

BIOLOGICAL 681

Chapter 681: The first step to truly be powerful

Erik stood over the lifeless Galewing's body. The once-majestic wings of the creature now lay sprawled out in a final pose that lacked any sense of dignity. As he stood there, a strong feeling of triumph washed over him, mixing with the lingering rush of adrenaline that continued to flow through his veins.

He had done it. A feat of bravery and skill, he had taken down one of the most terrifying creatures known to humanity, a beast that even the most accomplished warriors would think twice about facing.

While Galewings were not classified as the most powerful flying Thaidis, they were undoubtedly beyond the reach of humans. Unless they joined forces to exterminate it, there was no manner in which they could accomplish it. Yet Erik did it. He had single-handedly killed the beast.

When his gaze shifted, he noticed a glistening item covered by the sand, lying close to the creature's severed neck, and to his surprise, it turned out to be its brain crystal.

The source that granted Galewing its formidable powers has now been rendered inert. As Erik stooped to pick it up, a smile appeared on his face, and he couldn't help but notice the cool and smooth feel of it against his skin.

Erik, with the crystal held high above his head, observed how it seized the beams of sunlight, resembling a prism that scattered them into a captivating array of colors.

The light moved and played on the surface, causing the simple act of observing to turn into a symphony of colors, resembling the way sunlight filters through stained glass in a cathedral, casting a vibrant and otherworldly glow over everything it touches.

In those passing instances, Erik granted himself the luxury of being consumed by the immense delight and thrill brought on by his extraordinary accomplishment.

Just like a mountaineer who has conquered an impossible peak, standing at the pinnacle of the world and reveling in the glory of their triumph, it felt similar to that.

The fleeting moment of euphoria that he experienced was a precious and infrequent break, an opportunity to indulge in the taste of triumph that came from his hard work.

In a daring display of bravery, he confronted a deadly predator, used his wits to outsmart it, and emerged as the triumphant victor.

The feeling of satisfaction that he experienced was beyond measure, and this was not only because he had eliminated a threat and saved the convoy.

It was also because he had proven to himself that there were very few individuals in the entire world who could stand up to him now.

His thoughts shifted towards his fallen comrade, the driver whose life had been taken away by this exact creature.

Although the victory couldn't bring him back, it provided a sense of retribution, restoring some semblance of balance, albeit in a small way.

With a firm grip, Erik clenched the crystal in his hand, vowing to work on honing his skills and growing stronger.

While showing a deep sense of respect, he cleaned the surface, removing any traces of brain matter, blood, and sand that were still there.

As he held the crystal in his hand, he could feel its coolness and weight, a tangible representation of the creature's once-great strength.

With each step, he could feel the weight of it in his pocket, as if it were a sacred talisman, reminding him of his triumphant victory.

After that, his focus shifted to the lifeless body of Galewing, fixating on the wide-open wound on its head, which resulted from his powerful punch.

The blood continued to seep out, forming a pool on the sandy ground beneath. Erik took out his flask and collected some of the creature's blood. The liquid, which had a dark and viscous appearance, was infused with mana.

He was brimming with anticipation. Then he grasped the flask and brought it to his lips, taking a satisfying sip. As the blood flowed down his throat, he felt a surge of energy coursing through his body. As his muscles tensed, a noticeable change occurred in his senses, sharpening them.

Erik couldn't help but break into a wide grin that spread across his entire face. He was aware of the fact that by consuming the blood of the creature and getting its brain crystal, he would gain a formidable new power. He was overcome with an overwhelming sense of elation that was difficult to put into words.

<SYSTEM! SPEND AS MANY DNA POINTS AS POSSIBLE BUT I WANT THIS POWER ASAP! > Erik shouted in his head.

[THIS WOULD REQUIRE SPENDING 2000 DNA POINTS TOTAL FOR THE DNA AND THE BRAIN CRYSTAL POWER ABSORPTION. ARE YOU SURE?]

<YES! >

[GALEWING'S DNA ACQUIRED. STARTING THE ANALYSIS.]

[ANALYSIS COMPLETE.]

[1000 DNA POINTS USED TO ABSORB INSTANTLY THE THAID'S DNA. PROCEDURE COMPLETE.]

[PROCEDURE COMPLETE.]

The process of assimilating the Galewing's DNA was a one-of-a-kind occurrence for Erik, setting it apart from any other experience he had ever undergone. Once the system finished the assimilation process, an overwhelming surge of mana, unparalleled in its intensity, engulfed him.

The mana, with its incredible potency and density, had such a firm presence that it felt almost tangible, as if it were physically surrounding him.

It felt as though I was partaking in a mystical ritual, where the act of drinking was akin to immersing oneself in a legendary spring, where the water possessed not only the qualities of a typical liquid but also the transformative power of a vibrant elixir of life.

The way he reacted made it seem like he had consumed a substance that contained liquid gold, a substance that was infused with a potent and almost heavenly energy.

The energy that flowed through him was so powerful that it resonated at a frequency beyond the ordinary, comparable to the crescendo of a symphony orchestra where each note was filled with such clarity and intensity that it almost overwhelmed the senses.

The sensation was both exhilarating and humbling, like a mortal being granted a fleeting glimpse into the realm of gods.

The merging of the Galewing's majestic and formidable essence with his own made him feel as if he was being given a part of the prowess it possessed. But what amazed him was that all of this came from its blood.

The creature's mana was so high and pure that it still lingered in the blood. It was incredible.

The effects of this were not only immediate but also profound. The rapid alternating between tension and relaxation in his muscles gave the impression that they were getting accustomed to a novel energy.

With a heightened sense of awareness, his senses became so acute that they reached an almost surreal level of clarity, magnifying each sight and sound to an intense degree. His body seemed to go through a process of recalibration, making adjustments to accommodate the sudden surge of power.

Erik experienced a sense of invigoration and rejuvenation, as though the accumulated effects of years of wear and tear had been erased. His cells seemed to sing in harmony, a symphony of biological perfection that left him in awe of what he had just achieved.

The sensation that washed over him was one of utter completeness, as if a puzzle that had been missing a piece had found its perfect fit, leaving him feeling more whole and satisfied than ever.

Erik stood there for a moment, immersed in this newfound sensation, filled with awe and wonder as he contemplated the astonishing complexity of his own body.

Despite this, he had more work to do. As Erik extended his hand into his pocket, he could feel his fingers wrapping around the brain crystal that he had got.

He pulled it out and then took a moment to admire it once more. The essence of the Galewing was held within this small, glimmering object. If he were to consume it, he would be able to assimilate its power and make it his own.

The pounding of his heart in his chest was not due to fear, but rather from sheer anticipation. This moment held great significance as it marked a pivotal turning point in his journey toward personal growth and strength. As if showing great reverence, he raised the crystal to his lips with a sense of ceremony.

After having swallowed it, Erik felt a surge of energy that was new to him, surpassing any previous experiences. It appeared a dam had burst inside of him, unleashing an overwhelming surge of untapped potential that flowed through his veins and permeated every aspect of his existence.

He experienced a fiery sensation, as if his senses were set ablaze, and every nerve ending tingled with an electrifying surge of newfound power.

[GALEWING'S BRAIN CRYSTAL ACQUIRED. STARTING THE ANALYSIS.]

[ANALYSIS COMPLETE.]

[1000 DNA POINTS USED. BRAIN CRYSTAL POWER ABSORPTION COMPLETE.]

A sense of euphoria overcame him, causing a wide grin to spread across his face. He had done it. He had slain the Galewing, claimed its power, and emerged victorious. The level of joy he experienced was impossible to put into words, a blend of triumph, relief, and an overwhelming sense of potential for the future.

Chapter 682: Aerokinesis

"Analysis," Erik said.

[Host Information]

NAME: Erik Romano

AGE: 17

POWER LEVEL: 374

SYSTEM LEVEL: 46

EXPERIENCE: 80898/115600

DNA POINTS: 23550

HEALTH: 3440 /3440

MANA: 3370 /3370

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 176

INTELLIGENCE: 218

DEXTERITY: 156

ENERGY: 167

Available Attributes points: 0

{Powers}

[Biological Super Computer Powers]

(...)

[Host's Powers]

(...)

AEROKYNESIS Cσ1A RANKED

(This innate ability grants the wielder control over wind generation and manipulation. The potential of this power is intricately linked to the user's proficiency, affording them the capacity for both offensive and defensive maneuvers, as well as the versatility to engage targets both near and far.)

{Skills}

(...)

Erik stood there, still reveling in the newfound power coursing through his veins.

"Aerokinesis, uh?"

The young man was in disbelief. This was a power that would allow him to jump to the next level. It was powerful, belonging to the branch of the elemental powers. Based on what the system told him, this power allowed to control the wind but it was not like Becker's power. The man could do some very bizarre things, like materializing wind weapons thanks to mana. Instead, Aerokinesis was more basic.

One could send wind blades, or create some protective winds, or even fly if mana was enough. However, it couldn't do out-of-the-ordinary things. This didn't mean it was a weak power, but it wasn't as unique as Becker's one, which was related to wind too.

Exactly like him, though, this was a power that could turn the tide of any battle and make him a force to be reckoned with.

For a moment, his mind raced with the possibilities. Could he fly? The thought was tempting, but he quickly reined in his excitement.

Such a feat would likely require an enormous amount of mana, something he was still in short supply of. That was the crux of the matter. For all his physical prowess and the array of powers at his disposal, his mana pool remained his limiting factor.

He needed to level up, to accumulate as many Energy Points as possible to truly unlock his potential.

As these thoughts swirled in his mind, Erik suddenly remembered the convoy. He turned his gaze to the horizon, scanning for any sign of the vehicles. They were but tiny specks in the distance now, almost swallowed by the vast expanse of the desert.

By reaching into his backpack, he pulled out his radio, grateful that he had the foresight to keep it on him. "Kael, do you hear me?" he spoke into the device.

Kael's incredulous voice followed a moment of static. "Erik? Is that you? We thought you were... What happened?"

Erik couldn't help being slightly offended by the lack of faith Kael showed. Though, the scowl quickly turned into a radiant smile. "I killed it, Kael. The Thaid is dead. The Galewing is no more."

There was a pause on the other end, long enough for Erik to imagine Kael's jaw-dropping. "You did what? You killed a flying Thaid? Are you serious?"

"As a heart attack."

Another pause, this one filled with awe. "That's... that's incredible, Erik. But, this... means that..."

Erik chuckled. "Don't even think about leaving the body here, Kael. This will fetch us a huge amount of money."

"Wait, Erik, how are we going to explain this? Killing a flying Thaid is no small feat. People will ask questions," Kael's voice crackled through the radio, tinged with concern.

Erik already thought about that, and there wasn't a single problem. "We won't have to explain anything. We're going to sell the body to Lysa. She will take care of the matter, and won't tell anyone who killed it. I trust her that much, not because she wouldn't do it, but because it is not convenient for her. If words spread about this feat, people would start contacting us to kill such monsters.

This would mean we would have less time to deal with her, and she would earn less."

There was a brief pause before Kael responded, "But wouldn't be beneficial to us if we do these types of quests?"

"Yes, but such dangerous hunts require time, something I do not have. Only I can do them after all. Besides, I want to keep this a secret." Erik confirmed. "A flying Thaid's body will fetch a high price, not to mention its research value. We won't have to answer to anyone, and we'll make a good profit through Lysa. That is, if the guild members stay silent."

Kael was uncertain about what to do. "Are you sure? This is a monumental achievement. This means your strength is comparable to that of the Fierce Lioness."

"Yeah, and that is a problem. People are already keeping an eye on me because of our results. Imagine if the word that I'm that strong started circulating."

"Understood," Kael responded, the awe in his voice now replaced by the crisp tone of a soldier. "We are on our way to fetch you."

"Good. I'll wait."

Erik clipped the radio back onto his backpack and took a deep breath, savoring the feeling of the warm wind against his skin, a wind he could now control.

He scanned the sprawling surroundings, his gaze locked onto a distant speck that, with each passing moment, grew larger on the horizon.

"I have little time available..."

Erik started channeling mana through the newly established neural link. He wished for the wind to increase its speed, and then it started moving and brushing against his face with stronger force. The wind increased in intensity, moving the sand beneath and throwing it into the air. A small whirlwind appeared.

It was barely visible at the start, but the sand quickly entered it, creating a visual spectacle. The whirlwind was small, hardly visible from the convoy. However, since he didn't want to risk it being seen, he stopped channeling mana.

"This is what Becker felt, uh? No wonder he was so arrogant. This ability feels like let me control the planet itself."

Erik's anticipation swelled as the speck on the horizon gradually took on recognizable forms. Then, emerging from the shroud of haze, armored and dirt-smeared vehicles came into focus, their engines resonating like a harmonious chorus of mechanical beasts.

Through the windshields of these approaching vehicles, individual faces emerged. There was Kael, Erik's steadfast second-in-command, whose loyalty was unwavering.

Mira sat in the car behind, her face a canvas of conflicting emotions. Relief and worry warred within her eyes, painting a portrait of someone torn between happiness at seeing Erik and anxiety for his well-being. Her concern for him was as clear as a beacon in the night, unmistakable and bright.

Among the convoy were others, men and women, who had embarked on this dangerous journey with Erik. They had placed their lives in the hands of his leadership, like sailors entrusting their fate to the captain amidst a tumultuous sea.

As the convoy halted in front of Erik, the engines' roar faded, giving way to a serene quiet, much like the calm after a storm.

The surrounding dust settled, like a curtain drawing to a close on a dramatic scene. Doors opened, and people emerged in a cascade, their expressions an intricate tapestry of emotions. Relief was etched on their faces for their leader's survival, mingled with awe and admiration for his almost mythical feat.

Their gazes, Mira's included, turned to look at the dead Thaid. They looked at it in disbelief, their faces mirroring the shock of sailors who saw a ghost ship.

"What the fuck...?"

"It's dead!"

"The guild master did it. He did it for real!"

Their eyes were transfixed on the scene that unfolded before them: the mighty Galewing, once a majestic force of nature, now lay as a defeated giant upon the harsh desert sands.

Its formidable frame, which had once soared through the skies with regal grace, was now motionless.

Beside this colossal creature stood Erik, their leader, an embodiment of triumph against overwhelming odds. The contrast between his human form and the immense size of the Galewing painted a picture of David and Goliath, a visual narrative of courage and determination prevailing against seemingly insurmountable odds.

The air was heavy with the metallic tang of blood, a scent that mingled with the dry, earthy aroma of the desert. The smell permeated the surroundings, an invisible yet potent presence that underscored the gravity of what had transpired.

At that moment, this 17-year-old kid looked like a monster to them. This was no easy feat for anyone with 20 years of experience, yet this kid, barely of age, killed it.

At that moment, the air got filled with murmurs and whispers. Erik's stature as a revered leader was undeniable, but that wasn't all. As it became clear, this was no ordinary man. The not-so-hidden looks of disbelief among his loyal comrades turned into looks of admiration. It was at that moment they realized that joining this guild had been the best decision of their life.

If their leader was that strong, nothing could stop them.

Chapter 683: Tonight we feast

Mira's boots kicked up sand as she sprinted, her eyes locked onto her lover.

"ERIK!" Her voice was tinged with a blend of relief and disbelief.

As soon as she reached him, she threw her arms around him and pulled him into a tight embrace. Erik reciprocated her gesture by wrapping his arms around her as if he needed the reassurance that she was indeed real and not just a figment of his imagination.

"Are you ok? You are not injured, are you?"

"No, I'm fine," he said with a beaming smile. That reassured her, but her heart was still beating fast.

But then, a murmur rippled through the crowd of mercenaries who had gathered. Mira pulled away slightly, following their gazes to the colossal figure lying on the ground. Her eyes widened in shock as she saw the Galewing's shattered head—its feathers now stained with its own blood.

She quickly assessed the shock Erik unleashed had to be pretty high if he destroyed the beast's head. She knew Erik's brain crystal power was strong, but the brain crystal itself didn't have that much mana. So, she wondered how he did it.

"Did you... Did you really do this?" Mira said. She still couldn't fully believe it. "I didn't know what to think when Kael claimed you did."

Erik looked into her eyes and nodded. "Well, the body speaks for itself, no? I was the only person around here."

As the words left his lips, the crowd of mercenaries erupted into a cacophony of chatter higher than before. They circled the fallen beast, their eyes wide. Whispers spread like wildfire.

"I can't believe he took down a Galewing," one mercenary said.

"Do you know how strong you must be to kill one of these things?" another said.

"I've seen nothing like it in my entire life. It is a first to me," a third said.

It was as if the guild members were seeing Erik for the first time—not just as their leader, but as something more. They couldn't tell if the actual monster was him or the Galewing. He was only 17, for fuck's sake!

Erik took the time to listen to the comments, questions, and speculations expressed by those present. When it came to showcasing his fighting abilities, he had always been reserved and hesitant to reveal the full extent.

He couldn't say he had multiple brain crystal powers, but he didn't talk about his strength either, as it was clear he was much stronger than he should, considering what the public knew about the number of his neural links.

He had a big scheme in the works, and it was imperative for him to keep his true capabilities hidden, as he relied on the element of surprise. However, at this moment, as he stood next to the motionless body of one of the most dreaded beings on the planet, it appeared the illusion he had meticulously constructed had been shattered. At least among his guild members.

Aiden and Lila made their way through the crowd, their eyes meeting Erik's. "How did you do it, Erik? How did you kill a Galewing?" Aiden asked, his voice tinged with disbelief.

For quite a while, Aiden had been fulfilling the role of leader for his team. From a young age, he committed himself to training. While he may not have been recognized as a genius, he definitely displayed intelligence that exceeded the norm, just like Kael, Lila, and Mira.

Yet, this kid, barely an adult, achieved something not even veterans could hope to achieve. Through his ambitious endeavors, he built an empire, or at least he was steadily progressing towards that outcome. In all sincerity, he couldn't help but feel a twinge of envy towards him. Lila was the opposite, she was simply happy for her friend's achievement.

She didn't know how hard was to lead, contrary to Aiden, and didn't really care about it. Of course, she aspired to be stronger, but she realized Erik had to be a genius, or at least have some secret. Otherwise, it wasn't possible for him to be that strong already.

Erik noticed both looks on Aiden and Lila, one of envy and the other of eagerness. He looked at them and explained what had happened. "I couldn't attack or reach it while it was in the sky. So, I had to bring it down here."

Lila raised an eyebrow, intrigued. "Really? What did you do?"

"I created a diversion," Erik said, choosing his words. "I used my powers to kick up a massive cloud of sand and dust, obscuring its vision. Then I hid under the car. From the sky, it couldn't see me, and its massive size made it unable to peer down the vehicle. But he wouldn't have seen me regardless, as I was covered by sand."

Aiden and Lila exchanged glances, absorbing the information. It was a believable story, especially given the circumstances. They hadn't seen what Erik had done, but the result spoke for itself.

"Once it was on the ground, distracted by the driver's body, I took my chance and killed it," Erik concluded, keeping his gaze steady.

The explanation seemed to satisfy them, but the implications of Erik's actions still hung in the air. To kill a creature like a Galewing, subterfuges or not, a mercenary would typically need to be at the α level. But even that wasn't a guarantee of success. It also depended on the amount of mana one had, and the type of brain crystal power one possessed.

Aiden broke the silence. "Did you hide your strength?"

Erik nodded, acknowledging what his friend said. "To be honest, I did."

"So, the guy at the practical test back then said the truth," Lila said. "That was clever." Then a radiant smile blossomed on her face.

"Indeed. But he was also weak. What I said to him wasn't by any means false."

Erik then sighed. His eyes swept over the faces of those gathered around him, settling into a stern gaze. He then turned toward the lifeless Galewing sprawled on the sand and spoke, his voice carrying a weight that demanded attention.

"Guys, keep this a secret. I don't want unnecessary trouble. I will tell you this now. If I learn that someone else knows about this, you will all face the consequences."

"Uh? Why?"

Erik approached the person who spoke. His face concealed by the mask he wore didn't let his gaze come out. Yet, his impressive build and the mana ripples he spread in the air alone spoke volumes.

The air grew thick with tension, the gravity of Erik's words settling over the group like a heavy fog. Kael, Mira, Lila, and Aiden exchanged glances, but remained silent.

They were Erik's friends and knew he wouldn't do anything bad to them, but they understood how serious he was about the matter.

But it wasn't just for them that the message was clear. The others, too, understood they couldn't mess things up. Erik would not hesitate to enforce his warning, and given how vague his words were, they didn't know what he meant by talking about 'consequences'. Based on what he did here, he was plenty able to make them disappear all.

The atmosphere became even heavier than before as everyone got the hidden message, each person contemplating the weight of the secret they now carried.

Finally, a mercenary broke the silence, her voice tinged with resolve. "I won't tell anyone." Her words seemed to open a floodgate, as another mercenary chimed in, echoing her sentiment. "Neither will I." One by one, the others followed suit, their voices forming a chorus of pledges that filled the air.

Erik looked at each of them, his eyes searching for any hint of insincerity, but finding none. It seemed they understood to not mess up with him, as he wouldn't have mercy. With a nod, Erik acknowledged their vows of silence, hoping the trust he was placing in them would not be misplaced.

Then, with a shift in his tone that signaled a return to the task at hand, he spoke. "Good, now bring the Galewing's body onto the vehicles. Oh, and tonight, we feast."

The atmosphere seemed to lift almost instantly. The serious, almost fearful faces turned into radiant smiles. Cheers broke out among the mercenaries, replacing the solemn words that ran through their ranks.

The prospect of a feast, a celebration of Erik's victory, was a welcome change. It was as if their guild master's words had breathed new life into them, rekindling the companionship that the severity of the situation had momentarily overshadowed.

With renewed energy, the group set to work. Several mercenaries moved toward the fallen Galewing, coordinating their efforts to hoist the massive creature.

Ropes were thrown, pulleys were set up, and slowly but surely, the beast's body was lifted onto one of the vans. It was a laborious task, but the promise of a feast and the thrill of their recent victory seemed to fuel their efforts.

Chapter 684: The Black Box

The sun had just ascended, bathing the vast desert in a golden radiance. The white sands stretched out like an endless sheet of parchment, unmarked and pristine, as Erik and the convoy continued their journey.

Everyone was in high spirits. They just reached the area where the plane was believed to have crashed, and every passing minute brought them closer to finish the quest that had led them on this dangerous expedition.

Erik leaned forward, his eyes meeting Kael's through the rearview mirror. "How long until we reach the black box's location?"

Kael glanced at the GPS, then back at Erik. "Half an hour, give or take."

Erik nodded, settling back into his seat. In a landscape as uncertain as this, every minute held tremendous value, making a half-hour appear substantial despite its short duration.

The area through which they were journeying was incredibly vast, appearing to stretch on endlessly with its sea of sand and rock, and the black box could be located anywhere within it. The crash has the potential to propel it a considerable distance away from the main wreckage, which would further complicate their search efforts.

While the vehicle continued to move steadily forward, Erik's mind churned with a multitude of possibilities. The black box was crucial. The key to understanding what had happened to the plane was held by it, and, even more importantly, it had the potential to offer them valuable information that would assist them in their mission.

With a glance out of the window, his eyes immediately began scanning the horizon. The desert stretched out before them, its vastness both awe-inspiring and terrifying.

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While the armored vehicle made its way through the rough and uneven terrain, Erik and Kael, with anticipation and curiosity, peered intently through the windows, meticulously examining the panoramic view of the surrounding landscape.

The desert had a way of swallowing things whole, erasing traces of anything that dared to intrude upon its vastness. But today, it seemed, the desert was willing to give up some of its secrets.

"There," Kael pointed. As Erik followed his gaze, he was met with a chilling sight - fragments of twisted metal and shards, remnants of a once intact plane, strewn across the sandy landscape, resembling the scattered remains of a mechanical creature. They knew the plane was likely destroyed, but seeing the wreckage in person was unsettling.

As they neared the wreckage, the vehicle gradually slowed down, causing its tires to crunch over the smaller debris in its path. As they watched, both men experienced a profound sense of solemnity that seemed to envelop them. These fragments were all that remained of a journey that had ended in tragedy. But they weren't there to mourn.

No, their goal was to find the cargo, as the success of the mission depended on that.

"We are here." Kael got a serious look on his face as soon as they got closer to the partial wreckage.

"Yeah, but we are not sure where the cargo is," Erik said. "It could be scattered around the desert for what we know."

With its engine idling and the dust settling around it, the armored vehicle came to a halt. With synchronized movements, Erik and Kael exchanged a knowing glance, their eyes filled with resolve. A sense of purpose resonated within them as they walked out, each clasping a handheld scanner capable of finding the black box's position.

Both were on edge, as Thaid's could come out of the sand at any moment.

"Go check the wreckage for the cargo. Be thorough and be careful. We don't know what made it crash. It could still be around here."

The sound of affirmatives filled the air as the men and women wasted no time in getting out of their armored vehicles upon hearing his words. Filled with a strong sense of determination, they approached the wreckage of the partially destroyed plane, carefully examining the scattered debris, hoping to discover any clue that could lead them to the cargo they had been entrusted to locate.

At the same time, Erik and Kael shifted their focus and directed their attention toward the handheld scanners they were holding. They began moving in a synchronized manner, fixated on the readings, with every beep and blip narrowing the search area. The desert sun blazed overhead, its intense heat ignored by both men.

The scanners beeped, each a hint they were close yet not close enough. After some research, Kael's scanner emitted a continuous beep. He looked at Erik, knowing he understood what it meant. "I think I've found it."

With his scanner, Erik moved to Kael's side and confirmed the find. Kael lowered himself to the ground and started digging, his hands revealing the black box from its sandy burial site. As he raised it from the ground, taking care to remove any remnants of sand, his eyes met Erik's, and a smile appeared on his features.

"Let's find out what happened," Erik said, his voice tinged with a resolve that seemed to lift the weight of the moment, if only just a little.

Meanwhile, as time passed, the men and women of Erik's convoy spread out across the crash site, scanning the scattered debris with their eyes and preparing their hands to sift through the wreckage.

Amid all the chaos, their eyes caught sight of something that grabbed their attention—wooden boxes. Some of them were still in one piece, while others were broken and scattered both inside the hollowed-out fuselage of the plane and in the surrounding vicinity.

"Over here!" As one of the mercenaries shouted out, he motioned to the rest of the group while using a crowbar to open one of the sturdy wooden boxes. With a creak, the lid gave way, allowing the contents to be revealed.

A team member, who was equipped with gloves, took the time to inspect a box located just a few feet away from the wreckage. Using a small tool, she manipulated the lock to gain access and then lifted the lid.

As the mercenaries opened each box and assessed its contents, they marked them for further inspection.

"There is another box here!" shouted another mercenary.

Erik heard the man and then remembered his men and women. "Remember to find those weapons!" He was referring to the brain crystal weapons, the main thing they were asked to retrieve.

The team worked in an organized manner, accounting for and securely handle every single box. As they completed their task, a feeling of collective accomplishment washed over them. However, based on the information shared by their employer with the guild, it became clear that there were likely many more boxes yet to be found. Their job wasn't done yet.

Erik held the black-box in his hand. He observed the device with a pensive look on his face. That, until Kael voiced a question. "What do you think had happened?"

"I was wondering the same thing," Erik began, his brow furrowed as he gazed at the scattered wreckage. "There's no way we can learn much from this alone. We'd need to examine the plane itself, what's left of it, or the black box to make any real deductions."

Kael nodded, a hint of uncertainty in his eyes. "Yeah. To be honest, I suspect it was a Thaid."

Erik's lips tightened, skepticism clear in his voice. "That's the likely cause, but planes usually fly much higher than where Flying Thaid's roam. Could it have been a wyvern?"

The other man shrugged, his gaze drifting to the horizon, lost in thought. "Don't wyverns usually stick to mountains? Besides, I don't know of anything that could fly that high."

"Yeah," Erik said, his voice trailing off as he considered the possibilities. "But it's the only creature capable of something like this. Unless..."

The pause hung heavy in the air. Kael's eyes narrowed, a dawning realization reflecting in them. "It was man-made..."

Erik turned to face him, his expression turning solemn. "Indeed."

"This plane carried precious cargo," Erik began, his eyes narrowing as he pieced together the puzzle. "If someone on board got greedy, they could've sabotaged everything."

Kael leaned against a fragment of the wreckage, his arms folded, a skeptical look crossing his face. "But that's risking their own life, and they likely didn't survive. What are the odds of surviving a fall from that height, not to mention the Thaid's in the desert, all while injured?"

Erik shook his head, a grim certainty in his tone. "Almost none," he said. "No, not 'almost none.' None at all." His gaze fixed on the debris.

"What do we do now?" Kael's voice carried a hint of fear. His eyes flickered with the uncertainty of their situation. "We got lucky with the Galewing, but what if there's more, or something even worse lurking nearby?"

Erik, standing with a resolved stance, met Kael's gaze. His face was set, a mix of determination and an underlying sense of duty. "I'll buy you as much time as I can," he said. "Just promise me you will keep Mira safe."

Kael's expression hardened. "I'll do what I can," he replied, his voice steady yet laden with the weight of the responsibility he had just accepted.

Chapter 685: Scorpion (1)

With the intention of covering more ground, the convoy members made the choice to spread out. Their eyes scanned the ground while they carried shovels and metal detectors in their hands.

The wind in this part of the desert was notorious for shifting sands, capable of burying objects in a matter of minutes. They knew that if more parts of the cargo were out there, the desert could have claimed them, hiding them beneath layers of sand.

"Keep your detectors on the highest sensitivity," one of the team leaders instructed, adjusting the settings on his own device. "And mark any spot where you get a powerful signal. We'll dig there."

The group of mercenaries systematically moved in a grid pattern, ensuring that they covered every inch of the area surrounding the crash site. At intermittent intervals, the sound of a beeping metal detector would fill the air, causing the individual holding it to kneel and begin digging.

"Did you find something?"

"No man, just other debris from the plane!"

"Fuck... We are going nowhere like this!"

Although their searches often yielded nothing more than plane wreckage, they persevered, fully aware that valuable cargo might be concealed just a few inches below the ground.

"Help me dig here!" a woman said.

"Here too," another said.

As their labor persisted, the once mild breeze gained strength, evolving into forceful gusts that playfully traversed the entire expanse. As the gusts of wind blew, they picked up the sand and created tiny vortexes that twirled in an upward direction.

As the sun lingered prominently overhead, its rays created captivating shadows that elegantly interacted with the twirling columns of sand, resulting in an atmosphere that seemed almost mystical.

As the wind played its whimsical tune, the swirling sand transformed into tiny dancers, their graceful movements weaving an intricate and dynamic tapestry against the breathtaking backdrop of the desert.

Although it may have only been a short period, it felt like hours as they covered a substantial portion of the area. Despite the lack of additional cargo findings, they eliminated certain options, thus narrowing down the potential burial sites for the cargo.

"We've done what we can for now," one of the mercenaries said, wiping sweat and sand from his brow. "Let's report back to the guild master and Kael."

A wave of agreement spread through the group as they nodded in unison. Given the circumstances, they tried to search the area. They realized it was time to come together, evaluate their progress, and strategically determine their future course of action.

With their spirits dampened by disappointment and their minds burdened by unanswered queries, they returned to Erik and Kael, ready to recount the findings they had unearthed.

The sight of them coming towards him caught Erik's attention, their faces showing a combination of frustration and concern etched with worry. "Boss, our team has thoroughly combed through every inch of the surrounding area. Aside from those wooden boxes we found in the wreckage, there doesn't seem to be anything else," a man reported, his voice tinged with disappointment.

"We even checked for signs that the wind might have buried some of the cargo under the sand, but no luck," a woman said, brushing a stray lock of hair from her face.

Erik, understanding the circumstances, nodded in acknowledgement. Prior to starting the search, he knew already that it wouldn't be a simple task, and he didn't have any strong feelings about not finding anything significant.

"Alright, it's possible that the cargo was scattered over a larger area during the crash, or someone else got to it before we did. Either way, we've done what we can here."

Amid preparing to address the upcoming course of action, Alina's voice broke the silence, resonating with a piercing and pressing tone. "Something's approaching!"

There was a noticeable shift in the atmosphere, transitioning from disappointment to a heightened sense of alertness. With a narrowing of his eyes, Erik barked out orders. "Everyone, back to your positions! Man, the artillery and ready your weapons!"

As the threat materialized, Erik's team, galvanized by the imminent danger, cast aside their weariness and sprang into action.

They moved, using the strategic layout of their vehicles in the White Desert. The vehicles were positioned in a staggered formation, with each one set at an angle to the others.

This strategic placement ensured that only one vehicle could be directly targeted or drawn into an attack at any time.

The team members clambered onto these armored vehicles with urgency, taking up positions behind the mounted weaponry.

They positioned themselves behind machine guns and missile launchers, each member having a clear line of sight for defense while also maintaining the safety of the other vehicles in the formation.

Rifles clicked and clacked as they were loaded, the metallic sound echoing in the vast desert.

Scopes emitted soft, mechanical whirs as they were adjusted, each click denoting a fine-tuned calibration.

The subtle feeling of mana being channeled through neural links filled the air, almost in harmony with the tense atmosphere.

The team was not only primed for combat but also ready for the possibility of a swift retreat, the readiness in their actions underscored by the symphony of preparedness resonating around them.

With binoculars pressed to his eyes, Erik stood on one of the vehicles, sweeping the expansive landscape. A surge of gratitude overwhelmed him as he thought about Alina. Her abilities had given them the precious seconds they needed to prepare.

Despite everything, what stood out the most to him was the fact that hiring her had proven to be a wise decision.

While he relied on the system to alert him to imminent threats, the others found her power, despite its lack of strength, to be valuable in terms of preventing any surprise attacks.

"Anything?" he asked, turning to Kael, also scanning the area.

"Nothing yet, but it's only a matter of time." Kael's eyes never left the scope of his rifle. He had a look of focus on his face, knowing that the approaching Thaid was bound to be strong.

"We have to thank Alina after that," Erik said.

"Indeed, but nothing will make sure we may leave unscathed."

The merciless wind let out a bone-chilling howl, causing the mercenaries to shudder involuntarily. The desert seemed to be in a state of anticipation, as if it was holding its breath, eagerly waiting for whatever was approaching to make itself known.

Erik's hands tightened around the binoculars, ensuring a firm grasp. He was aware and had the understanding that the initial moments of contact were of utmost importance, as they would set the tone for the ensuing fight.

"Stay alert." Erik knew it was useless to remind that to his team, but he couldn't help himself. They were his precious comrades, after all. "The moment you see anything, you shoot at it. No hesitations."

[WARNING. HOSTILE DETECTED.]

From beneath one of the armored vehicles, a colossal figure emerged, causing the air to resonate with a thunderous whoosh and sand to erupt into the sky.

As it came out of the sand, the creature's massive form created a fleeting shadow that covered the area, wreaking havoc on the vehicle and its occupants, and crashing back to the ground with a seismic impact.

While bursting outward in a chaotic display, clouds filled with sand and debris disperse in all directions, obscuring the view with a hazy curtain. With the dust settling around them, the mercenaries were able to see the foe they were up against.

"It's a Scorpion!"

The beast stood tall at three meters and stretching an astonishing six meters. The creature was a nightmarish amalgamation of a scorpion and some otherworldly beast.

The beast glistened under the relentless desert sun. It stood a formidable three meters tall and extended six meters. Its body, encased in a dark, chitinous exoskeleton, seemed impervious, absorbing light like a void. The armor's ebony sheen contrasted starkly against the bright white sand.

Clustered across its head were many black, beady eyes, each reflecting a minuscule, distorted image of the surrounding landscape. These eyes scanned the environment with an unsettling alertness, indicative of its predatory nature.

The creature's tail was a spectacle in itself—long and sinuous, ending in a venomous stinger that dripped with a deadly neurotoxin. The mere sight of it, with its lethal payload capable of felling a grown man in seconds, demanded the immediate attention of Erik's team.

Its legs, six, were sturdy and thick, supporting its bulky, heavily armored body with ease. Each leg ended in sharp, hooked claws, well-adapted for both combat and navigating the arid terrain of its desert habitat.

As a carnivore, this creature was an apex predator, preying on smaller desert inhabitants with ruthless efficiency. Its aggressive and territorial nature, coupled with its skills as an expert ambush predator, made it a fearsome adversary. Few dared challenge it, given its formidable defenses.

Its brain crystal power added to the already terrifying nature of the Scorpion. The creature had the uncanny ability to manipulate the very terrain around it at a small degree.

Just a single thought had the ability to make the sand beneath their feet shift and rearrange itself, forming snares or obstacles to ensnare their prey.

With few natural predators to challenge its dominance, the creature stood as a testament to the unforgiving nature of its harsh desert environment.

Chapter 686: Scorpion (2)

Erik's command sliced through the tension, sharp and urgent. "Fire at will! Use everything you've got!"

Without hesitation, the mercenaries responded, their movements swift. A thunderous cacophony erupted as they let loose a relentless volley of bullets and artillery shells.

Yet, their faces fell as they watched the Scorpion's armor absorb the onslaught with ease. Each impact seemed futile, the creature's defenses impenetrable.

A mercenary cursed under his breath, a mix of disbelief and frustration coloring his tone. "Shit! It's like it's made of Aclatium!"

"Shut up and keep firing!"

Their hands worked in a mechanical manner, reloading and firing, even as their expressions betrayed the sinking realization of their attacks' ineffectiveness.

Even though the attacks were harmless, the Scorpion showed its distaste towards them. Its body was affected by the shock waves caused by the attacks, causing painful ripples and filling it with anger.

The beast's brain crystal power activated, and in an instant, a wall of sand materialized, shielding it from the onslaught of incoming attacks. The sand mana reinforced wall absorbed the projectiles with a soft thud, making them lose their impact.

With unwavering determination, the mercenaries who possessed brain crystal powers capable of long-range attacks entered the chaos, unleashing a spellbinding show of lights and energy to ensure they were not left behind in the fight. Arrows, energy bolts, and a multitude of other projectiles, all powered by mana, were launched at the beast in a continuous barrage of attacks.

A strange and guttural sound escaped from the Scorpion, serving as a clear sign it was in great pain. Its armor was penetrated by the attacks, resulting in shallow wounds on its body.

Yet, despite these measures, they were unable to overcome the power of the beast. Although the creature had many wounds, they were superficial and did not significantly breach its tough exoskeleton or its mana protective film.

As Erik observed the Scorpion, he noticed how it effortlessly shrugged off the attacks, its tail twitching in a menacing manner, as if expecting a retaliatory strike.

While considering all the details, he assessed the situation with a critical eye. Because of their lack of expertise, his mercenaries proved to be no match for the formidable Scorpion and were unable to eliminate it.

Although this could be an excellent learning experience, its armor, impenetrable to these kinds of attacks, and its brain crystal power that allowed it to manipulate the very terrain, made it impossible for them to kill it.

He knew their actions would only result in the wastage of ammunition and energy. Prompted by a split-second choice, Erik propelled himself off the vehicle and ran towards the beast.

The Scorpion seemed to perceive an added danger as the young man neared. With a swift motion, the creature raised its sand barrier even higher and redirected its attention towards him, its menacing dark tail poised for a lethal strike. With a swift and swooping motion, the beast swung its tail.

Without even turning his head, Erik dodged to the side, ensuring that he never lost sight of the beast, as he was determined not to let it escape his gaze.

With a loud crash, the tail descended, causing the venomous stinger to crash on the ground and resulting in a billowing cloud of sand and debris being thrown into the air because of the force of the impact.

However, Erik remained steadfast and did not let his focus waver. A resolute expression was obvious on his face. His team's ability to continue their search relied on him taking the life of the beast.

He weaved through the Scorpion's subsequent attacks. The tail moving around, sometimes like a whip, some others like a spear, each dodge and sidestep calculated to bring him closer to the creature. In order to instill a sense of security, he wanted to create a spectacle that would show to his men and women that they were safe in his care.

With frustration apparent, the Scorpion emitted a hiss while its eyes darted around, desperately trying to anticipate Erik's actions.

But the young man was too fast, too agile. With remarkable grace and quick thinking, he evaded the creature's claw and rolled underneath it, positioning himself beneath its vulnerable underbelly.

This was his moment. As Erik closed his hand into a fist, he could feel the unbridled strength coursing through his veins. He didn't need to channel mana for this.

The sheer force of his physical strength was more than sufficient to obliterate the creature. Without making a single noise, he delivered a fierce punch targeting the belly of the Scorpion. He didn't even need to choose a weak spot, as he knew his punch would kill the creature.

With an incredible amount of strength, Erik's fist collided with the armored body of the creature. The Scorpion's chitinous armor, at the precise moment, splintered with a sound that was like the fracturing of stone.

This violent collision resulted in a gruesome explosion of gore. Chunks of its dark exoskeleton flew in all directions, mixed with a visceral shower of crimson and visceral matter.

The sheer force of the blow left a gaping, ragged wound, from which a torrent of dark, thick blood and entrails spilled forth, painting the ground in a macabre display. The air was filled with the acrid scent of freshly spilled blood and the stark, metallic tang of shattered armor.

The Scorpion's gaze quickly became blank. It didn't even usher in a single sound, as its death likely happened as soon as it got it. Its body went limp, collapsing onto the sand with a resounding thud.

The tail, once a weapon of death, now lay motionless, its threat nullified. Erik stood over the fallen beast, his chest heaving normally, as if nothing had happened, but his eyes were alight with the fire of victory.

[SCORPION 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. 1042 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

Erik's mercenaries stood frozen, their expressions a picture of disbelief. Their weapons hung at their sides, forgotten. Eyes wide with shock, their mouths agape, they struggled to process the scene before them.

It was as if time had stopped, capturing their faces in a tableau of sheer amazement. Some blinked, as if trying to clear their vision of an illusion, while others had brows furrowed in bewilderment.

Their leader had single-handedly vanquished a Thaid they wouldn't be able to kill even as a group, with nothing more than his fists, seemed to defy logic.

It was a moment that transcended their understanding of possibility, etching a permanent mark of awe and incredulity on their stunned faces.

Erik's eyes scanned the faces of his team, searching for any signs of injury or distress. Most seemed in good shape, but his gaze quickly shifted to a group of men rushing toward the damaged armored vehicle. The artillery had been destroyed, and the vehicle rendered useless.

"Is everyone okay?" Erik asked, already moving toward the car.

His men were pulling the driver out, rescuing him from the wreckage. With no movement, the artillery operator laid still. She met her demise at the hands of the Scorpion. The driver was still breathing, albeit with clear difficulty.

"Get him some first aid, now!" Two of Erik's medics rushed forward with a first aid kit. They assessed the driver's injuries, applying bandages and antiseptics where needed.

If only healers had asked for less money, he would have hired them. The guild's finances were still not enough to hire them, but he was going to put an end to this with the mission's reward.

Once stabilized, the injured man was carefully lifted and transferred to another vehicle. Erik approached him, looking down at the youthful face. The driver, a 22-year-old named Tim, looked up at Erik with a mixture of relief and shame.

"I'm sorry, boss," Tim said. Regret laced his voice as he struggled to breathe.

Erik shook his head, offering a reassuring smile. "Don't apologize. You're alive, and that's what matters. You'll get stronger. We all will. Just focus on recovering for now."

In response, Tim nodded his head. His guild master's words had a profound effect on him, instilling within him a renewed sense of hope and making him feel better. After patting him on the shoulder, Erik turned his attention back to the rest of his team.

"Alright, everyone, back in the vehicles. We still have the rest of the plane to find." Erik's voice was calm and reassuring. He had to set an example to show that everything was under control.

As everyone climbed back into their respective armored cars, the atmosphere was tense, yet focused. As the engines roared to life, the convoy moved, leaving the Scorpindra carcass and the wreckage of the damaged vehicle behind.

With a sense of calmness enveloping him, Erik found himself in his seat, his eyes fixated on the ever-changing panorama stretching out before him. The search for the remaining components of the plane, along with its critically important cargo, was still in progress and far from being resolved.

<System. Show me the status.>

[Host Information]

NAME: Erik Romano

AGE: 17

POWER LEVEL: 374

SYSTEM LEVEL: 46

EXPERIENCE: 82040/115600

DNA POINTS: 23650

HEALTH: 3440/3440

MANA: 3370/3370

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 176

INTELLIGENCE: 218

DEXTERITY: 156

ENERGY: 167

Available Attributes points: 0

{Powers}

[Biological Super Computer Powers]

-Brain Crystal Manipulation

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

-Brain Crystal power Merging (Allows to merge two powers birthing a new one. It requires the merging of the DNA to work.)

-Brain Crystal Power Analysis (Allows to analyse the target brain crystal without the need to know the creature.)

- (LOCKED)

- Brain Crystal Power Strengthening (Allows the gaining of the energy attribute points)

- (LOCKED)

-DNA Manipulation

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

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

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

- (LOCKED)

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

-(LOCKED)

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

-Brain Information Injector (It allows the injection of information directly to the brain. Based on touch)

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

[Host's Powers]

-POISONOUS MANA DARTS: Cσ3D-RANKED (Conjure poisonous mana darts whose lethality depends on the mana injected)

-POISONOUS ASTRAL WOLF BITE: Cσ2D-RANKED (Conjure an astral but solid projection of a Leylahad's head whose only aim is to bite at whatever target the host is aiming. Its teeth have a poisonous element whose toxicity depends on the mana used. Notice: the target must be close to the projection.)

-FORCE MANIPULATION: Cv1B-RANKED (Manipulate a mana-driven force to produce powerful shockwaves that can change in intensity, radius, speed, and power. It is also possible to use the power differently as to generate force shields.)

-PARALLEL WILLS: Cv1C-RANKED (Allows the user to passively increase intelligence based on the number of neural links. It also allows the construction of a mana brain that allows independent thoughts and can be used for multiple purposes.)

-ICE SWORD: Cσ1E-RANKED (Allows creating a powerful ice blade, but needs a real weapon to be used as a base)

-STRENGTH ENHANCER: Cp2D-RANKED (Depending on the amount of mana used, the amount of strength increases)

-PLANT MASTER: Cπ1B-RANKED (Allows to grow and control plant based organism. The usage depends on the plant and the user's will.)

-CHAMELEON VEIL: Cp1C-RANKED (Allows to turn totally transparent and to project what is behind you, making it almost impossible to be seen. The user can move while using this Brain Crystal power. However, notice that the ripples in light the power creates while moving decrease the power's hiding abilities, increasing the chance of being seen.)

-BESTIAL ROAR: Cσ2C-RANKED (Allows to emit a roar that can instill fear into the surrounding creatures. It affects all but the user.)

-TARGET LOCK: Cσ3D-RANKED (Allows the user to lock onto the mana signature of a target in order to always find it.)

-CHIMERIC BIOMETAL SOLDIER: Co2A-RANKED (This power allows the user to create a human-worms hybrid with 50% of the user's physical stats. The clones are permanent, but to make them, a lot of mana is necessary. They can't use brain crystal powers. The clone is born from an egg, and it takes a month for them to reach maturity after having hatched two weeks after the eggs were made.

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

-THELEPATHY: Cp1C-RANKED (It allows Telepathic talk with creatures of the same species or similar DNA)

-SOLIDIFYING SLIME: Cσ1D-RANKED (It allows to produce a slimy substance whose viscosity, stickiness and quantity depends on the amount of mana used. The Slime can solidify and its hardness depends again on the mana used)

-AEROKYNESIS: Cσ1A-RANKED (This innate ability grants the wielder precise control over wind generation and manipulation. The potential of this power is intricately linked to the proficiency of the user, affording them the capacity for both offensive and defensive maneuvers, as well as the versatility to engage targets both near and far.)

{Skills}

Kyokar hand-to-hand style (ADVANCED) (A military fighting style developed in Frant)

Crypt of the Desert Style (ADVANCED) (Flyssa fighting style developed by Master Nieminen)

Etrium's sword style (INTERMEDIATE) (Basic Sword Style developed in Etrium.)

Chapter 687: The rest of the plane (1)

In the passenger seat of Kael's armored vehicle, Erik sat, his gaze sweeping across the stark expanse of the White Desert.

The morning sun cast a soft, golden hue over the landscape, illuminating the snow-white sands that stretched before them.

The sand, pristine and unmarred, resembled a vast, frozen tundra under the gentle light of the sun. Shadows of the vehicle and occasional rock formations were etched against the pale ground, creating a striking contrast.

The monochrome panorama of the White Desert, with its undulating dunes and the gentle play of light and shadow, presented a scene of tranquil desolation.

The convoy had been searching for the remaining parts of the crashed plane for a while, and they got tired.

As Erik observed, the expressions on the faces of his comrades revealed their thoughts and feelings. Their bodies were weary, and they longed for some rest. Their wish was to go back home.

"Kael, any updates from the AI?" Erik turned his gaze to his friend, who was focused on driving while giving occasional glances to a small screen displaying data.

"The AI suggests the rest of the plane should be nearby, based on the trajectory and last known coordinates," Kael's eyes still glued to the road. Though the white desert was empty, and he didn't have problems looking at the screen.

"And the black box decryption?"

"It's still in progress. The AI hasn't completed it yet," Kael said, a hint of impatience in his voice.

Erik nodded, understanding the urgency but also the limitations of technology. However, he was eager to know what happened on the plane.

The attack may have been perpetrated either by an individual or by an external force. He was uncertain about the potential for a technological failure.

In addition, that individuals would attempt to attack the plane implied they possessed substantial financial resources, as hiring someone to target a heavily protected aircraft would require significant funding.

The issue at hand stemmed from the fact that, in the event of an attack on the plane, it seemed odd the attackers did not seize the cargo, especially considering their financial resources.

That unless their intentions were focused on a specific aim or driven by a desire for revenge against the plane owner. However, to Erik, it didn't seem to make much sense.

Although he believed that something had attacked the plane, he couldn't help but wonder what kind of creature could have possibly done it.

Aircraft ascended to great altitudes in the atmosphere, primarily to evade the threat of Thaidis, and were engineered to sustain significant damage.

It was also required to them to near the point of exiting of Earth's atmosphere, almost venturing into the vacuum of space.

In these immense heights, conditions were incredibly hostile. Temperatures plummeted drastically, reaching levels where even the most robust materials and sophisticated technologies were pushed to their limits.

The intense cold at such altitudes was a stark contrast to the relative warmth of the Earth's surface, posing a significant challenge to any form of life or machinery.

In addition, the air was thin, with oxygen levels significantly lower than those found at sea level. The scarcity of this essential element created an environment that would be uninhabitable for life forms, Thaidis included.

As one ascended, the atmospheric pressure decreased. This decrease in pressure, coupled with the frigid temperatures and oxygen deprivation, had created a trifecta of extreme conditions.

All of this raised a question: what kind of creature could have endured such an environment? It defied the conventional understanding of Earth's known creatures and their capabilities.

With his focus redirected towards the vast desert landscape, he held onto the hope of spotting any clue that could guide them to the remaining wreckage, all while anticipating the conclusion of the AI's ongoing procedure.

...

...

...

Following an additional half-hour of thorough searching, signs became visible. Scattered boxes lay partially buried in the sand, some torn open, as they didn't resist the crash, their contents strewn everywhere.

Along with various objects, there were also weapons scattered all over the place. Yet, there was something conspicuously absent—no Thaid bodies, no food supplies.

However, what really caught Erik's attention were the scattered bones found in the area, which appeared to be from both animals and possibly humans.

<Looks like the perishable items had been devoured by the Thaides.> He then decided to check around.

"Stop the convoy." Erik ordered into his radio, and the line of armored vehicles came to a halt.

Upon leaving the vehicle, his boots sank a little into the sand, leaving imprints behind. The air was of such high temperature that it could fry an egg on a rock. Erik observed his team, witnessing a blend of relief at the discovery and apprehension regarding its implications.

"Let's collect what we can and continue the search. Be quick about it. We don't want to become part of the desert's next meal."

His team acknowledged with a nod and dispersed to gather the dispersed items. Erik's gaze returned to the bones, serving as a stark reminder of the unforgiving nature of the desert.

Kael made his way over to Erik, his expression composed but his eyes revealing a hint of concern. The rest of their team was occupied with the cargo, oblivious to their conversation.

"No news from the black box yet," Kael said, his voice steady.

Erik exhaled a heavy sigh. "Damn..."

Kael observed him closely, noting the crease of worry on his brow. "You seem really troubled. If the others see you like this, it might stir some anxiety in them."

Erik ran a hand through his hair in frustration. "I can't help it. This whole situation feels off. What if we're dealing with something like a swarm of flying Thaid's?"

Kael's response was matter-of-fact, almost resigned. "It means we die."

Erik nodded grimly. "Exactly. I'm thinking the merchant who assigned us this quest was hiding something. He likely knows what happened here, but said nothing."

"We'll avoid working with him in the future, then."

Erik's expression darkened as he shared more troubling information. "I've had some people look into him. Turns out he's not as straightforward as we thought. He's got ties to the Band of Giants and several political figures in Nokisi Point."

Erik's face got serious. He wanted this quest to end. He turned to Kael. "Follow me." Then he picked up the radio.

"To everyone collecting: continue with the task. I'm heading out to scout the area," he said into the radio, his voice conveying both command and caution.

Kael made his way to the steering wheel. He started the engine and gave gas, steering the vehicle through the undulating dunes.

The minutes appeared to stretch endlessly, with each one feeling more protracted than the one before, as their search persisted. Erik's eyes never wavered from the landscape, scanning for any sign of the wreckage.

"What's on your mind?" Kael asked.

"Nothing, it's just that I want to find the rest of the plane as soon as possible and leave this place..."

Following that, the other half of the plane materialized from the horizon like a phantom. Unlike the tail end they had found earlier, this was the front part of the aircraft.

Submerged in the desert sands, the plane presented a haunting image, its nose jutting upwards toward the heavens, almost in a silent protest against its demise.

The most striking feature which caught Erik's attention was the clean, almost surgical cut that had divided the aircraft. The edges of the severed metal were sharp and defined, suggesting the work of a large blade.

This thought sent a shiver through Erik as he envisioned the sheer force and precision required to inflict such damage.

"We've found it," Erik announced into the radio, but he was not that happy about it. "I'm going to check it out."

As soon as Kael reached the plane, he brought the vehicle to a halt, and Erik, stepping out, approached the wreckage with his boots crunching on the sand.

"Stay here."

"Are you sure you want to go alone?" Kael asked.

"You can't help me anyway if there is danger inside." Kael lowered his head in resignation.

With each step he took towards the wreckage, the details of the scene became more and more apparent—broken cockpit windows, mangled metal, and an eerie silence that seemed to fill the air.

As he reached the plane, he circled it, examining every single detail with his eyes. The cut was clean, almost surgical, raising more questions than answers. What could have the power to do this? And more importantly, where was it now?

His radio crackled to life. "Boss, we've collected most of the cargo around. What's the status on your end?"

"We've found the other half of the plane. There are more boxes here. Come pick them up,"

Erik's voice was steady despite the unsettling discovery. "We're not alone in this desert. Come here fast."

After powering down the radio, Erik's eyes lingered on the halved plane, its skeletal structure standing as a bleak testament to the perils that lived within the desert.

Taking a deep breath, he turned around and prepared himself for the arrival of his team, his mind filled with a flurry of questions, theories, and above all, a heightened sense of caution.

Chapter 688: The rest of the plane (2)

As Erik made his way towards the maw of the shattered fuselage, his eyes narrowed, trying to take in the chaotic scene that lay before him.

The young man stepped inside. The first thing that struck him was the smell, a strong and pungent combination of burnt metal, fuel, and an unidentified scent that he couldn't quite identify.

Inside the wreckage of the plane, the interior was a scene of utter chaos and devastation. The twisted metal, jutting out at peculiar angles, formed a complex maze of sharp corners and distorted surfaces.

What would have been rows of seats in a commercial airliner were replaced here by large, open spaces filled with strewn items and toppled wooden crates.

The limited number of seats that were available were in a state of disarray, with a few of them being ripped from their moorings and left hanging with shredded fabric, while others were completely displaced and thrown around.

With the overhead compartments left open, their contents spilled out and ended up in the aisle. The previously tidy aisle became a mess, filled with a combination of personal items, scattered papers, and remnants of the in-flight amenities that were once provided to the passengers.

Wires dangled from the exposed ceiling, sparking from time to time, while panels and insulation hung like torn fabric, swaying in the desert wind that swept through the gaping tears in the plane's fuselage.

The once-smooth floor was now a treacherous terrain of debris and sharp objects, making navigation perilous.

The wall lining in certain areas had peeled away, revealing the skeletal frame of the aircraft, while in other areas, the windows had shattered, causing shards of glass to sparkle in the sunlight.

The scars and dents on the metal walls showed the immense and violent forces that had torn the plane apart.

The plane, being a cargo model, was designed for hauling goods rather than accommodating passengers, and its cavernous interior reflected this intention.

But it was the cargo that caught Erik's attention. Weapons—lots of them. Rifles, handguns, and even some heavier artillery were scattered around the interior.

The sand, blown in through the broken windows and gaping holes in the fuselage, had left some of the objects half-buried, while others remained strapped to pallets, as though they were awaiting delivery to a distant battlefield.

Now, the wooden boxes that had once held them were damaged and shattered into pieces. The contents spilled out from the container, resembling the entrails of a mechanical beast.

As Erik made his way through the wreckage, the sound of his boots crunching on the floor, a mixture of sand and debris, echoed in the air.

He stopped to examine one of the wooden crates, prying one open to reveal more firearms, still wrapped in their protective packaging.

Remaining vigilant, Erik scanned the disarrayed interior of the plane, his senses heightened and ready to detect any potential threats.

After a thorough search, seeing nothing was there, he was satisfied. He then grabbed his radio. "Kael, the place is empty. Get in here."

"Give me a minute." Without turning off the engine, Kael left the vehicle and entered the plane. He stepped through the twisted metal opening, his eyes widening as he took in the scene. "What a mess."

"Yeah, it's a plane crash, after all. We have been lucky enough the plane didn't explode."

"I wonder what happened."

"Yeah, me too." There was a look of focus on Erik's face. "We're looking for black metal suitcases." His eyes darted around in search of the suitcases. "Our employer's most valuable weapons should be in them."

"Understood, black metal suitcases."

Both men started working together, sifting through the debris and wreckage. Not only did they take the time to move wooden crates.

They also pushed aside any loose weapons they encountered and checked the overhead compartments that had somehow remained intact. As the minutes continued to pass, there was still no sign of the black suitcases.

As they continued their search, Kael turned towards Erik with a questioning look. "So, what are we supposed to find in these cases? You mentioned they're brain crystal weapons, but what kind?"

Erik, still holding the suitcase, shifted its weight, his focus turning on their surroundings for a moment. "Yeah, we're looking for a sword, a spear, and a bow."

Hearing this, Kael paused, his eyebrows arching in surprise. "I thought it was something more exotic. This means there is not a single case, right? No way that case can hold a spear."

Erik, scanning the area, responded without breaking his stride. "Yeah. Three cases," he said. "One for each weapon."

Kael let out a low whistle. "I wonder how much these things are worth. I bet a lot."

Erik, with a brief smirk, glanced at Kael. "You're right, especially considering our employer will pay us a couple million Eurems more if we retrieve them. I'd say they're pretty valuable."

Kael gave a firm nod, his determination clear. "Alright, let's keep searching, then. With that much on the line, we can't afford to leave any stone unturned." His gaze intensified as he surveyed their surroundings, ready to delve deeper into their mission.

Both men returned to their task, spurred on by the enormity of what they were searching for. These pieces of equipment awaited them, hidden somewhere amidst the wreckage and chaos.

The prospect of millions of Eurem being at stake was so enticing that it almost made their mouths water. The very idea of the countless ways in which this money could be utilized sent shivers down their spines.

Right at when Erik was on the verge of proposing the idea of broadening their search, his attention was captivated by a glimmer of black metal partially concealed beneath a stack of wooden crates and an assortment of firearms.

"Hold on," he said, moving to unearth the object.

With no sign of exertion, he shifted the heavy wooden crates to the side, exposing a concealed black metal suitcase.

The case, although visibly scratched and dented, demonstrated its resilience by shielding its contents from external influences. Erik picked it up and unlatched the locks, lifting the lid with a sense of anticipation.

"This thing is made of Bristalite ore!"

"What? Are you joking?" Kael asked.

"For real!"

If Eshalt represented the entry-level of valuable mana-infused ores, and Aclaitrium held a mid-tier position, then Bristalite was positioned near the top, surpassed only by Mernium and Dranstone.

The latter material, because of its exceptional durability, mana infusion capabilities, and high mana conductivity, stood out as the ultimate symbol of excellence and became the most sought-after ore on the entire planet. Bristalite, ranking third in these categories, signified a high level of prestige and value.

The existence of a suitcase crafted from Bristalite suggested that the merchant who issued their quest was very wealthy, implying the weapons inside were far more valuable than Erik and Kael had estimated.

In order to verify what was inside, Erik opened the suitcase. Within the confines of the interior, cushioned by layers upon layers of foam, there rested a sword that was unlike anything he had ever laid eyes on.

The blade, which had a mesmerizing shimmering silver color, seemed to possess an otherworldly beauty.

It emitted a faint hum that appeared to be in sync with the mana present in the surrounding atmosphere. Although there were many impressive aspects to the sword, Erik's attention was drawn to the pommel.

Attached to it was a large, red crystal that glowed, its luminescence casting a warm light within the confines of the suitcase. As if it possessed a life of its own, the crystal seemed to pulse, infusing the weapon with mana.

Erik was quite familiar with brain crystals, having seen many of them, and he noticed that they all shared the common characteristic of transparency. How come there was a red one?

However, despite the questions, he couldn't help but smirk as he looked at the extraordinary weapon. "Well, we found the first."

Kael hastened to join Erik, his gaze drawn on the sword with an expression of sheer amazement. "Incredible."

He leaned in, eyes locked on the weapon, as if trying to commit every detail to memory. "I wonder when we will finally be able to get some for us."

"We will get them sooner or later, but you better stick to your training." Erik's tone was calm. Kael was too weak to have such a weapon. Someone could easily kill him to steal the weapon.

Erik then closed the suitcase, his movements precise as he secured the locks. Then, with a steady grip, he lifted the case.

"Well, I'll be damned." He chuckled. "Now it makes sense why they used such a high-end suitcase."

"Yeah, this sword alone could be worth hundreds of millions of eurems," Kael said, his eyes still lingering on the case.

"Let's continue our search; there should be two more."

With a nod of agreement from Kael, they turned their attention back to the task at hand, each step driven by the prospect of uncovering more hidden treasures.

Chapter 689: Back to Civilization

Erik emerged from the plane's wreckage, carrying the three black metal suitcases he and Kael had found.

Upon the arrival of the remaining members of the convoy, their speechlessness was palpable as they laid eyes on the wreckage of the aircraft. The questions that swirled in their heads, like a tornado, were the same ones that occupied Erik's mind.

<What the fuck is that cut on the plane? >

"Listen up, everyone."

Erik placed the three suitcases inside his and Kael's armored vehicle. "I want you to collect everything you can from the plane. But be careful, the structure is unstable. We want no more casualties."

In unison, every single person present nodded their heads in agreement. Erik's gaze lingered on them for a moment before he redirected his attention towards Kael, who was engrossed in checking the progress of the AI decryption on the black box.

"Any progress?" Erik asked.

Kael looked up, his eyes meeting Erik's. "It's at 69%. Still working on it."

Nodding, Erik's attention returned to his team, his gaze shifting. As the next three hours unfolded, the vicinity surrounding the aircraft transformed into a bustling hub of activity.

Inside the wreckage, the members of the convoy were busy moving in and out as they hauled out many wooden crates, weapons, and a wide range of other valuable items, all of which were then loaded onto the waiting vehicles. However, it was not without facing its fair share of challenges.

Because of the large number of people, the group was targeted and attacked by multiple Scorpionids. Each time the creatures appeared, Erik would step in and dispatch them with his fists and powers.

At long last, after what felt like an endless wait, the last of the items were loaded onto the vehicles.

Erik gazed at the vehicles that were filled to the brim with a sense of satisfaction on his face. With a sense of deep appreciation, he let his gaze rest upon the faces of those who had aided him in this quest.

Despite their exhaustion and fear, they mustered the bravery to confront a place that was far beyond their capabilities, and in doing so, achieved a remarkable accomplishment that most others were too intimidated to even attempt.

"Alright, everyone," Erik said. "We're done here. Let's head back to the city."

As soon as the statement was made, a collective cheer erupted from the group, releasing the tension that had been weighing on them for days. One after another, they made their way into their vehicles.

The engines of the vehicles roared to life, creating a thunderous sound that filled the air, signaling their imminent departure from the desolate landscape.

As Erik settled into his seat, he couldn't help but feel a sense of accomplishment. Despite encountering many challenges, ranging from dangerous creatures to a harsh environment, they triumphed.

The mission was deemed a success, and as they drove away, leaving the wreckage and perils of the desert in their wake, Erik was certain they had deserved their reward.

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While the convoy was making its way back through the desert, Erik and Kael were together in the same vehicle. Erik choose to go with him, rather than Mira because of the black-box.

The tension that had filled the air during the mission was now replaced by an unsettling feeling of apprehension.

Both of them had a strong desire to find out the cause behind the destruction of the plane.

"So, what do you think we'll find in that black box?" Kael broke the silence, his eyes meeting Erik's.

Erik sighed. "I bet on a Thaid. It's the only explanation that makes sense given the clean cut that halved the aircraft."

Kael raised an eyebrow, skeptical. "Yeah. But those altitudes..."

Erik leaned against his seat, his gaze fixed on the distant horizon as he spoke. "Don't get yourself fooled by the altitude point. There is an entire continent on the other side of the planet we know nothing of." His fingers tapped a rhythmic pattern against the armrest, betraying a hint of anxiety.

He turned to his right, his eyes sweeping across the landscape through the car's window.

Outside, the desert stretched, its sand almost as white as snow, creating a surreal scene.

The sun hung low in the sky, casting shadows that danced across the dunes, giving the terrain a dynamic, ever-changing appearance.

The brightness of the sand contrasted with the deep blue of the sky, creating a striking visual tapestry.

As the car moved, small whirlwinds of sand spiraled playfully in their wake, disturbing the serene vastness of the desert. That landscape made him feel better despite the dangers lurking inside.

"As scary as it may be, nothing prevents them from flying here. Maybe they hide in the mountains and the forests and we don't know."

"Shouldn't the Blackguards be tasked to prevent this from happening? That was the whole point why their base is in Hin."

Despite this, Erik's seriousness escalated even further. The young man seemed to perceive the situation as growing increasingly grave.

"Don't buy everything the blackguards says, or what people says about them. They are hiding a lot of things..."

"Why?" But Erik didn't reply. He knew that excessive disclosure could lead Kael to inadvertently share sensitive information with the wrong people, potentially resulting in significant consequences.

"Ok." Kael looked at him, concern etched on his face, and understanding that was a taboo topic. "Let's say your hunch is correct, and we find evidence pointing to a thaid. What do we do with that information?"

"It depends on what we find. If we can handle the beast, we keep it to ourselves, since such Thaid's body would be valuable. But if outside our possibilities, we might consider selling it. Either way, we need to tread with care."

Kael nodded, his face filled with a solemn understanding of the gravity of the situation. "All right. Let's just hope it is at least something worth a lot of money."

"Yeah."

The two men fell silent, their thoughts consuming them, as the vehicle pressed on through the desolate wasteland.

The convoy neared the gates of Testrovsc's Rest, and the sound of relieved sighs echoed through the ranks of the tired mercenaries.

The city's towering buildings and bustling streets offered a welcome respite, easing their frayed nerves after the grueling mission.

The vehicle's interior underwent a noticeable shift as the tension from the previous days dissipated, replaced by a palpable sense of accomplishment. Conversations erupted among the mercenaries, filling the air with laughter and animated chatter.

"I can't wait to sink my teeth into a juicy steak," one mercenary said, his eyes practically glowing at the thought.

"Steak? I'm going straight for the strongest ale they've got." A chorus of approving nods and a cheer arose.

"I'm hitting the market first thing. Need to upgrade my gear with the pay from this job," a third said, calculating the best way to spend his earnings.

The sound of cheerful chatter reached Erik's ears, and he couldn't help but feel a warm sense of satisfaction at the uplifted mood of his men and women.

But even as he shared in their relief and anticipation, a lingering heaviness weighed down his shoulders.

There were fallen comrades to account for, families to notify, and funerals to attend. The weight of leadership responsibility hung on his shoulders, reminding him that his duties were far from over.

As they entered the city—a beacon of safety and civilization—he allowed himself a brief respite.

With the city's landscape enveloping them, characterized by towering skyscrapers that seemed to stretch into the sky and flying cars darting through the gaps between them, the team's accomplishment took on an even greater sense of importance amidst the organized chaos of mercenaries prowling the streets.

Mercenaries roamed, their attire a blend of old and new. Some bore leather armor, while others sported advanced gear, laser rifles at the ready.

Erik couldn't tear his eyes away from the mesmerizing sights that surrounded him. Holographic advertisements flickering on the facades of buildings, drones buzzing above like a swarm of bees from the future, and now and then catching a glimpse of swords and shields strapped to the backs of mercenaries passing by.

<I missed this view, > Erik thought. He really did.

Testrovs's Rest held a special place in his life, a haven he considered his true home. This city, a cradle of opportunity, was where he claimed his freedom.

Here, in this vibrant city, he found respect and comfort, something not possible in New Alexandria.

It was a place of admiration for him, where he could live in comfort, and where people would go to extreme lengths, screaming and kicking, just to have the chance to meet him.

In the same breath, politicians, wielding their influence, exerted every effort to strike a deal with him.

In Testrovs's Rest, Erik wasn't just another face in the crowd; he was a person of significance, a man who had carved out his place in a world where respect and comfort were hard-earned.

ERIK'S STATUS:

[Host Information]

NAME:Erik Romano

AGE:17

POWER LEVEL:374

SYSTEM LEVEL:46

EXPERIENCE: 92660/115600

DNA POINTS:23850

HEALTH: 3440/3440

MANA: 3370/3370

{Attributes}

STRENGTH:176

INTELLIGENCE:218

DEXTERITY:156

ENERGY:167

Available Attributes points: 0

{Powers}

[Biological Super Computer Powers]

-Brain Crystal Manipulation

-Brain Crystal Power Extraction (Allows the absorption of the brain crystal , making the host able to acquire the power contained within. Notice: the DNA must be changed in order to allow the body to use the power. See DNA extraction.)

-Brain Crystal power Merging (Allows to merge two powers birthing a new one. It requires the merging of the DNA to work)

-Brain Crystal Power Analysis (Allows to Analyse the target brain crystal without the need to know the creature.)

- (LOCKED)

- Brain Crystal Power Strengthening (Allows the gaining of the energy attribute points)

-(LOCKED)

-DNA Manipulation

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

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

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

-(LOCKED)

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

-(LOCKED)

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

-Brain Information Injector(It allows the injection of information directly to the brain. Based on touch)

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

[Host's Powers]

-POISONOUS MANA DARTS: C₃D-RANKED(Conjure poisonous mana darts whose lethality depends on the mana injected)

-POISONOUS ASTRAL WOLF BITE: C₂D-RANKED(Conjure an astral but solid projection of a Leylahad's head whose only aim is to bite at whatever target the host is aiming. Its teeth have a poisonous element whose Toxicity depends on the mana used. Notice: the target must be close to the projection)

-FORCE MANIPULATION: Cv1B-RANKED(Manipulate a mana-driven force to produce powerful shockwaves that can change in intensity, radius, speed, and power. It is also possible to use the power differently as to generate force shields.)

-PARALLEL WILLS: Cv1C-RANKED(Allows the user to passively increase Intelligence based on the number of neural links. It also allows the construction of a mana brain that allows independent thoughts and can be used for multiple purposes)

-ICE SWORD: Cσ1E-RANKED(Allows the creation of a powerful ice blade, but needs a real weapon to be used as a base)

-STRENGTH ENHANCER: Cp2D-RANKED(Depending on the amount of mana used, the amount of strength increases)

-PLANT MASTER: Cπ1B-RANKED(Allows to grow and control plant based organism. The usage depends on the plant and the user's will.)

-CHAMELEON VEIL: Cp1C-RANKED(Allows to turn totally transparent and to project what is behind you, making it almost impossible to be seen. The user can move while using this Brain Crystal power. However, notice that the ripples in light the power creates while moving decrease the power's hiding abilities increasing the chance of being seen.)

-BESTIAL ROAR: Cσ2C-RANKED(Allows to emit a roar that can instill fear into the surrounding creatures. It does affect all but the user.)

-TARGET LOCK: Cσ3D-RANKED(Allows the user to lock onto the mana signature of a target in order to always find it.)

-CHIMERIC BIOMETAL SOLDIER: Co2A-RANKED(This power allows the user to create a human-worms hybrid with 50% of the user's physical stats. The clones are permanent, but to make them, a lot of mana is necessary; moreover, they can't use brain crystal powers. The clone is born from an egg, and it takes a month for them to reach maturity after having hatched two weeks after the eggs were made.

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

-THELEPATHY: C_p1C-RANKED(It allows Telepathic talk with creatures of the same species or similar DNA)

-SOLIDIFYING SLIME: C_σ1D-RANKED(It allows to produce a slimy substance whose viscosity, stickiness and quantity depends on the amount of mana used. The Slime can solidify and its hardness depends again on the mana used)

-AEROKYNESIS: C_σ1A-RANKED(This innate ability grants the wielder precise control over wind generation and manipulation. The potential of this power is intricately linked to the proficiency of the user, affording them the capacity for both offensive and defensive maneuvers, as well as the versatility to engage targets both near and far.)

{Skills}

-Kyokar hand-to-hand style (ADVANCED)(A military fighting style developed in Frant)

-Crypt of the Desert Style (ADVANCED)(Flyssa fighting style developed by Master Nieminen)

-Etrium's sword style (INTERMEDIATE)(Basic Sword Style developed in Etrium.)

Chapter 690: The Black-box's content

Kael guided the lead vehicle through the winding streets, steering it deftly towards the guild's headquarters. As they approached, the courtyard unfolded before them, a spacious expanse filled with vehicles. The tires crunched over the gravel path, adding a rhythmic undertone to their arrival.

Upon reaching the entrance, the group was welcomed by the familiar, inviting creak of the massive gates as they swung open. The scent of the nearby gardens wafted through the air, a mixture of blooming flowers and freshly cut grass, providing a stark contrast to the dust of the road they had traveled.

As they entered the courtyard, the ambient noises of the headquarters greeted them—distant voices of guild members, the clatter of equipment.

The moment the wheels came to a stop, a group of professional individuals burst out of the main building and hastened towards the convoy.

In Erik's inner circle, which comprised Noah, Luke, Ari, Yori, Nick, Damon, and Swaran, his clones were among the key members.

Erik disembarked from the vehicle, his boots creating a distinct crunch on the gravel beneath them. He stood tall, his figure imposing.

His team, a group of clones, mirrored Erik's imposing presence. As they approached him, their movements were synchronized.

They halted a few meters from Erik, their postures erect and disciplined. In unison, they bowed in greeting.

"Master Kay, welcome back. May I ask how the journey fared? Was the quest successful?" Noah asked, his concealed eyes scanning Erik for indications of the mission's outcome.

"We retrieved the cargo and earned a lot more," he said, choosing his words with care. "But there's still much to be done."

He turned to Noah, his gaze steady and commanding. "I want everything unpacked and inventoried. Make sure our men and women have everything they need to rest and recover. They've earned it."

Noah nodded, his face obscured by a mask. "Of course, Master. It will be done," he said. His voice was muffled a little by the mask he was wearing.

Noah displayed deference by clasping his hands together and bowing his head. His posture was straight, yet relaxed.

Following that, Erik's expression underwent a noticeable change, transitioning into a more serious and solemn demeanor. Of course, no one could see it because of the mask he was wearing.

"There's another matter. We lost some good people out there. I want their families contacted as soon as possible. Explain the situation to them and make sure they're taken care of."

His words were filled with such solemn gravity that the group couldn't help but bow their heads in acknowledgment. The cost of the mission was not solely measured by the objectives achieved or the treasures gained. The measurement of the lives lost was also considered.

"We also need to find substitutes for those we've lost. We can't afford to be understaffed right now."

The group of clones looked up, their gaze met Erik's through their masks. With a renewed sense of purpose, they chorused: "Yes, Master."

After giving out his orders, Erik watched as the group dispersed, and then he took a moment to stand in the courtyard.

While taking a moment to survey the guild that he had worked to establish, he couldn't help but feel a sense of pride and accomplishment.

As he glanced at the individuals who had not only become his loyal subordinates but also his chosen family, he realized the profound impact he had on their lives. Many of them improved their economic situation. Almost everyone got new gear and had more time available to train and increase their neural links.

The weight of leadership, though a substantial burden, rested on his shoulders without a whisper of complaint.

Erik saw the tangible outcomes of his endeavors, the fruits of his labor. He engaged in a transformative mission: elevating individuals who once stood little chance of success or power when alone, offering them opportunities.

It was the same opportunity that eluded him back in New Alexandria, one that only a stroke of fortune had brought his way. An opportunity, he knew, that others might never encounter. His role not only involved guiding them, but also providing a path they could not have found on their own.

While making his way through the corridors of the guild headquarters, Erik exchanged nods with the guild members who respectfully acknowledged his presence with bows and salutes.

When Erik looked around, he realized that there were many faces he didn't recognize.

<The clones are working a lot, uh? >

As he moved with intent, he directed his steps towards his private quarters. Once he stepped inside the room, he locked the door behind him, and then he took a deep breath, letting go of the heavy burden of the mission that had been weighing on his shoulders.

As he stepped into the bathroom, he made his way towards the shower and reached out to turn the knob, allowing the warm water to flow out and cascade over his body, washing away the grime, sweat, and stress accumulated from the journey.

In that brief period, he was completely engulfed by the tranquilizing feeling of water embracing his body. Once he was finished drying off, he changed into comfortable clothing, placing the battle-worn gear that he had been wearing for days into a designated laundry bin.

He picked up his phone from the table and dialed Lysa's number. The call connected, and her voice came through the speaker, tinged with surprise and warmth. "Erik! How are you? How did the quest go?"

"We found the cargo," Erik said, cutting straight to the point. "I need you to contact our employer and arrange for someone to pick it up. But clarify that the items will only be handed over after we've been paid."

Lysa chuckled on the other end, her voice tinged with amusement. "Don't worry, I'll handle everything."

"Thank you, Lysa," Erik said, his voice softer now. "I knew I could count on you."

Erik concluded the conversation with a brief goodbye, ending the call and placing the phone to its place on the table. He moved to the bed and lay down, staring at the ceiling.

Despite his weary body, his mind remained active and was filled with thoughts and plans for the future. Amidst the countless thoughts that were swirling around in his mind, there was one thought that stood out above all others, unexpressed but deeply ingrained.

Once again, Erik reached for his phone and tapped on the screen to open the video that Kael had sent and retrieved from the black box. His eyes remained glued to the screen, where the high-quality footage played before him, captivating his full attention. The events of that day on the plane unfolded with clarity, leaving no detail obscured.

The creature it captured was unmistakable—a Thaid, but unlike any he had ever seen or heard of. The colossal bird had feathers that were a mesmerizing shade of cerulean, shimmering in the sunlight. The creature's wingspan was colossal, making the plane it had attacked appear tiny in comparison.

Erik tried to comprehend how such a massive beast went unnoticed as he watched the footage.

The Thaid's dominance in the air was unmistakable. The ease with which it manipulated the currents revealed a strong and instinctive connection to its element. However, what fascinated Erik was the creature's extraordinary physical abilities and the incredible amount of mana it must have had to execute such remarkable feats.

<This thing it's much more powerful than a Galewing. Its power seems to be comparable to wyverns. I've never heard of something like that. >

This Thaid was an anomaly, a creature of immense power that defied all conventional understanding. Its existence raised more questions than answers. From where did it come? How had it gained such extraordinary abilities? What was the broader implication of its appearance for the world as a whole?

<Was I right when I said that Thaid's from the other continent were migrating here? > A shiver ran down his spine. <But if a flying Thaid it's as powerful as a wyvern, then how strong the other continent's wyverns will be? >

As Erik delved deeper into the subject, his mind churned with a multitude of theories and conjectures. Despite this, he acknowledged these assumptions would remain mere speculations without additional information. Despite everything, the unveiled footage presented a truth that was both surprising and had the power to reshape their knowledge of the Thaid's and the vastness of their capabilities.

He remained seated, enveloped in a deep, contemplative silence. His gaze remained fixated on the screen, never wavering, as he remained captivated by the frozen image of the cerulean bird.

A sense of resolve and determination built up inside him as he was driven to find and confront this creature. While witnessing the bird's wind-controlling abilities, all thanks to its unique brain crystal power, Erik was left astounded, having seen nothing like it before.

The thought of combining this new power with the Galewing's abilities that he already possessed intrigued him, making him wonder what extraordinary abilities might emerge.

The possibilities ran through his mind as he pondered for a while. By combining these elements, the potential outcome could cause an unparalleled power that could exert unprecedented control over the wind, showcasing its exceptional strength and versatility. Erik's mind was filled with excitement as he contemplated the potential of such power.