

BIOLOGICAL 611

Chapter 611: 27 West Gallon Street (2)

His footsteps were soft as he continued to circle the building, eyes scanning for a potential point of entry. Then he spotted it: a window that seemed reachable, but it required climbing. Erik's heart pounded in his chest as he realized the risk involved. Inside, Erik had to be careful since there were no cameras and he didn't know how many people were there.

Ducking into a nearby alley, he activated the Chameleon Veil, feeling the familiar sensation as his form faded from sight. He knew it wouldn't render him entirely invisible, yet sufficient to evade detection by passersby.

He glanced at the sun, noticing how its rays played across the surrounding surfaces, creating shifting patterns of light and shadow. He knew his movements could cause unusual disruptions in those patterns, but he had no choice.

Time was of the essence, and he needed to act quickly.

Erik approached the wall, feeling a surge of adrenaline as he prepared to climb. With his gloved hands firmly gripping the rough surface, he began his ascent. The Chameleon Veil helped him blend with his surroundings, but he knew that any astute observer might notice something amiss.

He moved with precision and speed, his muscles working in harmony as he climbed higher. He calculated each movement and placed each hand and foot with care. The window drew closer, and he could feel the thrill of anticipation building within him.

His mind raced with thoughts of what he might find inside, of the dangers and the secrets that awaited him. But he pushed those thoughts aside, focusing on the task at hand. He was determined to continue despite anything.

As he reached the window, he took a moment to glance around, ensuring that no one had noticed his climb. The street below seemed muted, the sun's rays playing innocently across the ground.

Erik was wary of letting his guard down because he knew appearances could deceive.

He eased the window open, careful not to make a sound, and slipped inside. He stepped into the dark room, aware of the secrets it held, and waited for his eyes to adjust.

He then sent his location to Rebecca through a message.

Erik's heart pounded in his chest as he stepped out of the darkroom and into the corridor of the third floor.

He activated the Chameleon Veil, which made him partially invisible, appearing only as a distortion of light to observers. The corridor was faintly lit, and he could hear the distant hum of machinery and the murmur of voices.

As he crept forward, he peeked into the rooms that lined the corridor, his eyes widening at the sights he encountered.

The building was bustling with activity as scientists, chemists, and workers occupied each room, all working diligently on their respective tasks, which included concocting potions, manufacturing drugs, and dissecting Thaidis.

With clinical precision, the extraction of the brain crystals from the Thaidis was performed, and Erik observed that the delicate procedure resulted in placing the crystals into liquid-filled vials.

The armed guards patrolling the floors were more alarming.

With his analysis power, he was able to determine that he could easily handle any guard on the floor by himself, but the challenge of fighting against so many guards was likely to cause problems. Besides, he could risk jeopardizing his mission.

With feline grace, he moved through the third floor, observing everything but not lingering too long in any one spot. His mind was processing the information, cataloging the evidence of what was happening in this building.

With each step he took on the stairs, he remained alert and vigilant, always watchful of his surroundings, making his way up floor by floor.

The production of illegal substances being carried out on an industrial scale was a recurring scene on every floor that he encountered.

The people working there seemed focused and unaware of his presence, while the guards were alert but didn't notice his subtle movements.

Erik's muscles were tense, and he moved with stealth, born of experience and necessity. The higher he climbed, the more elite the personnel seemed, and the security measures became more sophisticated.

Finally, he reached the tenth floor. He paused at the top of the stairs, taking a moment to steady his breathing and listen for any sound that might give away what awaited him.

Unlike the other floors, the tenth floor had a unique feel to it. The atmosphere at the new location differed greatly from the previous one, with the air having a distinct chill and the place being much quieter and secluded.

It seemed to Erik that he was getting closer and closer to the heart of the operation, where all the most important secrets were being safeguarded.

The gritty industrial atmosphere of the lower levels was replaced with a sterile, clinical environment. The walls were painted a cold white, and the lighting was harsh and unyielding.

As he crept down the corridor, he peered into the rooms, his heart sinking at what he found. Each room had four or five captives, with gaunt faces and vacant eyes.

They were drooling, their minds clearly affected by whatever experiments were being performed on them.

A chill ran down Erik's spine as he realized the scale and horror of what was happening in this building.

These rooms were not just ordinary manufacturing spaces. It was clear that Doran's research went on with or without him.

But it was the scene in one particular room that stopped him dead in his tracks. Through a glass window, he saw men and women dressed in medical clothes, surgical masks hiding their faces.

They were gathered around a table, their hands holding scalpels and other medical instruments.

The sight on the table was a gruesome one, as a man lay with his scalp peeled back, revealing his brain. Erik's breath caught in his throat as he realized they were attempting to implant a Thaid brain crystal into the man's brain.

The horror in that scene was almost too much for one's brain to handle, and for a moment, Erik's vision swam, his stomach turning.

But he knew he couldn't afford to lose focus. This was not his job to intervene, as much as every fiber of his being screamed at him to stop the monstrous act taking place before his eyes.

With a grim determination, he tore his eyes away from the room and continued down the corridor. The images were etched into his mind, a testament to the depths of depravity that those involved in this operation had sunk.

Catrina, Lumina, and this place had an undeniable connection. The evidence was everywhere - in the captives' faces, the cruel experiments, and the building's walls.

Chapter 612: 27 West Gallon Street (3)

While Erik silently and stealthily walked down the corridor, the tenth floor of the building was teeming with activity.

The frigid and austere atmosphere fit with the tangible unease that pervaded the air. He had a sense of nearing something, though what lay ahead was still veiled in mystery.

Unexpectedly, a door swung open ahead of him, and a team of elite guards emerged into the corridor.

Their uniforms were immaculate and commanding, their countenances rigidly resolute.

They started a thorough examination of the hallway, their eyes alert and acute.

Erik's heart raced with the thrill of a challenge, rather than fear, as he readied himself to fight these individuals. He wanted to avoid detection and fighting his way out of the building to make it look like he wasn't there. But he was not afraid, as these people were not his match; he was prepared for whatever came his way.

He flattened himself against the wall, his body blending with the surroundings thanks to the Chameleon Veil. His breath was shallow and controlled, his movements utterly still.

One of the guards appeared to detect something unusual. He narrowed his eyes and surveyed the corridor, tilting his head slightly, as if trying to comprehend what he saw. The lights were toying with his sight, generating a faint flicker in the spot that Erik had passed through before.

Intrigued, the exclusive guard moved towards Erik's spot, taking slow and calculated steps. But Erik's every cell was synchronized with his surroundings, his instincts acute.

The young man could feel the sweat forming on his brow, a droplet threatening to trickle down his face. His muscles were taut, and his senses heightened. Time seemed to slow as the guard came closer, the seconds stretching into eternity.

The guard's gaze was fixated on the spot where Erik was concealed, yet he appeared hesitant, unable to fully comprehend what was bothering his perception. Erik could almost hear the cogs turning in the man's mind, the doubt creeping in.

The elite guard suddenly halted just inches away from Erik and meticulously examined every inch of the wall, floor, and ceiling. Despite staring straight ahead, he did not seem to notice Erik. By being still, Erik achieved complete invisibility.

Erik's body was a coiled spring, ready to react at a moment's notice. His mind was calm and focused, every scenario playing out in his head. He knew he was in control, that his training and instincts would guide him.

The seconds ticked by, each one an eternity as the guard continued to scrutinize the area. Erik's breath was held, his body frozen, a statue in the shadows.

Finally, with a shake of his head, the elite guard turned away, dismissing the odd sensation as a trick of the light. He rejoined his companions, and they continued down the corridor, their attention elsewhere.

Erik let out a slow exhale, feeling the tension leave his body. The moment had passed; the danger averted. Even though it was over, he could still feel the adrenaline coursing through him, and that he had come so close to being found was still fresh in his memory.

Erik continued to explore the tenth floor, the dark secrets of the place weighing heavily on him. He moved with caution, his every movement precise, his senses tuned to the slightest sound or shift in the air.

He checked most of the rooms and, after a short time, discovered a slightly ajar door with a soft murmur of conversation coming from inside. He cautiously nudged the door open a bit more, making sure not to make noise, and looked through the crack.

A woman in her early forties was seated at a desk inside the room he entered. With her sharp features and calculating gaze, she appeared to be more suited for a high-stakes negotiation than a research project.

Her raven-black hair was pulled back into a tight bun, giving her an air of severe authority. The sterile fabric of her white lab coat was like the chilling environment around her.

It was Catrina.

<Found you, bitch...>

Erik's heart pounded in his chest as recognition set in. This was the person he had been seeking. He mentally rejoiced at the discovery, the sense of satisfaction mingling with the tension of the moment.

His eyes remained fixed on her, trying to read her body language while he strained to listen to the conversation on the phone. Her voice was cold and emotionless, and her words had a bitter edge that made Erik shiver.

"Those mother fuckers found Doran," she spat, her voice dripping with contempt. "It was hard to find again people who could do the job he did, and for sure, we slowed down."

Erik tried to comprehend what she meant. What was the significance of what she said? Who were the people she referred to? The Blackguards? But weren't they just a tool? The answers seemed just out of reach.

The puzzle was still incomplete. 1

The voice on the other end of the line responded with an indistinct whisper that Erik couldn't discern. He exerted himself to catch the sound, but the words evaded him, a far-off resonance in the space's gloom.

Catrina's reply was simple, though, her voice rising in anger and frustration. "Leaving the black-tards made things harder, that is certainly true, but at least I am free now and don't have to do the inhuman things I had to do for them before."

Erik's breathing hitched, the words suspended in the air like a gloomy haze. He was rendered speechless, his mind spinning with the implications.

If Katrina considered her current actions to be less inhuman, what horrors had she been involved in before?

How could any circumstance be grimmer than the abductions and inhumane tests he had already seen?

Besides, what did she mean when she said leaving the black-tards?

Her reference was unmistakable. However, her words suggested that the search party for her and Doran were the blackguards themselves, which didn't fit with what he knew about them.

<Fuck... This mess is bigger than I expected...>

He knew he had found what he was looking for, that his mission was accomplished. But the victory was hollow, tainted by the knowledge of what lay beneath the surface.

As Katrina continued to speak, her voice a distant drone in his ears, Erik backed away from the door, his mind still struggling to process what he had heard.

With a heavy heart, he turned and made his way back through the building, the images and sounds of what he had witnessed haunting him. The mission was over.

Chapter 613: A conclusion

The inside of Erik's head was like a hurricane as he walked back through the lit floors of the building.

The haunting images of the captives, their vacant eyes, and the chilling surgical procedures lingered in his mind. He could feel their silent pleas for mercy, their longing for freedom. Yet, he knew he couldn't grant it.

The temptation to free the kidnapped was powerful, a nagging voice in the back of his mind urging him to take action.

But he wrestled with it, grappling with the harsh reality of his situation. If he were in their place, no one would come to save him.

The blackguards would realize he was the one who freed them while searching for Catrina. He was aware of it. The world was a cruel and unforgiving place, and he had to play by its rules.

He pondered the Blackguards' enigmatic nature while navigating the corridors undetected.

He had always seen them as justice paladins, warriors in the fight against evil. But their actions had shown him a different side, one that was far more sinister and brutal, and Catrina's words confirmed this.

What was the reason they killed everyone when he found Doran last time? Wasn't their goal to save people? The thought weighed on him, and he couldn't shake it. Did Catrina and Doran conduct these experiments at the behest of the Blackguards? Could they be the hidden puppeteers?

His mind reeled as he reached the third floor. The room where he had entered through the window beckoned him, the darkness within a reflection of the shadows that had gathered within this building.

The ease with which he climbed back out of the building was because of his practice, and his movements were so fluid and graceful that he made it look effortless.

As he emerged into the open air, the weight of what he had discovered pressed down on him. The mission was over, the goal achieved, but the victory was tinged with a bitterness that left a sour taste in his mouth.

He stood for a moment, looking back at the building, the innocuous exterior hiding the horrors within.

Erik turned away, the cold realization settling in that he was part of something much larger and more complex than he had ever imagined.

The concept of right and wrong had become murky, and it became difficult to distinguish between hero and villain. Many questions remained unanswered.

With a heavy heart, he moved on, leaving the building and its dark secrets behind.

As soon as Erik had left the ominous building behind, he pulled out his phone and dialed Ms. Lyria Bannon's number. Her response was immediate, her voice sharp and expectant. "Any news?" she inquired.

Erik felt a chill as he replied, "I found Catrina. She's at 27 West Gallon Street." He sent her the address and a photo of the nondescript building. Then, with a hint of warning in his voice, he added, "There are hostages inside again."

"Don't worry about that," she said. "You did a good and fast job again. Our men searched for her for months but were unable to find her. I'm very curious to know how you did so." Lyria's voice was silky and unfazed as she spoke these words.

"Trade secret," Erik replied.

"Fair enough," the woman said.

But inside, Erik's heart clenched, remembering the fate of the last group of captives.

"Ms. Bannon, sorry for changing the topic, but may I ask what happened to the previous hostages?" He asked her point-blank.

"They've been successfully rescued," Lyria lied, her voice filled with false reassurance. "They are now in a facility meant to help them recuperate..."

Erik knew better, the bitter truth festering inside him. He kept his voice steady, hiding his growing suspicion as he instructed her to send the money to his bank account after a brief talk.

As he ended the call and continued walking, his mind was a whirlpool of thoughts and suspicions. The pieces of the puzzle were fitting together, and the picture they revealed was dark and troubling.

He believed the mercenary guild was in cahoots with the Blackguards, or at least Lyria. And what about the Band of Giants? Were they also involved? Was this the reason they sent Rebecca?

Then, like a bolt from the blue, he recalled something that had nagged at him in the past: the footage of Uncle Benjamin dining with Doran. Catrina's claim, if valid, and the recording predating the search for Doran, would implicate Uncle Benjamin's complicity with the Blackguards.

Erik's blood ran cold at the realization. The Blackguards had footholds everywhere, but he hadn't realized the depth of their reach. They had contacts within the mercenary guild in Etrium and high-ranking individuals in Frant.

His lunch with Uncle Benjamin came to mind, the hidden agenda now clear. He was mistaken to think the Frant Military searched his apartment. The ones responsible were the blackguards.

The realization hit him hard, like a physical blow, shattering his belief in Uncle Benjamin's love for him.

Everything became intensely personal. This was no longer just a mission or a job. The search for truth penetrated his very essence.

Erik knew he had to understand what was happening, to unravel the web of lies and deceit that surrounded him. The problem was that he couldn't do this alone. He needed resources, people, money, and power.

Doubt and suspicion loomed around him as he walked the streets, convinced that he had committed to a path with no return. The road ahead was fraught with peril. The enemy was hidden and elusive.

As Erik thought about the potential results of his investigation, his heart raced with a mix of excitement and apprehension.

Would he be able to uncover the truth and bring those responsible to justice? The possibility of him being silenced or eliminated by those who wanted to maintain their grip on power and control could not be ruled out.

Despite the danger and uncertainty, Erik knew he could not turn back. He had already come too far, seen too much. He would continue investigating on this matter, and maybe find out what happened to his father, and who were the people targeting him were.

Chapter 614: Connecting

Erik made his way back to the guild headquarters. As he walked toward his room, he called Rebecca, informing her he had found Catrina and she could come back.

"Really? Erik, that's wonderful news!" As Rebecca spoke, Erik could hear the joy in her voice, and he could almost envision the smile on her face. "I'll head back now. See you soon!"

With a warm farewell, Erik ended the call and continued down the corridor, his footsteps echoing in the emptiness. The victory felt hollow, tainted by the sinister undertones of his discoveries.

When he reached his room, he found Noah waiting for him. The young clone had grown so much in just a few days, his eyes filled with a wisdom that belied his years. "Master," he greeted Erik, his voice tinged with respect and curiosity. "How did the day go?"

Taking a moment to examine Noah, Erik felt a sense of sorrow for losing his innocence. "I found my target," he replied, his voice weary.

"That's wonderful, Master!" Noah was clearly eager, but Erik's somber expression suggested that he was not as enthusiastic.

"Yes, it's a good thing," Erik said slowly, "but I wish I could see what happens at that lab.

Unfortunately, because of the absence of cameras in the building, I won't be able to take any pictures."

Erik's words weighed on the air, causing the room to fall silent. Curiosity brimmed in Noah's eyes, yet he restrained from asking his questions, feeling it was not the opportune moment.

As Erik moved to the window, he heard the distant sounds of sirens blaring in the city below. Etrium had become a murky place for him, where the boundaries between morality and immorality had been blurred by the twisted games of power.

Despite knowing that such occurrences were common, he still believed that this place was a little safer.

Noah's eyes followed his every move, his thoughts racing as he tried to understand what was happening. He could feel Erik's unease, sensing that something significant had changed within him.

Finally, Erik turned back to face the room, his eyes meeting Noah's. "We've done our part," he said, his voice firm but filled with an undercurrent of uncertainty. "Now, all we can do is wait and see what happens."

The mystery loomed before Erik, and he knew he had only scratched the surface; the real challenge was yet to come. The thought of the obstacles that lay ahead weighed heavily on his mind.

As he settled into his chair, his mind still whirling with thoughts and suspicions, he knew he was on the brink of something much larger than himself.

Just as he was drifting into a state of relaxation, a sharp knock on his door jolted him back to alertness. As soon as he put on his mask and Noah hid, he opened the door and saw a concerned guild staff member standing outside.

"Sir, Miss Ravithier has arrived at the guild headquarters," the man informed him, his voice steady.

Erik's eyebrows raised in acknowledgment. "Thank you," he replied, his mind instantly shifting gears.

"Please tell her to meet me in my office."

The man nodded and hurried off to deliver the message, leaving Erik standing in the doorway, his mind now fully awake.

Hastily changing into clean clothes, Erik made his way to his office, his mind racing with thoughts of what lay ahead.

He arrived at his office and settled behind his desk, his eyes scanning the various documents and notes scattered across the surface. Each piece of paper held a clue, a fragment of the truth that he was determined to uncover.

The door to his office opened, and Rebecca stepped in.

The woman's entrance was marked by an air of weariness. Her shoulders were slumped, and the fatigue in her eyes was clear. She took a seat in the chair opposite Erik's desk, letting out a sigh.

"I really need some sleep..."

Erik leaned back in his chair, studying her face. She had been through a lot, and he could see that the quest had taken its toll on her.

"Yeah, feel free to take a room and sleep as much as you want," Erik replied.

"Yes, thank you..."

"So, what do you plan to do now that the quest is complete?" he asked, his voice gentle.

Rebecca's eyes flickered with uncertainty before she replied, "I never thought I'd say this, but I'm tired of traveling," she said with a hint of a smile, her voice tinged with exhaustion.

"I'm thinking of sticking around this city for a bit. Mind if I stay at your guild?"

Erik's face, hidden by his mask, broke into a warm smile. "Of course, you're more than welcome here."

A look of relief crossed Rebecca's face, and she leaned back in her chair, visibly relaxing. The two of them fell into simple conversation, discussing their recent adventures and sharing stories from their past.

As they talked, Erik grew curious about Rebecca's history. The daughter of the Fierce Lioness, she had lived a life filled with expectations and pressure. He was eager to explore the complexities of growing up as the child of a celebrated figure.

"Tell me about your past," he asked, leaning forward, his eyes fixed on hers. "What's it like to be the daughter of the Fierce Lioness?"

Rebecca's eyes widened at the question, but she didn't hesitate to answer. She began to open up about her life, describing the challenges and triumphs, the weight of her family's legacy, and the constant need to prove herself.

As she spoke, Erik listened intently, a new understanding of her character forming in his mind. She was strong and determined, yet vulnerable and human. Her experiences had shaped her into the warrior she was, but beneath the surface, there was more to discover.

The talk went on with no hitches. As they delved into each other's pasts, the barriers between them naturally dissolved. Needless to say, Erik's remarks were heavily edited to obscure his non-Etrium origins.

It was a moment of empathy, a joint appreciation that exceeded their functions as mercenaries and collaborators.

Chapter 615: A good conversation

Erik's curiosity was piqued as Rebecca's story unfolded. Her voice softened as she recounted an intense memory.

"You know, there was a time my mother brought me to Frant to assist with a grave situation," she said, her gaze distant. "They were facing an invasion because of a Thaid. The Heniate, I believe it was called."

Erik's eyes widened as he recognized the name. "The Heniate?" he exclaimed. "I've heard of it. A monstrous Thaid that caused untold destruction. Do you know if Frant killed it?"

Rebecca shook her head, her expression thoughtful. "I'm not sure. We were only there briefly during a chaotic period. The Heniate was a menace like no other, and I heard it was in their territory for a lot of time."

They sat in silence for a moment; both lost in thought, the weight of the memories heavy in the room.

Rebecca's voice broke the silence, her tone tinged with curiosity. "You know, there's something else that's been bothering me about Frant. Are you aware that they had, or perhaps still have, an awakener?"

Erik's heart skipped a beat at the mention of an awakener. He nodded, his mind racing. "Yes, I've heard about him. Why do you ask?"

Rebecca leaned forward, her eyes searching Erik's face. "Well, it's a strange story. Apparently, this awakener disappeared without a trace. There is uncertainty surrounding his death. It's all very mysterious."

Erik's brows furrowed as he considered her words. The information was disconcerting, and he couldn't shake the feeling that it was significant.

"A missing awakener," he murmured, more to himself than to Rebecca. "That's not something that happens every day."

Rebecca's eyes sparkled with a mixture of intrigue and concern. "No, it's not. Awakeners are rare, and their abilities are sought after. For one to vanish like that... it raises many questions."

Erik leaned back in his chair. "What do you think happened to him?" he asked, his voice above a whisper, eager to know what the Band of Giants knew about him.

Rebecca shrugged, her expression filled with uncertainty. "I wish I knew. The whole thing is shrouded in secrecy. Some say he went into hiding; others believe he was silenced by those who feared his power. The truth could be anything. Rumors suggest he had enemies in criminal organizations, and that they killed him."

<They covered Nathaniel's father's matter well. I bet this was Caiden's job.> They continued to talk, exploring theories and possibilities, but the answers remained elusive. For Rebecca at least, as the truth was, though, that the awakener they were talking about was right in front of the woman.

Erik listened as Rebecca shifted the conversation to a more personal topic. Her eyes held a glimmer of admiration as she leaned back in her chair.

"You know, I had the chance to see him in action," she began, her voice filled with genuine respect. "I watched him fight through some drones when the monsters entered the city. He was strong for his age. I'd say he'll be as strong as me in less than a year. That's a sign of immense talent."

"Really?" He asked. "What power did he have?" he asked, faking ignorance.

"He could grow plants if I'm not wrong. That was his birth power. Pretty pointless one, to be honest. But he could also sharpen things to high degrees. It wasn't the best power out there, but it was a proper one for combat."

Erik looked at her, intrigued. "Cool..."

Her expression became more serious, and she leaned forward, resting her elbows on the desk. "As I was watching him, though, something strange happened. I lost connection to the cameras that were showing his escape through the city. It was like they were deactivated by someone. The technicians couldn't explain what happened."

"Deactivated?" he repeated, his voice tinged with disbelief. "Do you believe he did that?"

Rebecca's brow furrowed as she considered the possibilities. "It's impossible. He was fighting at that time. He lacked access to computers and similar technology. But it's clear that someone didn't want us to see what he was doing. Someone with enough skill and knowledge to bypass our security."

The conversation between Erik and Rebecca shifted to lighter topics as they continued to talk; of course, Erik had many thoughts in mind, but couldn't let his doubts betray him, so he faked being okay.

They discussed their training methods, shared stories of past missions, and even joked about some of the more humorous aspects of their respective backgrounds. The connection between them deepened, and mutual respect and friendship formed.

Erik realized it was getting late as he looked at the clock. Before calling it a night, he had a question for Rebecca.

"Hey, Rebecca," he said, leaning back in his chair and looking at her with a casual smile. "How would you feel about joining me for a hunt tomorrow? I think it would be a fun idea."

Rebecca's eyes lit up at the suggestion, and she grinned. "I'd love to! I'm sure I could learn a lot from you."

Erik chuckled, feeling embarrassed by her enthusiasm. "I don't think you are the only one who can learn here."

Rebecca nodded, her excitement clear. "I'm looking forward to it," she said with a smile that could throw countries to ruins.

Fatigue took its toll as they chatted. Their words became fewer, and the pauses between sentences grew shorter as tiredness crept over them.

Erik let out a soft yawn and stretched his arms above his head. "I think it's about time we called it a night. We've got a busy day ahead of us."

Rebecca agreed, rising from her chair and stretching as well. "You're right. Sleep sounds wonderful right now. Goodnight, Erik, and thanks for everything so far."

Erik stood and offered her a warm smile. "Goodnight, Rebecca. Rest well, and I'll see you in the morning."

They parted ways, each heading to their respective rooms, the echoes of their laughter and conversation lingering in the empty corridor. As Erik lay in bed, he couldn't help thinking about the conversation he had with Rebecca and a thought began to nag at him.

She had mentioned that she had been monitoring him while he was in Frant. The idea that she was able to watch him from a distance was surprising enough.

Given all the findings he had made about Uncle Ben and the mercenary guild in Etrium, it was not that unexpected that the band of giants was monitoring him at that time.

Erik rolled over, trying to shake the thought from his mind, but it lingered, growing into a gnawing suspicion.

Erik mentally resolved to investigate Rebecca and the giants and to monitor any abnormal incidents before dozing off.

With a heavy sigh, he closed his eyes, resolving to face the challenges of the next day with a clear head and an open mind. But the questions lingered, weaving themselves into his dreams, leaving him with an unsettling feeling that something was amiss and that the answers were still just out of reach.

Chapter 616: A month Later

After finding Catrina, a month passed for Erik and Rebecca. The young man was in his room. Noah, his worm clone, had taken on a more human-like form and stood to one side, his appearance still bearing the distinct hybrid qualities that set him apart from pure humans.

Though his features had matured, they remained unspoken, hidden beneath the clothing Erik made for him. Some normal clothes for 2-meter tall people, a mask identical to his, and a long hooded black coat.

A smaller clone named Luke was in the room, with intelligence beyond his appearance. While he resembled both Erik and Noah, subtle differences in his face allowed for a clear distinction between the clones.

Erik couldn't help but marvel at his creations. He had imbued the Mirror Centipede with various brain crystal powers, and the small clone's ability to harness and understand those powers already rivaled that of many adults.

The progress was astonishing, almost unnerving, and Erik found himself caught between pride and a sense of caution.

The room was filled with a strange, comfortable silence. The bond the three shared was profound, something that transcended normal human relationships.

Noah, who had always been perceptive to Erik's emotions, tilted his head, a curious look in his eyes. His understanding of Erik's feelings seemed almost intuitive, and Erik couldn't help but feel a warmth toward the being he had nurtured from infancy.

"Master," Noah's voice resonated in Erik's mind, "Is there something troubling you?"

Erik shook his head, offering a reassuring smile. "No, nothing specific."

The young man's eyes held a mixture of trust, and expectation as he glanced at Noah. He could feel the strength of their connection, and he knew it was time for Noah to step up and take on more responsibility.

"Noah, I want you to teach Luke everything I've taught you," Erik said, his voice firm but gentle.

"Monitor him, and as soon as he matures, we'll start his training. You're expected to train as well starting from today. While you two know how to fight from the knowledge you've gained from my brain crystal power, you still need to improve and maintain your physical form."

Noah nodded, his eyes filled with understanding and determination. "Of course, Master. I'll ensure that Luke learns well, and I'll work on my own training, too."

Erik continued, emphasizing the importance of secrecy. "Remember, never reveal your body to anyone. Your appearance must remain concealed. But I think it's time you had more freedom. You can leave this room now."

A hint of excitement gleamed in Noah's eyes, but he responded with measured calm. "I understand, Master. I'll be cautious."

Erik's gaze shifted to Luke, the younger clone still absorbing all that was being discussed. "Until you are mature enough, you can't leave the room. Is this clear?"

"Yes, Master!"

Erik's smile widened as he felt a surge of pride for his creations' maturity and loyalty. Knowing Noah's skills, he trusted that the tasks he had given him would be completed without issue.

Erik looked around the room, feeling a profound sense of connection and potential as he prepared to leave them to their tasks. The young man's work nurturing these beings had paid off, and he was eager to see what they would achieve.

Erik left the room with a nod and a smile, closing the door softly behind him.

He took out his phone and, with swift fingers, tapped the screen, dialing Lysa's number. Almost immediately, her voice came through, professional and alert.

"Where are you?" she asked.

"We're on our way to your office," Erik said, his tone hinting at the arrangement they'd discussed earlier. "Rebecca and I will take care of that personal quest you mentioned regarding your company."

A note of gratitude was clear in Lysa's voice as she replied, "Thank you, Erik. I appreciate your help with this matter. I'll be ready to discuss the details when you arrive."

As soon as Erik ended the call, he immediately reached out to one of his trusted men, giving him specific instructions to prepare the new car he had recently purchased.

The month had been incredibly successful for Erik, and he had rewarded himself with a sleek and modern flying vehicle.

The car was a thing of beauty, with a smooth and aerodynamic design that made it stand out from the rest. It was equipped with the latest technology and gadgets, making it a perfect fit for Erik's new high-end lifestyle.

Shortly after, Rebecca approached Erik, her face brightening as she greeted him. "Morning, Erik. Ready for our meeting with Lysa?"

Erik smiled, nodding, and the two made their way to the car that was waiting for them. The vehicle was gleaming, its design both elegant and futuristic. They settled into the plush seats, and with a soft hum, the car lifted off the ground, taking to the sky.

Even though the trip was brief, the view from the car's windows was unforgettable, showcasing a breathtaking panorama of the sprawling city below.

With wide-eyed interest, Rebecca looked out while Erik kept his focus on the task ahead. Soon, the car descended, hovering gently. Rebecca could feel the rush of air against her face and the slight lift in her stomach before landing in front of Lysa's shop.

The driver opened the door for them, his face impassive but his eyes revealing a trace of admiration for his employer.

"Thank you," Erik said, stepping out of the car, followed by Rebecca.

As Erik and Rebecca made their way towards the entrance of Lysa's shop, the driver nodded and pulled away, leaving them to their destination. The building was stylish and inviting, reflecting Lysa's taste and success.

Upon approaching the door, Erik turned to Rebecca and thought about the challenge that awaited them. The personal quest that had been assigned to them by Lysa was of utmost importance.

Lysa needed help, and given the fact that Erik owed her a significant debt of gratitude, he was eager to do everything in his power to help her and wanted to execute his responsibilities with precision.

After a moment of eye contact, they both nodded and then entered the shop.

Erik's Status: (A.N: OK, I tried to divide the status by using the footnotes but I can't because the status is too big and I can't put more than 1000 characters in each note. So I do apologize for the status, but I think not putting it at all will ruin the immersion. The status will ONLY occasionally be put in the text.)

ERIK'S STATUS:

[Host Information]

NAME: Erik Romano

AGE: 17

POWER LEVEL: 306

SYSTEM LEVEL: 40

EXPERIENCE: 21402/78400

DNA POINTS: 22850

HEALTH: 2840/2840

MANA: 2770/2770

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 146

INTELLIGENCE: 198

DEXTERITY: 126

ENERGY: 137

Available Attributes points: 0

{Powers}

[Biological Super Computer Powers]

-Brain Crystal Manipulation

Brain Crystal Power Extraction

(Allows the absorption of the brain crystal, making the host able to gain the power contained within.
Notice: the DNA must be changed to allow the body to use the power. See DNA extraction.)

Brain Crystal Power Merging

(Allows to merge two powers birthing a new one. It requires the merging of the DNA to work.)

Brain Crystal Power Analysis

(Allows to analyze the target brain crystal without the need to know the creature.)

- (LOCKED)

- Brain Crystal Power Strengthening

(Allows the gaining of the energy attribute points)

(LOCKED)

-DNA Manipulation

DNA Extraction

(Allows to absorb foreign DNA, making the host able to replicate it inside his own body. Notice: Changing the DNA is a slow process, and it is required to use new brain crystal powers.)

DNA Merging

(Allows to merge two DNAs, birthing a new one. Required to accommodate merged powers.)

DNA Analysis

(Allows to analyze the enemy DNA from a distance for a better understanding of the target's stats.)

- (LOCKED)

DNA Strengthening

(Allows the gaining of the Strength, Intelligence, and Dexterity attribute points)

(LOCKED)

- Analysis

(Gives the host information about his surroundings, plants, creatures, and ores.)

-Brain Information Injector

(It allows the injection of information directly into the brain. Based on touch)

-Device Manipulation

(Allows the Host to manipulate electrical and mana-driven devices. Based on touch)

[Host's Powers]

POISONOUS MANA DARTS Dσ3D RANKED

(Conjure poisonous mana darts whose lethality depends on the mana injected)

POISONOUS ASTRAL WOLF BITE Dσ2D RANKED

(Conjure an astral but solid projection of a Leylarhad's head whose only aim is to bite at whatever target the host is aiming. Its teeth have a poisonous element whose toxicity depends on the mana used. Notice: the target must be close to the projection.)

FORCE MANIPULATION Dv1B RANKED

(Manipulate a mana-driven force to produce powerful shockwaves that can change in intensity, radius, speed, and power. It is also possible to use the power differently as to generate force shields.)

PARALLEL WILLS $D\nu1C$ RANKED

(Allows the user to increase intelligence based on the number of neural links. It also allows the construction of a mana brain that allows independent thoughts and can be used for multiple purposes.)

ICE SWORD $D\sigma1E$ RANKED

(Allows creating a powerful ice blade, but needs a real weapon to be used as a base)

STRENGTH ENHANCER $D\rho2D$ RANKED

(Depending on the amount of mana used, the amount of strength increases)

PLANT MASTER $D\pi1B$ RANKED

(Allows to grow and control plant-based organisms. The usage depends on the plant and the user's will.)

CHAMELEON VEIL $D\rho1C$ RANKED

(Allows to turn completely transparent and to project what is behind you, making it almost impossible to be seen. The user can move while using this Brain Crystal power but, notice that the ripples in light the power creates while moving decrease the power's hiding abilities, increasing the chance of being seen.)

BESTIAL ROAR $D\sigma2C$ RANKED

(Allows to emit a roar that can instill fear into the surrounding creatures. It affects all but the user.)

TARGET LOCK Dσ1D RANKED

(Allows the user to lock onto the mana signature of a target to always find it.)

CHIMERIC BIOMETAL SOLDIERS Dρ3A RANKED

(This power allows the user to create a human-worms hybrid with 50% of the user's physical stats. The clones are permanent, but to make them, a lot of mana is necessary; moreover, they can't use brain crystal powers. The clone is born from an egg, and it takes a month for them to reach maturity after having hatched two weeks after the eggs were made.

Before that, their physical stats were lower than 50% of the original's body. The clones are half as intelligent as the main body, but know everything the main body knows when he created them. They also have several biological abilities.)

{Skills}

Kyokar hand-to-hand style (ADVANCED)

(A military fighting style developed in Frant)

Crypt of the Desert Style (ADVANCED)

(Flyssa fighting style developed by Master Nieminen)

Etrium's sword style (INTERMEDIATE)

(Basic Sword Style developed in Etrium.)

Chapter 617: Problems for Lysa

An elegantly dressed woman greeted Erik and Rebecca as they entered Lysa's shop. Her smile was professional, and she directed them toward her boss's office without delay.

"Lysa is expecting you. Please, right this way," she said, leading them through the exquisitely designed interior.

As they made their way, Erik's eyes scanned the surroundings, taking in the subtle details.

He noted the high-quality merchandise, the tasteful decor, and the discreet security measures.

Lysa's recent success was unequivocal in every aspect of her business, especially since the woman started doing business with him. Erik felt a growing curiosity about the personal quest she asked him to complete.

Once inside Lysa's office, they were met with a warm smile from Lysa herself. The room was spacious and sophisticated, filled with artwork and tasteful furniture, a tremendous improvement from the first time he met her. Lysa gestured for them to take a seat, and they settled into plush chairs.

"Thank you for coming," Lysa began, her eyes meeting Erik's. "I'm afraid I have a rather pressing matter that requires your attention."

Erik's brow furrowed, concern clear in his eyes. "What's going on, Lysa?"

Her face tightened as she leaned forward. "One of my storage buildings has been ransacked. Finding the culprit and retrieving the stolen items is imperative."

Erik's eyes narrowed, his mind already racing with possibilities. "Tell me everything you know."

Lysa's voice took on a serious tone as she recounted the details. "It happened at night, two days ago. According to the security footage, ten people were involved. They were all wearing hoods and masks, so their identities were concealed. But it was clear they were professionals, moving with precision and coordination."

"Did they take anything specific?" Rebecca asked, her voice sharp with interest.

"Many things, but they focused on Thaid's bodies. Bones, pelts, fangs, brain crystals. There is footage."

Erik leaned back, his mind working. "I need to see it. Can you arrange for access?"

Lysa nodded. "Of course. I've already prepared copies for you. It's all on this drive." She handed Erik a small, sleek device he carefully took in his hands.

He examined it before tucking it away. "Thank you, Lysa. We'll sort this out."

Lysa's eyes were filled with gratitude. "Erik, I have faith in you and your abilities. I trust you will retrieve the merchandise for me as soon as possible. I must get it back, as I will face significant problems this month if it is not recovered."

"Consider it done," Erik said, his voice firm. "Anything else we should know?"

Lysa hesitated for a moment before responding. "Just be careful. Whoever did this is very skilled. They left no evidence behind, no fingerprints, no DNA. Nothing. It's as if they were ghosts."

"We'll handle it, Lysa," Rebecca assured her, her voice strong. "We won't let you down."

They talked a little more, mainly about the quest, but also about their daily life. But then the meeting ended, and Erik and Rebecca left Lysa's office.

"Damn thieves..." Erik said.

"Yeah, I'm sorry to hear that this happened to your friend," Rebecca replied.

"Yeah, thank you," he added. "Things are becoming weird around the city; these kinds of things started happening more in the past months."

"Yeah, it is weird, honestly speaking. If they have the skills to rob a shop, why didn't they just hunt Thaid's?"

"Agree. It is weird," Rebecca said. "Let's see what we can find in the storage building for now," she suggested.

"Do you think we can find something? Lysa wasn't able to, so I doubt we would gain anything useful there," Erik said. He thought highly about Lysa, so he couldn't comprehend her missing something.

Rebecca gave Erik a confused look. "I'm surprised you said that."

"There Is a first time for everything."

The storage building was a massive industrial structure on the outskirts of the city.

Constructed with concrete and steel, its design was more functional than aesthetic. High walls and a robust security system underscored its purpose: a fortress for valuable merchandise.

The building was part of a complex network owned by Lysa, each serving as a vital link in her expansive business.

As Erik and Rebecca approached the site, their attention was drawn to a gaping hole in the wall. The destruction was violent and methodical, with jagged edges where the mana-hardened concrete had been blasted apart.

"Looks like they cared little for subtlety," Erik observed, his eyes narrowing as he studied the breach.

Rebecca shook her head, her expression filled with disbelief. "No, they didn't. That's a powerful explosion. They must have used high-grade explosives or a powerful brain crystal to create an opening like that."

"This wasn't some amateur job. Whoever did this planned it thoroughly. They entered and left within minutes before security arrived. We'll only know after seeing the storage footage."

They noted the precise execution of the blast while examining the damage. The perpetrators had aimed for a precise section of the wall, intending to minimize collateral damage.

After a thorough inspection of the exterior, they ventured inside the building. The interior was vast and brightly lit, with rows upon rows of shelves filled with various goods. The air was heavy with the smell of dust and lingering traces of smoke.

Erik's eyes darted around, taking in the details. "This place is a maze. They knew where to go, as Lysa explained to us."

Rebecca nodded, her eyes scanning the surroundings as well. "They must have had inside information. It wasn't possible to navigate this place and go through the shelves straight to the target without knowing where it was."

They found the targeted area as they went further into the building. Shelves were toppled, containers broken, and goods scattered. Yet, despite the chaos, there was a pattern to the destruction. A clear path had been forged, leading to a specific section of the storage.

They spent the next hours combing through the wreckage, searching for clues, and piecing together the puzzle, but there wasn't much they could find.

Chapter 618: Findings

Erik and Rebecca moved through Lysa's storage building, their steps echoing in the space. Monumental structures lined the walls, filled with wooden crates that held an assortment of goods.

The air was chilly, filled with the distinct smell of preserving chemicals, especially near the cellars where Thaid's bodies were kept for later processing.

The two of them worked methodically, examining each area with a discerning eye.

They began in the main storage area, looking through crates and inspecting the contents. Erik's experienced fingers sifted through the packaging while Rebecca scrutinized the labels and documentation.

"No sign of forced entry on any of these crates," Erik noted, delight clear in his voice.

Rebecca shook her head, perplexed. "Nothing seems to miss either from here. Everything's accounted for."

They moved on to the cellars, where the temperature dropped considerably. Thaid's bodies were the only items stolen by burglars from the now-empty cellars. Erik's breath fogged as he looked around, his mind racing.

"Your guild hunted most of the Thaid's that were stored here, right?" Rebecca commented, her eyes narrowed.

"You're right," Erik agreed, his voice tinged with concern. "You know, the theft of Thaid's bodies seems to have happened often in this city lately," he said, looking at Rebecca.

Rebecca, who had been examining a shipping label, looked up and nodded. "I've heard that too. It's strange, isn't it? Thaid's are valuable, but this operation doesn't look like a typical black market job. Everything's too neat, too controlled."

"Well, let's keep digging. Sooner or later, the pieces will fit, and we'll see the entire picture."

With a determined nod from Rebecca, they continued their investigation.

They continued their search, moving from one area to another, probing every corner, every shadow.

They climbed ladders to check upper shelves, crawled into narrow spaces, and examined the security system. Yet every path they pursued seemed to lead to a dead end.

Hours passed, and the sun reached the apex, casting long shadows across the building. "These motherfuckers," Erik said, leaning against a shelf, weariness etched on his face. "They left no damn clue!"

Rebecca sighed, rubbing her temples. "I can't believe they really left nothing."

The storage building was filled with the smell of wood and the pungent odor of Thaid's bodies still lingering in the air. As Erik and Rebecca sifted through the remnants of the ransacked area, their eyes scanning for any clues, something caught Erik's eye.

Nestled between wooden crates and hidden amongst debris in a small, shadowed corner, there lay something out of place.

A glint of metal, almost imperceptible, had caught the light filtering through the artificial lights hung on the ceiling. It was enough to draw Erik's attention, and he found himself inexplicably drawn toward it, as there was something familiar in it.

He strolled, navigating the cluttered floor, his eyes never leaving the hidden object. A sense of curiosity mingled with apprehension settled over him. What was this thing that seemed to call out to him, almost hidden from view but not quite invisible?

Reaching the corner, he leaned down, his hands entering the narrow space between crates and rubble. His fingers brushed against something cold and metallic, and he pulled it out, holding it up for examination.

He stared at the item in his hand, time standing still. Recognition dawned, followed by disbelief, then anger. He focused solely on the emblem, and on the Crystal Cross Gang sign on the pin. Everything else disappeared.

The surrounding room seemed to grow still, the very air charged with the weight of his discovery. His hand clenched around the pin, and he knew that what he had found was more than a mere clue.

Erik's hand trembled as he held the pin, his mind racing, the Crystal Cross Gang emblem staring back at him. The criminal gang should have had no business here in Etrium. A chill ran down his spine as Erik recalled the link between Etrium and Frant—Uncle Benjamin.

Erik's mind was in chaos as he tried to sort through his jumbled emotions. If Uncle Benjamin was here in Etrium, and as Erik believed, he worked with the Blackguards, that meant that the latter was working with the Crystal Cross Gang too, on behalf of the Blackguards.

Then, it was no surprise that the gang had never been uprooted or destroyed in Frant, given the circumstances. The reason General Becker failed to clean up the city of criminals was just explained by this tiny link represented by Uncle Benjamin.

Confusion gave way to a growing sense of rage as the young man recalled what the gang did to him. Erik's heart pounded in his chest as he thought about Uncle Benjamin's role in this.

What was his connection? Was he in charge, or was he a pawn in a larger scheme? The questions spiraled in Erik's mind, each one building upon the other, creating a maze with no apparent exit.

Anger bubbled up, mixing with apprehension. The picture created by betrayal, lies, and hidden agendas was impossible for Erik to ignore. He felt a burning desire to expose the truth that lay beneath the layers of deception.

His hands clenched around the pin, the metal digging into his flesh, grounding him in the situation's reality.

Rebecca's voice pulled him from his thoughts, her concern clear. "Erik? What's wrong? What did you find?"

He looked up at her, his eyes dark with uneasiness and realization.

With a deep breath, Erik steadied himself, the weight of the discovery settling on his shoulders.

He handed the pin to Rebecca, his voice barely above a whisper. "We've just stumbled upon something much more problematic than we thought."

In his heart, he knew they were only scratching the surface of a conspiracy that ran deep and wide.

The Crystal Cross Gang's pin was just the beginning, a small piece in a puzzle that was about to become a lot more complicated. And Erik was determined to see it through, no matter where it led.

Chapter 619: Asking for help

Erik's hand trembled as he held up the pin for Rebecca to see, not with fear but because of his rage. His voice was tight with the significance of his discovery as he explained, "This is the pin of the Crystal Cross Gang."

Rebecca stepped closer to get a better look at the pin. The implications of what Erik had just said were sinking in, and her expression mirrored his concern.

"The Crystal Cross Gang?" she repeated. "Who are they?"

"They're a notorious criminal organization in Frant, the most dangerous in New Alexandria," Erik replied. "The militaries there haven't even been able to dismantle them. They deal with everything from drugs and prostitution to extortion," he explained.

"Ok, but why are they here?"

Erik's eyes narrowed as he pondered the question, his mind racing with the possibilities. "I don't know, but honestly, I don't think this is a coincidence." Erik's tone was solemn. If the Crystal Cross gang was here in Testrovsc's Rest, it meant something big was going on.

"Okay, let's assume it's really them, and this pin is not something Lysa owned to sell. Why would they steal Thaid's bodies?"

Erik's eyes shifted uncomfortably as he searched for the right words to explain what he knew. The weight of his omission bore down on him, but he knew he had to tell Rebecca the full story.

"There's something I didn't tell you, Rebecca," he began, his voice filled with both seriousness and regret. "This is related to my first private quest given by Lyria. She asked me to find a man, Doran Stedman."

Rebecca's eyebrows furrowed as she listened, sensing the seriousness of what Erik was about to reveal.

"I found him," Erik continued, "in a lab, and Catrina was with him. What I didn't tell you when I found Catrina is that she, like Doran, was conducting human experiments that involved Thaid's."

Rebecca's eyes widened, and her mouth fell open in shock. "What? Human experiments involving Thaid's? But how... why?"

Erik took a deep breath, steeling himself to share the disturbing details. "I read some of the files in Doran's lab, and it's as horrific as it sounds. Doran was likely trying to implant Thaid's brain crystals into humans, and Catrina was doing the same. I think they got inspired by Etrium's new technology."

The words hung in the air, their implications sinking in. Rebecca's face paled, and she reached out to grip the edge of a nearby crate as if to steady herself.

"That's monstrous," she whispered, her voice quivering with both horror and anger. "But this doesn't explain why the Crystal Cross gang is here."

Erik shook his head, his expression troubled. "Examining some video footage during my first quest, I found a link between Etrium and Frant. People from Frant were working with Doran before the guild started searching for him. He and Catrina probably went rogue."

Erik's gaze was fixed on Rebecca, his eyes filled with determination. "I think that whoever was financing Doran and Catrina made everything they could to capture them, that is the reason I was tasked to find them, and now that they have them again, they resumed their research, this time making it so they can't escape. The Crystal Cross Gang probably works for them."

Rebecca met his gaze, but a look of confusion could be seen in her eyes. "Okay, but if they had the means to finance them, why did they send a criminal organization to steal the bodies? Couldn't they have sent someone to kill the Thaidis or buy the corpses?"

"I think the scope of operation is so big they do not have enough money, or this is simply the Crystal Cross Gang's way to profit more."

"I don't know. If someone bigger is the one financing the operation, sending the Crystal Cross Gang makes little sense. They could have done things much more covertly. Sending people to do so bold things here is weird."

"You are right. The only way is to find out who sent the gang, but I don't think it will be easy," Erik said that because he suspected it was the Blackguards behind everything. Uncle Benjamin worked for them, after all. Erik's idea was that Uncle Benjamin was the one coordinating the Crystal Cross gang here in Etrium.

He was the only viable person he knew who worked with Doran who could do that, and if this was true, then the Blackguards were involved.

"We are going to search for these guys," Erik said, "but keep in mind that their members are known to be powerful individuals, and their leader remains a mystery. "

He turned the pin over in his hand, studying it as if hoping it would reveal more of its secrets. This was no ordinary crime, no simple burglary. They had stumbled upon a connection that reached across borders and delved into the shadowy underworld of organized crime.

"We need to be careful," Erik said, his voice low and serious.

Rebecca nodded, her face set doggedly. "We'll sort this out."

Erik pulled out his phone, his fingers moving deftly to dial Mira's number.

"Mira," Erik said tersely when the call connected. "I need you and your team here right away. Aiden, Kael, Lila. All of you. We need your help."

"What's going on?" Mira's voice came through the phone, sharp and concerned.

"It's for a quest; we need more people to investigate the matter."

A pause followed, and Erik could almost hear Mira's mind working, processing the information.

"We'll be there in half an hour," Mira replied, determination in her tone.

"Thank you," Erik said, ending the call and sliding his phone back into his pocket.

He looked at Rebecca, his eyes hard with resolve. "They're on their way."

"Why did you call them?" Rebecca asked.

"The presence of the Crystal Cross Gang implies many thugs will be present. Since we will probably be busy fighting, I need someone to search this place better and monitor other things."

Rebecca nodded, her expression mirroring Erik's determination.

Chapter 620: Planning the operation

Erik and Rebecca continued their search through the large storage building, each aware that the details they might uncover could prove crucial in their investigation.

After an exhaustive search of the premises, which held no further hints, they turned their attention to the video footage that Lysa had given Erik.

They set up a temporary workstation on a cleared table amidst the clutter of the storage area, connecting a device to play the video on a portable screen.

As the footage began, they both leaned in, eyes narrowing as they focused on the events unfolding before them. The timestamp on the video showed that it was late at night when the incident occurred.

The video showed the peaceful and still exterior of the storage building, but that didn't last for long, as the peace was suddenly interrupted by a blast that ripped through part of the wall.

Dust and debris flew as the shockwave from the explosion settled, and ten figures emerged from the darkness.

Dressed in black, their faces concealed by hoods and masks, they moved with synchronized and purposeful steps.

Their precision hinted at careful planning and familiarity with their target, suggesting that they were well-prepared for the task at hand.

Erik and Rebecca watched the video in silence, seeing as the group entered the gaping hole they had created in the building's wall.

The camera angle shifted to an interior view, showing the intruders methodically making their way through the aisles, avoiding security measures with practiced ease.

The group seemed to know where they were going, heading straight for specific crates and the cellars where the Thaid's bodies were stored.

They worked with almost mechanical efficiency, their motions fluid as they loaded the stolen goods onto carts.

Erik's mind was racing as he watched the footage, the Crystal Cross Gang's presence upsetting him at a deep level.

Rebecca's hand came to rest on Erik's arm, her touch grounding him as they continued to watch the footage. They exchanged a glance, recognizing how good these people were at their jobs.

The group of thieves left the scene with the same efficiency and speed that they had entered, taking their stolen goods with them, and disappearing into the darkness of the night as the video approached its end.

The building was left in a ransacked state and we were left with more questions than answers after the operation, which had taken less than an hour.

After the footage ended, Erik played it once more, intending to watch certain parts to see if he could gather any additional information he may have missed.

Side by side, Rebecca and he worked together to analyze the video frame by frame, using their analytical minds to the fullest.

The possibility of connections and conspiracies that ran deep was suggested by the dangerous development of The Crystal Cross Gang's presence in Etrium.

Mira, Aiden, Kael, and Lila arrived at the storage building that had been ransacked, responding quickly to Erik's urgent call.

Upon their arrival, they found Erik and Rebecca standing amidst the chaos, their expressions determined and resolute.

Mira asked, "What's the problem?" as she surveyed the disrupted space with her sharp eyes, quickly realizing that this was no ordinary burglary.

"We're searching for some thieves," Erik replied, his voice carrying a weight that told Mira there was more to the story.

"Thieves?" Mira's eyebrows shot up, a touch of incredulity in her voice.

"Why are we taking this kind of quest?"

Erik met her gaze, his eyes serious. "It's for Lysa. But," he paused, choosing his words with care, "this isn't just a simple burglary. Rebecca and I found out that the people we're dealing with aren't ordinary thieves. We need more men to find these guys."

Mira's curiosity was piqued, and her initial skepticism gave way to focused attention. Sensing the gravity of the situation, she asked, "What do you need us to do?" Her stance conveyed a readiness to take action and do what was necessary.

With determined steps, Erik approached a table where he had meticulously laid out all the evidence they had gathered, which included the pin and video footage.

With great care, he retrieved the pin, the one that was synonymous with the notorious Crystal Cross Gang, and then he held it up for all of them to see.

"We need to prepare different teams and scatter them throughout the city. They must search for people wearing this pin," he explained, his voice firm.

A murmur of recognition passed through the group as they looked at the pin.

"Who are they?" Aiden asked, his voice low. "Some kind of criminal gang?"

Erik nodded, his face grim. "Exactly. We're dealing with a dangerous criminal organization, not just common thieves. Their presence here is alarming, and we need to act as soon as we can."

Lila and Kael exchanged glances, understanding the urgency and the potential risks involved.

Kael's mind was already working on a strategy, considering the best way to deploy their resources.

"We'll organize the teams," he said, determination in his voice. "We'll search every corner of the city if we have to."

Erik's eyes softened with gratitude as he responded, "Thank you, Kael. Let's cooperate and pool any information we come across."

Over the next hour, the group delved into the intricacies of the plan, carefully dividing the sprawling city into manageable sectors, assigning teams to each area, and establishing clear communication protocols to ensure the success of their mission.

Despite the daunting complexity of their task, they worked with a collective sense of purpose that propelled them forward.

Rebecca, standing steadfastly by Erik's side, provided valuable insights and support to the planning process, drawing upon her personal connection to the situation to add an extra layer of strength to the group's efforts.

As they finished their preparations, the realization of the responsibility they were about to undertake weighed heavily on their minds.

They were venturing into a treacherous and enigmatic world, one filled with deceit, treachery, and ulterior motives.

With a last nod of agreement, they dispersed to do their respective tasks, each knowing that the days ahead would be filled with challenges and uncertainties.