

## BIOLOGICAL 671

### Chapter 671: The Ravine (5)

Another surge of Xeridon Anteris suddenly erupted from the side tunnels, causing Erik's eyes to narrow instinctively as he observed their snapping mandibles and the captivating shimmer of their exoskeletons in the dim light. He grabbed the communication device, punching in the frequency of Kael's vehicle.

"Something's off, Kael." Erik's voice held an edge, a ripple of concern. "Xeridon Anteris, they don't gather like this. It's too large."

Kael's voice crackled through the speaker, tinged with the stress of managing the convoy's defenses. "What do you mean, Erik?"

"Colonies merging," Erik said, eyes fixed on the teeming mass. "Only a grave threat unites Xeridon Anteris like this. A Thaid, perhaps, compelling unity." His laser rifle discharged, downing a Xeridon Anteris mid-scutter.

A pause filled the airwaves, heavy with the weight of Erik's words. Finally, Kael responded, "That would mean—"

"They're starving, Kael," Erik cut in, his voice grim. "They've probably exhausted all the local fauna to sustain this new, massive colony. That's why they're attacking us so relentlessly. We're not just intruders; we're probably the last thing they have seen running around."

The realization sent a chill down Kael's spine. "What do we do?"

"We keep moving, and we keep fighting," Erik said, his tone resolute. "But be prepared for anything. If there's a Thaid powerful enough to cause this kind of behavior, then we need to be ready for when we encounter it."

Erik's gaze wandered as he contemplated the time it would take for them to flee from that place. "How much further until we're out of this ravine?"

Kael's voice came through, tinged with urgency but remarkably composed. "We've got about three kilometers left, Erik. At our current speed, that should take us around ten minutes."

"Ten minutes," Erik repeated, the weight of that time frame settling in. Ten minutes could feel like an eternity in a situation like this, with each second stretched taut over the frame of life and death.

"Exactly. We just need to hold out for ten more minutes," Kael said.

As Erik gazed upon the swarm of Xeridon Anteris, he couldn't help but notice that their numbers showed no signs of diminishing, despite the assault from the convoy. Ten minutes. They would have to make every second count.

"Alright, Kael. Keep everyone focused and tell them to conserve their ammunition. We need to make it last until we're clear of this hellhole," Erik instructed.

Kael's voice came back, steadier now, fortified by Erik's resolve. "Understood. I'll relay the information to the rest of the convoy."

With a deliberate motion, Erik carefully set the communication device aside, his eyes narrowing and his expression growing resolute as he focused on what lay ahead. Ten minutes. They would either find salvation or damnation, and Erik was determined to lead them toward the former.

Erik's hand, steady and sure, coaxed the Flyssa from its scabbard, the blade's song resonating through the tense air, a sharp contrast to the surrounding chaos.

He vaulted from the vehicle, his armored silhouette casting a fleeting shadow over the cracked, desolate ground below.

The driver's eyes grew wide, mirroring the harsh landscape, his incredulous gaze reflecting the stark madness of Erik's audacious descent.

Erik landed, boots sending a puff of dust skyward, his focus laser-sharp on the encroaching danger. No room in his mind for the driver's silent astonishment.

Erik surged forward, boots etching a warrior's path up the ravine's jagged wall, an eagle in ascent.

His silhouette, a stark contrast against the cliff, moved with the fluidity of a shadow in twilight.

The Flyssa cut the air, a streak of silver doom, each swing a silent verdict for the encroaching Xeridon Anteris.

Their armored carapaces yielded like clay before the potter's knife, succumbing to the relentless song of his blade.

They plunged in succession, hollow husks descending like marionettes with severed strings.

Below, convoy members halted mid-action, gazes locked on Erik. Words found themselves prisoners in their throats as they witnessed the ballet of destruction, their leader a tempest incarnate.

Eyes wide, the convoy members beheld the unfolding spectacle. Erik, embodying the grace of a panther, navigated the convoy's maze. His movements, a choreographed symphony of purpose and speed, carved a path through the chaos—every gesture a deliberate stroke on the canvas of battle.

He glided among the enemy, a grim ballet master, his blade a silent partner in the deadly dance.

The Xeridon Anteris wilted like winter wheat under a reaper's sickle.

Their numbers, once a formidable tide, ebbed swiftly, each moment claiming more of their throng under his relentless steel.

[MULTIPLE XERIDON ANTERIS KILLED: MANA ABSORBING PROCESS STARTING.]

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

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY ABSORBED, STARTING CONVERTING PROCEDURE.]

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

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY CONVERTED INTO EXPERIENCE. 0 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

As Erik wove his deadly tapestry, a question whispered through the minds of the onlookers: How did such a young man come to wield such ancient power?

At seventeen, how did Erik already loom so large, outclassing warriors with decades on him? What kind of relentless grind had honed his raw talent to such a razor's edge?

He walked among them, a living storm of shock and awe—was it just innate skill, or had some hardcore mentor pushed him beyond the limits? Where had this kid tapped into that kind of power?

Yet, for all the silent praise cast his way, Erik remained an island amid the sea of admiration; his focus was an unyielding fortress, his blade a relentless river carving its path through the stone of his foes.

Erik grasped the urgency of each fleeting moment, the imperative to breach the ravine's shadow before the horde could claim them. He fought with a ferocity that turned his Flyssa into a tempest wrought from steel, each arc and thrust dismissing pleas for clemency.

Then, from the abyss of the ravine, surged a new threat. Not a mere band, but a legion of Xeridon Anteris, numbering close to two hundred, emerged. Their exoskeletons caught the dim light, refracting it into an ominous shimmer that danced across the jagged walls of their earthen fortress.

The creatures moved as one, a single entity with a hive mind set on destruction. Each step they took caused the ground to tremble, the sound of their approach a drumbeat heralding doom. Their mandibles clicked in a sinister symphony, while their claws, sharp as the shards of night, promised a swift end.

Erik stood his ground, the lone bulwark against the encroaching tide. His blade sang a song of defiance, its edge kissing the air with deadly precision. Each swing cleaved through carapace and sinew, each strike a sentence of death for the alien forms that dared advance.

The air filled with the copper tang of ichor and the cries of the fallen Anteris. Their glow dimmed upon death, lights snuffed out in an instant, only to be replaced by another as the swarm pressed forward.

Above, the sky bore witness to a tapestry of twilight blues and purples, indifferent to the plight below. High in the sky, the sun cast long shadows that reached out like spectral fingers, perhaps to grasp at the life that teetered on the brink of destruction.

And in that moment, Erik was more than a warrior; he was the embodiment of resolve.

Erik felt the air crackle with the surge of energy that the Xeridon Anteris exuded, a tangible aura that signaled their mana-infused strength surged. With each pulse, their bodies grew more formidable, muscles bulging and movements becoming blurs of lethal precision.

The swarm started their assault with a terrifying synchronicity. Erik, scaling the wall with the grace of a seasoned climber, watched as the horde converged on his position.

They ascended with ease, their claws finding purchase in the smallest of crevices, turning the sheer rock face into a ladder of flesh and chitin.

Their advance was relentless. Claws scraped against stone, sending shards skittering down into the abyss below.

The Anteris moved with unnatural agility, their bodies coiling and uncoiling, propelling them upward in a relentless pursuit of their prey.

The Xeridon Anteris displayed a cunning tactical acumen, systematically demolishing potential footholds to trap Erik in a vertical maze with no escape. Simultaneously, a contingent of the swarm sped up their advance, mandibles crashing with the force of bear traps, each motion a calculated strike of ruthless efficiency.

Their actions were not random; they were the maneuvers of a highly intelligent adversary, coordinating their attack to outmaneuver and outwit their prey.

Erik's focus tightened as the situation ramped up. The spots he'd normally hit were now crawling with enemies, and his wiggle room was closing fast. But he couldn't just drop; he was the shield for a whole convoy, with lives hanging on his next move.

He hit the gas, launching off his shrinking safe zone, cutting through the air with the finesse of a pro skater hitting a half-pipe.

On his way down, he turned into a one-man wrecking crew. His blade moved with him, parting the air in a clean swipe that mowed down a line of Xeridon Anteris. It was one smooth, practiced move—no hesitation, all action—like a perfectly timed combo move in a high-stakes video game.

#### Chapter 672: The Ravine (6)

Erik's blade, an extension of his will, wove a deadly arc through the thickening air, cleaving limb from limb, exoskeleton from flesh. Each swing was a show of strength and precision, a brutal ballet.

With each Xeridon Anteris that crumpled to the ground, a gap emerged in their once impenetrable swarm. Their ranks dwindled, yet the intensity in their remaining eyes spoke of a battle far from over.

Right as Erik was on the verge of leaping to a separate area of the wall, Mira's voice reverberated from her vehicle.

"Erik, we're almost out of the Ravine! Get back here!"

His gaze shifted toward the convoy, his eyes narrowing with scrutiny. The vehicles were just a hundred meters away from the exit, their engines roaring and echoing through the rocky terrain.

He knew he could make it back, but doing so would leave the convoy vulnerable and unprotected.

The risk of being overwhelmed by the swarming Xeridon Anteris was too great for them to ignore.

Erik's resolve hardened as he pushed himself to swing his Flyssa faster, each strike a blur as he cleaved through the swarm.

Each movement was precise and calculated, every stroke a display of skill and control.

His rampage was like a hurricane, obliterating everything in its path, and leaving behind a gruesome trail of dismembered Thaidis.

The sound of engines filled the air as the first vehicles emerged from the dark maw of the Ravine, bringing Erik a wave of relief.

Yet, he couldn't allow himself to celebrate until he had made sure that everyone was safe.

He continued his deadly ballet, his blade twirling and spinning like a dancer in a macabre performance. The Xeridon Anteris were relentless, but Erik was a tempest they couldn't contain.

"ERIK!" Mira said.

As the last vehicle cleared the threshold of the Ravine with a rumble of its engine, Erik's heart filled with anticipation, knowing that the moment he had been waiting for had arrived.

After taking a final, sweeping glance at the swarm surrounding him, he coiled his legs and made a powerful leap.

Fueled by adrenaline, the jump was a remarkable display of athleticism, as it soared through the air in a gravity-defying arc.

With unwavering focus, his gaze remained locked on the rooftop of the trailing vehicle, defying the laws of time as it stretched and slowed around him.

As the vehicle sped away from the Ravine, he landed with a thud, feeling the grip of his boots on the metal.

Taking a brief pause, he remained in that location, his chest heaving as he recovered his breath.

After that, he turned around and directed his gaze towards the swarm of Xeridon Anteris, who were still attempting to pursue the convoy, but this time on the surface.

While the convoy picked up speed and left the shadowy Ravine behind, Erik found himself unable to resist stealing a final glimpse backward. The Xeridon Anteris were not giving up .

Like a breathtaking living waterfall, they descended the towering walls of the Ravine with astonishing speed, their hooked claws gripping the rock.

The moment their feet touched the ground, they wasted no time and broke into a sprint, their six legs working in unison to propel them forward in a frenzied rush.

However, even with their agility and increased speed granted by their brain crystal abilities, they were unable to compete with the mechanical power of the convoy, especially now that the vehicles were free from navigating the treacherous road of the narrow ravine.

As time went on, the distance between them and their quarry continued to grow wider.

With their engines humming and tires kicking up dust, the vehicles roared down the open plain, leaving the swarm further and further behind.

In a display of determination, the Xeridon Anteris went beyond their usual capabilities, their mandibles snapping in frustration and their antennae twitching erratically. However, all their efforts were in vain.

The convoy was pulling away, and the gap was now too wide to close. The collective group of insects lost speed, transitioning from a fast sprint to a leisurely jog, and, to a demoralized crawl.

After a long while, they came to a halt. The Thaidis stood together in silence for a moment, resembling a vast ocean of glistening exoskeletons, almost as if deep in thought over their unsuccessful chase.

Following what appeared to be an unspoken order, they changed direction and retraced their steps, retreating into the depths of the Ravine, where they had emerged, disappearing.

Observing their departure, Erik's eyes narrowed as he pondered the situation. Although they had evaded death in this instance, the encounter served as a powerful reminder of the wild and untamed perils that loomed in this world.

As the Ravine vanished from sight and became a speck on the horizon, Erik shifted his focus ahead.

Even though there were still many miles left to cover and many challenges to face, at least for the moment, they could take solace in the fact that they had emerged victorious from this battle. And that was enough.

Erik's face lit up with a wide grin, reflecting his delight. As the Ravine vanished from sight, absorbed by the vastness of the landscape, Erik sheathed his Flyssa.



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With grace, Erik landed on the roof of his vehicle. As Erik descended into the vehicle's interior, he exchanged a nod with the driver, who appeared both relieved and astonished to see him back.

The radio crackled to life in his hands as he turned the dial, connecting with Kael's voice.

"Kael, do a quick check. Is everyone still alive? Are there any injuries?" Erik's voice carried a sense of urgency, even though he kept a steady demeanor.

He knew well that during battles like these, the rush of adrenaline often had the power to disguise the pain caused by injuries, rendering them visible only after the immediate threat had diminished.

There was a brief pause before Kael's voice crackled through the radio. "Doing a headcount now, boss. Give me a moment."

Erik waited, his eyes darting back and forth as he scanned the convoy through the reinforced windows.

While the vehicles were in motion with no issues, the expressions on the faces he observed were a blend of relief, exhaustion, and underlying fear. Finally, Kael's voice came back on. 's voice came back on.

"Looks like we're all here, Erik. A few minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises mostly, but nothing serious."

Erik's exhale was visible in the cool air, his shoulders unclenching from their battle-ready tension. "Well done, Kael. See to their wounds swiftly." His eyes, moments ago narrow with focus, now roved over the crew in the cars behind, softening as they met each gaze. "Tell them they've done more than survive; they've excelled."

"Will do," Kael responded, relief clear in the ease of his stance, the radio crackling slightly as he spoke. "Erik, the way you fought... it changed the game for us. You saved us."

A hint of a smile flickered across Erik's face, a momentary break in the stoic mask he wore. "We fight because we must, Kael." His eyes flicked to the rearview mirror, catching a glint of the setting sun on metal and glass. "But keep your guard up. Danger still lurks. Erik out."

Taking a break from his tasks, he put the radio back in its holder and relaxed in his seat, savoring a moment of respite.

Although they had survived, this was the first part of a long and perilous journey, with countless unknown dangers lying ahead.

The radio crackled as Mira's voice came through, laced with concern that seemed to pierce through the static. "Erik, that was too close for comfort. Are you hurt anywhere?" Her steady tone couldn't hide the underlying worry.

Erik keyed his mic, a small smile on his lips despite the adrenaline still pumping through his veins. "I'm fine, Mira. Just a few new scratches to add to the collection." He glanced down at his arms, the marks thereon badges of the day's survival.

Lila's voice interrupted Mira and Erik, vibrant and full of life. "That was incredible, Erik!" The awe in her voice danced through the frequency. "You were like a storm, just sweeping them away. How do you even move like that?"

"It's all in the wrist," Erik responded with a lightness that belied the danger they had just escaped, his hand making an unseen flourish in the confined space of his vehicle. "And a bit of practice, I suppose."

There was a moment of silence before Aiden's voice came through the radio. "Your blade work out there saved the convoy." Erik could imagine Aiden's scrutinizing gaze, assessing every detail as he spoke. A pause hung in the air before he said with a hint of mirth, "And they say I'm the one with quick reflexes."

"Thank you, Aiden."

On her end, Mira listened, her expression softening with each exchange. Lila's grin was almost audible over the radio. She knew Erik had a problem opening up to others.

Chapter 673: Before the desert

As the convoy journeyed on, the landscape underwent a subtle transformation.

The once lush verdure of dense forests, with their canopies teeming with the chatter of wildlife, slowly receded, replaced by a sparser landscape.

The ground beneath their feet became strewn with stones and pebbles as the trees thinned out, standing like sentinels at the border of two worlds.

The air grew drier, carrying the scent of ancient dust, as the verdant greens turned to muted browns and the earth cracked under the relentless sun. In the distance, the White Desert loomed, its pale sands a stark contrast to the dark, jagged rocks that now lay scattered like breadcrumbs marking their journey's path.

Erik reached for the radio and deftly turned the dial to connect with Kael.

"Kael, let's halt the convoy. We'll set up camp here for the night," Erik instructed, his voice steady.

There was a brief pause before Kael responded, "We're close to the White Desert, Erik. We could make it before nightfall if we push a bit more."

After a brief pause, Erik contemplated the situation. The White Desert's perilous reputation urged caution, recognizing that entering it while fatigued would prove unwise.

"I know we're close, Kael, but I'd rather have everyone well-rested before we tackle the desert. It's not a place to enter lightly."

Kael sighed on the other end, a sound that conveyed understanding. "Alright, boss. I get your point. I'll signal the convoy to stop."

Erik replaced the radio and observed as the vehicles gradually decelerated, eventually halting on a relatively flat terrain. Almost simultaneously, the doors of the armored cars and trucks opened, and people emerged, stretching their limbs and inhaling the fresh air.

"Alright, everyone! We're setting up camp here for the night!" Kael's voice boomed through a megaphone, echoing Erik's earlier decision. "Let's get to work!"

As the caravan came to a halt, the mercenary teams burst into a flurry of activity. A pair of sturdy figures worked in tandem, heaving canvas and poles from the backs of the pack animals.

"Get those tents up before nightfall!" barked a woman with a clipboard, her eyes scanning the organized chaos.

Nearby, a group ventured to the edge of the clearing, collecting branches and logs. The rhythmic crack of wood echoed back to camp.

"Think this'll be enough to keep the fire going till morning?" one of them asked, balancing a hefty log on his shoulder.

"It'll have to be," another grunted in response, wiping his brow.

In the center of the camp, healers tended to the wounded. A medic carefully wrapped a sprained wrist, offering a wry smile.

"Keep out of trouble, and this will heal in no time," she advised her patient.

The patient smirked back, flexing his fingers. "No promises, doc."

Everywhere there was movement; every action was purposeful. The camp was transforming into a well-oiled machine, each member playing their part to ensure they were ready for whatever lay ahead.

Erik stepped out of his vehicle, surveying the scene. He felt a sense of pride watching his team work so efficiently. Each person knew their role and executed it flawlessly. He walked over to where a group set up a large tent and lent a hand.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, the camp transformed. Long shadows stretched across the undulating landscape, intertwining with the amber hues of twilight. Tents rose like silent sentinels against the dimming sky, their canvases glowing softly with the last rays of daylight.

Campfires flickered to life, casting a warm, dancing light and sending sparks to mingle with the stars above. A secure perimeter took form, marked by the subtle gleam of watchful eyes.

Approaching Erik, Kael's face was etched with satisfaction, mirroring the day's fading light in his contented expression.

The camp thrummed with energy, yet a palpable sense of relief and camaraderie wove through the air. Around makeshift fire pits, mercenaries gathered, their faces bathed in a warm, golden glow from the dancing flames.

A few huddled figures sat apart, tending to their injuries, the evening sun glinting off pristine bandages wrapped around limbs and torsos.

"Keep that tight," one grizzled veteran instructed, his hand steady as he secured a dressing on a young archer's arm. "It'll help stem the bleeding."

Across the campfire's glow, a pair of men reenacted a skirmish with broad motions.

"I'm telling you, it was a beast, nearly the size of a cottage!" one exclaimed, arms wide to stress the enormity of their encounter.

His companion laughed, ducking under an imaginary swipe. "And yet here you stand, thanks to your quick thinking with that trap!"

Their laughter mingled with the crackling of the fire, a brief respite from the day's ordeals.

The aroma of grilled meat filled the air, signaling a feast in the making. Meats sizzled on the grill, juices meeting the heat with an occasional flare, while smoke rose in lazy spirals, carrying the scent of charred wood and caramelized fats.

Around the firepit, a symphony of dinner preparations unfolded. Metal tongs clicked against the grill, chefs flipped the meat to ensure an even cook, and laughter mingled with the rhythm of utensils sorting through side dishes.

Glass bottles clinked as they passed from hand to hand, caps popping with a fizz that joined the hum of conversations.

"Yo, toss me the salt, will ya?" a voice rang out, casual and friendly.

"Man, nothing beats a solid meal to make us forget about all that crazy stuff today," someone replied, the sound of a bottle opening adding to the relaxed vibe.

Laughter bubbled up, easy and light, as shared stories flowed as freely as the food.

Erik strode through the camp, eyes sweeping over the faces of his team. Pride swelled within him, alongside the weight of his responsibility. More clones were necessary, he mused, to embark on perilous quests with robust teams.

As he moved, he caught sight of Mira approaching him. Her face was serious, and at that moment Erik understood she was mad.

"Erik, a word?" Mira's voice cut through the din, her eyes locking onto his mask with an intensity that silenced the surrounding chatter.

Erik nodded, the hidden corners of his mouth twitching upward in a restrained smile as he followed her lead.

Jack, one of Erik's men, couldn't help himself. "The boss caught a summoning," he quipped, a sly smile playing on his lips as he watched them.

"Trouble in paradise, Boss?" The jest came from another, her laughter mingling with the clink of her bottle.

Erik's smile faltered for a moment, a flush creeping up his neck. He turned back to Mira, his expression sobering at her stern look. They moved away from the firelight to where shadows made it hard for them to be seen.

Mira's gaze pierced Erik as they stood apart from the rest. "Erik, what was today's stunt about?"

Erik met her stare, his brow furrowed in confusion. "Stunt? Mira, I don't follow."

"Leaping from the vehicle mid-ambush," she pressed, her voice steady but her eyes ablaze. "It was an unnecessary risk."

He exhaled, shoulders dropping as he sought the right words. "It seemed reckless, sure. But necessary. I had to intervene."

Erik sighed. "I know it seemed reckless, but it was necessary. I couldn't stand by and watch when I had the ability to protect you all," he said in earnest.

"But you don't have to carry all the weight on your shoulders," Mira argued, her voice tinged with concern and frustration. "We're all in this together. You don't have to risk your life like this!"

Erik looked at her, his eyes softening. "I'm sorry I made you worry, Mira." He grabbed her hands. "But I can't say I regret what I did. Because of that decision, you're all alive and well."

Mira's eyes were filled with a mixture of relief and exasperation.

Ensuring no one was watching, Erik enveloped her in his arms with a gentle urgency, pulling her close.

Her body stiffened for a fraction of a moment before melting into his embrace, her guarded stance crumbling as she accepted the comfort he offered.

They stood there, the world around them fading into a hushed stillness, their shared warmth a silent testament to the unspoken bond between them.

Erik leaned down, his head tilting as he closed the inches between them. Their lips met in a kiss that was both a balm for recent hurts and a wordless promise, tender and full of an eloquence that needed no speech to be understood.

"Promise me you'll be more careful," Mira's plea emerged softly as they parted, her eyes searching his for assurance.

Erik's lips curved into a faint smile, his response gentle yet resolute. "I promise I'll try."

Mira's frown betrayed her discontent with his answer, hinting at the future risks he might take. Yet, it was the most commitment she could extract from him.

Together, they returned to the camp, their clasped hands a silent accord. A subtle shift hung in the air; the crew seemed attuned to the undercurrents of their exchange.

Settling down, Erik and Mira joined the feast, savoring the charred flavors of the meal. Conversation sparked anew around them, knitting the group back into a cohesive whole.

#### Chapter 674: Arrival

As the convoy rumbled forward, the landscape changed, signaling their approach to the White Desert.

The once dense forest that had enveloped them for days thinned out, like a painter meticulously erasing strokes from a canvas. The trees grew sparser and more scattered, their branches reaching out like bony fingers, their leaves losing their autumn hues, fading to a weary, muted color.

As the forest reluctantly receded, it left behind a stark transition zone. The ground beneath their feet shifted to something harsh and unforgiving.

The last remnants of the forest seemed to cling to the edge of the terrain, their roots buried deep, as if reluctant to venture any closer to the arid wasteland beyond.

The ground beneath the tires turned from the bare earth to a mixture of gravel and sand, crunching in a different tone as they moved. More importantly, the chance of being seen by flying Thaid's grew significantly.

That prompted the group to cut down some trees and bushes and cover the vehicles with them. It was a crude solution, and Erik doubted Thaid's would be deceived by it, but it was still something.

The mercenaries, who had been jovial the night before, now wore more serious expressions.

They sensed the shift not just in the landscape but in the atmosphere; the air grew drier, and a subtle tension hung like a veil over the convoy.

This was especially because of the fact they were aware of how dangerous the White Desert was.



In this unforgiving landscape, their reliance on Erik, their leader, became paramount. The experience, knowledge, and tactical prowess he brought to the table were their best hope for navigating this terrain.

If their previous encounters were dangerous, this was an entirely different beast, and they understood that Erik's leadership was their compass through the dangerous unknown.

Understanding their role in the mission, the mercenaries harbored no shame. Erik had been clear: their primary task was to help drive the vehicles and handling the cargo should they find it. This clarity of purpose resonated within the group, anchoring them to their duties.

As the journey progressed, conversations within the convoy diminished to critical exchanges. Each member, acutely aware of their surroundings and the task at hand, minimized idle chatter, focusing instead on the essential.

In the rear vehicle, vigilance was as present as in any other part of the convoy. A scout, eyes scanning the horizon, broke the silence with a report, his voice steady and clear over the radio. "All clear at the rear. No sign of Thaid's."

His partner, the driver, nodded in acknowledgment, her eyes fixed on the path ahead. "Keep a sharp watch," she responded, her tone firm yet calm. "They could appear at any moment."

The scout nodded, his gaze returning to the expanse behind them.

Erik, sitting in the lead vehicle, saw the surroundings' change. He looked out at the increasingly desolate scenery, his eyes narrowing as he considered the White Desert dangers.

The place was notorious for its harsh conditions and deadly thaid's, and they were now on its doorstep.

Erik queried, sounding focused. "Kael, what's our estimated time at the checkpoint?"

Kael responded, a hint of concentration in his voice. "Around two hours at our current pace, Erik."

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As the convoy continued its trek, the last remnants of the forest faded away in the rearview mirrors, replaced by an open expanse that seemed to stretch infinitely.

As the convoy neared the White Desert, the sky above unfolded, mirroring the expanding terrain below. It stretched endlessly, a vast canvas of blue that swallowed the horizon, making space for the boundless desert ahead. This transformation in the sky was like turning the pages of a familiar book to reveal an uncharted chapter.

The sky, once dotted with clouds, now lay bare like a painter's empty canvas. Nature seemed to pause, taking a breath before plunging into the desert's harshness. The sun blazed with intensity, casting a golden hue over the landscape that flickered like molten gold.

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It took little time for them to arrive there.

The desert was a realm of extremes, a place where the elements conspired to test the mettle of any who dared to traverse its barren plains.

During the day, the sun blazed unforgivingly, turning the sand beneath their feet into a scorching furnace. Yet, despite the harsh conditions, there was an undeniable beauty in the landscape.

Amidst the scorching desert, one mercenary, gazing at the dunes, shuddered, "I wonder what Thaid's lie ahead..."

Another, their voice tinged with anxiety, replied, "I've heard tales of the creatures in these sands, mate. It's giving me the chills. They are often said to ambush their prey."

"Ah... Fuck... That would be an unpleasant situation."

"Yeah."

As they pressed forward through the scorching desert, fear gnawed at them, and their conversation was fraught with trepidation about the horrors they might encounter in the unforgiving landscape.

The way the light played upon the sand created an ever-changing tapestry of shades and textures as if the desert itself were alive and breathing.

The mercenaries peered out of their armored vehicles, their eyes scanning the landscape with apprehension. The desert stretched endlessly before them, its vastness seeming to swallow everything in its relentless embrace.

Each of them understood the unforgiving nature of this land, a place where only the strong survived.

Erik surveyed the scene from the lead vehicle, his eyes narrowing as he took in the vastness that lay before them. This was the White Desert, a place of both peril and promise, and as the wheels of the convoy churned the pristine sand beneath them.

Erik's eyes scanned the barren landscape. He picked up the radio and pressed the button to connect with Kael, who was taking care of the general management of the convoy with Aiden.

Erik leaned forward in his seat, his eyes fixed on Kael, his impatience thinly veiled by a calm tone. "Kael, fill me in. Where are we exactly? How far till we reach the spot where that plane might've gone down?"

Kael didn't leave Erik hanging for long. His voice was steady and concise, mirroring his professionalism. "We're on the outskirts of the desert, Erik. About 150 kilometers from the target area, which spans about 50 kilometers wide."

Erik took a moment to process the information, his brow furrowing slightly. "How long's it gonna take us to reach that spot?"

Kael's hesitation was palpable, a visible moment of uncertainty that played out in his furrowed brow and the slight tremor in his hand as he ran it through his tousled hair.

His eyes flickered between the sand mountain that dominated the horizon and Erik.

His fingers, as they combed through his hair, betrayed the whirlwind of thoughts churning within him.

"Well," he began slowly, "it all depends on the path we choose. See, we got two options here." As he spoke, Kael gestured towards the sand mountain and then traced a winding path with his finger in the air.

"Up ahead, there's this massive sand mountain. We can cross it to save time, but it's gonna slow us down big time. The terrain's a real beast." He paused, his fingers nervously tapping on the steering wheel.

"Or," Kael continued, "we can take the longer route. Adds about three hours to our trip, but we'd keep a steady speed, which might be a tad safer."

His hand rested on the map spread out on the dashboard. "Either way, we're guaranteed to hit our destination today. So, Erik, what's your play?"

Erik reclined in his seat, his brow furrowed in deep contemplation. He couldn't ignore the lives of his team. Yet, he didn't want to

His thoughts wandered to the weapons in their vehicles. But he knew these weapons were no match for the Thaidi roaming this unforgiving land. Avoiding conflict seemed not just prudent but necessary for their survival.

Yet Erik recognized the dichotomy of their situation. While evasion might be their best bet to stay alive, having an unobstructed view of the surroundings was paramount to finding the crash site amidst the desert.

He assessed the potential hazards and advantages, recognizing the unpredictable elements that might sway the balance. After thorough consideration, he reached a conclusion.

"There's no point in prolonging our exposure out here," Erik said, his voice resolute. "We'll take the fastest route. Prepare the convoy to cross the sand mountain."

Kael's voice came back. There wasn't a better or worst choice, and in the end, since the task of defending the convoy from the stronger Thaidi fell on Erik, it was his call to make. "Understood. I'll relay the orders."

Erik, seated in his vehicle, surveyed the scene from a distance as the convoy pressed forward. Even at this distance, he could discern the actions of his men and women within their vehicles.

He noticed them attending to their firearms, checking mechanisms, and loading magazines.

Some were taking sips from their water bottles to combat the desert heat, some were sharing a quick meal. They savored bites of simple rations, understanding the need to conserve supplies for the journey ahead.

#### Chapter 675: The Sand dunes

At the base of the massive sand mountain, the convoy came to a halt. The ranks came alive with murmurs, creating a ripple of sound that filled the once-quiet radio channels.

With wide eyes filled with astonishment, a single mercenary leaned out of the window and extended his arm, pointing up towards the towering dune. "Wow, look at the size of that thing!" he said, awe-struck by its magnitude.

Running a hand over the vehicle's dashboard, another individual furrowed their brow in concern, questioning the capabilities of the machinery.

"That's one steep climb. Are you sure these vehicles can handle it?" they asked, skepticism clear in their tone.

Looking up at the daunting ascent, a third individual, exuding a seasoned air of experience, had a wry smile on his lips.

"I've seen worse, but not by much. This is going to be interesting," he remarked, almost relishing the challenge ahead.

A fourth mercenary patted the engine housing reassuringly, a flicker of hope in their voice. "Hope these engines are as good as they say they are," they mused, their gesture showing both doubt and optimism.

Erik's mind was preoccupied with other thoughts, even as he listened to the comments.

If the convoy were to pass near the immense dune, it would face a twofold danger - the first being the possibility of encountering dangerous Thaidis hidden within it, and the second being the heightened vulnerability to aerial attacks.

This part of the journey held the highest level of danger, and the young man was conscious of that fact.

With a loud rev of their engines, the vehicles started their ascent, one after another. The wheels churned through the sand, sending a cloud of fine particles swirling around as the engines roared with effort.

It was a slow and arduous process, but the vehicles proved capable. They ascended to the summit, measuring their progress inch by inch.

The lead vehicle finally reached the top, and the rest of the convoy followed suit, creating a line of vehicles stretching into the distance. While looking out from the summit, Erik was amazed by the sheer magnitude of the desert spread out beneath him.

The landscape before them transformed into an endless expanse of sand, stretching as far as the eye could see. As far as the eye could see, the dunes rolled like colossal, golden waves, giving an illusion of movement.

The mounds of sand cast long, wavering shadows that danced and blurred the line between earth and sky.

The seamless merging created a horizon that seemed ethereal, as if from another world.

Silence fell upon the convoy, creating an eerie stillness. Each member, struck by the sheer magnitude of the desert, couldn't help but be captivated by the stark beauty of this unending sandy expanse.

The vastness seemed to stretch not just across the land, but into the far reaches of time.

In an instant, as if a sudden clap of thunder had disturbed a serene moment, the radio unexpectedly crackled to life, shattering the awe-inspired silence and forcefully pulling them back to the harsh and unforgiving reality of their mission in this remote and untamed wilderness.

"I've never seen something so... empty," chimed in someone.

Erik picked up the radio, his voice cutting through the chatter. "Focus on the surrounding guys, do not sightsee, we are not here to play."

Erik's scolding cut through the air, grounding everyone and causing a tinge of embarrassment among the younger members of the convoy.

Erik then picked up the communication device and dialed into Aiden's frequency. "Aiden, prepare the scanners. Set them to locate the plane's black box. We're entering the crash zone."

"Roger that, boss," Aiden's voice crackled back through the radio. As Aiden powered up the scanners, the air was filled with the constant hum of machinery. Their screens, displaying a series of complex algorithms and data points, flickered to life.

During the time that the scanners were performing their tasks, Erik switched channels and got in touch with Alina. Considering the constant threat of ambushes by Thaidis in this area, her power was going to be an asset. "Alina, I need you to be our eyes and ears right now. Use your brain crystal power to sense for any Thaidis that might lurk beneath the sand. I want no surprises."

"I'll do my best." Her voice came through, tinged with a seriousness that matched how tense the situation was for everyone.

After having closed her eyes, she directed her attention toward the vast expanse of sand surrounding them, using her senses to focus on the environment.

Time seemed to slow down as minutes transformed into what felt like hours, with each passing second elongating as the convoy impatiently waited for the scanners to locate the black box.

The scanners emitted beeping sounds and mechanical whirs as their complex algorithms processed large amounts of data, searching for any possible signal that could provide information about the whereabouts of the plane.

The mercenaries sat in their vehicles, weapons at the ready, eyes scanning the horizon for any sign of movement.

Eventually, a scanner emitted a lengthened and unbroken beep, as its screen illuminated with the coordinates of the signal that had been detected.

Aiden's voice abruptly broke the tense silence, causing an unexpected interruption on the radio.

"Got it, Erik! We've located the black box. Sending you the coordinates now."

Erik felt a wave of relief wash over him. "Good work, Aiden. Relay the coordinates to all vehicles and set a course. We need to get there as quickly as possible."

As Erik gave the signal to proceed, the engines of the convoy roared to life, creating a symphony of mechanical sounds that filled the air. The vehicles, filled with a sense of collective resolve, started their descent down the sand mountain.

In a display of utmost concentration, the drivers held onto the steering wheels, their knuckles becoming white with tension as they skillfully navigated the challenging terrain.

The steep slope that lay ahead of them appeared to be quite intimidating, resembling a vast expanse of golden grains that flowed and murmured with the desert breeze, creating a challenging driving situation for them.

"Stay alert, everyone," Erik said into the radio, his voice steady but filled with the weight of responsibility.

The driver, with his eyes fixed on the path ahead, could feel the weight of the wheel in his hands and the heavy burden of responsibility resting on his shoulders.

To descend was a delicate operation that required careful execution. The consequences of one incorrect maneuver couldn't be underestimated.

It might cause a vehicle to tumble down and cause issues, potentially derailing the mission if other trucks were unfortunately involved, transforming the mission into a complete catastrophe.

The loose and erratic sand beneath the tires demanded careful handling to evade getting stuck or losing command.



While making their way downwards, the pace of the convoy was intentionally slowed down, ensuring that each vehicle maintained a safe distance from the one ahead of it.

The engines growled, their deep, throaty roars breaking the desert's stillness. This cacophony melded with the softer, almost serpentine hiss of sand grains shifting and swirling beneath the heavy tires.

The air vibrated with these sounds, creating a symphony that resonated with the raw power of machinery and the timeless whisper of the desert.

While they were descending, the radio suddenly came alive with a buzzing sound, piercing through the ambient noise of the vehicle's engine and the faint murmur of the desert wind. The urgency in Alina's voice instantly grabbed Erik's focus.

"Something's coming, Erik! From the front!" Fear laced her words, making her voice quiver. Whatever was coming must have been truly frightening to elicit such a reaction from her.

Erik's grip tightened on the Flyssa and then he pressed the radio's talk button. "How many? How strong?" he asked, his voice steady but alert.

"Just one!" Alina said, a note of apprehension seeping into her tone. "But it feels... powerful. I'm not sure what it is!"

With his eyes narrowing, Erik's mind quickly raced through the various thaids that might be near the convoy.

Galewings, Scorpion, Terrapeds, or worse, Terracores could roam the area. Managing the second and third Thaids was a breeze, but the first one was going to be very challenging because of its aerial vantage.

Regarding the fourth, Thaid, even he harbored doubts about his ability to defeat a creature of such power and size, should he ever come across one.

However, while there was only one Thaid, Alina's description of its power showed that it should not be underestimated.

With lives at stake, he understood the importance of his role in safeguarding and making choices that would impact others.

"Understood," he said, releasing the talk button and taking a deep breath. His shoulders bore the weight of leadership, though it was a burden that he had shouldered multiple times before.

On each occasion, he had bravely taken on this responsibility, resolute in his determination to protect his people, regardless of the consequences.

#### Chapter 676: Flying Menace (1)

"How long until it reaches us?" Erik asked without letting panic or fear set in. Something Alina understood.

"A minute, maybe less."

Erik's decision was immediate. The first thing he had to do was to make sure the convoy was left unharmed.

He then switched channels and addressed Kael. "Kael, change course; all vehicles divert to the left. Now!" His voice was a commanding boom over the radio, leaving no room for hesitation. Kael shared the order and the drivers adjusted their steering wheels; the convoy veered off its original path, engines roaring as they kicked up plumes of sand.

Turning to his own driver, Erik's eyes were steely. "Keep heading in our original direction," he said. The driver looked at him with clear fear flashing across his face, but he nodded, understanding the weight of Erik's responsibility and his duties. Though he felt like he was going to die soon.

As the convoy shifted its course, Erik's vehicle continued to barrel straight ahead, a lone wolf separating from the pack. His grip tightened around the hilt of his Flyssa, anticipation high. He did not know what thaid was around, but he had to be ready.

Whatever was coming, he would face it head-on. The Thaid was powerful, according to Alina, but it was all compared to her. This meant it wasn't necessarily a threat to Erik.

He glanced at the rearview mirror, watching the convoy change direction, a wave of relief washing over him.

He cast a quick glance at Mira's car, feeling a sense of relief as he diverted the thaid's attention from her.

As time ticked forward, the gap between Erik and the advancing Thaid narrowed. The driver's face, a canvas of emotion, transformed, portraying his escalating fear.

His eyes widened, almost bulging, as they fixated on the looming and unseen threat. The surrounding skin was creased and wrinkled, resembling the furrows and folds of a parched desert landscape, etched by the relentless forces of nature.

Sweat beaded on his forehead, trickling down his temples in rivulets, reflecting the harsh desert sun. His complexion took on a pallid, almost ghostly hue, drained of color by the terror gripping his heart.

Every twitch, every minute contortion of his facial muscles, broadcast his terror to the world.

[WARNING. HOSTILE DETECTED.]

<Oh... fuck!>

This was a notification he hadn't gotten in a while, and that was because it appeared only when a hostile had the power to be dangerous or pose a challenge to Erik. He didn't know what of the two, but one thing was sure: this fight could be dangerous even for him.

Erik's eyes were glued to the sandy terrain below. Every muscle in his body was ready for battle with the monstrous thaid.

The monster's elusive nature until this point showed it was not a flying Thaid and suggested an upcoming clash with a sand-dweller. Although that was reassuring, he couldn't confirm that everything was as he assumed until he saw the creature. He was smart, especially so thanks to Hais's brain crystal power, but he couldn't predict the future.

At that moment, almost like a forewarning, a subtle feeling of unease, causing a tingling sensation on the back of his neck, brought his attention to the imminent danger. Overwhelmed by his instincts, he didn't hesitate and launched himself out of the moving vehicle with a jump.

As Erik's boots touched the sandy ground, a piercing screech shattered the silence, followed by the gut-wrenching sound of metal being ripped apart.

Whirling around, Erik witnessed a scene of surreal horror. His vehicle, now bisected, appeared as if sliced by some unseen, monstrous blade. The sharpness of the cut was chillingly precise, the two halves of the vehicle splayed open like a grotesque metal flower.

In a macabre display, the driver's head had been severed with chilling cleanliness, detached from its body. It soared through the air, tracing a horrifying arc against the stark desert sky.

With a sickening thud, the head landed on the unforgiving desert floor, sending a small cloud of sand into the air.

Erik's heart pounded in his chest, adrenaline surging through his veins as he took in the horrifying scene. Then, the gravity of the situation hit him: the attack had come from the front, but not from the ground but from above.

"What the fu—?!"

A chill ran down his spine as he realized that his worst nightmare had just materialized and he had been incorrect about his assumption. A flying Thaid, one of the most fearsome creatures known to mankind, had targeted them.

Thoughts were racing through Erik's mind at a rapid pace. Besides their lethal nature, the Flying Thaid's were known for their intelligence, cunning, and unparalleled mastery of the skies, rendering them hard to eliminate. And now, one had them in its sights.

With squinted eyes, he scanned the sky, trying to shield himself from the intense sunlight, but unfortunately, he saw nothing. Spotting these creatures proved to be quite difficult, because they would often employ their brain crystal powers to launch aerial attacks.

Their ability to strike from such a long distance made it impossible to discern the origin of the attack, and their subsequent movement added an extra layer of complexity to the task.

Erik's gaze fixated on one of the convoy's armored cars, stilled in the chaos. Through the reinforced glass, he saw Mira's face, a picture of shock and fear. Her eyes, wide and filled with terror, said she saw the creature's assault.

Mira's features were contorted in horror, her pallor betraying the depth of her shock.

Her breath seemed to catch, visible in the rapid rise and fall of her chest, as she processed the scene before her.

Yet, amidst this fear, there was a distinct glint of concern—a worry that extended beyond her own safety.

Her eyes, darting, were not just mirrors of the fear of death but also of her deep concern for Erik's well-being, as he was tasked with battling such a beast.

Around her, the rest of the convoy shared similar expressions of dread and disbelief.

Faces pressed against windows bore the same stamp of horror, reflecting a collective realization of their precarious situation.

In that fleeting moment, their eyes locked, and it was as if a silent storm of emotions raged between them. Fear, concern, and a desperate longing for each other's safety surged like tumultuous waves in a once calm sea.

With a swift, decisive motion, Erik raised his hand and gestured for her to stay back. His eyes conveyed a message as clear as any spoken word: "Do not approach. It's too dangerous," was what he tried to convey.

Mira's face contorted with a combination of frustration and concern, her eyes desperately imploring him to reconsider, to allow her help, but Erik's expression remained unyielding.

Despite Mira's obvious objections, it appeared the armored car driver was able to interpret Erik's silent signal.

The vehicle's engine thundered to life, its roar cutting through the tense air. As a powerful beast awakened, it sped up, rejoining the convoy's formation.

The line of armored vehicles moved as one, a metallic serpent slithering through the landscape.

Their coordinated maneuvering resembled a well-rehearsed dance, each vehicle slipping into its designated place with precision.

Erik watched this display, his eyes tracking the convoy's retreat. Yet, his attention was divided, darting to the skies, vigilant for the lurking presence of the flying thaid.

The convoy's departure, under the shadow of such a threat, was like a fleet of ships navigating treacherous waters, each wave a potential harbinger of the lurking leviathan above.

As the distance between them continued to grow, Erik felt an increasing pang of anxiousness, knowing that the convoy was vulnerable to potential attacks while he was engaged in the battle against the flying Thaid.

However, he made the conscious choice to set it aside and not address it. This was not the moment for indulging in sentimental feelings. A deadly predator, something not hypothetical, was on the loose, and he had to make it, so he became its target.

He watched as the armored car blended into the line of vehicles, each one carrying people whose lives were now in his hands. With Mira and the others at a safer distance, Erik turned his attention back to the looming threat. His grip tightened around the hilt of his Flyssa, his senses heightened to a razor's edge.

He understood his sword would be of minimal value in defending against an airborne adversary. In order to overcome his problem, he needed to find a suitable solution.

Erik, someone who refrained from indulging in emotions, experienced an overwhelming surge of frustration and helplessness.

Erik took a moment to draw a deep breath, preparing himself for the impending battle. He might not be able to see the flying Thaid, but he could make it difficult for the creature to strike again. And if it dared to come close, to underestimate the human it had chosen as its prey, then Erik would be ready.

He would be ready to show this flying horror that even the most fearsome predators could become prey.

Erik's eyes swept the sky, vigilantly searching for any hint of the flying Thaid. Each second of his search stretched out like an endless horizon, expansive and unyielding.

Adrenaline flowed through his veins, enhancing his senses to their pinnacle of sharpness. As he thought about the daunting challenge ahead, he could feel a knot forming in the pit of his stomach.

Facing a flying Thaid required great skill and was certainly no small accomplishment.

The lethal prowess of these beings was well-known and only individuals with exceptional skills, like Becker, could confront them with confidence.

The gap between Erik and Becker was something that Erik had always been mindful of.

Physically, they might be on par after Erik made use of the system. He firmly believed in his capabilities, to the extent that he thought he could outperform Becker in that respect.

There was a substantial increase in the disparity between brain crystal powers and mana. Becker possessed an A-ranked brain crystal, a rare and potent power source, an almost inextinguishable mana source.

But it wasn't just any A-ranked brain crystal. With its placement on the higher end of the spectrum, Becker's mana reserves were among the most abundant in the world, placing him among the elite few. He wasn't invincible, but 1v1 he got dangerously close to that.

Becker's brain crystal power was wielded with incredible efficiency, thanks to the mana advantage he possessed, a capability that Erik was unable to rival.

Although his own brain crystal powers were strong, they were not focused on offensive capabilities like Becker's powers. Even in the event that they were, Erik knew well that his mana reserves were not enough to sustain such a demanding level of combat.

This time, Erik found himself in a predicament that was unlike any he had faced before. The Flying Thaid, much like Becker, were renowned for their ability to manipulate the air.

He was still in the dark about the particular Thaid species he was facing, and this lack of knowledge made it more challenging for him to devise a strategy.

Each species of Flying Thaid's exhibited unique attack patterns and vulnerabilities. Knowing which one he was up against could be the key to survival.

In a split second, Erik's complete focus was shattered when two blades of wind, incredibly sharp, cut through the air with suddenness and danger.

Carving through the atmosphere with deadly accuracy, these blades, though unseen, left behind a disrupted air trail as a testament to their lethal nature.

With an impressive display of agility and quick decision-making, Erik swiftly moved away from the spot, narrowly escaping the blades.

The impact of their landing sent shockwaves through the ground, causing a fierce explosion of sand.

The eruption caused a massive cloud of fine grains to billow into the sky, creating a temporary haze that blocked his view.

The swirling airborne particles created a chaotic dance, shimmering in the sunlight and creating a blinding haze that engulfed the area, momentarily disorienting him amid the unfolding danger.

His reflexes came to his rescue, saving him from harm. They allowed him to dodge the attack, with his body moving as if it had a mind of its own. The near miss drove home the reality of what he was up against.

Through the dissipating dust and his squinting eyes, Erik's vision cleared and he could make out the creature that had been shadowing his every move without rest.

A large entity, akin to a hawk of mythic proportions, ruled the skies above. Its wings, vast as the sails of an ancient ship, beat with a force mighty enough to buoy its enormous frame through the air.

Bathed in sunlight, the bird's plumage resembled a masterpiece painted by celestial beings. Its feathers, a brilliant tapestry of blues and whites, shimmered as the ocean, kissed by the sun's rays, casting a dazzling, iridescent glow.



The creature's talons and beak, each gleaming with a metallic sheen, were reminiscent of finely crafted weapons, forged in the fires of the gods and honed to deadly perfection.

Yet amidst this fearsome display of strength, it was the creature's eyes that captivated Erik the most. They bore a penetrating gaze, intense and imbued with a keen intelligence that belied its primal nature.

These eyes, like twin pools of ancient wisdom, seemed to pierce through the very fabric of the mundane, offering a glimpse into a mind as sharp and unyielding as the edges of the world.

As he stood there, recognition slowly dawned on Erik like a light bulb flickering to life. This was a Galewing.

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<Quest: The Galewing's Extermination. >

-Description: Kill the Galewing and survive.

-Rewards for completion: 10,000 experience points, 2,000 DNA points, and ten stats each in strength and dexterity.

-Failure Penalty: Death.

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A sense of joy illuminated Erik's face, and a smile formed, slowly spreading across his features. Instead of feeling dread, a sense of excitement filled him upon realizing that he was facing a Galewing.

Instead, a wave of anticipation washed over him, igniting a spark of excitement. It was within his capabilities to eliminate this specific species.

"ANALYSIS."

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Name: Galewing

Brain Crystal Power: Aerokinesis.

With its Aerokinesis ability, Galewings can summon gusts of wind to propel themselves forward with greater speed, launch themselves into the air from a standstill, and create powerful wind blades they can unleash upon their enemies. With their incredible power, the wind blades have the ability to cut through both flesh and bone.

The Galewing's ability to control the wind grants it unparalleled agility, rendering it a dangerous adversary in aerial combat. The belief is that Galewing's brain crystal power not only gives it the ability to sense changes in atmospheric pressure but also allows it to predict weather patterns and effortlessly navigate through turbulent winds.

With its ability to adapt to the constantly changing conditions of the skies, this makes it an apex predator in its environment.

Size: Massive with a wingspan of up to 40 feet

Color: Vibrant blues and white feathers

Appendages: Sharp talons and beak gleaming with a metallic sheen

Wings: Large and powerful, enabling swift flight

Ecology: Galewings are often found soaring high above desert regions and open plains. Large animals and thaids serve as their primary source of sustenance, which they hunt from above by swooping down with precision and snatching their prey in their powerful talons.

The lair of the creature is usually found nestled among the cliffs and rocky outcrops, which not only provides it with a vantage point for observation but also serves as a means of protection.

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 137.0

INTELLIGENCE: 6.0

DEXTERITY: 127.0

ENERGY: 906.0

{Others}

Power Level: 451

Estimated Experience: 4908 (EXP per kill)

Neural Links: A3tA-level

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Upon witnessing the analysis results, Erik's heart pounded with exhilaration, a symphony of anticipation rather than fear.

The data laid bare before him revealed a formidable opponent, a creature whose immense strength emanated from its boundless mana reserves.

Despite this revelation, Erik couldn't help but feel the weight of his own mana's inadequacy compared to the beast's overwhelming power.

The Galewing's mana flowed through it like a roaring river, overpowering and unstoppable, highlighting the stark difference from his own meager abilities.

However, Erik's sharp eye caught an important detail. The creature's physical capabilities were awe-inspiring, yet they didn't seem to measure up to his own.

He realized that in the realm of brute strength and agility; he held an advantage. This understanding brought a strategic clarity to his mind.

He knew that victory in battle was not solely determined by mana.

As he pondered, his plan gradually took shape. The battle's dynamics would change in his favor if he lured the Galewing down from the sky.

On the ground, Erik could use his physical strength to gain the upper hand against the creature, despite its abundance of mana.

With each thought, his strategy solidified, his confidence growing stronger as he imagined outsmarting such a powerful opponent.

Erik sheathed his Flyssa, feeling the weight of the weapon settle against his side. It was impossible for the blade to overcome the beast's defenses, as they were too strong.

The consequences were too high for him to afford to make even a single mistake.

One wrong move, one momentary lapse in concentration, and it could all be over. However, he knew he could not allow himself to be immobilized by indecisiveness. He had to act, and he had to do it now.

As Erik stood there, his eyes fixated on the menacing creature circling above him, he experienced an inexplicable sense of clarity.

In that precise moment, a deep realization dawned upon him, eradicating all his doubts and insecurities, and revealing his true and untainted self.

He was not just any ordinary person. He was a warrior, someone who had faced countless challenges and emerged victorious.

It didn't matter who his adversaries were or the seemingly insurmountable odds against him, Erik was firm in his resolve: he would not concede defeat without a battle.

## Chapter 678: Flying Menace (3)

As Erik stood below, the Galewing circled in the sky, its watchful eyes focused on him, getting ready to strike once more.

With a single powerful flap of its wings, it conjured a storm of wind blades, each one a razor-sharp crescent of compressed air, hurtling toward him with deadly accuracy.

Erik's senses were heightened, every sound and movement making him tense. The tension in his body heightened as he analyzed the trajectory of each attack.

With an impressive burst of speed, he maneuvered to the left, escaping the first blade that had sliced through the air right at the spot where he had been standing only a moment earlier.

But the Galewing showed no signs of relenting. Once again, a series of wind blades was unleashed, but this time, they originated from a different direction.

"Motherfucker," the word was a calm acknowledgment rather than an outcry of frustration.

Faced with the unrelenting wind blades, Erik's demeanor was the epitome of focused tranquility.

Despite the barrage from his long-range adversary, there was no hint of desperation in Erik's actions.

His physical prowess was clear, each dodge and weave executed with an almost meditative focus.

This calm, focused approach highlighted Erik's ability to maintain control amid battle.

His every move was a deliberate act, a testament to his mastery over his body and the situation, turning what could have been a frantic skirmish into a display of controlled, strategic defense.

In an impressive display of agility, Erik executed a succession of intricate maneuvers, rolling and leaping to avoid the attacks coming his way.

The wind blades caused sand and dust to be thrown into the air, making it harder for him to see and anticipate the next assault.

The attacks were so close to him that he could feel them grazing past, and he could even hear the distinct whistling sound they made as they sliced through the air.

As he was grazing his arm, he ended up with a shallow cut that bled almost instantly.

Despite the perilous situation, Erik's lips curled into a grin as he looked up at the circling Galewing. "Is that all you've got?" With a mix of mockery and excitement, he shouted, his voice carrying the distinct tinge of both emotions. "You'll have to do better than that if you want to take me down!"

The Galewing emitted a screech, as if in direct response, while narrowing its eyes at what appeared to be a display of indignation.

"Come on, stupid chicken! Show me what you're made of!"

As its wings beat, the Galewing released yet another barrage of wind blades, each one a dangerous crescent of compressed air, all directed straight toward him.

As the lethal wind blades sliced through the air and headed towards him, Erik's calm demeanor remained steadfast, acting as a powerful fortress amid the storm.

To find stability amidst the chaotic and dangerous situation, he took a long, calming breath, grounding himself in the present moment.

In a sudden burst of agility, he changed direction, navigating towards the right, his actions executed with an almost indiscernible precision.

Despite his narrow escape from the first wave of wind blades, his heart skipped a beat when he saw a second, much fiercer onslaught advancing towards him.

With instinctive prowess, Erik executed a backflip. Like a fearless acrobat defying death, his body twisted in mid-air during the performance.

As he somersaulted, the wind blades passed just inches from him, their edges slicing the air where he had been moments before.

Erik's feet hit the ground with a thud as he regained his stance. Another haunting screech escaped from the Galewing's beak, its sound echoing through the desolate landscape.

As Erik dodged another set of wind blades, he couldn't help but feel the difficulty of the fight. "This is a lot harder than I expected." His eyes never left the circling Galewing above.

The constant movement left his muscles throbbing, and he could feel droplets of sweat trickling down his forehead.

For a moment, Erik's eyes shifted their focus away from the circling Galewing and scanned the horizon in search of the convoy. They had transformed into minuscule dots as they moved further away, almost merging with the immense stretch of the desert.

Relief swept over him like a cool breeze on a hot summer day. They were now a considerable distance away, out of harm's reach, and unlikely to detect his mana or witness the intense battle.

With the distance between them, he could ensure the convoy's safety and unleash his full power, with no concerns about his abilities being exposed. But it was a double-edged sword. This great distance also resulted in him being alone in his fight against the Galewing.

With a small smirk forming on his face, Erik shifted his attention back to the airborne predator.

With its impressive mastery of the skies, the Galewing proved to be a fearsome adversary because of its exceptional agility and unparalleled control over the air.

Throughout this entire time, Erik's sole focus has been on evading the relentless attacks of the creature. The reason he was able to stay safe was because the Galewing remained flying high above, which allowed him the time to observe and evade the incoming attacks.

The number of options Erik had for attacking was quite restricted. He could use his deadly mana darts to either eliminate or debilitate the creature, yet despite possessing this long-range ability, the creature remained out of his reach.

A direct attack, attempting to jump as high as possible with the aid of Nathaniel and the Xeridon Anteris's power, would prove futile as the beast's agility would enable it to evade such attacks.

The Galewing circled above, its sharp screech echoing through the air as if daring him to take action.

Erik knew that his best chance to defeat the beast was to lure it into a fierce ground battle where he could rely on his strength.

But how could he entice such a clever and elusive creature to descend from the sky?

While lost in his thoughts, the Galewing surprised everyone by launching another onslaught of wind blades, resulting in a symphony of whistling and howling sounds that echoed through the air.

With lightning-fast reflexes, Erik dodged the attack, feeling the rush of adrenaline heighten the urgency of the situation.

With time not on his side, he felt the pressure mounting. The longer this dragged on, the more opportunities the Galewing had to land a fatal blow.

Erik's eyes shifted from the expansive sky to the wreckage scattered on the ground. The armored vehicle that the Galewing had targeted was now a mangled heap of twisted metal and shattered glass.

The vehicle's exterior lay sundered, as though an invisible sword wielded by a giant had sliced it in two. Its formidable armor was rendered asunder like paper in the hands of a wrathful deity.

The once vibrant and sturdy tires now sagged, devoid of air, almost as if they were lamenting the defeat of a mighty beast.

Once transparent and unharmed, the windows had now become a jigsaw puzzle of shattered glass, a testament to the chaos that had unfolded.

Many fragments, each capturing the sunlight, came together to form a grim mosaic that shimmered with a beauty that was both eerie and reminiscent of a disturbed sea sparkling under a stormy sky.



Inside, the scene was just as harrowing as the chaos outside. Reduced to a headless figure, the driver was no longer identifiable as a human being.

With his body still slumped in the seat, he resembled a macabre marionette that had its strings severed.

Inside the vehicle, there was a ghastly still life unfolding, like a morbid tableau depicting the abrupt and violent end of life.

The durability of the driver's armored suit was showcased by its ability to remain intact even after the incident. However, despite its many positive attributes, the one fatal flaw that stood out was in the neck region, where the absence of a head highlighted its vulnerability.

In a grim display of irony, the seatbelt fastened now served as a somber reminder of the futile attempt to ensure safety in the face of a violent and tragic fate, as it held the decapitated body in place.

Dashboards and controls were decorated with splashes of blood, creating a macabre scene.

Covered in droplets and smears, the sterile controls turned into an unintended canvas of gore, each mark recounting a silent and horrifying story.

Instead, the steering wheel, rendered purposeless, seemed to ache for the comforting grip of the driver's hands, hands that had once maneuvered it but were now absent forever.

With his fists clenched, Erik felt a surge of determination coursing through his veins. There was no margin for mistakes. The Galewing's deadly power had already snuffed out a life, but he was determined to protect others from its grasp.

Erik, having decided to trust in the Galewing's hunting instincts, came to the understanding that his plan was daring and full of potential risks.

Chapter 679: Flying Menace (4)

Erik took a deep breath, starting a process similar to that of a conductor calling forth the symphony of an orchestra.

As he tapped into his mana reserves, a vibrant river of light surged through his neural links, flowing through a complex network of canals.

Like the city's lights springing to life at dusk, each strand of mana illuminated the neural links in his body, weaving through them like luminous threads.

The flow of energy, which was both graceful and powerful, created a harmonious dance within him, connecting every part of his being and echoing the rhythm of Erik's will in a cycle of creation and flow.

With a mere thought, he triggered the activation of his brain crystal's power, "Target Lock," securing his focus on the Galewing's unmistakable presence in the heavens above.

The connection between them seemed to be as strong as an invisible tether. The creature's every movement, along with its continuous circling above, was easily detected and sensed by Erik.

In this manner, the young man would never be unaware of the location.

Subsequently, Erik focused his mana towards harnessing the powers that he had obtained from the Xeridon Anteris and Nathaniel.

The initial power he gained greatly enhanced his physical strength, causing his muscles to transform into tightly wound springs of immense explosive energy.

Nathaniel's "Force Fist" power lent that extra to his natural strength, elevating it to a level reminiscent of a human cannon.

The power emitted in each pulse appeared to create a resonance in the air, infusing the atmosphere with a palpable and almost electrifying energy.

After meticulously weaving an energy matrix into his arm, Erik shifted his focus downwards, feeling content.

His gaze settled on the ground, where the slightest vibrations under his feet connected him to the earth.

As he prepared to unleash the pent-up energy, he took a stance, feeling the sand beneath his feet sink slightly as he coiled his muscles.

By using all his strength, he delivered a ferocious punch that contacted the ground. The consequences of the event were cataclysmic. From the point of contact, a powerful shockwave radiated outward, causing the sand and dust to be lifted high into the air.

In a matter of seconds, an enormous cloud of sand and dust erupted from the ground, expanding to cover a vast area of 50 meters in radius and causing the complete obstruction of anything in its trajectory.

The scene was such that it seemed like the desert had been called upon to assist him, with a swirling vortex of particles that obscured the sun and transformed the day into a dim and hazy twilight.

Erik understood that the Galewing's targeting abilities were reliant on its keen eyesight, and by immersing it in this self-created sandstorm, he had deprived it of its vision.

A disoriented screech escaped from the creature, its piercing cry resounding and echoing through the clouded air. Erik's awareness of the beast's confusion led him to observe how it circled hesitantly, its predatory focus disturbed and uncertain.

With his teeth gritted against the swirling sand that surrounded him, he grinned. With its dual purpose, the cloud was able to perform two tasks.

Besides obscuring him from the Galewing's sight, it also concealed his movements, thus enabling him to make preparations for the next stage of his plan.

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As the Galewing flew in circles above, its keen eyes were focused on scanning the cloud of dust and sand that had settled below.

Where had the human gone? The empty expanse of the desert was all that the creature's piercing eyes, renowned for their ability to locate prey from afar, could find.

As if a predator had lost its prey, the creature felt an overwhelming sense of frustration.

Accustomed to the relentless pursuit and unerring focus of a hawk eyeing its quarry, the sudden loss of its targets left it bewildered and agitated, much like a seasoned hunter confounded by the unexpected escape of a cornered animal.

In order to get a more comprehensive view of the landscape, the creature expanded its search radius and soared higher into the sky.

With a whoosh, the wings of the creature sliced through the air, propelling it even farther away from the cloud of vanished dust.

With every passing minute, the sense of time seemed to elongate, amplifying the disappointment as the Galewing's search proved fruitless.

The human was nowhere to be found, even after ten minutes had gone by. With each passing moment, the creature's frustration grew, morphing into a simmering rage.

The disappearance of the human was so perplexing that it appeared they had vanished, a concept that troubled the Galewing's sharp intellect.

The sound of the creature's piercing screech, filled with irritation, echoed across the empty landscape.

The Galewing carefully considered its options before finally making a decision.

The creature had a choice to make - either it could persist in this search, spending even more energy and time, or it could go back to its original hunting grounds, where there was an abundance of prey that was easier to catch.

However, there was a part of it that fought against choosing the latter option. The hesitation it displayed might have been because of its pride, or it could have been its instinct as a predator, which made it reluctant to let its prey slip away.

As the Galewing spotted an unfamiliar object on the ground below, its eyes narrowed in curiosity.

It was an anomaly, something that stood out and didn't seem to belong in its surroundings.

Resting in the barren desert landscape, there was a rectangular object that stood out because of its shape, which was distinct from the natural contours of the surroundings.

The Galewing had never seen a rock or natural formation that resembled it. The Galewing, who knew this world so well, recognized the object as a clear foreign anomaly.

With an ever-increasing curiosity, the Galewing descended in a spiraling motion, circling around and inching closer to the captivating discovery that lay beneath.

As it made its way down, the recognizable form of a lifeless person emerged from the wreckage.

The creature made several chirping sounds, revealing its delight and eagerness. Despite being unexpected, the end of its hunt resulted in a rewarding outcome.

With every descent, the Galewing's stomach emitted a rumbling noise, resembling the distant thunder heard on a stormy horizon, showing its intense hunger.

Its predatory instincts turned into a symphony of anticipation as the prospect of nourishment loomed.

As the creature approached, it recalled that the human it had attempted to eliminate earlier had actually come out of that very metallic structure.

The creature was filled with uncertainty as it tried to comprehend the nature of that peculiar object. Was it a rock? At first glance, it appeared to be the case, but simultaneously, it seemed not to be true. Despite this, the situation remained unchanged: the "non-rock" still contained food inside.

The Galewing hesitated briefly, pausing for just a moment. Despite the potential risks involved, the bird landed and investigate, ultimately prioritizing the meal it was about to have.

The creature's sharp intellect and primal instincts clashed, each competing to determine its next move.

The creature took its time, but finally, it decided. The Galewing, with a forceful flap of its massive wings, started the last part of its descent, its unblinking eyes focused solely on the enigmatic rectangular object beneath. There were no opponents to challenge it.

As it grew closer, it became more perceptive, its senses on high alert, searching for any sign of human activity or looming peril.

The Galewing's descent was marked by grace as it extended its massive wings, causing vast shadows to envelop the sun-baked sand.

With precision, as it approached the ground, the creature manipulated its wings, decelerating its descent in a manner reminiscent of a proficient glider nearing its intended target.

With a final, calculated motion, it made contact with the ground, its sharp talons piercing the soft, sun-kissed sand.

When it landed, the impact was so strong that it created a small cloud of fine grains, which shimmered for a moment in the sunlight before settling back down.

The creature's talons, resembling the roots of an ancient tree, anchored it to the ground as if they were embedded in the earth.

With sharp and unblinking eyes, it shifted its focus to the strange object placed in front of it.

In a display of majestic beauty, the Galewing stood still for a moment, its predator instincts kicking in as it surveyed its surroundings with keen interest, every sense attuned to the nuances of this unexpected find.

As the Galewing prepared to delve deeper into its investigation, its head tilted in a gesture reminiscent of a scholar pondering a complex riddle.

The curiosity in its gaze was as clear as a star in the night sky, shining with the desire for understanding.

At this moment, the creature, usually the epitome of alertness and caution, allowed itself a rare lapse into vulnerability.

It lowered its guard, basking in a sense of security as if it were a king within the walls of his own impregnable fortress.

The thought of danger seemed as distant to the Galewing as the possibility of a mountain being uprooted from the earth.

In its mind, what force in nature could challenge a being of such majesty and power?

However, it was clear the beast wasn't as smart as it believed to be.

#### Chapter 680: Flying Menace (5)

From his hidden vantage point, Erik watched in awe as the Galewing descended onto the sand, its talons sinking into the ground with a fierce, predatory grip.

As the creature drew closer, Erik recognized the lifeless body of the driver, a man he had relied on throughout their dangerous expedition to the White Desert.

They had shared meals, laughter, and stories around campfires, forming a camaraderie that was now severed.

Erik watched in horror as the Galewing descended upon the severed head. With a grace that belied its massive size, the Galewing extended its razor-sharp talons, grasping the grizzly prize.

Its movements were precise, almost ritualistic, as if performing a sacred rite of the wild. The Galewing tilted its head, examining the head with an intensity that seemed almost contemplative.

Then, with a swift motion, it opened its massive beak, revealing a cavernous maw lined with rows of needle-like teeth.

A wave of sorrow washed over him, gripping his heart. Erik knew well that he couldn't afford to grieve, no matter how much he mourned the loss, as he had a cunning predator to outmaneuver.

With the gruesome meal now consumed, the Galewing directed its attention towards the wreckage of the armored vehicle.

The keen eyes of the creature had noticed the remaining part of the driver's body, which was still secured in the seat.

A mischievous smile tugged at the corners of Erik's lips, forming into a cunning smirk. All the elements of the scenario were playing out under his plan.

By employing the dust cloud as a diversion, he created a smokescreen to mask his actions and secure for himself a significant amount of time. Once the cloud of dust emerged, he activated his Chameleon Veil to conceal himself.

The Galewing was positioned at such a distance that it was impossible to discern the faint ripples created by its movement.

Recognizing the opening, Erik concealed himself in proximity to the protected vehicle, planning to execute a swift decapitation of the ferocious beast upon its arrival for sustenance.

If he didn't seize this opportunity, he would have no other chance to eliminate the Galewing.

As the Galewing reached the vehicle and prepared to feast on the remaining human remains, Erik knew this wasn't yet his moment.

With his muscles tensed, his senses heightened, and every fiber of his being concentrated, he was focused on the task at hand.

The Galewing, with a swift and dismissive gesture, flicked its talons, extracting the headless body from the vehicle's wreckage. It then cast the lifeless form onto the sandy terrain with a powerful and careless motion, as if discarding an unwanted item.



As the body landed, it produced a dull, heavy thud, a sound that seemed to disturb the quiet of the desert. The body came to rest a short distance from the twisted metal of the car.

Then the Galewing paused, surveying its surroundings with an air of regal caution. Its eyes scanned the horizon, its head moving in measured motions.

The creature seemed to assess the safety of its environment, ensuring that no threats loomed nearby before it continued.

This pause was a display of its primal instinct for survival, a moment of vigilance in a world where danger could lurk behind any dune or shadow.

In a measured, almost deliberate manner, the Galewing lowered its beak toward the motionless figure on the ground.

With ease, it tore through the armored suit that had once served as a protective shell for the driver.

The suit, designed to withstand significant force, was no match for the Galewing's powerful beak and sharp talons.

Like paper in the grip of a shredder, the armor yielded to the creature's relentless strength, revealing the tender meat that lay beneath.

As Erik experienced a pang of both sorrow and hate, his emotions were overwhelming. The driver had played a role that extended beyond being just a member of the convoy.

On this dangerous trek through the White Desert, he had stood by as a companion. And so, he was left as nothing more than a small bite-sized portion of this terrifying predator.

However, a mischievous smirk spread across his face as Erik observed the Galewing engrossed in its gruesome feast. He was already savoring the creature's blood. He was going to act, to kill the beast that dared kill one of his men.

He had been longing for this specific moment to arrive, and now it had. As the creature's undivided attention was focused on its meal, it presented him with the ideal chance to make his move. At long last, the time we had been waiting for had come.

He started channeling mana for both Nathaniel's and the Xeridon Anteris's brain crystal pow's brain crystal powers. There was only one thought in the young man's mind: to kill.

The Galewing, so absorbed in its forthcoming feast, had become careless, thus giving Erik the perfect chance to strike.

Erik channeled almost all his mana to his legs and arms and supercharged Nathaniel's power.

If he were to miss, it would have dire consequences, as that would cause the creature's survival. He felt the need to go above and beyond by playing it with excessive force.

In a sudden surge of velocity, Erik burst forth from his place of concealment, his unwavering focus directed toward his target.

In a moment of swift motion, the Galewing's head jolted upwards, its eyes widening in astonishment and the slow dawn of realization. Unfortunately, by the time the monster realized what was happening, it was already too late.

With the intensity of a wound spring, Erik's muscles coiled, his entire being consumed by the singular aim that lay ahead of him.

His strength reached unimaginable heights as his mana surged in rhythm with his heartbeat, each pulse amplifying his power.

With an incredible burst of speed, he propelled himself into the air, ascending to great heights and leaving the desert floor far below.

As he ascended, time appeared to slow down, and his gaze remained fixed on the head of the Galewing.

To avoid the imminent danger, the creature, filled with a sense of fear, attempted to fly away.

However, their realization came after the opportune moment had passed. Erik's fist, gleaming as it harnessed the immense power of his channeled brain crystal powers, descended toward its target with the unstoppable force of a falling meteor.

Erik's fist connected with the Galewing's skull with devastating impact. The force was so immense that it triggered a shocking, instantaneous reaction.

Almost instantly, the creature's head shattered, disintegrating in a gruesome display. A ghastly spray of blood and brain matter erupted outward, forming a macabre halo around the now headless creature.

Amidst this violent spectacle, Erik's focus zeroed in on the brain crystal. He watched as the crystal, once housed within the Galewing's skull, now tumbled through the air before landing on the ground with a muted thud.

[GALEWING KILLED: MANA ABSORBING PROCESS STARTING.]

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

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY ABSORBED, STARTING CONVERTING PROCEDURE.]

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

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY CONVERTED INTO EXPERIENCE. 4908 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

[QUEST COMPLETE. REWARD ISSUED.]

The force of Erik's strike unleashed a potent shockwave that rippled through the air with palpable intensity.

This wave of energy radiated outward from the point of impact, creating visible disturbances in the air.

As it traveled, it sent ripples cascading across the sandy terrain, distorting the smooth surface of the desert like stones skipped across a calm pond.

Erik landed and his feet sank into the soft desert floor, leaving an imprint. As he gazed upon the headless corpse of the Galewing, he witnessed its once-majestic wings, now devoid of life, hanging as it slumped to the ground.

A wave of dark and unsettling satisfaction washed over him, leaving him with a peculiar sense of contentment.

The creature that had instilled terror in their hearts and ended the life of his comrade had been extinguished.

His state of mind remained unchanged as he stood there. The driver, his fallen companion, could not be brought back. He was dead and there was nothing he could do about it.

Though he acknowledged he was not all-powerful and could not rescue everyone, he carried a sense of remorse for his perceived inadequacy.

Erik clenched his fists that his knuckles turned white. His motivation for fighting and risking his own safety was to ensure the protection of his guild members.

Everyone understood just how dangerous this mission was, and those who partook embraced the associated risks.

Even though they had reservations, they placed their trust in him to ensure that no lives were lost, aware that he could fail. If it weren't for that, they wouldn't have agreed to be a part of the mission.

As he glanced toward the convoy's direction, which was visible only as a distant speck, he came to the understanding that the journey was still long and far from being finished.

There would be more threats and more life-or-death struggles.

However, for the time being, at least, there was one less monster wandering around the White Desert, and that was at least something.

