

BIOLOGICAL 491

Chapter 491: A new identity

Erik's eyes darted around the crowded shopping center, searching for a path through the maze of stalls and shops.

He approached a random person walking by and asked where to make his ID again since he had lost his.

The individual indicated with his hand towards a structure that bore the neon sign "Administration Office" above the entrance to a building.

The office was a glass building with a slick contemporary design that starkly contrasted the other shops and places inside this weird gate-shopping mall. The neon lights framed the entrance cast a warm and inviting light on those waiting outside. People gathered together to form a line extending from the entrance and wound its way through the surrounding stores.

Despite the apparent chaos, there was an unspoken order to it all.

Some people were engaged in animated conversation with their companions, their voices mingling with the crowd's buzz.

After giving an appreciative nod to the man, Erik started walking in the indicated direction. As he got closer to the office, he noticed a crowd congregating around the entrance, and everyone in the crowd appeared to be very annoyed. Maybe it was because of the crowd, or maybe because they had to settle something big, but there wasn't anyone not having that expression on their face.

The presence of so many people was disconcerting. Erik was well aware of the peculiarities of his situation; he was well-known in Frant and needed extreme caution.

The very last thing he wanted was to be recognized by someone in that crowd, especially in such an unpredictable setting. It was a risk he was not willing to take, so he decided to stay as far away from the crowd as possible.

Erik waited just far enough away from the entrance to be able to hack into the computers inside and let the System do its job. The continuous stream of people went in and out of the building or walked past him.

< System, can you connect to the computers from here?> the young man asked. The biological supercomputer replied immediately.

[ANSWER: YES. WHAT YOU NEED ME TO DO?]

<Connect to the computers and create a fake identity for me. However, keep my name the same aside from the surname; I want to avoid confusion and possibly weird situations. Erik is a relatively common name, after all.> The young man gave his orders; there was determination in his eyes but a slight apprehension.

He hoped no one would find out his identity was fake and wondered if someone would check it in the future. Everything depended on the biological supercomputer, but he was sure the AI wouldn't make any mistakes.

<Also, make sure that the date the ID was made is not suspicious.>

[UNDERSTOOD. CONNECTING TO "ADMINISTRATION OFFICE" COMPUTER NO. 7. CONNECTION COMPLETE. STARTING FORGING PROCEDURE. PLEASE WAIT.]

While he had to wait, Erik found himself fixating on a nearby weapon shop. He couldn't resist the allure of the sword proudly displayed in the shop window. His Flyssa had accompanied him on many adventures, but it was evident to him that the weapon started becoming obsolete. The weapon couldn't be used against too strong Thaid's since it would shatter their bones and skin. He had to replace the weapon.

Erik's gaze was drawn to the weapon. It was a piece of artwork bearing the signature of the illustrious artisans of Etrium.

Eshalt, an ore of lower quality than Aclaitrium with lower mana conductivity but affordable to the masses, was most likely used in constructing the blade.

The artificial lights directed onto the weapon revealed a kaleidoscope of colors when it illuminated the metallic surface. The blade had a complex wave pattern, and the metal made it shine almost iridescently, indicating the enormous amount of heat and force used in its creation.

The blade's edge was as sharp as a razor, a menacing guarantee of instant retribution. The hilt of the sword held the same allure as the blade itself.

It appeared to be crafted from jet-black obsidian, carved, and polished to a smooth finish by a skilled craftsman. Along the length of the hilt, there were embedded miniature iridescent gemstones.

In the center, there was a symbol, possibly the maker's signature, etched into the obsidian in a silvery script that was barely visible unless one knew where to look.

This emblem could be found in the center of the object. The young man was taken aback by the craftsman's skill and the weapon's beauty. Despite imagining it was worse than one made of Aclatrium ore, the craftsmanship behind it and the weapon's beauty left the young man stunned.

[TASK COMPLETE. ID FORGED. THE HOST CAN FREELY USE IT WITHIN ETRIUM'S TERRITORY. HOWEVER, A PHYSICAL COPY OF THE ID MUST BE MADE. SINCE THE USER DOES NOT HAVE IT, THE BEST THING TO DO WOULD BE TO GO TO THE ADMINISTRATION CENTER AND REQUEST A NEW ONE TO BE MADE. IT IS SUFFICIENT TO SAY THAT THE USER LOST IT WHILE HUNTING.]

<Tell me the info you inserted.> The young man said to his loyal companion. He couldn't risk messing up now that his goal of entering the city was within reach.

[UNDERSTOOD. HERE ARE THE SPECIFICS:]

|ETRIUM IDENTIFICATION|

|PHOTO

| FIRST NAME: ERIK

| LAST NAME: KAY

| DATE OF BIRTH: 08 / 11 / 3025

| AGE: 17

| BIRTH CITY: NOKISI POINT

| BIRTH NATION: ETRIUM

| OCCUPATION: MERCENARY

| CURRENT RESIDENCE:

| Street: 225 SERENITY LANE

| City: NOKISI POINT

|Postal Code: ET67309

| SEX: MALE

| HEIGHT: 170 cm

| WEIGHT: 65 kg

| EYE COLOR: BROWN

| HAIR COLOR: BLACK

| BRAIN CRYSTAL POWER: FORCE MANIPULATION

| Unique Identification Number: ETR7893456123

<Hey, System. It says I'm a mercenary, but what if they check if it is true?>

[ANSWER: I ALREADY MADE A FILE FOR YOU IN THE MERCENARY GUILD BY CONNECTING TO THE DATABASE THROUGH TESTROVSC'S REST MERCENARY GUILD HEADQUARTERS DATABASE. I INSERTED NOKISI POINT AS YOUR REGISTRATION HUB. I ALSO CREATED A FAKE BIRTH CERTIFICATE SO THERE WON'T BE ANY PROBLEMS REGARDING THIS MATTER.]

<Good. People will think I came here for more opportunities instead of staying in Nokisi Point since it is oversaturated with mercenaries and the Band of Giants monopolized the best hunting grounds.>

Chapter 492: Looking around

Erik left the Administration office with his ID tucked into his pocket. The sprawling building's overhead lights cast long, stretching shadows that danced and shifted as people milled about, a mosaic of motion and life.

He craned his neck to scan the various signs for an ATM. With his biological supercomputer, extracting money from these machines was a simple task, although not one he could indulge in often.

His mind raced with plans and ideas; he needed a proper cover to survive.

His gaze was finally drawn to a machine nestled between a cozy-looking café and a shop selling exotic fruits.

He moved closer to the ATM, keeping an eye out for any suspicious stare. People in Etrium came from all walks of life, and everyone knew better than to pry into the affairs of strangers, but better safe than sorry. His fingers danced over the keypad as he stood before the machine, seemingly random digits entering and withdrawing.

In reality, he was communicating with the biological supercomputer, using its abilities to breach the ATM's security.

There was a brief pause before the machine began to whirr, and a stack of Eurems was dispensed.

As he pocketed the money, his heart thumped in his chest. A successful transaction that went unnoticed, precisely as he had planned.

Yet, he could not repeat this often; the risk was too great. He had to lay low, not draw attention with a sudden influx of money. So, the idea of working as a mercenary began to solidify. In the rough and tumble world of mercenaries, a little extra money was never questioned.

Erik had found the ideal cover, a means to an end in his new life in Etrium. Having an idea, a direction to go in, made Erik calm a little bit, though there was much he needed to do. Erik decided to head toward the weapon shop to gain an understanding of the prices in this city.

The door to the shop chimed gently as Erik entered, stepping from the bustling cityscape into the quiet haven of steel and craftwork. The air inside smelled like polished metal and worn leather, a scent that any warrior would find comforting. Weapons of various types hung on the walls, gleaming in the soft, artificial light.

Erik noticed a pair of delicate throwing knives shimmering in the light to his left. The blades were razor-thin and as sharp as a surgeon's scalpel. The price tag attached to them read '17,500 Eurems'.

A magnificent longbow carved from the vibrant red wood of a Harn tree stood next to them. Its graceful curvature and intricate carvings spoke of a master's touch. The price tag, however, read a hefty '22,000 Eurems'.

A spear on a pedestal seemed to glow with an internal light, implying the Thaid's brain crystal power was imbued within.

The armor appeared to be lightweight yet durable, with intricate engravings. The cost was '3,600,000 Eurems,' far beyond Erik's current means.

A middle-aged man wearing a neat uniform with a tag bearing the name 'Kiran' approached Erik. His eyes held the bright shine of someone who took immense pride in their work. "Looking for something in particular, sir?" He asked in a polite tone.

Erik's gaze moved from the Eshalt sword to the spear that was displayed in front of him. Its price tag was staggering, a whopping '3,600,000 Eurems'. Erik motioned towards it and asked, "Well, I was looking at your goods and started wondering why that spear has such a high price tag."

Kiran nodded as he followed Erik's gaze. "Ah, you have an eye for unique pieces," he said as he approached the spear. "This here is no ordinary weapon," he said, motioning to the spear.

"It was forged in Nokisi Point by Elara Steelhand, the finest crafter of the city. She's famed for her superior craftsmanship and the ability to imbue weapons with Thaid's brain crystal powers."

"This particular spear is imbued with the power of an Eganese. It allows the wielder to convert their mana into a potent venom. Every time you thrust the spear, it injects this venom into your enemy. It's not just a weapon; it's a death sentence to any opponent."

Erik nodded in agreement after hearing the explanation. The spear was undoubtedly out of his price range, but the idea of weapons imbued with brain crystal powers piqued his interest. The ability to convert mana into venom added a new level of complexity and strategy to battles. Etrium was already living up to its reputation.

Erik thought about the clerk's words momentarily before gently shaking his head. "I understand," he said, "but I'm not ready to make a purchase just yet." His gaze returned to the weapon displays, where he admired the brilliant array of options. Each weapon had its charm and story, but none had beckoned to him just yet.

"However," he added, returning his gaze to the clerk, "I'll be back in the future." I hope to see something more powerful on display when I return." Erik's words were not meant to be a challenge but a testament to his goals. The weapons he saw were extraordinary, but he knew he'd need something even better to overcome the trials that awaited him in this land.

Kiran, the clerk, nodded with a knowing smile at Erik's statement. He'd seen many warriors come and go, each with goals and dreams. Erik was no exception. "I will look forward to your return, young man. Rest assured; we're always acquiring new pieces. When the time comes, I'm certain you'll find a weapon befitting your strength and your pockets."

Erik gave a final acknowledgment nod before exiting the store. He let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding as the door closed behind him. The shop had been an eye-opening experience with its exquisite weapons.

Etrium was a land of wonders, where the old coexisted with the new, and tradition coexisted with innovation. Erik was eager to explore every nook and cranny of the city in search of opportunities.

Chapter 493: The Luminary Plaza

Erik stepped through the city gates and into the vibrant heart of Testrovsc's Rest. He was immediately confronted with towering buildings, each with about ten floors.

Although these structures were mainly concrete, they had an intriguing charm. Their utilitarian nature reflected the city's practical spirit. Still, each had its aesthetic details that gave the city its personality.

Despite its smaller scale, the city's bustling streets were reminiscent of New Alexandria's thriving cityscape. Shop signs hung from every corner, offering a tempting array of goods and services.

Yet it was the people that genuinely breathed life into the city. A veritable sea of humanity ebbed and flowed around Erik, a thrumming rhythm that gave a pulse to the city's concrete veins.

People from all walks of life brushed past him, their expressions determined and purposeful. They all had one thing in common: they were mercenaries. Erik was reasonably sure of this based on the way they moved and the keen gaze in their eyes.

Their clothing, the weathered weapons they carried, and the calluses on their hands all told of a life lived on the edge of danger.

The young ones, the novice mercenaries, were easy to spot, their eyes wide with excitement and a touch of fear. Some clutched their weapons nervously, while others walked with a cocky swagger. Still, all carried an air of uncertainty as they moved toward the city's exit. Some hadn't yet experienced the crucible of actual combat and were just out of the nest.

Erik, among this sea of youth, could spot the veterans. Some were grizzled with age; their faces were etched with hardship and experience lines. Others were still young, but their eyes were hardened, and they had a quiet strength that spoke of countless battles.

However, those who bore the visible scars of their profession piqued Erik's interest the most—men and women with robotic limbs and glowing mechanical eyes.

Each prosthetic was a grim reminder of an old injury, a harsh reminder of the price they paid for their line of work. But there was no shame or regret in their expressions. They wore their scars as badges of honor, as reminders of battles fought and won.

Despite their disparities in age and experience, they all shared a bond. They were Fortune's soldiers who had chosen a dangerous and uncertain path. Erik saw reflections of his journey in their eyes. He was a mercenary in a city of warriors.

A sense of belonging washed over him as he took in the city's pulsating life. He was a stranger here but felt at ease amid the hustle and bustle, tension, and anticipation.

Erik's boots echoed crisply against the pavement as he walked through Testrovsc's Rest's bustling sidewalks. His sharp and discerning gaze swept over the crowd.

He was a stranger in a strange city, and his priority was to find a place to stay. His journey from Frant had been long and exhausting, and he yearned for the simple pleasures of a soft bed and a hot shower. But first, he needed to hail a taxi.

Bodies of all sizes moved past him as he searched, a river of life flowing through the city's veins. The citizens of Testrovsc's Rest were a mixture of mercenaries, traders, and adventurers, all drawn by the city's vibrant pulse. Their colorful armors and gear were a testament to the city's reputation as a mercenary hub.

Yet, amidst the ebb and flow of city life, he found what he sought. A taxi, painted a glossy black, was parked a few steps away, its driver leisurely leaning against the side. The man's gaze was trained on the crowd, patiently awaiting his next fare.

Erik approached the taxi driver with a polite smile, tugging at the corners of his lips. "Are you free?" he inquired, his voice rising above the city's constant hum. The man's eyes swept over Erik, a slight nod indicating his availability.

"I need a good hotel," Erik said as he slid into the back seat of the taxi. He required a base of operations, a location to plan his next steps, and, most importantly, a location that would provide adequate comfort and security.

Erik had barely finished his request for a good hotel when the taxi driver's face lit up with a broad and friendly smile. "You should check out the Luminary Plaza, young man," he said firmly. "It's one of the best in Testrovsc's Rest," he said, his fingers nimbly tapping into the vehicle's navigation system.

"Luminary Plaza, it is," Erik agreed with a nod, his gaze sliding past the window, capturing the city's skyline as it flowed past.

The taxi hummed quietly as it flew over the sky of Testrovsc's Rest. The city was alive with activity, streets bustling with pedestrians and various vehicles, neon signs advertising many businesses, and towering buildings piercing the sky.

The taxi driver, who introduced himself as Gil, peppered the drive with chatter, telling Erik about the city's favorite haunts, the best places to eat, and even recommended a few shops for equipment. All the while, Erik found himself captivated by the panoramic display of city life unfolding outside the vehicle.

In less than twenty minutes, the taxi arrived at a tall, sleek building that glowed like a beacon in the fading evening light. "Luminary Plaza," Gil said, a proud tone in his voice as he motioned towards the structure. "Doesn't it look lovely?"

Erik nodded, pleased with the place. The name Luminary Plaza was certainly fitting. The hotel exuded a quiet elegance that set it apart from the surrounding structures, bathed in the soft glow of strategically placed lighting. He paid the fare and thanked Gil for the pleasant ride and suggestions.

"I'll make sure to look them up," Erik assured the taxi driver, who smiled back at him through the rearview mirror.

Erik stepped out of the taxi and into the cool evening air with a final wave. He stood for a moment, taking in his new surroundings. He'd explore the city tomorrow, but the Luminary Plaza would be his refuge for now.

Chapter 494: The Mercenary Guild (1)

With the first rays of dawn, Erik forced himself out of the cozy confines of his bed. He quickly dressed, showered, and ate breakfast before leaving his hotel room. He was a man with a purpose, and he couldn't waste any time.

Testrovs's Rest was already bustling with activity when Erik stepped outside onto its streets. People from all walks of life hurried about, each on their particular quests, as vendors set up their booths, the clanging of smithies resounded in the air, and merchants set up their stalls.

Erik motioned for a cab. Within seconds, a sleek, black car pulled up to the curb. "Where to?" inquired the driver, a woman with kind eyes and a weathered face. Erik said, getting into the back seat, "The Mercenary Guild, please."

The driver did not seem surprised in the least by his request and simply nodded. The Mercenary Guild was a popular destination for travelers in this city full of adventures and mercenaries. A low hum could be heard as the taxi merged into the morning air traffic and wound its way through the city streets to get to Erik's destination.

As they drew nearer to the Mercenary Guild, Erik could already make out the crowd of people that had gathered around it, which included people of all ages and stages of life, from fresh-faced youths to weathered veterans and everyone in between.

This was the first step he needed to take in order to become a mercenary. It was also the first step he needed to take in order to advance professionally, acquire power, and establish a foothold in this world.

When the taxi arrived, a stop was made at the curb in front of the Mercenary Guild. After handing the driver his money, Erik exited the vehicle onto the cobblestone streets and stared at the massive and menacing structure that stood in front of him.

The Mercenary Guild building stood out like a giant monolith against the background of the sprawling cityscape. It was a stunning example of modern architecture that managed to combine form and function in a natural way.

The guild was the central meeting place for the active mercenary community in the city, and its building was designed to resemble a shiny mirror on the outside so that it could reflect the surroundings.

The clouds had obscured the building's peak, but the structure itself was tower-like in appearance and reached far into the horizon of the city skyline. Its exterior was covered in panels of brilliant neon lights, the colors of which subtly changed, painting the structure in a spectrum of colors that was constantly shifting.

These lights served a purpose other than aesthetics; they made important announcements and news about the guild's activities visible to everyone in the city.

The grand entrance to the guild featured a pair of substantial double doors made of polished dark wood adorned with intricate carvings of various mythical beasts, a nod to the risky and fantastical nature of the mercenaries' work.

Large holographic banners bearing the guild's crest—a pair of crossed swords atop a circle-shaped shield—flew from the building's top. The guild's dedication to defending the city and its residents was symbolized by the brightly shining emblem, which stood out against the skyline as a steadfast beacon.

The guild hall served as the hub of activity, with a constant flow of people entering and leaving. At the same time, their various armor and weapons created a rainbow of colors.

Erik was astounded by the sheer number of people milling about inside the Mercenary Guild as soon as he entered.

The expansive room buzzed with a variety of different activities. A wide range of emotions were present, including trepidation, resolve, and anticipation.

Erik's attention was immediately drawn to the plethora of holographic displays strewn about the room.

Their long, flitting shadows on the stone floor shimmered with an ethereal blue glow as they cast their effect. The adventurers clustered around each screen to examine the available quests in greater detail.

They engaged in an animated conversation, pointing at the screen and discussing various strategies, potential benefits, and associated risks.

Close to one of the displays, a young woman with fiery red hair and a large man carrying an axe on his back were conversing with each other. They appeared to be having a heated argument while pointing to a quest on the screen. Still, the hum of activity around them obscured their voices.

A stoic-appearing man with a prosthetic arm stood by himself before another screen. He had cybernetic fingers that danced over the holographic interface as he navigated the available quests. He also had a mechanical eye, an icy blue color, which was fixed intently on the screen as he evaluated the quests with a grim resolve.

"I guess I have to take a quest from these holographic screens," the young man said to himself. However, as he got there and entered the password to the account the System made for him, he was left disappointed. The only quests he could take were training ones. It was clear he didn't need training at all.

<System, why did you place me at the Novice Rank, the lowest one?> he asked the biological supercomputer.

[ANSWER: PEOPLE YOUR AGE ARE STATISTICALLY AROUND THIS LEVEL. SETTING ONE HIGHER WAS GOING TO BE SUSPICIOUS.]

It made sense, but Erik still hated the situation. The young man didn't have time to inject information about the guild system. Besides, he wanted to ask something to a human to see if he could take higher-ranked quests.

Erik began to navigate his way through the crowd, heading toward the reception desk. Behind the counter, a cheerful-looking woman with braided hair and glasses perched on her nose was busy attending to the queries of a pair of twin sisters who looked no older than 20.

While he waited, Erik was impatiently counting down the seconds until it was his turn. He was on the verge of signing up, stepping in a new direction, and beginning his journey. The holographic displays continued to flicker in the distance, giving tantalizing glimpses of the upcoming adventures.

Chapter 495: The Mercenary Guild (2)

Erik's footsteps echoed against the polished floor as he approached the clerk's desk. As the twins moved out of the way, it was his turn to speak with the woman.

"Excuse me! I have a question," Erik called out politely, a forced smile tugging at the corners of his lips. The clerk paused her work, lifting her gaze to meet his.

"I went to the holographic screen to take a quest, but I couldn't avoid noticing I can't take 'real ones,' but only training-related ones. I received private tutoring at Nokisi Point, and I'm fairly strong. Is there a way to take a higher-ranked quest?" the young man asked.

"Can you tell me your name?" the woman asked.

"Erik Kay," the young man replied.

"Just give me a second. I need to check your profile."

The woman typed something on the holographic screen. His information flashed up on the device before her, the dull glow of the holographic light painting her face in shades of green and blue. She scanned his profile, her lips pressing into a thin line.

"From here, I can see you are a Novice Ranked Mercenary. I'm sorry, but since you are only at this rank, I can't give you other quests besides the ones you saw in your account," she told him, her tone holding a touch of finality.

Erik's heart sank. He knew it would take much work to persuade the guild to let him take on higher-level quests so soon. But he wasn't the type to give up easily.

"Couldn't you make an exception, given my skills?" He asked.

"Unfortunately not," the woman replied. "The Novice Rank is a critical one. It is designed to give you time to learn how to fight, critical thinking, and the guild values and rules. You must do everything as it should inside this rank, or your untimely death would only have higher chances."

"But!"

The clerk shook her head, her gaze fixed. "There won't be exceptions," she stated firmly. Erik could tell by her tone that there was no room for negotiation.

Part of him was disappointed, but he understood the logic behind the rules. It was all about ensuring the mercenaries' safety, and the guild couldn't risk novices trying to overachieve and getting hurt or worse in the process.

Erik thanked the clerk for her time and walked away, a wave of disappointment washing over him. He returned to the holographic screen, his eyes scanning the quests.

"Fuck all these training and learning quests!" he exclaimed angrily. However, because he couldn't do anything else, he decided to embark on a sword-training quest.

Since he used a Flyssa, a sword, the best thing to do was to take on a quest that taught him how to use sword-type weapons more effectively.

<Quest: Sword Training.>

<Duration: 1 month.>

<Rewards: Learning a basic sword style; Accommodation for a month in the mercenary guild barracks, two meals a day.>

<Rank: Novice.>

<Difficulty: Easy.>

He took a deep breath, steeling himself before making his decision. It wasn't what he had hoped for but a start. And with each quest he completed, he got closer to his goal.

Erik then looked for something else on the holographic screen. Information on the mercenary ranks. According to what he was reading, there were ten ranks:

1) Novice

2) Pupil

3) Seeker

4) Warden

5) Brawler

6) Gallant

7) Myrmidon

8) Paragon

9) Titan

10) Legend

Erik scanned the list, his fingers hovering over the screen as he read the details. Each rank was clearly defined, with the point requirements and trials for rank advancement detailed below. It appeared simple, but he could tell it was a system designed to test the full range of a mercenary's abilities.

All newcomers started at the Novice rank, the rank he currently held. The tasks at this level were simple, but the trials were numerous. Erik wasn't too concerned about him having to prove himself in combat. He had already fought and killed many Thaidis, including people who had gone to the Red Palace. There was no reason to be concerned from this point of view.

A knowledge-related trial, on the other hand, posed a more significant challenge for the general population. They would have to demonstrate their knowledge of the world, its creatures, and its numerous dangers.

However, even for this trial, Erik did not need to be concerned because he could simply use the system to inject the required information. He already had information on Frantian Thaidis; all he needed to do was inject the ones related to Etrium.

The problem-solving trial came next. This would put his ability to think on his feet, react quickly to unexpected situations, and make sound decisions under pressure to the test. Erik was confident in this aspect of the trials. His experiences in the wilderness, where quick thinking was often the difference between life and death, had honed this ability.

Besides, he had Hais's Brain crystal power, so he wasn't that concerned.

After that, there was a trial based on the guild's standards. It was a verbal examination to determine his familiarity with the guild's guiding principles and his capacity to uphold those principles.

In all honesty, it would be more of a test of character. Regarding this topic, Erik could not help but feel uneasy. He had spent a significant portion of his life looking out for himself, and when it became necessary for him to do so, he broke the rules. Despite having some, he did not understand the importance of adhering scrupulously to strict moral guidelines.

At long last, there was a proper trial to undertake. After the results of the earlier tests had been disclosed, the examiners were supposed to decide. A fake rescue operation was usually required to earn high scores.

He needed to do well on these examinations to advance in level and be eligible for more challenging and rewarding quests. As he reviewed the list again, Erik took a long, deep breath and stooped his shoulders.

He knew he had a long journey ahead of him but was ready to face the challenges he would face along the way. He shifted his gaze away from the screen as his mind raced with different strategies and plans for his upcoming challenges.

Chapter 496: The tests (1)

Time seemed to pass quickly for Erik as he threw himself into his new regimen. As he attempted to adjust to the new sword style, he put his body through a daily punishing workout routine. He would practice the fluid movements over and over again until they became ingrained in his muscle memory.

Despite this, he picked himself up each time he failed and tried again. He never gave up. Even though his muscles were sore from the long hours of practice, he welcomed the ache in his body. In addition, he worked on his usual sword technique and the formation of neural links.

But it wasn't all physical training. Thanks to the biological supercomputer, he could inject his brain with information about the local Thaid's and other creatures native to Etrium. Erik would have done this regardless, but since the trial required this knowledge, the reason for learning all this increased.

As Erik sat at a corner table in the bustling cafeteria of the mercenary Guild, he shared a friendly banter with the waiter, a cheerful man named Vance. Over the course of the previous month, Erik's routine trips to the cafeteria after his strenuous workouts had resulted in the two of them developing a friendship.

A stocky man with a wide grin and a head full of snowy white hair, Vance had been with the Guild for decades. He had seen a lot of young people with promise come and go, and Erik was just one of them. However, Vance was drawn to Erik because of his tenacity, toughness, and the fact that there was something unique to Erik's aura.

During their conversations, Vance would share tales of past mercenaries who had come through the Guild, their triumphs, and failures, adding to the rich tapestry of stories that Vance seemed to have an endless supply of. For his part, Erik would listen attentively to each story as they revealed specifics about the daily life of a mercenary in Etrium.

"So, do you have any suggestion for the trial?" Erik asked the older man. Vance refilled Erik's glass with cola; then, the older man took a moment to reflect before responding.

"Well, lad, all trials are significant in their own right," Vance started, his tone solemn. "But if there's one aspect that many underestimate and that you shouldn't, it's the Guild Values assessment."

He straightened up and crossed his arms, his eyes meeting Erik's.

"Many people come here intending to become the greatest mercenary, focusing solely on combat skills." They forget that being a mercenary is about more than just strength and fighting skills."

Vance pointed around the bustling cafeteria at the many men and women engaged in camaraderie and laughter in heated discussions and quiet debates. "Take a look around, Erik. What you see here is a neighborhood. The Guild is more than just a place to complete quests and earn money. It's a place where we watch out for one another and uphold certain principles and values."

He leaned in closer, his voice softening. "Trust, integrity, cooperation, respect for all life, commitment to the mission, and duty to the Guild. These values are the bedrock of our Guild. Neglect them; no matter how great a fighter you become, you'll never truly be one of us."

Erik looked the old man in the eyes, and with a teasing glint in his eyes, he said, "You know, I just realized you are always here to chat with me instead of working." He laughed.

The older man did the same, throwing his head back. His eyes twinkled as he looked at Erik, and a mischievous smile curled at the corners of his lips.

"Work?" Vance laughed, slapping his hand on the counter. "Kid, I've been working here for more years than you've been alive. I've earned my breaks. Besides," he leaned closer, his eyes twinkling with mischief.

"My secret is... the Guild's boss is my sister. So, as long as I don't burn the place down, I'm golden." He chuckled, throwing his head back and his laughter echoing in the bustling cafeteria.

Erik couldn't help but laugh along with him, but I wondered if he was serious when he said that. The atmosphere in the Guild's cafeteria was lighthearted, a welcome relief from the ferocity of life outside.

Vance slapped Erik on the shoulder with a final laugh before turning to tend to the other customers, leaving Erik chuckling at the older man's candid and cunning response.

Erik was left alone with his thoughts, pondering the significance of Vance's words about the test. The trials were a test of his character and values as well as his abilities. He realized then that he needed to approach them with the seriousness they deserved.

Erik rose from his chair after finishing his conversation with Vance, leaving behind the comfort of the Guild's bustling cafeteria.

He strode purposefully across the marble-tiled floor, his gaze fixed on the nearby clerk's counter. The muffled hum of the Guild's administrative operations replaced the noise of clattering cutlery and bubbling conversations behind him.

As he approached the counter, the clerk of the day, a middle-aged woman with warm brown eyes and silver streaks in her hair, looked up from her holographic computer screen. The display's ambient light illuminated her face, casting a soft light across her features.

"I'm Erik Kay. I came here to take the Novice trial and jump to the Pupil rank," he introduced himself, capturing her attention. She blinked at him, "Just give me a minute to check your points," the woman then looked back to the holographic display, her hands quickly dancing across the glowing interface as she searched for his name.

The soft click-clack of her keystrokes filled the air, a rhythmic melody in the Guild's administrative hub.

She quickly scanned through the digital information for a brief moment before finding his file. She nodded after verifying his request, her hand swiping on the holographic display as she set up his trial. The procedure was quick, owing to the numerous times she had done it before.

She then raised her head, meeting Erik's gaze, and said, "Corridor A10, room B1." Her tone was firm but not harsh, revealing the balance she had found between being firm and friendly.

Erik turned and began his journey toward Corridor A10, leaving the clerk behind, who had already resumed her work.

Chapter 497: The tests (2)

Erik was greeted by an expanse of meticulously designed, ultramodern interiors when he stepped through the door of corridor A10. The corridor was wide and open, with smooth ceramic floors glowing with an ambient blue light emanating from the neon strips along the walls. The radiant light filled the space, creating an ethereal ambiance that gave the corridor an almost surreal quality.

On both sides of the corridor, multiple doors were marked with an alphanumeric code in luminescent lettering. Erik knew these were the test rooms where trials of strength, intellect, and character were held. Each door held a different challenge and path for aspiring mercenaries looking to rise through the guild ranks.

Erik's instructions were clear, so he descended the illuminated pathway toward door B1. The only sound he heard was the echo of his footsteps in the wide corridor, the silence heightening the gravity of the journey he was about to embark on. The letter 'B1' glowed brightly against the metallic surface as he approached the door.

Upon reaching the door, Erik paused, taking a moment to steady himself before what lay ahead. Then, with a deep breath and determined gaze, he reached out and pushed open the door to his trials.

The door swung open with a low hum of automated machinery, revealing a large, high-tech room. Erik entered, his gaze immediately drawn to the figure waiting for him. The man was in his early thirties, with a build that suggested a life of physical activity. As Erik walked in, his eyes scanned him.

"Greetings," the man said calmly and authoritatively. "My name is Kane Shand, and I'm the examiner for this assessment." He extended his hand, and Erik shook it, introducing himself in return. His grip was firm, like the handshake of a veteran of many battles.

"I'm sure you're aware, but this is the Combat Assessment test," Shand said, motioning around the room. Erik realized it was an arena with training equipment and interactive screens displaying various parameters and statistics. "Your task is to demonstrate your combat skills against a series of robotic opponents."

Shand then went on to explain the scoring system. Erik's performance would be graded on various criteria, including offensive techniques, defensive maneuvers, and overall combat effectiveness,

with a score ranging from 0 to 10 assigned to each. The young man nodded in understanding, his mind thinking about battle strategies and tactics he could use to win.

A platform in the center of the room held several humanoid robots, their frames made of advanced alloys and mechanical components that gave them an uncanny resemblance to real fighters. These were the opponents Erik would face, advanced training bots programmed with various combat patterns and techniques. However, Erik wasn't intimidated in the slightest.

Shand crossed his arms across his chest, his gaze fixed on Erik. "We want to see how well you can handle yourself in battle and how well you learned the combat technique during training, Erik," he said, his tone serious. "Your performance here will determine your progression within the guild, so give it everything you've got."

Erik took a deep breath, taking in the high-tech arena, the testing bots, and the watchful eyes of his examiner. The tension was palpable, the anticipation heavy in the air. But beneath it all, Erik felt a spark of exhilaration. He had come here for this to prove his worth and climb the ranks of the guild.

He clenched his fists, his features hardened by determination. "Understood," he said calmly. "I'm ready to start."

Shand took a step back, signaling the start of the test with a nod. Erik stepped onto the platform, his heart pounding as he prepared to face his opponents.

The young man used analysis on them. They were robots, so the biological supercomputer had an easy time understanding their combat ability.

-Name: Sentinel-5R

-Brain crystal power: N/A

-Race: Robotic.

-Physical characteristics: Stands at 1.95 meters tall. Their weight is 125 kilograms. Constructed from high-strength alloy.

-Personality and traits: Sentinel-5R is an advanced training robot programmed to mimic various fighting styles. It can adjust its combat style and difficulty level based on the opponent's performance. It does not possess a personality per se but is relentless and unforgiving in its attacks.

-Power Level: 56

-Strength: 30

-Intelligence: 5

-Dexterity: 26

-Energy: 0

...

...

...

Erik stood opposite the five robots, his gaze wandering across the five metallic foes. The soft hum of the robots' servo motors punctuated the silence between them in the room, a practical realm of gray concrete.

The cold white illumination from the ceiling lamps cast long, sharp shadows that tangled with Erik's feet, adding to the austerity of the testing area.

The robots across from him remained motionless, their bodies a mix of polished steel and muted alloy. Despite being built in the shape of humans, their featureless faces remained frozen in an eerie non-expression. Their bodies glistened under the sterile lights, exuding an intimidating presence.

The young man looked at them with calm eyes. He was well aware that they were only tools. Tools that provided just enough resistance to put a novice's abilities to the test.

A challenge designed for people new to the job, not for Erik, who had faced far more dangerous battles and encounters than any people his age.

The biological supercomputer's information displayed in his peripheral vision confirmed his observations.

His opponents could not harm him; their power levels were far too low compared to his. The corners of his mouth twitched slightly. The irony wasn't lost on him - the real challenge here wasn't the combat itself but ensuring he didn't expose his true strength while making a good impression. He would make it so that he was much stronger than his peers but not so much as to arouse suspicion.

Erik readied himself as the digital countdown clock etched into the stark, concrete wall approached zero, his posture relaxed and poised. The five training robots looming across the arena seemed to twitch eagerly. Yet Erik wasn't worried; he knew they were just machines, not nearly capable enough to challenge his true capabilities.

Though, he had to tread carefully, ensuring that his performance remained plausible for a Novice, albeit a powerful one. The true challenge here was balancing showing his potential and hiding his true strength.

As the countdown ended, the room fell silent, giving way to the low hum of the robots coming to life. Their mechanical eyes glowed with an eerie, soulless light, and their bodies moved with an unnatural fluidity that was both intriguing and slightly unsettling.

On the other hand, Erik didn't seem to mind. Instead, he mentally prepared himself to take a defensive stance, ready to expertly parry and evade incoming attacks. His gaze darted from one robot to the next, calculating their potential moves as a faint smile tugged at the corner of his lips.

This was it. It was time to put on a show.

Chapter 498: The tests (3)

A buzzer echoed throughout the clean fighting room as the countdown reached zero, and the mechanical creatures began to show signs of life.

Their servo motors responded to the command embedded in their programming, causing the machinery to whirl as they accelerated.

They advanced simultaneously, coordinating their assaults and forming a ring around Erik. Their movements were uncannily synchronized as they prepared to attack, and the emotionless expressions on their faces did not indicate what was to come.

In response, Erik moved with calculated ease. He pretended to retreat defensively by falling backward.

The robots lunged, and Erik skillfully avoided the attacks by performing fluid, evasive maneuvers, avoiding the sweeping arcs of the robots' strikes.

His movements were quick but lacked any sense of urgency or panic. His evasion had a measured rhythm to it that spoke volumes about the confidence he possessed. The robots were slow for him. Still, he had to be careful not to overdo it, so he didn't move too fast or anticipate every move with ample time. He made it so that it looked like he was stronger yet around the five robots level.

The evasion dance abruptly took an unexpected turn as Erik took an unexpected detour, causing him to break the circle and move at the speed of an arrow shot from a bow.

The blur of motion he created caught them off guard. Before they could even respond, Erik had moved in on one of them. With a quick and error-free motion, he swung his Flyssa, which appeared as a silver streak in the artificial lighting.

An incredible display of power occurred when the robot's head was cleanly severed from its body, with a blow delivered with lightning-fast precision.

"One less..." Erik noted. He noticed the examiner nodding his head approvingly when he looked at him.

The remaining four robots did not hesitate, their programming relentlessly driving them toward their target. Their inhumanly precise movements brought them closer to Erik, their metal frames glinting in the harsh light of the training room.

Erik took another step back, increasing the gap between himself and his opponents. It was a calculated retreat, a dance of deception and deft strategy.

He permitted one of the robots to approach him; its movements indicated that it intended to attack. The robot moved quickly, its arm making a sweeping motion that could damage anything in its path.

<Too easy...> the young man thought

Erik's response was to move with a grace that belied his intimidating power. By deftly bending himself, he quickly twisted his body and sidestepped the robot's reaching arm. It was a deceptive dance in which he acted as the maestro, directing the tempo and cadence of the onslaught.

Erik made his move while still attempting to elude capture. A swift blow from his weapon, delivered with pinpoint accuracy, decapitated the assailant robot. Because of how quickly he moved, a lightning-quick strike gave the machine no time to defend itself.

Erik's attack was lethal, and the robot fell victim to his precise, deadly strike. The severed head fell to the ground, joining the other severed head in a gruesome display of Erik's combat superiority.

As a result of his actions, Erik was now standing in the middle of his opponents, having successfully eliminated two robots in rapid succession.

<I think that wasn't too much... Right?>

His two strikes were a clear testament to his lethal skills, as was the fact that he had demonstrated his formidable ability with only two attacks. The remaining robots were locked in a battle with Erik, and their mechanical calculations were being tweaked to account for his undeniable prowess.

With the fall of their counterparts, the remaining trio of robotic adversaries regrouped, their actions synchronizing into a simultaneous assault. Their movements were swift and precise, reflecting their programmed skill and coordination. But Erik stood his ground this time. He did not retreat, as he determined that facing three of these robots head-on was a feasible feat for a Novice.

The first robot lunged at Erik with a whirring of motors and gears, its metallic arm slicing through the air in an arc aimed directly at Erik's torso. But Erik was quicker, his body moving with a fluid grace as he sidestepped the attack.

The blow passed harmlessly through the space where Erik had stood a split-second before, the whir of the robot's mechanisms echoing hollowly in the training room.

Even as Erik evaded the first robot's attack, the second came upon him, its movements mirroring its counterpart's. It swung its arm in a broad sweep, its trajectory aimed to intercept Erik's evasive maneuver.

Yet, Erik's agility defied its calculations. With a quick roll, he slipped underneath the sweeping arm, the robot's attack barely grazing the tips of his hair.

Taking advantage of Erik's apparent vulnerability, the third robot launched its assault. Its arm shot forward like a piston, aiming for where Erik would be as he completed his roll. But Erik was ahead of it, his movement culminating in a springy leap that carried him over the reaching arm of the robot.

Now came Erik's turn to counterattack. Erik's propelled his Flyssa forward with the precision and speed of a slithering snake. The blade's point reached the first robot's head and sliced through its metal skull with relative ease.

When Erik's blade made contact with the primary circuitry of the robot, it immediately began to stutter, and its movements became frozen.

Even as the first robot fell, Erik was on the move again. He spun around the momentum, carrying his blade in a swift arc that eventually made contact with the second robot's head. The blade cut through the metal as quickly as butter, and the robot's head was neatly separated from its body.

The final robot barely had time to adjust its strategy when Erik focused on it. Erik's blade struck its target with one final, swift thrust, the point of the blade penetrating the robot's head. Erik's blade severed the robot's primary circuitry, causing its systems to shut down in the middle of its movement.

As a result, Erik was forced to stand among the shattered remains of his mechanical foes. At the same time, the harsh lighting of the practice room illuminated his weapon. He had faced and defeated his opponents with commendable skill and effectiveness but didn't destroy them instantly. Overall, he was happy, as his performance was excellent but believable.

"Well done, young man, well done. It's clear you received training before becoming a mercenary, am I right?" the examiner asked.

Erik nodded. "That's right, I asked the clerk if you could make an exception and give me a higher rank, but she was adamant about me undergoing training."

Chapter 499: The tests (4)

"She was right in doing so, not only because of the rules but because many promising mercenaries ended up dying because they overestimated their abilities. That's why we enforced this rule. Do not take offense," the Examiner said.

"No offense taken," Erik replies. "Good, now let's wait five minutes to rest. Would you like something to drink? There is a vending machine outside," the Examiner said.

Erik politely declined, saying, "No, sir, thank you."

The Examiner, having observed the entire performance, finally spoke. "All right, then, let's start by saying that was an impressive performance, Erik. Let's go through the scoring, shall we?"

"You received 10 points in Offensive Techniques. Your use of the Flyssa was superb. Your attacks were launched with exceptional precision and control, and your blade control was excellent. You also displayed a level of creativity and adaptability that is uncommon at your level, less at your age.

You could easily switch between attacking and defending, and your attacks were always decisive and effective."

"You scored 10 points in Defensive Maneuvers once more. Your attack anticipation and avoidance were exceptional. While limited in this context, your use of the spaces you had available demonstrated strategic thought. Your evasive maneuvers, blocks, and parries were precise and timely, and you recovered quickly."

"You also got 10 points in Combat Effectiveness. You managed your energy perfectly, and your combat effectiveness didn't drop at any point during the fight. Your decision-making was quick and effective, and you maintained control of the fight at all times."

"9 more points for strategy and adaptability. Your battle strategy was crystal clear from the start and extremely effective. You also modified it in response to the robots' actions, turning their attacks into opportunities for your strikes, but you lacked diversity."

"Finally, ten points for efficiency. You rendered your opponents immobile with minimal movement and maximum effect. Your timing and precision were flawless, and there was no wasted movement."

The man took a brief pause before continuing. "Overall, you've shown extraordinary skill and competence for a Novice. Keep up the excellent work, Erik. I'm excited to see how you progress in your future."

Having taken in all the feedback, Erik nodded at Shand in understanding. Shand then checked his wristwatch to see what time it was, and his expression became more solemn.

"Alright, we don't have any more time to lose, Erik," he said, urgency creeping into his voice. "Your next test, the Knowledge Assessment, is in room C3. There will be another examiner there, but the test is on the computer, so their main job will be to keep an eye on you simply."

Erik listened attentively, then offered a salute of respect to Shand. "Thank you for your guidance, Shand," he responded. His voice conveyed gratitude and determination, echoing slightly in the now-silent room.

He quickly exited through the designated door, descending the corridor towards his next challenge. Erik felt prepared despite the rigors of the tests.

He was determined to prove his abilities and advance to the next rank. His strides were purposeful and assured, propelling him forward to room C3.

Erik was only irritated because all these tests were a waste of his time for him. He was eager to demonstrate his worth and validate his training and development.

On the way, he passed several other rooms, each one hosting a different test, a different challenge for different people. He could see other participants through the glass doors, their faces etched with concentration and determination.

All around him, other mercenaries were striving for their own growth and progression, each on their own unique path.

As he approached room C3, he paused briefly at the door to collect himself. Then, with a firm nod to himself, he entered, prepared to face the Knowledge Assessment.

The room was vast, filled with the low hum of holographic computers. Only one other person was in the room—a woman sitting behind a desk, idly scrolling through data on her own holographic screen. As Erik approached, the woman lifted her gaze from her screen, her eyes sharp and discerning.

"I'm Erik Kay. I'm here to take the knowledge assessment test," Erik stated confidently. The woman nodded and motioned toward one of the holographic computers.

"Log into the system using your mercenary account credentials. The test should be ready for you to start immediately," she instructed.

Erik walked over to the computer, his posture relaxed but alert. The holographic screen materialized as he entered his login information, displaying the assessment's starting page. Erik began the test with a final preparation breath.

The topics covered in the questions ranged from Thaid's and their characteristics to the various types of terrain that could be found on a mission.

He was questioned about the various types of ores found all over the world, as well as the applications and values of the ores, as well as the uses of the various types of plants.

Erik was able to respond without any difficulty to these questions. This was something that he had been adequately prepared for, thanks to his extensive training and the personal knowledge that he had gained from the brain information injector.

He typed his responses with precision and self-assurance despite the rapid movement of his fingers across the holographic keyboard.

His eyes darted all over the screen as he skimmed through the questions and quickly processed the information in order to respond. The only sounds that could be heard in the room were the computers' low hum and the holographic screens' flickering every so often.

Erik completed the exam in a time that was less than twenty minutes. His last keystroke produced a faint echo in the otherwise silent room. As he relaxed his shoulders and pulled his lips into a teasing smile of contentment, he leaned back.

-Thaid knowledge score: 10

-Plant knowledge score: 10

-Terrains knowledge score: 10

-Ores knowledge score: 10

He got perfect scores on everything. When she saw the test result on her screen, the woman behind the desk arched her brows in surprise. She had expected him to take a little longer.

Erik just shrugged. The exam had been easier than he had expected. After all, knowledge was his strong suit.

"It looks like you like to read, am I right?" the woman asked.

"Not particularly," Erik replied. "But everything that could make a difference between life and death, I learned it."

Chapter 500: The tests (5)

"That's a positive mindset." The woman's icy and authoritative voice cut through the room's silence. "But don't let it make you arrogant," she warned Erik, her gaze piercing. "You may have breezed through this section, but the next challenges, particularly the puzzle test, will be more difficult."

Erik simply shrugged, unfazed by her words. He had confidence in his abilities, knowing that he was well-equipped to deal with the challenges that lay ahead thanks to the biological supercomputer; besides, with Hais's brain crystal power, he doubted there was something he couldn't understand. "I'm not worried," he replied, a calm smile playing on his lips.

The woman snorted with a smirk on her face as she leaned back in her chair. "We'll see how you fare. Don't say I didn't warn you," she retorted, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Head to room D8 for the next test. Bye," she said as Erik turned to walk away. Her gaze followed him until he vanished from view. "Ah! Kids these days..."

A large room in the bustling guild headquarters was the activity hub. A massive holographic scoreboard dominated the space in the center, casting a vibrant array of flickering lights across the room.

In a seemingly never-ending cycle, real-time updates displayed test participants' names, scores, and ranks. People gathered at the cafeteria near the scoreboard, eating and drinking while watching the results unfold.

Guild members of various ranks filled the room, their gaze fixed on the hypnotic data display. Bursts of laughter, curse words, and animated discussions broke up their whispered conversations.

The room fell silent as a new name appeared on the leaderboard: Erik Kay. His outstanding Combat and Knowledge Assessments results drew notice and raised eyebrows. In the crowd, murmurs of intrigue, skepticism, and curiosity spread like wildfire.

"Who's this, Erik Kay? Never heard of him before," a grizzled veteran with a robotic arm muttered, squinting at the holographic display.

"Must be some whiz kid; look at those scores," another replied, a young woman with a sharp glint in her eyes.

"Did you see that?" a shocked man with a set of goggles resting on his forehead turned to his companion, an older woman with hair silver as the moonlight. "A perfect score on the Knowledge Assessment. About ores, too, no less. Who in their right mind knows that much about ores?"

"Well, you'd be surprised, Cal. Ores are a big deal, especially for us folk who needs weapons made from them," the silver-haired woman replied, cocking an eyebrow.

Cal snorted, still not convinced. "Sure, Agnes, but we're talking about a kid here. How could he have had the time to learn about ores?"

"But it's not just about experience, Cal," The woman intervened. "You can learn much from books and data chips if you're motivated enough."

A third voice, a young man with sandy hair and a smug grin, chimed in. "Sounds like a nerd if you ask me. He probably spent his whole life with his nose stuck in a book. Can't imagine he'll fare well in the real world."

"You underestimate the power of knowledge, Remy," Agnes countered, her eyes still on the screen. "Besides, didn't he get remarkably high scores even in the combat test? He isn't a simple nerd."

"Still, a perfect score on the ores is unheard of," Cal grumbled, shaking his head in disbelief. "I've been with this Guild for years and can barely tell iron from copper."

Remy laughed boisterously, "That's because you've got rocks in your head, Cal."

Ignoring the jibe, Cal continued, "But you have to admit, Agnes, this Erik Kay is quite the good lad."

"Indeed, he is." Agnes nodded, her gaze fixed on the moving scoreboard. "It's not just the scores. It's the speed. He completed the Knowledge Assessment in record time."

"That doesn't mean anything if he can't handle the field," Remy said again, folding his arms over his chest. "Brains don't mean much when you're staring down the barrel of a blaster."

"Young one," Agnes said in a stern voice, turning to Remy, "knowledge and wisdom can be far more powerful than any blaster. They're not separate; they work together. You can't have strength without knowledge, nor can you have knowledge without strength."

The old miner's wisdom surprised Remy, who frowned. He nodded as if he had taken Agnes' words to heart.

Erik's name was now on everyone's lips, and his enigmatic persona piqued curiosity as he excelled in the Novice rank trials. Speculations arose, casting doubt on his origins and debating his potential. All eyes were on him, waiting to see if he would become the prodigy his scores suggested.

Erik stepped into a sleek room that seemed to hum with energy. The walls were smooth and made of a high-tech alloy that glistened with a metallic sheen when illuminated by the pulsating holographic lights that were suspended above.

A streamlined chest took up space in the exact middle of the room. Its surface was illuminated with neon buttons, levers, and symbols.

The enormous holographic display that took up an entire wall in the room was responsible for the explosion of color that could be seen throughout the space.

In addition to the enormous display, there was also a holographic projector that housed a data scroll library.

As Erik got closer, a touchscreen console in the far corner of the room came to life and displayed an image of a letter that had been used and worn for a long time.

The presence of futuristic machinery that buzzed and lights that pulsed in a rhythmic pattern contributed to the atmosphere of intrigue. This was no ordinary room; rather, it was an elaborate setting with the purpose of putting Erik's analytical abilities to the test and stimulating his mind.

Every object in the room was a piece of a complicated puzzle, and it was up to Erik to figure out how to put the puzzle together in order to find the treasure. Erik had no trouble understanding what needed to be done, and as he got ready to unravel the mystery that was in front of him, he felt an exciting rush of adrenaline.