

BIOLOGICAL 471

Chapter 471: The Lumisgrove (2)

Erik continued to lead the party deeper into the Lumisgrove, directing them with great care along the verdant paths that wound their way through the towering vegetation.

Their objective was to reach a specific region of the forest that was referred to as the Lumisfalls.

The stunning aesthetics of cascading water and lush greenery were not the only factors that gave the Lumisfalls their name; what lay beneath the falls inspired the name.

Erik began explaining where they were going by saying, "The Lumisfalls are unique," Erik began, his voice steady and authoritative as he explained their destination.

"Yes, there are waterfalls. But the mana in the water has had an unusual effect on the rocks below. It's turned them into something extraordinary, which will be very common for you if we successfully retrieve the Auburn Pine."

He remained silent to give his companions time to process the information.

"The rocks have been transformed into Aclaitrium," he finally revealed, his gaze fixed on the path ahead.

After hearing his words, the group immediately fell into a hushed silence.

Aclaitrium was an extremely uncommon mineral that commanded a high price.

It was recognized for its capacity to store vast quantities of mana, which led to its classification as an essential resource intensely sought after for its many potential uses.

"It's not just the Auburn Pine they're after," Erik explained, referring to the Frantian soldiers they'd been evading. "The Aclaitrium is a precious resource too. It's another reason why Frant has such a vested interest in this place."

Ava furrowed her brow in curiosity, glancing toward Erik as she posed her question. "Why is this Aclaitrium so important? What makes it so coveted by the Frantians?" she asked, her voice echoing softly within the quiet expanse of the forest.

Erik turned to face her, his expression thoughtful. "Aclaitrium is known for its remarkable mana conductivity," he began, his voice level as he laid bare the information. "It's one of the few minerals that can greatly enhance the effectiveness of brain crystal powers thanks to its high mana conductivity."

He paused, looking at each of his companions, their faces alight with intrigue and surprise. "Those who can imbue their weapons with elemental powers, or even poison, find Aclaitrium invaluable," he continued. "It's affordable, yet has a level of mana conductivity that can at least double the efficiency of these powers."

Garrett, Marcus, Ava, and Alexia went silent as their eyes moved back and forth between Erik and the scenery surrounding them.

The idea that such a resource could be concealed beneath the Lumisfalls was undeniably alluring, leading their thoughts down a tempting path.

"Should we...take some for ourselves, then?" Garrett suggested, his gaze turning towards Erik for approval.

But Erik shook his head, a stern look crossing his face. "Our mission is to retrieve the Auburn Pine. Any detour could put us at risk," he said firmly.

"Besides," he added, his expression softening slightly, "the ancient underground city Samuel has probably cleared is filled with Aclaitrium, ready to be harvested."

The group was silent as everyone processed what Erik had just said.

The allure of Aclaitrium was strong, but they decided that the risks involved in obtaining it were not worth putting their mission in danger.

They knew Erik was right, even though the prospect of owning a piece of the highly prized mineral was very appealing.

It would have been wiser for them to proceed with caution and keep their attention on their objective rather than allow themselves to be swayed by the allure of quick gain.

They nodded in agreement as the reality of their situation began to sink in.

They stifled their curiosity and refocused their attention on the activities that needed to be completed.

After a long journey through the Thaid-infested forest, the group finally reached a point where they could not continue.

They were forced to take cover after a sudden noise rang throughout the Lumisgrove.

A jarring cacophony reverberating eerily between the towering trees shattered the tranquil hum of the forest, which was broken by the unmistakable sound of engines.

Erik abruptly turned his attention toward the noise, and his eyes narrowed in anticipation. There was no way to misunderstand it. Frantian vehicles were the source of the roaring engines.

The vehicles transported soldiers from the Frantian army deeper into the enchanted forest.

Erik's heart raced in his chest, beating at a faster rhythm that mirrored the rising adrenaline levels in his system.

The rest of the group turned to him, their expressions mirroring his own.

Tension gripped them, each acutely aware of the danger the approaching vehicles signified.

It was not the mere presence of the Frantians that worried them but rather the implications of their proximity.

Ava's eyes flashed over to Alexia, and her concerned gaze widened as she looked at her.

She spoke louder than a whisper, asking, "What do we do?"

Just as the harsh grumble of engines perforated the tranquil silence of the Lumisgrove, Alexia's ears perked up, her hazel eyes narrowing with a discerning glint.

She stood still momentarily, processing the sound, until recognition dawned in her eyes. Instantly, a sense of urgency washed over her.

"Hide, now!" she commanded her voice a mere whisper, but the intensity behind it palpable.

Her words' underlying note of urgency didn't go unnoticed, and the group sprang into action without a second thought.

The towering trees of the Lumisgrove suddenly became their shield, the luminous foliage a curtain that veiled them from prying eyes.

With their hearts pounding in their chests and their breaths held captive, they ducked behind the nearest colossal tree. The bark, rough and calm under their touch, was a comforting reminder of their cover.

Garrett quickly dropped to his knees; his back pressed against the tree, his face ghostly pale but determined.

Ava and Marcus were next to him, their eyes wide and alert. Even though Marcus was still visibly weakened from his recent injury, the stubborn glint in his eyes told them he was far from backing down.

On the other hand, Erik was crouched near the edge of their makeshift cover; his gaze fixed on the ominous noise's direction.

Given the circumstances, he maintained a level of composure that was almost unsettling.

His hand made a cryptic motion, suggesting the others sit down and be quiet.

They were in obvious danger as they huddled together for protection behind the towering tree. The air was thick with tension.

The noise became increasingly audible and closer, the rumble of engines resonating menacingly throughout the woods.

But hidden behind the gargantuan tree, Erik, Ava, Marcus, Garrett, and Alexia held their breaths, waiting anxiously as the danger passed by, unaware of their presence.

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Alexia watched Erik cautiously peek around the corner while concealed behind a massive tree.

Erik's eyes were fixed on vehicles making their way through the forest.

His face appeared taut due to the deeply etched lines of concentration on his features.

The rumble of the engines became increasingly audible, and the ground began to vibrate due to the intensity.

Alexia took a few deep breaths as her heart raced in her chest, and she clenched her hands around the hilt of the weapon she was holding.

She had never before witnessed such a massive procession in her life.

Ava shifted her position next to her, turning her attention to Erik.

Beside her, Ava shifted, her gaze focused on Erik. She leaned in closer, her voice barely audible over the roar of the engines. "How many are there?" she asked, her tone laced with worry.

Erik didn't look away from the scene unfolding before them, his gaze steady. "At least a hundred vehicles," he replied, quiet but steady. "Each carrying about four men."

Ava's eyes widened as she processed the information and felt a shortness of breath.

One hundred vehicles indicated that they were outnumbered by a significant margin.

The fact that they were all moving in the same direction as them meant that the task became much more difficult.

Erik turned to face them; his expression was solemn. "They're heading towards the Lumisfalls," he informed them.

The news was like a punch to the gut. Their destination was swarming with Frantian soldiers. Suddenly, their mission seemed much more daunting than before.

Marcus's resolute voice was the first to break the tension-filled silence, and his eyes darted between Alexia and Erik as he spoke.

"What do we do now?" he inquired, his tone laced with determination.

Alexia's eyes narrowed as she considered their alternatives, her mind racing with thoughts of strategy and survival as the situation continued to deteriorate.

She whirled around to look at Marcus with a determined expression.

"We need a plan," she replied, her voice steady. "We can't afford to engage them head-on. We must find a way to navigate around them, find an alternate route to the Lumisfalls."

Erik nodded in agreement while his eyes swept the area around them as he considered their constrained options.

"Agreed," he continued, the conviction in his tone audible.

"We'll have to be stealthy, find a path that keeps us hidden from their sight. We can't risk a confrontation."

Ava interjected, her voice tinged with concern. "But what about Marcus?" she asked, glancing at the injured man who stood resolute but visibly weakened. "He didn't recuperate fully yet."

Marcus squared his shoulders, determination etched upon his face despite his injuries. "I'll manage," he assured them, his voice firm and resolute.

"We can't let this setback deter us. We've come too far." Alexia placed a hand on Marcus' shoulder, her touch reassuring.

"We'll support you every step of the way," she said, her voice filled with determination.

Erik's eyes flashed a steely resolve as he moved his gaze from one member of the group to another of the same group.

"Don't worry; we will try to avoid fighting as much as possible. Though, it may appear necessary at one point, so be ready," he proclaimed, his tone remaining unmoved throughout the statement.

Erik stepped forward while keeping his attention fixed on the line of vehicles receding into the distance.

His thoughts were racing with potential tactical approaches.

He turned to face his friends, the intent in his voice growing stronger by the second.

"Before we make any moves, we need to gather more information," he suggested, his tone steady and focused. "We should scout their camp, assess their numbers, and understand their positions."

Alexia gave a confident nod, her eyes gleaming with the will to succeed.

She affirmed, with a firm tone in her voice, "Agreed. Knowing their strength and layout will give us an advantage in planning our next steps."

"Let's follow them," she said, her gaze steady as she locked eyes with each group member.

Erik's brow furrowed as he considered Alexia's suggestion's potential benefits and drawbacks.

He was well aware of the inherent dangers of approaching the adversary more closely; however, their mission required knowledge and comprehension on their part.

Following a brief period of introspective reflection, he nodded his assent.

"If we want to succeed, we must gather as much information as possible. It won't be easy, but it's a risk we must take," Erik said, trying to convince the others since they were reluctant.

Ava and Garrett looked at each other with expressions of equal parts resolve and anxiety as they exchanged glances.

They were aware of the gravity of the situation and the risks that could be encountered in the future.

They were ready to follow their leader's instructions and nodded in agreement.

They moved stealthily into position, their steps quiet and organized as they followed in the footsteps of the convoy in the darkness.

Their perceptions honed in, making them more sensitive to even the most minute shifts in their surroundings.

The sound of snow crunching under their boots, the rustling of leaves, and the far-off hum of vehicles' engines all came together to create a symphony of caution.

They pushed through the physical strain hour after hour, their resolve remaining unshaken despite the task's difficulty.

Despite the Lumisgrove's otherworldly beauty being all around them, they focused on the goal of their mission.

They got closer and closer as time went on, both of their hearts thumping furiously in their chests.

They were getting closer and closer to the Lumisfalls as the sound of the rushing water grew louder, a constant reminder of the power and energy that were still to come.

They could see glimpses of the cascading waterfalls through the openings in the thick vegetation, which cast an ethereal glow that illuminated the surrounding area.

The scene was mesmerizing, but they couldn't let their focus wander because their mission required it.

Erik's sharp eyes combed over the landscape, looking for any advantage they could use, when he suddenly had a flash of recognition.

He turned his attention to a slender path that wound upward and veered off to the right of the waterfalls as it ascended.

Their route led to a natural perch that was situated at a higher elevation and could provide them with a more unobstructed view of their surroundings.

He stopped the group by signaling with a raised hand that they should wait.

As Erik continued to describe his discovery, the others quickly followed his lead and turned their attention to him.

"Look," he hushed, his voice carrying a tone that was a combination of eagerness and trepidation.

"There's a path over there that leads up to higher ground. We might be able to get a better view from up there."

Ava's eyebrows furrowed as the question piqued her interest.

"Do you think it's safe?" She asked with some uneasiness in her tone of voice.

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Erik thought about her question momentarily, weighing the risks and benefits.

"It's difficult to say for sure," he replied, his voice measured.

"However, if we proceed cautiously and remain vigilant, I don't think there would be problems."

Garrett nodded, his eyes reflecting a mix of determination and curiosity. "It's worth a shot," he added.

"If we can get a better view of their camp and any potential threats, it could greatly aid our planning."

Alexia's gaze shifted between Erik and the path, a mixture of excitement and trepidation on her face. "Let's go," she said, her voice strong and determined. "But remember that we must be cautious and stick together."

The group resumed their journey with a collective nod, cautiously approaching the path.

Each step was deliberate, and their senses were sharpened as they traversed the terrain.

The path was narrow and winding, with lush vegetation and jagged rocks bordering it.

The Lumisfalls revealed themselves in all their majestic glory as they ascended.

The cascading water glowed with an otherworldly radiance, casting a soft, ethereal glow on the surrounding landscape.

Finally, they arrived at the summit, their breath taken away by the view that unfolded before them.

They could see the sprawling camp below and the Frantian soldiers moving about with purpose from their elevated position.

The camp was a frenetic hub of activity, teeming with soldiers, machinery, and vehicles.

The sheer size of the operation was mind-boggling as if a small city had sprung up in the heart of Lumisfalls.

The metal frames of the vehicles gleamed from the glow released by the Aclaitrium and the surrounding flora, and they were scattered throughout the area.

Their engines roared as they moved back and forth, transporting supplies and equipment.

Erik's pupils constricted as he watched the machines extract the valuable Aclaitrium ore from the stream at the base of the falls.

The enemy had spared no expense in pursuing this valuable mana-conductive ore.

Soldiers in Frantian military gear patrolled the camp, their laser weapons gleaming menacingly.

They patrolled the area with strict discipline, their presence a constant reminder of the danger they posed.

Some carried melee weapons, their blades gleaming in the dappled light, ready to engage in close combat or use their powers.

An undercurrent of tension hung thickly over the camp, charging the air with energy.

Workers worked hard, their hands moving quickly as they processed Aclaitrium ore.

The clanking of machinery, the shouting of orders, and the whirring of engines blended into an industrial cacophony.

Erik scanned the camp, noting strategic points, potential weak points, and the overall layout.

He reported his findings to the rest of the group, who were taken aback by the magnitude of the enemy's presence.

It was obvious that avoiding the camp and taking the Auburn Pine would necessitate meticulous planning and execution.

Erik's keen eyes caught a sight that made his heart skip a beat.

He spotted an Auburn Pine among the dense vegetation of the Lumisgrove.

Its vibrant red foliage stood out against the lush greenery like flames, casting a mesmerizing glow that seemed to dance with ethereal light.

The Auburn Pine stood tall and majestic, its branches reaching for the heavens, a testament to nature's tenacity.

Its gnarled and weathered trunk bore the marks of time and whispered ancient wisdom.

But the radiance it emitted truly distinguished this tree—a soft, warm glow that the naked eye could almost see.

"That's what we're looking for!" Erik pointed in the direction of the Auburn Pine.

The others immediately perched to look at it, but they couldn't help but notice that it was in the middle of the enemy camp.

The gravity of their mission became apparent as they watched from their hidden vantage point.

They were up against an organized force armed with advanced technology and needed to go inside their camp to complete their mission.

The odds were stacked against them, and their success would be determined by their ability to exploit flaws and work as a cohesive unit.

Garrett's voice broke the tension as he turned to face the group, his eyes searching for direction.

"What do we do now?" he asked, his tone tinged with trepidation.

Alexia, ever poised and astute, stepped forward to share her thoughts.

Her voice was firm, cutting through the air with conviction.

"We should search for other trees," she suggested, her gaze fixed on the camp. "It's too dangerous to go inside there."

Her words hung in the air, and the group exchanged puzzled looks.

The mission and the importance of the task weighed heavily on them.

Erik, the group's calm and contemplative member, interjected with a note of caution.

"Finding more Auburn Pines won't be easy," he admitted solemnly.

"These trees are known to have a slow growth rate and are rare to come by. Since we can't stay in the Lumisgrove for long, it would be better to take THAT Auburn Pine..."

Erik went on, offering an alternative solution to their predicament.

"Instead of searching for fully grown trees, we could enter the enemy camp and gather seeds from this Auburn Pine tree," he proposed, his gaze steady and resolute.

"Once we return to the village, I can nurture and hasten the growth of new saplings with my power. That's why we came here in the first place."

His words struck a chord with the group, sparking hope amid uncertainty.

Despite their difficulties, the prospect of using Erik's unique abilities to cultivate new Auburn Pines filled them with hope.

Garrett creased his brow as he considered Erik's suggestion.

"So, we gather what we can from this tree and trust Erik's power to grow more?" He clarified, with a hint of curiosity in his voice.

Alexia's brow furrowed in concern as she spoke up again, her voice filled with trepidation.

"Erik, going into the enemy camp is too dangerous. We could get caught or worse. There must be another way."

Erik met her gaze, his expression calm yet determined. A glint of confidence flickered in his eyes as he replied, his voice carrying a hint of mystery.

"Don't worry, Alexia. I have an idea," he said, his words hanging in the air, leaving the group intrigued and eager for more.

Chapter 474: Emily's vision

In the heart of the once-thriving city, now a desolate wasteland stood. The towering buildings that once touched the sky now stood as decaying husks, their windows shattered and their walls crumbling. Nature had reclaimed its territory as vines snaked their way up the crumbling facades, reclaiming the city street by street.

The echo of footsteps was the only sound that broke through the eerie silence. These, however, were not the sounds of human feet. No, these were the haunting footsteps of twisted and distorted humanoid monsters. Their eyes shone with an unnatural light, an evil hunger within them.

Once alive with life and vibrant energy, the streets were now used as hunting grounds for these abominations. Their elongated limbs and sharp claws revealed their true predatory nature as they moved with predatory grace. They sniffed the air for signs of life, their senses heightened by the relentless pursuit of prey.

Buildings that were once homes and businesses became safe havens for those unfortunate enough to be trapped within the city. Broken windows and boarded-up doors provided only a brief reprieve from the horrors patrolling the streets.

The once-thriving city was now in ruins, a testament to the destructive force that had once ravaged its proud inhabitants. The echoes of a lost civilization lingered, telling stories of a time when the city bustled with human activity and the streets were alive with life.

It was now a place of despair and terror. The monsters were free to roam; their hunger was insatiable, and their intentions were clear. The only instinct that drove those who remained, hiding in the shadows, hoping to escape this hellish nightmare, was survival.

Emily's senses were heightened as she walked through the city, attuned to the smallest of sounds amid the city's chaos.

<This is not New Alexandria,> she thought.

Judging by how old and destroyed everything was, this place had been destroyed a long time ago, and despite what was currently going on in New Alexandria, the situation was far from desperate.

She was still trying to understand where she was when a distant noise reached her ears, a faint echo in the desolate city among the clashing of metal and the roars of the creatures.

She instinctively turned her gaze toward the source of the strange sound. Her determination grew stronger with each step, bringing her closer to the noise. Emily moved with caution and curiosity, following her instincts through the rubble-strewn streets.

Her fear grew with each passing moment, fueled by apprehension. Emily couldn't shake the feeling that this noise had meaning, a hint of something bigger hidden among the ruins. Her heart rate increased as she got closer to the source, and her senses sharpened.

She eventually found the source of the noise. It was an old and ruined plaza. Emily went there with steadfast determination to see what was going on.

<What...?>

She discovered a group of fighters standing together, their collective form exuding strength. Three women and five men comprised the group, each with a distinct skill set and unwavering resolve. Their eyes burned with the fiery determination to protect one another and overcome the imminent threat that surrounded them, despite their worn, tattered clothing.

<Those are...!>

Then Emily noticed someone among the men, someone she didn't expect to see again, but there he was.

<IS HE ALIVE?!>

The air crackled with intense energy as the horde of humanoid monsters closed in, their grotesque forms lurching forward. The fighters formed a defensive line, their weapons gleaming in the rays of sunlight that pierced through the crumbling structures.

They charged forward, a whirlwind of blades and unyielding spirit, with a synchronized battle cry. Each fighter was fighting their own battle against the monsters; their movements were a blur of precision and agility. Swings of blades and thrusts of spears sliced through the air, leaving their imprints on the creatures' twisted bodies.

The monsters retaliated with frenzied ferocity, their claws slashing through the air, but the fighters moved as a unified unit. They used their combined strength and skill to avoid attacks, cover each other's blind spots, and launch devastating counterattacks.

As the group engaged in a fierce battle against the horde, metal colliding with flesh echoed through the desolate streets. Each clash demonstrated their combined prowess, with years of training and shared experiences shining through in their seamless coordination.

The group's resolve grew stronger with each defeated monster. They pushed forward; their movements were fluid and strategic, taking advantage of the surrounding ruins. They outmaneuvered the monsters with calculated precision, leaping from debris, scaling walls, and using crumbling structures as obstacles.

Sweat trickled down their brows, mixing with dirt and grime, but their resolve was unwavering. They fought not only for their survival but also for their comrades' safety and well-being.

However, as Emily started levitating and going up in the sky, she started to see the sheer scale of the monsters' numbers. The city was full of them, and they were all going to the fighters.

"AMBER! ERIK!" Emily yelled, but her voice couldn't reach her friends, no matter how loud she yelled. Then darkness engulfed her, and she regained consciousness after passing through a light tunnel.

Emily was startled awake, drenched in a cold sweat that clung to her skin. She sat up in bed, gasping for air, her chest heaving with the fear that lingered in her vision. Her heart beat quickly in her chest, echoing in her ears.

Emily's surroundings gradually came into focus as the remnants of her vision faded. She was back in her room, the familiar furniture and soft lighting starkly contrasting the haunting images that had

just consumed her mind. The damp and tangled sheets clung to her, evidence of the intensity of her experience.

Her trembling hands reached up to wipe the sweat beads dripping down her brow. Despite the room's warmth, Emily shivered, her body still gripped by the fear that had enveloped her during the vision. Her dream images replayed in her mind, vivid and unsettling.

Even in the safety of her room, she felt vulnerable and exposed due to the lingering sense of danger. Emily wrapped her arms around herself, seeking comfort and reassurance in the familiar embrace. Her breathing gradually steadied, but her mind remained racing, trying to make sense of the cryptic messages that her visions conveyed.

Chapter 475: Amber's anguish

In New Alexandria, the situation was not ideal. A growing threat now threatened the formerly vibrant city.

The Heniate's parasites, those insidious creatures that had infiltrated the city, were multiplying at a frightening rate.

Their presence had spread like wildfire, infecting innocent people and causing havoc in their wake.

What began as isolated cases quickly grew into a full-fledged epidemic.

The city's busy streets and regular life obscured the parasites' presence, allowing them to thrive in the darkness and remain hidden.

Individuals infected with these creatures went about their daily routines, oblivious to the impending danger, but it was clear they would mutate and kill people soon.

The number of infected people increased exponentially as the days turned into weeks.

Cunning parasites easily found new people to infect, their insatiable drive to proliferate, driving them to seek out new victims.

As the gravity of the situation became clear, panic set in. This enemy was encircling the city and slaughtering its inhabitants.

However, despite the situation's gravity, hope was still on the horizon. According to official sources, the military forces engaged in a campaign to eliminate the Heniate were returning to New Alexandria.

Rumors spread among the population, whispering of the military's return even though they had been forced to postpone their mission to eradicate the Heniate.

People clung to these stories of hope, desperate for solace in believing that salvation was on the way. However, as the days passed, doubts began to surface.

The city was still in shambles, with the infected multiplying at an alarming rate.

The military's once-confident promises of a return began to ring hollow, their absence casting a shadow of doubt over the desperate residents.

The situation was out of control. Fear and uncertainty hung heavy in the air, suffocating the once-vibrant spirit of the city.

The New Alexandrians braced themselves, their hearts heavy with the weight of the unknown. They waited for the military, hoping for quick intervention and a return to normalcy.

Gwen ascended the Red Palace's towering structure, its red-tinted windows gleaming in the sunlight and casting a crimson hue across the surrounding landscape.

The massive skyscraper was a symbol of power for Frant's most renowned training facility for young geniuses.

With each step, Gwen got closer to the gym, where Amber and the others were already working out. That didn't stop despite the situation because it was imperative that these people learned how to fight and became strong enough to defend themselves.

In the meantime, the adults did what they could to kill as many infected as possible.

As she entered the palace's gymnasium, Gwen felt the energy in the air. The vast training facility hummed with activity as people pushed their limits and perfected their skills.

The echoes of weapons clashing and shouts filled the space, creating a focused intensity. Gwen noticed Amber and the others engrossed in their respective training routines among the bustling training sessions.

Her eyes narrowed in concern as she observed Amber from a distance. Her friend's face was filled with determination, almost to the point of insanity, as she relentlessly practiced her dagger techniques.

Gwen recognized her desire to push herself beyond her limits. She approached Amber with caution, her voice carrying a sincere tone as she apologized for her tardiness. Amber, on the other hand, did not reply.

Instead, Amber's actions spoke volumes when she hurled a pair of gloves at Gwen.

She caught the gloves with a firm grip, sensing the unspoken invitation. She slid her hands into the gloves without hesitation, feeling the snug fit that promised protection and enhanced grip.

It was a silent agreement, a mutual understanding that they would train together and push each other to new heights.

Gwen's muscles tensed as she prepared for the rigorous practice session, mirroring Amber's unwavering look.

Their eyes locked in a shared resolve, and their synchronized movements reflected a profound connection between battle-hardened warriors.

"How is the situation?" Amber said, her voice cold and slightly enraged.

She was looking for an update on the situation in the city, and her gaze was drawn to Gwen's face for any signs of news.

Gwen sighed softly before responding, her voice concerned.

"It is the same," Gwen said, her voice steady but solemn. "The number of infected people roaming the streets has significantly increased. Master Rook and the others are doing what they can, but among the infected, some particularly powerful ones were born in the past weeks and are having trouble killing it.

The police and the available military personnel are doing their best in the northern district, but it is a difficult battle there."

Amber's eyes twinkled with excitement and a desire to be back on the front lines of the battle. "Good," she said curtly, her voice firm and determined.

"I wonder when the Red Palace will send us out again to hunt them," Amber added.

Gwen's face softened, a mix of understanding and concern crossing her features. Her voice was full of concern as she placed a gentle hand on Amber's arm.

"Amber, I understand your eagerness to face the Thaid. But engaging in battle as you did the last time is reckless." Amber's reply was curt; her eyes were irritated.

"Gwen, I appreciate your concern, but mind your own business," Amber retorted firmly. "Besides, you should focus on our training."

Gwen skillfully evaded each strike as Amber launched herself into a fierce attack, her movements fluid and precise.

Gwen briefly spoke briefly as their blades clashed and sparks flew.

"Amber, I understand the pain you're going through," Gwen said, her voice soft and compassionate.

"Erik and Anderson's deaths have left a void in all of us." However, putting yourself in danger will not change what has already occurred."

Amber's eyes blazed with rage and grief as the names Erik and Anderson echoed in the air.

She withdrew her knives abruptly, her breathing heavy with pent-up emotions. She turned and left the training ring without saying anything, her footsteps echoing in the emptiness that lingered behind her.

Gwen stood there momentarily, her heart heavy with her friend's anguish. Amber's anguish and desire for redemption were clearly in front of her.

Her friend frequently blamed herself for the deaths of their friend and her lover. She was one of the strongest students at Thornton High School, but that was no longer the case, and that made it so that she couldn't help them when they needed her the most.

Things might have turned out differently if she had been stronger. Gwen was well aware of this, but none of her words managed to alleviate her friend's distress.

Chapter 476: The Plan

Erik, Marcus, Ava, Alexia, and Garrett had left the Lumisgrove's mystical, alluring confines, setting their sights on where they had last seen the Ursus Glacialis. Compared to the lush, emerald canopy they had seen at the Lumisgrow, the snow-laden forest seemed distant and hostile.

Erik's strategy was straightforward. He hoped to use the beast as a distraction and create chaos to avoid Frant's soldiers, or at least lessen their numbers, while retrieving the seeds from the Auburn Pine.

The young man's heart pounded as he gazed at the forest. He and the others were aware of the dangers posed by the Ursus Glacialis, but despite the risks, they knew that finding the beast and turning the predator into an unwitting ally was their best chance for completing their mission.

It was not a task that any of them looked forward to. Marcus wore a stoic expression of acceptance. Fear wouldn't be able to defeat Ava, but she was visibly apprehensive. Alexia was calm and collected but thought this plan was riskier than charging into the soldiers and fighting them. Garrett was also calm, but his eyes betrayed his concern.

The Ursus Glacialis was easy to locate because it was only necessary to search for the devastation it had left behind due to its massive size. They trekked for hours across the desolate landscape. The only sounds that could be heard were the crunches of boots on fresh snow and the harsh, gusty winds.

The Ursus Glacialis became more visible as they progressed deeper into the icy realm. Massive footprints were etched deep into the snow, tree trunks were scratched and gnawed, and a faint, grumbling growl echoed in the distance. The team pressed on, their anticipation growing with each step.

They knew they were getting closer to their goal - capturing the first-ever footage of the legendary Ursus Glacialis. The signs of its presence were becoming more ominous, fueling excitement and a sense of caution among the group.

Erik led his companions with the prospect of facing the beast, growing closer with each step. Uncertainty and anticipation twisted together in his stomach, forming a knot. Nonetheless, a sense of determination shone through his eyes. The Ursus Glacialis was close by. Their risky strategy was entirely dependent on the outcome of this encounter. It was a desperate bet to turn the tide in their favor.

"Look at these tracks; they're fresh," Marcus said, his usually soft voice ringing out clearly in the snow-covered forest.

His gloved fingers traced the deep imprints in the frost-covered earth, each indentation a stark reminder of the monstrous size of the beast they were searching for. "We are getting closer," he added.

"Good," Erik said.

The group fell silent as the gravity of Marcus' words became clear.

The forest around them was a disaster zone. Mighty trees, hundreds of years old, stood shattered and broken, their proud trunks ripped apart by the Ursus Glacialis's tremendous strength. The forest floor was littered with snow-dusted branches.

The beast's weight had decimated the undergrowth and pounded it into oblivion. The path it had blazed was a wide scar, a battered patchwork of battered foliage and churned earth punctuated by massive, chaotic divots where the Ursus Glacialis had planted its massive paws.

A thick carpet of fresh snow crunched underfoot as they navigated the terrain, echoing eerily in the profound silence. Even though battered, the trees remained majestic, their skeletal branches reaching upwards as if in prayer to the cloud-swathed sky. Their bark was frost-encrusted, transforming the entire forest into a monochrome display of winter's harsh beauty.

After waiting a quarter of an hour, they could finally see the Ursus Glacialis; its massive form carved an imposing silhouette against the snowy forest. It was a frightening manifestation of primal power and raw ferocity, and its sapphire fur glinted menacingly in the waning light of the winter sun.

It searched the surrounding wilderness for prey while sniffing the air and moving its massive head back and forth, but it could not find any signs of life.

Their hearts were thumping wildly in their chests as they dove for cover behind the thick trunks of the trees covered in frost. They maintained their distance and watched the enormous beast stalk around in an agitated state while the faint tremors caused by its movements reverberated throughout the snowy ground below them.

Ava, the fastest among them, took a step forward due to her brain crystal power. Her determination could be seen in the set of her shoulders and her unwavering gaze as she stared down the monster from a distance. "I'll lure the creature as planned," she said, her voice steady despite the danger lurking just a few paces away.

The rest of the group exchanged glances, their trust in Ava evident as they nodded in agreement. With a final, reassuring smile, Ava began her calculated approach towards the towering creature, ready to execute their daring plan and save their village from its destructive path.

Without another word, she dashed from her hiding spot, sprinting across the white landscape with grace and speed that belied the difficult conditions. She spread her arms wide as she approached the beast, her loud, clear voice echoing through the still forest. "I'm here, you stupid beast! Come on! Try to catch me!" she yelled, defiance echoing in every syllable.

The Ursus Glacialis stood perfectly still for a split second, its eerie blue eyes riveted on the brave human standing before it. After that, it lunged forward, launching itself into the pursuit of the agile figure with a mighty roar that shook the core of the forest to its very foundations.

Ava's heart was pounding in her chest as the beast started chasing after her, but she could keep her sliding strides long and sure, and her path was unwavering as she led the creature away.

The roars of the Ursus Glacialis and the loud crash of its charging pursuit filled the air, providing a spooky soundtrack to their situation.

As Ava ran from the monstrous beast chasing after her, Erik and the others watched her with their breath caught in their throats.

"Let's get moving!" Erik yelled.

Chapter 477: Attack on the camp (1)

Ava's swift figure darted through the snow-covered trees, chased by the *Ursus Glacialis*. The colossal beast was unstoppable, barreling through the forest with terrifying disregard for the obstacles in its path. Every thunderous step and every enraged roar echoed through the desolate wilderness, a constant reminder of the mortal danger they faced.

Erik, Marcus, Garrett, and Alexia had kept a safe distance from the chase, trailing along the monster's path of destruction. They had to remain unseen by the beast as it pursued Ava, their presence a secret they couldn't afford to reveal.

The tension among them was palpable, every heart pounding in time with the beast's thunderous pace. Their hearts leaped into their throats whenever Ava narrowly avoided a lunging swipe of the *Ursus Glacialis*'s monstrous paws or every time it threw ice spears at her. Each of Ava's daring maneuvers triggered a new wave of nervous anticipation, trapping their breaths in their chests.

Erik led the team, eyes scanning the area for signs of danger. Garrett strode alongside him, his calm demeanor a stark contrast to the wild energy of the chase. Alexia brought up the rear, her gaze never leaving Ava's figure, her every sense tuned into the chase's progress.

The snow-covered forest blurred as they raced alongside the beast's path, their progress obscured by the creature's destructive advance. The constant crunch of their boots against the snow echoed their growing fear. Their breaths became cloudy in the cold air, a testament to their exertion.

Erik, Ava, Marcus, Alexia, and Garrett finally led the *Ursus Glacialis* to the Lumisfalls, but that wasn't enough. The most dangerous part was yet to come.

A wave of relief washed over them as they gazed at the towering trees, luminous flora, and cascading waterfalls. The sight was breathtaking—a dazzling display of nature's grandeur that overshadowed their tiredness and aches.

They had the uncanny feeling of having stepped into another world, where reality stretched into a grander, more vibrant canvas, bathed in the soft glow of the luminescent plants and touched by the gentle light trickling through the dense canopy.

While the Ursus Glacialis pursued her, Ava fixed her gaze on the distant Frantian Military camp. The place was nestled among the sprawling, glowing undergrowth at the base of the Lumisfalls. Despite their exhaustion, they continued.

Alexia, who had taken up the rear for some time, stepped forward after traversing the labyrinth of the colossal trees and the radiant undergrowth. "We're getting close to the Frantian camp," she said, her voice high from exertion and her sharp gaze scanning their surroundings.

Erik turned to face the others, his expression hardening, his gaze meeting each of theirs. "Be ready," he warned them, his voice filled with an intensity befitting the gravity of their situation. "Soldiers could be around every corner."

Each group member nodded in agreement, their faces grim and determined. They checked their weapons in unison, the soft shuffling sounds and whispered confirmations creating a solemn symphony in the Lumisgrove's echoing silence.

The young man's gaze shifted to Ava, who was leading the beast toward the camp as The Ursus Glacialis continued to destroy everything in its path. This Thaid was a natural force, a beast of such size and power that it seemed to defy natural laws.

Its size was mind-boggling; each stride was a tremor beneath the snow-covered ground, and each roar was a bone-shaking reverberation echoing across the landscape.

The Ursus Glacialis ripped through the glowing forest, destroying everything in its path. Towering trees that had stood for many winters were swept away like twigs, their branches shattered by the beast's powerful swipes.

The sound of cracking branches and the monstrous roars of the beast replaced the tranquility of the forest, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake.

Even the wildlife had fled in its wake, the smaller Thaid's fleeing in terror while the larger ones stood back, a shared sense of dread visible in their vast, fearful eyes. The beast's presence was an anathema, a perversion of the natural order that turned predator into prey and terrified even the most hardy creatures.

Erik watched the woman and the monster. The mesmerizing beauty of the Lumisgrove faded into the background briefly as the entire group shifted its focus to the sprawling Frantian camp. At that point, they began to see the waterfall clearly and saw human silhouettes.

The Frantian soldiers' first glimpse of Ava was a blur in the distance, a flash of movement in the corner of their eyes. As she got closer, the tiny figure became more defined, and the men gasped as they saw what was following her. The Ursus Glacialis was hurtling towards their camp in all its terrifying glory.

The sentinel on duty sounded the alarm, his voice like a blade cutting through the air. "Incoming enemies!" he cried, his voice reverberating throughout the Frantian camp. A wave of tension rippled through the soldiers, followed by a quick, well-practiced response. The clang of unsheathed swords and the rattle of weapons being prepared filled the air.

The assault then began. A hail of arrows rained down from the sky, a swarm of steel aimed at Ava and the monstrous beast behind her. In the distance, the rhythmic roar of weapons echoed, the ground trembling under the force of their discharge. Ava kept moving, her body a graceful spectacle amid the chaos, while the others ran toward the Auburn Pine.

Ava pushed her mana to its limit in a burst of determination. A soft aura enveloped her as her speed increased, her movements blurring as she effortlessly glided through the terrain. It was as if time had warped around her, allowing her to outrun the Ursus Glacialis' relentless pursuit.

However, she was not yet out of danger. A group of Frantian soldiers broke away from their ranks, their armor gleaming as they pursued. At least some of them were the Frantian army's elite. Fueled by her mana and the will to survive, Ava outran them with apparent ease.

The remaining soldiers on the frontlines faced the oncoming Ursus Glacialis. The beast was a living nightmare, a horror of raw power and fury. But the soldiers stood firm, their weapons drawn and their resolve unwavering.

"TAKE POSITION!"

"TAKE POSITIOOOON!"

Chapter 478: Attack on the camp (2)

Meanwhile, Erik, Marcus, Alexia, and Garrett were sprinting through the Frantian camp, their hearts racing. The camp was a labyrinth of tents and erected barricades, teeming with soldiers frantically

mobilizing to face the monstrous threat bearing down on them, the Ursus Glacialis. Their arrival was not ignored for long.

A Frantian soldier spotted them, his armor glinting in the sporadic light. "Who are you?" he demanded, instinctively reaching for his weapon. However, he was unable to continue acting. Alexia moved as quickly as a hawk diving for its prey.

An arrow that glowed with mana was knocked from her bow. She let it fly in an instant. The mana arrow pierced the air with a deadly streak of light and found its target. The soldier collapsed to the ground with an arrow lodged in his skull.

[FRANTIAN SOLDIER KILLED: MANA ABSORBING PROCESS STARTING.]

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

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY ABSORBED, STARTING CONVERTING PROCEDURE.]

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

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY CONVERTED INTO EXPERIENCE. 341 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

When Erik received the notification, the soldiers around him let out a collective gasp. There was a brief moment of stunned silence, as they had not expected humans to target them, especially in their territory.

They sprang into action like a hornet's nest that had been kicked. The loud roars of laser rifles broke the silence. The laser and the mana-infused projectiles filled the air, a lethal hail aimed at the intruders.

Marcus reacted instantly. He stepped forward, putting himself between his comrades and the onslaught of firepower. He closed his eyes and concentrated, his mana responding to his command. In front of him, a shimmering dome appeared, a wall of rippling energy that absorbed the onslaught.

The projectiles collided with the shield, sending a burst of light against the mana barrier. Marcus remained steadfast; his determination was fuelled by a desire to protect his friends. His body

trembled under the strain of having to endure all those attacks, but he didn't falter; his eyes filled with steely determination.

Erik, Alexia, and Garrett stood in awe as Marcus held the shield against the oncoming barrage. They knew they had to act quickly to take advantage of this protection window. They didn't even wait for the barrage to end, since they got closer enough to wreak havoc.

Erik focused his eyes on the enemies in front and used his mana to connect with the plants surrounding them. He compelled the plants to obey his will with a quick mental command.

Vines and branches twisted and turned, moving with defying speed and dexterity. They whipped out at the soldiers like a swarm of serpents, striking with lethal precision. Each lash was lethal, slicing through armor and flesh alike and dispatching the soldiers right there.

[FRANTIAN SOLDIERS KILLED: MANA ABSORBING PROCESS STARTING.]

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

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY ABSORBED, STARTING CONVERTING PROCEDURE.]

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

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY CONVERTED INTO EXPERIENCE. 2387 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

Alexia was a study of calm amid a storm. She moved with the fluid grace of an experienced archer, each arrow drawn and released with ease. Her mana arrows were deadly accurate, each hitting its target and dispatching the soldiers standing after Erik's assault.

Marcus was a staunch defender, his mana shield absorbing the onslaught of Frantian soldiers. As he continued to protect his friends amidst the chaos of the battlefield, his concentration never faltered.

At the same time, Garrett waded into the fray, his Aclatrium longsword gleaming in his grip. Infused with wind mana, the sword became an extension of his will, amplifying its power many times. Each swing was a burst of lethal force, severing the soldiers' waists with terrifying ease.

The fight was intense, with the outcome depending on the group's skill and determination. Erik's control over the plants created a lethal obstacle for the soldiers, a trap they could not see or anticipate, and that eased Marcus's burden many times.

Alexia's arrows were deadly accurate; each shot reduced their enemies' numbers. Marcus' shield was a deterrent to their attacks; his unwavering resolve shielded his friends from harm.

Garrett was a destructive force, his longsword leaving a trail of dead enemies in his wake. His mastery of wind mana transformed his sword into a weapon of devastating power, and his skill with the blade was unrivaled.

As they kept fighting, they moved deeper into the Frantians' camp. Each fallen soldier brought them closer to their goal.

Erik caught sight of their goal after ten minutes of fighting, immersed in the heart of the battle amidst the chorus of clashing steel and the roar of mana. The Auburn Pine stood tall and radiant, a luminous beacon amid the chaos.

He felt a wave of relief wash over him. Turning to his companions, he shouted over the clamor, "I'll go take the seeds; you cover me!" His voice rang with determination, echoing amidst the chaos.

Understanding the urgency of his words, they nodded, their faces set in grim resolve.

Erik dashed towards the Auburn Pine while his friends shielded him. As he weaved through the battlefield, dodging attacks and shrugging off minor blows, his heart pounded in his chest. He didn't pause for a second when he arrived at the tree. He climbed the massive trunk as quickly as a mountain cat, his hands finding traction on the rough bark.

He spotted the coveted pine cones high up among the branches. Each one was a veritable treasure trove of seeds, brimming with promise. He harvested three of them with deft movements, carefully stowing them in his pouch.

Erik descended the tree with a grace that belied the urgency of his actions; his task was completed. The descent took only a few seconds, but it felt like an eternity to the young man and his friends. Each second was a heartbeat, a ticking clock amidst the chaos of the battle.

When he was back on solid ground, he turned to face his companions, his voice echoing with a command. "Retreat now!" he yelled. His voice cut through the din, pointing the way forward.

The time for confrontation was over; the time for escape had begun. With the prized seeds secure and their mission accomplished, they were ready to retreat, to escape from the confines of the Frantian camp and the perils of the Lumisgrove.

Chapter 479: Fleeing the camp

The time for confrontation had passed; now was the time to flee. With the prized seeds safely in their possession and their mission completed, the group was ready to flee the Frantian camp and the dangers of the Lumisgrove.

As Erik's command echoed across the chaotic battlefield, the group sprang into action. They took off on their heels, their sights set on escape, leaving a scene of carnage and confusion in their wake. As they dashed through the maze of tents and fortifications, their hearts pounded in their chests, adrenaline fueling their movements.

They could hear the pursuing Frantian soldiers' shouts close behind them, their boots pounding on the frozen ground while they attacked them from a distance. The soldiers' rage and the raw sounds of battle created a dangerous soundtrack that kept them moving forward.

The group formed a row to escape.

Erik was the third person in the row, and he was carrying the priceless Auburn Pine cones in the backpack he was wearing. He ran at a grueling pace, and the chilly air made his breath look like it was frozen.

His Plant Master's brain crystal power assisted their escape by manipulating the vegetation to impede their pursuers, allowing him to expertly navigate the obstacles that stood in their way as they made their way through the maze.

Marcus followed behind, his eyes scanning the area for potential threats. His shield was ready to deflect any attacks that came their way. The strain of keeping the mana shield up for so long was visible on his face, but he refused to give up.

Alexia and Garrett led the charge, their weapons drawn. Alexia killed soldiers from a distance, while Garrett rushed forward and killed anyone who got past Erik's and Alexia's attacks. His sword, still humming with wind mana, dispatched any soldiers who got too close.

Their escape was a blur—a race against the clock against the relentless pursuit. Every breath was a gasp, and every stride was a fight against exhaustion. They did not, however, slow down. Fear gave them wings, and the threat of capture or death pushed them to move faster.

The issue was that the ranged attacks became more intense at some point.

"Marcus, please get behind us!" Alexia yelled over the commotion of their escape, her voice franker than usual. "Cover our retreat with your mana shield!"

Marcus didn't question her command after hearing her words amid the chaos. Instead, he nodded in agreement, realizing the importance of his role. He had been their shield, their bulwark against the Frantian soldiers' relentless attacks. His role was more important than ever before.

Erik, Alexia, and Garrett went farther away as the man slowed. His attention was drawn to the task, and his senses were alert to the danger around them. Sweat beaded on his brow from the strain of maintaining his shield.

He extended his mana shield as he fell behind, the shimmering barrier enveloping the group from behind. His eyes were hard, and his resolve firm as he held the line, ensuring his friends' safety from the onslaught.

This formation allowed the others to concentrate on their escape, running as fast as possible. They had a chance of outrunning their pursuers and making it out of the Lumisgrove and away from the Frantian camp, with Marcus covering their retreat.

Marcus' mana shield provided some protection, but it did not deter the most determined of their pursuers. Undaunted by the formidable defense, a small group of Frantian soldiers continued their pursuit.

Their eyes were determined, and their armor glinted in the Lumisgrove's otherworldly glow. They maneuvered around the slower soldiers, their agility and skill on display. Each stride closed the gap, their sole focus on their evading quarry.

Erik looked back, his heart pounding as he saw the soldiers closing in on them. Each person's face was a grim mask of determination, their intent obvious. The danger was palpable, the threat real, and it grew by the second.

"Keep going!" Erik yelled, his voice ringing with urgency. Every second, they counted. Every step was a victory—a battle for their lives. They needed to outrun their pursuers to reach safety before their strength dwindled.

Alexia and Garrett surged forward as if in response to his words, their bodies pushing past the point of exhaustion. They knew their lives were on the line and that slowing down was not an option. Their resolve was echoed in their strides; their grit and determination were imprinted on every step they took.

Marcus continued to defend behind them, his mana shield gleaming with resilient energy. Alexia and Erik attempted to kill the men chasing, but they were clearly elites from how they moved, and their attacks did not have the desired effect.

After some time, Erik and his companions found themselves beyond the immediate battlefield, with the Frantian camp's discordant sounds and the Ursus Glacialis roars becoming faint.

They were, however, far from safe. The elite Frantian soldiers were still after them.

"We can't shake them off!" Garrett exclaimed, his breath ragged from the constant running. His gaze returned to the pursuing soldiers, their figures drawing ever closer. "What should we do?"

Alexia looked at Erik with a grim expression on her face. "We fight," she proposed, her voice steady despite their dire situation.

Her hold on the bow became increasingly firm, and the steely determination in her words was mirrored in her determined gaze. She was prepared to take a stand and go head-to-head with those pursuing them.

After a brief pause, Erik broke the silence by nodding in agreement. They were in a hopeless predicament, and the odds were stacked against them, but there was nothing else they could do. They were unable to get ahead of the elite soldiers by running faster. The idea of battling against them was extremely terrifying, but it appeared to be their only choice.

"We really need Ava's help!" The following is what Erik emphasized: He turned to face each of his friends, meeting their gazes with a resolute composure despite his calm demeanor. "I'm not sure we'll be able to beat them!"

Chapter 480: Confrontation (1)

Alexia ignored Erik's warning and turned around to shoot a mana arrow at one of the soldiers, who blocked it with his sword and then cut it in half with his blade.

There was an eerie silence as the two opposing forces fought each other in the forest. The elite Frantian soldiers moved as one, their resolve conveyed clearly by the expressions on their faces. They were all highly skilled warriors whose intimidating presence reflected their prowess and years of experience.

The Frantian soldiers gave a guttural battle cry as they charged forward, their weapons shining brightly in the dim light of winter. The group Erik was leading sprang into action, with each member deftly shifting into a different role in the fight.

Garrett led the initial assault on the opponents. His Aclatrium longsword made a buzzing sound in the breeze, and the sharp radiance of its edge shone brightly. Each blow was like a deadly gust of wind, a raging storm that had been honed to a razor's edge.

The ordinarily tranquil setting was suddenly transformed into a frenetic battleground by the roar of gunfire and the sound of metal on metal.

Captain Alvar led the charge, his sword pulsing with mana. Each attack was accompanied by a weird vibration, which disoriented Garrett and forced him to adjust his rhythm. It was a strange feeling; the sound was akin to a swarm of hornets clashing and flying.

Lieutenant Yoric dashed toward Alexia, sending sonic pulses to jolt her senses. Erik struggled to control the vegetation due to his dwindling mana. His connection to the plants wavered, but he pushed through the turmoil, manipulating the flora he had at his disposal to assist her in fleeing the chasing assailant.

Roots snaked out, attempting to trap Yoric, but the deft lieutenant evaded them with uncanny grace.

Sergeant Ilsa, instead, was a phantom, leaving trails of confusion in her wake. Marcus tried to track her movements, his shield raised in defense, but Ilsa had the upper hand due to the illusions. She struck like a viper, her blade slicing through Marcus' shield, looking for a weakness in his defense.

Erik noticed Alexia struggling to find a clear shot; the phantom-like movements of Yoric and the sonic disruptions from his brain crystal power were throwing her off target. The young man tried to help her but couldn't do much with his mana.

Marcus stood firm, his mana shield raised to deflect the woman's attacks and his Axe drawn. His job was to protect, which he did admirably by occasionally erecting a dome to protect Garrett from enemy attacks.

He then charged toward the woman, his Axe raised, but she was too quick for him, avoiding the charge and attempting to plunge her blade into his stomach. Only his quick thinking saved the man.

Erik's mana was running low, but he summoned all his remaining strength, focusing his plant manipulation powers on the ground beneath Yoric's feet. Vines sprouted from the ground, twisting and writhing like serpents in an attempt to entangle the agile lieutenant.

Yoric, who was skilled in combat and quick on his feet, attempted to avoid the onslaught. His sword sliced through the animated vegetation as he darted, leaped, and rolled. Despite this, two more seemed to sprout for every vine he cut. However, the young man's mana vanished at that moment. He couldn't use anything right now.

He could face the man in melee thanks to his many neural links, but doing so would expose him, as his only weapon was the Flyssa. Because he was pretty well-known within New Alexandria due to his awakener status, it was apparent the man would recognize him if he went close and used the sword. Erik had a better chance of not being recognized if he stayed away.

Yoric lunged toward Erik, hoping to exploit the young man's tiredness. But as he charged forward, a hail of mana arrows pierced the air, halting his progress. Alexia's unerring aim turned the battlefield into a tornado of flying death. Each arrow forced Yoric back as he defended Erik from the lieutenant's attack.

At the same time, Garrett's encounter with Alvar was a swordsmanship contest, a high-stakes dance between two skilled fighters. With his training, Alvar was an expert with his weapon, far superior to Garrett.

The fight started with a flurry of slashes and parries. Garrett's wind-charged blade whistled through the air, attempting to pierce Alvar's defenses. Nonetheless, the Frantian soldier stood firm, his sword

deflecting each of Garrett's aggressive strikes with the measured precision that only an expert could have. The clashing of their swords echoed through the forest like a symphony.

Alvar was as solid as a mountain; his weapon was a raging river that rushed to meet every strike. His movements were fluid, with each parry flowing into the next.

Garrett's attacks seemed to crash like waves against the cliffside, mighty but ultimately futile against his opponent's unyielding defensive stance.

Garrett made a tactical adjustment, moving away from an offensively-focused approach and toward a more balanced one.

The ebb and flow of the battle began to change, and the rhythmic clashing of swords began to morph as each combatant adapted to the fighting style of the other.

The wind-infused blade wielded by Garrett morphed into that of a darting viper, striking swiftly before retreating and continually searching for a weakness in Alvar's defense.

As a result of being forced to adapt, Alvar's fluid parries eventually developed into razor-sharp counterattacks.

Even though the man knew that the Liberty Watch villager lacked training and resources, he found himself in front of a natural talent. Garrett's Aclatrium Longsword proved to be a rather good weapon.

"Where did you get that?" Alvar asked.

"It was a gift from one of you pigs!" Garrett retorted.

Alvar stepped up his game, but it was difficult to anticipate Garrett's quick strikes even with his training, and the fact that the wind mana enhanced the blade's sharpness turned every near-miss into a potentially fatal blow.

In this complicated dance, the two were basically on equal footing, their lives hanging precariously by a thread. Every blow, counter-blow, and near-miss was aimed at putting an end to the other fighter's life.

