erik apologized, looking around the room, slightly embarrassed. His earlier concentration on neural link training had left the room in disarray.

Vanessa shook her head, dismissing his concerns. "I don't mind, Erik," she said, showing an understanding smile. "We're not here for a formal meeting."

Her casual words partially alleviated the tension in the room. Erik made space on the floor by rearranging his belongings and moving some of them to the side.

They eventually found a comfortable position, sitting cross-legged opposite one another.

The atmosphere in the room was one of expectation and silence. The glow of the embers from the stove cast long shadows on the wooden walls of the cabin, painting their faces in a soft and warm light.

When it came to acquiring new skills, Erik was not used to being in an environment like this one, but he ignored any apprehensions he might have had about the situation. Vanessa was present, and he was eager to absorb new information.

<System, can you analyze the technique now that she will explain it? Maybe we can use it to improve the one we already have,> Erik said in his mind to the biological supercomputer.

[ANSWER: YES. IT WOULD BE GOOD IF YOU PRACTICED IT, SO I COULD ANALYZE THE MANA FLOW BETTER.]

<Will do...>

Then, Vanessa started speaking, her tone remaining even and authoritative throughout.

"The technique we use in the village is unique; it's based on our understanding of mana and its relationship with our bodies and minds. Essentially, it's a method to create more neural links. However, the process is not as simple as it sounds."

She glanced at Erik to see if he was following along, and she continued when she saw that he was.

"As you are well aware, mana is considered an internal power source, something you draw in and manipulate from the brain crystal. As much as we know, the technique you use in the city is like building a bridge from the brain to the brain crystal, but this is not our technique works."

Erik paid close attention to her and followed her every word as she spoke. The explanation that Vanessa provided was comprehensive and patient, walking him through each stage of the process step by step. She talked about concentrating and how mana must be channeled carefully and deliberately through the neural links to be effective.

"The neural links are like bridges, connecting the two organs, yes, but depending on how you build the bridge, things maybe be different," Vanessa illustrated, "They allow your brain to handle amounts of mana and control it more efficiently. However, creating these links is a delicate process. If done incorrectly, it can lead to mental exhaustion or even damage."

Erik acknowledged the significance of her words with a nod, taking them all in. He had learned the hard way in the past that mishandling mana could have disastrous effects, and he was aware of this.

Despite the effectiveness of this strategy, it was not without its share of potential drawbacks. On the other hand, he was aware of its significance. If he had more neural links, he would be able to process mana in a more effective manner, which would boost his abilities and overall power.