

BIOLOGICAL 631

Chapter 631: Howl and the Boss

Erik's mind was reeling as he parsed the enormity of the information he had uncovered. He learned a lot from this data, but there were still obscure parts in it.

Leaning heavily against the desk, he closed his eyes momentarily, taking in deep breaths as the implications of the data sank in.

The Crystal Cross Gang, once merely a thorn in the side of the authorities, had become a formidable force, their reach extending across the human-populated world.

But this was not the work of a criminal gang acting alone. The meticulous planning, the coordination, the resources required for such a vast operation—it all pointed to something bigger, something far more sinister, and a cunning person behind it.

Then Erik's thoughts wandered to some rumors he heard in Frant. These rumors said that behind the Crystal Cross Gang there was a leader, someone no one knew the identity of. The data referred to this boss, but who was he?

The mysterious figure known only as "the boss" loomed large over everything, a shadowy puppeteer pulling the strings from behind the scenes.

The information was frustratingly vague about the identity of this figure, but the scale and sophistication of his intellect were undeniable.

Then Erik's thoughts went back to what was happening in Etrium. He pieced together the puzzle the more he thought about that.

The Thaid's bodies were not just being stolen from Etrium, but from cities and shops across the world.

This concerted effort was a global scheme that went far beyond greed or power. Someone, somewhere, was orchestrating all of this, guiding the hand of the Crystal Cross Gang with purpose and precision. But who? And why?

The answer to that question was not even within the data, but there were some answers hidden behind layers of encryption and code.

Only the higher-ups within the organization knew the true nature of their employer, and they were not about to divulge their secrets easily. However, based on what he just found out, not even they knew his identity.

The more Erik thought about it, the more troubled he became. The scope of the operation was staggering, the implications far-reaching. This was not just a criminal enterprise; it was a threat to the very fabric of their society, a shadow that hung over them all.

His blood boiled when he thought about them and what they did to him and his friends in the past. He then activated Hais's brain crystal power and, thanks to it, he started contemplating what was happening in depth, hoping that the power would help him understand what their actual goal was.

<So, Doran and Catrina were experimenting using Thaidis. Catrina pretty much confirmed that she and Doran worked for the Blackguards in the past; Doran was seen with Uncle Benjamin, meaning that he was and maybe is still working with the Blackguards. Uncle Ben is the obvious link between Frant and Etrium, but who is he working for, the Blackguards? Frant's military?

Was he the one who hired the Crystal Cross Gang to come here? If only I had some more information... but here, in this data, there isn't a single document talking about him. I still don't know many things and I can't make assumptions without proof. >

However, aside from that, the data showed how the Crystal Cross Gang was essentially expanding its operations here in Etrium, doing the same as it did in Erik's birth nation.

They were smuggling illegal drugs across the border. They had their fingers in illicit arms dealing, too, supplying weapons to local gangs. There was also evidence of the usual human trafficking they did back in Frant as well, with the victims being moved around like chess pieces in their sick game of power and control.

And then there were the countless instances of extortion and blackmail, aimed at anyone who had the potential to stand in their way or expose their operations.

There were also records of assassinations - cold, calculated hits on influential figures who dared to oppose them. Some even made a lot of clamor in Etrium.

These guys were not just criminals; they were monsters, pulling the strings from the shadows and sowing chaos wherever they went.

The situation was too complicated. Erik saw from the data what these guys were doing here, but there was no explanation for why. What were they planning? Was the stealing of the Thaid's bodies related to Doran's research? The questions were maddening, the answers elusive.

With a determined set to his jaw, he pulled himself away from the desk, his mind made up.

Erik stood at the precipice of a dilemma. Should he delve deeper into this risky investigation, risk his life to unearth the truth? But as he pondered, the faces of the Crystal Cross Gang members who tried to kill him in Frant flashed through his mind.

Their smirking faces were a constant reminder of the personal vendetta he had against them. His heart pounded in his chest, a drum of war against those who had wronged him.

Then there was Uncle Benjamin. The man he had trusted and looked up to, now implicated in this web of deceit and crime. The thought of his betrayal was like a knife twisting in Erik's heart, the pain raw and unyielding. It was a bitter pill to swallow, the taste of disappointment and betrayal lingering on his tongue.

The matter of the break-in at his house was also making him feel worse since Uncle Benjamin played a role in it. Moreover, if they were searching for the biological supercomputer, it could mean danger beyond what he had ever imagined.

As his thoughts swirled, Erik felt a surge of emotion welling up within him. Anger, so potent it was almost palpable, coursed through his veins.

A torrent of memories flooded his mind, each one stoking the flames of his rage further. He remembered the relentless bullying he had suffered in Frant, the taunts and jeers echoing in his ears. The way they had looked down on him treated him like he was less than them - it was a humiliation that still stung.

He thought about the life he had lived before the Red Palace, a life of poverty and hardship. The gnawing hunger, the cold nights, the desperation - they were experiences that had left deep scars on his soul.

The contemptuous looks, the scornful laughs, the blatant disregard for his existence - each memory was a cruel reminder of the life he had once lived. But the most hurtful thing was the realization that his sole friend, the sole person who cared for it, Uncle Benjamin, likely faked it all.

All these memories, these injustices, fed the fire that was raging within him. It was bloodlust, pure and simple.

He could feel it, a burning fire in his belly, an uncontrollable desire to make those responsible pay for their actions.

And for the first time, he directed this bloodlust towards Uncle Benjamin as well. The man who had betrayed his trust, who had been a part of this world that had caused him so much pain. The thought of him sent a fresh wave of anger coursing through Erik's veins, intensifying his resolve to uncover the truth and make them pay.

His decision was made. He wouldn't tolerate threats against his loved ones or betrayal from those he trusted. The young man would plunge into this enigma, driven not only by curiosity but also by a burning desire for revenge.

In the office's silence, the computers hummed quietly, and Erik was still there thinking about what to do.

However, as he thought of the data, he noticed some were encrypted. Erik wanted to see what they hid.

<System. It looks like there are some encrypted files in the data. Do you mind decrypting it? > Erik was sure the computer could do that simple task.

[NOT AT ALL.]

[SEARCHING FOR DECRYPTED DATA.]

[FILES FOUND.]

[DECRYPTING FILES.]

[DECRYPTION COMPLETE.]

[STARTING INJECTION OF THE DECRYPTED FILES.]

Erik's eyes widened as the data streamed into his brain. A new torrent of information flowed like a river, filling his mind with new images, text, and connections.

He found himself immersed in a series of emails, a correspondence between someone the email referred to as Howl and another person. The messages were cryptic but revealing, shedding light on the operation's intricate network and its underlying purpose.

Howl's words were filled with urgency, a sense of impatience that was palpable even through the digital medium. Erik could almost hear the man's voice, curt and demanding, as he instructed his people to escalate their efforts, to steal more Thaidis and send them to specified locations, including Hin and Frant.

"The boss is growing nervous," Howl had written in one of the emails, his tone tinged with a note of warning. "He expects things to flow. Do not fail him or you know the consequences."

Erik's heart pounded in his chest as he read those words, feeling the weight of their significance. Whoever this "boss" was, he inspected a great deal of fear into his subordinates and was someone who held the reins of the operation and expected obedience and results.

However, Howl was even more interesting. It was clear he was in a lower rank compared to the boss, but appeared to know him. Maybe this person wasn't a random gang's pawn. Maybe he was important.

The emails painted a picture of a highly organized and efficient criminal network operating under the watchful eye of a shadowy figure who was not afraid to make his displeasure known.

As Erik delved deeper into the emails, he found more clues, fragments of information that hinted at the true scale of the operation. Dates, locations, code names—all part of a jigsaw puzzle that was slowly coming together in his mind.

<I can't tell the guild all of this. It was the Blackguards who asked them to send me to find Doran. If I tell the guild what I found, they will probably silence me. There are still people I can't fight against, especially with the mana I have available. >

The more he read, the more intrigued he became, drawn into the mystery like a moth to a flame. Who was Howl? And who was this elusive "boss" who seemed to pull the strings from behind the scenes?

The answers were not present in the emails.

Chapter 632: Aftermath

After five minutes, a fleet of vehicles arrived in front of the building. Erik saw them parking before the building and started heading to the lower floor.

When Lysa arrived at the scene, a sight greeted her that sent a cold shiver down her spine. The building's entrance was an unhinged mess, evidence of a forceful entry, but it was what lay inside and outside that truly took her breath away.

The place was a ghastly panorama of death, a chilling spectacle that reeked of the finality of life. It was as if the grim reaper himself had visited this forsaken place, leaving behind a morbid tableau of the Crystal Cross Gang members.

The once bustling hideout was now transformed into a silent mausoleum, a testament to the cruel hand of fate that had swiftly descended upon its inhabitants.

Each lifeless body was a grotesque sculpture, frozen in its last moments of despair and shock. The harsh fluorescent lights flickered intermittently, casting long, menacing shadows that danced on the cracked concrete floor, making the scene even more eerie.

Blood splatters painted a macabre mural on the peeling walls, each droplet telling a story of its own - of struggle, of violence, and ultimately, of defeat.

The bodies were scattered haphazardly, some slumped against the cold metal containers while others lay sprawled at unnatural angles on the grimy floor.

Their faces were masked with terror, eyes wide open in perpetual surprise, mouths agape in silent screams. Each one was dispatched with brutal efficiency - wounds marred their bodies, the dark crimson seeping into their clothes and pooling around them.

The crystal cross insignia that they proudly bore was now nothing more than a bitter irony, a symbol of their fall.

The air was heavy with the metallic tang of blood. The only sound was the distant hum of the city beyond the walls and the occasional drip-drip of blood from a lifeless hand hanging off the edge of a table.

The place was not just a scene of death; it was an art gallery of violence and power, each detail a brushstroke in this gruesome masterpiece.

Her eyes widened as she stepped further into the building, carefully avoiding the pools of blood that had gathered in the carnage's wake. The smell of iron hung thick in the air, and the silence was oppressive, broken only by the distant echoes of her men as they explored the building.

She found Erik descending the stairs from the first floor, his face concealed by his mask and the aura of a murderer around. His Flyssa was sheathed, but the glint of its blade, the blood on his clothes, and the stench he emanated bore witness to the violence he had wrought.

"What happened here?" she asked, her voice betraying a hint of fear, even though she had expected something drastic from Erik's earlier call.

"I took out the trash," he replied simply, his tone flat and devoid of emotion.

Lysa's gaze lingered on him for a moment, reading the underlying message in his words. She knew he had done what he deemed necessary, but the reality of the situation was far more complex.

"Erik, you need to understand that..." she began, choosing her words carefully. "This situation is terrible. We're in the slums, yes, but people will notice this, as you didn't even try to take a hidden approach. They'll alert the authorities."

He looked at her, his face beneath the mask, unconcerned. But Lysa pressed on, her voice firm and authoritative.

"The guild always gives quests to kill people; why should it be a problem now?"

"Because you're not working for the guild at the moment, and these people weren't explicit targets the guild recognized. Killing them could be problematic. You need to get away from here. Now."

Erik's expression hardened, but he nodded, recognizing the wisdom in her words. He knew his actions had consequences, and he trusted Lysa's judgment.

Lysa turned to her men, her voice rising to a command. "Ransack the place! Find anything of value, but be done in ten minutes. Time is of the essence!"

Her orders sliced through the heavy silence like a blade, instantly injecting life into the grim scene. The echo of her voice lingered for a moment before being replaced by the cacophony of hurried footsteps. Her team, a well-oiled machine of efficiency and precision, sprang into action.

The building buzzed with a newfound urgency as the team worked in synchrony, their years of working together clear in their coordinated efforts.

They moved from room to room, their gloved hands rifling through drawers, cabinets, and hidden compartments. Anything valuable was swiftly bagged - bundles of cash, high-tech weaponry that could be sold - nothing was overlooked. Yet their primary objective lay beneath them, in the cold, dank cellars.

The cellars were a labyrinth of narrow corridors and dimly lit rooms, their walls lined with monstrous bodies preserved in transparent containers.

The team moved with practiced caution, their boots echoing ominously on the floor. The monsters' bodies, frozen in death, glistened under the cellar's weak lighting. Time was of the essence.

As Lysa and Erik made their way toward the exit, the weight of the situation settled on them both. The building had become a tomb, a monument to a battle fought in shadows, and its secrets were about to be laid bare.

But the deeper implications of Erik's discovery were still resonating in his mind, a puzzle that was far from complete. The Crystal Cross Gang was just a piece of a much larger picture, one that was coming into focus.

Rebecca quickly arrived at the entrance where Lysa and Erik were.

"We are leaving," Erik said. She nodded and started going out.

With a last glance at the grim tableau behind them, they stepped out into the day, leaving the ghosts of the slain behind.

The car's engine hummed as it sped over the dark streets, the glimmering lights of the city passing by in a blur. Inside, Erik and Rebecca sat silently, each lost in their thoughts. The day's events had unfolded in a whirlwind of violence and discovery, leaving them both with a sense of unease.

Rebecca glanced at Erik, noticing his foul mood. His eyes were fixed on the road ahead, but she could tell that his mind was elsewhere.

"What's the problem?" she finally asked, breaking the silence. "You're really quiet."

Erik turned his gaze to her; then, he talked in a way that made her heart skip a beat. "We'll talk about it once we reach the guild," he said, his voice low, pointing at the driver. His caution was clear; he didn't want anyone else to hear what he had to say.

Rebecca nodded, understanding his concern. She settled back into her seat, feeling the weight of the day's revelations pressing down on her. The car continued its journey; the minutes ticking away as they drew closer to the guild's headquarters.

Finally, the vehicle pulled up to the entrance, and they were met by a rush of workers and attendants from Erik's guild.

They greeted the two mercenaries with smiles and nods, their eyes briefly flickering over their bloodstained clothing. But they said nothing, accustomed as they were to the often brutal nature of their profession.

Instead, they offered Erik and Rebecca clean pairs of boots and assisted them as they exited the car.

Erik's authoritative presence commanded respect, and he issued instructions with calm efficiency. "Rebecca, go wash yourself and give your dirty clothes to the staff. They will take care of it. We will meet in my office in an hour."

She nodded. As she made her way to the washrooms, she couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. It was true that they made a mess at the Crystal Cross Gang base, but it wasn't the first time she did something like that. So why was she feeling so restless?

Erik, meanwhile, was aware of the severity of the situation. The information he had gleaned from the Crystal Cross Gang's computers clarified he needed to understand what was happening around him. He also wanted to make the Crystal Cross Gang pay and find out why the blackguards or the military went to his home.

Erik stripped off his bloodstained clothes, each piece a grim reminder of the day's battles, and left them in a heap on the cold, ceramic floor.

He then stepped into the tiled bathroom. The shower was simple and clean, with its polished chrome fixtures and the faint scent of pine-scented soap hanging in the air.

Turning the shower knob, he was greeted by a jet of water that cascaded from the overhead rain shower.

The water was icy at first, a shocking contrast against his heated skin, but it gradually warmed to a comfortable temperature. Steam filled the room, fogging up the mirror and creating a soothing, misty atmosphere.

"What a mess..." he said while thinking about the situation.

Erik stepped under the rainfall shower, allowing the warm water to wash over him. It coursed down his battle-hardened body, tracing the contours of his muscles and washing away the grime and blood that had clung to his skin. The water pooled at his feet before spiraling down the drain, taking with it the physical remnants of the day's violent encounters.

He reached for a bar of soap nestled in a niche in the wall, its fresh scent cutting through the steamy air. As he lathered it between his hands, the soap turned into a rich foam that he worked into his skin, scrubbing away the sweat and dirt.

The water pressure massaged his tense muscles, easing the aches and pains that came with the day's battles. He tilted his head back, allowing the water to rinse through his hair, washing away the day's stress.

As he stood there, enveloped by warmth and the rhythmic sound of splashing water, Erik allowed himself a moment of reflection. His thoughts drifted to the day's events - the gruesome scene at the gang's hideout.

He didn't relish doing this, but every time he fought against people, it was like a demon possessed him. He quickly realized he didn't really like people in general. Or was it just because they were Crystal Cross Gang members? Each memory was like a snapshot, vivid and raw in his mind.

Yet in this moment of solitude, under the soothing spray of the shower, Erik found a semblance of peace. It was a brief respite from his demanding role, a chance to wash away not just the physical grime but also the mental burden of his responsibilities.

Chapter 633: I don't want to do this.

An hour had passed, and Erik found himself in his office, sitting behind his desk and lost in thought.

The door creaked open, an old tune that echoed in the quiet room, announcing Rebecca's arrival. She stepped inside, her movements as graceful as a panther on the prowl.

Her lustrous black hair, free from any restraint, cascaded down her back in gentle waves, catching the dim light and lending her an ethereal glow.

She wore a tailored blazer over a crisp white blouse; the fabric hugging her form in a manner that was both professional and subtly alluring. A pair of dark trousers completed her ensemble, accentuating her lean figure. The outfit was a stunning blend of aesthetics and functionality, much like Rebecca herself - a harmonious balance of beauty and strength.

As she walked towards the couch, her posture straight and confident, she broke the silence. Her voice was as smooth as velvet, yet carried an underlying note of steel. "So, what did you want to talk about?" she asked, her gaze steady and unwavering. Her presence was as captivating as it was intimidating, a testament to the extraordinary woman she was.

Erik looked up, and for a moment, he was caught off guard by her beauty. Her movements were graceful, almost ethereal, as she glided across the room.

The soft lighting cast a warm glow on her skin, accentuating the delicate curve of her neck and the gentle slope of her shoulders. Her eyes sparkled with a mixture of curiosity and concern, and her lips were slightly parted as she awaited his response.

He gestured for her to sit down, unable to take his eyes off her. As she settled onto the couch, crossing her legs and leaning back, Erik said something she didn't quite expect him to say.

Erik's voice broke the silence, a low rumble that resonated in the room. "I don't really know how to say this," he began, his words coming out slightly hoarse, like gravel under a heavy wheel.

He paused, his gaze fixed on a nondescript spot on the floor, as he wrestled with what was threatening to spill from his lips.

His fingers clenched unconsciously, the only visible sign of his internal struggle. His jaw tightened, and he swallowed hard, his Adam's apple bobbing in his throat. The room seemed to shrink with the weight of his next words; the air growing thick with unspoken tension.

"But I really think you must head back to Nokisi Point," he finally said, his voice barely above a whisper. The words hung in the air, like a heavy fog, their implications sinking into the silence that followed.

He looked into her eyes, but of course, she couldn't see them. However, if she could, she could have seen them revealing a turmoil of emotions - regret, concern, and a hint of reluctance.

These were not the words he wanted to utter, but circumstances had backed him into a corner.

Her eyes widened, and a look of confusion crossed her face. "Why?" she asked, her voice filled with genuine surprise. "What's going on?"

He hesitated, his mind racing. He knew he couldn't tell her the real reason; Rebecca came for the quest the guild gave, but since what Erik was going to do was probably bound to go against the guild, he didn't want to put her in danger.

The information he had uncovered was too sensitive, too dangerous. But he also knew that he had to send her away to keep her safe.

"I can't tell you," he said finally, his voice firm but filled with regret. "I need you to trust me on this."

She looked at him, her eyes searching his face for answers. But all she found was his mask and a wall of determination, a resolve that she couldn't penetrate.

The words tumbled from her lips, a mixture of disbelief and hurt. "You're sending me away?" She echoed, her voice fracturing under the weight of her shock. The room seemed to echo her sentiments, the silence amplifying the sting of his declaration.

Her eyes, usually so full of curiosity and intelligence, were now clouded with confusion and a touch of betrayal. Her hands clenched at her sides, the knuckles whitening.

"Just like that. Without an explanation?" Her voice rose at the end, a question that hung heavily in the air. The accusation was clear in her tone, a sharp contrast to the usual calm composure she held.

The disbelief etched across her face was as palpable as the tension that now filled the room. Erik's words had hit her like a physical blow, leaving her grappling for answers.

He reached out, wanting to comfort her, but she pulled away, her eyes filled with hurt. "I thought we were friends," she continued, her voice trembling with emotion.

"We are," he said, his voice soft but insistent.

She shook her head, tears welling in her eyes. In the past month, Rebecca's relationship with Erik had developed into something deeper than mere friendship.

She had taken a huge liking to him, finding Erik a rare and refreshing person. Though the daughter of a guild that was far bigger and more powerful than his, she had never encountered someone her age who could stand on the same ground.

In the gilded world of the rich and privileged, Rebecca was an object of fascination and envy. She moved among people whose wealth was surpassed only by their ambition, individuals who were always weaker both physically and in spirit, yet constantly vying for her attention.

They sought her favor not for who she was, but for the influence she wielded and the doors her lineage could open. It was a dance of social politics, a game she was forced to partake in, that left her feeling like a prized artifact rather than a human being.

She was objectified, her worth measured by the power of her mother's name. Every smile directed her way was calculated, every compliment laden with ulterior motives. The superficiality of it all left a bitter taste in her mouth, a hollowness that echoed in the hollow laughter and insincere toasts of high society.

Erik, however, stood apart from this world. He was a stark contrast to the glittering façade of privilege and power she was accustomed to. He treated her with genuine respect and equality, acknowledging her for her strengths and intellect rather than her lineage.

To Erik, Rebecca was not an asset to be leveraged or a tool to curry favor with her influential mother. He saw her as an individual - strong, intelligent, and fiercely independent.

His interactions with her were devoid of any pretense or hidden agendas, a refreshing change from the constant manipulation and deceit she faced in her world.

In Erik's presence, Rebecca felt seen and valued for who she was as a person rather than the social capital she represented. It was this stark difference, this genuine respect and acknowledgment, that set Erik apart from the others and made their current situation all the more difficult to bear.

Despite being more powerful than her, Erik never treated her with contempt, something many in his position would have done. His respect for her was genuine, his interest in her was real, and it had nothing to do with her status or her family's wealth.

As the days turned into weeks, Rebecca found herself drawn to Erik in ways she hadn't expected. A subtle crush had blossomed, adding layers of complexity to their relationship.

And all this while, she had never even seen his face nor told him her feelings. His actions and his words had spoken to her, touching her heart in a way that went beyond mere physical attraction.

So when Erik asked her to go back to Nokisi Point, it hurt. It was more than just a professional decision; it felt like a personal rejection. His refusal to explain only added to her confusion and pain.

She couldn't help but feel that she was being pushed away, that something she valued was being taken from her without reason.

Erik's request was not just a mission directive; it was a severing of a connection that had become precious to her. It left her feeling lost and betrayed, struggling to reconcile the person she thought she knew with the decision he had made.

"Is it because of what happened today? Because I berated you for what you did to that man?"

"No," he said, his voice filled with torment. "It's not that..."

She stared at him, disbelief written all over her face. "So what is it, then? Did you find something on that computer?"

He looked at her, his heart aching, knowing that he was causing her pain. But he knew it was necessary and that he had no choice but to send her away.

"I'm sorry, Rebecca," he said, his voice filled with sorrow. "But with how things are right now, and how I think they will end up, I think it's better you go back to the capital."

She looked at him, her eyes filled with a mixture of hurt and anger. But behind it all, he saw a flicker of understanding, realizing that there was more to this than he was letting on.

"Tell me why, Erik!" she shouted.

Erik studied her, his gaze intense and probing. Her reaction baffled him. They had known each other for a mere month and a half, yet her response felt heavy, laden with an emotional depth that seemed disproportionate to their acquaintance.

"Rebecca, do not make me repeat myself," he said, his voice firm yet laced with an undercurrent of regret. His words were a command, but his eyes, if she could have seen them, pleaded for understanding.

Her shoulders sagged slightly, the fight visibly draining from her. "All right," she conceded, her voice barely more than a whisper, filled with the bitter taste of resignation. The room seemed to hold its breath, the silence punctuated by the echo of her capitulation.

"But I want you to know that I don't like it," she continued, her voice growing stronger with each word. Her eyes met his, a defiant spark igniting within them. "And I don't understand it."

He nodded, his throat tight with emotion. "I know," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "And I'm sorry."

She stood, her movements still graceful despite the turmoil in her eyes. She walked toward the door, pausing for a moment to look back at him.

"I hope you know what you're doing, Erik," she said, her voice filled with doubt. "Because I'm not sure that you do."

With that, she turned and left, leaving him alone with his thoughts and the heavy burden of the decisions he had made.

Chapter 634: Goals

A week had passed since Rebecca left the city, and Erik couldn't shake the feeling of loneliness that had settled over him. She had become a great friend in a short time, a companion in his arms, and her absence was keenly felt.

Fortunately, he had Mira; their relationship was different, but Erik could say that she was becoming a precious part of his life.

Over the course of the past week, Rebecca and Erik had found themselves increasingly drawn to each other's company.

Their shared moments were like pockets of tranquility amid the chaos, often culminating in silent evenings spent in the sanctuary of her room.

It was a space where they could shed their public personas, allowing their true selves to surface without judgment or pretense.

Rebecca had a calming presence, her strength and intelligence providing a comforting counterbalance to the stress that Erik faced.

Her words were soothing, her laughter a balm, her mere presence a beacon of reassurance. Mira had a way of making the world seem less daunting, her optimism and resilience infectious.

The woman was sweet to him, her kindness manifesting in small gestures and thoughtful words.

She listened when he needed an ear, offered advice when he was lost, and sat in silence with him when words seemed inadequate.

Her empathy was a warm blanket around him, her understanding a soft light in his moments of darkness.

Their relationship was an unexpected solace, a refuge from the relentless pressures of their lives. It was a bond that had grown organically, nurtured by shared moments and mutual respect.

As Erik walked to Noah's and Luke's room, his mind was awash with thoughts and plans. The situation was becoming complex, and the path ahead was filled with obstacles.

He was determined to find out what was happening and to destroy the Crystal Cross Gang here in Etrium, his major goal. But to do so, he needed resources, and he needed to grow stronger.

He needed men, reliable and capable individuals who could stand with him in the fight.

He needed money, the lifeblood of any operation, to fund his plans and ensure he and the others had the tools he required. But above all, he needed personal power.

Erik was strong, his physical prowess enough to kill v-ranked individuals easily. His body was a weapon honed to perfection, and he had proven it against the gang members back in the slums.

But he knew these victories were only against those with mediocre brain crystal powers and low mana capacity.

If he had to face someone with similar physical stats but much more mana than him, he would be at a significant disadvantage.

It wasn't in having a powerful body that the true strength of a warrior lay. No, it came from his Brain Crystal Power.

Then there were those who stood apart, the elemental wielders. These fighters defied conventional norms, their prowess not rooted in physical strength despite likely possessing it.

Instead, they commanded the very forces of nature, bending them to their will in a display of raw, unadulterated power.

These individuals were a class apart, their abilities transcending the limitations of physical combat.

They were like conductors orchestrating a symphony of elemental forces, their movements fluid and precise, their control absolute.

Fire, water, earth, air - they could manipulate these elements with an ease that was both awe-inspiring and terrifying.

Their mode of attack was usually from a distance, their abilities not constrained by the boundaries of physical proximity.

They could unleash a torrent of elemental fury from afar, their attacks as unpredictable as they were devastating.

Against such foes, one's physical strength meant little. The battlefield became a chessboard, the fight a game of strategy and wits.

For Erik, such opponents posed a genuine threat. Despite his own considerable strength and skill, he could find himself dangerously outmatched against the elemental wielders.

Their unpredictable abilities and the sheer scale of their power could easily tip the scales of any battle in their favor. It was against such adversaries that Erik had to be most vigilant, for they held the potential to pose real danger.

His strength alone would not be enough. He needed mana, and to gain it, he needed a lot of experience.

He mulled over these thoughts, aware of the gaps in his capabilities and the work that needed to be done.

As he neared Noah's and Luke's room, his mind shifted to the immediate future. There were decisions to be made, alliances to forge, and plans to devise. He knew that the road ahead would not be easy, but he was resolute.

The weight of responsibility rested heavily on his shoulders, but he embraced it, driven by a sense of purpose that went beyond mere ambition.

Erik's mission was clear yet complex. He needed to unearth the truth that lay shrouded within the city's underbelly to expose the puppet master orchestrating the intricate web of events that had been unfolding.

The city was a labyrinth of secrets, and Erik was determined to navigate its twisting paths to uncover the truth.

Moreover, he had to decipher Uncle Benjamin's role in this convoluted plot. There was a nagging suspicion in his mind that Benjamin's involvement ran deeper than what met the eye. His role seemed to be a piece of a larger puzzle, a puzzle that Erik was determined to solve.

However, his mission was fraught with formidable challenges. He was up against entities like the Crystal Cross Gang and the Blackguards, behemoths in their own right. These were forces with deep roots and far-reaching influence, entities that wouldn't be easily toppled.

To challenge such powers, Erik needed more than just determination and bravery. He needed an arsenal of resources - more power, more men, more strategic assets. It was an uphill battle, one that required meticulous planning and careful execution.

But gathering such resources was a task in itself, one that demanded time and patience. It was a game of chess, and Erik had to ensure that his pieces were in place before making his move.

The path ahead was fraught with challenges and uncertainties, but Erik was resolute. He knew what he had to do, and he was prepared to do whatever it took to achieve his goals.

The challenges were many, but he was prepared to face them, to overcome them, to triumph.

Erik's footsteps echoed in the corridor as he reached the door, his thoughts momentarily quieting as he prepared to face the day's challenges. The road ahead was long, but he was ready. He had to be. The stakes were too high, and failure was not an option.

As Erik stepped into Noah's and Luke's room, the atmosphere was charged with the intensity of rigorous training.

The room had been repurposed into a temporary training ground, the usual decor pushed aside to accommodate their demanding routine.

The rhythmic thud of fists against training pads echoed in the space, punctuated by occasional grunts of effort.

Both Noah and Luke were deeply engrossed in their practice, their bodies moving with a laser-focused intensity that demanded attention.

Noah, with his well-honed physique and swift movements, was a tempest of speed and precision.

His fists moved like lightning, launching a rapid succession of punches at the training pad that his younger brother, Luke, held with determined stability.

Luke, despite still not having matured, was an embodiment of controlled strength. His smaller frame absorbed the force of Noah's punches with surprising ease.

Luke's eyes were locked onto Noah's every movement, tracking his brother's actions with an intense focus that belied his age.

His own movements were measured and deliberate, his body subtly adjusting to brace against each powerful strike. Erik assumed that was because of the memories they got from him, and he trained extensively for a lot of time.

The room was alive with the rhythm of their training, a testament to their shared dedication and discipline.

Sweat glistened on their skin like dew on a summer morning, each droplet a testament to the effort they were putting into their training.

Their chests rose and fell rhythmically, breaths coming in quick, controlled bursts as they pushed their bodies to the very edge of their limits.

Muscles strained and flexed under the harsh, unforgiving light, each movement showcasing the raw power and agility they possessed.

The air in the room was thick with more than just physical exertion. It was heavy with a palpable sense of determination and resolve that hung around them like an aura.

The scent was a heady mix of sweat, leather from the training pads, and the metallic tang of adrenaline. These scents combined to create a unique fragrance that spoke volumes about the trials they were preparing for.

Every punch thrown, every dodge made, every gasp for breath was a potent reminder of what they were training for.

Each bead of sweat that trickled down their foreheads and splashed onto the cold, hard floor symbolized the trials they were readying themselves to face.

The room, with its stark lighting and echoing sounds of exertion, was a crucible where they were being forged into something stronger.

Though the room provided enough space for their current needs, Erik couldn't help but notice it wasn't enough, as his two clones didn't have a place to train, and they had to repurpose the room for this task.

However, if he wanted them to improve, they would need more space, rooms, and better facilities to do so. Maybe Intrity weights and gravity chambers, and even body enhancing serums.

Luke, in particular, was maturing at an impressive rate. He was larger than he had been just a week ago, his muscles more defined, his movements more fluid.

Erik felt a pang of pride at his growth but also an awareness of for what would happen if someone saw them.

Without a preamble, Erik addressed Noah, his voice cutting through the noise of their training. "How are the other five eggs doing?" he inquired, his mind turning to the additional clones he had created.

Though he had enough mana to create more, space had been the limiting factor. He couldn't afford to have too many clones roaming among the humans, especially not Noah.

Noah stopped his training, turning to face Erik, his eyes gleaming with intelligence. "They are growing well, Master," he said, his voice filled with respect and a touch of excitement.

The term 'Master' resonated strangely in Erik's ears, a reminder of the complex relationship they shared.

"And the sacks of human blood?" Erik inquired, his mind already racing ahead to the next steps in their plan.

Noah nodded, his face composed but his eyes bright. "I have got them, Master," he answered, his voice steady. "We only need Luke to test if your theory is correct."

Erik's eyes narrowed as he considered the words, the implications of what they were doing.

If they got Conal's shapeshifting ability, and they needed only blood, as he did when he still had the power, then it was possible for them to shapeshift into humans if they drank human blood.

He looked at Luke, his gaze lingering on the young clone's form, his mind weighing the potential, the promise.

Luke was the key, the living proof of what they were trying to achieve. If their theories were correct, if their experiments succeeded, they wouldn't have problems anymore.

He met Noah's eyes, seeing the same understanding, the same determination. They were in this together, bound by a shared vision, a shared purpose.

"Very well," Erik said, his voice firm. "We proceed as planned. Have Luke drink the blood and tell me the result; if it is positive, show me."

Noah bowed his head, his face a mask of concentration. "Understood, Master."

Erik watched him for a moment longer, his mind still racing, his heart filled with a strange mix of excitement and trepidation. Then he nodded, satisfied.

"Good," he replied, his voice filled with silent resolve. "Now, get back to work."

And with those words, they turned back to their training, to their experiments, to their quest for knowledge and power. The room was filled again with the sound of effort and determination, the echoes of a future yet to be forged.

Chapter 635: The War that was to come

Erik left Noah's room, his mind still buzzing with the potential and complexity of their project. But another matter was calling for his attention. With purpose in mind, he deftly dialed Lysa's number, his fingers dancing over the device.

The call connected, and Lysa's voice came through the speaker, warm and familiar. "Erik," she greeted, a touch of relief in her tone. "I'm glad you called. How are things on your end?"

Erik's response was calm and collected. "Good. I called to find out about the situation in the slums. Any news?"

There was a pause, and Erik could almost hear Lysa's worried frown. "The police are investigating," she drawled. "They're asking around, trying to piece together what happened. But all they have is the description of two masked people, which could fit anyone."

Erik's lips quirked in a small smile. "That's good to hear. So, they don't have any leads?"

Lysa's voice tightened, her worry palpable. "No, but Erik, this isn't something to take lightly. They're determined to find out who did this. And even though no one recognized us or our vehicles, the guild has issued a reward and a quest to find the killers. It's possible that you might confront someone in the future."

Despite the mounting pressure, Erik's composure remained unshaken. He was acutely aware of the risks involved, having meticulously weighed them against the potential outcomes before deciding on a course of action.

He understood their actions were drastic, but he also knew they were inescapable. Erik needed to punish the Crystal Cross Gang.

"I understand your concerns," he said, his voice a steady baritone that cut through the tension in the room. His gaze was unwavering, his eyes reflecting the resolve that had carried him through countless challenges. His hands, though scarred and weathered from many battles, were steady as he clasped them in front of him.

"But we did what was necessary, Lysa," he continued, his tone firm yet empathetic. He understood the weight of their actions and the potential fallout that could ensue. But he also knew that hesitation or inaction in the face of such a threat was not an option.

"We'll face whatever comes at us," he concluded, his words ringing with a silent determination. His shoulders squared, ready to bear the burden of their choices. His calm demeanor belied the storm of challenges they were about to face, but Erik was ready. He had to be.

Lysa's sigh came through the phone, a mix of frustration and concern. "I know, Erik. I trust your judgment. But I can't help but worry. This is a dangerous game you are playing."

Erik's expression softened, his voice gentle. "I know you're worried, Lysa. And I appreciate your concern. I'll be careful, and we'll be prepared."

A silence descended upon the room, dense and tangible, laden with unvoiced thoughts and suppressed emotions. It was as if time itself had paused; the air seeming to thicken around them.

The only sound was the distant hum of the building's central air system, a soft, rhythmic drone that underscored the weight of their conversation.

Erik could sense Lysa's fear, a tangible undercurrent that ran beneath her otherwise usually composed exterior. He could see it in the tone of her voice and in the way her fingers nervously tapped over her desk, as they were loud enough to be heard on the phone.

Finally, Lysa spoke, her voice firm. "Alright, Erik. I'll trust you, as always. Just promise me you'll be careful."

Erik's response was immediate and sincere. "I promise."

Lysa's voice softened, the tension easing. "Thank you. Is there anything else you need, Erik?" She asked.

He paused for a moment, considering how to phrase his request. "Actually, Lysa, there is something. I need you to find a building for me, one that can house around two hundred people. It must have training rooms, kitchens, and all the basic amenities."

There was a brief silence on the other end of the line, filled with Lysa's contemplation. "That's quite a request," she finally said, her tone laced with curiosity. "May I ask why you need such a place?"

Erik's mind twirled a web of lies, fabricating a reason that would satisfy her without revealing too much. "I need a place to train some selected people without disturbance," he replied, his voice steady, betraying no hint of deception.

"Have you found someone strong?" Lysa's voice was filled with interest, her mind racing with possibilities.

"Yes," Erik affirmed, keeping his response short, his tone confident.

Lysa's curiosity was piqued, but she knew better than to press further. "Is any building good, or do you have specific requirements?"

Erik thought for a moment before answering, "Any building will get by, but if it's close to the guild's headquarters, that would be ideal."

There was a reassuring note in Lysa's voice as she responded, "Consider it done, Erik. I'll take care of it."

"Thank you, Lysa," Erik said, his voice softening with gratitude. "I knew I could count on you."

"Don't worry about it," Lysa said, her tone lightening. "Just let me know if you need anything else."

They exchanged a few more pleasantries before ending the call, both returning to their respective tasks.

Erik found his gaze locked on the phone that lay innocuously on the polished mahogany desk, its screen now dark, the echoes of the conversation still ringing in his ears.

The device seemed almost too mundane, too ordinary for the weight of the words it had just carried. His fingers absently traced the cool, sleek edges of the device, his mind lost in thought.

He knew fully that he was involving Lysa too much, especially considering the recent upheaval in the slums. The vivid images of those events were still fresh in his mind - the chaos, the rage, the urge to kill. He could still hear the cries for help, and see the desperation in the eyes of those he had killed.

On one hand, he felt glee knowing that those people suffered when they died, but on the other, he couldn't stop feeling like a monster.

But amidst the turmoil, he also knew that Lysa was one of his most steadfast allies. She was a friend, and she was one of the few people who would stand by him, who would face the storm at his side without a moment's hesitation.

However, he felt a pang of guilt for lying to her, for keeping her in the dark about his true intentions, but luckily she didn't ask questions, as she was too smart to not understand when and if asking questions was right.

Nevertheless, he also knew that it was necessary to lie to protect her, to keep her safe from the storm he was sure was going to fall on him and the surrounding people.

With a nod that was as much an affirmation to himself as it was a conclusion to the conversation, Erik slipped the phone into his pocket.

The cool metal of the device disappeared into the fabric, leaving only a slight bulge as evidence of its existence. His hand lingered there for a moment, a silent promise of the commitments he had just made.

He then turned his attention back to the array of documents appearing on his computer. The sight was daunting, yet oddly comforting. It was a tangible representation of their plans and their strategies, a testament to the care and thought they were putting into their preparations for what Erik could only define as a war.

There was much to be done, an overwhelming list of tasks that would require his full attention and dedication.

"Ahhhh. Fuck! I will do this later!" Erik then left the room, since he couldn't concentrate.

His thoughts were still mulling over the things that had happened in the past weeks as he made his way through the halls of his guild's headquarters.

His mind was focused on the tasks ahead, particularly the urgent need to increase his rank to the Warden level. The requirements of taking specific quests weighed on him, a necessary step in his preparation plan.

As he reached the entrance of the building, Erik motioned to one of his men, a loyal and attentive member of his guild, who was always ready to assist him.

"Prepare a car to take me to the guild," Erik ordered, his voice firm but not unkind. "I'll be leaving shortly."

The man nodded obediently, his eyes betraying no curiosity about Erik's sudden departure. "Right away, sir," he responded, moving promptly to fulfill the command.

Erik watched him go, appreciating the efficiency and dedication of his men and women. They were the backbone of his operations, reliable and skilled individuals who played their part without question.

With a hum that resonated through the cool evening air, the sleek flying car swiftly made its arrival. Its streamlined body, gleaming under the glow of the sun, cut through the daylight sky with an effortless grace.

As it came to a gentle stop, the humming of the engines subsided, replaced by a soft purr that hinted at the latent power under its hood. The car's doors slid open with a whisper of hydraulics, inviting its passengers into the plush comfort of its interior.

As he entered, he turned his gaze to the window; the cityscape sprawling before him as the car started lifting in the air, a world filled with complexities and secrets. He knew that every step he took was fraught with risks, every decision a delicate balance between opportunity and danger.

Chapter 636: Shocking News

Erik settled into the comfortable seat of the car, glancing out of the window as it ascended into the sky above Testrovsc's Rest.

The city spread out below him, a maze of buildings, roads, and green spaces, alive with the hustle and bustle of daily life. As the car soared through the air, Erik's thoughts drifted to those he had recently parted ways with.

Rebecca's face came to his mind, her eyes filled with determination and curiosity, yet tinged with vulnerability.

His thoughts then wandered to Uncle Ben, the man who took care of him when he was little, and who had guided him through many challenges.

Erik felt a pang of gratitude for what the man had done for him in the past, but this was mixed with sadness at the thought of what he had become for him recently. Nothing but a stranger, probably an enemy.

The thoughts of the Blackguards lingered, too, their enigmatic and shadowy existence a constant puzzle.

As the flying car began its gradual descent toward the guild's designated landing pad, Erik's mind shifted gears. The sprawling cityscape below receded, replaced by the familiar sight of the guild's headquarters.

Erik's thoughts honed in on the immediate task at hand. The quests that lay ahead were not just tasks to be completed; they were stepping stones on his path to ascend to the Warden rank and higher ones within the guild.

Higher ranks would allow him to get more fame and with it more power, and more credibility.

Erik entered the guild's bustling headquarters, immediately immersed in the energy and activity that filled the space. Mercenaries of varying ranks moved through the hallways, their footsteps echoing on the polished floors as they hurried to and from missions.

Voices mixed in a cacophony of different languages, filled with the urgency of negotiations, the excitement of success, or the frustration of failure.

The air was thick with the smell of leather, metal, and the faintest hint of sweat—a tangible reminder of the physicality of their work.

The atmosphere was charged with a sense of purpose, the thrum of activity never ceasing, never slowing. This was a place of business, of opportunity, where reputations were made and fortunes earned.

It was a hive, a complex and efficient machine fueled by the ambition and skill of those who called it home.

With his mask securely in place, concealing his identity, Erik moved through the crowd, his eyes fixed on the holographic computer that stood in a prominent place in the main hall. He navigated the sea of bodies with practiced ease, his steps purposeful and sure.

Reaching the computer, Erik's fingers danced over the holographic interface, scrolling through the quests.

The options were many, ranging from simple escort missions to complex assassination contracts, each with its own set of requirements and rewards.

After a moment of consideration, Erik's eyes settled on one particular quest that caught his interest.

QUEST DETAILS

Quest Name: The Grythok Menace

Goal: Kill Thaid known as Grythoks

Quest Type: Hunting

Location: Testrovs's Rest's enchanted forest.

Guild Reward: 25000 Eurems

Minimum Kills Required for Completion: 40 Grythoks

Average Market Price for Body: 8000 Eurems

Thaid Level: ξ1-ξ3

Quest Briefing: Grythoks have recently terrorized the region with their fearsome presence. A rare and enigmatic breed of Thaid, The Grythoks possess a Brain Crystal Power that grants them heightened sensory perception and the ability to communicate telepathically with another member of their species within a limited range.

They can track prey with uncanny accuracy and coordinate attacks with other Grythoks. Their growing numbers and aggressive behavior are causing havoc in nearby settlements.

This quest calls for skilled mercenaries to cull the Grythok population and restore harmony to the area.

<That would be a cool brain crystal power to have with my clones. >

Without hesitation, he selected it, accepting the challenge with a determined nod.

The computer beeped in acknowledgment, and Erik turned away, the details of the mission already planned in his mind. It was time to prepare, time to act.

The hustle and bustle of the guild faded into the background as Erik focused on the task ahead.

Satisfied with his choice, he swiftly pulled out his communication device and called Thorne, his voice steady and filled with determination.

"Thorne, gather your team. We're hunting 40 Grythoks in Testrovsc's Rest's forest. Meet me at the city's entrance," Erik said, his tone leaving no room for argument.

Thorne's voice echoed through the phone Erik held, his tone vibrant and filled with infectious excitement. The guild headquarters around Erik seemed to fade into the background as he focused on the conversation.

"Understood," Thorne affirmed, his voice a rich baritone that carried an undertone of unwavering determination.

There was a brief pause, a moment of silence that stretched across the digital connection as he processed Erik's instructions.

"We'll be there," he continued, his commitment ringing clear in those three words. His promise was solid and reliable, much like the man himself.

"See you soon, boss," Thorne finished, a hint of a smile audible in his voice. The term 'boss' was delivered with a respect that went beyond the typical hierarchy. It was a testament to their shared history, their camaraderie, and the mutual respect they held for each other.

The call ended, and Erik wasted no time. He left the bustling guild building, his mind already strategizing the hunt. The noise of the guild's interior further faded behind him as he stepped out into the city, replaced by the sounds of everyday life in Testrovsc's Rest.

The streets were filled with people going about their daily business, but Erik paid them little attention. His focus was solely on the task ahead. Grythoks were cunning creatures, and their telepathic abilities made them formidable opponents.

With determined strides, Erik reached the city's entrance. His thoughts were clear, his purpose unwavering. It was time to face the Grythoks.

Erik stood at the city's entrance, dwarfed by the towering fortress-like walls that flanked one side. On the other side, a sprawling complex of shops bustled within a multi-story building. The vibrant buzz of commerce echoed through the air, a stark contrast to the silent, stoic walls.

He was there, alone, his gaze scanning the crowd for the familiar faces of Thorne and his team. But they were nowhere to be found.

Erik started growing impatient, but he quickly figured out they needed time to prepare. Besides, he had arrived relatively early; it was only natural they weren't there yet.

Erik had been idly surveying the bustling cityscape as he waited for Thorne and his team.

His eyes were drawn to the wall on the other side of the entrance fortress, a sprawling complex filled with an array of shops.

The structure was a hive of commerce, its inhabitants buzzing with activity. The bright neon signs of vehicle shops vied for attention alongside the more traditional storefronts of sword smiths, each promising their own form of power and protection.

Erik found himself drawn towards the vehicle shops, his interest piqued by the sleek models on display. Each vehicle was a marvel of modern engineering, their streamlined bodies gleaming under the artificial lights. He admired their beauty from afar, his fingers itching to test their capabilities.

Next, his attention shifted to the sword shops. Their displays were a stark contrast to the high-tech allure of the vehicle shops. Here, tradition reigned supreme. The swords, each lovingly crafted by skilled artisans, held a timeless appeal.

Their gleaming blades promised strength and precision, their ornate hilts a testament to the craftsmanship of their makers.

Erik paused at each shop, his eyes scanning the displays for anything that caught his fancy. He was, after all, not just a guild leader awaiting his team, but also a man with an appreciation for fine craftsmanship - whether it was as a state-of-the-art vehicle or a finely forged sword.

But his idle browsing was cut short by the breaking news that flashed across the many screens strewn everywhere there, pulling him away from the allure of potential purchases and thrusting him into a world of shocking revelations and brewing concerns.

The news anchor spoke, her voice echoing through the mall.

"Shocking news, ladies and gentlemen! General Becker Frant's leader has been accused of being in a relationship with many criminal organizations, including the infamous Crystal Cross Gang," she announced. Erik felt his heart skip a beat.

<Becker? Involved with criminal organizations? >

The anchor continued, "Rumors say that Becker may be responsible for smuggling the Heniate into the country, causing many deaths as a result. Apparently, he escaped the country, and a manhunt is currently undergoing."

The rest of her words were drowned out by the roaring in Erik's ears. He felt a cold shock wash over him, chilling him to his core.

This made little sense. Erik had met Becker once, and the man had seemed nothing but dedicated to Frant's prosperity. The young man couldn't imagine him involved in such illicit activities. His mind raced as he tried to process the information.

His thoughts then leaped to Richard Stone, Becker's right-hand man. If these allegations were true, then Stone and his family would undoubtedly be in deep trouble as well.

A pang of concern shot through him as he thought about Emily, Stone's daughter. If her family was implicated in this scandal, she could be in danger.

However, this wasn't true only for the Stone family but also for Amber's, since his father, Caiden, was a close friend of both Richard Stone and General Becker.

Erik felt a wave of helplessness wash over him. He was here, kilometers away from Frant, while those he cared about could be in jeopardy. He clenched his fists, frustration simmering within him. The accusations against Becker seemed so outlandish, so contrary to the man he had met. But if they were true.

He shook his head, trying to clear the whirlwind of thoughts. Erik needed to stay focused, to find out more about what was happening and figure out how he could help. But for now, all he could do was wait for Thorne and his team and hope that they arrived soon.

Chapter 637: Memories and Quests

Another week had drifted by since Erik took on the quest to hunt the Grythoks, a time filled with momentous progress and transformative achievements.

He now stood in the new building, a space he'd bought through Lysa at the cost of 4 million Eurems. Despite its smaller size compared to the guild's main headquarters, it was classier and filled with an air of quiet elegance.

The past week had been eventful for Erik. One of the most significant accomplishments had been getting the telepathic power from the Grythoks' brain crystal.

This newfound ability allowed Erik to converse with other humans and his clones through a mental link forged by mana. It had a seven-kilometer range and the added benefit of complete privacy.

Erik appreciated the immediacy of it, knowing he could use this telepathy during battles without delay.

But there was more. His experiment with Luke absorbing human blood had yielded astounding results.

With the shapeshifting ability the clones got when Erik merged the Mirror's Centipede's brain crystal power with Conal's, Luke could now shapeshift into other creatures by ingesting their blood, though it was permanent unless Luke or the other clones decided to shapeshift again.

The transformation was nothing short of miraculous. Luke, who had once been an unassuming presence, had morphed into a human form that was both striking and commanding.

He now stood tall, his physique well-proportioned and radiating a sense of strength that was hard to ignore. His features were finely chiseled, lending him an air of quiet authority.

There was a certain allure to the idea of having an army of such beings at his disposal. The possibilities seemed endless; he could have an infinite supply of manpower, each individual as capable and reliable as Luke.

More than the physical prowess, it was the certainty of their abilities that appealed to Erik. With Luke and others like him, he wouldn't have to worry about incompetence or betrayal. He could trust them to execute their tasks with precision and dedication.

The new building had become home to Noah, Luke, and the five eggs that he made two weeks prior. Small but highly intelligent, the clones hatched and quickly adapted to their human form after drinking human blood.

They appeared as children, but their sharp minds held promise, and Erik knew they would grow both in stature and strength.

Erik walked through the new building's corridors, taking in the layout and the various facilities it offered. Training rooms, kitchens, and accommodations - everything had been well thought out.

His mind was abuzz with things to do, visions of what this place could become after he filled it with more clones.

His clones, too, were settling in. They followed his commands without question, their loyalty absolute.

As he stood there, reflecting on all that had been achieved and all that lay ahead, Erik felt a sense of contentment. But there was much more to do, as he had a clear goal in mind.

Noah, a figure of mystery and intrigue, tiptoed through the expansive hall of the newly erected building. His features were artfully concealed behind a mask, a piece of craftsmanship that served both as a shield and an enigma.

Enshrouding his figure was a voluminous hooded coat, its dark fabric swallowing the light. The coat, tailored from a rich, heavy material, billowed around him as he moved, adding to his cryptic presence. It was both a cloak of concealment and a statement of his unique style.

His destination was clear - he was approaching Erik, his master. Despite his concealed appearance, there was an air of deference about him that spoke volumes about their relationship.

Erik stood at the far end of the hall, his figure bathed in the soft glow of the overhead lights. His gaze was focused on Noah as he approached, his expression unreadable.

"Master," Noah began, his voice tinged with a respectful urgency, "You should start heading to the guild; the test to increase your rank is scheduled to start soon."

Erik paused, his gaze meeting Noah's masked eyes. The corners of his mouth twitched into a slight smile as he replied, "I know that. Don't worry. The quest is not that hard, though, as the guild informed me of the quest's details; I'll have to hunt a Crombo. Even if, for average people, it could be considered a powerful and rare creature, I believe I won't have problems defeating it."

A hush fell over the room in the wake of Erik's words, the silence as profound as the revelation he'd just shared. The only sound to break the stillness was the soft rustle of Noah's coat, a whisper of movement in the otherwise silent hall.

Erik had spoken of a Crombo - a creature of power, a rarity in their world. The young man hadn't encountered one in a long time, and the mere mention of it now brought forth a flurry of memories and emotions.

Noah remained silent, his concealed features giving away nothing of his thoughts. He stood there, a silent sentinel in his master's presence, awaiting Erik's next words.

The mention of a Crombo had undoubtedly stirred something within him too as he shared Erik's memories and was aware of how dangerous the creature was.

In that moment, the hall seemed to hold its breath; the silence echoing with the weight of Erik's revelation and the uncertainty of what lay ahead.

Erik's mind drifted back to his past encounters with the beast; memories tinged with adrenaline and challenge. It had been a very scary encounter and a test of his resolve. The memory was as vivid as if it had happened yesterday.

The Crombo was a formidable opponent, capable of going toe to toe with the assassins sent from the Crystal Cross Gang when he was still in Frant. Its strength and agility had once been a significant threat to him.

The Crombo, a colossal beast of raw power and primal rage, had dealt with the 'little pest' that was the assassin. It had used its power to trap him in a slimy substance that hardened almost instantly.

Erik remembered the look on the assassin's face - a fleeting moment of panic that was quickly replaced by his characteristic calm.

With a swift leap, the assassin had disappeared into a shadow, reappearing far from the ensnaring slime.

The Crombo's roar of frustration still echoed in Erik's mind, a thunderous sound that had sent tremors through the earth.

The sight of the beast charging was indeed terrifying. Its charge had been so powerful that it had caused the other Thaidis to lose their balance and fall, only to be swiftly dispatched by the other assassins.

But the shadow-hopping one had stood his ground. He had waited calmly for the Crombo to approach, dodging its attack at the last moment and inflicting more wounds on the creature.

Erik could still recall the triumphant smile on the man's face as he faced off against the enraged monster.

Despite his equipment not being sufficient to kill the beast, the assassin had held his own. He had matched the Crombo's strength with his intelligence, using his wits to keep himself alive and keep the beast occupied.

Indeed, times had changed. Erik was no longer the man he once was. His powers had evolved and grown exponentially, transforming him into a formidable force.

The once daunting figure of a Crombo, while still a threat to the unprepared, was no longer the insurmountable challenge it had once been to him.

Erik's abilities had flourished, bolstered by countless battles and experiences. He had pushed his limits, honed his skills, and emerged stronger.

The man who once tread cautiously when fighting Thaid's was now a seasoned warrior, capable of facing these creatures.

Even the assassins, who had once seemed like shadows of death, were now within his reach to defeat. They were strong, yes, but Erik had grown, too.

The knowledge of his strength brought with it a sense of calm assurance. Erik's thoughts returned to the present as he continued, his voice steady and confident.

"If the opportunity presents itself, I would gladly take advantage of it and get its brain crystal power. This might be quite useful."

The hour passed quickly, filled with preparation and anticipation. Erik reviewed the details of the quest, but wasn't worried.

Erik turned to Noah, his eyes filled with determination. "Resume your training while I'm gone," he said, his voice firm but not unkind.

"Stay committed to your training regimen. Keep your attention on the current task, and we can go over the next steps of my plans upon my return."

Noah nodded, his own determination reflected in his eyes. "Yes, Master," he replied, his voice filled with respect and a hint of anticipation.

With a last nod, Erik turned and strode toward the exit, the weight of his task settling firmly on his shoulders.

Erik left the room, and the door closed behind him, leaving Noah standing in the quiet room, his thoughts on the training to come and the future that awaited them.

He knew that Erik's success in the quest would mean more than just an increase in rank; it would be a step towards greater things, something that would allow them to gather fame and consequently power.

Erik's footsteps echoed through the empty corridor as he made his way toward the exit of the building. The memory of the Crombo, its raw power, was a vivid image in his mind, a symbol of a past struggle.

Pushing open the door, the young man was met with the hustle and bustle of the city's streets. The city's entrance was his destination, a gateway to the wilderness where the Crombo awaited. The driver arrived with a car, and he quickly jumped in.

The buildings and streets of the city passed by in a blur. The noise of the city faded into the background, replaced by the anticipation of battle.

Soon, the city's entrance loomed ahead. Erik's heartbeat with a steady rhythm, a fusion of excitement and resolve. The test was waiting, and he was ready.

Chapter 638: Departing

Erik found himself at the city's gate, a colossal structure that pulsed with energy and life.

Beyond its purpose as a mere gateway to the city, this grand entrance held a greater meaning. With traders from all corners of the world convening, it was a bustling hub and the heart of commerce for Testrovsc's Rest.

The atmosphere was filled with the bustling sounds of trade and negotiation, interrupted by bursts of laughter or intense arguments.

Such places were known for their electric atmosphere, filled with a heady mix of anticipation and excitement, which Erik could see all around him.

The symphony of sounds and a whirl of activity were almost overwhelming. This place was like a different world, one where mercenaries like him could find everything they ever wanted or needed.

The streets were a hive of activity, with stalls and shops strung together like beads on a necklace, each one offering something unique and enticing.

Erik's eyes widened as he gazed at the magnificent showcase of weaponry. The vibrant colors and intricate designs of each weapon were a sight to behold, leaving him in awe.

The variety of arms on display seemed endless, with every imaginable type represented.

There were melee weapons, their blades glinting under the harsh glare of artificial lights, promising power and precision to whoever wielded them.

They came in all shapes and sizes - from short daggers perfect for close combat to long swords designed for sweeping attacks.

And then there were the bows. Erik couldn't help but marvel at the variety on display.

There were traditional bows, their designs reminiscent of the ancient warriors who had once used such weapons.

The simple elegance of the traditional bows stood out in stark contrast to the technologically advanced ones showcased next to them.

These modern marvels were sleek and efficient, equipped with features such as laser-guided aiming systems and high-tension strings that increased their range and power.

Erik was impressed by how well the old and new elements were integrated. The experience felt like time had folded in on itself, resulting in the perfect combination of the best aspects from two different worlds.

With its blend of ancient artistry and modern innovation, the city gate was a captivating destination where visitors could appreciate the mastery of a traditional blade and marvel at the innovative technology of a laser rifle.

The city's ability to balance its past and future was clear, serving as a testament to its commitment to preserving history while progressing forward.

The marketplace held a special significance for Erik, a mercenary, as it represented not only a place to trade goods but also a vast array of potential opportunities waiting to be seized.

However, it wasn't only weapons that could be found in this place. The presence of flying vehicles was noted. With a sleek and futuristic design, these hovering objects floated above the ground, emitting a soft hum from their engines.

There was a wide selection of models available, ranging from compact ones suitable for personal use to larger ones designed for transport or combat.

The ingenuity and skill displayed by their creators transformed each one into a true marvel of engineering, serving as a testament to their technological prowess.

As Erik scanned the bustling crowd, he recognized his dependable and proficient Logistic team, who had assembled and were expecting his arrival.

With purposeful strides, he made his way toward them, his eyes scanning and assessing each individual.

Once Erik arrived with his usual mask donned, Thorne, who was considered the foremost member of the group, cleared his throat. "How are you feeling, boss?" he asked, his voice rough with concern.

"I'm okay," Erik said, his tone measured.

While Faelan looked on with curiosity, Elara glanced at him, her face displaying a clear focus.

The revelation that a Seeker-ranked mercenary was hunting for a Crombo alone came as a complete surprise to him, marking the first time he had heard of such a thing.

"Erik, before we go out, are you confident about hunting this beast alone? Killing a Crombo is not an easy feat," Thorne went on, his eyes narrowing.

"You know, you may hire someone to help you, or you can ask the guild members. They just need to be of equal or lower in rank than you if you want to receive help."

Erik met Thorne's gaze, his confidence unwavering. "Don't worry," he said. "I'm strong enough to bring the beast down alone. I won't have any problems."

In a wordless display of connection, the group exchanged knowing glances with one another. They placed their trust in Erik's judgment, as his abilities had been shown. Despite everything, it was Thorne who voiced their shared worry. "Be careful, Erik. A Crombo is not to be underestimated."

With a nod, Erik acknowledged their concern and expressed his gratitude. However, as his gaze extended past them, something grabbed his attention. "You brought it?" he asked, looking at the large truck parked nearby.

Thorne followed his gaze and grinned. "Aye, we needed something bigger. The Crombo is a massive Thaid. The regular vehicles wouldn't cut it."

Erik approached the vehicle, taking the time to examine and appreciate its unique design.

The transport truck had a reinforced metallic body, making it ideal for navigating rugged terrain and heavy-duty purposes. Its flatbed was spacious, allowing for large cargo to be transported with ease.

The cab was equipped with state-of-the-art navigation and communication systems, making it a reliable choice for transportation.

The purpose of its design was to be suitable for challenging missions, those involving the transportation of big Thaid's corpses.

He turned back to Thorne, his eyes gleaming with energy. "This will do," he said, his voice filled with firmness.

Thorne clapped him on the shoulder, a gesture of camaraderie and faith. "We knew you'd approve."

The vehicle roared to life as Faelan took the wheel, navigating the path toward the Crombo's last known location.

The others settled into their seats, their faces etched with focus and anticipation.

Thorne glanced at Erik, his eyes reflecting a mixture of curiosity and concern. "Have you ever seen a Crombo before?" he asked.

Erik shook his head, lying smoothly. "No, I haven't," he lied. "But I've done some research on this Thaid species before taking this quest. I must say, I'm quite impressed by its size."

Thorne snorted, a knowing grin spreading across his face. "Impressed? That's an understatement, my friend. The Crombo is a spectacle like no other."

He then described the creature, "The thaid is one of the biggest ones you'll ever lay eyes on, seven meters tall and at least fifteen meters long. It resembles a lizard, covered in scales, with patches of fur scattered about. The skin looks scaly, almost textured."

As he listened, Erik's mind transported him back to when he had witnessed the fight between the Crystal Cross Gang member and the Crombo near New Alexandria, the images playing in his memory.

As Thorne continued to speak, his voice became animated. "The monster is a sort of bipedal creature, using its long tail to help it stand. And those frontal arms, thick and long, end in claws as sharp as razors. Those claws alone could kill any opponent within seconds."

Elara and the rest of the group listened, their eyes filled with a combination of awe and fear, as they had only been working as porters for less than three years and had never encountered a Crombo before.

Thorne's voice dropped to a near whisper as he went on. "Its head is strange, almost like a gecko's, but when it opens its mouth, it reveals rows upon rows of sharp teeth. Its eyes are reptilian, and it wears an animalistic grin, its fangs extending past its lips, ending just above its upper jawline."

He paused, letting the image sink in. "But you know what the most surprising thing of it all is? This thing it's Lomalins' natural predator! AH! Isn't it funny that such a beast eats worms?"

"Yeah, yeah, hilarious, Thorne," Erik said sarcastically.

"By the way, pay attention to its brain crystal power. Since the Crombo needs to eat a lot of Lomalins to sustain itself, it developed a brain crystal power that allows it to create a hardening slime. It uses this slime to trap the Lomalins while it devours them alive."

Erik's face remained impassive, his voice calm as he said, "I know all of this, Thorne. Don't worry, I'm prepared."

After observing Erik for a moment, Thorne nodded in agreement, his expression showing a hint of tenderness. "Alright. I trust you."

As the vehicle continued its journey, the group fell into a contemplative silence, with each person getting lost in their own thoughts. The landscape outside was a blur, a backdrop to the looming challenge ahead.

As they neared the place where a Crombo was last seen, the anticipation grew palpable. The air was charged with a mix of excitement and trepidation.

Faelan eased off the gas, gradually slowing down the vehicle until it came to a safe stop.

The engine's rumble faded away, and the peaceful sounds of the untamed wilderness filled the air.

The atmosphere was filled with a palpable sense of anticipation as all eyes remained fixed on the horizon, with everyone aware that the successful killing of a Crombo would enhance Erik's rank, benefiting the entire guild.

Chapter 639: The Crombo's Tracks

The vehicle ground to a halt, its engines sighing as Faelan switched them off. With a sense of purpose, Erik and the others disembarked, their feet crunching on the wild terrain.

The wilderness stretched out before them like an unending canvas. Untouched and undisturbed by the constructs of civilization.

The landscape was a beautiful mix of dense, autumnal forests, imposing mountains, and wide-open plains.

The trees, now adorned with leaves in hues of gold, orange, and red, stood as ancient sentinels, their rustling whispers telling tales as old as time itself.

The mountains loomed in the distance, their jagged peaks cutting through the September sky and topped with a frosting of early snow. As far as the eye could see, the plains were covered in a sea of golden grasses, their slender stalks bending and swaying in the gentle autumn wind.

But beneath the breathtaking beauty of the wilderness lay the ever-present sense of danger.

Survival of the fittest governed this world. Predators lurked in the shadows of the forest, their eyes gleaming with a predatory hunger.

A rustle of leaves or the snap of a twig could signal an impending attack, transforming the serene landscape into a battlefield in an instant.

As they gazed upon the wilderness, Erik and his companions felt a stirring mix of trepidation about what the guild could become, thanks to Erik's presence and new rank.

As they ventured into the wilderness, they stepped into the embrace of the unknown.

Erik turned to Thorne, his eyes determined. "I'm going to search for the monster," he said, his voice steady. "I'll let you know once I finish the quest."

Thorne's face softened, his eyes betraying a hint of concern. "I know I shouldn't have to worry, but are you sure you can do this?" Thorne asked.

"Yes, don't worry."

"All right. Take care out there, Erik," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. He gave Erik's shoulder a firm pat, a simple act that spoke volumes of their friendship and mutual respect. "We'll be right here, ready for your signal."

Erik nodded, a grateful smile spreading across his face as he appreciated the unwavering support. He then turned away from the group, his eyes scanning the vast expanse before him.

He knew that locating the Crombo would pose less of a challenge than actually confronting it. Given the beast's massive size, it was probable that there would be numerous tracks left behind.

Erik combed the area, hoping to discover the tracks that would reveal the creature's whereabouts.

The land was rugged and untamed, with dense foliage, uneven ground, and hidden crevices. Erik moved with caution, his senses attuned to every sound, every movement.

His eyes darted from side to side, searching for any signs of the Crombo's passage. He knew what to look for - the deep impressions of its massive feet, the disturbed earth where its tail had swept the ground, the broken branches where its immense body had pushed through.

As he roamed the area, Erik's mind was a whirl of thoughts and emotions. He felt a thrill, a rush of excitement that coursed through him.

The prospect of hunting the Crombo filled him with excitement, and he was eager to determine just how difficult it would be.

It was an opportunity to gauge his progress and see how far he had come since his days at the Red Palace.

As he pressed on in his search, time lost its significance, his body moving gracefully and with the expertise of someone who had faced countless battles and quests.

After what seemed like an endless amount of time, Erik finally discovered the initial clue that hinted at the presence of the Crombo.

The soft earth bore the unmistakable mark of a deep footprint, its size and shape leaving no room for doubt.

A sudden surge of adrenaline caused his heart to leap into his chest. The trail, with its unmistakable freshness, hinted at a recent passage.

With a determined focus, Erik pursued the tracks that lay before him. Each footprint, each disturbed stone or broken twig, served as a breadcrumb, guiding him deeper into the wilderness.

His pace quickened, his boots crunching on the autumn leaves and loose gravel beneath his feet. His senses became razor sharp, attuned to every rustle of leaves and every whisper of the wind.

The trail led him on a winding path that meandered through the heart of the wilderness. It was a maze crafted by nature itself. Towering trees formed a dense canopy overhead, their branches interweaving to create a tapestry of leaves that filtered the sunlight into a dappled dance on the forest floor.

Tangled undergrowth and sprawling roots served as natural obstacles, forcing Erik to weave and duck as he followed the elusive trail.

Now and then, he would stop to listen, his eyes scanning the surroundings for any signs of movement.

As he followed them, the tracks grew fresher, the signs of the Crombo's passage clearer.

The footprints were massive, far larger than anything he had encountered before. They were deep and well-defined, each one a clear imprint of the beast's unique physiology.

Erik knelt beside one of the prints, his eyes narrowing as he studied it closely. The sheer size of the footprint was awe-inspiring, easily larger than his entire body. The edges were sharp and defined, the shape unmistakable.

"By the gods," Erik said to himself. "This thing is a giant." He estimated the beast to be at least fifteen meters long and seven meters tall. The Crombo was almost there, maybe only a few kilometers away.

As he navigated the trail, Erik's keen eyes spotted something amidst the natural landscape. Scattered across the forest floor were droppings, large and repugnant, a stark contrast to the earthy scent of the wilderness.

They were littered with the remains of Lomalins - the large worms Erik had hunted at the beginning of his journey.

Erik approached the droppings with caution, his boots crunching on the fallen leaves as he moved closer. The droppings were fresh, their putrid smell permeating the crisp autumn air.

He could see the Lomalins' remains clearly now - their bodies partially digested.

Erik drew in a deep breath, steeling himself against the foul odor. His senses were on high alert, his gaze scanning the surrounding foliage for any signs of movement.

"It's fed recently," Erik said to himself, his voice barely above a whisper, a thoughtful undertone lacing his words. He crouched down, examining the droppings more closely. "It must be satiated, possibly even lethargic from the meal."

He glanced at the remnants of the Lomalins, their bodies now just a part of the predator's waste.

"But that doesn't make it any less dangerous," he said, straightening up and scanning the surrounding wilderness with renewed vigilance.

His hand instinctively moved to the hilt of his weapon, the cold metal providing a slight comfort against the unknown.

Erik ventured deeper into the wilderness, drawn by a noise that was slowly growing in intensity. The ominous sound of low, rumbling growls resonated through the dense forest, a haunting melody that made his excitement for the hunt only stronger.

Along with the ominous growls, a symphony of destruction played out in the wilderness. The unmistakable sound of trees splintering, their trunks groaning under an immense force, echoed through the forest.

One after another, they succumbed to the invisible onslaught, their sturdy forms snapping like twigs.

Each crash was followed by a thunderous impact, as the once towering giants met the forest floor. Leaves rustled violently in the aftermath, creating a flurry of green and gold in the dappled sunlight.

The earth seemed to tremble with each fall, sending a ripple of unease through the undergrowth.

The pattern was relentless, a domino effect of destruction that cut a clear path through the dense forest. It was clear the colossal creature was making its way through the wilderness, oblivious or indifferent to the chaos it was causing.

Erik's heart raced as he approached the source of the noises, his mind alive with curiosity and caution. The growls were deep and primal sounds that spoke of power and ferocity.

"What is it doing?" Erik said to himself, his brow furrowed in concentration. The Crombo was close, perhaps only a few hundred meters away. Was it hunting or perhaps marking its territory? Was it angry or simply restless?

Taking cautious steps, Erik persisted in his approach, his ears alert and focused on capturing each subtle sound of the Crombo's actions.

The sounds, growing louder and more distinct with each passing moment, came together in a symphony of destruction that evoked both fear and fascination.

As he drew nearer to the menacing beast, Erik's thoughts shifted to the imminent battle and the daunting challenge that loomed ahead.

A creature of both legend and terror, the Crombo proved to be a formidable opponent that struck fear into the hearts of many.

Despite the circumstances, he was completely prepared for what lay ahead, armed not only with knowledge but also with skill and an unyielding determination.

Chapter 640: Surprise Attack

Through the dense foliage, Erik finally laid eyes on the Crombo, and the sight was both awe-inspiring and chilling.

The sound of trees being ripped apart echoed through the air as the massive creature's long, razor-sharp claws effortlessly cleared a path.

The beast's frustration was palpable, clear in its restless movements within the confined space.

The colossal beast unleashed a deafening roar, causing the forest to tremble and branches to snap like twigs.

Transfixed, Erik watched as the Crombo harnessed the power of its brain crystal.

The creature released a thick, sticky slime that spread across the ground like a web, ensnaring a frantic group of Lomalins trying to escape.

The slime solidified, creating a sticky trap that ensnared the frightened creatures, offering them a convenient meal for Crombo to enjoy whenever it desired.

The creature's growls echoed through the air, gradually transforming into a triumphant and satisfied tone as it leisurely approached its helpless prey.

"So that's why it was destroying the trees." The realization dawned on the young man.

The Crombo's massive size hindered the tight forest, and it had been clearing a path to move more freely.

The destruction was not random; it had been calculated. Erik's gaze narrowed, focused intently on the Crombo, observing its every twitch and rustle.

He now understood that the growls were not angry outbursts, but rather a nuanced expression of emotions.

The Crombo was not just a mindless beast; its eyes held a glimmer of intelligence. It was a hunter, a predator with instincts and desires.

As he watched the Crombo feast on the trapped Lomalins, a sense of respect and caution settled over Erik. Underestimating this creature would be a grave mistake.

The opponent displayed unparalleled abilities and an uncanny knack for navigating its environment.

Erik's mind raced, planning and considering his options.

The upcoming battle would be no simple task because of the hardening slime—it would require strategy, skill, and courage.

With a last glance at the Crombo, Erik retreated into the shadows, focusing on the task at hand. The beast's growls echoed through the forest, a haunting reminder of the challenge ahead.

Erik knew he was up to the task, but he also knew that the Crombo would not be defeated as easily as he initially thought.

<I need to use the surrounding trees to avoid the slime; after all, I can't hop into shadows as that motherfucker from the Crystal Cross Gang did back then. >

Erik channeled mana through his neural links, focusing his energy and preparing for the battle that lay ahead.

The Crombo was indeed formidable, with hard scales that seemed impenetrable and a slow but powerful physique.

The predator's slimy Lomalin trap showed its cunning. Erik had to be quick to beat it and dodge the fast-setting slime. However, the first thing he did was to check how strong this individual Crombo was.

<Analysis>

Name: Crombo

Brain Crystal Power: Hardening Slime.

The Crombo's Brain Crystal Power, "Hardening Slime," is an extraordinary ability that enables the creature to generate and control a unique type of slime using its mana.

The slime starts off sticky and fluid, which makes it easy for it to adhere to the Crombo's prey, primarily the Lomalins.

The unique aspect of this power is the Crombo's ability to harden the slime using its mana. Once the slime is expelled and comes into contact with its prey, the Crombo channels its mana into the slime, triggering a rapid transformation. The slime hardens almost instantly, effectively immobilizing the prey and preventing escape.

This strategic use of its Brain Crystal Power makes the Crombo a formidable predator. It can trap multiple Lomalins simultaneously, allowing it to consume its prey leisurely. This power

significantly enhances the Crombo's hunting efficiency and gives it a dominant position in its ecological niche.

Physical Characteristics: The Crombo is a large, lizard-like creature standing at seven meters tall and fifteen meters long. It has a bipedal structure supported by a long tail. Its body is covered in scales and patches of fur. It has two long, frontal arms, each equipped with sharp, razor-like claws. Its head resembles that of a gecko and houses rows of sharp teeth. Its eyes are reptilian.

Ecology: The Crombo is a top-tier predator in its ecosystem, primarily preying on Lomalins.

Its natural habitat is a forest environment where it uses its physical attributes and unique abilities to hunt and trap its prey.

It has evolved a specific brain crystal power to create a hardening slime, which it uses as a trapping mechanism to immobilize the Lomalins, making them easy prey.

The Crombo's enormous size requires it to consume a significant number of Lomalins to sustain itself, which impacts the population dynamics within its ecosystem.

Its presence and hunting habits significantly shape the behavior and distribution of other species in its habitat.

Despite its fearsome nature, the Crombo plays a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance.

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 125

INTELLIGENCE: 5

DEXTERITY: 95

ENERGY: 510

{Others}

Power Level: 327

Estimated Experience: 4313 (Exp Per Kill)

Neural Links: 25

<It's more powerful than the one near New Alexandria, this is for sure. >

However, despite this, he wasn't worried, as he was strong enough to defeat the creature alone.

Erik then assessed the situation, his mind racing through various strategies and tactics on how to do this.

The young man doubted his Flyssa could pierce the Crombo's scaly hide, which could absorb the weapon's force.

A direct attack seemed risky and futile; worse, he could break his Flyssa.

So, using the weapon was not a brilliant choice. He had to use his fists if he wanted to kill the creature and to do it efficiently; he had to use Nathaniel's power.

His eyes flicked to the beast's claws, the sharp edges glinting menacingly.

Perhaps a targeted strike at a more vulnerable area could wound the creature enough to give him an advantage.

But even that would require a substantial amount of strength and precision.

The Crombo's growls and the sounds of its feasting on the trapped Lomalins filled the air, as Erik decided on the approach to take.

As he continued to channel his mana, he could feel the energy building within him, a potent force that surged through his veins and invigorated his muscles.

<Fists and kicks it is then...>

With a determined exhale, Erik prepared himself mentally, his unwavering gaze fixed on the Crombo.

Oblivious to its impending doom, the creature continued to feast, its jaws tearing into the succulent meal.

Channeling mana through Nathaniel's power's neural links, he created a surge of mana force beneath his feet.

He felt the energy push against the ground as he launched forward with incredible speed.

The forest became a blur as Erik's focus narrowed to the Crombo, its immense form dominating the landscape.

His mind buzzed with calculations and predictions as he darted between trees, a fluid dance of strength.

In a mere three seconds, Erik soared above the Crombo's head, the rush of wind whistling in his ears.

The beast was completely absorbed in its meal, paying no attention to the imminent threat.

Erik's body was a coiled spring, every muscle primed and ready to strike. Time seemed to slow as he descended, the details of the Crombo's scaly head becoming clear.

The armored scales, reptile eyes, and fierce teeth seemed to freeze while Erik raised his leg high and delivered a powerful kick.

The impact was explosive, a shockwave that reverberated through the air.

Erik's leg connected with the creature's head with a resounding crack, the strength of the blow magnified by his speed and the power of his mana-infused muscles.

The Crombo's reaction was immediate, violent, and breathtakingly primal.

Its colossal head snapped to the side, a raw, guttural roar ripping from its throat as if it were trying to expel the pain.

Its eyes, usually cold and predatory, flashed with surprise and fury, the reptilian slits narrowing in an instinctive response.

Its body recoiled from the unexpected assault, muscles rippling under its scaly hide as they contracted in shock.

The long tail, usually used for balance, thrashed wildly, carving deep furrows into the earth and toppling smaller trees like they were mere toys.

The forest seemed to hold its breath in response.

Trees shuddered as if in fear, their leaves scattering in a sudden gust caused by the Crombo's movements.

The ground beneath trembled due to the beast's immense size and power.

Even the air seemed to vibrate with the echo of its roar, carrying the sound far into the distance.

As it fought to regain its balance, the Crombo's long claws dug into the earth, displacing soil and rocks in its effort to stabilize itself.

The beast's breaths came out in short, angry huffs, misting in the cool air as it prepared to retaliate.

The once confident predator was momentarily thrown off guard, but it was far from defeated.

With agility, Erik landed on the Crombo's massive body, his boots sinking slightly into the scaly hide beneath him.

He found his footing amidst the undulating muscles, his balance impeccable even as the beast thrashed beneath him.

Then, with a warrior's determination etched on his face, he rained blows onto the Crombo's head.

His fists moved in a blur, each punch landing with a precise, powerful thud that echoed amidst the chaos.

The impact of his strikes sent shockwaves through the creature's body, further increasing its confusion.

His fists connected with the Crombo's skull, the hard scales offering resistance but not enough to deter him from attacking.

With each punch, he could feel the beast's reaction—a flinch, a shudder, a low growl—signs that his attacks were not going unnoticed.

Despite the beast's size and strength, Erik was a tempest of power, relentlessly attacking the Crombo as he fought to bring down the colossal predator.

The battle had only just begun, and Erik knew the Thaid would not be defeated easily, as it was already trying to get him off.

But the first strike had been made, a decisive blow that had caught the creature off guard.

It was a promising start.