

## BIOLOGICAL 481

### Chapter 481: Confrontation (2)

Marcus found himself in a dance of blades and deception with Ilsa, the Frantian soldier skilled at creating illusions, made some afterimages that confused her opponent.

Her power was based on disorientation rather than brute force, making her a difficult opponent for a straightforward guy like Marcus.

Ilsa's eyes glowed menacingly as she maintained her stance and focused her mana. Then, like ripples on a pond, the air around her began to distort. Suddenly, Marcus saw multiple versions of her. He focused but couldn't find the original despite his many attempts.

Marcus gripped his Axe tighter; his knuckles whitened. His gaze darted from one illusion of Ilsa to the next, each appearing as real as the last.

Ilsa raised her sword and lunged at him at the same time. Marcus raised his shield instinctively with his right hand and the Axe with his left. At the same time, he set up the mana barrier glowing with mana. The illusions began to circle the man.

Ilsa was a blur of movement, her afterimages mirroring her movements and amplifying her threat. Marcus was encased within his shimmering mana shield, the only barrier between him and the phantasmal onslaught, as a spectral army danced around him in a surreal ballet of deception.

Ilsa circled him with a faint smirk on her lips. "How long can you maintain that shield of yours?" she mocked, her voice eerily echoed by her duplicates. "You must be exhausted from your previous battles." Your mana is dwindling, and when it runs out, you'll be at my mercy."

Ilsa's smirk was met with a defiant grin; Marcus's gaze never left her after images. Even though his muscles ached from the long battle, and he could feel his mana reserves dwindling, he stood firm, his grip on his Axe unwavering.

"I've always been a fan of suspense," he shot back, his voice strong despite the fatigue tugging at his edges. "I guess you'll have to wait and see. But do not blame me if the ending is disappointing for you."

With a huff of annoyance, Ilsa lunged, her illusions mirroring her, a slew of strikes aimed at Marcus; only one was real, but the woman was so fast that Marcus couldn't tell where the blow came from. But he stood firm, his shield firmly in place, his confidence undiminished.

The real Frantian soldier weaved through the chaos, her sword poised for a quick strike. Marcus dropped his mana shield and swung his Axe, sure he had found the real woman.

But his blow was met with nothing but empty air; the Ilsa he had aimed at dissolving into nothingness was a mere illusion. It was a fatal mistake, a split-second miscalculation, and the true Ilsa seized the opportunity, her blade descending in a fatal arc.

A new figure entered the scene just as her sword was about to make contact. Ava, who had appeared out of the picture until now, appeared in front of Marcus like a specter, her movements swift and lethal. She blocked the downward slash intended for Marcus, her body bending with the grace of a dancer to parry the move. Then, rising behind Ilsa, her dagger, a streak of deadly metal, moved.

Before Ilsa could react, Ava's dagger slashed across the woman's throat. Ilsa's eyes widened in shock as her hands flew to her throat, her sword clattering to the ground.

Her illusions faded, and their energy source was abruptly cut off. The woman's knees buckled, crumpled to the ground, her life fading as quickly as Ava's had appeared.

Marcus stood there, his eyes wide with disbelief and relief, realizing how close he had come to death. Above all, he was grateful for Ava, his timely savior. He didn't have to say anything; his gaze said everything.

"We have two more people to kill!" Ava yelled. They then headed to Alexia, Erik, and Garrett.

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[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. 10989 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

That was the message Erik received as soon as the dust settled from the battle. Garrett wiped his brow and turned to Ava, a wry grin on his face. "That was quite the entrance, Ava. Couldn't have picked a better moment."

Ava softly chuckled, scanning the surrounding area for any remaining threats. "Running away from the Frantian soldiers was no cakewalk, but I managed. Glad I came here on time."

"Ah, you are damn right!"

But that wasn't all; Alexia was also enraged. During the fight, Erik abruptly stopped using his power and went melee; this was not the issue; instead, he did not use his sword. "Erik, why did you switch to hand-to-hand combat in the middle of the fight?" she demanded accusingly.

For a brief moment, Erik let out a long sigh. "I ran out of mana, Alexia. And I didn't want the Frantian soldiers to see my blade. If they recognized it and reported back to General Becker... well, I'm sure he'd send more troops after us, and that would put Liberty Watch Village in even more danger."

There was a brief pause as the gravity of his words sank in. Alexia's brow furrowed in thought, her eyes narrowing slightly. She didn't seem convinced, but she dropped the subject. "Alright," she said finally, nodding at him. "I'll trust you on this one."

Marcus then broke the silence with an urgent voice. We should move. The journey back to the village will take a while, and we can't afford to waste any more time."

"Yeah... I'm tired, honestly, and would like to rest a little bit," Garrett said. He then turned to look at Erik, "Do you think you will have enough mana to make a shelter in a couple of hours?"

"Yes, most likely," the young man replied.

They took off, leaving the carnage of the battle behind. The toll of the battle dampened their spirits, but they also carried a sense of accomplishment and newfound resolve.

They had fought against elite Frantian soldiers and won. Not only that, but they managed to obtain the seeds of the Auburn Pine. With Erik's assistance, they were confident that the agricultural project inside the ancient underground city would be feasible.

#### Chapter 482: Back Home

Ava, Marcus, Erik, Alexia, and Garrett had been struggling against the bitterly cold weather and treacherous terrain for three weeks when they finally caught sight of the silhouette of Liberty Watch Village on the horizon.

The sight was a welcome distraction. However, it was obvious even from a distance that their once-bustling village had been transformed into a solemn battlefield due to the war with Frant, and there was now an unsettling silence.

The farmlands had been abandoned, the chilling winter winds had replaced children's laughter, and the cold replaced the warmth coming out of the chimneys.

As they got closer, the winter sun, which was just about to set, cast an ethereal glow on the snow-covered roofs and the frosted paths.

The harsh realities of war, such as houses with barricades and reinforced walls, were illuminated by the icy light. Their people's spirit persisted despite the desolation, reflecting a resilience that brought a surge of pride to their frozen hearts.

The sight of their battle-scarred but still-standing village invigorated the group, and they picked up the pace of their travels.

They anticipated that Frant would launch an attack while they were absent but believed the village could withstand it.

The sound of their boots crunching on the frozen ground reverberated throughout the otherwise quiet village, serving as a constant reminder of the enormous size of their adversary.

When they arrived, a small group of hardy and determined villagers greeted them and welcomed them to the village.

Their warm eyes and genuine smiles cut through the biting cold, and their heartfelt greetings were evidence of their unwavering commitment to the community.

The faces of Erik, Alexia, Ava, Garrett, and Marcus were simultaneously worn out and triumphant. The challenges they had to overcome and the opponents they had prevailed over now had significance for them.

They brought with them, on their journey back home, the promise of a brighter future. However, the once-familiar pathways that were lined with vegetation that had been well-maintained were now devoid of any sign of life.

A woman made her way out of the small group of villagers who had survived. She approached the group in a solemn manner that was in keeping with the subdued tones of their wintry environment.

Marcus, the usually stoic guardian, regarded her with concern, his brow furrowed. The silence was palpable, like a heavy blanket that added to the burden of their tired bodies.

"What happened here?" he finally asked, his voice barely audible above the howling wind.

The woman's eyes did not flinch, reflecting the grim reality of their situation.

"The village has been relocated; we were forced to proceed due to Frant's attacks," she explained, her voice tinged with regret.

"Only a few of us remained here, including Amos. He is waiting for you...in the village hall." The news struck them like a cold wave.

Their home and people had been uprooted from the land they had loved and defended.

Yet, amid the desolation, a spark of hope ignited their new home. Amos was waiting.

Their guide, friend, and symbol of their community's tenacity. The group set out for the village hall with renewed zeal, their footsteps resounding ominously on the snow-covered path.

As they walked, they were struck by the strange silence of their village. Where once there was laughter and chatter, now only the wind sang a mournful song.

They felt a range of emotions when they saw the overgrown vegetation. The air became tense as they approached the village hall. The once vibrant heart of their community now stood solemnly against the white backdrop of winter, its wooden structure looking more intimidating than ever.

Their journey had led them back home, but it was not the same as when they left it.

Stepping through the village hall's sturdy doors, their gaze was drawn to Amos, who sat alone at a large wooden table, a map of their region spread before him.

His gaze was downward, his fingers tracing the paths and landmarks on the map, and his shoulders sagged from the weight of his responsibilities.

When he noticed their arrival, he looked up, his eyes shining with relief at their return.

"Welcome back," said Amos. Alexia took the initiative, approaching him and speaking with him.

"Amos, what happened?" she inquired, her voice concerned. The village chief sighed deeply, his fingers tapping on the table.

"Frant's forces launched several attacks on the village," he said calmly, despite the gravity of his words. With the few people we had available, there was no way we could've defended ourselves. But we managed to hold them off long enough to gather the crops and relocate."

His words painted a bleak picture of their once-peaceful village, now a battlefield scarred by the Frant's forces' relentless attacks.

"We moved hastily, but we did manage to move," he continued, attempting to inject hope into the gloomy atmosphere.

"But now, our situation is dire. We must solve the problem of food production. That was the reason why we sent you to retrieve the Auburn Pine."

"Erik, we need your help to solve the problem," he said, facing Erik. We'll do it with your brain crystal power. We're counting on you."

"I am ready to help, Amos," Erik replied without hesitation, his voice firm. That's why I accompanied Alexia and the others."

He came to a halt, turning to face his companions. They were battered and tired from their journey and battles, but they nodded in agreement, their spirits unafraid.

Their determination was as strong as the day they set out. "Lead the way," Erik said, returning his gaze to Amos.

The village elder rose from his seat at the table and led the group out of the hall. As they stepped outside, the cold winter air nipped at their faces, but they marched on, their footsteps leaving a trail in the fresh snow.

Their destination was the ancient underground city, which would become their new home. They'd have to start all over again in this subterranean haven.

Chapter 483: The result of Erik's efforts

Erik had been back in the ancient underground city for a week, and the time had flown by.

There was no respite, no quiet contemplation. Due to a task that only he could complete, he was constantly moving.

His Plant Master ability was invaluable, and his connection to the earth and its flora was critical to the village's survival.

He began by sowing Auburn Pine seeds. These were not ordinary seeds; they contained the power of life and renewal.

Each seed, nestled in the earth, held the promise of a brighter future. The Auburn Pine was unique because it released energy similar to the sun's.

The once-chilly cavern began to warm as each seed took root and sprouted into saplings.

It was a slow change, a subtle shift in the atmosphere that whispered of transformation.

It was not an easy task. The soil was hard and unyielding. On the other hand, Erik poured his mana and energy into the earth, softening it and making it more receptive to the seeds.

He used his Plant Master abilities to direct the growth, coaxing the roots deeper and encouraging the stems upward toward the cave ceiling.

If the trees were already large naturally, Erik's power had made them massive. The fruits of Erik's and the farmer's labor became visible over the course of the week. What was once barren rock and soil transformed into a verdant wonder.

Tall Auburn Pines reached for the high cavern ceiling, their radiant glow illuminating the sprawling underground city in soft, warm light.

A plethora of plants took root under their watchful boughs. Verdant fields carpeted the ground, adding color to the cave walls' muted gray.

But Erik's work impacted more than just the city's appearance. It gave it a much-needed boost.

The vegetation he and the others cultivated significantly improved the air quality. The plants breathed life into the stale cave air, transforming it into a fresh, oxygen-rich environment. It was an enormous accomplishment.

He brought life to a place where none was thought to be possible. He transformed an inhospitable cave into a sanctuary, a safe haven for his people.

Erik sowed another seed in the rich soil—the seed of the plant he discovered within the ancient brick house that kept the Thaid's away.

The plant was not only useful, but it was also beautiful to look at, creating an otherworldly scene within the city. The conditions became favorable for its growth under the glowing light of the Auburn Pines.

Erik used his Plant Master abilities to help it grow. He cared for it, fed it mana, and encouraged it to grow.



The plant responded to his care, and its growth accelerated under his watchful eye. It spread through the underground city, a silent, unassuming protector against the threat of Thaid's.

The city, which was already glowing with the light of the Auburn Pines and the Aclaitrium ore and vibrant with many other plants, gained another layer of safety and beauty.

The residents watched in awe and gratitude as the seemingly ordinary plant covered the walls and floors, creating a natural barrier between them and the Thaid's. Once cold and lifeless, their underground city had transformed into a living, breathing entity pulsing with life and energy.

And, thanks to Erik's tireless efforts, it was a haven. They had a safe haven in the earth's core, a place they could call home without fear.

Erik gazed at his work, and his heart swelled with pride. He had promised to assist, and he had delivered.

While the young man was observing the city and admiring his and the other's work, a voice called out from behind.

Turning, he saw Vanessa approaching him, her eyes sparkling with an almost infectious energy.

"Erik," she said, her voice slightly echoing in the ample space, "Amos and Samuel are looking for you."

"Why?" he inquired.

"I don't know; they just told me to find you and tell you to come to the village hall." Erik nodded, acknowledging her message.

He broke the ice with, "By the way, how are you finding our new home?" Her response was unequivocal.

"I think it's amazing, Erik! With the warmth from the Auburn Pines and the sense of community among us, it feels like we're slowly building our home again. It's difficult, yes, but it's also exciting."

Her words were filled with hope and determination. Erik could tell she was ready to live there. They were all like that. They'd come too far and fought too hard to give up now.

Erik set off through the underground city, hearing the low hum of activity around him. The city's inhabitants worked hard to make this vast refuge their home.

He could see small groups gathered around the ancient houses, their hands deftly maneuvering tools as they worked to repair the time-worn structures.

He could hear the rhythmic thud of hammers, the crisp sound of saws cutting through wood, and the low murmur of conversation.

They worked together in unison, their common goal binding them together and strengthening them.

Further down the road, other villagers were cleaning the path of the Acidspitter Arthropods' dead bodies with brooms and shovels.

From the effort they were putting in and the occasional grimace, he could tell that this wouldn't be an easy task.

His path led him toward the ancient military building. The building had been converted into its current use, and its architecture was now used to house the village hall.

As Erik approached the structure, his gaze was drawn to the recently installed door, and he was overcome with awe.

It shone brightly in the light cast by the Auburn Pines, and the Aclaitrium ore's polished surface reflected the light's gentle glow.

As Erik moved closer to the entrance, the only sound that could be heard was the echo of his footsteps.

As he got closer, the sounds of the bustling city receded into the background, and he concentrated all of his attention on the activity that was currently taking place.

#### Chapter 484: Decisions

Erik descended into the depths of the military structure, traversing a series of corridors.

Rooms that once housed lethal arsenals now house the necessities of village life: food, clothing, tools, and many other necessities for survival.

He passed by villagers rushing back and forth, their faces etched with a resolve mirrored his own.

The atmosphere inside the building was charged with a sense of purpose, with each individual contributing to their shared goal of rebuilding their village and lives.

Erik arrived at the main room after navigating the maze of corridors. The large chamber, once the hub of strategic planning, had been transformed into a forum for collective decision-making.

The warmth of the villagers' efforts to make the space theirs offset the austere military aesthetics.

Amos and Samuel awaited him in the room, their faces solemn and their eyes reflecting the weight of their responsibilities.

Both the older men exuded the aura of men in distress. Amos's eye corners were etched deeper than ever, like ancient riverbeds that had seen countless floods.

The dark circles that framed his normally bright eyes emphasized how tired they were.

Despite his obvious exhaustion, his back was straight, his posture as unbending as ever—a solid monument amid their trials.

Samuel, the younger of the two, appeared more hunched than Erik remembered as if the burdens they were now bearing had taken a physical toll on him.

His hair, already a silver gray, seemed to stand out more against his tanned, weathered skin.

His hands, though still steady, were trembling from exhaustion. Despite this, a fiery determination shone in his eyes, promising he would not be trounced.

Erik saw the cumulative weight of years of service to their village in their tired faces, not just the toll of recent months. Every line and wrinkle on their faces reflected the strain of leading their people through this crisis.

There was no sign of surrender, only an iron will and a steadfast determination to see their people through these trying times.

The first to break the silence was Samuel. His voice was a little lower than usual.

"Erik," he began, the word coming out as a sigh. "You've been working tirelessly since you've come back. How are you holding up?"

Erik's lips curled into a tired smile. "I'm exhausted," he admitted. "But fine, nonetheless. I knew what I was getting into when I volunteered for this."

Amos chimed in at that point. His tone was firm but not harsh. "It's more than just volunteering," he explained.

"You've been the pillar of this village, especially in the last week. We've all seen how many hours you've put in, and it hasn't gone unnoticed."

Erik's humility prevented him from accepting the compliment, so he only shrugged.

"I'm just doing my part to help." That's all there is to it." Erik's humble words echoed within the metal walls, returning to the trio standing in the heart of the ancient military structure.

Amos nodded, his lips set firmly. His eyes were filled with deep gratitude and glistened with unshed tears of relief.

"You've done more than simply 'help,' Erik," he said. His voice was rough and wrought with emotion.

"You've breathed new life into this village." He indicated the metal structure around them with his hand.

"We survived because of you," he continued. "It was a bitter pill to swallow, leaving Liberty Watch. Our homes, our livelihoods... we left it all behind."

His voice became softer, like the rustle of dry leaves in the autumn breeze. "But we didn't have a choice," he admitted.

"The constant attacks, the fear, the uncertainty... we couldn't live like that. Not anymore." Erik sat silently listening; his face etched with sympathy.

He was aware that the villagers had suffered greatly. He had witnessed their homes destroyed and their lives uprooted and lost. But he had also witnessed their tenacity and determination to survive and begin again.

Amos fixed his gaze solemnly on Erik. "And now, here we are," he said. "In our ancestral home. It's not much, but it's safe. Hidden from the prying eyes of those who wish us harm."

His voice took on a hopeful note. "With time, we'll rebuild," he affirmed. "We'll make this city our home, just like Liberty Watch was. We have you to thank for this chance, Erik."

As the echoes of Amos' words faded, the room fell into reflective silence. The three men, each lost in their thoughts, realized how lucky they were to have passed this ordeal.

They were starting over in a strange city beneath the earth, a far cry from the life they had known. But the fact that they were alive was all that mattered.

They would rebuild and thrive beneath the Auburn Pines' protective canopy and the Aclaitrium ore's radiance. They had hope because of Erik.

Samuel's eyes hardened, and his brow furrowed in concern. "Erik," he replied solemnly.

"I know I shouldn't ask you this, but are you planning on leaving?"

Erik kept his gaze fixed on them. "I am," he said, his voice steady. "I appreciate everything this village has given me, but there are opportunities out there that I must seize."

Amos and Samuel exchanged a solemn glance. "Erik!" Amos begged, his voice pleading.

"To us, you're more than just a village member; you're family. We don't want you to leave."

"I know," Erik said softly. "And I feel the same. But I have dreams and aspirations that I need to follow. This village has given me a lot, and I will forever be indebted to you all. But I need to take this step. I don't know when but I will surely return here in the future."

"We understand," Samuel said, his voice heavy with resignation.

"However, we can't help but feel... concerned."

"I appreciate your worry," Erik said, a tired but genuine smile on his face. "And I promise, I'll do everything I can to stay safe."

"Be sure you do, Erik," Amos added, his voice gruff with unshed emotion. "Remember, no matter where you go; you'll always have a place here."

Erik nodded, his heart heavy but resolute. "Thank you," he said. "I'll remember that." The room fell silent, the weight of their words hanging in the air, a poignant reminder of their bond and the trials they had overcome.

Chapter 485: Leaving the village

Erik moved towards the door as those words hung heavy in the air. The echoes of his concern and promises seemed to linger in the air, enveloping him as he reached out and touched the cold iron door handle.

His gaze returned to Amos and Samuel, holding theirs for a moment longer. It was a silent conversation filled with respect, camaraderie, and an unspoken promise to meet again.

He opened the door by turning the handle. Erik said, "Goodbye, Amos... Samuel." His gaze remained fixed on theirs, and silent gratitude and assurances of safety were communicated through the constant eye contact.

"Goodbye, Erik," they said, their voices tinged with sadness and acceptance that this was necessary for him. The finality of the farewell seemed to settle in as the door closed behind him, signaling the end of this chapter in their lives.

Even as he walked away, Erik knew this wasn't a permanent goodbye. He'd made a promise that he intended to keep. It wasn't a question of 'if' he'd return but of 'when.'

The metal corridors' chill encircled him, starkly contrasting the warmth of the meeting room he had just left. His footsteps echoed through the ancient military building's eerily silent halls.

Erik's journey back to his temporary residence took him past the villagers' hustle and bustle. He saw men, women, and even children pitch in to repair the dilapidated structures, their shared hope for a fresh start resonating in their every action.

Erik took a moment to take in this scene despite his impending departure, their determination in his heart.

Erik arrived home. His temporary residence, which was a room in a recently repaired house, was stark and minimalist.

There was a single wooden cot, a table, a chair, and a makeshift shelf for his personal items. It was only temporary, and it was home, however brief.

He carefully examined the contents of his backpack after retrieving it. A change of clothes, food, medical supplies, cooking tools, water bottles, and, most importantly, the Thaid repelling plant's seeds.

Everything was in order. His gaze was drawn to his weapon, a Flyssa that had served him well on his journey thus far. Picking it up, he felt its familiar weight in his hands, a welcome reassurance in an uncertain world.

After double-checking everything, Erik hoisted the backpack over his shoulder, his weapon secured by his side. He looked around the room, etching its memory in his mind. It was time to go.

He stepped out of the room with a determined nod, ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead. Erik walked out of the house, his heart heavy but determined.

His footsteps echoed off the cold, paved ground as he walked through the city streets. He took in the familiar sights around him: the ancient houses being meticulously repaired, the vibrant Auburn Pines standing tall and proud, and the villagers, his people, going about their daily lives.

They wore their resolve as a badge of honor, a testament to their unwavering spirit. He was leaving a place he'd come to consider home, a community he'd grown to adore.

But he was also stepping into the unknown, a world full of possibilities and adventures. The wide city streets narrowed as they wound toward the cave's exit.

The sounds of the city grew fainter, replaced by the solemn silence of the underground. The glow of the Auburn Pines and the Aclaitrium ore was still visible on the cave walls as flickering lights. The winter chill became more noticeable, and his excitement for his journey seemed to pulse within him.

As Erik threaded his way through the city, his journey was halted by the familiar face of Ethan. He turned to see the man standing there, his gaze heavy.

"So, you're leaving," Ethan stated rather than asking. His tone was one of understanding and acceptance.

Erik only nodded, his silence reflecting the bittersweet moment. "Yeah," Erik finally replied, his voice steady despite the turmoil in his heart.

Ethan nodded, his face expressionless. There was no need for them to communicate. Their shared experiences, as well as their friendship, spoke volumes.

Ethan extended his hand as a parting gesture, wishing Erik a safe journey and demonstrating their bond.

"Take care of yourself out there," he said, his voice full of concern.



"And don't forget about us."

"I won't," Erik promised, firmly clasping Ethan's hand. Their handshake lingered for a moment as they both realized the significance of this farewell. And then, it was over.

"Goodbye, Ethan," Erik said with a small smile. It was not a sad farewell but rather a promise of a future reunion.

"Goodbye, Erik," Ethan said, echoing Erik's words. Erik resumed his journey towards the cave exit, remembering this farewell and realizing that goodbyes were not permanent.

Erik crossed the cave and strode through the tunnel, the dim, warm glow of the city's heart replaced by the stark, cold illumination of the exit tunnel.

The path was now well-lit, with each overhead lamp casting a pool of light illuminating the way ahead. Hewn from the earth's bedrock, the tunnel walls echoed with his every step. He soon noticed the exit.

The door, with its imposing stature, was more akin to a monument defining the boundaries of their sanctuary. A group of ten men, all stalwart city defenders, stood guard at the entrance, their presence a constant reassurance of safety.

They straightened their postures as they recognized Erik, their expressions changing to respect and gratitude. They knew Erik's sacrifices and significant contributions to transforming their humble village into a formidable sanctuary.

They reached for the heavy wheel that controlled the door without saying anything. The door swung open with a deep rumble, revealing the outside world.

The crisp, cold winter air rushed in, sending shivers down Erik's spine. Erik took a step forward, nodding his thanks to the guards, who responded with respectful silence.

He felt a sense of completion as he stepped through the exit door. Erik felt the winter chill envelop him as the guards slowly closed it behind him, a stark contrast to the comfortable warmth of the underground city.

The familiar was now behind him, and an ocean of opportunities awaited. He was alone, but he was ready, armed with the knowledge he had gained in the village, and eager to face the challenges that the world had in store for him.

#### Chapter 486: The Eldraith Mountain Range

As the days turned into weeks and months, Erik's journey became a crucible that forged and reforged his abilities, pushing the boundaries of his powers.

His brain crystal powers, while formidable, appeared to be rendered obsolete in the face of the mounting challenges. As a result, he decided to merge them into something more potent, creating new powers from old ones.

Sharpening and Metallization were the first to be combined, resulting in the ability "Metallic Edge Enhancement." Erik could use this fusion to envelop an object or even a portion of his body in a layer of metal, which he could then infuse with mana to create a sharp edge.

This ability bestowed enormous cutting power compared to before, transforming everything from his fingertips to weapons into instruments of death.

Despite its formidable power, the Metallic Edge Enhancement retained its parent's limitations. Overuse could drain him, and damage to the metal layer could harm him if enough power were used against him. Clearly, if he did it on an item, he didn't risk being injured.

Erik then combined Bone Manipulation with Mana Exoskeleton. The resulting power, which he dubbed "Biomantic Armor," was both impressive and terrifying. This power altered his skeletal structure, resulting in protruding spikes and plates that served as weapons and armor. It was similar but slightly different from the previous power since he couldn't make armor before the merging.

However, the Biomantic Armor was not without flaws. Manipulating his bones and forming the energy exoskeleton strained his physical body and mana reserves. It was more powerful than the previous brain crystal powers combined, but the disadvantages of one merged with the disadvantages of the other. Nonetheless, Erik knew that this power's potential benefits far outweighed the costs.

Then he gained some neural links in Force Manipulation and Parallel Will, which reached the ξ1 (XI1) level. He also got to level 33 and used his attribute points to boost Energy, which pumped his mana up.

Then he unlocked two more system powers: "DNA Analysis," which allowed him to analyze the target's DNA from afar, improving the previous analysis function, and "Brain Crystal Power Analysis," which allowed him to know the target's brain crystal power even if he didn't know what power it held.

This meant that the analysis power could also be applied to humans, and he would know what they had automatically.

Erik's powers had made the wilderness more accessible than imagined. Metallic Edge Enhancement and Biomantic Armor combined revolutionized his ability to navigate vast forests and dangerous terrains as he felt safer than ever. Every day, he became more accustomed to a life of constant motion and living in sync with nature's rhythms.

However, when he arrived at the foot of the Eldraith mountain range, he was met with new challenges. The mountains were teeming with a formidable array of Thaid's, the most dangerous of which were the dreaded Wyverns.

These terrifying creatures were eerily similar to dragons, with leathery wings, large scales, and ferocious snouts that exhaled plumes of fire. They were terrifying, however, because they possessed incredible physical strength, speed, and cunning intelligence that made them unpredictable and lethal.

Erik's progress became excruciatingly slow and difficult from then on. The mountain range's every crag and crevice seemed to hide potential threats. The sharp-eyed Wyverns patrolled the skies above, their brain crystals resonating with powerful and destructive energies.

Since leaving the village, Erik faced numerous challenges, each serving as a stepping stone toward becoming a more capable survivor. But the Wyverns were a completely different breed of challenge.

However, Erik had no intention of backing down and turning back. His mind began devising strategies, relying on his merged powers and every bit of information he possessed about these dreadful creatures.

Ultimately, only the Chameleon Veil enabled Erik to survive in that environment, increasing his stealth by several orders of magnitude.

Although the stealth was not absolute, and the problems he had while moving since the stealth decreased, the power was still excellent and allowed him to more or less safely navigate the mountain range, avoiding any Thaid he couldn't face.

His new system's capabilities also aided him in this endeavor because they no longer displayed approximations of his opponents' stats but actual values. He knew what he had to avoid and what he could hunt for food and experience.

Erik's journey through the Eldraith mountain range was his most challenging endeavor yet. He had pushed his body to its absolute limits over the previous weeks, contending with the harsh mountain climate, treacherous terrain, and the constant threat of flying Thaid, which were not discouraged from approaching him due to the Thaid repelling plant he now knew as Luminara Serpensis.

He noticed that the wyverns didn't want the plant in their territories because they found its powers repulsive, so they attacked it as soon as they saw it. Erik almost died the first time he used the plant, as he was attacked but miraculously managed to flee since the Wyvern was focused on the Luminara Serpensis.

Erik had awoken before dawn every day, the sharp cold of the mountain mornings stinging his face. He'd spend the early morning scouting safe routes through the mountain's treacherous slopes.

Each step was deliberate due to the jagged rocks and steep cliffs. Erik had to be cautious as he climbed icy cliffs and crossed narrow ledges.

A single miscalculation could result in a dangerous fall, which he couldn't afford. Every step he took was calculated, his survival weighing heavily on his shoulders.

When the sun was at its highest, the mountain range would turn into a deadly game of cat and mouse as Wyverns took to the skies.

Erik had spent countless hours huddled beneath rocky outcrops, holding his breath as the Wyverns' shadows slid over his hiding spots. He'd stand there, his heart pounding, as they passed, their roars echoing across the mountain range.

The nights were equally unforgiving. The plummeting temperatures turned the mountain range into an icy wasteland, leaving Erik huddled in whatever shelter he could make.

Creating fire was risky there since the wyverns knew humans probably made fire, and they always came to check the source whenever the young man started one.

That forced him to mostly eat vegetables and fruit, leaving him without some vital nutrients since he didn't have all kinds of seeds. Sleep was a luxury; his nights were filled with the constant vigilance to stay alive.

Through sheer determination, Erik had managed to navigate the Eldraith mountain range. It was a grueling test of his endurance, intelligence, and powers. But as he stepped into the land of Etrium, looking back at the mountain range that had been his home and adversary for the past months, he felt a sense of accomplishment.

#### Chapter 487: Etrium

After weeks of strenuous travel and navigating through the dense forests of Etrium, life became easier as the Thaid's gradually grew weaker. Erik wasn't overly familiar with the landscape of Etrium. Still, the Brain Information Injector had supplied him with a detailed map. Thus, with the aid of the biological supercomputer, traversing through the terrain became a relatively straightforward task.

The biological supercomputer's map showed the geographical features of Etrium but also highlighted potential dangers and safe routes. This allowed Erik to avoid treacherous areas and efficiently progress toward his destination. With each passing day, he grew more confident in his ability to navigate the unfamiliar landscape with the help of this advanced technology.

Erik's destination was the nearby city of Testrovsc's Rest. Nestled near the border of Frant and the Eldraith mountain range, this frontier city was renowned for its strategic position. Additionally, it was well-known for housing a powerful mercenary guild, the Border Wolves, who lent an additional layer of security and protection to this outpost city.

Despite its location on the outskirts of Etrium, Testrovsc's Rest was a vibrant city, bustling with activity and brimming with unique culture. Erik was eager to arrive, to see the city in all its glory, and to possibly find opportunities for himself in this frontier city.

Erik continued his journey, the only sound in the snow-covered wilderness being the gentle crunch of the winter leaves under his boots. "According to the map, I should be near Testrovsc's Rest," he commented as he looked at the empty forest. However, the scenery still reflected unbroken nature; no sign of civilization existed.

Suddenly, his ears picked up the distant sound of a struggle—the unmistakable noise of a battle: grunts of effort, angry yells, and monsters' roars. Erik's eyes widened slightly, and he muttered, "Humans!" The realization caused an adrenaline rush.

He began to sprint toward the source of the noise, his footsteps pounding against the forest floor.

As he got closer, the din of the fight became louder and more distinct. The familiar sounds of battle: swords clashing, men shouting, combat grunts and cries.

Erik emerged at the edge of a small clearing after pushing through the snow-covered field. His eyes scanned the area, taking in the sight of the ongoing battle.

He watched the battle from behind the safety of a tree, using his newly empowered Analysis power to assess the situation. Two men and two women were fighting a pack of silver-furred, wolf-like creatures with a single, gleaming orange horn on their heads. With the knowledge injected by the biological supercomputer months earlier, he recognized them instantly; they were Ma Cofs.

They weren't particularly fearsome thaids, but their ability to paralyze their prey with electrical bolts posed a significant threat even for expert hunters.

Erik carefully examined the human combatants. One of the men, brandishing a long sword, was a force to be reckoned with. His movements were lightning-fast yet controlled and precise, revealing a heightened reflex ability enabled by his brain crystal power.

This speed and reaction time advantage gave him a clear advantage in the brutal melee.

Among them was a woman, her hands expertly knocking and releasing arrows from her bow.

Erik noticed the arrows' unusual trajectory as they weaved through the air, striking the advancing thaids with pinpoint accuracy.

She possessed a unique brain crystal power that was sure, and that allowed her to manipulate air currents and subtly alter the path of her projectiles.

Another figure stood his ground with a sturdy halberd, his eyes constantly scanning the terrain as if taking a panoramic view. His brain crystal power was evident, and it extended his visual range. Erik

believed that sometimes the man looked like he had eyes on his back. This enabled him to anticipate threats and react quickly to changes on the battlefield.

The group's final member moved fluidly between the shadows, twin daggers glinting ominously in the fading light.

Now and then, she seemed to disappear entirely into the darkness, a brief illusion of invisibility brought about by her brain crystal power. It was a helpful trick for ambushes, allowing her to catch her enemies off guard.

However, despite the quartet's extraordinary abilities and good fighting skills, the relentless attack from the numerous Ma Cof was gradually overpowering them. Each passing second pushed the group closer to defeat.

Erik, silently observing from his hidden location, felt compelled to intervene as he noticed a shift in the battle. Still, he remained hidden for the time being, deliberating his next move while carefully studying the group's strategy, the dynamic battlefield, and the strengths of these people.

The monsters surged forward like a silver wave, their paralyzing electric bolts whizzing through the air in an onslaught that the fighters were finding increasingly difficult to avoid.

The man with the long sword fought bravely, his blade a blur as it danced among the foes. The pack was encircling him despite his speed and accuracy. A blunder, perhaps a brief loss of footing, was all it took for one of the bolts to strike him. He slipped, stumbling backward, and the Ma Cofs pounced, their eyes glowing ominously.

Erik caught sight of the woman with the bow out of the corner of his eye. Her arrows sliced through the air towards the threatening group of thaids. But he could see they wouldn't make it in time to save her friend.

The man with the halberd was too far away, caught in his struggle; meanwhile, the shadow-bending woman was trapped by several Ma Cofs, and her brief invisibility was no longer an asset.

Time seemed to slow down as the crackling sound of energy began to emanate from the beasts' horns, the man's expression of resignation as he looked helpless; the efforts that his companions made were for nothing. The MaCofs' eyes glowed with ravenous anticipation as they looked forward to their meal. After that, there was a rush of adrenaline.

In that split second, a decision was made. Erik decided it was time to step in. It's time to turn the tide. It's time to reveal his presence. Erik took a deep breath and dashed forward, his face solemn.

#### Chapter 488: Helping the team

Erik's muscles coiled, every nerve in his body ready for the burst of speed that would propel him into the fray. His mind was clear, focused solely on the fallen warrior amid the impending electric onslaught. The world narrowed to him and the monstrous Ma Cofs, preparing to strike.

As he exploded into motion, time seemed to slow. The whisper of his flyssa unsheathing was a sharp note of deadly intent amid the battle. Erik moved like a ghost, a blur amid the chaos. Among the Ma Cofs, he was a whirlwind of death.

His flyssa flashed through the air in a deadly arc. One Ma Cof fell, then another, their bodies collapsing to the ground almost before they could react.

Erik was a tornado of strength and accuracy; his movements were refined through countless battles. Each swing of his weapon was lethal; each step was calculated, and each breath was controlled. His rhythm was relentless: strike, move, strike, ten times in a row.

Ten Ma Cofs had been decapitated in ten seconds, their lifeless bodies falling to the ground. The remaining creatures stumbled, a ripple of uncertainty passing through them as they faced the sudden shift in the tide of battle.

The electrical charge in the air dissipated as the monsters stopped providing mana, their deadly edge scattered in the wind. Erik stood between the monsters and the fallen man, his silhouette tall and defiant against the monstrous horde. The tide of the battle had indeed shifted, and Erik was the catalyst.

A collective gasp of surprise rippled through the fighters as they beheld the spectacle before them—the sudden apparition who'd breached the battlefield and turned the tide. But there was no time for awe, only action. The group re-entered the fight with a vigor they hadn't had in a long time, fueled by renewed determination.

The battlefield was a living, seething entity in and of itself, a swirling vortex of confusion and chaos punctuated by the sharp clash of metal against bone and the guttural roars of the Ma Cofs. A sense of urgency in the air and an electric tension mirrored the Thaid's actual physical electricity.



Two fighters stood out among the chaos: the woman with the bow and the woman with the twin daggers. They moved with an effortless grace that contrasted with the gruesome scene around them, their lethal prowess adding to the Ma Cofs' confusion.

The archer drew an arrow, the bowstring humming with tension. A gentle ripple formed around her arrow as an unseen force tugged at the surrounding air currents. She let it fly with a decisive movement, the arrow streaking through the air like a lightning bolt.

Though seemingly erratic to an observer, its path was precise and deliberate. It was a blur slicing through the air, and as it traveled, it found its mark, embedding itself deep into a Ma Cof's skull. Another creature fell, a startled expression frozen on its face.

The other woman, armed with twin daggers, was a deadly dancer amid chaos. Shadows clung to her, flickering and shifting like a second skin. She was visible in the winter sun for a moment, then vanished.

She reappeared behind a Ma Cof, twin daggers glinting viciously before disappearing into the monster's back. The beast collapsed with a startled yelp, and its life was cut short by the swift and lethal dance of the shadowy figure.

With the last Ma Cofs dispatched, the chaotic battlefield quickly transformed into a solemn scene. The man armed with a halberd rushed over to his fallen comrade, his cry of "Aiden!" echoing in the quiet clearing. He moved with a sense of urgency as he examined the paralyzed fighter.

Meanwhile, the two women approached Erik, their expressions a mix of relief and gratitude. "We owe you our life," one of them began, her gaze steady and appreciative. "Without your intervention, our comrade, Aiden, would have died."

Erik dismissed the thanks with a casual wave of his hand. "It was nothing," he assured them. The women stared at him, their eyes wide with disbelief at his casual dismissal of such a heroic act. Though, Erik added, "You don't have to thank me."

As silence fell between them, Erik wondered why these well-armed individuals were so far from civilization in the wilderness. "What brings you out here?" he asked, breaking the silence. He suspected they were Mercenaries, but being used to Frant, where only the military could pass through the barrier, it seemed weird.

The two exchanged glances before the one who hadn't yet spoken responded. "We're a party, working," she explained. "We accepted a quest to eliminate this group of Ma Cofs. They've been causing problems for the local merchants, but we underestimated them."

Erik cast a thoughtful glance over at the incapacitated man. "Do you need help getting him to the nearest city?" he asked, returning his gaze to the two women.

They both blinked in surprise at his offer. The person who had initially thanked him opened her mouth, most likely to decline the offer and save him the trouble. "There is no need, really," a woman said. But it was clear to Erik that it wouldn't be easy to fight for them if they found Thaid's on the way back.

"Are you sure? I'm going to the city; it is not a problem for me to escort you there."

Erik had his reasons for offering his assistance. He was in unfamiliar territory. Coming from Frant, he needed an Etrium ID that would have allowed him easy access to the nation's cities.

Although travel and trade between Frant and Etrium were common, flying vehicles usually facilitated them. A lone, seventeen-year-old boy traversing the terrain on foot would be suspicious unless he were a mercenary, and even that was weird.

Erik saw the party's presence as a valuable opportunity. Associating himself with them, even temporarily, could provide him with the cover he needed to enter the city.

Recognizing the logic in Erik's insistence, the two women exchanged glances before nodding in agreement. "We appreciate the help," the second woman said, her eyes meeting Erik's with a genuine expression of gratitude. They had yet to learn that the assistance would be mutually beneficial.

#### Chapter 489: Toward the city

The group started moving in the direction of Testrovs's Rest, which was their final destination. The atmosphere was laid back, but there was a trace of exhaustion in the air; after all, they had just finished fighting a draining battle.

The members of the group each took a moment to introduce themselves to Erik as they strolled along together. The woman holding the bow smiled and greeted the young man; she also frequently looked at him with curious sidelong glances as she approached. It was weird for him how a guy so young was so strong, much more than her.

"Well, since you've seen me in action, it's only fair you know my name," she began, a faint smile playing at her lips. "I'm an archer by choice and a free spirit at heart. People often tell me I have a way with air currents. You could say the wind whispers secrets to me. My name is Mira."

Next was the man wielding the halberd. He was a bit more reserved, choosing his words with careful consideration. "I'm the group's strategist, and I like reading," he admitted, his gaze steady on the road ahead. "My name is Kael." Clearly, Erik couldn't see how the man liked to read due to his impressive build.

The lively woman with the twin daggers was the last to introduce herself, her energetic demeanor barely dimmed by the earlier skirmish. "And I'm just your everyday rogue," she said cheerily, twirling one of her daggers with an ease that spoke of countless hours of practice. "My name is Lila."

The man Erik had saved was the only one who remained silent, as he was unconscious. Kael, the halberd-wielder, introduced him. "And our friend here, who you've so graciously assisted, is a swordsman," he explained, his tone tinged with respect from countless shared battles. "His name is Aiden."

Erik looked around at the curious faces and replied, "It's a pleasure to meet all of you as well. My name is Erik." He omitted his surname. Lila blinked a mischievous glint in her eyes.

Mira blinked, a playful glint in her eyes. "You're quite a mystery, Erik," she said teasingly. "Running around in a dangerous forest all by yourself. Don't you know it's risky going alone?" She chuckled, shaking her head, her hair catching the rays of the setting sun.

"Although," she continued, her gaze turning slightly serious, "it doesn't look like you need much help, considering how you handled those Ma Cofs."

A sliver of a smile crossed his lips in response to the rogue's statement. "I was going to the city," he explained, looking around the group. "But I got lost when going through the forest. And as for why I'm alone," Erik's voice trailed off momentarily as he considered how much information to reveal. "Let's say that stuff happened."

"But you're right," he admitted, chuckling, "The forest is dangerous. As you've seen, I can handle myself pretty well." His eyes twinkled mischievously as he acknowledged the woman's compliment about his strength.

Like everyone else in the group, Erik had secrets but seemed content to keep them for the time being.

Then Lila laughed, breaking the silence. "Well, that's an understatement," she said, grinning broadly. "We owe you one, Erik."

"Don't mention it," Erik said, dismissing the thanks with a casual wave. There was a brief pause before Kael, the man with the halberd, broke the silence.

"Your accent, it's unique," he observed with a puzzled expression on his face. "Where do you come from, Erik?"

"I'm from Frant," Erik confessed, his expression unreadable. There was a moment of surprise among the group, but they didn't interrupt. "A wyvern attacked my vehicle while we were flying over the Eldraith mountain range," Erik continued, his voice steady.

The group let out a collective gasp. Mira, the woman with the bow, was the first to regain her calm. "Why were you flying so low?" she questioned, furrowing her brows. "It's dangerous to be within the monsters' reach."

Erik shrugged, appearing unconcerned. "One of the passengers asked the pilot to fly low. He wanted to see the mountain range up close," he explained in his best actor performance, his voice devoid of emotion. "I was lucky to have survived, but the others..."

He trailed off, leaving the unspoken words hanging in the air after he had finished speaking. The others were silent; each lost in their own thoughts as they remained by his side. Erik was, without a doubt, not telling the whole truth. The story was made up to justify his presence in the wilderness of Etrium without arousing any suspicions about his true situation.

Nevertheless, it seemed to be successful for the time being. The group members offered their condolences, and Erik allowed the tiniest of smiles to play across his lips as they did so. The deception he attempted to pull off was, at least temporarily, successful.

Before speaking, Mira, the archer, cleared her throat. "If you intend to enter the city," she explained, "you must first stop at the entrance and explain your situation to the guards."

Erik arched an eyebrow in response. "Is that so?"

Mira gave a nod. "Yes. They will likely check your Frantian ID on their computers, and if everything checks out, they will issue you an Etriumer ID."

Erik nodded, grateful for her advice. He'd anticipated that moving to a new city would present new challenges, but he hadn't anticipated the specifics. "Thank you very much, Mira," he said gratefully. "I'll be sure to do that as soon as I arrive," he said.

In spite of this, he intended to use the biological supercomputer to fabricate an identity for himself. This was the most reasonable course of action to take; it made perfect sense.

The Biological supercomputer gave him the ability to achieve something that was previously impossible. It would be a major setback for Frant, which most likely was looking for him, to learn that he had made it to Etrium and was still alive if the news made its way there.

#### Chapter 490: Testrovsc's Rest

As they got closer, the entrance to Testrovsc's Rest revealed itself to be more and more impressive.

It was a magnificent structure, a testament to the one-of-a-kind blend of tradition and technology that the city possessed.

A pair of enormous, sleek metal doors propped open flanked the entrance on either side. Unlike the homogeneity of New Alexandria, this city thrived on diversity.

Even from a distance, Erik could see a flux of people moving through the gates, an endless, vibrant tide of activity. This was not a silent, sterile stream of city goers; instead, it was a bustling crowd of adventurers, mercenaries, and traders, all of whom were wrapped in almost intoxicating chaos.

The individuals were striking and armored in various protective gear designs ranging from straightforward to outrageously original.

Weapons as diverse as simple swords and bows, plasma rifles, and energy shields were familiar sights, either slung across backs or fastened to belts. Their animated expressions told stories of dangerous travels, and each individual exuded an air of unyielding resolve.

The security guards stationed at the entrance were a sight to behold, too, because of their highly technological body armor and visors to conceal their eyes and give them information in real time.

At their side, they held impressive weapons - a hybrid of melee and ranged designs, radiating a soft glow, signaling their readiness.

Testrovsc's Rest was the pinnacle of organized anarchy due to the flurry of activity that prevailed there. The city was a safe haven for those who chose to go the less traveled routes, sought the excitement of the unknown, and courageously faced the many dangers that life presented.

As Erik got closer to the gateway, he couldn't contain his excitement any longer. Despite what appeared to be complete anarchy, the city had a vitality that New Alexandria lacked and was pulsating with life.

People didn't just live here; they were thriving despite the challenges, their spirits unaffected by the daily dangers, Thaidis.

He fervently wished that these people weren't like the Frantians, who were obsessed with power and looked down on those who were less capable.

Mira turned towards Erik after a brief pause, her eyes gentle beneath the shadows of the city gates. "We'll part ways here," she said softly, her voice barely above a whisper amid the bustling crowd.

Erik gave a gentle nod and a warm smile in response. "I understand. Wish you safe travels and bountiful hunts to all of you."

Kael was the next to speak, his eyes genuine as he extended his hand to Erik while holding his unconscious companion. "It was nice to meet you, Erik. We hope to run into you again inside the city."

Erik accepted the hand with a firm shake, acknowledging the sentiment with a heartfelt grin. "The pleasure was mine. If we have time, we will definitely meet; I look forward to it. Have a nice day."

He turned to face the city gates once more, waving goodbye to his new friends before embarking on his journey into the unknown. But first and foremost, he needed to get into range to connect to the Internet and fill out the data needed to create a fake ID. He needed a new identity if he wanted to get inside the city.

Erik approached the gate slowly, his gaze drawn upward to take in the massive structure that towered above him.

What he first thought was a city gate was much more, a massive structure. Its interior humming with activity under the harsh glow of artificial lights. The scene that unfolded before him as he crossed the threshold of the city's gate was utterly unexpected.

It resembled a vast shopping mall bathed in overhead lights' cool, sterile luminosity. The spacious hall was lined with shops and illuminated storefronts selling everything from modern clothing to ancient weapons.

The variety of merchandise was astounding, spanning both practicality and antiquity. The sight was overwhelming yet captivating in its own right.

Erik's gaze wandered across the plethora of shops, each offering something unique. However, it was the weapon stores that piqued his interest the most.

Etrium was renowned for its craftsmanship, and the weapons on display were nothing short of spectacular. The display cases were filled with a dazzling array of old and new weaponry, each an artful combination of craftsmanship and functionality much different from the sterile and simple ones made in Frant.

Among them, Erik could make out weapons that bore the distinct signs of being imbued with the powers of Thaid's brain crystals, which was further proven by their price tags, which were much higher than the other weapons, but at the same time, making them all the more coveted. Still, they weren't much since this was a secret technology, and there were just a few crafters able to do that.

His gaze was drawn to the food stalls and cafes scattered throughout the vast hall—the enticing aroma of cooking mingled with the rich aroma of freshly brewed coffee in the air.

The restaurants were a melting pot, serving everything from local delicacies to exotic dishes. On the other hand, the coffee shops exuded a welcoming atmosphere, with baristas brewing orders behind gleaming countertops.

Erik took note of the vehicles for sale inside some of the shops as he moved through the people. Most were vehicles with high capacity; some had weapons mounted on them, while others were

purely thought to bring Thaid's bodies back to the city after a hunt. Nonetheless, each vehicle exuded elegance and power, reflecting the sophistication of Etrium's craftsmanship.

The entire place was a riot of color, noise, and movement. People milled about, their voices rising and falling in a steady hum of conversation, laughter, and bargaining. Merchants shouted from their stalls, hoping to catch the attention of passersby. Customers moved between stores, their arms laden with purchases.

Erik felt awe and curiosity as he surveyed his surroundings. It was a different world, one full of possibilities and challenges.

Despite the strangeness of it all, Erik felt a rush of excitement. This was a new beginning, an opportunity to carve out a place for himself in an intimidating and fascinating world.